

# **Public Awareness of Aids in the Federal Republic of Germany 1996**

A trend study of the  
Federal Centre for Health Education, Cologne

## **Summary**



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## Details of the study

Project title:	Public Awareness of Aids in the Federal Republic of Germany 1996
Goals:	Evaluation of the Aids education campaign via a long-term study of the changes in <i>information and communication behaviour</i> , and in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in relation to Aids
Study method:	Annual representative surveys of the over-sixteen population in the Federal Republic of Germany
Data acquisition method:	Computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI)
Selection procedure:	Sample size: 3,600 persons. Random sample (computer-generated random telephone numbers, random selection of people in the household); disproportionally stratified sampling plan as regards age (16 to 44 year-olds, 2419 cases)
Survey period:	November/December 1996
Data documentation and computer analysis:	FORSA Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen mbH, Dortmund/Berlin
Concept development, analysis and reporting:	Federal Centre for Health Education, Cologne, Unit 2-25, Gerhard Christiansen and Jürgen Töppich  Tel.: (+49) 221/8992326 Fax: (+49) 221/8992300

Since 1987, the Federal Centre for Health Education has conducted annual representative surveys of the over-sixteen population in order to evaluate the effect of the Aids education campaign. This long-term study reveals changes in information and communication behaviour, and in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour related to Aids, so that the campaign can react accordingly and achieve a maximum effect. The main results of the latest survey are as follows:

### **Communication processes**

The density and reach of the Aids communication infrastructure have been gradually declining, particularly since 1993. This development, which continued in 1996, can be shown by the following changes:

- (1) The reach of all types of media (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, etc.) which disseminate information on Aids is shrinking. Thus, the overall reach of the available information is also declining.
- (2) As a result, the average number of different media used simultaneously is also decreasing.
- (3) These downward trends also apply to the media used in the Aids education campaign. Today, one-fifth (20%) of the over-sixteen population has no, or only very limited, contact with such media and programmes (9% in 1993).
- (4) The declining utilisation of mass media on AIDS also has an impact on the communication behaviour dependent upon it: for example, awareness of the existence of telephone counselling is steadily decreasing and interpersonal communication on the subject of Aids among friends and acquaintances is declining.

This development of the utilisation of Aids information options is not the result of a declining interest in Aids education and thus also not an expression of so-called "Aids-weariness" among the population. Among young singles, in particular, interest in protection against Aids has remained unchanged at a high level since 1989.

### **Compensatory information offers**

The „Mach's mit" ("Use 'em!") poster campaign, World Aids Day and the most important Aids conventions of 1996 showed that such campaigns and events are acknowledged by large sections of the population, particularly by the sub-populations with a higher risk of infection, e.g. by more than half of the 16 to 45 year-old singles.

The use of these information strategies can help to compensate for deficits resulting from the decreased utilisation of the actual media of the Aids education campaign.

The „Mach's mit" ("Use 'em!") poster campaign is characterised by its clear message and symbolism, on the one hand, and the continuity resulting from its repeated release, on the other hand. It particularly reaches the important target groups of prevention and, in turn, those who are not reached by other media. An extended

Up to now, the reports of treatment successes have neither led to a change in the population's image of the Aids disease nor to a situation where Aids is viewed more as a chronic disease of a less threatening nature. Similarly, there is no evidence of an effect on the intention to use protection.

As it is uncertain whether or not reports on the treatability of Aids will possibly only have an effect at a later date, the relationship between the treatability of Aids and the intention to use protection must be closely observed over time.

### **Development of protective behaviour**

Since the beginning of the Aids education campaign, protective behaviour to avoid HIV infection through sexual contact has increased steadily among the German population. It showed strong growth at the start, slowed after 1989, but is continuing to increase.

This particularly applies to population groups of special significance to prevention campaigns. Young singles for example, showed a linear increase in condom use during the observation period from 1988 to 1996.

The increase in protective behaviour is above average in population groups with riskier lifestyles (e.g. people who had several sex partners in the last twelve months), where not only the percentage of those who use condoms at all is increasing, but also regular condom use, especially in riskier situations.

In 1990, 40 percent of those who had sexual relationships with unknown partners on holiday said they always protected themselves with condoms, while 70 percent said the same in 1996.

In 1994, 65 percent of those surveyed who had started a new sexual relationship in the past year said they used condoms in the last new relationship. The figure rose to 72 percent in 1996.

### **HIV antibody test**

More than one-fifth (22%) of adults over 16 years of age in the Federal Republic - almost one-fourth (24%) in the old Federal Länder - have had themselves tested for HIV antibodies at least once. Based on the annual test rates, there is no evidence of a decrease in the willingness to be tested.

The majority of German citizens still favour voluntary testing.

### **Attitudes towards persons with HIV and Aids**

Since the start of the Aids education campaign, a general attitude towards persons with HIV and Aids has developed according to which persons with HIV and Aids are not viewed as a group of people who should be excluded from contact with other people. In 1985, before the start of the education campaign, more than one-third

(36%) of those over 16 in the old Federal Republic were of the opinion that Aids patients should not come into contact with anyone, except medical personnel or relatives. In 1996, only a relatively small portion of the population expressed ostracising and discriminating opinions (approx. 4%). This applies in both the old and new Federal Länder.

The comprehensive results report (78 pages plus Appendix only in German) can be ordered from the:

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