

Views of women regarding infant feeding practices of HIV exposed children in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province South Africa

Introduction: South Africa consists of many cultural groups who manage pregnancy and lactation differently. Infant nutrition is one of the best practices to promote life and reduce infant mortality rates that are escalating due to various issues. During PMTCT programme women are advised on feeding options. South Africa has 5.6 million people who are HIV positive including children. Parents have choice of choosing the feeding method deemed to be relevant and appropriate for them within their communities. It is not surprising that mothers of newborn infants are somewhat bewildered by what constitutes best practice, and hence they are highly susceptible to the (III) advice of individual health workers or family members. There is scant literature on how choices are made and what influences change more specifically amongst the Tsonga speaking people in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The purpose of the study was to describe the views of women regarding infant feeding practices of HIV exposed children in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province South Africa



Methods: The study was conducted in Vhembe district Limpopo Province. The research approach conducted included research design and methods (population, sampling, data collection, data analysis, ethical measures and trustworthiness of data

this theme. The quotations presented underneath illustrate the problems experienced by breastfeeding mothers.



2.1 Stigma and infant feeding practices

"I have seen the treatment given to a woman who has indicated that she is infected, each it goes to community gatherings nobody wants to sit next to her, it's so pathetic, so I end up, my baby bottle when I am alone and breastfeed when I am in the midst of other people."

"I am forced to breastfeed my child for long time regardless of my HIV status because ever, knows nowadays that once a woman delivers and does not breastfeed it means that person is positive, so I am not ready to face such challenges of being neglected by people in community."

2.2 Mixed feelings regarding breastfeeding and spread of HIV to infants

"Too you don't understand I have a dilemma because I know when I breastfeed my child I be infected and at the same time if I stop breastfeeding he will starve to death"

"HIV has brought many complications to us as women you end up not knowing which believe in whether truly HIV exists or not, even though it's risky because when you breastfeed chances of the baby getting infection is very high"

2.3 Denial of HIV infection

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

THEME	CATEGORIES
Community reactions and in-laws regarding infant feeding fueling the spread of HIV to infants and newborn babies as well as children.	Lack of disclosure makes it difficult for HIV positive mothers to stick to chosen method of infant feeding
Mothers have mixed reactions regarding feeding options	Cultural beliefs regarding infant feeding Stigma and infant feeding practices Mixed feelings regarding breastfeeding and spread of HIV to infants Denial of HIV infection
Physical problems experienced by mothers who are breastfeeding	Sore breasts makes it difficult to breast feed Severe illness resulting in lack of energy hampers feeding options for the baby

Theme 1: Community reaction and in-laws regarding infant feeding fueling the spread of HIV to infants and new-born babies as well as children

Discussions with participants revealed that mothers want to stick to feeding options that are healthy to avoid HIV infection in their babies. However community reactions make it difficult for these mothers to follow safe infant feeding practices. During interviews two categories emerged namely: Lack of disclosure makes it difficult for HIV positive mothers to stick to chosen method of infant feeding and Cultural beliefs regarding infant feeding

1.1 Lack of disclosure makes it difficult for HIV positive mothers to stick to chosen method of infant feeding

Participants indicated that failure to disclose makes it difficult for them to feed their infant correctly in order to avoid HIV infection. Discussion of the category will be given in detail in

subsequent paragraphs. The quotations have been presented below followed by literature control.

"Disclosure is not easy moreover I am not working I rely on my husband and my mother in law pension. I am afraid should I disclose I may be kicked out and I don't have anywhere to go"

"I told my sister about my status from that day she turned her back from me so imagine what is going to happen when I tell my lover when my own flesh and blood treat me like that"

1.2 Cultural beliefs regarding infant feeding



Participants illustrated that babies get hungry at an early age and the need for breast milk supplementation becomes higher.

"Culturally when a baby cries it simply means he/she is hungry a very fine and soft porridge containing herbal medicine is prepared and given to the baby. The herbal medicine in the soft porridge is for the fontanelle to close faster."

Theme 2: Mothers have mixed reactions regarding feeding options

The findings indicated that participants have problems regarding breastfeeding leading them to doubts not knowing whether to breastfeed their babies or not. Three categories emerged from

"I find it difficult for me to understand how I got infected because the man I got married to was the first man to indulge in sexual intercourse with that's why I doubt the testing conducted at the clinic"

"Why me really is it punishment from God or what, I am failing to get to terms with it"

Theme 3: Physical problems experienced by mothers who are breastfeeding

Breastfeeding revealed that there are challenges experienced by mothers which are likely to make breastfeeding problematic. Two categories emerged and the quotations have been presented in the subsequent paragraphs.

3.1 Sore breasts make it difficult to breast feed

"Most of the time my breasts are so sore and painful and I feel breastfeeding would kill me, and as such I would prepare soft porridge and give it to my baby and later I give the baby water to wash off the soft porridge"

"Maybe you were fortunate you have never experienced painful breasts, the type of pain is horrible and when the baby sucks you feel as if a sharp pin is striking your heart"

3.2 Severe illness resulting in lack of energy hampers feeding options for the baby

"When I'm sick I struggle a lot failing to take care of the baby and my in-laws would ask me what I am suffering from, I don't have any choice but lie."



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