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## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH USE OF INDIGENOUS PARENTING PRACTICES ON CHILD DISCIPLINE

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### ABSTRACT

*In Zimbabwe, like elsewhere in the world, the issue of child discipline remains a grey area in parenting. The major debate revolves around what constitute better parenting styles between traditional and modern child nurturing systems. The major focus was to investigate the opportunities and challenges of indigenous parenting practices on child discipline among BaTonga speaking in Binga District, Zimbabwe. The study was inspired by the current emotional debates regarding the issue of parenting and child discipline in Zimbabwe and beyond. The general observation by the researchers was that, many synopses on parenting and child discipline have been written focusing on contemporary child protection protocols without attempting to assess the efficacy of indigenous systems in handling child disciplinary. Inspired by Afrocentric views, the study attempted to verify the usefulness and challenges of indigenous parenting methods on child discipline in modern day society. Qualitative design was used to collect data from the participants. On opportunities, participants lauded the efficacy of indigenous methods on child discipline for its ability to; instil better and responsibility in children and creation of sound and inclusive child protection policies. On other side, it was raised that indigenous parenting practices are associated with; child abuse issues, fail to meet human rights demands, and had long term impact on child development in form of personalities. The study recommended for inclusive child discipline debate emanating from public debates and further research in the area.*

**KEY TERMS:** opportunities, challenges, indigenous parenting, child discipline, Zimbabwe

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## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In traditional Zimbabwe, families constituted an expansive web of network through which children were raised and discipline instilled with intergenerational values of the society (Chemhuru, 2015). While extended families are still visible in Zimbabwe's rural areas (Hanzi, 2006); the use of indigenous parenting practices is gradually fading. This is being aggravated by the advent of global village within the broad spectrum of political, economic, technological and cultural integration in the society which had ushered new forms of parenting practices. As argued by several scholars (e.g. Gudyanga et al., 2014; Ndofirepi, 2011); the role of parents in child rearing has drastically shifted with children getting much knowledge on so called 'international child rights.' Like elsewhere across the globe, Zimbabwe is facing multiplicity of challenges in coming up with alternative and appropriate methods to deal with child indiscipline related issues. The country's plausible commitment to international and regional child rights protocols such as United Nations of the Rights of Children (UNRC) and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children (ACRWC) has made the country face a daunting task in allowing parents to follow their indigenous methods of child discipline.

Several scholars like (Gudyanga et al, 2014; Mugabe and Maphosa, 2013) believe that the major challenge facing Zimbabwean societies is failure to reconcile between international and local child protection frameworks. Within indigenous realms, there is a call for children to be anchor players in preserving African heritage and values. Today, the debate on child discipline remains inconclusive as both key child protection players and parents have different expectations from children. For example, Bukaliya and Mapuranga (2015) found out that parents feel their role in child discipline has substantially diminished and had made children lose their family values. Against this background, this paper argues that there is a need to introspect the perceived opportunities and challenges associated with indigenous parenting practices.

## LITERATURE REVIEW ON INDIGENOUS PARENTING AND CHILD DISCIPLINE

While the criticism leveled against indigenous parenting practices and its relationship with child disciplinary issues are abound (Idu & Olugbade, 2011); the utilization of these practice in child nurturing present consortium of opportunities which can be useful in modern day child nurturing. Scholars (e.g. Knauer et al., 2018; Orowolo, 2010;) argue that disregarding traditional systems in negotiating child rights across the globe is first step in the creation of false front in ensuring that children are well socialized and nurtured. Several scholars (e.g. Asante, 2002; Dastile, 2013) entertained, in their arguments that, African society has been culturally and intellectually dislocated in terms of their history, culture and identity. The same authors encourage for the clarion call to reconsider the reciprocal benefits of indigenous parenting practices, of which child discipline is one of them. Knauer et al (2018)'s study among indigenous and non-indigenous Mexican established that indigenous parenting practices were more stimulating than non-indigenous practices. In a famous article titled 'bring our tradition home' paying particular homage to Aboriginal parenting practices, BC Aboriginal Childcare Society (2010) outlines the fundamentals basics which can be inculcated in children using indigenous parenting practices. The key virtues in this articulation, were the following virtues which result after children had passed through cultural metamorphosis processes; love, belonging, humility, respect, honouring, courage, wisdom, generosity and celebrations. Arguing in European context, Crow and Peterson (2002) reflect that cultural recovery is best way to reclaim modern youth who are at risk and improve child rearing practices.

