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Childhood as social construction concept

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INTRODUCTION

The global community has paid close attention to childhood and childhood problems in recent decades. Recognition of the importance of such issues is increasing as the concept of the rights of the child spreads. The idea is that raising attention to childhood and improving the lives of children is a fundamental moral and legal requirement of the time.

This essay gives the idea of what is the social construction of childhood. It shows how childhood has changed throughout historical time to our times. It also examines the concept of the family as socially constructed and how British households have changed.

This work demonstrates the factors and their causes that helped change the lives of children for the better from historical to the present.

The last section discusses what is in place under current child support rules in the UK and possible interventions to reduce the disparity between disadvantaged and privileged children.

DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS OF CHILDHOOD CONSTRUCTION

The concept of being a child! What does society include in the idea of a child? There are three different directions: legal, biological, and sociological. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Anon., 1989), a child is 'Everyone under the age of 18' (NSPCC, 2022).

From a biological point of view, the child is the moment from birth until puberty (age 13). From social policy interpretation, the child is vulnerable and needs protection. (Kehily, 2013).

There is no generally accepted agreement on the word 'child' (Najeeb, 2020).

The international community has decided to take action to protect children as they are physically and mentally immature. Basically, the concept of a child is seen in a social context, but the legal point of view is just as important. It is necessary for the term 'child' to designate a time frame since the child as a person enjoys special rights only for that period. It is not easy to do because there are huge differences between states in the spheres of culture, religious matters, and political and legal systems. Therefore, contrasts between societies must also be considered when determining the age at which childhood ends.

The experience of children from different countries: child marriage, child labour, child prostitution, and FGM (female genital mutilation) confirms that childhood is a social construction. Comparing two other countries, the UK and Yemen, we see different childhood events.

In England, compulsory education was introduced in 1870, but the children continued to work. Finally, in 1880 mandatory school attendance for children aged five to ten law was introduced (Parliament, n.d.).

Currently, all children under the age of 16 are required by UK Legislation to attend school (GOV. UK., 2021).

Contrarily in Yemen, most children at nine go to work (BBC, 2019). According to the New Humanitarian, 15000 children aged under 12 works hard and are compromised to hazardous work-related dangers (The New Humanitarian, 2007). This comparison demonstrates the attitude toward child labour and education in England and Yemen and how it differs.

In some countries, such as Ethiopia, it is common for adolescents under 16 to get married (Young Lives, 2006), while in England and Wales, marriage is legal from 16 (Children's Commissioner, 2021).

BASIS OF THE FAMILY LIFE

No Educational institution has a personal influence on children as a family. The family is where children receive care, love, and support. Families cannot take a single form since the experience of family life is individual for everyone.

Over the past 50 years in British society, main social trends have influenced the family's structure (Dr Sarah Jenkins, n.d.). On the one hand, there are many complex families; on the other hand, the traditional family structure remains the norm for most people in modern society.

There are many diverse families: some have two parents who take care of their children, and others have more extended families living with grandparents. The increase in the number of single-parent families, foster families, cohabiting and same-sex couples has led to the diversity of family formations. Such a wide range of family structures shows that people can exist in social family networks that include non -consanguineous relationships: adoptive parents and stepsiblings, who are still considered a 'family'.

According to statistics in 2018, in the UK, the number of families increased to 19,1 million people. 67,1% were the most common family types: married and civil relations families. 17.9% were families of couples living together, and 15% were single parents families. If we compare these dates with 2008, the percentage of married couples decreased by 2% and the percentage of families in which couples cohabit increased by 2,6%. This type of family has been the fastest growing since 2008 (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

This can be explained by the fact that most couples prefer cohabitation over marriage. However, unlike in other European countries, there is no concept of civil marriage in the UK.

Couples cohabiting together do not have legal rights as married pairs (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILY'S LIFE FROM THE PAST TO THE PRESENT TIME

Throughout historical periods, there has been a transformation in attitudes towards children and the period of childhood in general in Europe and the UK. It should be noted that the approach toward children was not sentimental in the past of different social.

The first comprehension of childhood took place in the 16-17 centuries. Puritanical dogmas express the image of childhood. People believed that children were born already with sin and represented evil.

Later, in the 17 centuries, this theory was challenged by Locke (1632-1704). He argued that the child is a 'blank slate' whose formation depends on the environment, education, and experience (Alison Clark, 2014)

By the 18th century, childhood image was presented as a period of innocence, and children needed protection. Rousseau supported this theory and created an idyllic image of youth (Kehily 2013).

Wealthy families and the middle class maintained the romantic notion of childhood for nearly a century. With the advent of industrialization, the concept of child innocent has changed. Children worked on equal footing with adults and were an important economic commodity (Kristine, 1996)

Economic crises have given rise to the problem of homelessness and youth violence. To feed themselves, children united in gangs and threatened the stability of city streets and the safety of people (Smith, 1996).

