

Lived Experiences Of Distant Parented Adolescent Learners In The Shiselweni Region, Kingdom Of Eswatini.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of distant parented adolescent learners in the Shiselweni Region of Eswatini. This study was qualitative in nature and utilised the phenomenological research design. The target population were the distant parented adolescent learners in the Shiselweni region high schools. Data were collected from 15 distant parented adolescent learners in three schools. Purposive sampling method was used to select the schools. Thus, only those schools which had distant parented adolescent learners were selected. Semi structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data. The findings showed that a majority of the distant parented adolescent learners underperformed at school due to many challenges they faced in the absence of their parents. Many of them had feelings of abandonment, anxiety and depression which lead to rejection of adult authority and became deviant and that had a negative bearing on their academic performance. Thus the main study concludes that distant parenting affects learners' academic performance especially at adolescence. Based on the findings, the study recommends that the stakeholders, parents, school, church, peers and Ministry of Education and Training in Eswatini, should work cooperatively in handling distant parented adolescent learners to help them cope and overcome the challenges they face in the absence of their biological parents, hence improving their academic performance and life in general.

Keywords: *Distant parented adolescents; diaspora orphans; left behind children; transnational parenting; distant parenting; migrant parents; mobile phone parenting.*

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I. Introduction

The prevalence of transnational families in the developing countries, like Eswatini, has attracted a lot of interest in research. Most parents migrate leaving behind their children with relatives and/or sometimes alone. These parents practice distant parenting on the left behind children. Carrie (2013) says a distant parent is someone who is separated from his/her child by distance but looks for ways to maintain a relationship and bridge the distance between him/herself and the child. Coon and Mitterer (2010) define parenting as any activity that the parent offers to the developing human being throughout the lifespan. Nonetheless, the migration of the parent into the diaspora leaves what Kufakurinani, Pasura and McGregor (2014) call 'diaspora orphans' (Makondo & Tabani, 2023). The child, in the absence of the parent, has to juggle between being a child and a parent, especially those children that have been left alone. Passer and Smith (2010) observe that the most vulnerable group when it comes to distant parenting, is the adolescent.

Hall (1904) describes adolescence as a period of storm and stress. In the same vein, adolescents are always preoccupied with who they are, where they come from and where they are going. They also want to know how they fit in society (Mwamwenda, 2004; Erikson, 1968). Mwamwenda (2004) continues to observe

that if basic adolescent needs are not met at home, the adolescent girl falls into risky behaviours such as prostitution and falling in love with sugar daddies to make ends meet. All these could only be alleviated when the biological parent try every possible means to defy geographic barriers and offer parental care and support to the distant parented adolescent.

Parents provide a source of support to their children and their absence leaves a vacuum which breeds a plethora of psychological and social problems (Asis, 2006; Luyckx et al, 2011; Makondo & Tabani, 2023). As much as the relocation due to migration by parents is necessary for resource mobilisation in the family, Williams (2016) notes that it may have both positive and negative impacts on the children's development, particularly at adolescence level. This therefore means that there can never be a substitute of the biological parent and therefore, the absence of a biological parent can never be underestimated.

In sub-Saharan Africa, Kruk (2013) observes that migration has profoundly shaped the lives of individuals and families. Leaving the children behind creates a lot of anxiety as they are not certain as to when they will be re-united with their biological parents. Kruk posits that this kind of anxiety has a bearing on the experiences of these developing young people, particularly in countries like Eswatini, where this phenomenon is to a large extent still unexplored. According to Beegle, Filmer and Tiererova (2010), the percentage of children living apart from their mothers ranges from as low as 3% in East African countries like Eritrea to nearly 30% in Namibia and parts of West Africa. These statistics report the rampant prevalence of children who grow up with absent parents in sub-Saharan Africa, where Eswatini is located.

