

## **PRESS RELEASE**

Croatian Medical Journal  
Zagreb University School of Medicine  
Šalata 3b  
10000 Zagreb  
Croatia

Phone: ++385-1-4590-286

Fax: ++385-1-4590-222

Mail: [dario.sambunjak@mef.hr](mailto:dario.sambunjak@mef.hr)

All papers published in the Croatian Medical Journal  
are freely available at [www.cmj.hr](http://www.cmj.hr)

### **Pupils have more positive attitudes toward HIV-positive children than their parents**

ZAGREB – Thirteen and fourteen year old children have more positive attitudes toward HIV-positive children than their parents, shows a new study published in the April issue of the *Croatian Medical Journal*.

Prompted by an incident in 2002 and 2003, when parents of primary school pupils had refused to accept an HIV infected girl into the same class with their children, researchers from the University of Zagreb Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences investigated the attitudes of the school environment towards the integration of HIV positive pupils. They conducted a questionnaire study among 64 teachers, 108 seventh and eight grade pupils and 124 parents from two regular primary schools in Croatia – one from a small town, Nova Gradiška, and the other from the Croatian capital of Zagreb. For the purpose of the study two questionnaire instruments were developed – one to investigate the attitudes and the other to find out the level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS.

All participants showed positive attitudes towards the integration of children with HIV/AIDS into regular schools. However, the comparison of the three groups (teachers, pupils, and parents) revealed somewhat lower attitudes in the group of parents. This finding could explain the recent incident with the HIV-positive girl. The study indicates that the children have fewer prejudices and that they are more willing to accept their HIV infected peers.

Teachers with a university degree had lower attitudes than teachers with a college degree, who work with younger pupils (first to fourth grade) and therefore may be more sensitive and emphatic about the problems of first grade HIV-positive pupil in Croatia.

Knowledge about HIV/AIDS was high among all participants, with pupils showing lower level of knowledge than their parents or teachers. These results may be related to the public discussion and general education about HIV/AIDS and education about human rights in Croatia.

The place of residence was a correlate of the knowledge about HIV/AIDS, with parents and pupils from a small town having lower scores on the knowledge test than participants from the capital city. Higher level of knowledge in the city could be the result of greater availability of information than in small towns. The authors of the study suggest that education should be more decentralized so that information can be accessible to everyone.

As it was expected, higher education also meant better knowledge about HIV/AIDS. The parents with college or university degree had higher score than parents with high school or primary school, teachers with university degree had higher level of knowledge than their colleagues with college degree, and eight grade pupils were more knowledgeable than seventh grade pupils.

The study was conducted soon after the public incident with HIV positive girl alerted the Croatian public. The authors suggest that the positive attitudes of participants may be due to increased media interest. This leads to conclusion that more public discussion, which would provide information about this sensitive issue, is needed to make Croatian population more sensitive towards the problem of HIV-positive persons in the society.

„Not only people living with HIV/AIDS but all 'different' people should be accepted in their communities with dignity and care“, conclude the authors of the study, Maja Maček and Vlatka Matković. „The incident that happened in Croatia showed that fear is still the most dangerous enemy, which can only be overthrown if people work together towards more positive and educated community.“

Corresponding author:

Maja Maček

Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences

University of Zagreb

Kušlanova 59a

10000 Zagreb, Croatia

*majamacek@net.hr*