

Measuring sexual confidence and enjoyment among people living with HIV in the context of biomedical prevention technologies and undetectable=untransmissible

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Background:

People living with HIV (PLHIV) have historically faced a range of challenges negotiating satisfying sex life. We sought to develop a measure of sexual confidence in the context of HIV biomedical technologies, and investigate associated demographic, HIV-related and social predictors.

Methods:

Data were collected from 816 PLHIV in Australia between 2021-22. Participants were asked to report the extent to which they agreed with the following statements regarding sexual confidence, biomedical prevention technologies and U=U: “I enjoy sex more when I know my viral load is undetectable”, “I am confident that I will not transmit HIV to a sexual partner when my viral load is undetectable”, “I enjoy sex more when I know my partner is on PrEP”, “I feel more confident seeking sex or relationships now that PrEP is widely available”, “The availability of PrEP has improved my sex life”. Exploratory factor analyses were performed to assess for latent factors within the item set.

Results:

Exploratory factor analysis revealed one latent factor, labelled the ‘sexual confidence and biomedical prevention scale’ (SCBPS). Higher SCBPS scores were significantly associated with identifying as gay or queer, identifying as male, having a primary partner + additional casual partners (vs single, one regular partner, and more than one regular partner). Number of years living with HIV did not significantly predict scale scores.

Conclusion:

These findings underscore the interplay between biomedical prevention technologies and sexual confidence, as well as their link with demographic factors such as sexual orientation, gender identity and relationship status. The absence of a significant association with number of years living with HIV suggests that the impact of these biomedical advancements may be more immediate and not necessarily cumulative over time. This research emphasises the importance of considering diverse factors in promoting a holistic approach to improving the sexual lives of PLHIV.

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