

# Disclosure of PrEP status and its association with online sex networking among men who have sex with men in Hong Kong

Janice Y.C. Lau<sup>1</sup>, Ngai-Sze Wong,<sup>1</sup> Shui-Shan Lee<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Ho Centre for Emerging Infectious Diseases, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

## Background

Social media is a commonly used platform of men who have sex with men (MSM) for seeking partners, which has been researched in relation to sexual risk behaviors. While pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) has emerged as an option for HIV prevention, little is known as regards the impact of the identity of "PrEP users" on engagement in online sex networking. This study aimed to understand the experience of communicating PrEP status by MSM in the context of online sex partner networking.

## Materials and methods

A qualitative study was conducted that included in-depth and semi-structured interviews performed on 20 Hongkong-Chinese MSM, who have used PrEP between March and August 2019. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and thematically analyzed using a grounded theory approach.

## Results

We identified three types of disclosure behaviors as regards PrEP: continuous disclosure through online profile; concealment after first-time disclosure through online profile; and offline disclosure with continuous concealment of online profile. The findings highlighted three main themes: (1) "PrEP as an additional partner selection criterion by social media members", (2) "PrEP users are seen to be more available for high-risk activities by social media members", and (3) "PrEP concealment online as a strategy of risk reduction". Some PrEP users regarded revealing PrEP status offline only, with the potential partner, and at the moment of sex negotiation, would be a safer means. Participants who persistently practiced condom use with casual partners, in particular, expressed challenges with encountering increased online requests for condomless anal intercourse, and a great need for alertness about consistent condom use to protect against other sexually transmitted infection.

Characteristics	N=20
Age	
20-29	12
30-39	3
40-49	4
50-59	1
Education	
Secondary school	1
Post-secondary school/ Associate Degree	1
University or above	18
Employment status	
Full-time employed	17
Unemployed	1
Student	2
Monthly income*	
<HK\$15,000	0
HK\$15,001 - 30,000	7
HK\$30,001 - 50,000	6
>HK\$50,000	4
Engaged in sex with ≥ 2 people at the same time	
Yes	17
Never	3
Himself/ his male partner has taken recreational drugs before/ during sexual activities	
Yes	8
Never	12

\* Of fully employed participants (n=17)

## Quotes

Theme (1) "I would consider someone taking PrEP as a big plus, at least he's actively protecting himself. It's quite another matter if he does so with misleading intention." (35-year-old MSM)


Theme (2) "There seems to be more people with risk-taking behavior come to me. I mean, those who prefer condomless didn't approach me in the past, but I realize that after displaying (the on PrEP status on apps), on the contrary, turn out they do." (24-year-old MSM)

Theme (3) "Because...em... quite a lot of people in Hong Kong go chem-fun nowadays,, Normally people (who go chem-fun) take PrEP to reduce the risk of getting HIV infection; and so they can go wild, but I'm not that kind of person, so I rather hush up on taking PrEP." (24-year-old MSM)

## Conclusions

In the MSM community, knowledge of the identity of "PrEP users" may influence the pattern of sex networking. Future research on the perception of PrEP held by social media members is needed so that providers can better support PrEP users with the communication skills that are needed for safer sex negotiation.

Contact information  @ceid\_cuhk  
Janice Y.C. LAU  @ceid.cuhk  
janicelau@cuhk.edu.hk

 Stanley Ho Centre for Emerging Infectious Diseases  
何鴻燊防治傳染病研究中心

Funding: AIDS Trust Fund (MSS321R)

Acknowledgements: Li Ka Shing Institute of Health Sciences is thanked for technical support.



Presented at HIV Glasgow 2020  
5 – 8 October 2020

