INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

OF SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH

VOLUME 4 ISSUE 3 • SEPTEMBER 2024
ISSN 2782-9227 (Print) • 2782-9235 (Online)

For publication concerns, contact the publisher at irssr@iiari.org.

ISSN 2782-9227 (Print)
2782-9235 (Online)

Published by:
Institute of Industry and Academic Research Incorporated
South Spring Village, Bukal Sur
Candelaria, Quezon, Philippines
Postal Code 4323
Contact Number: (+63) 916 387 3537
Visit the website https://iiari.org

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH

ISSN 2782-9227 (PRINT) 2782-9235 (ONLINE)

Volume 4 Issue 3 | September 2024

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2782-9235 (Online)

This journal is published quarterly every March, June, September and December.

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International Review of Social Sciences Research
Volume 4 Issue 3 September 2024
DOI: https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353076

Women's pathways to homicide offending in Uganda

Milliam Kiconco

Abstract

According to the feminist pathways perspective, women's offending behaviour is largely attributed to their experiences of victimisation at the hands of male friends and relatives. Though there is considerable research, especially in the United States where the perspective originated, women's pathways to homicide offending in Uganda are not yet known. Moreso, studies on female adult-onset offenders are lacking. Therefore, to fill the identified gap, I conducted a qualitative study with 30 women convicted of murder and investigated their pathways to homicide offending. The study was guided by phenomenological research. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were used to collect data while data analysis was done with the help of NVivo 12 software. Consistent with Western literature, this study found that victimisation was majorly responsible for the offending behaviour of women. The study identified four types of women's pathways to homicide offending which included; the intimate partner violence-related pathway, the protecting marriages and children pathway, the financial greed pathway and, the pathway to prison due to guilt of association with criminal intimate partners. However, intimate partner violence-related pathway was responsible for the offending behaviour of most of the women (N=20). Implications of this study for policymakers and practitioners in the criminal justice system are discussed.

Keywords: *feminist pathways perspective, victimisation, women convicted of murder, qualitative study, phenomenology, Uganda*

Article History:

***Received**: April 26, 2024* ***Revised**: June 3, 2024*
***Accepted**: June 4, 2024* ***Published online**: July 9, 2024*

Suggested Citation:
Kiconco, M. (2024). Women's pathways to homicide offending in Uganda. *International Review of Social Sciences Research*, 4(3), 1-24. https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353076

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1. Introduction

Traditional criminological theories had, exclusively, focused on men and ignored the experiences of women as offenders and victims in the criminal justice system (Holtfreter et al., 2022). Because of this lapse, as compared to male, research on female crime remains scanty (Leote de Carvalho et al., 2023). The situation is worse in most African countries. According to Artz and Rotmann (2015), there is no information about women's offending and imprisonment in all African countries. This is irrespective of the fact that of late, the number of girls and women in contact with the criminal justice system has increased more than that of boys and men (Freiburger, 2016). However, in recent decades, the feminist pathways perspective has been used to explain women's offending behaviour. This is especially so in the Western world such as the U.S. where the theory originated. The feminist pathways perspective aims to investigate the realities and challenges in the lives of female prisoners (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014). The perspective takes a whole-life history approach to investigate how early life experiences affect the later life experiences of female offenders. The feminist pathways perspective emerged to provide an alternative to the male-based criminological theories in understanding women's offending behaviour (Holtfreter et al., 2022). The perspective introduced gendered risk factors to explain women's pathway to offending that was lacking in the traditional male-based theories. According to the feminist pathways perspective, gender shapes the risk factors for women's pathways to offending (Cruz et al., 2023). This perspective provides a better explanation for women's pathways to offending and imprisonment because it includes gender differences in risk factors and how the experiences of men and women are shaped differently in the criminal justice system (Holtfreter et al., 2022). The perspective is rooted in the understanding that the risk factors that women and girls are exposed to tend to be different from those of boys, and, that girls and women respond differently to the risk factors (Stanojoska, 2023).

The perspective, however, recognizes gender-neutral factors such as criminal networks, criminal history and education that are linked to both women's and men's offending behaviour, but, emphasizes the fact that there are gender-responsive factors that play more in the offending behaviour of women than men (Brennan et al., 2012). The perspective, specifically, pays attention to the long-term impact of early victimisation on the girls and women who come into contact with the criminal justice system (Belknap, 2014). It holds that the offending behaviour of women can largely be attributed to the long-term impact of early victimisation on women manifested in different forms that include among others sexual, physical, psychological and controlling behaviour (Stanojoska, 2023). Accordingly, this victimisation stretches from childhood to adult relationships (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014). To respond to different victimisation experiences, some women and girls develop coping mechanisms like drug abuse, running away and sex work all of which are criminalized (Gehring, 2018). In the end, the criminal behaviour of women accelerates due to factors like different forms of abuse and economic vulnerability (Becker & McCorkel, 2011).

Guided by the feminist pathways perspective, this paper intends to investigate women's pathways to homicide offending in Uganda. The paper contributes to the body of knowledge on women's pathways to homicide offending and to the limited research on the subject matter specifically in Uganda and generally in Africa. Moreover, beyond Africa, there is a gap in the literature because studies on female-related homicide offending remain few (Jeffries & Chuenurah, 2018). Theoretically, this paper contributes new knowledge for the development of southern criminology given the fact that the offending behaviour of women in the current study could not fit in the feminist pathways explanation. This is because, this study involves adult-onset offenders yet according to the feminist pathways perspective, women's offending behaviour begins in the adolescent stage as a response to multiple forms of victimisation (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014). The current study shows that feminist theory is limited in explaining the unique situation of rural women in the southern hemisphere.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Earlier research on women's pathways to offending

Present research on the feminist pathways perspective builds on the foundation that was established in the 1980s and 1990s beginning with the work of Chesney Lind (1989) who emphasized that major criminological theory could not sufficiently explain female crime (DeHart, 2018). Daly (1992) expounded on this work by documenting five pathways to New Haven courts in the United States. The first pathway (harmed and harming women) involved women who were victims of childhood physical and sexual violence and, thereby, ended up abusing drugs and harming others. The second was composed of street women who escaped abusive homes and committed crimes like prostitution and drug abuse. The third pathway was that of battered women who experienced intimate partner violence and ended up offending their abusers. The fourth pathway was of drug-connected women who abused drugs due to association with male friends. The fifth pathway that Daly termed the "other," involved women who were first-time offenders, and had no history of violence and drug abuse but were motivated to offend by greed and economic situations.

Several studies after Daly employed the feminist pathways perspective to document circumstances that compel women into offending (see Gaarder & Belknap, 2004; Hillis et al., 2001; Owen et al., 2017; Siegel & Williams, 2003). These studies situate women’s pathways to offending in the history of victimisation that stretches from childhood. For example, the qualitative study by Siegel and Williams (2003) documented a cycle of offending women that begins with child abuse followed by promiscuous behaviour and exposure to risky situations that culminate into adult victimisation. In their qualitative study of 22 imprisoned girls, Gaarder and Belknap (2004) found that these girls had experienced sexual victimisation before offending. In addition, there is evidence that links intimate partner violence (IPV) to women's offending behaviour.

2.2 Intimate partner violence and women’s pathways to homicide offending

Intimate partner violence has been reported to be the most important factor that explains women’s violent behaviour in intimate relations (Becker et al., 2024). Intimate partner violence is multidimensional and impacts on health, physical socio-economic, psychological and human rights aspects of individuals (Matias et al., 2020). Intimate partner violence involves any behaviour that results in physical, sexual and psychological harm in a relationship and, remains the common form of violence against women (Colagrossi et al., 2023). More so, it has been documented that IPV explains the majority of women in prison for murdering their abusive intimate partners (Walker et al., 2023). Estimates indicate that 67%–80% of intimate partner homicide involves abuse of a woman irrespective of who is killed (Matias et al., 2020). In this case, studies have shown that in most cases, women kill to defend themselves or to retaliate against their abusers (Enander et al., 2021). In a qualitative study that involved 40 female prisoners in Belgium, women reported being subjected to physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse by their partners before offending (Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2012). In an Australian study with 115 female intimate partner homicide offenders, it was found that women had been subjected to long periods of abuse by their victims (Voce & Bricknell, 2020). By using content analysis on 10 archival case files of American women who murdered their intimate partners between 1989 and 2016, Scott et al., (2023), found that eight women had experienced IPV before murdering. In Cambodia, a study by Jeffries and Chuenurah (2018) with a sample of 18 women imprisoned for homicide offending reported that women's pathways to offending were due to traumatic life history, victimisation at the hands of family members and marital abandonment among other factors. In Iran, a study with 23 female offenders found that families with domestic violence facilitated women's offending behaviour (Maghsoudi et al., 2018).

2.3 Women's pathways to offending in Africa

In Africa, few studies that have utilized feminist pathways perspective to investigate women's offending behaviour have reported victimisation as the central factor (Artz et al., 2012; Jeffries et al., 2019). For example, in their study with 55 South African female prisoners, Artz et al. (2012) reported that 38% were victims of childhood physical abuse while 29% were victims of childhood sexual abuse. In this study, women are said to have developed coping strategies like substance abuse and gambling in addition to being subjected to sexual abuse and controlling behaviour by their intimate partners (Artz et al., 2012). A qualitative study with 15 South African women imprisoned for killing their intimate partners found that 14 were victims of physical, verbal and emotional IPV (Hesselink & Dastile, 2015). In Uganda, a qualitative study that involved 66 women imprisoned for violent crimes like assault and murder with 55 having directed their violence on family members mostly men, women reported alcohol-perpetrated IPV at the hands of their intimate partners (Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza, 1995).

2.4 Contextualizing the study

Uganda is dominated by patriarchal structures and is predominantly an agricultural economy in which land is the major factor of production. In Uganda's sociocultural, economic and political structures, women's position remains low. For example, the rights to land inheritance and ownership are vested in men while women can only access land through a male relative (Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2019). In Uganda, women are overrepresented in unpaid agricultural-related and non-market work (Theeuwen et al., 2021). There are also harmful cultural practices like early marriage and bride price that afflict women (Neema et al., 2021), Women's education levels are low compared to men's (Uganda Demographic Health Survey, 2016). In addition, violence against women (VAW) is widespread, accepted, and facilitated by gender norms (Bukuluki et al., 2023). It is estimated that 51 per cent of women between 15-49 years have ever been subjected to physical violence (UBOS & ICF, 2018). According to Devries et al. (2013), between 74 and 98 per cent of children have been subjected to physical, emotional and sexual violence by their caretakers.

It should be noted that the Ugandan government acknowledges that VAW is a public health concern. The government subscribes to different international conventions like The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention Against Torture among others. There are national laws and legislation intended to protect women against violence of all forms. Among these are the National Policy on the Elimination of Gender-based Violence, The 1995 Constitution of Uganda and the Domestic Violence Act of 2010. Despite the availability of formal laws, VAW has persisted with gender values and norms that oppress women, mainly, due to poor implementation of laws (New Vision, 2023). For example, according to the Uganda Police 2020 crime report, there was an increase in domestic violence-related cases from 12,541 in 2019 to 17,664 in 2020 and of 17,664 cases, 13,145 were adult women (Uganda Police Report, 2020). It is important to note that under the Ugandan judicial system, VAW cannot be used as a defence. Women who murder their abusive partners are, therefore, treated as offenders and may end up having death sentences if convicted according to the Ugandan penal code of 1951 (*Peel, 2023).*

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research design

The study used the qualitative tradition of phenomenology. This design was useful in helping the researcher gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of women victims of violence and their pathways to offending (Hourigan & Edgar, 2020). From their standpoint, this design empowered the participants to openly describe their personal experiences with homicide offending (Yang et al., 2022).

3.2 Sample and sampling strategy

The site for this phenomenological study was one female prison not disclosed to protect the participants. The basis for choosing this prison was because most of the women imprisoned for murder are accommodated. The study involved a purposive sample of 30 women selected with the help of prison wardens. In qualitative research, scholars recommend the idea of a saturation sample attained at a point when no new information is being collected (Fofana et al., 2020). This is, usually, a small sample but big enough to offer rich data. However, there are other proposals such as one by Morse (1994) who proposes 30-50 participants for ethnography and grounded theory studies and Creswell and Poth (2018) who propose five to 25 for phenomenological studies. Following these guidelines, this phenomenological study targeted at least 25 women but, the saturation sample was reached at 30 women.

Female participants were purposively selected. Purposive sampling is central in qualitative studies because it is useful in selecting participants with qualities, which help to achieve the study's purpose (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The inclusion criteria were; Uganda women who were 18 years and above, convicted of murder, able to communicate in either English or "Luganda” (the local language widely spoken capital city) and able to give consent. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria include women with characteristics that could not allow them to be part of the study such as mental disorders that cannot allow them to give accurate data. The age range of women was 22-69. Illiteracy was high in that of the 30 women, only 3 had certificates attained after senior secondary education or form four. Eighteen women were primary school dropouts while nine women never went to school. Before committing murder, 27 women were married and three were divorced. Most of the women (N=17) were peasant farmers producing, mainly, for subsistence consumption. Only three women were employed in the formal sector. Two women reported being unemployed while the rest (N=8) were casual labourers. Of the 30 women, 28 were staying in rural settings while two were living in urban settings. All women were first-time offenders with no criminal and imprisonment history.

3.3 Data collection

Face-to-face in-depth interviews were used to collect data from research participants. With this method, rapport was created between the researcher and participants, participants were able to answer questions freely and the researcher took note of non-verbal communication (Yeo et al., 2014). This method was empowering for women and, they were able to freely narrate their pathways to homicide offending. I conducted interviews in "Luganda*"* a local language that every female participant could speak. Because researchers are not supposed to use voice recorders in Ugandan prisons, I used note-taking.

3.4 Data analysis

The process of data analysis was continuous and began at the time of data collection. Data was analyzed and managed using NVivo 12 software, which assisted in coming up with final narrative themes. I started the process by transferring interview notes to the software. The notes were read closely and, the software conducted an open coding structure and came up with a system of nodes. What followed were specific categories, which were created by axial coding through synthesizing and reorganizing interview notes. The specific categories created the narrative themes that form the discussion of this study (Marshal & Rosman, 2016).

3.3 Ethical considerations

City University of Hong Kong's Research and Ethics Committee and Uganda Prison Service officials cleared the study. Officials at the Uganda Prison Service headquarters offered me a clearance letter, which I presented to the officer in charge of the female prison. The officer in charge of prisons, then, introduced me to female participants involved in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary and all women provided consent. I assured them of confidentiality and anonymity. The names mentioned in this paper are not their real ones and were proposed by women.

4. Results and Discussion

From the interviews with women, this study identified four pathways to homicide offending which included; the intimate partner violence-related pathway, the protecting marriages and children pathway, the financial greed pathway and, the pathway to prison due to guilt of association with criminal intimate partners. Consistent with the pathway to offending literature that presents the history of female prisoners as one characterized by victimisation, findings indicated that 24 out of 30 women involved in this study experienced victimisation before committing murder. In effect, 24 out of 30 women reported being subjected to different forms of victimisation by, mainly, family members that included fathers, sisters-in-law and intimate partners. Of the 24 women, 12 experienced childhood victimisation, 21 experienced multiple forms of IPV while 17 women were psychologically and physically abused by criminal justice officials like the police and judges. However, one striking difference that this paper presents is findings from a sample of women who were adult-onset offenders with no criminal and imprisonment history and committed murder as their first offence. Relatively similar studies have been conducted in Belgium (Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2012, 2016). These studies with forty-one women imprisoned for various offences found that only seven had, at least, offended once before the age of 18 years old. The current study is, therefore, unique in that it has a sample of women who are all adult-onset offenders. The findings of this study contradict women's pathways to offending literature that links adult offending to risky adolescent behaviours resulting from childhood victimisation. One possible explanation could be the role of tradition and extended family in preventing childhood and risky adolescent behaviours (Ssemogerere, 2011). Given the fact that women in this study were staying in rural areas, they may not have been exposed to criminal activities and delinquent peers common in urban areas (Gunnison & McCartan, 2010). According to Moffitt's (1993) dual taxonomy theory, adult-onset offenders must have been socially prevented from participating in delinquent activities as children and adolescents

4.1 Intimate partner violence-related pathway

Majority of the women murdered due to the cumulative effect of IPV (N=20). These women suffered different forms of IPV that included; physical, sexual, psychological, controlling behaviour and economic violence. The experience of IPV according to women was repetitive and enduring (between 12 to 35 years). Of the 20 women, 14 murdered their abusive partners, three murdered their stepchildren, two murdered their fathers and one murdered her brother. Eight women murdered out of self-defence while 12 planned the action It was, however, noted that even when some women killed their victims in self-defence out of provocation, the impact of cumulative experience of multiple forms of IPV played a big role. Asked if there was any other factor that influenced their action apart from self-defence, eight women hinted at the desperate situation they were going through. They had before negotiated escape routes from IPV without success. They all expressed the sense of a desperate situation that was filled with accumulated anger and fear of getting killed at any time. For example, Abwori who murdered her partner after 29 years of suffering multiple forms of victimisation said that though she murdered out of self-defence, her enduring experience of victimisation without any solution was responsible for the anger that she used to murder her partner:

> *I killed in response to the provocation from my partner. On the fateful day, he came back from the bar at 8:00 am which was his habit and started kicking me --------. I responded by hitting him with an axe and he died. You can imagine the kind of anger that suffering without a solution brings. I think I harboured a lot of anger that burst the day I fought back and killed him (Abwori, 58 years old).*

Aryampurira said that by the time she responded in self-defence, with her four children, they were in fear that any time they would be killed;

> *By the time I responded to defend myself against my abusive partner, with my four children, we had got engrossed in fear. I knew my partner was going to kill me any time. I think I killed him out of that fear, thinking that I was to be the first one to die (Aryampurira, 28-year jail sentence).*

Interviews with women who carefully planned to kill their abusive partners revealed that they did so to end abusive relationships, which they had endured for long without an escape route. Sarai, for example, planned with her two big children to kill her partner. According to her, children were part of the plan to kill because they were also victims of abuse for a long and were of seeing their mother being abused;

> -------*For long a time, I tried to be a good woman, but this did not stop my partner from abusing me and my children. By the time I killed him, I had endured many years of suffering. My big children were also tired of being abused and seeing me go through all the abuse. This is the reason we conspired and hatched a plan to kill him (Sarai).*

Murder by women has been taken to be more likely in intimate (Spencer & Stith, 2020). It has been documented that majority of the women kill their intimate partners and other family members after they have been subjected to a long period of abuse by their victims (Voce & Bricknell, 2020). What is common among researchers is that female-perpetrated homicide reflects an extreme outcome of IPV against women (Matias et al., 2020). Moreover, it has been acknowledged that before killing their abusive partners and other family members, in part, due to a range of difficulties and failure to get a safe exit, abused women chose to stay in abusive relationships until a time they responded to end abusive situations (Estrellado & Loh, 2019; Milliam, 2019).

Agumisiriza who killed her stepchild said that the victim child compounded her already existing multiple experiences of IPV. Agumisiriza said that she withstood physical, sexual, and psychological abuses and control for a long, but the situation became worse when her partner forced a child on her. She narrated that a two-year-old stepchild was brought and thrown into her compound by a woman who claimed that her partner was not providing any support. According to Agumisiriza, her partner not only forced her to look after the child but also abused her more because of the child. She thus said:

> *I endured abuse from my partner without any other option at my disposal. I was shocked one evening when a woman came quarrelling and dumped a child in our compound claiming that my partner had failed to provide basic needs to him. --------my partner who had never disclosed to me that he had a child of this kind forced me to take care of the child. This child escalated the abuse. I remember one time my partner beat me seriously because he found a child just crying (Agumisiriza, 60 years old)*

It has been documented that extramarital affairs and polygamy condoned by most African cultures result in jealousy and insecurity among women, which compel them to kill (Bagala, 2016).

After separating from their abusive partners and going back to their parents' homes, the three women, two of whom killed their brothers and another one killed her father said that though they killed their relatives because of having no place to go, IPV experience they had just escaped played an indirect role. Rukundo, Owobusingye and Kihembo left their partners after being married for 17, 14 and 12, years respectively. Their parents paid back the bride price and gave the women land and shelter to settle and this positive gesture facilitated the separation. The arrangement of acquiring land at their home of birth did not go well with their big brothers who wanted to take away the land from the women. In the attempt to take back land from these women, their fathers supported their sons' initiatives. In effect, women ended up killing their relatives over the matter of taking away land from them. The women's options to survive after divorce were limited because they only looked at the land and rightly so for survival. Their parents' homes also served as their valuable shelters so being chased from there meant becoming homeless. One of their extracts is stated:

> *For attempting to snatch land away from me, I killed my brother because I had neither other option nor alternative means for survival. I had just left marriage on an unfortunate note, and I never intended to marry again. I still had fresh memories and scars from the abusive marriage. No one was willing to help me out of my predicament, including, my father of all people--------- But in all this, I blame my former abusive partner. I would not have been at my parent's home had he not abused me (Kihembo, 28-year jail sentence).*

The women became victims of laws and customs that favour men when it comes to land inheritance in an agricultural economy of Uganda (Rugadya, 2010). What is not found in the literature is the adult women who kill their parents and siblings. In a study by Stevens (1999) with eighteen abused women who killed their abusers, two cases of 16- and 17-year-old women killed their parents. Stevens reports that the women had experienced life-long experiences of physical, sexual and psychological abuse at the hands of their victims. Contrary to such findings, women in this study had extended experience of IPV at the hands of their intimate partners, which experience they had just left but were compelled to kill their victims who threatened to take away the land they only saw as a source of livelihood.

4.2 Protecting marriages and children's pathway

Uganda is a society contextualized by respectfulness accorded to women in a marriage relationship and with divorcees being stigmatized. This is in addition to children being, solely, under the care of women and the elder son, usually, being taken as the heir of his father's estate. With women, including, girl children playing a peripheral role in society, women may end up killing to protect their marriages and children. Such a situation was reflected in the pathway to murder of five women who were married and had several children at the time of murder and were not, necessarily, victims of IPV. Though three of the five women were victims of multiple forms of childhood victimisation, they said that their killing had nothing to do with the effect of childhood victimisation as stated in one extract:

> *----I killed because I wanted to protect my marriage. I had already overcome the trauma faced during childhood. I wanted to guard my nine-year marriage. My partner was a very loving and caring man, but the problem was the extra-marital affair he was having with another woman. I feared that this woman was going to destroy my marriage and I had to kill her (Survivor).*

Forty-five-year-old Nehum, who was sentenced to 60 years for killing her step-child said that she killed because she wanted to protect her children from the competition over resources. Nehum who had three young boys at the time got scared and jittery when her partner brought a fifteen-year-old boy to her home. She imagined that her stepchild being the oldest son would automatically be the heir of his father's estate as by cultural norm established and so would take the biggest share of his father's resources to the detriment of her children. In her words:

> *I only killed to protect my children. I was living peacefully with my partner for nine years but matters turned sour when the 15-year-old child born outside marriage came into our marital relations. At the time the boy came into our family, I had three younger boys one of who was rightly expected and destined to become an heir to my partner's estate. I kept imagining that this boy would be the heir and would take all the land since he was the eldest of all (Nehum).*

Contrary to the pathway to committing murder through victimisation, the role of culture was traced in the pathways to offending behaviour of these five women who killed to protect their marriages and children. Scholars have acknowledged the role of understanding the cultural and ethnic differences of women who murder (Ventura et al., 2022). This difference has been noted in Australia where the rates of indigenous women who kill their intimate partners are higher than those of non-indigenous women. An Australian study by Voce and Bricknell (2020) that involved 115 homicide offenders reported that indigenous women were more likely to kill their intimate partners than non-indigenous women. Voce and Bricknell note that the lives of indigenous women were characterized by unemployment, substance abuse and unstable accommodation. In Uganda, a woman is respected only in the confines of marriage, divorce is discouraged, and divorcees are stigmatized. Sons, especially, first sons are valued and are, always, the heirs to their fathers' estates (Archambault & Zoomers, 2015). Women in this situation may end up killing to protect their threatened children from the competition, which was the case with the story of women who killed their stepsons.

4.3 Financial greed pathway

One woman mentioned prospects of financial gain as the reason for killing her partner. Murungi never reported any history of victimisation. Murungi said that her partner had a very big chunk of land from which much of the family wealth was produced. However, one part of this land was later to be the cause of offending. Murungi at one time wanted her partner to sell a small piece so that they get money to begin a business for their son who never had a job. Her partner rejected the idea of disposing of part of the land and, this refusal led to his death. Murungi is said to have hatched and connived with her son to kill her partner as described:

> *I think I was just greedy for money. My partner was a peaceful man------- He had a lot of land to supply us with enough food. However, when my son finished college and failed to get a job, I suggested to him that we sell part of the land and have him start a business for his economic empowerment. I, in my imagination, hoped to get side income from the business my son was to start. My partner rejected the idea of selling part of the land. This infuriated my son and me and this is how we planned to kill him (Murungi, 48 years old).*

With no history of victimisation, Murunga's story was due lack of correct decision-making power in the affairs of a family estate that belonged to her family but was mediated through her partner. This finding contradicts the feminist pathways perspective that attributes women's offending behaviour to the experience of victimisation. Research has demonstrated that not all women who kill their intimate partners have experienced IPV and not all those who experience IPV kill their partners (Voce & Bricknell, 2020). Though women's pathways to committing murder through financial greed have been reported elsewhere, the experience of a woman in the current study reflects the Ugandan traditional customary practices that disadvantage women as compared to men in terms of land ownership. Patrilineal inheritance practised in most of the communities of Uganda hinders women from accessing and controlling land (Kabahinda, 2017). Customary land tenure is the common type of access to land with 80% of the land being administered customarily (Dieterle, 2021). This is the case in most African agricultural economies (Kameri-Mbote, 2005). This, however, has a negative implication on the status of women. For example, Uganda being an agriculture-based economy, lack of land implies women's economic dependency on men.

4.4 Pathway to prison due to guilt of association with criminal intimate partners

This category had four women who, accordingly, never committed the crime but were in prison because of the crimes committed by their intimate partners. These women blamed poverty and the corrupt justice system for their conviction. Adroa, Hannah, Nakintu and Aryanzahura were imprisoned together with their partners. These women said that they were arrested and convicted with their partners. Adroa, for example, said that her culpability, according to police and judges, was because she never reported the offence of her partner to authorities. Adroa whose partner committed suicide inside the prison before trial was considered to be the number one suspect. She said she failed to get money to hire a private lawyer to represent her and ended up being convicted;

> *I am here because of the crime that was committed by my partner. He killed his friend in a fight inside our house. We were arrested and remanded together but he committed suicide before appearing in court. Without money to enlist the services of a private lawyer, I was left vulnerable. The presiding judge treated me as the number one suspect and convicted me to life imprisonment (Adroa).*

Literature in non-western countries has documented how women's pathway to prison is impacted by inadequate access to legal representation and corruption in the criminal justice system (Jeffries et al., 2019). In Kenya, for example, a study with forty-nine women found that twelve of them were wrongly imprisoned due to guilt of association and being framed by others but were unable to explain themselves in courts of law because of limited access to justice (Jeffries et al., 2019). The qualitative study by Fox (2018) in the US documented stories of five women who were convicted of murder and were serving sentences due to guilt of association with criminal intimate partners. With one of them being convicted for the death of her child murdered by her abusive husband who happened to be the biological father, Fox argues that women are, always, wrongfully convicted for violating criminal code and standards of appropriate womanhood and motherhood. This is based on the view that the victim woman was blamed for failing to protect her child against the abusive intimate partner (Fox, 2018).

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study are somewhat consistent with the existing feminist pathways perspective literature on role victimisation in the offending behaviour of women. In particular, the study extends the pathway perspective to an African context and adds to non-Western research that has utilized the feminist pathways perspective. This study, however, breaks the ground by presenting a group of female adult-onset offenders whose offending behaviour cannot be fully explained using the feminist pathways perspective as advanced and used in Western literature. In the current study, childhood victimisation did not influence adolescent and adult offending behaviours as advanced in the Western pathway literature. Instead, for the majority of the women, homicide offending was a response to multiple forms of IPV. As Nuytiens and Christiaens (2016) argue, female adult-onset offending could present an important angle to study and challenge the pathway perspective that was developed and tested in the United States. In this case, the findings of this study contribute to the development of southern criminology (Carrington et al., 2016); existing criminological theories may not be sufficient in explaining the dynamics of crime in the southern context and so, there is a need for adding new knowledge and perspectives to the existing theories. More so, it has been argued that the feminist perspective may not fully explain the unique experience of rural marginalized women in the southern hemisphere (Potter, 2015). However, this study is without limitations. For example, the study used purposive sampling with a focus on female participants who meet a certain criterion and this did not capture the experiences of others in the same setting and is limited in terms of in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Also, this study required women to re-construct their past and most had spent many years in prison, it is possible that some may not have fully revealed their past experiences. It is, therefore, acknowledged that some stories could have been either missed or misconstructed.

