Policy Brief: Abuse and extreme poverty drive increased transactional sexual exploitation among AIDS-affected youth


Little is known about impacts of familial HIV/AIDS on abuse and sexual health. We investigated links between AIDS-orphanhood, caregiver AIDS-sickness and physical, emotional, sexual abuse or transactional sex. We also investigated what factors were driving heightened risk of transactional sex amongst AIDS-affected girls. This research is a collaboration with the South African government, the National Action Cttee for Children Affected by AIDS (NACCA), Oxford University, & Cape Town Child Welfare.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Questions:</th>
<th>The Research:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are AIDS-affected youth at increased risk of physical, emotional &amp; sexual abuse or exploitation?</td>
<td>A longitudinal study with 1000 adolescents at Time 1 and 730 at 4-year Time 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does being AIDS-affected, abused &amp; extreme poverty have a cumulative effect on risk of transactional sex?</td>
<td>Standardised measures of abuse, sexual risk behaviour, &amp; sociodemographic variables</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finding 1: AIDS-affected youth are at higher risk of abuse and transactional sex

- AIDS-orphanhood and caregiver AIDS-sickness predicted emotional abuse, physical abuse and transactional sex – independently of any sociodemographic factors.
- Other-orphanhood and caregiver sickness by non-AIDS causes, as well as having healthy surviving parents, did not predict abuse or transactional sex.
- Youth affected simultaneously by AIDS-orphanhood & having an AIDS-sick caregiver (dual-affected) are 3x more exposed to emotional & physical abuse and 6X more likely to experience transactional sex than in healthy families.

Finding 2: Abuse, food insecurity and family AIDS raise risk of transactional sex for girls from 1% to 57%

- Youth in AIDS-affected families are at higher risk of transactional sex. This is partly due to increased food insecurity & abuse in AIDS-affected families.
- The combination of familial AIDS, food insecurity and abuse raise transactional sex risk amongst girls from 1% to 57%

Conclusions:

- AIDS-affected youth are highly vulnerable to emotional, physical abuse, and transactional sexual exploitation.
- Being in an AIDS-affected family, being abused and extreme poverty has a major cumulative effect on transactional sex.
- To combat risk of transactional sex, we need to address family and poverty risk factors for youth.