

MULTI-LEVEL PREVENTION IN CULTURE AND CONTEXT WITH LATINO MSM

PI: Diane Binson

CO-PIs: LeRoy Blea and William J. Woods

CO-I: Margery Lazarus

PROJECT STAFF: Robert Siedle-Khan, Project Director; Gabriel A. Ortiz and Mateo Rutherford, Interviewers.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

We are in the process of evaluating data of an HIV prevention program for Latino men who have sex with men (MSM) who do not self-identify as gay (MSM/NG). The project relies on an established community collaborative relationship between CAPS and the City of Berkeley, CA AIDS Office, Department of Public Health. To evaluate the program we used both a survey and qualitative questions.

The goals for this project are to:

- 1) Design a program in dialogue with the target community of Latino MSM/NG to ensure a culturally sensitive, multi-level approach that will address critical aspects of HIV prevention both for the individual and for the environment of public places where sex takes place.
- 2) Implement a 2-month program for the individual by providing multiple, one-on-one intensive conversations about the participant's social support system. The conversations were recorded and played back at the second sessions to help participants assess what kinds of changes they wanted to make in their lives to ensure their health and safe behaviors. The third session assessed how the participant's plan for change worked and developed strategies for ways to ensure success.
- 3) Conduct an evaluation of the program by administering a survey to 100 men just prior to their participation in the program and a follow-up interview 3 months after the last intervention session.
- 4) Throughout the developmental phase of the intervention, we conducted qualitative interviews to evaluate the process of crafting an intervention and continued conducting interviews through the implementation stages. All providers were interviewed at multiple junctures of the developmental and implementation phases.

SIGNIFICANCE

MSM have been and continue to be one of the demographic groups most affected by HIV in the US, especially in California. The impact of HIV disease on Latinos in the US is particularly severe, as Latinos account for 19% of AIDS cases while representing only 13% of the population. In Berkeley, CA, census data show that Latinos comprise 10% of the population, yet 18% of the HIV+ persons identified at publicly funded HIV test sites in the city; over 70% of these are MSM. It is critical to address the growing epidemic among Latino MSM in a way that takes into account the considerable challenges of providing HIV prevention services for this population.

INTERESTING FINDINGS

In Northern California, 62 Spanish-speaking Latino men were recruited in venues where men go to meet other men for sex and through networks of similar men who frequented these venues. Venues included gay bars, straight bars where men go to find male sex partners, parks, adult book stores, and a bathhouse. Most of the men migrated to the US from Mexico (66%) and other Latin American countries (32%). For many men, sexual silence started from childhood experiences of sex with older men, affecting their experience of difference and communication with their families about their sexual desires at odds with familial expectations. In their search for sexual partners, men chose venues that could signal their interest without demanding an overt expression of sexual identity. In "straight" venues, men communicated sexual interest through body language and ritualized exchanges that did not jeopardize their public expression of a male sexual identity. In mixed venues with both straight and gay-identified men, men relied on trusted networks of men who they confided their preferences, plus non-verbal communication of their interests. In families, some men initiated the erosion of sexual silence by confiding their preference to a trusted sibling or parent. (excerpted from *"Situational Gay Identity, Sexual Silence, and HIV Prevention among Latino Men who have Sex with Men."* Presented at the National HIV Prevention Conference, December 2007)