

The importance of enabling environment: The impact of crackdowns on HIV prevention and treatment among PWID in Myanmar

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Background:

In Myanmar, HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs (PWID) is estimated at 28.3% (IBBS 2015), which is the highest among key affected populations. Substantial investments have been made in harm reduction services, and by 2012, 49% of Myanmar's estimated 75,000¹ PWID population had been reached with HIV prevention services supported by Global Fund and other donors. During the same period, opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar nearly doubled (UNODC 2015), resulting in a further increase in drug use in the area. Despite law enforcement efforts to reduce supply, arrest drug dealers and detain drug users, local community members have seen little impact on drug use in the area.

In 2014, among rising community frustration, local groups in Kachin took matters into their own hands, a campaign known locally as "*Pajasan*." This campaign included opening faith-based "treatment" centers and formation of neighborhood watch groups to chase away dealers. In some cases, PWID were forced to submit to these "treatment" centers, which were often bleak institutions lacking basic resources and expertise to treat withdrawal.

Methods:

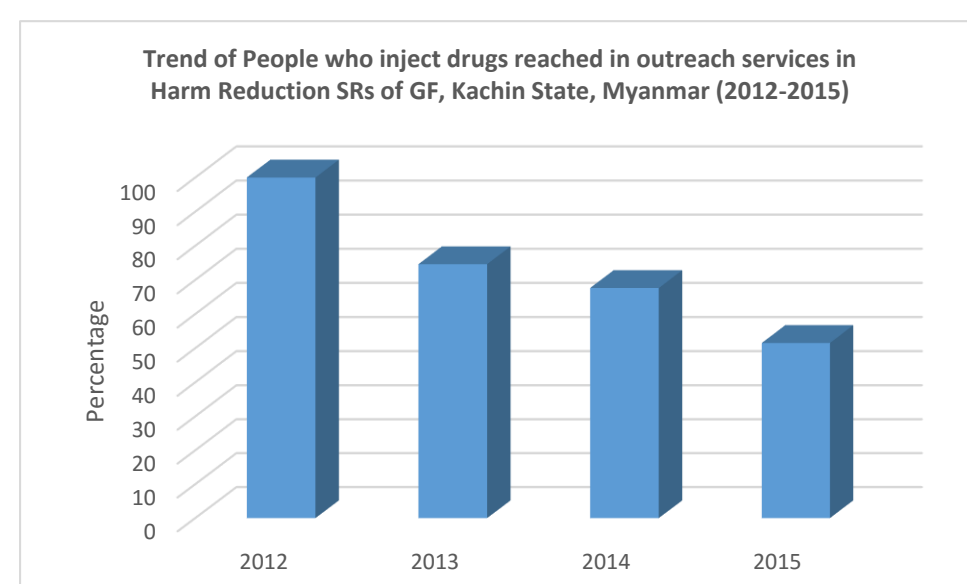
With support from the Global Fund, two INGOs funded by Save the Children Principal Recipient working for people who inject drugs (PWID) in Kachin area. We aggregated the data reported by these INGOs and analyzed trends in the number of PWIDs reached before and after the "*Pajaison*" campaign.



Source: Yangon.coconut.com, 22 February 2016

Results:

Significant decreased in PWID reached was noted, especially in outreach service (48%) than DIC service. These crackdowns, physical violence and incarceration resulted in sharing of needles and syringes and loss of contact for outreach activities; in some areas, peer outreach workers left the project out of fear of persecution.



Conclusion:

Moving forward, harm reduction implementing partners will be supported to engage local community members in program implementation to increase acceptability of harm reduction interventions among local key stakeholders.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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¹ 2014 IBBS, estimated PWID is 83,000