EFFECTS OF AN AIDS EDUCATION PROGRAM ON THE KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES OF LOW INCOME BLACK AND LATINA WOMEN

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to test the effects of an AIDS education program on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of low income black and Latina women. A pretest-posttest nonequivalent control group design was used with a 2-3 month retest of the experimental group. The sample consisted of 506 experimental and 206 control group women who were clients of the Public Health Foundation’s Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children in Los Angeles County. The program included a slide-tape presentation, and educational and resource brochures in English and Spanish. Knowledge, attitudes, and sexual and drug use practices were measured using a structured questionnaire that was developed in English and Spanish. Content validity and reliability of the questionnaire were established. A 2-way repeated measures ANOVA examined differences in pretest-posttest knowledge, attitudes, and practices for experimental and control groups and for both racial/ethnic groups. The experimental group made significant gains over the control group on pretest-posttest measures of knowledge and attitudes. Both experimental and control groups made significant changes in practice. Changes in knowledge were retained on retest; changes in practices came close to significance on retest. Blacks and Latinas differed on pretest knowledge and attitudes but not practices. Blacks had more knowledge and positive attitudes on pretest. However, posttest improvements for both knowledge and attitudes were greater in Latinas than in blacks. A multiple regression analysis revealed that the best predictors of knowledge, attitudes and practices were racial/ethnic group, education, and religion. It is concluded that a didactic audio visual program can positively affect the knowledge and possibly the practices of participants and that these are retained over time but that changes in attitudes will take further efforts.
INTRODUCTION

Recently, attention has been focused on the disproportionate occurrence of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) among black and Latino populations, especially in urban areas.\(^1,2,3,4\) Although blacks and Latinos account for about 18% of the total population of the United States, they make up almost 40% of all AIDS cases nationwide.\(^5\) Blacks represent 12% of the total population but 26% of AIDS cases; Latinos represent 6% of the population but 13% of AIDS cases.\(^6,7\) The ethnic differences, however, are even more stark among women and children. Among U.S. women with AIDS about 54% are black and 16% are Latina; 55% of children with AIDS are black and 20% are Latino.\(^8\) Black and Latina women are at risk of contracting AIDS through intravenous drug abuse and through sexual contact with males who are HIV infected, both IV drug abusers and bisexuals.\(^6,7,8\)

Blacks and Latinos may be at greater risk than whites because of less knowledge of AIDS and fewer available health resources. Education programs as well as health services are necessary to prevent the spread of AIDS. However, education and prevention programs may not be effective in reaching minority populations unless specifically designed for these groups.\(^6\) Targeted programs are needed for blacks and Latinos to prevent transmission of HIV through IV drug abuse, sexual contact, and perinatal exposure. The purpose of this study was to test the effects of culturally relevant AIDS education programs on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of low income black and Latina women in Los Angeles County.

Risks in Minority Communities. In minority communities, AIDS particularly affects male and female intravenous drug users (IVDUs), their sexual partners and children.\(^6,9\) About 25% of all AIDS cases involve IVDUs.\(^9\) Recent data have identified poor inner city residents as a subgroup at highest risk. Among women with AIDS who are IVDUs or sexual partners of IVDUs, the ethnic/racial breakdown is 74% black, 80% Latina, and 52% white.\(^2\) In addition, IV drug use is a major contributing factor in the perinatal transmission of AIDS. Among children with AIDS the proportion whose mothers or mothers’ sex partners are IVDUs is 62% black, 72% Latino, and 31% white.\(^2\)

Another possible threat to minority communities comes from the spread of the virus to the heterosexual population by bisexuals. Several reports have suggested that many blacks and Latinos who engage in homosexual activity are bisexual.\(^1,5,4,8,10,11\) The Centers for Disease Control