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Hepatitis B and C infections among injecting drug users in Istria County, Croatia

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Aim: The aim of the study was to analyze the prevalence and some risk factors for contracting hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection in injecting drug users (IDUs) in Istria County.

Patients & Methods: 49 IDUs from Istria, the largest Croatian peninsula were tested in 2014 for the presence of hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg), hepatitis B core total antibodies (Anti-HBc) and hepatitis C virus antibodies (Anti-HCV). Study participants were recruited from the counseling center at the Istria County Institute of Public Health. Serologic tests were performed using an enzyme-linked fluorescent assay. Anti-HCV repeatedly reactive samples were further confirmed using a third generation line immunoassay.

Results: The overall prevalence of HBsAg, anti-HBc and anti-HCV was 2%, 38.8% and 75.5%, respectively. Male participants predominated (81.6%). Most of the participants clustered in the 30-49 years age group (83.6%). Prevalence of anti-HBc antibodies increased progressively with age starting sharply with 30 year olds ($p=0.008$). Sharing injection equipment correlated with HCV infection. Higher seroprevalence rates were found in IDUs who shared occasionally/frequently injection equipment than in participants that did not report sharing (anti-HCV 88.9%/66.7% vs. 57.9%, $p=0.049$). Results of the logistic regression showed that sharing injection equipment was a significant risk factor for HCV infection (IDUs who shared equipment occasionally: OR=4.32, 95% CI=2.28-8.20; AOR=4.6, 95% CI=2.21-9.57, IDUs who shared equipment frequently: OR=17.11, 95% CI=6.72-46.99; AOR=21.18; 95% CI=7.27-61.64).

Conclusion: HBV and HCV infections are widespread among IDUs in Istria. Older age correlated strongly with HBV infection, while sharing injection equipment was the main risk factor for HCV infection.

Biography

Jasmina Kucinar was graduated from the School of Medicine, University of Zagreb in 1991 and became a Specialist in Medical Microbiology and Parasitology in 2000. She has worked at the Microbiology Service of Istria County Institute of Public Health as Head of the Serology and Immunology Laboratory.

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