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## **To Identify and limit the risks of neglect in orphaned students: Can France manage it?**

Jérôme Clerc, Kamilla Khamzina, Caroline Desombre

The success of all students is a major concern of educational systems around the world. Yet many groups of students are often less successful than others at school. Even if the situation of orphans is quite different from one country to another, orphaned students have frequently lower academic performance than non-orphaned students (for example in Ghana, Salifu Yendork & Somhlaba, 2014; in Tanzania, Beegle et al., 2010; in France, Blanpain, 2008). It has been shown that the loss of a parent is associated with difficulties in getting an education (for example in the AIDS context, Zhao et al., 2007), with frequent absences from school (Cluver et al., 2009), and with fewer years of schooling (Beegle et al., 2010). The present theoretical paper focuses on French orphans. In France, a study conducted in 1999 by the National Institute of Demographic Studies (Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques) estimated that about 500,000 people under twenty-one had lost one or both parents (Monnier & Pennec, 2003). A more recent study by the same institute shows that, nowadays, about 270,000 people under 18 have lost one or two parents, which represents 1.8% of this population (Flammant et al., 2020). Orphans who lost one parent are called simple orphans whereas orphans who lost their two parents are called double orphans.

In France, the term orphan refers to biological orphans, i.e. children or adolescents under 18 who have lost one or both parents by death (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2016). In contrast to other countries, like Poland (Nowak-Fabrykowski, 2004), Russia (Shipitsyna, 2008), or several African countries (Salifu Yendork, 2020), this category

does not include social orphans because they are rare in France. Social orphans are children whose parents are still alive, but no longer educate their children nor satisfy all their needs for growth, some of these parents being still available to their children but unable to provide adequate care for reasons such as poverty or illness. In France, orphaned children also most frequently grow up in their family, with the other parent (when single orphans) or with uncles, aunts, or grandparents (when double orphans). In the same vein, although the death of a parent often causes familial income to suddenly decrease, orphanhood is not a major cause of poverty in France.

Despite these differences around the world, there is a common thread: Orphans' needs are barely identified, barely acknowledged, and barely treated notably in France (Author A, 2018) and especially at school (Author A et al., 2021). The concept of special educational needs corresponds to the cognitive, conative, and social elements necessary for students to benefit from learning (Author B et al., 2013). Defining and assessing the educational needs of orphaned children is challenging, particularly because specific needs (related to orphanhood) coexist with nonspecific needs (not related to orphanhood). Parental loss generates specific needs such as need for significantly increased protection and care or need to support their cognitive ability at school when their parents' support disappears (Chitiyo et al., 2008). Indeed, orphans are seen as having more cognitive problems than their schoolmates who lost neither parent (Dowdney et al., 1999). They also have significant psycho-social needs. For example, they are perceived by their teachers as being more anxious and depressed than their peers, and emotional difficulties are frequent in this population (Dowdney et al., 1999). Orphaned children and adolescents also struggle to remember school lessons and to do their homework (Cordier, 2008). Orphans' needs at school are thus multifaceted, as consequences of parental loss may affect cognitive,

relational/behavioral, and emotional dimensions of their daily psychological functioning. These consequences make new, specific, psychological needs to emerge after parental loss. Addressing these specific needs in orphans is necessary, and they must be considered as seriously as are other nonspecific needs that pre-existed before parental loss. If the specific needs that emerged after parental loss are not correctly addressed, one should expect orphans to encounter many difficulties at school. Such difficulties are likely to give rise to lower academic achievement, due to (1) sudden cognitive difficulties, especially in memory and attention, (2) decreasing quality of relations with peers and teachers, as well as the emergence of undesirable behaviors and, (3) difficulties in regulating one's emotions and staying focused on schoolwork.

