THE NEED FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTIONS FOR ORPHANS & VULNERABLE CHILDREN: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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Overview of Presentation

- Introduction
- Child Health
- Definition of Child & OVC
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- Theoretical Perspectives
- Research Design & Methodology
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- Discussion of Findings
- Critique of Developmental Theories (if time permits)
- Conclusion

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Introduction

- UNICEF (2014) estimates 150 million orphans in the world ranging from 6.2 m in the USSR to 58 m in Africa (Mostly due to the spread of HIV/AIDS)
- 11m under 15 years of age live in Sub-Saharan Africa which is estimated to escalate to 20m by 2020
- 3.7m to 4m orphans in SA alone
- Figures are contested- does not take into account street orphans, sexual trafficking, child labour & child soldiers.
- If this continues we will see a serious depletion of children and eventually that of young people and adults
- This has implications for Pediatrics which means “healer of children” (Abraham Jacobi, 1830-1919)
- Healers of children vs healing of children
- Focus is on managing physical, mental, and emotional well-being of children at every stage of development
- Aim is to reduce infant and child death rates and promote quality of life
- OVC should be top on the agenda of pediatrics, especially in Africa

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Child Health

- Thousands of children under the age of 5 die every year of mainly preventable causes.
- HIV/AIDS –related diseases are a major cause of death in young children
- Followed by pneumonia and acute diarrhoea
- Malnutrition is a major reason contributing to child death (1 in every 4 children are stunted and many are deficient in vitamins and minerals essential in the prevention of disease and disability)
- High death rates of newborn babies and mothers
- Almost 40% of all under-five deaths occur in the first 28 days of life
- Around 20 000 are stillborn each year
- Around 300 000 children are born to HIV-infected mothers each year
- Almost 50% orphans have lost their parents to HIV/AIDS-related diseases
- UNICEF estimates that almost 50 000 babies and young children could be saved every year if healthcare interventions reach them.

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Definition of Child & OVC

- ***Child*** refers to a person under the age of 18 years (UNAIDS, 2006).
- Debates around the use of a quantitative number, views on children as agents and actors in the social world, importance of historical and cultural discourse

An ***orphan*** refers to a child who has lost one (single orphan) or both parents (double orphan) "due to AIDS, other illnesses, violence or other causes of death". This may also include abandonment, unwillingness, and inability of parents to care for their children.

1. The definition of what makes a child ***vulnerable*** is complex and focuses on three core areas of concern: *material problems*, including access to money, food, clothing, shelter, health care and education; *emotional problems*, including insufficient caring, love, support, space-to-grieve and containment-of-emotions; and *social problems*, including a lack of supportive peer groups, role models to follow or guidance in difficult situations, and risk-factors in the immediate environment.
2. There are ***multiple vulnerabilities*** that children can be exposed to from their early years, including HIV/AIDS and other illnesses; disability; poverty; limited access to services; physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect; and violence and substance-abuse within communities.

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Early Childhood Development

- Early childhood development “refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years of age with the active participation of their parents and caregivers”.
- The aim is to provide equal opportunities for all children to develop to their full capacity in the following areas: physical, cognitive/mental, emotional, social, spiritual and moral.
- Child development research has shown that most accelerated brain development occurs before a child turns three years old. In this period children “develop their abilities to think and speak, learn and reason and lay the foundation for their values and social behaviour as adults”.
- Over the last five decades there has been general consensus amongst all people studying child development that prenatal growth and early childhood experiences set the foundation for long-term health and development of children into adulthood.
- A proliferation of research publications have indicated a significant correlation between poverty and its negative impact on early childhood development .
- This negative impact is clearly visible in the lower educational achievements, health problems, and low positive social behaviour of children from lower income families
- Research has indicated that the cognitive development of more than 200 million children in developing countries under the age of five have been negatively affected by poverty, poor health and under-nutrition.

