COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL DEVELOPMENT IN ALTERNATIVE CARE AND FAMILY SETUPS: A CASE STUDY OF MERU DISTRICT, ARUSHA

Frida Mville
Tengeru Institute of Community Development (TICD), Arusha, **TANZANIA**
P.OBOX 1006 Arusha, Tanzania
Email: fridamville3@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study compares the behavioral outcomes of children raised in alternative care institutions and family setups in Meru District, Arusha, Tanzania. It seeks to identify preferred and non-preferred behaviors and the underlying factors influencing these behaviors. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 86 parents and 20 caregivers through open-ended questionnaires and interviews. Participants were selected through purposive sampling. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed. The findings indicate that children in alternative care are more likely to exhibit behavioral challenges such as physical aggression, restlessness, lying, and anxiety. These behaviors are primarily attributed to inadequate caregiver-child ratios, limited individual attention, psychological distress stemming from parental absence, and weak integration with the surrounding community. Conversely, children raised in family setups demonstrate more positive behaviors, including cooperation, emotional stability, and problem-solving skills, which are strongly influenced by parental guidance, community support, and religious values. The study also notes instances of resilience among children in alternative care when provided with consistent care and emotional support. The study concludes that institutional care often poses significant barriers to children's psychosocial development, while family environments tend to foster more favorable behavioral outcomes due to close parental involvement and supportive networks. It recommends targeted caregiver training, improved caregiver-child ratios, and the prioritization of kinship care to better support children in alternative care. These findings aim to contribute to evidence-based policies and practices for improving child welfare in Tanzania and similar contexts.

Keywords: Child behavior, family setup, alternative care, psychosocial development, caregiver-child relationship.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Children are universally regarded as the cornerstone of future societal development and the most valuable assets to any nation (Burman, 2020). Their well-being, safety, and development are critical to ensuring the success and sustainability of communities (Clark et al., 2020; Varghese et al., 2019). Global efforts, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), emphasize the importance of securing children's rights to care, safety, and family support. Article 7 of the CRC asserts that every child has the right to know and be cared for by their parents, while Article 20 mandates alternative care arrangements for children deprived of a family environment (UNHCR, 2020).

Despite these global commitments, an estimated 8 million children worldwide live in institutional care due to a range of factors, including armed conflicts, natural disasters, economic hardships, and social challenges (UNICEF, 2021). Children in institutional care

often face systemic challenges such as insufficient psychosocial support, limited individual attention, and exposure to violence and exploitation (Ross, 2023; Sitienei & Pillay, 2019). These limitations are linked to higher rates of emotional and behavioral issues, such as anxiety, aggression, and social withdrawal, among children raised in such environments (King et al., 2023). By contrast, family setups are widely associated with better outcomes in child development, as they provide emotional stability, consistent guidance, and community integration, which are essential for shaping positive behaviors (Braithwaite, 2021).

In Africa, the challenges of alternative care are particularly acute due to resource constraints, societal dynamics, and limited regulatory oversight. The continent has one of the highest rates of orphaned and abandoned children, driven by poverty, diseases like HIV/AIDS, and conflicts (UNICEF, 2021). Many institutional care facilities are understaffed and under-resourced, further exacerbating the developmental challenges faced by children in these settings. Studies in African contexts highlight the need for improved caregiver training, child-focused interventions, and greater emphasis on kinship and foster care as alternatives to institutionalization (Julian, 2019).

In Tanzania, approximately 2 million children are orphaned or abandoned, with a significant proportion placed in institutional care (UNICEF, 2021). Although alternative care provides basic needs such as shelter and food, many children in these settings face challenges related to poor caregiver-child ratios, a lack of individual attention, and limited psychosocial support, all of which are crucial for emotional and behavioral development (Ross, 2023). By contrast, family setups, which often benefit from stronger community ties and cultural traditions of collective child-rearing, are more likely to foster cooperation, emotional stability, and problem-solving skills in children.

In Meru District, Arusha, the impact of these differing care environments is particularly evident. Institutional care facilities in the region often grapple with resource limitations, leading to overcrowding and insufficient staff to meet the emotional and developmental needs of children. This contrasts with family setups, where children tend to receive closer parental guidance and benefit from community cohesion and traditional values. However, the specific behavioral differences between children raised in alternative care and family environments remain underexplored in this context. The study was guided by the Bowlby's Attachment Theory which believed that the early relationship with parents play a major role in child development and continue to influence social relationship throughout life.

