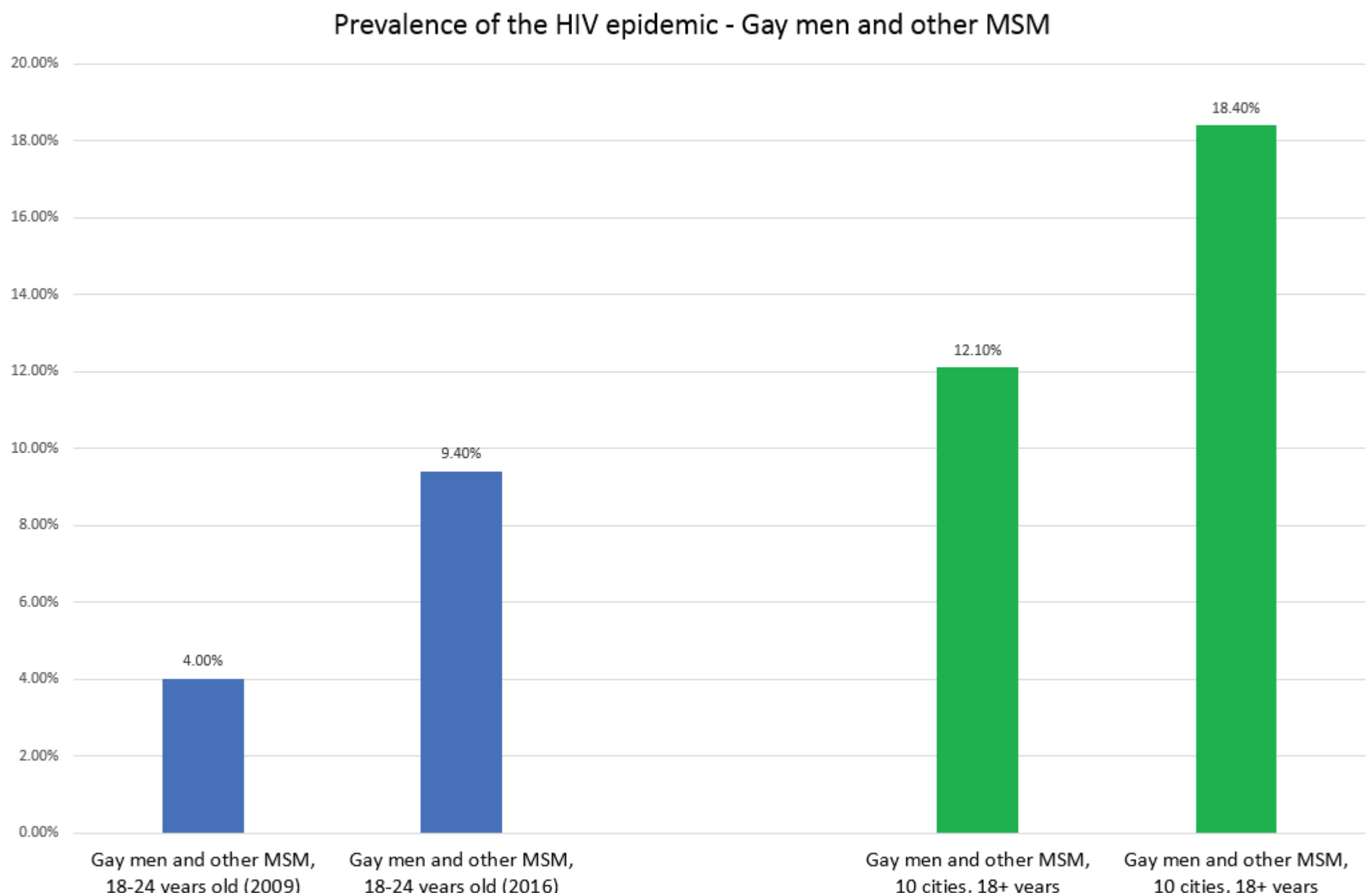


Brazil, PrEP, & gay dating apps. A survey about knowledge, access and future use of PrEP among users of dating app Hornet

