

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Operations of Parachurch organisations in Mutare, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of COVID-19 on organizational operations of parachurch organisations in Mutare, Zimbabwe for the period December 2019 to February 2022. The main purpose of this research was to analyze and evaluate the impact COVID-19 had on organizational operations of Parachurch organizations. The advent of COVID-19 came with a lot of challenges that affected organizational operations and parachurch organisations was not spared as lockdown measures were implemented by the Ministry of Health (MOH) under the Government of Zimbabwe to curb the spread of the disease. The study employed an inductive approach in which questionnaires were administered to a sample of 60 participants drawn from Scripture Union Zimbabwe (SUZim), Family Aids Caring Trust (FACT), Simukai, Youth Alive and Hope Alive in Mutare. The study results showed that COVID-19 had a negative impact on organizational strategic plans and operational objectives of the organization. The findings also identified the impact COVID-19 had on staff and beneficiaries of the organization's operations. The findings indicate the importance of organisations being proactive and prepared for unforeseen eventualities, and the need to equip and empower human resources with technology and tools for online execution of work in case of eventualities.

Keywords: COVID-19, Organizational operations, risk mitigation, protection motivation theory, social services.

Introduction

Worldwide fatalities were caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the corona virus. Medical Times Today reported that the pandemic spread to 217 countries worldwide (Cohut, 2021). There was over 5 million deaths worldwide, with 275,255 deaths on the African Continent and 5,386 and over 233,571 instances in Zimbabwe (World Ometer, 2022).

The world economy was predicted to shrink by 5.3% in 2022 as a result of this pandemic (Cohut, 2020). Millions of people died as a result of the pandemic between 2019 and 2022, and it only slowed down as a result of various medical researchers' reaction mechanisms and the lockdown measures implemented by various governments as they upheld World Health Organisation (WHO) health protocols.

The business sector was slowed down through the lockdown measures implemented by the Ministry of Health (MOH) under the Government of Zimbabwe to curb the spread of the disease whilst essential services providers had to operate with a skeleton staff of 10 to 20% (Ministry of Health, 2021). The church was also affected by the stringent lock down measures, initiated by MOH, which prohibited all public and social gatherings as well as requiring social distancing in public transport and inside buildings (Isabelle, 2020)¹. On social welfare issues, usually attended to by parachurch organizations, operations were paralyzed and their strategic plans stalled as human resources were sent on lock downs. These operational modalities are hypothesised to have an influence on the achievement of operational goals. As such, this study seeks to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on operational goals within parachurch organizations.

COVID-19 pandemic effects have been severe and widespread across organisations, with persistent negative impact on business and employee performance (Farooq & Sultana, 2022). Employees were affected by stress, de-motivation, fear of loss of earnings, fear of business closure, salary cuts due to reduced working hours. According to Farooq and Sultana (2022), the working from home (WFH) concept decreased employee productivity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The management of parachurch organizations was affected negatively and efforts to try and survive in this environment had to be made. There was an inevitable diversion from the core business to coping mechanisms. Globally, for the past decade natural disasters have claimed 0.1% of total deaths which are around 60 000 lives annually (Montana State University, 2020). However, with COVID-19 there was accelerated number of deaths to figures unseen before (Ministry of Health, 2021).

To assess further damage that was done to society, economy and businesses, a survey of more than 5,800 small businesses was conducted between March 28 and April 4, 2020 (Meyer et al., 2022). The survey showed that most organisations' operations were derailed with some businesses incurring unbudgeted for expenses as they tried to abide by the WHO

¹ Parachurch organizations which usually worked together with churches in social welfare issues like these were needed at this time but were not spared. Parachurch organizations are Christian faith-based organizations that work across denominations filling the areas that individual churches may not be able to specialize in such as social welfare, evangelism and discipleship (Wilson, 2021).

health protocols in order for them to be allowed to operate. COVID-19 has had a negative impact on task and contextual performance (CP) and a positive impact on adaptive performance (AP) (Park & Park, 2019). The question faced by many businesses and Parachurch organizations was how to minimize the impact of the epidemic on their operations, its performance results and, most importantly, on employees. These were the main issues of concern for every organizational leader and it was anticipated that this study will provide recommendations to guide future response to pandemics/shocks of such magnitudes as COVID-19.

