The Influence of Partnership Type and Characteristics on Condom Use Among Young African American Women

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Background

- Partnership classifications following a "Main/Steady/Primary" or "Casual/Non-steady/Regular" dichotomy are commonly used in research on sexual risk behavior, however no operationalized definitions have been established.
- Youth tend to have dynamic/ephemeral partnerships.
- Main/Casual dichotomy fails to describe the characteristics and qualities of relationships that influence riskier or safer sex, particularly amid concurrency of partnerships and rates of unprotected sex.1,2
- To understand how partnership types affect sexual risk behaviors, classifications used must be relevant to the study population.
- The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of partnership characteristics on condom use among young African American (YAA) women.

Methods

- AA women ages 18-19 living in New Orleans, Louisiana were recruited for participation in a randomized controlled trial (RCT) called You Geaux Girl (YGG) – a web-delivered pregnancy and STI prevention intervention.
- Audio computer-assisted self interview (ACASI) at enrollment elicited detailed health behaviors including sexual history, partner-specific sex behavior, frequency of sex acts, and condom use.
- Participants were asked to classify their sexual partners using a 10-category list1 of descriptors which included “Other.”
- Partnerships could be classified with more than one category.
- Biological specimens were collected for Chlamydia trachomatis (CT) and Neisseria gonorrhoeae (GC) (NAAT), and pregnancy [HCG] testing.

Results

- 331 women who had sex in the past 3 months reported 434 sexual partnerships; 19.1% were classified using > 1 category.
- Most commonly reported partnerships were “Boyfriend” (47.2%), “ex-Boyfriend” (21.0%), “Friend with benefits” (20.5%) and “Someone I want to have a relationship with” (18.4%).
- Table 1: Selected characteristics of participants sexually active in past 3 months (N=331)
- Table 2: Classifications & Characteristics of Sexual Partnerships (N=434 partnerships)
- Table 3: Comparing partnership classifications to “Main” or “Casual” (N=434)
- Table 4: Potential Predictors of Inconsistent Condom Use (N=434)

Discussion

- Sexual partnership classifications among older adolescents are more nuanced than main and casual; more precision may be needed to accurately tailor counseling messages.
- While consistent condom use was found more often for partnerships that would be considered less stable (e.g. one night stand, friend with benefits) relationships that were more intimate (e.g. someone I want to have a relationship with, ex-boyfriend) had higher rates of inconsistent condom use.
- Counseling messages should reinforce the need to use condoms with partnerships that are intimate but sporadic.

References


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