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Perceptions of HBV infection and hepatitis B vaccine in a French urban free testing center for sexually transmitted infections

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Background

HBV vaccine is proposed in France to all infants and to at-risk populations. Concerns on the risk of adverse effects and vaccine refusal are routinely expressed by people attending our free testing center for sexually transmitted infections (FTC-STI).

We aimed to explore in this exposed population the knowledge concerning HBV infection, to quantify HBV vaccine refusal, and the reasons for this refusal.

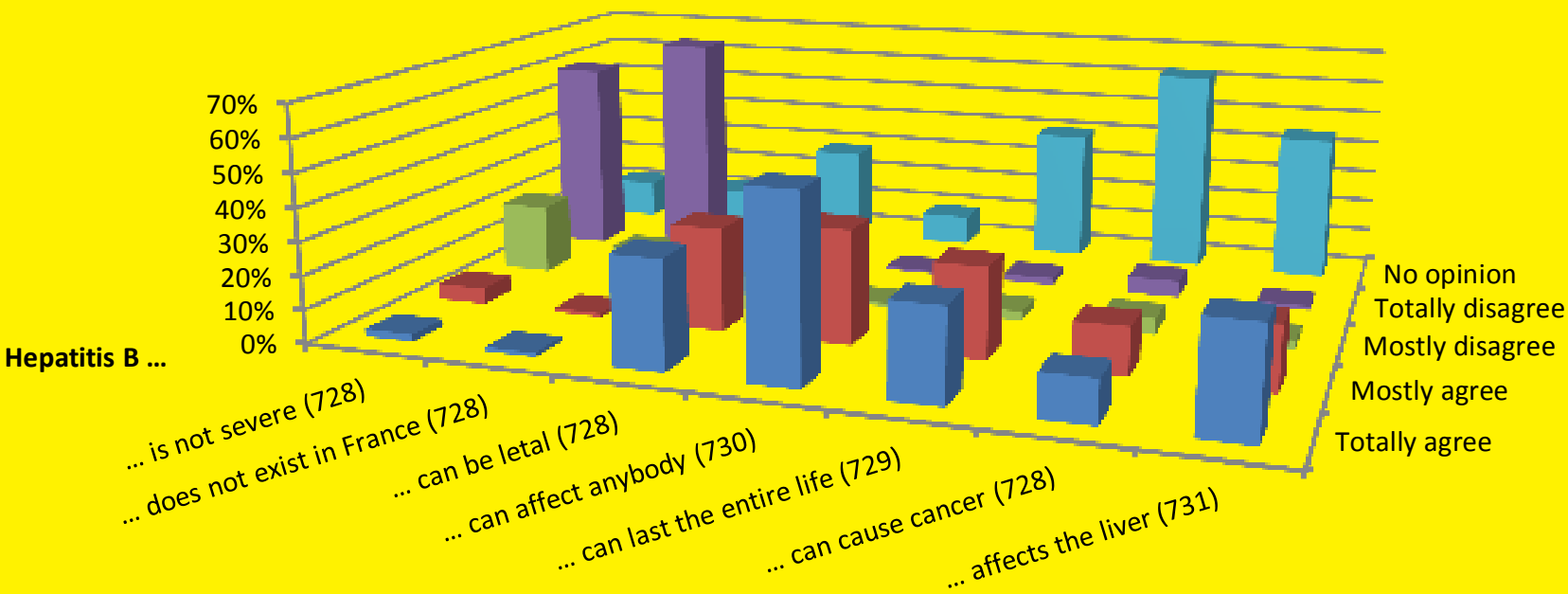
Population and methods

All subjects attending Grenoble FTC-STI during 3 months in 2013 were proposed to fill an anonymous questionnaire. Ten questions explored the knowledge on HBV infection; 7 the perception of HBV vaccine; 7 the acceptance of free HBV vaccination on the same day; and 7 the reasons for refusing this proposition. Determination of HBV serological status was performed.

