



Assessment Component 2

Written Essay

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1 Introduction

The lives of children, young people, and families have changed over the period of time due to various factors and key elements of family life. Hence, the essay discusses the key elements of family life and childhood, along with definitions of childhood. In addition, the changes in the lives of children and their families are discussed, alongside the factors that have influenced the changes and their impact. Approaches and interventions to support vulnerable children, young people and families are evaluated based on their effectiveness. Additionally, the essay provides suggestions for improvement to benefit the children, young people, and families.

2 Childhood

The dictionary definitions of childhood refer to an infant, baby, or immature person (Cao *et al.*, 2017). Childhood refers to the state or period of being a child and the early development period of a person (Wildova and Kropáčková, 2015). As per Clark (2010), childhood is socially constructed, which is referred to as not a natural process but the creation of an adult. On the other hand, according to IPPF (2012), childhood is also referred to as the time in which a person is emotionally and physically immature and vulnerable as compared to adults and having a lack of dependency. While Oliver and Pitt (2011) mentioned that childhood is limited till the child is dependent on biological needs.

The legal definition of childhood refers to anyone under the age of 14 is a child; at the same time, under the UN Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC), consider a person as a child under the age of 18 (UN, 2021). Similarly, in the UK, any person under 18 years is considered a child, even if the person is living independently, a member of the armed forces, pursuing further education, or in custody or hospital (NSPCC, 2021).

3 Key elements of family life and childhood

The key elements of family life and childhood include mutual respect, encouragement, communicated love, commitment, safety, appreciation, and acceptance. Mutual respect and love are key elements that are needed for all members of the family and have a significant impact on

childhood. Similarly, individuals in their childhood are dependent on adults, which makes safety a key element, as it limits the vulnerability of the children and the family members (Morris *et al.*, 2018). Encouragement, appreciation, and acceptance are more key factors of family life and childhood in the individuality of the family members, and the child is embraced, along with accepting what the child will be in future. Believing in the family members benefits in building strong relationships within the family that further aids in strengthening the abilities and development of the children (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2021).

4 Development of the social construction of childhood

The social construction of childhood has evolved with time; the beliefs related to childhood innocence and the need for protection has been the dominating view over childhood. The emphasis on relating childhood specifically to children under the age of adolescence has varied in the past (Norozi and Moen, 2016). Moreover, until the 20th century, childhood has not been given attention as a separate social category. The social construction of childhood varies from societies and cultures, as in the 18th century; it referred to childhood as innocent. While in the 19th century, children belonging to low-income families were socially constructed to work in factories, while the children of rich families were developed to pursue education. The social construction of childhood in the 18th and 19th centuries resulted in increasing stereotypes as children of colour having the responsibility of own safety, wellbeing, and education (James and James, 2017). In the current time, the social construction of childhood places a high degree of separation between childhood and adulthood, such as by limiting the entry of children or adults in specific places or the laws preventing children from performing certain activities that are allowed for adults. Similarly, in the current times, the social construction of childhood also focuses on providing opportunities for education and health equally for every child as compared to the past. Similarly, the social construction of childhood in the current times also focuses on inducing the role of caring among the children, which has been neglected in the past (Cabral *et al.*, 2015).

5 Changes are seen in the lives of children and their families.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, family members were separated into two distinctions, men as breadwinners and women as household in-charges. In the era, due to lack of resources, children suffered during their childhood, resulting in a 30% mortality rate for children under the age of 15. Similarly, due to lack of medical care, the infant mortality rate was as high as 14% at the time, mainly because of influenza, pneumonia, scarlet fever, and smallpox. Children were rarely treated by professional and trained physicians that resulted in delaying diagnosis and treatments. However, during the 18th century, the concept of patriarchy started reducing, leading to companionable relationships (Payne, 2021). However, children of wealthy families were more exposed to ignorance by their parents. In contrast, the children of low-income families were exposed to risks of malnutrition, child labour, and lack of education. During the 19th century, children and their families were more open to education and healthcare (Castelow, 2021).

However, during the world wars, the children and their families suffered significantly as the lack of medical care and food increased throughout the society. Education suffered during the wars and more problems for poor and working-class Victorian children. The inequality in the society was high, leading to child labour for poor children, along with a lack of accommodation. At the same time, rich children and families were well fed and had stable earning and accommodation (IWM. 2021). Nevertheless, the present times have been beneficial for children and their families as the inequality as reduces, education and healthcare has been made available for all people, and financial support is provided to vulnerable families. However, the vulnerability, child poverty, and inequalities have decreased from the past but, it is still present in the society (Wickham *et al.*, 2016)

6 Factors influencing changes in the social construction of childhood

There are various factors that have influenced changes in the social construction of childhood, such as legislation and policies proposed by the UK government. The creation of the Children Act in 1948 focused on placing a duty on local authorities and parents of vulnerable children. However, the Children Act 1948 is no longer active but is presented as a factor for changing the social construction of children in the UK (Guentner *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, reforms such as

