

Prevention of communicable diseases in prison

Source: Stover, H., Trautmann, F. (2001). *Risk reduction for drug users in prisons*. Trimbos Institute, The Netherlands.

In about 19 prisons in Switzerland, Germany and Spain, needle exchange programs have been introduced. Interesting findings from the evaluation of these interventions have included: a decrease in needle-sharing among the participants was found; the number of abscesses dropped dramatically; the amount of drugs found and seized did not rise. This can be seen as an indication that fears that an increase in the availability of clean needles would result in increased drug use have not been confirmed. No scenario of using a syringe to threaten someone has appeared in any of the 19 prisons running needle exchange schemes so far. None of these prison have witnessed attacks on staff or fellow inmates by prisoners using needles as a weapon.

Objectives:

1. Raising awareness of effective measures of prevention of infectious diseases
2. Debating the pros and cons of needle exchange projects in prisons
3. Discussing a hierarchy with alternative measures for the prevention of communicable diseases

Duration: 60 - 80 minutes

No. of participants: Minimum 4, maximum 20

Material needed: Flipchart, pens,

Exercise outline:

- Present reasons for models and the results of needle exchange in prison
- Ask participants to split up in two groups ('Pro' and 'Con' groups). Give all participants a photocopy of the text above:
 - For 30 minutes, the two groups should collect arguments on the pros and cons of a needle exchange project in their prison
 - Collect the arguments on a flipchart in the plenary. Look at how the needs of the staff are addressed and what priority they gain in the arguments.
 - Discuss the backgrounds of arguments pro (advantages for inmates and staff, etc.) and con (contradiction of general prison policy, fears of needle sticks, etc.) of needle exchange in prisons.



Variation:

- Ask one of the two groups to write a proposal for a needle exchange project in their prison. The other group should develop a bleach project
 - Who should be participating in the planning phase?
 - What kind of mode of distribution should be preferred, and why?
 - Ask each group to react to the proposals of the other

