

# Youth and children

Understanding the needs of our youth and children today, for a brighter tomorrow





HSRC studies on children focus on data that demonstrates the importance of early childhood development to individual and national development. Research on youth development provides the evidence-base for an integrated and coherent response to the needs of the young through policies and programmes. Research areas included peer education for vulnerable children, the up-scaling of early childhood development programmes, an audit on Child Care Forums and research on the prevalence and determinants of teenage pregnancy.

### A long-term perspective on child and youth development

The Birth to Twenty (Bt20) study has now been running for 20 years, collecting longitudinal data on a group of 3 273 singleton children born in Johannesburg-Soweto between April and June 1990. The sample is roughly representative of the demographic parameters of South Africa, and attrition has been comparatively low (below 30%), occurring mostly in the first 3-4 years of children's lives.

Approximately 2 300 children and their families remain in contact with the study. Currently funded mainly by the WellcomeTrust (UK), Bt20 data is collected across multiple domains, including growth, development, psychological adjustment, physiological functioning, genetics, school performance, and sexual and reproductive health.

Bt20 has made substantial methodological contributions with relevance to research in post-apartheid South Africa, as well as to cohort studies more broadly. These include accurate measurement of pubertal status, maximising the disclosure of sensitive information by adolescents, and the use of mobile phones to collect ecologically responsive information.

An exciting new development in the study is the launch of the Third Generation project (G3) which tracks all children in the Bt20 cohort, providing a perspective of child and youth development across three generations. To date, more than 250 G3 children have been enrolled in an intensive study of the effects of early stress on growth and risk for adult ill-health.

Results from the study and publications are available on <http://web.wits.ac.za/academic/health/Research/BirthTo20/>

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## Early growth influences everything in later life

### The focus

How much you earn as an adult depends on, among other things, how you grow in childhood. The Consortium of Health Oriented Research in Transitioning Societies (COHORTS) is a collaboration between the five largest and longest running birth cohorts in low- and middle-income countries. The five studies – based in Pelotas in Brazil, Guatemala, Cebu in the Philippines, New Delhi in India and our local Birth to Twenty study – have pooled their data to produce new information about the role of early growth in predisposition to health and disease as well as human capital development, including education and earnings.

### The bigger picture

COHORTS analyses have found that growth during the first two years, specifically height, predicts age at school entry; whether a child ever failed a grade; and their highest grade attained, but growth from 2-4 years has little relationship to schooling outcomes. Stunting (low height) is associated with a reduction in attained schooling of about one year. Weight gain between birth and 2 years is associated with about a half an additional year of schooling respectively.

Given an estimate of about a year of schooling lost, stunting in early childhood is estimated to decrease lifetime income by about 10% in low- and middle-income countries. The recommendations from the study are clear – we need to improve the nutrition of pregnant women and children between birth and 2 years to achieve clearly demonstrated benefits to adult education and income.

### COHORTS



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## Peer education for vulnerable children and youth

### The focus

Peer education has long been considered a valuable tool in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Until now, there has been little positive evidence to show whether it is effective. Working with the Harvard School of Public Health, and funded by USAID, this study examined the impact of two peer education programmes for children and teens.

Local community-based organisations recruited young people aged 10-13 and 14-16, living below the poverty line in rural villages and peri-urban townships, to attend peer-led support groups on HIV and AIDS. Called Vhutshilo (Tshivenda for 'life'), the groups were run after school at nearby drop-in centres and used a carefully structured peer-education model in which 2-3 peer educators were trained to provide formal education, build social norms, and recognise and refer young people for help over a 13-week period.

Over the past two years, using a mixed-methods approach, we evaluated the impact of these groups. Research tools included lesson observations; qualitative interviews; and a survey administered to group members after the test and again four months later. The same research tools were applied to control groups active in similar organisations but who were not attending Vhutshilo groups. Other stakeholders such as community members, peer educators and organisational staff were also interviewed as part of assessing the programme's impact and feasibility.

