Introduction

- There is limited epidemiological data on the sexual behaviors and practices of African American college students and their reported alcohol and marijuana use.
- Empirical studies have linked illicit drug use and binge drinking to sexual risk-taking behaviors.\(^1\)\(^2\)
- While drunk or high, college students are more likely to be sexually active and to have sex with someone they just met.\(^3\) More than three-fourths (78 percent) of college students who used illicit drugs have had sexual intercourse compared to 44 percent of those who never used drugs.\(^4\)
- Both females (14%) and males (17%) reported having unprotected sex within the last 12 months because of their drinking.\(^6\)
- White students are more likely to use and abuse all forms of drugs than minority students.\(^7\)
- Although the relationship between substance use and higher risk sexual behaviors may be inconsistent among college students,\(^8\) the increasing consumption of alcohol and illicit drugs among adolescents and college youth (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Study, Monitoring the Future Study and the National College Health Assessment) supports the need for more empirical studies to determine the link between substance use and the gradient of sexual risk behaviors.\(^9\)

Purpose

To examine the associations between alcohol and marijuana use and the sexual behaviors and practices of African American college students attending a mid-Atlantic Historically Black College & University (HBCU).

Methods

- Data was collected using a self-administered survey to intact classrooms of students taking health and physical education courses and to psychology students adhering to protocols established by that department.
- African American College Students between 18-24 years of age, single, and matriculating at a mid-Atlantic HBCU were asked to complete the paper and pencil questionnaire that examined factors influencing sexual behaviors.
- 681 college students completed the Factors Influencing Sexual Behaviors Questionnaire.
- Selected Demographic & Background Characteristics of participants are highlighted in Table 1.

Survey Measures

- Three items from the National College Risk Behavior Study (NCHRRS) measured students’ binge drinking and marijuana use.
- The instrument was reviewed by an expert review panel (n=3) for content analysis, clarity, and formatting of the instrument.
- A pilot test (n=30) was conducted with African American college students not participating in the main study for understandability and acceptability of items.
- The investigator made revisions to the instrument based on expert review panel comments, student feedback and internal consistency reliability analysis before study implementation.

Discussion

- Of the 681 college students sampled, 86% (n=590) reported being sexually active and 13% (n=91) reported abstinence.
- Overall, African American students in this sample reported low rates of marijuana use and binge drinking. This finding is consistent with the literature that reports lower overall substance use for students attending HBCUs.\(^7\)
- Students who reported binge drinking or marijuana use were more likely to report being sexually active than students not engaging in these behaviors.
- A small percentage of students that reported being sexually active (15%) reported binge drinking and smoking marijuana four or more times in the past month.
- Twenty-four percent of sexually active youth reported drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana before the last time they had sexual intercourse.

Conclusion

- This research provides confirmatory data that alcohol and marijuana use contributes to student’s decisions to be abstinent or sexually active.
- College sexual health awareness campaigns should highlight the inextricable link of illicit drug use and sexual risk-taking behaviors and the adverse consequences that may result from having sex while intoxicated or high.

References