

Ndebele Cultural Practices And The Promotion Of Children's Rights In Zimbabwe

ANSLEY TSHUGULU¹ AND SAMUEL LISENGA SIMBINE²

ABSTRACT

Culture offers ecological resources for the promotion of child rights in Africa despite it being also a host of harm to children through harmful cultural practices. In line with the strength perspective in social work, it is imperative to explore the contribution of culture in the promotion of child rights in Zimbabwe. This article is based on the findings of a qualitative study that explored the contribution of the Ndebele cultural practices to the promotion of children's rights in Zimbabwe. The study was guided by a constructivist research paradigm and the case study as a research design. Purposive sampling was used to select both participants and key informants. In-depth interviews were conducted with 7 community-based participants who were considered to be the custodians of Ndebele cultural heritage. Additionally, 3 child protection social workers who were conversant with the Ndebele culture and working in the Nkayi district were interviewed as key informants. In-depth interview guides were used as data collection tools. To analyse data, thematic data analysis was utilised. It was established from the study that there are several cultural practices among the Ndebele people that promote children's rights in Zimbabwe and these include child naming, traditional child games, totem recitals, and the extended family and communal care system.

Keywords: Ndebele people, culture, cultural practices, children's rights, Zimbabwe

¹ Midlands State University, School of Social Work, alandraetee@gmail.com

² Lecturer, Midlands State University, School of Social Work, smahuntse@gmail.com

Introduction

Regardless of their history, race, colour, handicap, gender, or other characteristics, all children have an essential right to basic liberties known as children's rights (Olomu, 2021). Globally and among Africans, culture is vital and is a people's mainstay (Ncube, 2018). Cole (2019) defines culture as "ideals, beliefs, language, communication, and customs that are unique to that group and make up a group's shared practices". Within the culture of the Ndebele people in Zimbabwe, several cultural practices promote children's rights since children in as much as there are harmful cultural practices. This paper explores the Ndebele cultural practices which promote children's rights in Zimbabwe's Nkayi district. First, background and context are provided, and a statement of the problem espoused, research paradigm, research approach, and research design are explained. The paper also proceeds to describe the sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis, and the ethical considerations which guided the study. The findings are presented and discussed, implications for social work are provided, and a conclusion ties the paper.

Background And Context

Children's rights are the human rights of children hence they are indivisible and inalienable entitlements to be enjoyed by every child regardless of race, sex, religion, creed, geopolitical space, or social status (Collins, 2017; Simbine & Muridzo, 2022). On November 20, 1989, the United Nations enacted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which established international guidelines to guarantee the safety, survival, and growth of all children. Countries that ratify this agreement promise to safeguard children against sexual and economic exploitation, abuse, and violence while also advancing their rights to sufficient living conditions, health care, and education (Theis, 2018). In response

to criticism that the CRC received for the inadequate representation of African countries during its drafting, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (1990) was enacted to address issues that were unique to Africa, such as harmful cultural practices, issues of armed conflict and communal responsibility, and to also provide for children in the African context (Moles, 2017).

Culture is an important part of people's daily lives in Zimbabwe and beyond. Pappas and McKelvie (2020) define culture as the features and knowledge of a particular people entailing language, religion, cuisine, social customs, music, and arts. African societies are strongly organised around children who are an important part of maintaining communities and boosting household economies unfortunately sometimes this comes through vices like child labour (Howard, 2016; Mahuntse, 2021). Many concur that in Africa, children are regarded as key to society and therefore their protection is a concern to the whole community (Simbine & LeRoux, 2022; Mahuntse, 2021; Mupedziswa, Rankopo & Mwansa, 2019). Zimbabwe is endowed with positive cultural practices related to the protection of children and this is mainly hinged on the principles of Ubuntu and collectivism which acknowledge that a child belongs to the whole community hence the community has a collective duty to care for and protect every child (Simbine & LeRoux, 2022; Mahuntse, 2021).

