

## Abstract

- **Background:** Stigma is an important and understudied barrier to hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection treatment and elimination. The association between knowledge about HCV infection and perceptions of stigma among HCV-infected patients remains unknown.
- **Methods:** We conducted a cross-sectional survey study among 270 HCV-infected patients in Philadelphia, using the HCV Stigma Scale and National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) Hepatitis C Follow-up Survey (2003-2008).
- **Results:** Median knowledge scores did not significantly differ between HIV/HCV-coinfected and HCV-monoinfected participants (10 versus 9;  $p=0.29$ ). Greater HCV knowledge was significantly associated with increased HCV Stigma Scale Scores in unadjusted analyses ( $p=0.013$ ) and when adjusting for demographic and clinical covariates ( $p=0.034$ ).
- **Conclusions:** Regardless of HIV status, the majority of the participants in this study answered questions about HCV knowledge correctly. Surprisingly, greater HCV knowledge was associated with increased HCV-related stigma. Additional qualitative studies are needed to better understand this association.

## Background & Objectives

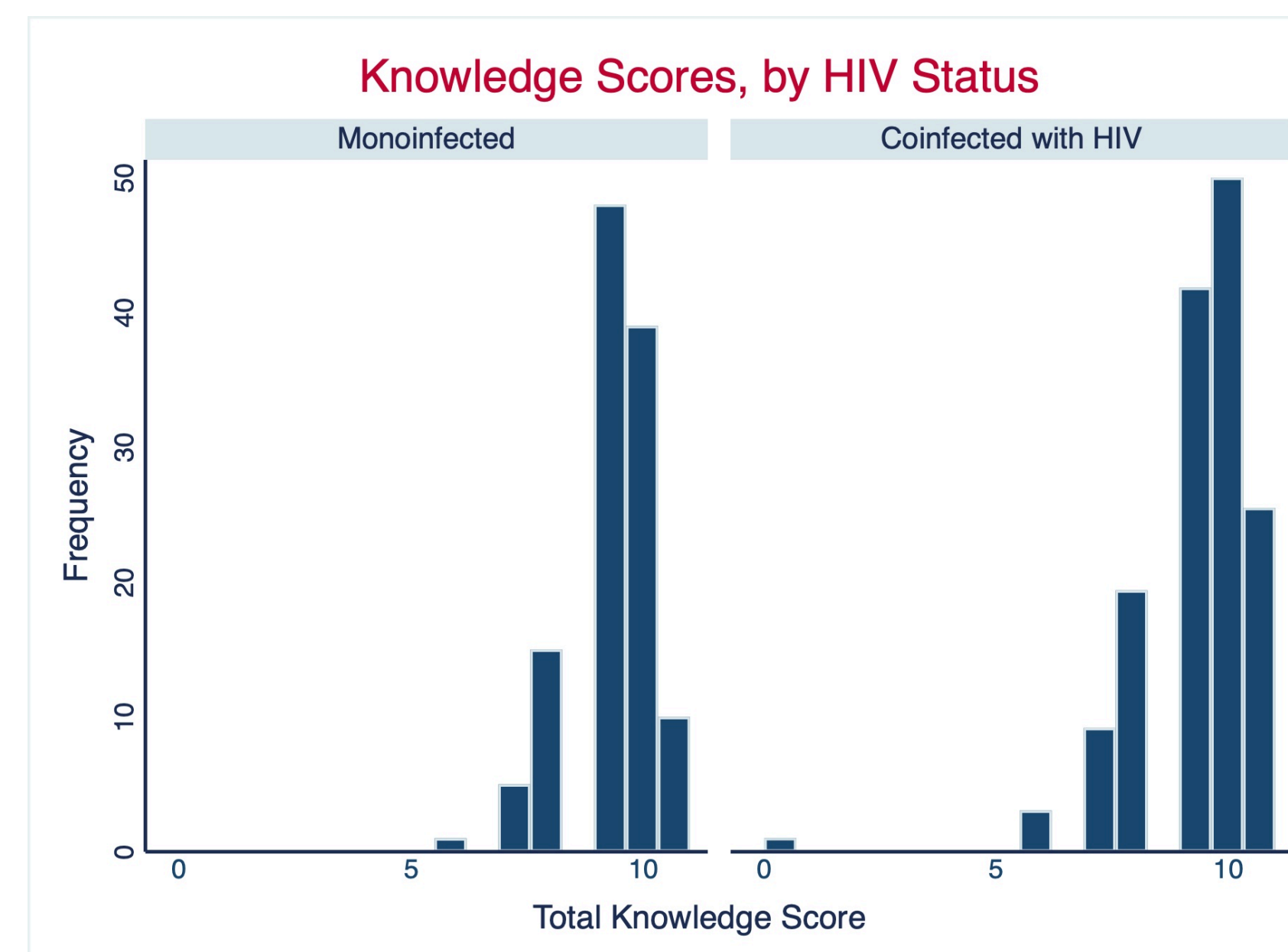
- >4.5 million Americans with hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection
- Disease stigma: social process linking individual attributes & medical dx → poor health outcomes & ↓ quality of life
- Educational interventions seek to ↓ stigma by dispelling disease-based myths & misinformation
- The association between knowledge about HCV infection & perceptions of disease-related stigma among HCV-infected patients remains unknown
- **Objective:** Evaluate whether increased knowledge about HCV infection & transmission is associated with decreased HCV-related stigma