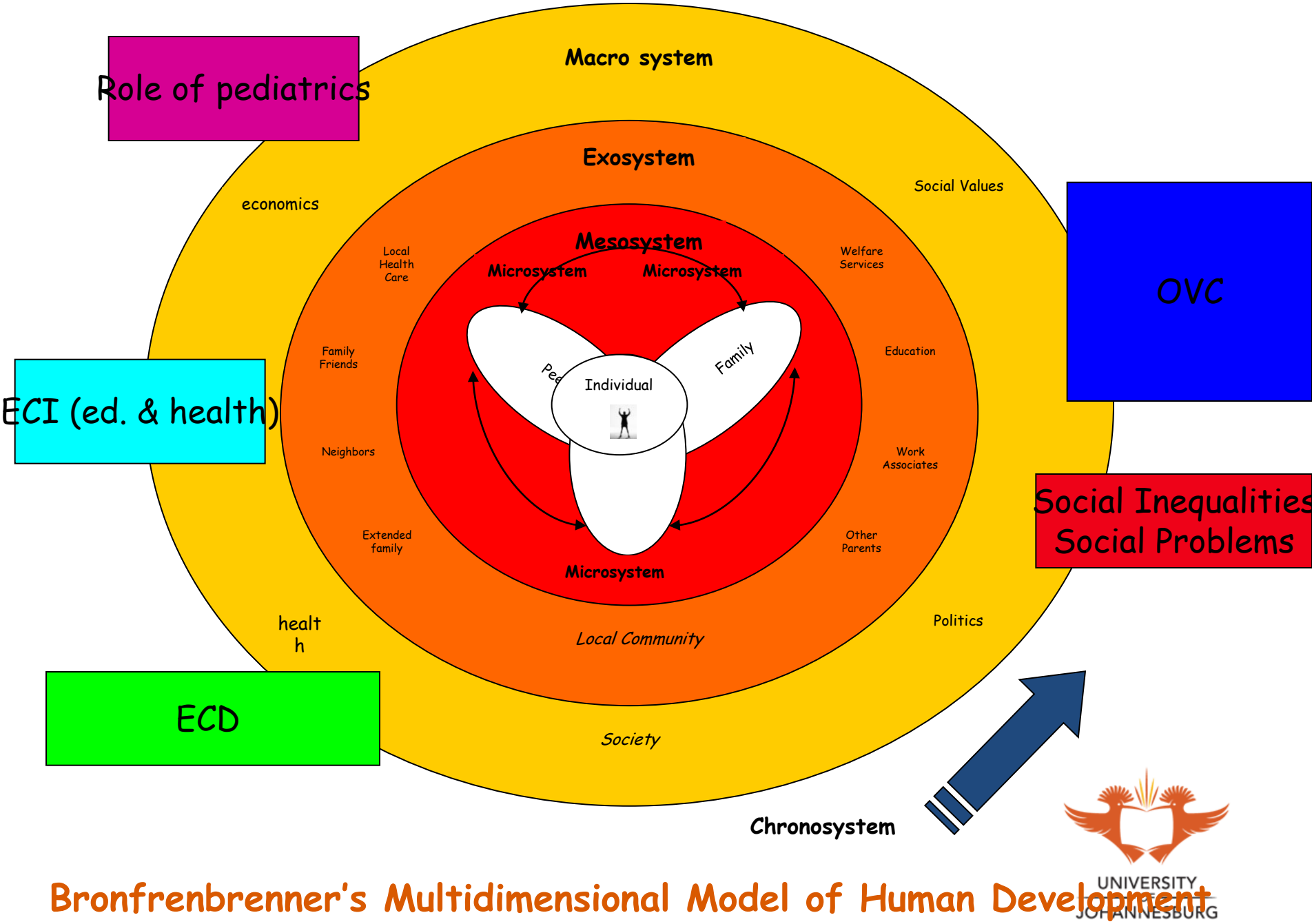
Theoretical Perspectives: Bio-ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner)

Bio-ecological Systems Theory:

- Focus is on families, schools & communities
- Explore different but interrelated and interdependent contexts & systems that influence their lives

  Construct realities through systemic interaction within their environment- both influence and are influenced by the environment

Shift from Medical Model of deficits to Asset-based approaches



Bronfrenbrenner's Multidimensional Model of Human Development

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: SOCIAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK FOR PEDIATRICIANS

