

“We Want to See Youth That Would Be Better People Than Us”: A Case Report on Addressing Adolescent Substance Use in Rural South Africa

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BACKGROUND

Although a lot has been done to engage adolescents and youth in meaningful activities, many challenges persist:

- i) **Widening spectrum of addictive substances available to adolescents and youth continues to be major public health threat**
- ii) **Widening spectrum of risk factors – increased rates of divorce (absentee fathers), lack of parental supervision in childhood, lack of role models, social media peer pressure, community poverty, increased number of parents who use or misuse drugs/alcohol etc.:**
- iii) **Growing population of adolescents/youth – particularly that of NEET youth (those not in education, employment or training).**



RESEARCH PROBLEM



Substance use among rural South African adolescents

- i) Need to explore:
 - a) How Sibanye was created,
 - b) Challenges experienced
 - c) Impact/success the coalition has had on adolescent health risk behaviours
- ii) **Primary goal:** Gain insights on what community level interventions work towards reducing health risk behaviours among rural adolescents.

RESEARCH METHODS

Broader study:

- i) Exploratory, descriptive, contextual qualitative design was used to collect information on the youth risk behaviours and needs ranking activity.
- ii) Purposive and snowball sampling methods were used.
- iii) **99 youth living in seven rural communities.**
Majority aged 22 to 25 years (40.4%; n=40)
Majority had no Grade 12 (42.4%; n=42)

Sibanye study:

- i) Nine participants –founding members – participated in a FGD

For both studies, no incentives (apart from snacks) were provided for participation.

Data were thematically analysed by three researchers

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Health and Social Care in the community WILEY

Needs ranking: A qualitative study using a participatory approach

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Abstract

Youth disengagement is a growing concern globally, yet little research has been done to explore participatory approaches that can engage youth as co-creators of community programs that improve their resilience. The primary objective of the study is to report on the results of an innovative participatory approach used in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces, South Africa, to engage vulnerable youth in needs ranking. Data for this paper were collected in three phases. Using information gleaned from the literature review (Phase I), authors compiled a list of core needs on separate cards. In Phase II, youth discussed and ranked each need in terms of importance for their community. In Phase III, youth participated in focus group discussions on the ranked needs as part of a broader discussion on youth risk behaviours. Thematic analysis was used for qualitative data. Needs ranking data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Although expressed priority needs differed amongst communities, combined data revealed the top expressed priorities as further education (priority 1; 85%), skills development (priority 2; 74%) and career development and training (priority 3; 68%). Differences between critical needs as discussed in the literature and those perceived by youth were noted. Focus group data validated the expressed priority needs and highlighted that vulnerable youth felt valued through the needs ranking activity.

RESEARCH SETTING

Sea Vista in Kouga Municipality, Eastern Cape:

- (1) Youth form 34.6% of population
- (2) Small 'township' within an affluent community
- (3) In 2016, population was estimated to be 7 500, but large influx of migrants since then
- (4) Approximately 472 brick houses and 1 000 informal shacks
- (5) One primary school, no high school. Closest high schools situated 17km away in Humansdorp

Sibanye Members



Table 1: Participant Socio-demographic Information

Characteristics (n = 9)	n (%)
Gender	
Male	0 (0)
Female	9(100)
Ethnicity	
Colored (mixed race)	6(67)
Black	3(33)
Education level	
Some High School	5
Grade 12	2
College	2
Marital status	
Married	5
Single	4
Children under 18 years	
4	1(11)
3	2(22)
2	4(45)
1	2(22)
0	0(0)
Household income (monthly – Rands)	
<1000	1(11)
1000 - 4999	4(45)
5000 - 9999	3(33)
>10000	1(11)
Age	Mean (SD)
	41.4 (9.76)
Length of stay in community	20.3 (7.9)

EMERGING THEMES

Themes that emerged fell into four groups:

- (1) Shared vision
- (2) Role modeling
- (3) Impact
- (4) Challenges

EMERGING THEMES

Shared vision

“We are a group of 10 African women, different ages, different religions. We came together because we wanted to fight substance abuse and all the other things that come after it, like crime, teenage pregnancies, and school dropout.”

“We are passionate about making a change in our community. We want to see youth that would be better people than us and make Sea Vista a better place.”

Role modeling – a supportive role for adolescents .

“My role is to be a role model. I’m talking to girls, trying to make them better people, aware that life is not as easy as they think and to stay away from the dangers that are happening in our community, especially drugs, crime, and abstain from sex so that we won’t have more teenage pregnancies.”

“It’s about self-esteem, making them aware of the dangers that are happening in our society with drugs, and crime. Just encouraging them to work hard at school. So that’s the empowering. With the girls, we talk about if you do unprotected sex then you become pregnant or you become sick. So, my main thing is to actually tell them to abstain until they are old enough to actually know what to do.”

“We teach the boys how to respect the girls because most of the boys don’t respect girls. They must know when girls say no, they must accept that.”

EMERGING THEMES

Impact

Improved communication and relationships between the adolescents and their family members:

Families are doing things together more now than before. “**Goodness is infectious**”, We have started to see changes in our adolescents’ friends (who are not participating in Sibanye) as a result of the impacting we are making on these teenagers”

More adolescents involved:

At its inception in 2017, Sibanye had a few adolescents (4 girls and 3 boys) but has grown to 24 girls and 20 boys, as of October 2022.

Challenges

“What I would say about children in Sea Vista is some are privileged, some are not. (...) it is 10% or even 5% that is privileged, because we have parents that are not working at all. There is no income.”

“Some companies say we want a person with five years’ experience. How do you expect a person from Sea Vista to have five years of experience?”

“Moreover, another problem, we do not have a high school in Sea Vista. Like now, the problem that we are facing is we have children that have to go to Humansdorp [neighboring town about 6 miles away] for the high school.”



IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- i) Local community organisations hold promise in reducing substance use among adolescents.
- ii) Key stakeholders in raising children (families, schools, local government, community members) should partner in address adolescent and youth risk behaviours.
 - Volunteering
 - Role modeling
 - Expressing love to children at the family level
- iii) Resources, e.g. financial, human, physical capital should be invested in supporting locally initiated efforts.
- iv) Researchers, community leaders, NPOs, and local and national governments need to collaborate, especially on substance use, to create and offer ongoing public educational programmes aimed at adolescents, giving parents and caregivers the knowledge and skills they need to identify substance use risks, and abuse, and treatment/care resources.



WE ARE DONE



REFERENCES

Refer to:





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Article

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Abstract: Research suggests that substance use, particularly among adolescents may lead to increased illegal activities as well as physical and social health consequences. Around the world, communities, overburdened with adolescent and youth substance use, are finding ways to address this public health threat. Using a case study based on a focus group discussion with nine founding members, this paper reports on the case of Sibanye—a rural community coalition whose mission is to reduce the burden of adolescent substance use on families in rural South Africa. The focus group discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using Nvivo 12. This work highlights the power of an engaged collective effort in addressing key community issues, even in rural areas of emerging economies where health and community infrastructure may be limited. The Sibanye coalition taps into its collective wealth of community knowledge to provide social contributions and aesthetics to help adolescents abstain from substance use and sexual risk behaviors. These activities offer adolescents safe places to meet each other, health education, and the ability to structure their free time meaningfully. Engaging community residents, particularly disadvantaged groups, should be central to any local and national strategies for promoting health and well-being.



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