

*“Now I see AIDS as something far from me”:*

Perceptions of HIV risk among heterosexual men and women receiving antiretroviral treatment at a selected clinic in KwaZulu-Natal

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# Outline of presentation

- Introduction
- Aim of the study
- Research approach
  - Sample size
- Results
- Concluding remarks
- Acknowledgements



# Introduction

- With access to antiretroviral treatment (ART) improving, there is growing global concern about the perceived severity of HIV and AIDS, and the sexual behaviour of those receiving these lifelong treatments
- Studies on treatment optimism have tended to be among men who have sex with men in developed country contexts



# Aims of the study

- To describe perceived severity of HIV and AIDS, preventive attitudes and behaviours among heterosexual men & women receiving antiretroviral treatment at a selected clinic in KZN



# Research approach

- A cross-sectional study
- Men & women, aged 18 years & above, presenting at the clinic
- Data collected at 3 time-points, using structured questionnaires
  - when respondents started treatment
  - after 3 months
  - after 6 months
- Data collected from February – December 2005



# Sample size

- 105 respondents at 1<sup>st</sup> interview
- 102 at 2<sup>nd</sup> interview
- 98 at 3<sup>rd</sup> interview
- 7 lost to follow-up



# Results

- 74.3% (78) were women
- 28.7% (29) in the age group 26-30 years  
– average age: 34.5 years (range 21-59 years)
- 68.6% (72) were single
- 76.2% (80) of respondents had secondary level
- 60% (63) were unemployed



# HIV disclosure

- All respondents had disclosed their HIV status
- Family most common source of support
- Additional support needed:
  - financial support
  - access to welfare grant
  - food
  - a cure for AIDS



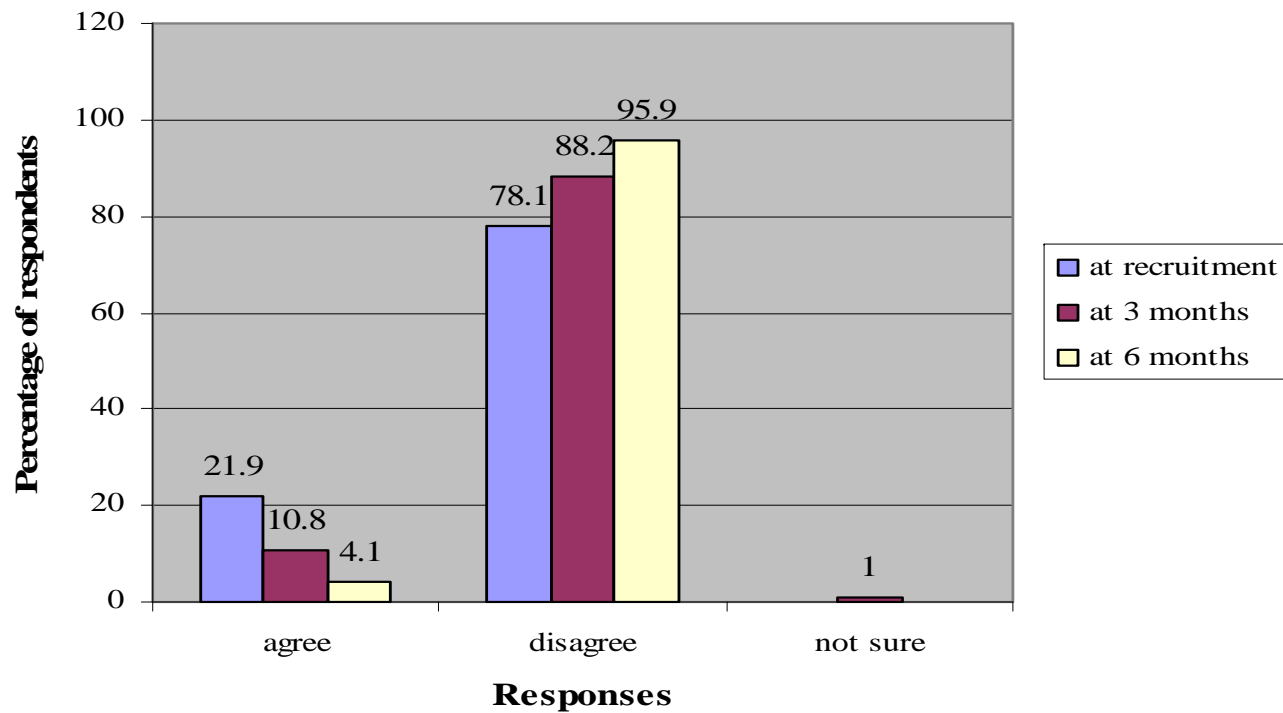
# Treatment knowledge & adherence

- All could name their drug combination
  - Had discussed ART efficacy & side effects with health providers
- Treatment adherence was high
  - All respondents had taken their pills as per advice by health workers in the past 2-3 days
- 81.9% (85) said treatment improved quality of life
- 9.5% (10) quality of life worsened
- 6.7% (7) had no effect



