LIFE IN A CHILD/ADOLESCENT HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

A qualitative study on everyday life experience of children living in Child/Adolescent headed households in Western Kenya Region

By

AUTHOR: DORCUS AWINO
VT 2010

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

Master of Sociology

In the
Sociology Department

Faculty of Social science

Supervisor: Dr. Charlott Nyman
Abstract

This thesis focuses on the everyday life experience of children living in household headed by a child or an adolescent after the loss of both parents in the rural communities in Western Kenya Region. Child/Adolescent headed household is a rapidly growing form of family in Sub-Saharan Africa mainly due to increased deaths rates caused by HIV/AIDS, civil wars and the weakened state of traditional family safety nets in taking up care and raising responsibilities of orphaned children. Majority of these households are often headed by the eldest child/adolescent left in the family who takes up huge responsibility of heading and fending for the younger siblings. The family as an institution has over the years been changing in its structure and function that have brought both negative and positive impact.

In this study I investigate how children in child headed households make meaning of their lives by engaging them in giving short narrations of their everyday life experiences with the guide of open-ended interviews. Using purposive sampling method, I sampled nine household heads that were identified and interviewed, but only responses from six household are used in the analysis. Those who participated were between ages 15 and 23 years old. Later qualitative content analysis method was used to code the data and establish themes and patterns describing the children’s life experience. In analyzing and interpreting the data, social ecological systems, resilience and symbolic interaction theoretical frameworks were used.

The results show that the interactions and relations in the children’s lives changed a great deal after the loss of both parents which led to social isolation and loneliness, changed childhood experiences, burdening parenting role and responsibilities, weak economic situation, and limited support systems, but despite all the obstacles the children/adolescents were still optimistic about their future and those of their siblings. This led to the conclusion that children in child/adolescent headed families, despite the disruption and breakdown of their immediate nurturing environment if provided with all the support they needed within and outside the home environment were still capable of building resilience and achieving positive development. Therefore strategies and interventions initiated towards ensuring that all children experience positive growth and development should be based on a joint effort from all stakeholders; the children, communities, organizations and the government.

Keywords: Child headed household, everyday life experience, HIV/AIDS, ecological systems, resilience, symbolic interaction, development, environment.
Table of Content

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... II

TABLE OF CONTENT ......................................................................................................... III

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................... 1

AIM OF STUDY ...................................................................................................................... 3

  RESEARCH QUESTIONS .................................................................................................... 3
  DEFINITION OF TERMS ............................................................................................... 4

BACKGROUND ...................................................................................................................... 5

  TRADITIONAL AFRICAN FAMILY SYSTEM .................................................................... 5
  LIFE SITUATION FOR ORPHANED CHILDREN ................................................................ 8
  CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS .................................................................................... 10

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH ....................................................................................... 11

  QUALITATIVE APPROACH .......................................................................................... 11
    Narrative Interview ...................................................................................................... 12
    Interviews with Children/Adolescents ......................................................................... 13
  SETTING .......................................................................................................................... 13
  DATA COLLECTION ....................................................................................................... 14
  PARTICIPANTS .................................................................................................................. 14
  DATA ANALYSIS ......................................................................................................... 16
  VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY ISSUES ......................................................................... 17
  ETHICAL CONSIDERATION ............................................................................................ 18

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ............................................................................................. 19

  SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS ............................................................................... 19
  RESILIENCE .................................................................................................................... 24
  SYMBOLIC INTERACTION ........................................................................................... 24

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS DISCUSSION ............................................................................. 26

  THEME ONE: SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS ............................................... 26
Separation of siblings .................................................................................................................. 27

Theme Two: Childhood and Parenting Responsibilities ............................................................... 29

Childhood.................................................................................................................................... 29

Parental Responsibilities ............................................................................................................. 31

Theme Three: Economic Situation .............................................................................................. 33

Earning Strategies ....................................................................................................................... 33

Schooling & Hardship Conditions .............................................................................................. 34

Financial support ......................................................................................................................... 37

Theme Four: Social Support System ........................................................................................... 38

Extended family support ............................................................................................................. 38

Sibling and Peer Support ............................................................................................................ 40

Theme Five: Future Life Aspirations ............................................................................................ 42

Conclusions ................................................................................................................................. 44

Recommendations ....................................................................................................................... 45

Reference ..................................................................................................................................... 47

Internet Sources .......................................................................................................................... 50

Appendix 1.0: Consent Form ....................................................................................................... 51

Appendix 2.0: Interview Guide ................................................................................................... 53
Introduction

Research, writings and discussions on the family have for a long time focused on changing forms and structure such as the growth of families headed by single parent, widows, widowers and those headed by same sex couple, but not much focus or investigation has been done into the rising form of families/households headed by children. Child headed households is a rising phenomenon and mainly in the developing world, where children are losing their parents or guardians to civil wars, famine and diseases such as HIV/AIDS. According to UNAIDS fourth stocktaking report of 2009 on Children and AIDS, HIV/AIDs is the leading cause of parental deaths leading to the rising phenomenon of children being left to care and raise other children.

Approximately 12 million children ages 0-17 years in Sub-Saharan Africa have lost either one or both of the parents and have taken on the responsibilities of care giving for their siblings and taking up household work at the expense of their education and other life goals (UNICEF, 2006).

Statistically, in the whole world it is evident that Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 24 out of 25 hardest hit countries by HIV/AIDS, which explains the rapid increase of orphans and households headed by children in this region because more than three quarters of the worlds’ parentless children live in Sub-Saharan Africa. And projections indicate that this trend is bound to continue even when we start to experience a decline in the prevalence rates, due to the lag period between HIV infection and death (UNICEF 2006).

Child-headed households (CHH) are households that are headed and composed of children some as young as 10 years of age who find themselves taking up the responsibilities of providing and caring for their sibling and on other occasions even care for their terminally ailing parent(s) until death(Foster, et al.1997). Usually the older children are forced to develop survival tactics to support the younger ones when they themselves may also still need support and guidance. The rise of families or households headed by children is being witnessed very much in Sub-Saharan African countries where many of these children have lost their parents in deaths caused by civil wars or serious terminal illnesses such as AIDs and there no extended family members willing to take up the responsibility(Foster, et al. 1996). According to previous studies done in this area, majority of all parental deaths from the beginning of the 1990s in Sub-Saharan Africa have been caused by HIV/AIDS and in many other studies it has been confirmed as the major factor in the emergence of households headed by children (Foster, et al.1997).
Previously the traditional African family system provided a sense of belonging, security, social and safety net for support of its members at all times, and there were no such a thing as child headed families or orphans since the people through clanism or extended family networks took care of all children and in case someone lost a parent they were taken in as own children by aunties, uncles and even grandparents in the worst case scenarios. At the moment with the great demographic changes and worsening economic states of many Africa societies, the traditional safety net can no longer cope and this had led to calls for support from external sources other than the family and individual community (Nyambedha, et al. 2001). Due to various reasons these children are being left to fend for themselves from a very early age in life and without a properly functioning welfare system, some end up on the streets in urban cities, with no education, early marriages, poor nutrition and poor health.

In Sub-Saharan African nearly 90% of the orphaned children have in the past been cared for by members of the extended family (UNICEF, Africa's orphaned generations 2003a), but with the rapid increase of orphans, this traditional system of support has been overwhelmed. Therefore we find that there is a significant rise in households headed by children because their relatives have no capability to care for these children when they themselves are languishing in poverty. Transformations and changes brought about by labour migration, urbanization, westernization and change in economic system have led to changes in the traditional support systems. The new economic system brought about by contact with Europeans and Arabs changed the production systems; political action led to forced labour, racial segregation and alienation of land, all of which had an impact on traditional family life (Kayongo and Onyango 1984). Other challenges that have also risen with time are civil wars, poverty, poor agricultural production, diseases (most importantly HIV/AIDS pandemic) and meager resources, all have rendered the traditional system incapable of still continuing to serve it people as it did many years ago (Barnett and Whiteside 2002).

Children in child/adolescent headed households experience hardship in meeting their daily needs which leads to them livings a distressful life full of uncertainty and anxiety that raises a need to create more opportunities accessible to these children and creating enabling environment where they can better their socio-economic conditions. It is also evident that they need psychological support from the significant others in their children’s immediate environment, such as teachers, extended family members, church leaders and community leaders be enhanced. Unlike many other previous studies done into studying children, this study has given importance to giving the
children/adolescents the opportunity to communicate their perceptions and perspectives of their everyday life experience within their social contexts, with the intentions that the information shared should trigger appropriate support and care provision.

**Aim of study**

The aim of this study is to investigate the everyday life experiences of children in child/adolescent headed household taking care of themselves and their siblings after the death of their both parents from an experience-based perspective. The purpose is to create awareness that can be of importance in assisting policy makers and those involved in designing and providing services in their effort to improving the lives and development of the vulnerable groups in society.

**Research Questions**

- How do children in child/adolescent headed households make in everyday practical life matters?
- Do they get any form of help/support?
- In comparison with other children, how do they see themselves in relation to what they do or do not do?
- What are their future aspirations?
Definition of Terms

Some of the concepts used such as household, family and child/adolescent headed household are clarified in this section to bring better understanding of their use in this inquiry.

**Household:** This concept is used alternatively with the term family in the work. It is a unit of economic viability whether or not its members are physically dispersed at any one time (Kayongo and Onyango 1984). The membership includes persons who actually reside at the homestead and those who are temporary absentees. For instance in the case of child/adolescent headed households, those children who live in boarding school or with foster families and are back during school break and those who live there on day to day basis are all part of the household. There also those who live alone which I have termed lone household.

**Family:** The concept has been defined differently by various cultural groups. In the African context it refers to a social grouping of persons who live together, pool its resources, work together and are psychologically and/or biologically related with historical and emotional bonds, who perceive themselves as a part of the household (Kayongo and Onyango 1984). Usually there are two or more live in adults and one or more children. The adult members are usually responsible for the running and maintenance of its members. In this study, the families being focused have no live in adult and are being headed by children/adolescents after the death of both parents.

**Child/Adolescent headed Household:** This is a household where a child/adolescent takes up the responsibilities of providing leadership, decision making, daily running, feeding and maintenance of his or her younger siblings after the death of both parents and in other instances it starts during their parent’s terminal ailment. In some cases the children have links with their extended relatives or community-run organizations that provide some support.
Background

According to a United Nations estimates, in Sub-Saharan African approximately 9% of children have lost one of the parents to AIDS and one in six households is caring for orphans and two-thirds of people living with HIV are found in Sub-Saharan Africa although the region contains only 10% of the world’s population (UNAIDS 2006). Currently in Kenya there are approximately 2.4 million orphans and more than half of them are caused by AIDS pandemic. Although the prevalence rate has greatly reduced, the rates are at 8.3% in urban areas and at about 4% in the rural areas (National AIDS Control Council 2008).

