

## IMPACT OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AFFECTED BY HIV

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### ABSTRACT

COVID 19 has affected everyone's lives today. It has led to a huge loss of life globally and posed a serious challenge to public health. Also, due to the pandemic, there is economic and social disruption countrywide. It will not be just to term this pandemic as a health crisis only, rather we can say that it is a human, economic, and social crisis. The pandemic has affected all sections of the population and particularly it has been detrimental to the vulnerable groups. Among this vulnerable group, children occupy quite a pivotal place in society as they are considered to be the key element in determining what the societal outcome would be because children are considered to be the future of any society. It can be rightly said that a society that invests in protecting the rights of the children, in turn, invests in its future. Generally, children are considered to be at low risk during COVID-19 but the scenario changes completely when we take into consideration a child who is living with HIV/AIDS. Children living with HIV/AIDS has a very weak immune system and therefore the chances of contracting COVID-

19 infection are on the higher side for them which may later prove to be fatal. The lives of these children affected by HIV during the pandemic have changed in several ways. They are facing a number of challenges during the COVID-19 phase ranging from mental health issues due to isolation, access to their life-saving treatments, lack of educational facilities owing to the closure of schools, etc. The current paper intends to identify the challenges faced by children living with HIV during COVID-19 and to study the effect of COVID-19 on the lives of the children already affected by chronic disease like HIV.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Pandemic, Vulnerable group, Children, Health, HIV

### INTRODUCTION

The general notion that we all have is that acquired immune deficiency syndrome (hereafter, AIDS) is a disease that affects majorly adults since it is usually transmitted through sexual contact and drug use but the truth is it threatens and kills thousands of children and often the young ones get affected too. Children affected by human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (hereafter, HIV/AIDS) experience quite a challenging life. In terms of the life of a child affected by human immunodeficiency virus (hereafter, HIV), this disease has a greater impact in terms of health, nutrition, and social situation which includes high infant and child morbidity and mortality rates, decreased life expectancy, and also major cause to orphaning. The children may themselves live with a high risk of HIV/AIDS or they may be residing with chronically ill parents and the responsibility of running such a house be it economically or caregiving is put on the shoulders of such children. This kind of situation sometimes makes these children suffer from deep and long-lasting psychological trauma.

These children often become orphans at an early age by losing one or both of their parents to AIDS- related illness. Furthermore, the children who are HIV positive are often unaware of the consequences of the disease and are generally scared when they experience the symptoms related to the disease.

According to UNICEF Data there were nearly 38 million people globally in 2019 with HIV/AIDS among which 2.8 million were children (aged between 0-9 years) and Adolescents (aged between 10-19 years). Daily around 880 children become infected with HIV and about 310 people die from AIDS due to inadequate access to HIV prevention, care, and treatment services.<sup>1</sup> Around 15 million children affected by this disease are orphaned among which 12 million in sub-Saharan Africa alone.<sup>2</sup> In accordance with NACO's 2019 report, In India at the national level, there are an estimated 23.49 Lakh people living with HIV (hereafter, PLHIV) and children living with HIV comprised 3.4% of the total PLHIV estimates.<sup>3</sup>

As reported by World Health Organization (hereafter, WHO), Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has been identified as a pandemic, and WHO emphasized the importance of taking quick actions by different countries to treat, detect and reduce transmission to save individual's lives from its deadly effect.<sup>4</sup> It is a disease caused by a virus named SARS-CoV-2 that causes a respiratory tract infection which can affect the upper respiratory tract or lower respiratory tract.<sup>5</sup> COVID-19 can affect anyone but studies have shown that elderly people or people which even includes children who have a weakened immune system because of bone marrow or HIV are at a risk of severe illness.<sup>6</sup>

During the COVID19 outbreak, HIV prevention, testing, and care have been disrupted due to strict lockdown rules at various places. It is being feared that the corona virus- related health care service disruptions may reverse all progress made for children in the fight against HIV/AIDS. As already stated earlier, children who are already suffering from chronic illnesses like HIV/AIDS are at greater risk of getting infected from COVID-19 due to their compromised immune system.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**The Psychosocial Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Youth Living with HIV in Western Kenya<sup>7</sup>**, The study takes into account the psychological impacts of COVID-19 on young people living with HIV in Kenya who were mostly adolescents. The Telephonic interview method was used to collect empirical data in this study. Questions related to challenges during COVID-19 were put to participants during the interview. Participants were mostly from Kenya affected by HIV and within the age bracket of 10-24 years. The findings of the study were that due to the closure of schools, social distancing norms, and considerable economic impacts in Kenya there were moderate to severe depression signs among the young adults. Through this paper, the researcher can get a useful insight as to how COVID-19 can have a negative effect on the mental health of young children living with HIV.

