



UNIBESITHO YA PITSOTSI  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PITSOTSI

# Prevention and early intervention services: the role of drop-in centres in empowering vulnerable children

K Kgothadi & MP le Roux

2017



Building a Caring Society, Together.

[www.dsd.gov.za](http://www.dsd.gov.za)



social development

Department  
Social Development  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



# INTRODUCTION

- Children are vulnerable due to their age and stage of development
- They are dependent on adults for their survival, development and well-being
- The family, as the basic unit in society, is responsible for the care and support of children
- It forms the system in which children grow, develop, learn and socialise

# Children's needs: Maslow's hierarchy of needs

*Level 5: Self-actualisation needs*

- fulfils potential, develop skills to deal with challenges

*Level 4: Self-esteem needs*

- feels good about self, respected, worthwhile

*Level 3: Need for love and belonging*

- belonging, acceptance in family/group

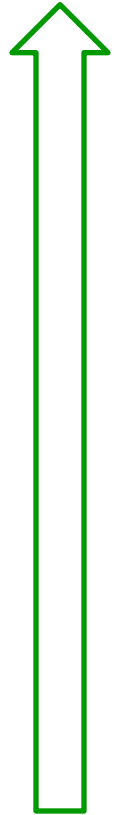
*Level 2: Safety needs*

- physical and psychological safety

*Level 1: Physiological needs*

- food, shelter, water, warmth (clothing)

(Henderson & Thompson, 2011)



- Bill of Rights (Constitution of RSA, 1996) states that every child has the right to, amongst others
  - family care or parental care or appropriate alternative care
  - basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services
  - be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation
  - a basic education
- When basic needs are not met, children become vulnerable (Liebenberg, 2010)

- The Children's Act 38 of 2005 defines a vulnerable child as:  
“a child whose survival, care, protection or development may be compromised due to a particular condition, situation, or circumstances which prevents the fulfillment of his or her rights”
- Several socio-economic conditions affect the capacity of parents to fulfill their role towards children, which contributes to child vulnerability
- Factors that contribute to the vulnerable situations of children include poverty, unemployment and chronic illnesses of parents or caregivers

# PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

- Developmental social welfare emphasises prevention and early intervention programmes
- It promotes integrated, family-centred and community-based social services that are rendered through a multi-disciplinary approach; and is embedded in a rights-based approach
- Developmental social welfare emphasises services to strengthen and support families to care for children in the community where they live (Conley, 2010:49)

## **PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION (Cont.)**

- Prevention and early intervention programmes are provided to families with children in terms of the Children's Act 38 of 2005
- The intention is to strengthen and build the capacities of families to address problems before they lead to statutory intervention (S143)
- The establishment of drop-in centers was one of the strategies that were meant to provide prevention and early intervention services to meet the needs of vulnerable children (S213(3))

# THE ROLE OF DROP-IN CENTRES

- The Children's Act 38 of 2005 makes provision for the establishment of drop-in centers within the communities to address the basic needs of vulnerable children
- Drop-in centers are facilities that provide basic services aimed at addressing the physical, emotional and social developmental needs of vulnerable children (Section 213 of the Children's Act)
- Drop-in centers provide basic services such as food, school attendance support, assistance with personal hygiene as well as laundry, which are compulsory (S213(2))
- Other services may be provided, such as counselling, guidance, psychosocial support, life skills development, educational and recreational programmes (S213(3))



# RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

- The rationale of this study was linked to high levels of vulnerability of children in South Africa
- Many children still struggle to attain their basic needs (Manuel, 2012:10)
- Poverty and co-existing social conditions have a harmful effect on families and on the children in their care
- The researcher took interest in how drop-in centres as intervention strategy could impact on the needs of vulnerable children
- The theoretical framework that applied to the study, was the social development approach
- Research question: What are the experiences of vulnerable children regarding the services they receive from drop-in centres

