Nigeria: WACN Tackles HIV Transmission from allAfrica.com

In as much as mother-to-child-Transmission (MTCT) of HIV is almost entirely preventable where services are available, infant feeding choices for the HIV-infected women remains one of the most contentious issues in efforts to prevent MTCT of HIV in resource poor countries like Nigeria.

Statistics have shown over 7400 new HIV infections daily, about 1000 are in children less than 15 years of age while 90 percent are acquired during pregnancy, child birth and the post natal period through breast feeding.

However, a high percentage of MTCT of HIV can be attributable to breast feeding and yet breast feeding is known to confer several protective health benefits to the infant and it is the cultural norm in many communities in Nigeria.

These facts alone, according to the Chairman of the West African College of Nursing (WACN), Nigeria Chapter, Prof Mildred John pose a dilemma both to health care provider and to the infected pregnant mother.

In recognition of these and others, the Nigerian chapter of WACN organised a 2-day sub-regional workshop on the Prevention of MTCT of HIV/AIDS for nurses in Lagos.

Giving insight into the problem of infant feeding choices, John lamented that HIV infection is wreaking havoc and taking a toll on the population.

Without intervention 15-45 per cent of infants born to mothers living with HIV will become infected, while 5-10 per cent would occur during pregnancy, 20 per cent during labour and delivery and 20 per cent through breast feeding.

John noted that PMTCT can be achieved through giving the HIV positive pregnant women a combination of antiretroviral (ARV) drugs from late in pregnancy until six months into breast feeding as well as ensuring safer infant feeding practices.

In her key note address entitled; "Mother - To - Child - Transmission: Implication on infant Feeding and Nutrition in Children;", Dr. Dayo Lajide from the Lagos State AIDS Control Agency, (LSACA) recommended that infant feeding should depend on a mother's individual situation as replacement feeding can be much more hazardous in resources constrained countries like Nigeria.

She advocated for support for mothers who choose replacement feeding as it could be challenging even in the best of circumstances.

In her words, "Replacement feeding is the only 100 per cent effective way to prevent Mother - To- Child Transmission of HIV after birth. This benefit however, must be weighed against practical difficulties and the risk from other illnesses."

Lajide stressed that as part of efforts to support mothers who choose replacement feeding, counsellors must emphasise the need for sterile equipment and correct dilution and the dangers of keeping prepared formula for long periods in a room temperature.

"Mothers should also be taught how to prevent breast engorgement, particularly without drugs and how to recognise and treat dehydration when it occurs."

To access this article online, go to http://allAfrica.com/stories/200911120952.html.

Niger: Reinforcing Sex Education in High Schools from allAfrica.com

Niamey — High school students in the Niger capital, Niamey, learned to put HIV/AIDS and reproductive health in a broader context during a recent essay contest.

"In preparing my essay I learned that AIDS is not a death sentence," said one female student who requested anonymity. "This kind of exercise should be encouraged because it allows students to increase their knowledge of AIDS and its consequences."

Nearly 500 students in Niamey participated in the recent contest, an initiative of the Réseau National des adolescents et jeunes en population et développement (RENAJEN/POPDEV).
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Students were asked to cover one of two themes: what kind of moral support to offer to a friend who learns he/she is HIV-positive, or what advice to give to someone who does not practice birth spacing, said Hinsa Garba of RENAJEN.

The contest aimed to bring home the concept of responsible sex to students, Ousseini Boubacar, the head of RENAJEN, told IRIN. "At the same time, by participating in this contest the young people give us the opportunity to gauge their knowledge of reproductive health and HIV/AIDS."

Niger authorities welcomed the exercise. "It's a good strategy, not only for educating youths about sexually transmitted diseases, but also to call parents' attention to the necessity to facilitate openness and debate about these subjects," Mallam Issa Mallam Souley, national population director, told IRIN.

Abdoul-Kader Moussa, one of the contest winners, told IRIN: "I said in my paper that I would tell a friend not to be discouraged, and to follow the treatment as prescribed by a doctor." He said this was based on things he had learned in radio and television education programmes about HIV.

Cultural factors sometimes trump education - about 40 percent of adolescents in Niger have sexual relations before age 15, according to the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS); 97 percent of women have never had an HIV test. UNAIDS said the determining factors included low education, economic dependence, and early sexual relations and marriage.

Niger has an HIV infection rate of 0.7 percent. In its 2008-2012 poverty reduction strategy the country aims to keep the rate below that.

[ This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations ]

To access this article online, go to http://allafrica.com/stories/200911120952.html.

HIV/AIDS Leading Cause Of Death Among Women Ages 15-44, WHO Study Shows
from kff.org

In follow-up coverage to the WHO's report on women's health, several news outlets examine the impact HIV/AIDS is having on women around the world. "In its first study of women's health, the World Health Organization said yesterday that the AIDS virus is the leading cause of death and disease among women between the ages of 15 and 44," the Associated Press/Boston Globe reports (11/10).

"Unsafe sex is the greatest risk factor for HIV among women of childbearing age in the developing world, causing one in five deaths among women in this age group, the U.N. agency said," the Daily Mail reports. "Other important contributors include a lack of access to contraceptives and a shortage of iron, the WHO said" (Thornhill, 11/9).

"Women who do not know how to protect themselves from such infections or who are unable to do so face increased risks of death or illness," as do "those who cannot protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy or control their fertility because of lack of access to contraception," the WHO said its 91-page report, the AP/Boston Globe writes (11/10).

The Los Angeles Times' blog "Booster Shots" also examines the WHO report on women and includes comments by WHO Director-General Margaret Chan (Dennis, 11/9).


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