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Risk behaviour among PWID in Flanders : Results from 10 years of monitoring

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1. Context



- Context of needle and syringe exchange programs (NSP)
- History :
 - 1994, first NSP in Wallonia (Liège)
 - 2000, in Belgium, the legislation has been modified by decree to allow the distribution of needle/syringes for PWID
 - 2001, first NSP in Flanders (Antwerp)

1. Context



- NSP in Flanders :
 - Integrated in the existing low-threshold ambulatory drug services :
 - 1 in every 5 provinces + satellites
 - +70% syringes exchanged
 - But also via
 - Pharmacies : 10%
 - separated NSP : 15%
 - other treatment centres : 3%
 - street outreach organizations : <1%

1. Context



- Some numbers :
 - Number of syringes exchanged has increased over the years

Number of syringes exchanged, Flanders, 2002-2016



- The return rate of syringes was in 2016, 107%
- In average 47 syringes distributed by contact. But not possible to evaluate it by client

2. Objectives



- NSP is seen as a unique context for data collection about its clients
- In order to evaluate the efficacy of the program and the achievement of its goals in an objective way it has been decided to conduct a yearly survey
- Questions about :
 - Sociodemographic information
 - Injecting drug use
 - Health and treatment condition
 - Risk behaviour
 - Opinion on NSP

3. Method



Questionnaire :

- Based on the Injecting Risk Questionnaire (IRQ) developed in the UK (Stimson et al., 1998), a validated and comparable instrument of 18 questions
- + other questions added (79 in total), mostly closed questions
- Evaluated and fine-tuned in 2006 → We will focus on period 2007-2016
- Questions adapted during the years (e.g. on base-cocaine, NPS, interest for drug consumption rooms)

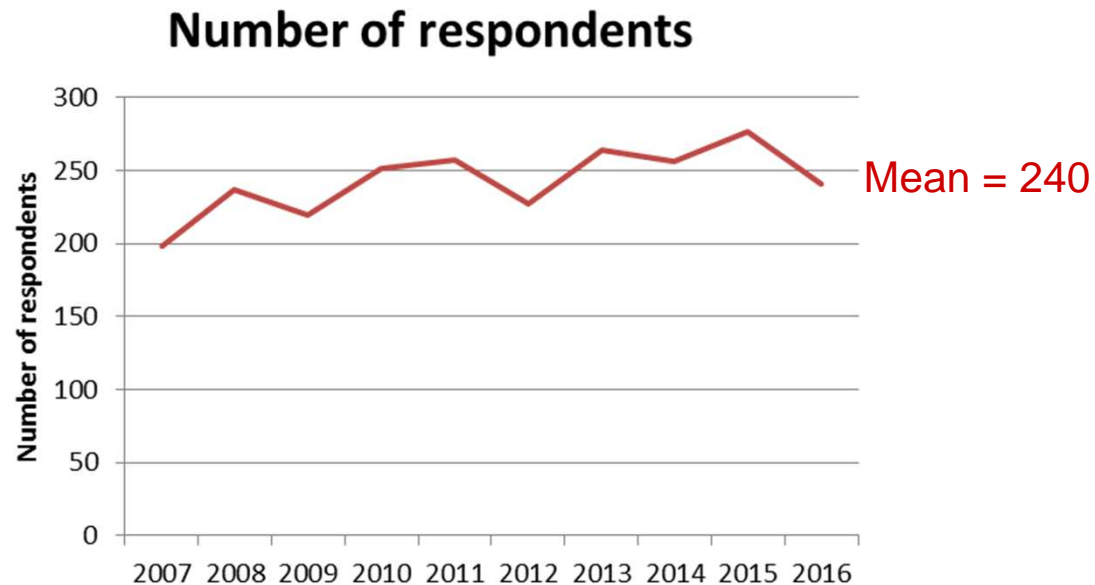
3. Method



Recruitment of people :

