

Elimination of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV/AIDS: A Study of the Knowledge, Attitudes and Perceptions of Healthcare Workers in Abuja Nigeria

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Abstract : HIV infection in children is largely as a result of vertical transmission (mother to child transmission [MTCT]). Thus, elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS is critical in eliminating HIV infection in children. In Nigeria, drawbacks such as; limited pediatric screening, limited human capital, insufficient advocacy and poor understanding of ART guidelines, have impacted efforts at combating the disease, even as treatment services are free. Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) program relies on health workers who not only counsel pregnant women on first contact but can competently provide HIV-positive pregnant women with accurate information about the PMTCT program such as feeding techniques and drug adherence. In developing regions like Nigeria where health care delivery faces a lot of drawbacks, it becomes paramount to address these issues of poor PMTCT coverage by conducting a baseline assessment of the knowledge, practices and perceptions related to HIV prevention amongst healthcare workers in Nigeria. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted amongst 250 health workers currently employed in health facilities in Abuja, Nigeria where PMTCT services were offered with the capacity to carry out early infant diagnosis testing (EID). Data was collected using a self-administered, pretested, structured questionnaire. This study showed that the knowledge of PMTCT of HIV was poor (30%) among healthcare workers who offer this service day-to-day to pregnant women. When PMTCT practices were analyzed in keeping with National PMTCT guidelines, over 61% of the respondents reported observing standard practices and the majority (58%) had good attitudes towards caring for patients with HIV/AIDS. Although 61% of the respondents reported being satisfied with the quality of service being rendered, 63% reported not being satisfied with their level of knowledge. Predictors of good knowledge were job designation and level of educational attainment. Health workers who were more satisfied with their working conditions and those who had worked for a longer time in the PMTCT service were more likely to observe standard PMTCT practices. With over 62% of the healthcare workers suggesting that more training would improve the quality of service being rendered, this is a strong pointer to stakeholders to consider a 'healthcare worker-oriented approach' when planning and conducting PMTCT training for healthcare workers. This in turn will increase pediatric ARV coverage, the knowledge and effectiveness of the healthcare workers in carrying out appropriate PMTCT interventions and culminating in the reduction/elimination of HIV transmission to newborns.

Keywords : attitudes, HIV/AIDS, healthcare workers, knowledge, mother to child transmission, Nigeria, perceptions

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