

Orphaned and Vulnerable Children in the Global South: Systems, Communities, and Advocacy

Course Description

This course provides an in-depth exploration of the challenges faced by orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) in the Global South, with a particular focus on Thailand as a case study. Students will examine the intersecting roles of families, communities, governments, and international organizations in shaping the lives of these children. Through an interdisciplinary approach that combines the social sciences, public health, and development studies, the course addresses issues such as child rights, education, health disparities, and social reintegration.

Students will engage directly with organizations working with vulnerable children, participate in experiential fieldwork, and gain firsthand insight into community-based care models. The course challenges students to critically analyze global approaches to OVC care while considering local cultural contexts and ethical dimensions of intervention.

This course is a part of a broader faith-based semester, examining approaches from faith-based organizations, in particular analyzing those from a Christian faith perspective. Other faith traditions will also be studied, as well as non faith-based ethical practice more generally.

By the end of the course, students will understand the systemic issues affecting OVC, recognize culturally appropriate strategies for advocacy and care, and develop practical skills to engage with marginalized populations compassionately and effectively.

Course Objectives

The objectives for this course are to:

- Analyze the systemic factors contributing to the vulnerabilities of children in the Global South.
- Understand the sociocultural and economic contexts shaping the lives of OVC in Thailand.
- Critically assess international frameworks for child welfare and their local applications.
- Articulate the ethical considerations involved in working with vulnerable children and communities.
- Develop skills in qualitative field research and participatory observation.
- Collaborate with local organizations to identify strengths and challenges in community-based care models.

Methodology

This course integrates lectures, readings, group discussions, and experiential fieldwork. A significant portion of the course takes place in rural and urban communities in Thailand, working with local NGOs, social workers, and families involved in OVC care. Students will also participate in structured reflection sessions to contextualize their experiences. Guest lectures from experts in child rights and development will provide additional insights. Active participation and engagement with course materials and field studies are essential for success.

Grading and Assessment

Engagement

This means participation in and out of the classroom, being an active member of the course, and being fully present and engaged in the field. This includes participation in discussions during seminars and in the village, etc. This also means being an active and supportive member of the course, including as a designated leader and active follower/self leadership. 10

Writing

Seminar and Observation Notes: An important component of learning to observe and analyze the issues during this course is taking notes in class as well as keeping an on-going daily journal of observations outside the classroom. Please put the date at the top of each page. 5

Field Research Notebook: A more structured way of taking notes and learning outside the classroom assigned to specific field studies. 15

Essays: There are two (2) essays during the course. Essays should be 4-5 pages long in your journal, and cover the following points: 20

- How this issue or topic links to the overall topic of the course. (1)
- Why you are interested in this specific issue or topic. (1)
- A description and analysis of the specific issue and why it is important. (5)
- Reference to interviews or observations during the course. (2)
- Other questions that this issue raises for you to explore further. (1)

Independent Field Research Project (IFRP)

Each student will choose an issue **related to the course** to study independently. This should be a combination of research, observations, and analysis of a topic that the student is interested in. The **emphasis is primarily on field observations** drawing on field studies as well as independent observations. This is not a book report or literature review, but field research. **Students must receive instructor approval for their chosen topic/issue.**

Proposal: The IFRP proposal is a written outline and a short presentation to the class explaining the question, how it is related to the course topic, how data will be gathered, and any potential challenges you may anticipate running into. 1 page typed as well as an in-class presentation. 10

Progress update: An update during the course on what the student has discovered about their topic so far, what further questions this raises, any challenges and how they have been overcome, as well as further information they will be looking for during the second half of the field study. 1 page written in your notebook as well as an in-class presentation. 5

Final Presentation: On the last day of the course each student will give a five minute presentation on their research. Focus on clarity, field observations, interviews/discussions with community members, and analytical depth. 5-10 slides in PDF format. 15

