

**AIDS: GAYS. TWO OUT OF THREE  
TAKE THE TEST, BUT GAYS  
ACCOUNT FOR 20% OF NEW CASES**

**ARCIGAY SAYS THAT THE  
GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO  
CANCEL THE HOMOSEXUAL-  
TARGETED ANTI-AIDS  
CAMPAIGN IS VERY SERIOUS**

Here are the new data on the spread of AIDS among homosexual people in Italy and the first results of the most extensive scientific survey ever carried out on the homo-bisexual population of the country. The health and the sexuality of 10,000 people were studied. The complete results will be presented during a conference in Florence on December 16. Arcigay committees organized initiatives in several cities for World AIDS Day.

Two gays out of three have taken the HIV test (HIV is the virus responsible for AIDS), but one out of three thinks it is difficult to find clear information about the kind of sexual intercourse that carries a risk of infection risk, and the number of gays continues to increase among the new cases of AIDS. This is what emerges from the most extensive statistical survey ever carried out in Italy on the homosexual and bisexual population and from the last official data of the Higher Health Institute (Istituto Superiore di Sanità, ISS) on the spread of AIDS in the country. According to the first results of the survey, which has been renamed "Modi-di" and has been carried out by Arcigay with the approval of the Higher Health Institute, 68% of gays and 45% of lesbians have taken the HIV test at least once; 4.2% of the former and 0.5% of the latter are HIV positive. Yet two women out of three and one man out of three think that it is quite or very difficult to find clear information about risky sexual behaviours between people of the same sex. Moreover, according to the last report issued by the ISS, the percentage of gays among the new cases of AIDS keeps increasing and in the two-year period 2004-2005 it has come close to 20%, versus 15% in 1996-97.

Sergio Lo Giudice, national president of Arcigay, commented, "If it's true that the number of new people suffering from AIDS (but not that of newly infected people) is constantly decreasing, especially thanks to new therapies, it is also true that this situation is slower for gays than for the rest of the population. In such a situation a specific responsibility of the Berlusconi

government can be recognized, because, for the first time since the appearance of the epidemic, it decided to cancel the awareness campaign specifically targeting homosexuals".

The data of the Arcigay survey – the first to consider women as well – derive from the first analyses, carried out on a selected sample of 6774 individuals (4690 males and 2084 females) who define themselves as gays or lesbians or who have recently had sexual intercourse with people of their same sex. The complete results of "Modi-di", including also those about love, life style and social relationships, will be published on the website [www.modidi.net](http://www.modidi.net) and will be presented on December 16, during a conference in Florence, at the Conference Palace, 1 Adua Square.

### **Men**

As for males, the study dwells particularly on AIDS and risky sexual behaviour. Though a high percentage of gays have taken the HIV test at least once in their lifetime, the percentage varies between 45.4% for people under 25 years of age and 83.2% for people over 40. Another interesting figure is that one interviewee out of four is sure or thinks that it is probable that he hasn't been infected, despite the fact that he has never taken the test. If we consider how long ago the last HIV test was taken, we find out that 44.3% took it in the last 12 months, 19% between 1 and 5 years and 5% more than 5 years ago. Among HIV positive men, a substantial majority of 57% undergo drug treatment.

Analysing the frequency of sexual intercourse carrying the risk of infection, we can see that all over Italy this involves 23% of the sample and this rate does not vary significantly by geographical area or age group. In fact, adults tend to run risks in the same proportion as the very young. A slight difference can be found between those who lives as couples and those who are single. Among the former 20.2% have unprotected sex, as opposed to 25.2% of the latter. The use of the Internet for sexual encounters, among men, seems also to be related to a lowering of the guard towards the risk of infection: 29.3% of those who have recently met partners through the Internet has had unprotected sex versus 16.1% of those who have not used the web.

As for sexually transmitted diseases (STD) this is the picture that emerges from the survey. While the majority of the male sample declared that they haven't been affected by them during the past 5 years (56.9%), 3.9% said that they have suffered from hepatitis B, 3.6% from hepatitis A, 2.3% from hepatitis C, 4.2%

from syphilis, 5.3% from gonorrhoea, 8.3% from condylomata (venereal warts). The spreading peak is in the age group between 31 and 40 years of age. The exception is represented by syphilis, which is more frequent among people over 40.

Raffaele Lelleri, sociologist and director of the research, commented, "We are often swamped with trash data, devoid of any scientific reliability. Instead 'Modi-di' is a goldmine of information that, if precisely analysed, will teach us a lot about aspects like sexuality, prevention and the spreading of diseases among the homosexual population. Obviously, despite the vastness of the sample, it is difficult to determine its representativeness, because we lack objective information about the universe set. Most of the interviewees are very young, so some of the indicators, such as those related to the sexual activity, are very high and cannot be compared, for example, with the corresponding data concerning young heterosexual males. Unfortunately, no similar survey has been carried out on the population in general".

### **Women**

As for the spread of STD among women, there are some differences in comparison with the male sample, and two out of three think that it is very difficult (45.6%) or quite difficult (32%) to find information about risky sexual behaviour. Like the male cohort, most women have not been affected by STD in the past 5 years, but in this case serious pathologies are much less widespread. In particular, only 1.5% of female interviewees suffered from hepatitis c, 1.4% from hepatitis A, 1.3% from hepatitis B and only 0.2% from syphilis. The number of mammographies or pap tests is even higher than in the ISTAT average for the country's total female population. This represents a countertendency in comparison to the surveys carried out in other countries. Pap tests are taken by 65.8% of the interviewees over the age of 25, while 64.8% of the interviewees over 40 have a mammogram.

### **Rapport with doctors and the health system**

One of the other aspects considered in the survey is the rapport with the family doctor and health services. A large majority of gays (78%) and an even higher number of lesbians (87%) avoid talking to their doctor about their sexual orientation. In 14.5% of the cases people, both men and women, say that, after discussing it, their relationship with their doctor improved. It deteriorated in 4.5% of the cases and did not change in 81% of the cases. Women tend to speak

more freely with gynaecologists, who know about the sexual orientation of their patients in 29.7% of the cases. But, more in general, what are the expectations towards health workers? Over a third of the total interviewees are afraid that they will receive worse treatment because of their sexual orientation (31% of males and 34.5% of females).

### **Characteristics of the sample**

The sample is composed of 6774 people (4690 males, 2084 females). Italian citizens represent the overwhelming majority (97.7%); 31.6% live in the northeast, 29.2% in the northwest, 22.3% in the centre, and 17% in the south and the islands. The distribution by age favours the younger generation. Interviewees under 40 represent 84.9% of the total. In particular, those under 25 account for 32.7%, those between 26 and 30 represents 20.9%, between 31 and 40 years 31.3%, 12.2% are between 41 and 50, and 2.8% are over 50. The percentage of questionnaires filled in online is 78.6%, as opposed to 21.4% on paper. The collection of data was coordinated by a scientific team of sociologists, psychologists and statisticians, and was carried out with the help of dozens of volunteers throughout the country.

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