The Stigma Associated with HIV

Why in news?

Drugs have been developed against HIV but stigma is still high and in some areas of the world the prevention strategies are hindered.

What is AIDS?

- Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) is a chronic, potentially life-threatening condition that damages the immune system.
- **Cause** - Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
- It attacks cells that help the body fight infection, making a person more vulnerable to other infections and diseases.
- **Spread** - It can spread through sexual contact, illicit injection drug use or sharing needles, contact with infected blood, or from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding.
- **Treatment** – There is no vaccine to prevent HIV infection and no cure for HIV/AIDS.

What is the stigma associated with HIV?

> ***UN report**-2022 reported that more than 1.5 million people had become infected with HIV in 2021, around three times the global target.*

- **Fear of judgement** – Sometimes, people avoid testing out because of fear of judgment and being discriminated if they got tested.
- **AIDS crisis** - Certain public health campaigns that emerged in the 1980s in response to the AIDS crisis are still deeply indulged in people's perceptions of the virus across the globe.
- **Issue in rural areas** - If woman comes from a tight-knit rural area for treatment the news of her positive status can spread fast among family and community members.
- **Misconception on sex** - The community will think that the sexual activity of that infected woman is all over the place and that's why they need treatment.
- **Reflection on the family** - In Kenya, **children's HIV status** could impair access to education because they will question the motherhood of the child's mom.

What are the steps taken by Indian government to eradicate AIDS?

- **National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO)** – It was delegated with the responsibility of formulating, implementing and monitoring policies of prevention and control of AIDS in the country.
- It took control of the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) implementation for

HIV prevention.

- **The National AIDS Control Programme (NACP), 1992** – It is being implemented as a comprehensive programme for prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in India.
- It was launched to coordinate the national responses of surveillance, blood screening details and programmes of health education.
- **Mass media campaigns** - NACO has been conducting regular thematic mass media campaigns on TV and radio regarding the spread and treatment.
- **National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI)** – It is a seven year programme (2017-24), which aims to attain universal coverage of HIV prevention, treatment to care continuum of services for people living with HIV.
- **Free Anti-retroviral therapy (ART)** - India is attempting free roll out of ART under the **test and treat strategy** to achieve the second 90 of the 90-90-90 treatment target, which aimed that, 90% of all people with diagnosed HIV infection will receive sustained ART**.**
- **Bilateral and multilateral partners** – A number of international organisations are working with the NACO in addressing HIV/AIDS issue by contributing their technical expertise and financial resources.

SDG Target 3.3 - End the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases by 2030

What are the challenges in eradicating AIDS?

Across countries

- **Croatia** - Treatment is available for free in Croatia only for people with insurance and not for those, such as undocumented migrants who do not have insurance.
- There is only one HIV treatment center in Croatia, thus posing difficulty in accessing care.
- **Thailand** - In some Thai provinces, it can take up to a day to get to a facility that treats the condition.
- Religion also impacts how HIV is perceived in the Buddhist tradition, the virus is often seen as bad karma, a sign of bad actions in a past life.
- **Kenya** - People are suspicious about taking pills for prevention on taking PrEP.

PrEP is a preventative medication for at-risk groups that, if taken correctly, can reduce a person's chances of getting the virus through sex by up to 99%.

What lies ahead?

- **ART** - The treatment for HIV is a combination of drugs taken daily called antiretroviral therapy (ART).
- There is a need to increase the access of ART usage worldwide as it has been very successful at lowering HIV mortality rates.

- **Daily oral medication** - Another preventative treatment is the PrEP, a daily oral medication that is highly effective if taken correctly.
- **Nullout the stigmas** - All countries have to work on the stigmas of people to nullify certain myths and increase the awareness among all the classes of people.

Quick Facts

90-90-90 target

- The idea behind the 90-90-90 target is to
  - diagnose 90% of people who are HIV positive
  - get 90% of the diagnosed HIV+ people on antiretroviral treatment
  - 90% of those on antiretroviral should be virally suppressed

The United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS)

- UNAIDS is the main advocate for accelerated, comprehensive and coordinated global action on the HIV/AIDS pandemic.
- It is headquartered in **Geneva, Switzerland.**
- It is a member of the United Nations Development Group.

References

1. The Hindu|Why HIV treatment is still undermined by stigma
2. Hiv.gov|what-are-hiv-and-aids

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