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Using ubuntu to deal with psychosocial issues arising from institutionalised children

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ABSTRACT

Juvenile delinquency is among some of the major social problems in Zimbabwe. This was the focus for this study. This study was explorative and descriptive with the use of case study design. Data were collected from in-depth interviews with the caregivers, selected children and social workers. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed. The study found that some children at children's homes are engaging in a number of delinquency activities such as sexual abuse, sexual intercourse, drug and alcohol abuse and assaults. This paper recommends that the government must educate children in institutional care on their rights but at the same time teaching them to be responsible. It further recommends that residential child care facilities (RCCFs) need to adopt ubuntu principles, that is, African culture values the importance of family relationships and communal responsibility. This means that vulnerable members of the family and community will be the responsibility of the family or whole community. To this end, the society in general needs to engage with institutionalized children thereby socializing them into values and principles of ubuntu to potentially moderate their behaviors.

KEY TERMS: *delinquency, ubuntu, residential child care facilities (RCCFs), caregiving, social detachment, Zimbabwe*

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INTRODUCTION

The increase in juvenile delinquency can be attributed to several factors. Juvenile behaviour has its roots in family breakdown, permissive home or community environments and domestic violence. The failure to address all these challenges can be attributed to the breakdown of ubuntu philosophy which is the basis of African life. This philosophy expresses the interconnectedness, common humanity and the responsibility of individuals to each other (Nussbaum, 2003). Despite, residential child care facilities (RCCFs) are regarded as a common care giving option, some studies found that orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) living in institutions of care are faced with cognitive and behavioral problems (Kangethe & Makuyana, 2014). Therefore, there is need for more in-depth studies to clarify the role of RCCFs in instigating delinquent behaviour (Orol-Granado, Sala-Roca & Filella, 2014).

Existing literature confirmed that juvenile delinquency in RCCFs is a common phenomenon. A report that was published by the Sunday Mail (2011) quoted in Masuka, Banda, Mabvurira and Frank (2012) noted that orphans at Mariele Children's Home in Mhondoro are believed to be involved in delinquent behaviour owing to minimal supervision following the sacking of their caregivers by new owners. Evidence produced by some studies in the country show that institutionalization is perpetuating deviant behaviours among children and this has negatively affected their re-integration in the society. This is supported by a study that was conducted by Powell, Morreire, Rudd and Ngonyama (2004) which found out that children in residential child care facilities are separated from the Zimbabwean most important element of ubuntu or *hunhu* because institutions base their socialisation on Mission statements and objectives in making orphans productive. Hence, detaching children from the fundamental values and principles of the general societies implies the breaking down of ubuntu's relational philosophy that is 'I am because we are' and this is more likely to result in deviance behaviour. In support, Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013) posits that ubuntu philosophy points towards a strongly constructivist ontology in which a person's sense of being cannot be detached from the social context in which they find themselves

In furtherance, a study by Olsen, Egelund and Lausten, (2011) reports that in terms of the distribution of crime types across type of care, children who experienced residential care tend to exhibit significantly more serious types of criminal behaviour such as violence and sexual offences, whereas children looked after in foster care and by their families are more likely to have verdicts for drunk driving and other lighter offences. Positive behaviour results among children in foster care can be accredited to Ubuntu values that are socialized into these children as opposed to RCCFs which remove children the society. To this end, the government coping strategies for child-headed families and disabled children should be guided by concepts such as sympathy, compassion, benevolence, solidarity, hospitality, generosity, sharing, openness, affirming, available, kindness, caring, harmony, interdependence, obedience, collectively and consensus (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013).

The study aimed to gain empirical insight into the delinquent behaviours exhibited by children in RCCFs. Data were collected from the children above the age of fourteen (14) years and their caregivers. Some social workers at the institution were also engaged. This has provided an understanding into the diverse dynamics and insights of the delinquent behaviours that children were engaging in. The results could be important for engaging the Ubuntu philosophy in addressing quagmires emanating from RCCFs since Ubuntu encourages the society to absorb children than sending them to institutional care.

