

IMPLICATIONS OF ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION ON DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES WITHIN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was to examine implications of economic deprivation on developmental outcomes within early childhood developmental settings in a selected resettlement area. The design employed was qualitative in which views and observations of respondents were thematised and discussed. 20 parents and 20 children participated in the study. Interviews, focus group interviews and observations were employed to solicit views of the participants on the extent to which economic deprivation impacted on developmental outcomes of children in their early years. The study revealed that families experienced problems related to poverty, sanitation and health, transport availability and discrimination experienced by children at home and school, owing to their deprived circumstances. These negative forces affected school attendance and performance. There is need for collaboration between families, the government and schools to assist children and households affected by abject poverty and deprivation so that they are equipped with skills to combat deprivation in order to enhance developmental outcomes in children at ECD level.

Keywords: Economic deprivation, developmental outcomes, early childhood development, poverty.

INTRODUCTION

Appropriate early childhood education is fundamental to the child's development later in his/her life. (Freitas, Shelton & Tudge, 2008). To this end, both human and material resources are required for effective establishment of developmental programs at ECD level (Taruvinga, Mushoriwa & Muzembe, 2011). Young children have a right to live and receive education and support because it is their legitimate right (Education Act, 1987 revised 1996; 2006; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006; UN Rights of the Child, 1948). The need to identify and educate children in their tender ages is further echoed in The Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) and Sustainable Development Goals (2016-2030)

In their study on integrating early childhood development (ECD) into mainstream primary school education in Zimbabwe with reference to implications to water sanitation and hygiene delivery (WASH), Gunhu, Mugweni & Dhloho (2011) emphasized the need to address educational and developmental aspects of the 3 to 5-year-old children. Their study centred on rural community schools which catered for the economically as well as socially disadvantaged rural African population. Tertullo (2002) confirms that early childhood is a

period of great opportunity. Children at this stage need to be properly nurtured. To this end, communities should provide these children with a safe, clean and enriching environment that caters for optimal development.

In her paper on socioeconomic disadvantage and child development among African Americans, McLoyd (1998) cited challenges emanating from childhood poverty. She further indicates that factors contributing to deterioration of American Children's economic wellbeing included sluggish economic growth that had stagnated and eroded income among young families. Smith, Brooks-Gunn & Klebavon (1997) also cited the effects of poverty and low socioeconomic status on children's cognitive functioning. Children living in poverty are exposed to more extreme environmental conditions (Barnett, 1995; Bradley et al, 1994; Campbell & Ramey, 1995; Crooks, 1995; Dubow & Ippolito, 1994, Duncan, 1991). There is also growing evidence that income poverty and related experiences influence children's cognitive academic and socioemotional functioning through environmental processes that go well beyond genetically transmitted attributes (Huston, McLoyd & Coll, 1997; Raymonds, 1991, Rowe & Rodges, 1997; Yokishawa, 1995; Zigler, 1994).

Persistent poverty has been found to have more adverse effects than transient poverty on the cognitive development of pre-school children (Duncan et al 1994; Korenman et al, 1995; Smith et al, 1997; Zill et al 1995). There have been also studies conducted to determine the effects of schools 'socio-economic implications on children's development (Tienda, 1991). It has also been discovered that home resources have their impact on children's academic growth (Eutish, 1997). It has been proved that poor children from poor families who attended preschool intervention programmes had superior academic readiness skills than children who did not enrol for preschool programs (Currie & Thomas, 1995; Raynolds, 1991).

The family unit is the primary context for providing resources and opportunities necessary for healthy development of young children (Hephum, 2004). Most studies, however, reveal that the majority of children are reared in families where the income and earnings capacity are less than what is actually needed (Shea, 2000; Frey & Slutter, 2002). Effective parenting focuses on the relationship that the young child has with the adults who are emotionally and consistently available to the young child's needs (Santrock, 2004). This denotes that family relationships economic and social factors influence parental responsiveness, nurturing as well as consistent practices aimed at facilitating the child's development across all domains.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals Number 1 (United nations, 2015) stipulates eradication of extreme poverty and hunger in order to ensure that all children develop well. The increased prevalence of poverty, however, in developing countries, impacts negatively on children's development, particularly at ECD level (UNICEF, 2010; Redd et al, 2009; Gershoff & Rover, 2003). It is in this light that this study shall focus on implications of economic deprivation on developmental outcomes within early childhood development settings within the Zimbabwean context.

