

People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) in Mozambique: HIV and Hepatitis Prevalence, Risk Factors and Interventions

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SUMMARY

Most HIV data produced in Mozambique focuses on the general population, with prevalence estimates calculated from routine programmatic data, antenatal clinics, periodic population-based indicator surveys, and mathematical modeling.

People who inject drugs (PWID) are at higher risk of acquiring and transmitting HIV, syphilis and viral hepatitis not only because of their engagement in risk behaviours but also because they are often marginalized in society, which reduces their access to health information and health services.

Objectives and Results:

We first describe the socio-demographic characteristics, and assess the prevalence of HIV, viral hepatitis (B and C), co-infections, and risk behaviours among PWID in two main urban areas in Mozambique. The results of the analysis demonstrate high HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C prevalence rates, frequent unsafe sexual behaviours and injection practices, which are likely to contribute to the disproportionate burden of disease among this population.

Secondly, we assesses the dynamic around knowledge, use of health and social services, and identifies barriers to access these services, including geographic distance, limited or unavailable specific programs for PWID, lack of knowledge on the existing programs, concerns

about the quality of health providers and fear of stigmatization and criminalization.

And lastly we examines the results of the first year of the implementation of the first drop-in center (DIC) for PWID in Mozambique. We describe the linkage to care among referrals between drop-in centers and specialized HIV and treatment centers, analyzed retention and the feasibility of the DIC as a source of information about the prevalence of HIV and viral hepatitis among PWID. The development of a National Harm Reduction Plan and the importance of inclusion of age-specific interventions focusing on young PWID, is discussed.

Conclusion:

Our studies are the first conducted in the country and contributes to understanding the HIV and Hepatitis epidemic among PWID in Mozambique. We found an alarming burden of HIV, hepatitis (B and C), co-infections (HIV/hepatitis), and unsafe sexual behaviors and injection practices among this population. These results highlight the need to effectively introduce harm reduction programs to prevent the spread of HIV and viral hepatitis among this population.

Intensified efforts in prevention and behavioural change interventions, care, and treatment specifically for PWID are needed to limit the transmission of these diseases.

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About the author

Cynthia Semá Baltazar, is a biologist, with a Master's degree in Public Health. She is a researcher at the National Institute of Health in Mozambique



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