

SHORT COMMUNICATION

## Stigma, awareness and education

### SC 53 From information to test: the experience with high school students

#### Authors

C. Pellegris<sup>1</sup>, D. Meli<sup>1</sup>, P. Meli<sup>1</sup>, I. Mercurio<sup>1</sup>, E. Zanetti<sup>1</sup>, F. Maggiolo<sup>2</sup>, A. Cambareri<sup>3</sup>, S. Malvestiti<sup>4</sup>, S. Zuppardo<sup>5</sup>, F. Tognoli<sup>6</sup>, I. Fontana<sup>7</sup>

#### Affiliation

<sup>1</sup>Cooperativa Don Giuseppe Monticelli – Bergamo, Italy, <sup>2</sup>Bergamo Fast-Track City, Italy, <sup>3</sup>IISS Ettore Majorana - Seriate, Italy, <sup>4</sup>ISISS Valle Seriana - Gazzaniga, Italy, <sup>5</sup>IIS Caterina Caniana – Bergamo, Italy, <sup>6</sup>Liceo Don Milani – Romano di Lombardia, Italy, <sup>7</sup>Ufficio Scolastico Territoriale di Bergamo, Italy

#### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Since October 2019, as part of the initiatives of the Bergamo Fast-Track City network, the Don G. Monticelli Cooperative has been implementing the #cHIVuoleconoscere project within the secondary schools of the province. Up to now, in its fourth edition, we have met 9460 students. Beside training on HIV and sexually transmitted infections, students are involved in competitions to create useful communication material and/or awareness events. The impact of the project is measured through the analysis of the surveys carried out with students before and after the course.(Table A)

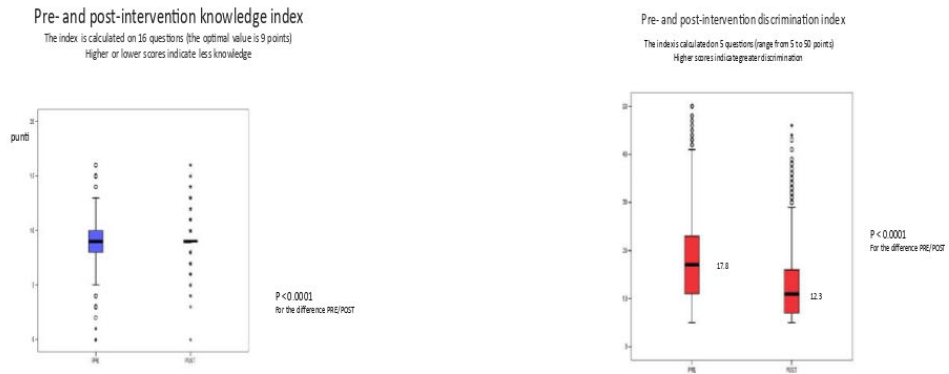
**Material and Methods:** After a short experimentation in two institutes during the school year 21/22, in 2023 Prevention Days were organized in 6 institutes during which students had the opportunity to take rapid, anonymous and free tests for HIV, HCV and syphilis. Through a link, students and school staff could book their test. The proposal was made only to students over 18 years, given the legal limits still in force in Italy.

**Results:** During the 7 days of screening, 350 people underwent the test, 89% were students and the remaining 11% were adult school staff members (teachers, educators, ATA and secretarial staff) (Table B); 48% were females, 52% males and 1 transgender. This was the first test for 93% of students and for 50% of adults (Table C) In the schools that allowed the organization of the day during school hours, the turnout was very high and it was not always possible to satisfy all the students' requests, sending them back to the City Checkpoint. Taking into consideration only the 3 institutions where we went during school hours, they counted for 1000 adult students, 246 were tested with a participation rate of 24.6% (one out of four students). The participation of teachers and auxiliary staff was also significant, and had a specific educational meaning. We found only one reactivity to HCV, who accessed the Papa Giovanni XXIII hospital for confirmation and care. (Table D)

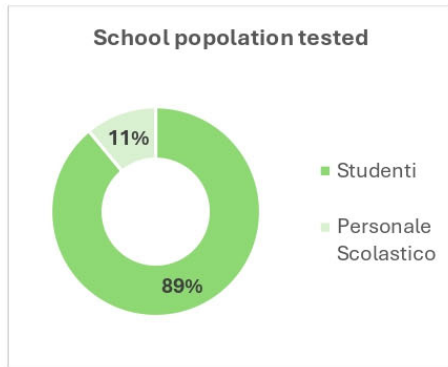
**Conclusion:** The students, trained and stimulated, respond enthusiastically to the proposal to test themselves by putting themselves on the line and moving from the cognitive level of the training phase to the level of action. The value of this kind of events in schools lies not so much in the possibility of finding any reactivity, but in the powerful symbolic and educational value about sexual health. Undergoing the

test for the first time at school normalizes the issue of sexual health screening which must become a routine, good practice: a young person who is tested at his/her sexual debut is more likely to become an adult who will take care of his sexual health throughout his life.

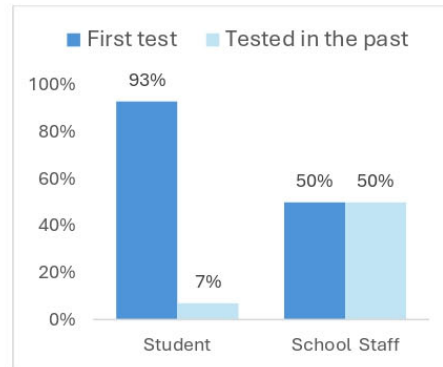
**Table A**



**Table B**



**Table C**



**Table D**