Objectives

- To examine the extent to which economic deprivation impacts on developmental outcomes of children at ECD level.
- To explore strategies of minimizing effects of economic deprivation on developmental outcomes for children in early childhood development

Research Questions

- How does economic deprivation impact on developmental outcomes of children at ECD Level?
- What strategies can be employed to minimize effects of economic deprivation in developmental outcomes for children in early childhood development situations?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological model of child development, (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Like Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner maintains that there are contextual activities and interactions that are likely to promote or derail optimal development of children. Bronfenbrenner conceptualized the ecological environment in which development occurs as a set of 'nested structures' which influence children's developmental outcomes, (Berk, 2010). The structures of the ecological environment serve as a framework to explain the process by which economic deprivation impedes children's development. This means that a family and community's diminished coping capacity creates a sense of powerlessness and economic pressures which will result in low level of nurturance, uninvolved and inconsistent parenting (Keenan and Evans, 2005). Obstructions that a child meets in life, however, do not stop development but create trajectories that will either impede or facilitate development (Rutter, 1999). Not all children exposed to poverty and economic disadvantages experience negative outcomes, but some challenges make them resilient.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The study was qualitative and employed the case study research design. Creswell (2011) states that the case study approach enables the researcher to build a rich picture on an entity using different data collection tools and diverse individuals relating to the case. This was done in order to describe, understand and interpret multiple realities that were specific to economic deprivation and child development issues (Creswell, 2011; Cohen & Manion, 2011). The case study allowed the researchers to obtain first-hand experience relating to the issue under study.

Participants and Setting

20 parents were purposively sampled and 20 children were selected by systematic random sampling.

Instrumentation

An interview guide was used on the children's sample whilst teachers participated in focus group interviews. The responses of participants were recorded and thematised for easy analysis of findings. An observation schedule for children was also employed where a check list was used .

Observations were conducted to determine the extent and effect of economic deprivations on ECD children. These observations were done over a period of 10 days at each homestead. Observations were relevant in that the checklists developed by the researchers were applied, to check on the availability of different children's needs, parents and child interaction.

Procedure

Permission was granted by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in the case of ECD centres attached to primary schools. With regards to centres privately owned,

permission was granted by the managers of these centres. The study was carried out in Zimbabwe in a selected resettlement area. No participants were coerced to take part in the study. With regards to children, parental consent was sought through the heads of institutions and centre directors.

FINDINGS

Results from parents

Parents interviewed responded that they did not have resources to send their children to the ECD centre in the resettlement area. There was no transport and the rivers were full and there were no bridges.

“Totomirira kuti rwizi rupweve tozoyambutsa vana”- ‘We shall wait till the river subsides then we will help the children to cross the river’.

Parents also indicated that there was no food on the table. They did not have maize because the harvest was poor.

‘VeCARE vachatipa kudya mwedzi unouya’- ‘The CARE NGO will provide us with food next month’.

Some parents revealed that they did not have money required to pay the teachers at the ECD centres. They also responded that they could not cope with the requirements at the ECD centre.

“Miviri yaneta, hatichakwanisi kuenda kuchikoro kundovaka pacentre”, - ‘Our bodies are tired, we cannot walk to the centre to take part in the building projects’.

Most parents responded that they had one meal in 2 days, hence, parents and children were malnourished. They also revealed that it was impossible to raise gardens in the home and village because the ground was dry.

“Todyei munhamo yakadai, ivhu rakaoma, hatina magadheni”, - ‘What must we eat in this poverty, the soil is hard, we do not have gardens’.

Parents also revealed that children suffered from hunger and kwashiorkor all round. Even the parents experienced abject poverty and hunger, as result, children only attended ECD classes twice per month.

”Kuchikoro kwacho hakuchaendwi mazuva ose. Wangu Tonderai atova nemwedzi wose asingaendi”, - ‘School attendance is no longer a daily occurrence, my child Tonderai, has not been to school for the past month’.

