

## Health education: HIV at school

Cisnara Pires Amaral<sup>1</sup>, Eduarda Pires Amaral<sup>2</sup>, Luana Casarotto de Borba<sup>3</sup>.

### ABSTRACT

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was once a matter of great concern, but nowadays it is not widely covered in the media. The current news puts the disease in the spotlight, especially in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (RS), as noted by the “Correio do povo” website, which carries the article entitled “RS lives HIV epidemic, with prevalence in the Metropolitan Region”. This study points out that, in 2021, the AIDS detection rate in Brazil was 16.5%, while in RS it was 24.3.

**Keywords:** HIV, Sex education, Preservation.

### INTRODUCTION

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was once a matter of great concern, but nowadays it is not widely covered in the media. The current news puts the disease in the spotlight, especially in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (RS), as noted by the “Correio do povo” website, which carries the article entitled “RS lives HIV epidemic, with prevalence in the Metropolitan Region”. This study points out that, in 2021, the AIDS detection rate in Brazil was 16.5%, while in RS it was 24.3% (CORREIO DO POVO, 2021).

The study also states that the country's HIV prevalence rate as a whole is around 0.4%, while in RS this figure is 1% or more. Today the state is in third place in the ranking of infected people, with more than 100,000 individuals, second only to Rio de Janeiro, with 140,000 infected individuals, and São Paulo, which leads the ranking, with more than 310,000 individuals with the disease, according to UNAIDS reports (2021).

The Epidemiological Bulletin (B.E) for Porto Alegre, published in 2022, notes that in 2020 there was a prevalence of cases among young people aged 12 to 17, totaling 455 cases, while in 2021 this number dropped to 441 cases. It can also be seen that the majority of cases occur among young adults, 35.2% of whom are between the ages of 20 and 29 (PORTO ALEGRE

2022). It is therefore essential to discuss this epidemic with young people, looking for ways to help them make choices, especially during adolescence.

Adolescence is a period marked by many discoveries and experiences, including the first sexual intercourse, which often occurs without the use of condoms, which predisposes to the acquisition of

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<sup>1</sup> Universidade Regional Integrada do Alto Uruguai e das Missões - URI – RS

<sup>2</sup> Universidade Federal do Rio Grande - FURG – RS

<sup>3</sup> Universidade Regional Integrada do Alto Uruguai e das Missões – RS



sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. Although the number of cases of adolescents infected with HIV showed a subtle reduction between 2020 and 2021, the number remains worrying, so it is believed that this demand needs to be discussed (SILVA et al., 2022).

Thus, this study aims to promote health education, verifying adolescents' knowledge about HIV, exploring the importance of condom use; the risks of the disease and the relationship that the virus has with this stage of life. In addition, through a literature review, the aim is to find out the epidemiological rates of HIV related to adolescence, so that they can contribute to the discussion about this STI among the target population, as well as helping to promote health and develop criticality among young people.

## **OBJECTIVE**

Promoting health education, checking adolescents' knowledge of HIV, exploring the importance of using condoms, the risks of the disease and the relationship the virus has with this stage of life.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was based on the inclusion of students from the Medicine and Nursing courses as co-supervisors of a Scientific Exhibition at URI's Basic Education school. A narrative literature review (NLR) was carried out by searching for scientific articles in the Virtual Health Library in integrated mode, selecting scientific publications from the following databases: Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature (LILACS), Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE) and the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) virtual library.

The following descriptors were used to select the articles: "HIV in RS" and "HIV in adolescence". The inclusion criteria were free articles published between 2018 and 2023. The abstracts and objectives of the articles found in the initial search were read in order to select those that were in line with the objectives of this work.

The students were guided by their teacher and had help from the academics, which took place online via google meet and whatsapp. After the NLR, an online questionnaire was distributed on the adolescents' social networks to check the incidence of adolescents using condoms and to assess their knowledge of the incidence and spread of HIV.

The questionnaire accepted responses for five days. The data obtained was then interpreted, using bibliographical references for discussion. The activity was not referred to the Research Ethics Committee (CEP), as the school has the autonomy to carry out scientific activities with its students. Armed with information, the teenagers presented their work at the school's XXIV Scientific Exhibition. This article presents the data related to the research, which took place in conjunction with academics and primary school students.



