



Hispanic Injection Drug Users and HIV

Injection drug users (IDU) make up a significant portion of new Hispanic HIV cases, particularly among Puerto Ricans. From the beginning of the AIDS epidemic until 1998, Hispanic male IDUs comprised 36% of HIV cases, and IDUs who also engaged in sexual intercourse with other men counted for an additional 7% of new cases (CDC, Aug. 1999). Although 47% of Hispanic women contracted HIV through heterosexual intercourse, most of these cases involved men who are injection drug users (CDC, Aug 1999). Furthermore, 41% of Hispanic women with HIV are IDUs themselves (CDC, Aug 1999).

The percentages of HIV cases attributed to injection drug users differ among various ethnic groups in the Hispanic community. For example, 46% of new AIDS cases reported in 1998 by people born in Puerto Rico were from injection drug users; however, IDUs born in Mexico accounted for only 8% of all new Mexican AIDS patients (CDC, Aug 1999). Indeed, numerous studies have shown that HIV cases due to injection drug use are significantly more prevalent in the Puerto Rican community than among Mexicans, Cubans, or other Hispanic groups (CDC, Aug 1999). Therefore, it is essential to bear in mind the diversity of the Hispanic community when creating programs to teach Hispanic injection drug users about preventing HIV.

Substance abuse prevention programs that target Hispanic youth are necessary in building awareness about the HIV virus. Teaching youth about the dangers of drug abuse, including the possibilities of contracting HIV, will help them make the right decisions in the future that will benefit themselves and their communities. Also, programs for injection drug users should give them information about HIV

and the support they need to stop using drugs in order to ensure a brighter future for themselves, their families, and their communities. Injection drug use is a serious problem that creates higher rates of HIV infection for Hispanics; however, it can also be remedied through education and prevention programs.

HIV Education and Men Who Have Sex With Men in the Latino Community

From the beginning of the AIDS epidemic through 1998, the majority of Hispanic males contracted the HIV virus by having sexual intercourse with other men (CDC, Aug 1999). In most Hispanic ethnic groups, including Cubans and Mexicans, male-male sexual intercourse is the major way that HIV is spread (CDC, Aug. 1999). Therefore, efforts to educate young Latino men about the HIV virus is essential in preventing the spread of the disease in the Hispanic community and in the United States as a whole.

Unfortunately, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that a study of recently diagnosed HIV-positive people revealed that 15% of Latino men who had male-male sexual intercourse identified themselves as heterosexual rather than homosexual or bisexual (CDC 2000). The CDC states that this may be due to stigmas of homosexuality in many segments of the Hispanic community (CDC 2000). This behavior has the potential to further spread the HIV virus in the Hispanic community if these individuals have sexual intercourse with many different men and women (CDC 2000). Furthermore, since HIV has been considered a virus that effects mostly homosexuals, by identifying themselves as heterosexual, these men may incorrectly believe that they are not at risk for contracting HIV at all (CDC 2000).

Male-male sexual intercourse is the major way in which HIV is spread in most segments of the Hispanic community. Unfortunately, however, a significant percentage of Latino men who have sex with other men do not believe that they are at high risk for contracting HIV. Therefore, programs to prevent the spread of HIV among Hispanics must target Latino men who have sexual intercourse with

other men but do not identify themselves as homosexual or bisexual. As the CDC states, it is important to create an environment for these men where they do not feel that receiving HIV counseling and testing will cause them to be ridiculed by their communities (CDC 2000).