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Adolescents' Experiences of Living with HIV and AIDS

By Linda Anne Black

Submitted in partial fulfilment of a degree of Master of Arts (MEd. Psychology) by coursework and Research Report at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg South Africa

Declaration

I declare that this research is my own work and that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Signed: _____

On this the _____ day of _____ 2008

Dedication

This research is dedicated to the young adolescents who participated in the process. Their ability to survive and to hang onto hope, despite their many daunting experiences, is truly inspirational.

Acknowledgement

I am indebted to Dr. Esther Price for her hard work and encouragement in helping me to write this document.

In addition I would like to thank the management of the two care centres for giving me permission to conduct the research and to the children who assented to their work being used. Without their co-operation and assistance, this research would not have been possible.

Finally I would like to thank RG for his ongoing support and encouragement.

Abstract

A growing body of research exists that examines the nature of interventions aimed at educating adolescents in terms of HIV and AIDS (Campbell, 2003; Campbell & McPhail, 2002; Van Dyk, 2001). However, there appears to be a grave paucity of literature that explores the impact of HIV and AIDS on adolescents' psychological and emotional functioning. Adolescents who live in the aftermath following the death of a parent, or parents often have to deal with rejection from their community, and are often confronted with significant emotional, educational and psycho-social challenges. These challenges continue to pose enormous threat to the development of a healthy self-concept (Foster & Germann, 2002). These adolescents continue to be marginalized as their voices remain largely silent in contemporary research.

Using a combination of Art therapy, and narrative creation, twenty-eight adolescents participated in a group intervention intended to facilitate, empower and encourage meaning making processes, and to facilitate both oral and written communication about their experiences of living with HIV and AIDS. Findings suggest that while adolescents living with HIV and AIDS continue to have significant emotional, physiological, and social challenges on a daily basis, their stories espouse great hope, determination and resilience.

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