

PRACTICE OF SHARING INJECTION DEVICES AMONG DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS OF PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS IN GEORGIA (INTEGRATED BIO-BEHAVIORAL SURVEILLANCE SURVEY 2022)

Authors:

Kanchelashvili G^{1,2,3}, Butsashvili M^{1,2,3}, Kochlamazashvili M^{1,2}, Gulbiani L^{1,2,3}, Abashidze G^{1,2}, Chelidze N¹, Kamkamidze G^{2,3}

¹Health Research Union, ²Clinic "NeoLab", ³The University of Georgia

Background: People who inject drugs (PWID) are at increased risk of acquiring bloodborne infections due to their high-risk injection practices. This study aimed to evaluate the sharing practice of injection devices among Georgian PWID participating in Integrated Bio-Behavioral Surveillance Survey (IBSS) conducted in 2022.

Methods: The study included PWID ≥ 18 years old who injected illicit drugs within the past month. Respondent-driven sampling was used to conduct a cross-sectional IBSS across seven cities in Georgia. Face-to-face interviews were conducted using a structured survey to collect respondents' socio-demographic data, and knowledge and practices regarding drug use. Association between sharing injection devices with different socio-demographic factors and HCV prevalence was evaluated.

Results: The survey was conducted among 2005 PWID. 78.3% of participants were >35 years old. During the last month, a higher rate of injecting the device used with someone else was reported in younger participants (48.8% vs 30.2%; OR=2.21, 95% CI: 1.59-3.08). During the last drug use, 23.4% of participants aged ≤ 35 used shared injection paraphernalia being in touch with the needle/syringe used by someone else, as opposed to 18.7% of those aged >35 (OR=1.33, 95% CI: 1.03-1.72). HCV antibodies were positive among 42.0% of PWID with the history of sharing injection devices compared to 29.5% of those who never shared (OR=1.73, 95% CI: 1.37-2.18).

Conclusion: Risky behavior related to drug use, namely sharing the injection devices, is more common among younger PWID. Therefore, this age group should be the major target while planning educational activities. The HCV antibody positivity was also significantly associated with injection device sharing, emphasizing the importance of preventive measures to reduce the transmission of bloodborne infections.