AIDS is preventing both men and women from providing their full contribution to development, maintaining the structure of families and sustaining productive capacity over the longer term. The pandemic is also eroding the savings capacity of households, formal and informal enterprises and governments through its direct effects on flows of income and levels of expenditure. Over time this has led to falling demand, reduced investment and output hence declining per capita income. For example, studies in Kenya and the Côte d'Ivoire by Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) found that sickness and mortality due to AIDS resulted in the dramatic depletion of savings, the loss of key skills and organizational capacity and a fall in food production in households where only one member was sick with AIDS (UNAIDS 2006). HIV/AIDS is no longer seen as a health issue but a development problem that is a major threat to the attainment of the Millennium Development goals in the developing world especially Sub-Saharan Africa with its devastating impact of Children.

Traditional African Family System

Throughout the world we find that families vary very much in their form and structure and that over time their structure and functions have been changing significantly (Jamrozik and Nocella 2000). The growth of other forms of families with new living arrangements, decline in birth rates and changes brought up by economic pressure, the family as an institution has lost some of its stability and function.

In the African context the institution of family for a long time has been central in the provision of its members’ needs, safety and survival. Extended family system was the most important indigenous African institution with many African families being characterized by large numbers of

---

1 This is a family that includes relatives who are not part of the nuclear family such as cousins, aunts, uncle, grandparents
member with close kinship ties. It did provide sense of belonging, care, security and social support to its people.

Polygamous marriages were a common practice and people lived within big homesteads with members to even third or fourth generation in patriarchal residence (Foster, et al. 1996). It is within these quarters that reproduction, care, love, and protection of member were practiced. In many African ethnic groups, the members were dependent on kinship support systems for their livelihood and security (Nyambetha 2004). The children belonged to the entire kinship and were socialized, provided for and supported by kin members in their way of life (Kayongo and Onyango 1984).

Traditionally, marriage was more creating a social bond between two families (husband’s and wife’s) and not as it is now linking individuals, the bride and groom (Kayongo and Onyango 1984). Bride wealth in the form of a number of cattle in many African communities, although not in all, was paid to the bride’s family as a form of appreciation and latter used by brothers of the bride to also pay their bride price. And children born within these families were close to each other and became the responsibility of the whole family and not only of their parents (Foster, et al. 1997). Children could go to live with distance relatives for schooling or some training. Adults had the responsibility of socializing the children and any form of misconduct was disciplined by any adult in the group, meaning the child belonged to everyone in the traditional society (Kayongo and Onyango 1984). In cases of parent’s death, children were left in the care of their aunts, uncle and grandparents. The extended family was the traditional social security system for its members, where the vulnerable received their protection, care and transmission of traditional social values and education were provided (G. Foster, et al. 1996). Children were very important to the family and husbands were allowed (in some communities still allowed) to marry many wives to avoid childlessness and widowerhood, large number of children was very much valued and those who had many were seen as wealthy. They were also considered as a gift from God and family planning was seen to be antithetical (Kayongo and Onyango 1984).

Although children are ranked lower when it came to decision made and access and control in the traditional family, they were also valued for their potential labour contribution. They helped with daily work in the homes such as care for the younger siblings, farming activities and other domestic work such as cooking of food. In normal circumstances the young were cared for by their parents, who later provided support for their own parents that were described as the “inter-generation

---

2 Kinship is a relation between two or more people by decent and or marriage
3 Bride wealth is payment given to the family of the bride by the groom’s family in an African customary marriage
bargain by some social scientists. In Greek tradition this has been likened to a vine, where the young adults stand straight and firm as the new shoots climb up and the old ones make their way down to the earth, if you take out the middle support the children can’t climb and the old collapse (Barnett and Whiteside 2002). Children in the traditional African family system were socialized by all older members and not only by parents as in common in the Western countries. Adults had the full authority to ask children to perform simple duties. Grandparents were important agents of socializing children to traditions, roles, values, and sexual behavior through storytelling, songs and proverbs (Kayongo and Onyango 1984). Siblings were also and still are largely involved in socializing younger siblings and sometimes had authority equal to that of parents over the younger ones who highly respected them. Older siblings were expected to sacrifice for the younger ones as if they were their own children and we find that this practice in modern society is evident in cases where older siblings take up the responsibility of educating the younger ones by paying for their schooling fees if they have employment (Kayongo and Onyango 1984). Children were also fostered by other relatives who were either childless or had better economic conditions.

Currently, African families have been through significant transformation as a result of factors such as colonization, modernization, urbanization, and labour migration (Sakyi & Takyi 2006, Barnett & Whiteside 2002). Colonization and trade brought contact with Europeans and Arabs that changed the production systems; political action led to forced labour, racial segregation and alienation of land, all of which had a great impact on family life (Kayongo and Onyango 1984). Introduction of schooling also led to conflicts within families as the educated started to question the authority of the older and unschooled which brought a disruption in the authority patterns (Kayongo and Onyango 1984). Previously families had joint economic unit of production and consumption but that has changed, in cases where both husbands and wives are actively engaged in the labour market and have separate jobs with own salaries and run separate accounts, but share household budget with each selecting separate items with no family budget (Kayongo and Onyango 1984). Traditionally children were and still are but not very common purposefully sent to live with other relatives in urban areas to get better education or even to those with no children. In the modern African family, children are mainly socialized within the nuclear family by their parents and house servants for those living in urban areas, fostering is less frequent, authority of older children over younger ones is diminishing, and fewer children are cared for by their grandparents.
Alongside the transformations I have discussed, the family has also been confronted with many other challenges such as: poverty, civil wars, HIV/AIDS, decaying economies and decline in government support (Foster, et al. 1997). HIV/AIDs have led to the emergence of new family forms headed by single mothers, widows, widowers, grandparents and even children. This change has brought with it increased need for support from the extended family but with its limited resources being stretched to levels that the kin support systems can no longer cope with the responsibilities (Foster, et al. 1997). Despite all the challenges, the extended family system still continue to be the central social welfare mechanism in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, 2003a). In Kenya for instance the vast majority of orphans and vulnerable children are cared for by grandparents but with the scourge, care givers are becoming impoverished and scarce (Saoke et al. 1996). Similarly a study in Rakai District, Uganda, showed that as early as early 1990s most of the guardians were found to be over 50 years old (Hunter 1990). It is also evident that weakening of kinship system of support and security, has forced women and children to look for other forms of support of which some may involve activities such as prostitution that may expose them to even worse and dangerous situations, and risks of getting infected by HIV (Nyambedha, 2004).

In the next section we look at the life situations in general for orphaned children in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Life situation for orphaned Children**

Nutrition and food security is essential in achieving good health in growth and development for every child. Although for many orphaned children this is a far from reach since many of these children live in very impoverished states after the family having spent most of their resources in medical care and other expenses during parents illness. Studies in rural parts of East Africa have shown that household which took care of orphans reported from moderate to severe food insecurity and that orphans in these areas were more likely to go to bed hungry that those who were not orphans (UNICEF, 2006).

Basic education for all children is one of the key millennium development goals and central in preparing the young people for their future roles in the society (UNDP 2010). But households with ailing parents have high medical care cost and other expenses that usually leave the children with very few resources after the parents’ death. The impact of parents’ death on children’s schooling is determined by the economic circumstances, school readiness and their relation to adult decision makers (Case, et. al 2004). Children/adolescents without parents find themselves in situations where they are forced to drop out of school to care for their ailing parent, and on some occasions they take
up the responsibility of the breadwinners of their family and have to work to fend for the family (UNICEF, 2003a). With high cost of education in countries where there is no free education (even with free education the children still costs for books, school uniforms and meals that are not provided for by the government). Their school enrollment as shown by previous research is far much lower than those of non- orphaned children (UNICEF, 2006). Children with their biological parents are more likely to be better cared for and continue with their schooling even when they belong to poor families. Due to notable differences in roles played by mothers and fathers in these African communities, findings from other studies indicate that children who first lose their fathers are more likely to remain in fair care of their mothers and continue schooling unlike those who first lose their mothers (Case and Ardington 2006). Findings have also shown that children who are left in the care of their grandparents had higher school enrollment when compared with those left in the care of distant relatives or non-related caregivers in some Sub-Saharan countries (Case, et al. 2004).

Some of the children are left with the responsibility of caring for their siblings and sometimes with little or no help from relatives, neighbours or the community. In some occasions these children receive some help and support from church based support groups, local community based organizations, governmental and non-governmental organizations that have either supported the children while they live in their own home or in foster care or in institution (G. Foster, et al. 1996). According to the National Aids Control Council of Kenya’s report only 17 % of orphaned and vulnerable children receive some free basic external support for care and these are mainly those child headed household in the urban areas (National AIDS Control Council 2008).

Institutionalization has been advocated for by many as the solution to orphanhood, but has also received criticism as being expensive, creating dependency and being detrimental to children (Grooten 2006). Institutionalization stores up problems for society, which is ill equipped to cope with an influx of young adults who have not been socialized in the community in which they have to live and that it lacks government standards of care provision therefore they should only be used as a temporary measure (Grooten 2006). Other alternatives that have also been used to care for these vulnerable children is whereby church organizations recruit community members to visit orphans in their homes, where they live either with foster parents, grandparents or other relatives, or in child-headed households (Foster, et al. 1996). Although what has not been pointed out in majority of these findings is the situation of school enrollment for children in child/adolescent headed household. The general low trend in enrollment of orphaned children has long term consequences on both the lives of these children and their countries.
Child-headed Households

The rise of child headed households is a recent phenomenon, first noted in the 1980s within communities affected by AIDS and war torn areas. Sub-Saharan Africa is the hardest hit areas with the pandemic and many children have lost their parents or guardians to the disease (Grooten 2006). Majority of the children usually end up in the care of relatives, or non relative or even in institutions but there are those who are on their own and find themselves caring for each other. Consequently the meaning of childhood is redefined for many around the world by the death of their parents and one of the more unfortunate responses to a death in poorer households is removing the children (especially girls) from school (Case, et al. 2004). In many Kenyan families the children are left in an impoverished state with wealthier relatives wanting nothing to do with the children in fear of contracting HIV and stigma from society. At the moment the percentage of household being headed by children is significantly small and this is so because of the central role the extended family in past has played in taking up children who have lost either one or both parents, but with widespread effects of HIV/AIDS we find that the extended family can no longer keep up with the rapid demands of care and support for orphans (Nyambedha, 2004), therefore the number is bound to increase and measures need to be taken to ensure appropriate policies and support in the near future.

