

## **FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SKIN AND SOFT TISSUE INFECTIONS (SSTIs) AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS (PWID) IN NEW YORK CITY (NYC)**

Dominguez Gomez L<sup>1</sup>, Jordan A<sup>1</sup>, Zaidi I<sup>1</sup>, Harocopos A<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bureau of Alcohol Drug Use Prevention Care and Treatment, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Long Island City, United States

### **Background:**

SSTIs can cause serious morbidity among PWID. Safer injection practices may be challenging to carry out when material supplies are low such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. We examined factors associated with SSTIs including an application of the *Bacterial Infections Risk Scale for Injectors (BIRSI)* among PWID in NYC during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Methods:**

People in NYC who use opioids were interviewed (N=312) (Mar/2021-Nov/2021); 146 reported drug injection (prior 90-days) and were included in this analysis. We examined factors (e.g., sociodemographic, drug use, syringe services program [SSP] use) including the 7-item BIRSI and a summed composite BIRSI score. Associations were examined between factors and reporting  $\geq 1$  SSTI in 90-days prior.

### **Results:**

Participants were 55% Hispanic, 30% female, and a mean age of 45 years. 17.8% and 23.3% reported using syringes or other injection equipment used by others, respectively. SSTI prevalence was 25%. Younger age (OR: 0.95, 95%CI: 0.91, 0.99), using a syringe (OR: 6.01, 95%CI: 2.46, 15.23) or injection equipment that someone else had used (OR: 4.55, 95%CI: 2.00, 10.55), injecting heroin (OR: 4.32, 95%CI: 1.18, 27.94), and a higher BIRSI score (OR: 1.61, 95%CI, 1.27, 2.11) were associated with SSTIs. Controlling for age, gender, race, heroin injection, and number of injections, a higher BIRSI score was independently associated with SSTIs (aOR: 1.47, 95%CI: 1.13, 1.95). There was no difference in BIRSI scores between those reporting and not reporting past 90-day SSP use.

### **Conclusion:**

Our findings emphasize the importance of providing wound prevention and care in programs serving PWID to reduce injection-related SSTI risk and related morbidity. The high prevalence of PWID reporting SSTIs and sharing injection equipment despite SSP engagement indicates the potential impact of COVID-19 on service access and material supply availability as well as on-going risk for blood-borne infections such as hepatitis C and HIV.

### **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

*The authors have no conflicts of interest and therefore, have none to disclose.*