CHILD ABUSE IN AFRICA: WHAT CAN SOCIAL WORKERS DO?

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Abstract

In many traditional African societies, children were well treated and it was the responsibility of every adult to look after the young. There was collective parenthood. However, the cruel reality is that millions of children throughout the world, particularly in Africa each year have been abused, in some cases by the people they love and trust the most. Child abuse is now a great cause for concern in most African countries. This paper argues that if the problem of child abuse is not urgently tackled, the 21st century will witness generations of maladjusted children in Africa who might not completely recover from the trauma of child abuse. It further argues that social workers, as front-line workers could play a critical role in dealing with the problem of child abuse. Consequently, the paper chronicles the various roles social workers could play and also highlights the problems they might face in the course of their work.

INTRODUCTION

Sufficient literature exists to reinforce the frequently made statement that child abuse has occurred since time immemorial and is known to exist across cultures. While it is more widely recognised as occurring in the West, and there is a wealth of theoretical and empirical information about it in the context of developed countries, much less is known about this phenomenon

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in developing countries, especially in Africa. Increasing concern about child abuse, however, among some medical and social service researchers and practitioners in several developing countries (Ariyo 2005; Bhattacharyya 1981; De Silva 1981; Haffejee 1991; Segal 1995) and their interest in calling attention to it have been making the human service community truly aware that the parental or community abuse of children is, in fact, an issue of global concern and will emerge as a major area of intervention cross-nationally well into the 21st century. There is a general realisation that child abuse can have extremely negative consequences for societies in general and the abused children in particular. Waterhouse (2002:30) rightly notes that child abuse causes much personal misery for children and parents, raises public concern and requires professional attention.

This paper deals with the issue of child abuse and is divided into three parts. The first part presents the nature or concept of child abuse. In doing this, the various forms and explanations of child abuse are given. The second part deals specifically with the problem of child abuse in Africa. Various examples of how child abuse occurs in the continent are given. The third and final part provides the possible roles that social workers could play in dealing with the problem of child abuse in Africa. A conclusion follows.

DEFINING AND EXPLAINING CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse has been defined differently by different authorities. As a result, there appears to be no universally accepted definition of what constitutes child abuse, although there are many ad hoc formulations and operational guidelines. These derive mainly from research studies in which investigators have attempted to formulate specific, operational definitions that are nevertheless broad enough to include a wide range of abusive and potentially abusive incidents. The clarity of some of these definitions is obviously helpful, but the diversity among those adopted in different studies is sometimes quite considerable (Glaser and Frosh 1993:4). That is why Waterhouse (2002) argues that there is no absolute definition of child abuse. Segal (1995) also argues that it is essential that the definition of child abuse be understood within the constructs of the culture in which it is being studied. Nevertheless, official definitions of child abuse usually describe abusive incidents, taking into account whether there is definite knowledge of an

intention to harm or knowingly not to prevent harm by any person having care or custody of the child. Waterhouse (2002) says that harm to the child involved in child abuse includes physical injury; physical neglect and failure to thrive, e.g. exposure to dangerous circumstances or starvation; emotional abuse where the health and development of children are threatened; and sexual abuse where children have been involved in sexual activities they do not truly comprehend or to which they do not give informed consent.

Marsh and Wolfe (2005:440-445) classified child abuse into three main forms: physical, sexual and emotional. Physical abuse is the infliction or endanger of physical injury as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning, shaking, or otherwise intentionally harming a child. Sexual abuse consists of acts that are sexual in nature, including fondling a child's genitals, intercourse, incest, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism and commercial exploitation through prostitution and the production of pornographic materials. Emotional abuse is behaviour that involves acts or omissions of acts of parents or caregivers that cause or could cause serious behavioural, cognitive, emotional or mental disorders in children.

In relation to emotional abuse, Osei-Hwedie and Hobona (2001:146) observe that emotional abuse includes situations wherein a parent, caregiver or other adult verbally assaults a child by using harsh words in communicating with the child, or withholding warmth and affection. It may be manifested in indifference, not showing any interest in what a child wants to say, or not listening to a child, or teasing a child. Emotional abuse is also associated with discouraging children's self-esteem, particularly by constant scapegoating, putting down and belittling the child; using sarcasm or telling children that they are stupid, worthless, clumsy, ugly, unloved and unlovable; depriving children of opportunities to develop as individuals and punishing them for expressing opinions and ignoring their likes, needs and feelings. Putting unnecessary pressure on a gifted and talented child is also a form of emotional abuse.

