

Monitoring Sexual Behavior in the Russian Federation

*The Russia
Longitudinal Monitoring Survey
1992-2003*

April 2004



Russian Longitudinal
Monitoring Survey

University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill

The Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS) is a series of nationally representative surveys of the Russian Federation implemented between 1992 and 2003. This report is based on surveys conducted in September 1992 (Round 1), February 1993 (Round 2), August 1993 (Round 3), November 1993 (Round 4), December 1994 (Round 5), October 1995 (Round 6), October 1996 (Round 7), November 1998 (Round 8), October 2000 (Round 9), October 2001 (Round 10), October 2002 (Round 11), and October 2003 (Round 12). Data from all rounds have been weighted to ensure comparability of the information presented herein. The October 2003 data used in this report comes from a sample of 12016 respondents in 4422 households.

To date, the RLMS has been carried out in two phases, each of which has followed a different nationally representative sample of the Russian population. All aspects of field work in Phase II (the current phase, consisting of Rounds 5-12) were handled by the Institute of Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences, headed by Drs. Polina Kozyreva and Mikhail Kosolapov, along with the late Dr. Michael Swafford, Paragon Research International. The Institute of Nutrition, Russian Academy of Medical Sciences, headed by Dr. Alexander Baturin coordinated and carried out the collection and processing of health and diet data.

Data collection for Phase I (Rounds 1-4) was implemented by the Russian State Statistical Bureau (Goskomstat), with Alexander Ivanov and Igor Dmitrichev co-directing this effort. Assistance was provided by the Russian Center for Preventive Medicine, led by Drs. Alexander Deev and Svetlana Shalnova. The Russian Institute of Sociology, especially Drs. Polina Kozyreva and Mikhail Kosolapov, and the late Dr. Michael Swafford of Paragon Research International also provided detailed assistance in Phase I.

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The University of North Carolina team that has coordinated all phases of the RLMS includes: Barry Popkin, Principal Investigator, and co-investigators Namvar Zohoori and Thomas Mroz.

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Access to RLMS data is being provided to the public as data sets become available at the RLMS home page, <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/rlms>

Monitoring Sexual Behavior in the Russian Federation

The Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey 1992-2003

*Vani Vannappagari
took the lead in the preparation of this report*

Part 1. Overview of Key Findings

- A little less than one third of the 14-20-year-olds in the sexual behavior study of the RLMS reported being sexually active during the previous year, with a higher proportion of females than males having been sexually active. In our 2001 survey, one third of the same age group reported being sexually active, with a slightly higher proportion of males reporting sexual activity as compared to the females.
- The average age at coital debut has declined over the years, with 41-49-year-olds reporting first sex at age 19 yr, 31-40-year-olds at 18.8 yr, 21-30-year-olds at 17.4 yr, and 14-20-year-olds at 15.9 yr. The reported age at first sex has not changed since our last survey in 2001.
- Among sexually active 14-20-year-olds 42.6% did not use a condom the last time they had sex. This indicates a low level of condom use.
- Among married participants, 16.7% reported having sex with a non-marital partner during their last sexual event, indicating a considerable amount of extramarital sex. Of those, 83.5% did not use a condom during the sexual event.
- The vast majority of the respondents who had used a condom cited prevention of unwanted pregnancy as the reason for using it. Less than one third used a condom to prevent STDs, and only one fifth did so to prevent HIV.
- Over one tenth of the participants reported having two or more sexual partners during the previous year. Of those, about two thirds did not use a condom the last time they had sex.
- Misconceptions are widely prevalent among the participants about such issues as HIV transmission modes and the effect of preventive measures like consistent condom use and monogamous sexual relationships. Knowledge about mother to child transmission is also lacking among this population.
- Negative attitudes towards HIV infected people like teachers and grocery store managers are abundant, although participants are kinder and more accepting of HIV infected family members. The desire to keep HIV in a family member a secret is indicative of the social stigma attached to the infection.

Part 2. Discussion of Results

Background

The Russian Federation experienced a rapid increase in the number of reported HIV/AIDS cases during the latter part of the 1990s. According to UNAIDS, Russia and the countries of Eastern Europe have the highest incidence rates of HIV infection and the fastest growing epidemic in the world. The number of newly reported cases in Russia has almost doubled annually since 1998. Differing estimates put the number of HIV infected people at 700,000 at the end of 2001, up to a million at the end of 2000, and up to 2 million by the end of 2001.

RLMS 2003 – Sexual Behavior Module

This is the second time the sexual behavior survey was conducted among the Russian population. The principal goal of the survey is to provide descriptive information about the knowledge level, attitudes towards HIV/AIDS and sexual

behaviors that potentially could increase risk of HIV infection in a nationally representative, 14-49 year old population of the Russian Federation. Another important aim is to compare the survey results with those of our earlier survey conducted two years ago in 2001.

Results

We report weighted percentages that account for the sampling design of the survey.

Out of the total 6115 participants who participated in the survey, 49.7% (N=2821) were men and 50.3% (N=3294) were women. Table 1 shows the proportions of respondents by age group and gender.

