

Psychosocial Support Offered to Learners: A Case of Gwanda District

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ABSTRACT The purpose of the study was to investigate the efficacy of interventions by multi-sectoral organisations in enhancing educational opportunities for school-going orphaned children in Gwanda District in Zimbabwe. The thrust of the study was to interrogate whether these interventions addressed holistically the needs and rights of the orphans who were registered under the organisations. Using the child rights-based and human needs theoretical frameworks as a dual lens, the investigation adopted the mixed-model type of mixed methods research premised on the post-positivist paradigm. The total sample of participants comprised 4 organisation representatives, one representative for each of the four categories of multi-sectoral organisations, 426 school-going orphans and 26 school authorities. The data collection instruments were self-administered questionnaires and researcher-administered questionnaires (structured interviews). The study found that only two of the categories of multi-sectoral organisations were implementing psychosocial support programmes. It was established that all the orphans under government and non-governmental organisation were not availed with psychosocial support interventions and thus had missed out on the educational opportunities which were inherent in the psychosocial support programmes availed to their counterparts. Rated on the nature and scope variable, the conclusion was that, psychosocial support interventions were limited and fragmented in the coverage of both organisations and orphans and thus were deemed not efficacious in enhancing educational opportunities for the school-going orphaned children in Gwanda District.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of children and their rights has been on the international agenda since shortly after the First World War in 1918 (Chinyangara et al. 1998). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989, makes it clear that children are independent subjects and have rights (Detrick 1999). Zimbabwe is signatory to the UNCRC which came into force in 1990. Broadly, the rights of the child, as listed in this document, can be grouped into four main categories, namely, survival, protection, development and participation (Dyk 2005). In 1999 Zimbabwe, together with other African countries, re-affirmed and contextualized the child's rights as spelt out in the UNCRC through signing the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child 1999). The two treaties, the UNCRC and the ACRWC, can be viewed as global and regional acknowledgements, respectively, of the importance of the child.

Over the years, Zimbabwe has promulgated a number of legislative instruments and policies whose main objectives are to protect the child's

rights as enshrined in the global and regional instruments (Mushunje and Mafico 2007). Examples of policies that safeguard the child's rights are: the Zimbabwe National Orphan Care Policy; and the NPA for OVC (Dhlembeu and Mayanga 2006).

The first specific reference to the right of the child to education in an international human rights instrument is enshrined in Principle 7 of the 1959 UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child (Detrick 1999). The child's right to education is enshrined in the following global instruments: the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); the World Declaration of Education for All (1990); the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999); and the Millennium Development Goals (2000) (UNESCO and UNICEF 2007). Among other provisions, the right of the child to education as contained in these instruments entails the provision of educational opportunities through access to school, regular attendance at school and retention. Article iii (4) of the World Declaration of Education for All (1990) emphasizes the need for States Parties to provide education to "underserved groups" such as: street children, working children, refugees, the poor and those displaced by war (UNESCO 1990). The Education Act of Zimba-

bwe stipulates that education is a fundamental right for every child and that, "subject to this Act, every child in Zimbabwe shall have the right to school education" (Education Act 2004). Thus, access to school education is a core prerequisite for the realisation of the child's right to education in Zimbabwe.

By committing themselves to education for all, the States Parties recognized that education is the foundation of other basic rights of the child (UNESCO 1990). UNICEF and WFP (2005) assert that at school, children can also be provided with emotional support. In addition, education can reduce the children's risk of HIV/AIDS infection by increasing relevant knowledge, awareness, skills and opportunities (Hepburn 2001). This is the concept of the "education vaccine" against HIV/AIDS. Bicego et al. (2003) buttress the notion of "education vaccine" in relation to orphans and other vulnerable children by positing that, "Provision of educational opportunities is considered one of the key components of current 'safety net' programs for orphans and vulnerable children in AIDS-impacted communities in sub-Saharan Africa". UNESCO (2005) argues that education empowers individuals by making them capable of making "strategic life choices" and enhancing their well-being and "self-efficacy".

