



“I feel like the shackles have been loosened a little”: The impact of PrEP on sexual cultures from the SIN-PrEP study

Bridget Haire, 24 September 2018

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GIPA acknowledgement



What does PrEP mean for safe sex in Sydney?

What does PrEP mean for 'safe sex' in Sydney?

- Sydney-based **gay men taking PrEP** (through clinical trials OR personal importation)
- Sydney-based sexually active **HIV positive gay men**
- Sydney-based HIV sexually active **negative gay men**
- Australian-based **healthcare providers**
- Australian-based **HIV sector professionals** involved in PrEP policy and advocacy
- **A proportion of individuals are interviewed twice, about a year (9-18 months) apart**
- **Recruitment of community participants:**
 - ACON 'Ending HIV' elist
 - Advertisements at Fairday and in the SSO
 - Purposive sampling of transmen and people who stopped PrEP

Included in this analysis

50 interviews

5 health care providers

26 PrEP takers (4 importers, 5 Prelude, 17 Epic)

5 HIV negative men not on PrEP

2 HIV positive men not on PrEP

12 repeat interviews (11 PrEP users, 1 non-user)

3 focus groups

12 community sector workers

1 health care provider

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STI – relational impacts

Relational consequences of STIs

PrEP doesn't stop other STIs coming into the relationship, we had a few encounters along that which meant that it couldn't be just happening over there; it kept impinging in on our life in really kind of confronting ways

*[Because of PrEP] we didn't have to have a few tough conversations [early in the relationship]: they really came back to bite us in the bum later. **Liam***

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Safe sex I think is, also a combination of like not only what you do with your genitals but how well-informed you are, the kinds of practices you have when you pick somebody up, even if it's on an app or a sauna... the criteria generally that you need to satisfy with yourself to, to, to think, "Yeah, okay, this is, I've weighed up the risks and the rewards, and I'm fairly certain that the rewards outweigh the risk in this instance," and so that's safe sex.

*It's all of that other stuff that goes into forming the meet-up or whatever, and then judging the person, and, you know, how clean is their house or whatever. Are they scraggy? Are they dirty? All that sort of stuff. **Jason***

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Yeah, it's a big, it's a scary conversation to have with people. **James**

Role of social media

*I think it's very important that, if you are on it, then everyone should know. **Gordon***

*I'd tell people on the apps. I tell people face-to-face. I've, I've got no issues about explaining that I think it's an amazing thing that people don't know exist. **James***

*It's there [in my profiles] because I like to promote it. I think it's a good thing. **Jason***

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*My perception of the culture is, if you put PrEP on there, you are basically saying, "I'm up for bare-back." And because of my first time condom rule [Yep] or preference for time one condom rule - it's probably a better way of saying it - it's kind of, the last thing I really want someone to say. **Steve.***

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*So I've got it in [my profile]. I've heard some people will be like take it off and like I will have like periods of having it on and then taking it off, and then putting it back on. You do find that, if you do have it on, they take that as like, "Oh, he's going to like be into like bare-back. Like no condoms." I like try to but like now being on PrEP, if they don't use a condom, I don't push too hard. **Calvin***

**Bridging the serodivide -
or not?**

Have you knowingly had sex with people who are positive?

Yep

What about the ones that don't have controlled viral loads?

*Yep. I've got no problem with that. That, obviously, changes, without a doubt, my, my behaviours. Categorically, condoms go on in either position and I'm probably [Yeah] more likely to top, [Yep] if that's the case. I, I have no reason to reject that person because they're HIV positive. **Teddie***

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How confident would you feel about having sex with a positive person who told you that he had an undetectable viral load, when you weren't taking PrEP?

Pretty confident, provided I was, I, I used protection like condoms and that sort of thing. I'd feel pretty confident. I mean even if ... My understanding, and I may have this the wrong way around, my understanding is that, if you're undetectable, it's very unlikely that it's gonna be passed on from one partner to another. But you never know so I probably would, there would be, like if I had unprotected sex in that situation I would probably have a slight concern. But nothing, I don't think I'd be too overly-worried about it, and I would possibly then follow it up with PEP.

Manacounda

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I understand that someone who's, has an undetectable viral load is, you know, safe. But, you know, nevertheless, it just kind of plays on your mind and it's very difficult, even though you, you, you tell you these things, there's something in the back of your mind that makes it difficult.

Josh

Existential questions

*... like an out-of-body experience sometimes where I'd feel like I'd be watching over myself. you keep finding yourself actually removed from it because you're so worried about what you might be saying or doing, or, or how you're feeling or anything. **Lance***

*I found myself making some decisions around who I was having sex with, the kind of sex I was having, which I would later wonder why I had done [Yep] and was not necessarily super-happy about or comfortable with, not necessarily in terms of ... more in terms of having kind of sexual encounters that veered towards practices that I don't really like necessarily or I don't find super-hot, or attractive, or kind of appealing. But I sort of went with it in the moment and then afterwards I'd be like, "What were you doing that you feel shit about that? **Liam***

A double edged sword

*I sometimes question how mature our value sets are around sex. I think, there really is a lot of truth, as much as it annoys me to admit it, that a lot of us seem to be stuck in this almost like teenage, adolescent mindset with respect to sex and sexual appetite, pushing boundaries and things like that. ... And I know that that, at least for some people, it can be a double-edged sword, psychologically. It can be very, very liberating but, you know, if you start to go down a road of compromising on some of those sort of higher-level functions of the mind and the like in order to satisfy a more primal urge to have sex, yeah, you've gotta be a little bit careful about that because you can generate issues to do with self, self-worth and, and that sort of thing. **David***

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Implications for health promotion

- *PrEP didn't precipitate condomless sex for men in SIN-PrEP, but with PrEP nearly all men reported an increase in sex, particularly condomless sex*
- *STIs present relational challenges to sexually active men*
- *While most men report very satisfying sex lives, some men have negative experiences*
- *One of the great benefits of PrEP – removing the threat of HIV – can be complex in that many received ways of sexual relating had been structured by HIV*
- *Impacts of PrEP are complex, and gay male sex cultures can't be reduced to a narrow focus on disease control.*

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Thank you

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