Post-Institutional Integration Challenges Faced by Children who were Raised in Children’s Homes in Zimbabwe: The Case of ‘Ex-Girl’ Programme for One Children’s Home in Harare, Zimbabwe

By

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

This is an investigation of post-institutional integration challenges faced by former inmates from institutions in Zimbabwe basing on Ex-girl group members of one institution for children in Harare. The study aimed at exploring challenges faced by girl children discharged from one institution. The research focused on three objectives namely an assessment of empowerment goals of institutions for girls in preparation for life after institutionalisation, to identify problems encountered by girls when they leave institutions and establish community support systems for the girl children as they leave the institutions. The research was exploratory and descriptive in nature and used qualitative research approach. Ten girls out of one hundred girls were targeted for the study.

Focus group discussions, interviews and observations were used for the study. The research revealed that institutional care is so regimented and depersonalised environment in which children have no opportunity to experience a normal family life and could not acquire the basic skills of developing ubuntu/hunhu (humanness). As a consequence, they fail to acquire culturally specific life skills and the capacity for independent thought and motivation which is necessary in their lives. The findings indicated that children discharged from institutional care endure chronic abuse and emotional deprivation which gives rise to a lasting inability to form loving and trusting relationships at time resulting in marriage break ups. One of the research recommendations were made thereof.

Keywords: Institutionalisation, care, Abuse, Relationship, ubuntu/hunhu, Acculturation, independent, Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

A number of researchers have noted problems faced by children in institutions who include orphaned, abandoned and other vulnerable children. There are various reasons why children end up in institutions as well as the type of treatment they get from care givers in those institutions. Children are therefore likely to face integration challenges after they have been weaned from a particular home or institution without proper training (Murray 2009, Penglase 2007). The main concept of bringing them in children's homes is for them to enjoy the benefits of care just like those who grew up in a normal family set up. They are expected to be given all other aspects that include being able to culturally fit into society after release from the children's home. A holistic package should be available to them. The package should include training children the African philosophy of hunhu/ubuntu which can be literally translated into meaning (humanness) “I am because we are; I can only be a person through others (Mbigi, 2004:3). One becomes what he/she is because of copying from others the good behaviour displayed or shared.

There is a deliberate emphasis on solidarity and interdependence which is a key characteristic of African communities of affinity. As Mbigi (2000) notes, the Archbishop Right Reverend Desmond Tutu clearly said that Africans have a thing called ubuntu which is about the essence of being human, which is part of the gift that Africa is giving to the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, being willing to go that extra mile for the sake of others. Tutu in Mbigi (2000) went on to say that a person is a person through other persons. He noted that when one dehumanises someone, he or she would have inexorably dehumanises oneself.

In an African culture, children of the deceased member in a family are supposed to be looked after by relatives of that same person. It does not matter how big the gap of the extended relations are, so long as they share the same totem and surname. This has been the common practice in Zimbabwe (Gelfand, 1982). Shifts are
now realised because of the creation of a nuclear family. Wakatama (2000) discovers that there are many children that are distributed among various relations after the death of their parents, breadwinner or guardian.

However, some of the remaining relations could be either too poor to cope with the increased load of looking after more children or could be old grandparents who could not command adequate resources to satisfy the needs of the additional number of children. Therefore, children of the deceased parents will drop out of school and end up in children’s homes.

In Zimbabwe, the Department of Social Services, Head office, indicated that there were 70 registered children’s homes with an enrolment of 3200 children by 31st December 2011 (Government of Zimbabwe 2012).

Some of the forces that lead many children to leave their homes and stay in children’s homes are in the form of physical abuse like corporal punishment, child labour, torture and even sexual abuse (Unicef, 1998).

Although children’s homes have been identified as the solution to children without relatives to care for them, children’s homes do not bear 100% strengths of providing quality services for children hence they have their own weaknesses (Mupedziszwa, 2005). Penglas (2007) discovers that some of the care givers are untrained people and they came up with the idea of looking after the disadvantaged children as a way earning a living. He goes on to say that untrained caregivers would always remind children why they are in that particular institution, which might breed low self-esteem to the child.

