THE WASHINGTON D.C. HIV PREVALENCE ISSUE:

There’s an NPR story titled “Washington, D.C. Facing HIV/AIDS Epidemic” that aired on November 30, 2007. Farai Chideya (the host) interviews Shannon Hader (the Director of the D.C. HIV/AIDS Administration). If you want to listen to it (it’s only 6:30), you can do so here: http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16778438

The interview took place in 2007, so the data they discuss is from the span of 2001 to 2006, but the rate of HIV/AIDS was ten times as high in DC as the rate in the U.S. At the time, there were 12,500 people who are HIV positive in the DC area. The majority of the epidemic faces African Americans . 60% of the residents in DC are African American, but 81% of new cases of HIV were among them. And women had just started to become infected more (with 90% of those cases being among African Americans).

The interview doesn’t get into causes; it mainly describes the need for public health interventions.

On July 9, 2012, an article came out in The Guardian titled “AIDS conference forces Washington’s epidemic into global spotlight.” This article cites DC’s HIV infection rate as 3.2% (higher than the Democratic Republic of the Congo). The article included an interview with Lisa Fitzpatrick (infectious disease researcher at Howard University) credits the broad separation between the wealthy and impoverished, and the way in which the impoverished are marginalized and neglected.

David Catania, who became the chair of DC’s health Committee in 2005, credits the poor use of taxpayer money to investigate and address the problem. One of his quotations in describing the previous administration: “What dollars we did spend got burned in a bonfire out the back. There was one instance where a guy used AIDS money to refurbish a strip club.”

El-Sadr and colleagues published an article in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2010 titled “AIDS in America – Forgotten but Not Gone” which characterized the epidemic well:

“More than 1 in 30 adults in Washington, D.C., are HIV-infected — a prevalence higher than that reported in Ethiopia, Nigeria, or Rwanda.”

“In New York City, 1 in 40 blacks, 1 in 10 men who have sex with men, and 1 in 8 injection-drug users are HIV-infected.”

It goes on to say that, in D.C., the rate among black men is 1 in 16.

In this article, the authors credit the local residents’ engagement in unprotected sex “within relatively insular social-sexual networks.” This could also be said for needle-sharing behaviors. The authors go on to say that “Many of the populations most affected tend to have limited social mobility; thus, partner selection tends to concentrate transmission patterns and amplify spread within defined geographic areas.”