

Researchers relate arrests with HIV risk environment

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Practices used in policing injection drug users in Russia might contribute to HIV transmission and overdose mortality.

A study, conducted by researchers from Boston University Schools of Medicine and Public Health, in collaboration with St. Petersburg Pavlov State University, sought to discover the effect police arrests had on the health outcomes of a cohort of HIV-positive people with lifetime of injection drug use.

Those who were arrested by police were more likely to share needles—increasing HIV transmission—and to overdose, according to the study published in the *Journal of the International AIDS Society*. Their research also found no indication that police arrests reduce drug use.

"We already know that addressing individual risk behaviors is important in reducing HIV transmission among people who use drugs, who are most at risk for HIV infection," said lead author Karsten Lunze, MD, MPH, DrPH, a BUSM assistant professor of medicine. "Our study adds that drug laws and policies, and the way they are enforced, are also important to prevent the spread of HIV."

By linking the impact of police tactics with [health outcomes](#) of [injection drug users](#), the researchers identified the need to create prevention programs for modifying individual behaviors and to address policing practices as part of the HIV risk environment.

"Instead of arresting people who use drugs, there should be more of a focus on facilitating access to treatment," said Jeffrey Samet, MD, MA, MPH, a professor of medicine and community health sciences at BUSM and BUSPH who also led the study. "Public health and public safety working together can help address the increasing problem of HIV among people who use drugs."

Further research needs to relate these findings to the operational environment of law enforcement and to understand how police interventions among [injection drug](#) users can improve, rather than worsen, the HIV risk environment, the researchers said.

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

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