

Demography of South Africa's children

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The UN General Guidelines for Periodic Reports on the Convention on the Rights of the Child,¹ paragraph 7, says that reports made by states should be accompanied by "detailed statistical information ... Quantitative information should indicate variations between various areas of the country ... and between groups of children ...".

The number and proportion of children living in South Africa

In mid-2010, South Africa's total population was estimated at 50 million people, of whom 18.5 million were children (under 18 years). Children therefore constitute 37% of the total population. The child population has grown by about 6% (1.1 million) over the nine-year period from 2002 to 2010.

Exactly half of all children live in three of the nine provinces: KwaZulu-Natal (23%), Eastern Cape (14%) and Limpopo (12%). A further 18% of children live in Gauteng, a mainly metropolitan province, and 10% in the Western Cape.

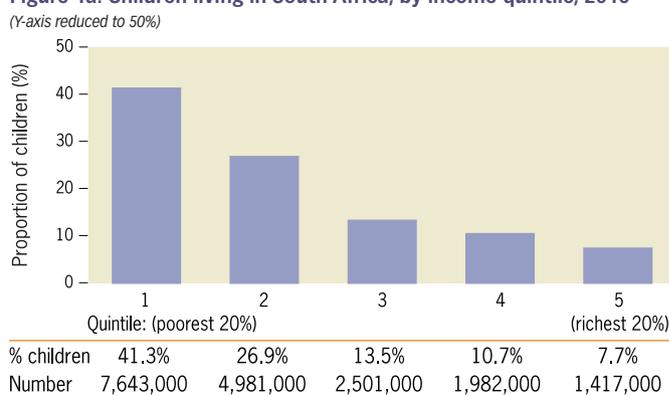
It is not uncommon in South Africa for children to live separately from their biological parents due to labour migration and care arrangements that involve extended families. The distribution of children across provinces is slightly different to that of adults, with a greater proportion of children living in provinces with large rural populations (Limpopo, the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal) and with greater proportions of adults in the largely metropolitan provinces. Despite being the smallest province in the country, Gauteng accommodates nearly a quarter (24%) of all adults, and 25% of households, but only 18% of children. This is because of the relatively large number of adult-only households in that province.

There have been striking changes in the provincial child populations since 2002. While there are slight decreases in the number of children living in the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and the North West provinces, the number of children living in Gauteng has risen by 21%. This may be caused by the migration of children to join existing households, or new births within the province. Either way, the increase suggests a more permanent migration pattern. The apparent increase in the child population in the Northern Cape is very pronounced due to the relatively small population in that province.

We can look at inequality by dividing all households into quintiles: five equal groups, with quintile 1 being the poorest 20% of households, quintile 2 being the next poorest, and so on. Quintile 5 consists of the least-poor 20%. The income quintiles are based on total income to the household including earnings and social grants. Nearly 70% of children live in the poorest 40% of households.

Children are fairly equally distributed across the age groups, with on average just over one million children in each year under 18. The gender split is equal for children, while it is slightly skewed towards females (53%) in the adult population.

Figure 1a: Children living in South Africa, by income quintile, 2010



Source: Statistics South Africa (2011) *General Household Survey 2010*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

Table 1a: Distribution of households, adults and children in South Africa, 2010

Province	Households		Adults		Children		% change 2002 – 2010
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Eastern Cape	1,667,000	13	3,971,000	13	2,684,000	14	-5.4
Free State	817,000	6	1,848,000	6	1,071,000	6	8.2
Gauteng	3,208,000	25	7,442,000	24	3,310,000	18	20.8
KwaZulu-Natal	2,408,000	19	6,283,000	20	4,264,000	23	11.2
Limpopo	1,240,000	10	2,991,000	10	2,258,000	12	-9.7
Mpumalanga	922,000	7	2,179,000	7	1,459,000	8	11.7
North West	961,000	7	2,203,000	7	1,276,000	7	-10.8
Northern Cape	293,000	2	724,000	2	430,000	2	42.9
Western Cape	1,467,000	11	3,694,000	12	1,771,000	10	11.3
South Africa	12,983,000	100	31,334,000	100	18,524,000	100	6.1

Source: Statistics South Africa (2011) *General Household Survey 2010*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

The number and proportion of children living with their biological parent(s)

South Africa has a long history of children not living consistently in the same dwelling as their biological parents as a result of poverty, labour migration, educational opportunities, or cultural practice. It is common for relatives to play a substantial role in child-rearing. Many children experience a sequence of different caregivers, are raised without fathers, or live in different households to their biological siblings.

