

THE HEPRIS STUDY - PREVALENCE OF HEPATITIS C IN NORWEGIAN PRISONS

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Background:

People incarcerated in prison are a recognized high-risk group for hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection. The primary aim was to assess the prevalence of HCV infection among people incarcerated in Norwegian prisons, with a special emphasis on people who inject drugs. Approval granted by Regional Committee for Medical and Health Research Ethics South-East Norway (2016/1189).

Methods:

Newly incarcerated individuals in 6 prisons in a 12–18-month inclusion period in 2018-2019 were offered participation. Participants were tested for anti-HCV by rapid diagnostic test (HCV OraQuick®) and retested for anti-HCV and HCV RNA if positive.

Results:

A total of 870 participants were included. Median age was 35 years (IQR 28-45), 10.3% (90/870) were female and 78.7% (685/870) were Norwegian citizens. Ever injecting drug use (IDU) was reported by 35.9% (312/870) and current/former opioid agonist treatment (OAT) by 12.4% (108/870). Prevalence of anti-HCV was 19.7% (171/870) and of HCV RNA 9.3% (81/870), hence 47.3% ever exposed to HCV had chronic HCV infection. Anti-HCV positivity was 14.6% (62/425) among participants < 35 years and 24.5% (109/445) ≥ 35 years ($p < 0.001$), 36.7% (33/90) in females and 17.7% (138/780) in males ($p < 0.001$), 23.4% (160/685) in Norwegian citizens and 6.0% (11/184) in foreigners ($p < 0.001$). Participants reporting IDU had 53.5% (167/312) anti-HCV positivity, compared to 0.5% (3/553) in participants not reporting IDU ($p < 0.001$). Anti-HCV positivity was 80.6% (87/108) in participants ever in OAT and 10.9% (83/759) in never in OAT (< 0.001), but 39.2% (80/204) of participants with IDU and never in OAT, were anti-HCV positive.

Conclusion:

People incarcerated in Norwegian prisons have a high prevalence of anti-HCV, and nearly half of the study participants exposed had a chronic infection. Further analysis of association with risk factors for infection and treatment uptake will contribute to determining the future role of prisons in the elimination of HCV in Norway.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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