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 **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this to my wife Ivy and my children Tanatswa, Tashongedzwa and Taitirwanyasha. My parent for the lovely support morally.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor Mr. Munhande for his time and effort in helping me see this project to fruition. May the Almighty richly reward you.Be blessed.

I also acknowledge the support given by my parents, it indeed went a long way.

**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the plight of the unaccompanied refugee minors from a human rights perspective. A case study of Tongogara refugee camp is used for purposes of this study. The human rights approach used explores the refugee minor’s plight from the perspective of the unaccompanied children themselves, that is, how they view their difficult situation becomes very important. The study exposes the importance of involving the unaccompanied refugee minors in making decisions on issues which concern them. The study also probes on the efforts being done by government and non-government stakeholders in trying to address the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors.

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**CHAPTER 1:**

**Introduction**

African regions have witnessed an increase in the number of conflicts occurring, resulting in massive displacements of people which in some instances have resulted in separation of families. There has been an increase in the number of children who are displaced and separated from their families. These children end up migrating in search of safe havens without their parents or caregivers. These children are commonly referred to as unaccompanied minors.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2010), children and adolescents represent the majority of migrants in Africa. The UNHCR (2010) indicates that in Central Africa, in the great lakes region and in the East and Horn of Africa regions, children constitute 56 per cent of people of concern to UNHCR. In 2009, more than 18 700 asylum applications were lodged by unaccompanied and separated children in 71 countries thus constituting 4 per cent of all claim lodged in these countries (UNHCR 2010).

It is important to note that unaccompanied children or minors are the most vulnerable migrants who require special protection which is appropriate for the situations in which they exist. This has resulted in the international community coming up with internationally recognized statutes to govern the handling of unaccompanied refugee minors. Individual countries, Zimbabwe included, in their endeavor to promote the protection of refugee minors derive their domestic policies and legal frameworks from these international statutes. These statutes demand that the unaccompanied refugee minors be accorded assistance and protection upon their arrival in a receiving or host country.

Considering that these children underwent traumatic experiences, assistance which is accorded to them is meant to address their physiological as well as their psycho-social needs. It is important to note that assistance is rendered in accordance to international instruments and guidelines on refugee protection. Regardless of all the assistance being offered to unaccompanied refugee minors, there still remain some gaps in addressing the plight of these minors. The predicament or plight of unaccompanied refugee minors in receiving countries still remains a big challenge and worsening as conflicts continue to rise.

This research, therefore sought to understand from a human rights perspective, the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors accommodated in rural refugee camps of Zimbabwe. The research was being carried out against the background that, Zimbabwe has, in the last five years become one of the major destinations for the unaccompanied refugee minors in Africa.

* 1. **Background of the study**

Refugees have been a part of human history as long as war, persecution, and natural disasters have existed. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the lead agency mandated to handle issues relating to refugees the world over. Since its inception, 50 million people were assisted by the UNHCR. Those assisted include refugees and other populations affected by war (UNHCR, 2009). According to Loescher (2001) since the mid-20th century the annual number of people of interest to UNHCR increased significantly due to globalization, increased mobility, availability of high-powered weapons, and increased duration and intensity of conflicts around the world has increased.

The UNHCR (2009) in Hartwell (2011) indicate that when the UNHCR was formed, it was estimated that there were approximately 1.5 million refugees worldwide. By 1980, the number had risen to 8.2 million. UNHCR (2011) estimates current global refugee population as standing between 13 and 25 million.

According to Von Barrata (2010), of the 25 million refugees worldwide, about half of them are children, that is, minors under the age of 18 years. These numbers comprise only the refugees who fall under the mandate of the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees; but one has to assume that there is in actual fact an even greater number of refugees and therefore a respectively greater number of child refugees (von Barrata 2000).

Racketseder (2002) identified some of the reasons why parents flee with their children, or children and adolescents flee alone. The reasons are varied and include amongst other things, political persecution, imprisonment, torture, war, compulsory recruitment into armed services, female genital mutilation, poverty, child labour, slavery, sexual and other forms of abuse, and violence. Besides individual persecution for political reasons, civilians are also increasingly used as deliberate targets in war. The destruction of civil communities is often a weapon in the course of civil war.

Refugee children are categorized into two, that is, accompanied and unaccompanied. Accompanied are those who flee with their parents and siblings, part of the family or other important care takers from the extended family, whereas, unaccompanied minors move or flee on their own without their parents, guardians or any family members.

Ayotte (2000) estimates that currently about 100,000 unaccompanied minors exist as refugees in Europe. Children and adolescents, especially unaccompanied, are categorized as refugees who are mostly in need of protection. The United Nations General Assembly (2005) report states that, an estimated 65 % of the 25 million people displaced by armed conflicts in Africa are children and youth under the age of eighteen and 45 % are unaccompanied.

 In the international context there are different agreements which specify children’s rights, for example, the 1984 UN Convention Against Torture and the leading 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, demand children’s rights, including those of child refugees. These amongst other international statues provide guidelines in so far as assistance of unaccompanied refugee minors is concerned.

According to UNHCR (2013) Zimbabwe has over the past years witnessed an increasing number of refugees crossing into the country from countries as far afield as Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan and Rwanda just to mention a few. Amongst these refugees are unaccompanied children whose reasons for leaving their home countries are usually conflict related, that is, war, and forced recruitment as child soldiers or sex slaves, natural disasters and severe poverty (UNHCR 2013). Upon reaching Zimbabwe, the unaccompanied minors are offered places to stay at Tongogara refugee camp where government and non-government actors make efforts to meet their needs. Assistance is guided by internationally laid down procedures as highlighted earlier. This means that there are systems in place to meet the physiological as well as psychosocial needs of these unaccompanied minors; however the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors still remains a challenge within Tongogara refugee camp.

According to the UNHCR (2012), Africa alone had 1.4 million unaccompanied refugee children. By January 2013 Zimbabwe housed 436 of these unaccompanied minors at Tongogara refugee camp and Waterfalls transit centre, 194 being girls and 242 boys. This research was prompted by the need to understand the plight of these unaccompanied minors as well as having a deeper understanding of the day to day lives of these children.

* 1. **Statement of the problem.**

Regardless of the assistance offered, the general vulnerability and plight of refugee children is worsened when they do not have accompanying parents or legal guardians. Without the care and support of their parents or family members, they are bound to face physiological as well as psycho-social challenges in adapting to new environments, bearing in mind that they are still in the early years of childhood development which is mostly dependent upon trusted adult support.

Compounded by acute shortage of resources, unaccompanied refugee children face far greater dangers to their safety and well-being than the average child. It should be noted at this point that, most of them go through traumatic experiences such as torture, rape and killings of their parents, siblings or family and community members. In other words, the sudden and violent onset of conflicts, contributed to the disruption of families and community structures, in turn, deeply affecting the physical and psycho-social well-being of unaccompanied refugee minors.

* 1. **Research questions**
* What are the perceived psycho-social needs of refugee minors and how they are being met?
* What form of assistance is being offered to unaccompanied refugee minors?
* Is the assistance adequate to meet the needs of these unaccompanied minors?
* What are the challenges, from minor’s perspective, are being faced regardless of assistance offered?
* Are there any possible synergies that can be exploited to improve the plight of the minors?
	1. **Objectives of the study**

The study sought to:

* Explore the formal assistance offered to unaccompanied refugee minors and determine its adequacy in addressing their plight.
* Explore challenges being faced by unaccompanied refugee minors from a human rights perspective
* Find out how government and non-government stakeholders in the refugee camp collaborate towards a human rights approach with regards to the protection and welfare of unaccompanied minors.
* Find out existing and possible opportunities for synergies in addressing issues to do with unaccompanied minors in the camp.
	1. **Significance of the study**

Given the limited literature on unaccompanied refugee minors, this research will add on to the existing qualitative research information done so far on unaccompanied refugee minors. The study should help in building the pillars of qualitative research around the works of refugee children accommodated in camps. It should be noted that most of the available research on refugee minors is mostly quantitative, thus does not capture the emotions and feelings of unaccompanied refugee minors (Silverman, 2000).