Kanu (2007) argues that the unappreciative beliefs on efficacy of indigenous parenting practices are much advanced by colonial peddlers who want to continue to put African realities into perpetuating the mental servitude and pacification of mental thinking. Be that it may, indigenous parenting methods on child discipline are explicitly lauded for its approach in trying to demystify the devaluation of African strengths on child rearing by colonial governments. The studies by (Asante, 2002; Dastille, 2013; Ndofirepi, 2011) gives the credence on African child nurturing by its ability to encourage African society to re-appropriate and reclaim the discrediting of African indigenous parenting practices in enhancing the cognitive, social and cultural skills of children and re-assuring the continued existence of African community identity. While these observations invite continued wars on the colonial issues, the use indigenous parenting practices are believed provide opportunities for societies to instill children with disciplinary disposition which reflect the value of society and people residing in it.

On other hand, Devi (2014) argues that punitive and restrictive parenting practices on child discipline relied on use of strict rules and regulations which undermined children's freedom of expression. In his submission, the same author posits that children were to be seen and not heard. Whilst the author accepts the collaborative role of family members in giving advice to children, the traditional parents did not worry about building children's self-esteem and emotional freedom. In contrast, Muzingili (2018) argues that, in indigenous parenting practices, the use of harsh child disciplinary measures was compensatory with age and gender. Whilst appreciating the shortcomings of indigenous parenting practices on child discipline, parents were very sensitive and conscious to any form of disciplinary response. The fundamental but equally disquieting questions which need to be answered by everyone are; what is happening and where are we going in terms of child discipline; how effective were/are

traditional mechanisms on child discipline and what evidence exist on the efficacy of both indigenous and modern parenting styles on child discipline to choose the best course of action. Perhaps, modern parenting styles erroneously present indigenous parenting practices on negative connotations (Kudenga, 2015).

Various laboratory studies (see for example; Cohen et al, 2004; Sege & Siegel, 2018) have demonstrated that indigenous practices such as physical punishment and emotional neglect have negative impact on mental, physical and neurological development of child. The authors above observed that children who have not subjected to physical pain have better brain development than those have faced physical punishment. Although this issue remains contentious, ardent critics of indigenous parenting methods such as authoritative and neglect are believed to have a deleterious effect on child development. Shevtsova (2016) argues that physical punishment such as spanking/slapping, use of belts and cane, among others may result in injuries, death or internal damages to body tissues. On other hand, these methods have a long-term impact on personality development in children (see Freud, 1966). Irfan and Cowburn (2004)'s study among British Pakistani community, established that, 72% of parents who experienced physical punishment at early age still perceived physical punishment as an appropriate in disciplining children. Premised upon above observations, Levi (n.d) strongly revile physical punishment and calls for substituting it with serene child disciplinary methods such as; disproving facial expression, sarcasm and oral reprimand. However, the current study argues that, no clear or established statistical relationship between the frequency of using corporal punishment and indigenous parenting practices is in existence.

## METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Considering the multiple streams of understanding traditional parental practices and child discipline, the study used qualitative design. Therefore, the use of qualitative research design enabled the researcher to avoid rigid frameworks in understanding parenting practices together with challenges and opportunities associated with these indigenous methods in dealing with child disciplinary issues. The study was conducted in Binga district, Zimbabwe, Ward 1. Researchers' prior knowledge to the community reveal that Tonga Speaking people in Binga Ward 1, people still perform traditional rituals such as rain making, traditional spirit, beliefs in importance of natural features such as trees and rivers; and consultation with medium spirit on certain issues of the society. Based on these observations, the researchers chose Ward 1 on the assumption that they resemble the true characteristics of the tribe under inquiry.

