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Evaluating the feasibility and acceptability of *Tele-B6:* A telehealth intervention designed to enhance social capital among young, Black sexual minority men living with HIV

Srija Dutta[1], Tsedenia Tewodros[1], Marcus O. Reed[1], Antonio Newman Jr. [1], McKinsey Bullock[1], Samuel C.O. Opara[1], Kamini Doraivelu[1], Raphiel Murden[1], Kristi Gamarel[2], Gary W. Harper[2], Sophia A. Hussen[1]

[1]Emory University, [2]University of Michigan

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Background

- Social capital, or the assets in a person's social networks, is a naturally occurring social resource that can buffer the deleterious impacts of stigma and discrimination on HIV care.

- *Brothers Building Brothers by Breaking Barriers (B6)* aimed to enhance social capital through manualized, weekly synchronous sessions, in which YBSMM-LWH engage in group discussions

- Here, we adapted as a B6 as a digital intervention *(Tele–B6)* featuring group interactive activities via videoconference and conduct a pilot waitlist control trial of the intervention with N=60 YBSMM-LWH

Methods

- IDI guide development

- Qualitative interviews with a subset of *Tele–B6* participants (n=24)

- Framework guided rapid qualitative analysis (RQA) approach to analyze IDI data

Research Objective	Relevant RQA Domains
Evaluate feasibility and acceptability of Tele-B6	•Expectations from the program •Motivation to participate in B6 •General experience and perceptions about the program •Most and least valued activities and reasons
Evaluate the process of implementing Tele-B6	•Changes/improvements needed for the program •Reason for missed sessions •Waitlist control experience •Barriers and facilitators to participation and engagement •Perceptions about facilitators •Perceptions about B6 materials and communication channels
Explore preliminary intervention effects on identity beliefs, social capital, stigma	•Changes in social capital •B6 lessons in practice •Open discussion about HIV status •Group dynamics and relationships

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Domain	IDI1	IDI2	IDI3
General experience with B6	• Made him feel more comfortable talking to people • Liked getting paid for talking about his life • Pace of the sessions was perfect	•Rated b6 9.3/10 •Highlighted how consistent sessions and energetic facilitators inspired him to participate as much as he could •Enjoyed flexibility of being able to join while at work	•Overall participant had a good/pleasant experience despite existing disdain for gay men/people due to lack of trust in the community stemming from previous encounters, altercations, etc. •Participant describes the experience as a "breath of fresh air" •Appreciated the camaraderie and transparency with fellow B6 members
Changes/improvements needed in program	• Wished they met on different days, maybe Thursdays but keep it as a weekday and in the evenings	•Suggested offering at least one in-person session with ice breakers to introduce all participants and provide motivation to attend future sessions •Include more conversation about LWH	•Wished for there to be a way to dismiss less engaged/disruptive individuals, particularly for the sake of maintaining the spirit/energy of the group during vulnerable moments •Would have preferred two or three more sessions •Having more sessions could've afforded stronger relationships since participants would've had greater time to become more comfortable with another
Changes in social capital	•Did not have spaces to open up about his experiences prior to B6 •Doesn't really have anyone in his life (dad, brother and grandma recently passed away and no relationship w mom) and was able to open up about that and relate to others •Says his life is the same especially in the midst of loss but feels as if the program helped take him out of a dark space	•Intervention helped him identify the strong, dependable relationships in his life apart from the others •Enhanced effective communication	•Prior to attending Tele-B6, participant describes social capital as "vast"; his network contains a lot of people who have a range of careers, upbringings, backgrounds, and resources •Highlighted that B6 added to his social capital, now having a broader/larger support network - feeling able to call upon study team members, if needed •Clarified that B6 worked on his sense of trust more than his resources •Is more willing to consider community-based (not just LGBTQ) opportunities for support

Results

What participants liked

Having a space to be vulnerable and open

*"It allowed me to see that I wasn't alone, and it kind of **validated certain feelings that I had growing up** because there were like a couple of, like a person, somebody who was like young in the group and to hear their feelings and the things that they went through, it kind of like, made me understand that when I was they age, **I wasn't alone** or I wasn't the only person feeling that way."*