 Above all, the research will inform future researches on the importance of gathering information from the perspective of the affected children. Reynolds (1991) affirms the existence of information gaps in knowledge about children’s experiences. This is due to the tendency by most researchers, relying on adults’ views about children. It is important to note that the views of adults can radically differ from the views of children. In addition, a human rights approach to researches on unaccompanied refugee minors ensures a holistic approach to qualitative research on minors. Therefore, unaccompanied refugee minors will be engaged as people in their own right.

In addition to academic benefits, the study will enable social workers, humanitarian aid workers and development practitioners to identify shortcomings of the current formal assistance being availed to unaccompanied minors in refugee camps. Most importantly the study will give a voice to these marginalized children who have had assistance imposed on them without taking into account what they see as their pressing and important needs.

It is also important to note that whilst this study is for academic purposes, its findings can also be used for advocacy as well as in influencing policy and programme formulation to meet psycho-social and human rights needs of unaccompanied refugee minors in Zimbabwe and in similar situations in Africa.

* 1. **Delimitation of the study**

The study was carried out at Tongogara refugee camp in ward 5 of Chipinge district in Manicaland province of Zimbabwe. It is situated in the lowveld climatic region 5 along the SAVE river. The camp has a population of around 6500 people from different African countries; of this population about 3000 are children. The research targeted unaccompanied minors who contribute a figure of 246 (142 males and 106 females) to the total population in Tongogara refugee camp.

* 1. **Limitations**
* Some intended respondents were unwilling to respond to questionnaires or be interviewed.
* Language barrier may have resulted in omission of some important information.
* The time frame within which the study was to be carried out was limited and this did not allow for an in depth study of some of the aspects covered in this study.
	1. **Assumptions**

The research was based on the following assumptions:

* Unaccompanied minors in the camp are at risk of falling victims of all forms of abuse.
* Social services being offered in the camp are failing to meet or address the plight of unaccompanied minors in the camp.
* The multi-ethnic community at Tongogara refugee camp worsens the plight of unaccompanied minors.
* Unaccompanied refugee minors are well informed of their rights as children and refugees.

**Chapter 2: Literature Review**

**2.0 Introduction**

The last fifty years, according to Hartwell (2011), have seen refugees becoming the most favoured subject of research. Available literature shows that prior to World War II most researchers focused on the impact of war on combatants as opposed to civilian victims of war. The above mentioned thinking changed after the Holocaust which occurred in the mid-20th century, where scholars shifted their study focus to civilian war survivors, including refugees (Krippner and McIntyre, 2003).

Hartwell (2011) indicates that academic literature did not widely and fully represent the experiences of refugee children, the experiences began to be considered towards the end of the 20th century. Initially, priority was given to the physical and social consequences of war, examples being malnourishment and poverty, on children. Only recently, researchers shifted their attention to the psychological impacts of war on refugees, including children and young adults (McIntyre and Ventura, 2003). Unaccompanied refugee minors, specifically, have been the focus of only a small number of studies, and therefore many questions regarding their unique experiences as young survivors of persecution, displacement, and family separation remain unanswered (Bean, Eurelings-Bontekoe, Mooijaart, and Spinhoven, 2007).

This chapter explores the international context of unaccompanied refugee minors. The review of literature will include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) and protective measures that were put in place by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). International literature pertaining to refugee children would also be explored. Relevant regional policies and literature in the African context are also to be explored. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) would be examined.

**2.1 Refugee**

A refugee is any person forced to flee his or her country as a result of either persecution, war, or violence (UNHCR, 2012). According to Lee (2007), a refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. In most cases people who are identified as refugees cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries

According to Lee (2007), the term refugee is used in the circles of international law resulting from the United Nations Convention (1951) following World War II. Legally, the definition outlines the criteria for qualifying forced migrants to allow for internationally recognized legal statuses. However in common thinking, the term refugee is likely to evoke images of flight from danger and lack of a safe homeland, and perhaps includes the need for others to provide basic necessities for survival. Gatrell (2005) suggests that,

“…while this can make people more willing to help refugees, it can paradoxically lead people to think of refugees as having lost attributes of humanity. It implies that a refugee is incapable and cannot act on their own behalf, but that they must be helped, framing them as passive victims rather than active survivors.”

The underlying assumption that being a refugee, or being in need of refuge, implies passive helplessness, is a perspective that is not confined to the uninformed, but permeates the literature and professional practice with refugees as well.

Malkki (1995: 496) stated “the term refugee has analytical usefulness not as a label for a special, generalizable kind or type of person or situation, but only as a broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of socio-economic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations.”

The World Vision (2011) describes the term refugee as retaining a strict legal definition. It categorizes refugees into two categories which are statutory or convention refugees and mandated refugees. The world Vision (2011) states that statutory or convention refugees are those who can be determined on a case by case to have a well- founded fear of persecution on certain grounds. Mandatory refugees are groups of people who can be presumed to be without, or unable to avail themselves of the protection of the government of their state of origin, and therefore eligible for protection and assistance within the mandate of the UNHCR (World Vision 2011)

**2.2 Unaccompanied refugee minors**

Wallin and Ahlström (2005) estimate that approximately half of most refugee populations are children. The majority of refugee children are accompanied by parents or other family members during their escape and flight to neighbouring countries, but there is also a substantial group of others who become separated from their families and therefore arrive in countries of asylum on their own. Those children who arrive in receiving countries on their own are referred to as unaccompanied minors. The UNHCR (2005) defines an unaccompanied refugee minor as a person under the age of 18 “who is separated from both parents and for whose care no person can be found who by law or custom has primary responsibility for doing so” (UNHCR, 2005:3).

**2.2.1 The development of unaccompanied refugee minors**

Alfredson (2002) in the European Journal of academic research (2013) defines displacement as a term that refers to the removal or separation of children from either their parents, immediate families as well as their familiar environment due to a number of factors. These factors or reasons could be as a result of social, political, religious or economic conflicts.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (2012) found out that, the parents or primary caregivers of these minors may have been killed or detained during conflict. In some instances they died from conditions or dangers associated with flight. The survey further states that, some of the parents and primary caregivers went missing and separated from their children during the chaos of escape. According to Rutter (2001), parents and caregivers in a conflict situation may resort to sending children away on their own as a desperate measure to protect these children from violence or forced military recruitment.

The findings of Eurelings-Bontekoe (2006) show that, young males, who are usually at risk of becoming targets of violence or forced participation in warfare, greatly outnumber females in most unaccompanied refugee minor populations. According to Bixler (2005), other contributors to this sex difference are that single males are often seen as the most likely to survive a solitary flight or secure a family’s economic future (due to their size, physical strength, or higher level of education), and because single females are more likely to be captured and abducted for the purposes of forced marriage, servitude, or trafficking.

**2.3International Policy and legal framework**

The United Nations General Assembly (2005) stated that the vulnerability of unaccompanied minors is very high. They are likely to face risks such as violence, neglect, forced military recruitment, sexual assault and abuse, thus special protection and care for them are needed.

It is imperative to note that unaccompanied minors are entitled to international protection under international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law. Under these international instruments, it is essential for unaccompanied minors to be provided with appropriate as well as effective protection and assistance. This can only be achieved by looking closely at obligations deriving from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the rights and welfare of the child vis-à-vis unaccompanied and separated children or minors. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) spells out the responsibilities necessary for a country to take care and protect refugee children. In other words state actors should ensure that unaccompanied refugee minors do have the same rights as children of the receiving country, thus reinforcing the provision of guidance, care, protection and treatment of unaccompanied minors.

The international statutes demand that the following principles, as cited by the International Organisation for Migration (2011), must be respected when handling issues to do with unaccompanied minors. According to IOM (2011), the principles below are not exhaustive.

