

The Reasons For And Benefits Of Institutionalisation Of Orphaned Children: A Case Study Of A Children's Home In Harare Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Background: Orphan Population Is Increasing Worldwide Including In Zimbabwe. In Most Countries, Institutionalisation Is One Of The Preferred Care Options For The Orphaned Children. Elsewhere institutionalisation Of These Children Is Preceded By Research On Its Benefits. Such Research Has Not Been Done Prior To institutionalisation Of Orphans In Zimbabwe. This Study Sought To Determine The Reasons For And Benefits Of Institutionalisation Of Orphaned Children.

Materials And Methods: In This Study, The Researcher Purposively Sampled 16 Experts Who Worked With Orphaned Children At A Children's Home In Harare, Zimbabwe. Self-Administered Questionnaires And In-Depth Interviews Using Unstructured Interview Guides Were Used To Collect Data On Reasons For Institutionalisation Of Orphans And How Institutional Placement Benefits The Way They Lived Their Lives. The Statistical Package For Social Science (SPSS) © Version 16 Was Used To Analyse Quantitative Data Using Descriptive And Inferential Statistics. Frequencies Percentages And Standard Deviation Were Used To Report Patterns And Trends Which Emerged From The Data. Qualitative Data Were Grouped Into Themes And Analysed Using Content Analysis.

Results: Findings Indicated That Death Of Parents, Neglect By Parents, Poverty And Abuse Can Lead To Institutionalisation Of Children. Institutionalisation Impacted The Physical, Emotional, Social, And Spiritual Well-Being Of Orphans. Specifically, Orphans Were Provided With Food, Shelter And Fees For Education And Medical Services. In Addition, Orphans Received Counselling And Spiritual Services. In A Low Resourced Country Like Zimbabwe, Institutionalisation Of Orphans Remains The Best Care Option.

Conclusions: The Study Established That Death Of Parents, Neglect By Parents, Poverty And Abuse Can Lead To Institutionalisation Of Children In Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe There Are Many Children In The Orphanage Homes Benefiting In Terms Of Food, Shelter, Education, And Medical Services.

Key Words: Impact, Institutionalisation, Wellbeing, Orphaned Children, Children's Home

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I. Introduction

Institutionalisation refers to the practice of placing children under the age of 15 who need care, fostering and adoption into residential institutions (Bellany, 2001; Burckner, 2004; UNICEF, 2014). Such placement is done according to laws and procedures of specific countries (UNICEF, 2013). In Eastern Europe and central Asia, most children under the age of three are placed into residential institutions because parents cannot care for them (UNICEF 2012). Similarly, Csaky (2009) observes that most children in Ghanaian orphanages were from poor families who could not support their children without assistance. According to Browne (2009), most European orphanages are populated by children who have been abandoned by their poor and homeless parents. According to Wagstaff (2002) poor and/or ill parents who cannot afford to look after their children are allowed to place their children in residential institutions. Biryukove and Sinyavskaya (2017) observed that abuse and chronic neglect by parents or other care givers are the reasons for institutionalisation of children especially in the face of alcohol and drug abuse or in cases of untreated mental illnesses. In central, Eastern Europe and other Commonwealth Independent States, one third of children in institutional care are there because of disability (Marta, 2017). Children with disabilities are abandoned at birth or later in life because of cultural beliefs and persistent discrimination (Browne, 2009). Tsegaye (2013) maintains that children may enter residential care after being separated from their families by natural disasters, so that their immediate needs for shelter or medical care may be met. Marta (2017) acknowledges that poverty, domestic violence, abuse or neglect, conflict in the household; abandonment and the death of a parents lead to

institutionalisation. Similarly, UNICEF (2014) has it that children under the age of fifteen who have lost either their mother (maternal orphan) or father (paternal orphan) and a vulnerable child who may not have parents are housed. Thus, institutionalising orphaned children is a commitment to fight the orphan crisis.