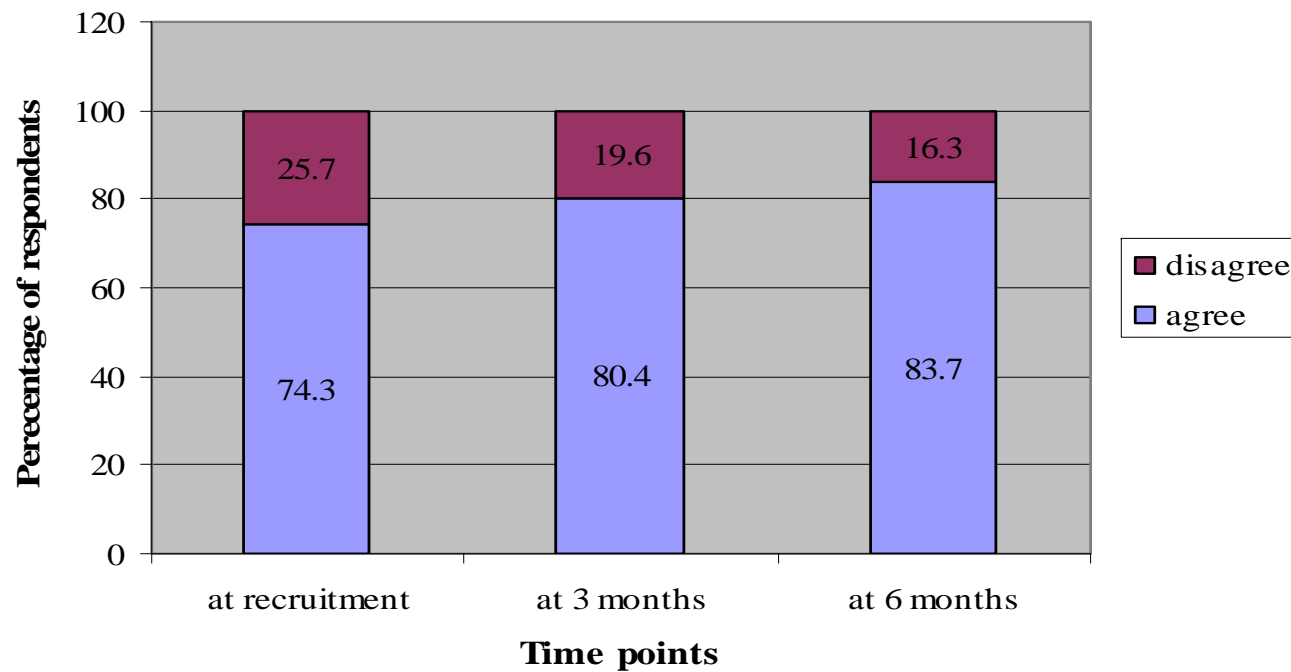
# Perceived severity of HIV

**Figure 1: Being HIV+ is still a big deal**



# Perceived severity of AIDS

Figure 2: AIDS is no longer a life threatening disease

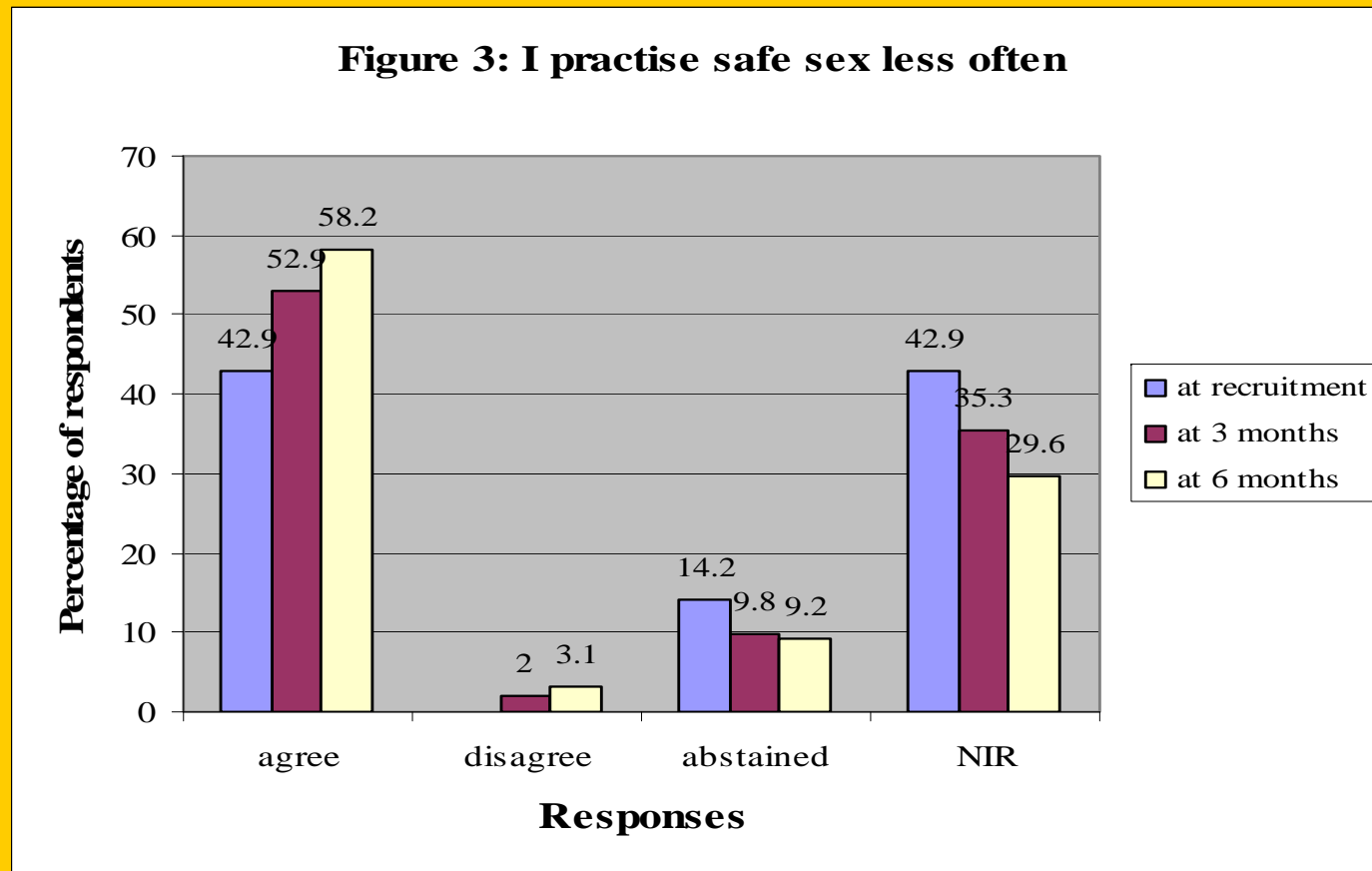


# They said ...

- *Now I see it as something far from me. I see myself as very healthy. I see myself as going to be healthy for a long time. It is no longer a life threatening disease to me.”* Man, 30, single.
- *“It is up to you how you take it. I take it as another chronic disease, like diabetes and arthritis.”* Woman, 33, single.
- *“AIDS is not a serious disease if one follows all the instructions given at the clinic.”* Woman, 38, widowed.

