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# Parenting in Modern Societies

*Edited by Teresa Silva*





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Parenting in Modern Societies

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IntechOpen Book Series

# Education and Human Development

Volume 7

## Aims and Scope of the Series

Education and Human Development is an interdisciplinary research area that aims to shed light on topics related to both learning and development. This Series is intended for researchers, practitioners, and students who are interested in understanding more about these fields and their applications.





# Meet the Series Editor



Katherine Stavropoulos received her BA in Psychology from Trinity College, in Connecticut, USA and her Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology from the University of California, San Diego. She completed her postdoctoral work at the Yale Child Study Center with Dr. James McPartland. Dr. Stavropoulos' doctoral dissertation explored neural correlates of reward anticipation to social versus nonsocial stimuli in children with and without autism spectrum disorders (ASD). She has been a faculty member at the University of California, Riverside in the School of Education since 2016. Her research focuses on translational studies to explore the reward system in ASD, as well as how anxiety contributes to social challenges in ASD. She also investigates how behavioral interventions affect neural activity, behavior, and school performance in children with ASD. She is also involved in the diagnosis of children with ASD and is a licensed clinical psychologist in California. She is the Assistant Director of the SEARCH Center at UCR and is a faculty member in the Graduate Program in Neuroscience.



# Meet the Volume Editor



Dr. Teresa Silva is an Associate Professor in Criminology at Mid Sweden University. With a background in health sciences and psychology, the focus of her research has been on child development and the risk factors for children's and adolescents' mental health and problematic behaviour, including delinquency and violence. Initially in Spain, and after in Canada and Sweden, Dr. Silva researched different parenting areas such as child maltreatment, dysfunctional families, harsh and warm parenting, parental monitoring, parental alienation, and family migration processes, among other topics. In her academic career, she has always advocated for children's rights and the necessity of improving the support and assistance that public administration and private organisations provide for them and their families.



# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>XV</b>
<b>Section 1</b>	
Outcasts in an Adult World	1
<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>3</b>
Introductory Chapter: Parenting, a Natural and Culturally Defined Role <i>by Teresa Silva</i>	
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>11</b>
The Impact of Dysfunctional Families on the Mental Health of Children <i>by Lucy Kganyago Mphaphuli</i>	
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>23</b>
Parenting and Work-Family Balance in the Twenty-First Century <i>by Ethelbert P. Dapiton, Enrique G. Baking and Ranie B. Canlas</i>	
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>39</b>
Desolate Childhoods: The Surrender of the Adult World – Notes from the Pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 <i>by Mónica De Martino and Maia Krudo</i>	
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>55</b>
Children’s Rights (Absent) in Universal Parenting Training <i>by Hetty Rooth</i>	
<b>Section 2</b>	
Migration and Child Rearing	69
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>71</b>
Communication in Times of Uncertainty and Loss: Refugee Parents in Interaction with Kindertuinen and Schools <i>by Anne Marit Vesteraas Danbolt</i>	

<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>83</b>
Mitigating the Unmet Psychosocial Support Needs of Left-behind Learners in Child-Headed Households: Exploring ‘Educare’ Support at a Zimbabwean School	
<i>by Ricanos Jaure and Alfred Henry Makura</i>	
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>97</b>
The Effectiveness of Foster Care Arrangements for Unaccompanied Migrant Children in Zimbabwe: A Case of Children under Foster Care in Dulibadzimu, Beitbrigde	
<i>by Mulwayini Mundau and Maxwell Chikowe</i>	

# Preface

Modern societies have evolved to make life easier. Many political systems are (apparently) devoted to attaining a good population level of welfare and social security for families and their children. Over the past 70 years, national and international organisations and agencies have developed with the aim of protecting children's rights, human rights, universal access to education, the health and safety of individuals, and their freedom. Cooperation across nations has made it possible to offer support for those who are most in need as a result of natural or man-made disasters. Furthermore, the continual evolution of technological advances facilitates our ability to communicate across distances. Breaking news almost instantly reaches televisions and mobile devices broadcasted by media corporations and spread on the Internet. Every day we use gadgets developed to simplify daily tasks that used to require great effort in the past. For instance, while they are asleep, parents can now monitor their young children by placing small video and audio-capturing devices in their rooms. Driving children to daycare is currently safer, thanks to special seats. In many countries, education is becoming more digital, and children are taught digital skills from a very young age. In some way, modern societies are societies of the future while, at the same time, dealing with problems of the past. Like in the past, or possibly even more so today, children are adrift in a world that, in many ways, forgets them and does not understand their needs.

This book highlights the challenges that children and their parents face when adjusting to modern life's complexities. The first section opens with an introductory chapter focused on the dual nature of the parental role and how it is defined culturally. The author discusses this duality and highlights elements of evolutionary theory and the importance of the natural and cultural environments.

The impact of being raised in a dysfunctional family on the child's well-being and mental health is the object of debate in Chapter 2, which serves as a timeline reminder of the value of a family system's healthy functioning. Interparental conflict, domestic violence, abuse, neglect, and severed ties between the child and the parent are pointed out as risk factors for a child's behavioural and emotional problems.

Chapter 3 addresses the issue of work-family balance and how today's fast-paced societies, where performance and productivity are highly regarded, affect children and their families. A literature review grounds the discussion of work-family conflict, hustle culture, family vulnerabilities, and the importance of egalitarianism to achieve a necessary balance.

Chapter 4 analyses the plastic expression of Uruguayan children, which uncovers their isolation and loneliness, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Contrary to expectations, the outcomes reveal that children's isolation was not due to government-forced

confinement but rather to the low density of their bonding networks, both internal and external to the family, depleting them of their potential social capital. Adults were portrayed as being sick or armed and ready for violence rather than as being nurturing and supportive.

Chapter 5 examines universal parenting training programs in Sweden, a country with a long tradition of parental assistance, that since the early 2000s have been implemented as a primary preventive effort. The author concludes that the idea of “rights,” as they are outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, is not an intrinsic value of these programs. Although children may internalise democratic principles as a guide for handling interactions with others, including their parents, the author emphasises how family dynamics and the child’s existence, in general, are largely governed by adult norms.

The book’s second section collects topics related to themes of migration and child upbringing. Nowadays—perhaps more than ever—many individuals are forced to migrate because of war, violence, poverty, unsustainable living circumstances, and climate change. Moreover, as the world becomes more interconnected, employment and personal ties can also cause relocation to another country. When children are socialised in a culture different from that of their parents, conflict occurs almost inevitably. It is natural for adolescents to rely on their peers, the school, and the community, where they integrate as a reference to construct their system of values, challenging their parents’ values. In extreme situations, the parenting role may be severely disrupted and eventually taken over by others when children are left behind in their home countries and towns.

Chapter 6 discusses the challenges that refugee parents encounter when they enter the host country. The inability of parents to communicate with educators due to language barriers makes it difficult for them to interact with the new education system. The author interviewed refugee parents who had recently arrived in Norway and concluded that while both parties have good intentions for cooperation and integration, misunderstandings caused by the situation’s complexity create uncertainties. The degree to which children adjust to the parenting behaviour in the new nation depends on whether the uncertainties are resolved in the medium term or result in parents rejecting the new culture.

Migration also comes in other forms. In some countries, parents migrate spurred by poverty, leaving their children behind either in the care of other relatives or, as discussed in Chapter 7, in the care of the older child who assumes parental responsibilities for the young children. In such cases, the community plays a significant role in supporting the child-headed household. Care is provided through schools in addition to education. In this chapter, the outcome of interviews with school personnel and children are discussed regarding the benefits and drawbacks of the “Educare” system, which was put in place in Zimbabwean schools with the intention of ensuring the welfare of children.

Finally, Chapter 8 examines the situation of unaccompanied migrant children in a city that borders South Africa and Zimbabwe, as well as formal and informal



foster care arrangements in place to help the children overcome their more urgent problems. Empathetic cooperation by the community neighbours was a vital resource for the children estranged from their parents. However, the emotional toll of being accidentally or incidentally separated from the care and security that parents are expected to provide will probably leave a permanent impression on the children's lives.

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Section 1

# Outcasts in an Adult World

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## Chapter 1

# Introductory Chapter: Parenting, a Natural and Culturally Defined Role

*Teresa Silva*

## 1. Introduction

Parenting is a demanding role. Parental investment in building up a solid parent–child relationship, which warmly supports the child, being constantly attentive to the child’s emotional needs and providing consistent discipline, will revert positively in the child’s development at the cost of parents’ exertion.

For Bowlby [1], parenting is not a job for a single person. In order to do it appropriately and meet the child’s needs without getting too exhausted, a caregiver needs assistance. From whom that assistance come varies, depending on societies and cultures. In Northern Europe, the couple is expected to find support in each other, while in South Europe, grandparents play an essential role. In rural areas of China, the grandparents may entirely overtake the parenting role when parents immigrate to find work in the cities, and in some African countries, children of working migrant parents are left in households where the older child takes care of the youngsters with some occasional support from the community. In this regard, we find multiple types of family configurations.

In the framework of family systems theory, families are considered adaptable systems that respond to stressing factors occurring inside and outside the system. The goal of such adaptations is to maintain the family’s integrity and autonomy [2]. Three critical dimensions rule the way the family works. First, cohesion among the family members allows the family to be independent and more resilient to adversity. Flexibility, the second dimension, allows a healthy adaptation to changes and, at the same time, keeps stability in a functional manner. The third dimension, communication, facilitates cohesion and flexibility. The family system’s integrity and stability are constantly menaced by different factors. Against this background, in modern societies, life entails many challenges for parenting that have the capability to threaten the child’s adjustment.

Families cannot thrive alone. As the African proverb says, “It takes a village to raise a child”, meaning that the community has a role in providing safety and a healthy environment for children, in order for them to develop appropriately and become well-adjusted adults. Raising a child is not the sole responsibility of their parents or immediate family but rather a collective effort that entails the support and involvement of the wider community [3]. In past traditional societies, every individual in the community had a responsibility to ensure that children were well-fed, healthy, educated and safe. Neighbours and relatives would look out for the youngsters,

offer guidance and share resources to support their well-being and development. Nowadays, the “village” is mainly composed of institutions and organisations in the community, which includes schools, neighbourhood groups, sports clubs, supportive organisations, religious associations, etc. However, we find that the “village” in modern societies is each time more fragmented and disengaged when not broken by political conflicts and war. In many countries, families have to cope with economic pressures, harsh working conditions, professional expectations impossible to achieve, poverty, violence or stigmatisation.

## **2. An evolutionary perspective**

We are biologically prepared to be parents. The selfish gene theory [4] proposes that living organisms are the guardians of the information codified in genes and have evolved to act selfishly to make the information prevail no matter the circumstances. To ensure the survival of the genes and, therefore, the next generation, replication is, in Dawkins’s theory, the primary purpose of life. Genes or organisms themselves are not endowed with a conscience that prepares them for strategic replication, but nature will favour those better at replicating.

Strategies for reproduction fall along a continuum [5]. On one extreme of this continuum, we find organisms that reproduce prolifically without much concern or care for the offspring. Many descendants may die, but enough will survive to secure the next generation. On the other extreme, are organisms with a low rate of reproduction but a high investment in raising offspring. The dedication of parents, in this case, maximises the chances that each individual in the progeny survives.

In humans, these different strategies were found by anthropologists to be related to the physical environment. Raine [6] explained this by comparing two ethnographic groups, the !Kung bushmen of the Kalahari desert and the Mundurucú villagers of the Amazon forest. The group living in the extremely difficult conditions of the desert had a low fertility rate and was highly invested in parenting their children, who depended on the quality of parental care for survival. In contrast, the group living in the rich environmental conditions of the Amazon forest, where nature easily provided resources for them, had more descendants, mothers were less caring, men played a minimum role in parenting, and the children had to learn early to fend for themselves.

“Kin selection,” a natural tendency to act altruistically in the interest of genetic relatives has been found in many species as well as in humans [7]. Altruistic behaviour is more likely to happen the closer the genetic relationship between individuals is. This explains the assistance that parents may provide for their offspring even when their own lives may be at risk. In this regard, neglecting or intentionally injuring the progeny may seem to defy nature and any evolutionary logic. However, child abuse and neglect in the human species have been overly reported in every culture throughout history. The neo-Darwinian theory identifies four conditions when child abuse and neglect, and in extreme cases, infanticide, by parents, might be favoured: (1) when parents have more children than the necessary resources to rear all of them, (2) when parents do not cooperate with each other in child rearing, (3) in cases of less capable of reproducing offspring, and (4) when the offspring is not genetically related to the parent [8]. In support of these theoretical predictions, research has shown that parental abuse and neglect among humans is more prevalent in situations of single parenthood, large families, multiple birthing and poverty [9–11]. Moreover, children

with severe physical or mental disabilities are more at risk [12], and step-parents are more often perpetrators of violence against the children than biological parents [13].

### **3. Parenting and environment**

Although we can find biological roots in different parenting behaviours, parenting is not the product of a deterministic instinct. Life experiences occurring in parents' childhood, adolescence, before and during the marriage and the experiences with each individual child also determine the way parents raise their children [1]. Environment, as seen earlier, is another strong conditioning factor. For instance, for parents living in war zones, refugee camps, or poverty-stricken areas, the challenges can be overwhelming. The lack of resources, food, clean water or basic medical care forces parents to struggle to provide for their children's basic needs. Parents may have to work long hours in difficult conditions or rely on the generosity of others while exposed to violence and trauma.

Whether it is the threat of war or the daily violence that is commonplace in many impoverished areas, parents must find ways to protect their children from harm while also addressing their emotional needs. At the end of 2021, it was estimated that 36.5 million children worldwide were displaced from their homes due to war, political conflicts and violence [14]. Whether they are dealing with the aftermath of a conflict, the ongoing violence in their communities, or the fear of a potential conflict, parents must navigate difficult terrain when raising their children in such circumstances. In order to ensure their safety, parents may need to take precautions such as finding shelter in safe areas, limiting their children's exposure to traumatic events, and helping them develop coping strategies to deal with the stress and trauma of living in a warzone. Children may also be at risk of violence, exploitation, or recruitment by armed groups. Access to education and opportunities for development is hindered, and countries' economic instability and poverty frustrate any parental endeavour.

Parenting in a world at war demands that parents provide emotional support and help their children develop resilience in the face of adversity. Exposure to significant stress and trauma produced by unsafety environments can lead to depression, anxiety and other mental health problems jeopardising parents' ability to properly parent their children. Eltanamly and colleagues [15] found that in war scenarios, parental warmth decreases while parental harshness increases, compromising children's adjustment, which is linked to an increase in a child's posttraumatic stress symptoms.

Despite these challenges, parents in harsh environments are often incredibly resilient and resourceful. They find ways to adapt to the surrounding and provide their children with the care and protection they need. A strong and supportive social network can favour parenting and child development even in adversarial conditions, and a strong emphasis on cultural traditions and practices helps to maintain a sense of identity and community.

In contrast with harsh living conditions, wealthy societies are characterised by more or less easy access to high-quality education, healthcare and social support systems that make it easier for children to have a stable home as well as opportunities for growth and exploration. Access to high-quality education in well-funded schools where teachers are thoroughly trained and curriculums are well-thought facilitates children's future success. Parents in these environments can support their children's education by staying involved in their academic progress and providing additional resources and support when needed. At the same time, children thrive on structure and routine,

providing them with a sense of security and stability. When parents are able to consistently provide daily routines, including regular meals, bedtimes and study periods, they may find that children react more positively to their parenting practices.

#### **4. Parenting in different cultures**

Parenting practices vary widely across cultures, and what is considered “acceptable” in one culture may be viewed differently in others. For instance, parenting in East Asia is often characterised by emphasising academic achievement and discipline. Parents in East Asian cultures focus on children’s education and may push them to excel in school while at the same time using strict disciplinary measures, such as physical punishment, to maintain order and obedience. East Asian parents also place a strong emphasis on respect for elders and family hierarchy. Children are often expected to show deference to their parents and grandparents and to prioritise the family’s needs over their individual desires.

For parents in Latin America, family and community take the lead. They prioritise social relationships and encourage their children to develop strong bonds with extended family members and neighbours. They often express love and support for their children by demonstrating physical affection, embracing and kissing them. However, parenting in Latin America is also characterised by strict gender roles and expectations. Boys and girls are socialised differently, with boys encouraged to be assertive and independent and girls expected to be nurturing and obedient.

On the other hand, parenting in Africa is diverse and varies widely depending on the specific culture and region. Many African cultures place a strong emphasis on community and family life while promoting respect for elders and traditional values. Children are raised by their parents, and the extended family and community members often play an essential role in their upbringing. Children are expected to show profound deference to their parents and to follow cultural traditions and customs.

Regarding indigenous parenting practices, they also vary widely depending on the specific culture and region. Common among indigenous is the connection to the natural world and to live in harmony with the environment. Children are taught to respect and care for nature and to see themselves as part of a larger community of living beings. Parents in indigenous societies prioritise storytelling and oral tradition as a way of passing down cultural knowledge and values. Children are encouraged to listen to stories and to learn from the experiences of their ancestors.

In contrast to the previous cultures, Western parenting practices are often characterised by affirming individualism and independence. Children’s self-esteem is prioritised, and parents encourage them to pursue their individual goals and interests. Positive reinforcement is used as a way of encouraging appropriate behaviour and development. Sometimes, parents in Western cultures are criticised for being overly permissive and lacking discipline. Children may be allowed more freedom and autonomy than in other cultures, which sometimes is seen as a risk factor for behavioural problems and lack of respect for authority.

#### **5. Parenting in modern societies**

Modern societies have become more diverse and complex, creating new challenges. Immigration and globalisation have brought people from different backgrounds and



values together, making it important for parents to be sensitive to these differences and raise their children accordingly.

Immigrant parents who move to another country with their children face unique challenges. Navigating unfamiliar cultural and social norms while also providing for the family is a daunting experience. Language barriers hinder the ability of parents to communicate effectively with the new social and educational system in the income country. It is, therefore, difficult for parents to advocate for the children's needs and to establish an effective social network with other parents and educators. Immigrant parents also struggle with cultural differences that affect their parenting styles. While in some cultures, parenting is predominantly authoritarian, in others, it is more permissive. Corporal punishment may be a usual educational practice in some cultures, while in Northern Europe, for instance, it is a crime. When immigrant parents are exposed to new cultural norms and expectations, they may feel unsure of how to behave, with a significant risk of social isolation. Moreover, when children are raised in countries with different cultural norms from that of their parents and learn from peers what is acceptable and expected, they may find themselves between two cultures in conflict.

Another significant challenge facing parents in modern societies is the increasing pressure of burdensome work schedules and unattainable professional careers that jeopardise family life. In 2016, the OECD reported that many parents with young children had difficulties balancing their work and family commitments [16]. The report indicated, however, that there were differences between countries. While families from North Europe and Switzerland were more likely to indicate they had little to no trouble juggling work and family, in nations like Chile, Poland, or the Slovak Republic, an average of 70% of parents reported they find it very challenging.

Moreover, in many countries, living costs have risen dramatically, making it necessary for both parents to work. This can generate situations in which parents have limited time and energy to devote to their children, leading to feelings of guilt and stress. Balancing the demands of work and family can be a delicate juggling act that requires careful planning, communication and prioritisation. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is crucial for creating healthy solid relationships with children, and it helps to reduce stress that otherwise risks impairing both physical and mental health. High demands from work and family can lead to burnout, exhaustion and depression. Children need attention, affection and guidance to develop well-adjusted. Parents who are constantly stressed and overworked find it difficult to provide the emotional support their children need, which may impair the parent-child relationship.

On a different note, modern societies have become more accepting of different family structures and lifestyles, including single-parent households, same-sex families and co-parenting arrangements, which also bring many challenges to parents. The number of children currently living in households with LGBTQ parents has increased sharply over the last few decades, pushed by a sociopolitical change in many countries and a technological development that facilitates assisted reproduction [17]. In recent years, society has started to recognise the rights of LGBTQ families for parenting their children. As more and more same-sex couples adopt children, use assisted reproductive technologies, or have children from previous relationships, parenting by LGBTQ families is becoming increasingly visible. Parenting by LGBTQ families comes with a unique set of challenges, such as discrimination, bullying at school, rejection from extended family members, or even difficulty in finding suitable housing or employment. As Carone and colleagues pointed out, although the family structure seems not

to affect child's developmental outcomes, there are factors regarding stigmatisation and discrimination against their families that affect them [18].

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, parenting is a natural role determined by our biological nature. But parenting is also culturally and environmentally determined. In some cultures, child development is the responsibility of each individual in the community, besides the parents. In more individualistic cultures, parental support is a matter for institutions and organisations to care for. Either way, "it takes a village to raise a child," meaning that families need support to adequately parent their children.

The complexities of modern societies and the multiple environmental challenges parents have to face in their daily lives jeopardise parenting roles and put at risk many children. Prioritising children's development and well-being should be a primary concern for any government and community, a goal not impossible to attain if there is sufficient political commitment to supporting families.


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## Chapter 2

# The Impact of Dysfunctional Families on the Mental Health of Children

*Lucy Kganyago Mphaphuli*

### Abstract

A healthy and nurturing family environment is necessary for the development of mental health in children. A positive atmosphere within the family, such as open communication, strong interpersonal relationships between parents and children, harmony and cohesion, contributes to a conducive and a safe space for children to develop healthy habits. Children who grow up in dysfunctional families are at risk of developing mental illness, which, if not treated, can result in long-term mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. Children who are exposed to constant conflict, aggression, abuse, neglect, domestic violence and separation because of divorce or parents who work long hours away from home are likely to present with behavioural and emotional problems. Parents, whether single, married or divorced, have got the responsibility to protect their children's mental health.

**Keywords:** dysfunctional families, mental health, mental illness, parenting, parent-child relationship, parental practices

### 1. Introduction

Mental health of children is a global and persistent concern. It is a multifaceted problem with some of the leading causes being depression, anxiety and behavioural disorders. According to the World Health Organisation [1], one in six people are of ages 10–19, and within this age group, one in seven experience mental health challenges. Children of this age group are at a critical period of developing healthy habits that are necessary for their mental wellness. Being exposed to difficult circumstances at this tender age can compromise their ability to develop healthy mental wellness.

The first year of life is pivotal in the neurological development of children [2]. The childhood experiences during this period can have a positive or negative impact in the development of the brain. Children who are raised in nurturing environments of love, care and support can develop healthy attachments, relationships of trust, security and a good self-esteem. Infants who grow up in uncondusive environments characterised by abuse and neglect tend to feel unloved, unappreciated and unwanted. Such children may avoid building intimate and social relationships later in life as they find it difficult to trust other people. They develop fear of their environment and view the world as a dangerous place [2].

Domestic violence is one of the environmental factors that may not be physically directed at children within the family but have a direct impact on them. Children who witness violence at home experience mental, emotional and social challenges that predispose them to mental illness. They are likely to be victims of child abuse and or perpetrators of violence later in their adulthood. The impact of domestic violence on children is likely to manifest in behavioural challenges, low school grades, criminal behaviour and antisocial behaviour [3]. The World Health Organisation [4] estimates that 1 billion children of ages 2–17 have experienced violence of one kind or another, most of which is perpetrated within the home environment. It is in this sense that children are often referred to as silent victims of violence and abuse.

