

# The effects of HIV and Aids on the Academic Performance of Orphaned and Vulnerable Children from Child Headed Families

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## ABSTRACT

*The descriptive survey investigated the effects of HIV and AIDS on the academic performance of children from child headed families (CHF). Questionnaires and interviews were used as instruments of data collection. Members of the CHF, teachers and administrators formed a total sample of seventy five (75) participants. Data collected gave the opinions of the participants in as far as the academic performance of these children is concerned. Findings from the study revealed that members of the CHF perform poorly in academic circles due to the effects of HV and AIDS. It was discovered that the loss of adult figures in the family due to HIV and AIDS plunges children into educational dilemmas as they become heavily loaded with adult responsibilities in case of child heads. Besides, lack of resources also exacerbated their poor performance. However, due to resilience some members of the CHF were found to defy all the odds and perform extremely well. The researcher therefore recommends that National AIDS Council (NAC) and other stake holders should not concentrate only on the infected but should also channel funds to the affected children in order to improve their educational welfares. Also, further research is recommended on the topic in order to enable the nation to have a permanent solution to the problem.*

**Key Words:** Child Headed Family, Academic Performance, Resources/materials, Potentials/Capabilities, Shortcomings, Resilience, Child.

## Introduction

The contemporary issue of HIV and AIDS has given birth to the dreaded phenomenon of child headed families (CHF). As we all know, the phenomenon has of late attracted the attention of academic giants in the name of scholars and theorists in their bid to nap the predicament in its

bud. Indeed, it is against this background that this research study seeks to examine the effects of HIV and AIDS on the academic performance of children of the double orphaned category (DOC) and at the same time belonging to the CHF.

The learner's academic performance is defined by Mellisa Bell (2012) as a measure of how well a student meets standards set out by local government and the institution itself in academic circles. This is further elaborated by Amato (2010) saying that, it is a term used for students based on how well they are doing in their studies and classes. In other words academic performance refers to how students deal with their studies and how they copy with or accomplish different tasks given during or at the end of their studies. This is to say that, it is indeed the outcome of education, that is, the extend to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals.

According to SAFAIDS (2005) and WHO (2006), a child headed family is a unit comprising siblings who are children. This definition is consolidated and elaborated by UNAIDS (2006) saying that the absence of a parental subsystem is the main feature of the house hold(s). The most significant factor in the CHF is the changing lifestyle where a caring role has to be performed by children instead of adults. In some instances, some child headed families have adult members (parents) who are terminally ill and children have taken over parental responsibilities. Alternatively, some children are staying with very old grand parents who have offloaded parental roles to child heads. For the purpose of this research study, the two instances shall be considered as child headed families.

### Background

HIV and AIDS has become the latest troublesome predicament to the entire nation and its products, the orphans, especially the double orphans who look after themselves, have suffered the most (SAFAIDS, 2005). The government, non governmental organizations (NGO), civil society and various other stake holders have conducted campaigns to try and rescue the children from the jaws of HIV and AIDS pandemic but all the effort seems to have gone down the drain especially for children from the CHF, as evidenced by their disastrous academic performance at school as elucidated by Bennell, Hyde and Swainson (2009).

According to Brown and Sittitrai (2006), the HIV and AIDS pandemic in Thailand has grown from a handful of infections to become a major problem. UNAIDS (2006) states that in the same nation, many orphans are finding it difficult to cope with their education. Once the parents are dead in traditional Thai, children have nowhere to turn to and this highly affects their academic performance for those who would be luck to remain in school. On the same note, Beck's (2005) article in the Eternal Prospective Ministries' website says, "..... as of year 2004, 470 000 children in Brazil were known to have lost their parents to HIV and AIDS, an increase of 23% since 1995. this indicates a very serious 'orphan crisis' in the country. This also means that such children assume roles pf parenthood at the expense of their school work thereby retarding their academic performance.

