Do Microaggressions Affect the Health of Black Women With HIV?

Researcher Sannisha Dale and Project MMAGIC plan to find out.

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New research out of the University of Miami (UM) will look at the possible ways microagressions and violence affect the health and engagement in care of Black women living with HIV.

Sannisha Dale, PhD, assistant professor of psychology at UM, will spearhead the research thanks to a $670,000 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health that will help fund a unique study called Project MMAGIC (Monitoring Microaggressions and Adversities to Generate Interventions for Change).

Most anyone who belongs to a minority group—such as people living with HIV—has been subjected to microaggressions. These are the insults, slights, jokes and gestures that trade on stereotypes or reference a minority status and are particularly painful because they are often delivered unconsciously and are prevalent.

“Microaggressions are subtle, but they are very hurtful. For example, it’s hearing someone say, ‘She doesn’t look like she’s positive,’ as if HIV has a face. Or ‘I’m HIV negative, I’m clean,’ with the connotation being if you’re HIV positive, you’re dirty, you’re tainted,” Dale explained in a UM’s News@TheU. “When microaggressions come up, they disrupt people’s mood, they throw people off, and when they happen in a clinical setting with a health care provider, they may disrupt women’s care in terms of their desire to return to visits or trust recommendations from that provider.”

The study will follow 150 women living with HIV for one year. Participants will document their experiences through daily text messages and quarterly visits. Dale and her research team will see whether psychosocial experiences affect the women’s viral load.

In addition, researchers will collect information on any violence the women may experience, such as physical or sexual assault, and see whether it affects their engagement in care—including, for example, attending doctor’s appointments and taking meds.

“We are also going to look at resilience factors, such as self-efficacy, spirituality, coping mechanisms, as well as environmental factors, like where Black women with HIV live and the

resources that are available in their communities, such as domestic violence shelters, health centers and transportation access," Dale said in the release.

The questions explored in the study are important for Black women with HIV because about 42% of them do not have an undetectable viral load, which means better health and longevity. What's more, science shows that people with an undetectable viral load cannot transmit HIV sexually, a concept referred to as undetectable equals untransmittable, or U=U.

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/microaggressions-affect-health-black-women-hiv