Overall, 6.9% of respondents said they knew at least one homosexual man and 28.4% knew someone who used illegal drugs. Among male respondents, 1.3% said they have had a homosexual experience.

Table 1: Participants by age group and gender

Age, Year	Male Weighted % (N)	Female Weighted % (N)	Total Weighted % (N)
14-20	10.17 (514)	9.37 (546)	19.54 (1060)
21-30	12.88 (865)	13.16 (1032)	26.04 (1897)
31-40	12.58 (712)	13.15 (816)	25.73 (1528)
41-49	14.08 (730)	14.62 (900)	28.69 (1630)

Marriage and Cohabitation

Two thirds of the participants have been married at least once, 55.0% are currently married and 52.3% live together with the spouse.

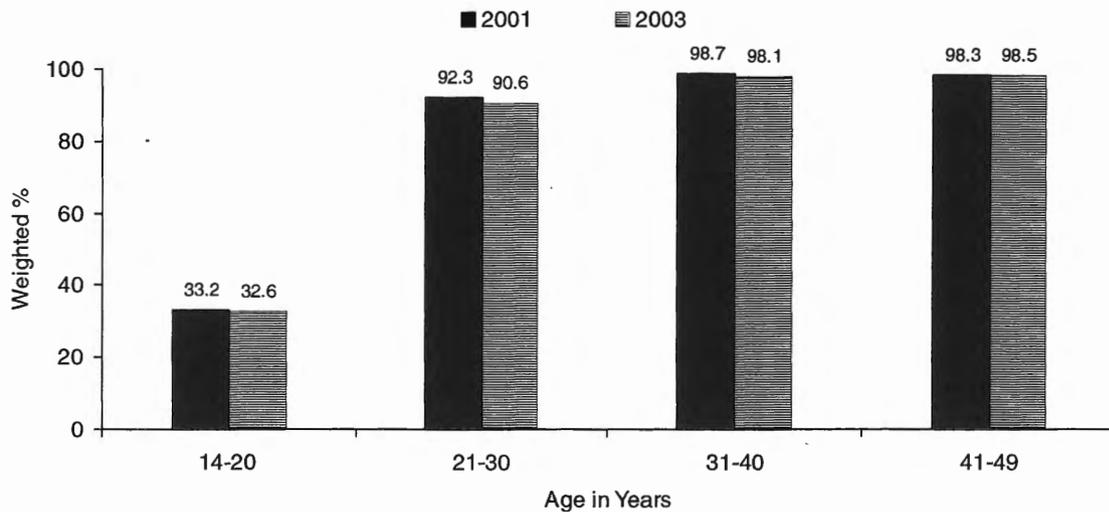
The average age at marriage was 21.5 years (SD = 2.7), with 14-20-year-olds having married at age 17.9 yr, 21-30-year-olds at 20.7 yr, 31-40-year-olds at 21.4 yr, and 41-49-year-olds at 22.1 yr.

Among all males, 4.9% reported currently being married and also having other sexual partners.

Current Sexual Behavior

Among all the participants, 83.5% have ever been sexually active (figure 1) and 76.7% have been sexually active in the previous year. A little less than one third of the 14-20-year-olds said they had been sexually active in the past year, with a higher proportion of females (30.3%) having been sexually active than of males (27.8%). In our 2001 survey a slightly higher proportion of 14-20 year old males (32.7%) reported sexual activity in the past year as compared to the females (28.1%).

Figure 1. Ever Been Sexually Active (%)

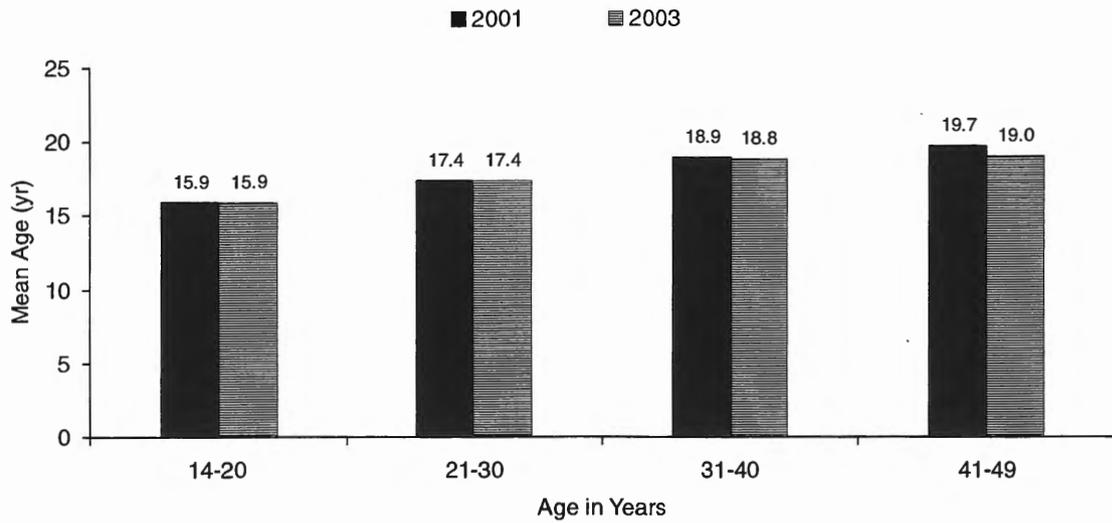


The average age at first sex for all participants was 18.4 years (SD=2.4). In each age group, men reported being sexually active slightly earlier than did the women. The reported age of coital debut across age groups and gender has not changed from our 2001 survey (figure 2).

