Role of stigma in pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) uptake and continuation among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW): Considerations for programme implementers

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Role of stigma in pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) uptake and continuation among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW)

Considerations for programme implementers
Evidence review focusing on strategies to address stigma related to PrEP uptake and continuation

This review is a synthesis of the following:

34 peer-reviewed articles published in last 5 years

42 references from grey literature (2015 – present)

Focused on South-South HIV Prevention Learning Network (SSLN) countries but studies that were found were primarily from South Africa and Kenya

Rely on qualitative data; mostly descriptive studies

None of the studies rigorously tested stigma reduction interventions

• This review topic was identified by the East and Southern African Champions working in HIV prevention for AGYW.

• The following slides are a synopsis of the findings of a rapid review that was conducted to fill a knowledge gap about the role of stigma on PrEP uptake and continuation among AGYW and strategies to address it.

*Countries included: Botswana, Eswatini/Swaziland, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, South Sudan, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe
How stigma influences AGYW PrEP uptake: A framework

**Types of Stigma**

- HIV-related stigma
  - Anticipated stigma
  - Experienced stigma
- Stigma related to sexual activity & promiscuity
- Stigma related to sex work
- Stigma related to selling sex

**Forms of Stigma**

- Expecting negative reactions or rejection from others
- Stigma due to being (incorrectly) perceived as having HIV
- Disclosure
  - Stigma influences disclosure of PrEP use, but disclosure can combat stigma
  - Social and cultural norms perpetuate stigma related to adolescent sexual activity and perceived promiscuity
  - Stigma related to selling sex

**Undergoing acts of discrimination and stigma from others**
Strategies to address anticipated and experienced stigma to increase demand and use of PrEP

1. At the AGYW level
   - Positive and empowering messaging around PrEP to create demand
   - AGYW mentored safe space clubs to promote PrEP and help empower, build resilience to stigma and support disclosure and adherence

2. At the Partner and Family level
   - Engage with male sexual partners (steady/regular) and families to increase support for PrEP use
   - Facilitate disclosure (e.g., direct facilitation; increase self-efficacy to disclose; education and awareness-raising)
   - Host PrEP sensitization meetings with family, partners and friends of AGYW

3. At the Community level
   - Communications must target broader community in order to normalize PrEP use; Position PrEP as something that reflects health rather than something that reflects treatment for illness to reduce stigma
   - Education and sensitization of community members/leaders to remove misconceptions of PrEP (e.g., PrEP is not antiretroviral therapy [ART], PrEP is not only for sex workers)
Strategies to address anticipated and experienced stigma to improve provision of PrEP

1. At the Provider level
   - Move from risk assessment screening tools to a more conversational approach about HIV risk and PrEP to reduce judgement (e.g., motivational interviewing); Consider self-assessment tools.
   - Address provider negative attitudes re: AGYW sexual activity, promiscuity and sex work.

2. At the Health System Infrastructure level
   - Integrate PrEP into other health services routinely accessed by AGYW and that do not have the stigma associated with ART clinics (e.g., maternal and child health, family planning clinics, youth-friendly centers).
   - Decentralization of PrEP — although initiation may occur at clinics, follow-up appointments and refills may occur at community centers/safe spaces.

3. At the PrEP Characteristic level
   - Re-packaging PrEP so that it looks different from the antiretroviral (ARV) bottles.
   - Pills should have different characteristic from ARVs.
   - Multi-purpose technologies are favored by AGYW due to potential for discreetness of method.
A research brief will be available at the end of June 2023