In this study, the target population to whom the study collected data is BaTonga speaking people in Ward 1. Based on 2012 census, Ward 1 in Binga had 3678 people. Of these, there are 1733 males and 1945 females. The study primarily targeted females and males aged between 22 and 90 years who have rich experience of parenthood. As a result, 14 parents were selected to illuminate opportunities and problems emanating from applying indigenous parenting practices on child discipline. The study is also selected 5 Key Informants (KI) from local schools, child protection nongovernmental organisations and government ministries who work with children and families. The researchers conducted 14 in-depth interviews by employing in-depth interview guide. The researchers further cemented the data collection methods by conducting 5 key informants' interviews using open ended interview guide with expert from education, Non-Governmental Organisations and other government ministries.

To ensure the safety of the researcher, the research sought the clearance for community entry. The letter seeking permission was presented to District Administrator (DA), clarifying the purpose and objectives of the study. The letter was presented to Chiefs, Wards Councils, Village Kraal heads and research participants. The researchers designed consent form for the participants and these were translated into Tonga for easy understanding among the participants. Confidentiality and anonymity of participant's information and their names was exercised in this study. Research instruments did not contain the names of participants and Pseudo names were used during data presentation. This is because, the issues of cultural or traditional practices which the participants need to be protected and divulged in public.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

During data collection, majority of participants saw it beneficial for children to be raised using indigenous parenting practices.

### **Opportunities indigenous parenting methods on child discipline**

Both key informants and parents agreed that indigenous parenting practices on child discipline. During data collection, participants perceived indigenous disciplinary methods to be effective in dealing with challenges of child indiscipline in today's society.

### Improved discipline among children

The study findings established that indigenous parenting practice on child discipline were important in improving child discipline. Some parents noted that, in traditional society, children were well behaved and even parents were proud of their children's behaviour. The following were some of utterances from parents:

*It shapes good behavioural attitudes to children and they remain focused and they will be able to know what is good and what is wrong.*

*With indigenous parenting practices, the child will be disciplined by exhibiting good behaviour by reducing crimes or deviant behaviour which are being caused by irresponsible children*

In a similar tone, one of the key informants noted that:

*Indigenous parenting practices are important in improving parenting outcomes in the families. Currently, debates on corporal punishment continue to be topical and there is deadlock between parents and child rights movement. I think including indigenous parenting will definitively improve child disciplinary outcomes.*

From above, the study learnt indigenous parenting practices were believed to improve child discipline. Key informants noted that indigenous parenting practices provide better understanding to the issue of child discipline. The conviction of parents was that indigenous parenting styles never failed in instilling discipline among children.

### Societal values can be maintained-improved issues of child morality

Another key theme which emerged in the findings was that, indigenous parenting practices can ensure that societal values are maintained. Parents expressed that children are losing societal values. It was expressed that advent of technology has led children to follow the western life styles, forgetting their cultural and social beliefs.

*Another respondent noted that: A child will be not a misfit but become a role model in the society by molding the child to suit the needs and expectations of society*

*Better discipline is helpful as it prepares the good future of children. That's why children in traditional were more responsible and supportive to its society, families and relatives than these days*

It can be seen above that parents were concerned on that the preservation of cultural values will be lost if children are not disciplined. Key issues which were raised by parents was that, children need to be responsible to themselves and for others in the society. Findings further revealed that societal values are important in instilling integrity in children. Observed findings were that indigenous parenting methods instill sense of morality and responsibilities in children. Some parents argued that the modern-day social problems such as unwanted teenage pregnancies, self-inflicted child abuse and other unacceptable behaviour can be reduced.

