

HIV PREVALENCE AND ASSOCIATED RISK FACTORS AMONG MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN (MSM) IN GREECE: A community-based approach

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Background

In the EU/EEA countries, HIV prevalence among Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) still remains high with 40% of new diagnoses in 2016 being ascribed to this group¹. Likewise, the epidemic in Greece is also concentrated in the MSM community² ever since the epidemiological surveillance began by the Hellenic Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (HCDCP) in 1985, apart from an outbreak which was recorded in 2012 in the people who inject drugs (PWID) community and it was successfully dealt with the pioneering “Aristotle” “seek-test-treat-retain” intervention project in Athens³. Nevertheless, little is known about the factors potentially associated with HIV seroconversion in MSM in Greece, something that this study attempts to shed light into.

Method

The sample consisted of 9,970 MSM who were tested through rapid testing assay (INSTI™ HIV 1/2, BioLytical Lab.) in the Athens and Thessaloniki “Checkpoint” and during various outreach testing and awareness-raising interventions within 2016 - 2017. The Ath and Thess “Checkpoint” prevention and testing project is a joint partnership between the Greek Association PLWHA “Positive Voice” and AHF Europe. During the testing session the beneficiaries received general sexual health and safer sex counseling services and were also administered through a structured interview, a questionnaire dealing with demographic, testing history, behavioral and sexual health data. These questionnaires were the source of the current research data. Absolute and relevant frequencies were estimated. Factors significantly correlated with HIV infection were estimated through chi-square tests with Monte Carlo correction.

