



Providing mentoring for orphans and vulnerable children in internally displaced person camps: The case of northern Nigeria



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Dates:

Received: 06 June 2016 Accepted: 15 Aug. 2016 Published: 31 Oct. 2016

How to cite this article:

Chiroma, N.H., 2016, 'Providing mentoring for orphans and vulnerable children in internally displaced person camps: The case of northern Nigeria', HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies 72(1), a3544. http://dx.doi. org/10.4102/hts.v72i1.3544

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number of OVC throughout northern Nigeria is growing as a result of the Boko Haram pandemic.² Mostly, this is caused by the death of parents who have been killed by the insurgents. It has been estimated that by 2015, 200 000 children under the age of 18 had been orphaned by the Boko Haram insurgents. As the number of OVC is growing, it is becoming more and more difficult for their communities to address all their needs, including their need for positive role models and mentors. This article discusses the role that mentoring can play in the development of OVC affected by violence in northern Nigeria, specifically those in internally displaced person (IDP) camps. This article argued that one approach to improve the holistic care of OVC in IDP camps in northern Nigeria is through the use of mentors.

The challenge of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) has become central to the response

of many organisations (UN, UNHCR, AONN, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, etc.)1 today. The

Introduction

In 2009, according to UNAIDS, Nigeria had one of the highest number of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in the world; now projected at 17.5 million, which is 24.5% of all children younger than 18 years in Nigeria. While the official estimate is 17.5 million OVC in Nigeria, including 7.3 million orphans, practitioners in the field believe that this could be an underestimation of the size and scope of the problem (Nigeria OVC Situation Analysis 2012). The UNICEF data base estimates that there are 9.7 million orphans in Nigeria, making it the third highest absolute number of orphans in the world, after India (25 million) and China (17 million). These findings have grave implications for the current and future work with OVC in Nigeria.

According to Sipe (2002:16), mentoring programmes have been used fruitfully in various countries to enrich school attendance and attainment, moderate risk-taking behaviours and promote psychosocial well-being of many children at risk. Furthermore, Thurman, Pells and Ntaganira (2006:12ff) add that qualitative indication suggests that mentoring programmes could nurture increased community support of OVC. Enduring mentoring relationships have been found to be associated with a wide range of benefits to children and young people (Freedman 2014; Morrow 2009; Synder 2010). Mentors have been used in Nigeria to effectively promote psychosocial wellbeing among youth-headed households. However, owing to some cultural practices in northern Nigeria (such as the notion that a child is not a complete human being until he or she is an adult), the use of mentors among children is very limited. More so, according to Danladi (2015:167), mentoring programmes have not been implemented among OVC in most Nigerian rural and urban communities. This article will consider how mentoring practices could strengthen adults to offer quality support for OVC, particularly those in internally displaced person (IDP) camps in the context of northern Nigeria.

Objectives

My current involvement with children in various camps for the IDPs in northern Nigeria motivated me to write this article. My aim is to show how mentoring could offer additional

1. United Nations, United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Association of OVC NGOs in Nigeria, Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS, United Nation Fund for Population Activities, United Nations International Children's Fund.

2.The term 'Boko Haram' implies a sense of rejection and 'resistance to imposition of Western education and its system of colonial social organisation, which replaced and degraded the earlier Islamic order of the *jihadist* state' Aghedo and Osuma (2012:853). Further, according to Isa (2010:16–27), Islamic scholars and clerics who once held authority in the caliphate state and courts ascribed the name boko to northern leaders who spoke, acted, ruled and operated the state like their Western colonial masters. Isa (2010:22) adds that it is not uncommon to hear in discussions among Islamist academics and average northerners that poverty and collapsed governance – the misery of the region – can be blamed on the failures and fraudulent attitudes of yan boko (modern elites trained at secular schools) who have attained Western education and are currently in positions of power. As such, the structure represented by the yanboko is unjust, secular and has no divine origin.

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support in addressing some of the crises and challenges faced by OVC, especially those in urban IDP camps. Osmer (2008:8–11) proposes a helpful methodology for practical theology which he describes as 'tasks of practical theology'.³ However, the article will try to answer only two of Osmer's questions, namely the descriptive-empirical task: 'What is going on?' and the pragmatic-task question: 'How might we respond?', owing to the fact that the interpretive task: 'Why is it going on?' and the normative task: 'What ought to be going on?' have been adequately dealt with in previous research (Christian Aid 2007, 2013).