## Methods

- **Design:** Cross-sectional survey study
- **Participants** (n = 270): 1) ≥18 years of age, 2) HCV antibody positive, 3) English speaking
- **Data Collection:**
  - **Outcome:** HCV-related Stigma → 33-item HCV Stigma Scale Score (score, 33 - 132)
  - **Exposure:** Knowledge about HCV infection → 11-item NHANES Hepatitis C Follow-up Survey (2003 - 2008)
  - Self-reported covariates: age, sex, race & ethnicity, education level, HIV coinfection, years since HCV diagnosis, stage of HCV management
- **Statistical Analyses:** Linear regression models
  - Adjusted for self-reported demographic & clinical covariates

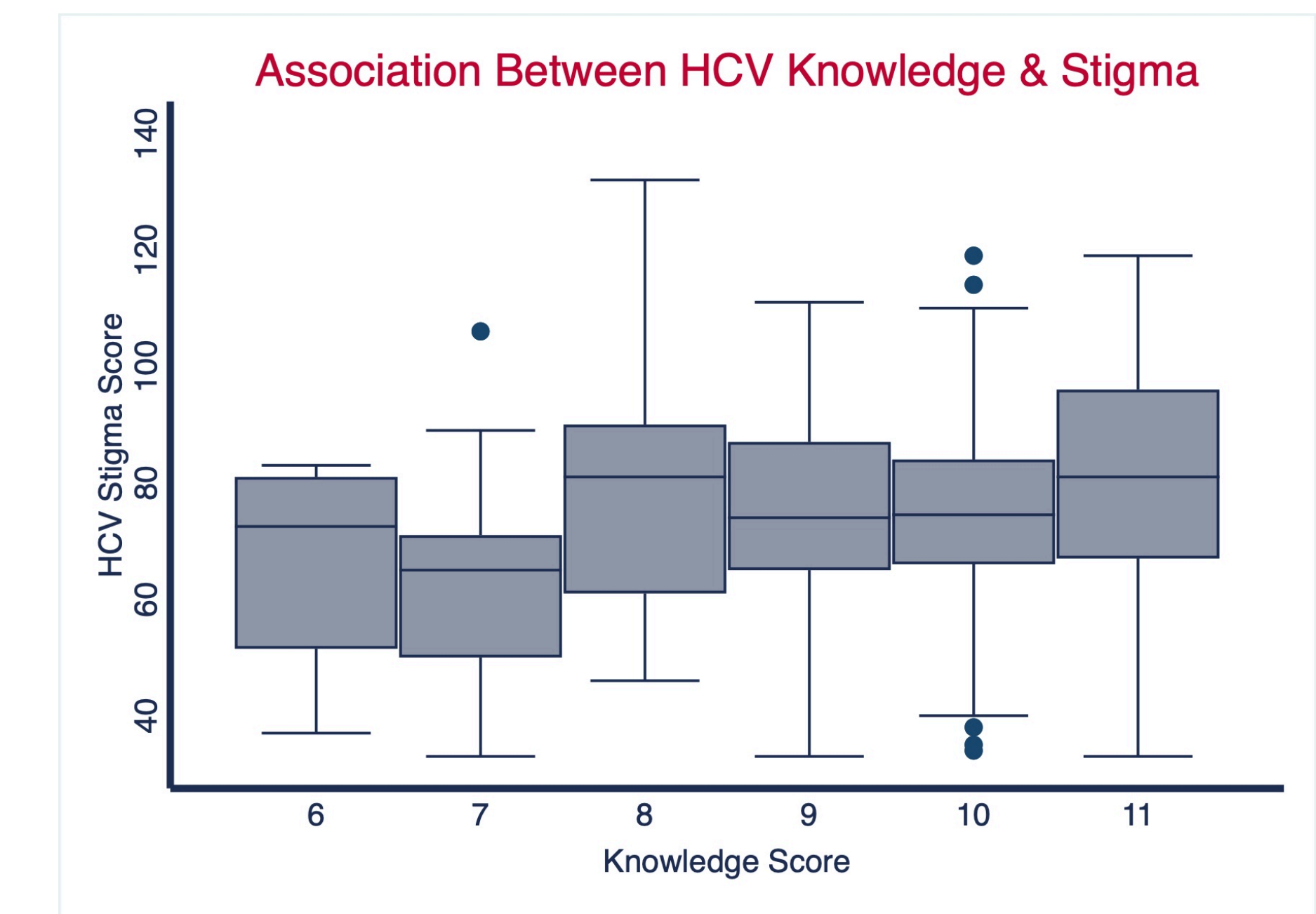
## Results

- Median HCV knowledge score: 9 (IQR, 9-10)
- Knowledge (median score, 10 vs. 9;  $p=0.29$ ) & stigma scores (mean score, 74.8 vs. 76.2;  $p=0.574$ ) did not differ by HIV status



## Results

- Higher HCV knowledge scores associated with higher HCV-related stigma scores in unadjusted ( $p=0.013$ ) & fully adjusted analyses ( $p=0.034$ )



## Conclusions

- The majority of participants answered questions about HCV knowledge correctly
- Unexpectedly, greater HCV knowledge was associated with increased HCV-related stigma
- Additional qualitative research is needed to identify the process by which increased knowledge may impact HCV related stigma, which may inform future education-based interventions to reduce HCV-related stigma

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