The Ndebele people of Zimbabwe are characterised by a resilient cultural heritage that has stood the test of time. Whilst some of the Ndebele cultural practices violate the children's rights, they are equally touted for their positive cultural practices which contribute to the care and support of orphans and vulnerable children (Mutonhori, 2014). Based on the study findings, the paper explores the Ndebele cultural practices which promote children's

rights in Zimbabwe. It adds a voice to the on-goingongoing debates on the promotion of Afrocentric approaches to social work in Africa by heralding the Ndebele culture as an ecological resource from which social workers can draw examples to promote contextualised, Africanised, and decolonised child rights debate.

Theoretical Framework

The study relied on the socio-cultural theory and the interest theory of rights as theoretical frameworks. According to Cherry (2022), the socio-cultural theory is a new psychological theory that emphasises society's involvement in development while focusing on how societies contribute to individual growth. Thudium (2021) posits that Lev Vygotsky's (1896–1934) sociocultural theory's central tenet is that people's capacities are influenced by how they interact with others and their culture. According to the socio-cultural theory, each person's behaviours are influenced by their surroundings, as well as by social and cultural factors. (Saheed et al., 2021). According to the socio-cultural theory, societal elements like culture have an impact on how people behave and grow (Thudium, 2021). Cherry (2022) also adds that the sociocultural theory views culture as a learnt, non-natural phenomenon. This theoretical framework assisted the researchers to gain a thorough grasp of how the Ndebele culture has contributed to the realisation of children's rights in Nkayi District. According to the social-cultural point of view, cultural infringement or the promotion of children's rights can be learned through contact between social groups or participation in cultural activities that have been accepted as normal. To better comprehend the research problem the study and ultimately this paper make makes use of the interest theory of rights as a complement to sociocultural theory.

The interest theory of rights was initially put forth by Bentham (1987) who believed that when others are required to maintain one of a person's interests, that person has a unique human right (More, 2021). Jeremy Bentham first proposed the interest theory, which was later expanded by John Salmond and Rudolf von Ihering, both German jurists (More, 2021). In the opinion of McBride (2020), this theory suggests that rights protect the interests and well-being of the right holder. According to the interest theory, legally protected rights must be kept, and there must be a trustworthy procedure for doing so (Palovicova, 2017). The interest theory of rights in conjunction with the socio-cultural theory helped the researchers to understand in depth the aspect of culture and rights concerning children and therefore helped us to address the research question on the contribution of the Ndebele culture to the realisation of children's rights in Nkayi District.

Methodology

The section provides details on the research paradigm, research approach, and research design adopted by the study. Sampling procedures, sample size, data collection, and data analysis methods, and ethical considerations applicable to the study are described in the ensuing sections as follows;

Research paradigm

A research paradigm provides a framework for articulating the goal of the investigation. As such, the constructivist research paradigm, on which this study was based, stresses the specific context in which individuals live to comprehend the participants' varied cultural and historic backgrounds and it is also concentrated on the participant's perspective of a situation (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The constructivist research paradigm was

utilised in this study as it allowed for the collection of rich and comprehensive data on the Ndebele cultural practices and the promotion of children's rights in Zimbabwe based on the views of the participants.

Research approach and research design

The study adopted the qualitative research approach which according to Fisher (2013) is designed to reveal a target audience's range of behavior behaviour and the perceptions that drive it concerning specific research issues. The qualitative research approach was used as it ensured the collection of in-depth data on the Ndebele cultural practices and the promotion of children's rights in Zimbabwe. Bhasin (2020) defines the qualitative research approach as a method for gathering non-numerical data and attempting to comprehend why and how situations happen. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), this approach is useful for probing phenomena about which little is known or about which little data is available. To gather particular, contextual, in-depth knowledge about a particular real-world subject, this study used a case study research design, which is described by McCombes (2019) as a detailed examination of a particular topic, such as a person, group, place, or phenomena. A case study research design ensured the gathering of comprehensive data on the Ndebele cultural practices and the promotion of children's rights in Zimbabwe.