In the same vain, Buomore and Danielle (2007) holds that Uganda is experiencing a rapid growth in the number of HIV and AIDS orphans most of whom are already members of the CHF. Basaza and Kaija (2002) share the same sentiment as above confirming that HIV and AIDS is responsible for up to 12% of deaths in Uganda. As a result of this, 46% of the total orphans are due to HIV and AIDS and 380 000 die of HIV and AIDS every year. This is a clear indication that HIV and AIDS has an unpleasant effect on children in general and their education in particular in Uganda and world over. A research study done by the Ugandan

Ministry of Health (UMOH) (2004) indicates that the percentage of children dropping from school due to the impact of HIV and AIDS has increased from 45% in 1994 to 53% in 2004. If this is true of dropouts, then their performance especially that of the DOC, should be highly questionable.

In Zimbabwe, traditionally the sense of duty and responsibility of extended families towards other members was almost without limits (WHO, 2006). Even though the family did not have sufficient resources to take care of existing members, orphaned children were taken care of by the extended family. The extended family would assure its members of all forms of support thus providing a buffer for many orphaned and vulnerable children (SAFAIDS, 2006). The practice was not only common in Zimbabwe but in other African states like South Africa and Swaziland among others. Therefore, traditionally the concept of a social orphan did not exist in Zimbabwean societies (Foster, Drew, Makufa and Kravolec, 2007). Members of the extended families especially aunts and uncles, cared for biologically related orphaned children.

Currently, the spiraling numbers of the child headed families is indicative of children who are not receiving traditional extended family care. A recent study by Foster et al (2007); Sqoke, Mutemi and Blair (2006) indicate that CHF are the main features of communities with a severe HIV and AIDS pandemic and weakened safety nets. As the pandemic increases, the numbers of adults available decreases resulting in a high number of children of all ages who are left orphaned, vulnerable and destitute. A large number of children end up living without an adult with the older siblings automatically getting the mantle of a caring responsibility.

The reality is that, children from CHF face hardships that force them to leave school. Hunter and Williamson (2002:13) outline the hardships that children heading families are usually faced with. These include dropping out of school, getting involved in farm work or household work all these compromising their academic performance at school. According to Davids, Nkululeku and Mfecane (2006 as parents, guardians, and members of the communities increasingly become infected by HIV and AIDS and eventually succumb to the disease, children are increasingly lacking basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, health and most importantly education. They become subject to many psycho-social impacts of HIV and AIDS such as stigma, fear, anxiety, worry, depression and hopelessness thus to name but just a few. All these impact negatively on their academic performance at school.

A research study done by Aid Workers Network (AWN) (2007), revealed that the spread of HIV and AIDS, as well as natural disasters, war and civil strife have led to an increase in CHF in various parts of the world especially in Africa and especially in rural areas. The research also found out that older children in the CHF are forced to spend majority of their school time at home caring for young siblings or sick parents in the households with very little or no resources at all. All this has a part to play in the academic performance of these children.

From the above information coupled by a number of studies made reference to, it has been recognized that HIV and AIDS is a worldwide predicament and has negative impacts on the lives of the children from the CHF in general and their academic performance in particular. The manner at which the pandemic has descended on children varies from country to country and it is the interest of this researcher to focus on the effects of HIV and AIDS on the academic performance of children from the CHF.

### Objectives

The researcher aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify the reasons why children from child headed families (CHF) perform dismally in academic circles
2. Determine how HIV and AIDS is responsible for the poor performance academically by members of the CHF.
3. Establish other variables that contribute to poor academic performance by the orphaned and vulnerable members of the CHF.
4. Identify if members of the CHF are by some means capable of performing well in Academic work.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Basically, the study leaned broadly on the Hierarchy of Needs Theory propounded by Abraham Maslow (1943) and a host of other humanist affiliates. Maslow (1908-1970) cited by Woolfolk (2004) posits that, human beings are born with certain needs. Without meeting these initial needs as elaborated by Kenrick (2010), we will not be able to continue with our lives and move upward on the hierarchy. If this is true of human race in general, then when it comes to orphaned and vulnerable children from CHF, surely it would be a sad story. According to Tay, Louis and Diener (2011), Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory describes the stage of growth in human development. Since CHF have children of various ages, Maslow's theory was considered the best applicable to form the basis of this research study. In his theory Maslow used terms like physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem and self actualization needs equating them to the pattern that human motivation generally moves through.

