

Results of a third round of HIV surveillance amongst female sex workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland

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Background

Previous rounds of HIV surveillance conducted in Hargeisa, Somaliland in 2008 and 2014 indicate a concentrated HIV epidemic among key populations, particularly female sex workers (FSW). HIV prevalence among FSW was 5.2% in 2008 and 4.8% in 2014. A third round of surveillance was conducted in 2017.

Methodology

A cross-sectional integrated biological and behavioural surveillance survey among FSW was undertaken between April and June 2017. A total of 238 FSW participated in the study. A face-to-face, structured interview using electronic data collection was completed and blood samples collected for serological testing. All three surveillance surveys used respondent driven sampling and data was analysed using RDS Analysis for comparing results.

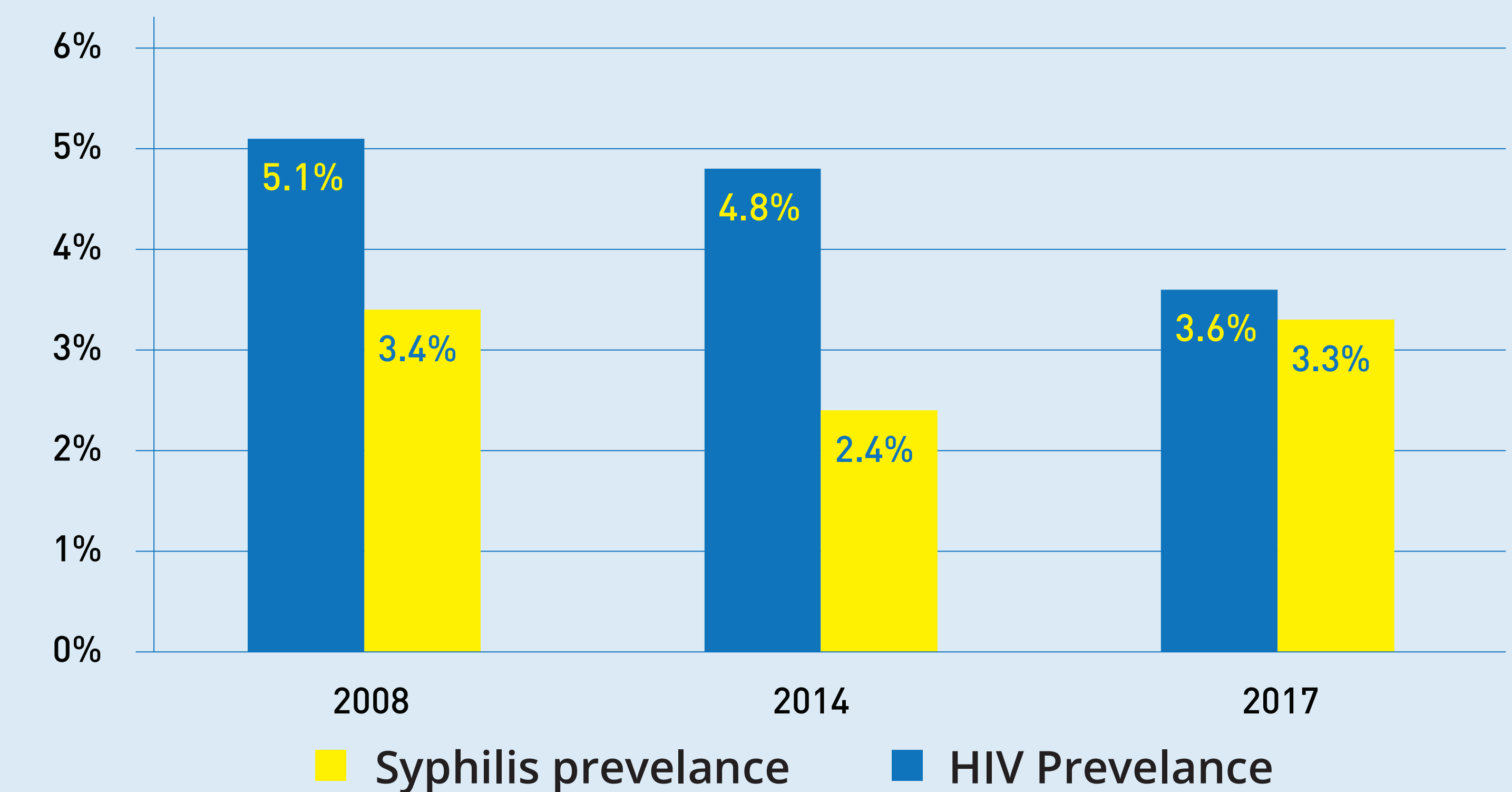
Results

The 2017 IBBS survey showed a steady decline in HIV prevalence among FSW in Somaliland. However, while prevalence of active syphilis among FSW decreased from 2008 to 2014, it rose again in 2017.

FSW use of condoms with their most recent transactional or non-transactional client has increased steadily from 25.6% (2008) to 31.5% (2014) to 36.6% (2017). The proportion of FSW who know their HIV status from an HIV test in the previous 12 months is also trending upward.

