

THE STAYING SAFE INTERVENTION: CONTEXTUALIZING KNOWLEDGE ON HCV TRANSMISSION, PREVENTION, AND RISK BEHAVIORS AMONG YPWID

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BACKGROUND

- In U.S., HCV infections among young people who inject drugs (YPWID) increased by 300% between 2008-2019.¹
- Vulnerable to
 - Injection-site injury and physical complications
 - Serious bacterial infections, and
 - Opioid-related overdose
- Few behavioral interventions aim to prevent HCV and are specifically tailored to young people
- Staying Safe is a socio-behavioral HCV-prevention intervention tailored to young opioid injectors.

METHODS

- Staying Safe, a harm reduction intervention for YPWID, ages 18-29 (n=169)
 - Upon enrollment, all completed baseline assessment
 - Randomly assigned to: 1) Staying Safe or 2) Control intervention
 - Follow-up assessments every 3 months for 1 year post-intervention

- Qualitative interviews were conducted between 3 and 9 months post-intervention and lasted ~30-90 minutes
 - Interviewees (n=21) discussed:
 - HCV-transmission knowledge pre/post intervention
 - Experience participating in intervention and trial
 - Impact on drug use practices and/or social relations

RESULTS: Individual-Level - Intervention & Trial Experiences

- **SOCIAL OBSERVATION → REFLECTION:** Participating in the intervention fostered peer-based change in perceptions of risk; understanding their own drug use through the lens of others' use. *"Just seeing people [in] the intervention, the demographics, the ages, the people here during that group, and having people share like their sides of what's going on ... having me like open up my eyes ... like you kind of, kind of don't know what's going on until it's in your face."*
- **HEIGHTENED SELF-AWARENESS:** The follow-up assessments prompted introspection when participants were asked to self-report on drug injection. *"Coming in for the follow-ups and realizing at the end, wow, I spent in the last few months this much money on drugs? I should try to cut down, so that way in the next few months, I don't end up spending a lot."*
- **CONTEXTUALIZED RISKY SITUATIONS:** Comic vignettes helped identify risky practices. *"There were these comics of different situations that people get into ... sharing needles with others when they're not thinking ... I'd been in those positions before. It was so relatable."*

RESULTS: Network-Level - Safety of Others

- **BECOMING A RESOURCE:** Instead of being at risk of passing infection to others, Ssafe participants found information easy to share: *“I actually gave two of them the comic books, but also I knew that two of them were sharing needles, so I told them about the needle exchanges ... I was like looking out for them because I felt like they were in danger because of the way they were using.”*
- **PROMOTING SAFETY WITH PEERS:** Open communication with injection networks models healthy protective behaviors for themselves and others to avoid situations that present risk for HCV transmission. *“We talked about ... the results of our [HCV] tests ... and I try to make sure that before I meet up with my friends, that they have works or I get them.”*

CONCLUSION

- **YPWID DEMONSTRATE INTEREST AND WILLINGNESS TO STAY SAFE**
 - Adopting Ssafe strategies to help themselves and peers in their drug injection network, which helped them avoid high-risk injection settings
- **IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXTUALIZED INFORMATION FOR YPWID**
 - Harm reduction education can be improved by specifically addressing gaps in knowledge
 - Contextualize risk-reduction information within common situations
 - Practice how to respond to these situations.

DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

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