

**Sergeyev, Boris, Inna Vyshemirskaya and Victoria Osipenko**  
**People Who Use Injecting Drugs in Kaliningrad: Survey Results**

The survey was conducted among drug-using clients of the Low-Threshold Service Point (LTSP) that operated in Kaliningrad under the EU-funded project “Taking up Challenge: Developing Services to Contain the Spread of HIV and TB among Injecting Drug Users in Kaliningrad Oblast” between October 2012 and November 2013. The LTSP was established in cooperation between Kaliningrad Drug Treatment Dispensary and the NGO “YLA” in September 2012. On voluntary basis, LTSP’s clients took part in this survey focused on their exposure to health risks and awareness of infectious diseases. If accepted, each client was informed in detail about the interview session to come and given the opportunity to sign a consent form. Interviews were conducted “face-to-face” by psychologists and trained social workers who served as interviewers. Individual code for each client was assigned so that the respective interview data are entered in the database under this code and not client’s name or other characteristics by which the respective individual can be identified. The client was then administered the health and risk questionnaire focused on his/her injection and sexual practices; health concerns and contacts with medical and social institutions; awareness of infectious diseases and techniques to prevent them. Socio-demographic characteristics of clients were also recorded. Any gaps in the client’s knowledge of infectious diseases or his/her exposure to unsafe practices were addressed during health education session that followed the interview. The interview took approximately 40 minutes, while disease prevention education session required 15 to 20 minutes. Clients received rewards of 10 EUR, in the form of mobile telephone cards, snacks and were also provided with condoms, lubricants, bleach and vitamins. 510 clients underwent interviews during this exercise. The respective results are presented below.

## **1. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE**

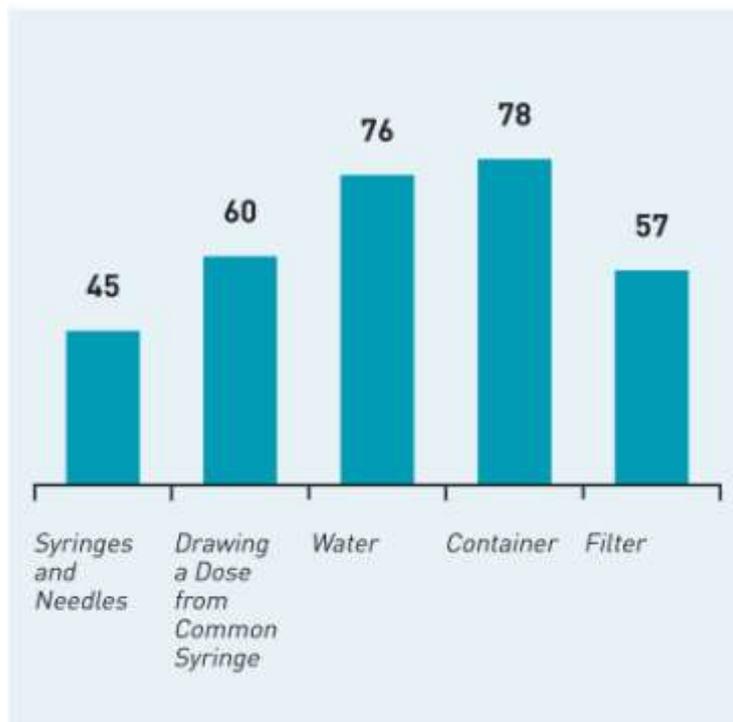
The absolute majority of respondents (76%) are males who dominate among drug users in Kaliningrad and Russia. Their average age is 38 years while most respondents were between 30 and 50 years of age. 83% had secondary or college education, 39% were employed. Among them 40% had jobs at public or private organizations, disabled accounted for about 5% of the sample, while students constituted less than 1%. Median monthly income among respondents varied between 10,000 and 25,000 rubles (approximately, 300-500 Euro). About a half of the sample were those never married.

## **2. DRUG AND PARAPHERNALIA USE**

Practically every respondent admitted injecting drug use, with 74% of them having 10 or more years of drug experience. “Beginners”, i.e. those injecting drugs for less than a year constitute only 4.4% of the sample. 74% of respondents prefer heroin, although talking about the period of 30 days before the interview, 40% also mentioned injecting other drugs, mainly amphetamines. Usually, drugs are injecting together with others: 92% indicated that they practiced drug consumption in groups. This fact has to be taken into account when planning overdose prevention campaigns, the condition experienced by 68% of respondents.