The vast majority (86%) of children live in households where there are two or more co-resident adults. This indicator examines co-residence between children and their biological parents specifically. Although many children live with just one of their biological parents (invariably their mother), this does not mean that the mother is a “single parent” as she is not necessarily the only adult caregiver present in the household. In most cases there are other adult household members, such as aunts and grandparents, who may help to care for children.

The proportion of children living with both parents decreased from 38% in 2002 to 33% in 2010. Thirty-nine percent of all children – more than seven million children – live with their mothers but not with their fathers. Only 3% of children live in households where their fathers are present and their mothers absent. Twenty-four percent do not have either of their biological parents living with them. This does not necessarily mean that they are orphaned: in most cases (79%) at least one parent is alive but living elsewhere, and over half of all children who live without co-resident parents have both parents living elsewhere.

There is some provincial variation in these patterns. In both the Western Cape and Gauteng, the proportion of children living with both parents is significantly higher than the national average, with around half of children resident with both parents (54% and 50% respectively). Similarly, the number of children living with neither parent is low in these two provinces (11% and 12%). In contrast, over a third of children (34%) in the Eastern Cape live with neither parent. These patterns are consistent from 2002 to 2010.

Children in the poorest households are least likely to live with both their parents. Amongst children living in the poorest 20% of households, only 19% have both parents living with them, compared with 73% of children in the least-poor 20% of households.

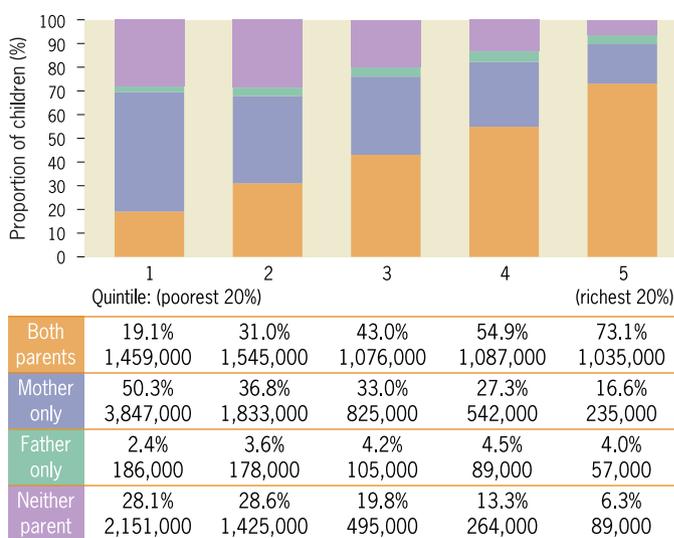
Less than a third (28%) of African children live with both their parents, while the vast majority of Indian and White children (81% and 77% respectively) are resident with both biological parents. Just over a quarter

(27%) of all African children do not live with either parent and a further 42% of African children live with their mothers but without their fathers. These figures are striking for the way in which they suggest the limited presence of fathers in the domestic lives of large numbers of African children.

Younger children (0 – 5-year-olds) are more likely to be living with their mothers (whether or not their fathers are present) than older children (6 – 17 years), who are more likely than younger children to be living with neither parent. While 15% of children aged 0 – 5 years were not resident with either parent in 2010, this situation applied to more than a quarter of children aged 6 – 17 years.