One further broad type of child abuse might be termed ecological abuse, wherein a particular group or class of children is subjected to abuse by virtue of their group or class characteristic. Examples include exploitative child labour or those who are victims of natural disasters or wars.

For the purpose of this paper, child abuse is considered to occur when an adult causes, or threatens to cause, physical or mental harm to a child. Child abuse includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse as well as neglect, which may include lack of supervision, inadequate physical, medical or educational care, and abandonment.

It may also be noted that the abuser can be stranger or someone the child knows and trusts, such as a friend, neighbour or family member. Child abuse is not limited to any one group. It happens in all socio-economic, racial, ethnic, and religious sectors. Common problems for abused and neglected children include: emotional difficulties, disruptive behaviour, and poor performance in school, vulnerability to further abuse, depression and suicide attempts.

Explanations of child abuse have evolved from an initial concentration on single factor – for example, presence of specific psychological characteristics in the parents of abused children – to complex models of the interrelationship between multiple factors. As Osei-Hwedie and Hobona (2001) rightly note, child abuse and neglect are triggered by a combination of forces at all levels of society, including that of the individual, the family and the community. They further argue that such complex causes require a multi-professional response that is sensitive to cultural diversity and other special needs.

Waterhouse (2002) reports that Gelles (1987) and Brown (1988) in their models of the causes of family violence stress the importance of the interaction between psychological, cultural and social factors and family relationships. Families already facing adversity – for example, inadequate housing or unemployment – where poor parent and child relationships routinely feature, are considered more likely to resort to aggression in child upbringing. Psychological studies concerned with parental style and the sociability of the child suggest that highly punitive and highly permissive parents tend to have children who are aggressive. Parents who are aggressive to their children may, in turn, provoke aggression, contributing to a cycle of mutually antagonistic interaction. Parents who are highly permissive may fail to provide sufficient positive controls and support to children who, in turn, may not develop sufficient self-control.

Waterhouse (2002*)* also notes that explanations of reported sexual abuse concentrate on the misuse of power by adults (mostly men) over children (more often girls), and have been highly influenced by feminist writing which examines the influence of gender on relations between men, women and children. Growing concern about sexual misconduct by women against children (especially boys) raises questions about the comprehensiveness of this explanation to account for different types of abuse by different perpetrators.

Studies in the USA continue to identify characteristics of abusing parents and abused children, and tend to suggest that the physical abuse of children may be more prevalent in conditions of poverty as many of the stresses and environmental circumstances experienced by potential abusers are often concomitants of poverty. These may be due to greater financial stress, less opportunity to escape from child rearing, less inhibition to express and discharge aggression, and greater cultural approval for harsh discipline. On the other hand, occurrence of child abuse may just be more visible in lower income families that are more likely to come to the attention of public agencies for other socio-economic reasons (Segal 1995).

CHILD ABUSE IN AFRICA

Children in traditional African societies were highly valued and a couple without child was looked down upon by society. Childlessness caused great misery or sorrow. On the other hand, the responsibility of looking after children was put in the hands of all adults in the community. The phenomenon of orphans, as a result, was not a problem in Africa because the extended family system took care of all children. Also, the phenomenon of child abuse was very rare. Nevertheless, at the advent of the 21st century, child abuse in Africa has become cause for concern. In Africa, child abuse is now a serious problem although some societies do not want to acknowledge this. The ratification by the nation states of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989*)* and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999) have also brought issues of child abuse and exploitation to the top of national agenda in many African countries. Both the Convention and the Charter consider the principle of "the best interest of the child" as paramount. If properly implemented by the states which have ratified it, the

Convention on the Rights of the Child protects children at risk from sexual, economic and other forms of exploitation, including their sale, trafficking and involvement in armed conflict. Most African countries have also ratified the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

Obikeze's Framework for Child Abuse in Non-Industrialised Countries

As for the causes of child abuse in Africa, Obikeze (1986) provides an analytical framework for viewing child abuse in non-industrialised countries and this framework is adopted in this paper. According to Obikeze (1986) abuse may be described at three operational levels – global, cultural and individual. At the global level, child abuse is a function of the socio-economic structure of society and solutions lie in the radical transformation of the society; at the cultural level, child abuse may be inextricably interwoven with specific child rearing practices that may, in fact, be detrimental to the child; at the individual level, low parental tolerance thresholds, and high incidence of environmental stresses, family discord and parental pathology may result in dysfunctional parent-child relationships.

