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# Socio-economic supports available for the education of adolescent girls in child-headed families in the Kingdom of Eswatini: Policy Implication for Educational Evaluators

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## **Abstract**

*The study sought the socio-economic supports available for the high school adolescent girl learners from child-headed families (CHF). The study used the phenomenological research design using a total of 40 learners from five (5) rural schools which were randomly selected for the study. Data were collected using focus group discussions and individual interviews. Data collected were thematically analyzed by scrutinizing them for commonalities. The findings of the study revealed that the adolescent girls in CHF receive the majority of their socio-economic supports from the communities and non-governmental organizations while the government does not do much for them in terms of their socio-economic needs for their education. Hence, the participants expected from government full support for them in terms of their educational socio-economic needs. These findings have policy implications for educational evaluators across the globe. This implies that educational evaluators in conjunction with the appropriate government authority need to come up workable policy document to submit the children from CHF. It was recommended, that the Ministry of education and Training should make frantic efforts to ensure that the educational needs of adolescent girls in CHF are met.*

**Keywords:** Adolescent girls, Child-headed families, Education, Kingdom of Eswatini, Socio-economic supports

## **I. Introduction**

Literature has revealed the emergence of child-headed families (CHF) in Swaziland which is attributed to the increasing number of HIV and AIDS orphans. Child-headed family is a family where both

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parents and guardians are permanently absent and the person responsible for the day to day management of the family is a child aged below twenty- one (21) years. The Government of Swaziland has taken an initiative of affording these children education opportunities by establishing the Orphaned Vulnerable Children (OVC) fund under the Deputy Prime Minister's office in respect of high school students and free primary education (FPE) for those in primary schools. Though these children receive educational support from Government, they remain marginalized as certain aspects of their lives are left un-attendant. Orphans and vulnerable children caused by the effects of HIV and AIDS have made it difficult for the families and communities to cope with the care and support of the affected which compelled the affected to look after themselves giving rise to a new type of family known as the child-headed family (Mogotlane et al., 2010). High rate of HIV and AIDS among the adult population in Swaziland has led to the issue of vulnerable children in The Kingdom of Eswatini (Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini, 2019). Swaziland's education system defines vulnerable children as children who are orphaned, living in child-headed households, and children from poor social and economic backgrounds (Mkhatshwa, 2017).

Despite the variation in the causes of vulnerability, ranging from children living in child-headed households to other factors among children, poverty is a common feature among them (Mkhatshwa, 2017). Many families in Swaziland are faced with poverty which makes it difficult for the country to achieve the First Millennium Development Goal (MDG), of alleviating poverty (Motsa & Morojele, 2018). Based on the everyday school experiences occasioned by the complexities of the young vulnerable children there is a need for research on the issue to promote equitable schooling experiences for such children (Motsa, 2018). Since children are future of any nation, there is the need for the government of any Nation to rethink the nature and extent of support given to children domiciled in Child Headed Households (Makuyana et al., 2020). Thus, the researchers explored the socio-economic supports available for the education of adolescent girls in child-headed families in the Kingdom of Eswatini drawing from the theoretical framework of Erikson's (1963) psychosocial theory of social development.

### ***Theoretical background of the study***

This study was conducted within the theoretical framework of Erikson's (1963) psychosocial theory of social development. According to Erikson personality develops in a predetermined order of psychosocial development, from infancy to adulthood. The person experiences at each stage of the development, a psychosocial crisis which may be positive or negative for his or her personality development. For Erikson, these psychological crises are psychosocial because they involve the psychological needs of the individual (i.e., psycho) which conflict with the needs of society (i.e., social). According to the theory, successful completion of each stage results in a healthy personality and the acquisition of basic virtues but failure to successfully complete a stage results in a reduced ability to complete further stages thereby creating a more unhealthy personality.

Erikson opined that parents must allow their children to explore the limits of their abilities within an encouraging environment which is tolerant of failure. This can be done by parents encouraging the children to become more independent while at the same time protecting the children so that constant failure is avoided. Concerning the present study, it is the belief of the theory that adolescent girls in child-headed families should be assisted by the communities, government, and non-governmental agencies to enable them to successfully

complete their stage of high education. Where this assistance is absent, the adolescent girls are bound to be unsuccessful in their journey of education which invariably will affect their future careers. Child-headed children face socio-economic problems and recommended that child-headed families should be supported by government and other organizations (Gubwe et al, 2015). Children from child-headed families viewed education as a vehicle for their aspired better adult life but held anxieties regarding anticipated lack of support to complete further education (Motsa & Morojele, 2018).

