

Policy Brief: Psychological distress in youth with AIDS-sick caregivers

Citation: Cluver, Orkin, Boyes, Gardner, Nikelo (2012). AIDS-orphanhood and caregiver HIV-sickness status: Effects on psychological symptoms in South African youth. Journal of Pediatric Psychology, 37, 857-867.

No large-scale controlled studies have examined psychological impacts of having an AIDS-sick caregiver. We conducted a 4-year longitudinal study with 1021 children in 2005 and 730 followed up in 2009. This research is a collaboration between the South African government, the National Action Committee for Children Affected by AIDS (NACCA), Oxford University, and Cape Town Child Welfare.

The Questions:

- What are long-term psychological effects of living with an AIDS-sick caregiver?
- Are psychological effects similar to those of AIDS-orphaned children?
- Does being both AIDS-orphaned and living with an AIDS-sick caregiver (dual-affected) have a cumulative effect on psychological distress?

The Research:

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

Finding 1: Children with an AIDS-sick caregiver had more psychological disorder – even after 4 years

- In 2005 children living with an AIDS-sick caregiver scored significantly higher on measures of depression, anxiety, and Post-Traumatic Stress (PTSD) than children living with an other-sick or healthy caregiver.
- In 2009 children living with an AIDS-sick caregiver *still* scored significantly higher on measures of depression, anxiety, and PTSD than children living with an other-sick caregiver or healthy caregiver.

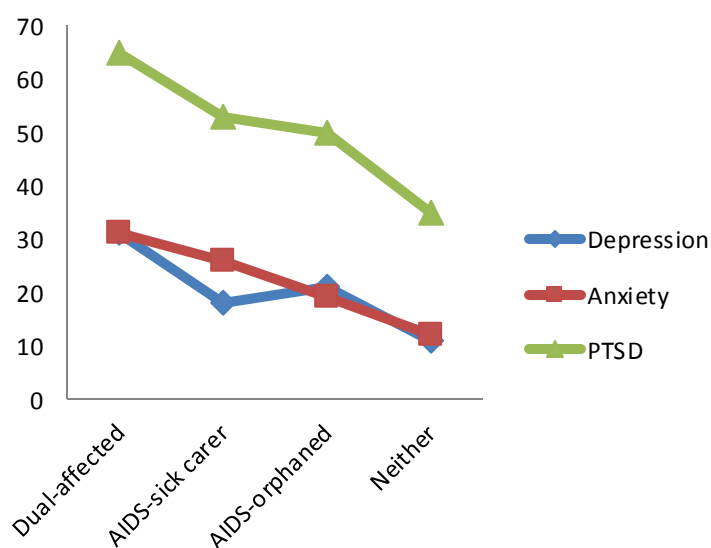
Finding 2: Psychological distress in youth living with AIDS-sick caregivers is as high as in AIDS-orphaned youth

- In both 2005 and 2009 living with an AIDS-sick caregiver was associated with comparable levels of psychological distress to that of AIDS-orphaned children.

Finding 3: Cumulative effects of both AIDS-orphanhood and living with an AIDS-sick caregiver

- Children who were AIDS-orphaned *and* living with an AIDS-sick carer (dual-affected) had the highest risk of psychological distress.

Children with a clinical-level psychological disorder (%)



Conclusions:

- Having an AIDS-sick caregiver is associated with comparable levels of psychological distress to that of AIDS-orphaned children and these mental health problems persist over 4 years
- There is a cumulative effect of being AIDS-orphaned and having an AIDS-sick carer on psychological distress
- Policy and interventions – currently focused on orphanhood – should also include youth with AIDS-sick caregivers
- We may need long-term interventions for AIDS-affected children