Although a few studies have addressed the role of children in shaping migration decisions, children are largely ignored in the migration literature in sub-Saharan Africa (Adsera & Tienda, 2012). This has created a gap in existing literature which is particularly important to focus on as migration is becoming common and many children are and will still be left behind with other people other than their biological parents (Madhavan, Schartz & Collinson, 2012). The antisocial activities like substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, low academic performance and many others were a cause of concern to the researchers especially in the schools under study. It was against this background that the study was undertaken to investigate the lived experiences of distant parented adolescent learners in the Shiselweni region of the kingdom of Eswatini.

II. Statement Of The Problem

The poor socio-economic status of Eswatini, has over the years compelled a lot parents to seek employment out of the country, leaving behind their children in the process, with either a relative or alone. Though the prevalence of the left behind children is high in Eswatini, literature on the phenomenon remains scanty as observed by the researchers. The researchers observed that at some high schools in the Shiselweni region of the Kingdom of Eswatini, learners were distant parented since their parents were out of the country working there. Since the children were high school learners, they predominantly fell on the adolescent age group. Hall (1904) calls adolescence, 'a time of storm and stress'. For adaptive purposes during this period, parents can act as facilitators and protectors of their children (Gordon & Cui, 2012). The migration of parents out of the country leaving the children behind, especially the adolescent learner, bred what Kufakurinani et al, (2014), term the 'diaspora orphans' here in Eswatini and other affected countries. To have a profound understanding of the phenomenon, the researchers carried out a study in Eswatini to investigate the lived experiences of distant parented adolescent learners with an aim of suggesting intervention strategies to assist these children.

III. Objectives Of The Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Examine challenges faced by distant parented adolescent learners
2. Establish how distant parenting affects learners' academic performance
3. Suggest intervention strategies to help distant parented adolescent learners

IV. Literature Review

A review of literature was done to check the trends of distant parenting the world over. This assisted the researcher to identify gaps in literature which this study sought to address and come out with a body of knowledge pertinent to Eswatini. Before a major review of literature was presented, the researcher presented the theoretical framework which informed the study.

V. Theoretical Framework

This study used the Intergenerational solidarity theory by Richard and Bengtson (1991) as its main theoretical framework. It explains social cohesion in the larger sense. However, for the study, it explains the relationship between the distant parent and the distant parented adolescent child. It is used concurrently with the psychosocial theory by Erikson (1968), where only stage 5 which is Identity versus Role confusion, was

selected for this study on the basis of unpacking what adolescents go through as they navigate through this stage.

The Intergenerational Solidarity Theory

It seeks to explain the relationship of family members across different generations within the family and in society (Mancini & Blieszner, 1989). In other words, it explains the relationship between a child and the parent in the family. It is divided into six constructs, namely; structural solidarity, associational solidarity, affectual solidarity, consensual solidarity, functional solidarity and normative solidarity. Treas and Gillespie (2017) say that the affectual solidarity or intergenerational feelings of closeness, have been linked to geographic distance between parents and their children later in adulthood. It was deemed appropriate because of its clarity in explaining relationships between family members across generations.

Structural solidarity

This refers to factors such as geographic distance that either constrain or enhance interaction between parents and children. The bigger the distance between parent and child, the weaker the solidarity between them. The smaller the distance, the stronger the solidarity since interaction will be frequent. This theory emphasizes frequent interaction between parent and left behind children in spite of the prevailing geographic barriers.

Associational solidarity

This refers to the frequency of social contact and shared activities among family members. When the extended family come together more often to share in weddings, funerals, parties and family reunions, the more the integration between young and old and the more solidarity established within members of the extended family. The distant parented adolescent learns that even if the biological parent may be geographically displaced, there are other members of the extended family that he/she can still relate to. In this study, it was noted that parents interact with their children more, through cell phones; hence they are sometimes called cell phone parents.

The affectual solidarity

These are the feelings of emotional closeness, affirmation and intimacy between family members. Parenting and parenting styles are a source of affection in the family. When a child is raised within a loving family atmosphere, attachment at all costs results. When the distant parent makes frequent calls, frequent visits and gives credit to the child where it is due, the child feels emotionally secure. To the child, it dispels the notion of abandonment and hence lowers the anxiety levels in the child. In this case, the distant parented adolescent learner feels the affection of the distant parent through talking to him or her through the cell phone.