Findings from a study in Zimbabwe on factors leading to child headed household found that some of these children were left to live on their own because some of the close relatives such as uncles and unties did not want to take up the responsibility due to economic strains Foster, et al. (1997). In other instances the children opted to stay together in their own home due to risk of separation or in keeping family property, some it was the fear of mistreatment and exploitation by foster families, others did so to fulfill the promises made to dying parent, in other cases relatives lived close and could visit them often, some had no known close relative capable of taking care of them, and some relatives did not want to take care of orphaned children due to AIDs deaths fearing infection and stigmatization. Thurman, et al. (2008) point out that in Rwanda, studies found that three out of four children orphaned were isolated from community and one out of five was ill-treated by others.

Children who have lost either one or both of the parents already suffering from lose of affection, support and protection are further subjected to more psychological trauma when they are separated and sent to live with different families thereby dissolving the family, some are sent in to institutions, others to relatives or non relatives and others left to fend for themselves and with the responsibility of taking care of their siblings without any guidance (Ashford 2006). With increased poverty, lack of maturity and experience these children experience poor health, poor nutrition, do not attend
school and their development is stunted, limiting their possibilities of a good childhood that in the end affects their future ambitions (Lyons 2006).

A study on policy implications of the inadequate support in the Western Kenya region found out that the major problem areas for orphaned children were schooling, medical care, food and clothing (Nyambedha, et al. 2001). Some of deprived children end up on the streets where they may be sexually abused, infected with HIV or even engage in criminal activities (Schoenteich 2001; Ramphele 2001). The prospects for the children families living in the rural areas were seen to be further hampered considering the fact that majority of these families in these areas are wholly dependent on subsistence farming with no external support (Nyambedha, et al. 2001). Among the orphaned children in the study a few were taking care of their siblings with either little or no support from the extended relative.

**Methodological Approach**

 Majority of the research work done in this area have been conducted through guardians, teachers, institution managers, relatives, foster parents or other adults in the children’s life and therefore the children’s voices have been passive for a long time. In this study, I collected the data directly from the children, and it is my belief that it is the bearer of the problem issue that is the one best placed to tell it. Through a qualitative approach, I collected short narrations from the children/adolescents heading households using open ended interview guides.

**Qualitative Approach**

Qualitative research involves studying things in their natural settings, by attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 2008). It is best suited for exploring issues to gain in-depth understanding of phenomena (Silverman 2001; Ritchie and Lewis 2003), which makes it relevant for this study into the everyday life experiences of children in child/adolescent headed households. It emphasizes the importance of looking at variables, or subjects in the natural settings where they are found. With the aim of this study being to investigate the everyday life experiences of children heading households from their perspective, we get to understand interactions and relations within their social contexts. Qualitative research is mainly used in social sciences to understand social phenomenon within its cultural, social and situational context without imposing pre-existing expectations (Ritchie and Lewis 2003).
In this study, the qualitative method used in data collection was narratives by use of an interview guide with open-ended questions to initiate the telling of everyday life experiences of children in child/adolescent headed household and the stories recorded by use of audio tape recording. Sampling was purposive to draw a sample size of nine child-headed household and the interview sessions lasted from forty minutes to one hour. Due to the subjective nature of qualitative research, the findings from this study are not for drawing any statistical representation nor generalization to the situation of child headed household in the Western Kenya region.

**Narrative Interview**

Narratives are naturally occurring and deeply rooted human phenomenon, we have used and still use them for sharing knowledge, insights and feelings with others and often synonymous with storytelling (Poindexter 2002). Stories are also known to be a natural and persuasive way of communicating and people are able to express understanding of events and experience without suppression. Children/adolescents are able to express themselves well through telling stories of events about themselves and about others in the everyday life conversations. They engage in telling stories not only to communicate, but also to make sense and meaning of their lives for themselves and those of others. Studying narratives provides researchers with a rich understanding of how people live, experience and tell about their world (Schank 1995). Being grounded on the study of particular, narrative analysts interrogate intention and language, by giving much focus on how the teller puts together and arranges events, language use and visual images used to communicate meaning (Riessman 2007). The sample size used was small (six household heads) since it requires going into details with individual subjects which is almost impossible to achieve if one has a larger number of participants.

The interviewee and interviewer both co-constructed the meaning of the participants’ lives. Child/adolescent heads narrated their experiences of heading a household, caring for younger siblings, how they experience childhood, being responsible for decision making in the household and what they aspired for the future. As the researcher I got an experience of the children living it and provided a way of experiencing the effects without having to experiment with own life.

With the help of an interview guide questions such as, “can you tell me do how you make in everyday life matters such as food, clothing, schooling and health care problems in case of illness?” (See appendix 2) were asked. The questions were simple and open-ended to make it possible for the teller to express their experience in their own way.

During these sessions I did keenly listen, registered emotions stimulated through the discussions, took note of the language used and the feelings described because this was helpful in giving
meaning when analyzing and also noted areas where there were agreements or disagreements between the interviewer and interviewee, alongside the tape recording (Heather 2004). This provided me with a rich description and in-depth understanding of events that we may not be able to obtain in mainstream research methods (Riessman 2007).

**Interviews with Children/Adolescents**

In this study, the participants were of ages between 15 years and 23 years who have fairly well developed cognitive capacity to give narrations of their life events. Open-ended interviews gave the participants the opportunity to express their personal perspectives (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). In using interviews the children/adolescents were able to give voice to their interpretation and thoughts rather than rely only on adult representation and interpretation of their lives (Eder and Fingerson 2003). Human beings are also known for being able to make sense of their experience through narrations and the ability to do so develops fairly early and rapidly in children with no training or instruction, therefore making it appropriate for this study (Cohler 1982).

Narratives are valuable when dealing with emotional and personal issues and the interviewee is always free to express him/herself in the way best known to them, which was very vital in this work since the issues discussed were personal, unique and also very emotional because the children had lost both of their parents few years ago and had taken up responsibilities of heading the family, caring for siblings with almost no psychological, moral, economic and social support.

**Setting**

An international non-governmental organization working in Western Kenya region; SCC-VI Agroforestry programme helped with identifying and reaching the study participant in their areas of operation around the Lake Victoria Basin. Through Världens Barn Radiohjälpen, the organization receives funding for a project known as Children of the World Programme with the aim of developing and/or capacity building systems that can effectively contribute to better conditions for child and youth development through an improved physical, social and moral environment.

The study was conducted in Kisumu and Nyando divisions in Nyanza province within Western Kenya region in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to the 2009 population census, Nyanza province had a total population of 5,442,711 people; Nyando had a total population of 388,002 people with a growth rate of 3.4%, whereas Kisumu had a population of 578,539 people (CBS Kenya).
There are several AID projects working in the area on prevention, awareness and care of vulnerable groups of people. Around the Lake Victoria Region is the hardest hit area by HIV/AIDS pandemic and poverty in the country and many children have lost their parents and other close relatives. The extended family support safety nets are incapable of providing support and care that these children need due to their impoverished state of life, growth of individualism, urbanization and lack of government run welfare.

**Data Collection**

Open-ended interviews and specific probes were used since they are flexible and useful for gaining in-depth information of people’s experiences, perceptions and beliefs. The child/adolescents heading household narrated their life experiences by telling their past, present life situation and what they thought of their near future state (Riessman 2007). The individual interview sessions lasted from between forty minutes to one hour with each participant. The sessions were audio-tape recorded to enable better accuracy when representing what was told (Riessman2007). Eight of the interviews were conducted in the local language Luo and one in English and later in the day translated to English.

**Participants**

The study participants were child/adolescent heading household during parents’ illness and after parents’ death (double orphans), as result of HIV/AIDS, civil wars and other natural causes in Sub-Saharan Africa. Some of the children were still going to school; others had just completed the secondary school education, whereas there were those who had dropped out of school because they were not able to afford the schooling costs and had taken up the responsibility of caring for their siblings.

The process of identifying the participants begun days before I got into the field with making appointment dates, through an officer working for SCC& Vi Agroforestry programme with Children of the world project, who with the help of local administrative leaders identified and made appointments with the study participants. Every participant was visited in their homes, where a written informed consent was obtained detailing the purpose and intention of the work and that their participation was voluntary and confidential (see appendix 1).

A total of nine household of ages between 15 years and 23 years living in the rural areas of Western Kenya within Nyando (5 participants), and Kisumu (4 participants) divisions were visited and interviewed for the study, but only six interviews were used in the analysis. The other three that
were not used was due to 1) one was a test interview 2) the presence of a local community development worker compromised the session, because the participant behaved in manner suggesting she had to answer the questions in relation to what the organization was doing and kept looking at the officer and 3) the exercise was conducted during a heavy rain and the recorded sound was not very audible to translate. Three of the Child/adolescent headed households were living with their siblings in their parents’ house after the death of both parents, one household had moved back to live in their own parents after a year in foster care with relative, and two were living in lone households with younger siblings living in foster families. Those of younger than 15 years of age were left out since they were thought of not having the cognitive capability to give proper account of their life experiences through narrations. Below are brief descriptions of the participants, and the names used to identify them are pseudonyms.

Majority of the child/adolescent headed household were headed by the girl child and is as a result of that in the African family systems, there were and still are clear differences in gender division of labour, whereby women take more responsibilities in the reproductive work, whereas the men dominate in the productive work. Although in this study I ended up with an equal number of three male and three female heads, who had taken up full responsibilities of running their families irrespective of their gender.

**Background description of the study participants:**

**Akinyi:** Is 15 years old, she has one brother and two sisters. The older sister is married and stays far away from home. Her younger brother and sister are staying with their foster families who are not relatives to them. She rarely sees them since they live far from their home. Her younger brother does some time visits when he is not going to school for instance on weekends, but she has never been invited to visit him where he lives with the family that took him. She did her primary education examination last year and now she is just staying at home alone. She did not have any relatives living close.

**Ochieng**: Is 23 years old, has six siblings. Two are older and stay away from home. Of the remaining five he is the eldest. They have two relatives staying close by, that is their grandmother and step mother. Although they live alone at home and he is the one responsible for his siblings. He is the one taking care of them.
**Adhiambo**: Is 18 years old, she completed her secondary education last year. She has one brother who is handicapped and two sisters who are all in school. The brother and one sister are in boarding school. They have relatives living nearby; their uncle and his family. She is the eldest and takes care of her younger siblings. She is more of a parent to her siblings than one of them because she is responsible for their well being.

**Odhiambo**: Is 18 years old, and in secondary school at form four. He has three sisters and two brothers. Currently he is living with one sister, while the others siblings are in school but when the schools close they come home. Two of them got sponsorship for their education, but the other three are without support. One lives in school and never comes back. They have no close relatives living nearby, their father had six brothers but they have all died together with their wives.

**Otieno**: Is 16 years old, he has two older brothers. Parents died when he was 9 years. In the past years he used to live with his brother in-law who took him in as his child. At the moment he lives alone and gets support from one of his biological brother who is now partially taking care of him.

