

## **Experiences of Youth (Orphans) Leaving Care Homes and Transitioning into Independent Living Situations: A Case Study of SOS Children's Village in Waterfalls, Harare, Zimbabwe**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of the study was to explore the views of youth (orphans) leaving care homes and transitioning into independent living situations. A qualitative research approach based on an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was done using semi-structured in-depth interviews with 11 participants (7 males; 4 females) aged between 17 and 18 years who were purposively selected. Data was transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed. Three major themes emerged from the study: (1) views about the future; (2) preparation for independent living; and (3) evaluation of interventions provided. Key findings indicated that the participants wanted to further their education while others who acknowledged underachieving in school showed interests in self-employment, income generating projects and the desire to connect with their biological parents. Participants were taught life skills such as household chores, filing essential documents, controlling emotions and budgeting. Interventions were viewed as good and necessary. The socioeconomic environment impacted negatively on formal employment prospects and accommodation.*

**Keywords:** Young adult orphans, aftercare care services, institutional care, *ubuntu*, deinstitutionalisation

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the views of youth (orphans) leaving care homes on transitioning to independent living situations. Youth transition refers to the transition from adolescence to young adulthood, corresponding roughly to the period of 15 to 25 years (Van Breda, 2018). The high unemployment rate among young adults in Zimbabwe is a limiting factor for young people to transition from school or college into the workplace. One of the groups that have

unique challenges and needs is the youth transitioning out of the care system. Orphans are an example of individuals found at care centres. Care leavers are said to be disadvantaged because traditional family options and opportunities to be socialised in their own communities are taken away from them when they enter the care system (Gwenzi, 2015). Circumstances that make care a necessary intervention include, but are not limited to child neglect or abuse, mental illness or crime, behavioural problems and being AIDS orphans. Alternative care for orphans and vulnerable children which includes foster care, residential care, adoption and community because of the inability of the family unit to provide care (Van Breda, 2018). Biehal et al. (1995, as cited in Brenda, 2015) indicate that, upon leaving care, the lack of adequate preparation coupled with the early age at which care leavers are expected to assume full adult responsibilities, have tended to mean that loneliness, isolation, unemployment, poverty, homelessness, movement and “drift” were likely to feature significantly in many of their lives (p. 1). Also, care-leavers often show poorer outcomes than their peers who did not enter the care system in relation to education, crime, substance abuse and finances.

Literature distinguishes between pure orphans and social orphans. Pure orphans are children who are abandoned with no trace of their biological parents (Karandikar & Charegaonkar, 2019); while the deprivation endured by children due to parents' failure to perform their duties or parental negligence is called social orphans (Nar, 2020). There were 153 million orphans worldwide in 2015 of which 17.8 million lost both parents (UNICEF, 2017). Social orphans constitute 90% of the 2.7 million children living in orphanages around the world (Nar, 2020).

In Africa, there were nearly 52 million orphans of which 1.6 million are in Zimbabwe and an estimated 5000 live in Zimbabwean orphanages (NAC, 2011). The high number of social orphans in Zimbabwe might be attributed to absent parents who left the country due to economic hardships in search of greener pastures. Orphanages refer to facilities for short to long-term care of children other than in family settings (Sameena, Raouf, Tabish & Khan, 2016). Children in need of care and protection (for example, victims of abuse, children without biological parents, run away children and missing children) are provided with two forms of alternate care which include residence in child care institutions and foster care (Karandikar & Charegaonkar, 2019). Children in institutional care bring with them common scars inflicted by poverty, abuse, neglect, malnutrition, ill health, emotional trauma and lack of education and interventions in institutions in

the form of attachments with caregivers, ability to regulate emotional or tolerate emotional states, behavioural problems, basic social skills, education and vocational skills training, and career counselling to allow them to be independent (Karandikar & Charegaonkar, 2019).

Child care policies in Zimbabwe include the Zimbabwe Orphan Care Policy of 1999, the Zimbabwe AIDS Strategic Policy of 2006, the National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children of 2001, and Basic Education Assistance Module of 2007 (Masuku, Banda, Mabvurira, & Frank, 2012). The Zimbabwe Orphan Care Policy views residential care as the last option in a six tier system of social safety nets for orphans, wherein the first option is biological parents, followed respectively by the extended family, community care, formal foster care and adoption (Velempini, 2014). This was premised on the idea that foster care and adoption should be alternatives for children without extended families and that institutional care be discouraged as long as other options had not been fully explored (Kurevakwesu & Chizasa, 2020). Informal care refers to any private arrangement provided in a family environment whereby the child is looked after on an ongoing or indefinite basis by relatives or friends (informal kinship care) or by others in their individual capacity while formal care is described as care that has been legally sanctioned whether it is placement in family care or in a residential facility (UN General Assembly, 2010).