- **A social justice theoretical framework** is imperative in understanding the impact of environmental and systemic influences on the development of OVC
- Social justice theory highlights the **social injustices that exist in society that often lead to the oppression and unequal opportunities,** which OVC may be exposed to often compromising their dignity and potential to succeed in life
- **For example food and hunger are major social justice issues** because of their cultural and political connotations.
- Studies have shown that the lack of nutritional food and hunger are very common amongst **particular children and communities** (Anyon, 2005; Patel, 2007).
- Children from these communities also bear the brunt of **social stigma**, especially when they have to stand in line to receive food hampers at their schools
- Social justice theorists postulate that all children should be provided **with fair and equal opportunities** to make certain that they succeed in life
- **In the context of this paper this would mean that OVC should be provided with equal opportunities to grow and achieve their full potential as part of a healthy life**

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Research Design and Methodology

- Design – generic phenomenological qualitative research design
- Purposive sampling – 10-15 years old; grades 5-7; converse in English; orphans living in CHH
- Data collection – Individual interviews
- Focus group discussions with grade 6 learners till data saturation
- 122 questionnaires with incomplete questions
- Trustworthiness – triangulation of data collection methods. Use of actual words of participants

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FINDINGS

Themes	Sub-themes	Responses
Home	Bleak picture of home & family context	"We live in disgraceful conditions. I even feel shame to describe it"
	Disillusionment	"We have no windows and broken doors"
		"Our roof is falling down. When it rains we are scared that we might drown"
	No water & electricity	"There is no water and lights. We have to walk long distances to get water"
		"The people from the office they come and cut off the lights because we have no money to pay"
	Poor sanitation & unhygienic conditions	"The toilet is outside the house in the back yard"
		"We use a bucket that overflows and the stink is too much"
		"There is urine and dirty water all over"
		"I am worried about malaria and TB"
	Inadequate furniture	"There are no beds in my house. We sleep on the floor with no blankets"
		"lucky we are five children. We squeeze up and keep warm"
		"There is no table or chair to do homework"
		"My house is small and overcrowded"

FINDINGS

Themes	Sub-themes	Responses
Home	Poverty	"There is no food to give my small brothers and sisters" "Many times we go to bed hungry" "I have no clothes to wear. Sometimes I don't go to school because I have only one dress which is dirty" "When I use my dirty clothes the children say I smell"
	Change of Roles Take on adult responsibilities	"I have to be a mother at home. I need my mother but I have to be her from the time she died" "I have to cook, clean, bath my baby sisters" "I got to get the food and see that my small brothers and sisters are fine. I must see they go to school. I must see that no one touches them" "I don't like it now, I am a rogue. I have to steal so that I can feed my family" "Now I act like a big lady. I have to sleep with men so I have money to feed my brothers and sisters" "So many girls, as young as 12 years, are pregnant. I even know of some girls who have AIDS"
	Negative psychological consequences (unhappy, sad & angry)	"I am so unhappy at home" "I am helpless and hopeless" "I wish I was dead so I would not go through all the bad things"

FINDINGS

Themes	Sub-themes	Responses
Home	Safety	"I always have this feeling that someone is going to walk into my house and hurt us" "At night I try not to go to the toilet even if I am in need. I know I will be raped because it has happened to so many girls in my area"
Community	Positive feelings	"Some people are nice; they give me food to eat when I am hungry" More than 80% indicated they were happy when they were supported by the community.
	Negative feelings were overwhelming (lack of safety, violence & crime)	"I don't feel safe in my community. The people come for you when they know you are alone and there is no grown up person in your house. Sometimes we have to pretend that there is a big person in the house" "Lots of fighting in our community" "Where I live there is a lot of killing" "The men take drugs and then they get violent, they look for fights and run after the young girls" More than 70% indicated that they do not want to live in their local community.

