

Condom and safe sex promotion for drug users communities

Catalina Iliuta

What I will talk about

- Institutional and organizational issues related to condom promotion in drug services
- National and international documents and their implementation
- Romanian situation

- UNAIDS **2006 AIDS Update** talk about the feminization of epidemic
- Anecdotal data sustain that in Eastern Europe and Central Asia , where the leading cause for HIV/AIDS is injecting drug use, the feminization of HIV is linked with sexual partners of drug users
- Most of the time, sexual partners of drug users are not the target group for many HIV programs

Institutional and organizational barriers

- Condoms should and most of the time are part of the minimum package of HIV prevention and treatment services for drug users
- *In the same time, compare with safe injection messages, condom use and safe sex messages do not have the same proportion*

- Many services for drug users (and especially harm reduction services – as needle exchange or methadone programs) are developed and implemented by civil society representatives, with international funds, and are not part of the medical systems
- Struggling with lack of funds, many programs skip to address the needs of communities with whom they work
- Sometimes, the service providers are too focus on risks associated with injection practices, and do not talk too much about the other risks related to drug use

Condoms and drug users

- First of all in working with drug users, we need to define very well our group and to adapt interventions to drug users characteristics
- There are many sub-groups in the DUs community, who has specific risks and vulnerabilities related to sex:
 - *Drug users that sell or trade sex*
 - *Young people under 18 that use drugs*
 - *Drug users in prisons*
 - *Drug users of different substances that has different effects on sexual life*

Recommendations

- Develop quality indicators for HIV services for drug users
- Scale up of the programs
- To fund in the transparent manner the HIV programs, that are cost efficient and respond to the local context
- Comprehensive services and integrated approach of drug use

National documents and their implementation

- Most of the countries recognized HIV prevention and services for drug users and other vulnerable groups as priorities in National AIDS Strategies, Reproductive Health Strategies or other documents ratified at national and international level
- ***BUT... most of the countries do not fund these services, or if they do, the services are not integrated and comprehensive***
- Most of the countries prefer to fund HIV services that are not too much linked with vulnerable groups – cause drug policies needs social support and politicians are usually very sensitive to this issue, and do not take commitment to make something that society will consider that is a “bad thing” and “something that encourage promiscuity”

Thank you!

Catalina Iliuta

Email: catalina.iliuta@arasnet.ro

- AIDS challenge us to deal with taboos and things that we are not comfortable to talk about: ***sex, sexuality and drug use***
- In the end we fail up to take risks and we start to discount *human lives*.

HIV response and commitment should be long term

- **We can not base responses on piloting programs, at small scale or fixed term projects only.**
- Many programs that targets vulnerable groups in countries are as the ones above mentioned
- *Eg:* The limited progress to scale services is fragile and we see this in Romanian example where services were expanded in the last years, and many of them are closed within last few months

Recommendations:

- To continue to advocate for national and local funds for HIV/AIDS services for vulnerable groups
- To Keep HIV/AIDS high in the health and social agenda and including there other infections and drug dependency in order to minimize the social and economical costs using cost-effective interventions
- To advocate for integrated approach of HIV/AIDS and drug use
- To advocate for sustainable services for most at risks groups

Romanian situation

- Romania is a country with a low HIV/AIDS prevalence
- Specific progress has been made since 2001, when Romania ensure universal access to treatment
- BUT... HIV prevention services for vulnerable groups are totally missing from HIV/AIDS national funding agenda

That means that the progress made is very fragile!

- Services that targets drug users are very limited and only in Needle Exchange Programs the condoms are part of the service package
- Even if national data and reports shows increase level of synthetic drug use, no services are in place. Usually these drugs are associated with unsafe sexual practices
- Most of the condom promotion and campaigns do not address drug users needs, and none campaign for condom use targeted directly drug users and their sexual partners

- In Romania there is a only one organization of users, but peer education is not for the moment on their agenda
- Condom promotion and campaign usually are implemented in big cities and there is no national, long time campaign

- Even if from Romania many people from rural area are going abroad for work (including sex work as well), most of the HIV and drug use education and information campaign are not implemented in this area
- Drug education is focus more on “Just say no!” and is not linked with sexual education and condom promotion