It is important to note that challenges emanating from institutions create other challenges which make children not fit to get into the community they are supposed to be accepted.

This paper seeks to bring to light post-integration challenges faced by children who grew up in children’s homes. It also seeks to bring to light how the same children adopt cultural practices which are not prevalent in their local communities. These institutional training practices make them unsuitable when they are discharged for community re-integration. This will minimise the element of social misfits on the part of discharged children. They will not be strangers in their own communities as they would see norms and values in the community as different from those they were used to.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is that presented by Berry (1980). Berry (1980) proposed the Bidimensional Model Immigrant Acculturation Orientation. The acculturation model was developed to understand immigrants’ ability to acculturate to the culture of the host nation. Acculturation refers to changes that take place as a result of contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups, and social influences (Gibson, 2001). Although these changes can take place as a result of almost any intercultural contact, acculturation is most often studied in individuals living in countries or regions other than where they were born, that is among immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and sojourners (Berry, 2006). Acculturation was initially conceptualised as a unidimensional method in which retention of the heritage culture and acquisition of the receiving culture were viewed as opposing ends of a single continuum (Gordon, 1964). According to this model, as individuals acquired the values, practices, and beliefs of their new settlement, they were then expected to do away with their cultural heritage.

According to Berry (1980), acculturation is a term which was originated by anthropologists to describe a bidirectional change when the immigrant comes into contact with mainstream society. According to Berry (1980), the bidimensional model crossed the independent dimensions of receiving – culture acquisition and heritage – culture retention by creating four categories. According to Berry (1980), the four categories are assimilation (acquire the receiving culture and discards the heritage culture), separation (rejects the receiving culture and retains the heritage culture), integration (acquires the receiving culture and retains the heritage culture) and marginalisation (rejects the receiving culture and discards the heritage culture). According to Berry’s (1980) acculturation framework, integration strategy maintains cultural heritage while supporting intergroup relations. The Assimilation strategy involves doing away or giving up one’s cultural heritage and adopting the beliefs and behaviours of the mainstream culture. The separation strategy entails one maintaining their heritage culture while rejecting intergroup relations. The marginalisation strategy involves sticking to the heritage or mainstream cultures. In the case of marginalisation, the individual relinquishes contact with his heritage and mainstream cultures.

According to Segall et al (1999), the first approach could be perceived as easy, where the individual’s behavioural shifts will occur without difficulty as this is recognised as cultural shedding, cultural learning or cultural conflict. The second approach could be perceived as problematic yet controllable. According to Segall et al (1999), the second approach is revealed as acculturatively stressful for individuals although they are aware that their challenges originated from intercultural contacts cannot be handled with ease, by adjustments and assimilation. The third stage could be perceived as so problematic that the situations are not controllable. This can result in withdrawal or cultural shedding without any cultural learning. In most cases immigrants are engaged in events that deal with situations that are viewed as problematic. They therefore have to deal with problem-focused coping that is trying to change the problem or emotion focused coping that is trying to regulate the emotions attached to the problem.

The study will adopt the model in explaining situations taking place in children’s homes. The cultural training in institutions does not take into cognisance that these children will one day leave the institution and stay
among the community. The type of training is basically to train children to do away with their heritage culture and adopt the host culture.

The hypothesis is therefore applied to children in institutions in a manner in which they are cared for using alien methods of caring which they will not face as they live institutions. Our thesis is that children in institutions should be guided by the African philosophy of *hunhu/ubuntu* such that they would not face any post institutional integration challenges.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Research design**

The study design was exploratory and descriptive in nature and it helped the researchers to gain some insight into the group’s activities. The case study method was chosen for the study as Denscombe (2010) argued that the main benefit of using the case study is that it focuses on one or a few instances which allow the researchers to deal with subtleties and intricacies of complex social institutions. The case study can fit in well with the needs of small scale research through concentrating effort on one site or even a few sites. In this study the study helped us to understand human personality as directed by cultural assimilation and integration.