Consensual solidarity

This refers to the differences in opinions that family members may have. However, there is always the actual or perceived level that both the parent and adolescent learner come to. The consensus reached by both parties creates a strong solidarity even in the reality of the distance between them. In this study, the lived experiences of the distant parented adolescent learners in the Shiselweni region, all decisions would be done in cognisance of the consensus reached between the parent and the adolescent.

Functional solidarity

This is the exchange of instrumental and financial assistance and support between the parent and the adolescent learner. The timeous, consistent payment of remittances to the adolescent learner's upkeep, is key to creating a strong solidarity in this regard. Adolescents, in particular, love money. It therefore should be enough for their upkeep in order to keep them away from antisocial behaviours which would allow them to explore in order to get money. In this study, the distant parent should ensure that the monthly remittances are sent consistently and timeously so that the presence of the parent is really felt by the left behind adolescent.

Normative solidarity

This is the strength of obligation felt towards other family members. One family may espouse dependency on each other, yet another may espouse independence. However, for adolescents and their parents, a strong feeling of dependence on one another enhances ease of navigation through challenging stages of development like adolescence. Even in the extended family, family norms compel one to have an obligation to the other so that when challenging times come, the distant parented adolescent has other support structures within the larger family structure. In this case, cohesion is created and a strong solidarity formed. This is true for Eswatini where communalism is esteemed even in child rearing practices. Therefore, lived experiences of

distant parented adolescent learners in the Shiselweni region of Eswatini, highly recommends the application of this theory in real life.

The psychosocial theory stage 5 - Identity versus Role confusion

To augment the intergenerational solidarity theory, stage 5 of the psychosocial theory of Erik Erickson which is Identity versus Role confusion, was also adopted. It explains the behaviour of adolescents in their quest to discover their identity and role to play in society. The challenges that are inherent in this stage make the adolescent a unique person who has one foot in adulthood and another one still in childhood. That is why Hall (1904) terms adolescence as 'a period of storm and stress'. Similarly, Spear (2000) describes adolescence as a period of heightened stress due to the many changes experienced concomitantly including physical maturation, drive for independence, increased salience of social and peer interactions and brain development. This theory therefore explains the challenges adolescents face in their navigation of the stage, more especially in the absence of their biological parents. In this case, it is relevant in shedding light on the lived experiences of distant parented adolescent learners in the Shiselweni region of the kingdom of Eswatini.

Literature Review

Challenges faced by distant parented adolescent learners

Odom, Zimmerman and Forlizzi (2010) point out that the left behind children may face risks in their psychological development. They argue that children are generally imitators of their parents and as such they may see migration as a path they would follow and so become less interested in school work. Rightly so, children idolise their parents (Makondo & Tabani, 2023). Hence, the parent is the only one who can motivate and encourage the child to work diligently at school and study at home. Boccagni (2012) intimates that the adolescent may develop anxiety as a result of being left alone without parental care. As such, a study done by Jensen (2011) in America showed that girls who grew up in homes without parents, participated in rebellious acts and were likely to be imprisoned for breaking the law. Madziva and Zontini (2012) posit that teenage delinquency may increase due to parental absence. Pantea (2011) concurs with the above in saying that parent – child separation has detrimental effects like erosion of family relationships, discipline issues, disruption of family roles and household routines. From these assertions, one can see the need for parental involvement to curb some of the challenges faced by distant parented adolescent learners in Eswatini.

How distant parenting affects adolescents' academic performance

Research has shown that the left behind adolescent learners have high levels of depression and resentment towards parents who had left. The left behind adolescents have fewer educational aspirations and are more likely to drop out of school than children living with their parents (Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012; Makondo & Tabani, 2023). Similarly, in a study done in China, it was revealed that children with both parents absent, were more likely to underachieve at school compared to their peers (Fu, Bo, Xue & Yuan, 2015). Notably, absenteeism, teenage pregnancy, engagement in criminal activities and misbehaviour are some of the challenges which resonate with children who are left alone by their migrant parents. Hunter (2017) points out that migration creates emotional displacement for migrants and their left behind children, hence that may have a detrimental effect on their children's health, education, emotional stability and behaviour. It is therefore clear that the challenges that the left behind children are subjected to by the absence of their parents, go a long way in impeding their educational performance at school.

