



ATTITUDES OF ORPHANS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN HAMISI SUB-COUNTY, KENYA.

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ABSTRACT

Academic performance has become a measure of success in any institution of learning. It is supposed to measure how and where one will be placed in the larger society. Burn (1979) reveals that until the late 1950's even educationists had tended to restrict their investigations into factors influencing academic performance to IQ, social class, parental interest among others. These variables provide only a partial explanation of academic performance. More variables have emerged in the recent past; Orphan hood with its psychological, sociological and physiological aspects is one such variable that requires investigation to find out how it affects academic performance. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of orphans' attitude on the academic performance of students in secondary schools in Hamisi Sub-County. Out of the 36 secondary schools in Hamisi Sub-County, 13 were selected using stratified random sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select orphans only. Only form 3

and 4 participated in the study. This study was conducted using ex post facto design. The study was based on Maslow's hierarchy of Needs Theory. Data was collected using the questionnaires and document analysis. Data was analyzed using the descriptive and inferential statistics. The study findings spelled out the unique physiological, sociological and psychological problems that orphans go through, their attitudes towards orphan hood and their effects on the academic performance. This study demonstrated that attitudes which orphans have towards orphan hood affect their academic performance. It is therefore recommended that the secondary school administrators, teachers and other educators should look for methods to assist the orphans to adjust and cope up with orphan hood and inculcate healthy attitudes in these students in order for them to perform well in their academic work.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Academic excellence, Attitude, Orphan hood, physiological effects.

Introduction

Kenya as a society places heavy value on education and academic excellence. However, numerous factors continue to affect the students' academic performance. One such factor is orphan hood which is a state of losing one or both parents through death. Orphan hood has diverse physiological, psychological and sociological effects on students in secondary schools. In Kenya, relatively few studies have dealt with how these factors affect an orphan's academic performance. In the African traditional settings there were safety networks for children's care and protection after a calamity such as death of a parent had occurred. Grandparents, aunts, uncles and older people in the society provided the orphaned children with basic needs of nutrition, healthcare love and affection (Mbithi, 1969). Today the extended family ties are broken if not severely weakened as a result of emphasis on nuclear families and migration patterns in search of further education, jobs and lands. The schools have become 'homes' for most of the orphaned students and the teachers have become their 'parents'. Unfortunately the schools are rarely prepared for such roles of parenting. Children get traumatized by the events they undergo after the death of their parent(s).

Students especially in their adolescent stage are rarely prepared for the death of a parent (Parkes, 1972). According to Parkes when death of a parent occurs, the orphans go through intense

emotional, cognitive, physiological and behavioral reactions as a result of the grief incurred which may be exhibited in impaired school performance. It is against this background that this study was carried out to investigate the effects of orphan hood on academic performance of secondary schools in Hamisi Sub-County. From time immemorial the stark reality of death presents diverse challenges. These challenges are sociological, psychological and physiological. Societies have designed coping mechanisms to help adults in grief. When parents lose their children they get support from fellow adults (Parkes, 1993). Prior to the late 1970's most of the literature concerning adolescent bereavement consisted of meta psychological expositions or case reports of psychiatrically ill youth who are also bereaved. According to Furman (1974) these clinical reports tended to be just single-case studies, begging concerns about small size and their representativeness. The reasons for these few empirical studies were; low rate of adolescent bereavement, belief that adolescents are not developmentally capable of the kind of grief or depressive states like adults, the emotional painfulness of death for the adolescent, the family and the researcher, inability to know whether the bereaved adolescents had psychological difficulties before the death of the parents or whether all reactions were new psychological difficulties brought about by death.

