Prevalence of PrEP use and partner support among male couples in the San Francisco Bay Area of USA

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Background

In recent years PrEP use has increased among men who have sex with men. Past research has shown that male couples have unique HIV prevention needs and therefore it is important to explore PrEP use in couples and study whether a couple dynamic fosters or hinders the partners’ sexual health strategies.

Methods

• Between July 2017 and March 2020 we recruited 308 concordant HIV-negative and serodiscordant male couples (616 individuals) for an HIV prevention intervention trial in the San Francisco Bay Area using active and passive strategies.
• To be eligible, each partner had to: be 18 years or older, be fluent in English, know their own as well as their primary partner’s HIV status, have had anal sex in the past three months, and not be transgender. The couple had to have been in the relationship for at least 3 months.
• Both partners completed a self-administered baseline survey.
• We used the data from the HIV-negative partners in the sample (N=551) to obtain frequencies of select items of interest regarding PrEP use.

Results

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Median (SD)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (yrs.)</td>
<td>33 (11.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Length (yrs.)</td>
<td>4 (7.5)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Details of PrEP Use Among HIV-negative Men (N=551)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever used</td>
<td>348 (63.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used in past 3 months</td>
<td>285 (51.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Among those who ever used PrEP (N=348) 8 (2.3)

Reasons for starting PrEP (multiple allowed):

- I wanted to protect myself from HIV 289 (83.1)
- I wanted to protect myself from HIV in an open relationship 184 (52.9)
- My doctor suggested PrEP might be right for me 85 (24.4)
- Other reason [eg., partner is HIV-positive, to protect sexual partner(s)] 33 (9.5)

Among those who took PrEP in past 3 months (N=285) 8 (2.8)

Support for PrEP:

- Talk openly about taking PrEP 241 (84.6)
- Told primary partner 280 (98.3)
- Primary partner is ‘moderately’ or ‘very’ supportive of taking PrEP 270 (94.7)

PrEP regimen followed:

- 1 pill daily 229 (80.1)
- 4 to 6 pills per week 32 (11.2)
- Only around sexual activity 15 (5.3)

Excellent or ‘Good’ ability to take PrEP as prescribed 266 (93.3)

Conclusions

• Partners are making sexual health decisions together.
• Participants on PrEP followed different regimens and rated very highly their ability to take PrEP as prescribed.
• Partner support for PrEP use is high among couples.

Taken together, having open discussions about HIV safety strategies and having the partner’s support in these decisions may foster not only PrEP uptake and adherence but also other strategies that promote sexual health among couples.

Acknowledgements

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