VI. Methodology And Sampling Procedure

This is a qualitative study which used the phenomenological research design. Purposive sampling was used to select the schools which had the required characteristics and those that were accessible to the researcher. Thus, three (3) high schools from the Shiselweni region were selected. From these schools, fifteen (15) distant parented adolescent learners were selected and these came from two classes, Form 4 and Form 5, selected from each of the participating high schools. Each school had five (5) distant parented adolescent learners purposively selected.

VII. Data Collection Methods

Interviews and focus group discussions were used in the study. The interviews were done in the schools of the distant parented adolescent learners. This was done to ensure that the environment was not changed and the learners were in their comfortable spaces. Prior to data collection, the purpose of the exercise was communicated to the heads of the schools since they were under their supervision. Moreover, the same was done to the participants, who were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Face to face in-depth individual interviews were done with the five (5) participants from each of the participating schools. Open ended questions were used which allowed the researcher to get direct quotations from participants about their experiences,

opinions attitudes, feelings and knowledge about distant parenting and academic performance. Each of the group five (5) participants per school formed a focus group discussion. In total, there were three (3) focus group discussions, one (1) in each of the selected schools. A similar interview guide was used with minor alterations to accommodate a group.

VIII. Findings

The Challenges of Distant parented adolescent learners

The findings revealed that distant parented adolescent learners lacked parental support and care. The fact that their biological parents were away, made them suffer from depression and hence engaged in risky behaviours which rendered them as social reprobates. The following quotation by one of the participants supports the above assertion.

When the school bell rings for knock-off time, I am always depressed knowing what awaits me in the house. I fetch water from the communal tap. I have to get firewood since I don't have a stove and then cook. At other times, I need to wash my school uniform and then cook. It is quite depressing. Mom always did her responsibilities when we stayed together but now here I am on my own.

In addition to the above, the findings also revealed that distant parented adolescent learners predominantly had a poor choice of friends. The friends they chose influenced them negatively in the majority of cases, hence they engaged in antisocial behaviours like alcohol and substance abuse, premarital sex, having sugar mamas and daddies and even drug trafficking. The following quotation from one of the participant learners corroborates the above assertion.

I have friends who do not struggle when it comes to having things. I have always wondered where they got all the money. It was until one of my friends hooked me up with an elderly man who had money. We would be taken out on Fridays and would skip weekend lessons. It affected my school work immensely.

The participants also revealed that poor parent-adolescent relationship was a challenge which manifested in poor decision making since there was no guidance from the parent. A strong communication behaviour was expected from the parent to help the adolescent make informed decisions. To support this assertion, one participant was quoted as saying:

Whenever I do not do well at school, after sending them the report card, they always complain about my performance. To me, it is not justified because if they cared about my school work, they would show by calling the school on a regular basis to find out how I am doing at school.

Distant parented adolescent learners and academic performance

Findings revealed once again that lack of parental support and care led to these learners underperforming at school. That the parent was quite distant, balancing between school work and pleasure was very hard. The following verbal quotation supports the above claims.

I still think I work hard at school, but I guess it is no longer like I used to. I cannot figure out exactly what has happened. Maybe it is because I stay alone and my mom who used to push me is far away in Taiwan now. Nobody cares about my school work like my mother did. Her support is what I lack now, hence my academic lapse.

It was revealed from the findings that the distant parented adolescent learners suffered from fatigue owing to the overwhelming out of school activities. As such it became difficult to pay attention to school work when tired. The following verbal quotation supports the above assertion.

I fail tests because I do things after school that my mom would do if she was here. I cook during the time I should be studying. By the time I have to study, I am already exhausted and the next thing I want to do, is sleep.

It was also revealed that adolescents were usually labelled name called such as; prostitutes, drug dealers and loafers. They reported that they were labelled by both the community and the educators at school. Being labelled and stigmatized made them hate school and it affected their academic performance to a large extent. They thus developed a self-fulfilling prophecy and identified themselves with the label. The following verbal quotation supports the above.