Banks and Zuurmond (2015) conclude that discrimination, poverty, disability, and lack of access to education push vulnerable families to give up their children to orphanages.

The world over, institutionalisation has been regarded as one of the care options for orphans that provide opportunities for better living conditions for the children. UNICEF report of (2014) found that Institutions provide a participatory engagement on steering activities which provide direction and guidance to orphans. Thus, institutions provide food, clothing, health care and medical supplies to establish an effective learning environment thus empowering orphaned children. These findings are consistent with those that were made by (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2009; Skovdal, 2010) who posit that orphaned children who are not in institutions might not have time to play as they must carry out a number of household chores and have no one to provide for their basic needs, most of them end up living in ruptured and poor households. These findings are congruent with those that were made by Save the children (2009) who says, parents often consider opportunities for adequate nutrition and education superior in an institutional setting to opportunities that could be provided within their families.

A study conducted by Bellany (2001) revealed that institutionalising orphaned children is a model for orphan care aiming at strengthening the capacity of families and mobilizing and strengthening community-based responses. Hence, it ensures access to services and strengthens government's role in protecting children and raising awareness in the development of children. This finding is consistent with later findings by Froebel, as cited in Bruce and Meggitt (2002) in which caregivers are referred to as gardeners and the children as growing plants in the garden, that would guide the children in the institutions. A study conducted by Embletonetal. (2014) acknowledge that some institutions provide on-site education, while others send their children to local public schools taking up the full school fees responsibility.

II. Materials and Methods

Research design: The study utilised an Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methodology design to investigate the impact of institutionalisation on the well-being of orphans. In this design quantitative results are presented and elaborated ahead of qualitative results. The approach is appropriate for studies that collect both numerical and verbal data and use descriptive statistics and qualitative strategies to analyse the data (Borg & Gall, 1989).

Procedure methodology

Ethical approval for the study was sought from the Great Zimbabwe University while permission to conduct the study was sought from the home administrators. Each participant signed a consent form. Questionnaires were administered at home in a room provided by the administrators while interviews were scheduled for a time when the participants felt comfortable talking to the researcher. Before the study commenced, participants received information about the research. The information provided explained in detail the research purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits including the rights of the participant and contact information of the researcher. Questionnaire administration lasted for 20 minutes while each interview took between 45 to 60 minutes and all interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. To ensure credibility, in-depth individual interviews were conducted to get to the core of the impact of institutionalisation of orphans. Interview scripts were written in a notebook to allow for auditing of the research process, and this helped to improve trustworthiness of the data (Davidson, 2009).

Statistical analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) © version 16 was used to analyse quantitative data using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies percentages and standard deviation were used to report patterns and trends which emerged from the data. Qualitative data were grouped into themes and analysed using content analysis.

III. Result

16 participants ie (12 females and 4 males) who belong to Christian religion were included in this study. Their ages ranged from 30 to 60 years and had more than two years' experience at the home.

DEATH OF PARENTS AS A REASON FOR INSTITUTIONALISATION

100% of the participants in table: 1 agreed to the fact that death of a parent can lead to institutionalization which is consistent with the findings by UNICEF (2014) that children under the age of fifteen who have lost either their mother (maternal orphan) or father (paternal orphan) and a vulnerable child who may not have parents are institutionalised. However, interviewee participant had this to say,

“At time it is not always the case that the death of a parent or care giver leads to institutionalisation.”
 “In Africa we have the extended family system that at times take over the parental responsibilities, however in some cases when extended family network is not available, children who deserve the support of care institutions do not get it due to lack of knowledge of the procedures by some families and communities resulting in child headed families.”

