

# Public Knowledge, Views, Perceptions & Attitudes towards HIV and People with HIV in Switzerland – Results of a national survey

Thomas Grabinger<sup>1</sup>, Corinna Oberle<sup>1</sup>, Marlon Gattiker<sup>2</sup>, David Haerry<sup>3</sup>, Dominique Braun<sup>4,\*</sup>, Katharine Darling<sup>5,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Gilead Sciences Switzerland Sàrl, Zug (Switzerland); <sup>2</sup>Swiss AIDS Federation, Zurich (Switzerland); <sup>3</sup>Positive Council Switzerland, Bern (Switzerland); <sup>4</sup>Department of Infectious Diseases and Hospital Epidemiology, University Hospital Zurich, University of Zurich, Switzerland; <sup>5</sup>Infectious Diseases Service, Lausanne University Hospital, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland.



\*equally-credited senior authors

## Conclusions

- U=U is a message with limited recognition that is not well understood by the Swiss public
- This lack of knowledge is accompanied by HIV-associated stigma and misperceptions and in some cases limited understanding of HIV transmission routes
- The knowledge of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis is limited in Swiss general population
- Effective awareness campaigns are needed to spread the U=U message and help foster a more informed and supportive public stance towards PWH.

References: 1. WHO. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/360860/978924005179-eng.pdf> (accessed TBC)  
 2. DHHS. <https://clinicalinfo.hiv.gov/sites/default/files/guidelines/documents/adult-adolescent-arv/guidelines-adult-adolescent-arv.pdf> (accessed Jun 21, 2024);  
 3. IAS. <https://www.iasociety.org/ias-statement/ias-statement-u=putting-science-action> (accessed Jun 21, 2024);  
 4. EACS guidelines v.12, Oct 2023 <https://www.eacsociety.org/guidelines/eacs-guidelines/> (accessed Jun 21, 2024)

## Background

- People with HIV (PWH) on effective antiretroviral therapy who achieve and maintain undetectable viral load cannot sexually transmit the virus. This message known as U=U (Undetectable equals Untransmittable) has the power to reduce HIV-associated stigma. Stigma is a significant barrier impacting early diagnosis, retention in care or access to specialized services, and negatively impacts quality of life for PWH<sup>1</sup>.
- Suppressed viral load during pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding reduces the chance of vertical HIV transmission to <1% and there is no risk of transmission if the mother is taking ART and has undetectable VL prior to and throughout pregnancy and delivery<sup>1</sup>.
- Zero risk of transmission as stated by U=U is supported by Major Worldwide Guidelines<sup>2-4</sup>

## Objective

- Evaluate the awareness, understanding and acceptance of U=U in the general population in Switzerland (CH).

## Methods

- We conducted a HIV public opinion surveys, using a questionnaire with closed-ended questions, to understand public opinion towards HIV transmission, PWH and U=U in November 2023.
- Participants (age ≥18 years) were randomly selected and representative quota sampling across demographic variables such as age, gender, educational level, and geographic location within Switzerland was ensured. Participants were recruited by a panel institute able to provide representative population surveys.

Table 1. Demographic data

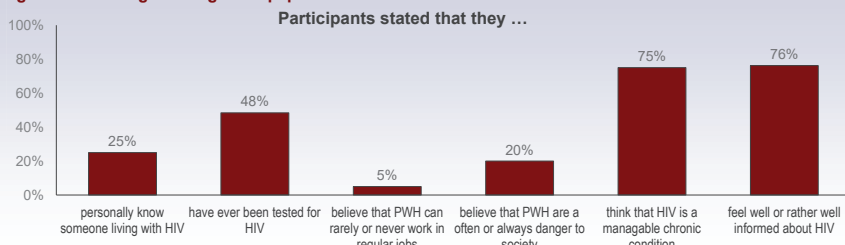
		Switzerland
Participants	Total	1015 (100%)
	Gender	
	male	498 (49.1%)
	female	515 (50.7%)
	diverse	2 (0.2%)
Age Group	≥18 - 30 years	168 (16.6%)
	31 - 40 years	173 (17.1%)
	41 - 50 years	175 (17.3%)
	51 - 60 years	188 (18.6%)
	61 - 70 years	183 (18.1%)
	>70 years	128 (12.6%)
	Living area*	urban
	rural	191 (18.8%)
Educational level	school/completed compulsory school	158 (15.6%)
	apprenticeship / secondary school without leaving exam	470 (46.3%)
	secondary school with leaving exam / university degree	358 (35.3%)
	other	29 (2.85%)
	Region	
	Lake Geneva Region	202 (19.9%)
	Espace Mittelland	238 (23.4%)
	Northwestern Switzerland	145 (14.3%)
	Zurich Region	182 (17.9%)
	Eastern Switzerland	142 (14.0%)
	Central Switzerland	102 (10.0%)
	Ticino	4 (0.4%)