The global impact of HIV and AIDS led the United Nations (UN) member states to sign a Declaration of Commitment on HIV and AIDS during the June 2001 UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS). The NPA for OVC, premised on the UNGASS Declaration, is a government social protection programme that was developed and is being implemented collaboratively by government ministries and civil society organisations which comprise non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs) and United Nations agencies.

The increased drop-out rate of orphans has been a significant contributory factor to the decline of primary school and 'O' Level completion rates since 2000 (Kajawu and Mwakiwa 2006). It is predicted that in 2010 the number of enrolled primary school students would be 24% lower than in 2000 (Johnson 2006).

Review of Related Literature

The child rights-based and human needs theories require that OVC programming main-

tains a holistic approach in addressing the needs of children. The present research sought to establish the extent to which the interventions implemented by multi-sectoral organisations in Gwanda District addressed both material/physical and psychosocial needs of the school-going orphans registered under them. In this section, the literature review focuses on the concept of psychosocial support. According to Southern Africa HIV/AIDS (SAfAIDS), psychosocial support can be defined as, "an ongoing process of meeting the social, mental and spiritual needs, which are considered essential elements for positive human development". The definition of "psychosocial" given above embraces the other (besides material/physical) categories of human needs as spelt out in human needs theory. SAfAIDS throws more light on what psychosocial support entails by identifying and elucidating four components of psychosocial support as follows:

- ♦ Emotional needs that include the need for love, security, encouragement, confidence, motivation, care, trust and self-esteem. This component also includes a sense of affiliation or belongingness. Children need to be heard and need to express their feelings in an understandable manner. This has a bearing on their personal development;
- ♦ Mental needs which refer to children's areas of mental growth. Formal education (schooling), informal education (opportunities for observational knowledge, adaptational skills) and general skills (life skills, general knowledge, etc.) combined with the right motivation and application to success are essential elements within the mental framework. Opportunities for observational knowledge, adaptational skills and general life skills are fundamental in the development of the child;
- ♦ Social needs – children's social requirements are essential and they entail involving children in a community without them feeling stigmatized or different, to develop a sense of belonging, form friendships and community ties, acceptance, identity, and acknowledgement from peers; and,
- ♦ Spiritual needs enable children to develop hope for their future. They are usually guided by a belief in a Higher Being. They also need to develop trust and security in their survival. This gives them hope to keep

trying, courage and perseverance to keep trying, to trust in a Higher Being and to whom they can turn for spiritual guidance and support at difficult times in their lives.

SAfAIDS' classification of the components of psychosocial support is in line with the definition of the concept as given states that it includes formal and informal services that address the psychosocial well-being either directly and specifically (for example, through interpersonal moral support, counselling, spiritual support, creation of memory books, etc), or indirectly (for example, school and nutritional support programmes that may alleviate stress and worry).

Psychosocial Support Programmes for Orphans

Dyk (2005) notes that there is no blueprint for the types of psychosocial support programmes that are most effective. Dyk (2005) posits that from experience with existing models of psychosocial support, family and community-based approaches to caring for orphans are the best way of meeting the child's physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual and social needs in a synergistic way. Dyk (2005) argues that, overall, orphanage care should be seen as a last resort. In Dyk's view, orphanages often function as singular satisfiers or even as inhibitors. He believes that a child's emotional and psychological needs can seldom be met in an orphanage. Therefore, Dyk (2004) recommends that orphans should receive psychosocial support while they remain in family and community settings. Dyk's thinking is in line with the mode of orphan care proposed by Government in the Zimbabwe National Orphan Care Policy whose six – tier safety net system for orphan care places institutional care at the bottom of all options available (Zimbabwe National Orphan Care Policy 1999).

Some forms of psychosocial support interventions listed here do not involve funds, and can be organized successfully in different communities. Multi-sectoral organisations could co-opt community volunteers to organize the activities for the orphans. In line with one of the four core principles of the child rights-based theory of programming – participation, orphans themselves should be encouraged to participate actively and to be proactive to make the activities a success, instead of waiting for things to be

done for them. The succeeding paragraphs identify and discuss specific cases of psychosocial support interventions that incorporate the activities cited in this paragraph.

