High STI Prevalence and Low Past PrEP Use among Women who Engage in Sex Work in Southwestern Uganda

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BACKGROUND

- Women who engage in sex work (WESW) have increased exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STI) and account for an increasing proportion of new HIV diagnoses.
- In Uganda, HIV prevalence among WESW is over 30%.
- Oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) could substantially reduce HIV incidence among WESW and is available through public health facilities in Uganda, but stigma and lack of flexible services at health facilities are barriers to PrEP use.
- Data are limited on STI prevalence among WESW in Uganda given that syndromic management is routinely used for diagnosis and treatment.
- We aimed to quantify PrEP use and STI prevalence among WESW in southwestern Uganda.

METHODS

- The **Peers for PrEP (P4P) study** (NCT06353295) is testing a peer-led PrEP delivery strategy for cisgender WESW in two communities in southwestern Uganda.
- We assessed demographic characteristics and prior PrEP use at enrollment into the P4P study.
- We tested urine samples collected at study month 3 for Neisseria gonorrhea (GC) and Chlamydia trachomatis (CT) via GeneXpert (Cepheid).
- We used descriptive statistics to summarize self-reported use of oral PrEP (TDF/XTC) in the last 0-3 and 4-6 months prior to enrollment, as well as STI prevalence.

RESULTS

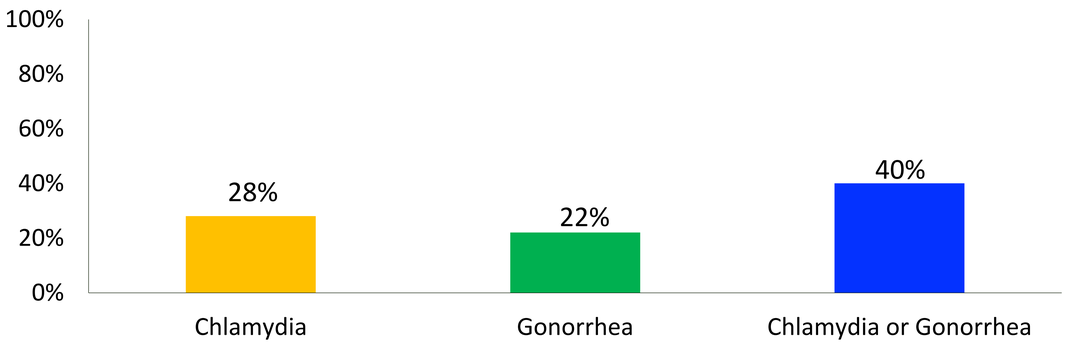
- Among 140 participants: the median age was 23 years (range 15-42; IQR 20-27); 138 (99%) reported exchanging sex for goods or money in last 3 months (**Table 1**)
- 69 (49%) reported alcohol use >=4 times per week.
- 37/140 (26%) reported using oral PrEP in the 3 months before study enrollment; 13 (9%) reported using PrEP in the 4-6 months before enrollment.

Despite 40% of women having prevalent gonorrhea or chlamydia, only one quarter of participants had used PrEP in the 3 months before enrollment, while less than 10% had used PrEP in the 4-6 months prior to enrollment.

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of women enrolled in the Peers for PrEP study

	Median (IQR) or n (%)
Age, years	23 (20-27)
Unmarried	90 (64%)
Alcohol use >=4x/week	69 (49%)
1+ night away from community in last 3 months	57 (41%)
1+ week away from community in last 3 months	25 (18%)
Exchange of sex for goods or money in last 3 months	138 (99%)
PrEP use in the 3 months prior to enrollment	37 (26%)
PrEP use 4-6 months prior to enrollment	13 (9%)

Figure 1. Prevalence of chlamydia and gonorrhea among a subset of 78 participants with STI testing completed at study month 3



- Among a subset of 78 participants with STI testing completed, 31 (40%) had at least one STI detected: 22/78 (28%) CT and 17/78 (22%) GC
- Of 31 pts with CT or GC detected, 7 (23%) reported PrEP use in the 3 months prior to enrollment, whereas among 47 pts with no STI detected, 17 (36%) had recently used PrEP

CONCLUSIONS

- In this HIV prevention study for women who engage in sex work in southwestern Uganda, 40% of women had prevalent gonorrhea or chlamydia – higher than STI rates in prior surveys in the region.
- Despite high STI prevalence and all participants having a PrEP indication, only one-quarter of women reported using PrEP in the last 3 months, while less than 10% had used PrEP 4-6 months prior to enrollment.
- Innovative strategies are needed to expand access to integrated STI and biomedical HIV prevention services to reduce the burden of HIV and STIs among women who engage in sex work.

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