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**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND
FAMILIES**



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Introduction

Childhood

It is a known fact that Childhood does not enjoin a universal definition. Many academics have attempted to define the term "child" and "childhood" in the past. Childhood can be defined as the first stage of a human being's physical and mental development, whether in biological science or from any of those aspects. However, the phrase has a more profound meaning. It is indeed a fact that there is no concept such as a universal childhood and the definition and explanation for the terms and concepts such as child and childhood vary across each culture, place and time.



Childhood is either a normal biological period of development or a contemporary idea or invention, according to most people. A concept of childhood merely demands that children be distinguishable from adults in some way; a conception entails more explicit concepts about children's uniqueness. Childhood was perceived by the Medieval authors in a different light than it is today. They focused on children's roles and responsibilities, as well as the rights granted to them at various stages of development (Zhang, 2015). Childhood was primarily characterized in terms of social position rather than psychological and developmental stages.

Historians and anthropologists have argued that modern Western civilizations draw a particularly strong line between infancy and maturity (Sabar, 2014, citing Ariès 1962). Law and convention keep Western youngsters out of many facets of adult social life. They spend the most of their time with their family or in institutions that care for, educate, or entertain the elderly. They along these

lines have little contact with grown-ups outside the circle of loved ones separated from childcare experts. A significant number of the uncommon plans made for kids serve to accentuate their distinction from grown-ups: their garments, toys, games, melodies and books, even the shades of their rooms. Youngsters are dealt with not just as unpracticed citizenry, however as subjectively not the same as grown-ups.

Elements of childhood

The understanding of childhood varies significantly around the world. No widespread agreement can be found with regards to what youngsters need for their ideal turn of events, what conditions best accommodate those requirements, and what structure and level of security is fitting for kids at a particular age. Without a doubt, there is no concession to the idea of adolescence, when kids become grown-ups, or the objectives that families try for their kids.



However numerous suppositions exist concerning what adolescence is, the means by which youngsters create, and the assumed abilities and limits of kids. Conventional stage hypotheses, which comprehended kid improvement as a progression of discrete stages each related with an inexact age range, have would in general impact how we comprehend advancement through adolescence. These speculations, albeit presently progressively being tested, keep on affecting our reasoning (Meloy, and Schachner, 2019). There continue to be five significant elements about childhood deriving from these theories:

- ❖ **Child development is a universal process:** All children develop along the same trajectory or path towards adulthood and implies that a set of ‘rules’ are followed throughout the process of child development.

- ❖ **Adulthood has normative status:** Once a child reaches adulthood s/he has full human status. In other words, everything a child does is basically a preparation for adulthood.
- ❖ **Goals of child development are universal:** All cultures have the same ultimate goals for development. Yet in reality, different cultures have significantly different aspirations for their children.
- ❖ **Deviations from the norm indicates risk for the child:** There are assumptions about what constitutes normal behaviour and activity at each stage of development and any deviations from these normal behaviours are deemed to be potentially harmful for the child.
- ❖ **Children are passive players:** Childhood is seen to be a process of acquisition of competencies and skills according to pre-determined biological or psychological forces.

Key elements of family life and childhood

Children's early experiences shape who they are and affect lifelong health and learning. To create to their maximum capacity, youngsters need protected and stable lodging, sufficient and nutritious food, admittance to clinical consideration, secure associations with grown-up guardians, sustaining and responsive nurturing, and great learning openings at home, in kid care settings and in school.



We all want to have happy family experiences, have fun together and build strong loving bonds. Raising children should be an enjoyable experience. Unfortunately, to create to their maximum capacity, youngsters need protected and stable lodging, sufficient and nutritious food, admittance to clinical consideration, secure associations with grown-up guardians, sustaining and responsive nurturing, and great learning openings at home, in kid care settings and in school (Jung, 2015).

Nowadays, there is a huge worry concerning the development and behaviour of children. Many authors studied this matter and we will briefly address some of these theories in which family play an important role. From a global perspective, children between six and 10 years old (the age of our sample) are in a consolidation phase concerning the learnings acquired in the first childhood, preparing for adolescence. According to Karsten (2015) around the age of six a great cognitive change happens, the child begins to understand the world around him/her, gaining skills to resolve problems, finding new solutions, learning to reflect, judge, and understand that others have a different point of view and that it can bring consequences to them and to the interaction between them.



At this age, the child's life is pronounced by tensions between the child's autonomy and expectations that can or cannot stimulate his/her self-esteem (Covey, 2014). Therefore, the socialization process has a way of children to learn beliefs, values, and social accepted behaviour (Everts, 2003). It is inside the family and in their assistant relations that the youngster learns the fundamental guidelines of socialization, the qualities and obligations, being the future practices and mentalities mollified by this understudy learning. In the Brofenbrenner's viewpoint, the youngster has a functioning and inactive job in its improvement as this model stresses the significance of connections among people and changes conditions, prompting subjective changes. Personal or environmental events (e.g., parental divorce) can lead to sudden qualitative changes.

