

HCV AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS IN FRANCE: ACTING ON RISK ENVIRONMENT IN AN EVOLVING CRISIS

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Context (1)

- France is generally presented as a country with an efficient harm reduction model, **thanks to high OST coverage, a facilitated access to HCV treatment.**
- Our country is currently facing a very critical situation regarding the HCV dynamic among PWIDs.
- The objectives of the present study were to describe the HCV exposure among PWIDs, by measuring HCV incidence and the level of at-risk injection practices.
- We also aimed to identify **factors associated with this high level of risk exposure**, and to **contextualize epidemiological data using a sociological analysis of the characteristics of the French harm reduction model** compared with those of other similar European countries.

Methods

- Our study combined data from ANRS-Coquelicot **cross-sectional seroprevalence repeated surveys**. These studies were based on a time-location random sampling design and blood testing.
- Fingertick blood samples were collected on dried blood spots (DBS).
- We estimated **HCV incidence** in two ways:
 - by using a **statistical comparison method between the two cross-sectional surveys**;
 - by using **biological data to measure the presence of HCV-RNA among people testing negative for anti-HCV antibodies**.

Results

- **Needle and syringe sharing** (in the last month) **has increased significantly**, from 13% in 2004 to 24% in 2013 (*Jauffret-Roustide et al, Drug and Alcohol Review 2017*).
- Multivariate analysis showed that the time period is only significantly associated with needle sharing among the **most precarious PWID** (IRR=4.2).
- **Relative decrease in HCV** seroprevalence, from 73% in 2004 to 67% in 2013, but this figure was **not significant** (*Léon et al. Biostatistics 2015*).

Results

- In 2013, HCV incidence was estimated at 11% a year based on the statistical comparative method (*Léon et al. Epidemiology & Infection, 2018*).
- We made another estimation with a biological method and found a very high HCV incidence (22%).
- Knowledge of HCV status was quite low: 39% of PWID declared being HCV negative and tested positive.
- 33% of PWID said they face difficulties when trying to obtain sterile syringes in the last 6 months (*Weill Barillet et al. Revue d'épidémiologie et de santé publique, 2016*).

Conclusion

- ANRS-Coquelicot is the only French study that provides HCV estimates based on biological methods at a national level. The two last editions of the survey has been done in 2004 and 2013 and will be repeated next year in 2020.
- The estimated HCV incidence and the increase in at-risk practices in France were among the highest observed in all high-income countries.
- This critical epidemiological situation may be partly explained by **France's delay in implementing a strong harm reduction model and its persisting criminalisation of drug use.**