We do get stigmatized and marginalized because our parents are not close by. One teacher even told us that all we knew was vagabonding instead of doing our school work. It appears as though all of us who live by ourselves are loose and uncontrollable loafers. No matter how hard you try, you will always be under the same bracket. Well, we are human beings and for that we tend to relax a bit, hence our performance drops.

Another thing revealed, was that lack of monitoring and supervision. This leads to adolescents doing things they should not do. They revealed that they also need close supervision and monitoring for them to be successful academically. Rapport between the adolescent and the distant parent was needed to create a friendly atmosphere between them. The verbal quotation below sums it all.

Our parents never sit down with us and talk about our future. My parents, being so traditional, are only concerned about telling me that all my sisters have got married and I have to follow suit. They forget that nowadays people can be 'married to their careers'. Since they care less about my school work, I find myself relaxed since they do not even call to find out how I am doing at school.

Intervention strategies to assist distant parented adolescent learners

The findings revealed that improved communication between the distant parent and the adolescent learner was crucial. The learners emphasized that the communication should be efficient, reliable, friendly and consistent to create a rapport between parent and adolescent child. The adolescent felt that talking with their parents in the manner it is now, only worsened the situation than curbing it. The parents showed no affection at all in addressing adolescent issues. The following verbal quotation supports the assertion given above.

What manifests as conduct disorder in my life, is just a tip of an iceberg. Really, I need my parents to take their time and find out the root cause of whatever problem they may find with me. Talking to me in a friendly manner as opposed to what they do, helps me see my mistakes and therefore endeavour to correct them in order to please them. As I please them, my whole life becomes fruitful too.

It also transpired that both professional guidance and counselling and spiritual guidance and counselling were needed to mitigate challenges faced by distant parented adolescent learners. The participants revealed that some issues needed more than just professional counselling but even spiritual counselling. One of the participants had this to say as an intervention.

I went to church when my life was at crossroads. When the preacher began preaching, I was immediately relieved when he assured me that somebody loved me unconditionally. I began to love church. I get counsel from the Bible on a daily basis. Church seems to transcend the physical needs of an adolescent and reaches the depth of your spirit and soul. Church prepares one for the present and the future. It is a place to be when in distress. The word of God is one irrefutable counsel that a confused person requires.

Furthermore, another aspect of intervention that was deemed necessary was the formation of peer educator programmes. The participants revealed that it was easier to listen to a peer than an old person. With peers, they related easily and their conversation flowed naturally. The participants could not overemphasize the fact that they related more to their peers than adults. To substantiate this, the following verbal quotation was captured from one of the participants.

We need people of our age to share peer related experiences which will educate one another on pertinent issues we face as adolescents. An adult always comes up with a judgemental, instruction giving and authoritarian lense which deters openness between them and us. It would be better if at school, church and community, forums for peer education would be made available for us to share our experiences. I do not mind having an adult overseeing the proceedings.

IX. Discussion Of Findings

Challenges faced by distant parented adolescent learners

The findings of this study revealed that lack of parental care and support led to many distant parented adolescent learners engaging in a lot of risky behaviours. Most of these learners reported to be abusing alcohol and other substances, engaging in premarital sex, having sugar daddies and sugar mamas and even trafficking drugs. Odom et al, (2010) intimates that distant parented adolescent learners may face risks in their psychological development. The results of this study agree with other scholars found out that distant parented adolescents begin to engage in antisocial behaviour due to the psychological disturbances they go through. From the above, it could be deduced that the presence of the parent is a hindrance to a lot of problems that adolescents may encounter as they grow up. Johnson et al (2015) maintain that if parents do not monitor and guide their children, particularly at adolescent age, they may lack understanding of the consequences and dangers of abusing substances which may expose them to many risks. The use, therefore of the intergenerational solidarity theory go a long way in explaining how the gap could be bridged gap between the geographically displaced parents and their left behind children.

