



UBUNTU OR HUNHU PERSPECTIVE IN UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS OF STREET CHILDREN OF HARARE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Very few academic studies have been conducted that interrogate substance abuse and sexual behaviours of the street children of the Harare Central Business District from the Ubuntu or Hunhu perspective. Over the years, the Western world theories and concepts have been used to explain the realities of these children. Ironically, when the street children engage in the substance abuse and various sexual behaviours it is seen as in contrast with moral values which is one of the cardinals of the Ubuntu or Hunhu perspective. The most crucial question is whose morals? The study is based on reviewing existing literature around Ubuntu or Hunhu perspective and streetism. The paper concludes by arguing for Ubuntu or Hunhu perspective in understanding the sexual behaviours of the street children of the Harare Central Business District.

KEY TERMS: street children, ubuntu or hunhu, Pan-Africanism

KEY DATES

Received: 02 November 2019

Revised: 02 December 2019

Accepted: 10 December 2019

Published: 20 February 2020

Funding: None

Conflict of Interest: None

Permission: Not applicable

Ethics approval: Not applicable

This article appeared in a special issue of the African Journal of Social Work (AJSW) titled Ubuntu Social Work. The special issue focused on short articles that advanced the theory and practice of ubuntu in social work. In the special issue, these definitions were used:

- Ubuntu refers to a collection of values and practices that black people of Africa or of African origin view as making people authentic human beings. While the nuances of these values and practices vary across different ethnic groups, they all point to one thing – an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world.
- Ubuntu social work refers to social work that is theoretically, pedagogically and practically grounded in ubuntu.
- The term ubuntu is expressed differently in several African communities and languages but all referring to the same thing. In Angola, it is known as gimuntu, Botswana (muthu), Burkina Faso (maaya), Burundi (ubuntu), Cameroon (bato), Congo (bantu), Congo Democratic Republic (bomoto/bantu), Cote d'Ivoire (maaya), Equatorial Guinea (maaya), Guinea (maaya), Gambia (maaya), Ghana (biako ye), Kenya (utu/munto/mondo), Liberia (maaya), Malawi (umunthu), Mali (maaya/hadama de ya), Mozambique (vumuntu), Namibia (omundu), Nigeria (mutunchi/iwa/agwa), Rwanda (bantu), Sierra Leone (maaya), South Africa (ubuntu/botho), Tanzania (utu/obuntu/bumuntu), Uganda (obuntu), Zambia (umunthu/ubuntu) and Zimbabwe (hunhu/unhu/botho/ubuntu). It is also found in other Bantu countries not mentioned here.

INTRODUCTION

Very few academic studies have been conducted that interrogate substance abuse and sexual behaviours of the street children of the Harare Central Business District from the Ubuntu or Hunhu perspective. Over the years, the Western world theories and concepts have been used to explain the realities of these children. Ironically, when the street children engage in the substance abuse and various sexual behaviours it is seen as in contrast with moral values which is one of the cardinals of the Ubuntu or Hunhu perspective. The most crucial question is whose morals? The study is based on reviewing existing literature around Ubuntu or Hunhu perspective and streetism. The paper concludes by arguing for Ubuntu or Hunhu perspective in understanding the sexual behaviours of the street children of the Harare Central Business District.

UBUNTU AND STREETISM

Substance abuse and various sexual behaviours are twin problems affecting street children the world over (Wakatama, 2007; Hetch 1998). The *Ubuntu* or *hunhu* is a philosophy which is grounded in the African thinking as noted by Mugumbate and Chereni (2019), Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013), Ramose (1999) and Mbiti (1969). According to Samkange and Samkange (1980), Shutte (1993), Mbiti (1975), Mangena, (2007 and 2012), Hanks (2008), Wagid and Smeyers (2012), Morreira (2013) the *Ubuntu* or *hunhu* philosophy is premised on key characteristics such as humanness, kindness, love, compassion, moral values, and a Xhosa proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. Ramose (1999); Mbiti (1969) observed that the *Ubuntu* or *hunhu* as an African philosophy originated among the Bantu speaking people. The paper argues that the *Ubuntu* or *hunhu* philosophy is relevant to theorize and problematise substance abuse, sexuality issues and street children in the African context.

