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**CHILDREN'S WELLBEING IN AN ORPHANAGE IN
KOLE DISTRICT, UGANDA.
*The Children's Perspectives***

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Abstract

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Title: CHILDREN'S WELLBEING IN AN ORPHANAGE IN KOLE DISTRICT,

UGANDA. *The Children's Perspectives*

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This study explored the views of orphaned children about how they perceived and described their wellbeing in an orphanage which is located in the rural area of Kole District in Northern Uganda, East Africa. Recent reports estimates that 14% of children in Uganda were orphaned (experienced the loss of one or both parents), which is an equivalent of 2.43 million out of 17.1 million children under the age of 18 years.

A mixed method (triangulation) approach was used in this study whereby focused group discussion with the help of the interview guide was employed to collect the data. The criteria used for the selection of the participants was purposive sampling in which thirty five children were selected and interviewed in eight different focused groups and each group consisted of three to five participants. Observation method was also employed in this study whereby I observed the orphans' behavior in order to compliment their actions against the views expressed by the participants during the interview sessions. I also sought the views of the orphanage administrator as well as some of the house moms in order to obtain detailed information about the orphanage. Gender perspectives were used to analyze the interviews with the respondents in order to understand the complex relationship that exists between the participants given the fact that they all underwent through difficult situations during childhood and faced multiple risk factors prior to joining the orphanage.

The findings of this study revealed that the orphanage, according to the orphaned children was not as problematic as most previous studies had indicated. The participants' views were based on the fact that the orphanage offers them the basic needs such as food, clothings, shelter, security, health care, education and spiritual guidance which they

lacked while they were in their family homes after the death of their parents. The critical point of departure in this study stemmed from the theoretical aspects in which theories of care, childhood and resilience were used as a mirror to reflect the participants' responses.

Keywords: Children's perspectives, wellbeing, orphanage, Uganda

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1. Introduction

The past century witnessed an increased number of armed conflicts throughout the world (Pedersen, 2002) in which conflicts took place mostly not between states but rather between groups within a population with prolonged grievances against each other based on ethnic, cultural or religious lines (Onyango, 1998). Most victims of armed conflicts have always been children (Al-Eissa, 1995; Ronstrom, 1989) who are killed, maimed, displaced, made homeless, parentless or remained emotionally traumatized. However, the alarming rate in the increase of orphaned children in sub-Saharan Africa has been exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic that has devastated the continent since the late 1980's (UNAIDS, UNICEF & USAID, 2004). According to Perez (2008), conflicts/wars and HIV/AIDS, irrespective of its level of intensity, continue to rob children of their childhood, increase their vulnerability and risks and they are more likely to live a life of fear and insecurity.

Several studies and researches carried out on children have maintained that children need and have a right to be cared for and grow up with their biological parents so as to live in a family environment. Although most governments and international laws have recognized the fact that children have a right to grow up with their biological parents, experience have shown that millions of children are living in residential institutions¹ around the world even then with no clear statistical figures, (Williamson & Greenberg, 2010). However, in Uganda, insecurity and civil strife which ripped the country for almost three decades coupled with the AIDS pandemic led to a tremendous increase of orphaned children to date (Ntozi, *et al.*1999). A survey carried out in Uganda in 1992 during the outrage of civil war and the widespread of HIV/AIDS pandemic revealed that approximately two thousand nine hundred children were living in residential homes (Williamson & Greenberg, 2010).

A report published by UNICEF in 2004 on *Framework for the Protection, Care and Support of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Living in a World with HIV/AIDS* defined

¹ Residential/orphanage/institutional care homes shall be used interchangeably to mean the same thing in this paper

an orphan as a child under eighteen years of age who has lost either the mother or the father or both parents and who would have died of any cause. It further classified orphans into different categories such as: a single orphan - a child who lost one of the parents; a double orphan - a child who lost both parents; maternal orphan – a child whose mother is dead (including double orphan); paternal orphan – a child whose father is dead (including double orphan). For this study, all categories of orphans were considered irrespective of the nature of cause of death of their parents.

In northern Uganda where this study was carried out, extended family relationships which was cherished as one of the ways through which children were cared for and brought up to respect the family values and norms amongst the society is at the brink of collapse. This has mainly been due to insurgency which existed for the last two decades coupled with HIV/AIDS pandemic. Most families were placed in the internally displaced people's camps (IDPs) which distorted the traditional kinship ties and family relationships to the extent that orphaned children have become both care givers and providers to their siblings. Creation of orphanages as an alternative means of child care which never existed in the mindset of this society has become the order of the day. Orphanages are now considered by both children and adults in this community as a way through which a few 'lucky' orphaned children are made to benefit from the emotional health and material needs. The emotional health that most orphaned children desire include but not limited to education, health care, safety and security, love, care and a sense of belonging and the material needs include clothing, food, shelter and the like. Both the emotional and material needs mentioned above are lacking in the family homes of these orphaned children and is being provided for at the orphanage so as to uplift and transform the lives of these children.

As a point of departure from the findings of most authors and organizations such as Drew *et al.* (1998); Clark (2008); Foster *et al.* (1997); Larose, Bernier & Tarabulsky (2005); Ntozi & Mukiza-Gapere (1995); Ntozi *et al.* (1999); Nyamedha *et al.* (2003); Williamson & Greenberg (2010); Wolf & Fesseha (1998) and UNICEF (2010) regarding orphans and orphanages, this study explored the children's perspectives on how they perceived their

wellbeing in an orphanage since lots of debates have been generated in recent times on the wellbeing of vulnerable children (orphans) especially those residing in orphanages.

Statement of the Problem

According to a study carried out by Tadele *et al.* (2010) on understanding institutional child care options for children in Ethiopia, it was found out that apart from lack of appropriate parental care, other factors such as HIV/AIDS, natural disasters, internal migration due to internal conflicts and biting poverty were the basic underlying challenges that children faced globally and particularly in Africa today. A recent study done on the situational analysis of vulnerable children in Uganda estimated that 14% of children in Uganda are orphaned (experienced the loss of one or both parents), which is an equivalent of 2.43 million out of 17.1 million children under the age of eighteen years (Kalibala & Elson, 2010). On the other hand, Oleke *et al.* (2007) in a study carried out to assess policy implications and experiences of orphan care in Amach², Lira District, found out that female orphan especially those aged between five and twelve years were at a greater risk of exclusion from education compared to their male counterparts. This is because the demand for girls is particularly high for domestic work. However, several studies have revealed that the plight for most of these vulnerable children and their caregivers were largely offered by Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) who provide financial, material, educational, moral and spiritual support to orphans. In Uganda, most government programs are geared towards offering ideological and administrative framework through which projects are initiated, developed and implemented with little offer in terms of funding. Nevertheless, the most well known national projects supporting orphans in Uganda are: ‘Uganda Women’s Efforts to Save the Orphans’ (UWESO) and the ‘National Committee of Women Living with HIV/AIDS’ (NACWOLA). Both organizations are women’s organizations working for the care and support of orphaned children in Uganda (Kalibala & Elson, 2010).

² Amach is located within the same sub-region (Lira district, Northern Uganda) to which this study was conducted

According to the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly, 64/142 on the guidelines for Alternative Care of Children, section (c) (123), states that “*facilities providing residential care should be small enough and organized around the rights and needs of the child, in a setting as close as possible to a family or small group situation...*” In order to promote and protect the rights of children, the government of Uganda enacted child care legislation, “The 1996 Children’s Statute” which among other provisions located the burden of responsibility for care and protection of children to parents and communities. This was meant to operationalize the African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) argued Oleke *et al.* (2007).

A report by UNICEF (2010) on *Africa’s Orphaned and Vulnerable Generations*, points out that a lot still remain unknown about the number of children who are under the residential care in sub-Saharan Africa because estimates are only available for a limited number of countries. Clark (2008) in a study carried out on orphanages argued that the primary purpose of most orphanages is to provide orphaned children with accommodation and offer social support such as feeding, health care and education. The secondary purpose is to give time during the period of support for decisions to be made about their future, whose outcome could be to have the child adopted.

This study sought to explore the children’s views themselves on how they perceived their wellbeing in an orphanage considering that orphanages have become one of the ways through which orphaned children are taken care of in Uganda today. However, most researches have negatively reported on the quality of these institutions and have criticized the use of institutional care homes for not being appropriate in orphan care. Wolf & Fesseha (1998) argued that although orphanages often meet the material needs of orphans much better than foster care, nonetheless as institutions they deprive orphans from autonomy and personal contact with their relatives. In order to understand the children’s views better, I considered the view of Fraser *et al.* (2004) that understanding the children’s feelings and attitudes towards their lives should be an integral part of research whose aim is to improve the services rendered to them and their families. Cheney (2007)

on her part argued that experiences that children face in an orphanage reshape their identities and feelings towards their families, communities and the nation since they have no proper channel through which they could express their political identities. Nonetheless, Sondergaard (2002: p452) suggested that sensitive aspects of social life such as gender, sexuality and ethnicity as well as socio-cultural and historical understandings of identity should be incorporated into individual consciousness through a process of sifting and synthesizing. Furthermore, Lave & Wenger (1991) pointed out that children usually experience, engage in and perform their ethnic identities within their locality and they recommended that a framework of communities of practice be used in understanding children's perceptions. Wenger (1998) on his part pointed out that institution such as schools and communities provide legitimate peripheral participation in shaping ethnic and cultural identities. Since most orphaned children prefer to identify themselves with their immediate families in search of love, care, protection and provision of the basic needs, Christensen, James & Jenks (2000) suggested that children's identities can be formed within a localized matrix of constraint, contested meaning and conventions of placing and avenues of possibilities. This implied that control of power would be exercised by the movements and positioning through which emergent identities are made and articulated. In this study, I considered the fact that children's perspectives towards their wellbeing and how they identified themselves with the orphanage should best be explained by them and not only or mainly adults.

