Differences in Risk Behavior among Female School Dropouts in the Western Cape Province of South Africa

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2. Methods

1. Introduction

"Reports indicate HIV prevalence is highest among South African women aged 15 to 24; women in this age group are 4 times more likely to be infected with HIV than males in the same age group (17% vs. 4%)."

Study Design

From March to August 2006, a total of 450 (170 Black and 280 Coloured) out-of-school females aged 13 to 20 years were recruited through a targeted sampling plan using outreach workers from Coloured communities and Black townships in the Cape Peninsula region of Western Cape Province, South Africa.

Differences in risk behaviors were observed between Black female adolescents reporting early onset of sexual activity, experiences with sexual abuse, STI symptoms, older male partners, pregnancy, and childbirth. Among those who reported onset of sexual activity before age 15 (see Figure 2), Black adolescent females were more likely to report early onset of sexual activity, experiences with sexual abuse, STI symptoms, older male partners, pregnancy, and childbirth. Black adolescent females were more likely to report early onset of sexual activity, experiences with sexual abuse, STI symptoms, older male partners, pregnancy, and childbirth.

3. Characteristics

Table 1. Sample Characteristics (N = 450)

| Characteristic | Total | Black Sample (N = 170) | Coloured Sample (N = 280) | p values
|----------------|-------|------------------------|---------------------------|---------|
| Age last enrolled in school (SD) | 15.68 | 15.68 | 15.68 | .001
| Grade last enrolled in school (SD) | 9.29 | 9.29 | 9.29 | .001
| Do not expect to complete school through 12th grade | 10% | 12% | 8% | .008
| Expect to be unemployed for a long time after completing secondary school | 29% | 32% | 25% | .002
| Number of people sharing bedroom (SD) | 2.84 | 2.85 | 2.83 | .005
| Have not eaten enough food to be healthy (SD) | 28% | 32% | 16% | .002

The average estimated age of the sample was 17 years of age, with an approximate age of 15 years when last enrolled in school.

Black female adolescents were significantly more likely than the Black adolescents to report low expectations about completing their schooling and finding future employment.

In contrast, indicators of poverty were significantly more likely to be reported by Black female adolescents than by their Coloured counterparts.

4. Results

Figure 1. POSIT Functional Areas and BDI Scores, by Race

Figure 2. Differences in Substance Use among Those Who Reported Having Sex before Age 15

| Substance Characteristic | Black Sample (N = 170) | Coloured Sample (N = 280) | p values
|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|---------|
| Age last enrolled in school (SD) | 15.68 | 15.68 | 15.68 | .001
| Grade last enrolled in school (SD) | 9.29 | 9.29 | 9.29 | .001
| Do not expect to complete school through 12th grade | 10% | 12% | 8% | .008
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5. Summary

Racial differences were observed in this diverse population of high-risk female adolescents in the Western Cape in indicators of poverty and in their hopes and aspirations for educational attainment and future employment.

Studying differences further indicated that among adolescent female school dropouts, Coloureds were more likely to experience difficulties in family relationships, educational attainment, social skills, and delinquent behaviors.

Coloureds were also more likely to be moderately to severely depressed.

Black female adolescents were more likely to report low expectations about completing their schooling and finding future employment.

In contrast, indicators of poverty were significantly more likely to be reported by Black female adolescents than by their Coloured counterparts.

Black adolescent females were more likely to report early onset of sexual activity, experiences with sexual abuse, STI symptoms, older male partners, pregnancy, and childbirth.

On the other hand, Coloured female adolescents were significantly more likely to report having multiple sex partners in the past 90 days and less likely to report condom use at their last sexual encounter and discussing condom use with their sex partners.

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Significant racial differences in risk behaviors were observed between Black females reporting higher rates of risk behaviors relative to Coloured females in sex before age 15, sexual encounters, STI symptoms, older male partners, pregnancy, and childbirth.

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