

The 29th Annual Canadian Conference on HIV/AIDS Research Le 29e Congrès annuel canadien de recherche sur le VIH/sida

Session: **KP1**: Saturday May 2 – 11:00:12:30 – African, Caribbean and Black people

Track: Social Sciences

Subject: Programming and Policy

Presentation Type: Oral

Title of Abstract: **Successes and Challenges in Empowerment Strategies amongst Newcomer PHAs: Insights from the Ethno-racial Treatment Support Network Training Evaluation Study**

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Abstract

Background: The Ethno-racial Treatment Support Network (ETSN) program was established to build PHA's capacity in health literacy and peer support. Since 2003, ETSN has trained over 200 PHAs, their caregivers and service providers. This program evaluation study was conducted in 2018 to identify the long-term impact and challenges to inform improvement in peer empowerment strategies.

Methods: Using community-based research framework, a mixed-method study using self-administered surveys and focus groups was implemented during April – October 2018. We engaged graduates in both survey (n = 92) and focus groups (n = 62) to assess long-term program impact. Using standardized scales, we surveyed participants on six domains: health literacy, self-health management efficacy, treatment adherence, social connection and support (SCS), community engagement (CE) and sense of empowerment (SE). Community stakeholders including managers of AIDS service organizations (ASOs) and training mentors (n = 15) also participated in focus group to identify overall long-term program impact and strategies for improvement.

Results: Quantitative data show significant positive impact in over 80% of the participants in SCS, CE and SE. Over 60% reported changes in their level of engagement and complexities of their roles within HIV or health service sectors. Qualitative data indicate major contributions of ETSN graduates as peer counsellors, support workers, service navigators and peer leaders. Key challenges that limited the positive impact of peer empowerment and engagement includes ASOs privileging professional credentials over lived experiences, lack of systemic resources to support employment opportunities for program graduates; and lack of recognition and utilization of their training experiences beyond the HIV sector due to HIV stigma.

Conclusion: Culturally competent, community-driven health promotion programs are effective in advancing PHA peer empowerment. However, the impact can be maximized with attention to eradicating HIV stigma, honoring lived experiences, and establishing consistent strategies and committed resources to support peer engagement.