THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RISKS UNDERMINING WELLBEING OF CHILDREN PROVIDING CARE TO PEOPLE LIVING WITH AIDS IN KENYA'S INFORMAL SETTLEMENT: ***A Case of Mukuru Informal Settlement of Nairobi***

Submitted by

Marambo Elijah Otiende

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ABSTRACT

This study was set out to examine the responsibilities and risks that undermine the well-being of children who provide care to people living with AIDS (PLWA) in the Mukuru informal settlement of Nairobi. Caring for PLWA exposes children to risks such as stigma and discrimination; loss of self respect; HIV infection and lack of opportunities for education. Lack of risk reduction strategies has the potential to deprive child carers of good health, education, and psychological and physical well-being.

The specific objectives of this study were to examine the responsibilities of children providing care to people living with AIDS in the Mukuru informal settlement, in order to determine the risks that undermine the well-being of these children, and to analyze the risk reduction strategies (coping, mitigation and protection) put in place by government and the community to support children providing care to PLWA.

The study was limited to: (1) children below the ages of 18 years who take care of PLWA, (2) the people living with AIDS, who are being taken care of by these children, in the three zones of the Mukuru informal settlement (Fuata Nyayo, LungaLunga and Kayamba). Mukuru was chosen because it is one of the biggest informal settlements in Nairobi, characterised by high HIV infection rates, large number of orphans, and high level of poverty.

The research based on the theoretical framework of responsibilities, risks and strategies of minimizing risks used questionnaires, key informant guides, focus group discussion and secondary data sources to collect data. The data collected was coded, analysed, classified into recurring themes and sub-themes, and then summarised as percentages and frequencies.

The study findings revealed that the ―role reversals‘ in a child‘s relationship with a PLWA compromises their well-being especially with regards to discrimination, hunger, exposure to abuse and HIV infection, depression, distress, and a higher rate of school dropout. The caring responsibilities are a two-way relationship, even when aspects of the care role have been reversed. The study also established that community and government have limited coping, mitigation and protection strategies in place to protect child carers from physical, emotional and psychological risks. Finally, that it is the intensive time involvement and emotional attachment with substantial evidence of negative outcomes that distinguishes child caring responsibilities from other types of roles that other children perform

This study recommends that the government should immediately implement such risk reduction strategies as the provision of medical care and supplies to PLWA and children as well as legalise and fund social protection strategies such as a child carer‘s insurance plan, and cash transfers, modeled on the South Africa Child Support Grant. The study also recommends that parents and communities should integrate community-based programmes aimed at improving children‘s social environment..

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