

## 015 – UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTIONS AND BELIEFS: IMPROVING STI/HIV INTERVENTIONS AND OUTCOMES

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10:45 AM – 12:15 PM

### 015.1 'A PREP USER IS SOMEONE WHO HAS A LOT OF BAREBACK': A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF ACCEPTABILITY OF PREP IN MSM IN LEBANON

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**Background** Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a significant development in the global efforts to prevent HIV transmission and acquisition. In order to realize the potential of this antiretroviral medication for preventing acquisition of the virus by HIV-negative people, it is crucial to understand how it is perceived by most-at-risk populations and to assess their willingness to use it. PrEP have been shown to be effective in preventing HIV in MSM. The aim of this qualitative research was to understand the willingness of MSM in Lebanon to use PrEP, including their perception of it, its effectiveness, as well as potential motivators for and barriers to its uptake.

**Methods** Interviews were conducted with 18 Lebanese MSM using an STI clinic and checkpoint in Lebanon. Data were analyzed using Qualitative Thematic Analysis.

**Results** All participants recognized that PrEP reduces the risk of HIV acquisition and frequently positioned it as an alternative to condoms. Perceived barriers to PrEP included one's lack of discipline to adhere to PrEP adequately, the risk of potential side effects, the stigma surrounding PrEP and its users, and the potential cost of acquiring PrEP.

**Conclusion** Findings from this qualitative study suggest that in principle PrEP may be acceptable to MSM in Lebanon but that there are significant barriers to its uptake that need to be addressed before its implementation. Greater awareness and understanding of PrEP are critical to its successful implementation in Lebanon. Furthermore, its implementation needs to be matched by an adequate stigma reduction campaign.

**Disclosure** No significant relationships.

### 015.2 INTERESTED? WHY OR WHY NOT? STI CLINIC CLIENT PERCEPTIONS OF BACTERIAL STI VACCINES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

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**Background** Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) contribute to a large global health burden, potentially leading to cancer,

infertility, and increased risk of contracting other STIs. Several STI vaccines are in development, with the potential to decrease STI prevalence and morbidity. However, concerns remain regarding acceptability across populations. To plan for implementation and rollout, the objective of this study was to explore attitudes STI clinic clients have towards STI vaccines, including acceptability and perceived barriers.

**Methods** The STRIVE-BC consortium - a group of public health leaders, scientists, and clinicians focused on STI vaccine research - implemented a 31-item questionnaire at two large STI clinics in Vancouver, Canada to understand STI vaccine acceptability. Demographic and clinical characteristics were summarized using descriptive measures. A multivariable logistic regression (MLR) model was constructed using a combination of *a priori* clinically relevant variables and significant covariates ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) from univariate analysis. The MLR model assessed predicting factors of STI vaccine interest as odds ratios (ORs) with 95% confidence intervals (CI).

**Results** 293 surveys were analyzed with 86.5% of respondents reporting they would be interested in receiving an STI vaccine. The average respondent was a 33-year-old Caucasian heterosexual male with post-secondary education. MLR indicated that willingness to pay was a significant factor for syphilis vaccine interest (OR=3.83, 95% CI=1.29, 11.38,  $p=0.02$ ). Intent to engage in positive health behaviours after vaccination was significant for chlamydia (OR=5.94, 95% CI=1.56, 22.60,  $p=0.01$ ) and gonorrhoea (OR=5.13, 95% CI=1.45, 18.07,  $p=0.01$ ) vaccine interest.

**Conclusion** Participants attending large STI clinics expressed a strong willingness to receive STI vaccines. As STI vaccines are still years away from commercial availability, highlighting acceptable cost, ages, and anticipated health behaviours allows for informed implementation and rollout. Research priorities and areas of future work including additional populations and explorations of hesitation can be considered by attendees to apply within their research and practice areas.

**Disclosure** No significant relationships.

### 015.3 DEVELOPMENT OF A SCALE MEASURING STIGMA TOWARDS ALCOHOL ABSTINENCE AMONG PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV IN VIETNAM

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**Background** Hazardous alcohol use is prevalent among people living with HIV (PLHIV), leading to sub-optimal HIV treatment outcomes. In Vietnam, alcohol use is highly normative making it challenging to reduce or abstain among PLHIV. We developed a quantitative scale to assess alcohol abstinence stigma (AAS) and assessed the association with alcohol use among PLHIV in Vietnam.