

SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL FACTORS AFFECTING INJECTING DRUG USERS (IDUs)

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Heroin users basically use two methods for drug administration in Sri Lanka. The majority of them use the ‘Chinese’ method, while the others use the injection method. The Injecting Drug Users (IDUs) are not widely scattered all over the island; they are largely limited to Colombo and the coastal areas. There is a possibility of spreading blood borne infections including HIV/AIDS due to the sharing of needles. The objective of this study was to identify the behavioural traits, economic ties and social bonds of IDUs. A survey was conducted with a non-probable sample of 721 IDUs. In Addition to the survey, in-depth interviews and observations were used to identify the behaviour of IDUs. It was revealed that most of the IDUs followed unsafe injecting practices, including the reuse of needles (50%) and sharing the injecting equipment with peers (44%). When considering the behavioural patterns of the sample, 210 (29%) injected drugs alone and a majority of 500 (69%) injected drugs with friends. There was an inter-relationship between the initiation of drug injection and behavioural patterns of drug injection. Most of the IDUs initiated drug injection due to peer pressure and thereafter they have started injecting drugs with peers. The price of a heroin pack or other types of tablets fluctuates, and when the price is high many IDUs cannot afford them. The average cost of drug injection per occasion was Rs. 1,010. As an alternative, some users buy drugs jointly and then share it. There are strong bonds among drug users; users help each other and enjoy different events together. IDUs get into sharing practices due to peer pressure, the influence of group norms and the lack of resources within the group. The survey findings conclude that drug using peers share common behavioral traits; mutual economic ties and social bonds.

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