

UNPACKING HOW POVERTY AFFECTS THE HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN ZIMBABWE.

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ABSTRACT

The spread of HIV and AIDS have brought unprecedented increase in poverty which negatively impact on the holistic and sustainable development of orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) in Zimbabwe and the world over. This study examined how poverty affects the holistic development of OVCs in the two purposively selected secondary schools in Masvingo district, Zimbabwe. It also investigates the teachers' views and perceptions on the academic performance of OVCs. In this study, a qualitative phenomenological design was used with two focus group discussions, interviews and observations as data collection instruments to fifteen (15) OVCs from the two secondary schools, and six (6) teachers in Masvingo province. The Tesch's open coding method of data analysis was used to identify the major themes and the main categories that emerged from the findings. The study is foregrounded by Urie Bronfenbrenners' ecological theory and Maslow's needs theory. Findings revealed that scarcity of resources due to economic hardships, involvement in income generating activities (maricho), psychosocial distress, lack of parental guidance and supervision, peer pressure, drug and sexual abuse, malnutrition and health related problems and early marriages as being the major factors negatively influencing the OVCs' cognitive capacity. This study recommends that the problems of OVCs be addressed by the microsystems of the school, the extended families, and the neighbourhood mesosystems (linkages) and exosystems, as well as by the macro-systems (government, political and ideology). Collaborative work is also needed among Zimbabweans, Non-Governmental Organisations and all stakeholders to revisit the root causes of poverty.

Keywords: Poverty, Orphans and Vulnerable Children, Phenomenological Design, Psychosocial, And Holistic Development.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Access to education is one of the important basic children's rights in both the African and Western societies. Nziramasanga Commission (1999) states that countries throughout the world are in agreement with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1990 World Summit for Children, the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien. All of them affirm the right of every human being to education and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which advocate equal education for all by 2030, and wish to eradicate poverty and hunger completely by 2030. The provision of education to all the people irrespective of their vulnerability, socio-economic background, race, sex and religious affiliation has been one of the most critical issues of the Zimbabwe government. Poverty, however, has to some extent remained a stumbling block for most children and especially OVCs to attain this basic right (Chinyoka, 2013 and Moyo, 2013). The SDGs aim to improve the lives of children and young people through a number of clear goals and targets. They address poverty reduction (Goal 1), health (Goal 3), education (Goal 4), gender equality (Goal 5), violence against children (Goal 16), as well as a number of other areas that impact children's lives.

Several scholars define poverty as a broad, multifaceted and multidimensional concept that involves the economic, social, political and environmental well-being of people (World Bank, 2002). This researcher defines poverty as being unable to afford basic human needs (financial and material). The term orphan is also used and understood differently by different people. The UNICEF, UNAIDS and USAIDS (2004) define an orphan as a child 0-17 whose mother (maternal orphans) or father (paternal orphans) or both (double orphans) are dead. In Zimbabwean communities now there is the mushrooming of some social orphans. The concept of "social orphans" is sometimes used to describe children whose parents might be alive but are no longer fulfilling any of their parental duties. In their research, Ganga and Chinyoka (2014) describe such children as latchkey children. Such children are vulnerable by nature, although some children are more critically vulnerable than others.

Zimbabwe's economic crisis have deeply affected the lives of millions of OVCs since deepening poverty is inextricably linked with rising levels of homelessness and food insecurity/hunger for many OVCs (Ganga and Maphalala, 2014). It is estimated that an average of eight out of ten OVCs in Zimbabwe live in dire poverty and drop out of school because of socio-economic instability, economic and political sanctions levelled against the Zimbabwean government by the Western countries, and also the scourge of HIV/AIDS, which exacerbates poverty in Zimbabwe (Chinyoka, 2013). The impact of poverty and the HIV pandemic has significantly contributed to the increase of orphans and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe. Abebe (2009) claims that there is a strong correlation between endemic poverty, child destitution and orphanhood. He also postulates that one (1) in every three (3) children in African countries is poor and malnourished. Unfortunately, as the economic crisis in Zimbabwe continues to deepen, many OVCs' lives become defined by severe poverty, deprivation and neglect thus affecting their intellectual, cognitive, physical, emotional and social development. This has a negative impact on their sustainable development.

