More than Just a Label: The Afterlife of HIV/AIDS in Richmond, VA

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Research questions/goals

• **Research Question One**: What is the connection between HIV/AIDS and a person’s identity, specifically sexuality and/or race?

• **Research Question Two**: How can HIV/AIDS lead to feelings of social isolation (which could inhibit migration)?

• **Main Goal**: Engage in critical research surrounding HIV/AIDS to help destigmatize the condition

• **Side Goal**: Formal Recommendations
Background information: terminology

- AIDS: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. This is a condition that is acquired as a result of HIV.
- Ryan White Funding: Federal funding for HIV testing, HIV treatment, and the treatment of conditions related to HIV. Does not cover mental health.
- ART - medicine commonly used to treat HIV
- PrEP - medicine to take before HIV exposure to help prevent the contraction of HIV
Methodology

My project

HIV Rates in VA/Richmond

Interview Data
Richmond data: Regional rates

HIV/AIDS Rates over the Last Five Years (per 100,000 people)

Source: AIDSVu Program, Emory and Henry University.
Virginia data: By race

WHITE
61.5% of population

BLACK
20% of pop.

27.8% living w/ HIV
56.7% living with HIV

27.3% of deaths
58% of deaths
Important theme: Identity and HIV/AIDS

Important Findings: Identity and HIV/AIDS

- Challenges for: Low SES, Monolingual Spanish people
- Racism in coverage of HIV/AIDS
- Perceived queerness of HIV/AIDS diagnosis
Impactful quotes

“In the 80s and 90s, there was public uproar when white gay men were the face of HIV. Now that the demographics shifted and it is more common for Black people to have HIV, no one cares.”
Impactful quotes

“I (a heterosexual man) got HIV from a blood transfusion. Ever since my diagnosis, I felt judged because I was positive...people assumed that I was gay because I had HIV.”
Important theme: Mental health and stigma

Important Findings: Mental Health and Stigma

- Importance of support systems to fight isolation
- Inequities of physical and mental health resources
- Comorbidities of HIV/AIDS with mental health conditions
Important theme: Mental health and stigma
Impactful quotes

“Every week, I would have Medicine Mondays. I would go on Instagram Live and dance every time someone took their ART or PrEP. That way, they could know that we were all in this together.”
“After I was diagnosed (with HIV), I felt so alone…I began to distance myself from my friends and family because I was afraid being HIV positive would change how they saw me...It was only months after this that I realized I had started to develop depression.”
Final products

- Essay
- Website
Future extensions/formal recommendations

1. Mental health resources
2. Decriminalization of HIV/AIDS
3. More comprehensive education in schools regarding HIV/AIDS and the LGBTQIA+ Community
Questions?

Thank you for listening!