

Available and Lost Opportunities for Effective Parenting in South Africa

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ABSTRACT Many children in South Africa are affected by widespread social problems, a situation, which has resulted, to a very large extent, from significant discrepancies in the degree to which effective parenting is being practiced. This state of affairs is indicative of available opportunities, which are provided in the form of counseling services, child protection services, parenting skills programs and legislation such as the Children's Act, to some extent failing to keep pace with the levels of child abuse, crime and violence committed by children, prostitution, early pregnancies and other social ills. On the other hand, the legacy of apartheid has reinforced lost opportunities, which is particularly evident in troubled housing and educational programs. Although the economy is developing swiftly in certain sectors, discrepancies underline the lack of an effective redistributive capacity to advance social programs, particularly those, which affect the wellbeing of parents and children. The researchers, who respectfully submit this paper, on the basis of the gaps, which have been identified, recommend either an altogether new paradigm, or else a dramatic paradigm shift in order to provide opportunities for communities to educate their members adequately.

INTRODUCTION

The healthy growth and nurturing of children may be observed to constitute a key global concern (World Health Organization (WHO) 2016), with the United Nations robustly steering the campaigning, advocacy and lobbying for the rights of children to be held supreme (Waterson and Goldhagen 2007; Global Child Forum 2015). The concerns of children have also assumed center stage in many global platforms and frameworks. The degree of gravity accorded to the welfare, interests and rights of children has resulted in the establishment of global bodies such as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) (UNICEF 2009). Many developing countries have welcomed these children's welfare bodies, either by domesticating their aims and mission statements, or by having rich policy environments, which promote the safeguarding

of the rights of children. South Africa is at the forefront of the developing countries in terms of the immensely rich policy environment, which it has with respect to the welfare of children. At the national level, the rights of children are upheld by fundamental documents and legislation such as the National Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 and the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 (Bekink 2012; Ndonga 2016). It is commendable that this policy environment has been conducive to giving birth to arms of government such as the Departments of Social Development and Education, which are dedicated to ensuring the welfare of all children in the country. These departments have played a pivotal role in supporting the interests of children by ensuring that their welfare and upbringing are safeguarded (UNICEF 2009). However, despite all of these benefits, the country is failing to come to grips with the innumerable reports in the print and electronic media of atrocities committed against children, including murder, battering, and grievous abuses of many different kinds, among the worst of which are the seemingly endless reported instances of violent rape (Sky News 26.07.2013). Perhaps the fact that the country is frequently referred to as the rape capital of the world may aid an understanding of the gravity and the magnitude of the phenomenon

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(Orton 2013). There can be no question that the atmosphere of peace and tranquility, which should be the right of all children, is under siege for many of South Africa's poorest children. On the other hand, it can also be said that many children are also abusing the freedoms which they are afforded, and that social pressure is driving many of them to engage in either part-time or full-time prostitution in order to put food on the table, either for their siblings or for themselves. This phenomenon needs to be understood within the context of child-headed households, which continue to multiply exponentially, as a result of the deaths of parents, largely owing to HIV and AIDS (Assim 2013). In areas such as Durban, for example, child prostitution is reported to be very rife, with young girls selling their bodies for sex, for as little as ZAR 50. Possibly even more horrifying is the discovery that some of these girls are forced by their own parents into prostitution in order to provide for their families (IOL News 9.9.2012). Abuse of all kinds committed against children is frequently given prominence in various media, with assertions often being made that cultural practices constitute a significant factor, which contributes to the persistent and widespread nature of this problem (Kaime 2009). Some customs, such as *inhlawulo* and *ukugeza*, which emanate from traditional cultural practices among the Nguni groups of South Africa, have a significant bearing upon this assertion. These customs entail a man who impregnates a woman being obliged to make payments, in the form of either money or livestock, as a means of acknowledging responsibility for the child. However, if a child is impregnated in a non-consensual relationship, payments can be made without any remorse, which could serve to encourage the persistent abuse of children (Magwaza 1997, cited by Dawes and Higson-Smith 2004).

