

18° CONGRESSO NAZIONALE



Italian Conference
on **AIDS** and **Antiviral**
Research

Presidenza del Congresso

Paolo Maggi, *Enna*

Giuseppe Nunnari, *Catania*

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Knowledge reduces stigma: the results of the #cHIVuoleconoscere project

Caterina Pellegris¹, Paolo Meli¹, Ilaria Mercurio¹, Vanessa Gotti¹, Francesca Gritti¹, Emma Zanetti¹, Franco Maggiolo¹, Ilenia Fontana²

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

Declaration of potential conflicts of interest



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The organization I belong to, Don Giuseppe Monticelli Social Cooperative Society, manages the following projects:

- *#cHIVuoleconoscere 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 editions*, funded by the Community Award Program of Gilead Sciences.
- Together for Health, funded by the Zeroing In: Migrant and Mobile Population Grant of Gilead Sciences.
- CONCRETO, funded by the RHIVolution 2025 Call of ViiV Healthcare.
- Take and Test: Do It Yourself, Do It for You! — which received sponsorship from Gilead Sciences.

Background



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The #cHIVuoleconoscere Project

Over 6 years of activity, the project has reached more than 13,000 high school students in Bergamo and its province, offering training programs on HIV and STIs and, in the last 4 years, the offer of the rapid test to adult students in a growing number of institutions



Objectives

- Foster reflection on sexual health
- Fight stigma and prejudice towards people living with HIV
- Promote mutual respect, consent, and personal responsibility



Format

2-3 sessions per class (2 hours each) with a participatory and dialogical approach. Focus on prevention, clear and inclusive language. CSE based approach.

Materials and Methods



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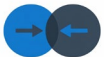
Pre/post intervention questionnaire

- 9 items on HIV and STI knowledge
- 5 items on perceptions and stigma towards people living with HIV



Index construction

- **Knowledge index:** range 1-23 (1 = minimum, 23 = maximum)
- **Stigma index:** range 5-50 (5 = minimum stigma, 50 = maximum stigma)



Correlation analysis

Analysis of correlations between the two indices.

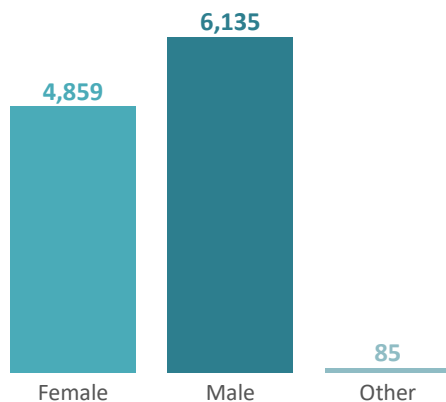
Results - The Sample



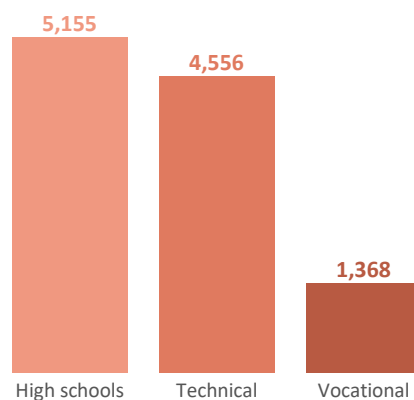
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11,079 students analyzed

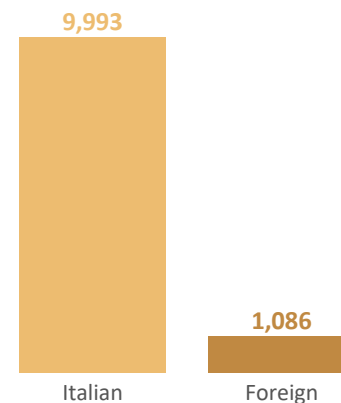
By gender



By school type



By nationality



Mean pre-intervention knowledge index: 16.5/23 (good level)

Results - Correlated Factors



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Knowledge index varies by gender, nationality, and year of birth

