

Purpose

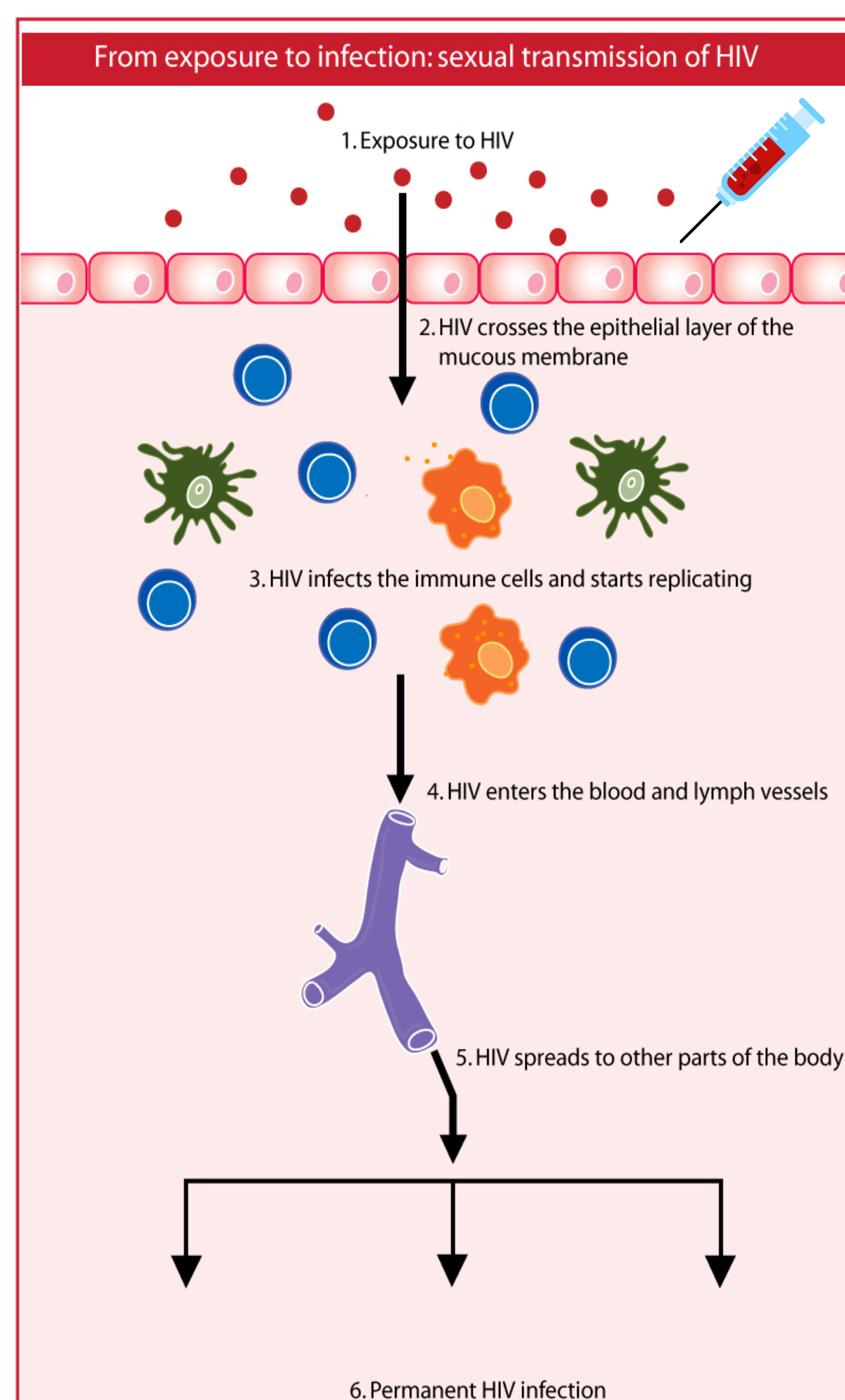
- Highlight the severity of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) pandemic among female sex workers (FSWs)
- Expose the lack of awareness of mental health, specifically depression on this underrepresented population



Background

HIV

- HIV takes over one's immune system by compromising T-cells, disabling their lymphocyte abilities to defend the body against pathogens
- Modes of transmission: infected blood (i.e. injection drugs), sexual fluids, and mother-to-child during pregnancy