The Mutare population is estimated at 184,205 and a huge proportion of these people relied and benefited from the operations of these Parachurch organisations before COVID-19 came (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, over 5,000 families that usually received assistance from five parachurch organizations suffered a huge blow as none of the organizations could reach out to them (Chipenda, 2022). All staff and employees of these organizations were sent on lock down and other restrictions making it impossible to carry out the core strategic plans and duties.

Globally, a lot has been documented regarding the impact COVID-19 had on human life. However, regarding its impact on organisational operations of Parachurch organisations, in particular within the African context, little has been documented with specific reference to Zimbabwe. Therefore, it is against this background that this study sought to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on organisational operations of Parachurch organisations with specific reference to the case of Scripture Union Zimbabwe (SUZim), Family Aids Caring Trust (FACT), and Simukai, between 2019 and 2022.

Literature Review

Theoretical Underpinning

This paper is anchored on two main theories, the Protection Motivation theory developed by Rodgers in 1975 and the Resource based theory by Barney in 1991.

The Protection motivation theory (Rodgers, 1975) describes how individuals are motivated to react in a self-protective way (Westcott, 2017). This theory best fits the study because it proposes that human beings themselves are based on threat appraisal and coping appraisal (Westcott, 2017). Threat appraisal sees the severity of situations and examines its seriousness while coping appraisal responds to the situation as humans relate (Westcott,

2017). The COVID-19 pandemic caused self-motivation in finding a self-protective way and survival both for self and for the organization (Westcott, 2017). Therefore, the protection motivation theory deals with people coping and making decisions in harmful and stressful times or in events of life that threaten them (Westcott, 2017). The theory attempts to predict what motivates behaviour change (Westcott, 2017).

The protection motivation theory postulates three crucial components which are: the magnitude of noxiousness of a depicted event, the probability of the event occurrence and the efficacy of the protective response (Rodgers, 1975). Thus, considering that the pandemic emerged with rapid spread, high fatality rate and limited knowledge hindered protective response, as such, this was one of the worst disasters ever to happen. The probability of the event occurrence seeks to analyse how the situation or event can be stopped from happening again in future. Vaccinations have been manufactured against COVID-19 and countries are slowly accepting them considering what may happen in the future with the disease (WHO, 2020). People all over the world have become aware of the best practices during a pandemic from careful hand washing, restrictions in schools, businesses and public places (Rogers, 2021). The primary concern being the survival of the human race. From time to time, organizational environments undergo cataclysmic changes so sudden and extensive that they alter the trajectories of entire industries, overwhelm the adaptive capacities of resilient organizations, and surpass the comprehension of seasoned managers (Vahlne et al., 2017).

The Resource based theory (Barney, 1991) focuses on internal resources to deliver superior competitive advantage – firm resources are critical for surviving the pandemic and resulting in economic disruption. This helps to look at internal resources in order to develop capabilities and competences to deliver (Edwards, 2014). Due to lockdowns, many organizations have suffered in donation revenue and had significant cash flow problems. With stringent donor measures on the use of finances, many Parachurch organizations have had more pressing concerns with respect to the long-term plans covered in their agreements with key stakeholders.

The crisis caused businesses and non-profit organisations to think outside the box in Zimbabwe and the world over by prioritising survival, reducing their exposure where possible even if it means laying off or not paying staff (Ahmed et al., 2022). According to the resource based theory, in order to survive the pandemic, the loss of business and revenue could be solved with simple training on applications and digital functions that can keep organisations in touch with their donors and beneficiaries (Baldwin, 2020). However, the efficient use of

online applications is always frustrated by the age-old Zimbabwean question of high data costs and lack of adequate ICT infrastructure systems across the country (Moyo, 2021).

