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PROMOTING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING OF ORPHANED AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN CHILDREN'S HOMES IN HARARE, ZIMBABWE.

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to examine how the psychosocial wellbeing for Early Childhood Development orphaned and vulnerable children was being promoted in children's homes. The qualitative research approach which was descriptive in nature with a bit of quantitative methods were used. Participants in the study were children's home Heads and caregivers (5 children's home Heads and 12 caregivers). Data was content analysed. The analysis included direct reports of the participants' responses to interviews and questionnaire results were tabulated. The study revealed that the Heads of the children's homes and caregivers were doing their best in promoting the psychosocial wellbeing of orphaned and vulnerable children emotionally, socially, spiritually and materially. The following conclusions were made; children were getting emotional, social, spiritual and material support and though they lacked entertainment. The study recommended that, the government, civil society and other stakeholders collaborate and assist children's homes in every way possible so they may not feel isolated and that the Heads of the homes may ensure that entertainment is provided for the children from time to time.

KEYWORDS: Psychosocial wellbeing, Early Childhood Development, orphaned, vulnerable children, caregivers, Heads of children's homes

1. INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that the percentage of orphaned and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe will keep rising in years to come (Chandiwana, 2009). According to Strebelt (2004), about a quarter of all children in Zimbabwe are classified as orphaned and vulnerable children. Some of these children find themselves under the safety nets of children's homes. There is need to cater for the needs of orphaned and vulnerable children to fulfill their hard won rights.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

When children become orphaned or vulnerable due to different factors among them HIV/AIDS, they are at increased risk of losing opportunities for school, health care, growth, development, nutrition and shelter. Non-discriminatory policies have been put in place with regard to the welfare of orphaned and vulnerable children (Bohler and Carroll, 2003). These policies include World Declaration



on Survival, Protection and Development, Article 26 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Education for All among others. The signatories committed to programs that protect the rights of children and improve their lives.

A Senegalese study by Smart (2003), showed that a national assessment of the situation of orphaned and vulnerable children was conducted and this led to improvements in interventions for this population group. 5000 orphaned and vulnerable children were targeted with assistance from the World Bank. Civil society organizations provided psychosocial support to orphaned and vulnerable children. The government of Senegal also directed a budget in line for orphaned and vulnerable children. Thus, there was improved social integration of orphaned and vulnerable children .

The Zimbabwean government has also responded to the situation of orphaned and vulnerable children as other nations have done. According to Chandiwana (2009), Zimbabwe has two key national policies and legal framework that support children. Legislation pertinent to children include Children's Protection and Adoption Act and its amendment, The Maintenance Act, The Guardianship of Minors Act and the Child Abduction Act. National policies include the National Orphan Care and National AIDS policies both adopted in 1999. All these seek to support existing legislative and policy framework and coordination of structures by among other strategies mobilizing human, material and financial resources for orphaned and vulnerable children.

Psychosocial well being is the physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual development of orphaned and vulnerable children in children's homes (Makame, Ani and Grantham, 2002). This directs attention towards the totality of children's experiences rather than focusing exclusively on the physical or psychological aspects of health and wellbeing and emphasises the need to view issues within the interpersonal context of wide family and community networks in which they are located. Focusing on children in all areas helps to understand them as a whole being. The study sought to establish whether children's total experiences were being focused on.

One of the foundations of psychosocial wellbeing is access to basic needs (food, shelter, livelihood, health care, education services) together with a sense of security that comes with living in safe and supportive environment (Makame, Ani and Grantham, 2002). The benefits of psychosocial support interventions should result in a positive way children's wellbeing and address the basic psychosocial needs of competence and relatedness. The material, biological and psychosocial aspects of wellbeing are integrally related and will not be helpful separating them in a program. This is so because they interrelate such that they all need attention. The study sought to establish whether basic needs of children were being met.

Koltko-River (2006) notes that, psychosocial wellbeing of orphaned and vulnerable children can be promoted by following Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Physiological needs are required to stay alive and these are oxygen, food containing protein and salt, water and sleep. Satisfying these lower needs is important as their deprivation leads to unpleasant feelings or consequences. Unpleasant feelings lead children to seeing negativity in all aspects of their lives. Safety needs follow in the hierarchy and is done by providing children with safe places to play so they are protected from any harm and are secure. When children are taking antiretroviral treatment, they need to be encouraged on adherence to keep their health in good check and are not prone to infections. This enables them to engage in a variety of activities as they will be healthy. Next on the hierarchy are love needs. These are characterized by their interactive and relational aspects such as give and receive love. Children need to be encouraged to have positive nurturing relationships in future. Peer relationships should be encouraged rather than letting the child be alone.