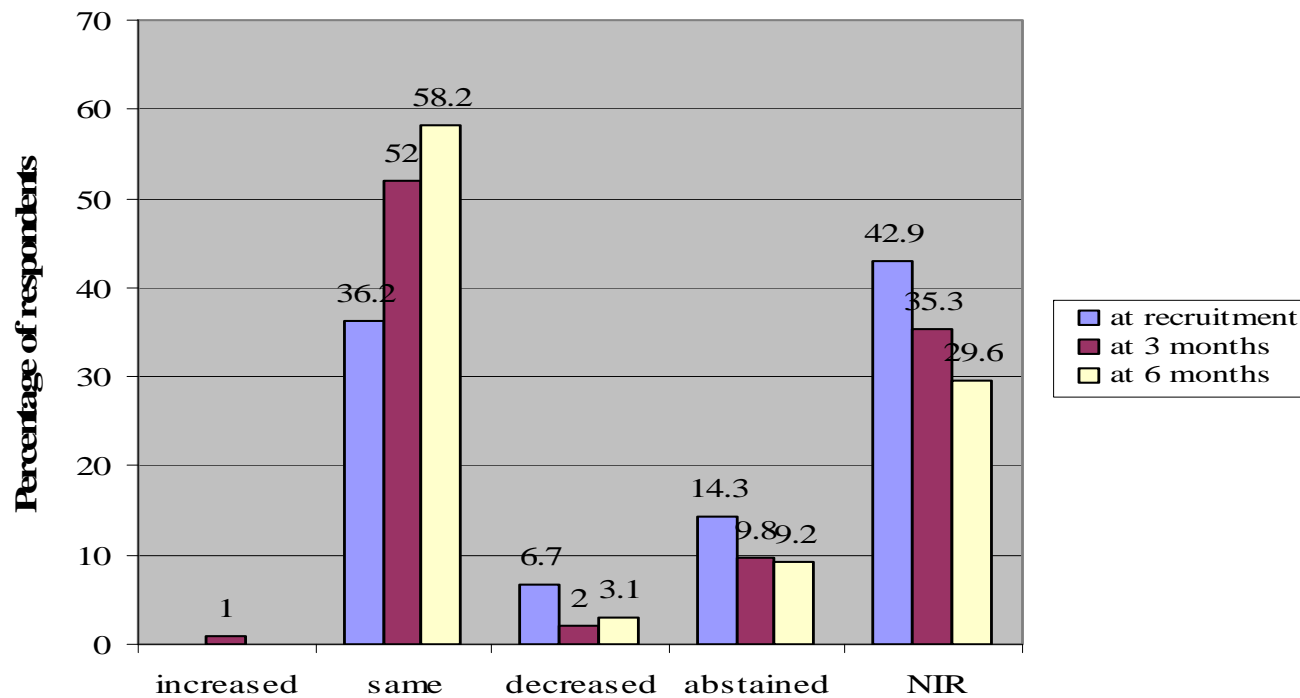


# I practise safe sex less often



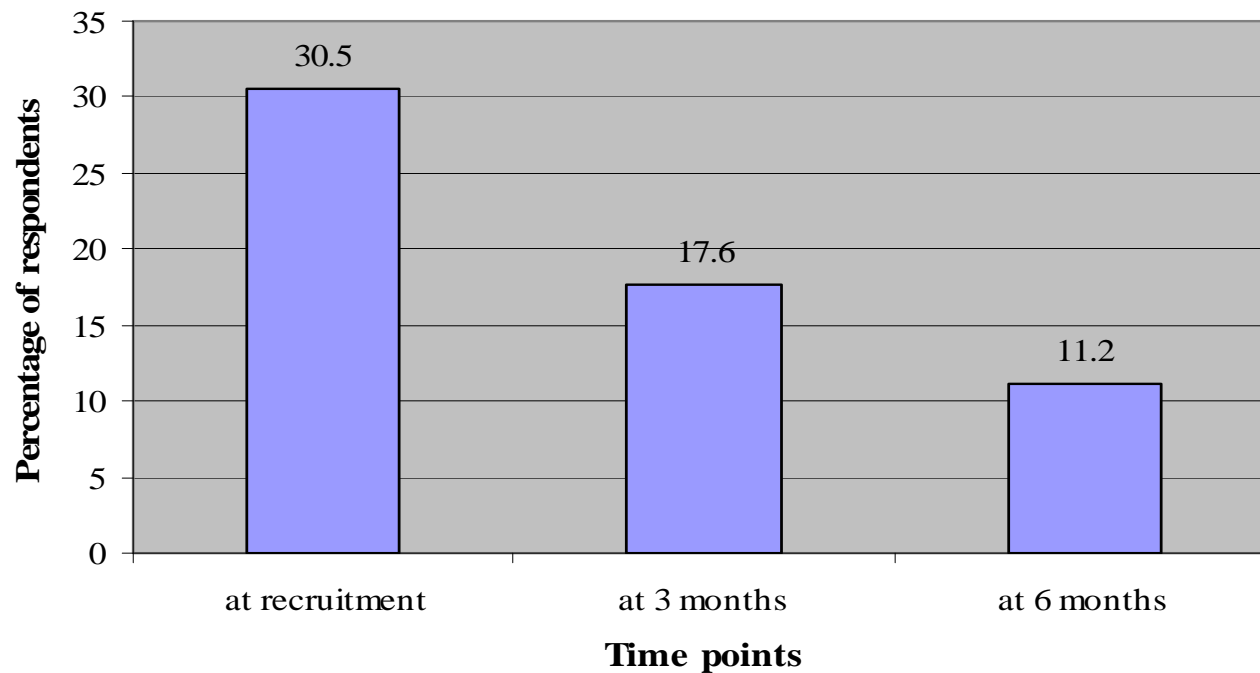
# Number of sexual partners

**Figure 4: Number of sexual partners at recruitment, 3 months and 6 months**



# Treatment for STIs

**Figure 5: Treatment for STIs in the past 2-3 months at recruitment, 3 months and 6 months**



# Concluding remarks

- Measures to assess both perceived & real quality of life improvements
- Occurrence of STIs highlights need for appropriate prevention strategies
- Research, using appropriate approaches, on how perceived severity of HIV & AIDS may influence the maintenance (or not) of safe sex practices



# Acknowledgements

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