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FINDINGS

Themes	Sub-themes	Responses
School	Bad treatment from other children who were better of	"The children they don't like us. They treat us bad" "They hit me and tease me and tell me to shut up" "They say nasty things that hurt my feelings"
	Poor physical conditions of the school	"The classroom windows are broken and haven't been fixed for a long time" "The ceiling is falling down and it scares me. What if it falls on us?"
	No textbooks	"We don't have textbooks. Sometimes we have to share or wait for teachers to give us photocopied pages" "Sometimes I don't do my homework because I did not have the text book that I needed"
	88% emphasized positive experiences - Got clothes and food at school	"At least when I go to school I eat some food for the day" "When there is no school I starve" "I don't like holidays and weekends because I get no food and clothes" "I get food at school but I take it home to feed my little sisters"
	- Had friends at school	"I have friends at school that try to help me" "Some of my friends are just like me, have no parents. So we understand each other and try to help each other when things are really bad"

FINDINGS

Themes	Sub-themes	Responses
School	Positive emotions	"Coming to school takes away my sadness. I feel better knowing that I am not the only one going through tough times" "draws strength and courage just being at school" 76% noted that school was what kept them going in life 82% were happy 64% felt more confident
	Safe at school	"I only feel safe when I am in school" "At least I can use the toilets without fear that I am watched or going to be attacked. The doors are not broken at school"
	Inspiration to learn and succeed in life	"I want to learn and pass school. I have to if I want to do better in life" "The only way I can get out of this dump is if I educate myself"
	Helpful, caring and supportive teachers	"I like my teachers. They are kind to me" "The teachers show me love" "She explains things to me when I don't understand" "She shows that I am important even if I don't have parents and live in a squatter camp"

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Discussion of Findings

- In South Africa alone it is estimated that **10 million children fall within the birth to 9 years range** (Department of Education, 2001).
- The problem with this figure is that **40% of families in the country live in gross poverty** with rural families being the worst affected.
- children raised in poor families are "**at risk of infant death, low birth weight, stunted growth**, poor adjustment to school, increased repetition and school dropout" (Department of Education, 2001).
- Over the years many studies on child development have **correlated poverty with low health,** cognitive, emotional, behavioural, social and moral development in children. Some have also highlighted psychological difficulties in children as a result of impoverished environments.
- More disconcerting is the evidence provided by several researchers that most of the problems children face in their early lives **affect them in adolescence and later in adult life**.
- For example, it has been noted that children raised in poor families themselves become poor in adulthood.
- Many girls raised in poor families also end up having **underweight and unhealthy babies**.
- So the **vicious cycle of poverty** is perpetuated across generations.

Discussion of Findings

- **Government to invest** in the early development of children.
- Several research findings have provided substantial evidence to indicate the benefits of early childhood intervention programmes.
- Poverty is highly prevalent in developing countries so the problems experienced by children in their early years of life are expected to be more intensive and extensive.
- Research has shown that **an investment in early childhood development is actually an investment in the economic future of a country**. Children who have equal opportunities early in life tend to be more productive and have better life satisfaction as adults.
- African states should view an investment in early childhood development as a crucial aspect of governance.
- Since OVC comprise a significant percentage of the population in African countries it will be essential for African states to give particular attention to the plight of OVC – who in many instances would be the **future leaders** of such states.

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Discussion of Findings

- South Africa is a leading example in developing policies on improving early childhood development. For example, the democratic South African government has introduced policies that established a national system of reception year provision for five year olds and established funding proposals to make this a reality in poor and rural communities, and introduced **inter-sectoral programmes for children from birth to four years** (Department of Education, 2001).
- Further policy development includes better **management of social grants** to ensure that OVC actually get the funds; the safety and security of OVC; access to counselling services at schools and local communities; aftercare support centres, school homework support programmes; learning support for OVC; better housing facilities for OVC; **improved health services**; better training and support for teachers working with OVC; and special policies to promote the well-being of orphaned and vulnerable girls who are the targets for sexual abuse and exploitation as revealed in this paper.
- Addressing OVC concerns **needs systemic intervention so policies directed at improving the lives of poor families** should also be promulgated, such as, earning supplements directed at correcting wage inadequacies, tax policies that do not penalise the poor, job creation policies. An integrated coordinated strategy that involves the different sectors of government together with relevant stakeholders in the community is needed for policies pertaining to OVC to be developed and successfully implemented.

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Conclusion

- The main aim of this research was to express the need for deliberate government intervention to improve the early childhood development of OVC by **ensuring the quality of Paediatric care**

- Since there are almost **a billion OVC children worldwide** who fall within the early childhood range, most of them being in Africa, it is imperative for governments to take full responsibility for improving the quality of health and education in the early years of childhood.