### ***Review of related empirical studies***

Despite that social support networks and personal attributes of adolescents from child-headed households (CHHs) form resilience for their future careers, Leatham (2005) revealed that their physiological needs and physical surrounding are threatening to their well-being. Mogotlane et al. (2010) revealed that the rights of the affected children were compromised by making those heading the households not to attend school often due to domestic chores and lack of food, clothes, money, and shelter. Collins et al. (2014) found that adolescent girls in CHFs were more likely not to attend school than children living at home with a parent due to the lack of their immediate educational needs. Nxumalo (2015) found that some adolescent learners in CHFs experience difficulty in coping with scholastic activities and home life while some displayed resilience and were able to cope quite admirably but a lot still has to be done to empower such children in South Africa. There is a provision of networks of support for child-headed children, but perceptions of hostile adult surveillance were found as an unexpected competing dominant factor (Haley & Bradbury, 2015). Maushe and Mugumbate (2015) established that adolescent girls in CHHs faced immense difficulty in providing for their daily needs including food, education, and clothing due to lack of psychosocial support such as guidance, love, belonging, and protection.

Child-headed families (CHF) adolescent learners lack social support from the relation of other sources and their success at school is dependent on communities, government, or non-governmental organizations taking over their physiological and educational needs (Mpofu & Chihenga, 2016). Lobi and Kheswa (2017) found that adolescent girls in CHHs had unpleasant experiences ranging from early pregnancy, alcohol abuse, school dropout, prostitution, and psychological problems. Adolescent girls in CHFs tend to be relatively more deprived in that they have only the most limited access to opportunities for voice and agency within their families and communities which have an implication on their wellbeing and personal advancement (Chant et al., 2017). Adolescent girls in CHFs lack adequate social support during and after institutional care as a result of the lack of adequate levels of engagement by different transition stakeholders (Mhongera & Lombard, 2017). Shava et al. (2017) revealed that adolescents from child-headed households are faced with a myriad of psychosocial and economic challenges such as hunger, starvation, high school dropouts.

Thwala (2018) found that child-headed adolescent girls experience a lack of poverty, food security, and strained extended family relations but showed resilience despite their adversities. William (2018) found that roles and responsibilities of CHFs have a significant negative relationship with their social-emotional development of pre-school learners and recommended that government and all strategic partners should objectively support such learners to improve their overall educational development. Child-headed children needed basic survival necessities like candles, clothing, and general parental guidance from the community and teachers to assist them to develop well academically (Motsa & Morojele, 2018). Ncamsile (2019) found that

child-headed children had dreams for the future through education, but their resilience proved inadequate to ensure that they attain aspirations and hence needed supports from society. In Lubombo region of Eswatini, Mabuza and Mafumbate (2019) revealed that education was a shared responsibility between the parents/guardians and the school but most of the parents and guardians showed very little interest in their children's learning. Makuyana et al. (2020) revealed that children from child headed households experience poor personal grooming, indecision; sexual violence and unplanned teenage pregnancy; familial and societal neglect.

### *Gaps in literature*

An extensive literature showed that adolescent girls in CHF's in Swaziland experience enormous challenges in their educational careers ranging from physical, sexual abuse to abject poverty. Swaziland, unlike other Southern African countries, has witnessed a low turnout of empirical research on the available socio-economic supports for CHF's adolescent girls. This gap in the literature in the Swaziland context necessitated the researchers' quest for this research.

### *Objectives of the study*

The following objectives were pursued by the researchers.

1. Determine the socio-economic supports that are available for the education of the adolescent girls in child-headed families from their respective communities, Government, and Non-Governmental organisations.
2. Determine the expectations of the adolescent girls in child-headed families from the Government.

### *Research questions*

1. What socio-economic supports are available for the education of the adolescent learners from their respective communities, Government, and Non-Governmental organisations?
2. What are the expectations of the adolescent girls in child-headed families from the Government?