This enabled children to feel that they belong to a group. Kuti (2004) agrees by saying, children should interact with others and share ideas and materials and thus they have a sense of belonging. Cooperative and kind play behaviors should be praised so children grow up having consideration for other feelings. When children have problems they need to be listened to and provide the best help possible to help them at all times. The study sought to establish whether children's needs were being met.

Esteem needs follow in the hierarchy. Children should be encouraged to have self-acceptance. Smart (2003) says, the caregivers role is to help children feel good about themselves and have respect for others. It helps them live in harmony with others. Children's progress should be monitored and where improvement has been made, positive reinforcement is needed. This could result in children striving to good all the time. Caregivers should talk about the school day with children so they pick any problems early and assist where possible. Homework should be done with the help of caregivers to show they are interested in children's work. Satisfying this need helps children become confident. The study sought to establish whether caregivers were helping children have a positive regard of their selves.

Last on the hierarchy is self-actualization, which is the most difficult to reach and include one's potential. Children need to be equipped with life skills so they function independently in the society. In this view, children will be independent in future life thus



reducing the dependency syndrome. They need encouragement in setting goals and working on them and reach their full potential. Maslow's humanistic view focuses on the development of healthy individuals. Therefore the study sought to establish life skills the children were being equipped with.

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present study sought to establish whether psychosocial wellbeing of orphaned and vulnerable children was being promoted. The study is part of a larger study ascertaining the psychosocial wellbeing of orphaned and vulnerable children in Harare children's homes in Zimbabwe.

4. METHODOLOGY

Design

The descriptive survey research design which was mainly qualitative with a bit of quantitative methods was used for this study. The survey describes variables such as people's life styles, attitudes among others (Du Plooy, 2002). In examining the psychosocial support for orphaned and vulnerable children, the researcher needed to probe and persuade in order to gain access to respondents' feelings and emotions. Sage (2010) says, descriptive survey helps to provide answers to questions of who? what? and where? with a particular research problem. Punch (2009) goes on to say that qualitative research is conducted through intensive or prolonged contact with the field or life situation. Most analysis is done with words, they permit the researcher to contrast, compare, analyse and bestow pattern upon them.

Sample and Sampling

A sample is a part of collection of things, individuals or results of operation that are quantitatively expressed (Madan, Dalival and Bhurdway, 2010). A purposive sample was done on the children's homes in Harare. Matthew and Ross (2010) say, purposive sampling is a technique also referred to as judgment, selective or subjective sampling. It is a non-probability sampling that is characterized by including groups or typical areas in a research. The sample was done from Harare because that is where the researcher resides. 5 children's homes heads and 12 caregivers were purposively sampled.

Instruments

Interviews and questionnaires were used for the study. Interviews were conducted with each Head of the children's homes. Madan, Dalival and Bhurdway (2010) posit that, interviews allow more information and too in depth views to be obtained. Interviews allow off guard information to be revealed, thus securing spontaneous reactions. Questionnaires were administered with caregivers. Questionnaires are normally used when one cannot personally see all people from which desired responses are needed. They enable large amounts of information to be collected from a number of people in a short period of time and in a relatively cost-effective way (Rao,2009).

Data collection procedure

Permission to conduct the research was sought from the Ministry of Child Welfare and Protection Services. The researcher visited the purposively sampled children's homes to carry out the interviews with the participants at their convenient time and administer questionnaires. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research and free to withdraw their participation at any given stage of the study. Participants were referred to with pseudo names.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Data findings from interviews with the Heads of the children's homes indicated that they promoted the psychosocial wellbeing of orphaned and vulnerable children by being involved in children's experiences. The yellow home head highlighted this as follows; *"I stay at the institution and meet with the children and their caregivers on a daily basis and exchange ideas and experiences with them"*. On further probing the head highlighted that he rewards those children who excel in whatever they are expected to do. Furthermore findings revealed that the heads overall see to the daily upkeep of the orphans and vulnerable children as highlighted by Green Home



head; “Day in day out I see if children are well fed and everything is in order”. On further probing they revealed that they encouraged children to value and respect themselves. In addition the heads took time to discuss with the children what transpired in school during the day. The home heads further revealed that the community offered psychosocial support by playing with the orphans and vulnerable children as well as donating material resources. However, the heads noted that there have been occasional cases of abuses hence the need to screen the community members who come forward to play with the children. Consequently this put off more people who would want to come to play with the children. Findings further revealed that there was little collaboration of different stakeholders hence they hardly came to the homes as a team. The home heads further revealed that they sponsored and encouraged their caregivers to attend staff development workshops. However, casual observations made by the researchers throughout the interview sessions and questionnaires showed that there was hardly anything mentioned on the hidden talents of the orphans and vulnerable children.