In an illustration of the importance of the basis or foundation of Maslow's theory, a pyramid form is used with the largest and most fundamental levels or needs at the bottom and the need for self actualization at the top. The most fundamental and basic four layers of the pyramid contain what Maslow dubbed "deficiency needs" or "d-needs" and they are esteem, friendship and love, security and physical needs. With the exception of the most fundamental (physiological) needs, if these deficiency needs are not met, the body gives no physical indication but the individual feels anxious and tense (Beck, 2007).

According to Maslow's (1943) theory, the "d-needs" include love, security and physical needs thus to name but just a few things which children from CHF rarely acquire making their school life very difficult. If they do not have physical needs like food, clothes, shelter and materials to use at school, this automatically has an impact on their academic performance. Maslow's theory as paraphrased by Cianci Gabriel (2003) suggests that the most basic level of needs must be met before the individual strongly desires or focuses on motivation as the secondary or higher level needs. This clearly consolidates the notion that it is very difficulty for CHF members to concentrate on their school work when they do not have the most basic needs like food on the table.

Physiological needs according to Kenrick, Griskvicius, Neuberg and Schaller (2010), are the most important of all the other needs. Therefore, the children that lack food, love, esteem or safety like in the case of children from CHF, would consider the greatest of their needs to be food. Maslow also alludes that, with their physiological needs relatively satisfied, children's safety needs take precedence and dominate the behavior. In the absence of physical safety due to the passing on of parents because of HIV and AIDS for example, as in the majority of the cases of most orphaned and vulnerable children from the CHF, children experience post traumatic stress disorder and trans-generational trauma transfer. This stage as given by Maslow (1943), mostly affects the children because they have a greater need to feel safe and once this is

affected, there is retardation of their growth in general and their academic performance in particular.

Maslow's feeling for belongingness is very strong in childhood and can be demonstrated by children overriding the need for safety. A good example is when children cling on to abusing parents (Lam, 2010). If children so desperately need to be loved and to belong, then the multi-million dollar question is, "Where will orphaned and vulnerable members of the CHF turn to for such a fundamental need and right?" to illustrate the importance of love and belonging (parents and family) Maslow (1943) cited by Tang, Ibrahim and West (2002) goes on to say that, the need for belonging and love focuses on the children's desire to be accepted, to fit in and to feel they have a place in society and the world as a whole. For children from CHF, it's a double tragedy because at home they do not have parents to turn to for warmth and comfort and at school, they are subjected to severe stigma and isolation and all these have very strong effects on their academic performance at school.

The other theory used to consolidate the undertaking of the research study was the Ecological Systems Theory coined by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005). Bronfenbrenner, a well known and a very influential psychologist developed his path breaking Ecological Systems Theory which impacted on the education of the disadvantaged and marginalized sections of society like children from the CHF (Kail, and Cavanaugh, 2010).

Bronfenbrenners' ecological systems theory holds that, development is influenced by several environmental systems (Santrock and John, 2007). He went on to identify the environmental systems which are very important in the development and education of children. Bronfenbrenner's (1917-2005) micro-system includes any immediate environment that the child lives in, for instance, the family, peers, school and neighborhood. How these groups or organizations interact with the child will have an effect on how the child grows and in turn their academic performance at school. According to Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) cited by Vander, Zanden, Cradwell and Cradwell (2007) the more nurturing these relationships and places are, the better the child will be able to grow and the good the academic performance at school.

