HIV Prevention Interventions Targeting Asian Masseuses

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Project Description: Health Project for Asian Women (HPAW) is a four year community-level intervention study funded by NIDA. This study will identify and describe drug use and HIV-related behaviors among Asian female sex workers at massage parlors (Asian masseuses) in San Francisco. The study will also conduct an exploratory intervention and evaluate the efficacy of the intervention modalities (Massage Parlor Owner Education Program and Peer/Professional Counseling Program) by addressing the determinants of the HIV-related risk behaviors in the cognitive and sociocultural contexts among the targeted Vietnamese and other Asian masseuses. This study is a community-based research project which has been developed in collaboration with API-focused AIDS service organizations.

Significance: This is the first HIV intervention study targeting Asian female sex workers at massage parlors in the US, a difficult to reach population that has been neglected by HIV/AIDS and drug abuse prevention efforts. Ignorance and myths about this population are prevalent in the US as well as in Asian communities. First, there are still persistent stereotypical views on Asians: Asians are model minorities who achieve higher education, get professional jobs, and have relatively little trouble with drugs, violence, and crime. Second, despite the high rate of increase in AIDS cases among APIs in the US and a formidable explosion of AIDS cases in Asian countries, HIV prevention issues among Asians in this country have not been taken seriously. Third, studies targeting ethnic minorities are costly and face a number of barriers to conduct “rigorous” research. Last, Asian masseuses are discriminated against because of their race, gender, occupation, and immigrant status.

Interesting Findings: Currently, in San Francisco there are approximately 23 massage parlors that employ Asian women as masseuses. Based on focus groups, we have found that Asian masseuses have been engaging in culturally-specific HIV-related drug use and sexual risk behaviors and have been exposed to high-risk environments that are unique to them. For example, the majority of masseuses are immigrants from Vietnam and other Asian countries who lack English language skills to negotiate safe sex with customers. Asian masseuses often engage in unsafe sex with customers because of the economic pressure to support family members in their home countries, to pay gambling and other debts, and to support their drug habits. This information has served in designing an intervention, in which procedures, curriculum, and measurements are culturally and occupationally appropriate to the targeted massage parlor owners and Asian masseuses.

Project Recruitment Dates: Now until April 30, 2005
Project End Date: June 30, 2005