

Youth Co-Researchers Explore Street-Involved Youth Perspectives on Preventing the Transition into Injection Drug Use

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Background: From 2002 to 2008, 30% of newly diagnosed HIV cases in British Columbia (BC), Canada identified injection drug use as the major risk factor; with 20% of all HIV cases reported in persons aged 15-29 years¹. The Youth Injection Prevention (YIP) Project is a collaborative study between the UBC School of Population and Public Health, UBC School of Nursing, BC Centre for Disease Control, community partners and youth co-researchers that focuses on identifying factors associated with preventing the transition into injection drug use (IDU) among street-involved youth in Metro Vancouver, BC.

Methods: Ten focus groups and twenty interviews were conducted with street-involved youth aged 15-24 years from November 2009-March 2010. Youth co-researchers participated in script design, co-facilitation of focus groups and data analysis. Study participants were recruited through community service providers. Focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed using open coding and domain analysis with NVivo 8 qualitative software.

Results: Domain analysis identified four main threads associated with transition into IDU: (i) risk factors; (ii) resiliency factors; (iii) gender influences; and (vi) service design recommendations. Preliminary findings suggest: (i) risk factors include: boredom, drug pricing, homelessness, IDU in social network or family; (ii) resiliency factors include: concern for self-image and health, desire for a better life, fear of needles, sense of responsibility for others, stigma; (iii) gender influences include: females more likely to transition via association with dealers and/or pimps, to be doctored by males rather than vice versa; males perceived more influenced by peer pressure; (vi) service design recommendations include: capacity building, low-barrier policies, experiential youth peer outreach, youth-specific services.

Conclusions: Study results will be disseminated via various forms of knowledge translation to inform potential intervention strategies to prevent the transition into IDU and/or reduce the harms associated with injecting among street-involved youth.

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¹ HIV/AIDS Annual Update Report 2008, Division of STI/HIV Prevention and Control, BC Centre for Disease Control, Vancouver, BC, Canada.