

GAY MEN WHO USE PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP AGREEMENTS: THE EVOLUTION OF NEGOTIATED SAFETY?

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Background:

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) presents opportunities and challenges for gay and bisexual men (GBM) negotiating sex with their regular and casual partners, particularly whether regular partners have an explicit agreement about condomless anal intercourse with casual partners (CAIC). We used behavioural surveillance data to examine agreements by men in relationships who were and weren't using PrEP.

Methods:

A community-based, cross-sectional survey of adult GBM was conducted in Melbourne, Victoria in January 2018. Recruitment occurred at gay venues/events and online. Using multivariate logistic regression with the sub-sample of non-HIV-positive men reporting regular partners at the time of the survey, we compared PrEP users and non-users and assessed their relationship agreements and recent sexual behaviour including CAIC.

Results:

In 2018, 1264 GBM with regular partners completed the survey, of whom 23.2% were on prescribed PrEP and 75.6% had an agreement about casual sex. The mean age was 35.7 years ($SD=11.0$) and 94.9% were gay-identified. There were no significant differences between PrEP users and non-users in age, sexual identity, education, employment status, country of birth and relationship length.

Multivariate analysis indicated that PrEP users were significantly more likely than non-users to have an explicit agreement with their regular partner that allowed CAIC (AOR=3.15, $p=.008$). They were more likely to report recent CAIC with both HIV-positive and HIV-negative casual partners (AORs=4.31 and 2.48, $p<.001$); higher numbers of sex partners (AOR=1.52, $p<.001$); recent PEP use (AOR=2.54, $p=.04$); and less time since their last HIV test (AOR=.40, $p<.001$). PrEP users were also significantly more likely to have a HIV-positive regular partner (AOR=2.95, $p=.008$).

Conclusion:

Representing an evolution of historical negotiated safety agreements, PrEP users are significantly more likely to broker relationship agreements that allow condomless sex with casual partners compared to non-PrEP-users. These new agreements will redefine primary and secondary prevention approaches to sexual health literacy and management for GBM.

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