Perceptions of primary healthcare providers towards integration of art services at departmental levels in Lira District, Northern Uganda.

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Background: Integration in this context refers to the incorporation of ART services at departmental levels of health facilities. Uganda has for long experienced inadequate understanding of the perceptions of Primary Health Care Providers (PHCPs) towards integration. The Ministry of Health has tried to ensure that ART services are integrated with other healthcare services provided at some departments levels such as ANC and TB sectors despite the fact that paucity of data on the perceptions of Primary Health Care Providers (PHCPs) towards integration of ART services at departmental levels still exists. The objective of this study was to assess the perceptions of PHCPs towards integration of ART services at departmental levels in Lira District.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study design employing qualitative data collection and analysis methods was used and data collected from Lira Regional Referral Hospital, PAG Mission Hospital, Ogur Health Centre IV and Amach Health Centre IV. 20 Key Informant Interviews (KII) and 4 focused group discussions (FGDs), one at each health facility were conducted. Purposive sampling technique was used to select both the study sites and the respondents. Trained research assistants collected data by KII & FGDs using their respective guides. Data was encoded using both written and audio transcription. Data was analyzed manually using thematic analysis.

Results: The point of saturation was reached at 20 PHCPs, and 4 focused group discussions. The average age for PHCPs was 40 years. The levels of education of PHCPs ranged from certificates levels to Masters levels. We noted two broad categories of the perceptions of PHC providers toward ART integration. Positive perceptions in which some of the health care workers attributed integration to a problem solving approach and Negative perceptions in which they saw integration as a burden intensifying intervention.

Conclusion: A majority of primary health care workers expressed positive perceptions towards the integration of ART services at departmental levels in Lira District. Therefore, an urgent need for reforms in terms of policies and improvement of infrastructure to ensure the integration strategy suits the health care system is required if integration is to be adopted.