The first objective of this article is to show from previous research (Chiroma 2015; Danladi 2014; Gardner 2015) the current state of OVC in IDP camps in northern Nigeria, which helps to answer Osmer's descriptive question: 'What is going on?' The remainder of this article focuses on providing mentoring for OVC in IDP camps answering Osmer's pragmatic question: 'How might we respond?' This will be done by proposing how mentoring can and should be provided to OVC, especially those in IDP camps in northern Nigeria.

Definitions

An orphan is any child younger than 18 years without one parent (maternal or paternal orphan) or both parents (total orphan) through death. While a vulnerable child is a child who, because of birth or environmental circumstances, lacks access to basic needs, care and protection that are necessary for optimal growth and development. Such a child is less privileged compared with their peers and is prone to abuse and deprivation, which if unaddressed might result in physical, mental, emotional harm (Beatie 2012:5). This definition is in line with the understanding of OCV in most communities in northern Nigeria.

Mentoring

There is no universally agreed-upon definition of mentoring. However, it is generally agreed that mentoring involves not only career guidance and support but also personal, psychological and social aspects. The term 'mentoring' is used in different contexts and it can be applied to different organisations. Griffin (1995:23) and Hill and Reddy (2007:89) suggest that mentoring should encompass helping people

to focus on their encounters, choices, consequences, creative solutions and conclusions. According to Parsloe and Wray (2000:64), the goal of a mentor is leaning towards an interchange of wisdom, support, learning or guidance for the purpose of personal, spiritual, career or life growth. Treston and Cook (2013:50) define mentoring as the 'relationship in which the mentor provides support, advice, feedback and guidance' to the protégé based on the traditional mentoring model of the apprentice learning from a master. Merriam (2006:78) defines mentoring as an interface between an older person and a younger person, in a trusted, loving relationship. Therefore, the relationship between the mentor and protégé is an important factor in enhancing the growth and development of the mentee.

Community-based mentoring

In addition, this article takes into cognisance the community dimension of mentoring, namely community-based mentoring (CBM), which as argued by Kingston (2013:65) is a mentoring process where the entire community adopts a child or children with the goal of providing support, nurture, care and advocacy. This is done not out of mere sense of obligation, but rather with the understanding that children are the responsibility of the entire community not just the extended family members. However, this opportunity of CBM has not been fully explored in northern Nigeria, especially in the IDP camps.

Mentor

The person offering mentoring is usually referred to as a mentor. Daloz (1986:19) argues that mentors are leaders who have something to do with the 'growing up', with the maturity of identity in the protégé. The word mentor in this study is defined as a trusted counsellor and guide, or a person who makes their personal strengths, resources and networks available to help a protégé reach his or her goals. A mentor then is the person who provides care and support to an individual in the context of a trusting relationship, which is vital for mentoring OVC in IDP camps. More so because many of the children have been wounded emotionally and/or psychologically by other adults; hence, they find it difficult to trust let alone be open for a relationship with adults.

Theological framework

A proper understanding of child theology is vital to any work with children. In other words, a faulty theological understanding of a child produces a faulty theology of working with children, which in turn produces a skewed theology. In the words of Ackerman (2003:27), 'Theology is worrying about what God is worrying about when God gets up in the morning'. In the context of child theology, Watson (2007:1–20) notes that child theology encourages being open to children, an 'expecting' of children, in spheres of life that traditionally exclude or ignore their *human* experience and meaning-making activities. In order to engage in a meaningful mentoring relationship that reflects a proper understanding of child theology in IDP camps

^{3.}The first task is what Osmer (2008:8ff) calls the descriptive-empirical task. This task pursues the question: What is going on in a particular social context or field of experience? It gives special attention to religious praxis. Osmer further asserts that a particular approach is chosen for a given study, because it is best suited for the purposes of a particular project. The second task is the interpretive task. Research findings are not self-interpretive. Thus, the interpretive task of practical theology seeks to place such findings in an explanatory framework, thereby answering the question: Why are these things going on? Osmer emphasises that the important point is that contemporary theologians move beyond the findings of their empirical research and place them in an interpretive framework. The third task is what Osmer describes as the normative task. Practical theology does more than investigate and interpret contemporary forms of religious praxis. It seeks to assess such praxis normatively from the perspective of Christian theology and ethics, with a view to reform when this is needed. The normative task, thus, pursues the question: What forms ought current religious praxis to take in this particular social context? Osmer further asserts that in this new model of practical theology which he is proposing, explicit attention is given to forming norms that can be used to assess, guide and reform contemporary praxis. The final task is the pragmatic task. The primary focus of this task is matters of 'how to', although it is informed by the why to gained from empirical, interpretive and normative reflection.

