Social issues faced by children which can be solved through children’s literature: From a bibliotherapy perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses social issues faced by children which can be solved through children’s literature. Apart from children’s literature being seen only as a resource for reading, it can also be utilised in solving other societal ills faced by children. These ills include, bullying, abuse, family structure and physical impairment. Social challenges are unpacked, detailing how they affect children. Low literacy levels are an issue for many children in South Africa. There are external conditions of learning which may be explained as features outside the learner that influence learning possibilities and are involved in the learning process. These external features are what this article analyze as it has been observed that some of them inhibit the environment for learning, thereby obstructing learning or the required standard of literacy in general.

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Introduction

Even though children’s literature may be used to solve social issues faced by children, so far, no study has been conducted dealing with this subject. Mojapelo (2021) as the author of the study of which this article is based, is the only one who has attempted it.

In as much as children’s literature is primarily meant to solve literacy issues, there is a whole array of other issues which it is meant to solve or can endeavor to solve. These issues are called social challenges or social problems. Mitchell-Kamalie (2002) mentions that in South Africa, a relatively large proportion of children continue to be affected by a host of physiological problems. This is as a result of, or associated with, malnourishment and poor health, general social problems, and impoverishment. Social challenges affect almost everyone and defining them is not easy. Mooney, Knox and Schacht (2009) state that there is no universal, constant, or absolute definition of what constitutes a social problem. Rather, social problems are defined by a combination of objective and subjective criteria that vary across societies, among individuals and groups within a society, and across historical periods. From their notion, they mention the two criteria that can be used to understand what is meant by social problems. It is mentioned that the objective element of a social problem refers to the existence of a social condition. People become aware of social conditions through their own life experiences, through the media, and through education. On the other hand, the subjective element of a social problem refers to the belief that a particular social condition is harmful to society or to a segment of society and that it should and can be changed. Social problems affecting children are many, the researcher has realised that, indeed, there are social challenges that children are facing and that children’s literature can help to address some of them. The subheadings of this article are: Motivation for the Study, Objectives of the Study, Questions of the Study, Theoretical Framework, Issues Facing Children, Social Issues that Could be Addressed Though Books and the Conclusion.

What prompted this study are the external issues that affect children’s literacy. These issues can make literacy learning unconducive. Illeris (2009) mentions external conditions of learning and they are explained as features outside the learner that influence learning possibilities and are involved in the learning process. These external features are what this study is trying to deal with as it has been
observed that some of them inhibit the environment for learning, thereby obstructing learning or the required standard of literacy in general.

The external issues are what the researchers identify as social challenges. When explaining the concept of a social challenge or problem, Lopata and Levy (2003) say that when personal troubles take on the status of mutually recognised and shared difficulties for a sufficient number of people, these exigencies may be perceived as social problems that require social action or solution. The above scholars further explain that something becomes defined as a social problem through a process of social construction in which a situation or condition is collectively perceived as harmful to a sufficient number of people or society itself. One can say that an awareness of a social challenge somehow prompts one to find a remedy for it, hence this study.

Lopata and Levy (Op cit.) mention four points on what social problems can do to society:

i. They cause physical or mental damage to individuals or society.
ii. They offend the values or standards of some powerful segment of society.
iii. They persist for an extended period of time.
iv. They generate competing proposed solutions because of varying evaluations from groups in different social positions within society, which then delays reaching a consensus on how to attack the problem.

The above points are indeed proof of what is observed in the South African society. Many South Africans suffer from depression or mental health issues due to social challenges. Some social challenges like illiteracy, do affect a powerful segment of the society. A society with children that are illiterate results in a whole lot of other social problems, as the children might miss out on opportunities in their adult life.

Social problems tend to change with time, an existing one gets replaced by a new one that results from the prior one. As Lopata and Levy (2003: 6) mention:

The process of constructing a social problem may be truncated before achieving full recognition or status, sustained interest may wane with time or be lost, or a specific problem may lose importance as others emerge and compete.

Based on the above statement with regard to literacy, it is very crucial to never tire to find solutions. The need to find solutions to ensure that children have access to proper reading materials and that reading is taking centre stage should never wane.

This study has the following objectives:

i. To show some social ills or challenges that be regarded as eternal conditions that can affect children and their literacy learning.
ii. To demonstrate how social issues can be incorporated into children’s literature.
iii. To show how bibliotherapy can be used to help children deal with some social problems.

