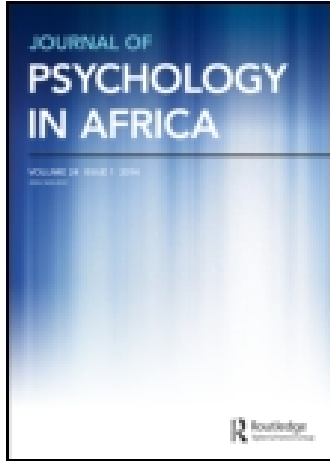


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## BRIEF REPORT

### School and community participation of in-school teenagers affected by orphanhood in a rural South Africa setting

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This study investigated schooling and community participation qualities of teenage learners affected by orphanhood in rural secondary South African setting. Participants were a purposive sample of 30 teenage learners, (female = 60% black = 98%, 12 to 19 years old). Data on their school and community participation were collected using semi-structured individual interviews. The data were thematically analyzed with open-coding. The findings indicated that learners need support for livelihoods, relationship development with extended family or guardians, school attendance, school task engagement and follow through. They experienced material shortages despite state support. From livelihood deprivations and forced opportunities, the learners who had been orphaned enter the working environment earlier than is typical and often do menial jobs.

Children who have been orphaned are those under the age of 18 years who have lost one or both parents from any cause (Jeff & Chris, 2002, UNICEF, 2003). This represents about 18.8% of South African children (3 374 971) and 7.3% of children (24 6373) from the Free State or central province of South Africa alone (Central Statistics South Africa, 2011). According to the World Bank (1998), children affected by orphanhood are less likely to have proper schooling from lack of parenting and the resource deprivation associated with being orphaned. Under guardianship, the host family may reduce a child's attendance at school by labour demands or the inability to pay for schooling (UNICEF, 2003). From these deprivations, learners affected by orphanhood may enter the labour force prematurely, and mostly in the unregulated informal sector (UNICEF, 2012). As a matter of fact, a learner who is orphaned is deprived of childhood from the socio-economic demands on him or her which are developmentally atypical (Ganga & Maphala, 2013).

**Keywords:** culture, developmental stage, livelihood, orphans, schooling

#### Introduction

Common consequences of being orphaned include growing poverty and its concerns, thereafter follows the loss of parental affection; reduced levels of care; stigma and the psychosocial implications of repeated personal and material loss, such as trauma, stress, depression and loss of social connectivity (Wekesa, 2000). The mere fact of being orphaned may carry social costs including stigma and marginalisation by host family and peers (O'Connor & Earnest, 2011). This means community participation may be adversely impacted. Studies are needed on the lives of children who are orphaned in rural South African settings; and particularly with regard to school and community participation. This study took place in a rural (Free State) South African setting.

#### Context of study

The following are the key features of a rural profile in the Free State, South Africa: long distances to towns; poor conditions of roads and bridges to schools; a lack of or limited access to Information Communications Technologies (ICTs); a lack of services such as running water, electricity, sanitation, health and educational facilities; low economic status and little access to lifelong learning opportunities. One of the most pervasive features of rural communities is poverty (Hlalele, 2012). Often, teenagers who are orphaned cannot afford to pay for transport to go to school or afford educational resources.

In rural Free State areas, grandparents are typically the carers for children who have been orphaned, whilst being themselves recipients of care. Children who are orphaned may live in learner-headed households with older siblings looking after younger ones (UNICEF, 2003). This is increasingly true of rural South Africa, where a grandparent(s), sibling or close family friend becomes the child's main caregiver, keeping a family based-structure, as opposed to institutional forms of care. Kinship care is often the preferred choice for the carer, the child, and community based organizations, due to better opportunities for children if they stay within a family home that is known to them, and the cheaper costs than an orphanage (Smith, 2007). Engaging learners to participate in school activities such as extra-mural activities and the school curriculum is erratic due to the high absenteeism by teenagers with orphanhood.

According to DoBE (2003), in the past most children affected by orphanhood were taken care of by the extended family but today families may find it difficult to cope with the number of children who need care. The illness and death of parents leaves children scarred and marginalized in ways that predispose them to delinquency and criminal behaviour. Reducing the levels of parental care, and the loss of positive role models, places children at high risk of developing antisocial tendencies. The growing number of children who are orphaned provides a recruitment pool for individuals and organizations wishing to violently challenge the existing socio-political order in African

countries. The AIDS epidemic stands to leave millions of children orphaned. It is likely that many will be left in situations of intense hardship.

