

Role of Counselling in Helping Neglected Boy Children in Lusaka District, Zambia.

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ABSTRACT

The exclusion and neglect of boy children in Zambia, particularly in Lusaka district, has resulted in increased conflicts between boys and girls, a rise in illiteracy among boys, heightened crime rates, more street boys, and increased drug abuse among boy children (Kambilima, 2014). Despite societal focus on protecting the girl child, the neglect of boys poses future risks to the very girls being safeguarded. This study explores the role of counselling in mitigating the effects of boy child neglect in Lusaka. Guided by Empowerment Theory, which emphasizes enhancing individuals' capacity to make choices, the study aimed to: (a) describe the factors causing boy child neglect in Lusaka, (b) explore experiences of boy children due to societal neglect, and (c) establish how counselling can address these outcomes. Employing a qualitative and descriptive research design, data was collected using in-depth interview guide and focus group discussions with 50 participants, including 20 elderly men and women and 30 boys. Elderly participants were selected using simple random sampling. Data was thematically analyzed, revealing that one primary factor of boy child neglect is the preferential care and support given to girls in the which is influenced by cultural societal systems. Boys are often expected to be more independent, leading to reduced attention and neglect. The findings highlighted educational disadvantages as a significant experience among neglected boys. The study recommends enhancing counselling services by increasing the availability of qualified counselors trained to meet the unique needs of neglected boy children. These counselors should utilize culturally sensitive approaches and tools to effectively engage with this demographic.

Keywords: role, counseling, neglect, child and Gender

BACKGROUND

In recent years, societal efforts have rightly focused on addressing the challenges faced by the girl child, aiming to promote gender equality and empower women. However, this well-intentioned emphasis has inadvertently led to the neglect of the boy child, particularly in the context of Lusaka District, Zambia. The consequences of this neglect are becoming increasingly evident, manifesting in various forms such as heightened conflicts between boys and girls, educational disadvantages for boys, a rise in street children, increased crime rates, and a surge in substance abuse among boys (Kambilima, 2014).

In Zambia, numerous programs have been initiated to support and empower the girl child, recognizing the

historical and systemic disadvantages faced by girls. For example, the “Keep Girls in School” program, supported by the World Bank, focuses on improving educational opportunities for girls. This program aims to reduce barriers to education for girls, providing scholarships, sanitary products, and other resources to ensure girls can attend and stay in school (Ministry of Education, 2024). While these efforts are commendable and necessary, they highlight a significant disparity in the attention given to boys’ issues.

The focus on girl-centered programs, while essential, has created an imbalance where the boy child’s needs are often overlooked. In many Zambian societies, boys are expected to be more independent and self-reliant, leading to a perception that they require less support. This cultural expectation results in fewer programs and resources being directed towards boys, exacerbating issues such as school dropout rates, involvement in crime, and substance abuse (Kambilima, 2014).

The neglect of boys has broader implications for societal stability and development. Boys who drop out of school or engage in criminal activities and substance abuse pose long-term risks not only to their own well-being but also to the safety and development of their communities. Moreover, the focus on empowering girls at the expense of boys can lead to increased gender conflicts and a sense of resentment, undermining the very goals of gender equality and social cohesion.

To achieve true gender equality, it is crucial to ensure that both boys and girls receive adequate support and resources. This includes developing programs specifically designed to address the unique challenges faced by boys. By investing in boys’ education, mental health, and overall well-being, society can create a more balanced approach to gender equality that benefits everyone.

However, there are emerging perceptions and public debate in Zambia suggesting that the boy child is being left behind in the gender equality agenda. The general perception is that the challenges faced by the boy child hinder his enjoyment of opportunities for progress, especially in education. The key drivers of boy child exclusion include issues related to homes and families, socialization processes, and cultural and traditional factors (Antonsson, 2017). Achieving gender equality requires ensuring that men, women, boys, and girls enjoy equal opportunities in all spheres of life: social, economic, and political. UNESCO (2015) indicates that this will require concerted efforts and effective collaboration among stakeholders at the national level to achieve gender parity.

This has caused to an increasing number of boys dropping out of school, which has led to girls being ahead in terms of the development agenda. The rise in singlehood, due to choices, separation, and divorce, is partly because boys do not feel empowered to take up their roles as heads of families later in life. The focus on girl child empowerment amid boy child neglect has led to widespread feelings that boys have been left behind after many years of prioritizing girls. This neglect is evidenced by increased alcoholism and school dropouts among boys.

There is a notable disparity in the availability of services and facilities for boys compared to girls. For instance, there are more boarding houses for girl children in Lusaka than for boys, and affirmative actions favoring girls during admissions into educational institutions have resulted in an imbalance in the number of male and female students in classes (Kambilima, 2014). This exclusion of boys not only exacerbates their vulnerability but also creates long-term societal issues, including increased crime and drug abuse among boys.

Counselling emerges as a vital intervention to address the adverse effects of neglect on boy children. By providing psychological support, guidance, and empowerment, counselling can help boys navigate their challenges and develop resilience. Empowerment Theory, as articulated by Zimmerman (2000), focuses on enhancing individuals’ capacities to make choices and improve their lives. Applying this theory to counselling neglected boys can help them build self-efficacy, set and achieve goals, and ultimately

contribute positively to their communities. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate how counselling can effectively address the challenges faced by neglected boy children, offering them the necessary support to thrive and contributing to a more balanced approach to gender equality.

