

**Stony Brook University
The Graduate School**

Doctoral Defense Announcement

Abstract

The Best of Intentions: Using the Transtheoretical Model to Explore Substance Use
Patterns and HIV Risk Behaviors in a Suburban Sample

By

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The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) continues to pose significant challenges to public health in the United States and abroad. Despite modest treatment gains in the last decade, HIV infection remains incurable and invariably fatal. The modification of high risk behaviors is the only available means for preventing the spread of HIV. The behaviors associated with HIV transmission – unprotected sexual activity and the sharing of contaminated drug injection equipment – are complex and often difficult to alter given individual, social and cultural dynamics. Understanding how people change and the variables associated with behavior modification can enhance HIV prevention interventions and ultimately reduce the spread of HIV. The study sample includes 220 active substance users interviewed as part of a federally-funded community outreach program on Long Island. Subjects were interviewed at baseline and again 6 months later regarding actual and intended sexual behaviors and substance use. Using the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) of behavior change as a lens, this study describes substance use patterns and sexual behaviors among a sample of suburban substance users and identifies predictors of behavior change. Predominant drugs of choice among subjects were alcohol, marijuana, crack/cocaine and heroin. Intention to quit using substances was reported by 80% of subjects, though intended timeframes varied. More than half of subjects reported unprotected sex within the last 30 days. Those who reported an intent to quit using substances or to start using condoms within 30 days were more successful at doing so than those who planned behavior changes within 6 months, but not necessarily within in the next month. The study outlines practice and policy implications for HIV prevention and substance use interventions.

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