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Abstract:

In two studies, we assessed several indicators of psychological health and coping resources in a sample of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) impacted by parental HIV/AIDS, who were recruited from an NGO-supported program in South Africa. The participants included 119 children (ages 6-10) and 175 adolescents (ages 11-18) from a low-resource rural community, and consisted of three groups: non-orphans (OVC1) who were the comparison group, orphans due to AIDS (OVC2), and orphans by other causes (OVC3). Parents of children in OVC1 and legal guardians of OVC2 and OVC3 rated their children on age appropriate 112-item Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), South Africa version. The adolescents rated themselves on the CBCL/Youth Self-Report and The Children's Coping Strategies Checklist (CCSC). The results indicated that children in OVC2 group were significantly different on the CBCL scales from their peers in OVC1 and OVC3, with a higher proportion of OVC2 at the borderline to the clinical score range for Internalizing problems and Somatization. Females had elevated scores on the Anxious/Depressed, Internalizing and Total Problems compared to males. There was an interaction between factors, such that boys in OVC2 had elevated mean scores on Somatic Complaints. These findings were relatively similar for the adolescent participants. On coping, group status was not predictive of coping strategy, but active coping strategy negatively predicted Internalizing, Externalizing, and general psychological problems, whereas Avoidant coping positively predicted general psychological problems. These findings suggest that participants who are orphaned by AIDS are at an increased risk of emotional problems that warrant attention, and there are gender differential outcomes that may have cultural implications. The findings may offer a viable rationale for the inclusion of mental health screening and coping resources in the protocol of welfare agencies that provide services to the OVC.

Keywords: OVC, parental HIV/AIDS, psychological health, rural community, Sub-Sahara Africa

Biography:

Prof. Asanbe completed her PhD in psychology with emphasis on child mental health. She is an Associate Professor of Psychology, and the current Deputy Director of the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at the College of Staten Island/City University of New York (CSI/CUNY). Her research focuses on three main themes: identifying the factors that pose a threat to the psychological health of children, especially those related to parental drug use, investigating pre and postnatal drug environments and child outcome, and assessing the psychological health and the coping resources of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) due to parental HIV/AIDS. Prof. Asanbe has publications in psychological and medical journals, and book chapters on children's mental health. Prof. Asanbe is a representative of the American Psychological Association (APA) at the United Nations (UN), and the main representative to the Department of Public Information (UN-DPI). She is a licensed psychologist in New York State.

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