Aims and research question

Most researches carried out on orphans and orphanages around the world including the reports by UNICEF, UNAIDS, USAID, Save the Children and similar organizations reveal that an orphanage is not the best option for alternative care of vulnerable children. This study generally aimed at examining the views of orphaned children themselves on how they perceived their wellbeing in an orphanage something that most previous studies largely ignored. Having identified that orphaned children's perspectives were largely ignored in most studies previously carried out on orphanages, the general aim of this study was to bridge the gap of the existing knowledge base of previous studies carried out on children living in orphanages. This implied that consideration on methodological and

theoretical perspectives would be addressed as will be discussed in subsequent sections of this thesis.

However, the specific aim of this study was:

- To understand the children's daily life experiences, living conditions in general and how they adjusted to a new life discourse in this kind of environment.

Research question

In order to achieve the above aims, the primary research question designed to guide this study was:

How do orphaned children perceive and describe their wellbeing in an orphanage?

The reason for designing the research question in this manner was to guide the researcher in examining the views of children on how they perceived their wellbeing in an orphanage, so as to gain a deeper understanding of the knowledge and experience they had about an orphanage, and specifically analyze it from their perspective. For this study, wellbeing was used as a mirror through which children's standpoints on the issues that affected them were used to reflect the theoretical framework of this paper. Woodhead *et al* (2009) conceptualizes wellbeing and argued that it is a socially contingent, culturally-anchored construct that changes over time both at individual life course changes as well as changes in the socio-cultural context. They further contend that children's wellbeing should be placed at the core of qualitative research that moved beyond the traditional poverty research, to the one which offered an interdisciplinary enquiry centered on children's experiences, perspectives and aspirations. It was against such argumentation that the research question was formulated in this manner so as to seek the views of the orphaned children themselves which appeared to be lacking in most previous studies as will be discussed in the next section.

2. Previous Research

Although many studies have been carried out on orphans and orphanages with the results giving different dimensions of the orphans' status in different locations across the globe and sub-Saharan Africa in particular, very little information is available on the views expressed by orphans themselves regarding their wellbeing in an orphanage. Christensen & James (2000) argued that childhood had been studied within the framework of adults' notions about children and how they were understood and the children were rarely called upon to express their views. Most researches were primarily *on* children or *around* them rather than *with* them and it was not until the rethinking behind the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) that these approaches have changed (Verhellen, 1993). This part of the thesis analyzed the reports, articles, journals and studies previously done on the general condition and the care of orphans and also examined the different studies carried out on orphanages across sub-Saharan Africa with particular reference to Uganda.

Studies carried out on the situation of orphans and orphanages

The first article produced by Foster *et al.* (1997) on orphan care addressed the changing definition of "orphan" due to the AIDS pandemic and provided more psychological needs of children orphaned by AIDS and specifically dwelt on the notion of stigma. This gave the orphanhood label a new meaning since most of these children were so stigmatized and were almost always ignored by the different communities. Depending on which of the two parents died first or if both parents were dead, researches revealed that maternal orphans were more vulnerable than their paternal orphans. According to most African culture and proved by a study carried out in Kenya, it was found that most men would remarry another woman in case of death of the first wife and that the situation of orphaned children almost always worsened because the second wife would favor her biological children other than the orphans. Although most widowed mothers were less likely to remarry, another study revealed that they were always overburdened with the care of orphaned children (Nyamedha *et al.* 2003).

On the other hand, a study carried out in Malawi on orphans indicated that most of the children usually preferred to be placed under the care of their grandparents implying that orphaned children usually prioritize love and respect for their deceased parents over material situation and as such preferred to stay with their very close relatives (Mann, 2002). However, their situation were made worst if they were unable to find a relative who would support them with the basic needs such as shelter, clothing, food, education, health care and security.

Studies in USA found out that AIDS orphans faced an uncertain future regarding their custody and financial benefits (Levine, 1995) and the situation is even worse in Africa where orphaned children usually drop out of school. Matters were never made better when some of them were dispossessed off their parents' property by their own relatives (Webb, 1995; Bedri *et al.* 1995). In Uganda, the biggest challenges that orphaned children faced in most parts of the country included but not limited to shelter, school fees, school uniforms, scholastic materials, food, bedding, clothing, medical care and the general provision of care especially to the younger siblings (Shuey *et al.* 1996). Studies carried out by Hunter (1991), Ntozi and Mukiza-Gapere (1995) and Foster (1996) revealed that many people who cared for orphans in Uganda were either too young or too old to manage the task. Shuey *et al.* (1996) observed that orphan care is solely the task of surviving parents, mainly mothers and that occasionally other family members came in to assist when both parents were dead. However, Carswell (1988) observed that kinship ties were no longer close enough to provide for orphan care as it was in the traditional African kinship care system before. With traditional African family kinship support dwindling, institutional care system was being introduced and used as alternative care system (Ntozi *et al.*, 1999) in which orphanages mostly administered by NGO's, CBO's and FBO's provided direct support for the basic needs and school fees to the orphaned children (Urassa, 1997).

Nevertheless, a study jointly carried out in 1994 by the Department of Pediatrics of the University of Zimbabwe and the Department of Social Welfare concluded that several attempts were made in response to the orphan crisis in Zimbabwe in which a number of

organizations created new institutions to take care of the orphans despite the absence of any official position or government policy. Families were found to be struggling to take care of the orphans and that most of these families found it appropriate to send the orphans in the residential care since it would guarantee the children food, clothing and education (Williamson & Greenberg, 2010).

The above arguments reveal how appalling the state of orphaned children are which probably give reason for the rapid increase of orphanages in most countries in the sub-Saharan Africa in general and Uganda in particular. This is coupled with inadequate financial, moral and material support offered to orphaned children by most African states and the few institutional support provided by some African states were mostly ineffective or inefficient (Burch & Dewit, 1986). In Northern Uganda, the region where this study was carried out, Ntozi *et al.* (1999) observed that the increment in orphanhood level has been due to civil wars and a high level of AIDS prevalence which led to a very high rate of school drop out especially amongst the orphaned children resulting into the creation of many orphanages in the sub-region in particular and Uganda at large.

Reasons advanced against institutionalization of children

Notwithstanding the above facts, most researches have negatively reported on the quality of these institutions and have criticized the use of institutional care homes for not being appropriate in orphan care. Wolf & Fesseha (1998) argued that orphanages often meet the material needs of the orphans much better than foster care, and yet these institutions deprive orphans from autonomy and personal contact with their relatives. This was corroborated by Drew *et al.* (1998) who pointed out that institutions often have limited capacity, catering only to physical needs and were very expensive to operate. They further contend that children who lived in residential care homes suffered from psychological problems such as delayed cognitive development and impaired social functioning. Larose, *et al.* (2005); Marsh, *et al.* (2003) contend that institutional care was assumed to be highly undesirable if not pathogenic.

According to UNICEF (2010) report on *Africa's Orphanhood and Vulnerable Generations*, it stated that residential facilities were not an appropriate primary response for orphans and the following reasons were advanced against institutionalization of orphan care:

- High turnover rates of staff which made it very difficult to sustain a caring environment
- High child-to-staff ratios that exacerbated the care deficit
- Difficulties in reintegration during the early childhood, due in part to community stigma
- Frequent failure to respond adequately to the psychological needs of children
- Higher cost compared to community-based care and greater challenges to scaling up
- Lack of government standards and monitoring of the care provided and
- Worse outcomes physically and mentally for children living in residential care facilities, as documented through research in western countries.

Further researches on institutional care have also revealed that it was more expensive to care for children in residential homes than any other form of alternative care system. According to a report entitled, *Families Not Orphanages* submitted to the Better Care Network organization by Williamson & Greenberg (2010), it stated that professional foster care costed US\$ 91 per month/child (based on the 1998 official exchange rate) compared to between US\$ 201 and US\$ 280 per month/child for the cost of institutional care. The report further revealed that high quality community-based child care was estimated to cost between US\$ 98 per month/child to US\$ 132 per month/child. Nevertheless, these comparative estimates were based in Central and Eastern Europe. However, similar results were also observed in the sub-Saharan region of Africa. For example, a study carried out in Kagera region, Tanzania, revealed that the annual cost for taking care of one child in a residential home was more than US\$ 1000, about six times the cost of supporting a child in a foster care. In South Africa, the study showed that the cost of residential care was six times more expensive than foster care or statutory adoption. Such comparisons was also done in the east and central Africa by Save the

Children UK and found out that residential facility for the care of children were ten times more expensive than community-based forms of care (Williamson & Greenberg, 2010). How relevant is this thesis to the previous studies that have been examined in this paper? The response to this question is analyzed as follows.

Relevance of this thesis in relation to the previous research

Although the above citations provided very useful points of reference for this study, it did not take into consideration the different experiences orphaned children went through and how they perceived their wellbeing in an orphanage. It would have been more interesting to know whether these costs, for example offered any meaningful changes in the orphaned children's wellbeing and how it enabled them perceive their social world. The fact that orphaned children previously lacked the basic needs, parental love and care as well as suffered from stigma and trauma, this study was meant to bridge the gap in the study of orphans and orphanages by adding the orphaned children's views on how they perceived their wellbeing in an orphanage. Woodhead (1998a) contends that taking an account of children's experiences and perspectives is important in that children have a right to be heard; capable of expressing their feelings and aspirations in a context which respected their abilities and mode of communication and that they are an important source of information on what they thought might harm their future development within their environment, family and community setting. It is for this reason that this study was intended to seek the children's views and experiences on how they perceived their wellbeing in an orphanage despite the general negative assertions revealed by the previous studies on orphanages. The researcher considered John's (2003) view that seeking children's experiences signified a transformation of adult-child relationships upon which the adult's views should not dominate the children's perception of their wellbeing which provided a reciprocal understanding of each other.

