

## **Impact of Institutionalisation of orphaned children on their wellbeing**

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**Abstract:** *This study sought to find out the impact of institutionalisation of orphaned children on their wellbeing. A case of an institution (orphanage centre) in Mtoko district of Zimbabwe was used. Ten teachers from the primary school where most of the institutionalized orphaned children learn were randomly sampled and responded to the self designed questionnaire, followed by an interview of 2 purposively selected teachers from a neighbouring secondary school, where some of the older orphans from the same orphanage centre do attend school. Interviewing secondary school teachers meant to complement findings from the primary school teachers. Out of the 55 orphans at the orphanage centre, 10 orphans (age range 6-20 years) were randomly selected to participate in the focus group discussion. Out of the 10 caregivers, (the employees at the orphanage centre), 5 were conveniently selected to participate in the interview. Age range, and sex of sampled caregivers was (29-55 years, 2 males and 3 females), respectively. The orphans' wellbeing was satisfactory, ranging from good health status, well balanced emotional attributes, and good social welfare issues, including having good meals and adequate shelter and good education. The institutionalized orphans face the challenges of limited resources and lack of parental affection. The care givers however played loco-parentis role. It was recommended that teachers were to be more emotionally available for the orphaned children. The communities, NGO's and governments were requested to gear up their support of orphanage centres in order to increase the positive impact of these centres on the wellbeing of orphans.*

**Keywords:** *institutionalisation, care giver, non- institutionalisation, orphan, orphanage, school*

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### **I. Introduction**

This study focuses on the impact of institutionalisation of orphaned children on their wellbeing. The concept of wellbeing refers to the welfare of the child centering on the physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of orphaned children. Institutionalisation of orphaned children refers to children who are under the age of 15, who would have lost either their mother or father and are vulnerable, who are kept at a residential institution, which is devoted to care, fostering or adoption (Bellany, 2001; Buckner, 2004; UNICEF, 2014).

### **II. Background**

According to the UNESCO (2009) orphaned children lose their childhood as they become breadwinners. Accessing adequate nutrition, basic health care, housing, clothing and education becomes horrendous. On the other hand, some households are dissolved as parents are dead and children are sent to relatives for care and upbringing.

The WORLD BANK (2011) reported that the impact of poverty and HIV and AIDS epidemic has exacted a ghastly toll on children and their families. The UNICEF (2014) report has it that, during the thirty years of the global HIV and AIDS epidemic, an estimated one hundred and fifty-three million children have lost one or both parents due to HIV and AIDS. It added again that about 30 million children under the age of fifteen are living with HIV. Thus, despite some decline in HIV and AIDS prevalence worldwide and increasing access to treatment, the number of children affected or vulnerable remains high. As a result of the social effects of HIV and AIDS, millions of HIV affected children are highly vulnerable, as they are more likely to be victims of abuse in the institutions of care, in the street or in child headed households.

The economic meltdown in Zimbabwe in 2008 had a negative impact on the lives of orphaned children. Freidman (2000) posits that economic stressors may lead to parental depression or harsh inconsistent parenting which are associated with socio-emotional problems in children. Buckner (2004) purports that children may be placed with family relatives or strangers in a group or home where up to a dozen foster children live under a continuous supervision of a parental figure or an institution. Maslow (1987) in Biehler and Snowman (2000) argues that if the physiological needs are not satisfied, the child is socially, cognitively and emotionally affected.

## **2.1 History of institutionalisation of children**

Wars and great epidemics such as HIV and AIDS, poverty among others have created many orphans. Even in biblical times and in the Quran, orphans were there. Hence, the introduction of institutional provision in a variety of spheres occurred throughout the nineteenth century and before. The driving ethos behind this provision was the ideology of self-help and religious factors.

Smart (2003) purports that World War Two, with its massive numbers of deaths and population movements left many children and adults homeless. Estimates for Europe ranged from one million to thirteen million. Michel Foucault cited in Scanlon (1998) identified the nineteenth century as the period of which the great confinement took place. The main objective was to control, contain and caring both adults and children who were now homeless, fatherless and facing challenges. Hence, rehabilitation was an important part of this and was particularly pursued by the provision of education and industrial training for young people as efforts to restore independent living to children.