\*urban: in a city or close to a city; rural: far away from a city

## Results

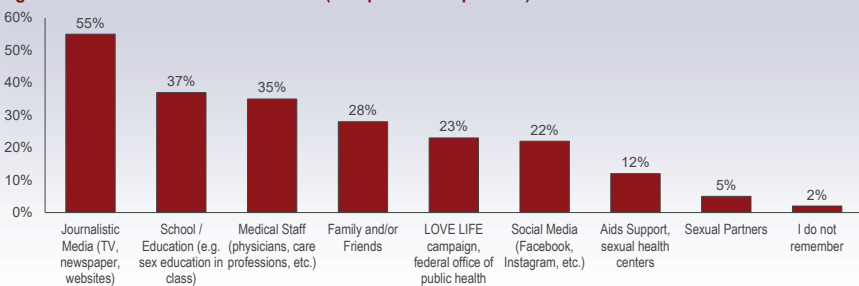
- A total of 1015 respondents participated in the survey (Table 1, demographic data). On average, 76% of respondents stated that they were feeling informed about HIV and 75% agreed that, due to modern ART, HIV is no longer a deadly but a manageable chronic condition. In contrast, 20% believed that PWH are often or always "a danger to society" and 5% believed PWH are "not able to work at regular jobs", (Fig.1)

Figure 1. Knowledge of the general population towards HIV and PWH



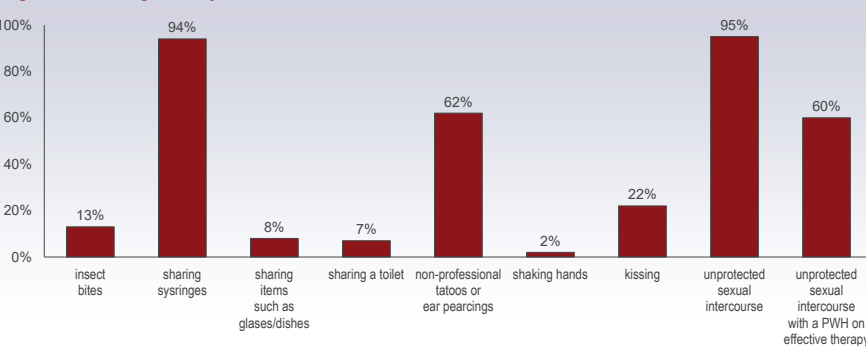
- Respondents were asked about the sources of their knowledge about HIV. The majority (55%) were informed by journalistic media (TV, newspaper and websites), but also school/education, medical staff and family & friends played a major role as sources of information about HIV (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Sources of Information about HIV (multiple answers possible)



- Respondents were asked whether they agree, disagree with or do not know about specific statements on how HIV is transmitted (Fig.3 presents agree responses as %). While >90% agree that HIV can be transmitted via sharing syringes and unprotected sexual intercourse, 60% and 22% still agreed that HIV could be transmitted through unprotected sexual intercourse with PWH on effective treatment and by kissing, respectively.

Figure 3. Knowledge on Ways of HIV Transmission

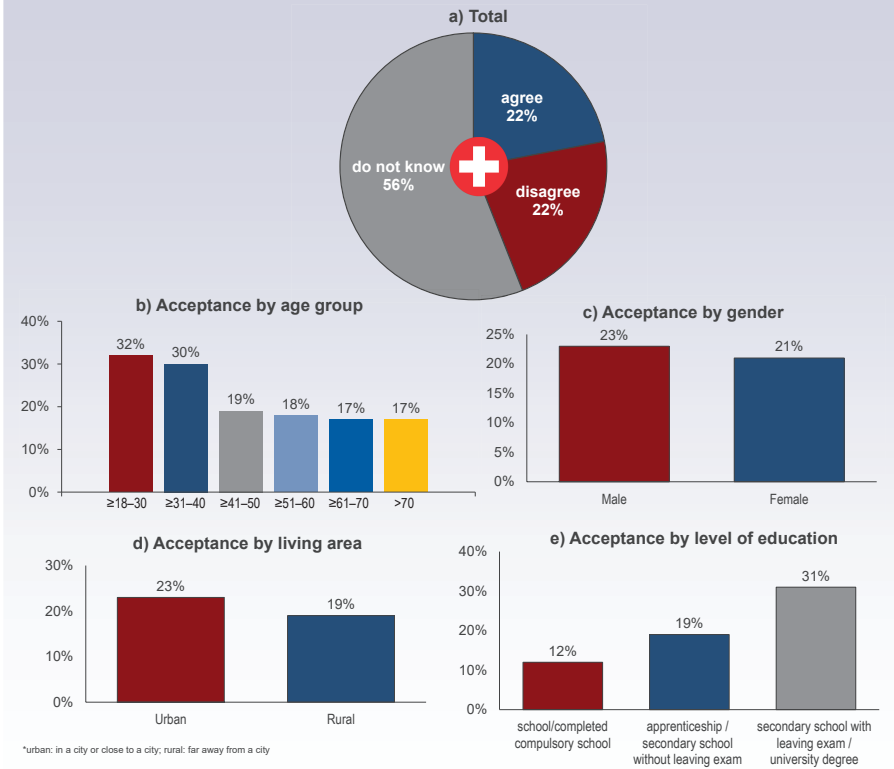


## Results

- Approximately 22% of the participants agreed with the U=U message. On the other hand, a similar proportion did not agree with the U=U message and 56% answered that they do not know about it (Fig 4a).
- The acceptance of U=U was higher in younger people, people living in urban areas and those with higher education (Fig 4b-e)

Figure 4. Understanding of U=U Message (total and acceptance by subgroup analysis)

Do you agree with the statement that people with HIV who take HIV therapy and achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load cannot sexually transmit the virus to others?

