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Abused Women of Color: Sex Education as a Crisis Intervention
Principal Investigator: Curtis Wadlington
Blacks Educating Blacks About Sexual Health Issues (BEBASHI)
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Grant Amount \$19,963

BEBASHI's Women and AIDS Project has, since 1985, worked closely with several other related agencies and programs to provide needed services to abused women of color. This AmFAR-funded project is one of seven different components of the BEBASHI outreach strategy for this population. Because of the high HIV transmission risk and many other problems confronting abused women of color, BEBASHI has designed a video module for AIDS education whose images emerge from the experience of this population and which is sensitive to the special needs of these women. Formative research, including focus groups, was used to construct 3 scripts which, once in video format, are being added to the existing intervention curriculum. A comparison study between women receiving the project intervention and women receiving traditional intervention will determine if knowledge differences are impacted by the specialized video intervention.

The long range goals of the full, 7 component strategy are the development of the video module, a full HIV/STD curriculum for abuse shelters, a resource base covering related issues for the Philadelphia community of professionals working in the field of domestic violence, and the empowerment of these women to discuss factual sexual issues and advocate for their own risk reduction.

Important project activities and/or findings to date:

In the assessment stage of the project, a committee consisting of domestic violence program professionals was assembled. This committee helped create questions that are used with focus groups to document common domestic experiences. These questions were then used in BEBASHI staff-facilitated focus groups, and the responses were audio taped. The audio tapes were transcribed and given to a professional script writer. The script writer created six vignettes based on the tapes. The six tapes were evaluated by the advisory committee. Three vignettes most reflective of the typical domestic survivor's experiences were chosen for production. Professional actors were secured to portray vignette characters. Villanova University drama and film students filmed the production in their University studio.

Principal Investigator's Comments:

I did not anticipate the following:

- "The expense of employing a professional script writer."
- "The expense of employing professional actors."
- "The additional amount of time that would be allotted for coordination time when working with several agencies."

I learned that:

- "When planning a lengthy project, a less stringent time schedule should be used. Cold weather brought snow, illness and other problems (frozen pipes, lack of heat) and caused cancellations and rescheduling of focus groups."
- "We should have planned a larger budget that would have allotted more funds for the hiring of professional technicians and courtesy expenses (refreshments for focus groups and perhaps car fare and other tokens of appreciation)."

Prevention of HIV Transmission Among Couples in Harlem

Principal Investigator: Wafaa El-Sadr, MD

Harlem Hospital Center

New York, New York

Grant Amount \$49,459

The AIDS epidemic has had a devastating impact on the Harlem community including its women and children. The women are at significant risk for acquiring HIV infection either through sexual transmission or drug use. The acquisition of HIV infection by the women is responsible for the ever-increasing number of newborn infants with HIV infection in Harlem. AmFAR funding is used in this project to combat the devastating effects of HIV on the Harlem community, with a special focus on women and children. The project is a pilot program, whose goal is the prevention of HIV transmission among HIV status-discordant couples in which the male is seropositive and the female is seronegative.

The intervention includes individual, couple and group support sessions, the development of caring assertiveness and a sense of social responsibility among the men and a sense of community among the women. The impact of the program will be evaluated using a variety of measures, but ultimately will be based on the maintenance of the seronegative status of the women. The success level of this program will indicate its potential as a model for similar interventions in other communities where women are at significant risk for HIV infection.

Important project activities and/or findings to date:

Twenty couples (HIV positive men, HIV negative women) were recruited from the Harlem community and agreed to participate in the program; ten couples served as controls. An instrument was utilized to determine the level of AIDS knowledge and the nature of sexual and drug-related risk behavior. This instrument was administered prior to and at regular intervals during the program. A program includes individual, couple and group counseling. Support was developed with the emphasis on maintaining confidentiality, developing trust between the participants and staff and care assertiveness among the couples. Methods of reporting sexual and drug-using activity and its characteristics (whether safe or unsafe) were developed including a confidential diary system, mailed postcards and telephone messages to the staff.

Principal Investigator's Comments:

I did not anticipate:

- "That referrals of couples who were HIV positive females and HIV negative males would outnumber couples consisting of HIV positive males and HIV negative females."
- "The extent to which the individual providing the intervention phase of the study would be bombarded by the multiplicity of the couples' psycho-social needs."
- "The emotional drain caused by the rapid pace of the study and attempt to address the couples' social needs. This necessitated the development of stress management for providers."

