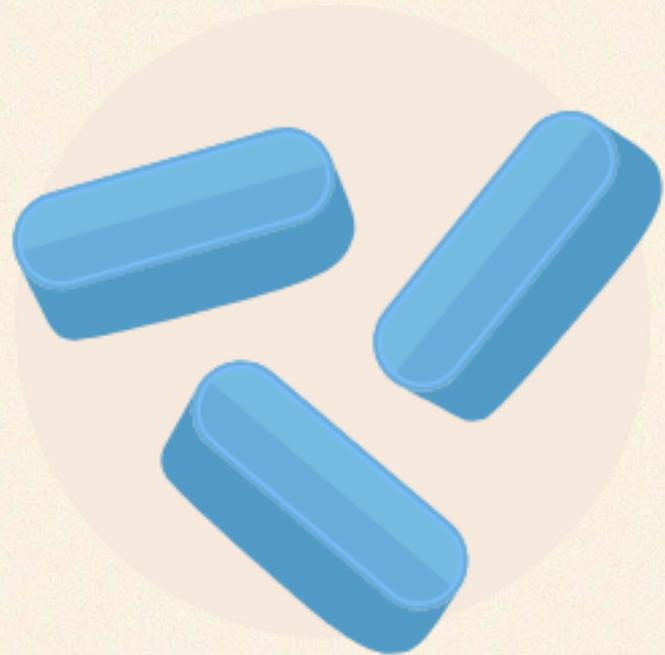


“Using PrEP is being part of a larger movement”:

Additional Individual and Community Level Benefits of PrEP Use Among Latino Gay and Bisexual Men

Research team
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Background & Objectives

HIV infections disproportionately impact Latino gay and bisexual men (GBM) in the United States:

- **1 in 5** Latino GBM are projected to contract HIV in their lifetime compared to **1 in 11** White GBM.
- Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is a proven prevention strategy that can help reduce these high rates of infection in the Latino GBM population.
- Unfortunately, PrEP adoption and persistence among Latino GBM remain low.
 - Only **14%** of eligible Latinos were prescribed PrEP, compared to **63%** of white persons.

Background & Objectives

Circumventing these alarming rates will require innovative and culturally relevant ways that go beyond the biomedical focus on HIV prevention as a motivating factor for PrEP use.

- Other studies have qualitatively assessed the added benefits GBM receive from using PrEP beyond HIV prevention.
- The current study contributes to the literature by examining the additional benefits of using PrEP specifically among Latino GBM PrEP users.

Methods

- A purposeful sample of Latino GBM PrEP users were recruited, between January 2017 and October 2017, in LAC through sexual and social networking apps, community events, and community agency referrals.
- After screening, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants to identify feelings and emotions experienced, plus any additional benefits gained from using PrEP.
- Data were analyzed using an inductive, experiential, essentialist thematic analysis approach.

Methods

Demographic and PrEP Use Characteristics (N=29)

Characteristics	N	(%)
Age (years); mean (range)		30 (21-49)
Gay/homosexual	25	86.2
Some college completed	26	89.7
Employed (FT or PT)	23	79.3
Annual income below \$40,000	23	79.3
Length of time using PrEP (months); mean (median, range)		17 (12, 0.25 – 68)
“Very good” or “Excellent” adherence	22	75.9

Results

Five themes were constructed reflecting additional benefits gained by Latino GBM PrEP users, and included:

1. Reduced fear, anxiety, and stress about HIV, HIV testing, and sex
2. Reeling empowered and in control of their HIV risk
3. Greater awareness of sexual risk behaviors and sexual health
4. Greater sexual exploration and pleasure, and willingness to have condomless sex
5. A greater connection to the gay community and a feeling of contributing to the elimination of HIV

Results

Reduced Fear, Anxiety, and Stress about HIV, HIV Testing, and Sex

- *“HIV has always been that **dark cloud** amongst young boy’s gay life. And really just like flying around like, ‘When is it [HIV infection] going to hit me, when is it going to hit me?’ And now I don’t feel that”* (Enrique, age 39, 37 months on PrEP).
- *“It is a level of anxiety that you don’t have to worry about, or that you can have **off your shoulders**”* (Carlos, age 24, 9 months on PrEP).