*Table 5.9 Summary of statistical significant differences found for individual questions between control group (T1) and Vhutshilo group post-test (T2) and delayed (T3)*

#### Question

Indicator 2: Supportive behaviour	Control	Post-test	Delayed post-test
68. My friends think that I'm good at helping them solve problems (Procidano & Heller, 1983)	0.74	0.90	0.96

#### Question

Indicator 8: HIV, sexual and rela- tionship health - Attitudes	Control	Post-test	Delayed post-test
54. I believe it's OK for people my age to have sex with several people in the same month (Basen-Engquist et al., 1999)	0.28	0.19	0.09

### The findings

The results show that for the poorest children and youth, especially those living in the rural parts of South Africa, peer education makes a significant difference. Young people who participated in peer education support groups showed statistically significant gains in HIV knowledge and attitudes, including a positive shift in attitudes regarding multiple partners, gender attitudes, future orientation and supportive behaviour when compared to control groups. In a number of areas, these gains increased over time.

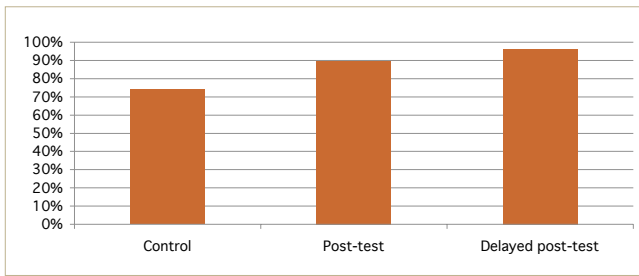
### The bigger picture

The study contributes towards the science of peer education with regard to understanding the roles to which peer educators are best suited (e.g. formal educational content rather than informal role modelling); the systems and support necessary for effective peer education (e.g. training, adult supervision, self-evaluation); and the optimal difference in age (three years) between group members and peer educators.

In terms of policy implications, this study contributes to the national guidelines for peer education currently being produced by the department of basic education.

The graphs below show how Vhutshilo group members outperformed those who did not attend peer education groups in the area of supportive agency (Figure 1) and attitudes towards multiple partnerships (Figure 2).

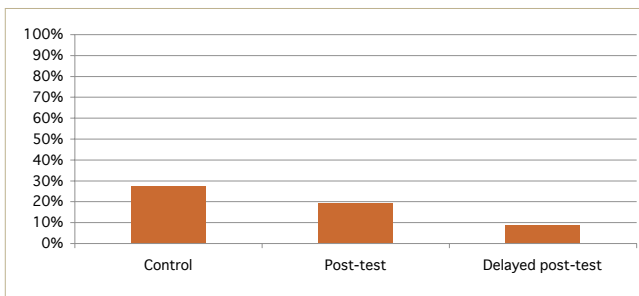
*Figure 1: Survey question: "My friends think that I'm good at helping them solve problems."*



\* Significant at the 95% level of confidence  
 \*\*Significant at the 99% level of confidence

In Figure 1, statistical difference was found between the control group and the post-test intervention group ( $p=.005$ ), and between the control group and the four-month delayed post-test group ( $p=.001$ ). In Figure 2, statistical difference was found between the post-test and four-month delayed post-test groups ( $p=.005$ ).

*Figure 2: Survey question: "I believe it's OK for people my age to have sex with several people in the same month."*



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## Scaling up quality development services to young children

### The focus

More than two-thirds of the children in the 0-4 age group live in poverty and are exposed to conditions which compromise their development. We believe that approximately 350 000 net new jobs could be created through scaling up early childhood development (ECD) programmes. Our project focuses on building strategy and vision, as well as providing evidence that can support the achievement of this potential.

The first phase comprised an in-depth analysis of the state of ECD, so as to identify lessons learnt and the challenges to be addressed to support the scaling up of ECD. This work covered quality indicators, programme governance, budgeting, institutional delivery models and international case studies.

Phase two focused on identifying and testing innovations in the approach to implementation that could enable a more rapid scaling up of quality services that improve child development.

There has been considerable support and engagement in this work from the interdepartmental committee on ECD, the national treasury, the WK Kellogg Foundation, the Second Economy Project at TIPS/ComMark, and the department of basic education.

### The bigger picture

Our research currently serves as the most comprehensive data set of information in respect of ECD in South Africa and therefore is a unique resource. Moreover, inferences point to a large number of innovations being identified which would address both scaling up quality and access to ECD services for children 0-4 years, and could also address employment and labour market conditions of ECD practitioners.

