

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

Kudzai Chinyoka¹ and Narainsamy Naidu²

¹*Great Zimbabwe University, Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Foundations
Telephone: +263 773 551 922, E-mail: chinyokak@gmail.com*

²*Department of Psychology of Education, University of South Africa (UNISA),
College of Education
Telephone: + 27-012-4294755, E-mail: naidun@unisa.ac.za*

KEYWORDS Ecological System. Phenomenological. Basic Human Needs

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.

INTRODUCTION

The number of children living in poverty in Zimbabwe and in the rest of the world is continuously increasing. Poverty has precipitated, and will continue to precipitate, enormous suffering to countless children. The United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2006) cited in Ganga and Chinyoka (2010) report that current estimates indicate that more than 200 million children in developing countries are at risk of not developing to their full potential because of poverty and HIV/AIDS. The majority of the Zimbabwe's poor (88%) live in rural areas; communal farming areas contain 76% of the poor and 82% of the very poor in Zimbabwe (Robertson 2011). Thus the severity of the level of poverty in Zimbabwe is critical. Hence there is a need to develop interventions and social policies to protect children at risk.

Research has shown that millions of children do not have access to secondary education despite the concerted efforts to push the cause forward. Chitiga and Chinoona (2011), Kaba and Musonda (2011), Saito (2011), Okeke et al.

(2012) identified child labour, poverty and lack of sponsorship, quest for wealth, bereavement, truancy, broken homes and engagement of children and as house helps, as factors or the clog in the wheel of children's access to secondary education. According to World Bank Report (2012), more than 350 million people, over half of Africa's population, live below the poverty line of one dollar a day. This implies that poverty to a larger extent, excludes many children from school.

The World Bank Report (2012) defines poverty as the inability to attain a minimum standard of living, not having enough to eat, a low life expectancy, a higher rate of infant mortality, low educational standards, enrolment and opportunities, poor drinking water, inadequate health care, unfit housing conditions and lack of active participation in decision-making processes. Thus, poverty is a broad, multifaceted and multi-dimensional concept that involves the economic, social, political and environmental well-being of the people. The researchers define poverty as being unable to afford basic human needs (financial and material).

Poverty affects the children's psychosocial development across multiple contexts including family, home, neighbourhood, and school (Chilton et al. 2007:263) and has more detri-

mental effects on socio-emotional functioning, cognitive functioning, and academic achievement (Conger and Donellan 2007:24). Children living in poverty are much more prone to health and safety risks associated with malnutrition, disease, infection, and injury than are children who are not poor (Donald et al. 2010:156; Jenson 2007; Lacour and Tissington 2011:552).

Malnutrition, for example, remains one of the major obstacles to human well-being and economic prosperity in developing countries (Ecker and Nene 2012). According to Acosta (2011), there are strong normative and instrumental reasons related to human and economic development to address the burden of malnutrition as an issue of public concern. This calls for governments to prioritize policies and actions and allocate substantial investments in efforts to address the needs of their malnourished populations. Governments have the responsibility to establish functioning institutions and infrastructure enabling the poor to achieve nutrition security and to provide services for treatment and prevention of malnutrition and related diseases.

Despite high-level commitment in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 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. For example, developing countries as a whole have less than a 5 percent probability of meeting the MDG one target, but 61 of these 141 countries have a probability of 50-100 percent (Stevens et al. 2012). Countries that are highly unlikely to achieve the target of halving child under nutrition are concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, whereas most Latin American, Southeast Asian, and Central and East Asian countries have been quite successful (Stevens et al. 2012).

In addition, progress towards other MDGs directly related to nutrition such as 'reducing child mortality' (MDG 4) and 'improving maternal health' (MDG 5) is still much too slow in most developing countries and particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa for achieving the targets by 2015 (United Nations 2012). 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 some developing countries a func-

tional nutrition policy in place may be the driver of success (Nabarro et al. 2012).

Many of the health and safety risks cause myriad problems to the learner. Poverty is also associated with higher rates of academic failure or grade retention (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan 2007), and higher incidences of school dropout (Connell 2010). Adolescent parenthood is higher among poor teenagers (Chabaya et al. 2009), and children raised in poverty have poorer employment records as adults (Abebe 2009). Furthermore, an increased likelihood of smoking, prostitution, teenage pregnancies and illegal drug use is associated with poverty among children (Kapungu 2007). More research is essential for educators charged with making informed decisions on the psychosocial effects of poverty on the academic performance of learners in Zimbabwe.

