INFLUENCE OF CHILD HEADED FAMILY FORMATIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS AMONG PRE-SCHOOL LEARNERS IN MUSENGO ZONE, KITUI WEST SUB-COUNTY, KITUI COUNTY-KENYA

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Abstract

The study set out to study the influence of Child-headed family formations on the development of interpersonal relations among the pre-school learners in Musengo zone, in Kitui West Sub-County, Kitui County in Kenya. Families, ECDE institutions, and the community at large, provide conducive environment which necessitate acquisition of interpersonal skills and social competencies among the pre-school learners of Musengo zone. In Kitui West Sub-county, Kitui County, Kenya. This paper provides a broad review in understanding on the importance intervention of key stakeholders namely the peers, siblings, parents, community members and teachers on the development of social skills aspects of the pre-school learners. The study employed descriptive survey design to gather information, summarize, present and interpret the results for the purpose of clarification. Purposive sampling technique was used to select ECDE teachers and other key informants while questionnaires, interview guides and observation schedules were used in data collection. Data collected was analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The study targeted a population of 906 respondents comprising of 25 headteachers, 56 ECDE teachers, 25 parent representatives and 800 ECDE learners.A sample size of 145 respondents constituting 5 headteachers, 15 ECDE teachers, 5 parents representatives, and 120 ECDE learners. Data was presented by use of frequency distribution tables. The study established that there is a significant relationship between child-headed family formations and the development of interpersonal relations among pre-school learners. The researcher concluded that the government and all strategic partners should objectively support the orphaned and vulnerable children and mentor them so that they developinterpersonal. The study findings will be of great importance and relevance to ECDE teachers, Non governmental organizations, curriculum developers and administrators.

1. Introduction

The contemporary trends in family formations in the last decades have led to a sharp decline in the traditional forms of families and a rise in new family forms globally which include; polygamous, monogamous, blended, and child-headed and single-parent families.For example, American families have been changing for some years now with family forms and roles of family members becoming more varied (Bray & Kelly, 2013). A child-headed family or child-headed household is a family in which a minor (child or adolescent) has become the head of the household and are most common in developing countries and areas of war, where the children's parents have been killed by conflict or disease (Strong, Devault & Cohen, 2011).

Booth and Paul (2013), assert that, over the past two decades or so, a significant literature has developed on the impact of child-headed family structure and family change on child well being. They also indicate that early childhood learners raised in different family contexts such as child-headed family formations had differential patterns of outcomes across a wide range of socio-interpersonal developmental domains. They further argued that ECDE learners raised in child headed families have been found, on average, to do less well across a range of measures of wellbeing than their peers in two-parent families, while child-headed families have been found to be associated with an array of adverse outcomes on the development of social and interpersonal skills among the pre-school learners.

Harris (2003) asserts that skill in emotional expression is an important part of peer acceptance and motivates a child to interact with others. Children who learn to employ culturally accepted ways of expressing emotions in accordance with situations are more likely to be successful socially. The study further asserts that family structures with effective interpersonal skills support for children have them manifest impressive social relations, cooperation skills and are able to accommodate others.

Children living in child-headed households face stigmatization and discrimination, isolation such that they have reduced self-esteem and lack confidence to participate in class activities. However, much still needs to be done since Kitheka (2016) has not interrogated how different aspects of child-headed families impact on children's development of socio-emotional skills such as language, interpersonal relations, cooperation and leadership skills amongst learners in ECDE centers.

2. Problem statement

Early child-hood learners from child headed families have constantly shown poorly developed socio-emotional skills. The finding provide a vivid description of their living conditions, changing roles, community fears and school experiences which inevitably affect their psychological well-being and propagate the need for effective school psychological services. Findings from this research indicate that these children have increased rates of absenteeism, truancy, behavioral disorders, lack interest and concentration in school learning activities. In addition, they manifest in ability to solve challenging class assignments and tasks, and that they lack interest to interact with their peers.

They lack cooperation skills and have poor leadership qualities. They do not relate well with fellow learners, peers and teachers, hence they withdraw from activities they are to engage in. Based on the findings, several lessons transcending national boundaries are presented for school psychologists to be successful in assisting learners from child-head households.

Child-headed household is readily growing phenomenon globally, Africa, East Africa in general and in particularly mainly due to increased death rates of parents caused by HIV and AIDS. This issue of assuming adult roles early in life has caused a big problem on children's socio-emotional development. Most of them drop out of school, engage in drugs, early marriages and vices with the same problem. This implies a heavy economic burden on the children as they have o maintain their started families, and they mostly engage in criminating activities so that they survive the burden as they rarely get assistance to survive the burden and response from the community and other agencies rarely reach them and are poorly understood and felt.

Pre-school learners in Musengo Zone have constantly manifested instances of poorly developed socio skills. They have also manifested erratic instances of interpersonal relations, leadership and cooperation skills. That is, learners have manifested poor relations with peers, teachers and parents, poor coordination, turn-taking and sharing skills. They usually withdraw from the activities that the other children in school or in the neighborhood engage in.

