



Abstrakt: "A Comprehensive Review of PMTCT Strategies: Insights from the Albanian Context"

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Background:

"The prevention of mother-to-child transmission" (PMTCT) of HIV is a key component for any national response to HIV. In practice, the implementation of PMTCT in Albania has not been at optimal levels. Pregnant women testing has not been offered as recommended in the national PMTCT guidelines (2015) and the standards developed in 2019, supported by UNFPA and the Global Fund in Albania. The lack of testing for pregnant women has led to cases being diagnosed late, while the failure to implement all steps of PMTCT may increase the risk of transmission. As a result, every year, 1 to 3 children born from HIV-positive mothers are reported undiagnosed during pregnancy."

Methodology: This is a descriptive study. The aim of this study is to describe the implementation progress of the PMTCT Program in our country, including data on vertical transmission of HIV in Albania and information on HIV-positive pregnant women who were successfully managed in recent years. To carry out this study, data from HIV surveillance in Albania were utilized.

Results: Until the end of 2022, 1604 cases of HIV have been reported. Vertical transmission of HIV accounts for 2.5%, but at least one case of vertical transmission of HIV is reported every year. By the end of 2023, a total of 42 cases of this transmission have been reported; in 2021, only 3 new cases were reported, and during the year 2023, 2 new cases have been reported. The majority of these children have been diagnosed after birth, becoming the reason for the HIV diagnosis in their parents. Pregnant women testing has seen an increase in recent years, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to the discovery of new cases of HIV in pregnant women. In 2022, 8 cases were reported in pregnant women: 4 through the provision of testing during antenatal care, 3 cases with known HIV status before pregnancy, and 1 case with foreign citizenship. In 2023, 7 cases of pregnant women with HIV were reported.

Conclusion: The increase in HIV-diagnosed cases in pregnant women suggests the need to strengthen the implementation of the National PMTCT Program and achieve one of the UNAIDS objectives, aiming for zero cases of HIV in children born to HIV-positive mothers. This implies offering HIV testing for every pregnant woman during antenatal care and successfully managing each case based on the recent guidelines and standards.