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# Psychosocial experiences of adolescents with tuberculosis in Cape Town

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# BACKGROUND

- Adolescents, aged 10-19, account for nearly 10% of the annual global tuberculosis (TB) incidence.<sup>1,2</sup>
- In 2020, TB affected 1.09 million children and young adolescents aged 0-15, with only 400,000 recorded cases, highlighting a significant diagnosis and reporting gap.<sup>3</sup>
- Adolescents are increasingly being recognised as an important group for TB interventions, treatment, and epidemic control because of their biosocial vulnerability.
- TB affects adolescents in various aspects of their lives, including physiological, social, psychological, and educational aspects, potentially affecting their future negatively.

1. Snow et al (2018)

2. Chiang et al (2023)

3. Yerramsetti et al (2022)

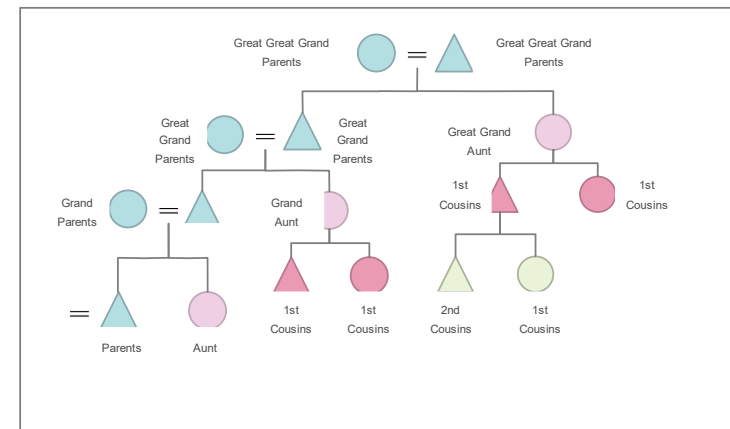
## STUDY OVERVIEW AND AIMS

- The study aimed to (a) locate adolescents' experiences of TB relative to their economic and health contexts (b) describe the impact of TB disease (including individuals with both drug-susceptible and MDR-TB) on adolescents' psychosocial, socio-familial, and school / employment wellbeing and, (c) consider adolescents' agency and resilience.



# METHODS

- A purposive sample of 20 adolescents was selected for its diversity and richness.
- At each interaction (four interactions), participants were interviewed using an activity-based, semi-structured interview schedule.
- All interactions were recorded, and photographs were taken of completed participatory research activities and detailed case descriptions were written.



## FINDINGS

- We conducted 47 interviews with 19 adolescents.
- One participant was lost to attrition and was withdrawn from the study.

	No of participants	Male	Female
Afrikaans	8	4	4
English	2	1	1
Xhosa	9	4	5

# FINDINGS

## IMPACT ON PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING

- The TB diagnosis had an impact on adolescents' mental health. Participants described feeling depressed, hopeless and sometimes suicidal.
- A 19-year-old male diagnosed with drug-susceptible TB said the following:

*“This TB thing is not just a physical challenge, it’s a mental challenge as well.”*

## IMPACT ON COMMUNITY AND FAMILIAL WELLBEING

- TB and its treatment disrupted adolescents' ability to feel connected to family and friends.
- Many participants reported and isolating themselves from others to prevent onward transmission of TB. A 15-year-old adolescent boy being treated for MDR-TB complained:

*“My life has changed a lot, because I had to give up many things, like drinking alcohol. It was during the festive season, and I couldn't go out with my friends, I was always indoors. My friends went to the Eastern Cape, and I was alone, always wearing a mask because I didn't want to infect others.”*





# IMPACT ON SCHOOLING AND EMPLOYMENT WELLBEING

- Most participants were school-going adolescents who struggled to manage their treatment and schoolwork simultaneously.
- Participants reported that they did not attend school for a period following their TB diagnosis.
- A 15-year-old female with drug-susceptible TB explained:

*“At school, they don't care [...]. They did not send work for a long time. They failed to provide the homework so that I could study for the exams. They told me at school that I would have to repeat Grade 9.”*



## IMPACT ON AGENCY AND RESILIENCE

- Adolescents in this study reported limited agency due to being diagnosed with TB.
- A 15-year-old female who had MDR-TB explained:

*"My aunts and uncles were visiting one weekend, and my mother told them about my TB diagnosis because she was afraid that they will discriminate me."*

- However, resilience in the face of TB and its treatment was surprisingly commonplace among our participants.



## CONCLUSION

- This study makes an important contribution in that it is among the first to show the impact TB has on adolescents' intimate and romantic relationships.
- Existing TB programmes focus on drug therapy with little consideration for holistic care.
- Until these more complex psychosocial and socioeconomic issues are addressed, it is unlikely that TB control efforts will be achieved in this population.
- Future research should prioritize exploring the potential of social protection programmes providing adolescents and their families with psychosocial and economic support.