As to paraphernalia sharing, this is a widespread practice among those surveyed (*Diagram 1*). During the period of 12 months before the interview, 45% of respondents either used others’ syringes or lent theirs to other users. 57% shared filters to draw drug solution; 60% drew their dose from common syringe; 76% shared water to cook drugs and 78% cooked drugs in common container.

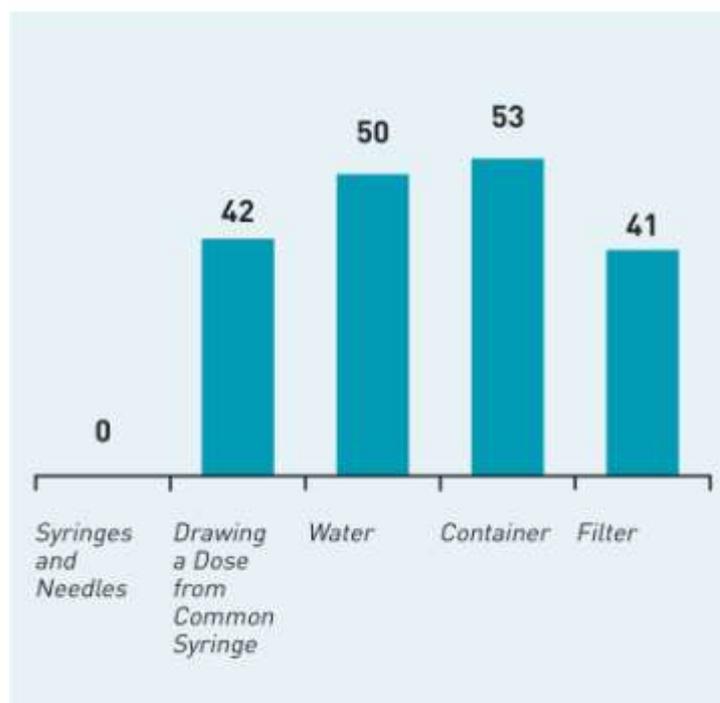
**Diagram 1.**  
**Sharing Syringes and Paraphernalia,**  
**Last 12 months (%)**



In other words, preparation and injection practices among drug users in Kaliningrad tend to be risky creating numerous possibilities for HIV and hepatitis transmission.

This conclusion is supported by responses on the question about syringe and paraphernalia sharing during last injection (*Diagram 2*). As positive tendency let us note that every respondent declared using his/her own syringe at last injection. On the other hand, sharing containers, filters, water and drawing individual doses from common syringe are typical from 41% to 53% of respondents.

**Diagram 2.**  
**Sharing Syringes and Paraphernalia,**  
**Last Injection (%)**



Respondents report syringes as accessible in Kaliningrad yet 56% of them mentioned having difficulties buying syringes when they needed them.

Extensive drug experience among respondents is reflected in over two-thirds (68%) of them going through overdose, with almost a half (48%) of this sub-sample having overdose one or two times, every third (28%) – from 3 to 5 times and another quarter (24%) – over 5 times. High prevalence of overdose among drug users indicates the need for launching the respective prevention program in Kaliningrad.

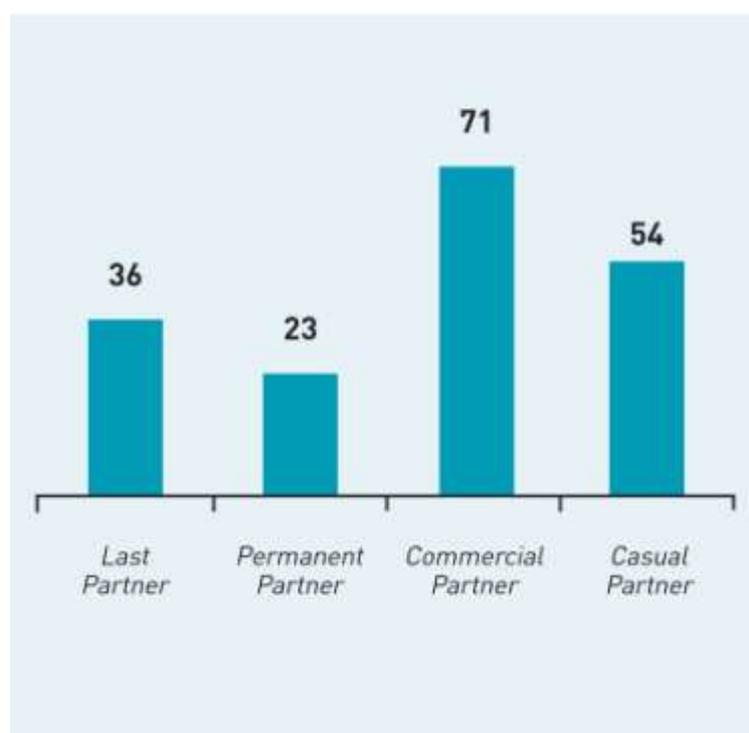
It is noteworthy that almost a half of those who took part in disease low-threshold prevention programs TIME 1, TIME 2, and TIME 3 implemented in Kaliningrad earlier, report practicing less risky forms of behavior. This is an indication of positive effect of prevention information distributed among drug users and testifies to the effect of low-threshold programs.