Beck (2007) elaborates Bronfenbrenner's second level, the meso-system saying it describes how the different parts of the child's micro-system work together. When the relationship between different Microsystems is a compatible one, development of the child progresses more smoothly. When role expectations are similar in both settings, for example, do your own work, be on time, do your homework and so on, children are expected to perform better than if the role expectations differ substantially from one setting to the next. In CHF, role expectations are totally different since children have no option other than assuming adult roles at a tender age (Beck, 2007).

The exosystem level as given by Bicego, Ruststein and Johnson (2011) includes the other people and places the child may not interact with often but has a large effect on her, for example, the extended family members and the neighborhood. How the extended family treats children from the CHF has a bearing on their academic performance. The last of his levels as given by Paquette and Ryan (2001), is the macro-system which is the largest and most remote set of people and things to the children but which still has a great influence over them. The macro-system includes cultural values, the economy and wars as well as diseases like HIV and AIDS which sweep the loving and caring parents. All these have some negative impacts on life and education of orphaned and Vulnerable children especially those from the CHF.



Bronfenbrenner's work focuses not directly on the child but on how aspects of the much broader micro-system directly impinge on what Comer et al (2004) call the primary social network of the children. The key to this theory is the interaction of structures between layers (Paquette and Ryan, 2001). The theory points out that, while relationships close to the child have direct impact, other outside factors also have powerful impact in human development (Avidson, 2006).

### Study Methodology

The general aim of the study was to investigate the effects of HIV and AIDS on the academic performance of orphaned and vulnerable children from child headed families (CHF). This section in particular has the intention of elaborating on the study design, population, sample and sampling as well as instrumentation. It also illustrates on the issues of ethical considerations to be observed.

According to Oja and Smulyan (2009), a study design is a plan for selected participants, study sight and collection procedures to answer the study questions. This is consolidated by Creswell (2012), who considers a research design to be a 'blueprint' for the study dealing with at least four questions which are: Which questions to study, which data is relevant, what data to collect and how to analyze the results? The best study design depends on the study questions as well as the orientation of the study (Bola and Carroll, 2003).

Being a mixture of the two, that is, qualitative and quantitative study, the descriptive survey was used. Nolfke and Stevenson (2006), posit that the descriptive survey is a method that is used to describe conditions, situations and events. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) share the same sentiment with the above when they propound that the descriptive survey is a method of research that deals with accuracy of the phenomenon of the moment and describes what the researcher sees. All this is wrapped up by the information given by Mbatha (2003) which says, descriptive survey offers a snapshot of a current or condition. It is a method equivalent to a balance sheet, capturing reality at a specific point in time. In other words, this study used Denzin's (1970) methodological triangulation by employing different methods on the same subject of study. Employing this method enabled the researcher to collect both qualitative and quantitative data pertaining to the issue under study

After having established the number of CHF households in the area through the information gathered from the two Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) working in the area of study, that is, Catholic Relief Service (CRS) (2010) and Ray of Light (ROL) (2011), who pegged the child headed households at 22 comprising 107 children who are still going to school, this researcher decided to work with a population of 50 children. The children were drawn from both primary and secondary schools. Besides the children, 20 classroom practitioners who were directly involved in the day to day teaching and learning of the members of the CHF were harnessed to give their own side of the story as far as these children are concerned. Five administrators, that is, three from the primary school sector and two from the secondary level were also taken aboard and they gave some information on the academic performance trend of the orphaned and vulnerable members of the CHF in both local and national examinations. This pegged the total number of participants to 75.

Since this was to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher used two sampling procedures, that is, convenience and purposive sampling. A sample according to Foster (2007), is simply a sub set of the population. It must be representative of the population from which it was drawn and it must have good size to warrant statistical analysis. According

to Beegle, Weerd and Dercon (2006), convenience sampling is a non probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. The subjects are collected not because they are the easiest to find but because they have the required characteristics of the population in question. Convenience sampling, also known as opportunity, accidental or haphazard sampling, like any other sampling technique, also has its own draw backs as given by (Show 2003). This is why the researcher used it together with purposive sampling.