This study is guided by H. Lausch's (2011) Empowerment Theory, which has its roots in the civil rights movement of 1975. The theory initially aimed to empower marginalized groups, particularly within the black community, and has since been widely applied across various fields, including social work and community development. Empowerment Theory emphasizes enhancing individuals' capacity to make choices, thus enabling them to take control of their lives and improve their circumstances. This framework is particularly relevant in the context of this study, which seeks to address the neglect of boy children in Lusaka District, Zambia.

Empowerment Theory provides a robust framework for understanding how counselling can play a crucial role in addressing the effects of neglect on boy children. According to Lausch (2011), empowerment focuses on the individual, highlighting the importance of providing them with the tools and opportunities necessary to make informed choices. This individual-centered approach aligns with the objectives of counselling, which aims to support and guide individuals through their personal challenges.

The World Bank's measurement of empowerment, as outlined in their World Development Report 2001, further reinforces this framework. They define empowerment as the process of enhancing an individual's capacity to make choices and achieving those choices. This dual focus on the existence and achievement of choice is critical in understanding how counselling can empower neglected boy children by providing them with the psychological, educational, and social support needed to make and realize their choices.

In this study, Empowerment Theory serves as the foundation for exploring how counselling can mitigate the negative effects of boy child neglect. The theory's emphasis on individual capacity and choice provides a lens through which to interpret the experiences of neglected boys and the potential benefits of counselling. By framing the study within this theoretical context, the research avoids relying on personal experiences and assumptions, instead grounding its findings in a well-established theoretical framework.

Furthermore, Empowerment Theory's historical focus on marginalized groups, including women, highlights a critical parallel to the current situation of boy children in Zambia. Just as the theory has been used to advocate for the empowerment of women through education and other opportunities, it can similarly be applied to advocate for the empowerment of boy children. This study posits that by utilizing counselling as a tool for empowerment, the neglected boy children in Lusaka District can be supported in overcoming the challenges they face, ultimately leading to a more balanced and equitable society.

By applying Empowerment Theory, this research aims to demonstrate how counselling can enhance the capacity of boy children to make meaningful choices, thereby addressing the negative impacts of neglect and contributing to their overall well-being and development.

This study aims to explore the role of counselling in addressing the effects of boy child neglect in Lusaka District, Zambia. By understanding the factors contributing to boy child neglect and the experiences of neglected boys, this research seeks to provide insights into how counselling can mitigate these adverse effects and promote the well-being and development of boy children.

Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following research objectives:

1. To describe the factors causing boy child neglect in Lusaka.

2. To explore experiences of boy children attributed to their neglect by society
3. To establish how counselling can help in addressing effects of boy child neglect in Lusaka district.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars worldwide have conducted studies highlighting the neglect of boy children. However, there is a significant gap in research concerning the role of counseling in addressing the effects of this neglect, as well as the contributing factors to the issue. The neglect of boy children remains inadequately addressed in society.

One noteworthy study conducted by Chang'ach in 2012 titled "An Unfinished Agenda: Why is the Boy Child Endangered?" shed light on the challenges faced by boys in the 21st century. The study emphasized the urgent need to protect and support boys, as society risks losing them without appropriate measures in place.

It is crucial to recognize that despite the existence of studies on the neglect of boy children, comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to this neglect and the potential of counseling in addressing its effects is still lacking. Consequently, the issue of neglecting boy children has not received the attention and intervention it deserves.

According to Chang'ach's study in 2012, persistent campaigns for raising awareness about girls' retention in school have started showing positive results. However, it is crucial to recognize the plight of boys as well, as their dropout rates have been overlooked by society (Chang'ach, 2012). By addressing the educational challenges faced by both boys and girls, we can work towards achieving the goal of Universal Primary Education and ensure that all children have equal opportunities to complete their primary schooling.

All children are the future leaders and guardians of tomorrow, and it is crucial for families and societies to prioritize their upbringing in order to cultivate physically, psychologically, socially, and mentally well-developed individuals. While there has been a commendable effort in raising awareness and promoting girls' education, it is important to reflect on the fact that society has often overlooked the challenges faced by boys, resulting in a higher dropout rate among them. This situation poses a hindrance to the attainment of Universal Primary Education, which is one of the Millennium Development Goals aimed at ensuring that all boys and girls successfully complete primary schooling.

Another study conducted by Moraa (2018) explored the plight of the boy child amidst the increasing focus on empowering girls. The study aimed to investigate the current status of boys in society. The findings revealed a significant neglect of the boy child, leading to his marginalized position. In Kenya, for instance, there is an imbalance where more girls are enrolled in schools compared to boys, and girls tend to outperform boys academically. Moraa (2018) also highlighted that this perception of the boy child losing his societal standing is valid, as interventions and programs have emphasized the importance of empowering girls, inadvertently causing the boy child to experience diminished self-esteem and confidence. Consequently, boys have turned to negative behaviors such as engaging in crime, drug abuse, terrorism, and truancy.

Antonsson (2017) conducted an insightful qualitative study that delved into the circumstances faced by vulnerable boys in rural areas of Kenya. The research shed light on the potential long-term effects resulting from the predominant attention given to empowering the girl child, both within the educational system and through the involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The study findings underscored the urgent need to pay attention to the well-being of the boy child.

Antonsson's (2017) study uncovered a range of risks and challenges faced by boys and young teenagers. It

became evident that the boy child was susceptible and vulnerable in multiple ways. Firstly, the neglect of professionals who are responsible for providing support and guidance to young boys was identified as a significant factor. Due to the prevailing focus on empowering girls, boys often receive less attention, leading to a lack of resources and assistance tailored to their specific needs.

Secondly, the African culture itself can contribute to the vulnerability of the boy child. Traditional gender roles and expectations may inadvertently overlook the unique challenges faced by boys, thereby hindering their development and well-being. Cultural norms and stereotypes can perpetuate a sense of neglect or disregard for the needs and rights of boys within their communities.