Organization for final presentation

1. What did you study/research focus? How is this related to the course topic? (2)
2. How did you study this, including observations and interviews? (5)
3. What did you learn? Findings and analysis. (10)
4. Further questions this raises for you. (2)
5. Final slide of references / interviews. (1)

Final Exam

The final exam will be a comprehensive review of course topics with an emphasis on what was learned during the field portion of the course. There will be 10 short answer questions. Students may use their notes but not their readers or the internet during the exam. 20

TOTAL 100

Course Schedule

Week 1: Foundations and Systems

Theme: Introduction to OVC Issues in the Global South

Summary: The first week establishes the foundational understanding of the challenges faced by orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) within the context of the Global South. Students will explore global frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) alongside regional and local policy mechanisms. Seminars will provide an interdisciplinary overview of systemic inequalities and the sociocultural factors influencing child vulnerability. Field visits to urban NGOs will contextualize theoretical frameworks, offering students direct insights into advocacy and intervention strategies. Reflection sessions will encourage critical engagement with ethical dilemmas in OVC support.

Seminar: Overview of OVC in the Global South: Global Frameworks and Local Realities.

Seminar: Child Rights and International Conventions (e.g., UNCRC).

Field Visit: Visit to an urban-based NGO focusing on child protection and education in Chiang Mai.

Experiential Learning: Engage with staff and volunteers to understand challenges in urban care settings.

Reflection Session: Ethical dilemmas in OVC advocacy and intervention.

Required Readings:

UNICEF. (2024). *The state of the world's children 2024: Child food poverty – Nutrition deprivation in early childhood*. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-of-worlds-children/2024>

Markowska-Manista, U., & Liebel, M. (2023). Ethical challenges of research with children of the Global South. In *Childhoods of the Global South: Children's Rights and Resistance* (pp. 86–97). Chapter, Bristol University Press. <https://doi.org/10.46692/9781447370437.005>

Ladaphongphatthana, K. (2021). Holistic Orphan Care: A Call for Change in Caring for Orphans and Vulnerable Children. *Transformation*, 38(1), 50–63. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0265378820983355>

National Christian Foundation. (2020). Helping Orphans and Vulnerable Children. <https://www.ncfgiving.com/stories/helping-orphans-and-vulnerable-children/>

Week 2: Community-Based Care Models

Theme: Exploring Grassroots Responses

Summary: During the second week, the course shifts focus to community-based care models, examining grassroots responses to child welfare. Seminars will analyze the successes and limitations of community-driven approaches, highlighting the role of families, local organizations, and cultural practices in providing care. A field visit to rural communities in Northern Thailand will offer a first-hand perspective on the implementation of these models. Students will live with host families to experience informal support systems and discuss the challenges of balancing traditional values with modern child welfare initiatives.

Seminar: The Role of Communities in Child Welfare: Successes and Limitations.

Field Visit: Travel to rural communities in Northern Thailand to observe community-based care practices.

Host Family Stay: Students will live with host families to learn about daily life and informal support systems.

Reflection Session: Balancing tradition and modernity in care approaches.

Required Readings:

UNICEF. (2013). Review of Alternative Care in Thailand. <https://www.unicef.org/thailand/media/851/file/Review%20of%20Alternative%20Care%20in%20Thailand.pdf>

UNICEF Thailand. (2022). *National Action Plan of Alternative Care for Children Phase 1 (2022 - 2026)*. <https://www.unicef.org/thailand/media/10141/file/National%20Action%20Plan%20of%20Alternative%20Care.pdf>

Nyabera, F. (2023). Spiritual Nurturing in Children to Prevent Violence: A Christian Perspective. <https://globalchildren.georgetown.edu/responses/spiritual-nurturing-in-children-to-prevent-violence-a-christian-perspective>

JLI (Joint Learning Initiative). (2020). A Matter of Belonging: How Faith-Based Organizations Strengthen Communities Supporting Orphans and Vulnerable Children. <https://jliflc.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/A-Matter-of-Belonging.pdf>

Week 3: Health, Education, and Resilience

Theme: Addressing Systemic Challenges

Summary: The third week explores the intersection of health, education, and resilience in the lives of OVC. Students will examine disparities in access to essential services and their impact on psychological and social development. Seminars will emphasize strategies to strengthen resilience and promote long-term well-being for vulnerable children. Field visits to rural schools and clinics will enable students to evaluate integrated approaches to service delivery. Interactive workshops will provide practical exposure to life skills training programs tailored to OVC populations, fostering a deeper understanding of systemic challenges and potential solutions.

