



Socio-demographical and behavioural characteristics of Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) attending a Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) Centre in Brussels: Evolution over a five-year period (2008-2012).

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Introduction : In the past decade, Belgium has experienced one of the highest rate of new HIV diagnoses in Western Europe with a continuous increase of MSM among new cases (from 23,5% in 2002 to 44,2% in 2012).

Objectives : Analyse the evolution of : HIV/STD prevalence, socio-epidemiological and behavioural characteristics of MSM attending a VCT centre that offers anonymous/free testing and non-anonymous/charged testing between 2008 and 2012.

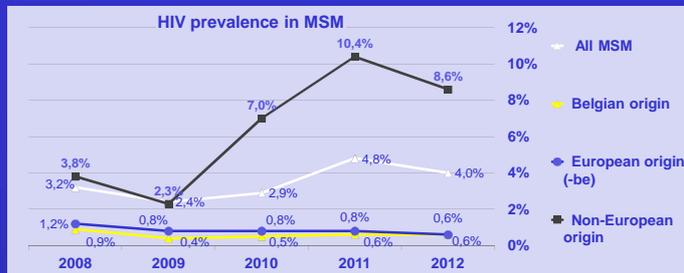
Methods : Calculation of prevalence and analysis with SAS 9.2 and Epi Info7 based on data collected through home made venue-based questionnaire completed by each patient attending the VCT centre. MSM were selected based on the question: " To date, have you ever had sex with man and/or women". Those who answered "men" or "men and women" were thereby classified as MSM. Stable variables will be presented as means, any significant evolution will be specified.

Results

Between 2008 and 2012,
14.652 persons were tested and completed a questionnaire.
 Among them **3326 were MSM**, representing
 23% of all patients tested and 34,5% of all men (stable over the years).
105 were diagnosed HIV+ (65% with a non-Belgian origin)

Socio-demographical characteristics

- 32% were bisexuals, 68% homosexuals,
 - Median age was 30, 75% in age group 20-39 years (min 14,max 80),
 - 68% had a higher education, 4% a low education,
 - 37% were unemployed of whom 59% are students and 8% undocumented
- From 2008 to 2012, we noticed an increase of :
- MSM with no health insurance from 7% to 12%,
 - MSM living outside the Brussels area from 19% to 24%.



Stable STI prevalence : 8% Syphilis, 4,8% Chlamydia, 2,8% Gonorrhoea, 0,8% Hepatitis C.

Behavioural characteristics

- 38% reported unprotected sexual penetration in the last 3 months,
 - 21% always had safe sexual penetrations,
 - 34% already had an STD in their life time.
- In the last 12 months before testing :
- 35% had concurrent sexual partners,
 - 32% had more than 10 partners and 15% more than 20,
 - 3% described consistent use of condom for oral sex and 33% for penetrations.
 - 3,5% practiced transactional sex and 8% are clients of prostitutes
 - less than 1% used IV drugs

MSM having never been tested before (15%) : median age and proportion of Belgians decreased respectively from 40 to 25 years and from 61% to 46%.

From 2008 to 2012 :

- MSM who never used a condom for oral sex decreased from 75% to 66%,
- Main reported reasons for not using condoms are : " I trust my partner " (60%) and " I'm in a steady relationship " (57%) and " It reduces sensations" (37%).

From 2011 to 2012, we noted an increase in all reported daylife consumptions :

Alcohol from 68 to 72% Cannabis from 22 to 29% Cocaine from 12 to 15%
 Ecstasy from 8% to 12% MSM using more than 2 illegal drugs from 12% to 16%.

Increase from 24% to 69% of MSM

who described unprotected sex because of alcohol and/or drug consumption in the last 12 months before testing.

Wherever MSM met their sexual partners, the proportion of those who always used condoms decreased in sexclubs from 37% to 28%, bars (38% to 29%), public places like parks and car parks (31% to 26%) and on the internet (37% to 35%).

Evolution of reported origin of MSM tested



Other findings

- 61% had a GP. Among them 66% never mentioned their sexual orientation.
- 16% chose our VCT because they didn't want to be tested by their GP.
- 66% were aware of post exposure prophylaxis,

Reasons for testing

- 43% because of unprotected sexual intercourse (2008-2010),
- 43% because of unprotected oral sex (2011-2012).
- 4,5% had sex with a HIV positive partner (steady or occasional)

Conclusion

Over the last 5 years, MSM HIV prevalence slightly increased to reach 4%. Most of the socio-demographical and behavioural characteristics remained stable. We noticed an increase of non-Belgians and social vulnerability, along with an increase of unprotected sex because of substance use, scarce use of condoms in all sexual practices and missed opportunities to disclose sexual orientation to their GP.