The study was based on the Hierarchy Needs Theory by Abraham Maslow. According to this theory the behavior of human beings is driven by an urge to satisfy needs. Maslow came up with certain basic human needs. He arranged them in order of hierarchy and in a shape of a pyramid. The pyramid shape is not only used to demonstrate the hierarchal arrangement but also to show that the physiological needs at the broad base are more in number and are basic. Maslow (1943) postulates that physiological needs like food, shelter, health and clothing are primary and have to be met first before higher needs such as educational needs are met. In this study orphans will be struggling to get physiological needs such as enough sleep, love, a safe neighborhood among others. This may make them get fixated on lower levels and fail to devote themselves fully to unleash their full potential in academic performance. Following the physiological needs are the security needs, love needs, esteem needs and need for self-actualization. When students lose one or both parents, the patterns of their lives change completely. One such change is that they may begin to lack most of the basic needs and therefore fail to reach their optimal potential. According to Maslow a student who has lost a parent may lack the love and motivation to study

and achieve his or her dream because the student will still be struggling with the very basic needs of food, clothes, home, belongingness and safety needs.

The implication of Maslow's theory is fairly obvious. For example, orphans are bound to linger long on the first and second level of needs namely physiological, safety and belonging needs which are mainly realized by the role played by a parent. Teachers should therefore know their students' needs and understand the Maslow's concept as they develop their teaching and learning programs. Ray (1992) observes that the teacher has a primary responsibility to develop, encourage, enhance and maintain motivation in the student.

Research Methodology

The research design used in this study was ex post facto. The subjects of this study were orphaned students in secondary schools, class teachers, guidance and counselling teachers and head teachers. The Sub county has 36 secondary schools. Five schools are girls' schools, three are boys' schools, 25 are mixed day schools and three are mixed day and boarding schools. The sub county had a population of 10,718 secondary school students. Out of these 2,183 were orphans. Out of these numbers of orphans 520 were in Form 3 and 4. Orphaned students were sampled from Form 3 and 4 because they had been in school long enough to depict the effects of orphan hood on academic performance. This is also the group whose grades could be analyzed for considerable consecutive terms to measure the academic progress. The sample consisted of orphaned students in 36 secondary schools .Out of the 36 schools thirteen schools were selected. Out of the 520 orphans in form three and four a sample of 260 students was selected. This formed 50% of the total orphan population in Form 3 and 4 in Hamisi Sub-County. The 50% sample was preferred in order to produce the salient characteristics of orphaned population to an acceptable degree that is; orphans from different categories of schools, different genders, and different status of orphan hood, which had to be considered in the sampling procedures.

This study employed purposive sampling to select orphans only in the schools. Stratified random sampling was used to select the categories of schools. This implies that the researcher selected orphans from single sex schools of girls and boys, mixed day schools and mixed day and boarding schools. The researcher used questionnaires and document analysis as the main tools for collecting data. The reliability of the instruments was ascertained by use of test retest

method to establish their consistency. The researcher piloted the instruments in four schools to rule out ambiguities in any of the item. The validity of this instrument was evaluated using the judgment of the Supervisors at Moi University to ensure that the instrument measured what it purported to measure and that the objectives of the study were well represented and emphasized in the items. The SPSS computer program was able to generate descriptive statistics from which inferences were made about the population based on the sample data. In order to establish if there were any significant relations among the variables, correlation and regression analysis was carried out at $p < 0.05$.

Results and discussions

The researcher tabulated the frequencies and percentages of the demographic variables of the respondents as shown in Table1.

Table1: Demographic Descriptions of participants

	Demographics descriptions of participant	Frequency	Percent	
1	Gender of the Respondents	Male	119	49.8
		Female	120	50.2
2	Category of Schools	Boys boarding	43	18.0
		Girls Boarding	52	21.8
		Mixed day &Boarding	21	8.8
		Mixed Day	123	51.5
3	Status of Orphan hood	Mother Dead	42	17.6
		Father Dead	132	55.2
		Both parents Dead	65	27.2
4	Length of bereavement	1-3 years	40	22.2
		4-7 years	49	27.2
		8-10 years	38	21.1
		11 and above	53	29.4