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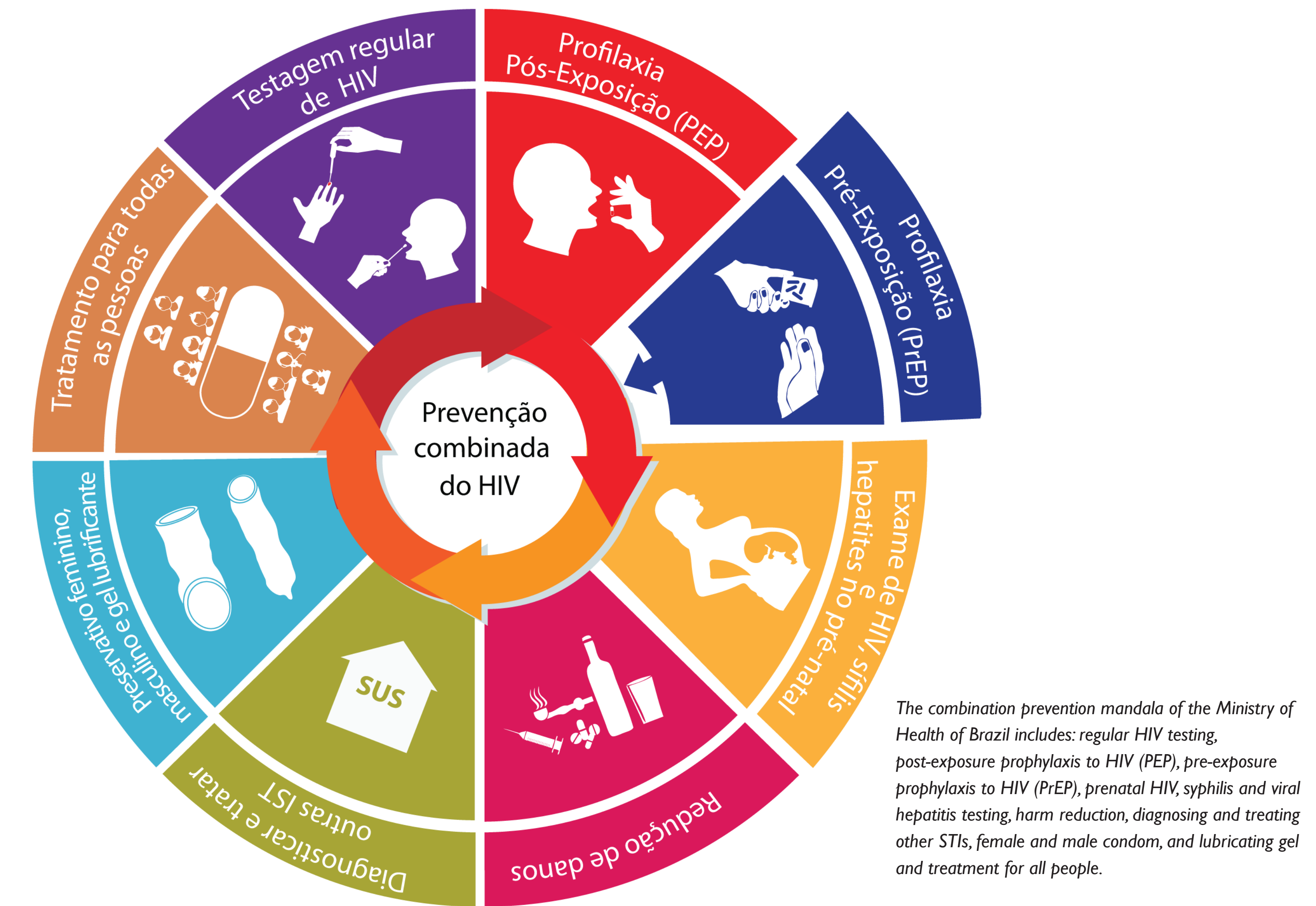
Background

In Brazil, the HIV epidemic has increased substantially during the last decade among gay men and other MSM. According to research from the Ministry of Health, HIV prevalence increased from 12.1% (2009) to 18.4% (2016) among MSM aged 18 or older. Among young MSM (18 - 24 years) HIV prevalence more than doubled, increasing from 4.0 to 9.4% during the same period.