This issue of assuming adult roles early in life has caused a big problem on the children's social skills development since majority of them end up dropping out of school, engaging in drugs, early marriages and other vices associated with the above problem. Although these cases are rampant, no single study has been carried out on the influence of child-headed

family formations on the development of interpersonal skills in Musengo Zone, hence the researchers identified this gap for the study.

3. Research question

What is the influence of child headed family formations on the development of interpersonal relations among pre-school learners in Musengo zone?

4. Review of related literature

United Nations Children's Fund (2007) defines a child-headed household as one where the head of the family and main caregiver is a minor under the age of 18. These minors have to provide for the family and take on the responsibilities of adults as their parents have passed and they have no relatives to take care of them in. In South Africa, UNICEF reports an estimated 3.7 million orphans with many more children living with sick or bedridden caregivers unable to provide them with the financial and social support required for optimal education and growth.

Child-headed family formation, also known as parentification is linked to social difficulties particularly lower competency in interpersonal relationships (Hooper, 2007). As well as academic problems such as high absenteeism and poor grades (Mechilling, 2011). If left unresolved, these symptoms of maladjustment can continue into adulthood, causing further dysfunction throughout the parentified individual's lifespan. Despite the fact that there are known effects of parentification on individuals during childhood, such as those listed above, currently there has been limited research in this area. Instead the majority of research conducted has focused solely on the effects of childhood parentification on individual characteristics in adulthood. (Katz, 2009).

Specifically, it has been shown to impede identify development and personality formation and to affect interpersonal relationships, including those with one's own children. It has also been found to be associated with later attachment issues, mental illness, psychological distress, mesochistic and narcissistic personality disorders, substance abuse and one's academic and career choices (Earley & Cushway, 2002).

McElwain (2005) argues that emotional and instrumental parentification may prove beneficial for individuals in adulthood. Specifically, it can lead to greater interpersonal competence and stronger family cohesion as well as higher levels of individual differentiation from family and self-masterly and autonomy when the child experiences low level of

parentification and when the efforts of the child are recognized and rewarded by adult figures (Hooper, 2007).

The vast array of research on attachment has demonstrated that a child's sense of security, overall well-being and especially connections to others are dependent upon the early mother-child relationship and the internal working models created from this relationship (Hooper, 2007). Due to the social support unavailability and irregularity of parents, insecure attachment is typically formed (Ainsworth, 1978). This relationship as it appears to the child through the process of parentification, is internalized, fostering future attachment issues throughout childhood and into adulthood (Earley & Cushway, 2002). These individuals often experience anxiety over abandonment and loss and demonstrate difficulty handling rejection and disappointment within interpersonal relationships (Katz, 2009). This is also expressed through depressive symptoms in adulthood and social problems during early childhood regardless of child gender.

5. Research methodology

The study used descriptive survey design which is conclusive in nature. As per the records of data held in Musengo zonal office, (Ministry of Education), the zone has 25 ECDE centers which will be targeted by this study, 25 head teachers, 56 ECDE teachers, 25 parent representatives and 800 pre-school children all totaling to 906 as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Target population of the study

Categories	Target population
Head teachers	25
ECDE Teachers	56
Parents' representatives	25
ECDE learners	800
Total	906

Researcher used content limit theory which states that, for any sample size less than 30 percent, sampling distribution of means is approximately a normal distribution irrespective of the population (Kothari, 2005). From the central limit, therefore, the researcher sampled 145 respondents that is 16% of the 906. The researcher then applied stratified sampling to create 5 strata based on the number of the sub-zones in Musengo zone. From each sub- zone, 1 head teacher, 3 ECDE teachers was selected using purposive sampling. At the same time 1 parent representative and 24 ECDE learners were selected using simple random sampling. This was appropriate since it eliminated bias and favoritism. The sampling, procedure enabled the

researcher to realize a sample size of 5 head teachers, 15 ECDE teachers, 5 parent representatives and 120 ECD learners.

Table 2: Sample size

Category size per sub-zone	Target population	Sample size	Sample
Head teachers	**25**	**5**	**1**
ECDE teachers	**56**	**15**	**3**
Parent representatives	**25**	**5**	**1**
ECDE learners	**800**	**120**	**24**
Total		906	145
29			

Source: Researcher (2016)

According to Guba & Linocolin (1985) a test has to be credible in that both its qualitative and quantitative nature should indicate a correlation coefficient expression of the degree of relationship between two sets of scores by numbers ranging from + 1.00 to 1.00. They further assert that a correlation by a coefficient 1.00 lays midways between these extremes and indicates no relationship between the two sets of cores.

Quantitative data wasthen entered into the computer for analysis using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Frequencies (f) and percentages (%) obtained from the SPSS output was used to discuss the findings. Tables were used to present the data. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically. In the analysis of data research questions, all items focusing on a given research question was analyzed together and conclusions made. Data from the observation schedule was qualitative and hence was tied with the analysis of the quantitative data.