Sampling procedures and sample size

The study used purposive sampling to choose the primary participants and key informants. Purposive sampling, also known as judgement sampling, involves choosing informants solely on their capacity to describe a certain concept, idea, or subject (Robinson, 2014). Purposive sampling, according to Muraudzi

(2018), tries to obtain comprehensive knowledge from sources who can do so, such as prominent members of the community or subject-matter experts.

Ten participants made up the sample size for this study, including seven primary participants and three key informants. Both the primary participants and key informants were purposively chosen based on their knowledge of the Ndebele culture. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for primary participants included that one fell within one or more of the following categories: traditional leaders, elders, and custodians of the Ndebele culture in Nkayi District, male or female, who have resided in Nkayi for at least two years and are also willing to participate. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for key informants included that one was: a child protection social worker domiciled in Nkayi District, have knowledge of the Ndebele culture, willingness to participate in the study, and who had worked in Nkayi District for at least two years.

Data collection and data analysis

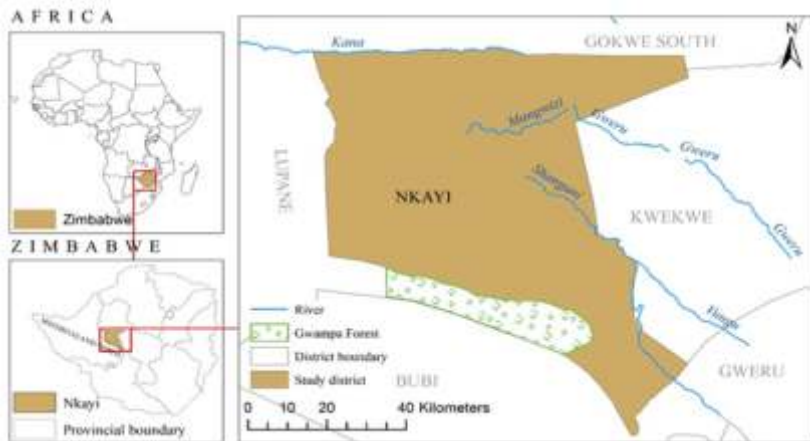
The researcher used in-depth interviews with both primary participants and key informants to collect precise information. In-depth interviews are a qualitative data collection method that comprises conducting multiple individual interviews and speaking with participants one-on-one (Dopson, 2021). The adoption of in-depth interviews made it possible to gather comprehensive data and comprehend the subject on a deeper level. Since they featured open-ended questions, in-depth interview guides were used as data-collecting tools and these were useful in enabling participants to submit extensive data (Bird, 2016). In this study, thematic data analysis was used to analyse data following the six steps of thematic data analysis. The six steps of thematic data analysis that were followed include; familiarisation, coding, producing themes, evaluating themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up

the findings (Caulfield, 2022).

The research site.

This study targeted the Ndebele-speaking people in the Nkayi district. Nkayi is a rural district in Zimbabwe's Matabeleland North province on the country's north-east side, it has thirty wards, 156 villages, one growth point, and five chiefs, and is separated into North and South Nkayi (Michael, 2022). The region is largely characterised by livestock-rearing, mining, and crop production. (Michael, 2022). Nkayi is one of the areas within which traditional Ndebele-speaking people reside and thus the utility of the area as a study site. The study focused on Nkayi District because the area houses a large population of traditional Ndebele-speaking people.

Figure 1: Adapted from International Crop Research Institute for semi-aridSemi-arid Tropics (ICRISAT).



Ethical Considerations

The researcher initially secured ethical clearance documents from the university and the Nkayi Rural District Council before beginning their investigation. Additionally, the study upheld the

principles of ethical research, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, as well as the publishing of results. Bhandari (2021) defines ethical concerns as a set of rules for research designs and processes that work to promote research quality, safeguard participants' rights, and increase the reliability of research. Researchers must submit a research proposal for ethical review before conducting a study (Bless, Higson-Smith, and Sithole, 2013).