## DEVELOPMENT

We began the discussion by highlighting the AIDS cases identified by the Notifiable Diseases Information System (SINAN), at national level in the period from 2019 to 2022, observed during the studies.

Chart 1 - AIDS cases notified on SINAN from 2019 to 2022.

Age group	No. of cases	Education							Sex	
		Illiterate	FI	FC	MI	MC	SI	SC	Male	Fem
10-14	84	3	26	6	2	3	0	0	33	51
15-19	1.292	4	162	99	295	347	79	9	934	358
Total	1.376	7	188	105	297	350	79	9	967	409

FI = Elementary School Incomplete; FC = Elementary School Complete; MI = High School Incomplete; MC = High School Complete; SI = Higher Education Incomplete; SC = Higher Education Complete  
Source: SINAN/ SISCEL/SICLOM

The table shows that between 2019 and 2022, 1,376 cases of AIDS were notified through SINAN among young people between the ages of 10 and 19. Most of the reported cases were concentrated among adolescents aged 15 to 19, totaling 1,292 infected individuals, of whom 72.29% were male and 27.70% female.

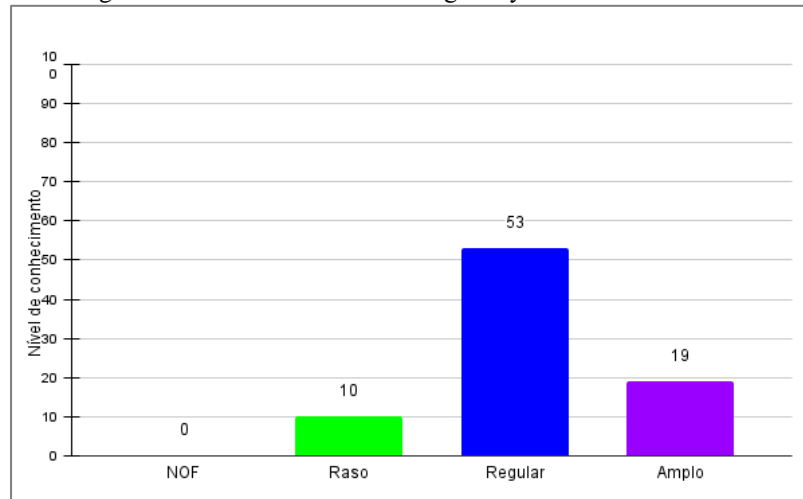
With regard to the schooling of the cases, 188 (13.66%) had incomplete primary education. 105 (7.63%) of the cases had incomplete primary education. In 297 (21.56%) of the notifications, the public had incomplete secondary education, while the majority, 350 (25.43%) had completed secondary education. There were also 79 (5.74%) incomplete university graduates and 0.65% complete university graduates.

This shows that young people at school, especially in secondary school, are more susceptible to contact with HIV and AIDS, considering that this is a phase in which social and biological transformations occur. Based on the data in the table, we can see the importance of investigating young people's knowledge of HIV, providing them with information so that they can have discernment, discussing scientific knowledge so that it can serve as a basis for choices; as well as providing dialogues and exchanges with health academics, instigating care, criticality and health education.

To this end, we decided to produce an online questionnaire, which received 82 responses.

Figure 1 shows the respondents' level of knowledge.

Figure 1 - “What level of knowledge do you have about HIV?”



NOF = Never Heard Of  
Source: Prepared by the authors.

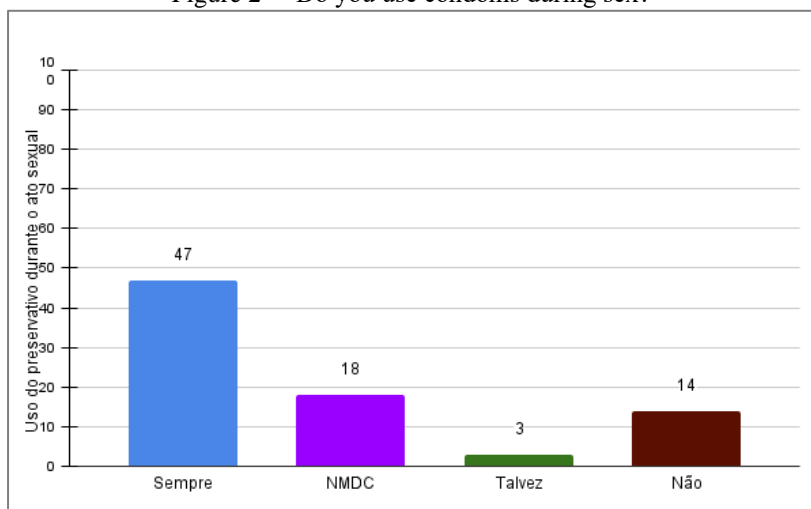
According to the graph presented, 53% of those interviewed had a fair knowledge of the subject. This shows that although the subject is covered in schools, there are still many taboos, shame about the subject, myths that need to be dispelled and, above all, a lack of knowledge. If everyone really knew about the subject, we wouldn't be experiencing an epidemic in relation to the disease and we wouldn't be the third state with the highest number of cases.

