PREVENTION OF MOTHER-TO-CHILD TRANSMISSION (PMTCT) AND SOCIAL WORK RESPONSE.

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ABSTRACT

Services for Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) of Human Immune Virus (HIV) were first introduced in Zimbabwe as a pilot project in 1999. PMTCT was declared a public health priority, and national scale up of these services within antenatal care services (ANC) was initiated in 2001. By December 2005, Zimbabwe had approximately 394 Comprehensive Package PMTCT sites and 988 Minimum Package sites delivering PMTCT services across the country. Social work aims at enhancing the problem solving and coping capacities of individuals, groups and communities. With regards to the prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV, the Social Work profession has played a critical role in providing care, follow-up and psychosocial support for HIV infected women and their babies. This paper considers how social work intervention strategies may be utilized to achieve better health outcomes with regards to prevention of HIV transmission to unborn babies. This is achieved by empowering and sensitizing communities in dealing with PMTCT issues, particularly, community involvement in health care provision, improved access to treatment as well as male involvement and a family centered approach in the PMTCT programmes. Communities may therefore be conscientised with the view of changing destructive attitudes, cultural beliefs and practices which have the potential to increase the risk of mother to child transmission of HIV. This paper further emphasizes the key role that is played by the social work profession in providing psychosocial support to HIV positive pregnant and lactating women, their partners and their families. Furthermore, challenges associated with implementing the PMCT programme in Zimbabwe have also been highlighted.

KEY WORDS: Social work, HIV and AIDS, PMTCT, Psychosocial Support, Infant feeding