Low PrEP Awareness and Willingness Among Transgender Women in South Africa

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Background

- Transgender women (TGW) are at disproportionately high risk for HIV.
- Recent studies indicate a pooled HIV prevalence of 25% among TGW across 6 sub-Saharan African countries (Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Lesotho, Malawi, Senegal, Swaziland and Togo).
- Compared with men who have sex with men, TGW had twice the odds of testing positive for HIV (OR=2.15; 95% CI: 1.76-2.49) and half the odds of condom use during last receptive anal sex (OR=0.50; 95% CI: 0.44-0.55).

Methods: TMAPP Study

- Surveys offered in English, Afrikaans, or Xhosa.
- Electronic tablet device.
- Each participant completed a face-to-face interviewer-administered survey (30-45 mins).
- TGW recruited by network referral and outreach by peer research assistants.

- Background

- Surveys conducted in 3 cities (see map above):
  - Johannesburg (n=73)
  - East London (n=83)
  - Port Elizabeth (n=65)
- Data collection dates: July 2018 to October 2018.

- The effects of gender affirmation dynamics on HIV prevention has not been explored in South Africa.

- A sub-analysis of data from the seminal iPrex study (6 countries, including South Africa) found that unmet gender affirmation needs can lead to engagement in HIV risk behaviors.

- In 2016, the South African National Department of Health implemented PrEP for high-risk populations.

- Of those enrolled, 9% was TGW.

- Compared with men who have sex with men, TGW had twice the odds of testing positive for HIV (OR=2.09, CI: 1.76-2.49) and half the odds of condom use during last receptive anal sex act (OR=0.47, CI: 0.35-0.64).

- Among HIV-negative and status unknown participants who had taken PrEP (n=19):
  - 4.33 (2.41-7.79)*
  - 4.69 (1.49-14.75)*
  - 3.51 (1.60-7.67)*
  - 2.95 (1.19-7.30)*

- Among HIV-negative and status unknown participants who perceived their risk for HIV acquisition to be high were
  - 3.29 (1.85-5.62)*
  - 3.06 (1.25-7.48)*
  - 1.71 (0.75-3.85) ---

- Unmet gender affirmation needs are associated with increased HIV risk behavior engagement.

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- Among those who did not take PrEP:
  - 1.71 (0.75-3.85) ---

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Additional Notes:

- HIV-negative and status unknown participants who perceived their risk for HIV acquisition to be high were NOT more likely

Conclusions

- PrEP awareness, willingness, and uptake remain LOW among TGW in South Africa.
- HIV-negative TGW who perceived their risk for HIV acquisition to be high were NOT more likely to take PrEP than TGW with low perceived risk.
- TGW sex workers were NOT more likely to be aware of PrEP or willing to take PrEP than TGW who had not engaged in sex work.

Strategies are needed for increasing PrEP awareness and willingness that are tailored for populations with the greatest vulnerability to HIV.

Findings suggest a need to raise awareness of PrEP in transgender communities and to include TGW in building strategies for increasing engagement in PrEP services.