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**Children, Young People and Families
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Assessment Component 2

Written Essay

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Introduction

This is an individual essay that is research based seeking to explain the meaning of childhood by looking at past and present perspectives following what is known, and what has been researched. This essay also explains factors of family life and childhood as well showing how childhood is socially constructed, and exploring different childhood experiences in Ethiopia and Great Britain. The essay also looks at what interventions have been implemented to tackled different social inequalities which affect children, young people and families. Logical conclusions have been drawn, and recommendations suggested at the end of the essay.

Discussion/Analysis

In England, a child is legally defined as a person who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. According to the Department for Education (2018), even if the child has reached 16 years and below 18 years living independently, or in further education, he/she is still legally regarded as a child and therefore should have same protection and entitlements like any other child. Similarly, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child noted that any person below 18 years is a child and should be protected from abuse and neglect as well as giving them quality education, proper sanitation and housing among others. Biologically, O'Toole (2013) defined a child to mean anyone at the age between birth and puberty, usually 13 years. At this stage, a person is considered to be biologically immature.

Childhood a social construction

Childhood is a social construct because it is the society which determines whether a person is still a child or is already an adult, ignoring the natural process from childhood to adulthood. (Biddle, 2012). This means that ideas people have about childhood are created by the society varying from historically and across cultures;

The concept of childhood varies across cultures because different cultures construct stages of the physical development differently. The age at which children take responsibilities varies in different cultures, and those children who got responsibilities at earlier age were considered mature compared to those with no responsibilities. (Fox, Levitt and Nelson, 2010). Age of getting married and consent varies, expectations of child obedience, and the age of starting work varies from

society to society in different countries.

Social construction of childhood in the modern Britain

In addition to the biological differences, the societies in Great Britain have established special places and special products for the children which separates how societies view children, and shields them from adulthood. These places are meant to give children a softer lifestyle compared to adults and they include; children parks and day care for children among others. In the modern Britain, children should be protected and this is why various laws have been introduced specifically to protect the children; Children Act 2004, The Education Act 2002, Children and Social Work Act 2007, Keeping Children safe in Education 2019, and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018.

The special places and products, and special laws for child protection are not supposed to be there but the society has made us appreciate and adopt to these ideas, and actually believe that children are different from adults and deserve a special treatment.

Change of childhood perspective from historic times to present

Puritan Parents in 17th Century

The Puritan Parents believed and considered children to be born ignorant and suggested that they should be guided and shaped at an early age. The Puritan parents believed in being very strict to children when it comes to social life and the way they behave when in public which meant to give them hope of a better future. The Puritans were very loving to their children even though they taught their children not to publicly express their feelings of joy, fear, anger, and physical affection. The Puritans are great believers in God, and they believed that Godly parents produced Godly children unlike the parents who were perceived to be ungodly. (Levin, 1994).

John Locke's ideas (1632-1704)

John Locke believed that children are born with an empty mind which he termed as "blank slate", and that they learn everything from the environment. He also stated that children have weaker brains that can easily be "corrupted" by the factors of

environment especially when the child is in early childhood. (Gay, 1964). According to Locke, children achieve knowledge and learning through the environment and turn it into understanding through reasoning. Locke believed that all children are born equal and the environment later shapes their behaviour to become. Therefore, education and environment determine whether will be good or bad. (Gay, 1964). For example, environment determines children to become thieves and beggars by being unfair to them.

Before the 19th century, child and infant mortality rates were very high because of lack of medicalization of child and child care. (Conrad, 2007). The rates were also very high because of lack of quality health services at the time brought about by lack of hospitals, out of pandemics, lack of maternal care, and lack of advancements in reproductive health.

Expenditure on children has increased compared to the 18th century and years before, and the main reason for parent employment is to provide for their children. In addition, research has shown that parents spend more time with their children today compared to earlier years.

Legislations have also been put in place to protect children from any kind of harm, unfairness, and to ensure their rights are protected. For example, the Children Act 2004 stipulates the rights of children and their entitlements. In Great Britain, children are not legally to engage in any kind of paid work until they are 14 years and 16 years for fulltime work respectively. (Children Act, 2004). The Children Act also gives children consent to have sex and join the national arm when they are 16 years. However, children in England are given alcohol consumption restriction until they are 18 years of age.

Childhood experiences in Ethiopia

Child, early and forced marriages

Pankhurst (2014) revealed that many parents in the societies of Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa have reportedly been involved in child, early and forced marriages in one way or another. According a report by UNICEF (2009), forced and early marriage is the situation where a girl child is married off early before the age of 18 years, and sometimes without their consent. Some girls below 18 years married off to assume

mother/wife duties forcefully to older men leading to unequal gender power relation, while others actually want to get married at an early age. (World Vision UK, 2014).

Corporal punishment

A 2005 study by Save the Children and the African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) revealed that three quarters of parents in Ethiopian families used sticks and open hand as a way of punishment at home following a common African saying “Spare the rod, spoil the child”. In addition to use of sticks to punish children, parents and other people in the societies were found to be harsh on children by use undesirable measures like; threats, insults, punches and physical fights with children. (Save the Children & ACPF, 2005).

Female Genital Mutilation

According to UNICEF (2013), Female Genital Mutilation is common referred to female circumcision in some societies of Ethiopia. This act is entirely driven by cultural beliefs of people in Ethiopia for girls shortly after birth and before marriage in the north and south of Ethiopia respectively. (Pankhurst, 2014). The reasons for female circumcision in Ethiopian communities vary from culture to culture. For example, some people attribute it to hygiene, protection of girls especially at a period of giving birth, and protection of girls from being ridiculed if they fail to get a husband. (Pankhurst, 2014; World Vision UK, 2014).

Key elements of Family life and childhood.

