Results of a Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial of IDEAS for Hope, a Brief Telehealth Intervention for Suicide Prevention and HIV Care Engagement in Tanzania

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IDEAS FOR HOPE
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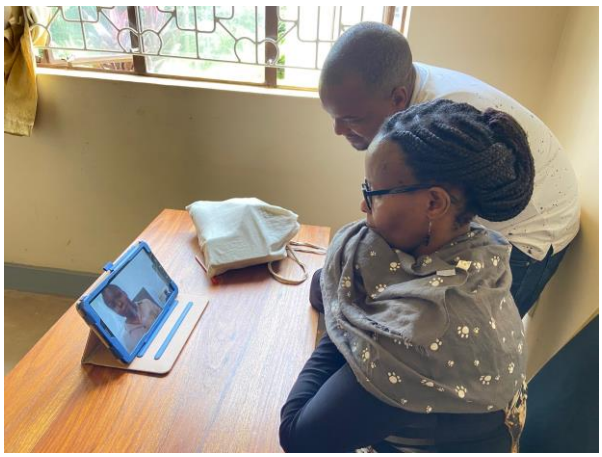
Why We Did This Study

People living with HIV (PLWH) often face serious mental health challenges, including thoughts of suicide. In Tanzania, mental health professionals are extremely scarce, and suicide rates among PLWH are much higher than the global average. The study tested IDEAS for Hope, a three-session telehealth counseling program designed to help reduce suicidal thoughts and improve HIV care. The program combined universal suicide screening, HIV

education, stigma reduction, adherence counseling, and problem-solving strategies. Researchers wanted to see if the program was possible to deliver in this setting, acceptable to patients, and might help reduce suicide risk and support continued HIV treatment.

Who Participated in This Study?



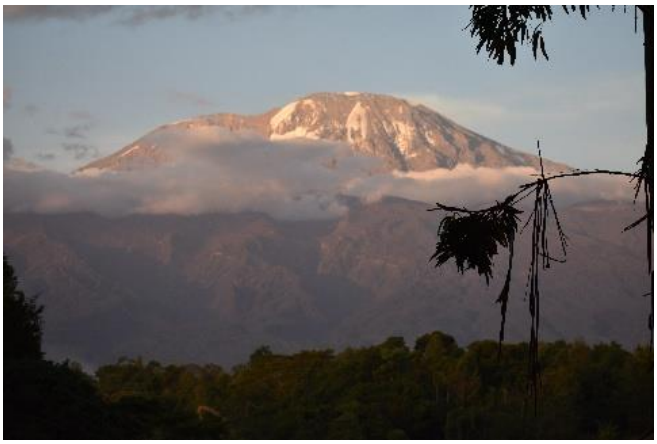
The study included 60 adults living with HIV in Moshi, Tanzania, who were screened at two HIV clinics and found to have suicidal thoughts. Participants were mostly women (78%), with an average age of 43 years, and most had a primary school education. Many reported previous suicidal intent or plans. Few had received any prior mental health treatment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups: the IDEAS for Hope telehealth program or a single safety planning session. All participants completed surveys at the start and after three months.

What Were the Results?

Both groups who received care believed it was highly acceptable, and over 94% of sessions met quality targets. Attendance was excellent, and most IDEAS for Hope sessions were done via video calls. Participants reported finding the counseling very helpful for reducing suicidal thoughts and improving coping skills. After three months, most participants no longer had suicidal thoughts, and none had suicide attempts or intent. Both groups had reductions in suicide risk, and HIV medication adherence stayed strong, with moderate improvement in the IDEAS for Hope group compared to the safety planning group (not

statistically significant). Qualitative interviews described improved hope, coping skills, problem-solving, and motivation to engage in HIV care, though HIV stigma and economic challenges remained ongoing concerns.

What Do These Results Mean?



The study shows that a brief telehealth counseling program for suicide prevention among people with HIV is both possible and well accepted in Tanzania. Even with very few mental health professionals available, the IDEAS for Hope sessions were delivered successfully by trained nurse counselors with high quality. Both the telehealth program and a standard safety planning session helped reduce suicide risk, highlighting the benefit of even brief counseling in low-resource settings. These results suggest that IDEAS for Hope could help fill critical mental health gaps and support HIV treatment engagement, but larger studies are needed to confirm its effectiveness and explore how to expand access across clinics and rural areas.