Real-life experiences of breastfeeding women and infant care in the context of HIV/Aids: A narrative review

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In this paper, the authors do not enter the debate with new data on the relative risks of breast and formula feeding for infants in the context of HIV/AIDS in resource poor countries. Instead, the authors want to reflect briefly on what appear to be entrenched opinions on both sides of the feeding debate, opinions that are as much ideologically as rationally generated, and that are so forceful that they may deflect careful consideration of all the factors involved in a particular situation. The findings in this research paper identify the wider importance of baby feeding practices and experience that goes beyond simply providing the baby with nutrition. The authors argue that choice should not be offered nor based on a reductionist conception of infant feeding divorced from its role in infant care. Apart from the issues of resources, guidelines generated without understanding of the determinants, context and role of infant feeding in child care are likely to lead to guilt and confusion in women who are apprised of their responsibility to prevent HIV transmission to their infants, but who are left uninformed and unsupported about how they may realistically protect their infants in a way which is intelligible within their cultural experience and social expectations. This paper explores South African women’s, who belong to a mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) programme, views of their experience of breastfeeding and infant care in the context of HIV/Aids through the use of debate and informal discussions as a narrative tool.

Biography

P Van Der Merwe is currently a senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychology at University of South Africa (Unisa). She obtained a D Litt et Phil degree in Psychology. Her main academic and research interests concern the important role that Emotional Intelligence (EI) can play in an social context. She has published in local and international accredited journals and presented a variety of papers in South Africa and abroad with the emphasis on this research theme. The caring role of the counsellor with particular emphasis on a positive, sensitive and understanding approach is the main concern of her. In the light of this, the invitational and friendly climate has to be emphasised to ensure that the client – as a person-in-totality – feels valued.

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