

# TRENDS IN SOUTH AFRICAN CHILD WELFARE FROM 2001-2010

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## Executive Summary

In an effort to move away from a discriminatory, residual welfare model towards one that is more inclusive, rights-based and developmental in character, the South African welfare system experienced important shifts post-apartheid. Change has typically been assessed through the lens of transformation. This study endeavoured to establish the trends, particularly in child welfare, over the previous decade (2001-2010). Trends were described as including new practices or practice models, significant changes within existing practice, novel projects and programmes, new internal agency policies, but also ongoing practices.

The purpose of the study was to identify developments which might extend beyond the formal transformation agenda. In addition, the study aimed at highlighting the drivers that influence or shape these trends. Policymakers, practitioners and academics can benefit from understanding the recent trends and the factors motivating them.

In order to access the required information, three sources of data were used:

- Seven in-depth interviews were held, five with representatives of national child welfare organisations, one with a child welfare advocacy expert, and one with a university child welfare instructor.
- A total of 250 directors of child welfare agencies (almost all affiliated to Child Welfare South Africa) were asked to complete a questionnaire, with 12 responses received. Of the 17 university social work departments approached, six instructors completed the questionnaire. In both the interviews and questionnaires, respondents were asked to identify trends and drivers firstly within their own agency or institution, secondly within the South African child welfare field and finally internationally.
- A literature scan of child welfare related articles written between 2001 and 2010 was conducted in the local journals *The Social Work Practitioner-Researcher* and *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, yielding 155 entries. From the international literature, 131 entries were identified utilising the search concepts 'child abuse'; 'child maltreatment'; and 'child welfare' in *Scholars Portal*.

Analysis of the interviews and questionnaires revealed particular trends and drivers. The dominant developments and the contributing factors are frequently intertwined. Nevertheless the following dominant trends were identified:

- Conceptual and methodological shifts which included greater awareness of community work guided by the notion of an "integrated approach" and the importance of utilising partnerships. Tensions between casework and prevention, as well as instrumental aid (providing food, supporting grant applications) versus community development continued to exist.
- Shifts in who the target groups are for child welfare interventions, i.e. vulnerable children included not only physically, sexually or emotionally abused children, but also those with disabilities or affected by HIV/AIDS, those exploited for sex or labour, or exposed to domestic or community violence.
- The emergence of an acute crisis in child welfare, characterised by increasing demand for services, human resource shortages, inadequate planning and regulation regarding an emerging child welfare workforce, the absence of a child welfare information system and funding deficiencies.

The factors that were revealed as key to driving the trends included:

- Changing needs and hence implications for care, such as the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and widespread poverty.
- The relationship with government, primarily through the introduction of various policies. Despite many of the policies being viewed positively and cooperative relationships existing at certain levels, interaction with the state was characterised by participants as frustrating, due to policy inconsistencies, funding challenges, inadequate coordination, unrealistic demands for accountability and inadequate subsidisation.
- Shortage of human resources and the emergence of an expanded, diversified child welfare workforce that extends beyond social workers to include such categories as child and youth, social auxiliary, and community development workers.

- International influences, which through funding and international priorities, affected - both positively and negatively - target groups, emphases (e.g. on children's rights) and programmes implemented locally.

The predominant areas in the journal articles reviewed were on sexual abuse, the HIV/AIDS crisis and the needs of adolescents. While there was some overlap with teaching and practice trends, the research agenda diverged markedly from national policy and practice realities.

## Conclusions

While the study highlighted the fact that there were conceptual and methodological shifts towards a developmental social welfare approach, the South African child welfare system continued to be inclined towards a child protection model. Furthermore, increased demands were placing the system under pressure. Hence various tensions could be observed, for example, between therapeutic and administrative casework, expert- and user-led programmes, early intervention and prevention, and inter-sectoral collaboration and substitution of services.

The influence of government was enabling through the introduction of certain policies, positive relationships particularly on the national level, and the official support of children's rights. Simultaneously, however, deficits in governance constrained and frustrated efforts by child welfare agencies. Although South African child welfare has perennially been described as being in crisis, the situation had now become acute. Study participants feared a collapse failing urgent intervention in the areas of funding and human resource shortages.

International influences were also experienced ambivalently. Certain exchanges, particularly where South Africans felt they were contributing, were positive and funding support was valued. However, international agendas that did not seem to coincide with local priorities were experienced as detrimental.

Recommendations emerging from the study include:

- Urgent attention by the state in partnership with child welfare actors and academic institutions to develop a sustainable, comprehensive child welfare workforce.
- Immediate resourcing of NPO child welfare service providers.
- When seeking to shift local practice and teaching, decision makers need to consider the influence of changing needs, the child welfare crisis, and the international diffusion of ideas.
- Research priorities need to support practice, particularly with regard to the shifts in target groups, the demands in meeting new needs (for example, AIDS), responses to state policies, challenges arising from the neglect of services to children, a shifting workforce and international influences.

## Introduction

Child welfare potentially plays a key role in South Africa. While families suffered intensely under the apartheid regime, the burden on children, their caregivers and their communities seems to have increased despite the advent of democracy. Various local and global factors have resulted in an increase in poverty and a greater income divide. Increasing numbers of people have left the rural areas for opportunities in the cities. HIV and AIDs have ravished the social structures around children. Many children have lost one or both parents and require alternative care arrangements. The violence of the past has been inherited and seems to have become ingrained in social life. Identifying and implementing meaningful responses remains an ongoing challenge.

In attempting to respond to the lived realities of children and families, South African welfare, including child welfare, has undergone some important shifts post-apartheid (Patel, Schmid & Hochfeld, 2012). The goalposts for transformation are articulated in the White Paper on Social Welfare (1997) which outlines a developmental social welfare (DSW) foundation. The intent of this policy was to move welfare away from a curative, overwhelmingly residual model that was discriminatory, resource intensive, individually focused and problem oriented. The tendency post-apartheid has been to focus on “transformation”. Assessing change in the welfare sector has been through the prism of the DSW policy. Despite DSW rhetoric, a child protection orientation - which defined the child welfare system throughout colonialism and apartheid - continues to influence policy and dominate practice (Schmid, 2010). Child protection models typically stress child safety rather than child well-being more broadly, intrusive measures directed at errant parents (mothers) being the norm. Such an approach is ill-suited to the South African context in which cost-effective approaches are needed and systemic issues, such as poverty, need to be addressed to ensure families and communities are able to adequately care for their children.

### The Research Problem

The above transformation focus applies also to the child welfare sector, made up of government (developing the policy and legislative framework and offering some statutory services) and non-profit agencies (subsidised and thus implicitly contracted by government to deliver child welfare services). In this research, it was anticipated that shifts might be in areas outside of the formal transformation agenda and might not be directly driven by the policy. This study aimed to capture the changes in local child welfare from 2001-2010 and to explain the factors that might have led to such movement.

### Rationale for the Study

It was envisaged that this study would allow practitioners, academics and policy makers to have a bird’s eye view of developments in the sector and an appreciation of what has hindered or promoted particular shifts. Trends are understood as new practices or practice models, significant changes within existing practice, novel projects and programmes, new internal agency policies, and ongoing practices, while drivers are the factors or impulses propelling such trends. By understanding the impulses behind the trends, policy makers in government and in the non-profit sector may be better able to harness positive forces for change. This report may provide academics with some insight regarding the extent to which their research and teaching priorities meet the needs identified by practitioners and what may be needed for a greater alignment of practice and teaching/research demands.

## Literature Review

The literature review revealed a paucity of international research regarding child welfare practice trends. The academic writing concentrated on particular treatment approaches. The international literature focussed predominantly on child welfare as practised in the global North. While reflections on the history of social work exist, early initiatives concern themselves primarily with child and family welfare, while the overall development of child welfare policy and practice has received scant attention. Seemingly, only Feiring and Zeilinski (2011, p.6) have examined research trends, honing in on child maltreatment and recommending that future research address functioning across “individual, family and social-environmental domains”.