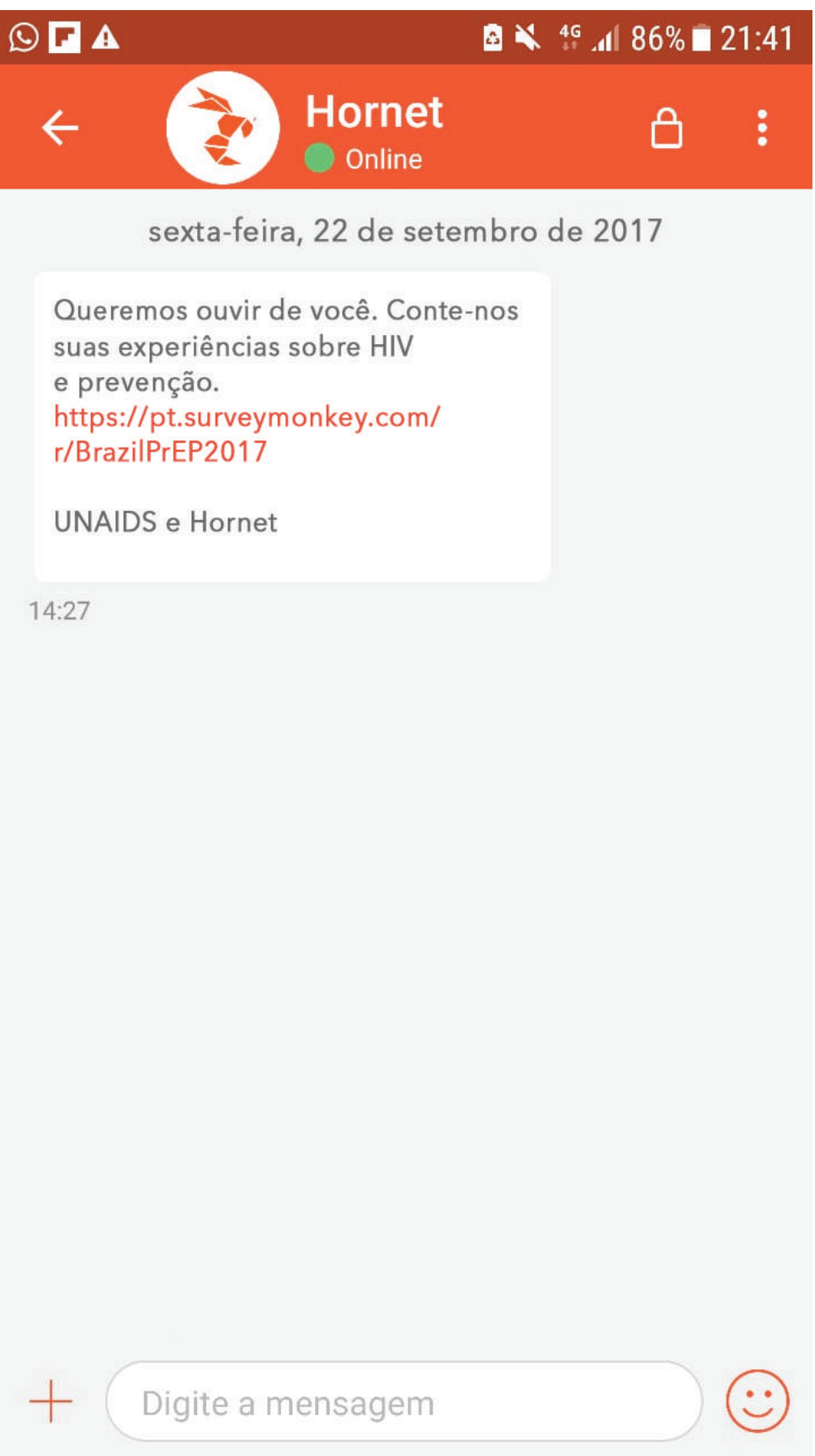
As part of a combination prevention strategy focused on key populations, the Brazilian Ministry of Health announced that would start to offer PrEP for free of charge through the Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS), Brazil's universal health system. Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is the use of an antiretroviral medication to prevent the acquisition of HIV infection by people who are uninfected. The Ministry of Health estimated that 9,000 people from key populations (MSM, transgender people, sex workers and serodiscordant couples) at high risk of acquiring HIV will be offered PrEP in the first year (starting on December 2017) and 54,000 in the first five years.

Aiming to provide evidence for the implementation of PrEP in Brazil and for the development of advocacy and communication strategies to expand access to information and increase demand for this prevention technology, UNAIDS Brazil and the gay social networking app Hornet have come together to conduct a survey about knowledge, access and future use of PrEP among users of gay social networking app Hornet.



Methods

A questionnaire, adapted from the one implemented by Hornet in 2017 in partnership with European Center for Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC), was distributed through the gay social networking app platform. The app sent an invitation to its users asking if they wanted to participate in an anonymous survey about HIV prevention. During over three weeks (Sept 22 - Oct 16 2017) app users answered the research, which after concluded generated a spreadsheet with data.

