

Children, Families, And Young People- developments in social construction of childhood from historical times to modern society- has there been an improvement regarding child safeguarding?

This essay will evaluate the developments in social construction of childhood from historical times to modern society. The term 'childhood' refers to the period of being a child, the Children's Rights Act 1989 and 2004 defines the term 'child' as 'anyone who has not reached their 18th birthday'. There are many aspects that can detriment an individual's childhood such as poverty, crime, disability, neglect and abuse. This essay will focus on safeguarding. The term safeguarding means protecting an individual's health, wellbeing and human rights. Those in need of crucial safeguarding involve children, young people and vulnerable adults (NHS, 2022). This essay will include developments in policy such as the Children's Rights Act (1989 and 2004), Equality Act (2010), and the child protection legislation, evaluating the changes seen in the lives of children and their families. After the policies are evaluated, this essay will then move on to identify a range of approaches and interventions which support vulnerable children, young people and families such as the UN Convention On the Rights Of The Child (UNCRC) and The Child Adolescent Mental health services (CAMHS). This essay will explore the New Right theory, which was developed by Charles Murray who supports the role of the traditional nuclear family, examining whether this theory is considered as out-dated in today's society.

Legislation to prosecute people who have been accused of child cruelty has been in force since the 1880's (NSPCC.2021). This means that before the 1880's children were not protected against any harm towards them. The definition of 'harm' under section 31 of the Children's Act (1989) means ill treatment, or impairment to health or development, including seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. The first formal child death inquiry took place in 1945, this led the Children's Act (1948) to set out new support measures for children across the UK, stating that local authorities had a duty of care to children whose families were unable to care for them. Local authorities include the aspects such as the police, government, local councils and social care workers. Corporal punishment in Britain was known within the education sector in the 19th and 20th century. Corporal punishment is a Latin term meaning body, therefore punishment to the body. In the 19th century hitting students with a bamboo cane became popular in Britain, and in the 20th Century the cane was used in both primary and secondary schools (Local Histories, Lambert.T, 2021). Corporal punishment was outlawed in public schools and government funded private schools in 1986, however for independent schools who did not receive government funding, corporal punishment was outlawed in 2000 (Stop The Rod, 2022). This allowed children to feel safe in their school setting, allowing them to concentrate without fear. The children's right Act (1989) enforced the concept of children feeling safe by introducing a policy to "safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need" stated under section 17 of the children's right Act 1989 (The New Handbook Of Children's Rights,2001). A child in need refers to a child/children who is disabled, health development is likely to be impaired, or have a reasonable standard of health under section 17 of the Children's Act 1989. The Children's Rights Act (2004) expanded on their previous legal policy and aimed to improve all laws previously legalised promoting safeguarding and well-being of children. The Children's Right Act 2004 did this by improving children's services and combining multiple care professional teams in order to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people

and their families. Leading on from this is the Equality Act 2010, this Act protects everyone in Britain from discrimination against protected characteristics such as, race, gender, age, disability, sex, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity and marriage or civil partnership (Gov, Equality Act 2010). However this Act only gives adults the full protection against unlawful age discrimination, children under the age of 18 only receive protection against age discrimination in employment (Government Equalities Office, 2010). Recently On the 21st March 2022 physically punishing children became illegal in Wales, the physical punishment involves smacking, hitting, slapping and shaking a child, or any other type of punishment that physically harms a child (Welsh Government, 2022). This law applies to all UK residents and visitors, giving children protection from assault. The laws stated previously have contributed to societal beliefs and attitudes, it is clear that in historical times the term 'childhood' was not seen as the state of being a child, however they were seen as small adults due to the lack of understanding. This is because as stated above, before the 1880's there was no protection against child harm, also child labour was a common feature in the 1700's during the industrial revolution where children as young as four years old would work in factories and mines (History Crunch, Beck, E., 2016). This job is considered dangerous in modern society, with the minimum age of 16 of working full time in modern day Britain. This perception of 'small adults' has changed in modern society, allowing children to act their physical and mental age, which has formed a sense of value to the way society thinks about children. There has been a clear improvement to laws and societal attitudes, this is because societal attitudes and beliefs are always reforming, deciding what they consider right and wrong, and this is able to be shown within the growth of stated laws above. These laws in place allow children to feel safe and equal to others in society, enabling them to recognise what is acceptable and not, providing them with a voice which children were not provided with before the 1880's when it came to child cruelty. This can also aid a child's wellbeing, the effects of physical and mental abuse can lead to depression, anxiety and a number of disorders such as bipolar disorder.

As well as laws being in place to improve the lives of children and their families from historical to present times, there are also a number of organisations that work with the community to improve and support the safeguarding of children and those in need. Organisations who provide this service include the Child Adolescent Mental health service (CAMHS), and the UN Convention On The Right Of The Child (UNCRC). These organisations support vulnerable children, young people and families improving their qualities and beliefs about their personal life. CAMHS is a free NHS service, aiming to provide children and young people with support through mental health issues, providing them with a safe space to discuss their issues which may have been triggered by past childhood trauma such as physical or mental harm. Mental health over the years has become more common, this is because of the resources we have in society that effectively educate individuals what poor mental health is. In 2017 1 in 9 young people were affected by poor mental health (Addiction Advocates, 2021). CAMHS follows the UN Convention On the Right Of the Child (UNCRC), stating that the organisation must take the opinion of the child service user seriously when discussing decisions about treatment. This allows a child to have control of their own body and mind, encouraging them to feel more equal within society. The UN Convention On The Right Of The Child (UNCRC) is the basis of all UNICEF'S work. This organisation aims to build a better world for every child around the world, the organisation works with families to ensure that all children are reaching their full potential. UNCRC focuses on the children who are considered the most vulnerable, providing them

with clean water, life-saving food, vaccines, education and protection from violence, (UNICEF, 2022). It is arguable that many vulnerable children in need may go unnoticed with this organisation. This is because many vulnerable children do not show signs of abuse or trauma within the home, this is down to the fear of consequences. Children may fear being hurt by the perpetrator or being removed from the family if they seek help.

Another factor that supports vulnerable children, young people and families is the police. The police' role is to provide a duty of care and protection for those in need of their services. This has not always been the case within the police force however, in 1991 rape within a marriage became a crime (BBC News, 2008), this means that before 1991 was seen as normal behaviour due to the consent given in marriage. This act was laid out in the Sexual Offences Act (2003). The police must work closely with social care workers to ensure that the child is not at risk of physical or mental abuse or exploitation of risk factors such as crime. This is linked to legislation to prosecute those who have been accused of cruel behaviour towards children which started in the 1880's, as since this date, authorities started to tarnish behaviours including harm and neglect. All authorities including directors of children's services, chief officers of police, senior leaders within organisations and agencies that work together to provide services for children, young people and families must work together to follow the guidance of safeguarding (HM Government, 2018). This highlights that authorities must work as a jigsaw to safeguard children effectively.

There has also been change in the construct of the family, traditionally the ideal family type consisted of a nuclear family. In 1967 Edmund Leach recognised the power of this traditional family type, branding this family type as the 'cereal packet family' (revise sociology, 2018). The traditional role of the nuclear family consists of a married couple and their dependent children, the father is classed as the breadwinner, this is where they go out to work to provide financial stability for their family. The mother would traditionally undertake the role of a stay-at-home wife, however this is arguable in contemporary society with this new social concept of the 'new man'. This is the transformed presentation of the traditional man. The definition of the new man is where men undertake the roles of the traditional stay-at-home wife, such as cooking and cleaning, showing vulnerability and emotions; these aspects would be considered as weaknesses in historical times. The New right theorist Charles Murray (1993) supports the body of the nuclear family. Charles Murray argued that governments should cut out benefits for lone parent mothers to force them to be dependent on men again (Simpman.S, 1993), Charles Murray believed that the lack of a male role model in childhood can cause children to develop deviant behaviour and attitudes. The term deviant is used when an individual does not conform to society's standards, norms and values. The sociologists suggested that this deviant behaviour could lead to a rise of the underclass. This theory of the traditional family is arguably outdated in modern society, women now have more rights due to the rise in feminism- which started by the four waves of feminism where individuals would petition for women to be treated as equal as men. With this, society's attitudes have also changed. The family is a core element in a child's development, it is the grounding of a child's beliefs and behaviour for their future. If a child faces abuse or neglect within a traditional nuclear family, it is classed as best interest in modern society to remove that harm for the child therefore safeguarding the child, this was not considered before 1880's therefore a child was still at high risk of harm to face

physical/verbal/ mental abuse within the nuclear family, impacting their mental and physical development.

There has been improvement within the policies in place to protect the health and welfare of children in society today compared to historical times as stated above, however child abuse and neglect is still a problem in modern society. In 2021-22 the NSPCC contacted authorities about 22,505 children to investigate concerns about abuse and neglect (NSPCC, 2022). This figure highlights the significance of children still facing abuse, suggesting that the policies in place may not pose a threat to certain perpetrators of crime. After examining organisation throughout this essay it is clear that authorities may not work successfully together to complete their duty of care and safeguarding, for example the Victoria Climbié case (2000), it is clear to see that local authorities did not communicate effectively to protect the child, causing the child to face more harmful abuse and torture. It is clear to understand that these policies improve equality and the lives of children, young people and families, improving their development and attitudes towards society which can cause a positive cycle throughout generations. However these laws and policies in place do not prevent a crime from happening but provide consequences to the crime, therefore are these policies/ laws set in place benefiting a child's wellbeing and health? Has society's attitudes really changed with how they see children, or are children still facing abuse compared to historical times but overshadowed by fear?.

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