**Target Population**

We targeted hundred former inmates from the ‘Ex-girls’ group. We targeted the “girls” who were discharged from the institution from 2003-2010 whilst they were still girls as the majority of them are now mothers. The respondents’ ages ranged from 18-32 were years. We therefore used purposive sampling to get the 10 “girls” from the group and also purposive sampling from key informants. Our use of purposive sampling for the girls was meant to identify those we could get in touch easily and for key informants, it was because they had the specialised knowledge in the area of caring for the needy. For the purpose of this study, the word ‘girls’ is referring to all members of the “Ex-girl group”

**Data collection Techniques**

We used interviews, observations and focus group discussions to gather data from the “girls”. Denscombe (2010) argues that an interview involves a set of assumptions and understandings about the situation which are not normally associated with a casual conversation. The girls were interviewed at the group’s meeting place. We gained valuable insights based on the depth of the information we gathered and the wisdom of key informants. Key informants included the group’s Chairperson, staff from the girls’ previous home and an Officer from the Department of Social Services. We obtained data based on key informants’ priorities, opinions and ideas. Key informants had the opportunity to expand their ideas, explain their views and identify what they regarded as crucial factors. We used focus group discussions in which we utilised two groups of five people each. The idea was to establish the feelings and perceptions of the girls as a group and how their attitudes towards the way they were managing their lives.

According to Hussy and Hussey (1997), the observation method uses the researcher’s self as the main instrument of research and therefore requires little by way of technical/statistical support. The non-participant observation method which we used helped us to get information which informants could not convey by way of speech. This was happening right at the scene of the activity. We observed the girls’ attitudes towards their situation and how they reacted to questions as we posed them. We also observed their type of dressing, speech and care for their own children.

Prior to the actual data collection, piloting of the instruments was carried out among four females who were once institutionalised. This was done to familiarise ourselves with the study and to determine the effectiveness of the interview guides. This exploratory phase helped us to discover the extent of information that the respondents were willing to disclose, the sources of any discomfort, the terminology they were comfortable with, and understood.

**Data Analysis**

This was carried out in terms of the research objectives and themes as a way of delineating the research results. It also involved running through respondents’ answers, developing a coding scheme and categorising the responses to the questions into several themes. Some of the themes identified were: marital status, level of education and challenges faced by respondents whilst in care. We also utilised results from interviews, observations, and results from focus group discussions.
Ethical considerations

Before each formal interview began, we had to make sure that we explained the purpose of the study to the respondents.

Permission to carry out the research was obtained from the group's Chairperson and the Director of the Department of Social Services.

Confidentiality was ensured through non presentation of names of respondents. Consent forms were signed by each of the respondents before any form of interview was carried out. This was meant to make sure that everyone agreed to the study being carried out. Those who did not agree with the terms were not coerced into the study as this was purely undertaken on a voluntary basis.

Findings

Distribution of the girls by age

The research revealed that 2 girls among the respondents who were considered to be young were aged 18 and 19 years. The oldest was 32 years old.

The respondents noted that there were some who have been helped by the group and got weaned and move on with their lives. There were reports by the group’s chairperson that some of the group members died due to HIV and AIDS. There was no respondent aged below 16 because from those who were discharged during this period from 2003 to 2011. The staff at the former children’s home noted that the policy of the institution is that a child should be discharged at the age of 18 years unless he or she might have committed a serious offence. This is a government policy as well.

Marital Status of the respondents

The researchers found out during sessions that 2 of the respondents were single. The other 2 were married individuals.

Six of them were divorcees and this was consistent with what Chamberlin (1999) states that children who grew up in care have a problem of lasting relationships. This could be an indication that there was no proper training of children in children’s homes about care for their families. At times this does not necessarily have an effect to children who grew up in children’s homes alone but even those who grew up in a normal family set up with both parents. When children grew up in institutions, they should not be like animals kept in a zoo. Such animals find it difficult to survive on their own when they are removed from the zoo. Such children who grew up in an institution showed signs of lacking skills sufficient to do away with early divorces. They had no relatives to lean on when problems arose. From respondents it was established that training in survival skills which help such children who grew up in institutions to use for survival on their own was found to be lacking.

