

# Understanding ART Adherence

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**VALORISATION**

## VALORISATION

The findings of this thesis will be explained in terms of its relevance at a societal level. In so doing, this section defines the group targeted by the practical implications of this thesis, the actual product and innovation that could be potentially gained from it, and the future planning and implementation that will be formulated.

South Africa has an estimated 8 million people living with HIV and has adopted a policy of providing anti-retroviral therapy (ART) medication to all those who are HIV positive no matter their CD4 or immune system count. This thesis sought to better understand adherence as well as non-adherence to ART among HIV positive pregnant women in Mpumalanga province, South Africa. In order to progress in the battle against the HIV epidemic, it is critical that people who are living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) remain adherent to their ART regime which would lead to the virus becoming undetectable within them and thus they would become non-infectious. If this were to happen among pregnant women then it is very possible to have all babies born in South Africa to be born HIV negative and be sustained that way for the first year of their lives.

The thesis provides a number of practical implications aimed at different national and international role players that interact with pregnant PLWHA on a daily basis. Firstly, the South African Department of Health (DoH) would be instrumental in insuring a national linked computerized patient filing system is put in place so that patients and their health care providers can access their health records anywhere in South Africa and can thus provide the correct intervention as, when and where needed. In cases where needed, the DoH needs to ensure that ART adherence is also measured using dry blood spot (DBS). The thesis does highlight the expense of using DBS but states that it should be used only when needed to ensure adherence is maintained. The DoH can also ensure better patient retention by increasing its patient outreach program and also include pregnant and post-natal mothers into this outreach program.

The practical implications of this thesis are also aimed at national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who would be instrumental at setting up and running the suggested psychosocial support groups. These should be done in conjunction with academics who would research best practice that is theory based and utilise intervention mapping to suggest intervention and then continually improve them for individual situations. Interventions for increasing ART adherence post-partum by potentially utilizing the necessity concerns framework also require further academic research. These sort of interventions either if government initiated or initiated by NGOs or academics require funding and thus international donors as well as the private sector need to be brought aboard. The findings of this thesis is therefore also aimed at them as a critical component.

The five chapters that make up the empirical component of this thesis have already been published in international peer reviewed journals. Apart from these five articles, numerous other articles have been published by the research team and further articles are planned. The findings of the study will also be presented at international conferences as well as via electronic and paper based media briefs. As a large and important component of the recommendations involve the South African government, policy briefs, specifically aimed at the DoH, will be written to highlight the problems and recommendations. The study observations and findings have encouraged the research team to consider writing proposals and seek funding for increasing the uptake of PMTCT in South Africa, increasing the number of children on ART as well as to investigate the impact of ARVs on early childhood development. Concept notes are currently being explored.