### **Overview**

In this paper, given the detrimental impact of parental loss on academic achievement, we argue that orphaned students should be considered as students with special educational needs (i.e., students "who have significantly more difficulty learning than the majority of children of the same age when they are in a particular situation or who have a disability that prevents or hinders their learning", OECD, 1996). This category includes students with disabilities, high-IQ children, non-French speakers and even pupils in jail. This idea has already been suggested by some researchers in different countries including Zimbabwe (Chitiyo et al., 2008), France (Author A et al., 2021), and Cambodia (Serey et al., 2011). Categorizing orphaned students as having special educational needs is important to provide appropriate educational responses. In this paper, we attempt to go one step further, by identifying different specific needs of orphaned children and by proposing avenues for pedagogical responses. We will use Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1992) ecological development model to specify several risks of neglecting orphans' special educational needs and to propose ways to limit neglect. Neglect is defined here as a

chronic failure from adults to address orphans' needs, putting risk to their education (see CLIPP, 2008 for their report for a similar definition considering neglect in development).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1992) ecological development model accounts for human development in a way that includes several systems, each putting specific constraints on the development of the individual. The ontosystem refers to the child's personal strengths, weaknesses, preferences, cognitive and social abilities, as well as the child's own history. At the next higher level of influence, several microsystems are distinguished. A microsystem is a structured organization the child lives in, typically the family, the school, or the community. Microsystems are linked and they correspond with each other in the next formal level, called the mesosystem. Of particular interest is the fact that the mesosystem allows for teacher-parent discussions about the children and their life at school, especially regarding academic achievement and peer relationship. Next is the exosystem, which comprises distal influences on the child's development, ranging from local health organizations and providers to the location of the parent's workplace, which can shorten total time for parent-child interactions depending on how far the workplace is from home. The next level is the macrosystem, which refers to the values that are shared by people belonging to a same community or nation, and particularly the definition of concepts like children's needs, or teachers' role and missions. A last level, the chronosystem was added later (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). It considers the temporal changes of all other systems and permits us to understand human development as fundamentally dynamic and adaptive.

We now turn to some academic difficulties that have been observed in orphans and attempt to link the various risks experienced by orphans to the various levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological development model.

### **From academic difficulties of orphaned children to their special educational needs**

The loss of a parent during childhood often leads to a decrease of academic achievement in the first months following parental loss (van Eerdewegh et al., 1982), and even after several years (Berg et al., 2014). This lower academic performance may be the result of social and financial difficulties that may follow the loss of a parent (Cluver et al., 2009; Zhao et al., 2007); the link between socio-economic status and school achievement is indeed well-defined (see Sirin, 2005, for a meta-analytic review). Social and financial difficulties are mainly linked to the exosystem. Another explanation is that, regarding simple orphans, the living parent would be considerably less available for supporting his/her child, including assisting with schoolwork, especially due to its own grief. This pertains to the family microsystem. However, these two levels of explanations (exosystem and family microsystem) are somewhat external to the students themselves since they pertain to environmental causes. The scientific literature also supports the idea that the orphans' lower academic achievement may also be related to their specific cognitive functioning in the classroom (Mueller et al., 2015), their specific relational/behavioral difficulties (Kalantari & Vostanis, 2010), and their hard emotional regulation that produce difficulties at school.

#### **Cognitive difficulties**

Several authors suggested that the loss of a parent may affect cognitive skills (Harris, 1991; Mueller et al., 2015). Distractibility, inattention, confusion, decreased cognitive control, and a lack of concentration have been reported (Author A, 2020; Harris, 1991; Mueller et al., 2015), all referring to the ontosystemic level of Bronfenbrenner's model as they are individual characteristics. Orphans' cognitive difficulties may be mediated by traumatic consequences of parental loss. The loss of a parent is likely to traumatize the child, sometimes resulting in

symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (Cluver et al., 2009; Sharer et al., 2015). Studies have often shown that links exist between trauma and problems of an academic (Dube & McGiboney, 2018) or cognitive nature (e.g., DePrince et al., 2009). A recent meta-analysis showed that children exposed to trauma had poorer memory and executive functioning (high-level cognitive control functions) than trauma-naive children, and that trauma within the family is more detrimental than external, non-familial trauma (Malarbi et al., 2017). This meta-analysis did not distinguish between children who grieved the loss of a parent and those suffering from other types of trauma (e.g., parental violence). However, one might hypothesize that orphans show cognitive profiles that are likely to interfere with their academic functioning.

