

EPILOGUE

The prognoses for South Africa state that by the year 2010, the AIDS epidemic will reach its peak with seven to eight million people being infected with HIV. By the year 2010 five to six million will have died of AIDS leaving behind more than three million orphans³⁵ (Gow & Desmond, 2002). When the majority of children who participated in this study reach the age of 18 the epidemic will have reached its highest level; they will be young adults just starting their independent lives and establishing families.

The biggest question now is: Will they, as the new South African generation, be prepared to cope with the demands of life in an epidemic situation under the most difficult constraints? At this stage, making health information available to a large percentage of children, who are not yet infected and are not yet sexually active, will give them the knowledge and tools to make informed personal choices later in life.

Finally, I would like to give voice to a South African woman whom I learned to appreciate very much for the advice she has given me. She survived apartheid, an abusive marriage and impoverished living conditions in which she, as a single mother, successfully raised her four children. She is now in her mid-fifties and faces another problem she never expected to be exposed to. Within four years she lost her youngest daughter, her son and one of her grandchildren to AIDS. Despite her great emotional suffering and devastation which is evident in her physical change into an old woman with snow-white hair and a chronic disease (diabetes), her mind is still strong and courageous. In her community, she is one of the few who has started to speak openly against ignorance and fear, and with the youth about taboo issues such as HIV, sex or condom use; this has finally made her overcome her own fears. In one of our last meetings she asked me to write the following message in this research report for the people in my country.

Protect your children and speak with them, otherwise you will have to bury your children before you leave this world as we do here. (S.G.G.)

We, as adults (e.g. parents, teachers or parts of society and government), have the greatest responsibility in this situation to guarantee a given child the right to live; we have to overcome our own personal barriers to fulfil this duty and responsibility in order to safeguard the next generation who will need to rule the world we leave behind.

³⁵ Children under the age of 15 orphaned by AIDS whose mother has died of HIV/AIDS.