

Title

**ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF ORPHAN CARE PROGRAMS ON THE WELL-BEING OF ORPHANED CHILDREN: A CASE STUDY OF CHILUNGAMO ORPHAN CARE CENTRE.**

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**Abstract**

This study assessed the impact of orphan care programs on the well-being of orphaned children: a case study of chilungamo orphan care centre, the study focused on key dimensions of well-being, including physical health, emotional stability, social integration, and educational support. Guided by Social Capital Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, the study examined how care services, social relationships, and access to basic needs influence the overall well-being of orphaned children. A mixed-methods research approach was employed, combining questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The study targeted orphaned children aged 10–24 years and caregivers aged 26–40 years, with a total sample of 12 participants selected through stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. The findings revealed that orphan care programs provide essential services such as educational support, child protection, healthcare referrals, nutritional and hygiene support, and psychosocial care, which positively contribute to children's well-being. However, challenges such as inconsistent funding, limited caregiver training, and community stigma were identified as factors affecting service delivery. The study concludes that while orphan care programs play a vital role in improving the quality of life of orphaned

children, strengthening resources, caregiver capacity, and community support is essential for sustainability and effectiveness. The findings provide practical insights to inform program improvement and enhance the well-being of orphaned children at chilungamo orphanage

**Keywords:** orphan care programs, child well-being, psychosocial support, Malawi, Chilungamo Orphan Care Centre

**Introduction**

The rising number of orphaned children in Malawi, driven largely by HIV/AIDS, poverty, and socio-economic instability, has increased the demand for organized orphan care programs. Chilungamo Orphan Care Centre was established to respond to these needs by providing essential services such as education, health support, psychosocial counselling, and child protection. Despite these interventions, little empirical evidence exists on how such programs affect the holistic well-being of orphaned children in TA Tsabango. This study therefore sought to assess the impact of orphan care programs on children's physical health, emotional stability, social integration, and educational development at Chilungamo Orphan Care Centre.

**Background of the Study**

Malawi faces significant social and economic challenges that continue to contribute to the increasing number of orphaned children. The HIV/AIDS pandemic, persistent poverty, and high adult mortality have weakened traditional family systems that previously provided care and protection for orphaned and vulnerable children (Government of Malawi, 2015; Cluver & Gardner, 2007). As a result, many households are unable to meet the basic physical, emotional, and educational needs of children who have lost one or both parents.

Traditionally, extended families in Malawi played a central role in absorbing and caring for orphaned children. However, rising levels of poverty, food insecurity, and unemployment have overstretched these family structures, making it difficult for them to provide adequate care and support (Ainsworth & Filmer, 2006). Research shows that orphaned children in such households are more likely to experience poor health, school dropout, emotional distress, and social exclusion compared to non-orphaned children (Cluver & Gardner, 2007; Whetten et al., 2009).

In response to this crisis, a range of orphan care programs have been established by government agencies, faith-based

organizations, and community-based institutions across Malawi. These programs aim to provide essential services including food, shelter, education, healthcare, child protection, and psychosocial support in order to improve the well-being of orphaned and vulnerable children (Government of Malawi, 2015; Nyasulu, Mphande & Zgambo, 2018). Community-based orphan care centres such as Chilungamo Orphan Care Centre were created to ensure that children remain within familiar social and cultural environments while receiving structured care and protection.

Although orphan care programs play a crucial role in addressing children's immediate needs, their effectiveness varies depending on available resources, quality of caregiving, and community support. Studies conducted in Malawi indicate that while many programs successfully provide food, shelter, and education, they often struggle to deliver adequate psychosocial and emotional support due to limited funding and lack of trained caregivers (Nyasulu et al., 2018). Similarly, international evidence shows that children in well-managed orphan care programs experience better physical health, safety, and access to services than those in unsupported households (Whetten et al., 2009).

