

## Title

# Enhancing the resilience of the orphans using the Ubuntu philosophy: A case of Marange community in Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

The aim of the study was to enhance resilience among the orphans using the Ubuntu philosophy. The study adopted the descriptive design as it allowed the participants to describe felt distress. The study population was drawn from Marange district in Manicaland province in Zimbabwe. Purposive sampling technique was used in the study. The auto biological questionnaire was used to elicit the participants' information. The provided information included the participants' age, sex and orphan hood status as either double or single orphaned. A sample size of 15 participants was determined by the saturation level which occurred when similar responses were repeated by the participants. Data were collected using semi-structured interview questions and content data analysis was used. The community members served as protection factors against challenges experienced by the orphans. The shared cultural philosophy of Ubuntu invigorates the sense of belonging and confidence among the orphans.

## Key words

Enhance; Orphans; Philosophy; Resilience; Ubuntu

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## Introduction

Orphans and vulnerable children are often isolated and find it difficult to share experienced challenges and problems. They are often ignored and have no access to parental love, protection and guidance. Lack of quality care and protection make the orphans more vulnerable to depressive episodes. This culminates to self-destructive behaviors such as indulging into drugs and substances abuse. In a socio centric African context, it is the duty of community members to show sympathy and look after the orphans. The community members embrace and share the cultural philosophy of Ubuntu which reminds them to help the disadvantaged community members. Community members do not live in isolation but as an integral part of the whole society where the pain of one is viewed as the pain of all. The painful and pleasant moments are shared by the community members. The orphans find solace from the other community members in the context of Ubuntu philosophy. It is the duty of the local members of the community to serve as protective factors and safeguard the interests of the orphans. Orphans who have lost hope and confidence find encouragement. The limited resources are shared for the benefit of all members of the community including the orphans. The community members are expected to uphold the Ubuntu philosophy of respecting, caring and providing for the needs of the orphans. In this context, life becomes meaningful among the orphans and is positively viewed where every measure is taken to preserve it.

## Background

Mugumbate and Chereni (2019) and Van Breda (2019) viewed Ubuntu as an African philosophy on which a person is a person through others. Mwansa (2020) views Ubuntu as an African philosophy of interdependence irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity and social status. Ubuntu is a culturally oriented African philosophy anchored on social inclusion, protection, mutual trust and reciprocity. It is common indigenous philosophy among the Bantu speaking people found in eastern and southern Africa. There is social cohesion as community members help each other and share both good and bad moments. It takes the whole village to raise a child especially the orphans and vulnerable children (Reupert, Straussner, Wemand, & Darryl, 2022). Members of the community have got an obligation to sustain the needs of the orphans and vulnerable children. The community members serve as buffer against challenges experienced by the orphans and vulnerable children (Parry, 2023).

Guided by Ubuntu philosophy, extended family members assume the parental role for the orphans (Ringson, & Chereni, 2019). The orphans view them as source of social protection with whom they can share distressful experiences, social problems and even joyful moments. Through sharing painful feelings, they are able to get a sigh of relief. The extended family members have got an obligation of looking after the welfare of the orphans (Moran & Taylor, 2021). In

the context of Ubuntu, they ensure the provision of shelter, clothing, food and medication among the other necessities. This culminates to resilience enhancement among the orphans.

The integration of orphans in the community empowerment programmes is essential for resilience building (Muguwe, Taruvinga, Manyumwa, & Shoko, 2012). The orphans need to be actively participating in community developmental projects. Their decisions which affect their lives should be taken into consideration. The Ubuntu philosophy emphasises equality of mankind irrespective of socio-economic status (Tawodzera & Themane, 2021). It is, however, unfortunate to note that not all the community members respect the values of inclusivity. This has resulted to the side-lining of orphans in community developmental programmes. They have not been given the opportunity to benefit from community empowerment programmes. The failure to participate and access community empowerment programmes has perpetuated the experienced distress (McCannon & Rodriguez, 2021). Irrespective of the limitation, the Ubuntu philosophy serves as a reminder to the community members to care, love and protect the disadvantaged members of the community.

