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# Sociopolitical Context of Health and HIV Vulnerability among Heterosexual African, Caribbean and Black Men (ACB) in Ottawa

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# Background and Objectives

## Background

- **weSpeak:** A 5-year program of research and community building studies HIV vulnerability and Health care access among self-identified heterosexual African, Caribbean (ACB) men from 16 years and older.
  - Initiated in 2015.
  - Funded by the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN) and the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR).
  - Program focus: Mainly on the ACB community areas, by studying the uptake of HIV tests among the heterosexual ACB men, and not just infection rates.

## Objectives

The primary objective of the weSpeak research was to subsequently reduce the HIV vulnerability and build resilience by promoting active engagement among self-identified heterosexual ACB men in the community.

Research questions:

- How do sociopolitical conditions impact the self-identified heterosexual ACB men?
- What are the social and behavioural vulnerabilities to HIV among self-identified heterosexual ACB men, including their social identities related to race, class, gender and sexualities?

# Theoretical Perspectives and Methods

## Theoretical Perspectives

In this study, we used two theoretical approach:

- **Socio-environmental approach:** This approach to health recognizes that the construction and evaluation of health largely depends on the interaction of the individual and the social as well as the environmental situations. It identifies the links between a person's health, the disease, and the social environment.
- **Intersectionality theory:** This theory illustrates how inequities and the organization of power in a society shaped social divisions such as race, gender or class that interact to influence each other. It postulates gender, race, and class as oppressive structures that are mutually established and work together to create inequalities.

The social concepts embedded within the socio-environmental and intersectionality approaches would help uncover the connection between HIV related vulnerability and sociopolitical factors of their everyday lives.

## Methods

### Data

- Using secondary data analysis, we addressed the sociopolitical conditions contributing to health and HIV vulnerability among heterosexual ACB men.
- Existing weSpeak qualitative data were used to answer the research questions.
- It provided an in-depth analysis on social and behavioural vulnerabilities to HIV among self-identified heterosexual ACB men.

### Data collection

- Qualitative data from weSpeak program was available. The information retrieved from the original study was used to create new themes for the research.

### Data analysis and Quality Assessment

- Thematic analysis was used to transcribe the data following the six steps in thematic analysis by Braun and Clark (2006).
- This entailed coding the quotes from interviews and focus groups into themes that are related to the sociopolitical contexts affecting health.
- With each emerged theme, vivid quotes were analyzed and used to support them.
- The data collection and analysis was external audited by research coordinators. Moreover, it has been debriefed by peers from the research group to reduce bias and errors.

### Ethics

weSpeak has received research ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB).



# Result and Discussion

- From our study we discovered the following themes as factors which affect health and HIV vulnerability: poverty, housing, racism and lack of recognition of foreign credentials.
  - Other studies have found some of these factors to affect the health of ACB community. In Noonan, Velasco-Mondragon and Wagner's (2016) study, poverty, housing and racism were among the factors which affect health among the African American population. This affirms the themes to be vital sociopolitical factors affecting heterosexual ACB men.
  - Using intersectionality lens, a study by Gilbert et al (2016) reveals how racial, gendered, social and economic factors work together to shape the health outcomes of Black men. This is also seen in Ostrach and Singer's (2012) study on how biological, economic, social and political factors affect Black women. This justifies the findings of this research, which shows the correlation of themes as determinant of health for heterosexual ACB men seen in diagram 1.
  - Heasslip and Ryden (2013) identifies vulnerability to be a situational experience rather than a dichotomous experience, stating that one is not when placed in a good environment but may vulnerable in a different one. This is evident from the findings, as ACB men are placed in an environment where different factors makes them vulnerable to HIV. Looking at it from the socio-environment approach, heterosexual ACB men's health are affected by the social factors from the environment and not the individual.