METHODOLOGY

This study used post-positivism paradigm as a theoretical framework, mainly because it was considered practically realistic per se in relation to the study's research questions. Babbie (1986) argues that no research approach is better than another. "They are better at doing different things" (Babbie 1986).

The researchers decided to adopt the mixed methods research approach. Mixed methods research is defined as the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study (Creswell et al. 2007; Johnson 2008). The implication of this definition is that, in mixed methods research, the researcher has the legitimacy and freedom to combine quantitative and qualitative strategies. Ivankova et al. (2007) echoes the mixing element in mixed methods research when he posits that:

Mixed methods research is a procedure for collecting, analysing and "mixing" both quantitative and qualitative data at some stage of the research process within a single study to understand a research problem more completely.

Therefore, the mixed research approach requires that the qualitative and quantitative data collected for the study be mixed or combined at some stage in the research process for the research to qualify to be termed mixed. As Ivankova et al. (2007) put it, "the term "mixing" implies that the data or the findings are integrated or connected at some or several points within the study".

Population

Ten (10) multi-sectoral organisations that were implementing interventions targeting orphans in Gwanda District;

- ♦ All primary school-going orphans in the 107 primary schools in Gwanda District;
- ♦ All secondary school-going orphans in the 34 secondary schools in Gwanda District;

- ♦ All school authorities (school heads or their representatives) in the 107 primary schools and 34 secondary schools covered by the 10 multi-sectoral organisations in Gwanda District.

The Sample

There were ten (10) multi-sectoral organisations assisting orphans in Gwanda District with a total population of 11371 orphans. Four of the ten multi-sectoral organisations made up the multi-sectoral organisations sample with a total population of 4268 orphans, which gave a 37, 5% sample size.

The sample of orphans from the four selected multi-sectoral organisations was 10% (426) of the total population (4268) of the orphans assisted by the four multi-sectoral organisations. There is consensus among authorities that, in descriptive research, any sample that is between 10% and 25% is representative enough to produce generalisable information about a population (Leedy 1980). The sample of school authorities was made up of 26 school authorities who were either Heads or representatives of the random sample of schools attended by the sample of orphans.

Data, Analysis and Interpretation

The main thrust was to interrogate whether the interventions addressed holistically the needs and rights of the orphans who were registered under the organisations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data were sought on the forms and coverage of psychosocial support programmes, which were implemented by the sample of multi-sectoral organisations for school-going orphans.

As revealed by the literature review, psychosocial support programmes provide opportunities for formal, non-formal and informal educational opportunities. Hence, the forms of psychosocial support programmes availed to the orphans indicate the forms of educational opportunities, which were available to the orphans. Although psychosocial support is not directly a special curriculum in itself, it is considered one of the special education-related services because it targets an area that affects the children's education. Psychosocial support may lead to "collateral improvements" which can in turn lead to positive educational outcomes. Table 1 shows the responses of the three groups of participants to the question on the forms of psychosocial support programmes which were available to the school-going orphans under the CBO.

Table 1 shows that, according to the organisation representative, the CBO implemented all seven forms of psychosocial support activities, namely, counselling, camping, life skills activities, recreational activities, youth clubs, peer education and spiritual activities. However, the orphans who were supposed to be the beneficiaries of psychosocial support (19) and the total sample of school authorities (5) corroborated each other's evidence that only four of the seven psychosocial support activities were implemented by the organisation. These four were: counselling, life skills activities, recreational activities and peer education. Data in Table 1 reveal that the majority 104 (84.55%) of the orphans who were registered under the CBO had not received any form of psychosocial support, unlike their counterparts who constituted 15.45% of the sample of orphans. The former had thus missed out on both the primary and secondary benefits of psychosocial support in relation to educational opportunities.

