

# HIV STIGMA STUDY

African & Caribbean Perspectives on  
HIV/AIDS Etiology & Prevention:  
Theoretical Implications

# Research Objectives

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- Describe HIV-related fear, denial, and experiences of stigma and discrimination reported among HIV infected and low and high risk persons.
- Understand the role of social structures (e.g. family, cultural, economic, political, educational and health institutions) in creating and perpetuating HIV/AIDS-related fear, denial and stigma.
- Explore other related issues identified through narratives and group discussions.

# Study Populations

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The study will include a total of 144 people from the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa. The communities are:

- Jamaican, Trinidadian & Guyanese (72 people)
- Kenyan, Somali & Ethiopian (72 people)
  - 24 individuals from each country
  - 12 males and 12 females from each community
    - Self-identified HIV-status (8)
    - High risk, HIV-negative or status unknown (8)
    - Low risk, HIV-negative or status unknown (8)

# Sample Characteristics

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<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	
Jamaica	6	5	<b>11</b>
Trinidad	8	3	<b>11</b>
Ethiopia	9	6	<b>15</b>
Kenya	6	5	<b>11</b>
Somalia	9	8	<b>17</b>
	<b>38</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>65</b>

...he must be gay

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***But the thing is when you work with your own from the Caribbean, if you're a very proper person and you dress nice, people tend to think that he's very proper, he's very mannerable, he must be gay.***

***Stupid things like that. And for instance I'll say to somebody, 'Oh, let's do lunch next week and then a movie.' 'You're going to do lunch and a movie with a man? You a batty man?' Little things like that.***

***... You're not free to walk about in certain communities unless you can pass as a straight person, whatever that means. (Jamaican man)***

...they would talk behind her back, they would pray

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*My mother had two friends from her church stay with her. I was living with my mother at the time, and I could kind of see, she would lose all her friends, they would talk behind her back, they would pray for her, and pray over her and feel sorry for her that she had a daughter that was gay. Her life would be changed. And that was the first time I really felt sorry for her. You know, just the way they would [say] 'Marriage is between a man and a woman.' They had the Canadian, you know, same sex bill, 'Oh, that's so nasty'. And the other sister [said to me] 'I'd like to see you with a little more hair' and, you know, um, 'are you against marriage?' She was always alert trying to find out my views on marriage, trying to get conversation rolling on what my sexual identity was. I'm like 'no'. They would go and tell everybody at home. I don't discuss my sexuality with my family at all. I ended up moving out and just not really being in touch because I think that's better. It would really ruin [my mother's] life as she knew it. (Jamaican woman)*

We have culture that promotes ignorance & protects people...

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*I want to make a really controversial point, but it's a truism as well. The same culture that we are talking about of the Somalis that sort of shames people into keeping their mouths shut about this disease also does a very wonderful thing of having kept those numbers down. By having shamed people [against] having unprotected sex and all that, it's a stigma, it's a dilemma we face. We have a culture that promotes ignorance and also protects people. How do you unbundle this thing? (Somali man)*

## I think the Black community does not want...further stigmatization

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*I think part of why the mainstream Black community doesn't want to deal with it is because AIDS has been portrayed as something from Africa. And they don't want the mainstream world, the European White world, to pin this on Black people. So there's a sort of [view that] it's homosexual and it's from sin, it's not from Africa. ...I just think the Black community does not want AIDS to be associated with coming from the continent or, you know, Haitians, or the group being stigmatized as the people that, you know, like the way people avoided Asians through the SARS, wouldn't sit next to them, wouldn't go to their restaurants. I think the Black community does not want, you know, further stigmatization (Jamaican woman)*

## Link between Blackness & HIV

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*The link between AIDS and Haiti, strengthened in innumerable articles in the popular press, seemed to resonate with what might be termed a North American 'folk model' of Haitians... The press drew heavily upon readily available images of squalor, voodoo, and boatloads of "disease-ridden" or "economic" refugees. One of the most persistently invoked associations related the occurrence of AIDS in Haitians to voodoo. Something that happened at these ritual fires, it was speculated triggered AIDS in cult adherents presumed to be the quasitotality of Haitians (Farmer, 1990:416, cited in Baer, Singer, and Susser, 1997, pp. 162-163).*

## ...Our culture is not just a culture of ignorance

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*Our culture is not just a culture of ignorance. It's also a culture that has protected us. So they should not just blame our, we don't want anybody to blame our culture and say it's just an ignorant culture. This culture has protected Somalis who are only seven million people all around the world.*

*When people who are in the system, you know, in Canada, talk about education to ethnic communities, it makes us feel like we're ignorant, stupid. But they can also learn something from us. We have this dilemma as I said before. You know, we have a culture that the man who's trying to educate us will probably look at with some contempt, but this culture protected us. The researchers might learn something also about abstinence, how abstinence and taboos perhaps help. I don't know; taboos are not nice things. But in this case, Somalis will tell you it protects them. So the education we're talking about is not a one-way street (Somali man)*

If you leave the culture, then you are in more danger...

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*You know, we're talking about now, we come to centres of education, I mean in Canada. We've come to a country where people can get educated. But again, our people face dangers within that same education. Because you see a lot more people who actually get modernized getting affected by various diseases more and more. In fact, the irony is, if you leave the culture, then you're actually in more danger. And if you remain in the culture, again, you are in more danger of ignorance, of not knowing what the hell is going on.*

# Acknowledgements

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