Seminar: Health and Education Disparities for OVC in the Global South.

Field Visit: Partner with a rural school and clinic to observe integrated services for vulnerable children.

Interactive Workshop: Participate in life skills training sessions delivered by local organizations for OVC.

IFRP Progress Presentations: Mid-course update on research findings and challenges.

Required Readings:

Hoontrakul, S., & Kaweevongprasert, P. (2011). Development of Home and Community Care for AIDS Patients in the Socio-cultural Context of the Central Region, Thailand. *Journal of Population and Social Studies [JPSS]*, 19(2), 243–254. retrieved from <https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jpss/article/view/84553>

Penner, F., Sharp, C., Marais, L., Shohet, C., Givon, D., & Boivin, M. J. (2020). Community-based caregiver and family interventions to support the mental health of orphans and vulnerable children: Review and future directions. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 2020(173), 77–105. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/cad.20352>

Schiariti, V., Simeonsson, R. J., & Hall, K. (2021). Promoting developmental potential in early childhood: A global framework for health and education. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(4), 2007. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18042007>

Ntuli, B., Mokgatle, M., & Madiba, S. (2020). The psychosocial wellbeing of orphans: The case of early school leavers in socially depressed environment in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. *PloS one*, 15(2), e0229487. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0229487>

Week 4: Advocacy and Sustainable Solutions

Theme: Building a Better Future for OVC

Summary: The final week emphasizes advocacy and the development of sustainable solutions for OVC. Seminars will focus on the importance of elevating local voices within global child welfare dialogues and crafting culturally relevant policies. Students will engage in field visits to meet policymakers and community leaders, fostering an understanding of the policy-making process and its impact on child welfare. Experiential learning activities, such as organizing a community event, will enable students to synthesize course concepts and present their findings. The week concludes with a final reflection session, highlighting ethical leadership in development work and preparing students for future engagement in OVC advocacy.

Seminar: Advocacy and Policy: Local Voices in Global Spaces.

Field Visit: Meeting with policymakers and local leaders to discuss child protection policies.

Experiential Learning: Organize and facilitate a community event showcasing student findings and cultural exchange.

Final Reflection Session: Ethical leadership in development work.

Course Wrap-Up: Final exam, IFRP presentations.

Required Readings:

Williamson, J., & Greenberg, A. (2022). *Families, Not Orphanages: Advocacy for Change*. Better Care Network. <https://bettercarenetwork.org/library/particular-threats-to-childrens-care-and-protection/effects-of-institutional-care/families-not-orphanages>

National Christian Foundation. (2020). Helping Orphans and Vulnerable Children. <https://www.ncfgiving.com/helping-orphans>

Ladaphongphatthana, K. (2021). Holistic orphan care: A call for change in caring for orphans and vulnerable children. *Transformation*, 38(1), 78–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378820983355>

UNICEF Thailand. (2020). Holistic Review of Alternative Care Provision in an Area of Thailand With a High Number of Migrant Children. <https://www.unicef.org/thailand/media/8701/file/Holistic%20Review%20of%20Alternative%20Care%20Provision%20in%20an%20area%20of%20Thailand.pdf>

Course Policies

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes. If you are ill or otherwise need to miss a class, please inform your instructor or teaching assistant.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in ISDSI courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action.

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing an academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Grading Standards

Letter grade	Score or percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B	83–86	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C	73–76	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
D+	67–69	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
D	60–66	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an Incomplete.