



TODDLERS AT THE BRINK OF INTER-GENERATIONAL POVERTY; A CASE OF MUCHEKE HIGH DENSITY SUBURB

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Key Words

Inter-generational, invisible poor, poverty, toddlers, urban

ABSTRACT

The study sought to explore the lived circumstances of toddlers living in impoverished conditions in slums and sub standard housing units in Mucheke high density suburb in Masvingo in Zimbabwe. In-depth interviews, focused group discussions and observations were used to gather data from participants most of whom were toddlers' single mothers surviving on vending. These were considered ideal for the study as their conditions could help to unravel the focus of the study premised on the "invisible urban poor" a concept overlooked by many scholars. It emerged from the study that adopted a qualitative approach, that toddlers in the said context survived in conditions of abject poverty rarely captured by the ordinary eye. Contrary to popular belief among adults that young children are oblivious of their deprived circumstances, toddlers observed in the study demonstrated an awareness of their lack of basic necessities as demonstrated by their protest and aggression against parents/guardians and peers in given situations. Adult-child interaction also appeared compromised given the weak attachment and bonding as a result of long periods of separation as adults engaged in numerous socio-economic activities to earn a living. This reduced the toddlers' sense of self and self esteem. Lack of basic provisions such as food and clothing and a general inability to access decent health, sanitary and ablution facilities compromised standards of living and subjected toddlers to a culture of perennial poverty and extinguished prospects for school attendance. The toddlers' circumstances laid fertile grounds for a vicious cycle of poverty and heightened the risk of inter-generational poverty as their families are often excluded intervention programmes by government, donor agencies and other stakeholders who usually prefer rural communities for various reasons.

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Background

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) sought to create platforms that observe and safeguard children's basic rights and freedoms. A number of years have passed and most governments and various institutions across the globe still struggle to meet basic children's rights to create habitable conditions that enhance children's livelihoods. According to Brokkerhoff (2015) conditions for children, particularly in least developed countries have actually deteriorated thereby painting a gloomy picture of socio-economic conditions in which young children survive. Given that children constitute about a tenth (10%) of most nations' populations (United Nations Human Settlements Programmes (UNHSP), 2013), it therefore follows that the impact of poverty on young children could be enormous and underestimated.

According to Dyson (2013) poverty affects billions of people worldwide and historically all nations have confronted its misery at one point or another. While poverty appears to be on the decline in some parts of the globe, stakeholders' efforts to combat the scourge seem inadequate in the third world and parts of Sub Saharan Africa

(United Nations,2009).. Unfortunately, poverty has no boundaries and cuts across the social strata and inflicts the old, young and newly born. According to the UNHSP (2013) a child is caught in poverty because their family or country is poor.

Of concern is the seeming reality that poverty propels further conditions for poverty and thus the creation of a vicious cycle. As Gulyan and Basset (2010:84) rightly point out "...what makes people poor seem to breed further conditions for perennial poverty. Marginalised sections of society and in particular women and children therefore risk surviving livelihoods that are perpetually trapped in poverty. There is therefore need for collective and robust intervention mechanisms by society to rescue families surviving in poor livelihoods to break the cycle of inter-generational poverty.

This background to poverty provides the premise for this study that sought to explore toddlers' livelihoods in Mucheke high density suburb located in Masvingo in Zimbabwe.

Rationale for study

Toddlers' poverty is a unique and disturbing societal ill that society has for long erroneously addressed in the general context (Levy, 2008). According to the World Bank (2014) children's experiences of poverty vary greatly from adult circumstances. It was therefore the conviction of this study that toddlers surviving in poor livelihoods in Mucheke high density suburb be accorded the attention of society they duly deserve in their unique circumstances as citizens.

Young children cannot speak for themselves and are therefore exposed to socio-economic injustices (Levy, 2008). Besides, families in conditions of poverty rarely speak out (Dyson, 2013) nor want their state of need exposed. This could endanger young and innocent lives and block possible child poverty alleviation efforts by well-wishers and other concerned stakeholders. The plight of toddlers could therefore escape public attention as a result of a conspiracy of silence.

Furthermore, child protection and welfare is real investment for communities, nations and the entire global village. The need for collective commitment by all stakeholders to continually seek workable solutions (World Bank, 2009) towards child betterment is therefore apparent. Montgomery (2009:120) emphasises the need for genuine, urgent and vibrant activism for child emancipation and asserts "... to expose and therefore seek to rescue children from the shackles of poverty is to champion a real cause for the dignity of children and humanity..."

