

TRENDS IN KNOWLEDGE, TESTING, AND PREVALENCE OF SEXUALLY TRANSMISSIBLE INFECTIONS: INSIGHTS FROM THREE AUSTRALIAN SURVEYS OF HEALTH AND RELATIONSHIPS (2001-2023)

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Background:

Sexually transmissible infections (STIs) have increased in Australia – chlamydia by 20%, gonorrhoea by 160%, syphilis by 400% last decade – and cause a significant burden on public health. STIs are well-studied in populations with higher risk but the general population is less known. We assessed 20-year time-trends of STI knowledge, self-reported STI testing and history among Australians aged 16-49 years.

Methods:

The Australian Study of Health and Relationships (ASHR) is a nationally-representative survey conducted every 10 years to provide population-weighted data about the sexual health and practices of Australians aged 16-69 using computer-assisted telephone interviews. In 2023, 4228 respondents aged 16-49 (2123 women/2040 men/65 non-binary people) participated in the third wave (ASHR3 cooperation rate=93.1%). We estimated prevalence using linearized standard error for STI knowledge (true/false/don't know), self-reported STI testing and history. We compared men's and women's responses with the 16–49-year-olds from ASHR1 (2001-02) & ASHR2 (2012-13); non-binary was added in ASHR3, thus no time-trends were reported for this group.

Results:

For STI knowledge, the mean score was 4.7/6.0, similar to ASHR1&2 (mean score=4.0 & 4.9, respectively). Reporting being tested for STIs in the past 12 months was 19.5% overall (95%CI:18.3-20.8), compared to 17.6% in ASHR2; higher in women (22.2%;95%CI:20.4-24.0) and non-binary people (40.9%;95%CI:29.2-53.7) than men (16.2%;95%CI:14.6-17.9). Reporting ever having an STI was 16.9% overall (95%CI:15.8-18.1), compared to 16.8% and 12.8% in ASHR1&2; higher in women (19.0%;95%CI:17.4-20.8) than men (14.9%;95%CI:13.5-16.6) and non-binary people (14.8%;95%CI:8.0-25.9). In the last 12 months, reporting an STI was highest in 16–29-year-olds (2.5%;95%CI:1.7-3.7).

Conclusion:

Nearly 1/5 Australians aged 16-49 report ever having an STI, highlighting the social, clinical and public health burden of STIs, and this is likely an underestimation due to suboptimal testing. STI knowledge and testing have not increased over last 20 years, indicating the need for more investment in STI prevention strategies.

Disclosure of Interest:

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