Foster and Brooks-Gunn (2009) postulate that orphans are on the risk of engaging in risk behaviours such as substance abuse and committing crimes due to experienced environmental harsh conditions such as poverty. They end up being labelled as dangerous elements of the community without addressing the insinuating circumstances. The disintegration of the social fabric has compromised the provision of psycho-social support to the orphans (UNICEF, 2016). There is lack of patience and tolerance in fragile community networks such as the families, religious organisations and mental health support systems has worsened life for the orphans. This has resulted to high school dropouts and poverty among the orphans. Lack of parental close monitoring and guidance has made the orphans more vulnerable to abuse (Morantz, Cole, Vreeman, Ayaya, Ayuku, Braitstein, 2013).

The Ubuntu philosophy embrace a holistic caring approach which considers the physical, social, emotional and psychological growth of the orphans (Koen, 2021). The values of working hard in life are encouraged. The orphans are taught to be self-reliant instead of begging. Social growth is emphasised on the need to uphold community norms and values such as respecting the elderly, exercising tolerance, trustworthy and honest behaviour. The orphans are taught to refrain from temperamental behaviour such as anger outbursts (Moran & Taylor, 2021). Psychological growth is emphasised through valuing mindfulness in daily activities and endeavours. The Ubuntu holistic approach facilitates the orphans to be resilient in diversified environmental conditions.

The social support from the community members serves as bolsters of resilience among the orphans in the face of socio-economic adversities (Subbarao, Mattimore, Plangemann,

2001). Guided by the philosophical concept of Ubuntu, the community members take a leading role in imparting self-survival skills to the orphans (Parchment, Small, Osuji, & McKay, 2016). The success of one community member is received with joy as it is perceived as the success of all the other community members. The study aims at enhancing the resilience of orphans using Ubuntu philosophy. Very limited research in Zimbabwe has been done on enhancing the resilience of orphans using Ubuntu philosophy (Mavhura, Manyangadze, & Aryal, 2021). The study sought to answer the following questions: a). what is the community's perception towards the orphans in the context of cultural philosophy of Ubuntu? b). what is the role of Ubuntu philosophy in enhancing resilience among the orphans?

## Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive design as it allowed the participants to describe felt distress. This enhanced the validity of the findings as the participants capitalised on their mother language proficiency.

### Target population, sample and the sampling technique

The study population was drawn from Marange district in Manicaland province in Zimbabwe. The area served as a rich source of data as the role of the extended families in taking care of the orphaned children is still prominent. The extended family members assume the parental roles. It is from this contemplation that the rich source of data for the study was drawn from Marange.

Purposive sampling technique was used in the study. The auto biological questionnaire was used to elicit the participants' information. The provided information included the participants' age, sex and orphan hood status as either double or single orphaned. A sample size of 15 participants was determined by the saturation level which occurred when similar responses were repeated by the participants.

### Data collection and analysis procedure

Data were collected using semi- structured interview questions. Consent was sought to record the verbal responses during the interviews. Thematic data analysis procedure was informed by the research design as outlined below:

- The recorded data from semi-structured interviews was grouped into themes.
- Themes were then divided into sub themes.
- Interconnected sub themes were linked and amalgamated into categories.
- The final stage was the translation of data categories into an account.

### Ethical considerations

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from Manicaland State University of Applied Sciences ethical committee.

Ethical issues were taken into consideration during the study. Initially the researchers sought the consent of the guardians before seeking the assent of the participants as they were still minors below the age of 18 years. The participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they felt to do so. Confidentiality of information, anonymity of participants, justice and participant rights were also ensured.

## Results

### Participants' autobiographical information

A total of 15 participants took part in the study and the size was determined by the saturation level. Pseudonyms were used for the purposes of confidentiality. The participants were numerically coded for identification purposes during data collection. A total of 8 (53%) participants aged between 10 to 15 years. Of the participants, 4 (27%) were below the age of 10 years whilst 2 (13%) were 16 years old and one (7%) was 17 years old. The youngest participant was 8 and the oldest was 17 years old.

From the analysed data, the emergent themes were prejudice and discrimination, community relations, inclusion, mindfulness and optimism.