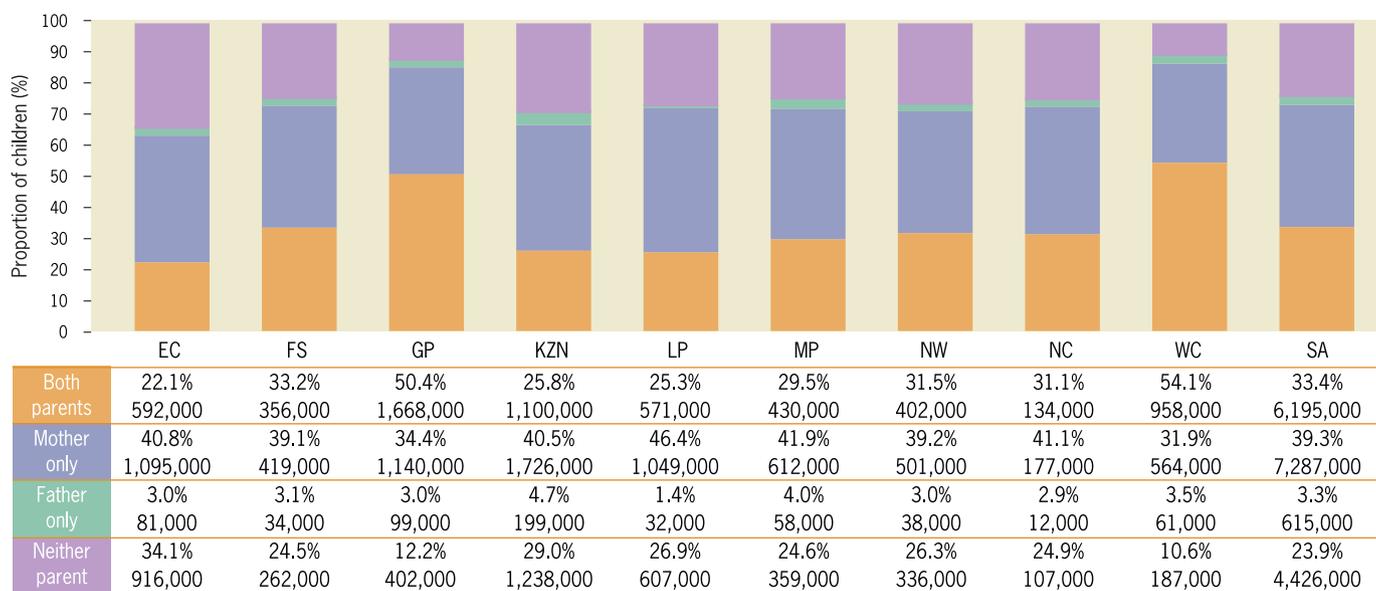
Only 19% of children living in the poorest 20% of households live with both parents, compared to 73% of children in the richest quintile. Children living in poorer households are also more likely to be living with neither parent.

Figure 1c: Children living with parents, by income quintile, 2010



Source: Statistics South Africa (2011) *General Household Survey 2010*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children’s Institute, UCT.

Figure 1b: Number and proportion of children living with biological parents, 2010



Source: Statistics South Africa (2011) *General Household Survey 2010*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children’s Institute, UCT.

The number and proportion of orphans living in South Africa

An orphan is defined as a child under the age of 18 years whose mother, father, or both biological parents have died (including those whose living status is reported as unknown, but excluding those whose living status is unspecified). For the purpose of this indicator, orphans are defined in three mutually exclusive categories:

- A maternal orphan is a child whose mother has died but whose father is alive.
- A paternal orphan is a child whose father has died but whose mother is alive.
- A double orphan is a child whose mother and father have both died.

The total number of orphans is the sum of maternal, paternal and double orphans. This definition differs from those commonly used by United Nations agencies and the Actuarial Society of South Africa (ASSA), where the definition of maternal and paternal orphans includes children who are double orphans. As the orphan definitions used here are mutually exclusive and additive, the figures differ from orphan estimates provided by the ASSA models.

In 2010, there were approximately 3.8 million orphans in South Africa. This includes children without a living biological mother, father or both parents, and is equivalent to 21% of all children in South Africa. The total number of orphans has increased substantially, with 845,000 more orphaned children in 2010 than in 2002. This is an increase of 28% in the number of orphaned children since 2002.