## **II. Methods**

### *Research approach and design*

This study employed a qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach was used for this investigation to compliment the phenomenological research design upon which this study was embedded. The phenomenological research design is an inductive descriptive research method, which examines the individual's experiences in a given situation which for this study were adolescent girls from child-headed families. The central aim of the phenomenological research design is to explicate the essence of the phenomena and its accurate description through everyday experiences of human beings. This design has been used by Thwala et al. (2020), and Baloyi-Mothibeli et al (2021).

### ***Participants' selection***

The target population for this study was adolescent girl learners from child-headed families, whose ages ranged between thirteen (13) and eighteen (18yrs) years from five rural schools located in Nhlanguano in the Shiselweni region. Forty (40) adolescents from child-headed families were participants in the study and were selected from five (5) rural high schools through the assistance of the school principals however their number varied from school to school. This study used a purposive sampling technique in selecting the research participants. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who were to provide the richest information and those who had the characteristics which were required by the researcher in answering the research questions. Figure 1 shows the bar chart of the number of participants from each school.

### ***Instrumentation***

Data collection instruments used were focus group discussions and individual interviews. The focus group discussions were used with the learner participants and individual interviews with those learners who were observed to have rich cases during the focus group discussions and those who asked for privacy. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected, the researchers conducted member checking whereby the same participants were asked the same questions to correct errors. For the sake of credibility in this study, the participants were accorded the opportunity of reading the transcripts of the dialogue in which they had participated. The tape recordings were accurately recorded and were replayed for the same participants of the study.

### ***Data collection procedure***

The focus group discussions and individual interviews were conducted by visiting the five (5) schools during the time which was allocated by the school administration. Classrooms were used for conducting both the focus group discussions and individual interviews. A focus group guide was used which had specific questions relating to child-headed families. The researcher served as a moderator in the focus group discussions. The responses from the focus group discussions were tape-recorded in a bid to capture all information emanating from the discussions and field notes were recorded for corroboration purposes. The notes were recorded under the numerical figures that were given to the participants in their respective schools. This was done to avoid the distortion of information during data analysis. The discussion sessions took between forty-five (45) minutes to one hour thirty (1hr 30) minutes. The discussions progressed smoothly with all the participants contributing to the discussions and they were conducted both in English and SiSwati language hence the element of code-switching. The focus group discussions were conducted in three sections: the opening section, question section, and closing section.

### ***Ethical measures***

A clearance to conduct the study in the five schools was applied for and obtained from the Ministry of Education and Training through the Director of Education and Training. The researchers ensured that consent forms were given to the participants to sign for them to consent to be interviewed, observed, and have their documents looked at. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants' details were ensured by the researchers using pseudonyms. Interviews and observations were conducted as objectively and professionally as possible.

Teachers were also notified from the onset that they were at liberty to drop off at any given point in time from the study and they were not to be questioned about their withdrawal.

### *Data analyses*

All the data from focus group discussions and individual interviews were thematically analyzed using the principles of thematic analysis. The thematic analysis offers a method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data; it also serves to organize and describe data sets that are rich in details. The raw data were organized, prepared, read thoroughly to make meaning the responses of the participants.

## **III. Results**

The results were presented based on the two themes that emerged from the analysis. These themes are socio-economic supports and expectations of adolescent girls in CHF's from government.

### **Theme 1: Socio-economic supports**

The participants in most of the groups revealed that there is zero economic and emotional support from their communities particularly the chiefdoms. All the participants concurred that the chiefdoms do not assist them with anything, neighbours are said to be caring, the church offers spiritual and moral support and only a few receive aid from the Non-Governmental organizations.

Some of the participants in respect of the chiefdoms posited that they have learnt that there are fields which are destined for orphaned children but they do not receive anything from the chiefdoms not even visits to check on them if they are coping with life as the chiefdom is entrusted with the welfare of its subjects irrespective of their status. Neighbours have been described as the most supportive structures in the communities. The neighbours are applauded for offering them food and any form of assistance they need which include spiritual healing and moral education. Most of the participants argued that in the event they run out of candles they ask them from neighbours who give them without any complaint. One learner is quoted having said:

*In the event we fail to secure food for more than two days I then visit our neighbours who in turn give us food, even when we do not have soap our neighbour would give us as long as we have reported (participant # 9, 17yrs, F2, school B).*

Another participant stated as follows:

*If there is no food to eat at home, our neighbour would give us mealie meal and they also give us soap as we sometimes run out of soap in my family ( participant # 5, !4 yrs, F1, school B).*

Another participant had this to say:

*My neighbour is like a mother to me as she would sometimes call me and my sister to her home where she would educate us on how to behave ourselves as girls and further advised us about the importance of education (Gladys, 16yrs, F2, school E).*

The participants also stated that the neighbours assist them by offering them domestic work as the money they get from the domestic work contributes a lot towards purchasing the family's basic needs which include food and they also manage to buy themselves cosmetics from the money they earn from their neighbours.