### 3. SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Practically all respondents (94%) admit having sexual ties during 12 months before the interview. Most of them have numerous partners, with median set at 1.5 partners. 42% admitted having sex with casual partners, 11% – with commercial ones. The absolute majority of respondents had sex under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Under these circumstances it is difficult to expect them to take precautions – only 36% of respondents report using condom at last sex. Drug use varies by type of partner: for commercial partner it is 71%; casual one – 54%; and permanent one – 23% (*Diagram 3*).

Note that respondents are well-informed about protective qualities of condom, with 93% saying that condom use reduces risk of HIV. Also it is possible to state that condoms are easily available for respondents: 90% of them agreed with the statement that they can get condom easily, if needed. On the other hand, 44% expressed doubts about whether they will use condom at their next sexual encounter. Obviously, the reasons behind their doubts have little to do with their not being informed or condoms being non-available. To some extent, they may be linked to prevalent perception that using condom reduces sexual pleasure.

**Diagram 3.**  
**Using condom at Last Sex (%)**



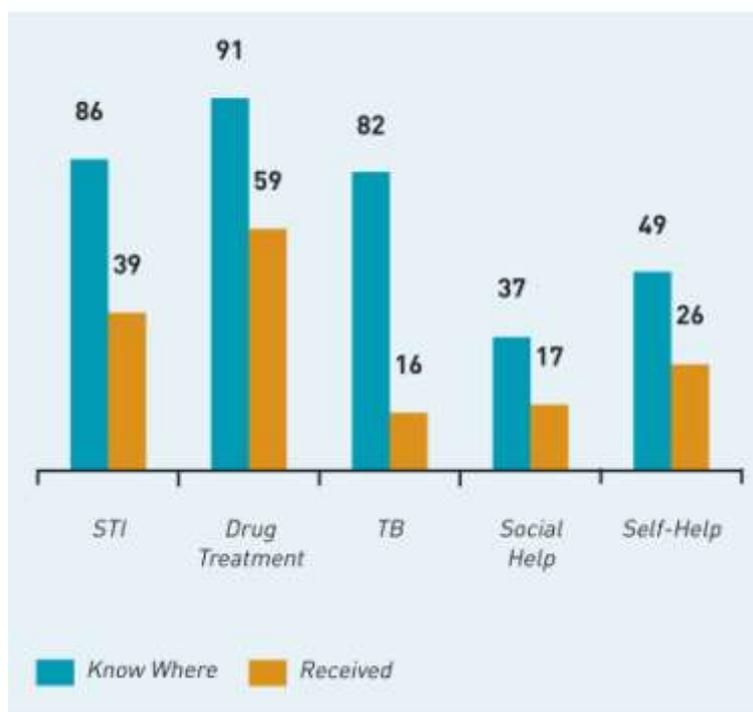
#### 4. GETTING MEDICAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES. HIV AWARENESS

Although 54% of respondents consider themselves to be in “normal” or “good” health, their contacts with medical institutions are quite intensive: 91% underwent HIV testing; 85% were tested for hepatitis; 89% had X-ray done in the past two years; 15% were treated for tuberculosis and 48% underwent drug treatment. As to HIV testing, only two-thirds of those tested received post-test counseling despite the respective normative requirement. As a results, medical service miss the opportunity to provide prevention information to those who need. Among those who underwent HIV testing, 36% report to be HIV positive. 67% admit carrying HCV, 4% – HBV. 49% of respondents smoke, while 45% consume alcohol.

60% of PLWH among respondents are in need of ART, yet in reality only 41% receive it. It is noteworthy that PLWH in treatment are serious about staying in the program: 75% visit doctor regularly and know their immune status and virus load. About one-third or PLWH in treatment show positive dynamics: virus load is not detectable among 32% of them. At the same time 54% admitted having breaks and intervals of more than 3 days in taking medications while 46% adhere to treatment protocol properly. In other words, our results indicate that drug users can be motivated to undergo ART in accordance with treatment protocols. Nevertheless, the proportion of those who are committed to ART therapy among the respondents is high: 46% reported that they had no failures and interruptions in receiving ART therapy. In general, it should be noted: findings of our survey show that people who use drugs can quite successfully undergo ART treatment.