Rutter (1987) cited in Bernard (2012) revealed that in some situations children from poor backgrounds defied the odds and performed very well due to resilience. This shows that not all children from low socio-economic backgrounds will perform badly at school. However, this is not a justification to expose any child to risk because there are children who do better when not exposed to high levels of risk (poverty) or adversity (Conger and Donellan 2007). The researchers adopted qualitative methods to establish the extent to which the multiple contexts of poverty affect the academic performance of form three learners in Zimbabwe.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by Bronfenbrenner's (2008) ecological theory which suggests that a child's surroundings, including their home, school, work, church, neighbourhood, culture and government, has an influence on the way the child develops (Donald et al. 2010; Woolley and Kaylor 2006). This theory looks at learners' development within the context of the system of relationships that form their environment.

According to this model, the microsystem is the small, immediate environment in which the child lives. The ecological model states that child development occurs within an interactive system of nested influences between the child and the environment. Bronfenbrenner's ecological environment consists of the following five nested structures: microsystems, mesosystem,

exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem (Berk 2006:27; Berk 2007:24; Donald et al. 2010:41). Children's microsystems include any immediate relationships or organisations they interact with, such as their immediate family, school, peers, neighbours and caregivers. How these groups or organisations interact with the child will have an effect on how the child grows. The more encouraging and nurturing these relationships and places are, the better the child will be able to grow (Donald et al. 2010). Bronfenbrenner's next level, the mesosystem, describes how the different aspects of a child's microsystem work together for the sake of the child (Cole et al. 2009). The exosystem level includes the other people and places that the children may not interact with often but still have a major effect on them, such as parents' work places, extended family members and the neighbourhood. Bray et al. (2010), 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 systems. 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 learners.

Understanding the interactions of these systems is therefore the key to understanding how children develop and what factors lead to their failure. While multiple environments and mechanisms exist, the researchers are interested in examining how poverty acts on families to influence academic achievement by focusing on five environments, which are family/home, neighbourhood, peers, school and government.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to explore the impact of poverty on the academic performance of form three learners in Zimbabwe with the aim of suggesting solutions thus minimising consequences caused by poverty on the academic performance of form three learners. It is guided by the research questions below:

- What is the impact of poverty on the academic performance of form three learners?
- What recommendations can be suggested to attenuate the negative impact of poverty on form three learners?

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative phenomenological approach is used to highlight the specific phenomena and to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in the situation. Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and emphasise the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. As such they are influential for understanding subjective experiences and gaining insights into people's motivations and actions (Lester 1999). One of the advantages of this approach is that it allows the researcher to gain an understanding of social phenomena from participants' perspectives in their natural settings (McMillan and Schumacher 2010; Conrad and Serlin 2006). The main aim of the study was descriptive and exploratory.

Research Design

This study entitled: 'Uncaging the caged: exploring the impact of poverty on the academic performance of form three learners in Zimbabwe', is an example of qualitative research that attempts to accumulate data regarding the impact of poverty on the academic performance of form three learners in Zimbabwe. The study adopted the phenomenological research design. This study is informed by Bronfenbrenner's (2008) ecological theory.

Sampling

The study was carried out in two secondary schools in Masvingo district, Zimbabwe. The selection of the schools and the classes was purposefully done to ensure that the findings were authentic. The two schools were chosen because of their proximity to the researchers. The target population comprised learners doing form three (3) at the two secondary schools and also teachers teaching these pupils in nine different subjects. About twenty (20) teachers teach form three (3) learners in nine different subjects at the two schools. The total number of learners doing form three (3) in the two selected schools was one hundred and forty (140), 76 from school A and 64 from school B. The target population was therefore one hundred and sixty (160). From

a total population of about one hundred and sixty (160), a sample of fifteen learners (15), eight from school A, seven from school B and ten teachers (10), five (5) from each school was purposively drawn.

Data Collection and Analysis

In addition to the intensive review of related literature, data was collected through interviews with the target population comprising fifteen learners and ten teachers. During the focus group interviews the researchers created a social environment in which group members were stimulated by one another's perception and ideas. This technique was believed to increase the quality and richness of data, more than one-on-one interviewing could have done (McMillan and Schumacher 2010).

Targeting teachers provided collaborative data about the performance of pupils and impact of poverty on pupils' academic performance. Pupils also gave their views and perceptions regarding the extent to which the impact of poverty affects their academic performance. The interviews were audio-taped and the researchers made observations and copious notes during the interviews.

Validation/ Trustworthiness of Data Collected

Strategies were applied to counteract validity threats. Information was obtained from individuals in their respective focus groups and settings, using different sources, cross-checking and verifying sources of information (Conrad and Serlin 2006).

This strategy helped eliminate the problem of inaccuracy or incompleteness of the data which, according to Maxwell (2009:89), is the main threat to a valid description of what the researchers saw or heard.

In order to make sense of collected data, the researchers applied the Tesch's open coding method of data analysis to identify themes and categories (Creswell 2010:155). It is a systemic process of examining, selecting, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing and interpreting data to address the initial propositions of the study (Yin 2009; White 2002; Leedy and Omrod 2012).

