

# Influence of Public Benefit Organizations' Institution-Based Strategies in Addressing Psychosocial Wellbeing of Neglected Children in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

The neglected children's psychosocial well-being is of great concern to the world today. Research shows significant evidence that child neglect is the primary root cause of psychosocial and mental health difficulties among young children. The governments and public benefit organizations, have endeavoured to address the cases of child neglect and the psychosocial well-being of children. Despite these efforts, the cases of child neglect and psychosocial problems are still high. There is also scanty information on the influence of public benefit organizations strategies used to address the psychosocial well-being of neglected children. This study sort to investigate the influence of public benefit organizations strategies in addressing the psychosocial well-being of neglected children in Tharaka Nithi County Kenya. The study used descriptive survey design. The attachment theory by Bowlby and the structural functionalism theory of Durkheim was used to form the basis of this study. The target population was neglected children in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. The accessible population was 494 children supported by public benefit organizations centres. The sample size of 248 children were systematically selected. 34 staff working with public benefit organizations were purposively sampled, and the raw data was collected using pre-designed descriptive survey questionnaires. The Standardized starling's Children Well-being Scale and the World Health Organization 5 well-being Index, was used to collect data from children. Internal consistency levels of the tools were established by pilot study and expert analysis. Various tests were conducted; using the IBM Statistical package for the Social Sciences version 27; Cronbach's( $\alpha$ ) to test level of consistency. Non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test, Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure of adequacy, and analysis of measures of central tendency. The results indicated a statistically significant difference in starling's Children Well-being Scale and the World Health Organization 5 well-being Index, scores across the six age groups indicating that age is a significant factor influencing social and emotional Psychosocial well-being of neglected children. The findings revealed that public benefit organizations Institution Based strategies have significant positive influence on psychosocial wellbeing of neglected children. The findings imply the need for targeted interventions for counselling psychology practice to develop and implement age-appropriate interventions that can adequately address the unique needs at various age of development. The findings can serve as base for advocacy for policy change, that prioritize mental health resources for neglected children. significance of this study is that the findings may be of benefit, to Government agencies involved in social protection services, that target the psychosocial challenges of neglected children. The study concludes that age is a significant factor influencing the psychosocial wellbeing of neglected children. The findings indicates that public benefit organizations play a crucial role in addressing the psychosocial well-being of neglected children in Tharaka Nithi County, through institution-based, strategies. The study recommends collaboration amongst various stakeholder. Research Ethical guide lines were strictly followed.

**Key Words:** Addressing, Influence, Children, Neglected, Psychosocial Wellbeing Public Benefit Organization, Institution Based Strategies.

## INTRODUCTION

The Psychosocial well-being, of neglected children can be understood as mental, emotional, social and

spiritual health of neglected children. The influence of public benefit organisation's (PBOs) institution-based strategies in addressing psychosocial wellbeing of neglected children; refers to the impact of (PBOs) interventions as an institution. It concerns with what PBOs does within itself to mitigate the negative effects of child neglect by promoting resilience, mental, emotional, social and spiritual health of neglected children. Eisenberg, and Raghavan (2024). Points out that despite societal advancement and progress in public health issues, mental health improvements for children have lagged behind. Public benefit organizations (PBOs) have played a pivotal role in providing psychosocial support to neglected children in society by addressing the adverse effects of neglect through prevention and intervention strategies.

Hoeboer (2021) shows that there is significant evidence to suggest that child neglect is the primary root cause of social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health difficulties among children. World Health Organization (WHO) report (2020) shows that emotional abuse is estimated to impact the lives of millions of children all over the world, with an estimated global prevalence of 363 per 1000 children aged less than 18 years. Elkin (2020) noted that in England, child neglect scores (48%) of child abuse reported cases, this is why many children are on child protection placement. In Wales in the United Kingdom, child neglect cases are at (36%), being the second most common cause for children to be in the child protection plan. The study indicates that psychological abuse or emotional abuse goes on without being detected, unlike physical and sexual abuse, which can easily be detected.

