

Challenging childhood vulnerabilities from an ethical perspective in the South African context



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Childhood vulnerabilities in South Africa: Some ethical perspectives

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Review Title:
Challenging childhood vulnerabilities from an ethical perspective in the South African context

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The prevalence of child abuse has sadly become one of the many broken realities South Africans are faced with daily. Judging by the enduring and growing nature of this phenomenon, the war against it is far from over. *Childhood vulnerabilities in South Africa: Some ethical perspectives*, edited by Jan Grobbelaar and Chris Jones (2020) adds a timely and relevant collaborative voice to the moral and academic outcry against this societal ill.

The editors not only succeeded in combining the efforts of some of the top experts in the field with their own, but also managed to address some of the lesser-known issues related to child vulnerability, such as LGBTIQ parented families (chapter 4), the complexity of child marriage (chapter 7) and a critical reflection on the effectiveness of child support grants (chapter 9).

The list of contributors contains an intriguing mix of academics and practitioners from a variety of disciplines, including Elisabet le Roux (social violence expert), Jaco Louw (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder specialist) and Selina Palm (violence against children expert).

This collective work is grounded in a comprehensive theological analysis of vulnerability related to children. Grobbelaar, an established children and childhood theologian, unpacks the vulnerability of South African children in relation to the calling of the church (chapter 1). This renders ethical conduct towards- and on behalf of children – something that cannot be shunned to the periphery, but rather be a priority for all who can in some way, act on children's behalf.

Although the focus of the book is 'not primarily on religion and/or theological ethics' (p. xiii), the various chapters are carried by the theme of reimagining ethical conduct in many societal situations, pertaining to complex phenomena through which children are harmed. Some examples include the stigmatisation of children living with FASD (chapter 5, co-authored by Leana Olivier, Lian-marie Drotsky and Jaco Louw), male initiation and circumcision (chapter 6 by Chris Jones) and racism (chapter 8 by Henry Mbaya).

As academic work, the book undoubtedly makes an important contribution to the discourse about childhood vulnerabilities in South Africa, as it is reflective of the contemporary issues we currently contend with. Due to the vast scope of childhood vulnerabilities, the reader understands that only a limited number of themes can be dealt with in a publication of this nature. Challenges such as vulnerabilities due to gang-violence and the effect of COVID-19 on family structures, may well be on the agenda of a next issue.

The book should resonate well with a wide reader audience including social workers, educators, church leaders, as well as theologians with an interest in childhood vulnerability and their students. It also goes far in sensitising the reader to act ethically towards children as vulnerable and exploited members of society.

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