

ASSESSING HEPATITIS C TESTING AND TREATMENT UPTAKE AMONG PWID IN GEORGIA

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Background:

Hepatitis C is considered a significant public health challenge in Georgia (5.4% HCV RNA). The most affected risk group is PWIDs with high anti-HCV prevalence (50-92%). National HCV elimination program started from 2015. Simplified lite-BBS methodology was developed to assess risky behaviors and HIV/HCV testing uptake among PWIDs in 2021.

Methods:

2000 PWIDs were recruited through combined methodology of on-site consecutive recruitment at Needle and Syringes Program (NSP) sites and mobile outreach, and snowball sampling. The study was conducted in seven major cities. A brief questionnaire was administered through face-to-face interviews with participants. Blood samples were taken to measure HIV and HCV prevalence and HCV reinfection.

Results:

Nearly all (98%) respondents were aware of viral hepatitis. While 47.7% self-reported they were HCV positive 56.6% tested anti-HCV positive; 14.7% were HCV RNA positive. 2.5% of respondents reported being diagnosed with both B and C hepatitis.

38% of those testing anti HCV positive reported having received treatment for HCV, 90.3% of reported being cured (having had a negative SVR test. Among those who had not received treatment 25% reported they did not know it was necessary, 24% reported that they didn't need treatment and 21% never thought about it.

79% of PWID who reported HCV treatment were the existing beneficiaries of the NSP. 16.4% reported being tested for re-infection and 7% were positive. 79% of PWID who reported HCV treatment were the existing beneficiaries of the NSP.

Conclusions:

While 84% of people who tested positive knew their status there is still a sizeable group who are positive and don't know their status. Harm reduction sites might address this challenge through improving access to HCV diagnostics and linkage to care. Targeted peer driven interventions with integrated clinics will be useful to address these needs.