

12TH WORLD PEDIATRIC CONGRESS

July 22-23, 2019 Melbourne, Australia

Child neglect in Botswana: A hidden epidemic

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Neglected children in Botswana have received considerable attention in the past three decades owing to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country. The neglected children who received the most attention were the orphan and vulnerable children (OVC) which led to the child protection system being framed by the OVC thesis. This has led to neglect hardly studied among the general population of children. Leading to needs of neglected non OVC children been grossly overlooked. Additionally, neglect is usually studied with other forms of child maltreatment as it often co-occurs with them. This has led to neglect epidemic being unclear and difficult to mitigate. The main challenges facing Botswana include gathering accurate child neglect empirical data to aid child protection policy practice. Therefore, there is an urgent need for accurate data on child neglect to better inform child protection policy and practice. Using existing data, this study seeks to understand the extent of child neglect in Old Naledi, Gaborone. The study utilised secondary data sources from Botswana Social Services records in Old Naledi, Gaborone to establish the extent of child neglect and inform the prospective intervention study. The data was categories according to four types of child neglect namely; physical, emotional, educational and medical neglect and further characterised according to demographic data. The findings show a number out of school children some of which have never being enrolled in school, a significant number of children who play on the streets at night until hours of the morning or when the police disperse them, children with no birth certificates, parents who have no identity cards and therefore their children cannot access government services, excessive alcohol use by some parents, low socioeconomic status of the residents, young mothers who have neglectful behaviour towards their children, alcohol and substance use by children, children left to self-care. The findings from this study add to existing empirical data as well as have immediate implications for strengthening child protection system in Botswana.

Biography

Nankie Ramabu completed her PhD in Health and Community Studies from Leeds Beckett University. She is an independent researcher in Botswana communities focusing on designing interventions to address child abuse. She has published 6 papers in reputed journals and currently running a trust that sets up libraries in Botswana rural communities.

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