Optimizing Health/Non Health Outcomes for Adolescents Living with HIV amid COVID-19

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Human Touch Foundation

- We are a youth focused and youth serving organization working in Goa within sexual and reproductive health, substance abuse, TB and HIV movement.

- We work strategically and collaboratively to strengthen this movement to ensure the health, well-being and human rights to all young people.
Strategic Area – HIV and AIDS

Human Touch Foundation adopts a holistic approach to address contextual barriers and reduce the unmet needs of 330 ALHIV for information, guidance and services, including advocacy.

A harm reduction program with comprehensive HIV and HCV services for young people who inject drugs (YPUD).
Mental Health and Dual Pandemic

• The burden of anxiety was high during COVID lockdown among our adolescents who are already socioeconomically disadvantaged and appeared to be influenced by concerns about ART availability, food security and livelihood.

• The importance of prioritizing innovations in mental health care for ALHIVs, in the setting of the pandemic can be inferred given that worsening mental health has been reported in the general population.
Mental Health and Dual Pandemic

• The COVID-19 pandemic have had devastating effects on the mental health of ALHIVs as well as down streamed HIV-related treatment outcomes.

• The COVID-19 pandemic’s health impacts, containment measures and ensuing economic fallout are expected to result in a rise in mental health disorders and poorer mental well-being both in the short and long term.
Mental Health and Dual Pandemic

• Immediate non health-related concerns centered around financial insecurity resulting from unemployment and a lack of savings and predominantly drove apprehensions about food security, eviction, and the ability to provide for the family.

• The vulnerability of children and young people to HIV has been further exacerbated by school closures, interrupting access to education and to crucial social services, such as school mid day meals.
Our Approach

Biopsychosocial Model

Optimizing Health/Non Health Outcomes for Adolescents Living with HIV amid COVID-19
Our Approach

Leveraging social protection systems for COVID-19 and HIV

Provided services and social assistance in response to COVID-19 that adequately covered the unique needs and vulnerabilities of ALHIVs by linking with social protection programmes and livelihood strengthening activities so that health gains are sustained in the long term.

Unique needs included access to entrepreneurship, skill building, support for higher education, access to IT gadgets for online learning, etc.
Our Approach

- Strengthening Food Security for COVID-19 and HIV

During early months of COVID-19 pandemic, most of the ALHIVs and their households experienced food insecurity (insecure or inadequate access to food, either because of financial constraints or lockdown.), affecting mental health.

Food support was integrated into the services for 200 households to aid uptake and retention in care and treatment and prevent adverse mental health outcomes.
Our Approach

- Investing and innovating in emerging mental health crisis

Hybrid model of mental health care services delivery was adopted. i.e. telephonic and in person counseling (with COVID-19 safety protocols). Different techniques from varied therapies were integrated to tailor the intervention in accordance to the problems presented by the client.

Engaging family members/caregivers was taken into consideration when required.
Recommendations

• We recommend that HIV care providers regularly use readily available, short screening tools to identify and prioritize ALHIV risk for anxiety and other mental health conditions and triage patients as an extension of current HIV services.

• This strategy will not redress the deleterious effects of the pandemic on HIV care but might at least reduce their impact.
Recommendations

• Engage in a person-centered care program where clients partner with the therapist to plan, develop and monitor care to meet their needs.

• Family and caregivers need to be involved in the therapeutic process especially when they need support for the additional responsibilities of the client.

• Appropriate referral links need to be established to refer a client when services required is beyond your expertise.
Thank You

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