The Ndebele-speaking People In Zimbabwe

The Nguni languages, including isiNdebele, are spoken by people who are also known as Matebele or amaNdebele. They are grouped into three groups: Southern, Northern, and Zimbabwean amaNdebele. Compared to the Ndebele in South Africa, the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe speak a different language (Knoll, 2015; South African History Online (SAHO), 2019). Under Mzilikazi's direction, the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe are a branch of the Zulu that broke away from King Shaka in the 1820s (Cobbing, 2018). The Ndebele are described as religious people who struggle to distinguish between their culture and traditional African religion Moyo (2013). According to South African History Online (2019), ancestors play a significant role in Ndebele Ndebele's religious life, and sacrifices and offerings are made to them to ensure their happiness, safety, and health. According to Knoll (2015), umuzi refers to the various family groups that make up a traditional Ndebele community. Each "umuzi" is made up of the head unnumzana, his wife, and their children. When the children get older, they start their umuzi, hence the community expands. The Ndebele males are obligated to provide for the spouses and children of their deceased siblings, with the eldest son among the Ndebele as the heir to his father's properties (South African History Online, 2019).

When children reach adulthood in traditional Ndebele society, they undergo rites of passage that prepare them for life as women

and men. One of these rites is "ukuwela" for males and "iqhude" for ladies, during which time the children learn how to make jewellery (South African History Online, 2019). There are three ways for Ndebele people to get married and that is through a traditional agreement (ukuganisela), an elopement (ukubaleka), or by paying a bride fee (lobola) after completing the rituals for entering maturity (Longwe, 2020). Traditional medical practices and a belief in spells, curses, and magic are also part of the Ndebele culture (South African History Online, 2019). The Ndebele religious tradition places a lot of emphasis on ancestral spirits, and people make offers and sacrifices to them in exchange for their protection, good health, and pleasure (SAHO, 2019).

The Ndebele community as a whole is responsible for taking care of children, especially orphans and those who are vulnerable (Parenting in Africa Network, 2014). The Ndebele people are famed for their artistic talents displayed through the artwork of their homes and beadwork, and it is primarily the girls who are liable for decorating the walls. This is passed down through families and from mothers to daughters. Children are highly valued in Ndebele culture and society (Knoll, 2015). In addition to growing and consuming various food crops and vegetables, the Ndebele people also eat maize or sorghum meal (thick-porridge) known as "isitshwala." Corn is the primary food source for the Ndebele, according to Cobbing (2018), while cattle are kept for milk production, status purposes, and other expenses (Karen, 2019). The extended family serves as the foundation of Ndebele culture, and the structure of the family is typically patriarchal (Karen, 2019).

Results and Discussion

The study aimed to explore the contribution of the Ndebele culture to the realisation of children's rights. Participants' pseudo-names are used to ensure their anonymity is maintained. This article presents and discusses findings from the study through four sub-themes namely, child naming, traditional child games, totem

recitals, and the role of the extended family and communal care system as follows:

Child naming

The findings of the study show that child naming among the Ndebele people of Nkayi District is a cultural practice promoting children's rights. It was established from the findings that the Ndebele people in Nkayi District have a child-naming ritual that upholds children's rights to a name and identity. Giving a child a name is viewed as mandatory in Ndebele culture hence this ensured that every child at birth was given a name regardless of their circumstances at birth. One of the participants held the following view:

“When it comes to giving names to children, these days you call it identity but we call it “ukwethiwa kwebizo”, where a child should be known including who they are and where they are from. We have names like “Ngqabutho”, which are usually for first-born children, and we have names like “Cinathunjana”, which are for last-born children. Naming children is very important because it shows the situation that the parents will be in and sometimes you hear that a child has been named “Dubekile” meaning, after all, they were born during a period of suffering or “Nhlakanipho” because they should grow up clever and be able to care for the family when they grow up. Thus, child naming is very important.” (Nkululeko).

