

Title

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF ORPHANHOOD TRAUMA ON CHILDREN PERFORMANCE  
A CASE OF CHILDREN OF ALL NATIONS IN CHITIPI, LILONGWE

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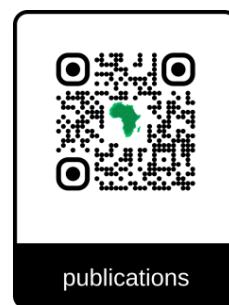
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## Abstract

This study examined the impact of orphan hood-related trauma on the academic, emotional, and behavioral performance of children at Children of All Nations in Chitipi, Lilongwe, Malawi. Existing literature on childhood trauma indicates that the loss of one or both parents disrupts emotional attachment, psychological stability, and cognitive development, which are essential for effective learning and social functioning. Studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa further show that orphaned children are often exposed to compounded traumatic experiences such as poverty, neglect, stigma, and emotional deprivation, leading to poor academic outcomes, behavioral difficulties, and long-term psychosocial distress. Despite this evidence, psychosocial support services in many child care institutions remain limited.

Guided by these perspectives, the study adopted a mixed-methods case study design, utilizing qualitative interviews and limited quantitative data from a sample of 25 participants comprising orphaned children, caregivers, and educators. Data were analyzed using thematic and content analysis techniques. The findings revealed that bereavement trauma was the most common experience among the children and was associated with emotional distress, low self-esteem, behavioral challenges, and academic difficulties such as poor concentration, irregular school attendance, and grade repetition. Although the institution provides basic needs and educational support, psychosocial counseling services were inadequate.

Furthermore, the study highlighted that children who received consistent emotional support from caregivers and teachers showed better coping mechanisms and relatively improved academic engagement, suggesting that

even limited psychosocial interventions can positively influence resilience. This underscores the importance of structured trauma-informed programs, caregiver training, and continuous emotional support to mitigate the negative effects of orphan hood trauma on children's learning and overall development.

**Keywords:** Chitipi Community, Children, HIV/AIDS, Orphanhood, Trauma

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of orphan hood is increasingly prevalent in Malawi due to factors such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, and other health-related issues. According to UNICEF reports, the number of orphans in Malawi has steadily increased over the past decades, creating a vulnerable segment of the population that requires targeted care and intervention. The trauma associated with losing one or both parents can have profound implications on a child's mental health, sense of security, and capacity to thrive academically and socially.

Children living in orphanages or institutional care settings often come from backgrounds marked by emotional neglect, abuse, abandonment, or extreme poverty. While many organizations such as Children of All Nations in Chitipi, Lilongwe, aim to provide shelter and basic education, the deeper emotional scars left by traumatic experiences can hinder children's capacity to perform well in school and adjust socially. The psychological impact of orphan hood is not always immediately visible but can manifest in low self-esteem, depression, behavioral issues, and poor academic outcomes.

## Background of the Study

The loss of one or both parents is a profoundly distressing experience that significantly affects a child's physical, emotional, psychological, and educational development. Parents play a central role in providing emotional attachment, socialization, moral guidance, and academic support. When this support is abruptly removed through death, children are left vulnerable to feelings of grief, fear, insecurity, loneliness, and abandonment. These emotional disturbances often disrupt a child's ability to regulate emotions, develop resilience, and maintain a sense of stability, which are essential for healthy development and effective learning.

Orphan hood is frequently associated with multiple traumatic experiences that extend beyond the death of parents. Many orphaned children experience prolonged exposure to poverty, neglect, inadequate care, and in some cases, abuse before being placed in alternative care settings. The absence of parental supervision and protection may expose children to exploitation, early responsibilities, or unstable living arrangements, which further intensify emotional and psychological stress. Such trauma can have long-term effects on brain development, cognitive functioning, and emotional regulation, leading to difficulties in concentration, memory retention, problem solving, and classroom participation.

Educational performance among orphaned children is often negatively affected by these traumatic experiences. Emotional distress and unresolved grief can lead to reduced motivation to learn, poor academic engagement, and increased absenteeism. Orphaned children may struggle to complete schoolwork, perform poorly in examinations, or drop out of school altogether. Additionally, trauma may manifest through behavioral challenges

such as aggression, withdrawal, lack of confidence, or difficulty forming positive relationships with peers and teachers. These factors collectively contribute to lower academic achievement and hinder overall educational progression.

