

Global patterns of drug use among people who inject drugs

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Introduction: The use of different drug types and routes of administration are associated with distinct harms and treatment needs. A deep understanding of the global patterns of drug use among people who inject drugs (PWID) is necessary to tailor interventions to address these needs. A comprehensive exploration of the geographical variation in drug using practices of PWID, including types of drugs and routes of administration used, has yet to be undertaken and is the aim of this paper.

Method: Systematic searches of peer-reviewed and grey literature published between 2008-2022 were conducted. Data on drug type and route of administration within the past year were included and, where possible, country-level estimates were pooled to generate regional estimates of any, injection and non-injection use of common drug classes.

Results: 40,427 studies were screened and 394 were included in analysis. Recent heroin use via any route of administration ranged from 24% of PWID in South Asia to 84% in East and Southeast Asia. Any use of methamphetamine ranged from 22% in Sub Saharan Africa to 76% in North America. Recent non-injection heroin use was highest in Western Europe (45%) while non-injection methamphetamine use was highest in East and Southeast Asia (43%). Recent methamphetamine injection was highest among PWID in Australasia (64%), as was recent any use of cannabis (72%). Recent alcohol intake among PWID was greatest in Eastern Europe (84%).

Discussions and Conclusions: This review provides regional and global estimates of injecting and non-injecting use and use via any route of administration of several major drug classes among PWID.

Implications for Practice or Policy: The regional variations in drug types and routes of administration utilised among PWID indicate the need for adaptation of treatment and harm reduction interventions to target the specific behaviours and harms associated with these profiles of use.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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