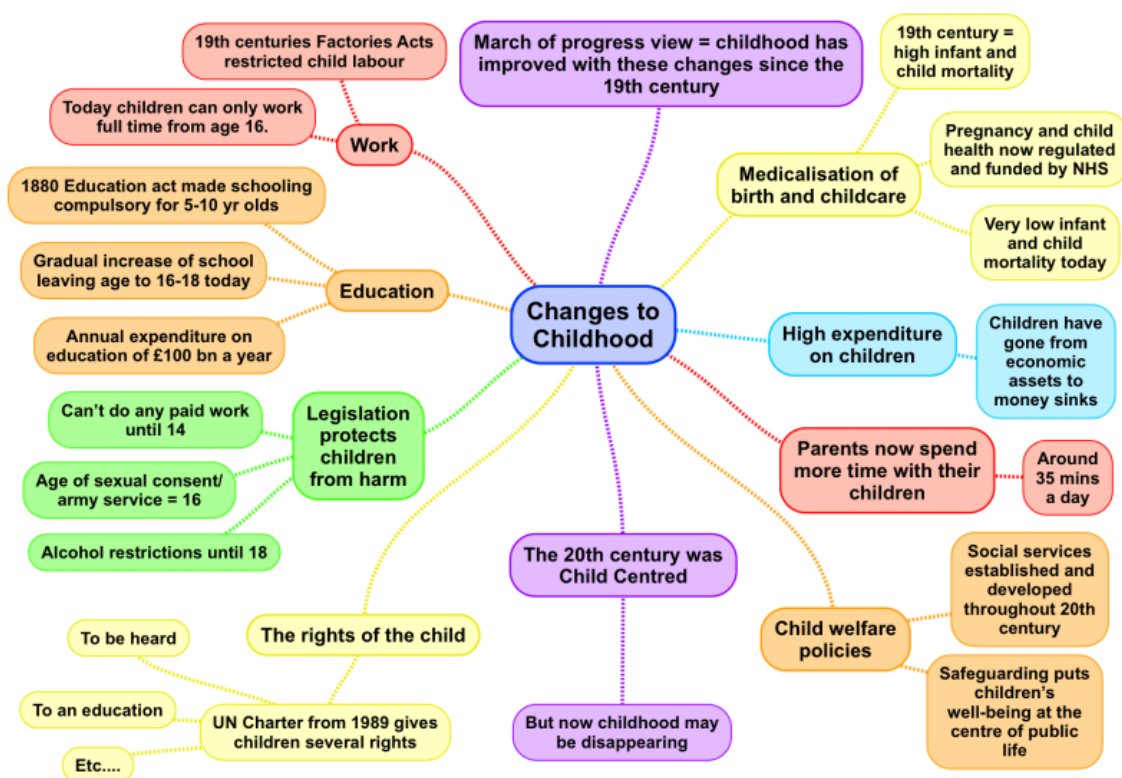
Widespread social reforms and the child labour bill that followed made notable improvements in the formation of the current childhood. The presence of children at work was not that relevant.

ELEMENTS AFFECTING THE IMPROVEMENT OF CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES

UN Convention of the Rights of the Child has recognized childhood as a life stage with value. It follows from this that it is necessary to pay attention to the indicators that make adult life successful and the factors that make childhood better and more fulfilling (CRAG, 2016)

Since the Victorian period, many factors have been changed to improve children's lives, including sociological factors, infant development and neuroscience, and not least new policies and legislation.

Changes to childhood since Victorian Times (Thompson, 2020).



An important example of policies and legislation is the implementation by England of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1991) relating to the education, health, and work of children. This convention has the importance of ensuring that every child has the right to life, is educated and not discriminated against, is protected from harm and abuse, and has healthy development.

Great importance is given to the legislation 1883 Factories Act of the 19th Century (National Archives, 2021) concerning child labour. This legislation abolished child labour before the age of 9 and further improved by prohibiting child labour before 16. years (GOV.UK, 2021), they are ensuring education for children and that they are protected from abuse and exploitation (UNICEF, 2016).

In 1880 obligation of education from 5 to 11 years was introduced; the UK has further improved this law with compulsory education up to 16 and training up to 18 (GOV.UK, 2021)

It was fundamental to protect children from harm and abuse caused by alcohol and sexual abuse, regulating sexual consent from 16 years and the prohibition of consuming alcohol before age 18. These laws have helped the growth of children;

according to Childline, a child under 16 cannot give sexual consent (Childline, 2021); according to the NHS, consuming alcohol before the age of 18 can harm healthy development (NHS, 2021).

