

EMPOWERING TRANSFORMATION: HARNESSING CHILD AND YOUTH NARRATIVES TO PROPEL MEANINGFUL AND SUSTAINABLE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN LESOTHO

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Abstract

Background and objectives: This research emerges from Lesotho's diverse landscapes, where children's stories remain largely unheard in the realm of health policy. The study aims to harness these narratives to drive equity, inclusivity, and human rights in health interventions, positioning youth not just as beneficiaries but as active participants in all health interventions.

Methods: This research represents a meta-analysis of a larger, cross-sectional, qualitative research project, focused on understanding children's narratives and experiences on their health and wellbeing. The study employed Participatory Learning Approach (PLA) tools, notably Social and Resource Mapping, Body Mapping, and Cause and Effect Analysis, to delve into these narratives. It involved a purposeful sample of 180 children, ranging from 6 to 19 years old, including school-goers, herd boys, children with disabilities, and teenagers. It occurred in diverse regions of Lesotho (Lowlands, Mountains, Foothills, and Senqu River Valley). This comprehensive approach also encompassed 18 Focus Group Discussions, enriched by Key Informant Interviews with local stakeholders.

Results:

Key findings from this study highlight significant issues in health, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), education, nutrition, and child protection. The study underscores the challenges in accessing general healthcare services, particularly stressing the importance of sexual and reproductive health in high HIV/AIDS prevalence areas. The need for improved water and sanitation infrastructure is critically emphasised. In education, children and youth advocate for greater equity and inclusivity. The impact of climate change on nutrition is evident, leading to food insecurity and malnutrition, with high prevalence of stunting. Participants highlighted key facets of child protection, emphasising the increased vulnerability and exploitation of children and youth, alongside a considerable risk of gender-based and sexual violence.

Conclusion: Participants' powerful testimonies advocate for a paradigm shift towards more inclusive and youth-involved policymaking, challenging the dominance of adult-centric approaches and calling for a holistic integration of their perspectives in programmes and policies.

Ethics statement

This study: Has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Ethics Review Board (ERB) of my institution and has local ethics approval or permission in the study country, in accordance with local requirements.