

**FINDING ROSES AMONGST THORNS:  
HOW INSTITUTIONALISED CHILDREN  
NEGOTIATE PATHWAYS TO WELL-BEING  
WHILE AFFECTED BY HIV&AIDS**

by

**Kamleshie Mohangi**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR**  
in  
**EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY**

Department of Educational Psychology  
Faculty of Education  
University of Pretoria  
South Africa

Supervisor: Professor Dr. Liesel Ebersöhn

Co-Supervisor: Professor Dr. Irma Eloff

PRETORIA  
2008



*For dad, my guiding star from up above...*

## *Acknowledgements*

*I am grateful to my pillars of support who illuminated my path with rays of light and beacons of hope:*

*To the children in my study, thank you for all you have taught me about love, life, loss, joy and happiness.*

*To Liesel Ebersöhn, thank you for being the bottomless well from where I drew my fortitude.*

*To Irma Eloff, thank you for enveloping me with your warm glow throughout this endeavour.*

*To my mum, who personifies dignity, hope and optimism, thank you for your constant encouragement and your words of wisdom.*

*To Tahlia, my precious younger daughter, may you never lose your zest for life. You were beside me every step of the way and for that, I thank you.*

*To Tashta, my pride and joy, thank you for your gentleness and for your strength. May you flourish in the years ahead.*

*To Vicky, my dearest - words cannot express my deepest gratitude to you for having created various spaces within which I could pursue my dreams. Thank you for providing me with love as well as real and surreal support from day to day.*

## Declaration of Authorship

---

I, Kamleshie Mohangi, declare that

**Finding roses amongst thorns: How institutionalised children negotiate pathways to well-being while affected by HIV&AIDS**

is my own work and that all sources and citations from literature have been acknowledged in-text and referenced in full.

Signature: .....

Date: .....



## Table of Contents

### Chapter 1 Introducing the study

---

	Page
<b>1.1 Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>1.2 The focus of the inquiry</b> .....	2
<b>1.3 The rationale for this study</b> .....	3
<b>1.4 Research design and methodology</b> .....	5
1.4.1 Paradigmatic choices.....	5
1.4.2 My research setting.....	6
1.4.3 Getting to know the children in the study.....	7
1.4.4 Data generation: strategies, documentation and analysis.....	8
<b>1.5 Ethical considerations</b> .....	10
<b>1.6 Ensuring the quality</b> .....	11
<b>1.7 Clarification of core concepts and terminologies</b> .....	12
1.7.1 HIV&AIDS.....	12
1.7.2 Children.....	13
1.7.3 Children affected by HIV&AIDS.....	13
1.7.4 Orphaned child.....	14
1.7.5 Residential care and children's home (institution).....	14
1.7.6 Well-being.....	15
1.7.7 <i>To negotiate obstacles to create pathways</i> .....	15
1.7.8 Psychosocial.....	16
1.7.9 Positive psychology.....	16
<b>1.8 Summary of findings</b> .....	17
<b>1.9 Potential limitations of the study</b> .....	18
<b>1.10 Outline of chapters</b> .....	19

## Chapter 2

### Situating the study within a conceptual framework by reviewing pertinent literature

---

	<b>Page</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction</b> .....	21
<b>2.2 A conceptual framework</b> .....	22
2.2.1 Adopting a positive approach to supporting children affected by HIV&AIDS.....	22
2.2.1.1 Resilient adaptation.....	24
2.2.1.2 Coping efforts as they relate to resilient adaptation.....	27
2.2.1.3 Pillars of support from a positive psychological perspective.....	28
2.2.2 The context of HIV&AIDS.....	34
2.2.2.1 The magnitude of the HIV&AIDS pandemic.....	37
2.2.2.2 The stressors and challenges that could increase the risks and vulnerabilities facing children.....	38
2.2.3 Well-being and adversity.....	50
2.2.3.1 Resilience and coping.....	50
2.2.3.2 Well-being.....	53
<b>2.3 Towards a positive psychological approach</b> .....	62
<b>2.4 Conclusion</b> .....	63

