

Policy Brief: Long-term mental health impacts of AIDS-orphanhood

Citation: Cluver, L, Orkin, M, Boyes, M, Gardner, F (2012) Persisting mental health problems among AIDS-orphaned children in South Africa. Journal of Child Psychiatry and Psychology, 53, 363-370.

Children orphaned by AIDS are at risk of psychological problems but to date no longitudinal research has examined long-term psychological effects. We conducted a 4-year longitudinal study with 1021 children in 2005 and 730 followed up in 2009. This research is a collaboration between South African government, the National Action Committee for Children Affected by AIDS (NACCA), Oxford University, and Cape Town Child Welfare.

The Questions:

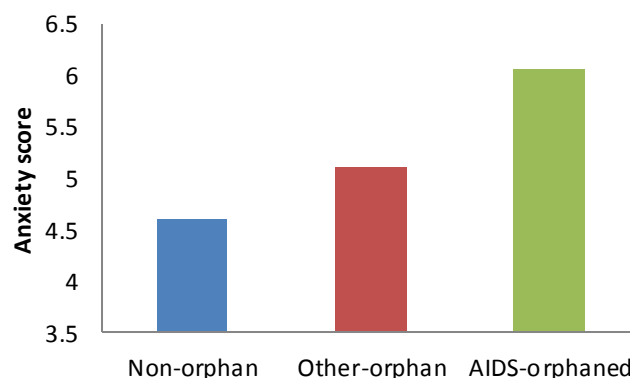
- What are the *long-term* psychological effects of AIDS-orphanhood?
- How does AIDS-orphanhood impact on adolescents and young adults?
- How do these outcomes compare with non-orphans and children orphaned by other causes?

The Research:

- 2005: Interviewed 1021 children aged 10-19, 730 followed up in 2009.
- Included street-children, child-headed and youth-headed households, AIDS-orphaned and AIDS-affected children
- Standardised psychometric instruments
- All analyses control for sociodemographic factors

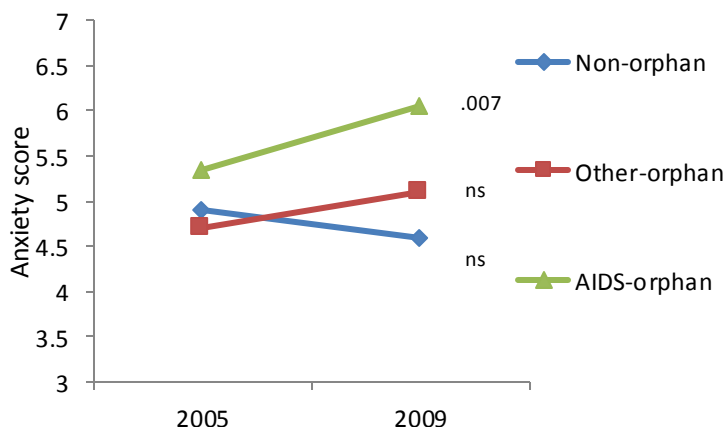
Finding 1: After 4 years, AIDS-orphaned children were still more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress (PTSD)

- In 2005 AIDS-orphaned children scored significantly higher on measures of depression, anxiety, and PTSD than non-orphans and children orphaned by other causes.
- In 2009 AIDS-orphaned children *still* scored significantly higher on measures of depression, anxiety, and PTSD than non-orphans and other-orphans.



Finding 2: AIDS-orphanhood was associated with increases in depression, anxiety, and PTSD over time

- AIDS-orphanhood predicted greater increases in depression, anxiety, and PTSD between 2005 and 2009
- This was true *independently* of depression, anxiety, and PTSD scores in 2005, age, gender, household size, and living arrangements
- Non-orphanhood and being orphaned by other causes did not independently predict rise in psychological distress



Conclusions:

- Mental health problems associated with AIDS-orphanhood persist over a four-year period
- AIDS-orphanhood *independently* predicts increases in depression, anxiety, and PTSD over time
- Interventions should be focused not just at AIDS-orphaned children, but also older adolescents and young adults
- We may need long-term interventions for AIDS-orphaned children

This research was generously funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council and the Nuffield Foundation