Orphans, probably due to the emotional consequences of having lost one or both parents, have also specific difficulties with cognitive inhibition (Mueller et al., 2015) and working memory (Author A, 2020). Cognitive inhibition is one of the three fundamental so-called executive functions, which allow an individual to control their cognitions, behaviors, and emotions (Diamond, 2013). It consists of rethinking and, if necessary, permanently suppressing, a verbal answer, a specific behavior, or the expression of an emotion. Thus, inhibition allows for cognitive control over one's own mental and emotional processes, and as such it is essential for learning (Best et al., 2011). Mueller et al. (2015) showed that adolescents who lost one or both parents exhibit difficulty in an inhibition task, compared with adolescents who lost neither parent. Orphans' poor performance on such a task can be explained by the presence of intrusive thoughts tied to the deceased parent. These involuntary thoughts, which are frequent after parental loss (Balk, 2011; Dopp & Cain, 2012), can hinder the orphans' cognitive functioning by degrading the exercise of prolonged cognitive control while doing a cognitively demanding task. Intrusive thoughts are indeed very difficult to ignore in a learning situation (Boekaerts & Pekrun,

2016). Furthermore, cognitive inhibition and intrusive thoughts are ontosystemic, since they characterize an individual independently from contextual factors.

Moreover, working memory seems to be also affected among orphaned children. Working memory, a second executive function, assures simultaneous maintenance and processing of information for a brief time. It is involved in many academic achievements, as varied as reading, writing, language learning, science, mathematics, multimedia, and concept formation (Cowan, 2014). As Cowan (2014, p. 213) states: “The importance of a good working memory is evident when something new is learned, and logical connections are not yet formed so the working memory load is high”. Furthermore, working memory is often impaired among children who have experienced traumatic events (DePrince et al., 2009). A recent study by Author A (2020) showed impaired working memory among French orphaned children when compared with non-orphaned children. Forty-four single orphans, and thirty-one control children with both parents alive, aged from 7 to 14, were compared on a working memory task. The results showed a disadvantage among orphaned children when compared with their non-orphaned peers. Again, the presence of intrusive thoughts may hinder the orphans’ cognitive functioning, as research showed that intrusive thoughts can cause cognitive load (Paas & van Merriënboer, 2020) and cognitive load is detrimental to memory. Again, individual levels of working memory and intrusive thoughts refer to the ontosystemic level.

In summary, orphaned students present cognitive difficulties that may prevent them to fully benefit from school time and school activities. Due to these difficulties, especially including less efficient inhibition and working memory, they are likely to present significantly more difficulties with learning than non-orphaned children of the same age. Thus, they should be considered as having special educational needs. As special educational needs have to be



addressed by the educational systems, teachers should consider orphans' special educational needs and try to find the best possible educational answers and pedagogical adaptations.

Moreover, cognitive difficulties are only one dimension of the difficulties that orphans seem to encounter, as they have been frequently reported to struggle maintaining good relations with their peers.

### **Relational/behavioral Difficulties**

Inter-individual relationship, notably with non-orphaned peers, is grossly impacted by parental loss. Indeed, orphaned children have frequently been observed to become isolated or withdrawn, to struggle with their non-orphaned counterparts (Heath et al., 2008), or to be teased by their peers for being too old for their class (Salifu Yendork, 2020). Sometimes they become oppositional or even rebellious (Heath et al., 2008), maybe due to strong feelings of anger which frequently appear after parental loss. These relational difficulties may discourage other students and even teachers to spontaneously provide social support to orphans. In the same way, classmates and siblings may refuse to help an orphaned child with his/her schoolwork or homework. Behavioral problems have also been documented, as aggressive or disruptive behavior at school and at home (Ahmad & Mohamad, 1996; Kalantari & Vostanis, 2010). Kaur and her colleagues (2008) conducted a descriptive cross-sectional study to investigate the behavioral and emotional problems of institutionalized orphans. They showed that “most of the orphans [...] were found to be having conduct problems (34.90%) followed by peer problems (15.80%), emotional problems (14.70%), hyperactivity (8.60%), and low prosocial behavior (3.40%)” (p. 166). These behavioral issues are likely to be a major problem in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers less accept in their classroom students with behavioral difficulties than students with cognitive difficulties (Jury et al., 2021). Regarding Bronfenbrenner's model,

relational and behavioral difficulties refer both to the ontosystem -since each child has its own responses to social interactions- and to the microsystems -mainly the school microsystem, and to a lesser extent the family microsystem. Interestingly, the interactions between family and school at a mesosystemic level seem to be rarely considered in the literature.