In addition to interview responses from the Heads of the homes, questionnaire responses from caregivers revealed the following as presented in the table below:

Table 1. Questionnaire findings on caregivers’ staff development and meetings attendance on the psychosocial wellbeing of orphaned and vulnerable children.

Item	Yes	No	Total
Do you attend workshops on the psychosocial wellbeing of children?	100%	-	100%
Do you have meetings as caregivers?	100%	-	100%

The findings of the table above indicated that 100% of the caregivers attended workshops on psychosocial wellbeing of orphaned and vulnerable children whenever called by Ministry of Social Welfare and other organisations that dealt with children. This could be to keep abreast with current issues and trends regarding to children’s needs. Caregivers had scheduled meetings on their own as well as with the Heads of children’s homes to discuss issues pertaining to children’s psychosocial wellbeing. This could be because they needed to share ideas on how to handle children better as their experiences differed and understand the children as individuals with peculiar needs.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that the Heads of the homes understood the psychosocial wellbeing requirements of orphaned and vulnerable children as the total experiences within the interpersonal contexts of wider family and community networks in which they are located. This may be because the caregivers and Home heads are well trained personnel in the welfare of the orphaned and vulnerable children. It may also be because any other person who played a part in their lives besides the Heads and the caregivers impacted on their lives either positively or negatively. This concurs with Cummings, Sherryl and Kropf-Nancy (2013) who revealed that, promoting the psychosocial wellbeing of orphaned and vulnerable children aims at easing resumption of normal life and preventing potentially traumatic situations. The people in the communities visited the homes and gave support whether by just playing the children and providing material resources needed in the homes and prayed with them. This promoted the holistic development of the children and consequently supported the wellbeing of the children. This concurs with Mosina (2012) who notes that, even if support is provided by all different kinds of people with the simplest gestures of playing with them they would at least be offering and addressing the psychosocial needs of children though it is not adequate due to their incompetence. This made the children feel that they were not alone and that other people out there cared about them.

The findings of the study further revealed lack of entertainment in the homes. This may be because funds were needed to sponsor that and yet the homes had more pressing issues to attend to. This exposure to entertainment could enable children to interact with others and develop networks. The lack of exposure to fun is in contrast to Brannon and Feist (2000) who ascertain that there is a positive link between entertainment and good health and social support. The study also revealed that the caregivers encouraged children to have self-acceptance, appreciate their history and identity. This could be to enable children feel good about themselves and show respect for one another and look towards the future. Those that showed improvements in school work and behavior were given rewards like choosing what they would want or go for shopping. This implies that children’s efforts were recognized and reinforced. This could result in boosting the positive self-esteem of the children.



Caregivers discussed with children what would have happened at school and where help was needed they gave the children and this boosted their self-confidence knowing they had caregivers who were interested in their lives. This concurs with UNICEF (2010) which posits that children need caregivers who are involved in all their experiences. Children were also encouraged to set goals and accomplish them and this could instill in children the importance of focus in life. However, neither the Heads nor caregivers were concerned about children's hidden talents which leaves some children disadvantaged as their talents die a natural death. This could hinder the development of multiple intelligences. The fact that they hardly referred to the children's hidden talents could be because they never thought about it or they had a lot to do since there were more children than a normal parent to child ratio.

7. CONCLUSIONS

From the findings of this study, the following conclusions are made; Children in the homes were getting emotional, social, spiritual and material support to promote their psychosocial wellbeing and there was lack of entertainment in the homes.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made;

- ❖ The homes may make an effort to provide entertainment to children periodically as they may need to unwind from everyday activities.
- ❖ The community at large may desist from abusing orphaned and vulnerable children.
- ❖ The government and the civil society at large and other stakeholders may collaborate to assist children's homes in every way possible, be it materially, financially, socially, emotionally and spiritually to meet the needs of the orphaned and vulnerable children fully.

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