Parents also indicated that the shortage of water in their area was acute and that they sent children to distant places to fetch water for drinking, cooking and bathing. Children were going to the ECD centre without bathing and food.

‘Chibhorani chepamagirosa chakanguri chafa hachina kugadzirwa, vuye simbi dzakabiwa namakorokoza. Cchiya chibhorani chemhiri kweminda hachina mvura, chakapwa’- ‘The borehole at the grocer’s shop has been out of order for a long time and the parts of the pump were stolen by gold panners. The borehole across the fields is dry.’

Parents also cited lack of clinics, medication and health facilities in the area. There were few toilets and people used bush toilets, hence, health problems affected both parents and children.

”Kuno hakuna maravhatiri nekirinika. Tsvina yazara pese pese musango. Vana vari kufa mumisha. Muraini rokwa Bhiza umo, takaviga vaviri zuro chaiye”, - ‘There are no toilets and a clinic. Human faeces are everywhere in the forest and children are dying in the villages. In the Bhiza village, we buried 2 children, only yesterday’.

Parents cited the need for governmental intervention to assist them in their poverty. They needed clothes, money, food and transport.

“Hurumende ngavatirangarire tirarame nevana vedu”. ‘We request the government to assist us and our children’.

Results from children

The children cited lack of clothes and food at home and to take to school.

“Handina dhirezi reкупfeka. Handina satchel reкупtakura zvidhori zvangu seraChipo”, - ‘I do not have a dress to wear. I do not have a satchel for keeping my dolls like Chipo’s’.

Children complained of not having regular meals.

“Handina kuisa chinhu mumuromo zuva rose”. ‘I haven’t had anything to eat the whole day’.

The children indicated that they did not have any toys at home and at school. They also complained that their brothers and sisters laughed at them and beat them.

“Mukoma vanogarondirova vachiti ndinodyisa, ndinokara”, - ‘My elder brother always hits me and accuses me of overeating and greed.’

Children also complained that their parents deprived them of things which they gave to their elder brothers and sisters and there was no medicine if they complained of headache and stomach aches. They indicated that clinics were far away from home.

“Mudumbu mangu munorwadza asi hapana mushonga”, - ‘My tummy is painful. There is no medicine’.

Some of the children indicated that they were not freely accepted at the ECD centre. They indicated that their friends (other children beat them and scolded them).

“Ndanzwa nekurotukwa nevamwe vana kuchikoro vanonditi, “Pepuka. Uri chibharanzi.” ‘I am always scolded by others at school, they say to me, “Wake up, you’re a fool”

Children revealed that they had no friends at school. They needed assistance from other children. They also complained that teachers scolded them for being slow and for not paying attention in class.

“Ticha vanondituka kana ndarasa penzura yangu. Inenge yatorwa naTimoti zimbabvha mukirasi”.- ‘The teacher scolds me if I have misplaced my pencil. Timothy steals my pencil. He is a big thief in class.’

Some children indicated that they received mahewu at school and longed to go to the ECD centres to drink the mahewu.

“Tinopiwa mahewu anonaka kuchikoro”, - ‘We are given sweet mahewu at school’.

The children confessed that their parents were unemployed and things were difficult at home. They had many brothers and sisters and life was hard without food and clothes.

“Imba yatinorara inovhinza. Baba havagoni kuipfurira. Tanzi tinocheka uswa musango”, - ‘Our hut where we sleep is leaking. Dad is unable to repair it. We have been instructed to fetch grass from the forest’.

The children also revealed that there were no toys and they borrowed from other children. Some children indicated that their mothers did not have pots for cooking food. They borrowed from their neighbours.

“Nezuro vakakweretya kwambuya Chingwena kudhuze nekumunda kwedu”, - ‘Yesterday mummy borrowed from granny Chingwena who lives near our field’.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of findings shall be thematically presented.

Resources

The study revealed that the parents in the resettlement area lacked resources to maintain their lives, hence they could not adequately look after their children. The resources included money to send their children to ECD centres, transport as well as food. Children indicated that they were hungry and lacked food. They also cited lack of toys in their homes and at the

ECD centres. Parental incomes have implications on child outcomes (Meyer, 1997, Duncan & Young, 1995; Gottschalk, 1992). Economic hardships in the home have a bearing in children's development, (McLoyd, 1998). Lack of resources in the home and at school has adverse effects on children's cognitive development and learning motivation. (Smith & Zaslow, 1995; Ramey et al, 1995; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Duncan, Brooks-Gunn & Klebanov, (1994), indicated that. lack of resources impacts on childhood developmental outcomes and attitudes to life. (Ridge, 2006; Vander Hoerk, 2005; Atree, 2006).