6. Results

This study sought to examine the influence of child headed family formations on the development of interpersonal relations among pre-school learners in Musengo zone. The respondents were requested to indicate whether the orphaned and vulnerable children had challenges in relating with their peers. The responses were presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Challenges in Relationships

Have challenges	Frequency	Percent
Yes	12	80.0
No	3	20.0
Total	**15**	**100.0**

According to a majority (80%) of respondents, the orphaned and vulnerable children have challenges in relating with their peers. The researcher further sought to determine who among

the orphaned and vulnerable children had challenges in relating with other children. The results were presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Most Difficult in Relating

People	Frequency	Percent
Peers	6	40.0
Parents	4	26.7
Teachers	3	20.0
Adults	2	13.3
Total	**15**	**100.0**

Table 4, shows that majority (40%) of the respondents indicated that the orphaned and vulnerable children have challenges in relating with their peers. The other groups were the parents (26.7%), teachers (20%) and adults (13.3%). This agrees with Hooper (2014), who asserts that parentified children may struggle with lingering resentment, explosive anger and difficulty in forming trusting relationship with peers, issues which often follow them into adulthood. Forming close, trusting romantic and spousalrelationship may be particularly difficult.

From the check list data, it was established that the orphaned and vulnerable children had a problem in interacting with their peers because they looked withdrawn and were not very cooperative while in school.

The researcher further requested the respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the statements given in Table 4 using a five-likert scale with1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Neutral, 4 = Disagree and 5= Strongly Disagree.

Table 5: Factors Causing Difficulties in Interpersonal Relations

S/No	Factors	1 F %	2 F %	3 F %	4 F %	5 F %	Total F %
1.	Stigmatization	3 20.0	7 46.7	2 13.3	1 6.7	2 13.3	**15** **100**
2.	Lack of role models	2 13.3	9 60.0	2 13.3	1 6.7	1 6.7	**15** **100**
3.	Inadequate basic needs	4 26.7	7 46.7	2 13.3	1 6.7	1 6.7	**15** **100**
4.	Stress due to overload of responsibilities	3 20.0	6 40.0	3 20.0	2 13.3	1 6.7	**15** **100**
5.	Unfriendly living conditions	6 40.0	5 33.3	2 13.3	1 6.7	1 6.7	**15** **100**

Table 5 revealed that majority (60%) of the respondents agreed that lack of role models was the major factor in relating with the orphaned and vulnerable children. Other factors include;

inadequate basic needs (46.7%), stigmatization (46.7%) and Stress due overload of responsibilities. These results agree with the ones from the interview guide for parents and the head teachers. It was reported that, the peers, teachers and parent kept on complaining about the orphaned and vulnerable children character. One head teacher said, "*the orphaned and vulnerable children interaction with the other children is very poor*"

The researcher further sought to establish the association between child headed family formations and the development of interpersonal relations among pre-school learners using Chi-square test. The results were presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.875(a)	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	12.239	4	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.759	1	.003
N of Valid Cases	15		

The results in Table 6 shows that, χ^2 (4, N=15) =11.875, p=0.000.This shows that, there is a significant association between child headed family formations and the development of interpersonal relations among pre-school learners. These results agrees with those of Hooper (2007) who argued that child-headed family formation, also known as parentification is linked to social difficulties particularly lower competency in interpersonal relationships As well as academic problems such as high absenteeism and poor grades.

7. Discussion

The study established that, 80% of the respondents indicated that there was a relationship between child- headed family formations and the development of intrapersonal skills amongst pre-school learners. From the study, 40% of the respondents indicated the orphaned and the vulnerable children have challenges in the relating with their peers. The other groups were the parents 26.7%, teachers 20% and adults 13.3%. This agrees with Hooper (2014) who assets that parentified children may struggle with lingering resentment, explosive anger and difficulty in forming trusting relationship with peers, issues which often follow them into adulthood. Forming close, trusting romantic and spousal relationships may be particularly difficult

8. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that, the orphaned and vulnerable children have challenges in relating with their peers, parents, teachers and adults.

This was attributed to lack of role models which isa major factor incausing difficulties in relating with the orphaned and vulnerable children and other members of the community. Due to their social backgrounds, heavy economic burdens and the great responsibility of heading these families, these children have less opportunities of interacting with their peers hence poor development of their social and interpersonal skills. These children lack basic necessities such as play materials which is a basic component and avenue for interaction and which assist in the development of their interpersonal skills.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers made the following recommendations; the government should identify the orphaned and vulnerable children and support them with all their basic needs instead of paying schools fees only. The ECDE teachers, school community and school administrators should identify data on their number, and the degree of their vulnerability for the purpose of guiding and counseling them in addition to devising mechanism of assisting them with basic necessities.

The non governmental organizations, community Based organizations, and other development partners, the county governments and the Ministry of education should carry out further research on the influence of child-headed family formations on development of interpersonal skills.In addition, they need to come up with strategies of sustaining these children on their physical needs, growth and development aspects and rehabilitation programmes.

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