PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS CASCADE AMONG MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN IN ZIMBABWE

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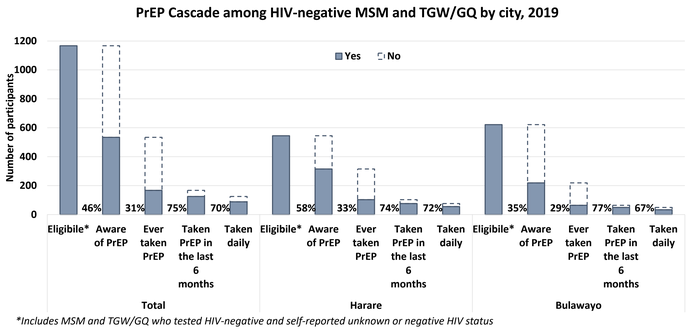
BACKGROUND

- Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for key populations (KP), including men who have sex with men (MSM), transgender women (TGW) and other gender minorities including gender queer individuals (GQ) is increasingly being scaled-up in Zimbabwe, with goals to roll-out PrEP nationally.
- We assessed gaps in PrEP awareness, uptake, and use among HIV-negative MSM and TGW/GQ in two cities of Zimbabwe.

METHODS

- We used respondent-driven sampling to recruit 1538 MSM and TGW/GQ to participate in a cross-sectional survey assessing HIV-related outcomes in Harare and Bulawayo, Zimbabwe (March–July 2019).
- MSM and TGW/GQ were eligible for the survey if they were born male, engaged in anal or oral sex with a man in the past 12 months, and were aged ≥18 years. Consenting participants completed a questionnaire on sociodemographic and HIV risk behaviors and received HIV testing.
- The sample did not reach equilibrium on key variables and was treated as a convenience sample. Unweighted bivariate analyses were restricted to MSM and TGW/GQ who self-reported having a negative or unknown HIV status and tested HIV-negative using a three-test algorithm.
- PrEP cascade variables were stratified by city and KP group. Data were pooled for analysis by KP due to sample size.

Figure 1



**Includes MSM and TGW/GQ who tested HIV-negative and self-reported unknown or negative HIV status*

Despite increased scale-up of PrEP for key populations in Harare and Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, PrEP awareness and uptake remains low among HIV-negative MSM and TGW/GQ.

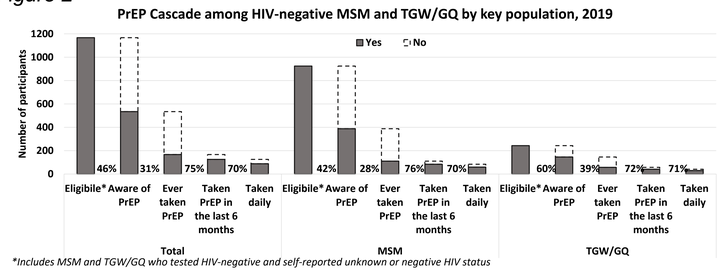
RESULTS

- 75.9% (1167/1538) of all participants tested HIV negative and self-reported HIV-negative/unknown status ([Harare, 75.9%; Bulawayo, 75.9%]; [MSM, 77.4%; TGW/GQ, 70.6%]). Demographic characteristics for these participants are described in Table 1.
- Awareness of PrEP was 45.8% (534/1167; Harare, 57.8%; Bulawayo, 35.2%; Figure 1). PrEP awareness varied by key population (MSM, 42.0%; TGW/GQ, 60.1%; Figure 2).
- Of those aware of PrEP, 31.3% (167/534) had ever taken PrEP ([Harare, 32.7%; Bulawayo, 29.2%]; [MSM, 28.4%; TGW/GQ, 39.0%]).
- Most (71.1% [261/367]) reporting never taking PrEP were interested in starting PrEP ([Harare, 65.1%; Bulawayo, 79.4%]; [MSM, 71.2%; TGW/GQ, 70.8%]). The top 3 reasons for never starting PrEP included not knowing where to access PrEP (24.8% [91/367]), fearing side effects (20.4% [75/367]), and not feeling at risk for HIV (19.6% [72/367]).
- Most (74.9% [125/167]) participants who had ever used PrEP had taken it in the last 6 months ([Harare, 73.8%; Bulawayo, 76.6%]; [MSM, 76.4%; TGW/GQ, 71.9%]).
- Reasons for discontinuing PrEP included side effects (59.5% [25/42]), trust in partner (7.1% [3/42]), inability to access PrEP (4.8% [2/42]), concern about others finding out (2.4% [1/42]), or other reasons (26.2% [11/42]).
- Most PrEP users in the last 6 months reported taking PrEP daily (70.4% [88/125]). Among those who reported PrEP use in the last 6 months, 42.4% last took PrEP yesterday or today (53/125), 12.0% last took PrEP within the past two weeks (15/125), and 45.6% last took PrEP more than two weeks ago (57/125).

