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Topic: The first 1000 days, infant feeding, and early childhood development

Title: Barriers to practicing exclusive breastfeeding in communities

Presentation Type: Poster

Background

Exclusive breastfeeding rates at six months in South Africa remain at 25% (according to HSRC), despite the policy declarations and recommendations that all mothers should breastfeed exclusively for the first six months. Women's feeding practices are influenced by factors beyond health facilities such as cultural, social and psychological factors. Inadequate community engagement on health improving interventions, and pressure from family member's impacts women's compliant to infant feeding guidelines.

Methodology

PATH facilitated community dialogues in four supported districts in South Africa. The dialogues targeted pregnant women, women with young children, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, traditional healers and community leaders. In each district, the dialogue was attended by about a 100 people. They were divided into three groups that were representatives of the attendees. The topics for discussion included nutrition (breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices), the usage of the Road to Health Booklet that has infant feeding messages and understanding of Early Childhood Development practices with specific reference to stimulation and play.

Results

Participants had good knowledge of infant feeding recommendations including benefits of breastfeeding as promoted in health facilities. However, cultural practices such as having to introduce a child to ancestors, and belief that a baby can never become full on breastmilk alone prevent them from encouraging exclusive breastfeeding for six months. Going back to work and socio economic circumstances are also seen as barriers. There was very little awareness on the RtHB as a parent tool for guidance on feeding messages, play and stimulation.

