

# Sexual Risk Behaviors and Partnership Characteristics Among Women who Exchange Sex in NYC

**W2W**

Women To Women

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# Outline for today

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- HIV among women who exchange sex
- National HIV Behavioral Surveillance
- NYC DOHMH's *Women To Women* study
  - Formative research
  - Design & sample
  - Survey results
- Summary
- Challenges & limitations
- Conclusions

# HIV risk and prevention among women who exchange sex in the U.S.

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- Structural and social barriers to health care access and utilization, including HIV prevention services, are well-documented
- Little research on burden of HIV among women who exchange sex in US; existing data are outdated
  - Systematic review<sup>1</sup> found 14 studies from 1987 to 2013 → HIV prevalence across studies was 17.3%
- In-depth, up-to-date information on HIV risk and prevention needed to inform programming

# **NATIONAL HIV BEHAVIORAL SURVEILLANCE**

# National HIV Behavioral Surveillance (NHBS)

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- Ongoing, cyclical study of three groups:
  - men who have sex with men (MSM)
  - persons who inject drugs (PWID)
  - high-risk heterosexuals (HET)
- Currently conducted in 22 cities through the U.S.
- Funded and designed by CDC
- Cross-sectional study design
- Anonymous, structured interview and optional HIV testing



# NHBS study objectives

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- Determine frequency and correlates of HIV risk behaviors
- Assess HIV testing history and patterns
- Assess exposure to and use of HIV prevention services
- Estimate the prevalence of HIV infection
- Understand trends in HIV risk and prevalence



# ***WOMEN TO WOMEN STUDY***

# *Women To Women*

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- NYC was one of 5 cities nationally to conduct its HET4 NHBS cycle among high-risk women only, and with a focus on women who exchange sex for money or drugs

**W2W**

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Women To Women



# **FORMATIVE RESEARCH FOR *WOMEN TO WOMEN***

# Formative research

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Part I: Data and literature review on women who exchange sex in NYC

Part II: Primary data collection:

- Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders
- Focus group discussions

# Part I: Data and literature review

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- Data on exchange sex among women from previous PWID and HET NHBS cycles:
  - HET3 and IDU3: of 424 women interviewed, 102 (24%) reported exchange sex in the past 12 months
    - Women who reported exchange sex in these cycles were predominately black and Latina,  $\geq 40$  years of age, US-born, had less than a high school education, and had an annual household income  $< \$20,000$ .
  - HET1<sup>1</sup>: 41% of women reported exchange sex partner in past year. More common among women who reported: homelessness, a higher number of total sex partners, a higher number of unprotected sex partners, and frequent non-injection drug use.

# Data and literature review (Cont'd)

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- Differences in HIV risk behaviors and drug use depending on type of exchange<sup>1</sup>:
  - women who exchanged sex for **drugs only or for drugs and money** more likely to report smoking crack, using alcohol, engaging in unprotected sex, and sex with PWID
  - women who exchanged sex for **drugs only** reported less sexual activity/partnerships but more unprotected sex
  - women who exchanged sex for **money only** were the least likely to report unprotected sex but most likely to inject drugs

# Part II: Primary data collection

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## Objectives:

- **Garner the support** of the community and its stakeholders
- Describe the **spectrum of exchange sex** in NYC
- Obtain information needed for conducting **field operations**
- Identify potential **barriers** to recruitment and participation, and develop **solutions** to address them

# Primary data collection

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- >80 potential key informants identified and contacted
- 15 interviews with professional key informants
- 1 interview with a community key informant
- 2 focus groups composed of women who reported lifetime history of exchange sex (n=7)

# Themes from interviews and FGDs

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- Women who exchange sex are a diverse group
- Exchange sex takes many forms; HIV risk varies by specific circumstance
- Women are often engaged in multiple types of exchange sex at one time and throughout their lifetime
- Variability in pay, levels of agency for women and coerciveness
- Networks are generally small; stigma and shame limit disclosure within networks
- Effect of criminalization of prostitution on engagement in research
- Inequities (e.g., by race/ethnicity, education level) affect opportunities and economics of exchange sex

# Challenges during formative research

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- Mostly positive feedback and support for the study from stakeholders, though some skepticism from sex-worker advocates
- Difficulty identifying seeds, recruiting community key informants
- Difficulty forming a community advisory board
- Organizational divisions re: women's agency within exchange sex
- Unable to conduct street observations, outreach, or intercepts due to safety concerns



# ***WOMEN TO WOMEN* DESIGN & SAMPLE**

# W2W study design

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- Interviewer-administered survey and optional HIV testing
- Recruitment target: 500 women who exchange sex
- Data collected from August – December 2016
  - August – September: Manhattan and Queens
  - October – November: Bronx and Brooklyn
  - December: Bronx only
- Referrals: HIV and other healthcare, trafficking resources, domestic violence resources, legal/social work services

# W2W eligibility criteria

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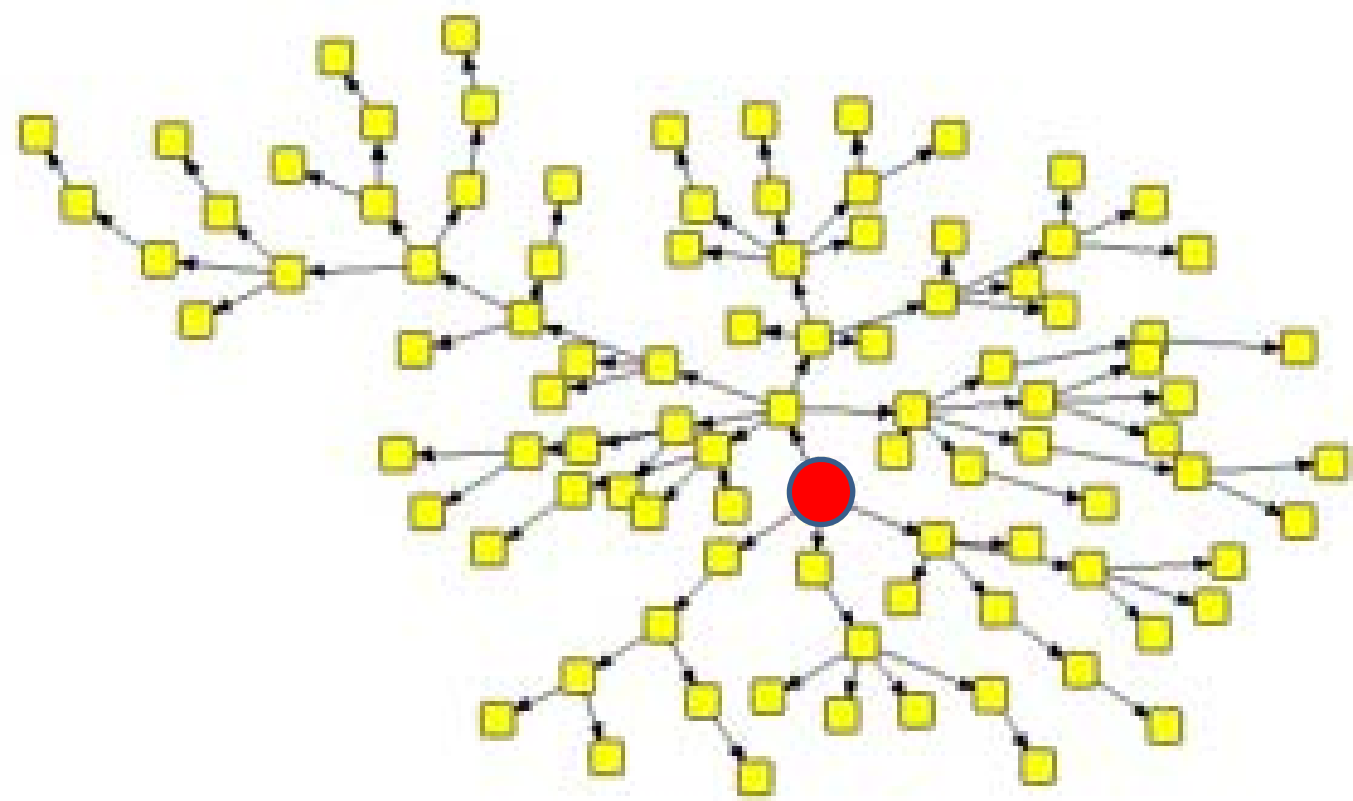
- Identifies as female (not male or transgender)
- Between the ages of 18 and 60 years old
- Resident of NYC metropolitan statistical area
- Has had vaginal or anal sex with a man in the past 12 months
- Is able to complete the interview in English or Spanish
- Recruited by another participant (except for seeds)