In addition, a rise in teenage pregnancies has also heightened concerns and aroused public interest concerning this social problem, particularly in view of the large numbers of young girls who fall pregnant before they reach the age of twenty years. It has also often been suggested, from various quarters, the perceived value and importance of marriage have also been lost and that, in some cases, the institution of marriage is, to a large extent, either ignored or even abhorred (Baron 2006; Seidman and Gassman 2008; Woodside and McClam 2008; Mkhwanazi 2011).

Moreover, there is a great deal of evidence that the incidence of violent crimes against children continues to rise unabated and that in some quarters and contexts it has reached unfathomable levels. This phenomenon signifies a violation of the rights of children and their citizenship of the country on an obscenely large scale (Di Giulio 2001; Jourbert 2010). On the other hand, shocking reports also point out that children are often, themselves, the perpetrators of crimes against other children. For example, although the country is blighted by huge numbers of cases of child rape, a very significant proportion of them involve children raping other children, although these statistics respect the national and international definition of a child as a person who is below the age of eighteen years (Buck 2014). A study, which was conducted among seventy-two schools in Durban and Cape Town, confirmed that many learners are involved in the committing of status crimes, including the bullying of other learners. Bullying can have very detrimental social, emotional or psychological effects on victims and can include name-calling, persistent teasing, tormenting, ridicule, humiliation or abusive comments (Finley 2011). In addition, other social ills seem to be taking their toll on the lives of children in South Africa, including substance abuse, with statistics showing that up to one third of South African teenagers abuse drugs such as marijuana. Fears have been expressed that those children who abuse drugs are at an abnormally high risk of contracting HIV and AIDS (Seidman and Gassman 2008). Perceptions of addiction portray some youths becoming trapped in cycles of crime, as a result of stealing in order to obtain money to buy drugs, owing to the highly addictive characteristics of particular illegal drugs (Chatikobo 2015; Mario 2014).

It could be suggested that a close examination of the historical background of society in South Africa could help to locate some of the underlying factors, which have contributed to this present social malaise. It is the considered opinion of the researchers of this study that the policies of apartheid are at least partly to blame, as they resulted in an immense degree of social disintegration, including the breaking up of traditional family units, which inevitably resulted in elements of society becoming socially dysfunctional in many respects, and it was equally inevitable that these effects would be felt, par-

ticularly acutely, by Black children. The forced relocations instituted by the apartheid government uprooted people from their familiar surroundings and transported them to barren wastelands, which were devoid of amenities, shelter or the means to earn livelihoods. The era was also characterized by a massive migration of labor, particularly on the part of males, to work in the mines (Lester et al. 2014). The results of the departure of most able-bodied males from the rural areas had disastrous socioeconomic implications for these areas and the trickle effects of the problems created then are still evident, even today (Wilson and Raphael 2013).

Aims and Objectives of the Study

This aim of this paper is to investigate the deficiencies in parenting, which prevent children from developing the ability and the sense of morality needed to overcome the social problems, which undermine their lives, with the specific objective of establishing a viable status quo, to the extent to which the problems may be attributed to parenting.

Problem Statement

Indubitably, the changing terrain of societies, as they move from traditional social groupings to the complexity of modern societies, has brought with it a vast range of unprecedented challenges with respect to the nurturing and bringing up of children. In many developing countries it has become increasingly evident that the tasks associated with bringing up children to be socially responsible citizens, who are able not only to take care of themselves, but also to become formidable assets with respect to the contributions, which they make towards the economies of their countries. There is a great deal of evidence to support the assessment that children are becoming associated, to an increasing extent, with socially irresponsible and harmful activities and phenomena, such as involvement in status crimes and violent incidents, teenage pregnancies and drug abuse. This state of affairs begs many questions regarding whether the countries of the developing world will have children who possess the discipline and maturity required to steer their countries, whose progress has been made at a snail's pace to date, firmly, in the direction of development. Although

the desire for children to embrace responsible standards of morality and higher ethical standards is a cause of grave concern for those who fear for the futures of their societies, the researchers of this study maintain that the paths of holistic development of countries need to be examined before conclusions can be drawn.