This is the theory of ecological systems, which describes the multiple levels of the environment that influence the development of children and adolescents, a number of structures embedded in each other. There are four structures:

- (1) the micro-system that refers to the activities and interactions that occur in the immediate environment of the person and that gradually becomes more complex as the children come into contact with other contexts (day-care schools), of which family is always part of;
- (2) the meso-system that consists in the connections or interrelations among micro-systems such as school and peers;
- (3) the exo-system which includes the contexts in which children and adolescents are not part of but still exert some influence in their development (e.g., parents' working environment); and
- (4) the macro-system, the cultural context in which the micro-, meso-, and exo- system are embedded. These contexts differ from culture to culture and influence the types of experiences that children have in home and school (Shaffer, 2005).

Development of the social construction of childhood

A solid historical analysis of childhood is crucial for understanding children as actively contributing to societal production and change, while simultaneously creating their own child cultures. The historical context of childhood in Western society is well documented, and shows a great variety in societal attitudes towards children. During the Enlightenment period at the end of the 16th century children started to be perceived as a separate social class from adults. Aries' (1962) groundbreaking work on historical conceptions of childhood highlighted children's changing place in society. Aries noted a general movement from a lack of awareness of the idea of childhood, to a period where children were seen as a source of amusement for adults, to a moralistic period where childhood was seen as a time of training and discipline for adulthood (Swanson et. al, 2010, citing Aries, 1962).

In the Middle Ages there was a brief period of "infancy" which lasted until the age of 6 or 7 years. After that, the people we now refer to as children were simply assimilated into the adult world. Before 1750 women could be expected to give birth to as many as ten or twelve infants, most of whom died at birth or in their early childhood years about 2/3 before age five. Thus, with slim chances, emotional attachment was difficult to establish -and many who survived were abandoned in the streets and simply neglected. France & England instituted increasingly stricter penalties for infant.



For every three births recorded in Paris, one baby was left in a foundling home. Children in the orphanages did not fare that well. 90% died. In the 19th century, conflicting views of childhood rooted in self-interest of adults. Religious leaders and middle-class parents were concerned with the moral redemption of the child--methods to "break the will" of children, an essential aspect of moral salvation. Though at times kind and rational in their interactions with children, adults generally believed that firm discipline would produce an upright citizen. Children of the poor, on the other hand, were regarded as economic assets and were exploited by their parents and by employers. Worked long hours, dreadful conditions, often died young (WHO, UNICEF, World Bank Group, 2018).

Developments in policy and legislation in the social construction of childhood

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) is an international legal instrument that outlines a specific body of identifiable rights for children. One of its guiding principles, age-appropriate participation, holds that young people have the right to express their views in matters affecting them (Article 12). While all members of the United Nations have ratified the Convention (with the exception of the United States and Somalia), there is still a great deal of controversy surrounding the participatory principle. Critics argue that children do not possess the emotional or cognitive capabilities needed to make rational choices (Fishel, 2016 citing Purdy, 1992).

Also, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as a human being below the age of 18 years. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) considers a child as a person who is in between the age group 0-18 years. While the Juvenile Justice Act in India considers persons below 14 years of age to be children, the Right of

Education Act 2009 narrows the definition down to persons between 6 to 14 years. The different articles of Indian Constitution and Acts put various age limits for a child. Article 21 A of the Constitution of India says that the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children within the ages of 6 and 14. Article 45 of the Constitution specifies that the State shall endeavor to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of 6.

Under the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act, 1986 a child is a person who has not completed 14 years of age. The Indian Mines Act defines children as those below 18 years. While perusing all these acts or articles a uniform age range cannot be seen. It will be interesting to note that all over the world the age for legal adulthood differs. In India it is 18 years, in Iran it is 15 years, in Scotland it is 16 years, in Japan it is 20 years, and in Egypt it is 21 years. What do you think are the implications of legal age on life? Till one attains legal adulthood, one is a protected citizen. Therefore, children, adolescents or minors, are the responsibility of their guardians and the government. Their food and health, clothing, shelter, education and good life, are responsibilities of the guardians and the government. After attaining the age of adult, one is legally responsible for oneself. One can enter an employment, vote, contest election, marry, file a case, buy property, drive, and the like.

Recommendations

- Child care and protection should be catered for by looking beyond government agencies. It should enlist the community's help, schools, churches, other nonprofit groups should be engaged in providing aid to troubled families. "The well-being of children is the responsibility of the community.
- The community in general should identify children at risk of being removed from homes because of abuse or neglect and develop a system to work with families through counseling, drug treatment or mental health services.
- Integrating psychosocial interventions to support maternal mental health into early childhood health and development services is also recommended.



- The Government should focus on poverty through effective policies and programs shown to help families overcome it. "It is a huge factor in bringing children into foster care. Also, foster care should be the last resort to ensure a child's safety to avoid the trauma of removal from a home.
- The Government should improve pay, training and support for state social service workers and this will go a long way.

Conclusion

Enabling young children to achieve their full developmental potential is a human right and an essential requisite for sustainable development. Given the critical importance of enabling children to make the best start in life, each family has a specific role to play which goes a long way in the development of autonomy and individuality. The health sector, among other sectors, has an important role and responsibility to support nurturing care for early childhood development. This guideline provides direction for strengthening policies and programmes to better address early childhood development.

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