This study addresses this gap by comparing the behavioral development of children in alternative care institutions with those in family setups in Meru District, Arusha. By identifying the behavioral patterns, contributing factors, and protective mechanisms, the study aims to provide insights that can inform interventions and policies to enhance child well-being and development in Tanzania and similar settings.

2.0 Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Meru District Arusha region Tanzania. Meru District is chosen as a study area because is one among the districts in the regions that has many alternative care centers

Both probability and non-probability sampling method were employed, Simple random sampling was used to get the parents from Usa River, Leganga, Tengeru and Kilimani public primary schools to represent the other parents for the children in family set up and caregivers from Faraja, Huruma, Okia, Upendo, Kiwawa, East African, Usa River Children Center,

Upendo Face and Tumaini Children Foundation orphanages as non-governmental organizations were purposively selected to represent the other caregivers for the children in the orphanages of Meru district. slovin's formulae was used to get the sample size and resulted to 86 parents and 20 caregivers to make total of 106 respondents for entire study.

Data were collected using open –ended questionnaires and through interviewing of respondents form selected children care. The quantitative data collected was analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22.0.Whereby, thematic analysis was used to discover primary themes emerging from qualitative data captured by Interviews and Data analyzed were presented in forms of texts and tables.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Identification of Behavioral Differences Between Children Raised in Alternative Care and Family Setups

3.1.1 Behavior of children rose in alternative care.

Various expressions of bad characteristics of children raised at alternative caregiver as reported by respondents are presented in Table 2. It is clearly shown that there are some of the characteristics which were reported not to be expressed so much by children nurtured in the alternative caregiver as indicators of bad behaviors. Characteristics like children getting angry very easily with someone, encouraged other children to fight, called other children bad names, insulting other children to make them angry, picking or bullying other children and stealing school or elsewhere; were scantly reported to be exhibited by children nurtured in the orphanage centers. However, characteristics like teasing other children to make them angry, getting into physical fight when angry, often lies or cheats, being restless or over reactive, cannot stay still for long, often losing temper, many worries of often seems worried and many fears, easily scared were reported by both the parents and caregivers to be common for children nurtured in the alternative caregivers as it is shown in Table 1.

These findings of the study comply with the results reported by Elebiary et al., (2010) who conducted a study on behavioral and emotional problems among institutionalized child in India. The study found that institutionalized children are at risk for developing emotional and behavioral problems.

Table 1: Perception of respondents reported on the children behavior rose in alternative cares (N = 106)

Parameter	Strongly Agree (%)	Somewhat Agree (%)	Somewhat Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Teased other children to make them angry	57.0	3.1	30.7	9.2
Got angry very easy with someone	1.5	9.6	73.5	15.4
Encouraged other children to fight	9.6	38.5	36.5	15.4
Got into physical fight because s/he was angry	7.5	66.0	20.8	5.7
Called other students bad names	4.0	12.0	60.0	24.0
Insulted others to make them angry	7.7	11.5	67.3	13.5
Picked on or bullied by other children	2.0	9.8	62.7	25.5
Frequently get angry	13.2	20.8	52.8	13.2
Got into physical fight because of angry	2.0	48.0	44.0	6.0
Often lies or cheats	13.5	44.2	32.7	9.6
Restless overactive, cannot stay still for long	20.0	60.0	12.0	8.0
Often loses temper	7.7	59.6	26.9	5.8
Often fights with other children or bullies them	3.9	25.5	54.9	15.7
Many worries or often seems worried	8.2	44.9	24.5	22.4
Many fears, easily scared	12.2	46.8	18.0	24.0
Steals from home, school or elsewhere	16.0	26.0	50.0	8.0
Often unhappy, depressed or tearful.	26.4	5.7	5.7	62.2

Source: *Field data (2024).*

3.1.2 Reasons for bad character expressions by children raised in alternative cares

Various reasons were given by respondents for these children reared in alternative homes to express bad manners/characteristics. The major reason that was reported in many occasions by 22.5% was the influence of community surrounding a child. Other reasons given were differences in raising a child between parents and guardians and influence of media respectively by 18.6 %, hunger and pain due to loss of parents by 6.8%. Other reasons given are as presented in Table 2 below. The findings of the study comply with that of Rosa eta al. (2012) which reported that poor ratio between care giver and children impact on the quality of care provided to children where in some instance one care giver can serve 6 – 10 children, this drive limited care and attention given with regards to children behavior.

