HIV Situation in Areas Surrounding Larkana: Findings From Community Test and Treat Implementation

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BACKGROUND

An outbreak of HIV among children was reported in Ratodero (district Larkana, Sindh province, Pakistan) in April 2019, with unsafe injections and infusions in healthcare settings as the primary mode of transmission. Anecdotal evidence suggests high HIV burden in surrounding districts of Larkana.

To date, no data are available on HIV positivity or burden in these areas. We report the results of a first community-based educate, test and treat implementation to understand the HIV situation in surrounding areas of Larkana.

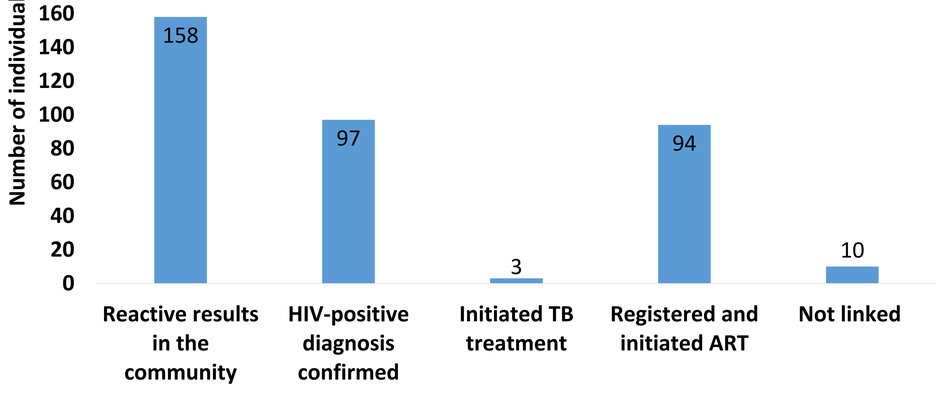
METHODS

Community-based door-to-door testing was performed in partnership with CDC Sindh and local administration. Testing focused on two tehsils (sub-districts) neighboring Larkana, one in district Jacobabad (159019 population) and one in district Shikarpur (316513), for which routine data and expert opinion suggested high burden of undiagnosed HIV. Those aged 18 months to 60 years were eligible, while those who self-reported HIV test in the past 6 months or were already on ART were excluded.

Thirty mobile teams of one trained male and female mobilizer each offered a single rapid HIV test (Abbott Early Detect) moving from house-to-house. Those with a reactive result were referred to the nearest ART centre for confirmation and ART initiation.

Both children and adults continue to be at risk of acquiring HIV from unsafe injection practices warranting immediate response.

Figure 1. Linkage and treatment results

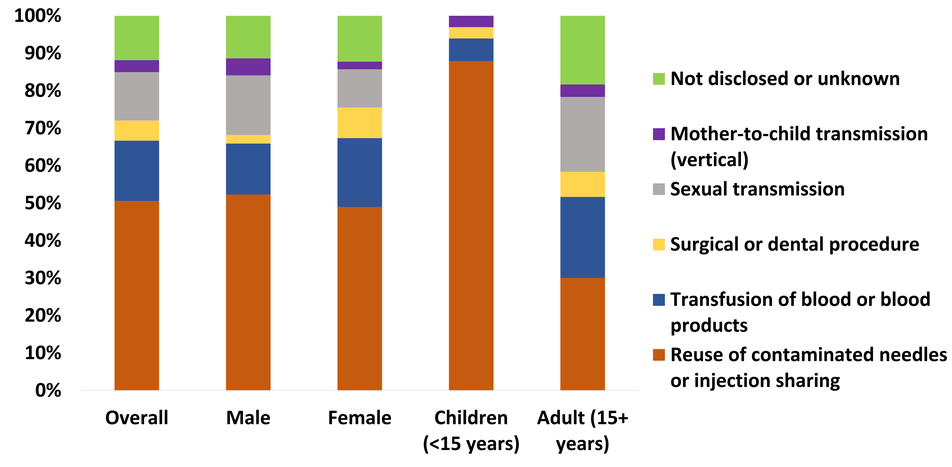


RESULTS

Between November 28 and December 12, 2023, 24352 HIV tests were conducted (60% among females; 49% among children aged 18 months-14 years). Overall, 158 individuals (0.65%; male: 0.69%, female: 0.62%) had a reactive HIV result. Nearly one-third (n=56) of all reactive results were among children (18 months-14 years). The positivity was higher among those 15 years and above (0.83%) compared to children (0.47%). The reactive rate was 0.56% in one district and 0.77% in the other. Of those with reactive results, 94 (59%) were confirmed HIV-positive and initiated ART as of February 13, 2024. (Figure 1).

The mode of transmission for 47 individuals (51%) was reported as reuse of contaminated needles and transfusion of blood or blood products for 15 (16%) individuals. (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Likely source of HIV transmission among those linked with ART (n=93)



CONCLUSIONS

HIV positivity in surrounding areas of Larkana is higher than national HIV prevalence (0.2%) suggesting ongoing community transmission.

Both children and adults appear to be at risk of acquiring HIV from reuse of contaminated needles/syringes and unsafe blood. Gaps in linkage among those diagnosed remain.

Actions need to be prioritized for identifying undiagnosed HIV and address unsafe injection and blood transfusion practices.

ADDITIONAL KEY INFORMATION

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