EXAMINING HOW FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION SHAPE THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORPHANED CHILDREN: A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study would discuss the profound influence that foster care and adoption have on the development of orphaned children while focusing on the psychology, emotional, and social issues arising out of early traumas, losses, and neglects. The temporary, often family-like environment provided by foster care allows children to have safety, stability, and a chance to develop attachments, but its effectiveness depends on the quality of care, stability, and the presence of supportive social work interventions. While foster care has been found to be effective for the healing process of trauma, it is possible for the same children to present with emotional disorders, behavioural issues, and even attachment disorders as a result of unstable or very short placements. Adopted orphan children, however, receive a stable family environment in which to form long-term relationships and feelings of belonging and safety, crucial to the success of development. In reality, the process is complex, involving even attachment problems if the children come from homes of previous traumatic cases. Thus, social workers have essential roles in each system where, after diagnosing the child's needs, the child would then be provided to the relevant foster or adoptive family while facilitating therapeutic assistance addressing trauma and attachments and behavioural aspects. Social workers also enlighten fostered and adopted children's families by making them sensitive to the children's emotional needs and developmental perspectives, hence they create a smooth environment for this integration. Based on the reading, the paper continues outlining the challenges experienced by orphan children in adjusting themselves to new family arrangements, such issues include identity dilemmas, disruptive behaviours, emotional wounds of psychological trauma. It underlines the need for holistic social work interventions, such as case management, therapy, and family support, to ensure that children receive the care and resources they need to thrive in their new homes, advocating for improvements in foster care and adoption systems for better outcomes.

Keywords: Foster Care, Adoption, Orphaned Children, Social Work Perspective.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Development among orphaned children is, however, heavily determined by the existing environments and systems that help care for them through foster care or adoption [1]. The psychology, emotions, and social developments of deprived children are majorly influenced by such systems. How these systems alter the developmental paths of the children is essential to know in the context of social work.

Foster care is generally a temporary measure, often within a family setting, and is considered a short-term intervention for children who are removed from their homes because of neglect, abuse, or other safety issues. Good foster care has been linked with better mental health, educational success, and the development of secure attachment. However, children in

foster care also experience emotional and behavioural challenges because of instability, trauma, and absence of stable carers.

Adoption provides children orphaned as a result of various reasons with a permanent family and the chance to have stability and belonging over the long run. The development trajectory of the child is heavily influenced by adoption, especially when such an environment provided is nurturing, loving, and allows for secure attachments [2]. Research shows that adopted children generally tend to experience improvements in behavioural functioning, academic performance, and life satisfaction as a result of adoption characterized by positive parent-child interactions and support systems.

The perspective of social work views the need to consider more social, cultural, and economic factors that determine the outcome of foster care and adoption. The ability of the foster and adoptive parents, along with access to social services, mental health support, and their preparation, all impact whether these systems work or fail. In addition, policies and practices in child welfare agencies can be supportive or counterproductive to the welfare of orphaned children.

By synthesizing previous studies and literature, this paper presents suggestions toward better improvement in foster care and adoption systems. Such recommendations, as shown earlier, would cater to the development needs of orphaned children while further promoting their welfare [3]. In short, social workers are the advocates and champions in policies and practice aimed at fulfilling the best interest of orphaned children; hence, the foster care and adoption system should be effective enough to attend to the development needs of children.

Table 1: Summary of Studies on Foster Care, Adoption, and Child Welfare.

Author Name	Topic Covered	Research Study Title
Gangopadhyay and Mathur (2021) [4]	Lived experiences of infertility and perceptions toward adoption in urban India	Examining lived experiences of infertility and perceptions toward the adoption of children in urban India
Haysom et al. (2020) [5]	Changing considerations in matching foster carers and children	Changing considerations of matching foster carers and children: A scoping review of the research and evidence
Kurevakwesu and Chizasa (2020) [6]	Analysis of Zimbabwe's national orphan care policy through the lens of Ubuntu	Ubuntu and child welfare policy in Zimbabwe: A critical analysis of the national orphan care policy's six-tier system

2. ROLE OF FOSTER CARE IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Foster care is crucial in providing a safe, stable, and nurturing environment for children who have lost their parents or have been abused. It might be a much healthier alternative compared to institutionalized care or family instability. It depends on how the foster care is provided in terms of its quality, experiences prior to that, and how the social workers intervene [7]. Positive foster care enhances recovery of post-traumatic memories in children through attachment and various life skills. Sometimes, when placements are transitional or unstable the children can even be adversely challenged.

2.1. Emotional and Psychological Impact of Foster Care

Children who come to foster care harbor emotional scars such as abuse, neglect, anxiety, depression, and disorders of attachment that may have resulted due to such happenings. Issues of trust, identity, may arise if one has had experiences with multiple placements. Social workers help these through therapeutic interventions with counselling and

therapies focused on building attachment to establish a stable setting for the child's building self-esteem as well as fostering emotional well-being.

2.2. Long-Term Effects of Foster Care Placement

Long-term outcomes will vary depending upon the stability of and quality within a placement: those children growing up in the more stable, more supportive home usually achieve better social and academic achievement, and enhanced emotional well-being [8]. In fact, the lack of security or instability from unstable placements creates issues of attachments, behavioural disorder, and, as adults, they might present problems of psychological and mental disturbances. Stability in continuity in the care system matters, and much rests in the hands of the social workers for this.

