



THE CHALLENGES OF ORPHANS AS VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN OREDO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

According to the report of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the joint UN program (2015), 7.6% children of the total population of the world are orphans. The objectives of this study are among others to examine the challenges facing orphans; and identify the services provided for orphans as vulnerable children in Oredo Local Government Edo State. The research design adopted in this study was the survey research design. The study population was the orphans in Oredo Local Government Area, Benin City. One hundred (100) orphans were drawn via purposive sampling technique from orphanage Homes. The findings of this study revealed that orphans were exposed to neglect, violence, exploitation and all forms of abuse. The study also revealed that the Non-Governmental Organizations intervention in assisting the Orphans as Vulnerable Children, OVC is not only necessary but also an indication of societal positive response to the situation and government failure to provide a comprehensive and realistic community oriented framework for the OVC. Furthermore, social workers involvement is needed in ameliorating the problems of the OVC in Edo State. Finally, it was recommended that Government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social workers should raise awareness about orphans as vulnerable children at all levels through advocacy and social mobilization. Both the civil society and the media should spread informed messages about orphans as vulnerable children.

Keywords: *Orphan, Vulnerable Children, Non-Governmental Organization, Social Workers, Oredo Local Government*



I NTRODUCTION

The 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey revealed that there are 17.5 million Orphans and Vulnerable Children, OVC nationwide. At some point, the burden of OVC in Nigeria was worse than in war prone countries like Syria, Sudan and Somalia (The Centre for Children in Crisis, CENCHIC, 2014). Among the continents in the world, Africa is recognized as the largest continent with a higher proportion of vulnerable children (Garba, 2017). Orphans and vulnerable children face problems such as hunger, physical and psychological abuse, lack of access to health and education, lack of love and affection.

Nigeria has one of the largest populations of orphans in the world. Out of the estimated 52 million children in 2011, about 5.4 million (10.3%) of the Nigerian children were orphans, and 995,000 (18.4% of the orphans) were orphaned due to AIDS, making Nigeria, as of 2011, the country with the probable highest number of AIDS orphans in the world. In 2013 alone, 800,000 children orphaned by AIDS were added to the estimated 7 million orphans Nigeria (UNICEF, 2013). There are wide variations across regions and communities in the prevalence and burden of orphans

and other children (OVC). Studies in various African countries have demonstrated that OVC are unevenly distributed across communities (Birmingham, 2021). In countries with time-series household surveys, a trend emerged indicating that the burden of orphan dependency on working adult members of the family had increased disproportionately in rural areas while remaining constant or declining in urban area. This suggests a shift of the economic and social burdens from urban to rural thereby increasing the child's vulnerability in the latter.

The surveys also revealed that in sub-Saharan Africa, non-relative child fostering (once an uncommon practice) has increased in some countries. Evidence also exists to show that orphans are more vulnerable than non-orphans. Studies have indicated that educational outcomes and nutritional status of orphans are worsening. A cross-country data assembled by UNICEF, 2013 showed that children who are double-orphans are less likely to be in school than non-orphans.

Badamasiu (2015) found that in Nigeria, maternal orphans and children in households with recent adult deaths delayed primary school enrolment. The study further revealed that the loss of either parent or the death of other bread-winning adults in the family setting



produced a negative effect on the growth of such children and sometimes resulted in stunted growth

Orphanhood and the problems it poses for countries and communities required a combination of national and targeted interventions. In many countries, public responses to orphan crisis have been very slow. However, in some countries, governments have enhanced social protection programs for orphans. In Nigeria, there has been a history of efforts by the Government, United Nations Children Fund, UNICEF, Save the Children (UK), and other Agencies to address the needs of children particularly those in need of special protection.

Unfortunately, many children continue to be deprived of the full enjoyment or access to their fundamental rights in Nigeria. Factors in contemporary Nigeria such as inadequate public social services, high rate of poverty in the population, incidences of harmful traditional practices (HTP), gender inequalities, and inadequate policies, (though these are in the process of being developed), have made many children vulnerable to abuse of their rights despite meaningful efforts which have been put in place to ensure the achievement of the rights of children (UNICEF, 2013).

Orphanage homes play a significant role in the educational development

of children in Primary Schools. Children in orphanages often face challenges that can affect their educational development. These challenges include lack of individual attention, limited resources. In a similar vein, a study by Derefaka (2014) found that children in orphanages often lag behind their peers in school. The study attributed this to the lack of a stable family environment, which is crucial for the cognitive and emotional development of children. However, the study also noted that orphanages that provide a nurturing and stimulating environment can help bridge this gap.

