ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Barriers to Safer Sex Practices for Lesbian and Bisexual Women

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Historically, literature on sexual health compared men vs. women, and gay men vs. heterosexual adults, while paying little to no attention to lesbian or bisexual women who have sex with women. Although researchers have continued to study sexual health risks among heterosexual adults, and gay and bisexual men, existing literature provides an inadequate understanding of sexual health risks for lesbian and bisexual women. This includes barriers to safer sex practices. The current study was designed to explore barriers to safer sex practices among lesbian and bisexual women who were college students. A total of 12 self-identified female, sexual minority students at a mid-sized mid-western university participated in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Using Consensual Qualitative Research (Hill, 2012), domains that emerged included: limited resources; lack of education, knowledge, and awareness; belief of invulnerability; and stigma and shame. The most frequently cited barrier across all interviews was lack of education, knowledge, and awareness of risk related to STIs for lesbian and bisexual women. Limitations, implications for future research, and interventions are discussed.

Keywords: lesbian, bisexual woman, barriers to safe sex, STI