

Hepatitis C reinfection in former and active injecting drug users in Belgium



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INTRODUCTION

There is currently no systematic screening for hepatitis C (HCV) reinfection in people who inject drugs (PWID) after treatment in Belgium.

However, in a recent meta-analysis, the overall HCV reinfection rate was 3.9/100 person-years (PY) among PWID.

AIM

This study was undertaken to investigate the **reinfection** rate in **former** and **active PWID** who achieved the **end of treatment response** after direct-acting antiviral (DAA) treatment in Belgium.

METHOD

An observational cross-sectional study between August 2019 and December 2020

- individuals aged 18 years or older
- a history of injecting drug use (IDU)
- achieved the end of treatment response (non-detectable HCV RNA at the end of treatment) to any interferon-free DAA treatment between 2015 and 2020.

Centers:

- zorGGroep Zin Limburg
- AZ Maria Middelares (digestive center)
- Private hepato practice in Brussels

- PCR test to detect HCV RNA
- Face-to-face questionnaire for risk factors

RESULTS

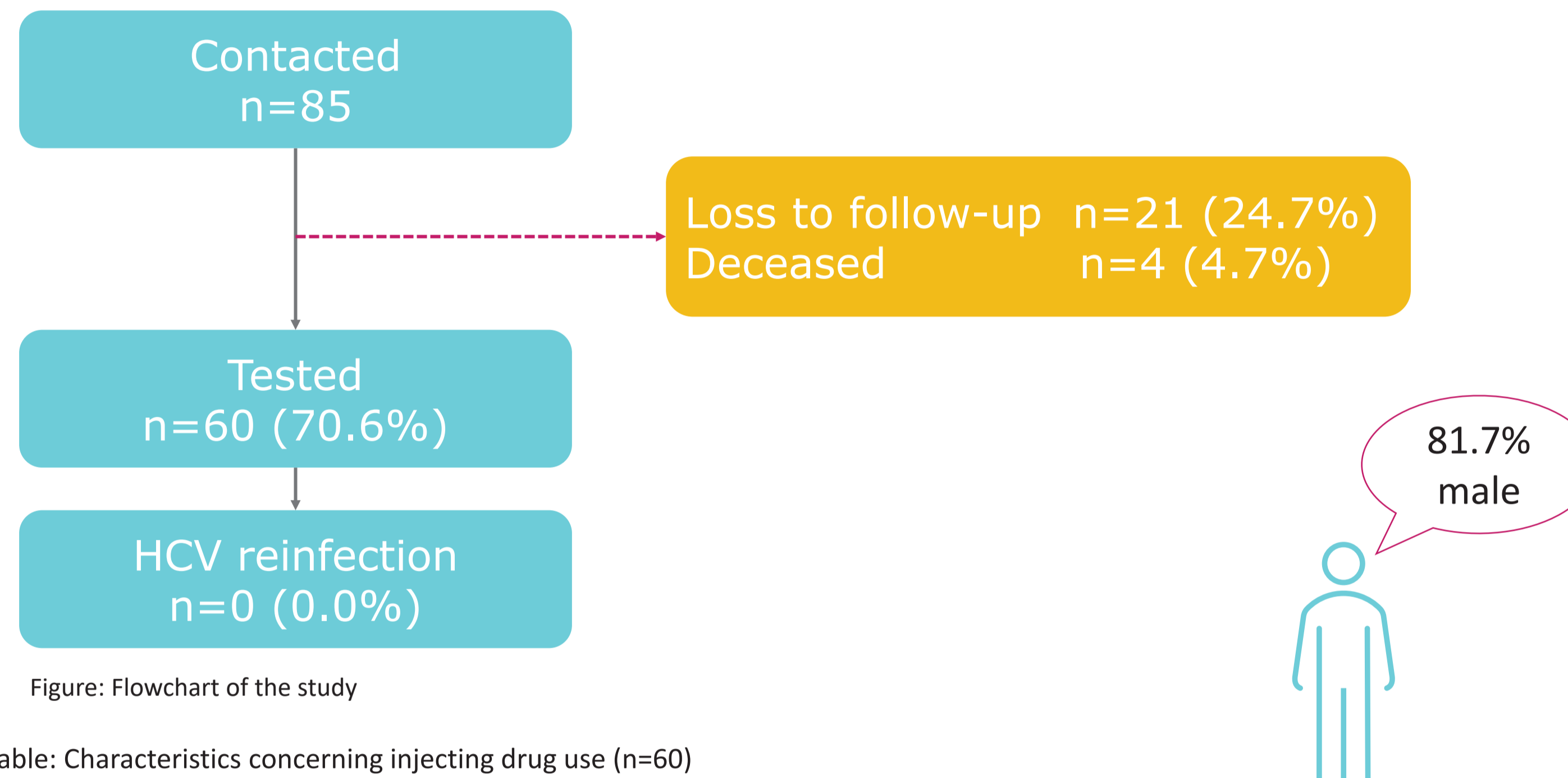
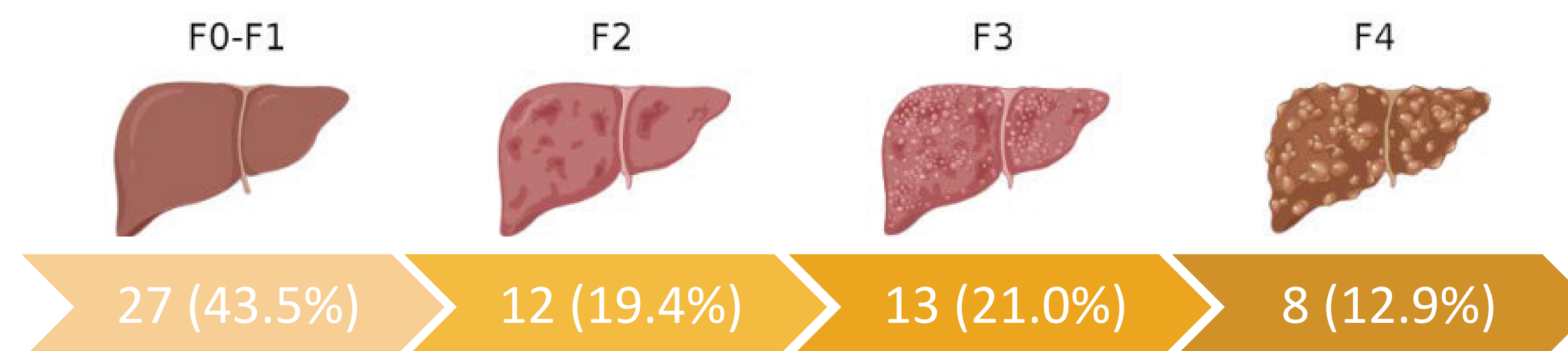


Figure: Flowchart of the study

Table: Characteristics concerning injecting drug use (n=60)

Characteristics	N (%)
Median age first drug use (IQR)	18.0 (16.0 – 21.0)
OAT	43 (71.7)
NSP	45 (75.0)
Ever heroin	55 (91.7)
Ever amphetamines	7 (11.7)
Ever cocaine	28 (46.7)
Ever shared a needle	45 (75.0)
IDU during DAA	13 (21.7)
IDU after DAA	14 (23.3)
Shared a needle after DAA	7 (50.0)



CONCLUSIONS

Reinfection after successful treatment with DAA initially appears to be **very low** in Belgian **PWID**. Therefore, efforts should be made to **screen** individuals with persistent risk behaviors for reinfection **systematically**. In addition, a **national HCV registry** should be established to accurately define the burden of HCV infection and reinfection in Belgium and **support the elimination** of viral hepatitis C in Europe.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

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DISCLOSURES

D.B. has been an employee of Gilead Sciences since October 2021 and a volunteer at Hasselt University.