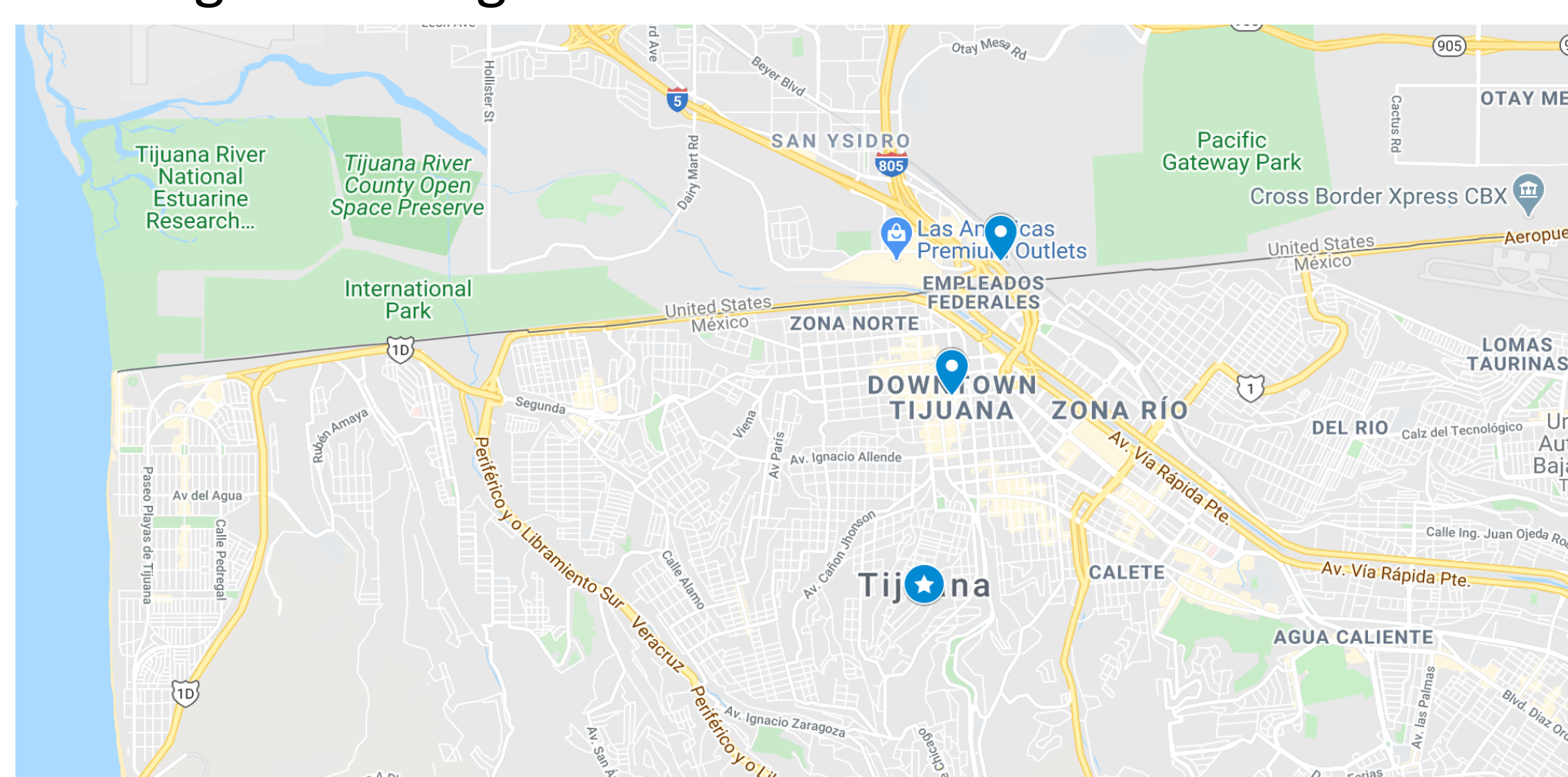
HIV Transmission. How it infects the human body

FSW Lifestyle

- **Low socioeconomic status** and additional **structural inequities** leaves FSWs susceptible to negative environmental exposures (i.e. disease, malnutrition)
- Also **affects health behaviors** (i.e. substance or drug abuse, being health conscious)
- Sex work exposes FSWs to **high-risk work behaviors**:
 - unhygienic drug use, unprotected sex, & transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

La Zona Roja in Tijuana, Mexico

- Located near the Tijuana border, a regional divider between San Diego, California and Mexico
- Tijuana is notorious for its narco-run government that lead to the development of "quasi-legal" businesses: the commercialization of sex work and drug trafficking

