



Research Article

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Social Challenges to the Education of Orphaned and Vulnerable Children in Eleme, Nigeria

Rosemary I. Eneji

Esther Patrick Archibong

Department of Sociology,
University of Calabar, Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigerian children under prolonged suffering because of loss of parents are faced with several challenges such as dropping out of school; in some cases, they may even be taken out of school to care for the home. In this study, we determined the challenges (financial, emotional and psychological) to the education of orphaned and vulnerable children in Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. All the 396 orphans in orphanages in the study Area constituted the study population. A Questionnaire captioned “the challenges to the education of orphans and vulnerable children, a case study of Eleme Local Government Areas of Rivers State”, was developed for the study. Whether male or female, the children held that financial situations and emotional stress, to a high extent affected their education. The children attempt to cope with these challenges by being frugal, seeking company among themselves, and trying to develop the ability to manage their emotions. Clearly, the provision of access to finance (e.g., through special bursaries and grants) and guidance and counselling professionals will enhance the continuity and performance of orphans and vulnerable children in the schools.

Keywords: Children, orphanhood, education, hardship, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Children younger than 18 years, who have lost their mother, father or both parents from any cause are considered to be orphans (Yanagisawa et al., 2010; Ogina, 2007). Children, who find themselves in a compromising condition because of the death or illness of the guardian who care for them financially or materially, are said to be vulnerable (Whiteside and Sunter, 2000). The vulnerable children include street children, orphans and those affected by war, diseases or disability (World Bank, 2002). The term ‘orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC)’ originated because of the lack of clarity in the definition of orphanhood in the scenario of HIV and AIDS (Skinner et al., 2005), but Subbarao (2004) grouped children whose safety, well-being, and development were threatened, as vulnerable. Absence of care and affection, proper housing, food, education and emotional support are the most important precursors of vulnerability among children, suggesting the kind of vulnerability experienced by children is essentially contextual.

Orphans are peculiar people that deserve educational attention like other children with living parents. A number of Nigerian children are orphaned because of parents being afflicted by human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and AIDS (Manyonganise, 2013), other vulnerable diseases and social

conflicts such as cult-related clashes, communal wars and refugee crises. This often predisposes children to social disadvantages which severely affect their ability to benefit from regular education, thereby worsening the incidence of poverty in the country (Chitiyo et al. 2008). Sub-Saharan Africa had more than 12 million orphans and 9% of the children had lost at least one parent to one severe disease or the other (Nthenya, 2018). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2008) further estimated that the number of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in sub-Saharan Africa grew to more than 16 million in 2011, of which 1,100,000 were in Nigeria.

Nigerian children under prolonged suffering because of loss of parents are faced with several challenges such as dropping out of school; in some cases, they may be taken out of school to care of the home. This is especially true for girl orphans, who are often the first to be tasked with caring for the sick (Mutiso, 2018), often times being forced to relocate in the process and bringing their social networks and education to an abrupt end (UNICEF, 2008). Also, these children often live in homes with poor food security and experience anxiety, molestation, depression and stigmatization (Richter, 2004). Some of the challenges to the education of orphaned and vulnerable children need to be properly understood to adequately proffer solutions to them. The understanding has to be in relation to problems of poverty (Ebersohn and Eloff, 2002; Moletsane, 2003; Leach, 2002; Whiteside, 2000; Giese, 2002).

According to section 15 of the Nigerian Child Rights Act (2003), every child is entitled to free, compulsory and universal basic education. The Act situated the duty of providing this basic education with the government, but each parent or guardian is to ensure that the child attends and completes Primary and Junior Secondary education. However, the situation with orphaned and vulnerable children is often different because they are frequently stigmatized. Also, their conditions have become a barrier to their integration into the mainstream of the society as a result of immobility of resources to provide them with health care, education and adequate shelter. Sometimes, these children grew up in an environment not conducive to their growth and well-being. Also, they are left at the mercy of the extended family that does not even care for their education or psychological and financial well-being. They are thus condemned to the streets to beg for a living, while some engage in prostitution, particularly the orphaned girl child as the boys engage in other criminal activities. In this study, we determined the challenges (financial, emotional and psychological) to the education of orphaned and vulnerable children in Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

2. Methodology

The study was carried out in Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The people in this area are predominantly farmers, oil company staff and civil servants, though some are self-employed. The study population comprised all the 396 orphans in orphanages in Eleme Local Government Area (Rivers State Ministry of women Affairs Records, 2018). Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The sample size (198) for this study was determined using the Percentage method (Felix and Anaele, 2006) thus:

$$\text{Sample size } (n) = \frac{50}{100} \times \frac{396}{1}$$

where $n = 198$.

