

Gynecologic Cancer InterGroup  
Cervix Cancer Research Network



# Grandmother Movement in South Africa



Cervix Cancer Education Symposium, January 2019, South Africa

## **Gogos: The context of ageing in modern day South Africa**

- **Traditionally, older people respected as the source and custodian of family history, culture, and wisdom**
- **Today, older people can no longer expect to be cared for by their families:**
  - **Gogos (grandmothers) are expected to look after the grandchildren**
  - **Relatives visit on pension day and demand money**
  - **Youth listen more to their peers**
  - **Gogos may not receive child grants for children at home or money taken**
  - **Financial, emotional and physical strain**



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## The challenges facing older women:

- ❖ Often the main breadwinner in the family (pension/grant)
- ❖ Raising the next generation alone
- ❖ Isolation, stigma, widowhood, poverty
- ❖ Gender-based abuse/violence/rape
- ❖ Health issues & impact of HIV
- ❖ Need for household sexual and reproductive health information and services
- ❖ Intergenerational challenges at home:
  - Unemployment
  - Literacy, skill and culture
  - Teenage pregnancy
  - Generation gap: expectations and chores
  - Youth drug/alcohol addiction (violence)
  - Feelings of lack of respect



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### Government responses to supporting gogos:

- ❖ Government support = 'hand outs' and events
- ❖ Pensions & child care grants = inadequate
- ❖ Medical facilities/orphanages = under resourced
- ❖ Information/support for elderly rights = inadequate
- ❖ Lack of public transport; high private transport costs
- ❖ Unfriendly forms and front-line staff with long queues at offices
- ❖ NGO's usually take the initiative when partnering with Government
- ❖ NGO's fill the gaps



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## **Grandmother programmes - Platform for sharing:**

- ❖ **Encourage gogos to share hope, joy, grief, wisdom and faith together**
- ❖ **Skills training to recognize and address power disparities and abuse; to negotiate and articulate rights and values**
- ❖ **Build awareness of health and wellness**
- ❖ **Preserving what is best in tradition and culture**
- ❖ **Advocacy for the voice of gogos (seniors) to be heard – power of numbers**
- ❖ **Build self-worth, release from past pain in order to move forward**
- ❖ **Promote financial independence through economic empowerment and sharing resources**
- ❖ **Collective voice to demand services**



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## Sharing life and opportunities:

- ✓ Support groups
- ✓ Saving schemes: use funds for starting and running businesses, supporting household needs, burials/funerals, building houses, special events, education
- ✓ Vegetable gardening and farming (food security and extra income)
- ✓ Sewing and beading groups
- ✓ Small business (bakery, crèche, poultry/eggs, etc.)
- ✓ Brick making & house repair
- ✓ Cooperatives
- ✓ Collective support at government offices



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## Food security through vegetable gardening and OVC feeding scheme



## Encouragement through recognition



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## Health and empowerment through sports



## Skills, training and enterprise



## Parenting and family support



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### Grandmothers need for Health and Wellness:

- ❖ HIV, BP, sugar/Diabetes awareness and testing
- ❖ Nutritional advice (themselves & children)
- ❖ Counselling
- ❖ Referrals
- ❖ Field Officer home visits
- ❖ Awareness of children and youth health
- ❖ HIV/AIDS, TB and STI screening for family members (often too ashamed to talk about these issues – cultural taboo)
- ❖ Support for HIV-infected grandchildren and medication adherence
- ❖ Information and education about diseases (i.e. cancer) and screening awareness



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## **Cervical Cancer within In-Patient Unit (IPU) at Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust**

- **Oncology crisis in KZN**
- **Linked to HPV – high prevalence**
- **Seeing increasing number of young women (in 30s)**
- **Young women stabilize HIV with ARVs (achieve reduced viral load) but cancer then goes untreated so gogos still impacted by the loss of the middle generation**
- **Women have extended stay in Unit (+/- 6 months) because no where else to go and no care at home**
- **Good policy....BUT on the ground: 1. pap smears not done, 2. if done, no results or follow up (i.e. lost forms), 3. positive results but no treatment or delays in appointments = unnecessary loss of life**
- **Diagnosed (stage 1) but no treatment or asked to return after long waiting periods – arrive at IPU (stage 4) for palliative care**
- **Gogos are losing their daughters and granddaughters leaving them again as care givers and breadwinners (\*Video)**

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## Influence through advocacy and rights awareness – the SA Grandmothers' Movement



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**Siyabonga!**  
**Thank you!**



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