Among the participants who were sexually active

in the past year, the relationship to the partner during the last sexual event was official spouse for 58.5% of the participants, unofficial spouse for 15.2% and a non-cohabiting friend for 21.1%. In 2.9% of the cases the partner was a casual acquaintance and in 0.6% of the cases money or gifts were exchanged for sex.

Figure 2. Average Age at First Sex



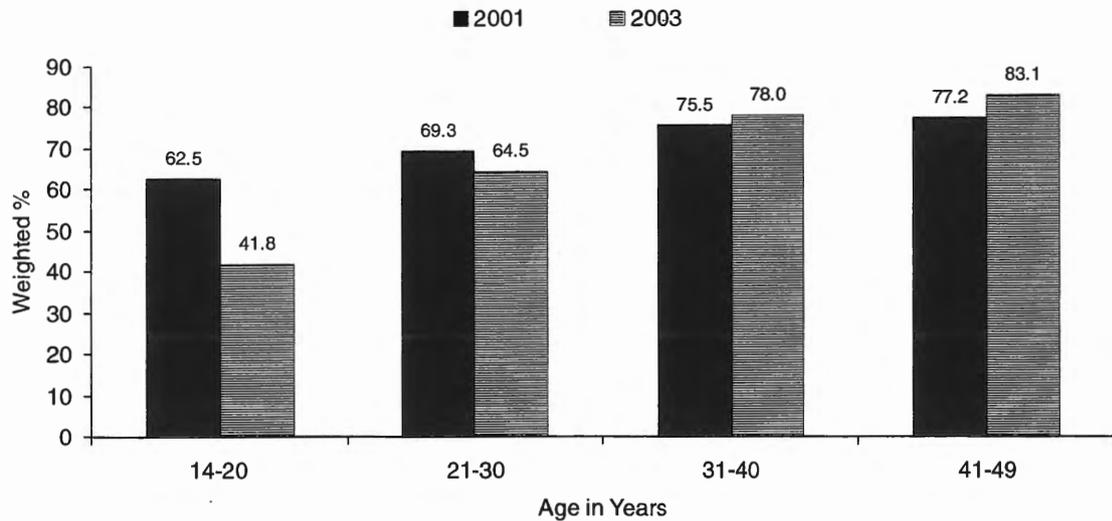
Condom Use

Three quarters of the participants did not use a condom during their most recent sexual act. Among those who used condoms, 12.5% reported using it only towards the end of the sexual act. More importantly, of the 40% who had a non-marital partner during their last sexual encounter, 64.5% did not use a condom.

Among the married participants, 16.7% reported having sex with a non-marital partner during their last sexual event indicating a considerable amount of extramarital sex and 83.5% of them did not use a condom during the sexual event.

Among the unmarried participants, 22.2% used a condom during their last sexual event; 76.1% did not use a condom (figure 3).

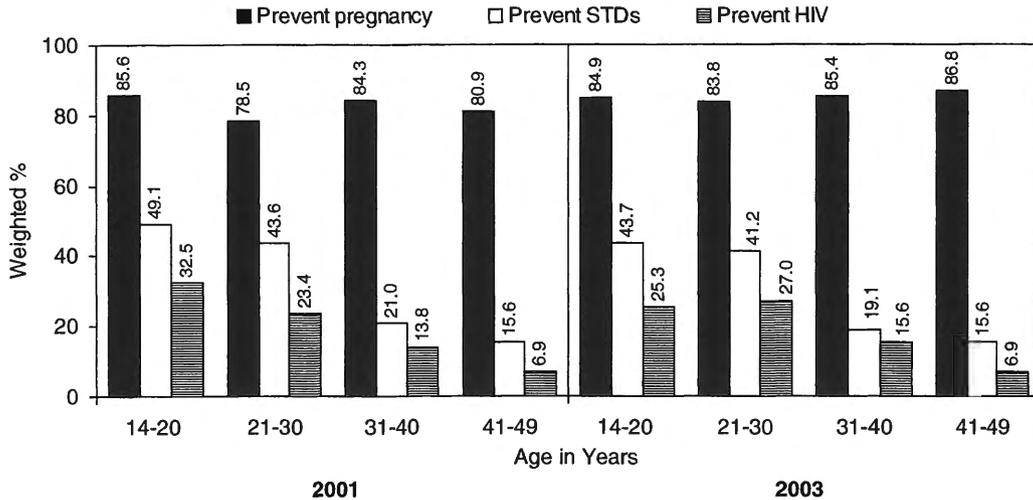
Figure 3. Unmarried Participants Who Did Not Use Condom During Last Sexual Act (%)



The majority (59.7%) of those who used a condom went to a drug store to obtain them; and 31.2% said they obtained the condom at a store (Kiosk).