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the study was secured from Masvingo Provincial Education Office, Zimbabwe as well as from the selected school headmasters/principals, teachers and form three learners. Further permission was sought from the parents of the selected learners.

The participants were informed that their involvement in the study was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any stage of the interviews if they were not comfortable. Permission was first obtained from the participants for the interviews to be audio-recorded. They were assured of anonymity in the research report.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the empirical data yielded the following themes:

Theme 1: Lack of Nutrition/ Adequate Food

According to Ecker and Nene (2012) the UNICEF framework of 1990 and the International Food Policy Research Institute... framework of 2010 suggest three tiers of causation of malnutrition. First, the *immediate causes* of malnutrition, which relate to the individual level, are inadequate dietary intake of nutrients (from food) and ill health causing or amplifying malnutrition (such as through infectious diseases). Second, the *underlying causes* operate at the household level and directly influence an individual's food and nutrient intake or health status. They include inadequate access to food, health care, potable water and sanitation—largely due to poverty; poor child caring and feeding practices; poor (female) education and nutritional knowledge; lack of family planning; and the poor status of women. Third, the *basic causes*, which are rooted at the societal level, emerge from problems in physical infrastructure, in the macro-economy, in institutions (including cultural norms) and governance.

Seventy-three percent (73%) of the children interviewed highlighted that they come to school without having any breakfast, not even a slice of homemade bread (*chimodho*). Teachers interviewed also confirmed that about ninety percent (90%) of their learners from poor backgrounds came to school without food and as a

result, failed to concentrate. Instead of paying attention to the teacher as she/he presents concepts to the class, the hungry learner would be busy pondering on what to do to fulfil a basic need. A number of studies in Latin America, Africa and the U.S. reported that, on intelligence tests, children with a history of malnutrition attained lower scores than children of similar social and economic status who were properly nourished (Lacour and Tissington 2011). Research findings by Pollitt and Brown (2006) concur that underfeeding in childhood was thought to hinder mental development solely by producing permanent, structural damage to the brain. Teachers interviewed went on to say that ...*When children experience food insecurity their mental and emotional states are altered, which can negatively affect their holistic development.* Malnutrition therefore causes illness, brain damage, delayed physical growth, delayed development of motor skills and delayed intellectual development (Lacour and Tissington 2011).

Form three learner's concerns were noted by such sentiments like...*Isu tonongouya kuchikoro tisina kana chatadya* (We come to school on empty stomachs) ...*Zviri nani tibise breaktime nokuti vamwe vana vanobva vatidadira nechikafuchavo* (Breaktime at school exposes us more and we feel stigmatised. We wish schools would remove breaktime), *takapedzisira kudya madeko sadza nemuriwo* (We last ate sadza and vegetables last night).

In most cases, based on the interviews with the learners, over 60% of these learners had a very small meal the previous night. Thirty percent (30%) of the pupils were estimated to be taking food with them to school. The implication then, according to these figures, is that the majority of children in the two schools eat nothing at all when they wake up in the morning and while they are at school. The unavailability of food and unpredictability of families from poor backgrounds give children little opportunity to interact at academic level with peers and teachers at school and this, according to Bronfenbrenner (2008), is the most destructive force in children's cognitive development. Learners who participated in focus group discussions stressed that the lack of nutritious food triggers an array of health problems in them, many of which can become chronic.

Theme 2: Health Issues

Results from interviews and focus group discussions established that there is a higher incidence of such conditions as asthma, respiratory infections, tuberculosis, ear infections, abdominal pains and hearing loss among children from poverty stricken households. This reinforced the findings made by Donald et al. (2010) as well as Okeke et al. (2012).

Donald et al. (2010) posit that children raised in poverty tend to miss school more often because of illness; these children are twice as likely to have impaired vision and hearing, iron deficiency and anaemia which can impair brain function. Eighty percent of the teachers interviewed confirmed various ailments among children from poor backgrounds saying that ...*health problems among learners lead to a low self-esteem, high levels of stress and anxiety, low I.Q., mental instability, psychosocial distress as well as underachieving in their academic work.*

Contributing factors given by the respondents included financial constraints, poor nutrition, unhealthy environmental conditions, and inability to obtain appropriate health care. Such learners are usually stigmatised, labelled and looked down upon. They also developed an inferiority complex which affected their academic performance.

Girls interviewed, and those who participated in the focus group discussions, stated that the greater incidence of health issues among lower income learners lead to increased school absenteeism, grade repetition, school dropout, tardiness rates, incidence of illness during class, and high rates of undiagnosed and or untreated health problems. Some learners interviewed complained saying ...*veduwe!* ... *Tinogara kune noisy, kwakasviba, kunonhuhwa uye kune matoilets mashoma asingasukwi, tinorwara nezvirwere zvose* (meaning we live in dirty, noisy and polluted neighbourhoods, where we share toilets which are not regularly cleaned. As a result, we suffer from myriad diseases).

