

**TITLE**

**Qualitative findings support the use of digital interventions to promote HIV care/prevention among young Brazilian Conectad@s Project**

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**BACKGROUND:** Reported HIV cases in Brazil are increasing among young gay and other men who have sex with men (worse HIV prevention/care outcomes compared to older peers. There is a lack of interventions for YMSM in resource-rich settings. We aimed to obtain formative data for a digital intervention to promote rapid linkage to HIV care/prevention among young men living in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

**METHODS:** As part of the Conectad@s study, we conducted in-depth interviews (N=20) and focus groups (N=18) using semi-structured guides from January-February/2021 with purposive sampling for diversity in age and race. Audio recordings were transcribed in Portuguese and translated to English. Descending hierarchical categorical analysis was conducted using IRAMUTEQ. E and coding were performed using Dedoose.

**RESULTS:** Among 38 participants, 76% were aged 20-24 years, 76% self-identified as gay, 47% as black, and 76% completed high school education. Three main thematic axes emerged: LGBTQIAP+ social networks and outness, HIV prevention and access to care, and challenges for implementing studies targeting YMSM. Most participants reported that discrimination by race, class, and sexual orientation affects social networks and outness. Social distancing impacted socialization, especially during the first months of the pandemic. Most participants were screened for HIV at least once in their lifetime, mostly at public health clinics. YMSM reported confidentiality concerns, fear of test result, HIV stigma, and not knowing where to get tested as barriers. Pre-exposure prophylaxis awareness were low. Potential side effects were the main barriers to PrEP. Peer delivery of interventions, age, and internet access available at research sites were important intervention components. Recruitment barrier confidentiality concerns, especially among religious YMSM and those who had not disclosed their sexual identity, and research sites. Acceptability of text messages to support adherence was high, especially through WhatsApp, which is widely used in Brazil.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Digital interventions using text messages may increase HIV care/prevention engagement among YMSM. HIV stigma, and low HIV knowledge must be overcome to decrease new HIV cases among the youngest MSM.