### **Emotional Difficulties**

The loss of a parent during childhood has important emotional consequences for the child, including the appearance or exacerbation of symptoms of anxiety (Salifu Yendork & Somhlaba, 2014), depression (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2009; Sharer et al., 2015), low levels of self-esteem (Getachew et al., 2011; Onuoha & Munakata, 2010), posttraumatic stress symptoms as for example intrusive images, thoughts or sounds (Kaplou et al., 2014) and posttraumatic stress disorder. Such emotional difficulties may overwhelm orphans' mental available resources, leading to less efficient learning at school. However, posttraumatic stress disorder seems to reach lower levels when orphans still have good access to school, thus pointing out a potential benefit of schooling on orphans' well-being (Cluver et al., 2009). Furthermore, these emotional problems can be linked with a lack of social support (Yasin & Dulkifli, 2010), especially since other members of the family who survive the parent (e.g., Grandparents) often struggle to handle orphans' emotional needs (Kuo & Operario, 2010). Finally, emotional difficulties seem to be more pronounced in younger adolescents than in older adolescents despite a higher level of perceived social support from peers and school in the youngest (Jameel et al., 2015). Emotional difficulties seem then to be at odds with academic achievement, and even more so in younger people. Ontosystemic and microsystemic (family, school, peers) levels are concerned here.

In brief, orphans are likely to experiment many harmful psychological consequences of parental loss. These consequences in turn are very likely to provoke more learning difficulties

than the majority of non-orphaned children of the same age, which is the definition of special educational needs. These needs should be addressed through educational responses in the school environment, such as a) cognitive compensation or reinforcement of cognitive skills, b) recognition of their orphan status and dissemination of information about orphanage to reduce relational/behavioral difficulties and c) social and/or psychological support to help orphans to deal with their emotions. In France, considering the needs of students and the related pedagogical responses have greatly improved in recent decades.

### **Special educational needs in France**

#### **Inclusive Education in France**

For over 30 years, the principle of inclusive education (i.e., providing the same opportunities for a full learning experience to every student regardless of their special educational needs, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2016) is at the heart of educational policies around the world (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2016). France is involved in this movement especially since the law of February 2005 (Loi n°2005-102) which states that every child is required to follow the regular curriculum, with, if necessary, additional appropriate instructional support. However, special schools are still available for students with severe to profound disabilities that do not allow them to be educated in mainstream classrooms. Many other laws have supported this policy, for example by improving teacher training in 2020, or consolidating the status of parents in their child's career choices (see for example, the French “Law for a School of Trust, 2019”). In consequence, the number of pupils with disabilities and/or learning difficulties included in regular education have consistently increased over the last decades (French Ministry of Education, 2020). Nevertheless, inclusive education is not limited to students with disabilities. Importantly, it encompasses a

number of principles (Ainscow & Miles, 2008) such as (a) reducing the exclusion of some students, (b) restructuring school cultures, policies and practices to respond to student diversity, and (c) ensuring the presence, participation and success of all students who are vulnerable to exclusion, not just those with disabilities or categorized as having special educational needs. Thus, orphans, as they are in a vulnerable situation, are covered by inclusive education.

### **Orphanhood and Inclusive Education**

In the French educational system, orphaned students are not schooled in special classes or special schools (except if they have a severe disability). They are enrolled in regular classes. Regardless the nature of the needs of these children, specific or nonspecific, orphanhood does not appear yet to be specifically targeted by French educational policies or settings. Furthermore, research on parental loss and its consequences for children is scarce, although almost three hundred thousand people under eighteen are of direct concern. Moreover, pre-service teachers do not receive any instruction on how to cope with orphanhood at school, and teachers feel largely defenceless when one of their students loses one or both parents. This is preoccupying since orphanhood can have several important negative consequences at school, as detailed above. Being more aware of these consequences may help teachers to deal with these situations more effectively, hence reducing the likelihood of orphans' being neglected in their specific and/or nonspecific needs.

A recent survey was commissioned by Organisme Commun des Institutions de Rente et de Prévoyance (OCIRP) Foundation and conducted by the French Institute of Public Opinion (IFOP). OCIRP is a group of provident societies which created its own foundation in 2009 to help the French society to better understand what orphanage is and who orphans are. IFOP is a private company specialized in opinion surveys. The results, gathered among 940 members of

