

A PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION OF HEPATITIS C PREVENTION AND THERAPEUTIC STRATEGIES FOR INJECTION DRUG USERS IN MOMBASA COUNTY, KENYA

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Background:

Globally, approximately 58 million people were chronically infected with Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) in 2019. Among injection drugs users (PWUD/ID), about 10 million have HCV, and injection drug use accounts for 23 to 39 percent of new HCV infections. In Kenyan PWID's HCV prevalence ranges between 18–30% compared to those who do not inject drugs at 0.2–1.8%. In Kenya, coastal HCV incidence was estimated at 6.31 per 100 person-years, nearly double Nairobi's 3.19/100 person-years and other regions.

Methods:

This study assessed trends of injection drug use and prevention strategies of Hepatitis C. The Mombasa Youth Study used a longitudinal digital community survey design with two waves of data collection among adolescents and young people (AYP). A total of 3863 AYPs and 456 healthcare workers were sampled. Data on injection drug use trends among AYP and stigmatizing attitudes were considered. Data was collected and analyzed using Stata version 18.

Results:

Injection drug users in Mombasa County have poor health scores. Male use was higher than female (38.5% vs 24.2%). 2.5% of respondents reported ever injecting drugs and 2.0% recent use. Alarming, two-thirds of those who inject drugs reported sharing injection equipment increasing their risk of HCV infection. 23.3% received support for use and harm reduction while 28.1% wanted help but could not access it. Estimated 54.7% of healthcare workers had low stigma towards injection drug users. 22.5% of clinicians and 27.8% of non-clinicians had high stigma while 7.5% of clinicians said they would refuse care to someone who uses drugs.

Conclusion:

While a portion of youth sought or wanted harm reduction support, few received it. Despite overall low stigma among healthcare workers, a notable minority expressed discriminatory views. Localized and evidence-based HCV-related services are essential for informing policy, optimizing resource allocation, and designing responsive strategies in Mombasa County.