

Religiosity as a Protective Factor Against HIV Risk Among Young Transgender Women

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PURPOSE: Young transgender women (YTW) face many challenges to their well-being, including homelessness, joblessness, victimization, and alarming rates of HIV infection. Little has been written about factors that might help in preventing HIV in this population. Our objective was to examine the role of religion in the lives of YTW and its relationship to HIV risk.

METHODS: This study is derived from baseline data collected for an HIV prevention intervention. A convenience sample of YTW aged 16-25 years from Chicago were recruited consecutively and completed an audio computer-assisted self-interview. Logistic regression models were used to evaluate the relationship between sexual risk taking (sex work, multiple anal sex partners, unprotected receptive anal sex), alcohol use, formal religious practices (service attendance, reading/studying scripture), and God consciousness (prayer, thoughts about God).

RESULTS: A total of 92 YTW participated in the study, their mean age being 20.4 years; 58% were African American, 21% white, and 22% other. On multivariate logistic regression, alcohol use was significantly associated with sexual risk in both models, with adjusted odds ratio (OR) of 5.28 (95% confidence intervals [CI]: 1.96-14.26) in the Formal Practices model and 3.70 (95% CI: 1.53-8.95) in the God Consciousness model. Controlling for alcohol use, it was found that Formal Practices was significantly associated with sexual risk (OR = .29, 95% CI: .11-.77), but God Consciousness was not (OR = .60, 95% CI: .25-1.47).

CONCLUSION: Among YTW, formal religious practices may attenuate sexual risk-taking behaviors and therefore HIV risk. Further research is needed to explore the role of the religion in the lives of YTW as a protective asset.

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