

# Trust of the Georgia National HCV Elimination Program among reproductive aged women

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**Background:** Georgia is among the countries with a very high prevalence of hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection. The recent availability of highly effective, direct-acting antivirals (DAAs) capable of curing >90% of persons treated has made HCV elimination a possibility. All adult citizens infected with HCV are eligible to receive free DAAs through the Georgia National HCV Elimination Program (Program). From April 2015 to December 2018, 54,087 persons were enrolled in the Program throughout the country. However, more than 20,000 individuals are aware of their HCV antibody positive status but did not have HCV RNA testing, a necessary step to determine treatment needs. We hypothesized that a reason for hesitance to enroll in the Program may be a low level of trust of the Program.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. Reproductive aged women were randomly selected from three maternity care centers during prenatal care. The self-administered questionnaire included questions on socio-demographic information, knowledge about HCV infection and trust in the Program.

**Results:** A total of 2185 women of reproductive age were enrolled in the study. The mean age was 28.5 (age range: 17-46) years. The majority of the study participants (76.4%) had a university degree. The vast majority of study participants (>95%) were married and 95.1% were Georgian ethnicity. Almost 90% of the participants were aware of their HCV infection status. Most women (85.3%) had heard of HCV elimination program in Georgia; 74.6% stated that they trust the Program. However, almost 10% of surveyed women stated they would refuse to get enrolled in the Program if their anti-HCV test result is positive. Trust in the Program was higher among women aged >25 years (80.7%) compared to younger women (68.4%) ( $p<0.0001$ ). Level of education was also associated with trust to the program: more women with higher education level reported that they trust the Program (78.7%) compared to women with lower education level (68.5%) ( $p<0.0001$ ).

**Conclusion:** Trust in the Georgia National HCV Elimination Program is not sufficiently high among women of reproductive age in Georgia. Effective educational campaigns are needed to improve trust to the Program for this targeted group.