In support of the above, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory suggests that development of the learner is explained in terms of relationships, for example, between a child and her/his environments (Berk 2007; O'Neil 2011). Understanding the interactions of these systems is therefore the key to understanding how form

three learners develop and what factors lead to their academic failure.

This study also established that education of girls in the two schools was hampered by inadequate toilet facilities at school, lack of running water and sanitary towels. This corroborates findings made by UNICEF (2012), on problems affecting the Masai girls' schooling in Kenya. Girls who participated in focus group discussions and interviews stated that...*We start menstruation as early as in grade seven and many girls do not know what to do. Lack of sanitary pads leads to absenteeism due to fear of embarrassment caused by accidental soiling. Some girls do not even have underwear so we find it difficult to participate in sports and other school activities. Many girls experience abdominal pain (called jeko), but have no money to buy drugs. These issues force us to skip school.*

As a result of such information, the researchers concluded that the girl child tends to suffer greatly from the effects of poverty at school. More research therefore needs to be done to explore the impact of the lack of sanitary pads and other basic facilities on the academic performance of girl children in Zimbabwe.

Theme 3: Low Socio-economic Status Leading to Child Labour

This study also established that monetary constraints and the need for food, shelter and clothing drives children into the trap of premature labour. The children are seen working in the fields, gardens and sometimes herding cattle for a pittance or food. Some girls were employed as part-time domestic workers. Unpaid child labour was also noted among families, where girl children engaged in domestic work, care for siblings, sick parents and relatives in order to save family income. This is in line with findings made by Ganga and Chinyoka (2010) in Chipinge, Zimbabwe. Ben-Chendo et al. (2012) conducted an investigation on household poverty and its effects on child labour in Nigeria and the findings are in line with the circumstances in Zimbabwe. Five of the eight girls who participated in this study said...*Because our parents are poor, they do not have money to pay for maids...so we do all the household chores like washing family clothes, cleaning the house, feeding young ones, cooking for the entire family, fetching firewood and water before*

we go to school. We also sell vegetables, fruits, juice cards and sometimes our bodies to supplement family income. We do not have time to study as a result...

The implication, as noted by these researchers, is that the girl children are overburdened by domestic chores and informal labour thus negatively affecting their academic performance. Research done in Africa show that girls are generally required to spend more time on household chores than boys (Engle and Black 2008; Chitiga and Chinoona 2011). Girls' labour is used to substitute for mothers at work, such as caring for siblings, fetching firewood and water, caring for animals and pounding grain.

Both girls and boys who participated in the study support child labour saying...*because we also lack school things such as uniforms, writing materials and school fees, in many cases we decide to leave because it is not useful going to school without such things. We would rather get money from working than going to school. After all schooling in our community does not reward.*

As a result, boys were also observed engaging in informal trade after school, where they sold fruits, and juice in the streets and spent time also on domestic chores to supplement family income. Kapungu (2007) noted that some boys also did not complete their Ordinary Level studies because of poverty. This indicated, to some extent, that poverty does not discriminate according to gender although it does appear that the girl child is more affected.

Togunde and Arielle (2008) cited in Ben-Chendo et al. (2012) state that children from the poor households that engaged in child labour activities faced some hazards such as abuse and rape which could affect their social, mental and physical development. Socially, children have been found to experience negative consequences to their educational development and performance.

This study also established that parents engaged themselves in menial jobs, vending and temporary jobs which took too much of their time. As a result they could not supervise their children's homework thus preventing their academic progress. Conversely, parents from low income backgrounds have to deal with nonflexible work schedules and stress due to residing in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, which inhibits their involvement in their children's educa-

tion (Lacour and Tissington 2011). This breakdown of the learner's microsystem leaves a child with no tools to explore other parts of the environment. Without proper adult supervision or love, children who engage in child labour may look for attention in inappropriate places thus affecting their self-discipline (Berk 2007; O'Neil 2011). Poverty is, therefore, a hindrance to the optimal functioning of form three learners in Masvingo.

Theme 4: Impact of Poverty/ High Mobility Among Families

Findings from interviews reveal that children from poor backgrounds moved from town to town, village to village and school to school as their parents searched for work or ran around to make ends meet and searched for cheaper accommodation. This concurs with findings made by UNICEF (2012) among the Masai of East Africa.

Teachers interviewed also complained of high mobility among children from poverty stricken households. Some learners interviewed during focus group discussions revealed that they sometimes lived in places that were rented by the month, week or even day and therefore were people of no fixed residence. The researchers noted that the families have adopted a rather laissez faire parenting option where children are sometimes left to do as they wish whilst parents leave for neighbouring countries like South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia in search of greener pastures. Studies conducted by Cameron (2012) in Bangladesh and Vietnam support the views expressed by the teachers and students interviewed.