### Themes

#### Theme 1: Prejudice and Discrimination

One of the themes which emanated from the analysed data was prejudice and discrimination. The participants reiterated that community members had a negative perception towards them. They were badly treated by their own community members. In some instances, they ended up being isolated which had some adverse effects. For example, participant 8 had to say:

*I am treated like a donkey by my own uncle.... I do all the household chores whilst other children of my age are going to school.*

Participant 2 echoed:

*I have lost hope of a good life, I am not going to school because no one paid school fees for me. My grandmother is old, poor and not working.*

Participant 11 said:

*I am not mentally well because of the labelling I always receive from community members. They call me thief, but I have not stolen from anyone...I think it's because I am an orphan who is very poor.*

Participant 5 insisted:

*I am suffering from distress .... I have lost hope of myself as there is no light at the end of the tunnel. I feel calm and relaxed when I take drugs and alcohol.... I know it's bad but what can I do when everyone does not want to see me.*

#### Theme 2: Community relations

Interpersonal relations is a valued aspect in Ubuntu cultural philosophy. The community members are bound together by common cultural practices and connections. They shared for example the same family lineages and totems. In the context of Ubuntu philosophy, the community members identify each other as having common blood lineages irrespective of belonging to different families. The burden of one is viewed as the burden of all which drives the need to provide care, warmth and protection of each other. The following are examples of sentiments which emanated from the participants:

Participant 9 revealed:

*The pain of one is the pain of all, similarly, the joy of one is the joy of all. I was rescued from starvation by my community members upon hearing my plight. I am one of the beneficiaries of the chief's grain reservoir for the disadvantaged members of the community. I am receiving grain allocation monthly from the chief.*

Participant 10 had to say:

*My relatives took care of my needs soon after the death of my parents. I am going to school, and they are paying the school fees.*

Participant 7 said:

*I am very grateful to my niece who is so kind that all my welfare is being catered for by herself. She is a good person who cares for me and my brothers as well.*

Participant 3 echoed:

*I feel accepted and loved by my community members. They encourage me to work hard at school and I sometimes receive presents from them when I do well both at home and school.*

### **Theme 3: Inclusion**

The integration and inclusion of the orphans in community programmes helped them in confidence building and decision making. The Ubuntu philosophy of inclusivity provided an opportunity for the orphans to gain some self-reliant skills. Through being included in community empowerment programmes such as establishing nutritional gardens, the orphans learnt problem solving skills rather than to be dependent. The following sentiments came from the participants:

Participant 1:

*I am experiencing growth each day I see myself amongst the community members participating in developmental programmes. I am experience both mental and physical growth.*

Participant 6 echoed:

*I am learning to solve my problems without depending on others. I can ask for help but not for everything.*

Participant 14 reiterates:

*Life is a journey of learning through interacting with others. I am really benefiting from these projects as I can now know how to start my own fishery project.*

### **Theme 4: Mindfulness**

Another theme was mindfulness which emerged from the analysed data. As one of the aspects of Ubuntu, the participants reported the need to have an awareness of the self, others and the environment. The participants emphasised the need to exercise contextual awareness and to behave accordingly. The community members were expected to have a shared level of consciousness to promote an understanding of each other.

The following are examples of participants' sentiments as participant 13 says:

*Be vigilant all the time to avoid regretting...you must be aware of yourself and what is happening around.*

Participant 9 went on to say:

*It is important to be aware of your culture and the interests of the community.*

Participant 12 reiterated:

*We share a common understanding of each other...we are bound by common blood, common culture and history.*

Participant 7 reiterated:

*We need to be conscious of our community needs and goals which need planning. We have to be mindful of our action plans and remain aware of the intended goals. All we do as a community should not cause harm to another person but promote peace and development.*

### **Theme 5: Optimism**

The community members were encouraged to exercise optimism as a strategy of dispelling unpleasant thoughts and experiences. The participants viewed optimism as a source of peace of mind and comfort when experiencing adverse and unpredictable life events. The positive imagination of a bright future irrespective of the current circumstances was viewed as ideal in the Ubuntu cultural context. The following are examples of the participants' sentiments. Participant 3 revealed:

*Even though, I lost all my parents, I am looking forward for a bright future.*

Participant 14 insists:

*I am moving on with my life and there is light at the end of the tunnel...let's hope for a better future.*

Participant 5 reiterated:

*My tomorrow will be bigger than today...I only need to remain focused and socially connected.*



Participant 11 adds:

*We need to be progressive rather than to be pre-occupied by the past life events. I am looking forward for a great and bright future.*

## Discussion

The orphans especially in developing countries are prone to distress due to socio-economic adversities such as poverty, hunger and lack of parental warmth, care and protection. The disadvantaged children experience a negative view of themselves, others and the environment. They had lost hope and the prospects of a bright future. The sense of security was lost and had low self-esteem accompanied by identity confusion. This was consistent with the findings of UNICEF (2016); Nyamukapa, Gregson, Lopman, Saito, Watts and Monasch (2008); Mugumbate and Chereni (2019) and Van Breda (2019) that in most cases orphans and vulnerable children drop out of school and end up in the streets begging and committing various crimes. The orphans found it difficult to share painful experiences as they did not have parental support, love and care. Lack of parental guidance predisposed the orphans to risk health behaviours such as drug and substance abuse. They resorted to peer group influence which adversely affected their moral standing. Irrespective of embracing the values of Ubuntu, the community members were reluctant to trust orphans whose moral standings were questionable. This was related to the findings of Kaunda (1966), Reupert, Straussner, Wemand and Darryl (2022), Wabwire (2013) and Tutu (2007) that orphans remain isolated and not given the opportunity to participate on community programmes. It was a great concern for the orphans that they were being labelled as thieves, hooligans and dangerous elements of the society without any justification. It became increasingly difficulty for the orphans to afford and access basic health services. The hope for a bright future was shattered which perpetuated depressive episodes among the other challenges.

In the cultural context of Ubuntu, the community members are however, reminded to be each other's brother's keeper. They are bound together by common cultural background which reminds them to be sympathetic especially to the marginalised community members such as the orphans. This was consistent with the findings of Mwansa (2020), Sekunda (2019), Nyaumwe and Mkabela (2007) and Samkange and Samkange (1980) that shared cultural norms and values promote interpersonal relationships and understanding among the community members. It is culturally viewed as an obligation of the society to look after the vulnerable members of the community such as the orphans. In the context of Ubuntu philosophy, the extended family members assumed the parental role of looking after the orphans. The social interconnectedness-built resilience as community members served as sources of encouragement, motivation and protection amongst the orphans.

In the context of Ubuntu philosophy, the provision of a conducive caring home environment for the orphans builds

resilience (Johnson et al., 2006; Ranson & Urichuk, 2008; Sharer et al., 2015; Wild et al., 2013). The orphans needed to be loved and supported in the community. They needed to be respected by attentively listening to their pleas. The culture of open communication was encouraged to enhance trust and sense of belonging. The Ubuntu philosophy values the sharing of concerns and the possible ways of alleviating the shared problems (Tutu, 2004; Kurevakwesu & Chizasa, 2020; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019; Mbigi, 2005). This enhanced a deep understanding of each other and a common shared responsibility of looking after the orphans. Emotional intelligence skills were viewed as essential in initiating and maintaining interpersonal relationships with the other members of the community. They learnt on how to behave in an acceptable manner in a specific context.

In the context of Ubuntu philosophy, the Government of Zimbabwe came out with a policy to pay school fees for the orphans and vulnerable children under a programme dubbed Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM). The programme is critical in enhancing the resilience of orphans as it protected them against school dropouts. It is, however, important to note that, in developing countries such as Zimbabwe, there has been an increase of orphans due to HIV/AIDS and covid-19 pandemic. It increasingly becomes difficult for the government to assist all the orphans due to limited financial resources. In a related study, Tawodzera and Themane (2021) put across that humanitarian organisations in the African context have subscribed to Ubuntu philosophy by caring and providing for the orphans. They did not only provide physiological needs such as food, clothing and shelter but also mental help programmes meant to enhance resilience. As a way of dealing with depressive episodes, the humanitarian organisations also provided some recreational activities for the needy children. The findings were consistent with the study made by Ringson and Chereni (2019), Mupedziswa, Rankopo and Mwansa (2019), Kurevakwesu and Chizasa (2020) and Maunze (2019) that recreational activities foster mental, physical, emotional and social growth among the orphans. Trust was built and the society's past negative perception towards orphans was gradually discarded as the members began to understand each other. The painful experiences faced by the orphans were shared and relevant measures to address the situation were taken into consideration. Instead of being pre-occupied by negative thoughts of the self and others, the orphans were encouraged to share concerns and exercise realistic positive thinking and talking. As embedded in the concept of Ubuntu philosophy, community members are supposed to be sensitive to the needs of the disadvantaged community groups such as the orphans (Parchment, Small, Osuji & McKay, 2016; Mugumbate & Chereni 2019; Wabwire, 2013; Van Breda, 2019).

