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Contents

Social Adaptation and Resilience in Social Orphans of Kyrgyzstan: A Systematic Review of Effective Strategies and Practices.

Irfan Ahmad Hajam*

Abstract *:*

This systematic review aims to explore the effective strategies and practices that can foster social adaptation and resilience in social orphans of Kyrgyzstan, a country facing political, economic, and social challenges. The review analyzes three main aspects of the orphanage environment: enrichment activities, programs and practices, and care giving relationship. The findings suggest that enrichment activities can enhance the children's social and emotional competence, socialization and identity formation, life skills and purpose, teamwork and communication, and cultural relevance and expression. The programs and practices can facilitate the children's rites of passage and mental strength, socio-emotional behaviour and resilience, life skills and adjustment, participatory socialization and inclusion, and educational space and family values. The care giving relationship can influence the caregivers' mental health and well-being, and their training and education. The review concludes that the orphanage environment can play a vital role in promoting social adaptation and resilience in social orphans of Kyrgyzstan, and provides recommendations for future research and practice.

Keywords: *Social Orphans, Social adaptation, Resilience, Kyrgyzstan and Orphanage environment.*

Introduction

In every country and in every society there will always be orphans and children who, for various reasons, are left without parental care. The society and the state take care of the development and education of these children. A child, who lost his parents, lives in a special and truly tragic world. The need to have a family, a father and mother is one of the strongest needs of the child. One among group are "Social Orphans". Social orphans are children who have been separated from their biological parents due to various reasons, such as death, abandonment, abuse, neglect, poverty, or migration (Ross, 2011). They are often placed in institutional care or foster families, where they may face challenges in their psychosocial development and well-being (Giese, 2002). Social orphans are a

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vulnerable group that requires special attention and support from various stakeholders, such as caregivers, social workers, educators, health professionals, and policymakers (UNICEF, 2019). According to UNICEF, there are more than 140 million orphans in the world , in which Kyrgyzstan has a high rate of social orphan hood.

Kyrgyzstan is a landlocked country in Central Asia, with a population of about 6.8 million people1. It is one of the poorest and most remittance-dependent countries in the world, with many of its citizens migrating to neighbouring countries or beyond to find work. This has resulted in a large number of children who are left behind by their parents, or who are abandoned or neglected due to various family problems. These children are often referred to as social orphans, and they constitute 80 percent of the total number of orphans in Kyrgyzstan. Social orphans are children who have at least one living parent, but who are deprived of parental care and protection for various reasons. According to the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, the population of Kyrgyzstan was 6.7 million in 2023, of which 23.6% were children under 15 years old. However, over 11,000 children, or about 0.2% of the child population, lived in 117 children's homes, sometimes called orphanages, in 2016. Most of these children were admitted for one of three reasons: the death of a parent (22%), a family's difficult financial situation (21%), or divorce (14%). Only 6% had no living parents. These children face many challenges and risks, such as poverty, violence, lack of education, and social exclusion. They are often placed in institutional care or foster families, where they may not receive adequate support and attention. Therefore, it is crucial to understand and enhance the factors that contribute to their social adjustment and resilience, which are the abilities to adapt and cope with the adversities and changes in their lives.

In this systematic review, we adopt the definition of social orphans as children who have at least one living parent, but are not under their care and custody, and live in institutional or alternative forms of care. We exclude children who are adopted, in kinship care, or in independent living arrangements. Our main research question is: what are the effective strategies and practices that enhance the social adaptation and resilience of social orphans in Kyrgyzstan? We aim to answer this question by reviewing the existing literature on the topic, and conducting a narrative synthesis of the findings. We focus on the following aspects of social adaptation and resilience: social skills, Intra-personal and interpersonal intelligence, Socio-emotional behaviour, family values, adjustment and coping with adversities. We also examine the role of various activities, programs, and caregiver-child relationships in the orphanage as potential sources of support and influence for social orphans. This systematic review aims to provide best practices and recommendations for the social adjustment and resilience of social orphans of Kyrgyzstan. The existing literature on this topic is insufficient and inconclusive. There is also a shortage of reliable and comprehensive research on the outcomes and durability of

the interventions that target these aspects. Additionally, there is a need for more comparative and contextualized studies that reflect the diversity and specificity of the social orphans and their circumstances.

