

# Love Your Man, Love Yourself: HIV Prevention for Women with Incarcerated Partners

Olga Grinstead, Ph.D., MPH, UCSF Center for AIDS Prevention Studies

## INTRODUCTION

We conducted focus groups and cross sectional surveys to learn more about HIV risk among women visiting incarcerated men. Based on this research we developed a peer-led HIV education and support intervention named “Love Your Man, Love Yourself”.

### WHAT LED US TO WOMEN VISITORS?

- Findings and anecdotes from our inmate intervention studies
- Battle, et al. (1995) found 22% of women in community sample had an incarcerated partner
- Increasing HIV infections among women
- Access to women at the prison visiting center

### LESSONS FROM INMATE PROGRAMS

- Most inmates have a primary female partner
- Most have unprotected intercourse with her immediately after release
- Over half of inmates have injected drugs
- Sexual and needle-sharing risk occurs regularly inside prison
- Their female partners in the community
  - Don’t believe that men are at risk
  - Don’t want to hear about risk behavior inside
  - Are offended by suggestion of condom use

### LEARNING ABOUT WOMEN PARTNERS

- Accessed women through visiting center
- Focus groups in 1994
- Cross-sectional surveys in 1997, 1998
- Love Your Man, Love Yourself peer-led HIV education program 1996–2000

## LESSONS FROM FOCUS GROUPS

- Had basic HIV information but misinformed about specific prison policies
- Didn’t see themselves as at risk because they were monogamous
- Willing to participate in programs at the visiting center

### CROSS-SECTIONAL SURVEYS 1997, 1998

- 150 women sampled each year
- Questions included demographics, attitudes and service utilization
- Majority were low-income (< \$25K/year) women of color
- Most were visiting an intimate partner

### “LOVE YOUR MAN, LOVE YOURSELF” PEER-LED HIV EDUCATION PROGRAM

- Recruited and trained peer educators
- Developed single session, small group intervention based on focus group and cross-sectional survey data
- One-on-one outreach, resource fairs, referrals, condom distribution
- Evaluation 1998–1999: Survey before, immediately after, and one month after intervention

### INTERVENTION ACTIVITIES

Two to five women participated in each intervention group; groups were offered twice a week. Peer educators gave a 15 minute talk on HIV prevention using posters and other materials they had developed. Condom demonstrations were offered. Educators led a discussion about specific HIV risk and risk reduction plans.

## WHY THIS INTERVENTION?

- Peer educators provide relevant information from a credible source
- Peer education works well in unique contexts
- Small group intervention promotes community building and dissemination of HIV prevention information

### EVALUATION PARTICIPANTS (N=79)

- Evaluation participants were 51% African-American, 14% Latina, 23% White, 5% Asian/ Pacific Islander and 6% Other
- Their median age was 30
- 43% had at least some college/vocational school
- 70% were raising children

### BASELINE SURVEY RESPONSES

- In general, are men more likely to get infected with HIV in prison than on the outside?
  - Yes (18%), No (60%), Don’t Know (19%)
- Is your man more likely to get infected with HIV in prison than on the outside?
  - Yes (9%), No (89%), Don’t Know (2%)
- 74% of women in the evaluation study were in a sexual relationship with the man they were visiting
- 53% were married or engaged to the man they were visiting
- 44% said that their partner had been incarcerated for more than half of their relationship

### FOLLOW-UP SURVEY RESPONSES

- Over 90% of evaluation study participants were surveyed one month after intervention
- 54% said they learned new information in the intervention
- 82% had talked to another person about what they learned; 73% to another woman, 31% to their incarcerated partner

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Peer educators can be recruited and retained
- Program increased relevant knowledge
- Information was shared with other women at the prison and in the community, and with incarcerated partners
- Visiting center is effective way to reach women who may be at risk for HIV

### PROGRAM/POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Address denial of risk with information, empathy and support
- Provide childcare, food and incentives to increase recruitment and retention
- Use models, materials and examples relevant to women with incarcerated partners
- Visitors should be provided with accurate and relevant information about HIV risks in prison
- Prison visiting can and should be used as an opportunity for women’s and children’s programs

## SUMMARY

Women with incarcerated partners are vulnerable to HIV. Prison visiting is a program opportunity. Population specific programs and materials are urgently needed. Both individual and policy change are needed to reduce HIV risk in this population

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