

Impact of HIV communication programmes on selected behaviours amongst young women in South Africa

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BACKGROUND

HIV prevalence in South Africa is among the highest in the world. HIV disproportionately affects women, with an estimate of 21.1% in 20-24 year-olds, and a peak of 32.7% in 25-29 year-olds. HIV communication programmes (HCPs) are designed to influence knowledge, attitudes, social norms and behaviours that in turn impact on HIV incidence. The objective of this study is to describe the impact of communication on selected behaviours among women aged 16-29 years old.

METHODOLOGY

A multi-stage, stratified random cross-sectional survey of 9,728 people (5,291 females and 4,437 males) aged between 16 and 55 years, from all nine provinces and representative of the country's population, was conducted in 2009. Respondents underwent a thorough interview, in which they were asked to provide answers to a structured questionnaire, focused on demographics, knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, sexual behaviour and exposure to HIV communication programmes. Women aged 16-29 years old constituted 50.2% of the total sample (27,410,651 people). Data was analysed using STATA 11.2.

FINDINGS

Young women exposed to one or more communication programmes reported higher levels of knowledge around HIV prevention, compared to those not exposed to any communication programmes. Condom use as a method for HIV prevention was mentioned by 88.6% of women aged 16-29 years; 80.5% of those unexposed and 86.7% in those exposed to 9-11 programmes (p=0.000).

HIV counselling and testing amongst young women is also associated to exposure to HCPs. Young women who had greater exposure to HCPs are more likely to have ever tested for HIV and more likely to have tested for HIV in the past 12 months.

Young women who have been exposed to HCPs were also more likely to report condom use at last sex compared to women who were not exposed to any programmes (32% unexposed compared to 59% exposed to 9-11 programmes; p=0.000).

Young women exposed to HCPs were more likely to have reported discussing HIV testing with a sex partner compared to women who were not exposed to any programmes; particularly in the 25-29 year age group, where dialogue was reported in 20% in the unexposed group compared to 69% exposed to 9-11 programmes; p=0.000). Figure 1 illustrates that a similar dose response was seen in the age groups 16-19 years and 20-24 years.

