**VERY YOUNG CHILDREN AFFECTED AND INFECTED BY HIV/AIDS: HOW ARE THEY LIVING? A CASE STUDY FROM NAMIBIA**

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**SUMMARY**

This paper describes a recent study conducted jointly by the authors in the Khomas Region of Namibia. The study developed and trialled research and documentation methods regarding very young children who had been infected or affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Because of the stigma attached to the disease, effective methods for assessing 'real' needs of the target population have been elusive in Namibia and elsewhere. The aims of the project were to identify ways to assess the developmental needs of HIV/AIDS orphans and other children without parental support and to test methods for securing and documenting this information. The study included an investigation of how health, nutrition, education and social services are distributed throughout the target population and how services can be strengthened within contextual constraints. The authors will share aspects of their study, which can guide processes for similar research in other regions and areas. As well as research methods, the paper provides analyses of the components needed for supporting sustainable environments for HIV/AIDS infected and affected children, including supports for child headed households and other orphan-care programs.

**RÉSUMÉ**

De très jeunes enfants contaminés et touchés par le SIDA ou la séropositivité: un cas particulier en Namibie. En raison du stigmate attaché à la maladie, les méthodes efficaces pour évaluer besoins réels de ’les ‘ de la population de cible ont été évasives en Namibie et ailleurs les objectifs du projet étaient d’identifier des manières d’évaluer les besoins développementaux des orphelins de HIV/AIDS et d’autres enfants sans appui parental et d’examiner des méthodes pour fixer et documenter cette information. L’étude inclut une recherche sur la façon dont la santé, la nutrition, l’éducation et les services sociaux est distribuée dans toute la population de cible et la façon dont des services peuvent être renforcés dans des contraintes contextuelles.

**RESUMEN**

Niños muy pequeños infectados con SIDA: Estudio de caso en Namibia. Debido a el estigma unido a la enfermedad, los métodos eficaces para determinar necesidades verdaderas del ’las ‘ de la población de la blanco han sido evasivos en Namibie y a otra parte las punterias del proyecto eran identificar maneras de determinar las necesidades de desarrollo de los huérfanos de HIV/AIDS y de otros niños sin ayuda parental y de probar los métodos para asegurar y documentar esta información. El estudio incluye una investigación de cómo la salud, la nutrición, la educación y los servicios sociales se distribuyen a través de la población de la blanco y de cómo los servicios se pueden consolidar dentro de apremios del contexto. Los autores compartirán los aspectos de su estudio que pueden dirigir los procesos para la investigación similar en otras regnes y áreas.
INTRODUCTION

It is now well known that HIV/AIDS has grave implications for children beyond infection. Huge numbers have been orphaned and/or have been subject to trauma, disruption of lifestyle, poverty, stigmatisation, abuse and other forms of victimisation. Research on this cohort is scarce.

The Namibian study represents a first attempt to document the experiences of young children infected and affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The study used open-ended questions, which facilitated the articulation of narratives or stories from children and their caretakers. Interviews were held with 35 individuals in 9 settings in a region of high HIV/AIDS prevalence. The findings provide an insight into what it means to be young, orphaned, infected or affected in other ways by HIV/AIDS. Situations and settings are described and conclusions are drawn about the ways by which global principles of healthy environments and quality settings for children are and can be met under current conditions.

This article is drawn from the larger study (Haihambo, Hayden, Otaala & Zimba, 2004). It describes the ways in which health and wellbeing rights and needs are being met for orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) in three distinct living situations: ‘safe homes’ within the community; ‘safe or group homes in a non community setting, and residential homes within the community.

FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN AND CAREGIVERS

The UN Charter of Human Rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1948) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) have identified basic rights and needs of individuals.

Human beings need and have a right to conditions that ensure survival – nourishment, shelter, protection from violence and harm. Beyond this they need conditions that allow for growth and development – adequate supplies of food and water, disease free environments and access to health services. All human beings need positive, reciprocal affiliation with others in order to develop and sustain emotional health and well-being. Exposure to conditions conducive to cognitive development and stimulation (learning) and membership within a family and community grouping are basic needs at this level.

As children mature they have a right to free and compulsory formal education. They need to be exposed to positive role models and to engage in activities, which provide skills for living.

Human beings need to be able to test and develop their unique talents and individual characteristics. Finally human beings need and have a right to seek conditions that allow them to fulfill their potential and follow their own interests. To do this they need to have freedom of expression, choice and