CONCLUSIONS

- Findings highlight gaps in PrEP awareness and use. Less than half of HIV-negative MSM and TGW/GQ were aware of PrEP, and awareness was lower in Bulawayo than Harare. Despite interest among participants in starting PrEP, uptake was low.
- To increase awareness and uptake, demand creation messaging could be strengthened by providing information on locations where PrEP is accessible, risk behaviors for HIV and PrEP eligibility, and side effects. Provider-initiated screening for PrEP eligibility and offering of PrEP to persons eligible may also help to reduce gaps in the PrEP cascade.

Figure 2



**Includes MSM and TGW/GQ who tested HIV-negative and self-reported unknown or negative HIV status*

Demographic characteristics and HIV risk factors among HIV-negative MSM and TGW/GQ by city, 2019

	Harare (n=545)		Bulawayo (n=622)		Total (n=1167)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Key population						
Male	344	63.1	580	93.3	924	79.2
TGW/GQ	201	36.9	42	6.8	243	20.8
Age						
18-24	316	58.0	311	50.0	627	53.7
25-34	174	31.9	210	33.8	384	32.9
35-44	42	7.7	67	10.8	109	9.3
45 or older	13	2.4	34	5.5	47	4.0
median (IQR)	23.0 (20.0-28.0)		24.5 (21.0-32.0)		24.0 (21.0-30.0)	
Race						
Black African	539	98.9	608	97.8	1147	98.3
Other (White/Colored/Indian)	6	1.1	14	2.3	20	1.8
Nationality						
Zimbabwean	541	99.3	613	98.6	1154	98.9
Other African	4	0.7	9	1.5	13	1.1
Employment status						
Self employed	119	21.8	143	23.0	262	22.5
Employed full-time	96	17.6	51	8.2	147	12.6
Employed part-time	63	11.6	59	9.5	122	10.5
Full-time student	88	16.2	96	15.4	184	15.8
Retired	2	0.4	1	0.2	3	0.3
Unemployed	177	32.5	272	43.7	449	38.5
Highest education attended						
Primary or less	7	1.3	49	7.9	56	4.8
Secondary	377	69.2	448	72.0	825	70.7
Tertiary	110	20.2	115	18.5	225	19.3
Vocational	51	9.4	10	1.6	61	5.2
Marital status						
Single, never married	455	83.5	535	86.0	990	84.8
Married (to one or more women)	40	7.3	23	3.7	63	5.4
Married (to one or more men)	1	0.2	6	1.0	7	0.6
Separated/divorced	47	8.6	47	7.6	94	8.1
Widowed	1	0.2	7	1.1	8	0.7
Cohabiting	1	0.2	4	0.6	5	0.4
Regular place to sleep at night						
Yes	539	98.9	612	98.4	1151	98.6
No	6	1.1	10	1.6	16	1.4
Sexual orientation*						
Gay/homosexual	294	53.9	357	0.6	651	0.6
Bisexual	251	46.1	264	0.4	515	0.4
Straight/heterosexual	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of male anal/oral sex partners in the past 6 months**						
0	8	1.5	21	3.4	29	2.5
1-5	471	88.5	550	89.3	1021	88.9
6-10	39	7.3	28	4.6	67	5.8
10+	14	2.6	17	2.8	31	2.7
Engaged in condomless receptive anal sex at last sex in the past 6 months (main male partner)[1]						
Yes	103	20.0	63	10.6	166	15.0
No	413	80.0	529	89.4	942	85.0
Engaged in condomless receptive anal sex at last sex in the past 6 months (casual male partner)[2]						
Yes	33	12.4	14	6.1	47	9.5
No	234	87.6	215	93.9	449	90.5
Used condom at last anal sex (main male partner)[1]						
Yes	334	64.7	422	71.3	756	68.2
No	182	35.3	170	28.7	352	31.8
Used condom at last anal sex (casual male partner)[2]						
Yes	213	79.8	188	82.1	401	80.9
No	54	20.2	41	17.9	95	19.2

*[1]Of those reporting anal sex with a main male partner in the past 6 months, [2]Of those reporting anal sex with a casual male partner in the past 6 months, *n=1 don't know/refuse to answer, **n=19 missing*

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This research was supported by the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under the terms of Cooperative Agreement Number #5NU2GGH001939. The contents are solely the responsibility of ICAP and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Government.

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