The following are the main questions that will be answered through the findings of this study:

i. What are some of the social issues that can be regarded as eternal conditions that can affect children and their literacy learning?
ii. How can social issues be incorporated into children’s literature?
iii. How bibliotherapy can be used to help children deal with some social problems?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This work is grounded on bibliotherapy as a technique that can be used to address some of the issues children face beyond literacy. Some of the situations that affect children include the following: growing up in abusive homes, children growing up in different types of family structures, child abuse, physical impairment and bullying. These challenges can be dealt with through what is termed bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is made up of two words which are ‘Biblio’, originating from the Greek word biblius (book), and ‘therapy’, referring to psychological help (Sechtman, 2009). Kanarowski (2012) says that bibliotherapy is a practice about which both research based and anecdotal claims have been made regarding its role in changing attitudes. Sechtman (2009) further explains that bibliotherapy entails the use of literature for therapeutic purposes and it includes listening to stories and poems, watching films, and looking at pictures. It is a playful, engaging, and fun process. This shows how literature can be used to address different issues and how relevant it can be in addressing issues facing children. Furthermore, Davies (1992) says that the use of books to assist in identifying and overcoming similar problems is termed bibliotherapy. Lonsdale and Mackintosh (1973) mention that bibliotherapy may help the individual to know himself better. It can also help to deepen his insight into human behaviour, to better understand the relations of people to one another and to find interest outside one’ self.

There is an agreement amongst the above authors when it comes to how bibliotherapy is described. It is mainly about using literature to help, hence this part of the study deems it fit that children's literature (oral or written) can be used to solve some of the social issues children are facing. It is a type of therapy that can help deal with behaviours, and also help to make people understand their behaviour and that of others. Lonsdale and Mackintosh (Op cit.) say:
Through books children can meet other boys and girls who are beset with the same real or imagined problems. A character in a story tends to become real to the reader, who is interested in finding how the character with whom he has identified copes with his problems and adjusts to certain situations.

The theory will help guide in showing how books can be utilised to solve some problems children are faced with.

Issues Facing Children

It is often mentioned that children are just innocent souls who do not deserve the challenges they go through, yet they still go through a whole array of them. Mitchel-Kalamie (2002) mentions how being directly exposed to violence, be it of a political or social nature, may be a traumatic experience for the child and that it could affect his/her personality development and interpersonal relations adversely.

Children’s literature can help solve many social issues that children experience. Children being unable to read, is a social problem on its own. However, solving the very same social problem of literacy can help address other social problems. Lopata and Levy (Op cit.) say:

The process of constructing a social problem entail gaining public attention and legitimacy for recognising the troubling aspect of the situation or condition, proposing and obtaining acceptance for solutions, and implementing strategies for change.

The recognition of the troubling aspect of the situation or condition propelled this study. Bibliotherapy can be used to deal with behavioural challenges, instilling confidence and overcoming fears. Below is an analysis of how some books can help deal with such:

Behavioural challenges

Books that deal with acceptable behaviour can be used to aid children in the right way. Sigmund Freud (Online Source) on child development, more especially on the development of personality, believes that “caregivers of children should be understanding and empathetic of children’s emotional states. If children are supported emotionally, then their personality, and emotional well-being is likely to be secure and stable”. This shows how parents or caregivers can either mold or break a child. In children's literature, the element of dealing with behavioural changes, most of the time, is captured well by folktales. They always have an element that deals with different kinds of behaviours. The following books are used as examples to show how books can aid behavioural challenges, The Greedy Dog by Ceko-Ndlovu (2018) and Polecats by Mongwe (2018).

The Greedy Dog is about friendship between a cat and a dog. The cat believes in sharing things but the dog is very greedy. The dog eats all the food without even leaving some for the cat and it also steals food to a point where one day it gets choked and nearly dies. This book has the ability to show children that being greedy is not a good thing and stealing has bad repercussions.

Polecats is about an animal, polecats, which is very mean to other animals. He is always mocking other animals for being rude. It does all these things without being aware of its own bad smell as it thinks it is better than other animals. It finally learns that it has hurt other animals after learning the truth about its bad smell. It apologises and the other animals are able to play with it. Most of the time, children tend to be mean to other children and end up having no friends at all. This book helps to show them that it is important to be kind.

