

A Help that restores hope of a single mother



Zahara, HIV positive mother of two, receives regular health education and follow up services from the Urban Health Extension Professional, Kidist, who also helped her and her children test for HIV.

Zahara, 30 is a single mother of two who lives in Addis Ababa in the customarily called Bistrate Gebreil area. Zahara left her home town, Jimma, looking for better life. But life in the big city wasn't easy as she imagined it- she became a single mother in a city where she had no relative and friends. Yet she managed to work and raise her children as single mother. But, since recently Zahara noticed her health has started deteriorating- she gets repeatedly sick from various diseases. Zahara said this made her suspected she might be exposed to HIV. But fear kept her from testing. But it was the fear to know if she ever exposed her children to HIV that was causing her major anxiety. "I had long days of worrying with so many sleepless nights." expresses, Zahara the time before her testing.

A month ago, with the help of urban Health Extension Professional, Kidist, Zahara and her two children were tested for HIV. Zahara found out she is HIV positive but she breathed a sigh of relief knowing her kids are HIV negative. "Now, I have less fear and more hope in my life. God sent Kidist to end my doubt. She told me I can live longer and healthier with the help of the medicine. I regret why I didn't test earlier. All I want is to see my kids growing healthy." says Zahara who is now enrolled in pre-ART counseling sessions at Woreda 03 Health Center.

According to Ethiopian Demographic Health Survey (DHS),2011¹ adult prevalence to HIV in Ethiopia is estimated at 1.5%. However prevalence varies according to age, sex, gender and geographical location. According to the 2011 DHS, adult prevalence was almost twice as high among females compared to males at 1.9% versus 1.0% respectively. The distribution of HIV prevalence also varies by age, the peak to be females in the 30-34 years age group.

¹ 2011- the year in which the last Ethiopian Demographic Health Survey (DHS) was conducted



Zahara receiving pre-ART counseling at Woreda 03 health center

For Kidist, approaching and convincing Zahara to test for HIV was a challenge. She had to visit her twice a week for two months before Zahara agree to test. “I had to build her trust and her knowledge about the benefits of knowing her HIV status. She assumed knowing her status would kill her; but in the contrary, it became her new start to live better.” says Kidist who currently serves around 475 households in her catchment area.

According to Kidist, provision of targeted HIV services to the HIV priority population including for discordant-couples, widowed persons, divorced individual, and TB

cases/suspects requires a skill to proper identification and reaching them at the households.

In support of the urban health extension professionals, the USAID funded Strengthening Ethiopia’s Urban Health Program (SEUHP) works to build the capacity of UHE-Ps in 40 cities/towns in health need and risk assessment and service provision skills to enable them with the skills of building rapport with beneficiaries, prioritizing vulnerable individuals and making efficient referrals to health services through training, job aid provision and continues supportive supervision mechanisms.

SEUHP provides training on core public health issues including, HIV, MNCH, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and Interpersonal Communications (IPC) for a2200 UHE-ps in 49 cities/towns. For Kidist, the skill and knowledge she got form the training on HIV and supportive supervisions have enabled her with better HIV risk assessment skills. “I am now able to identify people most at risk of HIV, and quickly refer for services to health center.”

According to Kidist, referral of clients to and from health facilities is vital to continuity of care. She works closely with the ART team in the Woreda 03 Health Center. She invites them to the field to provide counseling on adherence and positive living. She calls the health center staffs “her backing.” In this regard, SEUHP supports UHEP to improve referral and linkages between community and health facilities by taking the lead in initiating referral and linkage meetings between UHE-ps and Health Centers (HCs) and by providing referral forms to UHE-ps to ensure a functional and sustainable referral system. Poor adherence and defaulting from ART treatment represent major challenges for the ART program in Ethiopia. Only 70.3% of individuals who have ever started ART are currently on treatment.²

Kidist keeps providing Zahara health education and adherence counseling services with full hope to see her in better health condition.

² Federal HAPCO, Country progress report on the HIV response, 2014, Ethiopia.