



Assessment Component 2

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Introduction

Childhood is defined as 'the state of being a child' it ends where adulthood begins. While the Cambridge English dictionary defines a child' as 'a boy or girl from the time of birth to when he or she becomes an adult.'

The above two definitions give us two angles from which we can look at childhood as being determined from biological perspectives which end by the time a child gets to puberty or when society determines that someone is an adult, which can be seen as a social perspective (ReviseSociology, 2015).

Childhood has further been looked at as a phase of life, identified with a particular age, placed between infancy and youth, along with adolescence. Most childhood theories focus on what a child is, attributes of childhood, the meaning of childhood and the way the idea of childhood is applied in society (Encyclopedia.com, n.d.)

From another perspective, childhood is seen as a very subjective issue and has no universally accepted definition. Defining childhood from a global perspective means we must do it by analysing the make-up and philosophy that helped in moulding such childhood (Edwards, 2015). Different cultures, region, or country, have their view of childhood and it is quite distinct to them. Childhood in urban areas and rural areas are not the same just as it is not the same between an affluent family and a poor family. Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child holds that a child is every person who is below the age of 18 years (United Nations General assembly 1989)

It has been further pointed out that, childhood never evolved naturally, but rather it was created by society, and it is because of this reason sociologists' postulate that 'childhood is socially constructed' (ReviseSociology, 2015).

The ecological systems theory: This theory accepts the fact that social make-up and system combine to shape children's experiences of childhood. The proponent of this theory is Urie Bronfenbrenner, he mentioned five ecological systems that shape a child's development. The ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). It identifies five ecological systems that influence a child's development. They are.

- **Microsystem:** This is the direct surrounding where the child lives, this will include the immediate family, school, or friends.
- **Mesosystem:** In this case, the child's microsystems operate in an interconnected pattern. They have an influence upon themselves like parents reporting to teachers, the outcome may influence the child's development.
- **Exo system:** This is about one or more settings that affect the child without the child's being involved directly.
- **Macrosystem:** This is system pays attention to culture, society, and history and how they affect the child.
- **Chrono system:** This focuses on all the continuous changes that take place over time that helps in influencing the child's development. (Bronfenbrenner, 2009).

Childhood has evolved over time; poor children have always been made to engage in work once their parents see them fit and can get them employed by an employer. Though workplaces were very scarce at the time. But with the advent of the industrial revolution, factories and coal mines created many job opportunities including so many for children. The outcome was the resort to child labour, which later became a huge problem to society (Griffin, 2014)

As early as 1833, a push against child labour led to the enactment of two crucial pieces of legislation known as, the Factory Act (1833) and the Mines Act (1842). While the Factory Act outlawed the engagement of children below the age of nine and pegged the number of hours that children between the ages of nine and thirteen could work, the Mines Act increased the starting age for coal mine workers to ten. These couple of Acts helped in ending the official employment of young children (Griffin, 2014)

Many factors have contributed to shaping the emergence of modern-day childhood. These are.

Technology: Technological advancement has socially created a disconnection for children and young people alike. Children and young people these days spend more time on their screens, and they find it difficult to relate and interact well with others. Children and young people are more prone to unruly social behaviours, like being domineering or bullying (Qustodio Team, 2020)

Family Size: In the last thirty years families have changed in formation, household structure, children's well being and work-life balance. Family sizes have reduced drastically in many OECD countries and the world over because the fertility rate kept going down and there are fewer marriages and a higher divorce rate leading to many children growing up with single parents. Family sizes were much bigger in previous years than they are now (OECD, 2011)

Better communication: Advancement in communication has helped in shaping modern families in terms of their relationships among themselves, their friends and even at home. It gives room for bonding and helps in easing conflicts, resolving differences better than it did with families of old.

The economic wellbeing of the state: This is measured by elements like the provision of low-cost houses and the level of unemployment, which reflects on how parents can back up their children. Children raised in poor circumstances stand the risk of facing negative effects on the development of their brain, poor health, and poor performance at school. Such negative outcome includes teenage pregnancies, and the likelihood of dropping out of school, these two can impose a lasting negative economic consequence on such children. With a good education, children are equipped to progress through primary, secondary, colleges, and beyond and they end up earning a higher income and becoming very successful in life (KVC, 2021)

Healthcare: Health care

It has been noted that childhood as we understand it today was unthinkable in the pre-industrial revolution era. At that time, once children got to the age of seven and were physically strong and able to move around alone, they were instantly seen and addressed as adults. They were treated as quasi adults, and they were made to participate in work and other activities as adults. They were not protected or treated specially as is being done with children's rights and other protections today (Ben-Amos, 1995)

The experience of childhood has seen numerous changes since the early 19th century in many spheres, including the following:

- Education – The 1870 Education Act came up with the new education for all children from ages 5 to 12 but this was not compulsory (Education Act 1870). Compulsory education law was introduced and was backed up with increased funding and the raising of the age for leaving school with the Education Act of 1880 which made education in the UK compulsory for children aged from five to ten years (Education Act 1880). The school leaving age was reviewed to 14 years in 1918. In 1944, it was raised to 15 years, then in 1973, it was reviewed upwards to 16. As a result of the various Act enacted towards the education of the child, there is a greater tendency for children from diverse backgrounds to acquire education and the girl-child now can attain any level of education. Girls are no longer viewed as having no other purpose than to get married and raise children (Travis, 1999)
- Work – The century also saw the introduction of policies that barred the employment of children at places of work, this further led to the total ban of children from paid employment. The 1833 Factories Act made it illegal for children under the age of 9 to be employed in the textile factories and added a proviso for children between ages 9 and 13 to be provided with a minimum of 2 hours of education each day (The Factory Act 1833). In 1878 a new Act was enacted that prohibited the employment of children under the age of ten, this was aimed at synchronising it with the new educational policies put in place at the time (The Factory and Workshop Act 1878)
- Advanced medicine for childbirth and childcare: With the advancement in medical services the rate of infant and child mortality went down drastically. These days the NHS provides quality maternity and postnatal care for both mothers and children. Half a century ago, children dying of whooping cough, measles and tuberculosis was the greatest fear of parents, but this has been curbed drastically now.
- Increased spending on children by the government – Most governments in advanced countries are devoting more money to children needs with so many services solely for children, this was not the case with children of the 18th and 19th centuries.
- Legislations – Several legislations have been passed protecting modern-day children from potentially dangerous acts, these include alcohol restrictions until children get to the age of 18 and the age of sexual consent being pegged at the age of 16. One such Act is the Child Protection Act 1989, which deals with the safeguarding of children and vulnerable people in society from abuse and neglect (The Children Act 1989).
- Child Welfare – The Children Act 1989 covered most aspects of child services, it states that children's welfare is prime, and it points out parental responsibilities to the child.

Early intervention, which is also known as early help, is planned to be support earmarked for families when signs of problems begin to rear their head up in a child or young person's life. Early help services can be availed by both parents and children. Parents living in difficult situations could be given help to create a convivial environment for their children. Also, if a child is showing behaviour that tends towards risk-taking, early help officials may work with such child and their parents to discover the rationale behind the behaviour of the child to come up with plans to keep such child-safe (NSPCC, 2019).

Early intervention has some advantages associated with it. The early stages of a child's life is a very tricky aspect of their lives, this point is regarded as the foundation-laying stage which will reflect in their cognitive functioning, their behaviour, social and physical wellbeing as they mature into adulthood (The Children's League, 2020). The advantages of early intervention are listed as follows:

- It reflects positively where such children attain high academic achievements, they are well behaved. It helps in reducing juvenile delinquency and criminality among children and young persons. Children that benefit from early intervention have a higher tendency of succeeding in the labour market.
- Qualified and well-trained caregivers intervening and having a fewer ratio of children-to-trained caregivers yields better and more favourable results.
- A well-planned early intervention has proven to yield a better output to the American society where it was said that it generated a return to the American society thereby buttressing its importance to early life (The Children's League, 2020).

There is still much to be done by the government to make sure that early intervention achieves the desired result in society. There is the case of rising inequality in the United Kingdom, and this is posing a lot of concern to policymakers involved with child protection. Between 2011 and 2018 there have been increased cases of being referred to children's social care and children being taken into care also increased (Allcock, 2019). Furthermore, the positive impact of early intervention is being hampered by poverty, economic stress, and the increasing cases of violence in the community and high rate of unemployment. All these are contributing to hampering the development of the child by limiting the future social and economic opportunities and could lead to the potential likelihood of mental health issues, involvement crime and possible substance misuse among children and young persons or even parents too (Allcock, 2019).

Though Early intervention has been praised as making a significant impact in reshaping childhood, young persons and families, the financial allocation by the government is dwindling with every passing year and this portends so much danger in the actualisation of its noble objectives. The support being given by local authorities to children in need in care are statutory in the laws of the UK but there are no specific legal dictates on how and what support that should be provided. This has made the councils falling short in giving early intervention and rather finding themselves coming up with more funds for late interventions which are more expensive than early intervention because they are like carrying out emergency services (Allcock, 2019).

Schools are playing a great role in the shaping of the lives of modern-day childhood and families as they are at the forefront of safeguarding and promoting their welfare. The schools should be proactive by identifying children with needs and at-risk and reporting such to social services, they should also partake in assessments in conjunction with other practitioners to provide personal, social and health education thereby helping to reduce factors of risk.

Modern childhood experiences have got some positives associated with them. Children with very positive experiences, like caring home, warm and nurturing relationships with loved ones and friends do fare better in society (Zimlich, 2019) All the Laws and Acts which abhors child abuse, protect children, ensure that they attend school, designs school curriculum, advocates healthy eating, encourages outdoor play and exercise have all impacted positively on modern-day children and has created better standards for the children and society at large. Technology has also played a great role in shaping the lives of modern childhood experiences. Children are now able to explore the world from the comfort of their homes. The shape, size, functions, and definition of the family unit are changing too. Parents raise children these days without getting married, two people of the same gender can co-habit and raise children, there are also a trend of many single parents in the society of today. Half a century ago family was mainly made up of father, mother, and children. Children these days have more opportunities to exploit than their counterparts in the early part of this century (BBC, 2021)

Despite all the advantages associated with modern-day childhood, some negative impacts too. Electronic gadgets and the internet have exposed children to a fantasy world rather than the real world, rise in cases of obesity among children because of lack of exercise in rich nations (TCJ, 2007) Title: What is childhood and who created it?

In conclusion, children, young people and their families have evolved and have seen many changes in shape and size and ways of living. Several policies and Acts have been enacted in furtherance of the wellbeing of children, young people and their families and they live better lives are more protected than they used to be half a century ago.

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