### **Goals of the study**

This study sought to investigate the school and community participation of teenagers who are orphaned in secondary schools in rural South Africa. The following question guided the study:

What are the qualities that define school and community participation by learners who are orphaned in a rural South African setting?

### **Method**

The researcher used the qualitative research design for this study with a variety of methods, including literature review and interview. This methodology, according to Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen (2009), looks at the context of events, natural setting, subject's perspectives and reasons for the events and phenomena needing exploration and explanation. According to Leedy & Ormrod (2013), qualitative research enables the researcher to examine people's words and actions and report in narrative and descriptive ways – more closely representing the situation as experienced by the participants. A tape recorder was used to record the interviews while the note taking technique was also utilised as a complementary strategy.

### **Participants and setting**

Participants were a convenience sample of 30 learners (females = 60%) who had been orphaned from rural secondary schools in the Free State province of South Africa. The learners were enrolled in secondary school (age range = 12 to 19 years). Eleven different languages are spoken in this region but the language of instruction is English. Participants were mostly black, and spoke Setswana, Sesotho and Xhosa as their mother tongue. The majority of the learners were Christian.

### **Data collection**

Data were collected from 30 learners about their school and community participation using *semi-structured individual interviews*. They were selected using the guidelines of purpose sampling (Jonson & Christensen, 2012). The semi-structured interview used to collect the data from the respondent elicited information about the school and community participation of orphaned school teenagers in a rural South Africa setting. The schedule focused on support for development of school teenagers who were affected by orphanhood, the livelihood needs of these children and lastly the relationship and vulnerability of school teenagers who were orphaned in a rural South African setting.

### **Procedure**

Permission for the study was granted by the Principals of two rural schools. Participants assented to the study in writing. The respondents were not identified for ethical reasons.

### **Data analysis**

Data were thematically analyzed using open coding procedures (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This involved systematically organizing, categorizing and summarizing data and describing it in meaningful themes. Themes were assigned codes in an attempt to condense the data into categories.

### **Findings and Discussion**

School and community participation of the orphaned teenage learners in secondary schools was impacted by their perceived need for parental (if single-parent orphan) or guardian support appropriate to their developmental stage. Specifically, the learners affected by orphanhood need support for school attendance and school task engagement and follow-through by extended family or guardians. The learners also experienced material shortages despite state support. From livelihood deprivations, the learners affected by orphanhood have earlier than typical entry into the work environment and do menial jobs to survive. Adult support was an important missing link to the orphaned youth as well as vulnerable youth.

### **Development of appropriate schooling and personal support**

As examples of the need for typical supports for stages of development, some of the learner orphans made the following observations:

*...I do not have someone who can motivate me to attend school regularly. (Respondent # 6A, female, 13 years, orphan, rural secondary school).*

*...My mother used to advise me and encourage me to go to school but presently I do not any who can play the role played by my mother' and help me with school work. (Respondent # 28, female, 13 years, orphan, rural secondary school):*

*I wish I could have a role model. (Respondent # 3A, male, 13 years, orphan, rural secondary school).*

*My mother was my role model and she was talking to me freely, but now since I am staying with my relatives is difficult to be open or talk freely. (Respondent # 6B, female, 14years, orphan, rural secondary school)*

*I am forced to solve my problem alone without help of any one because I do not have parents. (Respondent # 7A, male, 16 years, orphan, rural secondary school).*

*I face challenges of life; I must stand up and solve the problems. (Respondent # 12A, female, 13 years, orphan, rural secondary school).*

The learners are expected to come with their parents to school during parent meetings or during school actives and in the case of children who are orphaned it is difficult to do so. Therefore the elder sister and brother who are also learners represent their brothers and sisters because they do not have parents. Their brothers and sisters are playing two roles: being parents and at the same time learners; meaning no one will represent them.

The learners who were orphaned reported early workforce participation to sustain livelihoods. For instance, they cultivated the land, did home gardening, cattle and goat herding and such other tasks. Some collected wood from the forest for cooking or for selling to support themselves and the carer in the family. This task

overload would be stressful to the children who had been orphaned (Skoda, Ogutu, Aoro & Campbel, 2009).

