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Developing field generated standards of practice for HIV /AIDS peer education programmes for South African youth.

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2006-11-13T11:03:28Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/1632

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Abstract

The focus of this action research study was to facilitate a field generated process to develop guidelines towards standards of practice for peer education. Peer education has been widely used across the globe and often in health oriented fields. In South Africa, peer education practice is marked by the lack of agreed standards and guidelines together with a lack of empirical evidence of its impact on beneficiary groups. The researcher consulted with over 200 individuals who are, in some way, connected or involved in the management of peer education or programmes focussing on youth. The research confirmed the lack of an agreed definition of peer education, the need for guidelines and eventually standards of practice for peer education. There was consensus that peer education was considered a 'valuable strategy' despite a chronic lack of reporting, monitoring and clear goals for most programmes. An additional challenge was the lack of evaluation of the benefit of peer education to beneficiaries. Programmes lack underpinning theories, and often are implemented in an attempt to 'help' communities in any way possible. Lack of a systemic approach and lack of agreed performance standards, perpetuates peer education interventions that fail due to avoidable challenges that could have been averted with more attention to planning and systematic organisation.

The research proposes that with agreed standards and support to implement and build capacity at national and provincial level, peer education could become a flagship for the prevention, care and support to many communities, particularly where there is a chronic lack of resources.

Key words: peer education; standards of practice; field generated guidelines; capacity building; HIV/AIDS education; action research.