Orphan numbers do not say anything about the nature or extent of care that children are receiving. It is important to disaggregate the total orphan figures because the death of one parent may have different implications for children than the death of both parents. In particular, it seems that children who are maternal orphans are slightly more at risk of poorer outcomes than paternal orphans – for example, in relation to education.²

In 2010, 17% of children in South Africa did not have a living biological father; 8% did not have a living biological mother; 3.5% were maternal orphans with living fathers; and a further 4.8% were recorded as double orphans. In other words, the vast majority (60%) of all orphans in South Africa are paternal orphans (with living mothers). The numbers of paternal orphans are high because of the higher mortality rates of men in South Africa, as well as the frequent absence of fathers in their children's lives (1.3%, or 244,000 children, have fathers whose vital status is reported to be "unknown").

The figures illustrate notable increases in the number and proportion of double orphans over the nine-year period. The number of children who have lost both a mother and a father has more than doubled since 2002 (from approximately 350,000 to 885,000), indicating an increase of nearly three percentage points in double orphans in South Africa (2002: 2.0%;

2010: 4.8%). These increases are likely to be driven primarily by the AIDS pandemic. Three provinces carry particularly large burdens of care for double orphans: 7% of children living in KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State have lost both parents, and 6% of children in the Eastern Cape are double orphans.

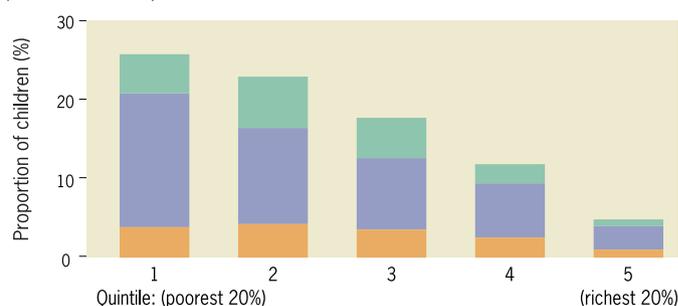
Throughout the period 2002 – 2010, roughly half of all orphans in South Africa have been resident in only two of the country's nine provinces: KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. KwaZulu-Natal has the largest population and the highest orphan numbers, with 27% of children in that province recorded as orphans who have lost either a mother, a father or both parents. Orphaning rates in the Eastern Cape are similarly high, at 26%, followed by the Free State, at 24%. The lowest orphaning rates are in the Western Cape (10% of children have lost at least one parent) and Gauteng (15%).

Children are more likely to be orphaned as they get older. In 2010, 80% of all child orphans were of school-going age (between seven and 17-years-old) and half were 12 years or older.

Orphaning is associated with poverty in that orphaning rates are higher for poor children than for relatively well-off children. Around a quarter of children in the poorest 20% of households are orphans, compared with the richest 20% where total orphaning rates are around 5%.

Figure 1e: Orphans by income quintile, 2010

(Y-axis reduced to 30%)