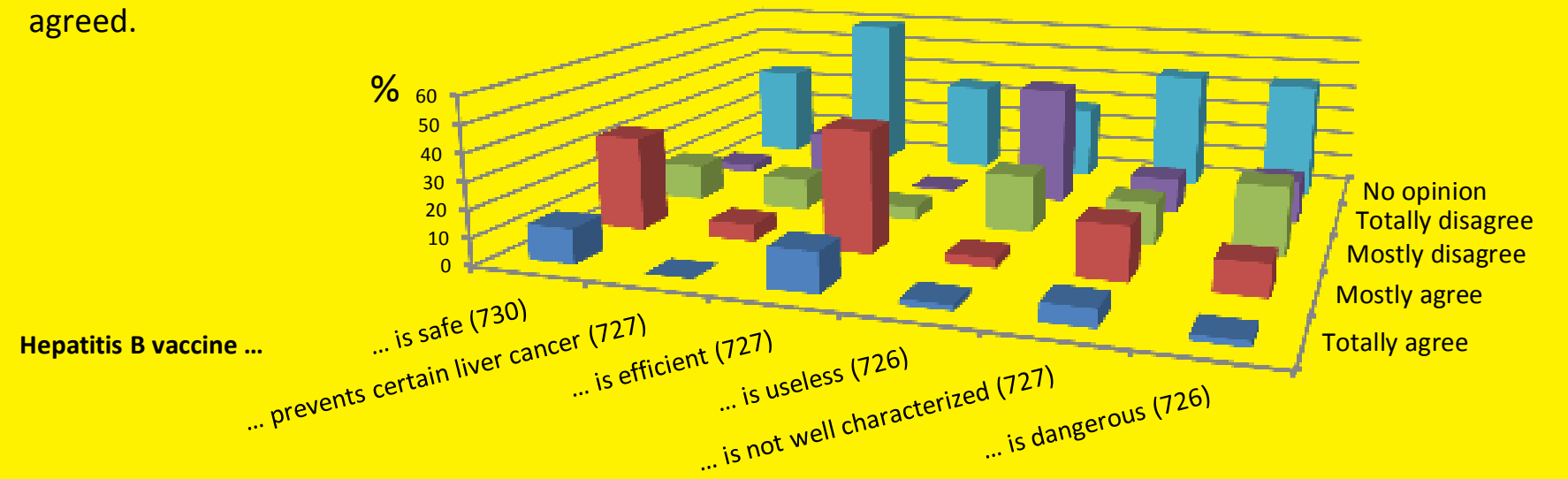
Results

The questionnaire was filled by 735 subjects (64.7% of the attendants during the study period) (mean age 27.9±9.2 years; males 59.9%).

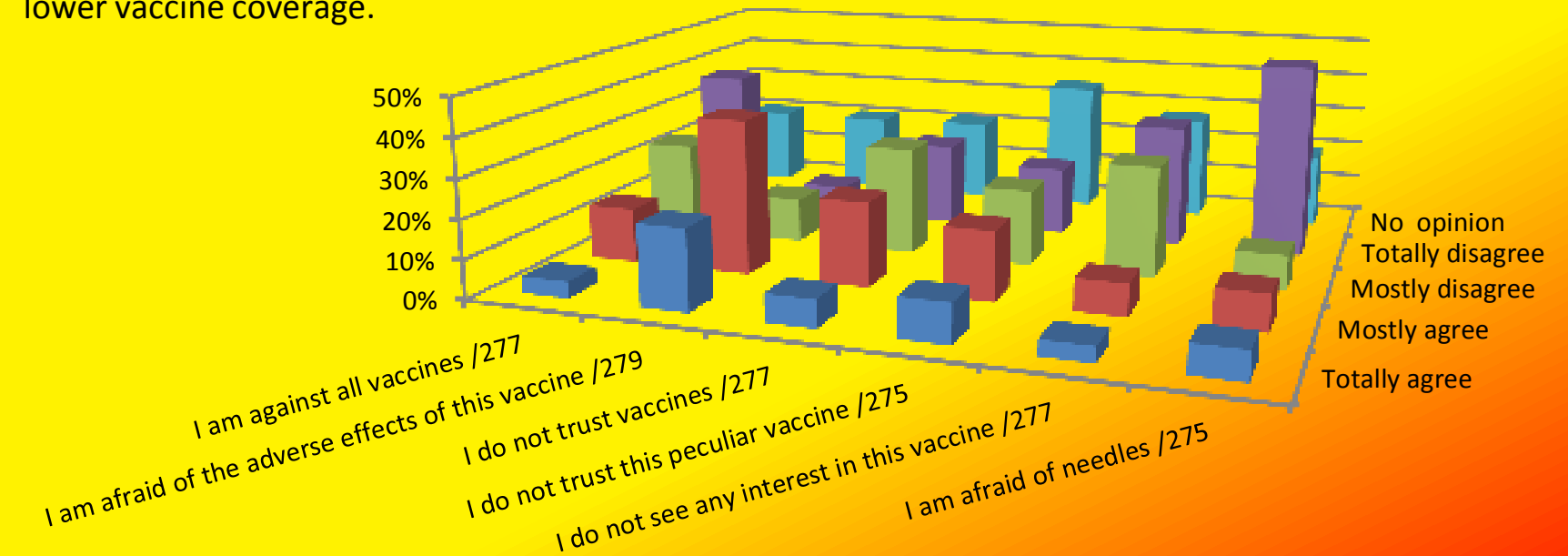
The majority identified this disease as being potentially severe, existing in France, and potentially lasting the entire life.



Concerning HBV vaccine, less than 50% totally or mostly agreed that it was safe; when asked if it was dangerous or "not well characterized", respectively 44.2% and 45.0% were "without opinion", and 14.0% and 26.5% totally or mostly agreed.



When asked if they do not trust all vaccines and if they do not trust HBV vaccine, respectively 28.9% and 39.0% of the unvaccinated population agreed; one third accepted to get vaccinated on the same day; only 18.7% disagreed (totally or mostly) when asked if they were afraid of the adverse effects of this vaccine. Subjects with negative perceptions of HBV vaccine had lower vaccine coverage.



Conclusions

The negative perception of HBV vaccine is marked in this at-risk population, peculiarly concerning supposed adverse effects. Communication toward this population must include reassurance on the innocuous nature of this vaccine.