

# The Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on HIV Care: A Cross-Sectional Study in a Tertiary Center

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** People living with HIV (PLWH) might be at risk of more severe COVID-19. Although anti-retroviral therapy (ART) may have theoretical activity against COVID-19, which can protect PLWH from COVID-19. Therefore, this study aims to assess the negative consequences of the COVID-19 lockdown on HIV care and anti-retroviral therapy (ART) adherence.

**Methods:** This cross-sectional study included HIV+ patients in Jeddah aged  $\geq 18$  years old who had clinic visits during the lockdown period (April-August 2020) and were on ART for  $\geq 2$  years; newly diagnosed patients were excluded. Data were collected by a tele-questionnaire and electronic medical records system.

**Results:** A total of 85 participants were recruited. The results showed that 58.82% of participants reported no change in their ART adherence during the lockdown, whereas 37.65% increased and 3.53% had decreased compliance. About 63.53% of participants could come to the clinic, yet 36.47% were disturbed. Approximately 10.59% couldn't reach healthcare providers, and nearly 89.41% could disclose their healthcare providers during the lockdown. Thus, 95.29% disagreed that the lockdown affected their HIV care in general. Though, 34.11% did not have ART refills for some period during the pandemic, with median days of 13 [IQR: 5-30]. Clinically, no significant change was observed in lab results before and after the lockdown.

**Conclusion:** The results showed a minimum negative impact on HIV care during the COVID-19 lockdown; this might be due to the enhanced policies applied by the hospital. However, additional research is necessary to raise the standard of healthcare in Saudi Arabia.

**Keywords:** Adherence, Anti-retroviral therapy, COVID-19, HIV, Saudi Arabia

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