



Integrated Biological and Behavioral Surveillance (IBBS) Survey among Women Injecting Drug Users (WIDUs) in Pokhara Valley

Brief description of the survey

This is the first round of the IBBS survey conducted among Women Injecting Drug Users (WIDUs) in Pokhara Valley. The females of 16 years and above who had been injecting drugs for at least three months preceding the survey were defined as WIDUs and enrolled in the survey. School of Planning Monitoring Evaluation and Research (SPMER) carried out this survey from December 2016 to May 2017. The survey was undertaken primarily to determine the prevalence of HIV, syphilis, Hepatitis B (HBV) and Hepatitis C (HCV) infection among WIDUs. Moreover, the survey also find out the baseline data of comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS, sexual risk behavior and injecting behaviors among WIDUs, their exposures to various HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support programs.

Methods

This was a cross sectional survey conducted among 155 WIDUs. All approach using network sampling method were applied to recruit WIDUs. A structured questionnaire was used to collect behavioral data related with background information, sexual and injecting behaviors among the respondents. Blood samples were collected to test HIV, Syphilis, HBV and HCV. The rapid test kits recommended by National Centre for AIDS and STD Control were used to test HIV, Syphilis, HBV and HCV. The ethical approval for the survey was obtained from Nepal Health

Research Council. WIDUs were interviewed after obtaining witnessed oral consent followed by pre-test counseling. WIDUs were provided with test results along with post-test counseling and syndromic treatment for STIs.

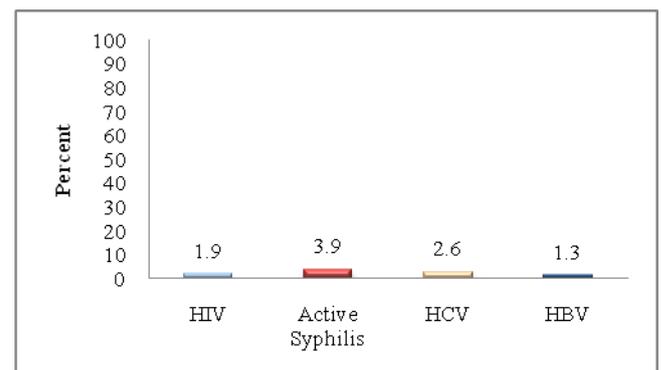
Key Findings

Prevalence of HIV, Active Syphilis, HBV and HCV among WIDUs:

The prevalence of HIV among WIDUs was 1.9 percent (95% CI=0.5, 5.9) and prevalence of syphilis was 3.9 percent (95% CI=1.5, 8.6). The prevalence of HBV and HCV was 2.6 percent

(95% CI=0.8, 6.9) and 1.3 percent (95% CI=0.2, 5.1) respectively.

About two out of three WIDUs were identified with HIV during the survey and remaining was previously diagnosed. The newly positive were linked with the national Program for treatment, care and support.



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Figure 1: Prevalence of HIV, Syphilis, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C

Co-infection of HIV/Syphilis, HIV/HBV and HIV/HCV among WIDUs:

The co-infection between HIV and syphilis was 0.013 percent (2 WIDUs), HIV and Hepatitis C was 0.006 percent (1 WIDU), and Hepatitis B and HIV was none. However, co-infections of all three and more STIs were not found among WIDUs.