Another environmental factor that affects not only the married couple but children as well is marital breakdown. Divorce brings a lot of devastation, grief and traumatic loss for the children of divorced parents. Logistically and practically, divorce results in single parenting. This is still the case even when in cases of shared custody. The parent who lives with the child carries more responsibility in terms of the day-to-day care and support for the child. More often, parents who bear custody of the children are overburdened financially and logistically, while the other parent might resist and contest reasonable financial contribution towards the needs of the children [5]. The stress of separation between parents can easily be transferred to children, leading to mental health challenges as parents go about creating a new life for themselves, paying less attention to the emotional needs of children. Divorce is, thus, one of the major sources of stress and anxiety in children that can result in mental illness.

Parents have got the responsibility to ensure financial security for their children such as provision of medical care, being able to cater for educational costs, housing, and day-to-day provision for the needs of the family. In most cases, this can be achieved through employment. Parental employment can have both positive and negative effects on parent-child relationships. On the one hand, employment can provide financial stability and a sense of accomplishment that can have a positive impact on the well-being of the family. On the other hand, employment can create stress and time pressures for parents, leading to a strain on parent-child relationships. Parents are likely to bring home the stress of work, which may destabilise the homely environment and further transfer stressful vibes to children.

Growing up in a dysfunctional family has harmful effects that extend to adulthood in children. Children have got no control of the unconducive living conditions created by their parents, caregivers and guardians. Often parents who engage in toxic relationships of violence and abuse are less considerate of the impact of their behaviour on children. They are not aware of the extent of the impact of their actions on children because their aggression is not directed at children, and therefore, they do not think that they are causing emotional harm to children. This unfortunately could not be far from the truth. Negative parenting patterns, such as emotional abuse and neglect, punishment and rejection, create trauma that can result in mental health issue for children.

Some parents come from toxic families themselves where they were exposed to violence, aggression, abuse, neglect, rejection and other negative parenting as children. It becomes difficult for such parents to divorce themselves from their childhood experiences and learn new and positive ways of parenting their own children. Many families are reluctant to accept that they fall in the category of dysfunctional families and thus resist or delay to seek help [6]. Parents are convinced that they are doing well because they are able to provide financially for their children, by so doing, overlooking the negative effects of the toxic environment in which they are raising

children. This circle, if not broken, can be transferred from generation to generation, hurting children up to the edge of mental illness and creating dysfunctional families and communities.

The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to provide information about the relationship between parenting, family dynamics and mental health of children targeting children, parents, families, caregivers and officials who are responsible for providing services to children and families such as social workers, psychologists, and teachers.

## **2. The impact of growing up in a dysfunctional family**

Dysfunctional families have become a huge problem in modern society. While there are no perfect families and people do not choose which family to belong to, the level of dysfunction and lack of coherence in some families are a cause for concern. Dysfunctional families are characterised by multiple conflicts, tense relationships, chaos, neglect, abuse, poor communication, lack of empathy and secrecy to an extent that the emotional and physical needs of the family members are not met, especially children. Conflicts are often between parents, parent-child conflict or sibling rivalries. Life in a dysfunctional family is a turbulence of uncertainty and instability as well as an unsafe space for family members. Instead of expressing their concerns and resolving issues in a positive manner, members in some dysfunctional families normalise their situation and get accustomed to condoning unacceptable behaviour such as abuse, victimisation and conflict, and they sweep issues under the carpet. Conflict is an inevitable part of human relationships; however, dysfunctional families model negative ways of managing conflict to children with the biggest problem being lack of effective communication. In dysfunctional families, communication is replaced with shouting, screaming, arguing and silence.

Healthy functioning families, on the other hand, exhibit harmony, love, care and support for each other; the home is the safest environment where they are able to express themselves, and members have a sense of emotional, mental and physical wellness. In healthy functioning families, conflict, disagreements and differences are resolved in a healthy manner that is beneficial to all concerned.

The negative dynamics that are found in dysfunctional families have adverse effects on the growing personality of children and creates a negative viewpoint on life in general; it inflicts pain and leaves emotional wounds that are not reversible. This is because the family has got influence on the development of the child and provides a foundation for the growth of the child such as one's identity, values, norms and morals that are acceptable in society by providing the child with a safe space, love, affection as well as instilling social awareness and confidence [7]. This means the family can influence the growth and development of the child in a positive or negative way depending on the lifestyle, parenting, and the level of functionality of that family. Children are likely to carry what they have observed and learned during their childhood into adulthood.

In dysfunctional families, mostly both or one parent exhibits unharmonious, parenting style and behaves in an unpredictable manner resulting in the home environment being unstable [8]. Children as a result are forever on guard because they never know what to expect and when conflict is going to take place. Some parents are emotionally distant towards children, making it hard to create normal family bonds. The impact on children is low self-esteem and the inability to express their feelings in a healthy way and ultimately childhood trauma. Children as a result experience repeated

trauma and pain from their parents' actions, words and attitudes, while parents are generally in denial that they lead a dysfunctional family [4]. Children grow up with multiple traumas that leave them with permanent emotional and mental scars, sadness and distress. Trauma if not treated may lead to physical and psychological illness [9].

Children from dysfunctional families may experience stigma by their peers for the situation at home. This increases the risk of becoming withdrawn and isolated within the family and around their friends. Growing up in a dysfunctional family indeed exposes children to emotional trauma that can lead to mental illness.

### **3. Mental illness of children**

Child mental health is the ability to grow psychologically, socially, intellectually and spiritually, reaching emotional and developmental milestones without a struggle [10]. Children with mental health challenges are at risk of experiencing a delay in age-appropriate development that can affect their normal functioning and the quality of life. Mental health in children is important for their present and future quality of life because childhood experiences have a profound effect on adulthood.

Mental illness in children can be caused by a variety of issues such as stresses relating to domestic violence, being bullied, losing a loved one to death, separation from friends because of moving homes or schools. It can also be caused by separation from parents because of divorce or parents who work long hours away from home as well as child abuse and suffering from a long illness. Mental illness can also be hereditary meaning there is a likelihood that parents can pass the illness to their children. Some of the symptoms in children are, but not limited to, persistent unhappiness and sadness, emotional outbursts and extreme mood swings, difficulties in academic achievement, loss of appetite or overeating, difficulty falling asleep and fear and sudden loss of interest in previously loved activities such as sport [11].

People exist within the family environment from childhood to adulthood meaning the family plays an essential role in the physical and mental well-being of its members especially during the formative development of children. Children need care that promotes resilience, ability to thrive, modelling appropriate behaviour and coping resources. It is, however, difficult to achieve this when children experience inadequate parental care [12]. Parents can minimise the risk of child mental illness by improving the conditions of living at home, the environment in which the child functions and general childhood relationships and experiences.

The family, specifically parents, have got the responsibility to raise their children in the manner that encourages positive emotional health and overall mental health and minimises the risk and exposure to anxiety, depression, fear and helplessness both at home and outside the home environment by providing love and positive affirmations. While some families try to raise children by ensuring healthy development towards a bright future, some instill and model unhealthy and unhelpful practices that will negatively impact the child's life permanently; an example of this is the high percentage of children who are born with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). FASD happens when a pregnant woman consumes alcohol, and the baby is exposed to the harsh impact of alcohol before birth. This condition manifests itself in physical learning and behavioural challenges later when the child is born. According to Tomlinson et al. [13], South Africa has got the highest rate of FASD in the world. Children with FASD are at risk of developing mental illness. FASD unfortunately creates a circle that requires resilience and courage to break.



Modelling negative behaviour to children results in children adopting unhealthy life habits. This can be seen in the prevalence of the adolescent who experience with alcohol in South Africa's province of Western Cape [13]. Such children are affected by the behaviour of their parents, the same parents who are supposed to protect them. This is an indication of unstable and unhealthy parenting practices that may ultimately lead to mental health problems in children.

Mentally healthy children, on the other hand, have a positive outlook on life, and they can function optimally emotionally, socially and academically.

#### **4. The impact of divorce on children**

Divorce is prevalent in today society across the world. According to the United Nations Organisation [14], 4.08 per 1000 married persons end in divorce worldwide. In 2020, for example, Maldives recorded the highest divorce rate in the world with 2984 divorces out of a population of 540,544, which translates to 5.52 divorce rate per 1000 married persons. In South Africa alone, 23,710 divorces out of the 129,597 marriages were recorded in 2019, according to Statistics South Africa [15]. Divorce, like other environmental factors that affect families, has a dire effect on children, and it undermines the parent-child relationship because of the decline in the quality of relationships, especially with the parent who does not bear custody. Children from divorced families often experience a range of emotions and challenges, including feelings of loss, confusion and insecurity. They lose the family structure that they are accustomed to, and they have to adjust to living in two separate homes and spending time away from one parent at a time.

Divorce creates emotional distance between the child and the parent who does not live with the child on a full-time basis especially in instances where divorce is preceded by conflict, tension and domestic violence between parents [16]. Protracted divorce processes that are characterised by conflict also create emotional distance between children and parents. According to Fagan and Churchill [17] domestic violence weakens and undermines the parent-child relationship. Children of divorced parents may also feel caught in between because of feelings of conflicting loyalty as though they have to choose between their parents. The distance between parents and children causes emotional strain and irreversible harm, which, if not treated, can result in long-term mental health problems. Children of divorced parents are likely to present with weakened health, psychological trauma and behavioural problems because of insufficient emotional support, affection, care and love from both parents. Children as a result struggle to trust and rely on their parents as they develop a sense of fear for the environment around them. Lack of trust hampers family relations.

On the other hand, parents who bear custody of children are faced with difficulties relating to raising children on their own. Juggling work and single parenting may result in lack of sufficient supervision of children. Single parenting because of divorce makes stress inherent as the parent tries to raise children alone. It reduces household income and makes it difficult for the one parent to maintain the standard of living that the children are accustomed to as well as ensuring the maintenance of the home. These challenges can translate into exposure to risk behaviour for children such as embarking on the use of drugs, criminal behaviour and ultimately falling behind academically. Children in broken families may not receive enough encouragement, support and stimulation, and this can affect their ability to focus on school. Active parental involvement of both parents in the child's life is important to prevent the

overload on one parent. Wajim and Shimfe [18] opined that children from divorced families have an increased likelihood of presenting with anti-social behaviour because of the lack of presence of both parents to bring the child up in the norms and values of society, a task that is the responsibility of both parents, playing complimentary roles in their children's lives. Behere et al. [19] elucidate that divorce is a risk factor for mental health problems especially for children.

Divorce paves a way for negative perceptions against marriage and stable relationships. According to Fagan and Churchill [17], boy children from divorced families, for example, are likely to engage in countless and short-term sexual relationships with multiple partners, and they also have a high turnover of failed intimate relationships compared to adults who were raised in intact families. Fagan and Churchill further revealed that children who experience strained relations between parents prefer to leave home earlier to get married, cohabit or live on their own because of the lack of peace and harmony in their homes, instead of continuing to witness the commotion between their parents.

## **5. The impact of domestic violence on children**

Domestic violence is recognised globally as a public health problem and a violation of human rights by organisations such as the United Nations [20] and the World Health Organisation [21] as well as national and international studies such as [22–26]. It is a destructive act of violence and aggression that causes harm physically and mentally as well as neglect and isolation to the family members who are victims. The intention of violence in the family is mostly to wound, intimidate, manipulate, humiliate and gain power over the victim. It affects people globally across the spectrum of race and class, and it is rooted in gender inequality [27, 28]. While violence in the family affect both men and women, its prevalence is higher in violence against women and children, perpetrated within the family or by intimate partners [29]. According to the World Health Organisation [30], exposure to domestic violence, especially intimate partner violence, increases the risk of mental health problems.

Despite a change in the trend in some countries, violence in the family is often still concealed and not reported because it is regarded as a private matter that does not require external intervention [31]. This assumption that family violence is a private matter normalises violence behind closed doors, leading to many families suffering in silence. Children who are raised in homes with family violence may not report it as they see it as a norm, meaning they may not receive help for the emotional trauma suffered. Children who are exposed to violence and aggression of one form or another may suffer psychologically and emotionally with the likelihood of using violence to resolve conflict with their peers and siblings. This is because of the lack of role models on positive conflict management. As teenagers, they may be victimised and stigmatised if they press criminal charges against their own family members; as a result, they continue to suffer in silence. This may lead to the use of unhealthy methods of coping such as self-harm, substances abuse and suicide. In adulthood, they are inclined to argue with their peers, shouting and using physical violence instead of communicating effectively, and they may exhibit signs of anxiety and depression [32].

Domestic violence is detrimental to the children's mental health as it introduces a stressful home environment with a sense of fear, anger, anxiety, nervousness and depression. The home is supposed to be the safest place for children; however, when violence takes place, children find themselves lost emotionally because they no longer

regard their homes as safe environments. Often violence in the family is directed at adults such as wives and girlfriends; however, the emotional impact goes to children who are helpless. Perpetrators of domestic violence fail to appreciate the impact of their actions on children as they believe that they are physically doing nothing wrong to them. A parent cannot claim to love a child whom they continually subject to witnessing violence against the other parent, mostly mothers. When children see their mothers battered, they feel pain, anger and resentment [28]. This means when violence is perpetrated against one member of the family, the entire family system gets affected, with children being the most affected. Parents who were abused as children may not be able to pay attention to nurturing their children as they may still be battling with their own childhood issues, and this can lead to isolation and neglect of their children.

Children need stable environments with responsive parents who are nurturing and protective to grow and explore without fear of failure or harm. Domestic violence is toxic, and it slowly hurts children emotionally.

## **6. The impact of working parents on parent: Child relationship**

Some parents are not directly involved in conflict, but they are simply too busy chasing careers, business or personal activities such as sport and personal entertainment. Working long hours, taking work home and spending a lot of time on their digital devices lead to physical and emotional absence in the home. As a result, providing inadequate parenting neglects the emotional needs of children and creates emotional distance between themselves and children. Parental employment is an essential tool to obtain economic means and fulfilment of material benefits for the family. Lack of income, on the other hand, can hamper the quality of parenting in terms of providing the day-to-day needs of the child, educational needs and provision of stimulating activities and entertainment.

By spending quality time with children, parents can provide a sense of security and stability, which is essential for their mental health, growth and development. The combination of parental employment and parent-child bond creates the foundation for a healthy functioning environment for the well-being of the child. Lau [33] emphasises that there is a need for parents to maintain a healthy family-work balance to ensure financial, material provision and quality family bonds and relationships.

Working parents might find it difficult to fulfil the parental role and participate in building family bonds. Juggling work and family responsibilities can also result in emotional distress for a parent, which can lead to parents not being able to spend quality time with children, participate in their schoolwork and provide support for their emotional growth concurrently. Lack of parental support may result in compromised parent-child relationship.

Working long hours away from home renders parents vulnerable to stress because of competing demands of work and family roles. Work overload can result in parents feeling overwhelmed, and this can lead to the deterioration in the mental health of parents. It is easy for parents to bring home stress from work that can affect the parent's ability to provide emotional support for children; if not managed, it can undermine the atmosphere in the home and transfer to children [34]. This is because the mental health of a parent has got an impact on the mental health of children. Lengthy hours of work also mean children might have to be placed in alternative care such as aftercare programmes resulting in children spending more time with schoolteachers

and aftercare staff members than with their parents. Bishnoi et al. [34] are of the view that the communication and interaction between parents and children is negatively affected when children spend more time with other people such as caregivers and relatives than with parents. On the other hand, poor-quality day-care services can expose children to physical and emotional harm. A good balance between family and work roles and responsibilities is important for the healthy functioning of the family and development of mental health in children.

## **7. Conclusions**

This chapter provides information about the role families play in the mental health of children and the difficulties faced by children who grow up in dysfunctional families. The family provides an environment for children to grow, develop, observe and learn behavioural traits that will enable them to function in society such as norms, values, morals and socially acceptable behaviour. What children learn and experience have a potential to influence their character and mental health. Children with negative experiences such as divorce, domestic violence, parent-child separation and dysfunctional families are prone to develop mental health challenges.

Divorce exposes children to the difficulties of being raised by a single parent as well as emotional distance. Children from broken families tend to experience trust problems with the perception that marriages and relationships are not safe and intimate partners should not be trusted. Divorce separates children from parents and undermines the parent-child bond, which is important for building and sustaining relationships in the family, as well as social and intimate relationships.

Children are affected by the violence and aggression displayed in families that are riddled by domestic violence. Violence in families is often perpetuated in secret, and as a result, children suffer in silence. Witnessing violence by one parent against the other affects children emotionally and psychologically. When they grow up, such children tend to use violence to resolve conflict and use arguments instead of communication.

The inability of parents to spend quality time with children because of work-related commitments impact the parent-child relationship and cause emotional distance as well. The stress of parents from work if not managed can infiltrate the home environment and lead to tensions in the family. Parental employment is necessary to provide financially for children; however, it is necessary for parents to strike a healthy balance between the two.

The challenges discussed above renders the family system dysfunctional. Dysfunctional families are not able to effectively provide for the emotional, psychological, social and academic needs of their children. Children as such are exposed to neglect, abuse, conflicts and poor communication. This can lead to mental health, behavioural and social challenges in children.

The environment in which children grow up has got an impact on their developing mental health. Families should ensure that factors that contribute to a dysfunctional family are avoided so that children can grow up in nurturing and enabling environments for the development of a healthy mental well-being.

### **Conflict of interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.


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## Chapter 3

# Parenting and Work-Family Balance in the Twenty-First Century

*Ethelbert P. Dapiton, Enrique G. Baking and Ranie B. Canlas*

### Abstract

Parenting in the twenty-first century compel among working parents a great deal of effort and balancing act between having a family and at the same time maintaining a good career. The challenges among working parents are on the balancing act of taking care and attending to family needs while becoming successful in chosen career. In the modern-day society where couples have to strive to make both ends met for the needs of the family, the issue and concern for balancing act is really perplexing. In this fast-paced twenty-first century world, such concern for balancing act has just been relegated to the confines of family resolution without the greater society having so much concern of it. However, it is a topic worthy of concern and study as it pervades not only within the realm of family life but as well as on the aspects of productivity and performance of working professional parents. In this paper, seven general themes with underlying discussions were presented. The themes are not exhaustive of the dynamics between parenting and work-family balance. The bottom line is to provide insights, reflection points and points to ponder about the realm of parenting and work-family balance in the twenty-first century.

**Keywords:** parenting in the twenty-first century, work-family balance, parenting challenges, parenting struggles, parenting dilemma

### 1. Introduction

The advent of twenty-first century has brought dramatic changes to social arrangements in general. In particular, parenting and work-family balance has its own series of vignettes worthy of attention since the dawning of the twenty-first century. To start with, parenting in the context of this paper refers to the attributes of activities about rearing and educating a child by parents [1]. On the other hand, work-family balance can be defined as the equal treatment of work and family responsibilities among parents [2, 3]. The dynamics between parenting and work-family balance has created several social contracts and constructs that are already distant in identity compared to that of the immediate prior centuries. Changes in social contracts supported by institutional polices that ranges from expansion and enhancement of child care facilities so that working parents can have the opportunity to attend to their work regularly down to the provisions of reduced work hours for working mothers and

flexible work schedules are already widely practiced among organizations [4, 5]. The social constructs of work-family dynamics have also seen several changes such as the role of mothers being the caregivers and fathers being the breadwinners. These social portrayal of roles in the family has slowly been eroded in the twenty-first century landscape [6]. This change in the societal role of men and women in the context of family responsibilities can be attributed to the ever-growing entry of women in the labor force in the beginning of the twenty-first century [7].

Perhaps the modernity of the twenty-first century is the main reason that has created significant impact to both the aspects of parenting and work-family balance. The evolving nature of society is truly a catalyst of change to the features of parenting and work-family balance that modern humans have seen and observed. At the macro-perspective, mega-factors such as political, social, economic and technological can be considered as the primary sources of significant changes to parenting and work-family balance. Looking into at the micro level, individual attributes such as job satisfaction, personal preferences, motivation, career choice and personal discernment among others are the primary turnaround of the subtleties of parenting and work-family balance in the twenty-first century.

Salient features of modern-day parenting can be seen in shared responsibilities along with the revival of egalitarianism. The delineation of gender roles and its corresponding stereotyped identities between parents are slowly eroding. This can be attributed to the changing consciousness of the current society which is more liberal and fluid. Another lever of change can be attributed to the financial and economic need and stability of the family. Thus, modern-day parenting does not account who will stay at home and who will work as long that opportunities offer economic stability for the family.

Globalization and interconnectivity hastened by the use of handheld technology gadgets has also empowered parents and families in general to learn from other parents and other individuals that share their experiences. Alongside, a plethora of resources about the topic can be readily accessible from the Internet. A lot of lessons can be learned by parents by simply browsing the Internet from the best practices about parenting and work-family balance in this modern-day society. Digital technologies and the Internet have empowered parents to learn from other people across time, space and national borders, making them more resilient and efficient in their parenting roles and managing their work-family balance [8].

The central thesis of this paper revolves around several pressing issues that confronts and pervades parenting and work-family balance in the context of twenty-first century. Anchored on the everyday backdrop of parenting and work-family realities in twenty-first century, this paper explores and explicate recurrent themes that are worthy to be reckoned with from the vantage points of parents, academic researchers and the greater society.

## **2. Methodology**

This research utilized the scope literature review as the methodology to fill-in the discussions of predefined themes relating to parenting and work-family balance in the twenty-first century. The predefined themes are presented in succeeding sections. Google Scholar was the primary platform for the search along with other databases such as ProQuest and Ebscohost. The inclusion was narrowed down subject to the relevance of the papers to this research at the discretion of the authors.

Other search parameters to expand the periphery of the topic was also made. The main term used for the search is “parenting in the twenty-first century” with Boolean operators “AND” and “OR” to connect with other string of words such as “parenting challenges”, “parenting struggles”, “work-family balance”, “parenting and work”, and “parenting and career trade-off” among others. Both peer reviewed articles and gray literatures were included. In order for the gray literatures to be included, it has to be either a conference paper, academic notes, or literatures coming from credible web sources and with reputable origin. Other criteria for inclusions are:

- Papers must be written in English.
- Papers must have at least some degree of contextual discussions related to parenting in the twenty-first century.
- Papers must have at least some degree of contextual discussions related to parenting and work-family balance.

### **3. Performing the balancing act**

It is indeed a challenging task for parents to work and at the same time attend to family needs. The struggles of everyday job and taking care of the needs of the family requires a lot of patience, courage and perseverance for parents. This reality is more vividly depicted for starter families wherein young parents has to juggle the balancing act of being an effective and efficient worker and at the same time providing perpetual attention to the newly formed family. Regardless of spatial and geographical context, there is a universal truth that the juggling activities among parents to strike a balance between work and family has made a dent on their emotional, psychological, physical and economic wellbeing [9].

The learning curve of performing the balancing act increases as the family becomes psychologically and emotionally mature and by that time, the children are already grown up with little attention being required to look after their personal needs.

Performing the act of good parenting and maintaining work-family balance is an overarching goal of almost all parents. Good parenting is referred in this paper as the awareness of parents and their ability to provide the needs of their child [10]. Good parenting is also allied to the notion of positive parenting which purports the attributes of parental warmth and responsiveness [11].

At the outset of the balancing act, a variety of negative spillover effects can come into fruition such as stress, family dissatisfaction and poor workplace performance just to name a few [12]. It is of crucial importance that parents has to spend quality time with their children but at the same time exert substantial quantity of efforts in their jobs [13].

