

Web-based Survey of HIV and STD Risk Factors among Women Attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the Southeast

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Background/Objective: Recent data indicate that minority women attending HBCUs may be facing an increased risk of acquiring HIV and STIs. To obtain information to guide the development of culturally appropriate and effective HIV prevention programs for young minority women attending HBCUs, we designed and implemented an incentive-driven, Web-based survey. The Web-based survey provided an avenue to evaluate student perceptions, behaviors, and characteristics that could be associated with increased risk of HIV/STD and barriers to HIV testing.

Methods: With funding from the Office on Women's Health, HERMES, LLC, partnered with the North Carolina Central University (NCCU) departments of Student Affairs and Health Education to develop the survey instrument and recruit survey participants. The selection of specific items on our questionnaire was guided by themes and issues we identified through discussions with female students attending HIV outreach programs. The assessment covered the types of health and wellness services (e.g., nutrition, exercise, sexuality, and relationship) that female students between the ages of 18 and 25 value the most and ways to encourage HIV counseling and test-seeking behavior. The target population was minority women between the ages of 18 and 25 enrolled at NCCU. Recruitment strategies included campus newspaper and radio announcements, distribution of flyers and tent cards, solicitation through student organizations, and word-of-mouth promotion during campus events. Each participant provided informed consent and received a \$10 gas credit card for completing the survey. We selected a target nonrandom sample of 1,000 women to ensure a defensible level of precision (95% confidence within 5% of estimates' value). We obtained approval from the NCCU Institutional Review Board and pilot-tested hard copies of the questionnaire and the visual display of the survey on different computer platforms. Using SAS 8.0, we will examine the distribution of the responses to each questionnaire item. We will use contingency tables and calculate chi-square statistics and the 95% confidence intervals to examine responses by subgroups (e.g., age, college rank, major, rural/urban primary residence).

Results: The 727 women participants were more likely to visit a private doctor for HIV/STD testing. Approximately half of survey respondents reported having had 3 or more sexual partners in the school year, being tested for HIV, and using condoms at the last sexual encounter. Women for whom religion is important or who had peer support were the least likely to report having more than 3 sexual partners ($P < 0.001$). Having received information on HIV and STDs from student health and counseling did not influence the number of sexual partners or increase condom use during the last sexual encounter.

Conclusion: The results highlight the relative value of condom promotion versus preaching abstinence among college-aged students on campus. This is the first time we have used a Web-based instrument to gather sensitive data from students at this HBCU. The results identified women's health needs and concerns and knowledge and attitudes towards HIV and HIV-related behaviors, and they support the continued use of peer education and gender-specific HIV prevention strategies.

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