Level of Education of the respondents

All the girls went through secondary education. Four of them proceeded to tertiary level. However, among the 4 girls, 1 of them is a graduate from one University in Zimbabwe and three of them hold Diplomas from one of the Poly-technical Colleges in the country. The third respondent had a certificate from the above colleges. None of the respondents was deprived of furthering their education up to secondary education. Following the researchers’ interviews with key informants, that is, the Children’s home staff, it was stated that all the girls who passed through their institution were given enough opportunity to study to their full capacity.

Reasons for institutionalisation

It was established from respondents that half of the respondents were orphaned largely due to HIV and AIDS. This information was consistent with the findings of Powell et al (1994) who argues that developing countries, including Zimbabwe, have been devastated by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The pandemic has made life difficult for children who end up seeking assistance from institutions. The abandoned respondents were 2 and it came out during the interview sessions that these were not aware of their relatives’ whereabouts. Efforts by the Department of Social Services to trace the relatives were said to be fruitless. However, three children reported abuse and neglect by relatives as reasons for being at the children’s home. The Officer from the Department of Social Services noted that during the children’s stay at the institution, Probation Officers made efforts to allow some children to visit their relatives but the bond between the children and the relatives were never properly cultivated as they could be observed to detest going to stay with the relatives. Until their discharge, it was not possible to reintegrate such children resulting in recidivism. They decided to come and stay with their colleagues whom greater attachment was formed. Some children came into care because their own family members were unable to provide support due to poverty.
Challenges Faced By Respondents Whilst in Care

All the 10 respondents admitted that they faced some challenges whilst they were in care. All of them stated that since they were coming from the streets or high density suburbs like Mbare (a high density suburb in Harare); they faced difficulties in assimilating to the institutional environment which included the strict rules and regulations. The researchers found out that the emphasis at the institution was based on creating an environment based on western cultural norms and values which emphasised on individualism and could not match the Zimbabwean principle of collectivism which emphasised on surviving through others. The different environment was also a challenge to about 8 of the respondents and 2 indicated that they adjusted very easily to the new environment because it was far much better for them than to live on the street. The fact that there was no parent who was mainly responsible for each of the children's needs, an attachment parent figure, the children noted that they find it difficult to adapt to the different mothers who were looking after them. They also noted that the routine of church activities did not bring them anything good by the time they were discharged besides furthering the interests of the church. This was only 6 of the members of the group whilst the 4 felt that if it were not the church, otherwise they would have been extremely wild by the time they left the children's home. The children’s home acted as a control mechanism or buffer zone for them. In as much as they were misbehaving, they also had time to visit the church where they received counselling and spiritual gifts.

Discharge Packages

All 10 respondents shared that they were not given any discharge packages. The children felt uncomfortable with such an arrangement. This was consistent with what McNair (2000) discovered when he notes that some children were told to leave institutions empty handed because they have found to be disobedient to the rules and regulations of the institution like refusing to go to church. Children’s home staff also confirmed this practice but quickly defending themselves as saying that provision of discharge packages was not an institutional policy. As long as their time to leave the home was up, children could be allowed only to leave the institution with their clothes only. Some respondents 4 out of 10, indicated that they were already working hence there was no need for them to think of discharge packages. However, some respondents noted that they were informally discharged and there was no time of discussing on the packages and these were 2 of the respondents. The remaining 4 of the respondents shared that they needed packages but they were not given and were told that their education was enough of a package. Some institutions could provide all the basic requirements for a person to start a new life.

Respondents’ First Place of Stay after Discharge

The respondents indicated that they started off renting. Among the 10 girls who were discharged, 2 of them could not manage to retain the ownership of their parents’ houses as lodgers had taken full control of the property. About 2 of the respondents tried to go back home to their relatives and failed to be accepted as respondents displayed a different type of life, whilst one, went into the streets after she eloped to a boyfriend who could not allow to stay with her. The rest felt a transition after discharge from a highly and regimented institution to being in a world that is ‘free’. The feeling of being ‘free’ led the girls to be out of control and fuelled the spirit of becoming very wild. Relatives could not stomach the presence of these girls as they felt they could also spoil their own children. They then literary ‘chased’ them away. They had no option besides going back to join the ex-girl group.

