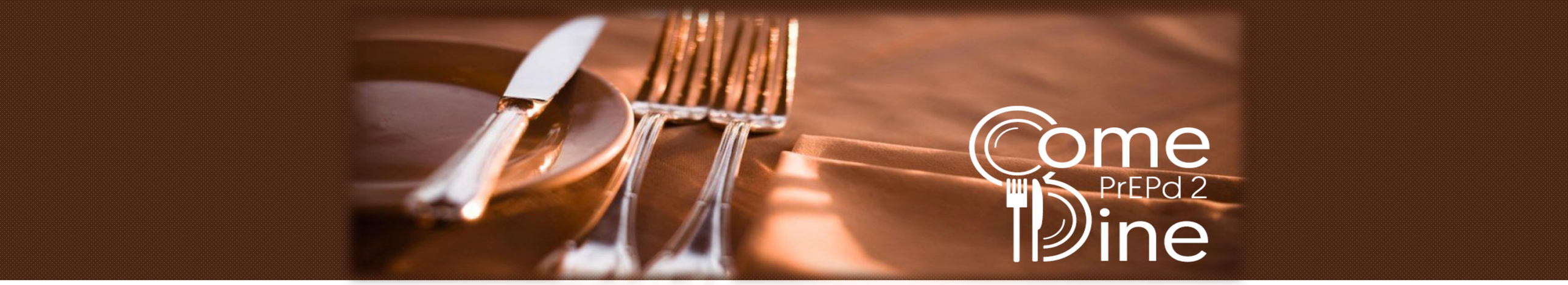

COMEPrEPd2Dine: Exploring Factors Influencing the Experiences of PrEP Use: An Innovative 'Dinner Party Conversation' Approach

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Background

- Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is an effective and accepted adjunct to the HIV prevention cascade.[1] There is growing understanding of how PrEP can best be integrated to complement existing HIV prevention strategies and how it influences behaviours such as condom use.[2,3]
- There is little qualitative work exploring the broader social, structural, and geographical factors influencing access and uptake, nor how PrEP potentially reconstructs individual and community identities and attitudes to HIV.
- This study explored factors influencing the experiences and expectations of PrEP from the perspectives of Queensland (QLD) PrEP users, non-users and People Living with HIV (PLHIV).

Methodology

- Using an innovative community based participatory research approach, six 'dinner party conversations' (DPC) (in Brisbane and five regional locations) were conducted in 2016-17 during the first months of QLDs' PrEP Demonstration Study (QPrEPd).
- The aim of the DPC approach was to create a warm relaxed 'homelike' environment where participants felt comfortable and safe to discuss PrEP among peers.
- The study was promoted through QuAC's community networks and purposive sampling was applied to ensure a diverse representation of locations and social networks.
- Each DPC was hosted by a participant who invited up to eight (8) people from their social network to dinner. The host received AUD$250 to buy food.
- 'Dinner guests' and researchers built rapport as they helped with dinner preparation and chatted over dinner. The DPC was guided by the researchers, one of whom was a peer researcher, using semi-structured questions.
- Thematic analysis of transcribed DPC was conducted.

Participant Characteristics

- The DPC approach recruited a diverse sample (n=36) of gay, bisexual and queer cis-men, transgender women and non-binary/ gender fluid people, aged 19 to 62 years (median=34yrs).
- 29 (81%) were born in Australia, 2 (6%) were Aboriginal peoples and 2 (6%) were Medicare ineligible.
- 3 (8%) were PLHIV and one person had never tested for HIV.
- 7 (19%) were PrEP users (for between 1 to 8 months).
- 26 (72%) were non-PrEP users with 5 (19%) of the non-users indicating they were unlikely to use PrEP.
- 11 (30%) reported ≥ 6 casual sex partners and 7 (20%) reported having fuckbuddies in the last six months.

Findings

The majority considered PrEP a '*safety net*' supporting an ***'evolution in sexual negotiation'*** that was ***'liberating and empowering'*** people to make informed choices.

All agreed one strong positive change was the effect which increasing access to PrEP was having on ***'opening conversation around HIV'*** in a way that was ***'diminishing negative connotations and stigma of HIV'***, making a ***'noted shift in willingness to have sex with PLHIV'***.

Positive attitude

Attitudes have shifted in a positive direction but there was disparity between users and non-users attitudes and experiences

Negative attitudes

A small number of non-users consider PrEP ***'gives people license to be irresponsible'***.

Many noted a **shift from the *'slut shaming'*** and stigmatisation of users toward non-users sensing new ***'pressure to use PrEP'***, or be seen as ***'irresponsible to self and others'***, generating discourse on how PrEP was shaping community attitudes to condomless sex and the ***'sexual liberation'*** described by both PrEP users and PLHIV.

Conclusion

- The DPC approach successfully collected community viewpoints and allowed social networks to express their attitudes about PrEP use during a time of rapidly changing HIV prevention landscape and access to PrEP.
- The DPC approach provided PrEP users, non-users and PLHIV a 'safe space' to come together and discuss their varying attitudes to and experiences of PrEP, HIV, condomless sex, living with HIV and stigma in a distinctly different manner compared with their past experiences of traditional research techniques.

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