



Reducing HIV/AIDS Disparities in Rural North Carolina

Project Description:

- Project GRACE (Growing, Reaching, Advocating for Change & Empowerment), funded by the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is an academic-community partnership aimed at eliminating health disparities in African American communities. Current research is focused on understanding multiple determinants of health as they relate to HIV/AIDS prevention in two rural African American communities located in Edgecombe and Nash counties, North Carolina.
- The Project GRACE consortium includes African American residents of Edgecombe and Nash counties the Rocky Mount Opportunities Industrialization Center, North Carolina Area Health Education Center, Community Enrichment Organization of Tarboro, the Edgecombe Ministerial Alliance, and researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Background: HIV/AIDS in African American communities in Edgecombe and Nash counties:

- African Americans comprised 74% of diagnoses of heterosexually transmitted HIV infection in the U.S. between 1999 and 2002, and 44% and 67% of all new male and female cases, respectively, diagnosed between 2000 and 2001. These estimates are 3-5 times the proportion of African Americans in the U.S.
- African Americans accounted for 50% of newly diagnosed HIV/AIDS cases in 2003. In 2003, five states in the country accounted for 55% of the cumulative cases of HIV infection reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): New York, Florida, New Jersey, Texas, and North Carolina.
- Nash and Edgecombe counties experience high rates of HIV/AIDS in African American communities: **In Nash, 78% of people living with HIV/AIDS as of 2002 were African American, although only 34% of the county's population was African American; in Edgecombe County, 89% of HIV/AIDS cases were African American, where African Americans represent 58% of the county population.**

Impact: Project GRACE: A Participatory Approach to Address Health Disparities:

- Project GRACE recognizes that in addition to individual risk behavior, the environmental and social context of African American communities is a critical component of any framework that seeks to understand and prevent the spread of HIV. As a result, researchers employ a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach to identify community needs and assets in Edgecombe and Nash counties related to health promotion and disease prevention. Through individual interviews, focus groups, and surveys, researchers establish baseline levels of individual risk behaviors and community educational needs.
- Researchers are testing the feasibility of methods for recruiting and training a network of lay health advisors to address both individual and community needs. This information assists in developing culturally appropriate multilevel interventions to address individual and environmental/contextual determinants of the spread of HIV.
- Specific activities include the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a pilot intervention designed to reduce the spread of HIV. The project goal is to design long-term, culturally sensitive, feasible and sustainable interventions to prevent the spread of HIV in African American communities.

Preliminary Findings/Policy Implications:

- **Need for comprehensive sex-education curriculum in schools**
 - Address issues related to the effectiveness of current sex-education curriculum in targeted counties. Advocate for the design and implementation of a more comprehensive sex-education curriculum.
- **Link between lack of recreational opportunities and high-risk sexual behavior**
 - Provide additional funding (i.e., grants) to existing community-based organizations to assist with the provision of a range of constructive activities for youth.