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## HIV gender-based vulnerabilities of women using drugs in long-term heterosexual relationships: baseline results from a randomized trial in Ukraine

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**BACKGROUND:** Sexual way of HIV transmission in Ukraine outweighs parenteral route since 2007. In response to situation change couple's counseling for IDUs was introduced and is currently tested within randomized trial.

**METHODS:** Baseline data were collected in June-September 2011: 548 IDU couples in 10 cities were surveyed and screened for HIV and hepatitis C. Participants were recruited using respondent-driven sampling method.

**RESULTS:** The average age of participants varied between 30 – 33 years old with women being 3 years younger. On many aspects drug using couples in long-term relationships share the same values as non-drug using couples. However, drug use resulted into specific HIV/STIs risks for the couple.

Common reasons of being with the current partner included mutual understanding (98%); similar life styles (90%); understanding life with addiction (88%); and love (87%).

At the same time, looking at the quality time partners spend together, it was found that mostly, they are connected by their drug use, fear of social exclusion and economical reasons. Although these

factors are important for both men and women, they have a bigger impact on women and put them into more vulnerable position: 25% have children who in 59% of cases mostly live with mother and her partner; 40% live in a partner's house; 30% are financially supported by partners; 77% women get drugs from partners and only 20% are first one to be injected.

Trust also seems to be an issue. Thus, 83% of respondents believe that they know the HIV/STI status of their partner and 90% of those believe it to be negative, while 20% of those surveyed appeared to be HIV-positive and about 30% hepatitis C-positive.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Understanding characteristics of sexual partners is crucial for HIV prevention programme design and implementation.

**KEY WORDS:** gender, HIV, drug use, condom, couples

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**Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of the study sample (N=548)**

Characteristic (unit)	Males	Females	Difference significance
Age (years)	33,4 (32,7 – 34,0)	30,3 (29,7 – 31,0)	*
Duration of relationships (months)	45,0 (41,6 – 48,4)	45,5 (41,9 – 49,2)	NS
Live in official marriage (%)	15,6 (12,6 – 18,6)	15,1 (12,1 – 18,1)	NS
Civil marriage (%)	64,2 (60,2 – 68,2)	65,5 (61,6 – 69,4)	NS
Close relationship but not marriage (%)	20,1 (16,8 – 23,4)	19,4 (16,1 – 22,7)	NS
Do not live together (%)	11,5 (8,8 – 14,2)	11,4 (8,7 – 14,1)	NS
Live in my apartment/house (%)	42,6 (38,5 – 46,7)	29,0 (25,2 – 32,8)	*
Live in parents' apartment/house (%)	26,8 (23,1 – 30,5)	39,7 (35,6 – 43,8)	*
Odd jobs (%)	53,0 (48,8 – 57,2)	31,1 (27,2 – 35,0)	*
Unemployed (%)	17,9 (14,7 – 21,1)	28,2 (24,4 – 32,0)	*
Housekeeper (%)	0,4 (0,0 – 0,9)	20,1 (16,7 – 23,5)	*
Partner helps finding drugs	50% (45,8 – 54,2)	77% (73,5 – 80,5)	*
Feel safe	69% (65,1 – 72,9)	83 (79,9 – 86,1)	*
Provides financial support	17 (13,9 – 20,1)	60 (55,9 – 64,1)	*
Afraid of my partner	4 (2,4 – 5,6)	8 (5,7 – 10,3)	*
Afraid to be alone	43 (38,9 – 47,1)	51 (46,8 – 55,2)	*
Partner physically abuses me	4 (2,4 – 5,6)	12 (9,3 – 14,7)	*
My child is living with us	20 (16,7 – 23,3)	59 (54,9 – 63,1)	*
Always first one to inject	39 (34,9 – 43,1)	20 (16,7 – 23,3)	*

**Гендерно-обумовлена уязвимость к ВИЧ женщин, употребляющих наркотики, в длительных гетеросексуальных отношениях: результаты первичного опроса рандомизированного исследования в Украине**

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КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: гендер, ВИЧ, употребление наркотиков, презервативы, партнеры

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**Гендерна уразливість до ВІЛ жінок, які вживають наркотики, в гетеросексуальних відносинах: результати первинного опитування рандомізованого дослідження в Україні**

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