

HIV and Popular Culture: A Web-based Educational Resource

Issues:

In the United States, new HIV infections continue to occur at an alarming rate among young people, despite a number of formal HIV education and prevention programs. Surprisingly, little research has been done using websites as HIV educational tools for youth even though this method holds great promise. In this study, we evaluate the effectiveness of a website on HIV and popular culture as an educational tool for at-risk youth.

Description:

We created a multimedia website (www.bio.davidson.edu/projects/aidspopculture) that conveys information about HIV through portrayals of HIV/AIDS in the visual arts, TV/film, and music from 1981 through the present. This site has been shown to several groups, including college students, middle school students, and disadvantaged youth. To determine the effectiveness of the site, we evaluated the attitudes and knowledge of students who did or did not view the site through the use of a short questionnaire.

Lessons Learned:

Viewing the website significantly increased students' knowledge of and attitudes toward HIV. Participants who viewed the site were more likely to express an interest in HIV/AIDS. They also displayed a better understanding of important HIV/AIDS concepts.

Recommendations:

This website on HIV and pop culture is an effective educational tool. We found that it improves knowledge about and attitudes toward HIV among Southeastern US college students as well as minority youth, both at-risk populations. HIV information presented through the Internet and involving popular culture may appeal more to young people than information presented in traditional academic formats, thus making this information more accessible. This site could be useful both in informal settings and as part of structured educational curricula. Because of the Internet's broad reach, this type of educational website may have great potential to disseminate important information to hard to reach populations.