

Injection Drug Use and HIV/AIDS Transmission in Somalia

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Abstract

Somali has been in a civil war more than three decades. Country's border is open and drug traffickers have higher chances to smuggle all types of drugs. therefore, injection drug-related diseases such as HIV/AIDS spread to the capital city and it becomes a major public health problem in Somalia.

Purpose: This study aims to investigate how HIV/AIDS transmits among injection drug users (IDU) in Somalia. The study also aims to assess HIV/AIDS knowledge and awareness among IDUs.

Methodology: The study used self-administered questionnaire and blood sample collection from respondents to test HIV/AIDS positive cases among respondents. Period to data collection, study enumerators visited different hot spots in

Mogadishu; (where drug users meet). The sample comprised 270 injection drug users.

Findings: 90% of the respondents do not aware HIV existence in Somalia. 270 cases tested HIV/AIDS were found 21 positive cases this shows 7.7% transmission rate among IDUs in Somalia, which is high rate. All cases found are unaware of their HIV status.

Research limitations/implications. This study only emphasized Somali drug injection; thus, the findings of the present study may not be applicable to other countries.

Originality/value: Limited studies have been conducted to investigate drug injection and transmission of HIV/AIDS in Somalia.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS, injecting drug use, Somalia

Introduction

For the past five years the number of drug addicted diagnosed with HIV/AIDS has grown in Somalia (MoH 2023). Majority of infected youth are related to injection drug use. According to Banadir Regional Administrative report, from 2020 - 2023 drug related cases were on peak and it becomes public health concerns, therefore, the police has taken different missions against drug trafficking, hot spots, and drugs users. During the operations, different business centers were closed while some others were revoked business license.

The estimated number of people living with HIV in the latest 2022 (2021 data) Spectrum (UNAIDS) report is 7,7461. The 2019 Antenatal surveillance showed a 0.1% prevalence among pregnant women (a proxy for the general population). The 2017 Integrated Biological and Behavioral Surveillance (IBBS) showed an overall HIV prevalence for women most vulnerable to HIV (vulnerable to transactional relationships) was 3.4%, for uniform personnel 0.5%, port workers 0.7% and transport workers 0.6%. Other populations assumed to be vulnerable to HIV infection, including IDPs (vulnerable women), survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and prisoners who have a higher rate of HIV

infection than the general population at 0.5% in 2019.

Literature

Nikki *et al.* (2019) found that youth in street-based are at a significantly higher risk of their behavior of borrowing and lending syringe among others who use injection drugs. Charles *et al.*, (2009) state that, in South Africa 20% of injection drug users (IDUs) who agreed to HIV screening tested positive. Yelena *et al.* (2016) argue that drug-related vulnerabilities associated with the risk of HIV infection. Islam and Conigrave (2007) stated that in the capital city of Bangladesh, the HIV prevalence among injecting drug users reached to the level of a concentrated epidemic (4.9%).

Methodology This study used the purposive Sampling technique to evaluate Injection drug use and HIV/AIDS transmission in Somalia. We assessed 270 injection drug users and all respondents were men. The study used self-administered survey questionnaire and blood sample to determine HIV/AIDS transmission among drug injection users.

This research method was derived from the phenomenological assumptions, which means the phenomena was explored by asking an individual respondent who has

experienced the phenomena to describe his/her experiences (Sale, 2007). Consent forms were signed from the participants and ethical approval letter were received from the Ministry of Health (MoH).

Sampling

300 parents were targeted, all were male respondents using systematic random sampling, however, after data collection completed, 270 responses were analyzed. The study missed 10% of the target respondents due to study illegibility, respondents rejected/reluctant to take part the study. However, 270 counts 90% response rate.

Data Collection

Data collection commenced Feb and completed March. Areas were selected for the study on the basis of their hot spot level for injection use. three enumerators were assigned to mobilize respondents.

Hotspots: first step of the data collection was identifying or mapping hotspots; where drug users meet together and estimating number of client on the spot. Enumerators were familiar with the geographic area of the study, and they found most hotspots in Mogadishu.

Second phase, randomly selected target respondents from the hotspots, period to data collection respondents were prepared vehicles to bring National Laboratory for interview and blood test. After the test each respondent was given \$ 5 for transportation back to the hotspot.

Process of the blood test and questionnaire were as follows: - there were team of four, namely screener, interviewer, lab technician and supervisor. Screener ensures weather the respondent is real drug injector; it was validated by checking signs of injected blood vessels, and asked to sign a consent forms; Interviewer was using Open Data Kit (ODK) application and respondents were asked questions related to their knowledge on HIV/AIDS.

Blood test: After the interview respondents proceed voluntarily blood test and used rapid HIV test equipment. Each case has taken 20 minutes to wait for the result.

Counseling We had counseling expert, for those become positive were given further counselling and information about where they can get anti retrovirus drugs, and location of ART centers in Mogadishu.

Data collection was completed two in week time, although sometimes use to work after working hours and public holidays.

