Body image and African American females' sexual health.

OBJECTIVES: This study examines the association between African American adolescent females' body image and their sexual health.

METHODS: African American adolescent females (n = 522) completed a survey that assessed body image using a 7-item scale (alpha = 0.71) and a face-to-face interview that assessed sexual behaviors.

RESULTS: In logistic regression analyses, controlling for depression, self-esteem and body mass index (BMI), adolescents who were more dissatisfied with their body image were more likely to fear abandonment as a result of negotiating condom use (adjusted odds ratio [AOR] = 3.3, p = 0.02), more likely to perceive that they had fewer options for sexual partners (AOR = 2.4, p = 0.001), more likely to perceive themselves as having limited control in their sexual relationships (AOR = 2.0, p = 0.002), and more likely to worry about acquiring HIV (AOR = 1.5, p = 0.04). There was an association between having a greater dissatisfaction with one's body image and never using condoms during sexual intercourse in the past 30 days (AOR = 1.6, p = 0.04) and more likely to engage in unprotected vaginal sex in the prior 6 months (AOR = 1.6, p = 0.04).

CONCLUSIONS: Prior research has demonstrated an association between African American women's body image and greater obesity risk, lower self-esteem, and greater...
depression. The present study has shown an association between body image dissatisfaction and a range of sexual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Women who are more dissatisfied with their body image may be at greater risk for unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and HIV infection.

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