Institutional care happens to be the most common and visible form in Zimbabwe (Muzingili & Gunha, 2017). The reason given by Kurevakwesu and Chizasa (2020) is the unprecedented decline of the African communitarian way of life, especially the use of values related to *ubuntu*. Due to colonialism, autocratic, corruption and the economic meltdown which resulted in many people leaving the country in search of greener pastures, *ubuntu* declined in Zimbabwe (Kurevakwesu & Chizasa, 2020). *Ubuntu* literally means humanness, 'I am because we are, I can only be a person through others' (Mbigi, as cited in Dziro & Mhlanga, 2018).

### **Previous research**

Studies across most countries have found that, compared to the general population, most care-leavers have consistently shown poorer outcomes in the following areas of their lives: unemployment, homelessness, lower educational qualifications, early parenthood, engagement in criminal behaviour, proneness to substance abuse, and susceptibility to poorer physical and mental health, social integration, lack of practical skills and direction for the future (Bond, 2020; Cashmore & Paxman, 2006; Courtney & Huring, 2005; Dickens & Marx, 2020; Stein & Munro,

2008; van Brenda & Frimpong-Manso, 2020). Such situations result in financial difficulties for young people, affecting their ability to access self-supporting scaffolds and this may be attributed to their accelerated and abrupt path into adulthood (Singer & Berzin, 2015) while others in the general population have an extended transition into adulthood (Mendes, Pinkerton & Munro, 2014; Storø, 2017). In their study, van Brenda and Frimpong-Manso (2020) indicated limited social welfare programmes or specific programmes for care-leavers and a weakened ability of family systems to provide informal support. Bailey, Loehrke and French (2012) found that care leavers maybe afraid of the future due to tenets of societal pressures luring them into anti-social activities, unfulfilled promises by family members, dropping out of school and begging on the street.

However, other studies indicated that assurances of a safe future in terms of accommodation, feeding and education are critical in the readiness of orphans to leave orphanages (e.g., Mwoma & Pillay, 2015; Ssewamala et al., 2016). The critical issue is feeling ready for unification with biological parents or foster parents (Muguwe et al., 2011). Many speak of their need to trace and connect with their living biological family members after leaving care, often because of the realisation that life was difficult without support (Van Brenda & Frimpong-Manso, 2020) and the need for an identity and sense of belonging (Takele & Kotecho, 2020). But other studies reveal mixed outcomes with the young people reporting both positive and negative of family connections (Mendes et al., 2012). However, those without biological parents are more prone to physical and psychological disorders (Irudayasamy, 2006) due to unresolved childhood traumas (Dumaret et al., 1997).

Kelleher et al. (2000) indicated that successful transition meant that the young person had not been arrested, nor was committed into a mental institution or rehabilitation centre and had managed to get stable employment, while indicators of a failed or struggling transition were those who ended up homeless, engaged in criminal activity and having mental health issues.

Life skills such as how to clean a home, fix bulbs, cook, money management, self-awareness, problem solving, effective communication, conflict resolution, coping with emotions and stress management, prevention from drugs and suicide, among others, need to be provided so that children who grow up in residential care can deal with daily challenges that they may face in future (UNICEF, as cited in Manful et al., 2015). Such life skills are based on good morals (WHO, 2009-2018). Evidence indicates that care-leavers living in their transitional youth house lacked

preparation in certain independent living skills and the cultural skills needed to function effectively in wider society (Frimpong-Manso, 2012). The skills identified as particularly challenging include handling money and budgeting (Dixon & Stein, 2003). A study conducted by SOS titled, *Lessons from Peer Research* (2012), found that most children in institutional homes had not received information on sexual wellbeing and how to handle relationships, healthy diet and keeping fit. However, Guma (2012) indicated that they had much knowledge on personal hygiene, personal relationships and making friends.

