



Puerto Ricans in the United States and the AIDS Epidemic

Latinos in the United States make up 13% of the population but 20% of new HIV cases (CDC 2000). Latinos who live in Puerto Rico, the Northeast of the United States, and Florida are among those who have the highest risk of contracting the HIV virus (CDC 2000). Although Hispanics born in the United States have the largest number of reported AIDS cases, of all Hispanics not born in the United States, Puerto Ricans make up the majority with 58% of cases (CDC, Aug 1999). Puerto Ricans differ from other Latino groups in the common mode of HIV transmission.

In general, male-male sexual intercourse accounts for the majority of HIV cases among various Hispanic groups (CDC 2000). For example, for U.S. born Hispanics, men who have sexual intercourse with other men comprise 37% of AIDS cases in that group; likewise, among Latinos born in Mexico, male-male sexual intercourse accounts for 48% of AIDS cases (CDC, Aug 1999). However, in the Puerto Rican community, male-male sexual intercourse only represents 14% of AIDS cases while intravenous drug use makes up 46% (CDC, Aug 1999). Risk behaviors among Puerto Rican men tend to differ from those of other Hispanic groups, but Puerto Rican women usually engage in risk behaviors similar to Mexican women (CDC 2000).

Many Puerto Ricans in the United States, particularly those born on the island, are at risk for contracting the HIV virus. In creating HIV prevention programs that target Puerto Ricans, one must keep in mind that injection drug users make up a

large proportion of HIV -positive Puerto Ricans. Therefore, it is necessary to include substance abuse prevention in programs that reach out to Puerto Ricans concerning HIV. By educating Puerto Rican youth about the risks associated with doing drugs, among them contracting HIV, we can help prevent the HIV virus from further spreading in the Puerto Rican community.