

Prevalence of HIV-related stigma experienced by young adults with HIV: findings from Positive Voices 2022

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INTRODUCTION

- Stigma negatively impacts health and wellbeing of people with HIV^[1]
- The level of reported stigma has improved slightly since 2017 but remains high across many domains^[2]
- We describe the experiences of HIV-related stigma reported by individuals aged between 20 and 34 years

METHODS

- Dataset: Positive Voices 2022 (PV2022) cross-sectional survey^[2]
- Participants were asked if they agree with: 'I am ashamed of my HIV status' and 'I have poor self-esteem'. Answers strongly agree or agree=ashamed, strongly disagree or disagree=not ashamed
- Participants selected if they had experienced different types of stigma in the last year (e.g. 'I feel isolated or lonely', 'I have heard my family gossiping about me', Figure 2).
- Participants said if they strongly believed, believed somewhat, did not believe, or were not sure about undetectable=untransmittable (U=U)
- Participants selected for a range of services (1) I have received this (2) I needed this but could not get it (3) I needed this but did not try to get it (4) I needed this but did not know about it (5) I did not need this. Answer(s) 1=met need, 2-4=unmet need

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

- 4,540 participants from HIV clinics in England, Wales, and Scotland
- Overall, 8% (360/4,540) of participants were aged <35 years (median: 32 years; range: 20 to 34 years), of whom 3% (10) acquired HIV through vertical transmission and 15% (52) were diagnosed aged ≤17 years

