



The impact of orphanhood on education attendance: evidence from Zimbabwe



Wei Ha ^{a,*}, Peter Salama ^b, Stanley Gwavuya ^c

^a Graduate School of Education and Institute of Economics of Education, Peking University, Beijing 100871, China

^b UNICEF Ethiopia, UNICEF House, P.O. Box 1169, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

^c UNICEF Zimbabwe, 6 Fairbridge, Belgravia, Harare, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The development community has started to question the exclusive focus of social protection programmes on orphans and vulnerable children affected by AIDS in the context of widespread poverty and vulnerability in Africa. This paper, using 2009 Zimbabwe Multiple Indicator Monitoring Survey data and multivariate regression analysis and simulations, shows that the impact of orphan-hood on children's access to education should be not underestimated. Specifically, the probability differential of dropping out of school, when comparing double-orphans and children with both their parents, is almost as large as the gap between a child from the fourth quintile and the poorest quintile.

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1. AIDS orphans and global responses

After nearly three decades' fight against HIV and AIDS, the world is solemnly reminded of the devastating cost on children. The number of children who have lost one or both parents due to AIDS is estimated to be a staggering 16.6 million for which Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) takes the lion share with 14.9 million AIDS orphans (UNICEF, 2011). The epidemic has worsened the situation for children who live in communities affected by AIDS, leading to unprecedented welfare problems for large numbers of children and at the same time undermining the ability of governments to meet their obligations as stipulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Foster, 2006). Recognizing such immense challenges, international communities have joined hands with national governments to formulate a holistic strategy to mitigate and/or break the intergenerational impact of HIV/AIDS, dubbed the four 'Ps': preventing mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT), providing paediatric care and treatment, preventing infection among adolescents and young people, and protecting and supporting children affected by HIV and AIDS.

Recognizing the long term implications of loss of parents on children, the fourth P, i.e. protecting orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) or protecting the most vulnerable children (MVC), has received increasing attention in the last two decades. This has

culminated in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS at the General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS in 2001 and has led to the mushrooming of National Action Plans for OVC in most Sub-Saharan African countries which focus on social protection and child protection services for OVCs. There has been solid evidence that programmes such as these can reduce the economic vulnerability of affected children and support their access to basic social services allowing them to realise their full potential in life (UNICEF, 2011).

Yet the use of orphan-hood as a convenient targeting proxy for children affected by AIDS is not without controversy.¹ While some argue that using orphan-hood as the primary criteria for targeting will cause both inclusion and exclusion errors (such as the inclusion of orphaned children from well-to-do families and the exclusion of children from vulnerable households) (Greenblott and Greenaway, 2007; Foster, 2006), others question more fundamentally whether orphans are indeed more vulnerable than non-orphans (Urassa et al., 1997; Lundberg and Over, 2000; Meintjes

¹ The definition of orphanhood is rather straightforward as children under 18 who have lost one or both of their parents. Vulnerability, however, is defined differently in different contexts by different stakeholders. In the HIV/AIDS context, the term vulnerable children means children living in households where adults are struggling with chronic illness whereas in the more general child protection setting, it includes all children who are likely to be subjected to exploitation, abuse and discrimination. These would include street children, Children in the Worst Forms of Child Labor, children affected by the war or conflict or Children Living with Disability, etc.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +86 1062767626; mobile: +86 13552933308.
E-mail address: wha@pku.edu.cn (W. Ha).