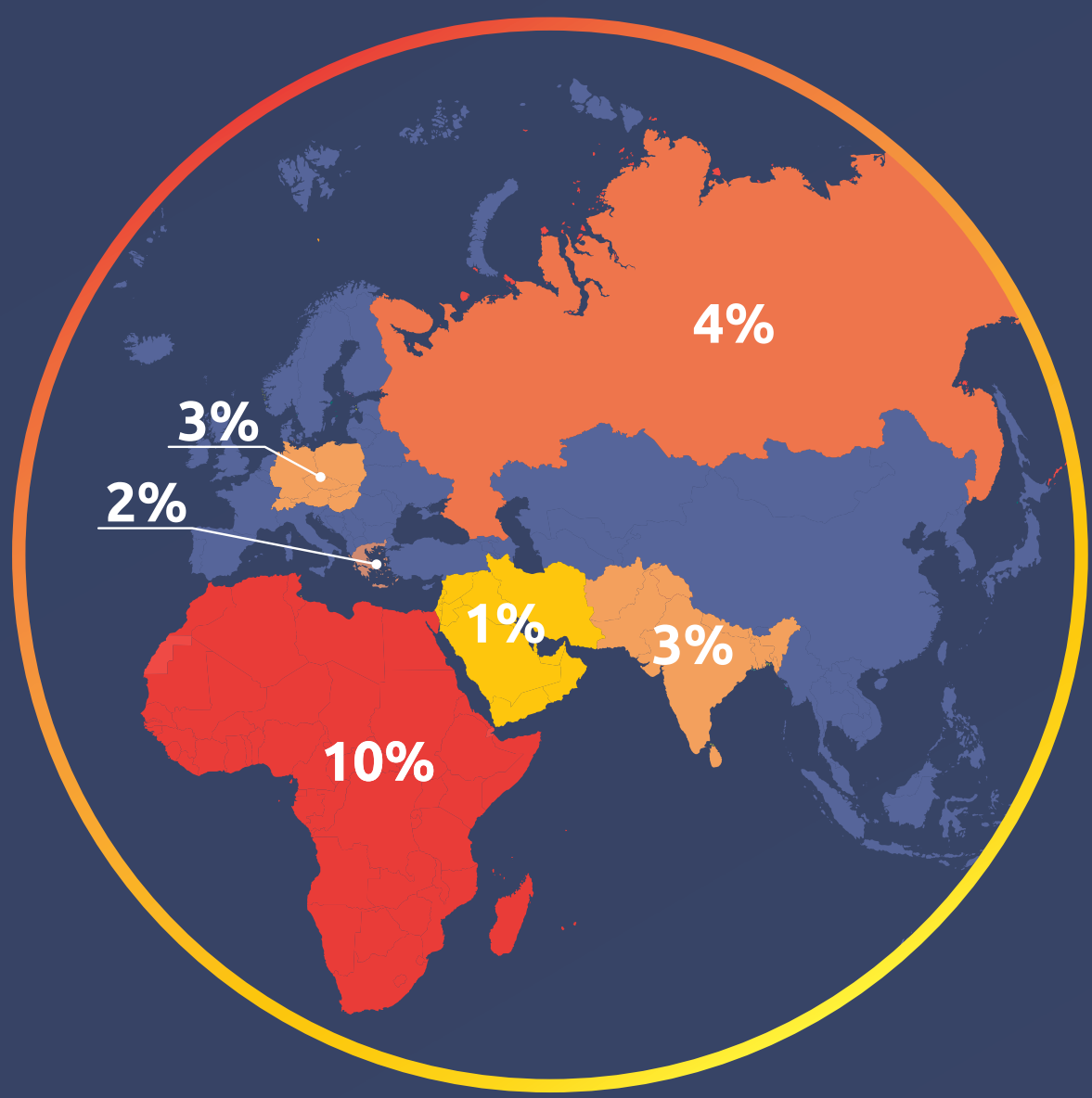
Results

Frequencies were estimated for education, employment, HBV vaccination, condom use in the last sexual intercourse of the beneficiary, lack of condom use within the last year, number of sexual partners within the last semester, age, sex work, migrant status, intravenous drug use, participation in sex parties and alcohol/other psychoactive substance use during sex. HIV infection was detected in 264 MSM (2.7%) and it was significantly correlated with nationality ($\chi^2=16.5$, p-value < 0.02), employment ($\chi^2=18.1$, p-value < 0.002), condom use during last sexual intercourse ($\chi^2=4.6$, p-value = 0.04), age ($\chi^2=30.6$, p-value < 0.001), intravenous drug use ($\chi^2=5.9$, p-value < 0.01) and alcohol and other psychoactive substance use during sex ($\chi^2=7.3$, p-value = 0.007).