The early years of parenting and family life is overwhelmed with mixed emotions and struggles to balance the variety of aspects between family and work. The balancing act require parents to keep up with the rapid growth and development of their children during formative years [14]. On the other hand, the desire to become successful or excel in one’s career or job is at the other side of the balancing spectrum. To some extent, trade-offs cannot be avoided in performing the balancing act among parents. There are circumstances that some parents have to take side and chose

priorities between family and career. Empirical evidence shows that women are more likely to trade career opportunities for their family and consequently devote more of their time to child rearing and household activities [15].

The nature of the balancing act between parenting and work is to some degree innate in the very environment where parents work. Organizations and institutions that have high-performance work practices and with some degree of flexibility offer better opportunities for their staff to exercise productivity at work and attending to family obligations [16]. Hence, there is a strong attribution towards the very nature of workplaces or working environments as significant contributory factor for proper balancing act.

Institutional and organizational policies that foster harmonious work and family life balance is an essential catalyst to attain the desired level of satisfaction and success between work and parenting [17]. Situational and work circumstances that are not complimentary in attaining harmonious work and family balance will render dysfunctionality among working parents and thus resulting to negative family outcomes [18]. The negative outcomes brought by dysfunctionality in the family has many root causes. Salient among them are parental stress and quality of relationship due to caregiving burden and role conflict [19, 20].

It can be deduced therefore that the performing of balancing act is not only burdened upon the shoulders of parents. The very organizations where these parents are working have to do their share of helping these parents perform the balancing act. It is the moral duty, obligations and social responsibility of these organizations to help parents achieve the proper balance of work and family [21].

#### **4. Challenges and constraints**

It is indicative that young and starting families are expected to face more challenges and constraints as compared to those that are nearing the stage of empty nest. Studies have found out that family life cycles are factors to reckon with when looking into the challenges and constraints of parents towards rearing their children [22–24]. The growing period for a family is beset with challenges and constraints due to the demands of raising a child which solicits time and effort and on the other hand compelling parents to work for economic sustainability and survival [22]. Thus, from the point of family founding up to child launching stage, it is expected that multiple challenges and constraints can be encountered.

Working parents are at dilemma on finding ways on how to balance their parenting responsibilities and being an efficient employee [25]. The reckoning of twenty-first century parenting issues and concerns has taken a visible step recently owing to the fact that more legislative and legal redress has been crafted to address the clamor from citizens to harmonize work and family activities [26].

One of the most prominent and distinct feature relative to challenges and constraints of parenting in the twenty-first century is the high level of perceptual stress among parents [27]. The post-modern work-family ecology has brought tremendous stress among parents in the aspects of financial, social and emotional amidst the demands of good parenting imperative. The pressing demands of good parenthood along with the need to provide the family with stable stream of economic stability has provided parents with so much pressure and stress [28].

Regardless of the setting, there exist some degree of disjuncture between parenting and work-family balance among parents in the twenty-first century [29].

Both parents actually have their respective stress and pressures because of their social roles to portray in the family. Mothers are destined to stay at home in exchange for a career to look after the needs of a growing child. While fathers are socially portrayed and expected to become good providers for the family. This portrayal and expectation of roles among parent were socially constructed by previous era and has been carried over to the present century.

There is a detrimental effect to such social construction among parents with regards to the portrayal of roles. Mothers can experience maternal depression while fathers can experience work-family stress phenomenon due to wage premium expectation. Maternal depression can have a significant effect in the development of a child [30–32]. On the other hand, fathers will tend to be confronted with work-family stress that can be associated with breadwinning demand. This is more pronounced among low-tiered income fathers that have been caught in a quandary between parenting roles and fulfilling the economic needs of the family through stable working environment [33].

In general, all parents can experience parenting stress in one way or another. However, too much of parenting stress can reduce parents psychological and cognitive ability to become optimal parents [34]. There is a need among parents to maintain their proper emotional, cognitive and psychological functioning even when confronted with challenges and difficulties brought by parenting.

## **5. The hustle Culture and work-family balance**

Almost all parents that are wanting to provide their families with substantial economic stability and resources are consumed by the idea and obsession of working harder and longer. The capitalist society is partly the source of the hustle culture and instilling in the mindset of individuals that the idea of rise and grind is the catch-all phrase for success. This can be a false panacea that the modern-day society has venerated.

Working parents are obviously sold out to this idea at the expense of work-family balance. Working hard is not bad after all. It fosters productivity and organizational commitment. What is detrimental to work-family balance is going beyond the limits of regular work and having little or no time for family responsibilities. Parents has to be cautious in oversubscribing to hustle culture as there are negative outcomes such as physical and mental health effects in the long run.

Twenty-first century parents have to be cognizant about the negative effects of the hustle culture to their family relations. Hustle culture can take some toll on employees' physical and mental health considering the negative effects of working long works [35]. Hustle culture is a quick path to burnout and can eventually affect the work-family balance structure in the long run.

The only way to counter the cult of the hustle culture is for institutions to implement work-family balance friendly policies. This will enable working parents to cope with their work demands while maintaining their active family roles [36]. Institutions have a key role and responsibility by implementing policies that are work-family friendly so that working individuals can achieve significant level of work-family balance [37].

The hustle culture can definitely take away precious moments that supposedly allotted for spending quality time with family and loved ones [38]. In the twenty-first century parenting context, parents have to work smarter more than working

harder. The rise and grind notion to success advocated by the hustle culture is more of a fallacy than a fact [39, 40]. Moreover, what does working parents can profit from hustle culture at the expense of strained family relations. Excessive working hours has negative effects on workers' mental and physical well-being as well as losing proper balance between work and their families [41].

## **6. Work: family conflict and family vulnerabilities**

Work–family conflict among families are common scenes among working parents [42]. Moreover, it has been found out that parents that are exposed to longer hours of work are prone to experience work–family conflict compared to parents with flexible work schedules [43]. The prevalence of work–family conflict poses a significant risk and danger to families. This may lead to adverse outcomes such as family dissatisfaction and consequently family dissolution. Work–family conflict can make parents and families vulnerable to negative outcomes that will result to strained family relations. Stressful experiences such as fatigue and psychological imbalance are visible manifestations of negative outcomes brought about by work–family conflict [44]. Further, work performance is also reported among scholars to be affected by work–family conflict [45–47]. The balancing of work to family demands can lead to work-interference-with-family making both parents vulnerable to unhealthy family interactions [48].

Moreover, those families that are in lower strata of the economy are more vulnerable to work–family conflict. Parents in this lower stratum of society lack the ability and mechanisms to compensate and mitigate the adverse effect of work–family conflict [49]. Low-income households still experience inequalities in the context of solving their work–family conflict since majority of their workplaces does not foster policies to mitigate such concern [50]. Scholars are already recognizing this phenomenon as a structural issue more than just a personal shortcoming among parents [51]. Moreover, women are often the most vulnerable between the two parents in work–family conflict [52]. The prevalence on the differential bias of gender role and responsibility in the family is still present although subtle in modern times [53, 54]. The result will be most likely that women are to take the burden of child rearing and household responsibilities [55, 56]. Both parents eventually will suffer the effects of work–family conflict and spousal disputes will significantly increase over time with collateral damages such as children's emotional well-being [57].

## **7. The motherhood penalty**

In this theme- 'the motherhood penalty' along with the succeeding theme which is the 'fatherhood premium' are presented consecutively for the purpose of capturing the dynamics of parenting from various standpoint. The purpose of presenting and discussing these two consecutive themes is to provide readers a comprehensive macro perspective about the context of parenting in the twenty-first century. The 'motherhood penalty' and the 'fatherhood premium' can be considered as paradoxes of parenting dynamics and are worthy to be given attention in the discussion of parenting issues. The importance of laying down these two important themes for discussions are not contradictory but rather a point of reckoning wherein in the grand scheme of things, in the realm of parenting such paradoxes exists.

Empirical evidences have showed that women are most likely to experience drawbacks from being a parent in relation to career progression than their male counterparts [58–61]. Gendered norm identities and responsibilities are inherent part of parenting aspects. The aspect of motherhood penalty is one of the most recognizable themes in the sphere of parenting and work-family balance. Income and career inequalities among working mothers are ascribed as the motherhood penalty [62]. Women are more likely to bear the sacrifice of striking the balance between work or career and family matters [63]. In the process, this results to gendered gaps in work opportunities and growth among working mothers which can significantly affect their careers [60].

Women usually experienced drawbacks in career progression the moment they became mothers [64]. This is due to the fact that women would have additional family responsibility during child rearing process that gives them additional work-family balance pressure. There is a common perspective among work institutions that women with children are more likely to reduce their commitment at work due to caregiving responsibilities at home [65]. This social perspective is more likely to result in gender inequality in the workplace as well as a prejudice to working mothers' opportunity for career growth and advancement [66]. This normative discrimination among mothers is associated with the view that they are less committed to their jobs since they have children to look after [64]. Consequently, this amplifies employers' perceptions that mothers have conflicting interests between work productivity and family responsibilities [67].

## **8. The fatherhood premium hypothesis**

The social perception that fathers as breadwinners and mothers as caregivers pervades the realm of parenting discussions. Such would often lead to the delineation of gendered roles and gendered pay gaps in the process of family formation [68]. Fatherhood premiums are associated with the theoretical underpinning wherein fathers are more likely to increase their productivity granting that marriage, family and child are reinforcing factors for such premium gains [69]. The fatherhood premium hypothesis can be considered as an incentive among fathers to strive hard to provide for their family's needs [70]. Occupational characteristics are the usual underlying elements of the fatherhood premium but is just one parameter among the myriad of explanatory mechanisms that can affect wage differentiation [71].

There are however contending arguments about the fatherhood premium hypothesis. Some empirical findings do not support the desired outcome of the fatherhood premium hypothesis which leads to the inference that underlying mechanisms for wage and productivity premiums among fathers are not universally true [72]. If that's the case, the fatherhood premium can be considered as milieu specific contextual results that can change over a period of time in different locales. The fatherhood premium therefore can remain as a working hypothesis subject to further verification. Other parameters aside from occupational characteristics should be explored such as work efforts as a moderating factor to assert the universal existence and veracity of the fatherhood premium hypothesis [73].

## **9. Importance of egalitarianism to work-family balance**

In the twenty-first century parenting scenario, it does not matter anymore whether it will be the mother or the father that contributes more to the family and

household chores. Raising a family is not about counting the contribution from each parent. It is about the convergence and concerted efforts from both parents that makes parenting and work-family balance becomes feasible and attainable [74].

Stereotyping of gender identity in the realm of parenting in the twenty-first century can be a thing of the past. Such stereotype perspective of gender identify parenting has an almost cult-following popularity in previous centuries. The context of parenting in the twenty-first century is more of an egalitarian nature rather than delineation of gender roles in parenting [75]. Basically, it has to be necessary to become egalitarian so as to promote the idea of equality among parents.

Although the notion of egalitarianism in parenting is not a new concept, there is a need to revive the spirit in order to propagate the essence of equality among parents. This can be called neo-egalitarian parenting movement. The bottom line that can be achieved with such notion is the attainment of equality of gender roles, sharing of accountabilities and responsibilities, and to unburden the other parent especially women from the despotic idea of masculinity of the other parent along with the stereotype roles and identities in the family.

The neo-egalitarianism can also be related to neoliberal concept of parenting and work-family management of the twenty-first century [76]. The social constructs of parenting and work-family balance in the twenty-first century is projected towards the functionality of the family along with its coherence in the general society. This can be considered as well as a post-modernism movement of parenting and work-family balance with emphasis on child-focused care together with institutional and social support mechanisms to achieve the desired outcomes of parenting ideals. The practice of egalitarian parenting can be diverse from country to country but the general trajectory points to the same direction [77]. Egalitarianism will prevail in the context of parenting in the twenty-first century.

## **10. Conclusions**

The themes presented in prior sections are not exhaustive of the realities and dynamics of parenting and work-family balance in the twenty-first century. However, to some degree, it has elucidated several pressing issues and topics that needs to be given attention in the context of parenting and work-family balance. Parents, academic researchers and even ordinary people are well aware that those aforementioned topics discussed are the central issues of parenting and work-family balance.

Although so much has been said about those topics, institutional and social support are still necessary to improve the working conditions of parents in the modern work environment. Legislative and legal actions are also vital to mitigate the stress and anxiety of parents due to the juggling demands between work and family responsibilities. The practice of egalitarianism and shared family responsibility roles at the personal and family level can greatly alleviate the burden of the family in terms of work-family balance.

Stereotyped gender roles are not necessary to be practiced in the twenty-first century parenting. It is a dysfunctional social idea that does not serve any merit in the twenty-first century parenting practice.

The academia which is the primary source of knowledge disseminated towards the greater society should constantly encourage researchers to embark on the topics of parenting and work-family balance. This is to further develop and expand the body of knowledge about the topic. There is also a need that this topic has to be revitalized



among researchers and scholars. Further, researchers that will venture into this kind of topics for empirical investigations should incorporate or consider other parameters which are vital to the building and development on this body of knowledge.

In succeeding opportunities for publication, the authors wish to explore other dominant and salient themes relevant to parenting and work-family balance in the twenty-first century that can still be developed and expounded.

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## Chapter 4

# Desolate Childhoods: The Surrender of the Adult World – Notes from the Pandemic of SARS-CoV-2

*Mónica De Martino and Maia Krudo*

### Abstract

The weakening of the authority of the adult world is a phenomenon studied for decades. State intervention, whether in its political or technical facet, is no stranger to it. Individualization processes and the predominance of projects from the adult world over the child world also have a fundamental influence. We can point out that most children today live in solitude, without a principle of clear democratic authority on the part of their parents, who also do not feel comfortable placing limits on a technical childhood that they do not recognize. The chapter will basically deal with these topics as an essay, based on our research and university extension activities regarding the impacts of the pandemic in the family environment.

**Keywords:** childhoods, adolescences, paternities, maternities, pandemic

### 1. Introduction

The bibliographic review at the European and Latin American level places emphasis on the consequences of the pandemic on families and the isolation measures taken by various governments. We briefly mention increase in situations of intergenerational and gender violence; increase in psychiatric medicalization in children and adolescents; the dramatic situations experienced by the elderly population; difficulties in schooling and access to networks to monitor educational tasks, rigor of teleworking in the domestic space, lag in health care for various pathologies and medical problems not associated with COVID, etc. [1]. However, it is worth asking about the situation prior to the pandemic, the social base in which it has been installed and that forms both the starting point and the social potential to mitigate such impacts. This is what this chapter is about, and it does so in a specific way.

The authors are investigating the impacts of the pandemic at the family level, in the Childhood and Families Academic Area, of the Department of Social Work of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of the Republic—Montevideo. The project obtained funding from the Scientific Research Sector Commission and the University Extension Commission of the Faculty of Social Sciences. The research lasts from May

2022 to May 2024, while the Extension Internship Space, from November 2022 to March 2023. The activities of the latter have been developed between the months of November and December 2022, and they will end in March 2023. The reflections that ordered this chapter were provoked by the result of these last activities.

The purpose of the Extension Internship Space was to support, through extension actions, the lines of research linked to the impacts of the pandemic, in the daily life and the psycho-social experiences of children and adolescents in popular sectors of Montevideo.

**Table 1** that follows briefly summarizes: 1—the instances of work with children and adolescents and their participants; 2—the institutions for the protection of children and adolescents in which they were developed.

Before beginning with a brief description of the information collected in the instances with children and adolescents, it is convenient to distinguish the organizations where work was done. The activities were carried out in two civil associations in Montevideo. First, the Gurí Children’s Club, which belongs to Vida y Educación and is located in the Manga neighborhood. Vida y Educación has among its objectives the development of educational activities that promote the defense of the rights of children and adolescents. On the other hand, the Youth Center and the Papyryka projects of the NGO Pablo de Tarso are located in the Borro neighborhood. The NGO Pablo de Tarso is a civil association managed by the Pablo de Tarso Foundation that works with children, adolescents and families of Borough D seeking to promote social inclusion and the construction of full citizenship.

It should be noted that such institutions are located and address the problems of popular neighborhoods in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay. These neighborhoods are inhabited by unskilled wage workers, with unstable occupations, without legal protection. The houses are built by low quality or light materials. In general, they are neighborhoods that bring together the working class with lower incomes and the

<b>Information on the activities carried out with Children and Adolescents (NNA)</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Applied techniques</b>	<b>Institutions and programs</b>	<b>Participants</b>
24/11/2022	Plastic expression through drawings	Gurí Children’s Club of the NGO Vida y Educación	Thirteen children and one educator participated in the first instance
24/11/2022	Plastic expression through drawings	Gurí Children’s Club of the NGO Vida y Educación	Fourteen children and two educators participated in the second instance
7/12/2022	Plastic expression through drawings	Papyryka Project of the Youth Center of NGO Pablo de Tarso.	Eight pre-adolescents, and adolescents participated together with the project coordinator.
7/12/2022	Plastic expression through drawings	Children’s Club and educators of the NGO Pablo de Tarso.	Thirteen children and two educators participated

*Source: Self-made.*

**Table 1.**  
*Summary of the information on the extension internship space.*

so-called precarious settlements (a group of light material constructions, without access to basic services). The most pressing social problems are unemployment, low income, access to housing and public services, difficulties to continue educational trajectories, etc.

This does not mean that the difficulties that we will talk about throughout the chapter are proper or ontologically attributable to the popular sectors. We reiterate, the results obtained were the ones that instigated our reflections on the plots of civilizing processes that allow us to speak today of the defenselessness of childhood and adolescence at a general level, in the various social classes. The cited bibliography also points this out.

A work proposal was recommended to each group that sought to promote the opinions and expressions of the participants, mainly on three fundamental axes: impacts of the pandemic on the link between the adult world and the child/adolescent world, and links between peers and educational trajectories during the pandemic. The activities were based on projective techniques. Operationally, we opted for techniques supported by the graphic production of the participants, which reflect, by definition and nature, as we will explain later, their perceptions and personality.

From this epistemic position, a construction of meanings and constructed significations [2] was elaborated together with the children who are the agonists and protagonists of the problem we are addressing. For this, the technique used was oriented to return the word to children and adolescents who, in general, do not have it. An attempt was made to reveal what they tell us, with their representations, their circuits, their transits through public and domestic physical spaces.

This technique is associated with the Freudian concept of projection. At first, Freud defines projection as a defense mechanism underlying paranoid problems. That is, the concept of projection was associated with the clinic of psychological pathologies [3, 4]. Subsequently, Freud himself expanded this concept, making it independent of its pathological character and approaching it as a “placing” outside unconscious elements associated with the various behaviors of the subject even in “normal” situations. In tune with this, this projective technique can be understood, in a very broad way, as tools sensitive to unconscious aspects of all human behavior [5].

When applying this technique, the playful aspects associated with her have also been assessed. This instrument makes it possible to analyze painful aspects through a necessary mediation, such as graphic products. We obviously recognize that distances must be saved with the elaborations of Freud [4] and Winnicott [5] regarding play in clinical settings. That is to say, this technique is not understood as transitional objects, and it is only indicated that in a certain way they are based on a “game”—drawing—that allows a more “mild” handling of what is painful. The technique made available would play the role of signifiers from which the children and adolescent, in this case, allude to meanings associated with the problem in question [2–5].

To this way of understanding projective techniques was added the consideration of the group space as a sort of mediating zone between subjectivity and objectivity, between a painful reality and the capacity to symbolize it. We are not talking about a space of transition between the original experiences of the mother or father and what is real. We speak of the group as a zone between the conscious and the unconscious, between the material and symbolic and between the individual and the collective.

Perhaps Winnicott [6] is the author who allows these last two aspects to be brought together. If for the author the game is always a creative, liberating and essentially symbolic activity, it is also a space different from the external world and the internal world. The author defines a line of accumulation or growth: “there is a development

that goes from the transitional phenomena to the game, from it to the shared game and from it to cultural experiences” (p. 76). In this sense, an attempt was made to reconcile the individual “game” with the group spaces for reflection, trying to feed children and young people other ways of positioning themselves before their situation.

Let us see below in a synthetic way, the results obtained and the theoretical elaborations that they have generated for us. Our reflections have as a central concern to indicate that, more than talking about the pandemic and its impacts, it developed at a certain historical moment, previously installed. We should not only talk about the effects of the pandemic. Instead, we should talk about what still needed to be done at the moment it abruptly interrupted our lives. Not everything is a pandemic, but it is the dialectical tension between the pandemic and the societal context in which it was installed.

Thinking *ex nihilo* about a phenomenon like the pandemic, out of nowhere and with nothing to generate it, is making a big mistake in perspective. That is why we will not place the emphasis on data on the pandemic, which is extremely widespread today, but rather on previous family processes that caused children and adolescents to assume the impact of the pandemic alone, in most cases. In Foucault’s words, we try to make “a history of the present,” genealogically speaking, “an unspeakable search for the beginnings,” in this case, for the desolation of childhood [7].

## **2. Desolate childhoods and adolescences**

### **2.1 About the results achieved**

In a synthetic way, we will gather in three items the results produced by a primary interpretation of the empirical material collected.

The results deserve a first observation. The space of these children and adolescents is a strictly domestic, endogamous space, associated with its natural course within the framework of the house. Beyond the differences between the genders, we could indicate a very marked tendency toward domesticity in children and adolescents of both sexes, without any extension to the already known or daily community or neighborhood. It should be noted that in Uruguay the government did not take measures to confine the population, but only a call for responsible freedom, regarding the care of oneself and others. The only more extreme measure was the suspension of classes throughout the educational system, going on to teach them under a virtual regime. The drawings or narrations do not incorporate activities with friends (except through phone calls in some cases).

The low density of their bonding networks, internal or external to the family, shows us that we find children and adolescents alone, in situations of anguish and isolation, denoting a very elementary family life. For example, the drawings do not represent family members, only children and adolescents with their siblings. In the cases in which the adult world is drawn, it is in its condition as a patient or sick person: in bed, getting vaccinated, etc. There are no drawings in which the family is carrying out common activities or adults carrying out habitual tasks such as cooking, going to or coming from work. This absence of the adult world in the drawings made and the lack of common activities among the various members of the family indicates phenomena that, we believe, go beyond the pandemic. In a way, the limits between the adult and child world are blurred: The few adults that appear are patient, like children. Except

in one case where the drawn adult appears armed and inside the house itself, which is explained by the child in the dialog held. This violent world is also observed in other drawings, where weapons and war transport appear.

Secondly, the works mark a clear logic of power, of domination, where the dominant and masculine social order is so deeply entrenched that it requires no justification, it imposes itself as self-evident and is taken as “natural.” This is expressed in the constant presence of doctors or vaccinators, all of them men, in the family space itself. This social order, where the public world that appears is of a sanitary and masculine nature, is achieved thanks to the almost perfect and immediate agreement obtained from social structures such as the social organization of space and time and the sexual division of labor, and on the other hand, of cognitive structures inscribed in bodies and minds. Field and habitus reinforce the patriarchal and adult-centric system. In the words of Bourdieu [8] “history made institution” and “history made flesh.” These stereotypes attributed to each sex crystallize in a very radical way in the identities of these children and adolescents.

Finally, we have analyzed the spatial configuration of the drawings where we can highlight figure and background, which are in relation to container and content. The sun, or clouds, or birds do not appear in these drawings. Just big viruses or lots of little ones. Neither do other living beings appear around the participants (except in some cases siblings, fathers as patients and male health personnel).