The samples were randomly selected to minimize bias (Nworgu, 2006).

2.1 Research Instrument

A Questionnaire captioned "the challenges to the education of orphans and vulnerable children, a case study of Eleme Local Government Areas of Rivers State" was developed for the study. It consisted of twenty items, organized into two parts - A and B. Part "A" sought to collect background data on the respondents while part "B" was further divided into four clusters to address the research questions from the respondents: Cluster (1) sought to explore the challenges that OVC face at home and in school that affect them and their education with 5 items; Cluster (2) sought to check the type of challenges that can stop

OVC's education with 5 items; Cluster (3) with five items aimed to determine the tools to be used to effectively manage the challenges to OVC education and help them maximize their ability to the benefit of the society and Cluster (4) with 5 items examined how the government, NGO's and individuals have attempted to support education of the OVC by subsidizing chargeable fees in public schools in the area. Section B also contained response items with 4-point numerical values assigned as follows: strongly agree (SA) 4 points; agree (A) 3 points; disagree (D) 2 points; and strongly disagree (SD) 1 point (Eneji and Attah, 2018). The questionnaire was subjected to face/content validation to ensure that it could adequately measure the variables for which it was designed. Its reliability was also determined twice through the test retest method on 20 respondents, who were not part of the sample size, within two weeks' interval. The two sets of scores were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r), yielding an acceptable reliability index of 0.82.

2.2 Data Analysis

For analyzing the research questions and testing the hypotheses, the mean, standard deviation, and Z-test of the numerical values were determined using a statistical software (SPSS version 22). The decision rule considered a mean score of ≤ 1.49 as very low extent (VLE), 1.50 – 2.49 as low (LE), 2.50 – 3.49 as high (HE) and ≥ 3.50 as very high extent (VHE). The decision of the tested hypotheses was taken by comparing the Z-calculated value with the Z-tabulated value at the 5% level of probability.

3. Results and Discussion

The perception of orphans and vulnerable children by sex on how financial challenges affect their education in Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers State is summarized in Table 1. The grand means for both male and female respondents were higher than the decision mean of 2.5 (that is 2.95, 2.99 > 2.50), an indication that both groups shared the same opinion that financial situations to a high extent affected their education. This is buttressed by the item by item analyses, showing the mean ratings for both groups to be higher than the bench mark of 2.5 with low standard deviations, which implies the homogeneity of responses. However, it was only in item 1 that the male respondents were indifferent in their opinion with the female respondents. The data, to a large extent, proved that financial challenges do affect the education of orphans and vulnerable children in Eleme local government area, Rivers state, Nigeria, as reported elsewhere (Dorcias and Pius, 2018). Therefore, there is need for redoubling of efforts by local government and donor agencies to improve the performance of the orphanages through adequate funding.

Table 1: Mean (\pm std. deviation) responses of male and female orphans on the effect of financial challenges to them in Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers State.

S/N	Item Statement	Male (n = 102)		Female (n = 93)	
		\bar{X}_1	Remark	\bar{X}_2	Remark
1	One of the problems facing me in school is that our expenses on books exceed what is usually given us.	2.48=1.23	LE	2.53=1.28	HE
2	Sometimes, I can't buy all my books because of insufficient money.	3.20=1.02	HE	3.22=1.07	HE
3	I cannot concentrate on my study due to financial problems.	3.21=0.66	HE	3.18=0.67	HE
4	I am unable to get the desired items for school due lack of money.	2.92=0.89	HE	3.01=0.89	HE
Grand Mean/SD		2.95=0.95	HE	2.99=0.98	HE