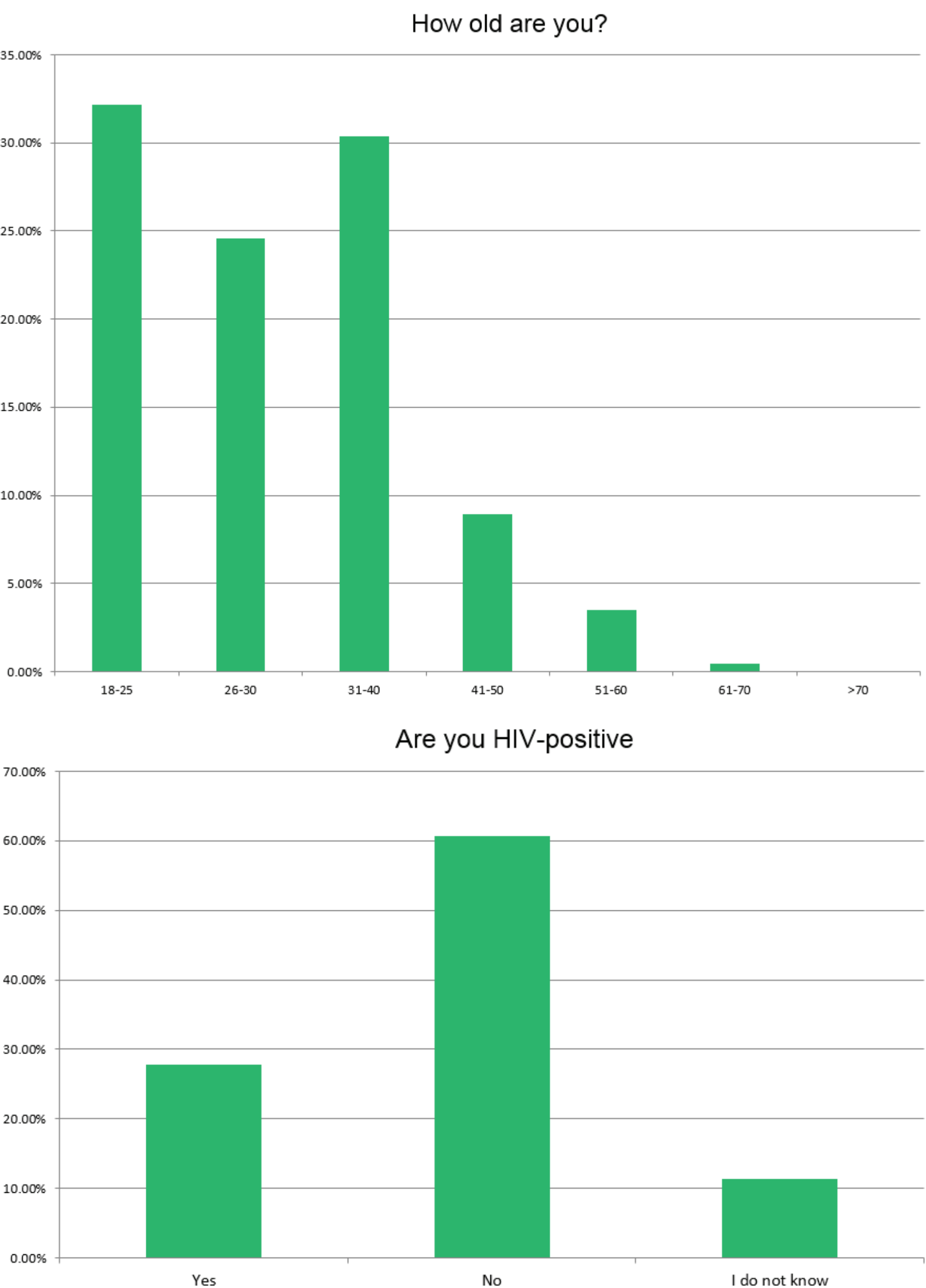


In-app invitation to the survey. Text: We want to hear it from you. Tell us about your experiences on HIV and prevention.

