

Intersection of gender and child welfare
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CENTRE FOR SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT IN
AFRICA

Introduction

- Circular, iterative relationship between child welfare systems & gender
- Will consider constructions of gender in child protection models
 - Anglo-American Child protection system
 - South African formal child welfare system
 - Developmental Child Welfare
 - Family Service & Community Care models
- Brief comments re Switzerland
- Will consider both service users & providers

My Social Location

I am a (white, female, middle class, hetero) South African, of Swiss descent, & a social worker

PhD thesis: Genealogy of South African Child Welfare

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Anglo-American Child Protection Discourse: Core Assumptions

- Need to prevent & respond to child abuse, risk of abuse
- Child abuse: emotional/physical/sexual harm, neglect
- Parents responsible for their children's well-being
- Nuclear family unit site of intervention & preferred family form
- Intervention at point of abuse/if significant risk
- Expert-led, intrusive, blaming and punitive
- Residual, individualistic, discriminatory, costly

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Anglo- American Discourse (cont'd)

- Preventive efforts
 - Marginal
 - of a secondary & tertiary nature
 - resources directed at statutory intervention

(Freymond & Cameron, 2006 ; Merkel-Holguin, 2004 ; Burford & Hudson, 2000; Swift & Callahan, 2006; Waldvogel 1998 a,b ; Waldegrave, 2006)

Caveat

- If definition of child abuse expanded to exploitation (child labour or trafficking), typically addressed by international NGOs on parallel track

Gender & Child Protection Discourse

- Paternalistic essence of child protection narrative is mirrored in concomitant construction of gender
- In Anglo-American societies, dominant construction of gender incorporated into child protection discourse
- Subjectivities regarding mother & father exemplify this

(Brown et al, 2009; Douglas & Walsh, 2010; Freymond,2007; Scourfield,2006,2003, 2001a,b; Schmid, 2006; Swift, 1995)

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Constructions of Mothers

- 'parent' short hand for 'mother'
 - primary caregiver - figure responsible for children's well-being
 - expected to find resources (material & psychological) to meet children's needs
- Mothers considered inadequate if unable to ensure children protected e.g. domestic violence
- Potential structural explanations minimised/overlooked

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Mothers

Young mothers:

embody irresponsibility, immorality,
inability to make sound choices,
threat to offspring

Question construction of girls as
innocent; challenge dominant
precepts regarding marriage &
stability

(Weinberg, 2006)

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Mothers as point of intervention

- Intervention directed at mothers
- Services developed with female caregivers in mind
- Progress (child safety) assessed in terms of maternal performance
- Women who challenge: uncooperative & resistant
- Subjectivity effectively reinforces & normalises patriarchal relations
- Burden of ensuring children's well-being placed directly on female shoulders
- Child protection workers tend to be female

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Construction of fathers

- Fathers not only not held to account, practically invisible
- Extends beyond fathers to any involved men (boyfriends, grandfathers, friends etc.)
- Three central depictions
 - Violent/potentially abusive. 'Unknown' men - potential threat to children & women's safety
 - intrusive. Dependent on mothers (e.g. financially); as only temporarily involved; burdensome
 - simply irrelevant. May be present, but are not imagined as having value.

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Consequences of gender constructions

- focus on immediate assessment of potential harm
- narrows repertoire of potential interventions (not conducting home visits, expecting office consultations)
- resorting to surveillance & intrusive measures
- little effort made to relate to 'unidentified males'
- potential resources a man might offer family overlooked
 - case of African-American fathers
 - financial support seen as prime indicator of involvement; men who don't help seen as uncaring, regardless if maintains relationship with child
 - men's unemployment = personal failure

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Further consequences

- Involved fathers/interested men must go to significant lengths to show connection & commitment to child
- Once he has 'proven' himself, father's willingness to parent highly validated by workers
- Reinforces notion that men need not take on responsibility for their children
- However, resources remain hidden & thus unavailable to mothers