One of the teachers we named Mr. Moyo (not his real name) had this to say about learners' parents, ...*tinotsva kwese. Kuti tirege kuenda, vana vanofa nenzara. Kuenda Joni kunounza school fees, rent, nhumbi nechikafu...* meaning that they have no option but definitely need to get to Johannesburg and/or other neighbouring countries in order to work for food, school fees, rent and clothes. Findings from focus discussions and interviews indicated that mobility among parents was high, even within the country, as they searched for jobs to have money to pay school fees, money for rentals, to pay for bills, buy uniforms and feed their children. This scenario seems to impede the development of

children's intellectual capabilities, emotional, social, physical and moral improvement. This finding is in concurrence with findings by Bowen and Bowen (2008) on poverty and its psychosocial effects on child development.

All teachers interviewed reported that the children often come to school with no records from their previous schools; and it may be difficult for schools to track the records down. Teachers have no idea what these learners have learned. It is challenging for schools to place these children in classrooms and get them the required additional services. This reinforces findings made by Conger and Donnellan (2007), and Engle and Black (2008), who also established that frequently changing schools by the learners is detrimental to their academic performance. One teacher said...*Even if placement is successful, these children will likely move again within the school year, making them difficult to teach.* A teacher we shall call Mr Nyimo, said that...*It is also challenging to help these learners to learn at least something of value while they remain in their classrooms.*

Seventy percent (70%) of teachers interviewed stated that those children who constantly change schools are at a disadvantage because they tend to miss valuable contact time as they move from one village to another, from one town to another and from one school to another. The teachers also established that school attendance is often irregular amongst children whose parents are very mobile. Transfer to a new school becomes the norm. Findings from interviews and focus group discussions revealed that mobility compounds the difficulty these children have in making friends. They were observed to behave hostilely or be totally withdrawn because of past difficulties experienced when forming friendships. With regard to both the academic and social aspects of school, they may develop an 'I do not care attitude'. The combination of this issue with the multitude of other issues faced by mobile and homeless children as well as the impact on their emotional, social and cognitive development can be overwhelming (Bronfenbrenner 2008).

Theme 5: Schooling

It was observed in this study that poor children attended poor schools, which were poorly endowed with resources and were taught by

demotivated and negatively labelled teachers. During interviews, the teachers highlighted that they were making frantic efforts to transfer to better schools. Studies from Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Thailand and Mexico, for example, attest to similar conditions (Chabaya et al. 2009; Kaba and Musonda 2011; Chitiga and Chinoona 2011). According to Cameron (2012), the process of family migration can disrupt children's education directly especially given that migration is often cyclical, involving repeated journeys between the rural origin and urban destination. Throughout the period of this research, teachers complained that they never got incentives (in the form of money) which their counterparts from affluent schools received monthly. This is reinforced in the studies conducted by Mufanechiya et al. (2012). This compounded the plight of form three learners in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. Teachers who were interviewed also revealed that the children from poor backgrounds failed to concentrate on the issues at hand and they lack participation in class and group activities hence their performance in daily written work is negatively affected. Teachers were also observed to have a negative attitude towards learners from poor backgrounds.

The researchers established that school attendance of children from poor backgrounds was erratic. The reasons for absenteeism, identified by the respondents, included: failure to get school fees, lack of parental support, hunger/malnutrition, child labour, sickness, lack of uniforms, lack of food to take to school, stigmatisation and discrimination and children compelled to be care-givers at home. These were the same reasons given by pupils who were interviewed. This view is also supported by the findings made by Mufanechiya et al. (2012). Teachers interviewed in this study lamented that dropping out of school due to poverty among pupils lead to stress, frustration, discouragement and maladjustment. A negative attitude towards learning may follow and this would interfere with further learning. This is in agreement with existing studies by Bradley and Caldwell (2004) who suggest that such children tend to show internalising rather than externalising symptoms in response to such influences, like depression, anxiety and withdrawal as opposed to aggression and other forms of anti-social behaviour.

Migrant families may also face bureaucratic obstacles, such as a refusal to admit children in

the middle of a school year, non-recognition of education attained in the rural place of origin, demands for birth or examination certificates that migrant families may not have, and selective admission based on household registration. Short-term migration, as appeared to be the case for a substantial number of households in Vietnam, may pose particular difficulties in terms of disruption of education, possibly requiring programmes that supplement the main school system (Cameron 2012).

