**Economic burden and mental health of primary caregivers of perinatally HIV exposed and infected adolescents from Kilifi, Kenya**

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**Abstract**

**Background**. Eighty percent of perinatally HIV exposed and infected (PHEI) adolescents live in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), a setting also characterized by huge economic disparities and higher burden of mental health disorders. Navigating adolescence while living with HIV presents specific challenges not only to the affected youth but also to their primary caregiver and/or immediate family. Caregiving is crucial to the management of chronic illness such as HIV/AIDS, but the economic costs and mental disorders borne by caregivers of PHEI adolescents often go unnoticed. In this study, we establish the economic costs and evaluate the mental health of caregivers of PHEI adolescents from rural Kilifi, Kenya.

**Methods:** We used a cost of illness analysis approach. Mental health was assessed using Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9). Cross-sectional data were collected from 121 primary caregivers of PHEI adolescents in Kilifi. Economic costs were categorized either as direct costs (costs of medicine, consultation, diagnostic procedures, food and travel in seeking care) and indirect costs (productivity losses to caregivers). Indirect costs were estimated as value of productive days lost by a primary caregiver while caring for a PHEI adolescent. We employed descriptive statistics to assess the economic burden and mental health of primary caregivers in the course of caring for a PHEI adolescent.

**Results:** Total monthly direct and indirect costs per primary caregiver was Ksh 2773 ($ 27.73), on average. Key drivers of direct costs were transportation (67%) and medications (13.7%). Total monthly costs represented 28.3% of the reported caregiver monthly earnings. About 10.7 % (PHQ>=10) of primary caregivers reported depressive symptoms. Indirect costs (productivity costs) were relatively higher on caregivers with depressive symptoms.

**Conclusion:** The evaluation shows that HIV/AIDS has caused a significant economic burden and mental health impact on caregivers while caring for PHEI adolescents. Results underscore the need for developing socio-economic programs to improve mental health of caregivers and help them reduce economic burden.