In earlier years, most families were extended families where people lived together under the same roof with other relatives. In addition to the mother and father, extended families include other members like aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. (Furstenberg, 1987). These families consisted of a bigger number of people, and the family head was responsible setting and communicating beliefs, and customs to guide children and other members in these families. However, in the modern Britain, extended families are fading out to nuclear families composed of father, mother and biological children or adopted children. (UNICEF, 2013).

Like childhood, families are also perceived differently basing on social, cultural factors, and religion. For example, in Moslem countries, big sized families are perceived as prestigious and the man is allowed by religion to have over three wives

which leads to much bigger families compared to Christian families who have relatively smaller families. (Uddin and Zohra, 2012). Big sizes of families in these countries determines how children behave because they are taught to share, to love each other, and to have solidarity with the help of religious teachings and culture.

Socially, the modern families' trends have changed characterized by divorce, remarriages, and cohabitations growing at a high speed. According to Woosley et al. (2009), there many divorce cases in the UK and USA in the modern times compared to earlier years. This can be attributed to factors like equality rights, financial independence of women, and intermarriages. High rates of divorce and cohabitation have increased the rate of children adoption, and high rates of single parenting. (Woosley et al., 2009). Society in the UK and USA and other European countries has also allowed same sex couples to exist even though this has caused mix reactions whether it is morally accepted and accepted by religion. (Kenneavy, 2012). Same sex couples being on arise has also greatly increased on the rate of child adoption.

Single parenting can be attributed to the high rates of divorce in the modern society. Society has accepted the concept of divorce which has affected the life of children in these families especially the children because they are deprived of a right of parental love from both parents since child does not live with both parents (Musick and Meler, 2010).

In developed countries like the UK and the USA today, there has been an increase of single parents for the past 10 years. This affects life of these families because they end up classified as troubled because single parenting is associated with stress, mental health illness, drug abuse, criminality, unemployment and other factors which expose the children to the risk of becoming vulnerable. (Pelvas and Vaz, 2007).

Family life has also been affected by cultural beliefs like acceptable gender roles and occupations, language spoken at home, customs, and leisure times. (Goleman, 2014). Some parents are too strict on the children by denying a right to socialize, a right to play and refusing children to speak languages of their choices. (Johnson and Kelley, 2011). Children who grow up in such families usually find trouble socializing with other children, and end up with low confidence and lack of self-esteem at school and in the society. (Goleman, 2014).

Interventions

In modern Britain, several interventions have been established to ensure the health and wellbeing of children. All children have been incorporated in the intervention including; those with special needs, those with disabilities, those from deprived areas, refugee children, and those at risk.

Schools

A number of schools have been set up to ensure that children attain quality education in time. Government in partnership with other agencies has provided a child friendly, inclusive and safe environment to facilitate children's learning and socialization. Through the Department of Education, schools have been encouraged to incorporate the children in the process of making curriculum which supports children's social and health needs. (Department for Education, 2018). This has helped to promote education in Britain thereby giving children an opportunity to new ideas, to choose their career paths, to think critically and become creative as well as preparing children for adult life. (Department for Education, 2018). Education has also enabled children to become relevant in the society because education is part of the culture developed countries. (Sentenac et., 2019).

Free school meals

In addition to schooling programs, the government has set up a special budget to provide free meals to school going children provided at school. These free meals have helped to promote health feeding at school, thereby fighting malnutrition in schools. (Department for Education, 2010). Free meals are very important because it encourages parents from deprived areas to take children to school since they are not afraid of food expenses hence promoting and according children a right of education. (Belot and James, 2011).

Protecting children through the law

Children Act 2004 also has the objective of protecting children from the inequalities in the communities, and to promote health and social wellbeing of Children in the Great Britain. According to Children Act (2004), children welfare is paramount and children should be given support in their respective aspects like; those with difficulties, refugees, children who victims of slavery, refugees and trafficking, and unaccompanied children. The act gives children a right to health care, right to

education, right to basic needs. The interventions stipulated in the Children Act have given children a voice which has helped in the process of protecting children from harm and support for children thereby tackling social inequalities.

School counselling

Schools have employed special counsellors to provide individual counselling services to children in school with personal and interpersonal issues. The children in schools are given counselling services regarding issues like; mental health, feelings, study skills, friendship skills, dealing with bullying, and giving children a voice. (Theresa, 2016). Introduction of school counselling programs has helped in tackling social inequalities because it has improved on student outcomes promoting equal academic, career and emotional development opportunities for all the school going children. (Theresa, 2016).

Conclusion

The definition of childhood is different in many aspects of social, legal and biological perspectives. However, all these perspectives point out that any person who is physical and emotional immature, and legally does not qualify to be called an adult, is then a child. Society ignores biological and legal perspectives but refers to childhood as a state of lacking responsible and not being liable to your actions. Historical perspectives that referred to children as “economic assets” has now shifted to “economic liabilities” considering the fact that children are spent on, not using them to make money. Many factors influence family life and childhood; single parenting, mothers joining work, divorce, and the legislations. Interventions by government have been made to improve quality of lives for children, young people and families so as to give children desirable childhood experiences.

Recommendations

Children in some countries like Ethiopia are still experiencing bad childhood experiences which is why Government of Ethiopia together with International bodies should promote social norms that protect children against violence and adversity. This will reduce on acts like child labour, early childhood marriages and female genital mutilation among others.

Respective governments should ensure an inclusion environment that is safe and

nurturing to help children reach their full potential. This will put children at the centre, and all resources available to protect children should be pulled out through strict laws and restrictions in favour of the children.

Government should also strengthen economic support by giving finances, and family friendly work policies to families that seem troubled by poverty, unemployment, single parenting and those with disabled children in order to tackle social inequalities that would affect cognitive development of children.

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