Religious factors also factored in to the start of institutionalization. Hence they were also driven by wars, poverty only to mention a few. Scanlon (1998) has it that, a combination of legal independence, religious ethos and philanthropic consciousness contributed to the expansion of institutional environments with diverse objectives. Churches played a key role in the alleviation of poverty in institutions. Their assistance was based on the religious philosophies that they wanted to keep a closer check on orphans until they reach a marriageable age, when they have sound judgment over their lives, (De' Paul, 2010). The increase of orphans due to war, the religious factors, poverty and legislation therefore led to the introduction of institutionalization of children.

## **2.2 Institutionalised orphaned children**

Institutionalization of orphans provides an alternative to fostering, care or adoption. UNICEF (2014) has it that children under the age of fifteen who have lost either their mother (maternal orphan) or father (paternal orphan) and a vulnerable child who may not have parents are housed. Thus institutionalizing orphaned children is a commitment to fight orphan crisis. Bellany (2001) holds that institutionalizing orphaned children is a model for orphan care aiming at strengthening the capacity of families and mobilizing and strengthening community-based responses. Hence, it ensures access to services and strengthening government's role in protecting children and raising awareness in the development of children.

Such institutional establishments become a socializing agent which is important in child development. Minnet (2005) holds that institutions used to designate social or physical settings that perform certain tasks deemed necessary in our society to ensure the integration of people in the dominant culture of the group of people who are housed there especially the orphans. Lindgren (2001) argues that these children seem to have an overriding need to associate with others and this need can be met most effectively within the context of institutionalizing these orphans. This can positively enhance performance in academic achievement since they can identify certain patterns of behavior that function to enable groups to maintain themselves and satisfy their quest for educational achievement and at the same time the needs of their members. Conformity to such norms is the price that institutionalized orphaned children must pay in order to enjoy the advantages of institutionalization.

Institutionalization of orphaned children seemingly enhances the quality of daily life and experiences. According to David and Weinstein (1997), despite the differences in type of children housed together, neighbourhoods or the purpose of the facility, daily life is an unvarying series of events taking place in an endless repetition of similar spaces, built into an unvarying time schedule all defined by some outside power. Organized play is an everyday aspect of the lives of these children in orphanages. Thus, this environment enables higher educational achievement since learning occurs through play and is also considered a recreational therapy. Rousseau in Aggrawal (2004) emphasized that learning in young children occur naturally through play. This means that in Rousseau's school an institution with caregivers provide all necessary materials and the orphaned children learn when interacting with the learning materials. Froebel, as cited in Bruce and Meggitt (2002) posits that a caregiver, who is referred to as a gardener and the children as growing plants in the garden, would guide the children in the institutions. Hence, in this setup. play is the order of the day thus institutionalized orphaned children bear an advantage in educational attainment over non institutionalised orphaned children. On the other hand, orphaned children who are not in institutions might not have time to play as they have to carry out a number of household chores. Many children end up living in ruptured and poor households (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2009; Skovdal 2010).

The primacy of order and obedience is apparent in the lives of institutionalised children. There is control and authority of these children as cited in Green (2007). Ochim (2006) has it that, if authority is not exercised and if obedience is not required, children will behave in ways that are totally out of control. Institutionalized children are taught to always line-up before and after every activity for instance lining up within their classrooms. In such situations children are expected to behave in a totally self-controlled manner, even when they are compacted into a small space within a group. Given this environment of strict discipline and

the focus placed on order by those in authority, these children fit well into the school setting and might be better placed to thrive academically. According to the UNICEF report of (2014), institutions provide a participatory engagement, thus steering activities which provide direction and guidance to the orphans. Thus, institutions provide food, clothing, health care and medical supplies to establish an effective learning environment thus empowering orphaned children.

Thus, institutionalisation of orphaned children enables one to know these children's interests and hence assist in the challenges or difficulties they encounter. Barnett (2008) has this to say that teachers who are aware of the interest of their children have a base for building good relationships and could motivate these institutionalized children to learn and be more academically apt.

