

Learning from the Voices of Youth: A Participatory Research Study Exploring the HIV and Hepatitis C Prevention Needs of Youth who Smoke Crack

Funding: Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)

This research project was developed in collaboration with community partners based on their expressed need for age-specific data relating to the HIV- and Hepatitis C virus (HCV)-related prevention needs of youth who smoke crack, in order to inform the development of effective HIV- and HCV- prevention strategies and resources tailored for youth who smoke crack. The original research questions for this study were presented to our research team by the Ottawa Youth Joint Action Team, which is a coalition of agencies and individuals formed as a sub-group of the Ottawa Coalition on HIV/AIDS. Based on this request, and the lack of existing data to answer these questions, our research team at the University of Ottawa in partnership with the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa (YSB) developed a research proposal for submission to CIHR.

Objectives

- To identify and characterize the HIV- and HCV-related risks experienced by young men and women who smoke crack;
- To identify and characterize the HIV- and HCV-related prevention needs of young men and women who smoke crack;
- To identify and characterize the impact of the age restriction policy for accessing the Safe Inhalation Program;
- To identify and characterize the differences in HIV- and HCV-related risk behaviours and service access patterns between youth (≤ 25 years) who smoke crack and adults (> 25 years) who smoke crack; and
- To collaborate with policy makers and program managers to initiate the development of targeted HIV and HCV prevention interventions for youth who smoke crack.

Methods

For this study a sequential mixed methods design is being employed. In-depth personal interviews will be used to gather the perspectives of youth who have been identified as holding insight into the particular risk environments occupied by certain groups of youth who smoke crack, in order to gain a greater understanding of the diverse experiences of youth who smoke crack and inform the development of the quantitative analysis plan and survey tool. Subsequently, we will carry out a quantitative survey to document engagement in HIV- and HCV-related behaviours and practices and the existence of risk conditions that may place young men and women who smoke crack at risk of HIV and HCV infection.

Youth engagement is an essential component of this research project, as it is through the perspectives and knowledge provided by youth that we will be able to effectively create the research tools, develop effective participant recruitment strategies as well as appropriately understanding the research findings and design a targeted effective plan for the dissemination of findings to key stakeholders. To this end, youth between the ages of 16 and 25 years who have experience with crack have been recruited to join the Youth Project Team, a working group to inform the research process and ordering of priorities. Through their participation in discussions and art-based participatory research activities, members of the Youth Project Team will help to guide and inform all stages of the research process including the final analysis of study results and the development of key findings and recommendations for dissemination to program managers, policy makers and the broader community.

Collaborating agencies include:

Youth Services Bureau (Ottawa)
Sandy Hill Community Health centre – Oasis Program
Somerset West Community Health Centre
Operation Come Home
Odawa Native Friendship Centre – Shawenjeagamik Aboriginal Drop-In Centre
Public Health Agency of Canada – Surveillance and Epidemiology Section
AIDS Bureau – Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care

More info

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