HIV Rates in Black MSM Are Linked to STIs, Economic Woes

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The vastly disproportionate rates of HIV among black men who have sex with men (MSM) in the United States are linked to unemployment, lower socioeconomic status and the presence of other sexually transmitted infections. Researchers conducted an analysis of data from a six-city study of 1,553 black MSM known as HPTN 061, which the HIV Prevention Trials Network has orchestrated with funding from the National Institutes of Health. The investigators published their findings in PLOS ONE.

With black MSM accounting for one in five new HIV infections in the United States despite the fact that they represent a tiny fraction of the overall population, public health researchers are trying to identify contributing factors to this troubling phenomenon in hopes of finding ways to most effectively target prevention efforts.

About one in six of the participants had already been diagnosed with HIV before entering the study. Out of the 1,263 men who were not previously diagnosed with the virus, 7.6 percent received a new HIV diagnosis. When compared with the HIV-negative men, the newly diagnosed men were more likely to be unemployed, to have syphilis, rectal gonorrhea or urethral or rectal chlamydia, and to have had receptive anal intercourse without a condom.

“To decrease further spread of HIV among black MSM, new interventions will have to address social and structural, as well as individual behavioral and biological, issues,” Kenneth H. Mayer, MD, medical research director and co-chair of The Fenway Institute of Fenway Health and the study’s lead author, said in a release.

To read a release on the study, click here.

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