Review of related literature

Defining poverty

Poverty defies definition as it is relative and contextual. However, in this study some definitions provided the needed insights. According to the World Bank (2016) absolute poverty refers to "livelihoods" dependent on one or two \$US dollars per day depending on the country's level of development. This definition clearly demonstrates that poverty is context bound. What may be perceived as poverty in the industrialised world (World Bank, 2016) may not necessarily constitute poverty in a least developed country. Perhaps, Ronaud (2016) offers a more functional definition by affirming that poverty is a state of livelihood in which a household struggles and fails to access life's basic necessities as a result of socio-economic incapacitation. Inflation and subsequent currency distortions on Zimbabwe's parallel market (United Nations Population Division (UNPD), 2006) over the years has seen the cost of most basic goods rise to exorbitant levels beyond the reach of many. It was also imperative to reflect on possible causes of poverty in this study.

Causes of poverty

Factors propelling poverty are numerous and different theories explain poverty differently. According to Muzin ((2008) the rich are hardworking and deserve rewards and similarly the poor are impoverished as a result of their inadequacies. While this view should be accorded the liberty of expression it democratically deserves, it could be lethal and misleading in that it could bless greed and corruption. Probably, this best explains why some societies with vast wealth and resources have some sections in their communities wallowing in abject poverty signaling possible massive exploitation of the poor by the rich elite some of whom could be economic saboteurs purporting to be hard working and industrious. For this reason some sections of societies are poor and undeniably caught in distributive injustice.

A more popular and emerging perception to poverty is that inadequacies of economic and political structures fail to provide sufficient opportunities for all and perpetuate poverty (Dyson, 2013). This view point sounds logical as proven by a significant proportion of migrants to industrialised nations who enjoy enhanced livelihoods having escaped socio-economic strife from their home countries. Economic and political structures' provisions are therefore a critical and more appealing factor to poverty than the mere focus on the individual's capacity. In fact, Montgomery (2009) sums it up well by stating that misplaced priorities by governments and selfish political interests have seen women and children condemned to the extreme depths of poverty in most developing nations where selfish interests hold nations to ransom.

Some scholars have argued that what causes poverty does not matter and is not the central issue but its effects on lives of citizens especially children (Fotso, 2016). While this could sound logical, the weakness of this notion is its obvious attempt to prescribe solutions to challenges of poverty without hindsight on the possible

causes. This is akin to addressing an underlying condition by simply glaring at symptoms and thereby creating chances of recurrence of the challenge. But how prevalent is poverty in societies?

Prevalence of poverty

About one billion people lived on less than \$US1 while 2.7 billion consumed less than \$US2 per day in 2010 worldwide (UNPD, 2010). Similar trends have also been noted in Bangladesh and India whose statistics reveal that close to 1.2 and 3 million urban dwellers, respectively, live in extreme poverty.

Interestingly, poverty is a global phenomenon (Coast, 2006) that has tended to be associated with rural communities. Inasmuch as poverty exists and is experienced in rural settings, shifting trends in countries' economies as in the case of Zimbabwe imply that some urban populations have become more vulnerable. Brockerhoff (2018) states that half the world's population lives in towns and cities where slums are a common sight. Levy (2008) concurs with this view and further explains that a quarter of children worldwide live in poor urban settlements in squalid conditions that challenge their resilience and subject them to perennial poverty. Also worth noting is Montgomery's assertion that though poverty exists in rural areas, the socio-economic pressure it exerts on urbanites is enormous.

While huge proportions of populations have moved above absolute poverty lines in East Asia, poverty has almost doubled in sub Saharan Africa (UNHSP, 2013). Trends of increasing poverty have been noticeable in Namibia, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe among other southern African countries (UNPD, 2006) where a significant proportion of children are under the age of five. Households headed by the old, single mothers and other children are the most affected. In recent years poverty in Zimbabwe has been on the rise (World Bank, 2014) and affecting a huge section of society and the urbanites are hard hit given their day-to-day reliance on a cash economy.