Mduduzi was interviewed and on identifying cultural practices among the Ndebele people of Nkayi District that promote children's rights, they concurred with other participants that names among the Ndebele carried a meaning. In particular, they highlighted the following:

“So, after a child is born, they are given names, these names are given based on various factors such that sometimes children are given “ibizo elikhulumayo”, like Senzeni (What have we done)

and this may affect the child in their growth as other people may laugh at them or make them feel like they are not loved by their parents and others may be given names showing joy such as Sibusiso showing that a child is seen as a blessing to the family. Sometimes children are given names of their family members or of important relatives who might have passed away and when people see that child, they refer to them as the incarnate of that deceased relative (ancestor incarnate).” (Mduduzi).

Child naming whilst touted as a good practice ensuring that every child has a name, key informants were worried that sometimes this practice negatively impact impacts the child’s self-esteem. They were of the view that some names herald children as poverty holders such as names like Hlupeko meaning suffering. To this end, Peter a key informant had this to say:

“Also, we, I am saying we because I am also Ndebele, we have a naming custom after a child is born. What happens is that the grandparents of the child are asked to give the child a name and anyone else who wishes to name the child comes with a gift and the person who comes with the most valuable gift gets to give a name to the child so that helps to uphold children’s rights to a name or identity. However, this practice may be harmful to children because some children are given symbolic names that represent bad things and may contribute to a child child’s low-self-esteem low self-esteem and, in such cases, children usually grow up fulfilling the meaning of that name. Children in our culture are given names according to a variety of factors and those determine the name that the child will get some are even named after their deceased grandparents or other relatives. (Laughs) These days it’s hard to even know if a person uses their real name since you youngsters now give yourselves names.” (Peter).

From the verbatims above, it can be seen that the culture of the Ndebele-speaking people in the Nkayi District includes child naming which promotes children’s rights to a name, and identity. Child naming in the culture of the Ndebele-speaking people is

based on a variety such as poverty, joy, and what the parents wish for the child. In the culture of the Ndebele people in Nkayi, children are also given names concerning family relatives or elders who will have passed away and thus they become the ancestor incarnate of that deceased person.

In a similar vein, Baiyewu (2020) asserts that child naming is one of the significant rites of passage in a traditional African civilization since the name given to a child can influence their personality. Similarly, to this, Mahuntse (2021) outlines the Vatsonga practice of giving their children names that have spiritual significance, that is symbolic, and convey meaning. A child's right to a birth name and nationality is enshrined within the CRC Article 7 and the ACRWC Article 6, hence the Ndebele people of Nkayi's child naming ritual helps for the realisation of this right.

However, from the evidence in the verbatim, it is clear that child naming can also harm the child and their rights as children are sometimes given symbolic names with negative meanings which may cause the child to be discriminated against by others and demean their stature. The socio-cultural perspective argues that culture impacts a person's behaviour and from this view, it can be understood that child naming which is part of the culture of the Ndebele people in Nkayi District shapes a child's behaviour. There is, therefore, a need for monitoring in terms of the meanings of the names given to children to ensure that children are not given discriminatory or names with a negative message. Names with a positive message should be encouraged to reinforce confidence and hope in children.

Traditional child games

Traditional child games among the Ndebele people in Nkayi District emerged as another cultural practice that promotes children's rights. Child games were found to be an essential socialization tool and an educational tool that taught children the

basics of life including basic mathematics such as addition and subtraction. This is evidenced by what one participant verbalised below:

“Yes, we have been told that children have a right to play, usually when our children return from school, we assign them tasks for example the boys have to go and herd cows till sunset and the girls also have to do household chores and duties like cooking and fetching water but children among the Ndebele especially here in Nkayi in rural areas, children meet and play games such as “smemelwane, amadlwane” among others so that they can refresh and get to interact and associate with other children.” (Xolisani).