Respondents’ Economic Status

Four of the respondents were open to share that they were earning a living through prostitution which they referred to as ‘carpet cleaning’ because there are no jobs at the present moment due to the freezing of posts by the government. From the collected data from respondents, 2 respondents are formally employed and the other 2 are house wives but constantly face domestic violence. One is self reliant and is a dress maker and the other respondent is knitting.

The number of respondents’ children

Among the respondents 4 have a total number of 10 children. Since a large number of respondents are prostitutes, they shared that they institutionalized some of their children so as to be ‘free’ from any burden of caring for their children. Some are staying with their children. Those with children in primary schools shared that they afforded to pay fees for them since the fees are affordable. The 2 who are formerly employed noted that they take care of their own children. Among the remaining 4, their children were taken by their fathers or parental relatives after they had not stayed together and mothers displayed lack of parental skills. The Chairperson of the ex-girl group indicated that some of the reasons which led to these children to be taken by their fathers’ relatives
were that the mothers were presumed to be immoral and could not be viewed as responsible persons to take care of the children after the divorce.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of them Being in Institutional Care

It was amazing for the researchers to realize from the interviews that 6 of the respondents were very negative about institutional care. However, 2 respondents struggled to identify the advantages of institutional care. The other 2 indicated that since some children initially came from residencies like Mbare, Dzivarasekwa, Tafara, Mufakose (high density suburbs in Harare) and some from rural areas and from the streets, being in children's home was an exposure for them to new things. Life in care was also helpful because they were taught how to communicate in English which was compulsory for each inmate hence they are able to fit in the global changing world. They also appreciated that they received everything they needed in terms of clothing, education and shelter.

The respondents also stated that life in care was not all that rosy. Eight of the respondents indicated that institutional staff lacked professionalism as noted by Murray et al (2009), that some carers have no training in child care hence methods of child care are negative and lead to low self-esteem, lack of confidence and also induced fear in children.

All 10 respondents were against the dormitory style of child care. The respondents said it resulted in their deprivation of attention and emotional support from members of staff. They did not experience proper face-to-face with mothers such that they get to hear their concerns as ‘parents’. As Children’s Home was mainly run by foreigners, 8 respondents mentioned that life in care did not promote Zimbabwean cultural values for children. The remaining 2 respondents identified that there were challenges for them to meet their relatives. Staff shared that there were problems encountered by the Department of Social Services in tracing children’s relatives. An Officer from the Department of Social Services also noted the issue of failure to locate relatives for children in some institutions due to transport challenges.

Among the respondents, 7 mentioned that life in care limited them to exercise their rights as interactive human beings because they were not allowed to go out of the institution on their own. They referred to it as ‘life in a cage’ or a ‘boarding school’ and 2 referred to the kind of life as a life that objectify them or reduced their humanity to just ‘mere things’ because everything they did was according to a time-table and no initiative as well as creativity beyond the time-table was allowed from inmates. There was one respondent who indicated that life in care was like in a military barrack. All the respondents mentioned that life in care did not help them with counselling, which was an important form of therapy they needed. They indicated that lack of counselling sessions blocked them to see the importance of creating friends in their lives. Therefore, they blamed their situation to their failure to having no friends outside those in the ex-girl group members. According to them lack of therapy deprived them of the time to reflect or deal with their past hence it is haunting them. The researchers observed that some of the respondents had experienced painful lives since they left the institution. Three of the respondents end up shedding tears during interview sessions a sign that they had challenges in dealing with their personal lives and the group was encouraged to do its best to assist them if they were to live a normal life. The researchers ended up providing counselling to the respondents.

Joining Ex-girls group

The respondents showed push factors for them to join the ‘ex-girl’ group. The largest number, 7 stated that they joined this group because they needed help like emotional, psychological, economical, social and medical support since some of them were HIV positive. Two from the 7 were not free to share their status. However, the 2 complained about ulcers, high blood pressure and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Some respondents also indicated that they joined the group because they needed assistance on how to maintain their marriages relationships. However, one respondent shared that the reason of joining the group was that she had faced unemployment problems hence the group was helping her with new ideas of how to earn a living.