Source: Researchers' Field Result, 2020

Responses as to the extent to which emotional challenges affect the children’s education are shown in Table 2. The grand means of the numerical values for both male and female orphans exceeded the decision mean of 2.5 (that is 2.97, 3.00 > 2.50), an indication that both groups shared the same opinion that emotional challenges affected their education to a high extent. This is further confirmed by the itemized analyses, showing mean ratings for both groups exceeding the bench mark of 2.5 with low standard deviations which indicates the homogeneity of responses. Teresa (2016) found that emotional trauma and other psychological issues still hindered the attainment of quality education even when mechanisms were employed to support OVC attain basic education.

Table 2: Mean (\pm std. deviation) responses of male and female orphans to the effect of emotional challenges on their education.

S/N	Item statement	Male (n=102)		Female (n=93)	
		\bar{X}	Remark	\bar{X}	Remark
1	I thought about how people feel about me when I am in school and so I do not concentrate on my studies.	2.62 \pm 1.19	HE	2.70 \pm 1.20	HE
2	My mood usually changes when I see other children whose parents are alive.	2.52 \pm 1.24	HE	2.57 \pm 1.29	HE
3	I am also afraid that I can't complete my school because there is nobody to sponsor me.	3.19 \pm 1.07	HE	3.20 \pm 1.12	HE
4	Anytime my teachers bully me for wrong doing, I usually thought about my late parents.	3.56 \pm 0.67	HE	3.52 \pm 0.69	HE
Grand Mean SD		2.97 \pm 1.04	HE	3.00 \pm 1.08	HE

Source: Researchers’ Field Result, 2020

Table 3 shows the extent to which psychological challenges affect the education of the orphans and vulnerable children. Again, the grand means for both male and female respondents exceeded the decision mean of 2.5 (that is 3.31, 3.30 > 2.50), suggesting that both groups shared the same opinion that to a high extent, psychological challenges affected their education. The itemized analyses further confirmed this as mean ratings for both groups were higher than the bench mark of 2.5 with low standard deviations which indicated high agreements between responses. This is consistent with previous reports elsewhere (Teresa, 2016).

Table 3: Mean (\pm std. deviation) responses of male and female orphans on the effect of Psychological challenges to their education in Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State.

S/N	Item Statement	Male (n=102)		Female (n=93)	
		\bar{X}_1	Remark	\bar{X}_2	Remark
1	I usually experience anxiety disorders every day in school, so I cannot concentrate.	3.29 \pm 0.62	HE	3.29 \pm 0.63	HE
2	Our givers do not give us attention; sometimes I can't concentrate when I remember it.	2.93 \pm 0.90	HE	3.02 \pm 0.90	HE
3	The trauma of not having parents keeps affecting my studied.	3.53 \pm 0.71	HE	3.45 \pm 0.73	HE
4	I feel stigmatized, so I am always depressed and I can't concentrate on my study.	3.50 \pm 0.70	HE	3.45 \pm 0.72	HE
Grand Mean/SD		3.31 \pm 0.73	HE	3.30 \pm 0.75	HE

Source: Researchers’ Field Result, 2020

Some of the coping strategies and solutions these challenges as proposed by the victims themselves are shown in Table 4. The grand means, whether for male or female respondents, was higher than the decision mean of 2.5 (that is 3.22, 3.24 > 2.50), indicating that both groups shared the

same opinion that to a high extent, all the itemized solutions could address the challenges identified.

Table 4: Mean (\pm std. deviation) responses of male and female orphaned and vulnerable children on solutions to challenges to their education in Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria.

