

ORPHANHOOD EFFECT ON PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS' INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN KENYA

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Abstract

In Kenya, orphanhood has risen and affected many children among them primary school pupils. A parent's death may affect children's psychological well being. There is a close coherence between children's psychological well-beings and their interpersonal relationships. Children who have poor psychological well-being are likely to be withdrawn, experience low self-esteem and have poor adaptations to human functioning and life experiences. These conditions affect their relations with others hence become deviants. A literature gap exists in Kenya on orphanhood's effect children's relations with other pupils thus motivating the authors to come up with such a study. Thus, the objective of the study was to establish the influence of orphanhood on pupils' interpersonal relationships in public primary schools by comparing the mean scores in pupils' interpersonal relationships between the orphaned and the non-orphaned pupils. Also, establish whether gender differences exist in interpersonal relationships between the orphaned pupils. Causal-Comparative research design was considered appropriate for the study because of the comparison of groups. A sample of 110 pupils (55 orphaned and 55 non-orphaned) drawn from 10 primary schools was involved in the study. The pupils were drawn from primary classes 6 and 7. The sample was selected by using purposive and stratified random sampling procedures. A questionnaire was used to collect data which was analyzed by use of independent sample t-test. The study established that orphanhood has a significant effect on interpersonal relationships among pupils in primary schools in Kenya. It was also established that significant gender differences exist in the effect that orphanhood exert on pupils; with boys being more affected than the girls. From the findings, it is evident that absence of parents negatively affect the interpersonal skills of children particularly the boy-child. Such children need counseling interventions to counter these effects. It is therefore recommended that school counselors, teachers and school administrators in Kenya should assist orphaned pupils cope with the loss of their parents by offering psychological and social support to them. This is because the poor interpersonal relationships of orphaned pupils may affect various aspects of their lives that include academics and discipline among others.

Key words: *effect, interpersonal, relationships, orphanhood, primary school pupil.*

Introduction

Since human beings are social beings, each pupil's sense of well-being depends to a greater extent on interpersonal relationships. In fact through interpersonal relationships, pupils establish their personal identity, express their thoughts, feelings and engage in collaborative activities with others both inside and outside the school. The school is a set up where children

from diverse backgrounds in many aspects congregate. As such, there is need to create an emotional and caring climate that is conducive for quality learning. Such a climate will only be possible when there is a good quality pupil-teacher and pupil-pupil relationships. The authors of the paper focused on the effect which orphanhood may have on primary school pupils' interpersonal relationships. This is crucial because children at this level of education may not yet understand the finality of death, thus unable to fully experience the mourning process which helps adults to cope with death. As a result, such children may grow up with unresolved anger, depression and anxiety that are potential for development of poor interpersonal relationships.

Problem of the Research

Worldwide, orphanhood has been on the increase due to the high death rate of parents. These deaths are caused by terminal diseases among them cancer, malaria, tuberculosis and full blown AIDS as a result of HIV infection. Other parents are brutally murdered or die from natural calamities such as landslides. Moreover, terrorists' attacks through bomb blasts, road, marine and aeroplane accidents, childbirth and old age have also left primary school pupils orphaned. A parent plays a crucial parenting role in shaping a child in terms of interpersonal skills. The parents' death may traumatically affect a child's psychological and social well-being. Consequently, such a child may experience stunted emotional and social development, which has been known to negatively affect academic concentration and relations with peers in class (UNICEF Report, 2000). The report further notes that such children may lack life skills like communication, decision making and negotiation skills which may negatively affect their interpersonal relationships both within and outside the school.

Orphans have been ignored for a long time by peers and teachers in school and any behaviour like withdrawal is taken to be an anti-social behaviour in school. This is made worse particularly in Kenya where teachers and teacher counselors are overloaded with teaching due to the congested school curriculum (Boitt & Chepchieng, 2011). In this scenario, teachers are left with no time to meticulously establish the sources of anti-social acts and withdrawal symptoms that are experienced by the orphaned children. According to Grannis (1992), when orphans are troubled, they express their concerns through actions such as crying, becoming withdrawn, aggressiveness and sadness or at times become unruly. This results to psychological stress that has been correlated with lower interpersonal relationships (Compass, 1987). Furthermore, this leads to behaviour disorders, short-term adjustments reactions and depression which affect their social, emotional and academic lives.

Research Focus

According to Perez (2012), good interpersonal relationship is indicative of better psychological well being. Therefore understanding the interpersonal relationships of children and the factors that contribute to it will help towards clarifying and defining ways to better their well-being. Research findings have shown that receiving support affection, and affirmation from parents is vital in boosting a child's self-esteem (Flaherty & Richman, 1986) whereas low family support has consistently been found to be predictive of depression (Barrera & Garrison-Jones, 1992). Children with high self-esteem are most likely to seek and develop good interpersonal relationships than the depressed ones. Orphaned children in most cases lack the parental support required to enhance their self-esteem. In effect, there is need to study the effect orphanhood has on children's interpersonal relationship. Likewise, recent studies on gender differences in regard to interpersonal relationships have yielded contradictory findings. For instance, Perez (2012) study shows that girls score higher in their relationships with their peers than their boy counterparts. But, Atrash (2011) reveal that in families where a parent

(s) has died the girls are mostly affected socially thus unable to relate well with others. These contradictory findings call for more research to clearly understand the effect orphanhood has on children's interpersonal relationships.