In order to pursue this argument further, this thesis offered useful concepts which should enable the reader understand the need to examine children's views on how they perceived their wellbeing in an orphanage so as to avoid generalization of vulnerable children especially those who resided in an orphanage. The next section therefore dealt with the

different theoretical perspectives that the researcher found useful in elaborating the critical point of departure for this study.

3. Theoretical Framework

Theories according to Silverman (1993) provide a set of explanatory concepts and these concepts offer ways of looking at the world which is essential for research. Flick (2007) conceptualizes theories and argued that similar to other forms of presenting empirical relations – theories are versions through which the world is viewed and that these versions undergo a continuous revision, evaluation, construction, and reconstruction. He further stated that theories are not representations of given facts, but versions or perspectives through which the world is seen. This chapter considered the theories of childhood and resilience which were found to be useful in providing the critical point of departure in understanding how children perceived their wellbeing in an orphanage. The relevance of childhood theory enabled me to understand the children’s perspectives about their experiences at the orphanage since the study placed them as ‘subjects’ and not ‘objects’. Secondly, using resilience theory, I was able to understand the participants’ views on how they were able to adjust to the new ways of life at the orphanage since they were faced with a number of risk factors during childhood. For this study, I considered the fact that working towards a responsible and realistic way in seeking children’s views while respecting and understanding how they felt, acted and appreciated their social world was very important. This part of the paper therefore discussed the theories of care, childhood and resilience which were meant to mirror the children’s perceptions.

The concept of care

According to Daly & Rake (2003), care is considered to be the activities and relations that involve the caring of the sick, the elderly and the dependant young. They further argued that it is a form of interpersonal relationship and social exigency or a necessary activity within the society. Daly & Rake (2003) further contend that the concept of care is rooted in relations of personal involvement and to some extent personal service. They stated that care has always been a subject of debate that focused on how social policies seek to manage the demand and supply of care. Barnett & Land, (2007) and Healy, (2008) on their part argued that care is a complex phenomenon and diverse, yet it is constitutive of togetherness that is excluding and a charitable provision that is

disempowering. All in all, care can be said to have consisted of physical, emotional and intellectual processes that enabled human beings to maintain their livelihood and distinguish these activities from the economic ones. This inevitably raises the issue of gender roles in the care giving process in which Tronto (2004) argued that in all societies gender relations were shaped by the different care arrangements. She further contends that women were the greatest providers of care compared to men and that care regimes shaped gender regimes and vice-versa. According to Oleke *et al.* (2007), the relative vulnerability of orphan care varied considerably with the category of kin. They argued that societies that followed patrilineal kinship provided responsibility of care to orphans within the paternal kin who offered protection of children's rights to safety, support, belonging and inheritance. Although most studies revealed that economic hardship was found to be greater among orphans residing with maternal kin, it is believed that they experienced compassion, care, and involvement in the household activities and always felt being part of that family compared to their counterparts who resided with their paternal kin, argued Oleke *et al.*

On their part, Ntozi *et al.* (1999) in a study carried out on the role of extended family in orphan care in northern Uganda, found out that most decisions concerning the care of orphans were made by male clan members and women were rarely allowed to make decisions and yet they were the main care providers who should have been at the heart of the decision making process. Therefore, the concept of care was important in this study since orphaned children were bound to have faced multiple challenges while at the orphanage. I found it relevant to seek the views of orphaned children themselves in order to understand the linkage in the care giving arrangements between family, society and institutional systems. Thus, presenting the concept of care in this section was meant to understand the relationship that existed between the care givers and orphaned children who resided in an orphanage. However, the researcher found it useful to connect the concept of care to the theories of childhood in order to compliment the issues that the participants to this study might not have raised during the discussion on how they perceived the caring practices at the orphanage. The theories of childhood are therefore discussed in the next section.

Theories of childhood

The notion of childhood has been discussed by several authors and most studies have revealed that this concept is constructed by adults and how children respond to adult notions of childhood. Recent social paradigms in the study of children, according to James and Prout (1997), Mayall (1994) and Schwartzman, (2001) stated that this notion presented children as agents and contributors to community functioning. James and Prout (1997: p8) argued that children were active participants in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they lived. For this study, I considered the fact that childhood and children's social relationship is important when studied in their own right; not just in respect to their social construction of their own social lives, but also the lives of those around them and the environment in which they lived. James & Prout (1990: p6) argued that children should not be regarded as passive objects of structural determinations but rather as subjects in their own right to their social construction. Nevertheless, children around the world have continued to be used as 'political tools' by most adult political actors who have often used the notion that children are the "leaders of tomorrow" and yet they have remained powerless in shaping their own destiny. Hammarberg (1993: p296) contends that children have always been, and are still the victims of hypocrisy to whom most politicians often pay lip service to their wellbeing, and yet in real terms when the economy and other interest came into play, children were often let down. Cheney (2007: p3) in an ethnographic study carried out on the role of Ugandan child citizens in the struggle for national development pointed out that children were not always subjected to the authoritarianism of the family and the educational system, but have also been disempowered by poverty, political insecurity and the AIDS epidemic. She suggested that qualitative methods of study that recognizes both the global political-economic and indigenous perspectives should take into account multiple meanings of childhood and children's experiences. This was in line with what Alma Gottlieb described in her ethnographical study of infant children in West Africa as a productive balance between the global and the local, the political and the cultural, and the social and the individual (Gottlieb, 2004: p42).

Although the concept of childhood was formulated because of the criticism against the traditional development theories which placed children as ‘objects’ other than ‘subjects’, orphaned children in this particular case were considered to have had a different set of experiences and perspectives. Their understanding of their social world and the environment in which they lived was never the same compared to the time they spent when they lost their parents and probably lived with their relatives. Hence, it was very important to encourage them to express their views on matters that concerned them.

In this section, I made an analysis on the concept of childhood and pointed out how children perceived their social world and the meaning that is attached to the kind of environment and the society in which they lived. I found it necessary to link the concept of care and the theories of childhood to that of resilience since they complimented each other. This was meant to address the issues that might not have been considered while analyzing how childhood is constructed in an orphanage, hence the theory of resilience would be used to bridge this gap.

Theories of resilience

Researches on resilience according to Fleming and Ledogar (2008) have been going through several stages for the past forty years and have most frequently been defined as positive adaptation despite adversity. They stated that resilience originated from a Latin word which meant “springing back” or “jumping back up” and that it helped changed the focus of research from pathologies to opportunities for supportive action. Werner (1995) provided three different general usages of resilience which included: good developmental outcomes despite high risk status, sustained competence under stress and recovery from trauma. Fleming & Ledogar (2008) pointed out that psychologists considered the factors that promoted resilience and found out that they normally originated outside an individual. They contend that most studies that were carried out on the vulnerable children considered the factors of resilience to have stemmed from the individual, family and community levels and most recently at cultural and environmental levels. These arguments could be analyzed by looking at the different views that emerged on the

studies of resilience and how this concept was defined by different authors as elaborated in this section.

HeavyRunner & Marshall (2003) stated that resilience is the natural, human capacity to navigate life well. They argued that resilience was something that every human being had and sighted the examples of wisdom and common sense. In essence it meant that every person had to know his/her thoughts well and how he/she felt spiritually irrespective of where one came from and where one was going. They further pointed out that resilience was the key to learning how to utilize innateness which amounted to observing the inalienable birth right of all human beings hence understanding our inner spirit and finding a sense of direction. Fonagy *et al.* (1994, p231) on their part defined resilience as that kind of normal development which is achieved under difficult conditions. Grotberg (1995, p5) on his part argued that resilience is a universally accepted phenomenon which allowed a person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of diversity with some sense of a common vocabulary of resilience.

Brigid, Wassell & Gilligan (1999) pointed out that careful assessment of factors of resilience in individual children, their family relationships and wider community networks was important for shaping intervention. John (1997: p19) suggested that resilience could be overcome by taking into consideration factors such as trusting relationships, emotional support outside the family, self esteem, encouragement of autonomy, hope, responsible risk taking, a sense of being lovable, school achievement, belief in God and morality and unconditional love for someone. She argued that in order to promote resilience, adults should provide family and institutional support to children.

Rutter (1990) & Luther (1999) argued that vulnerability modifies a person's response to risk and that different people react differently with the risk factors. They contend that identification of vulnerable and protective factors have greater effect if they occurred together with other risk factors rather than when they occurred in isolation. Therefore, most of the qualifying conditions necessary for resilience and risk factors as argued by authors on this issue demonstrated substantial risk factors that individual orphaned

children faced prior to joining the orphanage. The risk factors that the orphaned children in this study faced included but not limited to unresolved grief for the loss of their parents, confusion and anxiety about their past experiences, environmental and financial stress, lack of parental care, stigma and trauma as well as taking over adult responsibilities such as becoming the head of a family at a tender age.

It should therefore be noted that these three concepts provided a lens through which different aspects of children's wellbeing in an orphanage were found to compliment each other which provided a critical point of departure for this study as opposed to other findings. To prove whether these concepts were valid or not, different methods were used to explore the children's perspectives about their wellbeing at the orphanage. Thus, the desire to conduct a completed methodological approach for this study was to offer a meaningful link in the use of a mixed method (triangulation) as shall be discussed in the following section.

4. Methodology and Methods

Methodological approach

A mixed method approach (triangulation) was used to carry out this study. Triangulation was defined by Flick (2009: p445) to mean that it is the different perspectives taken by researchers on an issue under study or more generally speaking, in answering research question. Flick (2009: p129) contends that the way in which research questions are formulated exerts a strong influence on the design of the study. He further argued that questions must be formulated as clearly and unambiguously as possible, and that this must happen as early as possible in the life of the project. In the course of the project, Flick stated that questions became more and more concrete, more focused, and they were always narrowed and revised. Nevertheless, the different perspectives taken by different researchers can be substantiated in using several methods and or using several theoretical approaches. Therefore, Flick (2009) suggested triangulation should produce knowledge on different levels which meant that they go beyond the knowledge made possible by one approach and thus contributed to promoting quality in research.