Nine of the respondents indicated that the group was of greater help to them because it is re-shaping them, transforming their previous maladaptive behaviours which they had acquired soon after discharge. They responded that they felt a sense of growth within them, maturity and improvement in their lives. One respondent was open to say that the group was of no use to her. She said that there are some members of the group who still had the problem of gossip which was still hovering within the group and that members still lack seriousness, therefore, had no power to stand on their own.

All the 10 respondents shared that they meet once in a fortnight, on Sundays. However, 8 of the respondents noted that they regularly attend the ex-girl group meetings and they enjoy them but 2 shared that they were irregularly attending the meetings because of personal reasons.
Presentation on preparation for life after institutionalisation

During interview sessions, 8 respondents indicated that they were aware that they were supposed to be discharged. They shared that they knew that one day, they were going to be discharged and leave institutional care. They also stated that they were aware that a child aged 18 years should be discharged from the institution. However, 2 of the respondents said that they were not aware as to when they were supposed to be discharged. Therefore they were not prepared for the discharge because it just happened abruptly.

Problems faced by respondents in the society

After their discharge, the respondents indicated they faced problems of adjusting to the society. This was experienced by 9 of the respondents. One respondent said that she did not initially face the problems but they came later. Two of the respondents shared that they had problems with their in-laws because they were unaware of the expected cultural values by the society for a married woman. Eight of respondents shared that they were stigmatised and referred to as ‘children from orphanages’. Those 2 married respondents mentioned that society did not accept them initially as any other normal woman. They could observe it during society's gatherings or when they meet others when fetching water that they were isolated tactfully by comments like ‘these are foreigners who do not know our culture’. ‘The children of foreigners do not take up difficult jobs’. Such comments were nagging as they got to the former inmates’ ears.

Community's Reception of Respondents

Seven of the respondents indicated that the community or society was not yet ready to accept them as ‘normal’ people in their community. They shared that the society sees them as deviant people who have been spoilt by institutional life and they are also culturally immoral and a people without unhu. For those 2 who are married, they shared that they had problems with their in-laws and their husbands’ parents labelling them ‘lazy’ as they could wake up around 8am each morning. They were labelled as prostitutes, culturally unfit and immoral individuals. One respondent shared that she felt as if the community was feeling pity on her but unfortunately not even anyone had the guts to take her and stay with her and the other respondent also admitted that she was received positively by the community and they were helpful as well as re-trained her on the responsibilities or duties that she was supposed to be trained to do when she was in institutional care. The Department of Social Services Officer indicated that children were supposed to be formally told of their discharge plan and it was up to institutions to prepare them to suit what these children were going to face as they live institutional care. The Officer went on to emphasise that the concept of unhu/ubuntu (humaneness) was supposed to be initiated to the child soon after getting into the institution. The training of unhu/ubuntu concept requires that the initiator should also be in it and not someone who does not know the cultural practices of the local community in which the child would be discharged into. This led these children to experience problems because foreigners were initiating them into what is expected of them in a Zimbabwean community. The essence of unhu/ubuntu will be observed as former inmates are seen misbehaving showing that what they were trained is contrary to what they are practising.

Discussion of Findings

The research found that marriage has been a challenge for the majority of the girls. It stems from the concept that children in institutions fail to establish any form of proper relationships. This is consistent with Mavhaire (2000) who notes that emotional and psychological preparations for children in institutions are an important catalyst for establishing connections, contacts and helpful relationships that are beneficial for those who leave institutional care. In this modern world of networking, maintaining relationships with others is essential as opportunities arise from such relationships. This failure to form attachment with others whilst in institutions and culturally specific linkages has led to some of the children experiencing marital break-ups. This does not necessarily mean to say that those who grew up with relatives are immune to any marriage break-ups. In the majority of cases, children from institutions experience such challenges more. The normal scenario of a Zimbabwean marriage is that those who are about to marry are to be initiated into the marriage rites by relatives (Gelfand, 1985). In cases of marriage break-up, relatives should be consulted and at times marriages will not break through the extended family members’ interventions (Bourdillon, 1987). Once children who grew up in institutions leave the institutions, they have no one to consult in case they have problems. Rather than concentrating on issues at hand, children who grew up in institutions end up using their emotions to solve the problem. This is what Segall et al (1999) notes as emotion focused copying. They will be trying to regulate the emotions attached to the problem. The acculturative problems encountered by the girls would be overwhelming for them and producing crises, anxiety and depression. This would lead to divorces. The formation of the ex-girl group was to facilitate individual members’ needs and therefore acted as a conduit for members in times of needy.