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

Causal-comparative research design was utilized in the study because two groups of primary school pupils (orphaned and non-orphaned) were compared in order to determine the effect of orphanhood on their interpersonal relationships. In addition, determination on whether gender difference exists in interpersonal relationships among the pupils was done. The study was carried out in Meru South District Kenya.

Sample of Research

Only 110 pupils of classes 6 and 7 participated in the study. The sample could have been more if other primary school classes were involved. These classes were chosen because pupils at these levels of primary education in Kenyan education system are able to read, understand and respond to questionnaire items with little difficulty as compared to those at lower classes. In Kenya, the primary level of education ends at the class eight. In this study, the class eight pupils were not involved because they were busy preparing for their national examination at the time of the study. Out of the sample size of 110 pupils who participated in the study, 55 were orphaned and the other 55 were non-orphaned. Purposive sampling technique was used to obtain the number of the orphaned pupils whereas stratified random sampling was used to obtain the required number for the non-orphaned pupils. In the two groups, both boys and girls participated in the study.

Instrument and Procedures

A questionnaire was used in the collection of data from the respondents. The questionnaire was piloted in two primary schools where 30 pupils; both orphaned and non-orphaned participated. Through the piloting, Cronbach's alpha method was used to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. As a result, a reliability coefficient of 0.83 which obtained which was above the 0.7 threshold suggested for education and social sciences (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). Usually a high reliability coefficient indicates a high level of internal consistency of items within a research measuring instrument.

Data Analysis

Effect of orphanhood on primary school pupils' interpersonal relationships was explored to establish whether differences exists in interpersonal relationships between orphaned and non-orphaned pupils and also between orphaned boys and girls in the data analysis. To evaluate the differences, the t-test statistical technique was used. According to Ferguson (1989), t-test is used to establish whether significant differences exist between two groups in a given aspect. Independent sample t-test was preferred so as to compare orphaned and non-orphaned pupils, and also between boys and girls. The significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$

Results of Research

Interpersonal Relationship of Orphaned and Non-orphaned Pupils

In order to determine whether Interpersonal relationships differences exist between orphaned and non-orphaned pupils, pupils' mean scores of interpersonal relationships and standard deviations were computed. However, t-test analysis was also done to test the significance of any existing differences. Table 1, gives summary of the results obtained for orphaned and non-orphaned pupils.

Table 1. Comparison of Orphaned and Non-orphaned Pupils' Interpersonal relationships.

Variable	N	M	SD	t-value	df	p-value
Orphaned Pupils (I.R)	55	50.36	50.39	2.34*	108	0.000
Non-orphaned pupils (I.R)	55	53.56	52.32			

* denotes significance at $\alpha = 0.05$ level

I.R-Interpersonal Relationship

Results in Table 1 indicate that mean scores of interpersonal relationships for orphans was 50.36 whereas that for non-orphans was 3.2 points higher than that of orphaned pupils at 53.56. The deviations from the mean for orphans was 0.03 and for non-orphans was -1.24. This implies that orphaned pupils have poorer interpersonal relationships than non-orphaned pupils. This result is further corroborated by the t-test analysis where a statistically significant difference in interpersonal relationships was found between with the two groups ($t=2.34$, $p < 0.05$).

Comparison of Interpersonal Relationships of Pupils by Gender

The researchers also compared the interpersonal relationships for orphaned and non-orphaned boys and girls. This was considered crucial so as to understand the mechanisms underlying gender which may require designing appropriate interventions specific for each gender.

Table 2. Comparison of Orphaned and Non-orphaned girls' Interpersonal relationships

Variable	N	M	SD	t-value	df	p-value
Orphaned Girls (I.R)	30	57.97	28.79	5.71*	59	0.024
Non-orphaned Girls (I.R)	31	66.77	43.32			

* denotes significance at $\alpha = 0.05$ level

I.R-Interpersonal Relationship

From Table 2, the results clearly indicate that differences exist in interpersonal relationships between orphaned and non-orphaned girls. The interpersonal relationships mean scores for orphaned girls was 57.97 whereas that for non-orphaned girls was 8.8 points higher at 66.77. This implies that orphaned girls have poorer interpersonal relationships than non-orphaned girls. This was further proved by the t-test analysis where a statistically significant difference in interpersonal relationships was observed between the orphaned and non-orphaned girls ($t=5.71, p < 0.05$).

Table 3. Comparison of Orphaned and Non-orphaned boys' Interpersonal relationships.

