

UNSAFE SEXUAL PRACTICE PRIOR TO INCARCERATION, A HIGH-RISK FACTOR OF HBV AND HIV INFECTION AMONG PRISONERS IN BLANTYRE, MALAWI.

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Background

Hepatitis B and C viruses (HBV/HCV) are the major causes of liver diseases. Both HBV and HCV are primarily transmitted through contact with infected blood, and body fluids. Low and middle-income countries have a disproportionately high rate of chronic HBV and HCV especially in HIV infected population. Prison settings are associated with substantial risk of HBV, HCV, and HIV acquisition and could be a significant driver of blood-borne viruses among prisoners during detention and after release.

Methods

220 participants [86.4% males (n=190/220), 13.6% females (n=30/220)] were enrolled at Chichiri prison. Serum samples were prepared and analyzed utilizing HBV, and HCV rapid assays. All positive samples were run on sandwich enzyme immunoassay (EIA).

Results

The HBV prevalence was estimated at 8.6% among prisoners; whereas HCV was not detected among sampled participants (0%). The HIV prevalence rate was 21%, and HBV/HIV co-infection prevalence was at 11%. The majority (79.1%) of prisoners were incarcerated between 2017 and 2020. HBV/HIV co-infection was observed in 11% of the tested inmates.

Conclusion

This study confirms high prevalence of HBV among prisoners. The findings of this study suggest that intra-prison viral hepatitis transmission was very minimal, possibly due to criminalisation of high-risk practices for exposure to hepatitis viruses. Sexual transmission prior to incarceration was the highest risk factor for viral hepatitis.

Disclosure of interest

None to declare