

Burundi: People Who Use Drugs, a Highly Vulnerable Community to Viral Hepatitis B and C

Background :

The Burundi Association of People Who Use Drugs (BAPUD), established in 2016, strengthened its capacity to support people who use drugs after receiving ministerial accreditation in September 2017. As a community-based organization representing this population, BAPUD advocated with the Government of Burundi, UNAIDS, and the Global Fund to implement an Integrated Biological and Behavioral Survey (IBBS) conducted by and for people who inject drugs (PWID). The survey aimed to assess the prevalence of hepatitis B and C and the knowledge, attitudes, and risk behaviors related to transmission among PWID in Burundi.

Methods:

A descriptive cross-sectional study involved 150 PWID from five regions. Participants were adults (18+) who had injected heroin in the past six months. Hepatitis B and C testing followed national protocols, and standardized questionnaires evaluated participants' knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding hepatitis transmission and prevention.

Results:

The study found extremely high hepatitis prevalence among PWID: hepatitis C affected 58.3% of participants (31% men, 27.3% women), and hepatitis B reached 24.9% (19.6% men, 5.3% women). Knowledge of prevention was very limited: 56.8% of men and 43.2% of women were unaware of the hepatitis vaccine; 98% did not know that sharing injection equipment could transmit hepatitis, and 96% lacked information on effective preventive measures.

Conclusion :

Viral hepatitis prevalence among PWID in Burundi is far higher than in the general population. High-risk behaviors, gaps in prevention knowledge, and limited access to care highlight the urgent need for behavior change communication, expanded harm reduction services, and improved vaccination and treatment access to reduce the hepatitis burden in this vulnerable population.