

# The hidden impact of aids on South African children

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December 1st is World AIDS day. There are 33.4 million people worldwide living with HIV, 67 per cent in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. In South Africa alone, 5.6 million people are HIV-positive, with only 22 per cent having access to anti-retroviral medication. A pioneering study, funded by Economic and Social Research Council and the South African National Research Foundation, finds that those children who care for parents with AIDS have a higher level of mental illness.

With an overburdened [health system](#), many patients remain at home, where their children take responsibility for their care. For these children, orphanhood is not a single acute event, but a process preceded by a parent's chronic and debilitating illness. Early findings indicate that amongst children living with AIDS-sick adults, 25 per cent do more than three hours of care work per day. In addition, a third undertake medical tasks such as dressing wounds, bathing and toileting the sick person, far higher proportions than amongst children caring for other-sick parents or guardians.

The young carers' education can also be affected with 41 per cent missing school to care for the sick person. They are also more likely to be bullied at school, stigmatised in the community and exposed to emotional and [physical abuse](#) at home. Children who care for parents that are sick with AIDS and AIDS-orphaned children show higher levels of [psychological disorder](#), with strong linkages to the depression and anxiety experienced by their caregivers. As one seventeen-year old boy in the study said; 'I look at my mother and I see she is sick. I worry that

she is going to die just like my father'.

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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