**2.3.1 Principle of non-discrimination**

Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) stipulates the need for states to ensure as well as respect rights for children as set out in the convention. This should be done to all children without any form of discrimination. This endowment of rights should not be limited to national children but must be available to all children including refugee minors irrespective of their nationality. This principle, if understood well may call for differentiation on the basis of different protection needs such as those deriving from age and gender.

**2.3.2 Best interests of the child**

Article 3 of the CRC (1989) stipulates that, in all actions which concern children, primary consideration is on the best interests of the child. The actions may be seeking short term and/ or long term solutions to children’s needs. At any stage of displacement, determination of best interests must be documented in preparation of any decision fundamentally impacting on the unaccompanied minors’ life. This determination would require a comprehensive assessment of the child’s identity, including her or his nationality, upbringing, ethnic, cultural and linguistic background, particular vulnerabilities and protection needs.

**2.3.3 Life and full development**

Under article 6 of the CRC (1989), the right to life, survival and development is recognized. Many of the obligations of the Convention, particularly those related to health, adequate standard of living, education, leisure and play (articles 24, 27, 28, 29 and 31) are relevant to ensuring the maximum development of the child. The Convention provisions protecting the child from violence and exploitation (in particular articles 19 and 32– 39) are as vital to maximum survival and development as those on the provision of services.

**2.3.4 Family unity**

All efforts should be made to return an unaccompanied or separated child to his or her parents except where further separation is necessary for the best interests of the child. These efforts should also take full account of the right of the child to express his or her views (article 12, CRC).

**2.3.5 Participation**

The views of children should be given “due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” (article 12, CRC).

**2.3.6 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality of the information received in relation to an unaccompanied minor should be protected, consistent with the obligation to protect the child’s rights, including the right to privacy (article 16, CRC).

**2.3.7 Non-refoulement**

The receiving State must respect its international obligations, in particular its non-refoulement obligation. It must not return a child to a country where there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of irreparable harm to the child (article 33, Convention relating to the Status of Refugees; article 3, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; articles 6 and 37, CRC). The assessment of the risk of such serious violations should be conducted in an age and gender-sensitive manner and should, for example, take into account the particularly serious consequences for children of the insufficient provision of food or health services.

* 1. **Perspectives from the African Continent**

Regionally, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (1990) is one of the instruments which provides for the care and protection of children. The ACRWC does recognize the need for states to take appropriate measures which promote as well as protect the rights and welfare of children in Africa. The African charter like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), contain a set of principles. In *Article 3,* as cited by Chizororo (2008), the Charter speaks of non-discrimination and clearly indicates that “every child shall be entitled to the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms recognized and guaranteed irrespective of the child’s parents or legal guardians’ race, ethnic group, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national and social origin, fortune, birth or other status.” The Article illustrates clearly that unaccompanied refugee minors should not be disadvantaged in any way when accessing any services. Chizororo (2008) further states that refugee minors should enjoy full rights and protection like any other child, regardless of their country of origin.

According to Kesby, Gwanzura-Ottemoler and Chizororo (2006), states should play a pivotal role in addressing the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors. They make reference to Article 23 of the African Charter which highlights what needs to be done by states as soon as a refugee child enters a country. Should a refugee child enter the country, the State should take both domestic and International law such as the Constitution, Children’s Act, CRC and ACRWC into consideration (Kesby, Gwanzura-Ottemoler and Chizororo, 2006). Some of the interventions suggested by ACRWC as cited by Mupedziswa (1993) include states ensuring protection and assisting with tracing of parents or legal guardians. Alternative care should be arranged if no parents or legal guardians are found.

According to Magqibelo (2010), in South Africa, care and protection of unaccompanied refugee minors is minimal owing to poor implementation of polices and legislation pertaining to children. This left the plight of unaccompanied minors in South Africa unaddressed. At present, the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is unclear, especially when it comes to refugee children. Save the Children UK (2007) revealed that a significant number of children in South Africa had become vulnerable owing to migration, and were currently not receiving assistance.

* 1. **Zimbabwean Legislation and policies**

The regulation, protection and assistance of refugees in Zimbabwe are guided by the Refugee Act of 1983. This piece of legislation amongst other things recognizes refugees and stipulates the process of granting people refugee status. However it does not spell out unaccompanied refugee minors as a separate class of vulnerable refugees.

The legislation of Zimbabwe is not explicit in so far as the protection and care of unaccompanied refugee minors are concerned. However, these refugee minors are catered for by the country’s general legislation on children. Zimbabwe ratified the UNCRC in 1992, with certain reservations that unless “under an Act of Parliament any convention …shall not form part of the law of Zimbabwe” (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2005). This to some scholars may mean that UNCRC was not incorporated wholly into Zimbabwean law at the time of ratification. By ratifying the UNCRC Zimbabwe commits to giving children a voice in decisions affecting them and to raise children’s awareness about the UNCRC and their rights, unaccompanied minors included, (Faneli, 2006). In addition, Zimbabwe is a signatory to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child since 1995.

The Zimbabwe legal framework reflects rights to advance and protect children, which satisfy most of the international standards of the Convention and regional standards of the African Charter. Most important to this study is the constitutional right to participation accorded to children by ‘protection of freedom of expression’ in section 20 of the Zimbabwe constitution (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2005). Children are therefore legally allowable by the Zimbabwe constitution to express an opinion which is in tandem with participation rights of the Convention (Child Rights Network, 2011).

The key legislation pertaining to the participation, care and protection of children and their best interests in Zimbabwe include: The Children’s Act formerly known as Child Protection and Adoption *Act 5:06 (1996)* and The Guardianship of Minors Act *5.08* which emphasize children’s rights and their best interests and care (UN OCHA, 2011). The key policy driving child participation is the Zimbabwe Orphan Care Policy (1999) and the NAP launched in September 2005 (Faneli et al, 2007). The NAP has seven objectives for children and one of them sets to ‘increase child participation’ (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, 2008, p.7). The NAP Children’s participation theme is “anything for us, without us, is against us” (Faneli, Musarandega, and Chawanda, 2007, p.1). All of the above pieces of legislation can be effectively used in the care and protection of unaccompanied refugee minors.

Zimbabwe’s Education Act although in the domain of child protection rights, is worth mentioning here. The Zimbabwe Education Act encourages non-discrimination of children in education creating equal opportunities for boys and girls to education (Kubatana, 2011). Non-discrimination here also accommodates and includes vulnerable children such as unaccompanied refugee minors.

**2.6 Theoretical framework**

This study is informed by Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems’ theory as its underlying assumptions are suitable to respond to the research problem in different ways. This theory explains how everything in a child’s environment affects how a child grows and develops. In other words, the ecological model looks at how a child’s development occurs within an interactive system of nested influences between the child and the environment. According to Donald etal (2010), the model labels different aspects or levels of the environment that influence a child’s development; these include the Microsystems, mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem.

Rathus (2006) unpacks the structures as identified by Bronfenbrenner. The micro system is the small and immediate environment the child lives in, this include any immediate relationships or organisations they interact with, such as the immediate family or caregivers and the school. Rathus (2006) states that, the interaction of the mentioned groups or organisations with the child will have an effect on the growth as well as interactions of the child. In other words, the more nurturing and encouraging these relationships and places are, the better the child’s growth. Furthermore, how a child acts or reacts to the micro system affects their treatment in return.

Bronfenbrenner’s next level according to Rathus (2006) is the mesosystem. It describes how the different aspects of the child’s micro system work together for the sake of the child (Cole and Lightfoot, 2009). An example given by Rathus (2006) is that of caregivers taking an active role in a child’s school life such as going for parent teacher-conferences and watching their child’s soccer games, this ensures the child’s overall growth.

The next level is the exosystem which includes other people and places that the child may not interact with often but that still have a large effect on her, for example, parent’s workplaces, extended family members and the neighbourhood (Bray etal, 2010). Bronfenbrenner’s final level as cited by Rathus (2006) is the macrosystem. Bray etal (2010) describe the macrosystem as the one that involves dominant social and economic structures as well as values, beliefs and practices that influence all other social systems. The macrosystem includes things such as the relative freedoms permitted by the national government, cultural values, wars and the economy just to mention a few. The above mentioned can affect a child either positively or negatively.

