

Children as Carers

Implications for Early
Childhood Development

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Background

- Burden of care is increasingly falling on the shoulders of children.
- Little information available about the specific challenges faced by child carers and how policies and programmes are designed to meet their needs and rights.
- Gender-specific issues faced by child carers.
 - **There is limited information about the gender expectations on boys and girls in caring roles and how gender affects the success of child carers to access support.**
- Study conducted in Angola, Mozambique, Nigeria & Uganda funded by Ford Foundation using child researchers.

Project Phases

- Research phase to identify the protection, care and support requirements of boy and girl carers and their access to support through participatory child-led research.
- Implementation of pilot interventions based on findings in four countries
- National and regional advocacy for policy programming interventions in Africa.

Literature Review

- Very thin literature on child caring
- No evidence of interventions targeting child carers
- Scale of child carers remains unknown though likely to be widespread.
- Children are more likely to be caring in regions where HIV rates have been high for a long time.
- Little is known about the psychological impact of caring.
- Child caring not given specific attention in policy documents.

Findings from Literature Review: Characteristics of child carer households

- Children are performing a physically, mentally and emotionally demanding tasks
- Happening during periods of profound unwelcome change
- Caring is reciprocal – Unwell adults continue to try to care for the children in a significant way
- Children likely to assume responsibilities when HH has minimal (or no) human capital
- Ability to engage reciprocally in social networks hampered because of stigma and discrimination

Findings from Literature Review: impact on educational attainment

- Child carers often manage to stay in school
- However, performance in school suffers due to sporadic attendance, exhaustion and failure to complete tasks.
 - **Policies that focus only on improving enrolment amongst OVC will not address this problem.**

Definition of Child Carer

- **Children assuming a dominant role as caregivers in a household**
 - Living with parents who have a chronic and debilitating illness
 - Living with and caring for increasingly frail grandparents, who may have formerly been caring for their child
 - Heading households and caring for younger siblings,

Methodology: Child-led Research

- Purposive sample of 12 children in each country, trained to conduct research
- The 12 then interviewed two to three other child carers in their area
 - A total of 124 children (61 girls and 63 boys) participated in the four countries
- Documented the results using cameras and drawings
- Second workshop conducted to present their findings
- Researchers applied the Save the Children “Child Safeguarding – Safe Child Participation Policy Guidelines.”

Findings: Multiple and Repeated Caring

- **children cared for many people**

“I have problems of looking after my grandparents and my sick mother. There are ten of us children too. My youngest sister is also sick.” (17 year old girl in Uganda)

“My mother and my father passed away. I looked after my father with my mother and then my mother and then my sister came home and she was sick too. She passed away. Now I look after my little sister and brother and my aunt’s child. I also look after my great grandmother and my grandfather and grandmother.” (Girl, 14 Zimbabwe)



late
50 yrs



3 yrs

young
brother

±

±
80 yrs

grandmother



80 yrs

Grandfather



12 yrs

Cuculethu

young
sister



14 yrs

Co
ol

8 yrs

v-falls



20 yrs

v-falls

brother

Aunt's late.

Findings: Economic Responsibility

- Child carers are not only principle caregivers but also mostly responsible for household income too.
- Child carers defined their identity as a child who worked very hard to make sure that the household had food and other essentials.
- Looking after a sick or elderly person placed an additional burden on them.

“Sometimes at the health desk they give you a prescription for the child, but there are no drugs. You get the prescription and then you have to go and buy the drugs yourself. I have to do small jobs to earn money to pay for the drugs which we are going to buy.” (Girl 13, Angola)

Findings : Household and Caring work

- In addition to working to provide for the household, child carers also did household work e.g. collecting firewood and water.
- They said they did more household work than other children because of the added responsibility of caring for the sick.
- Children do a wide range of caring tasks: preparing special meals, bathing the ill, taking them to hospital etc.

Findings : Household and Caring work

- Cross-gender caring serious issue
 - Boys noted difficulty to wash their old grandmothers and girls about washing their fathers or brothers.

“I only wash my granny’s feet and hands. But it is a problem to wash the whole body. It is very difficult to wash the whole body. And you cannot tell anyone about it.”
(boy 16, Zimbabwe)
- Concerns about caring for sick properly and contracting HIV

“There are some people who come to talk about HIV/ AIDS, they just move around and talk and then go away. Nobody has shown me how to care for HIV person.”
(Uganda)
- Children did not show any resentment in relation to the burden of work they carried.

“We love them so we feed them and bath them...they are our grannies we need to support them” (Boy, 17 Uganda)

Findings: Educational Attainment

- Biggest challenge was finding money for school.
- Some left school because they had to earn money for younger siblings to continue going to school.
- Missed school or were constantly late because they had to care for an ill person.

Findings: Support and Discrimination

- Children mentioned friends (some who were also carers) as their greatest support
- Few people knew that children were caring
- Neighbours helped by giving them food or jobs
- Institutional support mainly from the church and NGOs
- Discriminated against because of poverty and caring for people who had AIDS
- Discrimination also related to gender roles
“Making charcoal is a boy’s job. They laugh at me...”

Findings: Resilience and Stress

- Evidence of both resilience and emotional stress
- Greatest strength was the sense of responsibility to the young, old and the sick.
- Worried about lack of food, school requirements, getting medicine.
- Complete lack of resentment in the way they talked about their duties.
- Compared to other children, they said they had more parenting skills and strategies for dealing with the sick or old.

“Sometimes when there are lots of things to do I feel like hiding. I look for a place to hide away from the house. For some hours after that I come back. Hiding does solve the problem because when I come out I feel calm. We do tell some friends and it helps.”
(Boy, 16, Uganda)

Recommendations for advocacy and programming

- Need for interventions to reduce the heavy burden of economic responsibility that child carers carry.
- Need (for governments, NGOs and community partners) to address the barriers to accessing schooling for child care providers.
- Child care providers need skills, information and support relating to how to care for older people, younger siblings and people who are living with HIV.

Recommendations for advocacy and programming

- Child carers should be targets of home-based care programmes where they receive age-appropriate training and support from community home-based care programmes.
- Support needed for medical costs
 - Monies are diverted from food and other basic necessities.
- Psycho-social support for child carer families
 - relationships within the family are protective
 - Children also need their own support groups

Implications for Early Childhood Development

- Young carers need skills to be able to support the healthy growth and development of younger children in the households
- Siblings can be very supportive of the growth and development of younger children in their households, so avoid sibling dispersion

Implications for Early Childhood Development

- Interventions such as cash transfers may mitigate poverty which is linked to **lower developmental outcomes**
- Unwell adults are still trying to provide some level of care for children, programs need to reinforce how caregivers can support those children (ensuring proper inheritance planning, foster arrangements, etc)

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