During the fieldwork study, the researcher combined both the focus group discussion (FGD) with observation method. The researcher noted that FGD provided an in-depth knowledge about the respondents themselves while observation method allowed the researcher to obtain knowledge about the behaviors of the respondents and also the general living condition at the orphanage which supported the information that was acquired from the focus group discussion. Flick (2009: pp222) stated that observation enables the researcher to find out how something factually worked out or occurred to which he suggested that comparisons should be made with the presentations in interviews. Hence, this comparison should comprise a mixture of how something was said and how certain things were done, which needed to be untangled, he argued. Thus, for this study triangulation involved the use of FGD and observation.

The participants to this study consisted of both boys and girls and were in the age ranges of fourteen to seventeen years old. Consideration on gender issues were made during the

analysis of this study in order to understand the relationship that exists in the care of boys and girls at the orphanage. Consequently, a gender perspective was used as a tool to examine the differences and similarities in children's perspectives on how they perceived their wellbeing at the orphanage. Tronto (2004) pointed out that in all societies' gender relations are shaped by the different care arrangements upon which women are the greatest providers of care compared to men and that care regimes shaped gender regimes and vice-versa.

Justification

Scott (2002: 101) argued that research methods that involved children as respondents should take into account the wide range of cognitive and social development that depends not only primarily on age, but also on the gender, socio-economic background, and ethnicity of the child. On the other hand, Elder, Modell & Parke (1993) pointed out that researches which concerned the life course perspective should consider the crucial concepts of choice and agency means that would be essential in collecting information from children themselves especially on issues that dealt with their present experiences and future aspirations. Scott (2000) contends that data collection about society became far much richer if children's account and information is taken into consideration. She further argued that once children were viewed as competent social actors in their own right, then it made a lot of sense to ask them about their own contributions and participation in social and economic life. O'Kane (2000:157) argued that understanding children and childhood requires listening attentively to their agendas and participating with them in the research process in order to provide a framework which is responsive, open-ended and above all, allow both children and young adults to set their own agenda. Hood *et al.*(1996: p118) and Schenk *et al.* (2005) contend that collecting accurate and geographically specific information on children should be done in a manner which respected their rights in order to learn more about their circumstances and design interventions which is suitable and appropriate for improving their well being. Therefore, the approach in collecting data on children requires a different dimension as suggested by John (2003: p82) who pointed out that there is an increasing awareness in the international community about the need to change the approach in collecting data which

provided some framework in the development of a more authentic picture in children's livelihood. Therefore, even if statistical reports were good, networking and composite picture building of children's world is very important, she argued.

Consequently, Scott (1997) pointed out that pretesting the survey instruments was very crucial in identifying problems with comprehension and ambiguities in question wording, detecting flippancy and boredom, and to discover discrepancies between the children's understanding and the researcher's intent. For this study the researcher pretested the interview guide with some few children before carrying out the actual research and found out that the question wordings were comprehensible enough in conducting the interviews. Nevertheless, the reason for the choice of these two methods was determined by the research question that was strongly influenced by the ethical considerations upon which mixed method approach was applied to enable the researcher obtain complimentary results.

Selection of the site and respondents

The choice of this particular orphanage which was located in the rural area of Kole district in Northern Uganda stemmed from the fact that the researcher had prior knowledge about its existence but little information was available to him about its operations. Secondly, it was convenient for this study since gaining access to the site was not bound to cause a lot of bureaucratic hurdles and financial demands due to the limited time that the researcher had. Hence, the location of this study site coupled with the challenges that most orphaned children are faced with in this sub-region notwithstanding the roles played by the care-givers informed the choice of this study site.

Purposive sampling method was used to identify the participants for this study with the help of the orphanage administrator who had substantial knowledge about the participants especially since the ages of the respondents, the different houses in which they lived not forgetting the gender balance were a crucial factor for this study. The participants to this study were in the age ranges of fourteen to seventeen years. The reason for choosing this age group was that they were in a position to reflect on their past/present experiences and

were also able to provide information about their future aspirations considering the fact that they had lived in this institutional care for quite a longer period of time than their family homes.

Whereas an interview guide was used as the key instrument to guide the FGD, field notes were taken during observation of the children's behavior within the environment in which they lived. In order to ensure group's cohesion and identity during FGD, the respondents were separated by gender and age respectively. Christensen & James (2000) pointed out that conventional wisdom regarding best practices for interviewing children in a group setting required that:

- Children should be interviewed in restricted age groups as otherwise older children will dominate
- Boys and girls should be interviewed separately since they have different communication styles and
- Groups should be small, with no more than eight children at maximum

The arguments fronted by Christensen & James (2000) regarding how to conduct an interview with children in a group setting formed the choice for interviewing the respondents in this study as indicated above. Nevertheless, during observation the researcher employed a naturalistic approach in order to observe the behaviors of the children at the orphanage. This approach was used because the researcher wanted to observe the children in their natural setting in order to understand how they behaved at the orphanage in comparison to what was discussed during FGD.

Method of data collection

The participants in this study were organized in eight different focused groups of informants and each group consisted of at least three to five members in which boys were separated from girls during the interview sessions. All in all, the participants' ages ranged between 14-17 years old. The total number of respondents was thirty five and the discussions with them lasted an average of one hour each in all the eight groups. The interview was conducted within the orphanage at the church premises and it took four

different days to carry out the interviews. The reason for choosing the church premises as the venue for conducting the FGD was because I was made to know that this place is always used not only for church services but also for conducting meetings with children as well as other activities such as holding the school's general assembly, drama, debates and staff meetings. Besides, there was no other venue that could be used which would provide an atmosphere that was conducive for conducting this kind of interview. Furthermore, I found it necessary to interview the orphanage administrator as well as also talked to a few house moms in order to obtain more information about the orphans and the orphanage.

On the other hand, the researcher used the interview guide during the different sessions. The interview guide was designed in English and the interviews were conducted in English. Although during the course of the interview, the interviewer noted that some respondents were not actively participating and by instinct sensed that most probably such respondents feared to express themselves in English, which happened to be true. Such respondents were asked to express their views using the local language, Lango, which they accepted and were eventually translated into English

Meanwhile, the researcher had initially planned to use both the tape recorder and taking of field notes as the tools for collecting data. In the end, tape recording was not feasible, when the available tape recorder proved faulty; I had to use only the detailed field notes that were taken during the interview sessions and observation. Consequently, the interviews were carried out with the aid of a research assistant who helped in taking the notes under my guidance and observation of the participants' behaviors. Meanwhile, the researcher facilitated the FGD with the help of the interview guide, made observations on the participants' behaviors as well as took field notes during the study period at the orphanage. During the interview sessions, whenever any informant was not very clear to the interviewer in what he/she had said, the respondent was requested to repeat his/her utterances to allow proper recording. For every session after the interview was conducted, the notes were read out and discussed with the respondents for purposes of clarity and where necessary, if any respondent felt that some more information needed to be added,

such views were considered and recorded accordingly. Nevertheless, use of cognitive techniques such as making the respondents to freely express their own views and shared their own experiences in addition to coding of the participants' behaviors was employed during the interview sessions.

It should not go without mention that ethical considerations on issues like the principles of anonymity, confidentiality and rights of withdrawal were shared with all the participants before the interview sessions were conducted and a verbal consent was obtained from all those who participated in the interview.

Data analysis

Stephens (2009) stated that data analysis involves searching for meanings in relation to the research question or purpose and that meaning could be found in the triangular relationship between theory, the data generated and the context or setting of the study. The qualitative data for this study was analyzed using the practical guide from Bernard (1991) who aimed at coding, categorizing and labeling the major themes and issues which emerged during the interviews in order to present the themes in a reasonably exhaustive category. The researcher then made several crosschecking on the analyzed data to ensure validity of the findings.

After data was collected from the field, field notes on both FGD and observations made were coded manually and in the process, themes and categories were identified. The themes and categories for this study were: children's experiences of their daily lives, their wellbeing at the orphanage, future plans for adult life and their suggestions for improvement of the orphanage. Careful comparisons of the statements from the participants were made and analyzed to make meaningful conclusions.

Ethical considerations

According to the guideline on *Ethical Approaches to Gathering Information from Children and Adolescence in Institutional Settings* Schenk *et al.* (2005) observed that researching on children raise ethical issues because of the nature of the subjects which

can sometimes mean to be extremely sensitive and was likely to affect the children's emotional health and feelings. This they note would be different from the effect of research questions asked to adults. On the other hand, *The Society for Research in Child Development* (SRCD, 1990) emphasized that children's rights should have priority over the interest of the investigator and stressed the importance of informing children about features of the research that might affect their willingness to participate. They further pointed out that procedure that might harm children physically or psychologically were unacceptable. Considering the fact that this study was done in an institutional setting that dealt with the care of orphans, it was very crucial that ethical standards were observed in order to avoid negative consequences that would have caused injury to the children or any other individual or group of persons. For this study, the fundamental principle of "the best interest of the child" as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) was observed in order to protect and promote the children's wellbeing. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) clearly stated that:

Children and young adults have a right to be involved in decisions which affect them. This right extends from decisions affecting them as individuals, to decisions which affect them as a collectivity- an acknowledgement that they are social actors in their own lives.

In order to accomplish the above ethical standards during the research, the followings were observed:

- The researcher was provided with a letter of introduction from Lund University which was presented to the orphanage authorities as evidence of participation to the study.
- Another ethical standard that the researcher observed was to contact the authorities at the orphanage who acted as guardians to the children who in this case were minors and as such was granted an informal permission in order to access the field and interview the children.
- Consent of the participants to the study was sought in order to affirm their commitment to be participants. The respondents were also notified in advance that their participation was not mandatory and that one was free to withdraw his/her

participation at any time during the course of the interview. This implied that each individual who accepted to participate in the study, did so willingly and with adequate knowledge

- The data collected for this study shall remain confidential and for academic purposes only and would not be disclosed to any other person(s) except with prior knowledge to the researcher. This is to acknowledge the trust exhibited by the participants and observe the ethical code of conduct on information gathered from the field.

