

Men stay away from antenatal visits



Queue. Expectant mothers line up for maternity relief items delivered at a health camp organised by Kitovu Mobile Aids Organisation last month. PHOTO BY MALIK FAHAD JUNGU

Scared. The men say the manner in which the tests are done is not confidential which may lead to domestic violence in case one of the spouses is found positive.

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KAMPALA. Masaka Hospital authorities have raised concern over the increasing number of expectant mothers who seek antenatal care services without being accompanied by their spouses.

The men are reportedly shying away from fear of a compulsory HIV/Aids testing carried out at the facility.

Dr Senyondo Gonzaga, the head of maternity department at Masaka Hospital, says despite the incentives being put in place to attract men to support the programme such as giving first priority to mothers who come for antenatal care with their husbands, many men have not welcomed it with open hands.

"Only one in every ten mothers come for antenatal care services while accompanied by a partner," Dr Senyondo says.

Ms Juliet Kintu, the officer in charge of maternal and child care unit at the hospital reveals that men only escort their wives on first time pregnancies and disappear on subsequent pregnancies.

Ms Rebecca Najemba, a resident of Nyendo, a Masaka Town suburb, who is expecting her second child, notes that her man is not supportive when it comes to escorting her to hospital.

"During my first pregnancy, he [husband] would escort me on the entire four antenatal visits, but nowadays he doesn't mind,

ing over it as many men do not want to test for HIV, especially in the presence of their partners.

"Generally, men have a poor health seeking behaviour in what is termed as men's health seeking gap. They [men] do not want to test for HIV or other infections," Dr Senyondo says.

But he notes that it gets worse when they have to do it in the presence of their partners because many tend to depend on the results of their spouses.

Others, according to Mr David Lubega, a volunteer HIV/Aids counselor at Masaka Hospital, who already know that they are HIV positive, do not want their spouses to know their status which makes it hard for them to escort their spouses.

Although Mr Joseph Makumbi, a father of two and a resident of Nyendo, attests to this, he says it is due to lack of privacy while testing for HIV as a couple that compounds fears to escort the wife.

"Such issues are meant to be confidential due to the likely disparity in results which may lead to violence at home. What if I emerge positive and my wife is negative, or vice versa? This definitely leads us to nothing apart from violence," Mr Makumbi, whose wife is expecting, says.

Other underlying factors

Besides HIV/Aids testing, Ms Kintu notes that many men are in extra martial affairs and fear escorting their expectant partners because information might leak to their legal wives.

"Some [expectant mothers] are teenagers who are impregnated by irresponsible men who can't even take care of them, and you expect them to escort their expectant moth-

KEY ISSUES

Launch. In 2014, Uganda launched a male involvement strategy, to encourage men accompany their expectant wives for antenatal care so as to increase their participation in reproductive health.

Findings. This followed findings from several studies that revealed that male involvement in antenatal care (ANC) can reduce the risk of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and infant mortality by more than 40 per cent and enhance good health outcomes of women and newborns.

Proposed Bill. According to the HIV and Aids Prevention Control Bill 2009, which is still before Parliament, a pregnant woman and her partner would be subjected to a routine HIV test to prevent transmission to the baby.

this because a mother in such a situation is cared for differently," Ms Mamugosa notes.

Ms Mamugosa further says men are briefed about the likely changes and such visits help them to know and follow such trends like minor disorders that come along with pregnancy like being sickly and rude.

Considered strategies to bring men on board

Ms Kintu says through non-governmental organisations such as Kitovu Mobile and The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO), they are trying to have house-to-house campaigns to educate men about the need to escort their spouses for antenatal service with a sole aim of promoting the elimination of mother-to-child HIV transmission.

The HIV/Aids scourge in Masaka District is still a major health hazard and the prevalence currently stands at 10.6 per cent, involving that an estimated 32 637 people are

briefly

Govt tasked on hospital

MUBENDE: Mr John Kisembo, the officer-in-charge of Kasambiya Health Centre III, has asked government to elevate the facility to a Health Centre IV due to the rapidly increasing number of patients in the area. Mr Kisembo on Saturday cited the antenatal section where admissions have risen from an average of 50 deliveries to 70 per month. "During the month of March alone, we recorded 204 expectant mothers who came for antenatal services. We have been forced to improvise a corridor to the maternity ward since our antenatal room cannot ably handle this overwhelming number of mothers," he said. [Josephine Nnabasaale]

MP advises farmers

KAYUNGA: Ntenjeru North MP Amos Lugolobi has advised farmers in the area to harvest water so that they can use it during long dry spells. Mr Lugolobi, who was addressing residents in Kiwangula Town, Busaba Sub-county on Saturday, said many farmers should think about constructing underground water tanks for water harvesting to irrigate their crops and farm throughout the year. He said they should use irrigation to grow high value crops such as vegetables and fruits. "It might sound as an expensive venture but if adopted, it will save you from water scarcity at a time when you need it most," he said. [Fred Muzaale]

Donor to stop funding

MASAKA: More than 400 pupils of William Hills Foundation are likely to lose the opportunity to attain free education following the decision by the donor agency to withdraw funding. Mr Heini Seitz, a German national, on Saturday declared the intention to stop sending in funds at the foundation which is on Masaka-Bukakata road in Mukungwe Sub-county. The declaration followed Masaka Resident District Commissioner Joe Walusimbi's announcement that he would hand over the foundation property to Justice Nantale, the cofounder, having separated with Mr Seitz. [Ali Mambule]

Three killed in accident

KALUNGU: Three people are reported to have perished in a motor accident in Bukulula Sub-county on Kampala-Masaka road last Saturday. Police identified the deceased as Kennedy Mwanje, a house broker in Lukaya Town, Tom Mugenyi, a boda boda rider and a woman only identified as Nasuuna, all residents of Lukaya Town Council in Kalungu