



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

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Introduction

This essay discusses the meaning of social construction of childhood. It provides an overview of the changes in childhood from historical to present times. It also includes the family as a social constructed concept and the changes within families in the UK. Therefore, the essay will discuss the factors which influence the changes of the life of children and reducing inequalities from historical to current times, including the reasons of how these factors improved the lives of children. Nevertheless, it provides a discussion of the current interventions in the UK to support vulnerable children and how these can reduce inequalities between children from advantaged and disadvantaged background.

According to Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a child is “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”. (UNICEF, 2021). On contrast, social policy define child as vulnerable and needs protection from harm, such as abuse, violence, neglect, and exploitation. (Kehily, 2013). However, biological point of view defines a child as an individual who is between the periods of birth and puberty (O'Toole, 2013).

There are various methods have been applied studying childhood and children which including social constructionist approach by Rogers. According to him the experience of being a child is not universal, childhood is something created and defined by society which influenced by socio-economic aspects, different cultures and families, experience, and at different time in history. (James & James, 2008). For instance, in some countries, such as England, children school attendance is compulsory until the age of 16 and all children are expected to be in education until the age of 18 years old (GOV.UK, 2021). However, in Yemen, the children are preventing from enjoying their education rights, thus quarter of the children or more are not educated due to the presence of armed forces, whereby the armed group targeted school to threaten the opposing parties by slaughtered children which make them to be terrified to go to school, also some school decided to close school to assure the security of the children (Humanium 2021). Also, in UK, the children under nine years old are not allowed to work, only until they reach 13 years old they can have part-time job but according to UNICEF, in Yemen due to the battle and economic devastation, which leave most of the families to have financial difficulties, children are seen as an economic asset, whereby 23% of children age of 5 and 9 years old are engage in paid work to support their family (Humanium 2021). Moreover, in UK children have been protected from harm and abuse, such as Sexual exploitation, by punishing offender by law with custodial sentence (CPS, 2019). In Yemen, children within their family are battered for abuse especially sexual exploitation, whereby parents are trading their children in the trafficking networks such as child pornography and tourist marriage. Therefore,

to escape this cruelty, children frequently escape from their families and find themselves homeless and alone which face poverty and brutalities of the streets (Humanium 2021).

Key elements of family life, factors which have contributed to changing in the lives of children and their families from historical to present times.

The life of the child in Europe and UK have changed through historical periods. According to Aries, because there was lack of child labour laws in 16th century, British society saw the children, at age of 7 years, as mini adults in their dress, facial expressions, and mannerisms (Aries, 1962). However, today, the society have seen children to be different from adults until 18 years of age, and protect them from labour, hard work and politics (NSPCC, 2021). Though, in some areas children who works are still treated like adults, as the thousands the Democratic Republic of Congo's children who are take on adult tasks as soldiers (Benadum, 2015). Another means of observing childhood in the Middle Ages was children born evil, as many Christian and Judean theologians said that children have inherited sinners from Adam's culpability for his sin in the Garden of Eden, thus every person heart is evil since childhood (Wiley, 2002). According to New International Version, child at the young age must be baptised to easing from inherited sins (Wiley, 2002). Therefore, the evil child today in British society is the one who has committed unspeakable crimes such as murdering. So, it is important to punish them by giving them a positive impact. Thus, most people used corporal punishment, including to cane children in schools (boys were caned on their bottom or hands and girls were caned on the backs of their legs). However, in the late 20th century this punishment has been banned in most schools and will become illegal in Wales in March 2022. (Lambert, 2021). However, in 17th century, after the persisted view of children as evil, upper classes in Britain, who had plentiful money to spoil their children, seen the children as good and vulnerable but was corrupted by adults as Roussea arguing, "All things are as good as their Creator made them, but everything degenerates in the hands of men" (Rousseau, 1987). Therefore, he believed that childhood is a crucial period in life, thus children must be protected against the adult evils by training to be independent and think in his own way to lean the consequences of their fault and not receiving punishment (Aries,1982)

Nevertheless, there are some factors that contributed to improve the lives of children since Victorian to current times, including changes in legislation and policy, the emergence of child development and sociological changes.