Children Act 1975 focused on children protection and services, such as custody and care. It also emphasised independent social workers and their rights towards children's welfares (Appleby, 2016). However, the most influencing development has been the Children Act 1989 that has not only provided the rights of children but also demonstrated the responsibilities of parents and guardians to boost the development of children. Additionally, the Children Act 2004 was established in which the rights and welfare of children are focused along with the establishment of children's trust boards (Foster, 2020). Moreover, factors such as cultural, political, economic, and personal factors have resulted in influencing changes in the social construction of childhood and families. As the culture in the UK mainly focused on the division of the rich and poor, which has diminished with time resulted in changing the social construction of children in being fairer, caregiver, and hardworking. At the same time, the political and economic conditions of the country have been more stable in the last decade as compared to previous years. This resulted in influencing changes such as more focus on education, employment, and healthcare.

7 Impact of the factors

Children Act 1989 has been beneficial in impacting the lives of children, young people, and families in the UK. The act benefited in advancing the movement of children's rights in the country, which further benefited in improving the lives of the children and their families. Throughout the history of the country, children in the society have been divided into categories such as poor and rich, white, and black (Biehal *et al.*, 2018). Before the act, the societal perception mainly accounted that parents had rights over their children, but the act promoted that parents have responsibilities. This resulted in enhancing the independence of the children, along with placing focus on the responsibilities of the parents. The act also impacted in reducing inequalities in health and social care, highlighting to cater the need of children belonging to different ethnicities, cultures, and religions (Stalford, 2018).

Furthermore, more factors such as the Children Act 2004, which is a development of the Children Act 1989, centre the responsibility and duty of welfare organisations and social workers. Through the factors, the lives of children, young people, and families have been improved as the key elements have been the health of children, the environment and safety of the families, and activities to contribute towards children's lives. Similarly, opportunities for

differently-abled are ensured to have similar opportunities in health and social care as other children and young people. Social care services such as assistance to pursue education, training, and accommodation are signified that aids in reducing the inequalities in social care services (Richards and Gallagher, 2017). The wellbeing of children and young people in the society also improved due to political and economic stability that aided in more actions by the government in which the education and training are focalised to assure the development of the young people. Similarly, the cultural changes in the society have resulted in boosting the sense of equality and fairness in the society, which also impacted in improving the lives of children, young people and families that were in vulnerable situations (Varnum and Grossmann, 2016).

8 Approaches and interventions and their effectiveness

There have been various approaches focusing on support and protection for children, young people, and families. Social welfare organisations are performing approaches such as advertising the needs of children and provide awareness for the factors that lead to increased vulnerability in children. An approach to support vulnerable children, young people and families include monitoring of social workers of the potential individuals in the society. It also includes planning and delivering different activities in the communities to allocate the vulnerable people and families in the community. This has resulted in increasing the availability of aids and services to the relevant people and the ones in need. In addition, it has resulted in reducing the gap in society (Morris, 2018). Moreover, approaches such as foster care, free food availability in schools, scholarships, free healthcare, and financial support for medical reasons are widely adopted to reduce inequalities in society and support vulnerable people (Lechner *et al.*, 2018). At the same time, interventions have been performed on various levels to reduce inequalities in society, such as primary prevention. In which interventions are performed addressing the root cause of vulnerability in children, young people and families, along with determining the inequalities in healthcare. In addition, early interventions are performed in which support to children and families is provided in the form of financial resources or healthcare. Another intervention includes ensuring that services that are being provided are reducing the negative elements and building up resilience in the families and individually (UK Gov, 2020).

9 Recommendations

Following are the suggestions for improvement:

- In spite of the interventions and approaches, there are still more than 2 million children in the UK. From which 1.6 million children are not recognised for additional support (UK Gov. 2021). Hence, it is suggested that educational institutions, including schools and universities, take part in increasing the welfare of the children by the tutors to determining the vulnerability of the students. Similarly, guidance and comfort should be provided to the children and young people by increasing engagement and communication among the tutors and students.
- It is also suggested that the government place in-depth analysis and monitoring programs throughout the country by focusing on the communities, social services, and organisations. This will enhance the activities of the government in tackling vulnerable individuals and families. Through this, the government will also be able to observe the actions taken by social and welfare organisations in tackling inequalities.
- Lastly, it is suggested that government collaborate with medical service providers to determine the most vulnerable areas in society. Through this, the government will be able to focus on the areas that are in more need and make general policies and allocating resources more efficiently.

10 Conclusion

The definitions of childhood are based on the concept of their growth and age, while sociologists consider childhoods as a socially constructed process instead of a natural process. Different societies having different norms and values have varying impacts on childhood, thus driving the process of childhood as a social construction. Moreover, the lives of children and their families have significantly changed in the UK over the years. Families are now more able to provide a stable source of earning and food to their family members as compared to the past. Similarly, children development has been stable during the present times, which was a significant problem in the past. Through the government policies and regulations, children, young people, and

families in the society have been focused on giving equal rights towards care, support, healthcare, and accommodation.

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