ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Prevalence of HIV in Kazakhstan 2010–2020 and Its Forecasting for the Next 10 Years

Kamilla Mussina (ID)[1], Shirali Kadyrov[2], Ardak Kashkynbayev[3], Sauran Yerdessov[1], Gulnur Zhakhina[1], Yesbolat Sakko (ID)[1], Amin Zollanvari[4], Abduzhappar Gaipov (ID)[1]

[1]Department of Medicine, Nazarbayev University School of Medicine, Astana, Kazakhstan; [2]Department of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Suleyman Demirel University, Kaskelen, Kazakhstan; [3]Department of Mathematics, Nazarbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan; [4]Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, School of Engineering and Digital Sciences, Nazarbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan

Correspondence: Abduzhappar Gaipov, Department of Medicine, Nazarbayev University School of Medicine, Kerey and Zhanibek Street 5/1, Astana, 010000, Kazakhstan, Tel +77172706297, Email abduzhappar.gaipov@nu.edu.kz

Background: HIV is a growing public health burden that threatens thousands of people in Kazakhstan. Countries around the world, including Kazakhstan, are facing significant problems in predicting HIV infection prevalence. It is crucial to understand the epidemiological trends of infectious diseases and to monitor the prevalence of HIV in a long-term perspective. Thus, in this study, we aimed to forecast the prevalence of HIV in Kazakhstan for 10 years from 2020 to 2030 by using mathematical modeling and time series analysis.

Methods: We use statistical Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA) models and a nonlinear epidemic Susceptible-Infected (SI) model to forecast the HIV infection prevalence rate in Kazakhstan. We estimated the parameters of the models using open data on the prevalence of HIV infection among women and men (aged 15–49 years) in Kazakhstan provided by the Kazakhstan Bureau of National Statistics. We also predict the effect of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) control measures on the prevalence rate.

Results: The ARIMA (1,2,0) model suggests that the prevalence of HIV infection in Kazakhstan will increase from 0.29 in 2021 to 0.47 by 2030. On the other hand, the SI model suggests that this parameter will increase to 0.60 by 2030 based on the same data. Both models were statistically significant by Akaike Information Criterion corrected (AICc) score and by the goodness of fit. HIV prevention under the PrEP strategy on the SI model showed a significant effect on the reduction of the HIV prevalence rate.

Conclusion: This study revealed that ARIMA (1,2,0) predicts a linear increasing trend, while SI forecasts a nonlinear increase with a higher prevalence of HIV. Therefore, it is recommended for healthcare providers and policymakers use this model to calculate the cost required for the regional allocation of healthcare resources. Moreover, this model can be used for planning effective healthcare treatments.

Keywords: HIV, prevalence, forecasting, ARIMA model, SI model

Introduction

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the immune system and can induce Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), which is recognized as one of the most threatening communicable diseases worldwide.[1] HIV is a growing public health burden that threatens millions of people around the world. Since its first discovery in 1983, HIV has become a pandemic affecting every country in the world. According to UNAIDS reports, 38 million people live with HIV and 680 thousand of lethal cases were registered with AIDS-related illnesses.[1]

Although the global situation of HIV is considered more stabilized, in Central Asia and Eastern Europe it remains to be a public health burden. Kazakhstan is a developing country that is largely situated in Central Asia. The spread of HIV in Kazakhstan probably coincided with the time the country gained its independence. Open international borders and labor migration might lead to the spread of infection into Kazakhstan. It is considered that the primary route of transmission of HIV infection in Kazakhstan is intravenous drug use, then followed by high-risk behavior such as sex workers and low condom use.[2,3]

Based on UNAIDS, 35,000 people (aged 15 and over) are living with HIV infection in Kazakhstan, which implies a prevalence rate of 0.3% (adults aged 15 to 49). Since there were 3600 newly acquired HIV cases in 2020, which is a 72% increase with respect to past decade, it is crucial to understand the epidemiological trends of infectious diseases and to monitor the prevalence and incidence of HIV in a long-term perspective.[4,5] Mathematical modeling and time series analysis will allow us to predict future disease development. Such evidence-based information provides the knowledge for healthcare providers that would be beneficial for the implementation of public health procedures for effective prevention and control of the future spread of HIV infection.[6,7] Since there is a lack of studies that forecast new HIV infections in Kazakhstan, it is essential to investigate HIV from a time series forecasting perspective. There exist various approaches to studying time series forecasting. Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA) models provide a family of statistical methods applicable to time series data in various situations.[8]

Since the time series we consider it coming from the HIV epidemic, the nonlinear mathematical compartment models provide another commonly preferred approach.[9,10,16,17] While the latter can be used to make predictions, these nonlinear models proved usefulness also in addressing the effect of various control strategies.[11] In this study, we aimed to forecast the prevalence of HIV in Kazakhstan using statistical ARIMA models and nonlinear epidemic SI models. We also predict the effect of PrEP control measures on the prevalence rate.

Methods
Dataset
In analysis, we use the official HIV prevalence dataset provided by the Agency for Strategic planning and reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan Bureau of National Statistics[12] (Table 1).