Most (84.9%) of the participants used a condom to prevent unwanted pregnancy; 31.4% cited prevention of STDs. Only 20.3% considered prevention of HIV as a reason for using a condom (Fig 4).

Figure 4. Reasons for Using a Condom

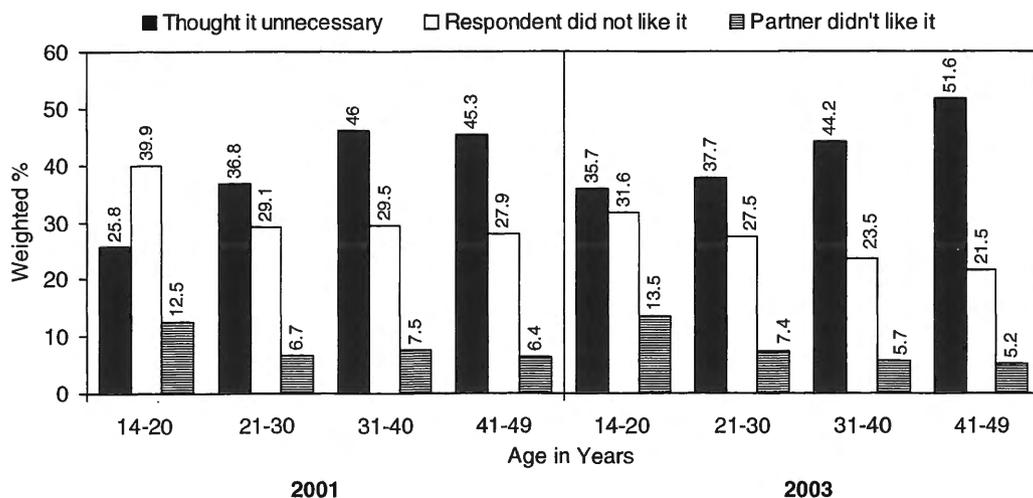


Among unmarried participants who used a condom during their last sexual event, 72% did so to prevent unwanted pregnancy, 50.5% to prevent STDs and 31.4% to prevent HIV. Among married people, 91.1% wanted to prevent pregnancy, 9.9% to prevent STDs, 6.2% to prevent HIV.

during their most recent sexual event, a majority (44.9%) didn't think it was necessary to use one, 24.1% said they didn't like using a condom, 6.3% said their partner did not like condoms, 6.7% just didn't think of using a condom, 5.5% said they were trying to get pregnant, 5.4% didn't have a condom on hand, and 0.9% couldn't get a condom or thought it was too expensive (figure 5).

Among participants who did not use a condom

Figure 5. Reasons for Not Using a Condom



Among the sexually active participants, 63.6% said that they did not use a condom when they first had sex with their current partner, with a higher proportion of women in all age groups (ranging from 49% to 75%) not using condoms as compared to men (27% to 71%).

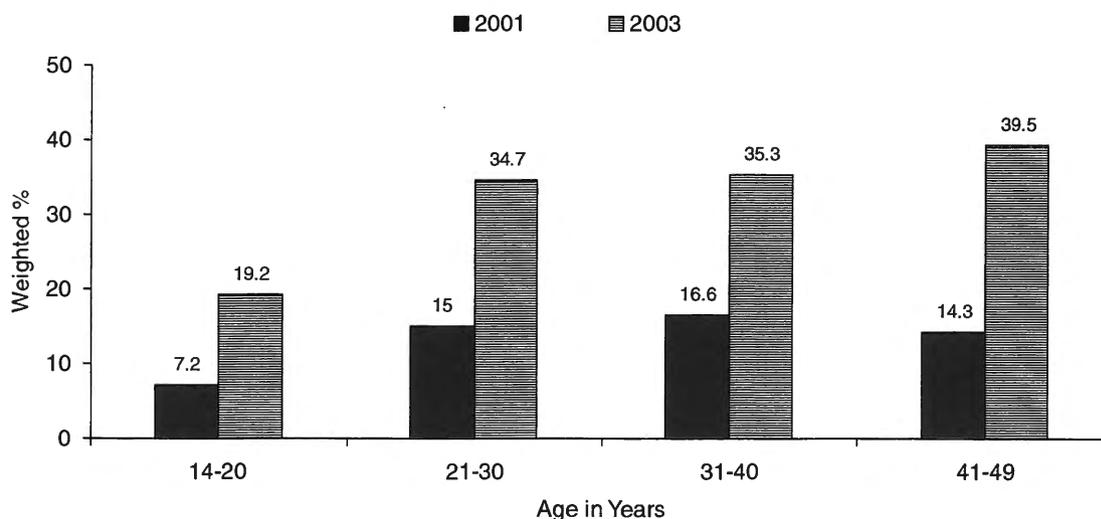
9.3% of the participants think that their partner has other partners. A higher proportion of adolescent males think that their partner has other partners than women of similar age group, but a higher proportion of older women think so as compared to men of similar age group (14-20 yr: 23.8% vs. 14.7%; 21-30 yr: 11.2% vs. 11.4%; 31-40 yr: 5.1% vs. 11.5%; 41-49 yr: 4.5% vs. 8.1%). Among those who think their partner has other

partners, only 39.1% used a condom the last time they had sex.