Since this study was purely meant for academic purposes aimed at contributing to the body of knowledge within this study area, the above ethical issues was observed and the views of the participants to this study shall be respected by the researcher to the best interest of the children.

Position of the researcher

Having gained rapport and trust of the participants by sharing my own experiences and views about being an orphan with them, the respondents opened up and freely shared their experiences by narrating accounts of their family lives and how they perceived their wellbeing at the orphanage. Although some participants almost dominated the discussion, the issues raised by such dominant participants stimulated, challenged and ignited the memories of other participants which enabled them to actively participate and shared their experiences while the researcher passively listened and took notes of their views.

Fox (2006, p35) argued that there is need to study our own culture, which is the reason for carrying out a longer field study if one is to understand the culture better. Connolly (1998, p103) on the other hand described how his being an adult affected the field of study carried out on children and how her choice of what to say and what not to say mattered. For this study, since the researcher was a native of the area in which the study was carried out, understanding the culture and language was not a problem but what could be read in the eyes of the participants was how they viewed the researcher since the researcher never underwent a similar experience like them at an early age. Hence, the

researcher was put in a paradoxical position where he was an insider due to being a native of the area, but at the same time an outsider since he was not an orphan under eighteen years of age but a social science researcher from a University in Sweden. This raised both problems and opportunities. Problems in the sense that being a native of the area, the researcher went to the field well aware that the expectations of the people (orphans) on those who lived abroad or those who have connections abroad were always very high. Since ethically carrying out a study of this nature did not allow the researcher to for example, distribute chocolate to the kids before interviewing them, such expectations were put aside by explaining to the respondents the purpose of the study. Secondly, the policy of the orphanage did not allow any researcher or visitor to directly offer gifts of any kind to the orphans whether before, during or after the visit of the orphanage. The opportunities stemmed from the fact that access to the field was quite easy since the researcher made prior contacts with the administration of the orphanage and his intentions were known in advance.

The Orphanage

The orphanage in this study was created in 2003 as ‘a family-like home’ to take care of orphaned children whose parents died as a result of HIV/AIDS pandemic and or those whose parents were killed during the over twenty years of insurgency in Northern Uganda. It started with seventy eight children who were rescued from a village that was attacked by the rebels and the children were at the brink of being abducted. This orphanage is now “home” to 236 orphans and it takes care of both boys and girls aged between five to eighteen years. Furthermore, it offers family protection, housing, education, health and spiritual guidance to the orphaned children. The orphanage contains circles of “homes” which accommodates eight children each with a widowed “house mom”. It’s believed that this “home-like” environment recreated a family like unit where care and love is shared.

By the time this study was carried out, there were circles of three ‘homes’ with eight to ten houses. However, the researcher established that twenty nine of the houses were fully occupied by the orphans and a fourth circle of eight houses was under construction. The

researcher established that the orphanage had nine classroom blocks meant for children in the primary level and two classroom blocks with a science laboratory meant for orphaned children at the secondary level of education. Another block was meant for vocational training in tailoring, bakery and production of bee-hive products. The orphanage also had a café and a craft shop which enabled it to raise income through sale of food and children's art work and other farm products to visitors. There were a total of twenty nine house moms, eleven teachers including the head teacher and an administrator, all who were fully employed at the orphanage. The researcher established that the average cost of feeding the children at the orphanage was US\$ 35 per child per month.

According to available record of the number of orphaned children at the orphanage in 2010, it had a total population of 236 orphans with the number of girls given at 111 children while the boys numbered 125 children. In 2009, the available record indicated that there were a total of 208 children at the orphanage with the number of girls given at 102 children whereas the boys were 106 children. This implied that there were slightly more boys than girls at the orphanage and more so the number of children whose ages ranged between five to thirteen years were more than those children whose ages ranged between fourteen to eighteen years. The record indicated that the total number of children whose ages ranged between five to thirteen years were 108 children compared to children whose ages ranged between fourteen to eighteen years who numbered only 98 children. The gender variance was also noticeable between the two age groups in which children who were below the age of fourteen were 96 boys compared to 92 girls and for those children whose ages ranged between fourteen to eighteen, the number of boys was 29 compared to 19 girls.

Nevertheless, the researcher found out that the greatest challenge the orphanage faced was over dependency on donations from abroad through which most children received support and sponsorship from individuals, families or charity organizations for their up keep with very little contribution from the government of Uganda or the local community. I also found out that the caregivers did not have any trained skills in caring

for the orphaned children, but mainly used their natural talents in addition to their moral attitudes and parental skills in child care.

In discussing the future plans of the orphanage with the administrator, the researcher was informed that because of the overwhelming number of orphaned children in Northern Uganda who were desperately in need of care and support especially on education, the orphanage plans to admit more orphans upon completion of circle four of the houses. The researcher was also informed that plans were underway to establish a fully fledged health unit that would take care of the children's health and the community around the orphanage. However, in order to raise more revenue for the orphanage, the researcher was made to know that a dairy farm had been established and a bee-keeping project was developed to supply honey to the international market after its products have been approved to meet the required standards of the European Union market. Furthermore, the researcher was informed that it was the vision of the orphanage to make it a modern 'state of the art' institution for the care of vulnerable children that recreated a family like situation in the best interest of the child, hence improved wellbeing of the orphaned children within the community and Northern Uganda as a whole. Nevertheless, going by the responses of the orphaned children and the care-givers to this study, the researcher noted that the participants seemed to have very little knowledge about the negative consequences of institutionalization of child care. Perhaps the introduction of life skills courses at the orphanage was one of the ways through which the children were being empowered to live a 'normal life' outside the orphanage.

5. Results and Analysis of the Study

The research question to this study aimed at understanding how orphaned children perceived and described their wellbeing in an orphanage. Using the interview guide to seek the children's perspectives, the research revealed that on average the participants to this study had lived in the orphanage for a period of between 3-8 years and they all came from different parts of Lango sub-region. Each of the participants had lost one or both parents either due to the insurgency or HIV/AIDS pandemic. At least each of them provided an account of their family background; and all of them pointed out that their wellbeing were at stake before joining the orphanage because they were unable to afford the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, education and health care. This meant that the respondents to this study had spent quite a long time at the orphanage, and had fully adjusted to its environment, and considered it a 'home' by their standards.

Presentation of results

The empirical analysis of this study was structured around four different themes, namely: daily life experiences at the orphanage; children's perspectives on their wellbeing; children's visions for adult life beyond the orphanage and children's suggestions on how the orphanage could be improved. The next section discussed the findings of the study and offered a comprehensive analysis on the issues raised by the participants upon which detailed account of their perspectives concerning their well being at the orphanage has been presented.

Daily life experiences at the orphanage

In describing how their ordinary day life was at the orphanage, four key issues emerged which were categorized into activities such as *housework, attending classes, participating in extra-curricular activities and entertainment.*

Most participants pointed out that housework activities involved preparation of breakfast and cooking food; dining; slashing and cleaning of the compound; mopping the house-

floor; washing the bathrooms as well as washing of clothes. Some participants commented that:

- *We are paired up to assist mom during the preparation of breakfast and supper for our fellow housemates but she (house mom) prepared lunch for all of us because we would be in classes.*
- *During breakfast or lunch or supper, we all sat at the dining table and before we ate, one of us had to lead us into prayers first*
- *We are responsible for keeping our houses and compounds clean since we always competed with other houses because the administration usually rewards the house that emerged best in terms of cleanliness every month...*

After conducting the interviews, the researcher walked around the orphanage and observed that the houses in which the children lived were tidy and the compounds were quite clean which implied that most children played a role in house work and or general cleanliness of the school before attending classes or went for, before engaging in extra curricular activities.

On the other hand, all the respondents indicated that they attended classes although some participants pointed out that besides attending classes they participated in reading story books provided in the library as well as revising notes and that sometimes they counseled fellow housemates who might be faced with some problems that was likely to hinder them from attending classes. Most participants revealed that whenever one of the housemates was sick or behaved in a ‘strange manner’, the house leader or the house mom reported the matter to the school clinic or the administration for immediate action which included treatment or counseling. Nevertheless, the researcher was not able to witness any incident of that kind during the study period at the orphanage. However, I was informed by the administrator of the orphanage that some children especially those who were abducted and rescued from the rebel ranks sometimes behaved ‘very strangely’ especially when they were just brought into the orphanage. He said that such children were treated in a ‘special way’ and offered psycho-social therapy by trained personnel as well as counseling since they suffered from trauma and stigma due to the loss of apparently most if not all their family members and experienced a very difficult life in the

bush. While interpreting such instances, the researcher contended that the risk factors faced by formerly abducted children were more than that of the other children having considered the fact that they were abducted and lived in the bushes with the rebels besides being orphaned which made them behaved ‘very strangely’ compared to the other children.

Regarding extracurricular activities, most respondents indicated that they participated in playing games such as football, netball, volleyball, spinning; while other participants said they were members of the debating and drama clubs and yet some members said they preferred to go and dig in the garden as well as beekeeping as part of their extracurricular activities. One participant stated that:

- *When it is time for games, we all go for what each one of us enjoyed most. As for me, I prefer going to the garden to dig or watch over the bee-hives in the field because I would like to see that when I leave this place I should be able to lead a fruitful life on my own and I think bee-keeping and selling honey will fetch me a lot of money...*

I also noted that during the extra curricula activities, almost all the children were engaged in some activity; while a few watched their friends play games like football or netball. However, the researcher observed that the participants in games such as football or netball were predominantly played and watched over by boys and girls respectively except for volleyball whose participants included both girls and boys. When I went to the garden which was within the orphanage, some girls were harvesting and carrying maize from the garden to the school store, some boys were cultivating in the field, while others were in the bee-hive field. The fact that these orphaned children participated in extra curricular activities and was able to make their own choices on the type of activity they preferred most can be connected to the usage of resilience theory as applied by the orphanage administration. This was being realized in children’s voluntary participation in various activities that they engaged in despite the high risk factors that they faced during childhood.

