RESEARCHERS’ OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Latchkey children in Zimbabwe: The plight of children in the absence of their parents

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ABSTRACT

This article investigated trends within the latchkey system of childcare in both rural and urban Manicaland in Zimbabwe.Latchkey children are children who look after themselves when their parents or guardians are engaged mostly at work. The case study is hinged upon Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, taking the latchkey child as part of a system that is dependent on other parts of the family and society. Ten purposefully selected latchkey children, five teachers and five parents made up the sample of twenty participants. Data were collected through observations and interviews during a focus group discussion in four conveniently selected schools. Despite the weaknesses of the latchkey system, some advantages were noted with regards to the socio-economic context in which we found latchkey children. The system has been found to address societal needs in situations of working parents and guardians, divorce, migrant workers, parents’ daily routine and death of caregivers. The affected latchkey children participants faced problems of need deprivation mainly due to poverty, abuse, conflicts amongst siblings and some forms of neglect. On a positive note, it was established that through the system, children learn to be independent and responsible beings whilst the breadwinners save on paying house workers. Recommendations are presented for parents and other stakeholders, all in an effort to help the child.

Keywords: abuse; children; deprivation; latchkey; neglect; parenting; poverty; Zimbabwe
In recent years, the child has been the focal point of most family discussions in newspapers, daily news, on radios, televisions and many other forms of the media. As parents nurture their children, they continue to doubt whether they are really giving the best treatment ever (Rambau, 2008). In echoing these sentiments, Gordon (cited in Brooks, 2008) urges parents to cooperate with their children by listening to their needs, responding to them and modifying the environment. This allows children to explore more as they grow. Levesque (2012) argues that a child is often regarded as having limited personal resources and needing to be protected from being overwhelmed with pressures.

As children grow older, compliance to parental wishes becomes a more complicated task. This may be due to the adolescent task of developing independence and challenging the status quo. In order for good quality parent-child relationship the child has to have a clear concept of the exact outcome parents would wish for. Possibly, because of the absence created by the latchkey system, the child may end up not knowing exact parental wishes and expectations (Darling & Steinberg, 2004). Unknowingly, parents may adopt a laissez-faire parenting style. Such circumstances may not be avoidable considering the poorer socio-socio economic context in which we find most African families.

This article strives to discuss the plight of children in the absence of their parents. Some authors further discuss them as latchkey children (Brooks, 2008; Bee, 2007; Eberstadt, 2003; Lamana & Riedmann, 2006; Rambau, 2008; Rice, 2005). These authors define latchkey children as unsupervised children who care for themselves before and after school, on weekends and holidays whilst their parents are at work or away doing other social activities such as gambling and drinking. The children carry the family home’s front door keys to let themselves in and out of their homes hence the term ‘latchkey’ (Rice, 2005). Fortunate ones may be afforded cell phones with which to contact parents when danger signals.

Levesque (2012) delineates latchkey children’s age groups from seven years up to thirteen years. Brooks (2008) states that in the United States of America, for example, the latchkey phenomenon starts from eight years of age up to the end of school-going age. Though the younger children cannot do all chores done by older latchkey children, they certainly suffer almost the same problems as those suffered by older latchkey children. The discussion therefore, includes all children from the time they are born up to about 18 years.

A more recent term is ‘self-care’ children (Berk, 2007; Brooks, 2008; Rice, 2005). Self-care in this study is equated to the latchkey system but does not necessarily mean child-abandonment per say, because difficult life circumstances may be the reason for adopting the latchkey option and not mere neglect. However, some versions of the latchkey system may eventually lead to child abandonment. Most of the time the affected children go home from school, and call their parents if facilities permit, to just say that they have arrived home. They then stay indoors, doing homework,
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household chores and sometimes watching television until their parents come home. This routine is often observed in affluent societies.

In other family set ups, especially in developing countries like Zimbabwe, these children may move from one location to the next seeking social contact. The researchers have also noted that those in the rural side of the country spend hours trying to obtain forest vegetation to make relish, some go to the grinding mill or to the fields whilst others sell items like dried fish, maputi (a type of an African snack made of roast maize seed), wild fruits and anything else that can bring them a little money to help sustain life (Ganga & Chinyoka, 2010).