What constitutes abuse has shifted over the years from a focus initially on neglect to incorporating a broad menu of abuse, including children who have been neglected, physically, sexually or emotionally abused, sexually exploited, exploited for their labour or subjected to (domestic/community) violence (including child soldiers) and child trafficking. The identification of target groups is dynamic and is related to historical and socio-cultural constructs of childhood and abuse (Mildred & Plummer, 2009; Ansell, 2005; Enns et al, 1995) as well as factors such as public awareness, statistical reporting on rates of abuse, related social indicators and welfare policy reform (Jones, Finkelhor & Halter, 2006). Attention to particular forms of abuse is also not static.

Comparative child welfare research across countries was relatively recent. For example, Freymond and Cameron (2006) and Waldegrave (2006) observed that the understanding of “child welfare” and “child protection”, the construction of parents and children’s families, and the point and nature of engagement varies across child welfare systems. Risk assessment became a feature of Anglophone child protection in the 1990s, accompanied by a marked focus on neo-liberalism in social policy and managerialism in service delivery systems (Ellison, 2007) as well as on information technology, shifting practice from “narrative” to “database” orientations (Parton, 2009). With increased questioning of the underlying punitive, intrusive assumptions within Anglophone approaches (Lonne et al., 2009; Parton, 2009), interest in family support/preservation, built on the trend towards strengths-based and solution-based initiatives, has emerged (Parton, 2009). An uneasy tension exists between risk assessment (deficit-based, expert-defined) and family partnership (strengths-oriented, joint decision-making) approaches (Cameron, Freymond, & Hazineh, 2011). Recently, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary collaboration have received increasing attention (Banks et al., 2008; Whiting et al., 2008; Drabble, 2007; Jacobson, 2001; Kolbo & Strong, 1997). With the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children in 1989, the rights of children were formally placed on the international child welfare agenda. Rights, along with children’s agency and participation, have become part of the everyday discourse of Western child protection agencies (Mildred & Plummer, 2009).

The literature review revealed remarkably little about the effective training of child welfare practitioners or core curriculum, and nothing specifically about comparative curricula. The scant information gleaned suggests that the level of education needed to be a competent child welfare practitioner is open to debate (Todel, Bagdasaryan & Furman, 2009; Perry, 2006; Gleeson, 1992), although both formal education and situational learning seem necessary. Only a smattering of articles recommended themes for inclusion in child welfare education.

While the information on trends was limited, the literature highlighted a range of factors influencing welfare practice and policy (and by extension child welfare). No single impetus but rather various determinants created the context for change. For example, in order to affect public policy and practice, changing needs (such as those of aging populations) had to be placed on the public agenda. Even well-designed policies and legislation were unlikely to alone change practice and service delivery (Hasenfeld, 2010; Van Delft, 2000; Pal, 1992). Only funding policies might succeed in directly affecting practice (Sewpaul & Hölscher, 2004). Local or indigenous conditions, including the state’s political, ideological and moral philosophies were perceived to play an important role in the policies developed (Gray, 2005; Weekes, 1999; George & Wilding, 1994). Global influences drove change through the international diffusion of ideas (Gray, 2005). In the welfare context, impulses further encompassed appropriate social work education (Patel, 2005a, 2005b), the service priorities set by agencies (Ludik & Nel, 2001) and service user advocacy (Westhues, 2002).

This study complements/extends the international literature by offering insights into child welfare trends and drivers in a developing context.

# Methodology

## Aims

The purpose of the current study was to identify, from the perspective of practitioners and child welfare instructors, the trends that had occurred within the South African child welfare sector over the decade 2001-2010 and to identify the factors that had driven these trends. The study further aimed to explore the trends reflected in the research agenda regarding child welfare in South Africa.

## Research Method

Both quantitative and qualitative data were accessed through a three-pronged strategy:

1. Interviews were conducted with seven representatives of national child welfare bodies, an advocacy expert and an academic.
2. A total of 250 questionnaires were sent to both the rural and urban affiliates of Child Welfare South Africa (CWSA), the study having been endorsed by this body.
3. Journal articles with a focus of child welfare published locally between 2001 and 2010 in *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* and *The Social Work Practitioner-Researcher*, as well as international articles, were reviewed to determine research priorities.

## Research Instrumentation

The Interview Schedules asked respondents to identify (1) the most significant trends in practice in the last decade in their respective *agencies/academic institution* and the influences or drivers that prompted these practice trends; (2) the most significant trends in child welfare practice in the last decade within the *child welfare field* and the drivers that influenced these trends; and (3) the most significant trends in child welfare practice internationally as well as the drivers contributing to these trends. While interviewees could respond broadly to these areas of enquiry, the questionnaires required respondents to identify the dominant trends and to rate potential drivers. In the literature scan, all articles related to child welfare were identified in the two local social work journals, while search words were used in *Scholars Portal* to identify articles in international journals.

## Data Analysis

The interviews and questionnaire results were thematically analysed to highlight the most significant trends. Statistical analysis was used to interpret the quantitative ratings given in the questionnaires. The research topics discussed in the journal articles were also analysed in terms of themes.

## Limitations

Potential inferences are limited due to the low response rate to the questionnaire, because none of the respondents served only a rural population, and because only the views of practitioners and academics and not government representatives were sought. Thematic analysis alone was employed due to the inconsistent ranking of quantitative aspects in the questionnaire.

# Results

## Findings from the Interviews and Questionnaires

Between February and July 2011 seven interviews were held with individuals who were staff at Child Welfare South Africa, UNICEF, Childline, the National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW), Johannesburg Child Welfare, and an academic from the Department of Social Work at Stellenbosch University. Interviewees observed that changes over the last decade were rooted in developments beginning in 1994. One interviewee noted: “...it has been a long process of transformation or change...In the last decade we could have moved more smoothly but tensions have stood in the way”. The tenor of the interviews ranged from optimism and excitement, particularly about agency initiatives, to frustration, indeed, for some, a sense of desperation. Frustration was expressed regarding national developments in the child welfare arena, especially the perceived lack of direction and commitment within the Department of Social Development (DSD). All interviewees communicated the sense of urgency expressed as follows by one participant: “We must get our act together and understand what is needed in this country”.

The questionnaires were sent to directors of 250 child welfare agencies affiliated to Child Welfare South Africa as well as child welfare instructors. Despite reminders, only 12 responses (a response rate of less than 5%) were received. (One respondent was not affiliated to CWSA). Seventeen university departments were approached, with 6 responses being received. The acceptable response rate of 35% masks the fact that typically there is more than one child welfare instructor per university. Just over two-fifths (42%) of the directors who responded were employed in an agency serving a predominantly urban population and 58% served a population that was equally rural and urban. The low response rate was possibly due to the topic being viewed as irrelevant or not a priority, or the questionnaire as too complex or long. However, some observations can be made.

The central trends (shifts) and sub-trends or sub-themes identified by the respondents are considered first and thereafter the drivers (impulses) are named. As the trends and drivers could not always be distinguished, the separation is partly due to the researcher’s construction.

## Trends

### Conceptual and Methodological Shifts

#### *Shift towards developmental welfare although practice remained predominantly clinical*

Study participants suggested that developmental welfare frameworks were increasingly shaping child welfare work in South Africa, both for practitioners and instructors. Comments included: “There has been a stronger emphasis in teaching on the implementation of a developmental model regarding child and family welfare services with an emphasis on support services or community development projects”; “[There has been a] move towards a developmental approach rather than a curative approach”.

However, individualistic, casework-oriented approaches still often dominated practice. One interviewee noted: “The emphasis in the child welfare service sector remains largely within a clinical rather than a developmental approach”, while an academic observed: “...there is... transformation...[but] ...Most of the welfare organisations... are still dealing with child protection work”. Another stated: “Community work has become a priority in theory, but unfortunately not sufficient community projects are being put into practice by child welfare agencies...”, while a further participant commented: “the majority of casework practices remain... statutory services...”. The academic observed that researchers also continued to adhere to this orientation: “...the research is still about foster care, child abuse, child neglect, changes in the Children’s Act”. Tensions and contradictions in conceptual and methodological paradigms were therefore very much in evidence. Nevertheless, shifts occurred on a number of levels.