The government's intention is that the majority of poor and vulnerable children would be serviced through home-based community ECD care. Currently, most of



the funding allocated for ECD services is targeted at centre-based ECD services, which at best reach less than 20% of the more than 5.2 million children in this age cohort.

Home- and community-based ECD services have the potential to reach larger numbers of children, particularly those from resource-poor environments. But there has been very limited roll out of home- and community-based programmes, mainly due to lack of funding flows to service providers.

According to government, the lack of norms and standards for such services has been identified as a key barrier to expanding funding to this area of work. The HSRC has been working with the interdepartmental committee on ECD – chaired by the department of social development – to develop a funding model for scaling up home- and community-based ECD services. It is believed that this would support and inform the department of social development bid to treasury for funding resources to be allocated to such programmes.

We therefore turned our attention to defining and costing these activities to unlock a critical barrier to expanding related services and employment opportunities. The research involved desktop work, roundtable discussion sessions, and data collection and analysis. Stakeholders engaged in this research have included national and provincial departments of social development, the national treasury, UNICEF and several non-profit organisations which are currently implementing such programmes.

Study findings included identifying the cost drivers for such provisioning and the need for further work to develop norms and standards which would inform the development of the funding model. Additional funding is being sought to facilitate the further development of the funding model.

*- Centre for Poverty, Employment and Growth*

## Communities taking the lead in caring for children

### The focus

Child Care Forums (CCFs) are community-based mechanisms for ensuring that services reach vulnerable children and their families, within their communities. Although officially recognised since 2003, little was known about the numbers, nature and distribution of CCFs in South Africa prior to an



audit conducted by the HSRC, with the support of EduAction.

The audit, funded and commissioned by the department of social development and UNICEF, identified 400 of these organisations across the country. Using a combination of telephonic interviews and site visits, these CCFs were mapped and data collected on the services they offered and facilitated; the numbers of children they supported; their sources of funding; their partnerships; their human resource capacity; and their needs in terms of training and support.

### The bigger picture

CCFs were found to be concentrated in KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Free State and Gauteng, with far fewer in other provinces (see Figure 1 below). Most CCFs facilitated access to governmental grants and health care, and provided home visits, feeding schemes and educational support. Smaller numbers provided additional services such as recreational activities, psychosocial support, home-based care and counselling.

Levels of funding available to the CCFs were generally inadequate, and most CCF managers said they had inadequate knowledge about funding sources. Almost all child beneficiaries interviewed during the study (95%) reported satisfaction with the services

Almost all child beneficiaries interviewed during the study (95%) reported satisfaction with the services received from Child Care Forums.

received from the CCF. Moving forward, the study recommends clarification around the definition of CCFs, as well as greater clarity around funding availability and criteria.

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## Teenage pregnancies and social fabric

### The focus

Research undertaken on behalf of the department of basic education provided insights into the prevalence and determinants of teenage pregnancy, especially among school-going learners. The department was provided with research-based information to help identify and address risk factors, including the need to work closely with social partners, faith-based organisations and other government departments to identify and help children most at risk.

### The bigger picture

The department of education will reformulate its guideline of dealing with teenage pregnancy in South Africa. The new guideline will emphasise encouraging learners to remain at school, and develop a method of targeting schools and learners who are at high risk of falling pregnant.

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## Young fathers

This reporting year saw the publication of the research monograph *Teenage Tata* by Sharlene Swartz and Arvin Bhana. Based on a study funded by Save the Children Sweden, the book highlights the frequently agonising experiences of impoverished young men becoming fathers in South Africa, often unplanned and unexpected.

The young men interviewed for this study spoke about wanting to take responsibility for their children but being prevented from doing so by cultural strictures; because they are considered 'not good enough' by the mother of their child's family; and due to their own fear of not being able to provide financially for their children.

In addition to the book, a summary booklet was produced and circulated to policy-makers and practitioners, many of whom also attended a workshop on the topic. Dissemination of this important research was achieved through two addresses to parliamentary committees; numerous radio and television interviews; and presentations at local and international academic conferences, including at Oxford and Cambridge Universities.



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