# W2W participant recruitment

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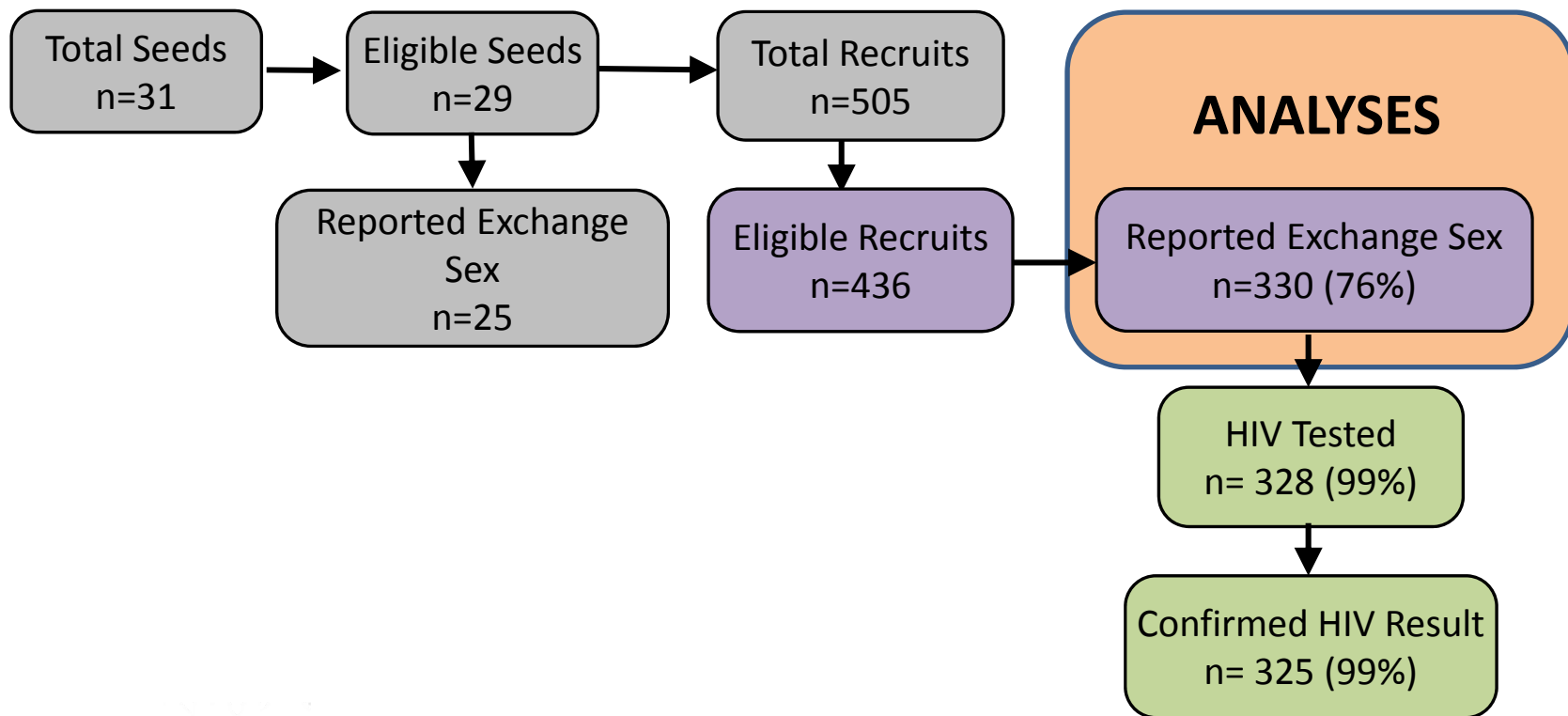
- Respondent-driven sampling -- ‘chain referral method’
- Hard-to-reach populations; used in international settings to recruit women who exchange sex

- How it works
  - Initial par outreach
  - Seeds the
  - If eligible, until sam



# W2W sample

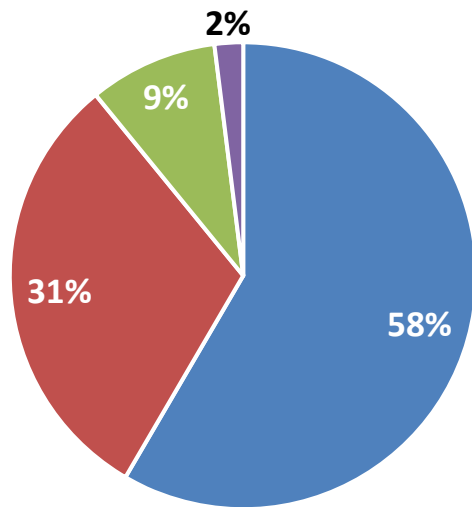
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# Participant characteristics

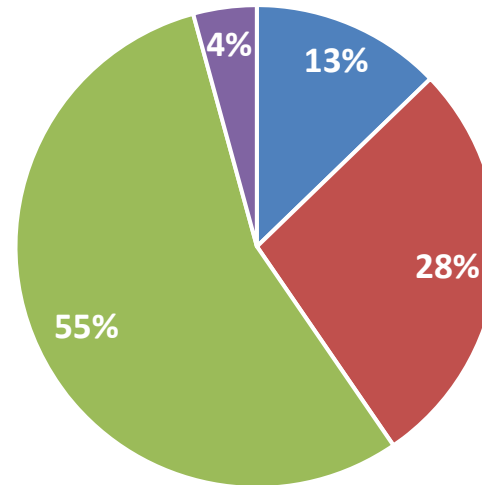
W2W – women who exchange sex (N=330)

## Race/Ethnicity



■ Black ■ Hispanic/Latina ■ White ■ Other\*

## Age



■ 18-29 ■ 30-39 ■ 40-49 ■ 50+

# Participant characteristics (Cont'd)

W2W – women who exchange sex (N=330)

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## Education

<High school grad 45%

## Marital Status

Never Married 65%

Currently Married or Cohabiting 7%

Previously Married 28%

## Household Income (12m)

< \$10k/year 52%

## Birthplace

United States 92%

## Homeless<sup>1</sup>

Past 12 mos. 50%

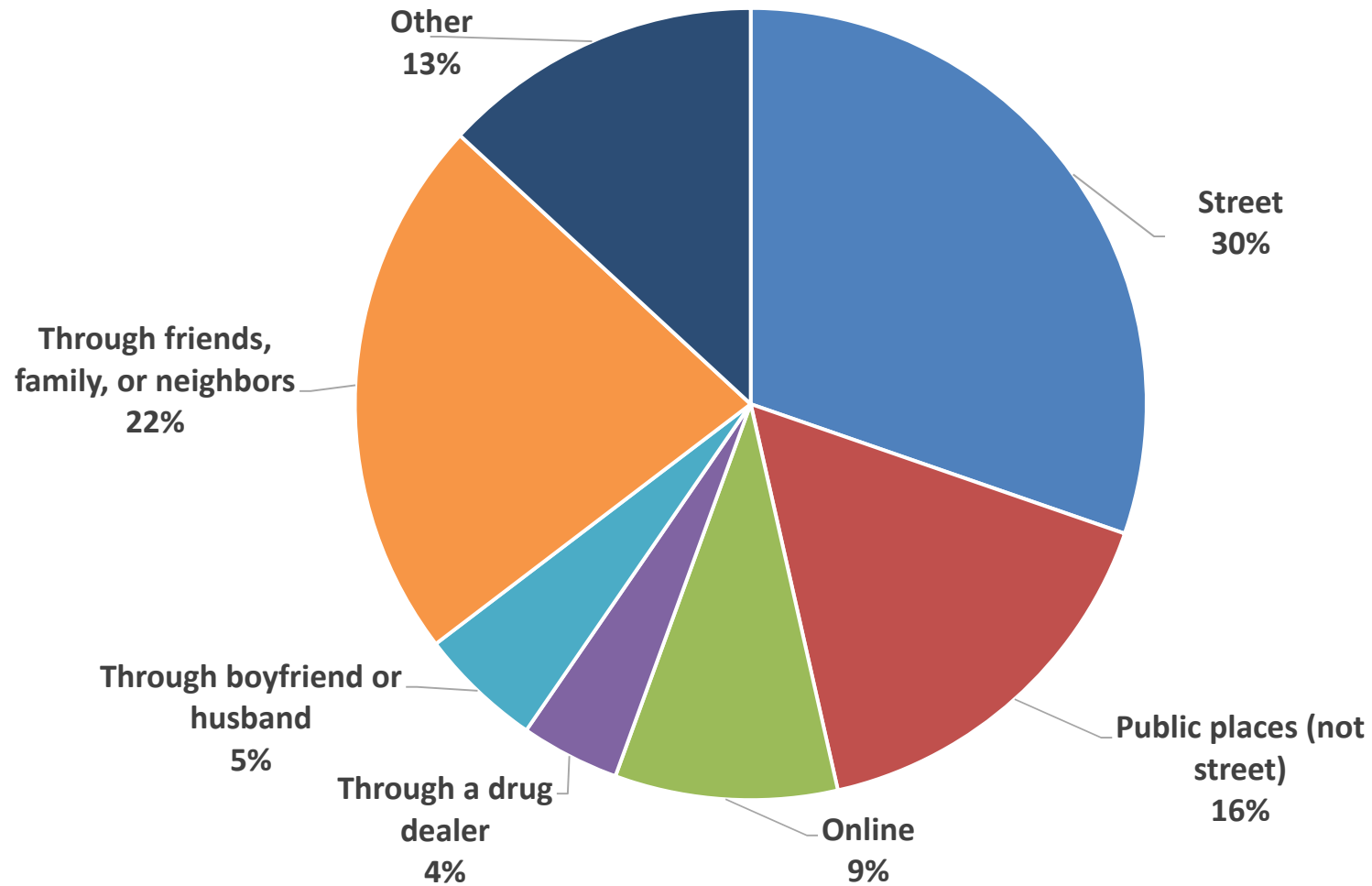
Currently 27%

## Criminal Justice

Incarcerated (12m) 18%

# Most Common Way Women Found Men for Exchange Sex

W2W – women who exchange sex (N=330)