### **Recognition of the need for community involvement**

One respondent revealed “We have moved from an individual casework approach to a community development approach. The bigger shift is towards community involvement: having the community members actively involved in the programme...”, while another stated: “Over the past 10 years there has been much more volunteer involvement and use of the community”.

Participants realised that their views about who should initiate and lead projects had changed, one suggesting that it was important to “get the buy-in of communities, with communities deciding what services and outcomes were needed”. Stress was laid on offering accessible, community-based services such as programmes in schools or substituting community supports for residential facilities. Part of community development was also understood as building networks between peers. Volunteers as well as certain paid staff were increasingly drawn from the communities in which projects were delivered, because such personnel were known to the community (and vice versa), and could knowledgeable and with passion advocate for their communities.

### **Promotion of a more integrated approach to community development**

For the interviewees, the preferred method of community development was an integrated approach, including as one proposed, “prevention, early intervention, statutory intervention and rehabilitation /reintegration”. A new emphasis was placed on prevention and early intervention (EI). Interviewees emphasised that community development did not preclude the use of individual or therapeutic interventions. One interviewee suggested that an integrated approach to child welfare also required an ecological, holistic view in the training of personnel: “We need to keep various elements alive and integrate all aspects in the community like disability, Isibindi, child protection and safe parks”. Instructors were also more likely to promote an integration of methods, as reflected in the response by one participant who stated: “The core of the child welfare course... has always been on child protection. The difference now is the social developmental paradigm ... We have ...become more aware of the context, of child poverty and the communities that children live in... as of third year there is a more generalist perspective, an integration of group work, community work and case work”.

### **Emphasis on collaborative partnerships**

Promoting partnerships was a further trend noted, though it was not suggested that this trend was a new way of working. This trend included partnering with international organisations or networks; engaging with other social work partners, both non-profit and the DSD; collaborating with government departments at all levels; and building collaborations with community members. For example, inter-sectoral collaboration often began with advocacy. Partnerships were utilised strategically to link into innovations outside of traditional child welfare work, for example, regarding sports, environment and technology. The interviewees indicated that in the previous decade, national organisations increasingly saw a role for themselves in capacity building, beyond skilling personnel to strengthening organisations. One national organisation was directing efforts not only at affiliates but also allied organisations, such as developing child welfare societies and early childhood centres. Networking and solidarity between child welfare organisations was perceived as vital. For some, the interaction between agencies and government played a critical role, as highlighted in the quote: “The NPOs are working hand in hand with the government to implement the policies”.

### **Awareness of children’s rights**

Participants identified “awareness” of the advancement of children’s rights in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was regarded as “the mandate” and “mission” of child welfare agencies. Child rights were associated with child participation, for example, through peer education programmes or being responsive to the “voice of the children”. Girls’ rights were a key concern for one of the study participants, particularly as these were intertwined with the rights of adult women: “... the child bride issue - how does it fit into bigger issues? These are women who will not get their matric .... This is rape that is called cultural abduction”. Another interviewee felt that rights messages to children needed to be expanded to include responsibilities and the reciprocal respect between children and adults.

### **Negative developments: Social work had become more superficial**

The changes in the field were regrettably not always ideal. One respondent noted that with attention being paid to circumstantial neglect, and because “the safety net has definitely become less effective”, physical abuse was only being identified in seriously hurt children. A participant suggested that “Family preservation, early intervention and preventative services remain unattended” despite these being expectations in terms of DSW and the Children’s Act. For another, the concern was that “Therapeutic work is almost non-existent”. As the respondent did not elaborate, the researcher assumes this scenario was in a context of high demands for statutory work.

### **Changes Regarding Target Groups**

In addition to the conceptual and methodological shifts, participants suggested that there had been changes regarding target groups, one of the participants commented: “We started off with generic, then... street children and then children and [children in] conflict with the law, and then HIV/AIDS, and now it is child trafficking”. This participant was not suggesting that the definition of vulnerable children had expanded as alluded to in the literature review. Rather the concern was that the spotlight seemed to regularly move from one particular group to another, effectively marginalising certain groups that deserved attention.

Greater innovation and equitable funding across provinces was required to ensure accessible service to rural children and their families. Participants believed that despite fiscal policies geared to addressing historical disadvantage between the provinces, inequalities continued to exist as provinces made their own decisions regarding resource allocations. Variable delivery capabilities between the provinces also influenced funding received.

Other service gaps for specific targets groups were also noted by some of the respondents. For instance, unaccompanied foreign minors were being under-served, as were witnesses to domestic violence. One agency had started a programme for children with disabilities; while another wanted to use a preventive approach that considered the interrelationship between abandonment, HIV/AIDS and young mothers. The absence of programming for men and the need to address gender issues in governance structures were viewed as serious gaps by one interviewee.

### **From Chronic challenges to an acute Crisis in the Child Welfare System**

A third trend that was identified was an acute child welfare crisis. Firstly, the crisis was described as an inability to respond to the “demands for services”. Two respondents indicated the following: “social workers are swamped by foster care grant applications” and “formal DSD investigations were delayed, placing children at significant risk”. Secondly, a lack of material resources meant practitioners struggled to meet their daily work commitments. They were challenged by both the requirements of the policy context and the extreme needs of children, families and communities. As described by a participant: “The focus in the new Act is family preservation. Social workers immediately ask: Where are the resources...? The challenges are related to poverty...violence...also ...the availability of cars... paying for telephone calls, car maintenance...”. Not only were the material resources limited, but, thirdly, social workers were overwhelmed because there were “too few of them” and because the child protection demands crowded out the ability to do preventive work, as encapsulated in the following response: “There is a shortage of social workers to implement the Act. Within the local child welfare society, the social workers are still busy with children’s court enquiries and foster care placements and don’t get into a more social development approach. ...I notice an increase in the number of children being removed, though we should focus on family preservation”. One person stated: “With the dearth of qualified social workers, social auxiliary staff have to be utilised. The [poor] quality/ lack of experience/ capacity and poor knowledge base leads to managers bearing the brunt of the workload”. Another respondent observed: “social workers do practicals and start working at organisations but leave soon afterwards for employment at government”, while another reflected: “...new graduates ...are less prepared when they start employment”. Finally, the crisis was defined by the manner in which policies were being implemented. This issue is addressed further under the section on drivers.

The trends described by the participants as characterising the last decade of South African child welfare practice were perceived to be driven by a range of impulses.

## Drivers

### Changing Needs in the Population

Changing needs in the population or “*the lived realities of children*” were increasingly considered and had resulted in changes in practice and teaching.

#### **Orphaned and vulnerable children**

In a context where there is a high prevalence of children affected by HIV/AIDS (Kibel et al., 2010) responding to the needs of children who were orphaned or vulnerable (OVC) was understandably a dominant theme. As noted by one participant: “*The past ten years... the vulnerable children... [were] the order of the day*”. Vulnerable children were described by respondents as orphans, abused children, teenage mothers, refugees, school drop outs, child labourers, young victims of rape, children who are victims of poverty, war and trafficking, and those affected HIV/AIDS. Children, one participant believed, became vulnerable because of “*lack of suitable alternate care resources, HIV/AIDS, TB, poverty, lack of accommodation and food security and poor infrastructure and monitoring and poor tertiary education*”. Respondents suggested that families and communities were increasingly stressed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, poverty, unemployment, crime and corruption, and substance abuse issues. Respondents observed that children often no longer had identifiable “*family*” or “*grandparents were becoming primary caregivers*”, as the middle generation was being lost with parents dying. One respondent confirmed: “*With services to children the impact of HIV and AIDS as well as poverty has been tremendous*”. An academic stated: “*...Demographic changes require practice to keep up with challenges that influences the welfare of children*”.