The first variable in table 1 shows the gender of respondents. The sample of students was fairly well balanced in terms of gender of the respondents in the different categories of schools. The

category of schools attended by respondents was the second variable. The results suggested that the highest number of orphans attended Mixed Day Schools. This trend may be as a result of lack of fees and basic needs that would keep them in boarding schools. It also shows that many of the respondents stayed home with their guardians or surviving parents. Data on the status of orphan hood of the respondents was also collected as the third variable as shown on table 1. Majority of the respondents had lost their fathers, followed by those who had lost both parents. Those who had lost mothers were the least. Therefore from the table majority of the orphans depended on their mothers thus missing a father figure to act as role models especially to boys. Ainsworth et al, (2002) compares and contrasts the effects of losing a father to losing a mother or losing of both. They posit that those who have lost their mothers are needier compared to paternal orphans. The number of those who had lost fathers was the highest followed by those who had lost mothers while those who lost mothers were only 42.

The researcher's main objective was to find out the students attitude concerning their state of orphan hood on academic performance. The orphans' attitudes were investigated against the actual performance in their examinations. This was measured by the use of a Likert scale which had 10 items as shown on table 2.

Table 2: Orphans' Attitudes towards their Academic Performance

ITEM	Mean	Std. Deviation
I find myself thinking about the death of my parent (s).	4.02	1.198
It is always hard to get school fees since my parent(s) died.	4.15	1.210
I have problems getting enough basic needs.	3.87	1.316
Since the death my parent(s) I perform poorly academically.	2.90	1.479
I am never sure that somebody will visit me on visiting days.	3.03	1.462
I feel disturbed when my friends talk about their parent(s).	3.84	1.411
I need special support to succeed in my academic work.	4.61	.730
I do not know how my future will be without my parent(s)	3.27	1.434
I am lonely most times.	2.73	1.418
If my parents(s) were alive I would be living a better life.	4.28	1.112

Out of the 260 respondents, 212 filled this part of the questionnaire fully. Table 2 a mean of 4.61 indicated their strong need for success in academic work. In Kenya the major yardstick used to measure education output is performance in examinations. A mean of 4.28 wished their parents were alive. They believed that if their parents were alive, they would live a better life. The data from the Likert scale was analyzed to determine the coefficients of predictors of academic performance. The results are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Coefficients of predictors of Academic Performance

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
(Constant)	49.360	6.232		7.920	.000
I find myself thinking about the death of my parent (s).	.536	.746	.057	.718	.474
It is always hard to get school fees since my parent(s) died.	-.343	.966	-.036	-.355	.723
I have problems getting enough basic needs.	.184	.860	.022	.214	.831
Since the death my parent(s) I perform poorly academically.	-2.096	.629	-.269	-3.331	.001
I am never sure that somebody will visit me on visiting days.	-.719	.687	-.089	-1.046	.297
I feel disturbed when my friends talk about their parent(s).	1.401	.688	.173	2.037	.043
I need special support to succeed in my academic work.	-.914	1.399	-.061	-.653	.515
I do not know how my future will be without my parent(s)	-.333	.747	-.040	-.445	.657
If my parents(s) were alive I would be living a better life.	-.195	.916	-.019	-.213	.832

The two items “*Since the death of my parent(s) I perform poorly academically*” and “*I feel disturbed when my friends talk about their parent(s)*” were significant predictors of academic performance as they had p values less than 0.05. The other items had p values above 0.05 and were not significant predictors of academic performance. The first predictor suggests that the orphans used to perform well when the parent(s) was alive but after their death the good performance went down. This shows that after the death of parents they lacked the basic provisions, love and support given by parents. These findings suggest poor performance in examinations depends on how an orphan views the problems they face. Concerning the actual examination results, out of the original sample of 239 orphans only 190 had valid results of the examinations from form 1-3 and form 1-4. Form 3 students had examination marks for 7 terms and form 4 students had examination marks of 10 terms. To investigate the effects of orphan hood on academic performance these examination marks of the 190 orphans were averaged and analyzed in group data frequencies as shown in Figure 1.