On the other hand, fifteen percent (15%) of the children interviewed maintain that the vicious cycle of poverty can only be broken by education. They alluded to the view that poverty can become a source of motivation to succeed. One student interviewed postulated that there are many children seemingly from poor families who have achieved well academically because their parents cared for them and used their meagre resources to instil discipline in their children from infancy. A significant number of boy learners in this study were noted to excel in their studies despite coming from poor backgrounds. The teachers interviewed concluded that they develop resilience and perseverance. Bernard (2012) asserts that resilient children have high expectations, a meaning for life, goals, personal agency, and inter-personal problem-solving skills. All of these things work together to prevent the debilitating behaviours that are associated with learned helplessness.

According to Schapiro (2009) cited in Cameron (2012) policies for internally migrating children in India, for example, have included "mobile schools, examinations on demand, bridge courses, residential camps and drop-in centres for street and slum children" to make education more accessible to children who (alone or with families) engage in circular or temporary migration. But a first step would be to ensure that migrants benefit from existing programmes designed to help the most disadvantaged households, such as school fee waivers and stipends. This system could possibly assist students of migrating families in Zimbabwe.

Theme 6: Financial Status/ Home and School Circumstances

This study established that children who experience poverty live in physical environments that offer less stimulation and fewer resources for learning. These include factors such as a lack

of lighting, overcrowded homes, noisy neighbourhoods, having no desk or table to work on, or an absence of books in the home. Their parents may be less able to purchase games and toys that promote learning, live in places that are not safe for outdoor play, or to provide their children with high-quality childcare (Ganga and Chinyoka 2010, Mufanechiya et al. 2012).

Some of the statements expressing such views given by learners from poverty-stricken households were: ...*Kumba kwakaomesesa, nokuti hakuna kana magetsi, macandles, tinoverenga nomoto* (the situation at home is pathetic, we experience power cuts, our parents cannot afford candles and we sometimes use fire when writing homework.), *tinorara muimba imwe tiri six* (we live in crowded homes, sometimes more than six people share a bedroom), ...*kumba kwedu kune basa rakawanda, hauzorori* (we do not have time to rest because of various household chores), ...*vabereki vedu havana kudzidza saka havagoni kutitisa basa rechikoro* (our parents are not educated therefore they fail to help us with the homework)...*Takakombwa nemhuri dzinoita ruzha rwakawanda*...(our neighbours make a lot of noise, it's therefore difficult to concentrate on school work) ...*hatina chero mabhuku okuverenga neeknyorera* (our parents cannot afford to buy textbooks and exercise books, they always give excuses). In agreement, Donald et al. (2010) state that poor parents can sometimes provide little support at home or to schools. In addition there are often few books at home, home conditions for doing homework may be bad and children are poorly motivated to do well at school because they do not perceive the benefits of doing so.

Without good textbooks or other classroom resources, more teachers cannot necessarily improve the quality of learning. Thus studies indicate positive effects of more good textbooks rather than those of additional teachers (Evans 2004:47). These home and school circumstances, as referred to by Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem, may also feature insecure or unstable environments and financial insecurity, leading to anxiety and emotional stress (Chilton et al. 2007). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory also stressed the significance of the child's microsystem in the academic performance of learners. Children's microsystems include any immediate relationships or organisations they interact with, such as their immediate family or caregivers and their school. How these groups

or organisations interact with the child will have an effect on how the child grows; the more encouraging and nurturing these relationships and places are, the better the child will be able to grow. So if conditions at the home and the school are not conducive for learning, learners' academic performance is affected. Donald et al. (2010) also state that the mesosystem is a set of microsystems that continuously interact with one another. So what happens in the family or peer group can influence how children respond at school and vice versa.

Theme 7: Unethical Behaviour/ Immoral Behaviour (Drug Abuse/ Substance Abuse)

Observations made by the teachers and the researchers confirmed that children from low socio-economic backgrounds end up cheating, lying and stealing, especially food from the peers or money so as to buy food. They also steal articles of clothing so as to meet their basic needs. Since this behaviour is regarded by society as socially unacceptable they end up being isolated by significant others and they may develop low self-esteem. This corroborates findings made by Chilton et al. (2007) and Bray et al. (2010). The majority of boys, seventy five percent (75%) and about forty percent (40%) of girls engage in smoking and drug abuse. They take drugs and smoking as a defence mechanism to help them cope with the poverty related problems. Findings from this research also indicate that poverty reinforces harmful cultural practices, such as intergenerational sex and early marriages for girls.

Forty percent (40%) of the girls are estimated to engage in sexual relationships with older partners. Girls interviewed said...*kufara nemadhara ane mari kuri nani pakufa nenzara uye kutambura*, (meaning it's better to be intimate with older men in order to get food, clothing and money than to starve). They go on to say that...*vabereki vedu vanotikurudzira kutsvaka mari nenzara dzose*...(meaning our parents do not mind if we became intimate with older men as long as we bring money and foodstuffs home).

