

Discrimination of HIV+ mothers still problematic

Young HIV-positive mothers in Northern Uganda begin to show a more positive attitude towards the health services meant for them. In the areas where Mama's Club has been active, there is a slight increase in uptake of HIV counselling and testing, and other services to prevent mother-to-child-transmission (MTCT). The biggest hurdles to take on are the on-going discrimination against these women, the lack of support from their partners and the absence of treatment in health facilities.

Mama's Club is a local community-based organisation that provides psychosocial support to HIV-positive mothers and their families. Its goal is to increase the number of young HIV-positive mothers receiving maternal health care, in particular MTCT prevention care before and after the baby is born. They also deal with reported violations of sexual and reproductive rights, which prevent mothers from accessing the services they need.

The work of Mama's Club focuses on both sides of the coin. They help HIV-positive mothers directly by giving them information, mental support and a social safety net, and they train health workers to become more accessible and responsive towards these women. Their activities have been documented and evaluated to enable replication and inform future initiatives.

Challenge women's rights violations

The activities of Mama's Club are based on the needs identified among HIV-positive youths who are in of reproductive age, sexually active, and would like to bear children. These activities included capacity-building of mentor mothers, regular home visits, setting up a family support group around the mother, talking with the husband about how he can support his wife and support saving schemes amongst the mothers.

The evaluators conclude that Mama's Club has been influential in changing the attitudes, beliefs and practices of HIV-positive young mothers in attending MTCT prevention care. As a result, more mothers reach out to health facilities for HIV counselling and testing. The programme helps beneficiaries to identify sexual and reproductive health violations, but the challenge of addressing these violations still remains. The most troublesome violations include husbands who do not allow their wives to see a doctor, and cases of severe stigmatisation and discrimination by the family and the community.

Recommendations

- Engage more men (fathers, husbands, etc.) to participate in family support groups.
- Seek for opportunities for the economic empowerment of HIV-positive mothers, for example by providing seed funds into groups' saving schemes.

Facts about the research

Where?

Northern Uganda: Amuru, Gulu and Kitgum

By whom?

Mama's Club

For whom?

Young HIV-positive mothers (under age 25).

Scope of the research

Desk review, focus group discussions and interviews with 109 key informants and health officers.

- Link health workers to legal aid workers, so health workers know what to do in case they witness serious rights violations.
- Increase training and logistical support to mentor mothers so they are better able to support young HIV-positive mothers.

Rutgers

For sexual and
reproductive health
and rights



choice.

**FOR
YOUTH &
SEXUALITY**



IPPF

International
Planned Parenthood
Federation

Simavi
Basic health for all.

**STOP
AIDS
NOW!**