IMPROVING RETENTION IN CHILDHOOD:
The power of family and community

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Prepared with support from Dr Barak Morgan, University of

[Logos of REPSSI, PATA, and other organizations]
PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- About REPSSI in brief
- The family & community: Find, Treat, Care
- A context of multi-dimensional poverty for families & communities in our region
- Family, Community & Early Childhood - Integrated Services for Retention
- Maternal Psychosocial & mental wellbeing
  - Maternal Resilience for Improved Retention: View from the Brain
  - Building Retention Resilience
- Concluding remarks
ALL GIRLS, BOYS & YOUTH ENJOY PSYCHOSOCIAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING
4 INTER-RELATED COMPONENTS OF REPSSI WORKS:

- APSSI Africa Psychosocial Support Institute
- Advocacy: Local, regional, global
- PSS Mainstreaming into Social, Health & Education
- PSS Knowledge Generation
EARLY CHILDHOOD: Pre-Primary Nurturing & Responsive Care

1st 1000 days of life – from conception to 2yrs (270 of pregnancy & 365x2)

Greatest damage to a child’s development can occur during 1st 1000 days

• Predicts many aspects of one’s health, wellbeing and productivity as one grows

Early stimulation for learning & cognitive development

Foundations for healthy, wellbeing & productivity

Safety net, Protection & Trusting relationships

Emotional support - Love & acceptance. Address feelings that children have

Social support
• Identity, connectedness
• Attachments - Relationships/bonds

• Early disruptions in primary relationships can also lead to difficulty forming close relationships later in life

REPSSI
Psychosocial Wellbeing For All Children
INTEGRATED SERVICES FOR RETENTION

• Before school going age - home, health and **ECD centers**
• Growth & development monitoring
• Nurturing care
• Linkages to care - ECD - connecting families to HIV care & promotes early interventions
• Critical to provide stimulating and responsive health services & care
  ➢ Start early (ECD)
Focusing on Maternal Resilience for Improved Retention in Early Childhood
Maternal Resilience for Improved Retention: View from the Brain

Prefrontal Cortex (TOP)

Thinking, Planning, Creating

Sub-cortex (BOTTOM)

Fight, Flight, Freeze

*MRI Image by Rene Mandl & David Terburg
Am I Safe?

Am I Safe?
Safe, bountiful, predictable environment

Keep your head
Thrive

See Big Picture
Think first, act later

Thinking, Planning, Creating

TOP-DOWN BRAIN

Fight, Flight, Freeze

*MRI Image by Rene Mandl & David Terburg
Fight, Flight, Freeze

See Small Picture Act first, think later

Thinking, Planning, Creating

BOTTOM-UP BRAN

‘Lose your head’ Survive!

Harsh, unsafe, unpredictable environments
Safe, favourable conditions

Top-down = Resilient
Unsafe, adverse conditions

Bottom-up = Resilient
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**VIEW FROM THE MATERNAL BRAIN**

**HUUH?**
Her psychosocial & mental wellbeing is a critical enabler for retention (ECD+HIV Care)

- Disclosing to child
Social protection services strengthen top-down mother-power that is usually left untapped because of other constraints.

Our children! – Protection & Services for children – ECD made a priority.

Linking services

✓ Service to service referrals
✓ Service to families and communities they serve.

Celebrating successes with the communities – for families that have disclosed - thriving children
Community parenting – able to identify families that need parenting support (teen parents)

Community as a social safety net – customs and traditions that support the parent/caregiver.

Resilient families and communities can deliver positive change for children – ensuring retention in care
LESSONS

- PSS is not a quick fix – ongoing for sustained wellbeing
- ECD – greatest opportunities for enhanced outcomes
- You cannot give what you don’t have – health worker support
- Tapping on social capital *(customs, traditions)* within families & communities; start early for children
- Value & understand families social environments. Family based approach – FABA & CABA
- Capacity development for families and communities
PSS FOR RETENTION IN CARE IN CHILDHOOD

- PSS best provided to children is through their families and communities

- Provide day-to-day caring actions and ways of life that show a caring attitude, concern, understanding, unconditional love, non-judgment and support.

- Invest in workforce psychosocial and mental wellbeing – caregivers for children they must be psychosocially well or resilient – more important than ever!

- Life course developmental changes and support – an observation – changing circumstances & disclosure.
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Thanks You!
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VIEW FROM THE MATERNAL BRAIN

EVOLUTIONARY (ADAPTIVE) FRAMEWORK

LIFE-HISTORY STRATEGY THEORY
In environments where the risk of dying from violence, accident or disease is high, where resources are scarce and where the future is uncertain it is strategic to:

• Grow up fast, take what you can get when it is available (entails taking risks and valuing short-term gains over long-term investments)

• Reproduce early and frequently, investing less parenting resources per child.

There is simply not enough to meet everyone’s day-to-day needs. And you may well die before your long-term investment bears fruit or you may lose it in other ways.
Children are born with a well-developed sub-cortex equipped to detect and avoid danger, and to detect and compete (violently if necessary) for resources.

The sub-cortex is not interested in formal education, it can never learn to read or reflect. It’s a survival machine fully operational from birth.
In environments where the risk of early death is low, where resources abound and where the future is predictably stable it is strategic to:

- slow, building sophisticated resources to compete in a complex, subtle social economy (entails taking few risks and valuing long-term goals over short-term gains)
- Reproduce late and infrequently, investing more parenting resources per child.

There is enough to meet everyone’s day-to-day needs. And your long-term investment are likely to be safe and to bear fruit in the distant future.
Children are born with a well-developed sub-cortex but a poorly developed cortex.

It takes over two decades for the cortex to mature. It’s a learning and thinking machine that requires vast and unending parental guidance to function well.