Empirical Review

The impact of covid 19 globally, continentally and nationally in Zimbabwe has been disruptive to societal values of meeting and visiting each other as a people. The negative impact of COVID-19 was felt in the five continents of the world. While Europe has the world's best economies, it was not spared by this current pandemic as it brought crisis in the operations of the economy and industry. A huge percentage of funding for humanitarian work done by Parachurch organization do come from Europe. However, it has been reported to the European parliament that the pandemic, because of lockdowns and restrictions in Europe and rest of the world, badly affected businesses and the church with its worship services (Honey, 2020). This overnight shift in parameters dealt churches and Parachurch organisations a huge blow to their tithe's income and donations for their charitable activities carried out by the latter (Alcorn, 2021).

In Asia, the impact of COVID-19 in investments has greatly plummeted by a staggering 24.4% in India while Philippines staggered by 33.1% (Sawada & Sumulong, 2021). In Africa, businesses were heavily affected also due to its trade links with Europe and the other continents, and due to lack of economic resilience and diversification (Gondwe, 2020). Africa faces greater risk being the last region to register COVID-19 cases while Africa had already been experiencing challenges of trade (Gondwe, 2020). The governments of several African countries which include Western and Southern African countries implemented a series of vulnerability reduction measures to contain the transmission of the virus (Bwire, 2021). The employed measures included closure of international airports, closure of borders of countries like Zimbabwe and South Africa, closure of schools and churches, freezing of public transport and private and outlawing huge gatherings (Gondwe, 2020). The lockdown included curfews, quarantines and nationwide lockdowns. In Zimbabwe, the President of the Republic pronounced measures that were meant to protect the population from the hotspot South Africa by closing the borders and testing all that were coming into the country (Nordling, 2020). Over three decades with economic crisis, the health sector has always been heavily affected by the hyperinflation, corruption and other failed deliverables (Bullough et al., 2020). The health sector was understaffed and gone for years with the health workers protesting for poor remuneration. As a result, people were dying of myriad of diseases like cholera, malaria and others.

The Parachurch organisations in Zimbabwe and those under study in Mutare have also not been spared the negative effects of COVID -19 pandemic. On Parachurch organisations, it was a moment of closing operations by every Parachurch organization, some who were focusing solely on health (Haywood et al., 2021). Those who were in the health sector were to distribute medications and educate people of diseases including COVID-19 (Haywood et al., 2021). The vast number of beneficiaries in Mutare operating area were all disadvantaged by the pandemic as each organization had to close down.

The COVID -19 pandemic has brought new threats making them vulnerable to various problems and threats facing orphans due to AIDS. While lockdown measures were necessary to curb the spread of the virus, they have brought negative side effects mainly on the general performance of business and economy. This, in turn has a direct bearing on all sectors of the economy including non-productive sectors such as charitable and voluntary organisations. The Parachurch organisations are no exception to these knock down effects of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a serious challenge of great proportions. Measures of containment ranged from lock down of different countries, practice of hygiene, banning of gatherings, screening, testing, isolation, quarantine, and contact tracing (Willey et al., 2020). The social life of people had been curtailed by banning of social gatherings, international migrations Thus, even Christians were prohibited from gathering in church and turned to social media for virtual online ministry which are not always accessible to all people (Willey et al., 2020). Schools were closed, with some institutions turning on to e-learning which again is not accessible to all people especial in Zimbabwe which has been experiencing economic slump for some time (Wonodi, & Obi-Jeff, 2022). Many Statutory Instruments were gazetted by the governments with the parliament of countries giving the executive extra-ordinary powers to deal with the pandemic e.g., SI 67 of 2022 for Zimbabwe which calls to visitors to the country to produce PCR test and those leaving to get tested first.