Neither do the houses rest on the ground. The houses are drawn in the air, without foundations that root them and contain them. The setting is almost empty of content: Isolated houses, very little furniture and the settings are decontextualized, there are no elements that account for the time of day, the ground is not drawn below the houses or the people, nor is the sky above, as we already said. It is practically a childish scenario, no ground, no sky, no time, no space. It would seem that these children and adolescents have a lack of support, elements that frame or contain them. They appear located in blurred spatial-temporal coordinates, a kind of “social limbo.” Their houses are like any typical house from any place, at any time, in a popular neighborhood of Buenos Aires, Montevideo or Santiago. The vital-nutritional elements that surround these childhoods and adolescences are almost imperceptible, as if they traveled through circuits of low social intensity and therefore of low vital intensity. The sun/symbol does not exist. Perhaps because of not waiting for the future to bring different events than today. Time passes and daily life is not invested with relevant and significant events, except for the outbreak of the pandemic: face masks, vaccines, doctors and nurses and many viruses. A sanitary and masculine world faced by children without clear adult references.

It should be noted that some adolescents did not resort to drawing but to sequencing the activities carried out throughout the day. This arrangement under his pandemic life reinforces what has been said: Activities shared with adults do not appear. In the case of girls, there are domestic and care activities, aspects in which the pandemic has had a strong impact in Latin America, burdening the shoulders of women of various age groups with this type of task, underlining the sexual division of labor, already mentioned above.

In this panorama of retreat from the adult world expressed by these children and adolescents, we believe that three phenomena or three civilizing processes come together that we will consider separately for the sole purpose of exposition. In this way, we avoid the stigmatization of adults by placing them as sons and daughters of their time. It should be noted that such processes are also developed in a historical context characterized by the highest historical levels of concentration of wealth,

increased poverty and loss of wages according to the Picketty report [9]. All this before the pandemic context, which what it has done is catalyze these structural and cultural processes already installed for decades: the cyclical crises of capitalism and the dilution of the borders between adults and children.

## **2.2 Investigating Oedipus and his present: the withdrawal of the father state**

What we want to point out, basically given the length of the article, is where the legality of paternity/maternity is anchored in the present, in a context of substantive changes such as those that can be observed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? Will such paternity and maternity and their legality be up to sustaining the world of children and adolescents affected by the pandemic? Without intending to exhaust the subject, we bring to this dialog Tuber [10] who criticizes the Lacanian constructions regarding the name-of-the-father saying:

Thus, we have on the one hand the sublime father, the great man, the peacemaker and on the other, the father who demands blind obedience to his authority and an unquestionable absolute belief. Consequently, the paternal role cannot transmit only the principle of reason, without also bringing cruelty and irrationality. ([10], p.78).

This conception of the symbolic father is related to a context in which man symbolically appropriated the maternal origin of life. The Father of Oedipus [4] is the real bearer of the prohibition that prevents the union with the incestuous object [11] and that will return as a symbolic authority later in “Totem and Taboo” [12]. This father is not the third party at stake, the one that prevents the union with the incestuous object; on the contrary, it is his murder that prevents the symbolic union with the mother, as an object of desire. And that collective murder should have happened to go from the animal state to a social state, culturally integrated. While in the myth of Oedipus someone kills the father in an exceptional way, in Totem and Taboo we all did it, the Horde did it and that crime shared by all plays the role of a common cultural base: The Father becomes a symbol. This father coexists with the father jouissance, alive and sexual and the dead father and interdicting symbol [11, 12].

Later, in “Moses and the monotheistic religion” [13], both figures are synthesized in Moses, the man who, sweeping away superstitions, introduced monotheism and, if you like, the idea of a world governed by a single rational system. But this Moses lives with the figure of a furious and vengeful Moses if his people betray him. This vengeful God is not the Father Jouissance, but the one who introduces the prohibition of incest, the norm, the cultural and expels all jouissance or sexualization.

The Father of “Moses and monotheistic religions” is not the father of “Totem and Taboo” who imposed the prohibition knowing jouissance, but this Father prohibits without knowing it and with fury [11–13].

The modern bourgeois family, by unifying within its bosom the two paternal functions (object of identification and, on the other hand, subject of capital authority, that is, cutting function and nurturing function), has generated not only what some call a “crisis of Oedipus,” but also a crisis of investiture of authority figures [11]. This historical process that Freud works on is historically associated with paternity and maternity in which the maternal origin of life has been expropriated by the father, from patrilineal lineage. In addition, it is clear that an affectionate, nurturing mother and a father who orders and sets limits reproduces the sexual division of industrial labor and the “spheres” of production and reproduction.

Although we do not have answers, we must think about how the nutritional and cutting functions are developed today, given the major changes observed at the family

level. There will always be someone in the family context who performs or complements them. More than the presence of one or the other parent, beyond their sexual identities, it is important that the function is fulfilled, but the truth is that the conditions for the exercise of these paternity and maternity duties must be thought from another perspective. In the general historical context of the loss of investiture of adult figures, it is especially the figure of the interdicting father that is in the process of withdrawal, with its diffuse limits [11].

What we want to invoke is that various authors for decades have questioned the validity of the Oedipus complex as a structuring element of the subject and/or pathology [14]. The advancement of women's rights, the different ways of being family, the diversity of cultural patterns to those that Freud observed, must be recognized and included in the analysis of the validity of the oedipal triad. Heritier [15] says that what is truly prohibited would be the contact of bodies and the transmission of flows from one body to another. In the tragedy, the Chorus does not tell Oedipus that he had a sexual relationship with his mother, but rather that he found his father in the womb. This is the unthinkable. If the limit disappears, we enter the terrain of the indiscriminate. And it is precisely in the field of sexuality and sexual relations and kinship, where the difference between the sexes and generations acquires greater relevance. Also in the paternal and maternal functions, due to the place they occupy in the construction of the human psyche, since when the barriers between the different and the identical are erased, there is a risk of falling into the indiscriminate, the unrepresentable.

What effects will all these changes have on future generations? We do not know yet, but perhaps it is a good indicator the greater presence of adolescents and young people with difficulties in the construction of a consolidated self or identity center. But these transformations, this return of the Father of the Horde, of a certain lack of differentiation between the adult and child world, could be speaking as much of an adulthood that denies one of its almost historical psychic conditions and demands, as of unrealized childhoods and adolescences.

Just as the Interdicted Father withdraws before the return of the Father of the Horde, the Welfare State withdraws, giving way to a light and distant state, as we will see later.

### **2.3 The disappearance of childhood**

If paternity and maternity must be reread in this social context, so must childhood. Neil Postman, an Australian sociologist, who has studied the ways in which technology impacts society, has a suggested book entitled *The Disappearance of Childhood* [16].

The central thesis of the work brings together three elements: the appearance and dissemination of TV, the collapse of the differentiation of information (adulthood and childhood) and the relativization of the adult and childhood categories.

Inescapable this author for our reflections. What the author maintains is that the lack of differentiation of information for adults and children, which TV shows indiscriminately to the adult world as well as to the children's world, would cause less distance between adults and children, or, in other words, the difference between them would begin to blur. We must not forget that Postman writes what he writes when TV was the quintessential mass medium in the USA.

In other of his works he tells us:

In each tool there is inscribed an ideological tendency, a predisposition to build the world in one way and not another, to value one thing more than another, to develop a sense or an ability or an attitude more than others ([17], p. 26).

Adding: This is how media technology works. A new technology does not add or take away anything. It changes everything ([17], p. 31).

But what relationship does the effect of TV have on the relationship between adults and children? For some authors, apart from Postman, TV blurs the line between adults and children. It is that TV does not require much instruction to be handled, the information it provides is simplified and does not discriminate against the audience. That is why the author indicates: "Without secrets, of course, there is nothing that can be called childhood" ([16], p. 80).

TV reveals secrets, children access issues previously reserved only for adults and TV makes public what was private [16]. This brings an unthinkable consequence in its repercussions: "The idea of shame is diluted and demystified" ([16], p. 85). But this does not mean that childhood is a "without shame" childhood; on the contrary, it means that it is a childhood that has not been able to build relationships of authority with adults [16].

Television forces the entire culture to "come out of the closet." In its desire to find new and sensational information to retain its audience, TV has to touch all the existing taboos within the culture—incest, divorce, promiscuity, corruption, adultery, sadism, masochism—one of them is now no more. Than a subject for a television show. And, of course, in this process, each of them loses their role as a secret that belongs exclusively to adults ([16], p. 93).

The author goes on to point out that, by using material from the adult world indiscriminately, TV is projecting a type of person that is completely new. We could call this person "the adult child." TV promotes as something desirable many of the attitudes that we usually associate with childhood. For example, an excessive need for immediate gratification, a lack of concern for the consequences, an almost promiscuous concern for consumerism, the author points out. Or the idea of eternal youth now facilitated by various cosmetic and surgical devices.

If you can conceive what it means to be an adult, you can conceive what it means to be a child. In any case, whatever description one wants to give this transformation that is taking place, it is quite clear that the behavior, attitudes, desires and even the physical appearance of adults and children are becoming less and less distinguishable ([16], p. 88).

If we say boy or girl, we almost immediately associate the future, an idea of the future. In communication terms, the author tells us that children are messages that we send to the future, living messages. But TV does not give a sense of history, past or future, it is eminently present. The author borders on cruelty when telling us that the message that TV can convey is that children do not matter, if they are exposed to the same sexual arousal, to the same consumerism as the adult world.

This leads us hand in hand to a fourth process that has crossed Western societies in the twentieth century and that has placed individualization processes and the exaltation of adult life projects as a form of biographical construction at the center of the scene. Successful.

## **2.4 The fading of the structures and the staging of risk management**

Since the 1980s are observed, there has been a marked sociopolitical tendency to individualize social problems and understand them in terms of individual



“disabilities” and failed acts of the self, when it comes to socializing or entering the market in one way or another. Poverty, understood as individual traits or attributes, is already a characteristic assumption of social policies, not only in Uruguay but in the region. It must be noted, then, that the call to build reflexive biographies or narratives of the self has become an emblematic feature of late capitalism.

We are talking about a supposed sovereignty of the subjects, who, with more options at their disposal in the various social spheres, could choose between different “opportunities.” At the same time, they will be held accountable for the decisions they make. The lifestyle is thus understood as a “project,” based on a supposed freedom and individual conscience. The contemporary subject is understood as clearly reflective, supposedly informed and rational when making their decisions [18–20].

The Theory of Reflexive Modernization, led by Beck, is also built by Giddens [18] who broadly shares the following diagnosis: In the face of the crisis of traditional identity models, the constitution of the self becomes a personal reflective project. It is the individual who has to interpret his own past, justify his options, choose how to be and how to act, in order to reflexively build his own identity, in a narrative that unifies the experience and provides coherence to the self. This open nature of identity would open up new possibilities of autonomy for individuals and would democratize, according to the author, social relations.

Scott Lash [18], from the USA, for his part, completes the map of the main voices in the debate. In his proposal, in contemporary society, more than the preeminence of the actor over the structure, new structural conditions of reflexivity are noticed, which result in a complex dialectic between both instances. In this way, reflexivity is a relational concept that articulates two simultaneous meanings: On the one hand, it is the achievement of a greater independence of the subject with respect to tradition and ferreous social formations, and on the other, the constant demand for self-definition that it presents to the subject once the classical sources that organize the social map have collapsed.

Unlike his theoretical companions, Lash [18] does believe in the validity of class polarization, although now the conflict would move from the place that the subject occupies in the work, family and political structure, to the question of the possibilities of access and the position occupied in the global structures of information and communication, given that today the capacities for the processing of the goods of reflexive production are acquired in replacement of the traditional social structures. Altered then, the canonical principle of accumulation appears a new class of excluded, who constitute what the author calls the “losers of reflexivity,” that is, “those who remain outside the limits of the informational society.”

From a critical perspective regarding these authors, Bauman [21] recalls that initially work was the main tool for building one’s own destiny. And, once chosen, the social identity accompanied the individual forever. However, the motto of the new times is flexibility. The author focuses on the term flexibility because he considers that whatever identity is sought and desired, it must have the gift of flexibility, and it is necessary that it can be changed in the short term. That is to say, the identities of late modernity are temporary and ephemeral for Bauman and their construction requires consumption. And in this sense it indicates: “the paths to reach one’s own identity, to occupy a place in human society and to live a life that is recognized as significant require daily visits to the market” ([22], p. 49).

This individualizing tendency, which advocates biographical resolutions to structural problems, impregnates the conception of poverty of the current social protection systems in our country. And it places a successful challenge on the middle

and wealthy classes, with a clear emphasis on the vital projects of adults regardless of the responsibilities regarding the world of children and adolescents. At least this can be derived from reading the book *Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* by A. Giddens [23].

The centrality of individual success, the understanding of the family as a network of individual adult projects, the biographization of structural social processes, place major responsibilities in the adult world, which could be interpreted as a change of course at the time. If the work, the directed and cumulative labor trajectory, the virtual absence of uncertainties, the modern, monolithic educational systems, in short, an “institutional program” of modernity that began to collapse, it is important to recognize the impacts of such transformations on the adult world. Adult world required to demonstrate its success in the construction of a healthy and rational biography. What spare time does the adult world, pressured by said demands, has to listen, care and be of emotional support for children and adolescents nowadays? [24].

### **3. Conclusions**

Taking items 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 as a starting point, we have tried to analyze some of the transformations experienced in the subjectivities of adults, children and adolescents. In these conclusions, we will try to close the items developed by trying to build a continuum of adult and non-adult subjectivities with the understanding that the adult's actions influence what a child or adolescent is like, since the adult is an important figure of authority and affection.

The challenges for parenthood in the twenty-first century can be summed up in the blurring of the adult that has consequences, not unique, in the new ways of being a child or adolescent. We have seen how, in item 2.2, we have questioned the psychological concept of adult that is traditionally handled.

This traditional psychological concept would seem to lose its legality once the Welfare State withdrew (item 2.3), demonstrating the links between the psychological and the economic, political and cultural aspects of the time. This mutation of the ways of being an adult and, therefore, of being a child, are the plot that allows us to understand the difficulties and challenges that fathers and mothers assume in the exercise of their function.

Functions that must be developed in the face of the new ways of being a child: being an adult child. In the continuum that we intend to synthesize, we will see how the context becomes a text in adolescent and child manifestations and how, in turn, this text is what allows, mistakenly or not, to find a place in this highly individualized society. It will bring to mind the corner where we grew up and the memories of our parents and grandparents. In this journey, we will discover resonances, either pleasant or unpleasant, that lead us to consider how we position ourselves as adults and parents.

In the first link of this continuum, we find the nineteenth century model of being an adult, marked by the incipient development of capitalism and the principle of authority (political, religious, by generation and gender). Capitalist development implied the domination of impulses (including sexual ones), the subordination of women to men and the subordination of children and adolescents to family power. We cannot leave aside the medical power that, in an organic alliance with the woman-mother, allowed home control of hygiene and educational principles, which were instilled in children and adolescents. Belonging to a social class implies having ways

of being and acting; religion form of thinking and the incipient democratic life the principle of meritocracy.

Children and adolescents were something different from the adult world, who, based on the principle of authority, were transformed into beings to be governed, educated under a series of adult-centric devices. The adult's gaze was imposed, and the child's and adolescent's voice were not heard. The figure of the Father of the Horde (item 2.2) is timely. On today's patriarchal societies, the feminine, the childish, the adolescents became beings to be governed. As an example, it should be noted that the concept of youth appears in this period of the beginning of capitalism, which in Latin America can be located in the nineteenth century. The expression youth was associated in the first place with the young worker, who was part of the ranks of the proletariat and for whom the world of education was foreign to him. Youth was associated with a certain social "dangerousness."

According to what was expressed and from the various lines of subordination, affection was not frequently expressed, and when it was, it was done harshly. This nineteenth century model gives rise to other ways of being in the twentieth century. Century of life in strengthened democracies; of the rights of the individual and citizen; of humanized capitalism under the Welfare State. Century of the revolution of the rights of women and children and adolescents. Century in which they were considered subjects of rights and political subjects. Also, under the Parsonian model, the democratic school and family were the institutions that generated childhood and adolescence.

It is a new period, the three decades after the World War II, the decades of victorious capitalism and cushioned by the interclass pacts financed by the Welfare State. In this period, the school and the family were the institutions that created participating childhoods and adolescences, educated with new pedagogical forms that placed the child as the starting point and center of educational action. On the other hand, the families were democratized although the imputed gender roles still persisted.

The Father Legislator, who fulfills the court function and makes the Law enter the family nucleus, is the father of the first decades of this twentieth century. The social role of women was modified, demonstrating the advances in her rights, but within the family, the nurturing and affective function was what she sustained. With fathers and mothers with clear family locations and with an organic alliance, now between family and school, childhood and adolescence continued to be viewed from an adult-centric perspective.

These last three decades of well-being have allowed adults to plan their lives and their families based on certainties, in full-employment societies. With certainties and with institutions that give meaning (unions, companies, churches, universities, etc.), transforming the world into something known and safe guided by protective states, as we pointed out in item 2.4. Starting in 1973, from the crisis of the global accumulation pattern of capitalism, the so-called late capitalism was installed, or, from another perspective, the moment of globalization arrived.

In this Second Modernization, according to the Reflexive Modernization theorists, with the opening and mobility of the National States, with a strong weakening of traditional industrialization and with the highest indicators of poverty and concentration of wealth never seen before, fathers and mothers had to face uncertainty, that is, uncertainty in their job projections, in their salary indexes and in the access to goods and services. Its future was no longer assured, the Parent State had collapsed, and the figure of a weak and outsourced state was emerging. How to educate your children for an uncertain future? Did he reach the ideal of a university son? Was it enough now

to think of sexual identity as something binary? Could they continue with the dream of a home of their own? How to take charge of his own adulthood, whose parameters were no longer those of the decades of well-being?

On the other hand, how to be a child or adolescent in a family that has changed and attending an educational system that still looks to the past? Family and School were institutions that began to present problems to generate childhoods and adolescences in an uncertain and hostile world. Beyond the progress in the rights of women, children and infancy, family and school began to be weak entities to comply with a socialization process appropriate to the new era.

The disagreement between an adult world worried about uncertainty, including that of one's own love ties, concerned about building a biography that gives pleasure and a world of children and adolescents facing screens, is one of the biggest challenges for being parents today. The loneliness of children and adolescents, as we have seen in the empirical data that we have brought to the beginning of the chapter, the excessive medicalization for their anxiety, insecurities and loneliness and the pathologies generated by the difficulties in the construction of a consolidated self are some of the problems that childhoods and adolescences place today in the adult world.

For its part, it would seem that the adult world gives up its condition by not taking charge and sustaining the maturation process of infants and by not taking charge of the limits that it must impose. The child is treated as an adult. He is transformed into a consumer to obtain an ephemeral satisfaction for his needs. On the other hand, the advent of new communication technologies has transformed childhood and adolescence into consumers, too, of new realities. As we have said before, when the "secret" is erased and the child accesses what corresponds only to the adult world, the borders between both worlds are diluted.

Adults in crisis and uncertainty, childhoods and adolescents alone, those of whom have winded up without clear guidelines and have transformed into compulsive consumers and the object of medicalization, which raises multiple questions that go beyond the limits of this chapter. But what we are sure of is that the adult of the second half of the twentieth century and the twenty-first is an insecure adult. The process of high technification of parental functions, under the Welfare State, is not unrelated to this.

As we have already analyzed in item 2.3, the adult dependent on technical opinion to exercise her paternity is the product of the good intentions of the Welfare State, its unexpected result. The weakening of parental authority is an element to take into account when analyzing how to be parents in the twenty-first century. C. Lasch [25] comes to our aid again in a text in which he analyzes American culture after three decades of well-being, post-World War II.

The author analyzes various processes. It indicates that the last hundred years of family crisis, this is, the passage from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, have ended with family authority. But the author does not speak of a family crisis in conservative terms, although some believe so. Family crisis in terms of once more state interference in family affairs. In such a way that parental and maternal functions underwent a high process of technification, among other things thanks to the action of the care professions and other knowledge.

The precariousness of paternal and maternal authority has placed the adult world in a difficult situation when it comes to setting limits or transmitting values or visions of the world. The adult world is somehow infantilized before the state and professional authority, in a situation of dependency and subordination [26].

The author, with some pessimism, makes a description of American society from a psychological perspective. Beyond the cultural specificity, his ideas can make us think about the national and regional reality.

When talking about narcissism in that time period, he does not put selfishness in the first place. Instead, it creates dependence on others to found and sustain our self-esteem and our judgments as a defining feature.

*Narciso drowns in his own reflection, without ever understanding that this is just a reflection. The essence of the story is not that Narciso falls in love with himself, but that he does not recognize his own reflection because he lacks any notion of a difference between himself and his environment ([25], p. 289).*

This narcissistic perspective allows us to understand the exposure of and to the mass media, the importance given to youth, to the present and its enjoyment, the various new age techniques that teach it, to the detriment of the intimate, the secret, the “academic education “and of history and its meanings.

Narcissism is a metaphor for the current human condition. As Erich Fromm indicated, beyond his psychoanalytic notion, one must also speak of narcissism as vanity, admiration, satisfaction, that is, as individualism asocial, oblivious to any expression of cooperation, kindness and cooperative participation.

If we unite this narcissism as a metaphor for the adult human condition and we add the figure of the *adult child* and *child adult* Postman [16], it is worth asking: Who sets limits, healthy authority, informs traditions, etc.? [24]. Considering the data we were based on, we ask ourselves, who takes care of the *adult child* whom has lived throughout the pandemic as best as they could?

We are thinking about something that we call, provisionally today, the surrender of the adult world. Adulthood perhaps today indicates the dose of claudication: of authority, of placing limits on the little one, of saying no and of carrying out activities that adults historically did. And do they also give up on the nutritional and cutting functions? Up to some point, yes, and it takes just for us to take a look back into our introduction to see how the children and adolescents do not draw their parents or if they do, they portray them as sick or ill. If such functions are weakened, the path could lead us to the Horde, to the undifferentiated and to a world where the incest taboo is generally abolished. The raise in cases of child sex abuse is an indicator of what we stated above. It is that the child adult may have forgotten what it means to be an adult. But the one who cannot give up is the adult child, since he has not even known childhood when he is subjected to the pressures and perversions of us, supposedly conscious adults [24].

In this panorama that we designed we have placed some of the challenges that parents face in this twenty-first century. Under this period diagnosis, sustaining in the post-pandemic picture would still be seem to be a debt owed and of life.

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## Chapter 5

# Children's Rights (Absent) in Universal Parenting Training

*Hetty Rooth*

### Abstract

In public health policies the child-parent relationship is regarded as a determinant for children's development and future health. During the first two decades of the twenty-first century Sweden implemented parenting training on a universal level as a proactive measure. Sweden ratified the UN Convention on the rights of the Child in 1990 by which follows that all policies involving children are entwined with children's rights. Still, research on society's universal manual-based parenting training interventions depicts that the concept of rights is not an intrinsic value. Adult norms and a preventive approach tend to rule over health promotion goals involving children. Moreover, research results show that children possess an awareness of democratic values and insight in how to handle a dynamic interchange in daily family life. Children's involvement in parenting training should be investigated and discussed as an ethical public health challenge for the future.