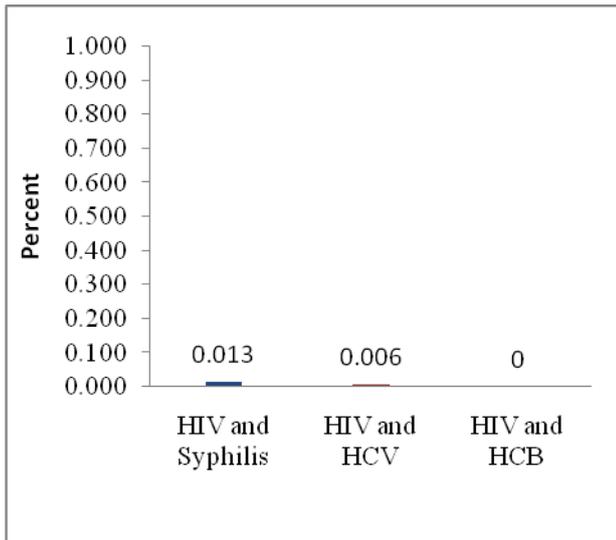


Figure 2: Co-infection of HIV/Syphilis, HIV/HCV

Comprehensive knowledge of HIV and AIDS among WIDUs was low:

The proportion of WIDUs who knew all three (ABC) HIV prevention indicators (A=Abstinence, B= Being faithful, C= Consistent condom use) was 33.5 percent.

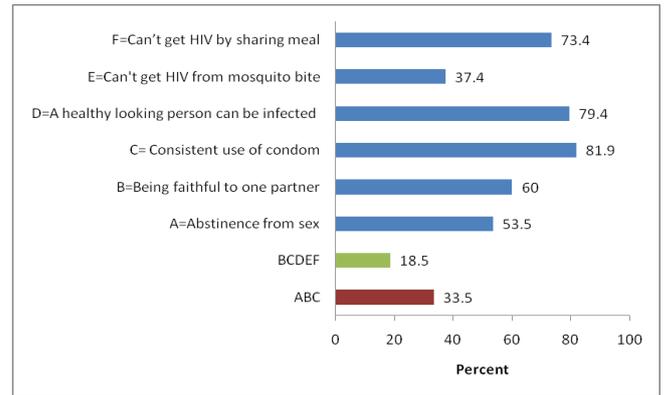


Figure 4: Comprehensive Knowledge of ABC and BDEF

The percentage of WIDUs who had knowledge of BCDEF (B= Being faithful, C= Consistent condom use, D= Healthy looking person can be infected to HIV, E= person cannot get HIV virus from mosquito bite and F= Person cannot get HIV by sharing meal with infected person) was 18.5 percent.

Majority of the WIDUs had knowledge on Hepatitis C:

Majority of the WIDUs (44.5%) had ever heard of HCV infection. Among those who ever heard of HCV, nearly three fourths (58%) knew HCV could be transmitted through sex. Almost all (77%) knew that sharing needles could transmit HCV and three fourths (74%) of the WIDUs knew that even people not infected from HIV could infect from HCV.

Almost three fifths of WIDUs aged below 25 years:

Almost four-fifth (80%) of the WIDUs were youths aged below 25 years. nearly 19 percent of them were 25 to 34 years of age and



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remaining 1.3 percent were of 35 to 39 years age group.

WIDUs were practicing sex in exchange for money and drugs:

Nearly one quarter (23.5%) of the WIDUs were found to exchange sex with money and drugs.

Majority of WIDUS were engaged in first drug injection at an early age:

Majority of WIDUs (67.7%) of WIDUs reported that they had been engaged in first drug injection at an early age before 20 years. The majority of the WIDUs (80%) had been injecting for less than 2 years.

Needle/Syringe sharing practices were prevalent among noteworthy population of WIDUs:

About 16 percent of WIDUs had shared needle/syringe with one or more people in the last injection. More than 7 percent of them had used the syringe given by their friend or relative after their use in their last injection. It was also found that more than two fifth (43%) WIDUs male regular sex partner injected drugs. Where, 10.5 percent WIDUs shared needle/syringe with their regular sex partner.

Majority of WIDUs had known how to obtain new/unused needles/syringe:

Most of the WIDUs (94%) knew how to obtain a new, unused needles/syringe. The most common sources to obtain a new needle/syringe was medical store (79%),

friends (58%), hospital (37%) and from health workers (19%). About 3 percent of WIDUs reported they were collected new syringe from DIC (needle exchange program).