Statistical ARIMA Models
An Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average (*ARIMA*) is a family of statistical time series models with nonnegative integer parameters *p, d* and *q* used to predict the future based on past values. For given parameters, we write *ARIMA(p, d, q)*, where *p* is the order of autoregressive part, *d* is the minimum number of differencing operations to convert the series into stationary time series, and *q* is the order of moving average terms. For a given time series $Y_1, Y_2, ..., Y_n$ a simpler model *ARMA(p, q)* can be considered if the time series is stationary. In this case, the *ARMA(p, q)* equation can be written as

$$Y_t = \sum_{i=1}^{p} \phi_t Y_{t-i} + a_t - \sum_{j=1}^{q} \theta_j a_{t-j}$$

where ϕ_i's and θ_j's are parameters and a_i's are unknown residuals assumed to be independent random variables with an identical standard normal distribution. When the time series is not stationary, one needs to integrate differencing into *ARIMA(p, d, q)*. Let *B* denote Box-Jenkins backshift operator given by $B^i Y_t = Y_{(t-i)}$. Then from *ARMA(p, q)* one can derive *ARIMA(p, d, q)* model given by

$$\left(1 - \sum_{i=1}^{p} \phi_i B^i\right)(1 - B)^d Y_t = \left(1 - \sum_{j=1}^{q} \theta_j B^j\right) a_t.$$

We note that *ARIMA(p, d, q)* model with nontrivial differencing has *p+q+1* parameters.

Table 1 Prevalence (%) of HIV Infection Among Women and Men (Aged 15–49 Years) and the Population of the Age Group Between 15 and 49 Years in Kazakhstan

Years	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Prevalence	0.12	0.13	0.14	0.15	0.16	0.18	0.19	0.21	0.23	0.25	0.27
Population	9,077,933	9,092,238	9,091,387	9,072,094	9,041,599	9,010,817	8,983,168	8,960,878	8,948,923	8,951,148	8,969,724

Notes: Data retrieved from https://gender.stat.gov.kz/page/frontend/detail?id=114&slug=15-49-5&cat_id=3&lang=en BHH cat_id=3 [ref]. Data is retrieved from PopulationPyramids.net. Kazakhstan 2010-2014. Available from: https://www.populationpyramid.net/kazakhstan/2010. Creative Commons.

In order to find the order (*p, d, q*) of *ARIMA* that best fits to the given data, we first need to determine minimal differencing *d* that leads to stationary time series. This can be done using the Augmented Dickey–Fuller (ADF) test. Then, *p* and *q* can be selected by minimizing the Akaike Information Criterion corrected (AICc) score given by[13]

$$AICc = nlnMSE + \frac{2(k+1)n}{n-k-2},$$

where *k* is the number of model parameters, n is the sample size, and *MSE* is the mean square error term. AICc score is preferred to the original AIC when the sample size is small as in our case.[13] For *ARIMA(p, d, q)*, we have *k=p+q+1*, when *d* is positive.

Nonlinear Epidemic SI Model

The mathematical model that we study is adapted from Zhao et al, where a two-compartment model is considered. More specifically, the population of sexually active individuals (ages 15–49) *N* is divided as Susceptible (*S*) and HIV Infectious (*I*). The flow diagram is given in Figure 1, where $f(N)$ is the annual rate of the population becoming sexually active, β is the transmission rate, μ is the sum of the annual natural death rate and rate of departure from the sexually active state, and δ is the annual death rate due to the disease.

It gives the following *SI* epidemic model

$$\frac{dS}{dt} = f(N) - \frac{\beta SI}{N} - \mu S,$$

$$\frac{dI}{dt} = \frac{\beta SI}{N} - (\mu + \delta)I.$$

There are essentially three different kinds of models for $f(N)$ that we may consider in this study, namely, constant, exponential, and logistic growth models. The constant model $f(N) = \Lambda$ assumes that annually Λ individuals become sexually active. The exponential model $f(N) = rN$ assumes that the rate of change of population is proportional to the current population *N* with the rate of growth *r*. Finally, the logistic growth $f(N) = rN(1 - N/K)$ assumes that there is a carrying capacity *K* that the population can never exceed.

Adding the equations in our model and recalling $N = S + I$ yield

$$\frac{dN}{dt} = f(N) - \mu N.$$

It follows from the data presented in Table 1 that the population of individuals aged between 15 and 49 can be assumed to be constant; that is, $N(t) = 9018174$ where we took the average between the years 2010 and 2020. It means $dN/dt = 0$, which leads to

$$f(N) = \mu N.$$

With this choice of $f(N) = \mu N$ we have the disease-free equilibrium when $S(t) = N_0$ and $I(t) = 0$. Now it is evident that the basic reproduction number *R* satisfies
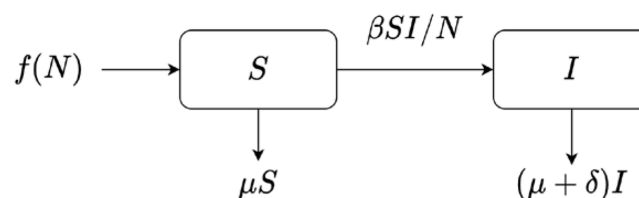
$$R = \frac{\beta}{\mu + \delta}.$$

Figure 1 Flow diagram for the epidemic model SI.