### **2.3 Effects of institutionalising orphaned children on their wellbeing**

Whatever its form, foster care is an enormous upheaval in the life of a child who often must adjust not only to a different family, but a different culture as well as a different school and different peers.

North (1990) posits that the longer a child is in a foster care, it is argued, the more he or she becomes estranged from his or her biological parents. Ormrod (2000) holds that, for children outside the home that substitute for parental care greatly affects in their development. This is due to that the child maybe placed with strangers in a group or home where up to a dozen foster children live under the continuous supervision of an institution. As such, these disruptions cause instability in the child's wellbeing thereby affecting him or her in different ways. Evans (2006) supports the above assertion through acknowledging that teachers may perceive students who are institutionalized less positively and thus expect less of them, give them less positive attention, fewer learning opportunities and provide them with less positive reinforcement when they do well.

Freidman (2000) acknowledges that institutionalization has a deep negative impact on the life of a child. Santrock (2004) further stated that institutionalization affects the children developmentally, emotionally and psychologically. Hence, having unconditional love is a crucial element for the care givers. Apart from this, institutions should be very short term transitional centres where the needs of the children can be evaluated before being resettled (Santrock, 2004). In addition, there is a school of thought that says that institutionalization is linked to developmental problems amongst children and should only be used as an absolute last resort.

Institutionalization's negative effects are revealed by the social and behavioural abnormalities portrayed by these children, (Keenan, 2002). Cases of behavioural problems, inattention, hyperactivity, delays in social, emotional development and autism can further be witnessed in these children. Evans (2006) postulates that children living outside of family care demonstrate a significant deficiency in sensory perception including responses to and understanding facial emotions. Thus, their emotional reactivity is poor and cannot define some of the non-verbal communication signs given by teachers. This then negatively impacts orphaned child's academic performance.

According to Johnson, a physician cited in Robertson and Simons (2000), an orphanage is a terrible place to raise an infant or a young child. This is so because, there is lack of stimulation, consistent caregivers, sub-optimal nutrition and physical or sexual abuse all conspire to delay and sometimes prelude normal development. They further stipulate that institutionalized orphaned children fall behind in large and fine motor, speech acquisition and attainment of necessary social skills. This negatively impacts the educational capabilities of the child whose physical growth is impaired.

Congregate living conditions foster the spread of diseases of multiple infectious agents which can further cripple the academic performance of these orphaned children. Gulliford (1997) identified intestinal parasites, tuberculosis, hepatitis B, measles, chickenpox, middle ear infections only to mention a few, as diseases found more commonly in institutional care settings. This increases stress and cause children to have more emotional problems or to perform worse in school academically.

Institutionalization has impact on the self-concept of an individual. Ormrod (2000) holds that the main factors determining the formation of the self-concept of an individual are the environment as well as people with whom the individual lives with. If care givers praise and love the orphaned child and again if playmates respect and give attention to the individual, he or she forms a picture of himself or herself as a desirable person, hence develops a positive self-concept. However, if on the other hand, if the care givers and peers reject and criticize the individual and are indifferent this leads to a derogatory self-picture resulting in inferiority complex. Thus, the orphaned child's academic performance is greatly affected because the child would have negative personality traits such as feeling incompetent, low self esteem and lack of confidence because of the environment he or she has been raised in.

By and large, institutionalization has dire consequences such as poor growth, emotional reactivity, deficit in IQ, social and behavioural abnormalities, physical growth only to mention a few (Ormrod, 2000). All these negatively affect the wellbeing of the orphaned children. It is against this backdrop that in this study, we sought to find out the impact of institutionalization of orphaned children on their wellbeing. The central research question being what is the impact of institutionalization of orphaned children on their wellbeing.

### **III. Research Design**

A research design refers to a plan and structure of investigation used to obtain evidence to answer research question(s) (Borg & Gall, 2004, p. 38; McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 31; Polit & Beck, 2004). In this case, a mixed methods design involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches was used as architectural backbone of the study (Creswell, 2008). A mixed methods design normally seek to ascertain respondents' perspective or experiences on a specified subject (Andres, 2012) which in this case, is, the impact of institutionalization of orphaned children on their wellbeing.