Lastly, the exposure to various hazards emerged as another area of vulnerability for the boy child. The study revealed that boys often face precarious environments that can have detrimental effects on their well-being. These hazards may include poverty, violence, limited access to education, and inadequate healthcare facilities. Such adversities can hinder their growth, limit opportunities, and increase their vulnerability to negative outcomes.

Additionally, Kambilima (2014) emphasized the importance of protecting the boy child. In today's world, there is a discernible emphasis on safeguarding the rights and well-being of the girl child, sometimes overshadowing the needs of boys. Kambilima (2014) argued that an equitable approach is necessary, as neglecting the boy child can lead to marginalization and hinder their overall development.

It is worth noting that the introduction of gender-related discussions and initiatives, while instrumental in advocating for the rights of girls, has inadvertently resulted in the relative neglect of the boy child. The focus on empowering girls, while commendable, should be balanced with efforts to address the unique challenges and vulnerabilities faced by boys. By recognizing and addressing these issues, society can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all children, irrespective of their gender.

The study conducted by Lichuma (2015) focused on the status of the boy child in Kenya and highlighted the emerging perception regarding the exclusion of the boy child in the gender equality agenda. According to the findings, the boy child in Kenya was found to be lagging behind the girl child in terms of gender equality, particularly in education. The study emphasized the need for interventions to prevent the boy child from being left behind. It identified various factors contributing to the exclusion of the boy child, including those related to homes and families, the socialization process, cultural and traditional factors, and peer pressure.

It is important to note that the studies mentioned, including the one conducted by Lichuma (2015), were specific to Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa and cannot be generalized to Zambia. As a result, there is a gap in knowledge regarding the factors contributing to the neglect of the boy child in Zambia. Therefore, it is necessary for researchers in Zambia to conduct a study to explore the factors unique to the Zambian context, particularly in Lusaka district. This research would help bridge the gap in the existing body of knowledge and provide insights into the role of counseling in addressing the effects of neglecting the boy child in Zambia.

In Raws' (2018) study on adolescent neglect, a review of research on identification, assessment, and intervention highlighted several factors related to neglect. These factors included a lack of emotional care, warmth, and encouragement, inadequate supervision, insufficient physical care, and a lack of interest in their education. The study emphasized that experiencing neglect during adolescence can have long-term consequences on various aspects of well-being, such as physical and mental health, engagement in risky behaviors, academic achievement, and overall adult outcomes.

On the other hand, Bhat (2015) conducted a study on the empowerment of women in India through

education. The findings of Bhat's study underscored the significance of women's education in the country. Education was identified as a crucial factor in empowering women to effectively respond to challenges, challenge traditional gender roles, and transform their lives. Both the government and civil society in India recognized the importance of educating women as it contributes to the development of the nation.

Kwachou (2020) conducted a study on the empowerment of Cameroonian women through higher education, employing an African-feminist and Capability Approach perspective. The study revealed that development agencies and governments have widely accepted the notion that education is inherently valuable, transformative, and particularly empowering for women. As a result, society has come to assume that an educated woman is an empowered woman, and the degree of empowerment increases with the level of education attained. However, the study highlighted the conditional nature of higher education's potential for women's empowerment. It emphasized the importance of considering intersecting factors when evaluating the empowerment of African women.

In Sharley's (2020) study on the identification and response to boy child neglect within schools, it was found that child neglect is the primary reason for children being placed under child protection. The study highlighted the existence of contrasting perspectives between school staff and social services regarding child neglect (Sharley: 2020). Firstly, the study emphasized the challenges faced by school staff in identifying instances of child neglect within the school environment. Secondly, it shed light on the inter-professional complexities encountered by school staff when addressing child neglect, particularly in terms of coordinating efforts between universal services and statutory services that aim to support and protect children suspected of experiencing neglect.

Overall, the study emphasized the importance of understanding the divergent professional perspectives on child neglect within schools and the implications these perspectives have on inter-agency practices. By addressing these challenges and promoting effective collaboration, it becomes possible to improve the identification and response to child neglect, thus enhancing the overall protection and well-being of children in educational settings.

Shoo (2017) conducted a study on the rise of feminism in Africa, focusing on Rwanda as a case study. The study aimed to analyze the emergence of feminism in Africa and its impact on gender and political inclusivity, specifically in Rwanda. The findings of the study revealed a gradual increase in women's participation in politics in Africa, facilitated by the implementation of various policy measures to achieve gender balance in political institutions. The study acknowledged the historical perception of women as inferior to men in different societal contexts, emphasizing the importance of addressing gender disparities.

While the literature reviewed by Shoo (2017) and other scholars shed light on the topics of education and women's empowerment, none of them specifically explored the experiences of boy children in Zambia who may face neglect from society. Therefore, there was a clear need to conduct a study in Zambia, specifically in the Lusaka District, to explore the experiences of boy children and the societal factors contributing to their neglect. By conducting this study, a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by boy children can be gained, filling the existing gap in knowledge and informing interventions and support mechanisms to address their needs.

A study by Oluwaseun (2020) on child neglect: the role of school counselors revealed the counselors' responsibilities to neglected children and also discussed the issues that should be considered in the assessment and treatment of neglected children and their families. The study also showed that dealing with child neglect will be more effective when school counselors leave the four walls of the school to provide support for neglect children and thus integrating them into the school system. Similarly, a study by Usakli (2012) on the school counselors' ideas on features, determinant and intervention of child negligence and abuse cases, indicated that counselors are key factors in the determination of child negligence and abuse

cases. They usually have child psychology knowledge, and are regarded as specialist of such cases. The counselors also are able to differentiate features and determination of negligence and abuse cases. However, counselors' information on intervention is limited.