Alfarhan (2022) observes that (63.1%) of children in Saudi Arabia suffers maltreatment (39.2%), of children experience supervisory neglect, 6.8 %, medical neglect (5.5%) emotional neglect and (3.2%), physical neglect and educational neglect respectively. The high percentages clearly show that nowhere we can precisely say is a safe place for children. This call for a concerted effort in addressing child neglect of all types, if at all nations of the world, will raise a reliable, mentally healthy generation. Children left to themselves without adult supervision or protection make children susceptible to other forms of vices and Maltreatment, hence challenges in child mental health and difficulties in socializing with others.

WHO (2020) report statistics reveal that the African continent performs worst with the highest rates of child neglect, with about (41.1%) of girls aged between (2-17) years and (39.1%) of boys in the same age group in the year 2020 alone. For example, in Nigeria, Edo's Study confirms that child abuse and neglect are prevalent in the everyday life of the child in Nigeria. Still, it receives no attention from the Society. Med (2020) in Uganda did an integrative systematic review study on psychosocial support interventions for children with a history of Maltreatment. The study investigated the situation in the East African Community. The study found there is evidence of child maltreatment, which includes neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and emotional abuse. The study mainly focused on psychoeducation, positive parenting, and strengthening teacher-child interaction. Endo (2021) asserts that Uganda ranks the highest, scoring (42%) with the most children in rural areas abandoned by their parents, hence emotional neglect, educational neglect, and having no access to food.

Avdibegovi (2020) asserts that those children who experience neglect in early childhood more often experience emotional and social long-term consequences which influence their emotional and behavioral adaptations. Strategic early childhood interventions are proven to have positive results in the quest to mitigate the psychological effects of child neglect. Gencoglu and Demirtas (2019) did a study in Turkey the finding indicate that early childhood psychosocial interventions yield positive, social, and emotional outcomes for children. Jurca and Borca (2022) study on the impact of an educational intervention program on primary school pupils' self-esteem, found out that intervention which focused on activities that addressed issues of self-awareness, emotions, altitudes, communication and team building, the study found an increase in self-esteem mean scores suggesting that the interventions had a positive effect on participants' self-esteem. This suggests that targeted programs or interventions can effectively enhance self-esteem of primary school students

World Health Organisation (WHO),2020 report shows that about one billion children are neglected globally. Nation Media Group in Kenya reported that between July 2020 and June 2021, the reported cases of child neglect in Tharaka Nithi County totalled 1800. In Tharaka North Sub County, 280 children dropped out of school due to parental neglect. Despite the presence of 9 PBOs dealing with children's welfare in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. The cases of child neglect and psychosocial difficulties among neglected children is still high and there is little information that tries to establish the influence of PBO strategies in addressing the

psychosocial well-being of neglected children in Tharaka Nithi county. Therefore, this study sought to establish the influence of PBOs school-based strategies in addressing Psychosocial well-being of neglected children in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Psychosocial well-being of neglected children is a significant concern in the world today. Notably child neglect exposes children to long-lasting psychosocial difficulties in life. Public benefit organizations (PBOs) have played a pivotal role in providing psychosocial support to neglected children in Society by addressing the adverse effects of neglect through prevention and intervention strategies. WHO report shows that about one billion children are neglected globally. Nation Media Group in Kenya reported that between July 2020 and June 2021, the reported cases of child neglect in Tharaka Nithi County totaled 1800. In Tharaka North Sub County, 280 children dropped out of school due to parental neglect on account of religious beliefs (Njeru 2019). This is despite the presence of 9 PBOs dealing with children's welfare in Tharaka North and South Sub-counties, there is little information that tries to establish the influence of PBO strategies in addressing the psychosocial well-being of neglected children in Tharaka North and Tharaka South Sub-counties, Tharaka Nithi County Kenya. Therefore, this study sought to establish the influence of PBOs strategies in addressing Psychosocial well-being of neglected children in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya.

