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NONE OF US WILL GET OUT OF HERE ALIVE: THE INTERSECTIONS OF HIV AWARENESS, RISK PERCEPTIONS, AND BEHAVIOR RISK

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The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) significantly impacts minority emerging adults, among whom the rate of new diagnoses remain alarming and health disparities are more pronounced. Unfortunately, the new emerging adults of today have limited knowledge of the earlier toll of the HIV when it was perceived as a death sentence. Among this population, perceptions of risk for HIV are low and sexual risk taking behaviors are high and often used as coping mechanisms. HIV risk perceptions have been shown to be significantly related to social and culture risk factors; however, current knowledge of the determinants related to HIV risk perceptions among emerging adults has been limited. The Get SMART Project, a behavioral HIV intervention aimed to increase the awareness of HIV, provide re-purposed HIV and substance abuse prevention education as well as HIV testing to African American emerging adult's ages 18-24 empowers youth to make well-informed decisions. The project is structured and guided by the Transtheoretical and socio-ecological models as well as a creative blend social networking, social media, social marketing, and community-based theater (CBT) which empowers individuals through creative arts. Three hundred and sixty-five emerging adults participated in population-based surveys and eight focus groups conducted with approximately 57 participants. Findings revealed that HIV acquisition is not a concern. Therefore, testing is low and behavioral health risks are escalated. There are significant gaps in knowledge regarding sex and gender differences in HIV acquisition. Emerging adults did not see themselves at risk for HIV but more importantly identified other risk priorities such as excessive police force, community violence, and environmental factors more of a concern. Specific risk priorities were identified and survival expectations strongly influenced risk behaviors.

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