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Qualitative research approach
- Applied research: findings has implications for practice
- Phenomenological design
- Population: adolescents receiving services from three drop-in centres
- Sampling: purposive and stratified sampling

- Sample: 12 participants, randomly selected (two males and two females from each centre)
  - Ages: 16 to 17 years
  - Received services from drop-in centre for at least six months
  - Parents were alive but unable to provide for children's basic needs
- Data collection: in-depth/unstructured interviews  
interview guide
- Data analysis: thematic analysis  
main themes and sub-themes identified
- Ethical considerations:
  - Voluntary participation, avoidance of harm, written informed consent, confidentiality, no deception

## PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

- Six (6) participants were 16 years old; six (6) participants were 17 years old
- Participants lived in single-parent households: ten (10) with their mother; one (1) with a father; one (1) with a grandmother
- Half of the participants (six) attended the drop-in centre because their mothers advised them to; the others were referred either by care-givers at the drop-in centres, a teacher, friend, childcare worker or an aunt.
- Most of the participants saw the reason for them attending the drop-in centres as a lack of material resources
- Lack of resources were due to parental unemployment (2 participants), limited income (3 participants), lack of food in the home (3 participants), and chronic illness of the parent (4 participants)

# **QUALITATIVE DATA**

## **DISCUSSION OF THEMES AND SUB-THEMES**

Theme 1: material support

Theme 2: school attendance support

Theme 3: enhanced self-esteem

Theme 4: psychosocial support

Theme 5: holistic services

# FINDINGS: MATERIAL SUPPORT

## Provision of food

- Most participants (11) highlighted the benefits of the provision of food by the drop-in centre
- Participants could not function optimally due to lack of food

*“There was no food when we came home from school. I used to think about the situation at home and about lack of food.”*

*“... at home there was no food when we come back from school ... here [at the drop-in centre] we have meals.”*

*“Since I came I received ... meals ... I notice I am now picking up weight and I feel healthy. I have energy to do anything.”*

- Maslow identified physiological needs as the first level of basic needs
- The findings resonate with literature that the fulfillment of basic needs is fundamental for the optimal development of the child

## FINDINGS: MATERIAL SUPPORT

### Provision of clothing

- The participants (nine) were grateful for the clothes they received at the drop-in centre

*“They gave me clothes and a jersey and I am grateful as my parents cannot afford it.”*

*“We do receive clothes and it is a relief for my mother.”*

*“Before I came here I did not have shirts, I only had one shirt.”*

*“My shoes were worn out and they bought me new shoes.”*

- The provision of clothing was valued by the participants
- The findings support literature that physical appearance and belonging to the peer group are important for adolescents
- Clothing can support the self-image of vulnerable adolescents and help them to fit in with the peer group

## FINDINGS: MATERIAL SUPPORT

### Assistance with shelter

- One participant mentioned that the drop-in center helped in repairing their house and stated:

*“They came to my home and found broken windows. ... They put in new windows and also replaced our door.”*

- The literature indicates that children must feel a sense of safety so that they can thrive and develop to their full potential
- Children living in poverty are often exposed to adverse environments, which might lead to anxiety, fear and stress
- The issue of shelter links with the basic needs as propounded by Maslow, referring to physiological needs and safety needs



# FINDINGS: SCHOOL ATTENDANCE SUPPORT

## Provision of school uniforms

- Participants in this study indicated that they received school uniforms at the drop-in centers

*“My life is better now. I got uniform and track suit.”*

*“I was struggling to have full uniform ... I did not believe it's me. I never thought I can have full uniform just like other children.”*

*“I feel good as I look like other children. I used to be ashamed.”*

*“I feel everything is going well with me. I was not confident with myself as I did not have a uniform.”*

- The research findings indicate that the provision of school uniforms helped participants to feel more confident about themselves and to fit in with peers at school
- Fulfilling basic material needs can enhance esteem needs (Maslow), which refers to a person's feeling of self-worth

# FINDINGS: SCHOOL ATTENDANCE SUPPORT

## Assistance with homework

- Participants received different kinds of support from the drop-in centres, including assistance with their homework, access to facilities such as libraries or the internet, and a positive study environment.