- African governments, in particular, should not only focus on what children need to grow and succeed in life but should actually see it has government's responsibility to fulfil the rights of children. In the long term improving the quality of early childhood health and education and the inclusion of OVC in this endeavour is bound to be a **strategic investment in future human capital**, especially in developing countries.

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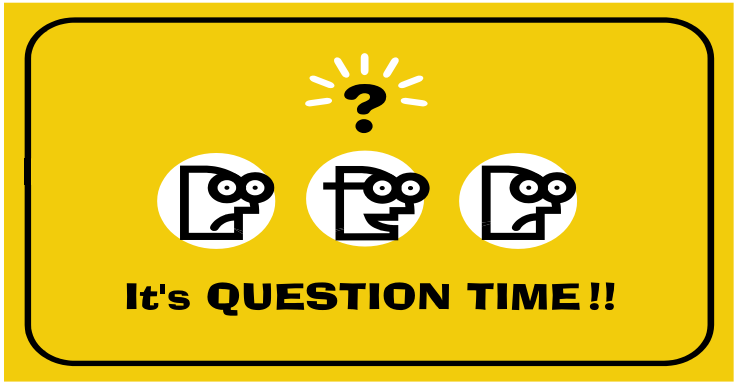
There are thorns in the prognosis of success











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PROMINENT DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES & ECD

- PIAGET
- VYGOTSKY
- ERIKSON
- KOHLBERG
- BAME NSAMENANG

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PIAGET'S STAGES

Stages	Development	Concerns for OVC
Sensorimotor (birth to 2 years)	Knowledge develops through sensory and motor abilities Object permanence	Abilities may be affected in deprived environments. Adults needed for early identification of difficulties What about parental permanence for orphans?
Preoperational (2 to 7 years)	Knowledge is represented by language, mental imagery, & symbolic thought	Can these be achieved without parents or adults?

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PIAGET'S STAGES

Stages	Development	Concerns for OVC
Concrete (7 to 12 years)	Can reason logically about concrete objects and events	Is this possible in the context of poverty and deprivation?
Formal Operational (12 years and up)	Think deeply about concrete events, reason abstractly	Context of poverty and deprivation

Criticism of Piaget's Theory

- Children's thinking is not as consistent as the stages suggest
- Infants and young children are more competent than he recognized
- Understates the social components of cognitive development
- He was better describing processes than explaining how they operate.

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Vygotsky's Theory

Major Assumptions	Concerns for OVC
Children develop through informal and formal conversations with adults	What happens when there are no adults or abusive ones present?
First few years are critical for thought & language independence	Can this be achieved without adults/parents?
Complex mental activities begin as basic social activities	Will they not develop these activities if they lack basic socialization skills?
Need help of advanced person to perform difficult tasks	Will they not be able to do this without parents/adults?
Challenging tasks promote cognitive growth	Will they be exposed to such tasks?
Play stretches cognition	What kind of play will they be exposed to in deprived environments without parents?

Western and Eurocentric Theoretical Challenges

Maslow Hierarchy of Needs > THE THEORY

- Maslow focused on what motivates people (1943; 1954).
- He believed that people are motivated to achieve certain needs, which he presented in hierarchical levels within a pyramid.
- He identified five stages ranging from basic needs to self-actualization needs.
- In the first stage people strive to meet their basic needs which include air, food, water, shelter, sleep, warmth and sex.
- The second stage involves safety needs (protection, security, order, and law).
- The third stage is social needs (belongingness and love- work group, family, affection, relationships).
- The fourth stage refers to esteem needs (self-esteem, achievement, mastery, independence, status).
- The fifth stage brings in self-actualization needs (realizing personal potential, self-fulfilment, and seeking personal growth).
- Maslow (1970) later expanded the five stages to eight, including cognitive (knowledge meaning), aesthetic (search for beauty, balance and form), and transcendence needs (helping others to self-actualization).

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Western and Eurocentric Theoretical Challenges

Maslow Hierarchy of Needs >THE CHALLENGES

- Firstly his findings lack empirical authenticity and is based on the subjective experiences of eighteen individuals (Mcleod, 2007).

- Secondly, his sample was limited to educated white males so it cannot be generalized to females and people from lower social classes.