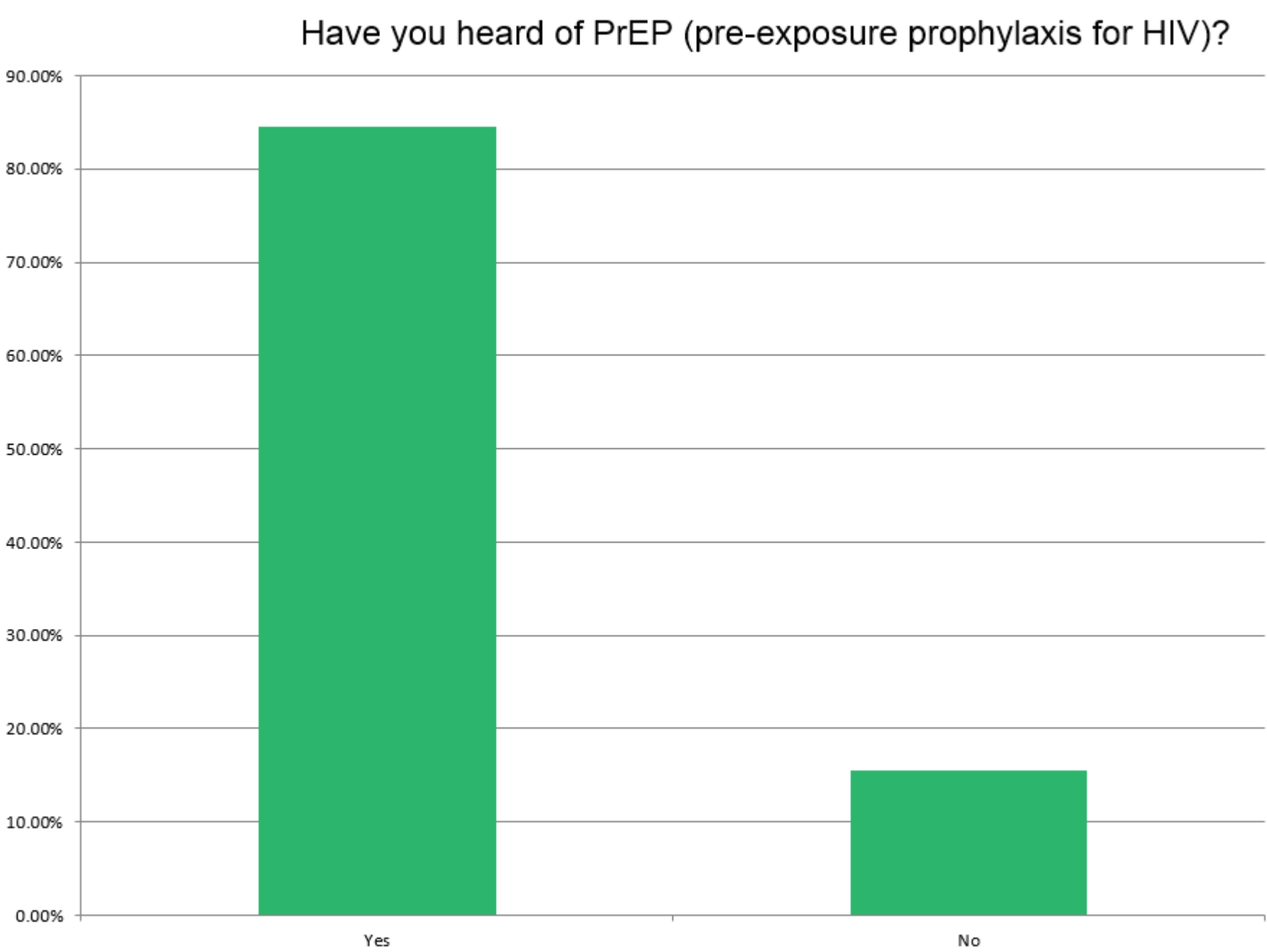
The survey was anonymous, but a few questions were asked to better understand the profile of the participants, such as the state where they live, their age and HIV status. 3,218 responses were collected.

