HIV SEROPOSITIVITY AND RISK BEHAVIORS AMONG DRUG USERS WHO OPERATE SHOOTING GALLERIES IN SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

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INTRODUCTION

Shooting galleries are places that provide the privacy and often the paraphernalia needed to inject drugs. Injecting in shooting galleries minimizes the time between drug administration and use, and users may receive support from drug injection peers. Shooting galleries are preferred places to inject drugs among Puerto Rican drug users residing on the island and the Northeast of the US (1). A study of injection drug users in Puerto Rico showed that 89.8% reported using shooting galleries (2). However, HIV transmission seems to be facilitated by the shared use of injection equipment in shooting galleries (3).

Table 1. Socio demographic characteristics by Shooting Gallery Management Experience Among IDUs in Puerto Rico (N = 463)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shooting Gallery Managers</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-2</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>p</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>405</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 25 years</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 or more years</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>0.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt; high school</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarceration history</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics. Although not statistically significant, the proportion of females is higher among gallery managers. Gallery managers reported significantly higher rates of homelessness when compared to IDUs who did not report gallery management (27.8% vs. 14.8%). Moreover, gallery managers reported a higher rate of incarceration history (82.8% vs. 71.1%).

METHODS

Sampling and Recruitment - The study catch area comprised six core municipalities of the San Juan metropolitan area (San Juan, Carolina, Trujillo Alto, Guaynabo, Bayamón, and Caguas). A cluster sampling design was used to select shooting galleries. A complete list of shooting galleries was identified through the use of community outreach workers familiar with the targeted areas. A complete list of shooting galleries was distributed through email and personal visits. Categorization of galleries was performed based on the presence of drug paraphernalia and the number of users present.

Data Collection - Data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted by trained interviewers. The interview schedule was designed to collect information on the use of drugs, injecting equipment, and risk behaviors associated with drug injection.

RESULTS

The majority of shooting gallery managers (89.7%) were located in private houses or apartments (See Table 1). More than half of the managers (58.2%) reported daily drug injection. The mean frequency of daily drug injection was significantly higher among gallery managers compared to IDUs (t = 9.4, df = 453, p < 0.001). Risk behaviors were significantly higher among gallery managers (13.2% vs. 9.8%). With regard to injecting and drug use behaviors variables, the mean frequencies of drug injection and sharing needles were significantly higher among gallery managers (12.1% vs. 7.5%, df = 453, p < 0.001). This result indicates that shooting gallery managers inject drugs more frequently than IDUs and are more likely to inject drugs more often.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that shooting gallery managers inject more frequently and share injecting equipment more often, and are more likely to be HIV seropositive, anabolic, and to report more suicide attempts and depression episodes than other IDUs.

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