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HIV VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE AMONG HETEROSEXUAL AFRICAN, CARIBBEAN AND BLACK (ACB) MEN IN WINDSOR, ONTARIO: A PERSPECTIVE OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

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Background

Introduction

- This paper explores the perspectives of service providers in relation to HIV vulnerabilities, resilience and health promotion among straight ACB men living in Windsor, Ontario.
- The ACB people make less than 5% of the Ontario population but account for more than 20% of all HIV positive people (OHESI, 2017). Straight ACB men account for over 60% of these infections.
- Despite the negative portrayal of straight ACB men and their sexual lives, the weSpeak data from Windsor suggest that these men face a lot of challenges that affect their vulnerability and resilience to HIV.

Methods

- We used data from the weSpeak project. weSpeak is a 5-year program of research and related activities with ACB heterosexual men in Ontario (London, Ottawa, Toronto and Windsor) to engage and mobilize ACB communities for HIV prevention and promote collective resilience.
- In April 2016, we conducted one focus group discussion with 6 service providers from various organizations working with ACB people in Windsor, Ontario.
- The aim was to understand service providers' perspectives on ACB heterosexual men's vulnerability and resilience to HIV in relation to masculinity and to suggest ways of promoting sexual health among ACB heterosexual men.

Results

Participants suggested that:

- Racialization of HIV and pressures associated with being bread winners influence the vulnerability of straight ACB men. Racialization of HIV impacts access to HIV related health services or support, also pressures associated with being bread winners leads to depression and may influence risky behaviours.
- Most straight ACB men fail to admit their vulnerable circumstances due to masculinity norms. The silence about sex and sexuality in most ACB communities discourage ACB men talking about their health, or seeking HIV testing services. In addition, pride and fear of shame or being stigmatized influences HIV vulnerability among ACB straight men.
- Resilience is associated with strength, enduring hardship, having tools to cope or being empowered. But ACB men lack the right tools to cope and the necessary education about their problems and ways to sustain themselves. Majority of them use unhealthy tools such as alcohol, drugs and sex as a way to cope with challenges or problems which pushes them into risky behaviours.

What did participants say...

□ **On racialization and pressures associated with being bread winners:**

“... from a health determination perspective, race is a factor in terms of determinants of health and a lot of racialized people, ACB people especially men are disproportionately affected in all of these factors, psychologically, economically, culturally, socially. So for example, looking at just economics, a lot of pressure is put on African and Caribbean men to be providers in their families. If they don't have a job or can't provide that financial support they are not necessarily respected by their peers or their children or their partners so that leads to depression and then leads to sexual behaviour that may be unhealthy for that person and put them at risk for HIV...” (Bryaner, service provider).

□ **On masculinity norms:**

“...But is it identity? Like my masculinity is tied into my sexual activity... So I am more active or have more multiple partners and that proves my manhood, when the other areas like economic web I cannot be that man, so it expresses itself...” (Corner, service provider)

□ **On resilience and tools to cope:**

“...to me I think education, they don't have the tools to cope, some of them though we not gonna generalize everybody, but they don't have tools to cope...” (Walter, service provider)

“...they do have the tools to cope, but tools that they use are not necessarily the healthiest, so there is addictions to alcohol, probably drugs, may be not the elicit ones, but marijuana is like a cigarette to a lot of ACB men and alcohol is just like drinking juice and that is something that is very unhealthy, but that is how they cope if there is an issue” (Bryaner, service provider).

Recommendations

- Given the complexity of issues faced by straight ACB men, HIV prevention strategies need to include conversations on race and its impact on health.
- There is a need for informal safer spaces for ACB men to talk about their issues.
- To strengthen the resilience of ACB Straight men, collaboration and coordination of community organizations and the available services is important and necessary.

Reference:

Ontario HIV Epidemiology and Surveillance Initiative (OHESI). New HIV diagnoses in Ontario, 2017.

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The University of Windsor ethics board approved the study protocol

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Conflict of Interest Declaration

We have no conflict of interest