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Words Matter: Caregiver-health worker communication when using paediatric TB treatment decision algorithms

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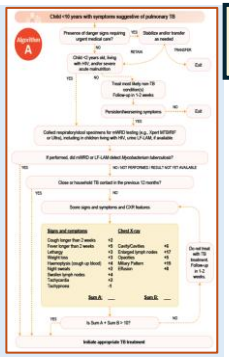
New Treatment Decision Algorithms (TDAs) for pulmonary TB in children



TDAs rely on **clinical evaluation** and **effective communication between health workers (HWs) and caregivers**

Study aim: To explore HWs' and caregivers' perceptions and experiences of TDAs' implementation in two Sub-Saharan Africa contexts.

62 semi-structured interviews and 4 focus group discussions with HWs and caregivers of children with signs and symptoms of pulmonary TB

Thematic and critical discourse analysis

Participants' sociodemographic characteristics

	Niger	Guinea
Health workers	**16**	**12**
Doctors	8	6
Nurses	8	6
Female	8	6
Male	8	6
Caregivers	**25**	**25**
Female	25	17
Male	0	8
Child treated for TB	14	13

Two contrasting communication environments in which TDAs were implemented:

Case 1 – Inpatient nutritional services (Niger)

Key challenges for TDAs' use according to HWs:

- × **High-pressure work environment**
- × **Lack of resources and equipment**
- × **Communication challenges** with mothers (*"limited knowledge", "low cooperation", "language barriers", "confusion between fever and night sweats"*)

Hierarchical dynamic and stigmatising discourse:

*'Sometimes, mums **refuse to cooperate**'*
*'They are **unable** to estimate the symptoms duration'*

*«We **villagers cannot understand**. » « I **do not know** what the doctors are saying. »*

Lack of communication impacts the search for TB signs

Communication barriers reduce confidence in TDAs clinical scores, prompting clinicians to rely on X-ray or GeneXpert results.

Case 2 – Outpatient HIV clinic (Guinea)

- × **Lack of resources and equipment** and **lack of training** perceived by HWs as **the key challenges for TB diagnosis** and **TDAs' use**.

Collaborative dynamic (empathy, partnership, and shared understanding between HWs and caregivers):

*'You need to **take the time** to explain properly', 'to create a climate of **trust**'*

*"They explained each step of the diagnosis" "They explain things in our local language, so **we understand very well**"*

Dialogue based on trust

HWs consider TDAs clinical score **reliable**, yet their use requires **more time to explain** and access information on TB signs.

- **When patient history-taking is rushed due to communication barriers, TB diagnosis and TDA use become difficult.**
- **Using the TDAs, requires communication for patient history, and provides an opportunity to strengthen trust and dialogue between HWs and caregivers.**

Existing dynamics between HWs and caregivers influence the acceptability of the TDAs

Recommendations:

Raise HWs' awareness: Taking time for thorough medical history is key.

Training to enhance HWs' communication skills.

Promote TB awareness in the community to reduce stigma and improve engagement in care.

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