

Positioning Mama Mkubwa Indigenous Model into Social Work Practice through Alternative Child Care in Tanzania: Ubuntu Perspective

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Abstract : Introduction: Social work expands its boundary to accommodate indigenous knowledge and practice for better competence and services. In Tanzania, Mama Mkubwa (Mother's elder sister) is an indigenous practice of alternative child care that represents other traditional practices across African societies known as Ubuntu practice. Ubuntu is African Humanism with values and approaches that are connected to the social work. MMM focuses on using the elder sister of a deceased mother or father, a trusted elder woman from the extended family or indigenous community to provide alternative care to an orphan or vulnerable child. In Ubuntu's perspective, it takes a whole village or community to raise a child, meaning that every person in the community is responsible for child care. Methodology: A desk review method guided by Ubuntu theory was applied to enrich the study. Findings: MMM resembles the Ubuntu ideal of traditional child protection of those in need as part of alternative child care throughout Tanzanian history. Social work practice, along with other formal alternative child care, was introduced in Tanzania during the colonial era in 1940s and socio-economic problems of 1980s affected the country's formal social welfare system, and suddenly HIV/AIDS pandemic triggered the vulnerability of children and hampered the capacity of the formal sector to provide social welfare services, including alternative child care. For decades, AIDS has contributed to an influx of orphans and vulnerable children that facilitated the re-emerging of traditional alternative child care at the community level, including MMM. MMM strongly practiced in regions where the AIDS pandemic affected the community, like Njombe, Coastal region, Kagera, etc. Despite of existing challenges, MMM remained to be the remarkably alternative child care practiced in both rural and urban communities integrated with social welfare services. Tanzania envisions a traditional mechanism of family or community environment for alternative child care with the notion that sometimes institutionalization care fails to offer children all they need to become productive members of society, and later, it becomes difficult to reconnect in the society. Implications to Social Work: MMM is compatible with social work by using strengths perspectives; MMM reflects Ubuntu's perspective on the ground of humane social work, using humane methods to achieve human goals. MMM further demonstrates the connectedness of those who care and those cared for and the inextricable link between them as Ubuntu-inspired models of social work that view children from family, community, environmental, and spiritual perspectives. Conclusion: Social work and MMM are compatible at the micro and mezzo levels; thus, application of MMM can be applied in social work practice beyond Tanzania when properly designed and integrated into other systems. When MMM is applied in social work, alternative care has the potential to support not only children but also empower families and communities. Since MMM is a community-owned and voluntary base, it can relieve the government, social workers, and other formal sectors from the annual burden of cost in the provision of institutionalized alternative child care.

Keywords : ubuntu, indigenous social work, african social work, ubuntu social work, child protection, child alternative care

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