A randomly sampled 10 teachers from one primary school where the majority of institutionalized orphans learn, responded to our self made questionnaire, followed by an interview of 2 purposively selected teachers from a neighbouring secondary school, where some of the older orphans from the same orphanage centre do attend school. Interviewing secondary school teachers meant to complement the findings from the primary school teachers. Out of the 55 orphans at the orphanage centre, in Mtoko District, 10 orphans (age range 6-20 years) were randomly selected to participate in the focus group discussion (FGD). Out of the 10 caregivers, who are the employees at the orphanage centre), 5 were conveniently selected to participate in the interview to triangulate the whole methodological findings. Age range, and sex of sampled caregivers was (29-55 years; 2 males and 3 females) respectively.

#### **3.1 Ethical Considerations**

We obtained clearance from respective institutions to carry out the study. One of the institutions funded the study. We also got clearance from the ward councilor and the village head to visit the centre for the purpose of research. At first the ward councilor denied us access into the village giving us a torrid time as he initially viewed us with suspicion. We had to surrender our National and University identification cards in order to gain entry into the ward.

The head of the orphanage centre, (the loco-parentis), after having enquired from her Social Welfare Head office, granted us authority to interview the 5 care-givers and the 10 orphans. The participating care-givers consented in writing to engage in interviews and all ten orphans consented in writing too, to participate in the FGD. Anonymity and confidentiality were granted to all respondents. We fully explained the nature, purpose of the study openly and honestly, in an understandable manner to all participants. We also made it explicit on how the information from interviews, questionnaires and FGD was going to be used. The respondents were told that they could freely withdraw from the study at any time if they so wished.

### **IV. Results and Discussion**

One of the fundamental questions was: what comes into your mind when you hear the term orphan? The respondents (teachers and caregivers) gave three major dimensions of the term orphan. The first one was that the term orphan referred to a child who has lost both parents and maybe living in the custody of a relative or a child-headed family. The other respondents viewed the term orphan as a child or children with one parent dead or both parents deceased, and such children require care from adults. One of the respondents shared that, when he or she came across the term orphan he/she views children or a child without parents who have many problems. Lastly, one of the respondents stated that when I hear of the term orphan, I think of giving such children love and provide for their needs since they were marred with numerous problems left, right and centre. To this effect, Evans (2006) argued that an orphan is a child permanently bereaved of or abandoned by his or her parents. The UNICEF report of (2004) viewed an orphan as erupting from losing one or both parents.

Another question to respondents was: do you face any problems when interacting with institutionalised orphaned children? It was interesting to note that, of the 10 teachers who completed the questionnaires, half of the respondents faced problems when interacting with institutionalised orphaned children while the other half had no problems. One of the respondents said, institutionalised orphaned children sometimes portray a rigid artificial approach to life making it difficult to interact with them. Another respondent shared that orphans were difficult to interact with since the respondents lacked detailed background information of each and every institutionalised child. In the same vein, one teacher said orphans lacked seriousness in their daily activities and faced difficulties even when interacting with other pupils in class especially when doing group work.

A caregiver said she had no problems when interacting with the institutionalised orphaned children. She described them as being honest and obedient in their daily interactions. Another caregiver shared that orphans were not difficult to interact with if you show them that you are honest, loving, empathic and always pay attention to their views. Some teachers and caregivers perceived these children as happy and well socialized. While Robertson and Simmons (2000) argue that an orphanage is a terrible place to raise a young child in. This study, however regarded an orphanage as a lucrative environment for the child's well being, since some stimulation and good care from caregivers was noted.

It can be inferred that if institutionalised orphans are loved and cared for, they are most likely to display good behavior. Perhaps it is the labeling and the use of words like "troublesome" and "deviant" which

may make them behave in unconventional manner. Haralambos and Holborn (2001) posit that students labeled as trouble makers tend to seek out others' company and within their group awarded high status to those who broke the rules. Evans (2006) asserted that, "deviance like beauty, is in the eyes of the beholder". Therefore, these institutionalised orphans behaved either bad or good way because of the tags attached to them. Keenan (2002) contends that institutionalization has negative effects which can be heavily felt on the social and behavioural abnormalities portrayed by these children. Thus, cases of behavioural problems, inattention, hyperactive, delays in social emotional development and autism can be witnessed in these children.

