

Empowering grandmothers creates a community network to identify and report gender-based violence, protect and advocate for children.



Grannies' Tea Groups Move Mountains

Introduction

Grandmothers are a respected pillar in society and often overlooked, yet collectively they have moved mountains and created social change towards child protection in Kgatleng District of Botswana. Reports of defilement and gender-based violence (GBV) doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 Police / BGBVSC statistics 2021). Among children aged 13-17 years who had ever had sexual intercourse, one in four females (25.1 per cent) and one in twenty males (4.6 per cent) experienced unwanted sex at the time of their sexual debut. To reduce child sexual abuse Stepping Stones International, a non-profit organisation realises the power in community action to address the problems.

"MmaKgosi" is a grandmother who is taking care of four of her grandchildren. Two of these children's mothers have passed on. Some of her grandchildren's basic needs were not met, such as toiletries, school stationery and health care, as she was prioritizing food. Some of the children were absconding from school because they did not have school necessities. In joining the Grannies' tea groups she learned from others how to earn income by starting a small garden and a tuck shop. The shop has grown and MmaKgosi uses the profit to support her grandchildren who returned to school.



Grandmothers unite for social justice

Conclusion

The Grannies' group are scalable and sustainable to support the formal system of social work, which is overburdened in Botswana. Empowering grandmothers creates a community network to identify and report gender-based violence, protect and advocate for children and refer people to HIV and social services. Additionally, they provide lay counselling and collectively generate income to support themselves and the children. This approach to grassroots social work will lead to reducing the gender-based violence pandemic that Botswana currently faces. Recently grandfathers have joined the groups.

Partnerships formed to establish, train and support the Grannies' groups with Stephen Lewis Foundation, University of Pennsylvania, Gender Affairs, Social Welfare and Community Department, Village Development Committees, police and more, demonstrate the need for the community to raise a child.

Methods

The grandmothers, above age 45 formed groups to provide a form of psychological support and share experiences, such as dealing with intergenerational communication barriers. Secondly, they were recruited to provide the community with innovative approaches to address social issues. SSI applied a human center design approach to solving community problems.

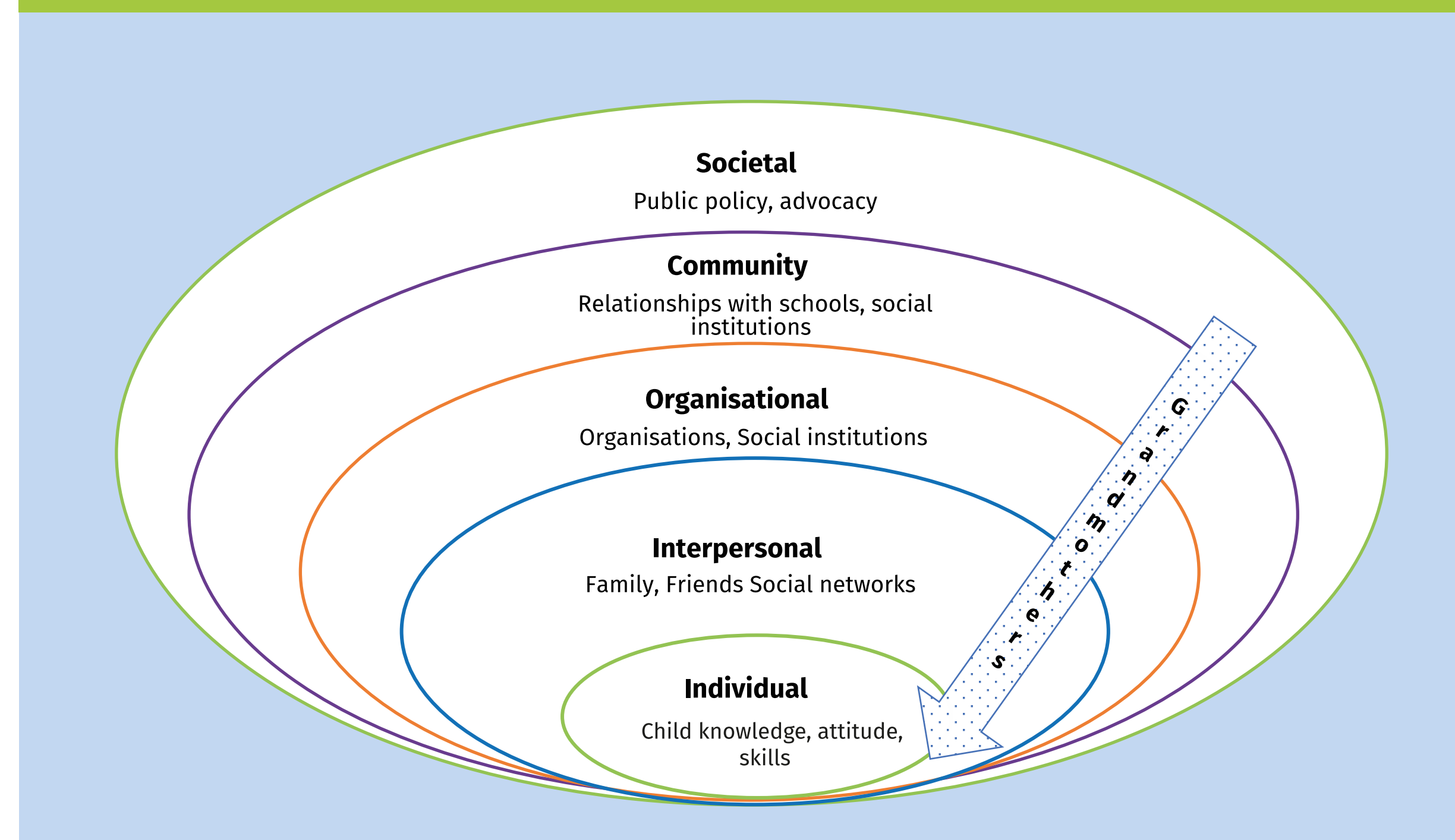
Ideation: Grandmothers identified the top three issues in the community: child sexual abuse and gender-based violence in families, poverty and inadequate knowledge on HIV and raising their children's children. Grandmothers and SSI designed tea chats creating a support group wherein discussions led to innovative solutions to problems.