I learned about:

- "The development of systematic data collection for enormous amounts of data generated from the study."
- "More effective administration of assessment tools by training interviews in a standardized fashion."
- "Soliciting in-kind services, products and donations to provide incentives to study participants."

Women United for Women at Risk

Principal Investigator: Dazon Dixon

SISTERLOVE: Women's AIDS Project

Atlanta, Georgia

Grant Amount \$45,800

This project is a response by SISTERLOVE to the disproportionate rate of HIV infection among black women, who represent 52% of female AIDS cases. Atlanta ranks 10th for reported AIDS cases in cities of 500,000 or more people. SISTERLOVE seeks to counter the heavy impact of AIDS and HIV infection in Atlanta and areas throughout the State of Georgia.

With AmFAR funding, SISTERLOVE is addressing the specific needs of black women at risk by establishing a coalition of 5 education and service agencies to provide appropriate interventions. Coalition member representatives will jointly engage in the project planning and implementation. The representatives will identify and recruit 20 facilitators who are members/clients of the coalition agencies. The facilitators will be trained to provide one-to-one and group counseling to promote HIV risk-reduction behavior. These facilitators will then provide intervention services to 200 women recruited for the project.

Evaluation will consist of an efficacy comparison between the one-on-one and group intervention formats, focusing on measures of behavior, but including measures of other factors such as self-esteem and self-assertiveness.

Important project activities and/or findings to date:

Several of the women trained as facilitators created their own unique methods of outreach to women in their own communities. For example, in the public housing sector, three facilitators, (one of whom can neither read nor write and another is HIV +), utilize a "street-team" approach with "familiar folk" to recruit women into their groups.

Principal Investigator's Comments

I never thought that:

- "The difference between one-on-one and group counseling would be as dramatic as it is."
- "The number of women who responded to the initial call would be much greater than we expected."
- "We would be able to actually complete the project within our budget."

I learned that:

- "The communities of women feel our work is long overdue, and they have been starving for this kind of support and attention."
- "Literacy levels play a major role in determining the success of evaluation. While I have great facilitators, lack of an ability to read makes information a unique difficulty."
- "For HIV+ facilitators, there is a positive response to "coming out" about their status, and to participating in more AIDS-related activities. (This removes feelings of isolation.)"

Peer Education/Leadership Project for Women at Risk

Principal Investigator: P. Catlin Fullwood

People of Color Against AIDS Network (POCAAN)

Seattle, Washington

Grant Amount \$50,000

As of February, 1990, Seattle-King County had 1,207 cases of AIDS. Whereas, only one year prior, people of color represented 7% of King County's AIDS cases, they represent 11% of this recent figure. Seroprevalence data indicate a growing disproportionality in seropositivity. As in many other settings, women of color in King County are at risk for HIV infection for reasons which include drug use behavior and sexual contact with IV drug using partners, a lack of clear information on HIV provided in a culturally relevant manner, and diminished self-efficacy and self-determination due to a variety of factors. Women currently represent 2% of the AIDS cases in Seattle-King County.

This project provides educational outreach in a culturally relevant manner which includes peer support for behavior change. AmFAR funds make possible the identification, recruitment and training of peer educators from a number of targeted groups: women involved in crack/cocaine activity and/or gangs, young single mothers, women involved in prostitution and/or IV drug use and sexual partners of men at risk. Through the development of a core of peer educators recruited from these settings, on-going peer education, skills-building and support will be provided to women of color across races and lifestyles. Impact evaluation will be conducted through pre- and post-treatment data collection on knowledge, skill and behavior change.

Important project activities and/or findings to date:

The peer educators have received intensive training in AIDS/HIV and local resources that are available. Peer educators maintain relationships with women they talk to and are able to support them in making changes and refer them to appropriate resources.

Principal Investigator's Comments:

I never thought that:

- "Youth would request more information and resources."
- "Women would want to include their partners in education efforts."
- "People in the community would request peer educators to work within their own subgroups."

I learned that:

- "Women with low self-esteem feel powerless to negotiate condom use with their partners."
- "Many women don't consider oral sex a risk."
- "Women do not believe that their husbands and permanent partners can put them at risk."