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Constructions of Children

- Children not identified as gendered beings
 - Prevailing construction of children conforms to Western portrayals :
 - limited agency
 - vulnerable
 - Require emotionally nurturing parenting figure
 - dependent on adult protection & intervention
- (Ansell, 2005; Bühler-Neiderberger, 2007)

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Subjectivities of Service Providers

- Service providers (both child protection workers & foster parents) tend to be women
- Men in child welfare agencies frequently inhabit senior positions
- Replicates broader gender relations: Women take on caring work, while men take on decision making & interaction with external world
- Subjectivities ingrained in Child Protection thinking-system built on early volunteer efforts of middle class women

(Scourfield, 2006, 2003)

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Conclusion: Child Protection Discourse

- Interrelationship & indeed a mutually reinforcing intersection between
 - key assumptions of Child Protection discourse
 - way in which gender is constructed within this discourse
 - dominant gender assumptions

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Child welfare in South Africa

- Despite White Paper & Developmental Social Welfare, SA child welfare policy & practice dominated by Child Protection discourse
- imported through colonisation
- reinforced through 'global, international' validations of Child Protection approach
 - child's rights instruments,
 - 'international' (English) publications, and
 - 'international' NGO agendas

(Allsopp, 2005; Patel, 2005)

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Mothers in SA Child Welfare Discourse

- Primarily women fall under gaze of child welfare
- Mothers responsible for their children's happiness & key to future intergenerational stability
- Unmarried (young) mothers = undesirable parenting figures.
 - Myth: Abuse Child Support Grant
 - Budgeting programs before referral for grant
- Societal factors giving rise to poverty & impact thereof on parenting capacity & hence gendered caregiving largely overlooked.

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SA Reality..... Child Gauge 2009

Pendlebury et al, 2009

- boys(52%) outnumber girls (48%).
- African children - 84% of total
- 3.7 million orphans: 20%, but 1/3 African
- 17% double orphans
- death of mother likely to have greater impact than absence of a father
- 1% or 170,000 children have fathers status “unknown”
- 34% lived with both their biological parents
- 40% — more than 7 million children — live with their mothers but without their fathers
- 3% live with fathers present, mothers absent

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Impact on gender construction

- reinforces gender bias in child protection, although gaze now shifts to grandmothers
- Female caregivers=‘grandmothers’
 - Programs for mothers now for grandmothers
 - Grandmother who provides nurturing care = worthy
- Females dealt with as individual units

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Fathers in South Africa

- Almost don't feature in SA child protection discourse
- When occasionally named, portrayed as deficient /potential sexual predators
- Many children don't know their fathers, fact over-generalized to all familial situations
 - Fathers who do have relationships with their children are not seen
 - Concomitant supports are not put in place

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Service Providers

- Gendered nature of Anglo-American child welfare systems mirrored in SA (Patel, 2009)
- almost entirely women
- the few men in senior positions
- 'foster parents' = lone foster mother
- Questions regarding impact of gendered child welfare systems has application also to South African reality

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Developmental Social Welfare

- Patel, expanding on Midgely's ideas re: social development, created South African welfare framework
- To
 - replace individualistic, discriminatory & expensive assumptions of apartheid welfare
 - assert people's rights & offer a meaningful response to mass poverty
- White Paper (1997); elaborated upon by Patel (2005)
- I have applied essential elements to create a model of Developmental Child Welfare

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Developmental Child Welfare

- shared childrearing betw. state & family networks
- starting point: child well-being rather than abuse
- children located within familial & community network, individual rights interwoven with collective ones
- holistic, strengths-oriented
- structural factors acknowledged

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Developmental Social Welfare

Site of intervention: community not deviant parent

Focus of intervention: developing capacity to promote child, family & community strengths

Prevention thru' community development; multilevel, addressing individual, familial, community, regional & national concerns thru' intersectoral, multidisciplinary initiatives

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More on gender & dev child wlf

- issues facing female caregivers (e.g. lone mothers, grandparents & aunts, as well as female dominated households) - structural component?
- Needs of fathers not overlooked
 - how the potential/actual resources of involved fathers can be maximised
 - how apparently uninterested fathers can perhaps be reengaged
 - What leads to less involved fathers?