**HIV/AIDS and COVID-19<sup>8</sup>**, The UNICEF data highlights how 15 percent of pregnant women and close to 50 percent of children and adolescents worldwide are not on life-saving HIV treatment due to the disruption in HIV testing and interrupted supply of antiretroviral medications. The report points out that most countries are diverting health care resources to fighting the coronavirus pandemic and implementing various social distancing measures which are creating a delay in the supply of essential medications for HIV affected people. The result likely will be heightening the risk of contracting COVID-19 among PLHA owing to their poor

immune system. Also, the report suggests that the social distancing measures might increase the mental issues affecting young PLHA which might be quite challenging to manage later on. The report gives a perception of the possible problems that HIV children are going through during the COVID-19 phase.

**Maintaining HIV care during the COVID-19 pandemic**<sup>9</sup>, The paper identifies some of the challenges that PLHA are facing in the current situation due to the implementation of quarantines, social distancing, community containment measures, overcrowding of the hospitals among the others which are reducing the access to HIV routine health care services. The paper recommends that government, community-based organizations, and international partners need to work together to continue the routine medical health care facilities which were available to the HIV affected people before the coronavirus pandemic had started.

**COVID-19 and HIV: A Tale of Two Pandemics**<sup>10</sup>, The report has been prepared by International Aids Society which is one of the associations of HIV professionals with members in more than 170 countries. The report analyses the different issues that are faced by the people affected by HIV and how COVID-19 has increased their misery considerably. The paper recommends categorically some of the steps that the government should be taking to take proper care of HIV affected people even during the coronavirus pandemic. Some of the steps like making HIV medication available through community pick up pints, Psychological support, and other necessary support should be adduced over the phone and online platforms wherever possible.

**From COVID-19 To AIDS, It Is Important To Take Diagnostics Closer To Communities**<sup>11</sup>  
The paper contemplates that both HIV and COVID-19 require similar public health approaches like communication for prevention, care, support, and regular follow-ups. The paper points out that because of COVID-19 the health care services have been disrupted in India due to overburdening at hospitals and clinics with patients affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The author of the paper has additionally mentioned how people of both diseases face stigma which leads to issues of access and discrimination. The paper recommends a region-specific strategy for HIV control.

**320,000 Children and Adolescents Newly Infected with HIV in 2019, 1 Every 100 Seconds**, Considering the report of UNICEF, every minute and 40 seconds, a child or young person under the age of 20 years was newly infected with HIV which brought the total number of children living with HIV to 2.8 million. The report reflects that children have been left behind in the fight against HIV. In 2019 only a little more than half of the children had access to life saving treatment worldwide. The COVID 19 crisis has additionally increased the inequalities in accessing to life saving HIV medical services for children, adolescents, and pregnant mothers. During April and May, this year in some countries due to lockdowns the pediatric HIV treatment and viral load testing in children declined as much as 50 to 70 percent and new treatment initiation fell by 25 to 50 percent.<sup>12</sup>

## Research Methodology

For the purpose of this research, secondary data have been taken into consideration and mostly collected from books, journals, magazines, the internet, and reports of UNICEF, NACO, UNAIDS, International Aids Society.

## HIV/AIDS, COVID-19 and children

HIV is the virus which attacks the cells that help the human body to fight any infection whereby

making the individual vulnerable to contract any kind of infection or disease. It is usually transmitted by contact with certain bodily fluids of an individual with HIV or if injection drug equipment is shared.<sup>13</sup> Generally, in case of HIV infections in children under 13 years of age almost all infections are from vertical transmission, i.e., the virus is passed to the child when they are in mother's womb or during the process of delivery, or through breastfeeding.<sup>14</sup>

Children can also be infected by sexual abuse or rape. If HIV is left untreated then it can lead to AIDS. Human body can't get away with the HIV virus since there is no cure. Nevertheless, by taking the antiretroviral therapy (hereafter, ART) people with HIV can live long and healthy lives.