Most Africans live below the poverty line and there is a lot of corruption, competition and unemployment. Basically, it is survival of the fittest, and as a result the weak, vulnerable populations such as the elderly, disabled and children suffer. Thus at the global level, child abuse may well be a function of the socio-economic structure of African societies, where intense competition sidelines children. At the cultural level, it is also a well known fact that corporal punishment is sanctioned in most African societies and is identified as a viable means of socialising children. Childrearing in Africa continues to be the prerogative of the family and the rights and privacy of the family are sacrosanct. Most African families are patriarchal and although infant indulgency is high, childhood and adolescence are marked by strict discipline as children are socialised into obedience to parents.

At the individual level, Segal (1995) notes that studies in the USA have suggested that abusers are often parents caught in highly stressful and unsupportive circumstances and are often afflicted by psychological or

emotional pathology. With increasing mobility of African families and movement away from the extended family structure, has come increase in the stresses and isolation that were heretofore absorbed by the extended family – shared child rearing, shared household chores, shared decision-making, and built-in emotional supports. Parents may also have poor knowledge of normal child development, which may result in high expectations of children. All this may also lead to abusive behaviour toward children.

It is clear then that child abuse may occur in Africa as a result of any, or all, of the three levels of factors identified in Obikeze's framework. The socio-economic conditions in a country may be such that parents may have high or unreasonably high expectations of children in order that they succeed, or survive, in the competitive environment. In addition, socio-cultural sanctions of corporal punishment may affect behaviour toward children, and the hierarchical structure of most African families and the unidirectional flow of communication may influence attitudes towards them.

Incidence of Child Abuse in Africa

In Africa child abuse is in the news headlines with alarming regularity and it is steadily increasing. Ariyo (2005) notes that recent events demonstrate that the present day African environment denies the average African child any true joy of living. She goes on to say that the African child continues to suffer the effects of war, poverty, ignorance, malnutrition, under-nutrition, diseases especially AIDS, exploitation, oppression and neglect. The African girl child in particular lives under the constant threat of sexual, physical and emotional abuse. For example, the newspaper Times of Swaziland (2007) reported that there were large numbers of sexual abuse cases in Swaziland. The number of sexual abuse cases reported was 172 on girl children and 11 cases of sodomy on boy children. The paper highlighted the case of a sixteen year old boy sexually abused by his married history teacher. Another case was of a four year old girl repeatedly raped by a 25 year old man. Elsewhere, Angus Shaw (2008) also mentioned that in Zimbabwe child rape has increased by 42 per cent and linked the worsening situation of child abuse and domestic violence to family tensions caused by the nation's economic meltdown. Teachers in Zimbabwe are also accused of abusing girl children of school going age. UNICEF (2002) noted that in Mozambique as in most

African countries, the extent of child abuse is hidden because of the sensitivity of the subject. However, the information available draws a grim picture of abuse of children, especially girls.

In many African countries, some men are reported to rape young girls due to the mistaken belief that if one slept with a virgin one would be cured of HIV/AIDS. This is borne out by the fact that in South Africa, there have been reports of babies as young as nine months being gang-raped by full-grown men. Cases of incest have also been reported throughout the African continent.

Disabled children are at the greatest risk of maltreatment or abuse in Africa. Abuse and neglect in the handicapped population are linked with the parents' obligation to provide constant physical care for the child as well as their frustration, denial, and guilt and the lack of visible improvement in the child as time progresses. Some parents actually dump these children at birth or before they reach the age of ten. This is more so when a woman is threatened with divorce by the husband after giving birth to a child with disability. Societal pressure and lack of financial/material resources may also lead to a family dumping a disabled child.