Table 2 Mortality Due to HIV in Kazakhstan

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
68	131	153	175	154	179

To estimate parameters, we use the constraint least square optimization. Since we let $f(N) = \mu N$, we are left with three variables β, μ, δ to estimate. We may estimate δ from HIV mortality data for the period 2014–2019, see Table 2.

The HIV mortality rate for a given year can be obtained by dividing the number of deaths in Table 2 by the population size in Table 1. Since we have δ constant, the point estimator can then be obtained by taking the average of these mortality rates leading to

$$\delta = 0.0016\%.$$

It remains to estimate β and μ. This is done with the built-in function curve_fit in the Python SciPy library that utilizes the Trust Region Reflective algorithm. Since all parameters are positive, we considered a lower bound constraint of 0.01 for both. To measure the goodness of fit we reported the coefficient of determination, r^2 given by

$$r^2 = 1 - \sum(I(t) - \hat{I}(t))^2 / \sum(I(t) - \bar{I})^2$$

where $\hat{I}(t)$ is the estimated number of infectious individuals and $\bar{I}$ is the average number of infectious individuals. To compare the *SI* model with ARIMA we report AICc scores for both.

HIV Control Strategies

Aside from comparing the models and forecasting the prevalence we also consider possible outcomes of HIV control strategies, more specifically, the effect of possible pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) introduction. In the presence of PrEP we split the Susceptible compartment as Susceptible PrEP users (S^p) and Susceptible individuals not using PrEP (S) resulting in three-compartment model $S^p SI$ with flow diagram given in Figure 2.

Here, k is the proportion of PrEP users becoming sexually active, and α is the efficacy of PrEP in reducing susceptibility per act. The corresponding epidemic model is given by

$$\frac{dS^p}{dt} = kf(N) - (1 - \alpha)\beta \frac{S^p I}{N} - \mu S^p,$$

$$\frac{dS}{dt} = (1 - k)f(N) - \beta \frac{SI}{N} - \mu S,$$

$$\frac{dI}{dt} = \beta \frac{SI}{N} + (1 - \alpha)\beta \frac{S^p I}{N} - (\mu + \delta)I.$$

Here, disease-free equilibrium is $(S^p(t), S(t), I(t)) = (kN_0, (1 - k)N_0, 0)$ and it follows that the basic reproduction number is given by
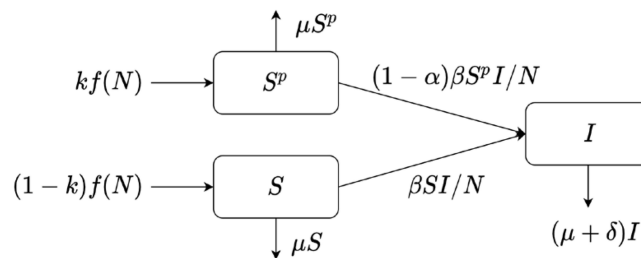

Figure 2 Flow diagram for the nonlinear epidemic model with PrEP.

$$R = \frac{\beta(1 - k + (1 - \alpha)k)}{\mu + \delta} = \frac{\beta(1 - \alpha k)}{\mu + \delta}.$$

For calibration we barrow $f(N), \beta, \mu,$ and δ from the parameters estimates of the *SI* model above. We assume that α=0.5 and simulate how the prevalence changes with varying *k* in [0,1].

Results

Order Estimates for ARIMA

In the analysis, we utilized the Augmented Dickey–Fuller (ADF) test to determine the appropriate value for the parameter d in the ARIMA model.[14,18] Initially, we examined stationarity in the time series, and the ADF test with d = 0 and d = 1 yielded non-significant p-values, indicating the persistence of non-stationarity. However, upon increasing d to 2, we conducted the ADF test again and obtained a significant p-value, suggesting that the differenced series achieved stationarity. This finding is further supported by the 2nd order differencing and autocorrelation plots depicted in Figure 3, where a clearer pattern of stationarity is observed. Thus, based on the ADF test results and visual analysis, we concluded that a value of d = 2 should be utilized for differencing in the ARIMA model.

After selecting d = 2 based on the Augmented Dickey–Fuller (ADF) test, we proceeded to determine the optimal values for the parameters p and q in the ARIMA model. By minimizing the Akaike Information Criterion with correction (AICc) score, we found that the best fit was achieved with p = 1 and q = 0, resulting in an AICc score of −65.94. The results of the ARIMA(1,2,0) model are presented in Figure 4, where the density plot of residuals indicates a normal distribution with a mean of 0.0078. These findings suggest that the ARIMA(1,2,0) model adequately captures the underlying patterns in the data.