Being able to socialize with other Black Gay men in a supportive space

*"Overall, I think it was good for me. Because I really don't f**k with a lot of gays…**my circle is very small**, and I am **not very trusting** of the community …So typically, when I think of like, us, like coming together, I think, oh, I'm going to pass. But this was actually like a breath of fresh air, so I appreciate the camaraderie with this batch of people. **I liked it**."*

Flexibility of attending virtually

*"I think if it would have been like in person, it would have created a more personable experience; although, I'm not mad at the ZOOM clause because everybody has to like, **most of the time I was just pulling in here from work.** I was talking on video, just like I am right now. So it's like, I get it. And people feel probably a lot more comfortable in their element or comfortability to be able to talk about certain things."*

What participants liked

Building relationships

*"What made it very - I never had experienced such - I mean, **I never experienced such togetherness** for me or a moment like that in my life. So, to have that experience that finally, for the first time, it was very impactful. I hope that is the word…It really impacted me. It really did make me feel as if people really do care about me. **It gave me more hope for my life.**"*

Interactive activities with real-world scenarios

*"Just because I know I have a tendency to react negatively to situations when I could just walk away because I think that was kind of a good activity for me, and **it helped me understand how I could personally better navigate my emotions** when I am in a situation such as dealing with somebody calling me out because of my sexuality or because of somebody talking about my status. 'How can I go about this situation without hurting myself or hurting the other person?' You know, the right way to go about a situation."*

Support from facilitators

*"I thought the facilitators did a really good job at organizing the sessions and getting everyone a turn to speak. Also, checking in to make sure everybody that had something to say, it was said, or restating things**. They were also very affirming when it came to other people's opinions** and related a lot. It didn't seem as if they were facilitators but maybe part of the group. So I would say that was a good element to it because **they definitely participated just as much as us.**"*

What participants learned

Personal relationships

*"I guess that comes with realizing that the people that you thought would be there for you, they are truly not. I guess being in the group, one thing that I kind of learned...**you can't always pour more into others** than what they can do for you, you know? It should be **some type of balance**. So sometimes you have to cut that loss."*

Self awareness

*"If you did the assignment, you learned more about yourself. That was the **most self-aware** that I have been... A lot of emotions that have been ignored resurfaced, and it gave me room to think outside of the group and have some areas of opportunity in terms of emotional healing, and how I go about my day-to-day, how I look at other people."*

Effective communication

*"It taught me to choose my words wisely, so I don't come off aggressive...and how to be more welcoming... like I'm actually **able to convince you** to do the right thing without coming off like rude."*

What participants suggested

Make the program longer

*"I would say more sessions because I think that it ended so quickly that **when I was really starting to open up and connect, it was ending**...I could say it could be at least four more sessions, and those sessions could have consisted of more activities, kind of to the first activity that I did in the group, like the mask activity or something of that nature"*

Make the program continuous

*"I hated that it seems like groups or gatherings like this are always for a short term or are very short-lived because it seems that **where we get the most use, the most knowledge,** or where certain places or certain groups truly offer and do give the greatest benefits but also **tend to be the most short-lived.** I would definitely love to see a part two or a continuation, even if it's just basic policies or whatever for whatever it is that B6 stands for."*

Hybrid format

*"**It** would make it seem more personable instead of it always just being online. I'm not against it being online sessions, but **at least one session** could have been in person."*

Conclusion

- Participants found *Tele-B6* highly acceptable and felt confident in building social capital after completing the intervention.

- Suggested improvements included changes to the delivery/duration of the program and tackling technological issues.

- Participants highlighted the following themes that enhanced engagement:

  - Flexibility of attending sessions virtually

  - Having a non-judgmental, welcoming session environment

  - Practical skills gained from activities and group discussions as primary themes that enhanced engagement

- More research is needed on factors affecting the acceptability and feasibility of similar telehealth interventions to maximize future success.

Thank you!