2.3. Social Work Strategies in Foster Care

Social workers play a very essential role in the foster care system. They diagnose the needs of the child and place them appropriately in foster homes. They observe the child constantly through home visits, counselling, and support of both the child and foster parents. Social workers also advocate for the child's needs, giving the child an opportunity to express their voice on matters of making decisions. By giving them education in trauma-informed care and attachment techniques, social workers facilitate an emotionally healing and enabling environment for the child to thrive.

3. ADOPTION PROCESS AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Adoption provides the orphaned or abandoned child a secure, loved, and permanent family environment, affording him or her an opportunity to overcome early-life traumatic experiences, then successfully form healthy attachments. The process is complex in both legal and emotional ways and can have a highly significant impact on a child's life.

3.1. Adoption as a Path to Stability

Adoption brings emotional and psychological stability compared to foster care, where one has to change homes multiple times [10]. It gives children a condition of long-term emotional stability, secure relationships, and a healthy condition to cope with life's adversities. Stability in adoption helps in the enhancement of belongingness, self-esteem, and social integration.

3.2. Attachment and Bonding in Adoptive Families

Children who experienced trauma often struggle to attach to the adoptive families. Adoption enables children to establish new, secure attachment relationships with their adoptive parents, enhancing emotional security. The attachment building process is slow and demands much patience from adoptive parents while social workers will help through counselling and guidance.

3.3. Social Work Practices in Adoption

Social workers are the key people involved in adoption since they assess the needs of the child, evaluate adoptive families, and ensure safe and stable placement. They offer support at every step, helping the child and the adoptive parents deal with the issues of trauma and attachment. After adoption, social workers remain in contact, providing guidance as the child's needs are met and the family adjusts. Their role is very important in ensuring that the adoption process is ethical and the child's well-being is placed first.

4. CHALLENGES FACED BY ORPHANED CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION

Placement of orphaned children into foster care or adopted families often results in a continuum of the emotional, psychological, and behavioural challenges that such kids

encounter. Such children may have strong experiences of traumatic loss and instability in their very early lives, affecting how they respond to this new environment and build healthy relationships with their new family [12]. While foster care and adoption give the child a second chance for safety, stability, and emotional healing, it is never without difficulties to adjust to the new family dynamic. The need to understand specific challenges these children are likely to face is key in supporting their development and their well-being over the long run.

➤ **Trauma and Loss in Early Childhood**: Emotionally, they often bear with the scars of trauma, especially when they lose or are removed from their biological parents due to abuse or negligence. This results in a mistrust of any new caregivers as well as their ability to build attachment. Therapy is required as a support tool in helping children cope with unaddressed loss.

➤ **Behavioural and Developmental Challenges**: Children or those on adoption are characterized by lack of emotional regulation that makes them appear angry, anxious, and depressed. Behaviour may be problematic aggression, withdrawal, and impulsiveness. In some cases, delays in language and attention skills develop, thus children require more time, behavioural intervention and therapeutic help so that their growth and skills acquisition can take shape [13].

➤ **Barriers to Successful Integration into Families**: Integrating into a new family after trauma is not easy. Orphaned children will face difficulties in accepting their new identity, attachment, and trust with caregivers. The repeated transitions in foster care or cultural differences in adoption make this process even more complicated. Loss, confusion, and stigmatization as "different" may hinder the child's integration into the new family, making it essential for caregivers to provide a supportive and understanding environment for the child to heal and thrive.

5. SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORT FOR ORPHANED CHILDREN

Social work interventions are key in addressing the special needs of orphaned children placed in foster care or adopted families. It focuses on offering emotional, psychological, and practical support to the children and their caregivers during the whole process of foster care and adoption. The ultimate aim is that orphans should benefit from proper care and support provided by new caregivers in overcoming traumas in their past, becoming secure in attaching, and getting a better home life [14]. A social worker takes part in managing the process directly and by associating families with additional resources available for integration to make the transition fruitful and beneficial over the long haul.

➤ **Case Management**: Social workers coordinate services and ensure children are placed in suitable environments, monitor the improvement of the children, and offer support after adoption. Social workers play a mediating role between the child, caregivers, and birth family to afford stability and resources for the child's success.

➤ **Counselling and Therapeutic Approaches**: Children orphaned require therapy for trauma, emotional issues, and attachment problems. Trauma-focused treatment allows children to process what they have lived through. Meanwhile, attachment-based treatment helps children build secure relationships with caregivers [15]. Family therapy helps foster/adoptive families support the child's emotional needs and manage behavioural challenges.

➢ **Role of Social Workers in Family Adjustment**: Social workers guide the adoptive and foster family to cope up with the dynamics. They support them in parenting and understanding the background of the child, which leads to dealing with emotional or behavioural issues. In addition, they are able to support the child into the community so that the family can build up a stable nurturing environment over time.

6. CONCLUSION

Quality care and support structure around the children are intricately intertwined in developing orphaned children in foster care and adoption systems. Foster care provides essential temporary support, though successful fostering depends on stability, supportive caregivers, and adequate social work intervention to deal with the emotional and psychological scars resulting from past traumas. Adoption ensures a more permanent solution, as it promotes the child's long-term emotional security and attachment. On the other hand, it creates its own challenges, especially to traumatized children. Therefore, social workers play a great role in enabling positive outcomes while providing therapeutic support, managing case interventions, and guiding families through the complex integration and adjustment processes. Despite the problems that children in this situation face, foster care, as well as adoption, if strongly supported by good social work practice, has indeed helped orphaned children overcome problems in the past and transition into healthy and stable development. The sustainability of these systems calls for proper equipping with resources and training as well as holistic support in ensuring the overall well-being and successful integration of orphaned children into permanent family environments, emphasizing continued advocacy, research, and policy improvements.

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