

'IT'S LIKE I DON'T WANNA BE STRAIGHT WITH REALITY': ALCOHOL IN THE LIVES OF PWID LIVING WITH HEPATITIS C

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Introduction:

Alcohol use is the strongest known modifiable risk factor for negative hepatitis C virus (HCV) outcomes yet remains a relatively unexplored area of research, particularly in the context of people who inject drugs (PWID) living with HCV.

Methods:

Based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with 18 people who inject drugs living with HCV in Melbourne, this study explored participant understandings of living with HCV and the impact that alcohol has on their lives.

Key Findings:

Half the sample reported drinking at harmful levels as measured by the AUDIT. Three prominent themes were uncovered from the interview narratives:

(1) Most participants were knowledgeable about the potential negative consequences of drinking with a HCV diagnosis, however, this did not necessarily translate to a change in alcohol use; (2) Participants identified a tendency to substitute drugs when reducing heroin consumption and this included increasing alcohol use; and (3) Significant life events such as moving to a different city or increased access to children acted as strong catalysts for change in alcohol use.

Discussions and Conclusions:

Participants expressed a yearning and a hope for positive change in their lives. For public health workers interested in alcohol related harm reducing interventions gaining trust and access to this population is essential. New treatment options for HCV may be a starting point for change.

Implications for Practice or Policy:

Alcohol related harm may best be mediated through support for peer based education programs with a focus on harm-reducing strategies, assertive outreach and the integration of brief interventions.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

SD has no conflicts of interest to declare. PD, MH, and PH have all received investigator initiated funding from Gilead Sciences for work unrelated to this study. PD has received funding from Reckitt Benckiser for work unrelated to this study. The authors retain complete control of the study protocol, data collection, analysis, and the decision to submit this abstract.