Forms of Child Abuse in Africa

In several developing countries including some in Africa, a core of professionals in the field of human services is beginning to recognise the existence of intra-familial child abuse or wilful acts of commission or omission, that are detrimental to the growth and development of the child (Segal 1995). Ariyo (2005) notes that child abuse in Africa takes many forms. Some of the forms of abuse are highlighted as follows:

Child Trafficking

The phenomenon of child trafficking for forced compulsory labour is growing so fast in most African countries. Child trafficking has become a very profitable, multi-billion dollar business for the organised syndicates involved. As they flee poverty, Africa's children are being increasingly exploited by traffickers, who make billions of dollars a year by buying children

and sending them to slavery in Europe or the Gulf. According to an ILO report, an estimated 60 per cent of sex workers in Italy are from Nigeria. Ariyo (2005) quotes Meera Sethi of the International Migration Organisation: Africa has become a supplier of fresh flesh for countries in the European Union, via paedophile and prostitution rings. Sethi also said that Belgium, Britain and Italy receive the young African girls, while Germany and Spain are major transit centres.

Child Soldiers

There is also the issue of children in armed conflict. Forcible recruitment of children into military service has been reported in many parts of the world. Out of the 300,000 child soldiers around the world, it is estimated that 120,000 of these are African children who have been forcefully recruited to take part in wars and fighting in some African countries. Sudan, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, to name a few African countries, are all shamelessly supporting the tragedy of child soldiers. The nature of child participation in wars ranges from active to support roles such as spying, mine clearance and manning checkpoints. Young girls are made to provide sexual services for adult combatants. The consequences for these children are devastating. Many have died or been disabled in armed operations, while others have been interrogated, tortured, beaten, or kept as prisoners of war. Ariyo (2005) also says that since armed conflict does not discriminate in terms of gender or age, child soldiers often suffer greatly from the physical and psychological effects of violent conflict. They are exposed to atrocities such as murder, torture and sexual abuse. Under the influence of drugs and alcohol, often they are perpetrators of such brutality, some of the time against their own family members.

Child Labour

In most African countries the phenomenon of child labour is on the increase. Child labour is in great demand because it is cheap, and because children are naturally more docile, easier to discipline than adults, and too frightened to complain. Their small physique and nimble fingers are seen as assets by unscrupulous employers for certain kinds of work. It often happens that children are given jobs when their parents are sitting at home, unemployed.

There are children between seven and ten years of age who work twelve to fourteen hours a day and are paid less than one-third of the adult wage. For example, child domestic servants in Africa not only work long hours for a pittance but are particularly vulnerable to sexual as well as other physical abuse resulting in contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including the dreaded HIV. In 1996 the wife of a former Minister in the Republic of Benin was sentenced to a prison term for beating to death a child she employed as a domestic servant. Child labour, often hard and hazardous, damages health for life, deprives children of education and the normal enjoyment of their early years. This is especially true for young boys who work as herd boys in most African countries. Mainly due do poverty, they are forced by their parents to look after other people's cattle in return for money. They end up not attending school. This is one of the worst forms of abuse because education is a basic right and without education in this globalising world, one's future is doomed. African children without education cannot compete with their counterparts from other continents especially in the formal job market.

Cultural and Religious Practices

Some cultural and religious practices have also led to children being abused in Africa. For example, in Zimbabwe there is the practice of child pledging whereby children are married off to old men to pay off debts incurred by their parents. Again, there is a religious sect known as VaPositori (an African independent church) which is notorious for its male "prophets" marrying very young girls after having dreamt of them being their wives. The children in both instances are never consulted in decisions which affect their lives. Worst still, the children end up being part of polygamous marriages. Although these practices are being condemned by professionals such as social workers and human rights lawyers in the country, they still persist – may be due to the fact that old habits die hard. Another detrimental practice, especially in most Moslem countries in Africa is that of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This practice entails the removal of some parts of the female sexual organs with the belief that the woman would be marriageable.

Street Children

There has also been an increase in the incidence of street children. Most cities in African countries are now home to children who roam their

streets with no fixed abode. For instance, Human Rights Watch/Africa (1997) indicates that street children in Kenya face innumerable hardships and danger in their daily lives. In addition to the hazards of living on the street, these children face harassment and abuse from the police and within the juvenile justice system for no reason other than the fact that they are street children. Living outside the protection of responsible adults, street children are easy and silent targets for abuse by police and society at large. On the streets, they are subject to frequent beatings by police as well as monetary extortion and sexual abuse. They are subject to frequent arrest simply because they are homeless; 'vagrancy' (being without a fixed abode) is a criminal offence under Kenyan Law – Vagrancy Act, Chapter 58 of the Laws of Kenya.