AIDS is the last stage of HIV. It occurs when the body's immune system has been badly damaged because of the virus. Generally, a person with AIDS without taking HIV medicine can survive only for 3 years and if someone contracts or has opportunistic illness then the life span is about 1 year without treatment.<sup>15</sup> According to the Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017 (hereafter, HIV/AIDS Prevention Act) AIDS is defined as a condition characterized by a combination of signs and symptoms, caused by Human Immunodeficiency Virus, which attacks and weakens the body's immune system making the HIV-positive person susceptible to life threatening conditions or other conditions as may be specified from time to time.<sup>16</sup>

According to WHO, COVID-19 is an infectious disease brought about by a new type of coronavirus. Many individuals who have been infected with COVID-19 will be experiencing mild to moderate level of respiratory illness and can recover without the need of any special treatment. But older people or those individuals with a medical condition like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer have major chance of developing serious illness if contracted with COVID-19.<sup>17</sup>

A Child under the NCPCR is defined as a person in the 0 to 18 years of age.<sup>18</sup> According to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 a child means a person who has not completed eighteen years of age.<sup>19</sup> According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier".<sup>20</sup>

According to the HIV/AIDS Prevention Act, a child affected by HIV means "a person below the age of eighteen years, who is positive or whose parent or guardian (with whom such child normally resides) is HIV-positive or has lost a parent or guardian (with whom such child resided) due to AIDS or lives in a household fostering children orphaned by AIDS."<sup>21</sup>

The HIV/AIDS poses a great threat to children's welfare. Children and adolescents affected by the disease face a number of problems like psychological distress, discrimination and stigma, malnutrition, lack of security, loss of access to healthcare facilities, fewer schooling and education opportunities, loss of inheritance, homelessness, starvation, etc.<sup>22</sup> According to WebMD, children mostly get HIV from their mothers when they were pregnant or during the process of birth or breastfeeding and if the women who are pregnant get tested or adhere to regular treatments then there is a low chance of passing the virus to the babies.<sup>23</sup>

Currently, medical treatments in HIV can only slow down the degree to which HIV deteriorates the immune system so that a person living with the chronic disease may lead a normal life but sadly, there is no cure for HIV infection. When we talk about COVID-19, fewer children have indeed been sick with COVID-19 as compared to their adult counterparts but when it comes to a child who is already affected by HIV/AIDS and is having a weak immune system due to the aforementioned illness then he/she is more susceptible towards contracting COVID-19 infection which could prove to be fatal.<sup>24</sup> Regarding the treatment for COVID 19, we are aware that there are vaccines which can help a patient to recover from the illness but there is

no cure of the virus which is quite similar to the treatment of HIV infection as well.

### **Challenges faced by HIV affected children during COVID 19**

Across the globe during the pandemic, children are suffering from malnutrition, lack of education due to closing down of the schools, closure of free school meals, disruption of mental health due to isolation, etc. The situation during COVID-19 has worsened more for children suffering from chronic illnesses like HIV/AIDS. Following are some of the challenges faced by HIV children-

**1. Mental health issues:** Ordinarily, most children affected by HIV/AIDS are required to be kept in an environment surrounded by other children so as not to increase their anxiety or depression, or uncertainty which in turn might worsen their health condition. They are advised to be around people who make these children feel safe since depression is one of the most common mental health disorders among people living with HIV.<sup>25</sup> But when we look at the current situation of a pandemic these children can't be around a lot of people due to their own health risks, prolonged quarantines, physical distancing, and school closures which in turn make them feel isolated and is increasing their anxiety, stress and depressive symptoms as they no longer have the peer group support or school-based support network resulting in mental health issues which demand immediate psychological care which can later lead to serious developmental issues. Even though physical distancing may serve to benefit the child's physical health, but it might harm the child's social and emotional health. According to a study conducted by UNAIDS in 38 countries across the globe it has been reflected that 15 percent of adults and 25 percent of adolescents living with HIV reported depression which could possibly be a hindrance to adherence to the antiretroviral therapy.<sup>26</sup>

### **2. The problem of access to HIV medicines and proper health care facilities:**

According to a new survey conducted by WHO, 73 countries have raised an alarm that they are in danger of supply shortages of antiretroviral (hereafter, ARV) medicines due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and 24 countries wherein 8.3 million people were benefitting from ARVs in 2019 have now announced that they either have low stock of ARVs or they are facing problems in supplying these life-saving drugs. The survey also projected that a six-month disruption during COVID-19 in access to ARVs could result in doubling in AIDS-related deaths in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020. The reasons cited for the disruptions in the survey were shut down of land and transport services and limited access to health services within the countries as a result of the pandemic.<sup>27</sup>

