

# Health care related stigma among people who inject drugs in New York City

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## Background

- Stigma experiences of people who inject drugs (PWID) in healthcare settings are under-researched.
- Stigma towards PWID may pose barriers to HCV care and preclude HCV treatment.
- Scales to measure PWID stigma related experiences in health care settings are needed. We present a newly developed scale to assess such experiences.

## Methods

- Data collected at baseline from 130 PWID participating in an on-going study to assess the efficacy of providing HCV care at Syringe Exchange Programs.
- Eligibility criteria includes positive HCV RNA test and injection drug use in the past 3 months.
- Structured interviews focused topics on drug use history, health care past-experiences, and prior history with HCV care.
- Stigma experiences were measured at study entry by a 11-item scale developed by principal components analysis.
- The scale is divided into three subscales: enacted (5 items reflecting medical providers' attitudes/behaviors), internalized (3 items reflecting participants' attitudes/behaviors), and perception (3 items reflecting participants' perception of medical providers' attitudes/behaviors) stigma.
- Stigma was numerically mean scored ranging from 1 (least stigma) to 5 (most stigma)

## Participants Characteristics

- Mean Age: 45.5 (SD=10.8)
- Gender: Male 76%; Female 24%
- Ever Homeless: 90%
- Race-Ethnicity
  - Hispanic 59%
  - Non-Hispanic White 31%
  - Non-Hispanic Black 6%
  - Other 6%

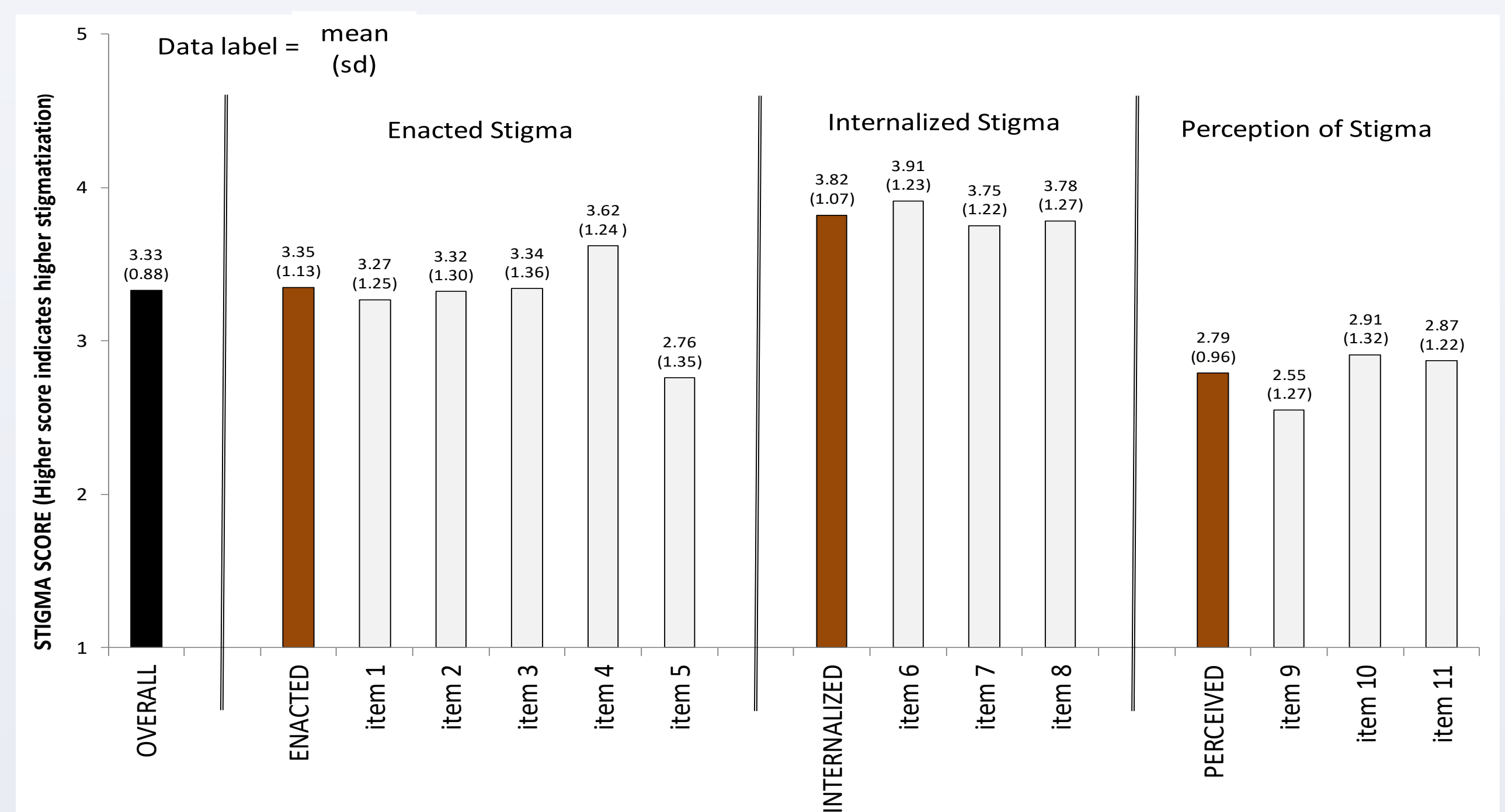
## Stigma by medical providers (subscales)

