

ABSTRACT

In Zimbabwe, many studies on the care of HIV/ AIDS orphans mostly focus on how caregivers are selflessly enduring the burdens of raising HIV/AIDS orphans without external support because of the collapse of the traditional system of childcare. Although African children have long been acknowledged as making important contributions in the family livelihoods in rural settings, current studies tend to tone down orphans' agency and underline their dependency and care-seeking positions thus presenting orphans as burdens and caregivers as the bearers of the burden. The aim of this study was to understand the experiences of caregivers raising HIV/AIDS orphans within extended families in the rural area of Bulilima District, Matabeleland South province, Zimbabwe. The study argues that within the financial challenges and burdens of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, families in rural Zimbabwe are developing adaptive means to care for HIV/AIDS orphans. The study followed a qualitative approach by interviewing 15 caregivers using a semi-structured interview guide. The caregivers were selected using purposive sampling and the data was analysed using thematic analysis. Findings that emerged suggest the extended family orphan care support system is not breaking up, but rather actively ameliorating the structural challenges of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, harsh economic conditions, and persistent droughts. The capacity to care and caregivers' experiences should be viewed as a continuum because the family capacity to care is subject to change at any given time and place. The economic status of the family where the caregiver lives and economic status of the caregivers themselves influence experiences of the primary caregiver raising the HIV/AIDS orphans. Further, the study noted rural orphans with age become active household members who contribute significantly to the subsistence way of life in rural Zimbabwe.

Key words: Experiences; Caregivers; HIV/AIDS; orphans; Bulilima district