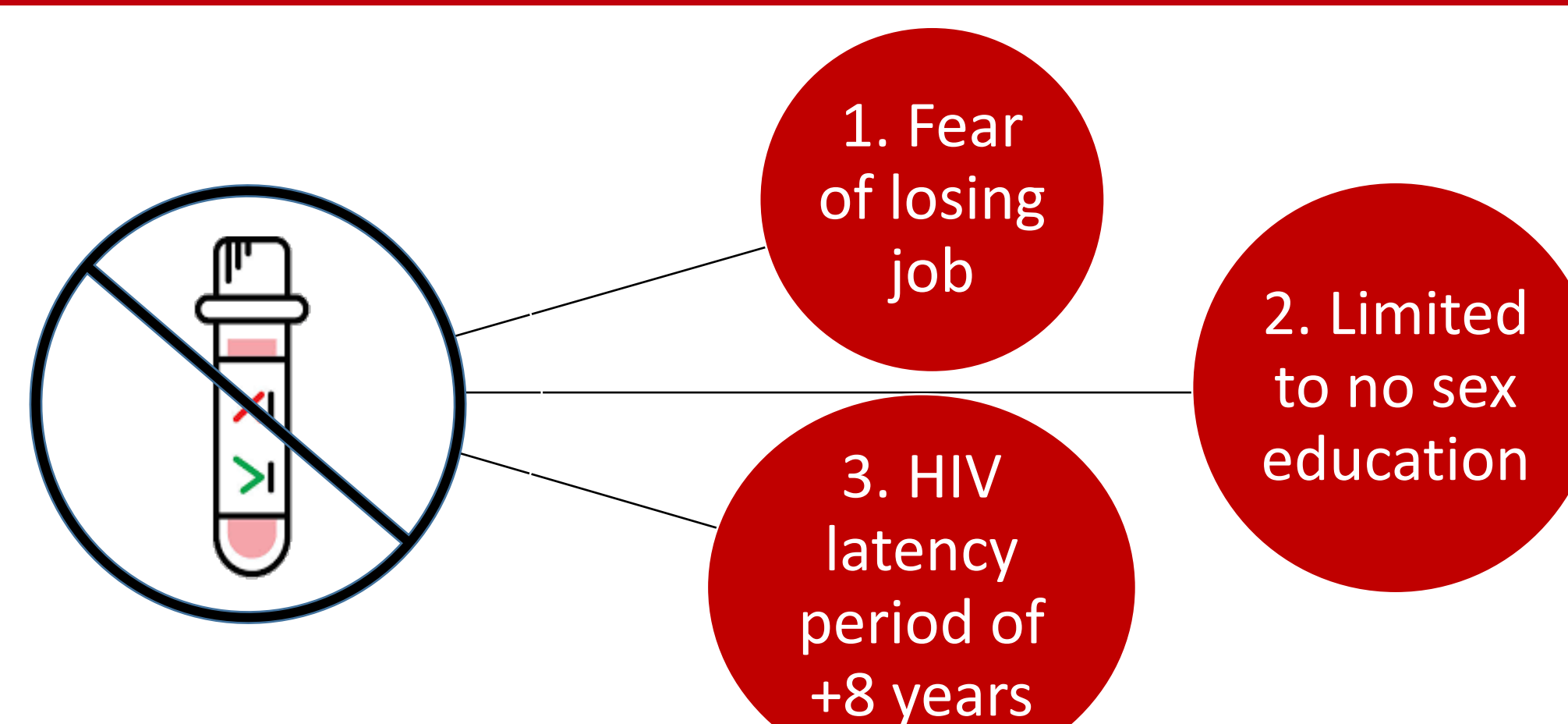


Border Map of Tijuana, Mexico. Includes location pointers for La Zona Roja in Downtown Tijuana

Materials and Methods

A literary review of various research articles through multiple academic databases was conducted. The research focused on HIV transmission factors within FSW environment that lead to HIV+ serostatus, reasons why FSWs were not getting tested, and how the syndemic nature of these factors lead to an increase in depression.