The authors of the current article have also observed that the number of extended families in Zimbabwean homes may have a reduction in the number of latchkey children. However, the rise on financial demands on parents lives children to operate under the latchkey or self-care system. In some instances, some latchkey children were found to be contemplating suicide, suffer depression, academic failure and getting involved in drug abuse. This is supported by Eberstadt (cited in Rambau, 2008). Such childhood experiences have later effects on the future of an adult and personality development (Mol, 2004; Santrock, 2003).

In this article, reasons why families adopt the latchkey system are discussed in light of exploratory findings noted from the qualitative data obtained from latchkey children, their parents and teachers. The study attempted to examine challenges facing some latchkey children in some Zimbabwean home set-ups of Manicaland.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is centered around the ecological systems theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1986) whose assumptions are based on interdependence between different organisms and their environment (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2010). The relationship between organisms and their environments are seen holistically. In a family, as in this study, every individual is vital to another in order to sustain the cycles between birth and death. And so, the links between organisms or people within their entire system are largely dependent on one another. The theory sees different levels and groups of people as interactive systems where the functioning of the whole is dependent on the interactions between all parts. A latchkey child, as is the case in this study, is part of a system that can be affected by different parts such as parents, teachers, neighbours, peers, the curriculum and the school administration. Interdependence here is highly dependent on the activities of each member.

It becomes important to understand how children’s development is shaped by their social contexts (Bray, Gooskens, Khan, Moses, & Seekings 2010). Bronfenbrenner explains how different levels within a system in the social context interact in child development. Interacting dimensions are central in his model covering personal
factors (for example, child’s or parent’s temperament), process factors (forms of family interactions) contexts (families, schools or local communities) and time (changes over time in the child and the environment). He explains reciprocal influences in families, peer groups, classrooms, schools and local communities covering four nested systems namely; the microsystem, meso system, exosystem and macro system that all interact with the chronosystem.

And so, the latchkey child is in the centre of it all. The reciprocal interaction with her/his peers, school administration, family and the external community all impact on the child, parents and their community. For instance, the notion of latchkeying can affect the exosystem, for example, a parent’s workplace activities, since this is where the child’s means for survival should be plucked from. Therefore, any frustrations from the work place can eventually affect the family, which in turn affects the latchkey child, her/his peers and eventually the whole macrosystem is affected in a way.

**METHOD**

**Research Design**

The study adopted a phenomenological descriptive case study design to explore and present an authentic latchkey situation and resultant implications on the children, their parents and the community at large. The enquiry falls within a qualitative research paradigm (Creswell, 2008; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

**Sampling**

Ten children were purposefully selected from the Chipinge district of Manicaland, Zimbabwe. These children’s parents were employed in and around the district. An equal number of boys and girls aged between 10 and 18 years were selected. Five teachers and five parents were randomly selected to assist with observations at school and at home. In total, there were 20 participants. All the teachers who participated had either a certificate or a diploma in education.

**Instrumentation**

Effects of the latchkey system were noted on an observation guide developed for use by teachers and the authors. The authors were residing in Manicaland during the time of the study, thus making participant-observations convenient. Non-obtrusive observation procedures (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011), were employed to check latchkey behaviours, emotions, strengths and weaknesses (Venter & Rambau, 2011), during interactions with teachers, researchers and other children. The teachers too, were trained to use the observation
guide beforehand. The focus group discussion was mounted with latchkey children and teachers. Parents responded to an interview guide that determined the consequences of the latchkey system within varied home environments. The instrument triangulation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) was meant to extract an authentic situation about the latchkey status in Manicaland.

**Ethical considerations**

The authors were aware that each and every citizen, including children, has the right to dignity of treatment and privacy. Participation in the study was voluntary. Therefore, it was prudent to explain the purpose of the study to the school’s authorities and all participants. Participants were assured of strict confidentiality and that pseudonyms were to be utilised. Consent forms were used especially for the minors and guardians involved. The major aim of the study was to establish the situation of children in the absence of their parents and to inform possible interventions to assist children. Data collected were used only to establish and recommend ways in which the latchkey children could be assisted to eradicate negative effects of the child-rearing system on the development of children.

**Data analysis**

Themes emerged from the focus group discussions and interview transcriptions as well as from the observation reports. Within these themes the authors were able to place extracts taken from the latchkey children’s experiences within their phenomenal fields (environment).