In the context of Ubuntu philosophy, the traditional leaders had an obligation of looking after the orphans. They are supposed to keep and administer granary reservoirs to cater for the orphans and other vulnerable children. This practise sprouts from Ubuntu philosophy meant to protect the orphans against harsh environmental conditions such as starvation. This was consistent with the findings of Muguwe, Taruvinga,

Manyumwa and Shoko (2012), UNICEF (2016), Tutu (2007) and Tawodzera and Themane (2020) that the orphans are susceptible to hunger and poverty. The provision of food helped to alleviate them against the experienced distress.

The exercising of mindfulness enhanced role identity and self-confidence which are valued in Ubuntu philosophy. The orphans were encouraged to be aware of their community obligations and take active roles in decision making. In a related study, McCannon and Rodriguez (2021), Mwansa (2020), Tawodzera and Themane (2020) and Tutu (2004) revealed that, instead of begging to earn a living, the orphans needed to be conscious of their environmental opportunities which they can capitalise to earn a living. Through collaborating with the other community members, the orphans explored and benefited from the environmental resources. The orphans felt accepted as they participated in community capacity building programmes. This enhanced resilience as they were encouraged to exercise mindfulness in the planning and execution of daily activities. The intended goals were shared but needed to be realistic and achievable. The orphans were able to adjust successfully in the face of stressful environment.

Ubuntu philosophy embraces optimism as a driving force of imagining a bright future irrespective of the debilitating conditions. The orphans were encouraged to direct their energy towards the attainment of their socio-economic aspirations instead of contemplating on the past stressful events. Community celebrities served as role models for the orphans to emulate and gave them hope for a bright future. This was in consistent with the findings of Nyamukapa, Gregson, Lopman, Saito, Watts and Monasch (2008), Muguwe, Taruvinga, Manyumwa and Shoko (2012), Maunze (2019) and Wabwire (2013) that in the context of Ubuntu philosophy, the successful community members are at liberty to share their experiences with the orphans. The orphans were taught problem solving skills essential for them to survive in the face of adversities.

## Recommendation

In considerations of the study findings, the following recommendations were made:

- There is need to provide mental health support to orphans following the deaths of their parents.
- Ubuntu philosophy should be used as a framework for providing guidelines of building community-based structures meant to enhance resilience among the orphans.
- There is need to protect the orphans against the other community members who may pretend to offer help in the context of Ubuntu, yet they end up abusing them for personal gains and interests.

## Conclusion

In consideration of the foregoing discussion, it was found that the loss of parents predisposed the orphans to maladjustment disorders such as anxiety, social withdrawal and drunken behaviour. The levels of uncertainty, anxiety and dysphoria were heightened. The orphans were viewed as minors who were not capable of making meaningful community decisions. The orphans find themselves in a new family set up not by choice but by the circumstances beyond their control. It was found that the embracing of the cultural values of Ubuntu philosophy by the Marange community reminded the members that the pain of one is the pain of all, hence, they had to take an active role in engaging the orphans in community programmes. The community members served as protection factors against harm directed to orphans. The community members were bound together by common family lineage in the form of totems. The shared cultural philosophy of Ubuntu invigorates the sense of belonging among the orphans. The orphans were at liberty to share both the pleasant and unpleasant experiences. In the context of Ubuntu philosophy, extended family members assumed the parental role. It is however, important to note that, these families are not well resourced to take care of these orphans due to poverty. The shared plight of the orphans normally touches the hearts of the community members who subsequently assume an active role in helping the orphans. The altruistic behaviour is an embodiment of Ubuntu philosophy which helped to enhance resilience among the orphans.

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