Results

Feeling Empowered and in Control of their HIV Risk

- *“I feel like more at-open with myself. I feel more open with my doctor. I feel like I’m taking agency over my health”* (Guillermo, age 30, 12 months on PrEP).
- *“I think PrEP is very empowering and I think that’s what it does for me, and I would use that to be my message to other guys. Like, ‘You can say fuck it and take the pill and be like, I like to fuck and I don’t want to worry about HIV, and **being engaged in health care is going to keep me healthy**”* (Antonio, age 32, 42 months on PrEP).

Results

Greater Awareness of Sexual Risk Behaviors and Sexual Health

- *“Before I would get tested for HIV, like, once a year. Sometimes twice a year. STDs, probably **like one or twice a year**. Wherein now I’m testing **every three months**, and I think the more you’re keeping track of your health and where you’re at with STDs or your health and your liver functions, obviously because they check that for PrEP, you become more conscious”* (Edgar, age 44, 27 months on PrEP).
- *“I’m a little bit **more relaxed** with using condoms. And I’m **trying to get better** about that, but definitely knowing that I’m on it, it almost feels like additional defense that I can afford because I’m using PrEP.”* (Julio, age 24, 4 months on PrEP).

Results

Greater Sexual Exploration and Pleasure, and Comfort Having Condomless Sex

- *“I love using it. It’s a great tool. It allows me to have the **sex life that I want** and not stress too much about it” (Antonio, age 32, 42 months on PrEP).*
- *“I feel very sexually **liberated**. I’m able to do a lot of things, sexually, that I never thought I could do in my lifetime because of **HIV and AIDS in the 80s and 90s** when I was growing up” (Enrique, age 39, 37 months on PrEP).*

Results

A greater connection to the Gay Community and a Feeling of Contributing to the Elimination of HIV

- *“I’m living in a reality, in a present time where there is a medication that prevents me from becoming HIV-positive. It’s **a step forward** to an AIDS-free generation. I’m happy to be a part of it” (Adrian, age 25, 68 months on PrEP).*
- *“The benefits that I’ve gained from using PrEP is being part of **a larger movement**...By me being on it [PrEP] and spreading the word of PrEP and spreading the message of how beneficial PrEP is and encouraging others to get on it, that hopefully they do the same and that this could be some sort of larger effect, where we now are **more protected as a community**” (Ricardo, age 21, 33 months on PrEP).*

Discussion

- These benefits beyond HIV prevention encompass a range of social, emotional, and psychological benefits that Latino GBM experience while using PrEP.
- While several of these findings on additional benefits of PrEP have been previously reported, we identified another: feeling more connected to the gay community and a sense of rapport, in eliminating HIV infections.
- In a sense, these participants serve as PrEP champions, educating, advocating, and promoting the use of PrEP.
 - Thus, even in the case of PrEP, the individual is subordinate to the group indicative of Latino culture.

Future Directions

- Beyond prevention, PrEP generates other collateral benefits of promise to Latino GBM.
 - These benefits can inform the development of future PrEP messaging to help fortify and incentivize motivation for PrEP uptake and persistent use among Latino GBM.
- Increasing Latino GBM PrEP adherence can be improved by further incorporating them in the process, who have demonstrated to want to help their own community.
 - This may be especially helpful with the future uptake of injectable PrEP.

Limitations

- Our sample was recruited in Los Angeles County with a large Latino population and, therefore, results may not reflect the experiences of Latino GBM PrEP users in other settings (e.g., rural settings with smaller Latino populations).
- The sample consists solely of English-speaking Latino GBM and may not reflect the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latino GBM PrEP users.
- Research with monolingual Spanish-speaking Latino GBM is needed to assess if positive experiences and benefits gained from PrEP use differ based on language and other related cultural nuances associated with monolingual Spanish-speaking populations.

Thank you

We also wish to thank our participants for all their incredible insight.

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