

HIV Treatment Optimism Among Gay Men: An International Comparison

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Objective

To examine optimism in light of highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) among gay men in four industrialized countries using standardized scales and outcomes.

Methods

Gay men were surveyed between January and December 2000 in Sydney and Melbourne (n=3120), Vancouver (n=357), London (n=690) and Paris (n=1715). Information was collected on HIV status, sexual behaviour and responses to a 4-item scale. Possible responses were: strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree. Agreement indicated optimism in light of new HIV drug therapies. Total scores ranged from 4 (strongly disagree with all 4 items) to 16 (strongly agree with all 4 items).

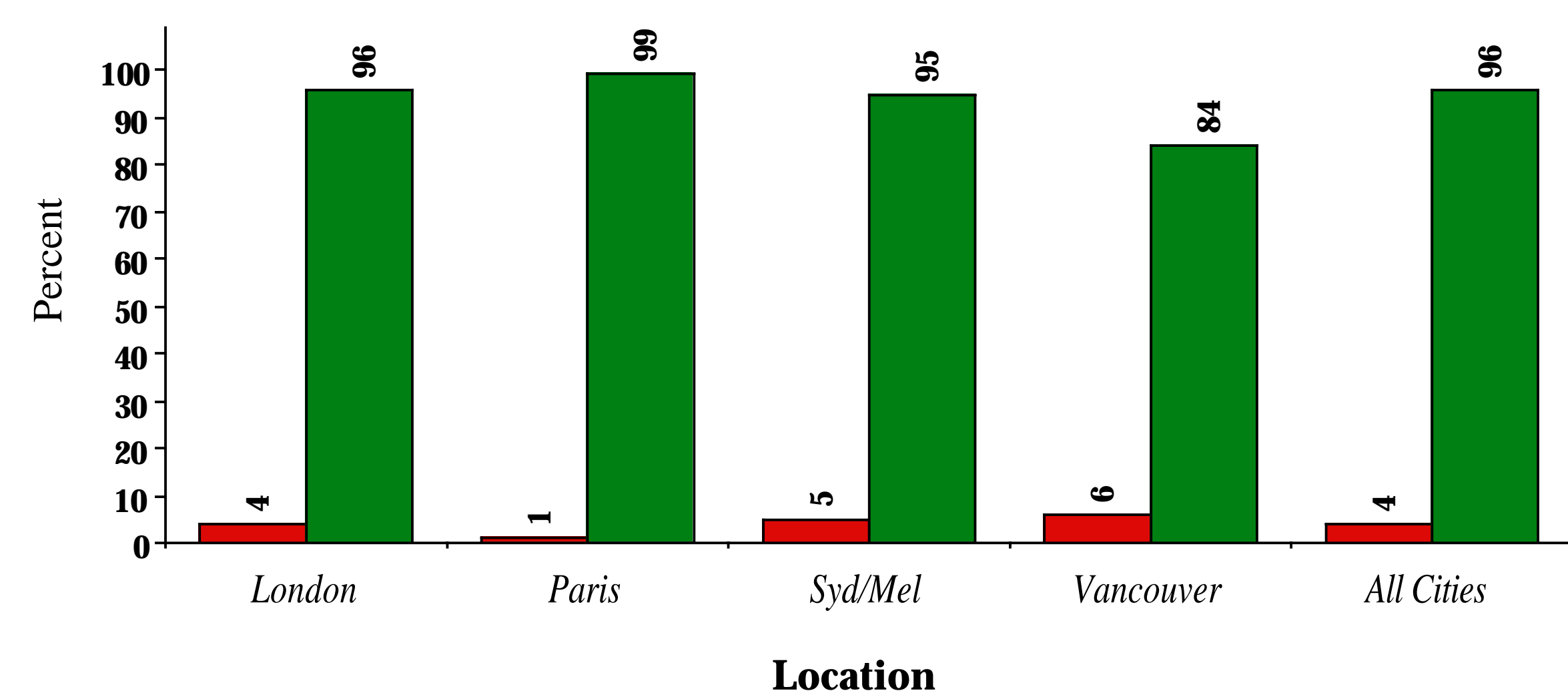
Results

In all cities, overall mean scores were low (<7), indicating that for the most part men did not agree with the optimism statements; mean scores were lowest in Paris (p<0.001). Mean optimism scores varied significantly by HIV status in Paris, Sydney and Melbourne (p<0.05) but not in the other cities (interaction term p<0.05); and by age in London and Paris (p<0.05) but not elsewhere (interaction term p<0.001). In London, Paris, Sydney and Melbourne, the mean scores of those reporting unprotected anal intercourse with a casual partner were slightly higher than for those who did not report UAI (p<0.001).

