

POLICE ARE RESPONSIVE TO HEPATITIS C PREVENTION: POLICE SENSITIZATION WITH A HEPATITIS C ENTRY HAS PROVEN TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE IN NAIROBI, KENYA

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Background: Medecins du monde (France) MdM implements a Harm Reduction program for People Who Use Drugs (PWUD) in Nairobi County. The success of harm reduction in Kenya is greatly sabotaged by punitive drug laws. The Narcotic and Psychotropic Act of 1994 makes illegal: possession, use, paraphernalia, and being in the environment of drug use. Consequently, police disproportionately target PWUDs. This greatly affects prevention of Hepatitis C (HCV) and other harm reduction interventions.

Description of intervention: Since inception of the program 200 police officers are sensitized per a year in harm reduction. Since 2016 the entry for the sensitizations shifted to HCV. The rationale of a HCV entry to police sensitizations is to not only give them knowledge on HCV but also to encourage them to join the rallying call for eliminating HCV in Kenya. This has seen unprecedented success.

Effectiveness: The number of police raids have reduced drastically to about one raid in 3 months from at least once weekly. This has enhanced the Needle Syringe Program (NSP). Majority of the People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) in Nairobi rely on street storage for the syringes due to homelessness or due to stigma so that they cannot carry the syringes home. Consequently, the tremendous reduction in police raids is a big boost to the efficacy of NSP and prevention of HCV.

Conclusion and next steps: Police are more responsive to a HCV tailored harm reduction sensitization than a general harm reduction sensitization. The next step is to engage policy makers for change of law. HCV will be the entry point as it is more effective.

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