Table :1 DEATH OF PARENTS OR GUARDIAN					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	9	56.2	56.2	56.2
	Agree	7	43.8	43.8	100.0
	Total	16	100.0	100.0	

POVERTY AS A REASON FOR INSTITUTIONALISATION OF ORPHANS

Table 2 below shows that 98,8 % of the participants agreed that poverty led to placement of children into an orphanage home. This finding is consistent with the finding in a study conducted by Browne (2009), most European orphanages are populated by children who have been abandoned by their poor and homeless parents who cannot afford providing their children with their needs. However, one of the interviewees had this to say:

“Not in all cases do we have children institutionalised because of poverty in Zimbabwe. It is because of our culture that we think sending them to institution is not African. Despite the challenges the parents just persevere in any circumstances failing to pay fees and may get them employed secretly in rural communities disregarding the law against child labour.”

Table 2: POVERTY LEADS TO PLACEMENT					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	9	56.2	56.2	56.2
	Agree	6	37.5	37.5	93.8
	Not sure	1	6.2	6.2	100.0
	Total	16	100.0	100.0	

ABUSE AS A REASON FOR INSTITUTIONALISATION OF ORPHANS

Figure 1 below shows that 43.8% of the participants strongly agreed, 50% of them agree whilst 6.3 disagreed that abuse may lead to placement into orphanage home. This finding is confirmed by a study conducted by Biryukove&Sinyavskaya (2017)observes that abuse and chronic neglect by parents or other care givers are the reasons for institutionalisation of children especially in the face of alcohol and drug abuse or in cases of untreated mental illnesses an interview respondent had this to say:

“Yes, abuse at times lead to institutionalisation of children, it is how ever not very common in some of our communities because of cultural and religious reasons.” “Abuse is defined differently in different cultures such that some abuses just go unreported, and the children continue to suffer for example we have places where child marriages are normalised to the extent that people remain quiet after having witnessed such circumstances.”

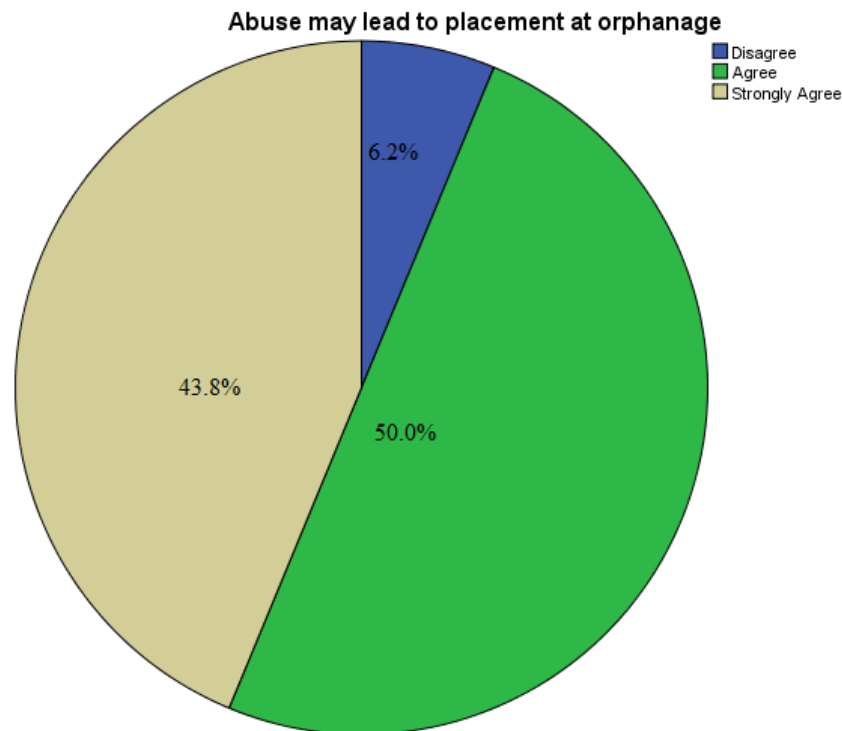


FIGURE:1

NEGLECT AS A REASON FOR INSTITUTIONALISATION OF ORPHANS

As shown in Figure 2 below shows that most participants (93.8%) agreed that neglect may lead to placement of orphans into orphanage homes whilst 6.3% were not sure. This finding is consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Marta (2017) who acknowledges that poverty, domestic violence, abuse or neglect, conflict in the household; abandonment and the death of a parents lead to institutionalisation. One participant in an interview has this to say:

“Child neglect is indeed a reason for institutionalization but at times it’s difficult to draw a line between neglect and genuine being incapacitated to provide in this economy.” “In some rural communities’ people do not report parents neglecting as they do not mind other people business which leads to some deserving children living in difficult situations out of institutions.”

