

The PROUD Study: Housing Status and HIV Risk in a Community-Based Research Cohort of Injection Drug Users in Ottawa, Ontario

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BACKGROUND

People who use illicit drugs are over-represented among the homeless and unstably housed in Canada. In the Nation's capital city, Ottawa, there is a shortage of housing for people with substance use issues [1]. This shortage exists within a setting where HIV incidence among people who use injection drugs (PWUID) is twice the provincial average [2]. While there is substantial literature on HIV risk environments within urban centres, there has been little research on housing status and HIV risk among PWUID in Ottawa. **The PROUD Study** is a prospective community-based research cohort that examines barriers and solutions to HIV care, treatment and prevention for illicit drug users in Ottawa. The cohort includes residents from the Ottawa area who are 16+ years old, and who injected drugs and/or smoked crack cocaine in the past year.

METHODS

A bivariate analysis was conducted comparing HIV risk factors among PROUD Study participants who reported being unstably housed and those who were stably housed ("stably housed"=own apartment/house, supportive housing, halfway house, recovery house/detox, friends/relatives house/place) vs. "unstably housed"=rooming house, shelter, street/homeless, hotel/motel room, other). Respondents who were recruited in the city's ByWard Market neighborhood between March and October 2013 and reported injecting drugs in the past year were included in this analysis (n=272). Odds ratios with corresponding 95% confidence intervals were calculated to examine bivariate associations between housing status and demographic, clinical and HIV risk behaviour variables.

RESULTS

- Median age of participants was 42 years and 76% identified as male
- **58% (n=157) were currently unstably housed** and 93% reported they had ever been homeless
- Participants who were unstably housed were more likely to have:
 - injected drugs with a used needle (OR=2.18, 95% CI: 1.17-4.06)
 - have injected in public (OR=7.38, 95% CI: 3.96-13.73)
 - have overdosed in the past year (OR=2.49, 95% CI: 1.39-4.47)
 - received drugs, money, gifts for sex (OR=2.04, 95% CI: 1.02-4.19)
 - reported drug use in living space (OR=6.57, 95% CI: 3.54-12.20)

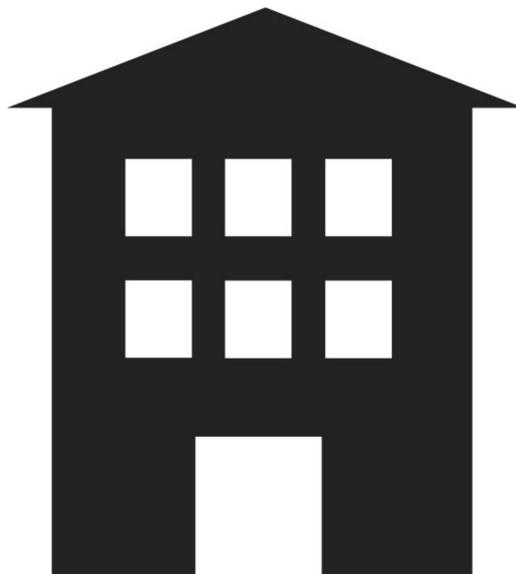


TABLE 1

Factors associated with housing status among PROUD participants who injected drugs in the past 12 months (N=272)

	Unstably Housed (n=157), No. (%)	Stably Housed (n=115), No. (%)	OR (95% CI)
Location of most injection drug use, past 12 months			
In Public	82 (52.2%)	16 (13.9%)	7.38 (3.96-13.73)
Not in Public	66 (42.0%)	95 (82.6%)	
Injected drugs with used needle, past 12 months			
Yes	44 (28.0%)	17 (14.8%)	2.18 (1.17-4.06)
No	113 (72.0%)	95 (82.6%)	
Overdose, past 12 months			
Yes	54 (34.4%)	20 (17.4%)	2.49 (1.39-4.47)
No	103 (65.6%)	95 (82.6%)	
Received drugs, money, gifts for sex, past 12 months			
Yes	32 (20.4%)	12 (10.4%)	2.04 (1.02-4.19)
No	110 (70.1%)	84 (73.0%)	
Drug use in living space			
Yes	132 (84.1%)	58 (50.4%)	6.57 (3.54-12.20)
No	18 (11.5%)	52 (45.2%)	

CONCLUSION

Findings suggest that **unstable housing environments in downtown Ottawa may be associated with needle sharing, public drug use, exposure to drug use, overdose, and transactional sex**. Policy and programs that increase the supply of safe, affordable and permanent housing for those with substance use issues could protect PWUID and the larger community in Ottawa from enhanced risk of HIV infection and adverse health outcomes.

REFERENCES

- [1] Gaetz, S., Donaldson, J., Richter, T. & Gulliver, T. The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press. [2] Remis R, Swantee C LJ. HIV/AIDS in Ontario: Preliminary Report, 2010. 2012.

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