Another issue which emerged regarding the participants daily life experiences at the orphanage was entertainment. Some respondents pointed out that they enjoyed playing guitar or piano; while others said they participated in singing and dancing in the church choir or better still listened to the gospel music as well as meditated; a participant revealed that he preferred listening to radios and reading newspapers and said thus,

- *My every day activity at this place is to listen to news and read newspapers in the morning, both local and national and re-read the main news to my brothers and sisters during the general assembly*

This was corroborated with the observation made by the researcher during his stay in the field who found out that some children led prayers followed by reading of the 'News' during the morning assembly. This implied that the orphanage promoted resilience factors by allowing the orphans to freely participate in entertainment which enabled them to sustain competence and recover from stress and trauma that they went through during childhood.

It also emerged that some participants were a fan of traditional dances which they said helped them to maintain their culture. It was a general consensus amongst the participants that they enjoyed interacting with friends so that they could share fun and joke as well as telling oral tales and riddling. One participant shared his view on this subject and said that:

- *I don't like seeing my housemates bored. Whenever there is boredom in the house I start telling stories that I used to be told when I was at home. Stories like that of the tortoise who was once a very handsome and respectable animal in the animal kingdom but because of greed he was thrown down from heaven when they went for a visit and he crushed on a rock and broke all his bones and that is why he now has a very hard body(shell)...*

During observation, the researcher found children in some houses very attentive with occasional breakdown of laughter while listening to a fellow housemate's story and this happened to be after they had had supper. On enquiring from the house mom whether it was the child's daily routine to tell stories to the rest of the housemates, the researcher was informed that the children always told stories sometimes alternately and that story telling helped them feel at home. The house mom indicated that she also participated in telling stories as well as listened to the children's story especially after supper and sometimes they sang both traditional and gospel songs before retiring to bed. As explained by different authors of resilience in this paper, another way through which resilience theory were promoted at the orphanage was to allow the children tell stories, share jokes and have fun with each other. By doing so, the orphanage provided the children with the opportunity to gain common sense knowledge through individual thoughts irrespective of the children's experiences.

Children's perspectives on their wellbeing

Most participants to this study indicated that they felt so happy being at the orphanage because they received the love and care which they were unable to afford while at their family homes. Besides receiving love and care at the orphanage, the participants reported that they were now able to access the basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, health care and education. Most participants expressed their happiness being at the orphanage and expressed their feelings by stating that:

- *I feel good living here because we now can afford to have the basic needs that we didn't have while in the village and used to feel that we were not going to study*
- *I now feel good and have lots of hope for the future because we are being educated which is the key for a better life*
- *It's a better place to be because I receive basic needs that is education and entertainment*
- *OK because while in the village I had no hope*
- *I feel healthy because of the clinic at the orphanage*
- *I feel happy because I am learning more things than when I was in the village*
- *I feel happy because I feel like I have part of my family which was lost*

- *I feel blessed because not every child has this chance*

The researcher observed how happily they attended classes during the days that he was at the orphanage. The researcher interpreted such instances and connected them to the theories of care and resilience which was at interplay as discussed in the theoretical perspectives of this paper.

Furthermore, most participants recognized the roles of the teachers, the moms and pastor as being helpful in offering them both spiritual guidance and psychosocial needs necessary for their wellbeing. Regarding the relationship between fellow children, the participants were happy to note that they were very comfortable living together and always identified themselves as brothers and sisters in their different houses in particular and the orphanage at large. They contend that they felt much more encouraged within them at the orphanage compared to how they lived in their family homes because they felt that their future looked brighter, in the future.

However some participants felt that despite the attempts being made by the administration of the orphanage to make them feel good, they were not so happy because they were denied access to see their siblings who made them feel bad because they were always kept wondering what kind of life their brothers and sisters at home were leading. Some of the participants pointed out how they felt about the orphanage and stated that:

- *We feel good because moms and teachers are like parents to us and we stay together as brothers and sisters*
- *Friends are very generous and we share ideas. Teachers are committed and moms are caring and loving and they provide all that is necessary for us in as far as their position is concerned*
- *Sometimes I feel happy but other times I feel bad because of stress from friends who make me annoyed*
- *Also I feel sad especially during holidays when I am not taken back home to play with my sister who is at home*
- *Feel good and bad, because there is no chance to visit relatives*

- *Different lifestyle from different backgrounds sometimes leads to fights and quarrels which I don't like*

While moving around the orphanage, the researcher observed that some children were quite lonely and seated at the verandah of their houses while their housemates shared jokes and told stories inside the house. The researcher interpreted the above such instances and linked it to the theories of care and childhood. This implied that the caregivers at the orphanage re-constructed the orphaned children's childhood and determined their social world in response to the functioning of the environment in which they lived which made some of the children feel bad.

Another aspect through which the participants viewed their wellbeing at the orphanage was how they were cared for. Most participants indicated that both the house moms and teachers cared so much for them and made them feel at home being at the orphanage. This was demonstrated by several responses as indicated below:

- *I feel like I am home with our own parents*
- *Mothers and guards are like parents and we have pastors*
- *I feel lucky because I am protected, proper education and being fed*
- *I feel good because we are given special care needed*
- *It feels good because you feel there are people who love you and care about you*
- *It's a pleasure because they take care and give advice for the future*
- *Feels good because the moms are approachable in case of problems other than the village with nobody to guide*
- *When friends are sick, we help them to wash their clothes and fetch water for them*
- *The teachers are good and give advice but also discipline you in case you have done something wrong*
- *Moms advise especially with the young ones to bathe, wash clothes and behave well*

The above responses was interpreted in connection with the theory of care since vulnerable children deserved to be cared for in various aspects of life notwithstanding the physical, emotional and intellectual processes that every child needs for development of their cognitive and social wellbeing in any environment in which they lived.

Other relevant issues such as gender roles and culture also emerged during the interview sessions. Some participants felt that they were being made to do certain tasks such as cooking and cleaning the houses which they considered as specifically meant for girls. However, most of the participants especially girls downplayed such issues and argued that they were all equal and there was need for them to share work equally irrespective of their gender. They further argued that they were in another environment different from their family homes and they have to abide by what the orphanage administrators wanted them to do. These arguments stemmed from the view of some participants who stated that:

- *I feel good and bad since there are activities which are carried out like cooking, fetching water and mopping house-floors which is for girls*
- *I'm happy because mothers encourage us to listen to and respect the elders, guardians and friends alike*
- *I'm happy especially with the moms because they teach girls how to behave well in public in order to become good mothers. For example, they advise girls to ' laugh like ladies' and always make sure they are tidy*
- *Feel happy with the moms because they teach all of us how to do housework and cook*
- *Teachers advise us not to involve in sex*

The above responses was interpreted as a way through which children viewed how they were cared for by adults, how their social world are shaped and the meaning that the children often attach to the environment and the society in which they lived. The gender issues raised by these participants indicated that gender roles are shaped by the different care arrangements in different societies. For this particular case, the children within this locality viewed certain roles as gendered which implied that societal cultural beliefs and

identities is deeply rooted in the children's mindsets irrespective of the environment in which they lived.

Children's visions for adult life beyond the orphanage

In response to the issue regarding their future plans, most participants revealed that they had lots of hope for their future since they were not only being offered the basic necessities of life at the orphanage but most importantly that they were being provided education which was essential in attaining a better livelihood. Some participants pointed out that their dream plans for the future included among others becoming doctors, engineers (civil/electrical), bank managers, accountants, police officers, lecturers, journalist, air hostess, politicians, pilots and computer engineers and the like.

- *I want to read hard and become a doctor, produce four children and take care of four orphans*
- *I want to be a doctor dealing mainly with children*
- *I want to become an accountant, good mother, take care of the elderly and desperate children as well as become a pastor*
- *As for me, I want to become a journalist, have four children and open up an orphanage...*

Some participants considered their future plans for adult life to become counselors (offering help to children who would be in need especially the orphans), musicians (gospel singers) religious leaders, being good parents, farmer (bee-keeper) and being business women/men. They stated that:

- *I prefer to become a businesswoman and produce two children and keep ten orphans*
- *I want to become a gospel singer with less than six children and one wife*
- *I'd prefer to give the money collected during my gospel music performances to those who are needy especially the orphans*
- *I want to become a Reverend Sister and lead a congregation of trusted worshippers who fear God*

- *Helping grandmas who can't do anything*

The above comments revealed how the respondents viewed their future plans despite living at the orphanage. They believed that the knowledge gained from the orphanage provided them with a better hope for the future which would enable them to achieve their dream plans. This implied that interventions such as careful assessment of factors of resilience in individual children especially the most vulnerable ones can as well be shaped in an orphanage as had been revealed by the participants in this study. The fact that they were able to value their future by indicating their willingness to be responsible adults, showed how best institutional support can shape the children's mindset depending on how it is structured. The views expressed by the participants to this study exhibited a high level of hope for their career developments as well as a commitment to a strong family relationship. Furthermore, these responses revealed that the children viewed their social world beyond the orphanage and within the context of love and care not only for fellow children but also for the adult community which they believed could be demonstrated through peaceful co-existence within the society.

Children's suggestions on how the orphanage could be improved

In giving suggestions on what areas the orphanage should consider making improvements on, the respondents pointed out that orphaned children should be given opportunities to make friends not only within the orphanage but also with the outside world. They recommended that this could be achieved by allowing them to visit other orphanages such as Watoto children's home in Gulu and Kampala where they could share their experiences; participate in competitive games and sports with other schools within the neighborhood and above all visit other countries where they could be able to share their experiences with fellow children.