**Anyango**: Is 18 years old and a student in secondary school form 4. She has six siblings; four brothers and two sisters. They have relatives staying close by; their grandmother and other distant relatives. She is the eldest among the siblings, therefore responsible for all the others. After the parents died, she was living with her grandmother and her siblings with other relative in the village. They were scattered all over and she stopped going to school for a year, her siblings were also not going to school regularly and performed poorly. She decided that they move back to their parent’s house and started to farm and feed them. At first it was very difficult but after six months they started to make money from selling farm produce such as vegetable and all resumed schooling.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was done using qualitative content analysis to interpret the meaning and understanding of the children heading households’ gave of their lives. It is “a research method for subjective interpretation of the content of text data through a systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsiu-Fang and Shannon, 2005 p.3).
The process begun with listening to the audio-tape recorded data and recording of the narratives using the participants’ words verbatim, then reading and rereading each from the beginning to the end. Transcriptions and translation from the local language of Luo to English was then done.

Through coding, the data was simultaneously reduced by dividing it into analyzable units (Heather 2004). Coding of data to establish categories & subcategories and patterns within the story was done by classifying responses and references made to popular discourses to establish some commonalities and differences among the research participant’s perspectives; categories/themes that connected were therefore clustered for interpretation (Ritchie and Lewis 2003).

I did use different colour highlighter to put together the categories that emerged and later condensed the data with the main research questions being used as frame of reference during the process (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). The process was quite time consuming and challenging but very beneficial because I got up close with the stories, and did not have to spend a lot of energy on briefing and debriefing the transcribers (Heather 2004).

Interpretation followed after the stories had been coded and categories and themes identified. This involved interrogation and systematic exploration of the data to identify the style and direction of stories as well as contradictions (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Heather 2004). Through keen, creative intellectual examination of the data codes, I generated the theoretical ideas that guided the analysis of the findings (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). The process was quite challenging when the interviewee did not have a clear sequence in the story and kept going back and forth but this was dealt with by dividing the story into sets of ideas expressed to generate broader conceptual frameworks (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Finally were the writing and presentation of analyzed findings and the conclusions drawn that were I did with precaution not to draw conclusions about truths since narratives are always subject to reconstruction and reinterpretation (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Heather 2004).

**Validity and Reliability Issues**

Like many other qualitative research approaches, narratives face the challenge of validity and reliability or trustworthiness of the stories collected and of the interpretations made. The data and the investigator’s analysis presented usually are partial, committed and incomplete; therefore the investigator or researcher is obliged to give convincing arguments that persuade to his or her audiences on trustworthiness (Riessman, 2007:184). Narratives mainly “seek to elaborate and
investigate individual interpretation and world view of complex and human-centred events” (Webster and Mertova 2007:89). This I dealt with by ensuring that there was coherence between the narrator’s story and my interpretation as the investigator to gain trustworthiness (Riessman, 2007). To achieve coherence between the story and the written analysis in the study, I used parts of the stories.

A good research should persuade the readers and to do so I presented the data in ways that showed the data was genuine, and interpretations were plausible, reasonable, and convincing (Riessman 2007). The story telling sessions were audio-tape recorded to enable better accuracy when representing what was told and the theoretical claims supported with quotations of what was shared.

Generalization of finding across populations is not done in this study since I did not expect to discover or make such claims but strived to explore and expose diversity and variation in order to find greater meaning on the subject matter, by focusing on individual truths rather than on identifying generalisable and repeatable events (Webster and Mertova 2007). The main focus in this study of the everyday life experience of children in child/adolescent headed households was more on depth than on breadth in giving more detailed account of events.

**Ethical Consideration**

Carrying out research with children and the disabled does raise a lot of legal and ethical issues that must be well taken care of before proceeding with their involvement in studies. Consent and confidentiality are central and in many cases we find that research can be prevented when the risks seem harmful to the participants in social sciences.

Written informed consents of the children/adolescents were obtained. Information on the nature, purpose, duration, procedure and the benefits and possible risks of research was (see appendix 1) provide and the participants were guaranteed confidentiality of information shared (APA 2010). The participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about any aspect of the research, at any time during or after their participation in the research (APA 2010).

The child/adolescent heads were asked if they could take part in the study and that participation was voluntary, meaning they had the right to decline and participant was free to withdraw from study at any level if they felt they were not able to continue without any form of penalty (APA 2010). The study participants consisted of children who are able to consent for the study participation (from age 15-23 years) and were actively involved in care provision for their younger siblings.
Theoretical Framework

Theories are systematic collections of concepts and relations that are used in science to guide interpretation of ideas, predicting the future by helping us understand the past and the present and in explaining the how and why questions in research (White and Klein 2002).

In analyzing the data, I use three theoretical models; social-ecological systems, symbolic interaction and resilience theories as discussed in the sub-sessions that follow.

Social-ecological Systems

Urie Bronfenbrenner one of the well known scholars in the field of development psychology, is a primary contributor in development theories and a leader in research works that examined the family, economy, and political structure as influencing development into adulthood. His greatest work put together aspects of sociology and developmental psychology and laid an enduring foundation for future approaches. Ecological systems model was conceptualized by Bronfenbrenner (1979) to explain how child growth and development is affected by everything in their environment. The relationships between individuals and their environments are viewed as "mutually shaping". He saw an individual's experience "as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 22).

Ecological systems model, also known as “development in Context”, views individuals as being embedded in five types of nested environmental systems, with bi-directional influences within and between the systems (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Each system contains norms, roles and rules that shape development. The systems are microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. The interactions that occur within and between the overlapping ecosystems influence each other (Bronfenbrenner 1979). How a system interacts with a child will have an effect on how the child grows and how the child acts or reacts to the system will in turn affect how they react to the child.

In his most recent conceptualization of bio-ecological model, he explains that development takes place through processes of progressively more complex interaction between an active child and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner 2004). He points out that a child’s development is determined by what she or he experiences in the settings where time is spent and for the interactions to be effective, they should take place regularly over extended periods of time (1979).
The model focuses on the changing relations between individuals and the environments in which they live. In studying human development we need to see within, beyond and across how several systems interact, e.g. family, school, community, and economy (Bronfenbrenner 2004). This provides us with insight into all the factors that play role in the growth and development of individuals and how all factors are intertwined and impacting on the development cycle, which can be used in developing government policies and programs that can benefit the society in dealing with issues such as the rapid growth of orphaned children living without the care and supervision of an adult in the developing world.

Bronfenbrenner agrees that humans are social beings, meaning they are not able to develop in isolation, that is without interactions with others such as their family, home, community and society and the interactions among these environments are key to development (Bronfenbrenner 1979). He suggests that there are multiple levels of interacting systems such as biological, psychological, social, cultural, economical and political which result in growth, development and change.

According to Bronfenbrenner (2004), the differences we find in individual’s interms of what they know, how they develop and how competent they may be are all the result of the support, guidance and structure of the society in which they live. This model analyzes how well the individual or family fits with their environment basing on the assumption that when a person or group is connected and engaged within a supportive environment then functioning improves. He adds that to find out the best fit for an individual we have to look at the difference between the amount of social support needed by the person and the amount of social support available in the existing environment (Bronfenbrenner 2004). For this study I look at the kind of support available to children in child/adolescent headed household and what they need.
The social ecological systems model concept is represented as a series of overlapping circles. Each of the systems is characterised by roles, norms and relationships. The model explains how individuals relate with their environments and the bi-directional form of interactions that bring about change and development, which gives us the ability to see how our lives are balanced between every aspect of our environment (Bronfenbrenner 2004).

It also points out that individuals are likely to experience a range of contexts that are shared with others, but the interactions of individuals may have different consequences on different people. The ecological model helps in developing policies and programs that can benefit children and more particularly in the case of this study are those children in CHH. According to Bronfenbrenner, child
rearing requires public policies that provide opportunity, status, resources, encouragement, example, stability, and above all parenthood, primarily by parents, but also by significant other adults in the child’s environment both within and outside the home (2004).

Microsystem is the small immediate and closed environment in which an individual operates such as family, peers, neighborhood and school. Individuals in their own microsystems are constantly shaped by, not only their environment, but by the encounters and other individuals they come in contact with. There are multiple interactions at this primary level which influences the child’s learning, behavior and development such as parent support, school, education, peers, and culture. The family is the basic unit in the human ecosystem and the heart of the social system, and in keeping a healthy society it has to be nurtured so as to thrive (Bronfenbrenner 2004). At this level personal relationships and overlapping interactions influence individual differently depending on their personality, behaviour and social context in which they find themselves. For instance, as children develop they are brought up into roles with their caregiver other than mother: school, peers, extended family members such as aunties, grandparents etc. These social roles and social systems outside the family play an increasing part in shaping the child’s abilities, motives and behaviour (Bronfenbrenner 2004). All these interactions represent significant transitions for the developing child in that there are new roles and interactions with the immediate environment and increasingly distant environments (White and Klein 2002). Children/youths from the CHH both shape and influence their environment through reciprocal interactions which over time impact on their development.

The next level is mesosystem; it describes how the different parts of a child’s microsystem work together for the sake of the child. For example family experiences to school experiences together educate the child. For instance, in this study children in child headed household with no close adult relations at home may have difficulties developing positive relations with teachers because they lack the link that parents provide in the network of interaction.

Family being the most intense, durable and influential part of mesosystem and its influence extends to all aspects of the individuals development. In cases of instability and unpredictability, its children get little interaction with parents and other important adults such as other close relatives (Addison 1992) and this can at times spill over to school settings and affect the child in a destructive way. The breakdown of a child’s microsystem (family) leaves a child with no tools to explore other parts of its environment. Without proper adult’s supervision and love, children look for attention in
inappropriate places that may give rise to deviant behaviours. For example engage in drug abuse, prostitution and other crimes, thereby making them more prone to exploitation and abuse.

Exosystem involves links between a social setting in which the individual does not have an active role but can indirectly have a strong impact on the individual's development (Bronfrenbrenner 1979). These include structures such as the community health services, social support groups (formal and informal) that provide material resources, values and context within which adult relationships required for development operate. For example, children growing in a weak or broken exosystem with no one to voice them may get worse negative impact. A child’s mesosystem can be further affected by forces such as economic pressures, political decisions and other life transitions such as parents divorce or death of a parent(s) such as in the case of children in CHH. (White and Klein 2002). And available of resources and a functional welfare system within the individual child’s community will determine how well he/she can access the support need to experience positive development.

Macrosystem describes the culture in which individuals live. Cultural contexts include developing and industrialized countries socioeconomic status, poverty, and ethnicity. For instance unaccompanied children living on their own in a developing country with weak welfare system are bound to experience strain in their development than those in developed country with functional social welfare systems. Macrosystem influence the what, how, when, and where we carry out our relations (Bronfrenbrenner 2004). Many of the developing countries have weaker economic status, with huge numbers of their people languishing in poverty and this trickle down to individual family’s capacity to provide for their members. For instance in Sub-Saharan Africa thousands of children dies of hunger, malnutrition and preventable diseases every year.

