

"I had to always think positive" - resilience measures adopted by young people to navigate COVID-19

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Background

Emergent research documents how COVID-19 exacerbates underlying inequities. Adolescents and young people in South Africa are bearing the indirect effects of COVID-19. Growing evidence documents that the pandemic has amplified challenges resulting in significant impacts to their schooling and their home life.

Objectives

To understand the resilience tools employed by adolescents and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic. We report on their experiences, resourcefulness and strategies to buffer against adversities.

Methods

The Teen Advisory Groups, as part of the Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents Hub, explored the resilience and coping mechanisms adopted by adolescents and young people (n=41, ages 15-23) using three weeks of art-based, participatory online group activities focused on resilience. The group consisted of adolescents and young people who are young parents, living with HIV or living in AIDS-affected households in a mixture of urban, rural, and peri-urban areas in two South African provinces.



We offered young people an overview telling them that there are things that make us strong to get through the hard times like our head with our thoughts and beliefs, our heart as the people we love and care about and, our hands and feet which are the things in our lives and communities that help us. We then asked them to explore each of these sections per week with guided prompts.

Results

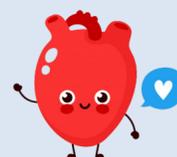
Adolescents and young people utilized diverse resources and employed resilient behaviours to buffer adversities. These resilience measures included drawing on the financial and emotional support provided by close relationships to cope. They also relied on faith-based beliefs and practices of positive self-reinforcement to counteract adversities.

I would find strength by thinking about my background and how I grew up before and tell myself I won't live again the life I lived and I empowered myself by looking at my granny and tell myself if she was not around I don't know where I would be



I think the thing that makes me strong is to have hope that one day everything will get back to normal we will stop living with this virus

I had to always think positive...Yes It Isn't easy, but It Is necessary to think positively because thinking the wrong things sometimes can hold a person back



My Uncle - He would check up on me over the phone everyday and make sure I had food in my kitchen! My Mentor, as well as my Tutor.. always text me on WhatsApp to update me about school activities and assisting me on school work. Helping me with life challenges and difficulties.

Lessons

Despite the contextual factors that limit AYP ability to exercise agency, build resilience and cope in the time of COVID-19, adolescents still actively and creatively leveraged assets at their disposal to access resources. Their resilient responses account for internal and relational-level strategies employed to mitigate difficulty. Research interventions would benefit from strengths-based approaches that consider the ways that AYP adapt and overcome the risks and challenges experienced during COVID-19 as a way to inform the promotion of resilience strategies.