

WORKING WITH PAN TO EXPLORE DIGITAL CONNECTION AND LONELINESS AMONG PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV IN SMALL COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN BC

A JCURA Experience
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Background

Social isolation can affect HIV treatment and wellbeing [1, 2]. In smaller urban, rural, and remote (SURR) communities in BC, geographic isolation, limited healthcare access, and HIV-related stigma can intensify isolation among people living with HIV (PLHIV). Digital connection and community spaces may provide routes for support [3]; however, having access to technology may not translate into feeling connected. The TIE Study is a community-based, mixed-methods project led by PAN with PLHIV and community partners to better understand social isolation and related supports in SURR Northern BC.

JCURA Project Objectives

To assist with TIE Study development, including a) survey creation, b) Knowledge Translation Plan development, and c) preliminary descriptive data exploration

Methods

- I participated in 7 meetings with PAN's Director of Research & Evaluation and the TIE Study team (including peer researchers) to understand the study aims and contribute to Phase 1 study development.
- I assisted with Phase 1 survey development by building and revising the survey in SurveyMonkey, incorporating iterative feedback from the PAN team and peer researchers.
- I developed a Knowledge Mobilization plan to outline primary audiences, key messages, and feasible dissemination activities.
- I conducted an illustrative descriptive analysis of TIE survey data using a small preliminary sample from 1 Northern BC community (n=42) under supervision to practice data summarization and cautious interpretation. Loneliness was measured using the UCLA 3-item scale [4] and categorized as UCLA-3 ≥ 6 vs < 6 . Digital access items were select-all-that-apply. Perceived connectedness in online communities and physical spaces was summarized descriptively (counts/percentages among respondents who answered each item).

Results

- 1) Survey development (SurveyMonkey)
 - I built the Phase 1 survey in SurveyMonkey (60 items/ 4 sections), and refined response options through 3 rounds of team and peer review.
- 2) Knowledge Mobilization plan
 - I developed a KM plan that identifies primary audiences (PLHIV in SURR Northern BC and local HIV/community service partners) and outlines key messages, products, and dissemination channels.
 - Draft KM products created during my placement include plain-language study overview infographics (e.g., "Why this matters," "What we are doing," and "What we will share back"), designed for community partners and participants.
- 3) Illustrative preliminary descriptive snapshot (1 community; n=42)
 - Among 42 PLHIV aged 18+ living in 1 small northern BC community, 17 (40%) were classified as lonely (UCLA-3 score ≥ 6).
 - Among those classified as lonely, 14 respondents answered the item on reliable access to communication/internet resources; most reported Wi-Fi (9/14), cellular internet (9/14), and smartphone/tablet access (9/14).

