

Experiences of PrEP Stigma among Black and Latino Gay and Bisexual men in Los Angeles

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Background

- In the U.S., Black and Latino MSM are disproportionately affected by the HIV epidemic.
- The lifetime HIV risk is 1 in 2 for Black MSM and 1 in 4 for Latino MSM compared with a lifetime HIV risk of 1 in 11 for white MSM.
- Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is a powerful biomedical HIV prevention strategy
- Nationally, in 2015, approximately 500,000 African-Americans and 300,000 Latinos could have potentially benefited from PrEP, but only 7,000 (1.4%) and 7,600 (2.5%) of prescriptions were filled by African-Americans and Latinos, respectively.



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STUDY

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Study Population and Design

- Between January 2017 and October 2017, a purposive sample of Black and Latino MSM PrEP users was recruited through gay-oriented sexual and social networking apps (i.e. Grindr and Growlr), community events, and community agency referrals.
- 26 Black MSM and 29 Latino MSM PrEP users completed an in-depth, semi-structured interview.
- Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data.

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Demographic characteristics (N=55)

Characteristic	n	(%)
Age (years); mean (range)	30 (21-49)	
Black/African-American	26	47%
Hispanic/Latino	29	53%
Sexual orientation: Gay/homosexual	50	91%
Education completed		
High school/GED	7	13%
Some college or more	48	87%

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Demographic and PrEP use characteristics (continued; N=29)

Characteristic	n	(%)
Have health insurance	51	93%
Employed (FT/PT)	42	76%
Annual income of \$40,000 or less	40	73%
Length of time using PrEP (months); mean (median, range)	19 (12, 0.25-68)	

LA PrEP Stories Project: Main Themes Related to PrEP Stigma



1. Perception that PrEP users engage in high-risk sexual behaviors
 - *Negative labels and identities assigned to PrEP users
2. Conflicts in relationships attributed to PrEP
3. Experiences of discomfort, judgment, or homophobia from medical providers
4. Perception that PrEP users are HIV-positive
5. Gay stigma in families limits PrEP disclosure

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Perception that PrEP Users Engage in High-Risk Sexual Behaviors

- “I think everybody understands that if somebody says they are on PrEP on Grindr, it means that I will most likely let you cum in me. It is a kind of stigma that I don’t want.” (Latino, age 21, 33 months on PrEP)
- “The only negative response I got was from someone who’s HIV-negative who assumed that because I was on PrEP I was having a lot of sex... I think he assumed that I was getting gang-banged every weekend or something.” (Latino, age 37, 23 months on PrEP)
- “When I told [my regular partner] that I was about to go on [PrEP], he actually said to me, ‘Don’t you think... you’re going to be more promiscuous and put yourself at risk for contracting other diseases when you go on it?’ And I said, ‘No, not necessarily.’” (Black, age 43, 12 months on PrEP)

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Negative Labels and Identities Assigned to PrEP Users

- “I’m a huge online dater... I’ll say that I’m on PrEP. They’re like, ‘What does that mean? Does it mean you have a lot of partners? [...] Like, are you a **Truvada whore**?’ I’m like, ‘No, I take it because you can’t trust anybody.’” (Black, age 31, 12 months on PrEP)
- “I tell most of my sex partners about it – most of my fuck buddies. Some of them didn’t like it and some of them did. Some of them told me, ‘Oh, you’re just going to be a **slut** the whole time. You’re not going to want to have sex with me anymore. You’re going to want to have sex with other people.’” (Latino, age 25, 1 month on PrEP)

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Conflicts in Relationships Attributed to PrEP

- “I’ve actually had to hide the bottle from my husband... And I have to because I think if he knew I was on it, I think he would view it as a level of mistrust – [that] I don’t trust him.” (Latino, age 30, 9 months on PrEP)
- “I had a guy break up with me because I was on PrEP... I’m very monogamous, but he broke up with me because he didn’t like the idea of me being on a pill that prevented me from using condoms. But I even used a condom when we were together.” (Black, age 22, 44 months on PrEP)

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Experiences of Discomfort, Judgment, or Homophobia with Medical Providers

- “I felt her sense like, ‘What are you out here doing? Because when you talk to me and you regularly get HIV tests, you told me you wear condoms. So why do you need PrEP?’ [...] It was kind of like, ‘Well, maybe you should find you a partner that wants to be only with you.’” (Black, age 33, 24 months on PrEP)
- “I’ve had doctors who have sort of come off condescending about the kind of sex that I have engaged in. It makes me want to be less communicative with them. I don’t want to tell them things... So I think they need to be trained on communicating or even just being tolerant or open-minded about things.” (Latino, age 24, 26.5 months on PrEP)

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Perception that PrEP Users are HIV-Positive

- “I think one of my friends I had to tell exactly what it was because they saw the bottle, and I think they looked up what it was for and they thought I had HIV because it was an HIV med.” (Latino, age 37, 23 months on PrEP)
- “I just wouldn’t like my mom or my sister finding the bottle and then Googling it and being like, ‘He has HIV?!’ [...] Because they’re not in our community – they’re straight folks and they’re very religious.” (Black, age 31, 18 months on PrEP)

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Gay Stigma in Families Limits PrEP Disclosure

- “I haven’t come out to [my family] and I know mentioning this sort of thing, again, it’d be on way of coming out to them, essentially, and I’m just not ready for that.” (Latino, age 29, 8 months on PrEP)
- “My family’s very religious. So anything remotely considered a contraceptive is bad. And also the fact that I’m gay is not accepted. So it didn’t roll over well when I told my mom [that I was on PrEP].” (Black, age 22, 42 months on PrEP)

Conclusions

- Black and Latino MSM using PrEP experience stigma within the context of PrEP disclosure. Our findings highlight some of the personal and social consequences that can result from PrEP disclosure.
 - The assumption that PrEP users engage in elevated sexual risk behaviors.
 - Attachment of negative labels such as “whore” or “slut” to PrEP users.
- To reduce conflict in relationships, the introduction of PrEP will require more open lines of communication and/or mutual decision-making between partners.
- Experiences with providers suggest that there is a lack of LGBT and PrEP competency among medical providers, particularly primary care physicians.

Conclusions (cont'd)

- Strategies to address PrEP-related stigma should utilize a multi-level approach:
 - Public health campaigns to normalize PrEP
 - Personal testimonials from other BLMSM PrEP users
 - Targeted education to communities impacted by HIV
 - Using local opinion leaders or celebrities to promote PrEP
- To increase PrEP uptake, the persistent HIV stigma and gay stigma within Black and Latino communities must also be addressed.

Thank You!

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