Self Confidence

There are books that deal with self-confidence, acceptance of one’s weaknesses, appearance and other themes. Such books include Lara the Lady Yellowbird by Evans (2016) and My Special Hair by Dingwall (2017).

Lara the Lady Yellowbird is about a yellowbird named Lara. She is different from all her friends as she is the only yellow one, and all others are red. Lara wants to fit in, so she ends up painting her wings red so that she blends in like others. The next day, nobody notices her. This makes her feel sad, and her friends are shocked when they realised that it is her. Her teacher makes her realise that being unique is special, so she goes home to wash the red paint and remain with her unique yellow wings. This book instils self confidence in children. The latter are made aware of the need to accept themselves even if they are different from everyone else. Other children will also learn that it is okay for others to be different from them.

My Special Hair is about a young black girl who explains how special her hair is. She mentions all the things her hair does and all the styles she can do to her hair. In a society where hair is very controversial as schools are particular about what normal hair looks like, teaching children about hair is crucial. Work places deem certain types of hair as normal and, in all this, a black person's hair is not deemed acceptable. From this book, black children can embrace their own natural hair more, and some children from different races will learn that any type of hair is beautiful and that other children have to wear their natural hair just as much as they wear their own.

Fear

Children tend to have many fears. Some of these fears are because of the adults around them. They use fear as a way of getting children to behave and to prohibit them from doing some things. There is danger in instilling children with fear, more especially fear that can paralyse and prohibit them from doing things in life. Sometimes fear is good as it can keep children safe from danger.
However, there should be a limit to it. Some books that deal with fear include *Scared Tumi* by Mashego (2016) and *Teju’s Shadow* by Martins (2019).

*Scared Tumi* is about a girl who is scared. She mentions all the different things that make her scared and have fear. In all the fears she has of doing some of the things, she is assured that she does not always have to be scared and that sometimes other people will be there to assist her. This type of book can help children overcome their fears and open up to doing different kinds of things without worrying that something will go wrong all the time.

*Teju’s Shadow* is about a boy, Teju, who is scared of his own shadow. He even refuses to sleep. This is one of the fears that are very prevalent in children. They seem to think that they are being followed. Teju’s mom makes him understand how a shadow works and from that understanding, he stops being afraid of it.

The above are some of the ways that children’s literature can be used to help children deal with some of the challenges they face. The child can identify with the character. Davies (1992: 121) mentions how important the manner in which a character faces the problem and deals with it is for the reader. She further states:

The young reader who has a problem discovers that he is not alone. He realises that others also experience difficulties in relationships with their families or with society, or may suffer from a physical problem or encounter obstacles brought about by circumstances or natural disasters beyond their control.

Beyond the pleasure children get from reading books, they can also always learn life lessons. However, these lessons are not supposed to be explicit, as that does not challenge them in any way. The main aim of books is to cognitively strengthen learners. When they are put to test, comprehension is built and, once they start comprehending, that is when they start getting the life lessons in the books.

### Social Issues that Could be Addressed Through Books

The following social issues that could be addressed through books will be discussed: Bullying, Family Structure, Child Abuse and Physical Impairments.

#### Bullying

Bullying involves treating someone abusively, either physically, verbally, emotionally or all three (Murphy and Banas, 2009). In Lidzegu (2019), Neser *et al.* define bullying as intentional, repeated hurtful acts and words, name-calling, and threats directed at a child or group of children by another child or other children. Furthermore, Adam (2007) says bullying is an external barrier that contributes to internal trauma such as fear and anxiety amongst victims. According to the definitions above, it is prevalent that bullying is not something one can take lightly or for granted. It has repercussions that can alter one's life forever. It is an inhumane act that demoralises the victim as it is an attack that, even though harm is done on the outside most of the time, it is the internal part that suffers. This internal suffering is dangerous due to its outcome on the individual, like lowering self-esteem, affecting mental health and others.

Bullying affects many children. It is another social problem many schools are faced with as it leads to disruptions in schools. It affects learning and the smooth functioning of the institutions. Adam (2007) says that in South Africa, it is evident that centres of education are faced with many and various barriers to learning. One such barrier is bullying. In primary and high schools alike, bullying is rife. It occurs not only on the playground but also in the classroom.

