

HIV SELF-REPORTED PREVALENCE AND OTHER INDICATORS ON HIV TESTING AND PREVENTION AMONG MSM IN ITALY. DATA FROM THE EUROPEAN MSM INTERNET SURVEY (EMIS)

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BACKGROUND

HIV prevention is one of the highest priorities on the European public health agenda and MSM are the largest affected domestic community in the EU countries and in Italy. The EMIS European project offered a model of research into HIV/STI prevention among MSM.

METHODS

Internet-based questionnaire with 278 questions was carried out among MSM in Europe in 25 languages. Inclusion criteria were, e.g.: men living in Europe, at or over the age of homosexual consent, who were sexually attracted to men and/or had sex with men. Questions were defined in order to allow the construction of UNGASS indicators.

RESULTS

16.689 valid questionnaires were collected in Italy. Among the 15.025 MSM who answered the question about their province, 59.1% was in the north, 23.9% in the centre and 17.0% in the south/islands. The average age of respondents was 33 (median).

UNGASS 23, the percentage of MSM diagnosed HIV positive among those who reported they had been tested, was 9.6%. However, 41.2% of respondents had had an HIV test in the last 12 months and knew their result (UNGASS 8). This figure was lower than 40% in the south/islands (see fig. 1). Younger people seem to have more limited access to HIV screening services: the lowest rates of HIV testing in the last 12 months were found amongst young MSM under 25 years old (30.2%), while the percentage amongst older MSM was 44.6%.

56% of younger men and 58.2% of older men used a condom the last time they had anal sex with a male partner in the last 6 months (UNGASS 19). A modified indicator was proposed for UNGASS 14 (knowledge about HIV). One of the 5 items of this indicator was, e.g.: "effective treatment of HIV infection reduces the risk of HIV being transmitted". The Figure for this indicator was significantly lower amongst younger MSM (31.5%), compared with the others (43.9%).

Finally, only 45.0% of MSM said that most of the people who are in contact with them know that they are attracted to men. This percentage was always lower than 36% in the south/islands.

CONCLUSIONS

HIV prevalence among MSM is high, while recent access to HIV testing is limited, especially amongst young MSM and in the south/islands. Younger men seem also to be less informed about HIV. Moreover, the low percentage of MSM who are "out" underlines the need for prevention and information in a community that, in Italy, seems to be particularly "hard-to-reach".

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Fig.1: UNGASS N.8
% of MSM who received an HIV test in the last 12 months and know their result by region



■ (40,50] ■ (30,40] ■ [20,30]