**Keywords:** universal parenting training, Sweden, UNCRC, liberty rights, participatory public health

### 1. Introduction: Institutionalized rights and their realities

Internationally political initiatives to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [1] have institutionalized children's right to participation and self-determination [2, 3]. In Sweden children's rights are established as a core rhetoric in social policies since the country's ratification of the UNCRC in 1990. In 2009 a national strategy to strengthen the rights of the child [4] outlined principles for the parliament, government, state authorities, county councils and municipalities, to ensure that the rights of the child were acknowledged in all activities. As a historic step the Swedish parliament initiated a bill to incorporate the UNCRC into Swedish law in 2020. Legislative measures were taken to ensure that the articles of the UNCRC were considered in all decisions made by public authorities. Literally this meant that other legislation must be interpreted in the light of the convention. Among the Nordic countries Norway had been a predecessor to this move towards consolidating children's rights, as the convention was incorporated into Norwegian law in 2003.

## **2. Manual-based universal parenting training**

In consequence with the Swedish political intention to respect children's rights in all things that concern children, a rights perspective was present when a broad governmental scheme to support the use of universal parenting training was implemented on a national level during the second decade of the twenty-first century. This parenting training scheme was realized through a national strategy for a developed parental support [5]. The strategy was initiated by a government proposal that suggested that parenting training should be available as a universal public health intervention for all parents with children aged 0–17. Local efforts for parental support interventions should be coordinated at central level in the municipalities. Collaboration between public, non-profit and private actors was also recommended, as was national and regional collaboration. Manual-based parenting courses were generally forwarded as an important intervention, but without favouring specific programs at this point [5].

The government's political step bore similarities to other European policy documents that informed that parents need to have access to expert advice in order to fulfil their parental tasks for the benefit of their children's best development [6, 7].

## **3. Statistics as a fundament for parenting interventions**

With referral to the UNCRC, the National strategy for developed parental support stressed that care of children primary is a parental task but also a societal responsibility. Care and welfare issues were moreover described as closely related to parent–child relationships. That in turn motivated society's parental interventions. On one hand from a rights perspective on the other for societal sustainability. For better understanding of the communication between children and their parents, Sweden has since 1985 cooperated with the World Health Organization (WHO). Surveys have been launched to investigate children's welfare in family settings [8]. These surveys have contributed with important information for political decisions in family policies. With consistency the results have shown that a high percentage of girls and boys above 10 years approve of the relationship with their parents. Their parents share time with the children and listen to them [9, 10].

Other national Swedish surveys have pointed in the same direction. As an example, 90% of 10–15 years old children have said that they mostly can rely on their mother's attention, and a bit less so on their fathers [11].

It can be problematic to identify children as a group in statistics and even to make comparisons over time [12]. Evaluating statistical material for policy purposes about children's well-being has been described as based either on a developmental perspective, focusing on the future or a children's rights perspective [13–15]. A predominantly developmental perspective has steered public health interventions towards parenting training in the twenty-first century [5, 16].

The political initiative for public health-based universal parenting training interventions [5] relied on reports about increased mental health problems among young people. Statistics about mental illness among children and young people received a lot of attention in the early 2000s as a growing public health problem. Psychosomatic symptoms such as headache and stomach-ache and psychological symptoms such as depression and nervousness were reported to have become more frequent among school-aged youth since the 1990s.

Following the national strategy on parental support [5], Sweden chose to support parents on a universal level with group-based parenting training. Group-based parenting training can be implemented on different levels, as indicative, selective or universal interventions [11]. Indicative interventions are not relevant for this chapter as they are aimed at families with diagnosed problems and primarily implemented as individual consultations [17]. Selective group interventions are used for problem-solving with families who have perceived difficulties with child behavior. Selective programmes have been in use in Sweden since the late 1900s [16]. Universal group interventions are intended for all parents with children between 0 and 17 years [11] and were recommended for use by the National Strategy for Developed Parental Support [5].

A public health argument for universal interventions referred to the prevention paradox that the few in need could be reached by targeting all parents, without stigmatizing those at risk. Possible benefits of preventive measures to promote health without targeting specific groups were explained in the National strategy in 2008:

*“By investing in universal prevention efforts, we are able to reduce the proportion of the population who would later have developed problems if no action was taken (...) with great opportunities to prevent ill health among a big group of children who have not yet shown any early symptoms”* [5].

From 2009 manual-based parenting training courses were disseminated to parents for free. Municipalities all over the country were, from then onwards, encouraged to offer all parents with children between 0 and 17 training with manual-based group-based courses with educated leaders and without costs. A problem following this political decision was that few Swedish efforts had been made to produce course material that met the purpose for universal use [18]. In absence of universal courses Sweden resorted to selective manual-based courses designed to adjust children's perceived problem behavior. The selective courses, mainly called programmes, were structured, effect-oriented and demanded high manual fidelity [19]. Some Anglo-Saxon selective programmes were tried for universal use, for example, The Incredible Years [20], Parent Management Training (PMT) [21]; Triple P [22] and Connect [23]. Selective programmes could broadly be labeled either as interaction or communication programmes [16], or as relational or behavior modification programmes [24]. Some of them have theoretical underpinnings from two of these categories.

Behavior modification programmes that are associated with social learning theory [25] like COPE [26] and Triple P [22] are prevalent. These programmes focus on observable and measurable behaviors which are learned from the environment through the process of observational learning [27]. Relational programmes, like Connect, are associated with attachment theory focusing on relational development, security and parental response [28–30]. In a selective context the methodologies have been proven to give some positive results in effect studies measuring parental feedback.

Societal parenting training interventions aiming at all parents have met with criticism from scholars and professionals in the twenty-first century. Some scholars have disputed the applicability of normative manual-based programmes in multi-faceted postmodern settings [31]. The programmes have also been criticized for disempowering parents, children and facilitators, because of prioritizing professional expertise over lay knowledge [32, 33]. Some of these critical aspects were forwarded by the Swedish Council on Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services (SBU). The council expressed concerns about the efficiency of parenting training interventions as such, stating that traditional welfare issues like staffing levels, health

care in schools, social services and education are examples of structural changes that are “*important to consider along with (or instead of) investing in programmes*” [19].

The Swedish political effort to educate parents was summarized by the government as an “*activity that gives parents knowledge of the child’s health, emotional, cognitive and social development and/or strengthens their social networks, based on evidence-based models, methods and applications with a set of values based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*” [5].

With that statement in mind, it is the aim of this chapter to shed light on how Sweden’s commitment to UNCRC was reflected and transmitted in manual-based universal parenting training implemented in a preventive/promotive setting from 2009 and onwards. Taking the discussion one step further, preventive top-down approaches as opposed to promotive bottom-up approaches could play out in parenting training as distinct practices of governing of parents and children [34].

#### 4. Prevention and promotion

For more than a decade universal parenting training interventions have now been incorporated in Swedish public health policies. Manual-based courses are launched all over the country as a rhetorically rights-based preventive intervention in a health promotion context, formulated to

“*promote mental health and prevent mental illness among children and young people, by reducing psychosomatic symptoms like anxiety, depression, sleeping disorders, tiredness and headache among school children, and thus promote health and prevent ill health among children and youth*” [35].

Sweden has a long tradition of supporting parents, but parenting training was previously rooted in welfare policies with a heritage of liberal education in the early welfare state [36]. During the first decade of the twenty-first century a least two major changes made way for the shift, from traditional welfare policies that previously had promoted child rearing: A political demand for scientific rationality of caring and evidence-based practices paved the way for new structured manual-based parenting methods, mainly embedded in a Anglo Saxon context [5, 19, 37]. Secondly political target groups for parenting interventions expanded, from parents with babies and infants to parents with children between 0 and 17 years. Underlying theories about parental uncertainty in a risk-oriented society supported the new policies.

From an equity perspective the promotive side of public health policies was paired with prevention in a new structure for Swedish public health in 2018. The idea of connecting prevention and promotion with one another was motivated to enforce the possibilities for successful intervention results [38, 39]. Public health science had at that time long drawn on the same tradition as the positivistic biomedical paradigm where only classical experimental designs were acceptable. Still, since the 1980s, when the WHO proclaimed the importance of health promotion [40], the promotive side of public health policies has played an important part also in preventive interventions. This was apparent in the national strategy for parental support [5] when described by the government as a strategy for universal *preventive* parental support. The government thus wrote that the goal of universal preventive parental support was to promote children’s health and positive development via parents and maximize the child’s protection. Such a societal turn to govern the direction of parenting relates to behavioral modification models with roots in the 1960s. These methods were therapeutically used for indicated problem solving, working with the parent (mediator) to

improve the behavior of the child (target) [41]. Such methods were later developed and reconceptualized for group intervention in programmes like The Incredible Years [20], Triple P [22] and similar selective programmes.

As one of the fundamental principles in the UNCRC, the limits and possibilities of children's participatory rights have been discussed and analyzed since the UNCRC was adopted. The balance of power connected to adult's rights and children's participatory rights have thus emerged as an issue of scientific concern [42].

Politically a child's perspective was acknowledged as important when the Swedish parenting support strategy was processed in 2008. The inquiry searched for and found only four research studies and two student thesis involving children's views on parent child relationships in Sweden [5]. Such a white spot in research posed a challenge for the future. Even more so as children's status as informants in research had progressively changed since the 1990s. From being mere objects of socialization and adult interventions, children were now also regarded as subjects and knowledge providers in their own right. The concept of "childism", which emerged in the twenty-first century, can be regarded as a theoretical development from this change.

Some researchers propose that children's participatory rights could hollow out the rights that adults have to make decisions, [43]. What it boils down to is to acknowledge the existence of a power balance between adults and children.

In the following children's perspective as distinctive from a child perspective is considered. There is currently room for discussions about how parenting interventions involve a children's rights perspective.

## **5. Child perspective-children's perspective**

The term "child perspective" has, influenced by children's rights, been frequently used in the twenty-first century, given different meanings depending on the context and who the senders are—politicians, lawyers, psychologists, researchers, social workers or children's rights advocates, etc. [44]. In science the term has been used by researchers both as a theoretical statement of adherence to a child rights paradigm and as an analytical tool. Due to often poorly performed definitions though, its usability in science has been disputed as lacking in clarity and distinction [45]. Some researchers have advocated for the use of the term "children's perspective" to clarify when children themselves are heard or have their say. But even this term has been disputed depending on how the word perspective is interpreted [46]. Today it seems hard, though, to bypass the ontological considerations affecting research about child-parent relations [47].

A natural consequence of ethical stances in child research is to incorporate children's views in research. Keeping in mind that capturing children's perspectives require adults, parents and health professionals to be attentive, sensitive and supportive of each child's expressions, experiences and perception [48, 49].

## **6. Adult views on children**

The emergence of the "new sociology of childhood" [50] during the 1980s challenged socialization as an instrumental and one dimensional concept of child development. Theoretically "new" children emerged, declared as subjective actors in their own right—competent, interacting and socially constructed. Parenting was accordingly conceptualized as a bi-directional communication.

With insights about how interaction works in multifaceted relationships, the use of a child perspective, as an adult assessment of children rights and needs, has been disputed and debated. In the place of child perspective, children's own perspective is claimed as an important analytical stance. Children's perspective is motivated as a rights-based conception of children's status in parenting [46]. Today it seems hard, to bypass ontological considerations in research about child–parent relations [47]. A natural consequence of ethical stances in child research is thus to incorporate children's views in research.

This is not an easy adult task. It requires an open mind and dynamic apprehension of children's ways of expressing themselves. Basically, awareness of diverse constructions of childhood leads away from structures where children are diminished as receivers of instructions [49–51].

## **7. Childism as a new understanding of childhood**

The concept of childism serves as a more recent theoretical base for childhood studies and has developed further from new social studies of childhood. Childism postulates that social theory needs to embrace the more fundamental potential for children's lived experiences, rather than just break down social norms. This requires reconstructing of interdependent social relations and generational orders.

Today childism theories are discussed in a global network with The Childism Institute as its base. Professor John Wall, founder of the institute, argues that by placing children at the centre of research, childhood studies can not only understand children's agency and experiences in their own right, but also develop critical understandings of child-adult relations and social practices [52].

## **8. Three research studies**

As part of a larger research project on parenting training, the adherence to children's rights was studied using material from two courses which were implemented universally in Sweden: The Canadian Connect programme and the Swedish All Children in Focus (ABC). Both courses were introduced to parents in 2011–2012 [53, 54].

As mentioned above, the Canadian Connect programme [23] is associated with attachment theory focusing on relational development, security and parental response [28–30]. Connect is originally designed as a selective programme, aimed at children between 8 and 12 with declared problem behavior. Connect has also been used universally in Sweden.

The Swedish course All Children in Focus (ABC) was developed by the Karolinska Institute and Stockholm Social Services in 2011 [55] for universal use only. ABC adheres to social learning theory but also uses some attachment theory. The developers were influenced by selective programme effectiveness as reviewed by Wyatt Kaminski et al. [56].

Both courses were chosen for the studies as they posed an alternative to the selective courses based on social learning theory that had been previously recommended in Sweden.

## 9. Course manuals

The Connect manual is extensive and consists of nine sessions coherently built up to fulfill the programs intentions. One optional follow-up session is also available. The manual contains four components with the aim to develop secure connections between parents and their children: sensitivity of parenthood, cooperation and reciprocity, ability to reflect as a parent and dyadic affect regulation. The group leader's lectures are mixed with role play and discussions with the part taking parents.

An overall purpose of the course manual is to inspire parents and guardians "to think about new ways to understand their children and their behaviour, new ways of understanding themselves and their behaviour as parents, as well as new opportunities in parenting" [23].

The ABC manual is presented in a binder with exchangeable information. The manual is less comprehensive with four basic sessions and one optional extra session. Each of the four parts has a theme: showing love (parental factors, five to one, focus on what works), being there (the interaction chain), showing the way (annoyance and anger) and picking your battles (natural consequences).

ABC seeks to strengthen parent-child relations. The part takers in the course get to learn more about relevant research on parenting and children's development. Role play is also used and short films about day-to-day family problems [55].

Both manuals were analyzed with qualitative content analysis which depicted that children's rights were not included as an aspect in either manual. The ABC manual's introduction mentioned rhetorically that the course values were founded on the UNCRC (1989). In the absence of referrals to children's rights in the manuals, the analysis concentrated on how the manuals displayed adult and child perspectives and if an ethos of children's welfare or liberty rights was present. The findings showed that the course manuals of Connect and ABC harmonized with a risk-prevention paradigm, prominent in Swedish public health policies [53].

The manuals forward advice and guidelines for parents in different ways. The Connect program uses adult preventive perspectives as well as child-oriented promotive methods. Children are to some extent seen as agents in a mutual developmental process with adults. The ABC affiliates to positive discipline based on authoritative prevention and control. The adherence to child autonomy and children's rights is weak.

In relation to the UNCRC, an ethos of children's well fare rights could be traced in the manuals, while a liberty rights perspective was restricted by adult preventive norms.

## 10. The course sessions

The sessions of Connect and ABC were observed, audio taped and transcribed. Between 12 and 16 parents took part in the Connect course and between 6 and 8 in the ABC course. Two leaders were present at each course. The recorded material from both courses was analyzed separately with discourse analysis [54].

The study confirmed that both courses relied on high manual fidelity. Normative goal-oriented methods were used which displayed adult centred child constructs and unidirectional parenting strategies. In general, parents were positioned as protagonists in the discussions between leaders and parents. Children, on the other hand,

were mainly positioned as secondary actors and subordinate others. Neither children's own perspectives on parent–child relations, nor the children's participatory expectations were explicitly met during sessions. The Connect course leaders used expressions describing human relationships—connection, lifelong attachment, natural conflicts, empathy and slow change. The ABC course leaders used expressions associated with regulation of human behavior show feelings, choose battles and of conflict handling like leadership in critical situations and use of natural consequences.

Findings from discussions during the two course sessions showed that neither Connect nor ABC dealt with children's rights as such. These findings confirm previous research with course leaders of the COPE programme and the Swedish universal course Family workshop. Leaders declared that they were aware of the intentions of the UNCRC but did not discuss children's rights during sessions [57].

Children's rights are highly regarded in Swedish social politics which makes the absence of children's rights as a guiding principle in universal parenting training courses notable. Today universal parenting training is embedded in public health politics which suggests that children's welfare rights and liberty rights have a different standing. Welfare rights, e.g., health and well-being, are an underlying value in adherence to a public health aim to secure children's health and welfare for the future. On the other hand, children's liberty rights, e.g., rights to participation can in a public health context be restrained by an adult position of parental strength, significant for a preventive public health paradigm [18]. The findings of these studies show that children's liberty rights can be limited by a preventive framework where children play a part as receivers of adult norms.

## **11. A research study with children**

Advocacy for children's rights as expressed in the UNCRC [1] should be informed by a moral, ethical and political responsibility for giving strength to children's voices [58]. Consequently, a third study in the research project consisted of semi-open interviews with 11 children aged five to nine whose parents had taken part in universal parenting training courses (72). Qualitative content analysis was used in this case [51]. The research questions did not deal with children's rights as such but aimed to reflect the children's views on their own standing in family relationships. Hence the study intended to shed light on children's capability to reflect on interaction between parents and children—a core issue in universal parenting training.

Today adult power towards children is a matter of concern for many researchers dealing with children: Several ethical issues have been critically discussed in the literature [59, 60].

Where children are concerned, an adult perspective is to some extent inevitable.

The findings of this study were divided in themes and categories. As an example, self-protection included to cherish one's own thoughts, withdraw from the adult company and to set limits for one's own space.

Togetherness' involved taking part in decision making, a will to compromise and a wish to behave in a good way. In general, the children expressed that they ideally took on a position that put them on equal terms with their parents in family discussion. Still, they listened to their parents and respected their knowledge. The children showed clearly that they were willing to compromise in decision making,

*“I usually badger a bit but then it blows over and after a while we agree” (Lotta, age 8).*



Moreover, the interviewed children sensed that they were qualified as active family members themselves. At the same time, they saw their parents as providers and protectors with good intentions.

The children's recollections and thoughts depicted strong desire to be listened to and to be taken seriously. They also displayed trust and belief in their parents' will and ability to meet their expectations [51].

## 12. Summary

Children's rights as expressed in the UNCRC have influenced Swedish social policies since the 1990s and are, in a European context, regarded as a primary consideration in parenting [61]. Consequently, the Swedish expansion of universal parenting training interventions to cover the whole period of child rearing could have great impact on rights of both children and their parents.

From a child rights perspective, this chapter has focused on how children's rights are realized in two parenting courses that are universally implemented. Two research studies of parenting course manuals and proceedings have shown a lack of adherence to children's liberty rights as expressed in the UNCRC. Moreover, children are placed as subordinate others in the course material and during sessions. These results do not suggest an absence of rhetoric acknowledgment of the fact that children have rights. Still it should be acknowledged that rights were not used as a fundamental principle in either of the studied courses.

Another suggestion has arisen from the findings from manuals and sessions. The possibility exists that a public health rule of preventive methods, based on adult norms, hinders the courses to forward children's liberty right and children as active agents in family relationships. Such a public health scenario would contradict the Swedish commitment to children's rights as a fundament for political interventions concerning children.

A possible future research area would be to investigate how children and parents regulate their joint family spaces in comparison with the parameters for family life that are outlined in today's parenting training programs. More knowledge about children's and parent's relational interactions can be gained by involving children themselves. Children's involvement could contribute to further development of policies for parent and child support. Health promotion as a theoretical base for parenting training interventions could also be further researched in relation to children's agency and participatory rights. Conclusively there still is a need for society to ethically and morally consider children's position and dependence on adult norms and wishes. Children's involvement in parenting training needs to be investigated and discussed as an ethical public health challenge for the future. As Wall claims, "rights have to be forged in social contexts that are always too narrow. The social whole has constantly to recreate itself" [62]. UNICEF has more cautiously described a way forward as "adults' evolving capacity and willingness to listen to and learn from their children (...) re-examine their own opinions and attitudes and to envisage solutions that address children's views [63].

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Section 2

# Migration and Child Rearing

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# Communication in Times of Uncertainty and Loss: Refugee Parents in Interaction with Kindergartens and Schools

*Anne Marit Vesteraas Danbolt*

## Abstract

Most refugee parents experience uncertainty and loss transitioning to a new society. In this situation, the family is ascribed an increased value, as a social capital and a point of reference in an unstable world. At the same time, the complexity of the new society creates new hierarchical structures that place the family in a vulnerable position. Educational institutions like kindergartens and schools play a major role in the lives of families, since their practices impact the wellbeing and prospects for the future of the children. This chapter explores how newly arrived refugee parents perceive their interactions with kindergartens and schools in their new context. Data is collected by observations in a group of refugee parents over one year and by individual interviews, using interpreters. The study shows that there are good intentions on both sides, but the complexity of the situation causes misunderstandings, thus creating new instances of uncertainty. There is, however, a good potential for improved communication and better understanding in the relationship between refugee parents and kindergartens and schools.

**Keywords:** refugee parents, education policy, initial literacy, diversity, communication

## 1. Introduction

In a globalised world, millions of families are on the move and settling in new surroundings. This migration often means major disturbances to family life as well as to the families' relationship with educational institutions like kindergartens and schools. Migration produces new hierarchical social positions, where parents must re-orient themselves and find new ways of coping with daily life. Families account for between one-fourth and one-half of the migrant population in the OECD countries [1], and forced migration due to war and conflict is part of this picture. Many refugees parents experience uncertainty and loss when transitioning to a new society. They have left behind family and friends, workplaces and social relations, in short, life as they knew it. Different societal norms and regulations may form barriers to integration and inclusion in a new community. There are thus good reasons for municipalities, local

authorities as well as teachers and managements in kindergartens and schools to take into consideration how families experience challenges when they are settling into a new local community.

The migration-driven diversification of societies in the Western world has been described as super-diversity [2]. This entails new patterns of inequality and prejudice, racism and segregation ([2], p.2), and the term is widely used across disciplines. This concept is fruitful for shedding light on communication patterns that arise in the interaction between migrant parents and representatives of educational institutions. In such interactions, the uneven distribution of power is noticeable, but may all the same be concealed in subtle ways. Settling into a community that is quite unfamiliar as regards ways of behaving, socialising, interacting and communicating with institutions that have a bearing upon their life as a family, the family is placed in a vulnerable position. In such times of uncertainty, family values, as well as the members of the family itself, are ascribed an increased value, as a point of reference in an uncertain and unfamiliar world [3]. The children in the family represent in this situation a social capital [4], increased in symbolic value, since other forms of social capital in the form of network, education, employment as well as economic capital are diminished or lost. All matters relating to the welfare of their children are therefore of the utmost importance to the refugee parents [3].

This chapter will focus on how refugee parents perceive their relationship with kindergartens and schools in a new community. The research questions guiding this research are: How do refugee parents experience their interactions with educational institutions like kindergarten and schools? What perceptions do they have regarding language and literacy when it comes to their children's education?

## **2. Immigration and education policies for refugees in Norway**

### **2.1 Settlement regulations for refugees**

Norway is among the 145 countries that have recognised the Geneva Convention of 1951. This convention protects the rights of refugees [5, 6]. Immigration to Norway has increased during the last decades, and especially after the influx of people fleeing from the war in Syria, the number of refugees increased considerably. Many refugees have also arrived from countries in Eastern Africa and have settled in Norway. The pandemic caused a sharp decrease in immigration, but since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022, nearly 40,000 refugees have sought asylum in Norway. Still, the percentage of people with refugee background is low: while about 15 percent of the Norwegian population have immigrant background, only 4,5 percent have a refugee background [7].