the national educational system including 876 teachers, showed that only 5% of participants were trained to include orphaned students and 7% were aware of the issue, while 84% expressed their willingness to be trained (OCIRP/IFOP, 2017). Just over half of the participants (51%) were worried about the inclusion of an orphaned student in their classroom and not being able to cope with such a situation efficiently. The lack of teacher training concerning students' difficulties surrounding the loss of a parent is likely to severely undercut the way they teach orphans and hence, directly affect orphans' academic experience, including achievement and wellbeing. Without appropriate training, educational staff cannot meet the needs of orphaned children efficiently, in terms of curricula, resources, and instructional adaptations. Other results from this survey are worthwhile. First, more than half of the participants (54%) reported not being able to identify any orphan in their schools, despite the high probability that every French school welcomes several orphans. Second, in 63% of the cases, no information on the orphaned children and their situations had been given to teachers. Third, according to 71% of the participants, no specific procedures for supporting orphaned students were offered in the school setting, which is consistent with what happens in most Swiss schools, a neighbour country (Author A et al., 2021).

This situation is highly problematic. Without being able to identify orphaned students, teachers and educational staff cannot accommodate their pedagogy to these students' special educational needs. Furthermore, in this context, it is more difficult to set up a concerted response at the institutional level that would fully include orphans at school. According to Wood and Goba (2011), these dysfunctions add to the teachers' stress, since it is unlikely that they can meet all the needs of these children, particularly in the absence of cooperation from the rest of the school community.

We now come back more deeply to Bronfenbrenner's ecological development model, as a way to help us conceptualize and meet orphans' special educational needs in an efficient way.

### **Meeting the needs of orphaned students using the Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1992) ecological development model**

Bronfenbrenner's ecological development model was already used to better understand the consequences of parental loss (Author A, 2020; Salifu Yendork, 2020). The ecological approach has allowed researchers to analyse the negative consequences of parental loss in an integrative way (see Figure 1). We use this model to understand why orphans can be neglected at school and suggest some avenues for its remediation. According to Figure 1, the French situation is characterized by risks of neglect at each level of the model, except the exosystem. Indeed, exosystemic answers seem to be less difficult to find in France to fight the risk of neglect, as several associations are devoted to widows' and orphans' wellbeing, and more broadly to people who grief the loss a loved one due to illness, accidents, or crime. Unfortunately, most of these associations do not frequently communicate with schools, since their focus is not on education but rather on social support to grieving persons and families. Thus, considering exosystemic level would be of very limited help in our quest of ways of limiting neglect of orphans in French schools. For this reason, we will no longer consider exosystem but will rather focus on the remaining systems present in the model.