On the other hand, a study by Birmingham (2015) found that children in orphanages often excel in school due to the structured environment and the emphasis on education. The study found that these children often have higher levels of discipline and are more focused on their studies compared to their peers. This is attributed to the structured environment in orphanages, which often includes set times for study and homework. However, a study by Badamasiu (2014) found that the quality of education in orphanages often depends on the resources available. The study found that orphanages with limited resources often struggle to provide a quality education for their children. This includes lack of



textbooks, inadequate teaching staff, and poor infrastructure.

Statement of the Problem

UNICEF (2013) defines orphan as a child less than 18 years of age who has lost one or both parents to any cause of death reports that, there are nearly 140 million orphans globally in 2022. This figure includes 61 million in Asia, 52 million in Africa, 10 million in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 73 million in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. From these statistics, it can be deduced that, Asia and Africa have the majority of orphans in the World. The figure represents children with either parents or only one parent dead. Out of the 140 million children classified as orphans, 15.1 million have lost both parents. This shows that majority of the orphans are living with a surviving parent or other family member. By considering the social and economic disadvantages confronting the orphans, these statistics become a key developmental issue to look at. In addition, there are other larger group of children who are vulnerable as a result of poverty and other developmental challenges.

The impact of orphanage homes on the educational development of children in primary schools is multifaceted. While orphanages can provide a structured and supportive environment that can enhance the

educational outcomes of children, they can also pose challenges that can hinder their educational development. Therefore, it is crucial for orphanages to have adequate resources and a stable environment to ensure the educational development of their children.

The Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, FMWASD (2018) estimated that there were 17.5 million orphans and vulnerable children nationwide. The children face enormous challenges to their health and development and it is estimated that 95 percent of orphans and vulnerable children do not receive any form of medical, emotional, social, material or school-related assistance (National Population Commission, Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). Institutional care has remained in use even after researchers have found it to be undesirable and the least option for the continuum of care. It is then the second best alternative to children in need of care.

These orphans as vulnerable children are usually cared for in institutional homes set up by either the government or private agencies, which provide some semblance of order into their lives. Efficiently caring for the materialistic needs of the children cause individuals to



ignore the psychological needs of these children. International and national children's rights groups argue that institutional care compromises children's future as well as cheat them of their future. They also report that child care facilities pose serious threats to the psycho-social, emotional and in some severe cases, physical well-being of children. A number of problems may arise in these institutional homes, such as; the problems of overcrowding, inadequate personal attention, poor academic environment, frequent moves which may affect the psychosocial health of these children.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- a) examine the challenges of orphans as vulnerable children in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State;
- b) identify the services provided for orphans as vulnerable children in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State;
- c) determine the role of Government in the care of orphans as vulnerable children in Oredo Local Government, Edo State;
- d) determine the roles of non-governmental organizations in the care of orphans as vulnerable

children in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State; and e) explore the social work intervention strategies to mitigate the challenges of orphans and vulnerable children in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State;

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

- a) What are the challenges of orphans as vulnerable children in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State?
- b) What are the services provided for orphans as vulnerable children in Oredo Local Government, Edo State?
- c) What are the roles of Government organization on the care for orphans as vulnerable children in Oredo Local Government, Edo State?
- d) What are the roles of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the care of orphans as vulnerable children in Oredo LGA, Edo State?
- e) What are the social work intervention strategies to mitigate the challenges of orphans as vulnerable children in Oredo LGA, Edo State?



Methodology

The research design adopted in this study is the survey research design. The study population was the orphans as vulnerable children in Oredo Local Government Area, Benin City. One hundred (100) orphans were drawn via purposive sampling technique from orphanage Homes. Purposive sampling refers to a group of non-probability sampling techniques in which units are selected because they are the characteristics that the researchers need in the study population. Data was obtained or generated through the use of structured questionnaires.

To determine the validity of the research instrument, content validity was adopted. To determine whether the questionnaire was valid, at least two experts certified the instrument. The respondents were informed that their responses would be treated with utmost confidentiality. All questionnaires distributed were filled and collected back for the purpose of analysis. The main statistical method used was the descriptive statistics, that is; frequency count, simple percentage method, mean and standard deviation.