At present, the medical facilities at various places are excessively burdened, especially in regions where the infections arising out of coronavirus are on the rise. Access to health care facilities is not only becoming tough for people affected with COVID-19 but also for others who are affected by a chronic illness like HIV/AIDS. Children affected with HIV/AIDS are especially defenseless during the hour of the pandemic. They are anyhow living with a compromised immune system which raises the risk of more serious illness if they come in contact with COVID-19. The major problem that the children with HIV are facing is that they can no longer get access to the regular clinic for medical care or their medication refills which is quite detrimental for their health since it is important for these children affected by HIV/AIDS to regularly visit their health care providers and adhere to the treatment. In spite of the fact that at various places there are arrangements made for digital or telehealth services during the pandemic, but these services cannot be a

substitute as it comes with its own limitations. Also, in circumstances like lack of access to technology or limited knowledge about these platforms the children are not able to fully access the digital/telehealth services.

- 3. Lack of education facilities:** Education is the most important human right. It is an enabling right that directly impacts all the other remaining human rights.<sup>28</sup> During the pandemic, schools are mostly closed as a protective measure to reduce the risk of infection by COVID-19 and online classes are the new normal. But the major concern for the HIV affected children is that they mostly belong to a population experiencing poverty<sup>29</sup> and have very less resources like cell phones, laptops, proper internet services to continue with the online class and stay academically updated and as a result, accessing online classes during the pandemic becomes very tough for them.
  
- 4. Non-availability of shelter:** PLHA many a time face problem like unemployment. The reason for it is when a person is affected by HIV or AIDS in his prime earning years it can lead to morbidity or death of such earning members.<sup>30</sup> The ones who are infected by HIV frequently experience social stigma and discrimination in their workplace. These individuals are often compulsorily asked to leave the workplace. During the pandemic situation, the lives of PLHA have become more difficult. It has become a factor of excuse for the employers to lay off these people, which results in a huge financial crisis for the PLHA and their family. Children are the ones who are majorly affected in this scenario as they are mostly dependent on the earnings of the members of their families. Unemployment in the COVID situation results in homelessness or unstable housing, which makes life all the more difficult for these children suffering from HIV. Without proper shelter facilities, these children are exposed to the risk of COVID more which can prove to be deadly for them. A Los Angeles study had found that half of domiciled PLHA felt that they were in danger of becoming homeless whereas another Philadelphia study portrayed that nearly 44% PLHA could not bear the cost of their lodging which could give rise to homelessness.<sup>31</sup>
  
- 5. Opportunistic infections on a rise:** Since children have a very weak immune system because of HIV/AIDS they are very vulnerable to opportunistic infections (OIs) like Tuberculosis (TB), Pneumocystis pneumonia (PCP), Histoplasmosis, malaria among the others<sup>32</sup>. This kind of OIs can be kept under check by effective regular treatment for HIV. A retrospective cohort study was undertaken at Debre Markos Referral Hospital of Northwest Ethiopia for the period of January 1, 2005 to March 31, 2019 wherein 408 HIV-infected children receiving ART were included and the results showed that the incidence rate of OIs among HIV-infected children were high due to significant reasons like advanced disease stage, poor ART adherence.<sup>33</sup> During the pandemic regular checkup is difficult and the children affected by HIV/AIDS are witnessing delayed ART due to this reason. The delays in treatments are mostly due to of overcrowding in the hospitals for COVID treatments and children who reach out for an urgent need to visit the medical health care facilities during this time are facing an increased risk of contracting COVID-19 infection among the other health risks while visiting these overcrowded health care facilities during the pandemic.

According to Friends of the Global Fight Against AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (which is an advocacy organization created in the US in 2004 dedicated to sustain and expand U.S. support for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria), interruption of six months of antiretroviral treatment could be a cause of 5 lakh extra deaths from AIDS-related

illness in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>34</sup>

### **Guidelines on Children living with HIV/AIDS during COVID-19**

The COVID-19 has posed serious health issues worldwide as already discussed earlier in the paper. It has exposed the PLHA to a greater risk of contracting the infection. Children living with HIV/AIDS are no exception. To minimize the exposure to COVID-19 which might prove to be fatal for the PLHA various international organizations have issued various guidelines and recommendations. The Supreme Court of India have also issued necessary directions so that the children have minimum exposure to, and prevent infection by the virus that causes COVID-19. Certain non-governmental organizations have been providing constant support to PLHAs during the lockdown. In this segment, we will be discussing the various guidelines recommended by the International Organizations as well as the strategies and policies taken by the non-governmental organizations to minimize the risk of COVID-19 exposure to PLHA.

