**LOW LEVELS OF HCV AWARENESS AND RISK AMONG GROUPS MOST AT RISK**

**IN VIETNAM**

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**Background:** In Vietnam, prevalence among people who inject drugs (PWIDs) is significantly high—close to 6 out of every 10 PWID are living with HCV. HIV/HCV co-infection rates are also high among PWID—98.5%. Given the absence of population-based evidence regarding HCV awareness, and behaviors among PWIDs, PSI conducted two rounds of behavioral survey data collected among PWID in three provinces: ThaiNguyen, Hanoi and HoChiMinh city.

**Methods:** Samples of 1,080 PWID (2013) and 1,100 PWID (2016) injecting heroin in the past 1 month were recruited using convenient sampling. Descriptive analysis was employed to assess levels of HCV knowledge and practices. Chi-square test was used to test statistical differences in key indicators between 2013 and 2016.

**Results:** While general knowledge regarding HCV transmission modes and prevention has doubled between 2013 and 2016, they remain alarming low. Only 19% PWID surveyed have ever heard about HCV (vs 9% in 2013, p<0.001). 1 out of 5 PWIDs understand that HCV can be transmitted through sharing needle/syringe (NS) (vs 42% in 2013, p<0.001). Not surprisingly, only 51.5% respondents in 2016 correctly identifying non-sharing of NS as an effective method to prevent HCV transmission. Only 19.6% PWID have ever been tested for HCV (vs 11.2% in 2013, p<0.001), and low perception of HCV risk is the main reason of non-testing for HCV. Still 13.5% PWID in 2016 reported NS sharing in the last three months.

**Conclusions:** Individuals with a high HCV risk are unlikely to be aware of this risk, methods to prevent infection. Not surprisingly among a group with low awareness of HCV risk, prevention and diagnosis behaviors are uncommon. Identifying factors associated with HCV prevention, diagnosis and treatment behaviors among PWID to inform programming with high coverage is critical to reducing HCV incidence and mortality rates among PWID.

**Key words:** HCV infection, PWID, HCV awareness and practice