## Chapter 3 Research Design and Methodology

		Page
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	64
<b>3.2</b>	<b>My research paradigms</b> .....	65
3.2.1	Methodological paradigm.....	65
3.2.2	Meta-theoretical paradigm.....	66
3.2.3	Adopting participatory principles.....	67
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Research design</b> .....	68
3.3.1	A case study design.....	68
3.3.1.1	My research setting.....	69
3.3.1.2	Selecting my research partners.....	70
3.3.2	The research process.....	72
3.3.2.1	Piloting the study.....	73
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Research methodology: data generation and documentation</b> .....	74
3.4.1	Data generation strategies.....	75
3.4.1.1	Informal conversational interviews.....	77
3.4.1.2	Observation.....	89
3.4.1.3	Textual Data: Social worker's report .....	91
<b>3.5</b>	<b>Data analysis and interpretation</b> .....	91
3.5.1	Constructivist grounded theory.....	91
3.5.2	Thematic analysis.....	92
3.5.3	Process of data analysis and interpretation.....	93
<b>3.6</b>	<b>Ethical considerations</b> .....	95
<b>3.7</b>	<b>What challenged me and how I worked through the issues</b> .....	96
3.7.1	My role as researcher.....	96
3.7.2	Reflexivity.....	99
<b>3.8</b>	<b>Ensuring the rigour and quality of the study</b> .....	100
<b>3.9</b>	<b>Summary of the chapter</b> .....	102

## Chapter 4

### Reporting the results of the study

		Page
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	104
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Presenting the results of this study</b> .....	104
4.2.1	Theme 1: The challenges and stressors that could increase the vulnerability and risk for children affected by HIV&AIDS.....	106
4.2.1.1	<i>HIV is a big word</i> : The stressors associated with the psychosocial consequences of HIV&AIDS.....	106
4.2.1.2	The challenges associated with unfulfilled psychosocial needs.....	121
4.2.2	Theme 2: Support for children.....	127
4.2.2.1	Positive systems offering support.....	128
4.2.2.2	Positive intrapersonal characteristics.....	136
4.2.3	Theme 3: Children coping with HIV&AIDS.....	143
4.2.3.1	Spiritual connectedness.....	145
4.2.3.2	Disengagement, denial and detachment as coping mechanisms.....	147
4.2.4	Theme 4: Children experiencing well-being.....	151
4.2.4.1	Hope, optimism and happiness as indicators of well-being.....	151
4.2.4.2	Positive relationships.....	153
4.2.4.3	A future perspective.....	155
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	156



## Chapter 5

### Situating and relating children’s experiences to existing literature

		Page
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	157
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Findings of the study</b> .....	157
5.2.1	Children affected by HIV&AIDS live within a context of challenges and stressors that could increase their vulnerabilities and risks.....	157
5.2.1.1	The stressors associated with the psychosocial consequences of HIV&AIDS.....	158
5.2.1.2	The challenges implied by unfulfilled psychosocial needs.....	171
5.2.2	Pillars that offer strength and support.....	174
5.2.2.1	Positive and enabling systems.....	174
5.2.2.2	Positive intrapersonal characteristics that buffer children.....	179
5.2.3	Children coping with HIV&AIDS.....	181
5.2.3.1	Religious and spiritual coping.....	182
5.2.3.2	Disengagement and denial as coping responses.....	184
5.2.4	Children’s experiences of well-being.....	185
5.2.4.1	Experiences of hope, optimism and happiness as indicators of well-being.....	185
5.2.4.2	Positive emotions as indicators of well-being.....	186
5.2.4.3	Positive relationships.....	187
5.2.4.4	Future orientation as an indicator of well-being.....	188
<b>5.3</b>	<b>An overview</b> .....	188

## Chapter 6 Recommendations and conclusion

		Page
<b>6.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	189
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Addressing my research questions</b> .....	189
6.2.1	Secondary question 1: <i>How did children in my study express a sense of well-being?</i> .....	189
6.2.2	Secondary question 2: <i>What are the challenges and stressors that place children at risk?</i> .....	191
6.2.3	Secondary question 3: <i>How did the children express their despair and distress?</i> .....	192
6.2.4	Secondary question 3: <i>What are the children's psychosocial needs?</i> .....	193
6.2.5	Secondary question 5: <i>How are children supported?</i> .....	194
6.2.6	Secondary question 6: <i>What are the children's coping responses?</i> .....	196
<b>6.3</b>	<b>The potential contributions of my study</b> .....	196
6.3.1	Potential theoretical contribution.....	197
6.3.2	Potential methodological contributions.....	199
<b>6.4</b>	<b>The potential strengths of my study</b> .....	<b>199</b>
<b>6.5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b> .....	200
6.5.1	Recommendations for future studies.....	200
6.5.1.1	Further studies associated with HIV&AIDS and children in residential care arising from my study.....	200
6.5.1.2	Methodological recommendations.....	201
6.5.2	Recommendations for future training of educational psychologists.....	201
<b>6.6</b>	<b>Final reflections</b> .....	201
<b>6.7</b>	<b>Conclusion: <i>Finding roses amongst thorns</i></b> .....	203
	<b>References</b> .....	204

