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Barriers for participation in HIV vaccine trials among general population in Argentina: first interim survey

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Background:

- Despite the availability of a wide range of effective HIV-prevention tools in recent years, the rate of new infections in adults worldwide has not shown a notable decrease.
- Many recent advances in the HIV prevention landscape have been developed. However, an effective vaccine remains the most promising tool to end the HIV-1 pandemic. Increased industry involvement, mobilization of resources, expansion of a robust pipeline of new concepts, and robust preclinical pivotal studies will be essential to accelerate efficacy testing of next generation HIV-1 vaccine candidates.
- Among the myriad factors related to HIV-vaccine research, one key aspect in conducting clinical trials is finding potential candidates that are willing to participate.
- HIV-vaccine acceptability studies have been conducted in the US and developing countries. This topic has not yet been evaluated in Argentina.

Materials and Methods:

- An anonymous online survey was administered from September to December 2019 among individuals (age between 18 to 60 years) who sought HIV testing services at a referral HIV clinic in Buenos Aires, Argentina, or who looked up information on its website and/or social networks.
- The survey captured attitudes towards a potential HIV vaccine, willingness to participate in an HIV vaccine trial and use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)
- A cross-sectional analysis was performed.

Results:

- 838 participants completed the online survey (self-reported gender: cis-male 56.6%, cis-female 38.1%, non-binary 3%, transgender 2.4%). Among cisgender-men, 81.22% self-reported as MSM (n=385).
- Median age was 29 (IQR 24-36) years
- 83.6% referred living in Buenos Aires and surrounding areas.
- Information regarding demographic profile and sex-related substance use is shown in table 1.
- Regarding participation in an HIV-vaccine trial, 60.6% reported they would agree to join a study, 29% would consider it, and 10.4% would refuse.
- The main barriers for participation were fear of being infected by the HIV-vaccine candidate (40.6%) and lack of time to participate in a trial (20.4%); 37.6% of the participants referred no obstacle for potential participation.
- Participant attitudes towards an HIV vaccine and PrEP are described in table 2.

Conclusion:

- This is the first survey conducted in Argentina to assess attitudes towards HIV vaccine trials.
- Although survey information specified that the vaccine candidate was not infective, main barrier to participation was fear of acquiring HIV due to the vaccine itself.
- Our study reflects the importance of education and the correct explanation of research protocols to potential participants.
- Since the study was carried out among individuals seeking health-services information, selection bias may apply.
- This report provides initial data to continue exploring an area of recent interest in our country.

Table 1. Demographic profile and sex-related substance use in 838 participants in an online HIV vaccine survey in Argentina. Values are numbers (percentages) unless otherwise stated

VARIABLE	VALUE (N,%)
AGE, MEAN (SD)	30.5 (8.5)
SEX AT BIRTH	MALE 500 (59.7)
	FEMALE 338 (40.3)
SELF-PERCEIVED GENDER	CISMAN 474 (56.6)
	CISWOMAN 319 (38.1)
	NONBINARY 25 (3.0)
	TRANSMAN 8 (1.0)
	TRANSWOMAN 12 (1.4)
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	PRIMARY 16 (1.9)
	SECONDARY 248 (29.6)
	TERTIARY 174 (20.8)
	UNIVERSITY 400 (47.7)
HEALTH INSURANCE	NO 216 (25.8)
	YES 622 (74.2)
CONDOM USE	SOMETIMES 245 (29.2)
	NO 186 (22.2)
COCAINE USE	YES 407 (48.6)
	NO 796 (95.0)
	PNTD 3 (0.4)
AMPHETAMINE USE	YES 39 (4.7)
	NO 773 (92.2)
	PNTD 5 (0.6)
POPPER USE	YES 60 (7.2)
	NO 776 (92.6)
	PNTD 2 (0.2)

Table 2. Attitudes towards an HIV vaccine and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) in 838 participants in an online survey in Argentina.

VARIABLE	VALUE (N,%)
WOULD YOU PARTICIPATE IN A HIV VACCINE CLINICAL TRIAL?	YES 508 (60.6)
	MAYBE 243 (29.0)
	NO 87 (10.4)
WOULD YOU RECEIVE AN HIV VACCINE IF PART OF YOUR REGULAR IMMUNIZATION SCHEDULE?	YES 744 (88.8)
	MAYBE 78 (9.3)
	NO 16 (1.9)
WOULD YOU USE PREP IF AVAILABLE?	YES 508 (60.6)
	IDK WHAT IT IS 243 (29.0)
	MAYBE 243 (29.0)
	NO 87 (10.4)

PNTD = "Prefer not to disclose" / IDK = "I don't know"