Reduced Access to Gender Affirmation is Associated with Increased Drug, Alcohol, and Hormone Abuse among Transgender Women

Overcoming Health Disparities in the Bay Area: Focus on HIV and HCV
Laurel Heights, UCSF
February 3rd, 2015

Jae M. Sevelius, PhD
Center for AIDS Prevention Studies
University of California, San Francisco

Jesse Fletcher, PhD
Friends Research Institute
Los Angeles, CA

Supported by NIH/NIMH Award: 1K08MH085566
Transphobia

- Assault
- Discrimination
- Harassment
- Rejection

Poor mental health outcomes

- Depression (60%, 10% in general pop)
- PTSD (61%, 8% in general pop)
- Substance abuse (69% any drug, 82% alcohol)
Model of Gender Affirmation: Hypothesized model

- Social oppression/stigma
- Low access to gender affirmation
- Psych distress
- Drug use
- Alcohol use
- Hormone misuse
Methods

• Cross-sectional study of adult transgender women in the San Francisco Bay Area (n=150)

• We used generalized structural equation modeling (GSEM) to examine multivariable relationships between:
  – social oppression
  – psychiatric distress
  – gender affirmation
  – substance abuse (drug, alcohol, hormones)
Results: Final model

Social Oppression → Psych distress → Internalized GA → Drugs, past 3 mos
Social Oppression → Psych distress → External GA → Alcohol, past 3 mos
Social Oppression → Psych distress → Hormone misuse

Psych distress → Drugs, past 3 mos
Psych distress → Alcohol, past 3 mos
Psych distress → Hormone misuse
Conclusion

• Mental health and substance abuse interventions for transgender women should prioritize increasing access to gender affirmation:
  ➢ medical
  ➢ structural
  ➢ psychosocial
“I am not a man”: Disaggregating transgender women from MSM in PrEP research is imperative to improve HIV prevention efforts

Jae Sevelius, PhD
Emily Arnold, PhD
CAPS, UCSF

Nikki Calma
Jae Truesdell
A&PI Wellness Center
San Francisco, CA

California HIV Research Program Community Collaborative Award CR10-SF-421
Background

- HIV prevalence among U.S. trans women: 28% (Herbst et al, 2008)
- 34 times more likely to acquire HIV than the general US population (Baral et al, 2013)
- Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), the first efficacious biomedical HIV prevention approach (Grant et al, 2010)
History of invisibility
Methods

• Qualitative data collection with sexually active transgender women in SF:
  – 3 focus groups
  – 9 individual interviews
  – total N=30

• Focused on knowledge of, interest in, and concerns about PrEP for HIV prevention

• Transcripts were analyzed for common themes using Atlas.ti
Results

• While knowledge of PrEP was low, interest was relatively high.

• Facilitators to PrEP uptake:
  – ability to obtain PrEP from a trans-friendly provider
  – education about PrEP within trans networks
  – risk perception
Protection during sex work

- “Some of us, you know, we do sex work on the side, and some of us, you know, we’re like a part of that kind of like, marginalized community and we don’t really have that much opportunity to employment. So, we end up trying to make a quick buck with sex work and that’s a lot of exposure, and that’s a risk and I think that’s one of the reasons why I would go for it.” (African American trans woman, 35)
Results

• Trans-specific barriers to PrEP uptake:
  – concerns about interactions with hormones
  – managing multiple medications
  – intersection of HIV stigma and transphobia
  – avoidance of medical settings
Concerns about interactions with hormones

• “If it stopped my hormone progress, I would be irate, because I like to look pretty and pretty is a soft face. And, if hormones do not give me that soft face while taking a pill that’s supposed to stop something that condoms do pretty just fine doing by themselves...that would definitely make me stop instantaneously.” (African American trans woman, 27)
Conclusions

• Trans women are not served by the dissemination of information to MSM networks, and they do not benefit from programming and services that are developed for MSM
Conclusions

• To maximize HIV prevention efforts, we must disaggregate trans women from MSM in HIV prevention strategies and research.

• Trans women have unique potential motivators for PrEP uptake, as well as unique barriers