Girl children in some instances may finance other children's education. A study on child prostitution in Mozambique in 2005 established that some girls were earning money through sex work in order to pay for their own schooling, often with the tacit approval of parents. Older men have more sexual experience and are more

likely to have been exposed to HIV/AIDS. Seven out of ten teachers interviewed confirm that young girls are often forced into early marriages, usually to older men who buy groceries for the child and her family until she is old enough to marry. This is in line with findings made by Lacour and Tissington (2011), Kaba and Musonda (2011).

Given the above scenario, the implication of this study is that the children affected by poverty are often highly vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS infection. Although there is evidence from the Global Aids Response Progress Report (2012) to support that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe is on the decline, it is still a major concern to the wellbeing of the people. Their risk for infection arises from the early onset of sexual activity, commercial sex and sexual abuse, all of which are precipitated by economic need, peer pressure and drug abuse.

CONCLUSION

This paper presented evidence to answer the question on the impact of poverty on the academic performance of form three learners in Zimbabwe. In line with the ecological perspective, this study established that poverty affects the girl child across multiple contexts including family, home, neighbourhood, and school and has more detrimental effects on socio-emotional functioning and academic performance. By understanding Bronfenbrenner's five nested systems at work in the life of the learners, these researchers are not only looking at the causes but also looking at possible solutions to those issues affecting children from poverty-stricken households. Although much is being done by the government of Zimbabwe and NGOs in both urban and rural areas to try and ease problems affecting learners, there is still much more that needs to be done.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are made in order to address the critical effects of poverty experienced by children.

- Every effort must be made to ensure that the affected children have stable and preferably family-based care and adequate social support. The Government has to generate more employment opportunities, for example, provision of small loans

(micro-credit) to poor families, which can help them to establish their own enterprises.

- Various policies and interventions such as feeding schemes and the distribution of contraceptives by the government, non-governmental organisations and all stakeholders can help to attenuate poverty's negative influence on child development.
- There has to be collaborative work among all stakeholders, especially in revisiting the root causes of poverty (socio-economic instability, political unrest, high population growth, environmental degradation, the land problem and the issue of international sanctions in Zimbabwe).
- Nutrition support programmes need to be introduced in schools. In addition the introduction of nutrition gardens to communities needs to be investigated and developed so as to distribute food to the children.
- Schooling must be available to all children and every effort must be made to ensure that all children (within the compulsory school going age) remain in school.
- There is a need to educate parents to help improve the academic performance of children. This can be implemented through workshops for parents by social workers and educational psychologists in order to guide them on how to assist their children with homework and other related activities.

Poverty is a societal problem that must be addressed by the microsystems of school, families and neighbourhood, mesosystems (linkages) and exosystems as well as macrosystems (political, ideology).

REFERENCES

- Abebe T 2009. Orphanhood, poverty and care dilemma: Review of global policy trend. *Social Work and International Online Journal*, 7(1): 70-85.
- Acosta A 2011. Analysing Success in the Fight against Malnutrition in Peru. *IDS Working Paper 367*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- Ben-Chendo GN, Lemch JI, Ohajianya DO, Eze CC, Emeyeeonu C, Ehirim NC 2012. Household poverty and its effect on child labour use among palm oil processors in Abia State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Developing Societies*, 1(1): 27-30.
- Berk E 2006. *Child Development*. 5th Edition. Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon.
- Berk LE 2007. *Development Throughout the Lifespan*. Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bernard KE 2012. *Nursing Child Assessment Satellite Teaching Manual*. Seattle: University of Washington.

