

HIV KNOWLEDGE AND TESTING AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Key Words: HIV Knowledge, HIV Testing, College Students

PURPOSE. The purpose of this study is to describe knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors of college students related to HIV/AIDS and HIV testing.

METHOD. A comparative descriptive study was conducted on two college campuses in the south. A convenience sample of 200 students was recruited at the two campuses. The HIV Knowledge Questionnaire (Carey, Morrison-Beedy, & Johnson, 1997) was used to assess HIV knowledge, and HIV Testing Survey (author developed) was used to assess knowledge and behaviors related to HIV testing. During the summer term an information/recruitment table was set up in the Student Centers at the two campuses. The study was described to interested students who were invited to participate if they were eligible. After signing an informed consent form the participants were given an envelope with the questionnaires enclosed. They were able to complete the forms at a table or return them later in the day.

FINDINGS. The sample consisted of 195 college-aged students from two southern universities. One hundred and three students were from a large state university, and 92 students were from a small private college. All four levels of students were represented, with the largest percent (35) being seniors. Their ages ranged from 18 to 51 years of age, with 88% being 24 years old or younger. Eighty nine percent of the sample was single. Sixty seven percent of the sample was African American, 26% was white, 4% was Asian, and 3% was other ethnicities. Ninety one percent of the sample had not ever had an STD.

The students' mean score from the large school was 82 and from the small school was 78. Items with lower scores were related to transmission (kissing, different types of condoms). 92 students thought they had needed to be tested for HIV, and 60 had been tested. The most likely reason for being tested was risky sexual behaviors. No students had been tested because of drug use. The most likely reason for not being tested was being afraid to know their status. The majority of the students (122) would prefer to be tested by a private doctor. The main benefit the students saw in being tested was peace of mind. Almost all of the students believed HIV/AIDS was a serious disease in general and for their age group.

DISCUSSION. Overall HIV knowledge was fairly high among the students. However, there are areas where they need more information. It is disturbing that one third of the students who thought they needed to be tested were not. This study demonstrates the need for college students to have more information about HIV disease as well as access to HIV testing services.