Refugees may come either as asylum seekers, or they may be included as resettlement refugees in a quota agreed upon with the United Nations High Commission for refugees (UNHCR). They are then brought directly to Norway from refugee camps abroad [8]. Refugees are granted a temporary residence permit for one or up to three years. Family members may also be granted a family immigration permit based on certain criteria. It is normally not possible to apply for a permanent residence permit before three years' stay in the country. Those who are granted a temporary residence permit are settled in designated municipalities, based on a request to the municipality by the Norwegian Directorate for Integration and Diversity. The municipality receives economic support from the government based on the number of refugees received

by the municipality, and they must offer an introduction programme including these elements: Norwegian language classes, courses providing knowledge about the Norwegian society, and educational work-related activities. In this study, data was collected among refugee parents who took part in a course on parenting practices, based on the Incredible Years programme.

## **2.2 Education policy for immigrant children in primary and lower secondary schools**

Education for pupils with another language background than Norwegian or Sami (which is an indigenous language in Norway) is regulated by Section 2.8 in the Education Act. This section states:

*Pupils attending the primary and lower secondary school who have a mother tongue other than Norwegian or Sami have the right to adapted instruction in the Norwegian language until they are sufficiently proficient in Norwegian to follow the normal instruction of the school. If necessary, such pupils are also entitled to mother tongue instruction, bilingual subject teaching, or both [9].*

The Education Act, Section 2.8, also states that the municipality must map the Norwegian language skills of the pupils before it is decided to give them adapted language education. This mapping must continue while they receive adapted Norwegian instruction, to assess whether the pupils are sufficiently skilled in Norwegian to follow the regular teaching in the school. The Norwegian Directorate for Education has developed curricula for adapted instruction in Norwegian and for mother tongue instruction and a tool for mapping of language development for second language learners of Norwegian [10].

It is the municipality, as the owner of the primary and lower secondary schools within their community, who is responsible for providing teaching for pupils who are second language learners of Norwegian. However, even though the Education Act states that mother tongue instruction is among the rights of a pupil who is a second language learner of Norwegian, mother tongue instruction is rarely used in Norwegian classrooms. In fact, even though the number of pupils with immigrant background has increased, the number of pupils receiving adapted instruction in Norwegian and mother tongue instruction has decreased [11]. This development is interesting, since the core curriculum for primary and secondary education states that all pupils “shall experience that being proficient in a number of languages is a resource” [12]. The same positive attitude to different languages is also mentioned in the Framework Plan for Kindergartens, which says that the kindergarten staff should help ensure that “linguistic diversity becomes an enrichment for the entire group of children and encourage multilingual children to use their mother tongue” [13]. The documents giving the mandate for kindergartens and schools thus promote a positive view on multilingualism and diversity, while the Education Act is open for interpretations and gives few directions for implementation.

## **2.3 Initial literacy and second language learning**

International research recommends that initial literacy should be taught in a language that is familiar to the learner [14, 15]. Since reading is to make meaning of written language, the familiarity with the language is crucial. However, many learners

around the world receive education in an unfamiliar language [15]. This also applies to Norway, where second language learners of Norwegian rarely receive initial literacy instruction in their mother tongue [11]. As mentioned above, only those pupils who are considered not to be able to follow the regular instruction in the classroom are granted adapted instruction and mother tongue instruction or bilingual subject teaching only when it is considered “necessary”. And when granted, normally only a restricted number of hours per week are allocated.

This means that pupils with another language background than Norwegian will have a different outset for their literacy development than their peers who are first language users of the language of instruction. They have a double learning task in the way that they must learn the language of instruction and the content of the curriculum at the same time. This is a demanding role and requires much support from those around the emergent bilingual pupil.

All children, irrespective of language background, have experiences with written language before they start school [16, 17]. When it comes to second language learners, who are emergent bilinguals, the literacy practices they encounter in their homes form a basis for the continued development in school. But if the literacy instruction rests on a monolingual bias, without any attention to other languages or other literacy practices than those of the language of instruction, the experiences emergent bilinguals bring to school will not be recognised. In such a situation, the second language learners’ experiences will be invisible and an unused resource. To draw on the resources of the emergent bilinguals requires a partnership between the school and the home.

Trends in research on literacy and language learning open for more flexible ways of building emergent bilinguals’ literacy. There are several examples of such partnerships where the school successfully builds bridges to the home and acknowledges the complexity of the situation for migrant families [17–19]. More flexible ways of drawing on the resources multilingual pupils bring to school can be a potential for a more positive development in the language learning process and for more confident multilingual practices in the family.

Many immigrant parents want their children to maintain the language(s) of their family, while they at the same time are dedicated to their children’s learning of the language of instruction. Making visible the language resources of an emergent bilingual pupil also confirms the identity of the family [17, 18]. To open up for a view on multilingualism as a resource requires competence among teachers in kindergartens and schools and is ultimately the responsibility of the municipality.

### **3. Research design**

The research design for this study was an exploratory qualitative case study [20]. Qualitative research seeks to explore and understand “the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” [21], which describes well the aim of this research. Data was collected in a group of refugee parents who took part in an introduction course in a semi-rural municipality in Norway. Data consisted of observations in classes when the participants talked about their family, by semi-structured interviews individually and in pairs and by reflection notes collected in a meeting towards the end of the school year. The data was analysed by a thematic analytical approach, developing codes to look for emerging themes.

The group consisted of six mothers and three fathers, representing six different families. Three couples came from an Arab-speaking country, two mothers came from East African countries, and one single mother came from an Asian country. All participants except two were newly arrived in Norway with less than 8 months' stay. Their education varied between six and twelve years, whilst one had professional training.

Since all the participants were newly arrived in Norway, the interviews were conducted with help from interpreters. The topics for the interviews were: Experiences from their interactions with the teachers in their children's kindergarten or school, and their hopes and expectation for their children's future, including their education. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the author. The participants were given pseudonyms to preserve anonymity, and all recordings were deleted after the transcription.

### **3.1 Limitations of the study**

This study is an observation and interview study of refugee parents, where the main purpose was to bring forth the voices of the parents. The school management and the teachers have not been involved in the study. This means that statements about the schools' teaching practices come solely from the parents, and the intentions behind the choices the schools have made will remain unknown to the researcher. This must be taken into consideration when interpreting the data. Furthermore, the number of participants is low, so findings from this study cannot be generalised to the wider population. However, this study may give a deeper understanding of how refugee parents experience their interactions with institutions that are of vital importance for their children's well-being and future in the new country.

Another limitation is that all communication between the researcher and the participants has been conducted with interpreters as mediators. This means that nuances and even important information in the participants' statements may have been lost. However, to capture the perceptions from newly arrived refugee parents who have not yet learnt the Norwegian language, the use of interpreters is indisputably necessary. The interpreters were experienced and knew the Norwegian school system well, which was an asset given the topic of this study.

Last, but not least, it is a limitation to the study that the researcher was an ethnic Norwegian and as such a representative of the new society. Even though the researcher came from the outside and had no links to the parenting programme nor to the kindergartens and schools in the municipality, this fact may have led to restraints in criticism or misplaced praise. The longitudinal design of the study, with frequent meetings over one year, was intended to counteract this tendency and build trust between the partners, but it must nevertheless be considered in interpreting the responses from the parents.

### **3.2 Ethics approval and consent**

Newly arrived refugee parents, not yet proficient in the majority language, must be considered a vulnerable group ([21], p. 95). Their situation must therefore be taken into account when doing research of this kind that will involve talking about private matters like family and children. This topic could also increase the parents' sense of loss and cause difficult feelings. Ethics approval was obtained from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), including approval of interview guides and information letters. The interpreters read the information letter to the participants in a

meeting, and the researcher was available to answer questions. It was made clear that participation in the research was voluntary and that the parents could withdraw from the study at any time, without any repercussions for themselves. The participants signed the consent form in the first meeting. No one wanted to withdraw during the period of data collection or afterwards. On the contrary, it seemed that they appreciated having the opportunity to talk about their children and to vent issues regarding their children's schooling.

## **4. Results and discussion**

Three themes emerged from the coding of the data: Communication in a mode of friendliness and trust; the complexity of the language policy; the value of education.

### **4.1 Communication in a mode of friendliness and trust**

The parents all expressed appreciation of their children's teachers, some more explicitly than others. Several of the families came from refugee camps in Lebanon, where the children were assigned to classes in the afternoon, after the resident children had left. This experience of a non-inclusive practice seemed to have left its mark on one of the parents, who saw the Norwegian school system in a stark contrast: "It is first of all a good and nice system, and I am so grateful there is no discrimination nor racist attitudes. My children can attend school in the morning and not in the afternoon, like in Lebanon". Given the huge pressure on the education system in Syria's neighbouring countries, the comparison may seem quite unfair; however, the experience of inclusion of their children in the mainstream classroom obviously meant a lot. The parents also mentioned that the teachers did not allow bullying, and that instances of unacceptable behaviour were sanctioned quickly. The teachers were described as "humane" and friendly towards the children.

The parents conveyed appreciation of this friendliness and positive interest from the teachers. Some of the teachers obviously tried to draw on the linguistic diversity in the classroom. One of the mothers described her daughter's teacher in this way: "For example Sylvia (pseudonym), who is the teacher in my daughter's class, I love her so much. She has learnt a lot of words, like 'good morning' and 'good day' and such things, she has learnt these words in all the languages of the children". The parents also mentioned teachers in their own language classes for adults who showed interest and a positive attitude towards their mother tongues.

Schools are required to have individual meetings with the parents of each pupil twice a year. These meetings focus on the child's individual progress in all areas, as well as the child's social adaptation to other pupils and to the school as a whole. The parents told that in these meetings, an interpreter was always present and available for them. The parents appreciated this practice. One couple mentioned, however, that in meetings with the whole class (parents' meeting), which are not mandatory, there were no interpreters available. When asked what he felt about being in such a situation, one father said: "It was like being inside a black bag". This lack of opportunity to talk with the other parents made him feel left out of the group.

Through the parents' descriptions, the teachers put much emphasis on friendly relations with the pupils and the parents. In the mandatory individual meeting with the parents twice a year, the school provides interpretation for the parents. But this

does not take place in social arrangements and meetings that are not mandatory, which indicates that there are limits to the inclusiveness. The friendliness and inclusive attitude seem to be a widespread but individual practice that was not yet fully institutionalised.

#### **4.2 The complexity of the language policy**

The parents were asked whether their children received any mother tongue instruction, cf. 2.2 above. One of the mothers responded that there was an Arabic teacher in the school and that there were four pupils in his class, but her daughter was not among those who were assigned to his class. She said that she had asked why her daughter was not included, but she did not receive an answer, or at least not an answer that she could make sense of. Her interpretation of the situation was that her daughter first should focus on learning Norwegian, and then, she could have classes in Arabic. This misconception was corrected by the interpreter, who asked if he could explain to this mother. He told her that the case was that her daughter was considered too proficient in Norwegian to receive mother tongue instruction. This was obviously new information to the mother, so the communication from the school seemed not to have fulfilled its purpose.

A report from another mother demonstrated that the mother tongue instruction was not always given under conducive circumstances. Her son received some help in the mother tongue from an interpreter who explained the teaching to him in class. He was placed at the back of the classroom, probably to avoid disturbances. Her son had told her that the class teacher sometimes said “Please don’t disturb” to the interpreter, since the help was given in the same classroom. The mother was obviously frustrated by this practice. “How can my boy learn if the teacher says, ‘Please don’t disturb’? And he is the weakest, and he is placed in the back of the classroom!” The mother also wondered why her son was put at the back of the classroom the whole day, while the interpreter was there with him only for a few hours. She had tried to ask the school about it but did not receive an answer that made this practice clear to her.

Since the provision of mother tongue instruction was relatively scarce, some of the parents tried to teach their children themselves. One of the mothers described how she tried to support her child at home: “I try to be the teacher myself, but it is hard. I have to learn Norwegian myself”. It is time-consuming to learn a new language, and the parents’ capacity is naturally stretched, when they try to do two quite difficult tasks at the same time.

The school seemed to strive for an inclusive practice and had allocated mother tongue instruction to some of the newly arrived second language learners. However, when it came to the realisation of this practice, there were obviously pitfalls. For instance, it was not clear whether the pupils actually met a qualified mother tongue teacher, and the use of the word “interpreter” indicates that the school might have opted for mother tongue support rather than mother tongue instruction or bilingual subject teaching. In this regard, the limitations of this study must be taken into account. It is also a fact that many schools struggle to find qualified mother tongue teachers. However, it seems quite clear that communicating the specific rights of pupils with another language than Norwegian and Sami, laid down in the language policy, seemed to be a challenge. Considering the somewhat complicated regulations and the rather unclear indicators of what is “sufficiently proficient”, it is not surprising that the school seemed to have a difficult task in explaining these features of the language policy to newly arrived refugee parents.

### **4.3 The value of education**

The parents were overall very proud of their children's progress in learning to speak the new language. They expressed no concern when it came to their children's progress in learning spoken Norwegian. However, when it came to basic literacy skills, like reading and writing, some of them expressed worries, like this mother, speaking about her 7-year old son: "He can speak Norwegian, but he struggles with reading and writing". When they were asked whether they had been given any advice as to how they could support their children's literacy development, one mother said that the teacher had asked them if they had audio books or a laptop or a computer. This made her feel uncomfortable, since she herself had very little experience with digital tools. In the meetings, the parents told that they had been strongly encouraged to visit the library and borrow books to read to their children. One mother confirmed that there were books in many languages in the school library, and her daughter had borrowed a book with Arabic letters. The book turned out to be written in Farsi, a language they did not know, and the mother laughed at the mix-up. But she clearly expressed her willingness to read to her daughter, if only the school could provide her with books in Arabic.

The parents put strong emphasis on the value of education in more general terms. One of the fathers explained in this way how he encouraged his children to work hard in school: "You must read, you must learn, you must just go on and work hard, we expect that you are doing your best". And he continued: "We tell them that being able to read and write is equal to seeing". In the final meeting in the group, the parents were asked to express their hopes for their children, and one of them wrote: "I want my children to have a good education and find a job, but first and foremost I want them to have a good and happy life in a peaceful society".

By the parents' accounts, there is an awareness among teachers in kindergartens and schools of the value of other languages than Norwegian. The encouragement the parents receive to visit the library and read books to their children points towards an interest in the language resources in the family. The school had also acquired books in many languages in the library, to be available for the newly arrived pupils. In the conversations about the children's education, there was a clear concurrence of values between the parents and the school.

## **5. Conclusion**

Refugee parents meet many challenges when transitioning to a new society. The transition is mostly involuntary and includes many experiences of loss. They have nevertheless proved great strength in enduring difficult circumstances and mastered the transition. In their new community, they want the best possible future for the children and show positive attitudes towards their children's teachers. However, they meet many expectations and regulations related to kindergartens and schools, which implies adjusting to new social complexities [2].

Findings in this study show that parents expressed trust in the teachers in the kindergartens and schools and experienced a warm and friendly attitude in their communication with the teachers. They encouraged their children's education and wanted to support the school. The concurrence of values as regards education can have a great potential in building a strong relationship between the home and the school.

However, there are challenges to the relationship. The communication gaps in explaining the language policy as well as the lack of a systematic support to the



children's multilingual development put strain on the family. The parents felt that it was hard for them to really contribute, since they were unfamiliar with the language of instruction, and some of them did not have much education themselves. But there are bright spots also to this picture. Some of the teachers practice an openness to the linguistic diversity in the class, and the schools have multilingual books in the library and encourage pupils and parents to borrow books. By the parents' report, the school seems to be interested in the parents' literacy practices, though this is probably not communicated in the best possible way to the parents.

Communication with refugee parents can be difficult for many reasons [17]. These difficulties can be mitigated by good preparation of the kindergarten and school staff, including capacity building, and to establish educational partnerships with parents.

In communication with refugee parents, it is important to be aware of the special circumstances surrounding their life in the new country. The underlying imbalance of power requires a sensitive approach in the interactions. Good intentions are important, but not sufficient in securing full understanding of the educational offer to second language learners of Norwegian, given the complexities of the language policy. Empowering the parents by acknowledging their resources and finding ways of how they can support their children will build their partnership with the educational institutions and give better prospects for their hopes and dreams for their children in a new society.

## **Conflict of interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

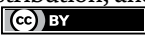
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## Chapter 7

# Mitigating the Unmet Psychosocial Support Needs of Left-behind Learners in Child-Headed Households: Exploring ‘Educare’ Support at a Zimbabwean School

*Ricanos Jaure and Alfred Henry Makura*

### Abstract

Following parental labor migration, the family unit is disrupted contributing to the formation of a unique form of child-headed households (CHH) among the left-behind children (LBC). Parental migration creates a gap in terms of children support, care, and protection leading to unmet psychosocial support needs among the LBCs in child-headed households. This research chapter sought to explore the fusion of education and care (Educare) in schools as a holistic system of support for the left-behind at a school where LBC spend most of their time. This elevates and transforms the school from just being centers for education excellency but also centers for care and learner well-being. The chapter draws from qualitative data in which twelve left-behind learners and ten education and community informants participated in a focus group discussion. Findings revealed that the school has great potential to support learners in adverse living and learning situations through the curriculum, extra-curriculum clubs, peer groups, and school personnel (teachers in loco parentis). However, the same school environment was found to be associated with negative typecasting of LBC's that sometimes affects the support system. This chapter recommends building the support base for LBC within school through sensitizations, capacitation, and tapping support from community resources.

**Keywords:** Educare, left-behind learners, psychosocial, learning, child-headed households, Zimbabwe

### 1. Introduction

“Schools are not just place where we learn facts and numbers but also place where we learn how to live” Dewey (1899).

The vision shared by John Dewey in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries about the school is still relevant today, more so, when world order and, in particular, parenting practices are under threat from global trends and most recently the

COVID-19 pandemic. Globalization and the economic crises have triggered labor migration trends in Africa and part of the developing world [1, 2]. Adults, who are also parents in the developing world, take the option to migrate to local and international destinations seeking employment opportunities. This process has significantly transformed, destabilized, and reconfigured the traditional parenting and family structure [3]. Following parental labor migration, the key tenets that define parenting such as co-residence, care, and guidance are sometimes delegated or neglected, thus exposing the left-behind learners to unmet psychosocial needs. The parent is made to perform parenting duties from a distance, which limits them in terms of carrying out the expected interaction, care, and guidance responsibilities [4]. In some cases, the migrating parents were also incapacitated in terms of providing for the needs of LBC's due to challenges associated with the then prevailing COVID-19 restrictions. It is in view of these complications that this book chapter sought to explore the potential of the school in supplanting parental roles and become not only a center of education but also care and learner well-being (Educare).

This research paper acknowledges extensive research on left-behind children and child-headed households [3–5]. There is, however, limited scholarly attention when the two components are combined. The combination of LBC and CHH settings could be described as an abysmal combination as regards the psychosocial functioning and educational outcomes. This book chapter sought to expose the potential of the school as a stopgap measure to address the unmet psychosocial needs of the LBC's. The utilitarian definition and understanding of the school as a center for life lessons and pillar for care for learners is used. A more holistic understanding of education is used in which performance is not only measured by performance in traditional subjects such as Mathematics, languages, or Sciences but life lessons. Schools become centers for both education and care (Educare) in which issues to do with learner well-being are prioritized.

## **2. Background**

Parental labor migration has been part of the history of many of the developing world countries, and in Africa, traced back to the days of colonization. This has been accepted as a means for survival and millions of adults migrate largely from rural to urban areas in search of job and life opportunities. Driven by globalization, social and economic challenges migration trends in Zimbabwe, for instance, have taken an international flare [3, 6]. The search for life opportunities is no longer limited by geographical and national boundaries, but parents move to where opportunities are. Parents in Zimbabwe have found settlement in countries such as Australia, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Qatar, and China for employment. In Africa, South Africa hosts the bulk of the labor migrants, (up to 3.5 million) while others have moved to countries such as Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia, Namibia, and among others [6].

The migration of a parent or parents is often met with lots of joy and anticipation [1]. In Zimbabwe, this is usually driven by the hope for a better life provided by the migrating parent. Lots of sacrifices are made by the family in the attempt to meet the migration cost for the parent. In some cases, some families disposed of their family houses to pay for the air tickets and the visa requirements. The hope is that all that is sold to finance the migration processes will be replaced when the parent settles, especially in the global north. The settling of the parent in the global north marks the onset of “survival circuits” characterized by remittances that keep the left-behind children surviving the economic challenges associated with the global south [2].

The remittances are not only significant for the family but they also contribute to the economy of the global north countries such as Zimbabwe [2].

Out of the more than 15 million people in Zimbabwe close to 7.7 million are children [7]. The children constitute close to half the population of Zimbabwe meaning they are important in terms of future planning. They need the proper upbringing so that they would be able to take up leading roles in the future. The UNHCR defines a child as someone immature below the age of 18. The immaturity may imply that the child is unable to feed and care for himself/herself. Thus, when the adult parent is not present in the life of the children there is indeed a chance that the children would be adversely affected in terms of their psychosocial functioning.

While the community makes attempts to address the plight of vulnerable children in CHH, the kind of support is described as not cohesive and comprehensive [8]. Support that is ad hoc fails to meet the psychosocial support needs of the left-behind learners. This understanding makes institutions such as the school significant. This study proposes to utilize the school as a center in the bulk, which support for children in adverse living and learning conditions could be coordinated. Outcomes, such as well-being and learner conduct, would be imparted to learners through both the curriculum and co-curriculum in school setups.

### **3. Left-behind learners in child headed household settings**

As parents migrate for labor, several restricting factors to do with immigration and the destination country sometimes makes it difficult for parents to migrate with their children [9]. Traditionally, when parents migrate, children were left in the care of the spouse or the extended family such as maternal or paternal grandparents were asked to assist. However, the breakdown of the extended family network and the prevalence of single parenting made this option difficult to make. Conflict over remittances between the migrating parents and the extended family is cited as one of the major factors leading to children being left in CHH [3]. Conflict usually arises because of remittances; some of the extended family members would feel they receive inadequate remittances, while the migrating parents would feel they are giving more. The result is some children considered “old enough” are left behind in their home country in child only families when parents migrate [10]. It is against this background that in Zimbabwe, there is a new growing population of children in CHH not because they are orphans but because the parents have migrated for labor. Left-behind learners (LBC) refers to children who are left behind for a period exceeding 6 months when parents migrate either to the cities or outside the country for work [11]. Following the breakdown of extended family networks and prominence of the nucleus family, many migrating parents end up leaving children in CHH.

In the developing world, children are more likely to be left in CHH because of single parenthood [12]. The number of female-headed households, in particular, is said to have increased dramatically driven by factors such as divorce and death of spouse [12]. This outcome eliminates the possibility of leaving the children with the other spouse when migrating. Females have also joined the bandwagon of labor migrants from Zimbabwe, and when they are single, they sometimes leave children in child only families. Zimbabwe, for example, has up to 40.6% female-headed households [13]. The feminization of labor particularly in the care field has triggered a massive exodus of women contributing to children being left behind in CHH. This to some extent contributes to the creation of this unique form of CHH [14].

