

# Exploring Relationship Dynamics: The Impact of Disclosure and Partner Influence on oral and injectable PrEP Adherence Among Users and Their Intimate Partners - HPTN 084 Qualitative Findings

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## BACKGROUND

- HPTN 084 demonstrated that long-acting injectable cabotegravir (CAB-LA) significantly reduced HIV acquisition compared to daily oral TDF/FTC in individuals born female.
- The dynamics between women using PrEP and their male partners remain a critical factor influencing adherence and success of these prevention strategies.
- Understanding these dynamics is essential, particularly in contexts where male partners' support or resistance can significantly affect the outcomes of HIV prevention efforts.



## METHODS

- This qualitative sub-study was conducted in Malawi, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe from 2021 to 2023.
- We purposively selected women (n=17) — who were taking oral or injectable PrEP — and their intimate partners (n=20) and conducted in-depth interviews
- One couple was interviewed together, and the remaining interviews were conducted individually.
- Interviews explored relationship dynamics, disclosure, and partner influence on adherence. They were recorded, transcribed, and translated.
- Data were coded and organized into matrices and memos to identify and visualize themes. Themes were further grouped according to the key constructs of the Health Belief Model (HBM).

# Male partners, when informed, play a significant role in supporting PrEP adherence through emotional and financial support, and their involvement strengthens the overall health of the relationship.

## FINDINGS

HBM Constructs	Supporting Quotations
Perceived Susceptibility	"At first, I couldn't accept it as I thought that she may think that she is now free even to be promiscuous since she now has pills that prevent HIV."
Perceived Severity	"...for a pregnant woman to be using oral or injectable PrEP, it can affect the unborn child. So, condoms can be ideal in this case," "The common side effects is that it can affect the reproductive system."
Perceived Benefits	"I feel good because it is something that is of great benefit to us as a couple and also other people in the community are benefitting because we share the information that we get from the clinic with them." "It is safe for the baby and the baby can be prevented from HIV..."
Perceived Barriers	"It was not easy [laughs] because she would first emphasize to me that she wasn't taking tablets meant for HIV-infected people... I used to tell her to miss some days e.g., three days and then take the tablets again."
Cues to action	"She told me that if I wanted her to stop, I should first let her take me there..."
Self-efficacy	"If CAB is available and if she has made a choice that she wants to be injected, I don't have a problem with it."

Table 1: Supporting quotations from participants

### PERCEIVED SEVERITY HIV RISK AND HEALTH EFFECTS OF HIV OR PREP

- Female PrEP users perceived HIV risk severity through the consequences of partners' risky behaviors (e.g., drinking, abuse)
- Women's determination to adhere to PrEP, despite side effects and stigma, reflects their understanding of HIV's severity and its potential life impact.
- Male partners were concerned about side effects of PrEP, particularly long-term consequences like infertility and birth defects.
- Male partners reported trust issues regarding their partner's participation in the HPTN 084 trial, driven by fears of infidelity and health risks from PrEP use.

### PERCEIVED BENEFITS

- PrEP benefits for female users included peace of mind and protection from HIV.
- Women noticed positive changes in their partners' behavior, such as increased responsibility and care, when the partners became more informed about PrEP.
- When male partners understood and accepted the benefits of PrEP, it strengthened relationship dynamics, fostering trust, better communication, and support.
- Male partners acknowledged the value of PrEP, especially for those who were in serodiscordant relationships.
- Partners viewed the option to switch to injectable PrEP as a benefit for women due to its less frequent administration.
- Women and their partners found injectable PrEP convenient as it reduces the daily burden of pill-taking.
- Women and male partners recognized the added benefit of PrEP in potentially offering indirect protection against HIV to male partners and unborn babies.

### PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO PREP USE

- Women identified poor communication, fear of confrontation, and partners' misconceptions about PrEP as barriers to adopting it, preventing the creation of supportive environments for PrEP adherence and HIV prevention in relationships
- Women found it difficult to discuss infidelity, protection, and HIV prevention with their partners; fear of conflict or abuse hindered open conversations about health and relationship issues.
- Women struggled to maintain daily pill routines, particularly due to forgetfulness and side effects. The need to hide pill-taking to avoid stigma further exacerbated these challenges.
- Partners' reported resistance due to fears of PrEP side effects and concerns that it might encourage infidelity
- Partners imposing restrictions on PrEP use, such as telling women to skip doses, posed as barrier to PrEP use.

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### PERCEIVED SUSCEPTIBILITY

- Male partners' initial reaction to their partner's participation in a PrEP study is rooted in suspicion and fear, often assuming their partner's participation implies infidelity.
- Male partners were, however, concerned about the impact of PrEP may have on their partners' current or future reproductive health and their ability to conceive or on the health of a future child.
- Over time, as male partners learned more about PrEP, their concerns eased, and their perceptions shifted. They recognized PrEP's role in reducing both their partner's and their own susceptibility to HIV, leading to greater acceptance and support for the PrEP study.

### CUES TO ACTION

- Women recognized that their HIV risk was linked to their partners' behavior, prompting them to join the HIV prevention study.
- The study provided essential information and motivation for PrEP. This served as a cue to take preventive measures.
- Women were motivated to continue with PrEP by cues like availability of less burdensome methods like injectable PrEP.
- Partners often acted as cues to action, such as accompanying women to clinic visits. This shift from suspicion to support was critical, leading to behaviors like providing encouragement and reminding women to take their pills.
- Exposure to the study through explanations from female partners or health workers often led to a shift in male partners' attitudes.
- Positive changes in their partners' behaviour, such as increased responsibility and support, also acted as cues to strengthen the relationship and promote health-positive actions.

### PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY

- Demonstrated by women's ability to negotiate safer sex practices and initiating conversation about HIV prevention with male partners.
- Shown in their persistence in PrEP use despite challenges.
- Supported by their strong belief in ability to protect oneself
- Partners providing financial and emotional support enhanced self-efficacy for study participation and PrEP use
- Male partners confidence in partner's ability to manage health and PrEP regimen
- Women felt confident about their PrEP use

## CONCLUSION

- Male partners initial reactions of suspicion and fear often gave way to acceptance and support as information about PrEP alleviated concerns and shifted perceptions of susceptibility to HIV. This transition fostered improved trust, communication, and shared responsibility within relationships.
- While barriers like poor communication, misconceptions, and fears of infidelity challenge PrEP use, women demonstrate strong self-efficacy in managing these challenges.
- They persist in HIV prevention efforts, often encouraged by cues to action, including the availability of less burdensome options like injectable PrEP and support from their male partners.
- Male partners, when informed, play a significant role in sustaining PrEP adherence through emotional and financial support, and their involvement strengthens the overall health of the relationship.