It also needs to be stressed that the behavior of individuals in specific age categories of society cannot, and should not, be viewed as isolated phenomena, as children form part and parcel of their larger societies and their wellbeing is by and large the responsibility of their parents and guardians. As many families in South Africa appear to display characteristics of becoming increasingly dysfunctional, with escalating incidences of divorce and separation and absent or abusive parents, it may not be assumed that children are being sufficiently equipped and guided to be able to maintain discipline and to develop all of the qualities, which are needed in order to become viable citizens of modern societies. The researchers contend that a close examination of all of these scenarios, environments, debates, discourses and critiques, could in all probability create the basis for developing plausible and pragmatic suggestions for improving the nurturing of children in many developing countries of the world.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper based its methodology upon a literature review in order to provide a holistic account of available and lost opportunities for effective parenting in South Africa. The researchers have made use of UN documents, government publications, empirical findings and the knowledge, which they have acquired as a result of their own experience of the domain.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Available Opportunities for Effective Parenting

It needs to be stressed that the government of South Africa has done a great deal to create opportunities to equip parents with the skills and abilities to raise and nurture their children. These initiatives are particularly important, given the large numbers of children who are at serious risk of being subjected to either emotional or sexual abuse. The legislative framework of

the country prioritizes the rights of children. Article 28 of the constitution sets out the obligations of the government, emphasizing its commitment to ensuring that children are protected from violence, exploitation and abuse (Republic of South Africa 1996). A great deal of the recently drafted legislation has focused on children and the Children's Act, Act 38 of 2005, has acknowledged the rights and responsibilities of children and parents in a broader context than previous legislation has done. In addition, Child Protection Week is held in or around May of each year, in order to raise awareness about the rights of children, which are contained in the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and also to articulate the pertinent issues, which affect children by engaging directly with communities (South African Government 2015). Chapter 8 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 provides for prevention and early intervention programs (Ward and Wessels 2013: 63). These programs encourage the developing of appropriate parenting skills and lay down norms and standards to ensure that programs of sufficient quality are delivered. It is also commendable that the government has developed programs for parenting through the Department of Social Development and UNICEF (Ward and Wessels 2013: 63). Although some programs, such as Fatherhood, remain almost invisible, it needs to be added that those opportunities, which are available constitute a crucial resource. However, it remains to be determined whether full use is to be made of these opportunities or not.

The social work profession has played a crucial role to mitigate the challenges facing families, with governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations employing them to attend to the needs of both parents and children. This is a clear indication that South Africa is domesticating international instruments in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its children. The Department of Education has also introduced life skills as a subject in the high school curriculum, in an attempt to mitigate the effects of crime and violence on society and to equip children, psychologically, to deal with the social problems, which they may encounter. Some schools have taken the additional step of employing school social workers, particularly in those instances in which therapy and specialized attention are needed. The White Paper on Families has been drafted, which is still under-

going reviews in order to ensure that it adequately meets the needs of South African families. The White Paper on Families aims to foster the strengthening of the family unit, its preservation and the promotion of a healthy family life with the objectives of strengthening social cohesion, improving the capacities of families and empowering families to maximize the opportunities which are available locally, or in other parts of the country, for their own betterment and wellbeing (White Paper on Families in South Africa 2012: 8).