in northern Nigeria, the theological understanding of personhood must be disrupted. According to Ottino (2000):

In Africa, personhood is attained through particular, predetermined challenges. Individual agency and ingenuity outside one's socially determined space is not encouraged, although it cannot be completely controlled ..., children – especially those who have not yet reached adolescence – are unable to meet these challenges, and thus are not recognised as persons in their own right. (p. 273)

Defining personhood, Herdt (1992:103) postulates that it is a reference to those 'attributes, capacities, and signs of what it means "properly" to be a social person in a particular society'. Understanding the child as a person created in the image of God provides a theological framework for providing mentoring to OVC in IDP camps in northern Nigeria.

Childhood has been tacit inversely in different contexts throughout history. For example, in northern Nigeria, among the Hausa people (whose children are the majority in most of the IDP camps in northern Nigeria), a child is not considered a complete human being until they have grown to be productive in their community. An illustration of this fact is seen in one of the popular Hausa proverbs Yaro ba mutum ba sai ya girma (meaning: a child is not a complete person until he or she is grown up). Unfortunately, as Bloomquist (2009:97) observes, this view of child and childhood often finds its way into theological conversations, religious education and many other aspects of the church, swaying how faith communities view, interact with and teach children. Bloomquist (2009:103) further postulates that whether children are viewed as an asset or burden, depraved or innocent, spiritual or unable to claim God's presence, the concern is that these ambivalent views of children continue to influence modern theological assumptions of children and cause many to underestimate the value of the child's presence in the faith community. Until children are welcomed as full partakers in the life of the faith community, our child theology will remain incomplete. This is because any theological understanding that does not value children or their spiritual experiences negates the total understanding of how God sees children. Furthermore, White and Willimer (2006:239) contend that 'this theology needs to be disrupted because it overlooks the creative possibilities that come from within the youngest members of God's good creation'. Walton (2015:90) sums it up well that 'when religious communities do not pay attention to God at work in children they silence children, ignore their creative potential, and prohibit them from participating fully in creation'.

The relationship between a child and other members of the Christian community is vivacious in enhancing a growing Christian faith in children that is vital to coping with challenges that life may bring. Howard (2009:15), for example, argues that Pauline letters exhort the early churches towards a maturing faith made manifest in their interpersonal relationships. A community's role in relating to one another is not merely to benefit personal faith formation; it is integral, because relationships are the primary location for Christ's

personal and communal transforming activity. In addition, according to Bonhoeffer (1998:191), 'Christianity is a relational faith, and the mark of maturity includes a move from *being with* others to *being for* others'. Mentoring occurs as believers experience the giving and receiving of encouragement of one another. Therefore, mentoring for OVC has the potential of empowering children to contribute to God's redemptive purposes in the world through the local faith community.

Tan (2007:56) succinctly reminds us that children can contribute immensely in the creative process of involving, disrupting and transforming the world when they are invited, encouraged, supported, guided and affirmed through mentoring. Building a relationship of trust through mentoring according to Bloomquist (2009:150) opens a door for consideration and understanding and summons children to participate in the world around them with compassion and creativity as they seek to be voices that link, disrupt and change their environment. Mentoring relations have the potential to nurture these values among OVC in IDP camps, guiding them as they associate with the world around them, helping them identify places and ideologies that need to be challenged and encouraging them as they foresee alternatives, disrupt status quo and work to transform the culture.

The context of OVC in northern Nigeria

As stated earlier, the focus of this paper is to investigate how mentoring can be provided to orphaned and vulnerable children as a result of the violence in northern Nigeria and are currently in IDP camps (especially violence caused by Boko Haram). In order to provide a context for this paper, a brief history and outline of Boko Haram's activities will be provided in this section, and later the conditions and state of OVC in IDP camps will be highlighted.