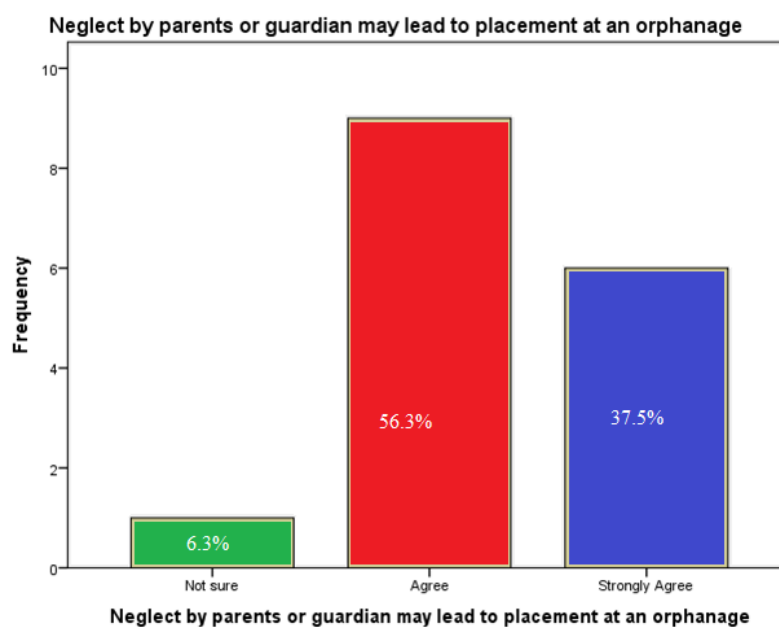


FIGURE:2

DISABILITY AND MENTAL ILLNESS AS A REASON FOR INSTITUTIONALISATION

In fig 3, 80% of participants agreed that disability may lead to institutionalization which was consistent with the findings by Browne (2009) which indicated that, children with disability are abandoned at birth or later in life because of cultural beliefs and persistent discrimination. Further confirmation was provided by an interview participant who acknowledged that:

“In some of our communities’ people do not accept those living with disability leading to their discrimination and later institutionalisation.”

” We had eight of our children who were living with different forms of disability, they were just abandoned by their families. We sent them to some institutions that assist children living with such conditions for specialised attention.”

