



Bio-behavioural study among MSM in European cities

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Christiana Nöstlinger & Wim Vanden Berghe (WP 8 Prevention)
on behalf of the Sialon II Project Group
ITM, Antwerp

Massimo Mirandola, Lorenzo Gios, Igor Toskin, Ulrich Marcus, Susanne Schink, Nigel Sherriff, Cinta Folch, Laia Ferrer, Alexandra Montoliu, Christiana Nöstlinger, Wim Vanden Berghe, Sharon Kühlmann-Berenzon, Inga Velicko, Achilleas Tsoumanis, Sónia Dias, Barbara Suligoj, Vincenza Regine, Danica Stanekova, Magdalena Rosińska, Saulius Caplinskas, Rima Krupenkaite, Irena Klavs, Alexandru Rafila, Carolina Marin, Ivailo Alexiev, Emilia Naseva

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Background: Epidemiology

- HIV still is a pressing public health issue in Europe
- MSM are a key population affected by HIV (next to migrants)

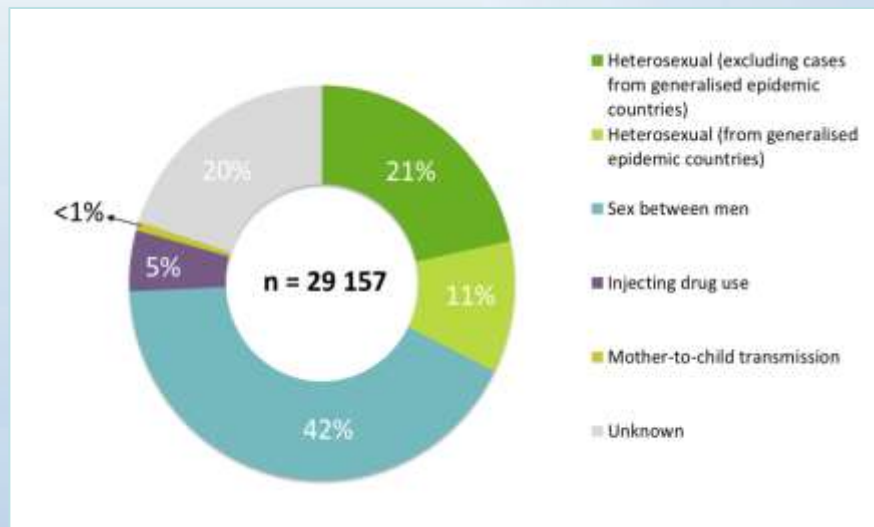


Figure 1: Mode of transmission of newly-diagnosed HIV cases reported in the EU/EEA 2013

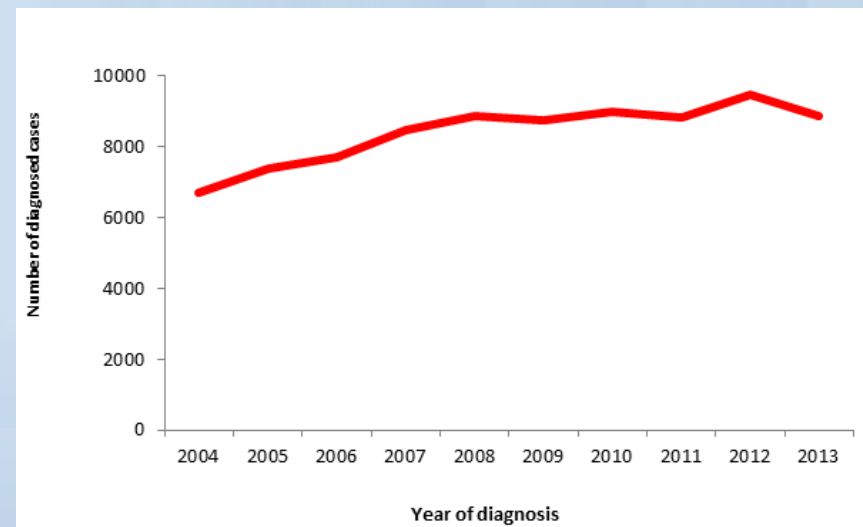


Figure 2: Number of new HIV diagnoses among MSM EU/EEA 2004-2013

Source:

Mode of transmission of newly-diagnosed HIV cases reported in the EU/EEA 2013 (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO 2014)



Objectives Sialon II

- To pilot the **implementation of a bio-behavioural survey** using different sampling methods, namely Time-Location Sampling (TLS) and Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS);
- To **estimate HIV prevalence** among MSM in data collection using the TLS method;
- To **estimate HIV, Syphilis, and HBV-HVC prevalence** among MSM in data collection sites using the RDS method;
- To describe **sexual risk behavior** patterns, **prevention needs and sexual health** in the MSM population, triangulating the biological and behavioural data, and contextual factors.



The Sialon II project: Methods

13 cities in EU countries:

- Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, **Italy**, **Lithuania**, Poland, Portugal, **Romania**, **Slovak Republic**, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom
- **Participatory approach: Strong collaboration with community partners in each country**

Technical support and Collaborating partners

- ECDC, WHO, UNAIDS, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM)



Sialon II Tools



Respondent-driven sampling (RDS)

- **Informed consent form**

Questionnaires

- Behavioural questionnaire (GARPRs)
- Network size form
- Coupons and result card

Tests

- Tests for HIV, Syphilis, HBV-HCV according to the protocol (4th generation HIV assay, etc.)



Time-location-sampling (TLS)

- **Informed consent form**

Questionnaires

- Behavioural questionnaire (GARPRs)
- Venue attendance items

Tests

- BIORAD Genscreen HIV1/2 V.2
- Vironostika® HIV-1 Plus O
Microelisa System - Biomerieux
- Total IgG test for sample validation

The Sialon II prevention activities

- **Training manual:** Data collectors (from local NGOs) were trained to start interactive discussions on prevention at the data collection sites: Sialon II Prevention manual
- **Scratch-cards** with questions on sexual health and prevention
- **Dissemination of prevention packs** incl. condoms, lube and information on sexual health organizations
- **RDS sites:** Voluntary testing and counseling (VCT) including behavioral counseling



Results: HIV and STI prevalence

- Study population: N=4.901
- **HIV prevalence** among MSM varied between 2% and 20%, with higher rates among individuals older than 25 years of age. Highest prevalence rates found for the younger age group: Bucharest 11.6%; Verona: 3.8%; but mostly under 2%
- A relevant proportion (ranging between 12% and 88%; in the different cities) of participants was unaware of being HIV-positive
- High STI prevalences (**RDS sites only**; age < 25 yrs.): Syphilis 2.4-12.5%; HBV 2.0-14.2%; HCV 0%-11.8%



Results: Prevention

- **Prevention training manual (→ for data collectors):** theory-guided to improve skills (Information-motivation-behavioral skills model; Fisher & Fisher 1992; 2006)
- **Data collection and implementation** of prevention activities at the venues
- **Prevention workshop:** September 2014; to discuss preliminary findings with all community partners
- **Final prevention report**
- **Sialon II website**



The screenshot displays the Sialon II website interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with tabs for Network, Projects, Impact, Prevention, Links, and Documents. The main content area is divided into several sections:

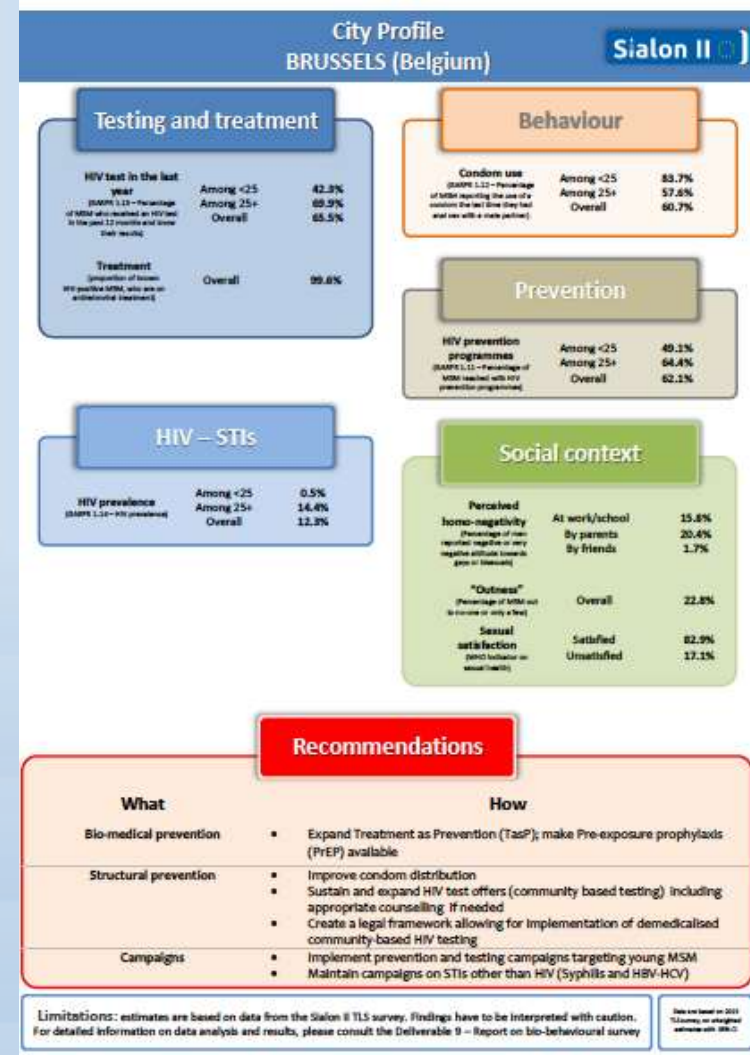
- News:** A news item dated Geneva, 27-02-2013, titled "SIALON II Protocol finally approved by WHO ERC". The text states: "SIALON II protocol successfully accomplished the WHO review process. After having been reviewed by the WHO Research Project Review Panel (RFP-WHO), it was finally approved by the Research Ethics Review Committee (WHO-ERC) on the..."
- Events:** An event titled "Second SIALON II Partners Meeting" in Berlin, 11-02-2013. The text mentions: "The second SIALON II partners meeting was held in Berlin from the 11th to the 12th of February 2013..."
- Project Description:** A large blue box with the SIALON II logo and the text: "Capacity building in combining targeted prevention with meaningful HIV surveillance among men who have sex with men". Below this, it states: "In line with the Communication on combating HIV/AIDS in the European Union and neighbouring countries (2009-2013) the overall objective of this project is to carry out and promote combined and targeted prevention complemented by a meaningful surveillance among MSM. In other words, the aim is to develop capacity building and know how through both training on-site coaching under the active supervision and in collaboration with UNAIDS and WHO on:"