It is therefore necessary to discuss, reflect and disseminate knowledge on the subject. Some barriers we encounter in this matter are: internalized prejudices and discriminatory sexual attitudes (COSTENARO et al. 2020). Costenaro et al. (2020) also mention: “This lack of knowledge affects the conduct of good health care practices, leaving adolescents at the mercy of biological and psycho-emotional diseases due to ignorance, or even the acceptance of poorly elaborated concepts by friends or the media.”

“Discussions on sexuality and sex education with adolescents have been going on for decades, but they were not developed systematically. Initially, the topic was not approached with the importance it deserved, but because of the numerous problems that were emerging related to teenage pregnancy, drug use by adolescents, as well as the concern of parents and teachers about the increase in the number of Sexually Transmitted Infections and the emergence of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)” (COSTENARO, et al. 2020).

Figure 2 shows the use of condoms.

Figure 2 - “Do you use condoms during sex?”



NMDC = In Most Cases

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The graph shows that 47% of respondents use condoms, 18% use them most of the time, 3% might use them and 14% don't use them. It's important to note that if we add up the individuals who use condoms occasionally, who might use them and who don't use them, we get 35%, which is a worrying rate and could be a factor in the spread of the virus in society. It is believed that the spread of the virus is under control, that antiretroviral therapies do not have an impact on people's lives, and that we don't hear about it in the media. These factors end up damaging the information and causing sloppiness when it comes to taking care of sex.

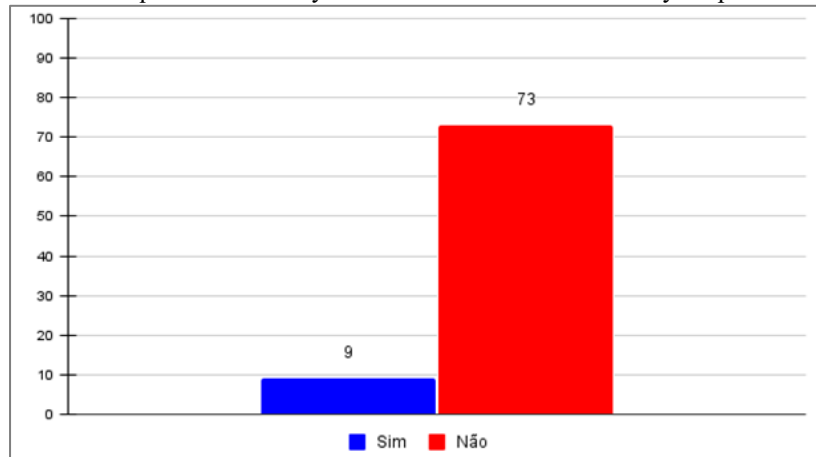
It should also be borne in mind that even though they are aware of HIV, 14% of those interviewed do not use condoms on all occasions, a fact that can be linked to factors such as: being embarrassed to ask to use them; not having a condom at the moment; pressure from the partner; ignorance on the part of the person; cultural and/or traditional practices and prostitution, among others (BOSSONARIO et al. 2022).

Vieira et al. (2021) showed a lack of knowledge among young people about the use of condoms and HIV. In contrast, even among those who have access to information, there was a low frequency of condom use, linked to low schooling, multiple sexual partners and misinformation.

Not using condoms is one of the main factors leading to contamination by various STIs, including HIV (MOREIRA, et al., 2021). Also, according to the UFRGS news portal in its article “HIV epidemic advances in Rio Grande do Sul”, after an analysis of the 2022 Epidemiological Bulletin, it appears that Porto Alegre is the capital with the highest rate of detection of vertical transmission of the virus, 17.1 thousand cases per thousand live births, this rate is almost six times the national rate.