**Addenda:** See compact disc

## List of Figures

---

	<b>Page</b>
<i>Figure 1.1: An overview</i> .....	1
<i>Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework</i> .....	22
<i>Figure 3.1: An illustration of the research process</i> .....	65
<i>Figure 3.2: Harry Potter in front of his home</i> .....	70
<i>Figure 4.1: A visual representation of the emerged themes, sub-themes and categories</i> .....	106
<i>Figure 4.2: HIV in the family – Michelle</i> .....	107
<i>Figure 4.3: HIV in the family – Harry Potter</i> .....	112
<i>Figure 4.4: Clay modelling – Meme</i> .....	116
<i>Figure 4.5: Collage: All about me – Michelle</i> .....	122
<i>Figure 4.6: Collage: All about me- Meme</i> .....	123
<i>Figure 4.7: Draw and write activity: I think, I feel, I need – Kaemogetswe</i> .....	125
<i>Figure 4.8: HIV in the family – Kaemogetswe</i> .....	129
<i>Figure 4.9: Friendship</i> .....	133
<i>Figure 4.10: Collage: All about me – Kaemogetswe</i> .....	139
<i>Figure 4.11: Collage: All about me – Lizzy</i> .....	141
<i>Figure 4.12: HIV in the family – Meme</i> .....	146
<i>Figure 4.13: Collage: All about me – Dimple</i> .....	150
<i>Figure 4.14: Spontaneous painting activity: Happiness –Lizzy</i> .....	152
<i>Figure 4.15: Spontaneous painting activity: Happiness – Meme</i> .....	153
<i>Figure 4.16: Spontaneous painting activity: Happiness – Michelle</i> .....	154
<i>Figure 6.1: Finding roses amongst thorns</i> .....	203

## List of Tables

---

	<b>Page</b>
<i>Table 1.1: Summary of data generation methods and instruments</i> .....	9
<i>Table 1.2: Summary of the main findings of my study</i> .....	17
<i>Table 3.1: Summary of data generation and documentation methods</i> .....	77
<i>Table 3.2: Data collection instruments</i> .....	80
<i>Table 3.3: Potential benefits and limitations of the task-based activities</i> .....	87
<i>Table 5.1: Silences with regard to HIV&amp;AIDS</i> .....	161

## Addenda

---

**Addenda: see compact disc**

Addendum 1: Official Documentation

Addendum 2: Textual Data

Addendum 3: Pilot Study

Addendum 4: Examples of Data

Addendum 5: Data Analysis Process

Addendum 6: Research Journal

Addendum 7: Verification of Findings

Addendum 8: My Research Setting

## Abstract

---

Against a burgeoning worldwide discourse on the psychological and emotional impact of HIV&AIDS on children's development, I conducted an empirical inquiry to explore how a group of nine orphaned and vulnerable children who were residing in a children's home negotiated pathways to well-being while they were affected by HIV&AIDS. The study aimed to explore, understand and describe the phenomenon of well-being within the specific context of the child participants' perspectives of their life-worlds. The study was informed by a qualitative and instrumental case study design within an interpretivist paradigm. In addition, it was guided by a conceptual framework derived from key concepts within the fields of HIV&AIDS, positive psychology, coping and resilience theories.

The study employed both inductive and deductive methods for knowledge development. I utilised task-based participatory activities to guide the informal and conversational interviews with the children in the study as the main data generation strategy. I incorporated the use of informal observations and an examination of documentation as additional data generation methods. By means of a thematic analysis approach incorporating principles of the constructivist grounded theory analysis of the children's expressions, I gained insights that informed my understanding of the children's perceptions and experiences of well-being, risks, challenges and stressors.

Findings indicate that the children in the study experienced risks, challenges and stressors arising from personal illness, stigma, discrimination, orphanhood, residential care, death and bereavement. The study has further revealed that those children who portrayed characteristics of well-being and resilient adaptation utilised psychosocial coping mechanisms. In addition, they were supported and strengthened by their positive intrapersonal characteristics and affirmative relationships that offered emotional and psychosocial support within their environments. The findings of the study suggest that feelings of well-being, hope and optimism might have co-existed with feelings of despair and hopelessness in the daily lives of the children in the study who were affected by HIV&AIDS. I concluded this study by suggesting that the well-being experiences of the children in this study may exist on a continuum and may depend on specific events, occasions or incidents on a day-to-day basis.

Key concepts:

- HIV&AIDS
- Orphaned and vulnerable children
- Residential care
- Risks, challenges and stressors
- Positive psychology
- Well-being
- Intrapersonal characteristics
- Positive and enabling systems
- Coping
- Resilient adaptation