Improving Access to HIV-Related Healthcare in Zimbabwe Among Young Mothers Living with HIV: Qualitative Lessons from Zvandiri’s Young Mentor Mother Program

Background

HIV disproportionately impacts adolescent girls and young women living in Southern Africa. Rates of mother-to-child HIV transmission are also elevated in this group, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to improve the health of young mothers living with HIV. Zvandiri, a non-profit organization in Zimbabwe, founded a peer-led care model called the Young Mentor Mother (YMM) program in response to this issue.

Methods

With support from Zvandiri, we conducted semi-structured virtual interviews (N=29) among Zvandiri staff and YMMs to identify the benefits and challenges of the YMM program. We applied deductive and inductive thematic analyses to transcriptions and performed a qualitative analysis using Dedoose software.

Results

Participant narratives revealed several themes, including three vital benefits from the YMM program: 1) peer-support, 2) holistic care, and 3) women’s empowerment. Barriers to the success of the program identified from interviews mapped onto the social-ecological model, whereby structural factors (lack of funding, food insecurity), community-level factors (HIV-related stigma, socio-cultural differences in accepting HIV care), and interpersonal factors (intimate partner violence) were found to impact the implementation and scale-up of the program. Barriers to scaling-up the YMM program included limited funds, lack of resources, and cultural and geographic differences. We also identified socio-structural challenges to scale-up, such as intimate-partner violence, food insecurity, and HIV-related stigma.

Conclusion

Zvandiri’s YMM program fills an important gap in HIV care for young women and girls and has several benefits, such as peer-support, holistic care, and women’s empowerment. Future research focused on the perspectives of clients, stakeholders, and young fathers will further inform the scaling of the program to new countries and regions.