Chapter 4
Social Welfare Issues in Childhood:
The Botswana Experience

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ABSTRACT

Children around the globe are confronted with numerous social welfare issues that adversely affect their wellbeing. These issues differ across countries and regions. This chapter explores childhood social welfare issues in Botswana, illuminating the ideological differences between traditional and more contemporary conceptualizations of childhood. Because children's issues are currently so complex, this chapter focuses primarily on HIV and AIDS-related orphanhood, alcohol and substance abuse, and traumatic events in the lives of the children. Problems in the lives of children in Botswana are identified, related opportunities are discussed, and recommendations made. The chapter demonstrates, among other things, that a number of commendable efforts (at practice, policy, and research levels) have been undertaken by stakeholders to address social welfare issues in childhood: however, a lot more still needs to be done to improve the quality of life among Botswana's most vulnerable children. Therefore, the chapter concludes by highlighting recommendations for research, practice, and policy.

INTRODUCTION

Children in Botswana, like their counterparts in many countries, are confronted with a number of social welfare issues. The issues are so diverse and multifaceted that they cannot be analysed adequately in one chapter. Therefore, this chapter focuses on HIV and AIDS-related orphanhood, substance abuse, and

traumatic events in the lives of the children in Botswana. The primary focus is on orphanhood because many parents have died in Botswana, especially related to the HIV and AIDS pandemic, leaving behind orphans of tender age who still need care and support. It is not unusual for a child in Botswana to lose one or more caregivers, after losing parents, as this is the extent of the pandemic in the southern region of Africa. Existing literature shows that although some orphans exhibit resilience and are able to cope adequately with the parental loss (Ginsburg, 2014, 2015), there are many who face enormous challenges that can adversely affect their well-being (e.g., Doyle & Perlman, 2012; Perlman & Doyle, 2012). Consequently, the Government and other stakeholders have put in place various programmes to address the complex and multifaceted needs and challenges of orphans. Despite these programmes, there are still many orphans who do not derive maximum benefit from such programmes; hence, there is a need for improvement to ensure that orphans' wellbeing is adequately addressed.

The interconnected areas of trauma and substance abuse are selected as second and third areas of focus here, because orphaned children in Botswana are exposed to such high levels of trauma (Malinga & Ntshwarang, 2011), and because alcohol and substance abuse by children and young people is a huge problem in Botswana (UNICEF, 2012). However, approaches, programmes, and strategies to mitigate the problem are not comprehensive, and existing services tend to be fragmented. Consequently, the unique challenges faced by traumatised children and youth who abuse alcohol and substances are not adequately addressed.

The purpose of this chapter is threefold: First, it highlights some of the factors that are associated with the above three social welfare issues in Botswana; second, it assesses existing strategies (both formal and informal) that are meant to address the issues, as well as challenges in service delivery; and, third, the chapter highlights several recommendations that could go a long way to ensuring that the above-mentioned social welfare issues confronting children are either prevented or adequately addressed. The structure of this chapter is organised around these aims and provides a description of the methodology and theoretical framework used here for examining the lives of orphans in Botswana. These issues are explicated in the following major sections of the chapter: (1) brief contextual information about child social welfare issues internationally, regionally and nationally; (2) childhood issues in Botswana, (3) solutions and recommendations, and (4) future research directions regarding childhood issues in Botswana. These four sections are followed by a summary of the most salient points of the chapter as well as conclusions.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Brief background information about child social welfare globally, regionally and nationally is crucial in order for readers to appreciate some of the issues discussed in this chapter. Concern about child welfare issues at an internationally level started in the 19th century as a result of observations that some children's rights (particularly the rights of those who were victims of world war II) were violated. Consequently, the UN fund for urgency for the children was created in 1947, which became UNICEF. At its inception, UNICEF focused on assisting (in the areas of education, health, and access to water and food) largely European child victims of WW2, but later, its mandate was extended to the whole world (Children's Rights History, n.d.). Between 1947 and 1989, there were various developments that were meant to address child welfare issues at an international level. In 1989, the convention on the rights of the child was adopted and later ratified by almost all countries (except two). The CRC is a comprehensive human rights instrument that covers all aspects of children's lives and their development into adulthood.

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