

A dire need for HIV awareness in Pakistan

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Madam, Pakistan has followed a similar HIV epidemic trend as other countries in the region and has been moved from the "low prevalence, high risk" category to "concentrated epidemic" with approximately 83,468 people living with HIV at the end of 2013.¹

There are several factors which make Pakistan vulnerable to full fledged HIV epidemics which include a high rate of poverty, a low rate of literacy, an expanding sex industry compounded by low level of condom usage as well as hazardous health practices such as unsafe blood transfusions.²

As HIV cases build up, the Pakistani people remain largely uninformed about this deadly virus and its routes of spread. The Demographics and Health Survey 2012-13 found only 38.9% of men and 22% of women were aware that HIV transmission can be prevented with use of condoms while 57.4% of men and 31.7% women knew the risk of contracting HIV can be lowered by limiting sexual intercourse to one uninfected partner.³ In a report compiled by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in 2013, only half of the surveyed Pakistani population had heard of HIV and only 13% of individuals could name three ways in which the virus can be transmitted.⁴

In response to the staggering amount of cases, the National AIDS Control Programme has developed The National AIDS Strategy III 2015-2020 which focuses on utilizing limited amount of sources to prevent new infections and decrease the number HIV related deaths. There are three strategic outcomes that have been defined by this programme.⁵

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1. HIV prevention is increased among key populations: IV drug users, transgender sex workers, female sex workers (FSW), and males who have sex with males (MSM).

2. HIV related mortality is reduced through available access to quality care services and filling the void between those eligible for treatment and those receiving treatment.

3. Enabling an environment for effective HIV response by promoting multi-sectorial coordination and monitoring of treatment coverage.

The rise in HIV infections indicate a dire need for a more forceful effort directed towards fighting this deadly entity. At the heart of this effort lies the task of spreading awareness among the general population especially with regards to how the virus can be contracted. Supplying citizens the proper knowledge will ultimately lead to decreased incidence of infection and prevention of HIV related epidemics.

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