Poverty in the Zimbabwean context

Zimbabwe experienced drastic socio-economic and political shifts at the turn of the millennium. According to Dyson (2013) the country faced numerous challenges ranging from acute shortages of goods and services, an acute scarcity of food supplies and a general decline in public service delivery. Economic recovery has been slow and almost unnoticeable with urban dwellers being the hardest hit.

According to the United Nations (2016) Zimbabwe's economic collapse during years of hyperinflation in 2008 eroded citizens' livelihoods. Savings were lost and the country witnessed massive brain drain that saw close to five million nationals Montgomery(2015) migrate to Europe and other regional countries in search of better livelihoods. This socio-economic and political dissonance tore apart families and exposed lives of millions of children especially in urban areas.

The infamous and controversial "Operation Clean Up" that demolished houses which authorities claimed were illegally built notwithstanding some political connotations, as well as massive industrial closure Levy, 2008) that punctuated the period, left many families homeless and without a source of income to this day. Many families were forced to seek habitation on the streets while others hopped from one rented premise to the other. Today, the Zimbabwean economy is still struggling and broken in numerous facets and citizens endure a higher price index of basic commodities (World Bank, 2014) compared to the country's regional partners. Earnings of the extremely rich in society measured against the extremely poor (Gulyan and Basset, 2010) has seen a huge distortion of exchange rates on the parallel market where many seek to convert electronic cash, mostly earned by government workers to access foreign currency. Zimbabweans' odd and agonizing socio - economic experiences is common knowledge in the southern African region and beyond as demonstrated by the huge influx of the country's citizens into neighbouring South Africa in spite of resentment and a fierce xenophobic culture that has gripped the southern neighbor for years. Migrants have also sought refuge in numerous other other destinations on the globe .

There could be untold experiences encountered by households surviving in poor livelihoods especially in urban settings that cause men and women to brave heightened hostility and aggression in a distant and foreign land.

The invisibility of the urban poor

According to Dyson (2013) families surviving in abject poverty in urban settings remain invisible in national data as some reside outside formal residential areas and illegal settlements. Statistics for populations living in poor livelihoods could therefore be distorted and most likely to be exceedingly higher than officially portrayed. Furthermore, the degree of families' depravity could be masked by the extreme gap between the rich and poor likely to yield false national aggregates of the Poverty Datum Line (PDL). As Coast (2006:13) succinctly puts it "...some households well above a country's poverty datum line could be struggling to survive..."

National aggregate figures could also overshadow the urban poor as most nations' wealth is concentrated in towns and cities (United Nations, 2016). Consequently, government and donor aid usually target the rural poor as urban households are depicted as better and economically stable than their rural counterparts.

Furthermore, national policy formulation also seem to be inclined towards rural populations in most countries as these are often perceived underprivileged though political motives cannot be ruled out (World Bank 2014). For this reason Gullyan and basset (2010) explain that infant survival advantage have long since disappeared even in some of the most affluent cities worldwide. In fact Muzzini (2008) points out that mortality rates in ru-

ral settings in Sub Saharan Africa have in some cases declined while urban averages have either stabilised or worsened.

Clearly then, numbers are elusive and therefore statistics may not necessarily be the issue at stake but what poverty entails to life, survival and development of adults and toddlers in poor livelihoods in real life terms.

Effects of poverty on toddlers

Poverty denies toddlers their fundamental right to survival, life and development; basic pillars upon which children's rights are founded (Dyson, 2013). It deprives them of educational opportunities and prevents access to medical care, clean water, food, shelter, security and protection (World bank, 2014). Poverty is therefore a societal ill denying toddlers basic provisions and erodes foundations for toddlers' future prospects.

According to African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) (2012) poverty linked to homelessness, substandard housing, inadequate nutrition and lack of access to health and unsafe neighborhoods endanger children and compromise quality of life. Toddlers in poor livelihoods also exhibit behavioral and emotional challenges (Levy, 2008) that include difficulty getting along with peers, aggression, attention deficit and hyperactive disorders (ADHD) and other general conduct disorders.

A research conducted by Young Citizens Network (YCN) in New Delhi, India to establish socio-emotional trends of preschoolers living in poverty established that poor quality of life cause toddlers to exhibit feelings of anxiety, depression and low self-esteem (Dyson, 2013). Perhaps, what remains unclear is whether or not such feelings of an inferiority complex are only demonstrated during interaction with peers of a better social class or even among their own class. Gulyan and Basset (2010) further explain that children and teens from poor livelihoods risk negative outcomes such as poor academic achievement, dropping out of school and developmental delays apart from the obvious socio-emotional challenges that afflict children caught in socio-economic conditions of dire need.

