Lack of Knowledge and Stigma Hindering PrEP Uptake Among Young Men at HIV Risk

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Lack of knowledge, awareness, and stigma surrounding Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) are the primary barriers preventing young men at risk of HIV from taking this preventative pill, according to a study released on World AIDS Day. PrEP is a medication that can be taken daily or on-demand to prevent HIV contraction in HIV-negative individuals. When taken as prescribed, it is 99% effective at preventing HIV transmission.

Researchers at the University of Bath conducted in-depth interviews with a small sample of young men aged between 18-22 to understand why the uptake of PrEP is low among young men who have sex with other men in the UK. The results, published in the Journal of Prevention and Health Promotion, revealed several factors contributing to this low uptake.

One major factor identified was a lack of perceived necessity to take PrEP. Many participants lacked general knowledge about the drug and how it works, which contributed to their hesitation in using it. Additionally, discomfort in obtaining

the drug and a reliance on STI screening as a solution were also mentioned as barriers.

Participants expressed difficulty in accessing detailed information about PrEP, and some reported encountering stigma when discussing PrEP with healthcare providers. To address these issues, the researchers suggest enhancing awareness by sharing stories from PrEP users about its consumption and benefits. They also recommend integrating PrEP discussions into sex education in schools to increase knowledge and reduce stigma.

Furthermore, the study proposes the implementation of new online services for PrEP acquisition to simplify the process, destigmatize it, and improve access for young men who have sex with men.

To further increase uptake among young men who have sex with men, we also recommend the implementation of new online services for PrEP acquisition, to simplify the process, destigmatize and increase access," said first author Loukas Haggipavlou from the University of Bath.

This study sheds light on the barriers preventing young men at risk of HIV from accessing PrEP and provides recommendations for improving uptake. By addressing the lack of knowledge, raising awareness, and reducing stigma, it is hoped that more individuals will be able to benefit from this highly effective HIV prevention tool.