
PROBLEMS OF ORPHAN STUDENTS IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

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Abstract

The study attempts to describe the major problems experienced by orphans. The study was applied to orphan male and female students from the 5th grade to 12th grade. They were 31 male students and 82 female students. A questionnaire was used as a research tool. The reliability of the instrument was made using the Reliability Coefficient and Cronbach's alpha with the main sample of the study (n = 113). Its value was (0.88).

The average percentage of the orphans' problems reached (25%). Jealous of neighbours' children, living with their parents, is the most often thing that orphan socially experience. 40% of orphans expressed such jealousy. The average percentage of psychological problems experienced by orphans is 24%. The orphan's feeling that he/she is not lucky in this world is the most psychological problems that impact him/her (38% of orphans). The average of materialistic problems was 30%. The biggest problem expressed by 46% of orphans is the lack of a person outside the family who can sponsor them. The average percentage of behavioural problems reached 23% of the sample. There are 30% of the orphans who do not find anyone to guide and direct them when watching satellite channels. The existence of school/academic problems was expressed by 34% of orphans. The highest school problem (41%) was that requests for projects required by the teachers cost them amounts of money that they cannot afford. In average, 50% of orphans have negative impressions about the school social worker. The orphans (74%) reported that they do not tell the social worker when they experience problems with their families. The results showed that the 63% of orphans had not got any opportunity to participate in an entertainment trips by school.

Keywords: social work, orphans, students, Islamic religion, Oman

1. Introduction

The concept of '**Orphan**' regards a young who has lost his parent before reaching the age of maturity. A person after maturity may still be called as an orphan metaphorically not really, as a reference to what he/she was. Describing him/her as an orphan is not used any more after his/her reaching the age of maturity. The loss of one's father is a great distress of a child. Accordingly, he needs care and attention [1].

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There are a lot of problems classifications including the type-based classification, where problems can be categorized as school, family, economic or health problems. They can also be classified according to their reasons, i.e., problems ascribed to self-reasons, to environmental reasons, or self/environmental reasons. They can also be categorized according to the size of the problem expansion, i.e., there are individual problems and societal problems, etc. [2]. Thus the current study attempts to answer the following main question: "What are the problems that orphan students experience in the Sultanate? And what is the role of school social work in dealing with them?"

Children have physiological, psychological and social needs, and other kinds of needs that should be satisfied. They need to have others to care, educate and serve their interests. Satisfying such needs, especially in relation to religious, moral and educational aspects, is vital for ensuring a vigorous life for children. Therefore, failing to satisfying those rights may yield street and abnormal children to be as distresses in the Omani society [3].

The family plays an important role in socialization. Within the frame of this process, the family can play an effective role in treating the behaviour of a child. This can be done through letting a child acquire knowledge, be well socialized, and release his/her feelings and inner charges through various modes such as games or sports [4]. The family also plays a major role in monitoring the orphan children and guiding them when noting any kind aggressive evidence [5].

2. Effect of the loss of parents on orphans

The loss of parents is one of major factors that threaten the familial care of a child. It means the loss of a normal resource of care and the hopelessness of compensating such a loss, even with an equal alternative. The degree of being affected by the loss of both parents or a parent differs. Their sudden loss has more impact because it leaves a gap in the style and pattern of caring of a child in addition to cruel deprivation from maternal and paternal sympathy [6].

In addressing the problems of children, and the most dangerous problem (i.e. street children), some scientific references pointed out that the most important reason for this phenomenon or problem is orphanage and deprivation from a parent or both parents [7].

Another problem faced by orphans is child abuse. It means causing continuous hurt to a child with the knowledge and guidance of his/her carers. This hurt includes underestimation, mocking. This must lead social workers to use the suitable approach to remove such abuse and work on treating its negative effects. Fahmy pointed out that 24% of street children come from broken families that has separated for divorce or the loss of a parent; 32% of them come from families that did not provide them with the necessary care and attention [8]. Although some families are still together, but as a result of losing the father, the orphan son misses care, monitoring, and parental teachings [9]. As Monsef cited in his study, Sears asserted that children deprived from maternal care are subject to a lot of physical, psychological and health problems; they experience the

aconuresis, slow development, absent-mindedness, and some kind of aggressive behaviour [10]. Orphans also are more vulnerable to deviation. Deviation means that an orphan is subjected to one or more of relatively powerful factors which lead - or will probably lead - to inadaptive behaviour [11]. The loss of parents also leads to breaking down of familial interrelations and failure of social roles' performance as a result of rational and emotional factors, or as a result of psychological or physiological illness [12].