Resilience is evident in African studies as young people are shown relying on their own capacity to create opportunities for themselves rather than on social welfare services (van Breda & Dickens, 2016). Some African youth who leave care exhibit resilience by attaining high educational qualifications and not using drugs (Bukuluki et al., 2020; Dickens & Marx, 2020; Frimpong-Manso, 2020). Their personal motivation, which includes fear of failure and hope for the future, makes them succeed during their transition (van Brenda & Frimpong-Manso, 2020) implying that young people in care view education as a springboard to a better life, and the desire for educational success is strong (Artamonova et al., 2020, p. 4). However, research in European countries indicate that children and young people with experience of out-of-home care do not perform well in school, when compared to their peers (Artamonova et al., 2020) and their chances of moving on to further and higher education are limited (Cameron et al., 2018; Dæhlen, 2015; Forsman et al., 2016).

### **Zimbabwean context**

The National Residential Care Standards of 2010 (Ministry of Labour and Social Services, 2010b) provides guidance on child protection services in institutions so that when adolescents are discharged from institutions they may not find it difficult to adjust to the local community lifestyle (Muzingili & Gunha, 2017). The Residential Care Standards focuses on children going on holiday and staying with approved foster families in communities for a certain period of time. This pre-community integration and contact process reduces the negative effects of institutionalisation. The leave of absence documents are found at the Department of Child Welfare which grants permission to exit the institution for a specified period. The Zimbabwean policies are silent about the provision of transitional support to those leaving alternative care. This means that these people are not visible to policy makers and service providers resulting in them being highly vulnerable within an already precarious context.

Save Our Souls (SOS) Children's Village is a private, non-denominational organisation that aims to provide care for orphans and vulnerable children through the provision of accommodation and other appropriate forms of care (Muzingili & Gunha, 2017). At an appropriate age, normally at the age of 18, the SOS Village consults with the child and places him/her in a youth house. This would enable the young adult to practise semi-independent living in preparation for independence or exit. To become independent adults, adolescents need to leave their parental home.

The Children's Act specifies that the residential facility from which a person who has outgrown the system is discharged shall work with the person and the Department of Social Services to put in place mechanisms to ensure continuing education, training or work (Chibwana & Gumbo, 2014). Such services provide family environment, psychosocial support and prepare adolescents to adjust to society and be responsible citizens after being discharged (Chinyenze, 2017). Gradual and supported transitions out of institutionalised settings or foster care settings are key to ensure that young adults 'ageing out' of the system prosper in their lives (Cantwell et al., 2012).

Such aftercare care services assists young adults to lead an honest, industrious and useful life. In Zimbabwe, social workers in the Ministry of Labour and Social Services' Department of Social Services assume the role of probation officers and follow court procedures to place and remove children in institutions (Gwenzi, 2019).

This paper adds to the existing literature by exploring how youths in transitional homes perceive discharge/exit from residential care in Zimbabwe in light of the fragile economic climate. The annual inflation in Zimbabwe reached 230% in July 2019 (compared to 5.4% in September 2018), with food prices rising by 319% in July 2019 (World Bank in Zimbabwe, 2019). Extreme poverty is estimated to have risen from 29% in 2018 to 34% in 2019, an increase from 4.7 to 5.7 million people (World Bank in Zimbabwe, 2019). Zimbabwe has a high youth population contributing to 70 per cent of the population of 15.6 million and they are the hardest hit by unemployment (Tambwari, n.d). Zimbabwe can be classified as a fragile state because the state cannot or will not offer basic services and functions to the majority of the population (Warrener & Loehr, 2005) or the state is unable or unwilling to productively direct national or international resources to alleviate poverty (Torres & Anderson, 2004). Transition to independent living in such an environment is critical as institutionalised children come with a history of trauma and abandonment and often have long-term psychological difficulties that are unique to their population (Modi, et al., 2016,

p.87) resulting in them being highly vulnerable within an already vulnerable context (van Breda & Dickens, 2016).

## **Research questions**

- 1) How do youth leaving care view about their future in light of the economic conditions?
- 2) How do they view services aimed at preparing them for independent living?