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Children & Dev child welfare

- differentiates between male & female children
- analyses access to resources; responsibilities & burdens
- differentiated programs required
- should ask for e.g.:
 - Experience of boys vs. girls if
 - identified as HIV positive
 - living or surviving on street experience
 - heading household
 - in young offender system
- intersectional analysis of power: How do race, class, gender & age intersect?

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Limitations: Dev Child Welfare

- Constructions of gender & dev child welfare not dominant constructions: Lessens probability that such a discourse will be adopted on both construction of child welfare & of gender

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Limitations

Critiques of Developmental Social Welfare which informs Developmental Child Welfare discourse

- Familialist
- Neo-liberal: focus on self-reliance, economic development, funding criteria
- Vague

(Sevenhuijsen, Bozalek, Gouws, & Minnaar-McDonald 2003; Sewpaul & Hoelscher, 2004)

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Response to limitations

- DSW
 - framework - required expansion for various fields; WIP
 - language of self-reliance & economic development language of community development
 - emphasis on synergy between socio & economic development
- In Ch. Wlf model hope to have addressed concerns

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Other child welfare models?

- No literature found on gender in
 - Family Services
 - Community Care models (this is not community care health model)
- Requires exploration; offer interpretation based on info available

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Family Services Assumptions

- joint childrearing responsibility between state & family
- preventive view – support child wellbeing through universal state initiatives
- partnership approach, seeking collaborative, joint solutions with families

(Freymond & Cameron, 2006; Hetherington, 2006, 2003; Waldegrave, 2006)

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Family Services model & gender

- Gender roles not explicitly addressed
- seems dominant subjectivities infuse approach
- View of family is nuclear, parents site of intervention
- Model employed in such societies as Sweden, where gender equity is promoted, but also in places like Germany, where mothers still viewed as being primary caregivers. Less punitive approach, thus mothers may be less harshly dealt with, but does not imply that they & fathers dealt with equally

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Community Care

(Horan & Dalrymple, n.d; Freymond & Cameron, 2006; Pennell, 2007; n.d)

- To date, primarily implemented through Family Group Conferencing
- ensuring all have voice in decision making process, noting power imbalance betw. service providers & users
- allows for integration of structural factors
- child participation in decision making
- use of FGC in domestic violence & sexual abuse- explicit discussions of gender dynamics
- acknowledge men are hidden in dominant child protection processes
- 'surrounded' by child protection system
- More explicit discussion needed

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Switzerland- Current child welfare practice (Stuckert, 2009)

- My examination superficial at best
- Child protection decisions made at local or regional level by community members (lay people) drawn from Communal/Local Municipality Social Welfare Committees into Vormundschaftsbehörde
- Input into deliberations given by social worker, who may / not have child welfare background. No voting power
- Charges with criminal courts when extreme abuse

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Proposed professionalization

- Current practice –
 - Deemed by Swiss as arbitrary & unprofessional
- New legislation (2013)
 - professionalized
 - expert-driven- specialized multidisciplinary teams
 - emphasis on creating clear & consistent process, with needs of children & families eclipsed by future bureaucracy needed
 - 'protection' is core (adult & child protection)

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Underlying assumptions

- Underpinning welfare values
 - individuals are responsible for their lot
 - vigilance & surveillance
 - re-integration
- Mimics Child Protection
 - Intrusion
 - Increased use of 'Behörde' (authorities)
- Mimics Family Services
 - Universal supports e.g. Jugend & Familienberatung
 - but limited e.g. ito child care spots or before/after school care
- Not court

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Gender in Swiss child welfare

- Dominant values
 - Patriarchal society
 - Structural arrangements require mothers at home
 - 60% working, 80% part time
- Expect that child welfare assumptions re gender replicate dominant society

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Concluding Thoughts

- Further exploration needed re interrelationship between assumptions of child welfare model & associated gender constructions
 - Is it simply reinforcement of dominant gender relations? Or do underlying child welfare assumptions shape associated gender constructions?
 - Can mothers/fathers/children be cast differently in developmental child welfare approach if dominant gender constructions don't conform?

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