- Bowen NK, Bowen GL 2008. The effects of home microsystem risk factors and school microsystem protective factors on student academic performance and affective investment in schooling. *Social Work in Education*, 20: 219-231.
- Bradley RH, Caldwell BM 2004. The relation of home environment, cognitive competence, and IQ among males and females. *Child Development*, 51: 1140-1148.
- Bray R, Gooskens, L, Moses S, Seekings J 2010. *Growing up in the New South Africa: Childhood and Adolescence in Post Apartheid*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Bronfenbrenner U 2008. *Ecology of Human Development*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brooks-Gunn J, Duncan GJ 2007. The effects of poverty on children. *Children and Poverty*, 7: 55-71.
- Cameron S 2012. Education, Urban Poverty and Migration: Evidence from Bangladesh and Vietnam. *Working Paper 2012-2015*. UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.
- Chabaya O, Rembe S, Wadesango N 2009. The persistence of gender inequality in Zimbabwe: Factors that impede the advancement of women into leadership positions in primary schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 29: 235-251.
- Chilton M, Chyatte M, Breaux J 2007 The negative effects of poverty and food insecurity on child development. *Indian J Med Res*, 126(4): 262-272.
- Chitiga ZM, Chinoona A 2011. Progress in Gender Equality in Education: Zimbabwe. *SACMEQ Policy Brief #6*. Harare: Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture.
- Cole M, Cole S, Lightfoot C 2009. *The Development of Children*. New York: Worth Publishers.
- Conger RD, Donnellan B 2007. An interactionist perspective on the socioeconomic context of human development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58: 175-199.
- Connell RW 2010. Poverty and education. *Harvard and Educational Review*, 64(2): 125-150.
- Conrad CF, Serlin RC (Eds.) 2006. *The Sage Handbook for Research in Education: Engaging Ideas and Enriching Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Creswell JW 2010. *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. California: SAGE Publications.
- Donald D, Lazarus S, Lolwana, P 2010. *Educational Psychology in Social Context Ecosystem Applications in Southern Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Ecker O, Nene M 2012 Nutrition Policies in Developing Countries: Challenges and Highlights. *Policy Note 1*. Washington DC, International Food Policy Research Institute.
- Engle PL, Black MM 2008. The effect of poverty on child development and educational outcomes. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1136: 243-256.
- Evans GW 2004. The environment of childhood poverty. *American Psychologist*, 59: 77-82.
- Ganga E, Chinyoka K 2010. Psychological disorders caused by poverty among orphans and vulnerable children in child headed households in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 12(4):186-198.
- Global AIDS Response Progress Report 2012. *Zimbabwe Country Report: January 2010- December 2011*. Zimbabwe.
- Jenson E 2007. National Centre for Children in Poverty (2006). Basic Facts About Low-Income Children: Birth to Age 18. From <<http://www.jensonlearning.com>> (Retrieved July 10, 2012).
- Kaba A, Musonda B 2011. Progress in Gender Equality in Education: Zambia. *SACMEQ Policy Brief #6*. Lusaka: Ministry of Education.
- Kapungu RS 2007. The Pursuit of Higher Education in Zimbabwe: A Futile Effort. *A Paper Prepared for the Centre for International Essay Competition on Educational Reform and Employment Opportunities*. CIPE: 2007.
- Lacour M, Tissington LD 2011. The effects of poverty on academic achievement. *Educational Research and Reviews Journal*, 6(7): 522-527.
- Leedy P, Omrod JE 2012. *Practical Research, Planning and Design*. 7th Edition. New Jersey: Pearson Educational International and Prentice-Hall.
- Lester S 1999. *An Introduction to Phenomenological Research*. Taunton UK: Stan Lester Developments.
- Maxwell JA 2009. *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- McMillan JH, Schumacher S 2010. *Research in Education: Evidence-based Inquiry*. 7th Edition. Boston: Pearson.
- Mufanechiya A, Mandiudza L, Mufanechiya T, Nyaradzo J 2012. Challenges faced by Zimbabwean primary schools that perform poorly at grade 7 level: A case for Chivi bottom ten primary schools in Masvingo Province. *Education Research Journal*, 2(10): 27-333.
- Nabarro D, Menon P, Ruel M, Yosef S 2012. SUN: A global movement to accelerate progress in reducing maternal and child under-nutrition. Brief 9. In: J Linn (Ed.): *Scaling Up in Agriculture, Rural De-velopment, and Nutrition*. 2020 Vision Focus 19. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute.
- O'Neil V 2011. *Psychology: An Introduction*. 3rd Edition. Oxford University Press, Southern Africa: Cape Town.
- Okeke EAC, Nzewi UM, Njoku Z 2012. *Tracking School Age Children's Education Status in UNICEF A-Field States*. Enugu: UNICEF.
- Pollitt L, Brown M 2006. The effect of poverty on child development and educational outcomes. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1136: 243-256.
- Robertson J 2011. *Salaries of Ordinary Zimbabweans Far Below Country's Poverty Datum Line*. Harare: National Statistics Agency.
- Saito M 2011. Gender equality in reading and mathematics achievement: Reflecting on EFA goal 5. *IIEP Newsletter* 22(2). Paris: UNESCO/IIEP.
- Stevens G, Finucane M, Paciorek C, Flaxman S, White R, Donner A, Ezzati M 2012.
- Trends in mild, moderate, and severe stunting and underweight, and progress towards MDG 1 in 141 developing countries: A systematic analysis of population representative data. *Lancet*, 380: 824-834.
- United Nations (UN) 2012. The Millennium Development Goals. *Report 2012*. New York: United Nations.
- UNICEF 2012. Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Well-being in Rich Countries. *Report Card*. Florence: Italy.
- White CJ 2002. *Research Methods and Techniques*. New York: Harper Collins College.
- Woolley ME, Kaylor AG 2006. Protective family factors in the context of neighbourhood: Promoting positive school outcomes. *Family Relations*, 55(2): 93-104.
- World Bank Report 2012. *Rwanda Education: Balancing Resources for Post Conflict Poverty Reduction and Growth*. Washington DC: World Bank.
- Yin RK 2009. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 3rd Edition. New Delhi: SAGE Publications.