Results

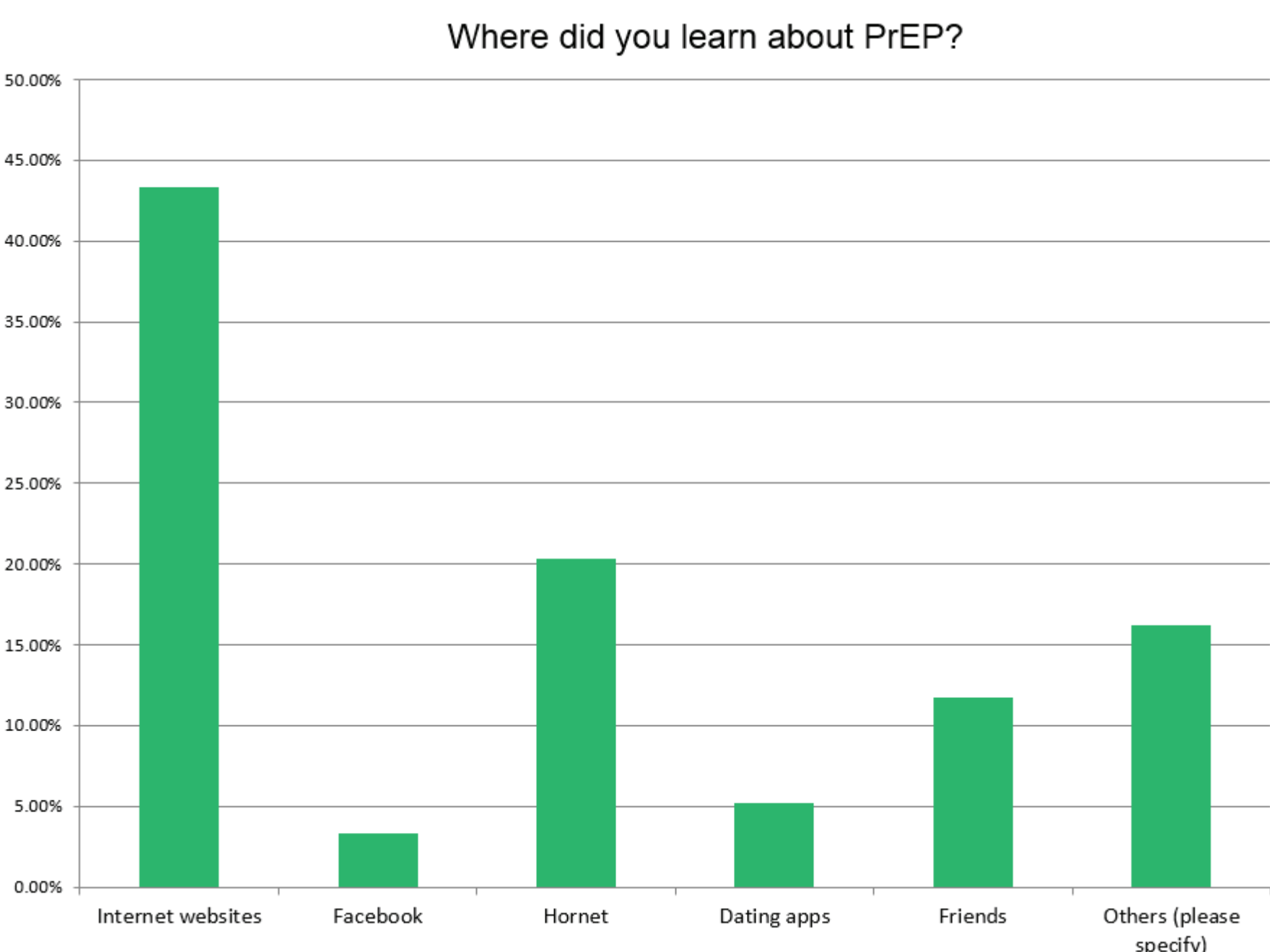
During three weeks 3,218 responses were collected. The profile of the participants was majority young gay men, 57% between 18 and 30 years old, and nearly 70% inhabitants of the southeast region of Brazil, with 49% of the participants from being the most populous state of the country, São Paulo. 27.8% respondents reported being HIV-positive.



Most users of the application (85%) have heard about PrEP. However, respondents from the Northeast and North regions presented the lowest percentages of knowledge about PrEP, 77% and 81%, respectively. The survey data also shows that 1 in 4 young people aged 18 to 25 years old have never heard of PrEP, while men aged 31-40 years old (90%) presented the highest rate knowledge.