## **Method**

The study used a qualitative research approach based on an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). The IPA focuses on exploring how participants make sense of their personal and social world (Smith, 1996). The phenomenological study tries to explore the views of young adult orphans in orphanages about re-integration by getting close to the participant's personal world through a process of interpretive activity. To gather such information, the researchers used semi-structured in-depth interviews with the aim of producing rich and meaningful data from a small number of people (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2006). This allowed the researchers to examine how participants perceived the particular situations they were facing. Different people have "different perceptions of the world" (Willis, 2007, p. 194) and such a multiple of perspectives can lead to a comprehensive understanding of a situation (Morehouse, 2011). This is appropriate for the study as it sought to understand and interpret orphans' views about re-integration in light of the adverse socio-economic environment in Zimbabwe and to understand the emotions involved in their interpretations (Babbie & Mouton, as cited in Zirima & Nkoma, 2018). This would result in making inferences about the relationships between individuals and their situations

## **Participants**

An IPA approach uses very small sample sizes, thereby sacrificing breadth for depth (Smith & Osborn, 2008) and, in this research, 11 participants (7males; 4 females) from SOS Children's Village in Harare, Zimbabwe, who were aged between 17 and 18 years were purposely selected and volunteered to participate in the study. This age group was selected because the government stipulates the age of exit as 18 and the participants were living in a transitional home or in the process of leaving care. The time frame of a minimum of 4 years in residential care was chosen because the participants could have experienced some care leaving programmes.

The recruitment of participants was done by social workers at the centre who were debriefed about the goals and procedures of the study. The feelings of youth about to leave care were critical in this study. The interviews lasted between 30 and 58 minutes - depending on the experiences of participants - and these were done at the residential administrative offices on weekends. The sample size provided a sufficient number of variations that were needed to come up with a typical essence (Giorgi, 2008). Table 1 below provides demographic information of participants.

## **Procedure**

Permission to carry out the research was initially sought from the Provincial Social Welfare Director in Harare and then from the Director at SOS Village in Harare. A preliminary meeting with research participants prior to the actual interview was carried out two weeks before the interview. The meeting provided an opportunity to establish trust with participants, review ethical considerations, complete consent forms, and review research questions, thereby giving participants' time to dwell and ponder on their experiences. In-depth interviews with orphans were conducted in a quiet office at the SOS administrative offices.

## **Data collection methods**

The primary data sources included orphans aged between 17 and 18 years who were residing at a transitional home in Harare. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission from participants and these were coded. These were then transcribed verbatim. Soon after each interview, key words, phrases, and sentences were transcribed.

## **Data analysis**

The researchers firstly described their own full personal experiences of youth leaving care so that they avoided interjecting participants' personal experiences into their 'lived experience' stories. This is known as 'bracketing' (Moustakas, 1994).

In order to understand the meaning and content of participants' mental and social world, an IPA involves a two stage interpretation process wherein participants make sense of their world and, in this case, the researchers' roles were to make sense of their participants' sense-making process (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). The standard analytic procedure followed Smith and Osborn (2008) guidelines on verbatim scripts. According to Zirima and Nkoma (2018), the approach focuses on a case-by-case analysis of each individual transcript which is read repeatedly in order for the



researchers to be familiar with the contents. Any significant meanings by the participant were noted down to the left-hand margin of the transcripts. When complete, the transcripts were re-read to note any emerging themes from the initial notes that captured the essence and importance of the text.

### **Ethical considerations**

Authority to carry out the project was sought from the Director of Social Welfare and the Director at SOS Village. Letter of authority was then given to the Director of SOS Village. A preliminary meeting with research participants prior to the actual interview was carried out 2 weeks before the interview. During the meeting, participants were informed that they could voluntarily participate or withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons for doing so. A neutral person assisted to serve and assist participants in the completion of consent forms. This assured privacy and confidentiality to participants who were also informed about how data was going to be used and stored. Participants were also assured that there was no perceived harm in participating in the study.

### **Credibility**

Credibility refers to the meaningfulness of the findings and whether these are well presented (Kitto et al., 2008). The credibility criterion focuses on ensuring that the results of the study are believable from the perspective of the research participants. To achieve credibility of the findings and interpretations, a meeting was convened with participants so that they could reflect on the written preliminary analyses and the compiled themes, so that their views were solicited and incorporated, and what was missing could be added. This member checking process helped researchers to check their own subjectivity and ensure the trustworthiness of their findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Results**

Three major themes emerged from the study: (1) views about the future; (2) preparation for independent living; and (3) evaluation of interventions provided.