Respondents are well-informed about where they should seek medical help: between 82% and 91% of them know where they can receive STIs, drug dependency and tuberculosis (*Diagram 4*). Yet respondents are not so well-informed about outlets of social help, with only 37% knowing where to apply. About a half of the sample (49%) are aware of public organizations and self-help groups where they can receive support

**Diagram 4.**  
**Number of Respondents Knowing Where to Get/Received Medical and Social Help (%)**

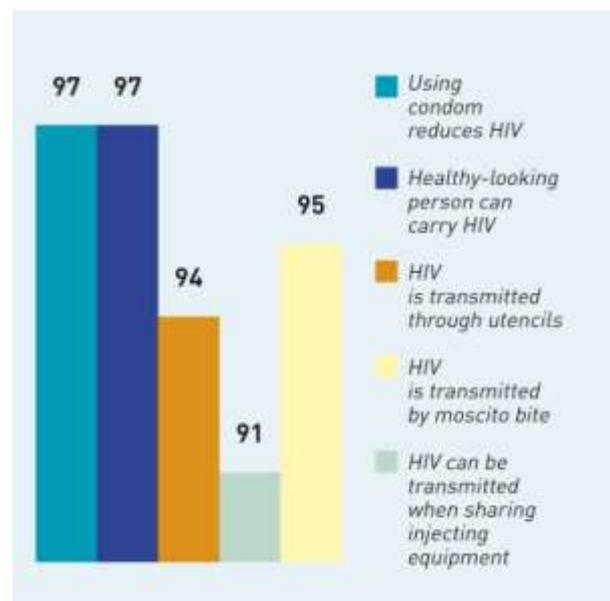


Note that the majority of respondents (91%) underwent drug treatment several times, specifically through detoxification (48%). 58% of respondents are registered as drug users at the Kaliningrad Drug Dispensary. Among those who underwent detoxification, 31% did it once; 29% – two or three times and the remaining 40% – from five to ten times. As to their motivation in going for treatment, 41% did it to get out of drug habit; 22% – to reduce drug consumption while for 16% treatment was kind of break after which they planned to have a new beginning. The outcome of this exercise was different from these expectations: 31% started to use drugs immediately after the course of detoxification was finished, 16% within several days; 15% within a month; 22% over a month and only 15% stayed sober for more than a year.

As to rehabilitation programs, participation in them is limited to 7% of the sample. A half of these respondents went through rehabilitation in Christian-based centers. 54% enrolled in these programs once; 20% – twice and 15% from five to ten times. The effect of rehabilitation programs is also limited, with 29% of their patients starting drug use within a week upon release; 17% within a month; 33% – over a month and 10% staying sober for a year or more. In other words, despite their being motivated to stop drug use, remission rates among drug treatment and rehabilitation patients remain high. Opioid dependency is a chronic disease with considerable potential for remission so that our results just confirm this.

Of interest is the distribution of responses to items on HIV transmission routes (*Diagram 5*). From 91% to 97% chose correct answers which testifies to their high level of awareness about how HIV is or is not transmitted.

**Diagram 5.**  
Awareness of HIV Transmission Routes  
(% correct responses)



## 5. PRISON EXPERIENCE

Considerable number of respondents (67%) had prison experience, with one-third of them having served 4 or more times. 80% of them ended up in prisons before they were 25 years old while 26% were convicted before they were 18 years old. A half of this subsample spent at least 4 years in prison.

Based on that, one can state that respondents are well-qualified to discuss prevalence of risky forms of behavior that may result in HIV or hepatitis infection in prison setting. According to respondents' reports, injecting drug use is quite prevalent in prisons, with 65% of those with prison experience admitting drug injections while in there. Note that for 6% it was first drug experience. As to their last imprisonment, drug use was admitted by 63% of respondents. High prevalence of drug use indicates

the need for drug treatment programs in prisons as currently this service is not available in Kaliningrad prisons.

Also of importance are high risks for HIV and hepatitis transmission in prisons. 55% of respondents admitted using other people's equipment when injecting drugs in correction institutions. Aside from injections, there are tattoos and piercing, the practices where non-sterile instruments are used. In this sample, 48% of respondents with prison experience report having tattoos and/or piercing done. The high prevalence of these forms of risky behavior suggests that disease prevention programs are conducted on limited scale, if at all in prisons.

Despite the normative requirement for prison inmates to get tested for HIV, only 60% of respective respondents report having this test done. It is not unlikely, though, that blood samples were taken from the rest without notification that this was HIV testing.