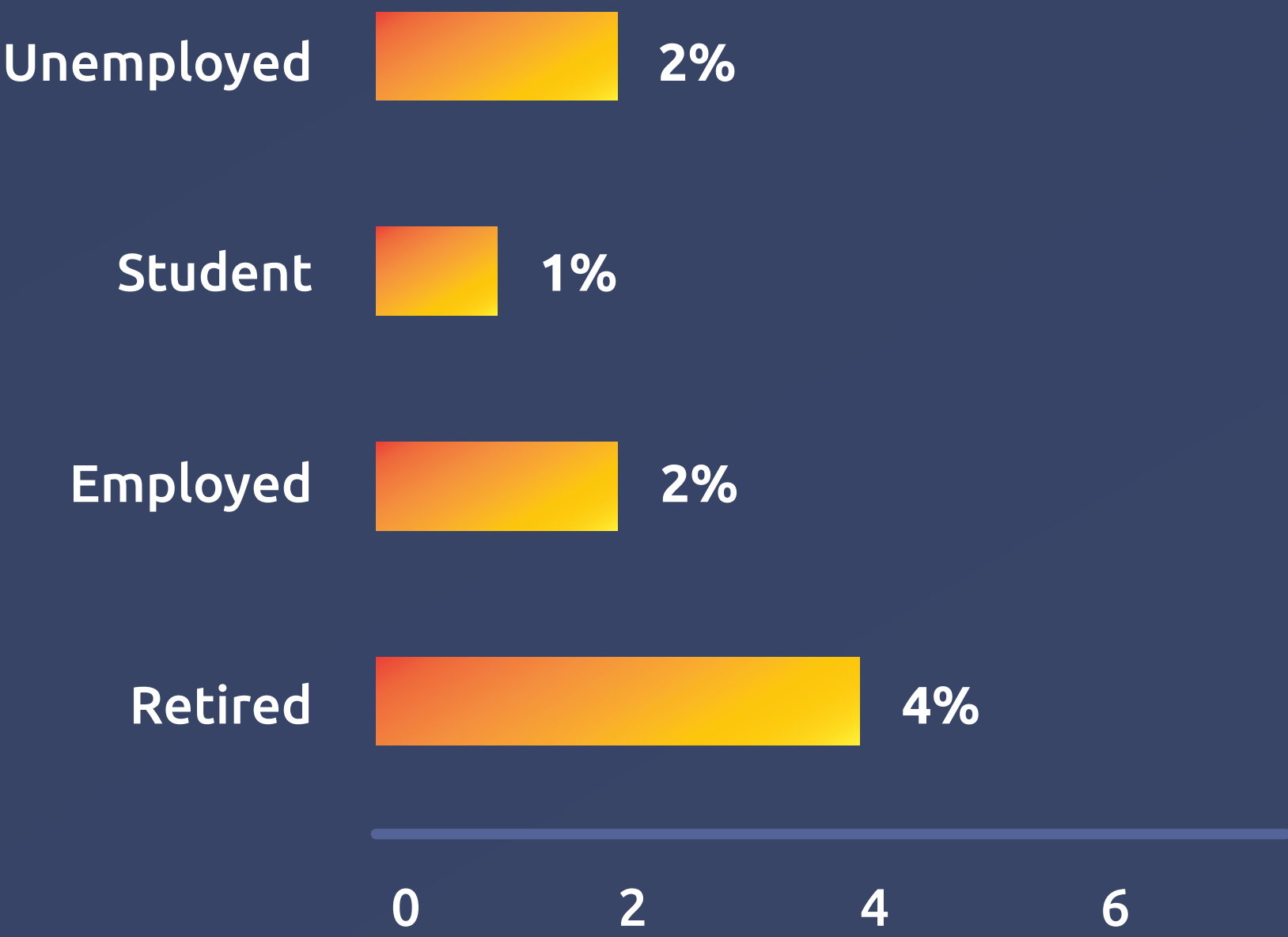
Conclusions

Community-based, cost-effective, easily accessible and low threshold counseling and testing programmes achieve high uptake of testing and appear to be an effective approach to encourage large numbers of people and mainly high risk populations (e.g., MSM, PWID) to know their HIV status. In addition, preventive and healthcare strategies that are culturally adapted to migrants are required and last but not least harm reduction services are urgently needed to prevent the HIV infection among MSM.