Despite the growing number of orphan care

initiatives, there is limited empirical evidence on how these programs affect the holistic well-being of children at the local community level, particularly in rural settings such as TA Tsabango. Understanding how services provided by Chilungamo Orphan Care Centre influence children's physical health, emotional stability, social integration, and educational development is therefore essential for strengthening social work practice and informing child protection policies in Malawi.

### **Problem Statement**

Orphaned children face numerous challenges that impact their overall well-being, including emotional distress, financial instability, limited access to education, and inadequate healthcare (UNICEF, 2021). In Malawi, an estimated 1.5 million children are orphaned due to various factors such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, and other socio-economic hardships (National Statistical Office of Malawi, 2020). Chilungamo orphan care centre is home to several orphan care programs designed to support these vulnerable children by providing shelter, education, psychosocial support, and basic necessities. However, the effectiveness of these programs in addressing the well-being of orphaned children remains unclear.

Despite the presence of these interventions, many orphaned children at chilungamo orphanage continue to experience significant difficulties. Studies indicate that orphaned children in Malawi exhibit lower academic performance compared to their non-orphaned peers due to financial barriers and emotional distress (Kadzamira & Rose, 2022). Furthermore, research has shown that orphaned children are more likely to suffer from mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, due to the trauma of parental loss and unstable living conditions (Mwoma & Pillay, 2016). Economic hardships also persist, with some orphan care programs facing resource constraints that limit their ability to provide consistent support (Chirwa, 2019).

There is a lack of comprehensive assessment regarding how these programs influence the physical, emotional, social, and educational development of orphaned children in TA Tsabango. Additionally, sustainability and efficiency concerns arise, as some initiatives struggle with financial instability and ineffective implementation strategies (Miller et al., 2021). This study aims to evaluate the impact of orphan care programs on the well-being of orphaned children in TA Tsabango. By examining their effectiveness, challenges, and areas for improvement, this research will provide

insights into how these programs can be enhanced to better serve the needs of orphaned children and improve their overall quality of life.

### Research Objectives

To assess the impact of orphan care programs on the well-being of orphaned children at Chilungamo Orphan Care Centre.

### Specific Objectives

To examine the types of care provided by orphan care programs at Chilungamo Orphan Care Centre.

To assess the impact of orphan care programs on the physical well-being of orphaned children at chilungamo orphan care centre.

To identify the challenges faced by orphan care programs in providing effective care and support to orphaned children at chilungamo orphan care centre.

### Research Questions

What types of care are provided by orphan care programs at Chilungamo Orphan Care Centre?

How do orphan care programs impact the physical well-being of orphaned children at chilungamo orphan care centre?

What challenges do orphan care programs face in providing effective care and support to orphaned children at chilungamo orphan

care centre?

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### Literature Review

### Definition of Terms

#### Orphan

An orphan is a child under the age of 18 who has lost one or both parents due to any cause of death. Orphans are classified as single orphans (loss of one parent) and double orphans (loss of both parents) (UNICEF, 2020).

#### Orphan Care Programs

Orphan care programs are structured interventions implemented by governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or community-based organizations to provide support such as shelter, education, health care, psychosocial services, and protection for orphaned children (UNAIDS, 2019).

#### Well-being

Well-being refers to the overall quality of life of an individual, about physical health, emotional and psychological status, social relationships, and access to basic needs and rights. In children, well-being also includes educational attainment, safety, and emotional development (Ben-Arieh, 2010).

#### Psychosocial Support

Psychosocial support involves services and interventions aimed at addressing the

psychological and social needs of individuals, particularly vulnerable groups like orphans. It includes counseling, group therapy, peer support, and activities that build self-esteem and resilience (Richter, Foster & Sherr, 2006).

### Community-Based Care

Community-based care refers to alternative care arrangements for orphans that are provided within a family or community setting, rather than institutional care. This approach leverages the role of extended families, foster families, and community members (Delap, 2009).

### Institutional Care

Institutional care involves the placement of orphaned or vulnerable children in facilities such as orphanages or children's homes, which are run by governments or organizations to provide basic needs and services (Williamson & Greenberg, 2010).