Communities have had to find their own ways of accessing information on COVID-19 and the awareness through WHO health protocols because of restrictions. A major challenge had been the filtering of all sorts of conspiracies about the use of vaccination. Vaccination is a centrepiece of global response to the severe acute respiratory syndrome which cause COVID-19 disease (Wonodi, & Obi-Jeff, 2022). The hesitancy to take the vaccine is based on a conspiracy worldwide misinformation which spreads false narrative on social media platforms as a religious position, which the WHO has explained as overwhelming false information which threatened the efforts to curb the pandemic (WHO, 2021).

The closure of schools from March 2020, only to be reopened in October, affected the education calendar of 2020 by disrupting children's continuous access to education. This also resulted in reduced opportunities for growth and development of children through educational and sports activities (Makombe, 2021). Furthermore, the quality of education, was heavily compromised especially for the economically incapacitated children, due to the shift to alternative education delivery methods such as the online learning (Makombe, 2021). Learners whose passion is sport and other extra-curriculum activities could not access these anymore during this period and as a result they became idle and the period of growth that was missed has become difficult to compensate. Most sports have an age range and if that age point was surpassed during COVID-19, it denied the child the use of God given talent which could open doors for life and livelihood. The fear and frustration brought about by this makes it difficult for the young people to live a normal life.

Children in families headed by single parents were the most affected since their single parents, be they mothers or fathers and other guardians, had to spend more time engaging in informal income earning activities to continue supporting the family and such parents would therefore fail to provide home-schooling for their children (Spinelli et al., 2020). Parents were not prepared to be with their children for long with them out of school, they had no plan for education because of being overwhelmed by needs in the house since the whole family was home (Spinelli et al., 2020). The whole family being home means more consumption as people will have to take three meals per day as opposed when they are at work or school (Spinelli et al., 2020). Majority of single parents live through informal jobs and they needed to double their efforts to cope up with pressure at home.

The pandemic was not friendly to people with other conditions like chronic illness and those with HIV/AIDS who were benefiting from the services of the Parachurch organisations (Waterfield et al., 2021). Whilst the number of HIV infections globally decreased there are subpopulations that remain at high risk due to limited access to prevention services offered by some of the parachurch organisations like FACT (Waterfield et al., 2021). According to Waterfield & Shah (2021) the persons living with HIV has high risk of COVID-19 infection, worse those who are older than 60 years of age, homeless, orphaned and vulnerable children too. The poverty-stricken areas with low incomes were most affected by the pandemic considering the unaffordability of health services (Waterfield et al., 2021). Thus, children were at high risk since in most disasters the people who suffer most are children, they are not assisted to understand or to cope psychosocially.

Most Parachurch organisations obtain funds from Church tithes and offerings, donor funds from third parties internal or external to the mainstream Church (Resane, 2020). Due to lockdown measures, many Parachurch organizations suffered a huge drop in donation revenue and had significant cashflow problems (Resane, 2020). Businesses operating at reduced capacity for shorter hours, negatively impacts on disposable income for congregants which was significantly curtailed, leading to little or even no inflow of funds from offerings, tithes and donations (Resane, 2020). While this was so, the church obligations did not change, thus paying for all utilities and staff thus, economically straining the church.

Mujaji (2020) confirmed a 50% decline in cash inflows linked to COVID-19-induced lockdowns, mainly due suspension of physical or in-person church worship services. Due to the stringent donor measures on the use of finances, many Parachurch organizations relying on donor funding had more pressing concerns on how to fund the goals of their social welfare activities (Mujaji, 2020). This is in line with the protection motivation theory which describes how individuals are motivated to react in a self-protective way. Threat appraisal sees the severity of a situation and examines its seriousness while coping appraisal responds to the situation (Resane, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic caused self-motivation in finding a self-protective way and survival both for self and for the church and Parachurch organisations. Lockdown by nature affected greatly the collections in the church from Christians who are the major sources of income for the church and the parachurch. This brought a challenge to the church to do projects which should be able to support various activities and obligations that the church has (Tebitendwa, & Ssendege, 2021)The pandemic did not take away the obligations like salaries for priests and pastors, water and electricity charges, and security as well as maintenance of the properties.

