HIV-1-Prevalence Among Drug Deaths in Germany

K. Pöschel1 and F. Mohsenian2

1 Institute for Legal Medicine, University of Essen, Hufelandstraße 55, D-W-4300 Essen 1, Federal Republic of Germany
2 Institute for Legal Medicine, University of Hamburg, Butenfeld 34, D-W-2000 Hamburg 54, Federal Republic of Germany

Introduction

Death as fatal result of drug addiction is of enormous medical, legal and social significance. Special attention is paid to the spread of HIV-infections and AIDS among the high-risk group of intravenous drug abusers (IVDA). Up to now there is a lack of reliable data concerning the incidence and prevalence of HIV-infections among IVDA. For prevention strategies and health policy a continuous monitoring of the development can be of great value. - We try to gain such data by means of scientific cooperation between the Institutes for Legal Medicine in the FRG. Data concerning the HIV-sero-status of drug deaths investigated by forensic scientists are sampled anonymously since 1985.

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Definition of drug deaths

For epidemiological analysis a standardized definition of the term drug death is absolutely necessary. It is evident that it is difficult to distinguish between drug-induced deaths and other causes of death among drug addicts.

In the FRG the following definition has been worked out by the Bundeskriminalamt and is designed to record all deaths where causal connection to drug addiction (illicit drugs or substitutes) is evident:

- Death due to intentional or accidental overdose ("golden shot").

- Death due to long-term abuse of drugs (i.e. myocarditis, hepatitis, liver cirrhosis, AIDS).

- Suicides connected with drug addiction (i.e. hanging, shooting, jumping from the height).

- Fatal accidents influenced by drugs (i.e. traffic accidents, fall from the height, fire and carbon monoxide intoxication).

"Supply" with heroin has apparently become so plentiful that almost all drug deaths within the last 3 years were caused by intravenous heroin intoxication. - Other narcotics and other ways of application are of minor importance for the fatal outcome.

Statistics

It is estimated that about 100,000 people in Western Germany inject narcotics intravenously. Since 1970 drug deaths are centrally registered in the Bundeskriminalamt. The amount shows a steady increase until 1979, the year in which over 600 drug victims were counted. After 1979 the number of drug deaths de-