* 1. **Chapter Summary**

The Literature review raised important issues in so far as addressing the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors is concerned. Of great interest and importance are the strides made by the whole world in trying to ensure the protection and assistance of unaccompanied refugee minors. These are evident in the instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Review of the above mentioned instruments was an eye opener regarding what receiving states ought to do in addressing the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors.

The review of literature was instrumental in bringing out the theoretical framework on which the study is to be undertaken. The study adopts Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system’s theory which takes into cognisance the impact of the environment on a child’s development.

**CHAPTER 3**

**Research Methodology**

**3.0 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the research design and adopted methods used in collecting data. The study used a qualitative approach. Warwick and Overton (2003) in Chizororo (2008) identify three overlapping areas in research design namely philosophy, methodologies and, logistics and practice. Warwick and Overt (2003:17) in Chizororo (2008:109) state that “philosophy covers issues of ontology (theories of what the world is) and epistemology (theories of what it is possible to know about the world and how we might know it)”. They further highlight that methodologies and methods are guided by philosophy. Chizororo (2008) describes methodologies as theories of how the world can be interpreted, whereas methods refer to sets of techniques for interpreting the world. According to Chizororo (2008: 109), logistics and practice “…relates to selecting the study area, proposal development, budgeting and planning for ethical research”. The rationale for choosing qualitative methodologies is to be addressed in this chapter. The last section of the chapter outlines the data analysis procedures undertaken.

**3.1 Research Design**

The study employed the case study research design. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used in identifying issues as they are perceived by the actors in the situation. Qualitative field research is defined as a disciplined inquiry examining the personal meanings of individuals’ experiences and actions in the context of their social and cultural environment (Borg and Gall, 2009). In other words, the study is carried out in a usual environment where a phenomenon occurs, rather than in controlled laboratory settings. Phenomenological approaches are based on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity. There is an emphasis on the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. Phenomenological approaches are thus powerful when it comes to understanding subjective experiences as well as gaining insights into people’s motivations and actions (Borg and Gall, 2009).

Qualitative research becomes the method of choice in attempting to understand the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors. Qualitative approaches are relevant when a study seeks to understand processes, events and relationships in the context of the social and cultural situation. It does not generate numerical data to support or refute hypotheses but aims at producing factual descriptions based on face to face knowledge of individuals as well as social groups in their natural settings (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). Qualitative research is commonly used for providing in-depth description of procedures, beliefs and knowledge related to certain behaviours as well as opinions of respondents on particular issues.

Qualitative study was a relevant approach in this study since it allowed the researcher to gain understanding of social phenomenon from participants’ perspectives whilst in their natural settings (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). Numbers may be considered to be good at describing general patterns in general, for example prevalence of unaccompanied minors, but they fall short of explaining causes of represented patterns. With numbers no explanations are given on experiences of those experiencing life as an unaccompanied refugee minor. According to Dear (1988:268) it “makes little sense to talk about facts, truths, the correctness of a theory, or even science itself, without further qualifications”. Thus the study sought to explore the experiences of unaccompanied refugee minors by using qualitative phenomenology within a case study, in this case Tongogara refugee camp. Furthermore the study attempted to overcome the limitation of most cross sectional studies that focus on the needs of the unaccompanied refugee minors by seeking surrogate means.

Furthermore, the very existence of unaccompanied refugee minors indicate that while it may be hard for them to survive in adult-less households, the fact they do shows that they have agency. Then epistemologically, if this is what children are like, then it makes sense to try and make knowledge about them by treating them as agents and by seeking their voices. In other words, the fact that unaccompanied refugee minors are staying on their own necessitates that we hear from them about their own experiences and challenges to survive through conducting research with them rather than on them. Such an approach has become central to the new paradigm for the study of childhood which views children as competent informants and interpreters of their own and other’s lives and experiences (James, 2001). This study adopted a purely qualitative approach which allowed respondents/unaccompanied refugee minors to speak for themselves in order to better understand their own perceptions and experiences of their struggle to survive without adult or parental guidance.

This study was shaped by the children’s rights agenda which is strongly fostered by the realisation that, children have a right to be consulted and to be heard on issues that concern them. They should be able to influence appropriately the services and facilities that are provided for them (Woodhouse, 2004). Thus, this study employed the use of qualitative approaches which allowed for the participation of children.

**3.2Population**

Hair et al (2000) defined population as the identifiable total set of elements of interest being investigated. Tongogara refugee camp accommodates a population of around 6500 refugees from different African countries. Two populations were used for the study; the main population was that of unaccompanied refugee minors and the second constituted key informants at institutions knowledgeable of unaccompanied refugee minors. Unaccompanied refugee minors in the camp are 246 (142 males and 106 females).

**3.3 Sampling**

Participants were recruited based on a purposive sample and thus cannot be expected to be representative. The goal here was not to randomly select units so as to create a sample with the intention of making generalizations or statistical inferences. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, that is, unaccompanied refugee minors. This enabled the answering of research questions during this study.

The total population for the study was 14 people, 10 were unaccompanied refugee minors and 4 were key informants within the refugee camp (1 teacher, 1 counselor, and 2 relief workers). The 10 unaccompanied minors (6 females, 4 males) participated at all levels of the study. The small sample size used in this study was not aimed to be statistically representative rather it was more illustrative (Valentine 2001). Qualitative analysis of data is time consuming and laborious, hence the use of a small sample size. Pseudonyms were used for anonymity.

**3.4 Data collection**

The data collection process included the use of the following research techniques, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

**3.4.1 Focus group discussions (FGDs)**

The study used the focus group discussion as one of the major data collection strategy. The focus group discussions had 10 participants at any given time and the same participants attended for consistency. Each focus group discussion had a focus on a specific thematic area. Focus group discussions were used because children are generally more comfortable discussing issues in groups (Morgan etal, 2002). The main purpose of focus groups was to enable and allow children to discuss as well as articulate their plight, perceptions, understandings and experiences of being unaccompanied refugee minors. The study considered the effects of group dynamics, peer pressure, gender dynamics and development stages within the groups.

The study adopted strategies which allowed focus groups to generate interactive conversation with and between children as opposed to mere interviews within a group of people. Focus group discussions should have a theme and be focused, they should not be conducted as a haphazard data fishing trip. Conducting focus group discussions in play centres and resting places in the camp indicated that this was not school work and helped in creating an informal environment which triggered interactive discussions and contributions. Activities were incorporated into the group discussions to provide both variety and interest for the children and to stimulate their thinking and discussion.

**3.4.2 In-depth interviews**

The study also carried out in-depth interviews in a bid to probe deeply and uncover new dimensions to the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors. The in-depth interviews were done on a one-on one basis to all 10 unaccompanied minors who participated in the study. Accurate and detailed accounts of personal experiences of unaccompanied refugee minors were elicited by use of in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews encouraged subjects to tell their own stories in their own words with a bit of prompting from the interviewer.

This method allowed the interviewer not to be guided by a rigid questionnaire thus it gave the researcher sufficient flexibility to follow up on interesting issues which came up during the interviews. In-depth interviews allowed for an in-depth probe into issues regarded as complex and sensitive by unaccompanied minors, thus seeking answers and clarifications.

The in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to capture some of the salient experiences of children’s lives and children managed to give their interpretations of their lives. Since this was time consuming, the life history approach was employed to complement other qualitative techniques used in this study. By using in-depth life history interviews, the study allowed the unaccompanied refugee minors to speak for themselves about their own lives, experiences and survival strategies about how they overcome their predicaments. The life history approach allowed the children to make sense of their situation and how their own action and that of others shaped their lives. According to Bruner (1986) the interpretive nature of life histories gives meaning to events and processes, and enables the researcher to see the present as part of a set of relationships constituting the past and the future. In other words, the life histories represented different voices.