UBUNTU THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The failure to address all these challenges can be attributed to the breakdown of Ubuntu philosophy which is the basis of African communal cultural life. This philosophy expresses the interconnectedness, common humanity and the responsibility of individuals to each other (Nussbaum, 2003:21-26). This is supported by a study that was conducted by Powell, Morreire, Rudd and Ngonyama (2004) which found out that children in residential child care facilities are separated from the Zimbabwean most important element of ubuntu or *hunhu* because institutions base their socialisation on western centered objectives. Hence detaching children from the fundamental values and principles of the general societies implies the breaking down of Ubuntu's relational philosophy that is 'I am because we are' and this is more likely to result in deviance behaviour. Apparently, children in residential care institutions tend to exhibit a serious lack of proper grooming in African culture and values, which phenomenon predisposed them to negative behavioral tendencies (Maushe & Mugumbate, 2015). Therefore, ubuntu philosophy is useful as it points towards a strongly constructivist ontology in which a person's sense of being cannot be detached from the social context in which they find themselves (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013).

METHODS

In practice, research methodology entails a well-structured set of specific procedures, inclusive of research design, methods of data collection, and data analysis which are the scientific conventional strategies that are observed by

researchers when partaking a research project. The study utilized a qualitative paradigm, approach and research design. The study adopted a case study as its specific research design, where the researcher is able to show complexity of social life and data is drawn from people's experiences and practices and so it is seen to be strong in reality, more persuasive and more accessible (Cohen, 2000). In this case, the researcher explored the delinquent behaviors of vulnerable children in residential care facilities based on the lived experience of both children and key informants.

The study utilized an explorative and descriptive research design. These designs are useful in unearthing some ambiguous quagmires and try to provide solutions to them thereby setting background for future research direction (Khan, 2014). Thus, this can provide a strong background for further research, either of quantitative approach or triangulation approach.

The researcher adhered to the ethos and principles of qualitative approach, both in data collection and analysis. The study made use of an interview guide as a research instrument with open ended questions that facilitated five (5) children, two (2) social workers and four (4) caregivers. The researcher comprehensively interviewed the participants to guarantee he attained sufficient data to warrant the analysis.

In data collection, this study adopted a non-probability sampling methodology with particular usage of a purposive technique. This sampling technique entails the researcher's judgement to select samples that contain the most appropriate traits of the population (Flick, 2009). In terms of age, the researcher focused on children who were fourteen (14) years and above. The study focused on this age range because at this stage children are considered to have the capacity of committing a crime (Children Justice Act 75 of 2008). The research targeted participants that were accessible and healthy enough to comprehend the questions posed by the researcher pertaining the diverse delinquent behaviors exercised children in the residential child care facility.

The data collection was done at SOS children's home in Bindura town, Zimbabwe. It was cross-sectional which means the data were gathered within a short period of time. The researcher the SOS children's village by one of the social workers at the institution. This helped the researcher to familiarize with the institution and ensure that participants would gain trust and confidence in him.

To speed up the data collection process, the researcher collected the data in Shona language since majority of the participants were contented to use this language. All the data were audio taped and transcribed later before the data analysis.

With regards to unit of analysis, only eleven participants were engaged in in-depth interviews. In this case, the researcher was more interested in the quality and depth of information rather than the magnitude of participants involved. The researcher also considered this number to be the best since the research domain was one RCCF hence the number of participants were adhered the needed traits were restricted.

Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis entails the grouping and clarification of linguistic material to make reports about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the gathered data and what is reflected in it (Flick, 2013). Content-thematic analysis method was utilized. This depicts that the data were gathered, polished and organized into themes that informed answers to the research questions.

Ethical and legal requirements

To warrant that the study was administratively and legally correct, all communications and appointments for interviews with the participants were made through the arrangement of SOS children's village, with the researcher being granted the permission by the manager to commence the study. Accordingly, the researcher followed the necessary application process of obtaining an approval letter from faculty of social sciences and humanities of Bindura University of Science Education. The study made use of pseudonyms to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants.