Unfortunately, most of the online church platforms were and are still directed to the faithful few that can afford to pay for the online platform which mode is rarely aimed in the direction of those with no faith unless if the mass media is used (Mujaji, 2020). The mass media outreach programs are quite expensive for Parachurch organisations. While COVID19 has generated the possibility of making the church accessible to many, unfortunately, it has also restricted the church to only those who can access the electronic platform. This, inevitably, excludes most poor people who cannot afford to connect on the internet. Virtual platforms have many challenges as it is an innovation which in Africa it has never been as effective considering that the Africans are more relational than anything (Isabelle, 2020), 2020). However, is hard to monitor people on virtual platforms and to get inputs or feedback (Isabelle, 2020). More than a decade now mass media of television and satellite had

introduced church on TV by Africans, but more people would prefer going physical because it is not their thing to be watching a preacher on a gadget or to listen to a voice which they don't see the person. TV has always been seen as an elite possession and not something that is rooted in people for serious ministry results. In Zimbabwe, research notes that internet access is around 0.07% in rural areas and therefore over emphasis on technology show that churches may concentrate in urban areas and as a result weakening the missionary role of reaching out to rural ((Mahiya & Murisi, 2022)

Methodology

Given that this was an investigative undertaking of the impact of COVID-19 on organisational operations within parachurch organisations in Mutare, Zimbabwe, the authors employed a qualitative research methodology. This study employed a case study approach to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on organisational operations. The case study approach allows for empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence.

A questionnaire with both closed and open ended questions was used to collect data and was administered to 60 participants from 3 parachurch organisations registered under the Social Welfare Act of Zimbabwe in Mutare (Scripture Union Zimbabwe (SUZim), Family Aids Caring Trust (FACT), and Simukai). The organisations were purposively selected out of a total of 9 organisations which represents 66.7% of the target population.

Scripture Union is a worldwide bible reading movement which emanated from England in 1865 through a young man called Josiah Spiers and has stood the test of times for over 150 years in existence for the gospel of Christ to children and young people (Scripture Union, 2022). It is international, interracial, interdenominational Christian organization which spreads the word of God to children with relevant approaches, in over 140 countries of the world with over 40 countries in Africa including Zimbabwe (Scripture Union, 2022). In Zimbabwe it started in 1945 at Mutambara mission in Chimanimani district of Manicaland province (Anudu, 2020).

Family Aids Caring Trust (FACT) is headquartered in Mutare and is a Christian based national working organisation working through partnerships to improve health, reduce poverty among HIV infected population (Family Aids Caring Trust, 2022).

Simukai is a street child rescue organisation based in Mutare and a Parachurch organisation which was a result of the coming together of Scripture Union, Catholic church and FACT.

Performance in the context of human resources is a broad because it may include productivity, consistency, quality, and so forth (Hafeez and Rehman, 2014). On the other side performance can also be seen through the results, a changed behaviour including management and leadership development and training skills (Hafeez and Rehman, 2014). In this study, performance of Parachurch organization will be measured in terms of how each organization attains or fails to achieve its goals.

Throughout the data collection process, ethical considerations were strictly followed to ensure that the privacy of the respondents would be respected and integrity of the information was maintained. Informed consent was obtained from the respondents, the purpose of the study was clearly stated and emphasis on participants' privacy was also assured. Anonymity and confidentiality were also maintained for all the participants.

