

# The Thogomelo Project

## Supporting adults who support orphans: there is a way

S L'Etang (Health and Development Africa)  
A Nel (University of the Witwatersrand)

### Background

The largely untrained community caregivers (CCGs) caring for children orphaned by AIDS risk adverse psychosocial consequences, including stress, burnout and compassion fatigue. The Thogomelo project seeks to better equip CCGs to support children and access health systems.

The immediate goal of the project is to strengthen the knowledge, skills and psychosocial wellbeing of CCGs through the provision of accredited skills development programmes. Increasing caregiver capacity will in turn improve the care, support and protection of the vulnerable children in their care. This study assesses the effects of the Thogomelo Psychosocial Support Skills Development Programme on psychosocial wellbeing, knowledge and skills gain.

The Thogomelo Project was initiated by South Africa's National Department of Social Development (NDSD) with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) South Africa. The project is managed by a consortium comprised of Program for Appropriate Technologies in Health (PATH), Health and Development Africa (HDA) and the International HIV/AIDS Alliance (IHAA). The pilot phase of the project ran from October 2008 to September 2013, thereafter an extension was granted for a further three years, until June 2016.

### Methods

Eighty-five participants (from a larger sample of 2 700 caregivers trained over five years) were drawn from four provinces. Their mean age was 31.7 years (SD = 7.3 years; range 20–40 years). The group received two weeks of classroom training followed by seven weeks of workplace-based mentoring and assessment. The assessment compared the change in learners' matched scores between baseline and endline (one year post training). Instruments included the Thogomelo Psychosocial Wellbeing Scale.

### Results

Results Indicated that at the one-year follow-up caregivers appeared to be more knowledgeable and confident in their roles and better able to identify the signs of stress than at baseline (p<.01). They were significantly more inclined to seek support from family members, friends, religious leaders (p<.01), and supervisors (p<.05) at endline than at baseline.

Overall, caregivers appeared to be more knowledgeable at endline about the prevention of child abuse and vulnerability. They knew who to refer an abused child to so as to prevent further risk or harm, with significantly more caregivers who indicated that they would refer a child to a social worker (p<.01). At follow-up, a slight decrease was noted in the number of caregivers who reported that they did not know how to prevent a child from being vulnerable.

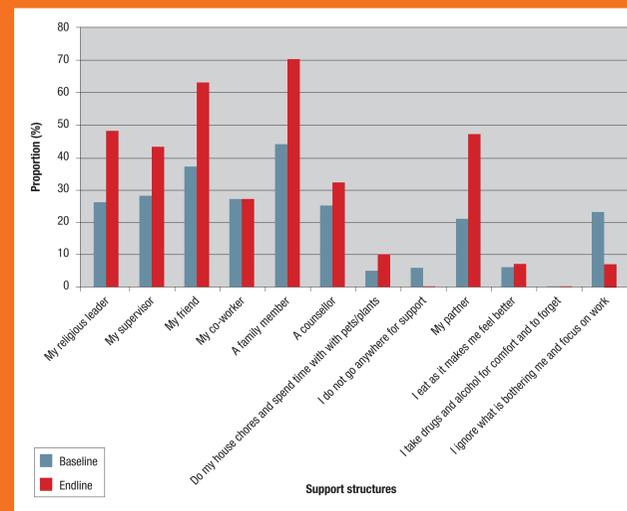


Figure 1: What do you do or where do you go for your own self-care?

### Conclusion

The findings suggest that the training successfully produced a lasting positive impact on CCG psychosocial skills development. The importance of timely identification of the signs of psychosocial distress combined with active sourcing of social support from both formal and informal sources to arrest its effects, as well as an increase in knowledge of how to prevent child abuse and vulnerability, were key findings. In this way, it can be said that the programme has contributed toward helping caregivers meet the challenges they face in the care and protection of vulnerable children. Future interventions might consider investigating caregivers' application of psychosocial and child protection responsive skills one to two years after training in order to establish the ways in which the intervention might challenge caregivers to change the way they practice.

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### Thogomelo Psychosocial Wellbeing Scale

Please complete ALL of the following questions as they relate to you:  
TICK ONLY ONE OPTION

	1. Yes, true	2. Sometimes	3. No, not true
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