Purposive sampling also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sample is a non representative subset of some large population and is constructed to serve a very specific need or purpose. The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest like those of orphaned and vulnerable members of the CHF and this enabled the researcher to answer research questions. The researcher chooses the sample based on who they think would be appropriate for the study. This is used primarily when there is a limited number of people that have a specific problem. Its weakness however is that at times results are subject to some degree of bias due to the frame and population not being identical (Deming, W. Edwards, 2009).

The sampling procedure saw two of the three secondary schools and three out of the seven primary schools in the target area being chosen for the study. Participants were drawn from form one up to the upper sixth at secondary schools and pupils from Grade Seven at primary school. This was because these were considered to be old enough to understand what it means to belong to a CHF. Besides, majority of the family heads belonged to this category and they were needed most for the study since they are the ones who bear the worst burdens of assuming parental responsibilities.

Choosing appropriate instrumentation (questionnaires, surveys and interviews among others) is a vital part of conducting good quality empirical research as paraphrased by Cullinan (2003), too often researchers fall vulnerable to availability bias and simply select whatever they can get their hands on or they default into using instruments that have commonly been used in the past. According to Spangler (2003), poor instrumentation adds noise and error to one's research. A thorough search and evaluation of all possible measures is recommended. According to Edwards (2009), time spent critically reviewing possible instruments is time well spent.

Nachimias and Nachimias (2008) define an instrument as a generic term that researchers use for a measurement device (survey, test, questionnaire and interview to name but just a few). Anisworth, Beegle and Koda (2005), elaborates this saying that, an instrument is a device whilst instrumentation is the course of action (the process of developing, testing and using the device). For the good of the research study, it is however, usually best to use an existing instrument, one that has been tried, developed and tested numerous times.

The researcher used both questionnaires and interviews as instruments of data collection. These were sub divided into two for there were questionnaires and interviews for orphaned and vulnerable members of the child headed families (CHF) as well as some for teachers and administrators. Pilot studying was done with a sample population displaying almost similar characteristics with the target people as propounded by Lam (2010). Pilot testing as elucidated by Best and Khan (2006), saves an economic function in that, it saves time and money by helping in the identification of inadequacies in the way the research is designed.

In dealing with human subjects, and in this case, minors, psychologist researchers follow a code of ethical principles published by the American Psychological Association (APA style), which requires investigators to leave their participants with human dignity and sound respect (Treichim, 2006). It is indeed a prerequisite for the researchers to obtain informed consent from all the participants. Essentially, this means that, prospective research participants must be fully informed about the procedures and risks involved in the research and must give their consent to participate. According to Edwards (2009), ethical standards also require researchers not to put participants in a situation where they might be at risk of harm as a result of their participation. Harm in this case, can be defined as both psychological and/or physical.

### Findings and Discussions

Having collected data intensively from the field, the following is what the researcher found about the academic performance of orphaned and vulnerable members of the CHF.

#### Poor Academic Performance

Children from both primary and secondary schools who took part in the research indicated that their academic performance was quite deplorable due to the fact that it is heavily affected by the effects of HIV and AIDS. The 90% of participants interacted with during data collection indicated that their poor academic performance was exacerbated by the fact that they live without an adult figure (consolidating Maslow's (1943) idea of love and belonging in his hierarchy of needs theory) after having suffered a lot of stress by watching their beloved parents slowly and irrevocably succumbing to the dreaded HIV and AIDS epidemic. In the same vein, 95% of the teachers and administrators who took part in the research consolidated and elucidated the views by the children saying that children who are orphaned and vulnerable members of the CHF are highly affected by the ordeal on the academic front. They emphasized that even some children who have signs and symptoms of being gifted in the academic front are performing poorly due to the effects of HIV and AIDS

