

HIV, Pregnancy and a Digital Comic

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Background

The annual rate of HIV infections via perinatal transmission has dropped more than 95% since the early 1990s in the US. In 2018, 226,903 live births were recorded in NYS hospitals, yielding zero cases of mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of HIV per 100,000 live births and 0% MTCT rate among those with confirmed or presumptive status.

Despite this achievement and public health messaging demonstrating this fact, women living with HIV still experience stigma related to childbirth and pregnancy. Comics are used for multiple public health interventions (cancer/sexual health) and have the potential to influence knowledge and encourage behavior change. Alternative methods must be developed and employed to address and combat stigma related to women living with HIV and pregnancy.

Methods

NYSDOH AIDS Institute, funded by a HRSA SPNS grant, developed the YGetIt? Project that includes a serial comic, *Tested*. The comic features a diverse cast affected by a range of health topics. Stakeholders have been involved at each step of the creation process. *Tested* is disseminated using various digital mediums (e.g. Webtoons, Instagram, etc.). *Tested*'s 3rd season explores the experiences of HIV positive women as they navigate various sections of social determinants of health (family, motherhood, pregnancy, work, school, etc.). Viewers can interact with the comic through comments, likes, and shares that are read and analyzed by public health experts. Health professionals respond to inquiries with accurate health information and connect viewers to resources. The YGI team leverages the, primarily young adult, audience of the online comic forum Webtoons.com to reach this population in an unexpected space.

Stakeholder Input

Tested

Digital Dissemination



- Tested's digital dissemination offers young adults a non-traditional way to receive and interact with sexual health information.
- Young adults are receptive to a health focused comic on an online comic forum.
- Healthcare providers should explore utilization of Tested to start dialogue with young adults and approach sensitive topics in a different way.



Results

Tested's viewership and engagement have steadily risen since the digital release in February of 2017. Most of Tested's interaction with the public occurs on the online comic forum, Webtoons.com. As of July 2020 Tested has received 630,000+ views, upwards of 700 comments and more than 62,000 likes.

Tested's Season 3 garnered:



Likes

8,250+

222+

Comments

Viewer Comments

WEB TOON

- "I honestly didn't know children could get HIV...this is a very good educational...thank you for this!"
- "I relate with Elena so hard. When I was 17...similar situation happened...my 21 year old boyfriend knew he was positive. I've tested negative...But it's still eye opening."
- "What is HIPAA?"
- "Just binged the whole story, LOVE IT! Please keep writing these stories"

Responses

WEB TOON

- "HIPAA is...Mandates industry-wide standards for health care information on electronic billing and other processes...Requires the protection of confidential health info"
- "When an HIV positive woman takes HIV medication properly there is almost no chance of the baby becoming HIV positive."

Conclusion

Using a digital comic such as *Tested* in a virtual space helps disseminate accurate health information. *Tested* serves as an additional educational tool for HIV health topics and helps spark conversations between providers and consumers and provides information in a different space.

