

ABSTRACT

Social support helps youth manage psychosocial stress. Though many studies have investigated the role of social support in helping youth in developed countries cope with their HIV status, such research is lacking among youth living in sub-Saharan African countries, including Kenya. The importance of research on youth living with HIV in Kenya is enhanced given young people's unique developmental stages and the HIV prevalence rate of 8.8% among Kenyans aged 25 to 29 years. To gain further insight, qualitative focus group interviews were conducted with 53 youth aged 18 to 27 years who lived in the informal urban settlement of Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya. A phenomenological approach was used to analyse the data from which four major types of social support were identified: 1) emotional; 2) informational; 3) appraisal; and 4) instrumental. Within each of these overarching themes more specific sub-themes were identified. The youth also reported receiving social support from eight main sources: 1) family; 2) friends; 3) clinicians and clinical services; 4) counsellors; 5) support groups; 6) religious sources; 7) partners; and 8) other. These findings suggest that various forms of social support, provided by diverse sources, which may fall outside of those commonly involved in interventions, can help youth living with HIV cope with their diagnosis and promote healthy lifestyles. Future research should investigate the roles and interactions of different types and sources of support, specifically as they relate to interventions aiming to ameliorate the experiences of youth newly diagnosed with HIV.