THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN ACCESS TO OPIOID SUBSTITUTION THERAPY AND HIV INCIDENCE AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS (PWID) IN KACHIN, MYANMAR, 2008-2020

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Background: Kachin in Myanmar has a large population of people who inject drugs (PWID) with a very high prevalence of HIV (>40%). We used routine HIV testing data to assess associations with HIV incidence among PWID attending harm reduction drop-in centres (DICs) in Kachin.

Methods: Data relating to HIV testing and drug use behaviours was collected from three Médecins du Monde DICs offering HIV testing over 2008-2020. HIV prevalence was assessed using testing data from first-time DIC visits. HIV incidence was estimated by linking subsequent test records. Cox regression was used to examine associations with HIV incidence, including the impact of opioid substitution therapy (OST).

Results: First test results were available for 13,056 PWID. Overall, HIV prevalence was 52.0% (95%CI 51.2-52.9%), which peaked in 2017 (69.7%; 95%CI 67.2-72.1%) and then declined to 39.5% (95%CI 36.9-42.2%) by 2020. Data on follow-up HIV testing was available for 37.4% (2,343/6,268) of PWID initially testing HIV-negative, with 5988.6 person-years (py) of follow-up and 466 incident HIV infections over 2009-2020. Overall HIV incidence was 7.8 per 100py (95%CI 7.1-8.5), which decreased from 23.9 (95%CI 16.9-33.8) in 2008-11 to 5.5 per 100py (95%CI 4.9-6.3) by 2017-20. Two DICs provided OST from 2008, with 65.4% of their clients followed on OST for on average 2.5yrs. Among PWID at these DIC, currently being on OST during follow-up was associated with reduced HIV incidence (aHR 0.38, 95%CI 0.28-0.51; p<0.001), following adjustment for DIC location and year of testing. Recent (≤6weeks) needle sharing was associated with higher incidence (aHR 2.23, 95%CI 1.86-2.97; p<0.001).

Conclusion: Although HIV incidence is high among PWID in Kachin, data suggests it has decreased over recent years and is lower if on OST. It is important to determine whether increases in harm reduction access contributed to observed decreases in incidence.

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