

# Sexually Transmitted Diseases, AIDS and Parasitic Infections & Parasitology, Infectious Diseases, STDs and STIs

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## HIV knowledge, testing practice and behavior among female people who inject drugs in Georgia

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**Introduction & Aim:** Needle sharing practice remains the main factor for spreading HIV (47.3%) among people who inject drugs (PWIDs) in Georgia. In spite of 5 times increased coverage of female injection drug users (IDUs) by Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) women IDUs remain hard to reach population. The objective of this study was to analyze risky injection/sexual behavior of PWIDs/female IDUs who are the clients of NSP, if there is a difference in behavior of male and female PWIDs.

**Methods:** Consecutive sampling was used to recruit PWIDs during 5 months in 2015. The selection criteria were: (1) Drug injection practice during last month; (2) Being a beneficiary of NSP program for more than 6 month; (3) Age more than 17 years. Sample size was 1032, among them females were 129 (12.5%). Structured questionnaire of Risk Assessment Battery (RAB) was used to assess drug risk and sex risk items separately and calculated RAB score.

**Results:** Female IDUs reported not using drugs in a close environment. They inject drugs with more than 2 persons (mean 2.9, median 3, mode 2) and mostly do not share injectable equipment (94.9%). While 38% of male PWIDs stated needle sharing practice at least once during last month, among them 43.8% shared with one person and 56.1% with more than 2 persons ( $p < 0.05$ ). As referring to sexual practice, 15.97% female IDUs had more than 2 sexual partners during the last 6 months with whom 22.7% use condoms regularly, 21.1% sometimes and 32.3% always. It was meaningful to find that 10.08% of female study participants (2 times less than men) never had an HIV test and 34.45% of them had HIV test a year ago. Female drug users revealed to have lack of knowledge on HIV transmission, 56% stated wrong answers on HIV transmission risks. Total RAB scale score for female PWID study participants was 0.26 (Range=0-1).

**Conclusion:** The study results demonstrate that female IDUs practice risky behavior but their practice is less risky than men IDUs. This refers to both sexual and injection behaviors. HIV testing rate is low among female PWIDs and reasons behind this need further investigation. The findings of this study can be used to address the risks female IDUs face, to modify program according to their needs, to develop and test new approaches for attracting, retaining and increasing safe behaviors of female IDUs.

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