Lost Opportunities Manifested by the Ramifications of Poor Parenting of Children in South Africa

Levels of Child Abuse

Although respect, acknowledgement and dignity are accorded to children by the constitution and various policy clauses, it is unfortunate that the levels of child abuse continue to skyrocket to unfathomable and unprecedented levels (Conte 2014). As an example, statistics show that in 2009, those children who were murdered met their deaths through child abuse and neglect, with their mothers being the perpetrators in a great many cases (Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG), 2014). In addition, between forty and fifty percent of the rapes, which were reported to the South African Police Services (SAPS) had been committed against children under the age of eighteen years. The potential risks associated with these cases include, but are not limited to teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. In addition, twenty-eight percent of cases of abuse were related to physical abuse and forty-two percent to emotional abuse, with victims displaying suicidal behavior, engaging in substance abuse, having mental health problems, among other adverse effects (PMG 2014). Reports have also shown that although the introduction of services, such as Early Childhood Development by the Department of Social Development has been acknowledged, a great deal regarding child protection services remains of questionable effectiveness (PMG 2014). Among the more horrifying accounts of child abuse in recent years was that of a 4-year-old child being dragged behind a car for more than 8 kilometers in Ridge Park in July of

2014, while in early 2016 a South African woman was arrested for murdering her three mentally challenged children (Mtshali 2014). In January of 2015 a 9-year-old girl was raped and burnt and left to die, while another account told of a 3-year-old girl who had been raped by a neighbor in Cape Town (Bentel 2014). The widespread nature of these atrocities, which are perpetrated against children would not bode well for the healthy growth of any country, but it is particularly shocking to be obliged to acknowledge that occurrences which would shock the populations of many other countries, if a single occurrence were to be reported in any of those countries, are commonplace in South Africa.

Crime and Violence Perpetrated by Children Themselves

South Africa is undoubtedly becoming characterized internationally to an ever-increasing extent as a crime-laden country, owing to the fact that the levels of various different categories of very serious crimes appear to rise unabated, with some tending to reach unprecedented levels, which are certain to be considered as alarming by citizens of most other countries (Manners-Bell, 2014). This state of affairs has resulted in both South Africans and foreign nationals residing in South Africa, living in fear. It is also of significance to add that according to the general perceptions of those who are alarmed as a result of the very high levels of crime in the country, the numbers of reported cases of crime usually represent a drop in the ocean when compared with the actual numbers of crimes, which are committed. This perception implies that the official statistics, which are horrifying in themselves, represent only an optimistic mirage, which shimmers above a seemingly bottomless abyss of serious crime (Gould 2014). Statistics show that one thousand and eighteen children were murdered in 2009, of which seventy-four percent were under the age of 5 years (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 2014). Although the innumerable forms, which incidents of violence and crime may take, cannot be adequately covered by a paper of this length, it needs to be reiterated that children play a significant role in the acts of crime and violence, which are perpetrated against children. The high levels of status offences committed by teenagers and adolescents have grim implica-

tions for parents and policymakers, as they provide a clear indication of a country, which is failing to contain and discipline its children. Also of grave concern are the potential projections of the types of people who will comprise the next generation. Disturbing evidence to support fears, which arise as a result of concerns such as these, was provided by horrifying video footage, which showed two grade 11 pupils at the Vukuzakhe High School in Umlazi in Kwa Zulu Natal beating a fellow pupil. After the episode had "gone viral" on social media, the culprits were expelled (Louw 2015). In Gauteng other video footage showed a pupil repeatedly slapping another pupil, while others looked on and some took video recordings of the incident. Particularly disturbing was the appearance of an adult in the clip, who appeared to be a teacher, who did not make any effort to end the abusive behavior. This incident prompted the Provincial Department of Education to demand that action should be taken against the pupil who had perpetrated the violent act (Nzimande 2015).