While effects of poverty on schooling may seem misplaced on a study targeting toddlers' welfare, research has demonstrated that early childhood events bear enormous impact on a child's development and personality in later life as indicated by Dyson (2013) in the explanation that children who suffer acute separation anxiety from their biological mothers during infancy are more likely to grow up to be social delinquents with a propensity to commit crime. Literature is abound with cases confirming convicts serving time in prison whose early childhood years suffered acute separation from the biological mother (Coast, 2006).

Hunger reduces the toddler's motor skills, activity levels and motivation (Levy, (2008) to explore the environment. Probably what makes this observation critical is the fact that movement and exploration are also vital not only to cognitive development but other domains. Active toddlers elicit more stimulation and attention from caregivers thereby enhancing bonding and attachment (Muzzini, 2008) for sound toddlers' emotional well-being.

Unfortunately, poverty and economic hardship challenge parents in poor livelihoods as they experience chronic stress, depression (Montgomery, 2015) and in some cases inevitable marital distress. They in turn demonstrate harsh parental behaviours likely to trigger unfavourable socio-emotional experiences for toddlers. According to Dyson (2013) toddlers born and bred in contexts that lack love, warmth and affection are less likely to grow up and demonstrate these attributes to their own biological children. In fact, research has also demonstrated that parents who ill-treat their own children would have most likely undergone similar experiences in their early childhood (Dyson,2013).

Of acute concern is the fact that children born and bred in deprived livelihoods could be socialized to beg, inclined to street life and engage in juvenile misdemeanors and thus the likelihood of a vicious trend (UNPD, 2006).

While child marriages seem to be on the decline in urban settings where pressure groups disapprove abuse of the girl child (Dyson, 2013) for cultural convenience, the practice could still be surviving in some religious sects. According to Fotso (2016) child marriages under the age of 18 are common as a result of prevailing cultural practices and customary laws especially in rural settings.

In urban locations, child marriages are pushed by economic factors (World Bank, 2014) and this further worsens the plight of the poor as chances of early child bearing are widened thereby exposing both the mother and child to perennial despair. According to Gulyan and Basset (2010) there seem to be an emerging trend of inter-generational transmission of poverty in households fended for by women especially single mothers with early child bearing experiences and incomplete secondary education. The implications of female poverty on toddlers' welfare are therefore obvious given that child rearing is a responsibility championed by women. This therefore lays fertile grounds for feminised poverty; a rich ingredient of inter-generational poverty.

However, it is worth noting that children in different circumstances and contexts behave and respond differently to poverty. According to Muzzini (2008) some children in contexts of poverty defy the odds and demonstrate resilience to excel and surpass their privileged counterparts in numerous facets of child development. The study also explored some theories that help to substantiate discussion child welfare in relation to poverty.

Theoretical framework

Brofenbrenner's ecological systems theory, De Lorne's concentric circles and Rutter and Kagan's path way model are the theoretical premise of this study in seeking an appreciation of the influence of poverty on the live-

lihoods of toddlers in the said location of study.

According to Brofenbrenner's in Tasson and Hucker (2016) the family does not survive in isolation but is impacted upon by various socio-economic and political forces that bear influence on toddlers' welfare. Parents' nature of work and incomes (exo-system) and a country's laws and policy formulation (macro-system) are beyond the family's influence and consequently billions of households across the world are caught in conditions of poverty (Sabat, 2018). Brofenbrenner's view on factors affecting young livelihoods is therefore in tandem with the structural factors theory that blames a country's economic and political environment for its citizens' misery. According to Dyson (2013) the inter-relatedness of various systems of the social network to which families and toddlers are part, explains the inevitable vulnerability afflicting billions of lives across the globe.

De Lorne acknowledges that the family is the closest social unit to the child (Sabat, 2018) and a context of development through provisions of material and emotional needs. However, De Lorne further appreciates that society and the broader community can disable the family (Dyson, 2013) and therefore inhibit the needed "scaffolding" necessary for appropriate child development. The socio-economic and political challenges that Zimbabwe faces obviously bear impact on households and ultimately toddlers' livelihoods are compromised. Ideas put forward by Rutter and Kagan's path way model to explain children's trends of development in different contexts were also explored for purposes of hind sight in this study.