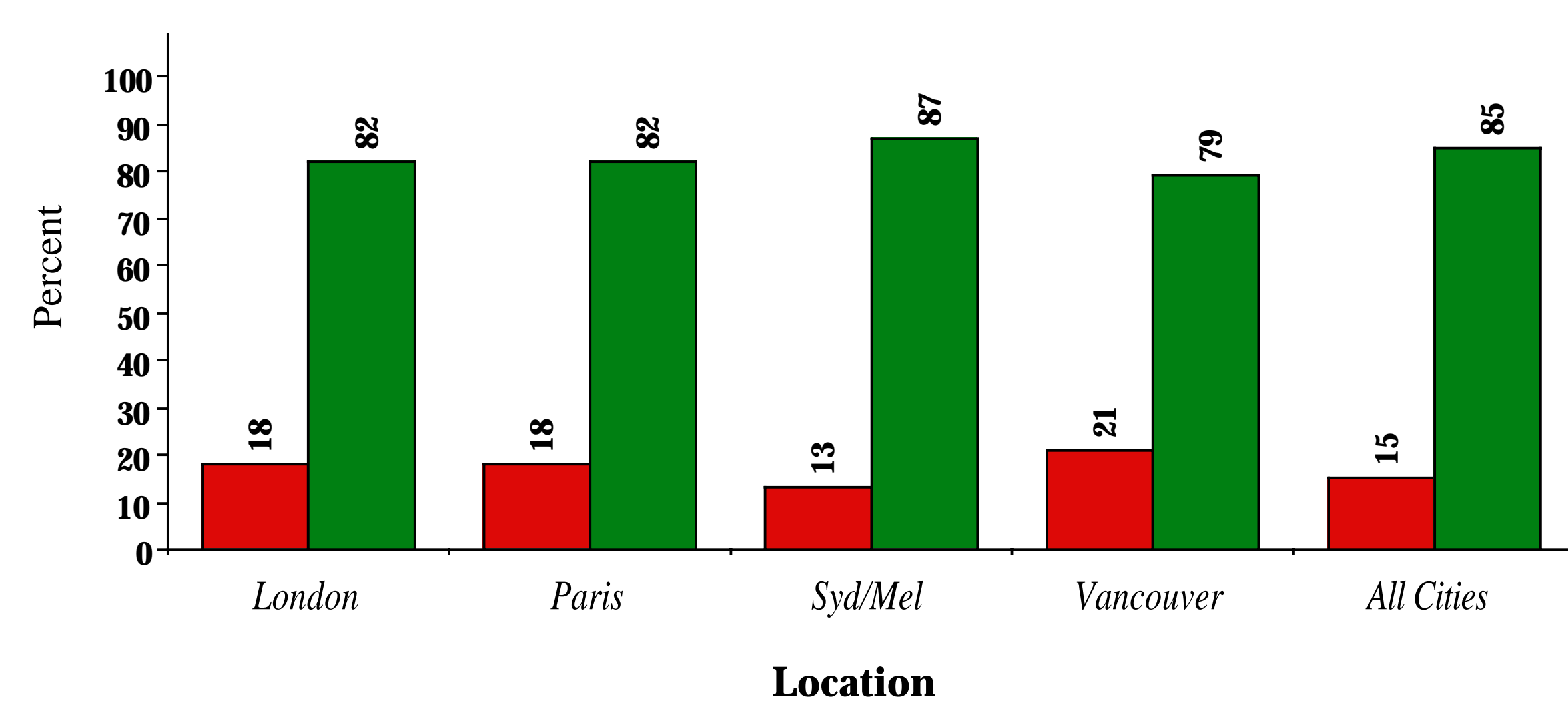
Conclusions

In 2000, a minority of gay men in Australian, Canadian and European cities were optimistic in the light of new HIV drug therapies. While there was an association between HIV optimism and high-risk sexual behaviour, the magnitude of the association was modest and causality could not be established. The lack of a consistent association between HIV optimism and either HIV status or age across the cities highlights the heterogeneous nature of gay men's responses to HAART in different countries. It is unlikely that HIV optimism alone can explain the recent increase in high-risk sexual behaviour among gay men in these countries.