### Children and society can be role models to others

The findings also established that in indigenous society, children were role models both to internal and external people. Parents reiterated that children displayed respects which were envied by visitors in the society. However, parents believed that currently children have adopted other styles of life which is characterised by selfishness. The following are the utterances of parents:

*When we grew up, our parents used to teach us that we need to be role models of good behaviour. Kids could learn from their brothers and sisters on how to behave.*

*The disciplinary focus was for children to be role models when visitors visit our homes. We were told on how to greet elders and visitors.*

It was established that children can be role model to other children in the society. Parents felt that children need to teach other good behavior especially young kids. It was believed that, without reverting back to traditional parenting styles, there is danger of having a society where there will be no point of reference in behavioural terms. These views were also echoed participants who noted that indigenous methods of disciplining children ensure that children grow with dignity, respect and exhibit enviable behaviour

### Reduced self-inflicted child abuse-enhances child discipline

Both parents and key informants concurred that there is high level of self-inflicted child abuse cases. Parents expressed that children no longer have responsibility to take care for themselves and for others. It was believed that children now engage in serious sexual practices, cybercrimes and other dangerous activities such as school parties. Key informants admitted that there are many cases of children sexually abusing each in schools and other social gatherings. One of key informant noted that:

*Issues of self-abuse among children cannot be taken for granted. There are many cases being reported on children abusing themselves. The challenge is that technologies have fashioned new styles of life and parents have no longer control over children*

In occurrence, one the parents noted that:

*It is really worrying these days that children no take responsibility for themselves. They are practicing dangerous activities. I am worried use of cell phones has made children to access dangerous sexual content on internet*

Another key informant noted that:

*Children these days are no longer careful about the dangers which they inflict to themselves. Imagine the cases of children abusing drugs, and some killing other children using dangerous objects such as knives. It really shows that something is wrong. I could not see those things happening in traditional societies*

From the findings, parents felt that there is urgent need to reconsider indigenous disciplinary methods. The feeling was that the current liberal and rights-based parenting are so damaging to children. Some expressed that, if this trend continue, society is losing on disciplinary front.

### **Collective and inclusive rearing of children**

Other lessons from the study were that indigenous parenting practices can result in inclusive parenting methods. The key informants felt that current emphasis in parenting is on child rights without recognising the importance of indigenous practices. It was revealed that there is no documentation of indigenous parenting practices. One of the key informants noted that:

*There is a serious gap in the documentation and research of indigenous parenting practices. The belief is that all indigenous practices are always dangerous and backward in terms of nurturing children. This has created a very big gap in coming up with best legislations on parenting*

Another key informant retorted that:

*This is a serious topic which we need to ensure inclusive and people driven policies in child protection. Modern parenting styles are key in child protection but parents feel the way rights are preached completely undermine the role parents in parenting*

In support of above, parents felt that current debates on parenting exclude them from having opinion. It was discovered that current child protections give me power on children without equally considering the importance of the parents. The study learnt, integration of indigenous parenting practices can enhance the debates on child discipline. In the same context, parents will have an influence in policies pertaining parenting and child discipline.

### **CHALLENGES OF INDIGENOUS PARENTING PRACTICES ON CHILD DISCIPLINE**

The study findings also revealed that indigenous parenting practices are associated with problems to children.

#### **Source of child abuse**

Both parents and key informants concurred that it is difficult to define clear and procedural approach in defining what constitute child discipline. The study learnt that indigenous parenting practices on child discipline was considered to be abusive especially those parents who opted to use authoritative and neglectful approaches. Most of the key informants' highlighted parents were not able to differentiate between corrective and transformative measures. One key informant noted that:

*These practices abuse children in a long run. Uncontrolled physical discipline can result in serious physical, emotional and psychological injuries in children. Parents are not able to differentiate what constitute abuse and discipline.*

Another parent echoed that:

*Indigenous parenting practices had no boundaries and they were not documented somehow and anyway to understand whether children were happy about them or not.*

In the same vein, the study findings revealed that these methods were not measurable and had no limit. Parents admitted during disciplining process there was no control on the level of pain or disturbance inflicted. Some parents admitted that child abuse is more of perceptions of people than a defined course of activity. However, some parents argued that indigenous discipline-based methods were framed and organised by elders hence children were over abused and they could not report any way. Thus, traditional puritans argue that in the true traditional culture abuse never existed; it exists in a faulted modern culture.