Sibusiso one of the participants retorted:

“Children also play games and usually amadlwane, (plays where children imitate adult roles and the family setup) among others and these games teach them a lot of things and give them time to refresh. However, due to technology, a lot of children nowadays would rather be on their phones than partake in these games.” (Sibusiso).

A key informant also was interviewed and they highlighted the issue of traditional child games:

“Children also play traditional games such as amadlwane, where they imitate adult roles and this helps them to have their time to play with others and rest, so this help because children have rights to play, rest, and leisure so by taking part in these games they will also be getting their freedom of association upheld” (Buhle).

As evidenced by the participants' and key informants' verbatims, traditional child games such as amadlwane (the game where children imitate adult roles) and smemelwane (a game in which children form a circle, and sing a song called smemelwane and chooses choose another player to also get in and do the same) are some of the traditional games within the culture of the Ndebele

people in Nkayi District. In engaging in these games, children get time to play and associate with other children. As evidenced by the verbatim, due to children's preference for using their phones instead of playing these games, technological advancements are putting these traditional child games at risk of extinction. These traditional games among the Ndebele children in Nkayi District help to promote children's rights to play and to take part in cultural activities as guaranteed in the CRC Article 12 and the ACRWC Article 31 which provides for the rights to play and leisure.

In convergence, Kpanake (2018) adds that games and songs serve as "Key cultural mediums" for teaching "Ubuntu" values to children in an African environment. For instance, children can learn love, unity, and teamwork via the song smemelwane. These activities aid children in developing a feeling of cultural identity. Similarly, Mahuntse (2021) discovered that among the Vatsonga people of Zimbabwe and Mozambique, children's games serve to impart Vatsonga ethics and principles to them. It also aids in the socialisation of children into various facets of life roles. Traditional child games are evidenced as promotive of children's rights among the Ndebele people in the Nkayi District.

Totem and family tree recitals

The findings from the study also showed that totem recitals are another cultural practice among the Ndebele people in the Nkayi District that is promotive of children's rights. Totem recitals are some forms of poetry that involve reciting one's genealogy and totem praises. This was found to be a cornerstone of fostering the child's identity and also ensured that children grew up knowing their family's history and genealogy. This also acted as a buffer against the incestual relationship as these are abhorred among the Ndebele, thus one was not supposed to have a sexual relationship with their kins. Therefore, reciting one's genealogy would be important to vet if one was related to you or not. One participant had this to say:

“I had forgotten my child, (Laughs), I am “MaDube, umthemboz’thembayo, idonki yezinanga” (laughs), you hear what I am saying my child, we recite our totems in our culture and we see them as important because they show who you are and where you come from. If you look at other ethnic groups for example among the Shona there are the Shumbas (Lions), in our culture, we have the Sibanda “oDawu Duna, Vodloza, uMaqoba”, you see my child it’s pleasing to hear someone reciting their totems and we value them. (stammers) Once a child knows where they come from for example if they are a Khumalo, they will grow up with some identity and dignity unlike a child who is born to an unknown father or family, such a child has no dignity in the family and that exposes them to abuse because if a child does not know their identity, that is when cases of incest arise.” (Nomalanga).

In light of totem recitals as a way of instilling identity among children, another participant had this to say:

“On that note, we also recite our totems to our children so that they may have a sense of identity for example if a child comes from the Nxumalo family like me, we teach them to recite their totems and that is “Nxumalo, Zwide kaLanga, Nkabanhle’ so that children can also be proud and show who they are among other people.” (Thulani).

Key informants agreed with research participants highlighting the positive role of totem recitals to children among the Ndebele people in Nkayi. Mkhuleko, a key informant stated:

“Okay, in the ward I stay in, I noticed that children are taught to recite their totems by their parents and grandparents especially here in the rural and as such children grow up knowing who they are, where they originate from, which family they belong in and they also grow up with a sense of identity that is knowing who we are. So, this helps because we say children have a right to identity so I think this practice of totem recitals helps to somehow protect children’s rights.” (Mkhuleko).