In Malawi, orphan hood remains a major social and developmental concern, largely due to HIV/AIDS, chronic poverty, limited access to healthcare, and other socio-economic challenges. A significant number of children grow up without parental care, placing increased pressure on extended families and institutional care facilities. While efforts have been made by the government and non-governmental organizations to support orphaned and vulnerable children through education and welfare programs, the psychosocial needs of these children are often under-addressed. Trauma resulting from parental loss continues to affect children's emotional wellbeing and learning capacity, highlighting the need for evidence-based and trauma-informed interventions.

Children of All Nations, located in Chitipi, Lilongwe, is an organization that provides care, shelter, education, and necessities to orphaned and vulnerable children. The center aims to create a safe and supportive environment that promotes children's growth and development. However, many of the children residing at the center have previously experienced severe trauma, including the loss of parents, family separation, neglect, and prolonged exposure to hardship. These experiences may continue to influence their emotional health, social behavior, and academic performance, even within a structured and supportive care setting.

Assessing the impact of orphan hood-related trauma on children's performance at Children of All Nations is therefore essential. This study seeks to examine how trauma affects academic achievement,

emotional wellbeing, and social behavior among orphaned children at the center. Understanding these relationships will help identify specific challenges faced by the children and evaluate the adequacy of existing support mechanisms. The findings of the study are expected to inform the development of targeted psychosocial support programs, trauma-sensitive educational approaches, and comprehensive child welfare interventions aimed at improving both academic outcomes and overall wellbeing of orphaned children in institutional care.

## Problem statement

Despite the rising number of orphaned children in Malawi, research on the psychological trauma they experience and how this trauma affects their behavior and educational performance—remains limited. At Children of All Nations in Chitipi, many children face significant emotional challenges related to parental loss, yet little is known about how these experiences specifically influence their academic outcomes and overall wellbeing. Without a proper understanding of these effects, current support systems may not adequately address their emotional and educational needs. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the impact of trauma on the academic and behavioral development of orphaned children at this center.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

### Main Objective

Assessing the impact of orphan hood trauma on children performance at children performance at children of all nations in Chitipi, Lilongwe

### Specific Objective

- To identify the types of trauma experienced by orphaned children at the center.
- To assess the impact of trauma on children's academic performance.
- To examine the emotional and behavioral effects of orphan hood trauma.
- To evaluate the support systems in place and their effectiveness in helping children cope.

### Research Questions

- What types of trauma do orphaned children at Children of All Nations in Chitipi, Lilongwe, and experience?
- How does orphan hood-related trauma affect the academic performance of children at the center?
- What emotional and behavioral effects are associated with orphan hood trauma among the children?
- How effective are the existing support systems at Children of All Nations in helping orphaned children cope with trauma

### Significance of the Study

This study will provide in-depth insights into the relationship between orphan hood-related trauma and children's overall performance, particularly in academic, emotional, and social domains. By examining how traumatic experiences such as parental loss, neglect, and

prolonged exposure to hardship affect learning and behavior, the study will generate evidence that enhances understanding of the unique challenges faced by orphaned children in institutional care settings. These insights will contribute to the development of more responsive, child-centered care approaches that recognize trauma as a critical factor influencing children's growth and educational attainment.

In addition, the study will contribute to existing academic literature on childhood trauma and education within the Malawian context, where empirical research on the lived experiences of orphaned children remains limited. By focusing on a specific institution, the research will provide contextualized and practical knowledge that reflects real-life conditions faced by orphaned children. This localized evidence will be useful for researchers, students, and practitioners seeking to understand how socio-economic and cultural factors interact with trauma to influence children's performance and wellbeing.

The findings of the study will be particularly valuable to caregivers and institutional managers, as they will highlight the emotional, psychological, and behavioral needs of orphaned children and how these needs affect daily functioning. Understanding the nature and effects of trauma will enable caregivers to adopt more empathetic, supportive, and trauma-sensitive caregiving practices.

Such practices may include counseling support, structured routines, positive reinforcement, and safe spaces that promote emotional healing and resilience among children.

Educators will also benefit from the findings, as the study will shed light on the link between trauma and classroom behavior, learning engagement, and academic outcomes. This knowledge can

inform the adoption of trauma-informed teaching strategies that promote patience, inclusivity, and emotional safety in learning environments. Teachers may be better equipped to identify signs of trauma, respond appropriately to behavioral challenges, and provide academic support that aligns with the emotional needs of orphaned learners.

## LITERATUR REVIEW

### Definition of terms

- **Orphan hood**

The condition of having lost one or both parents due to death. In this study, the term includes both single orphans (one deceased parent) and double orphans (both parents deceased), as recognized by organizations such as *UNICEF* (*UNICEF*, 2023).

