

Primary Prevention

Project ÒRÉ

ÒRÉ is a Yoruba [an African language] word meaning friends

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Project Description: Project ÒRÉ is a randomized, controlled trial of a friendship-based HIV intervention for young African American women aged 14-18. The project is funded by the Adolescent Trials Network (ATN), a national network funded through NIH and focused on adolescents and HIV. Project ÒRÉ is based on prior research in a San Francisco community and is now being conducted at CBOs in four communities in SF. ÒRÉ identified young women in each community who then recruited their friends to come to the group intervention. Groups are made up of 3 to 6 youth: just the close friends. We recruited 15-17 groups at each site.

There are two intervention and two control sites. The control intervention is a general health program delivered the same way (through friendship groups) with a focus on exercise and nutrition. The HIV/STD intervention is a half-day (5 hours) intervention. There is a strong focus on using the energy of friendship groups-- friends protecting friends to influence behavior change. The intervention presents HIV prevention education, skills building and condom use and ties it in to local and cultural issues.

Significance: African American adolescents living in inner cities are vulnerable to the threat of HIV due to the higher prevalence of STDs/HIV in their communities. In San Francisco, adolescents in Bayview Hunters Point district have the highest rates of STD infection. Typically, adolescent prevention programs have focused on changing peer norms (and thus behavior), but little attention is given to the myriad of subgroups that exist in the adolescent population. Such interventions have been delivered to a group of adolescents as a whole, failing to utilize naturally occurring social groups as a vehicle for program implementation.

Interesting Findings: Fifteen African American adolescents residing in an urban neighborhood participated in individual in-depth qualitative interviews. The findings suggest that close friends play a critical role in the dating and sexual behaviors of inner-city African American adolescents, as they appear to serve as socializing agents that impact how adolescents conceptualize and socially construct dating and sexual roles and behaviors. Close friends also play a significant role in acquiring new dating and sexual partners and in determining the course of dating and sexual relationships. Although females and males expressed similar expectations regarding sexual fidelity and condom use, they differed with regard to their method and process of talking with friends about dating and sex, their shared social constructions about dating and sexual roles and expectations, and their perceptions of the meaning of dating. (Harper GW, Gannon C, Watson SG, Catania JA, Dolcini MM. The role of close friends in African American adolescents' dating and sexual behavior. *J Sex Res.* 2004 Nov;41(4):351-62.)