Last but not least level is chronosystem which is concerned with the patterning of environmental events and transitions over the life course, as well as socio-historical circumstances (White and Klein 2002). In this study chronosystem level of socio-ecological system model is beyond the scope of this study, since it would involve looking at the changes and events over the children’s life courses which require a longer period of time.

In concluding this explanation we can say that the functioning of the whole system is dependent on the interactions of the subsystems. The analysis of this study focuses on the bi-directional interactions within the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem levels and how the different contexts influence their development. Human experiences and actions are best understood
when studied in context and with the circumstances in which they occur. The social ecological systems model provides the ideal theoretical base for discussing the different social contexts that influence and mould the everyday life experiences of children/adolescents in CHH.

**Resilience**

*How can we explain the difference on how some of these children who may be exposed to the same life adversity end up developing differently?*

As individuals we are only able to manage a certain level of stress in our lives and be able to revert from life adversity states to our normal levels of functioning and this had been argued to be dependent on various factors of which social contexts is a part of.

Resilience is the ability to “bounce back” from stressful or challenging experiences, such as death of parents (Masten and Reed 2002) and be able to survive and thrive under extreme on-going pressure without acting in dysfunctional ways. It does involve one being able to adapt to changes and approach negative life events positively and constructively.

In discussing resilience we have two major factors that play role i.e. the positive factors and the risk factors (Masten and Reed 2002). Risk and protective factors function at different level; household, community, wider social systems such as culture or government. It is argued that the source of one’s rebound and recovery for those who are able to bounce back, are attributed to the protective factors; inner capacity and more so resources such as strong sense of self, good social skills, sense of purpose in life, self control, individual factors such as genetics, personality, ethnicity, and social factors such as socio-economic background, supportive caregivers and geographical proximity to others, social and community support such as support from family, friends, community, and school (Masten and Reed 2002).

**Symbolic Interaction**

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective on self and society base on the ideas of George Herbert Mead a distinguished pragmatist and one of the founders of social psychology. He was interested in understanding how individual develops socially by interacting with others and the society. According to Mead, humans are a product of social interactions, who through interactions are confronted with issues and situations that make them act in certain ways (Liebendorfer 1960). Human life is lived in symbolic domain. And the symbols are culturally derived social objects that provide the means through which reality is constructed. Social life goes on because the meanings people give to the symbols are shared and agreed upon through social interaction by the members of
that society. Mead argues that when people have same symbols they can learn to live and survive in their environment (White and Klein, 2002). And for interaction to take place, each person involved must interpret the meaning and intentions of the other. Mead argues that human beings actions towards other people or things are based on the meaning they assign to them. People think and act according to meaning they attribute to their actions and context (White and Klein, 2002).

According to the symbolic interaction theory of mind, self and society, the individual become a self after developing a mind in the social experience concept (Liebendorfer 1960). The most important in symbolic interaction is the self as a symbolic representation of that which did an act (I) and that which was acted upon (ME). This means that we human beings are capable of representing ourselves as subjects and objects (White and Klein, 2002). The self being founded on symbols and consciousness.

For example, in role taking we represent ourselves as social objects (me). The self is constructed through consciousness of I and Me; as an objects it has the perspective of specific others but constructed from the generalized other perspective. The interaction between the two determines our actions and behaviour (White and Klein 2002). Therefore symbols are important in understanding human behaviour.

People engage in role taking and making through interactions with significant others within various contexts. And in taking up roles there are expectations both from the person taking them and others about what it takes. Mead termed this process of interaction ‘role taking’; whereby one takes the role of another and imaginatively places themselves in the other person’s position (White and Klein, 2002), hence necessitating understanding. In every society we have a social structure with positions, norms and roles. Individuals through socialization learn and take up various positions through a transition, and these positions come with roles and expectation to be fulfilled (White and Klein, 2002). The role expectations should be clear to both actors and in occasions where clarity is missing, role contradictions are experienced which are most likely to cause conflict. When an individual is faced with multiple roles and he or she has insufficient resources to carry out the role, the overload of expectations can be overwhelming and cause role strain because the individual is not able to live up to them (White and Klein, 2002).
Figure 2: General theoretical Framework structure

The social ecological system is the overall system that regulates the behavior and actions of the people living in this system. Symbolic interaction is one factor that determines individual’s relations and interactions within and between the sub-system levels that facilitates resilience. Resilience is the strategy to survive in this system of regulators by coping in its best way with them.

Results and Analysis Discussion

In this section is the presentation of the findings and analysis of the meaning children in child/adolescent headed households give to their everyday life experiences within their social context and how the interactions influence their development. The established themes & subthemes are discussed and supported by direct quotes from the narrations to support the findings. Some of the categories derived from the interpretation are related to each other, but have multiple meanings within the same context. The data analysis is done with the help of social ecological systems theory, symbolic interactionism theory and resilience theory. The main themes that emerged during the analysis were; social isolation and loneliness, childhood and parenting responsibilities, economic situation, support systems and future aspirations as discussed in the sections that follow.

Theme One: Social Isolation and Loneliness

The family is often regarded as the cornerstone of the society, the primary provider of support, protection and socialization of its member who are connected by kinship, marriage, birth or choice (Kayongo and Onyango 1984). Over time its structure and functions have been changing, which have led to the emergence of various forms and changes in relations, of which the child headed family is one of the latest forms. In this inquiry family relations within and without were seen as symbolic factors in going about the everyday’s life experiences of children in child/adolescent headed families, which had changed tremendously after the death of both parents leading to social isolation and loneliness when the children were split and separated into foster care.
Separation of siblings

After the death of both parents in most of the households visited for this inquiry, the relatives and well wishers had taken foster responsibility for some of the children who were very young and in other cases where there were no capable relatives to do so, some of the children were put in institutional care and received financial and material aid from organizations, whereas some who were fairly older adolescents continued to live at their parents farm. These different placements of the children led to the splitting and separation of the children hence loneliness and isolation. In two of the households visited the participants were more or less living in lone family household with younger siblings in foster care. And in the other four the children had opted to live in parents homestead with the eldest child taking the heading role.

The adolescents in lone family households felt lonely and isolated since they had been separated from their siblings and had very little and sometime no contact with their siblings. Fifteen years old Akinyi when asked whether she thought her life was different from other children had this to say:

Akinyi: (Sighs then pauses)... Living alone is quite tough, my younger brother and sister are staying with their foster families who are not relatives to us. I rarely see them since they are far from here. My younger brother does some time visit on weekends when he is not going to school for instance on weekends, but I have never visited him where he lives with the family that took him. I do not have any relatives living close by.

Anyango had this to say:

Anyango: ....After the parents died, I was living with my grandmother and my other siblings with other relatives in the village. We were scattered all over and I did stop going to school for a year, my siblings also were not going to school regularly.

Odhiambo: I have 3 sisters and 2 brothers but at the moment it is only two of us are living at home, the others are in school but when the schools close they come home. Two of them got people who have sponsored their education. One lives in school and does never come back. We do not have close relatives living nearby, my father had six brothers but they have all died together with their wives.

He also mentioned of not taking part in activities that some of his peers did, “I also do not attend local night dance ceremonies (disco matanga) around like other youths in my age do. I do spend
most of my time here at home working”. In Otieno’s case the relationship with his foster parents had become abusive with beatings and too much chores and finally had to move back to parents’ house:

**Otieno:** I had some problems, though my brother in-law was very harsh and his wife was also very harsh. I just continued to stay with them and I did not have any problem at that time. Then later there were some mistakes which we used to make and he would then beat us very badly and even abuse me.

Anyango and her siblings had difficulties creating same the relations as they had with their parents in their new environments where they lived with relatives, which led to them attending school irregularly and being out of school for a whole year because there was no one mainly interested in their well being. With no strong mutual emotional attachment from some of the adults left to care for them, Anyango and her siblings’ schooling and performance went down. Akinyi has lost contact with her siblings by not being able to visit because they were taken in by non relative families living far away in the urban areas. Odhiambo’s two younger siblings are living in orphaned children institutions and him spending most of his free time alone. Otieno experienced hostility in his new home that made it impossible for him to adjust to his new family. The extended family members such as the grandparents and the other relatives who were caring for some of these children were not able to play the parenting role well; therefore the children decided to move back to their parents’ home.

The children’s emotional, social, financial, and educational needs are suppose to be met within the family at the microsystem level, but when there was no adult or significant (mother&/father) others, the children encountered difficulties (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The richness of their microsystem (child-parent, parent-parent) relations and interactions and doing things together should improves their behaviour and development. The family influences all other aspects of the child’s development through input and behaviour related feedback within it. In this study the social relationships and proximal interactions of the children/adolescents in the child/adolescent-headed household were not as strong and diverse as they should be, after the loss their parents and being split to live with other families. Therefore the normal development of these children was being impaired by isolation not being able to actively participate in a progressive complex reciprocal activity on a regular basis over an extended period of time with their parents (Bronfebrenner 2004).
Theme Two: Childhood and Parenting Responsibilities

*If the children and youth of a nation are afforded opportunity to develop their capacities to the fullest, if they are given the knowledge to understand the world and the wisdom to change it, then the prospects for the future are bright. In contrast, a society which neglects its children, however well it may function in other respects, risks eventual disorganization and demise* (Bronfenbrenner, 1973).

**Childhood**

Socialization of a child is a process through which social and cultural continuity is obtained and is experienced in stages, of which the family, school, community and peers play a role (White and Klein 2002). The process is marked by two stages; the play and game stages. Being able to play involves taking the role of others which helps with learning and through interactions with the significant others that they develop the ability to regulate own behavior (White and Klein 2002). Childhood is a stage in life that has mainly been associated with less or no responsibilities but play. Play at this stage is associated with being free from responsibilities, and responsibility at this level means not having to work for an income (Wyness 2006). For children in child/adolescent headed household this is not the typical child life. In fulfilling the roles and responsibilities of fending for themselves and siblings, they have very little time for them to engage in play or interact with other children.