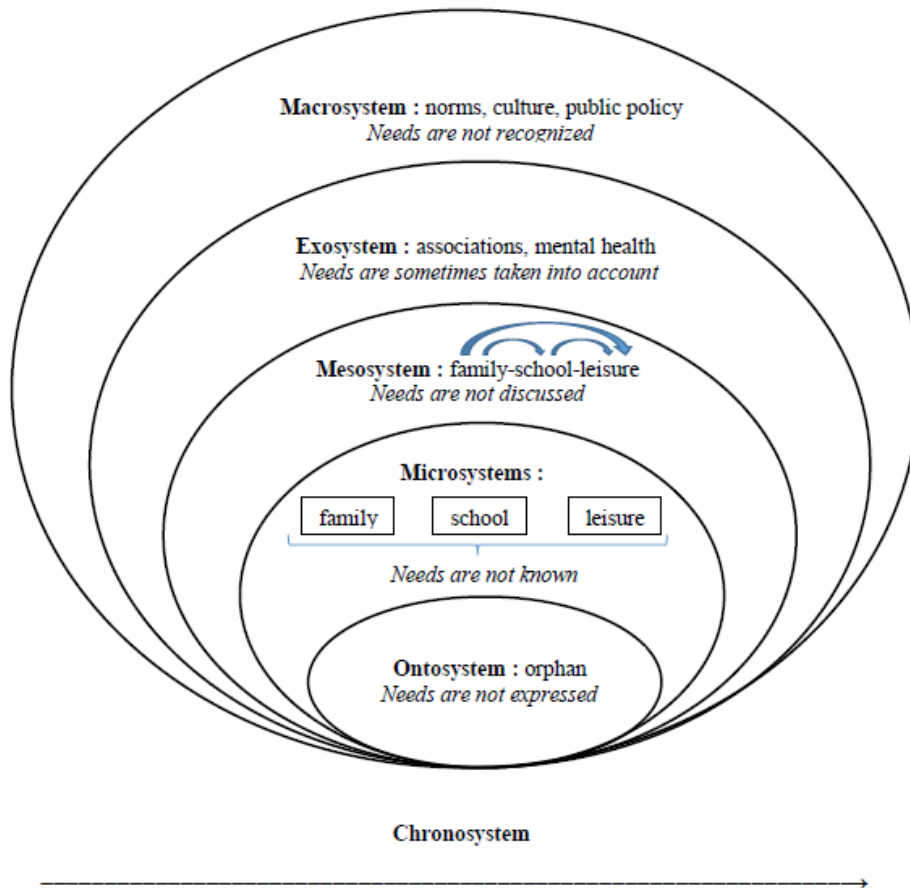


Figure 1. Proposition for analyzing orphans' needs within Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development (adapted from Author A, 2018).

### **A few recommendations for avoiding or limiting neglect**

#### **Adapting instructions to the cognitive, relational/behavioral, and emotional needs of orphaned students**

Given the cognitive difficulties that orphans themselves (which represent here the ontosystem) encounter at school, teachers aware of student's parental loss should pay attention to the cognitive load caused by new learning, and when possible, they should try to reduce it by instructional and curricular adaptations. Assuming that part of the difficulties encountered by orphans at school may come from cognitive load increased by the processing of intrusive thoughts (Author A, 2020; Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016; Paas & van Merriënboer, 2020), what may

teachers (representing the school microsystem) do in order to avoid more cognitive load coming from other sources? Some alternative pedagogical approaches may be proposed for students who have experienced parental loss. For example, breaking down school exercises or tasks to have the child process different parts separately instead of processing them all at the same time, could lower the cognitive load (Sweller, 1994). Another approach may be to use worked examples rather than asking students to search for a problem solution, since it could reduce cognitive load when working in a new domain (Tricot & Sweller, 2014).

Relational/behavioral difficulties pertain both to the ontosystem (the child's own responses to social interactions) and to the school microsystem (when these responses are produced in the school context). Ignoring relational/behavioral difficulties and the need for the orphan to be accompanied would thus be a case of neglect at both the ontosystem and the microsystem levels. To avoid such neglect in the classroom, a teacher may let the orphaned student know that he/she is aware of his/her status of orphan and ask him/her if he/she wants information about orphanage to be given to his/her classmates.

Emotional difficulties are proper to an individual and, as such, are grounded in the ontosystem. Yet, one should also consider emotions at the school microsystem level, since it is well recognized that emotions are partly socially determined (Rimé, 2009). Again, both the ontosystem (the orphan itself) and the school microsystem are involved in the risk of neglect. Of particular interest are emotions of anxiety which are very frequently reported by orphans themselves. If anxiety is not recognized and the orphan is not accompanied and helped to lower the level of anxiety, it is likely to have negative consequences on schoolwork. Teachers may take some time to discuss with the orphan about his/her anxiety and try to reassure him/her about its future achievements at school.



Beyond the above considerations, it seems necessary to try to address teachers' questions on how to deal with orphanhood in their classrooms in a concrete manner. The need for specific training to increase teachers' knowledge and skills regarding death education and student bereavement has been reported in several countries including Greece (Papadatou et al., 2002), Ireland (McGovern & Barry, 2000), and France (OCIRP/IFOP, 2017).

### **Teacher training**

Let us consider further the school microsystem and the ways teachers may address orphans' special educational needs. Despite great progress in inclusive education, teachers' consideration of special educational needs and optimal inclusive education remains modest across the world (Westwood & Graham, 2003), including France (Berzin et al., 2020). In France, the training offered by Institut National Supérieur du Professorat et de l'Éducation (i.e., the provider of pre-service teacher training) focuses on equipping teachers with knowledge about inclusive education as a whole, but the specific situation of orphaned students is not addressed. In consequence, no information is provided about how to care for and support orphaned children at school, and solutions may be found in directly training teachers to address their orphaned students' special educational needs. It is no wonder that the lack of training is regularly mentioned by teachers as the main barrier to inclusive education (Hind et al., 2019). Training is yet a powerful tool for successful inclusion of all children. Indeed, training and increasing practical and theoretical knowledge about inclusive education improves teachers' personal attitudes toward inclusive education (de Boer et al., 2011), self-efficacy and their ability to meet students' needs (Forlin et al., 2014). Training teachers on learning processes, memory function, and classroom discipline is likely to benefit orphaned students as well as all other students. At the same time, specific training on how to cope with orphaned students should enable teachers to

develop instructional materials that address these children's needs. In inclusive settings, teachers are asked to respond to the needs of all of their students – that is, to adapt their approach to help every student reach one's full potential.

