Incorporating Dating Application Strategies to Recruit Youth at Risk or Living with HIV (ATN CARES Project)

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OVERVIEW

1 in 4 new HIV infections occurs in youth ages 13 to 24 years

Recruitment Efforts

• The ability to recruit youth at risk and living with HIV is imperative to developing effective interventions.

• Current recruitment efforts for the ATN CARES projects (ATN 148 & 149) include in-person recruitment by field interviewers based in various community organizations serving homeless, incarcerated, and LGBT youth in Los Angeles and New Orleans.

• Traditional recruitment methods alienate youth who are not seeking services at participating community organizations.

METHODS

• In an attempt to diversify recruitment strategies, the CARES team has incorporated social media recruitment to reach youth outside community based organizations.

• Recruitment staff have created profiles on 4 dating apps under the name ATN CARES.

• Staff are able to filter potential matches by age range, location, sexual orientation, gender, etc.

• An average of 10 hours/week is spent recruiting through the apps.

• Interested youth are presented information about the project and invited to be screened for eligibility.

• Screening is conducted over the phone, and if eligible, participants are enrolled in-person.

• Dating apps currently used in the study include:

RESULTS

• 134 youth have been screened and 120 have been enrolled into the study through social media recruitment between LA and NOLA.

• It’s estimated that one participant is screened per 4-5 hours of time spent

• There have been roughly 300 connections made on each dating app

• Benefits of social media recruitment include:
  o Less time/costs associated with recruitment – When using the dating apps, staff are not required to drive to various recruitment sites.
  o Providing a greater reach – Field staff are limited to the number of youth visiting the sites, while recruitment with the app can have up to 30 messages/matches in the 4-5 hour timeslot.
  o Participant convenience – Youth are able to respond to messages, ask questions, and set up a screening appointment at any time.

• The addition of social media/dating apps opens up new opportunities to recruit hard-to-reach populations, homeless youth, and youth who do not seek medical/health services.

• Recruitment staff are able to connect with more youth in a short period of time as they’re not limited to one recruitment site.

• A high percentage of participants do not respond to the initial message sent by staff, however, among the 20-30 connections made, on average 1 individual responds.

• This method would best be used in conjunction with in-person recruitment and referrals, specifically during seasons/times where recruitment sites are receiving less visitors.

• Limitations include:
  o Participant preference for in-person engagement and communication vs. through dating apps.
  o Temporary/permanent suspension of dating profiles due to dating app community guidelines.

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