The number of orphans has risen tremendously with every family registering not less than two orphans. In Zimbabwe, for example, the number of orphans rose by 860% between 2004 and 2010 from 163 000 to almost 2 million (National AIDS Council (N.AC) 2011). A 2004 survey from high density areas in 21 districts of Zimbabwe estimated that 24% of children were vulnerable, 31% orphaned, and 12% OVC (Ministry of Public Service Labour and Social Welfare, 2005). Children were

classified as vulnerable if they lived in a household where there was a chronically-ill adult or an adult death in the previous year, or where the household head was under age, 18 years and below (UNICEF, 2013).

Poverty affects the OVC's cognitive development across multiple contexts including family, home, neighbourhood, and school (Chinyoka, 2013). Most of the hurdles faced by the OVCs in Zimbabwe range from situations of lack of food, school fees, housing, education, medical care, sanitation facilities, abuse, stress, violence, child labour, early pregnancy, intergenerational sex, diseases, stunting growth, stigmatisation and societal discrimination and globalisation driven social inequalities (Chinyoka, 2013, Ganga, 2013, and Abebe, 2009). Researches by Ganga (2013) and Chinyoka (2013) established that OVCs living in poverty stricken homes are much more prone to the health risks and safety risks, disease, infection, sexual, drug and substance abuse, early marriages. All these have a negative impact on cognitive development, higher rates of academic failure or grade retention. Given the above, poverty directly and indirectly causes many barriers to learning to OVCs. It is also the cause of a range of social, emotional, and psychological problems and learning difficulties (Chinyoka, 2013, Donald, et al., 2010: 157; Chireshe, 2010; Chireshe & Plattner, 2010) hence impedes the achievement of the 17 Sustainable development goals.

The OVCs in Zimbabwe have of late received considerable attention from government and NGOs covering virtually all facets of life. In Zimbabwe, a three-year program for the orphaned and the most vulnerable children of more than 80 000 families in the country has been launched, to try to protect them from the worst effects of poverty (NAC, 2012). The National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children Phase II will have a three-pronged approach to reach children most at risk, with transfers of cash, support to education through the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) and services for the protection of childhood. Despite heightened international efforts to bring more attention to poverty and human development, the OVCs, are still the most invisible (Chilton, Chyatte and Breaux, 2007). This will however perpetuate the cycle of poverty and poor human development (Engle and Black, 2007:14).

In Zimbabwe, not much research has been done on this subject. Most researches that have been carried out to date only emphasise the physical and health effects of poverty (Abebe, 2009:42). Less has been written on the intellectual, cognitive, behavioural and socio-emotional effects on the OVCs (Chinyoka & Ganga, 2011). Thus, this research, hopes to close the gap in research by exploring the impact of poverty on the academic performance and sustainable development of OVCs at two secondary schools in Masvingo.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is informed by Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and Maslow's needs theory. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System theory (2008) looks at a child's environment in terms of its quality and context, as well as how this environment affects all the other areas of the child's life (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 2010:34). It puts forward that child development occurs within an interactive system of nested influences between the child and the environment. His ecological environment consists of the following five nested structures: microsystems, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem (Rathus 2006:26, Berk 2007:23, and Donald et al 2010:36).

Thus, this theory looks at OVCs' development within the context of the system of relationships that form his/her environment. Donald et al (2010:37) posit that microsystems are systems in which children are closely involved in proximal

interactions with other familiar people (such as the extended family). They involve roles, relationships and patterns of daily activities that shape many aspects of cognitive, social, emotional, moral and spiritual development. In this study, the OVCs live within their family units with members of the extended family and some in child headed households. Relationships within these homes as well as their daily patterns of life will in turn affect their academic performance as well as adjustment in their school environment. Structures in the microsystem, according to Boyd and Bee (2006), Cole, Cole & Lightfoot (2009) include the family, school, and neighbourhood or childcare environments. Exosystem refer to one or more settings that do not involve the child as an active participant, but can affect the child's immediate setting, (Cole et al 2009, and Donald et al 2010).