Participants identified HIV/AIDS as a prime impulse behind the trends in South African child welfare service provision suggesting the pandemic had resulted in a growth of services directed at orphaned and vulnerable children “*in the form of support, protection, skills development and economic empowerment*” as well as “*kinship foster care, cluster foster care, and support of child headed households*”, “*establishing a community care home*” and providing or linking into adoption services. While one interviewee emphasised that “*The developmental programmes have been driven by the HIV-crisis... as workable solutions needed to be found that can respond best to the needs of large numbers of the population in dire need*”, another participant reported: “*The suffering of children resulting from the HIV/AIDS pandemic has prompted many willing organisations and individuals to assist in this field*”. Furthermore, as added by one participant, “[Because of HIV/AIDS] *we now look at leaving children in far less than ideal situations because they will then remain in their community of origin and assist them and the community with practical issues... Previously the child would ... have been placed in a children’s home or foster care*”.

#### **Poverty**

Participants identified poverty and associated issues as a concern, one putting it this way: “*...child poverty is a major issue. When there is neglect we want to move the child to safety...Students need to know about... the lack of safety in schools and communities, the poverty, the inadequate education and housing...The economic pressures... Even though there has been change and progress... there has been an increase in children without basic food, access to health services, more are malnourished, without proper shelter or abused in different ways*”. Participants suggested that agencies needed to increasingly support “*applicants to secure grants- old age, disability grants, child support, and CSGs [Child Support Grants]*”. In addition to grants, one participant noted that material support was increasingly provided through “*food security programmes*”, while another suggested that it was frequently offered in tandem with “*skills development, financial literacy, basic ABET, victim empowerment, income generating and preventive programmes*”. According to one participant, the goal was to ensure that vulnerable community members “*learn new skills and have an alternate employment option*”. Skill development was considered to go beyond direct income generation programmes. For example, one participant was of the view that it extended to, “*selecting and training young school leavers to become peer educators... They are then employed on a contractual stipend basis to supplement/complement the services of the developmental staff*”.

## Relationship with Government

The relationship of child welfare agencies with government (the national Department of Social Development and its regional counterparts, as well as local government) was cited as a major driver in shaping South African child welfare.

#### **Enabling policy changes and legislation**

The policies and legislation enacted by government was highlighted as a central theme. According to participants, among others, the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, the Constitution and Bill of Rights, the White Paper of 1997 on Developmental Social Welfare and the Integrated Service Delivery Model (ISDM), “*the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act, No. 32 of 2007 and Child Justice Act 75 of 2008*”, the Child Support Grant, “*...employment policy changes and the financial policy*” all influenced practice. Instructors regarded government policy/legislation, (particularly in the area of welfare), international policy, “*the exit-level learning outcomes as determined by the [South African Council for Social Service Professions] SACSSP*” and the university’s teaching policy (such as emphasizing a “*generic and holistic orientation*”) as framing curricula. One instructor noted, “*National welfare policies play an important role... These...are however seen within... international human rights instruments, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and regional directives such as the African Charter on the Rights of the Child*”.

Many of the more recent policy and legislative changes were seen as contributing to post-apartheid progress. As pointed out by a participant, “*The legislation...provides hope that we will eventually get there...The government has done a lot. There are the CSGs [Child Support Grants] and free medical care for children under six... a very powerful transformative mechanism helping to reduce ...poverty*”. These policies, according to various participants, resulted in efforts to promote “*greater accessibility and affordability of services*” with “*expansion into other areas*”; facilitate “*stakeholder inputs or involvement as well as networking trends*”; “*reduce statutory intervention to a developmental approach*”; and introduce “*income projects*”. Other policy initiatives, such as efforts by regional forums and the national councils were considered important, for example, as highlighted by a respondent: “*An introduction of national programmes... Through this, standardisation across CWSA [Child Welfare South Africa] is taking place*”.

#### **Policy constraints**

However, the policy environment also imposed constraints on practitioners, because as stated by a participant, “*Government policy and international instruments have to be mainstreamed in all services...*”. For example, a participant drew attention to the fact that children without birth certificates were “*...effectively invisible as they don’t benefit from social security...*”. Another added that because “*the CSG is...available up to 15 years...if one has been working with a child or a caregiver where they have been getting the grant, and then it stops, children drop out of school...*”. Certain policies exacerbated the load on social workers. One participant commented: “*The implementation of the new Children’s Act has impacted dramatically on our services...Our social workers are over-burdened with administrative activities and the requirements leave no time for proper services...the process of sorting out the issues is leading to staff not wanting to work in child protection and children more at risk*”. Another participant expressed the concern that “*Government policy /procedures /reporting formats change at no notice and no persons are trained to explain or carry out their unilateral decisions and instructions*”. Inadequately implemented policies affected not just agency personnel but also service users, with one participant giving the following example: “*People applying for grants never have their application resolved in one visit. They are made to come back three and more times*”.

#### **Lack of political will to implement legislation and policy**

Furthermore, participants were sceptical regarding the political will of government to implement legislation and policies. The state was perceived as insufficiently committed to service, whereas, as one participant believed, the non-profit sector “*still had a desire to actively respond to the needs of vulnerable South Africans*”. The state was regarded as not identifying service gaps or developing appropriate responses. A participant stated “*... we have set up caring in communities with donor funds. This should have come from [the Department of] Welfare, from their programmatic direction*”. Interviewees were concerned that a lack of accountability, particularly by government, but also service providers, resulted in children’s rights being compromised.



### **Lack of co-ordination**

The comments by the interviewees suggest that in addition to the absence of political will, a lack of coordination on multiple levels was causing serious difficulties. For example, one suggested, *“The introduction of the Child Protection Register caused enormous chaos as the courts initially refused to give orders without evidence from the registers, but these registers were not yet up and running, so people have had to rely on police clearance which is not so reliable. There is a Sexual Offences Register under sexual offences legislation and a Child Protection Register, managed by Justice and Social Development respectively, but there is no coordination and so there is duplication and it is expensive and time consuming”*. The lack of coordination was evidenced as a deficit in planning by the state. Poor coordination resulted according to various participants in unintended consequences such as the proliferation of unregistered children’s homes and crèches, an urban funding bias, resources *“used for statutory monitoring and not enough for education and preventive services”*, *“One-stop services”* that did not allow for *“specialised services”*, and it being *“...impossible to have proper case conferences [involving different state departments]”*. At the same time, NGOs were invited to meetings and expected to deliver information without witnessing improved service coordination or integrated delivery. A participant commented: *“Everyone seems to be drowning in swamps of paper”*. Last minute cancellations indicated disrespect for agencies.

### **The need for a child welfare information management system**

Interviewees were concerned about the lack of a child welfare information management system, as this situation hindered planning of challenges and retarded development. One person captured this theme as follows: *“We desperately need a proper information management system in order to formally assess what trends are occurring”*. The urgency to ensure *“planning, accountability and appropriate allocation of resources”*; to promote a *“rights-based rather than demand driven system”*; and prevent *“a crisis driven response”* was repeatedly echoed. Consequently, participants identified the need for a coherent, joint strategy: As reflected by a participant *“...there are not just challenges for those in the field or for academics, but also for legislators, government and society as a whole...we have to work together... in a ... coordinated, comprehensive effort”*.

### **Frustration regarding state funding policies**

A further issue relating to government was funding. One hurdle experienced post-apartheid, namely, that established agencies had to demonstrate credibility, seemed to have resolved itself. One participant commented: *“The older NGOs have since been able to show clear transformation and have been recognised for their experience and knowledge”*. However, the participants expressed extreme frustration regarding state funding policies and the effect thereof on child welfare practice. Furthermore, they were of the view that the government funding formulas still did not support a developmental social welfare orientation. An interviewee suggested: *“The shift to a developmental model is both internal and external. The latter refers to the structural arrangements through which resources, amongst others are allocated. For example, funding for general child welfare services and HIV-related service delivery often comes from two or more different funding sources within government. Non-government funding also sometimes set different priorities and NGOs need to juggle these conditions from the different sources to implement their programmes in the best possible manner. This often requires from NGOs to internally reprioritise funding to ensure that prevention and early intervention services get sufficient resources for its implementation. So the services or programmes queue where the funding comes from rather than focusing on community needs”*.