A study on parents' participation in the boy-child's education: a case of class three children in Nyeri County was conducted by Wanjiru (2016). The findings from Wanjiru (2016) study revealed that parental participation was at a very low level to influence, above average academic performance. The study further revealed that fathers participated more in financial activities while mothers were active in all educational activities including financial activities. Though mothers were more active, fathers' influence was a major predictor in the boys' academic performance. Three factors were cited as hindrances to effective parental participation in the boy-child's performance in the area of study: income, occupation and lack of parents' awareness of their roles in academic performance other than paying school fees. Wanjiru's study is very important to the current study as it gives an insight of parent's participation in the boy child's education. However, it did not provide valuable insights into the intervention's methods in boy child neglect which the researcher of the current study intends to address.

Wassells (2015) study on Bottom-up approaches to strengthening child protection systems: Placing children, families, and communities at the center, concluded that child protection systems have frequently taken a top-down approach of imposing formal, government-managed services and the approaches used are often characterized by low use of formal services and the misalignment of the non-formal and formal aspects of the child protection system. Wallells (2015) study also showed that community driven action, including collaboration and linkages with the formal system, promoted the use of formal services and achieved increased ownership, effectiveness, and sustainability of the system.

Naeem (2014) conducted a study on teachers' understanding of child protection issues in Pakistan. The findings of this study highlighted that the protection of children is a collective responsibility, involving various stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and medical staff. It emphasized the importance of adequate training for these stakeholders on child protection issues, including the detection, management, and prevention of child maltreatment. Effective policy implementation was also emphasized in order to enhance the understanding of child protection issues, such as child neglect and exploitation. However, neither the study conducted by Wallells (2015) nor the study by Naeem (2014) specifically focused on intervention methods to address boy child neglect. This literature gap emphasized the need for further research to identify effective intervention strategies that can be employed to prevent boy child neglect. The current study aimed to fill this gap by exploring and establishing intervention methods that can be utilized to address the neglect of boy children. By bridging this gap in the literature, the research aimed to contribute to the knowledge base on addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by boy children who may be neglected in society.

A study by Silva (2020) on Child abuse and neglect in Srilanka, showed that children are the most vulnerable group in every society, and they are the future generation of the world. Every child has a right to protection, education and to get health and shelter with love and care. Silva's (2020) findings indicated that child's, neglect, and corporal punishment are the most commonly prevailing child protection issues in the country and poverty is the main root cause for the majority of child prostitution and neglect problems. Furthermore, the lack of policies, cultural norms, and poor awareness of people on child protection issues has worsened the situation, despite the currently established policies and laws related to child protection. In addition, the study by the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (2018) on Guidelines for best Interests Determination for Vulnerable Child Migrants in Zambia concluded that fundamental principles such as Principle of non-discrimination, Principle of the best interests of the child, Principle of life, survival and development and Principle of respect for the views of the child should be established taken into consideration in all actions, taken by either public or private bodies institutions, when dealing with

children. However, the studies mentioned above did not focus on the innervations methods that can be used to avoid boy child neglect, hence the need to this study to conducted so that the researcher of the current study can establish the best possible methods which can be used to avoid a boy child being neglected in society. Furthermore, based on this literature reviewed, it is clear that this study was worthy undertaking in order to investigate the implications of neglecting a boy child in Zambia, a case study of Lusaka district.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

The research design for this study was a case study conducted in Lusaka District. This design allowed for a detailed, contextual, and holistic description of the phenomenon being studied (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). The study primarily used qualitative research methods, including interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions. These methods were chosen for their flexibility, interactive nature, and ability to capture in-depth insights into the role of counselling in addressing the neglect of boy children in Lusaka District (Orodho & Kombo, 2002).

Study Population:

The study population consisted of all male children and elderly parents (men and women) in Lusaka District who could provide coherent and reasonable responses. This population was relevant as it included individuals who possessed information pertinent to the research (Hair & Celsi, 2011). The study sample included a total of 60 respondents: 30 young males (boys), 15 elderly men, and 15 elderly women.

Tools for Data Collection:

Data collection involved the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility and the ability to probe deeper into responses (Minichiello et al., 1990). Focus group discussions facilitated interaction among participants and provided a broader range of insights. These tools were chosen to collect detailed and explanatory information about the role of counselling in addressing the neglect of boy children.

Procedure for Data Collection:

Data collection was conducted over a period of three to four months. The process included conducting one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions with 60 respondents (Burns & Grove, 2003). The researcher recorded and took notes during the interviews. Where necessary, interviews were conducted in local languages such as Chewa (Nyanja) and Bemba to ensure respondents' comfort and understanding. The qualitative data collected was analyzed thematically, identifying common themes or patterns from the participants' responses to draw appropriate conclusions.

FINDINGS

The first research question wanted to find out the factors causing boy child neglect in Lusaka district. The findings have been put into categories or sub themes for easy presentation. Responses for this question came from 30 boys (boy child) and 20 elderly men and women who were interviewed on one on one basis, through focus group interviews and their findings were analyzed qualitatively.

