

Male partner involvement in prenatal and postnatal care

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Valorisation

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Positive male partner involvement in maternal and child health and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) has an important social value as it promotes healthy families ultimately contributing to healthy families and a healthy society. The work in this thesis provides support for concerted efforts to work with both men and women within the South African context, to explore the important roles of all members of the family, in working together to provide the best possible health outcomes for mothers and infants.

Furthermore, while this thesis emphasises the importance and benefits of positive male partner involvement in maternal and infant health including PMTCT, it also highlights the influences of male partner involvement on the health of mothers and infants in PMTCT programs. The opportunities for involving men in this regard are also highlighted. This information is vital for future use by policymakers and health care providers working in the maternal, new-born and child health areas, particularly in PMTCT programs in rural South Africa.

Future interventions aimed at promoting positive male partner involvement in the health of mothers and infants in PMTCT programs should involve health care providers, mothers, and most importantly men as the agents. While health care providers have an opportunity during clinic visits to encourage positive involvement of fathers in maternal and infant health, mothers have many opportunities to do this.

Men as agents in promoting positive involvement of male partners in maternal, infant, and child health is vital and may be approached in different ways. Initiatives to engage men in community and clinic settings, and also engage boys and men of all ages should be identified. Initiatives may build on the already existing initiatives in South Africa such as the 'Take a boy child to work' initiative that was established as a campaign against the neglect of young men in society, and the previous 'Men as Partners' program in South Africa which aimed to promote men's constructive role in sexual and reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS.

A range of issues needs to be considered in the planning and development of interventions aimed at increasing male partner involvement in PMTCT programs in rural South Africa.

Firstly, promotion of positive attitudes towards male partner involvement in maternal and infant health and PMTCT in the communities in rural South Africa. This is even more necessary among men and, to be specific, the male partners of HIV positive women. Particular focus should be on making PMTCT services in public health facilities to be more inviting and responsive to male partners and improving male partner accessibility to these facilities. Male partner involvement interventions should encourage good communication skills among intimate partners. To achieve positive maternal and infant health outcomes male partner involvement interventions should also be tailor-made to achieve these.

The active engagement of men in the health of mothers and infants in PMTCT programs is thus important due to its contribution to healthy families, healthy communities, and a healthy society.