Factor	Category	Mean Knowledge Index	Significance
Gender	Female	17,2	$p < 0,001$
	Male	16,0	
Nationality	Italian	16,9	$p < 0,001$
	Foreign	14,8	
Year of birth	Recent generations	Gradual decline	$p < 0,05$

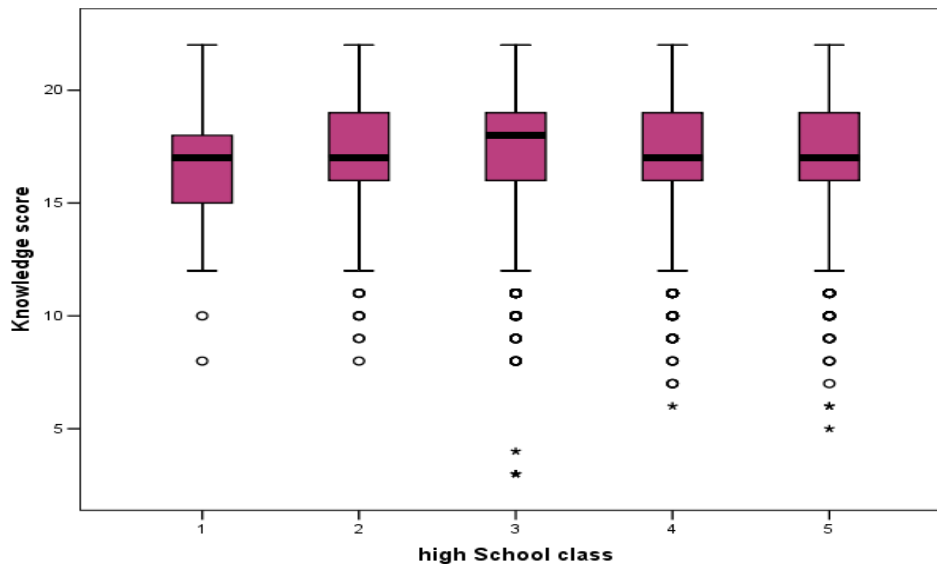
The index does not depend on school year but on year of birth

Knowledge of HIV and High School Class



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Knowledge scores remain stable across all five school years



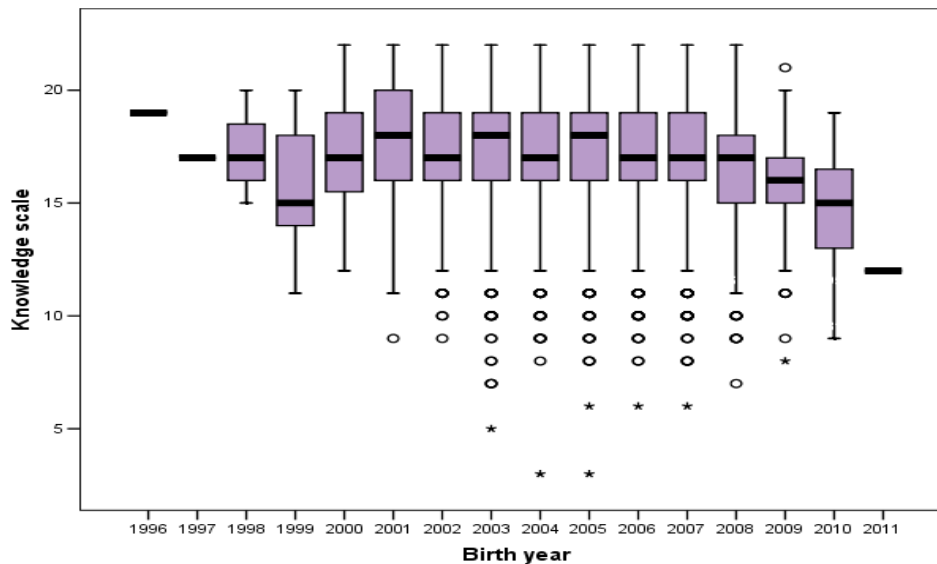
Knowledge scale 1 to 23, based on 23 questions