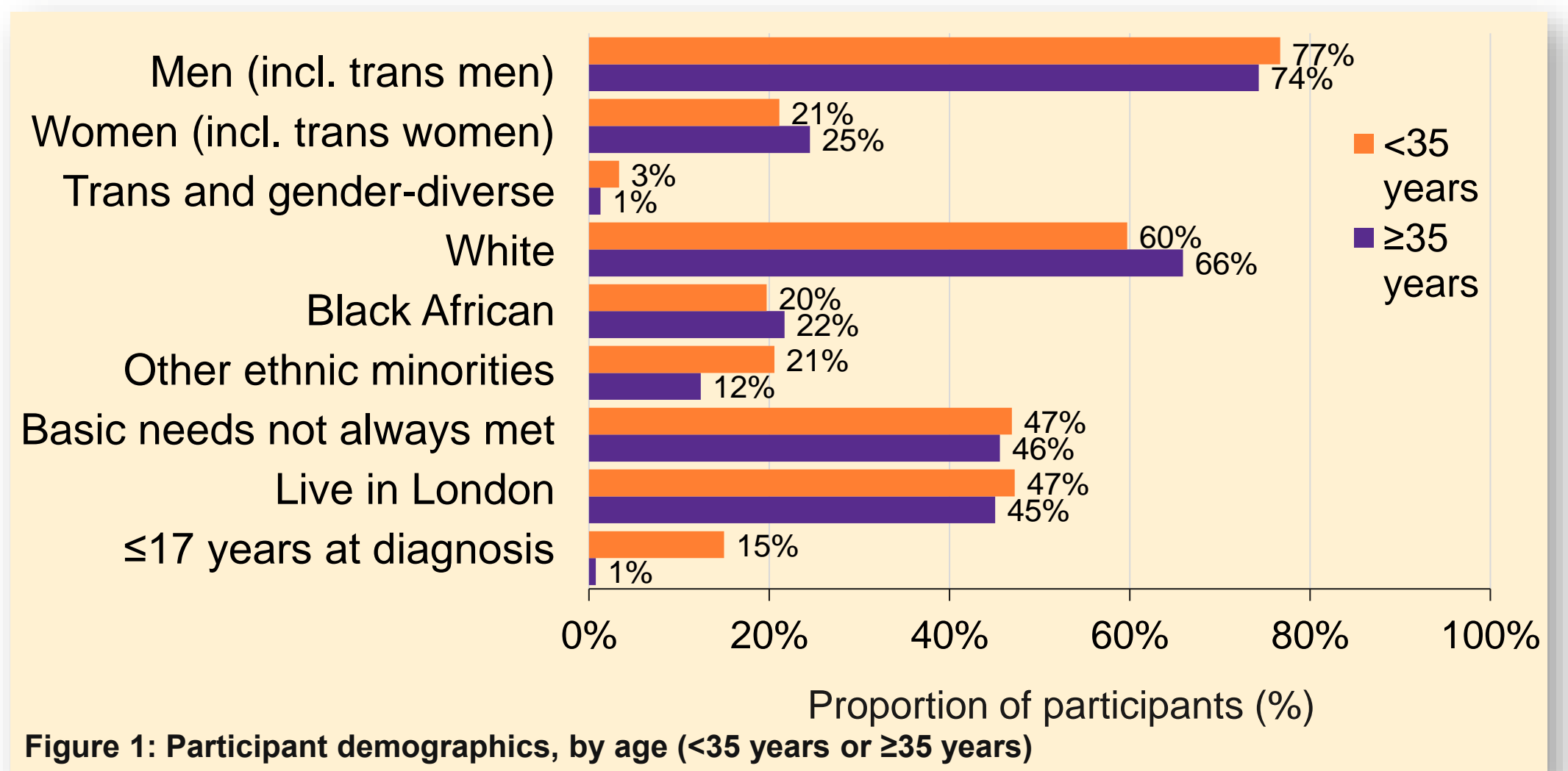


Figure 1: Participant demographics, by age (<35 years or ≥35 years)

RESULTS

Stigma

- Levels of self- and enacted-stigma remain high among participants aged <35 years
- Over half (53%) of young adults are ashamed of their HIV status
- Nearly a quarter (23%) of young adults had worried in the last year that they would be treated differently to other patients by healthcare staff
- The majority (75%) of young adults believe strongly in U=U, with an additional 22% somewhat believing in the statement