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the NHS began to provide comprehensive care for mothers and children early, reducing the high infant mortality rate.

Now the government spends more money on children than before, providing more services for children and their development.

Parents devote more time to their children and are interested in their upbringing (Thompson, 2020).

According to a Special Interest Group report, mental health problems in children by the age of 14 accounts for 50 per cent and 75 per cent by the age of 24 (England, 2019).

Public policy, research and data highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to improving and protecting psychological and social well-being in children and young people at every stage.

The authority has funded an additional £11 million for the Parental Conflict programmed (GOV.UK, 2022).

The programme funds the municipal government and operates throughout England. Its goal is to create personalized support to assist parents in their societies. This approach to children's mental balance can go a long way toward improving children's and adolescence happiness.

The Child Abuse and Harm Protection Act has improved children's and young people's lives. For example, it does not permit the consumption of alcohol under the age of 18. According to the NHS, early alcohol consumption negatively affects children's health and development (NHS, 2021).

According to Childline, this law protects children and adolescents from sexual abuse. Sex with a child under 16 is prohibited by law since, emotionally and psychologically, a child has not yet matured for a relationship and cannot give sexual consent (Childline, 2021).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has played an essential role in protecting children. It guarantees every child:

the right to life,
free education,
non-discrimination,
protection from harm and abuse,
healthy development (UNCRC, 1991).

Years of advances in neuroscience have shown the long-term utility of public funding investment in young children. Why is neuroscience critical, and should it be developed? An increasing percentage of people and politicians understand that the development of children is influenced not only by genetic information but also by their environment. Early childhood adversity can negatively affect future progress in physical development, learning and health (Jack P. Shonkoff, 2010).

It follows that the state structure should improve the quality of life of parents and their children, such as spending more money on services related to children; NHS provides free healthcare to ensure a happy childhood for all children.

ACTIONS TO ASSIST CHILDREN AND DIFFERENT FAMILIES

The lives of children and their families are directly linked to social policies, for example, education, health, social services, and social assistance. Social services work to ensure their present and future well-being (Ridge, 2021)

The right combination of universal and targeted services must be chosen to assist young children and their families to be effective and efficient.

Basically, human services are distinguished by their relevance to their goals and target categories. There are three types of services: universal, targeted and specialist provisions.

Universal services are characterized by accessibility to the entire population in England. They do not require unique resources to use them, for example, GP, school, or NHS.

Targeted services are for selected groups of children and young people who have health or developmental problems or are at risk of becoming ill, for example, free school meals.

Specialist services are available to young people and children with identified severe health issues or problems. These services will require a needs assessment to reduce the negative impact on the situation (Moore, 2008).

There are main reasons why services provided to young children and their families are essential. Firstly, it is to support their development and health. Secondly, it eliminates inequalities among children and the other concerns social and demographic changes.

According to Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs, a person, to achieve self-realization, must satisfy the requirements in hierarchical order are:

- physiological,
- safety,
- love and belonging,
- esteem and self-realization.

How is the theory related to services for children? For example, free school meals. Proper nutrition affects the child's physical, emotional, and social development. This follows how important it is for children to eat regularly and adequately (McLeod, 2007).

Uk government guidelines specifically highlight early intervention. Early help supports children and their families in the early stages of a problem. (Department for Education (DfE), 2018; Assistance early services are provided to parents, children and whole families. However, an important focus is on improving the quality of life of children. For example, suppose the child engages in risky behaviour. In that case, practitioners will work with parents and their children to help understand the cause of the behaviour and develop a plan to ensure safety.

According to NSPCC, forms of early help are:

- home visiting programmes
- school-based programmes
- mentoring schemes (NSPCC, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Although children's lives have improved, many children in UK continue to live in poverty. According to Statistics, 2.8 million children live in poverty (Francis-Devine, 2022)

UN Convention of the Rights of the Child has recognized childhood as a life stage with value. It follows that it is necessary to pay attention to the indicators that make adult life successful and the factors that make childhood better and more fulfilling (CRAG, 2016).

The government has undertaken reforms to prevent the "root causes of poverty". It was about children in workless families and families who have not worked for a long-time providing education at Key Stage 4 (GCSE) for all children (CRAG, 2016).

SUGGESTIONS

Low income has a causal effect on children's learning outcomes and school performance. Children are in school for 190 days. The Children's Food Campaign has ensured that 1,7 million young children receive free meals, regardless of their family income (SUSTAN, 2022). Providing free child food in educational institutions will help reduce health care costs in the future and will also help create equality and cohesion in society (Jonathan Bone, 2022).

The possibility of providing free meals to students has a significant impact on improving children's health, and this should be extended to all children regardless of their socioeconomic status.

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