#### ***Views about the future***

Some participants who were doing their lower and upper sixth forms narrated the need to further their education up to university level. Those who were doing forms 3 and 4 wanted vocational training in agriculture, motor mechanics and be self-employed. Some indicated the need to avoid

drugs. Participants who acknowledged under-achievement in school showed interests in the non-formal sector such as poultry rearing, and the desire to connect with their biological parents.

The following quote from a lower sixth form student summarises the drive and determination that make her study harder, find employment and the need to get married and have children.

We were promised continued support in the form of education for an extra 4 years. I work hard in school and, on several occasions, I ask myself: Why is it some students do better than me? This motivates me to study even more ....My aim is to study finance at university and proceed to get employment. I want to be like Chipo who is now at university. However, jobs are hard to come by, but with very good passes you might win. After my education and being gainfully employed....I can then plan to get married and have children. **(Participant 4)**

Participants who were doing forms 3 and 4 showed interests in vocational training and then be self-employed. They also indicated their wish to avoid drugs and crime.

I see no reason why I should continue with education up to advanced level. That is a waste of time. After my ordinary level, I want to study motor mechanics at a Polytechnic College. I can earn money through self-employment...I do not want to be like others who have left this place who swim in beer and engage in fights. **(Participant 1)**

Participants who viewed themselves as low achievers viewed the non-formal sector as the best option and the need to reconnect with biological parents.

Academics are not for me but I can use my hands. I am good at practical areas such as agriculture at school. Maybe farming might be good for me. I can learn this informally from others. Also, I want to go back to my parents and maybe stay with them. **(Participant 7)**

After form 4, I am not so sure what I can do ...I have been getting very low grades...but what appears to be the best for me is to venture into income generating projects like poultry rearing or buying and selling goods. If you get that start-up money things can be fine. **(Participant 8)**

Barriers mentioned focused on the economic situation in the country with a very high unemployment rate, cultural practices, concerns about returning home and the level of support provided.

It is difficult for some of us to have girlfriends from the community. I was once in love with a girl from this community and the parents came to me and said that I do not have a totem and so I cannot hang around with their daughter. The daughter was barred from seeing me. **(Participant, 2)**

*Hakuna mabasa uko* (literally meaning that - there are no jobs out there). Almost all private companies are closed. Those with degrees are now vendors.... Maybe I can stay longer in school. My parents and brothers drink a lot and are unemployed. They are always arguing and fighting. They cannot support my education. (**Participant 9**)

Life is going to be tough once I leave. My mother is a cross boarder trader and most of the time I am home alone selling goods like soap, cooking oil, cigarettes and *mazitye* (second-hand clothes). The money is only enough for food and paying rentals and not adequate for paying for my schooling (**Participant 7**)

One participant with unknown biological parents viewed an illegal activity such as money changing as an option to survive in the harsh economic environment.

Life is going to be difficult out there. People do not assist you. You need to do piece work – like loading river sand, selling airtime and changing money on the black market - in order to provide for your own food and accommodation. (**Participant 5**)

Some participants indicated the need to further their education (because they were promised continued support in education) and get employment while others who acknowledged underachievement in school showed interests in self-employment, income generating projects, not using drugs and the desire to connect with their biological parents. The challenges they anticipated focused on lack of jobs in the labour market, cultural practices, and money to start income generating projects. One participant, maybe due ignorance, showed interest in the illegal activity of money changing in the streets.

### ***Preparation for independent living***

Some participants indicated that they were taught life skills such as how to do household chores, filing essential documents, sent to buy some groceries, budgeting, personal hygiene, good diet, relationships, HIV, drugs and self-awareness.

The following narratives clearly indicate the preparations they got from social workers or carers and the reasons for doing them.

They (carers) make sure that you bath yourself, wash your teeth in the morning and evening, make your bed and prepare your own food. This is necessary because it equips me to be able to do these when I am on my own. (**Participant 10**)

We were assisted to get national identity cards, which I use whenever I go into town to buy a list of groceries.....they write the different types of meals to be cooked for each day of the week on a paper and place it on the kitchen wall...this is good because it teaches us planning for our meals and good diet when we leave. (**Participant 11**)

The following quote indicates that participants were told well in advance that they would be leaving the institution.

I remember being told some months back that we will be leaving the institution....we were told several times that the identity cards and school certificates need to be placed in a secure place and be easily accessible. (Participant 2)

They (social workers) told us how to handle relationships, dangers of using drugs, and HIV. (Participant 4)

The following participant indicated self-awareness and how to manage his anger.

