



Dr. Ndepewa Hamuniwe (far left) together with Rachel Odede (second from right) and Maria Kavezembe (far right) visiting some of the community members who support adolescents living with HIV. UNICEF

Empowering caregivers to support adolescents living with HIV through the Onyaanya Teen Club

Oshikoto Region: Through the establishment of a Teen Club at Onyaanya Clinic in Oshikoto Region, caregivers are being engaged to cope with the difficult emotions of anger, fear, denial and sadness among adolescents living with HIV.

At a recent meeting attended by caregivers of the 24 members who are part of the Teen Club, it was revealed that adherence to treatment is often affected by some of the stressful and difficult emotional and behavioural problems which the adolescents go through.

Caregivers also said the adolescents are prone to episodes of depression, anxiety, low performance at school and feelings of isolation because they are living with a stigmatised chronic illness.

“There is often scarcity of food in the household and this makes it difficult for me to force him to take his medicines on an empty stomach,” said one of the elderly caregivers attending the meeting.

Another grandmother, who is taking care of a 15 year-old boy, said her grandson is very angry with life and often asks why he is the one with HIV, while his siblings do not carry the virus.

Many adolescents living with HIV in Namibia became infected at birth and at a time when antiretroviral medicines were not readily available, while some got infected during the second decade of their life when they began to explore their sexualities.

Official statistics indicate that more than 1 in 5 new infections in Namibia occur among adolescents and young people aged 15-24 years, of which adolescent girls and young women account for two-thirds of those infections.

Through the Teen Club, which was established by Project Hope Namibia together with UNICEF, attention and support is not limited to the adolescents, but also to their caregivers, who need skills and knowledge to resolve some of the challenges faced by children in their care. The caregivers are sensitised and supported on fully disclosing to the adolescents that they are HIV

positive, while communities are encouraged to help break the silence and stigma around the condition.

Through the Teen Club at Onyaanya and 30 other clubs which UNICEF has supported to establish and run in different regions of Namibia, more than 5,000 adolescents living with HIV are today a part of the success stories of the AIDS response.

“By being part of the Teen Clubs, it becomes easier for the adolescents to meet freely with their peers and support each other. The support of caregivers also makes it easier for health care providers and other stakeholders to offer timely and regular treatment and support to the adolescents,” said UNICEF Representative, Rachel Odede.

The Teen Clubs have been an important response to HIV and AIDS in Namibia and a potential platform for the country to achieve **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 ‘Good Health’**, which aims to tackle epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases by 2030.