**3.4.3 Key informant interviews**

In addition to the unaccompanied refugee minors of Tongogara refugee camp, key informants were identified from the schools within the camp and the Department of Social Services. A key informant for the purposes of this study was defined as a member of the mentioned institutions familiar with the unaccompanied refugee minors in the camp. Key informant interviews were preferred as a data source to get institutional perceptions and experiences on issues to do with unaccompanied refugee minors. A key informant guided discussion form was used (Annex). Information gathered from the key informant was used to probe and identify additional discussion points during focus group discussions.

**3.5 Data analysis procedure**

Qualitative data analysis techniques were utilized to analyse data gathered in the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The analysis process entailed coding of responses according to thematic categories. Given the responses and data categories the analysis tried to link responses from different categories. This entailed drawing links and relationships between different categories.

In qualitative research no one approach is regarded as correct in coding data. The researcher used three different sources of categories that are, inferences from collected data, the research questions as well as theoretical knowledge. To a limited extent, the researcher used the line by line approach to generate categories and then move on to integrated analysis around the core category. To assist in the process of analysis a series of guiding questions were used in each category during the analysis. Information gathered using various tools was combined in order to answer the guiding questions.

**3.6Chapter Summary**

In this chapter the design of the study was outlined and the rationale for employing qualitative design was explained. The sampling methodology and protocols were described together with a summary of the sample size and data collection methods. The study utilized qualitative data analysis; the analysis procedures were also outlined in the chapter.

**CHAPTER 4**

**Data presentation and analysis**

**Introduction**

This chapter in its attempt to meet the research objectives, it gives a purely qualitative presentation and analysis of findings from the study. The findings are presented or divided into formal assistance analysis, major problems or challenges as viewed by the minors and exploration of synergies in the camp. To fully explain the findings and relating them to the research objectives, relationships and links between thematic areas are made. It should be noted at this point that it was not the intention of the study to understand the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors through establishment of statistical trends, hence the purely qualitative analysis.

**4.1 Analysis of formal assistance offered to unaccompanied refugee minors**

It emerged from the study that the unaccompanied refugee minors are receiving formal assistance within the camp. There was a 100% response indicating that indeed assistance is being offered as a way of mitigating or addressing the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors in the camp.

**Table 1: Assistance adequacy levels: responses by unaccompanied refugee minors**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Form of assistance** | **Adequate** | **Inadequate** |
| Food rations | 0 % | 100% |
| Education | 5% | 95% |
| Water and Sanitation | 90% | 10% |
| Health | 80% | 20% |

**4.1.1 Food aid**

The assistance comes in different forms and the popular one is food aid where the minors receive monthly rations as indicated by one participant:

 *It is better because we receive food at the end of every month though it usually does not take us through to the next month.*

The food as revealed by the unaccompanied minors is not adequate and does not meet all their food requirements. The unaccompanied refugee minors get 10 kg meali meal, 5kg Cone Soya Blend (CSB), 750 ml cooking oil, I bar of soap and 2kg pulses per person on a monthly basis. The quantities of the food rations are not adequate to cater for the minor’s monthly food requirements more so nutritional needs. The study shows that the food rations, little as they are, are expected to cover morning, afternoon and evening meals. One participant had this to say:

*…and the food is not much. I forego some meals in order for the food to last until the next distribution. I usually prepare morning and evening meals but it all depends, all I need to do is to have at least two meals per day.*

The inadequate food rations have made unaccompanied refugee minors more vulnerable. A hungry child is affected physically, socially and psychologically. School attendance can be affected where food is in short supply.The hard hit are girls who become prone to abuse and some of them resort to negative coping strategies such as engaging in sex in exchange for food. Some of them as indicated by the officials from the department of social services are forced into early marriages as a way of ensuring a constant supply of food.

**4.1.2 Education**

The unaccompanied refugee minors also identified assistance in the form of educational support. Education is offered for free to all children in the camp, this means that unaccompanied refugee minors also benefit. Upon arrival in the camp, children are offered English and Shona lessons to enable them to overcome the language barrier since most of them come from French speaking countries. All unaccompanied refugee minors benefit from the distribution of uniforms and books. The minors acknowledged and appreciated this kind of assistance considering that they do not have the means to finance their own education as echoed by one minor:

*I cannot imagine what I would do if schools here required me to pay my fees and buy uniforms. I received this uniform last week (with a smile)… the one that I am putting on.*

The educational support is periodical such that unaccompanied minors go to school with torn uniforms and in some cases with no uniform at all.

Some of the unaccompanied refugee minors are benefiting from vocational skills training being offered by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) through its partner United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (UCCZ).

**4.1.3 Water and Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)**

During a focus group discussion, unaccompanied minors indicated that they are benefiting from the WASH facilities which are in abundance in the camp.

*Aaah water is everywhere; there are taps and so many boreholes. You can just take a cup and drink from the water point instead of going with a big bucket (jokingly).*

The camp has adequate WASH facilities which cater for the refugees. These facilities were put to benefit the whole refugee community, thus unaccompanied refugee minors benefit as they are part of this community. The sharing ratio for water points is on average 5 households per point and the Blair latrine ratio as revealed by the study is average of 2 households per 2 squat latrines. The ratio becomes favourable and allows for the prevention of diseases caused by poor sanitation. Most of these diseases such as cholera and typhoid heavily affect children, unaccompanied included.

**4.1.4 Health related assistance**

There is a clinic which is well stocked and well equipped with ambulance services and standard referral systems. The unaccompanied refugee minors access health services for free.

**4.2 Major challenges facing unaccompanied refugee minors**

As highlighted in the last section, the unaccompanied refugee minors are indeed receiving assistance though in most instances it is not adequate. The plight of unaccompanied refugee minors is a complex one in the sense that, whilst efforts are being made to address it, there still remain several challenges. Below are some of the findings on the plight of unaccompanied minors, from a human rights perspective, on the challenges or problems which were reiterated by the unaccompanied refugee minors during this study.

**4.2.1 Lack of child participation**

This study establishes that children are somehow marginalised in adult-centred societies. Adult-centred communities are where adults have a say in everything which concern children. In this regard, refugee camps are not spared since most of the needs of unaccompanied minors are perceived from the perspective of adults. The unaccompanied refugee minor’s needs are addressed guided by international statutes and humanitarian instruments which children were never part of. In other words, the minors experience unequal power relations with adults and much of their lives are controlled and limited by adults. Thus, it becomes an ascribed position which most unaccompanied minors occupy as acknowledged by participants of the study, Asked on whether their views are considered by those addressing their plight, the minors had this to say :

*Steven (Male 16): Once an adult has spoken it is final. Adults are always right.*

*Martha (Female 16): I am not allowed to participate, adults think I know nothing.*

The Study established that unaccompanied minors are aware of the dominance of adults regarding their needs and interests. They also feel that adults always want to think for them regarding their circumstances:

*I am undermined as a child; my views do not matter unless an adult is saying them on “my behalf”…*

It becomes very apparent that unaccompanied refugee minors from a plurality of culture share the feature of childhood as being powerless and lacking in control of what happens to them. However unaccompanied refugee minors in this study do not view themselves as powerless as adults would want to think about children. To the unaccompanied refugee minors, having an opinion on their welfare involves decision making and as far as the competence is concerned:

*Sarah (Female 16): Being a child does not mean you are child minded. Given an opportunity, we can decide on what we want in order to address our difficult situation. As unaccompanied minors we are vulnerable and therefore we should decide and say out how we feel.*

*Valerie (Female 15): Some people think being a child means lacking knowledge. I can be a child and I can have lots and lots of knowledge.*

Children bring to light adult’s lack of knowledge about child participation rights and explain that as children they have ‘lots and lots of knowledge’ (Valerie,). Children are sensible and identify that their participation suffers due to cultural beliefs as one female child points out:

*In my culture [Balushwa] they believe children lack knowledge about participation and decision making, worse if you are a girl like me.*

Inequalities and gender issues become rampant and further suppress the voice of children in their quest to have their views heard and considered. Findings of the study show that unaccompanied refugee minors see their right to participate in issues concerning them as a space created by adults for children; they want to have a situation whereby they are made to be part of creating that space.

