

Assessment Component 2

Written Essay

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Module name: Children, Young People and Families

Module code: (BMHP5004_LON)

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Word count: 2500

Introduction

This essay discusses the social concept and construction of childhood. It will provide an analysis of how society has impacted childhood from historical to present times. In addition, it will discuss the social construct of family and how that has changed, in the UK over time.

The essay discusses, the factors that have contributed to the improvement to the lives of children in present day and how inequalities have been reduced throughout history.

Lastly, it will evaluate and provide the various interventions that the UK government implement to remove inequalities, support vulnerable children, and improve childhood.

Construction of Childhood

The definition of the word childhood is a difficult idea to deconstruct. Childhood varies according to the socio-economic and cultural surroundings. Even in the English oxford dictionary childhood is described as the state or period of being a child. So, these further questions arise, in what state and for what period? (Oxford, 2022)

According to the United Nations Convention anyone under the age of 18 is a child. (UNCR, 1990) Although in most states in the Unites states of America it is at age 21 that a person is allowed to consume alcohol and, in the UK, this is at age 18 (Licensing Act 2003). In India a male is considered an adult at age 21 and a female at age 18. (The Child Marriage Act, 1929) Another comparison between the UK and Yemen, many children at the ages of 9 years old work full time hours in Yemen (BBC, 2019). Albeit in the UK children are to attend school till the ages of 16 and cannot be in full time employment until the ages of 16. (gov.uk,2022)

All these events are usually termed to as “coming of age”. A statement that proclaims that a person is no longer in the state of childhood although they are not in universal conjunction as seen above.

History of childhood in the UK

The construct of childhood specifically in Europe were impacted by the social environment. Phillipe Aries was the first most notable book on childhood after the war had ended in 1914 to 1984. Aries argued that only up until the 17th and 18th century were children suddenly looked at very different. He argued that contemporary morality created unwritten laws that separated childhood to adulthood. His example was the reference to sexual matters to be unspoken in the presence of a child. Which he stated that “the notion was entirely foreign to the society of old”. (Aries, 1965, p.100)

In the 1680's Neo-Platonist philosophers expressed the idea of children as being innately good. John Locke published a paper called *some thoughts concerning education* and it portrayed children as tabula rasa. This means that children had a clean slate without blemish and that slate only got tainted as they grew and learnt the ways of the world. John Locke's idea although widely famous was different to other philosophers at the time which pushed the debate of childhood into the 18th Century with others such as John Wesley the Methodist leader, Rousseau another philosopher's joining the discourse. Further into the 18th and 19th centuries these ideas of childhood emerged. Namely, the romantic child, evangelical child, wage earning child, delinquent child, schooled child, child-study child, children of the nation, psychological child, child of welfare state and contemporary child. (James and Prout, 1997, pp. 33- 54)

The contemporary children ideology still stands till today in the 20th century as the identities of children become more difficult to classify due to the globalisation of our world. Three major time stamps to note the historical changes to present day of how children were treated are the Middle Ages, Industrialisation and Victorian societies.

In the Middle Ages Christianity was prevalent and children were viewed as evil. Due to this, practices such as coddling a child with wraps become popular to constrain babies (James et al, 1998).

In the industrial age the UK was going through a revolution where the nation was developing. That development introduced factories that needed workers. Children were desired because they were small and could move through machinery for cleaning and repairing easily and cost next to nothing. In addition, they could be punished and were forced to work long hours. (Wright, 2015, p.37)

In the Victorian society disparity between rich and poor introduced class systems. Upper- and middle-class children were protected with the use of governesses to educate. On the other hand, lower class children were exploited in continuation from the industrial age. Only certain children in the Victorian era were perceived as 'children'. (Wright, 2015, p.42)

In comparing these time stamps to today every child in the UK has rights that they would have otherwise not had. The 1878 Factories Act ban the employment of children under the ages of 10. Today a person can only work full time at the legal age of 16. (gov.uk, 2022) Today every child is required to attend school until the ages of 18 and certain dangerous and harmful activities are out of reach to children in the UK. The United Convention on the rights of children outlined that every child has the right to non-discrimination, to life, to identity, to education, to not be exploited, and to have their views respected. (UNICEF, 2022)

Family construct.

In speaking of children, it is only natural that the construct of family arises. Bronfenbrenner's theory supports the idea that a person's family can influence the construction of a child's life. In his theory there are various systems that influence childhood. The Chronosystem, the macrosystem, the exosystem, the mesosystems, the microsystem in which family falls into and the microsystem (the setting). (Clark, 2010, p.12)

In understanding a family's influence on children, we need to understand what a family is.

There are different types of families. The traditional nuclear family consists of mother, father and children. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022) However in modern societies many different types of families exist. Social attitudes have changed over time and therefore the ideal family structure started to paint different pictures. For example, the increased acceptance of homosexual couples have led to a rise in same sex -couples starting families. (The marriage (same sex couples) Act 2013) Immigration in the UK has also increased the number of dual-heritage children. (National Statistics, 2021)

Couples can exist outside the scope of marriage, therefore there are cohabitating couples who have children and in addition attitudes towards divorce changed with a lot more of the English population being atheist, divorce is no longer something to be shunned. In 2020 alone 103,592 divorces were granted in England and Wales. This shift in social behaviour has contributed to single parenting and co parenting family structures. (Office for national statistics, 2020)

Piaget's stage theory gave a vivid image of the awareness of children at each stage of development. It engaged a very serious discourse in the western society. It showed that children are aware of their surrounding and are more in tune with their feelings than what society taught before. (Kehily, 2013) In those early stages that Piaget outlined a parent's reaction could be detrimental to healthy development. Maslow also outlined that for a child to develop in a healthy way these five elements need to be present. They are their physiological (food, breathing and water), safety, love, esteem (achievement, respect) and self- actualisation (creativity, problem solving). (Maslow, 1954)

In understating these we can recognise that a key element to being a child is vulnerability.