Figure 5 presents the graphical representation of the actual HIV prevalence data in Kazakhstan alongside the fitted values obtained from the ARIMA model. Overall, the model demonstrates a satisfactory fit, closely aligning with the actual data, except for the initial two-year period. Table 3 provides a summary of the fitting details, including relevant statistics and parameters, shedding further light on the model's performance.
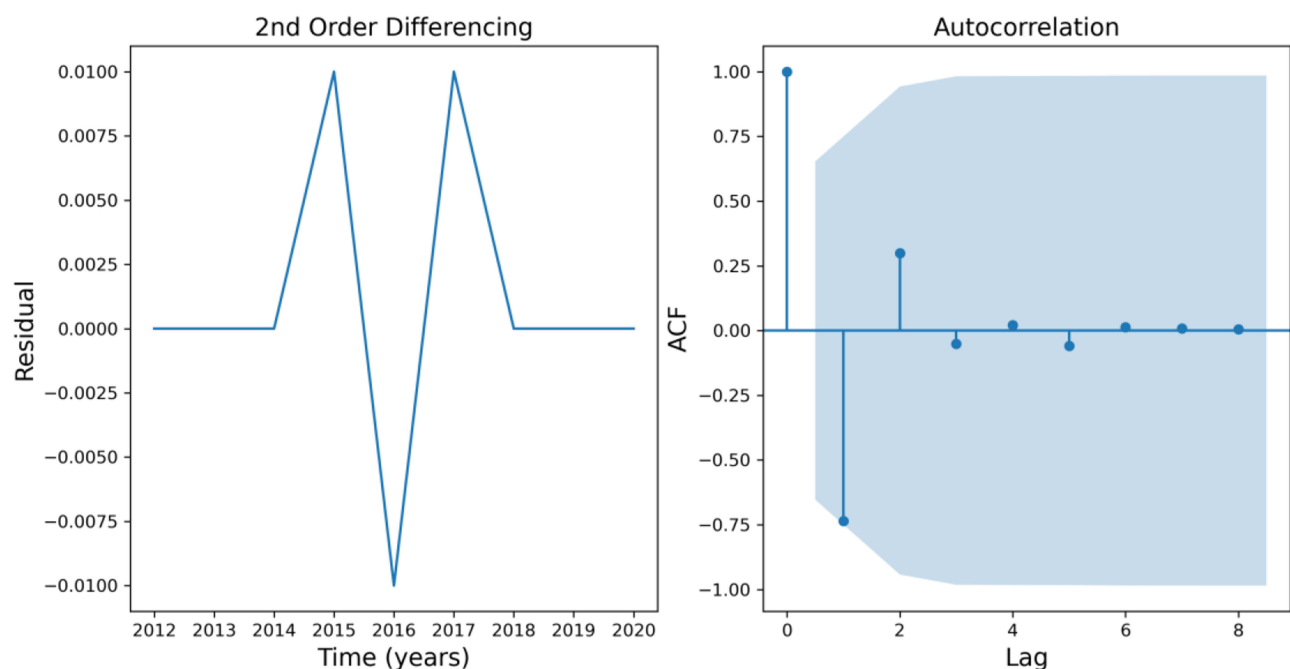

