Reviewer's report

**Title:** Spatial Distribution and Characteristics of Locations of Injecting Drug Users (IDU) in Five Northeastern States of India

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 1 March 2010

**Reviewer:** V. Anna Gyarmathy

**Reviewer's report:**

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   Yes

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   Methods are inadequately described.

3. Are the data sound?
   Cannot tell because the methods are inadequately described.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   Needs major rewrite – see may detailed comments below.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   Yes.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   No limitation section.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
   Yes.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   There are certain parts that are unclear – see below.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
   The paper needs thorough English language editing for style and grammar.

This is a very interesting paper, because it highlights areas of drug problem in five North Eastern states in India. This gives valuable and very needed information about geographical areas where harm reduction efforts should concentrate, especially in the light of the high HIV prevalence the authors describe in the introduction. The paper needs thorough English language editing
for style and grammar. Sometimes it feels like the authors are using too many unconventional abbreviations, e.g. DIC. The style of the references should match the journal style. Below are points for Major Compulsory Revisions.

Abstract:
What do the authors mean by “overlapping of injecting drug and sex”? Please write out the actual network size, instead of writing “medium and large”.

Introduction
Very interesting and shocking introduction.

Methods
This is a very well thought through study, with lots of collaboration with different agencies.

Can you please spell out (p6, par2), what type of experts the trainers were?

It is unclear how snowballing was used to identify the sites. Who were the “units” in the snowball (people, organizations, IDUs, social workers…?), and how did they refer to the next line of units?

To differentiate between “sex” and “sex”, please use “gender” for the sociodemographic characteristic and “sex” for the sexual act.

What is the definition of sharing injecting drugs with “different groups”?

More details are needed about the questions in the questionnaire. Was this an ethnographic survey of key informants with open ended questions or a structured survey of IDUs? This should be clarified.

There is nothing in the methods about how social network data was collected: data collection methods, and questions asked. Was it aggregate, egocentric or sociocentric data?

What methods of data analysis were used?

Results
“young” is correct, but “adult” is incorrect: 20-year-olds are also adults. Maybe a different term would be better here – or just say those under 25, and 25 and above. The categories <25 and >25 are incorrect: where is 25? So if both <25 and =>25 were observed in about 60% of the sites, how old is the rest 40%? Why did you pick 25 as the cutoff age? The use of “adult” is confusing, because the authors later seem to use it for older than 18.

The second to last sentence staring with “however” on p9, par1, should be in the limitation section of the discussion.

It is unclear what the authors mean by “networks”. To me it seems like what they
really mean is how many people were hanging out at the location of interest. That is not network size, but group size.

The injecting with different groups part in the methods is unclear because of lack of adequate description in the methods.

What are local pressure groups (p10)?

What do you mean by “punished”? Beaten up, locked up, arrested? By whom?

The part of the results on sharing behaviour is unclear. Were the drug users asked or were the key informants asked? This should be spelled out in the methods, but now it is not.

The quotes on p10-p11 are very interesting and informative.

Discussion
Can you please explain why graveyards are a popular place for injecting? This is a very strange finding, and it would be interesting to learn more about it.

P12, par 1: pathogens get transmitted from not because the users don’t know each other, but because one is infected and the other is not. Please rewrite sentence accordingly.

What do the authors mean by “interface”?

It seems like the words “network” and “networking” is incorrectly used to mean “groups” and “interactions”.

The limitation section is missing from the discussion.

Abbreviations:
What is EHA? What is OSD? Make sure the list of abbreviations in complete. There are way too many unconventional abbreviations.

Table 1: this table would be more informative as a map

Table 4 should be labelled as table 3. The footnotes have too much additional information – maybe they should be presented as part of this or another table.

Discretionary Revisions
Table 2: this could be presented in a bar chart

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published
**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.