### **Objective of the Study**

The study was guided by the following objective.

- i. To evaluate institutional-based Strategies that address the Psychosocial well-being of Neglected Children in Tharaka's North and south sub-counties.

### **Research Question**

- i. What are the institutional-based Strategies addressing the psychosocial well-being of Neglected Children in Tharaka's North and south sub counties?

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study used descriptive research design. The main goal was to describe the current state by defining the respondent's characteristics and derive patterns, traits, behaviors, attitudes, and values (Mugenda, 2010). It is best suited to explore the phenomena which is to examine the influence of PBOs' Institution Based strategies in addressing Psychosocial well-being of neglected children. The study was carried out in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. Despite the presence of 17 PBOs centers dealing with children's welfare there is scanty information on the influence PBOs in the area. The target population was 5152 both children and workers from PBOs that deal with child welfare in Tharaka Nithi County- Kenya.

The accessible population of (528) respondents comprised of (34) PBO workers. The PBO workers were preferred because of the nature of their work with children on daily basis and, therefore, were better placed to inform the study. Children respondents were essential in this study since they are the recipients of PBO services. The study used mixed techniques in sampling as follows; purposive sampling was used to select 17 PBO center managers and 17 center social workers. The accessible population of 494 children between the ages of 12 years and 17 years was systematically sampled by taking the following steps. In step one, the researcher assigned a unique number to each member of the accessible population from 1 to 494. The interval (k) was determined by divided the population size (494) by the sample size (248):  $k=494/248=2$ . In this case, the researcher randomly selected a starting point between 1 and the sampling interval (k), which is (2). The random starting point was 7. Therefore, every  $k^{\text{th}}$  individual,  $2^{\text{nd}}$  from the population starting from  $7^{\text{th}}$  individual, was sampled as  $7^{\text{th}}$ ,  $9^{\text{th}}$ ,  $11^{\text{th}}$ ,  $13^{\text{th}}$ , until  $494^{\text{th}}$  respondents. This systemic sampling was to ensure that a sample of 248 respondents is evenly spread across the 494-accessible population.

The sample size for this study was 282 respondents derived from 17 PBO centers spread within the county. The number comprised of 248 children supported by PBO centers within the range of 12-17 years of age since this age can read and write. Plus, 34 center workers which comprised 17 center managers and 17 center social

workers. The PBO workers were believed to have pertinent information for this study since they interact and address the needs of children on daily basis.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the two standardized tools that were used to measure the influence of PBO s strategies on children’s wellbeing, A Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were differences in SCWBS scores and WHO-5 scores across different age groups. Results were summarized in Table 1. The results indicated a statistically significant difference in SCWBS scores across the six age groups,  $H(5) = 28.462, p < .001$ . This indicate that age is a significant factor influencing social and emotional psychosocial well-being. This finding suggests that different age groups experience varying levels of social and emotional Psychosocial well-being, highlighting the need for age-specific interventions and support strategies.

Table 1 Kruskal-Wallis’s test

Factor		SCWBS_Score	WHO_5
Age group	Kruskal-Wallis H	28.462	20.731
	Df	5.000	5.000
	Asymp. Sig.	0.000	0.001
Care givers living with Child	Kruskal-Wallis H	19.607	25.551
	Df	6	6
	Asymp. Sig.	0.003	0
Grade level	Kruskal-Wallis H	34.011	12.668
	Df	6	6
	Asymp. Sig.	0.0000	0.049