**4.2.2 Limited educational opportunities / standards**

According children education is one of the fundamental rights for children enshrined in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children (ACRWC). This would mean the Department of Social Welfare and Non-governmental Organisations operating at Tongogara refugee camp prioritise sending unaccompanied refugee minors to school. Zimbabwe’s education policy for refugee minors is that the children are on full government sponsorship as long as they attend school (Primary and Secondary) in the camp. They can only attend school elsewhere when they proceed to Advanced level, college or university. With this policy in place, unaccompanied refugee minors felt that if their parents were with them, they would have been attending schools of their choice outside the camp, as one male participant in the study pointed out:

*If my parents were here, [with a trembling voice] I could be attending school at Chibuwe high school. I wanted to join my friend Spenser [not real name] who is in boarding school there but the camp authorities said I can only go there if I secure private sponsorship. My papa [foster parent] said it is too expensive and cannot afford.*

Such a scenario as highlighted above limits the educational opportunities for unaccompanied refugee minors since those who have their parents in the camp have the option of choosing other schools (with higher standards) with private sponsorship from their parents. Failure by foster parents could be a result of lack of eagerness to avail the sponsorship owing to the fact that these unaccompanied minors are not their biological children, in addition, they already get educational assistance from the government at the camp school . Findings from the study reveal that the camp schools are facing challenges in their attempt to deliever quality education as one teacher stated:

 *We always have to make do with the available little resources. The learning materials fall far short considering the numbers [enrolment] we have at this school.*

Such differences in status create an inferiority complex within a certain group of children. Unaccompanied minors feel inferior and rejected when other children attend boarding school elsewhere. This is exhibited by Elbert:

*I wanted to join my friend Spenser [not real name] who is in boarding school there but the camp authorities said I can only go there if I secure private sponsorship. My papa [foster parent] said it is too expensive and cannot afford.*

There is bound to be some dysfunctional tendencies as a result of the destruction of the child’s self-esteem owing to the creation of an inferiority complex. The study shows that failure to engage unaccompanied refugee minors would mean partial fulfillment of the unaccompanied minors needs. It is not only education that they need in order to address their plight but the standard and quality counts for these unaccompanied refugee minors. One female student said:

*School is what I need so as to learn and increase my chances of working and providing for myself. The quality of education I am receiving here [in the camp] is low and it reduces my chances of succeeding. The attitude of the teachers is so discouraging.*

From the study, there are a number of unaccompanied refugee minors who have dropped from school. Some of the reasons for dropping out are not the usual ones where children are denied education due to cultural ideologies. In some cases it is disappointment emanating from the process or the way in which the unaccompanied refugee minors are inducted into schools. One girl lamented that she could not attend secondary school because she could not produce records to prove that back home she was doing secondary level and she was made to start at primary school level. She felt that if her parents were with her they could have spoken on her behalf and qualified her claims:

*Up to now I wonder why they [teachers] could not test me to prove that back home [DRC] I was in form four. At least they could have taken me down to form two not grade six. I had to drop out because the children laughed at me and this greatly affected me. These teachers do not trust what we tell them as unaccompanied minors i wish my parents were there to speak up for me.*

The study reveals that there is antagonism between personal opinions of teachers as well as social workers and humanistic principles of unconditional positive regard. The ideal scenario is that teachers and social workers should be there at the point of need regardless of what the child knows, thus attempting to assist the child to self-actualise. In as much as the study focused more on the perspectives of the unaccompanied minors, key informants were also interviewed in a bid to clarify some issues. There were indications, from the educationists interviewed, that the unaccompanied minors and the refugee population in general are usually frustrated with the differences in the education systems of their countries and that of Zimbabwe.

In their countries they follow the French education system which requires a child to go through six years of primary education and then proceed to secondary. If they arrive in Zimbabwe after completing primary education, they will not be mature to start secondary education. The frequency of examinations is also a cause for concern for them hence they do not understand when they are told to go back to primary levels. It therefore becomes imperative for refugees to be fully appraised of such differences in the requirements of the education systems.

The unaccompanied minors indicated that their foster parents also contribute in denying them access to education. This usually happens to girls who are greatly affected by cultural values which expect them to be groomed for motherhood.

*She [adoptive mother] once denied me to attend school while the boys [adoptive mother’s children] went. She said I should be preparing for marriage rather than going to school, I should learn to cook and do all the household chores. I spoke to my teacher who convinced her to send me back to school.*

This becomes a double barreled blow for unaccompanied girl children for they have to bear loss of parents and the oppressive nature of the African cultures. In other words they become more vulnerable by virtue of them being girls and in a state of orphanhood.

**4.2.3 Lack of parental love**

Placing unaccompanied refugee minors under foster care is one way assumed to be effective in giving the children a home and parental care. It emerged from the study that even though the children had a place to call home and guardians who resembled their parents, they still lacked that parental love offered by one’s biological parents. In most cases the adoptive parents take in the unaccompanied refugee minors to enable them to benefit more from hand-outs and rations which are distributed in the camp. The unaccompanied minors are made to be responsible and fend for themselves as well as being responsible for their adoptive siblings as one male participant put it.

*I do not like it when they [foster parents] shout at me all the time. I work for everyone in the house. I am expected to cook after school whilst Isaac and Daniel [adoptive siblings; not real names] play in the grounds with other children. I only play with my friends when at school.*

Every child is entitled to space and time to play and interact with other children of his or her age this reinforces the development of a child in all spheres. The above extract shows that most of the unaccompanied minors have had to take up adult responsibilities. Social workers who participated in this study revealed that some foster parents took in unaccompanied children so that they can have free help around the house as well as extra food as the unaccompanied child gets an extra food basket during food distributions. The social worker further elaborated that trust between the refugees and social worker is removed thus defeating the whole purpose of giving a helping hand to unaccompanied refugee children.

 The lack of parental care has led to denial of basic needs as well exposing the unaccompanied refugee minors to abuse and exploitation. One child had this to say;

*At times children without parents are beaten, you see that house [pointing at a nearby shack] the boy who stayed there was always beaten for not completing household chores. We heard he is staying in town now [Chipinge]*

It also emerged from the study that neighbours revealed the beatings to the social workers in the camp. The interviewed social workers also said it was difficult to ascertain how bad foster families would be beforehand.

*It becomes very difficult because it is not expected that somebody will volunteer to adopt a child with the intention of ill-treating that child. At times the children themselves do not open up and report the cases of these abuses to authorities.*

The Ecological theory discussed in chapter 2 places so much importance on the child’s immediate environment which is the home, school and peers. This environment is very instrumental in shaping the development of a child. A child’s ability to respond to such new situations with a positive self-esteem relies also on positive environmental support through protective home environments and strong peer relations. It becomes imperative to allow unaccompanied refugee minors into foster homes which have a loving and nurturing environment.

**4.2.4 Self blame**

Most of the unaccompanied children who were interviewed showed an element of self-blame in relation to the loss of their parents and siblings. They felt they could have done something to avoid the loss of parents and siblings as expressed by one female participant.

*The Hutus killed my mother whilst we [including her 3little sisters] were in hiding. Why did I scream? Why did I even run away [sobbing]. I panicked now I do not even know where they are [the sisters].We could have been together [with the other siblings].*

Another girl witnessed her mother being raped and killed. She feels guilty and blames herself for doing nothing to help her mother.

*Sarah (Female): … at times I feel I do not desire to live…*

Buscher (2006) cites a research on unaccompanied refugee minors in Cambodia where researchers discovered that, vulnerability increases with autonomy and this causes children to relive past separations. Such a scenario creates difficulties in adjustments to new environments. Findings from the study also highlight the negative beliefs regarding their future, in other words the unaccompanied minors are pessimistic about their future.