Human Rights Watch/Africa (1997) goes on to say that more than 40,000 street children live in Kenya, with over half of their population concentrated in the capital, Nairobi. Numerous and complex socio-economic factors have fuelled the rising presence of children on the streets. They include, but not limited to: rapid urbanisation, and the breakdown of traditional support structures of the African extended family, exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic; the increasingly difficult circumstances of women as heads of single-parent households; the inability of parents to pay uniform and book fees, and other costs of public education; and the displacement of large numbers of people in urban slum clearance operations.

SOCIAL WORKERS' ROLES IN DEALING WITH CHILD ABUSE IN AFRICA

Social work is a helping profession and in its various forms addresses the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments. Its mission is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction. Professional social work is focused on problem solving and change. Social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideals, and its values are based on respect for the equality, worth, and dignity of all people. Since its beginnings over a century ago, social work practice has focused on meeting human needs and developing human potential. In Africa, however, social work is a relatively young profession which was introduced in the last millennium by western countries, particularly Britain, France and the United States of America. It therefore inherited a western

bias because of the colonial legacy. The way social work is practised in many African countries today largely mirrors western practice. Social workers in Africa are likely to be working primarily in government service, followed by NGOs and the voluntary welfare sector (Chitereka 2005).

For the purpose of this paper, a comprehensive definition of social work provided by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) is adopted. According to the IFSW and IASSW (2002), the social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and empowerment and liberation of people to enhance their well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social system, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

Everyone has a contribution to make to a world order which no longer tolerates inhuman exploitation, particularly where children are concerned. Social worker professionals, as front-line workers must play a crucial role in dealing with the problem of child abuse in Africa. The various roles they could play are explained below. Paterson and Urquiza (1993:7-9) provide some of the roles of mental health professionals in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect and some of these have been adapted to suit the purposes of this paper. The following, therefore, are the specific roles of social workers in dealing with child abuse.

Primary and Secondary Prevention

Depending on their interests and expertise, social workers may be involved in primary and secondary prevention of child abuse. Primary prevention is directed toward stopping a problem from ever occurring. Broad-based public awareness activities, media campaigns, and school-based programmes are examples of effective means of educating the public in general about the harmful effects of child abuse. Secondary prevention is targeted at a specific high-risk sub-population or group. Examples include home visit programmes for mothers of newborns identified at the hospital as being "at risk". In Africa, disabled children, street children and children living in child-headed households are particularly at risk of being abused. Hence

social workers should pay special attention to these vulnerable groups. They should advocate for the rights and protection of these children.

Tertiary Intervention

Tertiary intervention, the primary focus of social work professionals' training consists in providing therapeutic services to clients with a social and psychological problem that impairs their day-to-day functioning and relationships with others. In the field of child abuse and neglect, tertiary intervention involves working with both child victims and parents who abuse or neglect their children. Therapeutic interventions with children are directed toward preventing the harmful effects of child maltreatment. Therapeutic interventions with abusive parents are directed toward preventing recidivism through education, developing problem-solving skills, providing cognitive and behaviourally oriented counselling to prevent maltreatment, helping parents identify situations when they are at risk of abusing or neglecting their children, and teaching parents how to obtain support and resources to prevent abuse and neglect.

Evaluation and Treatment

The primary role of social workers in cases of child abuse and neglect is evaluation and treatment of children, non-offending parents, abusive or neglecting parents, and/or the family as a unit. Treatment begins by developing a therapeutic relationship, evaluating the overall functioning of the client, and planning treatment goals and intervention strategies based on the initial and ongoing assessment of client needs. Services for children and their families may be limited to crisis intervention and referral, brief therapy (10 to 12 weeks), or long-term therapy. Treatment modalities vary and may include individual and group therapy for children and parents, family therapy, and marital therapy. Group therapy may include victims grouped by type of victimisation, age, gender, or sibling group, or parents grouped by their role as offending or non-offending adults. Play therapy can also be used by social workers in dealing with child sexual abuse cases. This is also relevant to child soldiers who might have been extremely traumatised by their experiences during armed conflict.

