

# Khululeka Motivation

## Why is bereavement support necessary in South Africa



In 2018, there were 2.7 million orphans in South Africa<sup>1</sup>. Research has shown that bereaved children, i.e., children who have experienced the death of someone close to them, are at risk for developing depression, problems at school, behavioural problems and substance abuse<sup>2</sup>. Poverty, and its subsequent lack of access to services, add to this risk. The poorest households carry the greatest burden of care for orphans – close to half (48%) of all orphans are resident in the poorest 20% of households<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, multiple studies show that sexual risk behaviours are more prevalent among 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 risk<sup>3</sup>. Parental death, in lower and middle income countries, is associated with HIV positive status in females<sup>4</sup>.

In 2016, the global number of adolescents aged 10-19 living with HIV rose to 2.1 million, a 30% increase since 2005<sup>5</sup>. Three in four new HIV infections among adolescents occur in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>5</sup>, and adolescent girls are especially burdened. Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) are the most critical to South Africa's HIV epidemic<sup>6</sup>. It is estimated that a third of all new HIV infections in the country occur in AGYW age 15-24 years<sup>3</sup>.

The most common method of HIV transmission worldwide, at almost 70% of infections, is unprotected heterosexual intercourse<sup>7</sup>. However, given limited success in reducing HIV incidence, there is increasing recognition of the critical need to address upstream factors that shape risky behaviours<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Hall, K. (2019). Demography of South Africa's children. In Shung-King, M., Lake, L., Sanders, D., & Hendricks, M. (eds.) *South African Child Gauge 2019*. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Abdool Karim, Q., et al. 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Children and AIDS: Statistical Update. UNICEF; 2017. In Goin, D.E. et al. (2019). *Depression and incident HIV in adolescent girls and young women in HPTN 068: Targets for prevention and mediating factors*. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Downloaded from <https://academic.oup.com/aje/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/aje/kwz238/5609195> by University of Cape Town Libraries user on 09 April 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Goin, D.E. et al. (2019). *Depression and incident HIV in adolescent girls and young women in HPTN 068: Targets for prevention and mediating factors*. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Downloaded from <https://academic.oup.com/aje/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/aje/kwz238/5609195> by University of Cape Town Libraries user on 09 April 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Shaw GM, Hunter E. HIV transmission. *Cold Spring Harb Perspect Med*. 2012 Nov 1;2(11). In Goin, D.E. et al. (2019). *Depression and incident HIV in adolescent girls and young women in HPTN 068: Targets for prevention and mediating factors*. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Downloaded from <https://academic.oup.com/aje/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/aje/kwz238/5609195> by University of Cape Town Libraries user on 09 April 2020.



A study examining the association of depressive symptoms with HIV incidence among AGYW in South Africa, found prevalence of depressive symptoms of 18.2% in this young adolescent population, which was almost twice the prevalence recorded in a nationally-representative survey of adults in South Africa<sup>6</sup>.

*The findings of this study suggest that having depressive symptoms in adolescence may also increase risk of HIV infection. This demonstrates that depression is longitudinally related to HIV acquisition among AGYW in sub-Saharan Africa. The results are especially important given the high burden of depression among adolescents and point to areas for prevention strategies<sup>6</sup>.*

This study suggests that interventions that improve mental health among AGYW may also improve HIV prevention efforts<sup>6</sup>. While depression is a modifiable public health problem, access to mental healthcare services in South Africa is currently quite poor<sup>6</sup>. In spite of South Africa's internationally renowned legislative framework for human rights, there is a marked lack of capacity in several government departments at the coalface of service delivery<sup>8</sup>, there are insufficient numbers in the social work workforce and the existing workforce is poorly prepared to work in child care and protection<sup>9</sup>.

Non-Profit Organisation staff working in disadvantaged communities are typically working for small Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and medium sized Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) servicing children in communities characterised by a lack of safety, high levels of violence, and a lack of services. Nevertheless, relatively low-cost interventions, delivered by lay workers in the community, have been shown to be effective in low and middle-income countries, such as the rural South African context<sup>6</sup>.

The [Abangane programme](#) is one of these locally developed, evidence based, interventions. Teen girls who were part of this 8 x 100 minute, scripted, grief support programme showed less depression and improved social behaviour.

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.

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<sup>8</sup> Parliamentary Office of the Community Law Centre. 2014. Initial Complementary Report to the African Committee of Experts in response to South Africa's Initial Country Report on the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Cape Town: University of the Western Cape.

<sup>9</sup> National Department of Social Development. (2012). *Conceptual Framework for Capacity Building of Social Service Professionals and Occupations in Child Protection*. Khusela Project. Pretoria: National Department of Social Development.