

CHALLENGES FACED BY PARENTS RAISING ADOLESCENTS ABUSING SUBSTANCES: PARENTS' VOICES

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Substance abuse among adolescents continues to be a serious condition that affects their growth, learning and relationships with their parents. This article discusses the effects of substance abuse on parents who are raising adolescents abusing substances. It is based on a study that sought an in-depth understanding of the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of parents raising adolescents abusing substances in the community of Ramotse in Hammanskraal, Gauteng.

A qualitative research approach with purposive and snowball sampling was abused. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed abusing Tesch's eight steps. Guba's model was applied for data verification. The findings reflect the challenges that parents face and the article offers suggestions for social work policy and practice to deal with substance abuse. Ethical issues were also taken into consideration.

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### INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse has a major impact on individuals, families and the community, and it affects people financially and physically. It also contributes to health-related problems. According to the Department of Social Development (2012), National Drug Master Plan (2013-2017) define substance abuse as the abuse of legal and illegal drugs including alcohol, inhalants, over-the-counter drugs, prescribed drugs and indigenous plants. South Africa has experienced an alarming increase in substance abuse and addiction (Ramlagan, Pelzer & Matseke, 2010). Fernandes and Mokwena (2016:2) report that "about 15% of South African adolescents abusing substance are mainly exposed to the drug commonly known as 'nyaope', which is a combination of dagga and heroin". This article will focus only on nyaope as a substance abused by adolescents in Ramotse.

Despite the South African government having in place various pieces of legislation and policies with regard to substance abuse, the experiences of parents whose adolescents are abusing substances are not taken into account. Families are crucial yet frequently forgotten role players in substance abuse recovery strategies and service provision (Copello & Templeton, 2012). In addition, Winters, Botzet, Dittel, Fahnhorst and Nicholson (2015) contend that having someone abusing substances in the family can have a devastating impact on the family's life by arousing complex emotions, fracturing family values and advancing family dysfunction. Not being enlightened about the signs and symptoms of substance abuse, or the dangers of adolescents abusing substances, is a big challenge for most parents raising the affected adolescents. Parents might also lack knowledge about where to seek help as soon as they realise that their adolescents are abusing substances. Sometimes parents do not recognise the adolescents' changed behaviour and possible early symptoms of substance abuse, accepting that it is normal for adolescents to be rebellious, feel insecure and be emotionally unsettled. This acceptance of odd behaviour makes it difficult for parents to notice that their adolescents have already started abusing substances, but by the time they realise this, the adolescents might already be addicted. This dilemma makes it difficult for parents to cope with the substance abuse of their adolescent children.

Although the behaviour of adolescents abusing substances has a clear negative effect on the whole family, Copello and Templeton (2012) posit that counsellors interact mainly with the adolescents as clients. In other words, professionals focus their concerns on the adolescents who are abusing substances without paying attention to the vulnerability of their parents. Parents should also receive attention, since their needs tend not to be catered for or prioritised because of a lack of human resources or of limited time. The parents of adolescents who are abusing substances need some kind of formal or informal support (Orford, Copello, Velleman & Templeton, 2010). There is a need to improve current policies in relation to substance abuse and take the parents into consideration to avoid putting the parents at risk.

Although substance abuse among adolescents has been extensively researched, the challenges and coping strategies of parents raising the affected adolescents have not received the same attention. Little has been documented on the challenges and coping strategies of parents raising adolescents abusing substances, even though the responsibility for treatment mostly falls on the parents (Hoeck & Van Hal, 2012). A study by Copello and Templeton (2012) further explains that little has been documented on the parental challenges in coping with adolescents abusing substances, even though the responsibility for rehabilitation mostly falls on them as the parents. According to Manthorpe, Moriarty and Cornes (2015), research has mostly focused on interventions aimed at the individual abusing substances and not on their families, their parents or siblings. McKeganey (2014) confirms that research has mostly focused on interventions aimed at the individual abusing substances and not on their families, their parents or siblings. As a solution, Van der Westhuizen, Alpaslan and De Jager (2013) recommend that more research should be done on the challenges and coping

strategies of parents whose adolescents are addicted to substances. This is also in line with the recommendations by Smith and Estefan (2014) that more research should be done on the challenges and coping resources of parents and families whose children are addicted to substances. Van der Westhuizen (2010) also recommends more research be conducted on the parents of children who are addicted to substances.

Given the various constraints faced by parents who are raising adolescents abusing substances, the study sought an in-depth understanding of the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of parents raising adolescents abusing substances in the community of Ramotse in Hammanskraal, Gauteng.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Hoeck and van Hal (2012) and Waini (2015) confirm that little has been documented on the parental experiences and coping strategies of raising with adolescents abusing substances. Substance abuse can be described as the excessive abuse of substances to the level where the person is no longer in control of how they abuse the substance, even when that person realises that the substance could ruin his or her life.

According to the annual report of South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependency (SANCA), (2013) the prevalence of teenage substance abuse is high in the Gauteng province. The report also indicates that in 2012/13 SANCA (Pretoria) indicated an increase of 22% of in-patient clients younger than 17 years of age. The most commonly abused drug is nyaope, which is a combination of different substances. This figure on the extent of substance abuse implies that there are at least between 1.5 and 3 million parents affected by the abuse of substances by adolescents. A report from South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) states that, from 2016, there has been an increase in the number of persons admitted for treatment across centres in South Africa (Dada, Burnhams, Erasmus, Parry & Bhana, 2017). An increasing number of people were admitted for treatment in 2017, from 8 787 in 2016 to 10 047 across 80 centres, as reported by the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU) project (Dada, et al. 2017). The above statistics indicate that substance abuse remains high in Gauteng and Ramotse is not an exception. Ramotse is a village in Hammanskraal situated to the north of Pretoria in Gauteng. Ramotse is one of the communities with the highest rate of drug abuse because of the high rates of unemployment and school dropouts, and the inadequate provision of education, healthcare, housing and basic services.

The impact of substance abuse is devastating to the community at large as well as the families and significant others of people who are abusing substances (Slabbert, 2015). Studies by Barnard (2005) and Dreyer (2012) highlight that the problem of dysfunctional families as a result of divorce and blended families with step-parents can be a cause of adolescents' substance abuse, as these young people may be lacking love and care from their biological parents. McKeganey (2014) also states that family discord and broken families contribute to the high risk of adolescents abusing substances. Family problems such as substance abuse, aggression, criminal records, arguments and fights definitely increase the chances that the adolescents might engage in substance abuse (Dreyer, 2012). Consequently, divorce or separation and the impact of substance abuse by the adolescents lead to detrimental long-term effects on the health and social life of the parents; this in turn calls for support services to parents who are raising adolescents abusing substances.

