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Institutional childcare services in Harare, Zimbabwe: exploring experiences of managers, caregivers and children

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ABSTRACT

Institutional care is one of the strategies used to provide quality care to vulnerable children. Services in institutional care are designed to provide children with a family environment, psychosocial services, and services that prepare children to adjust to the society and be responsible citizens after being discharged. Noteworthy is the fact that many scholars argue that institutional care is not good for children because of its detrimental effects on child development. In spite of this strong and negative argument, institutional care is still being recognized as an option for vulnerable children and is therefore still prevalent in many countries including Zimbabwe. This study was carried out to explore the experiences of managers, caregivers and children in childcare institutions in Harare, Zimbabwe.

The study was aimed at exploring and analysing the views of management, caregivers and children about psychosocial centred childcare services in institutions in Harare, Zimbabwe; and adopted three theories namely Psychosocial Theory by Erik Erikson, Attachment Theory by John Bowlby and Ecological Theory by Urie Bronfennbrenner. A qualitative approach that was descriptive and exploratory in nature and a multiple case study design was used. Participants included one director from the Department of Social Services, five key informants, twenty-four caregivers and twenty-four children, all from four childcare institutions in Harare. Individual interviews were conducted with a Director from the Department of Social Services and Directors of four childcare Institutions to explore their views on the nature of childcare services at the different institutions. In addition, a group of six caregivers per childcare institution participated in focus group discussions held to explore their experiences in terms of services being provided in the institutions in Harare, Zimbabwe. Furthermore, individual interviews were held with six children per childcare institution to capture their voices on the childcare services that they were receiving in institutions.

The findings from the study revealed that although institutional care is regarded as the last resort in Zimbabwe, more and more children are being placed in institutional care. Findings also revealed that some of the services provided in institutional care are appropriate and pro-child development. In this regard, as a result of provision of these services, children in institutional care were accessing their basic needs like shelter, food and education and were