**REASONS FOR ADOPTING THE LATCHKEY SYSTEM**

**Poverty and inability to afford better care-giving**

Some families running the latchkey system had opted for a *laissez-faire* parenting style where children were sometimes left to do as they wished whilst parents left for neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia. This scenario was confirmed by teacher participants’ observation reports. The teachers also reported a reduction in some latchkey children’s academic achievements as well as altered emotional and social development. This finding concurs with findings by Chinyoka and Ganga (2011) on poverty and its psychosocial effects on child development.

Observations have also indicated that the families involved in this study had children who spent a number of months on their own whilst parents were away seeking means of survival. One of the parents, had this to say, . . . *tinotsva kwese, kuti tirege kuenda, vana vanofa nenzara. Kuenda Joni kunounza school fees, rent,*
nhumbi nechikafu . . . (meaning that they had no option but definitely needed to get to Johannesburg, South Africa and/or other neighbouring countries in order to work for food, school fees, rent and clothes). The teachers also mentioned the fact that, whilst some latchkey children were pampered, those who became latchkey in poorer families ended up dropping out of school because of failure to receive adequate resources and encouragement. These findings are supported by the work of Arrighetti (2001) and Eberstadt (2001). In worse situations some latchkey children were said to be vulnerable to HIV/AIDS due to exposure. The risk of infection arises from early onset of sexual activities. The teachers and parents affirmed that there were more disadvantages of latchkey system in poorer societies than the affluent ones.

**A consequence of divorce or separation**

The participants explained that the decision to divorce or separate that some parents make (usually as a result of infidelity and domestic violence), left a single parent as the sole guardian and parent. These parents are then forced by circumstances to seek employment in order to provide basic needs for them and the children. The sole guardian might keep the children with a domestic worker or child minder. In less-privileged societies, where the parent could not afford hiring a domestic worker, children became pure latchkey. They even ended up becoming street children if their parents stayed away for too long. In this case, child abandonment may be the end product.

However, some children from broken homes can develop to become law-abiding and well-functioning individuals. In Zimbabwe, there are no particular records of pure latchkey children because these are sometimes recorded more often with street children, abandoned children and orphans. All are grouped under Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC). It appears necessary for researchers to run a survey that identifies and delineates between all children at risk in terms of different circumstances.

The authors observed many latchkey children among the single farmworker families on coffee, tea and timber estates in Manicaland, Zimbabwe. Most days, even during weekends, the compound workers, mostly singles, were occupied fully from 5.00 am up to 6.00 pm in an effort to complete given manual tasks on the farms. In most cases the latchkey children were found fending for themselves. Some even ended up begging from the neighbours or even from a farm owner. For instance, one participant, a latchkey child of a banana farmworker lamented saying, *Dzimweni nguva kana mai vasipo tinotokumbira kumurungu . . . Pamwe vanofamba nekudoro pavanobva kubasa. Zvinosiyaneyi newakatofirwa hake nemubereki wacho?* (meaning that children sometimes beg if the parent is not around to offer supplies). The child participant also lamented her predicament relating it to that of an orphan in a needy situation. Little control of children’s daily routine is given because their parents are hardly at home during the daytime to supervise them.
Worse situations occur where the parent is single, misuses alcohol by diverting to the beer hall after work. The participant spoke of the neglect by her single guardian who, most of the time, passed through the beer hall for a drink even if there were no supplies at home. In this case, it is no longer a latchkey phenomenon, but child abandonment. The latchkey child’s predicament here matched findings by Sengendo and Nambi (1997) in Uganda who established that orphaned children in Uganda endured powerful cumulative and often negative effects as a result of their parents’ death. Even if they are not orphaned, some latchkey children are surviving in distressful circumstances, where intervention is necessary.

**Parents operating as migrant workers**

The teacher participants mentioned the issue of migrant workers as parents who moved places or are usually changing their jobs and moving from one city to another. The United Nations Convention on the Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families (2006) however, clearly defines a migrant worker as a person who is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a state in which she/he is not a national. In this study, a migrant worker was taken as defined afore, but included even working parents forced to move houses as they get employed from one company/organisation to another in Zimbabwe. Bee (2007) asserts that moving houses or changing jobs forces breakages of old social ties and the development of new friendships.

