

“Out here the rainbow has mud on it”: Amenability of mobile technology based EMA to assess high risk behaviors among rural MSM

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INTRODUCTION

- The rural HIV epidemic is growing with unique cultural elements making significant contributions.
- Studies have relied on cross-sectional data to understand the rural HIV epidemic which has limitations.
- Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA) can overcome some of these limitations; yet, its amenability have not been explored among rural MSM.
- Further, an evaluation of research risk as a result of EMA among this stigmatized population is needed.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) Assess amenability to and concerns with participating in EMA studies related to HIV risk behavior and substance use
- 2) Evaluate the role of factors such as community and social norms and stigma on privacy and confidentiality concerns.

METHODS

- Interview data collected from 40 MSM in rural Oklahoma (Index of Relative Rurality > 0.45; Waldorf, 2006)
- Grounded Theory Approach using NVivo software (Version 11) to code
- Cohen’s Kappa > 0.80 indicated acceptable agreement among coders

RESULTS

Theme 1: Confidentiality Risks of Participation

Unwanted Outing

“This is a good ole boy town—you do things at your own risk. Most of us [rural MSM] aren’t out around here...if people find out, you never know who you may lose or what may happen to you.”

23, Native American, Gay

Legal Ramifications of Sensitive Behaviors

Every place can be easily found here, you don’t need much information to figure it out where we are shooting up or scoring [buying drugs]...a little bit of information goes a long way, especially if cops get it.

28, White, Gay

Role of Outness Low Outness

“I don’t even identify as gay, it is not who I am. No one needs to know...if folks find out, it would change everything for me...it is not worth it, if I can stop it.”

36, White, Straight

High Outness

“People tend to know about me, so I’m not worried. If they are looking at my phone they should know what they are in for! Just like if Grindr popped up—that is what you get for being nosy.”

26, White, Gay

Theme 2: Overcoming Confidentiality Risks

Flexibility for Reminders

“...there are times that are best for me...at night is when I know I’m not usually around people and there’d be no reason why I couldn’t fill things out.”

24, White, Gay

“I have a special email account ... I use it for apps and meeting guys, only I know about it and no one else could get into it ...that would be the safest for me.”

36, White, Gay

Two-Factor Authentication

“All my younger nieces and nephews are over, it can be chaotic and we give them our phones to keep them busy...They are smart and get into some of my apps...I deleted Grindr because of it. I need to make sure they can’t get into that stuff.”

31, White, Bisexual

Theme 3: Community Engaged Research

Community Involvement

“Not many folks understand living out here. It is a way of life for us...it feels different and is different. There is no question about it...out here the rainbow has mud on it.”

20, Hispanic/Latino, Gay

“It is all about trust for me. Why should I trust you and why should you trust me...how have rural and gay folks been involved? They know what is at stake for us...they know our experiences.”

34, African American, Gay

Participant – Researcher Relationship

“I feel that we are giving a lot about ourselves and our lives...are we just being watched? I feel like researchers should be giving too during the study.”

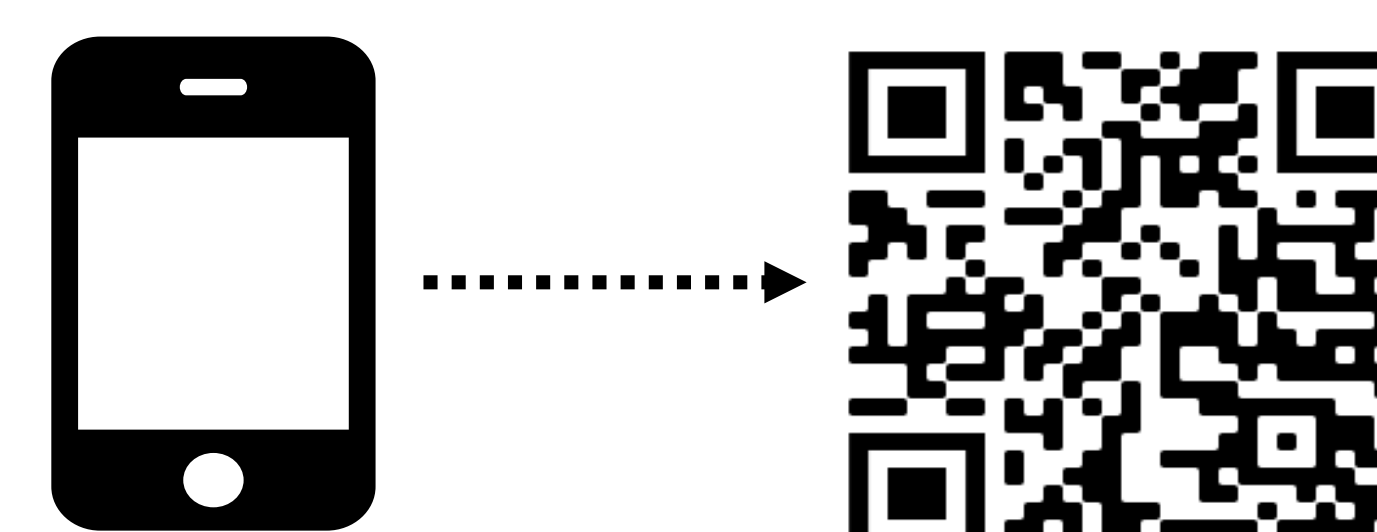
27, White, Gay

Research Benefits

“There is nothing out here for us [rural MSM]...it is hard to get care...this research could start something, something to help us.”

27, White, Gay

Take a picture to download the full paper.



PARTICIPANTS

- $M_{age} = 25.78$, $SD = 5.34$
- Predominantly White (31, 77.5%)
- Largest education category was some college (16, 40%)
- Majority made less than \$50,000 (30, 75%)
- Majority employed full-time (24, 60%)
- Predominantly single (27, 67.5%)
- Predominantly gay (32, 80%)

CONCLUSION

- EMA is viewed favorably among rural MSM.
- Rural MSM perceive benefits of participating in research.
- Input from community members is essential to ensure cultural relevance and appropriate privacy measures.
- Privacy should be valued and appropriate steps taken to avoid unintentional outing in participant’s local community which is often socially conservative.
- Future research should pilot mobile health interventions for this population.

REFERENCES

Waldorf, B., Kim, A. (2018). The Index of Relative Rurality (IRR): US County Data for 2000 and 2010. Purdue University Research Repository. <https://doi.org/10.4231/R7959FS8>

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