Exploring the Child Protection System and Child Well-being in Nyumanzi Refugee Settlement in Uganda

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Abstract

Recent studies suggest that the existence of a well-structured and functioning child protection system positively impacts on the well-being of children. Such arguments have been supported by theories, for instance, the child-centred general systems theory and ecological model. While such discussions remain prominent, children's well-being calls for close interconnectedness between the system components structure, process of care, continuum of care and ensuring paramount accountability. Currently, the child protection system in Uganda is not only weak but also mute in terms of its operationalization. The situation is worse especially in refugee settlements where many children are living on their own. This article seeks to establish the relationship between the selected system components of continuum of care, process of care and accountability on child well-being components that have been contextually selected using Nyumanzi refugee settlement in Adjumani district in Uganda. This study's findings unveil how and the extent to which the two variables relate. A correlational study design was adopted employing mainly quantitative data collection and analysis approach. The article argues that discovery of such selected system components on process and continuum of care to child well-being is paramount. Additionally the data indicates that the process of care and continuum of care are crucial in ensuring child wellbeing.

Keywords: **Child protection, Process of care, Continuum of care, Child well-being, Accountability**

Introduction

According to the (2013) Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD) abridged version report on the status of the child protection mapping in Uganda, the child protection system response and prevention mechanisms require strengthening at all levels and facets of the system to improve children's well-being. When it comes to conflict-stricken communities, extra effort is needed to reconstruct the child's protective environment in order to prevent and control situations that would potentially cause lifelong negative effects on the child. In Uganda, oftentimes when children are found in a compromising situation, the first questions that come to mind are: Who are they? Who are their parents? Where do they come from (immediate community)? Why are they here? What has largely remained unanswered is what has the government (wider community) done about this category of children? According to UNICEF's Innocenti Report Card 11 (2013) and Innocenti Report Card 7 (2009), no child well-being data is available on some of the vulnerable groups such as nomadic or pastoralist communities, street, refugee and institutionalized children. The report cards only capture data basing on household surveys. This article establishes the relationship between the child protection system and child well-being, taking Nyumanzi refugee settlement in Adjumani district Uganda, as a case study.

The article, among other issues, questions how the child protection system is designed to meet children's needs in humanitarian situations, stakeholders accountability and the measures in place to hold stakeholders accountable. The study reveals that irrespective of all the other players in the child protection system, accountability is a better predicator. Thus, once all facets to accountability are taken care of, everything else in the continuum of care and process of care will fall into place. The article is presented in diminutive and precise sections for easy comprehension starting with the problem statement, objectives of the study, significance of the study, the study scope, theoretical background, hypotheses, methodology, findings as solicited from the respondents of the study, conclusions and recommendations.

The Problem

With the breakdown of social protective structures around the child due to conflict in South Sudan, the government of Uganda with support from development partners has done a lot around the sphere of child well-being. Despite the government's efforts to strengthen the child protection system, children in Nyumanzi refugee settlement have remained vulnerable to abuse, neglect and exploitation. Results from the joint end assessment conducted in May 2014 for the July 2015 to June 2017 updated the Regional Framework for the protection of Sudanese and South Sudanese refugee children, highlight that the refugee girls and boys are at a high risk of abuse, exploitation, violence as well as recruitment in armed groups. Specific risks registered among girls include: sexual violence, child marriage and teenage pregnancy. The review points out that about 46% of the refugee children still have unfulfilled rights and needs which is affecting their well-being, and recommends child protection mainstreaming in all sectors. The above scenario remains unpleasant and repulsive, and if not attended to, there is a likelihood of failure to achieve certain expectations laid out in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study was to establish the relationship between child protection system and child well-being in Nyumanzi refugee settlement, Adjumani district. The specific objectives included, among others:

i) Examining the relationship between continuum of care and child well-being in Nyumanzi settlement, Adjumani district

ii) Scrutinizing the relationship between process of care and child well-being in Nyumanzi settlement, Adjumani district

iii) Establishing the effect of accountability on child well-being in Nyumanzi settlement, Adjumani district

Significance of the study

Assessing the relationship between child protection system and child well-being may help partners to keep efforts on track towards child protection goals/indicators to respond and prevent child abuse, neglect, violence as well as child exploitation. It may sharpen accountability and guide prioritization during resource allocation by partners for the immediate and long-term needs of children in conflict situations. The study also contributes to social policy development on child well-being and knowledge for future researchers and academicians.
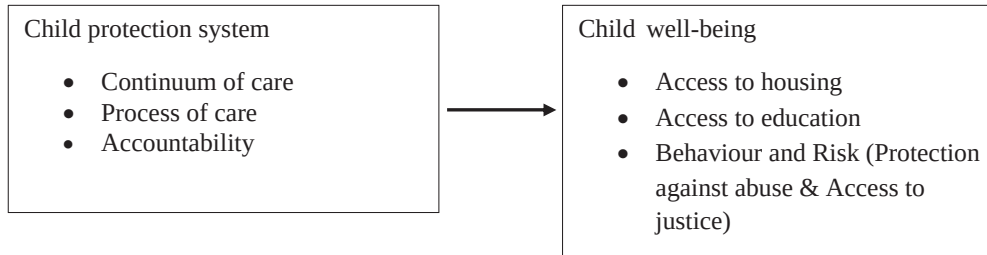
Scope of the study

The content scope of this study is confined to three variables of the child protection system, namely: continuum of care, process of care and accountability and how they relate to child well-being components of access to housing, education and justice for children in contact and conflict with the law. The geographical scope is confined to Nyumanzi settlement, Adjumani district, within a time scope from 2014 to 2017. A global comparison has also been offered to illustrate existential realities.

Theoretical underpinnings

This study is backed by the Systems Theory which tries to solve challenges by holistically looking at the whole picture instead of analysing individual components. The theory was propounded by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1951) who used anatomy nomenclature to describe open systems. To advance it further, he indicated that the human body, skeleton, muscles and circulatory system among others were sub-systems of the entire system (the human being). According to the Systems Theory, a system is a collection of sub-systems or parts which interact in order to accomplish an overall goal. Therefore, it offers a stronghold for UNICEF (2013) and Wulczyn et al's (2010) perception of the child protection system which comprises different components including structures, capacities, accountability, process of care and continuum of care; and that the most critical issue in a functional child-centred system is the way the components relate and interact to achieve the set goals. Thus, this theory was used to advance the study on child protection system and its component interrelations for the well-being of the child.

This study employed the Systems Theory to elucidate the relationship that exists between the child protection system and child well-being. The process of care, continuum of care and accountability are sub-systems which are instrumental in fostering improved child well-being. Just like the theory states, the nature of the system changes when one of its parts is removed. If there is no continuum of care, process of care or accountability, child well-being will be at stake. Therefore, the three sub-systems must remain linked to realize access to improved well-being. The relationship is expressed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: A conceptual framework that shows the relationship between the child protection system and child well-being

Child protection system	Child well-being
• Continuum of care • Process of care • Accountability	• Access to housing • Access to education • Behaviour and Risk (Protection against abuse & Access to justice)

Source: *Adopted from Wulczyn, F. et al. (2010) and modified by the authors*

From the above conceptual illustration, child protection system includes continuum of care in terms of promotion, prevention and response; process of care which involves reporting, identification, investigation of referrals, assessment, and treatment as well as follow up; accountability entails collection of data, quality standards and communication. It is conceptualized that an effective child protection system leads to improved child well-being in terms of accessing education, access to housing, reduced risk and bad behaviours by enabling protection against abuse and access to justice.

Hypothetical statements

The primary conjecture of the study was that: there's a significant positive relationship between the child protection system and child well-being. This was further broken down to child protection system sub-variables against child well-being to formulate the following hypotheses:

i)   There is a positive relationship between continuum of care and child well-being.

ii) There is a positive relationship between process of care and child well-being.

iii) There is a positive effect of accountability on child well-being.

Methodological orientation

The study applied a correlational research design limiting itself to quantitative comparisons. This was backed by documentary desk reviews of existing information in order to come up with an all-round report on the situation and relationship of the child protection system and child well-being. The population comprised 113 individuals in Nyumanzi settlement that resulted into a study sample of 102 using the selection aid of Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table of determining sample size. These were reached through simple random sampling and purposively selected to generate detailed narrative analysis for the study.

The research variables being measured were community child protection system and child well-being. These concepts were operationally defined in the conceptual framework (Fig 1) for easy tailoring of questions that helped in measuring the variables in relation to the study objectives. The questionnaire had both structured and unstructured questions. The questions were themed and rankings appended to measure levels of the participants' agreement to different questions. A five-point Likert scale (1- strongly agree, 2- agree, 3- undecided, 4- disagree and 5-strongly disagree) was provided for the participants to indicate their responses by ticking or circling the appropriate scale for each of the items. Validity and reliability tests were carried out using the content validity index and Cronbach's coefficient Alpha (α) approach (Amin, 2005) respectively.

Pearson's correlation "(0.00 (no correlation) and 1.00 (perfect correlation) statistical test was used to quantitatively analyze the data using SPSS in order to find the correlation between the dependent and independent variables. Descriptive statistics were presented in form of tables, diagrams, percentages and averages as well as correlation and dispersion measures in order to show relevant features which form a basis for hypothetical conclusions and generalizability of the findings. For accuracy of the results, the conclusions were dependent on the significance level (p) generated from the analysis.

Results and discussion

Views were sought from respondents regarding continuum of care and responses were given on the extent of agreement with the different statements. Varying responses were acquired and analyzed to get the mean, standard deviation and percentage for each question per objective. The general mean and standard deviation were then analysed to give a general conclusion on each objective as represented in the four tables under this section. Each of the table analysis results can be interpreted as follows; the mean as values less than three (<3) reveal disagreement in responses while those above three (>3) reveal agreement in responses. On the other hand, standard deviation scores less than one (<1) reveal cohesion in responses and those above one (>1) reveal divergences (mixed responses). Lastly, the researcher combined both agreed and strongly agreed to portray those that agreed, while disagreed and strongly disagreed are reflected as respondents that deviated from the statement.

Table 1:   Examining the Relationship between Continuum of Care and Child Well-being in Nyumanzi Settlement, Adjumani District

Statement	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Mean	St. Dev.
Promotion							
Laws in place are adequate to promote child well-being in Nyumanzi refugee settlement	3.6% (2)	3.6% (2)	12.5% (7)	26.8% (15)	53.6% (30)	1.96	1.934
Community members are responsive to promotion of child well-being in Nyumanzi refugee settlement	30.4% (17)	48.2% (27)	12.5% (7)	3.6% (2)	5.4% (3)	3.95	1.034

	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Mean	St. Dev.
There are adequate policies to promote child well-being in Nyumanzi refugee settlement	16.1% (9)	37.5% (21)	28.6% (16)	16.1% (9)	1.8% (1)	3.50	0.009
Prevention							
There is capacity building of community members to prevent child abuse in Nyumanzi refugee settlement	14.3% (8)	35.7% (20)	12.5% (7)	30.4% (17)	7.1% (4)	3.20	1.227
Nyumanzi refugee settlement has clear mechanisms to prevent child abuse	7.1% (4)	30.4% (17)	32.1% (18)	26.8% (15)	3.6% (2)	3.11	1.003
Refugees are supportive of projects that aim at preventing child abuse	19.6% (11)	50% (28)	19.6% (11)	8.9% (5)	1.8% (1)	3.77	0.934
Response							
Community members are too quick to respond to cases of child abuse and neglect	32.1% (18)	37.5% (21)	17.9% (10)	8.9% (5)	3.6 (2)	3.86	1.086
The police is always prompt in responding to cases of child abuse and neglect	30.4% (17)	46.4% (26)	12.5% (7)	7.1% (4)	3.6 (2)	3.93	1.024
Average mean and standard deviation						**3.41**	**1.031**

Source: Primary data

In the table above, the average mean for continuum of care was 3.41 and the standard deviation was 1.031 which represents the number of respondents with varying responses. Since the average mean was above 3.0, it shows that most respondents consented to statements on continuum of care. This is in line with secondary data from the African Report on Child Wellbeing 2013 which revealed that refugee settlement should have both formal and informal mechanisms such as the police, child protection committees, paralegal and parents' support programmes which have been created by child protection actors as a way of preventing abuse and responding to child protection concerns in the settlement. In addition, refugees are supportive of projects that aim at preventing child abuse because they encourage their children to join child rights clubs in schools and in the community.

Comparative results were also acquired under the process of care that made the second objective of this study. The analysis results and interpretation are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2.   Examining the Relationship between Process of Care and Child Well-being in Nyumanzi Settlement, Adjumani District

Statement	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Mean	St. Dev.
Identification							
Nyumanzi refugee settlement has mechanisms for early child abuse case identification	12.5% (7)	48.2% (27)	23.2% (13)	16.1% (9)	00% (00)	3.57	0.912

Nyumanzi refugee settlement has competent health workers to identify cases of child abuse	26.8% (15)	46.4% (26)	17.9% (7)	5.4% (3)	3.6% (2)	3.88	0.992
Reporting							
The refugee settlement has mandatory child abuse reporting laws	17.9% (10)	42.9% (24)	30.4% (17)	7.1% (4)	1.8% (1)	3.68	0.917
Cases of child abuse and neglect are always reported to authorities	8.9% (5)	1.8% (1)	17.9% (10)	14.3% (8)	57.1% (32)	3.73	0.884
Community members support the idea of reporting cases of child abuse to authorities	1.8% (1)	3.6% (2)	12.5% (7)	37.5% (21)	44.6% (25)	1.107	1.9473
Investigation of referrals							
Cases of child abuse are referred to police timely for proper handling	30.4% (17)	55.4% (31)	8.9% (5)	1.8% (1)	3.6 (2)	4.07	0.892
Assessment, treatment and followup							
Nyumanzi refugee settlement has mechanisms to treat children who have been abused	25% (14)	51.8% (29)	16.1% (9)	7.1% (4)	00 (0)	3.95	0.840
Management at Nyumanzi refugee settlement is supportive of child protection systems	30.4% (17)	48.2% (27)	12.5% (7)	7.1% (4)	1.8% (1)	3.98	0.944
Management at Nyumanzi refugee settlement addresses all reported cases of child abuse	32.1% (18)	51.8% (29)	10.7% (6)	3.6% (2)	1.8% (1)	4.09	0.859
Average mean and standard deviation						**3.561**	**1.030**

Source: Primary Data

Results in Table 2 indicate that the average mean for process of care was 3.561 while the standard deviation was 1.030, which shows that there were variations in the responses obtained. Since the average mean was above 3.0, it shows that most respondents agreed to the presence of process of care. This is in line with secondary data from the African Report on Child Wellbeing 2013 which revealed that management of refugee settlements should be supportive of the child protection system because it facilitates training of community structures, formation of child rights clubs and community awareness campaigns on the rights of children.

On the third objective above, views from respondents regarding accountability were sought and responses were given to what extent they agreed with the different statements as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Establishing the Effect of Accountability on Child Well-being in Nyumanzi Settlement, Adjumani District

Statement	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Mean	St. Dev.
Data collection							
Nyumanzi refugee settlement has standard data collection tools	23.2% (13)	41.1% (23)	21.4% (12)	12.5% (7)	1.8% (1)	3.71	1.002
Specific needs of children are always considered during data collection	21.4% (12)	57.1% (32)	12.5% (7)	7.1% (4)	1.8% (1)	3.89	0.888
Data on children is always among partners to facilitate planning and decision making	17.9% (10)	50% (28)	19.6% (11)	10.7% (6)	1.8% (1)	3.71	0.948
Demographic data such as socio-economic characteristics are considered during data collection	19.6% (11)	46.4% (25)	21.4% (12)	8.9% (5)	3.6% (2)	3.70	0.977
Quality standards							
Children in Nyumanzi settlement receive good quality services (education, health, accommodation)	8.9% (5)	3.6% (2)	23.2% (13)	23.2% (13)	41.1% (23)	1.71	1.039
Communication							
Nyumanzi settlement has clear mechanisms of communication	28.6% (16)	39.3% (22)	32.2% (13)	8.9% (5)	00 (00)	3.88	0.935
Children in the settlement always receive feedback from management	12.5% (7)	35.7% (20)	35.7% (20)	10.7% (6)	5.4 (3)	3.39	1.021
Average mean and standard deviation						**3.42**	**0.972**

Source: Primary Data

From Table 3, the average mean for accountability was 3.42 while the standard deviation was 0.972, which shows that there were slight variations in the responses obtained. Since the overall average mean was above the average of 3.0, it shows that most respondents consented that there was accountability in the settlement. The implication of this finding is that data collected by the settlement and other partners is always available to facilitate planning and decision-making, and that partners always share information regarding the needs of children and priority areas which require urgent attention.

Responses on Child well-being were also acquired to enable comparative analysis between the Child protection system and Child well-being variables in order to establish the relationship and impact the former bears on the latter.

Table 4: Responses on Child well-being

Statement	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Mean	St. Dev.
Children in Nyumanzi refugee settle-ment have access to justice	32.1% (18)	53.6% (30)	7.1% (4)	3.6% (2)	3.6% (2)	4.07	0.931
Nyumanzi settlement prevents vio-lence against children	25% (14)	58.9% (33)	14.3% (8)	00% (00)	1.8% (1)	4.05	0.749
Nyumanzi settlement empowers chil-dren to protect themselves	26.8% (15)	50% (28)	17.9% (10)	3.6% (2)	1.8% (1)	3.96	0.873
Children in the settlement have enough access to education	3.6% (2)	1.8% (1)	14.3% (8)	21.4% (12)	58.9% (33)	1.95	1.818
Children in the settlement have access to food	16.1% (9)	51.8% (29)	26.8% (15)	3.6% (2)	1.8% (1)	3.77	0.831
Children in the settlement have access to medical care	21.4% (12)	53.6% (30)	16.1% (9)	7.1% (4)	1.8% (1)	3.86	0.903
Children in the settlement have enough access to shelter	8.9% (5)	1.8 (1)	19.6% (11)	10.7% (6)	58.9% (33)	1.68	1.855
There is quick response in manage-ment of cases of child abuse	21.4% (12)	39.3% (22)	28.6% (16)	8.9% (5)	1.8 (1)	3.70	0.971
Average mean and standard deviation						3.38	1.116

Source: Primary Data

Overall, the average mean for child well-being was 3.38 as shown in Table 4 above. This being above the average of 3.0 while the standard deviation was 1.116 shows that there were varying responses obtained. This shows that more efforts are still needed and that there is need to enhance child well-being in refugee settings. This is further supported by anecdotal evidence that suggests that sometimes, children are denied an opportunity to go to school, made to sleep outside the house, denied food, shouted at and beaten.

In summary, Tables 1 to 4 indicate that the child protection system variables of continuum of care, process of care and accountability have a significant relationship and effect on child well-being. This was further illustrated in the Pearson's correlation coeffient in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Pearson (*r*) correlation coefficient matrix of the component variables

Variables	Child well-being	Continuum of care	Process of care	Accountability
Child well-being	1.000			
Continuum of care	.654**	1.000		
Process of care	.731**	.820**	1.000	
Accountability	.693**	.605**	.669**	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: Primary data

Descriptive statistics and regressions

In Table 6 below, the researchers present the magnitude of continuum of care, process of care and accountability on child well-being. This was done to determine the better predictor component of child well-being in Nyumanzi refugee settlement.

Table 6: Regression Analysis of the component variables

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.724	.357		2.028	.048
Continuum of care	.103	.149	.105	688	.495
Process of care	.415	.167	.406	2.490	.016
Accountability	.314	.103	.358	.358	.004
R =0.783R- square = 0.591F= 27.472 Sig = 0.000					

Source: Primary data

Table 6 above shows the components of child protection system, that is: continuum of care, processes of care and accountability and their predictor effect on child well-being as shown by significance level (.000). The regression analysis showed that the study variables had a strong positive relationship with child well-being. Thus the study variables explain 59.1% of the variance in child well-being in Nyumanzi refugee settlement. The findings further revealed that accountability (Beta=358; Sig.<.004) significantly predicts child well-being. However, process of care (Beta= .406, Sig. < .016) and continuum of care (Beta=406, Sig.<.495) were of low significance in the prediction of child well-being. Fisher's ratio (F=27.472) further confirms that the child protection system significantly affects child well-being.

Results in this section reveal that there is a child protection system in place. However, the existing by-laws are not adequate because many people torture children and abuse their rights, yet they are not punished at all. Reporting cases of child abuse causes hatred among children, family members and the community. However, early child abuse case identification is done through the existing child-friendly spaces, community-based protection mechanisms like Child Protection Committees, community structures, toll-free lines, help desk and community awareness sensitization programmes like dialogue.

Conclusions

The empirical findings of the study concur with the initial supposition that there is a positive relationship between child protection system variables and child well-being. It further indicates that of all the three selected child protection system variables measured, accountability is a much better predictor of child well-being in Nyumanzi settlement and the rest follow. Literature review reveals that a functional child protection system is essential for the well-being of children in refugee settings. Promoting and protecting child well-being is critical for the realization of children's rights as stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). The literature further reveals that there are various obstacles to identification and reporting cases of child abuse (Yang, 2009). In ensuring proper well-being

of children, data is critical for decision-making and programming, and demographic data is vital to the humanitarian community's ability to plan for and provide response for the needs of all populations in situations of emergency. It is against this background that the following conclusions were drawn:

1) Any efforts directed towards strengthening laws and promoting capacity building of community members including on positive parenting and providing quick response to cases of child abuse and neglect will lead to improved child well-being.

2) Mandatory child abuse reporting laws are necessary to ensure improved child well-being.

3) Considering specific needs of children during data collection, ensuring quality standards, feedback and effective communication at all levels will lead to improved child well-being.

4) Following the system approach to this study, all system components have to be fully functional and effective; otherwise, failures in one system component may frustrate efforts invested in the other component towards the improvement of children's well-being.

5) It is important to note that the child protection system cannot work well in isolation and so child protection mainstreaming into other sectors (systems) is paramount to realize holistic achievement of results for children.

Recommendations

Firstly, based on the findings, this study recommends that the Government of Uganda, through the Office of Prime Minister, should strengthen existing laws to promote child well-being in refugee settlements. Perpetrators of violence against children should be apprehended and punished to deter them from continuously abusing children's rights. Through schools, teachers can instil the "silence kills" notion to awaken reporting of abuse cases and break the deep-rooted silence that may lead to distress and thus negatively impact on the emotional well-being of the children. Protecting the reporters through introduction and functionalization of effective innovative communication tools like the Child Help Line and Ureport will help prevent retaliation and possible loss of lives in extreme cases.

Secondly, prevention activities such as establishment of child-friendly spaces and selection of child protection committees (CPCs) should be participatory. The multiplier effect of programmes carried out in the community and at the child-friendly spaces should be given serious consideration to ensure that every community member is involved in the prevention of and response to child abuse. Managements of settlements and development agencies should sensitize community members in and around refugee settlements about the importance of reporting cases of child abuse to authorities.

Thirdly, the Office of Prime Minister in partnership with development partners should provide more facilities to support education, health and accommodation for children in the refugee settlement. The community needs to have a common goal and understanding of child well-being in line with the governing laws and acceptable standards.

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