Figure 3 Differencing and autocorrelation when the parameter d=2, 2nd order differencing plot and autocorrelation plot.
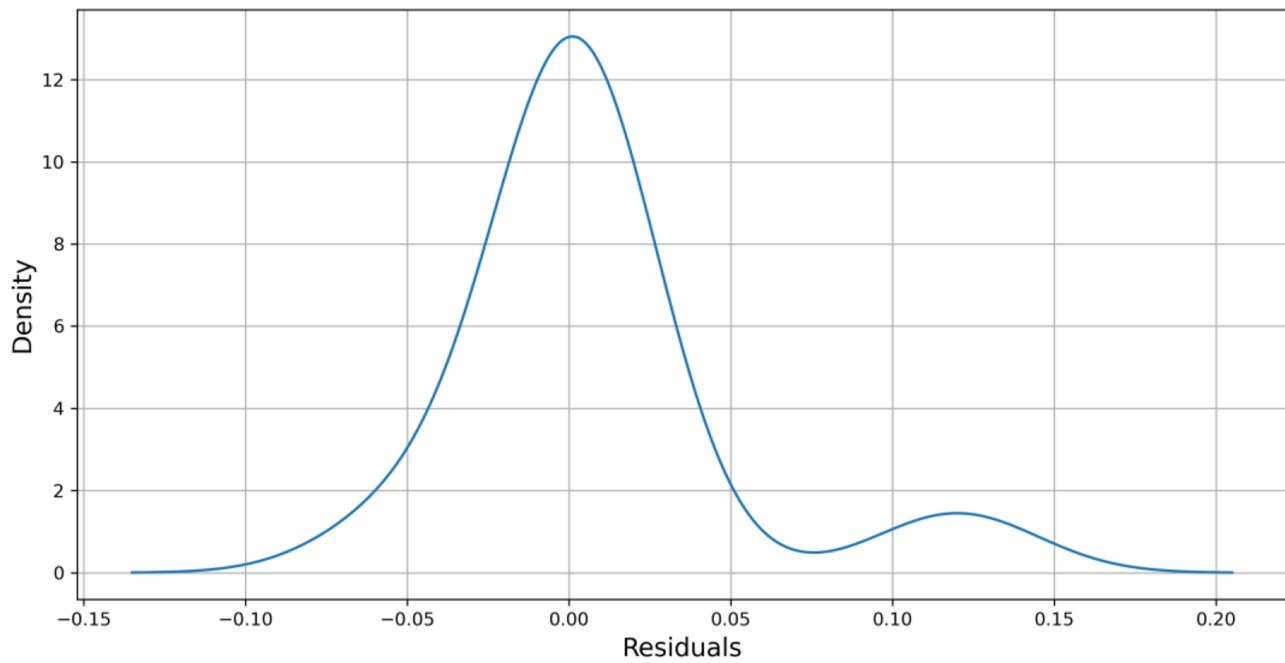
Figure 4 Normality of residuals for ARIMA(1,2,0) where mean equals 0.0078.
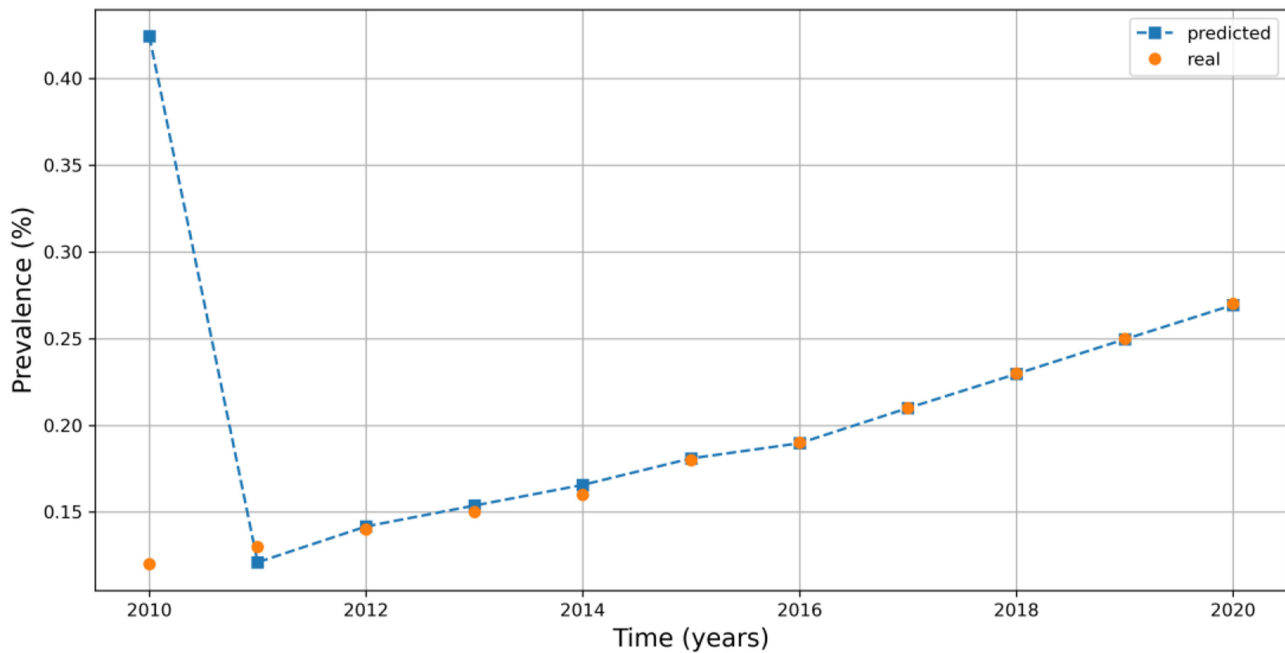

Figure 5 ARIMA prediction of prevalence.

Parameter Estimates for SI

By fitting the nonlinear dynamical SI model to the HIV prevalence data, we were able to estimate the model parameters as follows: β=0.09072 and, μ=0.01. The coefficient of determination r^2 for the fitted model is calculated to be 0.9971, which corresponds to an impressive 99.71% accuracy in explaining the variance in the data. Figure 6 illustrates the comparison between the fitted values and the actual values for the number of infectious individuals, providing a visual representation of the model's performance in capturing the underlying dynamics of the HIV prevalence.

Table 3 The Goodness of Fit Metrics for ARIMA and SI

Models	Number of Parameters	AICc	MSE	r^2
ARIMA(1,2,0)	2	−65.94	0.0016	32.54%
SI	2	−118.26	0.000009	99.60%

Based on the estimated model parameters (β=0.09072 and, μ=0.01), the basic reproduction number (R0) for the HIV prevalence can be calculated as 9.06. This value represents the average number of new infections caused by a single infectious individual in a completely susceptible population.

Using these parameters, we conducted a forecast for the number of HIV active cases up to 2030, as shown in Table 4. The forecast indicates that by 2030, the number of HIV active cases is expected to double compared to the current level. This projection highlights the potential growth and impact of the HIV epidemic if no significant interventions or prevention measures are implemented. It emphasizes the importance of continued efforts in HIV prevention, treatment, and awareness to address the challenges posed by the disease.

