

Rapid HIV testing for drug users in low-threshold services

HIV in Europe - Working Together for Optimal Testing und Earlier Care
Copenhagen 2012 Conference

Background

Although numbers of newly-diagnosed HIV infections in intravenous drug users have stabilised in Western Europe at a relatively low level, this group is particularly at risk of HIV.

Most current drug users in open drug scenes have only very limited access to the medical system.

Studies show that knowledge of the own infection status is insufficient and HIV tests are not taken up to the necessary extent.

The project

The model project "test it" offered drug users access to rapid HIV and HCV testing close to the scene and with a low threshold in Dortmund and Berlin.

The aim of the counselling and "risk check" was to raise HIV and HCV awareness and to support the development of individual protection strategies.

The task was to check whether rapid HIV and HCV testing can be used in low-threshold drug support agencies, and whether the barriers to having an HIV and HCV Test could be lowered.

Selected results

- ▶ 341 persons (25%female,75% male) attended the test counselling hours (216D*+125B*)
- ▶ 290 (179D+81B) took the test offer, 50 only used the offer for counselling.
- ▶ The majority were HIV Tests (254) (cause Dortmund offered only HIV rapid Tests)
- ▶ 61 HCV Tests were offered in Berlin 17 HCV Tests in Berlin were reactive (28%).
- ▶ In all, seven (7) of the tests were reactive (including in the confirmatory test). This corresponds to a proportion of 2,8 %.
- ▶ 83 % of males and 86% of females had been tested before on HIV. Among those 55 % hadn't had a test in the last two years
- ▶ The individual risk situations underlying the wish for testing result both from drug use (unsafe use) and from sexual intercourse (unsafe sex). Remarkable is the high percentage of risk situations during sex. **Figure 1**
- ▶ Alcohol consumption is one of the main indicators for an increased readiness to assume risks during sex.
- ▶ The fact that rapid HIV testing is "straightforward" largely contributes to the good rate of take-up (quick, no venous blood, uncomplicated).
- ▶ Confidence in the centre resp. the counsellors, plays an important role – only 2 % of the users would get tested elsewhere (Data only for D*= Dortmund). **Figure 2**

Conclusion

- ▶ Offering rapid HIV testing can indeed enable low-threshold access for drug users.
Two aspects are decisive for this:
a) The short duration between the test and the result is very attractive.
b) Confidence in the counsellor of "their" service centre plays a significant role.
The prior counselling and the further support for the client (in the case of a reactive result) are achieved through: familiar staff from a support centre working in an acceptance-oriented way.
- ▶ Drug users have a strong need to reflect on their "risk management" together with their counsellors and to obtain information about HIV and Hepatitis from them.
- ▶ The preceding risk check does not have the effect of putting them off, but makes a considerable contribution towards the acceptance and attractiveness of the project.
- ▶ Drug users definitely have a very high level of health awareness.
 - They want regular HIV & Hepatiitis C Tests.
 - They show risk-awareness by practising safer sex and safer use, and for the most part their behaviour is risky only in "crisis/exceptional situations".
- ▶ Low-threshold service centres can provide an adequate setting to offer community-based HIV/ HCV rapid testing.

Risk situation

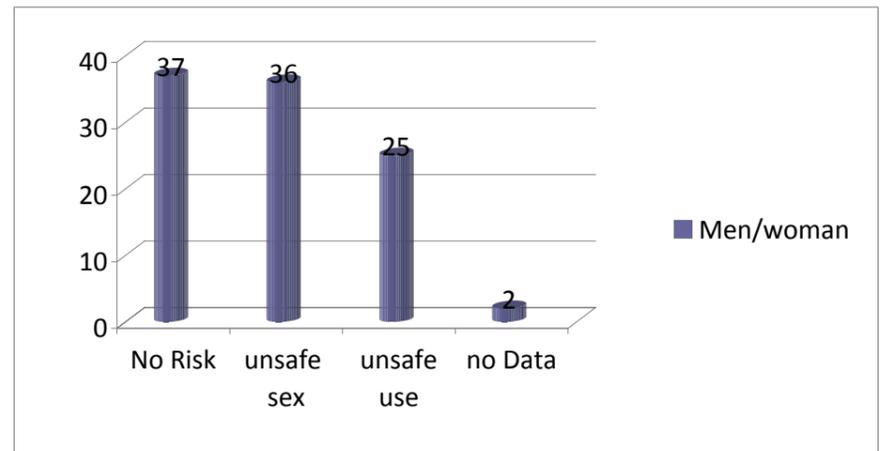


Figure 1

Importance of the „where“ and „how“

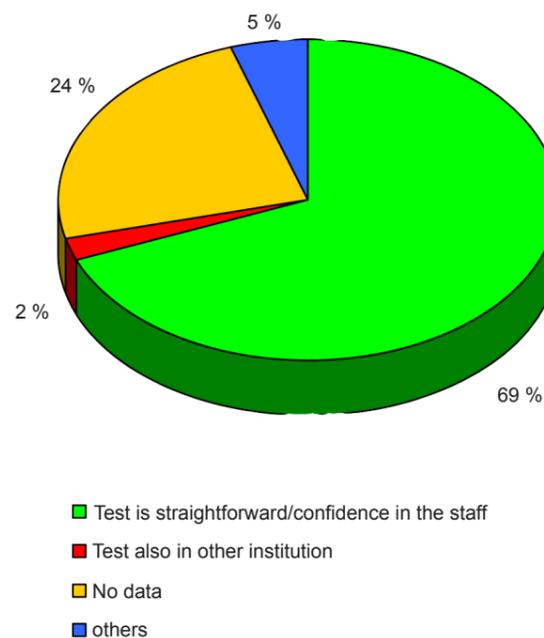


Figure 2

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*D = Dortmund
*B = Berlin