

Prevalence and correlates of injection of industrial silicone among transgender women in Argentina

M. Eugenia Socias^{1, 2, 3}, Thomas Kerr^{3,4}, Brandon D.L. Marshall⁵, Inés Arístegui¹, Claudia Frola^{1, 2}, Héctor Pérez², Pedro Cahn^{1, 2}, Omar Sued^{1, 2}

¹Fundación Huésped, BA, Argentina ²Hospital Fernández, BA, Argentina, ³BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, Vancouver, Canada, ⁴University of British Columbia, Department of Medicine, Vancouver, Canada, ⁵Brown University School of Public Health

BACKGROUND

- Transgender women continue to contend with high rates of HIV infection in many settings.
- To enhance their feminine appearance, many transgender women undergo medically unsupervised body modification procedures, such as self or peer-administered injection of industrial silicone (“airplane oil”).
- The use of non-sterile equipment and assisted injecting has been associated with increased risk for HIV acquisition and skin and soft tissue infections among people who inject drugs.
- The aim of this study was to assess the prevalence and correlates of industrial silicone injection among transwomen in Argentina.

METHODS

- Data was drawn from a cross-sectional, nation-wide study involving transgender women in Argentina conducted in 2013.
- Bi- and multi-variable logistic regression were used to investigate correlates of industrial silicone injection

<https://benjaminrocha.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/hombre-inyectandose1.jpg>



RESULTS

- In total, 450 transgender women were included:
 - Median age: 30 years old (IQR 25-37)
 - History of sex work involvement: 376 (83.6%)
 - Self-reported HIV infection: 104 (23.1%)
 - Self-reported HCV infection: 18 (4%)
- 277 (61.6%) reported having ever injected industrial silicone for body modification purposes.
 - 91.7% of them were injected by a transgender peer
- Unadjusted and adjusted correlates of silicone injection are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Factors associated with industrial silicone injection among transgender women in Argentina (n=450)

Characteristic	Odds Ratio (OR)	
	Unadjusted OR (95% CI)	Adjusted OR (95% CI)
Individual-level factors		
Age (per year older) *	1.05 (1.03 – 1.08)	1.05 (1.02 – 1.08)
Self- reported HIV status (positive vs. negative/ unknown) *	1.74 (1.08 – 2.79)	1.19 (0.70 – 2.04)
Educational level (≥high school vs. <high school) *	0.71 (0.48 – 1.07)	0.76 (0.49 – 1.19)
Self- reported HCV status (positive vs. negative/ unknown)	1.66 (0.58 – 4.73)	–
Extended health insurance	1.01 (0.61 – 1.66)	–
Social-structural factors		
Foreign-born status (yes vs. no) *	3.18 (1.44 – 7.00)	3.22 (1.38 – 7.52)
Stable housing (yes vs. no)	0.98 (0.62 – 1.56)	–
History of sex work involvement (yes vs. no) *	5.16 (2.94 – 9.07)	3.20 (1.67 – 6.12)
Discrimination by healthcare workers (yes vs. no) *	1.57 (1.05 – 2.34)	1.02 (0.63 – 1.64)
Ever avoided health services due to transgender identity (yes vs. no) *	1.77 (1.19 – 2.63)	1.61 (1.01 – 2.56)
Ever arrested (yes vs. no) *	3.88 (2.41 – 6.26)	2.00 (1.06 – 3.80)
Ever experienced police violence (yes vs. no) *	2.54 (1.72 – 3.76)	0.95 (0.56 – 1.61)

* Significant at p < 0.10 and entered into the multivariable model

CONCLUSIONS

- Our findings revealed that injection of industrial silicone is a common practice among transgender women in Argentina, especially among those engaged in high risk activities (e.g., sex work) and those experiencing barriers to healthcare.
- Although no association was found with HIV or HCV infection, this analysis was limited by self-report.
- Given the high prevalence of medically unsupervised and peer-assisted injecting in this sample, longitudinal studies are needed to investigate whether injection of industrial silicone is an important risk factor for HIV or HCV transmission among this population.
- Regardless, given the well-known morbidity associated with this practice, interventions to ensure appropriate access to transgender care are urgently needed.

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