

CHALLENGES AFFECTING SCHOOLING FACED BY CHILD-HEAD FAMILIES: A STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS BY TEACHERS, PARENTS AND LEARNERS IN MASVINGO DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Child only household is a new form of family that is rapidly growing especially in the sub-Saharan African countries. The meaning of childhood is redefined for many around the world by the death of parents. Children living in such households are denied a sense of childhood comfort and are burdened physically, emotionally, socially and psychologically. This study set to investigate the challenges faced by children from child only households that interfere with learning. The study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. In this study a qualitative case design was used with interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires. A total of forty four participants were used in the study. Data indicates that children heading families encounter many challenges in their everyday life that interfere with learning. They are left with an arduous task for fending for younger siblings. The children shoulder all the bulk of the housework and are vulnerable to poverty and social isolation and this creates an environment which does not foster academic performance. In conclusion the authors recommend that parents be encouraged to find means of ensuring that their children are well provided for when they pass on. It is also recommended that communities, teachers and peers be conscientised to treat children in child-headed households with respect, because they are humans and they are the nation's resources. They should refrain from cultural beliefs which promote stigmatisation, marginalisation and segregation of such children.

Key words: Child, learning, orphan, household, child-headed household.