

## **An Exploration of the Vatsonga People's Markers of Childhood**

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### **Abstract**

Children are entitled to a host of rights cutting across the socio-economic and cultural fabric. These are contained in various international and regional conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child among many more. The concept of childhood is socially constructed therefore childhood is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but rather a specific cultural component of given societies. The paper is based on a qualitative study in which purposively selected 40 Indigenous Knowledge Systems experts and 11 social workers drawn from Mozambique and Zimbabwe participated in the study. The article explores the Vatsonga people's markers of childhood drawing lessons for social workers working with indigenous groups. The findings revealed that childhood among the Vatsonga is not determined by chronological numeric age but by various markers such as maturity and rites of passage. Childhood was romanticised by the Vatsonga as a period of innocence and irrationality. Children were viewed as of great value as they represent the posterity of society and a gift from their ancestors. We conclude that a people's construction of childhood has a bearing on upholding child rights hence it is important for social workers to have an understanding of their clients' views on childhood to effectively prevent child rights violations.

### **Keywords:**

Construction of childhood, Childhood, Child, Child rights, Vatsonga people, Zimbabwe