Alcohol Consumption During Last Sex

A little over one third of the unmarried participants (36.4%) said they had consumed alcohol during their last sexual event. This is a substantial increase from the 15.2% of the unmarried participants who reported consuming alcohol during their last sexual event in the 2001 survey (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Consumed Alcohol The Last Time They Had Sex (%)

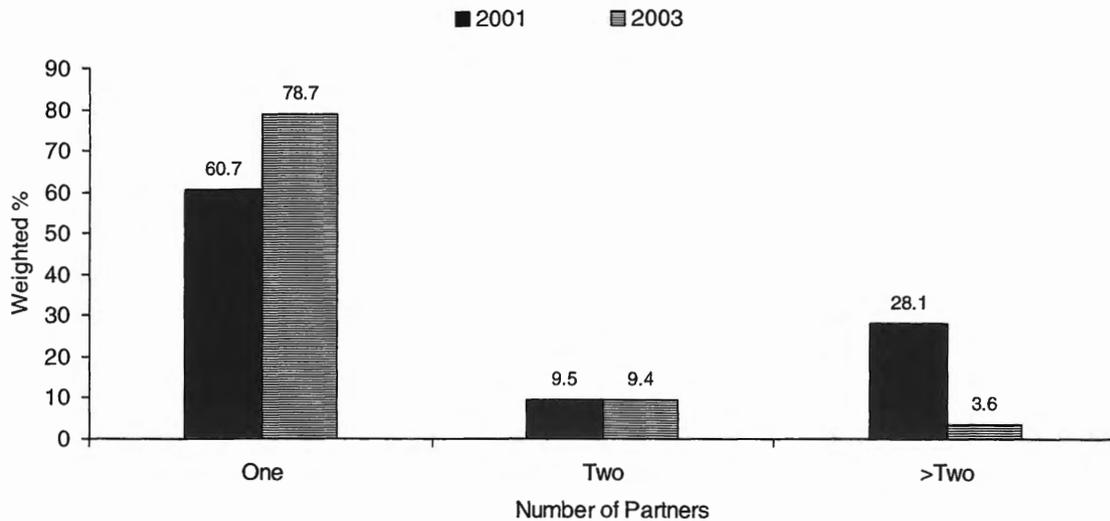


Multiple Sexual Partners

78.7% of sexually active participants said they had one sexual partner in the past 12 months; 9.4% had two partners and 3.6% had more than two partners (figure 7). The number of participants reporting more than two sexual

partners has decreased considerably as compared to the earlier survey. Of those participants with multiple partners, 68.9% of those reporting two partners and 54.8% of those reporting more than two partners did not use a condom during the most recent sexual act.

Figure 7. Number of Sexual Partners in the Past Year

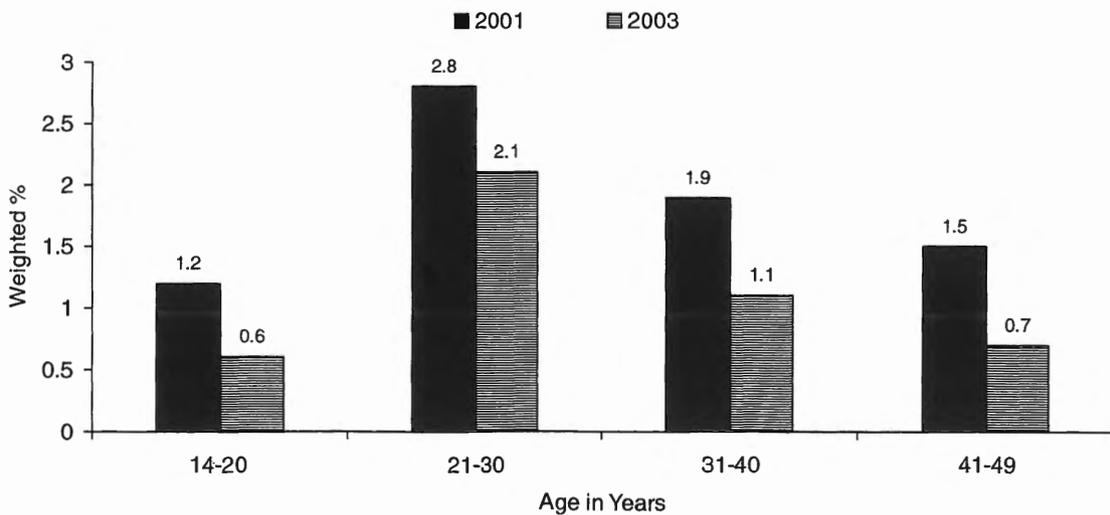


Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

A large majority of respondents (93.8%) had heard of sexually transmitted diseases. During the past year, 1.2% of the respondents said they had pus like discharge or sores in the genital area that might have been indicative of STDs (figure 8). The proportion of participants reporting these symptoms has decreased as compared to the earlier survey.

