

Khululeka Motivation

Why is bereavement support necessary in South Africa



One in five South African children have lost a parent¹, often due to AIDS². Violence and accidents also contribute to high and increasing adult mortality in the country³. Research has shown that bereaved children are at risk for developing depression, problems at school, behavioural problems and substance abuse⁴. Parental death, in lower and middle income countries, is associated with HIV positive status in females⁵. Depressive symptoms in adolescents are associated with nonuse of condoms and a higher risk of having an STI⁶. Nearly a third of all new HIV infections in South Africa occur in 15-24 year olds, with young women in this age group being five to six times more likely to be infected than their male peers⁷. For 2016, Statistics South Africa estimated the mid-year population as 55,91 million, with 5 076 221 young women and girls aged 15 to 24.

Multiple studies show that sexual risk behaviours are more prevalent among adolescent orphans and vulnerable children. Research in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa shows a clear relationship between the death of a parent and HIV prevalence; with those who lost only one parent being less at risk for HIV infection, than those who lost both, and non-orphaned adolescents being least at risk⁸.

Because of the heightened risk for psychological problems among bereaved children and teens, and the clear links between psychological health and sexual risk behaviour for teen girls, training and mentoring on effective bereavement support interventions are especially needed.

¹ Meintjes H, Hall K, Sambu W. Demography of South Africa's children. In: De Lannoy A, Swartz S, Lake L, Smith C, eds. *South African Child Gauge*. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, 2015: pp 102–06.

² Meintjes, H. & Hall, K. (2009). Demography of South Africa's children. In S. Pendlebury, L. Lake, & C. Smith (Eds.) *South African Child Gauge 2008-2009*. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town; and UNICEF (2016). *Biennial Report South Africa 2014-2015*. Pretoria: UNICEF.

³ Statistics South Africa (2014). *Mortality and causes of death in South Africa, 2013: Findings from death notification*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

⁴ Aynsley-Green, A., Penny, A. & Richardson, S. (2012). Bereavement in childhood: risks, consequences and responses. *BMJ Supportive Palliative Care*, 2(1), 2-4; and Kaplow, J. B., Saunders, J., Angold, A. & Costello, E. J. (2010). Psychiatric Symptoms in Bereaved versus Non-Bereaved Youth and Young Adults: A Longitudinal Epidemiological Study. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 49(11), 1145–1154.

⁵ Sherr, L. & Mueller, J. 2008. Where is the evidence base? Mental health issues surrounding bereavement and HIV in children. *Journal of public mental health*, 7 (4), 31-39.

⁶ Sherr, L. & Mueller, J. 2008. Where is the evidence base? Mental health issues surrounding bereavement and HIV in children. *Journal of public mental health*, 7 (4), 31-39.

⁷ Abdool Karim, Q., Kharsany, A.B.M., Leask, K., Ntombela, F., Humphries, H., Frohlich, J.A., Samsunder, N., Grobler, A., Dellar, R., & Abdool Karim, S.S. Prevalence of HIV, HSV-2 and pregnancy amongst high school students in rural KwaZulu-Natal: a bio-behavioral cross-sectional survey. *Sexually Transmitted Infections* 2014; 90(8):620-626.

⁸ Abdool Karim, Q., Kharsany, A.B.M., Leask, K., Ntombela, F., Humphries, H., Frohlich, J.A., Samsunder, N., Grobler, A., Dellar, R., & Abdool Karim, S.S. Prevalence of HIV, HSV-2 and pregnancy amongst high school students in rural KwaZulu-Natal: a bio-behavioural cross-sectional survey. *Sexually Transmitted Infections* 2014; 90(8):620-626.