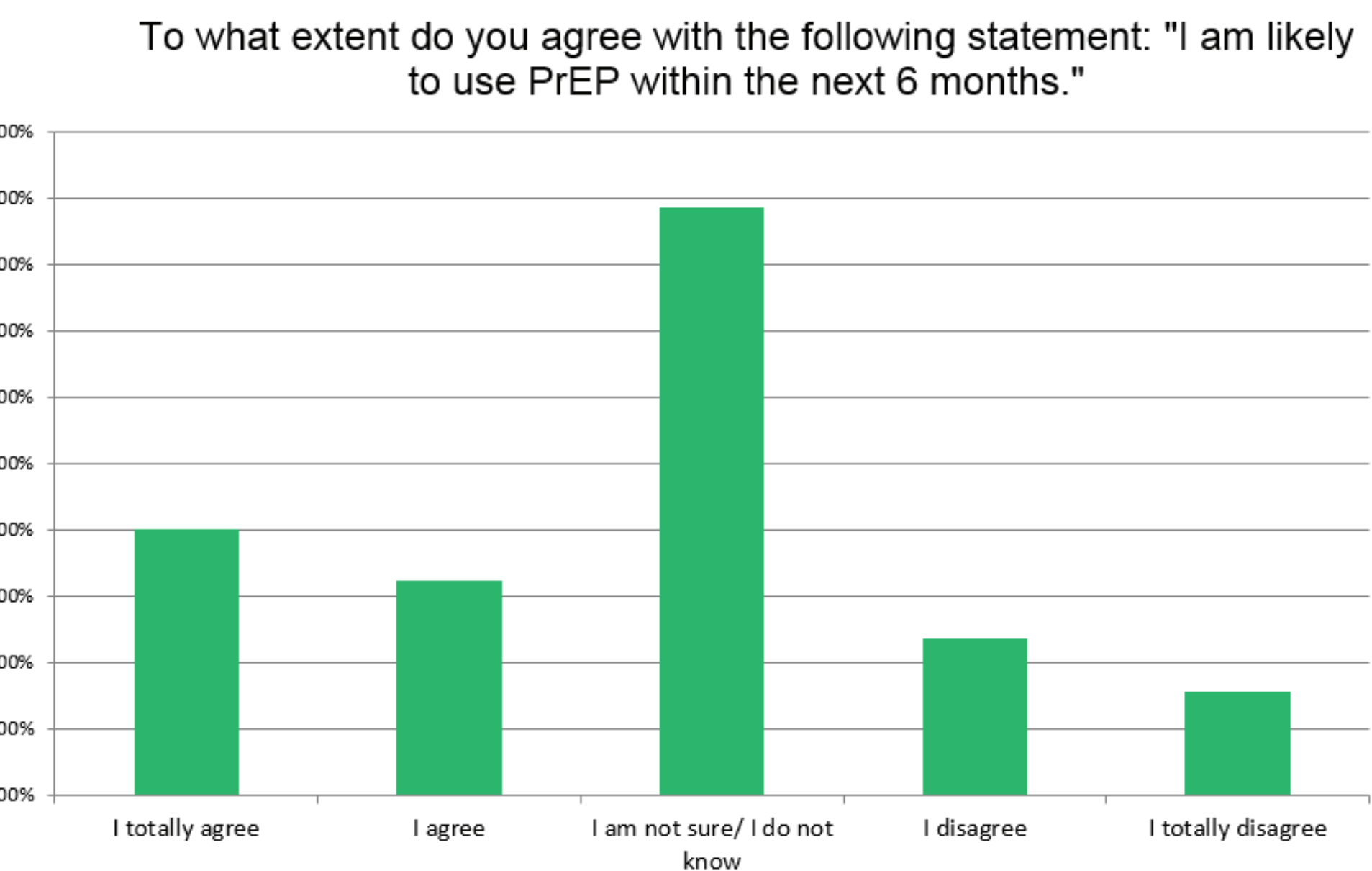


When asked about where they got to know about PrEP the majority (71%) replied that it was on the internet, including websites, Facebook, Hornet and other relationship apps, while 12% heard through friends and 17% in other places (health centers, universities, TV programs, etc).



