

Reproductive health among Italian adolescents: knowledge, attitude practice and behaviour

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Objectives: To estimate prevalence of knowledge, attitude, behaviour and practice on reproductive health matters among Italian adolescents.

Design and methods: In 1998 a cross sectional survey has been conducted interviewing probabilistic samples of students attending the first two classes of all high schools in 2,4 Local Health Units of 11 Italian regions. An anonymous questionnaire has been administered by trained interviewers. Questionnaire check and coding process as well as data analysis were performed in the Epidemiological Unit of the National Health Institute Rome Italy.

Results: Nobody refused the interview and 13% (952 students out of 7484) were absent at the time of interview. 75% of the sample was younger than 16 years and the frequency distribution by type of attended school and by geographical area resulted similar to official national data. More than 95% ask for sexual education at school, 23% from age 6 and 58% from age 11. More than 90% consider sexual education useful to increase consciousness and self-esteem. Thirty-six percent have been involved in sexual education activities at school. More than 80% refer they are living the puberal changes with naturalness, curiosity and enthusiasm. Communication among peers is the most frequent (67%) channel for information and advice. Only 33% know the fertile period of menstrual cycle. About 80% intend to use a contraceptive in case of sexual intercourse. Eighteen percent of interviewed have had sexual intercourses, 11% of them without using a contraceptive method. Even though 98% consider AIDS a sexually transmitted disease (STD), only 58% know that also hepatitis is a STD. About 80% think that condom is useful in preventing STDs.

Conclusions: The results of this investigation show healthy adolescents, ready to be involved in empowerment processes, with a positive attitude towards prevention of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.