

## Low Enrollment in Antiretroviral Treatment among Pregnant Women Screened HIV Infected in Informal Health Centers in Cameroon

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**Abstract :** Background: Despite the struggle of the Cameroonian Ministry of Public Health against informal health centers (IHCs) because of their illegality, IHCs are booming in Cameroon and a large part of the population uses them. In 2017, more than 3.000 IHCs were counted across the country. Most of these IHCs have antenatal clinics and they screen pregnant women for HIV. However, there is no data on the Prevention of Mother-To-Child Transmission of HIV (PMTCT) in this informal health sector in Cameroon. This study aimed to investigate the initiation of Antiretroviral treatment (ART) in pregnant women screened HIV positive in IHCs and associated factors. Methods: From January 01, 2018, to June 30, 2020, we carried out a cohort study of pregnant women attending their first antenatal visit and screened HIV positive in informal health centers in the cities of Douala and Ebolowa in Cameroon. Consenting participants were interviewed at two points: at least one week after delivery of the HIV result and three months later. The collected data were entered into Kobo collected and analyzed in SPSS V23.0 software. Results: A total of 182 HIV-infected pregnant women were enrolled in the study. The median age at enrollment was 30 years (IQR, 24-34) and the median gestational age at first ANC was 25 weeks (IQR, 19-31). Overall 61% (111/182) had a secondary level of education, 65% (118/182) were married/in a common-law relationship and 69% (126/182) had no income activity. At their first ANC, 91% (166/182) were naïve to ARV treatment. Among them, only 45% (74/166) initiated ART. The median delay in initiating ARV treatment was 5 days (IQR, 0-25). Of those who have started ART, only 64% (48/74) remained on treatment 3 months later. Conclusion: In order to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV, attention should be paid to IHCs.

**Keywords :** informal health centers, human immunodeficiency, antiretroviral treatment, pregnant women

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