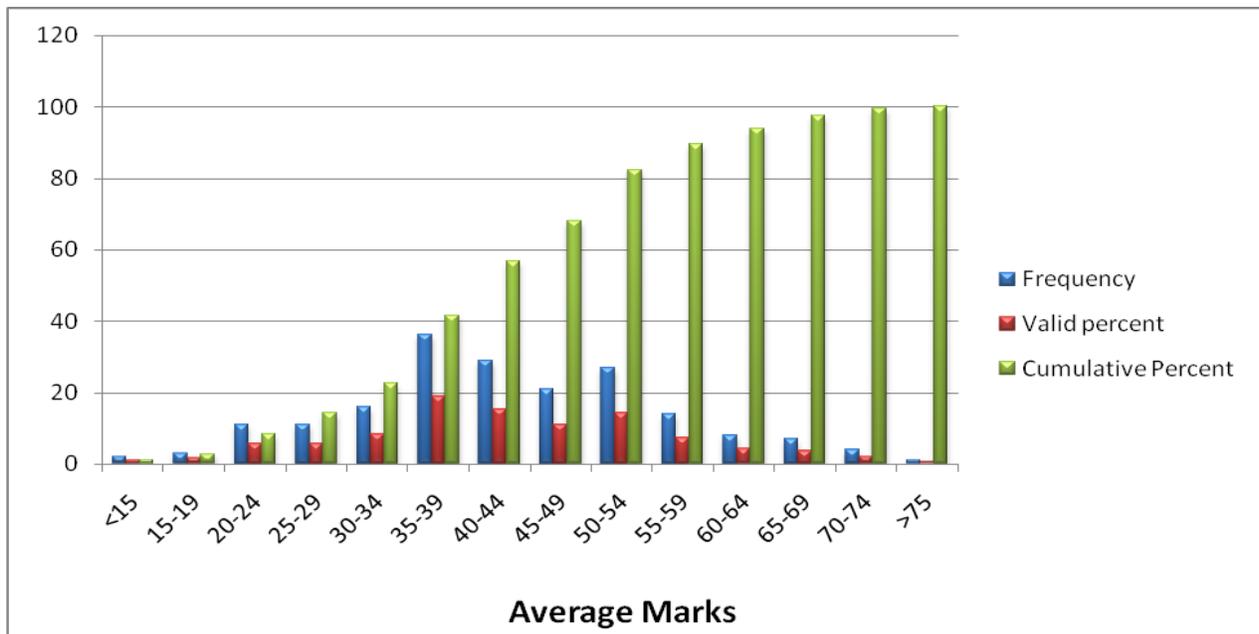


Figure1: Grouped Data Frequencies on Academic Performances of Orphans

From the results in figure 1 the majority of orphans had a strong desire to succeed in their academic work but many of them performed below average. Only 5 students had 70- 75 marks.

This performance showed clearly that there were many challenges which these orphans faced that may have hampered them from performing well in academics.

The researcher sought to determine whether the category of the school that the orphans attended had an effect on their academic performance. This is presented in Figure 1

students from mixed day boarding and the girls' boarding schools performed better than those in boys boarding and mixed day schools only. To examine if there were significant differences between academic performance and the type of school that the respondents attended a one way ANOVA inferential test was used. There were statistically significant differences between categories of school as group means as determined by one-way ANOVA. The test of homogeneity of variances yielded a Levene value at 3.071, $p=.029$ that was below the critical value of 0.05. Hence the value of $(F(3, 233) = 9.900, P = .000)$ was not significant. The Null Hypothesis was therefore rejected as the calculated F value of 9.900 is greater than the $F_{critical}$ of 2.649. This implies that there were significant differences between the means of academic performance based on the type of school. A posthoc analysis of the data to investigate the differences in the means between the groups yielded results as shown in table 4.

Table 4: Tukey Posthoc analysis of Academic performance between the categories of schools.