Implementation: Training in areas where grandmothers wanted more knowledge such as HIV, identification of gender-based violence was held in partnership with University of Pennsylvania and Gender Affairs Department in Botswana.

Reiteration: Feedback led to increased protection by the police, collaboration with chiefs and the community and formation of structured support groups.

There are an average of 30 in a group who are trained, graduate, develop plans and monitor their activities. They are pinned with a new shawl at graduation to signify solidarity.

Socio-Ecological Model of Implementation



Results

As of 2022, 1,450 grandmothers are participating in 57 groups in three districts. The results are presented based on three challenges the grandmothers identified when starting the program.

Advocacy and Child Protection

- Prevented children being raped on a pathway to school by patrolling the area
- Identified GBV in families and referred them for assistance
- Held family dialogues with households neglecting children
- Elected to participate in the leadership of the Village Development Committee, representing children's rights

Economic Empowerment, Reducing Poverty

- Supported the repairs of a member's house
- Created savings clubs supporting business initiatives
- Established pension and funeral plans
- Recycled plastic bags to make pins, purses, computer bags and hats
- Started businesses e.g chicken rearing, tuck shops, sewing school uniforms

Raising Children and HIV

- Referred family members for testing and HIV services
- Identified adolescent girls and young women to participate in national DREAMS program
- Improved knowledge on HIV and nutrition for children
- Learned about the impact social media has on young people.

Lessons learned

- Critical to determine expectations, guidelines and establish the "why" of the group from the beginning to avoid conflicts

References

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 Epidemiological Facts Sheets on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections 2004. (WHO, UNICEF, UNAIDS).
 Stephen Lewis Foundation <https://oneworldgrandmothers.ca/2021/08/01/botswana/>
<https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/grassroots-orhanisations-are-just-as-important-as-seed-m-money-for-innovation/>
 Report on Violence Against Children National Survey on Life Experience and Risk of HIV Infection Among 13-24 Year Old Males and Females in Botswana (Ministry of Local Government 2019)



Grandmother displays bags, hats and mats she makes from recycled plastic bags



Grandmother pins new shawl for recent graduate

After a training on sexual abuse, a young girl approached the grandmother saying,

“My uncle has been touching me the way I heard in the training, and I did not know it was abuse. This is not right, this is not love, this is abuse.”

The grandmother reported the case for counselling and family support.



Intergenerational love