Field (2007) mentions that bullying is a tradition in many schools. It tends to be worse in those that either admire, condone, tolerate, deny or do nothing about this practice. Subsequently, Govender (2013) states that numerous schools across South Africa are experiencing the same problem.

Bullying is very problematic in South African schools. It disrupts learning, leads to absenteeism and creates an unconducive environment for learning. Victims of bullying suffer immensely at the hands of the bullies and bullies themselves do not pay much attention to their studies and their main concern is what next to do to their victims. As the foundation phase is the focus of this study, the main concern will only be for children in those lower grades. These are children that still have the potential to learn to do better.

Bullying also has to do with a moral choice, the ability to know when one is doing the right thing or not. This moral choice is something that oral literature can help with.

In as much as some children can be taught good behavior, there has to be a balance. Field (2007: 15-16) has this to say about bullying:

> Every year, many parents pass on a simple, sound instruction to their child: ‘If you are nice to people, they will be nice to you.’ But some children get the wrong idea. They do not know how to be nice effectively – they are nice but vulnerable, or they seem polite but are more concerned with how they feel or appear than with showing genuine care for others. Naturally, other children may sense this lack of interest, and bully them in retaliation.

Books or any form of literature that addresses an issue such as bullying will have to ensure that it does not leave children vulnerable. It should address both the bully and the victim so that both can be able to identify where they fall. It should make children aware of instances or examples of bullying and let the intimidator know that the things they are doing are regarded as bullying. Lidzegu (2019)
says that findings reveal that educators, school principals, learners, and parents agree that bullying behaviour amongst primary school learners is a serious problem that requires serious attention. Individual approaches, whereby educators act in isolation to tackle dominating behaviour, have proven short-sighted and ineffectual. This is proof that there is a high demand for different interventions, a holistic approach where almost everyone gets involved and where any alternative that can help is utilised.

There are types of bullying that children's literature can try to address. Field (2007) mentions the four types which are teasing, exclusion, physical bullying and harassment. This is where literature can serve a purpose other than reading.

With children, the things they do are learnt. It could be from adults or due to a situation at home. Parents have a responsibility of correcting behaviours from their children and, more often, they do not even have time to do this. One of the recommendations for dealing with bullying, as suggested by Govender (2013), is that schools need to create an awareness of the seriousness of bullying by means of posters, talks and role-plays.

In his research, Lidzegu (2019: 179), during the interviews he conducted, mentions that:

It was emphasised that educators needed to intervene in managing bullying behaviour within schools or classrooms. Such interventions should consist in elaborating and enforcing classroom rules that condemn bullying actions.

Different strategies are needed for dealing with bullying, of recognising it and of correcting it. In the school setting, bullying is addressed as bullying. It is explicit. However, children learn things better through finding the things themselves and this is where children’s literature fits in.

**Family Structure**

A lot of European or English books that most children are exposed to, more often, have the same family structure, where there is a mother, a father and the children living in a house where the children even have their own rooms. As quoted in Thwala (1996), Haralambos and Holborn maintain that the family structure varies from society to society and the emergence of the nuclear family to other societies is due partly to the prestige of Western ideas and lifestyles. Furthermore, Meese (2010) highlights that family structures have obviously changed over the past 25 years. Families are more diverse than ever before, and many children live with people other than biological family members. Davies (1992) mentions that the family unit is the most important structure in society and it is of utmost significance to a child’s life.

In South Africa, more so in the rural areas where there is this challenge of reading, children are mostly growing up in a very different family structure from the ones they find in books. They find themselves not identifying with some books and even end up feeling inferior. It is very vital for children’s books to be inclusive of this difference. Children living in alternative family structures, other than the popular nuclear structure, need to also feel valued and made to feel that it is also normal to have their type of family setting or structure.

When talking about a nuclear family, Field (2007: 43) says: “Over the past few decades this close, core unit has changed and now functions differently, including the obvious change of divorce and re-marriage”. Children grow up seeing these differences in family structures that, at some point, affect them. On many occasions, they find no explanation at school and when they get to school, most of what can help them with understanding is often one-sided. Ndagurwa (2013) talks about how the family structure has an effect on children, mentioning that children living in nuclear families in South Africa have tended to do better in educational attainment compared to their counterparts living in other types of family structures.

