Sex Ed in the Age of Obama

It’s improving. But will African-American HIV rates get better too?

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Under the Obama administration, some abstinence-only programs are being replaced by comprehensive sex education—federally funded for the first time. One new effort, called the Personal Responsibility Education Program, channels $75 million a year to evidence-based programs teaching healthy relationships and other life skills.

But will these advances help stem HIV rates among black youth?

Not if the new programs don’t address the reasons kids have unsafe sex, says Cleo Manago, CEO and founder of the AmASSI Centers for Wellness and Culture in Los Angeles. “Sex education doesn’t go deep enough and is rarely taught in a way that’s relevant to students,” Manago told *Real Health*. “A lot of people know how sex is done. But they’re not being trained to value themselves despite the sexualized culture.”

In a 2006 AmASSI study of black men who have sex with men (MSM), 85 percent knew how HIV is transmitted. Yet this population experiences disproportionately high HIV rates.

In Atlanta, Dázon Dixon Diallo, founder and president of SisterLove, a sexual health organization for women of African descent, says we’ll only reduce HIV rates when we “normalize sexual health” from an early age.

“We must reach a point where talking about human sexuality is as normal as [discussing] diet,” Dixon Diallo says. “You teach kids how to brush their teeth and to look both ways before crossing the street. We have to do the same thing with sexual health.”

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