

Needs Assessments for Adolescent Girls Transitioning from Institutional Care Facilities in Zimbabwe: A Sustainable Livelihood Approach

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Abstract

Transition of adolescents from care facilities to independent living arrangements has been a topical issue in the childcare and protection sector. Mechanisms and systems must be implemented to ensure seamless transitions. This mixed-methods study, part of a broader evaluation of adolescent girls transitioning from institutional care in Harare, Zimbabwe, employed the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach to assess the livelihood needs of 32 girls from two institutions. Data were collected from 16 adolescents still in care facilities and 16 who had exited care facilities. Data collection involved semi-structured face-to-face interviews with all participants and two focus group discussions with girls in both institutions. For care leavers, responses were retrospective. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed concurrently using Framework Analysis. Quantitative findings categorised assets and assigned values to each, while qualitative results used narratives and direct quotes to compare the needs of girls within and outside institutional care. The study identified both similarities and differences in prioritized livelihood needs: human assets (41.5%) such as education, skills development and advocacy; social assets (29.5%) such as relationship-building and family connections; public assets (18.75%) such as access to services and support systems; financial assets (9%) such as economic resources and opportunities; and physical assets (1.25%) such as accommodation and material resources. The assessment highlights significant gaps in meeting these needs within institutional settings and recommends actively involving adolescent girls in the design of policies and programs that address their development priorities.

Keywords: Sustainable livelihood approach, Needs assessments, Livelihood needs, Adolescent girls, Institutional care, Youth transitions

Introduction

The transition to adulthood is a pivotal and complex journey, marking the profound shift from childhood dependency to adult self-sufficiency (Ramohai, 2025). While this period is filled with potential, its outcomes are not equally distributed. For young people without access to essential support systems, it can be a time of significant vulnerability, with lifelong consequences for their physical, psychological and economic well-being (Sibanda & Berejena Mhongera, 2025). This challenge is

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particularly acute for young people leaving institutional care. Unlike their peers in family-based settings, care leavers are often thrust into independence without the necessary resources or sustained support. Research consistently shows that this leads to negative outcomes, including interrupted education, unemployment, homelessness, poor mental health and increased risks of poverty and exploitation (Van Breda & Hlungwani, 2019; Mhongera & Lombard, 2017). This is a global concern, but the gaps in structured transition programs and aftercare support are more pronounced in the Global South.

Despite a growing body of care-leaving research, the specific plight of adolescent girls remains a critical blind spot, obscuring the profound influence of gender on transition outcomes (van Breda & Hlungwani, 2019). A gender-sensitive lens is essential, as the challenges girls face, such as heightened risks of gender-based violence, systemic barriers to education and employment and societal expectations, are distinct and compounding (Sibanda & Berejena Mhongera, 2025; World Health Organization (WHO), 2023). Without understanding these gender-specific realities, support programs risk being ineffective, leaving adolescent girls to navigate a perilous path to adulthood alone.

Gender mainstreaming in childcare and protection is crucial for adolescent girls exiting care because it tackles the unique and layered vulnerabilities they experience due to their gender and care status. Hesse-Biber (2012) views gender mainstreaming as a process that identifies and addresses the development challenges and needs of both women and men, while considering the impacts on both genders throughout all phases of policy and program development formulation, planning, execution, monitoring and evaluation. In the institutional context, transition programs should be gender-responsive (Sibanda & Berejena Mhongera, 2025). To achieve this, it is essential to amplify the voices of adolescent girls and boys so they can express their specific gender-related needs (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Gender responsiveness refers to the planning approach where programs and policy measures are designed specifically to tackle and prevent issues that may arise if the needs stemming from socially constructed gender differences between men and women are not properly addressed (Sibanda & Berejena Mhongera, 2025).

In designing transition programs, conducting needs assessments should be a top priority because they identify the specific requirements and gaps of the target population. This ensures that the programs are tailored effectively to address actual needs, leading to better outcomes and efficient allocation of resources. Livelihood needs include the capabilities, assets (both tangible and intangible), income and activities that individuals, households, or communities require to meet their essential needs and maintain their well-being (UNDP, 2017). These needs go beyond just covering basic survival essentials like food, water and shelter, but also include the ability to cope with and recover from shocks and stresses such as natural disasters or economic and social challenges (Morse, 2025). Successfully, meeting livelihood needs requires not only access to these forms of capital, but also the ability to mobilise and manage them effectively (Natarajan, 2022). This capacity is often shaped by broader vulnerabilities stemming from external influences such as government policies, institutional frameworks, market dynamics, and fluctuating environmental conditions, which can either constrain or enable sustainable livelihoods (Scoones, 2015; UNDP, 2017).

Mhongera and Lombard (2017) positions need assessments as more than a mere administrative step, but as a basis for a targeted, evidence-based and gender-conscious child protection system. Accordingly, needs assessments are the critical link between acknowledging the unique challenges faced by adolescent girls leaving care and taking meaningful action. By mapping each girl's individual risks, strengths and aspirations, the system can shift from being a generic, reactive support to proactively

co-creating a pathway to a safe, sustainable and empowered future for care leavers (Sibanda & Berejena Mhongera, 2025). In short, needs assessments ensure that these young women do not just leave care but are resilient enough to deal with the shocks and stress of life beyond care.

This article is based on a study that built on a larger research project that examined the transition experiences and livelihood outcomes of adolescent girls exiting two residential childcare centres in Harare, Zimbabwe. Applying, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), this paper assesses how access to various capital, including human, social, physical, financial and natural, affected the livelihood outcomes of these young women beyond care. The research compared adolescents transitioning from a government-operated dormitory-style facility (Institution A) with those from a non-governmental organization (NGO) managed, family-oriented facility (Institution B). Findings from that study showed that the absence of structured, well-funded and comprehensive transition programs prevented many adolescent girls from obtaining the services and support necessary to build the assets needed for sustainable livelihoods. Consequently, girls who had left care encountered higher levels of poverty and more challenging transition experiences than those still in care (Mhongera & Lombard, 2016).

Upon reaching the age of eighteen, young people living in residential institutions in Zimbabwe are typically discharged from care and cease to receive institutional support. Many transition out of care without the resources necessary to sustain independent livelihoods, with limited social competencies and weak or absent support networks, circumstances that heighten their vulnerability to multiple socio-economic risks (Child Protection Society, 2014). As increasing numbers of young people approach the age threshold for discharge, challenges related to reunification and community integration become increasingly pressing. In many cases, care leavers exit institutions without adequate material, social, or economic assets required for independent living. Although some may reconnect with relatives or friends within the community, these informal support systems are often constrained by poverty and may lack the capacity to provide sustained assistance. Others return to family environments characterised by prior abuse, exposing them to the risk of re-victimisation upon reunification. Together, these circumstances severely restrict young people's livelihood opportunities and undermine successful transitions to adulthood. Addressing these challenges requires strengthening the integration of care leavers into social and economic systems to enhance their access to employment opportunities, income-generating resources, public services and supportive social networks. However, the limited availability of programs promoting social and economic empowerment contributes to unsuccessful transitions, particularly among adolescent girls, who frequently encounter gendered constraints that compound their vulnerabilities during the transition from care to adulthood.

Against this backdrop, adolescent girls transitioning out of residential institutional care face a range of complex and frequently unmet needs. This article examines the livelihood needs of adolescent girls transitioning out of institutional care in Harare, Zimbabwe. Through a systematic assessment of needs, the study moves beyond broad generalisations to identify the specific vulnerabilities and support deficits shaping the livelihood outcomes of this population. The inquiry was guided by two central questions: What are the needs of livelihood of adolescent girls transitioning out of two residential institutions in Harare, Zimbabwe? In what ways do these livelihood needs influence their well-being and future opportunities? By addressing these questions, the study sought to generate an evidence base to inform the design of contextually relevant and targeted interventions aimed at supporting adolescent girls to achieve safe, sustainable and self-reliant lives beyond institutional care.

Background

Worldwide, it is estimated that five to six million children live in residential care facilities (Neville et al., 2025), while millions more are placed in informal family-based alternative care (e.g., kinship care or foster care) or remain at risk of separation due to poverty, disease, or disaster (Sibanda, 2025). In Germany and Denmark, over 30% of children in care remain in residential settings, while in Sweden, residential care continues to serve 22% of children (Gozho et al., 2026; Ulybina, 2024). The Sub-Saharan Africa region has a high rate of informal alternative care, predominantly driven by the extended family system taking in orphans. Many children live with neither biological parent, often absorbed into kinship networks stretched to their economic limits (Sibanda & Ndamba, 2023). Zimbabwe has one of the highest prevalences of children in alternative care in the region (Gwenzi, 2019). Roughly 24% of children live with neither biological parent, the country has 562000 orphans, and there are approximately 4500 children in formal institutions, while only 660 children are in formal foster care systems (Ntali, 2026).

Ironically, care leavers are expected to become independent, self-sufficient and productive adults almost overnight, yet they often lack the essential resources and support systems needed to navigate this difficult transition successfully (SOS, 2022). This expectation starkly contrasts with the wider context in Zimbabwe, where young people face profound challenges in their journey to adulthood. The transitions of young people in Zimbabwe are fraught with difficulties that raise concerns not only for the individuals themselves but also for their families, communities and the nation as a whole. Alabi (2024) underscores the severe barriers urban youth encounter in achieving self-sufficiency, mainly due to rampant unemployment and harsh socio-economic conditions.

Traditionally, youth followed a relatively predictable path of leaving school, pursuing further education and securing employment. However, shifting labour market dynamics and rising unemployment have disrupted this progression (ILO, 2023; Mauchi et al., 2011). Consequently, many school leavers experience prolonged periods of joblessness, leading to growing desperation and elevated rates of criminal behaviour (Luyi et al., 2025). If young people supported by families struggle to attain independence, then care leavers, often isolated from familial networks, face even more daunting obstacles, making their path to self-sufficiency significantly more precarious.

Research highlights the profound challenges care leavers face as they transition to independence (Ramohai, 2025; Pote et al., 2022). Nkomo et al. (2023) observes that many care leavers feel unprepared, immediately confronting financial hardship and housing instability upon discharge. A study by the Zimbabwe Care Leavers Network confirms this, revealing that unstable livelihoods force many into constant movement, with no fixed address (SOS, 2022). Desperate for shelter, some end up homeless, become commercial sex workers, or enter marriages of convenience. Tragically, the study reported women trapped in abusive marriages and unable to leave because they have nowhere to go (SOS, 2022). Compounding these crises are unemployment, a lack of education, limited healthcare access, and profound social isolation. In response, the Zimbabwe Care Leavers Network advocated for policies that enable a gradual, supported transition process alongside comprehensive financial, social and emotional support (SOS, 2022).

Adolescent girls in Zimbabwe face greater vulnerability and poor livelihood outcomes compared to their male peers. This is especially pronounced among orphaned girls, who are less likely to access quality education, healthcare and other livelihood needs due to poverty and entrenched socio-cultural barriers (Mhongera & Lombard, 2016). In urban areas, orphans are three times more likely to

contract HIV than non-orphans, with girls facing heightened danger due to increased risks of forced sex and sexual exploitation (Moyo, 2021). Early marriage remains prevalent, especially among girls from the poorest households and rural areas. Driven by poverty and harmful traditional practices, early marriage disrupts education, leads to early childbearing and limits access to reproductive health services (Fight Inequality Alliance, 2023; UNICEF, 2023). Undernutrition is another significant challenge, and about 64% of women and adolescent girls in Zimbabwe are undernourished, with higher rates in rural areas. This malnutrition is linked to poverty, limited access to nutritious food and discriminatory norms, increasing health risks for girls and their future children (Nhancumba, 2023).

Adolescent girls, especially orphans in care, face disproportionate challenges such as poverty, limited educational opportunities, early marriage, undernutrition and a higher risk of HIV infection. To support their successful transition into adulthood and improve livelihood outcomes, it is essential to implement gender-responsive programs that address these vulnerabilities (Sibanda & Berejena Mhongera, 2025). For these programs to succeed, they must reflect the livelihood needs of girls in the institutional context and show sensitivity to how these needs drive their livelihood choices and how these choices impact their livelihood goals. Under Zimbabwe's Children's Act, the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, together with relevant institutions, is legally responsible for providing protection and care to children living in institutions (Ministry of Labour and Social Services, 2010a).

To support this mandate, the National Residential Care Standards were developed to guide services that meet the individual needs of children in care and prepare them for independent life after leaving institutional settings (Ministry of Labour and Social Services, 2010b). However, both the government and care institutions often lack sufficient financial, human and material resources to run effective transition programs. This shortfall has detrimental effects on the livelihoods of young people leaving institutional care, many of whom then struggle to successfully integrate into society.

Addressing the unique and gender-specific challenges faced by adolescent girls leaving care requires conducting targeted needs assessments that capture their distinct vulnerabilities and aspirations. Such assessments enable the design and implementation of gender-responsive transition programs aligned with Zimbabwe's legal frameworks and care standards, ensuring that the support provided is tailored to the realities of girls' lives (Sibanda & Berejena Mhongera, 2025). By identifying specific barriers such as early marriage, educational gaps and health risks, these assessments help optimise resource allocation and intervention strategies, thereby improving the prospects for girls to achieve successful transitions and sustainable livelihoods despite existing institutional constraints (Scoones, 2015).

Upholding the principle of participation by actively involving care leavers, especially adolescent girls, in research on gender-specific livelihood needs is crucial to ensuring that their voices and experiences directly inform program design. When care leavers participate in assessing their own challenges and opportunities, the resulting data more accurately reflects their realities and priorities, fostering empowerment and ownership of the transition process (UNDP, 2017). As advocated by the Sustainable Development Approaches, people are not passive recipients of welfare-enhancing projects but are active agents of change in the development process (DFID, 1999; UNDP, 2017; Sibanda, 2025). This inclusive approach not only strengthens the relevance and effectiveness of gender-responsive interventions but also aligns with Zimbabwe's commitment to child rights and participation, ultimately leading to more sustainable and meaningful support for girls as they move towards independent, fulfilling lives.

Theoretical Framework

Grounded in sustainable livelihoods and feminist approaches, the study gathered evidence directly from adolescent girls transitioning out of care. By centering their voices, the study provided a crucial foundation for designing effective and equitable policies and programs that support these young women.

Sustainable Livelihood and Feminist Interpretive Approaches to Care Leaving

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) offers a holistic and people-centred framework for critically assessing the efficacy of transition programs designed for adolescent girls, especially those exiting institutional care. By focusing on the five key capitals: human, social, natural, physical and financial, the SLA moves beyond simplistic metrics to evaluate how these initiatives build a foundation for long-term well-being (UNDP, 2017). When integrated with feminist theoretical perspectives, this approach gains a critical lens to deconstruct the unique, intersectional challenges, such as gendered vulnerabilities and systemic inequities that shape these girls' journeys into adulthood and independent living (Sibanda & Berejena Mhongera, 2025).

This powerful synergy aligns with the core assertion of DFID (1999: 12) that “adopting the sustainable livelihood approach provides a way to improve the identification, appraisal and evaluation of developmental programs so that they better address the priorities of poor people,” ensuring interventions are not only effective but also emancipatory. Similarly, the feminist interpretive approaches adopt a transformative agenda that seeks to tackle the underlying causes of gender-based inequality and meet the needs of marginalised groups. Thus, according to Parry (2020: 3), “feminist research aims to represent diverse and unique lived experiences across gendered and cultural divides to address issues of inequality, gender-based violence, body politics, the discrimination of marginalised groups and the distributive nature of agency.”

A feminist interpretive lens was applied to critically explore the structural power inequalities influencing girls' livelihood needs and strategies. Drawing on the work of Hesse-Biber (2012), this perspective moves beyond a surface-level assessment of resources and institutions to examine the underlying power relations that shape them. The framework centres on key questions: In what ways do patriarchal norms limit girls' access to financial resources and constrain their livelihood opportunities? Do institutional systems truly strengthen girls' autonomy, or do they unintentionally reinforce dependency? It also considers which forms of social capital are recognized as valuable and how unequal power relations within social networks may expose girls to exploitation. By prioritising these concerns, the feminist approach keeps attention focused on the structural causes of inequality rather than merely its visible effects.

Livelihood needs encompass the diverse range of capital and assets that individuals and communities rely on to sustain and enhance their well-being (Morse, 2025). According to UNDP (2017), the assets include human capital, which consists of skills, knowledge, health and labour capacity that enable people to work and adapt. Natural capital covers vital resources such as land, water and biodiversity that provide raw materials and ecosystem services essential for survival and economic activities (UNDP, 2017). Financial capital refers to money, savings and access to credit, which facilitate investment and consumption (Natarajan et al., 2022). Physical capital includes infrastructure, tools, equipment and technology that support productive activities. Social capital involves the networks, relationships and social norms that foster cooperation, access to information and mutual support (UNDP, 2017).

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach suggests that individuals' access to and use of the five capitals is not direct but is influenced by transforming structures and processes. These include institutions, organizations, policies, and social norms that shape livelihood opportunities (DFID, 1999). In this study, residential childcare facilities serve as a primary transforming structure. Their internal policies on education, life skills training and especially the discharge and aftercare processes significantly impact the girls' asset portfolios as they transition from care. Key structures also include the Zimbabwean Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare. The Government's child protection and social welfare policies, cultural and gender norms, and power dynamics within households and communities strongly influence the girls' ability to access assets needed to secure their livelihoods.

Assets play a crucial role in reducing vulnerability and enabling people to access livelihood opportunities. Hence, understanding access to various kinds of assets is key to identifying different levels of vulnerability and finding ways to mitigate their impact. It is important to assess vulnerability levels to ensure fair resource allocation among populations living in poverty. Equally, a vulnerability assessment of care leavers is critical as the institutional context is characterised by risks. As asserted by Freidus (2010: 294), care leavers are at risk of exposure to physical and sexual abuse, dependence on the institution, undermining local kinship and family systems and lack of adequate health care and food. Furthermore, aging out of institutional care is very risky, as most care leavers fail to cope with the shock and stress of rejoining the community without enough support (SOS, 2022).

DFID (1999) emphasises the importance of understanding the specific aims of different groups when considering livelihood outcomes, since the needs, priorities, and interests vary among people. Similarly, this study sought to understand the varying livelihood needs, priorities and interests of adolescent girls leaving two childcare residential facilities through their participation in conducting needs assessments. As affirmed by (DFID, 1999), participatory needs assessments offer valuable insights into the diverse objectives of individuals and how to effectively gather reliable information about them.

In summary, the SLA framework aligns with feminist research principles by transforming needs assessments from a supposedly neutral administrative tool into a conscious, reflexive and emancipatory practice aimed at challenging power structures and co-creating knowledge with adolescent girls in the institutional context.

Methodology

The study adopted a convergent mixed-method approach with a qualitative emphasis. Needs assessments are one of the four categories of program evaluation, which seek to understand the level of need using multiple social indicators or variables (Engel & Schutt, 2008). Evaluation research is one of the feminist research strategies that assesses how effectively different actions meet needs and solve problems (Kabeer, 2021). The feminist principles that shaped the design of the study include participation, giving the adolescent girls a voice and a platform to tell their stories, and using the skill of reflexivity throughout the execution of the study. The study assessed the livelihood needs of adolescent girls in Institutions A and B, as well as examined how the identified livelihood needs affect their well-being and future opportunities.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently and later integrated during analysis and interpretation. Data collected using semi-structured interview schedules were placed into

asset categories, where each asset (variable) was allocated a value or score. The scores were assigned through a frequency count. Statistics were also used to analyse and compare the livelihood needs of adolescent girls inside and outside Institutions A and B. Using the Microsoft Excel computer package, the scores were summed and calculated as a percentage of each asset category. These statistics were presented in tables and graphs, analysed and then interpreted. Qualitative data were presented as narratives and participants' voices.

The research involved thirty-two participants, namely, sixteen adolescent girls residing in two institutions (A and B); sixteen who had been discharged from the same facilities. To accommodate the high mobility of the participants, particularly those who had left institutional care, availability sampling was utilised, and contact was established using records from the two institutions and the District Social Services Office. Data collection incorporated semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and direct observation. While interviews were conducted with both groups, FGDs were conducted solely with current residents, while the principal researcher performed observations on the living conditions of participants outside the institutions, and the researcher documented some field notes.

All research tools contained similar research questions. However, participants outside care responded to the questions retrospectively. The research questions were as follows:

1. Identify 5 livelihood needs that you consider a priority for you to achieve your livelihood goals.
2. How do these livelihood needs affect your well-being and future opportunities?

Data were analysed using framework analysis, selected for its systematic and transparent approach, which is appropriate for policy-oriented research and aligns with the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA). As noted by Creswell and Poth (2018), framework analysis is concerned with describing and interpreting what is happening in a particular setting to improve efficiency and outcomes. The analysis followed five key steps: (1) familiarisation through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes to gain a holistic understanding; (2) identifying a thematic framework, developed initially from research questions and the SLA (e.g., human, social and financial assets) and refined inductively using the data; (3) indexing the data by applying the framework systematically to tag relevant text; (4) charting the data into a matrix with themes as columns and cases as rows, allowing for comparison across cases and themes; and (5) mapping and interpreting to identify patterns, associations, and explanations leading to an overall interpretation.

Ethical approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Zimbabwe Ministry of Public Service, Labour, and Social Welfare, as well as the participating institutions. Informed consent and assent were rigorously obtained: guardians and institutional directors consented for minors, while participants over 18 years of age, who had exited institutional care, self-consented. All participating adolescent girls in the institutions gave signed assent after receiving an age-appropriate explanation of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained via the use of pseudonyms and the storage of data in a secure, password-protected file. This ethical rigour was vital for protecting the vulnerable participants' safety and dignity. The principles of non-deception, voluntary participation, and avoidance of harm were also adhered to throughout the study.

By synthesising data from the interviews, focus groups, and observations through framework analysis, the study provides a comprehensive description and interpretation of the livelihood needs and priorities of adolescent girls during and after their institutional care experiences in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Findings

The findings are presented below, beginning with the biographic profiles of the adolescent girls inside and outside Institutions A and B. Next, the livelihood needs of adolescent girls within the two institutions are highlighted, followed by those of their peers who have exited these institutions. A comparative analysis of the livelihood strategies between the two groups is then provided. Finally, the authors discuss the findings, draw conclusions, and offer recommendations.

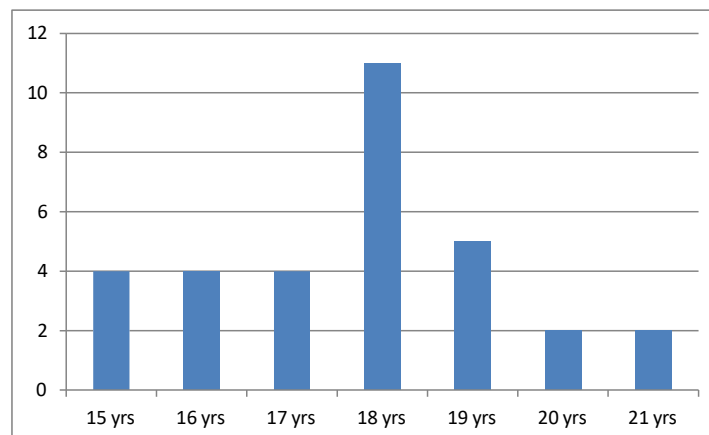
1. Biographic Profile of Participants

This study involved 32 adolescent girls, with an equal split between those currently living in institutions (Institutions A and B) and those who had exited those institutions; 16 girls were in each group.

1.1 Age of Participants

The ages of the girls residing in the institutions ranged from 15 to 18 years, while those who had left ranged from 18 to 21 years of age. The ages of participants are depicted in Figure 1 below:

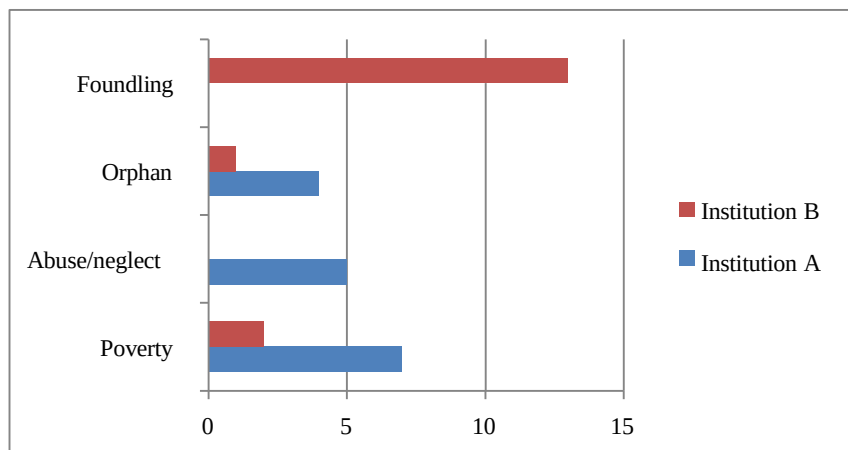
Figure 1 Age of participants



As seen in Figure 1 above, the age distribution of girls that participated in the study was as follows: girls aged 18 years made up the largest group, constituting 34.38% (11 out of 32) of the total sample, followed by 19-year-olds at 15.62% (5 out of 32), followed by 17-year-olds at 12.5% (4 out of 32), 16-year-olds at 12.5% (4 out of 32), 15-year-olds at 12.5% (4 out of 32) (Adolescents aged between 15 and 17 years accounted for 37.5%; 12 out of 32), and the smallest group was those aged 20, representing 6.25% (2 out of 32) and 21-year-olds, accounting for 6.25% (2 out of 32).

1.2 Reasons for Placement

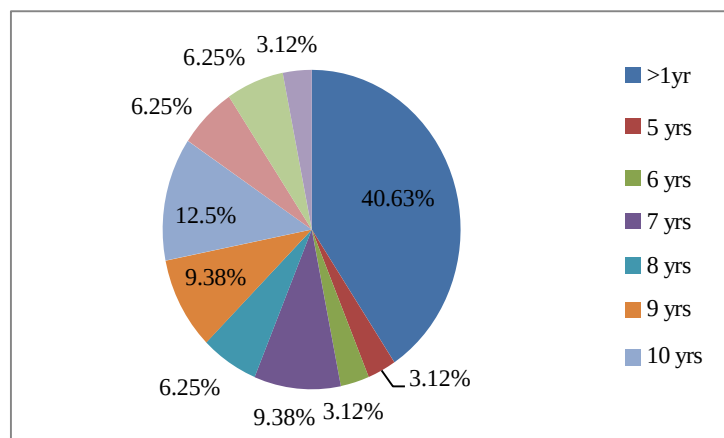
The adolescent girls were placed in institutional care due to various socio-economic challenges, including poverty, orphanhood, abuse or neglect by family members, abandonment at birth, and ill-health of a surviving parent. Figure 2 below illustrates the different reasons for placement.

Figure 2 Reasons for placement in the institution

As illustrated by Figure 2 above, 40.63% (13 out of 32) of the total adolescent girls were foundlings. These girls were abandoned by their biological parents at birth and were placed in Institution B, where they were raised by housemothers. In Institution B, 6.25% (2 out of 32) and 3.12% (1 out of 32) were placed because of destitution and orphanhood, respectively. 21.88% (7 out of 32) of the total girls in Institution A were admitted because of poverty. The parents of these girls were either living in streets or in squatter camps. Out of the total, 15.62% (5 out of 32) of girls in Institution A were removed from unsafe environments following some abuse from family members or relatives, and 12.5% (4 out of 32) were orphans with no supportive relatives.

1.3 Age on Admission

The ages when the girls were admitted to both institutions are shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 Age on Admission

As seen in Figure 3 above, out of the total, 40.63% (13 out of 32) who are foundlings were admitted to Institution B soon after birth. 12.50% (4 out of 32) were admitted when they were 10 years old, and 18.76% (6 out of 32) were either seven or nine years old at the time of admission. Similarly, 18.75% (6 out of 32) were admitted to the institution at the ages of 8, 11, and 12, respectively, and 9.36% (3 out of 32) were 5, 6, and 13 years old when they were placed in institutional care. The findings noted significant socio-economic challenges, including family instability, economic deprivation and vulnerability to exploitation among participants as reasons for placement. Foundlings constituted a larger proportion of participants, highlighting a unique dimension of lifelong institutionalisation.

2. Adolescent Girls' Livelihood Needs

Gender-specific livelihood needs are crucial for adolescent girls in institutional settings. Participants currently in these institutions shared responses based on their present needs, while young women who have left care reflected on their experiences in retrospect.

Both girls in care and care leavers identified five core livelihood needs, all addressing immediate requirements for short-term survival and future opportunities. The principal researcher organized these needs into five asset categories: Human Assets (skills/knowledge), Physical Assets (tangible resources), Social Assets (support networks), Financial Assets (economic resources) and Public Assets (community/institutional resources).

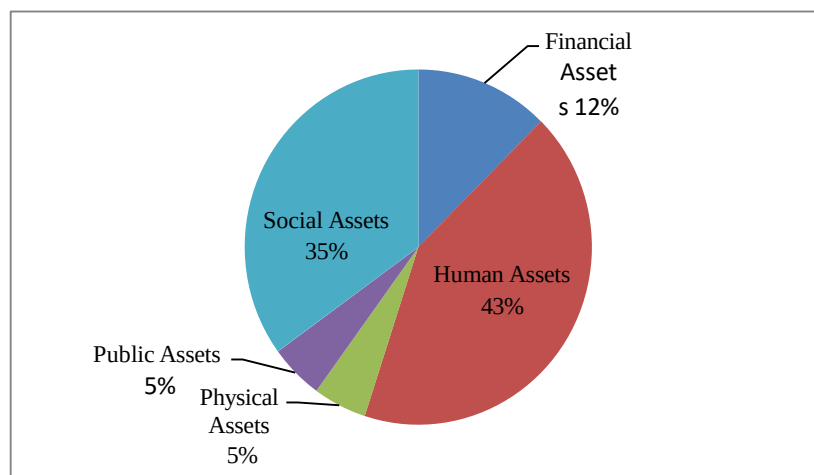
The principal researcher analysed responses using a quantified scoring system: Each need received a single score. 8 participants generated 40 total responses (5 needs × 8 participants). Scores were aggregated per category and converted to percentages. The subsequent section details the specific livelihood needs identified for adolescent girls in Institution A, presented through this analytical framework.

3. Livelihood Needs for Adolescent Girls in Institution A and Institution B

3.1 Livelihood Needs for Adolescent Girls in Institution A

Figure 4 shows the livelihood needs of eight adolescent girls in Institution A. An analysis of the chart below shows that adolescent girls in Institution A required the most human assets. Of all the livelihood needs, human assets constitute 43%, social assets (35%), financial assets (12%), public assets (5%) and physical assets (5%).

Figure 4 Livelihood needs for adolescent girls in Institution A

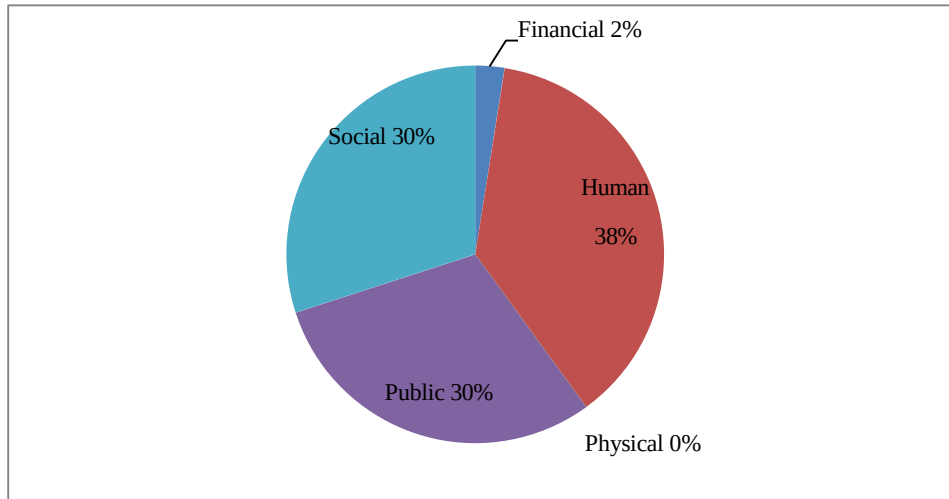


These livelihood needs are further broken down as follows. The analysis shows that the greatest need that adolescent girls in Institution A have is good food (75%). Although the girls are receiving 3 or 4 meals a day, their problem is not one of access but of the quality of food provided. 62.5% of the girls need pocket money, school fees, social interaction, as well as the love and support of family and relatives. 37.5% of the girls need new clothes and shoes, and 25% need career exploration, employment skills and talent development training. Finally, 12.5% of the adolescent girls need a passport, birth certificate, private living space and health cover, respectively. The livelihood needs of adolescent girls in Institution B are analysed as follows.

3.2 Livelihood Needs of Adolescent Girls in Institution B

The chart below demonstrates the livelihood needs of adolescent girls in Institution B. Adolescent girls in Institution B need human assets the most. The needs are ranked as follows: human assets (38%), public and social assets (30%), financial assets (2%), and physical assets (0%). Accordingly, the girls do not need physical assets.

Figure 5 Livelihood needs of adolescent girls in Institution B



A further assessment of the livelihood needs of adolescent girls in Institution B revealed that 87.5% of them need career exploration experiences, employment skills, and talent development programs. Seventy-five per cent of them need the love and support of family and relatives. Passing of the examination is very important for continued funding from the local non-governmental organization, thus 62.5% of the girls need textbooks and remedial classes. Fifty per cent of the girls need family tracing services and birth certificates. Girls who need the birthday parties constitute 37.5% of the total. Twenty-five per cent of adolescent girls need to visit places of interest, training in confidence and relationship building, as well as cell phones. Lastly, 12.5% of the adolescent girls need new clothes and shoes, pocket money, a passport, a mentor/role model and a male/father figure. The section below compares the livelihood needs of adolescent girls in the two institutions.

4. Comparative Analysis of Livelihood Needs (Inside Institutions A and B)

Table 1 below illustrates the different livelihood needs that the girls within the two institutions have. It shows their different priorities. The analysis, therefore, focuses on needs that are more prominent for adolescent girls in both institutions.

Table 1 Comparison of the Livelihood Needs of Girls inside Institutions A and B

Type of need	Institution A (n/8)	Institution B (n/ 8)	Variance
Pocket money	5	1	4
Good food	6	-	6
Educational support (school fees)	5	-	5
Educational support (tuition, textbooks, school shoes)	-	5	-5
New clothes	3	1	2
Medical support	1	-	1

Type of need	Institution A (n/8)	Institution B (n/ 8)	Variance
Career exploration, employment skills, talent development	2	7	-5
Private living space	1	-	1
Cell phone	1	1	-
Passport	1	2	-1
Birth certificate	1	4	-3
Visiting places of interest	1	2	-1
Social interaction /community exposure visits	4	-	4
Love and support of family/relatives	5	6	-1
Relationship of trust (mentor, foster parent, role model, caregiver	4	1	-3
Family tracing	-	4	-4
Confidence and relationship building training	-	2	-2
Birthday (party, cakes)	-	3	-3
Male/father figure	-	1	-1
Total	40	40	

The analysis shows that good food is needed most by adolescent girls in Institution A, whilst adolescent girls in Institution B are satisfied with the quality of food being provided. More adolescent girls in Institution A need pocket money than those in Institution B. During focus group discussions, some adolescent girls in Institution A shared the following views on pocket money:

“We need pocket money to buy delicious food that our age mates eat, such as chicken, chips, pizza and burgers. The meals that are prepared in this institution do not taste good at all, and we are tired of eating the same type of food over and over again.”

“As girls, we always need money for personal use. Looking good and presentable is important to us because it boosts our confidence, and with money, we can fix our skin and hair.”

Due to inconsistent educational funding, adolescent girls in Institution A need scholarships for secondary education. On the other hand, adolescent girls in Institution B are more concerned about passing their examinations and require support to improve their grades.

The lack of birth certificates affects girls in Institution B, who also want birthday celebrations. Birth registration for adolescent girls in Institution B is problematic because most of them are foundlings who do not know their biological families. On birth certificates and birthday celebrations, three girls said:

“I envy girls who have birth certificates and whose birth days are commemorated. I feel out of place if someone asks me when I was born. It also makes me sad not to have birthday celebrations year after year.”

“It would mean a lot to me to have a small party or even a cake for my birthday. To have someone remember me on my birthday makes me feel special and loved.”

“I wish my Probation Officer and Superintendent could be able to facilitate our birth registration before the end of the year. Next year, I will be sitting for a national examination, and my birth certificate is needed for the registration process.”

As a measure to protect the girls, movements outside the institution’s premises are restricted. Written consent is required whenever a girl wishes to visit relatives or non-relatives in the community. Although this practice seeks to ensure the safety of girls, some of them feel that they are being deprived of social interaction. Hence, 50% of adolescent girls in Institution A need to go out of the institution for community exposure visits and social interaction. Adolescent girls in Institution B need family tracing services, while all adolescent girls in Institution A know their relatives. This question of family tracing and support evoked a lot of emotions from the girls.

One adolescent girl from Institution B made the following remarks:

“I need to know my biological parents or relatives. I, however, do not know how I will feel after meeting them for the first time because I have many questions I need to ask them. Firstly, I need to know why they abandoned me as a baby. Secondly, I need to know where they were all these years or why they did not make an effort to look for me.”

Another girl from Institution A said:

“Knowing my relatives has not made a positive difference in my life because they have not been there for me when I needed them. I am just like one who has no relatives at all. I feel my relatives do not love or care for me; otherwise, they would visit me or invite me to their homes during school holidays.”

The following comments were made by one girl in Institution A.

“I am not interested in being reunited with my relatives because of the physical and emotional abuse they inflicted on me following the death of my parents. They grabbed all our parents’ property, leaving my brother and me destitute and with no inheritance. We were also denied food and told to go and fetch it from *kuchuru* (the burial place of my parents).”

Girls in Institution B need training programs for career exploration, employment skills, talent development, confidence and relationship building to prepare and qualify them for developmental opportunities in the community. During focus group discussions, some girls made the following remarks:

“We need training programs that empower us economically and socially.”

“Some of us do not have families, and others with families do not receive support from them.”

“If we are empowered, we will be self-sufficient, and we will be able to make important decisions on our own.”

Adolescents in Institution B have access to life skills transferred informally from their housemothers and are therefore more resourceful and self-motivated compared to girls in Institution A. The researchers observed that adolescent girls in Institution B are more emotionally stable and confident compared to their counterparts in Institution A. This may be attributed to more time spent with their housemothers, unlike girls in Institution A, who have one caregiver supervising over 20 girls at a given

time. Adolescent girls in Institution A, therefore, need more contact and one-on-one time with adults such as caregivers, mentors or foster parents.

5. Comparative Analysis of Livelihood Needs (Outside Institutions A and B)

The next section analyses the livelihood needs of adolescent girls who have left Institutions A and B.

5.1 Livelihood Needs for Adolescent Girls Outside Institution A

An analysis of the livelihood needs of adolescent girls discharged from care sought to establish the 5 livelihood needs they had before leaving care. The following presents an analysis of girls who left Institution A.

Figure 6 Livelihood needs of adolescent girls outside Institution A

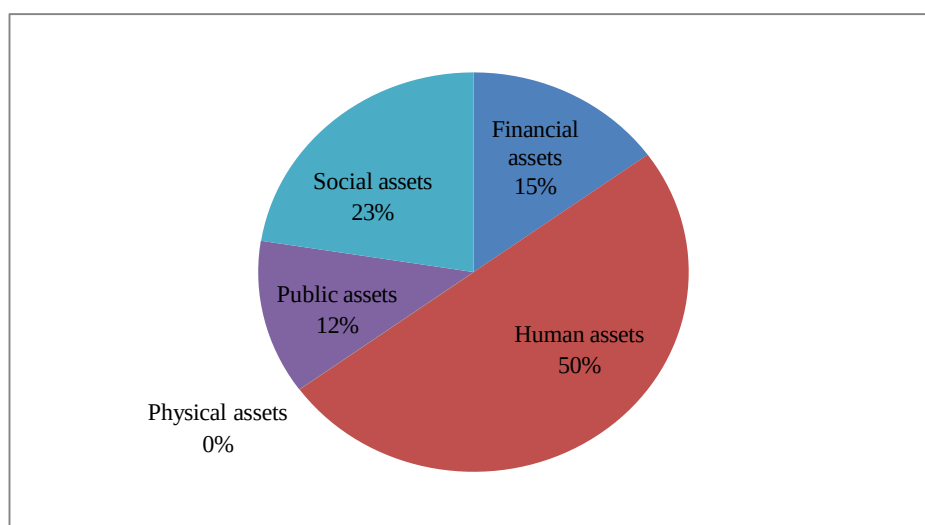
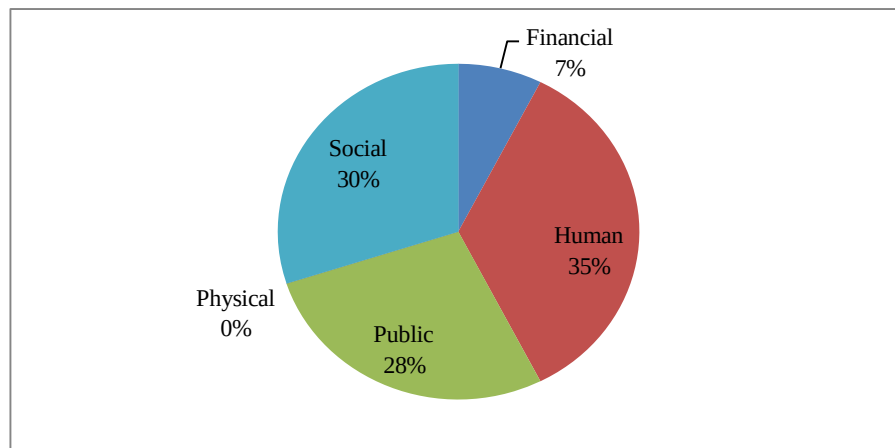


Figure 6 shows that adolescent girls outside Institution A needed human assets the most (50%). This was followed by social assets (23%), financial assets (15%) and public assets (12%). Adolescent girls outside Institution B did not need physical assets. The foregoing is elaborated on below.

Seventy-five per cent of the adolescent girls from Institution A needed good food and pocket money more than other needs. Secondly, the adolescent girls needed school fees (62.5%). Half of the girls needed life skills and training to build their confidence. The next level of needs (37.5%) was for social interaction activities and cell phones. These were followed by family tracing services, relationship building and career exploration experiences (25%). Adolescent girls from Institution A who needed new clothes, a passport, and a birth certificate accounted for 12.5%.

5.2 Livelihood Needs of Adolescent Girls Outside Institution B

Figure 7 outlines the livelihood needs of adolescent girls who were discharged from Institution B. According to Figure 7, adolescent girls outside Institution B most needed human assets (35%), followed by social assets (30%), public assets (28%) and financial assets (7%). The girls did not need physical assets (0%). An analysis of these assets is presented below.

Figure 7 Livelihood needs of adolescent girls outside Institution B

Adolescent girls outside Institution B needed educational support the most (75%). Secondly, they needed assistance to get birth certificates (62.5%). Fifty per cent needed to visit places of interest. The fourth need comprised birthday parties, love and support of family and relatives, confidence and relationship training, pocket money, new clothes and shoes (37.5%). A quarter (25%) of the girls needed cell phones, career exploration and employment skills. Those who needed a passport, a mentor and a male/father figure constitute 12.5%.

6. Comparative Analysis of Livelihood Needs (Institution A and B)

Table 2 below shows the different needs that adolescent girls outside Institution A and B had whilst in care.

Table 2 Comparison of the livelihood needs of girls outside Institutions A and B

Type of need	Institution A (n/8)	Institution B (n/8)	Variance
Pocket money	6	3	3
Good food	6	0	6
Educational support (school fees)	5	0	5
Educational support (tuition, textbooks, school shoes)	0	6	-6
New clothes	1	3	-2
Career exploration, employment skills, talent development	2	2	0
Cellphone	3	2	1
Passport	1	1	0
Birth certificate	1	5	-4
Visiting places of interest	0	4	-4
Social interaction activities	3	0	3
Love and support of family/relatives	4	3	1
Relationship of trust (mentor, foster parent, role model, caregiver)	2	1	1

Type of need	Institution A (n/8)	Institution B (n/8)	Variance
Family tracing	2	3	-1
Training in confidence and relationship Building	4	3	1
Birthday (party, cakes)	0	3	-3
Male/father figure	0	1	0
Grand Total	40	40	

The analysis focused on the needs as well as the priorities of adolescent girls discharged from the two institutions. Firstly, adolescent girls outside Institution A needed good food and pocket money. Adolescent girls in Institution B were satisfied with the food provided. One of the young women from Institution B said:

“To augment her income, my housemother provided catering services to social functions such as weddings and birthday parties at weekends. She was a great cook, and we learnt how to prepare a variety of dishes as well as bake cakes and other pastries. Because of her skills, we were guaranteed tasty meals every day, and we were also taught how to cook. I continue to use the skills to meet my livelihood needs even now.”

The greatest need for adolescent girls outside Institution B was educational support to help them pass their examinations. The need for school fees payment was equally important for adolescent girls outside Institution A. Five out of eight girls outside Institution B needed birth certificates before leaving institutional care. Fortunately, all the girls got their birth certificates before exiting care. One adolescent girl in Institution A left care before accessing a birth certificate.

While adolescent girls outside Institution B needed opportunities to visit places of interest, those in Institution A needed community visits for exposure and social interaction. During the interviews, one adolescent girl from Institution A said:

“I needed more community exposure to prepare me for life outside institutional care. I wanted to learn how people in a normal family interact because I lacked that experience before and during my placement in the institution.”

Adolescent girls outside Institution B needed birthday parties and cakes on their birthdays. Half of them needed love and support of family/relatives, as well as confidence and relationship-building training, compared to three girls from Institution B. Three girls in Institution B required new clothes and family tracing programs, while three girls in Institution A needed cell phones. One of the girls from Institution B made the following remarks:

“I needed new clothes because all we ever received in the institution were old clothes that had been donated by individuals and bales received from the government. I also wanted the opportunity to go to town on my own and choose clothes that fit me.”

7. Comparative Analysis of Livelihood Needs Inside and Outside Institutions A and B

This section provides a comparative analysis of the needs of adolescent girls inside Institutions A and B versus those outside the same institutions. Table 3 demonstrates the number of responses from the girls for each livelihood need.

Findings show that adolescent girls both inside and outside institutional care in Zimbabwe have the following livelihood needs and priorities, distributed across different asset categories:

- Human assets (41.5%): These include education, skills development and advocacy capabilities.
- Social assets (29.5%): Relationship-building and family connections
- Public assets (18.75%): Access to services and support systems
- Financial assets (9%): Economic resources and opportunities
- Physical assets (1.25%): Accommodation and material resources

Table 3 Comparative analysis: Livelihood needs in and outside Institutions A and B

Type of need	Inside A and B (n/16)	Outside A and B (n/16)	Variance
Pocket money	6	6	0
Good food	6	6	0
Educational support (school fees)	5	5	0
Educational support (tuition, text books, school shoes)	5	6	-1
New clothes	4	4	0
Medical support	1	0	1
Career exploration, employment skills, talent development	9	4	5
Private living space	1	0	1
Cell phone	2	4	-2
Passport	3	3	0
Birth certificate	5	6	-1
Visiting places of interest	3	4	-1
Social interaction activities	4	3	1
Love and support of family/relatives	11	7	4
Relationship of trust (mentor, foster parent, role model, caregiver)	5	3	2
Family tracing	4	5	-1
Training to build confidence and relationship building	2	7	-5
Birthday (party, cakes)	3	6	-3
Male/father figure	1	1	0
Total	80	80	

A total of 160 responses (80 from inside care and 80 from outside care) were collected from 32 adolescent girls who participated in the study. According to the analysis, both similarities and variances in livelihood needs exist. The following shared needs comprised pocket money, good food, educational fees, new clothes, passports and a male/father figure, and this constituted 31.25% of the total livelihood needs. Variations were noted on career exploration, employment skills, talent development, confidence,

relationship building training, love and support of family/relatives, educational support, private living space, cell phones, visiting places of interest, social networking, relationships of trust, family tracing and birthday parties, which constituted 68.75% of all the girls.

As shown from the analysis, the higher the number of responses, the greater the need and vice versa. Thus, in programming, addressing essential livelihood needs should be the highest priority. The analysis reveals that although some livelihood needs remain static over time, others change constantly. Therefore, periodic needs assessments should be conducted to capture the changing needs of young people in the institutional context. Capturing these changes is instrumental in developing livelihood strategies that are responsive to both the shared and individual needs of adolescent girls.

Discussion

Findings show that adolescent girls both inside and outside institutional care in Zimbabwe have the following livelihood needs and priorities, distributed across different asset categories, namely: 1. Human assets, such as education, skills development and advocacy capabilities. 2. Social assets, such as relationship-building and family connections. 3. Public assets, such as access to services and support systems. 4. Financial assets, such as economic resources and opportunities. 5. Physical assets, such as accommodation and material resources

One of the key objectives of Zimbabwe's National Orphan Care Policy is to engage, motivate, and raise awareness among communities nationwide to develop support strategies and interventions for orphans (Ministry of Labour and Social Services, 2010b). Consistent with this objective, the National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children seek to identify, mobilise, and coordinate resources to support orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) (Ministry of Labour and Social Services, 2011). Despite the existence of these policy frameworks, institutions remain responsible for implementing programs that equip young people with practical skills for independent living and prepare them for employment or further education (Ministry of Labour and Social Services, 2010b). However, this study found that institutions continue to face significant resource constraints, limiting their ability to adequately support adolescent girls. Similar findings were reported by Ramohai (2025). Despite Zimbabwe having policies and frameworks to support Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC), these statistics reveal significant gaps in meeting the comprehensive needs of adolescent girls in institutional settings (Ministry of Labour and Social Services, 2010b). Findings comparing different institutional models indicate that transition experiences and outcomes vary significantly based on the resources available to each institution, as well as the quality and quantity of transition services provided (Ramohai, 2025; Pote et al., 2022). These findings highlight the need for gender-responsive transition programming that addresses the specific needs and priorities of adolescent girls leaving institutional care (Kabeer, 2021; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Sibanda & Berejena Mhongera, 2025).

The findings indicate that adolescent girls experience challenges in transitioning out of institutional care facilities. Although young people in all environments go through the transition from childhood to adulthood, the differences in social and living arrangements result in variances in life experiences, level of access to assets and livelihood strategies (UNDP, 2017). The transition challenges are often more pronounced for adolescent girls, who face additional gender-specific obstacles (Sibanda & Berejena Mhongera, 2025). Studies indicate that adolescent girls leaving institutional care are particularly vulnerable to socio-economic risks that can significantly impact their transition outcomes (Stein, 2019; Pote et al., 2022; Ramohai, 2025). The abrupt cessation of support services when adolescents reach the legal age of majority (typically 18 years in many countries, including Zimbabwe)

leaves many young women without the financial, social and emotional support needed to establish independent lives (Gwenzi, 2019).

Findings from this study regarding the difficulties in transitioning out of institutional care facilities resonate with a study of young people who left Israeli group homes. According to Schiff and Benbenishty (2006), care leavers perceived their transitions as hard, with girls facing more difficulties than boys. The retrospective study, which investigated the young people's experiences within care and post-care, showed that the young people who left care needed more time to prepare for their transitions, follow-up and support soon after leaving care, assistance in housing and employment, as well as help in renewing relationships with biological families (Schiff & Benbenishty, 2006). According to Schiff and Benbenishty (2006), the girls needed a longer preparation time than boys to process the feelings and thoughts about transitions and establishing closer relationships with relatives, peers or parental figures before leaving care.

The study revealed the need for adolescent girls to be taught "how to redefine themselves and order their lives and relationships, considering the breakup of current relationships and the social constraints imposed on women in the general society" (Schiff & Benbenishty, 2006: 351). The study recommended that young people, particularly adolescent girls, need person-centred and gender-specific programs that will adequately meet their livelihood needs to facilitate smoother transitions from institutional care (Schiff & Benbenishty, 2006). In that regard, conducting needs assessments helps in understanding the unique and complex needs of adolescent girls in the institutional context, informs gender-sensitive and effective programming, addresses gaps in existing support systems, promotes the participation and agency of girls, ensures holistic and sustainable outcomes, and guides policy and resource allocation. Fortunately, for care leavers in Zimbabwe, there is a great scope for the transformation of the care leaving landscape through increased lobbying and advocacy work of Zimbabwe Care Leavers Network, with the possibility of favourable care reforms that support sustainable livelihoods among care leavers.

Conclusion

This study highlights the complex and gendered challenges faced by adolescent girls transitioning out of institutional care in Zimbabwe and underscores the limitations of existing systems in adequately preparing them for independent livelihoods. Although Zimbabwe has established policy frameworks, including the National Orphan Care Policy and the National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children, the findings reveal a persistent gap between policy intent and practice. Resource limitations within institutions continue to constrain the provision of comprehensive transition services, leaving many adolescent girls insufficiently prepared for adulthood despite formal commitments to care, protection and social inclusion. Consequently, many adolescent girls experience unmet livelihood needs that negatively affect their social, economic and psychosocial well-being.

Institutions play a pivotal role in addressing the livelihood needs of young people transitioning to independent living and self-sufficiency. This is because institutional policies, processes, and programs have the power to shape the circumstances and opportunities of young people either negatively or positively, resulting in varied livelihood outcomes. The unfavourable socio-economic conditions prevailing in Zimbabwe have affected the capacity of institutions to provide adequate services and support to meet the livelihood needs of adolescent girls transitioning from care. As a result, adolescent girls have unmet livelihood needs that affect their social, economic and psychosocial well-being. Additionally, the lack of participation of adolescent girls in reviewing their development plans

implies that their unique needs are not being identified. Consequently, their transition needs are not addressed in transition policy making and programming.

Implications of the Study

The study underscores the need to build robust monitoring systems to assess both immediate and long-term impacts and to adapt programs based on feedback and changing needs. The findings suggest that adolescent girls are active agents of development capable of articulating their views and developmental needs. Their increased participation in transition planning and programming is recommended, along with the development of support models that incorporate gender-specific concerns and address poverty in the institutional context. Therefore, the successful transition of adolescent girls from institutional care requires coordinated efforts across government agencies, NGOs, communities and girls to provide holistic support addressing their multifaceted needs.

This study has implications for social policy, particularly in relation to care transition systems and youth empowerment in Zimbabwe. It underscores the need for policies that strengthen institutional capacity to adequately support adolescent girls transitioning from care into independent living. Social policies should prioritise sustainable economic support, access to education and vocational training, psychosocial services, and employment opportunities to improve livelihood outcomes for care leavers. Another social policy implication of the study is the importance of participatory policy development. Adolescent girls transitioning from care should be actively involved in the design, review, and implementation of transition programs and development plans to ensure that policies respond to their specific needs and lived experiences. Without their inclusion, institutional interventions risk remaining ineffective and disconnected from the realities faced by young women leaving care.

Institutions and caregivers of adolescent girls who aged out of institutions need adequate resources to meet the livelihood needs of adolescent girls in the institutional context. Regular meetings should be held with adolescent girls to review their development plans. Needs assessments should be conducted to establish the individual and shared needs of adolescent girls during and after care. Therefore, data on the adolescent girls' livelihood outcomes should be collected periodically to monitor progress being made towards the achievement of livelihood goals. The process should be participatory, allowing the girls to express their views and opinions on the transition process.

Longitudinal studies can also be carried out to follow different cohorts transitioning from institutions to assess their evolving livelihood needs and outcomes over longer periods of time. The authors also recommend research on adolescent boys' transitions from institutional care to assess variances in livelihood needs, strategies and outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the research results highlighting the distribution of adolescent girls' livelihood needs across human, social, public, financial and physical assets, the following recommendations are proposed:

Table 4 Priority Areas and Key Recommendations

Asset Type	Priority (%)	Key Recommendations
Human	41.5	Education, skills, advocacy, mentorship
Social	29.5	Peer groups, family engagement, social norm change

Asset Type	Priority (%)	Key Recommendations
Public	18.75	Access to services, adolescent-friendly spaces
Financial	9	Financial literacy, savings, microfinance
Physical	1.25	Safe accommodation, material resources, infrastructure

By prioritising interventions according to these findings and integrating efforts across asset domains, programs can more effectively address the comprehensive livelihood needs of adolescent girls and support their transition to empowered and resilient adulthood. The study recommends the following;

Strengthen Human Assets (41.5%)

- Expand access to quality education, including both formal schooling and non-formal learning opportunities.
- Integrate skills development programs, especially in digital literacy, vocational training and life skills such as decision-making, self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Promote advocacy and leadership training to empower girls to participate in community decision-making and advocate for their rights.
- Partner with local organizations to provide mentorship and role models, especially female mentors, to reinforce positive aspirations.

Enhance Social Assets (29.5%)

- Facilitate the creation of safe spaces and peer support groups where girls can build trust, share experiences, and develop social networks.
- Encourage family engagement programs that strengthen family connections and support systems, recognizing the critical role families play in girls' wellbeing.
- Promote community-based initiatives that foster positive social norms and gender equality, reducing isolation and building collective agency.

Improve Access to Public Assets (18.75%)

- Ensure adolescent girls have access to essential services, including health care (especially sexual and reproductive health), counselling and legal support.
- Strengthen referral systems and community outreach to connect girls with available public services and support structures.
- Advocate for adolescent-friendly service spaces, ensuring that services are accessible, confidential and responsive to girls' unique needs.

Expand Financial Assets (9%)

- Implement financial literacy and savings programs tailored for adolescent girls, combining financial education with access to savings products for a stronger impact.
- Provide opportunities for safe and age-appropriate income generation, such as microenterprise development, internships, or apprenticeships.

- Facilitate access to microfinance, small grants, or seed capital, ensuring that financial interventions are linked to broader skills and empowerment programs.
- Integrate financial asset-building with other interventions to maximise both economic and non-economic outcomes, such as improved health and self-confidence.

Bolster Physical Assets (1.25%)

- Address the acute need for safe accommodation, especially for vulnerable groups such as out-of-school, married, or orphaned girls.
- Support access to basic material resources, such as school supplies, hygiene products and transportation, to remove barriers to participation in education and training.
- Where feasible, advocate for infrastructure improvements (e.g. safe transport, secure community spaces) that directly benefit adolescent girls' mobility and security.

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