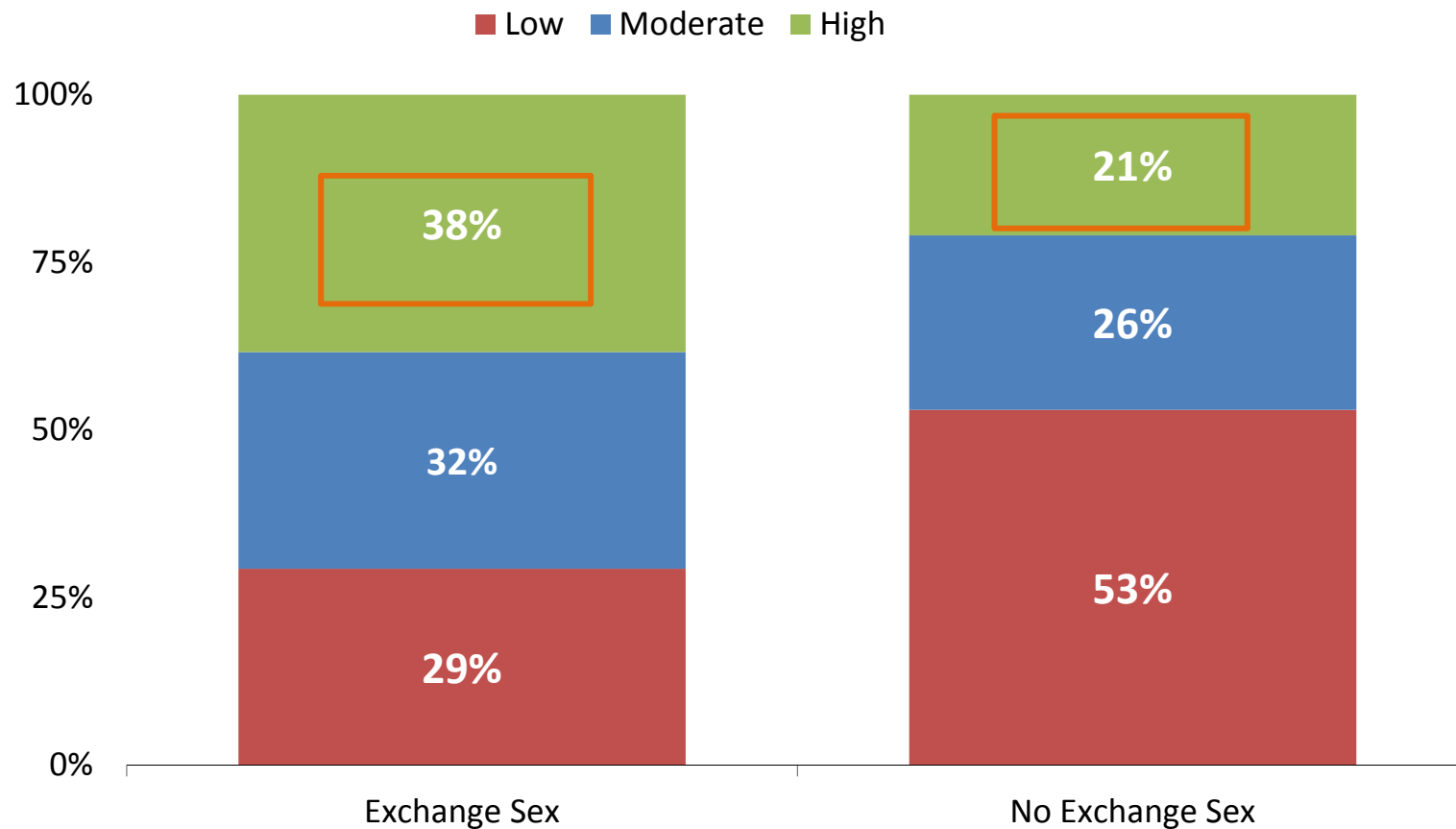




# SURVEY RESULTS

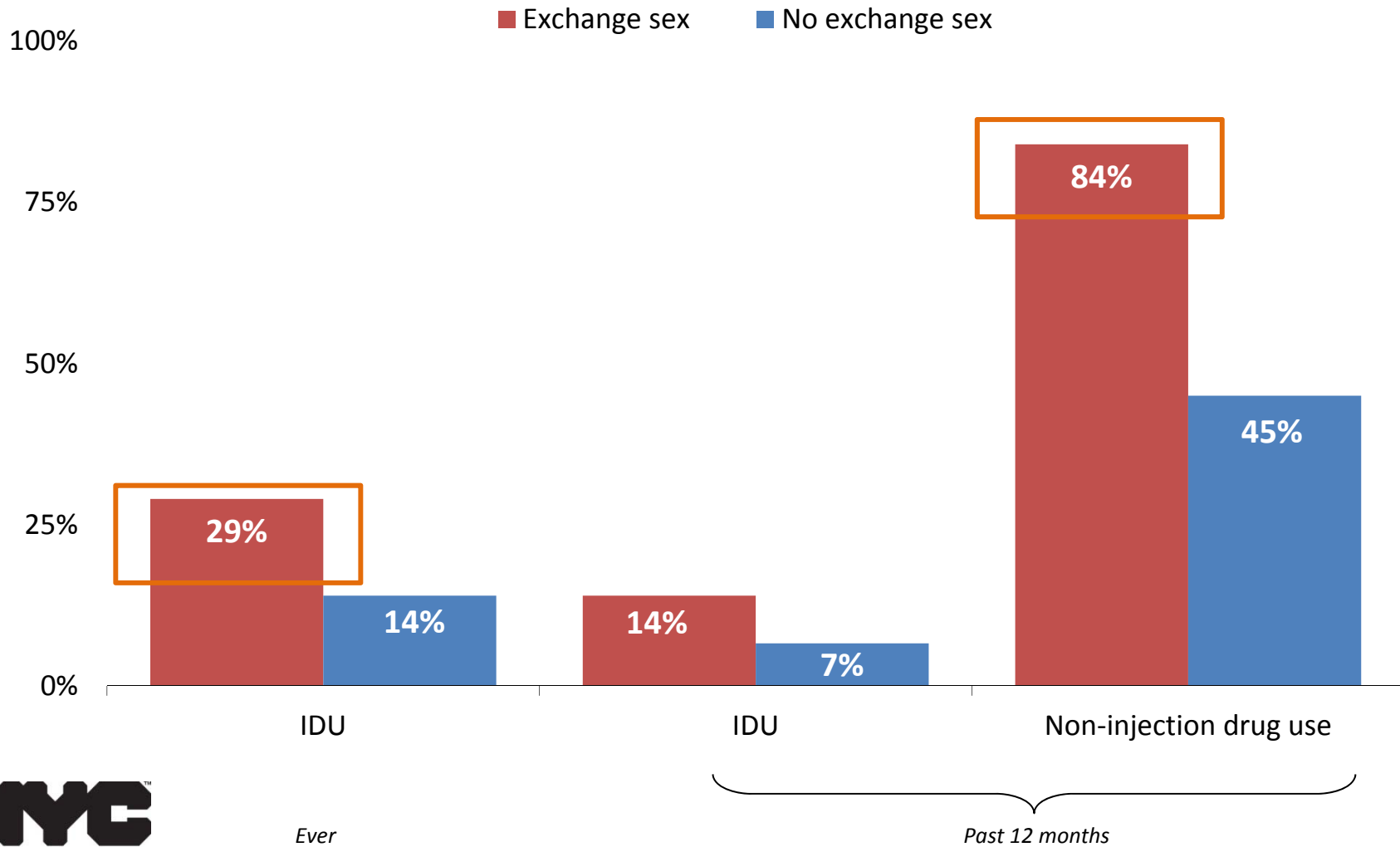
# Mental health – psychological distress

W2W – all eligible recruits (N=436)