### Impact Assessment

Impact assessment is the process of evaluating the outcomes or changes that result from a specific intervention or program. In the context of orphan care, it involves measuring how such programs affect the lives and well-being of orphaned children (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004).

### Empirical Review

Previous studies have shown that structured orphan care programs improve children's access to education, healthcare, and nutrition. However, many programs face challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of trained caregivers, and social stigma. Research in Malawi indicates that orphans are more likely to experience emotional distress and poor educational outcomes when care systems are weak.

Empirical literature demonstrates that orphan care programs play a significant role in shaping the educational, physical, and psychosocial outcomes of orphaned children. However, the effectiveness of these programs largely depends on the quality of services, availability of resources, and the capacity of caregivers.

Ainsworth and Filmer (2006) examined inequalities in children's schooling across sub-Saharan Africa and established that orphaned children experience lower educational attainment compared to their non-orphaned peers. The study attributes this disparity to poverty, emotional distress, and lack of access to learning materials. Their findings further indicate that orphan care programs that provide school fees, learning materials, and psychosocial support significantly improve school retention and academic performance among orphaned

children.

In the Malawian context, Nyasulu, Mphande, and Zgambo (2018) evaluated community-based orphan care services and reported that most programs succeed in addressing basic physical needs such as food and shelter but fall short in providing adequate psychosocial care. The authors identified shortages of trained caregivers and inconsistent funding as the main barriers to effective service delivery, resulting in gaps in emotional and behavioral support for orphaned children.

A comparative study conducted by Whetten et al. (2009) across five low-income countries revealed that children enrolled in structured orphan care programs had better access to healthcare, nutrition, and child protection services than those living in unsupported households. The study concluded that well-managed orphan care interventions are associated with improved physical health outcomes and overall child well-being, particularly when services are delivered in a coordinated and supportive environment.

These studies collectively underscore the importance of integrated orphan care programs that address educational, physical, and psychosocial needs. They further highlight the persistent challenges related to funding instability and limited caregiver

capacity, which remain critical considerations for improving the effectiveness of orphan care programs in settings such as Chilungamo Orphan Care Centre

## Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Social Capital Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Social Capital Theory emphasizes the role of social networks, trust, and relationships in promoting individual and community well-being. In orphan care, strong relationships between caregivers, children, and the community enhance emotional support and social inclusion.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs explains that children must first have their basic physiological and safety needs met before achieving emotional stability, self-esteem, and personal growth. Orphan care programs that provide food, shelter, protection, and emotional support help children progress toward higher levels of well-being.

## 3. Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods exploratory research design. The target population comprised orphaned children aged 10–24 years and caregivers aged 26–40 years at Chilungamo Orphan Care Centre. Using stratified random and purposive

sampling, 12 participants were selected. Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed. Results and

#### Discussion Response Rate

All 12 selected participants took part in the study, giving a 100% response rate. Demographic Characteristics Table 1: Age of Caregivers

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
26–30	1	25%
31–35	2	50%
36–40	1	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100%</b>

Most caregivers were aged 31–35, showing a balance of maturity and energy.

**Table 2: Age of Orphaned Children**

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
10–14	3	37.5%
15–19	3	37.5%
20–24	2	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>

Most children were adolescents, a group requiring strong educational and emotional support.

**Table 3: Gender of Respondents**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	4	33.3%
Female	8	66.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100%</b>

Women were more involved in caregiving roles.

#### Types of Care Provided by Orphan Care Programs

The study revealed that Chilungamo Orphan Care Centre provides integrated services including educational support, child protection, nutrition and hygiene support, basic healthcare referrals, and psychosocial counselling. Educational support and child protection services were the most frequently mentioned (22.2% each), followed by nutrition and health-related services (19.4% each) and psychosocial support (16.7%). These services collectively address children's educational, physical, and emotional needs.