The information gathered from the field revealed that orphaned and vulnerable members of the CHF do not concentrate during lessons because they carry a lot of preoccupations to school. In some cases they are forced to change environments that is, transferring from urban to rural schools after the death of their parents. Besides, the children have a serious lack of resources chief among them money for school fees. Poor academic performance was also noticeable due to huge burdens of parental responsibilities upon child heads thus concurring with what was said by Cree et al (2006) during the review of related literature, when they cited heavy adult responsibilities as contributing a great deal to the poor performance of these unfortunate members of society. These children are expected to run the day to day activities of the family which include putting food on the table on daily basis coupled by various other parental roles on other sibling brothers and sisters. Because of this, it was revealed, children from CHF have no time for school work and hence they perform poorly in their academic work.

#### **HIV and AIDS Related Stigma on Academic Performance**

Data obtained from the participating schools have brought to the fore that, by virtue of having parents who perished because of HIV and AIDS, orphaned and vulnerable members of the CHF are shunned and called derogatory names by members of the community in general and their peers in particular thus concurring with the results of the research done by Foster and Williamson (2000) who concluded that, HIV and AIDS related stigma has very serious consequences on the academic performance of the victims especially members of the CHF who have nowhere to turn to for advice and assistance. It was also established during data collection



that the origin of HIV and AIDS related stigma lies on the shame, fear and isolation that shape negative perceptions of those children who are infected or affected by the phenomenon.

The participants revealed during data collection that the stigma suffered by double orphaned children who are members of the CHF deprived them of the love, care and support of their school associates in the name of peers. Because they are deprived of such crucial privileges and rights, educators elucidated, the orphaned and vulnerable children's academic performance is done a big irreparable blow and damage respectively.

Both learners and teachers alike shared the same sentiment that members of the CHF loose friends because of the stigma and their acquaintances always point fingers on them. This agrees with the information obtained from Bicego, Ruststein and Johnson (2011), during related literature review which says, where members of the CHF used to be active in game playing, they become passive spectators or on-lookers and in the case of toddlers at Early Childhood Development centers (ECD), they begin to engage in solitary play because of the stigma. Since stigma is usually associated or accompanied by calling of derogatory names, thus labeling and children being allergic to that, their academic performance is at stake.

**Other Variables that Contribute to Poor Academic Performance by Members of the CHF**  
Information gathered during the data collection exercise has shown a positive correlation between lack of resources and poor academic work at school consolidating what was said by Cluver and Gardner (2007) during literature review who highlighted that losing parents due to HIV and AIDS is the birth of academic predicaments for children left without care givers. After having had a big blow in their lives due to the presence of HIV and AIDS which has seen their parents succumbing to the pandemic, children brought to light that it was suffer continue in terms of resources and this has a large indent in their education in general and academic performance in particular (Mishra, Anold, Otieno, Cross and Hong 2007).

Data from the field has also displayed that, chief among the scarce resources was money for school fees. Nevertheless, other resources like clothes (uniforms in particular), food, shelter and parental care, love and guidance, as propounded by Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), are not to be overlooked as they have a large bearing on how orphaned and vulnerable members of the CHF perform academically on the educational front. Visiting the schools during data collection revealed some of the CHF members in tattered and torn uniforms and jerseys yet it was at the peak of the winter season. Some had no shoes and the researcher was touched when one of the child heads broke into tears due to the memories of her nasty experiences which she recalled during the interview session.

By virtue of having no parents, members of the CHF do not enjoy the parental care, and advice about life, love health and education that their young counterparts are receiving courtesy of their lovely surviving parents. This being the case, the children revealed that they rely heavily on public advice and assistance on education and public sources of information and this concurs with what was echoed by Davids, Nkululeku, Mfecane, Skinner and Ratele (2006). All these have negative impact on their academic performance.

