

**D4**

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**Secrecy, Stigma, and Loneliness: Exploring How Trauma, Illicit Drug Use, and HIV Status Contribute to Loneliness among People Living with HIV**

Background: Loneliness is a critical public health issue that has been gathering further attention after the COVID-19 pandemic. People living with HIV (PLHIV) may be at greater risk for loneliness due to HIV stigma and marginalization, but these relationships have not been adequately explored in previous research. The objective of this analysis is to describe perspectives on loneliness and stigma among persons living with HIV.

Methods: Participants were drawn from the MACS/WIHS Combined Cohort Study (MWCCS) from five different sites: Brooklyn, Baltimore, Chicago, D.C., and Birmingham. The MWCCS is a longitudinal cohort study that explores chronic health conditions among PLHIV. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Participants (n=33) were selected to include those experiencing varying levels of loneliness and social isolation. Interview data were transcribed and deductive and inductive codes were developed through an iterative process and a final codebook was created. Data was coded and a thematic analysis conducted.

Results: Preliminary qualitative analysis describes a mechanism of loneliness that starts with experiencing trauma or illicit drug use. Furthermore, this is followed by secrecy related to stigma associated with HIV status and/or past history of trauma or illicit drug use. These different concepts may synergistically be associated with increased loneliness.

Conclusion: Further investigation is needed to contextualize how these different factors impact loneliness and HIV health outcomes. Qualitative findings will be incorporated within the context of a larger quantitative assessment of these variables to identify variables that future interventions can target to reduce loneliness among PLHIV.