

Project aims to improve HIV/AIDS prevention materials for African-American women

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African-American women make up a disproportionate number of HIV/AIDS cases in the United States. Researchers from North Carolina State University are trying to change that, leading a National Science Foundation project aimed at developing HIV/AIDS prevention materials that resonate with African-American female college students.

African-Americans represent approximately 14 percent of the U.S. population, but accounted for an estimated 44 percent of new HIV infections in 2009. The estimated rate of new HIV infections among African-American women was 15 times that of white women and over three times that of Latina women.

"We want to know how we can improve the language and [communication strategies](#) used in [HIV/AIDS](#) prevention efforts targeting African-American female college students," says Dr. Fay Cobb Payton, an associate professor of information systems at NC State and primary investigator (PI) of the project. "Our goal is to help craft messages that will be resonant with these young women," says Dr. James Kiwanuka-Tondo, an associate professor of communication at NC State and fellow co-PI of the effort.

The National Science Foundation awarded a two-year grant supporting the project, which is being conducted at NC State and Pennsylvania State University.

"Our previous research found a lack of 'cultural competency' in online prevention materials," Kiwanuka-Tondo says. "Meaning the materials were not culturally relevant to the African-American population in general, and [women](#) in particular."

The researchers have already begun conducting focus groups in an effort to define guidelines for prevention content and messaging that is culturally relevant to African-American female students.

"These guidelines will help us develop online content targeting this specific audience," Payton says. The researchers plan to test the newly developed content and messaging with the focus groups at the beginning of the fall semester.

"This is an iterative process," Payton says, "and we will incorporate feedback from the focus groups to fine tune these communication tools."

Meanwhile, co-PI Dr. Lynette Kvasny of Penn State will be leading a similar effort on her campus – which should help the research team identify any regional differences among African-American female students.

The NC State research team also includes Kathy Gore of NC State's Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management, as well as graduate and undergraduate students – several of whom are volunteering their time and effort to work on this important issue.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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