Jama'atuAhlus- Sunna Lidda'AwatiWal Jihad, popularly known as Boko Haram, was founded in 2002 in Maiduguri, Nigeria, by Mohammed Yusuf. Many scholars believe that Boko Haram 'seeks to establish an Islamic state in the north of Nigeria and supports Islamic education'. According to Bala (2014:3–16), some of the major attacks for which Boko Haram has been responsible are the following:

- 09 June 2014: The kidnapping of approximately 20 girls in the village of Garkin Fulani.
- 05 May 2014: The attack on more than 300 schoolgirls, which killed 310 people in Gamboru Ngala, Nigeria.
- 14 April 2014: The abduction of approximately 300 schoolgirls from Chibok.
- 29 September 2013: The attack on an agricultural school in Yobe, Nigeria, killing 50 students.
- July 2013: The attack on a school in Mamudo, Nigeria, killing at least 42 people, most of whom students.
- June 2013: Attacks on schools in Maiduguri and Damaturu, Nigeria, killing at least 22 children.

- January 2012: A series of bombings in Kano, Nigeria, which killed more than 180 people.
- 26 August 2011: The attack on the UN Headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria, killing 21 people and wounding many others.
- 25 December 2011: The attack on Saint Theresa Catholic Church in Madalla.

According to Griffiths (2015:8), more than 300 000 of the 2.3 million people displaced by the Boko Haram conflict in these states (Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Taraba, Bauchi) since early 2013 have fled their homes and are now living in various IDP camps around the country while some have fled across the borders. According to the United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, there are between 60 and 70 IDP camps with Boko Haram victims across Nigeria where there are VOCs.

Studies conducted by Chiroma (2015), Christian Aid (2007, 2013), Danladi (2014, 2015) and Gardner (2015) reveal the pathetic living conditions of OVC in IDP camps; however, because of space constraints, this article will focus only on a few that deserve mentoring attention, namely psychological distress, stress of isolation, problem with basic needs, anxiety about safety and cultural barriers.

Psychological distress

The psychological trauma experienced by OVC in IDP camps begins long before their arrival at the camps (Danladi 2014:167). Many have witnessed their parents being killed and other gruesome activities. They arrived at the IDP camps uncertain of their future, full of fear and denial; however, they were unable to express their feelings of grief, anger and fear, which in turn triggered behavioural problems such as aggression, poor self-esteem and rejection (Chiroma 2015:16). In addition, local care-givers at the camps focused on addressing the physical needs of the children and not their psychological trauma.

Stress of isolation

Immediately after losing both parents, almost all OVC in northern Nigeria end up being separated from their siblings. In the case of OVC in IDP camps, many of them are separated not only from other siblings but also from their familiar environment (Danladi 2015:34). Gardner (2015:6) adds that the stress of losing parents and then being separated from brothers and sisters and from their familiar terrain increases the sense of uncertainty and insecurity about their future as well as reduces their ability to cope with new external environments for OVC at IDP camps.

Problems with basic needs

Even though, in principle, there is provision of some basic needs for people living in IDP camps by the government and many other NGOs and faith-based organisations (FBOs), often times OVC are neglected, because sometimes they lack an adult figure who will stand for them. Moreover, Christian Aid (2013:72) an FBO working in various IPD camps in Nigeria states that many OVC experience food insecurity, shortage of clothing and inability to access medical care and are exposed to a myriad of ill-health problems, including malnutrition, malaria and reproductive health care needs. The fortunate OVC who continue to attend school often cannot concentrate on education as they are hungry and/or malnourished (Nyambedha *et al.* 2001:43).

Anxiety about safety

The natural anxiety of OVC in IDP camps concerns the risk of being attacked by their parents' killers; hence, they comply with whatever standards in order to stay at the IDP camps for safety. Gardner (2015:42) points out that care providers, taking advantage of the fact that many OVC consider the camps as safe havens, often emotionally, physically and sexually exploit and abuse OVC in IDP camps. Musa (2013:20) laments that in many instances, the work of OVC in IDP camps is extended to teachers' houses, including cooking, collection of firewood and water. 'The girls who are often selected to undertake this work are usually the older ones, and are particularly susceptible to abuse'. Often the vulnerable girls are made pregnant by either very close relatives or their own teachers who could have protected them.