Mbiti (1975) observed that African morals lay a great emphasis on social conduct, since a basic African view is that the individual exists only because others exist. The author noted that morals guide people in doing what is right and good to keep society not only alive but in harmony. Mbiti argued that morals guide people in doing what is right and good for both their own sake and that of their community. He also noted that morals help people to do their duties to society and enjoy certain rights from the same. Mbiti observed that it is morals which have produced the virtues that society appreciates and endeavours to preserve. Some of the virtues are; friendship, compassion, love, honesty, justice, courage, self-control, helpfulness, bravery and others.

Drawing from substance abuse among street children, it is the responsibility of the community to ensure that the needs and rights of vulnerable groups are met. For example, Mushunje (2006) observed that within the *Ubuntu* or *unhu* philosophy, vulnerable children such as orphans were taken care of by the community through the *Zunde Ramambo₁* programme. The *Zunde Ramambo₂* programme is a social protection mechanism which takes care of the needs of the vulnerable members of the society. Some of the vulnerable members of the society include orphans and other vulnerable children, the sick, the elderly among others. In traditional society these vulnerable members of society received assistance in the form of material and psychological support from their communities.

Within the context of *Ubuntu* or *hunhu* philosophy, for street children to abuse substance such as wild horse violates the moral values of the family and that of the community, as observed by Mbiti. In addition, for adolescent street children to engage in sexual behaviours such as oral sex, intergenerational sex, sodomy, child prostitution and multiple sexual partners, among others (Hecht, 1998; Mhizha, 2010; Tadele, 2009; Ruparanganda, 2008, Chikoko et al 2018 & 2019), is regarded as immoral. From the *Ubuntu* or *hunhu*, context, such children were seen as immoral and they might need to be punished.

One wonders who should be blamed in such circumstances? Is it the fault of these children to engage in the abuse of substances or it is the fault of the society for failing to protect these children from such vices? Within the context of *Ubuntu* or *hunhu*, such children belong to the families and communities. Therefore, it is the community in the form of families, local authorities and other stakeholders that should be blamed for the emergence of substance abuse among street children. Actually, the emergence of street children and substance abuse shows that there is moral decadence of society as families and communities are failing to uphold their moral duties and responsibilities of taking care of vulnerable children such as street children.

UNHU MODEL OF STREETISM

Table 1: Ubuntu model of streetism

Community or family with Unhu	Level	Community or family without Unhu
Adequate child support Children at home	Home (nuclear family)	No adequate child support Child neglect and abuse Divorce rates high
Takes care of children in need	Larger family (relatives)	Relatives ignore children in need
Takes care of children in need Adults are positive role models	Community	Communities ignore children in need Adults exhibit anti-social behaviour (negative md
Children are in school	School	No programs to keep children in school
Streetism is shunned	Streets	Adults exhibit anti-social behaviour Streetism is rewarded

Like any other theory or concept, the *Ubuntu* or *Hunhu* perspective has some weaknesses. The criticism of *Ubuntu* or *hunhu* philosophy is that it is a rather a vague concept as Lutz (2009) argues that “it seems to mean anything, that one chooses.” The *Ubuntu* or *hunhu* has no clearly defined characteristics. However, as its major stand point is the idea that when street children are indulging in abusing substances and various sexual behaviour this demonstrates moral decadences in societies or communities.

CONCLUSION

As discussed above, there is need to analyse the realities of the street children of the Harare Central Business District from the Pan African view of the *Ubuntu* or *hunhu* perspective. However, when street children engage in these behaviours it illustrates moral decadence on the streets of Harare Central Business District. The most crucial question is whose moral? Is it about the morals of these children or the society? The street children are a product of a society. The children were never born or given birth by the streets. Therefore, it is upon the society of Zimbabwe to produce citizens that have good morals.

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