Results

Table 1: Demographic data of respondents

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Below 10 Years	13	13
10-14 Years	68	68
14-18 Years	19	19
TOTAL	100	100
Sex		
Female	29	29
Male	71	71
Total	100	100
Class		
Primary	76	76
Secondary	24	24
Total	100	100
Religion		
Islam	40	40
Christianity	60	60
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024



Table 1 above shows age distribution of the respondents. The result therefore revealed that respondents who were below 10 years accounted for 13% of the total respondents. Respondents who were 10-14 years accounted for 68% of the respondents, while those between 14-18 years accounted for 19% of the entire respondents. This shows that the respondents who were between 10-14 years were the highest among the respondents engaged for the study. The result from the above table equally shows the sex distribution of the respondents. The result therefore revealed that there were more males than females as the female

respondents accounted for 29% of the population while male respondents accounted for 71% of the total respondents for the study. Also from the table 1 above, the result shows that primary school amounted to 76% of the population while secondary school accounted to 24% of the population. This implies that there were more respondents in Primary Schools than in Secondary Schools. The table also shows the religion of the respondents. The result revealed that there were more Christians than Muslims, as Christians accounted for 60% of the population while Muslims accounted for 40% of the population.

Table 2: Challenges of Orphans as Vulnerable Children

S/N	Item	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1	My parents/guardian do not provide most of my needs/school materials because they do not have enough money	100	2.84	0.92	Accepted
2	I have to sell things before or after school.	100	2.54	0.81	Accepted
3	My parents/guardian gets angry easily when I ask for money	100	2.91	1.24	Accepted
4	My parents are jobless and as a result they don't have money to give to me	100	2.70	0.91	Accepted
Grand mean		100	2.76	0.97	Accepted

N=100 Criterion mean=2.5



Table 2 shows a grand means of 2.76 was obtained for the four items and standard deviation of 0.97, with criterion value of 2.5. From this analysis, the grand mean value is greater than the criterion value which agrees that parents/guardian do not provide most of my needs/school materials because they do not have enough money. This is supported with the work of (Subbarao, 2015). Lack of care and affection, adequate shelter, nutrition, education and psychological support are some of the most important factors that accentuate the vulnerability of children.

Table 3: Services Provided for Orphans as Vulnerable Children

S/N	Item	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
5.	Do you have a pair of shoes	100	2.85	1.11	Accepted
6	Do you have two sets of school uniform	100	2.52	0.87	Accepted
7	Do you have a bed to sleep on	100	2.68	0.91	Accepted
8	Do you have a blanket	100	2.00	0.73	Rejected
	Grand mean	100	2.51	0.92	Accepted

N=100 Criterion mean=2.5

The table shows a grand mean of 2.51 was obtained for the four items and a standard deviation of 0.92, with a criterion value of 2.5. From this analysis, the grand mean value is greater than the criterion value which agrees that the services provided for orphans as vulnerable children were not adequate.

Table 4: The role of Government in the care of Orphans as Vulnerable Children

S/N	Item	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
9	Do you have access to any entertainment gadgets like TV, sound system, computers or videogames	100	2.89	0.95	Accepted
10	Do you have access to	100	2.06	0.79	Rejected



	clothing and food as at when you need				
11	Is there any medical care when you are sick	100	2.82	0.86	Accepted
12	Are your rooms spacious for you and your roommates	100	2.00	0.67	Rejected
	Grand means	100	2.66	0.81	Accepted

N=100 Criterion mean=2.5

Table 4 shows a grand mean of 2.66 was obtained for the four items and a standard deviation of 0.81, with a criterion value of 2.5. From this analysis, the grand mean value is greater than the criterion value which shows that Government has a role to play in the care of orphans as vulnerable children. This is in line with the position of UNICEF, 2013. Orphans suffer emotional stress; higher levels of anxiety, depression,

and anger, along with the associated inactivity induced by depression; feelings of hopelessness and thoughts of suicide due to the hardships they face after a parent dies. Research evidence also shows that orphans face many psychosocial challenges that involve the lack of parental guidance, love care, and acceptance in the new families they join (Mishra, 2008).

Table 5: The Role of Non-Government Organizations (NGOS)

S/N	Item	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
13	Do you get cared for when lonely	100	3.29	1.06	Accepted
14	Do you make friends easily at school	100	2.54	0.85	Accepted
15	Do you receive all your needs as I request from your care givers	100	2.81	0.91	Accepted
16	Are you supported when you are unhappy and emotionally down	100	2.77	0.74	Accepted
	Grand means	100	2.92	0.89	Accepted

N=100 Criterion mean=2.5



Table 5 Shows a grand mean of 2.92 was obtained for the four items and a standard deviation of 0.89, with a criterion value of 2.5. From this analysis, the grand mean value is greater than the criterion value which shows that Orphans as vulnerable children face challenges.