Rutter and Kagan in Tasson and Hucker (2016) propound that children in different parts of the globe develop in different and unique ways. Their societies define how they grow. This implies that while poverty is a global phenomenon, its magnitude and severity is circumstantial and thus varies from one context to the other. Poverty can therefore be best explained by individual circumstances and characteristics of people surviving in poverty themselves. Perhaps, this is one factor that has led most studies to address poverty in the general context and avoid "peeping" into the livelihoods of children particularly toddlers living in poverty to scrutinise the real life experiences the said children and thus a lack of advocacy for young children who do not speak for themselves. Apparently, toddlers in the geographical setting of this study experienced the aggregate consequences of poverty encountered elsewhere, though their experiences could be unique as a result of their geographical and socio-cultural circumstances. The need to explore real life issues and events in the natural context of the child therefore becomes inevitable.

According to Rutter children do not develop in perfect and uninterrupted paths (Sabat, 2018), not even among the elite class even though the impact of poverty is more pronounced among deprived livelihoods that lack appropriate material and emotional provisions. However, Rutter also sheds a ray of hope for toddlers surviving in conditions of depravity. Rutter's path way model affirms that if one area of child development is compromised, it can be compensated (restored) through appropriate intervention (Tasson and Hucker, 2016).

This theoretical perspective gives hope to millions of children living in poverty across the world and is an avenue that was also sought by this study. Exploring and sharing insights on toddlers' livelihoods in the said context, the oldest suburb in Masvingo, with a huge prominence of some of the most ancient buildings in Masvingo, erected in the colonial era is akin to providing "visibility" to the "invisible" vulnerable toddlers.

Rutter and Kagan believe in resilience of human development and its ability for re-adapt and pursue adaptation and pursuance of previously mapped paths (Sabat, 2018) with appropriate intervention. However, there is likelihood that some toddlers in some contexts of poverty could experience socio-emotional damage that is beyond restoration. According to Montgomery and Hewett (2019) research has demonstrated that the effect of abuse of an extreme nature such as sexual harassment and physical assault, often associated with a culture of poverty, can be complex to erase. What makes such scenarios gloomy is that child developmental domains are interwoven and a disruption in one as a result of poverty consequently throws other domains into disequilibrium.

Research methodology

Research design

The case study was adopted to gather data on the livelihoods of toddlers in Mucheke high density suburb. By virtue of its being a societal issue, child poverty attracts attitudes, emotions and opinions and accordingly the survey method was deemed most appropriate for this study which utilised mixed research methods. Sanders(2016) credits survey methods as the most commonly used approaches in educational research that help to unravel issues rooted in communities.

Participants

The study sought the participation of parents, caregivers and toddlers surviving in poor livelihoods in Mucheke high density suburb with those residing in slums and informal settings being the prime targets. Inhabitants of ancient houses found in a section of Mucheke high density popularly known as "*misana yenzou*" meaning "elephant backs" deriving from the arc design of the oldest housing units in the location, were most preferred in the the study. The families' inability to demolish or upgrade the ancient buildings built during the colonial era and inconsistent with modern forms of shelter, was perceived in this study as a firm indicator of poverty. Cards written one to fifty (1-50) to represent the targeted section of the community were put in a jar from which twenty (20) were randomly picked to constitute the sample.

Data collection

Data was gathered through the use of in-depth interviews that made use of both structured and open-ended interview questions to capture salient and detailed information on toddlers surviving in poor livelihoods in the said context. Interviews sought to establish family size, source of income, water, sanitation and nutritional provisions among other toddler welfare related issues. Huggins and Scott (2016) places enormous value on interviews as they grant the researcher control of the situation and allow further probing and clarification of issues. To compliment interviews, focused group discussions (FGDs) and observations of families and toddlers in real life settings were also conducted. FGDs allowed the researcher to summarise main points at the end of a plenary session to cross check and authenticate participants' attitudes, opinions and views (Mertens, 2014) The use of observations was only ideal and inevitable in this study as they could assist to capture the real circumstances of toddlers in their natural and uninterrupted settings (Andrew and Gulliz,2016). Research instruments were pilot studied at an informal settlement along the Masvingo – Morgenster peri urban area that comprised some small plots to verify their validity and reliability prior to use in the actual intended location of the study.