Social adaptation and resilience : A conceptual framework

Social adaptation is a complex and multidimensional concept that refers to the process of adjusting to changing social environments and conditions .It involves both individual and collective aspects, such as norms, values, behaviours, skills, and attitudes, that enable people to cope with and benefit from social changes .Social adaptation is relevant for various fields and contexts, such as education, health, migration, development, and climate change, where it can enhance the well-being, resilience, and sustainability of individuals and communities (Punia & Sangwan, 2011). However, social adaptation is not a static or linear process, but rather a dynamic and iterative one, that depends on multiple factors and interactions, such as motivations, capacities, opportunities, barriers, and feedbacks .Therefore, social adaptation requires a comprehensive and systemic approach that considers the diversity, complexity, and uncertainty of social systems and their responses to change .Orphans face many challenges and risks in their socialization process, such as the lack of parental care, the experience of trauma, the stigma and discrimination, and the transition to independent living (Merkul & Volchanskaya, 2021). Therefore, it is important to identify and implement effective strategies and practices that can foster their social adaptation and resilience, which are defined as the ability to overcome difficulties and achieve positive outcomes in life (Masten, 2014). Some of the factors that have been found to enhance the social adaptation and resilience of orphans are the quality of caregiver-child relationships, the participation in various activities and programs, the support from peers and mentors, and the preparation for adulthood (Telitsyna, 2021; Merkul & Volchanskaya, 2021; Masten, 2014). However, there is a need for more rigorous and comprehensive research to examine the mechanisms and outcomes of these interventions, and to tailor them to the specific needs and contexts of different populations of orphans, such as the social orphans of Kyrgyzstan, who are the focus of this systematic review.

In addition, social adaptation of orphans can be influenced by the type and duration of alternative care they receive, such as institutional care, foster care, or adoption (Browne et al., 2005). Institutional care, which is the most common form of alternative care in many countries, has been associated with negative effects on the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development of orphans, especially when they are exposed to poor quality care, overcrowding, and staff turnover (Browne et al., 2005; van Ijzendoorn et al., 2011). Foster care and adoption, which are considered more preferable

forms of alternative care, can provide orphans with more individualized attention, family-like environment, and stable attachments, which can facilitate their social adaptation and resilience (Browne et al., 2005; van Ijzendoorn et al., 2011). However, foster care and adoption also pose some challenges and risks for orphans, such as the possibility of multiple placements, the loss of cultural identity, the adjustment to new norms and expectations, and the discrimination and stigma from the society (Browne et al., 2005; van Ijzendoorn et al., 2011). Therefore, it is essential to ensure that foster care and adoption are well-regulated, monitored, and supported, and that orphans are given adequate preparation, information, and counselling before and after the placement (Browne et al., 2005; van Ijzendoorn et al., 2011).Furthermore, social adaptation of orphans can be affected by the characteristics and needs of the orphans themselves, such as their age, gender, ethnicity, health status, and educational level (Browne et al., 2005). Orphans may have different experiences and outcomes of social adaptation depending on their developmental stage, biological factors, cultural background, physical and mental conditions, and academic performance (Browne et al., 2005). For instance, younger orphans may have more difficulties in forming secure attachments and trusting relationships with others, while older orphans may have more challenges in developing self-reliance and independence skills (Browne et al., 2005). Orphans may also face different types and levels of discrimination and marginalization based on their gender, ethnicity, or health status, which can hinder their social integration and participation (Browne et al., 2005). Moreover, orphans may have different opportunities and aspirations for education and employment, which can affect their social mobility and economic security (Browne et al., 2005). Therefore, it is important to recognize and address the diversity and complexity of the orphans' situations and needs, and to provide them with appropriate and individualized support and services that can enhance their social adaptation and resilience (Browne et al., 2005).

