

Unraveling Barriers: A Study on Access Challenges to HIV Prevention Services Among Adolescent and Young Men who have Sex with Men in Mexico



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Introduction

In the current landscape, adolescents and young adults are disproportionately affected by new HIV infections globally. In Mexico, one-third of new HIV cases occur in people between 16 and 24 years of age, particularly among men who have sex with men (MSM). Some studies have highlighted that youth and male-male sexual encounters contribute to clustered HIV outbreaks. Notably, findings from the ImPrEP project emphasized that older age and higher education levels correlated with better retention in PrEP. Despite these insights, HIV prevention strategies inadequately target young individuals.

This study aims to uncover barriers obstructing access to HIV prevention for adolescents and young men who have sex with men (AYMSM) in Mexico.

Methods

This project was conducted in collaboration with Community Led Organizations in Chiapas, Yucatán, and Jalisco states, and involves data obtained through structured questionnaires from AYMSM reaching HIV prevention services. We collected information regarding sociodemographic characteristics, sexual behavior, drug use and perceived barriers to accessing prevention services. Using Likert scales, all answers reported as significant or very significant in the perceived barriers section were considered as "identified barriers". A comparison between those identifying or not identifying barriers was then conducted.

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Results

A total of 392 participants were included, and 38.8% (152) identified at least one barrier to accessing prevention services. The mean age of participants was 21.1 years (SD 1.09). The majority self-identified as cisgender men (n=378, 96.4%). Regarding the age at which partners began their sexual lives, 58.42% started between 18-25 years, with 30.87% starting between 16-18 years (p-value=0.013). Notably, only **2.8%** of the total participants were using PrEP.

Figure 1.- Distribution of perceived barriers reported by participants

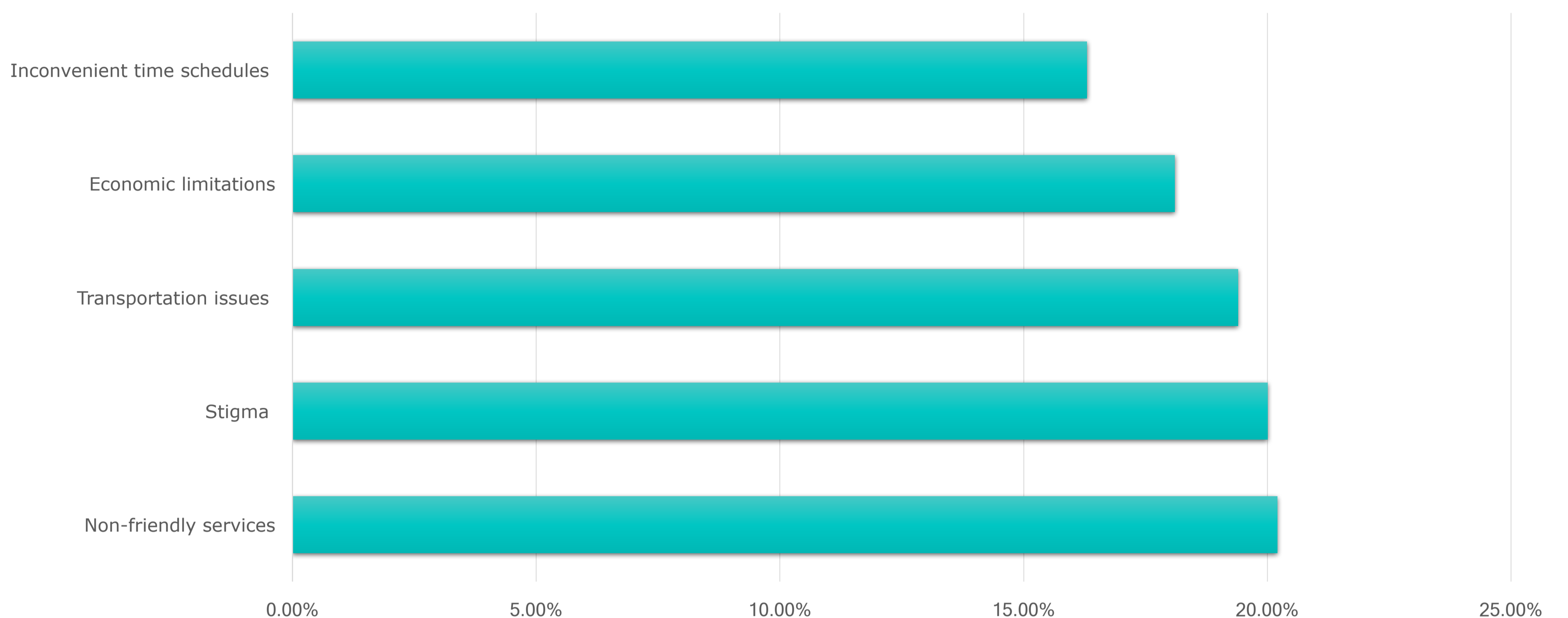


Table 1. Table 1. Characteristics and behaviors of participants by identification of barriers.

	Overall n=392 (%)	Did not identified barriers n=240 (%)	Identified barriers n=152 (%)	P-value
Education				NS
Primary school or less	44 (11.22)	28 (11.7)	16 (10.5)	
Financially dependent	174 (44.4)	95 (39.6)	79 (52)	<0.001
Condomless anal sex in the last 6 months	215 (54.9)	107 (44.6)	108 (71.1)	<0.001
Have felt pressured to have unprotected sex	25 (6.4)	1 (0.4)	24 (15.8)	<0.001
Chemsex*				<0.001
Rarely	30 (26.8)	25 (37.3)	5 (11.1)	
Often	33 (29.5)	12 (17.9)	21 (46.7)	
Usually	24 (21.4)	8 (11.9)	16 (35.6)	
Unknown	9 (8)	8 (11.94)	1 (2.2)	
Preferred not to answer	16 (14.3)	14 (20.9)	2 (4.4)	
Distance from their home to the HIV community center				0.005
<60 minutes	343 (87.5)	219 (91.3)	124 (81.6)	
≥60 minutes	49 (12.5)	21 (8.8)	28 (18.4)	

NS: not statistically significant. *calculated over the total of participants who reported drug use

Conclusions

AYMSM experiencing economic dependence, reporting higher risk sexual behaviors and longer journeys to community centers perceived significantly more barriers to access HIV prevention services. Adequately targeting their specific needs is key in order to improve PrEP and PEP uptake, as well as timely HIV diagnosis in this particular population.