- *We would also like to be given opportunity to compete in games and sports with other schools within the district so that we could improve on our talents as well as create friendship with other children*

- *We also thought that if we are allowed to visit other orphanages outside the district, such as Watoto children's home in Gulu and Kampala, we would be able to share our experiences and get more exposed*

During observation at the playground, the researcher noted how some children were engaged in a discussion about the children from Watoto children's home who visited Israel and gained sponsorship because of their performances as well as created friends there.

Another suggestion for the improvement of the orphanage fronted by the participants was that they should be given opportunities to express their views on how their wellbeing could be improved and the kind of help that they basically needed. They also felt that they were being denied freedom of expression and they recommended that sensitization of children on the child's rights as well as the society in general should be taken into account seriously.

- *We should be sensitized more about the children's rights because sometimes we feel oppressed and fear to express ourselves when something is really hurting*

In order for them to gain access and communicate with the outside world, the participants suggested that internet services should be provided at the orphanage and that electricity should be availed to all houses to provide a better environment for learning. They also recommended that more houses and classrooms should be constructed to accommodate more orphaned children who may be 'suffering out there'.

- *Electricity should be extended to all houses and in order to improve on the communication with the outer world and get to know what goes on out there, internet should be introduced*
- *It would also be good to construct more houses and classrooms so that other orphans are also given a chance to study*

The researcher was guided around the orphanage by the administrator and observed that a construction of the fourth circle of eight houses was ongoing and plans were underway to construct two more classroom blocks. The administrator informed the researcher that they intend to open up a day section which would offer opportunity to more orphaned children within the vicinity to access education and other vocational training in order to provide them with the necessary skills for a better livelihood.

Nevertheless, some participants also recommended that vocational training programs at the orphanage should be aimed at improving or tapping their various natural talents such as singing, dancing and drama which offered opportunity for talented orphaned children to compose their songs which in a way could help promote their plight in order to help change the society's attitudes towards orphans and other vulnerable children.

- *We do think that it is important to be taken to the radio stations where we could air our views as orphans as well as have our songs and plays recorded and played over the radios for other people to appreciate their wellbeing*

The participants also raised the issue of environmental protection in which they advocated for tree planting and safeguarding the environment not forgetting provision of safe drinking water and improved balanced diet at the orphanage. However, some participants allayed the fear of insecurity and suggested that the school fence should be strengthened because the current one was too weak.

- *They should improve on fencing because it's not safe; we need cooperation and unity with the community*
- *More boreholes should be constructed because it takes long to fetch water*
- *More vegetable foods should be provided as part of the balanced diet*
- *Everybody should engage in tree planting in order to protect our environment*

The researcher observed the children queued up at the only borehole at the orphanage to collect water during one of the evenings but also noted that the borehole was

supplemented with the water tank that collected rain water that children use for drinking. Regarding the fence at the orphanage, the researcher observed that part of the fence were falling, hence corroborated some of the participants' fears.

Considerations on the socio-economic status, the environmental factors as well as the geographical location and the gender issues were made during the process of analyzing the children's perspectives on how they perceived and described their wellbeing at the orphanage. In order to link the children's perspectives as exhibited in this part of the paper to the theoretical concepts of this thesis notwithstanding arguments fronted by some authors and reports on this subject, the next section offered a detailed discussion to this effect.

6. Discussion

Participants' account of their daily life experiences, their perspectives on wellbeing at the orphanage; the children's views on their future plans for adult life and their suggestions on how the orphanage could be improved was the main focus of discussion in the previous section. For this part of the paper, discussions will be held in conjunction with the theoretical aspects of this paper, the empirical results coupled with my experiences in the field and the arguments of some of the authors in this subject. The discussions in this part of the thesis will mainly focus on *a conducive environment that fulfils the basic needs of orphans; developing trusting relationship between care-givers and orphaned children; adjustment to a new life discourse in an orphanage; orphaned children attitudes towards adult life and the notion of gender, culture and ethnic identity.*

A conducive environment that fulfils the basic needs of orphans

The fact that children in this study viewed their daily life activities and participated in housework, attended classes, participated in extra-curricular activities and entertained themselves was significant enough to state that they did appreciate the environment in which they lived. Most of them pointed out that while under the care of relatives, they lacked most of the basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, education and health care besides love and care which was very crucial for their development.

Woodhead *et al.* (2009) conceptualizes wellbeing and argued that it is a socially contingent, culturally- anchored construct that changes over time both at individual life course changes as well as changes in the socio-cultural context. Wellbeing was used in this study as a mirror to reflect on the children's perception about how they felt being at the orphanage. Woodhead *et al* (2009) suggested that children's wellbeing should be placed at the core of qualitative research that moved beyond the traditional poverty research to the one which offered an interdisciplinary enquiry centered on children and their care-givers experiences, perspectives and aspirations as was reflected in the theoretical aspects of this study. The research found out that most children in this study positively viewed their wellbeing at the orphanage and argued that they were able to

afford the basic needs that they lacked while at their homes. The central arguments of the respondent's views were based on the theories of care, childhood and resilience which formed the basis of discussion in this paper. Daly & Rake (2003) assertion that care was rooted in relations to personal involvement and to some extent personal service was the subject of scholarship of this research in which focus was made on how children perceived their wellbeing while at the orphanage.

Developing a trusting relationship between caregivers and orphaned children

In response to the issue of care, the participants indicated that they trusted their care-givers who consisted of the house moms, teachers and the administration of the orphanage that they likened to their biological parents because of the manner in which the care-givers treated them at the orphanage. A report by UNICEF (2010) on *Africa's Orphanhood and Vulnerable Generations* stated that residential facilities were not an appropriate primary response for orphans' care due to the fact that these facilities were faced with numerous challenges. The findings of this research revealed that the children felt that they were treated well by their care-givers yet paradoxically these care-givers did not have any formal or professional training in regards to care of vulnerable children. Although the researcher agree with some of the reasons advanced against institutionalization of children, the perception of the children in this study over rode some of the negative assertions advanced against orphanages which did not take into consideration the children's perspectives. However, this issue was in line with Hood *et al.* (1996: p118) and Schenk, *et al.* (2005) views who suggested that collecting accurate and geographically specific information on children should be done in a manner which respected their rights in order to learn more about their circumstances and more so interventions should be designed in a manner which were suitable and appropriate for improving their wellbeing. The children in this particular case lacked the basic care necessary for their development which was the primary purpose of this orphanage according to the orphanage administration.

On the other hand, the research also revealed that children at this orphanage appreciated their wellbeing and were grateful that their future looked brighter than they had ever imagined. This was anchored in the arguments fronted by Fleming & Ledagar (2008) who pointed out that factors which promoted resilience normally originated outside an individual. They further contend that most studies which were carried out on the vulnerable children considered the factors of resilience to have stemmed from the individual, family and community levels and most recently at cultural and environmental levels. For this study, the creation of an orphanage which took care of the orphaned children whose wellbeing were at stake, created an enabling environment in which the orphaned children rediscovered their full potential and looked beyond their social world as argued by most participants. Brigid, Wassell & Gilligan (1999) on their part stated that careful assessment of factors of resilience in individual children, their family relationships and wider community networks was important for shaping intervention. John (1997: p19) on her part suggested that resilience could be overcome by taking into consideration factors such as trusting relationships, emotional support outside the family, self esteem, encouragement of autonomy, hope, responsible risk taking, a sense of being lovable, school achievement, belief in God and morality and unconditional love for someone. On the other hand, Rutter (1990) and Luther (1991; 2006) contend that vulnerability modifies a person's response to risk and that different people respond differently to the risk factors. The fact that orphaned children at this orphanage had developed a trusting relationship, were hopeful for a better future, trusted in God, obtained knowledge and attended school and felt that they were loved by their care-givers and those around them indicated that aspects of resilience theory was achieved in this study despite the different risk factors that the orphaned children went through.

Adjustment to a new life discourse in an orphanage

Whereas the notion of childhood had been discussed by several authors such as James and Prout (1997), Mayall (1994), Schwartzman, (2001) and James and Prout (1997: p8) who argued that this notion was constructed by adults and responded to by children besides presentation of children as agents who contributed to community functioning. They contend that children have always been active participants in the construction and

determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they lived. For this study, childhood was reconstructed by the orphaned children who lived at the orphanage in twofold. In the first instance, the children viewed themselves as being responsible for each other and treated one another with respect and dignity by always being there for whoever found difficulties in coping up at the orphanage. For example, the participants to this study revealed that they would help their housemates whenever one felt sick by washing clothes and comforting each other where need be. The second instance was where the house mom slept under the same roof with the children though in her own room which recreated a family-like situation as most homes within the Lango sub-region. This created a conducive environment in which the orphans felt that they were treated as children of the same 'parent' since the house mom were always there for them whenever they were in need.

Nevertheless, some participants in this study indicated that they missed seeing their relatives and other siblings which corroborated the views expressed by Larose, Bernier & Tarabulsky (2005) and Marsh, McFarland, Allen, McEthaney, Land (2003) who argued that institutional care was highly undesirable if not pathogenic and were against placing children in specialized and supervised settings since it separated them from adult public arenas. The fact that some participants in this study suggested that they felt bad about being at the orphanage due to its restrictive nature was a clear manifestation that growing up in an orphanage would never be the same compared to being raised within the family set up. This implied that however much an orphanage is designed in a setting which is as close to that of a home; it would never meet the children's desire of parental love and care that is needed during childhood. This is in line with James & Prout (1997) who pointed out that children ought to be viewed as active participants in the construction of their own lives and lives of those around them irrespective of the environment in which they lived.

Nevertheless, this study revealed that children's perspective on their wellbeing at the orphanage contradicted the general view of most researches such as that of Drew *et al.* (1998) who pointed out that institutions often have limited capacity, catering only to

physical needs and were very expensive to operate. The children's account in this study revealed that they considered their life course adjustments to be much more important and valued care and resilience factors as crucial for their future lives which they lacked before they joined the orphanage especially after they lost their biological parents.