To improve reliability of data, the questionnaire was pilot tested to correct and remove any ambiguity in the questionnaire. Validity of the data collection instruments used in this study was enhanced by the fact that questions were derived from the research objectives, with each question being checked if it was linked to the research objectives. Furthermore, the questionnaires were checked for completeness and quality respectively. The questionnaire was also checked for legibility and consistency through the pilot study.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The researcher distributed self-administered questionnaires to a sample of 60 employees, beneficiaries and management from the three Parachurch organisations operating in Mutare, Manicaland Province with response rate averaging 72%. Most (40%) of the respondents were females. The work force was mostly young (between the age group 20-45 years) and could be industrious showing that they could do the task of delivering service during the impact of such disasters. The workforce at the chosen Parachurch organisations were academically and professionally qualified enough to deal with the issues of service delivery and attainment of organisational goals. At least 37.9 % of the participants attained secondary school education, 29.3% primary school education, 26.4% had a degree or a professional diploma while 6.5 % had Masters degrees in various disciplines. Most of the workforce at Parachurch organisations had worked for more than five years and this showed that the workforce had adequate knowledge about service delivery. The three Parachurch organisations were manned by few permanent workers with the majority (65%) being voluntary workers.

Of the 60 participants, 46.67% strongly agreed the pandemic had a negative effect on management of Parachurch organisations, followed by 34% who said the negative impact was

moderate, while 13.33% thought impact was mildly negative. There were, however, 5% of the participants who argued that the effect was mildly positive. The dimensions of effect include reduction in working hours, staff shortage, restrictions on intercity movements. There were many backlogs in terms of progress reports, annual audits, data collection and data analysis that needed employee’s attention, yet they had short working hours. The demand for services were extraordinary which brought emotional stress and physical stress for the short-staffed organisations leading to emotional exhaustion which resulted in reduced work quality and results.

The impact of COVID 19 on staff in Parachurch organizations is summarised in Figure 1 below.