Model Comparisons and Prevalence Forecasting

Table 3 provides the goodness of fit metrics for both ARIMA and SI models. According to all three metrics we see that while both models have two parameters, the nonlinear SI model outperforms statistical ARIMA.

Table 5 and Figure 7 provide HIV prevalence forecasting results for both models. While ARIMA predicts a linear trend, SI forecasts a nonlinear increase with higher prevalence.

Controlling HIV with PrEP

In our analysis, we explored the effects of PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) on controlling HIV transmission. Our approach is supported by previous research conducted by Zhao et al, who investigated the impact of population recruitment on HIV epidemics and the effectiveness of HIV prevention interventions using the SI model.[11] Specifically, we examined the impact of varying the parameter k, which represents the proportion of PrEP users
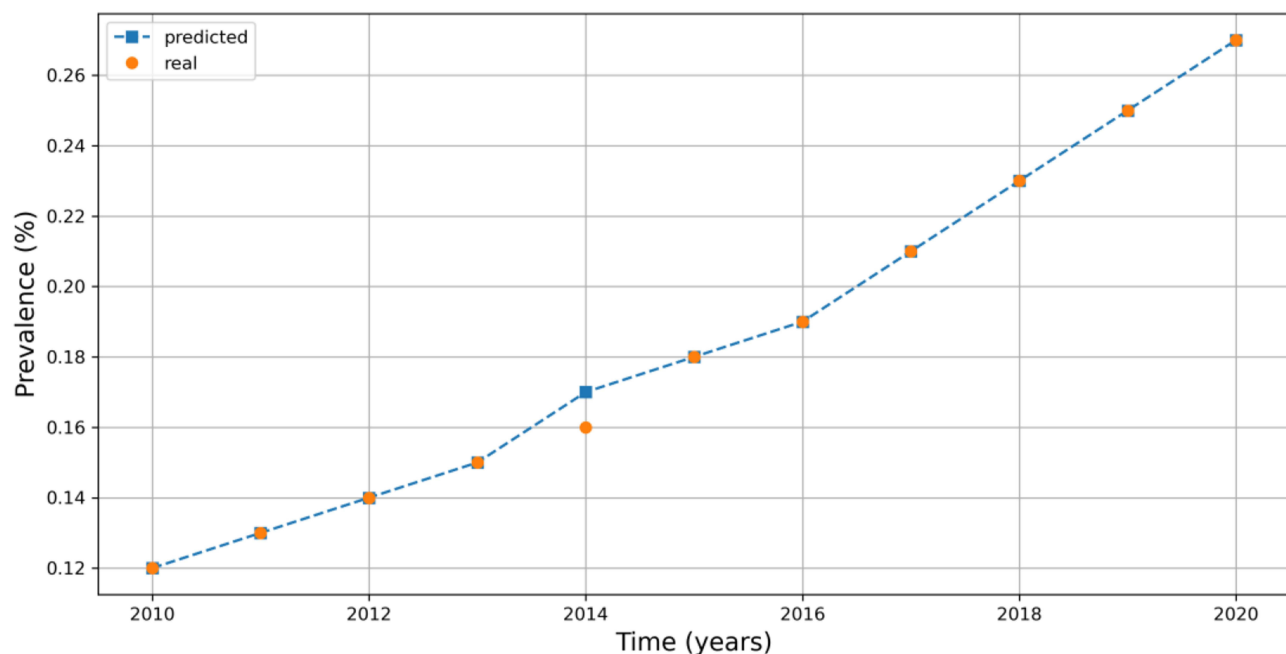

Figure 6 SI prediction of prevalence.

Table 4 SI Predicted Active Cases

2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
26,243	28,442	30,823	33,404	36,200	39,228	42,509	46,062	49,911	54,080

Table 5 Forecasted Prevalence (%)

Models	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
ARIMA	0.29	0.31	0.33	0.35	0.37	0.39	0.41	0.44	0.45	0.47
SI	0.29	0.32	0.34	0.37	0.40	0.44	0.47	0.51	0.56	0.60

becoming sexually active. It is important to note that we did not determine specific values for the parameters used in this study. Instead, we conducted a sensitivity analysis by varying the value of k from 0 to 1 to assess its influence on the predicted prevalence of HIV.

Figure 8 presents the results of the SI model, showcasing the predicted effects of PrEP. In the absence of PrEP, the model yielded a basic reproduction number of 9.06, indicating the potential for rapid transmission. However, by incorporating PrEP and adjusting the value of k, we observed a reduction in the basic reproduction number to as low as 4.53. This finding suggests that PrEP usage can significantly decrease the transmission rate of HIV.[15,19] Furthermore, our analysis indicated a notable reduction in the predicted prevalence of HIV, further highlighting the potential effectiveness of PrEP in controlling the spread of the disease.