Prostitution, Early Pregnancies and Other Social Ills

Prostitution, early pregnancies and other social ills also exert an extremely adverse influence on the lives of many children in South Africa (Sibeko 2014). The high prevalence of these ills raises serious questions regarding the welfare of South African children. Heartbreaking reports show that there is a dramatic increase in child prostitution, particularly in the province of the Free State (NEWS 24 30.7.2012). The problem has come to the attention of the government, which has promised to take measures to ensure that these children should return to their homes, in order to receive care and guidance from their parents. Also linked to this social problem are reports that some parents are actually sending their children to the streets, as a means of earning income to help to feed their families (NEWS 24 30.7.2012). The implications for a society are indeed grim when children, who themselves still need nurturing, have babies of their own to nurture. The immaturity of these young mothers precludes any possibility of their having the social, emotional or psychological capacity to nurture others. This scenario is indicative of a society which is failing in many respects, which affect its poorest and most vulnerable

people, and it becomes the responsibility of all of the stakeholders in the country, including the government, NGOs, the private sector and the citizens of the country to become sufficiently aware of the desperate plight of many to whose lives the ending of apartheid was intended to bring peace, prosperity and security. Statistics show that one hundred and eighty-two thousand young girls, who attend high schools throughout the country, fall pregnant every year. This phenomenon jeopardizes the futures of all of these children and places great burdens on their families. It is also of great concern that many of these young mothers are in the region of fourteen years of age. Early pregnancy carries serious health risks for these children, which can even include death, as prominent physicians have explained that their pelvis sections are normally not yet fully developed, which obliges them to undergo caesarean sections, which may also cause hemorrhaging and other debilitating problems (Ghosh 2013).

In addition, the severity of the ever-rising incidence of drug abuse among children in South Africa compounds the problems, which threaten a significant proportion of the country's youth. According to a research study conducted by the Anti-Drug Alliance South Africa, sixty-nine percent of the respondents confirmed that drugs were readily available at the schools, while the South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (SANCA) reported an increase in the number of children under the age of twenty-one years in treatment centers. Although some young people take drugs out of curiosity, hunger for experience or emotional pain, others do so as a result of poor role modeling on the part of parents or siblings (IOL NEWS 9.4.2013).

Effects of Apartheid on Families Becoming Dysfunctional

The policies of apartheid have undeniably created a vast range of problems whose effects are still felt today (Patel 2015). Many of the problems, which affect children, may be traced directly to the era of apartheid, which fomented cultural hostility through segregation and massive exploitation of the Black population. The bitterness created by subjecting generations of the majority of the population to vindictive and abusive legislation can only have severely det-

rimental effects on the social functioning of the society. It is often suggested that violence breeds violence, and the continual treating of a section of the population with contempt, very often accompanied by violence, could serve to explain, to a large extent, the swift recourse to violence, which is evident among many South Africans. This conclusion could at least, in part, also explain the preponderance of gender-based violence, in tandem with other crimes. The policies of apartheid actively promoted the destruction of families and children have not been spared either (Kang'ethe or Duma 2013). It is the opinion of the researchers of this paper that, as the policies of apartheid created a culture, which was detrimental to the majority of the population, all traces of its effects on the present environment need to be removed, or else they will destroy many children in the country (Simpson 1993). It is deeply worrying that most social programs do not acknowledge the detrimental and long-lasting effects of apartheid, which may continue to create fertile ground for violence against children or children, themselves, becoming violent.

CONCLUSION

This paper contends that opportunities are available to make parenting easier, thereby ensuring that children are protected. However, myriad challenges stand as obstacles in the path of ensuring the normal growth, development and welfare of children. This paper acknowledges these and has documented them in order to encourage more discussion and debate, which results in the welfare of children being prioritized holistically.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The importance of parents being educated, with respect to the parenting skills, which can equip them with the requisite skills needed to advance Millennium Development Goals and other important social initiatives, such as eradicating poverty and hunger, dealing with HIV and AIDS and taking a stand against the abuse, neglecting and abandonment of children, cannot be overemphasized. Using school curricula for behavior modification, by educating learners to enable them to understand what parenting entails, making sound choices in life and prostitution and drug abuse, could also help children

desist from activities, which have negative consequences. The providers of health services and social workers need to advocate on many platforms, such as the social media, broadcasting channels and learning environments, against early pregnancies. There is also a great necessity to create child watches to ensure that child prostitution is curbed and parents who force their children to engage in illicit sexual behavior need to face the full force of the law.

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