

INADEQUATE NEEDLE AND SYRINGE PROVISION AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT PSYCHOACTIVE DRUGS ACROSS ENGLAND AND WALES

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Background:

People who inject drugs (PWID) are an underserved group, with higher risk of poor health outcomes than the general population. Provision of needles and syringes (PoNS) is a proven intervention for reducing harms associated with injecting drug use, effectively limiting the spread of blood-borne viruses and bacterial infections. We describe self-reported coverage of PoNS in England and Wales (E&W) and identify factors associated with inadequate provision.

Methods:

This study utilised 2017-2019 data from the annual Unlinked Anonymous Monitoring (UAM) Survey of PWID recruited through specialist services. We characterised people who injected psychoactive drugs in the past month in E&W who did not have access to sufficient injecting equipment to meet their requirements. Logistic regression was carried out to identify demographic, social and risk factors associated with inadequate PoNS. For sensitivity analysis, the number of injection attempts contributed to the PoNS calculation.

Results:

Of 2,442 people injecting in the past month, 34.2% reported inadequate PoNS to meet their needs (51.3% including unsuccessful injections). Those who injected powder cocaine in the past month were more likely to inject more frequently, and report inadequate PoNS, than those who did not. Following adjustment in multivariable modelling, younger age (adjusted odds ratio (aOR): 2.05, 95% confidence interval (CI): 1.23-3.41), initiating injecting in the past three years (aOR: 1.52, 95%CI: 1.10-2.08), injecting more frequently (aOR: 12.58, 95%CI: 8.53-18.57), and sharing injecting equipment (aOR: 1.31, 95%CI: 1.08-1.59) were associated with inadequate PoNS.

Conclusion:

Given the poor reported coverage of injecting equipment in E&W, the lack of national policy addressing this since data were collected, and recent negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, there remains urgent need to increase access and provision to prevent serious infection outbreaks and reduce other injecting-related harms. Younger PWID may require more injecting equipment due to increased stimulant injection among this cohort.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

There are no conflicts of interest.