



The psychosocial wellbeing of orphans and youth in Rwanda

The Psychosocial Wellbeing of Orphans and Youth in Rwanda: Analysis of Predictors, Vulnerability Factors and Buffers

HELSINKI, FINLAND, January 9, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Doctoral Dissertation Analyzes Emotional Well-being of Rwandan Orphans

A University of Helsinki doctoral candidate discovers that marginalization and stigmatization affects orphans more than other factors.

HELSINKI, Finland --- Tehetna Caserta, a doctoral candidate at the University of Helsinki in Finland, just completed a dissertation on the well-being of orphans and youth in Rwanda. Analyzing survey results from 430 orphans, which was taken in 2009, the candidate discussed conditions that affect variations in the psychosocial health of orphans and youth in Rwanda. The findings are useful to organizations that work closely with orphans—stakeholders, policy makers and government institutions.

More than twenty years ago, the economic and political fabric of the Rwandan society was completely wrecked by the 1994 genocide. Accompanying the genocide tragedy, the country also experienced one of the most prevalent AIDS epidemics. Those who suffered most from the tragedies were the children and youth, resulting in the worst orphan crisis in modern history. Though local and international organizations from all over the world have provided support to the Rwandan orphans, many have struggled to overcome the traumatic experience of losing parents to horrible diseases or violence. Caserta's dissertation focused on discovering the most important factor missing in the children's lives, and what government agencies and other organizations can do to help.

“My findings show that stigma and marginalization are the driving forces behind the suffering psychosocial well-being of Rwanda's orphans,” said Caserta. “It is within the power of government authorities, charity organizations and policy makers to alter the attitude of societies toward orphans so that they are fully accepted as part of the society. Acts of stigmatization, abuse and marginalization should be prevented by law.”

Caserta's first study showed that an orphan's living environment played an important role in their level of emotional well-being. Many of the orphans in the study moved frequently from one living environment to another. 76% of the subjects started in foster homes and moved to other living environments. There is an indication that orphans looked for protection, security and love by moving from one type of living environment to another, though none of them felt truly content or adequately loved.

The doctoral candidates second study explored the psychological vulnerability of the orphans in relation to living environment, status of orphanhood and cause of parental death. A unique contribution, Caserta's research provided the first study that quantitatively established the pathways through which stigma, marginalization and social support are intertwined to drive levels of emotional health and mental distress in African orphans. Stigma and marginalization were found to drive over 50% of the variation in the psychosocial well-being of the orphans in Rwanda.

Exploring the relative importance of social support, Caserta's third study determined that not all perceived social support was equally significant for the emotional well-being and mental distress of the orphans. Perceived support from adults, such as relatives and community members, were associated with higher levels of emotional health, whereas perceived support from peers was not as significant. Companion support and emotional support were found to be most important in lowering mental distress.

The overall findings of Caserta's research proved that the mere lack of material provisions are not the only distress that affect an orphan's mental health, nor were they the most significant. Rather, the negligence, stigmatizing attitude, and abuse by communities have made them suffer the most. A costless effort of acceptance, inclusion, affection and encouragement could heal the deep wounds of thousands of Rwandan orphans. Visit <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/faculty-of-social-sciences> to learn about University of Helsinki's Faculty of Social Sciences.

About Tehetna Caserta:

Tehetna Caserta, a doctoral candidate at the University of Helsinki, defended her doctoral dissertation to the Faculty of Social Sciences on January 9, 2017. The title of the dissertation is The Psychosocial Wellbeing of Orphans and Youth in Rwanda: Analysis of Predictors, Vulnerability Factors and Buffers. Those interested in reading more may view the dissertation in electronic form through the e-thesis service. Contact Tehetna Caserta at tehetna.alemu@helsinki.fi or tehetna.a@gmail.com for further information.

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Tehetna Caserta
University of Helsinki
358443200704
email us here

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