

22 Maggio 2026 12.15 - 13.15 Sala Cassiopea 2

Oral Communications

Stigma, knowledge and behaviours in the era of HIV prevention

OC 55 Knowledge reduces stigma: the results of the #cHIVuoleconoscere project

N. prog: OC 55

Title: Knowledge reduces stigma: the results of the #cHIVuoleconoscere project

Authors: C. Pellegris¹, P. Meli¹, I. Mercurio¹, V. Gotti¹, F. Gritti¹, E. Zanetti¹, F. Maggiolo¹, I. Fontana²

Affiliation: ¹Cooperativa Don Giuseppe Monticelli/Bergamo Fast-track City Network, Bergamo, Italy, ²Ufficio scolastico provinciale di Bergamo/Bergamo Fast-track City Network, Bergamo, Italy

Abstract body

Background: The #cHIVuoleconoscere project has, over its 6 years, reached more than 13,000 high school students in Bergamo and its province, offering training programs on HIV and STIs to foster reflection on sexual health, and to fight against stigma and prejudice. The proposal includes two to three sessions per class, each lasting two hours, using a participatory and dialogical approach. The sessions focus not only on prevention but also on mutual respect, consent, personal responsibility in sexual decision-making, and the use of clear, inclusive language.

Materials and Methods: A survey was administered to participating students both before and at the conclusion of the program. The questionnaire investigates both knowledge (9 items) and perceptions and stigma toward people with HIV (5 items). Based on the analysis of these questionnaires, two indices were constructed — one relating to knowledge and one to stigma - and the possible correlations between these indices were explored. The knowledge index ranges from 1 to 23, where 1 is the minimum value of knowledge and 23 is the maximum. The stigma index ranges from 5 to 50, with 5 representing minimum stigma and 50 representing maximum stigma.

Results: The analysis was conducted on questionnaires completed by 11,079 students. The sample comprises 4,859 individuals who identify as female, 6,135 who identify as male, and 17 transgender individuals, 5,155 students from Prep high schools, 4,556 from technical schools, and 1,368 from vocational schools. 9,993 students are Italian, and 1,368 are foreign nationals. On average, the students surveyed demonstrated a robust baseline of knowledge prior to the interventions, with a mean score of approximately 16.5 out of 23. Furthermore, the data indicate that students with higher knowledge scores exhibit lower levels of stigma; conversely, those with lower knowledge indices present higher stigma scores (Table 1). These two variables are inversely proportional.

A strong performance in the knowledge index is significantly correlated with being female, of Italian nationality, and attending a technical school. Interestingly, the level of knowledge does not appear to be influenced as much by the current grade level (class) as by the year of birth, suggesting a downward trend among younger generations (Table 2). Both knowledge and stigma indices showed significant improvement in the post-intervention questionnaires (Table 3).

Conclusion: Recent generations are increasingly less exposed to discourse regarding HIV. The decline in knowledge among young people suggested by the data is not only concerning for their ability to protect themselves, but also regarding stigma and prejudice, as these two variables are inversely proportional. Educational interventions that foster

a holistic reflection on sexual health and address the prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) within school settings are effective in both enhancing knowledge and mitigating social stigma.

Table 1

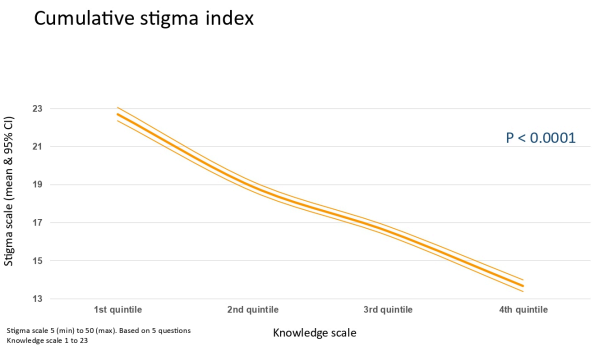


Table 2

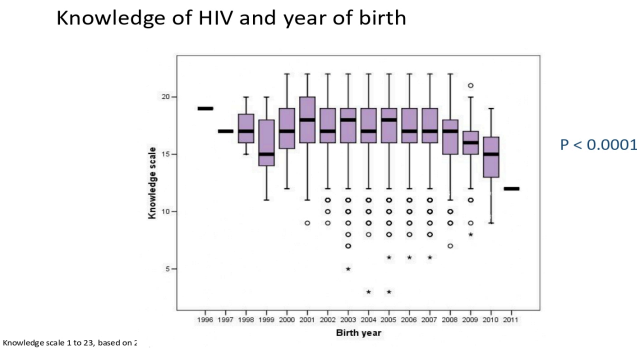


Table 3