Some of the participants also expressed the role played by the church towards their lives. They argue that the church has greatly contributed towards their acceptance of the death of their parents as it has managed to support them spiritually. They stated that the church also helps them with moral education and how to conduct themselves as girls. Some of the participants in one school stated that the church has made it its responsibility to pay for the camping fees and at times offers them food after church and also goes to the extent of donating second-hand clothing for them. One participant stated as follows:

*The church teaches us moral values, pays for our camping fees, and sometimes offers us free lunch after church, as a result, I get too much solace from the church (participant # 3, 16 yrs F2, school A).*

A few of the participants stated that they receive grants, food, moral education, gifts, and second-hand clothing from Non-Governmental Organizations. These are SOS, World Vision, and the National Emergency Response Council on HIV/AIDS (NERCHA). These participants stated that SOS and World Vision give their families monthly grants which they use to buy the family's basics which are beans, cooking oil, sugar, and soap. They posited that after buying the above cosmetics they have to submit the receipts of the groceries they have bought to the above entities so that they can get the following month's grant. They, however, decried that the money was too meager as SOS gives each family one hundred and eighty irrespective of the family size whilst World Vision gives five hundred and sixty every month. The participants again revealed that World Vision also helps them find friends who become their sponsors. One learner stated as follows:

*I have secured a friend through World Vision; this friend has become my sponsor. This friend of mine sends me second-hand clothing, food parcels, money, and novels every December. This has greatly helped me with clothing and I no-longer have a problem with sanitary pads (participant #3, 16yrs, F2, school A).*

Another participant stated as follows:

*I receive support from SOS in the form of moral education and the teaching of life skills. SOS also gives us presents such as notebooks and writing materials (participant # 1, 17 yrs, F1, school B).*

Those participants who are SOS beneficiaries revealed that SOS usually host functions in their respective chiefdoms where they engage in different activities which include being taught moral values and life skills. These learners also revealed that SOS again host outreach programs to educate them as per their ages on life skills issues and HIV/AIDS related issues. They argued that during such events they receive gifts and clothing from the organization which they said boost their self-esteem because they come to realize that there are people who love and care for them despite that they do not have parents.



Another learner stated that NERCHA assists young children in the respective families by providing them with free lunch through the community feeding scheme. This food is provided daily.

### **Theme 2: Expectations of adolescent girls in CHF's from government**

The participants expressed different responses on how they can be helped to improve their welfare in the different groups. Almost all of the participants stated that the Government should consider buying them school uniforms despite paying for the school fees. They argued that they struggle to get school uniform, as a result, they would wear second-hand uniforms from neighbours and this creates the feeling of inferiority complex in them. One learner stated as follows:

*I cannot afford to buy a new school uniform, the uniform I'm wearing was donated to me by a girl who is a neighbour (participant # 8, 15yrs, F2, school B).*

Some participants in one school where a top-up fee is still demanded pleaded that Government should stop the payment of the top-up fee in their school because they fail to pay it and this cause a lot of stress in them because their results are withheld at the end of the third term and hence they have to face the school administration trying to explain their case. One learner is quoted having said:

*The government should stop the payment of top-up fee at the school. Every year I'm compelled to face the school administration to explain myself as they have withheld my end of year results; this is real torture in my life (participant #4, 17yrs, F2, school D).*

Other participants in another group implored that Government should consider supplying them with food monthly as they lack sufficient food supply because some of them live all by themselves alone whilst others live with grandmothers who are too old and the responsibilities of caring for the old persons and the other children rest with them yet they do not have the means to buy the food.