Poverty

Poverty in the home affected children's attendance at school. Parents in the resettlement areas cited poor harvests, creating poverty, affecting child rearing practices in the home. Children were affected by poor living conditions which led to poor performance at school. Tarrullo (2007) confirms that early childhood is a time of great vulnerability and great opportunity. Freitas, Shelton & Trudge claim that appropriate early childhood education is fundamental for the child's later educational development. McLoyd (1998), concurs that children living in poverty are exposed to more extreme environmental conditions than those living in more comfortable circumstances. Persistent poverty is consistently found to have more adverse effects on the cognitive development of pre-school children than transitory poverty. (Duncan et al, 1994; Korenman et al, 1995; Smith et al, 1997; Zill et al, 1995). In the same vein, Pagani, Bowlerice & Fremblay (1997), affirmed effects of poverty on children's classroom placement and behaviour problems. Increased prevalence of poverty in developing countries impacts negatively on children's development, particularly during the early childhood preschool years (UNICEF, 2010; Gersholf & River, 2009)

Health problems

On the issue of children's health problems, it emerged from the study that lack of attendance at school resulted from children's illnesses. Parents also cited the absence of clinics and medication in the resettlement area which sadly led to deaths of children in their tender ages. Children also complained of health problems affecting their effective participation in the ECD centres. Education and health work in synergy (UNICEF, 2006). In tandem with the above observations, children's physical and cognitive development are a by-product of their health and nutritional status, (Tarrullo, 2007). Nutrition plays a significant role in cognitive development of children in the early years, the prime period of their growth. (Geavanis & Devi, 1994; food and nutrition council, 2010). Promotion of a healthy climate for children at ECD level is an empowering tool for rural communities (Gunhu, Mugweni & Dhlomo, 2011). Children living in persistently poor families were more likely, to experience deficits in nutritional status and affecting their health and cognitive and emotional development, (Miller & Karenman, 2004; Duncan et al; 2004).

Sanitation

The sanitation problem was cited by parents who lamented the lack of toilets in the area where several people resorted to bush toilets to release themselves. Lack of water was highlighted by both parents and children. The lack of water in the homes resulted in residents walking long distances to fetch water for cooking, drinking and washing. The provision of adequate nutritious foods, drinking water and sanitation services is a recognizable right for every child, (International Convention of Human Rights (...); Kent 2004). Sanitation provision in the home and families leads to cognitive development in young children and, ultimately, their all-round growth (Hulton & Haller, 2004; Luby, 2005; Pruss, 2005; Redhouse, 2004). Effective sanitation programmes are essential in addressing the educational and developmental needs of children at ECD Level. (Gunhu, Mugweni & Dhlomo, 2011).

Discrimination

Children complained of unfavourable treatment from their siblings who laughed at them. They also indicated that their parents deprived them of things they needed like toys. Teachers and other children at the ECD centres also ridiculed them. The need for love, care and friendship was quite evident from the children's responses. There is growing evidence in research concerning the role of parents' emotional responses to children's cries and concerns as they bring up children, (Duncan et al,1994; McLoyd & Shanahan, 1993, McLoyd et al, 1994). Effective child rearing practices have produced long term gains in self-esteem and social competence for children in their early years (Lee et al, 1990; Schweinhart et al, 1993).

CONCLUSION

The various forms of economic deprivation, manifesting themselves in poverty, poor parenting style, and sanitation and health deficits in homes have been discussed. The implications of such deprivation on cognitive and social development of children at ECD level are evident. It is vital that concerted efforts be engaged to address these negative forces for the healthy growth of children. Stakeholders in child development who include parents, school systems, governments and relevant organizations should play a significant role in alleviating poverty, ill health, resource scarcity especially in rural communities. This will ensure a healthy, all round child whose cognitive and social base is sound and secure, who shall remain an asset to the development of society.

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