It also emerged from the study that the left behind children make poor choices of friends which becomes a big challenge to the adolescent. They depended entirely on their peers for decision making which led them to making uninformed decisions. Erikson (1968) posits that there is need for adolescents to free themselves from peer pressure and dependency, but depend more on their parents who will help give them personal identity in the period of confusion. Liu and Leung (2016) confirms that when distant parented adolescent learners face the absence of a stay at home parent, it leads to declining in school performance, communication disorders and other psychological problems. So there is need for the distant parent to improve the relationship between himself and the distant adolescent. If the relationship is solidified as postulated by the intergenerational solidarity theory, problems of peer influence would be minimized, since failure to resist negative peer pressure also emerged.

Distant adolescent learners and their academic performance

From the study, it transpired that distant parented adolescent learners were affected by resentment and depression as their parents were far away from them. The study concurs with the observations made by Zentgraf and Chinchilla (2012) who indicated that the distant parented adolescent learners had high levels of depression and resentment towards parents who had migrated. They thus also noted that they performed poorly at school than their counterparts; at worst, they become school drop outs. The study also revealed that distant parented adolescents performed poorly at school because of the abuse they are subjected to in the hands of their caregivers. Pantea (2011) also made similar observations when he says that the propensity for abuse increases with children who are left in multiple caregivers. It is only the biological parent that has the heart to pay full attention to the work of the adolescent learner.

Gilbert et al (2009) observed that prospective research studies have consistently shown that maltreated children have lower educational achievement than other groups of children. Veltman and Browne (2001) found out that 91% of the studies indicated that abuse and neglect were related to poor school achievement. They further said that most of the children in foster care are abused in subtle ways so that they do not realise it. Moreover, socio-economic challenges affected the academic performance of distant parented adolescent learners. The distant parented adolescent children reported that they sometimes did not receive any remittances from their migrant parents or sometimes the remittances would come late. This left them in a precarious situation which made them vulnerable to abuse by 'sugar daddies and/or sugar mammas'. The study therefore revealed that if one is stable economically, there are no worries about running short of abysmal personal supplies, yet if one struggles economically, one has a lot of problems to grapple with. The timeous payment of remittances by distant parent is pivotal in the functional solidarity. Similarly, Liu and Leung, (2016) found out that there was a moderate to high relationship between socio-economic status and academic performance. On the same note, Silverstein and Bengtson (1997) explain functional solidarity as the exchange of money and other physical amenities between the distant parent and the left behind adolescent child.

Intervention strategies for distant parented adolescent learners

From the study, it transpired that the distant parented adolescent learners needed different stakeholders to come into play to assist in the absence of the biological parents. These players are: the distant parent, the peers, the school, the church and the Ministry of Education.

The distant parent

Erikson (1968) posits that adolescents attain their identity or sense of self from interacting with the significant other, in this case, the parent. Based on this observation, the distant parent should try every possible avenue to be present in the life of the left behind adolescent. Among other avenues, the distant parent should ensure frequent visits. Bengtson and Silverstein (1991) posit that in the Intergenerational solidarity, associational solidarity is established on the frequency with which members come together. Mills (2017) adds that in spite of the geographic distance between parents and children, the parent should do their best to remain present in the lives of their left behind children. He further notes that a solid schedule for visitation is key to successful long distance parenting. On top of the frequent visits, the distant parent should communicate consistently with his left behind children (Makondo & Makondo, 2023). Madianou and Miller (2009) found that Filipino migrants used mobile phones to communicate with children back home. Odom et al, (2010) found out that frequent and regular communication between migrant parents and their left behind children can help address certain problems their left behind children may have. Liu and Leung (2009) also found out that the portability and convenience of mobile phones helped to connect with families any time. These are just some of the avenues one can try to exert emotional presence in the adolescent back home.

The peers

The study revealed that the adolescent learner identified himself/herself more with his/her peers since they shared similar characteristics. Low, Yoon, Roberts and Rounds (2005) observed that adolescents try to fit their interests to their friends' interests and try to choose friends' interests in order to have similar interests. When used appropriately, for peer educator programmes, the other adolescent who has gone through some stage and prevailed, may teach the other one that not only is she going through such, but a lot. Therefore they would listen more since they relate to one another. Erikson (1968) describes adolescence as a time of identity crisis and role confusion. Mistakes are bound to happen here, however, careful planning of peer educator programmes are a necessity to help the distant parented learner.