Another group of participants argued that the Government should establish children villages in all the chiefdoms of the country where orphaned children will be kept to avoid a case whereby they are taken by relatives and foster parents who emotionally and physically abuse them. The same group also advanced that the Government should show her commitment towards them by deploying Social workers in all the chiefdoms of the country who will conduct regular visits to their homes to find out how are they coping with life. Social workers should also conduct unannounced visits to those families who have accommodated the orphaned children. One participant had this to say:

*The government should hire Social workers who will visit us in our different homesteads and also conduct unannounced visits to those families which have accommodated orphaned children (participant # 3, 17yrs, F1, school C).*

Again, in another group, the participants stated that the Government should consider giving them monthly grants so that they can be able to meet their needs like the other children who have parents. They

argued that such can help bridge the gap between them and their peers. They further pleaded that the Government should not end by paying their school fees but should extend such to the tuition fees in tertiary institutions because they have no one to pay for them.

#### **IV. Discussion of Findings**

The findings revealed that most of the learners do not receive any form of assistance from the society they live in which includes extended families and chiefdoms. It is observed from the findings that the chiefdoms which are the pillar stones of the country do not concern themselves with the welfare or social issues affecting these children irrespective of the fact that it is verbally articulated that chiefdoms have to take care of orphaned children through the ploughing of the orphans fields in the chiefdoms known as “emasimuendlunkhulu”. It also appeared that the church is also not fully involved in economic assistance to these children but; it is mainly concerned with the spiritual and moral issues. Despite that government provides support to the children in CHFs through orphaned and vulnerable fund grants, such support is, not enough to cater for their needs. The results also showed that out of the forty participants, only five (5) receive grants from the Non-governmental organizations which are SOS and World Vision in the form of monetary grants monthly.

In ascertaining what can be done by relevant stakeholders in helping the learners to manage their lives the findings revealed numerous aspirations by the learners. The results of the findings revealed that most of the learners urge the government to consider providing them with food monthly as they face hunger in their respective families. These findings are agreement with the findings of Mhongera and Lombard (2017), Shava et al. (2017), Thwala (2018), Motsa and Morojele (2018), Ncamsile (2019), Mabuza and Mafumbate (2019), Makuyana et al. (2020).

According to Mhongera and Lombard (2017), adolescent girls in CHFs lack adequate social support during and after institutional care as a result of a lack of adequate levels of engagement by different transition stakeholders. Shava et al. (2017) revealed that adolescents from CHHs are faced with a myriad of psychosocial and economic challenges such as hunger, starvation, high school dropouts. Thwala (2018) found that adolescent girls in CHFs experience a lack of poverty, food security, and strained extended family relations but showed resilience despite their adversities. Child-headed children needed basic survival necessities like candles, clothing, and general parental guidance from the community and teachers to assist them to develop well academically (Motsa & Morojele, 2018). Ncamsile (2019) found that child-headed children had dreams for the future through education, but their resilience proved inadequate to ensure that they attain aspirations and hence needed supports from society. Mabuza and Mafumbate (2019) revealed that most of the parents and guardians showed very little interest in their children’s learning. Makuyana et al. (2020) revealed that children from child-headed households experience poor personal grooming, indecision; sexual violence, and unplanned teenage pregnancy; familial and societal neglect. These findings have policy implications for educational evaluators across the globe. This implies that educational evaluators in conjunction with the appropriate government authority need to come up workable policy document to submit the children from CHFs.

## V. Conclusion

Children from child-headed families experience a low-quality life as they endure poverty in their respective homesteads. This situation deprives them some of basic needs such as food, clothing, and proper accommodation. However, despite the poverty that they face, Children from CHF's show remarkable resilience which is embedded in family unity, church support, neighbours support, and religious philosophy. These children have taken drastic steps towards changing their lives by engaging in manual labour to generate income for their families. Lastly, it has been revealed that government grants for vulnerable children such as the adolescent girls from CHF's are not sufficient to accommodate the physiological needs of such children.

## VI. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

1. There is a need to revive the Parent Teachers' Association in all the schools in the country and these associations need to take the issue of children from CHF's as their priority in their agenda, as these children need parental love and guidance.
2. The government should consider establishing a policy that will guarantee the provision of socio-economic supports to adolescent girls in CHF's in addition to the grant they enjoy.
3. There is a need for every school to have Social Workers who will not only concentrate on the school life of the children but also extend to the child's life after-school.

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### Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflict of interest.

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