PROFILE AND HIV DIAGNOSIS DISCLOSURE STATUS OF CHILDREN ENROLLED IN A PEDIATRIC ANTIRETROVIRAL PROGRAM IN GAUTENG PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract. A cross sectional survey was conducted with 121 caregivers of HIV-infected children aged 6-13 years enrolled in an antiretroviral treatment (ART) program at a tertiary hospital to determine the profile and HIV disclosure status of children on ART, as well as the socio-demographic profile of their caregivers. The majority of caregivers (n=104, 87.4%) were females, with a mean age of 39.6 years (range 21-76 years). Eighty-four (70.6%) caregivers had secondary education, 61 (51.3%) were single, 83 (69.8%) were unemployed, 73 (61.9%) depended on childcare grants, and 51 (42.9%) were biological mothers. The mean age of children was 9.4 years (range 1-13 years), 109 (90.8%) were schooling, and the mean diagnosis age was 5.2 years. Prevalence of disclosure was 40 (33.3 %), mean disclosure age was 9.4 years (range 3-13 years), and mean diagnosis age was 5.2 years. Fifteen (37.5%) of the children were told their HIV diagnosis by biological mothers, 10 (25%) by healthcare providers, 7 (17.5%) by grandmothers, and 8 (20%) were told by other relatives and foster parents. The prevalence of diagnosis disclosure to HIV infected children was higher than previously reported rates in South Africa and could be attributed to the older mean age of diagnosis. Although biological mothers were the main caregivers, they disclosed the HIV diagnosis to only one-third of the children. There is a need for more research to profile HIV infected children accessing ART in public health facilities to inform interventions to manage this growing population of children.

Keywords: antiretroviral therapy, caregivers, children, disclosure, prevalence, profile, South Africa

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