ENACTED STIGMA SCALE	
item 1	Doctors/medical providers have said critical or insulting things to me about my drug use
item 2	I have been very upset by comments that doctors/medical providers have made about my drug use
item 3	I feel that I have been treated disrespectfully by the medical profession because of my drug use
item 4	Doctors/medical providers have tried to scare me into quitting drugs by warning me about health risks associated with being a drug user
item 5	If I relapsed, doctors/medical providers criticized me for not trying harder
INTERNALIZED STIGMA SCALE	
item 6	When I go for medical care, I feel as though I try to hide my drug use
item 7	When I go for medical care, I feel that I am embarrassed or ashamed about being a drug user
item 8	I do not want to disclose my drug use to a doctor/medical provider
PERCEIVED STIGMA SCALE	
item 9	I feel my doctor/medical provider is afraid of me
item 10	I do not feel welcome at the doctor's/medical provider's office
item 11	I do not feel respected by my doctor/medical provider

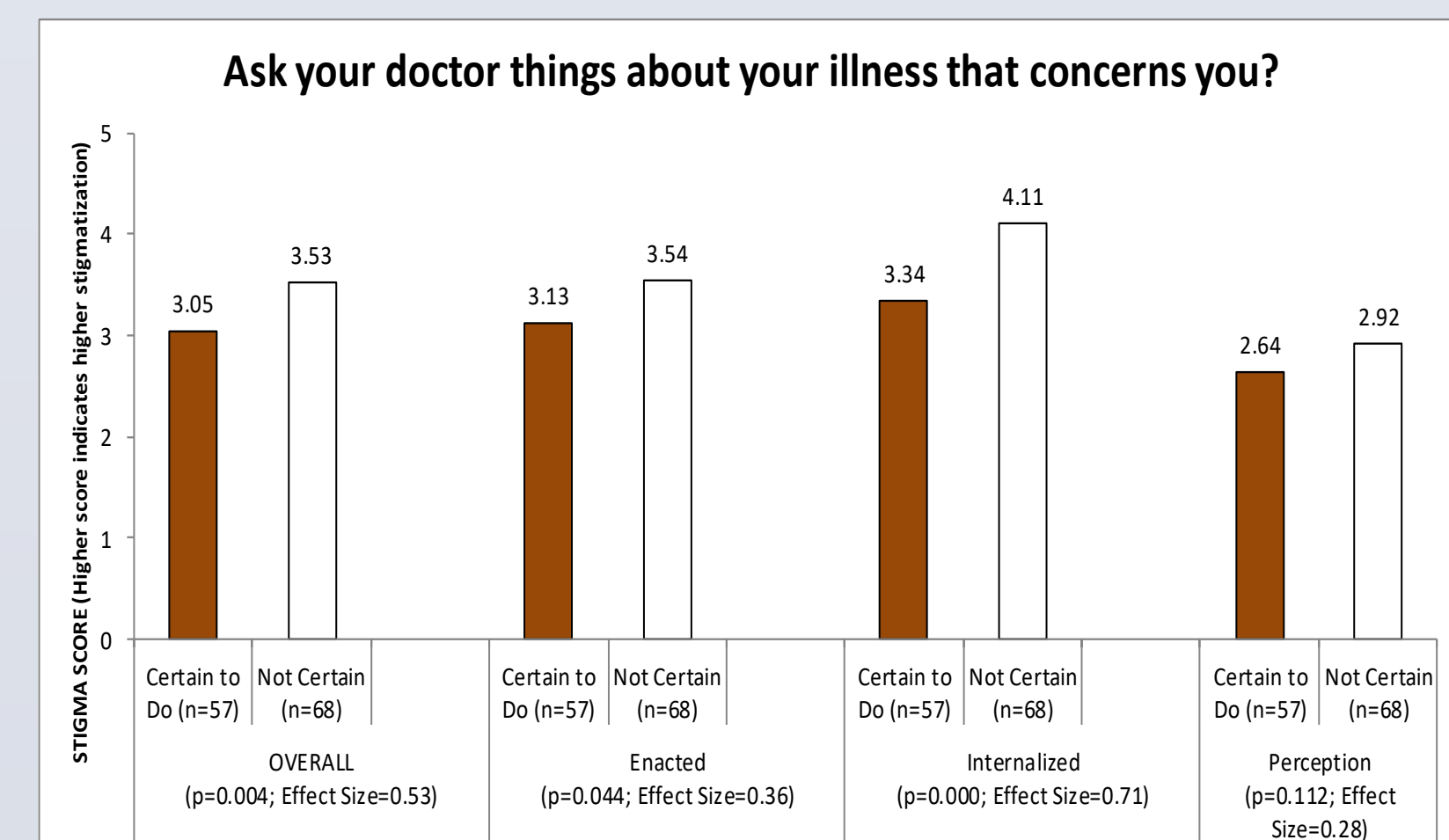