Additionally, there was a statistically significant difference in WHO-5 scores across the six age groups,  $H(5) = 20.731, p = .001$ . This result implies that general well-being, as measured by the WHO-5, varied significantly among different age groups. The variation in WHO-5 scores indicates that age-related factors may have played a crucial role in influencing overall well-being, and therefore, tailored approaches might be necessary to address the psychosocial well-being of neglected children. The Kruskal-Wallis H test also reveals statistically significant differences in SCWBS scores ( $H(6) = 19.607, p = 0.003$ ) and WHO-5 scores ( $H(6) = 25.551, p < 0.001$ ) based on the number of caregivers living with the child. This indicates that the presence and number of caregivers living with the child contributed to differences in psychosocial well-being scores, as measured by both scales. It also shows that social and emotional support provided by different caregivers vary, impacting the child's overall psychosocial well-being. The findings are consistent with Zou (2019), who observed that children living with biological parents often exhibit higher SCWBS and WHO-5 scores, attributed to more stable and consistent emotional support. The findings also agree with Bowlby (1988) attachment theory which postulates that early attachment experiences shape an individual's social, cognitive, and emotional development throughout the lifespan. That is to say, the quality of the attachment relationship between a child and their primary caregivers profoundly impacts the child's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Wagner (2024) adds that parents can build a positive parent-child relationship and foster healthy attachment by understanding a child's emotions and identifying their underlying causes by developing practical communication skills that open up emotional conversations. These outcomes are generally better for children in parental care compared to those in foster care or institutional settings, where disruptions in caregiving can negatively impact psychosocial well-being. However, Kruskal-Wallis H test is limited because it can only indicate the presence of significant differences between groups but does not specify which groups differ significantly from each other.

## Mann Whitney test

A non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was utilized to evaluate differences in SCWBS and WHO-5 scores between male and female participants. The analysis in Table 2 revealed a statistically significant difference in SCWBS scores between genders,

Table 2 Mann-Whitney Test

	SCWBS Score	WHO_5
Mann-Whitney U	5690.000	6270.000
Wilcoxon W	13193.000	13773.000
Z	-2.107	-.516
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.035	.606
a. Grouping Variable: 1. Gender		

with males and females exhibiting different levels of social and emotional well-being as measured by the SCWBS scale ( $U = 5690.000$ ,  $Z = -2.107$ ,  $p = .035$ ). This suggests that gender plays a role in influencing the SCWBS scores, indicating potential differences in the social and emotional well-being between male and female participants.

However, the analysis for WHO-5 scores did not show a significant difference between genders ( $U = 6270.000$ ,  $Z = -.516$ ,  $p = .606$ ). This suggests that the general well-being as measured by the WHO-5 scale was relatively similar for both male and female participants, with no significant gender-based differences observed in this sample. These findings highlight the importance of considering gender differences when assessing social and emotional well-being; contrary to Bauch (2022), who suggested that a gendered role plays a critical role in children's psychological support. However, general well-being measures like the WHO-5 may not exhibit the same gender disparities, suggesting that different aspects of well-being might be differently influenced by gender. Further research could explore the underlying factors contributing to these gender differences in social and emotional well-being.

## Institutional-based Strategies

Table 3. Institutional -Based Strategies

N	Valid	Missing	Mean	Median	Mode
We provide guidance and counseling to neglected children counseling	32	0	4.66	5.00	5
We provide group counseling for children.	32	0	4.53	5.00	5
We involve trained experts in counseling our children.	32	0	4.44	5.00	5
We have programs for children to develop social skills.	32	0	3.38	4.50	5
We have refresher causes for staff.	32	0	4.00	4.00	4
We recruit staff who are trained in counseling skills.	32	0	3.84	4.00	4
We have training for peer counselors among the students.	32	0	3.84	4.00	4a
We have Children Training on Sexual Purity and Boy-Girl relationship	32	0	4.50	5.00	5

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

The data reveals that institutional-based strategies for addressing psychosocial well-being do not apply only to neglected children but all school-going children. However, more often than not neglected children lack access to even to education. Therefore, PBOs leverage institution-based strategies which are comprehensive and varied targeting neglected children only as summarized in Table 3. The highest-rated strategy is providing guidance and counseling to neglected children ( $M = 4.66$ ), indicating a strong emphasis on direct, individualized support. Group counseling for children ( $M = 4.53$ ) also scores highly, suggesting that peer interactions and shared experiences are valued components of the support system. The findings seem to agree with Gencoglu (2019) Who observed that the psychological counseling services should factor family family-related work when addressing early childhood education. However, in this study PBOs in Tharaka leverage institutional psychological guidance and counseling services for their neglected children.

