

Infant Feeding Buddies:

Strategies for Supporting Mothers for Optimal Infant and Young Child Feeding

Core Group Spring Meeting 2011

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The challenge

- Exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 mos is protective against HIV
- Mixing breastfeeding with other liquids or solids is cultural norm
- Pressure from family and community impacts mothers' abilities to exclusively breastfeed
- Facility-based counseling is insufficient
- Home-based support system is needed



Project goal

- To provide support for HIV-infected mothers at the home and community levels for optimal infant and young child feeding (IYCF)



Infant feeding buddies

- Based on ART/treatment buddy concept
- Mother chooses trusted person to serve as 'buddy' who knows her status
- Buddy attends PMTCT counseling sessions with mother
- Provides support for mother
 - Clinic visits and recall
 - Adhere to infant feeding choice
 - Practice optimal IYCF
 - Counter stigma and pressure from family and community



Phase I: Acceptability

- Objectives
 - Gather background information on existing IYCF practices and support
 - Explore understanding and experiences around stigma
 - Determine acceptability of “Infant feeding buddies” concept
- Eight focus group discussions (Eastern Cape, SA)
 - HIV + mothers, fathers, grandmothers, nurses, counselors
 - Infant feeding and stigma



Acceptability findings

- Knowledge of HIV/PMTCT is high
- Difficulty sustaining infant feeding choices
- Pressures from community and family
 - Disclosure is needed
- Disparities in perception of stigma
 - Lived experience of HIV+ mothers
- Infant feeding buddy could be an acceptable option



Photo: PATH/Evelyn Hockstein



Phase II: Pilot feasibility

- Objectives
 - To determine willingness to participate.
 - To assess mother and buddy experience.
 - To pilot implementation.
- Methods (n=12 mother/buddy pairs)
 - Recruit HIV+ mothers at 3rd trimester ANC
 - Return with buddy for PMTCT counseling
 - Interviews at ANC, 6 days, 6 weeks



Results: Buddy selection

- Buddies chosen were:
 - Sisters 36%,
husband/partner 21%,
boyfriend 21%,
mother 14%, friend 1%
- Mothers selected infant feeding buddy because:
 - He/she was a family member
 - Mother trust this person, previously disclosed



Results: Infant feeding method

- 9/12 mothers chose 'ideal' buddy
- 9/12 buddies felt they were 'ideal' choice
- Improved IYCF practices observed
- Mothers said buddies made IYCF 'easier'



Results:

Perceptions of buddy role

- Mothers

“She reminds me of everything that was said during our visit [to clinic].”

“Someone to confide in, someone who boosts your self esteem.”

“Defends me when anyone says bad things about [me].”

- Buddies

“Knowing you can help someone.”

“You learn so many things from counseling”

“Would be a buddy again.”



Key findings & recommendations

- Infant feeding buddies was successfully integrated into routine PMTCT
- Counseling and support improved IYCF practices
- Leverage and improve upon existing strategies
- Educate health care staff on community and home-based support for optimal IYCF
- Integrate infant feeding buddies into routine PMTCT services



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