Among the respondents who said they had the symptoms suggestive of an STD, 74.6% had sought advice or treatment – 58.6% of them at a hospital/clinic where they didn't have to pay, 25.5% at a paying clinic, 32.1% at a drug store, 8.2% from a private doctor, 5.3% from a traditional healer, and 14.7% from friends or relatives and 7.6% of the respondents with symptoms went for an anonymous examination.

Figure 8. Had Symptoms Indicative of STDs in the Past Year (%)



61.2% of those who sought treatment obtained drugs to treat the pus-like discharge or sores in the genital area; and 33.5% did not seek medical advice. A little over half of those (53.2%), who sought treatment actually took the drugs that they obtained. This indicates that there is a significant proportion of the population who did not get appropriate treatment for their symptoms.

57.0% said that their symptoms have disappeared; 23.4% said that their symptoms did not go away. Among those who used drugs they obtained for treatment, 78.8% said their symptoms went away and 21.2% said their symptoms did not go away. This could indicate an incorrect diagnosis, incorrect or incomplete treatment. We also have to keep in mind the presence of asymptomatic STDs that can make our estimate of the population with probable STDs in the past year, an underestimate.

Among those who reported the symptoms suggestive of STDs, half of them informed their sexual partners, 53.6% stopped their sexual activities, and 25.4% began to use condoms.

Knowledge About HIV Transmission Routes

Overall, 95.6% of respondents had heard about the virus that causes AIDS. A higher proportion of the female population in the 14-20-year age group (96.7%) was aware of HIV as compared to the corresponding male population (86.5%). More than one third of the participants (38.5%) had heard, read, or seen information about HIV/AIDS in the past four weeks, through television, newspapers and magazines, radio, and posters and billboards.

Overall, 76.4% thought that a person who looked healthy outwardly could still be infected with HIV, 3.7% disagreed, and 14.3% said the question was too difficult to answer. One fifth of the

participants said that sharing dishes and silverware with an HIV infected person could transmit the virus; 43.4% did not think this would spread HIV and 28.4% said it was difficult to answer.

Three quarters of respondents thought HIV transmission could be prevented in all age groups, a slightly higher proportion of women than men agreed with this; 7.5% thought it could not be prevented, and 12.4% said the question was too difficult to answer. Of those who thought transmission preventable, 79.1% thought consistent condom use could reduce it, 4.0% did not think so, and 11.7% said the question was too difficult. The latter two groups need to be educated about the effectiveness of condom use to prevent HIV. Monogamous relationship was thought to reduce the risk of HIV by 83.2% of respondents; 3.6% disagreed and 7.9% said it was difficult to answer (figure 9). More respondents between the ages of 21 and 40 answered the questions on HIV transmission correctly than either the younger or older participants.

Mother to Child Transmission

Three quarters of the participants correctly answered that an HIV-infected mother could transmit the virus to her baby during delivery; 2.7% said she could not, and 16.8% said the question was too difficult to answer.

One third of the participants (34.7%) thought HIV could be spread through breast milk; 14.7% did not think so, and 45.0% said the question was too difficult. A higher percentage of women of all age groups thought that breast feeding could transmit the virus as compared to men of corresponding age (figure 10). These responses have not changed much from the previous survey results.