The study sought to establish "other" forms of psychosocial support programmes which were

Table 1: Forms of psychosocial support programmes (CBO)

Forms of psychosocial support programmes	Organisation representative (N = 1)		Orphans (N = 123)		School authorities (N = 5)	
	Yes	No	Yes (F)	No (F)	Yes (F)	No (F)
Counselling	×		19 (15.45)	104 (84.55)	5 (100)	0
Camping	×		0	123 (100)	0	5 (100)
Life skills activities	×		19 (15.45)	104 (84.55)	5 (100)	0
Recreational activities	×		19 (15.45)	104 (84.55)	5 (100)	0
Youth clubs	×		0	123 (100)	0	5 (100)
Peer education	×		19 (15.45)	104 (84.55)	5 (100)	0
Spiritual activities	×		0	123 (100)	0	5 (100)

available to the orphans besides those indicated in Table 1. In response to the open-ended question that solicited “other” forms of psychosocial support programmes, the organisation representative (OR4) mentioned that orphans were taken on adventure trips/outings to places of interest such as Bulawayo Town and Chipangali Wildlife Orphanage in Zimbabwe. The organisation representative explained that the adventure trips catered for the emotional and social development of the children. She explained that it was during these adventure outings that they detected abuse cases and sick children since the atmosphere encouraged the children to open up. “We then take up the investigations when we get back home”, she elaborated said the respondents. The organisation representative also explained that in the organisation’s circles, the youth clubs were going by the name “kids clubs”. She went on to explain that the orphans met as kids clubs during weekends to play games, engage in drama activities and other peer education activities said the respondent.

An analysis of the activities described by the organisation representative reveals that, essentially, these activities were the same as those embraced under the broad terms recreational activities, counselling and peer education, which the three groups of participants had already indicated (cf. Table 1). Now she was explaining specific details of these broad activities. However, neither the orphans nor school authorities confirmed the existence of kids clubs/youth clubs. From the evidence given, the researcher concluded that the psychosocial support programmes which were implemented by the CBO were: counselling, life skills activities, recreational activities and peer education.

In response to the same open-ended question on “other” forms of psychosocial support programmes, the organisation representative took the opportunity to explain the nature of the counselling support that was provided to the orphans by the CBO. She mentioned that counselling support for the orphans was given through “*capacitating the communities to be the teachers*”. She also explained that the caregivers and community leaders had been capacitated to give on-going counselling to the orphans since the orphans lived with them in family and community setups. According to the organisation representative, this unique counselling approach embraced psychosocial support

capacity building workshops, which were run in the communities, said the respondent. These were organized for the Village Orphan Care Committees, which comprised some caregivers and community leaders. She went on to explain that Child Committee members representing orphans at the various schools were invited to attend the workshops with the adult committee members. The following detail given by the organisation representative (OR4) about the community psychosocial support workshops was quite insightful:

We want the children to participate in every activity that has a bearing on their lives. That is why we want them to attend the psychosocial support workshops that we organize for the community, represented by the Village Orphan Care Committees. The aim is for the Child Committee members to take their issues or resolutions to the main committee of adults. We believe that whatever we do with adults should also help the children. We work with Village Committees. We have no direct link with the schools for psychosocial support programmes.

The organisation representative further explained that prayers were part of the spiritual support they gave to orphans. “We start every activity/workshop to which orphans are invited with a prayer and close with a prayer”, she said. Interestingly, though, none of the orphans, including the few Child Committee members who had attended the psychosocial support workshops, acknowledged receiving spiritual support from the organisation. Possibly, they did not link prayer with spiritual support.

The picture that emerges is that the CBO psychosocial support programmes were very limited in terms of coverage of orphans. The researchers also concluded that the package of interventions was not comprehensive vis-à-vis the totality of the orphans’ needs in that common core psychosocial support activities, namely, spiritual activities, youth clubs and camping were not implemented for the benefit of orphans. This is in spite of the complexity of problems the children experienced at home.

The study proceeds to present the findings on the forms and coverage of psychosocial support programmes that were implemented by the FBO. Table 2 shows the responses of the three groups of participants to the question on the forms of psychosocial support programmes, which were available to school-going orphans under the FBO.

