

Addressing Rising Drug Use Among Women in Thailand: Barriers, Stigma, and Harm Reduction Strategies.

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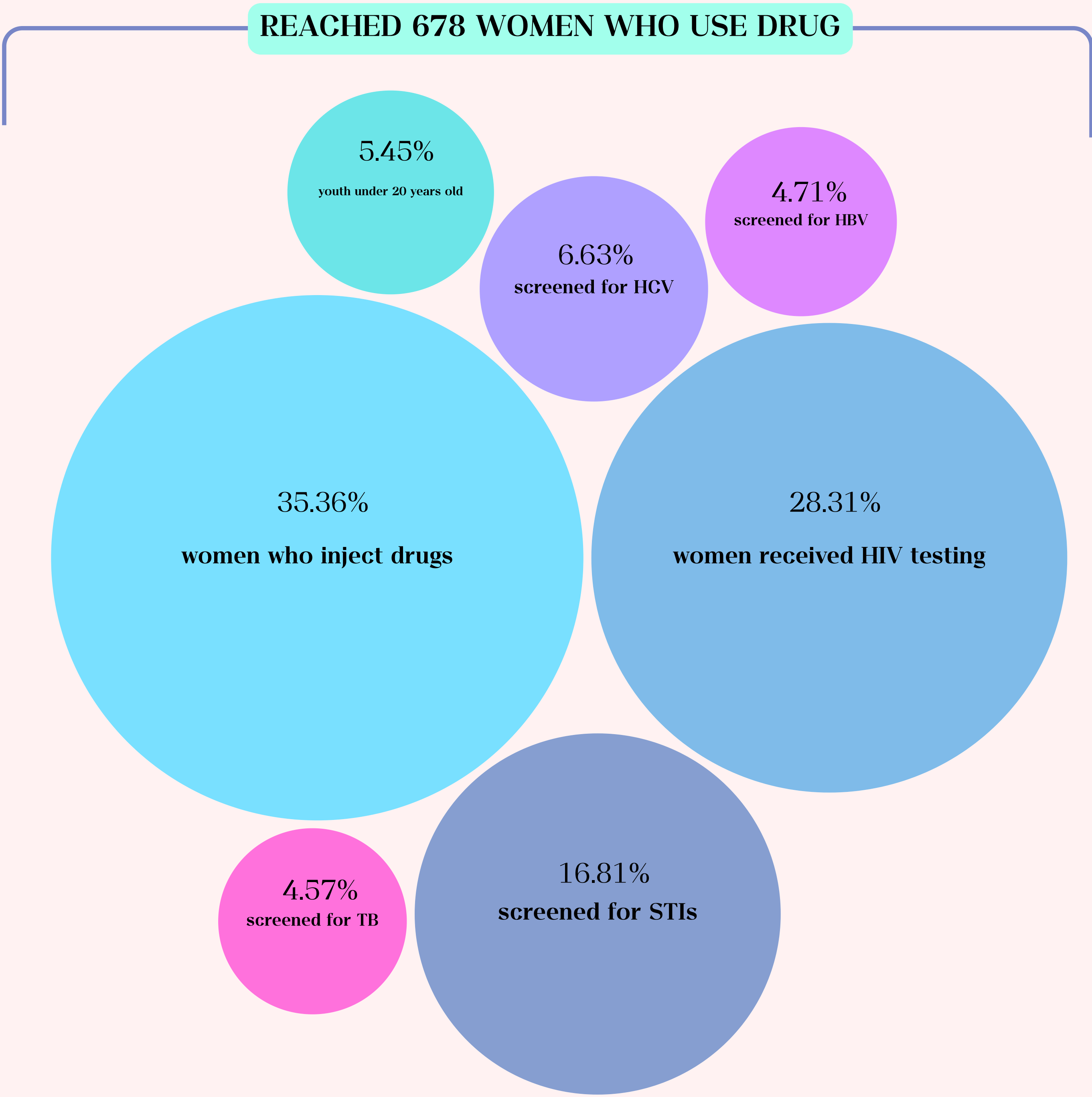
Background

The increasing prevalence of drug use among women in Thailand is driven by the low cost and easy accessibility of drugs. Drug use is reported across various age groups, from adolescents to middle-aged women, with a range of consumption methods, including injection. According to the Department of Corrections (as of September 27, 2024), there are currently 34,858 incarcerated women nationwide, 23,451 of whom are imprisoned on drug-related charges.

DESCRIPTION

The APASS Thailand, a community-based organization (CBO) working in six provinces across Thailand, provides harm reduction services with financial support from the Global Fund. Their program specifically targets women who use drugs, offering a range of services led by female staff with lived experience of drug use. These services are delivered both through in-person visits and online outreach. Women receiving services are provided with clean needles, condoms, HIV screening using oral fluid testing (OFT), and social support activities such as empowerment programs, legal assistance, and education promotion for interested youth.

LESSONS LEARNED



From January to July 2024, The APASS Thailand reached 678 women who use drugs, including 5.45% youth under 20 years old and 35.36% women who inject drugs. Among these, 28.31% women received HIV testing, 16.81% were screened for STIs, 6.63% for HCV, 4.71% for HBV, and 4.57% for TB. Additionally, 2,990 clean needle kits and 44,693 condoms were distributed.

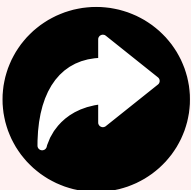


CONCLUSION

Women who use drugs in Thailand face high levels of self-stigma, exacerbated by societal stigma, which is stronger against women than men due to cultural, social, and religious beliefs. Harm reduction services tailored to women’s specific needs, including friendly health services and diverse options, are essential. These services should foster a sense of safety, privacy, and non-discrimination, thereby encouraging greater access and utilization among women.



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