Data Analysis

This research primarily sought to identify injection drug use and HIV transmission. Descriptive statistics have been mainly used for data analysis to observe the frequency distribution, means, and percentages of the target indicators. Results have been presented in the form of charts and tables in the subsequent part of the report.

Findings

The findings have showed that most injection drug users are below 25 years old, they have no or little knowledge about HIV, they share needles regularly and they are not aware of existence of HIV/AIDS in the country. The study also found level of HIV/AIDS transmission among drug users is higher.

Hotspots:

Hotspots are the meeting point for the injection drug users. The study found existence of more than ten different meeting points for the injection drug users. These hotspots are included public and private places, for the public places are included Lido beach, Elgab, Say-Piono, and Urubo beach, however, there are also private business hot spot, due to research ethics, we are unable to mention names of the business centers.

Demographic Profile

Age group of the respondents were close, there were not much deviation. According to figure one majority of the respondents, 35% age lies between 18-23 years, while about one-third (31%) aged between 24 – 29, about quarter of the respondents 23% are aged between 30-35.

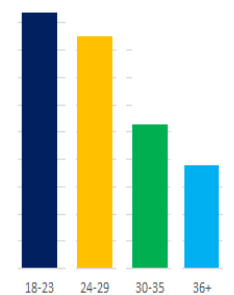


Fig. 1 Respondents'

while those above 36 years are only 11% of the respondents.

Education: education can have an influence on personal behavior, thus, during data collection, respondents were asked their educational level. According to figure 2, the study found that the majority for the injection drug users six in ten (60%) had no formal education, while 28% stated that they have primary

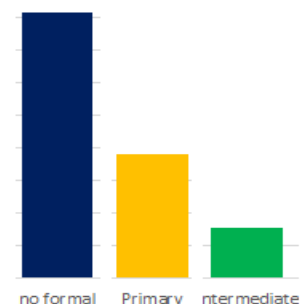


Fig.. 2 education level

education, only 12% have attended intermediate school. Although the study does not measure the correlation between education and drug addiction but through this finding can hypothesize; lack of education has high chance of drug addiction.

Drug Addiction Types: Drug addiction is linked to HIV/AIDS. Thus, the study aims to investigate common drugs addict to respondents and asked, if they addict to one of these; alcohol, Majuran, Tramadol injection and Cocaine. Study found Majuran, and Tramadol injection/pills are easier to purchase and consume while, drugs like heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine are difficult to get however, one of the respondents said “our body adopted drugs, regardless drug type, we should get something” another one said “I prefer injection because its effect is very quick and have a nice enjoy”.

Respondents’ Knowledge on HIV

People who inject drugs and share needles are at risk for transmitting HIV/ AIDS, this is because viruses spread through blood or other body fluids. This section aims to investigate respondents’ knowledge on HIV. Respondents were asked, have you ever heard of HIV/AIDS? Table 1. Explains the finding.

Table 1.1 Respondents’ awareness on HIV/AIDS

Have you ever heard of HIV/AIDS?	Yes	No	Don’t know
Count	232	25	13
Percentage	86%	9%	5%

Findings show that 86% of the respondents have heard about HIV, while 9% said, we did not hear HIV/AIDS and 5% said, don’t know. Respondents were asked follow up questions related to how the virus spread. Table 2 presents how respondents’ knowledge on HIV/AIDS transmission.

Table 2 Respondents’ knowledge on HIV/AIDS transmission.

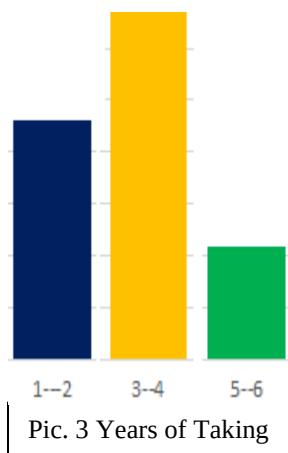
Can people get HIV from sharing unsterilized needles?	Yes	No	Don’t know
Count	196	48	26
Percentage	73%	17%	10%
Can people get HIV by sharing food with a person with HIV/AIDS?	Yes	No	Don’t know
Count	35	224	11
Percentage	13%	83%	4%
Have you heard about special antiretroviral drugs that can help people infected with HIV/AIDS?	Yes	No	Don’t know
Count	22	205	43
Percentage	8%	76%	16%

Study confirms that 73% of the respondents are aware of that HIV can transmit through sharing unsterilized needles with a person live with HIV, while 17% and 10% said no and I don’t know respectively. A follow up question was asked whether people can get HIV by sharing food with a person with HIV. Majority 83% said no, while 13% and 4% respectively responded yes and don’t know. Since injection drug users are susceptible HIV/AID, we asked, have you heard about

antiretroviral drugs that can help people infected with HIV/AIDS, unlike other two questions, majority of the respondents 76% confirmed that they never heard about that. While 16% replied don't know and only 8% said yes. We can conclude that, if drug users become HIV positive, they will miss the chance to seek antiretroviral drugs that can help people infected with HIV/AIDS.