Table 2: Responses of respondents on reasons given for bad behavior expressed by children raised in alternative cares (N = 106).

Reason	Percentage (%)
Influence of community surrounding a child	22.5
Difference in raising a child between parents and guardians	18.6
Influence of media	18.6
Hunger and pain due to loss of parents	6.8
Fear resulted from lack of parents	4.8
Bad guidance	4.8
Lack of confidence	2.9
School and home environment	2.0
Poor cooperation between parents	2.0
Domestic child humiliation	2.0
Imitating bad behavior	1.0
Haterage of children	1.0
Poor closeness to children	1.0
Carelessness to children	1.0
Bad advise	1.0
More freedom of children in alternative cares	1.0
Joyful to children nurtured in alternative cares	1.0
Poor children upbringing at schools	1.0
Total	**100.0**

Source: *Field data (2024).*

3.1.3 Behavior of children rose in family set up

The results of this study in Table 3 revealed that children rose in family setup majority of them having good characters compared to those rose in alternative care very few respondents were not positive when they were asked to comment on good characters expressed by children nurtured in home setting. The implication of this result is that not all children raised by their families' express good manners; there are some who are behaving differently from what was expected. This is also the same to children who are raised in the children's homes as it was reported during interview'

> "…. All of our children have good behavior because we have not come across of any critical problem of behavior to our children but just minor behavior cases of which it is normal for any child even us when we were children, we had the same situation which is very normal to a child…" shake (2024)

This result is in agreement with that reported by Kweka et al., (2014) who did a study in Tanzania; they observed that childcare includes access to adequate food consumption, health services and a healthy environment. Parents and siblings are critical caregivers and educators. They are primary social agency to develop the socially accepted moral values and attitude knowledge and skills to their children. Many parents in Tanzania realize the importance of proper childcare to their children but economic pressure (poverty, workload and lack of

amenities) has meant less care for children as parents struggle for subsistence needs. This implies that care giving to children raised by family might be lacking as parents are busy to make hand meet and leaving children with little or no care.

Table 3: Perception of respondents reported on the children behavior rose in family setup (N = 106)

Parameter	Strongly Agree (%)	Somewhat Agree (%)	Somewhat Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Helped someone stay out of a fight	59.6	34.7	3.8	1.9
Told other children how S/he felt when they did something S/he liked	63.5	32.7	1.9	1.9
Cooperated with others	69.2	23.1	5.8	1.9
Protected someone from a bully.	15.4	82.7	1.9	0.0
Helped other students solve a problem	7.7	78.8	9.6	3.98
Avoided getting in trouble at home, school in the community	26.9	67.3	5.8	0.0
Considerate of other people's feelings	13.7	70.6	11.8	3.9
Shares readily with other children, for example toys, treats, pencils.	68.0	26.0	4.0	2.0
Is generally, well behaved, usually does what adults request.	69.2	26.9	3.9	0.0
Is helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill.	25.5	66.7	2.0	5.8
Has at least one good friend.	75.0	19.2	1.9	3.9
Generally liked by other children.	57.7	38.5	3.8	0.0
Easily distracted, concentration wanders.	13.7	76.5	5.9	3.9
Picked on or bullied by other children.	11.8	23.5	58.8	5.9
Often offers to help other (parents, teachers, other children)	25.5	66.7	7.8	0.0
Thinks things out before acting.	11.8	76.5	9.7	2.0
Gets along better with adults than children.	13.8	76.5	5.9	3.8
Kind to fellow children.	14.0	74.2	5.9	5.9

Source: *Field data (2024).*

3.1.4 Reasons for good character expressions by children raised in family set up.

The findings of this study revealed that, factors that attributes to good behavior expressed by children raised in family setup were good surrounding community, good parental kid upbringing, religious believe and friend around. Other factors that influence good children behavior are as presented in Table 4 below.

