

The Mpowerment Project: A Community-Level HIV Prevention Intervention for Young Gay Men



The Research

The Science Behind the Package

The Mpowerment Project is a community building program designed to reduce the frequency of unprotected anal intercourse among young gay and bisexual men. Developed through an intensive social marketing process with young gay men, the Mpowerment Project is based on an empowerment model in which young gay men take charge of the project. The project draws on the theory of diffusion of innovations, which suggests that people are most likely to adopt new behaviors that have already been accepted by others who are similar to them and whom they respect.

Target Population

Young gay and bisexual men (ages 18–29)

Intervention

The Mpowerment Project is run by a “core group” of 10–15 young gay men from the community and paid staff. The young gay men from the core group, along with other volunteers, design and carry out all project activities. Ideally, the project has its own physical space where most social events and meetings are held and which serves as a drop-in center where young men can meet and socialize during specified hours. The program relies on a set of four integrated activities:

Formal Outreach: Teams of young gay men go to locations frequented by young gay men to discuss and promote safer sex, deliver appealing informational literature on HIV risk reduction, and distribute condoms. Additionally, the team creates their own social events to attract young gay men (e.g., dances, video parties, picnics, discussion groups) and at which safer sex can be promoted.

M-groups: These peer-led, 2–3 hour meetings of 8–10 young gay men discuss factors contributing to unsafe sex among the men (e.g., misconceptions about safer sex, beliefs that safer sex is not enjoyable, poor sexual communication skills). Through skills-building exercises, the men practice safer sex negotiation and correct condom use. Participants receive free condoms and lubricant and are trained to conduct informal outreach.

Informal outreach: Informal outreach consists of young men discussing safer sex with their friends.

Ongoing publicity campaign: The campaign attracts men to the project by word of mouth and through articles and advertisements in gay newspapers.

Research Results

After the Mpowerment Project, young gay men in the intervention were more likely than those in the comparison community to have:

- Significantly decreased their rates of unprotected anal intercourse

For Details on the Research Design

Kegeles, S.M., Hays, R.B., Coates, T.J. (1996). The Mpowerment Project: A community-level HIV prevention intervention for young gay men. *American Journal of Public Health*, 86(8), 1129-1136.

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The Intervention

A Package Developed from Science

Replicating Effective Programs (REP) is a CDC-initiated project that identifies HIV/AIDS prevention interventions with demonstrated evidence of effectiveness. REP supports the original researchers in developing a user-friendly package of materials designed for prevention providers. The Mpowerment Project is one of the REP interventions, and is the product of extensive collaboration among researchers, community-based HIV organizations, health department officials, and previous participants in the Mpowerment Project.

Core Elements

Core elements are intervention components that must be maintained without alteration to ensure program effectiveness. The core elements of the Mpowerment Project include:

- Recruiting a core group of young gay men to design and carry out project activities
- Establishing a project space where many of the project activities can be held
- Conducting entertaining, venue-based (e.g., bars, community events) outreach by teams of young gay men
- Sponsoring social events to promote community-building among young gay men
- Convening peer-led, one-time discussion groups
- Conducting a publicity campaign about the project within the community

Package Contents

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- Overview video of the projects' philosophy, components, and effectiveness
- Program manual providing background information and detailed guidance for implementation
- M-group facilitator guide providing step-by-step instructions for running M-groups
- Facilitator training video depicting a simulated M-group in action, and including tips for facilitators

Intervention Orientation

Two program staff attend a 2-day training in which they learn how to conduct the intervention, practice intervention delivery skills, and identify agency-specific implementation strategies.

Technical Assistance

Mpowerment staff and adopting agencies collaboratively solve problems to achieve an effective balance between maintaining core elements and tailoring for local needs.

Timeline for Availability

The package is available along with training on program implementation and technical assistance from the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies.

For More Information on the Mpowerment Project Package

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