Racial discrimination (T1) significantly and positively predicted emotional distress when condoms are not used consistently and young men engage in sexual concurrency (sexual partnerships that overlap overtime). The protective effect of social ties is also investigated.

Methods: A sample of 505 heterosexually active men aged 19-22 were recruited and surveyed for 3 time points. Men answered questions on racial discrimination, sexual risk behaviors, emotional distress, self-regulation, and substance use. Mediation and moderation models are tested.

Results: Racial discrimination (T1) significantly and positively predicted emotional distress (2). Emotional distress, substance use, and self-regulation partially mediated the association between racial discrimination and sexual concurrency. Protective social ties attenuated the effects of emotional distress on substance use and self-regulation.

Conclusion: Racial discrimination is an important context for sexual risk behaviors. Minority stress may translate to sexual risk behavior through psychosocial mediators, such as emotional distress, self-regulation, and substance use. Protective social ties may buffer against emotional distress to reduce substance and increase self-regulation. The findings of this study can provide new insights into the investigation of risk and protective processes that influence sexual risk behaviors among young Black men.

ABSTRACT

Context: Racial discrimination is a documented risk factor for sexual risk behaviors among young black men; mechanisms of effect and protective processes remain to be investigated. This study examines the mediating effect of emotional distress, self-regulation, and substance use on the association between racial discrimination and sexual risk behaviors. Sexual risk behaviors included in this study are inconsistent condom use and sexual concurrent behaviors (sexual partnerships that overlap overtime). The protective effect of social ties is also investigated.

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BACKGROUND

Introduction

Once confined mainly to urban centers, HIV infection has become increasingly prevalent in small towns and rural communities, particularly among African Americans in the southern United States (Fleming, Larsky, Lee, & Nakashima, 2006; Kann, 2016; Hall, Li, & McKenzie, 2005).

In 2014, in the rural south, 54% of new HIV diagnoses were among African Americans (Kann, 2016). The majority of research on the behavioral factors associated with HIV-related behaviors in the rural South has focused on Black women, intravenous drug users, or Black men who have sex with men (MSM) (Sharp & Hahn, 2011; Magar, Phillips, & Hoee, 2008; Cohen et al., 2011).

Emerging research, however, suggests that heterosexual Black men, aged 20-25, also experience elevated risk.

Sexual Risk Behaviors – Inconsistent Condom Use and Sexual Concurrency

Transmission of HIV is related to preventable risk behaviors including inconsistent use of contraceptives and sex with concurrent partners, particularly when partnerships overlap in time.

In rural communities, studies suggest that rates of HIV and other STIs in rural communities are associated with densely interconnected social networks and a restricted dating pool (Adimora, Schoenbach, & Doherty; Kogan, Cho, Barnum, & Brown).

When condoms are not used consistently and young men engage in sexual concurrency (sexual relationships that overlap across time), sexual pathogens can spread rapidly throughout the community.

Racial Discrimination and Minority Stress

Racial discrimination and other minority stressors have been linked to risk behavior. Little is known, however regarding the proximal, psychosocial mechanisms that translate exposure to minority stressors into HIV risk.

Informed by perspectives on minority stress and social ecological theory, we predict that men’s exposure to racial discrimination represents a stressful circumstance that translates exposure to minority stressors into HIV risk.

Little is known, however regarding the proximal, psychosocial mechanisms that translate exposure to minority stressors into HIV risk. It is important to consider the contextual stressors young men experience that put them at increased risk in the first place. Addressing racial discrimination could prove to be beneficial.

Prevention Implications

• When tailoring programs for heterosexual young black men and their sexual risk behaviors, it is important to consider the contextual stressors young men experience that put them at increased risk in the first place. Addressing racial discrimination could prove to be beneficial.

• Incorporating emotional distress, substance use, and self-regulation into the curriculum of prevention/intervention efforts could make programs more effective.

• Incorporating peer educators or family interventions to assist men with emotion regulation, decision making, and risk behaviors could also be beneficial.

Limitations and Conclusions

• This study identifies protective social ties as a buffer of the negative consequences of stress on emotional distress, substance use, and self-regulation.

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