**Health Seeking Behavior of HIV positive Lactating Women at Iba Village**

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**Introduction**

Babies born to HIV positive women are at a risk of contracting the virus during the time that they are breastfeeding. To reduce this risk the women who are HIV positive need to vigilant in seeking health care for themselves or the child whenever there is an illness or any medical related issue respectively. It is against this background that we undertook this small research.

**Objectives of the research**

The objectives of the study were; firstly to find out the services which the women and their babies access when they are sick. Secondly, to find out who influences their decision in accessing health care. Lastly, to find out about the barriers which they face when accessing care.

**Methodology**

The data was collected using qualitative methods. We conducted in-depth interviews with 5 lactating women living with HIV and 4 lactating women who were HIV negative. This was done to do a comparative analysis on whether there were any differences in the health seeking behavior between the HIV positive and HIV negative women. Furthermore, we did two focus groups with lactating women living in Iba village and Health care workers at Jalasi health center respectively.

**Findings**

Nature of illness determines where they will seek health care. For illnesses like malaria, diarrhea, sores and cough they go to the health center as soon as possible. They do this because they are diagnosed before being given treatment. However, for diseases like vaginal candidiasis they seek care from traditional healers where they believe the medication brings quick relief than the care from the hospital. When it comes to starting Anti-retroviral treatment, only women who said they had support from their spouses were able to start treatment earlier and also adhere. This was collaborated by the health care workers who indicated that women who do not have support from spouses do not start treatment or they bring back to the health center the drugs which they were given pending spouse’s approval. For the general illness mothers are the ones who decide when to go the hospital for medical care. For family planning it is mostly spouses and mother-in-laws who decide for the women. Distance, lack of partner support and health care worker bad attitude are some of the things which deter women from accessing health care from Iba and Jalasi health center.

**Conclusion**

There was no difference in health seeking behavior when it comes to illnesses between the HIV-and HIV+ women except that the women who are HIV+ have additional hospital visits to access ART. When a child or mother is sick they would go to the hospital for care. The women who lack partner support have stopped taking ART or have refused to start treatment. As such we believe that enhancing male involvement would ensure that women and their babies take up and adhere to ART.