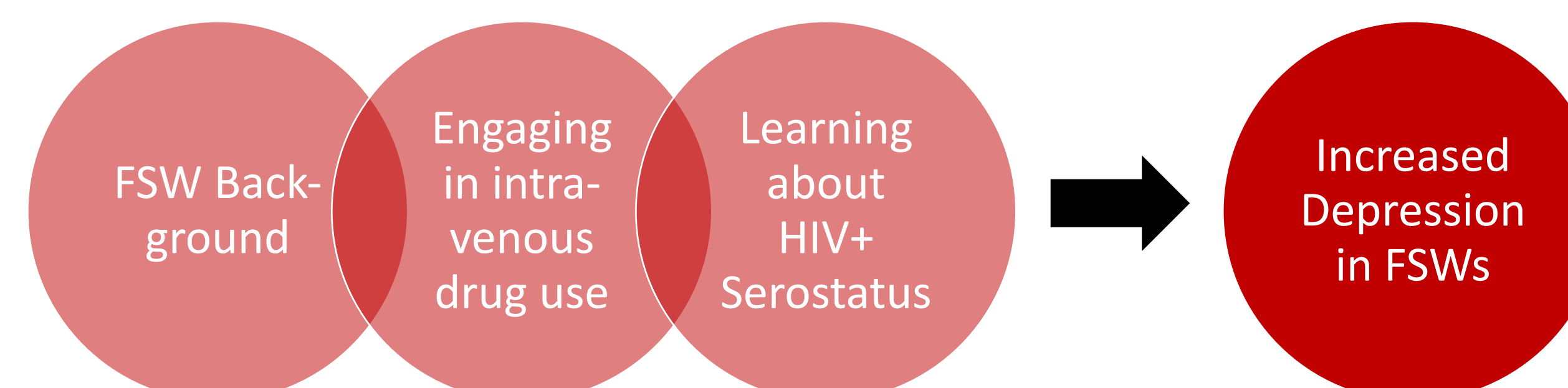
Deterring Reasons for HIV+ Serostatus Testing



HIV+ serostatus: label term for HIV+ individuals

1. The need for "clean workers" & obeying customer demands that include HIV exposing behaviors, causes FSWs to avoid or decline testing in fear that being HIV+ will compromise their job security.
2. FSWs are uneducated on what HIV is, transmission behaviors & available treatments. Therefore, they have no reason to get tested for a disease they have no prior knowledge about.
3. Along with limited education, HIV has a latency period of up to eight years, so these women could be cluelessly transmitting HIV & express no symptoms that indicate the disease is in their body.

Results



All three factors interact with each other in a way that increase rates of depression:

- **FSW Background:**
 - SES & structural inequities cause women to join sex work as an alternative to survive. (inducing mental stress)
 - Research shows FSWs have higher rates of HIV contraction due to their exposure to high-risk work behaviors.
- **Engaging in Intravenous Drug Use:**
 - Research shows that FSWs that utilize injection drugs (to cope with work trauma, depression or addiction) have higher rates of HIV prevalence than FSWs who do not engage in this behavior.
- **Learning about HIV+ Serostatus:**
 - If FSWs do get tested for HIV, learning about their HIV+ serostatus adds stress to their already existing mental health issues

Interventions and Future Directions

Further Depression Research



- Due to limited research on the effects of depression for FSWs living with HIV+ serostatus and drug use in Tijuana, more research needs to be conducted.
- Newfound evidence can be applied to other populations, like other low-income Mexican communities.

Sero-Surveillance & Testing



- Increased sero-surveillance will enhance HIV prevalence and incidence calculations among FSWs
- Clinical interviews during serostatus testing can determine reasons why FSWs are not getting tested.

HIV/Mental Health Awareness & Education



- By tackling negative cultural stigma against HIV & depression, Mexican communities can increase social support for FSWs.
- We need increased sexual & mental health education for FSWs for them to understand what STIs are & how to cope with depression.

Mental Health Resources & Psychiatrists



- More accessibility to mental health therapy, clinics, treatment, etc.
- With increased community support, this will encourage the recruitment of more psychiatrists in Tijuana.
- A mixture of trained Mexican psychiatrists will increase trust & encourage better health behaviors from FSWs.

Conclusion

- Overall, as FSWs participate in intravenous drug use, this leads to increased HIV contraction & HIV+ serostatus.
- These behaviors create a negative environment that enhances the likelihood of depressive symptoms among these women.
- Therefore, more interventions focused on HIV & depression care are needed in La Zona Roja.
- Limitations this study faced?
 - My research is very specific in the route of transmission for HIV, and how learning about serostatus affects FSW mental health → not enough research that focuses specifically on these subjects together

