

African American Prevention Intervention Network

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Research Synthesis

THE EFFECTS OF HIV/AIDS INTERVENTION GROUPS FOR HIGH-RISK WOMEN IN URBAN CLINICS

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Intervention Goal(s): To determine the effects of a small group intervention to promote safer sex and condom use.

Intervention Setting: Waiting room of an STD clinic.

Population: The impact of the intervention was evaluated with a sample of 187 women attending primary health care clinics located in a central city neighborhood of Milwaukee, Wis. in 1991 and 1992. Women between the ages of 18 and 40 years were eligible to participate if they met three criteria for high-risk behavior during the preceding 12 months: multiple male partners, diagnosis of a sexually transmitted disease, or unprotected sex with a high-risk male partner. The mean age of the participants was 29 years; their mean educational level was 11 years; and most (87%) were African-American. Almost all were unemployed.

Intervention Objectives

- \$ To decrease the incidence of unprotected vaginal intercourse.
- \$ To increase the use of condoms.
- \$ To increase knowledge about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention.
- \$ To increase sexual assertiveness and communication skills.
- \$ To improve peer support for change efforts.
- \$ To improve condom use skills.

Description of Intervention: Cognitive-Behavioral Skills Training Groups

The intervention incorporated cognitive-behavioral and risk reduction skills training principles and peer support elements. It consisted of four weekly group sessions, 90 minutes each. There were eight to 10 women in each group. The sessions were conducted in Milwaukee, Wis. by two female group leaders. The sessions provided detailed information about HIV risk and focused on behaviors that increase risk, common misconceptions about AIDS, and steps to reduce the risk of contracting the disease. National and local HIV seroprevalence and epidemiology statistics were summarized to personalize risk situations for the women, including the possibility of encountering an infected partner. Exercises emphasized cognitive-attitudinal areas, behavioral skills, and social factors. Participants role-played initiated discussion of concerns about AIDS and condom use with potential sex partners and resisting sexual pressure from a man whose risk history was unknown or with whom the woman did not want to have sex. Skills-building was a critical component of this intervention. Condom demonstration and practice were provided to desensitize participants to condom use. Also, attention was directed toward recognizing, understanding, and managing one's personal triggers for high-risk behavior.

Evaluation Methods

Each woman was individually assessed by a female assistant using a questionnaire on HIV/AIDS knowledge, personal estimation of risk, and sexual and substance abuse behavior in the three months preceding the assessment as well as a sexual assertiveness and communication skill task. Skill was assessed with four role playing situations scored by a panel of four women raters. After the baseline assessment, the participants were randomly assigned to either the intervention group (100) or to the control group (87). Three months after completing the intervention, the participants completed individually administered follow-up assessments similar to those used at baseline.

Evaluation Findings

Women who participated in the intervention reported a significantly greater increase in condom use with their partners and a significantly greater decrease in their frequency of engaging in unprotected sex than women in the comparison condition.

Source: *Compendium of HIV Prevention Interventions with Evidence of Effectiveness, 1999*, <http://www.healthstrategies.org>. *What Intervention Studies Say About Effectiveness, A Resource for HIV Prevention Community Planning Groups*. Academy for Educational Development. Funding provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention HIV/AIDS Prevention Research Synthesis Project. Atlanta, Ga.

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