

Pakistan

UNICEF HIV and AIDS Programming Country Profile 2006

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HIV and AIDS in Pakistan

Pakistan's first confirmed case of HIV was in 1986. Until the mid-1990s, it was widely believed to be a disease of foreigners, and that Pakistan's traditional values would prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS. Unfortunately, HIV now appears to be gaining a foothold among injecting drug users and sex workers, from where there is risk of expansion into the wider population.

Officially Pakistan is described as a low or emerging prevalence. As of December 2005, Pakistan had confirmed only 2,197 HIV cases, 37% of which were identified as resulting from heterosexual transmission. Disturbingly, in 34% of cases, no route of transmission is known. Despite the small number of confirmed cases, the WHO/UNAIDS forecast model estimates that between 70,000 and 80,000 people are infected. Underreporting is assumed to be due to low surveillance capacity, social stigma, and a lack of knowledge among the wider population and health professionals.

While the HIV prevalence rate in the general population of Pakistan remains relatively low (0.1%), it is considered a "concentrated epidemic" as the prevalence rate has climbed above 5% recently among vulnerable subpopulations, particularly injecting drug users and sex workers. According to two studies conducted in 2004-2005, there are currently approximately 60,000 injecting drug users, 99,000 female sex workers, and 14,000 male sex workers in Pakistan¹. Further, the age of initiation into these high-risk behaviour groups has been shown to be as young as 8 years old for male sex workers, 15 years old for female sex workers, and 14 years old for injecting drug users. The studies estimate that in Karachi alone, the number of HIV positive injecting drug users grew from .4% in 2003 to 26% in 2005, the cause of which is largely attributed to unsafe injecting practices. Moreover, 30% of injecting drug users purchased sex from a sex worker, and 90% of these did not use condoms. Considering that a large percentage of sex workers and their clients are married, high-risk behaviours and increased HIV transmission rates among these subpopulations create the potential for a widespread HIV epidemic among the general population in Pakistan.

Strategy and Objectives

In support of the Government of Pakistan's National Strategic Plan on HIV and AIDS, in 2004 UNICEF Pakistan developed its strategy and major lines of action on HIV and AIDS with three key objectives:

- ✘ *Broader societal support for effective, appropriate, and comprehensive HIV and AIDS prevention programming for young people and pregnant women adolescents.*
- ✘ *Increased access to and demand for HIV and AIDS prevention programming that creates supportive environments, raises awareness, develops life skills, and delivers services, in support of healthy behaviours among young people, including adolescents.*
- ✘ *Contribute to fight stigmatization and discrimination of young people, including adolescents.*

HIV and AIDS Estimates

(Source: UNAIDS, Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic 2006)

Number of people living with HIV	85,000
Adults aged 15 to 49 HIV prevalence rate	0.1
Adults aged 15 and over living with HIV	84,000
Women aged 15 and over living with HIV	14,000
Deaths due to AIDS	3000



Vulnerabilities and risks facing children and young people

- ✘ Socio-economic disadvantage and exclusion – particularly of girls and young women
- ✘ Traditional practices, including gender inequality
- ✘ Low levels of literacy and education
- ✘ High levels of child domestic labour
- ✘ High-risk behaviours
 - low condom use
 - needle sharing among drug users
 - Men having sex with men
- ✘ Inadequate blood transfusion screening and a high number of professional blood donors

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¹ - National Study of Reproductive Tract and Sexually Transmitted Infections, Family Health International, Pakistan, 2004.
- UNGASS Indicators Country Report, Pakistan National AIDS Control Program, 2005

UNICEF's HIV and AIDS Programme Areas

Prevention: Reduce adolescent risks and vulnerability to HIV by increasing access to and use of gender-sensitive prevention information, skills and services .

In Pakistan, 3.8 million children between 5 to 14 years of age are out-of-school and working. An estimated 1.2 million children are living on the streets. These children are especially vulnerable to practicing risk behaviours, becoming drug addicts or sex workers, or being exploited. Correct knowledge of prevention remains low outside of major cities and the capacity of Pakistani public and civil society organisations to prevent HIV is low. The lower socio-economic status of girls and young women increases their vulnerability to HIV.

UNICEF Pakistan realises that different groups of youth with different risk potentials need different targeted approaches.

Current programmes

Child Protection and Empowerment of Adolescents Programme (CPEA)

The programme focuses on commercial sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, juvenile justice, corporal punishment, adolescent empowerment, HIV and AIDS, and child participation. Also included in this programming is life skills based education (LSBE) which aims to provide in-school, especially vulnerable, and most-at-risk children and adolescents with skills and information which enable healthy and educated decision making.

Future Programming Priorities

- Assessment of access, availability and quality of targeted comprehensive interventions for most-at-risk adolescents
- Building the capacity among partners to provide relevant child friendly voluntary counselling and testing, STI and psychosocial support services
- Life skills-based education provided to most at-risk adolescents and incorporation of life skills-based education into school curriculum
- Building of capacity among religious leaders, media and duty-bearers to create a supportive environment
- Support to National AIDS Control Program and its BCC interventions for young people
- Build and monitor appropriate referral systems with link to services with NGO partners, government and UN agencies such as UNODC for most-at-risk adolescents



© UNICEF/PAKA00094N/ MANI LAMA – A social mobilizer conducting orientation on Girl Shield Project in Lahore, the capital of Punjab Province.