In terms of policies and legislation, in England as the growth of Industrial Revolution thousands of factories used children as cheap labour, thus they worked very long hours and severely punished (beating) or fined for any mistakes. So, in 1833 the government adopted a Factory Act to abolish child labour by prohibiting child employment under 9 years of age and during

night hours (the National Archives, 2021). According to recent government child employment guidance, children can only be in full-time employment only from the age of 16 years old, however they cannot work in a factory, industrial site, pub, or betting shop, during school hours, early in the morning or late at night (NSPCC, 2021). These legislations improve children working condition. Also, in 1980, through the Education Act government introduced compulsory education for all the children from 5 to 11 years old (Legislation.gov.uk, 1980), however the Education Act 2011 emphasis that all children must be in compulsory education until they are 16 years old and be in training until they are 18 years old (NSPCC, 2021). These legislations help all the children to receive better education that will help on their future well-being. Moreover, in UK, the age of sexual consent is 16 years old regardless their gender or race. Therefore, engage in sex or any sexual activity sexual such as distribute offensive photograph, pay for, or arrange sexual services with a child under this age result in a child protection referral (NSPCC, 2021). Therefore, this law is there to protect children from abuse and exploitation.

Another important factor which contributed to improve the children wellbeing is the emergency of child development including Bronfenbrenner's, and Maslow's, and Neuroscience theory. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory believed that the environment the children grow up impacts every aspect of their life. Usually, children find themselves in different ecosystems, from home to the school environment, then to the culture and society, and all this environment influence each other in all aspects of the lives of the children depends on how the children react to people and the treatment of these people towards the children. Hence, the parent is not only influencing the child behaviour but also the schoolteachers, family friends, the neighbour, the services in particular community, and childcare services. For instance, if the society has negative attitude towards a disabled child, obviously this will have impact on the children life. Therefore, adults must pay close attention to the children's behaviour, type and quality of the relationships that occur in these settings to improve children wellbeing (Guy-Evans, 2020). According to Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs for the children to able to concentrate on their learning, the basic needs, such as food, water, house, and protection, must be met. Therefore, when children know they are safe that no harm will come to them, they will be able to reach out to other peoples and explore their ecosystem. Hence it is very important for the children of being around with adults who are reliable and compassionate who can see them as competent and capable learners because a supportive environment can help children see themselves as respectable, capable individuals (Hopper, 2020). Hence, the Neuroscience has promoted the importance of providing a good childhood to all children and highlighting the impact of negative experiences in the first five years of the children's life that will last forever. Therefore, it is important for the family to work closely with range of services,

such as school, to provide supportive relationships and positive learning experiences to improve children's physical and emotional health, social skills, and cognitive-linguistic capacities at the early years of life (Lynch, 2019).

Sociological factor is another factor which contributed to improve the lives of children, this has involved how National Health Services (NHS) provide healthcare to children and the parent spend more time with their children. The NHS works closely with nurses, healthcare professionals, and schools to provide care and advice in breastfeeding, nutrition, physical activity, healthy weight, and mental well-being for the purpose of improving children's health. Also, NHS has provided free dental care those aged under 18 and free vaccination program from babies age of eight weeks old (Buswell, 2021). Also, nowadays parents spend twice as much time with their kids than they did in the 1960s. Therefore, parents who spend time together with their children by sharing everyday activities together and helping them with their schoolwork or reading together form strong and emotional ties, encourages communication, develops positive behaviours, and build their positive self-esteem (ParentingNI, 2017).

Interventions, recommendation, and conclusion.

Therefore, there are several legislations and policies to safeguard children and protect them from abuse and exploitation, including the current policy of Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 based on child focussed approach which advocated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Equality Act 2010 and the Children Act 1989 (HM Government, 2018). This policy is government statutory guidance which relates to all organisations and agencies who involving children, including all local authorities, police, clinical commissioning groups, and all other agencies and bodies, working closely to protection and promote the children's wellbeing by defending children from abuse and harm, preventing children's health and development from harm, and safeguarding children grow up in good and safe environment (HM Government, 2018). Therefore, under Part 3 of the Children Act 1989 guidance establishes the roles and obligations of local authorities and their agencies to provide support for children and families including security and financial assistance to the needy (Department for Education, 2021). Also, the Equality Act 2010 which safeguards children and young people against harassment, victimisation, and discrimination in associated to the provision of services, education, club, and housing (Children's Rights Alliance for England, 2021). Moreover, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which put more emphasis on provision of services which centred children interest without any discrimination because every child has a right to life, development and survival (UNICEF, 2021).

Despite of this policy intervention, there is a need for more intervention on criterial of getting universal credit. According to the Universal Credit, an individual will can be entitled to get extra money for any child born before 6 April 2017, but that individual cannot be entitled third child born on or after that date (GOV.UK, 2017). This is not fair for the parents, especially the single parent, who have more than two children, because some parents have low financial income and they do not have access to get enough income for their family daily needs. Therefore, the government should provide social security including financial assistance to family in need as they agreed on the article 26 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2021).

In conclusion, the past views of childhood can still influence legislations, policies, and laws and related to the protection of the children and determine the relationship between legislation, society and how constructions of childhood continue. However, there are some considerations on intervention to promote and safeguarding the children and their family wellbeing.

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