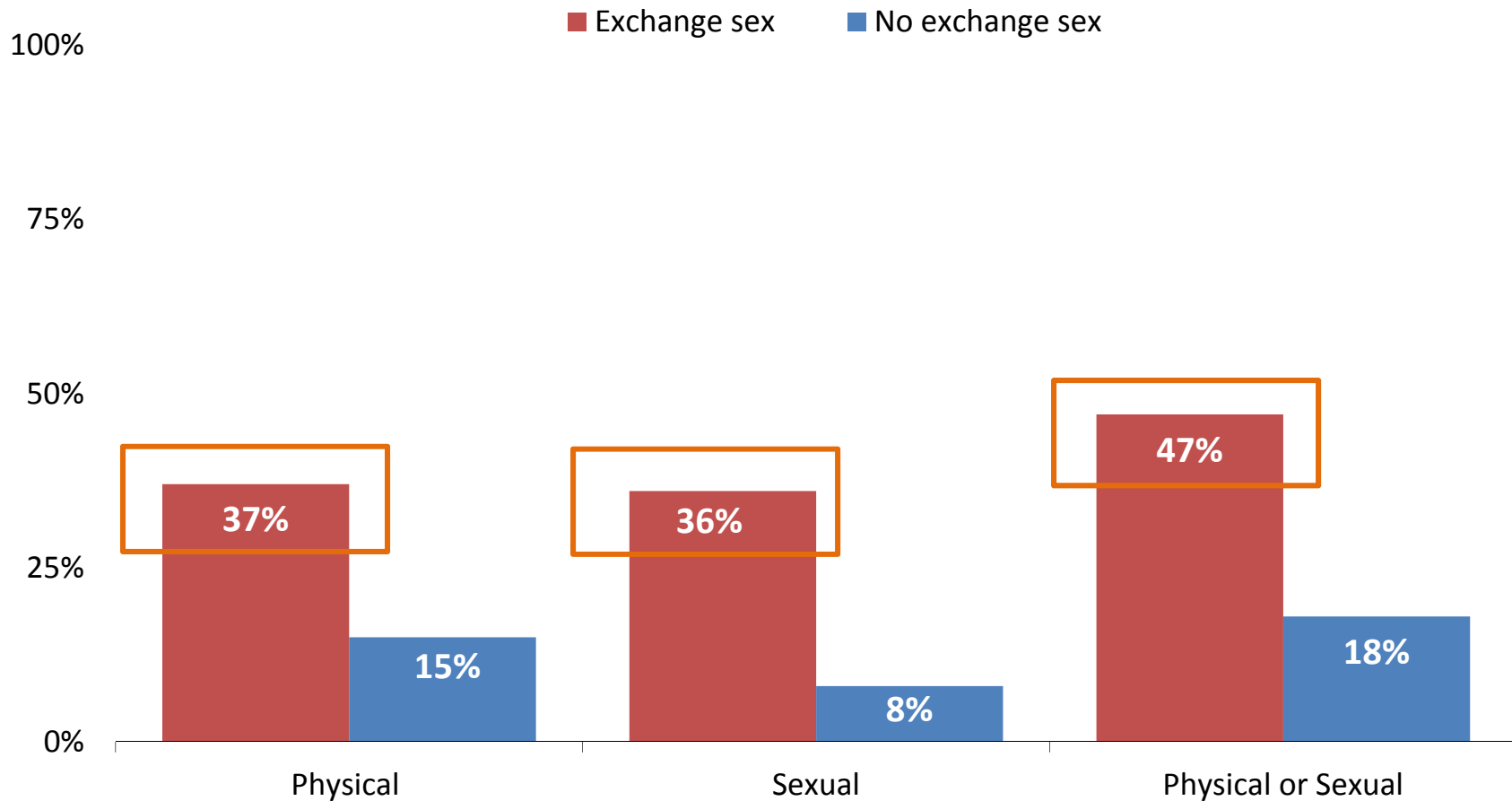
# Drug use history

W2W – all eligible recruits (N=436)



# Experience of violence in past 12 months

W2W – all eligible recruits (N=436)



# Sexual Partnerships and Behaviors

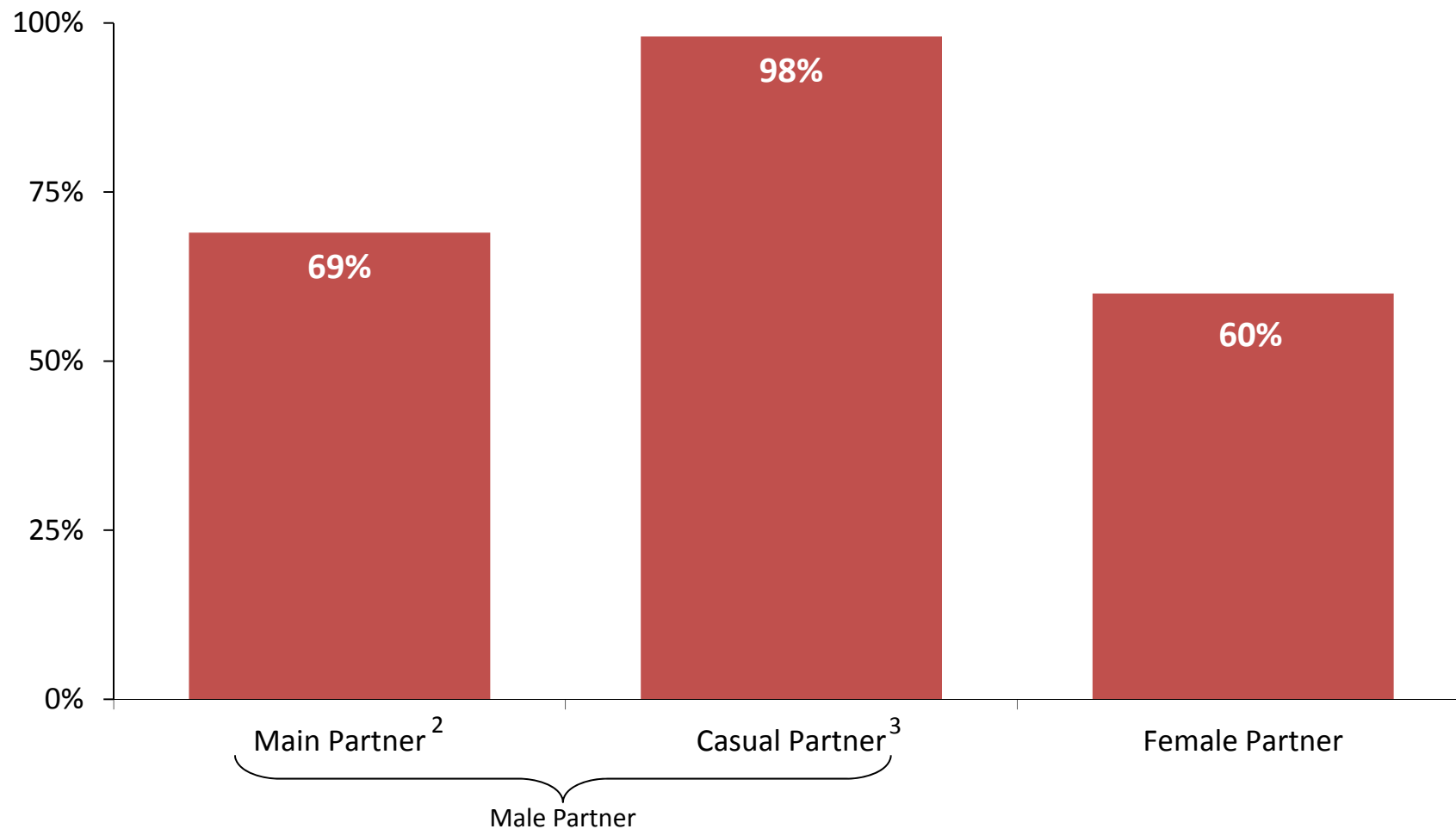
# Partner types

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- Main partner: Someone who the participant feels committed to above anyone else
- Casual partner: Someone who the participant does not feel committed to or does not know very well
  - Casual/non-exchange: casual partner who *did not* give money or drugs in exchange for sex
  - Casual/exchange partner: casual partner who *did* give money or drugs in exchange for sex

# Type of Sexual Partnerships<sup>1</sup> in Past 12 Months

W2W – women who exchange sex, with HIV-/unknown status (N=255)



<sup>1</sup>Oral, vaginal, or anal sex

<sup>2</sup>Someone who the participant feels committed to above anyone else

<sup>3</sup>Someone who the participant does not feel committed to or does not know very well

# Number of Male Sex Partners<sup>1</sup> by Partner Type in Past 12 Months

W2W – women who exchange sex, with HIV-/unknown status (N=255)

	Total (n=255)	
	Median	Mean
Main <sup>2</sup>	1	3.2
Casual <sup>3</sup> (Non-Exchange)	0	0.7
Casual Exchange <sup>4</sup>	4	39.3
Any Exchange	6	39.5
All Types	6	42.2