WHO during the time of COVID-19 has been working with organizations like UNAIDS and the Global Network of People Living with HIV to make sure that the basic human rights of PLHA are not compromised with and to ensure that they receive same access as others in terms of healthcare so that there is no disruption to HIV related healthcare facilities during the COVID-19.<sup>35</sup> International Aids Society which is a non-profit organization of HIV professionals with members in more than 170 countries recommends strategies to preserve the HIV services during the period of COVID-19. According to them, decentralized distribution of ART and the other medications is required for guaranteeing access to HIV healthcare services and decreasing the contact with clinics. They have also released certain recommendations like PLHA should reduce their visits to the clinics and if at all necessary then time spent at health care facility should be minimum, HIV medication refills should be made available through community pick-up points, transition to virtual platforms wherever applicable to be used for consultations and psychological needs, etc.<sup>36</sup>

In the matter of '*In Re: Contagion of COVID-19 virus in Children Protection Homes*' Supreme Court of India on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020 have passed a plethora of directions in a suo moto case to prevent the spread of COVID-19 virus to Child Care Institutions (hereafter, CCIs). It has given directions to Child Welfare Committees (hereafter, CWCs), Juvenile Justice Boards (hereafter, JJBs) and Children Courts, Governments, CCIs, children under foster and kinship care for the protection of children from the spread of COVID-19 to CCIs. It has been directed by the hon'ble court to CWCs that children should be kept in CCIs due to the health and safety concerns and special online video sessions might be called to consider that the spread of COVID-19 can be prevented in children's homes and shelters. Directions to the JJBs by Supreme Court included the release of children alleged to be in conflict with the law on bail to minimize the spread of COVID-19 virus. It has been also stated by Supreme Court that to prevent contact online sittings and video conferencing can be held for speedy disposal of cases. In the same matter, Supreme Court has issued directions to the government to develop a system of trained volunteers who could take care of children when the need arises, required to make provisions so that counselling is available, ensure budgetary allocations which may arise for the effective management of the pandemic, make sure that there is the availability of face masks, soap, adequate food, drinking water, and other necessities. The directions to the CCIs by Supreme Court include enforcement of regular hand washing with safe water and soap or sanitizer, daily cleaning of various surfaces which includes the kitchen and bathrooms, restriction of the entry of staff or any individual with COVID-19 symptoms from entering such CCI, etc. The directions for families that are fostering children include receiving information about how to prevent COVID-19. Along with all these

directions, Supreme Court has also included certain preventive measures for the CCIs such as spreading awareness about COVID- 19, taking necessary steps to practice, promote and demonstrate positive hygiene behaviours, practice social distancing, cleaning, and disinfecting regularly.<sup>37</sup>

HAQ, which is a Child Rights NGO has published a policy brief on Rights of Children in the time of COVID-19 wherein there are general and sector-specific recommendations for Government action. The policy brief is a product of the collaborative efforts of several organizations, academicians, practitioners, and experts working in the area of child rights.

Some of the recommendations like no child should be stigmatized or discriminated because of their COVID-status or their sex, caste, religion, tribe, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, social origin, place of birth, HIV/AIDS status, or the identity or status of their parent, etc. It has also been recommended that there should not be any cuts in existing budgetary allocation for children in the Union Budget and investments in public health, education, and child protection needs to be enhanced where there is a shortfall, strengthen the community-based action centers<sup>38</sup>

It is pertinent to note that the researcher in the process of doing the research work did not find any specific guideline or recommendations which address the needs of children living with HIV/AIDS during COVID-19.