FINDINGS

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the children, while Table 2 presents the demographic profiles of the key informants. Pseudonyms have been utilized to protect the participants confidentiality and anonymity. The themes from the study were:

1. Drug and alcohol abuse
2. Sexual abuse
3. Promiscuous sexual behavior
4. Verbal abuse of caregivers

Table 1: Profile of children who participated in the study

Name	Age	Reason for admission	Gender
Ivy	15	Death of parents	Female
Tinashe	17	Found on the streets	Male
Meshack	16	Death of parents	Male
Tineyi	18	Brought by strangers	Male
Memory	14	Death of parents	Female

On age, the study findings indicated that majority of the children were above the age of fourteen years, a deliberate move that was made by the researcher knowing that children above this age have the capacity to commit a crime. In terms of reasons for placement, majority of the participants reported death of parents as the reason. Perhaps, these are the consequences of HIV/AIDS which have claimed many lives living many children vulnerable. Gender imbalance in the findings do not reflect the true gender completion at the institution rather the researcher interviewed the participants who were readily available.

Table 2: Profile of caregivers who participated in the study

Name	Gender	Work experience	Occupation
CG 1	Female	12 years	Care giver
CG 2	Female	15 years	Care giver
CG 3	Female	8 years	Care giver
CG 4	Female	10 years	Care giver
SW 1	Male	11 years	Social worker
SW 2	Male	7 years	Social worker

On gender, majority of participants were female. Perhaps this reflected the gender roles ascribed to women who usually considered caregivers and responsible for house hold chores. Thus, the findings manifested feminization of caregiving. As alluded above, the participants interviewed in the study reported their work experience was above five (5) years. This heavily reflects a greater possibility that both social workers and caregivers were sufficiently furnished to deal with children. Thus, they had huge exposure to the delinquent behaviors exhibited by children.

Drug and alcohol abuse

Study participants indicated acts of misconduct presented by children especially when engaging in drug and alcohol abuse. This claim was very popular among participants.

My brother I drink beer and I also smoke pacific which is my favourite cigarette, I usually do this with my friends whenever we attend shows at Tendai Hall, Tinashe.

Our children smoke mbanje (cannabis) especially the older ones, you can see it from the way they behave. The older boys and girls usually escape from the village during nights and they will be at the nearest shopping centers like Chipadze attending dancehall shows and that's when they will be drinking and smoking. Sometimes they are reported to us by community members who know them, CG1.

We have several children who were once taken to the police due to drug abuse. Children who usually exhibit this form of behavior are those who are 16 years and above, especially boys. They might spend up to 3 days without reporting to their house mothers and they will be in the community engaging in drug and alcohol abuse, SW1.

The findings reflect that children are engaging in delinquent acts such as drug and alcohol abuse and this has the potential to destroy their future and the community at large.

Sexual abuse

Participants spoke at length particularly the key informants pertaining sexual abuse of minor children by older ones. The phenomenon leaves minor children traumatized and devastated since they are exposed to abuse in a place that is considered to be a place of safety. Apparently, older children have a tendency of committing sexual abuse by having sexual intercourse with the young children. Unfortunately, the cases are not taken seriously, perhaps, because the perpetrators are also considered to be minors. The following statements validates the existence of sexual abuse at the village:

I have seen boys of my age forcing small children to have sexual intercourse with them. I have seen it happening several times and sometimes the cases are not reported to the police, Tineyi.

Usually children in form three and above tend to force the young ages to have sexual intercourse with them. As the house mother I end up standing in court because once a child is involved in sexual abuse, he or she needs a guardian to represent him. The institution has decided to remove those children who are beginning to show interest in sex from the houses in the village and place them in one of houses in the community, CG4.

Apparently, older children have a tendency of committing sexual abuse by having sexual intercourse with the young children. Unfortunately, the cases are not taken seriously, perhaps, because the perpetrators are also considered be minors.