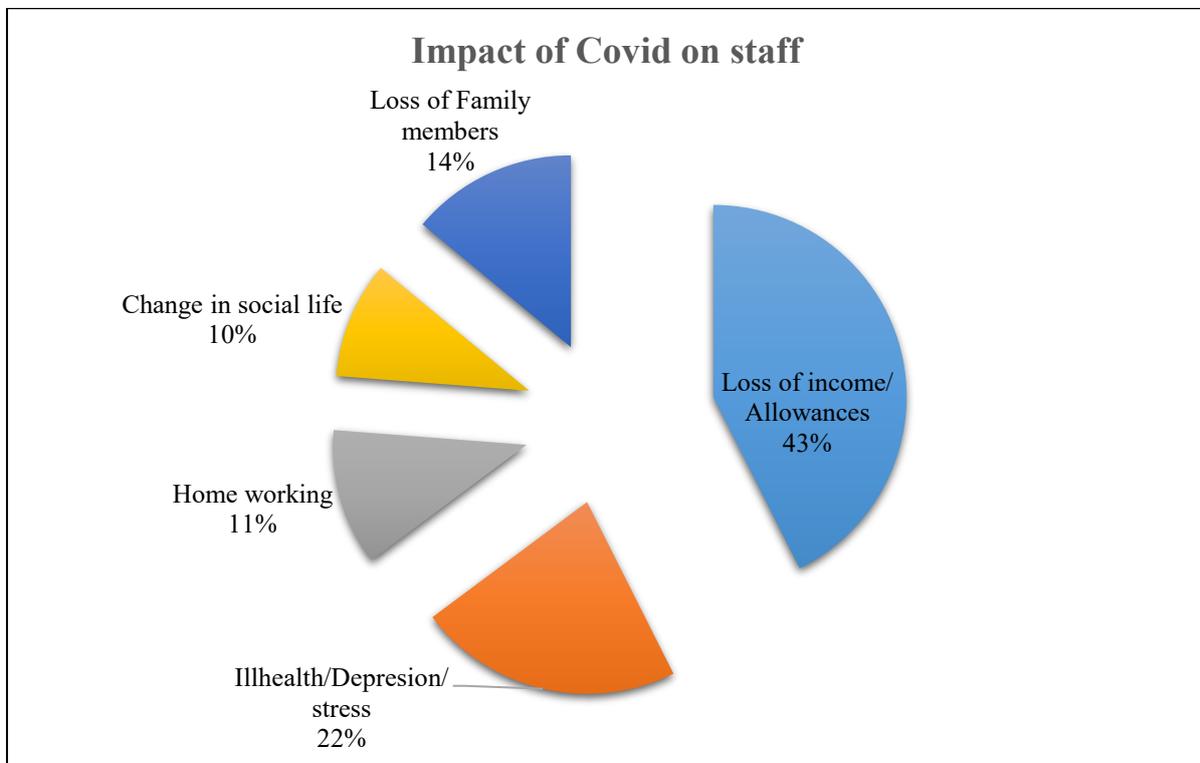


Figure 1: Impact of COVID-19 on staff

Figure 1 above showing loss of income at 43% of the participants proved this point to be the major factor affecting staff followed by ill health due to being infected by the disease or other health related effects at 22%. The third main factor was the loss of close family members at 14 % while 11% cited home online working and 10 % negative changes in social life.

Non-renewal of contracts and layoffs had a major negative effect as a result of COVID-19 induced changes that affected employee performance. This had an effect on employee

performance as it made them to feel insecure, unsafe, fearing being the next one to lose their jobs or to be laid off. This is supported by Brooke, (2020) who states that the feeling of insecurity reduces employee commitment and increases their stress, hence is a threat to employee performance.

Health scares among employees was one of the ways in which COVID-19 induced changes affected employees negatively. Fear of mandatory COVID-19 testing for all employees returning to work after the first lockdown made some of the employees not to show up for work on the days when COVID-19 testing was being done, with others going as far as applying for sick leave in a bid to avoid being tested for COVID-19. As the pandemic was affecting employees work performance due to loss of income and health scares, a dying family member had an added direct impact on the employees.

The home environment did not provide a conducive work environment compounded by the lack of physical management and physical interactions of staff. Poor connectivity and high data costs compounded the failure to balance family and work time. Social life was disturbed as COVID-19 induced restrictions introduced social distancing, lack of visits to friends and relatives as part of their social life and social support system in face of stressful situations. Failure to communicate amongst employees led to indifference, individualism, lack of commitment and collaboration which then affected teamwork and then resultantly affected their performance.

Of the 60 participants in the research study, 54% agreed COVID-19 had a very large negative effect on the strategic plans of the Parachurch organisations in Mutare, followed by 37% who agreed the disease affected to a large extent while a mere 9% agreed to a little extent. Therefore, 91% agreed the disease had a significant effect on the strategic goals of the Parachurch organisations. Priorities shifted from strategic to essential, with strategic timelines affected as human resources were redeployed to essential services, whilst those deemed non-essential could not discharge their strategic assignments.

The research has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic had far reaching implications on the operations of Parachurch organisations as well as the attainment of their goals. The objective of reaching out to young people through social activities like social soccer, indoor games and imparting life skills programs to develop their physical and mental abilities was completely frustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures. The young people became idle, and some became involved in bad behaviour of taking drugs and substance abuse since nothing was now occupying them. The alarming rates of girls becoming pregnant and giving birth to children was not a norm for primary school learners. Provision of

refreshments, meals and even shelter to the less disadvantaged such as children who are homeless commonly known as “street kids” and adults with no fixed lodgings commonly called ‘vagrants’ was a complete failure due to the strict travel restrictions and other lockdown measures. There were no more streets to hang around in as they were all deserted with restrictions and lockdowns implemented by government. The only option was for families to come together and live together working projects from home for sustenance. It was no longer an option to provide accommodation to big numbers of people in one place.