Table 2: Forms of psychosocial support programmes (FBO)

<i>Forms of psychosocial support programmes</i>	<i>Organisation representative (N = 1)</i>	<i>Orphans (N = 123)</i>		<i>School authorities (N = 5)</i>	
Counselling	×	43(81.13)	10(18.87)	5 (83.33)	1(16.67)
Camping	×	43(81.13)	10(18.87)	5(83.33)	1(16.67)
Life skills activities	×	43(81.13)	10(18.87)	5 (83.33)	1(16.67)
Recreational activities	×	43(81.13)	10(18.87)	5 (83.33)	1(16.67)
Youth clubs	×	0	53(100)	1(16.67)	5(83.33)
Peer education	×	43(81.13)	10(18.87)	3(50)	3(50)
Spiritual activities	×	43(81.13)	10(18.87)	5(83.33)	1(16.67)

Table 2 reveals that, in the main, there was concurrence among the three groups of participants that the majority of orphans (43) who comprised 81.13% of the sample of orphans had received the following forms of psychosocial support from the FBO: counselling, camping, life skills activities, recreational activities, peer education and spiritual activities. The data reveal that, contrary to the organisation representative's claim that the FBO had implemented youth clubs as a psychosocial support activity, the orphans' evidence that the programme was not provided to them was corroborated by all but one of the sample of school authorities (5).

Evidence from Table 2 further shows that one (16.67%) school authority indicated that none of the seven listed psychosocial activities were implemented for the orphans at his school. The school authority's "No" response accounted for the 18.87% orphans who answered 'No' to all forms of psychosocial support shown in Table 2. This school authority was SAB2 who explained that the psychosocial support activities for the orphans were scheduled to have taken place for the first time at the urban secondary school in December 2008. SAB2 pointed out that the plan had not materialized because of the cholera outbreak that plagued the country then.

Only one school authority corroborated the organisation representative's evidence that youth clubs were part of the variety of psychosocial activities that had been implemented for the orphans by the FBO. The majority (83.33%) of the school authorities indicated that youth clubs were not part of the package of psychosocial support programmes implemented by the FBO. It was taken that youth clubs were implemented in isolated cases of schools under the FBO. The fact that none of the orphans answered 'yes' to receiving youth clubs might mean that,

even in those isolated cases of schools, it was not every orphan registered under the FBO who was a beneficiary of the programme.

On peer education, 50% of the school authorities said it was not provided, going against both the organisation representative and the orphans (81.83%) themselves who said they had received peer education. From the evidence provided, it was apparent that counselling, camping, life skills activities, recreational activities, peer education, spiritual activities and youth clubs were the forms of psychosocial activities that the FBO implemented for the orphans they supported.

The study sought to establish "other" forms of psychosocial support programmes that were provided to orphans. In response, the FBO organisation representative (OR1) mentioned that the organisation had set up AIDS Action Clubs as special forms of youth clubs. He also cited the implementation of income generating projects (IGPs) as a specific life skills activity. The organisation representative explained that through the IGPs the school-going orphans received training on running income generating projects, as well as writing project proposals for income generating projects. He further explained that through the IGPs intervention, the orphans were encouraged to embark on income generating projects for themselves, the schools they attended as well as their families and communities.

Bereavement counselling was also cited by the organisation representative as a specific form of counselling provided to the orphans. "During bereavement time, we listen to their problems and we advise and counsel appropriately as they open up", the respondent explained. A third 'other' form of psychosocial support covered by the organisation, according

to the organisation representative, was the training of HIV/AIDS matrons as part of the counselling programme in the schools. According to the organisation representative, the matrons were adults who were supposed to be mentors for the orphans. School authority cited Christmas parties for orphans as one form of psychosocial support programme provided to orphans.

Apparently, the FBO provided a fairly wide range of psychosocial support programmes which the researcher considered fairly comprehensive vis-à-vis the totality of the orphans' needs (the 81.13% beneficiaries). However, the package of psychosocial support activities was deemed limited in the coverage of orphans in that it is not all orphans who were registered under the organisation who were provided with psychosocial support. The findings have revealed that 18.87% of the orphans were not catered for in terms of psychosocial support. The two theoretical frameworks that inform this study regard each child as an independent being with his/her own rights and unique needs, which have to be fulfilled holistically. From this perspective, the FBO psychosocial support programmes were deemed limited in the coverage of orphans.