Years of Taking Drugs

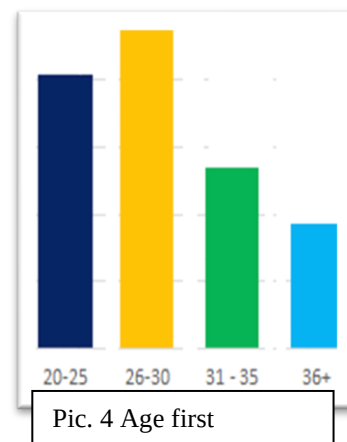
It's common to see people taking drugs for many years and habitual drug addiction is linked with HIV/AIDS, thus, respondents were asked, how long have you been taking drugs? slightly higher half 52% of the drug users stated that were using drugs an average of 3-4 years. While about one third (32%) stated they were using 1-2 years, only 16% stated average 5-6 years.



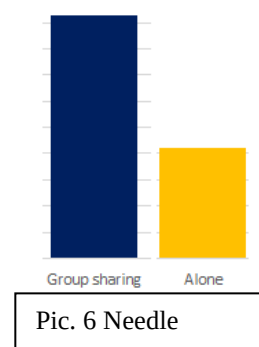
Follow up question was asked.

Study respondents were also asked how old were you when you first injected drugs? Most of the respondents 39% stated that they were between 26-30 years when they first injected drugs.

Followed by one third (33%) stated the age of 20-25, for those started at the age of 31-35 were 20% only 8% confirmed first injected after 36 years old as stated picture 4. Drug users hardly to stay without injecting, therefore, respondents were asked, how many



times do you inject drugs in a day? It was given minimum and maximum options. About seven in ten (73%) confirmed once a day while the remaining 27% stated twice a day.

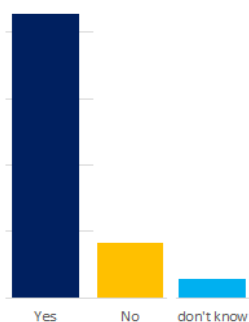


Worthy note, during the interview, blood sample collection and the waiting for the result, study enumerators could observe that respondents were in hurry to go back to their hotspot and most of the time they were requesting to speed up the interview as they were feeling addiction.

Injecting Unsterilized Needle

While any sort of substance abuse will impact a drug user's chances of having HIV/AIDS, some substances have a greater impact than others. The risk of transmitting HIV through sharing unsterilized needles, syringes, or other drug injection equipment are higher. Therefore, respondents were asked do you use non-sterile syringe/needle at any time you inject? About eight in ten (79%) stated that

they use non-sterile needle, while 16% argued that they use sterilized



Pic. 5 Unsterilized Needles

one; one said "we change the needle but share the drugs", 5% said, don't know.

Those answered yes, were asked follow up question, how did you get that syringe/needle? List of options were given, however, 71% said my friend gave it to me after his use. 16% I picked it up from our hot spot which was left there by others. 13%, I reused my own needle/syringe. Since this study examines whether those engaged syringe borrowing and syringe lending among street-involved youth who use, another follow-up question was asked were

you in a group or alone injected the same needle last time? About seven in ten (69%) stated injected in a group while about one third (31%) said injected alone. The study also aimed to know the frequency or times, they have injected drugs with a needle or syringe that had previously been used by someone else? The study found that 68% said every time, while 23% said sometimes and only 9% said never.

Can you obtain new, unused needles and syringes when you need them? About five in ten (51%) confirmed get unused, while about one third (32%) said sometimes, and 17% said never get.

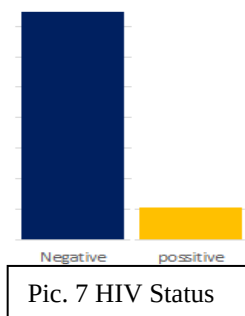
HIV Blood Test Result

The study aimed to know if injection drug users have HIV positive cases and if there's what is the percentage of positive cases

The study employed professional laboratory technicians. After screen check and the interview. respondents were taken finger stick blood sample for HIV test. Rapid antibody test has been. The process has taken in 20 minutes and the result shared with the target respondents.

Our study found that of 270 blood test the study found 21 HIV positive, and this is alert

for the HIV in the country. 8% of IDUs who agreed to HIV screening tested positive



Discussion

According study finding 8% of injection drug users who agreed to HIV screening tested positive. Charles *et al.*, (2009) state that, in South Africa 20% of injection drug users (IDUs) who agreed to HIV screening tested positive.

Conclusion

Injection drug use (IDU) contributed to nearly 10 percent of recorded HIV cases among men. Additionally, men who become infected with a virus can pass it to their friend during sharing needs, they can also pass HIV to their wives through intercourse. Prevention and treatment programs are urgently required in this population. The study concludes that there's association with HIV and injection drug use

Future research recommendations

Future research should investigate the relationship between female injection drug users associated with HIV risk.

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