Almost all WIDUs have knowledge on condom and its accessibility:

Almost all (96%) the WIDUs had knowledge of condom and its accessibility. However, only about 13 percent of them reported of usually carrying condoms with them.

The condom use in last sex:

More than a half (55%) of the WIDUs used condom at the last anal/vaginal/oral sex with a male partner. It was found half of them (50%) had used condom at the last anal/vaginal/oral sex with a male partner in exchange for money or drugs.

WIDUs exposure to some programs was notably low:

Over one-fourth of the WIDUs (27%) had met PE/OE in the last 12 months before the survey. Nearly 16 percent of WIDUs had visited Drop-in Centers in that period. However, only 12 percent of them had visited STI clinics and around 16 percent had visited HTC Centers in the last 12 months prior to the survey.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although awareness of HIV was almost cent percent among the WIDUs, comprehensive knowledge on HIV was found very low. Only a third of the respondents (33.5%) correctly identified all three **A**, **B** and **C** as HIV preventive measures whereas less than one-fifth of the respondents (18.5%) were aware of

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all the five major indicators i.e., **BCDEF**. Therefore, misconceptions of the target population on mode of transmission of HIV need to be addressed. Mass-medias and role of GOs/NGOs could play an important role to spread the correct knowledge of HIV among them.

More than two thirds of the WIDUs (73%) had injected drugs in very young age of below 20 years. Therefore, specific program activities that target *adolescents and youths should be designed to impart knowledge on sex education, drug prevention and HIV/AIDs awareness through Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) interventions.*

Prevalence of Syphilis (3.9%), Hepatitis C (2.6%) and HIV (1.9%) was found among the WIDUs, hence BCC and IEC programs should be implemented targeting the WIDUs in Pokhara Valley.

Considerable proportions of WIDUs are at risk of HIV as they have used needles that were already used by their friends (14.4%). Likewise, the practice of syringe sharing with the usual sex partner in the past week was also prevalent among the WIDUs (10.5%). Similarly, the practice of sharing needle during the last injection was prevalent among 16 percent of the respondents. *Hence, harm reduction programs including risk of needle sharing behaviour and advocacy on using new syringes should be launched.*

As notable percent (43%) of WIDUs male regular partner also injected drugs, *the*

programme of harm reduction and safer sexual behaviour targeting both the partners need to be initiated.

IBBS Key Indicators among WIDUs (N=155)

Selected Key Indicators	(%)
HIV prevalence	1.9
Active syphilis prevalence	3.9
Hepatitis B prevalence	1.3
Hepatitis C prevalence	2.6
Co-infection of HIV/HCV	0.013
WIDUs Below 20 years of age	55.5
Married	35.5
Illiterate	4.5
Alcohol consumption daily	28.4
Duration of drug injecting less than 2 years	80
Age at first drug injection (early age up to 20 years)	67.7
Used needle syringe given by their friend/relative after his/her use in last injection	7.1
Shared syringe with one or more partner in last injection	16
Use needle syringe used by others every times in the last week	0.6
Not injected in the last week	7.7
Shared needle/syringe with regular sex partner	10.5
Knowledge on how to obtain new, unused needle syringe	94
Using needle exchange program	0.6
Multiple sex partners in the last 12 months	31.4
Had male regular sex partner as injecting drugs	43

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Selected Key Indicators	(%)
Sexual intercourse with men in exchange of drugs or money	23.5
Knowledge on how to access condom	95.5
Always obtain condom free of cost	31.8
Usually carry condoms	12.8
Use of condom with last sex partner	55 (n=102)
Use of condom with male partner in exchange of drugs or money in last sex	50 (n=12)
Knowledge of ABC	33.5
Knowledge of BCDEF	18.5
Ever had an HIV test	29
Met/Discussed /Interacted with OE/PE in last 12 months	26.5
Visited DIC in the last 12 months	16.1
Visited STI clinic in the last 12 months	12.3
Visited HTC centre in the last 12 months	16.1
Ever enrolled in OST	5.8

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