“The movers and shakers in the Black communities”: The influence of social networks on PrEP use among young Black gay and bisexual men

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Racial disparities in PrEP

of people who could potentially benefit from PrEP are **African American** – approximately **500,000 people**

... but only **1%** of those – **7,000 African Americans** - were prescribed PrEP

*Prescription data is limited to those filled at retail pharmacies or mail order services from September 2015-August 2016*

Wilton et al. (2015), Strauss et al. (2017), Kuhns et al. (2017), CDC (2017)
Role of peers and social networks
Influence of peers and social networks

Characteristics of social networks influence PrEP use:

- Peer network size is related to PrEP uptake
- PrEP users are more likely to know other PrEP users and know a larger number of people living with HIV
- Identification as gay or having a House/Ball community affiliation are associated with increased PrEP awareness

Kuhns et al. (2017), Holt et al. (2018), Khanna et al. (2016), Pulsipher et al. (2016), Wagner et al. (2016)
How do social networks and peers influence young Black gay, bisexual, and other MSM’s knowledge and perceptions of PrEP?
50 qualitative interviews; 25 in Cleveland, OH and 25 in Milwaukee, WI

- Black/African American
- Gay, bisexual, or MSM
- Unknown or HIV-negative serostatus
- 18 years or older
- $50 compensation
## Study Design

**Recruitment strategy**
- LGBT community sites
- Social media

**Interview topics**
- Healthcare utilization
- Sexual health and relationships
- Perceptions of PrEP and PrEP users
- PrEP use among peers
- Social network characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>50 qualitative interviews; 25 in Cleveland, OH and 25 in Milwaukee, WI</th>
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Data analysis

- MAXQDA Qualitative analysis software
- Team-based 3-stage analytic coding strategy: open, axial, selective coding
  - Emergent codes: e.g. infidelity, promiscuity, discrimination from healthcare providers, peer leaders, involvement in the gay community
- Thematic analysis
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample characteristics</th>
<th>Milwaukee, (n=25)</th>
<th>Cleveland (n=25)</th>
<th>Total (n=50)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (mean, SD)</td>
<td>24.7 (3.2)</td>
<td>25.4 (4.5)</td>
<td>24.5 (3.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gay identity</td>
<td>18 (72%)</td>
<td>22 (88%)</td>
<td>40 (80%)</td>
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<td>Full- or part-time employment</td>
<td>17 (68%)</td>
<td>18 (72%)</td>
<td>35 (70%)</td>
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<td>Annual income &lt;$20,000</td>
<td>14 (56%)</td>
<td>21 (84%)</td>
<td>35 (70%)</td>
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<td>Lifetime sex exchange</td>
<td>4 (16%)</td>
<td>5 (20%)</td>
<td>9 (18%)</td>
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<td>HIV test in last 6 months</td>
<td>22 (88%)</td>
<td>18 (72%)</td>
<td>40 (80%)</td>
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<td>Current or former PrEP user</td>
<td>7 (28%)</td>
<td>5 (20%)</td>
<td>12 (24%)</td>
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Qualitative Themes

- Talking about PrEP with peers
- Filling gaps left by providers
- Increasing trustworthiness of PrEP
- Reducing PrEP stigma
- Need for peer leaders
How young Black GBM are talking about PrEP

“We’re just a bunch of people who talk about social issues on the couch while we sip wine. We’re not experts.”
– 35 year-old in Cleveland

“She tell me about PrEP all the time. Like help us. She’s the mother of the group. She’s the advocate.”
– 20 year-old in Cleveland

“I mean, who not gonna follow their friends? Especially best friends. Like, ‘My whole circle on PrEP except me?’ . . . Who not gonna believe their best friend?”
– 21 year-old in Milwaukee

“Don’t nobody know the community like we do. And that is not the topic of conversation. Like, health and sex and HIV, and PrEP and all that? I’m sorry, but if it is, it’s just in a bashing type of way. . . . Because people out here take that and try and use it against you.”
– 20-year-old, Milwaukee

“I would probably go with the condom, just because I don’t really know much about the pills because I never used it before. None of my friends have ever told me they used it. So, I just really have no education on the pill.”
– 23-year-old, Cleveland
I really haven’t had much information on it. I went to a doctor after hearing about it from a friend. I asked him, and my doctor didn’t even know anything about it. I was like, ‘Whoa. Ok, so it’s definitely not a thing.’ . . . So I just kind of put in the back of my mind as a drug that’s kinda like diet pills almost. You know how everybody says, “Take these pills, they’ll make you lose weight” but they don’t work? I kinda put it under the same category.

–20-year-old, Milwaukee
Improved trustworthiness of PrEP

P: If someone I look up to started taking PrEP, I would probably consider it more, because I know this person and I trust their judgment. I don’t think they would put me in harm’s way. I guess for a lot of people it’s more of a trust issue I guess you could say.

I: Okay. Trusting the friend or?

P: Trust within this friendship, you know. Like this doctor he checks up on me, but he only know me for when I’m there. And, like, my friend, you know, they check up on me all the time, and I’ve known them half my life. So anything they would try to tell me or try to push up on me I would probably consider it. That’s where a doctor, you know, how do I know you’re not just trying to get your brownie points? -30-year-old, Milwaukee
I feel like they took a chance on the pill and from their experience they’ve reached out. They allowed people to understand what the stigma is about PrEP and breaking stigma. They’ve touched more people and had an open conversation for them to be able to consider it at least, if nothing else. - 29-year-old, Milwaukee

Most of the people that have taken PrEP honestly have opened my eyes to see it more of a health thing than more of a gay thing. . . . I look up to the people that do take it with high regard as role models because I would want to be moving the way they do. - 22-year-old, Milwaukee
A need for peer leaders

I ask people, ‘who are the movers and shakers in the Black communities?’
-25-year-old, Milwaukee
A need for peer leaders

I don’t have negative thoughts about PrEP, but I just think if I knew someone, if I looked up to them and they were on it I would probably be more likely take it . . . I think it’s just something about the power in numbers; when you know people are doing it. . . I guess if it’s more popular then, as crazy as it sounds, I probably would be more likely to take it. -37-year-old, Cleveland
Key takeaways

- Many (but not all) young Black GBM are talking about PrEP
  - How do we intervene with those who aren’t?

- Peer influence improves knowledge and reduces PrEP mistrust and stigma

- Need to consider **injunctive norms** (i.e. perceptions of who would approve of PrEP use) and **descriptive norms** (i.e. perceptions of who might be using PrEP)
Who are “the movers and shakers” in your community?
Acknowledgements

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