### **Children's rights not completely expressed**

The study findings revealed that, the majority of participants agreed that indigenous parenting practices suppress a child's rights to express themselves. The findings revealed that, indigenous parenting practices empower elders or parents more than children. It was established that indigenous system suppresses children's freedom to expression and to be heard. One school child echoed that:

*Indigenous methods instill fear in children and parents rarely listen to the cause of children. For example, sometimes we behave without the knowledge on society expectations.*

Another participant noted that:

*Indigenous system is good in instilling good behaviour in children but parents sometimes abuses their power. Parents are more concerned with cultural rights but sometimes child's basic opinion is not heard in disciplinary process.*

From above, the study learnt that children's rights such as freedom of expression, right to be heard and participate in every activity of their lives is not promoted through indigenous parenting practices.

### **Long run impact on child development**

Apart from physical harm, the study established that indigenous practices such as authoritative and neglect results in children live in fear and results in poor self-esteem. In the same context, parents admitted that harsh indigenous practices can destroy self-esteem of a child. This has implication on child's confidence in life. Some key informants believed that, a child who grew up with parents using retributive measures tend to lose self-confidence and always live in panic. One key informant echoed that:

*It has been proved scientifically that a child who lived with abusive parents develop poor cognitive development and social learning skills*

Another key informant noted that:

*Exposure of child to hard and harsh disciplinary environment result in them repeating the same behaviour to their children in future. In some instances, children tend to be withdrawn and put these things in unconscious mind which regress later in life*

It was, therefore learnt that abusive indigenous create psychologically and emotional damage in children which reflect in poor child development. Although there are noticeable of using indigenous parenting methods on child discipline, problems can be also noticed when unsympathetic methods are employed in the process discipline.

### **Distrust between parents and children**

Some of the parents who were interviewed agreed with children that indigenous parenting practices on child discipline create distrust between children and parents. When parents believe that they are molding a child, some participants felt that the control from parents is over-exercised. One parent admitted that

*We parents will be viewed as unloving by beating children. Some children send to run away from homes and decide to stay with relatives*

However, another parent echoed that there is an ignorant among children to accept indigenous systems. She noted that:

*Peer pressure to children is making to be against about what they were taught by their parents. The idea is not that we don't love them but it is difficult to trust children of modern day. They can report you to the police and get arrested*

The study learnt that parents and children have different perceptions on the purpose of child discipline. Children believed that parents were using excessive parental power in name of child discipline.

## DISCUSSION AND SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

The study findings revealed that, parents believed that indigenous parenting methods on child discipline can result in improved and maintenance on societal values. Within same traditionalist opinion, respondents considered indigenous parenting methods to be a cog in instilling morality and ensuring children are roles models. In other argues arguments, some scholars such as Asante (2002) and Dastile (2013), encourage for a need to reconsider the reciprocal benefits of indigenous parenting practices, of which child discipline is one of them. In a similar study, BC Aboriginal Childcare Society (2010) outlines the fundamentals basics which can be inculcated in children using indigenous parenting practices which includes; love, belonging, humility, respect, honouring, courage, wisdom, generosity and celebrations. There was also a strong belief in participants that indigenous parenting methods are a way of instilling responsibility in children which can reduce self-inflicted child abuse. Despite the observations that parents supported indigenous parenting practices on child discipline, Sege et al (2017) contrast the findings by noting that some of indigenous parenting methods such as physical punishment can have negative impact on mental, physical and neurological development of child. Parents were convinced that indigenous parenting instill the sense of morality by social problems such as unwanted teenage pregnancies and type of dressing which expose a girl child abuse or risk of abuse. These findings are predicted in Kohlberg's cognitive theory of moral development which attests that development of moral behaviour, thing and attitude result from family and societal factors.

Indigenous parenting practices were also considered to be important in creating inclusive child protection frameworks. Respondents felt that current child protection frameworks are not cognizance of cultural values and norms. While findings revealed that indigenous parenting practices provides avenues for collaborated child care; scholars like (Asante, 2002; Dastile, 2013) entertained, in their arguments that, African society has been culturally and intellectually dislocated in terms of their history, culture and identity. Such scholars give credence on African child nurturing by its ability to encourage African society to re-appropriate and reclaim the discrediting of African indigenous parenting practices in enhancing the cognitive, social and cultural skills of children and re-assuring the continued existence of African community identity. While observations by scholars had political insights in it, the study also established that indigenous methods are sustainable and children can cope up with these methods. In the same essence, findings revealed that children will be able to work together and be well behaved.

