

Understanding the perception and potential promise of U=U and TasP among sexual minority men (SMM) in the U.S.

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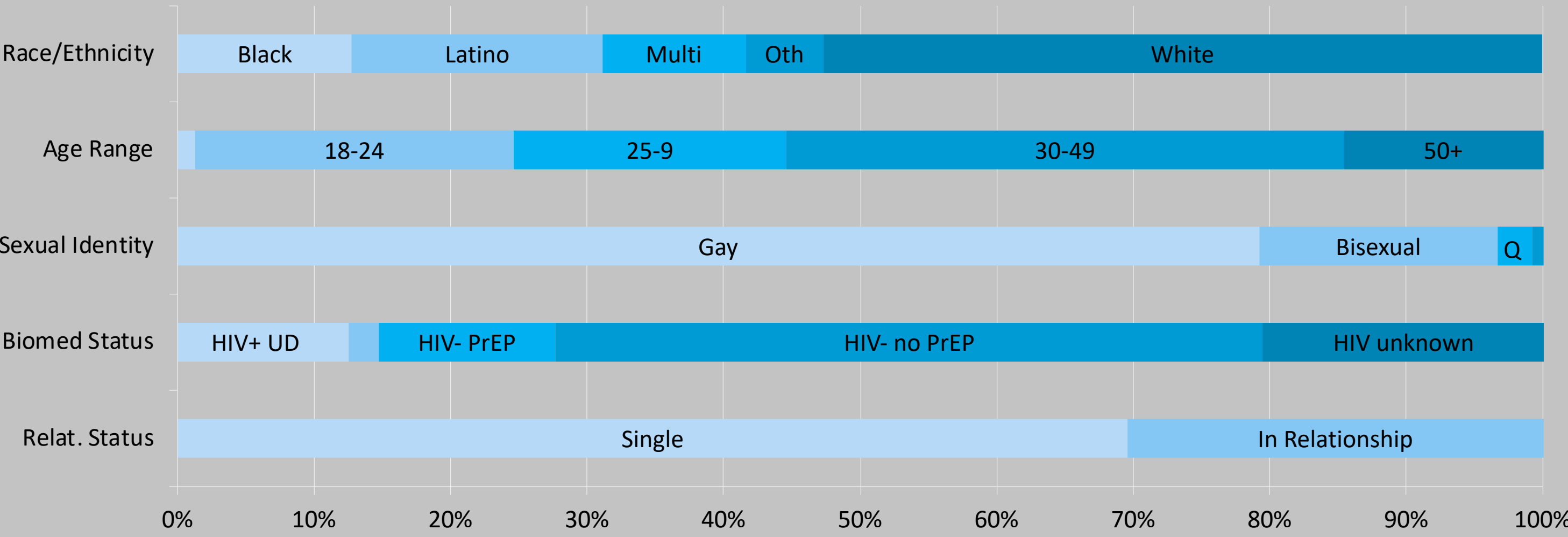
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Background

- To be successful at reaching UNAIDS 90-90-90 targets and the U.S. *Ending the Epidemic* goals, disseminating treatment-as-prevention (TasP) science effectively is necessary
- Dissemination of TasP messaging via the *Undetectable = Untransmittable* (U=U) movement have been scaled up, but little is known about their reach
- In this study, we aimed to:
 - Understand beliefs about the accuracy of the U=U message
 - Determine whether the message or the underlying facts are the sources of any disbelief
 - Describe the potential impact of U=U and TasP that go beyond just HIV prevention to transform the lives of sexual minority men living with HIV (SMMLWH)

Method

- We conducted a brief online survey as a screening measure for several studies – data were collected from November, 2017 through June, 2018, resulting in a sample of **N = 111,747**
- Participants self-reported a range of data on sociodemographic, behavioral, and psychological factors
 - Race/ethnicity, age, sexual identity, relationship status
- We classified biomedical status:
 - HIV status (positive, negative, “I don’t know”)
 - For HIV+ men: Currently undetectable (yes/no)
 - For HIV-/unknown men: Current PrEP status
- We developed a range of questions to assess familiarity with and understanding of U=U messaging and TasP more broadly
- After data were collected for approximately half of the sample, we developed additional follow-up questions
 - Belief in the “effectively no risk” language of the CDC
 - Personal/social impact of U=U messaging



Conclusions

- Compared to research in 2016, a greater proportion of HIV-negative and unknown men believed in U=U (**Fig 1**) from 2017-18
- Disbelief in U=U appears directly related to a lack of understanding of TasP (**Fig 2**), with fewer than 1 in 5 HIV+ men and substantially fewer HIV- men believing a lack of risk during sex with an HIV+ and undetectable partner – it does not appear to be about the wording of U=U
- Among HIV+ men, fewer than half overall understood that TasP was associated with “essentially no risk” of transmission (**Fig 3**)
- We also found that virtually no SMMLWH had heard about TasP/U=U from their medical providers (not shown)
- The vast majority of HIV+ SMM said U=U made them feel better about their HIV status (**Fig 4**)

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Highlights: tweet all about it....



