

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

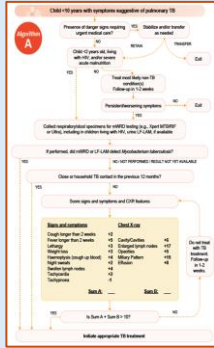
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New Treatment Decision Algorithms (TDAs) for pulmonary TB in children



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



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.

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.

🎯 **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

• **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.**

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