

Factors Influencing Condom Use Among African American Women: Implications for Risk Reduction Interventions¹

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Examined factors associated with condom use in a community-based sample of 423 sexually active African American women. Measures were selected to reflect the components in prevailing models of health behavior. Condom users were higher on AIDS health priority, prevention attitudes, stage of change, behavioral intentions, reported more frequent and comfortable sexual communication with partners, perceived greater partner and peer approval for condom use, and reported that peers also used condoms. Women in exclusive relationships evidenced earlier stage of change, lower intentions to use condoms, fewer peers who engaged in preventive behaviors, perceived themselves to have lower risk, and had lower rates of condom use, higher education, and family income. Women in fluid relationships were at particularly high risk, with lower rates of condom use relative to women not in a relationship and greater sexual risk for HIV. Implications for HIV-risk reduction interventions with African American women are discussed.

KEY WORDS: African American; women; condoms; risk reduction; HIV/AIDS.

AIDS and HIV infection disproportionately affect minority women in the United States. In 1993, AIDS incidence rates were 73 per 100,000 among

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Black women, 32 per 100,000 among Hispanic women, and only 5 per 100,000 among White women (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 1994c). The death rate from AIDS for African American women is ten times the rate for White women and AIDS is a leading cause of death among Black women between the ages of 25 to 44 years (CDC, 1994b). Early in the AIDS epidemic, most women contracted HIV infection through injecting drug use, sex work, or transfusions that contained viral contamination. More recently, heterosexual transmission has become the most frequent mode of new HIV infections in women. Heterosexual transmission now accounts for 37% of the new cases of AIDS among women, but only 4% of new cases among men (CDC, 1994c).

Race and ethnicity are not risk factors for HIV transmission, but do reflect social, economic, and cultural disparities that are associated with HIV transmission (CDC, 1994b). Minority women are at greater risk for HIV infection due to higher infection rates among racial and ethnic minorities in the U.S. and greater concentrations of HIV in urban inner-city areas (Dicks, 1994). Because many African American men report multiple risk factors and low rates of condom use (Peterson, Catania, Dolcini, & Faigles, 1993), heterosexual transmission of HIV to African American women is expected to continue increasing for the foreseeable future (Hobfoll, Jackson, Lavin, Britton, & Shepherd, 1993).

Consistent and correct condom use is the most effective way of preventing sexual transmission of HIV for sexually active women who are not in mutually faithful relationships with partners known to be uninfected. Although condoms reduce the risk of HIV transmission during vaginal intercourse by approximately 90% (Trussel, Sturgen, Strickler, & Dominick, 1994), condom use among inner-city African American women remains relatively low (Jemmott & Jemmott, 1991; Kelly et al. 1994). Efforts to increase condom use among African American women may be more effective when they attend to the social, economic, and cultural realities of many African American women's lives and the nature of relationships between men and women in the African American community. Lifelong monogamy among heterosexual couples is rare among the general population (Pinkerton & Abramson, 1993) as well as within the African American community (Fullilove, Fullilove, Haynes, & Gross, 1990). African American women also face formidable barriers in sustaining long-term relationships and trying to adopt measures to prevent HIV infection. For example, African American women are more likely to be poor and to live in inner-city areas with higher prevalences of HIV infection and injection drug use (Sobo, 1993). Violence, racism, incarceration, and lack of economic opportunity reduce the pool of potential African American male partners, increase the value of having a mate, and contribute to male dominance in