Knowledge of HIV and Year of Birth



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Younger cohorts show declining baseline knowledge



Knowledge scale 1 to 23, based on 23 questions

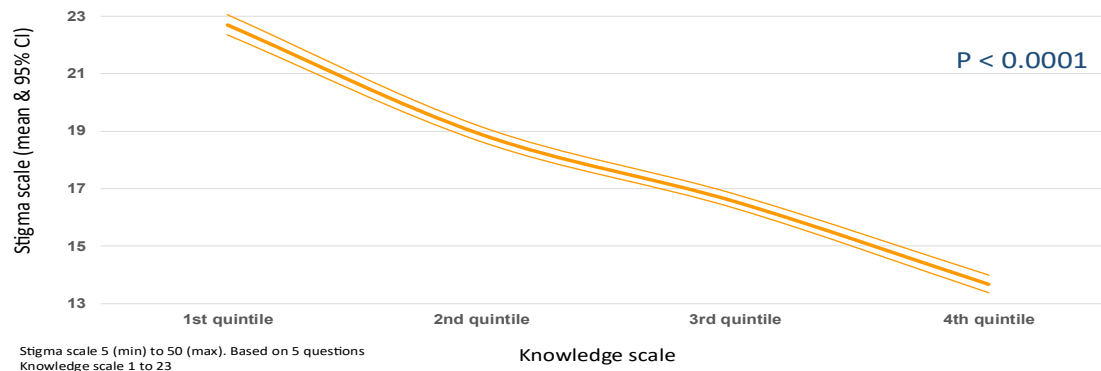
Results - Knowledge and Stigma



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The two indices are inversely proportional at baseline

Cumulative stigma index



Inverse correlation between knowledge and stigma ($P < 0.0001$)

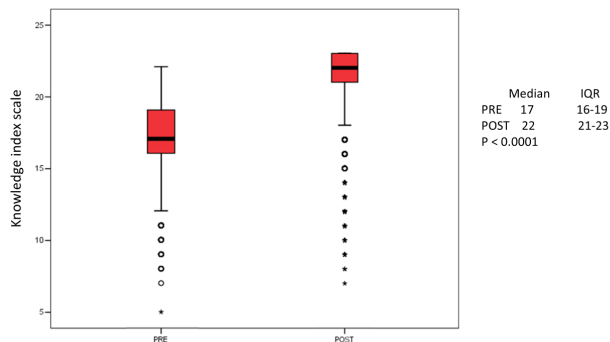
Results - Intervention Effectiveness



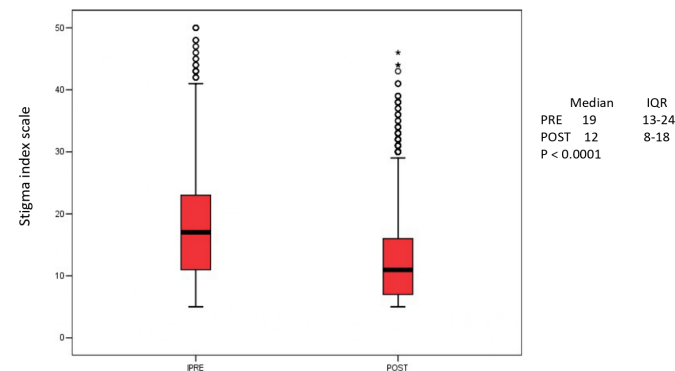
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Both indices improve in post-intervention questionnaires

Effect of intervention on knowledge



Effect of intervention on stigma



Index	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention	Change
Knowledge (1-23)	16,5	22	+4,5
Stigma (5-50)	19	12	-7

Conclusions



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- Younger generations hear less and less about HIV
- The decline in knowledge is concerning both for the ability to protect oneself and for stigma and prejudice (the two indices are inversely proportional)
- Programs that promote broader reflection on sexual health and delve into STI prevention in schools are effective in increasing knowledge and reducing stigma

Sex education in schools is an opportunity that should not be overlooked