

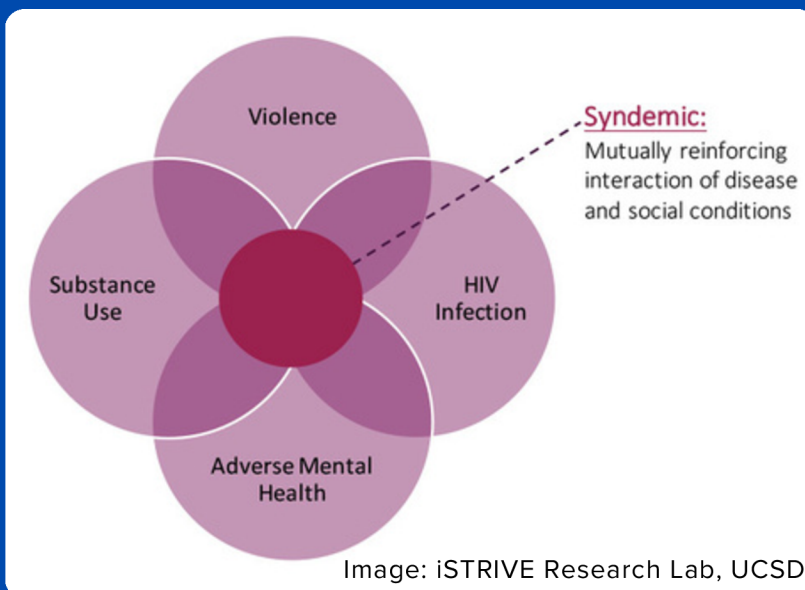
“IT’S NOT DISCRETE, IT’S NOT GOING TO BE EASY”: RE-CONSTRUCTING SYNDEMIC THEORY AS SYNDEMIC PRACTICE

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Syndemic theory provides a framework for analyzing the relationship between social conditions and the co-occurrence of two or more disease states within a local population.^{1,2} Over the past decade there has been increasing interest in syndemic theory at federal, state and local level.³

“We do people a disservice by centering the disease or condition, instead of centering the person.”

- NGO representative



STUDY SAMPLE & APPROACH

- ▶ We interviewed twenty experts from academia, government, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
- ▶ We used a semi-structured interview guide to explore how syndemic theory is being put into practice in HIV-related healthcare policy.

KEY THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

Syndemic Theory ...

- 1) forefronts a **person-centered approach** to healthcare
- 2) highlights the need for an **integrated approach** to healthcare provision
- 3) offers a new approach to health and wellbeing but faces **considerable challenges**

1 Singer, M., Clair, S., 2003. Syndemics and Public Health: Reconceptualizing Disease in Bio-Social Context. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*.

2 Mendenhall, E., 2017. Syndemics: a new path for global health research. *The Lancet*.

3 Outram, S.M., Koester, K.A., Moran, L., Steward, W.T., Arnold, E.A., 2024. Syndemic Theory and Its Use in Developing Health Interventions and Programming: A Scoping Review. *Current HIV/AIDS Reports*.

1 Syndemic Theory Forefronts a Person-Centered Approach to Healthcare

“You have to bring services to individuals and not expect individuals to come to those services.”

- *Government representative*

- **Focuses healthcare policy and practice on the whole person, not just their medical needs**
- **Recognizes the inter-relatedness of social conditions, individual behaviors, and health status**

“My understanding of syndemics is just recognizing again that these issues don't exist in silos. They're very much influenced by other social determinants of health, whether it's access to safe and affordable housing, poverty, mental health, and substance use issues.”

- *NGO representative*

2 Syndemic Theory Highlights the Need for an Integrated Approach

- **Developing healthcare interventions that address both social and health conditions**
- **Recognizing the limitations of programs that do not address social issues**

“As part of a syndemic analysis, we identify that depression and anxiety are interacting and increasing the negative health outcomes, and it is compounded with homelessness. You can do the best CBT [cognitive behavioral therapy] to address depression and anxiety, but if you don't address homelessness, how do you know that what you're doing is actually being effective.” - *Academic representative*

3 Putting Syndemic Theory into Practice Faces Considerable Challenges

- **Syndemic theory is gaining traction but there is no clear understanding of how it might be implemented**
- **Governmental departments are separated and separately funded, which challenges the integration of health and wellbeing services**

“We should work toward having more integrated and flexible funding sources to kind of break down some of these silos. But there are major political and practical hurdles to doing so.” - *NGO representative*

“We have siloed funding trees and siloing of resources that ultimately have to serve the same subpopulations, even at the individual level, make it hard to really structure programs in a way that there's sort of a holistic set of services being offered.” - *Government representative*

“It's not a hard sell to people that social determinants of health matter, but it is a very hard sell that within the confines of the bureaucracy in which they work.”

- *NGO representative*