These settings have an effect on the OVCs' life even though s/he does not participate. They include school boards, parent's workplaces and community agencies. In this study, the OVC's exosystem would be the social workers, government of Zimbabwe who make the policies and rules that affect the child's well-being according to their budget without necessarily meeting the children in person to discuss the issues affecting them. Gooskens, Khan, Moses and Seekings (2010: 207) describe the macrosystem as the one that involves dominant social and economic structures as well as values, beliefs and practices that influence all other social system. For example, a cultural value will then influence the proximal interactions in the child's microsystems and probably, her whole mesosystem too. Equally, how the government distributes resources like food, school uniforms, school fees and textbooks within the school affects the children every level of the system which would then have positive or negative implications for all interested parties as a whole and they form the basis on which individuals and families structure their lives. The chronosystem involves development over time that affects the interactions between these systems as well as their influences on the academic and intellectual development of OVCs. In this case, the OVCs have experienced change in their lives through their backgrounds, death of parents and family and neglect. The economic changes in Zimbabwe that have seen the withdrawal of donor support also have an effect on the successful adjustment of OVC learners in a new learning environment.

An ecological systems model thus provides an appropriate framework to guide this research and selection of appropriate interventions for families and children experiencing psychosocial problems. Understanding the interactions of these systems is the key in understanding how a child develops, what factors may lead to failure and factors that may also hinder on the sustainable development of learners. The ecological model incorporates all areas of influence on the development of the child to assess the cause and also the solution to some increasing behavioral, academic and emotional problems seen today. Donald et al (2010:37) purport that things that happen in one part of the system can affect other parts and ultimately the ecological system as a whole, as explained in the work of Bronfenbrenner.

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Maslow proposed a theory of needs, based on a hierarchical model with the basic needs at the bottom, and the higher needs at the top. The most fundamental and basic four layers of the pyramid contain what Maslow called the *deficiency needs* or *d-needs*; the individual does not feel anything if they are met, but feels anxious if they are not (Snowman & Biehler, 2011:79). Needs beyond the d-needs are called *growth needs, being needs* or *b-needs*. When fulfilled, the b-needs do not go away, rather they motivate further. Mwamwenda (2010) posited a hierarchy of needs based on two groupings, namely

physiological needs and psychological needs. The central point in Maslow's theory is that people tend to satisfy their needs systematically starting with the basic physiological (physiological, safety, love, esteem, cognitive, aesthetic, self-actualisation and transcendence) needs and moving up the hierarchy.

Maslow believed that the higher-level needs can only be achieved if the lower-order needs have been satisfied first, for example, a hungry person is not likely to be motivated to consider safety and affection until his hunger is satisfied. Rathus (2006:66) elaborates by mentioning that, "All the needs in the hierarchy are innate to humans, but those higher in the hierarchy are weaker". They only direct action when all the earlier needs have been satisfied. Only when people have enough to eat, and their physical safety is assured, will they be motivated by a need to belong or a need for esteem. Despite high-levels of commitment in the context of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other initiatives, most developing countries are likely to fail in achieving their nutrition-related goals, although there are large differences in nutritional achievements across countries. The lack of political commitment and action of central governments may be a critical factor (or even the main reason) for failure in reducing malnutrition, whereas in other developing countries a functional nutrition policy in place may be the driver of success (Nabarro, Menon, Ruel, & Yosef, 2012).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study seeks to explore the impact of poverty on the sustainable development of the OVCs in Zimbabwe with the aim of suggesting sound solutions, thus, minimising consequences caused by poverty on the holistic development of OVCs.

It is guided by the research questions below:

What is the impact of poverty on the holistic development of OVCs?

What recommendations can be suggested to attenuate the negative impact of poverty on OVCs?

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is based on primary data collected through a qualitative research methodology. Patton (2002) avers that qualitative research methods give an understanding of the situation in its uniqueness, presenting what respondents perceive about the situation and what their meanings are. The qualitative phenomenological design was adopted for use in this study as it is good at surfacing deep issues and making voices heard (Creswell, 2010). It also gives a description of what people experience and how they experience what they experience (Patton, 2002). Additionally, the phenomenological design provides complex descriptions of how respondents experienced a given phenomenon (Mack et al., 2005). In this study, participants were given the opportunity to share their experiences regarding the impact of poverty on the academic performance of OVCs in Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

Sampling

The study was carried out in two secondary schools in Masvingo district, Zimbabwe, one rural and one urban. The target population comprised OVCs doing form two (2) and their teachers. Through a purposive sampling strategy, six teachers and

fifteen OVCs were selected for this study. This allowed for the selection of information-rich cases whose situation illuminate questions and provides issues of importance to the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002).

Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected from respondents through in-depth interviews using open-ended questions. The open-ended interview questions provided an opportunity for the researcher and participants to discuss emerging issues in much detail. It also enabled the researchers to probe participants' responses for elaboration and to explore key issues raised by respondents, which were central to the study. The interviews and focus groups were audio-taped and the researcher made observations and copious notes during the interviews.

The consent of the respondents was sought before the in-depth interviews were conducted. For the children, consent was sought from their caregivers and emphasis was placed on the willingness of the children themselves to participate in the study.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the study was secured from Masvingo Provincial Education Office, Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, as well as from the selected school headmasters, DEOs and the social welfare department. Further permission was sought from the parents and guardians of the selected OVC learners.

Data Analysis

Tesch's thematic coding analysis method, a process aimed at uncovering embedded information and making explicit what respondents said, was used in analysing the data of this study (Mitchell, 2012.). Participants' responses were recorded verbatim and read thoroughly and repeatedly. The data was organised under themes based on the narrative explanations and opinions of respondents. Using the methodology of reduction, the researcher analysed the data and searched for possible meanings that made the information more meaningful and understanding (Creswell, 2013). The most illustrative quotations were used to buttress important points that emerged from the data gathered from respondents. Data was collected through interviews, focus group discussions and observations. An inductive approach to analysing the responses was undertaken to allow patterns, themes, and categories to emerge rather than being imposed prior to data collection and analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

- The analysis of the empirical data yielded the following themes:

