

## **HIV/AIDS, Education and Black Churches**

More than 185,000 blacks died with AIDS in December 2002, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. I am going to explain the impact of AIDS on blacks, why increased AIDS education for blacks is important, and how communities such as black churches can make a difference in HIV/AIDS education.<sup>1</sup>

In the United States, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, more blacks are contracting AIDS than any other group even while only making up 12.3% of the population in 2000.

Awareness of HIV/AIDS among blacks is important not only because a high percentage of blacks are contracting the disease, but to show that no race, ethnicity or sexual orientation is immune to the disease. When everyone, including doctors and people living with HIV/AIDS are aware of the numbers, they are able to begin research on prevention and a future cure beginning with questions such as: How did one population become noticeably more affected than other? What efforts will affect blacks' awareness of the disease?

Lack of education is an opportunity for a disease to infect another person, or shorten the life of someone who is already living with a disease. For example, in a

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that in this paper, 1) I am using "Black" consistently to cover what other resources may call "African-American, Black American or Black Non-Hispanic/Latino," 2) I am using the term "black church" mainly as a church with a predominantly black congregation, and 3) I realize that not all Blacks are part of a predominantly black church, or have the same religious or spiritual beliefs.

2001 survey, HIV testing rates for blacks and Latinos were higher than Whites, but of the blacks and Latinos tested, they, compared to Whites, “had the lowest percentage of people who knew about treatment...” (Ebrahim, Anderson, Weidle and Purcell 31). In a 1990 Texas community health center survey on low income and minority patients, “less than 5 percent of both black and Hispanic patients reported talking about AIDS with anybody at the clinics” (Aruffo, Coverdale and Vallbona 115).

One way HIV/AIDS education can reach more blacks is through churches. Any place where people gather for religious or spiritual practices can play a major role in a community or group of people.

Black churches have historically not only addressed spiritual issues, but social issues such as politics and economic assistance when blacks didn’t have equal access (Irwin, George-Davis and McDaniel 207). These services were easy to provide for blacks when many lived in rural areas (Irwin, et al. 207). Now, “the churches must take care disregard the social well-being of their congregation” as blacks move from rural to urban communities (Irwin, et al. 207).

Churches can influence a black person’s social-well being such as their approach to general health. For example a North Carolina church program focusing on fitness was carried out through Durham Ministerial Alliance. The ministers worked with health professionals to improve people’s health, such as lowering blood pressure (Logan and Freeman 19 navy blue book).

There are churches that are responding to the statistics on blacks and HIV/AIDS. For example, a 2000 Ohio newspaper article reported that while North Carolina public schools could only teach abstinence, Chapel Hill survey three-quarters of state clergies

addressed AIDS to youth ages 11-14 (Shimron). According to the Office of Minority Health website, the program “The Black Church Lights The Way: The Black Testing Campaign,” started in 2000 with a goal to “... educate blacks about HIV and to assist black churches in becoming community HIV information centers.” The Balm in Gilead, according to its website, is a national non-profit organization with a mission to “mobilize churches to become centers of compassion, education and prevention in the struggle against the devastation of HIV/AIDS in the Black community.” According to the website, programs include the African American Church HIV/AIDS Capacity Building Training for church leaders, congregation and anyone who wants to learn about “providing HIV/AIDS services in an African-American faith context.

Education in black churches should arguably continue since, according to NewsRX.com and NewsRx.net, “The Bush administration is proposing to double spending on sexual abstinence programs that bar any discussion of birth control or condoms to prevent pregnancy or AIDS, despite a lack of evidence that such programs work.”

Discussing HIV/AIDS in the church is a controversial topic for some. According to Sadye L. Logan and Jerome Joyce, the church dilemma is “...how to fulfill its historical civic role as community advocate without appearing to sanction the at-risk behavior that contributes to contracting the disease.” (60 orange book).

More education and awareness can hopefully lower HIV/AIDS cases among blacks. HIV/AIDS discussion in the church will, for some, controversially, open up more doors of communication for education such as from sexuality, to diseases other than HIV/AIDS, to morality. These issues though, affects people’s survival.

