HCV CRISIS AMONG RUSSIAN-SPEAKING INJECTING DRUG USERS IN FRANCE: THE URGENT NEED TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO CARE AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

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Background: Since the mid 2000s, many injecting drug users from Eastern Europe (especially from Georgia) have migrated to France, fleeing repressive drug policy in their home country and seeking easier access to substitutive treatment and HCV treatment in France. In the Paris metropolitan area, approximately a third of patients who attended harm reduction facilities or treatment centers came from Eastern Europe and Russian-speaking countries.

Method: We conducted a cross-sectional study among Russian-speaking people who inject drugs and who attend harm reduction facilities in Paris (N=150) along with sociological interviews (N=20). Our goal was to establish socio-demographic profiles and to learn about drug use practices, risk exposure to HCV, and level of access to care.

Results: Results show that HCV seroprevalence among Russian-speaking PWIDs is alarmingly high (89%). Eastern European PWIDs are highly educated (43% have an academic background), but they live in highly precarious conditions (90% have no stable accommodation). The majority of Russian-speaking PWIDs came from Georgia (58%). Our qualitative survey shows that their motives for migration included criminalization of drug use in their home country and access to HCV care in France — many thought France provided PWID with easier access to HCV care. Our epidemiological survey shows that only 58% have access to care for HCV and 18% receive HCV treatment.

Conclusion: When they migrate to France, Russian-speaking drug users undergo significant decline in social status following their migration experience. The sociological survey shows that they are very willing to enter into HCV treatment but that they sometimes face discrimination. These epidemiological and sociological data show that it is urgent to improve access to care and social integration for all sub-populations of drug users, especially those vulnerable to HCV infection.

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