## Recommendations

In response to the above-mentioned challenges following are the means through which the problems can be mitigated:

- 1. Access to continued medical facilities:** Many international organizations like WHO, UNAIDS, and the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+) have been working towards continued facility of HIV prevention, testing and treatment services even during the pandemic to ensure that PLHA continues to get their treatment.<sup>39</sup> According to WHO, countries should consider at national, regional and local level to recognize and maintain health services to all and routine health service delivery may be needed to be adapted so that during the pandemic for children affected by HIV/AIDS so that the latter can have access to refill antiviral drugs either at the nearest local health care center or by post or by doorstep delivery to maintain their treatment programs and to continue with ART.<sup>40</sup>
- 2. Availability of food and shelter:** As discussed earlier in this paper that the children suffering from HIV/AIDS belong mostly to the marginalized sector of the society, hence during this pandemic they are the ones who require proper food and shelter. Essential supplies of groceries for children living with HIV and their families need to be ensured by the government. There are various community-based centers and International organizations who are working towards providing essential supplies during the pandemic to PLHA. Provision of shelter camps is required to be made for such children with HIV so that the risk of transmission of COVID-19 can be decreased. Peter Borges, the founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Human Touch Foundation (an organization in Goa, India devoted to educate and advocate for children and adolescents with HIV) said “Many children and adolescents are with anxiety and depression, mostly concerning their survival, due to loss of income of their families and scarcity of essential supplies.”<sup>41</sup>



3. **Psychological support:** The lockdown due to the pandemic as discussed earlier has caused serious stress and trauma among many individuals. Children are the worst affected in this case. The restricted movements and isolation have taken a toll on their health. When it comes to children affected by HIV the psychological pressure causes a negative impact on their health which results in the deterioration of their condition. It is very much required for the government or the local communities to continue with non-interrupted psychological support to these children even during this pandemic either through tele-counselling or any other feasible mode.
4. **Dissemination of proper information:** The government should ensure that proper and reliable information should be adduced to the children living with HIV through reliable sources like UNICEF, UNAIDS, and WHO. The children should undergo a feeling of care and emotional stability.
5. **Proper care by using safety gears during COVID-19:** The government should ensure that the health workers who are to deliver care to the HIV children in their homes or such other places are being given effective personal protective equipment to minimize the risk of transmission of the COVID-19 virus to the children who are highly susceptible to it owing to HIV disease which has already affected these children.
6. **Engagement of community-based supporters of HIV:** It is in the best interest of the country dealing with COVID-19 to engage community-based centers dealing with HIV who through years of experience are aware of the HIV children's needs during a pandemic situation. The government should adduce proper economic support to these organizations to tackle this COVID 19 situation and side by side ensure the safety of children affected by HIV. Various communities at national, state and local levels have been providing solutions to the needs of the young people affected by HIV in this pandemic situation.

Ms. Daxa Patel, the President of NCPI+ (National Coalition of People Living with HIV in India) and the Secretary of the Gujarat State Network of People Living with HIV (GSNP+) said, "Since the lockdown started, the National Coalition of People Living with HIV in India established a good communication platform through WhatsApp and emails connecting the National AIDS Control Organisation and networks of people living with HIV to closely monitor challenges, find joint solutions and help coordination,"<sup>42</sup>

Dr. Bilali Camara, the UNAIDS Country Director in India said, "HIV-affected communities have played an important role delivering antiretroviral therapy to people who were not able to collect it themselves. The Human Touch Foundation, Champion in Me and the National Coalition of People Living with HIV in India are just some examples of what can be done at the national, state or city level by communities themselves. Many local solutions have been put in place in a joint effort between the government, UNAIDS and community-based organizations to get medicines, food or soap delivered to those in need,"<sup>43</sup>

7. **Access to technology:** Government should ensure accessible technologies to give digital access to HIV affected children to empower them to carry on with their online classes or get access to digital health care facilities. Low-cost technological support can help these children to go a long way.

## CONCLUSION

Some common parameters are present in the two diseases of COVID-19 and AIDS. Both the patients of COVID 19 and HIV/AIDS deal with a stigma which leads to problems of discrimination and access. The lockdown rules which are imposed in various corners of the

country are making it difficult for health care professionals to reach out to the ones in need and thus resulting in interrupted treatment. The government needs to ensure that the rights in the times of pandemic are not disrupted for the vulnerable groups and that they can get access to HIV treatment programs timely and continue ART. HIV Children being the most vulnerable have special needs as compared to their adult counterparts also affected by the disease. The main difference is that the children affected by HIV are not capable of getting access to medical services themselves and usually depend on their guardian or caregiver. It is also very important for the government to include community led organizations in this fight against the pandemic by better managing chronic illness like HIV. The present paper focuses on the current status and challenges that COVID-19 have brought to the lives of children affected by HIV. In addition to the challenges this paper has suggested ways so that the challenges during the pandemic can be mitigated.

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