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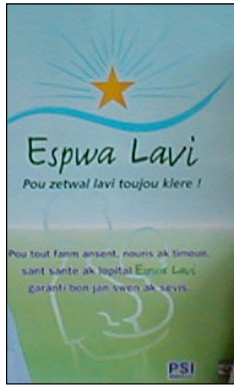
Bureau for
Global Health

SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

Pregnant Women Seek HIV Testing in Haiti

MARIE SAT QUIETLY IN THE afternoon heat in Carrefour, Port-au-Prince, one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in Haiti. A mangy old dog lying in the shade of the porch growled at a passerby, but Marie didn't take much notice of either of them. She was thinking about the radio



The *Espwa Lavi* logo

spot she'd heard the night before about how a mother can pass HIV to her baby. She was worried. She'd heard about women getting sick and throwing up a lot when they got pregnant, so she figured she'd been feeling so bad because she was almost three months pregnant. But now she wasn't so sure. The spot said pregnant women should get tested for HIV to make sure their babies could be protected before it was too late. Marie was thinking that she'd go do that—find out why she was feeling so bad and get that test. But she was scared. What if she had AIDS? What would she do, how would she tell her baby's father, what would he do, how could she take care of her unborn baby, how could she take care of herself, and what would her friends and family do? Marie couldn't keep up with all the questions swirling through her mind. She took a deep breath and promised herself again that tomorrow she'd go down to an *Espwa Lavi* (Hope for Life) clinic in her neighborhood where she'd heard she could get good quality care for herself and her baby. She had heard from a neighbor that she could also get tested for HIV there.

... AIDSMark ensures that pregnant women receive appropriate counseling and testing, and that those women found to be HIV-positive are given the support and care they need.



Photo courtesy of PSI

A nurse draws blood from a young woman who has come to an *Espwa Lavi* clinic for pregnancy and HIV testing.

Marie's decision to visit the *Espwa Lavi* clinic is just what Population Services International (PSI) intended. With funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, PSI implements a mass-media campaign and service network for prevention of mother-to-child transmission through its AIDSMark Project. Marie's choice to visit the clinic will be the first step she takes in accessing a cluster of prenatal and HIV-prevention and care services to help safeguard her health, her pregnancy, and her new baby.

PSI has taken big steps toward preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Haiti. In addition to developing a mass media and interpersonal communication awareness campaign, PSI has built a referral network of service providers, *Espwa Lavi*, equipped to address all the intricate aspects of prevention of mother-to-child transmission. Partnering with public and private clinics and hospitals, PSI/Haiti ensures that pregnant women receive appropriate counseling and testing, and that those women found to be HIV-positive are given the support and care they

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need. This care includes access to good-quality obstetric care, short-course antiretroviral prophylaxis, appropriate infant feeding, support groups for HIV-positive women, and counseling related to condom use and family planning. The participating institutions are linked through a tight referral network and the unifying and easily identifiable *Espwa Lavi* logo.

The outcome of Marie's pregnancy test was positive and the results of her HIV test were negative. She breathed a huge sigh of relief and listened attentively as the counselor took special care to explain the risks of HIV to Marie and inform her of the importance of practicing safe sex to protect herself and her unborn child in the future. The counselor also talked to Marie about the things she needed to do to ensure a safe pregnancy and delivery. Many women are less fortunate and learn that they are HIV positive. For these women, members of the *Espwa Lavi* network offer the counseling, care, and services to help them cope with the disease and protect their unborn babies.

Solid research clearly shows that counseling, testing, strategic administration of antiretroviral drugs, improved delivery conditions, appropriate breastfeeding guidance, and follow-up family planning dramatically reduce the chances of a mother's transferring the virus to her baby during birth or breastfeeding.

Haiti, May 2003