<sup>1</sup>Oral, vaginal, or anal sex

<sup>2</sup>Someone who the participant feels committed to above anyone else

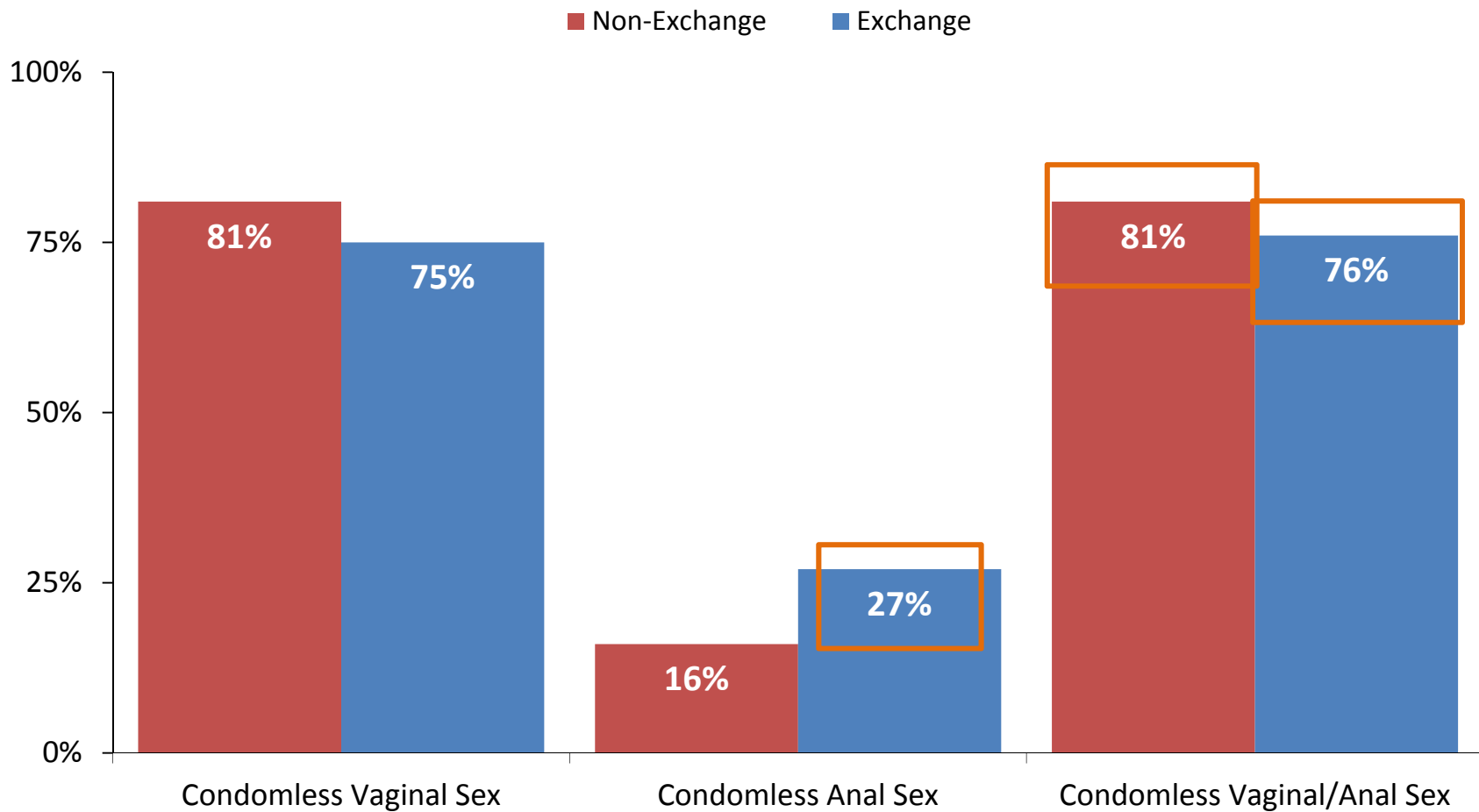
<sup>3</sup>Someone who the participant does not feel committed to or does not know very well

<sup>4</sup>Casual partner who gave money or drugs in exchange for sex



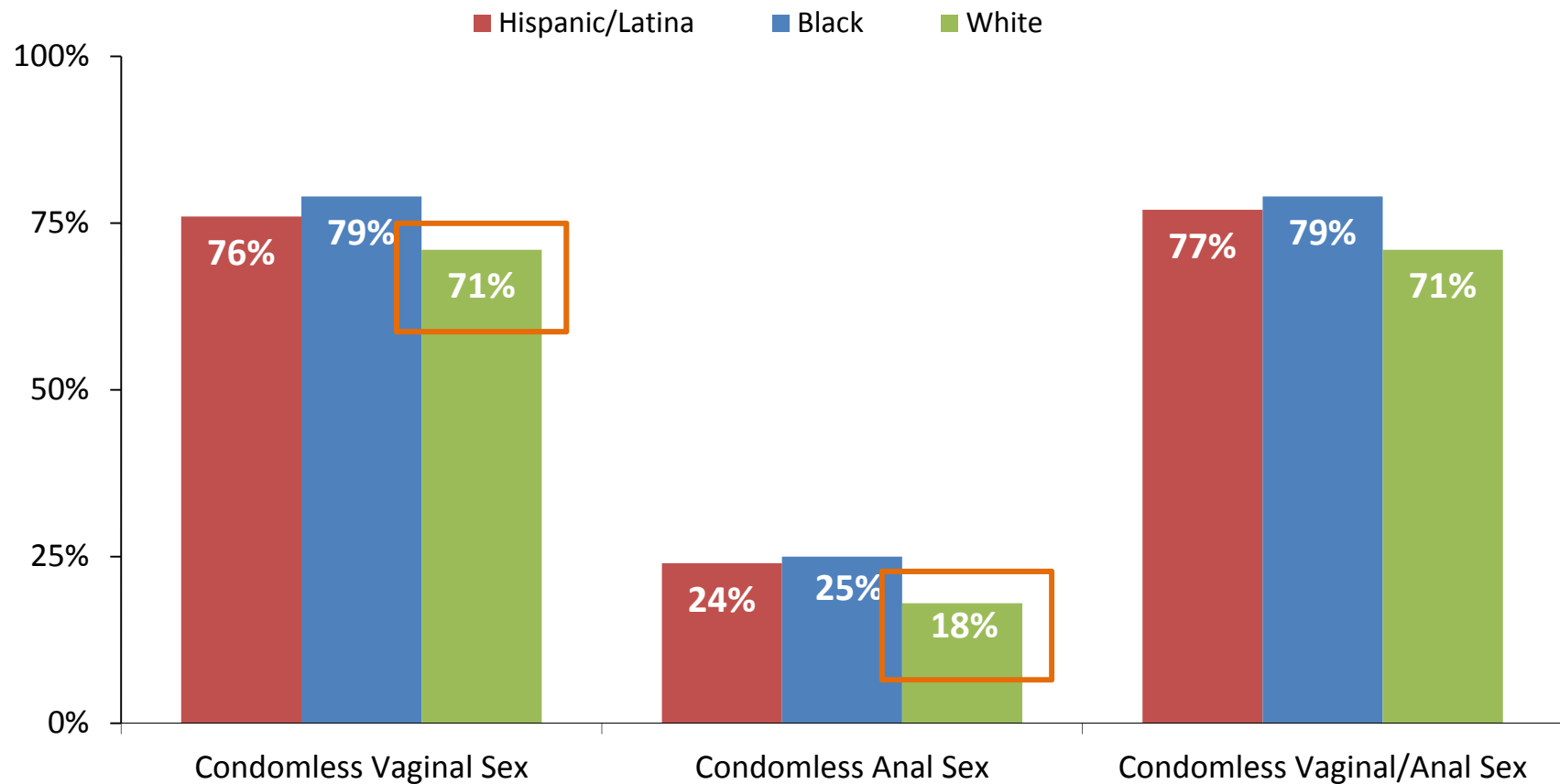
# Sexual Risk Behavior at Last Sex by Male Partner Type

W2W – women who exchange sex, with HIV-/unknown status (N=255)



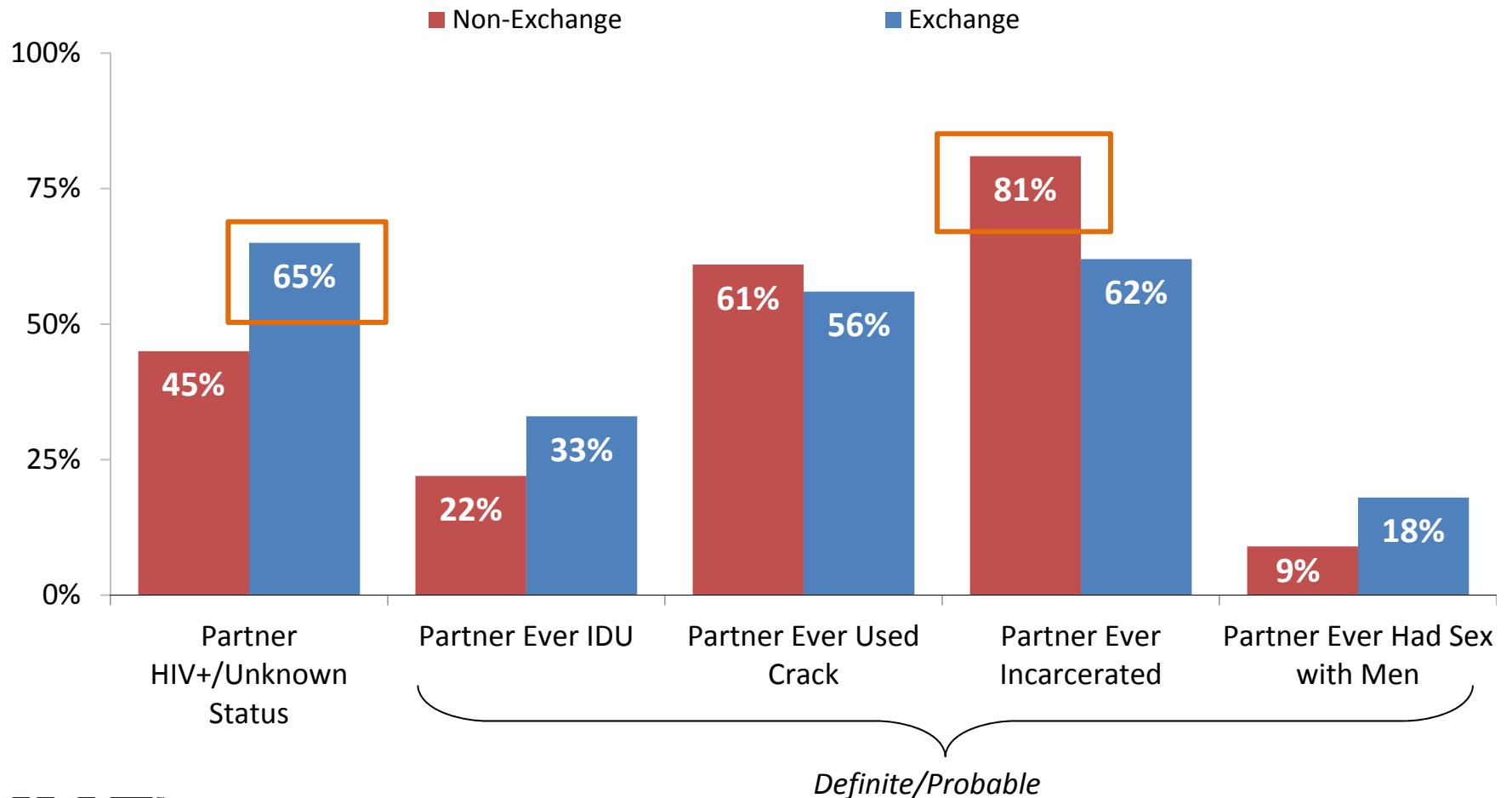
# Sexual Risk Behavior at Last Sex by Participants' Race/Ethnicity

