HIV/AIDS: Bringing Awareness, Knowledge, and Empowerment to African American Women
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ABSTRACT
HIV continues to have a devastating effect on the African American community, particularly women. The foundation of this project was to not only provide knowledge of HIV, but to encourage the African American female population in the South Memphis community to get tested, educate their peers and change any risky behaviors that may lead to infection.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND
HIV/AIDS (Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is one of the leading causes of deaths among African American women. It is a condition in humans in which the immune system begins to fail, leading to life threatening infections.

In 2004, The Center for Disease Control (CDC) stated that African American women were disproportionately affected by HIV. Of all the women living with HIV/AIDS in the U.S., 60% are African American, and the majority of African American women got HIV/AIDS from having unprotected sex with a man. The rates of HIV/AIDS diagnosed in 2006 for black women was approximately 15 times the rate for white women and 4 times the rate for Hispanic women. One in four African American women live in poverty which is strongly linked to HIV risk and can directly or indirectly increase infection. The best way to prevent the infection of HIV/AIDS is to abstain from sexual intercourse.

The purpose of this project was to inform participants of the increasing HIV/AIDS rates in Memphis/Shelby County, to inform participants of various ways of contracting and spreading HIV/AIDS, to teach preventive methods, and to connect them with community organizations and resources that can help them to stay healthy. This was achieved through two “Real Talk” panel discussions with community based organizations. The first panel discussion was held on the campus of LeMoyne-Owen College and the second panel discussion was held at Christ Missionary Baptist Church.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES
Two panel discussions were held to talk about misconceptions, concerns, and questions about HIV and how they could reduce/eliminate rates of HIV/AIDS infections. This panel discussions was held on the campus of LeMoyne-Owen College and at Christ Missionary Baptist Church. Included in these discussions were individuals who were HIV positive as well as service providers from the community. Panel participants openly discussed their they status, sending a message of prevention. At the discussion, information on HIV transmission and prevention were given. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and share concerns about HIV. Data and information was recorded through pre and post tests. The intention of this panel discussion was to inform African American women on the necessary steps to take to prevent transmission of HIV/AIDS. With these steps there are high hopes of increasing awareness.

DISCUSSION
The significance of this project was that the audience was more informed of the necessary precautions to prevent becoming infected with HIV. A positive impact was the fact that many persons had not had interactions with individuals who were HIV positive. Comments were heard, “She does not look like she has HIV,” and “Wow, I didn’t know that many people were infected in Memphis.”

This intervention allowed those in the audience to “put a face on individuals who were HIV positive.” Many participants expressed that they would take the information that they learned and share it with their family and friends.

OUTCOMES
Because HIV/AIDS is so prevalent in the African American community, participants gained knowledge on HIV/AIDS and why there is such a high transmission among African American women. Participants showed an increase in knowledge of:
- Risk factors
- Preventive methods
- Places in the city to be tested

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