**Ochieng:** *My siblings after school do not have free time because they have to help with housework which is a big burden on them, therefore they do not have time to spend with other children, because they have to leave very early in the morning to get to school and get back home late at around six in the evening and have household chores to do. It is only on weekends that they have some free time but they do not spend it playing because they choose to help me around in the home. So they have very little time to interact with other children.*

**Anyango:** *We have to work a lot on the farm to grow vegetables that my siblings help with selling in the evening after school and on weekends at a local market. When I have some free time I do spend it with women older than me because they are more able to advice me than with girls of my age because I feel if I ask them anything they will just answer as children.*
It is clear from the findings quoted above that play and social interaction time was limited in Ochieng’s household, for his younger siblings spent the little free time they had helping each other with household chores and trying to ensure that they could have a meal at the end of the day alongside the demands of taking part in schooling activities. The only connections they had was with significant other adults at school, which on its own without the parent to child link is weak. One instance which seemed quite peculiar was of an adolescent head who expressed that spending time with peers was more of a waste of time with no substantial discussion and support for an adolescent who had to provide for the family. Spending time with peers according to Anyango was lacking in substance that could help her in her new role as parent to her siblings she was expected to make decisions in the family, therefore she instead opted to spend more time with older women who had same expectations and responsibility who could give her the guidance and support that she could not get if she asked her peers. Her behaviour, interaction and relationships were being determined by her new position’s roles and expectations. Ochieng’ and Anyango who took part in the study had been responsible for their siblings for long periods of time ranging from three years and more, and seemed to have adjusted from being a children or just adolescents to being an adult with provision and care responsibilities.

From the above quotation we find that even though these children/adolescents were staying on their own and fending for themselves they had some level of social contact with other in the neighborhood. Basic life skills and cultural knowledge are often learnt to children from parents and close family relations through daily interactions within the home environment (micro systems) (Bronfebrenner 2004), but with this lacking because these children in child/adolescent headed families stay on their own with no significant others interaction, they are more prone to abuse and exploitation and seeing that they had developed relations with other adults within the community was a positive factor for them to have interactions with adult personalities for support and guidance.

The children in child/adolescent headed household are affecting and being affected by what happens in the settings in which they spent time such as school, neighborhood, with friends and with family, and the experiences in these settings determine their development (Bronfebrenner 2004). Growing up in a family setting with no or very minimal interactions and connections with significant others these children are more likely not to experience normal socialization process in the family setup and due to the lack of linkage that should be provided by the parents with other micro-subsystems such as school, they also experience exclusion.
Parental Responsibilities

In a conventional family life, parents play central roles in the care, provision, guidance and socialisation of their children into the societies and provide them with necessary life skill that they need to use in their day to day interactions with other people and in life transition, but in the absence of parents as it is in this inquiry, this function is lost in the family system or left to the eldest sibling who has not gone through gradual transition into this position.

Child/adolescent heads, with no role models find themselves in adopting the de facto adult/parenting roles and responsibilities of providing leadership and major decision-making in the running and maintainance of the household and caring for younger siblings too early in life.

Adhiambo, an eighteen year old girl who just completed her secondary education the year before says,

**Adhiambo:** *I am the eldest and take care of my younger siblings. I am more of a parent to my siblings than one of them because I am the one responsible for their well being....*

Ochieng’, a household head taking care of four of his younger siblings all attending school expressed how he experienced heading a household/family:

**Ochieng':** *I do feel that I have a heavy burden compared others “I am the one taking care of them; I take care of the animals, and work on the farm. My siblings go to school quite far away early in the morning. I have to prepare lunch food for then in good time so when they come back they can eat and go back in time. I just completed school and I should be going for some training somewhere but with the situation here I am not able to leave. If I do my sibling will not go to school. Sometime back I got an offer from someone who wanted me to go and work for him, but when I told my siblings they started to cry that I was not going to leave them behind but take them with me which was not possible so I chose to stay with them. I cannot develop myself or even buy myself nice clothes and have own things because at the moment all the money we make goes to our daily basic needs and my siblings are still in the primary school and will soon be joining secondary school that means even more and tougher burden for me.*

**Anyango:** *after our parents died, I was living with my grandmother and my other siblings with other relative in the village. We were scattered all over and I did stop going to school for a year, my siblings also were not going to school regularly... I decided that we move back to our parent’s house and we started to farm and feed ourselves. At first it was very*
difficult but after six months we started to get some money from selling farm produce such as vegetable and we all resumed going to school.

For instance Ochieng’, from the quotations above had just completed his secondary education, his ambitions to get some professional training and get into the job market, is stalled because he has to be home providing care and maintenance for his siblings. He finds himself in a life situation that does not provide many options to choose from, yet he still is in need for parental guidance and support especially in occasions when he encounters difficulties in meeting their needs. He feels obliged to make sacrificial adjustments in his lives to ensure that his siblings are provided for; forcing him to put his life ambitions on hold as he commits to keeping the family intact and functioning. Adhiambo on the hand also faced with same situation being the eldest in the family, has taken up the role of being a parent for her siblings who are all still in school and she has to provide for their daily meals, since their parents are not around anymore and the relatives or other adults to foster her and her siblings. In Anyango’s case she had to step in and take charge of heading the family when her life and that of her siblings worsened in foster care and they dropped out of school.

Having not gone through the gradual process of role transition from one position to another, and having to play to multiple roles at the same time such as; provide care for siblings, fend for the family, and at the same time being children or a student, these children pre-maturely take up the head of household position with insufficient resources to carry out the roles and responsibilities they experience role overload and strain (White and Klein, 2002). With multiple roles (a parent, a child/adolescent, sibling and a student) at hand these household heads experience an overload of expectations which contradict with each other. Many times the role expectations of heading the house conflicted with their roles as children/adolescents who should be in school or spending time with peers, and this led to the feeling of a burdensome life full of despair and making sacrifice. Despite the fact that they were still young, socially, emotionally and cognitively immature, they had courageously taken up the responsibilities of caring for each other. This shows that their symbolic representation of self as a social object (head of household) played the bigger role in determining their actions and behaviour (White and Klein 2002), therefore they tried to lived up to the expectations of parenting than being a sibling of the others.
Theme Three: Economic Situation

There are three sub-themes discussed under economic situation theme which are; the earning strategies the children use to meet their daily needs, the hardships they experience that result from their limited financial capabilities and other financial support that they received as discussed in the sections that follow.

Earning Strategies

Access to money is central in the maintenance and running of a family, and by default this is a role fulfilled by parents in the providing for their children/family. Usually the role of working is left to the adult parents and or significant other adults in a family and often no expectation on the children to work outside the home. In families/households where we only had Children/adolescents heading, the role was played by the eldest child/sibling after the death of both the parents, took up the responsibilities if they were not taken into foster care. The children/adolescents playing the provider role for their families experience extreme economic strains that influenced their life choices in many ways.

Akinyi: I have to weed other people’s farms in the village to get some money that I can use for food and other basic items that I need. But sometimes when there is no work I just stay at home. For instance on Sundays many people here do not work not even allow others to work on their farms, so on such days at times I have nothing to eat.

Ochieng': I do not have a job but we do a lot of farming, and sell some of the produce to buy food and other items we need. We also have two oxen that when other people want to plough they come and hire our services so from that we also get money for buying food and other things and even school uniforms. We also get our food from the farm. Even before you came I was in the farm planting for this season.

Adhiambo: we have a farm where we grow vegetables that we sell in the evening after school at a local market. I also look for work such as planting and digging for other people in the area.

Ochieng’s household largely depend on the two and a half acre farm to produce enough own consumption and some to sale, they also sell their labour to neighbouring farmers to enable them make it. Akinyi has learnt and adapted coping measures that help her in dealing with the everyday practical life matters. And every penny she manage to make through working or get from well
wishers is used with caution and careful planning and most of her time she spent on trying to ensure she earn some money. The Economic pressure has made them learn and practice what many other children in their age have not. Anyango and siblings have ventured into farming for commercial purposes, but this activity alone did not provide stability in the household economy, therefore to supplement she engaged in brewing illegal alcohol, hence exposing her to alcoholic people and even risking prosecution and jail.

Borrowing was also a means of getting by, but was almost inaccessible to many after some time since their close neighbours that they could borrow from were equally deprived. In other cases, if they got to borrow money paying it back was a problem and soon they became bad debtors and not many were willing to help anymore, at times they had to use borrowed money to pay older debts. And in other cases close relatives did not live within reach to support, and often the ones who took up fostering responsibilities for orphaned young children did not keep close contact with the adolescents left to fend for themselves.

The breakdown of their basic micro- subsystem; the family (death of parents) had left the children with insufficient tools to explore other parts of their environment (Bronfebrenner 2004), which had led to them engaging in activities that exposed them to abuse and exploitation such as brewing of illegal alcohol and engaging in sexual relationships for favours. Their position and life situation was being tested by their capability of living up to the expectation within their community and this was quite challenging because they had insufficient skills and resources (White and Klein 2002). These children lead a life full of uncertainty of when and whether there will be a next meal. When they are not able to sufficiently meet their needs, and there are no well structured support systems in the community to provide the less fortunate members with opportunities these children experienced strain and uncertainty in their life. Their economic situation at the family sub-system was a big challenge since the parents or adult providers are absent and the children having taken up the de facto adult role with no regular income alongside being expected to continue schooling have to find jobs to earn money for their family use (Bronfebrenner 2004).

**Schooling & Hardship Conditions**

Meeting their basic needs is a challenge considering the factor that they have no regular income source in the family. Their survival incomes are irregular, sporadic and some depended on the seasons of the year such as working in farms is only possible during the rainy seasons. In other
cases they got support from relatives and community based organization which at times they had to wait for a long time before they could get it. The children had also shown tremendous abilities in using the little resources they had creatively and wisely. They had come up with survival tactics when it came to feeding, of which some may have detrimental effects on their health hence growth and development such as skipping of meals, eating foods lacking in key nutrients (unbalanced diet) and even wholly depending on meals provided at school.

**Anyango:** For us at times we go to school without breakfast and sometimes there is no food when we get back for lunch so we maybe only take porridge....

**Otieno:** Sometimes he (my brother) does bring me some money and at times he does not appear for days so I even go without food (referring to his brother who is his guardian at the moment). I usually depend on the lunch meal we are provided with at the school.

**Adhiambo:** It is a difficult life we have, for instance now others children are in school and I am at home because I have not paid enrollment fee for the final examination and I do not know if I will be able to pay it before the deadline which is on Monday the 15th April.

**Akinyi:** I did my primary education examinations last year and now I am just staying at home alone. I would like to go to secondary school but I lack school fee. I am not able to get assistance from the government because they are only able to help students with 300 and above points but I got 208 points....

**Odhiambo:** I am just struggling. For instance when we close school, I do look for small jobs in the village to get money and some farm produce such as maize that I take with me to school when we open again to pay for my school fee. I also do work at the school during the holidays and the money I make is transferred to cater for my education fee to the school. When our parents were alive we had a very good life because we did not have to look for food and go to school, it was their work responsibility to look for food.

Adhiambo and her siblings, not being able to get what they needed when they needed it and not being able to decide on what support they got leads to frustration when they compared themselves with other children or peers with parents in the community. Adhiambo was working at the farm when visited, she had been sent away from school, because she had not paid examination fees and
did not know how she was going to raise the amount needed in time to be enrolled for the examination. Her feelings of uncertainty, had affected her ability to perform well in school, because she never knew whether the school administration would allow her to continue being in school and how she would get the money to pay examination fee in time. Being able to attend and participate in schooling activities is an important aspect of development at this stage for these children, although achieving the stability needed still seemed like a dream far away because they experienced exclusion from schooling because they had experienced difficulties in meeting the costs such as pay school fee, examination fees, buying books and school uniforms.

