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Social Factors that Contribute to Child Abuse in Informal Settlements: A case study of Ivory Park

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CHAPTER 5

MAIN FINDINGS, SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY.

5.1 Main Findings

5.1.1 Main Family Findings

The main findings in this study are as follows; firstly the primary caregiver who was the person responsible for the day to day care of the children was in most cases not the biological mother of the child. The care-giver was someone related to the child and lived in the same household with the child. These caregivers ranged from grandmothers, aunts, and parent's relative and adult sisters who took care of their siblings. Each caregiver was responsible for more than one child. On the average one caregiver looked after three to four children. The biological mothers of the children were either deceased, working away from home, living somewhere with a partner who was not the biological father of the child. There was not much that was said about the biological fathers of the children, or the roles they played in the child's life.

There were high levels of illiteracy among the women in the study, there were several women who had never been to school and many of them had only primary school education. The issue of illiteracy came to the attention of the researcher when the participants had to tick on their highest level of education. The only space provided on the questionnaire was from primary school education to tertiary education. This was when some of them asked as to where they can fill in if they never had any formal education in their lives. Some of them could not read or write and had to be helped in filling in questionnaires. It must be pointed out that participants did not came across as illiterate as they had knowledge of so many things that they have taught themselves.

All the children who were at school going age in these families attended school. Schools seem to play a very supportive role to the children. In some families children were part of the feeding scheme for needy and vulnerable children at the school. They receive lunch prepared at the school free of charge, especially at primary school level. There were corporate organisation and local churches that also assisted some of the children with school uniform. Some children whom their parents cannot afford were exempted from paying school fees. However, parents or caregivers had to come to the school and discuss their individual situation with the school principal.

The fact that school were playing this supportive role to the families and removed all the barriers and condition for accepting children into the school. This has indeed made it possible for most parents to send children to school and to approach the schools if they are experiencing some difficulties. This is unlike in the past when children could be denied schooling because they were not in possession of a birth certificate or did not have money for school fees.

The type of dwelling that most families lived in were mainly shacks build with corrugated iron or wooden material. There were also more than five people living in each family and the place they occupied was very small. Most families did not own the piece of lands where they were living, but they were backyard dwellers. They paid rent at the end of every month to the owner of the stand. In most yards the shacks were built very close together, as the stand owners wanted to make more money. This problem of overcrowding is evident throughout Ivory Park. This posed a serious health threat for most people; especially children as the environment is also not clean. Children are often seen playing at the dumping places. The threat of fire is also huge, especially because the source of energy for some families is paraffin and candles. This community seems to be very stable, as the majority of families have live at the same place for a long time.

The three main services that were widely available to the community members of Ivory Park are the schools, clinics and municipal offices. Many families have

either a school or a clinic within a walking distance. In other words community members did not walk long distances to get to any of these services. The clinics seem to be playing a very important role in the community, in primary health care and in the area of HIV/AIDS education and intervention. These clinics through the Gauteng Department of Health has strong partnership with community based projects dealing with different health issues in Ivory Park. These partnerships seem to be very effective and benefiting many people in the community. Some families who had sick family members pointed during the interview that they were receiving a lot of support and education to help them deal with their situation. The municipal offices were also a vital resource for the community members. They are used for different community based project that are facilitated by Social Developers and also used for pension paypoints. The services that most community members seemed to be struggling with were water for consumption and sanitation, houses and electricity.

There is a lot of substance abuse in this community, especially the abuse of alcohol and marijuana. Shebeens and tarvens are visible in most parts of the community. These are favourite hangout places for some community members, some of them are licence and some are not. There is a lot of violence, loud music, gunshots and alcohol is often sold to underage children. This is also a place where many young people get entertainment and many criminal activities happen at these places at night. Most participants cited the problem of underage drinking as one of the things that led to conflict between them and their teenage children in their families.

Respondents were a bit hesitant to answer questions on household income and expenses. Some could not clearly state what was the family income, because the family did not have a guaranteed income at the end of the week or month. In families, especially where the grandmother was the head of the household, the old age pension was the only source of income for the entire family. There were some children in families who qualified for social support grants but could not access these grants due to lack of proper documents that are required when an

application is made. These children did not have birth certificates or Road to Health Clinic cards and in some cases their teenage mothers did not have an identity documents. Some of the mothers with no proper documentation were illegal immigrants from neighbouring countries, but their children were born in South Africa.

There were families where both parents were deceased or the mother was deceased and the whereabouts of the father where not known. These families qualified for foster care grants and many of them have applied through social services. Few of them were receiving the grants and they waited for a long time before their applications could be processed. Many of them were still waiting for their applications to go through. The process is very long and this put a serious strain on the family.

Grand mothers and other elderly people who were raising children were experiencing great difficulties in disciplining children, especially teenagers. They described today's children as very different from the children they raised in their era. Many of them felt that these children challenge them a lot and disobey attributed most of the time. Most of them attributed this problem to the fact that children have rights and they are not allowed to punish them physically. This was one of the many challenges that families were facing.

There were other challenges that were facing these families, lack of employment, crime, violence and the lack of safety in the community. Young girls engaging in intimate relationship at an early age with men who are much older that them. This could be the cause of high incidences of teenage pregnancy in Ivory Park and could put many young girls at risks of contracting sexually transmitted diseases such HIV/AIDS. Some families were dealing with the loss/death of their loved ones, in most cases the person lost was some one who provided for their families. These were people who were in their economically productive years of their lives. Some families were looking after a member of the family member who were sick and were not fit to work.

There was alcohol and domestic violence in some of the families, this happened in most cases when there was a male partner who was violent and was abusing alcohol. In some cases the violence will be cause by an adult child who was still living with the family. Co-habitation seemed to be very common in this community, whereby partners were living together without any special agreement and younger partners living together without the approval of their parents. There was some degree of child neglect in some families, in those children were some times left without any adult supervision. There was also the strong evidence of punitive parents, who believed strongly in physical punishment as the best way of dealing with children.

The main findings in terms of the difference in coping between abusing and non-abusing families, abusing families seem to be isolated and had no support or did not utilise existing structures that could provide them with support. In some cases the abusing families were not originally South Africans, they were foreigners from the neighbouring countries. It was not clear as to why some of these families were isolated in most cases, whether it's being ostracised by local community members or they do not feel that they belong to this community. This however, does not mean that all abusing families were foreigners. Non abusing families seemed to have support and utilised other structures in their communities that could provide them with support. Also there seem to be communication in these families in terms of the way they resolved conflict.

5.1.2 Main Community Findings

The main community findings are as follows, the majority of participants in all the four groups were unemployed and seeking employment. Many of them were in the productive years of their lives economically. Many of them understood what child abuse was, with the majority of them understanding child abuse as sexual abuse. Sexual abuse was the most form of abuse they knew of. Many of them made examples of them forms of abuse from the things that they saw happening on daily basis in their communities. For instance children being neglected and

their basic needs not being meet adequately. All of them said they have heard and they knew something about children's rights. However, very few could give examples of children's rights.

The majority of in participants in the four groups of community viewed children's rights as the cause of problems responsible for difficult behaviour in children. That is because of the children's rights that many children today disobey their parents. Many of them said children should not have rights because they abuse those rights. They saw rights as something that was given to the children by the government and not as something that is in place to protect the children. It is mainly the youth group that agreed to the fact that children need to have rights so that they can be protected. Most participants in all the groups felt that rights were a Western notion and something that was imposed to the by the government. Most participants also believed that it was wrong for children to say no to parents or adults, this was seen as disrespecting one's elders.

The majority of participants in all the four groups believed that it was the responsibility of the mothers to take care of the children and to keep them safe. Even women themselves responded by saying they were the ones responsible for the safety and the care of the children. The safety, care and protection of children were not seen as a responsibility of everyone in the community. In the group of men that were interviewed many of them saw women as the ones abusing children. They were in some ways blaming women for doing certain things and saying they are the ones abusing children.

There were certain adults in the community who seemed to involve children in illegal activities. Some participants pointed out that some adults take advantage of children and use them to sell drugs and promise them a lot of money and material things. Some were even involved in stealing cars and doing other criminal activities. The area was also described as an unsafe place for young women and girl children. There were many young girls who fell in the trap of having intimate relationship with older men. Many of these men have their own

families and often use material things like money, a fancy cellular phone and nice clothes to attract these young girl. Some of the participants said this was one of the main causes of conflict with their teenage girls. According to some participants there were some parents who seem to be encouraging this behaviour in children. They encourage them to find means of survival by having relationships with men who can provide for them. This behaviour is often called (*u ku zama),* meaning surviving. Significantly this means that many young girls will be trapped in this situation because they do not see the risks involved and long-term consequence of engaging in this behaviour. Also because of their immaturity developmentally they are not able to see the after effects of this behaviour.

In all the four groups of community members interviewed the type of dwelling they reported to be living in was mainly shacks. There were illegal electric connections in some of the areas. Electric wires ran across the road where children and other people walked. This posed a serious hard to many people especially children who often play in the streets. It might be that the need for people to have electricity is greater and people often overlook the danger that can come with illegal connections.

Poverty was profoundly a serious issue and one of the many factors that was evident across all the people who participated in this study. Many individuals and households were living in absolute poverty in that they did not have enough to sustain life and to meet the basic needs. Some households did not have any form of income and lived below the poverty line. Some depended on the income from social support grant and for some the income was not guaranteed at all. Having food on the table depended on whether the individual provider of the family manage to find work and bring something home. As mentioned earlier in the study poverty places huge stress on the individual family and its members and consequently on the community and the society at large. It had serious implications in that it affected both adults and children, but children are affected the most.

The family's inability to meet basic needs for the children means that children who live in households where there is no food could suffer severe malnutrition at an early stage. When children get to a certain stage, they might find their own ways of surviving and getting food. This might mean doing some labour for other people and get paid, and this will result in child labour. Some children might runaway from their homes to seek better life somewhere in the streets and this will results in many children ending up in the streets. Young girls can be at risk of getting into sexual relationships with individuals who promise to provide for them. This is how many young women are taken advantage of in the community of Ivory Park.

5.2 Summary of the Study

The study aimed to look at social factors that contribute to child abuse in informal settlements. To identify specific social factors within Ivory Park, which make children to be vulnerable to child abuse. The study also aims to identify different forms of child abuse, which occur in this community and to develop an understanding of the family structures and the functioning of families. Also, to further explore the perception of community members on child abuse and their knowledge and awareness on children's rights. On the basis of the findings and the outcome of the study, it is hoped that there will be more understanding and knowledge on how certain factors within a community an effect of children or contributes to child abuse. Also, to offer more understanding about community member's perception on child abuse, their knowledge and awareness on children's rights. To identify different coping mechanisms and strengths between abusing and non-abusing families. Finally, to offer recommendations the can be helpful to the professionals and everyone working in the field of child abuse. In order to engage in a study of this nature fifty families living in Ivory Park were interviewed and four groups of community members. The groups of community members comprised of women, men, church members and the youth from Ivory Park.

5.3 Conclusion

The study concludes that there are specific social factors in Ivory Park that are implicated as playing a causal role in child abuse. The factors are not necessarily determining factors as being the main course of child abuse in this community. They are however contributing factors as to why many children are abused in this community. Specific to Ivory Park and the findings of this study, the contributing factors are lack of parental supervision. Children are often left without the adult supervision in this community and in some cases children are left under the supervision of other children. This problem put many children at risk of getting involved in danger or at risk of being abused by other adults in the community. As we know many cases of sexual abuse of children in South Africa, happened when the mother/caregiver was outside the house or went to the shop or left the child in the care of somebody. Some parents or caregivers would not check from time to time where the children were playing. Children will often leave home to play somewhere and be gone for a long time. Overcrowding is one of the factors identified as contributing to child abuse. Many children living in one or two roomed houses witness adults engaging in sexual activities and children become sexually precocious. Overcrowded living conditions also pose a huge health risk for most children.

Abuse of substances and the availability of the substance to children in the community was another contributing factor. Substances like alcohol and marijuana are easily available even to underage children. Shebeens and taverns in this community do not adhere to the rule of not selling alcohol to children under the age of eighteen. This makes children to start experimenting with these substances at early age before they can fully understand the consequences of their actions. Violence in the community and the fact that children witness a lot of violence in the community on regular basis can be seen as a form of child abuse. This is because violence affects children at different levels of their development.

Parental attitudes, in that many parents had different ways of child rearing practices. Some parents were punitive and believed in physical punishment as the only way to deal with children misbehaviour. Parents in these families often punish children severely when they are angry. Regarding community's attitudes towards the protection of the children, it came out clearly in this study that most community members did not believe that child protection was everyone's responsibility in the community. Child protection was often seen as the role of the mother or the parents of the children. In other words community members have moved from the belief that "every child is my child" and that child protection was everyone's responsibility.

Early parenting was one of the factors that contributed to child abuse, this was due to teenage pregnancy and teenagers having children at a time when they are not able to care for children. Poverty and unemployment can also be seen as factor contributing to child abuse. In cases whereby families are unable to meet the basic needs of the children, children could be at risk of finding their own ways of surviving when they get to a certain age. This is where they can be trapped into getting money in wrong ways and can be used by adults in criminal activities.

There was problem of male adults who have intimate sexual relationships with girls at an early age. Many of these adult seem not to be aware that having a sexual relationship with a child under the age of sixteen is statutory rape and that they can actually be arrested for this crime. Finally, as mentioned earlier in this chapter all the above mentioned factors are not determining factors to child abuse, but the significantly contribute to child abuse of many children in Ivory Park.

5.4 Recommendations

5.4.1 Recommendations for further research

The study recommends that there be further research on the following:

- Child abuse in general in South Africa.
- How social factors or problems in a particular community can contribute to the abuse of children in many different forms of child abuse.
- Research to establish the factors that make child abuse to be more prevalent in impoverished communities.
- Research to understand the context in which abuse takes place and the functioning of the families in which abuse occurs.
- Further research is also needed to establish as to why child abuse incidences seem to be on the increase. In the South African Polices Services statistics for 2004/5, child abuse was on the increase as compared to the previous years. It will be important to know as to whether there has been an increase in reporting as people are becoming more aware of child abuse or that has actually been an increase in the incidences of child abuse.

5.4.2 Other Recommendations

The study further recommends that intervention strategies in terms of child abuse be proactive. Proactive in a sense of doing something before the problem occurs. This could involve preventative work in community education on the different forms of child abuse. Educating community members at a large scale and involving the very children who are the victims of child abuse in most cases would be beneficial. Educating communities also about children's rights and their responsibilities is very essential. The fact that children's rights are there to

protect children in the same way we have workers rights to protect the workers and women's rights to protect women should be highlighted.

Finally, the study would recommend some form of support especially for grand mothers and other elderly people who are raising orphan children. Emotional support for families who are going through the grieving period due to the loss of their loved ones. Helping families with no income to get involved in self-help and income generation projects that exist in the community. Non-governmental organisation working in the field of substance abuse and reproductive health need to do more education in the community especially among the youth, to create awareness about the dangers of abusing substances and to curb teenage pregnancy in this community.