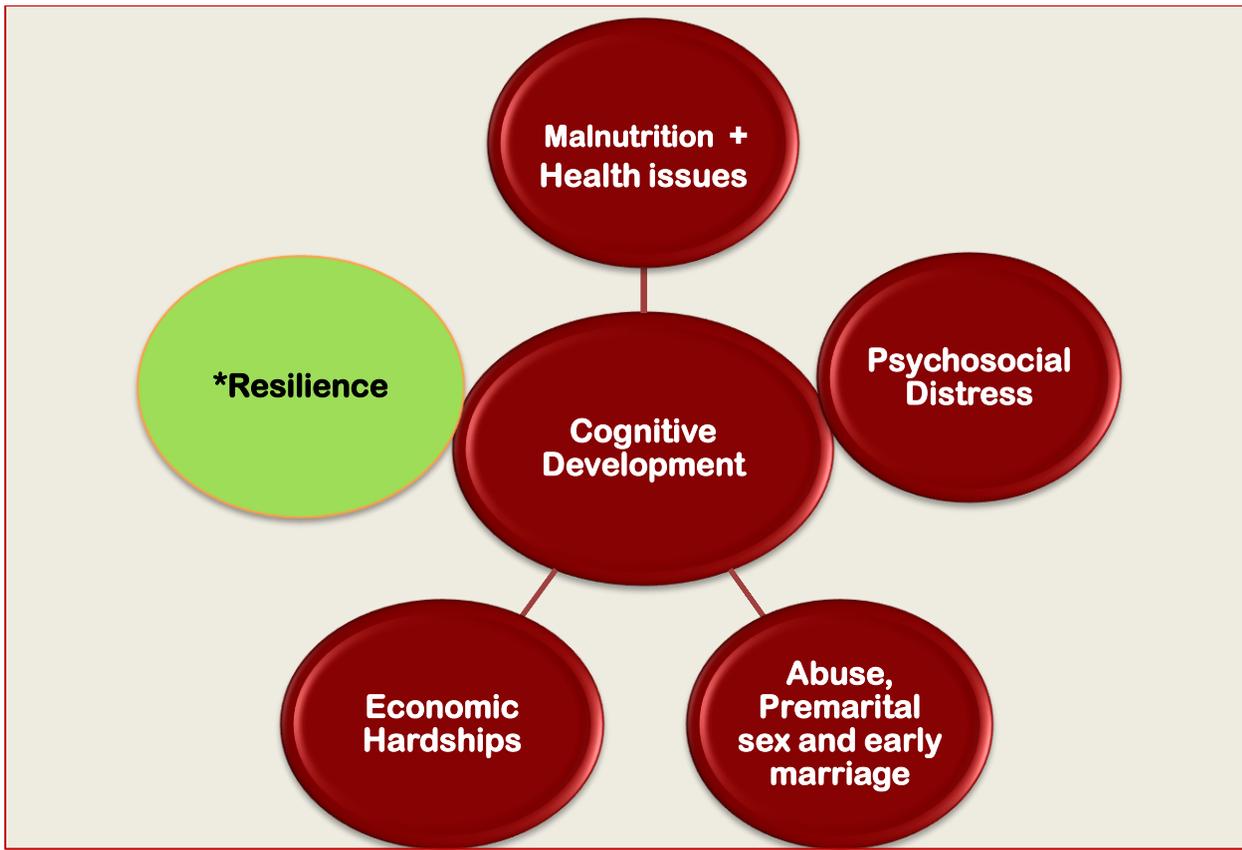


Fig 1: Themes derived from the findings of the study

Field data, 2016

Theme 1: Economic Hardships

The study established that the financial costs that affected OVCs schooling include not only school fees, but also other indirect costs such as the costs of transport, food and school uniforms. Teachers observed that expensive textbooks and school uniforms tend to be beyond the means of many OVCs. Girls and boys interviewed purport that they lacked basic resources such as exercise books, textbooks, uniforms, soap, pocket money, school bags and food to take to school. Expenses such as school fees and school uniforms present barriers to school attendance if orphans’ caregivers struggle to afford these costs. During interviews, one boy lamented that:

...there are girls who end up sleeping with several men to get basic needs. Boys are also sexually abused by rich women in our society. As poor boys, we do not have an option but to sleep with those ladies in order for us to raise money for our up keep. The situation is worse in a child headed households...

The economic hardships created the dog eat dog state of affairs thus directly and indirectly causing learning barriers among OVCs. Given the above, one can safely conclude that to some extent the OVCs fuel the HIV epidemic. Educators can therefore use Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model to assess problems in OVCs life and aid the rebalancing with their environment (Donald et al., 2010). Girls who participated in focus group discussions disclosed that their guardians could not afford sanitary pads thus they were forced to use tissue papers, newspapers and rags instead. They faced humiliation from

other pupils after they spoiled their uniforms. As a result they missed lessons for a period of 3-5 days a month. Also many girls experience abdominal pains, but have no money to buy drugs. These issues were observed to force the poor OVCs not to go to school. As a result, those who go to school conceded that they did not feel confident at all.

In support of the above, a teacher posits that the majority of the OVCs at the two schools were not supported psychologically and materially by their guardians thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Teachers also observed that OVCs that usually come to school without basic necessities develop behavioural, socio-emotional, moral and cognitive problems. It should be noted that unless basic needs are satisfied, everything else recedes (Santrock, 2009 cited in Chinyoka, 2013). All the human capacities such as intelligence, memory and dreams are put to work in trying to seek psychological as well as physiological needs (Maslow in Kenrick, 2010).

Existing studies, Chinyoka (2013), Ganga, (2013), Brooks-Gunn (2000) and Donald et al (2010) show that educational disadvantages among OVCs in various educational outcomes, including school enrollment and attendance, school behaviour and performance, school completion, and educational attainment. Vulnerable children may forgo education for work or household duties, suffer from psychosocial problems and experience greater household poverty. OVCs are vulnerable due to the effects of household economic challenges. It should be noted that, without education, these children miss the opportunity to acquire the skills to better their own lives.

Theme 2: **Abuse, Premarital sex and early marriage**

The study established that poverty exposes the orphans and vulnerable children to different forms of abuse and exploitation; that is physical abuse, defilement, sexual exploitation, child labour, and early marriages while more flock to streets to fend for themselves. A girl, GR2, interviewed highlighted that:

Tinobatwa chibharo nehanzvadzi dzamai nedzimwe hama mumba. Kashoma kuti vekune dzimwe dzimba kuti vade kurara nesu. Hatina watinoudza nokuti ndivo vanotipa sadza. Tigoendepi?(We are abused by our own very close relatives, we cannot report them because they are our bread winners. Where do we go after reporting them?)

