

INTRODUCTION

The injection and use of Image and Performance Enhancing Drugs (IPEDs) has, over recent decades, grown substantially in many countries, including the United Kingdom [1].

People injecting IPEDs had been perceived as not being at high risk of hepatitis C virus infection. However, recent studies indicate the prevalence of antibodies to hepatitis C in this group is 10 times that in the general population, but lower than among those injecting psychoactive drugs [2].

The uptake of diagnostic testing for hepatitis C and the extent of undiagnosed infection are examined using data from a voluntary unlinked-anonymous survey of people injecting IPEDs.

What are IPEDs?

- They are a range of enhancement substances that are used to increase muscularity and modify appearance.
- IPEDs are either taken orally or via intramuscular or subcutaneous injections.
- The most commonly injected IPEDs in the UK are: anabolic steroids (73%), growth hormone (26%), human chorionic gonadotrophin (21%) and melanotan (10%) [3].

METHODS

We examined data from participations in the Unlinked Anonymous Monitoring Survey of people injecting IPEDs during 2012 to 2015. Participants recruited from across England & Wales completed a short questionnaire and provided a dried-blood spot sample. The survey uses the voluntary unlinked and anonymous methodology, with the participants recruited through sentinel collaborating sites providing services, such as, needle and syringe programmes and outreach.

This survey is biennial, and data from two survey waves was used in this analysis (2012-2013 & 2014-2015). Participants in the second wave reporting participation in the first wave were excluded.

Participants current hepatitis C antibody status from the testing of the dried blood spot samples, and their self-reported uptake of hepatitis C testing and result of their last test, were used to examine:-

- hepatitis C testing uptake, and
- the extent of 'undiagnosed' hepatitis C infection (by comparing the hepatitis C antibody status from the testing of the dried blood spot sample with the questionnaire data on testing uptake and result of the last).

RESULTS

During 2012-2015, there were 564 first participations by people who had injected IPEDs:-

- their median age 31 years (at time of participation);
- one in fifty (2%) were women;
- 25% had been imprisoned;
- 95% had been born in the UK; &
- 14% had also injected psychoactive drugs, see figure 1.

The overall prevalence of antibodies to hepatitis C was 4.8% (27); prevalence varied by whether participants had injected psychoactive drugs or not, see figure 2.

Overall, 37% reported a diagnostic test for hepatitis C, uptake of testing varied by whether participants had injected psychoactive drugs or not, see figure 3.

Of the participants with antibodies to hepatitis C, 44% were aware of their status; awareness varied by whether participants had injected psychoactive drugs or not, see figure 4. Two-fifths (6/15) of those unaware they had ever had hepatitis C, had never injected a psychoactive drug, see figure 5.

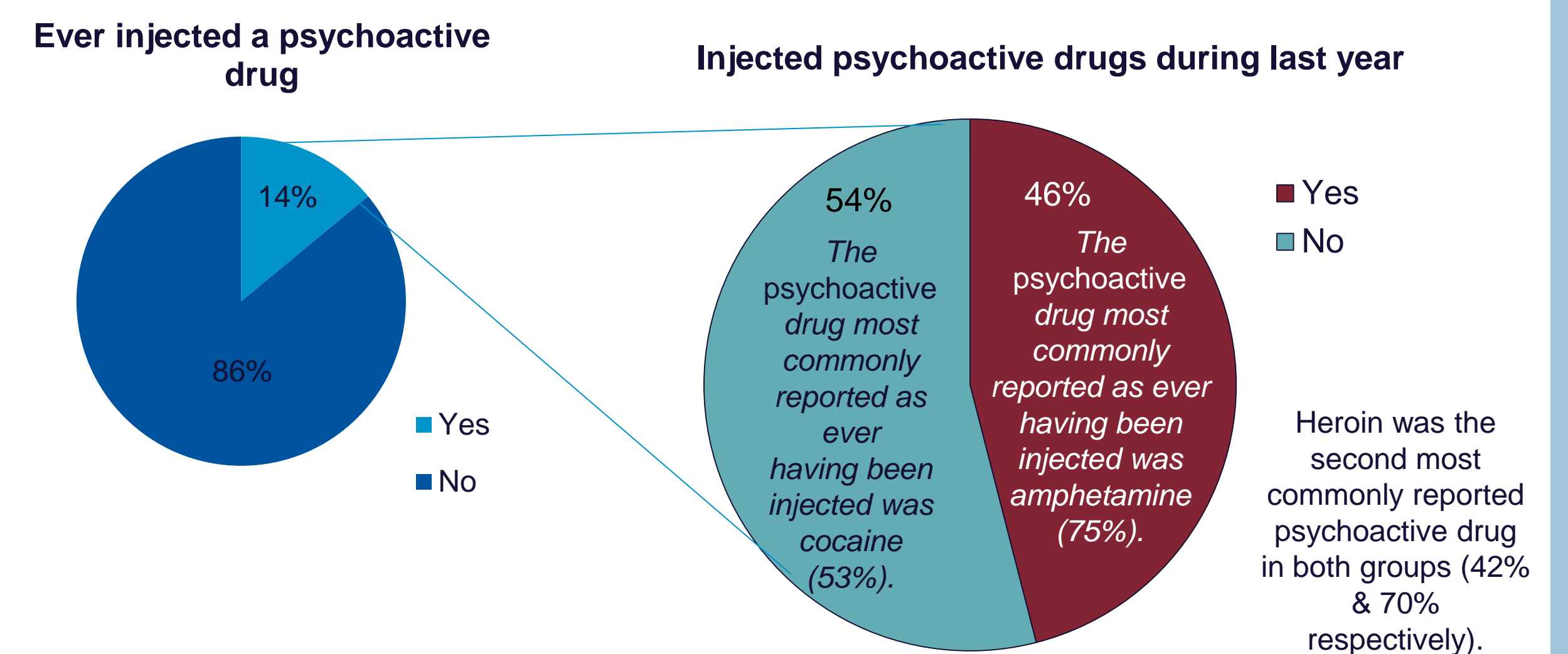


Figure 1: Proportion also injecting psychoactive drugs

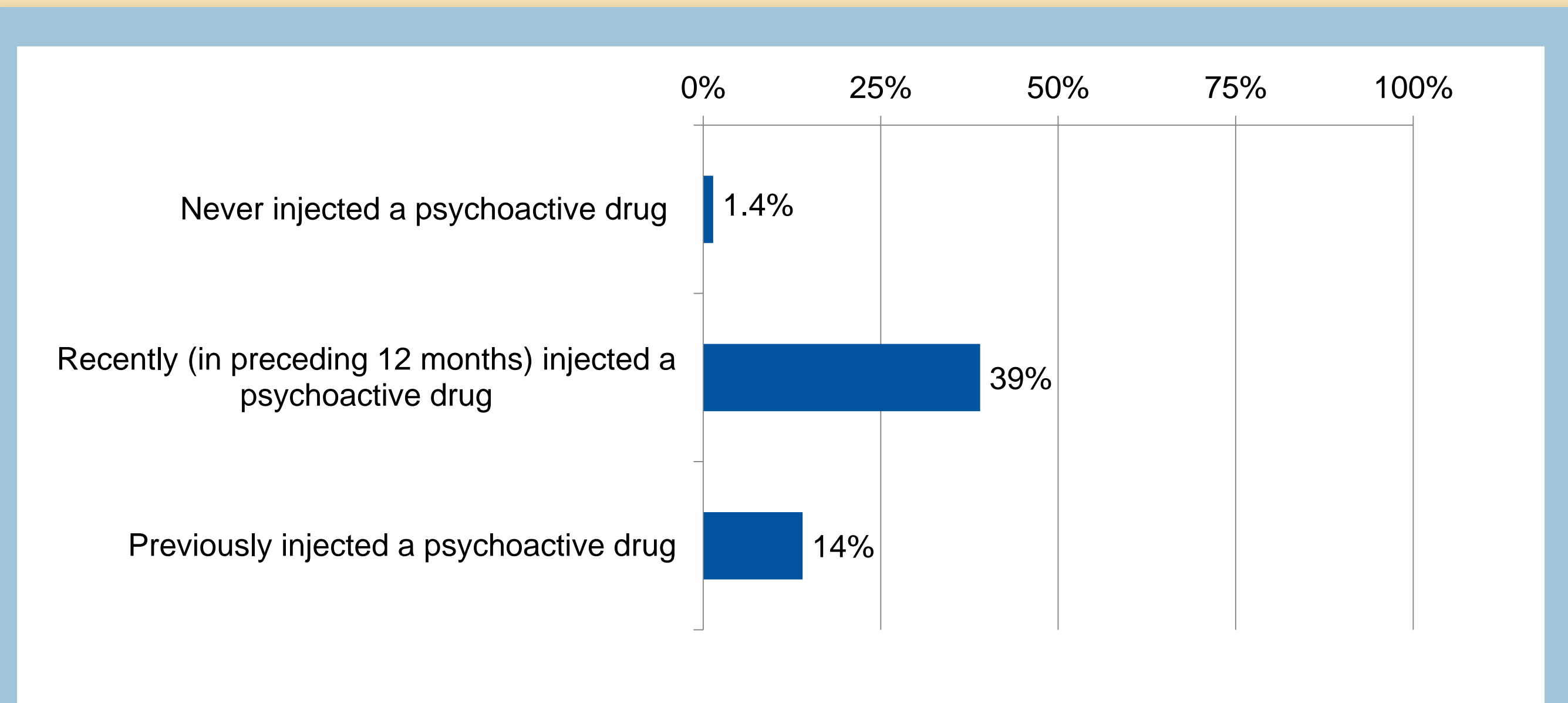


Figure 2: Prevalence of antibodies to hepatitis C

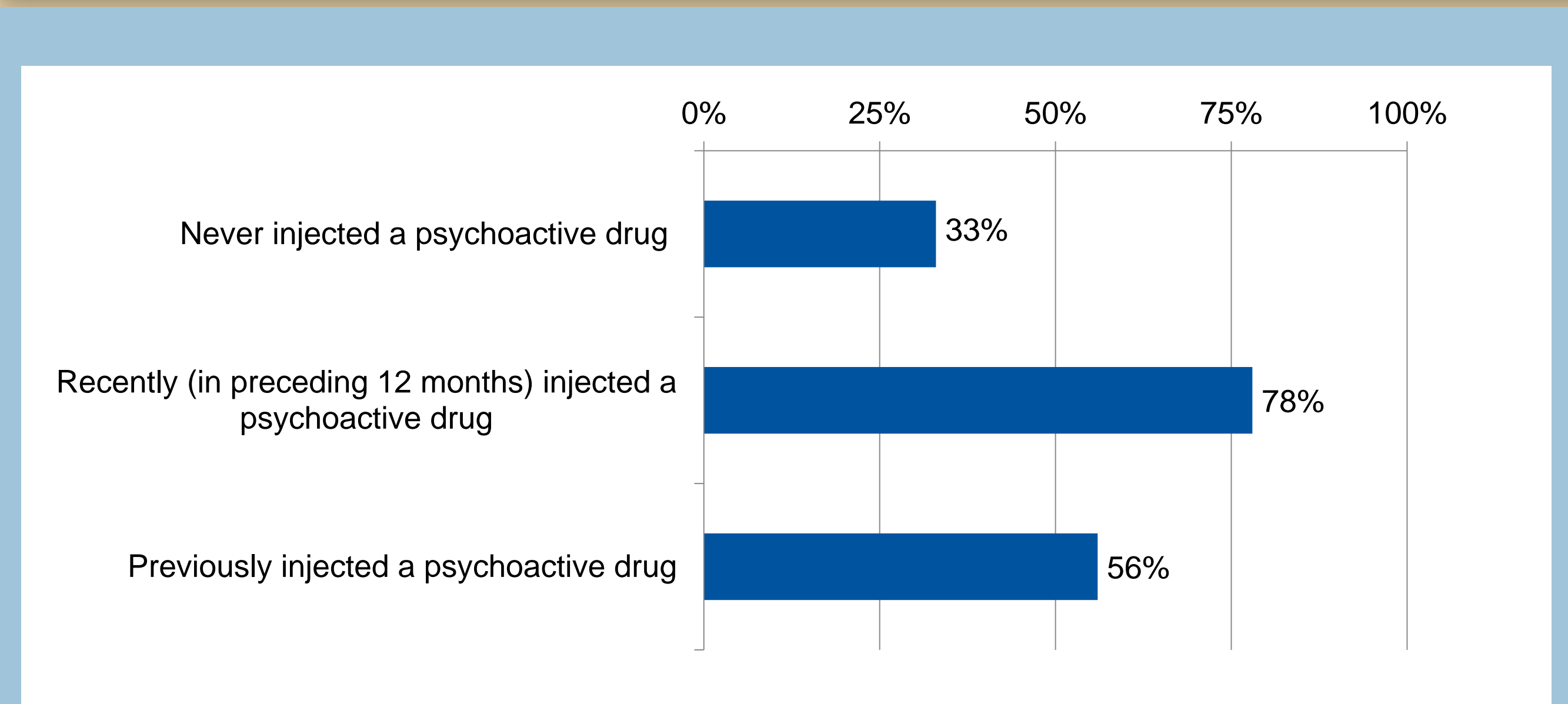


Figure 3: Uptake of diagnostic testing for hepatitis C

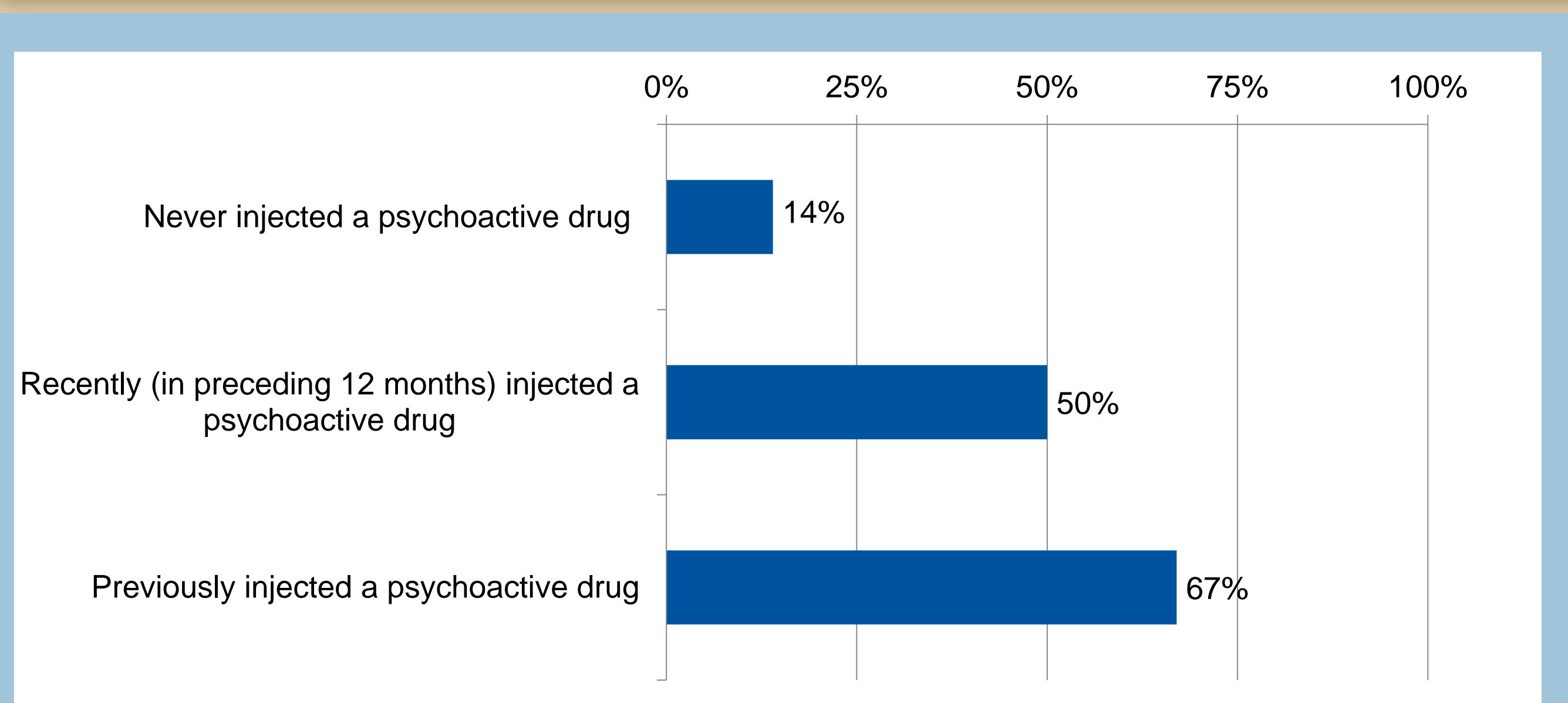


Figure 4: Proportion aware of having had hepatitis C

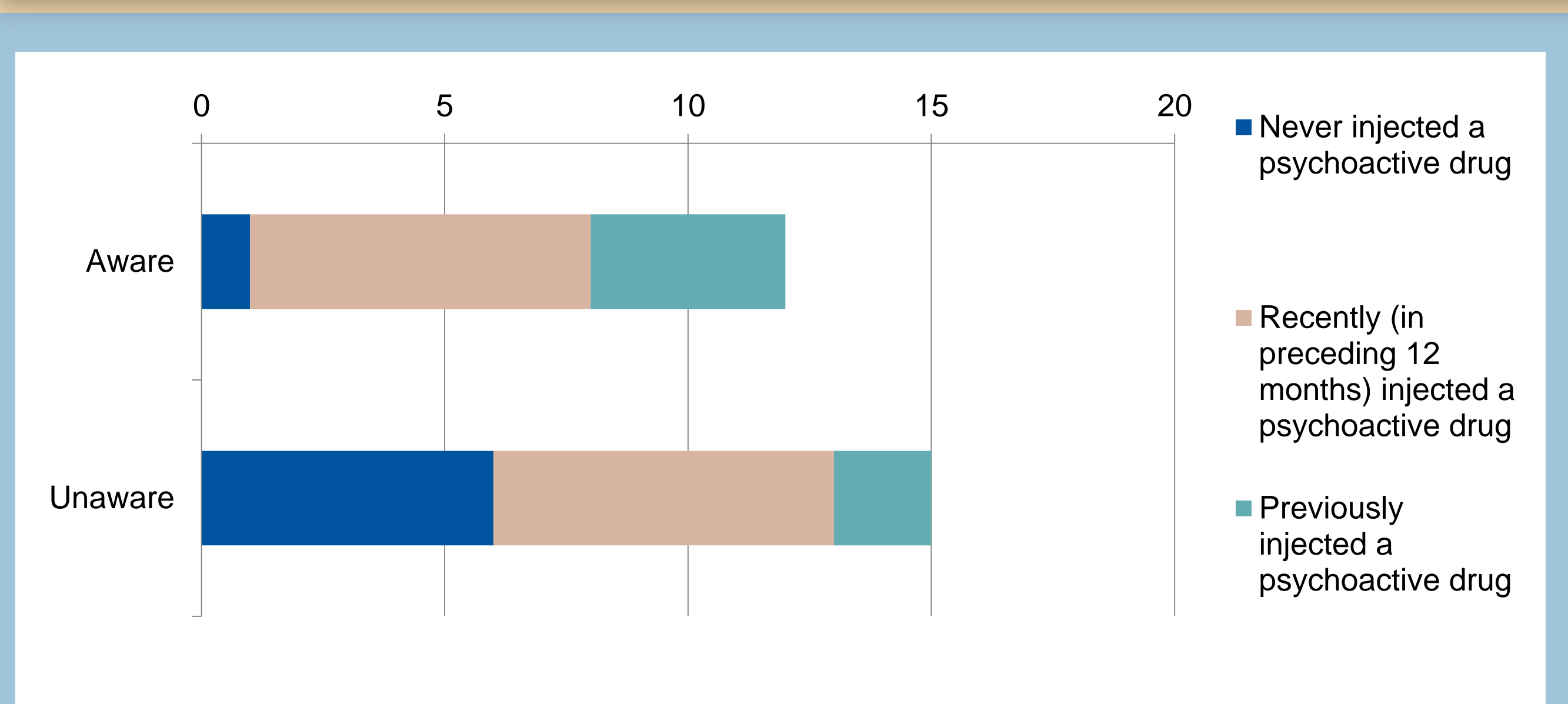


Figure 5: Numbers aware and unaware of having had hepatitis C

LIMITATIONS

- The dried bloods spot samples collected in the survey were only tested for antibodies to hepatitis C; they were not tested for hepatitis C RNA. Therefore we cannot look at awareness of current hepatitis C infection.
- Data on the uptake of testing for hepatitis C and the result of the last test were from self-reports.
- Due to limited data on the size and nature of this population, we are currently unable to assess representativeness of those recruited.
- Considering these issues the findings presented here need to be generalised with caution.

CONCLUSIONS

- Hepatitis C infection is common among people who inject IPEDs, with one in 20 having had hepatitis C.
- Those injecting IPEDs who have hepatitis C and who have never injected a psychoactive drug are mostly undiagnosed.
- There are also unrecognised hepatitis C cases among those injecting IPEDs, but who had also injected psychoactive drugs.
- Targeted interventions to improve the uptake of hepatitis C testing are needed for people who inject IPEDs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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2. Public Health England. (2014). Shooting Up: Infections among people who inject drugs in the United Kingdom 2013: Public Health England.
3. Image and Performance Enhancing Drugs: 2015 Survey Results. Liverpool John Moores University, July 2016. ISBN: 978-1-910725-64-1