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INTEGRATED BIOBEHAVIOURAL SURVEY AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS (PWID) IN UKRAINE,2023

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OBJECTIVES

Integrated biobehavioural surveys (IBBS) among key populations are a core component of HIV response, providing longitudinal data on behaviours, health outcomes, and service coverage. Full-scale invasion of Ukraine created major challenges for healthcare delivery, population stability, and HIV prevention and care. We aimed to assess HIV burden and risk factors among PWID in Ukraine, including HIV prevalence, viral suppression, awareness of HIV status, prevention and treatment coverage, knowledge of HIV transmission, and PrEP awareness, to inform future HIV programs.

METHODS

Study included PWID aged ≥14 years who had injected drugs within the past 30 days, resided or worked in the study area for at least 1 month, and provided informed consent. Respondent-driven sampling was used to recruit this hidden population. Data were collected in 6 sentinel cities and 4 additional sites. Capillary blood was tested for HIV; dried blood spot samples were tested for viral load and recent HIV infection. Data were weighted using Gile's successive sampling (SS) estimator.

RESULTS

Most respondents were male, aged 35–44 years, with casual earnings as their primary source of income. Street methadone was the most commonly reported injectable drug. Kyiv and Odesa had HIV prevalence rates of 17.9% and 22.1%, respectively; the lowest prevalence was observed in Zaporizhzhia (4.1%). Awareness of HIV-positive status among respondents remains low in some cities, and it was the most critical bottleneck in the HIV treatment cascade.

Vinnytsia and Kyiv had the largest gaps in ART coverage, while Chernihiv, Kyiv, and Lviv showed the lowest levels of viral suppression. PrEP awareness among PWID remains low, and current use was 3.6%. Awareness of PrEP was highest in Dnipro (34.1%), followed by Odesa and Kharkiv (28.1%), and Zaporizhzhia (22.4%). In contrast, it was very low in Vinnytsia (2.0%) and Rivne (6.7%). The highest reported PrEP use was in Dnipro (9.4%), Zaporizhzhia (7.8%), and Cherkasy (4.9%).

CONCLUSIONS

IBBS implementation during full-scale invasion was feasible. Improving HIV status awareness among PWID remains the highest priority, while PrEP awareness requires further scale-up.