3. Orphan in Islamic religion

The Divine Religions showed how necessary is to take care of orphans. The Christianity paid attention to orphans, as mentioned in messengers' teachings to bishops to take care of orphans, to meet their needs, and not to let them need anything [13].

The protection provided to an orphan is a must in Islam because God make it necessary for adults to meet the rights of young, such as mercy, care, attention and guidance. Islam also necessitates the teaching of ethics to children, which is considered as the basic right for the child and society [The Holy Quran, *An-Nisaa*, verse no. 36].

Hence, an orphan needs care and attention, as God says "Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good - to parents, kinsfolk, orphans..." [M. Abu Hussein, *Sahih Muslim*, Dar Al- Khilafah al Elmyah, 1330 HJ, 45]. Honourable messenger (PBUH) promised the sponsor of an orphan to be his companion in the Heaven. Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, "I and the one who looks after an orphan will be like this in Paradise", showing his middle and index fingers and separating them [The Holy Quran, *An-Nisaa* , verse no. 10]. God threatened those who eat the property of an orphan. God says: "Those who unjustly eat up the property of orphans, eat up a Fire into their own bodies: They will soon be enduring a Blazing Fire" [The Holy Quran, *Ad-Dhuha*, verse no. 9]. God ordered people to be charitable and nice to orphans since He says: "treat not the orphan with harshness" [The Holy Quran, *Al-Ma'un*, verse no. 1-2]. And God says "Seest thou one who denies the Judgment (to come)? Then such is the (man) who repulses the orphan (with harshness)".

Islam has been careful to ensure the social rights of orphans through its legislations and codes. These legislations have been developed to ensure the rights of orphans beginning from their early childhood. The honourable verses of Koran show the problems that an orphan face since his/her loss of father, such as, accommodation and good education including disciplining and learning, and finally, the money from which he/she spends [The Holy Quran, *Al-Israa*, verse no. 34]. The guardian of an orphan should invest his/her money in commerce or legal projects, and work on this property till the orphan reaches the adulthood to give the orphan his/her money. This was shown by Koran when God says: "Come not nigh to the orphan's property except to improve it, until he attains the age of full strength; and fulfil (every) engagement, for (every) engagement will be enquired into - on the Day of Reckoning" [1, p. 193]. To assure the

importance of caring for orphans, the term 'orphan' or 'orphans' has been mentioned in twelve chapters of Koran. The term orphan was mentioned 24 times in Koran. The verses show different laws that organize how to care for orphans and urges people to be charitable to them, spending on them, preserving their money, and not to cause any abuse to them [14].

Islam calls for being charitable and nice to them concerning food and clothes. Honourable prophet called for embracing orphans for educating and bringing them up in a sound and healthy way in order to get enough share of love, sympathy and kindness. The Islamic legislation also warned us to encroach upon an orphan's property, and that those who will do such a bad deed are threatened by punishment and loss. In addition, Islam called Muslims to integrate orphans with their own children in order to feel equal with their biological children concerning good treatment, kindness and sympathy. It also urges Muslims to take care of educating and teaching them the Islamic ethics and whatever may raise their status and prevent them from hurt or damage in their life. Concerning this point, God says: "They ask thee concerning orphans. Say: 'The best thing to do is what is for their good; if ye mix their affairs with yours, they are your brethren; but Allah knows the man who means mischief from the man who means good'". [The Holy Quran, *Al-Baqarah*, verse no. 220]

In addition, God, the most Glorious, has instructed the guardians with the regulations related to orphans and property. This was mentioned when God says: "But if at the time of division other relatives, or orphans or poor, are present, feed them out of the (property), and speak to them words of kindness and justice"[The Holy Quran, *An-Nisaa*, verse no. 8].