Ethical considerations

The study sought in all manner possible informed consent of the participants and upheld principles consistent with capturing information without distortions while preserving the dignity of participants. According to the South African Medical Research (2015) credible educational research strives to shun injustices while promoting human dignity, equality and attainment of human freedoms. Participants' informed consent was sought prior to conducting interviews and FGDs. Proxy consent was also sought from concerned parents and caregivers to observe toddlers. Confidentiality was upheld and pseudonyms were used to conceal the identity of participants (Mertens,2014) who were also informed that audio recordings of responses and discussions could be made. The guiding principle that adults and toddlers living in poverty are first and foremost people, whose rights and freedoms should be upheld and not sacrificed (Sanders, 2016) in the pretext of research, was pursued to the best possible extent in the circumstances of the study.

Limitations

Poverty is a sensitive issue that easily triggers emotions if not handled with the caution it duly deserves. As Gulyan and Basset (2010) explain households surviving in poor livelihoods often regard "intruders" with suspicion especially given that most of them breach municipal by-laws in their day-to-day activities to earn a living. The study therefore needed to be conducted with a sense of maturity and caution in approaching participants. Interaction with toddlers in their households and open places of play for authentic observation was inevitable in the course of the study and could also have attracted connotations outside research interests. Such speculation is justified as citizens in poor livelihoods are often misused for selfish gain. It was therefore necessary in some situations for the researcher to participate in the study (having obtained consent from concerned parties) as a participant observer (Sanders, 2018) to keep needless speculation by those outside the study at minimal. The researcher interacted with the toddlers in structured and open ended play in relaxed and informal situations.

Data analysis

Data obtained from interviews, FGDs and observations was clustered under themes that emerged from the shared and observed circumstances surrounding toddlers' livelihoods. Clustering data under appropriate themes and sub themes drawn from gathered data assisted the study to reflect and draw logical impressions (Sabat, 2018) deemed representative of the toddlers' lived circumstances.

Findings

Interviews sought to establish preliminary data on the general living conditions of the said toddlers in their respective households. Responses to interview questions were analysed under themes that emerged and were also cross checked with data obtained from FGDs and observations to validate some of the participants' claims on the general welfare of toddlers and the concerned families.

Family type and accommodation

It emerged that of the twenty (20) households, five (5) were child-headed while eight (8) comprised extended families though in crowded settings. Only six (6) families had both parents surviving. Nine (9) of the households were headed for by single mothers confirming a report by the United Nations (2016) that poverty is particularly acute in households headed by old, single mothers and other children. Dyson (2013) also posits that teenage and single motherhood is one of the correlates of poverty even in affluent societies such as the United States of America.

Occupants within a household ranged from three (3) to seven (7) and some of the participants confided to using curtains to partition space for adults and children in a single apartment. Sixteen (16) of the twenty (20) households stayed in rented accommodation whose rentals kept escalating. One of the interviewed mothers remarked: "*Kana vafunga kukudzinga vanongokwidza rent*" meaning some house owners increased rentals merely to get rid of tenants.

Continual relocation from one rented premise to another therefore implied compromised interaction trends for toddlers who were likely to suffer socio-emotional disequilibrium in the course of adjustment to their new places of abode.

Some families occupied a room or two while the rest of the intended building remained at the foundation or slab

level. Angela (not her real name) aged twenty one (21) narrated that her husband had relocated to South Africa and never returned. She could not afford to complete construction of the house. Similarly, Idah (pseudonym) indicated that she inherited the two roomed house in 2004 after her parents had both succumbed to HIV and AIDS. She had since given up on construction as she had to fend for her three children in the harsh economy.

Water, sanitation and source of income

On average, families obtained running water from taps even though they often resorted to using borehole water during frequent water cuts. Eight of the households had their water supply disconnected owing to non-payment of bills. Women and children near a squatter camp near Mucheke R, popularly known as “Gum Trees,” fetching water from unprotected sources dug on the banks of the dried Mucheke River were a common sight. This posed a serious health hazard to toddlers as well as adults as residents of the squatter camp lacked decent ablution facilities and resorted to the river banks and nearby bushes for convenience confirming the assertion by Levy (2008) that poor livelihoods are generally subjected to filthy conditions that defy the minimal hygiene and inhabitants survive by mere chance.

