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Chiara Pride

Trinity University, USA

The efficacy of trauma-informed and structurally-competent models of HIV testing and treatment by healthcare centers in addressing stigma and health disparities within marginalized communities

People living with HIV (PLWH) in marginalized communities face oppression from their social network while navigating their illness amidst systemic resource deprivation. A vast network of federal agencies and community health centers (HCs) are devoted to helping control HIV among these acutely affected populations. Moreover, the United States' epidemiological community is cognizant of the difficult lived experiences of individuals who are newly diagnosed with HIV, including the challenges they face while "coping with the reactions of others to a stigmatizing illness" (CDC, 2015). HCs however, struggle to transform their technical understanding of biosocial suffering into interventions that simultaneously address the social determinants of health, structural barriers to care, and trauma. This paper places the interviews of 33 San Antonio residents, at-risk for HIV or seropositive, in conversation with current medical anthropology and public health literature to examine the efficacy of trauma-informed and structurally-competent models of healthcare. As HCs combat stigma and health disparities within marginalized communities, these models may supplement the 'biomedicalization' of the clinical encounter. The larger study from which this paper is drawn interviewed mostly Latino men who have sex with men (MSM) about their experiences with HIV testing and treatment. The participants discussed their fears of rejection, traumas, and negative encounters with testing and treatment in relation to stigma and poor health outcomes. HIV/AIDS care that is rooted lived experiences like these, when combined with an applied scholarly understanding of structural violence and trauma, may result in greater positive outcomes along the 'care continuum' for marginalized communities.

Biography

Chiara Pride is an undergraduate researcher at Trinity University in San Antonio, TX. She is researching the double-edged sword of epidemiology as a tool for incredible healing and a contributor to biosocial isolation. She is also a performer with the "End Stigma, End HIV/AIDS: Forum Theatre Project". Her theatre team has crafted impromptu scenes, drawn from interviews with local PLWH, illustrating clinician and family stigma and presents them to HCs and community centers.

cpride@trinity.edu

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