The religion of Islam has treated the case of a child whose father died. Islam encourages the sponsorship of an orphan by the person who is considered as the closest relative for the child from the mother or father sides. This person is held responsible for bringing the orphan up, preparing him/her in a sound way, and to provide him with guidance, attention, ethics as if he/she is one of his children. Islam promised good gifts for the person who sponsors an orphan so that he can provide the orphan with kindness, sympathy and mercy to compensate his/her loss of parents. Besides being a close relative to the orphan, there is a condition that the sponsor is a charitable and good man with high efficiency and devoutness. He also should do this mission voluntarily and as a way to win divine appreciation, because he will be a guardian who brings the orphan up and sponsors his/her property. The tutor is the direct reformer of a man. He cares for the orphan to be well-tutored, well-educated by the right way, and to overwhelm the orphan with love, mercy and kindness as a compensation of a parent or both parents. The orphan also may not be that child whose parents or one of them died, but he may be a child whose parents are separated, overwhelmed with earthly desires, and ignore the care for their children and educating them. Sheltering an orphan and alleviating his/her sufferings by kindness and sympathy returns to him/her self-confidence and enhance his/her spirit and morale. On the other hand, hurting the orphan's feelings and dignity

can increase his feelings of coerciveness, touch old wounds, increase his/her spitefulness [15].

4. Western legislations

Some western legislations have dealt with the orphan through two methods. The first is by developing the system of adoption. As a family who does not have a child sponsors the orphan and takes the orphan as its own child. It is a system that denies the identity and ancestry of the orphan. This has been previously shown, when discussing the idea of adoption. In addition, some people deviated from the system when adoption was converted to a means for illegal trafficking of children and abusing them. They sometimes kill them and sell their organs. The second method is to reside the orphan in an orphanage house. This place does not provide enough love, sympathy, direction and education. The studies proved that there is a great difference between a child grown up within a family and others who grow in shelters institutions.

5. Social work and sponsoring orphans

Social worker helps the orphan child to get benefit from all available professional services in the society. This is done within the framework of each social worker's understanding of child's and parents' needs, problems, and the characteristics of developmental stage [16].

The professional program introduced by the social worker to children should be based on theoretical guidelines of practice. It depends on important strategies for intervention, such as, persuasion, negotiation, self-empowerment, etc. in addition to other technical tasks related to the social worker, such as, interviews, group discussions, observations and seminars [17].

The social assistant works with orphan children in alternative care centres. The social worker also organizes programs for parents, invests media for disseminating the alternative care in a sound way and paying attention to religious aspects in children [18]. The child welfare is one of the areas that social work practice cares for. In this area, social work attempts to provide services that can appropriately resolve orphan children's problems, especially those orphans who could not satisfy their social needs in an appropriate way within their family or society [19].

A study by Mohamed Mohsen Hosainat et al. showed that, the social institutions provide orphans with books and academic materials necessary for their education. Concerning the role of social institutions in social and economic care for orphans, one of the most important factors provided by the institutions is the moral and ethical environment that suits the society, in addition to materials necessary for living [20].

Abdellah Abdel-Ghani showed the differences between socialization of orphans and that of other normal children [21]. A study by El-Moshrafy found out that the program helped in accomplishing the learning well which led to the

excellence of the studied sample (orphan children) on a scale for measuring the concept of belonging in preschool children as the operational part of the program [22].

6. Methodology

6.1. The sample and sampling

The instrument of the study was applied to a sample from the second cycle of schools in Elseib, Muscat governorate. Each school has a social worker. There were 10 schools (3 female schools and 3 male schools). The study was applied to orphan male and female students from the 5th grade to 12th grade. Grades from 1 to 4 were excluded from application because they would not be able to answer the questionnaire and do not realize or define their problems as required. They were 31 male students and 82 female students.

