

Executive summary of European online survey for men who have sex with men (EMIS-2017): results from Spain

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Executive summary

The European MSM Internet Survey (EMIS-2017), which was developed and implemented by Sigma Research at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and funded through EU Health Programme 2014-2020, was an online questionnaire carried out in 50 countries and available in 33 languages. Information was collected on aspects such as sexual behaviors, drug use, psychosocial health, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing among gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM).

Recruitment was mainly via an app and gay dating sites. The present report sets out the key results of EMIS-2017 from participants living in Spain when the survey was administered. The main findings are as follows:

Sociodemographic profile

- A total of 10,634 men living in Spain participated in EMIS-2017, with most in the Autonomous Communities of Madrid (27.4%) and Catalonia (23.5%).
- The participants were mainly young adults (mean age, 35.2 years) born in Spain (78.5%), with a high educational level, and identifying as gay or homosexual (79.9%).
- More than half (65%) were in employment, and 42.2% reported living comfortably, or very comfortably, with their current income level.

Mental health

- Severe anxiety and/or depression was reported by 5.9%, and 21.4% had had suicidal thoughts during the previous 2 weeks.
- The prevalence of mental health problems was higher in younger men and in those with a more unfavorable financial and employment situation.

Discrimination and homophobia

- The results showed that 34.3% reported having felt intimidated during the previous 12 months, 19.4% had received verbal insults, and 2% reported having experienced physical violence (kicks, punches) at some time.

- The youngest MSM, who lived in small cities and whose sexual identity differed from gay or homosexual, had a higher degree of internalized homonegativity.

Alcohol and drug consumption

- The prevalence of consumption of alcohol at least once during the previous 12 months was 91.9%, and the prevalence of possible alcohol dependence was 14.9%.
- The prevalence of drug consumption for purposes of sexual relations during the previous 12 months was 14.1%, with 0.8% of respondents reporting having injected drugs.
- Consumption of drugs for purposes of sexual relations was greater among HIV-infected men, men born outside Spain, and men who lived in cities with populations larger than 500,000 inhabitants.

Testing for HIV, hepatitis, and other STIs

- In 19.4% of cases, the respondent had never been tested for HIV infection; among these cases, 28.3% reported not knowing where to get tested.
- Of those men who had been tested for HIV infection, 16.5% reported being diagnosed with HIV infection.
- An STI (gonorrhoea, syphilis, anogenital warts [condyloma], chlamydia/LVG, and hepatitis C) had been diagnosed in 15.2% during the previous 12 months.
- In 1.8% of cases, the respondent reported having been diagnosed with hepatitis C at some time; of these cases, 12.5% reported having been diagnosed with hepatitis C more than once.

Antiretroviral treatment (ART) and pre- and/or postexposure prophylaxis (PrEP and PPE)

- Most HIV-infected participants (99.5%) were in clinical follow-up, were taking ART (99.4%), and had an undetectable viral load (91.1%).
- The respondent had never heard of PPE in 36.4% of cases or of PrEP in 33.8%.
- In 45.5% of cases, the respondent did not know the meaning of U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable).

Sexual experience

- Almost all respondents (98.2%) reported having had sex with men; of these, 95.5% had engaged in penetration.
- In the case of men with a stable male partner during the previous 12 months, 73.3% did not always use a condom during anal intercourse; this percentage fell to 60.4% in the case of casual male partners.
- In 29.9% of cases, the respondent reported not having used a condom during the previous 12 months owing to lack of availability.

- Men diagnosed with HIV infection had poorer sexual negotiation skills.
- In 9.0% of cases, the respondent had paid for sex during the previous 12 months; in 5.2% of cases, the man had been paid for sex during the previous 12 months.

Priority intervention groups

- The results of EMIS-2017 have made it possible to identify specific subgroups of gay, bisexual, and other MSM who are more vulnerable to HIV and other STIs. These include young men (age <25 years) and those born outside Spain. HIV-infected men are also more vulnerable to other STIs.
- Interventions should be developed to target men living in small cities with reduced access to prevention and sexual health resources.