However, some children have developed resilience to an extent that they may not be as negatively affected by the latchkey system (Rutter, 2006). In the current study, adolescent participants mentioned that they sometimes opted to stay behind when their parents moved. They preferred to continue learning at their original schools for fear that the school curriculum or school subjects offered by a new school might differ from the ones that they were already studying.

Parent participants mentioned the issue of failure to afford requirements of new schools, for example, new uniforms and new learning materials. A greater number of participants in this study also mentioned unsafe working environments especially for their younger children as well as failure to secure ideal accommodation for safe family living. Unsafe and expensive living environments were also implicated as sources of decisions that are sometimes made by parents of latchkey children. The migrant parents of the latchkey children mentioned that they made arrangements to see their children only during the weekends or only when schools closed for holidays. For the rest of the week days, the children were unsupervised.

The authors noted that the latchkey children of migrant workers faced the greatest problems. Locally, parents employed by the banks and other organisations are constantly moved from one region to the other. Children may end up staying alone or with a domestic worker, who may not be able to assist in homework or any other school work, be it, oral or written tasks depending on where children
may need assistance. Whilst Smith (1982, cited in Brooks, 2008) asserts that as long as the environment in which children are placed is stimulating and curiosity is encouraged, their cognitive development proceeds at a very high rate. The teachers interviewed reiterated the fact that children become discouraged, learning may deteriorate and their intellectual ability may be deterred. In contrast, Rice (2006) states that, once their surrounding becomes sterile, changing and uninteresting, or their human contacts and experiences are limited, growth ceases or slows down because of intellectual deprivation.

Changing family roles
Traditionally, the women used to stay at home to rear the children whilst the man went to work. The situation is continuously changing in modern societies (Rambau, 2008). This paradigm shift or the increasing number of working parents was implicated as one of the factors that are causing more children to be left alone after school. Women are now changing or adding onto their mothering roles by joining the men at work. The children are sent to crèches, pre-schools or formal schools depending on their ages. Most industries or workplaces knock-off at 17h00, thus changing family roles and exposing children to the latchkey system of child-rearing. For those who cannot afford to send children to pre-school, for example, lowly-paid farm workers, the latchkey children in this situation are in danger of sexual child abuse and other consequences of parental absence.

The authors have observed that the idea of extended families in Zimbabwe tries to make a reduction in the number of latchkey children. On the other hand, it has been noted that the HIV and AIDS pandemic leaves many children parentless. The interviews held with children who were orphaned and living as latchkey brought about further effects of the latchkey system. Some latchkey children participants shared that they sometimes contemplated suicide, suffered anxiety, became depressed and engaged in drug abuse that led to school failure. In a study on poverty and psychological effects on OVC in Zimbabwe, Ganga and Chinyoka (2010) also noted a reduction in school performance in cases where children lived in distress. The trend was also noted by Eberstadt (cited in Rambau, 2008) in a study on the plight of latchkey children in South Africa.

Parents’ daily routine
Some participants indicated that, some husbands work in town whilst the wives reside in rural homesteads looking after the children and family property. The father sometimes takes with him the older children to attend school in town or the children are left to stay with the mother or grandparents in the countryside. When it is month end, the father brings home a few groceries, and sometimes takes his wife to town if it is not a ploughing season. For that whole season, the children become latchkey and are vulnerable.
If the older children are left to attend school there, some problems may also arise. For example, in instances where the father drinks heavily or has daytime work shifts, children are left alone to do all the household chores. Some fathers make a daily routine of passing through the beer hall after work. They only get home when all the children are asleep. Others may decide to cohabit with temporary town wives now known as small houses whilst the legal wife is in the rural home. It is only during the weekend that the children may see their parent.

The idea of parents wanting to further their education too, may bring more income to families. Its negative side was implicated by all parents and teachers whom we interviewed as one other factor perpetuating the latchkey system. This is because whichever parent remains at home may have his/her own professional and social duties to as well as rearing their children. Boots (2005) contends that there seem to be a rise in financial demands on parents resulting in latchkey children. The findings of this study also supports Ganga (2011) earlier finding that about seventy percent of local families in Chipinge district of Manicaland have limited means to afford basic human needs necessary to sustain life, thus compromising the psychosocial development of children.