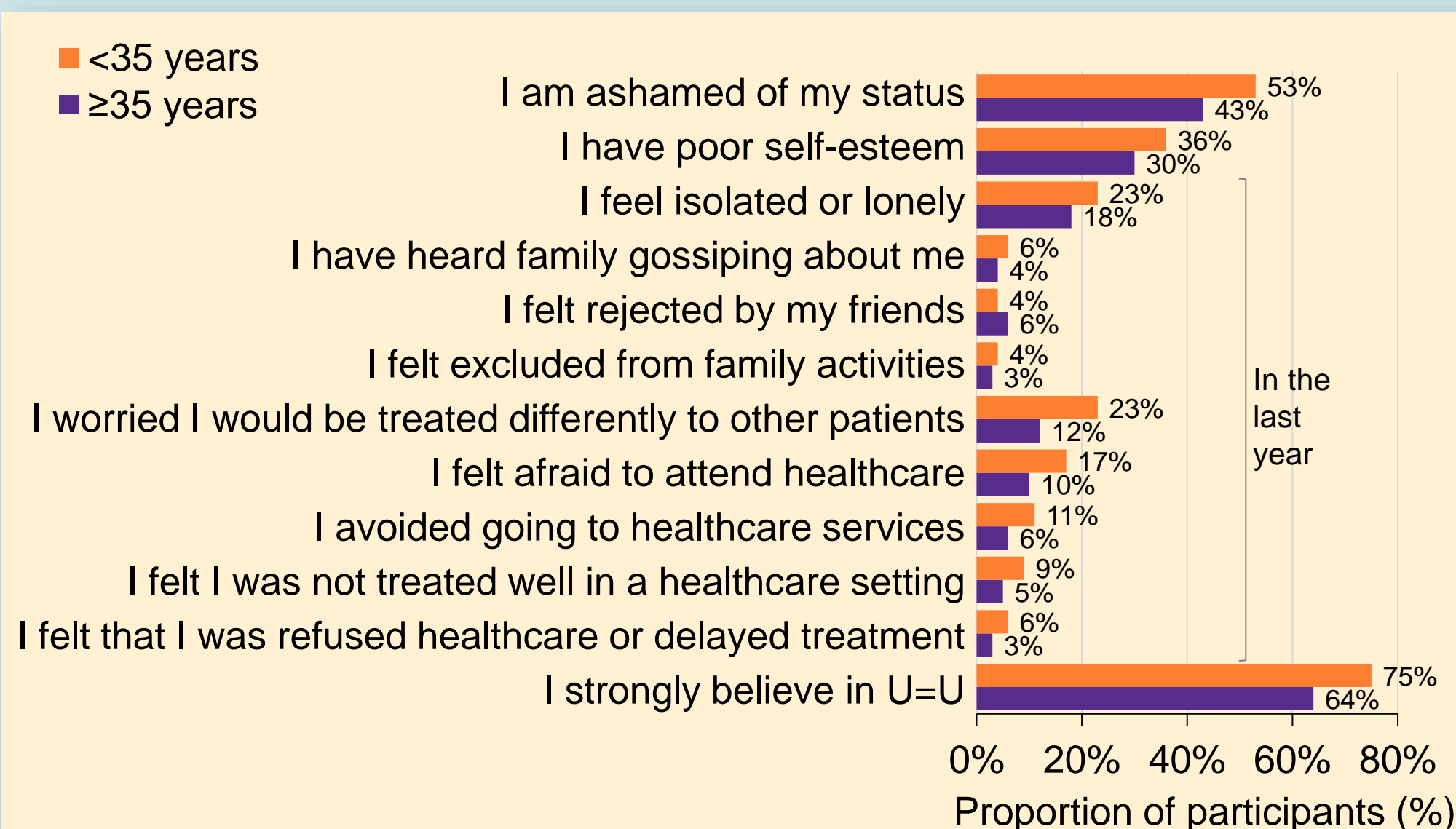


Figure 2: Prevalence of stigma, by age (<35 years or ≥35 years)

Self-stigma and unmet needs

- Young adults who are ashamed of their HIV have higher levels of need for various services and a higher proportion of this need is unmet compared to people who are not ashamed of their HIV status

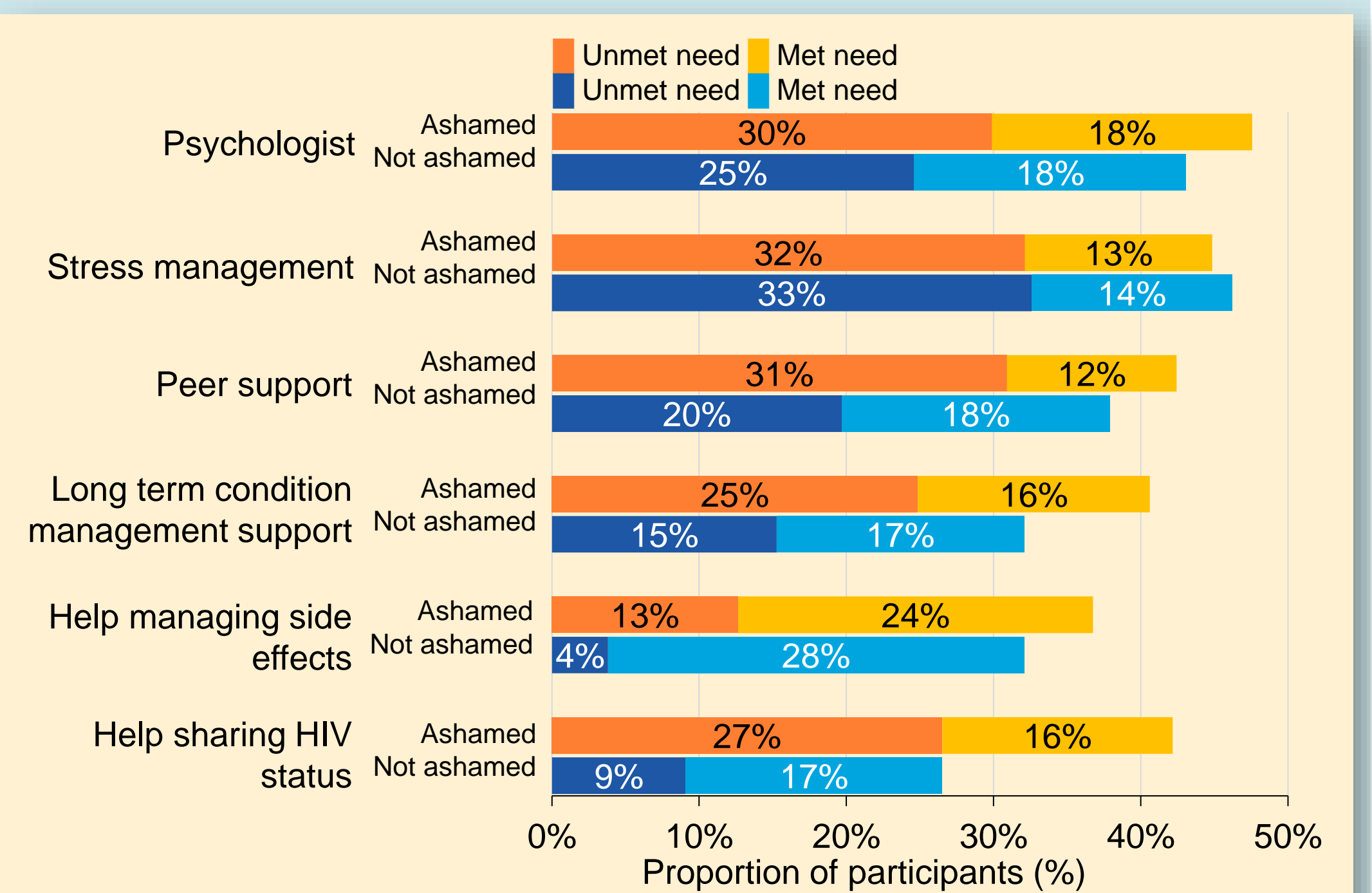


Figure 3: Proportion of young adults (<35 years) met and unmet needs, by response to 'I am ashamed of my HIV status'

