

Regional Brief

Regional Interagency Task Team on Children and AIDS – Eastern and Southern Africa



Living with grandparents is a major caring arrangement for children affected by HIV and AIDS, but these households urgently need external support to ensure children and older carers' wellbeing.

A study by RIATT-ESA and HelpAge International: *Intergenerational issues between older caregivers and children in the context of AIDS in eastern and southern Africa* (RIATT-ESA and HelpAge International, 2011) asked older carers and children living in the region about their lives.

What emerged was a deeper understanding of this common living arrangement which emphasised the fact that every effort should be made to support older-headed households through the urgent provision of external forms of support, especially social transfers.



Children and older carers affected by HIV and AIDS

Priorities for regional and national legislation, policy and programming for children affected by HIV and AIDS living with older carers

Children living in older-headed households is an extremely positive model of care for both children and older people when external support is provided

The study shows that many orphaned children affected by HIV and AIDS prefer living with grandparents than with other relatives or foster families. The grandparents also derive much support, both psychologically and materially, from having their grandchildren in the household. However, the heavy burden of poverty evident in many older-headed households, which often entails hard physical work for children and older carers alike, combined with stigma, rights violations and psychosocial stress means that improved and sustained forms of external support and protection are vital to ensure the wellbeing of children living in these households.

The rights of children and older carers are central to good legislation, policy and programming for vulnerable children and their carers

The right to the fulfilment of basic needs for older caregivers and children affected by HIV and AIDS is consistently violated through the extreme poverty experienced by many older-headed households. In particular, legislators, policy-makers and programmers need to review and revise frameworks and strategies relating to inheritance rights, discrimination against children affected by HIV and AIDS and living in older-headed households, the right to education, the right to basic healthcare, the right to safe and adequate shelter and child labour.

Older-headed households need external assistance from government and civil society to address deep poverty

The study shows that the emotional and physical wellbeing of the members of older-headed households is negatively affected by deep poverty. Older-headed households in rural areas have significantly reduced agricultural capacity due to age and the time constraints created through child care. The study also showed that the caring role combined with the physical and psychological stress faced by older carers, particularly related to generating income, can negatively affect the health of the older carers.

An older carer is defined as a woman or a man who is over 50 years old and is the sole caregiver of children under 18. Often the older carer is a grandparent, but not always; great-grandparents and older aunts and uncles are also carers. Older carers and children living together are defined as an older-headed household. Some 40%-60% of orphaned children are cared for by older carers, the majority being women (UNICEF 2007).

Appropriate national responses to rights violations include:

- Reviewing, revising and enforcing legislation to protect children, especially against land grabbing and child labour, and increasing access to legal services.
- Targeting schools and communities with information and support to assist them in better understanding vulnerable children's issues and challenges.
- Putting measures in place which enable children and their older carers to access health care more easily, which includes free health services for children and older people, strengthening home-based care services, health worker training on child health and health conditions of older people.
- Develop and implement social protection frameworks which target the needs of older-headed households, including social pensions, foster child grants and access to livelihood programmes.
- Integrate rights-based indicators relating to older-headed households into national monitoring and evaluation frameworks including: minimum packages of services and psychosocial support for children, National Plans of Action for OVC, national strategies on HIV and AIDS, Children, Social Development, Education and Agriculture.



Many older-headed households also lack safe and adequate shelter. Programmes are urgently needed to support the agricultural capacity and livelihoods of older-headed households, including social transfers to support these types of households. In partnership with governments, civil society organisations (CSOs) have a major role to play in supporting older carers and children. CSOs should review their strategies and programmes to reflect a family-centred and caregiver approach which addresses older carers and children.

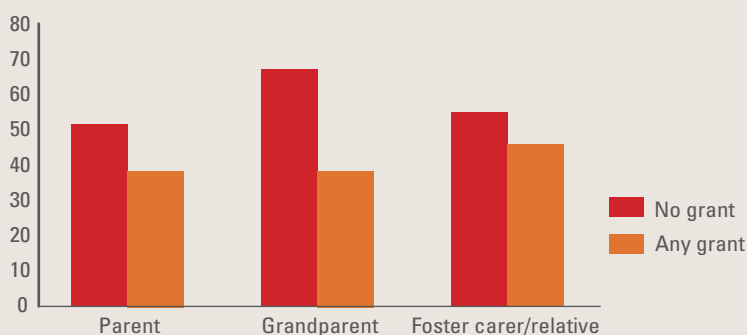
Children and older carers need to participate more fully in legislation, policy-making and programming

The study demonstrated that by asking older carers and children about their needs, valuable insights were gained which can enable more effective legislation, policy and programming. Children and older carers should also be involved in designing, implementing and monitoring the programmes that concern them. This entails developing and supporting formal structures which enable participation at national, district and community levels.

Children and older carers require more psychosocial support

The study confirmed how both children and older carers are deeply affected by the death of the parent/child and how they also worry about the future, with children fearing the death of their grandparents. Older carers face challenges related to communicating with and raising children and teenagers, as well as 'new' challenges such as protecting grandchildren from HIV and AIDS. Extreme poverty and heavy physical labour are also stressors for both older carers and children. In conjunction with vital livelihoods and rights strategies – especially social transfers – psychosocial support targeted at the emotional needs of older carers and children as well as training and support in parenting and communication skills is urgently required (see graph below). This should also include support to local self-help groups where older carers find great comfort.

Percentage of children with clinical-level psychological disorder, by caregiver type and grant. AIDS-orphaned children only.



Source: L. Cluver June 2012, Young Carers study of 6000 children in South Africa, data collected 2009-2011

References:

- Cluver, L. 2012, Analyses conducted for RIATT-ESA, June 2012: *From the Young Carers study of 6000 children in South Africa*, data collected 2009-2011. For more details see www.youngcarers.org.za
- RIATT-ESA and HelpAge International, 2011, *Intergenerational issues between older caregivers and children in the context of AIDS in eastern and southern Africa*
- UNICEF 2007, *The State of the World's Children*

The full study and this briefing can be accessed at www.riatt-esa.org and www.helpage.org

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