According to the participants, one of the issues with which they grappled was that the state has not undertaken enough proactive planning regarding the financial support of initiatives, particularly regarding the introduction of the Children’s Act. One person noted: *“There is now an official commitment to Early Intervention and prevention but the funding is not necessarily there”*. Funding constraints also impeded service delivery within the state, as different parts of the child welfare system were not functioning in concert. Equitable funding for innovation across provinces was also absent. Two participants suggested: *“we need the Department ...to make money available to support and sustain innovation”* and *“... to initiate, implement and scale up these ‘new’ services”*. One interviewee believed that the national organisations faced particular challenges: *“subsidies are paid late, they are paid differently in each province, the money is insufficient... There are human resource challenges in terms of providing managers and supervisors. The struggle is to build capacity in the small and emerging societies... The councils ...have to do applications to the lottery... There is a lot to do with the mechanisms and means for implementing or adhering to policies. They also have to pay for admin staff. The structure is challenging...”*.

Participants observed: *“NGOs are largely dependent for their existence on government and other funding”*; *“... rely on the lotto”*; and there was the *“drying up of international funding”*. An interviewee summed up the situation by saying: *“Funding remains a fraught issue. There is just no relation between state funding and the costs of services rendered. The NGOs are simply competing for a limited pot of money, and always have to put much too much of their time and energy into this. During the recession, lots of organisations got into trouble. This remains a threat to the survival of organisations”*. The sentiments were further captured in the following statement: *“so, the developments that should be happening are not; because of all these factors. This may be normal and historical but it is very frustrating”*. One interviewee suggested that drastic measures, such as court action (as had occurred in the Free State when an NGO challenged the Department of Social Development’s subsidy system), might be required to motivate the state to live up to its commitments.

Though participants viewed funding policies negatively, the situation was not entirely bleak. Certain provinces were considering *“programme funding”* rather than *“post funding”*, and movement was evidenced regarding relationship-building, particularly on national level.

### **Child welfare workforce**

Interviewees further identified the absence of a streamlined child welfare workforce as impacting on practice, illuminating factors contributing to an unstable workforce.

#### **Government siphoning away social workers and volunteers from NGOs**

As alluded to previously, a participant was of the opinion that *“The lack of parity in subsidies for NGOs and salaries of government social workers has led to NGOs struggling to maintain a consistent workforce”*. Social workers on bursaries could not work these off in lieu of re-payment in the NGO sector. Workers have thus been channelled directly into the state. The state also provided better remuneration and benefits, thereby siphoning social workers away from the NGO sector. One participant noted: *“Many NGOs are being deprived of social workers by the DSD [Department of Social Development] that simply absorbed all of them after training, especially those it sponsored. Poor salary situation has plagued the NGO sector, resulting from poor government funding, hence the preference for government jobs by social workers...”* In addition, NGOs were not rewarded by the state for the basic orientation they were providing to novice social workers.

A further concern mentioned was that, as with social workers, the voluntary child welfare sector was being used as a training ground, for example, in the Expanded Public Works Programme. Through this government initiative unskilled persons were expected to gain new competencies. However, these volunteers left once particular skills had been acquired because the sector was unable to retain them as paid staff. Nevertheless, the importance of the professionalisation of volunteers through a formal career path was stressed by an interviewee: *“One cannot have volunteerism in a context of poverty- this creates problems. People have aspirations”*. The following quote starkly captured the aspiration of volunteers: *“I want to be someone, a social worker or a community worker or someone”*. Hence clarity was needed about who was a volunteer, particularly in light of union allegations that volunteers were a cheap labour response to the lack of suitably qualified personnel.

#### **Social workers inadequately trained and lacking appropriate attributes**

According to participants, university education did not prepare students for the reality of the workplace. Novice social workers could not bridge the gap between competing demands for remedial intervention and developmental social work. Multidisciplinary work appeared to be missing in university training, resulting in social workers unable to function in an interdisciplinary context and frequently seeming to feel threatened. One respondent pointed out *“they are not willing to work in multidisciplinary teams. They worry that they will get landed only with statutory work”*. Persons on bursaries were perceived as not always having the right fit for social work, in that they frequently lacked compassion, passion, a vision for social justice and commitment. Agencies were concerned about university screening procedures, with one respondent lamenting: *“It does not appear that they know the values of social work and are often not able to conduct an adequate interview, develop and carry out a plan of action with the family or write a structured report ... I am concerned about the lack of empathy...”*.

Instructors concurred, one identifying as problematic the fact that “Child welfare practices do not form a specific part of the curriculum but are additionally incorporated on an ad hoc basis”. According to another participant, a generalist course not designed to train for “knowledge and skills in child welfare” was concerning “when graduates... are expected to be... familiar with foster care and adoption issues... to identify and [implement]... interventions with the abused child, and... [implement]... the Children’s Act”. Dedicated child welfare modules were needed. Universities were challenged as to what to teach. An academic maintained that a further gap was “...between the emphasis on family preservation and prevention... and the lack of manpower and resources to, for example, do intensive family preservation services”.

#### **Administrative and emotional overloading of personnel**

Other issues affecting staff were administrative and emotional overloads. It was noted that administrative responsibilities overwhelmed personnel, as one participant observed, particularly regarding the “often unrealistic demands on the numbers of different statistics forms ...combined with all the extra administrative demands brought about by the new Children’s Act”. The high turnover resulted in a poor quality of service for clients and the “lack of institutional memory and no retention of skills”. Apart from creating a personnel shortage, one participant believed: “The impact of staff changes on service delivery is immense as there are months where the post is vacant and then time needed for orientation of the new social worker... training... is costly when the staff member leaves a few months later”.

The work context was also perceived as a negative driver, as encapsulated in the following response: “HIV and AIDS has impacted ...our staff members and their families... staff members who have not been able to get over their own personal issues and losses needing to deal with the losses and personal issues of a similar nature with the children and families on their caseloads... staff members are also affected by poverty as it impacts on feelings of self-worth and the way that one views the world. Our staff do not earn good salaries and often “carry” other family members financially...”. Hence, the social landscape affected not only children directly, but their networks. It extended to the very persons who were expected to be providing children with a safety net, thus resulting in fragility across the entire system.

#### **Lack of skilled middle management**

Another concern related to middle management lacking depth of experience. They often did not have an adequate foundation and were unable to provide the role modelling and intense supervision essential for the training of young social workers. One respondent raised the question: “How well equipped are young social workers-especially those in rural communities without a supervisor? ...For inexperienced social workers, the emotional stress, the stress of dealing with cases like this, is enormous”.

#### **Unplanned, diversified child welfare workforce**

A related theme that was identified was the need for a child welfare workforce beyond the social work profession. A diversified child welfare workforce was reportedly already developing. It included Early Childhood Development workers, probation officers, social auxiliary workers, generic community facilitators, child and youth care workers, and community developers. Many of these service providers required social workers as supervisors, another planning issue requiring attention. Participants feared that development was becoming chaotic and ultimately unhelpful in addressing the dire human resource shortage. Although certain categories of workers have been delineated in the Children’s Act, the state had, according to participants, unfortunately not consciously identified which cadres of personnel were needed within a child welfare workforce.

#### **Lack of recognition and regulation of the different categories of workers in child welfare**

Appropriate recognition and regulation - important in terms of the appointment of personnel, salary structures and subsidies- was regarded as missing. One interviewee insisted that accreditation was needed due to: “...the apartheid history and education. It is for people important to have a valid certificate for their training, as this is often linked to finding employment”. Conflict existed between the initiatives of NPO organisations and such bodies as the South African Council for Social Service Professions. In addition, there was lack of clarity regarding which state departments were responsible for which category of worker. One interviewee concluded that to prevent an ad hoc, chaotic workforce from emerging: “A mapping and understanding of the core functions and responsibilities of the various categories of workers in the child welfare sector will make a significant contribution in clarity, collaboration and teamwork in the sector”.