As shown by the verbatim above, totem recitals are another cultural practice among the Ndebele people in Zimbabwe that promote children's rights. Totem recitals to children in Nkayi District are regarded as important and held with value as they help to show a child's identity as well as ethnicity and also provide children with protection from social taboos like incest. These totem recitals can also be seen as a form of entertainment for children. Article 8 of the CRC guarantees children their right to identity whilst Article 31 of the ACRWC provides for the child's right to engage in cultural activities. Comparatively, the Vatsonga parenting approach makes use of totem recitals to provide children with a sense of identity and belonging (Mahuntse, 2021). Totem recitals are therefore another beneficial cultural practice among the Ndebele people of Nkayi District that may need to be preserved for the benefit of families and children.

Extended family and communal care system

From the interviews with the participants and key informants, it was found that entrenched within the culture of the Ndebele people in Nkayi District is the existence of the extended family and communal care systems which aid in the promotion of children's rights. This is evidenced by what various participants had to say below:

“We hear that children must have a family and, in our culture, when a child loses their parents, they are taken care of by their parents usually their grandparents or any close family members. In the Ndebele culture, there are also no orphans, a child belongs to everyone in the community so a child cannot be an orphan in our culture.” (Lungisani).

Mulungisi also had the following to say about the extended family and communal care system and children:

“Okay so in our culture, when we talk about a child's parents we

mean their biological parents, the extended family, and the community at large. So, when a child loses their biological parents, they have the extended family and community to cater to them and offer them things like food and shelter and in other cases take them to school. However, in other cases children have to fend for themselves these are what we call child-headed families but these cases are not much. What we do is that the family has to care for the child. This practice is also tricky because it abuses some children, some family members take in these orphaned children and instead of taking care of them they end up being the ones doing all the house chores, herding the cattle, being the maid and not going to school while the biological children in that family will be going to school and doing no chores so that becomes bad to the child.” (Mulungisi).

Peter, a key informant shared the same sentiments with the views of the two participants above when they said:

“Okay, so in the Ndebele culture, there are no child orphans, children are taken in by their extended family for care than to be taken into institutions, the aspect of “ubuntu”, in our culture does not allow for children to suffer or to be called orphans because we believe that it takes a village to groom a child so the whole community here is the child’s family. So, children with no parents are taken in by their extended families and other people also help by providing other things they may need like food. Also, after the death of parents, the children’s inheritance is usually given to the person that will be catering for them.” (Peter).

Another key informant also added:

“(Sighs) Yes, in Ndebele communities here in Nkayi, it has become everyone’s responsibility to care for the child so anyone can discipline children. And on that note, here in Nkayi, as the Ndebele people, we believe that a child belongs to everyone and even when children are in need or orphaned, our culture says that the extended family or community is obliged to care for that child

as their own and they are obliged to provide for that child's needs. Every resident within the community is a child's parent that is why anyone can reprimand children and so there is never an orphan in the Ndebele culture." (Mduduzi).

As evidenced by the research findings, the extended family system and communal care system within the culture of the Ndebele people in Nkayi District is based on the philosophy of "Ubuntu" which is a collectivist worldview of life. Children within the Ndebele culture are cared for and taken care of by their family, their extended family, as well as the community at large, and this ensures that a child always has a family even in instances of nuclear-family break-down. From the findings, it is evident that a child's family in the culture of the Ndebele people does not necessarily mean a child's biological or extended family but the community at large. Children's rights, such as the right to food, shelter, and education, are taken care of through the nuclear family with support from the extended family and the communal care system, which serves as a safety net for children, especially orphans and the vulnerable.

