

Columbia University
School of Nursing

Title: Safe Sexual Communication between Women and their Stable Partners in the Dominican Republic

Name: Heidi Luft

Columbia University School of Nursing, NY 10032, USA

The proportion of diagnosed HIV cases in the Dominican Republic (DR) among women has increased from 27% in 2003 to 51% in 2013. Dominican women with stable partners have risk for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV related to factors such as infidelity, poverty, and gender inequality. At the same time, they have been overlooked in past prevention research. The aims of this mixed methods study were, among women with stable male partners in the DR, to: (1) explore perceptions and experiences of communicating about safe sex with their stable male partner and the sociocultural context of the interactions, and (2) describe characteristics of and assess correlations between safe sexual communication and factors related to sexual division of power, sexual division of labor, and cathexis (structure of affective attachments and social norms). The Theory of Gender and Power informed development of data collection tools used. Adult Dominican women were recruited from a comprehensive care clinic in southeastern DR that provides over 23,000 physician visits to patients per year. First, a qualitative descriptive study was conducted, using one-on-one interviews. Emergent content analysis of 12 interview transcripts, following Colaizzi's method, revealed two main themes. The theme "context of sexual risk" includes: the definition of safe sex for stable partners, behaviors related to sexual risk, beliefs and attitudes related to sexual risk, "confianza" (trust) between stable partners, power dynamics within relationships, and learning to manage safe sex within a stable relationship. The theme "safe sex communication" encompasses: reasons to talk about safe sex, methods and content, influential factors, and ideas for improvement. Findings from this study were used to inform the selection of variables for the succeeding cross-sectional study. One hundred, interviewer-administered, paper surveys were collected. Data analysis is currently underway. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample and examine variables. Ordinal

logistic regression modeling was used to determine associations between the outcome of safe sexual communication and various factors of sexual power in relationships. Study results show that communication about safe sex in the context of a relationship is complex and often challenging for women in the DR. Improving and encouraging its use could be a viable method of reducing risk of HIV and STIs among women with stable partners in the DR. However, there are multiple barriers to safe sex communication that need to be better understood and addressed in order to effectively use it as a STI/HIV prevention method for this population. Future research should aim to further examine these barriers, as well as the male partner's role in safe sex communication and risk reduction within relationships.

Biography

Heidi Luft, 28, is a PhD candidate at the School of Nursing of Columbia University in the City of New York. She is also a fellow on the National Institute of Nursing Research, National Institutes of Health under grant T32NR013454: Training in Interdisciplinary Research to Prevent Infections (TIRI). She obtained two small grants to support her research and one of her studies has been published in the Journal *AIDS* Care.