Orphaned children's attitude towards their future adult life

Another issue which the participants discussed was plans for their future adult life. Most participants indicated that they had positive attitude towards their future adult life and most of them showed willingness to be responsible adults despite growing up at the orphanage. The participants' dream plans for their future which included their aspirations to become doctors, engineers (civil/electrical), bank managers, accountants, police officers, lecturers, journalist, air hostess, politicians, pilots and computer engineers should not be underestimated nor over exaggerated. The fact that they identified themselves as would be responsible adults with the view of becoming professionals in different fields ought to be encouraged. The researcher established that four of those who managed the bakery, children's craft shop and trained children at the vocational site were the first batch of those who joined the orphanage in 2003 who were now adults. The researcher was also informed that it was the orphanage policy to conduct an 'open-day' ceremony in which all those who were at the orphanage but have been graduated came and talked to the orphans at least at the end of every year. Such events also attracted those who sponsored the children at the orphanage who happened to come from abroad and were able to meet and discuss the progress with the children and know how their lives were at this institution. Although Clark (2008) argued that the primary purpose of most orphanages was to provide orphaned children with accommodation and offered social support such as feeding, health care and education in order to give time for decisions to be made about their future, this orphanage provided more than that and offered opportunities that helped the orphaned children led a life beyond the orphanage.

The manner in which this particular orphanage was organized could probably have biased the views of the participants in this study. The fact that most respondents suggested that more houses should be constructed at the orphanage in order to accommodate many more

orphans who may be ‘suffering out there’ implied that the children viewed the orphanage as a safe haven for ‘normal development’ of the vulnerable child especially the orphans. The UN General Assembly resolution 64/142 on the guidelines for Alternative Care of Children section(c)(123), stated that *facilities providing residential care should be small enough and organized around the rights and needs of the child, in a setting as close as possible to a family or small group situation...* As previously described, this orphanage was located in a rural area and the houses were organized in a family like structure as most homes within this locality. This recreation of a family like environment enabled the children to perceive their wellbeing in a positive way and felt that their basic needs were met and their rights were being protected if it was to be compared to the same kind of institution which is not created in a similar manner with the same kind of facilities.

The notion of gender, culture and ethnic identity

A study carried out by Oleke *et al.* (2007) to assess policy implications and experiences of orphan care in Amach, Lira district, Northern Uganda on gendered vulnerability of orphaned children, found out that female orphans were at a greater risk of being excluded from education compared to their male counterparts because girls were more often than not required for domestic work. The statistics available at the orphanage which was located within the same sub-region indicated that there were more boys than girls at all levels of different age groups at the orphanage which probably are reason enough to agree with the argument of Oleke *et al* that female girls were at greater risk of being excluded from education. Christensen & James (2000) argued that neither adults nor children were homogenous groups and for that matter created their own cultures within a pronounced cultural and structural constraint. The fact that they shared responsibilities at the orphanage such as cooking; cleaning their houses and the environment in which they lived irrespective of their gender implied that they were being trained to appreciate their own lives in order to become responsible adults.

Nevertheless, this study considered the orphaned children’s gender roles by negotiating their perspectives on their daily life activities in a distinctive manner, which revealed their cultural and ethnic identity formation as provided for by their care givers. The

research found out that the children's identity transformation cut across their physical, cognitive, social and emotional development which was quite unique considering the environment in which they lived. Sondergaard (2002: p452) suggested that constructive aspects such as gender, sexuality and ethnicity as well as socio-cultural and historical understandings of identity became incorporated into individual consciousness through a process of sifting and synthesizing. For this study, the participants revealed that the moms always talked to the girls and advised them to behave well and 'laugh like ladies' in order to grow up and become good mothers. This kind of labeling girls to behave in a manner considered 'proper' by the moms provided a cultural belief that girls have certain norms to which they should conform to within the environment in which they lived. On the other hand, Lave & Wenger (1991) conceptualizes how children came to experience, engage in and perform their ethnic identities and considered the notion of communities of practice as a very useful framework. This view was manifested in the participants' response on how they perceived their relationship with the house moms as well as teachers and fellow children to whom they greatly felt happy being around with. The participants argued that they were happy with the moms because they always advised them to respect and listen to the elders and guardians as well as help one another at all times. The views expressed by these children corroborated Wenger's (1998) assertion that institution such as schools and communities provided legitimate peripheral participation in shaping ethnic and cultural identities.

Consequently, the choice of the theories of care, childhood and resilience for this study was meant to acknowledge the usually overlooked yet interestingly empirical perspectives of children. The theoretical perspectives mentioned above was successfully reflected on the children's responses in the way they expressed their views, felt, acted, related and interfaced with the social world in relations to the caring practices, roles and responsibilities of adults at this orphanage. However, children's responses to this study were in line with Verhellen (1993) who suggested that researches carried out on children should be done *with* them and not *on* them or *around* them in order to understand how children perceived their wellbeing in any social setting. This study was also in line with John's (2003) view that seeking children's experiences signified a transformation of

adult-child relationships upon which the adult's views should not dominate the children's perception of their wellbeing which provided a reciprocal understanding of one another.

However, it should not go without mention that there were some limitations that were encountered during this study. The next section provides an account of some of the limitations that were encountered during this study.

Limitations of the study

The sample size population for this study consisted of children whose ages ranged between 14-17 years and they were only 35 participants compared to the over all 236 children who resided at the orphanage. The views expressed by the participants in this study may not be representative enough to make a generalized statement about orphaned children's wellbeing in this orphanage since the majority of the children who never participated in this study were below fourteen years old. On the other hand, due to time constraints, the researcher was not able to stay for a longer period of time at the orphanage to carry out further investigations into the views expressed by the participants during FGD. Furthermore, during observation, I probably risked making generalized conclusions on the children's behavior since there was a very high possibility of children not displaying their true characters at the time of this study. Another limitation the researcher faced during observation was that he had no control over the environment in which the participants lived since he had to leave the orphanage early enough before the gates were closed to visitors. Apart from the general observation made in addition to information obtained from the administrator of the orphanage and some few house moms during the study period, it was not possible for the researcher to make follow-up interviews with the participants in order to independently verify whether their perception had changed or not. Failure to use the tape recorder as had been planned by the researcher was also a limitation to this study although the researcher's employment of a research assistant helped to gather the data appropriately without much hindrances.

7. Conclusion

This paper focused on how orphaned children perceived their wellbeing at the orphanage located in the rural area of Kole district, Northern Uganda. The respondents shared their life experiences and perceptions about the orphanage and it was discussed at length based on the theoretical concepts which were a critical point of departure for this study. Considerations were made on the different perspectives in which the theories of care, childhood and resilience were employed using the definition of by different authors and as such gender perspectives were reflected during the analysis and discussions of this study. Hence, these theories were reflected in the children's response on how they perceived their wellbeing at the orphanage and analysis using the gender perspectives.

The respondents said their lives were much better because they were offered the basic needs necessary for life course adjustments at the orphanage which they lacked while they were under the care of relatives. The participants to this study also appreciated the work of teachers whom they hailed for providing them with knowledge that would benefit them in future as well as achieve their dream goals. Furthermore, this thesis also discussed the children's views in relation to some of the studies previously carried out on orphans and orphanages in sub-Saharan Africa and the world over thereby presented the African perspectives on this subject. Hence, the research revealed that orphaned children adapted to the environment in which they lived due to homogeneity of the challenges they faced during childhood and as such accepted a new life discourse to which they viewed themselves as brothers and sisters. Despite the negative assertions about orphanages as revealed by most studies, the participants in this study viewed their wellbeing at the orphanage as 'normal' and were more grateful that they were able to afford the basic necessities of life such as education, health care, clothing, accommodation and food despite the high risk factors they went through during childhood.

The perspectives of these children is therefore relevant at the time when this research was carried out although the environment in which they lived might have biased the way in

which they viewed their social world and the society around them. Hence, generalization should not exactly be drawn from this study; but rather the experiences of this research could be used to develop properly designed intervention policies, as well as further researches should be carried out in this area in order to contribute to the emerging body of literature. Nevertheless, the aims of this study were achieved in the sense that the findings would contribute to the existing body of knowledge about orphanages in Uganda in particular as well as sub-Saharan Africa in general. Furthermore, this study also offered the children's perspectives about their experiences and life course adjustments in the environment in which they lived and as such offered another perspective that appeared to be lacking in most of the previous studies carried out on orphans and orphanages.

Future research

There are a number of areas in which researches on orphaned children's perspectives can be sought. One aspect could be to find out from the orphaned children who reside in an orphanage in an urban or city area and compare their views with those who lived in an orphanage in the rural area but in different locations. Another aspect for future studies would be to seek the views of the orphaned children who reside with their relatives (families) or community care homes or those who live in the foster care homes and analyze their views on how they perceived their wellbeing in such facilities. However, it is also recommended that another study should be carried out to seek the perceptions of children who are below fourteen years of age if generalized conclusion should be made about the orphanage in this study. I do hope that considerations will be made to redefine the concept of orphanages to suit the best interest of the vulnerable children as stipulated in the UNCRC.

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Appendix

Interview guide:

During the interview sessions, I introduced myself and the research assistant and gave a brief background of the study to the participants. The participants were informed of the choice of method that would be used and an explanation was made as to why the discussion will be documented. Furthermore, the participants were informed of the importance of speaking their mind openly and truthfully. This was intended to make the individual participant choose to either participate or not.

The following questions were used during the interview sessions:

- 1. Mention your name, where you come from and how long you have been here.**
- 2. How is your ordinary day like?**
- 3. Can you tell me how you feel being in this place?**
- 4. Can you tell me what it is like to be here with your friends, Moms and teachers?**
- 5. What future plans do you have for your adult life?**
- 6. Do you have any suggestions for improvement of the orphanage in any aspect?**

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION