

Drugs or Motherhood – What to Sacrifice.

Motherhood comes with loads of responsibilities and for mothers who use drugs there is a double burden of responsibility, with two extremely competing needs, where the baby often bears the brunt of its mother's addiction. Christina Iza Wambui, a recovering drug user and a mother of two understands this all too well.

Christina, under peer pressure influence, started out smoking Marijuana before she even got to teen-age. Shortly thereafter, her friends introduced her to smoking heroine. Before long, one puff was inadequate and slowly she was on a fast lane to addiction. What started out as fun soon became a habit she could not easily shake off. Un-known to her then, were the implications of heroin use as she now reflects.

Christina, now 24 recounts how she sank deeper into addiction each day that before she knew it, she was pregnant and thereafter a mother. She reflects that before she even knew the magnitude of motherhood, she got her second born barely two years after her first child was born. "As I sank deeper into addiction when I was pregnant with my second child, I visualized my children's misery and clearly understood that they would need me. That's when I started realizing that an addict's life wasn't mine and that marked my turning point," she says. In desperation to get help, she decided to enroll for Medically Assisted Therapy (MAT) treatment, which she learnt about from MEWA, a Mombasa based Civil Society Organization that works on harm reduction and a KANCO partner

Her journey to sobriety wasn't easy. As part of rehabilitation, she would be put on methadone an opioid substitution therapy that manages addiction to opioids. While she appreciates the availability of methadone, she laments that it lowers her production of milk. There is however, no scientific theory that supports reduction of milk as a side effect of methadone.

Caught up in the wallows of drug use, Christina never attended Ante-natal Clinic during her pregnancy hence lacked information on infant feeding. She expresses her gratitude that now that she is able to breast feed her one month old baby and feed her second child well. Before she came across the KANCO nutrition project dubbed *Pwani Lishe Bora* project: a project that focuses on the nutritional needs of women and girls between 15-49 years and children below 2 years, she had been planning to consult with other mother's to find out alternative ways to feed her baby based on the stories she had heard of methadone's effect on a baby. However, there has been no scientific theory that confirms methadone affects production of breast milk and this was well clarified after she linked with KANCO.

At Kisauni health center where she was referred, Christina was counseled on the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and seeking correct information from the health facility in regards to her child's well-being. Martina Adeg, KANCO's Nutrition Officer has since been following up to ensure Christina adheres to the exclusive breastfeeding for six months. Christina has since been made part of the young mothers' dialogue sessions that are planned to offer young parents in the community a chance to learn more about breastfeeding and nutrition. They address the myths in the community on nutrition issues.

Christina has gone through so much pain and rejection but states that she has no regret of being a mother. If anything, she adds, it is for her children she walked out on drugs. Christina recalls how she had loathed the idea of children earlier. She has regained her self-worth and is slowly being accepted back into society. As Christina looks forward to the growing up of her two children, she is determined to give them the best upbringing so that they can grow to be respected people in the society.

'My prayer is to maintain hope and have the strength to continue taking methadone,' she says and adds that not only does she appreciate the fact that she is a mother, but also embraces her responsibilities that come with motherhood. Christina is now reaching out to young girls who are abusing drugs and encourages them by sharing her story.