*“Sometimes I used to get stressed at home and not do my homework, but since I came here I do write my homework and I do not fail anymore.”*

*“At the centre there is a caregiver who assists with maths.”*

*“The centre assists us. We have access to the internet and we can do research on homework.”*

*“I come to the centre when I need more information. The library has many text books that I use.”*

- The findings indicated that the participants benefitted from support with their homework.
- The provision of assistance with homework is in line with developmental social work which focuses on empowerment, and on enhancing the well-being of children and families

# FINDINGS: SCHOOL ATTENDANCE SUPPORT

## Improvement in school performance

- Individual participants expressed improvement in their school performance
- They articulated that their work was getting better, their marks improved, answering questions in class, improvement of overall school performance, and being an achiever

*“My life has changed ... I now can answer questions in class ... I can perform better in class ... I can communicate better with other people.”*

*“... I am now an achiever because I do pass in class. I respond to questions since I learn a lot at the centre. ... They make me feel good.”*

*“I feel so good and the teacher can see the difference. ... I think I would not be in grade 11 if I did not come to the centre.”*

- Studies indicate that support is associated with educational achievement
- Perceived competence resonates with esteem needs (Maslow)
- Persons who perceive themselves as competent are more likely to persevere in the midst of challenges

# FINDINGS: SCHOOL ATTENDANCE SUPPORT

## Future plans

- All the participants stated that they were planning to study further. They mentioned a range of professions that they aspired to attain at tertiary level such as engineering, tourism, social work, teaching, psychology, boiler making, environmental science, medicine, economy and law
- The participants in this study had a desire to seek educational opportunities, and recognised education as a viable means of achieving their goal
- Literature indicates that school attendance support could prevent school drop-out and encourage children from poor households to consider pursuing further education

## FINDINGS: ENHANCED SELF-ESTEEM

### Personal appearance

- Participants highlighted how the material assistance through food and clothing enhanced their personal appearance, and their ability to fit in with their peers

*“I feel more decent ... I look like other children.”*

*“We now have our needs met. I feel good as I look like other children.”*

*“I was not the same as other children. It was really difficult. But since I came [to the drop-in centre] things got better ... I am now like other children.”*

- The findings resonate with literature, that for adolescents it is important to fit in with and be accepted by the peer group
- A positive personal appearance could enhance their need for belonging, as well as their esteem needs as described in Maslow's theory

# FINDINGS: ENHANCED SELF-ESTEEM

## Increased self-confidence

- Participants' responses indicated that increased confidence was one of the positive outcomes of the services they received from the drop-in centres
- They related this outcome especially to their enhanced personal appearance and their increased competence in school

*“I used to be ashamed and did not raise my hand ... now I can even explain exercises to other children in class.”*

*“I see myself as a school boy and I am still prepared to learn ... my performance ... is good.”*

*“Now I can speak in front of the class without fear ... I am focused ... I can now deal with challenges.”*

- The findings support literature indicating that a sense of competence could be a protective factor that increases resilience among vulnerable children
- It improves their self esteem, which is another level of Maslow's theory

## FINDINGS: ENHANCED SELF-ESTEEM

### Empathy with others

- Some of the participants demonstrated a sense of empathy with other vulnerable groups in the community

*“... now I can empower other children how they should care and support people with HIV.”*

*“We as children can help grannies that stay alone by cleaning their houses as they can no longer do for themselves.”*

*“The community has many sick people. We need to educate them on how it feels to stay with a sick parent.”*

- The increase in their self-esteem promoted a sense of self-worth among some participants, in such a way that they wanted to reach out and touch the lives of other vulnerable groups

## FINDINGS: PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

### Support groups

- The participants found the psychosocial support as a valuable service they received from the drop-in centres