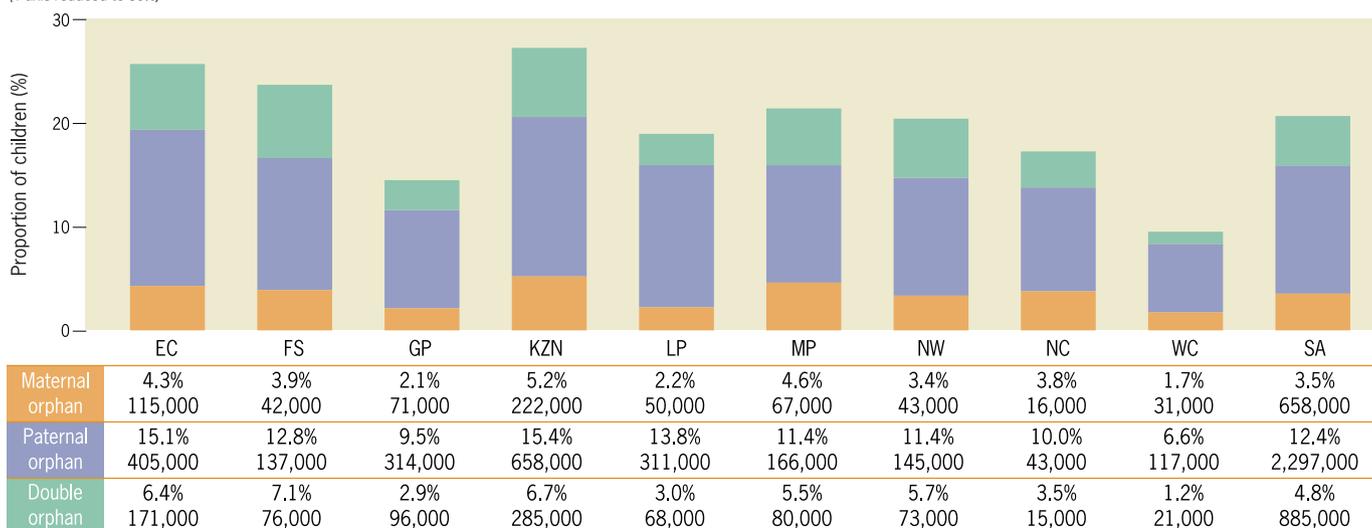


Maternal orphan	3.8%	4.2%	3.5%	2.5%	1.0%
	294,000	211,000	88,000	50,000	14,000
Paternal orphan	16.9%	12.1%	9.0%	6.8%	3.0%
	1,289,000	604,000	226,000	136,000	42,000
Double orphan	4.9%	6.5%	5.1%	2.4%	0.8%
	377,000	322,000	127,000	48,000	12,000

Source: Statistics South Africa (2011) *General Household Survey 2010*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

Figure 1d: Number and proportion of orphans, 2010

(Y-axis reduced to 30%)



Source: Statistics South Africa (2011) *General Household Survey 2010*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

The number and proportion of children living in child-only households

A child-only household is defined as a household in which all members are younger than 18 years. These households are also commonly known as “child-headed households”.

There is much concern within government and civil society that the number of children living in child-only households is escalating as the number of orphaned children increases due to AIDS-related deaths of parents. Many argue that kinship networks are stretched to their limits and are struggling to provide support to orphaned children. While orphaning undoubtedly places a large burden on extended families, there is little evidence to suggest that the capacity of extended families to care for orphans has been saturated, as commentators have feared. Rather than seeing increasing numbers of orphaned children living without adults, the vast majority of orphans live with family members, and child-headed households are not primarily the result of orphaning.³ Nevertheless it will be important to monitor the prevalence and nature of child-headed households as the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues.

There were just under 90,000 children living in a total of 50,000 child-only households across South Africa in 2010. This equates to 0.5% of all children. While children living in child-only households are rare relative to those resident in other household forms, the number of children living in this extreme situation is of concern.

Importantly, however, there has been no significant change in the proportion of children living in child-only households in the period between 2002 and 2010, nor has there been any change in the proportion of child-only households over the same period. This is despite a marked increase in orphans in South Africa over the same period. Predictions of rapidly increasing numbers of child-headed households as a result of HIV are at this point unrealised. An analysis of national household surveys to examine the circumstances of children in child-headed households in South Africa reveals that most children in child-only households are not orphans.⁴ These findings suggest that social phenomena other than HIV may play important roles in the formation of these households.

While it is not ideal for any child to live without an adult resident, it is positive that over half (58%) of all children living in child-only households are aged 15 years and above. Research suggests that child-only households are frequently temporary households, and often exist just for a period, for example while adult migrant workers are away, or for easy access to school during term-time, or after the death of an adult and prior to other

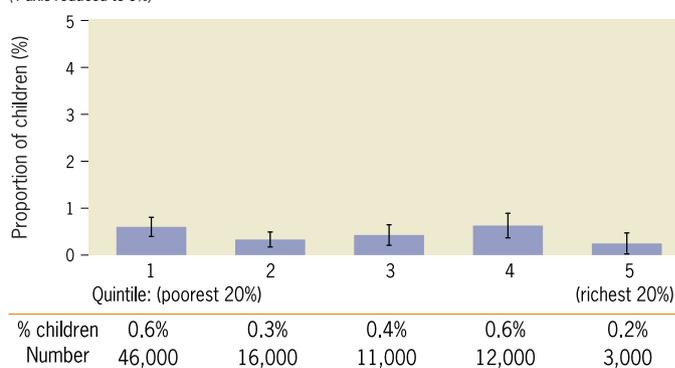
arrangements being made to care for the children (such as other adults moving in or the children moving to live with other relatives).⁵

Nearly 80% of all children living in child-only households live in three provinces: Limpopo (accounts for 31% of children in child-only households), Eastern Cape (25%) and KwaZulu-Natal (21%). From 2002 to 2010, these provinces have consistently been home to the majority of children living in child-only households.

