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Systematic Formative Research to Develop HIV Prevention Messages for People Living With HIV

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Abstract

Systematic formative research is vital to the successful development of health communication and marketing messages targeting people living with HIV (PLWH). The purpose of this study was to use a systematic process to develop and pretest HIV prevention messages for PLWH. We conducted our study in three phases with findings from each phase informing the development of the subsequent phase. In Phase 1, we employed idea-generation techniques in group settings with PLWH and HIV prevention experts to elicit a comprehensive list of HIV prevention strategies and persuasive arguments for these strategies. In Phase 2, we conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews with PLWH to evaluate the messages that emerged in Phase 1. In Phase 3, we administered a structured survey instrument to PLWH to quantitatively evaluate audience reactions and receptivity to the 19 most promising messages from Phase 2. By Phase 3, the majority of participants agreed with evaluative statements that expressed favorable attitudes toward the messages. These results support the utility of systematic efforts to generate and screen messages prior to large-scale testing.