#### **Need for indigenous social work models relevant to the South African context**

The content or orientation of training was also debated, with a holistic and indigenous orientation relevant to the South African context being recommended. A participant suggested: “Often the theorising of social work is based on international practice, influenced by American and European models, as these are what is available. Writing and theorising of African models and practices are emerging, and it will take, unfortunately, time to be available in the same volumes as those that are currently mostly used”. Ironically, according to one participant, social workers’ training made them candidates for overseas practice: “Our training makes our social workers popular and in demand in international settings such as the United Kingdom, but it also provides a “gap” for those who work in the country and in local communities”. One respondent located the issue as follows: “Although we try to integrate theory with practice on an ongoing basis...most theory is based on westernised concepts. When getting into practice, social workers are overwhelmed with practical responsibilities, usually on a micro level. We are making ongoing efforts to create an indigenous model of social work education, but this is an uphill climb because not many literatures and other resources are available”.

#### **Need for training sites to supplement formal university training**

A focus of university child welfare instruction was to enable students within a resource poor environment to translate what they had learnt theoretically into practice. It was therefore critical to have a functioning relationship with child welfare agencies. A respondent emphasised “The University remains dependent on NGOs for placements”.

Who should offer training was debated. Based on their lengthy field experience, two of the organisations represented were training an expanded child welfare workforce, seeking accreditation and exploring the issue of establishing training academies. Universities were thus not seen as the only sites for the education of a child welfare workforce. One interviewee pointed out: “It is also important to consider the importance of skills development programmes that are not necessarily linked to a formal accredited qualification”.

### **International Influences**

#### **International funding moved from communities to government post-Apartheid**

The interviewees also believed that relationships with the international community exerted a significant impact on the practice trends in child welfare in South Africa. One person suggested: “... international funding has been very instrumental in bringing many stakeholders into the field of child welfare. The creation of small NGOs and CBOs [community based organisations], as well as FBOs [faith based organisations] results from the availability of funding from external sources as well as internal organisations/companies”. The funding scene had changed post-apartheid, as one interviewee observed: “The international funding moved from communities (in the pre ’94 era) to government”. International involvement could however be problematic, as according to a participant “International funders channel their funds through state departments or agencies who are not au fait with welfare services or actual needs”. In view of the fact that only certain types of services were funded, the form and content of programming was also impacted. For example, international donors while supporting HIV/AIDS programmes tended to shy away from funding the material aid and poverty reduction programmes needed to limit children’s vulnerability. Funders were reportedly moving away from child abuse issues. This apparent donor fatigue had a direct impact on potential services rendered. The interviewees and the instructors spoke to the influence of international issues (“We have become much more aware of...the global world...”). However, practitioners responding to the questionnaire felt that the international environment was, apart from funding, relatively unimportant to them as it was the national office’s responsibility to engage on this level.

#### **International agencies influenced the local child welfare agenda**

Interviewees and academics agreed that the international rights discourse impacted the local welfare scene. As stated by one participant: “The government ratified international and regional instruments on the rights of the child which can therefore be seen as a point of departure for development of local policy and legislation”. One interviewee noted that certain issues - such as child trafficking and to an extent the child rights issue- only made it onto the local child welfare agenda because of priorities set by international agencies. The academic who was interviewed reported that national policies and legislation along with international human rights instruments provided one framework for teaching content. The academic added that the emphasis on families and family support, family

preservation, family decision making influenced their teaching priorities. Various participants mentioned “A focus on the systems perspective and strengths based approach”, “Risk and resilience”, “de-institutionalisation of children” and “asset development” as international foci that affected curriculum content. One participant observed: [T]he international trends still focus on a child protection approach. We have inherited this. It is recognised that we have to promote in-home services and family preservation. On a global level, the child protection system is seen as being involved in crisis intervention because it remains focused on the removal of children and placement in residential care...The trend in most countries is...the children that are removed tend everywhere to be the poorest and most disadvantaged”.

#### **International emphases can be positive**

Interviewees commented on the stringent monitoring and evaluation (M & E) expected by international donors, but also felt that improved local systems were required. Indeed interviewees expressed the need for social workers to have a better understanding of the value of M & E processes and for the need to comply with such expectations. International influences could therefore potentially play a positive role. International input had been important to the development of one respondent’s agency, although it had been critical to “Africanise” such contributions.

#### **Local agencies becoming more confident and able to influence world agendas**

Interviewees felt that to be credited as a meaningful player in the international field one had to comply with the international agendas. At the same time, South African agencies were becoming more confident about their own expertise, seeing themselves increasingly as partners rather than beneficiaries and thus more able to, in turn, influence world agendas. These positive relationships had further generated the ability of local organisations to take a clearer lead in the national context.

### **Literature Scan**

A third prong of the research was to identify and analyse the articles written regarding South African child welfare in the decade under study. The South African journals *The Social Work Researcher-Practitioner* and *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* were reviewed for local entries on child welfare over the previous decade, a total of 155 being found. In total 131 articles dealing with child welfare in South Africa were identified through a *Scholars Portal* search on the internet. Articles were found by searching for ‘child abuse’, ‘child maltreatment’ and ‘child welfare’ rather than by reviewing particular journals. Without studying the decades preceding the most recent one, it is not possible to state categorically whether or not the focus of the articles is a perpetuation of previous trends.

In an overall picture of the most predominant themes regarding child welfare in South Africa, sexual abuse, including child rape, emerged as the most commonly investigated issue, featuring in 60 articles. There was one paper on physical abuse, one on child labour and none on the issue of neglect. This finding was in stark contrast to those found on sexual abuse. When considered together with trauma (5 articles) and therapeutic interventions (13), the research regarding South African child welfare seemed to be heavily skewed in one direction. The impact of HIV/AIDS on children (40 articles) and the needs of adolescents (38 articles) were other themes widely addressed. Articles on care arrangements for children (18) were a related concern. Approaches to child welfare and legislative or policy shifts (14) was an important theme, particularly when grouped together with the articles on Developmental Social Work (DSW) (3), Child rights (6) and child participation (3).

Although the concern around sexual abuse dominated both research published in South Africa and submitted to international journals, the specific issue of rape of children featured in the international journals, but was not directly referenced in the local contributions. The HIV/AIDS pandemic and its effect on South Africa’s children and families was discussed more in the international literature than the local journals, perhaps reflecting the fact that health journals were also considered in the review of international articles. Approaches to child welfare found an important place in the international literature. International collaboration or comparison research was more likely to be submitted to international journals, only two such examples being written up in the local literature. Because the audience for each type of journal differs, this type of variance was to be expected. Issues related to child poverty and social assistance received more attention in the international journals. The Children’s Act and its implications

had similar coverage in both the local and international literature. Articles researched through *Scholars Portal* did not reflect a restorative justice theme, perhaps because of the search phrases employed.

Various research gaps were found. Given that DSW is addressed in articles on welfare generally, the relatively limited discussion in the articles scanned can be understood. Why sexual abuse remained such a dominant concern was unclear. If driven by the exceptionally high incidence of sexual abuse in South Africa, it does not explain the lack of attention to physical abuse which is even more pervasive (Richter & Dawes, 2008). Primary prevention was given little weight, discussed directly in only 3 articles and touched on in some of the school (12) and Life skills (4) articles. Regarding target groups, the literature focused particularly on the needs of youth (38 articles having a direct focus on adolescents). However, investigation was relatively sparse regarding young parents, unaccompanied minors, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) youth, victims of sexual exploitation, disabled youth, child labour and abandoned children. Schools seemed increasingly to be venues for programme delivery, which would seem to be an interesting topic for future research.

