HIV seroprevalence in street youth, St Petersburg, Russia

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Background: Reliable data on HIV infection among Russian street youth are unavailable. The purpose of this study was to assess HIV seroprevalence among street youth in St Petersburg and to describe social, sexual, and behavioral characteristics associated with HIV infection.

Methods: A cross-sectional assessment conducted during January–May 2006 included city-wide mapping of 41 street youth locations, random selection of 22 sites, rapid HIV testing for all consenting 15–19-year-old male and female street youth at these sites, and an interviewer-administered survey. Adjusted odds ratios (AOR) were calculated using logistic regression, accounting for intracluster homogeneity.

Results: Of 313 participants, 117 (37.4%, 95% confidence interval 26.1–50.2%) were HIV infected. Subgroups with the highest seroprevalences included double orphans (64.3%), those with no place to live (68.1%), those previously diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection (STI; 70.5%), those currently sharing needles (86.4%), and those currently using inhalants (60.5%) or injection drugs (78.6%), including Stadol (82.3%) or heroin (78.1%). Characteristics independently associated with HIV infection included injecting drugs (AOR 23.0), sharing needles (AOR 13.3), being a double or single orphan (AOR 3.3 and 1.8), having no place to live (AOR 2.4), and being diagnosed with a STI (AOR 2.1). Most HIV-infected street youth were sexually active (96.6%), had multiple partners (65.0%), and used condoms inconsistently (80.3%).

Discussion: Street youth aged 15–19 years in St Petersburg, Russia, have an extraordinarily high HIV seroprevalence. In street youth who are injection drug users, HIV seroprevalence is the highest ever reported for eastern Europe and is among the highest in the world.

Introduction

Young people represent almost half of all HIV infections worldwide \cite{1}. The HIV epidemic in Russia, the largest in eastern Europe and central Asia, is most heavily concentrated among youth: 15–30-year-old individuals comprise 80% of total infections \cite{1}. Young people living part time or full time on the street, known as ‘street youth’, constitute a group particularly at risk. Multiple factors lead youth to the streets, including abuse or neglect at home or in an orphanage, abandonment, and parental substance abuse or death \cite{2–6}. Although many

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