Relative to children in mixed-generation households, child-only households are vulnerable in a number of ways. Child-only households are predominantly clustered in the poorest 20% of households. In addition to the absence of adult members who may provide care and security, they are at risk of living in poorer conditions, with poor access to services, less (and less reliable) income, and low levels of access to social grants.

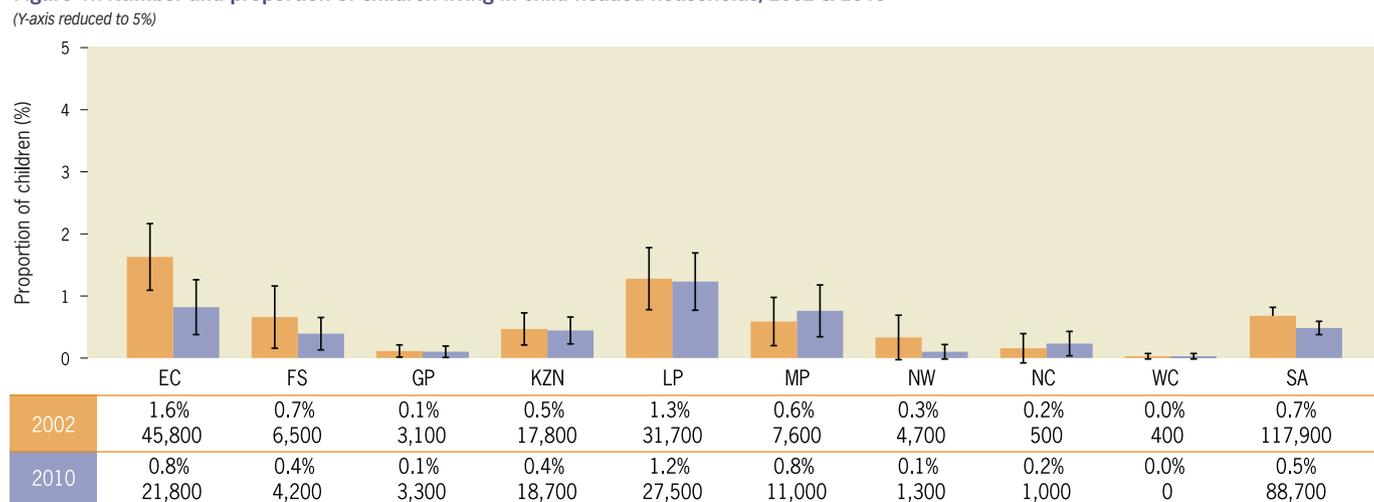
There has been very little robust data on child-headed households in South Africa to date. The figures should be treated with caution as the number of child-only households forms just a very small sub-sample of the General Household Survey. In particular, we caution against reading too much into the provincial breakdowns, or into apparent differences between the 2002 and 2010 estimates.

Figure 1g: Children in child-headed households, by income quintile, 2010
(Y-axis reduced to 5%)



Source: Statistics South Africa (2011) *General Household Survey 2010*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

Figure 1f: Number and proportion of children living in child-headed households, 2002 & 2010
(Y-axis reduced to 5%)



Sources: Statistics South Africa (2003, 2011) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2010*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

References

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- See no. 2 above (Meintjes et al, 2010).
- See no. 2 above (Meintjes et al, 2010).
- See no. 2 above (Meintjes et al, 2010); Hill C, Hosegood V & Newell M-L (2008) Children's care and living arrangements in a high HIV prevalence area in rural South Africa. *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, 3 (1): 65-77.