Cultural barriers

When resources are scarce and choices have to be made, it is often the OVC at the camp who are at the receiving end. Most parents who are in the camps with their children tend to cater to the needs of their children first before considering others. Hence, most of the OVC at the IDP camps are left to fend for themselves, and in a culture where children are meant to be seen and not heard, the OVC end up having no one to advocate for their cause. Other cultural practices such as children are not supposed to engage adults in conversation without the adults initiating it also contribute to the frustrations of OVC in IDP camps as they are often left with no one to share their challenges with.

Considering the above-mentioned conditions of OVC at IDP camps, it is imperative that they require other adults who will serve as mentors to help them cope. Evidently, these children lack other adults to talk to, to teach them important life skills and to offer a source of protection; as a result, many OVC in IDP camps in northern Nigeria are lonely and isolated. How then can mentoring be provided for OVC in IDP camps in northern Nigeria? This will be the focus of the next section.

Providing mentoring for OVC in IDP camps

This section of the article focuses on answering Osmer's pragmatic question: 'How might we respond?' In similar research conducted in Rwanda by CARE regarding the role

of mentors in OVC, OVC reported that their mentors added value to their lives by providing good advice, helping them feel more confident and protecting them; hence, the role of mentors in OVC is a crucial one. Moreover, in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, the widow, orphan and the poor are under the fortification of God. Goudini (2013:228) says that in the Old Testament, the orphan and other vulnerable groups in society are constantly knitted into the drapery of those critical segments dealing with the covenant programme of Sinai and its revitalisation before entering the Land of Canaan. Michael argues further that in Exodus 22:21-24 and 23:6, the widow, orphan and the poor fall under God's care. This point is reiterated in Deuteronomy where God is represented as the supreme judge who is interested in social justice (10:18ff). In the New Testament, we see the meta-narrative of family concept provided by both Jesus and Paul arguing that family is not just blood related but the household of faith. Hence, the response of community of believers is very crucial in providing mentoring for OVC in IDP camps. The church is the locus of healing, the OVC in IDP camps are in pain and in need of healing. Similarly, Gibson (2007:14) notes that in addition to those who are unswervingly involved in its exercise, mentoring also helps the community at large, because it nurtures an environment in which people work together and support one another in their effort to become competent. In the context of northern Nigeria, orphans were absorbed with the extended families that bore the responsibility to care and support them. However, in the case of OCV in IDP camps, almost all the relatives that are supposed to be responsible for the absorption are either killed or are in different IDP camps. Owing to this fact, the responsibility of OVC should be the central focus of the community and the church in northern Nigeria.

Aidar (2010:6) asserts that mentorship can alleviate the grieving process among children, particularly those without an adult care-giver. One randomised control trial in Rwanda according to Snider (2008:57) showed that '... despite disturbingly high levels of depression, maltreatment, and marginalisation among OVC, mentors made a significant impact in their lives'. The benefits of mentoring are numerous, but the few benefits outlined above and mentioned earlier gives enough evidence to the importance of providing mentoring for OVC especially those affected by violence who are living in IDP camps. Studies by Chiroma (2015) and Danladi (2015) have revealed that most of the IDP camps in northern Nigeria are not employing mentoring to help OVC. This is partly owing to cultural practices and partly owing to lack of awareness as to how mentoring can provide support for OVC in IDP camps. In order to respond to the needs of OVC in IDP camps and to provide mentoring support, the following must be taken into account.

Firstly, there is a need to identify potential mentors. A mentor for OVC must be an adult the child can trust, admire and respects, someone who will be able to provide support and guidance and is actively involved in children's work. The mentor must be a well-known member of the community and must have a good standing with child and social welfare.

Often times in IDP camps, they encourage the use of volunteers as mentors. In as much as the use of volunteers should be encouraged, considering the crisis that OVC in IDP camps are facing, there is a need to intentionally identify mentors who will be able to provide the needed care and support. Goodner (2015:15) echoes that the use of volunteers in mentoring OVC must be taken seriously and certain criteria for selection must be put in place to ensure that the aims and objectives of mentoring OVC are achieved. Use members of existing social networks to recruit mentors who could both live in and outside the IDP camps.