Figure 9. Knowledge About HIV Transmission

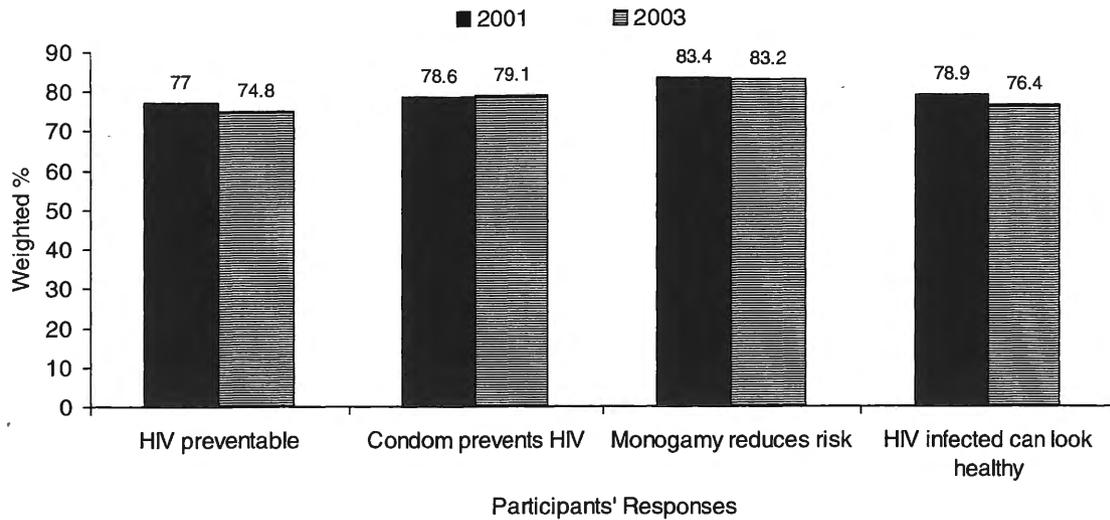
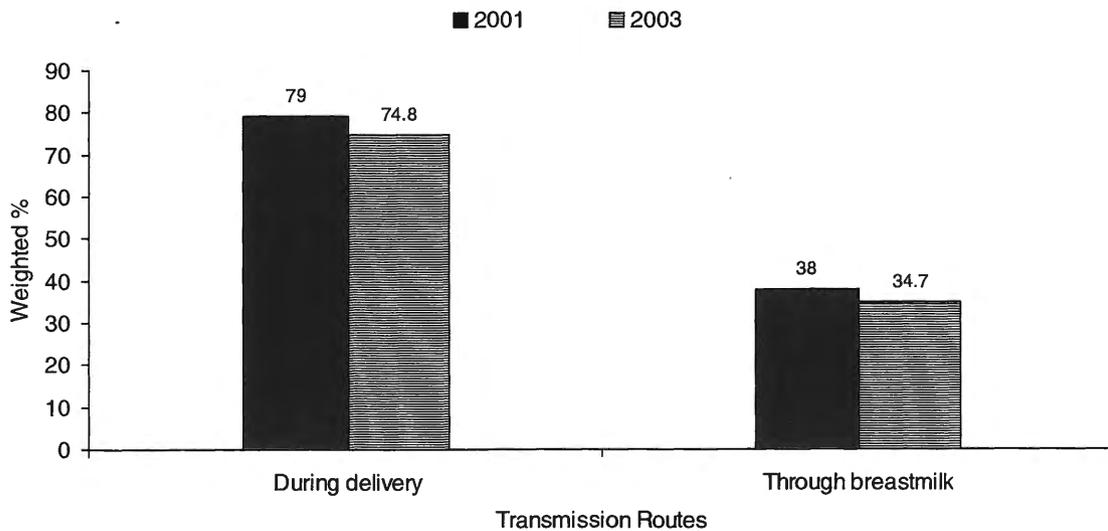


Figure 10. Mother to Child Transmission



One fifth of the participants believe that HIV transmission from mother to child could be prevented; 19.0% said the infection would pass to the child regardless of precautions, 48.3% said the question was too difficult and 4.8% believed that HIV couldn't pass from mother to child.

One tenth of the participants believe that

medication taken before childbirth is effective in preventing mother to child transmission of HIV; 6.6% believe avoiding breast feeding prevents transmission, and 4.9% thought caesarian delivery could prevent mother to child transmission. A majority of respondents are not fully informed about the possibilities in preventing mother to child transmission of HIV.

Attitudes Towards People With HIV

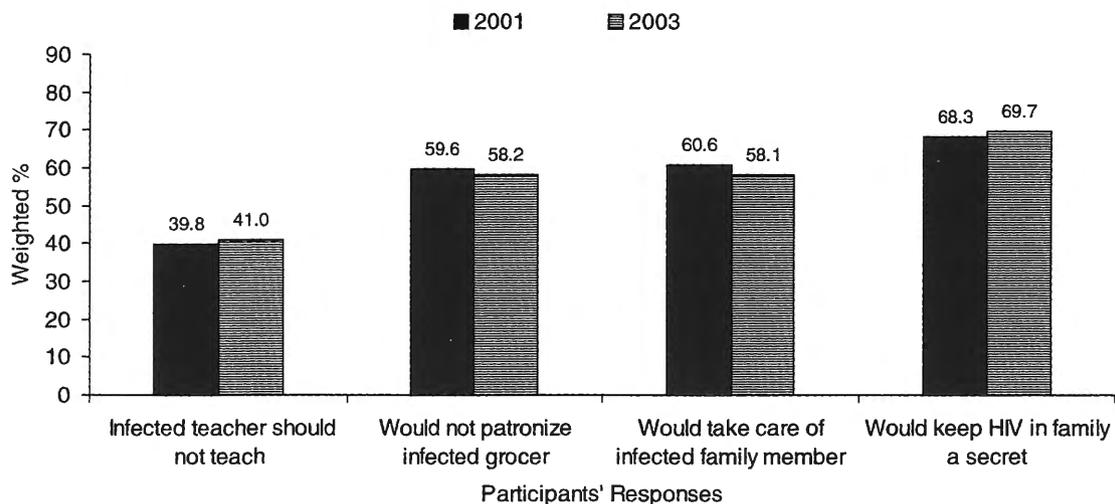
Our survey results show that negative attitudes towards HIV infected people are widely prevalent among the participants (figure 11). Few respondents (4.8%) said they knew someone who was living with HIV or who had died of AIDS.

Less than one quarter of the participants would like an HIV-infected teacher to continue teaching; 41% feel this should not be allowed, and 28.7% said the question was too difficult to answer. Only 10.4% said they would patronize a grocer

who was infected with HIV; 58.2% said they would not, and 25.3% said the question was too difficult. These opinions were consistent both across genders and across age groups.