Some people like to tease me and I know that I can easily get angry. Whenever they do this, I just keep quiet and move away. (Participant 3)

The following narrative indicates that participants were given money and taught how to budget.

We are given some money every month. We do not have any bank accounts because it is not permissible to open hard currency accounts. So our administration manage the money for us. You need to know how to manage your money after you leave this place – for example buying things like toiletries. (Participant 7)

The narratives from participants indicated they were taught life skills such as household chores, filing essential documents, sent to buy some groceries, controlling emotions, budgeting, personal hygiene, HIV, drugs and self-awareness.

### ***Evaluation of interventions provided***

Participants were asked about their readiness to leave the institution and to evaluate their experiences of preparation services and how these contributed or not to their readiness to leave care. Some participants were ready to leave but others were reluctant. However, others had mixed feelings about leaving. Most participants showed concern about deteriorating economic conditions in country.

The institution provides continuous counselling for re-integration. After these sessions you know that it is time to face the real world. You may feel low but there is nothing you can do. There is no mealie meal, sugar and the like in the country. These things are found on the black market and are very expensive. You will have to fend for yourself when you are out there. (Participant 4)

Some commented on the household responsibilities and the level of discipline provided as good for their preparation.

I am not sure about my readiness to face the world. However, I am a grown-up person and should leave. The skills they taught me such as cleanliness, making up the bed and the like are good for me. Of course things out there are different. For example, rentals are tagged in hard currencies and most people are unemployed. **(Participant 1)**

The following quotation indicates on how to relate well with the community and the desire to exit.

This is not an old people's home. One day you will have to leave. They provided us with useful preparation information. We were taught that once you do bad things – know that bad things will follow. Also if you do good things – know that good ones will happen. They said one needs to learn from his mistake and not to repeat that same mistake. **(Participant 6)**

One participant indicated that they were taught about respecting others and the effects of drug misuse. She also mentioned the need for follow-ups for those with medical conditions.

I am ready to leave. Life is difficult for everyone. We were told to respect other people's property and the dangers of drug use - which is very good – because you will be well prepared in the real world. However, the institution should have follow-ups to see how we will be faring. For example, I have a health condition (asthma) which needs continuous medication. **(Participant 7)**

The following narrative suggest reluctance to leave the institution.

I do not have any choice but to go and face life out there. I am not good academically and so I cannot proceed with education. There are no industries to cater for most of us and accommodation is expensive...if only they could assist us with accommodation. **(Participant 10)**

Although participants indicated that the institution provided them with some skills for independent living, they showed concern about continued health-care services and expensive accommodation and lack of employment because of the closure of several companies due to poor performance of the country's economy.

## **Discussion**

The first research question focused on participants' views about the future. Participants who were in their lower and upper sixth forms indicated the need to further their education up to university level. However, most of those doing forms 3 and 4 wanted vocational training. Those who acknowledged underachievement in school showed interest in self-employment, income generating projects, not using drugs and the desire to connect with their biological parents. The challenges they anticipated focused on lack of jobs in the labour market, cultural practices, and money to start income generating projects.

The government of Zimbabwe has social initiatives to integrate orphans into the community such as the National Residential Care Standards of 2010 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2010) that provides guidance on child protection services in institutions so that when young adults are discharged from institutions they will not find it difficult to adjust to the local community lifestyle (Muzingili & Gunha, 2017). The continued support for an extra 4 year period after the age of 18 years in the form of education and vocational training was a relief for those who were good academically. Those who were to leave care at a later stage were more likely to receive ongoing social and economic support thereby ensuring that they pursue their educational or employment related activities (Mendes, 2009). Young adults face high uncertainty after they exit education (Sironi, 2018) such as unemployment and lack of funds to start income generating projects. Those who were underachieving and showing interest in self-employment could be assisted by the Ministry of Small to Medium Enterprises which provides training and financial assistance. This group needs more support so as to prevent them from engaging in social ills such as prostitution, using drugs and stealing.

