

Health literacy and changes in pattern of drug use among participants at the Stockholm Needle Exchange Program during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lindqvist et al., 2020)

Elin Holmén, Psychiatric nurse / PhD student

Stockholm Needle Exchange, Stockholm Centre for Dependency Disorders / Karolinska Institute, Department of Clinical Neuroscience

Aim of study

- How was the COVID-19 pandemic affecting people who inject drugs in Stockholm, Sweden?

Stockholm Needle Exchange Program (NEP)

2 fixed sites, one mobile unit



- 4200 individuals

Data collection

- NEP's own data comparing Jan-Oct 2020 to the same period in 2019.
- COVID-19 Health Literacy Questionnaire
- SARS CoV-2 IgG antibody tests

Results comparing Jan-Oct 2020 to 2019

1. No change in number of NEP visits
2. Less heroin use
3. Less testing for HIV and HBV
4. Increased distribution of needles and syringes
5. Increased inclusion in THN program
6. An overall reduction in registered deaths among NEP clients

Results - Health Literacy Questionnaire

- Knowledge concerning COVID-19 was high
- 30% said that illicit drugs protect against COVID-19
- 38% reported no change in behaviour during illness
- 44% had confidence in a future vaccine

Results SARS CoV-2 Antibody testing

- **Low** antibody prevalence
- 4,2% in NEP clients compared to 11,1% in the general population in Stockholm

Conclusions

- High level of service maintained in the NEP
- Less testing for HIV and HBV
- Increase of distributed needles and syringes
- Increase in THN provision
- Transition from heroin to amphetamine use = decreased overall mortality?

Implications

- NEP – an arena for health information as well as provider of COVID-19 vaccine
- Low antibody prevalence → prioritized COVID-19 vaccination

Disclosure of interests

KL, CW, EH and AH have no conflict of interest.

MK has received honoraria for lectures/consultancy from AbbVie, Gilead, MSD, Mundipharma, DnE Pharma and Nordic Drugs, and has received research grants from Gilead and Nordic Drugs.

Contact details

elin.holmen.2@ki.se

+46 8 735800172

Elin Holmén

Sprututbytet, S:t Görans sjukhus,

Akutvägen 29,

112 81 Stockholm, Sweden