

Schooling despite all odds

Citation for published version (APA):

Yamba, B. (2017). *Schooling despite all odds: evidence from Lesotho on female child careers who stayed in school*. Boekenplan. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20170622by>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2017

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20170622by](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20170622by)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

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Valorization Addendum

In accordance with the Regulation Governing the Attainment of Doctoral Degrees at Maastricht University, this addendum discusses the valorization presented by this dissertation, presenting the non-academic value of the research. This study focuses on a group of children for whom there is little research. Studies on child or young carers have mainly concentrated on the global North (Aldridge & Becker, 1993), with a few studies emerging from sub-Saharan Africa (Becker, 2007). Lesotho national policy documents, however, acknowledge that being a child carer presents a risk to schooling (Government of Lesotho MOET, 2005, Government of Lesotho, 2006, Government of Lesotho, 2012). Some children will still attend school regularly despite facing adverse circumstances of being caregivers. The results of this research may therefore be used to further understand the phenomenon of child carers in the education, child protection, social protection, and resilience areas of research and work. My research contributes new information regarding child carers in sub-Saharan Africa that governments, educationists, civil society organizations and other stakeholders may find valuable for designing programs that help this group of vulnerable children.

The main focus of this research aimed to examine the conditions under which at-risk female child carers were still able to regularly attend secondary schooling despite the challenges of caregiving. This dissertation presents the perspectives of female child carers, teachers, policy makers, civil society organizations and community members on how individual and external factors influenced school attendance. The research focused on what was perceived to be keeping them in school deviating from emphasizing what may cause them to drop out, an area that has been broadly documented. The socio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) that I used as the framework for my research helped examine how factors within the individual, family, school and community domains influence school attendance for female child carers. The research findings present an in-depth picture of dynamics at play at each level and the interactions among various stakeholders within the domains. The findings showed that individual factors, family factors, school factors, and community factors all played a role in influencing child carers' school attendance. The study findings further highlighted

how stakeholders from each domain collaborated to find ways of supporting child carers' schooling by providing financial, material, or psychosocial help.

The dissertation presents policy and programmatic recommendations for policy makers and civil society organizations to consider for enhancing the capacity of these support structures to facilitate school attendance among child carers. Additionally, this information may be of value for designing preventative and protective interventions targeting at-risk children and their families.

My study was conducted at an opportune time when the new global sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action were put in place. These call for governments to provide free, equitable and quality education for both primary and secondary schooling. Governments are expected to deliver on these goals. The dissertation data is enriched by quotes from in-school children and their teachers who described how responsibilities of being a child carer compromise quality of learning. These voices from the child carers may provide education practitioners with insights into what may work to enhance quality of learning.

The research findings illuminated the fact that although the child carers reported regularly attending school, they were constantly worrying about the well-being of their care recipients left at home. These concerns may have a negative psychological impact on the child carers and consequently affect quality of learning. The dissertation suggests a more comprehensive community-based response that addresses the challenges faced by the children at home and calls upon government and civil society organizations to implement a household-based approach in supporting child carers. My data further showed that within the school setting teachers played a critical role in providing psychosocial support to girl-carers. The dissertation recommends a review of the preservice and in-service teacher training curriculum to incorporate a component of specialized counseling for children going through adversities.

The data demonstrated that providing school fees was one area of support that families, schools, and communities put efforts in covering. Participants described the extent to which the stakeholders went in order to dedicate effort, time, and resources to secure money to pay child carers' school fees. Child carers also

mentioned family members' migration to find jobs to cover school fees as one of the reasons they were in their situation. Making secondary schooling free would ease the financial burden on the families, and ultimately minimize the need for single parents to migrate. Advocates for social protection and free secondary education as well as policy makers and development practitioners may use the findings of this study to inform program design and implementation.

This dissertation would be of value to governments, NGOs and other stakeholders working within community settings. The study findings point to the critical role that neighbors played as a substitute parent or family by providing child carers with financial, material, and emotional support. The data further highlighted the role of local leaders in coordinating community responses to protect vulnerable children. The recommendations invite governments and NGO community based programs to maximize and enhance these existing resources and suggest implementation of interventions that strengthen capacity of households. These may include economic strengthening initiatives, psychosocial support and parenting skills needed to engage with children in adversity.

Results of my research may also be relevant to the work of development agencies and non-governmental organizations implementing HIV and AIDS prevention and impact mitigation interventions. Keeping girls in school has shown to have positive health benefits including decreasing the risk of contracting HIV. My study provides an in-depth understanding of how individual attributes and support structures may keep at-risk girl child carers in school despite the odds, information that implementing organizations may use to target their program activities.