In Zimbabwe, Dziro and Rufurwokuda (2013) found that care leavers struggle to fit well in the local culture after leaving institutional care because the values taught in institutions are different from those in traditional family settings. Some participants who acknowledged underachievement in school showed interest in self-employment, income generating projects, not using drugs and the desire to connect with their biological parents. In South Africa, Van Brenda and Frimpong-Manso (2020) and Takele and Kotecho (2020) found that many speak of their need to trace and connect with their living biological family members after leaving care. The studies attributed this to the realisation that life was difficult without support and their need for an identity and sense of belonging. Furthermore, some young people have to rely on their own capacity to create opportunities for themselves such as self-employment, rather than on social welfare services (Van Breda & Dickens, 2016). Some participants indicated the need to attain higher qualifications. Some African youth who leave care exhibit resilience by attaining high educational qualifications and not using drugs (Bukuluki et al., 2020; Dickens & Marx, 2020; Frimpong-Manso, 2020). Their personal motivation, which includes fear of failure and hope for the future, makes them succeed during their transition (Van Brenda & Frimpong-Manso, 2020). However, attaining higher educational qualifications does not guarantee employment in Zimbabwe. Unemployment is the most daunting challenge facing Zimbabwean people (Nhundu, 1992). Analysts agree that politics,

poor governance and the weakening of the rule of law are major causes of high levels of poverty and vulnerability in Zimbabwe (Bird & Prowse, 2009). Those participants who indicated underachievement in school showed an interest of joining the informal sector such as poultry rearing and selling second-hand clothes. One participant even indicated a desire to pursue money changing, which is an illegal activity. The unstable economic environment has led to the proliferation of the informal sector and parallel (black) market that absorbed most young people as agents and dealers (Chingarande & Guduza, 2011). Zimbabwe can be classified as a fragile state because the state cannot or will not offer basic services and functions to the majority of the population (Warrener & Loehr, 2005) or the state is unable or unwilling to productively direct national or international resources to alleviate poverty (Torres & Anderson, 2004).

In non-African countries, Mendes et al., (2014) found that those who leave care at a later stage are more likely to receive ongoing social and economic support which can enable them to participate in educational or employment related activities. After they exit education, young adults face high uncertainty (Sironi, 2018) such as unemployment and lack of funds to start income generating projects.

The second research question focused on preparation for independent living. The narratives from participants indicated they were taught life skills such as how to do household chores, filing essential documents, sent to buy some groceries, budgeting, personal hygiene, HIV, drugs and self-awareness. Such life skills are based good morals (WHO, 2009-2018). Guma (2012) found that youth leaving care homes on transitioning to independent living situations had much knowledge about personal hygiene, personal relationships and making friends.

In tandem to the study findings, Vybornova (2016) found that orphans leaving care have great difficulties in finding a job, housing, keeping their own budget and they have inadequate self-esteem, and parasitism. Similarly, Karandikar and Charegaonkar (2019) indicated that a lack of properly planned aftercare services results in problems of shelter, sustenance and finding employment. In Zimbabwe, people may rent a single room, a rough wooden shack outside the main house, or a half room (Meekers & Wekwele, 1997) in hard currency. Furthermore, government policies towards orphans are being restricted due to lack of resources, political interference and lack of accountability and transparency in the community and political leadership

(Ringson, 2017). The lack of properly planned aftercare services results in problems of shelter, sustenance and finding employment (Karandikar & Charegaonkar, 2019).

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The study found that young adults in orphanages might appear to be ready for exit but they were apprehensive of the multitude of problems in the form of unemployment, accommodation, and healthcare. These were problems compounded by the socio-economic environment in the country. Young people ought to be given opportunities to develop skills that can help them with prospects of self-employment as they leave care. This might be accomplished by consulting with the Ministry of Small to Medium Enterprises that provides training and financial support to people in need of self-employment. Similarly, the Women's Bank provides financial assistance at reasonable rates for those in need of assistance to venture into self-employment. Assistance in finding part-time work while in institutional care might be helpful. Social and intellectual empowerment is critical in improving future aspirations of orphans. Equipping these adolescents with vital skills such as technical training might assist them to realise a brighter future through self-employment. Small families with a stable income are recommended for foster care in this economic environment. Also, allowing some care leavers to return to the SOS Village and narrate their successful experiences to orphans might provide a source of motivation.

### **Further research**

The study focused on a small sample size of orphans at a particular institution. Further studies ought to compare views on transition from dormitory (wherein children are housed in dormitories and share communal dining and living areas) and family-based residential care (which replicates nuclear family settings with smaller units and children having a parent or guardian figure facilities). Views of carers and social welfare officers could also be incorporated in such studies.

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