

Unlinked Anonymous Prevalence Monitoring Programme



Survey of Injecting Drug Users

Summary of the findings for 2002/03 from the five collaborating centres in Northern Ireland:

For use by DHSSPS, CDSC Northern Ireland, & the Collaborating Agencies.

The Unlinked Anonymous Prevalence Monitoring Programmes (UAPMP) survey of injecting drug users monitors HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C infection levels in those injectors in contact with specialist services, such as needle exchanges, or on treatment programmes, such as methadone maintenance. It is a voluntary survey where those injectors who agree to participate provide an anonymous saliva sample and complete a brief behavioural questionnaire.

This ongoing survey was expanded to Northern Ireland in 2002.

THE SAMPLE

1. During 2002/03 there were 130 eligible samples returned from the agencies in Northern Ireland.
2. Of these participating injectors 30 (23%) were aged under 25, 75 (58%) aged 25 to 34, and 24 (19%) aged 35 and over. The median age in Northern Ireland was 28 years, it was also 28 years in Wales, and it was 32 years in England.
3. The majority were male, with only 35 (27%) of the participants being female.
4. Of those providing information on their injecting careers, 7% had been injecting for 15 or more years, 11% had been injecting 10-14 years, 40% 5-9 years and 42% 0-4 years.
5. Among the 130 who had injected during the 12 months preceding participation 114 (88%) had used opiates and 48 (37%) stimulants.
6. Among the 82 who had injected during the four weeks prior to participation 76 (93%) reported heroin as the main drug they had injected.
7. The majority (82%, 102 of 124) were currently receiving either a detox or maintenance drug regime.

HEPATITIS C

8. Of the injecting drug users participating 17% (22 of 130) had antibodies to hepatitis C.
9. The majority, 79% (99 of 125), reported having ever had a voluntary confidential test for hepatitis C.
10. Almost two thirds (11 of 17) of the participating injecting drug users who had antibodies to hepatitis C were aware of their infection.

HEPATITIS B

11. Of the injecting drug users who took part in the survey 2% (3 of 130) had antibodies to hepatitis B core antigen. This is much lower than the prevalence

found in any region of England, or in Wales.

12. Almost half of the participants (49%, 62 of 127) reported having received one or more doses of the vaccine against hepatitis B. This is a higher proportion than in Wales but not higher than the proportion in several regions of England.

HIV

13. HIV infection was found to be less than 1% (1 of 130) in the injecting drug users who took part in the survey.
14. Most of the participants (66%, 83 of 126) reported that they had ever had a voluntary confidential test for HIV.

INJECTING BEHAVIOUR AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

15. Of those who had injected during the four weeks prior to participating in the survey 44% (35 of 79) reported the direct sharing of needles and syringes during those four weeks. This was higher than the proportions found in the regions of England, and in Wales.
16. More than seven in ten (71%, 56 of 79) reported the sharing of injecting equipment other than needles and syringes, such as spoons, filters, and water, during the previous four weeks.
17. Nine in ten clients (116 of 129) had ever used a needle exchange. Of those who had started to inject in the last three years over four in five (21 of 26) had ever used a needle exchange.
18. Just under half (59 of 126) had ever been to prison, and just over half (30 of 57) had been to prison prior to starting to inject. Over one in five (13 of 63) reported injecting in prison.

Table: Summary Comparison of the Results from the Collaborating Centres within Northern Ireland: 2002/03

	Hollywell in-patient unit	Other Centres
<i>Number of samples returned</i>	54	76
Proportion male	76%	71%
Proportion under 25	33%	16%
Proportion with antibodies to hepatitis B core antigen	2%	3%
Proportion with antibodies to hepatitis C	2%	28%
Proportion ever having had a voluntary-confidential test for HIV	44%	82%
Proportion ever having had a voluntary-confidential test for hepatitis C	78%	80%
Ever used a needle exchange	96%	86%
Accepted offer of dose of the hepatitis B vaccine	67%	36%
<i>Number who had injecting in previous 4 weeks</i>	35	45
Proportion sharing needles and syringes in previous 4 weeks	38%	49%
Proportion sharing other injecting other equipment in previous 4 weeks	65%	76%