Affording Formula: HIV+ women’s experiences of the financial strain of infant formula feeding in the UK

Body & Soul

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Body & Soul

♥ Who we are – frontline support organisation for families
♥ Weekly support
♥ Donation of formula milk

“My benefits were cut at the time. I found it really difficult to afford formula milk. I would rather walk the streets asking for change than resort to breastfeeding, which I did have to do sometimes. I went to my hospital crying because I was really struggling to afford formula milk.”
Background

♥ UK guidance recommends formula feeding  
♥ Global guidance recommends breastfeeding 
♥ Perception of risk  
♥ Financial strain of formula feeding 
♥ Provision of milk across London patchy
Methodology

♥ Designed semi-structured interview questions
♥ Eligible women (n = 70) invited to take part
♥ Criteria: HIV+ women given birth in past 3 years, member of B&S
♥ 42 consented to take part
♥ Interviews were conducted over the phone
Demographics

Women lived across 18 London boroughs with 64% coming from outer London and 36% from inner London

48% did not have recourse to public funds
Results: Advice

♥ 76% of women told not to breastfeed and to only use formula milk
♥ 12% of women given options but strongly advised to formula feed
♥ 10% of women had breastfeeding or formula feeding presented as an option though the majority of these chose to formula feed
♥ 1 woman not given any advice from a health professional on how to feed her baby
Results: Provision

❤ 25% did not receive any provision for formula milk (although 3 of these 11 accessed it from food banks)

❤ Almost half of participants did not receive any grants to help with costs

❤ 71% spent >£10/week on formula milk with 7% spending >£20

❤ 64% did not feel the provisions they were given were adequate to cover their weekly costs

❤ More than half of women admitted there were times when they or a family member went hungry in order to buy formula milk

❤ 2 women revealed they had resorted to breastfeeding as they didn’t have enough money

❤ 1 in 2 women reported feeling unsupported to formula feed their baby
Qualitative answers

“We bought less food to make sure we could afford milk. I will be happy when my baby is [weaned] so there is less financial strain. Formula feeding is very expensive, I found it a struggle to afford. I felt sad not being able to breastfeed especially as culturally I am expected to.”

“I had twins... When I couldn’t afford to buy my family food each week, Body & Soul provided support by applying for grants and Food Chain.”

“The cost was too high. I didn’t feel supported by my health visitor. I had difficulties because people wondered why I wasn’t breastfeeding as it was much cheaper.”
Conclusions

♥ Lack of choice and lack of advice
♥ Costs of formula feeding: financial and emotional
♥ Lack of support in accessing formula milk even for those eligible for benefits

What were the limitations?

Recommendations:
♥ Free formula milk commissioned by NHSE available to all WLWH
♥ Vouchers for use in supermarket preferred way of receiving milk
♥ More education around choices