LOVE, SEX, AND MONEY: A qualitative study on family relationships and influences on high risk behavior in adolescents in South Africa

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WHAT WE LEARNED

Positive future orientation has protective benefits for children living in poverty. Family factors, like strong relationships with parents, can support positive adolescent future orientation.

However, poverty and other socioeconomic factors were a considerable source of stress in parent-adolescent relationships, which challenged family bonding and resulted in communication breakdown.

Future family-based interventions should build efficacy and skills in parent-child communication that include both sexual topics as well as finances. Novel approaches may include combined family interventions with structural economic interventions.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa faces the largest HIV epidemic in the world, with 5.6 million people living with HIV [1]. This study takes place in Khayelitsha Township, South Africa, and hopes to provide insight into potential targets for family-based HIV interventions that will reduce adolescent risk in this community and other HIV-endemic communities in South Africa.

Although the literature suggests that having a positive outlook on life (positive future orientation) can be protective for high-risk adolescents, there is limited research on the determinants of future orientation [2]. This study explores how family relationships might contribute to future orientation and adolescent risk-taking behavior, which includes sex, drugs, and crime.

METHODS

Data Collection:
• Qualitative data obtained through focus groups and one-on-one interviews with key informants
• Focus groups attempted to understand:
  1. Adolescent’s terminology for HIV and depression
  2. Adolescent’s perceptions of sexual risk-taking behaviors
  3. Adolescent’s perceived barriers and feelings regarding caregiver communication and parenting behaviors related to safe sex practices and depression
  4. Adolescent’s strategies of coping with their depression and/or caregiver’s depression

Analysis:
• Interview transcripts coded using NVivo Software (2012)
• Data was analyzed using an exploratory analysis with a grounded theory approach
• Recurring themes were identified using inductive analysis

RESULTS

1. Structural risk factors, such as poverty, and protective factors, such as future orientation, influence adolescent sexual risk behavior.

“I sway that there are children that who live in homes that are struck by poverty…there is nothing to eat there and even if that child was a scholar he/she may drop out and start to steal and rob people because they want to end poverty.” (Child Focus Group)

“Those who are determined to succeed and there are those who blame their background and lose hope and end up being failures.” (Child Focus Group)

“We need to be open as well about issues of finances and the major decisions that we take that would affect them in the near future. They need to be assured that when money issues do arise we will find a plan. These are the same issues that makes our children to take drugs such as tile.” (Parent Focus Group)

2. Socioeconomic factors can strain parent-adolescent relationships.

“We wish our children to become things in life but when they see that us as parents do not have enough money they follow their friends and do all bad things. On that situation as a parent you cannot do anything because there is no other alternative you have to get money.” (Parent Focus Group)

When asked what makes a good parent, adolescents responded:

“The parent that buys clothes for her children.” (Child Focus Group)

“A parent that pays for his or her children.” (Child Focus Group)

“A parent that pays for a child at school.” (Child Focus Group)

3. Parents identified structural economic interventions as promising areas for future research.

“For me as well I wish that we as parents we should be bold enough to take our stand to protect out kids. We should not fear our kids and should not shut away from opening up and talking freely about issues.” (Parent Focus Group)

“We do arise we will find a plan. These are the same issues that makes our children to take drugs such as tile.” (Parent Focus Group)

REFERENCES