From the sociocultural view, culture offers an ecological resource that is pivotal to the safety and development of children. The interest theory of rights advances that children's rights to a family must be upheld, and hence the family system and communal care provide for that right. Likewise, Mahuntse (2021) and Simbine and LeRoux (2021) argue that the extended system and communal care system among the Vatsonga serves the purpose of safeguarding children. The extended family structure supports children both materially and socially, and by actively participating in the lives of the children, its members make sure that numerous rights and needs of children including those for food, clothing, shelter, education, health, and psychosocial requirements are met (Save the Children, 2012). However, the extended family structure cannot be over-glorified as a safety net as sometimes it exposes children to exploitation, and abuse due to uncouth elements within the family structure (Luwangula et al., 2019). With the growing

levels of poverty among the elderly which happens to be a cornerstone upon which the extended family and communal care system are based, their capacity to care for and protect their child is diminishing.

Implications For Social Work

Findings from this study may have an impact or significance on children's rights and social work practice in Zimbabwe and other African contexts. The findings from the study highlighted some of the positive Ndebele cultural practices in Zimbabwe that promote children's rights and these are child naming, traditional child games, totem recitals, and the extended family and communal care system. These cultural practices promote various rights enshrined in the CRC and the ACRWC. Child naming among the Ndebele people in Zimbabwe was identified as a cultural practice promoting children's rights. Child naming upholds children's rights to a birth name and identity. Children among the Ndebele people in Nkayi are given names representing various things such as the joy, and poverty of the family, and sometimes children are given names of a deceased family member. They are also given names that have negative meanings which may affect the child. In this case, social workers in Zimbabwe should collaborate with local authorities and come up with ways to ensure that children are given names according to cultural expectations so that they have a sense of belonging. Social workers should also come up with strategies to monitor the names given to children to ensure that children are not given discriminatory names.

Traditional child games were identified as another positive cultural practice among the Ndebele of Nkayi. Children's rights to rest, and play, and the right to take part in cultural activities as well as their physical well-being are enhanced by the various traditional child games. Traditional child games are also seen as ways of transferring the principles of humanity to children such as love, respect, and collectiveness. Social workers in Zimbabwe can engage children in play therapy through the use of traditional child

games such as amadlwane when dealing with child protection issues for example issues to do with child sexual abuse. Traditional child games can help children to express themselves in a way they can better understand. Hence social workers need to incorporate traditional child games when utilising play therapy.

Totem recitals were also identified as a positive cultural practice that helps to instil identity in children as well as to make them take part in cultural activities and by so doing uphold children's rights to take part in artistic and cultural activities. The other cultural practice that was identified by participants as promotive of children's rights was the extended family and communal care system in the culture of the Ndebele people in the Nkayi District. The extended family and communal care system act as a safety net for orphaned and vulnerable children by providing the child with family life and other needs such as food, and shelter education to mention a few, and by so doing catering for the child's provision rights.

It was also noted that within the culture of the Ndebele people children belong to the whole community. In this light, social workers need to collaborate with the community members and the elderly who have knowledge of the Ndebele culture and incorporate the aspect of communal care when dealing with orphans and vulnerable children. In Zimbabwe, the National Orphan Care Policy of 1999 acknowledges the extended family and the community as the alternative caregivers for children in need, hence social workers can adopt the philosophy of Ubuntu and enforce the extended family and communal care system before opting for the institutionalisation of children just as aspired by the drafters of the National Orphan Care Policy of 1999. There is some need to urgently incorporate indigenous perspectives in social work training so that social workers become culturally competent and sensitive when dealing with child rights issues in African contexts.

Conclusion

The paper has demonstrated how the Ndebele culture in Zimbabwe promotes some of the children's rights. The Ndebele cultural practices in Zimbabwe that promote child rights examined in this paper include child naming, traditional child games, totem recitals, and the extended family and communal care system. The implications of these practices to child rights and social work practice in Zimbabwe have also been discussed. Further research can look into positive cultural practices amongst other cultural groups such as the BaTonga people of Binga to examine how their practices promote children's rights in Zimbabwe.

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