Of the twenty households, only five (5) had flush water closets. Shared latrines and in some cases Blair toilets were a common trend. Some participants, especially vending mothers explained that they sometimes resorted to the use of public toilets at the market place especially Mucheke bus terminus. Toddlers in the company of their elder siblings whose households were situated on the periphery of the high density suburb, could occasionally be seen retiring to the nearby bush and open space seeking to relieve themselves.

A bad stench of urine and human excreta was common on the peripheries of the location that also experienced unsanitary conditions as a result of uncollected garbage, broken glass and rubber as well as bad smell from a nearby home industry.

Only three (3) participants were engaged in formal employment in the security and retail sector while the rest engaged in informal trading selling wares that ranged from second hand clothing to fruit, vegetables, cigarettes and sweets. It was plainly evident income sourced from these activities could not sustain the families meaningfully. Responding to a question on how they supplemented their meager incomes, one middle aged woman and mother of two said:

“*Unozongoonawo yekutamba kuti mhuri irarame*” meaning one has to explore other options so the family survived.

Confiscation of wares by the municipal police for selling at undesignated points was cited by participants as a huge setback to their efforts to earn a living as indicated by one woman during FGD:

“*Mapurisa ekanzuru vanenge vanototsvagawo kurarama nesu*” translated to mean council police take advantage of our plight.

Impact of poverty on toddlers and adults

Participants generally expressed sentiments that they were overworked and often caught in hectic hassles and were rarely at peace. The most prevalent feeling was that realising one’s failure to provide for one’s children with the essential basic necessities was stressful and impacted adversely on child rearing practices.

Participants further acknowledged that circumstances could cause them to “neglect” their toddlers in some instances. Long separation from their toddlers to run socio-economic errands meant that elder siblings performed laundry, cooked and nursed the younger children (toddlers). This also meant that older siblings of school going age could have their attendance of school disrupted as they could be made to remain at home and take care of their younger siblings whilst their parent/s engaged in different socio-economic activities.

Police invasion also caused them to be irritable, unfriendly and intolerant to their children upon retiring home at the end of a day’s work. It was generally agreed that toddlers’ emotional wellness was compromised, as a result of parents’ unstable emotions.

This revelation concurs with findings of a study by Lister in 2015 on children born to mothers on the streets of Kampala. According to Dennis and Yawole (2017) the research revealed that children physically separated from their biological parents, especially the biological mother, subsequently lacked the desired maternal care and proximity essential for bonding and attachment; critical components of socio-emotional development.

Direct effects of poverty on toddlers

Skipping meals and inadequate nutritional provisions made toddlers to be sickly and naturally forced them to sleep as stated by one participant who said:

“*Zhara inoita kuti chana chiite sechinogwara chovata*” implying hunger makes the child to feel unwell and sleep more often.

This then meant that lack of nutritional provisions inhibit toddlers’ opportunities for social interaction and exploration of the environment. Movement and exploration are vital not only to social interaction but cognitive development as well (Dyson, 2013). One parent indicated that hunger makes a child irritable and difficult to console and naturally “conflict” arise among the toddler, caregiver and other siblings.

An old woman, granny Chigwe (not her real name), a widow aged 75, indicated that her two year old grandson whose mother had succumbed to HIV and AIDS, was aggressive and not sociable to peers. She claimed the boy looked quite healthy prior to the demise of his mother but now looked weak and slim as a result of conditions of

poverty as she could not afford life's basics given her old age. Asked how poverty affected her grandson she responded:

Ungagofara sei nevamwe miromo yakati papata ini ndachembera ndiri chirikadzi. Bhurukwa une rimwe chairu dzimwe idzi angova mamvemve, meaning the child cannot be sociable with others whilst hungry. I am old and a widow and cannot afford basics, he only has one decent pair of shorts, and the rest are tattered.

Some of the interviewed parents feared their toddlers could develop kwashiorkor as they woke up early to order green vegetables, fruits and other wares at the market popularly known as "*kuchitima*" as it is situated near the rail way line. They could also return home late in the evening and did not have time to adequately prepare meals for their toddlers who sometimes fed on packed food that often went cold given the frequent power outages. Substitute fuel such as fire wood and gas were beyond their reach as it would be an additional cost to electricity bills.

