

Women are at greater risk for HIV/AIDS acquisition than men by virtue of their biological make-up. Due to their increased vaginal

Based on review of the literature, it is evident that women's increased risks for HIV/AIDS are due to their biological make-up and their behaviors, which are influenced by cultural norms and practices as well as demographic (e.g., age, educational, and income levels), intrapersonal (e.g., self-esteem), and interpersonal (e.g., self-silencing and self-efficacy) variables. Despite the many studies that have investigated these variables, no study has investigated the influence of self-esteem and self-silencing on self-efficacy for negotiating safer sex behaviors in women in general or in urban Bahamian women in particular.

Theoretical Foundation and Hypotheses

Concepts from self-esteem (Cast & Burk, 2002) self-silencing (Jack, 1991), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1989, 1994) theories were synthesized to form the basis for this study (see Figure 1). The following hypotheses were tested:

- * There will be a negative relationship between urban Bahamian women's self-esteem and self-silencing behaviors.
- * There will be a positive relationship between urban Bahamian women's self-esteem and self-efficacy for negotiating safer sex behaviors.
- * There will be a negative relationship between urban Bahamian women's self-silencing and self-efficacy for negotiating safer sex behaviors.
- * Age, education, income, self-esteem, and self-silencing will significantly predict urban Bahamian women's level of self-efficacy for negotiating safer sex behaviors.

METHODS

Design and Setting

A cross-sectional correlational survey design was used. The setting for this study was a variety of community sites in Nassau that Bahamian women frequently visit (i.e., laundromats, beauty salons, clinic waiting rooms, churches, work-places, adult education settings). Owners of establishments were contacted via formal letters to ask their permission to collect data from women at their establishments and to post flyers to advertise the study.

Sample

A convenience sample of volunteer Bahamian women, ages 18 years or older, living in Nassau or Freeport was recruited for this study. A variety of recruitment strategies were used including word of mouth, flyers, letters of support from governmental leaders, and media advertisements. Public and private events and forums (i.e., church meetings, community service organization meetings, radio talk shows, television advertisements) were used to encourage participation of urban Bahamian women. Benefits of knowledge to be gained from the study to The Bahamas in general and women in particular were described. A small incentive (i.e., mugs, photo albums, bath brushes, make-up brushes, calculators, pen sets) valued at \$1 each were offered to the women to encourage their participation in the study and to show appreciation for their time (Patsdaughter, Christensen, Kelley, Masters, & Ndiwane, 2001).

Instrumentation

An 80-item questionnaire was used to obtain data. Twenty-one demographic items were carefully developed to ensure social and cultural sensitivity. For example, since age was deemed to be very personal to Bahamian women, an informal survey of 60 Bahamian women was conducted to determine how they would prefer to be asked the question (i.e., How old are you? vs. What year were you born? 19__). As a result, birth year rather than age was asked on the demographic questionnaire, and age was computed by subtracting birth year from 2003 prior to analysis. Demographic items were reviewed by a panel of 10 Bahamian registered nurses living in South Florida to ensure that questions were appropriate for Bahamian women.

Consistent with findings from other studies (Page, Stevens, & Galvin, 1996; Woods, 1999), a negative relationship between urban Bahamian women's self-esteem and self-silencing behaviors was found. This finding suggests that urban Bahamian women with high levels of self-esteem are more likely to speak their minds in intimate relationships than are women with low levels of self-esteem. Although a causal relationship cannot be established, it can be concluded that urban Bahamian women could benefit from skills building in areas such as self-esteem enhancement and sexual communication, which may improve their sexual negotiation powers and decrease their risk for HIV/AIDS.

A positive relationship between urban Bahamian women's self-esteem and their self-efficacy for negotiating safer sex behaviors was also found. Although findings from some studies have indicated that as an individual's self-esteem increases, so does his or her practice of safer sex behaviors (Mill, 1997; Ward & Samuel, 1999), other findings have suggested the contrary (Hylton, 1999; Long-Middleton, 2001; McNair et al., 1998). However, it is important to note that the studies that failed to link self-esteem with safer sex behaviors were conducted with adolescents who tend to engage in risky behaviors more than do adults (Ponton, 1998).

As hypothesized, findings showed a negative relationship between urban Bahamian women's self-silencing behaviors and their self-efficacy for negotiating safer sex behaviors. This finding suggests that urban Bahamian women who silence during intimate relationships are less likely to believe that they can negotiate safer sex behaviors with their partners, a conclusion that has also been drawn from other studies (Quina et al., 2000; Thompson, Harlow, Morokoff, Burkholder, & Dieter, 2001).

Findings showed that age, education, and self-esteem were significant predictors of urban Bahamian women's level (i.e., low or high) of self-efficacy for negotiating safer sex behaviors, whereas income and self-silencing were not. Findings indicated that older, more educated urban Bahamian women with higher levels of self-esteem are more likely to engage in negotiating safer sex behaviors than their younger, less educated counterparts with lower levels of self-esteem.

It was interesting that older urban Bahamian women were more likely to engage in negotiating safer sex behaviors than younger women. It has been suggested that older women are more likely to be in stable relationships and beyond the need for contraceptive use (Wyatt et al., 2000). The finding that older women had higher perceived self-efficacy for negotiating safer sex behaviors than younger women may be reflective of their years of experience rather than actual current -81 () -(their) -5iyof . stable highean women'

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