In South Africa family life is disrupted by, amongst other things, poverty, unemployment and lack of access to social services. An increase in the number of absent fathers is also a concern (Patel, 2005). Mazembo, Hayley and Mphaka (2013) assert that one father out of two is absent from his child's life in South Africa. This figure stems from estimates that around 54% of men aged 15-49 years are fathers, but nearly 50% of these fathers did not have daily contact with their children in 2004. Holborn and Eddy (2011) postulate that more children are growing up without fathers, which means that children are raised in a single-parent home. Although the above factors are not the only critical issues affecting parents whose adolescents are abusing substance, parents clearly need all the support that they can get at the micro, meso and macro levels.

Substance abuse puts a burden on the physical, spiritual, mental health and wellbeing dimensions of families (Usher, Jackson & O'Brien, 2007). Simply being a parent requires a lot of effort and time to raise responsible children. If an adolescent abuses substances, the household can experience conflict and continual crisis. The phenomenon of adolescent substance abuse causes severe strain on parents, as they often experience a wide range of negative feelings such as depression, anxiety, guilt, sorrow and confusion. A person who is abusing substances within the family can clearly compromise family relationships, which in turn often leads to enormously strained family interactions (Howard, Heston, Key & McCrory, Serna-McDonald, Smith & Hendrick, 2010). The problem with substance and alcohol abuse is that it "drains the physical, intellectual, and economic resources of each individual as well as their families" (Hoeck & van Hal, 2012). Substance abuse affects individuals, families and communities in many different ways, including the issue of stealing from family members. The adolescent abusing substances might engage in criminal behaviour in the home, resulting in the family suffering varying degrees of personal anguish both physically and psychologically (Barnard, 2005). Substance abuse has physical implications for the developing child or adolescent, and may produce symptoms that mimic other psychopathological behaviours (Mash & Wolfe, 2010). Such indications often lead parents to worry about the physical wellbeing of their adolescent children. These challenges are an indication of the side-effects of the abuse of substances at a micro, meso and macro level. The situation created by the adolescents abusing substances has negative consequences related to the psychological, economic, cultural and social aspects of their parents' lives and of the community at large.

There are different treatment and support programmes for adolescents abusing substances but little is known about the challenges, coping strategies and support for parents raising these adolescents. Masombuka (2013) recommends that more research should be conducted on understanding the challenges faced by parents who are raising adolescents abusing substances. Usher, Jackson and O'Brien (2005) state that more knowledge is needed to understand how families cope with and manage to live with the adolescents who are abusing substances and what type of support they find helpful. The recognised need for further research shows that more information is needed to understand the challenges and coping strategies of parents raising adolescents abusing substances.

According to McKeganey (2014), siblings of the substance abuser might feel that their parents are neglecting them, because the latter mostly focus their attention on the adolescent who is abusing substances. Barnard (2005) explains that when an adolescent abuses alcohol or other substances, siblings in the family may find their needs and concerns ignored or minimised, while their parents react to constant crises involving the adolescent who is abusing a substance. Family members of adolescents abusing substance may experience feelings of abandonment, anxiety, fear, anger, concern and embarrassment, and parents may wish to ignore or cut ties with the adolescent who is abusing substances. Sometimes family members may even feel the need for legal protection from the person abusing substances. Masombuka (2013) highlights the point that the results of adolescents abusing a substance called *nyaope* may be devastating for their parents as they find that their adolescents display uncontrollable behaviour. He adds that parents then perceive their adolescents as being difficult children, which in turn makes it difficult to interact with them. Parents complained that their teenage children who abuse substances would usually steal small valuables from them such as cell phones, jewellery and small amounts of cash. Masombuka (2013) asserts that the strain experienced by parents can increase if they are faced with the financial difficulties associated with having their belongings stolen by the teenager who is abusing substance. Parents are worried and scared of adolescents who abuse substances in the community. The discussion so far indicates that parents' rights are violated, the parents end up living in fear, as they do not have protection from their violent adolescent and are vulnerable to the risks of being harassed, victimised and discriminated against by their families and communities. This leads to parents to experiencing isolation, feeling helpless and losing hope for a better future for them and their adolescent children.

The goal of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of parents in Ramotse who are raising adolescents abusing substances (Thomas & Hodges, 2010; Fouché & Delpont, 2011).

In alignment with qualitative research approach, the researchers employed ecological systems theory. Ecological systems theory focuses on how people in a helping relationship adjust to the demands created by the environment, their needs and the development of the individuals, groups and community at large (Maxwell, 2013). The ecological systems approach was abused with the aim of focusing on the parents and on understanding the parents holistically, including how the environment influences them while they are raising adolescents who are abusing substances. The ecological systems theory focuses on the notion that individuals cannot be understood sufficiently without considering the various aspects of that individual's environment, namely their social, political, family, spiritual, economic and physical dimensions. These expose the person to several daily challenges, while also providing them with resources innate in their ecology. The application of ecological system allowed the researchers to effectively focus on experiences, challenges and suggestions of various systemic levels, including the individual, family, the small group, and the larger community. Ecological theory indicates that a positive and supportive functional relationship with microsystems (e.g. family, peer, parents, teachers, schools) increases the chances of healthy social functioning. The macro and exo-systems can play a supportive role by creating the appropriate ecology for the micro and meso systems to function (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2016).

The researchers attempted to get clarity on what they need to research by formulating the following problem statement: There is an absence of research-based knowledge on the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of parents who are raising adolescents abusing substances in Ramotse.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study utilised a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research plays an important role in understanding the meaning of the lived experiences of participants and in determining how meanings are formed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Explorative, descriptive and contextual research designs were abused as a bridge between the research questions and the execution or implementation of the research (Creswell, 2009). In view of the fact that little is known about the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of parents raising adolescents abusing substances, an exploratory research design was employed to elicit more information about the phenomenon under study. An exploratory research design was employed to enable the participants to share more information on their day-to-day raising of adolescents abusing substances. A descriptive design was used to obtain more specific details than the exploratory research design could elicit. The researcher (first author) used semi-structured interviews to obtain details and descriptions of the parents' experiences, challenges and coping strategies. The study contextualised the specific activities observed in their natural settings. The participants were studied in their real world, and the researcher conducted interviews with the participants, abusing venues of their choice where they felt comfortable about sharing their experiences.

For exploring the phenomenon of challenges and coping strategies abused by parents raising adolescents abusing substances, the following research question was formulated: What are the challenges and coping strategies of parents who are raising an adolescent abusing substance?

The study was conducted in Ramotse, Hammanskraal. Ramotse is a village in Hammanskraal which is north of Pretoria in Gauteng province. It is one of the communities with the highest rate of drug abuse, but it has only one out-patient treatment centre to treat hundreds of people who are addicted to substances. The population of this study consisted of parents of adolescents abusing substances who reside in Ramotse. Because of the time and money constraints, the entire population of Ramotse was not included in the study and a sample was drawn from the population.

Purposive and snowball sampling was employed to select parents who were raising adolescents abusing substances in Ramotse. The researcher identified participants who were relevant to the study and then

expanded the sample group through referrals. The proposed criterion of inclusion was parents residing in Ramotse and raising adolescents who were abusing substances; the adolescents should be aged between 13 and 19 years, and should have been through the SANCA programme for treatment. The parents should be willing and available to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using the face-to-face interview method with 13 parents who were raising adolescents abusing substances.

The data were independently analysed by two coders: the first author and the independent coder, whose findings corresponded. Data were systematically analysed using the eight steps for qualitative data analysis as outlined by Tesch (cited in Creswell, 2014). All the transcripts were carefully read; all the ideas that the researcher developed from going through the transcripts were noted. The shortest transcript was selected and notes were made on all the implied messages as well as on the themes that were identified. A final decision was made on what the abbreviation for each code should be. Descriptive wording for the topics was abused and ways of reducing the total list of categories by grouping together topics that relate to each other were considered. Three themes were identified and organised into sub-themes. Finally, the coded ideas or storylines belonging to each theme were grouped together thereby completing the initial analysis.

Data were verified against four criteria developed by Guba and Lincoln's model (1994) to test the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study. Data verification refers to the truth value of the study, its applicability, consistency and neutrality as issues against which the trustworthiness of the project can be evaluated (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Different interview skills were used, for example, probing, encouraging, listening, linking and reflecting, while also summarising the questions in order to enhance the credibility of the study. Triangulation of data sources was employed by means of interviewing different parents raising adolescents who are abusing substances. To ensure credibility, follow-up sessions were conducted and colleagues who are also qualitative researchers were consulted. These colleagues assisted by giving peer feedback, suggestions and recommendations. To further enhance the credibility of the research study, a copy of the transcribed interviews was verified by the language translator to confirm whether the English translation is a true reflection of the transcripts. The data were further triangulated with the literature and correspondence with the ecological system approach.

In considering the ethical principles in conducting the research study, permission was sought to conduct the study from the Departmental Research and Ethics Committee at the University of South Africa and SANCA (Pretoria) offices. The informed consent forms were given and explained to the participants who volunteered to be in the research. Confidentiality and anonymity were explained to the participants. The researcher as a qualified social worker was the first-hand counsellor to participants and referral were made to those participants who needed further counselling.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The participants consisted of 13 parents from Ramotse who were raising adolescents who are abusing substances. The participants' ages ranged between 35 and 61 years. This is the stage when most of the parents have reached milestones such as buying a house, finding a partner and preparing for retirement. Nine participants were mothers and four were fathers. This indicates that most of the adolescents came from female-headed households. The researcher concludes that from the gender of the participants that there were more female parents available than male parents. The findings are therefore likely to have a gender bias, that is, the data reflect more perceptions of mothers regarding the challenges and coping strategies of raising adolescents abusing substances than those of fathers. This corresponds with parenting patterns in South Africa in that there is a high percentage of children parented by single parents, mainly mothers (Mathibela, 2017). Of the 13 participants, nine were employed in government institutions and spending most of their time at work, leaving the adolescents alone with no adult supervision. The four participants who were unemployed were also doing odd jobs trying to make money in different ways, including selling different products such as Avon and Tupperware. These

activities kept parents away from home most of the time, leaving adolescents unattended. Employment of parents has been identified as one of the problems that causes most adolescents to be home alone and unsupervised, resulting in them depending on their peers for guidance (Venter & Rambau, 2011).

Three of the participants in this study were divorced and five participants were in estranged relationships, resulting in the other parent being uninvolved in the life of the child. Three parents were married but their partners were only partially involved in the upbringing of the adolescents; two other parents were widows. One of the four male participants in the study was married, but not to the biological mother of the adolescent who was abusing substances. An unstable family environment has always been associated with substance abuse in adolescents. This seems to be the case in this study as most of the adolescents were from single-parent households. According to Ceballo and Borqueza (2008), single parents face a number of challenges and this applies mostly to women. The fact that most of the participants in this study were women is testimony to the challenges they face in an attempt to play both parental roles and balancing that with work and other life commitments.

## DISCUSSION OF THEMES

Three themes are presented separately and below each are the accompanying sub-themes, which are confirmed or endorsed by direct quotes from the transcripts of the interviews.

### **Theme 1: Parents discovered how the adolescents were abusing substances in various ways**

Each parent was asked how s/he discovered that his/her adolescent child was abusing substances. Three sub-themes emerged from their responses, which ranged from money disappearing in the house to the adolescent's school marks dropping.

#### ***Sub-theme 1.1: Parents discovered that the adolescents were abusing substances when money and other items disappeared from adolescents' home and the community***

The above sub-theme is supported by the following storylines.

*"Money started to disappear. I usually just leave money lying around but when I confronted him, he asked me why don't I trust him ... He always has a way of shifting the focus and blaming me for everything that goes wrong in his life. He says I have never supported him and given him attention ... Then I just knew something was wrong."*

*"Money started to disappear. I was convinced that it was my helper. I talked to her and told her that if she needs money she should talk to me not just take. My helper told me that it was not her, but I just left it because I thought she was ashamed to admit that she had taken it. I was really convinced that she had taken it because this boy convinced me that he had no reason to steal in the house ... Then I spoke to my husband about it. We even gave the helper an increase to help her with caring for her mother. Little did I know that she was innocent, I should have just listened to her. She still told me that I should check this boy's behaviour, but I was too trusting ... Then I realised that the money was still disappearing. I went to talk to my helper again and she said we should go and search this boy's room. My sister, I felt so bad that I kept on accusing my helper for stealing."*

One other parent made the following statement regarding how he found out about his adolescent son's substance abuse:

*"Things started missing in the house and he kept on telling me funny stories. When I send him to buy groceries then he will always say that he was robbed or he lost the money and come back without groceries."*

The parents who were interviewed confirmed that they struggled to understand what was happening with their adolescents. Parents shared that they abused to trust their adolescents with money, even leaving money lying around in the house until they realised money was disappearing. Calder (2012)

confirms that when adolescents are addicted to substances, they end up stealing from people around them. Participants shared their frustrations about all the losses they had experienced and in particular having to buy the same things repeatedly as their substance-abusing adolescents continued to steal them.

This finding is similar to that by Waini (2015), who reports that parents were complaining about money missing in the house as the adolescents continued to take the money to buy substances. The parents were disturbed by the fact that they could not trust their adolescents anymore especially in relation to money. Hiding money and other valuable stuff in the house was the only option parents were left with. According to Masombuka (2013), at times parents have to consistently replace assets that would have been stolen from community members by the substance-abusing adolescents who commit petty theft in order to afford to buy substances. By replacing the stolen assets, parents try to cope with the challenge of raising a substance-abusing adolescent's stealing behaviour while avoiding conflict with community members. This is a costly practice for the parents.

The participants had the following to say with regard to adolescents stealing from the community:

*"I am always fighting with my neighbours because he steals from them, but now I just give him R30 every morning to prevent him from stealing from me and the neighbours."*

*"He stole my neighbours' groceries while we were busy chatting outside the house. This is so frustrating as I had to repay them".*

*"I had to replace two cell phones of the community members within three months. I just realized something is not right when money started to disappear in the house."*

The parents shared their frustrations regarding the fact that their adolescents stole from the community to maintain their addiction. They also shared that they had lost most of their belongings, especially kitchen and other electrical appliances, including cell phones and items of clothing since their adolescents started abusing substances. The parents explained that if their adolescents did not find anything to steal from them, then they stole from others in the community. They added that because these adolescents did not have money to buy their substances of choice, stealing was the only way for them to get money. The parents shared their frustrations of having to replace the things that their adolescents stole from the neighbours and other community members. According to Santisteban (2008), children who are addicted to drugs end up stealing from the family members and even from the community members.

### ***Sub-theme 1.2: Parents discovered that their adolescents were abusing substances when the adolescents' behaviour changed towards the parents and teachers***

The following storylines support the sub-theme on behavioural changes.

*"And the lady who is helping me in the house told me that my son's behaviour had changed, as she felt he was disrespecting her, but I took it very lightly."*

*"...but his behaviour changed a lot as well. He was disrespecting me."*

*"She would disappear for weeks and come back when she wanted to and when I asked her where she had been, she would respond very negatively and in an inappropriate manner."*

The sudden behavioural change in adolescents made the parents suspect that something was not right with their children as they saw them behaving in ways that were disrespectful. They felt their adolescents' behaviour had drastically changed, as they did not respect elders anymore both at school and at home. Confirming what the parents were sharing, Hoeck and Van Hal (2012) state that in their study one of the signs mentioned by the parents was behavioural change and that made them realise that substance abuse was involved. This view is supported by Waini (2015), who observes that adolescents' behaviour maybe be uncooperative, moody and even abusive to the parents and people around them.



The parents shared their concerns about the bad behaviour of their adolescents, especially the way they were talking to them, and the change of friends. Some of the parents expressed how their adolescents were being moody and aggressive when they talked to them. The adolescents started to lie about their whereabouts and the people they hung out with and that made parents to be suspicious that substance abuse was contributing to that behaviour (Usher, Jackson & O'Brien, 2007).

The following story lines attest to how parents learned that their adolescents' were disrespecting them and teachers.

*"He started to be disrespectful to the teachers and fought with everyone in the house, even the younger siblings."*

*"My son was such a respectful child but then he started to be very rude and disrespectful towards the teachers at school then we just knew something was not right. Then I confronted him wanting to understand what was going on."*

*"The teachers at school started to complain about his uncontrollable behaviour in class."*

The relationship between parents and adolescents is very important as it is key to a functional family. The quality of adolescents' relationships with parents has been found to predict many different health and behavioral youth outcomes; strong associations have also been found between these outcomes and family processes, and between relationship quality and family processes (Alexander, Waldron, Robbins & Neeb, 2013). Choate (2015) reports that parents noticed their children's behavioural change and had to deal with a different personality after their adolescents started abusing substances. The parents continued to receive complaints from school, even after they tried to admonish their adolescents for bad behaviour. Some of the parents shared that despite the efforts of the school management threatening to expel them from school if they continued disrespecting the teachers, the adolescents did not stop. This is consistent with the findings by Geyer (2012), who reports that the challenges in the classroom continued to increase because the adolescents who were abusing substances were constantly being disrespectful to teachers and fellow learners.

Parents also shared their feeling of being disrespected by the way their adolescents were treating them and the way they were addressing them. The efforts to involve other family members to encourage the adolescents to respect their parents were futile.

### ***Sub-theme 1.3: Parents discovered that their adolescents were abusing substances when they saw changes in the adolescents' school performance***

Some parents identified a drop in the adolescent's school marks as one of the indications that he/she was abusing substances. The following comments were taken from the transcripts:

*"I found out after I realised his school grades were dropping."*

*"My son was doing well at school; he never repeated any grade then I was amazed when the school called me in because he had failed."*

*"His grades have dropped drastically; he only goes to school when he feels like it. At times he stays away from home and school for more than a week."*

Parents shared that because of substance abuse, their adolescents were struggling to keep up with the grades they had before they were involved in this habit. The parents observed that the decline in the school performance also led some of the adolescents to drop out of school. They mentioned that their adolescents started to lose interest in their schoolwork when they got more involved in abusing substances. Confirming this finding, Choate (2015) states that most adolescents who abuse substances are not doing well in school as their brain functioning might be affected by their lifestyle.

The abuse of substances undermines the ability of learners to perform well in school (Van der Westhuizen, 2010). Substance abuse can affect the mental development of a child making it difficult for them to cope at school or in a learning environment.

The following story line from the transcripts attests to the adolescents' decline in their school performance and dropping out of school.

*"My son was performing well at school. I was surprised when I was called in at school because he had failed."*

*"He has dropped out of school; it's been two years now and I have been trying to encourage him to go back to school because I also believe that he needs to be responsible and be able to assist me in caring for his younger siblings."*

*"His marks at school dropped; he hardly goes to school and when he decides to go to school it's not even for the whole week."*

Parents explained that before taking substances, their children were doing well at school, but after they were addicted their performance dropped drastically and some even dropped out of school. Choate (2015) posits that challenges with school work are one of the effects of substance abuse, and it is through the decline in school performance that some parents find out about their adolescents' behaviour.

The adolescents who drop out of school because they are abusing substances and cannot cope with schoolwork anymore can be a challenge to parents. Confirming this, Calder (2012) points out that neglecting school work and dropping out of school are some of the signs indicating that an adolescent is abusing substances. Parents wish to see their children succeed in life, and seeing their adolescents abusing substances can cause them irreparable emotional harm. The participants interviewed mentioned the stress of seeing their adolescents messing up their future by dropping out of school. It affected them badly as they had dreams of seeing their children as having a brighter future than the one they had.

## **Theme 2: Parents' accounts of the challenges they face in dealing with adolescents abusing substances**

In response to the question requiring them to describe the challenges they faced as parents with adolescents who were abusing substances, they recounted a number of challenges. These are given in the following sub-themes ranging from health challenges to a total loss of hope.

### ***Sub-theme 2.1: Parents dealing with health challenges such as stress, anxiety***

Many parents explained the health challenges they faced, mainly as the result of the stress they experienced as a result of their adolescents' abuse of substances.

*"I also need help because at times I feel like I am losing my mind, especially if am not talking to anyone about this. I think one thing that keeps me sane about this whole situation is talking to people and not hiding anything ... My blood pressure is always high because of this boy .... I am 35 years old, but the way I am forever sick, I feel like am older than my age. This boy is frustrating me. He is going to kill me I tell you" Later she added: "I don't have peace of mind. Every time I think about him, it hurts me. I think about him and how that has affected my health a lot these days."*

*"It really hurts because other children will even make jokes about my son. This stresses me a lot. I have lost a lot of weight due to his behaviour and I'm on chronic medication for high blood pressure; it's difficult to get better with his behaviour."*

*"I am forever stressed. The way I have lost weight! The people who know me always tell me that I have lost a lot of weight. My clothes don't fit me anymore ... Look at me, I was a size 48 but now I have gone down to size 30 and I am still losing weight. I don't even buy clothes anymore. It is no abuse any more; my life has just been stressful. Even if I want to buy clothes, I can't because she will steal them and sell them for drugs."*

The stress-related health problems have been reported to be very common among parents who are raising children abusing substances as they are constantly worried about the behaviour and lifestyle of

their children (Smith and Estefan, 2014). Teater (2014) contends that substance abuse affects different levels of an individual as well as their families, including the biological, psychosocial, health and social.

Caring for a person abusing substances – be it a relative, child or spouse – gives rise to a stressful life that creates strain on the family members leading to physical and psychological sicknesses (Orford, *et al.* 2010). Most of the parents in the study mentioned that they had developed health conditions as a direct result of raising their adolescents with addiction problems.

The parents interviewed indicated that they were dealing with stress and anxiety caused by the behaviour of their adolescents abusing substances. The following story lines convey the challenges of the parents.

*“I lost a lot of weight due to his behaviour and am on chronic medication; it’s so difficult but I keep on hoping that he will change.”*

*“I worry every day; I don’t sleep at night because sometimes I do not even know where he is. At times I don’t even know what to think because sometimes he doesn’t come home for days.”*

*“There are times when I wish I could kill him and just get peace of mind, I am forever stressed and worried.”*

Two participants had the following to say about the stress that they endure every day.

*“I have lost weight; this situation has landed me at VISTA clinic ... I tried to commit suicide; I couldn’t take it anymore.”*

*“I have even been admitted several times to the hospital because of my blood pressure and heart conditions.”*

Some of the parents mentioned that the doctors had put them on depression medication, while others stated that they were struggling with hypertension, stress and other stress-related diseases. They now they had to rely on chronic medication as a result of the behaviour of their children. Parents indicated that their health had taken strain because of their adolescents abusing substances. They mentioned that it had affected them immensely and brought much emotional stress into their lives. Smith and Estefan (2014) contend that having an adolescent who is dependent on substances can bring about challenges and stress that affect the physical health and wellbeing of parents, leaving them feeling overwhelmed.

The emotional burden of having children who are dependent on substances is dangerous to the health of the parents, as they are constantly worried about the lifestyle and wellbeing of their offspring. Parents shared that since they had been trying to deal with their adolescents’ addiction, their health had been greatly affected by the situation. Parents with adolescents abusing substances are stressed a point where they feel it is too much and they cannot take it anymore (Usher *et al.*, 2007).

### ***Sub-theme 2.2: Parents dealing with community’s reactions***

Parents also identified the community’s reactions to them as parents of adolescents abusing substances as a challenge they had to face. These reactions were described as being negative or derisive.

*“I tried to give him everything he needed in life. I bought him the best things I could afford. I took him to a very good school in town but now everyone in this community is laughing at me that I am not only a bad parent but a bad teacher too. Parents here give me funny looks as if they are asking me what it is that I can teach their children when I fail to even teach my own son to stop stealing from the community ... It really hurts because people make funny jokes about my son.”*

*“It really hurts because other children even make jokes about my son. This stresses me a lot.”*

*“People don’t want to talk to me anymore; others feel that I need to get him arrested, but how do I even do that? He has a case whereby he stole the neighbour’s generator, but the magistrate said he cannot be arrested as he is underage and he was under the influence of drugs, but he should be put under my custody. My neighbour then accused me of bribing the police not to arrest him ... I once heard from another neighbour that everyone is talking about me that I protect my son even when he steals from them. The other one told me that they are planning on beating him up if they catch him stealing again because they think I protect him.”*

The challenge of substance abuse among adolescents is linked to various dangerous practices, including crime and violence (Taylor, 2011). As indicated in the comments above, the community gets fed up with the adolescents stealing from them and they start to resent their parents. Parents understand the fact that communities are tired of the adolescents stealing from them, but feel that it is not fair that they are blamed and victimised for the behaviour of their children.

Parents shared their concerns that the community perceived them as irresponsible parents, because their adolescents were abusing substances. However, the parents needed the community to treat them with respect and stop judging them. It was evident that participants were struggling to keep up with the way the community members were treating them. They stated that they felt unwanted in their own community.

Parents felt victimised by the community because of the adolescents’ abuse of substances. The following story-lines attest to this.

*“How can someone judge you because of your child’s behaviour? How can they expect me to pay for the things my son steals? It’s not like I send him to steal from them. He also steals from me, but I always have to replace the things he steals from the neighbours.”*

*“Every time there is a robbery in the community, people look at us as if we know the culprit. Some even swear at us for no reason at all. The other time my neighbour asked my friend why we are keeping this child in the community. This means we support his behaviour or we should get him arrested.”*

*“I know that I failed as a parent but it becomes worse if you constantly hear people gossiping about you and calling you names because your child is abusing drugs.”*

The parents shared their frustrations as they felt that the community members isolated and treated them as if they were condoning the behaviour of their adolescent children instead of realising that they were also challenged by it. This view is supported by Kirst-Ashman (2015), who states that parents feel unwanted, unloved and rejected by their communities and get a sense that they are not being treated fairly. Parents reported that they are discriminated against by the community and have to deal with the challenges of being called names because of their adolescent children’s addiction to substances. The community members made the parents feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in their own community. They stated that they felt like outsiders and considered being judged by the actions of their adolescent children as unfair to them.

Substance abuse in the family also affects the social life of family members and the way they relate to others (Hoeck & Van Hal, 2012). The parents felt that they were victims in this whole dilemma and they were caught between supporting their substance-abusing adolescents and dealing with the rejection from the community. Name-calling was said to be one of the kinds of insults they had endure as the community continued to gossip about them.

### ***Sub-theme 2.3: Family and friends distance themselves from parents of adolescents abusing substances***

Another challenge that emerged from the interviews with the parents was that family and friends had distanced themselves from the parent and adolescents because of the adolescents' behaviour. The following story-lines convey the experiences of being distanced from their families.

*"I am losing my family. No one wants to visit me and everyone is side-lining me ... When they [family] invite me, all we talk about is my daughter's behaviour. As a person, you can always sense when you are not welcome. So, these days I just stay at home and avoid going to family events, although I miss them at times ... Honestly, it hurts because I need my family, but I have tried to make peace with that".* She added: *"As for my community and family, they look at me as if I will contaminate them with some kind of disease."*

*"I do not have much support. My family and friends have just distanced themselves from me. Now I really understand what they mean when they say 'when days are dark, friends are few'. People who are total strangers are the ones who are actually trying to help me. They sympathise with me, unlike my own flesh and blood."*

*"My challenge is the loneliness of being away from friends and family because they don't want to come to my house anymore and I can't visit them either. Everyone has just distanced themselves from me, I don't have anyone to talk to and I also struggle to go and visit my family especially during the family gatherings ... it is because of the behaviour of my son, but I also do not feel comfortable with the family, because they do not support me anymore; they are all tired of ... I am also scared to leave the house because if I leave he comes and steals my stuff. I feel like a prisoner in my own house."*

The parents mentioned the challenges they faced daily as they continued to lose contact with other family members and relatives. The challenge of substance abuse in the family disrupts the whole family system, even affecting close friends and relatives. It leaves families broken and divided because the focus shifts to the affected adolescents. The individual abusing substances runs the risk of compromising the relationship in the family setting, which leads to the family system being severely strained (Howard, *et al.*, 2010).

Parents felt that their lives revolved around their adolescents who abuse substances, as they cannot plan anything the way they abused to. The parents shared that they continue to have a lot of disagreements and conflicts among themselves regarding the adolescents' behaviour. Other family members might decide to keep their distance to avoid being in contact with the adolescent who is abusing substances and avoid more arguments within the family.

### ***Sub-theme 2.4: Parents felt that they lack support from their families, relatives and the community***

The parents made the following points.

*"I don't get much support from my family and the community. I wish parents can also be given support the way people who are abusing drugs are given support."*

*"My family is not supportive as they feel I should stop trying to help my son and leave him in the street until he decides to change his life."*

*"My two children are abusing drugs; some of the relatives judge me just like the community members do. They say I failed to raise my children well."*

The parents mentioned that they do not get much support from their families and relatives. The family members and relatives are tired of supporting them as this is also taking a lot of energy and strength from them. The parents are mostly not included in the social workers' therapy sessions as the focus is

on the individual who is abusing substances. Choate (2015) confirms there is not much support provided for the parents.

The whole focus is directed towards the adolescents abusing substances; hence some family members do not want to continue to support them but request the parent to leave the addicted adolescents alone until he/she has decided to quit abusing substances. The issue of being discriminated against and being called names by neighbours and relatives because they have adolescents who are abusing substances is also a huge challenge that parents face.

### ***Sub-theme 2.5: Parents felt vulnerable to being hurt or even being killed by their own children***

Most of the parents explained how they are fearful that their adolescents will kill them or fearful that their offspring might be killed. This fear pervaded their thoughts. The following story-lines attest to this.

*“I fear for my life every day. I am always scared that when he needs these drugs and if I can’t give him the money he will kill me.”*

*“I am also worried about the fact that the people she associates herself with are very dangerous; I don’t know what she promises them. I also wonder what would happen if they decide to kill me ... She always lies; I don’t know what she promises them and what they are planning. You can see the anger she has towards me when I don’t give her money. I am just scared because she blames me for everything that goes wrong in her life ... I have heard lots of stories happening in our area; I am really scared and worried.”*

*“I really wish he could just die because eventually he is going to kill me instead ... I can see it in his eyes when he needs money for nyaope. He is so aggressive and doesn’t even think about anyone. The other time I found him fighting with his younger brother, because he saw that he had money and he needed to buy this nyaope. When I came in and tried to stop the fight, he started telling me that I don’t love him and I only give my attention to his siblings, but as for him I never even loved him. I am getting weaker and weaker every day due to stress and other problems. If I die, who is going to take care of him? I know his father will never tolerate him; even now his father really cares little about him. Imagine if I were to die, what is going to happen to him?”*

Most of the parents explained how they are fearful that their adolescents might kill them or fearful that the children might be killed. This fear pervaded their thoughts. The behaviour of their addicted adolescents tended to be abusive, even threatening at times. The adolescents would even push parents around when they needed money to buy substances. Parents were not sure what to expect from their addicted offspring as they knew that they were so unpredictable and violent when they experienced withdrawal symptoms and were looking for money to buy substances. These boys and girls were physically abusing their own parents when they needed money to buy substances. Orford *et al.* (2010) note that the person abusing substances can also be aggressive and sometimes verbally abusive to people around him or her. At times, s/he breaks things in the house and threatens those around him/her, which is what leads most parents to feel unsafe.

Parents reported to the researcher that they did not feel safe around their own children because of their behaviour due to substance abuse. Parents are terrorised by the verbal and physical abuse from their adolescents who abuse substances. The uncertainty of their safety made parents feel unsettled and unsure about their lives and the lives of their significant others. Having to deal with verbal abuse on a daily basis was making it difficult for parents to feel safe in their own homes.

Some parents indicated that they feared for their other children, because they realise that when the addicted adolescents are craving substances, they are capable of anything, including murder.

*“I am always scared when he needs these drugs because he becomes so violent and disruptive; you can see that he can kill anyone.”*

*"I don't trust him; these days I give him money for drugs because I am scared if I do not give him he will kill me."*

*"I have heard stories about parents who were killed by their own children sometimes. I think what if ... I always live in fear that anything can happen. Sometimes I don't even sleep throughout the night because I do not know what she is thinking and planning."*

Orford *et al.* (2010) state that the strain of raising an adolescent abusing substances emanates from the fact that the person can be aggressive, always fighting with the family members for money, and that might cause the family to feel unsettled and anxious when they are around the adolescent. The parents are also dealing with the challenge of ensuring their own safety and that of other family members.

Parents worry about the lifestyles of their children, even the people they hang out with, as they do not know the influence they have on them (Hoeck & Van Hal, 2012).

### **Theme 3: Parents provided different suggestions on how parents raising adolescents abusing substances could be better supported**

In response to the question regarding their suggestions on the support the community should offer parents in dealing with adolescents who are abusing substances, the parents offered a number of suggestions ranging from support and understanding to reviving the spirit of *ubuntu*.

#### ***Sub-theme 3.1: Parents suggested the reviving of the spirit of ubuntu***

Some parents suggested that communities could support parents by restoring the spirit of *ubuntu*, which not to exist in the community any longer. This is explained in the story-lines that follow.

*"I don't think that there is much that the community can do. I guess what is needed in the community is ubuntu ... in our community, people should know that they are laughing today because it's me, but tomorrow it can be another child."*

*"Communities have stopped caring about each other and everyone is just minding his/her own business ... Yes, we need to go back to our roots whereby your child was my child and people were taking care of each other. If we do that, we won't have these challenges because some of the people who are selling these drugs are parents; they have children but they don't care when they mess up someone else's life."*

*"I believe that our community should go back to ubuntu and caring for one another."*

The notion of *ubuntu* is based on an African idiom that says that it takes the whole village to raise a child. The parents raised the concern that the *ubuntu* principle is no longer applicable in their community, as people have developed a tendency of not caring about children other than their own. People are no longer supportive of one another, hence the communities are faced with these kinds of challenges. *Ubuntu* reminds the community members of their non-negotiable accountability to care for and support each other in their own communities (Masombuka, 2013).

Good-quality social support in the form of emotional support and material help are invaluable resources for supporting affected family members in their coping efforts and contributing positively to their health (Orford *et al.*, 2010). Parents believe that if communities can go back to the *ubuntu* principles, many problems such as adolescent substance abuse can be easily solved. *Ubuntu* encourages community members to care and love one another and it always reminds individuals that we need each other to succeed in life. Parents strongly felt that this principle needs to be revived in the communities.

#### ***Sub-theme 3.2: Parents need communities to be mobilised into working together in fighting the drug lords and substance abuse***

Other participants shared the view that the communities are too ignorant and self-centred to care about other people as they abused to do. The following reports support this view.

*“Parents in this community do know who is selling drugs but they don’t want to stand together and kick these criminals out of our community.”*

*“I just wish we could all work together as a community to fight drugs and the people who are bringing them to our children.”*

*“I believe we could mobilise community members and have an awareness campaign to show the importance of having a drug-free community. The community in Eldorado Park did it and they even got more support from the government, but I know we have to start working together.”*

Another parent expressed the need for the community to intervene.

*“In our community people should know that if we don’t start working together to get the drugs out of our community, today it’s my child, but tomorrow it can be their child.”*

Police officers are working with the drug lords in the communities, hence it becomes difficult to remove drugs from these communities, (de la Torre, 2008). Parents complain that police officers take bribes from drug lords and turn a blind eye on their crimes. Some of the community members have decided to give up on reporting the people who are selling substances in their community, as they know they become targets and are victimised by the drug lords.

Drug Master Plan (2013-2017) was designed to meet the needs of stakeholders working together to find solutions to substance abuse challenges. One of the goals of the Drug Master Plan 2013-2017 is to promote family and community-based intervention approaches in order to facilitate the social reintegration of abusers. Parents felt that despite the fact that some of the criminal cases involving substance abuse are reported and nothing is done, people should continue to report these cases until authorities do something. They believe that if the community members continue working with the police, the criminals who are bringing substances into the community will be arrested.

### ***Sub-theme 3.3: Parents suggested that communities need to be educated about substance abuse***

In order for the community to show the necessary understanding and support to parents with adolescents abusing substances, the parents who were interviewed suggested that the community needs to be educated. This is highlighted in the following story-lines.

*“I don’t think that there is much that the community can do because they are not well informed about drugs. I guess what is needed in the community is the education of community members first, then that can help us work together without judging each other ... In our community people should know that this is not the parents’ problem only, but it is affecting all of us because it’s me today but tomorrow it can be their child.”*

*“They call the children who are abusing nyaope the ‘nyaopes’ not even caring about the feelings of the parents.”*

*“I also think that our community needs to be informed about the seriousness of substance abuse.”*

In line with the ecological systems theory, one needs to look at the different aspects of an individual’s environment in order to be able to assist that individual holistically. Ecological systems theory states that substance abuse in a family does not affect only the adolescents and the parents but the communities as well (Klostermann & O’Farrell, 2013). Ensuring that communities are informed about substance abuse will improve their lives and prevent more adolescents from engaging in substance abuse.

Parents shared the importance of educating the communities about substance abuse through campaigns. Empowering communities with knowledge to work together towards overcoming this scourge will assist them to avoid stigmatising the adolescents and their parents. Educating communities will not only benefit the parents but the community at large.



### ***Sub-theme 3.4 Parents need communities to be educated about substance abuse***

Below are comments from parents who need the community to be educated about substance abuse.

*“People in our communities are so busy with their own lives so they don’t care about what is happening in their neighbours’ houses, but gossip about other people. I think if more community members could get knowledge and understanding they would know that we need to work together.”*

*“Our community members fail to realise that today it is my child but tomorrow it might be your child; so more education programmes should be introduced here in our area to allow people to learn more and then we will be able to support each other as community members.”*

*“The community needs to work together.”*

Parents believe that community members need to be educated about the prevalence of substances and harmful effects of substances especially among adolescents. Social workers and other stakeholders should provide community members with resources for substance abuse prevention, treatment and recovery, and should conduct workshops on strategies that community members can use to help adolescents say no to substance abuse.

An African proverb says *It takes a whole village to raise a child*. If communities are educated about substances, they will be able to support the parents whose adolescents are abusing substances and be able to empower their own children.

### ***Sub-theme 3.5: Parents suggested more frequent support group sessions***

Given that most parents felt supported by the South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (SANCA) (2013), family support groups, many participants recommended that these groups should meet more frequently.

*“I think more support groups; like I mentioned that there is only one support group per month. If we can have support groups every week even if we all cannot afford to attend every week, at least you know if you missed this week’s meeting you will still get next week’s meeting.”*

*“I wish SANCA could have regular meetings, unlike waiting for once a month, because the meetings really help, but the once a month thing isn’t working ... They should realise that a lot is happening in between just to assist us. At the last meeting I attended I stayed there for a long time even after the meeting ended and we were just there as parents supporting each other. It really helps because we go through a lot as parents and I understand that getting more and angrier and swearing at him doesn’t help the situation in any way, because it only pushes him into smoking more and more.”*

*“I also appreciate the support from SANCA, although I wish we could get more support groups like the one we attend ... I think they should increase the number of days because we only meet once a month and that is frustrating at times because it is just not enough. I was looking forward to attending the last meeting, but it was cancelled because the staff members at SANCA were attending a funeral. The other time we only had a meeting after three months because of other challenges. I really think we need more days, at least fortnightly, if every week is too much for them.”*

The above comments show that parents benefited a lot from attending support groups as they improved their self-esteem and confidence, and empowered them with knowledge. The support group also gave the parents reassurance about their common experiences, helping them to share ideas on how they can assist each other to cope. Parents stressed the benefits of attending regular support groups and reported how the meetings had increased their confidence in dealing with challenges regarding their children (Hoeck & Van Hal, 2012).

From the interviews conducted, the parents raised concerns about meeting only once a month and sometimes meeting only once in two months. It is stated that not much has been done to assist the parents and families of the people who are abusing substances because of the inadequate models to assist in dealing with addiction problems and the families (Orford *et al.*, 2010). In this study parents suggested more frequent support group sessions and that more focus should be on them. They also mentioned that more support groups would benefit other parents and accommodate their different needs.

***Sub-theme 3.6 Parents suggested that church leaders and church groups should be more informed about substance abuse***

It was clear to the researcher from the participants' perception that some of the church leaders were not well informed about substance abuse. This made it difficult for them to assist their congregants, who include the participants.

*"I get a lot of support from my pastor mainly in the form of prayers and counselling, but it would be really good if my pastor was more informed about substances as it would also assist him in making a difference in other people's lives."*

*"My church members are very supportive and I believe if churches are well equipped with knowledge on drugs it would make a huge difference."*

*"Churches are so involved in bringing a difference in the lives of people, so if more training workshops could be facilitated, pastors could work closely with the social workers to bring change in dealing with drugs."*

More training workshops by social workers and other relevant stakeholders can empower the church leaders as suggested by the participants. Participants also mentioned that other church members view substance abuse as immoral and blame the parents for allowing their children to abuse substances.

Waini (2015) postulates that parents rely on the church and their pastors for support, which provides them with hope and courage. Parents gain much strength spiritually from attending their different churches and they feel that the church is partially working on closing the gap created by unsupportive friends and families. The participants in this study needed more support and training to be provided to church leaders and members, who in turn can be able to provide better support to them and their affected offspring.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the above findings, the researchers drew the following conclusions and offer a number of recommendations.

- Parents highlighted how they realised that their adolescent children were involved in substance abuse. The most consistent sign was that the adolescents started to steal from the community and family members. Parents shared their disappointment when they linked the disappearance of money from the house to their adolescents' addiction to substances. The parents' suspicions were raised by the change of behaviour in the lifestyle of their adolescents. They also expressed how they were disturbed by the disrespect they experienced from their affected offspring and the numerous complaints from the teachers at school. Parents shared how their adolescents dropped out of school, while the school performance of those who remained dropped drastically. Based on the parents' accounts, it is concluded that the parents were disappointed by the lifestyle and the behaviour of the adolescents after they started abusing substances.

The researchers conclude that although parents were raising the adolescents in the same household, most of them took the time to learn about the abuse of substances by their adolescents.

The researchers recommend that social workers should encourage parents to be more involved in the lives of their children from a very early age and even after divorce or separation. In order to improve effective parenting, parent-child relationships and healthy family functioning, more interventions need

to be introduced. Parental skills will also encourage parents to find a balance between their jobs and caring for their children, especially the affected adolescents. Awareness campaigns on substance abuse should be conducted regularly.

- The parents described in detail how the behaviour of their adolescents led to deteriorating relationships with friends and family members. They told of how they were struggling to relate well with families as they were always stressing about the adolescents who were abusing substances and family members always complaining about the adolescents stealing from them. The parents also shared their fears of being killed or harmed by the adolescents, especially when they did not have money to give them to buy the substances. This challenge aggravated their problems, resulting in them missing work regularly. Some parents were even scared that they might even lose their jobs.
- The parents also expressed their frustration at feeling victimised by communities, resulting in more stressful situations. The parents explained how they felt financially stressed, as they were always buying stuff that their adolescent children stole from their own home and from the community members. The researcher concluded that the lifestyle and behaviour of these adolescents caused their parents great stress, which also resulted in more health problems for them.
- The parents expressed that it was very difficult for them to say that they were coping. They mostly avoided talking to their adolescents as they felt that they had really tried their best. Participants reported that they were hardly coping; they survived from day to day. Parents also stated that meeting with other parents and attending church, especially prayer meetings, helped them to continue to face daily challenges. Some of the parents opted to give their adolescents money to prevent dealing with the stress of having them steal, especially from community members. It is evident that the parents were trying by any kind of means to cope with the challenges they faced.

The researchers conclude that the rights of parents who are raising adolescents abusing substances are being violated. The South African government does not give the same priority to support parents of adolescents abusing substance and this leads to the plight of parents feeling helpless.

The recommendation is made that frequent counselling services should be made available for parents. Co-operation and compassion should be encouraged by social workers between parents and the adolescents to promote relationship building. The current support groups for parents should be facilitated continuously. There should be a policy or legislation that gives support to the violated parents of adolescents who are abusing substances, or current legal frameworks on substance abuse should be improved to incorporate the parents. As much as it is the responsibility of parents to raise their children, it is the responsibility of government to ensure that these parents are protected and supported from any form of violence from their children or the community.

- The participants expressed the need for support and understanding from their families and the community. They pointed out the need for frequent support groups, which focus on supporting parents with adolescents who abuse substances. The support groups would also empower parents with knowledge on substance abuse, its prevention, early detection and available treatments. They also expressed the need for social workers to provide parental skills to assist in empowering them to adopt better ways of building relationships with their children. Parents also expressed the need to revive the principle of *ubuntu* in communities. The *ubuntu* principle will encourage the communities to be more involved in the lives of one another and care for each other.

The researchers conclude that the parents bore the brunt of the consequences of substance abuse by the adolescents. Families, communities and the government need to face up this scourge and step in as change agents for the better future of all adolescents who are infected as well as their families and communities.

It is recommended that measures should be introduced by the government to prevent discrimination against parents whose adolescents are abusing substances. Ways to support the parents through awareness campaigns or practice guidelines should be implemented. Social workers should work

together with churches, non-government organisations and other faith-based institutions, which should collaborate with the government to offer effective and efficient services to parents with adolescents who abuse substances. Programmes should be developed that will include need assessment, support, referrals and follow-ups provided for parents raising adolescents abusing substances. Pastors and other faith-based institutions need more information on substance abuse, as they also assist in providing hope and faith to enable the participants to cope with their situation.

Parents raising adolescents abusing substances are faced with huge challenges: parents' rights are violated; parents end up living in fear of their lives; parents do not have protection from violent adolescents and are vulnerable to the risks of being harassed, victimised and discriminated against by their families and communities. For future research a practice model needs to be devised that will address the needs of the parents who are raising adolescents abusing substances.

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