Certain factors are considered by the migrating parents [5] before leaving their children in CHH. Such factors are primarily social and economic (gender, age, accommodation, and security, etc.). Jaure and Makura [1] assert that the gender of the LBC's is a critical factor that the migrating parent takes into consideration. In a study at a school in Zimbabwe and South Africa, Jaure, [1] for instance, observed that boys are more likely to be left in CHH when compared to girls. The possible reason is that they feel boys are less vulnerable as compared to girls [5, 12]. The reason may also be motivated by the general perception that regards sexual abuse as graver as compared to other forms of abuse. The idea that girls more than boys are known victims of abuse, justify this line of thinking.

The age and level of maturity of the LBC's is a factor [5] for consideration in determining the negative effects associated with parental migration. In a study conducted among LBC's in Zimbabwe, most of the LBC's are relatively mature, above the age of 15, at adolescence stage [10]. Nevertheless, the adolescence stage of development has noted developmental challenges that become compounded by lack of parental guidance. A study, in China, also affirms that the age and gender of the LBC were key predictors of negative psychological effects such as anxiety and depression [13]. Left behind girls tend to be affected by parental migration more than boys because in accordance to African culture, they are made to shoulder the household duties [7–24]. In that regard, girls are said to be affected more by parental migration as compared to boys.

#### **4. Unmet psychosocial support needs**

As parents migrate, LBC find themselves experiencing unmet psychosocial support needs that in turn affect their learning outcomes. The LBC attending school becomes left-behind learners in the context of a school. Left-behind learners find themselves with unparalleled psychosocial challenges attributable to lack of parental supervision, set boundaries, love, guidance, and support [16]. This elucidates the significance of the adult parent in the home. Literature to date associates such learners with social and emotional challenges at home and at school making them a vulnerable group [1]. Findings drawn from several studies on LBC indicate that such children are associated with challenges such as hyperactivity, emotional, and peer problems [5, 17, 18]. This implies that the children fail to function properly and fail to relate with peers and siblings due to parental absence.

The lack of support systems contributes toward psychological problems that affect mental health including depression, poor psychological well-being, and health problems [19]. This is further elucidated by comparative analysis on the LBC compared to children living with their parents. The comparisons reveal that LBC's fare badly in terms of mental health as compared to those children who reside with their parents [20].

LBC's have also been associated with negative outside behaviors that are attributed to the absence of their parents. Separating internalizing from externalizing effects of parental migration is complicated because they are interdependent [10]. It is usually the inside effects such as loneliness, depression, and anxiety that lead to negative outside behaviors, for example, conduct challenges. The social and emotional maladjustments significantly affect their outward behavior. The outside behaviors noted in several studies on LBC include violent, aggressive behavior, drunkenness, and risky sexual behaviors [21–23]. Such behavior and conduct problems become significant learning problems that affect educational outcomes. In Zimbabwe, the LBCs are



associated with wild parties commonly known as *Vuzu* parties in which they abuse drugs, alcohol, and experiment with sex [10]. Children with both parents as migrants were noted as having lower scores for psychological well-being and higher scores for emotional symptoms and literacy problems when they are compared to conventional families [14]. This implies that parental care is an important factor that can influence well-being. The absence of the parent can trigger unmet psychosocial support needs that manifest through internalizing- and externalizing behaviors.

## 5. The unique form of CHH

LBC in child-headed households are a recent development that partly owes their development to the demise of the extended family system [1–4, 6–13, 15–24]. This unique form of CHH has with its similarities and differences with the traditional CHH. Similarities and differences are noted in the composition and effects on children. A close analysis of the similarities and differences is significant in the process of trying to expose the unmet psychosocial support needs of the LBC's.

The traditional definition of a child-headed household carries with it connotations of orphans, poverty, or misery [8]. Discourse on CHH refers to children whose parents would have died, and the children live and fend for themselves [24]. Fending for themselves in this case implies that they provide their own meals, with no adult to care for them. The immediate family and the alternate carers who are usually drawn from the extended family are not available to provide care [8]. A qualitative study, conducted in Zimbabwe by Maushe and Mugumbate, [8] reveals that children who live and care for themselves have challenges with basic provisions such as food education, and clothing. There is also no adult to guide, love, and supervise the children. This, in turn, explains the poverty that the children are often associated with. Because of parental death the children left in child only homes become destitute and experience challenges in terms of school fees payment and are deprived of basic amenities [8].

Parental migration has redefined the child-headed household family setup. Firstly, the parents or parents are very much alive but because of labor migration, they reside separately from their children [10]. The parent can elect to continue playing a significant parental role in the lives of their left-behind children. In that regard, the parent is unable to perform parental duties full-time. When parents migrate, there is so much anticipation on the part of the left-behind children and other relatives. The idea that the parent would have migrated to better economies is the major reason for hope. The children sometimes become the envy of the community as the parent can provide the basics and luxuries. The migrating parents are said to make up for their absence by providing even more than what the children require. The migrating parent can also continue to interact with the LBC's through internet or mobile communication tools. This to some extent retains a level of intimacy between the LBC and the migrating parent.

Owing to parental labor migration, parenting is transformed from being a full-time responsibility to being done remotely or part-time. Research indicates that in countries such as Zimbabwe and South Africa, labor migration is also responsible for the creation of this unique form of child-headed household [10].

LBCs represent parenting reconstituted and reconfigured. The traditional model of parenting and family model is represented by cohabitation and proximity [16]. The family resides under the same roof and shares meals. In the family setup, there are set

responsibilities for the parents and for children. However, when parents migrate, the parental roles are sometimes performed at a distance. The parent could still provide for the children through remittances. The parent can also share love over the phone or other social media platforms. In some cases, the eldest child would assume some of the parenting roles for younger siblings [10].

## **6. Traversing the COVID-19 pandemic complications/challenges**

Circumstances following the declaration of non-governmental pandemic have unsettled and disrupted order among this growing population of left-behind learners in Zimbabwe. The negative impacts are even more pronounced among those left behind in child-headed households (CHH). Such children are made to do without parental social and emotional support, parental guidance, parental love, and monitoring over prolonged periods of time. These ensuing environments are perceived to disadvantage them in terms of their psychosocial functioning and educational proficiency [14]. The plight of such learners is further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic that to some extent, have crippled the traditional sources of their support, that is. return visits and remittances. Cross-border mobility became limited and made it difficult for the parent to make return visits [4]. This further prolonged the period of separation between the migrating parent and the LBC's.

A survey conducted in South Africa during the national lockdown induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, reveals that two out of five adults lost their source of income and ran out of money to buy food [25]. South Africa is of interest in this study because they house the bulk of the labor migrants from Zimbabwe [6]. When the migrating parent is incapacitated, it would also follow that remittances would be limited. Thus, children left behind in their homes are equally affected by what happens in the host country. The COVID-19-induced lockdowns affected the well-being of LBC's.

This makes it prudent to explore other schemes of support that would improve the psychosocial functioning and prevent or modify conduct problems among left-behind learners. The goal is to ensure that left-behind learners and other learners in adverse living and learning conditions learn how to 'live.' In this case, 'live' entails coping and striving for improved well-being in the face of challenges associated with parental absence due to migration. The goal is to promote the acquisition of requisite social and emotional competencies (of LBC) for improved well-being and improved learning outcomes.

### **6.1 Methodology**

This study followed a qualitative route and had the following objective (i) explore schemes of psychosocial support for LBC's in the context of the school. Focus group discussions were held with purposively selected participants drawn from one secondary school in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe. The participants were seven left-behind learners ( $n = 7$ ) and eight education and community informants ( $n = 8$ ). Separate sessions were held for learners and adults ( $n = 7 + 8$ ). The education informants were teachers, the school head, a senior teacher, and a school psychological services representative. The community contingent comprised a representative of the police community and liaison office and a representative of local nongovernmental organizations. To contextualize the envisaged support,

participants were asked to outline psychosocial challenges at school and at home. Thereafter, participants were asked to identify support systems within the school that could be utilized in building psychosocial support or mechanisms for the LBC's. Permission for the study followed an ethical clearance from the Central University of Technology (FRIC 21.18/2), permission was also granted by the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Written consent forms were completed by the adult participants. Participants' names were coded to protect their privacy. The discussions were recorded on a digital recorder by the main researcher and later transcribed verbatim. This was to ensure an accurate record of the proceedings. Data analysis followed the thematic approach (Thematic analysis) in which codes and themes were used. The collected information was coded and categorized after it was transcribed. Coding entailed systematically analyzing the transcribed data and disaggregating it into similar constituent parts (code clustering of data sets). After coding, data were organized or categorized into themes. Each theme entailed a unique aspect, which we elaborate in the results section. The analyses were used to arrive at conclusions, notwithstanding the goal of the study and the study's research objectives [26].

## 7. Results

Findings from this study revealed the different school-based avenues that have potential to be optimized for the support of left-behind learners affected by parental migration. Participants in the focus group discussion saw the essence of psychosocial support for left-behind learners in view of the unmet psychosocial support needs attributed to lack of parental support, monitoring, and discipline hand. By inference, this envisaged support is considered relevant in the face of threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants saw potential support as being housed in the curriculum, extra curriculum, school leadership, school culture, and in teacher-learner relationships.

Teacher participants acknowledged the significant role that is shouldered by the school in support of learners in adverse learning conditions. Teacher participant TR3 "We are teaching students from diverse backgrounds, some are orphans, some have parents in the diaspora and some are in poverty meaning to say now more than ever, as teachers we need to be innovative. The school is their hope, and the community expects the school to step in and make a difference." The school, in this case, is made up of diverse learners with diverse challenges. What stakeholders in the school expect is the transformation of the institute through innovations so that the diverse learners are accommodated and supported.

Participant TR1, who is an experienced teacher remarked, "So much is expected from the school in today's world, the teacher must play different roles depending on circumstances. Sometimes you are the father, mother, teacher, or even aunt, learners come to class with many different problems, and as a teacher, they look up to you for solutions." This implies that the teacher sometimes must play caring, teaching, and advisory roles among the learners. In playing the different roles the school as an institution goes through a transformation. The teacher is expected to be innovative and come up with solutions that would facilitate teaching and learning. Such an understanding of the teacher's role is significant in exploring the utilitarian role of the school in the support of learners. The key roles expected of parents, such as guidance and protection, are assumed by the teacher.

## **7.1 Curriculum-based support**

Participants revealed the critical role that the curriculum play in the support schemes of learners disadvantaged by adverse living conditions such as left-behind learners. The school curriculum in Zimbabwe has undergone several changes possibly to be apt to the transformation of society. More recently (2021) the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education launched the updated national curriculum. Participants also saw great potential in the support of left-behind learners within updated school curriculum. This was particularly pronounced in the guidance and counseling (G&C) course, and generally in crosscutting themes in all the learning areas. In this regard, a school head participant (SH) shared, “the new curriculum gives hope to disadvantaged learners because of its emphasis on guidance and counseling. True, left-behind learners need guidance and protection. If not, some end up abusing drugs and alcohol. We have several cases of learner dropouts because of pregnancy among these children of diaspora parents. This, G&C course, gives a fighting chance for left-behind learners because of its emphasis on life skills. Learners acquire decision-making skills, problem-solving skills among other skills.” In other words, the school becomes a place where learners learn how to live according to Dewey [27].

Teacher participant TR2 also shared, “Indeed the G&C course is an important component of the curriculum, the only problem is that teachers fail to take it seriously and so learners fail to benefit much from its teaching. My suggestion is the Ministry need to train at least one full-time teacher.” The learning area would teach and tackle real-life challenges and promote well-being among the learners.

“Cross-cutting issues within the updated curriculum can also help in resolving behavior problems among learners negatively affected by labor migration” (TR1). Cross-cutting themes in most of the learning areas in the syllabus include teaching on human rights, sexuality, Ubuntu, good citizenship, and social responsibility. Such themes when inculcated among learners would go a long way in assisting with coping strategies when challenges arise. Ubuntu is a guiding principle and an African philosophy that lays emphasis on humanity to others (‘I am because you are’). The word Ubuntu comes from Xhosa and Zulu languages of Southern Africa. This social justice philosophy emphasizes love, generosity, collectivism, sharing of resources for the common good, and respect for one another. It is essentially a guiding principle in the realms of societal leadership, governance, and leadership. Fundamentally, it is premised on the notions of kindness, compassion, and individuality. The curriculum becomes a tool for capacitation, empowerment, and inculcation of Ubuntu principles. Learners, who are educated on human rights and sexuality, are more likely to protect themselves from issues such as abuse. The Ubuntu philosophy can also foster collaboration, respect, and social responsibility among the learners. It is through such courses that LBC’s are empowered to deal with their unmet psychosocial support needs.

## **7.2 Teachers in the support schemes**

The teachers, who deliver the curriculum, were also revealed as a special group that could be utilized in the psychosocial support schemes of left-behind learners. Teacher support was suggested to be through lesson delivery, initiating a conducive learning environment, and through fostering positive relationships with learners.

Teachers have capacity to introduce classroom management philosophies that foster positive behavior among learners. Participants brought to perspective the concept of *loco parentis*. According to SH, “teachers at college level are trained on the concept of *loco parentis*. This means that they are the local parent and can step into the shoes of the parent.” This view suggests that the teacher is sometimes expected to play parental roles that may include emotional and physical support for learners going through challenges. Teachers in this regard take a leading role in educating the whole child as they do not concentrate not only on academic issues but also on the socio-emotional development of the learner.

### **7.3 Positive school environment**

Participants shared that when the school environment is positive, it may occupy the young minds of learners thereby minimizing on negative behaviors. In that regard, the school leadership plays a major role in cultivating a positive school environment. School psychological services representative (SPS1) shared, “...every school has its tone, the school administrators are supposed to develop the correct school tone so that learners from diverse backgrounds would be comfortable at the school.”

To achieve that end, participants, for example, TR1, TR2, SPS1, and SH1 identified key virtues that need to be nurtured in creating a positive school environment, for example, empathy, respect, working together, and discipline. In such a school environment, learners negatively affected by parental migration could easily get support. When the correct school environment is nurtured at school and develops to be a school culture, the support base for learners negatively affected by parental migration widens. “When the school has developed the correct environment, everyone has potential to support those who are down” (SPS1). The school would have a wide support base with the learners and teachers equipped with virtues such as empathy and respect.

However, participants noted that when the school environment is not positive the left-behind learners end up being negatively affected in terms of their psychosocial functioning. According to participant SPS1, “the problem at most schools is that left-behind learners are negatively type casted and vilified by teachers, school administrators, and even by their peers, they are labeled troublemakers, truant, and spoilt.” This labeling sometimes affects the learners socially and emotionally.

## **8. Discussion**

In the face of challenges associated with parental migration and compounded with the COVID-19 pandemic, the school was revealed as a potential source of support for left-behind learners. The school as an institution has capacity to define what needs to be learned and, in this regard, can teach well-being and coping strategies for learners affected by parental migration. This would be part of what Dewey (1938) described as teaching on life. Appropriate support schemes would facilitate improved psychosocial functioning among learners negatively affected by parental migration.

The school was also revealed as having potential to step into the shoes of the migrating parents. The concept of *loco parentis* shows that the teacher can step in and provide emotional and social support for learners. Social relationships are an important factor that influences well-being. This concept resembles the responsive

classroom approach in which the teacher facilitates a joyful learning environment in which learners thrive both socially and academically. Such an environment would ensure that the learners thrive socially and academically. The goal is for the school to move from concentrating only on academic subjects but to also facilitate learner well-being.

When learners are equipped with social, emotional, and academic learning skills, the whole learner is educated [28, 29]. It is important that appropriate capacity development programs be in place to professionally develop the teachers for such roles. Negative typecasting of the LBC's negatively impacts on the learners' well-being. The disruptions associated with left-behind learners among other social challenges warrant the need to adopt the concept of educating the whole learner. A socially deprived learner would not thrive academically. Thus, the goals of teaching and learning would not be met. This makes it impossible to separate learner well-being with education.

### **8.1 Educare in schools**

A school is often defined as an institution for the acquisition of knowledge in a formal way under teachers [10]. However, over the years the defining features of the school have been transformed beyond this limit as the expectations of society from it widened. More so, many began to see potential in the school that goes beyond just teaching and learning. According to Dewey [29] it is at a school that we "learn how to live," implying that the school is for the greater good for society. This view regards the school as a dynamic institution that also facilitates the adaptation process among learners. The school is transformed to become a center for both education and care for learners (Educare). Learners are capacitated through the school to cope with their changing circumstances. Educare describes a holistic approach in which education and care are equally important and inseparable [25]. Care is defined as a process of responding to needs, and according to Noddings [28] "needs do not stop at the entrance of a classroom door." The child, who comes to school with unmet needs, would still be deficient when he/she enters the classroom. It is the onus of the teacher to totally ignore such needs or to try and facilitate measures to mitigate. Addressing the psychosocial needs of the learners would also enable the teacher to pursue his/her own teaching objectives. The school environment should be supportive and be ready to take over support when need arises.

For learners left in CHH, the school would provide the much-needed care. The school steps into the roles of the absent parent and provide guidance and supervision for the LBC. The school steps in to provide socially and politically desirable skills, knowledge attributes, and skills among learners [27]. John White in response to his own question on what schools are said schools should be institutions that promote human happiness and well-being [27]. By implication, when life, happiness, and well-being are under threat, the school is expected to step in. The societal expectations of the school are not fixed as change in society is not constant. New threats and challenges to happiness, well-being, and life continue to emerge, and the school is expected to be apt to the changes and challenges. The school is also defined as a self-determining institution. That is to say: it has capacity to "define what needs to be learned and unlearned, and in what ways" [27]. Thus, the school has potential to facilitate the acquisition of skills and outcomes that it wants among its learners. This potential and capacity of the school are what this study believe is essential when support for left-behind learners is envisaged. Different avenues were scouted within

the school culture, curriculum, extra-curriculum, school leadership, and classroom management for well-being support for learners affected by parental absence due to migration.

## **9. Conclusions**

The COVID-19 pandemic yielded far-reaching ramifications on left-behind learners who were already made vulnerable by parental migration. The lack of parental protection and support exposes left-behind learners to vulnerable conditions. This, in turn, affects the educational outcomes of the left-behind learners. This, therefore, calls to the return to the philosophy of Dewey in which education goes beyond words and figures but should equip the learner with life skills. It also calls on society to embrace Ubuntu in relating the LBC. This study revealed support in the school being housed within the curriculum, the teachers, and the school environment. It is of importance that the school environment be positive and enabling for learners to thrive. When the environment is positive, and enabling support would be available to everyone. Conversely, when the environment is not conducive and characterized with negative typecasting and labeling of left-behind learners, negative outcomes would be expected. It becomes the key responsibility of the school leadership to nurture a conducive learning environment through continuous engagements. In the face of adversity, the school has potential to be a center for hope.

A widened understanding of the school is vital and relevant in view of the threats posed by globalization, parental migration, and compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper calls for going back memory lane and adopt Dewey's lenses. The school becomes a place where there is hope, as learners learn life lessons. This transformation is significant considering that most children spend three-quarters of their waking time at school. The teaching staff needs to be capacitated through professional development to effectively play their loco parentis roles in the school realm. The teacher becomes a specialist for both education and care (Educare). Such approaches will surely mitigate the unmet psychosocial needs of left-behind learners in child-headed households in contemporary times.

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## **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.


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# The Effectiveness of Foster Care Arrangements for Unaccompanied Migrant Children in Zimbabwe: A Case of Children under Foster Care in Dulibadzimu, Beitbrigde

*Mulwayini Mundau and Maxwell Chikowe*

## Abstract

The chapter examines the effectiveness of foster care arrangements for unaccompanied migrant children in Zimbabwe, with a specific focus on children in foster care in Dulibadzimu, Beitbridge. Through a qualitative research approach and an interpretive paradigm, the chapter highlights the formal and informal foster care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated migrant children that are existing as a place of safety, temporal home, community care, and as well an alternative shelter for the border town between Zimbabwe and South Africa. Furthermore, the chapter highlights the successes and possible challenges in dealing with this vulnerable group that is a product of economic migration between the two countries.

**Keywords:** children, foster care, migrant children, unaccompanied, Zimbabwe

## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of unaccompanied and separated migrant children is global, alarming, and escalating. Children on the move are widely confronted with multiple vulnerabilities and nations across the globe have a legal duty to provide social support and care. According to the UNHCR [1], 89, 3 million people around the world have been forced from their homes, and among these, 27, 1 million are refugees with over half of them being unaccompanied and separated children under the age of 18. Additionally, in 2019 there were also millions of children across the globe living outside their nuclear family environment [2].

In relation to Zimbabwe, the prevailing unfavorable socioeconomic circumstances have further made migration of children across national borders a serious challenge. In this regard, it was noted that Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) in Zimbabwe have constituted a large number of children on the move [3]. The case with Beitbridge involves an increasing number of migrant children without company and living outside the family environment. And such children are confronted with

multiple vulnerabilities such as sexual and economic exploitation, and trafficking, so their situation requires special attention.

The escalating vulnerabilities for separated children without company raise questions on the effectiveness of the relevant alternative care option which suits their scenarios. This yawning gap in social protection demands an appreciation from social workers and all practitioners in the helping professions. In order to have a better appreciation of foster care, it is necessary to have an exploration of the effectiveness of foster care in the protection of unaccompanied and separated migrant children. The provision of care and support to OVCs has long been a global mandate also for Zimbabwe and therefore are high expectations that such children should be looked after within a family environment and foster care exists as the more recommended care priority option under the six tier system. And also, the international United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children stand strongly on the placement of children without company into foster care.

In line with the preambles of the UNCRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), the constitution in Zimbabwe echoes that children should grow up in a family environment. It is the responsibility of the state to make sure that such entitlements are fulfilled and Zimbabwe has a long history of providing care and support to such children under a cherished tradition of Ubuntu. The strong tradition regards a child as everyone's child although such children belong to their nuclear families. The common adage such as "it takes the whole village to raise a child", presents the strong commitment of Zimbabwean villages to providing care and support to OVCs under various community structures. Foster care, therefore, stands as the predominant form of care in Africa and also in Zimbabwe, however much of such arrangements were informal.

Zimbabwe is confronted with the challenge of separated children without company in migration. These children are prone to facing unprecedented challenges in the face of the migration process. In particular, Beitbridge as a border district town has also received a large number of children transiting through the border. In relation to children on the move, according to International Organization for Migration (IOM) [4], foster care, or family-based care, is widely regarded as the best form of care for unaccompanied migrant children, as fewer children go missing from foster care compared to reception centers or institutions. Additionally, in relation to fostering vulnerable child migrants, IOM [4] notes that it is imperative to consider their special vulnerabilities and needs that are based on their triple characteristics of being children, being in migration, and without company of adults who know them well (their family or legal guardians).

## **2. The circumstances of unaccompanied and separated migrant children in Beitbridge**

The context of Beitbridge, being a border town makes it ideal for fostering services to shelter children who are separated through migration between Zimbabwe and South Africa whilst family tracings and reunifications will be awaited. Beitbridge is also a receiving district of unaccompanied minors coming up from high-sending districts such as Chipinge, Chimanimani, Chiredzi, Gwanda Bulawayo, and Mutasa. Apart from the above, the district is widely known for attractive commercial

activities, the illicit activities include rampant smuggling of contraband such as cigarettes and alcohol to South Africa and the importation of groceries, building materials, and many other supplies into Zimbabwe [5]. Such activities also attract high volumes of children looking for working opportunities. Concurrently the unfolding activities also make Beitbridge a risky place for children as it is highly characterized by high rates of prostitution, crime rates, and drug and substance abuse [3]. Additionally, IOM [5] noted both regular and irregular cross-border movements between Zimbabwe and South Africa for employment, trade, and commerce, seeking health services, family reunions, or illicit activities, which include trafficking in persons, smuggling of goods, and other illicit activities.