Critical decision making has proved to be elusive for children leaving institutions. This challenge has been facilitated by the dependency syndrome created by years of staying in an institution. Every action they take...
in an institution is pre-planned and every task is done according to schedule. Such reliance on caregivers weakens their ability to think critically and important decisions concerning their lives or relationships (Powell et al., 1994).

The level of education of children from institutions, in most cases, is very low. The majority of the ex-girl group members are luck to be educated but only unfortunate to be educated when there is a scarcity of employment opportunities. The levels of education help inmates to find employment as they leave care. If employment is not found, this will lead to such children being engaged in petty crimes and prostitution. Horton and Hunt (1984) noted that a vast number of petty crimes in the United States of America and Britain were committed by children from disturbed backgrounds. Therefore, in the Zimbabwean context, children from institutions stand no chance in the scramble for the few jobs on the market after the country went through serious economic challenges under Zanu(PF), which was the ruling party then, and the resultant sanctions imposed on the few individuals which affected the whole country. Some of the reasons put forward for failure to secure employment are due to little education by care leavers. Mupedziswa (1998) argues that the desperation caused by unemployment and little education has increased the risk of such children in acquiring and spreading HIV and AIDS. This means that frustration, hopelessness and low self-esteem forces these children to engage themselves in irresponsible behaviour.

Nevertheless, developed countries have tried to curb or contain the destitution caused by unemployment by introducing some government financial aid. The United Kingdom government introduced the unemployment benefits fund which gives people who are unemployed financial aid (Friedlander and Apte, 1980). But what compounds the unemployment situation for care leavers is their level of education in which case they find it difficult to compete with those who are educated and those with relatives.

This meant that education, as noted by Freire (1977), should equip individuals to name the world and also to acquire practical skills and the emphasis should be on living together as a family which is the hallmark of indigenous education.

The other major challenge faced by care leavers is identity crisis. The idea of hunhu is to make sure children grow up in a socially acceptable environment where their behaviours are linked to other members of society and where support is freely available when needed. Society is still in a position not to accept children from institutions as normal children as they felt their hunhu is far from society’s expectations of human beings. Their cultural values were assimilated to the institutional training which is alien to their heritage culture. Children from this study also showed signs of low self-esteem. Giddens (2009) notes that children from institutions fail to define who they are, who their relatives are and where they come from. The effect of this identity crisis is that the children are caught in a maze of confusion which creates a feeling of hopeless. This was also found by Mupedziswa (1998) who contents that most of the children from institutions with little preparation for life outside the institution find themselves in an alien territory on the very first day of release. Reasons would be that these children will not have any links with any relative or friend outside the institution. This should not be the case as Zimbabwean culture has it that every child should belong to every parent. So when a child becomes alien among his or her own people then it means he or she must have been given a wrong concoction which is in essence very alien.

The child becomes so alien to her or his own society because the institution did not manage to give proper cultural training to the child resulting in her or his hunhu becoming distorted and have problems in community re-integration. It is therefore important to provide children in institutions with culturally sensitive training which can make them behave in a manner which is appropriate for the society.

When these children are found in between cultures, they find themselves in identity crisis; the situation becomes compounded by the lack of accommodation as they leave the institution. Results from the study have shown that children end up staying with friends or staying on the street. The failure to secure accommodation puts female care leavers at high risk of being sexually abused or being raped. This will then expose them to such diseases as HIV and AIDS.

The ex-girl group members noted a sense of stigma of being someone who grew up in an institution as if it was in a foreign land. Powell (1994) found that children from institutional care are stigmatised by others when they seek jobs and even when they try to establish and create networks and contacts with others in their heritage culture. The stigma associated with having confined to a children’s home creates a sense of low self-esteem in children. More so, they lose all the hope of ever being integrated into mainstream society because they are associated with the tag ‘vana vekunherera’ (children from institutions).

