

PEER TO PEER NETWORKING IN IDENTIFYING HEPATITIS C INFECTIONS AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS (PWID) IN AN URBAN CITY, SRI LANKA.

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Background: Peer led approach is a high impact intervention to reach key populations and it is evidenced as one of the best strategy in HIV programs globally. . Peer led approach have been helping key population programs in Sri Lanka to reach hard to reach population to services approaching by their own peers.

Description of model of care/intervention: Likewise a Peer led intervention was initiated to identify people who inject drugs infected with Hepatitis with the intension to treat all people who are infected and prevent further transmission of hepatitis C by introducing harm reduction services among PWID.

A team of outreach worker and five peer educators enrolled to reach out peers in the community. Various approaches were used to identify the networks; such as tracing the known networks and expanding the networks from the identified PWID, identifying the new networks through approaches like reaching out communities, environmental police, & local court members were helped to identify PWID communities. These identified PWID were educated on safer drug use, safe injections, harm reductions and prevention of HIV, & hepatitis. Needles & Syringes were provided to people who are in need.

Effectiveness: Peer led approach works well in identifying PWID infected with hepatitis C by penetrating the networks. As such, as of February 2023 total of 705 PWID were tested for hepatitis within the community, of this 276 (39%) were identified as reactive for hepatitis C. Majority were males PWID of more than 25 years (n= 260, 94%) and 15 PWID identified were below 25 years. Female PWID were insignificant in this cohort (n=1, more than 25 years).

Conclusion and next steps: This ongoing intervention show cases high yield in identifying PWID and detecting hepatitis C within the networks. Therefore, strengthening and expansion of this approach is important. Similar exercise in other localities and identifying PWID networks and community testing are to be expanded.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: None