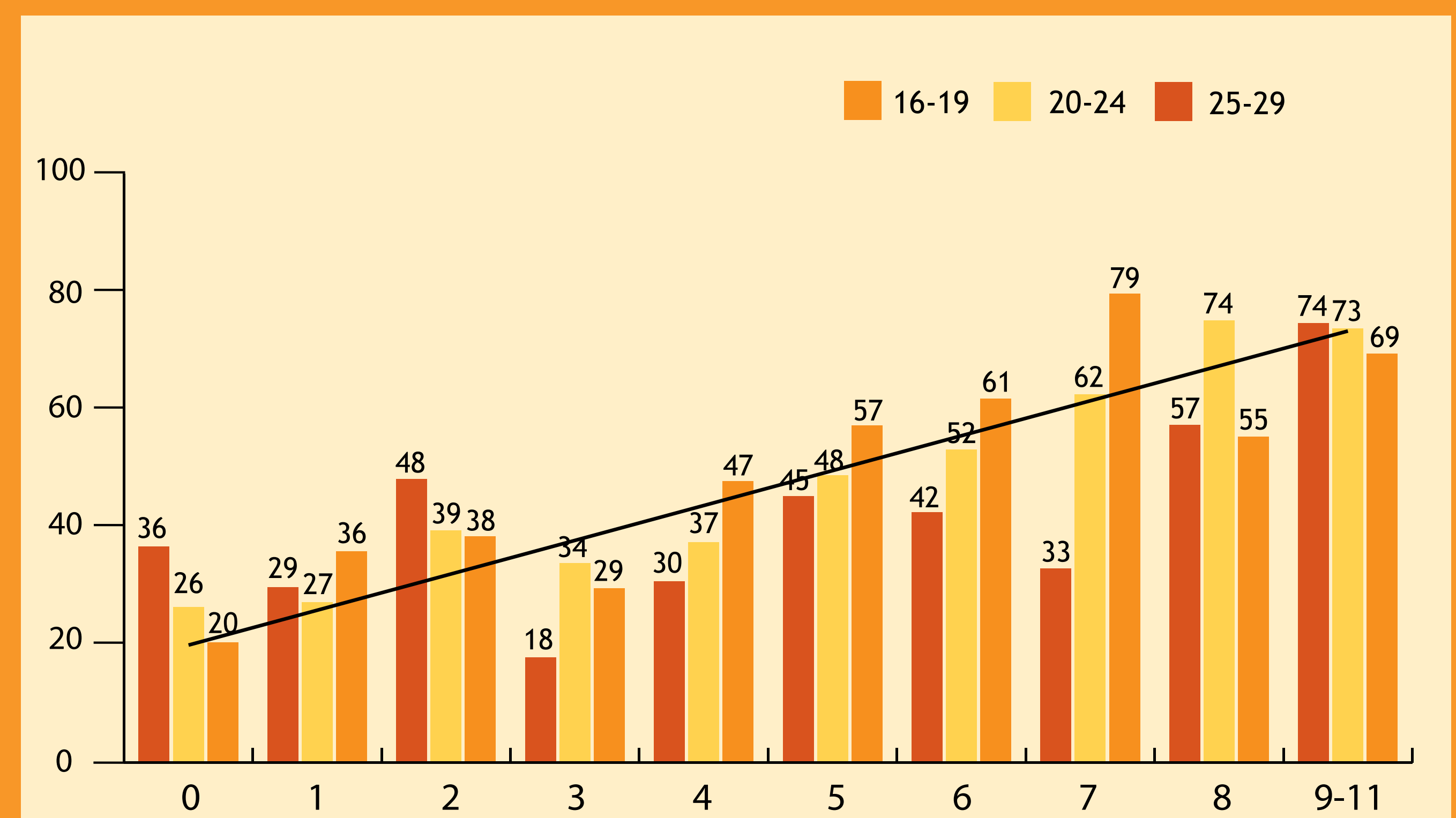


FIGURE 1: PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG WOMEN REPORTING DISCUSSING HIV TESTING WITH A SEXUAL PARTNER BY EXPOSURE TO HCPs

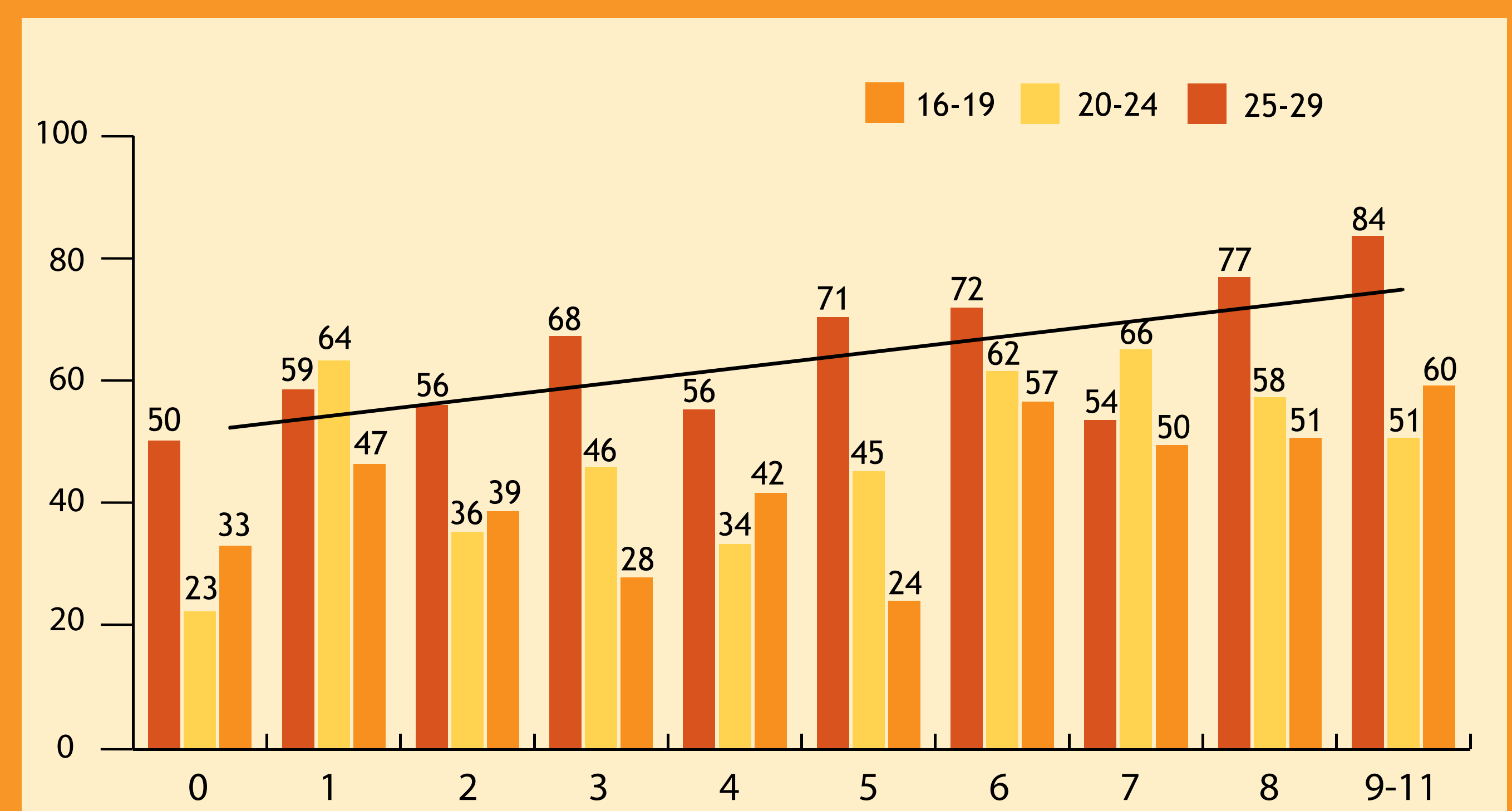


FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG WOMEN (16-29) WHO REPORTED CONDOM USE AT LAST SEX BY EXPOSURE TO HCPs

CONCLUSION

The survey findings indicate that communication programmes are having an impact on knowledge, attitudes and behaviours relating to sexual risk for HIV among women. It is imperative that communication programmes continue to target and reach young women as it is evident that the more exposed women are the higher their HIV risk reduction knowledge, attitudes and behaviours.

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