#### 4.1 Impact of Orphan Care Programs on the Physical Well-being of Orphaned Children

Findings showed that the orphan care program positively influences children's physical health through timely medical referrals, provision of hygiene materials, access to clean water, and regular monitoring

of children's health status. Caregivers reported noticeable improvements in children's health, growth, and knowledge levels, with many children experiencing fewer illnesses and increased energy. Younger children were given closer nutritional and health monitoring, while older children were encouraged to practice self-care skills.

### **Challenges Faced by Orphan Care Programs**

#### **4.2**

The study identified limited and inconsistent funding as the major challenge affecting service delivery at Chilungamo Orphan Care Centre. This constraint reduced the availability of food, school materials, and healthcare support. In addition, caregivers reported difficulty managing children's emotional and behavioral needs due to limited training opportunities and high child-to-caregiver ratios. Community stigma towards orphaned children further affected their emotional well-being and social integration.

### **Summary of Research Findings**

The demographic characteristics of the respondents provided important contextual insights into the study findings. The age distribution of caregivers showed that most were within the productive and active working age, suggesting their capacity to provide consistent care and supervision to

orphaned children. The age distribution of orphaned children indicated that the majority were adolescents, a group that requires increased educational, emotional, and psychosocial support. In terms of gender, the findings revealed higher participation of females compared to males, reflecting the dominant role women play in caregiving responsibilities within community-based orphan care settings. These demographic characteristics helped to shape the interpretation of the findings and provided a foundation for understanding service delivery dynamics at the Centre.

The findings further revealed that the orphan care program provides a range of interconnected services aimed at improving the overall well-being of orphaned children. These services include educational support, child protection, nutritional and hygiene assistance, basic health care, and psychosocial support. Caregivers reported that educational assistance and child protection services were the most prominent forms of support, followed by health-related and nutritional services. The availability of these services contributes to a safer, more supportive environment that promotes children's emotional security, school participation, and social development. The integration of multiple

forms of care demonstrates the Centre's commitment to addressing the diverse needs of orphaned children in a holistic manner.

The study also established that the orphan care program has a positive influence on the physical well-being of children. Caregivers reported noticeable improvements in children's health status, hygiene practices, and overall physical condition since joining the program. Regular medical referrals, access to clean water, provision of hygiene materials, and monitoring of children's health were identified as key contributors to these improvements. Younger children were observed to receive closer physical care and nutritional support, while older children were encouraged to develop personal hygiene routines and self-care skills. These findings indicate that the program plays a significant role in supporting both immediate and long-term physical health outcomes.

Despite the positive contributions of the orphan care program, the findings also highlighted several challenges that affect the consistency and quality of service delivery. Limited and irregular funding was identified as the most significant constraint, impacting the availability of food, educational materials, healthcare, and

hygiene supplies. Caregivers also reported difficulties in addressing the emotional and behavioral needs of children due to limited training and high caregiving demands. Additionally, negative community attitudes and stigma toward orphaned children were found to affect children's emotional well-being and social integration. Overall, the findings indicate that while the orphan care program plays a vital role in enhancing children's well-being, strengthening resources, caregiver capacity, and community support is essential to sustain and improve program effectiveness.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

The study demonstrates that orphan care programs at Chilungamo Orphan Care Centre significantly contribute to improving the physical, emotional, social, and educational well-being of orphaned children. However, sustainability remains threatened by financial instability, limited human resource capacity, and social barriers. Strengthening funding mechanisms, enhancing caregiver training, and fostering community support systems are essential for maximizing the long- term impact of orphan care programs.

**Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:**

The Centre should identify sustainable sources of income such as small-scale businesses to support fundraising and improve the quality and consistency of services provided to orphaned children at Chilungamo Orphan Care Centre.

Community involvement and awareness should be strengthened to reduce stigma against orphaned children and to encourage local participation in supporting the Centre's activities and child well-being initiatives.

Psychosocial and emotional support services should be enhanced through structured counselling sessions and group discussions to help children cope with trauma, loss, and emotional stress.

Caregivers should receive regular practical training in basic counselling skills and child development to improve their capacity to respond to children's diverse needs.

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