The study further sought to establish the psychosocial support activities, which were implemented for the orphans who were registered under the sampled NGO organisation. The evidence that came out from the three groups of participants indicated that the NGO did not implement any form of psychosocial support for the school-going orphans. However, when asked to state any other form/s of psychosocial support they had received, two (1.11%) of the orphans who attended a rural primary school indicated that they had gone on a camping retreat for four days to Sondelani Lodge (in the outskirts of Gwanda Town). They indicated that the psychosocial support retreat was organised and sponsored by United Baptist Church (outside the population of multi-sectoral organisations). This is further evidence of the principle of multi-sectoral partnership and co-ordination in practice.

The section which follows synthesises the findings presented in the preceding section on the forms, coverage and comprehensiveness of psychosocial support interventions to build the multi-sectoral picture in relation to these aspects of the key question posed by the study.

CONCLUSION

The data revealed that, rated on the coverage variable, the psychosocial support interventions were found to be limited and fragmented in the coverage of both organisations and orphans. The data revealed that only two of the categories of organisations (CBOs and FBOs) implemented psychosocial support programmes for the orphans who were registered under them. The findings showed that all the orphans under GOVT and the NGOs were not availed psychosocial support interventions. Data also showed that it was not all the orphans who were registered under the CBOs and FBOs who were beneficiaries of psychosocial support. The study concluded that the range of psychosocial support interventions availed to the orphan beneficiaries under the CBOs and NGOs was not a comprehensive package vis-à-vis the totality of the needs of the orphans. Therefore, under coverage of programmes, it was found that psychosocial support interventions were non-existent for the majority of orphans registered under the multi-sectoral organisations in Gwanda District. This implied that the majority of the orphans registered under the population of multi-sectoral organisations had missed out on the educational opportunities which were inherent in the psychosocial support programmes availed to their counterparts.

It also emerged that 81.13% of the sample of FBO orphans had received psychosocial support, while the remaining 18.87% had not been afforded any form of psychosocial support. This finding revealed that it was not all orphans under the FBOs who were availed with the educational opportunities that are inherent in the forms of psychosocial support programmes, namely, counselling, life skills activities, recreational activities, peer education, camping and spiritual activities, which were implemented by the FBOs. In addition, the study found that all the orphans under GOVT and the NGO had not been availed with psychosocial support. This suggested that, in all, only 14.55% of the total sample of orphans under the multi-sectoral organisations had received some form of psychosocial support. This was, clearly, poor coverage of the orphans.

The study thus concluded that the psychosocial interventions, which were implemented by the two categories of multi-sectoral organisations, were not comprehensive vis-à-vis the

orphans' problems/vulnerabilities. In the light of the foregoing discussion, the study concluded that, rated on coverage, the psychosocial support programmes were limited and fragmented in the coverage of both organisations and orphans. The study concluded that on the comprehensiveness variable, the range of psychosocial support interventions availed to the orphan beneficiaries under the CBOs and NGOs were not a comprehensive package vis-à-vis the totality of the needs of the orphans who were registered under these categories of multi-sectoral organisations. In the next section, the discussion focuses on the synthesized findings on the extent to which the identified educational support programmes met the needs of the orphans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that, with regard to the usefulness of the psychosocial support programmes, each of the CBO's psychosocial support programmes, namely, counselling, life skills activities, recreational activities, and peer education, were 'not useful'. The study established that the FBO's psychosocial support programmes, namely, counselling, camping, life skills activities, recreational activities, peer education and spiritual programmes were 'sometimes useful'. Both youth clubs and Christmas parties were rated 'very useful' by the respondents who cited them under the FBO. However, on the basis of the evidence that emerged in the study showing that youth clubs and Christmas parties were available to isolated cases of schools and orphans under the FBO, the study concluded that the extent to which these two programmes met the needs of orphans could not be generalized to the operations of the FBOs in Gwanda District.

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