THE SILENT VOICES OF ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN LIVING IN THE HIV AND AIDS ENVIRONMENT IN URBAN ZAMBIA: A PASTORAL CARE CHALLENGE

by

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SUMMARY

Orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) living in the HIV and AIDS environment in urban Zambia face numerous challenges. In most cases the children are either infected or affected by the HIV and AIDS crisis. The majority of orphans have lost one or both parents, while vulnerable children are too poor to afford basic needs of life (food, clothing, shelter). The challenges faced include lack of parental nurture and care when needed most at a critical period of growth. They suffer poverty, lack of health care and education, homelessness, violence, community scorn and humiliation.

The research's aim was to listen and gain a deeper understanding of the children's circumstances as they tell their silent stories and experiences of care and/or lack of it. The other specific objectives were: to provide an enabling environment where the children could voice their "silent" voices freely, and to disseminate the study findings to policy makers for consideration in formulating developmental and children care policies.

The research was carried out from a narrative approach within a postmodern social-constructionist paradigm. The listening of the stories and experiences of the OVC was done from a Practical Theological perspective. In the research process, various discourses about orphans, vulnerable children, care, HIV and AIDS and urban Zambia were examined and described.

Three separate groups of children participants were drawn from 3 care giving non-governmental organizations (NGOs) located in separate peri-urban areas within Lusaka city. These were: Cheshire Homes Society of Zambia: Divine Providence Home, St. Lawrence Home of Hope and Kondwa Day Centre for Orphans (Seko House).
The first two are faith based organisations (FBO) while the third is a community based organisation (CBO). St. Lawrence Home operates two ministries: one provides residential holistic care to the OVC, and the other is a street children ministry whose main objective is to reintegrate street children with their families.

The researcher also interacted and listened to the voices of the care givers about care of the children. The NGOs also talked about the various aspects and challenges they encounter in their efforts to provide holistic care to the marginalized children.

To enhance the understanding of the co-researchers’ stories and experiences, the African world view with regard to children and their care was explored and described. In addition, the various voices and discourses that affect OVC were brought into conversation as research done in Africa was reviewed. The feedback and reflections by the researcher and the various co-researchers was mainly based on the emerging research data categories and themes.

The implications for practical theology were discussed. In particular, the various pastoral care challenges in this era of the HIV and AIDS crisis and the phenomenon of OVC were explored and described.

As an outcome of the research, various care narratives were described. In addition other outcomes were identified, reflected upon and described. Finally, while evaluating the research process, issues of reliability, validity, credibility, transferability, and consistency in conformity with qualitative research were discussed.
DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis entitled:

THE SILENT VOICES OF ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN LIVING IN THE HIV AND AIDS ENVIRONMENT IN URBAN ZAMBIA: A PASTORAL CHALLENGE

is my own original work, and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

Deborah Wanjiku Shawa

April 2012
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the courageous children orphaned by AIDS and vulnerable children who accompanied me on my research journey.

I commend you for having the courage to tell your story and determination to fight for your survival.

Thank you for your valuable contribution to the research.
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To all my dear companions on my life and research journey

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in Zambia is a consequence of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Many of these children are orphaned at a critical developmental stage of their lives when parental care and nurture is most needed. In the African world view, children’s opinions in matters concerning them including care are rarely sort or heard.

The main aim of this research was to gain a holistic understanding of the silent voices of children affected and/or infected by the HIV and AIDS, and specifically about their experiences of care and/or lack of it. The other aims were: 1) to research alternative means of getting the silent stories of the marginalized children heard by the Zambian society; and 2) to disseminate the research findings to policy makers.

Ten children orphaned by AIDS and vulnerable children, who are the co-researchers, drawn from three Lusaka urban based NGOs participated in the study. The research process and experience was reflected upon by the researcher, co-researchers and the care givers. The research was carried out from a Practical Theology perspective and the narrative approach within the postmodern social-constructionist paradigm. The ABDCE model for fiction writing as a metaphor for doing narrative research was used. This approach enabled the researcher to carry out the research in a systematic manner. It also allowed the researcher and the co-researchers to begin and work together throughout the research process, as the researcher listened to the co-researchers’ stories and experiences of care and/or lack of it and was drawn into them.
KEY TERMS

Orphans and Vulnerable children (OVC)
HIV and AIDS
Care
Silent voices
Pastoral care
Narratives
Social constructionism
African world view
Extended family
Urban Zambia
Shanty compounds (slums)
Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
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