In as much as there are issues affecting children pertaining to the family structure, children who grow up in a nuclear family structure need to be aware that there are those who are not living the same way as they do. This then builds children who understand the difference and stop making other children feel inferior.

There are children who come from families where they are raised only by the grandmother. These children should also see other kids who are like them in books. Then there are other children who are raised by their older siblings as their parents might have passed away. There are also children who grow up in foster and orphanage homes. All these children tend to have social issues as they grow up and their family structure is also due to a whole array of other social issues. It is therefore imperative that books give them the explanation they so desperately need.

Another family structure is where children grow up in female-headed homes. It could be because the father passed away or the mother got divorced from him. Mabelane (2016) found that children raised in female-headed families have been reported to be disadvantaged in several ways. Many are said to be performing poorly at school, having low self-esteem, experiencing early sexual activity, and displaying adverse behaviour.

In South Africa, many children also grow up without their fathers due to the father’s neglect or his differences with the mother. Children who do not know how to respond when other children speak about their fathers often feel embarrassed. There should be children's books that teach them and other children that it is normal for others not to grow up in families with a particular structure.

Below are images from books that represent the family structure element:
Figure 1: Image taken from a book by Edem Torkornoo.

Figure 1 above is taken from the book *Baby’s First Family Photo* by Edem Torkornoo (2019) which was published by Bookdash. Normally, such books could be translated into some indigenous languages, Sesotho sa Leboa being one of them. The family consists of both parents, two children and the grandmother.

Figure 2: Image taken from a book by Melissa Fagan.

Figure 2 above is taken from the book *Where is Thabo?* by Melissa Fagan (2018), published by Bookdash. The book shows a nuclear family, where there is a mother, father and two children; the boy Thabo is just not visible. A lot of available books seem to be of the narrative that in a family there must be a mother and a father.

Figure 3: Image taken from a book by Mabel Mnensa.

Figure 3 above is the cover of a book titled *Who Takes the Train?* by Mabel Mnensa (2016). It is about a mother and her daughter who take a trip to town. The focus is only on the two having fun in town, just the two of them. It can serve as a representation for those children who are living with single mothers.
Child Abuse

Child abuse includes not only the physical, non-accidental injury of children but also emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. Therefore, abuse can range from habitually humiliating a child, to neglecting to give necessary care, and from excessively shaking a child to rape (Britz, 2005). As quoted in Mabade (2013), Chamber says that child abuse refers to the maltreatment of the child by any person, irrespective of their relationship. The child is physically, emotionally, sexually, psychologically, or economically maltreated. The abuser is more likely to be an adult person. Hanson (2008) further extends what child abuse is when he says the definitions of child abuse also include the witnessing of woman abuse. Child abuse is very broad and dealing with it means understanding how even the smallest things that one can regard as nothing can be regarded as child abuse. From the different scholars, child abuse seems to be any act done on a child either directly or indirectly, that harms or affects them either physically or emotionally. Abused children will not always show or have questionable attribute behaviour or visible scars. Therefore, it is crucial that adults, parents, teachers or caregivers constantly check on children.

Social challenges that affect children are so interwoven. Child abuse is also one of the major social ills that are affecting children. Hence the recommendation of literature, something they can always rely on. Teachers could use children’s literature to explicitly talk about child abuse and to observe abnormal behaviour from abused children. Olive (2007) mentions that many maltreated children are more likely to experience learning problems, depression, and stress disorders such as Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

It is through the above problems that one can detect some of the changes children who are abused experience. In South Africa, child abuse is one of the major social problems affecting children. To show the extent of this challenge, the country even holds 16 days of activism against women and child abuse annually. Children are the most vulnerable and they need protection at all times. Rampershad (2000: 93) mentions that “the universal need amongst all children is emotional support from a variety of sources like parents, teachers and peers”. The very same sources mentioned do not always fulfill their obligation and they tend to be the perpetrators and make it easy for children to go through abuse for a long time, before they eventually get caught.

Although child abuse is mostly physical, it can also influence the child’s cognitive and psychosocial development. The scars of abused children are often deeply buried or hidden and these victims can feel permanently scarred and damaged and believe themselves to be unable to lead a happy normal life (Kruger, 1996). Abused children often feel ashamed and isolate themselves. This denies them an opportunity to learn freely at school and play innocently with other children.

