HIV Risk Behaviors and Avoidance Strategies Among Low-Income African American Female Youth in Alabama

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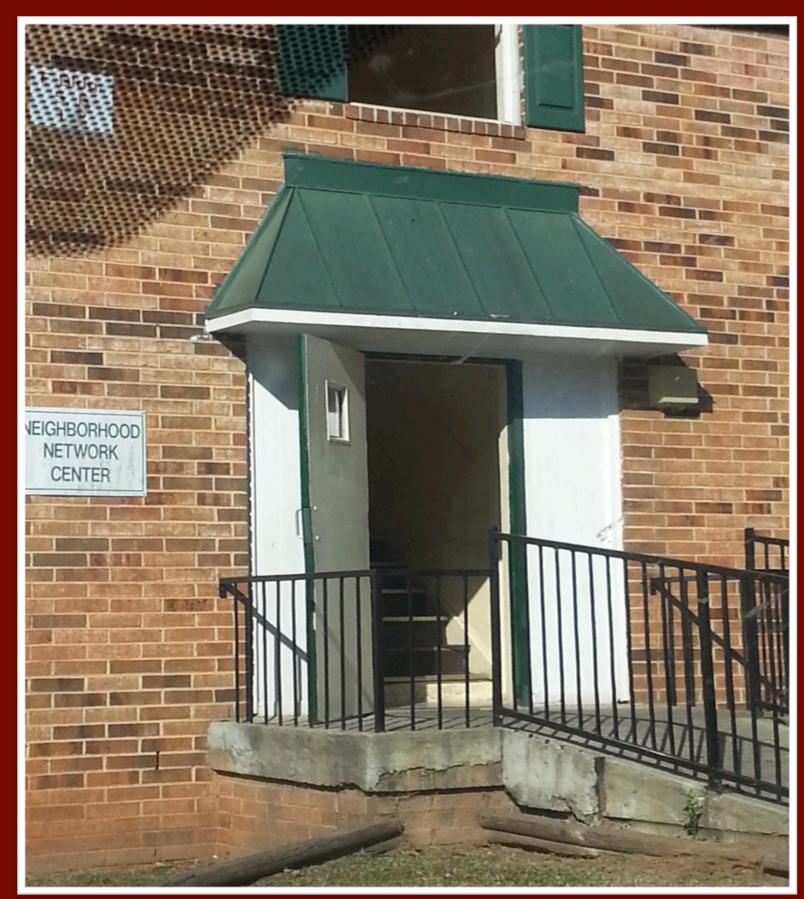### *Department of Anthropology, The University of Alabama*

BACKGROUND

- Sexual activity among adolescents is decreasing.
- However, condom use among African American high school teens has declined – particularly in low-income minority communities of the Southeast.
- This lack of condom use puts African American females at greater risk of STDs – particularly HIV.
- Objectives of Study:
  - discover cultural understandings of HIV risk;
  - determine risky and protective behaviors in a low-income community;
  - inform future HIV/STI prevention programs in Alabama.
- Results show that broader socio-ecological issues related to low socio-economic status contribute to higher HIV/STI risk among Southern African American teenage girls.

METHODS

- Phase IA: Aug. 2013 - Feb. 2014
  - Data Collection Methods: Field Notes and In-Depth Interviews
  - Participants: convenience sample of 14-18 year old African American adolescent female youth (n=10)
  - Field Setting: The Hope Center, a support facility located in a low income, predominately African American community
  - Data Analysis: transcription and analysis through thematic coding and grounded theory
- Phase IB: March – May 2014
  - Data Collection Methods: follow up focus groups (n=2)
  - Participants: previously interviewed 14-18 year old African American adolescent females

The Hope Center, Tuscaloosa, AL

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics.	
Number of Participants	10
Age (In Years)	Mean=15.5; range = 14-18
Relationship Status	Single (40%) Dating (30%) "Complicated" (20%) Long-term (10%)
Years in Alabama	Mean=13.9; Range = 3-18
Know Someone HIV+	Yes (30%); No (70%)
Tested for HIV	Yes (50%); No (50%)

RESULTS

HIV Risk Behavior Themes

- Partner Concurrency Outside the Hope Community
- Transactional Sex
- Sexual Interaction with Older Male Community Members

Avoidance Strategy Themes

- Staying Home
- Male Family Member Escort
- Limited Sexual Partnerships within the Hope Community
- Limited Interaction with Older Male Community Members

Condom Use/Protection Categorization

- Three Categories
1. Protective
2. Protective Depending Upon Circumstances
3. Not Protective
- Explanations for Variability in Condom Use/Protection Categories
  - Conversations with Peers and Young Family Members Regarding Failed Protection
  - Condom Box Warning
  - Media Influence
  - Decreased Sexual Sensation

CONCLUSION

- HIV Risk Themes Highlight:
  - Hypermasculine Gender Norms
  - Economic Motivators
  - Sexual Partnerships Outside Community
- Avoidance Strategies Highlight:
  - Male Family Members as Protectors
  - Home as a Safe Place
  - Sexual Partnerships Contained within the Community
- Condom Efficacy Beliefs Highlight:
  - Influence of Peers, Family Members, Condom Box Warnings, Decreased Sexual Sensation, and Media
- HIV/STI Prevention Recommendations:
  - Sexual health programming focused on:
    - Addressing community interactions and gender norms, as opposed to individual sexual behavior
    - benefits of containment of partner concurrency within community
  - Creating sexual health education partnerships with support facilities located in low income neighborhoods that encourage sexual empowerment strategies and dissemination of correct knowledge regarding sexual health and protection among female youth

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