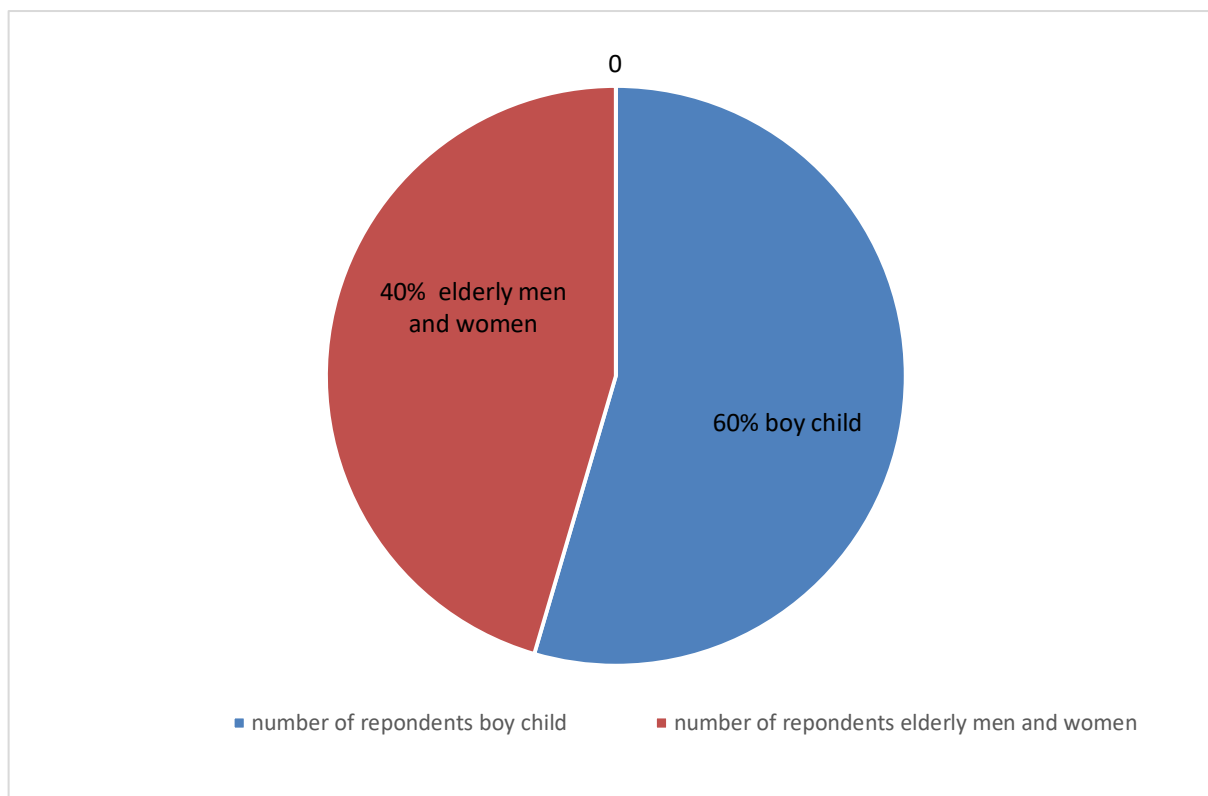


Figure 1.0 shows the number of participants

The following themes emerged as the factors causing boy child neglect:

a) Gender Stereotypes

It was clear from the knowledge obtained from the respondents that one of the factors causing boy child neglect is because there is more care and support given to the girl as opposed to the boy child. A boy child is expected to be more independent and less in need of care, this leads to less attention and neglect. There is favoritism in the families between a girl child and a boy child. For instance, one interviewee (boy child) narrated that,

It is not fair the way we are treated at home by my parents, a girl child is always favored because they think that they benefit more from a girl child than a boy child.

Similarly another interviewee indicated that:

There is more attention to the girl child because parents think that for a girl when she is fully supported and get married, they will also support them (parents) later. Unlike a boy whom if they get married will be supporting the wife and the family members of his wife more.

In addition, another interviewee (elderly women) narrated that:

If you educate a boy child, you will lose out, but if you educate a child you will gain a lot from it. Moreover a boy child is strong and can be able to stand on his own.

b) Death

It was also clear from the findings that another factor that causes boy child neglect is death which could be either both parents are dead or it only the mother or father who died. Death is a devastating phenomenon

which is hard to explain and understand. Usually when both parents are dead it becomes a challenge for children to live the kind of life they want as those who take the responsibility of taking care of them only prefer to take a girl as opposed to the boy child. A boy child is neglected with no one to take care of them. Therefore, not having parents lead to a boy child neglect.

For instance one interviewee reported that:

It becomes very difficult to help us in the way we want because of the situation at hand. As such you find that we have nowhere to get the support we need.

c) Economic Factors

Poverty and financial difficulties usually leads to parents being unable to provide basic necessities, education, and healthcare for their children. A boy child is always a victim been neglected if resources are limited, leading to disparities in care between genders. This is because a boy is seen of capable of providing for themselves. The girl's needs are seen to be more important than that of the boy child. Parents who are not aware of the unique needs of boys might unintentionally neglect their well-being and development.

For instance one interviewee (elderly man) showed that:

A boy child is not cared like a girl child because a boy child is always responsible and strong, hence capable of proving for his life on his own.

Another interviewee (elderly women) said that:

A boy child is different from a girl child, as a boy child can find something to do at anytime while a girl child may not.

Summary of the Findings on Question One (1)

Question 1 sought to describe the factors causing boy child neglect. The findings and responses from different personnel distinctively showed that, gender stereotyping, death and economic factors were among the common factors causing a boy child neglect. More attention is given to the girl child as opposed to the boy child because a boy child seen to be capable of taking care of themselves.

EXPERIENCES OF BOY CHILDREN ATTRIBUTED TO SOCIETY NEGLECTING THEM

The second question sought to explore experiences of boy children attributed to society neglecting them. The findings have been put in sub themes for easy presentation. Responses for this question were obtained from 30 boys (boy child) and 20 elderly men and women who were interviewed and their findings were analyzed qualitatively.