Children are unable to protect themselves from abuse but it is imperative that they are empowered with the knowledge of understanding what is happening or has happened to them. There could be recommendations of books that are for young children at school and also to take home to read with parents or caregivers. Some perpetrators abuse children because they know that they do not understand what is done to them is wrong. According to the opinions of the researchers of this study, children’s books, assisted by illustrations, can be used to:

i. demonstrate how perverts prey on children
ii. show how they should not be paid into silence, by any form of payment
iii. explain how anyone can abuse them

It should be noted that it is not only the girl child who is abused but the boy child as well. So both the girl and boy children must have such reference books. With this social problem, many authors shy away from writing about such a controversial subject. Many believe that children are too young to be exposed to such a subject. The issue is that the perpetrators do not, for a second, stop and think that the children are young.

In as much as children’s stories should be about happy stories, there should be a balance. Children’s literature should serve as a weapon for children, something they can use to navigate through life. No one wants children to grow up and experience hardships quickly but the society they live in forces them to do so. Child abuse should be tackled in every possible way. Olive (2007: 69) mentions that “abused children may also turn to self-destructive behaviours such as drug or alcohol use, crime, or skipping school. They tend to be psychologically fragile and need constant reassurance”.

South Africa has a destructive youth and evidence is seen at schools. This destructive youth has rendered schools dysfunctional. There is a problem of substance abuse amongst the youth. They take drugs and drink alcohol excessively, doing crime and getting involved in all sorts of destructive behaviours. According to what Olive (Op cit.) mentions above, the root of the problem could be that some of these children went through abuse. In black communities, therapy is not normalised and children often have to fend for themselves. Some children are not born in families that are very attentive, therefore parents can miss an abused child’s behaviour from the onset.

Children’s literature can also be used to help children to avoid an abuse like sexual abuse. The literature can present instances of how this abuse normally takes place, thereby empowering them with knowledge, should such a thing happen to them. Children live amongst perverts and, as early as possible, they need to be made aware of this. Of course, this will hamper their innocent outlook of life but that is the reality. There is nothing innocent about some environments that these children grow up in.
South Africa has The Teddy Bear Clinic for Abused Children (TTBC). This clinic has different branches but the head office is in Parktown, Johannesburg. Further information about this foundation can be accessed at http://ttbc.org.za. The foundation was started in 1986, as a response to the need for medical examinations for sexually abused children. Today, it has grown to deal with the following too: Forensic medical examinations, forensic assessments, counselling, psychological testing and, more recently, a diversion programme for youth sexual offenders. The Teddy Bear Clinic is one of the entities that can also rely on children's literature for some parts of their work. The clinic has noted that:

Child abuse causes trauma and emotional scars that can have a negative impact on a child's development and result in long-term consequences. Every victim of child abuse and their family are provided with the opportunity to receive therapeutic counselling and support. This enables the child and family to assume a sense of mastery to cope with the trauma. Supportive counselling is also provided to the caregivers of children who have been abused, as our experience has been that the better equipped the caregivers are to cope with the trauma, the better able they are to support the child through the process” (http://ttbc.org.za)

The clinic also found and suggested the following signs to look out for in children who are abused (http://ttbc.org.za):

i. Children suddenly have more money and gifts.
ii. Family members or other people want to take out only that child all the time.
iii. Your child takes longer than usual to get home from school.
iv. Your child refuses to go to school or visit people they used to before.
v. The child makes strange comments about a certain person.
vi. The personality of the child suddenly changes and he or she clings to you.
vii. Lack of appetite or sudden increased appetite.
viii. The child suddenly wants to be isolated and seems withdrawn.
ix. Bedwetting, nightmares or cannot sleep at night.
x. The child has a lot of sexual knowledge for his or her age.
xi. Depression, withdrawal, suicide attempts.
xii. Medical problems such as chronic itching, pain in the genitals, venereal diseases.

However, the clinic recommends that they be used as guides only, even though these signs might not be an indication that the child has been sexually abused. However, they indicate that something is wrong with the child. Children’s literature can be used by both the victims of abuse and caregivers. Writers or narrators of this literature need to be able to put more focus on the character instead of the problem. There has to be characters that are identifiable, those that abused children can be able to identify with and experience what they are going through. The signs mentioned by TTBC above can be used in children’s literature together with other signs that alert children that they have been abused and what they can do if they are in such a situation.