The factors that cannot be adequately inferred from the trends is what drove research initiatives. A youthful population may have propelled the focus on adolescents. In addition to the high incidence of people affected by HIV/AIDS, the international emphasis and local policy developments might have been an additional impulse behind studies regarding HIV/AIDS.



# Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

## Trends

In reviewing shifts and dominant practices over the decade 2001 to 2010, the research outcomes from the interviews and questionnaires suggest conceptual and methodological shifts; an acute crisis; and a diversifying workforce as core trends. These trends are discussed below.

### 1. Conceptual and methodological shifts towards “integrated approaches”

Firstly, while organisations continue to work within a remedial child protection model, the findings indicated conceptual and methodological shifts towards the delivery of “integrated approaches”. It was not easy to differentiate where these were shifts in thinking (conceptual) or where these had effectively translated into practice (methodological).

Shifting towards an “integrated approach” included offering individually-focused, therapeutic interventions as well as promoting community involvement. Integration was equated with the continuum of service. Components of an integrated approach were therefore seen to comprise early intervention (often referred to as prevention); the provision of income generation opportunities; capacity building (both in terms of building the repertoire of small or new agencies and expanding the skills of clients); and partnerships and inter-sectoral engagement. A conceptual shift reported on was children’s rights. The rights discourse had moved beyond emphasising those of women and girls, to recognising the importance of programming directed at men and affirming fathers’ contributions to their children’s lives. A further conceptual shift was the expansion of the traditional child welfare target groups, as endorsed in the new Children’s Act. The study also revealed a growing awareness of the differences and importance of targeting the needs of both urban and rural communities. The conceptual and methodological shifts must be applauded as they are positive responses to changing social, economic, and political contexts and concomitant shifting needs and are occurring despite the continued adherence to a child protection model.

Various incongruities and tensions were evident:

#### *i. Balance between community and case work*

Practitioners aimed to “balance” the investment in community work (equated with developmental social welfare) and casework. A social development approach to welfare does not preclude one-on-one counselling. However, the contradiction between casework that is professionally led, typically deficit-oriented and individually targeted, and community work that is driven by community members and asset-oriented, was not addressed. Furthermore, the respondents referred to “casework” as not only describing remedial interventions, but also the administrative tasks related to grant applications and the provision of material or food aid. The marked expansion over the previous decade towards delivering instrumental services should be critically examined, as these tasks have overloaded social workers and limited preventive programming – despite the introduction of social auxiliary workers who are expected to assist social workers with these tasks.

#### *ii. Tensions between therapeutic and administrative case work tasks*

Participants appeared not to distinguish between therapeutic and administrative casework tasks. This is a concern because, despite some overlap, the nature of the tasks is different. The tasks require different skills and solutions.

#### *iii. Expert versus user-led programmes*

Another inconsistency related to the portrayal of community involvement. There was greater awareness regarding the importance of community-based services and the use of local personnel, whether these were professionals, lay persons or volunteers. For respondents, however, the notion of “community involvement”, drawn from

developmental social work, did not in most cases purposefully imply user-led programmes. Instead, by agencies recruiting staff from communities, another class of service provider tasked with monitoring abuse was created.

#### *iv. Early intervention and Prevention*

The term “early intervention” (EI) when equated with “prevention” requires some deconstruction. While secondary prevention has merit, EI seemed to be part of a broader crisis response (named as such by one participant) and often substituted for primary prevention programming. This response might have been related to local definitions of child welfare which emphasise child protection. Strengthening children and families (and by extension their communities) to prevent them from becoming engaged with the formal child welfare system may therefore have seemed to be outside the mandate of child welfare organisations. It is critical that the preventive programming be expanded.

#### *v. Inter-sectoral collaboration versus Substitution of services*

Meaningful inter-sectoral collaboration, closely related to effective prevention, deserves closer examination. Respondents spoke about collaborations with various levels of government, other welfare agencies and health and educational institutions, these relationships being initiated through advocacy, referral or capacity building. However, it was also clear that certain agencies developed services to respond to service gaps by particular institutions. Such initiatives ought to be deepened towards mutual reciprocity and joint service delivery, rather than replicating systems by compensating for their inadequacies. It is imperative that child welfare agencies strengthen other organisations. They should use their expertise to complement other partners’ efforts rather than substituting for these, which seemed to be the case at the time the study was conducted.

### 2. Factors contributing to the child welfare crisis

The acute crisis in child welfare was a second dominant trend that emerged. While child welfare has historically been described as being in crisis, participants suggested that system collapse was imminent. Due to this multifaceted crisis, child welfare agencies were finding it increasingly difficult to respond to the demand for their services (which had also increased).

#### *i. Workforce issues*

One aspect of the crisis was workforce issues. The findings suggested that the state’s role in aggravating the social work human resource situation could not be ignored. For example, retention issues needed to be more extensively addressed with all categories of staff. The bursary scheme process, which respondents felt was important, needed to be reviewed to prevent unplanned consequences. As such, inadequate screening which resulted in persons not always committed to a career in social work using this option as an entrance into other qualifications or professions had to be improved. Furthermore, the non-profit sector wanted to be reimbursed or supported if it was to be a training ground for social workers who subsequently moved to government or entirely out of the sector.

In addition, because of a severe shortage of social workers, respondents suggested that a coordinated response to developing the necessary cadre of child welfare workers was critical. The lack of accreditation and regulation in response to an emerging workforce and the state’s avoidance of appropriate leadership in many instances tended to promote greater confusion and tension: coordination between departments was lacking, support was inconsistent and messages were contradictory. Participants felt that clear educational and career paths should exist, both to maintain motivation and foster excellence. Necessary procedures for accreditation at each level and minimal skills sets and competencies for each professional category needed to be defined. A generic holistic orientation was necessary. However, over-specialisation, which promotes fragmentation, had to be avoided. It was not clear from the responses who should offer training and education. The fact that agencies were developing training facilities may not be ideal, despite their on-the-ground experience. Educational expertise lies with the tertiary educational institutions. At the very least, training efforts (that incorporate indigenous components) for all categories of child welfare workers should be implemented in partnership with these educational facilities. This recommendation does not preclude in-service training and supervision, the latter being emphasised by respondents. A dilemma requiring resolution is whether educators train students primarily in case work as the demands in child welfare remain casework driven, or in developmental social welfare which is the policy direction but forms a minor part of

current child welfare practice. In addition, the workforce responses suggest that a critical review of volunteerism in South Africa is required.

### ii. Information gathering

Another facet of the child welfare crisis was the lack of an appropriate child welfare information system to provide baseline information for national and local planning. Not having such a system resulted in ad hoc responses driven by a multitude of agendas, but not by confirmed need. At the same time, agencies were frustrated by various state departments' increasing demands for meetings and information, particularly as existing data were not used to inform processes. This pressure exacerbated the crisis as child welfare practitioners were redirecting valuable energy into administration instead of direct service delivery. Social workers were perceived to be reduced to being clerks and were not encouraged to employ the skills they had learnt. In a context where social work is increasingly being identified with both statutory and clerical work, the question arises how one reconciles access to social security (an area where there is socio-economic synergy) with other aspects of social development work.

### iii. Funding

The funding aspect of the crisis is discussed under the drivers. Respondents felt an acute sense of panic and emphasised that the issues that had been raised had to be addressed urgently before the child welfare system collapsed entirely.

## Drivers

Key drivers that were identified included the effect of changes regarding needs, the influence of government, and international impulses.

### 1. Changing needs in the population

Changing population needs, particularly regarding the HIV/AIDS crisis, combined with extensive and increasing poverty has pushed child welfare practitioners towards a more developmental practice. In particular there has been a shift towards offering accessible community-based responses. Participants consistently spoke about how the HIV/AIDS pandemic had altered the way in which child welfare priorities and programmes were understood, an issue also evident from the literature scan. Respondents also linked issues such as unemployment and poverty to the HIV/AIDS crisis. The higher incidence of vulnerable children and families also placed greater stress on the system.

