

# COVID 19 and HIV: AWARENESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF INFECTIONS ON HIV-INFECTED YOUNG PEOPLE

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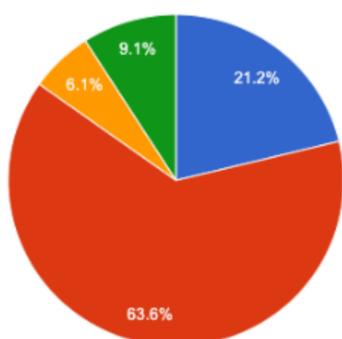
## Background

Public health emergencies may affect the health, safety, and well-being of both individuals and communities. These effects may translate into a range of emotional reactions and unhealthy behaviours. Some people may be more vulnerable than others to the psychosocial effects of pandemics. Young people living with HIV can experience solitude, depression and anxiety as a consequence of the stigma that continues to surround HIV and the daily challenge of living with a chronic infection. We investigated the psychological impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic among a group of HIV-infected young people and assessed their knowledge on HIV and COVID-19 infections.

## Methods

In June 2020, Ospedale Pediatrico Bambino Gesù (OPBG, Rome, Italy) and Penta (Padova, Italy) organized a webinar focused on COVID-19 and HIV infections and the importance of clinical trials in improving knowledge of infectious diseases. Participants were vertically infected HIV patients, aged 15-30 years-old, receiving treatment from the Paediatric HIV Service in OPBG or from the Department of Women's and Children's Health, University of Padova. Each participant was asked to complete a preliminary online anonymous survey on their knowledge of the infections before attending the webinar. Data were collected using Redcap®.

Figure 1 In the last 2 months did you feel tired?



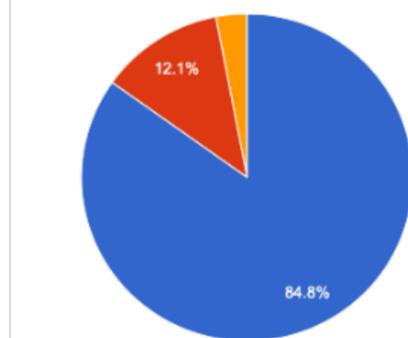
## Results

A total of 40 participants attended the webinar, of which 33 completed the survey. Participants showed a good knowledge of HIV and COVID-19, with almost all responses related to transmission and prevention of both viruses being correct. Only 3/33 people thought COVID-19 is a bacterium rather than a virus, while 6/33 (18%) respondents thought COVID-19 can be transmitted through the air, not by droplets. A total of 23/33 (70%) people were aware of the correct definition of a clinical trial, while 15% believe a clinical trial is an informative meeting on a specific disease.

Concerning the psychological impact of the current pandemic, 21% of participants stated they experienced a lot of suffering for social isolation during the lockdown period, while 18% did not suffer at all.

In the 2-months period prior to survey completion, participants stated they had felt tired (79%), worried (91%) and upset (82%). 79% of respondents signaled to have experienced a loss of interest and/or pleasure in their daily activities. 15% of respondents reported some interruption on HIV treatment during the previous 2 months.

Figure 2 In the last 2 months have you experienced loss of interest/pleasure in daily activities?



■ never  
■ sometimes

## Conclusion

Our data highlights that the current COVID-19 pandemic has had a psychological impact on young people living with HIV. Based on these preliminary data, we have created a more comprehensive survey using psychometric validated tests to be distributed across 40 countries across the world - thanks to the Penta ID Network - to investigate the psychosocial impact of the current pandemic and the restrictive measures on HIV infected young people.

Figure 3 In the last 2 months did you feel worried?

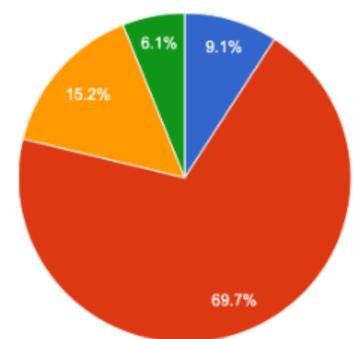
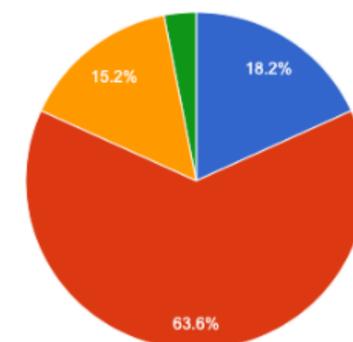


Figure 4 In the last 2 months did you feel upset?



■ more than half the days  
■ always