Divergent Perspectives about the Scientific Underpinnings of U=U among PLHIV and HIV-Negative Individuals

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Background
Clinical evidence has established the Undetectable equals Untransmittable (U=U) message as scientifically sound. People living with HIV who have an undetectable viral load have zero risk of transmitting HIV to their sexual partner(s).

Method
A 6-question online survey was fielded among both PLHIV and HIV-negative individuals from March to May 2024 to assess community understanding and belief in U=U and WHO’s Zero risk assertion. The survey was distributed through organizational partners and social media.
Results

- PLHIV (n=412)
- HIV-Negative (n=309)
- Prefer Not to Say (n=11)

N=732
Results – Confidence in knowledge of U=U

PLHIV (n=411)

- Confident: 87%
- Somewhat Confident: 10%
- Not Confident: 3%

HIV-Negative (n=309)

- Confident: 77%
- Somewhat Confident: 19%
- Not Confident: 4%
Results – Trust of U=U Science

- PLHIV (n=411)
  - Trust the Science: 89%
  - Unsure: 9%
  - Do Not Trust the Science: 2%

- HIV-Negative (n=307)
  - Trust the Science: 83%
  - Unsure: 14%
  - Do Not Trust the Science: 3%
Results – Belief in assertion of Zero Risk

PLHIV (n=411)

- Yes: 86%
- No: 8%
- Unsure: 6%

HIV-Negative (n=310)

- Yes: 71%
- No: 12%
- Unsure: 17%
Results

Provider Discussions of U=U (n=707)

- Yes: 53%
- No: 42%
- Prefer Not to Say: 5%

Public Awareness of U=U (n=707)

- Yes: 5%
- No: 85%
- Not Sure: 10%
Conclusion

Overall PLHIV reported slightly higher U=U knowledge and trust in U=U science compared to HIV-negative individuals. The majority of respondents, irrespective of HIV-status, agreed that public knowledge on the scientifically backed U=U messaging is lacking. Considering the limitations of distributing the survey through organizational partners, it is likely that respondents were more knowledgeable about U=U. Improving public knowledge and promoting broader acceptance of U=U is not only critical sexual health knowledge, but has the potential to mitigate stigma experienced by PLHIV.