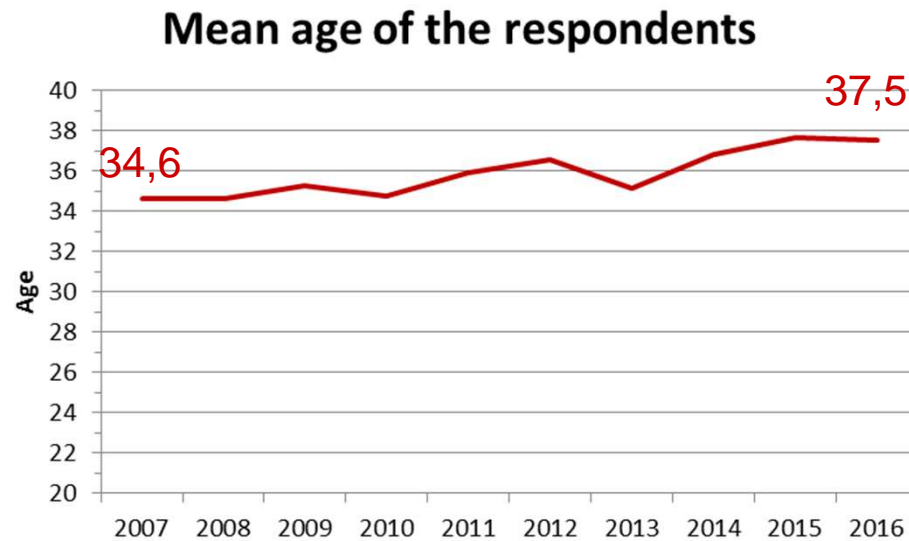
- Every visitor is asked to participate between November and December
- The participation is voluntary and 6€ cash is paid once the questionnaire is fully completed
- The questionnaire is self-completed by the user on paper, average duration 30-45 min
- Anonymity is guaranteed
- The doubles are checked based on a code

4. Results - Sociodemographic



- Sex rate : between 75% and 80% males, similar with the population in low-threshold centres
- Based on knowledge of researchers, the sample reaches a large majority of the clients