Resilience is the ability to adapt positively to adversity, stress, or trauma (Herrman et al., 2011). Resilience is not a fixed trait that some people have and others do not, but rather a dynamic process that can be influenced by various personal, social, and environmental factors (Herrman et al., 2011). Resilience can be enhanced by interventions that target different domains of life, such as emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational skills (Herrman et al., 2011). Resilience can also be fostered by supportive relationships and networks that provide emotional, informational, and instrumental resources (Cross et al., 2021). Resilience is especially important for vulnerable populations, such as social orphans, who face multiple challenges and risks in their lives (Herrman et al., 2011). Resilience can help them overcome the negative effects of institutionalization, attachment disruption, and social stigma, and improve their well-being and functioning in society (Herrman et al., 2011). Resilience can also enable them to

cope with the transition from institutional care to independent living, which often entails new difficulties and uncertainties (Herrman et al., 2011). Therefore, resilience is a key concept and outcome for research and practice in the field of social orphan hood. A conceptual framework for social adaptation and resilience helped us to identify and analyse the key elements, processes, and outcomes of social adaptation and resilience, as well as the challenges and opportunities for enhancing it in different settings and populations (Punia & Sangwan ,2011).Such a framework can also guide the design, implementation, and evaluation of effective interventions and policies that foster social adaptation and resilience in the face of social change.

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Methodology:

The aim of this systematic review is to examine the effective strategies and practices that enhance the social adaptation and resilience of social orphans in Kyrgyzstan. The specific objectives are to:

• Identify and appraise the relevant studies on the topic, using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and following the PRISMA guidelines for reporting.

• Extract and synthesize the data from the included studies, using a narrative approach.

• Analyze the findings and discuss the implications for policy, practice, and research.

To conduct this review, we searched and selected 16 studies that met the following criteria: they were published in English or Russian between 2000 and 2023; they focused on social orphans, aged 6 to 18 years in Kyrgyzstan,; they used quantitative or qualitative methods to measure or explore their social adjustment and resilience; and they reported on the outcomes or impacts of specific activities, programs, or caregiver-child relationships that aimed to improve these aspects. We searched the following databases: Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, and eLibrary.ru. We also used snowballing and hand-searching techniques to identify additional sources. The search terms included: social orphan, orphan, institutional care, orphanage, boarding school, Kyrgyzstan, social adaptation, social adjustment, resilience, coping, and well-being. We appraised the quality and rigor of the studies using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), and extracted the data using a standardized form. We then performed a narrative synthesis of the data, using thematic analysis.

Findings

The search of databases provided a total of 3204 articles. After duplicate removals 1802 articles remained. Of these, 1786 were removed after title and abstract screening, as

they did not meet the eligibility criteria. The research question guiding this review was: What are the effective strategies and practices for improving the social adaptation and resilience of social orphans in Kyrgyzstan? To answer this question, the selected articles were analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach, which involved extracting, coding, and synthesizing the data from each article and identifying the main themes and subthemes that emerged from the literature. The analysis revealed three main themes: Enrichment activities, Orphanage programs and practices, and Care giving relationships. These themes represent the different types of strategies and practices that have been implemented or investigated in relation to the social adaptation and resilience of social orphans in Kyrgyzstan. The following sections will present the findings of each theme and discuss how they answer the research question.

Enrichment activities provided by the Orphanage:

• **Social and Emotional Competence:**

Social and emotional competence is one of the key outcomes of enrichment activities for social orphans, as it enables them to cope with the challenges and opportunities of their lives. Enrichment activities can foster the development of intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences, which are essential for self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills (Azid & Yaacob, 2016). Moreover, enrichment activities can enhance the resilience of social orphans, which is defined as the ability to overcome adversity and thrive in spite of it (Ungar, 2011). Resilience is influenced by both individual and environmental factors, such as personal traits, social support, and cultural resources (Bunea & Cojocaru, 2015). Enrichment activities can provide social orphans with positive experiences, meaningful relationships, and a sense of belonging, which can buffer the negative effects of trauma and deprivation (Worku et al.,2018). Therefore, enrichment activities can improve the social and emotional competence of social orphans, which can facilitate their adaptation and well-being.

