

PREDICTORS OF HEALTH PROTECTIVE SEXUAL COMMUNICATION: DEPRESSION AND STD ATTITUDES

Jeffrey B Harris, J.D., Andrew Scherbarth, B.S. and Mark Vosvick, Ph.D.

This study examined links between health protective sexual communication (HPSC), depression, and STD attitudes to inform STD prevention efforts. HPSC is an important link to safer sexual practices. It includes discussion about sexual histories, safer sex practices, and use of contraceptives between sexual partners. Depressive symptoms (e.g. sadness, apathy, changes in eating or sleeping, and difficulty concentrating) can interfere with social functioning and are associated with sexual risk behavior. Attitudes toward sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) have three components: beliefs (i.e., contagability and severity of STDs), feelings about STDs, and intention to act to prevent STDs. The current study used a diverse sample (N=316, 64% women, 27% African-American, 8% Latino, age M=21). We hypothesized increased depressive symptoms (CES-D) and high-risk STD attitudes (STD Attitudes Scale) would be associated with less HPSC (Health Protective Sexual Communication Scale). After controlling for demographic factors, a stepwise linear regression analysis (adjusted $R^2=.25$ [$F(1,109)=3.53$, $p<.001$]) suggests that increased depressive symptoms ($t=2.18$, $p=.03$) and higher-risk STD beliefs ($t=2.41$, $p=.02$), are associated with less HPSC, whereas high-risk intention to act ($t=-3.23$, $p=.002$) is associated with more HPSC. There was no association found between feelings about STDs and HPSC. Given the complexity of STD attitudes, it may be helpful in future primary prevention efforts to consider the three attitude components (i.e. beliefs, feelings and intention to act). However, for more meaningful input on how to structure interventions, this study indicates that more research is needed to clarify the relationships between STD attitude components and HPSC.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: Mark Vosvick, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, University of North Texas, P.O. Box 311280, Denton, TX, 76203-1280, United States, 940-891-6844, 940-565-4682, vosvick@unt.edu