The above sentiments raised by the girl child showed that a lot of sexual abuse is going on without the girls reporting. Some children have reported instances of sexual abuse in their new households. However, many may silently accept it because they have nowhere else to turn for shelter or protection (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2003). In Uganda, sexual debut occurred earlier in orphans than in non-orphans; by age of 12, 30% of orphan girls were sexually active rising to 85% by the age of 18. During interviews, the following reasons for becoming sexually active were given by the participants: economic need, peer pressure, lack of parental or care-giver supervision and sometimes rape by strangers, relatives, friends and teachers. Teachers interviewed revealed that the earlier adolescence boys and girls engage in sexual intercourse, the more likely they were to show adjustment problems. Santrock (2009) suggested that though sexual intercourse can be a meaningful experience for older, mature adolescents, many adolescents are not emotionally prepared to handle sexual experiences, especially in early adolescence. On the other hand, the study also established that some of the OVCs voluntarily entered into the marriages to escape poverty while some were forced to do so under the (Kuputsa or Kuzvarira) tradition. A research by Chinyoka (2013) attests to the

above reasons. The majority of girls expressed that pregnancy and marriage were a consequence of poverty. Girls posit that they engage in sexual survival strategies to secure support for their schooling. This also in line with researches by Chinyoka and Naidu (2013). A study done in Manicaland, Zimbabwe, established that orphans *and* vulnerable children were 75% more likely than their counterparts to have STI symptoms. Teenage pregnancy was more prevalent among OVCs than non-OVCs (8.3% versus 1.9%). OVCs were also more likely to have initiated sexual relations and married, but there were no differences in the number of lifetime sexual partners. OVCs were also less likely to be enrolled in secondary school than their counterparts (Chinyoka, 2013 and Ganga, 2013).

The study also revealed that girls, in particular, assume caring responsibilities for their sick parents and their siblings. A teacher, T3, interviewed posits that:

With the weakening of the extended family systems in our societies, most children find themselves without proper social, economic and psychological support with the incapacitation and death of their parents. This would deny the OVC a chance to access their basic needs such as proper health care, education shelter and nutrition.

Another teacher, T4, during interviews highlighted that OVCs often experience many negative changes in their lives and can start to suffer neglect, including emotional neglect, long before they are orphaned. T2 goes on to say: they may suffer the death of their parent(s) and the emotional trauma that results. In this case, OVCs are forced to adjust to a new situation, with little or no support, and may suffer exploitation and abuse.

Although neglect is often thought of as a failure to meet a child's physical needs for food, shelter, and safety, neglect also can be a failure to meet a child's cognitive, emotional, or social needs. For children to master developmental tasks in these areas, they need opportunities, encouragement, and acknowledgment from their caregivers. If this stimulation is lacking during children's early years, due to death of parents and to the weak neuronal pathways that had been developed in expectation of these experiences may wither and die, and the children may not achieve the usual developmental milestones.

Theme 3: Psychosocial Distress

OVCs living in poverty are at greater risk of behavioural and emotional problems. Loss of loved ones, particularly during childhood, brings with it depressive thoughts, sadness, anger and guilt. Three of the teachers interviewed, found that anxiety; depression and anger were more common among OVCs from poverty stricken households. The study also established that OVCs suffer stigma, stress and trauma in addition to the loss of parental love, care and protection and more often they are disinherited. Some behavioural problems noted by teachers during interviews include impulsiveness, difficulty getting along with peers, aggression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and conduct disorder. The teachers revealed that some emotional problems include feelings of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Poverty and economic hardship is particularly difficult for parents who may experience chronic stress, depression, marital distress and exhibit harsher parenting behaviours. These are all linked to poor social and emotional outcomes for children. A teacher, T1, from one of the secondary schools studied remarked that:

...the levels of psychosocial stress were found to be common among orphans from poor backgrounds. Vulnerable children in the study, such as orphans, or children living with chronically ill, or elderly caregivers, also suffered

from more daily stress than non-vulnerable children, such as having to worry about school fees or performing excessive household chores.

Chronic stress associated with living in poverty has been shown to adversely affect children's concentration and memory which may impact their ability to learn (Abebe, 2009). Inadequate education contributes to the cycle of poverty by making it more difficult for low-income children to lift themselves and future generations out of poverty. These children also experience a less favourable social environment, perceive more *stigmas* in their community, feel *less integrated in their peer groups*, and report more *bullying* by peers (Ganga and Maphalala, 2014). While vulnerable children are not necessarily living in poorer households than non-vulnerable children, they get less food at home and have fewer personal items at their disposal. In comparison with other children in their household, they feel that they do not get the same material support. This suggests that there is some degree of *unequal treatment* of vulnerable children *within their homes*, which is not only explained by poverty (Ganga, 2013).

