

RAP* Time



RURAL CENTER *for* AIDS/STD PREVENTION

A JOINT PROJECT OF
INDIANA UNIVERSITY, PURDUE UNIVERSITY,
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*Rural AIDS/STD prevention. rap (rap) v. *Slang*. To talk freely and openly. Vol. 7, No. 9, September 5, 2003

Three-quarters of young, sexually active women underestimate their STD risk

Sexually transmitted diseases are a significant public health problem for young women. Over 15 million new cases of STD occur yearly in the U.S., with women experiencing the greatest prevalence of medical complications.

Most research on STD infection focuses on the highest risk populations, such as clinic samples, sex workers, and injecting drug users. Other samples have often been neglected by researchers. The purpose of this study was to describe the frequency of STD-related risk behaviors and attitudes among student and non-student women.

Methodology

Data were taken from the baseline survey of an intervention trial. Women were surveyed by telephone using Computer Assisted Telephone Interview software after obtaining verbal consent.

The 20-minute interview assessed demographic characteristics, risk behaviors and condom-related norms, attitudes and behaviors. Perceived risk of contracting an STD was measured with two items. Women eligible for the study were ages 18-25, unmarried, heterosexually active in the

prior 6 months, and not in a long-term exclusive relationship. The frequency of an relative contribution of risk behavior to unprotected vaginal sex were compared among non-full-time students (n=711) and full-time students (n=390).

Outcomes of the Study

Major findings include:

- More than 75% of all the women surveyed believed they were at low risk for acquiring an STD in the next year even though most were having unprotected sex. Some of the women did not perceive STDs as a "big deal" and were desensitized to the risk of STDs.
- For both groups, women were more likely to report unprotected sex if they reported using hormonal or not having a usual method of contraception, not having bought or carried condoms in the past 3 months, and that their partners did not think it was important to use condoms.
- For both groups, older women were about two times more likely than younger women to have had unprotected sex.
- Students reporting having a primary partner were almost four

times more likely to have had unprotected sex than those not having a primary partner.

- In non-student women, binge drinking was significantly associated with unprotected sex. This association was not found for the student group.

Implications for Prevention

STD risk behaviors were prevalent and had similar associations with unprotected sexual behavior in both subsamples. Older age, using hormonal or no usual contraception, and having a "primary" partner increased unprotected sex. Partner approval of the use of condoms and having bought or carried condoms decreased unprotected sex.

The long-term consequences of STD infection make it important that health care systems counsel women to increase the accuracy of risk perceptions, and encourage them to purchase and carry condoms.

SOURCE: Yarnall, K. S. H., et al. (2003). Factors associated with condom use among at-risk women students and nonstudents in managed care. *Preventive Medicine*, 37, 163-170.

HIV+ rural individuals feel responsibility to disclose status

It is important that HIV-positive individuals disclose their HIV status in order to decrease the number of new infections as well as to prevent co-morbid infections. This study investigated the extent to which HIV positive persons perceived themselves to have a responsibility to disclose their HIV status to sexual partners, rates of participation in high risk behaviors, and prevalence of actual HIV status disclosures among 353 HIV-infected persons receiving care at a mental health clinic.

Two-thirds of the sample were men, and over one-half identified as African American. Two-thirds of participants perceived themselves to have a responsibility to disclose their status to sexual partners, yet a large proportion reported unprotected sexual intercourse. Those from rural areas perceived a higher responsibility to disclose than those from urban areas. Higher perceived responsibility was predictive of actual disclosure.

SOURCE: Reece, M., & Smith, D. B. (2003). When to ask? when to tell? Perceived responsibility to disclose HIV status to sexual partners. *The Health Education Monograph Series*, 20, 54-59.

Early onset of douching associated with high-risk behavior

Vaginal douching has been associated with a number of potentially severe, adverse health outcomes, such as pelvic inflammatory disease, ectopic pregnancy and a susceptibility to a wide range of sexually transmitted diseases.

This study explored factors that are associated with early onset of vaginal douching among a sample of women aged 14-64 from seven primary care clinics. The mean age of the participants was 27.9 years, and over one-half of the sample self-identified as black.

Three-quarters reported ever using vaginal douching products. The most common reason given was to feel good and fresh. One in five believed that douching killed germs that cause infections and one in four agreed that women believe douching prevents pregnancy. Early onset of douching was associated with false beliefs about douching and early sexual debut.

The finding that douching is associated with high-risk sexual behaviors supports the need for further research on douching practices of young girls and women.

SOURCE: Oh, K. et al. (2003). Early onset of vaginal douching is associated with false beliefs and high-risk behavior. *Sexually transmitted diseases*, 30, 689-693.

New STDs occur in about one of nine of HIV-infected patients

The rate of new STDs among HIV infected patients from STD clinics between 1993 and 1998 was studied. 14% of men and 12% of women were diagnosed with an STD after their initial HIV diagnosis, suggesting continued exposure of HIV to others. More intensive screening and counseling interventions need to focus on STD prevention among HIV+ is necessary.

SOURCE: Erbelding, E. J. et al. (2003). New sexually transmitted diseases in HIV-infected patients: Markers for ongoing transmission behavior. *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes*, 33, 247-252.

HIV and cervical cancer linked

Cervical pap smears from 4119 Senegalese women were analyzed for HPV, HIV, and CD4+ cell counts. One of HIV+ women were infected with high risk HPV, compared to 15% of HIV- women.

SOURCE: Hawes, S. E. (2003). Increased risk of high-grade cervical squamous intraepithelial lesions and invasive cervical cancer among African American women with Human Immunodeficiency Virus Type 1 and 2 infections. *Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 188, 555-563.

RAP Time is a monthly AIDS/STD prevention bulletin published by the Rural Center for AIDS/STD Prevention (RCAP) at Indiana University, Bloomington. RCAP is a joint project of Indiana University, Purdue University and Texas A&M University. The major focus of RCAP is the promotion of HIV/STD prevention in rural America, with the goal of reducing HIV/STD incidence.

The opinions expressed here do not necessarily represent those of the cooperating universities.

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