Members of the CHF, it was indicated, are exposed to all sorts of abuse among them sexual, drug and alcohol thus to name but just a few. At times the abuses become physical or physiological or even both of them at the same time and hence the situation becomes a double tragedy. Besides, absenteeism also claims a large chunk on their academic performance since the children at times have to take turns to go to school in order to keep sanity on their so called

home. If there happens to be disability in the family just as highlighted earlier on by Edwards (2009), this would add insult to injuries. It is beyond reasonable doubt that, poor insecure home backgrounds and family instability (Bronfenbrenner's 1917-2005 micro-system) coupled by a lot of psychosocial predicaments have destabilized children's academic ability and self esteem.

#### Positive Attributes of the Effects of HIV and AIDS on members of the CHF

Well, it has been proved beyond any reasonable doubt that orphaned and vulnerable children from the CHF have a lot of predicaments as far as their performance is concerned. However, it cannot go without mention that during the data collection exercise in the field, it was revealed that, some children after having endured a lot of suffering have developed some resilience. According to Arvidson (2006), resilience can be defined as the phenomenon of recovery from a prolonged or severe adversity, or from an immediate danger or stress. In children, resilience refers to the individuals who are doing better than expected given a history that include risk or adverse experiences like stigmatization, shame, isolation and rejection which orphans from the CHF whose parents have perished from HIV and AIDS suffer.

Not only resilience came into picture, terms and phrases like positive illusion, peak experiences, meta-motivation and meta-pathology were brought to light suggesting the idea that a selected few are benefiting from the phenomenon and perform extremely well in their academic work. A good example is that of the scenario given by one of the participants during data collection that the death of her parents due to HIV and AIDS was a 'blessing in disguise' because this enabled her to learn at one of the most respected high schools, a thing she would not have been able to do if her parents were alive. This was because she got full sponsorship from well wishers after the ordeal and she and her fellow siblings were living a near 'normal' life. However, this is all but just like icing on the cake since the great majority of the members of the CHF are swimming in the deeper pools of poverty and have the gnashing of teeth academically due to the effects of HIV and AIDS.

#### Conclusion

All in all, it was generally concluded that the main problems for the members of the CHF to perform badly in school academic work were heavy adult responsibilities, lack of resources and moral support, stigmatization and insecurity among many others. Should the above mentioned predicaments be well addressed and put under control, truly speaking, members of the CHF have the zeal, the ability and the capability to perform very well in academic work and perhaps they can even do better than their counterparts who enjoy swimming in the glory of their surviving parents.

#### Recommendations and Suggestions

On the basis of the findings made in this study, the following recommendations and suggestions are made:

- Extended family responsibilities should be encouraged by the government, civil society and other stake holders especially through traditional leaders to tackle the predicament of child headed families (CHF).
- CHF should be identified and taken note of in various areas of the nation so that assistance can be sought specifically for their members to benefit.
- Teachers and heads of schools should be given the mandate to assist school going members of the CHF by seeking donations from Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) and other well wishers.

- The Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) should be closely monitored by the powers that be to ensure that it assists the intended and rightful beneficiaries (orphaned and vulnerable members of the CHF).
- Educational assistance should focus on improving members of CHF's academic performance instead of ensuring school attendance in general.
- As suggested by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) in his Ecological Systems Theory, both the home and the school environments should provide comfort for the members of the CHF to do well in academic circles.
- Heads of schools to ensure that HIV and AIDS related stigma has been done away with in schools at all costs.
- On top of the food they provide, NGO should also focus on other variables that can improve the academic performance of the CHF.
- Instead of only buying ARV, the National AIDS Counsel (NAC) should also ensure that money collected from AIDS levy and other sources has been channeled towards the improvement of members of the CHF's academic performance.
- Last but by no means least, the researcher recommends that more academic giants do further research in the area of academic performance by members of the CHF so that they can come up with more brilliant ways of improving these children's academic situation.

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