Strong Women Abakazi Bamaani

Creating a support group by and for HIV Positive Mothers Based in Mbarara Township

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GE/NMF
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A Little Background
Ugandan Numbers Game

- 700,000 women living with HIV/AIDS
- HIV prevalence of 6.5% among reproductive age women
- 1.4 million pregnancies yearly
- 27,000 potential newborn infections
- 40% of women attain optimal reproductive health
While Ugandan law upholds a woman’s right to make her own decisions regarding her reproductive health...
Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

...Her family, society, and healthcare providers often have undue influence on these decisions when HIV is of concern.
What if I want children?

- You are contributing to the HIV burden of the country! (healthcare workers)

- The MOH wants to eradicate pediatric HIV by 2015; you aren’t helping! (government)

- You are going to ruining your children’s lives! (society)

- How are you going to take care of your child? (family)
Okay, so I shouldn’t have kids?

- Give me children…or else! (husband)
- You aren’t a woman unless you have children! (culture)
- She doesn’t have children, she probably has HIV! (community)
- I don’t feel like a woman! (the woman herself)
I have a child, now what?

- Make sure you breastfeed! (family)
- Make sure you don’t breastfeed! (family)
- You should breastfeed! (healthcare workers)
- You shouldn’t breastfeed! (healthcare workers)
The Crux of the Problem

Being a mother is already the hardest job on the planet

This is especially true in a poor nation with limited resources and education

The social and medical burden of HIV complicate this job in unique and profound ways
A Potential Solution

- What if we could bring these mothers, mothers-to-be, and would-be-mothers together?

- Peer support groups have been described as an optimal medium for stress release, social empowerment, and counseling.

- Mothers may be particularly well-suited to provide support to other mothers.
Methodology

Eligibility requirements:
- Chart confirmed HIV-positive women above age 16
- Gravid, Post-gravid, or self-expression of pregnancy interest
- Completed background and interest assessment interview

Recruitment Locations:
- Mbarara National Referral Hospital Ante-Natal Ward
- Mbarara National Referral Hospital Labor And Delivery Ward
- Mbarara National Referral Hospital Post-Natal Ward
- Mbarara National Referral Hospital HIV Clinic

Recruitment Period:
- 7 April 2012 – 30 April 2012
Methodology

- **Interview:**
  - Questions per questionnaire with occasional impromptu questions
  - Answers transcribed by interviewer
  - Translations conducted by nursing students, medical students, or interested mothers where necessary

- **Incentivization:**
  - Women were paid 2,000 Ugandan shillings for completing the interview only as compensation for inconvenience
  - Women were informed that Strong Women was not a charity organization and no other monies would be paid

- **Reminders:**
  - Women who expressed interest were called 1 week and/or 1 day prior to inaugural meeting with nursing student translating
Methodology

40 women interviewed across 4 sites

37 women met eligibility criteria

33 women were interested

24 women came to inaugural meeting

- 2 HIV negative; 1 aged 15
- 3 stated distance too great; 1 wasn’t allowed by spouse
- 11 didn’t show up
- 2 arrived without interviews
Strong Women / Abakazi Bamaani
Inaugural Meeting
30 April 2012 at 13:30
HIV Clinic Mbarara Hospital
The Story behind Strong Women

- Founded to be a support group for HIV-positive mothers run and organized by HIV-positive mothers

- Based on Mother’s Support Group (MSG), founded in Ethiopia by IntraHealth

- Also based on MSG’s model, the groundbreaking mothers2mothers (M2M) created in South Africa
What Strong Women Wants

1. To enhance access to prevention services of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) for all mothers

2. Ensure all pregnant and post-partum women stay on their anti-retrovirals

3. To fight against HIV-related stigma

4. To improve HIV-positive mothers’ understanding of feeding options for their children
More of What Strong Women Wants

5. To reduce the incidence of new sexually transmitted infections and HIV among our girls and women

6. To increase acceptance and use of family planning

7. To increase compassion in our husbands and male partners, including fidelity and stopping of violence

8. To build connections with other programs that support women’s health and women’s rights
Goals

1. Ensure access to prenatal service of women to facilitate delivery of the baby safely
2. Encourage all pregnant and post-maternity women on their anti-retroviral medication
3. To fight against HIV/AIDS stigma
4. To improve HIV positive mothers understanding of having space in the household
5. To reduce the incidence of new sexually transmitted infections and HIV among our girls and women
6. To increase acceptance and use of family planning among post-partum women as they need
7. To improve compliance in our Antenatal and postnatal care services
Strong Women Leadership Squad

- Founder: Chid Iloabachie, MD Candidate 2012 GE/NMF

- Leadership: Volunteered during inaugural meeting
  - Head Mother of Education: Margret Kyomuhangi
  - Head Mother of Organization: Agness Tumuhairwe
  - Head Mother of Outreach: Marion Nabimanya
  - Project Leader: Shallon Murungi
Strong Women Action Basin (SWAB)

GOALS

1. Increase access to prevention services of mother-to-child transmission of HIV for all women.
2. Ensure all pregnant and postpartum women start on their ARV medications.
3. To fight against HIV-related stigma.
4. To improve HIV-positive mothers' understanding of feeding options for their kids.
5. To reduce the incidence of new sexually-transmitted infections and HIV among our girls and women.
6. To increase awareness and use of family planning among postpartum women as they need.
7. To improve comprehension in our husbands and new partners, including fidelity and stopping of violence.
8. To build connections with other programs that support women's health and their rights.
Points of Entry Into Strong Women

Strong Women is partnered with the physicians, nurses, midwives and administrators of Mbarara Hospital to reach potential members.
Sample Meeting Topics

- What is true and false about vertical transmission and how can we prevent it? (30 April 2012 topic)
- What is the best way to reveal HIV status to family members?
- Where can we access anti-retrovirals for free?
- Which strategies can we employ to reduce stigma?
In Strong Women’s Way

- Belief that HIV Organization = Charity
  - Members lose interest without immediate financial gain

- Inconvenience of attending meetings
  - Distant members cannot afford transportation
  - Working members have to miss work
  - Mother’s of young children must bring them
The members of Strong Women are contributing to grow a chicken farm business.

They will also do fundraising from their community.

I will match their contribution with one of my own.
The members of Strong Women are contributing to grow a chicken farm business.

They will also do fundraising from their community.

I will match their contribution with one of my own.

(Not our chicken farm. Not yet anyway)
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