



DRUG USERS NEED SUPPORT AFTER RELEASE FROM PRISON

BACKGROUND & METHOD

- Incarceration is a common experience for individuals who use illicit drugs. In Canada, recent surveys have found that more than half of all drug users report having been imprisoned at least once since they began using drugs.
- Although previous studies have identified the lack of sterile syringes in Canada's prison systems as a contributing factor to HIV transmission, very little is known about the effect of imprisonment on post-release HIV risks.
- To investigate post-release HIV risks, researchers used data from the Vancouver Injection Drug Users Study.

QUICK FACT

THIS STUDY FOUND AN ELEVATED RISK OF SYRINGE SHARING IN THE PERIOD AFTER PARTICIPANTS WERE RELEASED FROM PRISON.

FINDINGS

- When they examined the experiences of individuals after a period of incarceration, the researchers found an elevated risk of syringe sharing in the post-release period.
- They were unable to determine the cause of the elevated levels of syringe sharing.
- They hypothesized that individuals might get in the habit of sharing syringes while incarcerated, or perhaps are less able to access harm reduction services in the post-release period.

IMPLICATIONS

- This research sheds more light on the link between incarceration and HIV transmission in Canada. Previous studies have recommended that HIV risk could be mitigated by incarcerating fewer individuals and providing prison-based harm reduction services, such as needle exchanges.
- Findings from the current study underline the need for improved post-release supports for imprisoned drug users, such as increased access to methadone and other harm reduction opportunities.

Milloy MJ, Buxton J, Wood E, Li K, Montaner JS, Kerr T. **Elevated HIV risk behaviour among recently incarcerated injection drug users in a Canadian setting: A longitudinal analysis.** *BMC Public Health*, 2009; 9(1): 156.

