We must protect the children!

Breast/chestfeeding prohibitions

Alison Symington, HIV Justice Network

Not a Criminal: Safe Cities and Justice for All People Living with HIV
September 25, 2023
17:45 – 18:45
Emerald Room
Children & HIV in 2022

• 2.58 million children aged 0-19 were living with HIV.
• About 130,000 new HIV infections among children under five.
• Each day, approximately 274 children died from AIDS-related causes.
Reproductive Coercion

- intimate partner violence
- interference with contraception
- exclusion of parents &/or children (e.g., school, childcare, housing)
- Misleading/incomplete health information
- abusive obstetric care
- forced sterilization

High Court of Kenya
September 21, 2023

The forced sterilization of four women living with HIV constitutes a violation of their fundamental rights, including dignity, freedom from discrimination, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, and the right to establish a family.
Punitive approaches to breast/chestfeeding

• Preventing HIV transmission has been used to justify surveillance, judgement, and limitations on the autonomy and decision-making of parents living with HIV.

• Caregivers living with HIV have lost their jobs.

• 14 women have faced criminal prosecution for breastfeeding.

• Parents may hide their infant feeding choices to avoid stigma, violence, service interruption, and child welfare intervention.
Impacts

• parents living with HIV may not seek expert medical advice and family or community support.

• children may be taken away from loving parents.

• infants may not receive the best nutrition for their situation.

• women living with HIV may face punishment ranging from loss of employment to incarceration.

• spreads misinformation and stigma about HIV.
WHO 2023

• If a mother living with HIV is taking ART and maintains a suppressed viral load during pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding, the risk of vertical HIV transmission can be as low as <1%.

• If a mother is taking ART and is undetectable prior to and throughout pregnancy and delivery, there is no risk of transmitting to the infant during pregnancy.

• A pregnant mother living with HIV whose viral load is suppressed within four weeks of delivery is at low risk of transmitting HIV to their infant.

• WHO recommends breastfeeding for women taking ART.

(The Role of HIV Viral Suppression in Improving Individual Health and Reducing Transmission, Policy Brief)
Real safety and justice

- complete and accurate information regarding the risks and benefits of breast/chestfeeding.
- comprehensive healthcare, treatment and social supports.
- no criminal charges for breast/chestfeeding while living with HIV.
- no removal of children from their parents/guardians because of breastfeeding by a person living with HIV.
- supportive public health interventions.
- no one should lose their job working with children because of their HIV-positive status.
* Video & Discussion Guide available via www.hivjustice.net.
Thank you!

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