IDENTIFYNG PROBLEMS OF LATCHKEY CHILDREN

Emotional, moral, social need deprivation and child abuse

Participants indicated that in the latchkey system, the idea of bonding may not be fulfilled. Education (2009) defines bonding as something that unites two or more people or groups, for example shared feelings and interests. Erickson, Martinengo & Hill, 2010) concur with Lamanna and Riedmann (2006) that families are protective of each other. They want to eat together, play and share ideas, just like components of a system aiming to output something. All these strengthen ties between members of a family. Participants failed to experience adequate bonding with their families. The latchkey system seems to have brought in some negative aspects and insecurity into the family’s living system.

Rice (2005) asserts that the parental task is to fulfill emotional needs so that the children can grow to become emotionally secure and stable persons. If children’s needs for love, affection, security, understanding and approval are not met, they are likely to develop negative feelings (Cooper, 1983 cited in Rice, 2005). When children are deprived of their emotional needs due to latchkey, they may become fearful, hostile, insecure, anxious and rejecting persons.

Levesque (2012) reported that the amount of time latchkey children spent alone in their Grade 3 predicted children’s behaviour problems in both Grade 3 and 5 as well as predicting lower academic functioning.

Birdthistle et al. (2011) define child abuse as maltreatment constituting all forms
of ill-treatment resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development and/or dignity. It is a non-accidental harm inflicted to the child by a person responsible for his/her care. Three of the parents interviewed lamented over situations of sexually abused children whilst their parents were living away from home.

One of the parent participants (a police officer) also narrated the vulnerability of children to abuse especially where there is lack of parental care. She relayed how many times a 13-year-old girl was raped by her father`s best friend in her father`s bedroom. She confirmed that the case had been reported. Another police officer also narrated prevalence of child abuse cases in Zimbabwe. Cases involved rape, sodomy, infanticide and kidnapping –all afflicted to under16 year olds. These were likely not to be the only cases as instances of child abuse go unreported to the police because children fear intimidation and victimisation by the perpetrators as established in a study by Nyamukapa et al. (2010).

It was noted from the interviews that latchkey children may fall victim to child battering by domestic workers and even neighbours whilst the children continue to suffer in silence. This harm may cause disfigurement, impairment of bodily function or serious bodily injuries or even death. Notably, the Zimbabwe media has reported cases of child battering upon latchkey children alongside orphans.

Some adolescents raised through the latchkey system in marginalised societies have been reported to have become parents too soon, thus shortening their youth. One of the teachers explained . . . they then decide to marry even at the age of 14 years in order to try and establish caring relations that may help them to conquer life difficulties, stresses and anxieties. Not being fully prepared for parenthood, some young mothers, who married and gave birth too early ended up abandoning, scalding, suffocating or killing their infants (Nyamukapa et al., 2010). Arguably, there could have been a difference, had their parents been there to guide them. Chinyoka and Ganga (2011) affirm such consequences in that parents of lower income families encountering stress may abandon their infants.

Some latchkey children participants also relayed that sometimes children, especially siblings, fight when the parents are not at home. They can get hurt and no immediate help is given. There is also greater susceptibility to peer pressure and conflict especially with younger children who might decide to spend time at a friend’s home as is explained by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (cited in Donald et al., 2010). The family’s neighbourhood can play a very important role in shaping the life of children either positively or negatively depending on one’s location (Lamana & Reidman, 2006).

Teachers and parents mentioned that although most neighbours in affluent communities are said to be very cooperative, it is possible that some high density sections such as some parts of Manicaland in Zimbabwe, where this study was conducted, can have irrational influences on a child’s behaviour. Neighbours have the potential to provide social support as well as contributing to youth behavioral
problems through negative activities such as drug abuse, drug distribution, violence
and prostitution. A number of authorities in some western countries too have noted
such influences of neighbours on certain behaviors of children (Brook, 2008; Rutter,
2008).

