

Evolution of the knowledge in HIV transmission from 1997 to 2008 among the young people aged 15-24 yrs: data from the Belgian Health Interview Survey

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INTRODUCTION

An increase in the number of new HIV diagnoses among Belgians was observed in the last years. The evolution of knowledge on HIV transmission over the same period could bring information to help understanding that trend. Knowledge of ways of transmission and protection against HIV is an important tool for prevention.

OBJECTIVES

To assess the evolution of the knowledge in HIV transmission among those aged 15-24 years at the national and the regional levels over an 11-years period.

METHODS

The Belgian Health Interview Survey (HIS) is a nationally representative cross-sectional survey that collects information on a series of health-related subjects. Four indicators on knowledge about HIV were extracted from the HIS 1997 (N=1090), 2004 (N=1030) and 2008 (N=910) to explore the trends among the population aged 15-24 years.

RESULTS

In 2008, only half of the young people knew that choosing healthy looking partners did not protect against HIV (figure 1). The proportion giving the correct answer has strongly decreased since 1997. The level of knowledge for this indicator is particularly low among young men (43.9% in men; 58.5% in women in 2008), and in the Brussels and Flemish regions (respectively 35.3% and 41.1% in young men in 2008 compared with 52.8% in the Walloon region (figure 2)).

Fig.1: Percentage of the population 15-24 yrs knowing that choosing partners looking healthy does not protect against HIV by region and year

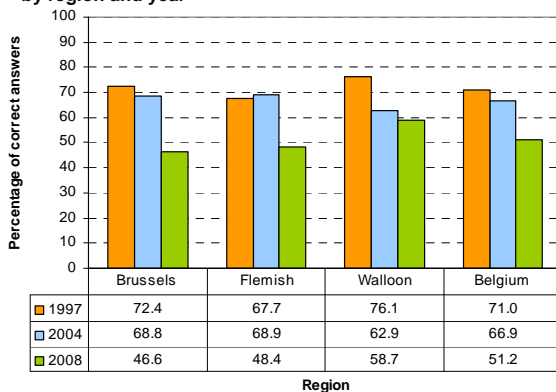
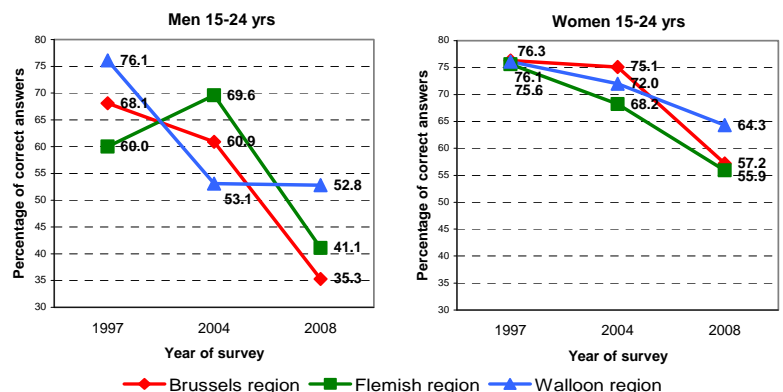


Fig.2: Percentage of men and women 15-24 yrs knowing that choosing partners looking healthy does not protect against HIV by region, year and sex



Around 60% of the young people surveyed in 2008 knew that HIV was not transmitted by giving blood in Belgium (figure 3). More than 80% knew that HIV was not transmitted by kissing someone on the mouth (figure 4); 64% knew that withdrawal before ejaculation did not protect against HIV (figure 5). For the 2 last questions knowledge was slightly lower in the Brussels region than in the 2 other regions. No major difference between men and women was seen for these 3 questions. The proportion of correct answers did not change noticeably from 1997.

Fig.3: Percentage of the population 15-24 yrs knowing that HIV is not transmitted by giving blood in Belgium by region and year

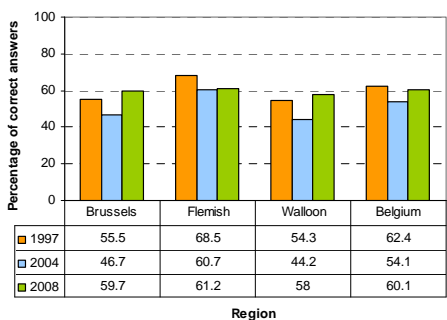


Fig.4: Percentage of the population 15-24 yrs knowing that HIV is not transmitted by kissing someone on the mouth by region and year

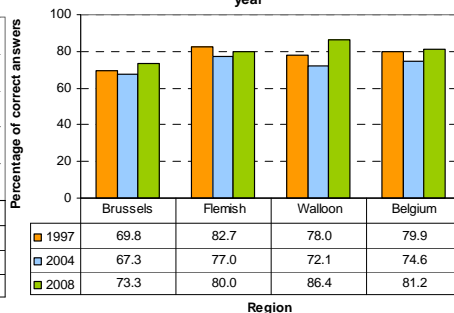
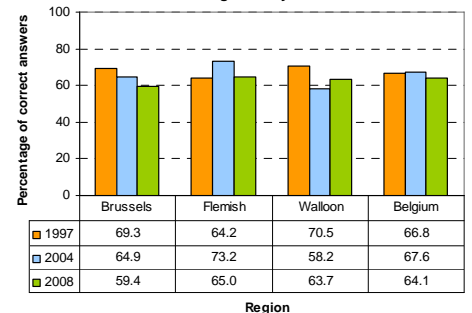


Fig.5: Percentage of the population 15-24 yrs knowing that withdrawal before ejaculation does not protect against HIV by region and year



CONCLUSION

Knowledge on HIV transmission, estimated by these questions, is low among young people in Belgium. For the question on non protection by choosing healthy looking partners, the knowledge has diminished since 1997, especially among young men. Prevention in this age group which is at the beginning of his sexual life and reachable through school prevention programmes should be reinforced. The next HIS survey will be performed in 2013.