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that victimisation within adult relationships has a significant influence on the offending behaviour of women in Uganda. Findings reveal that victimisation during intimate relations explains the pathway to homicide offending of the majority of women. This suggests that paying attention to the experience of women in adult intimate relations is important in understanding factors that compel them to murder in Uganda. This study’s findings have implications for practice, policy and future directions for research. In the area of practice, the findings of this study have implications for different professionals. The prior experience of imprisoned women that is characterized by poverty, unemployment/underemployment, low education, and a history of victimisation, all require that practitioners in the criminal justice system understand this history and treat female offenders and prisoners accordingly. Practitioners in this case such as police, judicial officers, prison guards, social workers and counsellors need to gain an understanding of issues affecting female prisoners. It is only by understanding of circumstances surrounding women's offending behaviour that officials such as police and judges can handle female offenders and prisoners in an empathetic and responsible manner by considering their special problems and needs. In order to determine the services and resources that women and girls need across their life spans, there is a need for gaining knowledge about the risks, vulnerabilities and forces that they face. Given the cultural and social forces surrounding violence against girls and women in Uganda as identified in this study, efforts need to involve different stakeholders including the public, and cultural and religious leaders among others. Efforts to educate the public about the dangers of VAW could involve the whole community at all levels. In terms of future research, emphasis should be put on widening the understanding of the interplay between social-cultural factors and intimate partner violence in explaining women’s pathways to homicide offending in Uganda.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was part of the author’s PhD, which was funded by the City University of Hong Kong.

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International Review of Social Sciences Research
Volume 4 Issue 3 September 2024
DOI: https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353079

A critical analysis of the impact of indigent policies on socio-economic inequalities in South Africa: A case of Amathole District Municipality

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Abstract

At the heart of local government administration and the inherent ability to deliver core services to the people is a progressive and responsive policy that is inclusive of the social values of society. This manuscript examines the nexus between indigent policy and the challenges local governments face, focusing on the Amathole District Municipality (ADM) in South Africa. Grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT), the study investigates how indigent policies intersect with socioeconomic disparities, drawing on secondary data sources and African theoretical perspectives. It highlights historical and contemporary factors shaping these policies and their impact on marginalised communities, revealing systemic inequalities within them. This paper employed an interpretivism paradigm and a qualitative approach, and it relied on secondary data that was analysed through themes. The study underscores the importance of inclusive and responsive policies in addressing core service delivery and societal values. While acknowledging the indigent policy's role in alleviating inequality and poverty, it identifies shortcomings in addressing unemployment. Recommendations include concurrent implementation of the policy with social grants, local economic development, and public works programs, alongside community empowerment and long-term monitoring for sustainable socioeconomic development. By offering insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars, the research contributes to evidence-based policymaking and social justice efforts in South Africa. It emphasizes the need for holistic approaches that prioritize equity and social justice, fostering inclusive and sustainable development.

Keywords: *indigent, policy, poverty, inequality, social justice, unemployment*

Article History:

***Received**: April 24, 2024* | ***Revised**: June 10, 2024*
***Accepted**: June 11, 2024* | ***Published online**: July 27, 2024*

Suggested Citation:
Kuhlengisa, I.R., Rulashe, T. & Jakoet-Salie, A. (2024). A critical analysis of the impact of indigent policies on socio-economic inequalities in South Africa: A case of Amathole District Municipality. *International Review of Social Sciences Research*, 4(3), 25-51. https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353079

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1. Introduction

In a bid to alleviate poverty, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed and adopted, and SDG number 10 explicitly speaks about inequality reduction to be achieved by 2030 (United Nations (UN), 2023). Regionally, the African continent has ascribed to the 2063 Agenda aimed at ensuring democratic values, practices, universal principles of human rights and the entrenched rule of law. South Africa is regarded as the most unequal country in the world as it experiences a skewed income distribution, unequal access to opportunities, and regional disparities (International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2020; Mtapuri &Tinarwo, 2021). In pre-1994, South Africa experienced apartheid, which was characterised by inequalities and injustices. Amid these historical injustices, indigent policies tend to be the beacon of hope, promising to redress past imbalances and shaping a way to inclusive prosperity. However, the effectiveness and efficiencies of these policies remain a fallacy, prompting the researchers to ascertain the impact of indigent policies on socioeconomic inequalities. Within the South African local government, the government introduced the indigent policy as a vital tool in tackling poverty and inequality. These challenges are not peculiar to South Africa; almost all African countries face the same challenges. Several initiatives have been proposed and implemented in South Africa to counter such challenges, such as the National Development Plan (NDP) detailing how this must be achieved by 2030. This study seeks to unravel the multifaceted dynamic encompassing municipal indigent policies and their role in addressing inequality issues in South Africa. By employing a rigorous exercise on the National Framework for Municipal Indigent Policy Framework (NFMIP), theoretical insights and empirical evidence, the study seeks to illuminate the intended outcomes of the indigent policies while advocating for in-depth consideration of their inferences for social justice and equitable development.

According to the National Indigent Policy Framework (2005), the municipality is responsible for ensuring that all the citizens have access to their constitutional rights of having access to a basic level of service. In 2005, municipalities adopted an indigent policy that embodies indigent support to increase the beneficiaries' quality of life by assisting them in exiting from their indigence (ADM Annual Report, 2018). Surprisingly, the situation on the ground paints a bleak picture as socio-economic inequalities and political compromise characterise South African society. Although indigent policies offer temporary relief to indigents, they tend to fall short of addressing the root causes of inequalities, perpetuate dependency and reinforce existing power dynamics. The inability of the state to adequately deal with these challenges impairs the social well-being of communities, among other things. Kuhlengisa et al. (2022) note the indigent policy as one of the important vehicles in addressing social ills at the local government level and ensuring that basic services to the people are a reality.

South Africa is the most unequal society in the world, and the unfortunate part is that people living in rural areas are heavily affected as they are the poorest of the poorest citizens (Ngarava, 2023). This study was necessitated by the need to determine the impact the indigent policy has had on reducing inequality in the municipality. The study seeks to answer the question on how the indigent policies in South Africa influence and perpetuate socio-economic inequalities and their implications for social justice and equitable development. The study seeks to reduce the research gap as there is limited evaluation of the impact of indigent policies on socioeconomic inequality in the Amathole District Municipality. Therefore, this study is not merely an academic work but a moral imperative. It adopts a critical lens informed by interdisciplinary scholarship based on political economy, public administration, and public policy studies. Through the positioning of indigent policies within a broader framework of critical race theory, the study seeks to unpack the ideological underpinnings and constraints that affect the design, implementation, and impact of indigent policies, while also comparatively giving an indigenous theoretical and conceptual perspective.

2. Literature Review

2.1. State of Indigence in South Africa

Official Statistics South Africa (StasSA) report in the first quarter recorded that South Africa's unemployment rate is 34.5% (Stats SA, 2022). In addition, despite South Africa's progress in reducing poverty since 1994, the trajectory of poverty reduction was reversed between 2011 and 2015; the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic further strained this. According to the World Bank (2020), approximately 55.5% of people in South Africa live below the poverty line. Poverty is not a static condition; amongst South African poor, a small positive shock to incomes has a possibility of lifting many out of poverty; however, a marginal shock could drive as many of the vulnerable into poverty. Since 2020, many households in South Africa have been vulnerable to shocks such as pandemics and disasters ranging from COVID-19 to the KwaZulu Natal floods (Pillay, 2021).

These are indicators that there is a need for a proper strategy aimed at addressing such challenges. The other challenge that South Africa is confronted with is inequality, as South Africa is regarded as the most unequal society (World Bank, 2020). Since the dawn of democracy, racial inequalities, in particular those who reside in rural areas, has been exacerbated. With the advent of the COVID-19 global pandemic, it was estimated that extreme poverty would increase in South Africa by close to 10% (World Bank, 2020). This downward trend of livelihoods and communities experiencing high poverty levels and hardship was evident before the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been attributed to many factors, such as corruption, poor governance, lack of political will and non-implementation of policy. However, evidence from previous crises of even smaller scales suggests that these negative effects could last across generations and further exacerbate South Africa's high inequality. It is against these assertions that the researchers seek to assess the developmental role of the Municipal Indigent Policy in addressing the issues of unemployment, poverty and inequality referred to in this study as the triple challenge.

2.2. Unlocking the municipal indigent policy's full potential in South Africa

Regardless of the economic growth and improvement in other facets of welfare, unemployment, poverty, and inequality remain a pervasive and complex phenomenon in South Africa (Kuhlengisa, 2021). Implementing the Indigent policies in South African municipalities reflects a progressive evolution in understanding the role municipalities can play in the fight against the triple challenges confronting South Africa (Leburu, 2018). For the indigent policy to achieve its full potential in dealing with the triple challenges, it must be brought up and sustained (Kuhlengisa, 2021). While also ensuring that all stakeholders play their role in realising the objectives of indigent policies. Against the backdrop of policy failures is also the lack of political will and non-upholding of accountability practices in the public service and the local sphere of government (Rulashe & Ijeoma, 2022).

Scaling up the policy involves dealing with a series of technical issues to identify parameters, tools and processes that can deliver maximum benefits to the poor and the vulnerable, (Leburu, 2018; Ruiters, 2018; Kuhlengisa, 2021). Implementing the indigent policies in South Africa aims to ensure that the most vulnerable and the poorest households can reach a minimum level of consumption and cover their basic needs (Leburu, 2018). Similarly, Kuhlengisa (2021) argues that the indigent policy is often more central in low-income settings characterised by poverty. In addition, Ruiters (2018) and Pillay (2021) postulate that implementing indigent policy within the South African setting has boosted consumption and lowered poverty.

2.3. Conceptualising the Amathole District Municipality Indigent Policy

South Africa, as a development state, requires a developmental approach to addressing the social ills that are confronting the country (Kuhlengisa, 2021). Municipality, as a government closer to the people, is committed to providing supportive initiatives to enhance community development by addressing the inequalities, poverty, and unemployment issues (Pillay, 2021). A developmental institution is committed to providing supportive measures to assist and empower the community (Leburu, 2018). According to the National Indigent Policy Framework (2005), the municipality is responsible for ensuring that all citizens have access to their constitutional rights and a basic level of service. In 2005, municipalities adopted an indigent policy that embodies indigent support to increase the beneficiaries' quality of life by assisting them in exiting from their indigence (ADM Annual Report, 2018).

The main objectives of the policy are aimed at providing sustainable basic municipal services to locals within the confines of the municipality's administrative and financial capacity as well as establishing a framework to identify and manage indigent households inclusive of a socio-economic analysis (Leburu, 2018). In addition, the policy seeks to enhance cooperative governance with other spheres of the government and provide procedures and guidelines for subsidising basic charges and free basic services to indigent households (Pillay, 2021). The grant depends on the availability of funds from the national treasury through an equitable share, and the grant is only given if the occupier of the property or owner is staying on the premises (ADM Indigent Policy 2023). Individuals guilty of malpractices will forfeit the payment of the grant (National Indigent Policy Framework, 2005).

A registered indigent holder is supposed to receive minimum standards of basic services such as water services, sanitation, and electricity (ADM Indigent Policy, 2023). Municipalities have a responsibility and a sole description to determine their own criterion in choosing indigent beneficiaries within their jurisdiction (ADM Annual Report 2021). According to ADM Indigent policy (2023), indigent households have access to 6000l of water per month, and they have access to 50 kHw of electricity per month. To qualify for indigent support, one must be a property owner, possess valid South African identity documents and provide proof that their household total income is equivalent to two times the Government social grants.

Although the various national policies make suggestions in this regard, the final decision lies with the municipality, and there are significant variations in qualifying criteria and registration processes (ADM Indigent Policy 2023). The ADM indigent policy requires anyone applying for indigent support to complete a formal indigent application form and provide proof of unemployment, proof of income, and a letter from the employer if the person applying for support, is a domestic worker. Indigent support is only valid for twenty-four months, and the beneficiaries must reapply at the end of this period.

2.4. Nature of Indigency in South Africa

Poverty, unemployment, and inequalities within the South African context may be attributed to the legacies of the apartheid system, where most of the black communities were deprived of basic socio-economic development (Pillay, 2021). Ruiters (2018) believes that poverty and unemployment in rural communities and urban spaces of South Africa have a historical connection. A study by Haas and Osland (2014) indicated that poverty and high levels of unemployment in most urban areas are triggered by rural-urban migration. This assertion is supported by Kuhlengisa (2021), who postulates that poverty in rural communities, where people cannot access necessities and basic services, is widespread. Service delivery inequality within the South African context is a result of historical legacies, and this has played a significant role in influencing municipal resources and efficiency (Sartorius & Sartorius, 2016). Despite the inequality issues being a global phenomenon, it is worth noting that in most instances' municipalities have always prioritised allocating limited resources to the rich at the expense of the poor (Warner & Hefetz, 2002; Sartorius & Sartorius, 2016).

Service delivery patterns in South Africa indicate that district municipalities in poor rural provinces, such as the Eastern Cape, have very low levels of service delivery. In this context, rural municipalities are confronted uniformly by a lack of resources, infrastructure, and skills across all municipalities in their areas (Kuhlengisa, 2021). This is a cause for concern as it is evident that the indigent policy in these areas is bound to fail as there are no services to start with. Inequality, unemployment and poverty are what both South African rural and urban settings are confronted with, which explains the need and the provision of indigent support amongst struggling households. Pillay (2021) postulates that following Chapter 6 of the National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030, the government seeks to alleviate poverty and inequality among all races and classes by the year 2030, and this strengthens the need to stimulate rural economies to ensure that people, get the basic needs and employment as part of enhancing human development. The critical race theory underpins this study.

2.5. A global Indigent policy perspective

The support and development of indigents is not only a South African phenomenon but the struggle of every state and government across the globe as nations grapple with the challenges of providing adequate social support and assistance to their most vulnerable populations. Historically, the foundations of modern social assistance schemes can be traced to established patterns of charity, often institutionalised and governed by formal religious or statutory norms. For instance, in early Saxon England, Canon and secular law supported the Christian practice of tithing. Similarly, in the Arab world, private charity became a central aspect of Islamic tradition following the advent of Islam. The processes of industrialisation and urbanisation over the past two centuries have profoundly affected social security arrangements globally. The origins of the modern social security system can be traced back to late nineteenth-century Europe, although its characteristic features developed primarily in the three decades following the Second World War.

In many developing countries, innovative social protection programs have been introduced in recent decades, reflecting a growing recognition of the need to address the challenges faced by the poor and marginalised (Ghai, 2003). The diffusion of ideas and practices has played a crucial role in the creation of social welfare services in the developing world.

Table 1

Global social welfare initiatives

Country	Policy	Articulation	Comparative Outlook
Republic of South Africa	*National Framework For Municipal Indigent Policies*	South Africa's indigent policy aims to provide basic services such as water, electricity, and sanitation at reduced or no cost to qualifying low-income households. Each municipality develops and implements its policy, which typically includes criteria for identifying indigent households, such as income thresholds and social circumstances.	This policy's effectiveness in providing essential services to the poor can be compared with similar social support mechanisms in other countries
Federative Republic of Brazil	*Bolsa Família Program (PBF)*	Bolsa Família is a conditional cash transfer program that provides financial aid to low-income families in Brazil. To receive benefits, families must ensure that their children attend school and receive vaccinations. The program aims to reduce poverty and improve health and education outcomes.	To Compare the direct financial support and conditional requirements of Bolsa Família with South Africa's provision of essential services as they both focus on the impacts on poverty alleviation and long-term socioeconomic outcomes and relief.
Republic of India	*Public Distribution System (PDS) and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)*	PDS provides subsidized food and non-food items to India's poor. MGNREGA guarantees at least 100 days of wage employment per year to rural households whose adult members volunteer for unskilled manual work	The food security and employment guarantees provided by PDS and MGNREGA align with some of South Africa's provisions for basic services. These are imperative for household stability and economic empowerment.
United Mexican States	*Prospera (formerly Oportunidades/ Progresa)*	Prospera is a conditional cash transfer program focused on improving health, education, and nutrition among low-income families. Conditions include regular health check-ups and school attendance.	Health and education conditions attached to Prospera benefit marginalised communities and citizens and relate to South Africa's service-based support.
Republic of Korea (South Korea)	*National Basic Livelihood Security System (NBLSS)*	NBLSS provides comprehensive social assistance, including cash benefits, healthcare, and housing support to low-income families in South Korea. The system is designed to ensure a minimum standard of living.	The comprehensive support provided by NBLSS, including cash and services, just like South Africa's indigent policy gives breadth and depth of support aimed at alleviating poverty.
United States of America	*Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)*	SNAP offers food-purchasing assistance to low- and no-income individuals and families. TANF provides temporary financial assistance and promotes work through various support services.	Both countries through such initiatives offer relief to needy families through various social relief and development programmes. While the TANF provides temporary financial assistance to deserving struggling individuals and families the South African indigent policy ensures legitimate individuals and families receive basic services like water and electricity free or at discounted costs.
Canada	*Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) and Canada Child Benefit (CCB)*	GIS provides additional income to low-income elderly individuals receiving Old Age Security (OAS). CCB offers financial support for families with children under 18.	The targeted support for the elderly and families with children in Canada is similar to that of South Africa's general indigent support.

Source: Author's Construction

International aid and donor agencies have increasingly emphasized the importance of universal health care and social protection, leading to the emergence of large-scale social assistance programs in countries such as China, India, and Brazil, which collectively cover hundreds of millions of people (Midgley et al., 2019). However, the specific nature of these arrangements continues to reflect each society's values, beliefs, and customs, as well as their economic systems, social structures, and political institutions (Ghai, 2003).

South Africa’s municipal indigent policy aims to alleviate poverty and promote social inclusion by providing essential services such as water, electricity, and sanitation to low-income households (National Treasury of South Africa, 2016). Similarly, Brazil’s Bolsa Família program tackles poverty through conditional cash transfers, ensuring that children in low-income families attend school and receive health check-ups, thus improving both education and health outcomes (Lindert et al., 2007). In India, the Public Distribution System (PDS) secures food for vulnerable households, while the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) offers guaranteed wage employment to rural families, providing both food security and income support (Dreze & Khera, 2013; Ministry of Rural Development, 2019). Mexico’s Prospera program also uses conditional cash transfers to enhance the health, education, and nutrition of low-income families, demonstrating the effectiveness of targeted social assistance in reducing multidimensional poverty (Levy & Rodríguez, 2005). South Korea’s National Basic Livelihood Security System goes further by providing comprehensive support, including cash benefits, healthcare, and housing assistance, ensuring a minimum standard of living for all citizens (Kim, 2013). Despite differences in implementation, these policies collectively highlight the diverse approaches countries use to support vulnerable populations and reduce poverty, tailored to their unique social, economic, and political contexts.

2.6. Critical Race Theory

This study is underpinned by the Critical Race Theory (CRT) propounded by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Peller and Kendall (1995). Though this theory has been used in studies about race, it is relevant in this study as it emphasises intersectionality, power dynamics, counter-narratives and transformative justice (Conradie 2016). Using the CRT, the researchers aim to analyse how indigent policies have perpetuated or alleviated inequalities within the Amathole District Municipal areas, given the legacies of discrimination and existing power imbalances between the rich and the poor. The CRT lens allows the study to understand the intricacies implicit in municipal indigent policies and their impact on indigent communities. The CRT assumes socioeconomic inequalities are socially constructed products of social thought and relations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Yosso et al. (2009) indicate that CRT assumes issues of inequality as entrenched within socioeconomic and political systems. In this vein, Boateng (2014) posits that inequalities are socially constructed where the poor are blamed for their plight. In line with this, it can be argued that inequalities are constructed by the economic and social policies that the government choose, the voices they listen to, the rights they choose to support and the rights they ignore. Therefore, this means that the people involved in designing indigent policies, the nature of services provided to indigents through the indigent policies, and how the indigent beneficiaries will be selected either perpetuate or reduce inequalities. Municipal Indigent policies in South Africa operate within a wider structural framework that tends to perpetuate economic disparities (Claar & Skinner, 2021). CRT assists the researcher in determining how municipal indigent policies unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities by not adequately addressing the structural roots of poverty and indigents.

According to CRT, individuals experience several forms of discrimination attributed to their gender and social class, termed intersectionality (Yosso et al., 2009). This is in line with indigents as they encounter different forms of discrimination based on their race, social class and gender. In the context of South Africa, it can be noted that indigents face barriers in accessing basic services due to intersecting factors that include geographical location, social status and gender. Therefore, this study seeks to ascertain if the indigent policies in ADM ensure that all indigents have access to basic services, thereby reducing or perpetuating existing inequalities. Delgado and Stefancic (2000) posit that CRT notes that individuals from vulnerable groups encounter different treatment and discrimination within the systems of power and authority. In line with municipal indigent policies, this theory explains how indigents may encounter discrimination in accessing basic services due to eligibility criteria and access to information. The eligibility criteria stipulated within ADM indigent policy and how information is disseminated to the potential beneficiaries can reduce or perpetuate inequalities.

CRT supports the promotion of counter-narratives that question the dominant discourses and speak truth to power, thereby prioritising the voices of those affected (Crenshaw et al., 1995). In line with the ADM indigent policy, CRT emphasises the significance of considering indigent perspectives in designing and implementing policies. The study will assess how indigents are involved in the designing and implementing indigent policies and the nature of involvement as the nature of involvement can reduce or perpetuate inequalities. Delgado and Stefancic (2000) highlight that CRT advocates for a transformative approach to justice to deal with the root causes of inequalities. Based on the ADM indigent policies, it can be noted that CRT supports an indigent policy that is transformative and dismantles all levels of inequality and past injustices. Through the employment of the CRT lens in this study, this section irradiates the power dynamics and structural injustices that shape parents of free basic services delivery in indigent societies in ADM. By holistically understanding such dynamics, policymakers can work towards equitable and inclusive indigent policies premised on social justice and human rights.

2.7. Indigent policy Afrocentric Theoretic and conceptual dispositions

Additionally, this study articulates African-centered theories and conceptual dispositions regarding the socioeconomic implications of indigent policies in South Africa. This is accomplished through the utilization of a multidimensional analytical framework rooted in African philosophies and post-colonial perspectives. By integrating Afrocentric theoretical and conceptual frameworks, Ubuntu philosophy, African communalism, decolonial thought, African feminist theories, critical Indigenous studies, and post-colonial perspectives, this paper meticulously examines the complex intersections between indigent policies and the historical legacies of colonialism and apartheid. By synthesizing insights derived from these diverse theoretical lenses, the study aims to elucidate the complexities inherent in indigent policies in South Africa and their implications for achieving socio-economic justice.

Table 2 reflects some of the ‘Critical Indigenous’ perspectives that attempt to give an Afrocentric disposition of theories and concepts that could contribute to the realisation of an indigent policy that can address the socio-economic challenges and social ills faced by the majority of societies in South Africa. These, among other, Indigenous Knowledge Systems and perspectives should be encouraged to ensure a post-colonial paradigm shift.

Table 2

Taxonomy of Indigent policy: Afrocentric theories and concepts

Theory/ Concept	Scholarship	Articulation
Ubuntu Philosophy	Ubuntu emphasizes mutual respect, community life, and the interdependence of individuals. It can be used to evaluate whether indigent policies foster community solidarity and collective well-being over individual wealth accumulation (Ukwamedua, N., 2011)	In modern-day South Africa, the government encourages public participation in policy formulation and implementation. This is to ensure that the values of society are enshrined the public policies. Observing principles like the 'Batho Pele' as articulated in The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (1997) the 'Ubuntu Philosophy' is embedded as it purports 'Putting People first.
African Communalism	African communalism pertains to the emphasis on the community's needs over individual desires. You could assess if indigent policies are aligned with communal strategies to reduce socioeconomic disparities (Higgs, P., 2012)	This disposition is anchored around mutuality with 'Ubuntu Philosophy' where the common existence of humans in communal settings feeds the need to collectively strive for common values. It advocates for Collective Decision-Making, especially in policymaking, Resource Sharing and Redistribution, Equal Access to Services, Cultural Preservation and Revitalization, Conflict Resolution and Social Justice, Interdependence and Solidarity.
Decolonial Thought	Decolonial thought challenges dominant Western-centric epistemologies and methodologies by advocating for the recognition and incorporation of diverse local knowledge and perspectives. In the context of South African indigent policy, decolonial thought prompts a re-evaluation of the underlying assumptions and power dynamics inherent in the formulation and implementation of such policies. It calls for an interrogation of how colonial legacies continue to shape socioeconomic inequalities and inform policy interventions. Decolonial thought emphasizes the importance of centring marginalized voices and indigenous knowledge systems in policy-making processes to ensure more equitable and inclusive outcomes. Mignolo, W. (2009)	While the democratic dispensation is 30 years old a lot of colonial legacies remain in the realm of society, legislation and scholarship. 'Decolonial Thought' encourages a paradigm shift that will result in Africans reigniting indigenous values that will contribute positively to their developmental needs. This requires an understanding of the historical context and thus policies need to redress the injustices of the past as well as the epistemic injustices embedded in the colonial knowledge systems. The emergence of Indigenous scholarship and theory will certainly in the near future translate to the ascendance of a Decolonial Thought'.

African Feminism	African Feminism draws from critical perspectives on gender, power, and liberation within the context of African societies and the broader global feminist movement. It challenges patriarchal norms, colonial legacies, and intersecting systems of oppression while centring on the experiences and agency of African women. “For me, feminism is an existential and material response to the problem of male dominance in the world." Gqola, P.D. (2015) “We cannot afford to ignore the complex, culturally specific forms of femicide, infanticide, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and forced pregnancy”. Tamale, S. (2011)	Black women in South Africa have endured intersecting forms of oppression stemming from colonialism, apartheid, and persisting systemic discrimination. Throughout history, they have been marginalized economically, subjected to gender-based violence, and denied reproductive autonomy, while their political representation remains disproportionately low. African feminist perspectives illuminate the intersectionality of their oppression, emphasizing the need for policies addressing race, gender, class, and other social factors. Despite strides made towards democracy, black women continue to face multifaceted discrimination, underscoring the imperative for transformative change to achieve social justice and equality for all.

Source: Authors’ perspective

3. Methodology

The study used a qualitative research approach and a case study design where ADM is referred to as a case. The case study design enabled the researchers to analyse the existing data to understand the contextual aspects of the impact of indigent policies on socio-economic inequalities in-depth and comprehensively. Data was collected using secondary data collection methods, and information was obtained from grey literature and peer-reviewed journal articles to ensure the reliability of the results. The inclusion criteria for selecting data sources were carefully defined. Firstly, only articles and reports published between 2018 and 2024 were considered, ensuring the use of the most recent and relevant data. Secondly, the relevance of sources was a critical factor, with priority given to those directly addressing the themes of socioeconomic and geographical inequalities, structural inequalities, intersectional impacts, and unintended consequences related to FBS. Lastly, the quality of the sources was ensured by selecting reputable journals and credible organisations' grey literature. The process of selection and elimination of articles involved multiple stages to maintain the study's scientific rigour. An initial broad search was conducted using academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, PubMed, and Scopus. Keywords included "socioeconomic inequalities," "geographical inequalities," "Free Basic Services," "structural inequalities," and "intersectional impact." Afterwards, articles were screened based on titles and abstracts to ascertain their relevance to the study's themes. Selected articles then subjected to a full-text review to confirm their relevance and quality. Articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria or did not significantly contribute to understanding the themes were excluded.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, a method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. This method allows for a detailed and nuanced understanding of the data. The analysis identified five main themes: reinforcement of socioeconomic inequalities, geographical inequalities in providing Free Basic Services (FBS), inability to deal with structural inequalities, intersectional impact on indigent individuals, and unintended consequences. Each theme was explored to provide a comprehensive understanding of how FBS policies impact various forms of inequality. By systematically selecting and analysing relevant literature, this methodology ensures a robust and scientifically sound exploration of the themes related to Free Basic Services and their broader social impacts. The researchers acknowledge potential bias in selecting ADM as a case and relying on secondary data since these decisions were influenced by our own perspective and the inherent limitations of the available data sources.

