

“It’s very genuine”: The perceptions of stakeholders on the primary caregiving relationships of adolescents orphaned by AIDS and grandmothers

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Adolescents orphaned through Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) are at higher risk of poor developmental outcomes due to the trauma caused by the parent’s AIDS related illness and resultant death, lack of stable care and support and financial difficulties among others. Research shows that high quality parental care is needed to nurture the development of these vulnerable youth. The current study explores the quality of caregiving relationships between AIDS-orphaned adolescents and grandmother primary caregivers, based on the narratives of stakeholders. Special focus was on finding out whether these relationships were perceived as promoting the emotional and psychosocial wellbeing of the orphans. A qualitative methodological framework with narrative inquiry approach was utilised. In-depth interviews were conducted with 6 purposefully selected stakeholders who provide psychosocial support services to orphans and primary caregivers. Stakeholders reported that, due to the grandmothers’ genuine love and care, most of these relationships were found to be nourishing to the development of the orphans. It was further indicated that, the orphans fared well socially, emotionally and cognitively and performed highly at school. However, stakeholders have also identified the negative side to these relationships which appeared to be threatening to the orphans’ developmental outcomes. They reported that, grandmothers tend to be overprotective at times. For example, when it is raining the child is not allowed to attend school as she or he may fall sick from cold weather. It was also mentioned that grandmothers were often manipulated by orphans. For example, some orphans would compile and print out a letter and claim it is a school notification for an outing -so that they may be permitted to spend some time away with friends. Interventions are needed to build on the strength of the grandmother caregiving. Grandmothers can be trained on adolescent behaviours and be equipped to provide adequate supervision.

Keywords: Adolescent orphans, AIDS, Caregiving relationships, Grandmothers.

Biography

Petunia Tsweleng is currently a fulltime doctoral student. She have a B.Ed. Educational Psychology honours degree and a psycho-socio masters' degree in Child and Family Studies. She is also a qualified Assessor and Moderator (registered with the HWSETA). She specializes in child, family and community development. She worked for three community-based Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), in Cape Town, South Africa. Her work focused mainly on Child and Family Psychosocial Wellbeing, Adolescent Development and Community Health Wellness.

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