Discussion

In this paper, we study the dynamics of HIV in Kazakhstan using statistical and mathematical models. In particular, we use the so-called Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA) statistical tool and a Susceptible-Infected (*SI*) compartmental model of nonlinear differential equations to forecast the HIV prevalence rate in Kazakhstan.[8,11,12] We estimated the parameters of the models using open data on the prevalence of HIV infection among women and men (aged
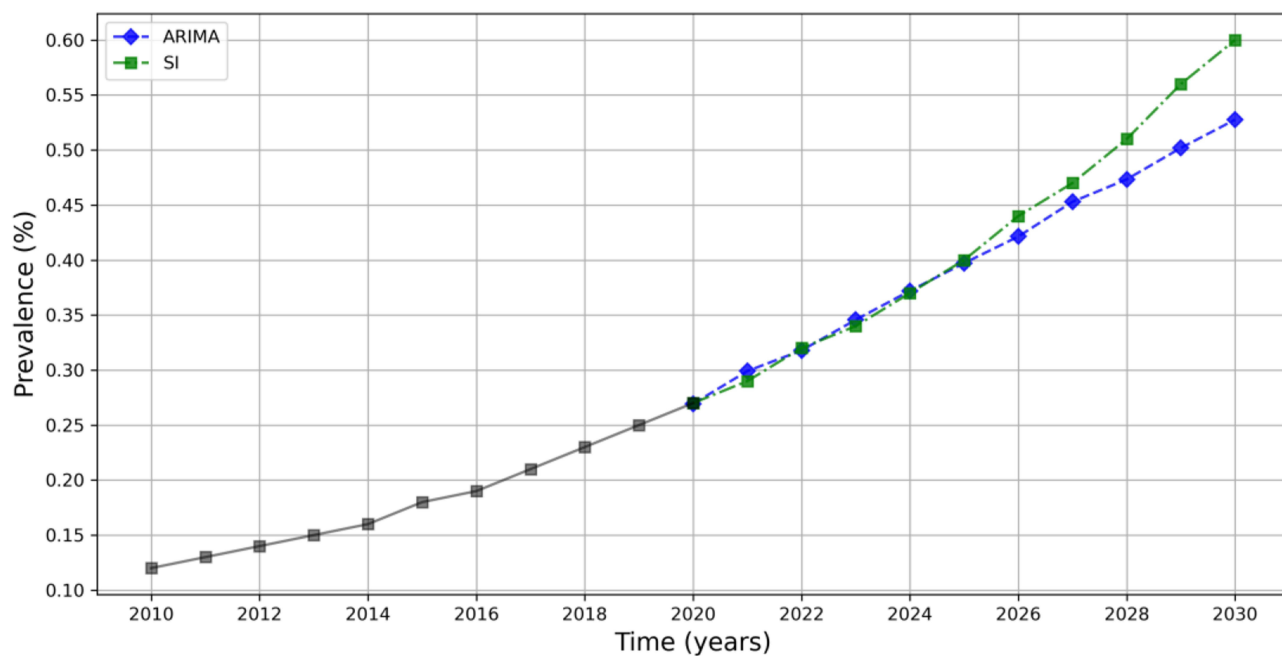

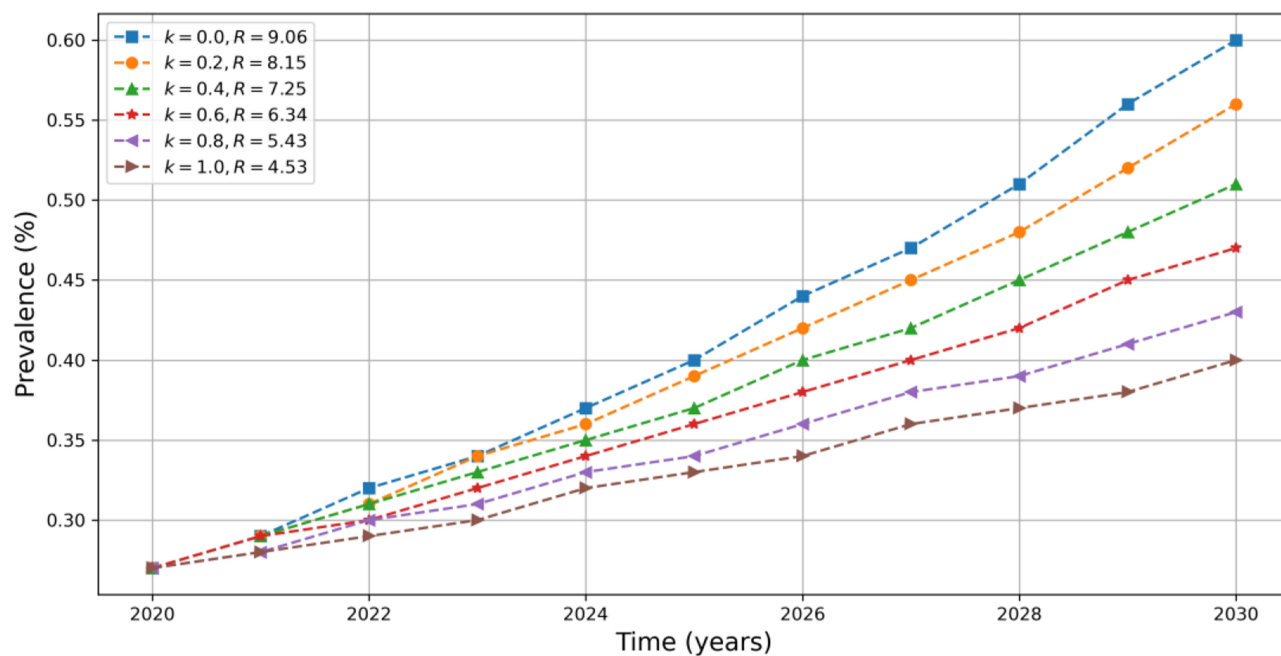**Figure 7** HIV prevalence forecasting by ARIMA and SI models.

