

## Teachers' influence on children's school experiences

Children's home challenges inevitably impact on their school attendance as well as their social and academic participation in school. Moreover, the way that teachers respond to children's challenges further impacts on their school experiences.

- **Limited knowledge of support available for children affected by HIV:** Some teachers had little awareness of sources of support available in the local community such as NGOs, CBOs and other community groups, which limited their ability to mobilize support for children in need.
- **Limited understanding and awareness of children's home circumstances:** Lack of knowledge of children's home circumstances compromised teachers' understanding of children's behaviour in school and limited their ability to make flexible and supportive responses.
- **Negative attitudes and harsh punishments:** Harsh punishment by some teachers made some children fearful of them. This fear hampered children's participation in class, prevented them from approaching teachers to report critical issues, or even made them stay away from school.

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*"Some boys were late for school and the gate was closed whilst they were outside. Some are given heavy punishment and some are beaten. Others are scared of being beaten so they return home."*

HIV-affected child, rural Zimbabwe  
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Thus, the continuous impact of HIV on children's lives influenced their daily school experiences and without adequate support, compromised their school attendance, general well-being and ability to learn. See leaflet II and III for teachers', community members' and children's own suggestions for how schools could strengthen their support for children affected by HIV.

## About us

This is a DFID/ESRC funded research project with collaborations between Biomedical Research and Training Institute (Harare, Zimbabwe), Department of Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Imperial College School of Public Health, (London, UK) and Department of Social Psychology, The London School of Economic (London, UK).

The research was granted ethical approval from the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe (MRCZ/A/1661).

## About this leaflet

This leaflet (I out of III) presents results from a multi-method research project carried out in communities in rural Zimbabwe, exploring the role of schools in supporting children affected by HIV. Drawing on experiences from 3 primary schools, and 3 secondary schools, these leaflets present what teachers, community members and children themselves regarded as i) How HIV impact on children's school experiences, and ii) examples of good practice to build on which could strengthen schools' support, care and protection of children affected by HIV.

## For further information:

<http://www.psych.lse.ac.uk/beyondeducation>  
[www.manicalandhivproject.org](http://www.manicalandhivproject.org)



Biomedical Research  
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## Making schools more supportive of vulnerable children

How HIV impacts on children's school experiences

Experiences from Zimbabwe

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## Barriers for school attendance

The HIV epidemic continues to have a negative impact on children. Children living in communities with high levels of HIV and poverty often lack food, clothes and adult care and support. This has a negative impact on their education and school experiences. Children's school attendance was challenged by:

- **Poverty:** Poverty itself was a significant cause of school absence due to inability to pay school fees and other school related expenses.
- **HIV:** Illness and hospital visits often disrupted HIV infected children's school attendance. Children living with sick relatives usually had heavy responsibilities in their homes such as caregiving for the sick, heavy chores and income generating activities to sustain the household. These caused children to be late for school, skip school temporarily or drop out completely.

*"Her parents are suffering from HIV. Every weekend she goes to the river to wash blankets that are spoiled by her parents' faeces. At times she comes late to school as she first bathes and clothes her parents."*

Primary school student, rural Zimbabwe



## Impact on performance and participation in school

Even when children were able to attend school – there were barriers for inclusion within school, which challenged their academic and social participation and development.

- **Lack of school materials:** Materially deprived children often attended class without adequate schoolbooks and pens. This compromised their learning opportunities.
- **Lack of food:** Many children came to school hungry and without food, which compromised their ability to concentrate and learn, and impaired the health of HIV infected children on ARVs.
- **Emotional barrier to concentration and participation:** When in school, many children worried about their general life challenges such as ailing or dying parents, how to ensure food for the household, or how to raise money for school fees. These worries compromised their emotional well-being and impacted on their concentration and participation in class.
- **Bullying and social exclusion:** Stigma related bullying of children affected by HIV was prevalent in many schools and left children socially excluded.

*"This illness makes her miserable. She always faints when she is walking. At times she starts to vomit when she is at school this makes her sad because people will be laughing at her."*

Primary school student, rural Zimbabwe



*"The photo shows that loneliness overcame that boy at school. The boy had no one to talk to at school. At lunch time he was usually alone in the classroom. This resulted in feeling that he was just but a foreigner at school."*

Secondary school student, rural Zimbabwe



*"It takes time for me to catch up with the others because I will be thinking if there will be food at home."*

HIV-affected child, rural Zimbabwe



*"Bullying is a problem at our school and makes me dislike coming to school. It causes you not to learn well because you will be afraid."*

HIV-affected child, rural Zimbabwe

*"She is sitting while the others are playing. I feel sorry for Maria because the other girls don't want to play with her because they say that she has HIV."*

Primary school student, rural Zimbabwe