- **Trauma**

According to *Herman* (1992), trauma is "an affliction of the powerless," wherein a person's sense of control, connection, and meaning is disrupted by overwhelming events. Trauma can lead to long-term psychological effects, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression.

- **Support Systems**

Support systems refer to the network of social, emotional, and institutional resources available to individuals for coping with stress and life challenges. These may include family, friends, social workers, community organizations, and healthcare providers as defined *Cohen & Wills* (1985).

- **Emotional Wellbeing**

According to *Ryff & Keyes (1995)*, emotional wellbeing is a critical component of overall psychological functioning and includes both positive feelings and the absence of negative emotions like anxiety and depression.

- **Behavioral Challenges**

Behavioral challenges refer to patterns of disruptive, inappropriate, or maladaptive behavior that interfere with social, academic, or emotional functioning. In displaced or traumatized populations, these may manifest as aggression, withdrawal, difficulty concentrating, or non-compliance as According to *Walker et al. (2004)*.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods case study design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative aspect enabled the researcher to explore in-depth the emotional and psychosocial experiences of orphaned children, while the quantitative aspect provided measurable insights into academic performance. A case study approach was chosen to allow a focused and detailed examination of children under the care of Children of All Nations in Chitipi.

### Research Method

Research methods these are variety of techniques that the researchers use when studying a given situation. There are two

general categories for research methods: qualitative and quantitative. Each approach has unique characteristics and ways of gathering data. This research will use qualitative type of research method. This method investigates the quality of information and data. It is aimed at collecting information on people's views and perceptions through interviews and surveys. As such, the qualitative method is subjective, the outcome depending on the respondents' feelings, views and perceptions (*Faryadi, Q. 2019*). In qualitative research method, interviews will be carried out with research participants, where face-to-face interview interactions will pursued at Children of all nations in Chitipi, Lilongwe whereby open-ended questions will be involved.

### Research setting

A research setting refers to the specific location, environment, or context in which the research is conducted. It provides details about where and under what conditions the study took place, helping readers understand the background and relevance of the study. This research will be conducted at Children of all nation Chitipi, Lilongwe district. The research will be conducted at this geographical setting because it is a place where more small businesses are located and most accessible to the researcher.

### Study population

Population refers to the number of people living in a particular area. Study population refers to the entire group of individuals, organizations, or elements that share common characteristics and are of interest to the researcher for the purposes of the study. The study population is not limited to the human population only. It can be

objects, animals or measurements. The target population in for this study comprises orphaned children residing at the Children of All Nations orphanage in Chitipi, Lilongwe, caregivers and educators.

## Sampling technique

Sampling this is the technique of selecting individual members or a subset of the population in order to make the statistical inferences from them and estimate the characteristics of the whole population. Sample methods can be generically categorized as "Probability" and "Non-probability" samples (*S Acharya. 2013*). Therefore, in this research, the researcher will use non-probability sampling technique whereby a researcher has to ask the personal random questions for the collection of data. (*Nikolopoulou, 2022*).

In non-probability sampling technique, the researcher choose members to participate in the research at random criteria and the technique does not give equal opportunity or chance to all members of population to be included in sample for the research. This technique is much easier and cheaper to access but it has higher risk of sampling bias. Therefore, the type of non-probability sampling technique that will be used in the study is judgmental or purposive sampling.

Judgmental or purposive sampling, the researcher will choose the sample based on who will be appropriate for the study. Participants will be selected according to the characters that the researcher needs in his sample size, in other way the sample will be selected for the purposive reasons of the study. Purposive sampling will help the researcher to save time during collection of data just because the researcher will target people who are beneficial to the study.

## Sample size

A sample is a subset of the population selected to be representative of the larger group. Since the entire population cannot be studied, a sample must be taken (*S. Acharya, 2013*). Sample size has been defined as the number of individuals included in a research study to represent the whole population (*Nishat, 2021*). In this study, a sample size of 25 participants was used to ensure adequate representation of orphaned children at the center.

## Research instrument

Research instrument is a tool used to obtain measure and analyze the data from subjects around the research topic, *Fearson (2014)*. Therefore, the researcher of this study will use interview guide as data collection tool. The interview guide is defined as the topic and the list of questions the researcher plans to be contained in the interview for questioning the respondents (*Fearson, 2014*). Interview guide helps the researcher to know the list of questions expected to be answered by the respondents in the process of collecting data.