Preparing Clients to Testify in Court

Children and adults experience anxiety about testifying in court. Most of them feel intimidated by the whole court proceedings. Social workers can play the role of preparing clients to testify in court. They have to provide support to the clients before and during court proceedings. Anxiety and ambivalence about testifying can be reduced by familiarising the clients with court procedures, the courtroom setting and the roles of the various court officials, such as the magistrate/judge and prosecutor. In Zimbabwe the concept of "victim friendly courts" is a good example of how this can be done. In this experiment, children who have been sexually abused do not have to appear in open court but in victim friendly courts. Social workers prepare the children before they appear in court. These courts are not open to the general public - the reasoning is that the child should not be put under unnecessary pressure.

Expert Witness

Social workers may be called to render an opinion or testify as an expert witness in juvenile, family or criminal court. The purpose of the juvenile or family court adjudication hearing is to determine whether the child needs protection through court-ordered supervision of the family or whether the child must be removed from the home temporarily in order to establish conditions for parental action for family reunification. Social workers do this by preparing the probation officer's report which will assist the magistrate or judge to make a ruling.

Other Roles

Since there are many children orphaned by HIV/AIDS and living in child-headed households in Africa, social workers, especially those working for NGOs, can provide the children with financial and material assistance within their communities. Organisations like World Vision International have provided educational assistance to many children in Africa. Social workers can also empower these children by giving them information about child abuse. They can also encourage them to report any cases of abuse to the relevant professionals or authorities dealing with child abuse issues.

Street children who are normally at risk of being abused can be placed in institutions by social workers. Although institutionalisation is not the best option, it can be used as a last resort especially for children with no parents or relatives. In institutions they may at least find care which they deserve. Social workers can also assist these children by placing them in foster care or putting them up for adoption.

Social workers can also help set up national commissions to protect and promote human rights, particularly of those children who are staying on the streets and are disabled as they are at risk of abuse. Finally, social workers can campaign for the ratification of international human right covenants and international conventions such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Where legislation against child abuse exists, social workers must make sure that it is enforced.

Problems Faced by Social Workers in Dealing with Child Abuse in Africa

The profession of social work is relatively young in Africa and most governments do not hold it in high esteem. This mostly stems from ignorance of what social work entails. Consequently, the profession is not afforded adequate financial and material resources by these governments. As a result social workers in Africa might experience problems when they want to highlight the problem of child abuse in society.

Social workers normally face transport problems, especially when they want to make home visits to their clients. Community outreach programmes are also hampered because of this. Child abuse is a very sensitive issue and as such it needs to be handled very carefully. Even though child welfare laws in most African countries give social workers powers to deal with issues concerning children, social workers still face resistance from abusive parents when they want to remove children from their custody. There have been reports of cases where physical violence has been used against professional social workers during the course of their work. This mainly affects female social workers, presumably because of their lower physical power.

Social workers in Africa also have excessive workload. This is because there are very few trained social workers in most African countries and those who are trained do not normally want to work in rural areas. Furthermore, the exodus of trained social workers from Africa to industrialised countries has robbed the African countries of their services and left it to the remaining few to carry the burden. This compromises on the quality of the service provided as social workers often experience burn out.

Finally, due to a shortage of office space in most government departments of social welfare in Africa, the principle of confidentiality in handling cases of child abuse is often not observed. There are cases where three social workers share one office which makes it difficult to respect the privacy of clients. When dealing with issues of child abuse it is of the utmost importance that confidentiality is observed.

Conclusion

This paper has defined and explained the causes and effects of child abuse. The paper also highlighted the various forms of child abuse obtaining in Africa. Problems faced by social workers in the course of their work have also been highlighted. It emerges from the above discussion that the child in Africa is often in danger of being abused, mostly by adults who should be providing the necessary care and protection of children. In conclusion, it can be argued that unless serious efforts are made to halt the madness of child abuse in Africa, the continent risks raising a generation of children who will be a menace to society since they are being exposed to extreme violence in their day-to-day lives. The recent xenophobic attacks in South Africa targeted at foreign nationals are an indication of the worst things to come. These attacks have been led by mostly young people from poor settlements in South Africa.

Although social workers can play a crucial role in the prevention, management and treatment of child abuse cases as discussed above, there is need for a shared responsibility between governments in Africa and mental health professionals involved in the welfare of children such as doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists as well as families and communities to work towards the eradication of the menace of child abuse. Teachers also

can play an important role in this matter as they see children on a day-to-day basis. So in a nutshell, all these groups of professionals working together with the support of governments can improve the abused children's life chances. Governments in Africa should provide the necessary support to social workers if they are to effectively deal with the problem of child abuse.

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