HIV knowledge among FSW has improved significantly: 48.9% of FSW in 2017 correctly identified ways of preventing sexual transmission of HIV and rejected major misconceptions, comparing to 10.4% in 2014 and 6.4% in 2008. However, key indicators around stigma and discrimination remain sub-optimal: 30.7% of FSW avoid accessing services because of stigma, and prevention programmes are only reaching 23.1% of the population.

HIV/Syphilis Prevalence



Note: The CIs for HIV & syphilis prevalence overlapped in all 3 surveys. Thus the observed differences may be due to sampling variation.

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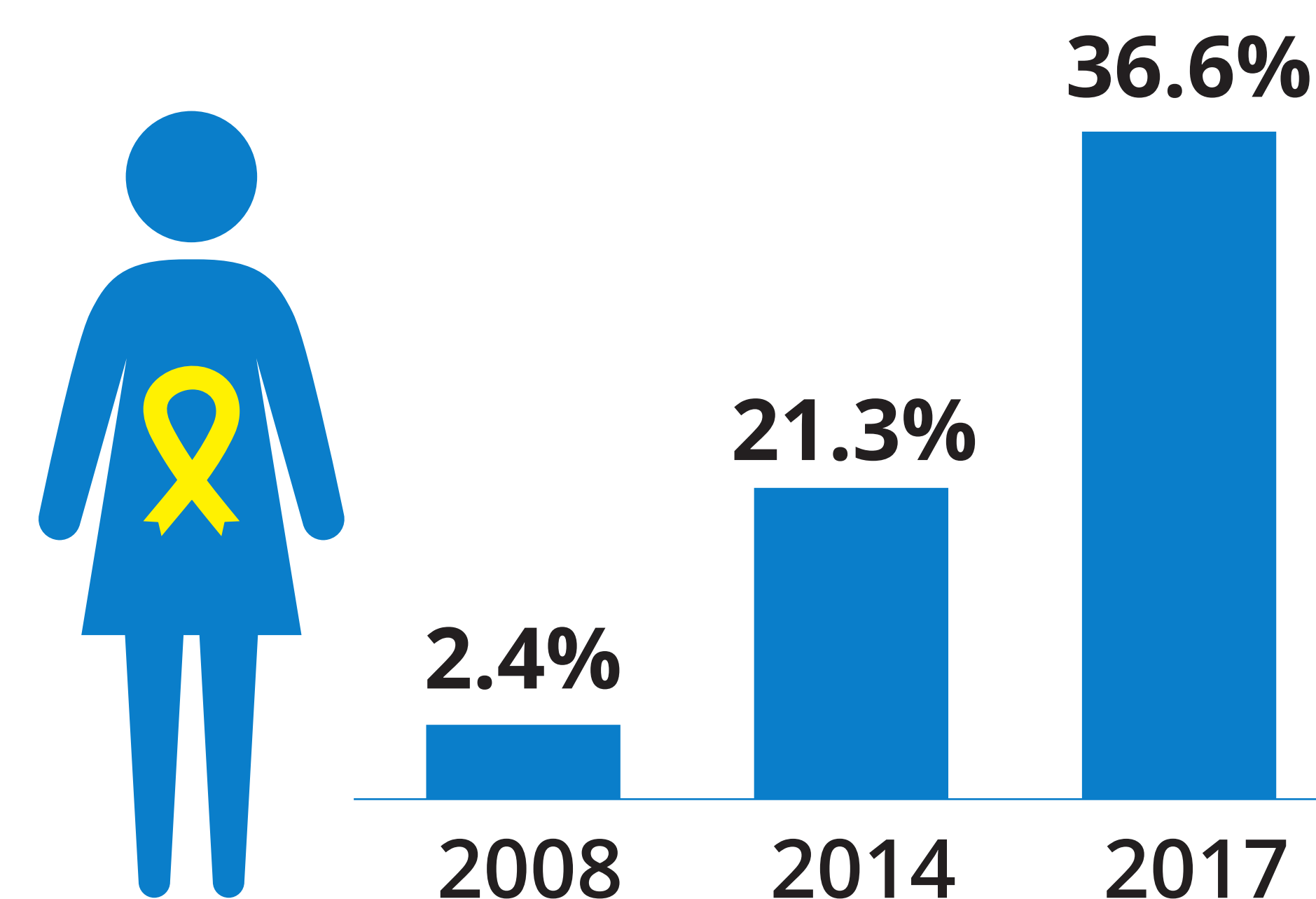
238

Number of female sex workers (FSW) that participated in the study

CONDOM USAGE

2008 - 25.6% | 2014 - 31.5% | 2017 - 36.6%

FEMALE SEX WORKERS THAT KNOW THEIR STATUS



Conclusion

HIV prevalence among FSW remains five times higher than in the general population, highlighting the need for targeted prevention, care and treatment programming. The 2017 survey revealed improvements in condom usage, HIV testing, and HIV knowledge. However, high stigma and discrimination of FSW persist, reducing access and utilization of HIV services, while limiting the effectiveness and impact of broader prevention and treatment initiatives.

There is critical need for HIV stakeholders in Somaliland to develop and implement targeted programs that address the underlying gaps driving high HIV prevalence among FSW.