Creating Safe Spaces Towards Preventing Child Victimisation in South Africa

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Victimisation of children in South Africa is difficult to ascertain, for amongst many reasons is the under-reporting and unknown extent of this phenomenon that blur the true picture (Artz, Burton, Ward, Leoschut, Phyfer, Lloyd, Kassanjee & Le Mottee:2016; Johnson 2004) Research reports that media coverage of child sexual abuse is negligible (Collings & Corbella 2007). Although victimisation is viewed as a social problem that is real and present, media coverage actually shows a significant underestimation of the social problem (Collings 2007). Victim vulnerability may be defined as the likelihood of a child becoming a victim of crime. This likelihood is determined by different factors, including the victim’s behaviour, personal lifestyle and interaction with the offender (Bruce 2013; Van der Hoven & Maree 2005). Children are one of the most vulnerable population group affected by crime (Gal 2012) and therefore vulnerability to victimisation can be viewed as a result of interplay of different factors.

Let’s use an example to try to find a typical reaction:

*Joyce, busy at her desk, did not see it coming. The assailant ran through the door, clobbered her on the head, and ran off. Joyce fell to the floor screaming.*

a. *(Joyce is 25)* Her co-worker reached for the phone and dialled 911.

b. *(Joyce is 5)* The kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Coyle, looked up and asked, “What’s going on here?” (Finkelhor, 2008).

Every day children find themselves in a variety of circumstances where they are victimised. According to Hartjen and Priyadarsini (2012) this should correctly be referred to as crime against children. Some circumstances are directly related to their personal, family and social environment whereas others are related to political unrest, war, drought and diseases like Aids (Finkelhor 2011; Leoschut & Kafaar 2017).
This paper intends to examine the issue of child/youth victims in South Africa who are vulnerable to victimisation, the factors that might contribute to their victimisation such as abuse, maltreatment, neglect, poverty, social isolation and the interplay between the levels that influence risk behaviours such as the personal; physical and social/environmental aspects (Collings 2012; Hartjen & Priyadarsini 2012; Leoschut & Kafaar 2017; Madu 2003). Furthermore, the paper will explore the various crime prevention options that are available to these vulnerable children, while ensuring a way forward to reducing and ultimately preventing future child victimisation.