

Chapter 2

Psychological and Social Issues Affecting Orphans and Vulnerable Children

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ABSTRACT

Orphan-hood is a natural occurrence event of life and not a personal choice. It is a natural life event of losing a parent or a primary caregiver in the life of an orphan child. This chapter focuses on the psychological and social issues that orphans and other vulnerable children experience when their parents are no longer alive. Using literature as a source, most psychosocial issues affecting orphans and other vulnerable children are categorized and justified. Possible solutions and recommendations are clearly illustrated for possible intervention and prevention strategies. Lastly, the chapter ushers future research directions regarding psychosocial issues affecting orphans and other vulnerable children.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter makes a contribution towards a subject matter called psychosocial issues affecting orphans and other vulnerable children. It seeks to expand the debate and create further awareness on the plight of the orphans and vulnerable children globally. By so doing, more intervention and prevention strategies would be devised

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in order to address the plight of orphans and other vulnerable children. The chapter highlighted the most critical psychological and social issues with the support of evidence as provided in the current literature.

Background

A large body of empirical evidence demonstrates that most orphans and other vulnerable children are generally being affected by psychosocial issues compared with non-orphans (Escueta et al., 2014). Certain things make children to be viewed as vulnerable, namely: being orphaned by the death of one or both parents, living on the street, living in poverty, living with disability, affected by armed conflicts, abused by parents, other family members and caregivers, being HIV positive and being affected by HIV and AIDS, being marginalized, being stigmatized and even discriminated against, being child laborers including domestic workers, street vendors and victims of human trafficking (UNICEF, UNAIDS, PEPFAR, 2006; UNICEF, 2007).

The challenges facing orphans and other vulnerable children have been partially known especially the ones in the developing world. Pillay (2014) found that sub-Saharan Africa has been identified as the world's poorest region with the largest proportion of vulnerable children in the world. It was further estimated that the highest number of orphans in the world of over 48.3 million were in sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, UNAIDS, PEPFAR, 2006). The loss of one or both parents often affects the psychosocial well-being of orphaned children. Psychosocial well-being is defined as a positive age and development stage appropriate outcome of children's psychological, physical and social development embedded in the child's natural abilities to cope in his or her environment (Richter, Foster & Sherr, 2006).

Literature has been consistent reporting that whenever a child happens to lose his or her parents, many of the orphans lack psychosocial support. Philippi et al (2006) defined psychosocial support as an ongoing process of meeting the physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and social needs of a child. Psychosocial support is the basic right of every child for his or her psychological, emotional, mental, physical and social development (Repssi, 2008). In their study, they warn that if psychological issues are not addressed satisfactorily, orphans and other vulnerable children would end up involving themselves in risk behaviors such as alcohol, drug abuse, prostitution and other risk behaviors that are not acceptable in the community. Not only that, orphans and vulnerable children are at higher risk of developing psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, trauma, mental health, mood swings and other somatic symptoms (Makame, 2002).

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