### 2. The influence of government

The study demonstrated that the influence of government was felt on a number of levels. It must be noted that while concerns regarding government functioning were vehemently expressed, the interviewees in particular noted that relationships, especially at national level, had improved in recent years. The *local policy context* had impacted the field through the introduction of Developmental Social Work and legislation such as the Children's Act. This policy context had required child welfare practitioners and instructors to review their priorities. Initiatives such as the Child Support Grant (CSG) were largely applauded by respondents. Another positive development was the greater sensitivity to *children's rights and child participation* that had resulted in programming being influenced by children's expressed opinions. Nevertheless, it was not clear from the research to what extent young people in the child welfare system were afforded the opportunity to actually identify needs and develop and implement appropriate programming, or whether participation remained generally at the level of consultation. A tentative conclusion drawn is that the emphasis on children's rights and participation has not led to substantive qualitative shifts in programming, strategy (such as who is engaged and how), or agency constellation (who delivers services). The incongruence of perhaps recognising the input of children but continuing to marginalise the voices of their parents, families and immediate networks seemed to have been overlooked by study participants. In addition, it was not clear whether a greater awareness of men's contribution also implied a greater understanding of the gendered nature of child welfare.

While the state had to some extent created an enabling environment, according to respondents the *consequences of policy directions* had not been adequately thought through. This gap resulted in development speak while services continued to be overwhelmingly remedial. Indeed, what emerged was not a negative perception of the policy direction of Developmental Social Welfare, as it was mostly supported as a useful orientation. Rather the concern was with the confusing, varied and often contradictory imperatives emanating from the state, operationalised via legislation, policy and funding mechanisms. A crucial issue was the apparent lack of political will on the part of government to pursue its own policies in a coherent and consistent fashion. There was unevenness between national, provincial and local governments. The study revealed a sense of an "all or nothing" approach by the state, with certain interventions being valued at the expense of others. One interviewee talked, for example, about the "overkill" regarding residential facilities, suggesting that children were moved out of institutions too quickly before appropriate alternatives were found. While agencies themselves could be criticised for failing to have or implement a clear vision, the lack of direction by the state seemed to have a significantly negative effect on child welfare services.

*Funding* has remained an ongoing concern, severely limiting available resources and hindering the development of a sufficiently large and competent child welfare workforce. Agencies were expected to implement DSW principles, but were not appropriately funded for such initiatives. Government was perceived to be investing its own resources in the processing of grants rather than into prevention and capacity building, thus perpetuating a crisis approach (and thus a residual approach) to welfare. Participants reported increasing resentment because funding was perceived as insufficient and inappropriately targeted. Simultaneously, the accountability demands were unreasonable and detracted from the commitment to the tasks for which the funding was intended. In addition, the pressure for financial stability created competition and disunity in the sector. The researcher was struck by the fact that for one agency represented in the study their current financial security engendered motivation, optimism and creativity, which seemed largely absent in those organisations that were financially insecure.

Another frustration of respondents regarding the role of government was the numerous *coordination activities* they were asked to engage in as there appeared to be no positive outcome. Unintended policy consequences had led to the mushrooming of unregistered children's homes and crèches on the one hand, while also leaving vulnerable children unsupported in risky situations on the other. The child welfare sector continued to be discussed as being in crisis and on the verge of collapse. Indeed, participants worried that poor governance had resulted in a reversal, not just stagnation, of the quality of services to children. The government's chaotic approach was interpreted by some as a breach of the state's responsibilities and obligations towards children. It is vital that a regime that has committed itself to honouring the rights of children ensures that this obligation is implemented through its own organs.

### 3. International factors

While directors completing the questionnaire did not attribute significant weight to international drivers, other participants were convinced that international agendas affected South African practice by influencing programme priorities. While adopting these programming agendas, agencies also searched for funding to address needs they had themselves identified. The discourse of children's rights, which echoes an international emphasis, has been introduced into the practice and academic setting. National agencies are feeling more empowered to assert local expertise and priorities. Indeed, national councils and organisations as well as social welfare forums were seen by directors and academics as having a critical function in developing South African child welfare.

## Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Because the trends and drivers were interlinked and because no particular driver was identified as being a prime influence, policy makers (on the level of government and national organisations) need to consider a wide spectrum of issues when focusing on change in child welfare. It becomes critical to ensure that policy directions match any changes in the populations' needs. The international diffusion of ideas must be taken into account although these were seen by study participants as being the least important of the drivers mentioned. Ensuring that policies and interventions are mutually reinforcing seems to be essential.

On a practice level, increased attention needs to be paid to the differences and similarities in rural and urban work, with the constraints and opportunities in each setting being acknowledged and integrated into training. The ongoing tension between developmental and remedial intervention requires more nuanced investigation. Both practitioners and policy makers need to distinguish between primary prevention and early intervention (secondary prevention). While the increasing attention to EI must be lauded, a greater emphasis on primary prevention is required. It is critical to explore the meaning which the expansion into instrumental social work (grant applications, food and material aid) has for child welfare, apart from the obvious overloading of social workers. Service user advocacy, in terms of child participation as well as involvement of their families and networks, seems to have had minimal impact on the direction child welfare has taken. If rights are to be fully acknowledged, practitioners must go beyond consulting children and adults to facilitating service user direction in needs identification, programme planning, and service implementation. Service users should also be engaged in strategic development. It would seem important to “up-scale” rights education and advocacy to empowerment, recognising the links, for example, between the rights of children and their family networks, or of the rights of girls and women. Overall, study participants stressed the urgency of a comprehensive response to child welfare issues, led by a coherent government strategy in close partnership with child welfare agencies.

## Recommendations for research

Generally, the trends and drivers evident from study participants’ responses were not reflected in the research priorities regarding South African child welfare over the decade 2001-2010, although it was not clear why this difference had occurred. Factors that might have influenced the research agenda merit further exploration. A research agenda which is focused primarily on therapeutic interventions in response to sexual abuse must be critiqued as being inadequate. Issues regarding physical abuse and neglect also need to be investigated. This perspective should be balanced against the prominence of research regarding youth as well as HIV/AIDS. While it can be argued that there is a delay between developments on the ground and related research, it can also be maintained that academic investigation should be on the cutting edge of development. Research gaps such as the influence of DSW on child welfare practice, the needs of particular groups of adolescents, the role of schools as service delivery sites and the impact of changing population needs on programming should be addressed. Indigenous responses must also be studied and highlighted.

While the purpose of the literature scan was to consider issues taken up by South African child welfare researchers, further observations about the nature of the articles themselves should be considered. There was an overwhelming disregard for the specific context in which South African children and families find themselves. While most articles cited the incidence of particular difficulties in South Africa, links were seldom made between the approaches described (usually a summary of international literature) and the benefits of such an approach for South Africans and their specific lived realities. Moreover, when citing literature, it was difficult to determine in which country the particular research had been conducted. Race as an issue was almost entirely absent or hidden. Literature referred to was often not current; thus even though the reliance was on “international” research, contemporary studies were often not considered. The need for indigenous responses and for tailoring outside interventions to local circumstances was not a dominant concern. Furthermore, critical reflection and analysis was not consistently employed, with a more conservative, normative agenda being evident (for example, in the discussion on abortion family values and the right to life were stressed). Finally, the vast majority of recommendations seem to have been related to therapeutic interventions (that is, individual work), with issues relating to structural change rarely being addressed and systemic transformation seldom considered.

It had been hoped through this study to expand the documentation of innovative child welfare programmes. This goal could not be achieved and remains an important task. In addition, research should be undertaken regarding the expanded child welfare workforce. As such, needed competencies should be identified and appropriate regulation as well as accreditation, education and career paths for a diversified workforce ought to be developed. The role educational institutions can play in equipping a diversified child welfare workforce should be examined. How to expand the cadre of qualified, experienced supervisors must be explored. Moreover, the academic community needs to pay greater attention to its research agenda, matching this agenda more closely with needs on the ground and contextualising research.

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