It is also imperative to state that Beitbridge is a major transit route for migrants from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who pass through Zambia or Mozambique and then Zimbabwe with the destination intention of South Africa. According to IOM [5], some migrants move from the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia, Somalia, and Tanzania, moving from Zambia or Malawi and passing through the same Beitbridge district in Zimbabwe. It was estimated that 30–40% of the travelers traveling to South Africa, traverse through this route and hence it is estimated that nearly 6000 travelers use this route on a peak day when the Beitbridge border post is fully operational [5]. The nature of Beitbridge being both a transit, receiving, and destination district for unaccompanied and separated minors makes it a town of migrant children who have attempted to cross the border and failed and also for those who have been deported from South Africa. Such children are found stranded, and resultantly find shelter in foster care centers. This makes it more of an area of focus in relation to child protection and therefore, justifies the importance of foster care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated migrated children.

### **3. Fostering services and legislation**

Fostering unaccompanied and separated migrant children is both a legal and moral responsibility. It is an essential form of alternative care option for OVCs across the globe. The UNCRC and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children stand strongly on the placement of children without company into foster care homes. In line with the preambles of the UNCRC and the ACRWC, the constitution in Zimbabwe places a premium on children to grow up in a family environment [6]. In such scenarios, the foster care option is the recommended immediate safety net for children with unclear immediate family status.

In this regard, Zimbabwe's Orphan Care policy (1999), introduced a six-tier system and considers foster care as a fourth priority in the protection of children outside the family environment, with biological family being the first priority followed by extended family then community care, foster care, adoption and institutionalization as the sixth option and a last resort which should be avoided. These environments should be given consideration in their priority order. Despite the significant investments and efforts for years to increase the demand and promote foster care as an ideal form of alternative care, it is associated with low uptake and institutionalization has maintained a grip over foster care for over 20 years after the adoption of the six-tier system in 1999. The study agrees with the definition of the six-tier system as defined by the National Orphan Care policy (1999). The six-tier care environments should be

adopted in their priority order, with the first being the best and the sixth being the last resort and to be avoided.

#### **4. Theoretical framework: fostering and children in need assessment framework**

The Children in Need Assessment Framework is an established systematic approach to the process of gathering information about children who may be in need and their families [7]. The assessment framework captures the three main pillars such as family and environmental factors, parental capacity, and children's developmental needs. The needs are looked at as interrelated parts that depend on each other and are critically essential for child development [7]. This framework was developed from the functionalist theory which regards the family as an equally essential system. This framework recognizes that individual needs are unique and therefore interventions should be individually tailored rather than having a universal care plan for OVCs. And also vulnerabilities varies across different age group and circumstance, and also much of them stretch through adult life. Sabates-Wheeler [8], rightly argued that vulnerabilities facing children differ from those of adults and there are child-specific vulnerabilities derived from asymmetrical power relations and inequalities in relation to resources, responsibilities, opportunities, voice, rights, and constraints. In the same view, these scholars further indicated that there are child-intensified vulnerabilities, which refer to vulnerabilities that may affect whole populations, such as migration, famine, or undernutrition, but have effects that are more damaging for children than adults.

In relation to the fostering of unaccompanied and separated migrant children, this model gives a view of how foster care arrangements effectively respond to the safeguarding and protection needs of these children. This assessment model is also essential to social work professionals working with families to inform their decision-making and foster parents in identifying the individual needs of each child. According to Turney et al. [7], studies indicate that good assessment is grounded in a thorough understanding of the child and family's situation, needs, and strengths, and to gain this knowledge, practitioners need to work directly with the child and their family. However, it needs to be supported by appropriate practice and research-based knowledge and tools to support practice [7]. The authors further state that keeping the child or young person 'in view' is fundamental to good assessment, and failure to do so can have severe consequences, as analyses of serious case reviews have consistently demonstrated. This provides essential guidelines in identifying the effectiveness of foster care in the protection of these children such that the effectiveness can be judged in relation to this framework.

Using this Children in Need Assessment Framework in the case of Beitbridge is likely to highlight multiple vulnerabilities that these children are likely to encounter. These may include among others, sexual and economic exploitation, and trafficking. Such proceeding circumstances have posed serious problems and exacerbated risky situations for such minors. The escalating vulnerabilities for these children question the effectiveness of the relevant alternative care option which suits their scenarios. This yawning gap in social protection demands appreciation from social workers. In order to have a better appreciation of foster care, it is necessary to have an exploration of the foster care arrangements in Beitbridge and appreciate their effectiveness in safeguarding and protecting this vulnerable group of children.

## **5. Methodology**

In an endeavor to examine the effectiveness of foster care arrangements for unaccompanied children in the Beitbridge District of Zimbabwe, a qualitative research approach and an interpretivist paradigm were adopted. In this study, an in-depth interview guide and a Focus group discussion guide, and a semi-structured Key informant interview guide were used. The adopted research approach and paradigm gave the researchers the freedom to conveniently establish the sample size which they could effectively handle in the context of constrained time and financial resources. The researchers were convinced that 6 Focus group discussions with children, 25 participants for in-depth interviews with foster care parents and caregivers that were purposively drawn from various foster care homes, and 6 key informants would constitute a significant population for the study. Key informants for this study were members of the District Child Protection Committee that were drawn from the Department of Social Welfare (Renamed Department of Social Development) Child Protection Society, Family Support Trust, International Committee of the Red Cross, International Organization for Migration, and the Immigration department.

## **6. Results**

This section of the chapter presents the research findings and the discussion thereof. These are centered on the foster care arrangements in Beitbridge, services available for unaccompanied and separated migrant children under foster and the effectiveness of foster care in the protection of unaccompanied and separated migrant children.

### **6.1 Foster care arrangements in Beitbridge**

This study had a specific objective of identifying foster care arrangements for unaccompanied migrant children in Dulibadzimu, Beitbridge. This study noted that there are formal and informal foster care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated migrant children in Beitbridge. Some of the foster care arrangements are formal and recognized by the Department of Social Development (DSD) while others are informal and unrecognized.

#### *6.1.1 Informal foster care*

The study established that there are informal foster care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated migrant children in Beitbridge. In this type of foster community care, DSD is the main actor involved in the placement of child under foster care. Informal foster care identified in this study included kinship and community care whereby migrant children identified without an immediate family status are looked after by relatives, churchmates, and local community leaders traced and identified in Beitbridge, whilst waiting for a permanent solution. The findings capture informal foster care as also pre-stage to formal foster care, as such formal care initially starts as informal arrangements of foster care. In the process, most of the foster parents indicated that they registered after they felt the joy of bonding and blending with migrant children as theirs. From the findings, the cases of unaccompanied and separated children have involved children placed in foster care after

attempting to cross the border and failed. One of the foster care parents from the in-depth interviews said,

*“I’m staying with 2 children, the children were received from South Africa, and volunteered to look after them, and these children are also our church mates”.*

The arrangement identified also involved unaccompanied and separated migrant children being looked after by community volunteers such as Community Case Care workers, local leaders such as councilors, and also Church leaders. The arrangements are widely popular as foster care in Dulibadzimu. One of the caregivers from the in-depth interviews said,

*“I volunteered to look after a child after I felt that there is a need, the child was roaming around my house and I felt pity as the child indicated that she couldn’t find her parents in South Africa, she decided to come back”.*

This indicated that migrant children before placement under foster care were identified whilst stranded and roaming on the streets. In addition, many of the children under informal foster care were registered as having biological families in South Africa and untraceable relatives in Zimbabwe. This indicates that children from unstable families are at risk of separation from caregivers and migrate unaccompanied across the national border. The vulnerabilities to which unaccompanied and separated migrant children are exposed motivate the community volunteers to take such children and look after them. This was also echoed by one of the in-depth interview participants, who said,

*“I picked the child when he was roaming in the streets and I felt so pity, he looked stranded and reported that he does not know the whereabouts of his parents, he was dumped by omalaicha (transporters) at the border, I decided to look after the child”.*

From the extract, it can be noted that the motivation behind fostering unaccompanied and separated migrant children in informal care is rooted in some values of love, peace, and caring, in a society in which some caregivers have a positive desire for the betterment of children’s lives. Another caregiver from the in-depth interviews confirmed that,

*“Sometimes, a child can be identified as unaccompanied and placed under foster through community and then the case will be reported after the child has been placed under foster care.”*

The findings indicate that some caregivers are also motivated towards fostering non-relatives children as long they share some cultural values and language. Venda people prefer fostering a child speaking Venda, the same also applies to Shona and Ndebele people in Beitbridge. The issue of totem and religious beliefs are also behind the motivation to foster unaccompanied and separated children. Additionally, the study further noted that the nature of Beitbridge being a multi-cultural and also multi-lingual border town makes it a resource for fostering migrant children as they emerge from diverse cultural backgrounds with different languages. The town comprised people speaking different languages such as Venda, Shona, Ndebele, English,



Migrant children placed under informal foster care arrangements also experience love and care from unregistered caregivers. The findings noted that some children have lost bonding connection with their biological parents abroad and tend to develop strong bonds and healthy relationships with their foster caregivers such that they feel that they prefer staying with caregivers their entire life. One of the children that participated in the focus group discussions reported that,

*“I see my foster parent as my real mother as she picked me when I had nowhere to go. I attempted crossing over to South Africa and failed and mom took me to stay with her, this is my real mother, with regard to my biological mother in South Africa, I do not even know her number”*

Apart from the above, the findings also indicated that some children under informal foster care are subjected to unsafe environments and risky situations such as forced labor. Children raised issues such as forced labor, sexual exploitation, and emotional and physical abuse. This was also echoed by a key informant from DSD, “cases of females minors sexually abused under foster care have been reported and also the informal foster care arrangement are at most not known and undocumented by DSD. This suggests that informal foster care arrangements in Beitbridge also expose children to risky situations and unsafe environments characterized by multiple forms of abuse despite being a resource to shelter unaccompanied and separated migrant children.

#### *6.1.2 Formal foster care*

The study findings also show that formal foster care is widely recognized by law and less adopted by the community. It is mostly considered an option after family tracings would have failed or in cases whereby the child is unwilling to be reunified with extended family or under community care. The findings from this study also noted that in Dulibadzimu, Beitbridge, formal foster care is a legal duty for social workers under the Department of Social Development and it is also a specific process with seven main stages. The first stage involves the identification and assessment of unaccompanied migrant child in need of foster care by a social worker, the child can be identified inside border area, or in South Africa by the immigration department or police and then referred to DSD for further assistance. Secondly, the child is placed in a place of safety at Beitbridge reception center (popularly known as IOM Centre) where they are not supposed to stay for more than 7 days without a court order. The third stage then involves the identification of a registered foster parent, a parent can be identified from the DSD register of foster care parents. Afterward assessments of foster the parent will follow as the next stage, looking at the suitability of the environment to the needs of the child. And then they will be an application of court order for placement of a child under foster care, prepared by a social worker writing to the high court. They will be an implementation of a court order through the placement of the child under foster care, this placement comes with an expiry date but can be extended in the event that it expired without a permanent in place. And finally case follow-ups by social work and they should be at least three within a year period.

In the study, it was also noted that the assessments in formal foster care capture critical issues relating to safeguarding and protection of the child such as the needs of the child and also parental capacity of the foster parent. It also captures the child's

developmental needs and capacity to adapt to the environment. This is in agreement with the Children in Need Theoretical Framework which also informed this study that, assessments should look at three main factors such as domains of the children's developmental needs, parenting capacity, and family and environmental factors.

Children under formal foster care are largely known, and recognized by DSD. One of the in-depth interview participants said,

*“For me to be a foster parent, I started by going to the Department of Social Development, police services took my fingerprints and the social worker did my home assessments, that’s when I qualified to be a foster parent. At first, I first I used to take children without the Department’s knowledge and sometimes, the Department would bring children until I had the desire to register.”*

This was echoed by another interviewee who said that *“the Probation officer is the one who gave us children for fostering, and at most I can be given a child together with a court order or I sign an affidavit form”* This suggests that foster care involves the registration of a foster parent by the Department of social development and followed by the placement of a child under a foster parent through a court order. From the above probation officer carry out the duties. This agrees with the Children’s Act [56.01] which characterizes foster care as involving situations where children are placed by a competent authority, through a court order.

The findings also show that Foster parents received training and support from the government and partners, in order for them to provide quality care to migrant children. The forms of support they received targeted foster parents and also children there are fostering, this included home visits, foster care packages, and access to free health and education services. In this regard, one in-depth interview participant reported that,

*“from our training, we learned that formal foster care involves registration of foster parent through the department of social development and placement of a child under foster care by a probation officer through a court order”*

Such arrangements identified are in line with the provisions in the country’s Children’s Act [Chapter 5:06] [9], which states that foster parents should be selected, qualified, approved, and supervised for providing such care. However, one of the foster parents indicated that the training content does not equip them with relevant knowledge of how they should respond to multiple challenges faced in fostering unaccompanied and separated migrant children such as administering corporal punishment and discipline to the child. This was also echoed by all the key informants indicating that such training often does not cover critical issues on how to administer corporal punishment for such children.

## **6.2 Findings on circumstances of unaccompanied and separated migrant children under foster care**

The findings of the study show that children in informal foster and formal foster require special attention. Participants in this study expressed that children under informal foster care were reported to be more vulnerable than children in formal foster care arrangements. In addition, the circumstances of unaccompanied and separated migrant children living under both types of foster care are not similar, as

children under informal foster care were reported to be a high chance of illegal adoption, sexual exploitation, and forced labor. Whilst children under formal foster care are reported to be under better circumstances as their living arrangements are closely monitored by state agencies and partners. In contrast, it was also noted that children under informal foster care have funny and friendlier relationships with their caregivers as compared to children under formal care where many of the participants from the in-depth interviews expressed that *“you even fear to laugh or discipline the child, everything is very formal”*. Notwithstanding that 90% of the key informants indicated that children under formal foster care have better access to child protective services than those under informal foster care.

### **6.3 Services available for unaccompanied and separated migrant children in foster**

The study noted there are specific services available to unaccompanied and separated migrant Children under foster care such as psychosocial support, mental health support, foster care packages, free educational and free health service.

#### *6.3.1 Foster care settling packages*

The findings from the study noted that foster care settling packages are part of the once-off package available for children being placed and the package consists of \$75 USD, which caters to hygiene and dignity kits for the child. One in-depth interview participant said, *“there are organizations that support foster families with \$75, and such an amount compliments the support needed for the child.”*

It was also noted that the foster care settling packages were reported to be essential in supporting the reintegration of unaccompanied and separated migrant children into the community. In relation to the number of foster parents accessing such packages, the findings noted 60% of the foster care parents indicated that they have not yet received the packages but they just heard about them. The other 40% of the foster parents who received the packages raised complaints that such packages are given only once off packages and cannot effectively respond to the basic needs of children alone, but rather they will be a need to complement such services. The majority of the participant confirmed that foster care settling packages complement the effort of foster families in looking after fostered children.

#### *6.3.2 Free educational support*

The findings also show that children under foster care lose many years of schooling whilst in migration. From this study, it was noted that children who have dropped out of school constitute a large number of children under foster care with a total of six children enrolled in primary schools and then three secondary-going children. The foster care arrangement for unaccompanied and separated migrant children under foster care allows such children to be enrolled back in school. There are educational support services to support in circumstances where the foster parent cannot afford school fees. From these services the findings noted that such children are entitled to free education which covers school fees and uniforms through Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) and public assistance programs, it was indicated that children under foster care are a first priority to such services. One of the in-depth interviewees reported that *“The government meets educationally related expenses such as school fees and uniforms, but there is low uptake of such services due to children’s*

*unwillingness to return back to school*". This extract indicates that children under foster care have access to specific services such as free education and this is consistent with what was identified by Chibwana [6] that the children go to public schools and they rely on either BEAM or school fees paid by the government. Such services are stipulated in the social welfare assistance Act and are largely relevant.

### *6.3.3 Free health services*

From interviews with foster parents, it was noted that children under foster care are entitled to free health services through Assisted Medical Treatment Orders (AMTO). One of the foster care parents in the in-depth interviews said, *"With regards to health services, once a child gets sick, that is not an issue, we simply apply for the AMTO at the Department of Social Development, we are likely to be assisted for free"* In line with the foster parent's assertion, one child in the focus group discussions echoed that, *on one occasion, I got sick, I went to the hospital with my foster mother and she confirmed that social welfare is responsible for payment of such a service.*

The extracts indicate that foster families also depend on free services provided by the government to access health. On the other side, foster parents also highlighted accessing health services is a challenge for unaccompanied and separated migrant children under foster care as AMTO was said not to cover the essential medication and pills, at most the medication that can be accessed through AMTO is often unavailable in local clinics.

The findings also show that some foster families have the financial capacity to afford health services for unaccompanied and separated migrant children under foster care. From this study, it was also noted that there are foster families which afford health bills for children under foster care at their own cost. One of the interviewees said, *"I consider the child I have as mine and I have the capacity to meet the required bills just like what I do with my biological children under my parental care"*. This indicates variations in the parental capacities of foster parents. Indicating that foster care parents have different parental capacity, some depends on state resources whilst some compliments were state services cannot reach.

The findings therefore suggest that foster homes have different capacities and offer different quality of life to children depending on the household income, some households depend on public assistance whilst some can sustain within their means to look after the child under foster care. This feeds well with what was noted by Chibwana [6] that, some foster families procure private medical facilities therefore they would not need the AMTOs it is well within their means to take care of the health needs of the fostered child. Henceforth foster care's responses to basic child protection needs vary from household to household, some families can afford to provide for the child whilst some families depends on public assistance.

### *6.3.4 Public assistance*

The study further noted that families fostering children also have a first priority in public programs and also the Drought Relief Programmes (DRP). Such provisions were identified as complimentary as fostering unaccompanied and separated migrant children is still a voluntary act than a well-paid activity. In support of this one of the in-depth interviews, participants said, *"Sometimes we are given rice and a bag of mealies through the drought relief program, we are not left behind, the Department of social development has promised us to receive a portion."*

From the findings, it can be noted that nutritional provision comes from both foster care households and also government and its partners. The quality of nutrition in foster homes varies from household to household depending on the household's capabilities. The findings of 80% of the children indicated that they do not access balanced nutrition whilst under foster care and at most they eat twice a day, whilst the other 20% indicated that they access food at any given time under foster care. The nutritional support provided does not fully suit children, particularly those under the age of 10 who demands special meals such as porridge and other supplementary meals recommended for children.

#### **6.4 Foster care arrangements for unaccompanied children from the Children in Need Assessment Framework's lens**

At the heart of the triple focused Children in Need Assessment Framework's principles of family and environmental factors, parental capacity and children's developmental needs is the safeguarding and promotion of the child's welfare. The framework provides a holistic and interrelated view of the parts that are critical to a child's development. In relation to the study at hand, this framework was of critical relevance in bringing out what exactly to focus on when exploring these foster care arrangements for unaccompanied and migrant children's welfare needs.

It is imperative to highlight that the framework promotes the use of relationships with other assessment processes and tools in the assessment of the child's needs. In this regard, the study relied on various sources to obtain a clear understanding of the inter-relationship between a child's needs, parents' capacities, and the impact of family and environmental factors according to the United Kingdom's Department of Health [10]. For the purposes of this study, information was sourced from foster parents, caregivers as well as key informants that also included key government departments like the DSD.

In line with this framework, the dire need situation of these children has been made clear. The various forms of care that children are exposed to are likely to affect them either positively or negatively. The study's findings show that there are two common forms of care in Beitbridge and these are informal and formal care systems. Within the context of the Children in Need Assessment Framework, the informal care system is likely to expose children's various developmental needs, parental capacity as well as family and environmental factors.

Furthermore, the framework provides the linkages between the child welfare providers. In this regard, there are collaborative efforts between the foster care homes and the DSD (Public Assistance program), Ministry of Health (providing AMTOs), Ministry of Education (BEAM program), and other private organizations that are committed to the provision of child welfare services. However, the findings point to the shortage of resources and failure to attend to special needs like for those below the age of 10 years. There is therefore a need to broaden the levels of collaboration in order to cater to all the children's needs.

The study is therefore of great significance in highlighting the multidimensional needs for children's development. It is, therefore, critical for the Zimbabwean government to address the emergency of informal care systems for unaccompanied and migrant children in Beitbridge and all other districts with the same challenges. In addition, the study also highlights the inadequacy of services provided to these children. It is therefore imperative for the country to ensure the provision of all the

basic needs that contribute to a child's holistic development in collaboration with all critical stakeholders in the child welfare sector.

## **7. Conclusion**

In summation, there are formal and informal foster care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated migrant children. The arrangement in Beitbridge involved children placed under foster care as a temporal arrangement whilst waiting for family tracing outside Beitbridge and in some scenarios involved children being fostered by extended families, local leaders, and churchmates. From the arrangement, it was established that foster parents prefer to foster children with whom they share similar totem, church, and languages. This is well in line with existing literature that, most of the urbanites who foster children are not bound by the traditional beliefs which are inhibitive to the concept of foster care [6]. Foster care arrangements differ extensively in the quality of care they offer to children. The foster care arrangements depend on government-sponsored services and also on their own resources to look after the children there are fostering. From the services it was noted that foster families that depend on state provisions are compromised on the quality of care they offer to unaccompanied and separated migrant children, whilst foster families that depend on their own provide better quality care to fostered children. The study also finds out that services around foster care arrangements are fragmented, less coordinated, and undocumented, this tends to make foster care unaccountable and compromise the quality of care for children in foster care.

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## **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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*Edited by Teresa Silva*

This book debates the high impact modern societies have on the way we raise children. Although problems such as family dysfunction, work–family imbalance, and migration due to war, violence, and poverty are not new, their consequences for children’s well-being and mental health are aggravated by the lack of effective social support networks affecting many children and families living in contemporaneous urban areas. The proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” is as valid now as it was in the early history of less complex communities. However, extended families and the social environment of villages have been substituted by a system of welfare and childcare institutions that, in many cases, fail to provide the appropriate care, education, and support the children need. Job-demanding competitive societies, where career achievement and wealth become the definition of success, force parents to the duality of choosing between family and career and depending on others to parent their children. Likewise, social inequality compels many parents to work in never-ending shifts that add to the hours they spend commuting to their workplaces. Sometimes, parents are forced to migrate, leaving their children behind. Children learn to survive in the absence of their parents and to deal with small or inexistent parental emotional investment. The parent-child relationship and attachment necessities are impacted in ways that will affect children for the rest of their lives. Alternatively, migrant children accompanying their parents to a new host country may feel the shock of a normative society with cultural values different from the ones they left behind. Parenting behaviour and style may then be considered inappropriate, challenging parents’ ability to educate and pass their values to the offspring.

This book is an academic reflection on these controversies.

*Katherine K.M. Stavropoulos,  
Education and Human Development Series Editor*

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