Figure 3 reports that the partner has ever felt embarrassed to ask to use a condom.

Figure 3 - Reference to the question: “Have you ever felt embarrassed to ask your partner to use a condom?”



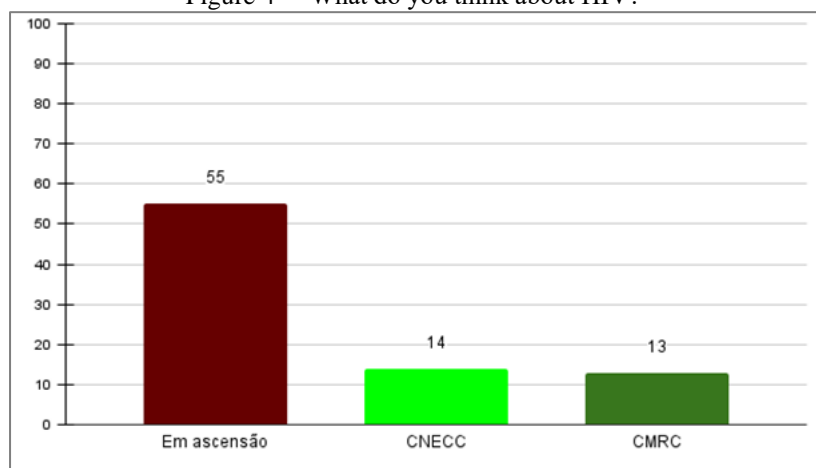
Source: Prepared by the authors.

This graph shows that 73% of participants are not embarrassed to ask their partner to use a condom, while 9% feel embarrassed to ask their partner to use one. The ease of having a partner and the superficial relationships that are formed make it easier to spread diseases, especially if young people are not aware of the minimum care they should take with their health. Although the survey shows that there is no embarrassment, it is still necessary to remember that young people are not always using condoms, according to figure 3. So we are left with a question: if there is no embarrassment, why don't many people use condoms?

According to Souza; Faria and Almeida (2022), in their survey of 171 adolescents, many said they didn't use condoms because it was uncomfortable, others said they didn't use them because they trusted their partner and some said they didn't use them because they didn't like them.

Figure 4 shows young people's thoughts on HIV.

Figure 4 - “What do you think about HIV?”



CNECC = Controlled, there are no campaigns to combat it. CMRC = Controlled, Media Reinforces Cures.

Source: Prepared by the authors.



It can be seen that 55% of young people know that the disease is on the rise, 14% think that it is under control, because there are no obvious campaigns to combat STIs and 13% think that it is under control, because the media reinforces it by announcing some cures and the lack of knowledge leads people to believe that the virus is not circulating among the population.

It can be seen that media reports often don't make it clear that, although there have been clear advances in research into curative methods for AIDS, there is still no method that can be applied in medical practice with certainty of effectiveness and safety for patients. In this sense, due to the lack of clarification, the public's understanding is compromised, which can contribute to the development of a mistaken perception that HIV has become a disease like any other, that it has a cure and does not have the capacity to cause as many consequences as those reported a while ago, when the virus had just emerged.

One example is the following story, published on the “CNN Brasil” website, with the headline “Man in Switzerland becomes sixth HIV patient cured”. However, it's worth pointing out that the reports on social media only inform about the progress of ongoing studies, since there is still no established curative practice in the health system.

Thus, the only certainty we have is that even with therapies advancing, we need discussions and the dissemination of scientific knowledge, and that it is essential to publicize in schools the importance of using condoms as an effective method to combat the HIV virus.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The importance of this proposal and of discussing HIV in the world of adolescents is reaffirmed, as it allows them to discuss, question and make choices about their sex lives. We can conclude that people have knowledge, albeit shallow, about HIV, condom use and the basics of sex education, but we can still observe negative points, such as: the ignorance of individuals in relation to the use of condoms, the lack of perception in relation to the spread of the virus in different groups, the lack of guidance to make choices that can impact life, the excess of partners, the ease of having sex without a fixed partner. It is therefore extremely important that campaigns and posts about HIV and sex education are widely discussed, after all, it is necessary for teenagers to discuss and take a stand on the issue, so that RS is no longer one of the states with the highest number of cases and so that people understand the importance of the issue and the impact it can have on an individual's life.



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