The following themes emerged as the experiences of boy children attributed to society neglecting them in Lusaka district:

a) Educational Disadvantages

Reponses indicated that boys face limited access to education due to financial constraints or societal expectations that prioritize girls' education especially in recent years. This is because a boy child is expected to work or contribute to household income instead of attending school, leading to a lack of educational opportunities. In terms of educational support, more support is given to the girl child, they are a number of

programs today that are centered on offering support to the girl child education and there is none for the boy child. For example, Forum for African Women Educationalists of Zambia (FAWEZA) and Keeping Girls in School (KGS) are programs that entirely look and support the affairs of the girl child.

One interviewee (boy child) reported that:

As a boy child I am not being supported in terms of school transport, personal clothing and support like books, body lotion and shoes. Am considered to be useless. It is hard and it is not fair, they support too much a girl child than a boy child. We survive by God's grace.

Another interviewee (parent) reported that:

A boy child is always playful, other with bad behaviour, they don't help out at home while a girl spends time at home and does all the home chores hence, they need to be supported. In addition, a boy child can hustle or even do some piece work to have money to get what they want but for a girl in doing so they may end up getting pregnant. Therefore, a girl child needs all the support she deserves.

b) Gendered Expectations

It was noted from the respondents that societal norms are one of the experiences of boy children attributed to society neglecting them. Societal norms have imposed a rigid gender role on a boy child expecting them to be tough, independent, and less in need of emotional care. There is also emphasis on boys' ability to contribute financially rather than their holistic development. Boys receive less emotional support from parents and caregivers due to the belief that they need to be self-reliant. This lack of emotional connection can have long-term effects on their mental health. This has greatly resulted in a lack of emotional support and neglect of their emotional well-being.

For instance in support of the above, one interviewee (parent) indicated that:

Society considers a boy child to be stronger than a girl child and a girl child is more respected in the society as compared to a boy child.

Similarly another interviewee (boy child) reported that:

I have never seen such a cruel thing where by the society is just dreaming about supporting a girl child only. A boy child is less considered in our society which is unfair.

c) Poverty and Economic Pressures

Respondents indicated that economic difficulties force parents to prioritize basic needs over the well-being of their children. In this case, a boy child will definitely lack access to proper nutrition, healthcare, and education due to financial constraints. Furthermore, the absence of positive male role models in families and communities has impacted boys' sense of identity and well-being, contributing to neglect.

For instance one interviewee (boy child) expressed that:

I lack support due to not having enough money at home, my father died and my uncle who promised to help me out he is not helping me, I don't have a helper but my sister is supported much. No one can see what is in me, they consider girls more than a boy child.

Similarly, another interviewee (parent) reported that:

Most of the times it is the economic hardships or economic challenges that leads to a boy child to be

neglected. And most of them are used as a source of cheap labour such as crushing stones used for construction, fishing and street vending. In addition, society treat a girl child as a source of income while a boy child id nothing.

Summary of the Findings on Question Two (2)

Question two sought to explore experiences of boy children attributed to society neglecting them. The findings revealed that economic difficulties forces parents to prioritize basic needs over the well-being of their children. Boys face limited access to education due to financial constraints or societal expectations that prioritize girls' education especially in recent years. And in this case, a boy child will definitely lack access to proper nutrition, healthcare, and education due to financial constraints. It's important to recognize that these experiences are interconnected and influenced by the broader societal context in Zambia.

HOW COUNSELLING CAN HELP IN ADDRESSING EFFECTS OF BOY CHILD NEGLECT

The third question wanted to establish how counselling can help in addressing effects of boy child neglect in Lusaka district. The findings have been put in categories or sub themes for easy presentation. Responses to this question were obtained from 30 boy (boy child) and 20 elderly men and women who were interviewed and their findings were analyzed qualitatively. The following themes or outcomes emerged as how counselling can help in addressing effects of boy child neglect in Lusaka district.

a) Emotional Support

Responses emerged from the interviewees stated that counselling can help in addressing effects of boy child neglect by providing emotional support. This is because counseling provides a safe and non-judgmental space for boys who have experienced neglect to express their emotions, fears, and frustrations. It validates their feelings and helps them feel heard and understood. Boys struggle with expressing their needs and emotions due to neglect hence, counseling helps improve their communication skills, enabling them to articulate their feelings and advocate for themselves.

For instance, one interviewee a boy child stated that:

Counselling helps to feel like even a boy child should be loved and cared for.

b) Building Self-Esteem

It was also clear from the respondents that neglect can affect a child's self-esteem and self-worth. As such Counseling can help on rebuilding their sense of self and reinforcing their strengths and positive qualities. Counselling equips boys with effective coping strategies to manage stress, anxiety, and difficult emotions that may arise due to neglect. They learn healthy ways to deal with challenges effectively.

c) Addressing Behavioral Issues

The findings showed that neglect can lead to behavioral problems. As such Counselors can help in with boys to identify the root causes of these behaviors and develop strategies to modify them. Counselling helps boys recognize harmful patterns and behaviors resulting from neglect and by addressing these issues, they are better equipped to break the cycle of neglect in their own lives and potential future families.

For example one parent reported that:

Counselling can help to control behaviour and help us how to take care of a girl child and a boy child so that all are treated equally and strengthen their rights. As well as see change in the way the way the boy child is being treated, because neglecting them we are building a savage who will grow up into beast.

d) Parental Education

The findings also revealed that counselling can involve parents to help them understand the impact of neglect on their child. It provides guidance on improving parenting practices, communication, and building healthier relationships. In cases where neglect is due to family conflict, counseling can facilitate dialogue and reconciliation, improving family dynamics and providing a more supportive environment for the boy.