(I) CATEGORY	(J) CATEGORY	Mean Difference (I- J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Boys Boarding	Girls Boarding	.367*	.122	.015	.05	.68
	Mixed Day Boarding	-.244	.157	.408	-.65	.16
	Mixed Day Only	-.131	.105	.594	-.40	.14
Girls Boarding	Boys Boarding	-.367*	.122	.015	-.68	-.05
	Mixed Day Boarding	-.611*	.152	.000	-1.01	-.22
	Mixed Day Only	-.498*	.098	.000	-.75	-.25
Mixed Day Boarding	Boys Boarding	.244	.157	.408	-.16	.65
	Girls Boarding	.611*	.152	.000	.22	1.01
	Mixed Day Only	.113	.139	.851	-.25	.47
Mixed Day Only	Boys Boarding	.131	.105	.594	-.14	.40
	Girls Boarding	.498*	.098	.000	.25	.75
	Mixed Day Boarding	-.113	.139	.851	-.47	.25

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The results from table 4 indicate significant differences in means of academic performance across all the groups, except for between Girls Boarding and Mixed Day Boarding; and also between Boys Boarding and Mixed day schools. The researcher wanted to find out whether the status of orphan hood affected the academic performance of the respondents. The ANOVA was used to show the significance of differences in the mean of academic performance and status of orphan hood. The results are as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: ANOVA (Academic Performance vs. Status of Orphanhood)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.682	2	.341	.881	.416
Within Groups	90.609	234	.387		
Total	91.291	236			

The ANOVA test indicated that there was no significant difference ($F(2,234) = 0.811, p = .416$) in the means of academic performance based on the status of orphan hood. This may imply that there are other variables in orphans which affect their academic performance more significantly other than their status of orphan hood. The researcher wanted to find out whether orphans' attitudes about their length of orphan hood affected the academic performance of the respondents. Results indicated that there was no correlation ($r = -0.006, p > 0.05$) between the two variables. This suggests that depending on the amount of support and the counselling that an orphan has gone through they are able to overcome the challenges they face and perform well in school.

Conclusions

The first research objective was to investigate the problems that orphans go through. These problems were summarized as sociological, physiological and psychological. Although all students face many challenges in secondary schools orphans go through much more in addition to the normal adolescents' challenges of growth and development. The study revealed that the greatest problem faced by orphans was lack of school fees and basic needs. Although the government of Kenya has done a lot to support secondary education, orphans continue to lack money to pay school fees and other additional levies. This scenario forces many of them to opt for day schools because they cannot afford to pay for boarding facilities. This agrees with the data which was collected in this study which had more orphans from day schools than from boarding schools. Day schools on the other hand pose their own problems on the orphan students because beside the assignments that must be done at home they have the normal daily chores or

the extra care towards their siblings especially in cases where both parents have passed on. To add to these problems the teachers also noted that orphans lack learning materials such as books, calculators and other items needed in certain disciplines such as technical subjects.

The findings also showed that there are many sociological problems which affect the orphans and derail them from achieving their educational goals. After the death of parents, many orphans end up living with guardians.

The second objective was to analyze the attitudes of orphaned students and their actual average marks attained in the examinations. Under these it was found that the attitudes of many of the students about their status as orphans were negative. Many suggested that they found themselves thinking a lot about their dead parent(s) hence they end up living in the past by believing that life would be better if their parents were alive. The regression analysis test showed that there was a significant correlation between the attitudes of orphans and their academic performance. The findings of the studies pointed that the type of school that the orphans attended affected their academic performance significantly. Based on these findings, this study recommends that there is need to acknowledge the pertinent issue of orphan hood as an issue of concern in our schools. Clear records of orphans should be designed, kept well and updated to provide important information about the orphans in schools. All the teachers should have lists of orphans and also seek ways to know them, understand their backgrounds and assist them accordingly. The government and non-governmental agencies should assist the orphans by paying their school fees. They should also find resources for workshops and short courses to retrain some school teachers in diagnosing psychosocial problems and offer them skills to deal with such problems. The psychological, sociological and physiological aspects of the orphan's life must be considered in counseling the orphan. Ways and means should be sort to assist the orphan remain in school, through payment of school fees and provision of the basic needs. Head teachers require that their school staff members accord the students special attention especially upon arrival from home after funeral and burial ceremonies. The affected student should be helped to accept the reality and move on with life.

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