Some parents accepted that indigenous parenting practices on child discipline can be psychologically damaging especially those practices which are intended at hurting the emotional set up of a child. For example, Millichamp et al (2006) argue that the use of physical or non-physical method and/or punitive and non-punitive is influenced by the parent's intended outcome of implementing disciplinary methods. In contrast, parents argued that, child abuse is now common because of modernity and disintegration of the traditional fabric. Koekemoer (2014) argue that more than 65% of traditional parenting practices on child discipline relied on use of strict rules and regulations which undermined children's freedom of expression. Arguably, such practices can hinder children to exercise their rights of expressions. A number of laboratory studies (see for example; Cohen et al, 2004; Sege et al., 2017) have demonstrated that indigenous practices such as physical punishment and emotional neglect have negative impact on mental, physical and neurological development of child. In Freudian argument, the personality of a person is a prototype of his childhood experience. Another emerging issue from study was that some of the indigenous practices resulted in mistrust between parents and children. The mistrust between parents and children is worsened by what Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick (2005) call '*battered child syndrome*' which entails parents who experienced abusive childhood environment employ punitive child discipline methods. It can be argued that, punitive indigenous methods created mistrust between parents and children in the society. Debatably, this mistrust between parents and children can result in children becoming skeptical and not seek parental guidance

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations based on the findings which were derived of major objectives of the study and themes which emerged during data collection and analysis.

**Policy framework:** There is a need to design indigenous based code of conduct which give responsibilities to children, parents and other child protection players on expected behaviours. Review of current child protection frameworks is also encouraged to ensure that they inclusively capture the views of communities on basic child protection system.

**Community initiatives:** Communities leaders need to organise some important and acceptable cultural activities where children can learn good about the past of their parents. In the same context, this can aid the concept of positive parenting which is also acceptable in the modern-day society. Communities leaders need to organise some important and acceptable cultural activities where children learn good about the past of their parents. In the same context, this can aid the concept of positive parenting which is also acceptable in the modern-day society.

**Public debate:** There is a need to encourage all players interested in the issue of parenting including Non-Governmental Organisations, politicians, technocrats, students, civil society, among others, to debate more on the issue of indigenous parenting practices and child discipline. This can open avenues for concerned players involved in parenting to under the opportunities and challenges associated with indigenous parenting practices on child discipline. These debates may include; parliamentary, guest lectures, inter-professional debates, among others, to provide the reflexivity on both those who support or disparage traditional and modern ways of parenting

**Inclusive child protection programme:** There is a need for inclusive child protection programmes to ensure that all interested express their views. Programmes such as child rights movement should include parents in planning so that their views on indigenous parenting practices are assessed and considered.

**Knowledge development:** There is need for documentation of these methods in form of books, journal articles, magazines, Newspapers, TV shows, among others. Increased research on indigenous parenting practices on child discipline will also likely to open new insights, debates and recommendations for policy review, formulation and implementation.

## CONCLUSION

The major lesson from the study was that, integration of indigenous parenting in modern day requires a multi-prolonged approach entrenched in critical and dialogical praxis among all child protection players. Society has its expectations and perceives indigenous parenting methods as a best way to restore the lost pride of African child, who at least in juxtaposition, an emblem of respect and dignity. Whether adopting a traditionalist or modernist view, it was clear from the study the most important thing to understand is that when applying child discipline, there is no one method which can explain the exception premise. In order to confirm or de-confirm, mythologise or demythologize the views on the efficacy of indigenous parenting practices on child discipline, this current study observed that the collaborative or punitive indigenous parenting practices require a detailed research to understand its efficacy. All in all, the call for revisiting of indigenous parenting methods is of the essence to ensure that child protection procession discourse is collaborative and in harmony with better child development espoused within societal expectations.



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