

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AND SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Authors:

Price O¹, Ireland J¹, Peacock A¹, Webb P¹, Ottaviano S¹, Colledge-Frisby S^{1,2}, Wheeler A³, Willing A³, Kairouz, A³, Cunningham E³, Hajarizadeh B³, Leung J⁴, Tran LT¹, Vickerman P⁵, Farrell M¹, Dore GJ³, Hickman M⁵, Grebely J³, Degenhardt L¹

¹National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW, Sydney, Australia, ²National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Melbourne, Australia, ³Kirby Institute, UNSW, Sydney, Australia, ⁴University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, ⁵Population Health Science, Bristol Medical School, University of Bristol, Bristol, England

Background: Research suggests people who inject drugs (PWID) are at excess risk of acquiring sexually transmitted infections (STI) but there has been no systematic review of the evidence. In the context of increasing STI incidence globally, this is particularly critical. Accordingly, we aimed to assess recent (i.e., past year) sexual behaviours, recent uptake of STI testing, and STI prevalence among PWID.

Methods: We conducted searches of the peer-reviewed and grey literature, date limited from January 2008 to April 2022. Sexual behaviour and STI testing uptake were based on self-report, while only data from studies which conducted STI testing were used to estimate STI prevalence. Where sufficient data were available, regional and global estimates weighted by population size were generated using random effects meta-analysis.

Results: The availability of data varied greatly by region. We estimated that 14.9% (95% confidence interval [95% CI] 8.1-24.3) of PWID have recently engaged in sex work, while 20.6% (95% CI: 12.3-31.0) reported recent sex with a casual partner without a condom. Globally, we estimated the prevalence of syphilis among PWID was 4.4% (95% CI: 3.0-6.9), ranging from 1.2% (95% CI: 0.5-2.5) in Western Europe to 12.0% (95% CI: 9.6-14.7) in Central Asia. The prevalence of genital herpes, chlamydia and gonorrhoea was estimated to be 19.2% (95% CI: 16.0-22.7), 4.7% (95% CI: 1.9-10.5), and 1.2% (95% CI: 0.1-5.5), respectively. Human papilloma virus and trichomoniasis were each only tested for in one study. Data on recent STI testing uptake were sparse and highly heterogeneous; the pooled estimate was 23.4% (95% CI: 11.9-37.3).

Conclusion: To our knowledge, these are the first global prevalence estimates of STIs among PWID, which may serve as a baseline for monitoring disease burden. Future prevalence estimates would benefit from an increase in quality and quantity of data.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *This review was supported by the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council ASCEND programme (grant 1150078).*