

Dettaglio abstract

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Title: Prejudice and perceived HIV risk among High School Students

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Session/Topic

Access to test and educational aspects

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Abstract

Background: #cHIVuoleconoscere is a project to promote sensitization, information and formation about HIV/AIDS in high schools aiming to improve the knowledge about the prevention, increment the acceptability of screening tests and fight the stigma.

Methods: The project engages high school students through interactive programs. The courses (on average

3 meetings of 2 hours each) for single classes are conducted by trained experts and afterwards evaluated by means of a pre- and post-intervention questionnaire, derived from those of the AIDS Project of Caritas Italiana. The questionnaire includes 2 questions about the perception of infection risk and 5 about stigma. All answers may be graded on a scale from 1 to 10. A comprehensive score combining the 5 questions on stigma was calculated with a range from 5 to 50 (being 5 the minimum stigma). This report focuses on these 2 aspects.

Results: Between October 2019 and March 2022, 4386 students participated into the project and compiled the questionnaires. Overall, only 3.5% of students did not show any prejudice (score = 5) toward PLWH at baseline. Before the intervention several variables were significantly associated to the individual prejudice. Type of scholastic institution being professional Schools at higher risk of stigma than technical institutes and both of them than Prep Schools (figure panel A); gender with males showing greater stigma than females, as well as students of foreign origin compared to Italians, and students born in the latter years compared to those of previous years. However, in the Probit multivariate analysis only the type of Institute and the gender retained significance. Interestingly, both these variables were significantly associated ($P = 0.008$) to the perception of risk, too. After the intervention all scores improved significantly ($P < 0.0001$) (figure panel B). As an example, at the question "Do you think that it is appropriate for a person living with HIV to work with children?" being the possible choices in the range from 1 (not at all) to 10 (yes, absolutely the mean score raised from 6.1 to 9.5 ($P < 0.001$)). The comprehensive score improved, too, lowering from a mean of 17.6 to 12.3 ($P < 0.0001$). However, the proportion of students showing no prejudice raised only to 11.2% and a 8% of students did not change their opinion or radicalized their stigma (score increment ≥ 3). The perception of a potential risk of acquiring HIV infection raised from a mean score of 2.8 to 3.14 ($P < 0.0001$).

Conclusions: Through the project #cHIVuoleconoscere a scientifically sound, correct and updated information is conveyed to students. Despite the fact that even younger people show a significant grade of prejudice toward PLWH, the educational project induces a clear reduction of the perceived stigma. We believe that betting on younger generations is a winning strategy to obtain 2030 WHO endpoints to end the HIV epidemics and defeat stigma.

Panel A

variable	P univariate	OR multivariate	95% CI	P multivariate
Institute Prep School (reference) Professional Technical	* < 0.0001 <0.0001	* 1.87 1.27	* 1.36 - 2.58 1.11 – 1.47	< 0.0001 0.001
Gender male (reference) female	* <0.0001	* 0.62	* 0.55 – 0.71	< 0.0001
Nationality Non Italian (reference) Italian	* < 0.0001	* 0.91	* 0.71 – 1.16	0.485
Year of birth	< 0.0001	1.05	0.98 – 1.13	0.135

Panel B