Secondly, there is a need to decide what specific role the mentors will provide for OVC in IDP camps. OVC in IDP camps have specific needs (psychological distress, stress of isolation, problem with basic needs, anxiety about safety and cultural barriers). Mentors must take into consideration these needs in order to help fulfil those needs. Addressing the vulnerabilities of OVC in IDP camps should be a priority for mentors. Placing OVC front and centre in mentoring programmes should be the key element of response to diverse vulnerabilities of OVC living in IDP camps in northern Nigeria. This effort should be complemented by strengthening mentors, assisting concerted accomplishment within communities and fortifying the human investment of rising generations.

Thirdly, provide training for mentors who will work with OVC in IDP camps. Nelson (2014:6) suggests that the training programmes should provide cultural training to mentors and incorporate various traditional values and practices into the programme framework and delivery. The cultural training for mentors is significant as it will help the mentors to be sensitive to the various culture and contexts of OVC in IDP camps, who even though are from northern Nigeria but are from different cultures and contexts. Nelson (2014:9) further recommends that the training should specifically include (1) involving extended and immediate families, (2) acknowledging language and customs, (3) acknowledging cultural identity and (4) conceptualising well-being as linked to the collective rather than the individual. Sánchez and Colón (2005:191-204) add that the training of mentors to work with OVC in IDP camps must also provide cultural competency in order to know how to effectively provide feedback that will underwrite to the positive development of the OVC and contribute to the establishment of trust between the mentor and the child.

Fourthly, for mentoring to be effective in supporting OVC in IDP camps, a qualified (a person who has been trained to mentor OVC) mentor should be assigned to each child upon their arrival at IDP camps. The mentor will establish the state of every child and the areas that will need to be addressed for their development. There should be a continuous childmentor relationship throughout the period that the child will be staying at the IDP camp. The responsibilities of the mentor should be to help facilitate an initial assessment of the psychological state of the OVC and to assist the child to make deliberate efforts towards its development.

Fifthly, mentors must help facilitate the spiritual well-being of OVC in IDP camps. One of the distinctive characteristics of child theology as argued by Grobbelaar (2012:9) is its ability to see children as God sees them, with the capacity of understanding spiritual things and being able to be transformative agents in the mission of God. Hence, mentors should provide spaces for reflection and nurture the spiritual well-being of OVC in IDP camps.

Lastly, provide mentoring support for the mentors. Mentors working with OVC need all the support they can get from the government, NGOs and FBOs working with OVC, as their work as mentors could be psychologically strenuous. There is a tendency to feel helpless at times while trying to meet the material needs and solving all the problems of the OVC in IDP camps. To that end, a support group needs to be created in order to facilitate the mentors' emotional well-being. There is the need to provide an opportunity for mentors to share experiences and challenges of their mentoring role with OVC and seek advice.

Community support for mentors working with OVC in IDP camps is critical to protecting OVC from the worst kind of vulnerabilities found in IDP camps. The mentors will need training with reference to justice and equality in order to adequately deal with some of the root causes of OVC issues. The use of mentors and other care-givers is key to helping OVC, but it should complement, not replace, community action.

The OVC in IDP camps in northern Nigeria are confronted with tremendous physical, emotional and psychological challenges on a daily basis. Left unaddressed, these presage serious implications on their development as productive members of their communities, and the nation as a whole. OVC are part of the promise for the future, the hope of a next generation. However, because of the tremendous impact of the existing conditions in IDP camps in northern Nigeria on OVC, there is a need to provide adult care-givers to serve as mentors.

Conclusion

To conclude, this article calls for the provision of mentoring to OVC in IDP camps in Nigeria. This article establishes the fact that these OVC are in the IDP camps as a result of violence mainly by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. Furthermore, this article highlighted some of the vulnerabilities faced by OVC in IDP camps and their bearings on the overall development of OVC. The article argues that, even though several NGOs and FBOs are providing different forms of care to OVC in IDP camps, they are yet to explore the power and the potential that mentoring provides towards the well-being of OVC. Lastly, the article suggested ways in which mentoring could be used in IDP camps to help OVC in their current crisis. The absence of parental care and guidance

results in widespread psychosocial disorders such as chronic fear and anxiety, poor interpersonal relations, aggression and other social disorders among many OVC in IDP camps in northern Nigeria. The use of adult mentors who are trained in various facets will enhance the provision of mentoring to OVC in IDP camps in northern Nigeria.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

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