Targets

- Most-at-risk children have access to child friendly HIV services including voluntary counselling and testing and STI treatment
- Most-at-risk children have access to context-appropriate information and life skills to protect themselves from HIV and AIDS
- Children in secondary schools and primary schools supported by UNICEF receive life skills-based education in their curriculum
- Children have access to specific HIV and AIDS information through electronic media
- Duty Bearers support children in their efforts to access specific information on HIV AND AIDS

Targets

- Increased knowledge on HIV and AIDS among child bearing aged women
- All identified HIV-positive pregnant women have access to comprehensive PMTCT plus services and follow-up

PMTCT Plus: Reduce HIV infection among pregnant women and prevent transmission of HIV to their infants.

PMTCT started only in Pakistan in 2005. UNICEF has assisted Ministry of Health in the revision of international guidelines and to develop an implementation framework. In the beginning of 2006 pilot PMTCT sites will be established in two provinces, and the intention is to expand to further two provinces in late 2006.

Future Programming Priorities

- Support the development of primary prevention messages for Prong 1 (targeted primary prevention) in four provinces and Tribal Areas
- Develop capacity of Lady Health Visitors and Lady Health Workers, traditional birth attendants, private practitioners and others to deliver the messages through outreach and antenatal care, and to make referrals to voluntary counselling and testing (VCT)
- Build the capacity of service providers in universal precautions and sensitizing them to the needs of HIV infected people, including children

Paediatric treatment: Universal access of HIV infected children to treatment, care and support.

Targets

- ⌘ All HIV-exposed babies receive cotrimoxazole prophylaxis
- ⌘ All identified HIV-positive children have access to drugs, medicines and treatment for opportunistic infections.
- ⌘ All identified HIV-positive children who require it, have access to appropriate ARVs.

- ⌘ Support the National AIDS Control Programme to develop a Paediatric Guideline for the clinical management of HIV and AIDS, including Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) and train clinicians on paediatric AIDS management.
- ⌘ Facilitate the National AIDS Control Program's antiretroviral drug order, including paediatric formulations, through UNICEF Copenhagen with funding by the Global Fund to Fight HIV and AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. UNICEF is advocating for easy paediatric combinations.



© UNICEF Pakistan – Strings has partnered with UNICEF to spread HIV and AIDS information and awareness messages.

Target

- ⌘ Children affected by HIV/AIDS access protective and social services and are not discriminated against.

Protection, care and support for children affected by HIV/AIDS:

Increase the proportion of children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS receiving quality family, community and government support, including education, healthcare, nutrition and psycho-social support.

The number of orphans and children estimated to be affected by HIV and AIDS is still low in Pakistan and UNICEF has just commenced a process for understanding more about these children in order to support programming.

Future Programming Priorities

- ⌘ Conduct survey on children made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS
- ⌘ Develop and disseminate HIV Counselling Guidelines for Children and Young People
- ⌘ Advocate for legislative frameworks to protect and care for children made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS
- ⌘ Build the capacity of the NGOs to provide support services for children made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS including psychosocial support

Partnerships

UNICEF Pakistan is working closely together with...

- ⌘ **Religious leaders:** UNICEF has worked with religious leaders of different faiths to develop an info-kit on HIV and AIDS, provide orientation to religious clergy at the district level, form the Pakistan Inter-Religious Council, and to enable participation in religious leaders study tours.
- ⌘ **Strings:** As UNICEF's National Ambassadors for Youth and HIV/AIDS, the popular band Strings has spread HIV and AIDS information and awareness messages to its widespread fan base.
- ⌘ **Media:** Through media training workshops and the development of the "Ethical Terms: Guide for HIV and AIDS," UNICEF has worked with the media to disseminate HIV and AIDS awareness messages and to encourage ethical reporting on HIV and AIDS related issues.

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A girl child carrying and looking after her younger sibling. She does not go to school as there is no one else to look after her younger brother. Village Lopowali, Sialkot District. Punjab Province.

Relevant Documents:

UNICEF Pakistan Country Programme (2004 – 2008) HIV and AIDS Strategy: *Fighting HIV and AIDS in Pakistan – UNICEF Strategy and Major Lines of Action*

UNICEF Pakistan/National AIDS Control Programme/UNAIDS, *Ethical Terms: Guide for HIV and AIDS*

UNICEF Pakistan/National AIDS Control Programme, *Positive Diaries*, PLWHA Testimonies

UNICEF Pakistan/National AIDS Control Programme, *National HIV Prevention Strategy for Young People in Pakistan*

Currently under development for 2006:

UNICEF Pakistan/National AIDS Control Programme, *National HIV Counselling Guideline for Children and Young People in Pakistan*

UNICEF Pakistan/National AIDS Control Programme, *National Implementation Strategy for PMTCT*

UNICEF Pakistan/National AIDS Control Programme, *National PMTCT Protocol for Pakistan*

UNICEF Pakistan/National AIDS Control Programme, *National HIV Paediatric Guidelines for Pakistan*