

An uprising threat in the Pakistani society - the HIV outbreak

Laila Tul Qadar, Osama Shabbir, Sarrah Ali Asghar

Madam, Pakistan is geographically located between HIV/AIDS high risk countries like India, Afghanistan and China. HIV is now on verge of becoming epidemic in Pakistan, a previously low prevalence country because of decreased knowledge about this virus in the general population. WHO and UNAIDS in 2017 estimated 36.9 million people globally living, with HIV and 1.8 million became newly infected.¹ The recent HIV outbreak cases seen in Punjab, reported by the Government Aids control program, revealed a conservative figure of 204 HIV confirmed cases in a village population of just 3000 in the Kot-Imrana area of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.² A reason for such a high number of HIV infected people was found to be transmitted through a local quack, an Aids patient who used and re-used, syringes on himself and others. There was another epidemic of same sort in the same province of Punjab, in the village of Jalalpur Jattan in 2008 which detected 88 new cases in 246 persons out of which 53 were investigated. The major risk factors outlined were reusing injections, unhygienic dental procedures, extramarital sex and multiple barbershop visits.³

It is claimed that socio cultural and religious factors are a deterrent to HIV-AIDS spread in Pakistan. However it seems that the same socio cultural reasons have been a barrier for people to show up, get treated and observe prevention for themselves, their families and the community at large. The HIV epidemic is thought to be a concentrated in Pakistan however the above statistics showed that the devil is expanding its arms in the general population also. Studies have shown that more reasons for the massive

.....
Dow Medical College, Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi, Pakistan.

Correspondence: Osama Shabbir, e-mail: osamashabbir100@hotmail.com

spread is largely hetero and homosexual, reuse of blood contaminated syringes, vertical transmission and some undetermined causes.⁴ Even the healthcare settings which are meant to be treating people have shown explosive spread of HIV in dialysis patients in year 2016 Larkana, Sindh.⁵

The recent epidemics once again remind us that we need to curb this menace of HIV along with its risk factors in Pakistan before it's a national tragedy. The control over this havoc is only possible if government of Pakistan and health authorities come together to spread awareness on severity of the issue specially in rural population via sex education, condom ads, sterilization of needles and razor use, voluntary counselling with regular screening of blood for HIV and rehabilitation centers for drug addicts. The role of media is mandatory in this regard and could help bring positive outcomes.

Disclaimer: None.

Conflict of Interest: None.

Sources of Funding: None.

References

1. HIV/AIDS. [Online] [Cited 2018 October 17]. Available from: URL: <http://www.who.int/news-room/facts-in-pictures/detail/hiv-aids>
2. 204 patients test positive for HIV/AIDS in Sargodha. [Online] [Cited 2018 October 18]. Available from: URL: <https://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/431865-patients-test-positive-HIV/AIDS-Sargodha>
3. Ansari JA, Salman M, Safdar RM, Ikram N, Mahmood T, Zaheer HA, et al. HIV/AIDS outbreak investigation in Jalalpur Jattan (JPJ), Gujrat, Pakistan. *J Epidemiol Glob Health* 2013; 3: 261-8.
4. Bhurgri Y: HIV/AIDS in Pakistan. *J Pak Med Assoc.* 2006, 56:1-2.
5. Altaf A, Pasha S, Vermund SH, Shah SA. A second major HIV outbreak in Larkana, Pakistan. *J Pak Med Assoc* 2016; 66: 1510-1.