CONCLUSION

The research findings have indicated that institutionalisation is not the answer in terms of addressing the rights of children in need of care. The respondents mentioned that the only assistance that institutional care offered them was material things and education, of which these alone were insufficient in equipping them for life after care. It came also from key informants, the children’s home staff that they could not go beyond education. However, education is not only the sole empowerment instrument. The respondents suggested counselling therapy to be
exercised whilst they are still in care so as to empower them to positively re-enter the community as they were removed from institutional care in a disheartened state. Training children in their heritage culture even if they grew up in an institution will help them develop unhu for easier re-integration into mainstream society.

The research also helped the researchers to identify problems that are encountered by girls or children in general after their discharge in institutions. They learn what they find difficult to practice in real life situation. They would then behave like animals that grew up in a zoo. Such animals fail to find their own food as they were used to being fed. They did not learn the specialised skill of catching a prey as everything was provided to them. The type of skill they learned is alien to the type of life they were to survive for the rest of their life. At last such animals would die of hunger. In like manner, the children did not manage to develop self reliant skills whilst in institutional care and therefore finding it difficult to do so now as they are staying alone.

These challenges are making lasting relationships, failing to find accommodation, finding employment, creating friendships, and marital problems as divorce rates for them is very high and ill-health because almost every respondent complained of a problem as a result of stress, stigmatisation by the community, low self esteem, search for relatives and adjustment problems. These problems could have been prevented through training and practising the concept of ubuntu/unhu whilst children were still in care.

Respondents also indicated in interview sessions that the community should be conscientised or be prepared to receive children whom they have placed in institutional care. The conscientisation process was said to include acceptance of discharged children from care as normal children whom they have in society and should support them as they would support their own biological children.

The study revealed that placing children in institutions would require further training for those who will be taking care of them and that institutionalisation of children should not lead the children to lose their own cultural heritage. This research has also shown that institutional care has been associated with disengagement of children from the society and the normal environments in which children have no opportunity to experience a normal family life. As a consequence, they often fail to acquire life skills and the capacity for independent thought and motivation. The challenges of being in an institution continue to haunt children after care. In addition, institutionalised children have indicated that they endure chronic abuse and emotional deprivation which gave rise to lasting inability to form loving and trusting relationships. These factors combined made it difficult for children, who have had a long exposure to institutional care, to cope outside of the institutional environment.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Following the interview sessions, the researchers recommend that carers in institutions should be professionals. It is recommended that the Government make sure those children’s home staff are trained and equipped with basic skills in counselling as well as other areas like basic administration. This will help staff in empowering children for life after care for it is said that ‘you give what you have’. The Government will make sure that institutions discharge children with life skills and provide exit packages for each discharged child as this will enable the child to have something to fall back on in times of need.

Children's homes should promote the Zimbabwean cultural values which include the Zimbabwean philosophy of ubuntu/unhu where everything is centred on the family and the extended family. Therefore when family units are promoted, children can easily practice Zimbabwean culture as a family and at the same time preserve it to their own advantage.

Child participation is a fundamental right and therefore all residential facilities should be encouraged to allow children space to express their views and opinions and that these should be considered in decision-making as far as is practical.

Policies that promote the rights and well-being of children after discharge should also be put in place especially those to do with discharge packages as these will help the discharged children to have something to start with.

A discharge plan should be prepared as soon as the child gets into the institution and this should be based on the individual child. Children’s homes should maintain registers for discharged children and then maintain contact with their institutions should they require any assistance.

There is need to educate society from family level, extended family up to the community at large on how to receive children discharged from institutional care. This can be done through workshops that are directed on that particular community and this should be centred on how to take care of discharged children so that they feel accepted and supported.

Quarters in employment should be created to accommodate disadvantaged children if they have the required skills for the job at hand.

Government and Non-governmental organisations should create platforms to introduce stress management sessions for children in institutions such that when they leave institutions they can manage stressful situations which they may encounter within communities.
REFERENCES