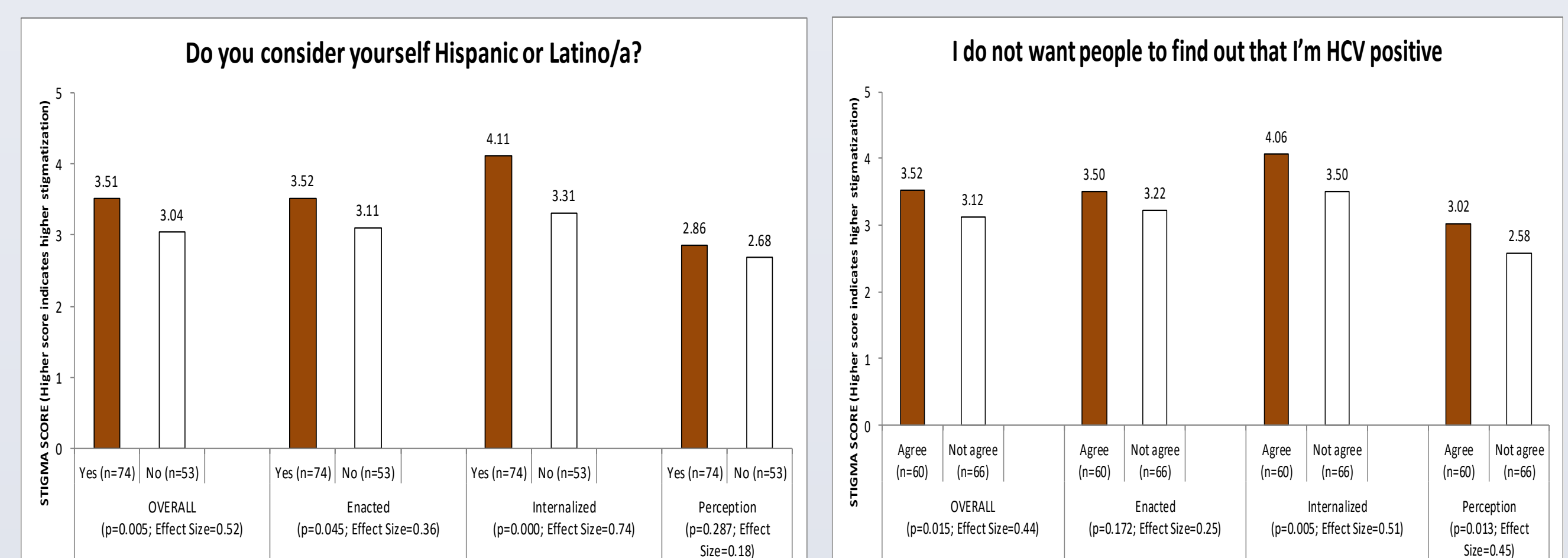
## Results

- Most participants were male, homeless, had income of <=\$10,000 and had not sought HCV treatment prior to study enrollment.
- Latinos had higher overall mean stigma scores (3.51) than non-Latinos (3.04)(p=0.005).
- Participants with higher overall stigma scores reported being less willing to disclose HCV status (p=0.015) and less likely to discuss health problems and concerns with doctors (p=0.004).

## Subscale Scores by Items



## Stigma Score Associations



## Conclusions

- PWID experience high levels of health-related stigma. Latino PWID might experience higher health related stigma than other ethnic/racial groups.
- Perceived, internalized and enacted health-related stigma may discourage engagement in HCV care among PWID; prevent open communication with doctors; and reduce HCV status disclosure to medical providers and others.
- Destigmatized access to health care may be crucial to the effective prevention, treatment and elimination of HCV among PWID.

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