**4.2.5 Trauma**

From the observations and interviews made during this study, it was evident that there are traces of trauma amongst unaccompanied refugee minors. This emerging fact cannot be disputed given the experiences these unaccompanied children went through in their home countries. The unaccompanied children lost their parents, siblings and close relatives and they currently live in fear which is exhibited as nightmares. The excerpts below show some of the traumatic experiences unaccompanied minors went through;

*Sarah (Female): They made me watch whilst they raped and killed my mother [she breaks down]…at times I feel I do not desire to live…*

*Martha (Female): The Hutus killed my mother whilst we [including her 3little sisters] were in hiding. Why did I scream? Why did I even run away [sobbing]. I panicked now I do not even know where they are [the sisters].We could have been together [with the other siblings].*

According to Corsaro (2005), such experiences as mentioned above lead to what is known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is referred to as a lasting consequence of traumatic ordeals that cause intense fear, helplessness or horror. Examples of the traumatic ordeals include amongst other things, death of a loved one, sexual or physical assault, war or natural disaster.

One teacher indicated that some of the unaccompanied minors exhibited a confused and disordered memory about events which is also one of the symptoms of PTSD (Corsaro 2005).

*… Some of them [unaccompanied minors] show signs of confusion… they sometimes find it difficult to narrate a simple incident.*

Besides confusion disorders, some of the unaccompanied refugee minors tend to have extreme personality changes which is another symptom of PTSD as explained by Thomas and Lau (2010). The teacher revealed that one unaccompanied minor has turned out to be aggressive and violent, a form of behaviour he never exhibited upon his arrival in the camp. Another example given by the teacher is of a student who changed from being cheerful to being so much withdrawn both at school and at home. The teacher further elaborated that;

 *Some unaccompanied minors have reached a point where they no longer attend school…yet they had been attending daily.*

The teacher explained such behaviour as indicating a defeatist attitude towards life.

**4.2.6 Ethnic prejudice**

During interviews it emerged that ethnic prejudice is rampant in the camp, especially towards the unaccompanied refugee minors. Unaccompanied minors are placed under the care of foster parents in an attempt to give them a homely environment. However from the interviews carried out some children were facing problems with their foster families owing to the fact that they belong to different ethnic groups. The study revealed that most of the affected unaccompanied children are from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). DRC has more than eight ethnic groups in Tongogara refugee camp and more than 400 ethnic languages in their country. This scenario makes it difficult to place DRC children under foster care as one boy (who could not find a family of his ethnic group) mentioned:

*I am Bemba and they [foster family] are Bamushe. Our ethnic groups back home hate each other [with a frown on his face]. My ethnic group is associated with witchcraft and satanic acts [digs the ground with a stick]. I am always blamed when something goes wrong in the family. I was once accused of bewitching my adoptive sister; however the illness turned out to be malaria. Even though, they [foster family] are still suspicious of me.*

At times, as revealed by the study, the ethnic hatred spills over to other spheres of the unaccompanied children’s day to day lives. The children are scolded and emotionally abused for belonging to different ethnic group. In some instances teasing is the order of the day and results in the withdrawal of unaccompanied children and they usually keep to themselves.

A girl from the Balushwa ethnic group is living with a Bacongo family who are not a real problem. However problems come from some members of the Bacongo ethnic group who warn her adoptive family that the child would bring misfortunes to their family.

*My family [adoptive] is not a problem. These others [Bacongo] are a real problem and they influenced their children not to mix with me. I am now miserable because even my own people [Balushwa] no longer accept me yet they did not volunteer to take me in.*

 In order to avoid unforeseen ethnic prejudice, it would be ideal to place unaccompanied children in foster families of the same ethnic group and country. In other words, that avoids or prevents cultural differences which would in turn erode the rights of these unaccompanied refugee minors.

**4.2.7 Lack of specialised expertise**

It also emerged during the study that specialised expertise in the camp is lacking. The information gathered during this study indicated that the camp has only two qualified and certified counsellors who cater for a population of around 6500 people who at one time or the other need psycho-social support. It also emerged that the camp, owing to lack of funding, has no specialist to deal with stress and trauma of children in the camp. A visiting psychologist was once hired to visit the camp monthly but the programme came to an end due to lack of funding. Teachers at the Tongogara schools are not well equipped to deal with trauma patients. The local clinic has nurses who can do counseling to certain levels which do not extend to trauma counseling hence they refer extreme cases to Harare.

**4.2.8 Overcrowding.**

The study participants revealed their appalling living conditions. The Department of social services provides materials for makeshift shelters but the material and space are fast dwindling. One female participant had this to say:

*All people want to be closer to the main buildings yet there is no space, we are crowded. I hope proper houses will be built for us.*

The squalid conditions are a looming health hazard.

**4.3 Opportunities for Stakeholder’s synergies in the refugee camp**

Addressing the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors requires a concerted effort by various stakeholders inside and outside Tongogara refugee camp. It emerged from the study that currently there is evidence of very strong synergies in the camp as put by the camp administrator:

*We operate in this camp as a human body which requires an active participation of every body part to address the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors. Imagine what will happen if the stomach becomes hungry and the hand fails to put food on to the mouth, such is the scenario here. We need every stakeholder, government and non-government.*

The Department of Social Services is a government arm mandated to run the Tongogara refugee camp, they are the administrators. The UNHCR is the funding partner for most of the interventions aimed at addressing the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors. Through its implementing partner Christian Care, there have been vast strides in so far as providing unaccompanied minors safe water to drink as well as proper ablution facilities.

There are also strong synergies within health related interventions for the unaccompanied refugees and the whole refugee population at large. Christian Care is supporting the local clinic through the provision of drugs and medical sundries; in addition it is the one providing qualified personnel. The local clinic has linked well with the district referral hospital in Chipinge where arrangements and specific days every week were agreed to bring patients from the camp to the hospital for check-up and further treatments.

The Norwegian Refugee council (NRC) brought in a component of vocational skills training for those unaccompanied minors who either dropped out from school or are ‘too old’ to join mainstream education.

There is also childline which is offering interventions related to psychosocial support for the unaccompanied refugee minors and other children in the camp. The organisation deals with child protection issues in the camp such as sexual abuse or any other form of abuse.

However in as much as there are strong synergies in the camp, there remain some opportunities for collaboration in the area of food security and livelihoods. Considering the food rations which are given out per month, there is need to work towards sustainable food production. There is need to engage such organisations as German Agro, FAO and the government department of AREX so as to improve the food situation of unaccompanied refugee minors.

There are also possible synergies with regards to housing of unaccompanied refugee minors. Synergies can be created the UNHABITAT whose mandate is to provide decent shelter for the disadvantaged and less privileged like the unaccompanied refugee minors.

**4.4 Chapter summary**

The chapter used a purely qualitative approach in analyzing data. The aim was to bring out issues from the perspective of the study participants. The study aim was to understand deeply the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors, considering that they are receiving assistance to address their needs. Despite all the assistance, the plight of the unaccompanied refugee minors remains a challenge. The findings of the study presented in this chapter reveal thematic areas which emerged.

**CHAPTER 5**

**Conclusions and recommendations**

**Introduction**

This chapter looks at the conclusions from the study findings. The conclusions are based on the thematic areas identified in the previous chapter. The conclusions are also derived from the perspective of the unaccompanied refugee minors. Recommendations are to be given bearing in mind the need to address the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors at Tongogara refugee camp.

**5.1 Participation of unaccompanied refugee minors.**

The findings of the study revealed that participation of the unaccompanied refugee children is lacking in interventions which seek to mitigate their plight. Interventions are more of imposed on the children by adults who in this case happen to be the social workers. The humanitarian principles prescribe the assistance which should be offered as well as how it should be handed out, thus, the unaccompanied refugee minors in Tongogara refugee camp are mere recipients of assistance created elsewhere. The voice of the unaccompanied refugee minors remains unheard by virtue of them not being decision makers in issues which concern them. They continue to be marginalised with the adult-centred communities in which the live.