Promiscuous sexual behaviour

Study findings revealed a state risky sexual behavior exercised by children which has the potential to destroy their future. Majority of the participants acknowledged that many children at the village are sexually active, unfortunately some of them do not have limits as they recklessly practice this phenomenon. The following are some of the responses from the participants:

Yes, I once had sex but am not the only one doing it. On several occasions' girls are taken by their boyfriends in the community for sleep overs and many older boys sleep with prostitutes, Mesheck.

I once escaped from the institution with my friends and we went back to the streets of Harare where I was taken. Am attached to this place because I have a lot of memories there. We used to engage in sex work for us to get money, Ivy.

Some boys end up conducting HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted disease especially those about to leave the village. There are given sponsorship fee which they are supposed to use to start their own projects. The amount is around US\$ 3000. Instead of starting projects they spend that money through buying beer, drugs and to have sex with prostitutes. In most cases we are informed by the community of these incidences, CG2.

Sometimes we deal with cases of children who have been infected by STI's and HIV/AIDS. These children also have sexual intercourse on their own and I think this is perpetuated by the set-up of the institution whereby both girls and boys stay in the same house. Sometimes we invite organizations such New Start Centre so that our children get tested and if necessary, they are included on ART, SW2.

Undoubtedly, engagement in promiscuous sexual behaviors is a trending habit among children at the institution. This has resulted in devastating consequences as some children, unknowingly, were subjected to sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and HIV/AIDS.

Verbal assaults

Majority of key informants reported to be victims as children tend to utter words that are meant either to dishonor or to provoke them. As such caregivers are left in a state of mental torture, misery, and placing them into a state of role confusion. Key informants agreed that most of these children were assaulting caregivers. These findings can be validated by the following sentiments:

They do not have respect at all because they don't attend or listen to what I say. They are very aware that if I give them a harsh punishment, I will be expelled. It's a shame because they take that advantage to provoke and disrespect me, CG3.

It's very common at this institution that children can backchat to their caregivers. This is phenomenon trends among the older children because they understand better their rights. Unfortunately, they are using their rights to abuse people who are providing care to them, SW1.

Unfortunately, caregivers undergo a state of agonizing pain and experience pangs of abuses from children they are providing care to. Perhaps, children suffer psychological torture of not have seen their biological parents hence lack of bond and denial of truth haunt them

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that substance abuse is one of the delinquent behaviors engaged by children at children's home. These findings support the view of Frederiksen (2012) that alcohol and drug abuse are some of the factors that drive placements into institutional care in many countries and these children have potential of persisting with these behaviours if there are given chances. In many cases vulnerability linked with the loss of self-confidence would explain the abuse of substances (Orol-Granado, Sala-Roca & Filella, 2014). To this end, Ubuntu has the potential to unlock the capacity of an African culture in which individuals express compassion, openness and interdependence thereby enhancing better future for vulnerable children (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013).

The study findings indicated that sexual abuse is a common phenomenon in residential child care facilities. These findings are validated by Frederiksen (2012) who also discovered that Children in outside home care have a higher frequency of verdicts for, sexual offences and they more often have more severe sentences such as unconditional and conditional convictions. These acts reflect that RCCFs lacks Ubuntu, a philosophy which has the capacity to enhance respect and love amongst the children. Especially by considering that Ubuntu expresses the interconnectedness, common humanity and the responsibility of individuals to each other (Nussbaum, 2003).

