

## When and How Do Individuals Transition from Regular Drug Use to Injection Drug Use in Uganda? Findings from a Rapid Assessment

**Authors :** Stanely Nsubuga

**Abstract :** Background In Uganda, injection drug use is a growing but less studied problem. Preventing the transition to injection drug use may help prevent blood-borne viral transmission, but little is known about when and how people transition to injection drug use. A greater understanding of this transition process may aid in the country's efforts to prevent the continued growth of injection drug use, HIV, and hepatitis C Virus (HCV) infection among people who inject drugs (PWID). Methods Using a rapid situation assessment framework, we conducted semi-structured interviews among 125 PWID (102 males and 23 females)—recruited through outreach and snow-ball sampling. Participants were interviewed about their experiences on when and how they transitioned into injection drug use and these issues were also discussed in 12 focus groups held with the participants. Results All the study participants started their drug use career with non-injecting forms including chewing, smoking, and sniffing before transitioning to injecting. Transitioning was generally described as a peer-driven and socially learnt behavior. The participants' social networks and accessibility to injectable drugs on the market and among close friends influenced the time lag between first regular drug use and first injecting—which took an average of 4.5 years. By the age of 24, at least 81.6% (95.7% for females and 78.4% for males) had transitioned into injecting. Over 84.8% shared injecting equipment during their first injection, 47.2% started injecting because a close friend was already injecting, 26.4% desired to achieve a greater "high" (26.4%) which could reflect drug-tolerance, and 12% out of curiosity.

**Keywords :** People who Use Drugs, transition, injection drug use, Uganda

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