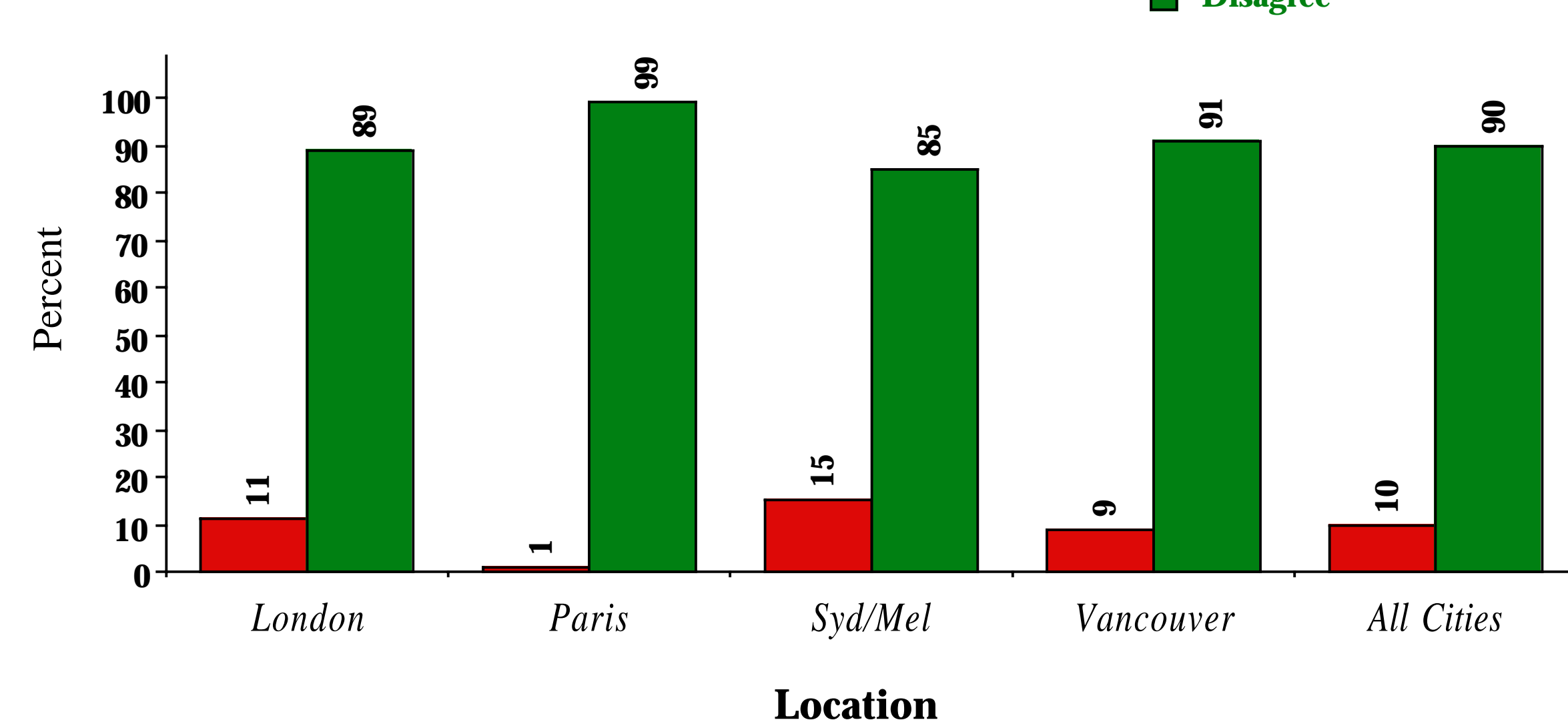
People with undetectable viral load don't need to worry so much about infecting others with HIV



HIV/AIDS is a less serious threat than it used to be because of new treatments



New treatments will take the worry out of sex



If every HIV-positive person took the new treatments, the AIDS epidemic would be over