The school

It was revealed in the study that school was home away from home especially for the distant parented adolescent learner. According to the Eswatini Educational Sector Policy (2018), the school should be a centre of

care and support. A school should create a safe haven for the distant parented learners in the absence of their biological parents by providing basic learner needs like food, infrastructure, counselling and education, just to name a few. It is in this premise that the participants felt that a strong Guidance and Counselling programme with relevantly qualified guidance teachers was necessary. They envisaged a child friendly school, with learner friendly educators which they saw as a catalyst for learning.

The church

The study revealed the need for spiritual counselling especially because participants felt that it touched the spirit, where no other person can touch. On the same note, Cornish, Wade, Tucker and Post (2014) intimate that the issues of spirituality and religion are important in the life of an individual because they influence one's perceptions and world view, interpretation of experiences and behaviour for good. One participant boy alluded to have been helped spiritually when he went to church just as when he had to make a decision of either joining a gang of bad boys and his school work also improved. He said that the preacher was like he was talking to him only on the day, admonishing him to make the right decision. He said that that moment changed his life completely. Something appealed to the spirit beckoning him to change his life, and it did.

The Ministry of Education

The findings revealed that the Ministry of Education needed to play a bigger part in ensuring that the adolescent learner got the necessary assistance in the absence of the biological parent. The policy makers, curriculum designers and other stakeholders need to include programmes in their plans aimed at integrating the distant parented adolescent learner into society. No child should be left behind. The ministry, through school committee meeting can sensitise parents and foster parents on what it feels to be a distant parented adolescent learner. The ministry should train professional counsellors that would handle the Guidance and Counselling department at schools. In-service training should also be conducted to cater for pertinent issues such as distant parenting. Other government agencies like police, nurses should also help in teaching about life issues. In this way, the distant parented adolescent learner will be equipped with the necessary skills to cope in the absence of the parent. In addition to that, the Ministry of Education and Training can use other government professionals like police, nurses and pastors among others, to build character in the distant parented adolescent learners. A programme which integrates the adolescents and suggested roles to play in society, was needed to give coping skills. This is in line with Erikson's stage 5 of the psychosocial theory which is identity versus role confusion. Moreover, the participants felt that parents needed to be sensitised on pertinent adolescent challenges so as to act accordingly and provide personal needs promptly. Interaction between the adolescent and the parent need to improve so as to break the barrier between them. The intergenerational solidarity theory explains how the two can do to meet each other half way.

X. Conclusions

- Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that distant parented adolescent learners go through a plethora of challenges. These include but not limited to depression and resentment. Some distant parented adolescents think that their parents had abandoned them and this interferes with their learning at school, hence they even perform poorly.
- It can be concluded also that distant parented adolescent learners do not have a low aptitude but are overwhelmed by the challenges they face due to their absent parents and hence fail to perform to acceptable standards at school.
- Migrant parents should ensure that they leave their children in the hands of responsible people. This is because the study revealed that some of the foster parents are abusive.
- It can also be concluded that both professional and spiritual counselling are necessary for distant parented adolescent learners.
- Some foster parents do not pass on the money they receive from the left behind children's parents in time. They prefer investing it first to generate profits before they would give it to the intended beneficiaries.

XI. Recommendations For Action

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- All distant parents should communicate consistently with their left behind children, pay frequent visits, and send remittances timeously to maintain the attachment that existed before. This is more critical with children who are at adolescent stage.
- Parents and educators need counselling services which address pertinent issues on adolescence and parenting so that they could offer appropriate assistance to the adolescent learners.

- Every high school should have a strong professional Guidance and Counselling department that would help learners like the distant parented adolescent learners.
- Peer educator programmes should be put in place in all high schools so that young people would openly share their experiences and suggest ways of addressing their challenges.
- Schools should invite motivational speakers to come and give direction and life orientation skills to the young learners. These may equip learners with life skills.

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