

# HIV spread among different groups of IDUs and influence of awareness about HIV-status on safety of sexual and injection behaviors

Saint Petersburg Charitable Fund for Medical and Social Programs “Humanitarian Action”

*Polina V. Girchenko, Oxana V. Dobroskok, Sergey G. Dugin*

## Introduction

According to WHO estimations there are about 60 000 of injection drug users in Saint Petersburg, Russia. As the official policy towards injection drug users is repressive, the population of injection drug users is hidden, which results in absence of work aimed at HIV prevention in this group. “Humanitarian Action” is the only organization providing direct services to injection drug users in Saint Petersburg, including needle exchange, HIV prevention counseling, testing for HIV, and other services aimed at harm reduction. As the only organization having access to the population of injection drug users, we started to document our experiences and to conduct studies in this population both to improve our work and to receive evidence based data to advocate the necessity of such work at the local and even governmental level.

## Objectives

Objectives of the study were to assess the levels of HIV spread among different categories of IDUs in Saint Petersburg, to identify major factors contributing to and preventing HIV-infection among different IDUs groups, to assess current behavioral risks, and to estimate influence of awareness about HIV status to safety of sexual and injection behaviors.

## Methods

Study was conducted in Saint Petersburg on the base of mobile harm reduction stations of “Humanitarian Action” (buses for IDUs and for CSW IDUs). Each participant was interviewed (semi-structured questionnaire) and tested for HIV (express blood test). Sample size is 1006 IDUs. Data were entered to SPSS database and analyzed using methods of descriptive and correlation analysis.

## Results

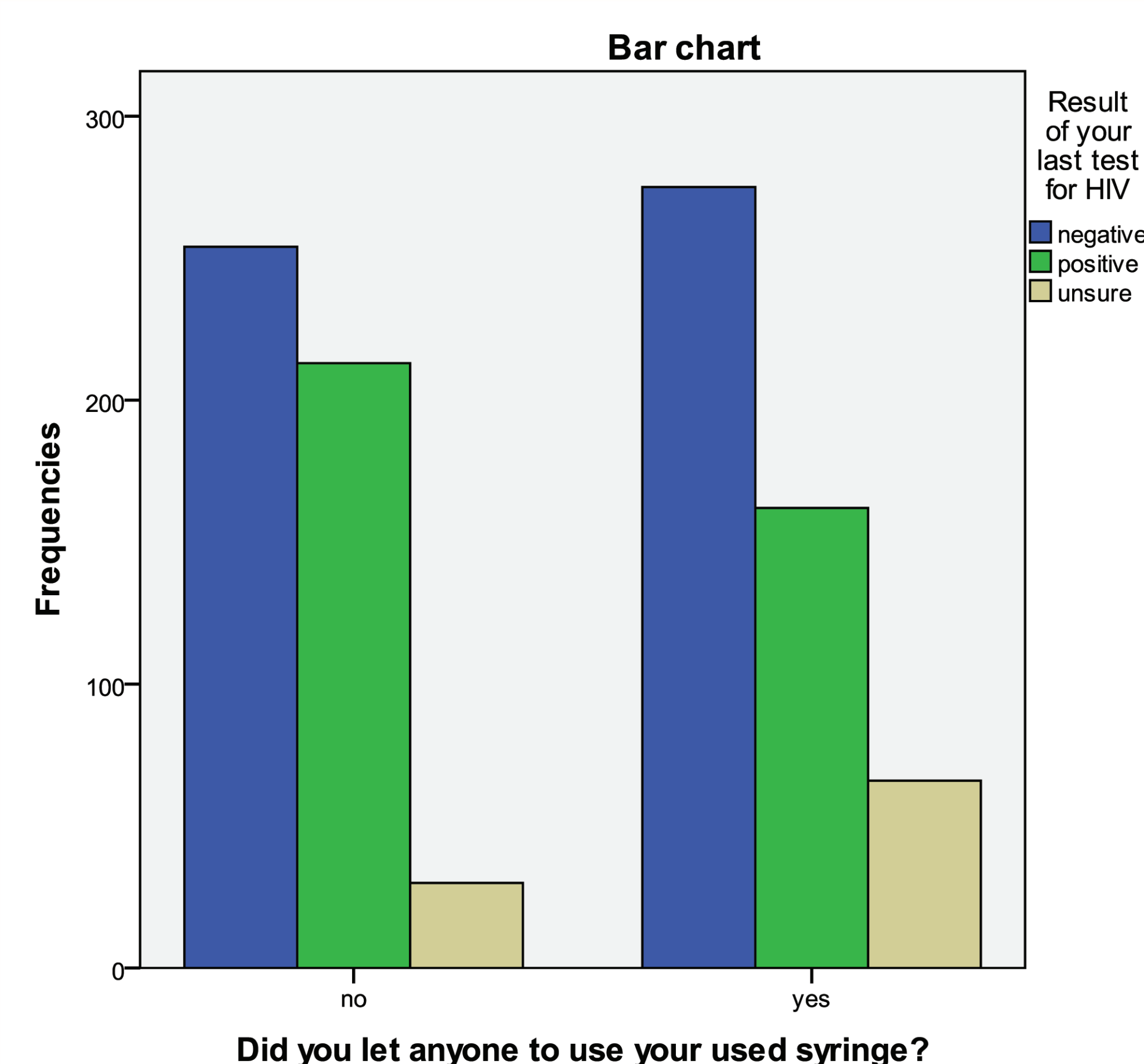
50,9% of respondents were tested HIV-positive (54,7% - women, 47,5% - men (sign.=0,0024)). Among IDUs using drugs for less than 5 years level of HIV-infection was 28%, among IDUs using drugs for 6 to 10 years it was 46%, for IDUs using drugs for more than 11 years the level of HIV was 58% (sign.=0,000). 26% of HIV-positive IDUs didn't know they were HIV-positive. Knowledge of HIV-status positively influences the safety of sexual and injection behaviors (see diagrams).

## Conclusion

Harm reduction programs should scale up testing for HIV to prevent new cases of HIV. Harm reduction programs should use differentiated approaches to different types of IDUs clients (men or women, CSW or not CSW, clients with different periods of drug use) as the objectives and methods of work with different groups of IDUs should be different.



Aptitude to share used syringes in relation to awareness about HIV status (sign.=0,000)



Average number of condom use per 10 sexual contacts in relation to awareness about HIV status (IDU not doing commercial sex work) (sign.=0,001)