If a family member is infected with HIV, 58.1% of the participants were ready to take care of them; 10.2% would not, and 25.8% felt the question was too difficult to answer. A majority (69.7%) of the respondents would want to keep HIV infection of a family member secret; 5.9% would not, and 18.5% felt the question was too difficult.

Figure 11. Attitudes Towards HIV Infected people

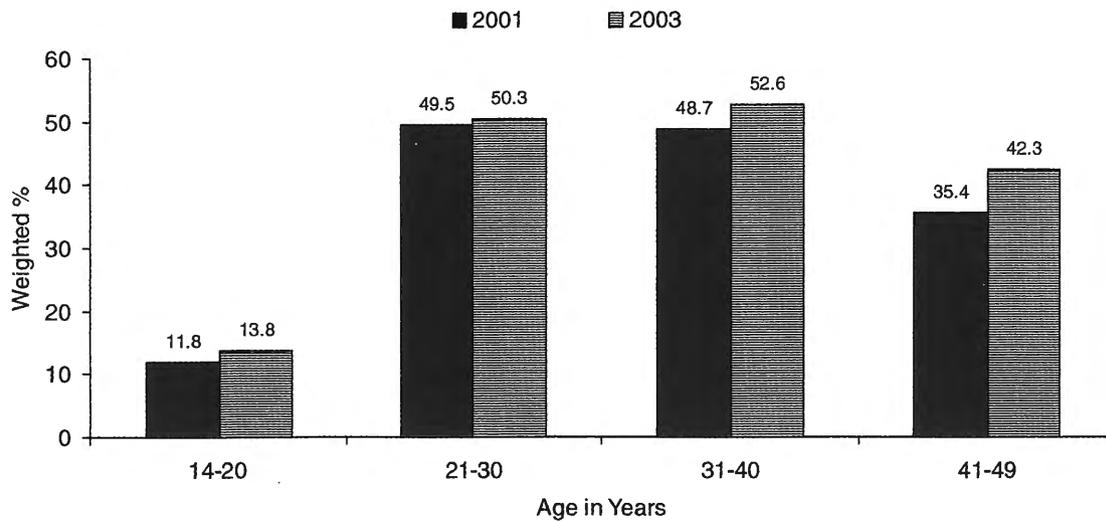


HIV Testing

Overall, 41.5% of respondents said they had been tested for HIV at least once (Figure 12). Of those, only 42.5% of the respondents had been told their results; 50.2% said they had not been tested and

2.5% said the question was too difficult. Among those tested, 44.7% had been tested in the past 12 months. There was a slight increase in the proportion of participants tested for HIV since our last survey.

Figure 12. Ever Tested for HIV



Of the respondents who knew their test results, 66.5% had shared them with someone else; 32.6% with their regular partner, 1.2% with a casual sex partner, 14.1% with a friend, 29.0% with a family member, 15.7% with a medical worker, and 12.5% with a co-worker. Among all respondents, 40.9% said they would like to be tested for HIV/AIDS. Among the respondents who had already been tested, 59.9% would like to be tested again.

More than two thirds (68.6%) of the respondents knew where to get tested for HIV; 21.3% did not, and 4.4% said the question was too difficult. Among those who said they knew of a place to get tested for HIV, 79.5% said they would go to a hospital or polyclinic, 23.8% to a women's health center or a family planning clinic, 7.0% to a private doctor, 24.0% to an anti-HIV center and 4% would go to a mobile laboratory.

Half of the participants said they would share the test results with someone if found to be HIV positive; 25.0% would not and 18.7% were not sure if they would tell someone.

Among those who said they would share a positive test result, 67.3% said they would tell a regular sexual partner, 12.4% would tell a casual partner, 77.9% would tell a family member, 60.9% would tell a medical worker, 19.4% would tell a friend and 6.6% would tell a coworker.

Two thirds of the female participants were pregnant at least once and 90.2% had consulted a doctor during the most recent pregnancy. Only one third of those who consulted with a doctor during pregnancy were given information about HIV/AIDS; 54.5% said they did not receive any information and 9.5% were not sure. More of them (43.4%) were informed about STDs, however, 48.3% said they were not talked to about STDs and 7.2% were not sure.

Among those who went to a doctor during pregnancy, 51.8% said they were advised to get HIV test during pregnancy; 98.1% of those advised got tested. 95.9% of those tested got the results of the test.

Conclusions

A considerable proportion of the adolescent population is sexually active. Our data show that the age of coital debut in Russia has been declining over the past three decades, indicating that adolescents are engaged in sexual activity at a younger age. A significant proportion of the sexually active population does not use condoms. A sizeable proportion of the married participants report extramarital sexual activity combined with not using condom.

Misconceptions about the transmission modes of HIV and negative attitudes towards HIV infected people are widely prevalent. There is an urgent need in Russia to educate people, especially young people, about the dangers of HIV transmission through unsafe sexual practices and about the need to take preventive measures. Continuing monitoring of the sexual behaviors of the general population is necessary for implementing preventive measures and also to evaluate the effectiveness of these measures.