Study findings indicate that children were engaging in sexual intercourse and were sexually active. It also reflects that sexual intercourse has long term effects such as HIV/AIDS infection and teenage pregnancy. These findings support the observation made by Bartollas (1997) quoted in Zenzile (2008) that due to drug abuse there is a quicker or easier spread of HIV/Aids within the youth population. On the same note, study findings reviewed that some children escape from the RCCF to engage to engage in sexual activities in the streets. This finding is echoed by Mella (2012) who suggest that street girls are subjected to extreme sexual violence especially by sugar daddies (adults who force themselves to have sex with young girls in the exchange of money or material) that patronize the street preying on these vulnerable girls. To this end, RCCFs can be credited for meeting the basic needs of children, however, they lag behind in terms of preventing them from committing offences (Orol-Granado, Sala-Roca & Filella, 2014). In this regard, the African Ubuntu philosophy can play a significant role in reducing the levels of vulnerability amongst children in an African environment.

The study findings established that the relationships between caregivers and children is not stable. These findings link with a study that was carried out by Kurfi (2010) in Kano Metropolis- Nigeria which found out that the relationship between children in the orphanage and the care-givers (institutional-care) was not cordial. The caregivers expressed cared-for attitudes which they considered to be disrespectful. The relationship gets bitter when the children mature and thereby realize that the caregivers were not their biological parents. These findings validate Orol-Granado, Sala-Roca and Filella (2014) who observed that children in RCCFs are more likely to dishonor authority, though they tend to have more emotional involvement with social workers. This is in line with an observation that was made by Santrock (2007) who argues that children living in residential child care facilities are raised by permissive parents hence they lack self-discipline, sometimes have poor social skills and may be self-involved and demanding. In contrary, children of authoritative parents achieve academic competencies, are good at problem solving social maturity, high self-esteem and confidence, self-confident in completing new tasks, self-controlled in their ability to resist engaging in disruptive behavior and less gendered type (Santrock, 2007). Therefore, if children in RCCFs are attached to societal values, more importantly ubuntu which carries a relational philosophy that 'I am because we are', children are more likely to develop a strong constructivist ontology in which their sense of being cannot be detached from the social context in which they find themselves (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

The study found out that children at SOS children's village were engaging in different forms of delinquent behaviours. Forms of delinquent behaviours were in various categories which include sexual intercourse, theft, bullying, assaults, sexual abuse and absconding. People from the community had an impact in perpetuating delinquency at the institution through labelling and engaging them in prostitution and drug abuse. The study found out that boys were mainly involved in activities such theft and bullying while girls were involved much in sexual intercourse with outsiders. Although there were some differences in activities engaged by boys and girls, the study found out that both were equally involved in delinquency. From the findings of the study it can be noted that forms

of delinquent behaviour at SOS children's village were not very much unique as children in the community are exhibiting similar behaviours. The findings also revealed that children who were engaging in serious delinquent activities were above the age of sixteen and these included theft, prostitution and drug abuse.

IMPLICATION OF UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY

RCCFs will benefit from reframing the objectives they set for children in their facilities as follows:

Table 3: Ubuntu inspired child care

Current objectives	Ubuntu inspired objectives
Accommodating children who are not able to live with their parents for example due to death of biological parents	Children's home needs to give the society a leading role in accommodating vulnerable children particularly the extended family so that they are not detached from the values of ubuntu.
Work closely with the children's family of origin, so that the children can return to live with them.	Children's home must not disintegrate children who have family of origin, rather they need to provide supporting system to those families so as to allow children grow with the values and principles of the society as a whole.
Creating a family encompassing child coming from different backgrounds.	Promoting foster care system which allow children to be raised in the society and socialised the conventional norms.

CONCLUSION

RCCFs need to create a normal home environment child have respect for their house mothers, in this case ubuntu philosophy can be adopted since it is centered on valuing love and respect. Also, ubuntu relates to bonding and connecting with the society at large. Thus, children can be socialised to conform into conventional societal values and principles. The communities should be educated on the importance of adoption and fostering. Fostering or adoption have the potential to uphold ubuntu which can ensure connection of a child to a family thereby avoiding unorthodox acts of conduct. On the same note, Social workers do have an important role in implementing ubuntu philosophy in RCCFs. If ubuntu is applied in residential care facilities it has the potential to unlock the capacity of an African culture in which individuals express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity and mutuality in the interests of building the future of vulnerable children.

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