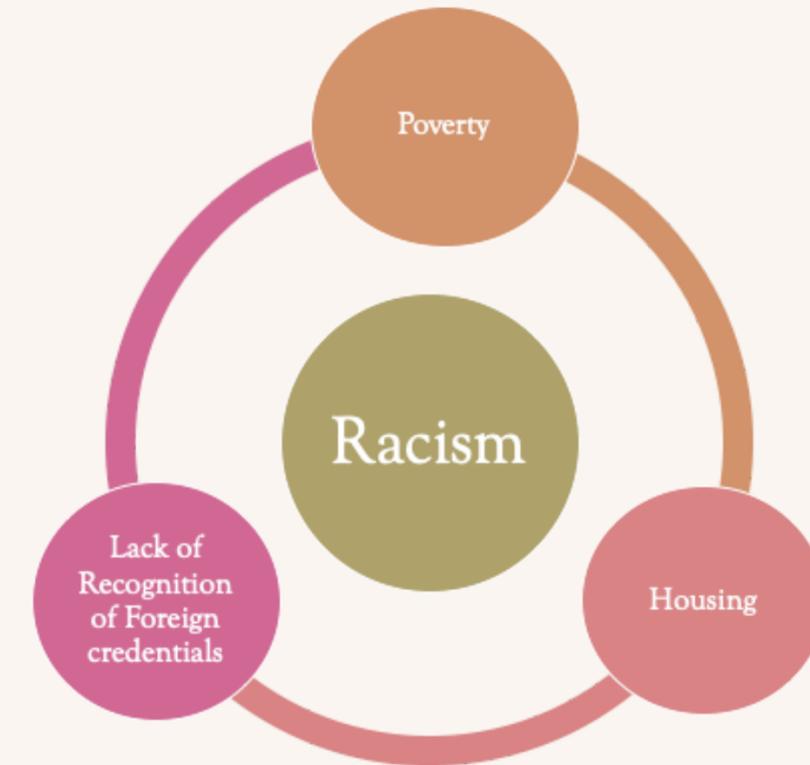
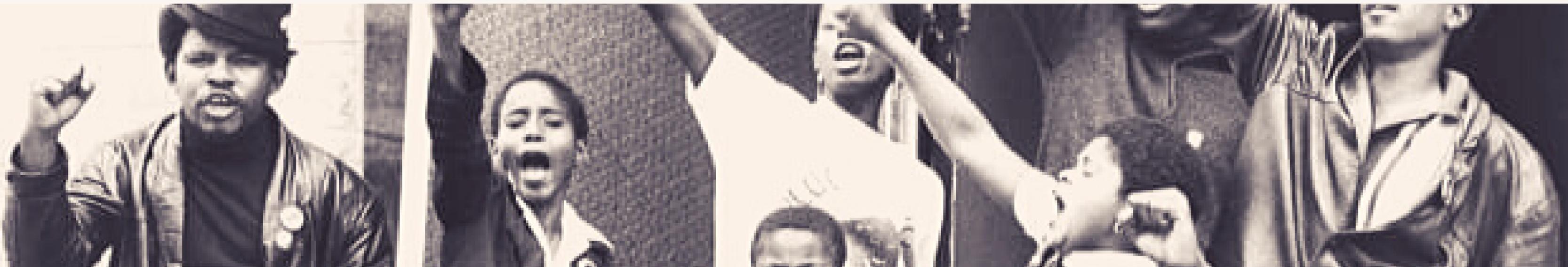


Diagram 1: Intersection of Sociopolitical Factors affecting the Health of Heterosexual ACB Men



# Conclusion

- This research promotes health literacy among ACB community and enlightens stakeholders on how these factors could possibly affect the health and wellbeing of ACB people.
- This would help in designing evidence and culture-based interventions for heterosexual ACB men to improve their standard of living and lifestyles. Such interventions include having a representative of the heterosexual ACB men community at the policy and decision-making level in the government and targeted programs aimed at addressing these sociopolitical challenges with a view to reducing their vulnerability to HIV.
- Prioritization and value of heterosexual ACB men is essential in improving their quality of life and access to good quality healthcare.

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