4. Results

The findings of this research have been structured around five themes, namely the reinforcement of socioeconomic inequalities, geographical inequalities in the provision of FBS, inability to deal with structural inequalities, intersectional impact on indigent individuals and unintended consequences (see table 3). These themes emerged from the analysis of grey literature and peer-reviewed articles.

Table 3

Emerging themes

Theme Number	Identified Theme
Theme 1	reinforcement of socioeconomic inequalities
Theme 2	geographical inequalities in the provision of FBS
Theme 3	inability to deal with structural inequalities
Theme 4	intersectional impact on indigent individuals
Theme 5	unintended consequences

Source: Researchers Construction 2024

Theme 1: Reinforcement of existing socioeconomic inequalities

The study revealed that in its current form, ADM indigent policy reinforces existing socioeconomic inequalities. The ADM Indigent Policy (2023) indicated that the municipality provided only 6000 litres of potable water to indigent households monthly. This amount of water translates to the provision of 25 litres of water per individual per day. However, studies have shown that this amount of water is inadequate for human survival as the accepted standard is at least 50 litres per day per individual (Maramura, 2017; Shayamano, 2020; World Health Organisation, 2010). Providing inadequate potable water to indigents negatively impacts their overall lives and their ability to plan for the future.

Providing inadequate water to indigents living in rural areas leaves them with no option but to gather water from other sources that may not be safe for drinking. In addition, in Africa, 80% of water gathering is done by women and girls; these people spend hours each day walking to collect water, losing more productive time that could have been used working or going to school, reinforcing existing socioeconomic inequalities. In South Africa, women are victims of sexual assaults and rape; water collection can be dangerous as women are vulnerable to attacks, thereby perpetuating inequalities. It should be noted that, providing inadequate water to indigents enhances the burden of waterborne diseases and causes poor living standards (Hara et al., 2020). As a result of insufficient water provided through the indigent policies, indigents are susceptible to waterborne diarrhoea-causing pathogens such as Vibrio, Cryptosporidium, and Salmonella. On the other hand, providing inadequate water services to indigents in towns and urban areas would result in them having to buy water from vendors, which perpetuates socioeconomic inequalities. Khabo-Mmekoa and Momba (2020) argue that providing indigents with inadequate water exposes them to the unregulated water black market, allowing vendors to increase the cost of water at their will.

Another finding from this study is that the ADM indigent policy notes the provision of sanitation; however, its failure to determine the minimum adequate human disposal is a cause for concern, perpetuating inequalities. The ADM issued a tender of R600m aimed at the construction of toilets for indigents, which resulted in these toilets not being built and of those that were built, substandard work was done, resulting in some collapsing. Despite the good intentions, this has negatively impacted indigents within the municipality. In the informal settlements, indigents are provided mobile toilets through indigent support (ADM

Indigent Policy, 2023). This is a cause for concern as it reinforces existing inequalities since sharing a toilet is uncomfortable and undignified as people are different, and some are not clean (Njingana, 2019). Consequently, this study argues that the current system of providing mobile toilets to indigents is unhygienic and makes it very difficult for children to use these toilets as they are not clean most of the time. Therefore, it can be noted that despite the ADM indigent policies anticipated to alleviate poverty, it has perpetuated existing socioeconomic inequalities as indigents in rural areas and informal settlements continue to encounter barriers in accessing basic services even though the municipality is implementing the indigent policy. This has exacerbated socioeconomic inequalities as it reinforces cycles of poverty. These findings discussed above align with the CRT, which postulates that inequalities are socially constructed where the poor are blamed for their plight. As a result, it can be argued that inequalities are constructed by indigent policies that the municipality chooses, the voices they listen to, the rights they choose to support and the rights they ignore. Therefore, this means that the people involved in designing indigent policies, the nature of services provided to indigents through the indigent policies, and how the indigent beneficiaries are selected perpetuate inequalities.

Theme 2: Geographical inequalities in the provision of Free Basic Services

Another theme from analysing different sources is geographic inequalities in providing FBS. The study noted that the ADM indigent policy led to geographic inequalities in providing basic services. Kuhlengisa (2021) highlighted that the ADM indigent policy does not entail how infrastructure can be developed. The silence of this indigent policy on how the infrastructure issue can be addressed has resulted in geographical inequalities in this provision of FBS, as the urban indigents tend to benefit more than their rural counterparts. According to the ADM indigent policy (2023), indigents in urban areas can access free potable water using a yard tap. On the other hand, indigents in rural areas have access to water using a communal tap, and often, they must travel some distance to fetch water. Conversely, indigents in urban areas have access to water from the comfort of their homes (Murei et al., 2022). As a result of the apartheid regime, South African rural areas encounter challenges that include inadequate infrastructure and failure of the ADM indigent policy to address infrastructure matters, perpetuating inequalities. Several rural areas within the ADM have been without access to potable water for years, such as villages in the Ngqushwa area where it is alleged that these areas are benefiting from indigent support (Ngqushwa Indigent Policy, 2023). Ensuring that people apply and register for indigent support and fail to provide the services stipulated within the indigent policy because of their geographical location perpetuates inequalities.

Theme 3: Inability to deal with structural inequalities.

Despite the ADM indigent policy's positive intentions to alleviate poverty and reduce inequalities in its current form, it has failed to address structural inequalities. This is because this policy has failed to address the underlying systemic issues that strengthen inequalities attributed to the policies' design, implementation, and unintended consequences. ADM Indigent policy (2023) indicates that the municipality decides on the services to be delivered to indigents, and the elected officials are responsible for verifying the indigent who would have applied for indigent support. This is a cause for concern as it reflects that the indigents do not have a say in determining the services they ought to receive. Kuhlengisa et al. (2022) revealed that the failure of municipalities to include those directly affected by the policy in the designing of the policies perpetuates inequalities as they may consider their voices insignificant in matters that affect them. According to the National Framework for Municipal Indigent Policies (2003), which gives guidelines for formulating indigent policies, ward councillors should play an active role in the indigent verification.

In line with this framework, the ADM indigent policy (2023) regards ward councillors as responsible for verifying indigents, and this perpetuates structural inequalities. Molefe and Overton-de Klerk (2019) argue that using ward councillors in government programmes may be catastrophic as priority may be given to communities or individuals based on party lines instead of genuine needs. This may result in indigent support directed towards political cadres excluding or marginalising other indigents. Perpetuating inequalities along party lines. Another challenge is associated with patronage networks where ward councillors may use the indigent verification process as a tool for the consolidation of power and enable control over their constituencies. Fourie and Van der Waldt (2023) bemoaned the involvement of ward committees in rolling out government programmes as leading to cronyism, resulting in uneven distribution of indigent benefits. As a result of cronyism, opposition groups may further be marginalised, exacerbating structural inequalities. It is worth noting that the use of ward councillors in the verification of indigents may strengthen existing power dynamics within communities where politicians exert disproportionate influence over who receives indigent support and who can be excluded from benefiting from indigent support. This can result in the deepening of the divide between elected officials and the marginalised groups, with the communities further entrenching structural inequalities (Molefe & Overton-de Klerk, 2019; Mbandlwa & Mishi, 2020).

The CRT underpinning this study posits that power dynamics significantly shape social relations and policy outcomes. Given the discussion on the use of ward councillors in the verification process, politicians tend to benefit from these power structures. It can be noted that in designing indigent policies with the ADM, the interests of elected officials are prioritised. Using the lenses of the CRT, it can be said that the ADM indigent policy is not transformative as it serves to maintain existing power dynamics. The CRT argues that the structural nature of inequality in South Africa is embedded in socioeconomic and political systems, and given the discussion in this section, it can be noted that the indigent policy operates in a broader structural framework that strengthens inequalities. In line with the CRT, this study argues that ADM indigent policies unintentionally perpetuate existing inequalities because they fail to sufficiently address the structural roots of poverty and indigency.

Theme 4: Intersectional impact on indigent individuals

According to ADM Indigent Policy (2023), indigent households must have 6000 litres of monthly potable water, translating to 25 litres per person daily. Scholars such as Maramura (2017) and Shayamano (2020) argue that people must have access to 50 litres of potable water daily. The ADM indigent policy (2023) provided 50kHw of electricity per month to indigent households to cater for heating and lighting. Ledger (2021) believes that the 50kHw of electricity, as identified by the indigent policies, is not enough and strengthens already existing inequalities, and these indigents must be provided 200kHw. Providing inadequate services through indigent policies negatively affects women as they have the responsibility of fetching water and firewood. Indigents with intersecting marginalised identities, such as being black women living in rural areas and living in poverty, encounter compounded forms of inequalities and providing inequality services through indigent policies negatively impacts them as they navigate several layers of systemic barriers and social exclusion. For instance, indigent black women experience more inequality than indigent black men as they have the responsibility of fetching water and firewood. Several studies have highlighted that indigent policies are failing people living in rural areas due to limited infrastructure (Fuo, 2020; Kuhlengisa et al., 2022; Pillay & Mutereko, 2022; Ngarava, 2023). ADM is not to be left behind, as a study by Kuhlengisa (2020) revealed that indigents in rural areas within the ADM fail to benefit from indigent support because the municipality fails to provide potable water because of a lack of infrastructure. The ADM indigent policy's failure to recognise intersecting identities and experiences of indigents is a cause for concern as indigent women living in rural areas who are members of the historically marginalised race face barriers in accessing indigent support because of the location they stay in and lack of infrastructure.

Theme 5: Unintended Consequences

Another theme that emerged from the data analysis is the unintended consequences of the ADM indigent policy. According to the ADM indigent policy (2023), the criteria for one to benefit from indigent support is that they must have a valid South African Identity document, provide proof that they live in poverty and own the property in their name. It can be noted that this indigent policy tightens any loopholes that may expose the policy to abuse by citizens and entails that those living in poverty benefit. In most instances, people residing in ADM without identity documents and those living in informal settlements are left out of accessing basic services, perpetuating poverty. This finding cements Fuo's (2020) argument, which highlighted that indigent policies tend to leave behind migrants because they do not have valid South African identity documents. By developing this stringent selection criterion, the indigent policies intentionally exclude people living in informal settlements and people without ID cards (Fuo, 2020; Kuhlengisa et al., 2022). It is worth noting that ADM indigent policy unintentionally influences indigents' behaviour, leading to unintended consequences such as gaming of the system.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In its current state, the municipal indigent policy tends to reinforce the socio-economic inequalities within the municipality which is against the pursuit of sustainable livelihoods. The current ADM indigent policy’s contribution to the pursuit of sustainable livelihoods is impeded because it is incapable of properly responding to the basic needs of indigent communities. This policy tends to reinforce rather than alleviate social hardships occasioned by poverty (Fuo, 2014). The provision of Free Basic Services (FBS) in South

Africa represents a critical effort by the government to address socio-economic inequalities and ensure basic human rights for all citizens. However, despite these intentions, this study reveals several significant challenges and complexities inherent in the implementation of FBS programs, particularly concerning the reinforcement of socioeconomic inequalities, geographical disparities, structural inequalities, intersectional impacts, and unintended consequences.

Through this policy, most indigent households have been able to access basic services when compared to before its implementation within the ADM, despite the existence of some constraints more than 33,000 households have had access to basic services in ADM since 2014 when the indigent policy was introduced (Kuhlengisa, 2021). This must be commented on because it is a step in the right position. To understand the instrumental role that this policy has played in dealing with inequalities one needs to understand how inequality is in South Africa, yes one might not understand when South Africa is regarded as the most unequal society in the world. By the use of this bracket approach, one might overlook its contribution, and this requires one to zoom on the inequalities in terms of access to basic services where more than 1.3 million households have access to basic services which did not have any before 1994.

In addition, from the findings of the study, it is clear that the policy is playing a vital role in dealing with inequalities attributed to gender in that as a result of the policy, women are no longer spending most of their time fetching water and are now able to use their time productively creating economic opportunities for themselves. In addition, the girl child is now able to attend all the school days. To some the contribution of the indigent policy towards addressing inequality may be minimal but in municipalities such as the ADM this is a huge achievement considering that most areas are rural set up which were heavily affected by the apartheid. More so, the findings of this study revealed that the indigent policy plays a certain role in alleviating poverty. Access to potable water reduces water-related health disasters as citizens collect water from unprotected sources which are contaminated for consumption purposes. This entails that access to potable water enhances physical health, which diminishes poverty. Another positive contribution attributed to the alleviation of poverty by the indigent policy may be linked to the fact that access to free basic services is key to raising the living standards of the beneficiaries. It should be noted that by ensuring that the services are provided for free most of the indigent beneficiaries who are in most cases social grant beneficiaries are left with some disposable income that would enable them to live above the poverty datum line. This is a clear indication that the policy has played a role in alleviating poverty.

Furthermore, the inability of FBS programs to adequately address structural inequalities represents a fundamental limitation in their effectiveness. While FBS initiatives aim to alleviate poverty and improve living conditions, they often fail to address the root causes of inequality, such as systemic discrimination, unequal distribution of resources, and historical injustices. Without addressing these underlying structural factors, FBS programs may only serve as temporary Band-Aid solutions rather than sustainable interventions for social change. Generally, when one looks at South Africa as a whole, there tend to be discrepancies in the rolling out of the indigent policy, close to 15% of households in South Africa qualify for indigent support and do not have formal electricity connection which entails that they are not receiving free electricity. However, the total number of such households is probably no more than 2.5 million, which does not explain the 8.2 million household gap between the number of households funded for free basic electricity and the number receiving the benefit. There is a lot that can be done to ensure that the policy plays a vital role in addressing poverty, the policy must be tailored to meet the needs of the indigents within the community. This means that the municipality should not use a blanket approach for both the rural communities and urban dwellers as they have different needs. Policy reorientation may increase the chances of successful implementation of an effective system.

The authors are of the view that currently the policy is failing to address poverty and inequalities because of mismanagement of funds as generally believed. This is so because even well-managed and governed municipalities with clean audits are under financial pressure. Miggels and Rulashe (2022) argue that at the centre of realising good governance that will translate into service delivery for the people is a major paradigm shift that needs to happen in government, that will enforce legislation, processes and overall existing systems. This will assist in holding public officials and representatives accountable. We should not assume that good governance will automatically make all municipalities financially viable while simultaneously resulting in genuinely affordable services. On the issue of the creation of employment, it can be noted from the findings that the policy is doing little to nothing to address high levels of employment. This means that the indigent policy on its own can never address the issue of unemployment directly it has to be employed simultaneously with other municipal policies such as the Local Economic Development (LED) and the Extended Public Works Programmes (EPWP). The indigent policy will ensure that the beneficiaries of the EPWP and LED are left with some disposable income to take care of themselves Our analysis reveals that certain groups, such as women, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals, may face compounded forms of discrimination and marginalization within the context of FBS provision. Intersectional approaches are therefore necessary to recognize and address the unique challenges faced by these populations and ensure that FBS programs are inclusive and equitable for all.

Finally, the implementation of FBS programs may lead to unintended consequences that undermine their intended goals. For example, the introduction of FBS subsidies for water and electricity may inadvertently encourage overconsumption and wasteful usage, exacerbating environmental degradation and resource scarcity. Similarly, the reliance on private service providers for FBS delivery may lead to market distortions and inequities, particularly for low-income households unable to afford alternative options. In conclusion, while FBS programs represent an important step towards promoting social justice and addressing basic needs, the analysis underscores the need for a more comprehensive and nuanced approach to addressing socio-economic inequalities. Future studies may focus on the applicability of the National Framework for indigent policies in different municipal categories to develop an alternative framework that allows municipalities to develop indigent policies that address effective existing socio-economic inequalities in South Africa. Efforts to improve the provision of FBS must take into account the intersecting dynamics of race, class, gender, geography, and other factors that shape individuals' experiences of marginalisation and exclusion. Only through a holistic understanding of these complexities can develop effective strategies for achieving equitable access to essential services and advancing social justice for all South Africans.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding
This work was not supported by any funding.

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International Review of Social Sciences Research
Volume 4 Issue 3 September 2024
DOI: https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353082

Binge watching and mental well-being: Study on emerging adults

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Abstract

With the advent of video on demand streaming services such as Netflix, Disney Hotstar, Amazon Prime Video, Sony Liv, binge watching has become a common media behaviour among the emerging adults, particularly aged 18 to 34. Binge watching, habit of watching TV shows or movies consecutively on internet-driven platforms at one's own discretion, is a double-edge sword, it could enhance viewer's well-being through perceived autonomy whereas excessive indulgence can reduce well-being through negative emotions such as guilt and regret. The purpose behind the present study was to determine the relationship between binge watching and mental well-being. In this study, data were collected with help of questionnaires such as BWESQ (Binge watching engagement and symptoms questionnaire) and MHC-SF (Mental Health Continuum-Short Form) while correlation, t-test and regression were employed to analyse the data. It was found that binge watching was significantly and negatively related to mental well-being and problematic binge watching significantly and negatively predict mental well-being. Further, results showed that males tend to engage in binge watching more than females and that males generally exhibit better mental well-being compared to females. This study highlights the complex relationship between user's mental health and binge watching behaviour, which can range from recreational to addictive on a continuum.

Keywords: *binge watching, well-being, emerging adults, gender*

Article History:

Received: *May 25, 2024* ***Revised***: *July 20, 2024*
Accepted: *July 23, 2024* ***Published online***: *July 31, 2024*

Suggested Citation:
Hans, A.K. & Kaur, H. (2024). Binge watching and mental well-being: Study on emerging adults. *International Review of Social Sciences Research*, 4(3), 52-75. https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353082

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1. Introduction

The traditional form of linear television viewing where individuals would eagerly await the release of episodes of their favorite programs has been long replaced by nonlinear and asynchronous viewing, which allow the viewers to watch the television or film content at their own pace and convenience. Technological advancement including stable internet connections, personal media devices (mobile phone, laptop, iPad) and launch of over-the-top platforms (OTT) such as Netflix, Hot star, Prime Video, Hulu has made this shift possible. This expansion in entertainment sector has not only taken place globally but there has been significant growth of OTT market even in India. In the United States, 33 million people cut the cord on their traditional cable packages in 2018 and subscribed to Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime (Perez, 2018). Meta-commissioned report by BCG (2022) done over 2600 consumers across 15 towns and cities of India revealed that the number of OTT subscription video on demand (SVod) subscribers in India is growing faster with compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 51% for the year 2019-2022. In fact, Disney Hotstar is at the top of the Indian OTT video content market, with Amazon Prime Video, SonyLIV, Netflix, Voot, Zee5, ALTBalaji, and ErosNow following closely behind based on subscriber percentage (Counterpoint, 2023).

Streaming television has changed the way people consume TV or film content by allowing the viewers to personalize their viewing experience according to their preferences in terms of timing, content, location, and choice of media device. The widespread adoption of digital television has played a significant role in popularizing specific viewing style: binge watching. Researchers have varying definitions for binge-watching, with some based on the number of episodes consumed in one sitting (Walton- Pattinson et al., 2016) while others based on the time span (Wagner, 2016). Even so, binge watching could be understood as the act of watching multiple episodes of a television series in succession (Merikivi et al., 2019).

While binge watching is relatively new phenomenon, its historical roots lie in television marathons (watching multiple episodes of a single television show back-to-back). Earlier, it was not easily accessible to the viewer but now because of the internet driven streaming platforms it has become common media behaviour. According to Spangler (2016), 70% of American viewers watch an average of five episodes per binge-watching session and 88% of Netflix subscribers watch at least three episodes of the same program in one day. In the

Limelight Network's 'State of Online Video 2019' research report, it was found that young adults in India spends on an average 2 hours and 25 minutes on binge watching.

Binge watching phenomenon is observed across all age groups but it is extensively popular among emerging adults (Bastos et al., 2024; Subramanian & Das, 2024). Young Indians, under 35 years of age, accounted for 89% of the total Indian OTT video content platform users and male users account for 79% of the total users (Counterpoint, 2023). Various motivations could lead one to indulge in binge watching such as entertainment, relaxation, social interaction, escape and habit (Sung et al., 2018). While binge-watching may initially appear as a recreational activity, engaging in excessive recreational behavior like this can lead to serious negative consequences such as social isolation, loss of sleep and poor well-being (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020; Alimoradi et al., 2022). As per Global sleep survey (2023), 25% millennials reported that screens/electronic devices keep them up at night and 21% respondents reported that limiting their bed screen time has improved their sleep. Furthermore, there have been various instances recorded highlighting the adverse impacts of binge-watching habits. For instance, a 26-year-old man from Bangalore, who was jobless and spent more than eight hours daily watching online shows, received treatment at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences Service for Healthy Use of Technology clinic, Bangalore (Shekhar, 2018). Similarly, an 11-year-old boy committed suicide at home after being reprimanded by his father for his excessive YouTube video consumption (Correspondent, 2023) while a 72-year-old man in a professional occupation asked for assistance in controlling his excessive binge-watching of television series (Yasmeen, 2023).

Empirical evidence shows that binge-watching is on rise and it could affect the user's mental well-being in different and more prominent way than traditional TV viewing. Hence, the relationship between binge watching and mental well-being is of greater research interest.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Binge Watching and Mental Well-Being

In recent years, research on binge watching has flourished and one of the prime reasons for this is that phenomenon of binge watching is currently on rise especially among the millennials in the age range of 18-39 years and is becoming significant aspect of their lifestyle (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). According to Irvine (2016), nearly 86% of millennials (18-34 years) are binge watchers. Similarly, other studies also reported that people younger than 25 often use OTT services and binge watching is a common phenomenon among the university students (Chastin et al., 2017; Riddle et al., 2018). In India, 49% of Indian young adults engage in binge watching (Limelight Networks, 2019). The nature of binge watching behaviour is similar to other types of behavioural addictions like occurrence of withdrawal symptoms (emptiness, irritability), neglect of family and friends and so on (Flayelle et al., 2020; Troles, 2019). Binge watching behaviour could lead to compulsory or addictive behaviour (Starosta et al., 2019). Thus, the widespread adoption of this type of media consumption has raised worrying concerns regarding user's mental well-being.

Literature points out that binge watching could affect user's well-being in two distinct ways. On the one side, it may enhance user's well-being like by increasing viewer's enjoyment level, by providing relaxation and by increasing social interactions. Potential benefits of binge watching on viewer's well-being could stem from the sense of autonomy viewers experience while streaming their favorite shows continuously on VoD platforms due to the unrestricted access to their preferred series. Meeting this inherent desire for independence can greatly enhance the user's well-being (Pittman & Sheehan, 2015). Conversely, it could also prove detrimental to user's well-being as it could lead to goal conflicts and feelings of regret and guilt (Granow et al., 2018). Goal conflicts could have long term negative impact on life satisfaction, particularly when crucial goals such as academic work are consistently hindered by a lack of self-control over media usage (Hofmann et al., 2014; Panek, 2014). Regret developing from investing extensive time in binge watching instead of utilizing it for completing the responsibilities could lead to adverse mental health consequences including sleep disturbance, impaired social relationships and reduced life satisfaction (Bastos et al., 2024). Guilt could diminish the situational well-being in the moment or shortly after the series ended (Reinecke et al., 2014). Panda and Pandey (2017) also revealed that viewers engage in binge watching in order to relax themselves but instead get caught up in vicious cycle of engaging in binge watching to escape negative feelings, feeling negative emotions at the conclusion of binge watching series and then re-engaging in binge watching session.

Shim and Kim (2018) found that individuals perceive binge-watching as a way to satisfy their desires for enjoyment, efficiency, and control. In addition, Pitmann and Sheehan

(2015) and Rubenking et al. (2018) revealed that people binge watch to relax, to manage their mood, for passing time and for social interaction. Nevertheless, studies also revealed that prolonged continued binge-watching could impair day-to-day functioning (De Feijter et al., 2016), results in sleep deprivation (Brookes & Ellithorpe, 2017; Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017), and reduces the social life quality (Pérez & Díaz, 2017). Prior research also indicates that binge watching is linked to decreased positive affect right after viewing and post-binge-viewing “show hole”, i.e., a feeling of emptiness following show completion (Tefertiller, 2017). Past researches also pointed out that binge watching is linked with goal conflicts and emotional distress (i.e., guilt, regret) (Király et al., 2017; Panda & Pandey, 2017). This suggests that despite being a leisure activity, binge watching could have negative outcomes with respect to user’s mental well-being.

2.2. Gender Differences

Previous researches have shown that gender plays a key role in affecting many behaviours related to adoption of new technology such as internet usage and use of smartphones (Mari et al., 2023). Gender may also have an impact on binge-watching behavior. Existing literature presents differing perspectives on this matter. On one hand, studies indicate that binge watching is gender neutral phenomenon (Moore, 2015; Sun & Chang, 2021) and gender differences are only seen in terms of TV genre preference of men and women (Mento et al., 2024; Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020) or in terms of types motivations behind the binge watching behaviour (Seifert, 2019). Research suggests that men tend to prefer watching science fiction and fantasy series while women lean towards comedy and drama series (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). Further, Parson's concept of the instrumental-expressive dichotomy also implies that the divergence in TV viewing behaviors between males and females stems from their contrasting orientations, with males prioritizing goals and tasks, and females placing a higher emphasis on relationships and emotions. Men usually use television for individual purposes such as receiving information or feeling stimulated, whereas women tend to look for social and emotional fulfillment from TV (Nathanson et al., 1997). On the other hand, few studies pointed out that females tend to engage more in binge watching than males (Light Speed Research, 2016). Furthermore, recent research points out that females tend to watch more cable TV whereas males tend to watch more online content (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020).

It is also crucial to examine gender differences in mental well-being because literature suggests gender, culture, personality and socioeconomic status influence psychological well-being (Sharma et al., 2022). The study by Gomez-Baya et al. (2018) revealed that European women have low psychological well-being and more health problems in comparison to European men. However, study conducted by Sharma et al. (2022) revealed that females have better psychological well-being in comparison to their male counterparts. This points out that existing literature is inconclusive regarding gender differences in relation to binge watching behaviour and mental well- being.

2.3. Theoretical Perspective

The rise of the binge watching behaviour could be explained with the help of Technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989), which states that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are important factors in predicting the adoption of new technology. Binge watching has replaced the traditional viewing to a larger extent because of perceived ease of use. Nowadays, individuals can consume TV or film content at their own convenience and pace, facilitated by easy accessibility and affordability of internet driven streaming platforms.

Further, the relationship between binge watching and mental well-being can be elucidated through the lens of User and Gratification (U & G) Theory (Katz et al., 1973). Historically, this theory has been utilized to comprehend media consumption behaviors such as television viewing and internet usage (Gangadharbatla et al., 2019; Katz et al., 1973; LaRose et al., 2001). U & G theory could also be applied to understand binge watching habits since binge watching encompasses elements of both television and the internet.

The theory of User and Gratification delves into why individuals choose to consume certain media and the outcomes of media consumption. It assumes that audiences are conscious of the gratifications they sought and actively choose different types of media to satisfy these diverse needs and accomplish personal goals. This framework is apt for studying binge watching phenomenon as its assumptions included key fundamental attributes of this behaviour: interactivity (more viewer autonomy), demassification (more viewer choice) and asynchroneity (choice to watch whatever they want and wherever they want using multiple media devices). U & G theory further explains that viewers seek five types of gratification through media consumption: to enjoy, to learn and get information, to escape from real life stressors, to enhance social connections and to identify with fictional media characters. Binge watching could enhance user's well-being if they binge watch for entertainment and relaxation purpose or due to social motivation (Panda & Pandey, 2017; Pittman & Sheehan, 2015; Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). On the contrary, if binge watching is used as an escape motivation from daily life stressors, it could have detrimental effect on mental well-being as using binge watching as coping strategy could decrease the chance of using more adaptive coping strategies (Castro et al., 2019; Panda & Pandey, 2017; Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). Although research on binge watching has gained momentum, more studies are concerned with what leads to binge watching and fewer studies explore the consequences of binge watching. Furthermore, there is no definitive consensus regarding the gender differences on binge watching and mental well-being. Hence, the two main goals of this research are to explore the relationship between binge watching and mental well-being and to investigate the gender differences on binge watching and mental well-being.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The study sample comprised of students from various colleges and universities of Punjab, India. The sample consisted of 729 participants of which 64% were men and 36% were women. Respondents were between 18 and 25 years old, with an average of 19.75 years (SD = 1.72). Majority of the sample comprised of undergraduates (72%), from urban areas (68%) and lived mostly in hostels or PGs (41%). The major portion of the sample was single (95%) and belonged to the nuclear family (35%). Demographic characteristics are presented in table 1.