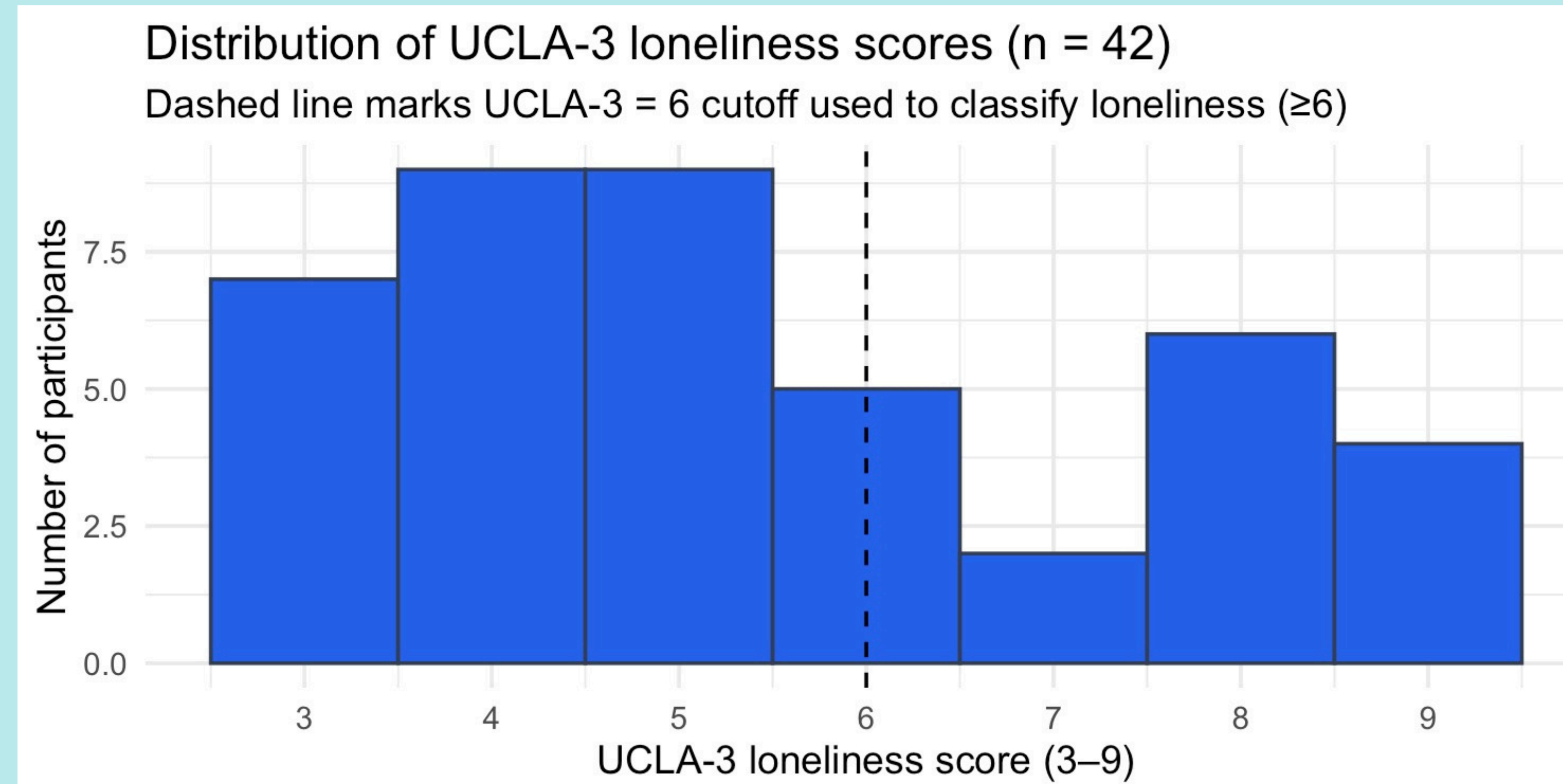


Figure 1. Distribution of UCLA-3 loneliness scores among 42 participants (illustrative preliminary sample from 1 northern BC community).

Key Takeaways

- **Survey development: Building the Phase 1 survey in SurveyMonkey (60 items, 4 sections) showed me how collaborative survey design is iterative. Three rounds of team and peer review helped refine response options and improve clarity and feasibility.**
- **Knowledge mobilization: Developing the KM plan helped me translate study goals into audience-specific products such as plain-language infographics and summaries, and into practical dissemination routes through community partners and PAN channels. It also reinforced the importance of partner and peer review before public sharing.**
- **Descriptive analysis: Conducting a supervised, illustrative descriptive snapshot (n=42 from 1 community) strengthened my skills in cautious interpretation and in communicating preliminary patterns appropriately, including loneliness classification and reported digital access among respondents who answered.**

Conclusion

This JCURA placement with PAN strengthened my skills in community-based research development, including collaborative survey design (SurveyMonkey), knowledge mobilization planning, and supervised descriptive data exploration using a preliminary sample. Moving forward, Phase 1 data collection and additional analyses will continue to better understand social isolation and supports among PLHIV in SURR Northern BC, with knowledge sharing guided by appropriate review processes and partner priorities.

References

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