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Compared to <40% in a study done in 2016, we found that 55% of the more than 100K sexual minority men (SMM) we sampled in 2017-18 endorsed **#UequalsU** as accurate – data showed accuracy beliefs increasing by 2-3% per month!



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Major gaps exist by **#biomedical** status – the majority of men engaged with biomedical treatment/prevention (HIV+ & **#undetectable** or HIV- & on **#PrEP**) believe **#UequalsU** is accurate, compared to 1 in 4 HIV-negative/unknown SMM not on PrEP



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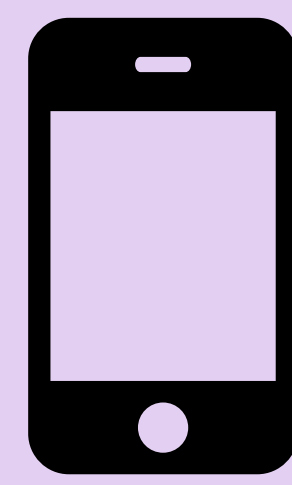
For SMM living w/ HIV, the notion of “effectively no risk” is gaining traction – just under half endorse it. The majority of SMM living w/ HIV say **#UequalsU** makes them feel better about their own HIV status.



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bit.ly/RendinaUU2019

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Results

Figure 1. Perceived Accuracy of U=U slogan. With regard to HIV-positive individuals transmitting HIV through sexual contact, how accurate do you believe the slogan “Undetectable = Untransmittable” is?

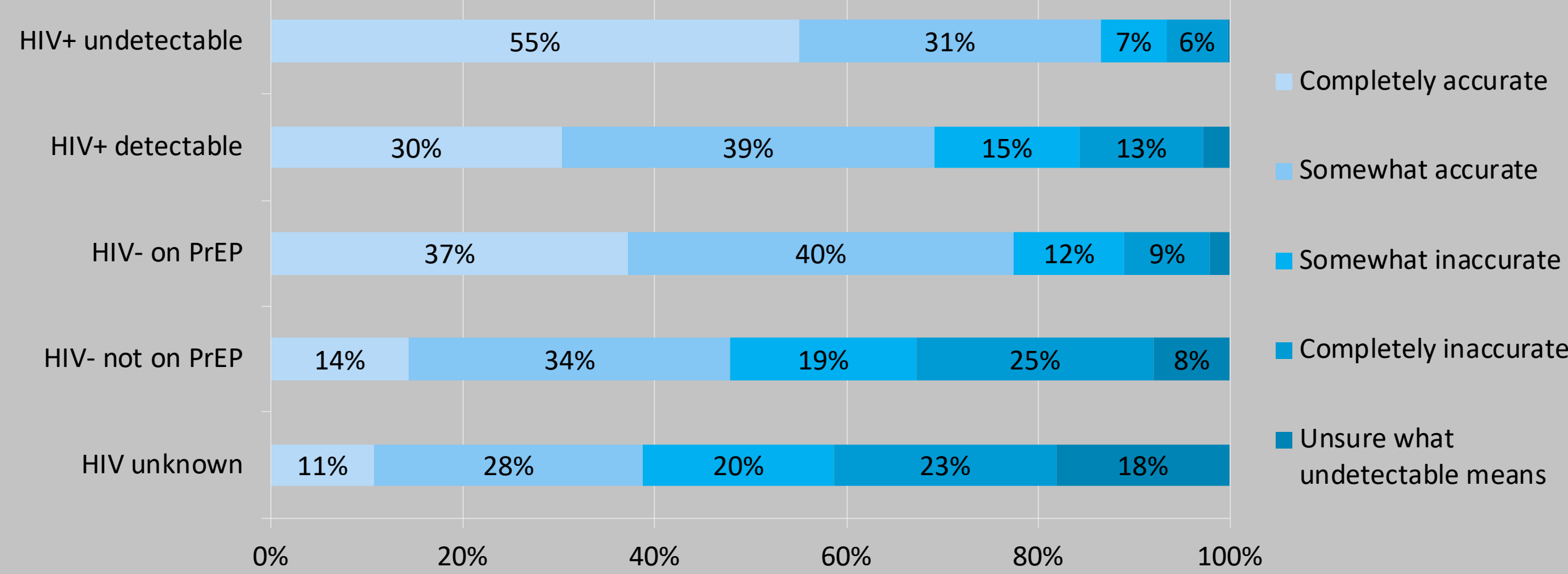


Figure 3. Beliefs in “effectively no risk” language (HIV+ men only). If you know that your viral load is undetectable today, what is the risk you could pass on HIV to a partner if you have sex without a condom with them today?

