ORAL COMMUNICATION

Awareness in Sexual Health: U=U and prevention

OC 42 Information and Misinformation on HIV and the Narration of the Evidence U=U: a mixed method analysis on social media in Italy

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ABSTRACT

Background: Despite a declining trend in new HIV diagnoses, late diagnosis remains prevalent, potentially due to reduced HIV risk visibility and stigma. Media play a pivotal role in disseminating accurate information, particularly regarding U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable) and preventive measures like PrEP and PEP. However, media language often perpetuates stigma. This study analyses HIV media communication in Italy by examining the communication language of the main Italian news sources on Facebook and Instagram, with a focus on U=U evidence.

Methods: A mixed-method analysis examined Facebook and Instagram posts on HIV, along with linked articles. from Italian news sources from 01/2009 to 04/2023. News sources were categorised as "reliable" or "unreliable" using independent third-party classification. Topic analysis identified the main topics in the posts, while an inductive content analysis was conducted on linked articles regarding U=U. The language and the accuracy in explaining U=U were evaluated through a checklist.

Results: A total of 10,539 Facebook posts were analysed, with 716 (7%) from unreliable sources, and 749 Instagram posts, with 18 (2%) from unreliable sources. Reliable and unreliable content surged around World AIDS Day (WAD) on both social media platforms, while it did not happen during the European Testing Week. On Facebook, the frequency of unreliable content increased over time, whereas on Instagram it was rare and recent. On Facebook, topics varied between reliable and unreliable sources: the 3 most frequent topics from reliable sources were: WAD, voluntary HIV spread, and public figures with HIV; those from unreliable sources were: Death and Migrant People; Luc Montagnier and COVID-19 Conspiracies; Public Figures with HIV. The first 3 topics on Instagram were the Italian National Institute of Health and Prevention, WAD, and public figures with HIV. After filtering duplicates, 68 articles nominating U=U were analysed. The analysis revealed 4 main areas: U=U definition, Prevention, Impact on people living with HIV (PLWHIV), and Stigma. Sub-areas within the "U=U definition" included Scientific evidence, Revolution, and Dissemination of the evidence. "Prevention" sub-areas covered Treatment as prevention, Test and treat, PrEP/PEP, and Risk of other STIs. "Impact on PLWHIV" was subdivided into Relationships and sexuality, Parenting, Life expectancy and chronicity, and Quality of life.

The accuracy in explaining U=U was generally low, with 6 articles (8.8%) providing only a definition.

Conclusions: The communication surrounding HIV in Italy is limited and primarily centred around WAD. Particularly on Facebook, biases persist, mainly from unreliable news sources, such as associating migration with HIV. The dissemination of the U=U evidence remains inadequate. Urgent action is needed to shift the narrative and emphasize this groundbreaking evidence, which significantly impacts HIV epidemiology and the lives of PLWHIV.