

Uncaging the Caged: Exploring the Impact of Poverty on the Academic Performance of Form Three Learners in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT The relationship between poverty and academic performance of children is far from simple and direct. It is more complicated than just the effects of poverty alone. The Poverty Assessment Study Survey (PASS) conducted by the Government of Zimbabwe in 2006 revealed that AIDS and poverty have reversed progress towards millennium development goals. It is estimated that about seven out of ten families in Zimbabwe live in dire poverty because of political unrest, socio-economic instability, economic and political sanctions and HIV/AIDS, which exacerbates poverty among families. This article examines the impact of poverty on the academic performance of form three learners in two secondary schools in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. The study is informed by Urie Bronfenbrenners' ecological theory. A qualitative phenomenological design was used with focus group discussions, interviews and observations as data collection instruments for fifteen (15) children and ten (10) teachers in Masvingo Province. Findings from this study revealed that over seventy percent (70%) of the families in Zimbabwe do not have access to basic human needs (food and non-food items) which are necessary to sustain life thus adversely affecting children's health, intellectual capabilities, academic achievements, emotional, physical, moral and social development. This study recommends early intervention programmes for children, sustainable development of both rural and urban communities and the need to provide food hampers to the affected children.