*“We get motivation in the groups. They give us guidance as teenagers. ... They tell us to do the right things. They encourage us that if we do not get awards at school we should not give up. ... The talks motivate me.”*

*“The support group helped me a lot. ... When we discuss with other group members, we are open, we share and get guidance.”*

*“They give advice and guidance and tell us that school is important, do not move around at night. ... After school we come to the support group and give each other guidance.”*

*“We learn about respect and discipline I also gained information from the support groups.”*

- The participants highlighted that the guidance, encouragement and information were helpful to them



## FINDINGS: PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

### Emotional support

- Participants indicated that they received emotional support from the staff and in the support groups presented at the drop-in centres
- The emotional support and information helped them to deal with the illness of their parents as well as their feelings about the loss of their parents

*“I learned a lot on how to care for HIV infected parents ... I used to be stressed but since I came here I became open and talk with her about her status and she is now fine.”*

*“They invited me to a group session with other orphans and they were sharing about their late parents who were sick so I also became open. ... Since I shared this problem, I feel better.”*

*“I learned about skills such as [knowledge on] HIV and AIDS.”*

*“I also gained information ... regarding infectious diseases such as HIV, TB.”*

- The findings relate to developmental social work which aims to mitigate the effects of adverse conditions such as HIV and AIDS through, amongst others, education and prevention programmes

# FINDINGS: HOLISTIC SERVICES

## Interdisciplinary services

- Participants received services from, amongst others, social workers, psychologists, doctors, dentists, child care workers and volunteers

*“They [the social workers] help us with problems.”*

*“They organised me for counselling with a psychologist.”*

*“They advised me to go to the doctor ... I went to the hospital twice and they helped me.”*

*“The dentist also comes, checks us.”*

*“The child care worker at the centre talked to me and guided me.”*

*“The Soul Buddies come and give advice ...”*

- The findings indicate that services provided by the drop-in centres were focused on the holistic development and well-being of children

## CONCLUSIONS

- The empirical findings highlighted that adverse socio-economic conditions negatively affect the fulfillment of children's rights, thus increase their vulnerability.
- Changing the quality of life of vulnerable children is a principle of the developmental welfare approach.
- The fulfilled in the participants' basic needs also had wider effects on their sense of well-being.
- School support services helped them to achieve in school and developed their confidence to participate in class and to strive towards tertiary studies.

- Psychosocial support services helped to address their socio-emotional needs
- The findings indicate that the services provided by the drop-in centres addressed several levels of the universal needs of people, as described in Maslow's hierarchy of needs.
- Based on the empirical findings of the study, it can be concluded that the services provided by the drop-in centres can play a significant role in enhancing the quality of life and the overall well-being of vulnerable children.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- According to Maslow's theory, the higher needs of children cannot be reached unless the basic needs have been met. Lack of food and clothing is a problem in poor families, which means that these families struggle to provide the most basic needs for their children.  
It is thus recommended that Government maintains a strong focus on prioritising the establishment of drop-in centres in communities where families struggle to provide in the basic needs of their children.
- The management of drop-in centres should maintain a strong focus on the basic services indicated in the Children's Act, Section 213(2). Such services can enhance their academic achievement and motivate them for tertiary education and training, and enhance their chances of becoming productive citizens.

- Drop-in centres need to strengthen the provision of comprehensive programmes appropriate to the developmental needs of vulnerable children.
- To address funding challenges that affect the provision of food and other services, the management of drop-in centres must seek partnerships and closer working relationships with the local business community.
- Since the findings of this study may not be generalised to the broader population, it is recommended that further research be conducted nationally to explore the experiences of vulnerable children and hear their voices regarding the services they receive from drop-in centres.



UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA

# THANK YOU

**KHOMOTSO KGOTHADI**  
Department of Social Development

**LIANA (MP) LE ROUX**  
Department of Social Work & Criminology,  
University of Pretoria



Building a Caring Society, Together.

[www.dsd.gov.za](http://www.dsd.gov.za)



**social development**

Department  
Social Development  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