In some situations, children end up abandoning school in search of manual
employment as domestic servants, resulting in more problems associated with child
labour. For those who remain in school, homework may lack parental supervision
as in the case of OVC residing in child-headed households. The latchkey system in
poorer societies seems to be taking a newer and serious dimension of childcare that
necessitates newer intervention strategies for the learning of affected minors. At the
same time, little attention is given to the after-school microsystem activities and its
impact on children’s learning outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The latchkey system in Zimbabwe entails different versions found in both rural and
urban set-ups. For instance, some children are part-time latchkeys because their
parents work long hours (06h00 to 17h00 each day) and are only present at home
during the night time and Sundays if at all their work schedules allow them one off-
day per week. Others are full-time latchkey because both parents are deceased and
the orphans are unable to fit completely into extended family set ups due to a variety
of reasons noted in earlier studies by Foster (2002) and Nyamukapa and Gregson
(2004). As a result, this type of latchkey children may become vulnerable to neglect.

The ecological impact of the latchkey system in poorer situations seems to be
much more detrimental than helpful because the participating children’s anecdotal
reports mentioned instances of need deprivation, emotional and economic abuse as
well as neglect. Unlike latchkey children in some developed countries, the ones
observed and interviewed in this enquiry seem to lack adequate food.

The search for worthwhile after-school programmes or vacation programmes
should be continued to prevent negative consequences of unsupervised child-care
such as drug abuse, school failure and unwanted pregnancies. Parents can formulate
functional after-school child-monitoring strategies to watch their children especially
where the parents/guardians cannot afford hiring a domestic worker or in instances
where the children live alone as siblings, as in the case of child-headed households.

Similarly to Venter and Rambau’s findings (2011) in South Africa, teachers in
Zimbabwe are also encouraged to extend their loco-parentis duties to weekends and
vacations in order to afford each learner the care and support that she/he continuously
requires and searches for. In a study of the effects of holiday lessons on learners from
low-income families, Jinga and Ganga (2011) found that many children want to
attend extra lessons but are incapacitated due to poor socio-economic backgrounds.
The search for the intended after-school activities should take into account both
children whose parents are working and orphaned children.
Every effort must be made to ensure that affected children have stable family-based care and adequate social support. Various policies and interventions can help to attenuate the latchkey system’s negative influence on child development especially in poverty-stricken households. The community could offer a much-needed assistance in the welfare of latchkey children especially those whose micro-systems are without biological parents. The extended family could play a pivotal role in enabling an effective reciprocal influence between the latchkey child and immediate family members, peers, school authorities, neighbours and many others within the latchkey child’s phenomenal field.

In poorer communities countrywide, perhaps collaborative work is needed among all stakeholders especially in revisiting the root causes of poverty such as socio-economic instability, political unrest, high population growth and environmental degradation. For poverty alleviation, state parties could generate more employment opportunities that may allow parents time to work comfortably and at the same time take good care of their offspring. There could be a possibility of providing small loans (microcredit) to the poor families, which can help them to establish their own enterprises. This may enable parents to plan a family-work routine that accommodates and enhances the child’s positive developmental activities.

The notion of nutrition support programmes, such as food support programs for pregnant women, children in schools, introduction of nutrition gardens by Non-Governmental Organisations could be gateways to eventually promote livelihoods of all minors. Such nutrition programmes have gone a long way in alleviating developmental problems in children of other developing countries and appear ideal for a number of latchkey children in Zimbabwe.

Schooling must be available to all children and every effort must be made to ensure that all children remain in school. Keeping children in school could also help to prevent vulnerability to HIV infection, by protecting children and reducing the child’s need to seek shelter, food and clothing through risky encounters.

In Zimbabwe, there is an urgent need for provision of parenting education to all parents and care-givers in order to enhance the academic and social performance of children. Improved parenting can lead to better child outcomes, but only if other needs in a family’s life are also addressed.

Recently, large investments in education have been provided by UNICEF, the international donor community and the Government of Zimbabwe, through the Educational Transition Fund (ETF) and The Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM). Notably, BEAM aims to offset costs for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). More of such funds may combat problems associated with deteriorating learning facilities, lack of supplies and shortage of learning resources. These interventions have gone a long way in improving the academic performance of the learners in Zimbabwe and latchkey children are not an exception. Such practices need to be expanded. The involvement of organisations that have an agenda of
child protection such as Childline-Zimbabwe appears needed in order to assist unsupervised children.

Lastly, further research needs to be embarked upon in other parts of Zimbabwe in an effort to envisage how best the children surviving self-care could be assisted, knowing the fact that their parents or guardians (if any) still need to work long hours in order to afford basic necessities and school fees.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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