

# Study: Gay Black men twice as likely to be HIV-positive

By Emily Ann Brown  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Jon-William Patterson is 24-years-old, Black and gay. He is secure in his sexuality, but he is not secure in knowing that because of his sexual preference he may be at a higher risk of contracting HIV than any other group.

If Patterson needs any proof, he can examine a report released last week by the Black Aids Institute titled "Reclaiming our Future: The State of AIDS among Black Youth."

It noted that 40,000 people become infected with HIV every year — more than half of them under the age of 25. "No matter how you chop those numbers up, African-American young people are heavily over represented," the report observes. "African-Americans account for 66 percent of HIV infections among those 13- to 19-year-olds. Among 20- to 24-year-olds, it's only slightly better, with Blacks accounting for 53 percent of those infected. Though in 2003, 62 percent of all reported AIDS cases in children under the age of 13 were found among African-Americans."

Black women were also disproportionately represented in the statistics.

"...African-American females comprise 72 percent of all young women newly diagnosed with HIV between the ages of 13 and 19, and 66 percent of all young women newly diagnosed with HIV between the ages of 20 and 24." As bleak as those numbers are, they are even bleaker for young gay men.

"In a shocking study the CDC released in June 2005, 46 percent of Black men of all ages who have sex with men in five major cities tested positive for HIV," the report observed.

"While the threat of HIV must be understood as a danger to the lives of all African-American young people, the numbers are especially troubling for certain groups in Black communities, specifically young Black men who have sex with men and young African-American women," said Cathy Cohen, a University of Chicago professor and co-author of the report with Alexandria Bell and Mosi Ifatunji.

Patterson, a recent Payne College graduate, joined Leaders in the Fight to Eradicate AIDS, or L.I.F.E. AIDS, a student-run organization that recently kicked off its 2nd Annual Student Teach-in and Town Hall meeting at Howard University.

"It's not helping our com-

munity when we have individuals who are not walking with integrity by being honest with themselves and with sisters," said Patterson, referring to the increased concern involving Black men who have sex secretly with men and women, commonly known as "the down low."

"As a Black gay man, I would not want to have relations with a brother who was secretly going behind my back and then going back to his wife, knocking her up and possibly infecting them and

putting them at risk," said Patterson. "You are not doing yourself any good and particularly not doing the gay and Black community as a whole any good by you living a double life. It's all about loving each other and being responsible because that's how we're going to end this."

Not only does accountability and responsibility need to increase in the Black homosexual community, Patterson said, but also among heterosexuals.

Shauna Cooper, a

Langston University student, agrees.

She said that an "air of invincibility" among young African-Americans often serves as a conduit for contracting HIV.

"It can't happen to me," Cooper said referring to the mentality of some Black students. "They don't even realize that they are in the risk group. If you are having unprotected sex, you're in the risk group. Whether you're bisexual, homosexual, regular sexual, however you are

— you're at risk. AIDS is like bullets, it doesn't have a face," said Cooper, 27.

Because many young people consider themselves unaffected by the plight of HIV, the message of prevention often falls on deaf ears, Cooper said.

"It's very hard for us to stand on the front line of fighting this epidemic," she said.

Cooper hopes that L.I.F.E. AIDS student chapters increases nationwide.

During the student teach-

in, she plans to motivate students to join the cause in preventing and bringing awareness of HIV and AIDS to the young Black community.

L.I.F.E. AIDS began last year with help from the Magic Johnson Foundation. Since its launch, 50 university chapters have formed, including the one at Howard.

About 60 students from various universities participated.

"We want to talk about everything people want to  
(See Gays, Page 12)

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