- Thirdly, he assumes that lower level needs must be met first before people move on to higher level needs.

- *This may not necessarily be true for most cultures in which poverty is rife.*
- *In Africa there are, arguably, many people who have achieved self-actualization even though they lived in poverty and hardship.*
- *Also there are many others who are still capable of higher order needs, such as love and belongingness, even though they live in poverty (McLeod, 2007).*
- *Maslow's theory may also suggest that the many orphans and vulnerable children in Africa may experience psychopathological behaviour, but research has shown that many of them display resilient behaviours (Lethale, 2008).*

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Western and Eurocentric Theoretical Challenges …continued

Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development > THE THEORY

- Erik Erikson (1963) viewed human life span as comprising of a series of developmental phases, each with a major developmental task.
- The ability to deal with crises in each of these phases would determine how healthy or unhealthy a person will become.
- In the first phase: Basic trust versus mistrust (birth to 1 year) the infant learns to trust the mother to be fed and comforted when she or he is in distress.
- In an African context children are often vulnerable from birth.
- For example, as a result of poverty some mothers leave their babies with caregivers so that they could go back to work. Increasingly, some mothers die during childbirth as a result of poor health facilities, lack of qualified doctors, and HIV/AIDS related sicknesses.
- A strict application of Erikson's theory would mean that there are many unhealthy children in Africa.

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Western and Eurocentric Theoretical Challenges …continued

Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development > THE CHALLENGES

- Questionable within an African context, since it does not take into consideration the impact of prolonged;
  - Structural oppression,
  - Cultural transitions,
  - Violence,
  - Inadequate education,
  - Health and
  - Family life (Pillay & Nesengani, 2006).

- Insinuates that vulnerable children may be psychologically damaged. Even though this is expected in most situations it is also contradictory, since it does not necessarily explain how many of these children have been resilient enough to survive against all odds (Dawes, & Donald, 1994; Lethale, 2008, Swartz & Levett, 1989).

- His **omission of cultural dynamics** in the different stages of psychosocial development. For example, African cultures may have different ways of viewing crises in comparison to western cultures.

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Western and Eurocentric Theoretical Challenges …continued

Kohlberg's theory of moral development > THE THEORY

- Kohlberg (1969, 1981) proposed a model of moral development comprising three levels, each consisting of two stages.

- Level one is preconventional morality made up of two stages, namely;
  - Obedience and Punishment, and
  - Individualism and Exchange.

- Level two involves conventional morality. Here the focus is on living up to social expectations and roles, and maintaining the social order (law and order).

- In the first stage children obey rules to avoid punishment and in the second stage individuals obey rules to serve their own interests.

- Level three focuses on post conventional morality.
- The two stages here highlight social contracts, individual rights and universal principles.

Western and Eurocentric Theoretical Challenges …continued

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development > THE CHALLENGES

- There is a difference between knowing what people ought to do and what they actually do.
- It overemphasizes the concept of justice in making moral choices.
- Its underlying philosophy is based on western individualistic cultures that emphasize personal rights (Boyes & Walker, 1988; Sullivan, 1977).
- The latter is obviously problematic in an African context where collectivist cultures emphasize society and community.
- With the escalating numbers of OVC in Africa there are often no significant adults in their homes to take care of the young let alone teach them morals and values.
- So does this mean that there is no hope of the young acquiring morals and values?
- Are there no other ways of children developing morals in the absence of parents and significant caregivers?

These are some of the concerns that need to be addressed within an African context.

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Social Ontogenesis Theory-Bame Nsamenang

- Social ontogenesis views human development as being determined by a combination of ecology and social systems.
- Children adopt social norms and cognitions from their own cultural environments.
- Social ontogenesis theory gives attention to the setting in which a child grows.
- Nsamenang (2005; 2010) identified three interconnected periods that depicts the African human cycle, namely; a social, ancestral and spiritual selfhood.
- In each of these periods there are specific developmental tasks that humans are exposed to, based on their cultural realities, for example, in the social stage of infancy pre-social priming is important and the developmental task within an African context is to prepare infants to tolerate multiple caregivers.

Mainstream psychology neglects ancestral and spiritual selfhoods, which are the essential tenets of an African worldview.

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