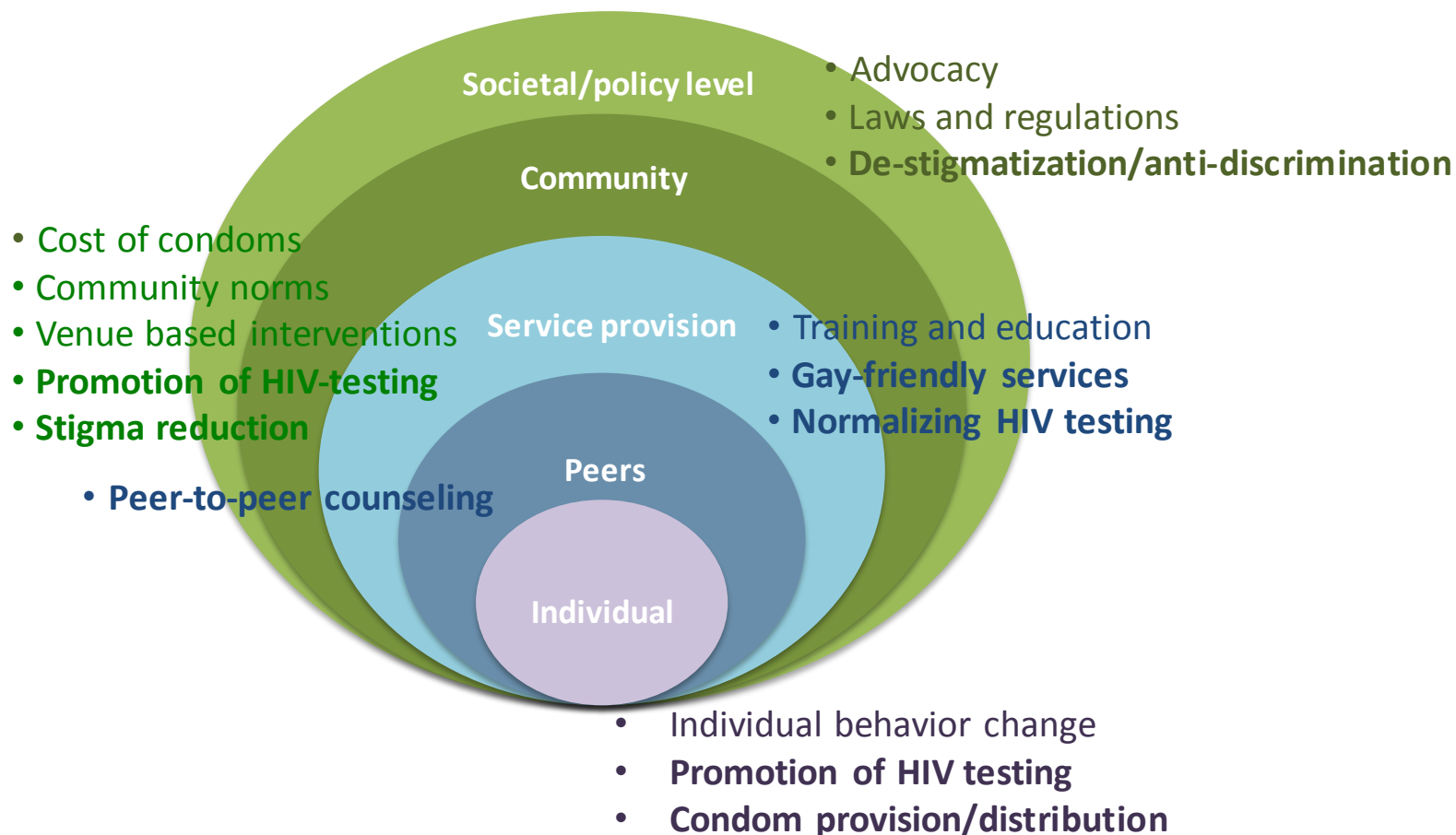
- 1) prevention needs assessment and prevention actions;
- 2) innovative surveillance methodologies for hard to reach populations like MSM (time and location sampling, respondent driven sampling, HIV and STI testing). The project, thanks to the participation of UNAIDS and WHO, will be implemented in both EU and neighbouring countries using the same methodologies (protocols, GARP/ECDC indicators, epidemiological algorithms) and prevention strategies.



Results: Prevention

- **Sialon II city profiles:**
To inform the work of local prevention organizations; using UNAIDS/GARP indicators





Transversal issues

- **Combination prevention:** interventions at different levels with cross-sectoral influences
- **Positive messaging for sexual health promotion** (comprehensive definition of sexual health)

Sialon II “MINIMUM PREVENTION PACKAGE” in the context of combination prevention

- Providing information on the importance of knowing one’s HIV status
- Improving access to HIV testing offers and promotion of VCT
- Promoting the use of male condoms and lube
- Using culturally tailored messaging
- Including a rights-based and positive approach to sexuality



Discussions and conclusions

- Using community-based, participatory approaches in bio-behavioural surveillance is feasible
- Integration of STI testing as a component of HIV surveillance
- Harmonizing prevention activities across the EU is complex (heterogeneous settings → different needs)
- Tailoring prevention activities to local prevention needs or specific sub-groups of MSM
- Communities become part of the full research process → ownership and sustainability!
- Policy makers are crucial in the implementation!



Acknowledgements

Thank you!



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Community partners: All local community-based organizations giving input through the whole course of the project and participated in data collection and prevention activities!

We would also like to thank all **study participants!**

More information : www.sialon.eu