Variable	N	M	SD	t-value	df	p-value
Orphaned boys (I.R)	24	50.8	26.45	-3.0*	49	0.048
Non-orphaned boys (I.R)	25	49.7	26.1			

* denotes significance at $\alpha = 0.05$ level
I.R-Interpersonal Relationship

From the results reflected in Table 3, it is clearly evident that slight mean differences exist in interpersonal relationships between orphaned and non-orphaned boys. The mean for orphaned boys was 50.8 and that of non-orphaned boys was at 49.7. In effect then, differences were 1.1 points higher in favour of orphaned boys. Through the t-test analysis, these mean scores difference was found to be statistically significant ($t=-3, p < 0.05$). This result suggests that orphaned boys have better interpersonal relationships as compared to their non-orphaned counterparts. Therefore, orphanhood seems not to have much effect on boys' interpersonal relationships.

Table 4. Comparison of Orphaned boys' and girls' Interpersonal relationships.

Variable	N	M	SD	t-value	df	p-value
Orphaned Boys (I.R)	49	50.04	26.45	2.767*	53	0.000
Orphaned Girls (I.R)	61	57.97	28.79			

* denotes significance at $\alpha = 0.05$ level
I.R-Interpersonal Relationship

From the results reflected in Table 4, it is evident that mean differences exist in interpersonal relationships between orphaned girls and orphaned boys. The mean for orphaned boys was 50.4 and that of orphaned girls was 57.97. Consequently, the mean scores differences were 7.57 points higher in favour of orphaned girls. This mean difference was found to be statistically significant ($t = 2.767, p < 0.05$). This finding shows that orphaned girls have higher levels of interpersonal relationships than orphaned boys. This could be due to the fact that girls generally tend to be more sociable and outgoing than boys.

Discussion

Results of studies reveal that rates of peer relationships difficulties are high among orphaned children, particularly among the AIDS orphans in sub-Saharan Africa (Bhargava, 2005; Cluver, Gardener & Operario, 2008). Moreover, other studies show higher rates of

depression among orphans as compared to non-orphans (Makame, Ani & McGregory, 2002; Sengendo & Nambi, 1997). Literature shows depression in children to be associated with interpersonal problems (Coyne, 1976). This is because when a child is depressed, he begins to feel low self-worth and low effectiveness in social relationships. In effect, the results of the above studies concur with the current study's finding that orphaned children experience poor interpersonal relationships as compared to the non-orphans.

Findings from other studies contradict the previous and current study's result with regard to the effect orphanhood has on orphaned and non-orphaned children's interpersonal relationships. For instance, Kiirya (2003) reveal that parental death tend to make children to seek more psycho-social support and satisfaction from as many peers as possible which in turn enhances their interpersonal relationships. This supports, Erickson (1963) view that those children who are faced with loss/absence of parents make up for isolation by seeking social support from several people including fellow peers. Moreover, a study by Behrendt and Mbaye (2008) found that orphans and non-orphans do not differ in terms of interpersonal relationships at school with orphans having even slightly higher skills than the non-orphans.

In regard to gender difference in children's interpersonal relationships, this study established that significant gender differences exist with girls scoring higher in interpersonal relationships as compared with their boy counterparts. This finding agrees with Perez (2012) who found that females score higher in their relationships with their peers than their male counterparts. Likewise Colarossi and Eccles (2003) study shows that girls tend to report higher quantities and greater satisfaction with peer support; meaning they are more likely to trust relationships with others and more willing to sustain ties with others. This observed difference is a clear indication that boys and girls may be different in the way they process and understand the social and personal aspects of their relationships with other people. This may be explained by the evolutionary theory that view boys to be more predisposed to pursue competition and dominance in groups while girls are predisposed more to engage in intimate relationships by caring and nurturance (Geary, Byrd-Craven, Hoard, Vigil & Numtee, 2003). Moreover, the observed difference between boys and girls may be due to the differential maturational processes between genders. Papalia, Olds and Feldman (1999) noted that girls attain physical, social and psychological maturation earlier and faster than boys. As such, girls may be able to resolve anger, depression and anxiety resulting from the loss of their parent(s) which are potential for the development of poor interpersonal relationships as compared to the boys.

Conclusion

Orphanhood affects the pupils' interpersonal relationships since orphaned primary school pupils had lower interpersonal relationships than non-orphaned ones. This implies that the absence of a parent(s) has an effect on the social lives of their children that include their interpersonal relationships. Specifically, absence of a parent(s) seems to have a more effect on the boy-child than the girl-child. This is because in the present study when a comparison in interpersonal relationships was made between orphaned boys and girls, the latter outperformed the former.

Interestingly, when comparisons were made with same gender of orphaned pupils, orphaned girls had lower levels of interpersonal relationships than non-orphaned ones, whereas boys were the opposite. The observed gender difference may be that boys and girls are different in the way they process and understand the social and personal aspects of their relationships with other people.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions made from the study, there is need for School counselors, teachers and administrators to come up with programmes that employ prioritized and feasible approaches to developing core psychosocial support capacities for orphaned children. Also, the Ministry of Education in Kenya needs to put in place monitoring tools such as regular school census to identify orphaned and other vulnerable children in order to mobilize timely responses to prevent unnecessary effects on their psychosocial well-being.

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