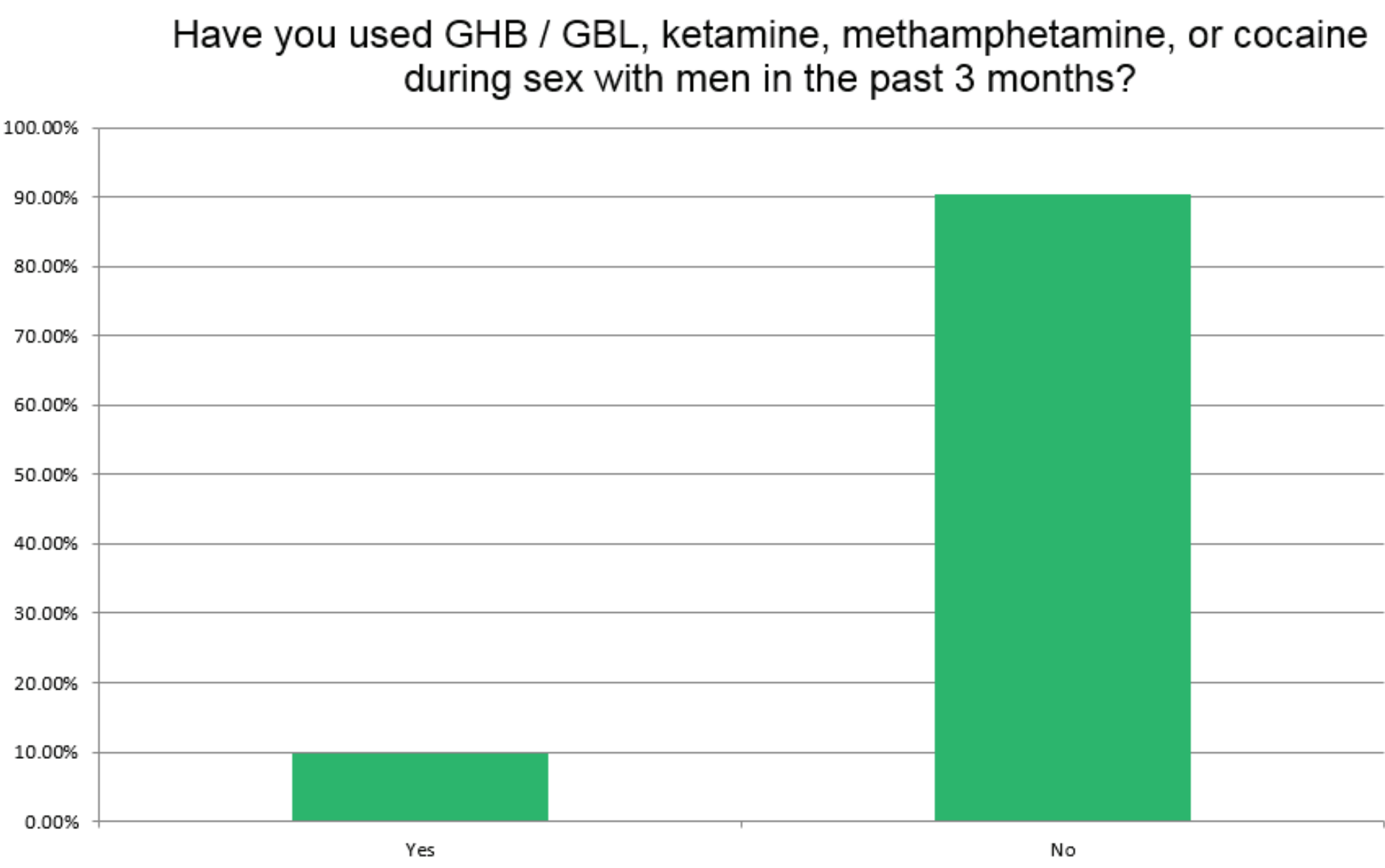
Although the PrEP was not available in Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS) at the time of the research, 167 respondents (7%) answered that they were taking PrEP. Of those, more than half (55%) were taking PrEP as part of a research project and another 20% bought PrEP over the internet.

36% agreed with the statement that they are likely to use PrEP in the next 6 months, while only 19% disagreed with the statement. This shows a high interest of respondents in this new form of prevention. 45% answered that they were not sure, which may indicate the need to improve access to information about PrEP.



Almost 20% of the participants said they had not been tested for any STIs in the prior 12 months. Among those who were tested, 27% had a positive diagnosis for some STIs.

Almost 10% said they had used some stimulant drug during sex in the last 3 months, which could represent a situation of increased vulnerability to HIV infection.



The results of the survey has been widely disseminated through UNAIDS and Hornet websites and social medias, and were also published in stories about PrEP in Brazil published in important newspapers, such as The New York Times.



Conclusion

MSM in Brazil are highly vulnerable to HIV and STI. Young MSM have less knowledge about PrEP than adults. A tailored communication strategy should be designed for them. Internet, including especially gay social networking apps are an important source of health information for MSM and should be included in HIV prevention strategies. Willingness to use PrEP is high, so government and community should work together to ensure that MSM have the information they need to access PrEP. Gay social networking apps can represent a fruitful space for the implementation of strategies of beneficial engagement for MSM of all HIV statuses.

Acknowledgment

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