## Annotated Bibliography and Web suggestions

Irwin, Darrell D.; George-Davis, Gloria; McDaniel, Clyde O. "The Black Church and Community Action Through Youth and Socialization and Mentoring." 21<sup>st</sup> Century African American Social Issues: A Reader. Ed. Anita K. McDaniel and New York: Clyde O. McDaniel. Custom Publisher, 2000. 207.

The book contains several articles on blacks such as identity, communication and education. The authors describe strong characteristics of black churches and how and why they are able to influence the congregation. Characteristics include the ability to keep church membership. It also describes how the church has historically helped blacks inside and outside the church doors. The paper was written at UNC-Wilmington and Columbia University.

Logan, Sadye L. and Freeman, Edith M. "An Empowerment and Health Prevention Framework for Understanding and Transforming the Health Care Outcomes of African Americans." Health Care in the Black Community: Empowerment, Knowledge, Skills and Collectivism. Ed. Sayde L. Logan and Edith M. Freeman. New York: Hawthorne Press, 2000. 18-19.

This book contains several articles on how to educate blacks about health care through being aware of issues in the black community such as inner-city families, stress, spirituality and current health status. This article is a specific example of how churches influenced healthy behavior in blacks such as exercising.

Logan, Sayde L. and Joyce, Jerome. "Helping Black Families who are Providing Care to Persons with AIDS." The Black Family Ed. Sayde L. Logan. Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1996. 60-61.

This book includes information on how to make positive changes in black families. This article for example gives strategies for helping families taking care of a family member with HIV/ AIDS. While churches play an important role in the community and therefore families, this article also shows that some churches have trouble addressing HIV/AIDS.

Ebrahim, Shahul H.; Anderson, John E.; Weidle, Paul; Purcell, David W. "Race/Ethnic Disparities in HIV Testing and Knowledge About Treatment for HIV/AIDS: United States, 2001.

This scholarly article from AIDS Patient Journal shows how blacks are tested more for HIV/AIDS but have less knowledge about the disease. It was found through Infotrac search.

NewsRx.com “Medical Letter on the CDC and FDA”. March 2004.  
Bush advocates abstinence-only education.

This article explains Bush and the administration’s efforts for abstinence only without discussing protection against AIDS.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention website.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/PUBS/Facts/afam.pdf>

This website contains health statistics for blacks. The HIV/AIDS facts are proof that HIV/AIDS has reached a greater number of blacks than other groups.

The Balm in Gilead website.  
[http://www.balmingilead.org/programs/capacity\\_building/intro.asp](http://www.balmingilead.org/programs/capacity_building/intro.asp)

This website reaches focuses on AIDS/HIV education in black churches across the nation. It offers several programs and suggestions for educating congregations on the disease and incorporating spirituality.

The Office of Minority Health Website.  
<[http://www.omhrc.gov/omh/aids/prevention/6C2\\_toc\\_prog.htm](http://www.omhrc.gov/omh/aids/prevention/6C2_toc_prog.htm)>  
This website includes programs, including a “church-based initiative” for blacks and HIV/AIDS awareness.

The NewsRx Website.  
<<http://newsrx.gsp.com/>>  
This website contains articles about health, including research conducted by the CDC and Federal Drug Administration.

Shimron, Yonat. “Health Expert Proposed More Sex Education in Black Church.”  
This article from the Dayton Daily Newspaper ([www.acticedayton.com/ddh](http://www.acticedayton.com/ddh)) is an example of how some churches are addressing HIV/AIDS in North Carolina.

Aruffo, John F., Coverdale, John H. and Valbona, Carlos.  
“AIDS Knowledge in low-income and minority populations.”

This scholarly article from the Public Health Reports was found through Inforac search and is a study in 1991 on some people’s HIV/AIDS education.

## Web Suggestion

This article can be beneficial as a start on where to go to look for HIV/AIDS research and connecting it to faith communities. This article can inform people of how many blacks are affected by AIDS and one way to educate more blacks. People may be drawn to this article on my website through posting it on the homepage and future additional information for future revisiting.