Figure 8 HIV prevalence forecasting with PrEP for various scenarios.

15–49 years) in Kazakhstan provided by the Kazakhstan Bureau of National Statistics. Based on this data, the ARIMA model suggests that the prevalence of HIV infection in Kazakhstan will increase from 0.29 in 2021 to 0.47 by 2030. On the other hand, the SI model suggests that this parameter will increase to 0.60 by 2030 based on the same data. As a result, we have the Akaike Information Criterion corrected (AICc) score for the ARIMA(1,2,0) and *SI* models are equal to −65.94 and −118.26, respectively. Moreover, the mean square error (MSE) for the estimated parameters were 0.0016 and 0.000009 for the ARIMA(1,2,0) and the SI models, respectively. Finally, to see the goodness of fit of the models we calculate the R-squared which turned out to be 32.54% and 99.60% for the ARIMA(1,2,0) and *SI* models, respectively. From these analyses, we conclude that the nonlinear mathematical model fits the given data better than the ARIMA model. Furthermore, with the *SI* model it is easy to compute the basic reproduction number R, which plays a vital role in taking public health decisions. In particular, the basic reproduction number of HIV in Kazakhstan is estimated to be 9.06. We further studied the *SI* model for HIV prevention under the pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) strategy. Depending on the coverage of PrEP among susceptible individuals, we provided different scenarios for HIV prevalence forecasting. For instance, if k=0.1, which means the proportion of PrEP users is 10%, then R is equal to 8.15, whereas the prevalence of HIV infection in Kazakhstan will be around 0.25. If k =0.6, then R and the prevalence drop to 6.34 and 0.21, respectively. Therefore, we conclude that prevention strategies such as PrEP can significantly help to mitigate HIV prevalence.

From the perspective of healthcare providers, since HIV prevalence is expected to increase, it will require more healthcare needs, which, consequently, leads to more costs for the country. Therefore, it is recommended for healthcare providers and policymakers to use this model to calculate the cost required for the regional allocation of healthcare resources. Moreover, this model can be used for planning effective healthcare treatments. Further, this model can be used for the study of designing disease-modifying vaccines and also for the prevention of HIV infection in the future.

While ARIMA is a statistical model that can be used in most of the time series analysis, it does not necessarily take into account various compartments involved in the population. In that sense, the SI model is more likely to provide better insight into the epidemic dynamics of HIV. However, with only two compartments, the SI model can be considered a simple dynamical system that does not necessarily reflect other aspects of the disease. To this end, it is possible to design a more complex system that includes age compartments, gender compartments, ethnicity compartments, regional compartments, and so on. However, having a more complex model does not necessarily lead to better forecasting. Another limitation of the SI model considered is

being an autonomous system that assumes all epidemiological parameters are time-independent. Since our data has only 11 points, this assumption does not affect the predictions significantly.

Conclusion

This study revealed that ARIMA (1,2,0) predicts a linear increasing trend, while SI forecasts a nonlinear increase with a higher prevalence of HIV. It is predicted that the prevalence rate will rise almost two times from the results of both models (from 0.29 to 0.47 in ARIMA (1,2,0) and from 0.29 to 0.6 in the SI model). Moreover, HIV control strategies such as PrEP can significantly reduce the predicted prevalence. Since these models can provide us with different scenarios for HIV prevalence forecasting, the results of this study will be beneficial for the prevention and control of HIV infection spread.

Data Sharing Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from Republican Center for Electronic Health of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan, but restrictions apply to the availability of these data, which were used under the contract-agreement for the current study, and so are not publicly available. Data are however available from the A.G., is a PI of the project, upon reasonable request and with permission of Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Informed Consent Statement

Patient consent was waived due to the retrospective nature of the study in which only anonymous data were analyzed.

Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was approved by the institutional review and ethic committee of the Nazarbayev University (NU-IREC 315/ 21092020 on 23/09/2020) with exemption from informed consent.

Author Contributions

All authors made a significant contribution to the work reported, whether that is in the conception, study design, execution, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation, or in all these areas; took part in drafting, revising or critically reviewing the article; gave final approval of the version to be published; have agreed on the journal to which the article has been submitted; and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Disclosure

The authors declare no competing interests in this work.

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