Children of different age groups (6-23) are present in the home. Because of the wide spectrum of age group, different socialization age groups naturally do exist as well. Children feel loved and warmed by virtue of belonging to others. Such love and warmth improves their wellbeing. Therefore, institutionalization children may enhance the quality of daily life and experiences of these children. Daily life has a series of events similar to that in an ordinary home hence the children become well socialized.

Considering academic performance, all respondents acknowledged that the problems faced by institutionalised orphaned children hinder their academic performance. Anyone with a problem, whether an orphan or not, if surrounded by problems, is not able to optimally perform in school activities. Teachers gave different or divergent views on the problems faced by institutionalised orphans that impact on their academic performance.

One participating teacher said the absence of a natural family unit means initial socialization is absent. In line with this, one respondent added that they sometimes think of their parents and the support they used to get. One of the respondents, a teacher, stipulated that looking at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, basic needs require to be satisfied first so as to teach the vulnerable child. Some respondents shared that, the children faced problems in the institution and these problems even manifest at school and if the teachers do not respect, and fail to show them acceptance and love their academic performance is negatively affected. One of the respondents said that these children are a bit reserved and they fail to interrelate and get information from other students making them prone to failure in their academic endeavours. The other respondent shared that, their availability or school attendance is often affected and thus participation in class is compromised.

From these responses one can conclude that institutionalised orphans face problems which hinder their academic performance. Boler and Carroll (2003) assert that orphaned children are embroiled with feelings of loneliness, rejection, anger, sadness and hopelessness. Bennell, Hyde and Swanson (2002) shared that, for an orphan, everyday is a struggle to go through, they wake up, go to school, get chased and never sure of whether they will eat before they sleep. Thus, the pre-occupations of death of their loved ones, their isolation due to the loss of friends and undertaking of additional work that is of supporting oneself, make it difficult for institutionalised orphaned children to concentrate in school.

A teacher participant suggested that institutionalised orphaned children need real family units in their wider world as institutions are artificial. Another respondent remarked that, institutionalised orphaned children need love, respect and guidance and counselling sessions here and again conscientising them about the life skills and at the same time educating the public or masses about the need to care for the orphans. Another respondent shared that de-institutionalisation is the possible alternative way of helping the orphans to be integrated into the society in the future. The other respondents indicated that some orphans are generally affected by how the surrounding community treats them, that is, psychologically they feel alienated by those around them who should be looking after them and this had a negative impact in their school performance.

Chirwa (2002) argues for the safety nets. In concurrence, D'Allessandro (2006) adds that families are the best to support children left parentless and hence safety nets which are deeply rooted in the African culture best handle the situation. All human capacities such as intelligence, memory and creativity cannot function well in an individual without the basic necessities being satisfied. It is plausible to acknowledge Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory which embraces the belief that when one part of the body is hurt, it will disrupt the whole body, until healing is brought to the injured part, (Slavin, 2008). Hence, sanity can prevail cognitively, socially, emotionally, physically and morally if safety nets are used as home units replacing institutionalisation of orphans or leaving the non-institutionalised orphans to fend for themselves without community intervention programmes.

During the focus group discussions, institutionalised orphaned children emulated the way they lived like a family since they have, "mother and father". For instance, one child said that, "isu pano tina vana baba naana amai vanotibata zvakanaka." (here in our institution we have our own fathers and mothers who treat us with good care). Some teachers indicated that, institutionalised orphaned children had maximum support, love, and care from the care givers. Apart from this, care givers propounded that, these children lived like how other children do in other households with a father and a mother. They also pointed out that these orphaned children in institutions can afford luxuries such as going for educational trips and having birthday celebrations. Apart from this, they were also taught life skills such as sweeping, cleaning, washing, gardening and farming.