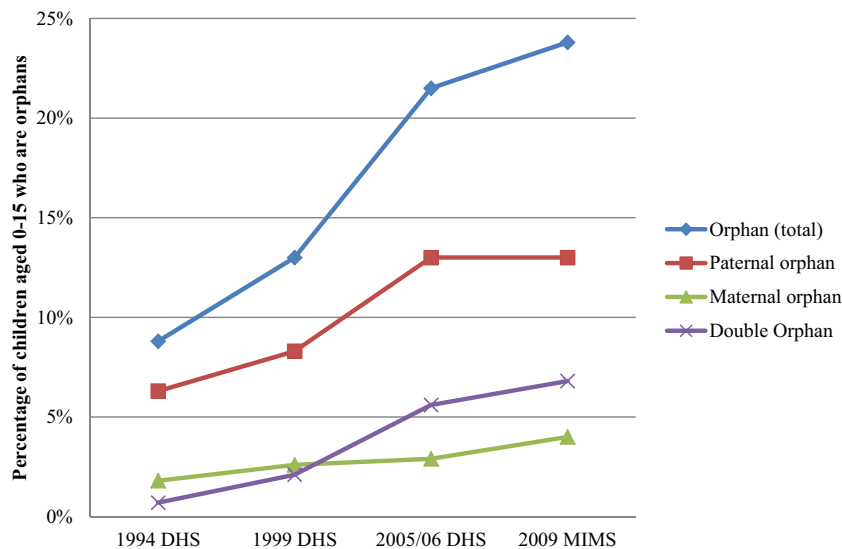


Fig. 1. Percentage of orphaned children (0–15 years old) 1994–2009. *Notes:* Double orphan indicates those children who lost both biological parents while paternal orphan and maternal orphan correspond to those who lost only one parent. The category “Orphan (total)” captures all three types of orphans mentioned above. *Sources:* Authors’ own tabulation of Zimbabwe’s Demographic and Health Survey in 1994, 1999, 2005/2006 and MIMS 2009.

et al., 2003). Empirical evidence on the latter has been equivocal especially in earlier studies from various Sub-Saharan African countries using cross-sectional data in the multivariate regression setting (Kamali et al., 1996; Lloyd and Blanc, 1996; Ryder et al., 1994; Bicego et al., 2003; Ainsworth and Filmer, 2002; Case et al., 2004). Ainsworth and Filmer (2006) found considerable diversity in orphan/non-orphan differentials for school attendance using household data from 51 countries and concluded that it is difficult to draw generalizations about the extent to which orphans are disadvantaged. Guo et al. (2012) reviewed 23 relevant studies published between 1999 and 2010 and reached the same conclusion. In a few cases, the negative effect of orphanhood on school enrollment or attendance disappeared after controlling for other confounding factors. The absence of consistent negative effects has often been attributed to the strength of extended family and community networks that care for orphans (Evans and Miguel, 2007).

More recent studies have taken advantage of longitudinal data to solve this puzzle. These studies have been able to track children’s educational outcomes before and after the death of their parents allowing a more solid argument for causality. They tend to suggest that there is indeed a causal link between parental death and children’s education (Ainsworth et al., 2005; Beegle et al., 2009 in Tanzania, Case and Ardington, 2006 in South Africa, Evans and Miguel, 2007; Yamano and Jayne, 2005 in Kenya).

Despite these new findings showing the risk orphans face when it comes to education, there is growing interest in developing more multidimensional indicators of vulnerability that describe not only the extent to which children are affected by AIDS, but also poverty-related vulnerability (UNICEF et al., 2010; Akwara et al., 2010; Alkire and Foster, 2007; Delamonica and Minujin, 2007; Roche, 2009; Biggeri et al., 2009).

This paper recognises the multidimensionality of children’s vulnerability especially towards access to education and intends to answer the following questions:

- Who are the orphans in Zimbabwe and what is the situation of their schooling in the context of a major economic and political crisis?
- Is orphanhood a useful predictor of children’s school attendance or dropout behaviour after controlling for all other major determinants such as family wealth and parental education?

How important is orphan-hood relative to the other major determinants?

- Is there a major difference between maternal and paternal orphans and double orphans?

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the orphan crisis and the decline of education sector in Zimbabwe in the last two decades and the multi-sectoral support that the international community and the government has provided to sustain children’s access to education. Section 3 describes the data and the methodology used to analyse the impact of orphanhood used in this paper while Section 4 covers the results. Section 5 concludes the paper and draw implication from the results.

2. Orphanhood in Zimbabwe and education in the context of AIDS dynamics and the economic/political context

Zimbabwe is one of the countries hardest hit by HIV/AIDS with adult prevalence peaking in 1997 at almost 30%. Although there has been a significant decline in HIV prevalence since this time due to a combination of mortality and behavioural change, the lag between decline in prevalence and adult death has translated into ever increasing number of orphans in Zimbabwe (UNICEF, 2011). Data from various rounds of DHS surveys show that number of orphans has risen from below 9% in 1994 to 22% in 2005/2006.² The latest Multiple Indicator Monitoring Survey (MIMS) 2009 shows a further increase to 25%, which translates to about 1.6 million children. The number of AIDS orphans in Zimbabwe now stands at an astonishing 1 million, more than 70% of all orphans (UNICEF, 2011) (Fig. 1).

The economic and political crisis in the last decade has paralysed Zimbabwe’s education system, once arguably one of the best on the continent, as education financing was eroded by hyperinflation and experienced teachers were lost to the diaspora (UNICEF, 2011). As a result, access to education increasingly depended on parents’ ability to pay for school levies, fees and teacher incentives while quality of education declined precipitously as demonstrated by low pass rates (Fig. 2). The Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) of the Enhanced Social

² Orphans are defined in DHS surveys as children aged 0–15 who has lost one or two biological parents.

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