

**Pottier, Lyndal. An investigation into the levels of support mechanism access by disadvantaged HIV-positive individuals and their households. (BSc Honours thesis in Disaster Risk Science, 2005)**

The South African urban poor are increasingly affected by HIV. With meagre available resources they are often reliant on informal social networks and formal external support mechanisms to assist them in coping with the impacts of the disease. This paper investigates the levels of support mechanism accessed by disadvantaged HIV infected individuals and their households. The study determined to (1) investigate levels of support mechanism access (2) identify factors constraining access and (3) assess whether the first two objectives contribute to individual and household vulnerability. Five key areas were investigated: financial resources, access to health care, psychosocial support, access to information and environmental conditions. In depth interviews were conducted with HIV positive individuals, supplemented by empirical observations in the outpatients section at Delft Community Health Centre, in Cape Town, South Africa. The study revealed under-usage of available support mechanisms in both formal and informal spheres. The main factors constraining access were identified as stigma, poor service integration, endemic unemployment and issues of acceptability. Financial and food insecurity as well as an absence of emotional support were found to be key vulnerabilities. This highlighted the need for a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach to effectively address the factors constraining use of support mechanisms.