Involving trained experts in counseling ( $M = 4.44$ ) and developing programs for social skill enhancement ( $M = 4.38$ ) are crucial strategies, highlighting the importance of professional expertise and structured activities in fostering children's social and emotional development within PBO centers. Refresher courses for staff ( $M = 4.00$ ) ensure that the personnel remain updated with best practices. However, the slightly lower mean compared to other strategies suggests that there might be variability in implementation. The institutional strategies include recruiting staff trained in counseling skills ( $M = 3.84$ ) and training peer counselors among students ( $M = 3.84$ ). These findings agree with Wichmann (2023) showing that the success of the PTSD intervention for victims of interpersonal violence, was most likely because the implementation of trauma counseling in schools, was led by trained mental professionals and trained school staff. However, these low scores indicate an ongoing effort to build internal capacities for psychosocial support. Training on sexual purity and boy/girl relationships ( $M = 4.50$ ) is another critical area, underscoring the importance of addressing developmental and relational aspects in children's lives.

These strategies emphasize providing guidance and counseling, both individually and in groups, and involving trained experts to address the social and emotional development of children's needs. Bauch (2022), and Gencoglu (2019), explore the broader context of psychological counseling and the effectiveness of multi-systemic therapy (MST-CAN) in reducing child neglect. While both stress the importance of counseling and guidance services, the research findings focus more on practical implementation within institutions, emphasizing the direct impact of these strategies on neglected children's well-being.

On the other hand, Bauch (2022) and Gencoglu (2019) tend to examine the broader implications of counseling services and their predictors, such as mental health and parental stress, but with little attention to the specific institutional practices highlighted in this research.

Further comparison reveals that while the research in Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya, emphasizes the role of institutional-based strategies, including the need for consistent staff training and peer counseling, Gencoglu (2019) tends to focus on the outcomes of interventions like MST-CAN and the necessity of early childhood psychological counseling. For instance, the study on the need for psychological guidance in early childhood aligns with the research findings that stress the importance of expert involvement and social skill enhancement programs. However, the literature often addresses these issues from a more theoretical perspective, lacking the localized, practical insights provided by this research in Tharaka Nithi County. Additionally, Elkin's (2020) findings on the reduction of counseling sessions in the U.K. contrast with the research in Tharaka, where guidance and counseling services are rated highly and considered essential components of the support system for neglected children.

## SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that institutional-based strategies are crucial in supporting the psychosocial well-being of neglected children. Key strategies included providing guidance and counseling, group counseling and involving trained experts in counseling. These strategies stress the importance of professional therapeutic interventions. These strategies help children in developing emotional stability and resilience. That means professional counseling services are essential, in addressing the mental health needs of neglected children. Literature analysis also showed that structured counseling programs result in notable enhancements in the emotional and behavioral outcomes of children.

Moreover, involving trained experts ensures that children receive high-quality care, aligning with the best practices highlighted in child welfare research programs aimed at developing social skills which was also highly rated, indicating the necessity of structured activities that promote interpersonal skills. Additionally, the implementation of refresher courses for staff and the recruitment of staff trained in counseling psychology highlight the need for ongoing professional development to ensure high-quality support for children. Peer counseling programs and training on sexual purity and relationships, further contributed to the holistic development of the children, addressing both their emotional and social needs.

The importance of social skills development programs is well-documented by Bauch (2022), who showed that parental stress significantly predicted the reduction of child neglect, improved children's social interactions, and reduced instances of behavioral issues. The emphasis on staff training and development is also consistent with findings from previous studies, which indicate that well-trained staff are better equipped to address the complex needs of neglected children psychosocial well-being.

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