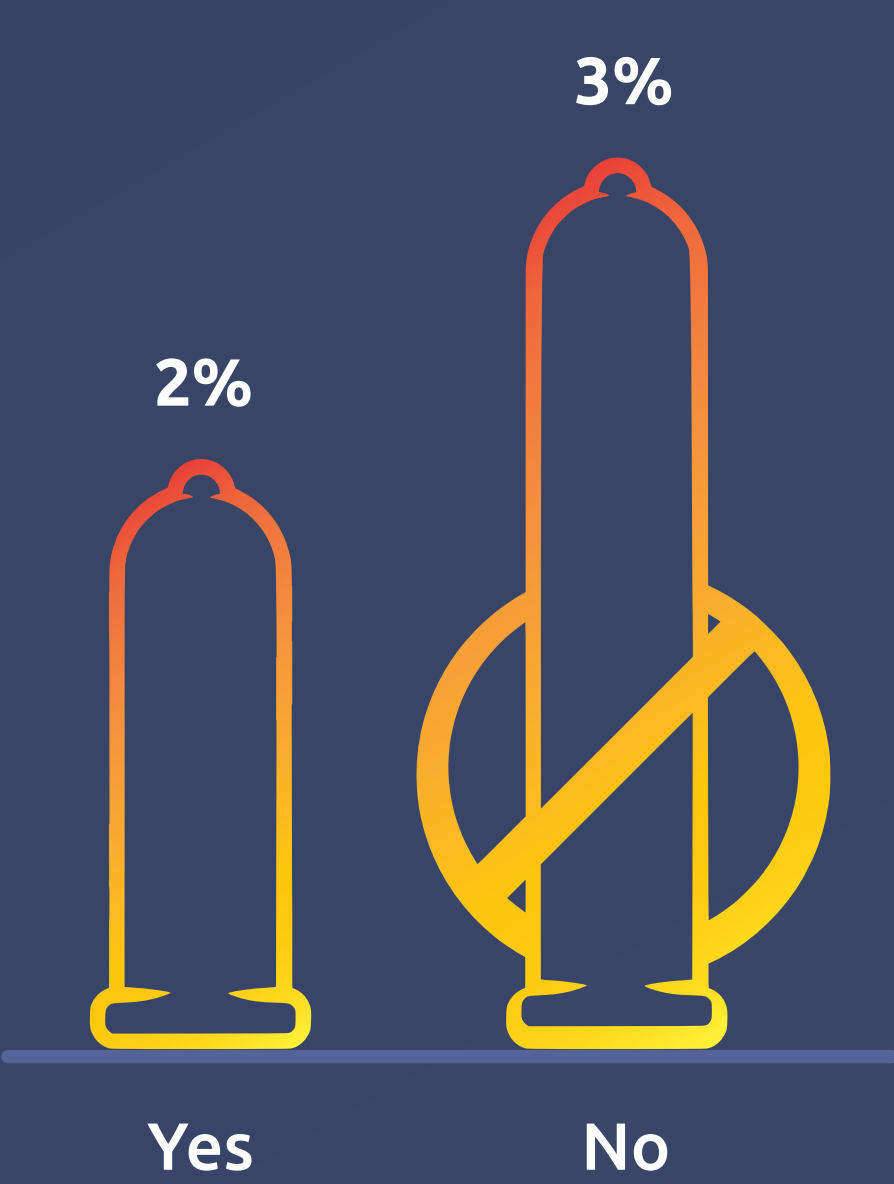
Nationality



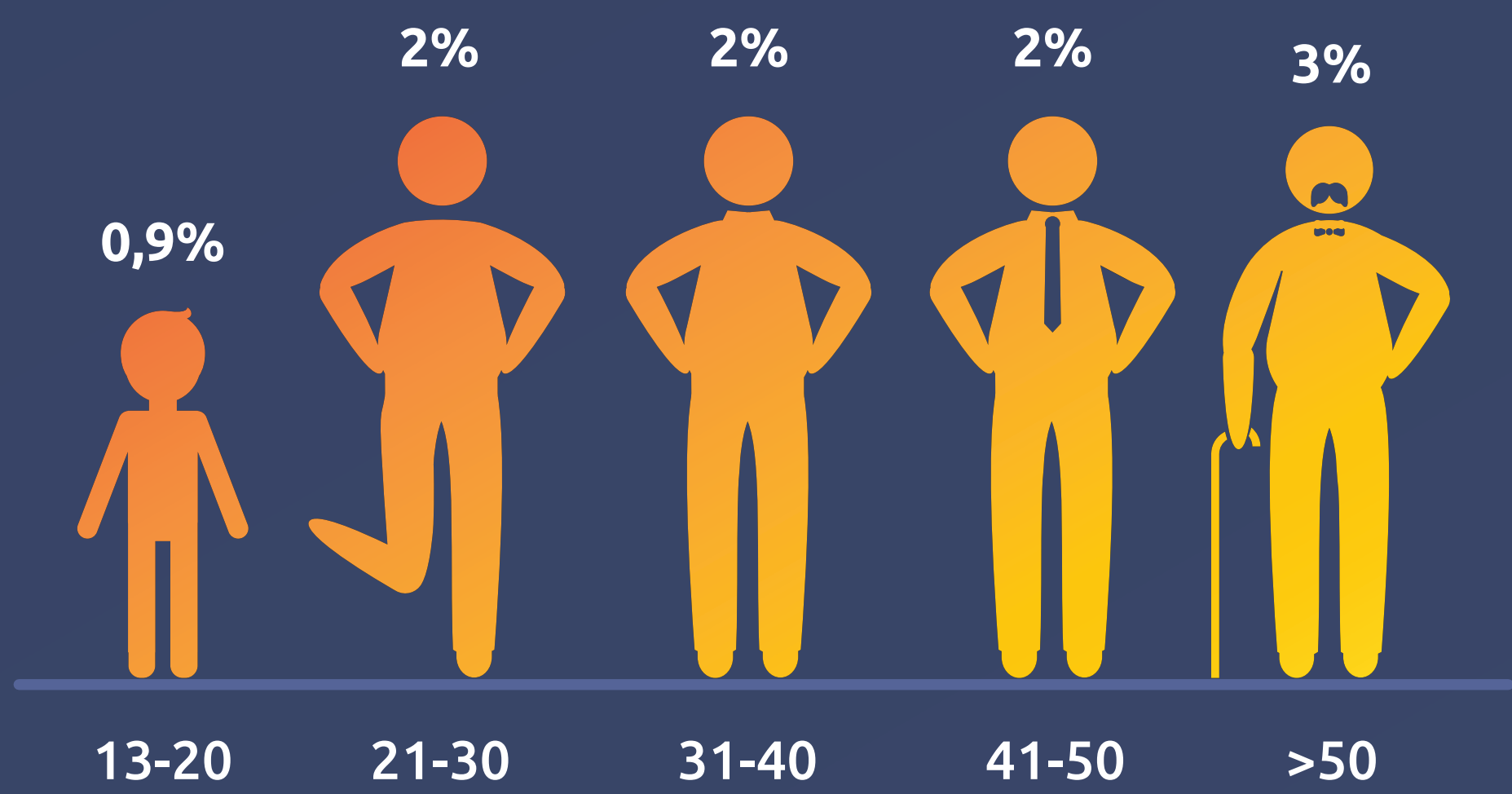
Employment



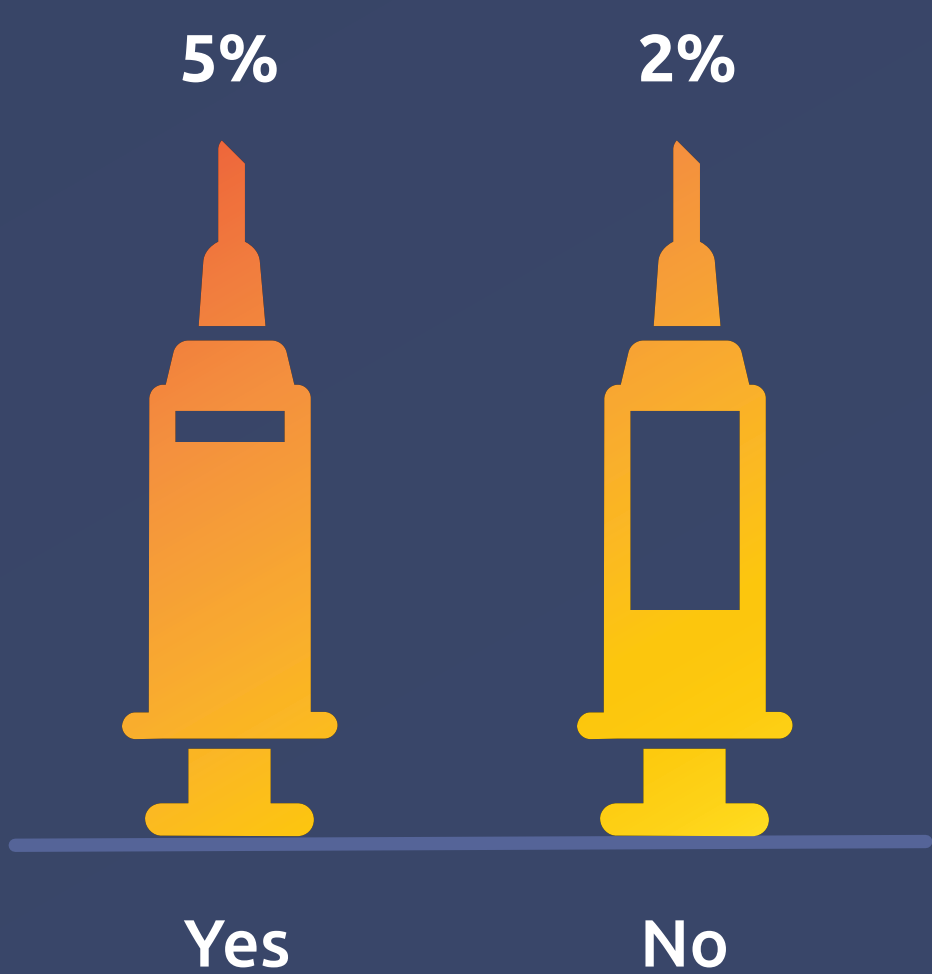
Condom use last sexual intercourse



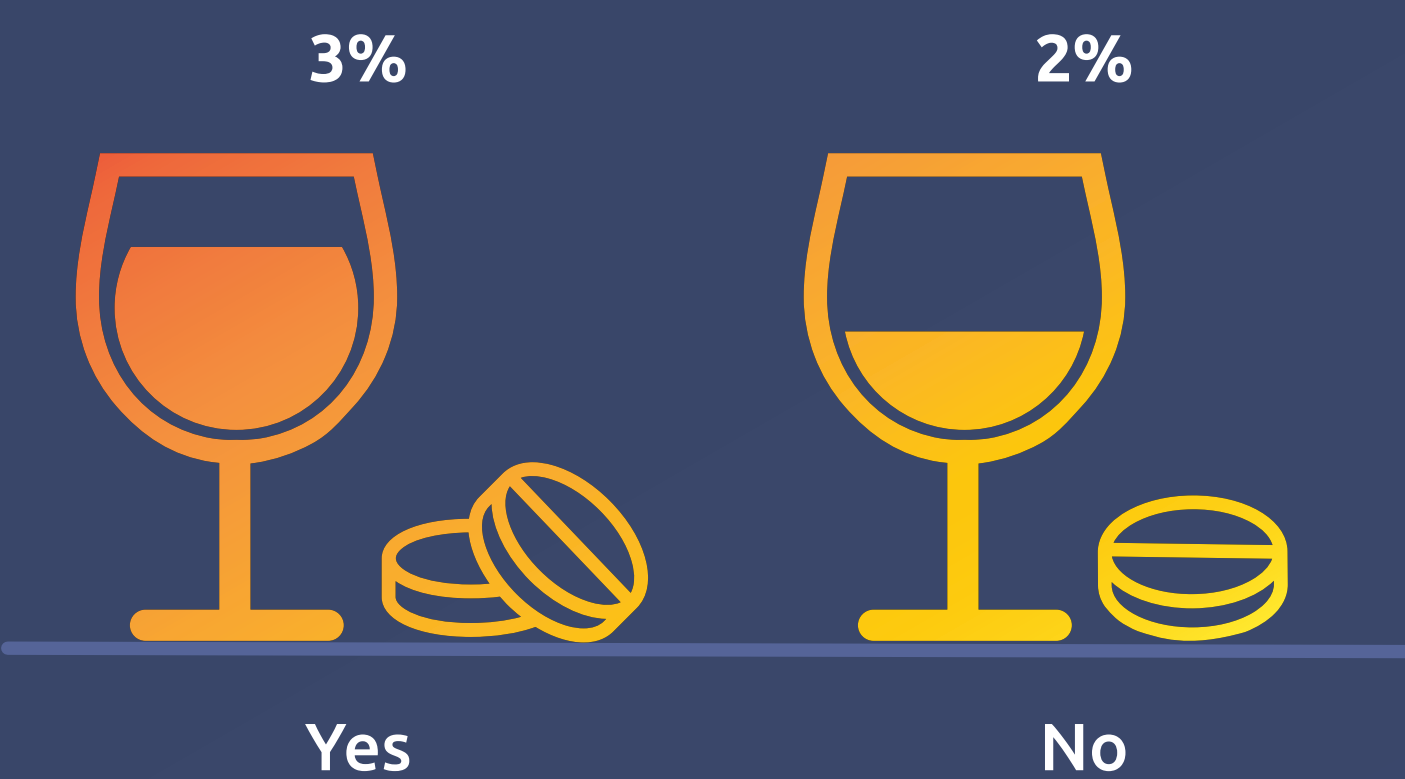
Age



Intavenous Drug User



Alcohol and other psychoactive substance use during sex



References

1. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO Regional Office for Europe. HIV/AIDS Surveillance in Europe 2017 – 2016 Data. Stockholm: ECDC; 2017.
2. HIV/AIDS Surveillance in Greece, Vol. no 32, December 2017. Annual edition of the Hellenic Center of Disease Control & Prevention (HCDCP).
3. Syypsa, V. et al. Rapid decline in HIV incidence among persons who inject drugs during a fast-track combination prevention program after an HIV outbreak in Athens. Journal of Infectious Diseases. (2017), May 15; 215 (10): 1496-1505.