

# HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

## Best Evidence – Risk Reduction

### INTERVENTION DESCRIPTION

#### Intended Population

- People living with HIV

#### Goal of Intervention

- Reduce HIV-transmission risk behaviors

#### Brief Description

*Healthy Relationships* is a small-group, skills-based behavioral intervention for men and women living with HIV. The intervention focuses on skills building, self-efficacy, and positive expectations about new behaviors. Through group discussions, role plays, videos and skill-building exercises, the intervention helps persons living with HIV develop skills to cope with HIV-related stressors and risky sexual situations. Intervention sessions also enhance decision-making skills for self-disclosing HIV-serostatus to sex partners, and help participants develop and maintain safer sex practices. Participants receive personalized feedback about their own risk practices, and with the help of the intervention group, develop strategies to maintain satisfying relationships while protecting both themselves and their partners. Intervention sessions are conducted separately for men and women in groups of 6–10 participants.

#### Theoretical Basis

- Social Cognitive Theory

#### Intervention Duration

- Five 2-hour sessions, with 2 sessions delivered weekly for 2.5 weeks

#### Intervention Settings

- Community AIDS service organization

#### Deliverer

- One male and one female group facilitator, one of whom is an HIV-positive peer counselor

#### Delivery Methods

- Exercises
- Goal setting
- Group discussions
- Lectures
- Printed materials
- Role plays
- Video

## INTERVENTION PACKAGE INFORMATION

Please contact study author for training and intervention materials. Please contact **Seth Kalichman**, University of Connecticut, Department of Psychology, 406 Babbidge Road, Unit 1020, Storrs, CT 06269-1020.

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## EVALUATION STUDY AND RESULTS

The original evaluation study was conducted in Atlanta, Georgia between 1997 and 1998.

### Key Intervention Effect

- Reduced unprotected anal or vaginal intercourse
- Fewer non-HIV+ sex partners
- Increased condom use
- Increased refusal of unsafe sex

### Study Sample

The study sample of 328 men and women living with HIV is characterized by the following:

- 74% Black or African American, 22% White, 4% other
- 70% male, 29% female, 1% transgender
- 52% homosexual, 39% heterosexual, 9% bisexual
- Mean age of 40 years
- 48% achieved high school degree or less

### Recruitment Settings

AIDS services and infectious disease clinics

### Eligibility Criteria

Men and women were considered eligible for the evaluation if they were living with HIV/AIDS and willing to complete the study activities.

### Assignment Method

Participants were randomly assigned to either the Healthy Relationships intervention (n = 185) or to a health maintenance comparison intervention (n = 143).

### Comparison Group

The health maintenance comparison intervention consisted of five 2-hour group sessions that included social support groups for people living with HIV. The sessions also provided informational updates on HIV disease, management of health problems, medication adherence, health care and health insurance concerns, and nutrition. Participants also developed personalized health maintenance plans.

### Relevant Outcomes Measured and Follow-up Time

- Sexual risk behaviors during the prior 3 months (including number of sex partners; number of unprotected vaginal and anal sex acts; proportion of protected vaginal and anal sex acts; and having safer sex without disclosure of HIV status) were assessed at 3- and 6-month follow-ups.
- Refusal of unsafe sex during the prior 3 months was assessed at 3- and 6-month follow-ups.

### Participant Retention

- Intervention
  - 81% retained at 3 month
  - 79% retained at 6 months
- Comparison
  - 85% retained at 3 month
  - 77% retained at 6 months

### Significant Findings

- At both the 3- and 6-month follow-ups, participants in the Healthy Relationships intervention reported significantly fewer occasions of unprotected vaginal/anal sex with non-HIV+ partners than those in the comparison intervention.
- At the 6-month follow-up, intervention participants significantly reduced their total number of occasions of vaginal/anal sex and occasions of unprotected vaginal/anal sex, and reported fewer non-HIV+ partners than participants in the comparison group.
- Finally, intervention participants reported a significantly greater proportion of condom use for vaginal/anal sex and refusal of unsafe sexual practices at the 6-month follow-up than comparison group participants.

### Considerations

- The comparison group participants were unexpectedly, but significantly, more likely to have refused unsafe sexual practice at the 3-month follow-up. This finding was reversed at the 6-month follow-up.
- A six-session group video conferencing intervention aimed at reducing occasions of unprotected vaginal or anal intercourse among women living HIV was adapted from Healthy Relationships and tested in a randomized trial with a waitlist control (Marhefka et al., 2014).
  - At the six-month assessment, intervention participants reported significantly fewer unprotected vaginal and anal sex occasions than comparison participants (Mean difference = 6.89, 95% CI = 5.43-8.73, baseline adjusted).
  - However, this study did not meet the PRS Best or Good Evidence criteria because the sample size was less than 40 participants per arm.

## REFERENCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

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