Background

African American women are disproportionately affected by sexually transmitted infections. They have staggering higher chances of transmitting sexual infection in comparison to their white counter parts. In the last decade they have ranked the highest for sexually transmitted infections (STI). There are five times more cases of chlamydia in African American women compared to that of white women (CDC). This then becomes a question of what about African American women is making them vulnerable to these illnesses. The Black Institute of Sexuality and Relationships report that the problem lies in the socioeconomic and cultural imprint that has impacted the life of many African American women. Negative self-image, poor mental health, and lack of positive parent communication all play a huge influence on a black woman’s sexual health. African American women between the ages of 15-24 are shown to be at the highest risk of having an STI. Though studies have given us a blue print to the epidemic that is present amongst African American women, little has been done to combat this. The lack of research and initiatives put in place has much to do with the lack of understanding about African American women.

Objectives

An initiative to combat the two cultural imprints that I feel negatively affect African American Women’s sexual health outcomes the most.

1. Mental Health and Negative Self-image
2. Lack of Sex Positive Parental Communication among African American Mothers and their teen/young adult children

The objective was to create positive interactions, productive events, and safe spaces to share thoughts and information in a way that is catered to African American women and that centered around the two cultural impacts above.

Healthy Us, Healthy Plus was geared toward African American women between the ages of 15-28 living in Atlanta, Georgia and surrounding cities.

Methods

Abnormal Self-image:

Depression is a modifiable factor associated with high-risk sexual behaviors and STI among youth in the US. Depression also may increase susceptibility to risk behaviors and infection. Depression may impair cognitive function and memory; decrease impulse control; contribute to psycho-social impairment including emotional reactivity in peer relationships; reduce motivation; and increase fatalism. These depression-related effects may inhibit clear perception of STI risk and the ability to prevent risk behavior. Recent or chronic depression in adulthood was more common among African American women (19%, men: 12%) than whites (women: 13%, men: 8%) based on data collected by The Public Health Association.

Lack of Sex Positive Parental Communication among African American Mothers and their teen/young adult children:

My hypothesis was if African American Mothers were more open about their sexual experience and sexual health practices with their daughters, then we would see a decline in the rate of adverse sexual outcomes or unplanned pregnancies in our communities.

Findings

The Vision Board Party was a hit among attendees however lacked qualitative and quantitative data necessary to measure its full success. I would continue with this event yearly, I would set a goal and provide surveys to participants before and after. The No More Secrets event had its ups and downs. While it did provide valuable outcomes, it was a very small population size and 2/3 mother/daughter pairs canceled on the event. Mothers had to be willing to openly discuss past experiences and sexual health practices with group.

Conclusions

- African American Women are disproportionately effected when it comes to transmission of STIs
- Mental Health and Sex Positive Parental communication play a role in this disparity
- There are still major issues that need to be explored when it comes to this devastating disparity, but this is a move in the right direction.