Skipping meals and at times having nothing at all and having to be in school to learn resulted in poor health for Anyango and her siblings which directly influenced performance at school. Akinyi a fifteen year old girl eager and full of ambition for her future was not able to access the bursary fund set aside for needy student and seemed to be suffering from high levels of distress and feelings of self-pity. Odhiambo’s limited financial capability, was forcing him to spend time finding means and ways to earn money to enable him pay for his education and feed his sibling and these multiple expectations seemed to be hampering his level of concentration and performance in school. Juggling between schooling and fending for the family featured as a very trying moment that lead to deep feelings of misery, loneliness and longing of the days when their parents were present.

The socio-economic conditions that these children live in has a great impact on their physical, social, emotional, and psychological health, and hence their development (White and Klein 2002). Their health is determined by the effective interactions between the various sub-systems in which they live (Bronfenbrenner 1979). A general decline in the standard of living is increasing the vulnerability of these children to poor education, child labour, exploitation and unemployment.

The family as argued in this model is the principal context of development, the happenings within it and interactions with other settings are dependent on each other (Bronfebrenner 2004). The interaction and relationship between the subsystems (family and school) are not working together, because when these children are not able to pay for the costs required to be included in school and there is no significant other (parents or guardians) interested in monitoring their progress both at home and school environment to ensure that, the linkage between the two microsystems is strong (Bronfebrenner 2004). For instance, parents are supposed to attend parent-teachers meetings, take part in their children sports days.

This shows that the happenings within the children’s immediate (absent parents) environment were directly affecting their abilities to achieve high performance in school.
When they are not able to meet the requirements of being included, the relationship and interactions gets strained. The existence of social inequalities in the macrosystem influenced their access to resources at the microsystem level. The society’s role is in providing resources to the children’s mesosystems to flourish and function was ailing due their weak economic stake (Bronfenbrenner 1979). These children are said to be the leaders, workers and parents of tomorrow and in preparing them for their future roles in society (macrosystem) they should receive proper health care, love and good (informal and formal) education that is central in developing the children’s social and intellectual skills development.

Financial support

Community and extended family efforts to support children in Child/adolescent headed households was evident in some but not in other and this variation was attributed to the differences in norms, values held and general resource base of the particular community. In some communities they had well organized functioning organizations targeting orphaned children which provided their basic needs such as food and clothing, and also paying for their education fees.

Adhiambo: We do get some support from Rabuor CBO (a local Community Based Organization), they buy for us food sometimes when they have money and pay school fee for my siblings. At times we are not able to get all we need when we ask for or we have to wait longer or suffer for some time before we get what we need and at times we get help we did not ask for and do not get what we ask or need. It is a tough life because I have to look for other means.

While in other communities the children were mainly helped by individual within the neighbourhood who offered them casual jobs in their farms or businesses.

Otieno: I do small casual jobs around, for instance I made these bread and sell for someone. Being that it is within the village I somehow manage to survive with the little I get from the jobs I do.

Odhiambo: When we close school, I do look for small jobs in the village to get money and some farm produce such as maize that I take with me to school when we open again to pay for my school fee. I also do work at the school during the holidays and the money I make is transferred to cater for my education fee to the school….” I have never got CDF
(community development fund) money but I perform well in school. I have sent many applications but have not received much help, its only last year that I got only ksh.3000 which is not enough to pay school fee....

Adhiambo and her siblings had been able to continue with their studies and live in their parents’ house; with the financial support that the local community organization has been providing that has enabled them to escape the burden and challenges that other child/adolescent headed households faced. Otieno living within familiar supportive neighbourhood environment and with people who understand his life situation was able get small jobs here and there to support him.

In Odhiambo’s case being allowed to work at the school by the community and being able to get casual jobs locally showed their support to enable him get education.

In addition to all the work government financial support was also available, although not enough to cover for all schooling costs because the communities have too many needy cases and inadequate financial support.

The children’s communities had the responsibility of providing access to resources and opportunities that should enable the good interaction at the mesosystems level so they can function properly and aid their development (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The communities’ financial support systems (exosystem) through community based organizations and governmental organizations (macrosystem) modelled to help ease the burden on the children in child/adolescent household directly influence them even though they are not directly involved. Availability and access to these support influenced the children’s attitude and behaviour in building resilience (Masten and Reed 2002).

**Theme four: Social Support System**

Support from extended family members, siblings, peers and other community members featured prominently in the child/adolescent heads narrations of their life experiences as a strong aspect in building resilience in the sub-themes discussion below.

**Extended family support**

In the traditional African families, the family provides the safety net for all its members. Within this system resources are shared, new members are socialized and cared for by all other grown up
members. Extended family support has played a central role in traditional African families for decades and majority of children left on their own after the death of their parents in this study were often in the beginning being cared for by their extended family members; grandparents, auntsies and uncles. Others were left in the care of older siblings staying away who after sometime gave up the responsibility because they themselves were struggling to fend for their family and could not cope with having more dependants, this led to the eldest is the siblings left at home taking charge.

**Odhiambo:** We do not get any regular help or support from someone, so we are just surviving with the little we get from our farm and casual work pay. We do not have close relatives living nearby, my father had six brothers but they have all died together with their wives.

**Akinyi:** I do have an uncle that lives far away from here so I can occasionally reach him through phone calls, but he also cannot help me much because he only works in someone’s farm to take care of the farm and does not get much from it. My older sister who is married lives far away and she does not help me in any way not even communicate.

**Ochieng** : I have two relatives staying close by, which is my grandmother and a step mother. Our grandmother is too old she cannot even make her own food. Our step mum who is staying in the neighbouring compound is a widow and has children to care for and had no proper income but casual work on other people’s farms and at times I am forced to help her too... (He smiles).

In this study the families visited that participated were living on their own at their parents’ house with no live-in adult/relative. In some cases they had brothers to their father and grandparent or step-parents living nearby that provided little moral and sometimes financial support, but in other cases the children received no support from extended families. These differences were as a result of many of the relatives left behind lived in an impoverished life state, poor relations resulting from family disagreement on property ownership, whereas on others cases they had no close relative living nearby and got no support. In cases where they got help, often the kinds of help were sporadic and got only what was available and not needed that made it impossible for them to depend traditional extended family for their survival. Due to the rapid growth of needy orphaned children, the numbers are overwhelming that a majority of the help systems and traditional safety nets were not able to keep up with the demand.
Availability of a supportive adult and support systems helps in reinforcing coping, enhancing resilience and in protecting mental health and well being for children and adolescents in child/adolescent headed households. These children used several coping skills and resources that made it possible for them to deal with stress effectively (Masten and Reed 2002).

**Sibling and Peer Support**

Support and understanding amongst the siblings in the family was a major source of strength for these children. Siblings supported each other emotionally, socially and psychologically through working together in ensuring the running and functioning of their family. They respected and guided each other more so to the ones heading the household felt they got most of the support they needed and that their siblings were aware and understood the difficulties they were going through. Sharing of the house work and responsibilities brought the feeling of togetherness in the family. Many of the younger siblings after school in the evening and when they had free time from school on weekends did opt to take part in the household chores and help around. The guidance and support these children got from each other was seen to result in better performance at school.

**Ochieng’**: *My siblings have a lot of respect for me and they obey and follow instructions that I give to them. We usually have family meeting where we discuss and advise and encourage each other about life matters and school issues. Last year when I was not here they were with our older brothers but they did not take good care of them, they had to work a lot and miss school, but that has changed since I moved back home. I now see a big difference, they go to school regularly and even the teachers say they now perform better in school. On weekends when they have some free time but they do not spend it playing because they choose to help me around in the home. I do not even have to ask them to help but they decide on their own to help at home and in the farm.*

**Odhiambo**: *My sister does run a small business of selling fruits locally to also help with our daily needs. My other siblings also help when they are at home on holidays with collecting firewood which we then sell at the nearest market. In decision making me and my sister are the ones who are in charge of the family.*
Otieno: At times talk to my older brother for advice. He does help with what he can but not everything. I also have friends with whom we spent time chatting and encouraging each other. My friend is also an orphan.

Adhiambo: On weekends my siblings also help in the farm but other children have time to spend with friends and visit each other.

This was not the case for Akinyi who was living alone after her siblings had been taken away by foster families. For her she felt lonely and life without anyone to share her feelings and thoughts with was filled with self-pity remarks. “...Living alone is quite tough and my life is different from others”.

Ochieng’ felt strengthened by the respect and the support he got with the work at home from his siblings, also important is the feeling of togetherness brought about by family meeting where they discussed, advised and encouraged each other. The siblings’ working together was seen as positive force in dealing with their adversities. Odhiambo and his sister engaged themselves in different activities and that her sister and younger siblings helped with getting in money for the family use. The joint effort and working as a team was a strength to reckon with in this family. Otieno, although at the moment was more or less living in a lone family, he did appreciate the moral and little financial support he was receiving from the brother and tried to socialize with his peers in life situation because they had a lot in common to share.

Also evident in the inquiry was support from peers and friends. Children’s ability to have social interaction and relations with their peers is important for their development. Some of the children respondents received support from other children who lived in similar life situations. They tended to make friends with children who had also lost their parents and in that case they sought comfort in each other and had a lot in common to talk about. This provided a platform for sharing experiences and discussing some of the possible way forward to their problems. Living with supportive siblings and peer helps children/adolescents in child/adolescent headed families develop positive attitudes in life that consequently influence their development positively.

These children derive support from their family that is siblings (microsystem), and from their social systems such as friends, extended family relatives, school and community (mesosystem) networks (Ward and Eyber 2009). Caring relationships brought the feeling of togetherness that played a big
role in building resilience for these children. The presence of one or more protective factors and uplifting of the child’s own capabilities enhances their resilience and ability to use positive coping mechanisms (Masten and Reed 2002). Some of the factors that impact on the process are, the presence of a caring adult, the household’s economic situation, access to education, presence of peer/sibling support and community participation (Ward and Eyber 2009), meaning how well the individual children or their families fit with their environment is based on the assumption that when a person or group is connected and engaged within a supportive environment their functioning improves. Sibling relations are an important sub-system that plays a key role in providing the basic needs but also emotional, psychological and social support for children in child/adolescent headed household.

**Theme Five: Future life Aspirations**

On inquiring what they thought and aspired for the near future most of the children/adolescent, despite the hardships and difficulties they were currently going through expressed that they wanted to have a better and brighter future and that they were capable of making it. Through their local social network support they had built resilience in their life and seemed to be coping despite being caught up in a deprived life full of uncertainty. Children in child/adolescent headed household like all other children with parents have aspirations to achieve a better life in the future. Education was central in discussing about the future for them and their siblings. Understanding, togetherness, helping and encouraging each other amongst siblings gave them the strength and reason to carry-on. Being able to study to higher levels was seen as a sure way of getting better opportunities in achieving better economic conditions for them and their siblings.

