

Scaling Up Psychosocial Wellbeing of Orphans and Vulnerable Learners in Rural Schools in Lesotho: An Ethnopsychology Approach

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Abstract : This paper explores strategies to improve the psychosocial wellbeing of orphans and vulnerable learners (OVLs) in rural schools in Lesotho that seem essential for their success, in anticipation of, and in the context of global education. Various strategies to improve psychosocial wellbeing are considered necessary in that they are inclusive and buffer other forms of conditions beyond traditional and Eurocentric forms in orientation. Furthermore, they bring about the local experiences and particularly of the learners and schools in rural areas – all of which constitute ethnopsychology. COVID-19 pandemic has enthused the demands for collaboration and responsive support for learners within rural and many deprived contexts in Lesotho. However, the increase of OVLs in the education sector has also sparked the debate of how many rural schools with a lack of resources, inadequate teacher training, declining unemployment and the detriment of COVID-19 throughout Lesotho affected the psychosocial wellbeing of these learners. In some cases, the pandemic has created opportunities to explore existing, forgotten or ignored resources dated back to the pre-colonial era in Lesotho, and emphasizing to have an optimistic outlook on life as a result of collaboration and appreciating local knowledge. In order to scale up the psychosocial wellbeing of OVLs, there is a need to explore various strategies to improve their psychosocial wellbeing, in which all learners can succeed during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, thereby promoting the agency of young people from the rural areas towards building supportive learning environments. The paper draws on qualitative participatory arts-based study data generated by 30 learners in two rural secondary schools in Lesotho. Thematic analysis was employed to provide an in-depth understanding of learners' psychosocial needs and strategies to improve their psychosocial wellbeing. The paper is guided by ethnopsychology – a strength-based perspective, which posits that in the most difficult situations, individuals including, young people have strengths, can collaborate and find solutions that respond to their challenges. This was done by examining how various facets of their environments such as peers, teachers, schools' environment, family and community played out in creating supportive strategies to improve the psychosocial wellbeing of OVLs which buffer the successful completion of their secondary school education. It is recommended that ethnopsychology should recognise and be used under the realm of positive wellbeing in rural schools in Lesotho.

Keywords : arts-based research, ethnopsychology, Lesotho, orphans and vulnerable learners, psychosocial wellbeing, rural schools.

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