The researcher established that high levels of academic failure are recorded among OVCs in the two schools studied because of diminished self-confidence due to stereotyping and labelling. OVCs who participated in focus discussions assert that:

...teachers tend to favour children from well up families because they are representable, healthy, supportive and bring learning resources to school. As OVCs, we also experience peer rejection, inferiority complex and conflictual peer relations than those from a high Socio-Economic Status.

Teachers therefore are instrumental in shaping the self-concepts of the learners, hence they need to be genuine, warm, loving, empathise with learners to help them self-actualise as purported by (Rogers cited in Chinyoka, 2013). Because of stress, the majority of OVCs miss out on school enrolment, have their schooling interrupted or perform poorly in school as a result of their situation. Children grieving for dying or dead parents are often stigmatised by society through association with AIDS, leading to shame, fear, and rejection. This stigma often denies orphaned children access to schooling and health care because it is assumed that they are infected with HIV and their illnesses are untreatable.

Theme 4: **Malnutrition + Health issues**

Majority of OVCs indicated that they only could afford to receive a single decent meal per day which was supper and that greatly affected their mental capabilities. Observations revealed that those pupils during the day relied heavily on maputi (dried, roasted meal grains) mangai (dried boiled meal grains, groundnuts, mahewu (traditional African drink from malted grain) and other African snacks and fruits which are nutritious but not always available. Maslow's hierarchy of needs also emphasized that the basic physiological needs to be satisfied before moving to the needs on top of the hierarchy. Snowman and Biehler (2011) stress that a hungry child is not likely to be motivated to self-actualise until hunger is satisfied. Ganga (2013) concurs with the above idea when she emphasized that failure to have enough meals per day resulted in many complaints from the OVCs such as lack of concentration during lessons. This study also established that recurring problems of stomach aches, headaches, learning and memory deficits, lower IQ and behavioral problems, conditions such as ADHD, Bipolar Disorder and schizophrenia, attention deficit disorder, impaired school performance, reduced language development and reduced problem-solving abilities from OVCs could be attributed to hunger. Since adolescents received a diet which was not balanced in most cases that had detrimental effects on their academic performance, they could not perform at par

with other adolescents from rich and affluent families. Malnutrition not only harms the body but leaves an imprint on the minds of those who survive it (Chinyoka, 2014). In support of the above, Ganga (2013) argues that poor diet had a bearing on cognition and learning of children because the brain needed energy to run all its functions efficiently.

This study also revealed that OVCs living in poorer communities are at increased risk for a wide range of physical health problems such as chronic conditions such as asthma, anaemia, and pneumonia and risky behaviours such as smoking or engaging in early sexual activity.

Given the above, this research provides important evidence for the beneficial effects, both to individuals and society, of ensuring that our children receive the nutrition they deserve. Malnutrition affects people of every age, although infants, children, and adolescents may suffer the most because many nutrients are critical for normal growth and development. A healthy, balanced diet is essential for optimal growth and development, and healthy tissue and organ function (). Whilst malnutrition can have severely damaging consequences for health and wellbeing, this scientific research demonstrates that improving the nutritional status of poorly nourished children can have therapeutic effects. It is important that we recognize this need and stop hunger from ruining the lives of our most vulnerable children.

Theme 5: **Resilience**

Despite coming from poor backgrounds, some teachers noted that some OVCs defied the odds and excelled in their academic performance. Other factors like resilience, inborn factors and relative support and motivation (self-efficacy) come into play. An orphan, pseudo named Dala, who always excels in his studies said:

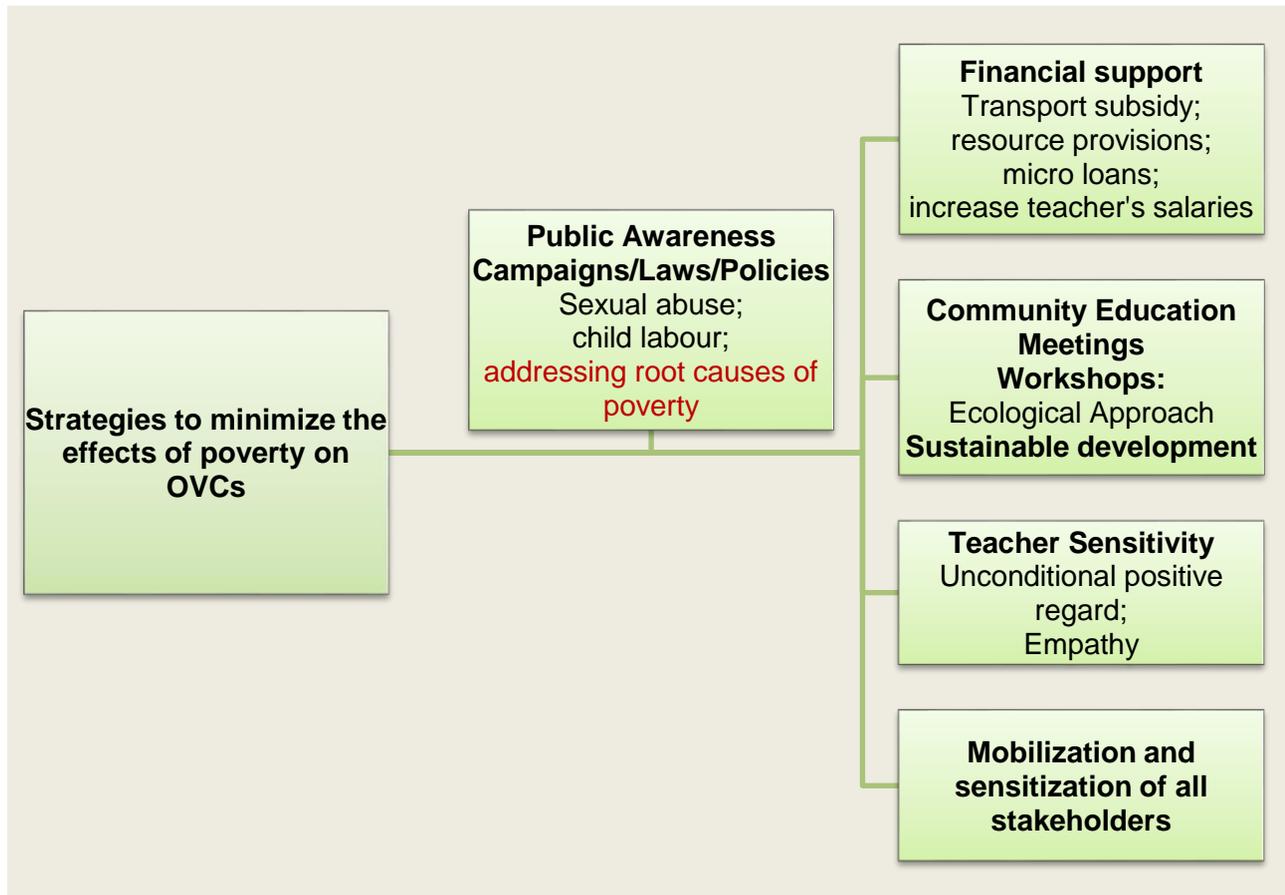
As the first born, I cannot afford to be lazy at school. I work harder than all the other students because I have a family to look after. I need a good job in order to be in a position to look after my siblings. I was also taught the virtues of hard work by my late parents...

During interviews, another OVC highlighted that:

I do not have problems in balancing household chores like cooking for the family, washing clothes, fetching fire wood and water with my studies. These duties do not compromise my studies in any way. In my community, it's cultural and God-given that women should work for the survival of the families. I have learnt to efficiently organise my time.

So, to say that all children from poor backgrounds and neighbourhoods will underperform at school, will be myopic, and an underestimation of a rather complex issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Some of the challenges can be addressed by making use of an ecological approach where caregivers, extended family and communities are supported in the micro, meso, exo and macrosystems leading to the sustainable development of OVCs' communities. Others, including equitable access to education, health, birth registration, foster care and inheritance legislation, also require government-level commitment and intervention. And efforts to increase awareness and reduce stigma and discrimination must be embraced by all. School feeding not only encourages children to get into school but it can also attract new enrolments from marginalised communities. School feeding can contribute to the enhanced growth of young children, increasing the availability of food or financial resources in the household. Keeping these children in school, especially girls, can reduce their vulnerability to HIV. The economic crises in Zimbabwe have adversely affected the country's education system. Professionals in special education, counselling, psychology, and medicine can provide their expertise in designing and implementing interventions that will promote positive outcomes among the affected children.

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