

Lower CD4 count in new clients enrolled during Covid-19 pandemic in a global HIV program



F. Fernandes Fonseca, J. van den Hombergh, W. Odoke, E. Waweru, B. Biwot, J. Nakhumwa, A. Benzaken

AIDS Healthcare Foundation, Global Quality Team

BACKGROUND

Late presenters are priority for HIV programs. Baseline CD4 cell count (CD4) is essential as the best predictor of disease status and risk of death and identifies those with advanced HIV disease. This study evaluates how the pandemic affected access to HIV care by monitoring CD4 of newly enrolled clients.

Low CD4 at enrolment is associated with high co-morbidity, early mortality, higher direct health-care costs and poor retention in care.

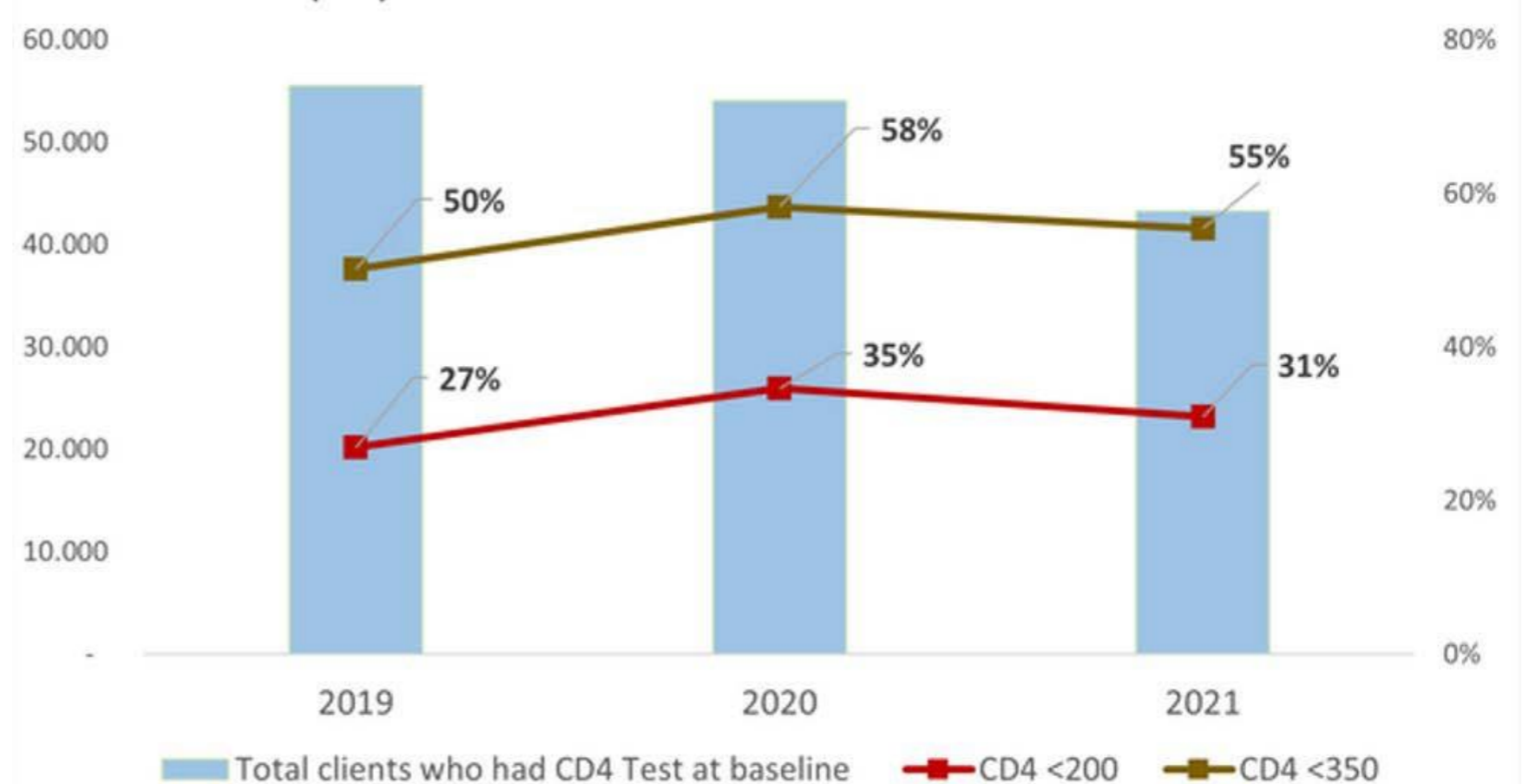
METHODS

Analysis of retrospective CD4 data from the AHF Global Program (32 countries* in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, India, and Africa), from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2021.

RESULTS

Comparing 2019, 2020 and 2021, the number of new people enrolled into HIV care declined (N=95,131 in 2019, N=91,536 in 2020, and N=70,000 in 2021). In the same period, the CD4 coverage (proportion of clients who had a CD4 at baseline) ranged from 58% to 62%, with a **marked reduction in total clients who had a CD4** (N=55,518 in 2019, N=54,032 in 2020, and N=43,275 in 2021). **The number and the proportion of clients enrolled with CD4<350 cells/mm³ is increasing over the years** (N=27,854, 50% in 2019; N=31,491, 58% in 2020, and N=23,992, 55% in 2021) whereas the proportion of those presenting with advanced AIDS (CD4< 200cell/mm³) ranged from 27% (N=14,963) in 2019 to 35% (N=18,700) in 2020 and 31% (N=13,386) in 2021.

2019-2021 Trend late presenters (CD4 <200 or CD4<350) as proportion of clients with a baseline CD4 result



CONCLUSIONS

The Covid-19 pandemic negatively impacted health services.

The first 2 years of the Covid-19 pandemic saw an increase of people living with HIV presenting late to care with 1/3 of all having a CD4 presenting with advanced AIDS.

Healthcare teams must be trained to manage complex patients including prophylaxis and treatment of opportunistic infections and adopt a fast-track approach for clients with advanced AIDS, avoiding that Covid-19 takes the control over the HIV pandemic.

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