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Title: Prevalence and incidence of HPV-infection, cervical abnormalities and cancer in a cohort of HIV-infected women in Mumbai, India: 12-months follow-up

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Background: HIV-infected women are at a higher risk of cervical intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN) and cervical cancer than women in the general population, partly due to a high prevalence of persistent human papillomavirus (HPV) infection. Generally, limited attention is given to screening HIV-infected women for HPV infection and cervical lesions in resource-constrained settings.

Methods: In 2010, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai introduced routine annual Pap-smears and HPV-DNA testing of women attending an antiretroviral therapy (ART) clinic, to enable early detection of HPV infection, cervical lesions and cancer. Women with abnormal test results were offered cervical biopsy and treatment, including treatment for sexually-transmitted infections (STIs), if indicated.

Results: Ninety-four HIV-infected women were screened. They had a median age of 35 years (Inter-Quartile Range (IQR): 28-41); median trough CD4-count of 164 cells/Al (IQR: 83-238); and median time on ART of 5.3 years (IQR: 4.5-5.6). HPV-DNA was detected in 27/92 women (29.3%), and 16/94 (17%) had either low-grade, or high-grade, squamous intraepithelial lesions (LSIL or HSIL) on Pap-smear. Overall, more than half of women had cervical inflammatory reactions, including STIs. Of 42 women who had a cervical biopsy, four (9.5%) had CIN-1, five (12%) CIN-2, and two (5%) had carcinoma-in-situ. All but one of these women had HPV-DNA detected (Relative Risk: 36.1, Confidence Intervals: 5.0 - 259.9). By the end of 2011, 55 women had completed at least 12-months of follow-up and had been re-screened. No new cases of HPV-infection, LSIL, or HSIL, were detected on re-screening.

Conclusions: The high prevalence of HPV infection, STIs and cervical lesions detected among women attending an ART-clinic, demonstrates a need for routine screening of all HIV-infected women. Large cohort studies are needed to determine the optimal screening interval, especially when resources are limited.

Country of research: India
Related to women and girls: Yes
Related to children: No
Towards an HIV Cure Symposium: No
Ethical research declaration: Yes