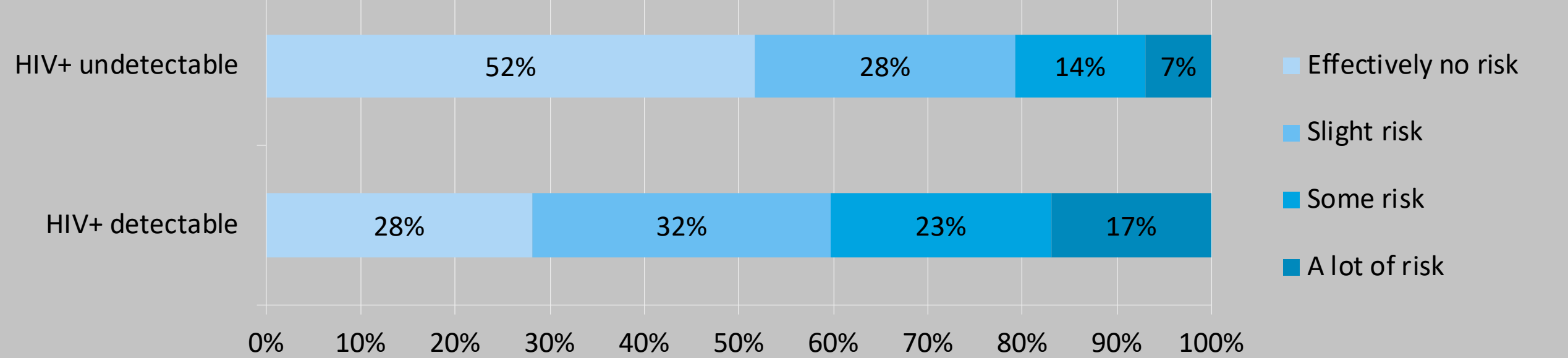


Figure 2. Perceived risk of transmission with a known undetectable partner. What is the risk that an HIV+ man who is currently undetectable could transmit HIV sexually to his partner through topping?

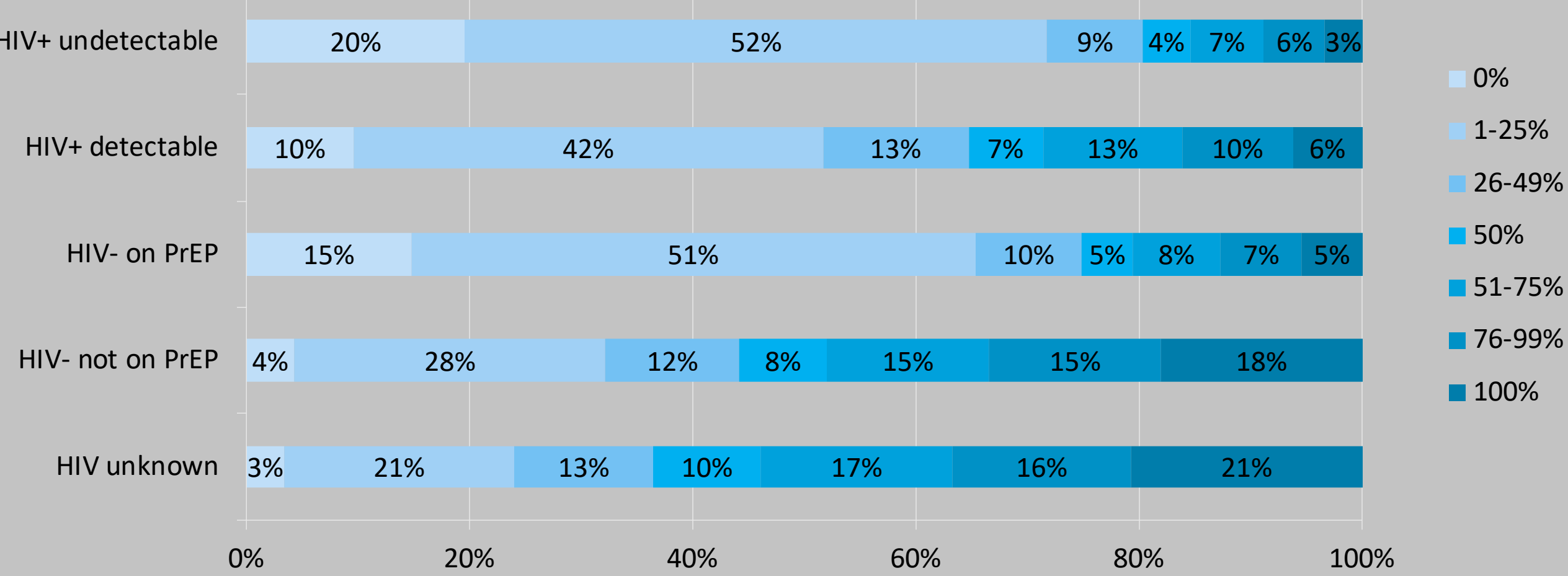


Figure 4. Perceived personal impact of U=U slogan (HIV+ men only). How does the Undetectable = Untransmittable message make you feel about your own HIV status?