The non-participation of unaccompanied refugee minors has a cascading effect, meaning it has a ripple effect on other spheres of these children’s lives such as education. It emerged from the study that, offering education to the refugee minors is not the panacea to their plight, what the unaccompanied refugees require is standard and quality education. The camp schools have very limited resources which makes it difficult for unaccompanied refugee minors to acquire the quality and standard of education they desire. The study concluded that there are possibilities of allowing unaccompanied minors in the camp to participate in determining their assistance.

**5.2 Foster parenting of unaccompanied refugee minors**

It also emerged from the study that foster parenting is one approach which is used to offer unaccompanied refugee minors a homely environment which covers up for the missing parental love and care. However the study revealed that most of these foster homes are not meeting the objectives of foster parenting. Instead of offering a protective environment, most of the foster parents are actually infringing on the basic rights of children. Evidence from the study shows that unaccompanied refugee minors are being denied their right to education and in addition being denied the right to associate freely.

 In some instances, foster parenting has exposed unaccompanied refugee minors to different forms of abuse. Emotional as well as physical abuse appears to be taking its toll within Tongogara refugee camp. Such abuse is exhibited where children are asked to perform all household chores before going to school as well as after school. Ill-treatment by foster parents has led to unaccompanied refugee minors reliving past experiences which were traumatic.

From the study, it can be concluded that there is collaboration of stakeholders towards a human rights approach with regards to foster parenting. However, the efforts are being affected with limited resources which result in children being place under unfavourable care.

**5.3 Impact of Ethnicity on unaccompanied refugee minors**

Foster parenting whilst noble within the camp, the study revealed that some unaccompanied refugee minors are living with adoptive parents from rival ethnic groups. These ethnic groups back home hate each other and in some cases such as Rwanda, ethnicity was the cause of these refugee’s displacements. One can imagine a scenario where a Tutsi child lives with Hutu adoptive parents, the psychological as well as emotional pressure that this child goes through might be unbearable.

The study in the previous chapter revealed how unaccompanied children from rival ethnic groups are ridiculed and scolded, in some instances beaten. There tends to develop some xenophobic tendencies towards the unaccompanied refugee minors within Tongogara refugee camp. Such xenophobic attacks on unaccompanied minors worsen their plight. Some children have undergone personality and behaviour changes such as withdrawal as well as developing aggressive and violent behaviour.

**5.4 Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

The unaccompanied refugee minors, experienced immense loss hence some level of trauma are experienced. These unaccompanied minors exhibit some symptoms of PTSD such as confused and disordered memory of events. The minors exhibit extreme personality changes; some have changed from being obedient and peaceful to being very aggressive. PTSD affects performance of unaccompanied minors in school as well as their social development.

During the study, unaccompanied minors showed that they blame themselves for the loss of their loved ones. They have a guilty conscience which has led them to be pessimistic about life. This also is one of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

It emerged from the study that, PTSD situations are further worsened by lack of specialised expertise in the field of counselling and psychology within Tongogara refugee camp. The shortage of specialists is a result of shortage of funding, to an extent that there only two qualified counsellors in the camp.

**5.5 Recommendations**

All interventions for unaccompanied refugee minors should strive to allow for their participation if their plight is to be addressed. A human rights approach should be employed, where children are treated as human beings who have a capacity to think and make decisions on issues which concern them. However the role of determining interventions should not be solely left to the unaccompanied refugee minors, the process should be a consultative one where no adults dominate.

In view of the human rights abuses experienced by the unaccompanied minors under foster parenthood, it becomes imperative for the Department of social services to set up foster homes in the camp which are run by the government. This creates a great opportunity for the creation of synergies between government and non-government stakeholders. Such an arrangement allows for resources to be channeled in specifically addressing the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors. However caution should be taken to avoid stigmatization of these children as result of separating them from the entire refugee community. There should be flexibility which allows for fostering by families from the same ethnic groups.

In addition, there is need to embark on psycho-social support programmes in the schools. This will also entail the training of teachers in trauma handling and counselling, considering that there is a shortage of trained counsellors in the camp. Efforts should be made to ensure that all children of school going age remain in school.

Creation of synergies is also recommended in the field of food security to ensure a sustainable food supply chain.

**5.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter highlighted that participation of unaccompanied refugee minors is important when addressing the plight of these minors. Recommendations from the chapter were linked to the conclusions on child participation, foster parenting, ethnicity and post-traumatic stress disorder.

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**Appendix 1: Guidance Provided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of**

**the Child**

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| Article | Provision |
| 3 | The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in mattersconcerning children |
| 5 | Recognises the responsibility of members of the extended family, communityor legal guardians to provide for the child in a manner consistent with his or herevolving capacities |
| 6 | Recognises that every child has the inherent right to life |
| 8 | Concerns the right of the a child to preserve his or her identity, including nameand family relations |
| 9 | Concerns a child’s right not to be separated from parents |
| 12 | Concerns a child’s right to freedom of expression and to be heard in anyproceedings that concern him or her |
| 16 | Concerns a child’s right to be free from arbitrary attacks and or reputation(stigma) |
| 17 | Recognises the right of access to appropriate information |
| 18 | Recognises the responsibility of the State to support parents and legal guardiansin their child bearing responsibilities and to develop services for the acre ofchildren |
| 19 | Concerns the protection of children from abuse, neglect, maltreatment orexploitation |
| 20 | Concerns the responsibility of the State to provide special protection for a childdeprived of his or her family environment |
| 21 | Addresses safeguards regarding adoption |
| 24 | Recognises the right of the children to the highest standard of health and accessto health services |
| 25 | Concerns the periodic review of the situation of a child who has been placed incare |
| 27 | Recognises the right of the child to an adequate standard of living |
| 28 | Concerns the right of every child to education |
| 31 | Recognises a child’s right to rest, leisure, play and recreation |
| 32 | Addresses the protection of children form economic exploitation |
| 34 | Concerns the protection of children from sexual exploitation and abuse |

Source UNICEF et al., (2004) www.aidsalliance,.org accessed 21/09/13)

**APPENDIX 2. In-depth interview guide**

Objective: To record first hand, experiences of unaccompanied refugee minors at Tongogara refugee camp.

Key questions (These are guides to help focus discussions)

1. How old are you?
2. When did you arrive in this country?
3. What is your home country?
4. Why did you leave your home country?
5. What were your experiences from the time of leaving your country up to this moment?
6. Whom are you living with?
7. Give a comparison of life back home and life at Tongogara ( probe to understand plight)
8. What assistance have you received since your arrival?
9. Are there any challenges you are facing by virtue of being in this camp?

**NB;***Observe non- verbal cues during the discussion. Interviews to be done on a one on one basis.*

**APPENDIX 3 Focus group discussions**

Objectives:

1. To find out the levels of participation by unaccompanied refugee minors.
2. To identify the unaccompanied refugee minor’s needs and how they are being addressed.
3. Find out how the needs can be addressed from the perspective of the children.

Guiding questions

1. What do you understand by child participation?
2. Does your culture allow children to give their views on issues which concern them?
3. As unaccompanied children are your views considered by your elders?
4. Have you been receiving any assistance?
5. What kind of assistance? Is it meeting all your needs?
6. At what level have you been involved in determining your assistance?
7. What do you think should be done differently?

**NB;***Observe non- verbal cues during the discussion*

**APPENDIX 4 Key informant guided form**

Objectives:

1. To find out some of the challenges faced by unaccompanied refugee minors
2. To establish existing synergies and possible synergies in the camp towards addressing unaccompanied minor’s plight.
3. To find out challenges being faced by key stakeholders in addressing the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors.

Guiding questions

1. What do you consider as the major challenges being faced by unaccompanied refugee minors?...................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................
2. Are there any synergies in trying to address the plight of unaccompanied minors?

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1. What are the roles of non-government stakeholders in addressing the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors? ..................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................
2. What are the challenges being faced by these stakeholders in mitigating the plight of unaccompanied refugee minors?

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1. What strategies are in place to overcome these challenges?

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