## Data collection procedures

According to (*Kabir, 2016*) data Collection is defined as the procedure of collecting, measuring and analyzing accurate insights for research using standard validated techniques. There are various methods used to collect data, the data types include primary and secondary data. The research will use in depth interviews as an instrument for primary data collection. Secondary data will be obtained from relevant literature like official records from organizations and institutions, internet and books. An in

depth Interview is an open minded and discovery oriented method that is used to obtain information about a topic from a stakeholder (Thomas & Bergold, 2012).

In-depth allows us to explore the depth of a respondent's point of view as well as their experiences, attitudes, feelings, and perspectives. In this case, in-depth interviews will help to collect information from participants.

## Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted prior to the main research to test the validity of the data collection instruments. The pilot study was carried out at a similar orphanage institution in Lilongwe, which also cares for orphaned and vulnerable children, but was not included in the main study site to avoid contamination of data. According to the research, the pilot study will be conducted with orphans who live around Mtandire area.

The purpose of the pilot study is to evaluate the clarity and appropriateness of the questionnaire and interview questions, determine whether the children could understand and respond effectively, Assess the time required to complete the tools, identify any sensitive or emotionally triggering questions and make adjustments and Ensure ethical procedures such as informed consent and confidentiality were properly followed.

The results of the pilot study indicated that minor adjustments were needed to simplify the language of some questions for younger children and to rephrase certain items that could cause emotional distress. These revisions were made before the full study commenced.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of changing, and processing raw data, and extracting actionable, relevant information that helps the researcher make informed decisions. Thematic analysis, Content analysis will be used to analyze data in this research study. Information collected will be written down in order to use it for content analysis. Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and qualitative description of the manifest content of communication

Ethical considerations are principles that are to be followed when conducting the research study, which helps the researcher to differentiate between what is right or wrong. The ethical considerations that will be followed when conducting this research study are as follows,

- **Obtaining consent from participants**

Participants will be informed about the topic, which is going to be conducted, and the participants have the right to participate voluntarily or not. This will be done before collecting the data required for the study. The aim of the study will be explained to the potential participants including key informants by addressing them before engaging the research questions. Participant interviewees will be given consent forms to read and understand. The participants will be aware of the reasons for the research project, and their right to participate voluntarily. After getting permission from the participants, the data will be collected.

- **Confidentiality and anonymity.**

Confidentiality will be used to build a relationship between the researcher and participants. Confidentiality means that the participants are known by the researcher, but the researcher removes all pinpoint information from the report so that it should not be known by anyone else. In this research study the information about

the participants will be secured and kept private. This will help to build trust and rapport with study participants. Will make sure there is confidentiality and anonymity of the information collected from different participants. The participants will be briefed about their right to privacy and anonymity, and they will be told about their right to withdraw at any point if they do not feel like continuing due to any reason applicable to them. Information collected from the particular study area and every participant who has provided the information will be unknown or unidentified.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Response Rate

The study targeted 25 participants comprising orphaned children, caregivers, and educators. All 25 participants took part in the study, giving a response rate of 100%. According to *Mugenda and Mugenda (2013)*, a response rate above 70% is adequate; therefore, the response rate in this study was sufficient for meaningful analysis.

### Demographic Information

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the study participants. Demographic data are important as they provide background information that helps in understanding the context of the findings (*Creswell, 2014*).

### Age of Participants

The ages of the orphaned children who participated in the study varied, reflecting the diverse population served by the institution. Age was considered important

because children experience and respond to trauma differently depending on their development stage.

The results show that the majority of participants (44%) were aged between 10 and 13 years. This age group is critical in cognitive and emotional development, making them particularly vulnerable to effects of trauma. Similar findings were reported by *Perry (2006)*, who notes that trauma during middle childhood can significantly affect learning and emotional regulation.

### Gender of participants

Gender distribution was also considered to understand whether trauma experiences and effects varied between boys and girls.

The findings indicate a fairly balanced gender representation, with males slightly outnumbering females. This balance allowed for diverse perspectives on trauma experience and ensured that the findings were not gender-biased. Research by *Cluver et al. (2012)* suggest that both boys and girls experience orphan hood trauma, though they may express emotional and behavioral distress differently.

### CONCLUSION

The study concludes that orphanhood trauma has a significant negative impact on children's academic performance, emotional wellbeing, and behavioral development. Addressing basic needs alone is insufficient without structured trauma-informed psychosocial support.

### RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study recommends strengthening psychosocial support services, training caregivers and educators in trauma-informed care, implementing supportive educational practices, enhancing stakeholder collaboration, and regularly evaluating support programs.

## Areas for Further Study

Further research should focus on longitudinal studies, comparative institutional and community-based care studies, evaluation of trauma-informed interventions, and broader regional studies across Malawi.

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