The physical distribution of free bibles and biblical materials in hotels, schools and other institutions with the objective of instilling Christian principles and moral values was not attained and the Parachurch organisations have had to come up with new strategies to distribute biblical materials online or through other means. The use of media platforms for bible and teachings as well as mass media thus the use of televisions.

The objective of evangelizing and seeking discipleship from young people through formation of interdenominational Scripture Union groups could be reached by evangelizing via the internet although this approach has limitations in that it is confined to those beneficiaries who can afford the data charges. Another innovation is to empower families to run the scripture union bible reading programs and if parents are forthcoming, it could be one of the best models to have families sit around together studying the word of God and doing discussions. Family devotions and learning together as a family is one of the best models that are demonstrated in the Bible. It is long lasting and makes families to grow together.

Coping mechanisms that were employed by the organizations in the face of the impact of COVID 19 are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Coping mechanisms employed by Parachurch organisations to counter the effects of COVID-19

Coping Strategy	Actual	Percentages
SWOT analysis to be conducted annually	3	5.0%
Rotate staff periodically to learn almost all office duties to ensure continuity.	2	3.3%
Establish a disaster recovery plan	4	6.7%
Train and develop workers on online working	5	8.3%
Improve home working for voluntary workers	3	5.0%
Develop a continuity plan	6	10.0%

Improve efficiency	7	11.7%
Improve effectiveness	11	18.3%
Sustainability	2	3.3%
Have alternative strategies ready when a threat occurs	17	28.3%
Total	60	100.0%

The findings in Table 1 reveal that having alternative strategies is one of the most influential factors in coping with the impact of COVID-19 with a response rate of 28.3%. Improvement of effectiveness followed with 18.3%. This was followed closely by the improvement of efficiency at 11.7% and the need to develop a continuity plan in the event of disruption of operations with 10.0 %.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

The main purpose of the research was to investigate the impact of COVID -19 pandemic on Parachurch organizations' performance in Mutare, Manicaland province in Zimbabwe, for the period 2019-2022. A descriptive survey methodology was adopted, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. A random sampling method was used to come up with sixty (60) respondents as a sample.

Most (80.67%) of the study participants agreed the COVID- 19 pandemic affected the management of Parachurch organisations negatively. The negative impact was seen in staff or human resources where the impact saw workers either going home or taking forced leave of absence, the risky involved in operating as essential service provider, as well as the beneficiaries of programs offered by the parachurch organisations being left with no supplies. The challenge of sticking to budget lines when no activity was happening meant a moratorium on use of donor funds. Staff salaries were slashed as a result. On the effect of COVID-19 on the organization's strategic plans, organisations ended up taking survival measures departing from the strategic goals of the organisations.

Whilst the organisations adopted technology and virtual platforms to provide services and products as a coping mechanisms, rural areas suffered the most in not accessing services online due to poor connectivity and unavailability of gadgets for use as well as the exorbitant costs of data to connect online.

From the study findings, it can be recommended that Parachurch organisations:

- Should always organise and budget for unforeseen eventualities at all management levels in order to mitigate the effects of pandemics such as COVID-19 on their operations.
- Should encourage and equip their workers and beneficiaries to be able to work online in the event that such eventualities as the COVID-19 pandemic occur.
- Should consider assisting their beneficiaries with accessing land and empower them to feed themselves. This, is a great lesson observed during the pandemic that if you do not have land to till one can actually starve because shops were closed and there were no longer usual food distributions.
- Should support and capacitate local people and empower them to do the work than rely on workers from of parachurch organisations. Workers from parachurch organisations could just monitor those empowered.
- Capacitate schools and homes with skills that allow them to complement the work of para church organisation workers and ensure continuity of service in the event of disruptions in the magnitude of the Covid-19.

The limitations of space and time are acknowledged and that the generalisations of these findings can be limited. A follow up study post Covid could present a more complete picture, hence an area of further study.

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