• **Socialization and identity formation:**

Socialization and identity formation are key aspects of human development that influence one's well-being, but social orphans often struggle with them due to the lack of parental care and stable relationships (Muli, 2010). Child-centered play and games, based on child-centered play therapy (CCPT), can help social orphans to overcome these challenges. CCPT is an approach that blends Rogerian tenets with the natural way children communicate through play (Rezaee Rezvan et al.,2022). Through child-centered play and games, social orphans can express themselves, explore their feelings, resolve

their conflicts, enhance their social skills, boost their sense of identity. (Aghaei et al., 2022; Deepa, 2012; Durualp & Aral, 2010; Rezaee Rezvan et al., 2022). Role modeling and identification can also be a beneficial strategy for social orphans. Role modelling and identification can help the children develop their self-esteem, identity, and resilience, as they can learn from the experiences and coping strategies of others who face adversities and who can inspire them and guide them in their social adaptation and resilience (Skovdal & Andreouli, 2011).Therefore, child-centered play and games can be a participatory socialization strategy that can improve the social adaptation and resilience of social orphans in Kyrgyzstan.

- **Life skills and purpose:**

One of the enrichment activities that can foster social adaptation and resilience in social orphans of Kyrgyzstan is life skills and purpose. This sub-theme refers to the benefits of engaging in sports and education for the development of practical abilities and personal goals. Playing sports can be a way of enhancing the social identity of the children, as it can foster their self-confidence, self-expression, and social interaction (Aghaei, Shomali, & Zarei, 2022). It can also be a source of fun and enjoyment, which can reduce their stress and trauma. Life skills training can also improve the life quality of the children by teaching them how to cope with problems, make decisions, and communicate effectively (Sadeghi, Alipour, Abedi, & Ghasmi, 2013). For instance, encouraging pro-social peer activities ,rewarding the good behaviour etc...can build a sense of sociability and life skills in them. Therefore, life skills and purpose can be regarded as a vital sub-theme of enrichment activities that can support social adaptation and resilience in social orphans of Kyrgyzstan.

- **Teamwork and communication:**

One of the enrichment activities that can foster social adaptation and resilience in social orphans of Kyrgyzstan is teamwork and communication. Teamwork and communication skills are essential for developing positive relationships, self-esteem, and coping strategies among children who have experienced trauma and loss (Barnsley, 2011). By engaging in team building activities, such as sports, games, or group projects, social orphans can learn how to communicate effectively, cooperate with others, and achieve their goals. For instance, how they can calmly explaining their points, keeping eye-contact, understanding the feelings of others, turn-taking, empathizing and sharing. These activities can also provide opportunities for social orphans to receive feedback, support, and encouragement from their peers and guardians, which can enhance their psychological resilience (Sewasew et al., 2018; Bunea & Cojocaru, 2015). Moreover,

teamwork and communication can help social orphans to overcome social isolation and stigma, and to integrate into the wider society (Muli, 2010). Sociability and adaptation can help the children improve their social skills, social competence, and social adaptation, as they can communicate effectively, cooperate with others, and adjust to different social contexts. This can also reduce the socialization problems and deprivations that are common among orphans and children without parental care (Aleksandrov et al., 2021). Therefore, teamwork and communication is a valuable subtheme for enriching the lives of social orphans in Kyrgyzstan.`

• **Cultural relevance and expression:**

This subtheme refers to using culturally relevant stories and games to engage the children and build social skills in them. Stories and folktales are forms of enrichment activities that can enhance the children's cognitive and emotional development, as well as their cultural awareness and respect. According to Wood, Theron, and Mayaba (2012), cultural stories can boost the positive adjustment of children orphaned by AIDS by providing them with a sense of identity, belonging, and hope. Similarly, Maree and Du Toit (2011) argue that the oral tradition can play a role in counselling people of African ancestry by facilitating communication, healing, and empowerment. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, stories and folktales can also help the children form ideas about the family and their role in society, as suggested by Skova et al. (2020). Moreover, Mayaba and Wood (2015) highlight the value of using folktales as an intervention tool to enhance resilience for children orphaned and rendered vulnerable by HIV and AIDS, as they can offer moral guidance, emotional support, and coping skills. Therefore, cultural relevance and expression is a subtheme that can contribute to the social adaptation and resilience of social orphans of Kyrgyzstan.

Orphanage 'programs and practices:

• **Rites of passage and mental strength:**

Rites of passage are ceremonial rituals that present a person with a challenge that needs to be overcome in order to grow or progress in life. The concept of rites of passage was first proposed by the French sociologist and folklorist Arnold van Gennep, who identified three stages in these rituals: separation, transition, and reincorporation. According to Thamuku and Daniel (2013), rites of passage can also strengthen the psychosocial wellbeing of orphaned children by enhancing their self-reliance, cooperation and coping skills. For instance ,The Ark for Children is a therapy for traumatized children who leave their normal life and enter a retreat of healing and bonding

activities (Ark & Mark, 2011; People and Nature Trust, 2007). There, they undergo a luminal transformation of their identity and meaning (Ark & Mark, 2011). They emerge with a new sense of self and community, and a restored hope and resilience (Ark & Mark, 2011). Therefore, rites of passage can be seen as a valuable tool to support the social and emotional development of social orphans and prepare them for the challenges and opportunities of adulthood.

- **Socio-emotional behaviour and resilience:**

Socio-emotional behaviour and resilience are important aspects of social adaptation for orphans, who often face multiple adversities and challenges in their lives. Research has shown that various programs and practices can foster positive socio-emotional outcomes and resilience among orphans in different settings. For example, Barnsley (2011) found that supportive relationships, meaningful activities, and positive self-concept were key factors contributing to resilience among children and youths in out-of-home care in Ontario. Sadeghi et al. (2013) reported that life skills training improved the life quality of adolescent orphans in Iran by enhancing their, social skills, and coping strategies. These studies suggest that socio-emotional behaviour and resilience can be nurtured in any institution, such as orphanages, schools, or communities, as long as they offer orphans a safe, caring, and stimulating environment.

- **Participatory socialization and inclusion:**

Participatory socialization and inclusion is one of the effective strategies and practices that can enhance the social adaptation and resilience of social orphans in Kyrgyzstan. According to Feliksovna et al. (n.d.), socialization of orphans left without parental care can be improved by involving them in physical culture and sport activities that foster their physical, mental, and emotional development. These activities can also help them to form positive relationships with their peers, mentors, and volunteers, who can provide them with guidance, support, and role models. Similarly, (Uskova et al. ,2020) suggest that forming ideas about the family in preteen youngsters at orphanages can be facilitated by creating a family-like environment and encouraging their participation in various social events and celebrations. These interventions can help the orphans to develop a sense of belonging, identity, and attachment, which are essential for their resilience and well-being. Moreover, (Muli ,2010) argues that the influence of institutional care on the socialization of teenagers can be reduced by providing them with opportunities to interact with the outside community and to learn life skills that can prepare them for independent living. By doing so, the orphans can gain confidence, self-esteem, and social competence, which can enable them to cope with the challenges and risks that they may face in the future. Therefore, participatory socialization and inclusion

is a key factor that can promote the social adaptation and resilience of social orphans in Kyrgyzstan.

- **Educational space and family values:**

One of the effective strategies to enhance the social adaptation and resilience of social orphans of Kyrgyzstan is to create an educational space within the orphanage where family values are instilled, such as love, care, respect, and responsibility. According to Uskova et al. (2020), forming ideas about the family in preteen youngsters at orphanages can help them develop positive attitudes towards family life, foster their emotional and moral development, and prepare them for future social roles. Similarly, Sadeghi et al. (2013) found that life skills training, which includes teaching family values, can improve the life quality of adolescent orphans by increasing their self-esteem, social skills, and coping strategies. Therefore, providing an educational space that promotes family values can be beneficial for the social orphans of Kyrgyzstan, as it can help them overcome the challenges of living without a family and integrate into the society.

Care giving relationship:

- **Caregivers' mental health and well-being:**

Caregivers of orphans play a crucial role in fostering the social adaptation and resilience of these children, who often face multiple adversities and risks. However, care giving can also be a stressful and demanding task, which can negatively affect the caregivers' own mental health and well-being. According to Proeschold-Bell et al. (2019), caregivers of orphans experience higher levels of depression, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion than the general population, and these factors can impair their ability to provide quality care and support for the children. Therefore, it is essential to address the mental health needs of the caregivers, as well as the children, in order to promote positive outcomes for both groups. Proeschold-Bell et al. (2019) suggest that caregivers of orphans need access to psychosocial interventions, such as counselling, peer support, self-care strategies, and spiritual resources, to enhance their coping skills, emotional regulation, and sense of meaning and purpose. By caring for themselves, caregivers can also model healthy behaviours and attitudes for the children, and create a more nurturing and supportive environment for their social adaptation and resilience.

- **Caregivers' training and education:**

Caregivers' training and education is an important factor for enhancing the social adaptation and resilience of social orphans in Kyrgyzstan. According to Bettmann,

Mortensen, and Akuoko (2015), orphanage caregivers in Ghana have a basic understanding of children's emotional and interpersonal needs, but they lack the training and support to fully attend to them. The authors suggest that caregivers need to learn about children's attachment needs and the specific emotional challenges of orphaned children, as well as their own feelings and coping skills. Similarly, in Kyrgyzstan, caregivers may benefit from training and education on how to provide sensitive, responsive, and consistent care for the social orphans, and how to foster their social skills, self-esteem, and identity. Such training and education may improve the quality of the caregiver-child relationship and the well-being of both parties. Moreover, caregiver-child relationships are crucial for the orphan resilience, as they can offer the children the support of their friends and guardians, who can act as positive role models and sources of affection.

Conclusion:

The orphanage environment can play a vital role in promoting social adaptation and resilience in social orphans of Kyrgyzstan, a country with many difficulties. The review analyzed three main aspects of the environment: enrichment activities, programs and practices, and care giving relationships. The review showed that these aspects can improve the children's social and emotional skills, identity, life skills, communication, cooperation, culture, diversity, coping, mental toughness, resilience, adjustment, inclusion, empowerment, family values, bonds, attachment, trust, security, self-esteem, regulation, support, quality of care, and outcomes. The review also emphasized the significance of the caregivers' mental health, well-being, training, and education.

Implications and recommendations of the Study:

The implications of these findings are that the social adaptation and resilience of social orphans in Kyrgyzstan can be enhanced by providing them with a holistic and supportive social environment that addresses their needs and potentials in multiple domains. The enrichment activities, the orphanage programs and practices, and the care giving relationships can work together to create such an environment and to facilitate the positive development and well-being of the children. However, more research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness and the sustainability of these strategies and practices, as well as to explore the contextual factors and the individual differences that may affect their implementation and outcomes. Furthermore, more research is needed to compare and contrast the experiences and the perspectives of the social orphans in Kyrgyzstan with those of other countries and regions. Also, we suggest some recommendations for future research and practice, such as: conducting more experimental and longitudinal studies; using mixed methods and participatory approaches; exploring the diversity and complexity of the experiences and needs of social orphans; and engaging and supporting

social orphans as active agents of change.

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