

Peer-review Comments and Author Responses

Reviewer 1

1. *Title. The title seems adequate. The authors may consider including “HIV” or another similar term in the title to facilitate the correct identification of the topic by readers not familiar with the “pre-exposure prophylaxis” terminology.*

The consideration to include “HIV” or another similar term in the title to facilitate the correct identification of the topic by readers not familiar with the “pre-exposure prophylaxis” terminology has been incorporated and reflected in the new title of the manuscript.

2. *Methods: The methods section, on the other hand, has important issues that must be addressed. The eligibility criteria, information sources, and search criteria are well described overall. Even though, given only studies conducted in the USA were selected, the authors should mention in the research question that the population is women living in the USA. This information could also be included in the objectives paragraph in the introduction and in the title. The database CINAHL should have its complete name described in the text. Also, I encourage the authors to review table 1 to double-check if all search strings are correctly written.*

The authors have included the reviewer’s suggestion to mention in the research question that the population is women living in the USA, and this is also reflected in the title and objectives paragraph. The complete name for the database CINAHL is now reflected in the text. Table 1 in the original manuscript which documented the search string was removed, modified to include the term “barriers” which was inadvertently missed in the initial search and replaced with a descriptive search syntax. Additionally, in the revised manuscript, there's an expansion of the methods and results section.

3. *The selection and data collection processes are poorly described, and important information is missing. The authors mentioned that the found articles were imported to EndNote and duplicates were removed. This corresponds to “identification” in figure 1. Then, the authors report the information that was collected. All the descriptions of the screening process to end up with the included articles are missing. How many authors screened the articles? Which authors screened the articles? Were the articles screened just by title and abstract? Also, by full text? A full description of these steps is needed.*

In response to the reviewer’s feedback on the selection and data collection processes, we have revised the manuscript, specifically adding a comprehensive description of the screening process. We now provide details on the number of authors involved and the specific criteria employed for screening articles, encompassing both title/abstract and full-text assessments. The revised text is located in the Review Protocol Section.

4. *The authors reported “key findings related to the risk factors associated with PrEP uptake as outlined based on the selected studies”, but this information is vague. Please, specify what are the key findings.*

The key findings text was expanded upon and thoroughly outlined to reflect the themes regarding barriers to PrEP use among study participants. A further emphasis was placed on not only naming these themes but also ranking them based on their prevalence and significance in the study. These changes are reflected in the manuscript.

5. *Also, no risk of bias assessment was reported in this study. Assessing the risk of bias is a crucial step in systematic reviews and should be considered by the authors.*

Following the reviewer’s suggestion, we have added a risk of bias assessment to our study. A summary of the CASP Qualitative Checklist assessment is presented in Table 4 in the updated manuscript. A copy of the CASP Qualitative Checklist is also included in Appendix A.

6. *Results:*

Studies selection and characteristics are well described in the results section. Since the outcomes regarding barriers in the uptake of PrEP were not clearly defined in the methods section, it might be a little difficult for readers understand the results of these outcomes. For each category reported (e.g., interpersonal factors), it would be better to cite which articles report each of the subcategories (e.g., instead of mentioning “incarceration (n=2)”, the authors could consider “incarceration (Johnson et al., 2000 and Lawson et al., 2001)”. For each category and subcategory reported in the results, it should be explained in the methods section how they were chosen.

The studies were evaluated to identify risk factors contributing to the barriers in the uptake of PrEP. These risk factors were then categorized and ranked in the order of frequency of identification.

7. *On the “age” column, consider including the dispersion measures (standard deviation or interquartile range) for the correspondent central tendency measure reported.*

Please note that Table 3, titled "Study Participants Characteristics" in the original submitted manuscript, is now Table 2, "Patient Characteristics," in the updated manuscript. We have expanded on documenting more data on socio-demographics for the patients in the studies, as reflected in the new table. We appreciate your suggestion regarding Table 3 (original manuscript), however, due to insufficient data provided in the studies, calculating dispersion measures for the age column was not feasible.

8. *The discussion section provides a general interpretation of the results, but there is a lack of other evidence to contextualize and compare findings. Please, consider discussing findings from other systematic reviews addressing women, men, and the general population.*

While we considered expanding on your request, the different approaches were discussed amongst the authors, and we came to the ultimate conclusion that it was inconsistent with the intent of the original paper and would require a review of additional literature on different populations outside the scope of our stated objective.

9. *Limitations from this study are not reported. Both analyzed articles and the systematic review process for this study may present limitations that should be acknowledged. Despite those issues, the interpretation of the findings seems adequate.*

Based on the common objectives of the studies analyzed in this review, it is evident that the studies referenced relied on interviews with small participant populations. This reliance restricts the ability to conduct a more comprehensive statistical analysis of the results, potentially limiting the generalizability and robustness of the findings.

We look forward to any further guidance or feedback from the editorial team. Thank you for your continued support.

Reviewer 2

10. Comment:

“The authors presented an interesting qualitative review on Preventive HIV Prophylaxis Use among women.”

Thank you for your comment.