W2W – women who exchange sex, with HIV-/unknown status (N=250)<sup>1</sup>



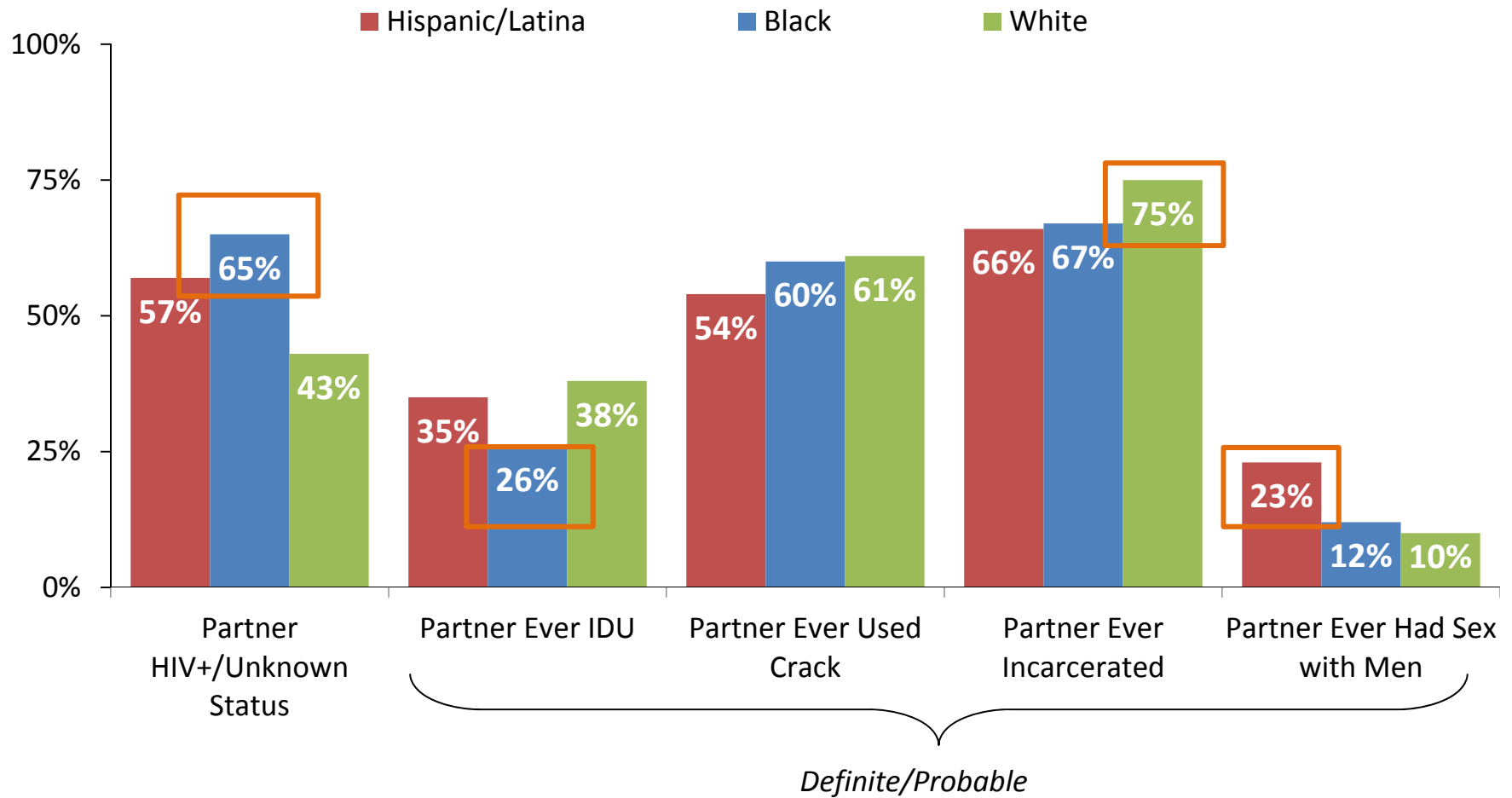
# Characteristics of Last Male Partner by Partner Type

W2W – women who exchange sex, with HIV-/unknown status (N=255)



# Risk Characteristics of Last Male Partner by Participants' Race/Ethnicity

W2W – women who exchange sex, with HIV-/unknown status (N=250)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>'Other' race (American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander) not shown due to small sample size

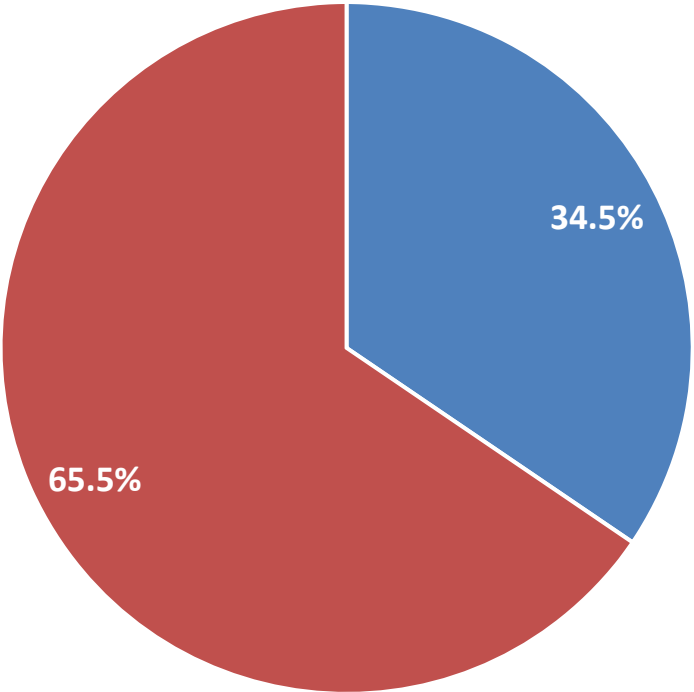
# HIV Prevalence

# HIV Prevalence

W2W – women with confirmed HIV result (N=325)

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■ HIV-positive ■ HIV-negative

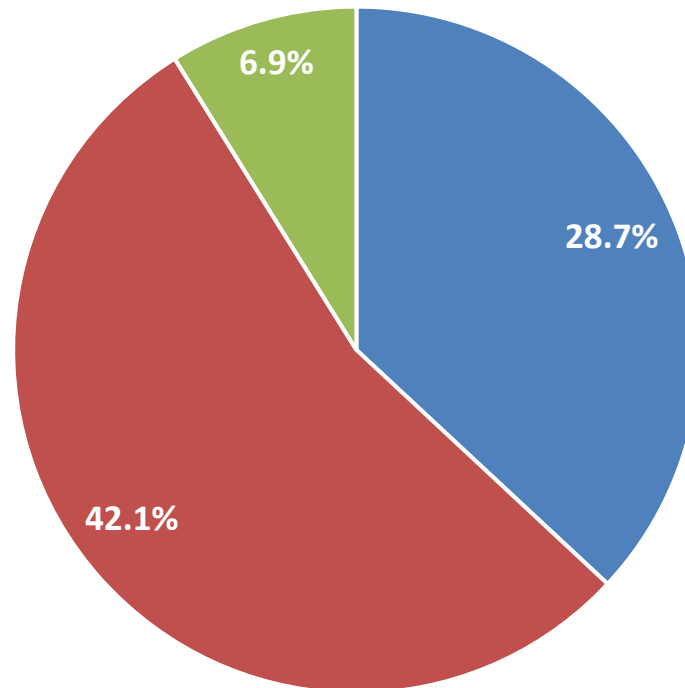


# HIV Prevalence by Race/Ethnicity

*W2W – women with confirmed HIV result (N=325)*

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■ Hispanic/Latina ■ Black ■ White

