

## Co-infection of HIV and Hepatitis C in Iran

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### LETTER TO EDITOR

Dear Editor,

The common co-infections with HIV are viral hepatitis including Hepatitis B and C. During approximately 1990–2000 decades, due to the predominant route of HIV transmission being injection drug use (IDU), Hepatitis C was particularly common among men living with HIV (MLWH), reaching as high as 80-90% in some studies [1-5].

Among women living with HIV (WLWH), the common transmission route was unprotected sexual contact, while sexual transmission of hepatitis C was very rare. Therefore, hepatitis C co-infection with HIV is much lower among WLWH compared to MLWH. Currently, due to a shift in the HIV transmission pattern from IDU to unprotected sexual contact, hepatitis C co-infection with HIV has significantly decreased, reaching about 20-30% in various studies [1,2,4,6]. In addition to IDU, the transmission of Hepatitis C in Iran is greatly influenced by tattooing, especially tattooing in prisons, which may be because of unhygienic condition [7-10]. Therefore, this decline in hepatitis C infection among people with HIV, besides indicating the shift in transmission pattern from IDU to unprotected sexual contact, highlights the need to pay attention to the implementation of prevention programs for transmission thorough sexual relationship.

IDU alone has become a social stigma in Iran, to the extent that people who use drugs are reluctant to do so because of the stigma, which has led to a decrease in IDU in the society. Furthermore, harm reduction programs, the most important of which is the methadone maintenance treatment (MMT) program that has been implemented in Iran since 2000, have also reduced IDU. The distribution of disposable syringes and needles has also helped preventing the HIV and hepatitis C transmission, which is currently being done in Drop-in Centers (DICs). In conclusion, the continued robust implementation of harm reduction programs, especially MMT, is recommended to reduce the incidence of hepatitis C in Iran.

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