



Confronting Russia's Achilles' heel: drug users with HIV and drug dependency represent a disproportionate large amount of HIV infection cases in Russia

Issues:

By 2000, the international AIDS-service community reached a consensus on the most effective evidence-based approaches to HIV prevention among injecting drug users. Syringe and needle exchange programs have shown significant reductions in risk behavior and HIV transmission among drug users involved in such programmes.

Existing Russian drug control law is mostly based on a repressive approach which has limited impact in terms of criminalising drug users rather than drug dealers, and therefore contribute to the public perception of drug users as criminals which do not "deserve" social care and treatment. In Russia nor an access to sufficient treatment for drug users, neither cost-effective preventive health care measures like needle exchange are not available.



Description:

Nearly of half million drug users are officially recorded with the state drug addiction registry, while a large part of drug population avoids registering, because it can result discrimination. In 2008, The Federal Drug Control Service estimated the actual number of drug users as between 2 and 2.5 million. However, harm reduction has been largely debated as a controversy between NGOs and political leaders and health officials.



Lessons learned:

Our drug policy employs law enforcement approach.

On December 28, 2009, the Russian State Anti-drug Committee submitted for adoption to the President of the Russian Federation a Draft Strategy of the National Anti Drug Policy, which includes controversial statements and omissions that threaten the future of HIV prevention among injecting drug users in Russia. Among key objectives, the initial draft of the strategy indicated "implementing measures to prevent introduction of harm reduction programs, including substitution treatment", however after consultation with the public this statement has been removed. Nonetheless, the Strategy still considers substitution treatment and syringe exchange controversial and equates with drug use propaganda.



Next steps:

Harm Reduction should be a public health matter, rather than the drug control issue.

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