

Intervention for African American MSM Who Do Not Identify as Gay

Project Staff: Susan Kegeles, PI; Carla Dillard Smith, Co-PI; Don Operario, Michael Benjamin and Emily Arnold, Co-investigators.

Project Description: Creating effective HIV prevention interventions for African American men who have sex with men (MSM) is among the most urgent priorities for the public health community. Among those at highest risk for HIV are African American MSM who identify as heterosexual. Through formative research (focus groups and individual interviews) and input from members of this group and community gatekeepers, this project will develop a culturally and gender-appropriate intervention tailored to the needs of these men. The study will compare an enhanced HIV prevention intervention, which involves HIV counseling and testing plus a series of individual health promotion/risk reduction counseling sessions, relative to a standard program involving HIV counseling, testing and referral to general case management services.

The enhanced health promotion counseling sessions will address:

- 1) Recognizing the risks involved with one's sexual behavior, with respect to male and female sex partners
- 2) Determining ways to reduce sexual risk-taking with male and female sex partners
- 3) Learning about one's cognitive justifications for risk-taking and generating plans to lower risk behavior.

A sample of 100 African American heterosexual-identified MSM (het-MSM) will be recruited from the San Francisco Bay Area. This is a pilot study to examine issues regarding recruitment, maintenance of a cohort, reactions to intervention protocol and impact on sexual risk behavior over time. Hence, all het-MSM will be provided HIV counseling and testing and the enhanced intervention. All participants will complete baseline, immediate-post and 3-month post-intervention behavioral risk assessments using an audio computer-assisted interview (ACASI). A subset of participants will also complete post-intervention qualitative interviews to provide in-depth experiential insight into the intervention process. Through outcome and process evaluation we will measure and describe behavioral outcomes of the enhanced intervention, as well as develop plans for a larger-scale randomized control HIV intervention trial for this group of men.

This work is a collaboration between the California Prevention and Education Project (CalPEP) in Oakland, CA, CAPS and Oxford University. Our team works out of a shared understanding that service providers, researchers, and community members must work together to create solutions that can mitigate the spread of HIV/AIDS in the African American community.

Significance: Very little is known about het-MSM, although there has been a great deal of discussion about "Black men on the down low" in the literature. The formative research has refined our understanding on who het-MSM are, their psychosocial issues and their risk behavior. African American MSM in general have been highly impacted by HIV, with disproportionate levels of HIV infection, HIV-related illnesses and mortality rates due to HIV/AIDS among these men. Several research studies indicate that many African American MSM do not identify themselves as gay or bisexual, or have any identity at all regarding their sexual behavior with men and consequently may not perceive themselves at risk for HIV, undergo HIV testing, utilize HIV prevention services or disclose their sexual behaviors to others.

Project End Date: 2008