### **Fostering Collaborative Work**

Another way of using Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework is to consider different systems surrounding child development and their inter-relations in the mesosystem. Limiting the risk of neglecting orphans' special educational needs may take the form of defining and following a clear intervention framework. Such a framework should be shared by different professionals from school and community services (mental health services, educators), which is likely to increase its efficiency (Chitiyo et al., 2008). Furthermore, it was proposed that caregivers in the family context may themselves benefit from psychoeducation on how sociocultural practices could adversely affect orphans' wellbeing (Salifu Yendork, 2020). We argue that this is probably the same for teachers. When building a shared intervention framework at the mesosystem level, training parents and teachers jointly may allow them to better meet orphans' special educational needs. Such a framework may also include mental health professionals as psychologists and/or psychiatrists. Regarding many orphans' cognitive difficulties, the question as to whether low scores in cognitive tasks are related to trauma remains open, since no study to date has measured or controlled for the traumatic consequences of parental loss. Along with further studies that should take this variable into account, a child with parental loss associated with trauma would require both pedagogical adaptations (e.g., reducing cognitive load as often as possible) and a psychologist's intervention (for helping this child regulating its own emotions). This is an important step to take because teachers are neither required nor supposed to intervene on the psychological consequences of a trauma. Thus, an

intervention framework targeting orphans' needs, which would include parents, teachers, and psychologists, should be proposed to orphans for efficient and adapted interventions.

A third way to limit the risk of neglecting orphans' special educational needs would be at the macrosystem level. According to Author A (2018), it is the last level characterized by an absence of recognition of orphans' needs in the French context. Therefore, it should be considered as a level which is also likely to provoke neglect of orphans' special educational needs. The macrosystem is characterized by the cultural values that are shared among people from a same community or a same nation, whether the values are philosophical, cultural, educational, etc. The proper definition of children's needs can vary across different communities, and it is difficult to find a consensual definition. However, a common need that seems to be present in most cultures worldwide is a need for psychological availability of a beloved adult (Lacharité et al., 2006). This need is likely to be especially strong in orphaned children. They have lost one or both parents, who are usually the best candidates for playing a role in satisfying children's need for psychological availability. As to orphans, psychological availability can take different forms, such as spending time with them (playing, leisure activities), helping them with academic work, or having discussions about the deceased parent(s). This last point is especially important according to many mental health practitioners, since it allows the child to keep vivid memories of their parent(s) and feel less abandoned (Lieberman et al., 2003). However, there is a risk that such discussions will not happen because of a "culture of silence". Silence surrounding parents' illness, and more generally death, has been reported by several researchers. Indeed, any discussion with orphans about their deceased parent(s) may be sometimes difficult because death is considered a highly private topic (Salifu Yendork, 2020) and is taboo (Author A, 2018), and

since adults are unwilling to upset the orphan because of feelings of sadness or distress (Lowton & Higginson, 2003).

This culture of silence seems to be deeply grounded in the fear of death, the attempt to avoid more suffering by evoking the deceased parent(s), and the idea that life is fundamentally in front of us and not behind us, all points which arise from a shared cultural foundation. Transforming this culture of silence into a culture of discussion about the child's deceased parent(s) may be possible if we first include work on defining orphans' needs and teachers' role in educational policies, and then share this work with people at the family and community levels.

### **Conclusion**

Orphanhood has a significant impact on children's learning and consequently on their quality of life and personal accomplishments (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004; Salifu Yendork & Somhlaba, 2014). The scientific literature shows that parental loss generates consequences for cognitive, relational/behavioral, and emotional daily functioning. In consequence, we supported the idea that orphans should be considered as students with special educational needs, which may help to better address their specific needs. Teachers must consider, in their educational practices, characteristics of orphaned students. To this aim, they should both know the particularities of orphaned students, and be accompanied to propose relevant pedagogical adaptations.

Furthermore, considering educational responses for orphaned students can be beneficial to all students, which is consistent with an inclusive education approach. The aim of improving teaching practices, for making them both adapted to each child and beneficial for all children, is at the heart of the inclusive project (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2016). Thus, considering orphans as having special educational needs may advance education for all students in France.

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