

HIV/AIDS and maternity care in Kenya: how fears of stigma and discrimination affect uptake and provision of labor and delivery services

Abstract:

Although policies and programs exist to promote safe motherhood in sub-Saharan Africa, maternal health has not improved and may be deteriorating in some countries. Part of the explanation may be the adverse effects of HIV/AIDS on maternity care. We conducted a study in Kisumu, Kenya to explore how fears related to HIV/AIDS affect women's uptake and health workers' provision of labor and delivery services. In-depth qualitative interviews with 17 maternity workers, 14 pregnant or postpartum women, four male partners and two traditional birth attendants; as well as structured observations of 22 births; were conducted at four health facilities. Participants reported that fears of HIV testing; fears of involuntary disclosure of HIV status to others, including spouses; and HIV/AIDS stigma are among the reasons that women avoid delivering in health facilities. Maternity workers now have to take into account the HIV status of the women they serve (as well as their own fears of becoming infected and stigmatized) but do not seem to be adequately prepared to handle issues related to consent, confidentiality and disclosure. Importantly, it appeared that women of unknown HIV status during labor and delivery were likely to be targets of stigma and discriminatory practices and that these women were not receiving needed counseling services. The findings suggest that increasing infection control precautions will not be enough to address the challenges faced by maternity care providers in caring for women in high-HIV-prevalence settings. Maternity workers need enhanced culturally sensitive training regarding consent, confidentiality and disclosure. Furthermore, this study points to the necessity of paying more attention to the care of women of unknown HIV-serostatus during labor and delivery. Such interventions may improve the quality of maternity care, increase utilization and contribute to overall improvements in maternal health, while also enhancing prevention of mother-to-child-transmission and HIV care