

## Injecting Drug Users in Sri Lanka

Bhadrani Senanayake<sup>1</sup>, Ravi Kandiah, Y. Ratnayake

An exploratory descriptive study on Injecting Drug Users (IDUs) in Sri Lanka was undertaken in the light of the increase in the number of IDUs between 1998 and 2002. The aim of the study was to understand the nature and the extent of injecting drug use in the country in 2003-2004. A non-probable 'snow-ball' sample of IDUs was studied from the correctional institutions and the community. The case histories and interviews were conducted taking into consideration the physical signs of drug injecting, body language and verbal expressions.

The IDUs were males aged mostly between 20 and 40 years, mostly from Colombo and adjacent urban areas. Majority them were form a lower social strata, employed as small-scale entrepreneurs or manual workers. The IDUs could be broadly categorised into 3 groups by their drug injecting: regular injectors, intermittent injectors and those injected once or few occasions. Many regular IDUs had a criminal record.

Periods of social and political instability or high profile drug law enforcement appear to have enhanced the spread of injecting drug use. During the crisis period, the street level supply of heroin had been severely hampered, which had forced the heroin chasers (Chinese method users) to switch to injecting as a means of survival. Sharing of injecting equipment was minimal among IDUs. Many of the IDUs had engaged in un-protected sex with multiple partners including commercial sex-workers in countries of high seroprevalence of HIV/AIDS and STDs. Many IDUs believed that injecting heroin could enhance their sexual libido, which had been proven otherwise within 3 months of regular injecting. However, this had been a major reason for initiating injecting drug use.

Sri Lanka at present is a low prevalence country for injecting drug use and HIV/AIDS. A scenario of decrease in accessibility to heroin due to high price, and law level of purity possibility of increase in the prevalence of injecting drug use could increase in seroprevalence of HIV/AIDS and other blood and STD. Hence, the injecting drug use has to be closely monitored to prevent this situation in Sri Lanka.

Key Words: Injecting, Drug users, HIV/AIDS, Criminal, Sex

---

<sup>1</sup> National Dangerous Drugs Control Board, Rajagiriya Sri Lanka. Email: badrani@nddcb.gov.lk