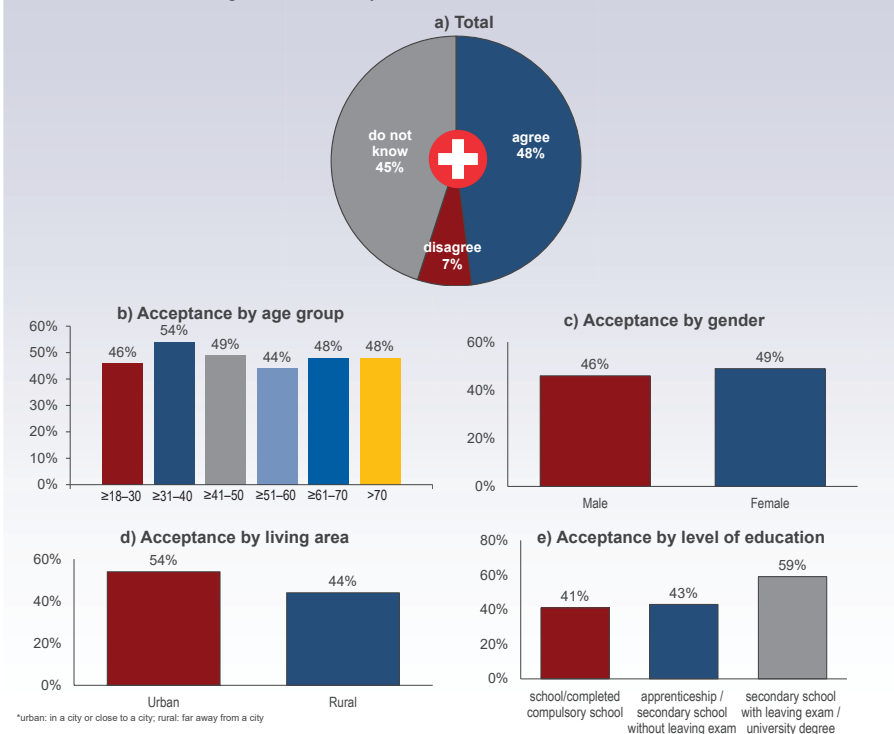


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- 48% of the respondents agreed that women with HIV on effective therapy can give birth to HIV-negative infants. On the other hand, 45% of the respondents did not know about this statement (Fig 5a)
- Understanding of vertical transmission was higher in people living in urban areas and those with higher education (Fig 5b-e)

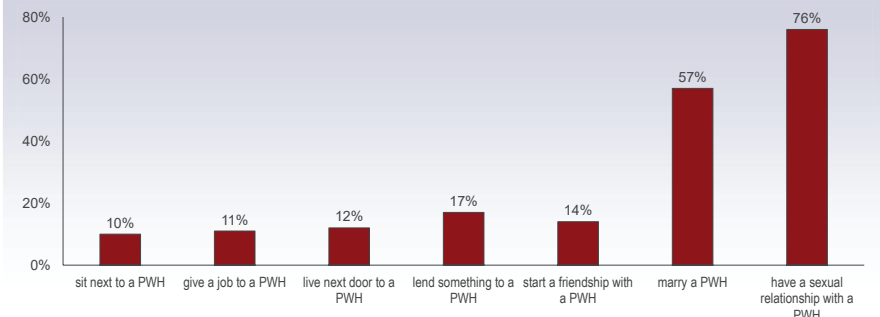
Figure 5. Understanding vertical transmission (total and acceptance by subgroup analysis)

Do you agree with the statement that women with HIV who take HIV therapy and achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load can give birth to healthy children without HIV?



- In Fig.6 results from HIV stigma-related questions are presented, specially referring to personal and social connection and distance.
- 14% of respondents would mind/not like to start a friendship with a PWH.
- 57% of respondents would mind/not like to marry a PWH and 76% would mind/not like to have a sexual relationship with a PWH.

Figure 6. Stigmatization of PWH



The sources of information and the awareness of the public about Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) was obtained. The vast majority (87%) had never heard about PrEP, and of those who stated knowing about it, only about 50% could correctly identify the definition of PrEP using a multiple-choice test.

Figure 7. PrEP awareness – Have you ever heard about Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)?

