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Risky sexual behavior focus of colloquium

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

In her frank but charismatic style, Assistant Professor of Nursing Frances Jackson presented a compelling case for educating older Americans about risky sexual behavior and its consequences in "Measuring HIV/AIDS Knowledge, Seriousness and Susceptibility and Risk Behaviors of Older African-Americans," the second presentation of this year's President's Colloquium Series.

Jackson used a number of startling statistics and quotes from focus group participants in her lecture, delivered before a full audience in the Oakland Center Gold Rooms March 18. Her research findings indicate African-Americans age 50 and older feel HIV/AIDS is not an issue of concern for them. The consequences are often undetected, untreated and ultimately devastating.

"Heterosexual transmission is the major mode for new cases of AIDS," Jackson said. "Between 1992 and 1995, HIV cases increased in young adults by 9 percent, but increased in persons age 50 and older by almost 22 percent. And 12 percent of persons diagnosed with AIDS are age 50 and older. African-Americans comprise 30 percent of the HIV population and almost 80 percent of all new cases. The message that older people can get AIDS has not gotten out. Older African-Americans are not concerned about it."

Jackson and her team of researchers conducted their study in two phases – first by conducting surveys by mail then following up with personal interviews with participants from nine focus groups. Some of the surprising findings were that 54 percent of those surveyed believe the cause of AIDS is not known and 61 percent of the males never use a condom. In general, older African-American men reported a high rate of participation in risky sexual behavior and 26 percent reported IV drug use.

"This puts a different face on those who have been considered to be typical drug abusers and AIDS victims," Jackson said. "They want information, but only to pass it on to younger people. They don't feel susceptible, so they don't feel the need to protect themselves. They're also not concerned with their mortality. They say, 'If I'm 70 and can live with AIDS another 10 to 20 years, why should I care?'"

Jackson said she constantly tried to dispel myths and gave correct information on HIV/AIDS during her subject interviews. With each group, she found condom usage was rejected, and men absolutely were resistant to using them. Jackson used quotes from the interviews to illustrate common beliefs and attitudes.

"Many males see contracting an STD as a rite of passage, as if you weren't a man until you got the clap," Jackson said. "If getting an STD is seen this way, how do you intervene?"

"There is also a pervasive belief that AIDS started with white people and was created as a form of black genocide. They also don't believe that we understand all the ways in which the virus can be transmitted."

As for a possible solution to these problems, Jackson proposes that HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns also target the older population.

"Many of these same false beliefs are shared among older Americans in all communities," Jackson said. "Future AIDS awareness campaigns have to make older people aware that they're susceptible to this disease. We need more older people in HIV/AIDS prevention messages on television and on brochures."

The rousing applause at the conclusion of Jackson's lecture indicated great interest among the attendees. Assistant Professor of Psychology Debra McGinnis took notes throughout the presentation since it related to her research on aging.

"I found it very interesting to hear the beliefs of older African-Americans on their longevity," McGinnis said. "It's an interesting problem, because in some ways, their beliefs lead to risky sexual behavior."

Assistant Professor of German Christopher Clason said he felt inspired by the presentation to tell others about Jackson's research.

"I was really positively impressed with her presentation," Clason said. "She is completely honest and able to present her material in a way that is striking, yet compassionate. I was surprised by the persistent unwillingness of older African-Americans to face the realities of the transmission of AIDS. Her delivery was fantastic and inspirational. I'm proud that my colleagues at OU are engaging in research like this."

The President's Colloquium Series, established in 1995, showcases the achievements of Oakland University researchers, promotes communication and collaboration among scientists, and recognizes the outstanding work of "Nobel Class" scientists.

For information on colloquium proposal guidelines and submission procedures, visit the [University Research Committee](#) Web page or contact Mark Severson, chair of the University Research Committee, at (248) 370-2327 or severson@oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

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