Chapter 11
Parenting Practices in Botswana: A Nexus of Legal and Sociocultural Discourses

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ABSTRACT

As in other Sub-Saharan countries, the legal reforms that occur in Botswana have significant effects on family functioning and how parenting occurs. Parenting practices such as strategies for supporting, monitoring, and disciplining children have significant effects on children’s physical, social, psychological, emotional, and behavioral wellbeing. An important section of the structural system that affects parenting practices is the law. Botswana’s Children’s Act is an overriding law that informs any children’s policy and program as well as parenting behaviors. Children’s laws in the country are influenced by both socio-cultural discourses as well as the international bodies that Botswana is signatory to such as the Convention for the Rights of the Child (CRC). The authors adopt a critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine how Botswana’s Children’s Act of 2009 contributes to parenting practices in the country and the impact of socio-cultural discourses in understanding and implementing the act. Implications for social work practice, research, and policy are highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

Parenting is a concept that is understood globally, but it is difficult to attach an exact meaning to it because nowadays a parent no longer necessarily means an individual with a biological tie to the child. For example, parenting can refer to a fostering situation including individual(s) or the state. The definition of parenting varies depending on the context in which it is used. Parenting commonly refers to child rearing behavior and parental beliefs, and attitudes such as perceptions, expectations, knowledge, ideas, goals, and values (Smith, 2011). That is, parenting denotes activities endorsed by parents when they interact with their child or children to enable physical, social, psychological, emotional, and behavioral wellbeing throughout the child’s lifespan (Liang, Fuller, & Singer, 2000; Danford, Schultz & Marvicsin, 2015). Parenting practices are noticeable behaviors, activities, decisions, and methods that are part and parcel of the parenting process implemented by parents to socialize and care for children (Liang, Fuller, & Singer, 2000; Bornstein, Hahn, & Haynes, 2011). Examples of parenting practices include parental involvement, support, monitoring, and disciplining of children.

Children’s exposure to various parenting practices speaks to their developmental processes (Williamson, Dutch & Clawson, 2010; Myers, Shoffner & Briggs, 2002). Positive parenting practices have affirmative behavioral outcomes such as delayed sexual debut (Wamoyi, Fenwick, Urassa, Zaba & Stones, 2011). Sexual debut is the age at which people have sexual intercourse for the first time in their life time (National AIDS Coordinating Agency-NACA, 2004). Negative parenting practices are associated with several behavioral challenges such as delinquency (Demuth & Brown, 2004) and depression (Garbarino, Vorras & Kostelny, 2002; Gershoff, 2010). For example, on the one hand, socio-cultural parenting practices such as physical discipline tend to be in conflict with legal parenting expectations since they often result in poor mental health development, and on the other hand those that encourage communal child care affirm legal expectations since they promote children’s security and protection that enhance children’s developmental needs.

Therefore the effects of structural factors on family structure and functioning as well as parenting practices cannot be over-emphasized. As in other sub-Saharan countries, the structural changes that occur in Botswana have significant effects on family structures and on how parenting occurs. Given the changes that occur at a family level as a result of economic and social development, one would expect that parenting issues would be given priority in research and social practice. However, limited literature on parenting implies that the issues pertaining to parenting practices are not given adequate attention in Botswana, especially in the research agenda. Culture and poverty play a significant role in the functioning of the family as well as in parenting practices (McDaniel & Zulu 1996; Ruiz-Casares 2009; Gaisie
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