



**SOCIAL EXCLUSION, CLASS ATTENDANCE AND AVAILABILITY OF COUNSELING SERVICES TO ORPHANS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA**

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**Authors: 1. Jane Ingado Misigo; Kabarak University, Kenya**

**Email: [janeingado@yahoo.com](mailto:janeingado@yahoo.com)**

**Tel: 0722923845**

**2. Lilian Ayiro, Maseno University, Kenya**

**Email: [ayiolilian@yahoo.com](mailto:ayiolilian@yahoo.com)**

**Tel: 0721945809**

## Abstract

- Orphan-hood can be a source of both physical and psychological trauma in children. Apart from being excluded by family members and friends, orphans are likely to miss classes and hence may require consistent guidance and counseling to help them come in terms with the new life they find themselves in. This paper outlines studies that were done in Bondo and Bungoma North Districts in Kenya respectively to investigate social exclusion, class attendance and availability of guidance. The two studies were done independently between 2009 and 2011 using survey designs among students in secondary schools. Findings revealed significant difference in social exclusion and class attendance between orphans and non-orphans indicating that that orphans are more socially excluded and are more likely to be absent from school than non-orphans. It was further noted that there was no difference in access to guidance and counseling services by both orphans and non-orphans.

## Background of study

- Over 14 million children in the world have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. Out of these, 12 million are live in Sub-Saharan Africa and only 2 million in other parts of the world (UNICEF, 2005). Apart from HIV/AIDS, there are also thousands of children who have been orphaned by wars, border conflicts, or tribal clashes in almost all parts of the world. These man made conflicts have also left men and women killed or injured. Scores of innocent children are orphaned or displaced (UNICEF, 2003).
- After the death of parents children faced an uncertain future (Sengendo & Nambi, 1997). They may be taken away from their homes, they are expected to adjust to a new way of life such as eating habits, language, and people, and possibly enroll in new schools. These changes may be both physically and psychologically disturbing to them (Kaffman & Elizur, 1983). However, Aliber and Walker (2006) noted that stigma associated with HIV and AIDS make people in the heavily affected communities to perceive the infected and affected as a source of shame to their respective societies hence orphans whose parents died of AIDS face isolation from their peers and the community as a whole. This suggests that apart from the death experiences and emotional loss of parents, orphans also suffer social isolation, distress, shame, fear and rejection and extreme poverty (Nyambedha, 2004; Kigotho, 2012).

## Literature review

### **Social Exclusion and Orphan-hood**

- One of the effects of HIV and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa is the rising number of orphans (Chirwa, 2002). The study observed that due to large number of deaths related to HIV and AIDS infection, orphans were more likely to fall into poverty, have their rights violated and participate less in matters that affected them most even in their own societies. It was further observed that in some cases when relatives came in to support them, they were taken away from their siblings and in most cases lost their property.
- According to a study by Nyambedha (2004) in Nyangoma Division, Bondo District, it was observed that the number of orphans in the district is high. Almost every household was affected and the burden was unbearable to the extended family. The orphans were reportedly made vulnerable by their impoverished contexts because very few relatives were willing to take them in or care for them but viewed them as burden. According to the author, most of these siblings were separated from each other consequently denying them the opportunity to grow together as a family. This suggested a possibility that these orphans may have been socially excluded from mainstream activities.

## Literature review con't

### **Class Attendance and Orphan hood**

- Some of the problems experienced by orphans are emotional adjustment, relationship with teachers and classmates, class attendance and good study habits. Both orphans and non-orphans need books, school fees, uniforms, pens and other stationery to aid in their learning. Furthermore it has been observed that there is nothing as traumatizing as learning on an empty stomach.
- UNAIDS (2000b) also observed that most of the AIDS orphans do not attend school. The report was based on a survey done among orphans and non-orphaned children. Out of the 1,239 children included in the survey, 56 percent of the girls and 47 percent of boys had dropped out of school within 12 months of parent deaths .Only 2 percent of non-orphaned children had dropped out of school. It has also been noted that lack of basic necessities such as uniform, books and pens contribute a great deal toward inhibiting the orphans from accessing, participating and performing in schools (Ochieng, 2004; Kimani, 2004). The orphans are often the first children to lose the support of extended families for attending schools. Even with the free primary education policy in place, many orphans were still out of school.

## Literature review con't

### **Importance of Guidance and Counseling Services in Schools**

- Guidance and counseling is one of the most important activities that were designed to promote learning/teaching in schools. Ministry of Education (1977) defined guidance and counseling as a continuous process aimed at determining and providing developmental needs to the learners both at a group and individual level. The report observed that guidance and counseling is supposed to help learners to understand their own characteristics and potentials as they progress through school. It may also address other social and psychological issues of the learners. Yelon and Weinstein (1977) noted that Guidance and Counseling in schools helps a pupil to feel emotionally secure and provides them with information they may need to cope with the situation.
- The Ministry of Education (1999) pointed that the HIV/AIDS pandemic would have an effect on the education system in schools as many learners are left behind as orphans and hence the need of guidance and counseling to help them to cope with their psychosocial problems. In addition, adjustment process for orphans is a difficult one, and it is coupled with various psychosocial problems (Smilansky, 1987). For example, some orphans are likely to grieve for a long time yet, this is a fact that is not understood by many people especially their care givers and teachers, (Saoke & Mutemi, 2000). Clinicians are of the opinion that all children who have lost their parents are 'at risk' and need some professional intervention (Mugambi, 2000).

## Methodology

- The studies focused on social exclusion, class attendance and availability of guidance and counseling services to orphans and non-orphans in public secondary school students in Bondo and Bungoma North Districts in Kenya. Survey research designs were employed using simple random sampling techniques. Questionnaires were used to gather data from students.

## Findings

### **Social exclusion of orphans and non-orphans**

- Independent sample t-test of orphans and non-orphans yielded a significant mean difference ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = .76$ ,  $n = 204$ ) for orphans and ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = .67$ ,  $n = 105$ ),  $t = 1.41$ ,  $df = 307$ ,  $p < .05$  for non-orphans indicating that social exclusion is elevated among orphans than non-orphans. It is possible that the hard situations the orphans find themselves in after the death of their parents and little acceptance in families they join could make them have low self-esteem and also view any act from people around them as a form of discrimination.



# Findings con't

## **Class attendance of orphans and non-orphans**

- A chi-square test was conducted to compare the class attendance of orphans and non-orphans. Findings revealed a significant difference in class attendance of orphans and non-orphans. The results showed a significant difference in class attendance between the orphans and non-orphans,  $\chi^2(1, N=330) = 6.4, p < .05$  indicating that Orphans are more absent than the non-orphans. The findings of this study were consistent with the findings of Ayieko (1997) who noted that many orphans were not in school due to heavy domestic responsibilities which most of them had to do before going to school.

# Findings con't

## **Availability of guidance and counseling for orphans and non-orphans**

- To find out whether guidance and counseling was available to orphans and non-orphans, the participants were asked to indicate if they had guidance and counseling services available in their schools or not. In response, 94.14% of the orphans and 91.45% of non-orphans reported that guidance and counseling services are available in their schools. The results indicated that most of the students in secondary schools were exposed to guidance and counseling services.

# Conclusion

- Orphan-hood status is likely to lead to exclusion of children from mainstream community activities and make them not able to attend classes hence influencing their academic performance.



## **Implication of the studies**

There was a need to promote and strengthen counseling programs through training of the teacher-counselors.

The Government should provide bursaries that target orphans to ensure that they are regular in school.

Due to the importance of counseling services in secondary schools, teacher counselors need to be fulltime basis for them to be able to reach more students.