

**Title: Stigma the underlying cause of poor access for HIV/AIDS health care in rural and urban communities in Uganda**

Authors; I. Birungi<sup>1</sup>, T. Nakyanzi<sup>1</sup>, H. Tumwujukye<sup>1</sup>, S. Nambi<sup>1</sup>, M. Motevalli<sup>3</sup>, P. Musoke<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Makerere University Johns Hopkins University Research Collaboration, <sup>2</sup>Makerere University College of Health sciences department of pediatrics, <sup>3</sup>National Institute of Health, Baltimore USA

**Abstract**

**Introduction;** Uganda like other developing countries has extreme challenges in providing health services to the majority of the population. Despite the availability of some services through the Ministry of Health and other private health providers, utilization of health services among different groups including children, mothers and pregnant women especially those living with HIV/AIDS is still low.

**Objective;** This study sought to identify health gaps in accessing quality maternal and pediatric HIV health care in rural and urban communities in Uganda.

**Methods;** A cross sectional study was carried out and data collected using an interviewer administered questionnaire, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) methods were used. Data from 788 households and 4 Focus group discussions was analyzed.

**Results;** Stigma was identified as the major factor hindering mothers and children from accessing HIV/AIDS health services. Among the mothers, 78.8% (affluent), 72.4% (semi urban), 73.8% (urban slum), 57.5% (typical rural) and 58.3% (rural slum) mentioned stigma as the major factor that hinders them from accessing HIV/AIDS health services. Attendees of the Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) preferred to have ANC and delivery services from the TBAs because of fear of being tested for HIV at the hospital.

**Conclusions;** Stigma is still huge across different demographic and socio economic strata. Increase in availability and quality of health services will not guarantee full utilization of services by people living with HIV/AIDS. There is therefore need for innovative ways to eliminate stigma if health services are to be fully utilized.