Table 1

Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Female	255	35
Male	474	65
Education Status		
Undergraduate	524	72
Graduate	170	23
Post Graduate	35	5
Place of Residence		
Rural	230	31.5
Urban	499	68.5

Characteristics	n	%
Current Status of Residence		
Hostel	150	20.6
PG	146	20.1
Alone	48	6.6
Nuclear Family	254	34.8
Joint Family	131	17.9
Relationship Status		
Single	695	95.3
Committed	34	4.7
Employment Status		
Employed	24	3.3
Unemployed	705	96.7

Note. N=729. Participants were on average 19.75 years old (SD = 1.72).

3.2. Measures

Binge Watching Engagement and Symptoms Questionnaire (BWESQ; Flayelle et al., 2019). Binge watching refers to the act of watching large number of episodes of television series or film content at one's own time and pace typically by means of internet-driven platforms. BWESQ assesses binge-watching engagement and features of problematic binge-watching. This questionnaire has seven subscales: engagement (extent of involvement in watching TV series), positive emotions (emotional benefits derived from watching TV series), desire-savoring (amount of desire for and appreciation of watching TV series), pleasure preservation (use of strategies aimed at maintaining or enhancing pleasure relating to watching TV series), binge watching (severity of continued viewing), dependency (difficulty abstaining from watching TV series) and loss of control (problematic involvement in binge-watching). The dimensions engagement, positive emotions, desire/savouring and pleasure preservation are considered as non- problematic dimensions whereas dimensions binge watching, dependency and loss of control are problematic dimensions of BWESQ. It is 40-item scale in which items are scored on 4-point Likert Scale with an average score being calculated for each scale. The score on each sub-scale has a range of 1 to 4 and higher score indicates either greater involvement or unhealthy binge watching. The developer's initial psychometric analysis of the instrument was conducted with individuals aged between 18 and 37 years. This scale has good psychometric properties with internal consistencies of subscales ranging from 0.65 to 0.83 (Flayelle et al., 2019).

The Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF; Keyes, 2006; Keyes et al., 2008). Mental well-being refers to the positive state that encompasses three core components such as emotional well-being (measures one's satisfaction with life and balance of positive and negative affect), psychological well-being (measures one's intrapersonal reflection of how one adjusts in their life) and social well-being (measures how much individual see themselves flourishing in their social life). The MHC-SF (2009) is based on Ryffs model of psychological well-being, Keyes model of social well-being and Bradburn's affect balance scale. The MHC-SF scale measures individual's positive mental health. It has 14 items in which three items represent emotional well-being, six items represent psychological well-being, and five items represent social well-being. MHC-SF thus, could provide 3 subscale scores (emotional well-being, social well-being and psychological well-being). This scale could also yield continuous global score in range of 0-70. Higher global score indicates higher mental well-being while a higher subscale score suggests that an individual exhibits a higher level of that specific aspect of well-being. The internal consistency of MHC-SF is high ($\alpha > .80$) and discriminant validity is also excellent in adolescents (ages 12-18) and adults (18 years or above) (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010).

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12; Goldberg, 1972; Goldberg & Williams, 1988). It is a 12-item questionnaire which measures the general level of happiness, the experience of depressive and anxiety symptoms, perceived stress, and sleep disturbance over the previous 4 weeks. It is 4-point Likert scale in which scoring is done with help of binary scoring method with two least symptomatic answers scored 0 and the two most symptomatic answers scored 1 (0- 0-1-1). The range of the scores obtained is from 0 to 12 with four as the cutoff point.

3.3. Procedure

This study has a correlational design. Purposive sampling method was used to select the participants. The target group for this study was college and university students as they are more likely to engage in binge watching (Panda & Pandey, 2017). The criteria for the inclusion of the participants were age range of 18-25 years, not having any common mental health problems, having internet access, having the ability to understand English and providing the informed consent to participate in the study. It was a cross-sectional study and the data was collected using questionnaires through survey method from various colleges and universities of Punjab. By asking about their internet usage in demographic questions, it was confirmed that participants had access to the internet. The GHQ-12 was used to screen out the participants having common mental health problems such as insomnia. Additionally, using demographic questions, individuals who stated they do not engage in binge-watching were removed from the study. Percentages, t-test, correlation, and regression were utilized to analyze the data from 729 participants.

The ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) of Punjabi University, Patiala. All participants were informed about the study’s purpose and procedure was explained to the participants in the language they understand. The ethical rights of voluntarily participation, confidentiality, informed consent, and anonymity were observed.

4. Results

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviations for all the variables. Pearson Correlation was used to determine the relationship between dimensions of well-being and binge watching.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for psychological variables

Variables	M	SD	Range
BWESQ			
Engagement	2.21	0.52	1-4
Desire/Savouring	2.56	0.58	1-4
Pleasure Preservation	2.22	0.66	1-4
Positive Emotions	2.56	0.54	1-4
Binge Watching	2.19	0.56	1-4
Dependency	2.10	0.57	1-4
Loss of Control	2.10	0.52	1-4
Mental Well-Being total score	42.62	14.00	0-70
Emotional Well-Being	10.10	3.50	0-15
Social Well-Being	13.10	6.01	0-25
Psychological Well-Being	19.39	6.54	0-30

Note. N=729. Binge watching engagement and symptoms questionnaire (BWESQ) has seven sub scales (engagement, desire/savouring, pleasure preservation, positive emotions, binge watching, dependency and loss of control) and total mental well-being assessed by Mental Health Continuum- Short Form (MHC-SF) comprises of emotional well-being, social well-being and psychological well-being.

The results showed that emotional and psychological well-being were negatively and significantly correlated with all the dimensions of binge watching (engagement, desire/savouring, positive emotions, pleasure preservation, binge watching, dependency and loss of control). The correlation between social well- being and dimensions of binge watching also came out to be negative and significant except for the dimension engagement. In other words, this means that higher involvement in binge watching is related to poor well-being. Table 3 reports all the correlations.

Table 3

Correlations for study variables

Variables	Engagement	Desire	Pleasure	Positive Emotion	Binge Watching	Dependency	Loss of Control
Emotional Well-Being	-.17**	-.11**	-.21**	-.13**	-.22**	-.16**	-.21**
Social Well-Being	-.06	-.10**	-.11**	-.12**	-.12**	-.08*	-.14**
Psychological Well-Being	-.16**	-.11**	-.20**	-.11**	-.24**	-.21**	-.29**
Total Mental Well-Being	-.15**	-.12**	-.19**	-.13**	-.22**	-.17**	-.25**

Note. N=729. *p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 4

Stepwise linear regression predicting total mental well-being

Variable	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
Constant	56.41	2.08	-	27.14	.001	[52.32, 60.5]
Loss of Control	-6.63	.96	-.25	-6.9	.001	[-8.53, -4.74]

Note. N = 729. R^2 = .06, F = 47.61, p = .001. *p < .05. **p < .01.

A backward stepwise linear regression analysis (table 3) was conducted to identify the possible predictors of mental well-being out of several candidate variables namely engagement, desire/savouring, positive emotions, pleasure preservation, binge watching, dependency and loss of control. The stepwise selection process resulted in a final model consisting a single predictor variable that is loss of control. This model was statistically significant with $R^2 = .06$, $F = 47.61$, $p<.001$. The adjusted R-square of .06, indicates that 6% of the variance in mental well-being was explained by problematic binge watching. The negative coefficient indicates that as the loss of control over binge watching increases, mental well-being of the user decreases.

Table 5

Gender differences on binge watching and mental well-being

Variables	Males		Females		t (727)	p
	M	***SD***	***M***	***SD***		
Engagement	2.26	0.55	2.12	0.47	3.18**	0.00
Desire/Savouring	2.59	0.61	2.51	0.53	1.76	0.08
Pleasure Preservation	2.27	0.69	2.14	0.59	2.59*	0.01
Positive Emotion	2.57	0.56	2.54	0.49	0.85	0.39
Binge Watching	2.22	0.58	2.14	0.51	1.79	0.07
Dependency	2.12	0.58	2.06	0.52	1.36	0.17
Loss of Control	2.11	0.55	2.06	0.47	1.31	0.19
Mental well-being	43.36	14.24	40.89	13.56	2.27*	0.02

Note. Results of t tests for Males (n = 474) and Females (n = 255) are shown. *p < .05. **p < .01.

The gender differences on binge watching and mental well-being were also examined using t-test (table 5). The results indicated that males and females do not significantly differ from each other on binge watching behaviour except for dimensions engagement and pleasure preservation. Males (M= 2.26, SD = 0.55) reported greater level of involvement in binge watching rather than females (M = 2.12, SD = 0.47) and males (M = 2.27, SD = 0.69) scored notably higher on the pleasure preservation dimension compared to females (M = 2.14, SD = 0.59). Further analysis revealed a significant difference between males and females regarding mental well-being, with males (M = 43.36, SD = 14.24) reporting higher levels compared to females (M = 40.89, SD = 13.56).

5. Discussion

The prime purpose of this research was to explore the relationship between binge watching and mental well-being among emerging adults and the findings revealed that binge watching is negatively associated with user’s well-being. Mental well-being and its three dimensions (emotional, social and psychological) were found to be negatively related to the engagement dimension of binge watching, although the correlation between social well-being and engagement dimension was not significant. This could be explained with the help of perceived exposure corollary (Eveland & Mc Leod, 1999; Tsfati & Cohen, 2012), which suggests that increased media exposure corresponds to a heightened media impact. In other words, excessive indulgence in binge watching results to more negative consequences such as loss of self-control, goal conflicts and neglect of social activities thereby reducing emotional, psychological and social well-being (Anozie, 2020). Raza et al. (2021) also reported that extensive binge watching is associated with mental health symptoms such as stress, loneliness, depression, insomnia and anxiety. The desire savouring and pleasure preservation dimensions of binge watching were also negatively associated with mental well-being and its dimensions. Flayelle et al. (2019) indicate that individuals do pleasure preservation in order to enhance their immersion and thereby enjoyment level. Due to this high level of immersion, viewer could lose self-control and end up spending more time binge watching than intended and this uncontrolled binge watching could further lead to reduction in emotional and psychological well-being (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). Pleasure preservation involves the use of the strategies such as doing binge watching in solitude and this could negatively affect the social well-being, as in this context binge watching could not be viewed as social activity. Rubenking et al. (2018) similarly found that individuals may neglect social activities and reduce their social interactions to indulge in binge-watching, potentially compromising their social relationships. Further, positive emotion dimension of binge watching was also negatively related to emotional, psychological and social well-being. It could mean that although the user can drive emotional benefits such as situational pleasure and happiness from binge watching but even in unproblematic form, binge watching can lead to negative consequences (Hoffmann, 2019). Similarly, previous studies also showed that relaxation feelings that viewers experienced during the session often ended shortly after the series concluded and got substituted with the feelings of guilt, regret, nervousness and anxiety (Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Dandamudi & Sathiyaseelan, 2018). These results could also be attributed to the possibility that binge-watching can be utilized as a maladaptive coping strategy to escape from one's reality, which in turn could negatively impact the mental well-being (Panda & Pandey, 2017; Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). Flayelle et al. (2019) reported that positive correlations exist between the dimensions of binge watching (engagement, desire-savouring, positive emotion and pleasure preservation) and coping-escapism motives. Similarly, it was also reported that all the dimensions of binge watching were positively associated with negative affect (sadness, guilt).

Mental well-being, including its emotional, social, and psychological dimensions, exhibited a negative correlation with binge-watching behavior, dependency on binge-watching, and loss of control related to binge-watching. In other words, excessive binge watching and difficulty abstaining from watching TV series leads to poor well-being. The uncontrolled binge watching give rise to feelings of guilt as viewers think they have wasted their precious time. It also leads to personal goal conflicts as one binge watches at cost of giving up other goals and responsibilities (Granow et al., 2018). Experiencing guilt immediately after media use could diminish the pleasure obtained (Reinecke et al., 2014) and persistent goal conflicts, wherein important goals are consistently neglected, can reduce the life satisfaction (Hofmann et al., 2014; Panek, 2014), thereby leading to poor emotional well-being. The binge watching can trigger feelings of regret when it is done to procrastinate important tasks (Anozie, 2020; Flayelle et al., 2017). The feelings of regret and guilt could lead to negative self-appraisals thereby causing decline in psychological well-being (Reinecke et al., 2014). The excessive binge watching could come at the cost of decreased social activities. In other words, viewers spend more time in front of screens watching their favourite programs rather than spending time with their family and friends and this in turn leads to poor social well-being (Feeney, 2014; Pierce-Grove, 2016).

The current study also revealed that binge watching, particularly the loss of control dimension of BWESQ, is the strong predictor of decreased mental well-being in the viewers. Thus, not being able to control binge watching behaviour may result in lower level of well-being. If people are unable to manage their binge-watching tendencies, they may struggle to finish their daily duties, may ignore their important tasks for school or work and may also feel regret or guilt after extended viewing sessions. These factors combined together could lead to decrease in their overall well-being. Recent findings are in line with earlier studies, such as those by Boursier et al. (2021), which indicate that increased engagement in binge watching is linked to anxiety, escapism and avoidance; Flayelle et al. (2020), which show that binge-watching behaviors are associated with self-reported unhappiness and psychological issues; and Anozie (2020), which suggests that higher levels of binge watching are tied to negative emotions, while lower levels are connected to positive emotions. Additional evidence supports the idea that binge watching is a leisurely activity, but it may have negative effects on well-being, Dhanuka and Bohra (2019) found that binge watching can have adverse social and psychological consequences for young people while Ahmed (2017) discovered a link between binge watching and higher levels of depression.

The results further showed significant gender differences on engagement and pleasure preservation dimensions of binge watching, where males showed greater involvement in binge watching and deployed more strategies to enhance their pleasure related to watching TV series as compared to females. Additionally, significant gender differences were also found with respect to mental well-being variable where males reported higher mental well-being as compared to females. These results are in concordance with the previous research. Research by Asmael (2018) reported that men may engage in binge-watching more frequently per week but with fewer episodes per session. Moreover, numerous studies indicate that being male increases the risk of developing internet addiction disorder such as online gaming (Mari et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2020; Xin et al., 2018). Mahemei and Palamattathil (2022) in their study on Indian sample also discovered female participants with exhibited lower mean scores than male participants across all six dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and positive relations with others. Gomez-Baya et al. (2018) also found that women tend to report a lower level of psychological well-being compared to men.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study revealed that binge watching in both non problematic as well as problematic form can have adverse effect on the mental health of the users. Furthermore, there are differences between males and females in terms of their level of involvement in binge watching and their overall mental well-being. This study contributes to the existing literature by revealing that emotional benefits drawn from binge watching could be diminished when it is done in excessive amount. It also sheds light on the fact that binge watching could be a gender-related phenomenon. In spite of these advantages, there are certain constraints in the present study. The research utilized a cross-sectional design and gathered data through surveys, making it prone to the inherent drawbacks of both survey methods and cross-sectional studies. These limitations could be addressed through future studies. Future research could employ longitudinal approach with more diverse sample for profound understanding of binge watching phenomenon and to reduce the constraints of generalizability. Future studies should also utilize qualitative methods to gain deeper insights into the psychological consequences of binge watching behaviour. Furthermore, this research also sets the stage for future studies to examine binge watching behavior on a continuum from recreational to addictive, and to explore how it impacts viewers' mental health even when not considered problematic.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding
This work was not supported by any funding.

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International Review of Social Sciences Research
Volume 4 Issue 3 September 2024
DOI: https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353085

Children's rights in the classroom: Do student rights outweigh teacher's authority?

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Abstract

The overprotection and overemphasis of child rights led to the rise of a new phenomenon of children disregarding authority and rules. This research explored the implementation of children's rights in Gweru, Midlands Province, Zimbabwe and its effect on their behaviour in the classrooms. The research was qualitative supported by the transformative paradigm. The Bronfenbrenner theory was the study framework with twenty purposively selected participants for interviews and focus group. Through the thematic analysis, challenges brought by children's rights in attaining quality education include indiscipline, bullying of teachers, overprotection of rights and delinquency. On the other hand, disempowerment, disintegration of teaching and learning, irresponsibility and lawlessness were identified as the effects on children's behaviours. The study further emphasised the strategies that could be adopted to foster successful teaching and learning while observing children's rights including raising awareness, training of stakeholders and revision of policies and legal frameworks. Given the empirical results, this study stressed that overemphasis on rights without stressing responsibility is cultivating a breed of selfish and rowdy child.

Keywords: *child rights, infringement, educator, learner*

Article History:

Received: *July 4, 2024* ***Revised***: *August 4, 2024*
Accepted: *August 8, 2024* ***Published online***: *August 18, 2024*

Suggested Citation:
Mpofu, P. & Machingauta, T.T. (2024). Children's rights in the classroom: Do student rights outweigh teacher's authority? *International Review of Social Sciences Research*, 4(3), 76-98. https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353085

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1. Introduction

Children’s rights take a holistic stance to ensure children’s human dignity, which is imperative as it ensures children’s development to full potential. Children should not be treated as objects or property as they are humans. Globally, children have been susceptible to violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of dehumanisation in societies (Fairhall & Woods, 2021; Chang et al., 2023). There are a number of strategies, policies and frameworks aimed at protecting children at global, African, sub-regional and national levels have been crafted.

Globally, there are instruments that seek to protect children, including the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG Agenda 2030). The 40 substantive rights in the CRC and the 17 SDGs also provide the metrics and methodology required to monitor communities’ progress in fulfilling children’s rights (Lichtsinn & Goldhagen, 2023). The UNCRC lays out rights of every child, consisting of 54 articles which include civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (Fairhill & Wood, 2012). The recognition of the child rights paradigm shift has been attested by SDG Agenda (2030) which illuminates Target 16.2, which according to the United Nations (2023) seeks to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture of children. The universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), being the supreme of all global rights instruments, notes that all rights are inalienable, hence children’s rights should be realized without compromise.

In Africa, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), African Union (2012) member states are obliged to undertake necessary steps in accordance with their constitutional processes, legislative and measures necessary for guaranteeing children’s rights. Several African countries are signatories of the ACRWC. As articulated by Vohito (2021), 49 African Union member states ratified and accepted the ACRWC thereby obligated to align to the charter. In the local context, chapter 2, section 19, chapter 4, part 3, section 81 of the Zimbabwe’s Constitution affirms the protection of children from any form of abuse. Similarly, the children’s rights liberated them in their education. Children’s rights compelled teachers to abandon the use of corporal punishment, which was the cause of some learners dropping out of school. Before the implementation and recognition of children’s rights, some teachers would abuse children physically, sexually, emotionally and some will go to the extent of exploiting them by making them do their own personal errands (Shumba, 2001; Melkman, 2024; Calitz & de Villiers, 2020; Hecker et al., 2023; Shumba, 2006). However, with all the privileges given to the learners and constant abuse of their rights, educators at the receiving end and guardians as support system are seemingly finding it difficult to impose measures in educational concerns. While Veritas (2023) highlight amendment of section 13 of the Child Act, which states that any parent or guardian who fails to take reasonable steps to prevent their child from committing offence shall be guilty of the offence and liable to penalties as if they were the offenders, many believe this provision will make it difficult for them to discipline their children (Chara, 2023). Congress should guarantee that parental rights are treated as fundamental rights that cannot be overridden by ideologically driven policies (Kao, 2023). Most parents are scared to report their children because they think they may have restrained them at some point. Cottrell (2001) notes that some teens erroneously believe they are protected from their parents' authority by law, and parents live by the threats of being charged with assault abuse and neglect if they attempt to discipline their teen. Common controlling comments are "*You can't touch me!*", "*You have to support me until I'm 18*." "*I'll call children's aid on you!*" and "*I'll call the police!*"

Most children threaten their parents citing the law while some display aggressive attitudes towards parents and teachers. With these scenarios, Barker (2024) argues that teachers did not sign up to become punch bags or referees in physical altercations between pupils. They have the right to feel and be safe at work. Furthermore, teachers felt as if pupils were in charge, as they would get sworn at after challenging a number of pupils who were roaming around the school not attending lessons, with no consequences. Moshman (2023) notes that parents, administrators, teachers and the public have developed a "*that's just part of the job*" attitude. When teachers get violated, they are expected to take threats and abuse from students. Teachers are struggling to execute authority in schools as the students feel like they are the authority. Violence against teachers is now becoming a global concern (Sukyadi et al., 2018; Previl, 2023; Walker, 2022; Garg, 2017; Lokmić et al., 2013).

The NASUWT (2023) in England found that 5% of the teachers were leaving because of poor pupil behaviour, and over 53% seriously considering leaving because of violence and abuse from pupils. According to Sibanda (2015), a number of parents expressed disgust at the lawmakers and child activists for seemingly giving children a "free play". Parents no longer discipline children in fear of violating their so-called “child rights”. Te One (2011) argues that the state undermines the sanctity of families, and parental rights to raise their children without risk of social engineering. Adults have their hands tied and are expected to tolerate children’s arrogance and ill-behaviour in the name of child rights. Failure to address the complexities caused by overemphasis of child rights in schools and homes today have long-term costs for educators’ retention and the education of pupils (Kükürtcüi & Erkan; 2022; Gillett-Swan & Lundy, 2021).

This study aims to investigate the effects of the implementation of children’s rights on the attitudes and behaviours of students within the schools. Specifically, it determines the benefits of children’s rights in their education, challenges brought about by children’s rights on students’ behaviours, effects of children’s rights on teachers’ authority within the classrooms, and strategies that can be adopted to foster successful teaching and learning while observing children’s rights.

2. Literature review

2.1. Infringement of children’s rights within the education system

Children’s rights are debated terrain. Some think they have been taken a bit too far, while others think their implementation should be given more priority (Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014). The recognition of children’s rights brought positive developments on the education of children especially the girl child in Africa. Children’s rights enabled all children in the world to reach their full potential (UNICEF, 2009); for instance, historically, in most African nations, boys were given preference to continue their education when there was insufficient funding for both girls' and boys' education**.**

Among other rights, children’s rights include the right to life, the right to education, right to healthcare, right to be heard, privacy, respect and right for adults to always do what is best for them. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states four basic rights of the child to be fulfilled, namely the child’s right to survival, the child’s right to protection, the child’s right to development, and the child’s right to participation. These rights overarch every other right enlisted in the UNCRC. Similarly, while the African charter article 11(6) emphasises on the education of children who become pregnant before completing their education, Fambisayi (2020) notes the adoption of the Education Amendment Act 2020 in Zimbabwe prohibiting expulsion of pregnant girls from school.

There is a dearth of literature when it comes to the infringement of children's rights in the classrooms. In a study conducted by Zwane (2017) in South African secondary schools, educators were found unaware on positive and constructive interactions with learners. For instance, name-calling, ridiculing and degrading learners were common experiences. The Facebook post of the Progressive Teachers Union Zimbabwe (2017) highlighted a computer science teacher at Herentals Group of Colleges fined with $150.00 in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe for administering corporal punishment on a form 3 student for not doing his schoolwork. The teachers probably might have overdone the beating, but argument states that it has become difficult for the teachers to implement any form of punishment or be effective in teaching. While these issues point on human dignity within the schools, literature also highlights numerous cases of violence and ill-behaviours of students emphasising their rights. In the study conducted by UNISA (2022) on the problems schools encountered in implementing positive discipline, some participants cited too much emphasis on learners' rights and too little on their corresponding responsibilities, or on the rights of educators. Pindula (2023) blames the banning of corporal punishment for the lack of discipline in schools, saying it was sad that teachers have become disempowered. There has been too much emphasis on the protection of child rights to maintain a safe and dignified schooling environment for learners (Ebrahim, 2017). However, some still use corporal punishment (Vohito, 2021). Ebrahim (2017) suggests reward chats, merit and demerit systems, taking privileges, time-outs, detention where learners can do schoolwork and picking up litter as viable options. Adopted strategies are Eurocentric, which are viewed as fun and adventurous by children.

According to Ncube et al. (2014), education policies were made, revised, implemented and abolished on a continuous basis, with little or no input from educators. The voice of the educators is silenced, thus disempowering the educators yet they have a pivotal role to play. Their buy-in is needed if policies have to succeed in schools and be put into action. Little or no attention has been given to how these policies have a great impact on the relations between the learners and educators. Others referred to the "cut-and-paste approach" used based on imported Western ideas but without these being customised to local contexts and African principles. In fact, the educator's rights have been overshadowed by the child's rights such that everything is done in favour of the child. Most of these strategies infringe on the African culture, as they overlook the values and norms. Similarly, the gap that exists then is that most of the provisions are embedded on the Western cultures, thus ignoring the African context.

Empirical evidence showed most studies on children's rights primarily focus on the protection of these rights and abuse of the rights by the adults. Literature is silent on how children are abusing these rights, which may influence how educators relate with them, hence affecting their education or the way they are taught. Not much literature, except for blogs and newspaper articles, have begun to articulate the effects of too much power given to the child, overprotection of their rights as well as the effects thereof. Literature has ignored that children have been given too much power, which has negative implications between the teacher, parent and student interactions. Hence, this study aims to give insight into what educators think of the endorsement of polices and frameworks on child rights which have a negative impact on their work.

2.2. Theoretical framework

The study adopted the Bronfenbrenner Socio-Ecological Model of Human Development (Urie Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which is made up of five interrelated systems namely, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. According to Paquette and Ryan (2009), the microsystem, as the layer closest to the child, contains structures such as school, family, and childcare environments that have bi-directional influences on the child. The mesosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person, e.g, the relations between home and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) while exosystem is the linkage that may exist between two or more settings, one of which may not contain the developing children but affect them indirectly such as the home and parent's workplace (Psychology Notes, 2021). On the other hand, macrosystem is the outermost layer in the child's environment comprising cultural values, customs, and laws, hence cascading influence throughout the interactions of all other layers (Paquette & Ryan, 2009) while chronosystem encompasses change or consistency over time, not only in the characteristics of the person but also of the environment in which that person lives such as family structure and employment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model of Human Development is relevant in this study because it highlights the interrelationship of ecological systems. As applied in this study, it reflects how the school and home environment are related and also how the macrosystem has influenced all other systems. This study therefore gained dexterity in disentangling the nested systems comprising home, school, society, culture and laws, how they coincide and influence different aspects of the child's life. Hence, providing insight on the matter at hand.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research paradigm

This paper adopted the transformative paradigm, which proposes not only to understand reality but also to modify it, often with an express political agenda (Mattor & Ramos, 2022). The goal is specifically to help people understand and challenge power relations in the study process and make something happen while the study is in progress. Transformative paradigm treats research as an act of construction rather than discovery (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). As used in this study, it constructs information as the researchers interacted with the participants as they unraveled that social oppression they are faced with.

3.2. Research design

Participatory Action Research (PAR) was used in this study as it recognizes that teacher and parents are powerless and disregarded in the society, which has been largely shaped by evolution of history. Children were dehumanised in most states, which led to child rights activist advocate for the realisation of child rights. However, there is now overemphasis and abuse of rights resulting to clashes with Africanism. PAR was used because of its participatory nature which facilitated the linkage between action and research. It allowed an investigation of the stakeholders involved in child custody who shared a complex situation, how child rights disempowered both parents and teachers.

3.3. Sample selection and Instrumentation

This study purposively selected educators to be research participants in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. According to Zwane (2017), purposive sampling presents an opportunity for the researcher to select relevant sites and credible participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study. The study selected teachers from secondary schools and parents as key informants in the study as they exchange the role of being custodians, hence making school an extension of home.

Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were used to gather information for this study. Semi-structured interviews were opted since they allowed the participants to narrate their experiences without any interference by the researchers. Open-ended interviews and focus group guides were used to ensure uniformity in asking questions. Probing was also applied, which allowed the participants to express their views without restrictions. For the interview, 14 participants were selected and 6 participants for the FGD. Since participants were geographically dispersed, some were contacted online. In total, 20 participants were selected for the study as well as two research instruments to ensure comprehensive and saturation of data. Consent to audio record the participants was sought to ensure data was correctly captured.

3.4. Data analysis techniques

Thematic analysis was utilised to give meaning to the participants' experiences. The researchers familiarised with the data by reading both interviews and FGD transcriptions, taking note of key ideas. Key ideas were identified and coding of the data was done as key ideas were labelled to make easy for categorisation of interrelated ideas, hence formation of themes that responded to the research questions.

3.5. Ethical consideration

The study followed several ethical procedures specifically in the data gathering process. Participants signed consent forms before participating in the study. The researchers explained the gist of the study to the participants and their rights to withdraw from the study at any given point. The study ensured participants anonymity; their identities remain anonymous all throughout the study. The FGD participants were explained that voice changing and blurring of the face are not guaranteed to comply with anonymity. However, they were assured that the recordings were kept safe and their identities were not disclosed even after the distribution and publication of the results.

4. Results and Discussion

Data were collected through interviews with teachers and their extracts presented by **[T]** and a focus group with parents was also convened and their extracts presented by **[P]** in the data presentation. The data is presented according to generated themes.

4.1. Benefits of children's rights on their education

To get balanced views on children's rights, participants were first asked about the benefits of children's rights. Most of the participants were not against the children's rights per se but were against its misuse and over emphasis.

Improvement in enrollment. Research findings revealed that children's rights liberated children coming from church sects like Johanne Masowe who were against educating their children in formal schools, as highlighted:

> ***[T2, T5, T1]*** *There are religious sects that were not allowing children to go to school keeping them at church shrines, but because of the rights there is improvement in enrollment of children in schools from these groups of people.*

Most participants praised the advent of children's rights as most children were able to go to school as all parents were not forced to send their children to school.

It afforded equal opportunity for both boys and girls to access education. Findings from the study highlight that children's rights afforded equal opportunity for both boys and girls to access education as participants commented that,

> ***[P5, T4, P6, T11]*** *Many parents had a mentality that educating the girl child was a waste of resources since she would be married off, but because of the child rights they now go to school without discrimination.*

> ***[P1, P3, T9, T12]*** *The rights are good because we have seen in the past if a girl child got pregnant whilst in school or college they would face expulsion. But now there is a policy that allows them to continue with their education.*

> ***[T10, T7, T2]*** *Affirmative action has been introduced to close the gap in education whereby girls are enrolled in programmes with lesser points as compared to boys.*

From these excerpts, children's rights ushered in equality among children without discrimination based on sex.

It reduced dropout rates and absenteeism. This study found that child's rights has led to reduction of learners' dropouts and absenteeism, as participants commented,

> ***[T12, T8, T5]*** *Most teachers would verbally, physically and emotionally abuse children in schools which led to high levels of dropouts and absenteeism. The abolishment of corporal punishment is celebrated because we now see an improvement in school attendance.*

> ***[T4, T9, T1]*** *I feel that the introduction of children's rights assisted in reducing bullying by teachers and fellow learners which could lead to learner dropout and absenteeism.*

These extracts highlight that children's rights have reduced the rates of child abuse in schools which was leading to learners' dropouts and absenteeism.

4.2. Challenges brought about by children's rights in students' behaviours

The first research question was to find out the challenges that can be brought about by children's rights in the students' behaviours. The following themes were derived from the collected data.

Indiscipline. As found in this study, indiscipline emanated as a challenge brought about by children's rights. Some of the participants cited that,

> ***[T14, 13, T1, T11]*** *We had a girl who got pregnant and was not expelled from school because of these policies and rights. We had a challenge with her as she was caught busy having sex in the classroom, her issue went viral. What do other children learn from that?*

> ***[T3, T7, T12]*** *They have the right to education and to make most of it, yet they abscond from lessons as well as not doing their school work, some even go for betting and engage in drug abuse during school time.*

These excerpts highlight that some students have become disorderly and exert disruptive behaviours thus abusing their right to education. Indiscipline as a challenge brought by children's rights in attaining quality education was supported by an article, "*parents also complain that some of their children have become stubborn and disobedient. Among the purported cases of indiscipline is denigration of teachers, skipping of lessons, bullying and abuse of drugs"* (The Sunday Mail, 2015).

Child custodians, teachers and parents are facing the same challenge of wayward children who are arrogant and rowdy. However, Vohito (2021) cited senior school officials or teachers reported caning students and not following government regulations on the infliction of corporal punishment in schools. This is an indicator that the classroom and the stick cannot be separated if there has to be cultured and cooperative students, it has to be there as an alternative disciplinary measure. Similarly, schools should always emphasise on student responsibility.

Bullying of teachers. Bullying of teachers has emerged as one of the major themes as some participants highlighted that:

> ***[T2, T12, T8]*** *A student asked me for my phone number and later he sent me a message passing sexual comments. The other day I caught him taking a picture of me whilst I was teaching. So, this freedom of bringing gadgets to school is causing chaos in the classroom as most won't concentrate.*

Teachers are now facing harassment from students as illuminated in the narratives of the participants. There is distraction of learning because of some of these privileges children have been given.

> ***[T9, T14, T6, T3]*** *Parents should do what's best for the child, like education, protection and provision. They don't respect the adults or even listen to instruction yet they want the best. I have seen some of my colleagues being shouted at by students. And in another case where I once worked, a deputy head being booed at by the whole school just because he had said something they didn't like.*

As highlighted by the participants, it is indicative that teachers are facing hard times with some students. From this study, it materialised that bullying of teachers is one of the challenges brought out by over-emphasis on children's rights. Pagones (2023) asserts that most educators were being assaulted at alarming rates and find themselves powerless against bullies due to woke school policies which offer little punishment or exclusion in favour of restorative justice policies. This has been an issue that is overlooked as most times the children have been the victims. This is in fact similar to the findings of Henebery (2019) in Australia revealing 70% of the participants bullied or harassed by a student in the preceding 12 months, which include verbal aggression, physical abuse, invasion of personal space, yelling and lying about teacher to get them in trouble. Furthermore, Henebery (2019) cited teachers left the profession because of incessant bullying.

Overprotection of rights. According to the results, overprotection of child rights has become one of the major challenges. One participant remarks that, *'…much emphasis is on the rights such that children are executing and claiming their rights aside responsibilities that accompany the rights. That's why there's so much chaos'*. The children themselves do not fully understand the rights that they claim. For example, in a bid to protect and promote the girl child by allowing her education, one notes that:

> ***[T11, P1, P6]*** *This issue of allowing pregnant girls continue with school, as an educator, I don't see it work. To begin with we had a pregnant learner this other year, she was having maternal sickness in class and this would get the attention of other learners as they tried helping her and this was during a lesson.*

As illuminated by the participants, the children's rights have been overprotected ignoring the impacts these rights and polices might have in the future.

Delinquency. One participant remarked,

> ***[T13, T4, P3, P6]*** *The right to healthcare is being abused as the children are taking drugs like mutoriro, dagga and crystal meth. Some of them you can see that this child is intoxicated with the rowdy behaviour they display during class.*

As highlighted by the excerpt, some children are resorting to drug and substance abuse as a hobby. Children are developing unusual habits, as remarked by another participant,

> ***[P5, P3, P1]*** *My son runs away to the soccer field where he was recruited into a local soccer team. Upon discovering that he was talented I have since been releasing him after some friends made*

> *me aware that it's a right to let them play as well as nurture their talents. But now I'm having challenges with him, all he now thinks of is soccer. He runs away from home even before doing his homework and sometimes he steals my money so he can go and buy refreshments with his friends. He comes home when it's dark too tired to do his schoolwork. Sometimes he even lies that he has no homework because he wants to be released to go and play.*

As parents, they may want to support their child and not infringe on their rights, which is commendable. However, the experiences of the participants indicate that some parents are facing hard times due to delinquency of their children; they are no longer controllable. This study established delinquency as a challenge. Congruently, a trade unionist was quoted, "*If you go to any school in Harare or anywhere in Zimbabwe now, we have learners who are on drugs. We have learners who are partaking sex sessions in schools and you want us to accept that. That is totally unacceptable. As teachers we have a role to make sure that we build the country, morally and socially," (Midlands Observer, 2023).* This study finds empirical evidence that schools are struggling with delinquency such as drug and substance abuse, illicit sex, and fights among students. Most of these waywardness acts are being committed during or after school.

4.3. Effect of children's rights on the educators' authority within the classroom

Disempowerment. From this research, it was found that disempowerment hampers educators' ability to support and foster growth in learners.

> ***[T1, T7, T14, P4, P2]*** *When learners are given schoolwork they won't do it, knowing that the educator will not punish them. Hence it will affect the pass rate. Sometimes the children will end up in drug abuse, alcohol, smoking etc. The problem is that mostly it is the teacher who gets blamed if the children fail, yet they don't even see that our hands are tied.*

> ***[P6, P5, P3, P1]*** *As a parent I'm failing to control my child, she told me that if 'you beat me I will report you to the police and you will get arrested'. These children just threaten us as parents but don't even think of what will happen after I get arrested as I'm the breadwinner. I pay their fees only for them to be playful and waste my hard-earned money. Imagine if they can't respect me as a parent what more the teacher. These children have too much power.*

From the narratives of the participants, it can be alluded that the educators had been disempowered. They cannot fully enforce support and growth of the child as they have become powerless and less respected. It is palpable from this study that disempowerment of teachers and parents is one effect of too much emphasis on children's rights. Similarly, "*some advocates critical of children's rights argue that the state diminishes the role of parents by granting children a voice in decisions that affect them. Thus, it is argued, undermines the sanctity of families, and parental rights to raise their children without risk of social engineering (Te One, 2011).* This is the exact opposition of Pindula (2023) that banning of corporal punishment develops lack of discipline in schools, proclaiming how teachers have become disempowered. The teacher and parental rights have been eroded, as children do as they please knowing that they always have the state and CSOs behind them.

Disintegration of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning has been disintegrated as **T7** highlighted that, '*they have the right to education and to make most of it, yet they abscond from lessons as well as not doing their schoolwork*'. Other participants remarked that,

> ***[T4, T2, T10, T13]*** *I gave my students CALA work to do over second term holidays and third term is almost over, they have not submitted anything, I have grown tired of asking them to submit. There's no way I can make them submit and no punishment I can give them. In the end my superiors will see me as incompetent.*
>
> ***[T12, T9, T5]*** *The right to be treated fairly no matter where they are from, educators spend most times in disciplinary hearings instead of attending classes. I'm talking from experience, there was a time I spent almost the whole week attending disciplinary hearings daily and had no time for my classes, attending to case after case with no rest.*

Teaching and learning has become disorganized as teacher can hardly foster support and growth of learners due to non-cooperation and disruptions. Steiner (2023) avows that inside the education system itself, the fundamental cause of poor outcomes is that education policy leaders have eroded the instructional core and designed the education system for failure. This study argues that student discipline inside the classrooms is becoming challenging with too much protection given to the students. Instead of teachers focusing on the instruction, they have to implement discipline measures in order not some students disrupt the entire class.

Irresponsibility. A participant reported that, '*I have heard much being talked on child rights, but the same people don't teach these children their responsibilities*'. Much of these rights are enforced aside responsibilities.

> ***[T7, T11, T1, P3]*** *I once heard that children need to be protected from hurt, exploitation and abuse. Parents put their children into boarding school where the school ensure that they are protected, there is a security guard and a durawall as a measure of security but many times the children escape at night going to night clubs. It is risky here because of the location of our school, they can be attacked as they walk past the bushes to the main road*

From these extracts, children are being irresponsible, not realising the consequences of their actions and how they are misapplying their rights. This has disrupted educators' passion for work as some level of negligence of work is highlighted as one participant remarks that:

> ***[T12, T7, T10]*** *As for me, I don't even bother, if I say something and the learner does not listen it's not my fault because at the end of the day, I'm not the one who will sit for national examinations and fail.*

It can be inferred that teaching and learning within the classrooms has been challenged nowadays with students and teachers becoming passive and careless about the consequences of their actions. This study established that irresponsibility has been developed among students hampering their ability attaining quality education. As aptly asserted by Sibanda (2015), parents and the community are no longer disciplining children in fear of legal measures while students have the tendency to become lazy. With parents not knowing how to impose discipline among their children, nobody teaches children on their responsibility more than their rights.

Lawlessness. Some participants annotated that,

> ***[T11, T14, T8]*** *I was in a disciplinary hearing where a case was reported of children playing truth or dare games whereby, they dare each other to do naughty things in front of other students such as kissing or fondling.*

> ***[T7, T12, T4]*** *I spent the whole week looking for a student who I had to pass money that was sent by his parent, only to find him later on after some days at the hostel. He doesn't attend school claiming he won't be having lessons. These children are now doing as they will despite the regulations of the school.*

As highlighted in the narratives of the participants, it can be presumed that children in schools behave as they will and unruly despite the regulations that have been set to guide them. In simpler terms, schools are becoming unsafe places for both teachers and children. Learning has been seriously compromised. In these circumstances, Pindula (2023) argued that the government and the parents connived to say kids should not be disciplined. In fact, Ndlovu (2022) asserts that the total withdrawal of corporal punishment has seen a quantum leap of deterioration of discipline among students in schools, hence resulting in an array of problems, including poor academic performance. Lawlessness in communities and schools has been the order as most children think they are untouchable.

4.4. Strategies to foster successful teaching and learning while observing children's rights.

Raising Awareness. The participants shared the following strategies.

> ***[T8, T10, T13]*** *Incorporate every stakeholder parent, teacher and learners themselves. Making learners to be aware of their rights and making them to be aware of how they can abuse their rights.*

> ***[T1, T6, T9]*** *The problem is that most of us teachers are not even well informed of these rights, as long as something has nothing to do with my teaching of geography there is no point for me to know about it. So, I think we need awareness of the legislations and policies on child rights*

According to PTUZ (2015), children should be taught rights and responsibilities as responsibilities make one accountable for their actions. However, Thompson (2017) stated that "*there's also the concern that raising children's awareness of their rights might instill in them the sense of entitlement and selfishness. Critics say, 'They will think they can do whatever they like,' 'Children need to learn not to be selfish, and how to care about other people. Rights don't teach them that."* Thus, more emphasis should be put on raising awareness on the responsibilities that are involved with child rights. As some participants highlighted that they had no idea on the complete provisions of children's rights, awareness on the rights and responsibilities should be done for stakeholders involved as custodians.

Training of stakeholders. With regards to training of stakeholders, the following suggestions emerged.

> ***[T7, T13, P1, P2]*** *Educational programmes for parents, teachers and children, even policy makers to inform every stakeholder involved a sell as enhance their knowledge of child rights.*
>
> ***[T5, T14, T10, P2, P6]*** *Psychosocial education of parents, teachers, children on child rights and responsibilities. We all need to be informed so that we each know how to conduct ourselves.*

There is a need for training and information dissemination to all stakeholders to avoid chaos and misconduct. It can be presumed that most educators and parents are not well-informed on child rights. According to Reyneke (2013), "*no guidelines are provided to ensure that school governing bodies, which consist mainly of lay persons, and sometimes even illiterate people, and not experts in children's rights, properly afford learners the opportunity to participate in accordance with the constitutional standards."* There has to be some level of involvement of children, parents and teachers in training as well as coming up with school regulations. Educators need to be equipped with ways of handling children that are non-derogatory. PTUZ (2015) suggests education ministry to reduce the teacher pupil ratio as some have over 60 pupils in a classroom as well as help teachers with ways and means on how to maintain discipline.

Revision of policies and legal frame works. Most participants mentioned that:

> ***[T7, T10, T13, P2, P5]*** *We are the custodians of these children; I don't understand why we are left out during the consultations of these legal frameworks. Teachers and parents are the ones who have to deal with these children when the policy makers and those who lobby for them are busy enjoying their lives and grants, they get for pushing for these useless policies.*
>
> ***[P1, P3, T8, T13]*** *We need to be consulted on the regulations that are best for our children. The government won't be there when we are facing trouble with our children.*

Custodians of children feel overpowered as they are not given the opportunity to decide on what is best for their children. In simple terms, those who spend most times with children are excluded and not consulted on the formulation of appropriate laws. Despite this, many government actors and agencies today are working overtime to substitute a parent’s decisions with the government worker’s own view of what it is best for a given child, from schools to hospitals to child welfare investigators (Neonadmin, 2017). Educators are not often consulted on the drafting of policies. As their right is often usurped by government and CSOs, there is no space for educators and caregivers to participate in the process. States should at least do a monitoring and evaluation of child-related legal frameworks as well as regular reviews and updates where necessary to ensure full realisation of child rights in the educational, home and social environment.

5. Conclusion

This study showed that children’s rights liberated many children in Zimbabwe. While both boys and girls were able to access education without discrimination, some children are misusing these rights making educators challenged on the proper educational strategies in the classrooms. Given the limitations on the number of participants, geographical scope of the study and the personal circumstances of the participants, the results of this study do not generally reflect the situation in the entire country. However, the study posits that student misconducts are happening as children are supported by legal rights and privileges without inculcating to them the value of responsibility. With these findings, this study recommends the state and child rights advocates to collaborate with the child custodians in policy making. Similarly, stakeholders’ participation is necessary from drafting to passing of the bills and policies. As the rules had been in place, it is necessary to provide educational programs and resources for educators and parents.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding
This work was not supported by any funding.

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International Review of Social Sciences Research
Volume 4 Issue 3 September 2024
DOI: https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353096

Resource governance: Does abundance of resources guarantee socioeconomic development in Nigeria?

Oluwatosin Owolabi Lajuwomi

Abstract

This study aims to assess how resource governance affects socioeconomic development in Nigeria. Using the multivariate regression technique, a statistical analysis system involving the dependent variable and independent variables, secondary data was adopted for this empirical investigation and were sourced from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WDI), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Central Bank of Nigeria Statistical Bulletin. The dataset spans from the first half of 2003 to the second half of 2022. The main analytical technique employed in this study is the Dynamic Ordinary Least Squares (DOLS) regression model, a systematic and effective method of estimating variables that do not change over time, otherwise known as stationary time series data. Empirical findings indicate that government effectiveness significantly negatively impacts socioeconomic development (proxied by the Human Development Index), while the Rule of Law positively and significantly impacts HDI. Furthermore, oil revenue exhibits a negative but insignificant impact on HDI, while Foreign Direct Investment has a significant negative impact on HDI. The findings of this study align with the Resource Curse Theory which states that countries with abundant natural resources tend to experience economic downturns as a result of high dependence on their natural resources. To address these issues, this study recommends that the government should implement sustainable and equitable management policies that ensure the responsible use of natural resources in Nigeria by embracing good governance, accountability, transparency, and ethical leadership to enhance capacity to address socioeconomic challenges.

Keywords: *resource governance, natural resources, socioeconomic development, abundance of resources*

Article History:

Received: *July 14, 2024*
Revised: *August 31, 2024*
Accepted: *September 2, 2024*
Published online: *September 3, 2024*

Suggested Citation:
Oluwatosin Owolabi Lajuwomi (2024). Resource governance: Does abundance of resources guarantee socioeconomic development in Nigeria? *International Review of Social Sciences Research*, 4(3), 99-122. **https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353096**

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1. Introduction

The debate on whether abundant resources guarantee development is persistent (Lashitew & Werker, 2020). Some scholars argue that an abundance of resources leads to development (Jack et al., 2016; Gyang et al., 2010), while others view it as a curse, particularly for developing countries (Fu & Liu, 2023; Osaghe, 2015; Kolstad & Soreide, 2009). Fu and Liu (2023) argue that prolonged reliance on natural resources can harm the economy, a phenomenon often termed a curse. Resource governance has been a pressing issue across African countries since the 1950s and 1960s. Nigeria, the most populous African country, is rich in natural resources, including oil, gas, gold, and iron ore (Gyang et al., 2010; Adesopo & Asaju, 2004). However, these resources have not translated into significant benefits for the population (Habiyaremye, 2020; Ogunleye, 2008), largely due to mismanagement.

Nigeria continues to grapple with poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and insecurity. Two divergent schools of thought exist regarding countries that possess substantial natural resources. The first school of thought acknowledged the fact that the availability of natural resources is a fundamental determinant of a nation's wealth (Jack et al., 2016; Gyang et al., 2010) and the overall well-being of its citizens, the abundance of natural resources in any given country can significantly contribute to its economic prosperity and facilitate its socio-economic development (Habiyaremye, 2020; Jack et al., 2016). The second school of thought believes that countries with natural resources, like Nigeria, are always victims of the resource curse “paradox of plenty” (Kolstad & Soreide, 2019). Regarding Nigeria's situation, it can be deduced that Nigeria's situation is the latter (Kolstad & Soreide, 2019; Osaghe, 2015).

Accordingly, countries with access to natural resource supplies should enjoy a considerable advantage in their socio-economic development and ability to attract foreign investment and partnerships with other countries and multinational corporations (MNCs) (Mahtani, 2008). However, in most African countries, like Nigeria, there has been a problem of poor governance of these natural resources (Mabrey, 2017), especially in the mining and extraction sector (Mahtani, 2008). The country has experienced more negative impacts than positive ones due to a lack of governance of this abundance of resources instead of socio-economic development (Osaghe, 2015; Ogunleye, 2008). Moreover, the Central Bank of

Nigeria reported that more than half of Nigeria's total revenue is generated from oil exports (CBN, 2022). The report also highlighted that Nigeria experienced a drop in oil revenue in 2020 due to the global challenges of the pandemic as well as the trade wars between Saudi Arabia and Russia (Uduu, 2022; Campbell, 2020).

In Nigeria, the lack of effective management of natural resources has given rise to a plethora of negative occurrences (Osaghe, 2015), including inter-ethnic conflicts, heightened incidents of banditry, and border conflicts, to cite a few examples. The root cause of these issues can be traced back to the inadequate governance of natural resources. Insufficient management of such resources results in their overexploitation, which, in turn, leads to resource depletion, environmental degradation, and social unrest (Erdoğan et al., 2021), for instance, the Niger Delta region have experienced the negative effect of natural resources rather than it positive effect (Osaghe, 2015). It should be noted that before natural resources can bring development, they must be properly extracted, mobilised and logically distributed (Fu & Liu, 2023; Jack et al., 2016), and use of these resources in a sustainable, transparency and accountable manner to ensure that the benefits are shared equitably and that the environment is not unduly damaged (Nkoa et al., 2024; Gotan, 2004).

The effective management of natural resources has the potential to bring about significant socioeconomic development (Erdoğan et al., 2021; Gotan, 2004), and this is if resources such as land, water, forests, and minerals are used judiciously, it can lead to improved livelihoods and enhanced economic growth (Gyang et al., 2010), the socioeconomic development of a country is influenced by both exogenous and endogenous factors (Ewetan, 2014). Exogenous factors can be a country's relationships with other state and non-state actors (Charountaki, 2018), the foreign policy it adopts or the agreements it signs (Haesebrouck & Joly, 2021; Morin & Paquin, 2018). These can contribute to a win-win or a win-loss situation (Lixin & Wanling, 2019), affecting the country's socio-economic development. On the other hand, endogenous factors include internal factors such as government administration, public policy, and the strength of public institutions (Onyango, 2023; Dobra, 2021). For instance, policies made by the government of a country can determine the level of a development-driven environment or hinder it. With natural resources available to a country, how a country manages its resources internally and in relation to other countries (Mahtani, 2008), especially its trading strategy in the international market, has a huge impact on its socio-economic development.

The measurement of socioeconomic development is fundamental to assessing a nation's economic and social progress. In this regard, indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), life expectancy, literacy rates, and employment levels are widely recognised as key measures of socioeconomic development (Ewetan, 2014). Gyang et al. (2010) identified several challenges impeding development in Nigeria. One particular concern is the management of natural resources, which has been identified as a significant obstacle to development. Hence, this paper seeks to evaluate the impact of resource governance on Nigeria's socio-economic development in Nigeria, to determine whether an abundance of resources ensures socioeconomic development in the country.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Natural resources and Natural Resources Governance

Resources can be human and natural (Adeope & Asaju, 2004). The focus of this paper is on the latter. According to Adesope and Asaju (2004), natural resources are gifts of nature that can be either renewable or non-renewable, including minerals, water, agriculture, forests, and the atmosphere. Barlowe (1978:228), as cited in Adeope and Asaju (2004), regarded natural resources as land resources, categorised into three as; fund resources, flow resources and a composite group. According to Barlowe (1978), the fund resources include metals, mineral fuels, coal, stone, and other similar resources, which is the focus of this work. On the other hand, flow resources refer to resources such as precipitation, water in streams and lakes, sunlight, wind, tides, and climate. Lastly, the composite group of resources includes subclasses like biological resources, soil resources, and manmade improvements such as buildings, reservoirs, or highways. On the other hand, Acosta (2010) defines natural resource governance as "*the set of strategies to improve the transparency and accountability of governments and private companies during the licensing, exploration, contracting, extraction, revenue generation, and allocation of natural resources*." This transparency and accountability must be in all areas of natural resource management (Nkoa et al., 2024). These areas include licensing, exploration, contracting, extraction, and revenue generation. It is crucial to involve all stakeholders, starting from the government (including the executive, Parliament, and other state institutions), private companies involved in extraction, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the media, and civil society organisations (Osawe & Uwa, 2023).

According to Osawe and Uwa (2023), natural resource governance does not only focus on regulating the extractive practices of private companies, such as the voluntary principles on security and human rights. Instead, it also considers how governments manage these resources. From the definition, natural resources governance is the management and distribution of a country's natural resources by its government to promote socioeconomic development in a sustainable manner. This also involves policies regulating foreign multinational corporations' extraction of these natural resources.

Socio-economic development, as defined by Ijere (2014), is a process that encompasses social and economic progress within a society. This progress can be quantified through indicators such as GDP, literacy rates, employment levels, and life expectancy. However, other equally important factors must also be considered, such as personal safety, dignity, freedom from fear of physical harm, and the degree of participation in civil society. Technological advancements and law changes are among the state's responsibilities in the governance process that contribute to socio-economic development. According to Chrisman (1984), as cited in Ijere (2014), socio-economic development is a collaborative process between different sectors and groups in society to enhance people's well-being. In essence, socio-economic development denotes the progress in the standard of living and economic conditions of society. The term encompasses the combination of social and economic development. In this context, socio-economic development pertains to the enhancement or betterment of the quality of life and the upswing in the economic welfare and conditions of the people.

Barlowe (1978) as cited in Jack et al. (2016) describes natural resources as productive assets that support economies by providing necessary resources. However, he also noted that they can be sources of ethnic conflicts and environmental degradation; this can happen when management lapses occur. The presence of natural resources has a profound impact on countries' socio-economic and political relations (Osawe & Uwa, 2023). Natural resources are finite and non-renewable (Adeope & Asaju, 2004), and their extraction can lead to significant environmental, social, and economic consequences (Osawe & Uwa, 2023).

Therefore, it is imperative to understand the implications of natural resource extraction to promote sustainable development and minimise negative impacts. The extraction of natural resources shapes countries' economic, social, and political landscape. Natural resources serve as a critical source of revenue for many countries (Lashitew & Werker, 2020), and their extraction and usage (Teng, 2023) often drive socioeconomic development (Fu & Liu, 2023).

Socioeconomic development is a primary objective for economies worldwide, and various strategies can be employed to attain this goal. One such approach entails effectively managing available natural resources, a strategy heavily influenced by a country's historical background and resource endowment (Ogunleye, 2008). Effective resource governance is fundamental in promoting socioeconomic development, which can be achieved through efficient management techniques.

2.2. Resource Governance Challenges and Socio-economic Development

Corruption and rent-seeking behaviour in resource management. Many resource-rich countries underperform economically due to corruption (Mlambo, 2022). Two main forms of corruption in these countries are rent-seeking and patronage. Rent-seeking occurs when individuals compete for a share of the resource rents rather than using their time and skills productively. Meanwhile, patronage occurs when governments pay off their supporters to remain in power, which leads to reduced accountability and a poorer allocation of public funds (Kolstad & Soreide, 2019). According to Erum and Hussain (2019), corruption in the natural resources sector can be viewed in two ways; first, the presence of natural resources without checks and balances can cause corruption, and second, the existence of corruption within the management system of natural resources poses a significant challenge to the attainment of optimal utilisation of these resources, resulting in adverse economic consequences (Kolstad & Soreide, 2019). The abundance of natural resources can lead to the creation of opportunities for rent-seeking and patronage (Mlambo, 2022; Erum & Hussain, 2019); however, as observed by Kolstad and Soreide (2019), countries having an abundance of natural resources perform poorly because of corruption impeding the achievement of socio-economic development. Nations with a surplus of natural resources are susceptible to falling prey to the resource curse due to mismanagement. The resource curse refers to the paradoxical phenomenon in which resource-rich countries experience economic stagnation or decline despite abundant natural resources (Alssadek, & Benhin, 2023; Saeed, 2021). This condition is often attributed to a combination of factors, including weak governance, corruption, poor economic policies, and a lack of economic diversification (Erum & Hussain, 2019).

Lack of transparency and accountability in the extractive industries. The process of extracting natural resources is linked to environmental degradation, a connection that is often ignored. When seeking sustainable development, it is important to address this issue. The extractive industries' lack of accountability and transparency is costlier than ever imagined (UNCAC Coalition, 2022). When natural resources are managed effectively, with the help of proper systems, transparent and participatory decision-making processes, and efficient institutions, the sector can attract foreign direct investment and generate government revenues (UNCAC Coalition, 2022). This can lead to socio-economic development. However, most countries with natural resources face challenges related to accountability and transparency, making it difficult to manage these resources effectively.

Environmental degradation and social impacts of resource extraction. It is evident that all 36 states in Nigeria possess abundant natural resources, as reported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d). If these resources are effectively managed may contribute to the country's socioeconomic development. It is logical to deduce that environmental degradation is inevitable in areas where mining and extraction of natural resources occur (Gyang et al., 2010). It was recorded that farmers leave their farms and students drop out of school, joining the army of illegal mining (Vanguard News, 2024). For instance, in Zamfara state in Nigeria, illegal mining has undermined the socio-economic development area of Bukkuyum and local government areas. Due to the degradation of the environment, many peasant farmers have left farming, increasing the poverty level in that area. The illegal mining in Zamfara is always carried out by local artisans and illegal mine traders from countries like Russia and China (Vanguard News, 2024).

Conflict over resource control. Ineffective management of resources has caused conflict and civil unrest among groups fighting for control of resources (Conrad et al., 2018). There are several ways in which natural resources can contribute to conflict. One such way is when the extraction or mining of natural resources is not properly regulated. This can allow rebel groups to gain access to these resources, which in turn provides them with the means to acquire weapons and recruiting fighters can potentially increase their military capacity and prolong the war (Conrad et al., 2018). Another instance that can lead to conflict is the inequitable distribution of natural resources; it is a factor that has been known to contribute to conflict in society. Specifically, marginalised groups may resort to aggressive measures to voice their grievances when their access to resources is compromised. As a result, conflicts often arise, leading to societal instability. The abundance of valuable minerals, including oil, gas, californium, and precious stones, in Borno, within the shores of Lake Chad and select areas of the Sambisa Forest, has piqued the interest of international investors. Unfortunately, this has also made the region more susceptible to the ongoing conflict, the current terrorism war being waged by Boko Haram rather than religious interest (Vanguard, 2024). The impact of this on socio-economic development lies in the fact that when there is conflict, people can go on their day-to-day activities, which impedes economic activities and reduces development. The productivity of the people has been hampered as there is no safe environment in which to carry out business transactions.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

In this study, two theories were used as theoretical framework. The first theory is the resource curse theory, which explains the Nigeria's current socio-economic status. The second theory is the governance theory, which was used to solve the problem posed by the resource curse theory and achieve socio-economic development.

According to the resource curse theory, nations with plentiful natural resources, such as Nigeria with abundant oil reserves, frequently encounter difficulties such as sluggish economic expansion, heightened corruption, and social unrest (Kolstad & Soreide, 2019). In the case of Nigeria, this theory sheds light on the socio-economic obstacles the country confronts despite its vast oil wealth. It underscores how Nigeria's excessive dependence on oil revenue has given rise to governance problems, economic disparities, and social strife (Osaghe, 2015), all of which have impeded the attainment of socioeconomic development.

On the other hand, governance theory emphasises the crucial role of transparent, accountable, and effective institutions in driving equitable and lasting progress (Lockwood et al., 2010). It provides a means to combat the obstacles presented by the resource curse theory. By prioritising good governance practices like transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement (Nkoa et al., 2024; Acosta, 2010), Nigeria can confront the root causes of its resource curse and chart a course towards socio-economic growth. This theory offers a blueprint for implementing reforms that can strengthen resource governance and foster sustainable development across Nigeria.

3. Methodology

This study seeks to assess how resource governance affects socioeconomic development in Nigeria. To achieve this goal, this study adopts a specific methodology encompassing the research design, data collection, estimation technique, model specification, and the underlying economic expectation.

3.1. Research Design

A research design is a blueprint or model for specifying various empirical analysis techniques (Khanday & Khanam, 2019). This study utilises a multivariate time-series research design, a statistical approach suitable for examining multiple dynamic variables for an entity. Given the focus on Nigeria, the scope of the study, and the availability of quantitative data on the variables adopted, a time series analysis is appropriate for analysing multiple variables measured (in this case, resource governance and economic growth indicators) at different points in time for a single entity (Nigeria). This design focuses on the dynamic relationships between these variables over time.

3.2. Description and Sources of Data

Secondary data adopted for this empirical investigation were sourced from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WDI), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Central Bank of Nigeria Statistical Bulletin. The dataset spans from the first half of 2003 to the second half of 2022. It is important to note that ethical considerations were put in place to ensure that all external data sources, empirical studies and publications referenced in this study are properly cited. This study adopts a multivariate time-series regression technique, a statistical analysis system involving the dependent and independent variables. In this regard, the Human Development Index (HDI) is the dependent variable, and it is used as a proxy for socio-economic development. On the other hand, the independent or explanatory variables include Government Effectiveness (GE) and Rule of Law (ROL) – the indicators of good governance, Oil Revenue (OIL) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

The Human Development Index involves three fundamental areas of human development, which are health (measured by life expectancy at birth), educational attainment (average years of schooling) and living standards (income per capita). The HDI combines these three indicators into a single index using geometric mean. In a nutshell, the HDI, according to UNDP, is the best measure of socioeconomic development as it shows how far a country has gone in attaining human development.

Government Effectiveness represents perceptions of the standard of public policy implementation, political power and the reliability of the current government and its agencies. It accesses the proficiency of bureaucrats in implementing adequate policies that will improve various sectors of the economy, thus allowing for investments in necessary infrastructure, such as access to socioeconomic benefits like education, health, and decent work. Government effectiveness also ensures transparency in the public sector as well as the absence of corruption.

Meanwhile, the Rule of Law demonstrates how unbiased government agents are when prescribing policies that affect the overall economy (Paleri, 2022). When there is a strong rule of law governing the resource sector, there will be transparency and accountability in resource governance (Osawe & Uwa, 2023), because individuals can survey how revenue from natural resources is distributed. This discourages corruption and ensures that proper infrastructural investments that will contribute to socio-economic development are made.

Oil revenue is the total revenue the country generates from oil exports, petroleum profit taxes and other rents and royalties directly or indirectly related to the oil sector; while Foreign Direct Investment entails the revenue the government generates from foreign investors that own businesses, company shares and other local facilities within the country.

3.3. Data Estimation Technique

The main analytical technique employed in this study is the Dynamic Ordinary Least Squares (DOLS) regression model which is a systematic and effective method of estimating variables that do not change over time, otherwise known as stationary time series data. As the name implies, the DOLS model estimates the dynamic relationships between the dependent and independent variables. The DOLS model was developed by Stock and Watson (1993) and this estimator is a valuable tool for analysing small sample datasets (in this case, Nigeria for the period of 2003 to 2022). Unlike many alternative estimators, it can handle higher orders of integration and account for potential bias among variables, making it particularly suitable for complex economic systems. By addressing small sample bias and dynamic issues, the Stock-Watson DOLS technique provides more reliable long-run estimates than the conventional method of ordinary least squares (OLS).

Additionally, the DOLS method is a robust single-equation approach that corrects for endogeneity by including leads and lags of first differences of the regressors. This approach is particularly useful for analyzing co-integrated panels, where using OLS to estimate long-run relationships can lead to inconsistent and inefficient parameters. Hence, this approach is best suited for analyzing the long-run relationship between resource governance and socio-economic development in Nigeria and the statistical software adopted for this analysis is EViews 12 due to its excellent statistical tools and user-friendly interface.

3.4. Model Specification

To verify if the “Resource Curse” and “Governance” theories collectively hold in Nigeria, this study presents the following model:

$$HDI = f\ (GE, ROL, LOIL, FDI) \qquad \text{(eqn1)}$$

Where:

HDI = Human Development Index; GE= Government Effectiveness; ROL= Rule of Law, OIL= Oil Revenue, FDI= Foreign Direct Investment

Equation 1, which is the functional form of the model is further transformed into the DOLS model as follows:

$$HDI_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 GE_t + \beta_2 ROL_t + \beta_3 OIL_t + \beta_4 FDI_t + \beta_5 \Delta GE_t + \beta_6 \Delta ROL_t + \beta_7 \Delta OIL_t + \beta_8 \Delta FDI_t + \beta_9 \Delta GE_{t+1} + \beta_{10} \Delta ROL_{t+1} + \beta_{11} \Delta OIL_{t+1} + \beta_{12} \Delta FDI_{t+1} + \beta_{13} \Delta GE_{t-1} + \beta_{14} \Delta ROL_{t-1} + \beta_{15} \Delta OIL_{t-1} + \beta_{16} \Delta FDI_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t \qquad \text{(eqn2)}$$

Where:

L= Logarithmic function

β_1 = Constant or intercept parameter

β_1, β_2, β_3, $\beta_{4,}$ = Long run parameters

β_1, β_2, β_3, $\beta_{4,}$ β_5, β_6, β_7, β_8, β_9, β_{10}, $\beta_{11,}$ β_{12}, β_{13}, β_{14} β_{15}, β_{16} = Lagged terms

ε = The random disturbance or error term. This captures all other factors, (other than the independent variables) that might influence the dependent variable which are not included in the model of estimation.

3.5. Economic Expectation

This study expects the indicators of good governance (Government Effectiveness and Rule of Law) to positively impact the Human Development Index. Simply put, if the Nigerian Government is transparent and accountable in its management of the country's resources, there will be a significant improvement in the socio-economic status of the citizens. Furthermore, according to the resource curse theory, an increase in oil revenue (that is, increased oil dependence) is expected to hamper socio-economic development (proxied by the Human Development Index). Finally, Foreign Directed Investment is expected to have a positive impact on socio-economic development.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis is a statistical representation of the distinctive attributes of the data employed in this study. It involves the mean and median (which are measures of central tendency), the standard deviation, skewness, the Jarque-Bera test for normality and the number of observations.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

	HDI	GE	ROL	LOIL	FDI
Mean	0.503526	14.17927	14.08445	8.471399	1.354772
Median	0.501500	13.58914	13.63095	8.482116	1.296661
Maximum	0.548000	20.58824	20.95238	9.091441	2.900249
Minimum	0.449000	8.612440	4.975124	7.637370	-0.039522
Std. Dev.	0.028346	3.141071	4.399568	0.324514	0.832797
Jarque-Bera	2.394204	1.502467	0.759958	0.350308	2.867253
Probability	0.302068	0.471784	0.683876	0.839328	0.238443
Observations	39	39	39	39	39

Source: Author's compilation from EViews' Estimation Output

From table 1, the mean and median of the variables are within close range indicating that there is no outlier. In other words, none of the variables have any observation that is extremely larger or smaller than the next nearest observation in the data set. The standard deviation also shows that all the observations vary. The probabilities of the Jarque-Bera statistics are all greater than 0.05 (level of significance), thus the null hypothesis of non-normality is rejected, implying that all the variables are normally distributed. Finally, the total number of observations is 39 as adjusted by EViews.

4.2. Correlation Analysis

A correlation test is conducted to ascertain the degree of association between two independent variables. A correlation coefficient greater than or equal to 0.8 indicates a high collinearity among the variables.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix

	HDI	GE	ROL	LOIL	FDI
HDI	1.00000	-0.63358	0.895896	0.072467	-0.85104
GE	-0.63358	1.00000	-0.55317	-0.12806	0.393753
ROL	0.895896	-0.55317	1.00000	0.069466	-0.6648
LOIL	0.072467	-0.12806	0.069466	1.00000	0.078491

Source: Author's compilation from EViews' Estimation Output

Table 2 indicates that there are no highly collinear independent variables, as there are no correlation coefficients greater than 0.8 among the eight matrix cells housing the independent variables (GE, ROL, LOIL, FDI) except the correlation of the variable with itself, indicated by a perfect collinearity of 1.0. Hence, in this study, there is no problem of multicollinearity.

4.3. Stationarity Test Result

A test for stationarity or the unit root test is a prerequisite for the main regression analysis. It is used to determine if the mean and variance of variables are stable or stationary over time. A stationary time series is necessary to avoid a spurious or bogus regression. In this study, the Augmented Dickey-Fuller Test for Stationarity was adopted, with the following hypotheses:

H_0: Non-stationary

H_1: Stationary

Decision rule: Reject the null hypothesis (H_0) if the p-value of the ADF test statistic is less than 0.05. Otherwise, fail to reject.

Table 3

Results of Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) Unit Root Test

Variables	ADF test statistic	t-statistic at 5% level of significance	Probability-value	Order of integration	Remark
HDI	-3.240130	-2.900670	0.0215	I(1)	Stationary
GE	-2.800020	-1.945456	0.0057	I(1)	Stationary
ROL	-1.993668	-1.945456	0.0449	I(1)	Stationary
LOIL	-3.357703	-2.900670	0.0157	I(0)	Stationary
FDI	-7.148845	-2.611531	0.0000	I(1)	Stationary

Source: Author's compilation from EViews' Estimation Output

Table 3 shows that all the variables are stationary, implying that the null hypothesis of non-stationarity was rejected for all. Three variables, HDI, GE, and ROL, became stationary after their first difference, while the remaining two, OIL and FDI, were stationary at their level form.

4.4. Cointegration Test Result

A cointegration test is a pre-estimation test conducted after the unit root test. It determines the possibility of a stable long-run relationship among the variables. This study adopts the Johansen Cointegration Test with the following hypotheses:

H_0: Variables have no stable long-run relationship

H_1: Variables have stable long-run relationships

Decision rule: Reject the null hypothesis (H_0) if the p-value of the trace statistic of a hypothesised cointegrating equation is less than 0.05 (denoted by *). Otherwise, fail to reject.

Table 4

Johansen Co-integration Test (Trace Statistic)

Hypothesised No. of Cointegrating Eqn(s)	Eigenvalue	Trace Statistic	5% Critical Value	Probability Value **
None *	0.584910	80.72240	69.81889	0.0052
At most 1 *	0.421833	48.18981	47.85613	0.0465
At most 2	0.386768	27.91778	29.79707	0.0811
At most 3	0.232996	9.824356	15.49471	0.2945
At most 4	0.000260	0.009637	3.841465	0.9215

Note: Trace test indicates 2 cointegrating eqn(s) at the 0.05 level

Table 4 indicates 2 cointegrating equations, thus, the null hypothesis (H_0) of no cointegration is rejected, implying that there is a stable long-run relationship among the variables.

4.5. Regression Analysis

The estimation result is presented and analysed based on the sign and magnitude of each of the variables’ coefficients. The study also determines if these results conform to the initial economic expectations. In a nutshell, the regression results verify if the resource curse and governance hypotheses exist in Nigeria.

Table 5

Dynamic Ordinary Least Squares Estimation Result

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
GE	-0.001648	0.000266	-6.202584	0.0002
ROL	0.002457	0.000231	10.62183	0.0000
LOIL	-0.004181	0.002430	-1.720643	0.1194
FDI	-0.016594	0.001317	-12.60033	0.0000
C	0.551218	0.016879	32.65718	0.0000

R-squared = 0.999244 **Adjusted R-Squared** = 0.997227

F-statistic = 495.3986 **Probability (F-stat)** = 0.0000

Durbin Watson Statistic = 2.442545

POST ESTIMATION TEST RESULTS

Residual Diagnostic Test	Test statistic	P-value	Remark
Normality Test (Jarque-Bera)	1.118018	0.571775	Normally Distributed
Heteroskedasticity Test (Breusch-Bagan-Godfrey)	28.13870	0.2542	Homoscedastic
Autocorrelation (Breusch-Godfrey LM Test)	7.498673	0.0235	Serially Correlated (Corrected)
Specification Test (Ramset Reset Test)	3.573325	0.0954	Correctly Specified

Source: Author's Construct from EViews' Output

The estimation results of the Dynamic Ordinary Least Squares Regression analysis, presented in table 5 show that Government Effectiveness (GE) has a significant negative impact on the Human Development Index with a long-run coefficient of -0.001648 and a probability value of 0.0002. This implies that holding other factors constant, as government effectiveness increases, there will be a 0.2% decrease in socio-economic development. While this does not conform to prior economic expectations, it is noteworthy that the resource curse in Nigeria might be a reason for this outcome. Effective control over specific sectors of the economy (in this case, the oil sector) often leads to negligence of other sectors like education, agriculture and health, which are measures of socioeconomic development. Thus, even with credible resource management by the civil service, there is still a decline in the education, health, life expectancy and personal income of the citizens of Nigeria. This result aligns with the views of Erum and Hussain (2019), who argue that government officials often prioritise their supporters. Kolstad and Soreide (2019) added that patronage occurs when governments are only effective in a bid to remain in power for the next political term. As Erum and Hussain (2019) pointed out, abundant natural resources can exacerbate these issues. Therefore, the findings of this study confirm that government ineffectiveness negatively impacts socioeconomic development in the long run, as suggested by the existing literature.

In contrast, the rule of law (ROL) significantly positively impacts socio-economic development (proxied by HDI), with a coefficient of 0.002457 and a p-value of 0.0000. Thus, other factors remain unchanged; as more clearly defined laws and regulations are put in place, Nigeria will have a 0.2% increase in socio-economic development. Intuitively, the rule of law ensures that the government is held accountable for its actions regarding resource control and revenue management. As a result, revenue can be properly invested in education, healthcare and infrastructure development when the bureaucrats involved are properly checked. The findings align with the UNCAC Coalition (2022), which emphasises the importance of effective legal and regulatory instruments for sustainable development. From the findings of this study, the rule of law ensures that the government and public services are held accountable for their actions. Osawe and Uwa (2023) suggest that if proper policies are implemented and backed by the rule of law, Nigeria can fully harness its abundant resources, leading to an improvement in the socioeconomic development of the country in the long run.

Table 5 also shows that Oil revenue (OIL) has a long-run coefficient of -0.004181 and a p-value of 0.1194, implying a statistically insignificant relationship. Based on this result, an increase in oil revenue tends to decrease socioeconomic development (HDI) by 0.4%. This supports the resource curse theory which highlights that a country's overdependence on its natural resources (oil in the case of Nigeria) impedes economic expansion and socioeconomic development. Despite Nigeria's vast oil resources, the citizens still suffer poor standards of living. However, from the empirical result, this relationship is statistically insignificant, meaning that the data available does not provide enough statistical evidence to support this outcome. This result aligns with the findings of Ezekwe et al. (2022), who recorded an insignificant relationship between oil rents and the human development index in Nigeria. They further argued that the lack of significant contributions from oil rents to socioeconomic development can be attributed to systemic corruption and mismanagement of oil revenues in Nigeria.

This study reveals a significant negative long-run relationship between Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows and the Human Development Index (HDI) in Nigeria. The coefficient of -0.016594, with a p-value of 0.0000, indicates that a 1% increase in FDI is associated with a 0.0166% decrease in HDI, all else being equal. This suggests that despite the potential benefits of FDI, such as technology transfer and job creation, its impact on socio-economic development in Nigeria may be detrimental. As previously discussed by Ogunleye (2008) and Osaghe (2015), the negative relationship between FDI and HDI can be attributed to several factors, including poor governance and institutional weaknesses. Poor effectiveness in resource governance, uncertainty, and lack of transparency can lead foreign investors to prioritize short-term profits over long-term sustainable development. This also aligns with the reports of UNCAC Coalition (2022) who suggested that the negative impact of FDI on HDI may be exacerbated by the "resource curse" phenomenon, where countries with abundant natural resources, may experience slower economic growth and development due to rent-seeking, and poor governance. In such cases, FDI may reinforce existing patterns of inequality and hinder the development of other sectors of the economy.

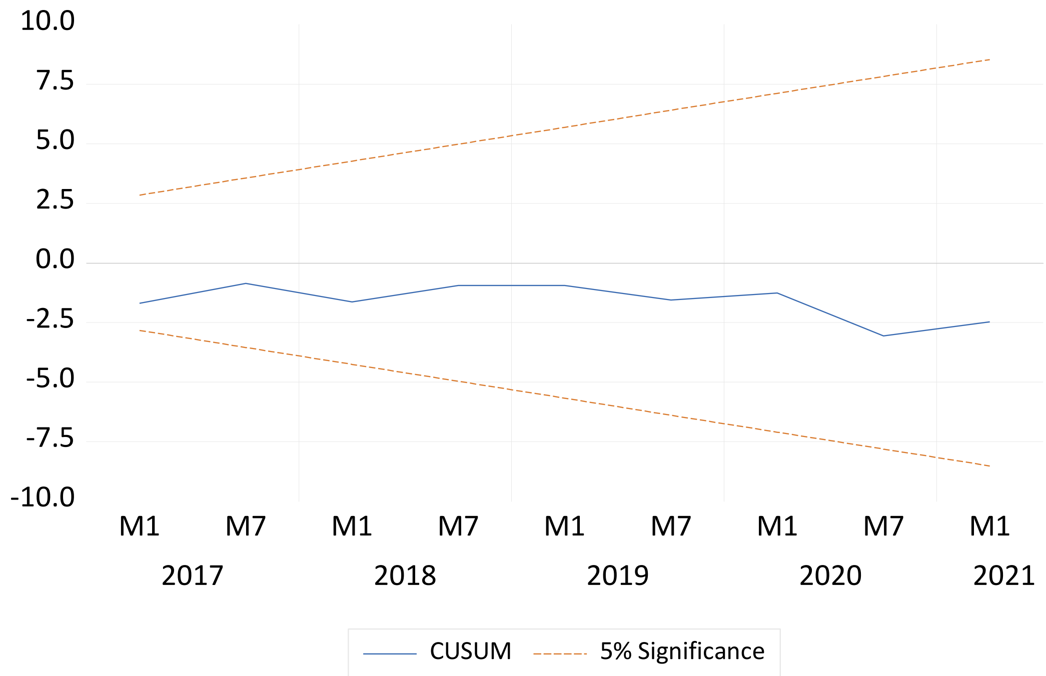
The post-estimation test results highlighted in table 5 indicate that the variables are normally distributed, meaning that the variables move together around the mean. The diagnostic test also shows that there is no problem of heteroskedasticity, implying that the residuals or disturbances (unobserved factors that also influence the dependent variable) are evenly spread along the regression line. Simply put, the residuals have constant variance across different levels of the independent variables thus, the model can adequately predict the actual impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Additionally, the overall model is correctly specified. However, there is autocorrelation which is corrected with Newey-West Heteroskedasticity and Autocorrelation Correction (HAC).

4.6. Parameter Stability Test (CUSUM Test)

The CUSUM test, the “cumulative sum” of the residual terms, shows that the parameters are stable over time given that they are within the bounds of the 5% significance value.

Figure 1

Parameter Stability Test Result



Source: Author's Construct from EViews' Output

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The empirical findings indicate that government effectiveness has a significant negative impact on socioeconomic development (proxied by the Human Development Index) while Rule of Law positively and significantly impacts HDI. Furthermore, Oil revenue exhibits a negative but insignificant impact on HDI, while Foreign Direct Investment has a significant negative impact on HDI. The findings of this study align with the Resource Curse Theory, which states that countries with abundant natural resources (Nigeria, in this case) tend to experience economic downturns as a result of high dependence on their natural resources. This study also supports the resource governance theory, which highlights the role of transparency and accountability in resource management.

To address the challenges associated with the resource curse and build a more sustainable and equitable economy, Nigeria should strengthen public-private partnerships, enhance the rule of law, diversify the economy, promote intergenerational equity, and foster regional cooperation. Specifically, there should be a collaborative effort between Nigeria's public sector and private foreign oil companies. The government should establish an independent audit committee that would verify the exact amounts of revenue generated from the oil sector. There should be task forces with representatives from the government, oil companies, and the civil service that will develop policies that channel oil revenues to targeted stakeholders. This can be achieved by enforcing contractual obligations for oil companies to contribute to local development and social welfare programs. Also, this study has established that the rule of law is a strong force in ensuring government effectiveness and accountability. Hence, legal and policy instruments in Nigeria should check resource governing bodies by mandating oil companies to publicly disclose data on revenue generated and allocated. Finally, there should be a proper allocation of resources towards developing and improving other sectors like agriculture, education, health, and infrastructure. By diversifying the economy, there would be a reduction in Nigeria's dependence on oil, leading to a more stable economy.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding
This work was not supported by any funding.

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International Review of Social Sciences Research
Volume 4 Issue 3 September 2024
DOI: https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353103

Decoding love signs: The role of perceived relational red flags in mate selection criteria among Filipino young adults

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Abstract

Abuse and infidelity are common relational conflicts in the Philippines. The prevalence of this growing social problem among Filipinos has also been observed in their calls regarding these warning signs in a romantic partner. Hence, this study explores how these issues influence young adults' mate preferences by examining their lived romantic experiences. Utilizing criterion purposive sampling, ten diverse stories of heterosexuals were evaluated through semi-structured in-depth interviews and interpretative phenomenological analysis to understand the complexity of experiential meanings of participants who have had long-term relationships with their previous ex-lovers and are currently engaged in committed relationships. Participants denoted relational red flags encompassing emotional distance, deception, emotional labor, destruction, and emotional manipulation. These turbulent behavioral patterns deliberately cause the deterioration of their previous relationship while they consider the dimensions of warmth, competence, and attractiveness when choosing an ideal mate. These preferences mentioned are similar to the desirable qualities of their current partners. Findings also assert that relational red flags were perceived as the diametric bases for mate selection, non-negotiable deal breakers, and a lesson to captivate dealmakers. Considering the rising numbers of reported domestic violence victims, including psychological abuse in relationships, this research has compelling implications for Gender and Development and Anti-Violence Against Women. Further, it is also pertinent to counseling psychology practices, especially in the current status and emerging development of Couples Therapy, which primarily handles relationship issues during the pre-marital stage.

Keywords: *counseling psychology, gender and development, long-term relationship, mate preferences, relational red flags*

Article History:

Received: *August 6, 2024*
Revised: *September 6, 2024*
Accepted: *September 7, 2024*
Published online: *September 14, 2024*

Suggested Citation:
Hernandez, N.M., Tampus-Siena, M. & Rungduin, T.T. (2024). Decoding love signs: The role of perceived relational red flags in mate selection criteria among Filipino young adults. *International Review of Social Sciences Research*, 4(3), 123-146. https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353103

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1. Introduction

Humans are inherently social beings, with relationships crucial for survival and well-being because interpersonal bonds provide a sense of attachment that shapes people's lives. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the physiological safety, love/belonging, esteem and self-actualization may all be used to explain why relationships exist (Maslow, 1943; Pichère & Cadiat, 2015). The Harvard Study of Adult Development suggests that building loving relationships is the strongest predictor of life satisfaction. The connections formed with others will reap the benefits of one's happiness and fulfilling life, rooted in the world's most powerful driving force–love (Waldinger & Schulz, 2016).

A "red flag" signifies signals of potential issues in a relationship, indicating whether it is healthy or destructive. While usually seen as any signs of impending danger, White (2016) defines relational red flags as any undesirable qualities such as—characteristics, behaviors, or traits—that a person would not want in a romantic partner. These negative characteristics can be costly to a healthy, stable relationship because they conflict with the individual's expectations, similarities, and compatibility.

In the Philippines, red flags in relationships are frequently discussed on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok, providing a space for individuals to share their frustrations and seek help regarding abuse, manipulation, and cheating issues. This emerging concern is notably prevalent among young adults and has also been apparent in their calls for these warning signs of domestic violence, a reality they face every day (Malig, 2021). According to the Mental Health PH, the most identified observable red flags in relationships involve contempt, suspicion, lack of communication, dishonesty, impatience, rigidness, dependence, conformity, lack of reciprocity, lack of empathy, lack of appreciation, lack of growth, and poor conflict resolution (Mojica, 2022). These warning signs highlight the need for greater awareness and vigilance in addressing destructive relationship conflicts.

While selecting a mate is among the most important life decisions a person will ever make, with a personal set of standards shaping how they envision themselves engaging in healthy romantic relationships without crossing the bare minimum. Mate selection is vital for societal and human development, typically involving complex decision-making (Svenson, 1996; Candolin, 2003; Li et al., 2016). In a qualitative study by Alavi et al. (2014), Malaysian postgraduate students prioritized religious beliefs, mental health, profession, physical attractiveness, and financial status in their mate preferences. These factors were closely followed by intelligence, sociability, physical health, refinement and neatness, physical appearance, education, character, and purity, highlighting both internal and external qualities.

When examining mate choices, scholars often focus on the qualities that individuals value in a mate. However, it is not just about what they want; it is also crucial to consider non-negotiables in relationships (Jonason et al., 2020). Consequently, dealbreakers assist individuals in eliminating potential partners who do not fit their standards. Hence, the emergence of this phenomenon has significant implications, particularly as reports of domestic violence in intimate relationships rise, with many seeking mental health services for relational conflicts. In a study released by the National Demographic and Health Survey conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority in 2022, the data showed that 17.5% of Filipino women aged 15 to 49 experienced "any form of physical, sexual, and emotional violence" from their partners (Tunac, 2024). According to Balahadia et al. (2022), emotional abuse is the most common type witnessed regardless of age, location, civil status, occupation, or educational attainment. Due to its covert nature, it is believed to be challenging to recognize, though it might result in growing distinct psychological issues in later life (Homoroc et al., 2022).

In light of this, the Philippine National Police reported 7,424 incidents of the Anti-Violence Against Women Act violations in 2022 (Sicat, 2023). As revealed by Irish and American studies, negative social interactions and relationships, particularly with intimate partners, heighten the risk of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts (Mental Health Foundation, n.d.). Relational red flags have been continually and inventively addressed worldwide for years despite the lack of empirical research on the nature of the phenomenon. Although there are previous studies about the issue, there is still a notion that has not yet been explored, especially on how these love signals arise in a long-term relationship and how they play a role in mate selection. Thus, this study specifically aims to identify the red flags encountered by Filipino young adults in their long-term romantic experiences, understand how they interpret the emergence of these warning signs, explore gender differences in mate preferences, and ultimately determine the influence of perceived red flags in relationships when choosing an ideal partner based on the mate selection criteria of Filipino young adults.

2. Literature review

2.1. Relational red flags

Relational red flags refer to warning signs in romantic relationships concerning the undesirable disruptive characteristics of an intimate partner (White, 2016). It is also regarded as deal breakers or the behaviors, values, and traits of a mate that a person genuinely disagrees with in a relationship. These are non-negotiable issues that, if raised, would result in the deterioration of commitment. Furthermore, these are also defined as a signal disaster by Anchor Light Therapy Collective (2023), which indicates signs of controlling behavior, unrealistic expectations, unhealthy jealousy, lack of respect for boundaries, dishonesty, deception, unwillingness to compromise, emotional manipulation, disregard for partner's feelings and needs, abusive language, and refusal to take responsibility for actions. Though widely discussed, most of these displeasing qualities can be hard to detect in romantic experiences.

Moreover, Porter et al. (2014) examined any associations between initial encounters with romantic partners that raised warning flags and subsequent patterns of relational conflict. They identified three conflict styles (mutual constructive, demand/withdraw, and mutual avoidance), five red flags (displayed a lack of interest, demonstrated narcissistic-like behavior, was overly sexual, too possessive, or drank too much), and one green flag (did not show any desire). Regression analysis showed that a partner's lack of interest was positively correlated with the demand/withdrawal and mutual avoidant conflict style; while possessiveness was negatively linked to mutual constructive conflict style but positively associated with demand/withdraw and mutual avoidant conflict styles.

On the other hand, the general public's awareness of domestic violence has risen dramatically over time. A recent local study indicated that childhood learned behavior/conditioning, economic stress, and alcohol consumption are the factors that influence men to commit violence against their partners (Tuason & Augusto, 2024). Conversely, Badua et al. (2023) examined the lived experiences of Filipino male victims of domestic violence, and they revealed that men suffered from more emotional abuse (such as low self-image, gaslighting, betrayal, and abandonment) and social abuse (such as social discomfort and coercive control) than physical abuse. They also endured psychological abuse, which led to their self-destructive thoughts. Their narratives provided an in-depth understanding of domestic violence and underscored the need for inclusive support to all survivors.

Mate selection criteria

Mate selection criteria refer to an individual's cue preference for specific attributes or characteristics when choosing an ideal partner (Buss, 1989; Buss & Schmitt, 2019). It contributes substantially to forming romantic relationships by guiding people in evaluating potential mates. Buss and Schmitt (2019) explore the complex and evolving nature of mate preferences and how these preferences manifest in behaviors and relationship dynamics; the findings show that gender roles and contemporary sociocultural changes influence conventional evolutionary mate choices. Gender differences in mate selection were also examined, and the analysis indicates that although there are certain similarities, including the appreciation of kindness and intelligence, there are also clear distinctions, especially in placing significance on traits like physical health and resource acquisition. Men favorably emphasize physical attractiveness in their ideal partner, while women frequently prioritize industriousness and financial capacity in potential mates.

Similarly, Hou et al. (2020) review the role and impact of resources on selecting a partner, and they argue that an individual's choice between luxuries and necessities determines their mate preferences, with financial and time resources playing an essential role in the decision-making process. Moreover, a study by Rafiee (2022) also probed that women place higher importance on psychological and financial factors as they were explicitly more interested in a partner's noble character and ability to manage the family, while men put great value on fertility or a partner's capacity to be a housewife. With this, both men and women concurred that social, familial, cultural, and psychological aspects were vital in selecting a partner despite these gender-based variations in mate preferences.

Bernarte et al. (2016) also conducted a local study on the desirable traits of Filipino youth in mate selection, demonstrating significant disparities in male and female preferences across six trait dimensions: physical, social, personality, skills, achievements, and spirituality. While both genders ranked some attributes equally, women generally valued all traits more than men. Nonetheless, this study indicates that both men and women greatly appreciated the criteria of love in trait desirability in forming and maintaining a meaningful intimate relationship with an ideal partner.

Deal Breakers in Mate Selection

Jonason et al. (2015) investigate and identify relationship deal breakers and how they operate across relationship situations. This research is distinct from other studies that emphasize partner qualities that people seek rather than those they avoid. They link deal breakers with undesirable personality traits, unhealthy lifestyles, and different mating tactics in sexual, romantic, and friendship contexts. Findings suggest that individuals with less constrained mating strategies reported fewer dealbreakers, while those with higher mate value reported more. This study highlights the complex interplay between dealbreakers and desirable traits. It is consistent with adaptive attentional biases in human social cognition, providing a deeper understanding of how individuals navigate social relationships.

Meanwhile, Csajbók et al. (2023) analyzed the factor analytic models of deal breakers in mate selection. They revealed six factors: gross, addicted, clingy, promiscuous, apathetic, and unmotivated; while forty-nine dealbreakers were categorized into unattractiveness, unhealthy lifestyle, undesirable personality traits, differing religious beliefs, limited social status, divergent mating psychologies, and differing relationship goals. Results showed that women rated dealbreakers less desirable, as did those with higher mate value and less interest in casual sex. Being clingy and gross were the most repulsive traits in the short-term relationship, and being apathetic and gross in the long-term relationship. Thus, dealbreaker systems are innate mechanisms people have developed to assist them in avoiding making poor mate choices. It is shaped by their prior experiences and factors like age, attractiveness, sociosexuality, and investment in commitment.

Nevertheless, the Interdependence Theory of Relationships, a social exchange theory, highlights the balance of rewards and costs in interpersonal interactions (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Van Lange & Balliet, 2014). It is a relevant theoretical foundation for understanding the role of relational red flags in mate selection, as it asserts that people evaluate relationships based on perceived benefits and drawbacks, which affect their decision to stay or leave. There are two levels of evaluation: the personal comparison level, in which individuals assess relationship outcomes based on their expectations, and the comparison level for alternatives, where they consider the possible benefits of other relationships. Thus, this theory provides insight into how perceived relationship red flags significantly influence mate selection among Filipino young adults, as these warning signs break the cost-benefit balance essential to maintaining healthy, fulfilling relationships.

3. Methodology

This study employed an interpretive phenomenological approach as it is intended to make sense of the participants' meaning-making in their lived romantic experiences and provide an extensive understanding of their mate selection preferences based on the perceived relational red flags. There were 10 Filipino young adults (5 men and 5 women) selected through criterion purposive and snowball sampling. They are 21 to 26-year-old heterosexual males/females who ended a long-term relationship (at least two years) with an ex-partner and are currently engaged in a committed relationship. As stated in Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, serious romantic companionship usually starts with emerging adults grasping life satisfaction, intimacy, and happiness before settling down and forming a home for a family (Santrock, 2022).

A semi-structured interview guide comprising open-ended questions was designed to comprehensively understand participants’ relationship narratives. To ensure the validity and feasibility of the interview questions, a pilot test was conducted with a one-sample case of a participant as a preliminary study. Before the actual interviews, a screening protocol was also implemented to assess the mental state of the participants. This step was taken to mitigate potential psychological risks the research instrument might induce. The ethical considerations for participants and the significance of their contribution to investigating the phenomenon were also thoroughly explained. With this, the study is committed to ensuring the highest standard of ethical conduct in research by the general principles of respect, beneficence, and justice anchored on the PNU Code of Research Ethics Framework (Rungduin, 2021). Then, the in-depth interview was conducted after they signed the informed consent form, acknowledging they had read and understood the outlined terms and voluntarily permitted participation in the study.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed to identify emerging themes essential for the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the findings. IPA is a double-hermeneutic collaborative qualitative approach as it explores experiential meanings through the interpretive process between the researcher and the participant rather than being a theory-driven analysis (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). The study adopted the six steps of IPA: (1) reading and re-reading, (2) initial noting, (3) developing emergent themes, (4) searching for connections across emergent themes, (5) moving to the following cases, and (6) looking for patterns across issues (Engward & Goldspink, 2020). The obtained data were profoundly interpreted and validated through expert review, peer debriefing, and member checking to ensure credibility and confirmability, reflecting the meanings of their romantic experiences.

4. Findings and Discussion

This research aims to explore the lived romantic experiences of Filipino young adults to examine how perceived red flags in relationships affect their mate selection preferences. Based on the data obtained, the findings are further discussed in the following areas.

Table 1
Overview of lived romantic experience of Filipino young adults

Emerging Themes	Subthemes
1. Perceived relational red flags - Red love signals were perceived as turbulent patterns of destructive attributes and behaviors from an ex-partner that caused the deterioration of their relationship.	Emotional distance Deception Emotional labor Destruction Emotional manipulation
2. Emergence of relational red flags phenomenon - The rise of red flags in relationships stems from the cultural glorification of risky intimate partner traits, which society often uncritically romanticizes.	Distorted perception of love Conditioned response Result of relational tolerance Relationship killer
3. Mate selection criteria - The trait desirability standard of men and women in their mate preferences includes trustworthiness, sociability, capability, assertiveness, and physical appearance.	Warmth Competence Attractiveness
4. Influence of relational red flags on mate selection - Adverse romantic experiences provide valuable insights, particularly in recognizing warning signs in relationships, which is significant for choosing potential partners.	Diametric bases for mate selection criteria Non-negotiable dealbreakers Lesson to captivate dealmakers

4.1. Perceived relational red flags

Emotional distance. It is the detachment of a couple from each other due to unwillingness to express their thoughts and feelings fully. Participants perceived their partners as emotionally distant, which can be seen as stonewalling and passive aggression. Stonewalling is a silent treatment for putting space among couples since it entails declining to engage in communication (Feuerman, 2023). While passive aggression is a behavioral pattern of indirectly expressing negative emotions such as resentment and anger rather than directly addressing them (Hall-Flavin, 2021). This intentional withdrawal during a disagreement can be upsetting, disruptive, and damaging to the partnership.

> *"Sudden blocking without any explanation. It happened repeatedly." —Chweng*
>
> *"She's upset about something. I'm not aware because it's not communicated to me, and sometimes it causes arguments between us." —Ian*

Additionally, insensitivity could be a reason for emotional distancing, as P8-Luwi shared that his ex-girlfriend lacks awareness of anything she would say, not considering his feelings. The findings also revealed that these patterns of emotional distance may be caused by incompatibility or a personality and values mismatch between the couple. As P9-Jon ascertained, differences in views, principles, beliefs, or likes could impede emotional connection in the relationship because they often do not understand each other in many aspects.

Every couple encounters some degree of relationship tension indicators. It is practically difficult to get things done effectively most of the time due to constantly shifting emotions, demands, expectations, and conditions. So, it can be challenging to connect, communicate, and resolve issues within a relationship when one or both parties become emotionally distant. While many factors can lead to distance, common causes are high stress levels, unhappiness in relationships, differing love languages, and emotional needs (Regain, 2024). With this, it is essential to understand that distance usually develops gradually, regardless of whether a partner has withdrawn. Hence, it is crucial for couples to be attentive and sensitive to the signs of emotional distance, as most fail to recognize something wrong with their relationship until they feel considerably detached from their significant other.

Deception. It is the act of intentionally deceiving and betraying a partner about the actual state of a situation. Deception in a relationship is present as withholding information and outright lying, such as infidelity, secrecy, and dishonesty. Based on the in-depth interview, most female participants experienced deception, such as cheating issues with their ex-partners. As P1-Yvonne stated, she never thought about being cheated on until she caught her ex-boyfriend flirting with other girls on social media. Meanwhile, P2-Sayi mentioned that she considered it a red flag if they had to hide their relationship from their parents and friends. With this, being unfaithful means breaking the commitment to their partner, which could be seen even in such a manner of deceiving and keeping secrets.

Deception can accumulate progressively, causing distrust and other relationship conflicts (Knobloch et al., 2021; Stritof, 2023). When deceived or cheated on, some lose faith in the truth of their perceptions and subjective experiences, destroying their sense of reality. Although it is widely frowned upon, infidelity is unquestionably rampant. Given this discrepancy, it is of the utmost importance for every couple to discuss how they intend to handle their cheating issue and assess the extent of openness and honesty in their relationship.

Emotional labor. In relationships, emotional labor is the unhealthy duty governing one's feelings to appease a partner (Yang & Chen, 2021; MasterClass, 2022). It involves egocentrism, codependency, and immaturity. Egocentric partners may lack compassionate empathy as they are consumed by self-absorption, selfishness, and self-centeredness. This could also lead to a lack of compromise as one partner only thinks about oneself, refusing to understand their partner's situation. This belief that one must always be considered and understood and not own up to mistakes could drain the partner enabling it. From the findings, some male participants shared their encounters of egocentrism with their ex-girlfriends.

> *"It was always about her and not fully listening to my heart. She thinks that all girls should be understood, but it's not fair—guys have feelings too." —Jon*

On the other hand, codependency was also experienced by P6-AJ since his ex-girlfriend became emotionally reliant on him. This constant need for attention and care has left him feeling confined and unable to attend to his own needs. Being a codependent partner who is always taking advantage and seeking demand may cause constant anxiety because of the burden for the other half to give care and support. It could also contribute to making their relationship dysfunctional.

> *"She was overly dependent on me and couldn't manage without me. I thought it was cute and clingy at first but over time, I felt trapped because she relied on me for everything and I had to consider her in all my actions." —AJ*

Immaturity is also part of emotional labor, which is a significant reason relationships did not work because of its toll of social expectations and responsibility, as said by P7-Ian since he often had to watch over her ex-girlfriend, acting as a babysitter rather than an equal partner. Being immature causes stress and pressure, leaving the other partner emotionally exhausted. Research reveals that those who engage in more emotional labor than partners have more mental health problems, including higher levels of anxiety and depression (Rusnak, 2024). With this, significant emotional labor places a person under much mental stress, which is detrimental for couples and can result in burnout, conflicts, and even the relationship's downfall.

Destruction. It refers to the turbulent behavioral pattern and toxic dynamics that are detrimental to the well-being of a partner being mistreated. Most participants describe this red flag as destructive behavioral patterns that could kill their relationship, such as disrespect, insecurity, discourtesy, contempt, unreasonable anger, irrational jealousy, privacy invasion, financial irresponsibility, emotional neglect, and poor conflict resolution.

> *"We argued almost every day with short-lived reconciliations and recurrent breakups. He would just walk out and only apologize when he realized how much he hurt me." —Ria*

On the other hand, P4-Chweng revealed that her ex-boyfriend might be insecure about seeing her thrive in the professional world, which impedes their personal growth because of a man's ego. In addition, she also experienced discourtesy and contempt, in which she received negative criticism from her ex-boyfriend, asserting that it made them feel more like rivals. This disruptive behavior also includes unreasonable anger and irrational jealousy of a partner, which makes a partner feel emotionally suffocated and smothered.

Furthermore, privacy invasion in a relationship is a sign of unhealthy boundaries. P10-Mikko implied that his ex-girlfriend monitors his social media accounts, crossing the line of his personal space. While a financially irresponsible partner could also contribute to the relationship turmoil as P7-Ian shared his experience with his ex-girlfriend mishandling their savings due to overspending for purchases and outings. Nonetheless, emotional neglect and poor conflict resolution were also significant causes of the destruction of relationships in which a partner never makes an extensive effort to address concerns after having arguments.

> *"He just made a bare minimum effort to fix things, only communicating through chat and never visiting me, even though he has a car and can go other places. He often sends gifts after making mistakes and apologizes afterward. I've lost count of how many times this cycle repeated. He curses at me, blocks me, then apologizes and sends things to my house. I'm fed up with this situation and have reached my limit." —Chweng*

Although some participants revealed that they talked about their problems and negative traits, no changed behavior or action was exhibited that could resolve the conflict. They also discussed that they withdrew from communicating after heated arguments to the point that the fighting never ended. Kieslich and Steins (2022) imply that discussing tensions in conversation may increase perceived stress, particularly for partners who frequently resort to insistent conflict resolution strategies. This cycle of problematic behavior patterns could lead to the destruction of relationships.

Emotional manipulation. This behavior intends to mentally distort and emotionally exploit their partners to influence and gain advantage. It may be seen as possessiveness, guilt-tripping, controlling, gaslighting, and love bombing. With this, participants mentioned that they had possessive ex-partners who feared losing them. Fundamentally, possessiveness is a form of ownership with a fear of abandonment (Sachdev, 2022). It is rooted in insecurity, which may be why they don't trust their significant others when hanging out with friends. Referencing P2-Sayi, P6-AJ, and P10-Mikko shared their encounters with possessiveness in their previous romantic relationship in which their ex-partners isolated them from their friends because they wanted their sole attention. This deprivation of social connections caused a strain in their relationships.

> *"He doesn't accept my friends and wants to be the only one in my life. This has led to frequent arguments. I keep defending my friends because they were part of my life before we got together." —AJ*

Some participants also experienced guilt-tripping and controlling behavior of their ex-partners, using threats to take advantage of them and get them to do what they wanted. It also involves restricting them from wearing the stylish clothes they want, which triggers ex-partners to get mad and be jealous as experienced by P1-Yvonne. Similarly, gaslighting in relationships has been cultivated to impose doubts or make partners question themselves. It occurs when their partner convinces them they're overlooking or misinterpreting events. To dominate their partners, the gaslighter portrays their convictions and emotions as acceptable truths. In the context of P7-Ian, as his ex-girlfriend, he professes concern about something and accuses him of an act he knows he did not commit. The practice prompts him to mistrust his senses and reality, unsettling him about the scenario.

> *"Besides being controlling, he also shifts the blame and gaslights me into believing I'm at fault when I'm not." —Sayi*

Aside from gaslighting, others are also overwhelmed by love bombing, which entails immense effort and passionate interest to sway a partner through showering gifts, flattery affirmations, and extreme displays of affection and attention to gain control of their partner. Their ex-partners habitually love-bomb them every time after their disruptive arguments and emotional detachment. According to Klein (2023) and Right to Equality (2023), love-bombing and gaslighting are two forms of psychological abuse used by people in intimate relationships. Both are damaging behaviors that can have long-term adverse effects for victims.

4.2. Emergence of relational red flags phenomenon

Relational red flags are perceived as follows:

A distorted perception of love. Relational red flags emerged from the distorted reality of affection in which destructive behaviors have been romanticized. In this instance, P1-Yvonne was warned by her friends about her ex being a playboy. But since he was her first boyfriend and she believed she was his "end-game," she ideally thought she could change him. Most female participants have misguided views of love regarding the red flags of their ex-partners since they usually justify their undesirable and destructive behaviors, which is why it has been normalized and lasted in their long-term relationships.

> *"When he gets jealous of other guys, I romanticize it. It makes me happy because it means he loves me." —Yvonne*
>
> *"I used to justify it. Even though I knew he's lying, I told myself he was probably just afraid to tell me because we might argue again." —Ria*

According to White (2016) and Anchor Light Therapy Collective (2023), red flags in a relationship might be tricky to spot because some of these undesirable traits could make a romantic partner feel special and loved. It has been romanticized because society and culture are permeated with tales of toxic and destructive relationships presented as romantic. Fairytales and romantic stories portrayed in movies and fictional books promote the notion that romantic love entails obsession, passion, or fighting for something or someone that is not even attainable. These misconceptions about romantic love can provoke people to put up with toxic behaviors and even emotional abuse because they think it will result in a long-lasting relationship, even if it is more likely to sabotage their mental health.

A conditioned response. This notion is the learned behavior developed throughout the relationship in response to mistreatment. Some participants admit that they also possess relational red flags, a learned behavior that has developed throughout their toxic relationships in response to the insistent negative experiences induced by them. Their partners heavily influenced their undesirable traits during their long-term relationships, which enabled the turbulent pattern of disruptive behaviors. As P1-Yvonne and P10-Mikko shared, they were conditioned to respond with the red flags of their ex-partners by imposing the same punishment and restriction on them.

> *"I'm very strict and don't want him interacting with other women, especially those I don't know. He's the same—it feels suffocating. Since he's like that with me, I do the same to him." —Yvonne*
>
> *"When we argued, we started forbidding each other from going to events with friends, like we were just getting back at each other." –Mikko*

These social exchange responses are supported by the Interdependence Theory of Relationships which suggests that interacting people shape one another's experiences (Van Lange & Balliet, 2014). Participants' learnt undesirable behaviors stem from the mutual influence between partners. The toxic dynamics in their relationships established a cycle of reciprocating control and punishment, reinforcing destructive behavioral patterns. As Yvonne and Mikko stated how they modeled their partners' restrictive actions, fostering the nature of mistrust and dominance. These costs outweighed the benefits, resulting in their tumultuous, dysfunctional relationship.

As a result of relational tolerance. It is the outcome of persistently tolerating the undesirable behaviors of a partner and still unquestioningly loving them. Since most participants tolerated the undesirable behaviors of their ex-partners, it seems to be normalized in the relationship. They had the choice to end their commitment but continued to love their ex-partners blindly. Though this does not equate to approval they acknowledge, it will never stop until they allow it. Findings revealed that most female participants tolerated the cheating issues in their previous relationship.

> *"He didn't care about my feelings because he knew I wouldn't leave him. He got used to always being forgiven after every time he cheated, even when he didn't deserve it." —Coreen*

Related to the study by Leyson et al. (2022), which sought to gain a more thorough understanding of the lived experiences of Filipino young adults in a tumultuous relationship and the factors that contributed to their decision to stay, it was found that young adults persisted because they felt guilty for wanting to end it and believed the problematic phase would pass. They thought they had found the one, and so they had given compassion for their partner. However, they have been mistreated and have gone through psychological, emotional, and verbal abuse as a result of being in a toxic relationship. All of these factors contribute to the decline of their mental health.

As a relationship killer. It can be described as turbulent behavioral patterns in which people turn against one another's attempts to form emotional connections, which could deliberately cause the deterioration of a relationship. The perceived relational red flags of the participants, such as emotional distance, deception, emotional labor, destruction, and emotional manipulation, contribute to the relationship turmoil that caused their breakup.

> *"My final straw was when I broke up with her because she was too dependent. Even at family gatherings, she expected me to keep chatting and cater her concerns." –AJ*

Participants also mentioned that their encounters with red flags have a tremendous toll on their mental and emotional well-being as they experience stress, emotional trauma, relationship anxiety, self-gaslighting, emotional exhaustion, self-isolation, and depression. P2-Sayi mentioned that she still experiences relapse occurrences and projects trauma from her ex-boyfriend. Participants also experience suicidal tendencies, low self-esteem, and a loss of sense of self or identity crisis after the breakup. On a positive note, participants also narrated how they focused on coping strategies to heal their heartache. P4-Chweng and P10-Mikko pamper themselves by doing everything they could not do in their previous tumultuous relationship. Participants also noted that they indulge in routines that could divert their attention, such as stress-eating, working out, hanging out with friends, shopping, praying, exploring, and self-caring. They go out to spend time for themselves, allowing them to feel liberating happiness again within their inner peace.

Despite everything that happened, participants still value the lessons instilled by their previous long-term relationships as they make rules and expectations for their following commitment that they would never tolerate gaslighting and ignore deal breakers in relationships. They also realized the importance of practicing self-compassion, raising standards in choosing a partner, providing a sense of comfort, and setting healthy boundaries even by considering getting close to significant other's friends. Moreover, compromising in a relationship and fostering empathy and understanding with a lover could help them achieve their personal growth.

Participants have grasped coping strategies helpful in their healing as they regained themselves with self-preservation and self-love. This is supported by the study of Crudo-Capili (2015) about lived experiences in romantic relationships of selected women, which concludes that women choose to leave a toxic relationship that leads to their happiness. After being cheated, hurt, and lied to by their partners, women who view relationships as essential to their well-being realize that they must end it to be whole again. This compassion for oneself reminds them not to give everything to their partner to please them since it wards off their way to self-actualize.

4.3. Mate selection criteria

Warmth. It is the dimension that captures perceived intent traits of trustworthiness and sociability. Most women prefer the warmth traits of a man, such as reserved, courteous, reliable, gentle, humorous, considerate, empathetic, kind, caring, communicative, jolly, supportive, and faithful. Similarly, most men prefer the warmth traits of a woman, such as kind-hearted, empathetic, sincere, demure, religious, compassionate, jolly, affectionate, honest, and soft-spoken.

> *"I prefer someone who doesn't yell, who is gentle, and who corrects issues privately rather than calling me out in public." —Ria*
>
> *"I want someone who understands my feelings and is willing to lower her pride. She should also be able to adjust for me, as a relationship requires mutual consideration." —Mikko*

Competence. It reflects traits that are related to ability or capability and assertiveness. Women also prefer competence dimensions that reflect traits of forthcoming, responsible, composed, ambitious, mature, money-wise, accountable, family-oriented, hardworking, practical, and inquisitive. Men also considered their desired women's perceived competence ability, such as intelligence, perseverance, mindfulness, maturity, open-mindedness, caring, financial responsibility, and boldness.

> *"Aside from being good with budgeting and handling finances, I also want someone responsible with household chores." —Coreen*
>
> *"I prefer someone who is smart and strives for excellence in what she loves doing. I'm attracted to conservative and modest women who think and act thoughtfully. I also appreciate someone who can regulate their thinking and emotions." —Luwi*

Warmth and competence were incorporated from the two universal dimensions of human social cognition by Fiske et al. (2007). According to the theory, the warmth dimension captures traits related to perceived intent, such as friendliness, helpfulness, sincerity, trustworthiness, and morality. In contrast, the competence dimension reflects traits related to perceived ability, such as intelligence, skill, creativity, and efficacy.

Attractiveness. It encompasses the quality of physical attributes that are pleasing and appealing to the beholder. The mate selection criteria of female and male participants also include those they perceive attractive. Physical attributes are considered, as P1-Ria has a certain preference for a tall and chinito man. Some male participants also prefer attractive traits of a woman, such as being pretty, tall, fair-skinned, and physically appealing. Moreover, participants also asserted that their mate preferences are similar to the desirable qualities of their current partners. As they describe the present state of their relationship, they note that most of them are thriving merrily with their healthy, committed serious connection. Thus far, their bond is going well as they described their love life as comforting, God-sent, happy, healthy, and blessed. And even based on how they narrate and describe their experience with their present lover, they seem content and delighted, which radiates with their positive outlook on their love story.

4.4. Influence of relational red flags on mate selection

The participants highlighted the following when it comes to how they see relational red flags in mate selection.

Diametric bases for mate selection criteria. The perceived relational red flags are standards for choosing their ex-partners' opposite traits. More so, participants mentioned that they do not want to experience tumultuous relationships again, so their perceived relational flags became their basis for being wary of those undesirable traits in choosing an ideal partner.

> *"I don't want to experience what I went through before. That's why I'm looking for a partner who is the opposite of what I experienced in the past." —Sayi*

Non-negotiable dealbreakers. Relational red flags are unassailable traits that one should be wary of when choosing a potential partner in order not to experience them again. In this aspect, participants tend to avoid experiencing a toxic relationship again by checking the non-negotiables in a relationship before settling on commitment again. With this, they are encouraged to inspect the background history of past relationships of their potential partners before as a preventive measure for possible consequences of committing to another intimate relationship.

A lesson to captivate dealmakers. The perceived red flags in relationships are valuable experiences that allow participants to choose wisely for their ideal mates. These provide significant insights into how to maturely handle a new romantic relationship with a potential mate. Participants want to commit to someone they would marry in the future with desirable traits; hence, these red flags should be considered to save people from another possible heartbreak.

> *"I learned from my past, so after getting hurt, I told myself that my next relationship would be the last and would be with the person I plan to marry." — Jon*

Participants also signify the benefits of their current relationship to their life and well-being. They also claimed that they feel a sense of tranquility, happiness, satisfaction, physical wellness, support, inspiration, motivation, confidence, personal growth, and self-compassion encompassing self-care and self-love. Furthermore, participants also shared that they have foreseeable plans and expectations with their current lovers, which involve settling down in the future, growing and achieving dreams together, getting work, saving up, traveling and getting married in the future, and blissfully building their own family. Moreover, they also asserted that God-centeredness, trust, respect, communication, understanding, compassion, compromise, patience, commitment, and assurance are the fundamental keys to a healthy and fulfilling relationship that they look forward to in the promising future.

5. Conclusion

This interpretative phenomenological study sought to explore the lived romantic experiences of young Filipino adults that emphasize the red flags they encountered and how these contribute to the selection of their mate preferences to establish a significant healthy relationship. Findings indicate that young adults perceive red flags in their previous long-term relationships involving emotional distance, deception, emotional labor, destruction, and emotional manipulation. The relational red flags phenomenon emerged as a distorted perception of love, a conditioned response, a result of relational tolerance, and a relationship killer. Despite the unfortunate romantic encounters in the past, participants still value the insights they have learned as they make standards and expectations for their succeeding commitment. While both men and women prefer the attributes of trustworthiness, sociability, capability, assertiveness, and physical appearance of their ideal mates., these preferences, especially the warmth and competence traits, are also similar to the desirable qualities of their current partners. Hence, it evidently shows that perceived relational red flags influence their mate selection criteria with the motivation to strive for a fulfilling relationship that significantly contributes to happiness and life satisfaction.

Understanding the significance of romantic relationships in one's life requires a thorough study of the red flag phenomenon to grasp its notable relevance to interpersonal relationships, mainly in behavioral and social sciences. This will considerably help individuals be aware of their partner's negative traits detrimental to their general well-being. Ignoring these warning signs could result in long-term misery from unhealthy and abusive relationships. Considering the surging number of reported domestic violence victims, including the psychological abuse of an intimate partner, this research has substantial implications for Anti-Violence Against Women, constituting a terrible violation of human rights. This concern is one of the serious issues for public health as it strongly exemplifies gender inequality by specifically attacking women due to societal stigma and discrimination. Hence, it is crucial for emerging adults to be vigilant of relational red flags to save themselves before settling down and forming a home for a family. Having a good set of standards in a potential mate also encompasses taking into account the gender roles and expectations of both parties to attain the inherent value of gender equality. Above all, this study is also pertinent to counseling psychology practices, especially in the current status and emerging development of Couples Therapy that most handles relationship issues. This substantial notion has various empirical implications, especially since it thoroughly highlights the importance of relationships in social and health psychology.

This study is limited to the experiences of heterosexuals, and so it recommends exploring the lived romantic encounters of homosexuals. It also highly suggests investigating the factors that contribute to the problematic behaviors that cause the deterioration of a relationship, specifically family history, parental involvement, peer influence, and physical proximity. It is also encouraged to determine the red flags encountered by middle-aged adults who have been separated due to broken marriages. Lastly, it is of further interest to highlight the lived romantic experiences of married couples and analyze the underlying factors that could affect their marital relationships. In such a manner, this could provide valuable insights and understanding of other relationship dynamics, focusing on the marital and familial relations that have a meaningful impact on improving Family Therapy in counseling practices.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding
This work was not supported by any funding.

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International Review of Social Sciences Research
Volume 4 Issue 3 September 2024
DOI: https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353106

Parental role and responsibilities in preschool distance learning environment

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of parents in the home schooling of their preschool children during the Covid-19 pandemic. It focused on the parental roles and responsibilities as parent-teachers, and the support they received from the school. Purposive sampling was used in this qualitative study in order to choose participants who had firsthand experience with preschool distance learning during the pandemic. Twenty parents from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds made up the sample, ensuring a thorough comprehension of diverse viewpoints. Based on the findings, parents played an active role in the learning process during the distance learning approach, facilitating and guiding their children through the modular lessons. To promote children's safe attachment, social-emotional competence, and cognitive development, they were expected to exhibit more positive emotions and greater levels of professional competence while doing remote learning. On the other hand, parents encountered variety of difficulties with distance learning, including the virtual environment, instruction delivery, unsatisfactory learning outcomes, challenges with the use and accessibility of technology, personal issues with health, stress, and their child's learning style. To ensure parents receive the resources they need, there must be strong collaboration and open communication between the school and parents. The results imply that planning for blended learning models in the long run should assist and ready parents to work as co-teachers.

Keywords: *parents role, responsibility, challenges, instructions, distance learning*

Article History:

***Received**: May 27, 2024*
***Revised**: July 24, 2024*
***Accepted**: July 26, 2024*
***Published online**: September 15, 2024*

Suggested Citation:
Amistad, J.A.G. (2024). Parental role and responsibilities in preschool distance learning environment. *International Review of Social Sciences Research*, 4(3), 147-165. https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353106

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1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced an unprecedented reliance on distance learning at all educational levels; young children in preschool are particularly impacted, as their special needs regarding direct adult interaction and their early developmental stages present particular difficulties (Joo & Lee, 2022; Khera et al., 2023; Oppermann et al., 2024; Irwin et al., 2022; Shapiro & Bassok, 2022; Jalongo, 2021). The health crisis has made children more averse to online learning at home (Dong et al., 2020). Empirical evidence showed that families have found it difficult and problematic to adopt online learning during the pandemic (Dong et al., 2020; Chifari et al., 2021). In addition, parents' attitude toward online learning is negative when it comes to supporting their children's education at home (Dong et al., 2020). While it expected that parents extend support for their child's learning at home and make their home the children's first learning environment, the experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic showed otherwise (dos Santos Laguna et al., 2021; Lantsoght et al., 2021; Shahali et al., 2023; de Jong et al., 2022; Whaley & Pfefferbaum, 2023; Mifsud, 2021).

The roles of parents have grown in the context of remote learning, and they must quickly adopt new technologies and instructional strategies (Knopik et al., 2021; Osorio-Saez et al., 2021). Parental adjustment to these new roles was found to be quick, and frequently without adequate resources or support (Garbe et al., 2020). While studies showed parental role on the online learning during the Covid-19 (Alshaboul et al., 2024; Jayanti & Indrakurniawan, 2022; Shal, 2024), only few studies focused on the lived experiences of parents as teachers to their pre-school children (i.e. Rohita & Krisnawati, 2022; Tish et al., 2023; De Dios, 2022; Arnilla et al., 2023). Majority of the studies focused on the challenges faced by parents on homeschooling their children but not on their main role as teachers to their children. Hence, this research study aimed to explore the lived experiences of parents as teachers to their preschool children during the Covid-19 pandemic. It specifically described the parental roles and responsibilities, support received from school, strategies applied in teaching and the coping mechanisms in dealing with distance learning.

The role of parents in educating their children has evolved dramatically since the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Rousoulioti et al. (2022), there is a need to emphasize the importance of active parental involvement during emergency situations and beyond. Hence, this study provides empirical evidence on the strategies applicable to parents in dealing with their preschool children in an online learning environment.

2. Theoretical Framework

This research was anchored on the academic socialization theory (Puccioni, 2015) and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Parent's academic socialization includes parents' attitudes, values, goals, expectations, beliefs about education, and the opportunities and activities they make available to their children (Puccioni, 2015). On the other hand, the ecological model notes that children's development occurs in several overlapping contexts (e.g., microsystems) and stresses that these contexts need to work well together (mesosystems) to optimize children's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Parental involvement is an essential factor for student achievement in traditional school settings. In fact, parent support has significantly contributed to learners' success even in a virtual learning environment (Borup et al., 2014; Liu & Cavanaugh, 2011; Lee & Figueroa, 2012; Makrooni, 2019; Woofter, 2019). However, parents must take on new and unfamiliar roles, and responsibilities as their children participate in online education while experiencing increasing instructional responsibility for their child's learning (Liu et al., 2010). As a result, parents often need help understanding their role concerning their children's online learning (Boulton, 2008; Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2009).

Feelings of parents towards remote learning are mixed. Some parents feel more connected to their children's schoolwork, while others see this as an additional burden (Selwyn et al., 2011). Sorensen's (2012) study revealed the most challenging and favorable aspects of online learning for parents, keeping their children on schedule while completing their coursework as the former and interactions with the child's online teachers as the latter. In addition, schools and teachers need more guidance to improve the parental engagement experience, especially with the effective use of technology (Goodall, 2016). Challenges that may impact parental involvement in remote learning settings include economic resources (Hohlfeld et al., 2010), lack of internet access (Hollingworth et al., 2011), lack of interest in using technology (Beckman et al., 2019), and having low digital self-efficacy (Povey et al., 2016). Research done on pre-pandemic virtual school learning environments shows that parents become learning coaches for students who spend a significant amount of their day online (Hasler Waters & Leong, 2014). When surveyed, teachers have identified the following parental scaffolds as helpful to the virtual learner: organizing and managing students' schedules, (b) nurturing relationships and interactions, (c) monitoring and motivating student engagement, and (d) instructing students as necessary (Povey et al., 2016).

In order to ensure that their children are engaged in and participating in online learning activities, parents play a critical role in managing the home education environment for their children. Teachers and parents should collaborate to this end (Kim, 2020). According to Yan (2020), today's parents are frequently concerned with the diversions and responsibilities of daily living. Some parents cannot be involved in or frequently engage in their children's activities due to limited finances, restrictive work hours, and language barriers. Parents need to prepare to do the role of a teacher since the home turns into a classroom. Many parents need help to perform this task, especially those with limited education and resources. Moreover, parents or guardians are educational partners with teachers. They function as home facilitators and para-teachers who guide students in responding to the modular lessons during modular learning (Manlangit, 2020). The parental duty in this regard includes direct responsibility for all aspects of children's conduct and financial liability for their misconduct or negligence. Therefore, in the new normal, parents and other caregivers must play a more significant role in their child's learning and development than they have in the past, given that the majority of education now takes place in the home environment rather than on school campuses, without the physical presence of teachers.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative research design, particularly phenomenological method to describe the lived experiences of parents as preschool teachers during the pandemic. According to Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022), phenomenological design involves three aspects; the aim of the research, philosophical assumptions and research strategies. In this research, the lived experiences of the parents as teachers to their preschool children during pandemic were described.

3.2. Participants of the study

The participants of the study were the parents of preschool children enrolled in two elementary schools in the Philippines during the academic year 2021-2022. There were thirteen (13) parents from one school and six (6) parents from another school. The participants were chosen purposively; only parents with preschool children during the distance learning who consented for survey or interview were included. The objectives of the study were clearly explained to the parents and they agreed to share their lived experiences in their role as teacher in the homeschooling of their children.

3.3. Data gathering instrument

The study aimed to conduct face to face interview but due to the pandemic restrictions during the data gathering it was not given permission. Instead of the interview, the questionnaire was sent to the participants through Google Forms for them to answer. The questionnaire dwells on their roles and responsibilities in the distance learning environment, school support to parents in performing these responsibilities, strategies used in teaching their children, challenges and difficulties encountered in teaching, and mechanisms in dealing with the challenges. The questions were open-ended and semi-structured, which was originally intended for interview. The interview questions were submitted for validation by an expert in a qualitative study.

One (1) of the participants opted to have an interview due to lack of time. During the one-on-one interview, the researcher was able to probe on the answers and ask follow-up questions to the participant. With the participant’s written consent, the interview video was recorded. This video allowed the researcher to observe nonverbal cues, such as verbal intonation, eye contact, facial expressions, interpersonal distance, touch, and gestures. Since participant combined the local Ilokano, Tagalog dialect, and English, video recordings were transcribed into the source language before translating into English. Transcripts were consistently checked against translated interpretations during analysis.

3.4. Data analysis

The researcher first set aside prejudgments and presuppositions so that the focus could be directed to the participants in the study. The researcher then delved into the information to thoroughly understand its depth and scope. To streamline and concentrate on particular data properties, the researcher utilized codes. After that, codes were examined to see if they seemed to form a meaningful pattern (Nowell et al., 2017). The information was then condensed into a more comprehensible group of essential ideas encompassing the text.

The tale each motif communicates was then identified in a thorough study that the researchers wrote. The report's final analysis and write-up were then completed. The analysis results ultimately determined the significance of everyone's lived experiences. Included were direct quotes from the participants. Additionally, longer quotations were used to help readers understand the original writings. The researcher consulted literature to make a convincing case for their topic selections and support the idea behind the story they had created.

Thematic design involves several steps: data collection, transcription, coding, and analysis. During the coding phase, the researcher identified and labeled relevant data segments, such as phrases, sentences, or paragraphs related to a particular theme or concept. The researcher then aggregated these codes into larger categories or themes, which describe the overarching patterns that emerge from the data.

3.5. Ethical considerations

Protecting human participants through applying relevant ethical norms is essential in any research study. In line with this, permission from the School Principal was requested before the data gathering commenced. A letter of invitation was sent before conducting the interview and uploading the questions through Google Forms. Moreover, the questionnaire includes the explanation of the study's goals, and the approximate time required to complete the questionnaire. In addition, the interview with one participant was recorded with written agreement of the participant. For privacy, video record was safely kept. The anonymity of the participants was strictly maintained throughout the entire study.

4. Results and Discussion

The following themes have emerged from the gathered data. Using thematic analysis, codes were used to diagnose the general answer, while the parents' statements from questionnaire and interview were analyzed carefully.

4.1. Parental roles and responsibilities during the distance learning environment

The participants described their roles and responsibilities during the distance learning. The parent became a co-teacher, assistant, supporter, and provider. It suggests that parents were expected to take on multiple responsibilities to facilitate their child's education while learning from home. As schools and educational institutions transitioned to online learning, parents had to step up and take on additional responsibilities to ensure their children continued learning effectively. The roles mentioned - co-teacher, assistant, supporter, and provider parent - suggest that parents had to be involved in various aspects of their child's education, such as helping them with their schoolwork, providing resources and materials, and offering emotional support. Concerns about learner motivation, accessibility, learning outcomes, and responsibility balancing were expressed by parents (Garbe et al., 2020).

They further described their responsibilities as challenging, demanding, and requiring time management. A role that is very challenging for all parents during the time of distance learning. They mentioned it was difficult and needed time management before teaching their children. Working parents and housewives mentioned that they had a significant adjustment in their time to manage to guide their children with other tasks like work and chores at home. They struggle to keep their children focused during online classes using gadgets, internet connection, and time to supervise them. Parent 4 said, *"It's really hard to be a teacher and at the same time a full-time housewife… it's all online learning."* They are likely referring to the challenges of balancing both responsibilities; preparing and delivering lessons as a teacher and taking care of household responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for other children. This is further agreed by parent 9, stating that *"Balancing chores, work, and my child's school is extremely difficult.*" Juggling household chores, work responsibilities, and managing the child's schooling is a highly challenging task. The participant expressed the difficulty of managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously. They likely feel overwhelmed and struggle to balance their domestic duties, professional obligations, and parental responsibilities. The everyday struggles many working parents face, particularly mothers, include the expectation to manage household responsibilities, work commitments, and childcare simultaneously. In addition, the online classes added to the challenges in adapting to new technology as parents have negative opinions about online learning and prefer traditional teaching methods (Dong et al., 2020).

Parent 5 further said, "*Their responsibility as teachers is very challenging."* The challenges that come with the role of a teacher include but are not limited to lesson planning, student engagement, behavior management, and student assessment. Parent 7 agreed that *"It is a little bit challenging.''* The sentiment is further shared by Parent 8 that his responsibility is *"Very heavy responsibility because it requires extra time and effort."* The participant acknowledges the weight of this responsibility and potentially indicates that it could be overwhelming. In addition, a parent-as-teacher position can significantly affect parent-child relationships, resulting in frustration for both parent and child. This dynamism usually happens after their online classes with their teachers. With online learning, parents and guardians assume responsibility as an integral component of the child's learning environment. They must be a part of the team responsible for the child's educational experience. Hence, parents play notable roles in their children's studies in blended learning.

4.2. School support in performing parental responsibilities

It was the school's duty to give the parents all the necessary help and guidance on how they would teach their children at home. Consistent follow-ups, reminders, and coordination with parents and teachers were done. This means the school regularly communicated with the parents, providing consistent follow-ups and reminders. Parents were generally satisfied with the level of support provided by school districts and agreed with the school closure policy, although there were some areas of struggle (Garbe et al., 2020). The school provided recorded videos and meetings online through Google Meet and Zoom. Parents mentioned that schools are very understanding when accomplishing requirements; they give enough instructions and activities. Books and modules were given for the children to answer and practice to enhance their lessons. Parent 3 said, *"They give us specific instructions and activities that we will teach and help our children."* while Parent 5 stated that *"They discuss it during their zoom class."* The discussion is a regular or planned part of their class curriculum or agenda. This indicates active engagement in the class, which was also attended by the parents. Moreover, Parent 7 even supports this by saying, *"The teacher is giving an advanced topic for the learners."* By introducing advanced topics, the teacher challenges the students to expand their knowledge and develop new interests or skills.

Parents are a critical component in the relationship between school and students. The significance of good and healthy cooperation between parents and other teachers is a well-known and extensively investigated topic in education. Several studies have demonstrated that parent-teacher collaboration enhances children's academic achievement, work habits, social skills, and emotional well-being (i.e. Msacky et al., 2024; Luna & del Valle, 2023). Epstein (2001) asserts numerous reasons for forming and establishing a partnership between the school, the family, and the community. The primary purpose of this is to assist students in achieving academic success. Other reasons include improving a school's climate and programs, developing parental skills and leadership, connecting families to others in the school and community, and assisting teachers with their work. These reasons emphasize the importance of parents' active role in their children's education and maintaining a solid and positive relationship with schools.

4.3. Parental strategies in teaching children

Though most are not knowledgeable on how to teach their child formally, they did their best to use some strategies for their child. Aside from the support and help from the school, parents were further taught how to approach their children. The participants mentioned time management and a reward system.

Parent 1 answered that the *"reward system or suhol (bribe)"* is useful in dealing with their children. They said that using a reward system or offering a bribe can effectively manage their relationship with their children, implying positive reinforcement must be utilized to enhance good behavior in children. They may view giving rewards or incentives as more constructive than punishment or discipline. However, the word "bribe" may further suggest a potentially negative connotation, implying that the reward system could be seen as an attempt to manipulate the child's behavior rather than genuinely encouraging positive actions.

Other parents further shared that to minimize the use of gadgets, arts and crafts were further used to enhance the activities and to keep them busy. This is based on the common answers of parents: *"I include art activities for my kids to have fun while learning."* Art-based activities may further help enhance children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Additionally, art activities can help foster children's self-esteem and confidence, which may positively impact their overall academic performance. A similar response was further given by Parent 5, stating, *"I show my child colorful crafts or visuals in giving examples because it attracts him to listen."* By using colorful crafts and visuals to give examples, they can capture their child's attention and keep them focused on what they are saying. They recognize the importance of engaging their child's attention and acknowledge that visual aids are effective tools to use. The participants' emphasis on using visuals to communicate with their child suggests that they are attuned to their child's learning needs and are taking steps to create a positive learning environment.

Additionally, with the help of technology, downloaded educational games and videos were also sued. Parent 3 said, *"Optimizing the use of technology by letting her watch educational videos and play educational games online."* They propose allowing the child to watch educational videos and play online games. As a parent, teacher, or caregiver who wants to enhance a child's learning experience through technology, they recognize that technology can be a valuable tool for learning and want to take advantage of it. They hope to engage the child's interest by suggesting educational videos and games while imparting knowledge and skills, reflecting positive attitude towards technology and its potential to support learning. Parent 7 agreed, *"I include playing and watching educational videos to incorporate the topics the learner needs to learn."* Using videos, they can cover various topics and make the learning process more engaging and interactive. However, children's digital learning has also been debated and criticized (Radesky et al., 2016; Jiang & Monk, 2015), concerning online risks and dangers, addiction to videos, social isolation, and physical health issues.

This study showed that using positive parenting technique is an excellent way to teach children discipline and morals, which is every parent's dream. However, it is a challenging feat. Furthermore, knowing that the parent-child relationship is a two-way street is essential. In other words, a partnership is needed between a parent and their child. When parents acquire effective parenting skills, they are empowered to bridge the generation gap. As parents understand the balance between setting limits, encouraging, and discouraging, their children will become better learners.

4.4. Challenges and difficulties encountered during teaching

The participants' typical response revealed that challenges and difficulties encountered while teaching their children are the following; attitude problems, time management, difficulty in explaining, lack of focus, and emotional problems.

Parents 1 and 4 said their children usually get tired and do not want to do anything. This behavior may occur at a specific time of day, such as late afternoon or evening, or after prolonged periods of stimulation or activity. They may be concerned about their child's lack of interest or motivation, which could indicate underlying issues such as fatigue, stress, or boredom. To address this, parents and caregivers may need to adjust their expectations and schedules, and offer breaks downtime, or new and engaging activities to keep their children interested and motivated. Additionally, it may be helpful to identify any underlying factors contributing to the child's fatigue, such as poor nutrition, lack of sleep, or health issues.

They further added *"We always have misunderstanding. They were very lazy to do modules or simple tasks. They cannot easily understand the topic sometimes, and I have to read and teach it once again for them to understand."* As they struggle with comprehension, they had to invest additional time and effort to re-teach the material. On the other hand, Parents 3 and 7 said that "*time management*" and the "*the child is easily distracted due to the home environment*." The child's home environment impacts their ability to focus and complete schoolwork. One parent further agreed, *"The only difficulty I encounter is the lack of time to teach the learners due to my responsibilities as a mom and my work."* They express that their roles as mothers and workers need help finding time to teach effectively. This situation may cause frustration or stress on the part of the parents, balancing their responsibilities with their professional duties. In the context of teaching, this can significantly impact students, who may need more instruction and attention to succeed. It further highlights the importance of support systems for working parents, such as flexible schedules, affordable childcare, and understanding employers.

Parents 4 and 5 further shared that children cannot easily understand the topic. They have to read and teach it once again for them to understand. The children's level of comprehension is less developed than that of adults as they are still developing their cognitive abilities as learners and may require extra support to comprehend complex topics fully. By recognizing the unique learning needs of children, educators, and parents can help ensure they receive the support they need to succeed academically. Additionally, parents 11, 12, and 13 agreed that the main problem with their children is the need for more attention and focus. Children's lack of attention and focus can be related to various factors, such as ADHD, anxiety, or excessive screen time. It can further be a symptom of underlying emotional or behavioral issues that may require professional help. Additionally, a lack of attention and focus can have negative impacts on a child's academic and social development, as well as their self-esteem. It is common for parents to struggle with their child's attention and focus, and it is crucial to address these issues on time. Seeking professional help and implementing strategies to support a child's ability to concentrate can improve their overall well-being and success. Some parents need more patience, time, attention, and approaches to keep their children motivated when it is time for modules or online classes. Some children do not follow or obey their parents because it is still a big difference when a real teacher is there to teach them.

These experiences are the similar findings of Wang et al. (2020). When parents and children work together on learning activities, they can spend much more time with each other. In these situations, parents can be a source of comfort to help ease their children's pain and worry and can talk to them to help them feel better. It has been suggested that parents should be taught how to help their kids feel better when things are uncertain. Hence, an online schooling system with parental support guidelines could help improve the bond between children and their parents. On the other hand, distance learning using networks or online learning has many challenges faced by parents. Parents at home replace the role of teachers in school; teachers only guide children to learn through materials or teaching materials prepared through learning media for students. Parents are the ones who play an active role at home to teach their children to learn. Challenges faced by parents in online learning, such as limitations and media resources, limited time, and mastery of technology, demand that parents must change and follow through, especially in the post-modern era. Parents can no longer fully assign responsibility to the teacher in learning activities; they must be able to guide, help and direct their children so that they stay caught up in learning (Esplana, 2022).

4.5. Mechanisms in dealing with challenges during distance learning

To deal with the challenges, parents revealed the following: rest time for their children, playing with them, and time management.

Parents 1 and 13 said that they let their children rest and then get their attention because they believe it is paramount to give some breaks to their children. Parents understand the importance of giving their children time to rest and recharge before engaging with them again. This could allow their children to have some alone time or engage in a calming activity before discussing important matters or having a conversation. Allowing children to rest before seeking their attention is fundamental to positive parenting. By prioritizing their children's well-being and needs, parents set an excellent example for them and promote healthy habits. Taking breaks can improve focus and concentration, reduce stress, and increase productivity. This approach encourages open communication and can help foster a positive parent-child relationship. It is an effective way for parents to support their children's development and success.

Other parents said *"Creating a play or game that can help my child learn as well as have fun; I want to design a game or activity that will be entertaining and educational for my child."* They recognize the importance of making education fun to encourage their child's interest and enthusiasm. Further, creating a game or play that combines learning and fun is an excellent way to motivate children to learn. By incorporating play and enjoyment into educational activities, children are more likely to engage with the material and retain the information they have learned. This approach can be especially effective for young children who may still need to develop a strong interest in learning. Designing a game or play that combines learning and fun can encourage children to engage with educational material and develop a lifelong love of learning. This is further supported by parent 4, saying, *"Setting their own time for study and time for play is my solution."* They normally balance study and play, which may be particularly relevant to children. A good rhythm of their routine is a big help; they know the time for study and play. As parents maintain patience with their children, taking breaks is critical for them too. Parents should give themselves some space when the stress of their child's schooling threatens to overwhelm them. If their child is too young to be left alone, they must take a 15-minute breather in another room or step outside for a few minutes to clear their head.

5. Conclusion

This study finds that parents, who served as facilitators or at-home teachers, were extremely important to their kids' education during distance learning. However, the virtual environment, managing the delivery of instruction, guaranteeing high-quality learning outcomes, technological difficulties, worries about their child's well-being, stress, and different learning styles were some of the identified difficulties parents had to overcome. Similarly, parents had difficulty managing their time while juggling their roles in their children's education and their personal and professional obligations.

While the study emphasizes the necessity of parental role in children’s education, it also highlights the crucial impact of parental support to the children’s educational success. In the post-Covid educational setting, parents are expected to maintain the same amount of support as teacher to their children. Hence, schools are expected to provide sessions to equip parents with necessary skills and knowledge handling and helping their children learn effectively. As an extension of students' learning, schools need to ensure that homes also provide a conducive learning environment to the children. It is imperative that parent-teacher relationship is enhanced, communication is kept open and collaboration is emphasized.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding
This work was not supported by any funding.

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