For example, one interviewee (parent) indicated that:

Counselling can help address the effects of boy child neglect in Lusaka by imparting knowledge in most parents through guidance and counselling. It can also help by gathering parents and children and discuss the issues at hand.

Another interviewee (parent) reported that:

Counselling can help both parents and a boy child in the community will understand the importance of caring a boy child, hence may go back to school and be treated equally with a girl child.

Summary of the Findings on Question Three (3)

Question three sought to establish how counselling can help in addressing effects of boy child neglect in Lusaka district. It was revealed that counseling can help in addressing the effects of boy child neglect by can involving parents to help them understand the impact of neglect on their child. It provides guidance on improving parenting practices, communication, and building healthier relationships. Counselling helps boys recognize harmful patterns and behaviors resulting from neglect and by addressing these issues, they are better equipped to break the cycle of neglect in their own lives and potential future families. However the boy indicated that they have not being helped in any way by counseling services.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Research objective (1) sought to describe the factors causing boy child neglect in Lusaka. The findings of the study revealed that one of the factors causing boy child neglect is because there is more care and support given to the girl as opposed to the boy child. A boy child is expected to be more independent and less in need of care, he this leads to less attention and neglect. It was also clear from the findings that another factor that causes boy child neglect is death which could be either both parents are dead or it only the mother or father who died. Usually when both parents are dead it becomes a challenge for children to live the kind of life they want as those who take the responsibility of taking care of them only prefer to take a girl as opposed to the boy child. Poverty and financial difficulties usually lead to parents being unable to provide basic necessities, education, and healthcare for their children. A boy child is always a victim been neglected if resources are limited, leading to disparities in care between genders.

The findings of the current study are similar to a study conducted by Chang'ach (2012) on an Unfinished Agenda: Why is the Boy Child Endangered? Chang'ach (2012) study showed that, the boy child of the 21st Century is faced with tremendous challenges which unless properly guarded, the society is losing him. The findings of Chang'ach (2012) study indicated that, persistent campaign for awareness of girl's retention in school has started bearing fruits, but in retrospect the society has ignored the plight of boy-child and there

are more boys dropping out of school.

Moraa (2018) study on The Tragedy of the Boy Child amid Souring Girl Child Empowerment also revealed that, the boy child is neglected entirely and has lost his place in the society such that in Kenya today there have more girls in school as compared to boys and the girls do better academically as compared to boys. Society has placed a high premium on the girl child over the boy child through interventions and programs, which have rendered the boy child prone to low self-esteem and loss of confidence.

Another study was conducted by Antonsson (2017) on the vulnerable boy child. Antonsson (2017) study revealed that there is a need to pay attention to the boy-child. There are a number of risks that the boy-child and young teenage boys are facing. Furthermore, Lichuma (2015) study on The Status of the boy Child in Kenya, disclosed that, the boy child is lagging behind the girl child in the gender equality agenda as such if there are no interventions, the boy child will be left behind especially in education since there has been over-emphasis on the education of the girl child.

The research question (2) sought to explore experiences of boy children attributed to society neglecting them. The findings of the study revealed that the experiences of boy children attributed to society neglecting them include educational disadvantages. Boys face limited access to education due to financial constraints or societal expectations that prioritize girls' education especially in recent years. This is because a boy child is expected to work or contribute to household income instead of attending school, leading to a lack of educational opportunities. Gendered expectations are among the experiences of boy children attributed to society neglecting them. Societal norms have imposed a rigid gender role on a boy child expecting them to be tough, independent, and less in need of emotional care. Boys receive less emotional support from parents and caregivers due to the belief that they need to be self-reliant. This lack of emotional connection can have long-term effects on their mental health. Economic difficulties also force parents to prioritize basic needs over the well-being of their children. And in this case, a boy child will definitely lack access to proper nutrition, healthcare, and education due to financial constraints.

The findings were similar to Bhat (2015) on the Role of Education in the Empowerment of Women in India. The study by Bhat (2015) revealed the importance of education in reference to women empowerment cannot be neglected, because education of women is the most powerful tool to change the position in society and if you educate a man, you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered. Nadia (2020) study on analyzing the Role of Education in Women Empowerment in Bangladesh showed a significant relationship between economic empowerment and the employment of women, as well as a significant relationship between education (having no education, primary education, secondary, higher secondary, and tertiary) and participation in the development of the country.

Another study was conducted by Kwachou (2020) indicated that development agents and governments have established the idea that education is both intrinsically and instrumentally good, life changing, has direct returns, and is particularly empowering for women. The cumulation of these ideas has resulted in the development of societal assumptions that an educated woman is an empowered woman, and the more educated a woman is, the more empowered she will be. Shoo (2017) study on Women in Politics and the Rise of Feminism in Africa, indicated that women participation in politics is gradually increasing in Africa, as different policy measures are introduced to reach gender balance in political institutions because women have for the longest time possible seen as inferior to their male counterparts in different scenarios across the board.

The research Objective (3) sought to establish how counselling can help in addressing effects of boy child neglect. The findings of the study revealed that counselling can help in addressing effects of boy child neglect by providing emotional support. This is because counseling provides a safe and non-judgmental

space for boys who have experienced neglect to express their emotions, fears, and frustrations. It validates their feelings and helps them feel heard and understood. It was also clear from the respondents counseling can help on rebuilding their sense of self and reinforcing their strengths and positive qualities as it equips boys with effective coping strategies to manage stress, anxiety, and difficult emotions that may arise due to neglect. Furthermore, the study revealed that counselling helps boys recognize harmful patterns and behaviors resulting from neglect and by addressing these issues, they are better equipped to break the cycle of neglect in their own lives and potential future families. And counselling can involve parents to help them understand the impact of neglect on their child. It provides guidance on improving parenting practices, communication, and building healthier relationships.