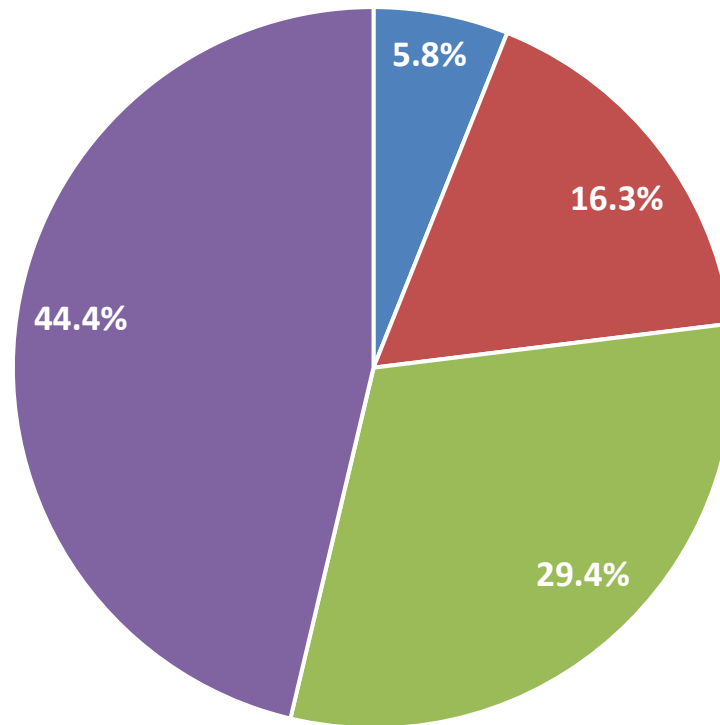


# HIV Prevalence by Age

W2W – women with confirmed HIV result (N=325)

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■ 18-29 ■ 30-39 ■ 40-49 ■ 50-60

