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Letting Them Die: Why HIV/AIDS Prevention Programmes Fail

By Catherine Campbell, Cape Town, South Africa: Double Storey Books, 2003, ISBN 1-919-930116

Letting Them Die provides a detailed account of a multi-component project aimed at mobilising a local community in a mining town in South Africa to prevent HIV/AIDS. The project included interventions to promote peer education among sex workers and young people, as well as efforts to mobilise various stakeholders to work together to prevent HIV/AIDS. As part of the outcomes evaluation, STI and HIV prevalence were monitored yearly among a random sample of sex workers, mineworkers and township residents over a 3-year period. A process evaluation was also conducted over the entire period of the project.

The book (196 pp.) is divided into four parts. The first part introduces the community in which the intervention took place, as well as several concepts that were central to the programme design. The second part describes attempts to mobilise sex workers living in the informal sector as peer educators, to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS and promote safer sexual behaviour in their profession. The author describes how gender relations and power dynamics within the community counteracted potential benefits of the intervention. The third part describes the implementation of a peer educator training and intervention programme in a high school aimed at promoting safe sex among young people. An interesting comparison is drawn between the respective processes and effects of peer educator interventions in chaotic informal settings versus those implemented in a rigidly controlled school system. The final part describes the difficulties experienced in promoting and maintaining partnerships between stakeholders on various power levels. The author not only seeks to answer the question *why* various components of the HIV prevention programmes failed, but also gives an in-depth account of *how* they failed.

Throughout the book the author provides the reader with the necessary background evidence that underpins various research decisions, and also provides possible explanations for events that occurred. At times these explanations felt somewhat premature and at other times downright confusing. However, later chapters or sections would almost always clarify and support decisions and explanations offered earlier. The author's skills as a journalist are clearly evident in a

book that is well-structured, and written in language that is easy to understand for those interested in HIV prevention and other community issues, although not strictly part of the academic community. For the astute intellectual, chapter three provides a detailed exposition of the theoretical framework which informed the intervention components. For the less academic reader the option is given to skip the abovementioned chapter, without losing touch with the rest of the book.

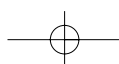
The book provides a compelling argument why interventions based on individual level perspectives often fail to bring about positive sexual behaviour change at community level. The author recommends that short and medium-term HIV prevention interventions should run parallel to initiatives aimed at bringing about social improvement in the long term. In this respect, attention should be paid to the macro social factors that influence sexual behaviour in groups and communities. Although the quantitative evaluation showed few positive effects resulting from the intervention, qualitative findings from the process evaluation contribute greatly to our understanding of social dynamics and individual sexual health behaviour in this township community. The most important contribution that the book makes is in giving us insight into *why* evidence-based HIV preventions often fail, and how difficult it is in reality to implement community-based interventions according to strict protocol. *Letting Them Die* is a must-read for all interested in the social and behavioural aspects of HIV/AIDS and prevention.

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The Moral Economy of AIDS in South Africa

By Nicoli Nattrass. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-521-54864-0

Has AIDS policy been left in the hands of technocrats? Nicoli Nattrass, in her 224-page book, argues that 'AIDS policy is too important to be left in the hands of technocrats'. As a Professor of Economics and Director of the Centre for Social Science Research at the University of Cape Town, she provides an economic analysis to inform social debate about AIDS policy in South Africa. In particular, Nattrass focuses



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on and discusses past and current government actions with respect to the provision of antiretroviral therapy (ART), thereby stimulating further questions and debate for both economists and non-economists.

The Moral Economy of AIDS in South Africa 'illustrates how economic analysis can help government and civil society think about addressing AIDS'. The book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the progression of AIDS policy in South Africa from the days of apartheid to the present. Nattrass describes South Africa's history of AIDS policy as a 'sorry tale of missed opportunities, inadequate analysis, bureaucratic failure and political mismanagement'. She compares AIDS management with warfare field-hospital management or triage. Triage makes both rational and reasonable sense because during war medical officers are confronted with stark imbalances between available resources and the need for medical attention. The philosophy of triage states that resources be allocated first to those with a good chance of recovery once treated. Given the resource constraints to the roll-out of mother-to-child transmission prevention (MTCTP) and highly active antiretroviral treatment (HAART) programmes, Nattrass argues that the South African government's policy on AIDS could be described as conforming to the moral economy of triage.

In chapters 3 and 4 Nattrass clearly argues in favour of expanding MTCTP and HAART programmes nationally. Her economic analysis shows that an expanded national MTCTP programme is not only affordable, but would in fact save the South African government money. Her argument of affordability is also drawn from the savings in terms of overall cost to the health and welfare sectors in treating opportunistic infections and caring for orphans, respectively. Nattrass provides evidence for possible cost-benefits to implementing the HAART programme and her argument shows that the conventional wisdom that HAART is not cost effective is untrue. Furthermore, she argues that with the high cost of the regime, the question one asks oneself is how many South Africans would actually prefer an increase in taxation to pay for the programme. It is here that the moral economy is explored.

In chapter 5 Nattrass explores the implication of extended lives of those on HAART with specific

mention of behaviour change. She discusses the potential occurrence of increased or continued risky sexual behaviour among those on HAART and also argues that spreading HIV infection could be conceptualised within subculture. She explains that issues of behaviour change should be explored within the social contexts of myths, stigma, voluntary counselling and testing and sexual culture.

Before concluding in chapter 7, Nattrass dedicates a chapter (chapter 6) to the interrelationship between poverty, AIDS and economic growth. In this chapter she shows that economic development is sure to be hampered if AIDS treatment is not made available and accessible. In the final chapter, Nattrass takes a critical viewpoint of government in concluding that 'government's rhetoric of expertise was deflecting attention away from the implicit social choices that were being made on behalf of society'. AIDS policy should be the 'product of broad social deliberation about how society should respond to the moral challenges posed by AIDS'.

Nattrass's book succeeds in its aim to 'facilitate informed social debate about AIDS policy in South Africa'. This book stimulates readers to think, question and seek answers outside of the preselected paradigms. *The Moral Economy of AIDS in South Africa* by Nicolai Nattrass should be compulsory reading for all those involved with HIV/AIDS.

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Learning from HIV and AIDS

Edited by George Ellison, Melissa Parker, and Catherine Campbell. 2003. New York: Cambridge University Press, ISBN 0-521-80866-9, 0-521-00470-5pbk

The introductory chapter of *Learning from HIV and AIDS* by Ellison, Parker and Campbell briefly describes the current status of the pandemic, emphasising the limited success, and even failure, of uni-disciplinary approaches to the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS. They advocate for multileveled, inter-disciplinary research-informed policy and action to turn the tide on the global impact of HIV/AIDS. They note differences in interpretation