

Exploring Young Black Gay, Bisexual and Other Men Who Have Sex with Men's PrEP Knowledge in Toronto, Ontario

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BACKGROUND

- Despite advancements in the HIV biomedical prevention landscape, studies indicate that young Black, gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (YBGBM) remain at significantly higher risk of HIV and other STIs than other young GBM
- This risk is compounded by a history of structural violence and social trauma that interconnects with gendered disparities to limit healthcare access⁽¹⁾
- While Health Canada approved PrEP in 2016 and usage has increased with its inclusion in provincial drug formularies⁽²⁾, Black GBM's PrEP awareness remains low⁽³⁾ and there is a void of literature on YBGBM's PrEP knowledge
- This void makes it difficult to determine the factors informing PrEP knowledge, including if YBGBM have the knowledge needed to self-assess their PrEP eligibility and navigate PrEP barriers such as access concerns
- Exploring PrEP knowledge in relation to YBGBM's social locations (race, sexual orientation, etc.) and ecological systems is important as international literature indicates that these factors impact how they engage with and understand PrEP

AIM

- To explore the individual and socio-structural factors that influence YBGBM's PrEP knowledge to begin identifying knowledge variations that could help inform culturally tailored public health PrEP programs

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METHODS

Study Design

- Purposive and snowball sampling, in-person presentations at community health centres
- A Peer Research Assistant and Frontline Service Providers helped recruit hard to reach YBGBM
- Design informed by Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory approach

Data Collection

- One-time, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with self-identified YBGBM aged 15-29 years who access healthcare services in Toronto, Ontario
- Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim

Data Analysis

- Intersectionality and the social-ecological model were used to analyze transcripts
- Data analyzed using NVivo12 software

Participant Characteristics

- 22 participants
- Gay (n=16), Queer (n=2), Heterosexual (n=1), Pansexual (n=2), non identified (n=1)
- Black-African (n=5), Black-Canadian (n=3), Black-Caribbean (n=12), Mixed Background (n=2)

RESULTS

Participants' narratives revealed . . .

Institutional Efforts to Disseminate PrEP Information are Ineffective at Reaching YBGBM

Participants noted this ineffectiveness even among clinics focused on young, racialized LGBT populations. As expressed by one participant:

I used to frequent [Healthcare Centre X] . . . there is where I got most of my knowledge about that [PEP and PrEP]. But I feel like I had to seek it [the knowledge] out . . . I didn't know about that [PEP and PrEP] before . . . I felt like I had to pick up a pamphlet somewhere . . . that was my first time, ever . . . reading about it or even hearing about it . . . (23-year-old, queer, mixed Black-African and Caribbean gender non-conforming participant)

Social Locations and Perceptions of PrEP Users Informs PrEP Knowledge

Participants also noted varied, interconnected factors that impeded their knowledge of and willingness to use PrEP. For instance, several non-Canadian born participants revealed low HIV biomedical prevention literacy and distrust of western medicine. As noted by one participant:

. . . It does not mean that you can actually have unprotected sex [while on PrEP] . . . And you aren't going to catch [HIV] . . . The day that they bring me, a hundred men [who] will have used PrEP . . . for . . . two years, each unprotected sex with HIV+ people and they have to prove that these guys, they were using PREP and they did not catch HIV that . . . I will [start] using that medication . . . Until then . . . I say preach, encourage to people to first protect yourself before you do anything else . . . (30-year-old, heterosexual and gay identifying, Black-African cisgender man and recent newcomer)

DISCUSSION

- Most participants had some PrEP knowledge. However, various institutional and social factors converged to produce knowledge gaps
- There is a need for more research on institutions' approaches to PrEP knowledge dissemination and the ways institutions attempt to engage YBGBM
- The healthcare system's often universal approach to care and dissemination of PrEP information yielded PrEP awareness campaigns that failed to resonate with many YBGBM and prevented them from learning more about PrEP
- Physicians' application of PrEP eligibility guidelines in their daily practice may inadvertently lead them to exclude eligible patients

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

- This study is unique in its exploration of YBGBM's PrEP knowledge
- Participants' various social locations and their socio-ecological environments converge to influence this knowledge
- Physicians' failure to consider Black-Canadians' unique social locations and socio-ecological factors when assessing their PrEP candidacy further perpetuates the experiences of exclusion and discrimination faced by numerous Black-Canadians when accessing the healthcare system
- The lack of physician-patient PrEP conversations indicates that physicians are missing opportunities to engage and foster YBGBM's PrEP knowledge
- As HIV rates among Black GBM continue rising and the move towards HIV biomedical prevention approaches continues, identifying ways to enhance YBGBM's PrEP knowledge is imperative