Most respondents acknowledged the fact that institutionalization can be a good option for orphans especially if well planned and implemented with the support of the donor community and government. From the interviews with care givers and focus group discussions, they reiterated that they were getting normal meals every day in the morning, break time, lunch time and supper. They also applauded their bedding system, that is, one bed one child with bed-sheets and proper blankets. Most teachers also shared that institutionalised orphaned children had better support in terms of academic material such as stationery and books. One of the respondents shared that institutionalizing orphaned children increased their academic performance since they have sponsors and stayed in a home where they are laid down rules and objectives.

One caregiver confirmed that institutionalised orphans were provided with most of the resources for their school welfare. However, he/she reiterated that these children also faced problems since they did not appreciate the role of caring of foster parents and the assistance given, hence, some of them had criminal tendencies depending on where they came from and also being lazy to work in the garden. They consider gardening as child labour and child abuse, which is a total misrepresentation of the life skill training.

The following solutions were suggested by the teachers so as to increase the academic performance of institutionalised orphaned children and at the same time lessening the negative impacts they pose on the academic performance of these vulnerable children. The teachers acknowledged that the donor community inclusive of all independent well-wishers, Non-Governmental Organisations should provide school fees, stationery, food, shelter among others to these learners. The communities should also have child care centres starting at village level.

The analysis of data yielded some themes. The institutionalised orphaned children, had resources which catered for many of their needs. The interviews with care givers and the focus group discussions with institutionalised orphans highlighted that they had an advantage since their role was simply that of waking up and going to school and not having to carry out any household chores like other children in the rural homes. They were also said to be eating all three normal meals of the day unlike some of the children in the surrounding villages. Their stationery, school fees, food, clothing was always taken care of. They reiterated that, ... isusu vana takangofanana nevamwe vana tinotengerwa zvatiri kuda sevana zvinotifadza zvakafanana neentertainment, mabhuku, pens, maschool bags, hembe, bhutsu, nemari yefeefees, kuti tifanane nevamwe vana. (we are just equal to other children in the community since we all enjoy the same privileges which include entertainment, school books, pens, bags, clothing, shoes, fees, just like any other children). Teachers and caregivers also confirmed the above assertion as true since most of these institutionalised orphaned children did not present any signs of lack and actually showed a lot of potential in their school work. They added that institutionalised orphaned children were good at group discussions or when interacting with other learners. Lindgren (2001) reiterates that institutionalised orphaned children, because of the sharing element they had, they formed group behaviour and seemed to have an overriding need to associate with others and this need was met most in the teaching and learning fraternity. This positively enhanced their academic performance since they identified certain patterns of behaviour that function to enable groups to maintain themselves and satisfy their quest for educational achievement.

The researchers also established that good arrangement of the indoor environment as depicted by institutions where orphans are kept, promoted social-emotional development in children and support teachers and caregivers' goals for children to learn and develop. In support of the above Barnett (2008) echoed that high quality indoor learning centres encourage children in their self-chosen activities to share materials, to solve problems in small play group using the available resources, considers others' views and feelings when they interact with play materials in learning centres. Hence, residential institutions for orphans provide a conducive space for educational attainment.

## **V. Conclusion**

The studied orphanage institution is managing to nurture a child whose social, emotional, intellectual and physical development is commendable. The encountered diseases are rather just like any diseases in any family which do spread through contamination and some are airborne. It was recommended that teachers were to give unconditional positive regard to all learners as asserted by Carl Rogers in his Person-Centered Theory. Guidance and Counselling sessions were also to form the basis of these institutions. Policies, laws and community-based monitoring systems should be put in place to eliminate any form of child labour. Orphanages should be supported by communities, governments and councils for they appear to have a positive impact on the welfare of orphans.

## **VI. Limitations**

Only one institution which houses 55 orphans was the focus of study. If more had been studied, the results would have earned more credibility having external validity attributes. The study sample of respondents was rather too small and confined to a small locus whose mono-culture influenced findings indisputably. Further

studies involving non-institutionalised orphans and comparability of the impact of such institutions are recommended.

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