The findings of the study revealed to that of Bradley, (2019). which finds that in family set up Parents play a key role in educating their children. However, they also rely on resources within their community to fulfill their parenting role. The degree of cohesion amongst members of the community influences the nature of these relationships. Communities characterized by high levels of cohesion, such as those with active community groups, provide good opportunities for individuals to become involved in and develop the resources in their community. Studies by Harris (2002) and Rowe (1994) also support these findings, showing that peer influence on behavior becomes more consistent when children are raised in a family setup compared to alternative care institutions.

Table 4: Respond of respondents on reasons given for good behavior expressed by children raised in family setup (N= 106)

Reason	Percentage
Surrounding community	49.0
Good parental kid upbringing	15.7
Religious belief issues	13.7
Friends around	5.9
Parental advise	3.9
To meet kid's need	3.8
Parental closeness	2.0
Good parental teachings	2.0
Involve children in home activities	2.0
To allow time for sports	2.0
Total	**100.0**

Source: *Field data (2024).*

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations
4.1 Conclusion
From the findings elucidated in this study, it can generally be stated that there are differences in behavior between children cared in family set up and those raised children's homes. Various bad behavior was realized in this study, however, causative of expression of such behavior was mainly instigated by poor care giver – children relationship mainly resulted from large number of children per care giver or frequent changing of care giver. This results into lack or warmth or closeness to children hence loneliness feeling of these children.

Good number of attributes impacting to good behavior expressed by children raised by their families was good surrounding community, good parental kid upbringing, religious believe and friend around. However, parents were singled out to play a key role in educating their children. Resources within their community to fulfill their parenting role is a factor of paramount importance as poor resource families leave their kids with little or no care in struggle to meet household subsistence requirements

4.2 Recommendation
This study recommends that, In alternative care centers, training should be given to care givers so as to foster understanding among them with regards to children good treatment and behavior monitoring, also there should be an optimal ratio between care giver and institutionalized children so as to improve attention to children raised in orphan centers. Furthermore, wherever possible children in alternative care centers who have their relatives, should be taken out of the centers and be nurtured by their relatives as the psychological impairment they acquire in the centers persist for their entire life. And lastly this study recommends more research on the impact of institutionalization to children health and well-being in Tanzania.

REFERENCES

1. Bradley, R. H. (2019). Environment and parenting. In Handbook of parenting (pp. 474-518). Routledge.
2. Braithwaite, V. (2021). Institutional oppression that silences child protection reform. International journal on child maltreatment: research, policy and practice, 4(1), 49-72.
3. Burman, E. (2020). Developments: Child, image, nation. Routledge.

4. Clark, H., Coll-Seck, A. M., Banerjee, A., Peterson, S., Dalglish, S. L., Ameratunga, S., ... & Costello, A. (2020). A future for the world's children? A WHO–UNICEF–Lancet Commission. The Lancet, 395(10224), 605-658.

5. Julian, M. M., Li, J., Wright, A., & Jimenez-Etcheverria, P. A. (2019). Young children in institutional care: Characteristics of institutions, children's development, and interventions in institutions. Children's social worlds in cultural context, 217-229.

6. King, R. D., Raynes, N. V., & Tizard, J. (2023). Patterns of residential care: Sociological studies in institutions for handicapped children. Taylor & Francis.

7. Ross, E. (2023). Emily Baughan. Saving the Children: Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and Empire.

8. Sitienei, E. C., & Pillay, J. (2019). Psychosocial support for orphans and vulnerable children in a community-based organization in Kericho, Kenya. Journal of Children's Services, 14(4), 292-302.

9. UNHCR. (2020). Guidelines for the alternative care of children, UN General Assembly

10. UNICEF (2020) *Child protection*: Case study of Tanzania.

11. UNICEF. (2021).*Alternative Care for Children without Primary caregivers in Tsunami Affected Countries*, Thailand UNICEF.

12. Varghese. P, Krishnan.R, Rejisha. A, Jacob.R, Raju.R and Nishad. K (2019), A Descriptive Study to Access the Behavioral Problems Among Institutionalized Children in Mangalore, America International journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social sciences, Vol.14 (609), 59-62