4. Results - Sociodemographic

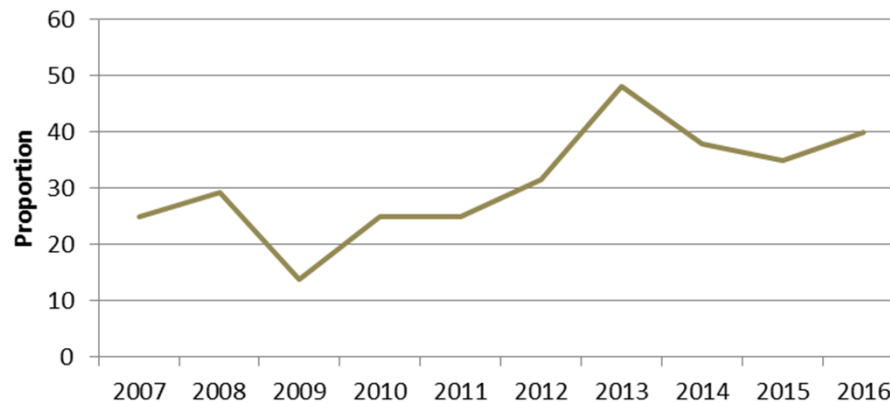


- Min : 18 ; Max : 62
- Mean age increased with +/- 3 years

4. Results - Sociodemographic

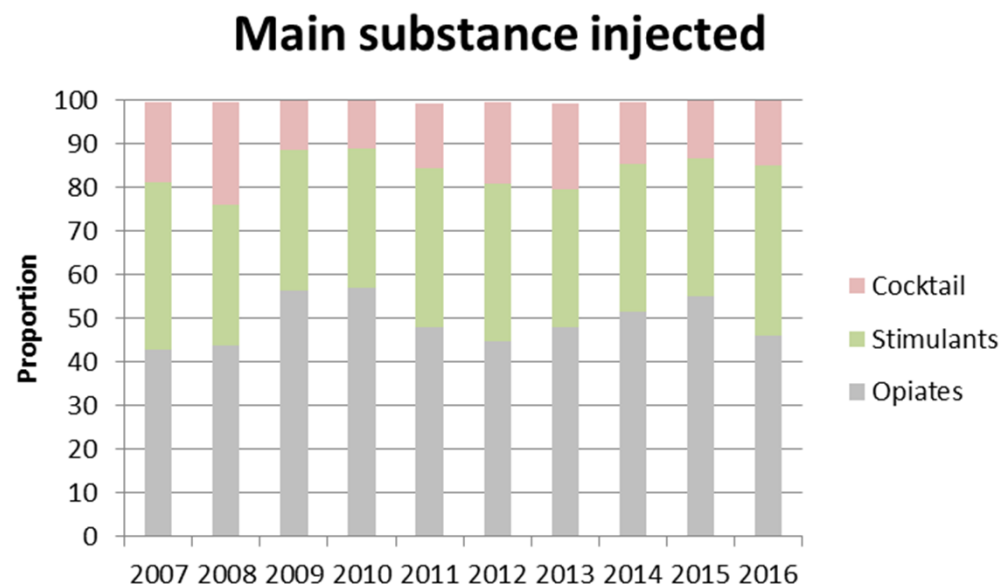


Proportion of the respondents in unstable living situation



- Unstable living situation is increasing (homeless + temporarily living with others)
- Including homeless (half of them), not only visible in big cities
- Hygiene limited → Higher risk situations

4. Results – Drug use



- Only one substance to be selected even though they are mainly polydrug users
- But also in details, other substances injected : methadon, hypnotics, hallucinogens, cannabis, alcohol,...
- 26% has used a NPS last year (future challenge)

4. Results – Drug use



Number of products used :

- On average : 4 products used during last month, including 2 by injection

Age at first injection :

- 21 years at first injection (range : 10-43) : No trends

Location where they inject :

- Between 14% and 22% inject sometimes or always in the street and higher proportion (very variable : between 30% and 60%) in open or semi-open places

Place of injection :

- The most common are arms, hands and legs but
- 3 dangerous body places for injecting :
 - neck (on average 6,6%)
 - groin (9,4%)
 - armpit (4,0%)

4. Results – Risk behaviour



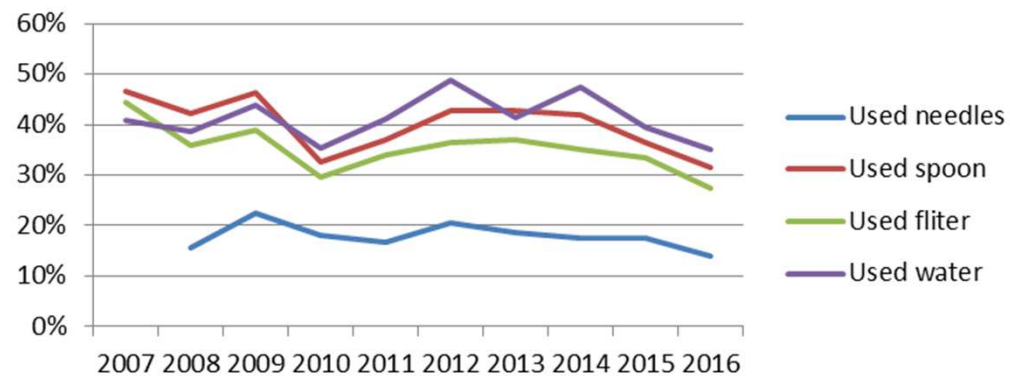
Proportion of respondents who shared material during the last month