6.2. Research tool

A questionnaire with the following dimensions was used: primary data of an orphan, family problems, behavioural, materialistic/financial, psychological, academic and social problems, role of a social worker and services suggested for orphans.

6.3. Reliability and validity

The instrument of the study was delivered to 9 judges to determine the external validity of the instrument. The adjustments were made to the instrument. Some adjustments were crucial and others are slight ones. Some parts were removed and others were added. The measurement of reliability of the instrument was made using the Reliability Coefficient and Cronbach's alpha with the main sample of the study ($n = 113$). Its value was (0.88). This result was considered acceptable and is a very good indicator for the strong internal harmony of the measured instrument.

7. Results

The female orphans were 73% and males 27%. This differentiation between both percentages is due to the application of the study to 6 female schools and 4 male schools, because there had not been statistics showing numbers of orphans in some of schools in the research population, and sometimes because some schools did not show cooperation in favour of the research. The concentration of orphans was in the age group (15-18 years old - 56%). Participants from the age group (12-14 years old) were 35% of the sample, and 9% in the age group 9-11. It is obvious that the younger age groups (less than 9 years old) were excluded because of their inability to understand the

nature of questions included in the research instrument or expressing their problems realistically.

Most of them live with their mothers (75%), 12% with their fathers, 7% with relatives, and 6% with siblings. We can observe that most members of the sample live with their mothers because most members of the sampled orphans are those whose father died. Hence, those whose both parents died or his/her mother married after the death of his/her father, live with siblings or relatives when there are not older siblings (34% of the sample from grades 5-8 and 66% from grades 9-12).

8. Problems experienced by the orphan students

Table 1 shows that the average of social problems experienced by the orphans is 25%. As identifying these problems, it was clear that **most social problems** are related to jealousy of neighbour children who live with their parents. They consider that their life is better than theirs, which was expressed by 40% of orphans. It is known that this feeling has negative impact on orphans. It is the feeling of self-inferiority and the superiority of neighbour's children which generates hatred and aggression. The next problem in order is related to neighbours, since 34% of orphans expressed that they do not care about neighbours who do not help or care about them. Thus, the majority expressed another feelings too, who are not considered due to low percentage. However, they express negative feelings towards neighbours.

The results showed that 32% of orphans experience discrimination in treatment at home. This may happen when the father marries after the death of the mother. Hence, they find that their siblings' children of the new wife are well-treated because their mother is still alive. Complaints that orphans do not find someone to take them at a picnic or entertainment outdoors are 31% of the sample. They find nobody to complain their concerns and speak out their sorrows. This makes it necessary for school social workers to give more attention to orphans by organizing entertainment trips and opening communication channels with orphans, to listen to their problems and sufferings.

Generally, the average percentage of **social problems of orphans** was 25%. Thus, the existence of such percentage of orphans should be considered, especially if we know that the Omani society is a conservative and socially cohesive society, so it is very important that this percentage should not experience such problems.

The average percentage of **psychological problems** at orphans reached 24%. By identifying those problems, the orphan's feeling as unlucky is of the most effective (38% of the sampled orphans); and 35% of them experience the feeling of stress and worry. Both problems have negative impact on the orphan's happiness, social and academic life. 33% of orphans expressed feelings of upset of their current conditions; and 26% of them experience feelings of sorrow and sadness. Hence, we can see their sufferings from losing a parent, inability to

achieve social and psychological adaptation to the current situation. The results also show that 22% of orphans feel jealous on others; and 20% feel depressed.

Table 1. Top problems encountered by orphan students.

Problems	Yes (%)	No (%)	Average	Order
Social problems				
Looking at the life of neighbour children as better than mine	40	60	1.40	1
None of neighbours cares or helps the orphan	34	66	1.34	2
Suffering from discrimination in treatment at home	32	68	1.32	3
None take the orphan at a picnic or entertainment	31	69	1.31	4
The orphan find nobody to complaint his/her problems	31	69	1.31	5
Psychological problems				
The orphan feels that he is unlucky in this life	38	62	1.38	1
To feel worried and stressed continuously	35	65	1.35	2
To feel upset of his/her conditions	33	67	1.33	3
To feel an endless sorrow	26	74	1.26	4
Materialistic problems				
Nobody outside the family volunteered to sponsor the orphan	46	54	1.46	1
There is not an amount of money dedicated for the orphan	43	57	1.43	2
No assistance has come from any institution	41	59	1.41	3
The orphan misses a lot of things that he/she cannot buy	38	62	1.38	4
Behavioural problems				
I don't find anyone to guide me when watching satellite	30	70	1.30	1
I don't find anyone to monitor my behaviour at home or school.	30	70	1.30	2
Nobody is watching my use of mobile phone	27	73	1.27	3
Nobody is watching my use of the internet	25	75	1.25	4
Academic/school problems				
I cannot afford the project cost	41	59	1.41	1
Nobody follow up my school homework	40	60	1.40	2
Nobody goes to follow up my level at school	37	63	1.37	3
Nobody monitor my certificates and mark sheets	26	74	1.26	4

The government provided a security salary for orphans, but the guardian is the one who receives this salary. There were some cases where the orphans did not receive their security salary. Yet, there is no assurance that this salary is restricted to satisfying the orphan's needs. The mean of materialistic problems of orphans reach 30%. It can be explained in the light of the tradition of keeping

the family affairs inside the family and to the unwillingness to find a guardian from outside the family. That there is no a certain amount of money dedicated for them was expressed by 43% of the sampled orphans. This is what we have previously asserted when the researcher referred to the guardians who take the security salary to spend it on the general house affairs and do not give the orphan his/her due share. 41% of orphans expressed that they have not received any money as assistance from charitable associations or institutions. Hence, one can say that it is important for charitable associations to focus on getting society members to help the orphans because more than third of orphans are unable to buy their needs. This makes it necessary for the society to support them. Besides, sponsoring orphans is a value that Islam calls for.

The results also showed that 20% of orphans come to school without daily pocket money to be used for buying food. This makes it necessary for school boards to find a clear mechanism for helping those orphans and not to deprive them from the school meal, since the health, psychological and academic conditions of an orphan are affected by watching peers eating while he/she is deprived because of his/her parent's death.

The **behaviours** of an orphan are a very important aspect that needs care and attention, since the orphan does not find a parent who monitor and refine his/her behaviours. Giving the average related to this aspect, the rate of shortage in the **behavioural aspect** was 23% of the sample. By identifying the major details of these results, one can find that 30% of orphans do not find a person who directs them when watching satellite channels. The age period covered by the study is very crucial to be monitored and directed. It is the adolescence in which man experiences a lot of psychological and physiological changes that impact human behaviours. Table 1 show also that 27% and 25% of orphans do not receive any kind of monitoring on using mobile phones and the internet, respectively. We know that smart phones and internet are two worlds full of bad persons who may misuse and blackmail those orphans when there is nobody to monitor or guide them if they meet one of those situations. There are 22% of orphans whose family do not know their friends, their manners or behaviours. You know friends have great impact on the adolescents.

Findings show that the school problems reach 34%. This percentage requires high consideration from school boards concerning their role in caring for orphans in schools. Giving special care to orphans is crucial since they miss those who can monitor and care about them except a little number. The biggest school problem (41%) is that the teachers' requirements from orphan students cost them amounts of money that they cannot afford. The second problem - that Nobody follow up my school homework - is expressed by 40% of orphans. This affects their academic level, followed by feelings of disappointment and dislike of school because of the embarrassment of not doing their homework. Accordingly, teachers should take into consideration not to embarrass them in front of their colleagues because of their default. The third problem rated 37% of orphans that nobody goes to school to follow up their levels. Accordingly, guardians should be more aware of how important to follow up the orphans at

schools is. Thus, if the school discovers something like that, it should assign one of its teachers to follow up the orphan, as a human or charitable kind of care.

Figure 1 shows that school problems are the most important problems that the orphans experience, with percentage (34%). The research attributes this to the school needs, such as parental monitoring or materialistic support for the student. The materialistic problems come at the second order with 30%. This is due to the orphan's need for materialistic support, which, as mentioned above, if an amount of money is dedicated for the orphan by the government, the guardian of the orphan spend it on affairs and needs of the family in general. The social problems come at the third order with 25%; then the psychological (24%), and finally, the behavioural (23%). The existence of behavioural problems at the bottom of the list may be due to the sensitivity of disclosure about the problems by the orphan students.

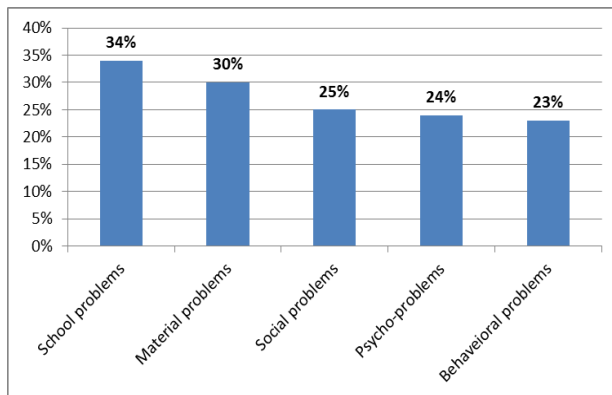


Figure 1. The order of problems experienced by the orphans.

9. Policy implications and applications

The following are some policy implications and applications.

1. To generalize using a statement edited by school showing names of orphans, with the following considerations:
 - a. Projects with high costs should not be assigned to the orphans, or projects that needs to the existence of the father.
 - b. The orphan students must not be embarrassed and hurt his/her feelings in class in front of his/her colleagues.
 - c. To monitor the orphan psychologically, academically and behaviourally. The teacher can play the role of the father to these aspects.
 - d. Showing sympathy and kindness through the movements to the orphan, especially the young orphans.
 - e. The careful accountability or stiffness should not be the methods used with the orphans because they can make the orphan hate the study.
 - f. The school should provide charitable associations and agencies with lists of orphans who are experiencing hard circumstances.

2. It is suggested that an orphan is assigned to each teacher who wishes to sponsor an orphan financially, educationally or behaviourally.
3. The social worker should communicate well with the orphan's family and to build a bridge of cooperation with the family to guarantee that the orphan is not subject to any kind of abuse at home.
4. It is suggested not to celebrate the so called 'Mother Day' at schools to respect the orphan's feelings.
5. When the school discovers that an orphan had been a target for breaking his/her materialist rights, any kind of abuse, or the illegibility of the guardian within his/her family, it should contact the Child Rights Committee.
6. The school should assume the responsibility of advocating the orphan in school and to be serious with the students who make use of his/her weakness.
7. To dedicate projects for orphan sponsorship at the parents level after getting the approval of families.
8. To encourage orphans to participate in school activities so that they can get back self-realization and consideration and to get them out of their isolation.
9. The school should encourage citizens and private sector institutions to implement funding campaigns to help orphans in occasions such as feasts, and in periods of buying school requirements.

9.1. Applications

1. To encourage individuals in society to start Volunteer work in the field of orphans is highly recommended, especially with orphans in the neighbourhood, where the neighbour orphan has two categories of rights: rights of orphan and rights of neighbour.
2. Helping orphans softens hearts and feelings. It might be a method of improving personality to those who suffer from cruel or harsh hearts.
3. To encourage people to go to the nearest school and to donate an amount of money, a computer to an orphan, meaningful books, kid stories books, school equipments, finance a trip for an orphan, the Holy Book, or offer any kind of presents to orphans.
4. To encourage citizens to volunteer in organizing campaigns and visits to meet and follow up orphan's needs in neighbourhoods.
5. Communication with voluntary teams and charity associations to support the orphans in the Sultanate, especially through the formal online gate for donations (<http://www.onlinedonations.org.om>) since one can use his cell phone to donate any amount of money he wishes in minutes.
6. To remind people of how charitable sponsoring orphans is. This can be done through fliers, cell phone messages or online social media.
7. To organize visit campaigns for visiting orphan's houses to make them feel happy in times of occasions and feasts.

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