Gender Issues Influencing Zika Response in Antigua

To better understand the real-time situation of Zika-related health services for women, men, couples and families, project stakeholders commissioned this gender analysis to look at existing services, challenges, and opportunities. The analysis, conducted in two ASSIST-supported parishes in Antigua, includes information gathering from patients and health care providers in five health facilities. A total of 70 persons shared their experiences and perceptions related to Zika knowledge and awareness, family economics and decision-making, well-baby care and long-term caretaking, and the impacts of disability on families. Key findings include:

- Care seekers are aware of Zika transmission by mosquitos but not with regards to sexual transmission, and misinformation about Zika symptoms and transmission exist;
- Both parents are involved in child care in dual-parent households, though primary responsibilities often fall to the mother;
- Perceptions of masculinities are not changing for men’s own health, but changing for male involvement in their partner’s health;
- Maternity and paternity policies can impact parental-child bonding and care roles;
- There is a discrepancy between what community members and family members of persons with disabilities perceive with regards to discrimination and stigma;
- Caring for children with disabilities can create additional emotional, financial, and physical stressors for families;
- The wider public feels that persons with disabilities are at greater risk of violence;
- Services for persons with disabilities are limited;
- Socio-cultural shifts are present in the country that affect care and support systems;
- While condoms are used, most pregnancies are not planned, and contraception is seen as ineffective;
- Barriers to quality and equitable care exist and can be improved upon.

Using these findings, nine recommendations were formulated to improve family health care, services for persons with disabilities, and generally the health system in Antigua. These recommendations should guide the MOH in preparing the health system to handle future disease outbreaks and to continually provide quality care for the people of Antigua and Barbuda. The recommendations focus on improving public education and awareness around key themes, promoting male engagement in well-baby care, increasing counselling opportunities and psychosocial support, improving coordination with other ministries/departments for public health outreach and social support, creating a web-based training platform for providers and staff or other efficient mechanisms to build and sustain capacity in sensitivity and cultural diversity; working with persons with disabilities and their families, including psychosocial support, gender awareness and gender-based violence and abuse; updating outdated policies and implementation tools based on input from community members and providers and make these tools more accessible for use, improving referral systems, strengthen systems to support continuous quality improvement, and improve accessibility of related services.

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