- All types of material together
- No clear decrease since 2010

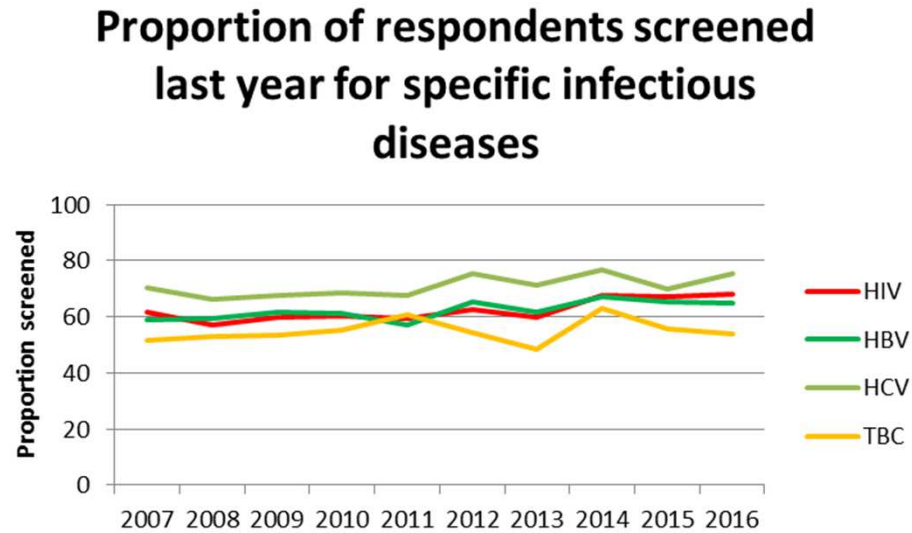
4. Results – Risk behaviour

Proportion of respondents who used material already used by another PWID



- Decrease for all types since 2012
- Much lower for needles but almost the double for other material

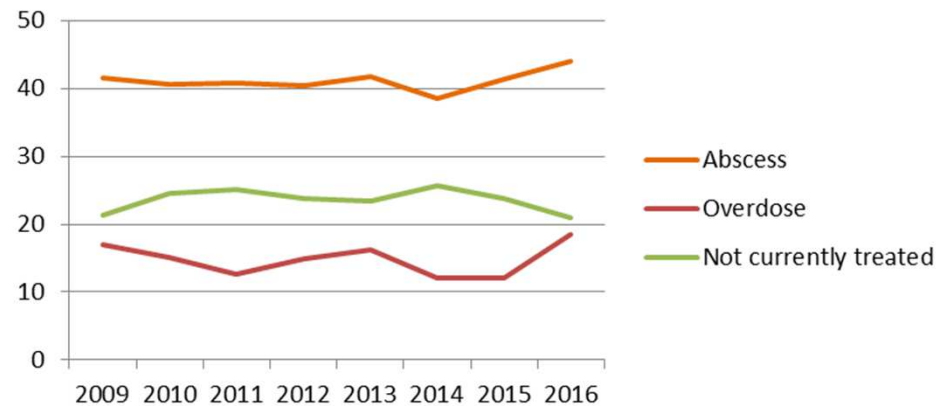
4. Results – Health conditions



- Increasing trend in screening

4. Results – Health conditions

Proportion of respondent having the following health conditions



- On average more than 40% have had one or more abscess during last year
- Almost 1 on 5 in 2016 had one or more overdose
- 1 on 5 not currently treated

4. Results – Opinion on NSP & DCR



Functioning of the NSP

- In general, good opinion about the NSP (above 80%)
- Most points for improvement : place of the NSP and accessibility
- Information provided, material and anonymity scored the highest

Drug consumption room

- 2/3 would use a drug consumption room
- 45% of them daily

5. Discussion/Conclusion



- Interesting and unique picture of the client population of Flemish NSP over more than 10 years
- Study set up from the field in order to improve their way of working → Feedback to the network (yearly report)
- Possible to
 - Picture their population
 - Evaluate the efficacy of measures
 - Detect emerging trends

5. Discussion/Conclusion



- Advantages :
 - Large amount of data collected (79 questions, large range of questions)
 - Based on international questionnaire (basis) + evaluated and adapted in collaboration with specialized researchers
 - Flexibility : new questions added over time (on NPS, base-cocaine, DCR)
 - Time period covered with comparable questions
 - Self-reported survey, anonymous (no bias from interviewers)

5. Discussion/Conclusion



- Limitations :
 - Self-reported survey : completion
 - Voluntary basis : representativeness of the sample?
→ No conclusion on the total PWID population
 - Length of the form, but compensated by closed questions
 - Over-representation of 1 NSP → analysis by province
 - No follow-up of patients but snapshot in time

5. Discussion/Conclusion



- Development of the survey in the future :
 - more representativeness
 - more scientific basis
 - more specific analysis of data
 - European collaboration



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Thank you for your attention !

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