

FACILITATING AND MANAGING DISCLOSURE - CHALLENGES FACING PEER SUPPORTERS PROVIDING SUPPORT TO PREGNANT MOTHERS.

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Background

Disclosure of HIV status is important in achieving exclusive infant feeding amongst HIV positive mothers. This research aimed to assess and intervene in challenges facing community workers around disclosure amongst pregnant women enrolled in a community randomized intervention trial.

Methods

This was a sub-study of the Good Start study; a community randomized controlled trial assessing the impact of peer support on exclusive infant feeding in three communities in South Africa (Paarl, Umlazi and Rietvlei). Early in the study peer supporters reported low rates of disclosure amongst women they supported. In response a training programme using experiential learning methodology was developed focused on *disclosure counselling in the context of infant feeding*. A train the trainer approach was used to rollout training at the sites. Disclosure rates and peer counsellors experiences were monitored for 6 months.

Results

Disclosure rates improved slightly in one site (Umlazi) but overall remained low. Of 700 HIV positive and HIV negative mothers enrolled at the Umlazi site, only 5% had disclosed to a peer supporter. In two clusters there was marginal improvement but the highest number of disclosures was 18% of all mothers enrolled. Factors were identified as constraints and enablers to disclosure. Constraints include peer supporter skill in eliciting and managing disclosures, fears of stigma, peer supporters' living in close proximity to mother, time required for optimal disclosure counselling, and lack of privacy. Enablers include mother's perceived benefits of disclosure and individual peer supporter characteristics. Indirect disclosures presented some opportunities in the peer support relationship.

Conclusions

Increasing disclosure to community peer supporters is a challenge but necessary to optimal, efficient support. Peer supporters need training and support to improve their skills in eliciting and managing disclosures. Community mobilization efforts may decrease levels of stigma and create environments conducive to disclosure.

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