Vulnerability is termed as "the quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally". Sadly, some children will be lucky and be born into a family that will provide them every developmental aspect as outlined in Maslow's theory whilst other children will find themselves being vulnerable.

The increased awareness to children who are vulnerable over the years and the developments in legislation with recognition of this. It has had a tremendous positive impact on the welfare of children. One of the most notable legislations is the Children Act 1989. This legislation was implemented to 'safeguard' children. From this legislation many policies have been put in place. The NSPCC guideline explains that safeguarding means "protecting children from abuse and maltreatment, preventing harm to children's health or development, ensuring children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care and taking action to enable all children and young people to have the best outcomes." (NSPCC Learning, 2022)

There are different reasons that a child will come to find themselves in a vulnerable situation. Some are exposed to violence either physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. The children Commissioner estimated that in 2014 831,000 children were living in households that were abusive. Government statistics estimates that 220,000 children lived in households where the parent substance misused drugs whilst in 2016 1.7 million children's lived-in low-income families that fell below the poverty line and their basic needs could not be met. (Public Health England, 2020)

The UK government are dedicated to having early help. This means that as soon as a problem emerges the local government can effectively recognise it and intervene. Under the Children Act (CA) 2004 the local authorities are under obligation to improve the welfare of children.

To ensure that early help is effective the government created the Assessment framework which decided what services and support was to be provided to the child that has been assessed as a 'child in need'. The framework takes the form of three steps;

- Is the child in need? s.17 CA 1989
- Is there reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering; and s.47 CA 1989
- Do they need accommodation. s.20-31(a) CA 1989

Legislation and Policies

The two major legislations in the UK that have contributed to the welfare of Children, was first the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004. The 2004 is current and in date. Section 11 of the act places obligations for authorities to work together to safeguard children. The authorities that it lists are "local authorities, district councils, social services, NHS organisations, the police, the British transport police, the national probation service, the governors/directors of prisons and young offender institutions, directors of secure training centres and principals of secure colleges". (s.11 CA)

Recently the children and social worker Act 2017 was introduced. This legislation was intended to support and work around safeguarding children. The act gives a guide to local authorities and councils on the best practices towards children in care and care leavers. The Equality Act 2010 was another legislation implemented to place responsibility on public authorities to eliminate discrimination whilst promoting equality. This was to ensure that no child, no matter what their race or social class should be treated any less or unfavourably by services put in place to cater their needs. In 1991 the UK government ratified the United Nations convention on rights of the child. This meant that children were recognised as entities with freedom of expression and freedom to gain information.

The 1878 factory Act was one of the first legislations that came to being to exclude the use of children under the ages of 10 to work full time hours and it ban children working in factories. This legislation saw to it that children were not exploited for work and money.

Interventions

As a result of the obligations these legislations place on organisations many intervention services and strategies have been created to intervene when a child is vulnerable. The model of support by the government has 3 layers. There is the specialist, targeted and universal provision.

Universal provision is available to all children and their families in the UK and can be accessed with any assessment. The targeted provision is for children who may need a particularly designed support service and can be assessed directly or without assessment. With specialist provision the child will have severe and complex needs and therefore need very targeted support. Within these provisions there is a four-tier model of services.

Tier 1 contains the universal services available. Examples are school, GP and so on. An example of a universal strategy the UK have implemented is that all 3- to 4-year-old children are entitled to 570 hours of free education.

In tier 2, the targeted services are outlined as school counselling, parenting programmes for families with risks and teenage support groups. Targeted services are used as an intervention when a family or child is beginning to experience difficulties or starts to become a risk. For example, in school, the government have implemented bursary incentives for low-income families and provide free school meals to children within those families running the risk of poverty.

Lower tier 3 specialist services are specialist mental health services and or services for children with disabilities. When the child needs reach a level of complexity that tier 2 cannot aide a reference is made, and the common assessment framework is completed.

In Upper tier 3 it includes children whose needs aren't met without children's social care present. (Children Act 1989)

Lastly tier 4 specialist services comprise of child protection services and impatient child mental health services. Example of these is when adoption plans, and care systems are considered. (Social care institute for excellence, 2012)

In the framework work for assessment all children above the Lower tier 3 from Trafford Children and young people's services must have a SMART individually tailored. The SMART plan stands for specific, measurable, achieve, relevant to the assessed needs of the child and time related.

Recommendation

Although the quality of life for children have improved over the years, in the UK in the year 2019/2020 3.9 million children were living in poverty, which is 27% of children in the UK and 8 in 30 pupils in a classroom. (CPAG, 2022) Although Bursary schemes have been implemented by the government, families must prove that they are below a certain income to receive this fund. Due to this many children who do need school meals deny themselves of this right from embarrassment. In order to combat this issue and cover the basic need of food, the government should provide free school meals to every child who attends school without the need to prove any family income.

In addition, there are no minimum wage legislative protection to children under the ages of 16. Therefore, for children working part time, employers can still exploit and take advantage of them. Therefore, the government should consider minimum wage rights to children working under the ages of 16 to prevent exploitation. (Work smart, 2022)

Conclusion

This essay has explored the definitions of childhood, the history and background in how the concept of childhood has changed over the years, how the social setting and surroundings can impact childhood, the vulnerabilities a child may face and ways we can combat these vulnerabilities. Although government policies and legislations are taking all the appropriate steps to safeguard and ensure that children are protected there is still a long journey ahead universally. However, if we continue to follow these legislations and recommended policies to change the social ideologies, all children have a bright future ahead.

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