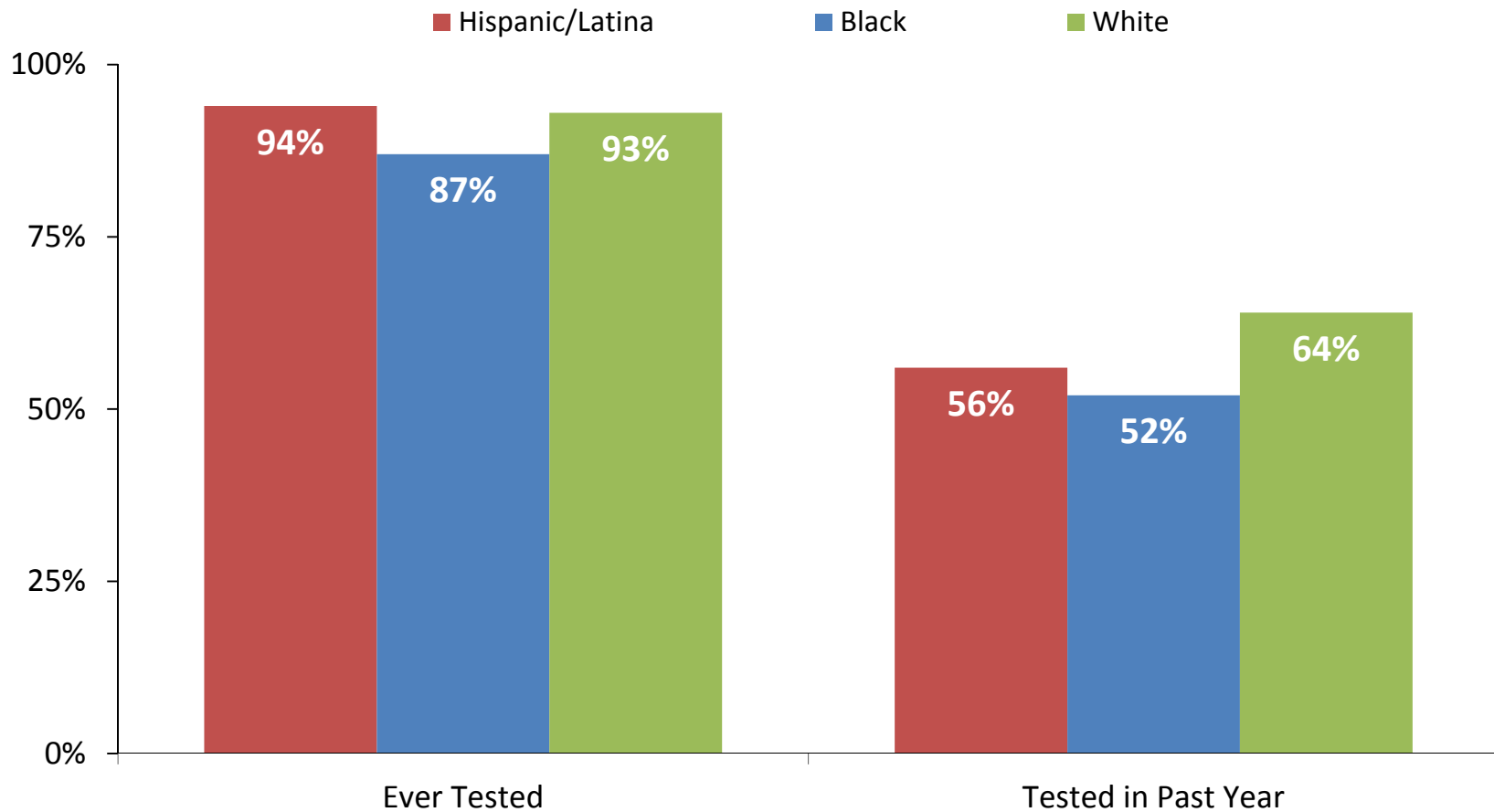




# HIV Prevention Experience

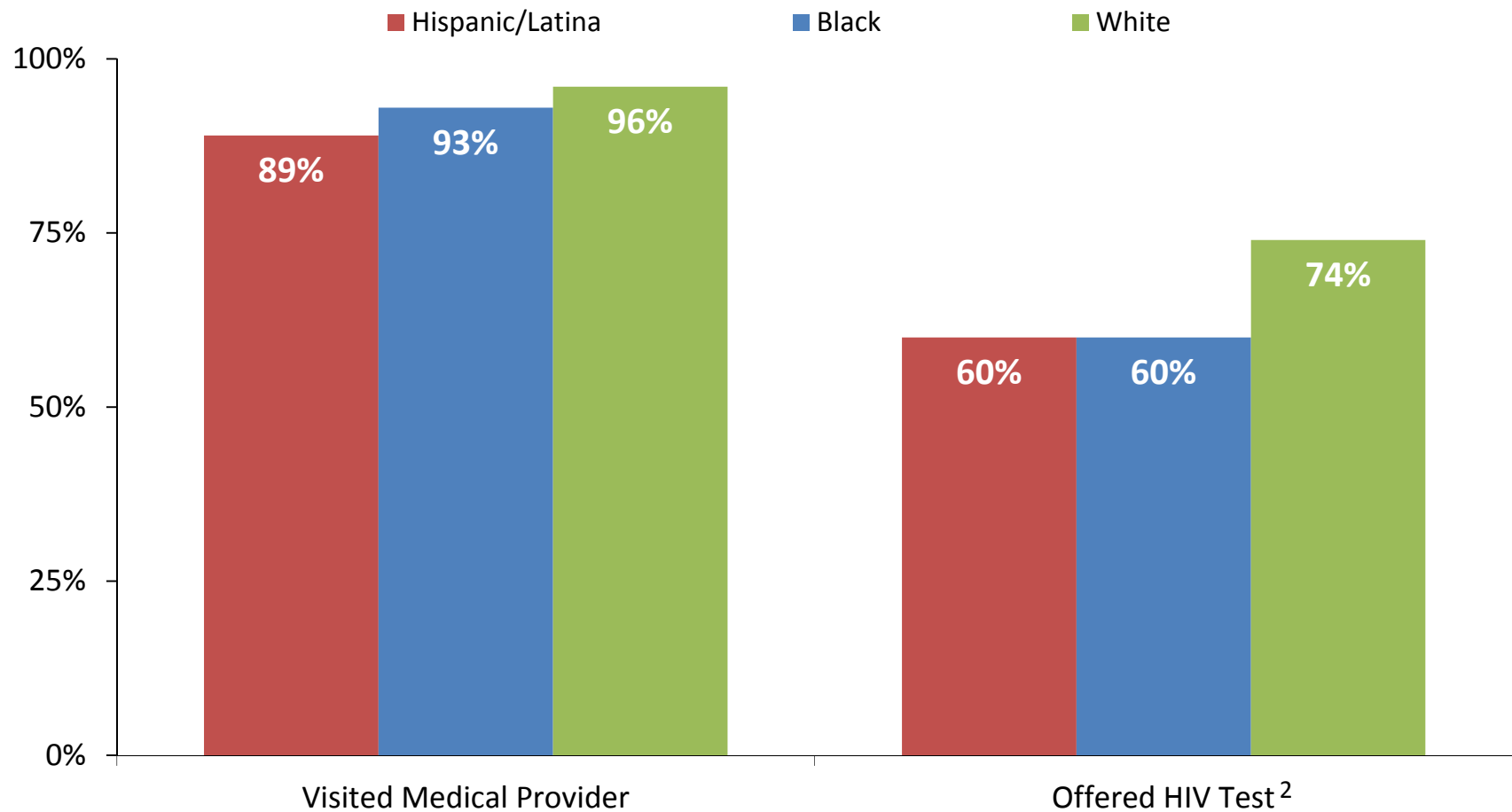
# HIV Testing History by Race/Ethnicity

W2W – women who exchange sex, with HIV-/unknown status (N=250)<sup>1</sup>



# Medical Visits and HIV Testing in Past 12 Months by Race/Ethnicity

W2W – women who exchange sex, with HIV-/unknown status (N=250)<sup>1</sup>

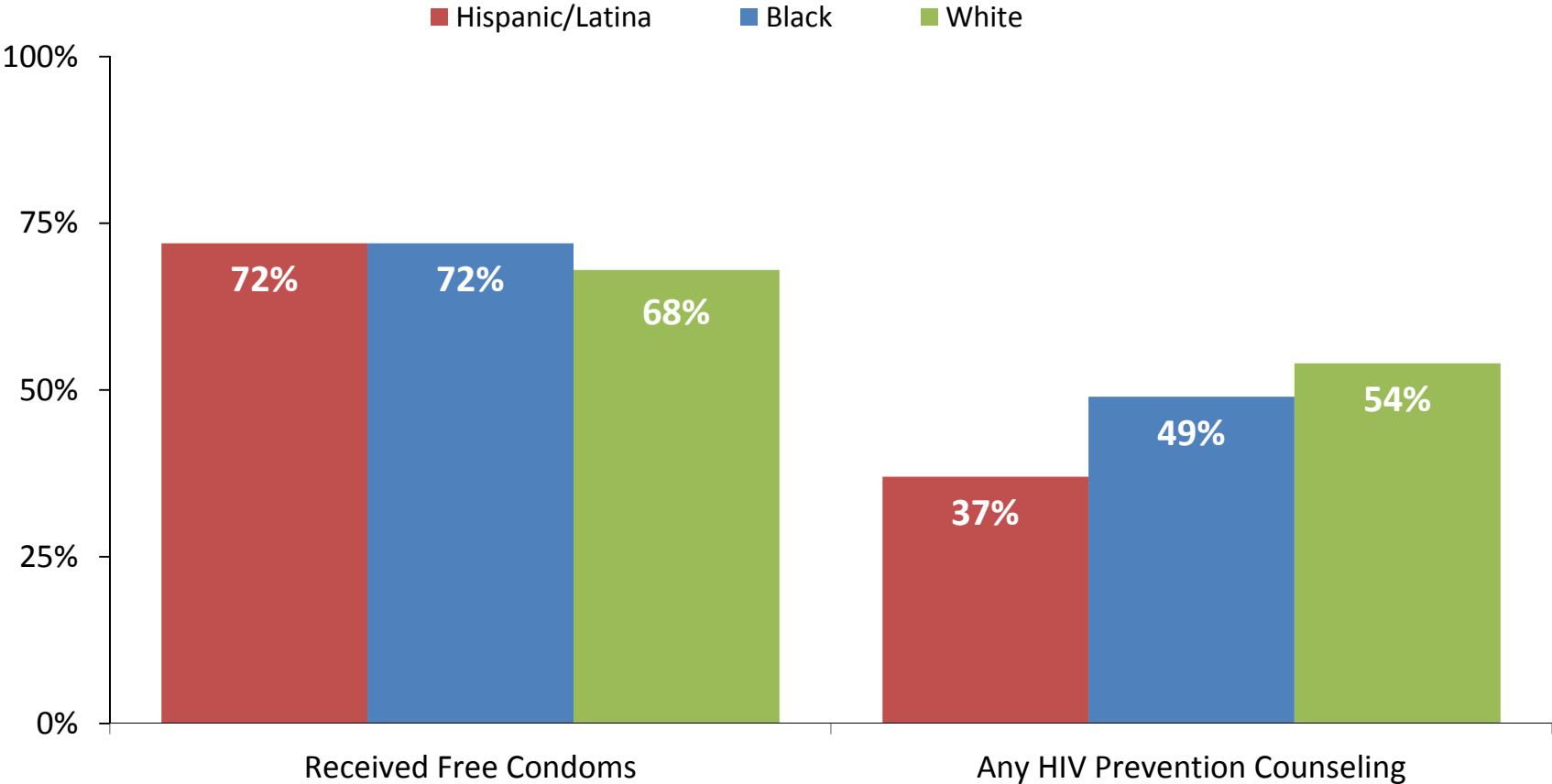


<sup>1</sup>'Other' race (American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander) not shown due to small sample size

<sup>2</sup>Of those who visited a medical provider

# HIV Prevention Engagement in Past 12 Months by Race/Ethnicity

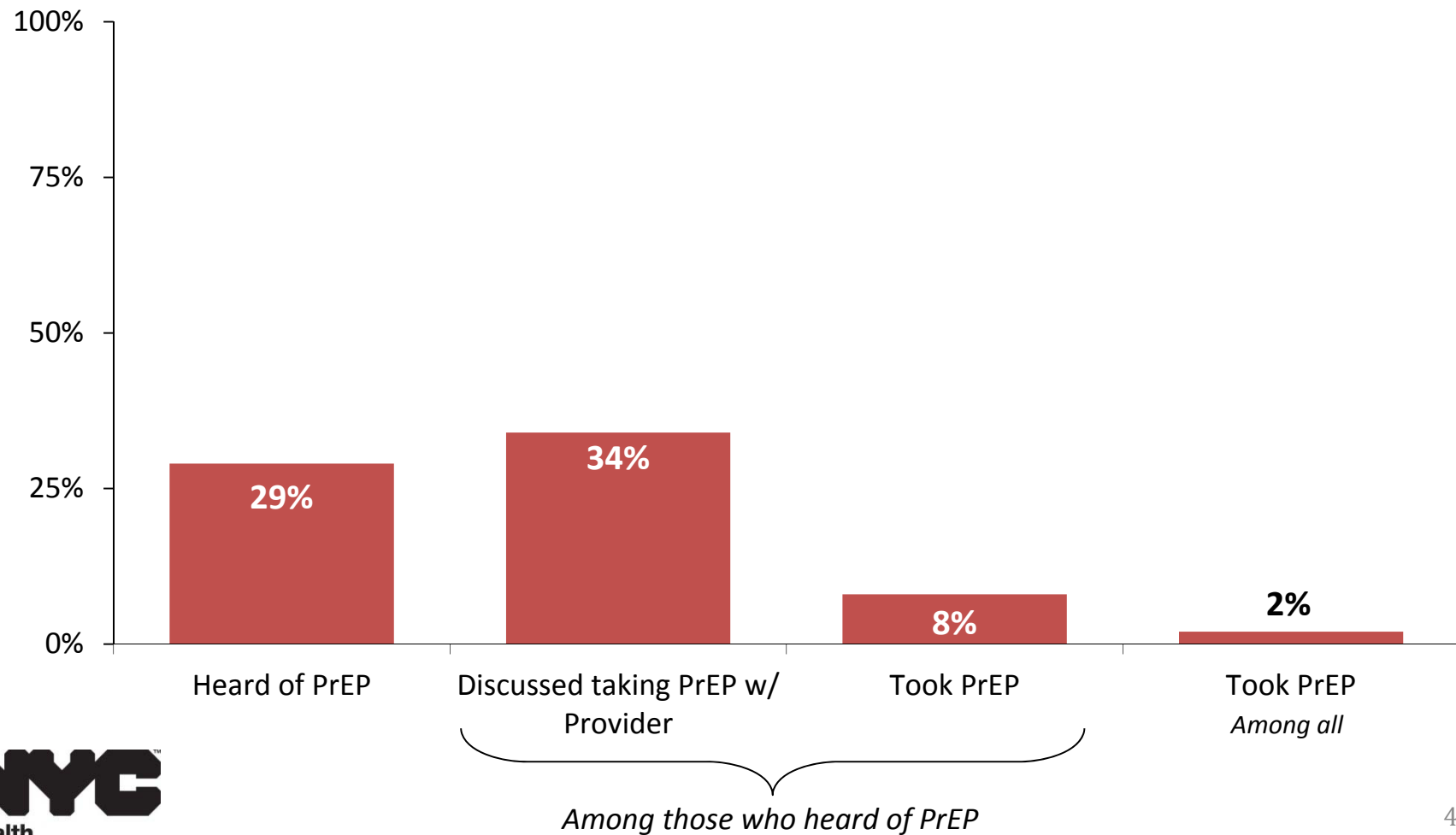
W2W – women who exchange sex, with HIV-/unknown status (N=250)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Other' race (American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander) not shown due to small sample size

# Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) Awareness and Utilization in Past 12 Months

W2W – women who exchange sex, with HIV-/unknown status (N=255)



# Summary

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- Many participants experienced violence, poverty, homelessness, and incarceration
- Participants reported high numbers of recent sexual partners and most reported condomless sex
- Sexual partnerships with high-risk partners (HIV+/unknown status, people who inject drugs, previously incarcerated, MSM) were frequent
- No significant racial/ethnic differences found in recent sexual risk or partnerships

# Summary (cont'd)

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- Gaps in engagement with prevention services:
  - Relatively low frequency of recent HIV testing despite high risk
  - Most participants received free condoms in the past 12 months, but less than half reported receiving HIV prevention counseling
- Awareness of PrEP was low and very few participants reported taking PrEP in the past 12 months
- HIV prevalence was higher than in general population

# Challenges & limitations

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- Subgroups of women who exchange sex not fully represented (i.e., brothel/massage parlor workers; escorts; online; women who do not speak English/Spanish)
- Other recruitment challenges – e.g., street-based exchange sex, women who are disconnected from services, “homophily” by HIV within networks
- Study findings may not be generalizable to broader population



# Conclusions

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- Special NHBS study successfully sampled women who exchange sex with multiple types of modalities and risks
- Study method (RDS) can reach “hidden” populations for which no sampling frame exists
- Extensive formative research supported data collection
- Study findings help fill information gaps around HIV burden, risk and unmet needs for women who exchange sex in NYC → inform tailored programming

# NYC's *Women To Women* Team

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# THANK YOU!

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