Table 6: Research Question Five: Interventions

S/N	Item	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
17	Does the Care giver give you some preferences because you are a male or female?	100	2.82	1.01	Accepted
18	Does anyone care to help you when you have a problem	100	2.52	0.79	Accepted
19	Do caregivers give you audience and attempt to solve your problem	100	2.56	0.95	Accepted
20	Does the Care giver give you some preferences because you are a male or female?	100	2.89	1.06	Accepted
	Grand means	100	2.69	0.95	Accepted

N=100 Criterion mean=2.5

The table above shows a grand mean of 2.69 was obtained for the four items and a standard deviation of 0.95, with a criterion value of 2.5. From this analysis, the grand mean value is greater than the criterion value which agrees that available interventions that can be used to support orphans to realize their personal dreams. This is in line with the work of Birmingham (2015) who argued that in the fight for orphans as vulnerable children, everybody's contribution is needed. Further, the role of the extended family, the local community and the

government to provide the necessary assistance cannot be over emphasized.

Discussion of Findings

The result shows a grand means of 2.76 was obtained for the four items and standard deviation of 0.97, with criterion value of 2.5. From this analysis, the grand mean value is greater than the criterion value which agrees that parents/guardian do not provide most of my needs/school materials because they do not have enough money. This is supported with the work of



(Subbarao, 2015). Lack of care and affection, adequate shelter, nutrition, education and psychological support are some of the most important factors that accentuate the vulnerability of children

The result also indicates a grand mean of 2.51 was obtained for the four items and a standard deviation of 0.92, with a criterion value of 2.5. From this analysis, the grand mean value is greater than the criterion value which agrees that to the services provided for orphans and vulnerable. This is in line with the work of Jasen (2010) argues that deteriorating environmental conditions have had profound impact on infants and children. He further asserts that “all children are exposed from the pre-natal phase, to a barrage of environmental threats to their health and survival. It costs millions of children their lives and impedes the growth and progress of countless others. This means, if all children are exposed to environmental threats, then orphans are more exposed because among many other disadvantages, they lack care and support.

The result reveals a grand mean of 2.66 was obtained for the four items and a standard deviation of 0.81, with a criterion value of 2.5. From this analysis, the grand mean value is greater than the criterion value which agrees that NGOS and Government have roles to play. This

is in line with the work of UNICEF, 2013 Orphans suffer emotional stress; higher levels of anxiety, depression, and anger, along with the associated inactivity induced by depression; feelings of hopelessness and thoughts of suicide due to the hardships they face after a parent dies. Research evidence also shows that orphans face many psychosocial challenges that involve the lack of parental guidance, love care, and acceptance in the new families they join (Mishra, 2008).

The results indicate a grand mean of 2.92 was obtained for the four items and a standard deviation of 0.89, with a criterion value of 2.5. From this analysis, the grand mean value is greater than the criterion value which agrees that orphans as vulnerable children face challenges.

Finally, the result shows a grand mean of 2.69 was obtained for the four items and a standard deviation of 0.95, with a criterion value of 2.5. From this analysis, the grand mean value is greater than the criterion value which agrees that available interventions that can be used to support orphans to realize their personal dreams. This is in line with the work of Birmingham (2015) who argued that in the fight for orphans, everybody's contribution is needed, which is to say everybody has a role to play. We acknowledge the role of the extended family, the local



community and the government to provide the necessary help especially in the case of vulnerable children and AIDS orphans who are steadily increasing in number. Thus, social workers within knowledge base and experiences will carry out their roles as teachers, brokers, advocates, enablers, facilitators, conveners, planners, and trainers.

Conclusion

The whole study has shown the general state of being or conditions of orphans as vulnerable children in Edo State. The conditions are deplorable and therefore the children are exposed to neglect, violence, exploitation and all forms of abuse. The major causes of orphans' condition are conflict between maternal and paternal relatives of the children: either separated, divorced, paternal orphaned, maternal orphaned or disruption in the extended family structure. The study indicated that the phenomenon of orphans' vulnerability is increasing due to many factors including poverty, population explosion, illiteracy, a general breakdown in family values and HIV.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government, NGOs and social workers should raise the awareness of orphans as vulnerable children at all levels through advocacy and social mobilization. Both the civil society and the media should spread informed messages about orphans as vulnerable children;
2. Government, NGOs and social workers to strengthen the capacity of families and communities to support, protect and care for orphans as vulnerable children. The government has to create favourable atmosphere for the parents or relatives to provide welfare for the orphans. It is therefore, a responsibility to be shared among the families, community and the government;
3. Government, NGOs and social workers should continue to increase the access of vulnerable children in relation to essential services (health, education, nutrition, medical, shelter);
4. Government, NGOs and social workers should enhance the capacity of orphans as vulnerable children, especially adolescents, to participate in the process of meeting their own needs;
5. Government should build capacity of stakeholders at all levels to coordinate, plan and leverage resources for most vulnerable children's programmes; and
6. Government to ensure the involvement of trained social workers in the affairs of orphans



and vulnerable children's cases in the society.

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