### Livelihood needs

Typical comments on livelihood needs included:

*I sometime come to school with an empty stomach ... Respondent # 17A; female, 16 years, orphan, rural secondary school).*

*I make sure that on Saturday am doing part time job to earn some income in order that I can buy food for myself and little brother and sisters. (Respondent # 21A, male, 15 years, orphan, rural secondary school)*

*We survives because of social grant from the state as the sources of income of income to put food on the table. (Respondent # 23A, male, 17 years, orphan, rural secondary school).*

*... my mother used to buy me everything for me e.g. clothes, food etc. but for now it is difficult to get clothes and food at any time, no one can give the money immediately to buy clothes and food..... (Respondent # 5B, female, 13 years, orphan, secondary school).*

*Sir I get the social grant from the state but the money is not sufficient to maintain the family i.e. my sisters and brothers. (Respondent # 11B, female, 13 years, orphan, rural secondary school).*

*...I do not get the social grant me and my sister and my grandmother are looking after me, but they cannot do anything for me like my mother used to do. (Respondent # 14A, male, 13 years, orphan, rural secondary school).*

*...my grandmothers who get old pension make sure that I get clothes and food. My grandmother with the little amount of money she gets from the state deposits a certain amount of money to the bank account for future purpose, to go to University after completing grade 12. (Respondent # 1B, female, 16 years, orphan, rural secondary school).*

Relations who were guardians were not often helpful due to their unwillingness or inability to provide. They may also be predatory and deprive the learners who were orphaned resources provided by the public welfare system. The survival strategies of the children affected by orphanhood, such as eating less and selling assets, intensifies their vulnerability (Fox, 2001; UNICEF, 2003).

Other studies done in Sub-Sahara Africa show that orphaned children are disadvantaged in numerous and often devastating ways. They are likely to be poorer and less healthy than non-orphans are (UNICEF, 2003). They are more likely to experience delays in cognitive and emotional development important for success in school (Fox, 2001).

### Relationship vulnerability

Examples of statements on relationship vulnerability included:

*...I survive because of my friends and other people who donate clothes and food to me. I get social grant but I do not benefit from because my relatives get the money for me. At school my friends give the food and if they change is over and I do not eat. (Respondent # 3A, male, 13 years, orphan, rural secondary school).*

*...My mother used to love me and gave me the warm love. I tried many people after the death of my mother to support me but I failed. I think no one will treat me like my mother and it is given me that love. (Respondent # 23B, female, 13 years, orphan, rural secondary school).*

*...Sir I think no one will replace my mother, my mother was always on my side, guiding me and generally taking care of my needs. (Respondent # 25A, male, 13 years orphan, rural secondary school).*

*...Sir, I felt I became an orphan when my mother died and when I am with other learners, but after getting the support from my grandmother it was better. (Respondent # 6A: female, 13 years orphan, rural secondary school).*

*Since I do not have parents I think next year I will be forced to go and look, look after the cattle. (Respondent # 7B, female, 12 years, orphan, rural secondary school)*

*...Sir I tried my uncle and relatives, no one is helping me and my grandmother is my last hope who can help me.' (Respondent # 10A, female, 17 years, orphan ,rural secondary school).*

*After the death of my parents my relatives wanted to take over and take our parents' house." (Respondent # 3A, male, 16 years, orphan, rural secondary school).*

*If other learners talk about their parents in classroom....I talks about my grandmother...others said my mother bought me the clothes, shoes and I only talk about my grandmother. (Respondent # 8A, male, 13 years, orphan, rural secondary school).*

Youth affected by orphanhood may experience rejection, suffer from lack of love, distress, lack of healthcare and access to education, labour exploitation, homelessness and lack of care and support (Matshalanga, 2002; Maphalala, 2013).

Some of the children who are orphaned experience relationship losses with their siblings when they are adopted for care by different families. This means they miss out on social development due to a lack of sibling support (Maphalala, 2013).

### Summary and Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that learners who are affected by orphanhood in rural South Africa need support for their livelihoods and relationship development with the support of extended family or guardians. Children who are orphaned have little support and protection and may feel hopeless about their futures. They are also judged and treated badly, instead of getting help and support, and some are silenced. The findings attest to the need to focus on the strategies or intervention programmes to support wellbeing among youth who are orphaned in South Africa.

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