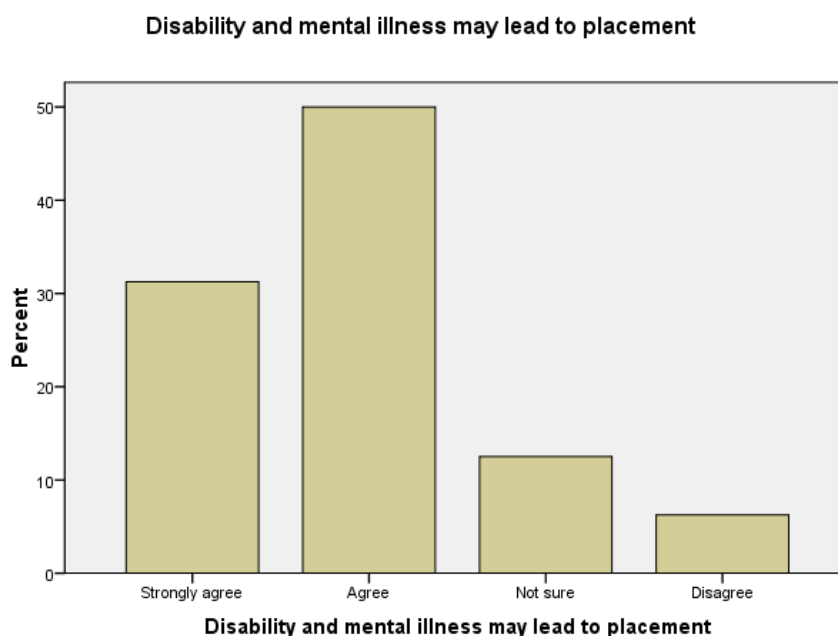


FIGURE:3

Although most studies have concentrated on the negative aspects of institutionalization, there are some perks that should not be neglected for orphaned children. Some of them are addressed in the following tables and graphs.

FOOD AS A BENEFIT OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ORPHANS.

Table 3 below shows that 93.7% of participants agree that orphaned children will receive food from the institution, as opposed to those in child-headed homes who lose their childhoods because they must meet their basic requirements on their own. This is consistent with the findings by Save the children (2009) who says, parents often consider opportunities for adequate nutrition and education superior in an institutional setting to opportunities that could be provided within their families. An interview participant had this to say in agreement with the findings:

“It is not fair to underplay the role that orphanages have taken in providing nourishment to orphaned youngsters.” “Orphanages provide the best opportunity to the children which some families cannot afford. Food, is provided by the institution, three meals a day, in this economy in which many families cannot afford a decent meal each day.”

Table 3

FOOD AS A BENEFIT OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ORPHANS.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	10	62.5	62.5	62.5
	Agree	5	31.2	31.2	93.8
	Not sure	1	6.2	6.2	100.0
	Total	16	100.0	100.0	

ACCOMMODATION AS A BENEFIT.

According to Table 4 below, 100% of the participants stated that the facility provides housing for orphaned children. This corresponds to the findings by Tsegaye (2013) who maintains that children may enter residential care after being separated from their families by natural disasters, so that their immediate needs for shelter or medical care may be met. This was consistent with an interviewees response who had this to say, "Like I said, our institutions provide accommodation and blankets and toiletry to the orphaned children up to the age of 18, though some remain with us until they get married if they have nowhere to go."

Table 4

THEY GET ACCOMMODATION FROM THE HOME					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	8	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Agree	8	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	16	100.0	100.0	

EDUCATION EXPENSES ARE PAID.

All the 16 participants concurred that educational expenses for institutionalised children are met by the home. This was consistent with findings by Embleton, Ayuku, Kamanda, Atwoli, Ayaya, et al. (2014) who acknowledge that Some institutions provide on-site education, while other send their children to local public schools taking up the full school fees responsibility. Apart from fees payment the institutions have a hidden curriculum in which the children learn other skills from the carers as supported by Bruce and Meggitt (2002) who had this to say, caregiver is referred to as gardeners and the children as growing plants in the garden, would guide the children in the institutions. An interview participant had this to say,

"All their educational requirements are met by our institutions, be it school fees, stationary, uniforms and any other requirements." "We have some of our former institutional children whose education was funded by our institution up to university level and are now engineers, doctors, and nurses who visit us on occasion and talk to our children about the benefits of hard work at school."

Table 5 THEIR EDUCATIONAL EXPENSES ARE PAID FOR					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	9	56.2	56.2	56.2
	Agree	7	43.8	43.8	100.0
	Total	16	100.0	100.0	

II. Conclusion:

The research findings above reveal that the causes of institutionalisation of orphans are consistent throughout the world, with most agreeing that death of parents, neglect by parents, poverty and abuse, and disability or mental health problems can all contribute to the institutionalization of children.

The children at Home, the home where the study was conducted, are well cared for, as the children there receive privileges such as food, lodging, and educational expenditures paid for by the institution. It is apparent, however, that mental health concerns exist, as in any other institution, because of the migration of caregivers, stress, and other adjustment challenges. In conclusion, the orphanage contributes significantly to the well-being of orphaned children.

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