**Ochieng:** *If I can get someone to support me I would like to go for a vocational training. I have tried applying to different places for support but I have not been successful, but I am still hopeful that I can get the opportunity.*

**Adhiambo:** *I look forward to joining the university when I complete my secondary education and would like to have a better future....*

**Otieno:** *I love to study physics and hope to become an engineer in the future.*

**Anyango:** *I would like to pass my secondary exam well and go for further studies in the university and become a doctor.*

**Odhiambo:** *I look forward to joining the university when I complete my secondary education and would like to have a better future.*
All the participants apart from one fifteen year old girl, who was living alone, talked of hoping for a better future through furthering their education, building careers, getting employment and finally achieving economic stability. With all the hope and aspirations there was still one hindering factor that many did not know how they would deal with. Money was a major challenge to these children, because being included in schooling required money for fees, uniforms, examinations and even books. Living in rural and underdeveloped communities with economic difficulties achieving their future aspirations without collaborative effort and support would only remain as dreams unfulfilled. Ochieng’ expressing that his siblings respect and help around the home was important for them and their family discussions on life matters and helping each other with their studies and for Odhiambo mentioning his love for studying physics and wanting to be an engineer shows that he is aware that he can do something to improve his life with some support he got to enable him study.

In the above discussions we find that children/youth child headed households are more likely to develop negative outcomes later in life due to the breakdown in their systems that may lead to failures such as not achieving in school. Death of their parents being a major disruption in their lives leading restructuring of the family which lead further to prolonged periods of instability, uncertainty, and economic strain hampered their development and ability to function in society. Even though at the moment the life situation does not offer much of clarity on what the future holds, the supportive environment led to development of a positive attitude towards the future, even though they did not get all the support they needed (Masten and Reed 2002). The hope, belief and support they got from each other the child/adolescent heads felt the future will be better and that they will be able to give their siblings and family a better life kept them going and working hard in school.

Although they may be experiencing hardship and struggling with the loss of their parents, I found that the child/adolescents heads and their sibling had developed resilience by use of protective factors such as good social skill, supporting each other and support from their friends, school and community, were able to take up the de facto adult role in the family and still able to go to school (Masten and Reed 2002). They had endured the tough life circumstances and were still able to perform fairly well in school while providing care for their siblings. Some of the children/adolescents were able to make good decisions for themselves and siblings.
Conclusions

This study was set to investigate the everyday life experiences of children and adolescents living in child/adolescent headed household in Western Kenya. These are children who find themselves in the roles and responsibilities of taking care and provision responsibilities of themselves and their younger siblings. Traditionally the extended family has for a long time been responsible for the care and support of orphaned children, but with the rapid growth in number of orphans, urbanization and insufficiency of resources, it can no longer live up to the members expectations. And in Sub-Saharan Africa where poverty levels are quite high, many families struggle raising their members with meager resources/income and when children loose the key providers (parents), their living conditions are further challenged. They are not able to experience normal childhood because they have to take up provision and care roles of each other with little or no support. These children’s experiences expose them to life more prone to delinquent behaviour, abuse and exploitation.

It emerged from the findings that the symbolic interactions within and between the children’s nested environment are mutually shaping and that progressive and regular interactions with parents and significant other adults over time within and outside the children’s immediate environment plays a central role in ensuring positive influences on development.

Although the children/adolescents family had been disrupted and broken-down after the loss of parents, they had shown tremendous competency in running and managing their families in extremely challenging life situation full of uncertainty about the future. This showed that the children/adolescents on their own were facing difficulties that they were not able to counteract without social, emotional, psychological and financial help/support from their various nested system level that they interacted with.

This led to the conclusion that children, who lived in supportive social environment with more encouraging and nurturing relationships even after the loss of parents, were still capable of building resilience and achieving positive development. Communities that had initiated support programs for children within child/adolescent headed households bred more positive and well behaved youths than those with insufficient resource base. And that children who were able to participate in the community initiatives or had access to some minimal resources, had better relations with their siblings, performed better in school, they felt appreciated and consequently improved their self esteem, sense of belonging and general development.

Resilient individuals do things to increase their experience of positive emotions in the face of adversity, through finding opportunities in some of life’s most challenging experiences (Saleebey
For instance, child/adolescent heads in CHH who participate in this study see education as key opportunity for a better future. Previous research works have discovered that many young people were surprisingly hardy, and were thriving in difficult conditions, such as extreme poverty, violence, trauma and disasters (Saleebey 2001).

**Recommendations**

Currently child headed households are one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in both urban and rural communities and should therefore be considered a special case when looking at all forms of support. For one reason or another, the extended family network is far from reach to fall back on and these children are forced to meet their needs themselves. As a result the children in these families or households are deprived of the opportunity to go to school and experience normal childhood in trying to obtain the basic needs for themselves and their younger siblings. Therefore, there is need to establish a replacement of the traditional safety net systems that can cushion the rising phenomenon.

Support from the larger context that is the government and Aid support programmes should come together with these children and their communities in modelling case specific support systems to ensure that these families function effectively and the children experience positive development. Cooperation and collaboration of all stakeholders is needed in the realization that the family on its own cannot make it.

Child headed household is new form of family that is rapidly growing more so in the Sub-Saharan Africa countries that needs to be incorporated in the countries policy and development plans.

Secondly, even in areas where community initiatives to help child headed household they are breaking down under the severe economic hardships and rapid growth of orphaned children in need of help is being experienced. Therefore, short-term interventions should be implemented to provide support for child headed households until such time as the community are able to offer long-term solutions. Community safety nets can be rebuilt and sustained if the community is empowered with access to other more lasting sources of support. For instance locally run technical training institutions. The local communities’ capacity to cater for these children should be enhanced by increasing the strength and scope of the internal connections and interactions among the people and their environment. Initiatives started to deal with the rising phenomenon should be whole inclusive, meaning they should be able to do an assessment on all the necessary support needed (physiological needs, emotional, psychological, economical and sociological needs) for these children.
Additional research is needed to better understand the children/adolescents experiences of what they go through so as to better inform policy makers and program initiators and implementers what would be more suitable and sustainable in helping the situation that might get out of hand if most affected nations do not act quickly. There are a lot of ongoing aid programs in many of the developing nations, but the effects of their efforts do not seem to trickle down to the people due to the top-bottom approach in implementation strategies. Unlike previous programmes that have mainly been centred in the urban areas, the focus should be inclusive of both rural and urban communities because the majority of growing young populations are in the rural areas.
Reference


Internet Sources


Appendix 1.0: Consent Form

Umeå University

Faculty of Arts and Social sciences

Department of Sociology

Livelihood strategies for Childheaded Household

Student: Dorcus Awino Adongo  
(+46) 0730895924  
doaw0001@student.umu.se

Supervisor: Charlott Nyman  
(+46) 907866007  
Charlott.Nyman@soc.umu.se

I am a student at Umeå university, and I am conducting interviews for my masters Project. I am studying child headed households livelihood strategies, education, and health issues.

During this study, you will be asked to answer some questions on how you deal with day to day practical issues when it comes to money, food, clothing, schooling and health issues, forms of support you get and where from. This interview was designed to be approximately an hour in length. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer.

All the information will be kept confidential and your identity kept anonymous. I will keep the data in a secure place. Only myself and the faculty supervisor mentioned above will have access to this information. Upon completion of this project, all data will be destroyed or stored in a secure location.

Participant's Agreement:
I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary. I understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop the interview, I may do so without having to give an explanation.

The researcher has reviewed the individual and social benefits and risks of this project with me. I am aware the data will be used in masters Project that will be publicly available at the University
library. I have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the submission. The data gathered in this study are confidential with respect to my personal identity.

If I have any questions about this study, I am free to contact the student researcher or supervisor (contact information given above).

I have been offered a copy of this consent form that I may keep for my own reference.

I have read the above form and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, I consent to participate in today's interview.

____________________________________  _______________________
Participant's signature                           Date

____________________________________
Interviewer's signature
Appendix 2.0: Interview guide

Before conducting the interview, we need an interview guide that can help us to direct the process of telling or narration towards the topics and issues of interest on own study participants or subject. These guides can vary from highly scripted to relatively loose, but they all share certain features: they help in knowing what to ask about, in what sequence, how to pose the questions and how to pose the follow ups (Kennedy 2006). He goes further to point out that a good interview guide acknowledges four important facts about human interactions that may influence what people will probably say to you. First, that research questions are not the same as interview questions, the research questions describe the issues to be learnt, but is rarely learnt by asking literal questions. Therefore ones we have the research questions we have to develop a data collection plan which is an interview guide that will make it possible to get credible evidence relevant to study. Secondly we should be able to differentiate between, people’s espoused theories from their theories in use. Espoused theories are the things they believe they believe, though they may not always act on these beliefs, whereas theories in use are the ideas that guide their daily actions, and theories in use are the ideas that actually drive their daily actions, and third, we should keep in mind that interviews are social occasions and that we cannot avoid social interaction that occurs during the interviews, therefore as a researcher we must be aware that our mannerism will influence an interviewee and that the interviewee will always want to put his or her best foot forward. (Kennedy 2006).

Below is the study interview guide that I used in data collection with children heading households:

1. Personal information
   - Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
   - Name
   - Age
   - Number of siblings
   - Relatives living nearby

2. Can you tell me do how you make in everyday life matters such as food, clothing, schooling and healthcare problems in case of illness?
   - Can you tell me where the money, food and clothing you have come from?
   - Can you tell me what happens when you or your siblings is unwell?
   - Amongst you and your sibling(s) how/who makes the decisions on what is to be done?
   - How does this differ from when your parents were there?
3. Can you tell me if you get any form of help/assistance or support, and if yes, what forms of help they get and where from?
   - Can you tell me what happens when you have problems that you cannot solve on your own? In terms of needs such as money, food, decision making
   - If you get help where does it come from?
   - Do you have to ask someone for help?
   - Do you get the help you need?

4. Can you tell me in comparison with other children, how do you see yourself in relation to what you do or do not do?
   - Do you have friends?
   - What do you do with other children?
   - How often do you see each other?
   - Do you see yourself as a child or a guardian or parent or both?
   - What do you do that other children do not do?
   - What do you think or feel about that?
   - What do other children do that you do not do?
   - What do you think or feel about that?

5. Can you tell me what your future aspirations are and where do they see themselves in the future?
   - Where do you think you will be in 5 years time?
   - What do you see yourself doing?
   - How about your sibling(s)?
   - And how about in 10 years time, where do you see yourself?