

Trust, Heat, and Smell: Findings from a Qualitative Investigation into Acceptability of Preventative Doxy-PrEP for STIs and Sexual Risk-Taking Behaviours in a Queensland Cohort.

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Background

Bacterial sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as gonorrhoea, syphilis, and chlamydia are increasing at a rapid rate in Australia despite prevention efforts. Early evidence suggests that Doxycycline prophylaxis (Doxy-PEP/PrEP) demonstrates strong efficacy against syphilis and chlamydia, however, insights into socio-cultural acceptability and provider readiness is limited. Qualitative research was undertaken to analyse social, cultural and ethical factors currently influencing the uptake and adherence to safe, equitable, and culturally appropriate Doxy-PrEP utilisation.

Method

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants. The participants were recruited online and comprised three population groups, including Indigenous Australians, GBMSM men, and heterosexual/bisexual young people between the ages of 18 and 29 years. Analysis and data collection occurred concurrently, with analysis drawing upon the thematic analysis approach of Braun & Clarke (2019, 2021) and Charmaz and Thornberg's (2021) grounded theoretical approach.

Results/Conclusions

Findings from the study provided rich insights into many of the reasons underpinning the reduction in condom use amongst participants, including relational trust, intimacy and attraction as well as situational factors such as alcohol use and the environment in which the participants met their sexual partners. Perceptions of STI risk varied: GBMSM and Indigenous participants focused on HIV, herpes, and gonorrhoea, while young heterosexual/bisexual participants often normalised chlamydia and expressed limited awareness of syphilis. Some interviews highlighted cisgender, heterosexual women and transgender men as being potentially more willing to take the Doxy-PrEP than young, cisgender heterosexual men. Practical considerations such as cost, adherence and potential side effects also shaped attitudes towards Doxy-PrEP across all groups. These novel yet exploratory findings identify key point to areas for further inquiry to gain a deeper understanding of the sexual risk-taking motivations and attitudes towards preventive Doxy-

PrEP amongst higher-risk populations of young heterosexual/bisexual people and Indigenous Australians.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: This research was conducted across three Australian Universities, QUT, USQ, and UTS, and was funded by an ASHM/SHRF grant. No other pharmaceutical companies or industries were involved in this project.

AI statement: No AI was used in the formulation of this abstract nor the research and findings write-ups in this research project.