As both girls and boys become victims of abuse, them having relevant literature may help to reduce the number of them becoming perpetrators when they grow old or even before they reach adulthood, as it is currently seen happening where young children, who are not yet in their teen years, sexually violate other young children of their age.

Physical Impairment

Children at a young age are carefree. All they want is just to play and make friends. At this age, they mention anything as it is. They do not coat anything. In South Africa, there are children who are born with physical impairments; some experience them at a later stage due to different contributing factors. However, children with physical impairments tend to be teased by others. According to STATS SA’s (2011) census of the profile of people living with disabilities in the country, there are about 447 843 children aged between five and nine living with some form of disability in South Africa. This is a huge number and, although it is a medical concern, at a social level these children need to be accommodated and others need to be taught about ways of having inclusive books that do not make them feel inferior.

There are physical impairments that children have that subject them to teasing by other children and they are even bullied because of them. Children’s books can diversify the child characters they use in the books. This can be done by portraying children with some impairments as normal characters that empower themselves in the stories.

Below are some of the physical impairments that often subject children to teasing:

i. Burnt wound scars
ii. Wearing spectacles
iii. Putting on hearing aids
iv. Slanted eyes

There are children with burnt wounds, some of whom even appear disfigured. These children are not born this way but they still need a representation of themselves that will assist them in dealing with how they look. The very same books could teach kids to learn that some children happened to have such a misfortune of being burnt. It is mentioned that South Africa has a high rate of childhood
burns, with as many as 1 300 burn related deaths each year (https://www.arrivealive.co.za/). Young children get burnt from hot water, mostly from pulling the kettle, hot iron, the fire used for cooking or warming the house, and cooking oil, to name just a few.

Another group of children that tends to be teased are those who wear spectacles because of having poor eyesight. Most of the time, children from poor backgrounds do not afford glasses that other children can perceive as cool. Sometimes, others get teased for putting a book too close to their eyes so that they can be able to see. Children with slanted eyes also get their nasty share of teasing. They get ridiculed for how they appear and are even called names.

Some children with hearing issues have to put on a hearing aid and they tend to speak too loud. For children, these seem to be unusual. These children are then subjected to bullying by their fellow classmates and they end up hating devices that are meant to make their life bearable and functional. Children's literature could assist by showing the different types of children as they are known in reality and not always the so-called perfect or normal children. It can also accommodate these children by making them heroes even in their differences. This allows other children to then see them as their equals beyond whatever impairment they might have.

Below are some of the books that show inclusivity:

**Figure 4:** A book by Lorato Trok

Figure 4 is the book *Mogau’s Gift* (2017). It is written by Lorato Trok and is about a boy who was born with a full set of teeth. This is very unusual. However, the focus in this book is not on his teeth but on his abilities as he is a very smart boy. Such types of books can teach children that people who are different from them can even be smarter than they are.

**Figure 5:** A book by Liz Sparg.

Figure 5 above is the book *Zanele Situ: My story* (2014), written by Liz Sparg. It is the story of a woman who grew up healthy but then got paralysed at the age of 11, due to the TB of the spine. The story explains how, from a young age, she got involved in sport. She plays javelin to a point where she participates in Paralympics.
Conclusion

In this article, the social challenges that children's literature is meant to solve have been explained. This was done by explaining what a social challenge is and giving examples of those challenges. A comprehensive analysis of the social challenges that affect children was done, and interventions were also suggested and analysed.

As observed, children’s literature can play a major role in society. It can assist in dealing with social issues which children are facing. Schools are riddled with many challenges that affect children and this affects the effectively running schools as well. This study has shown how children’s literature is not only about literacy but can also be a weapon, a tool and a problem solver. This creates an opportunity for many books to be produced in all languages because to use these books for self-help, children need to be able to read and comprehend the content.

Societal issues that have been identified cannot just easily be incorporated into children's books without an understanding of how to tackle them. For example, before one can write a book that deals with bullying, one needs to understand how to approach it in a way that a child reader will comprehend it. For instance, how issues of abuse and rape can be incorporated into children’s literature. From the findings on societal challenges, it is evident that the time of hiding things and saying children are young is behind us. This is because the very same young children are subjected to things way beyond their comprehension. The need for collaboration between writers and psychologists or child therapists is proving to be a necessity as it has been demonstrated how child therapists can use bibliotherapy when treating children.

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