In line with the findings, Oluwaseun (2020) study on child neglect: the role of school counselors revealed the counselors' responsibilities to neglected children showed that dealing with child neglect will be more effective when school counselors leave the four walls of the school to provide support for neglect children and thus integrating them into the school system. Similarly, a study by Usakli (2012) on the school counselors' ideas on features, determinant and intervention of child negligence and abuse cases, indicated that counselors are key factors in the determination of child negligence and abuse cases. They usually have child psychology knowledge, and are regarded as specialist of such cases. The counselors also are able to differentiate features and determination of negligence and abuse cases.

Naeem (2014) study on Teachers Understanding of Child Protection Issues in Pakistan, revealed that protecting children is a collective responsibility which should involve different stakeholders including parents, teachers, and medical staff in the process of detecting, managing and preventing maltreatment of children. Therefore, these stakeholders need to be adequately trained in issues of child protection with effective policy implementation on how child protection issues such as child neglect and exploitation are generally understood. In addition, the study by the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (2018) on Guidelines for best Interests Determination for Vulnerable Child Migrants in Zambia concluded that fundamental principles such as Principle of non-discrimination, Principle of the best interests of the child, Principle of life, survival and development and Principle of respect for the views of the child should be established taken into consideration in all actions, taken by either public or private bodies institutions, when dealing with children.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

This study employed three objectives in order to accomplish its purpose which was to *explore the role of counselling in helping neglected boy children in Lusaka district, Zambia*. The objectives of this study were to:

1. Describe the factors causing boy child neglect in Lusaka.
2. Explore experiences of boy children attributed to society neglecting them
3. Establish how counselling can help in addressing effects of boy child neglect in Lusaka district.

The first research objective and question were answered. The first objective of the study was to describe the factors causing boy child neglect in Lusaka. The findings of the study revealed that the factors causing boy child neglect is because there is more care and support given to the girl as opposed to the boy child. A boy child is expected to be more independent and less in need of care, this leads to less attention and neglect. The findings also indicated that another factor that causes boy child neglect is death which could be either both parents are dead or it only the mother or father who died. Usually when both parents are dead it becomes a challenge for children to live the kind of life they want as those who take the responsibility of taking care of them only prefer to take a girl as opposed to the boy child. Poverty and financial difficulties usually leads to parents being unable to provide basic necessities, education, and healthcare for their

children. A boy child is always a victim been neglected if resources are limited.

The second research objective and question were answered. The second objective sought to explore experiences of boy children attributed to society neglecting them. The findings of the study revealed that the experiences of boy children attributed to society neglecting them include educational disadvantages. Boys face limited access to education due to financial constraints or societal expectations that prioritize girls' education especially in recent years. Gendered expectations are among the experiences of boy children attributed to society neglecting them. Societal norms have imposed a rigid gender role on a boy child expecting them to be tough, independent, and less in need of emotional care. Economic difficulties also forces parents to prioritize basic needs over the well-being of their children. In this case, a boy child will definitely lack access to proper nutrition, healthcare, and education due to financial constraints.

The third research objective and question were answered. The third objective sought to establish how counselling can help in addressing effects of boy child neglect. The findings of the study revealed that counselling can help in addressing effects of boy child neglect by providing emotional support. This is because counseling provides a safe and non-judgmental space for boys who have experienced neglect to express their emotions, fears, and frustrations. It validates their feelings and helps them feel heard and understood. It was also revealed that counseling can help on rebuilding their sense of self and reinforcing their strengths and positive qualities as it equips boys with effective coping strategies to manage stress, anxiety, and difficult emotions that may arise due to neglect. In addition, Furthermore, counselling helps boys recognize harmful patterns and behaviors resulting from neglect and by addressing these issues, they are better equipped to break the cycle of neglect in their own lives and potential future families. Counselling by involving parents and to help them understand the impact of neglect on their child and provides guidance on improving parenting practices, communication, and building healthier relationships.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, discussions and conclusion, the study made the following recommendations:

1. **Enhancement of Counseling Services:** Given the adverse emotional and psychological effects of neglect on boy children, it is recommended that counseling services be expanded and enhanced within Lusaka District. This includes increasing the availability of qualified counselors who are trained to address the unique needs of neglected boy children. These counselors should be equipped with culturally sensitive approaches and tools to engage effectively with this demographic.
2. **Community Awareness Programs:** Community awareness programs should be implemented to educate parents, guardians, and community members about the potential long-term impacts of neglect on boy children's well-being. These programs could be conducted in collaboration with schools, local community centers, and religious institutions.
3. **School-Based Counseling Initiatives:** Schools play a pivotal role in the lives of boy children. It is recommended that counseling services be integrated into schools, providing a safe space for neglected boy children to seek support. School counselors can identify at-risk children and provide early interventions to address emotional and behavioral challenges stemming from neglect.
4. **Collaboration with Community Leaders:** Engaging community leaders and influencers in advocating for the well-being of boy children can have a significant impact. Collaborative efforts between counseling professionals and community leaders can help challenge harmful stereotypes and norms that perpetuate neglect. These leaders can serve as advocates for change within their communities.
5. **Long-Term Support Programs:** Neglected boy children often require ongoing support to overcome the effects of neglect. Long-term counseling and support programs should be developed to provide

consistent assistance throughout their developmental stages. These programs could include group therapy, mentorship initiatives, and peer support networks.

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