S/N	Item Statement	Male (n=102)		Female(n=93)	
		\bar{X}_1	Remark	\bar{X}_2	Remark
1	I am trying to develop the ability to manage my emotions	3.20 \pm 1.05	HE	3.22 \pm 1.10	HE
2	By managing the little money given to me for my schooling.	3.25 \pm 0.61	HE	3.25 \pm 0.62	HE
3	By reducing the occurrence of daily engrossed thinking.	2.89 \pm 0.93	HE	2.98 \pm 0.93	HE
4	I do avoid staying alone in school in order not to be stigmatized.	3.54 \pm 0.68	HE	3.49 \pm 0.70	HE
Grand Mean/SD		3.22\pm0.82	HE	3.24\pm0.84	HE

Source: Researchers' Field Result, 2020

4. Test of Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is a negligible difference between the mean response of orphaned and vulnerable boys and girls with regards to the effect of financial problems on their education in Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Table 5: z-test Analysis of differences between male and female orphans opinion on the effect of financial challenges to the education of orphans and vulnerable children in Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	Z-cal	Z-crit	α	Remarks
Male	102	2.97	1.04	-0.198	1.96	0.05	Accepted H ₀
Female	93	3.00	1.08				

Source: Researchers' Field Result, 2020

The analysis shows a Z – calculated value of -0.198 which is less than the Z- critical value of 1.96 and since the computed value is less than the table value, it is insignificant which confirms the stated null hypothesis. Consequently, the null hypothesis which says there is no significant different between the mean response of the male and female orphans regarding the effect of financial challenges to the education of orphans and vulnerable children in Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State is accepted and the alternative hypothesis is rejected. However, any observed difference can be attributed to sampling error.

Ho₂: There is a negligible difference between the mean response of orphaned and vulnerable boys and girls with regards to the effect of emotional problems on their education in Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Table 6: z-test Analysis of differences between male and female orphans on the effect of emotional challenges to the education of orphans and vulnerable children in Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	Z-cal	Z-crit	α	Remarks
Male	102	2.95	0.95	-0.29	1.96	0.05	Accepted H ₀
Female	93	2.99	0.98				

Source: Researchers' Field Result, 2020

The analysis shows a Z – calculated value of -0.29 which is less than the Z- critical value of 1.96 and since the computed value is less than the table value, it is not significant which confirms the stated null hypothesis. Sequel to the above facts, the null hypothesis which says there is no significant different between the mean response of the male and female orphans regarding the effect of emotional challenges to the education of orphans and vulnerable children in Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State is accepted while the alternative hypothesis is rejected. However, any observed difference can be attributed to sampling error.

Ho₃: There is a negligible difference between the mean response of orphaned and vulnerable boys and girls with regards to the effect of psychological problems on their education in Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Table 7: z–test Analysis of differences between male and female orphans on the effect of psychological challenges to the education of orphans and vulnerable children in Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	Z-cal	Z-crit	α	Remarks
Male	102	3.11	0.73	0.094	1.96	0.05	Accepted H ₀
Female	93	3.13	0.75				

Source: Researchers’ Field Result, 2020

The analysis shows a Z – calculated value of 0.094 which is less than the Z- critical value of 1.96 and since the computed value is less than the table value, it is not significant which confirms the stated null hypothesis. Consequently, the null hypothesis that there is no significant different between the mean response of the male and female orphans regarding the effect of Psychological challenges to the education of orphans and vulnerable children in Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State is accepted.

Ho₄: There is a negligible difference between the mean response of orphaned and vulnerable boys and girls to the various solutions to challenges to their education in Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Table 8. z–test Analysis of differences between male and female orphans on the various solutions to challenges to the education of orphans and vulnerable children in Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	Z-cal	Z-crit	α	Remarks
Male	102	3.22	0.82	-0.076	1.96	0.05	Accepted H ₀
Female	93	3.24	0.84				

Source: Researchers’ Field Result, 2020

The analysis shows a z – calculated value of 0.076 which is less than the Z- critical value of 1.96 and since the computed value is less than the table value, it is not significant which confirms the stated null hypothesis. Consequently, the null hypothesis that there is a negligible difference between the mean response of orphaned and vulnerable boys and girls as concerns the various solutions to problems connected with their education, is accepted while the alternative is rejected; any observed difference can only be attributed to sampling error.

5. Conclusion

The study investigated the challenges to the education of orphans and vulnerable children in Eleme LGA, Rivers State, Nigeria. The challenges were financial, emotional and psychological. Therefore,

providing access to finance (e.g., through special bursaries and grants) and guidance and counselling professionals will enhance the continuity and performance of orphans and vulnerable children in schools.

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