Self-stigma and U=U

- A higher proportion of young adults who do not feel ashamed believed in the U=U statement than those who did feel ashamed

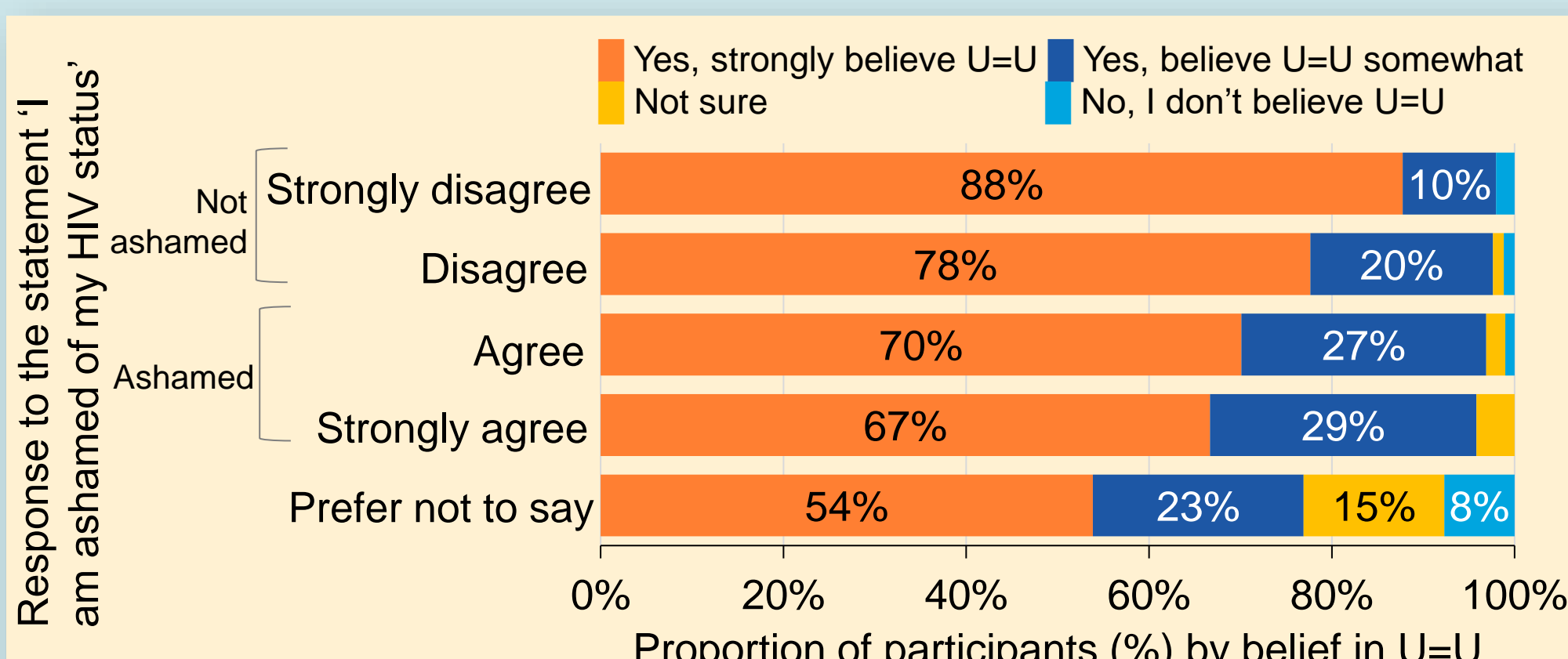


Figure 4: Proportion of young adults (<35 years) believing in U=U, by response to 'I am ashamed of my HIV status'

CONCLUSIONS

- Belief in U=U is high among young adults with HIV. Belief was highest among those with lower levels of self stigma, suggesting belief in U=U may reduce self stigma. However, overall levels of self stigma was high with over half feeling ashamed of their HIV status
- Work needs to be done to build upon the messaging of U=U and should extend to people without HIV
- Reducing stigma may decrease levels of need for some services, but more exploration is needed to understand this relationship
- Efforts and investments must be made to ensure adequate provision of stress management, psychologist services, help sharing HIV status, and peer support specifically aimed at young adults

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