HIV/AIDS Among Women of Color in Massachusetts

Erika Kates
*University of Massachusetts Boston*

Helen Levine
*University of Massachusetts Boston, helen.levine@umb.edu*

LaKay Cornell
*University of Massachusetts Boston*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cwppp_pubs](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cwppp_pubs)

Part of the [Economic Policy Commons](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cwppp_pubs), [Health Policy Commons](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cwppp_pubs), [Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cwppp_pubs), [Policy Design, Analysis, and Evaluation Commons](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cwppp_pubs), [Public Policy Commons](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cwppp_pubs), and the [Social Policy Commons](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cwppp_pubs)

**Recommended Citation**

Kates, Erika; Levine, Helen; and Cornell, LaKay, "HIV/AIDS Among Women of Color in Massachusetts" (2004). *Publications from the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy*. 51. [https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cwppp_pubs/51](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cwppp_pubs/51)

This Fact Sheet is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Women in Politics & Public Policy at ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications from the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@umb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@umb.edu).
Problem

According to a recent report1 on the status of women in Massachusetts, the Commonwealth has an “extraordinarily high” incidence of women of color with HIV/AIDS. Over 4,200 women are infected and women of color account for a disproportionately high number of these cases.

- Non-Hispanic white women comprise 84% of the female population but account for only 32% of the female HIV/AIDS cases.2
- Hispanic women comprise only 7% of the female population but account for 28% of HIV/AIDS cases.
- African-American women comprise only 5% of the female population but make up 38% of HIV/AIDS cases.
- “Other” ethnic/racial categories comprise 4% of the female population and account for 2% of the HIV/AIDS cases.

White women contract HIV primarily through intravenous drug use (IDU), while African-American and Hispanic women primarily contract HIV through sex and needle-sharing activities of their sex partners.

- 71% of HIV-positive African-American women in MA are reported as contracting the virus through heterosexual transmission.
- 61% of HIV-positive Hispanic women in MA are reported as contracting the virus through heterosexual transmission.
- 42% of white women in MA are reported as contracting the virus through heterosexual transmission.
- Women who identify no risk behaviors are reported as “presumed heterosexual” by reporting agencies.

“Down low” behavior puts women seriously at risk for HIV infection. “Down low” refers to men who covertly have sex with other men while involved in long-term monogamous relationships with women.

- Because these encounters are secret and rarely, if ever, discussed, condoms are seldom used.
- HIV is more easily transmitted from a man to a partner than it is from a woman to a partner.
- Many women are also unaware of their partners’ intravenous drug use or needle-sharing activities.

All percentages are rounded.

2 All percentages are rounded.
At least 60% of HIV-infected women have children under the age of 18.

- 75% of mothers with HIV/AIDS live with their children.
- Grandmothers care for about 20% of the children who have parents infected with HIV.
- Children of infected mothers face the continuing stress of living at home with a parent who has a chronic, stigmatizing disease.

**Context**

The geographical occurrence of HIV in women varies. In some Massachusetts cities there is a higher incidence of Hispanic cases, in others a higher incidence of African-American cases, and in yet others a higher incidence of non-Hispanic white cases.

Massachusetts HIV/AIDS policies and services are among the best in the country, but there is room for improvement in services for women.

- Minorities have the right to consent to HIV/STD services but, unlike many states, education in schools on sexually transmitted diseases and HIV is not required.
- Forty-three organizations are funded by the Department of Public Health to provide medical care, primary support services, and secondary support services for women living with or at risk for HIV, but data are not readily available on how many women utilize available services.
- The Massachusetts legislature recently restored MassHealth coverage for people with HIV who earn up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (an increase from the previous income limit of 133%). However, this increase has not yet been implemented.
- 40% of women with HIV/AIDS are mothers and retain a higher incidence of African-American cases, and in yet others a higher incidence of non-Hispanic white cases.

**TREATMENT DATA**


**BARRIERS TO CARE**


**CULTURAL BARRIERS**


**MEDICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS**


**TOPIC**

**SOURCES**


**Epidemiological Data**


**TREATMENT DATA**


**IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN**


**BARRIERS TO CARE**


**CULTURAL BARRIERS**


**MEDICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS**


**TOPIC**

**SOURCES**


**TREATMENT DATA**


**IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN**


**BARRIERS TO CARE**


**CULTURAL BARRIERS**


**MEDICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS**