

WELL-BEING OF ORPHANED AND SEMI-ORPHANED COLLEGE STUDENTS

Dr. Arockiaraj K

P.G & Research Department Social Work,
Sacred Heart College (Autonomous), Tirupattur Dt. Tamil Nadu

Emilinraj C

II MSW Student, P.G & Research Department Social Work,
Sacred Heart College (Autonomous), Tirupattur Dt. Tamil Nadu

Abstract

Orphaned and semi-orphaned college students face significant challenges that impact their overall well-being, including emotional distress, financial insecurity, academic difficulties, and social isolation. The absence of parental support often affects their psychological stability and personal development, making them vulnerable to mental health issues and lower academic performance. This study aims to assess the well-being of orphaned and semi-orphaned college students, analyse their productive and non-productive behaviours, and examine whether well-being differs based on demographic factors such as gender, stay place, and academic performance. A census-based quantitative research approach was adopted, including all 134 orphaned and semi-orphaned students from Sacred Heart College (Autonomous), Tirupattur, Tamil Nadu. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire validated for reliability and analysed using SPSS. The findings revealed that while most students demonstrated moderate to high well-being, significant differences existed based on gender and living arrangements. Male students reported better physical well-being than females, while hostel residents exhibited higher spiritual well-being than day scholars. Productive behaviours, such as volunteering, outdoor activities, and reading, contributed to better well-being, whereas non-productive behaviours were minimal. The study highlights the need for institutional interventions, including counselling support, financial assistance, and structured extracurricular programs, to enhance the well-being of these students. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and social workers in developing targeted support mechanisms for orphaned and semi-orphaned youth.

Keywords: Orphaned students, well-being, psychological health, college education, social support.

Introduction

Orphaned and semi-orphaned college students face unique challenges that significantly impact their well-being, encompassing emotional, financial, academic, and social aspects. The absence of parental support often leads to psychological distress, reduced self-esteem, and difficulties in adapting to academic and social environments. This study aims to assess the well-being of these students, analyse their productive and non-productive behaviours, and explore the influence of demographic factors on their overall well-being. The findings highlight key areas requiring intervention and provide insights into strategies for enhancing the well-being of these vulnerable students.

Review of Literature

Well-being is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various dimensions, including emotional, physical, intellectual, occupational, spiritual, and social aspects (National

Wellness Institute, 2023). These dimensions collectively contribute to an individual's overall quality of life and life satisfaction. Among orphaned students, poor well-being often arises from factors such as lack of parental care, emotional neglect, and inadequate support systems. A recent study highlighted that children who were raised in institutional settings without adequate emotional support experienced stunted brain development and regression in developmental skills (The Times, 2023). Such deprivation can lead to a range of psychological issues, including anxiety, depression, and social dysfunction. A systematic review found that orphans exhibited higher levels of mental health problems compared to non-orphans, underscoring the profound impact of parental loss on psychological stability (Duraismy et al., 2023). The consequences of poor well-being in orphaned students are far-reaching, affecting academic performance, social relationships, and future employment opportunities. Behavioural and emotional problems in these children can lead to social withdrawal, low motivation, and difficulties in forming stable relationships, thereby hindering their ability to engage in productive activities (Seth & Srivastava, 2018). Notably, the quality of care provided to orphaned children plays a crucial role in their psychosocial well-being. Research indicates that high-quality care, characterized by emotional support and nurturing environments, is associated with better psychosocial outcomes, regardless of whether the care setting is institutional or community-based (Whetten et al., 2019). Therefore, enhancing the quality of care and providing targeted interventions are essential steps toward improving the well-being of orphaned students.

Several national and international studies have explored the well-being of orphaned students, revealing significant findings. Escueta et al. (2014) found that adverse childhood experiences negatively impact cognitive development among orphans, with traumatic events and lower socioeconomic status linked to higher emotional difficulties. Shekhawat and Gopalan (2023) compared orphans and non-orphans in India, reporting lower self-esteem and psychological well-being among institutionalized adolescents. Wambua et al. (2024) highlighted the role of counseling in improving the psychological health of orphaned students in Kenya. Refugee Education UK (2024) pointed out that asylum-seeking teenagers in the UK face educational disruptions, leading to mental health challenges. Hope and Homes for Children (2023) reported that institutional upbringing stunts brain development and increases risks of ADHD and autism. The Aspiernaut Initiative (2023) demonstrated that STEM education programs benefit students facing adversity, helping them achieve academic success. Thurman et al. (2016) and Cluver et al. (2012) identified higher risks of mental health issues, including depression and PTSD, among orphans in Africa. In India, Rani and Kumar (2022) examined orphan students' emotional well-being and found that those receiving consistent mentorship displayed better psychological resilience. A Tamil Nadu-based study by Rajendran et al. (2021) highlighted the poor nutritional status among orphans in government homes, affecting their physical and mental health. Additionally, a Chennai-based study by Arumugam and Devi (2023) found that structured extracurricular activities significantly improved the social adjustment and emotional well-being of orphaned college students. These studies collectively underscore the need for targeted interventions to enhance the well-being of orphaned and vulnerable students in Tamil Nadu, India, and beyond.

Rationale of the Study

Orphaned and semi-orphaned college students face unique challenges that significantly impact their well-being, including emotional distress, financial instability, and social

isolation. The absence of parental support often results in lower self-esteem, academic difficulties, and limited access to resources necessary for personal and professional growth. While various studies have explored the mental health and social struggles of orphans, limited research specifically addresses the well-being of orphaned college students in the Indian context. Understanding the factors that contribute to their overall well-being is essential for developing targeted interventions and support systems. This study aims to assess the well-being of these students across multiple dimensions, including emotional, financial, academic, spiritual, physical, and social aspects. By identifying key determinants and their interrelationships, the study provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and social workers to implement effective welfare programs. Ultimately, enhancing the well-being of orphaned students can improve their academic performance, career prospects, and overall quality of life.

Statement of the Research Problem

Orphaned and semi-orphaned college students often struggle with emotional instability, financial insecurity, and a lack of social support, which can negatively impact their academic performance and overall well-being. Despite the growing awareness of student mental health, there is limited research focusing specifically on the well-being of orphaned students in higher education. Without adequate support systems, these students face significant challenges in adapting to academic, social, and professional environments. This study seeks to examine the well-being of orphaned college students by analysing key dimensions such as emotional, financial, academic, spiritual, physical, and social well-being. Understanding these factors will help identify gaps in existing support structures and propose effective interventions. Addressing this issue is crucial for ensuring the holistic development and success of orphaned and semi-orphaned youth in higher education.

Specific Objectives

1. To describe the demographic characteristics of the orphaned and semi-orphaned college students
2. To measure the well-being of the students
3. To analyse the productive and non-productive behaviours of the students
4. To verify whether the well-being differs by the demographic factors

Methodology

The study was conducted at Sacred Heart College (Autonomous) in Tirupattur District, Tamil Nadu, using a quantitative research approach with a descriptive design. The entire population of 134 semi- and full-orphan students studying at the college was included in the study, making it a census-based sampling. Data was collected using a self-constructed questionnaire, which was validated by the college's psychological counsellor, ensuring reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha score above 0.9. The questionnaire utilized a four-point Likert scale to assess various dimensions of well-being. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS to derive meaningful insights from the collected data.

Table No. 1: Summary of Demographic Details

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	46	34.3
	Female	88	65.7
Major Field of Study	Arts	55	41
	Science	79	59
Year of Education	1st Year	36	26.9
	2nd Year	62	46.3
	3rd Year	36	26.9
Stay Place at Present	Hosteler	35	26.1
	Day Scholar	99	73.9
Domicile	Rural	95	70.9
	Semi-Urban	39	29.1
Academic Performance	Average Performers (Up to 69%)	38	28.4
	Good Performers (70-79%)	64	47.8
	Excellent Performers (80% and more)	32	23.9
Total		134	100

The demographic profile of the respondents indicates that the majority of the orphaned and semi-orphaned college students in the study are female (65.7%). Most students are pursuing science courses (59%) compared to arts (41%). In terms of year of education, the highest proportion belongs to second-year students (46.3%), while first- and third-year students constitute equal proportions (26.9% each). A significant majority (73.9%) are day scholars, with only 26.1% residing in hostels. Regarding domicile, most students come from rural backgrounds (70.9%), while 29.1% are from semi-urban areas. Academic performance data reveals that nearly half (47.8%) of the students are good performers (70-79%), while 28.4% are average performers (below 69%), and 23.9% are excellent performers (80% and above). This demographic overview provides insights into the academic and residential characteristics of the orphaned and semi-orphaned students at Sacred Heart College.

Table No.2: Well-being Dimensions

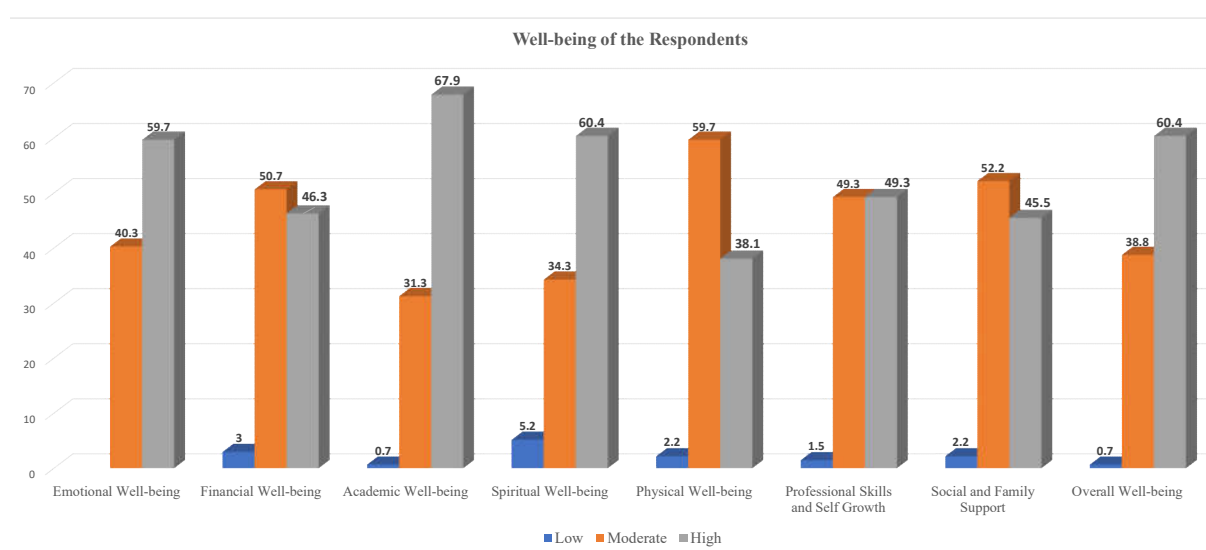
Well-being Dimensions	Never	Rarely	Often	Always
Emotional Well-being				
Frequently experiences positive emotions like joy or satisfaction	6 (4.5)	55 (41.0)	53 (39.6)	20 (14.9)
Feels confident in managing life challenges	7 (5.2)	28 (20.9)	48 (35.8)	51 (38.1)

Feels understood and supported by friends and teachers	10 (7.5)	36 (26.9)	55 (41.0)	33 (24.6)
Finds it easy to share feelings with someone they trust	27 (20.1)	47 (35.1)	34 (25.4)	26 (19.4)
Feels proud of their identity, achievements, and efforts	7 (5.2)	30 (22.4)	39 (29.1)	58 (43.3)
Financial Well-being				
Frequently borrows money to manage expenses	24 (17.9)	61 (45.5)	37 (27.6)	12 (9.0)
Feels confident in managing monthly expenses	22 (16.4)	51 (38.1)	38 (28.4)	23 (17.2)
Regularly saves a portion of their allowance or earnings	20 (14.9)	46 (34.3)	41 (30.6)	27 (20.1)
Feels prepared to handle unexpected financial emergencies	12 (9.0)	36 (26.9)	59 (44.0)	27 (20.1)
Feels secure about their financial future	19 (14.2)	55 (41.0)	32 (23.9)	28 (20.9)
Academic focus or well-being is affected by financial worries	8 (6.0)	43 (32.1)	51 (38.1)	32 (23.9)
Frequently budgets their expenses	14 (10.4)	39 (29.1)	53 (39.6)	28 (20.9)
Academic Well-being				
Often feels motivated to study	6 (4.5)	24 (17.9)	51 (38.1)	53 (39.6)
Satisfied with the academic support received from teachers	5 (3.7)	36 (26.9)	51 (38.1)	42 (31.3)
Frequently participates in study groups or collaborative learning	9 (6.7)	45 (33.6)	50 (37.3)	30 (22.4)
Feels confident about achieving academic goals	4 (3.0)	25 (18.7)	48 (35.8)	57 (42.5)
Frequently accesses learning resources such as libraries, online platforms, or peer support	6 (4.5)	44 (32.8)	55 (41.0)	29 (21.6)
Spiritual Well-being				
Believes in God	13 (9.7)	32 (23.9)	24 (17.9)	65 (48.5)
Feels that their life has a meaningful purpose	7 (5.2)	29 (21.6)	45 (33.6)	53 (39.6)
Spiritual beliefs help them make life decisions	17 (12.7)	29 (21.6)	51 (38.1)	37 (27.6)
Frequently seeks guidance through prayer or meditation	15 (11.2)	46 (34.3)	34 (25.4)	39 (29.1)
Beliefs in God provide them with hope and resilience in difficult times	19 (14.2)	33 (24.6)	32 (23.9)	50 (37.3)
Physical Well-being				
Regularly engages in physical activities or exercise	19 (14.2)	64 (47.8)	36 (26.9)	15 (11.2)
Feels energetic and physically healthy	14 (10.4)	46 (34.3)	54 (40.3)	20 (14.9)
Regularly gets enough sleep to feel refreshed	10 (7.5)	38 (28.4)	60 (44.8)	26 (19.4)

Maintains a balanced and nutritious daily diet	19 (14.2)	53 (39.6)	46 (34.3)	16 (11.9)
Actively takes steps to improve physical well-being	17 (12.7)	47 (35.1)	43 (32.1)	27 (20.1)
Profession Skills				
Feels confident in communication skills	8 (6.0)	44 (32.8)	62 (46.3)	20 (14.9)
Actively works on improving leadership abilities	7 (5.2)	43 (32.1)	57 (42.5)	27 (20.1)
Feels well-prepared for future job opportunities	9 (6.7)	38 (28.4)	63 (47.0)	24 (17.9)
Frequently participates in skill-building activities	5 (3.7)	49 (36.6)	57 (42.5)	23 (17.2)
Feels confident in managing time effectively	8 (6.0)	41 (30.6)	62 (46.3)	23 (17.2)
Social and Family Support				
Feels supported by friends	13 (9.7)	38 (28.4)	53 (39.6)	30 (22.4)
Feels encouraged by family to achieve goals	11 (8.2)	29 (21.6)	57 (42.5)	37 (27.6)
Frequently discusses personal challenges with someone close	21 (15.7)	39 (29.1)	51 (38.1)	23 (17.2)
Feels that family background affects academic success	26 (19.4)	33 (24.6)	54 (40.3)	21 (15.7)
Perceives that the absence of family impacts confidence and social life	15 (11.2)	37 (27.6)	49 (36.6)	33 (24.6)

Figure No. 1: Well-being of the Respondents

The well-being scores of orphaned and semi-orphaned college students were categorized as low, moderate, and high based on the expected minimum and maximum values. This classification helps in understanding their psychological, emotional, and social well-being. It enables targeted interventions to improve their overall quality of life. The categorization highlights key areas requiring additional support and care.



The well-being analysis of respondents across different dimensions reveals significant variations. Emotional, financial, and academic well-being predominantly fall within the high

category (59.7%, 46.3%, and 67.9%, respectively), indicating strong stability in these areas. However, a notable portion (40.3%) experiences moderate emotional well-being, suggesting potential emotional distress. Spiritual and physical well-being also show a higher proportion in the high category (60.4% and 38.1%, respectively), but with a considerable percentage in moderate levels, reflecting a need for holistic development. Professional skills and self-growth, along with social and family support, are distributed almost equally between moderate and high levels, implying that while students have a support system, there is scope for improvement. The overall well-being shows a dominant high category (60.4%), indicating that most respondents maintain good well-being, yet the 38.8% in the moderate range highlights areas requiring further intervention. The lower percentages in the low category across dimensions suggest that while well-being concerns exist, they are not widespread but should still be addressed through targeted interventions.

Table No.3: Correlation Matrix for the Dimensions of Well-being

Correlations		Financial Wellbeing	Academic Wellbeing	Spiritual Wellbeing	Physical Wellbeing	Professional Skills and Self Growth	Social and Family Support	Overall Well-Being
Emotional Wellbeing		.448**	.537**	.299**	.276**	.488**	.471**	.703**
	Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000
Financial Wellbeing		1	.361**	.231**	.474**	.470**	.455**	.714**
	Sig.		.000	.007	.000	.000	.000	.000
Academic Wellbeing			1	.349**	.434**	.572**	.523**	.756**
	Sig.			.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Spiritual Wellbeing				1	.283**	.250**	.337**	.591**
	Sig.				.001	.004	.000	.000
Physical Wellbeing					1	.380**	.505**	.682**
	Sig.					.000	.000	.000
Professional Skills and Self Growth						1	.384**	.713**
	Sig.						.000	.000
Social and Family Support							1	.739**
	Sig.							.000

N=134

The correlation matrix reveals strong positive relationships between various dimensions of well-being among orphaned and semi-orphaned students. Emotional well-being shows the highest correlation with overall well-being ($r = .703$, $p < .01$), highlighting its crucial role in holistic development. Financial well-being ($r = .714$, $p < .01$) and academic well-being ($r =$

.756, $p < .01$) also significantly contribute to overall well-being, suggesting that economic stability and educational success are key determinants of student welfare. Social and family support exhibits the strongest association with overall well-being ($r = .739$, $p < .01$), emphasizing the importance of a supportive environment. These findings suggest that enhancing emotional stability, financial security, academic success, and social support systems can substantially improve the well-being of vulnerable students.

Well-being by the Demographic Factors

The study examined the well-being of orphaned and semi-orphaned college students across different demographic variables, testing the hypothesis that well-being significantly varies by gender, stay place, domicile, and academic performance. The results revealed that physical well-being differed significantly by gender, with male students ($M=13.8$) scoring higher than female students ($M=12.1$), $t(132) = -2.950$, $p=0.004$, indicating a notable disparity in physical health. Similarly, spiritual well-being varied significantly based on stay place, with hostelers ($M=16.02$) reporting higher scores than day scholars ($M=13.9$), $t(132) = -2.620$, $p=0.010$, suggesting that hostel life may provide a more supportive spiritual environment. However, no significant differences were found in overall well-being based on domicile or academic performance, implying that factors such as rural or semi-urban backgrounds and academic achievements do not significantly influence well-being levels. These findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive and residence-specific interventions to enhance student well-being.

Table No. 4: Productive and Non-Productive Behaviours of the Respondents

Activity	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Playing Outdoor Games	22 (16.4)	29 (21.6)	55 (41.0)	11 (8.2)	17 (12.7)
Playing Indoor Games	21 (15.7)	42 (31.3)	51 (38.1)	16 (11.9)	4 (3.0)
Praying	17 (12.7)	27 (20.1)	34 (25.4)	22 (16.4)	34 (25.4)
Reading Books	7 (5.2)	33 (24.6)	55 (41.0)	30 (22.4)	9 (6.7)
Gardening	17 (12.7)	34 (25.4)	40 (29.9)	30 (22.4)	13 (9.7)
Smoking/Alcohol/Drugs	109(81.3)	13 (9.7)	8 (6.0)	2 (1.5)	2 (1.5)
Listening to Music/Artwork	4 (3.0)	20 (14.9)	26 (19.4)	30 (22.4)	54 (40.3)
Positively Active in Social-media	9 (6.7)	24 (17.9)	44 (32.8)	30 (22.4)	27 (20.1)
Negatively Active in Social-media	76 (56.7)	33 (24.6)	19 (14.2)	5 (3.7)	1 (0.7)
Volunteering	9 (6.7)	38 (28.4)	42 (31.3)	28 (20.9)	17 (12.7)

The analysis of productive and non-productive behaviors among orphaned and semi-orphaned students highlights their engagement patterns and potential impacts on well-being. A significant number of students engage in productive activities, with 53.7% playing outdoor games at least sometimes, 64.7% listening to music or engaging in artistic activities often or always, and 47.8% praying regularly. Reading books is another positive habit, with 48.1% reading sometimes or more frequently. Additionally, 33.6% of students actively participate in volunteering, indicating social responsibility and engagement. These behaviors contribute to better emotional regulation, social integration, and overall well-being.

On the other hand, non-productive behaviors are minimal. A large majority (91%) either never or rarely engage in smoking or drinking alcohol, and 81.3% avoid negative social media activity. However, indoor gaming is more common, with 47% engaging at least sometimes, which may indicate a preference for solitary activities. The findings suggest that most students adopt constructive coping mechanisms through outdoor activities, social engagement, and reading, contributing to their psychological resilience. The limited engagement in harmful behaviors indicates strong self-regulation and adaptability, aligning with research emphasizing the importance of structured and meaningful activities in fostering well-being among vulnerable youth.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several practical recommendations can be made to enhance the well-being of semi and full orphan students. Colleges should strengthen emotional support systems by ensuring access to psychological counselling, helping students manage stress and emotional challenges. Scholarship coordinators should actively identify financially vulnerable students and provide timely assistance to improve financial well-being. Social workers and faculty members should promote life skills training and mentorship programs to enhance professional growth and self-confidence. Spiritual and physical well-being can be improved through wellness programs, including yoga, meditation, and health camps. To foster a strong support system, student-led peer groups and mentorship initiatives should be encouraged to provide social and family-like support. Hostel environments should be made more engaging with recreational and volunteer opportunities to boost self-growth. Awareness programs on positive social media engagement can help reduce negative online behaviours. Future researchers can explore longitudinal studies to track the impact of interventions over time and examine additional factors affecting well-being, such as resilience, trauma history, and community support. A collaborative effort from all stakeholders, including counsellors, social workers, faculty, and student mentors, is essential to ensuring holistic well-being and long-term success.

References

1. Hudson, B. G., Hudson, J. K., & Pokidysheva, E. (2023). Aspirnaut Initiative: STEM education programs benefiting students facing adversity. *Aspirnaut*. Retrieved from <https://aspirnaut.org>
2. Arumugam, S., & Devi, R. (2023). Impact of structured extracurricular activities on social adjustment and emotional well-being of orphaned college students in Chennai. *Journal of Educational Research*, 45(3), 112-127.
3. Cluver, L., Orkin, M., Gardner, F., & Boyes, M. (2012). Persisting mental health problems among AIDS-orphaned children in South Africa. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 53(4), 363-370.
4. Duraisamy, P., Rao, K., & Iyer, S. (2023). Mental health challenges among orphaned children: A systematic review. *Psychological Studies*, 68(2), 143-160.
5. Escueta, M., Whetten, K., Ostermann, J., & O'Donnell, K. (2014). Adverse childhood experiences and cognitive development among orphans. *Developmental Psychology*, 50(6), 1697-1711.

6. Hope and Homes for Children. (2023). The impact of institutional upbringing on brain development and mental health risks.
7. National Wellness Institute. (2023). Dimensions of wellness: A holistic perspective on well-being.
8. Rajendran, P., Selvaraj, K., & Venkatesan, R. (2021). Nutritional status and well-being of orphans in government homes in Tamil Nadu: A cross-sectional study. *Indian Journal of Public Health*, 65(4), 287-295.
9. Rani, M., & Kumar, D. (2022). Emotional well-being and resilience among orphan students receiving mentorship. *Journal of Child Development Studies*, 58(2), 95-108.
10. Refugee Education UK. (2024). Educational challenges and mental health struggles among asylum-seeking teenagers in the UK.
11. Seth, A., & Srivastava, P. (2018). Behavioral and emotional problems among orphaned children: A comparative study. *Indian Journal of Psychology*, 42(1), 56-72.
12. Shekhawat, R., & Gopalan, M. (2023). Self-esteem and psychological well-being among institutionalized and non-institutionalized adolescents in India: A comparative study. *Journal of Adolescent Mental Health*, 49(1), 22-39.
13. The Times. (2023). Lack of emotional support in institutional settings and its impact on brain development.
14. Thurman, T. R., Snider, L., Boris, N. W., Kalisa, E., Nyirazinyoye, L., & Brown, L. (2016). Barriers to the psychosocial well-being of children affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa. *AIDS Care*, 28(2), 132-140.
15. Wambua, D., Omondi, P., & Kilonzo, N. (2024). Role of counseling in improving psychological health among orphaned students in Kenya. *African Journal of Child Welfare*, 39(1), 75-92.
16. Whetten, K., Ostermann, J., Whetten, R., O'Donnell, K., & Thielman, N. (2019). More than the loss of a parent: Impact of orphanhood on children's well-being. *Social Science & Medicine*, 239, 112530.