Participants also seemed agreed that toddlers were aware of their condition of need and could therefore be aggressive or shy away from peers especially peers who were seemingly privileged. Ardoin (2016) echoes similar sentiments in the explanation that children feel stigmatised, ashamed or even embarrassed by their lack of basic needs just like adults make effort to keep their lack of provisions hidden.

Provisions of space for play, safety and protection

A parent explained that she restricted and closely monitored her toddler for fear of imminent accidents and health hazards as traffic volumes and levels of filth were high. During FGD participants also raised concern that their toddlers could sometimes play in uncollected heaps of rubbish and broken sewer. These sentiments generally pointed to squalid conditions of congested living, a notion also acknowledged by Gulyan and Basset (2010) in the assertion that population density in slums complicates toddlers' depravity through poor toilets, ventilation, drainage and lack of open space thereby triggering emotions, anger and stress in young children.

Participants also claimed that their toddlers could also be left in the custody of neighbors as they attended to other urgent social matters and this could expose them to accidents, bullying and even sexual molestation as perpetrators of violence against young children are often masked and difficult to notice. Problematic behavioral trends among observed toddlers were also notable during the course of study.

Discussion

The study drew a number of insights on the livelihoods of toddlers in Mucheke high density suburb.

The observed households were home to toddlers experiencing poor and broken livelihoods most of which were fended for by single mothers without stable incomes. Vending was a common socio-economic activity whose hectic and demanding daily routine caused toddlers' mothers and caregivers to be emotionally unstable. Police invasions were also a huge setback to the mothers' effort to earn a living.

Bonding and attachment were severely affected as mothers and caregivers lacked opportunities for adequate and meaningful interaction with their toddlers. Busy schedules also meant that toddlers could be left in the custody of neighbours or elder siblings thereby exposing them to possible child abuse. Toddlers also lacked appropriate modelling in terms of socialisation and language development of ideal family settings.

Provisions of water, sanitation and safety were compromised and children playing in broken sewer and uncollected garbage as a result of non-disposal of refuse was quite noticeable. Ablution facilities were not adequate and this compelled some households to resort to the use of open space and nearby bush for relief. Some families also fetched water from "*mufuku*" ie water holes dug on the banks of a nearby Mucheke exposing toddlers to chances of diarrhoeal infections.

Observed toddlers generally lacked autonomy and play opportunities as a result of crowded conditions. Lack of independent movement implied restrictions in socialisation and exploration and this could adversely impact toddlers' cognition and ultimately other developmental domains as these are interconnected.

Most importantly, toddlers' prospects for schooling in later years appeared threatened given that some of their older siblings, as was the case in some households, were already out of school as families could not afford fees and uniforms. It was further noted that for those who were lucky to be in school, attendance was not continual as they could sometimes be made to be absent from school to take care of their younger siblings (toddlers) as the mother explored other alternative avenues of survival that forced them to be physically separated with the family for a few days' duration.

Conclusion

Toddlers surviving in poor livelihoods in Mucheke high density suburb live in sub-standard housing with very poor to average water and sanitary provisions. A number of households occasionally fetched water from the borehole and unsafe sources. Ablution facilities were not functional in many households as they were in a state of disrepair with frequent water cuts compelling families to resort to the use of public facilities. Open defecation on the periphery of the suburb was a common practice. Incapacitation of heads of the households, mostly single mothers, compromised nutritional provisions for toddlers and denied them the needed basic necessities. On average the mothers' ages in relation to the number of their biological children seemed to indicate a noticeable

trend of early marriages and child bearing. Prospects for schooling in a near future for the toddlers in the observed households appeared very low judging by the poor or virtually non-attendance of school by some of the toddlers' older siblings. Without the necessary government and other stakeholders' intervention, the future could be bleak for the toddlers in the area of study as they risked to be continually trapped in continual poverty thereby perpetuating a hard-to break vicious cycle. There is need for government to revisit policy on vulnerable children to embark on robust measures that seek to alleviate poverty among the invisible urban poor through appropriate legislation and fiscal policy. Such commitment by society could rescue and re-build young and innocent lives that seem shattered and therefore yield worthwhile investment desirable to any civilised and progressive society.

Acknowledgment

The author wishes to acknowledge all distinguished scholars whose work has contributed in diverse ways to the protection and safety of marginalised young lives.

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