

ARGENTINA; URUGUAY: "Hepatitis C Virus Among Non-Injecting Cocaine Users (NICUs) in South America: Can Injectors Be a Bridge? "
Addiction Vol. 106; No. 1: P. 143-151 (01..11):: Waleska T. Caiaffa and others

The team undertook the current project - an inter-country, cross-sectional study - to investigate factors associated with hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection among non-injecting cocaine users (NICUs) and to compare practices associated with HCV and HIV infection. The subjects of the research were 871 NICUs in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Montevideo, Uruguay.

Participants were interviewed, and blood was drawn for HCV, HIV, hepatitis B virus surface antigen (HbsAg), HB-anticore, and Venereal Disease Research Laboratory antibody assays. Comparisons of HCV and HIV mono-infected participants with HCV-HIV seronegatives were included in bivariate and multivariate logistic regression analyses.

Lab testing found prevalence rates of 8.8 for HCV (95 percent confidence interval: 6.9-10.8) and 7.9 for HIV (95 percent CI: 6.1-9.7). Compared to HCV-HIV seronegatives, HCV-infected NICUs were twice as likely to have shared straws to snort cocaine, even after adjusting for other variables. "HCV prevalence rates ranged from 3.6 percent among NICUs who denied sharing straws and having had an injection drug user (IDU) or an HIV-positive sexual partner to 12.6 percent among participants who reported ever having shared straws or having had either an IDU or HIV-positive sexual partner (X² trend=6.56, P=0.01)."

"Non-injecting cocaine users from South America are vulnerable to multiple infections, and HCV infection appears to occur through the sharing of straws," the authors concluded. "HCV infection is associated with intimate relationships with IDUs or HIV-seronegative partners, supporting the hypothesis that HCV risk may be due primarily to risk-taking behavior associated with drugs in this population."