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Childhood

Written Essay

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Contents

Introduction.....3

What is Childhood 4

History of Childhood 5

Key Elements 5

Policy and Legislation 6

Conclusion 8

References 9

Introduction

This essay explores the significance of how childhood is socially constructed. It gives a broad review of the differences between children in historical and modern times. The changes inside families in the UK as well as the concept of the family as a social construction are also covered.

The essay explores the variables that have changed children's lives and decreased inequality from historical to the present. the causes of how these elements benefited children's lives in the present.

Moreover, it discusses the interventions that are now being used in the UK to help vulnerable children and how they can lessen the disparities that exist between children from privileged and underprivileged backgrounds.

What is Childhood

Physical and emotional immaturity and susceptibility in compared to adults, producing a lack of autonomy, are some characteristics that are frequently linked with childhood, and reliance on others, internationally acknowledged.

According to Ariès, the term "adolescent" did not exist in premodern times and that phrases like "kid" would be used to describe everyone, regardless of age.

De Mause (1974), referenced in Oliver and Pitt (2011), would concur, suggesting that childcare standards can be perceived as getting worse as you look further back in time. He talked about instances like infanticide, which was followed by abandonment and ambivalence regarding kids.

From birth to adulthood, the period of the minority is known as childhood. The maturity age varies depending on the situation and the goal. For instance, in the United States, if you are 18 years old and want to join the military, you are still considered a minor. (Suzanne and Mandeep, 2022)

Childhood is the period of development a human organism goes through between birth and puberty, according to biology. Infancy refers to the first year of life and is encompassed under the idea of Infancy. Early childhood (one to five years), middle childhood (six to ten years), and pre-adolescence make up the years before adolescence. (Michael, 2019)

Definitions make reference to chronological age when identifying the line separating youth and adulthood usually 18 years old. Births in industrialized nations are registered, with the birth date being a significant factor in a person's legal and private identity. Though this is not the situation everywhere and in many places. Social events like marriage or labour migration, physical characteristics such as height, facial hair, or the beginning of menstruation, can be more significant than age as a marker of adulthood. Despite the encounter is universal and comes in a variety of forms. Cultural, political, personal, and economic factors. (Roz, 2012)

There is no single definition of childhood. This means that there is no single definition of childhood. It changes based on socioeconomic and cultural considerations. Examples of childhood experiences include child labour, child marriage, FGM (female genital mutilation), child prostitution, and child marriage in two separate nations. Your awareness that childhood is a social fabrication is demonstrated by this. It is clear that the experience of being a child differs when we contrast two distinct nations, such as Sierra Leone and the UK. This is due to the fact that most youngsters in Sierra Leone begin working around the age of 7-8 years.

Contrarily, in England, all children are expected to remain in school or training until the age of 18, and attendance at school is required until the age of 16. (GOV.UK, 2021). This demonstrates the disparity between the expectations for children in these two nations with regard to both education and child labour.

While child marriage is popular in certain nations, it is permitted to get married in England and Wales at the age of 16 (Children's Commissioner, 2021).

Child prostitution occurs in some nations, such as Thailand, but it is illegal in England and Wales and is penalised with a prison sentence (a custodial sentence) as sexual exploitation (CPS, 2019)

Numerous methodologies have been employed to study children and childhood, including scientific methodology, applied methodology, and social constructionist methodology. Social constructionism aims to comprehend who constructs children and childhood knowledge, why

they do so, and most importantly, what function it would serve. Using social constructionism, we can learn alternative things about kids and childhood. The social construction of childhood is based on varied perceptions in many nations, cultures, and historical eras. It also emphasizes the variety of conditions and situations that make up childhood. Social construction is a theoretical viewpoint that investigates how discourses and interactions between people shape how "reality" is negotiated in day-to-day living. This idea has been conceptualized. (Chris, 2005)

History of Childhood

Every society creates standards that govern the surroundings, interactions, and treatment of people who are most in need, particularly youngsters. However, the lines that define what is damaging or undesirable in acts and outcomes are historically and culturally distinct. My research examines these limitations from the perspective of a modern British historian. I have a keen interest in family dynamics, children's experiences and subjectivity, and the effects of welfare policy changes on social inequality.

Since the 1880s, child welfare has been conceptualised through a chronological narrative that shows how Britain came to pay more attention to the special fragility and malleability of children. Each of the ground-breaking actions was the result of impromptu partnerships between the national government, local governments, non-profit organisations, mutual aid societies, and professional knowledge, which is not surprising given the backdrop of the modern British state. We have a good understanding of the politics that over the past 140 years have allowed for this public investment in the lives of future people. In the 1880s, laws and organisations were established to protect children from maltreatment and neglect. In the 1880s, laws and organisations were established to protect children from maltreatment and neglect. (Alan, 2004)

In the 1900s, the state began to support infant welfare services, free school lunches, and medical examinations. In the years following World War II, family allowances (beginning with the 1975 child benefit) and free healthcare were introduced. Many of these modifications were brought about by briefly reported "scandals." When the public was paying attention, grumbling issues were briefly turned into national priorities, as was the case in 1885 with the dramatic reporting of W.T. Stead in The Pall Mall Gazette. Other times, during more serious national crises, the well-being of children grew unintentionally in importance. For instance, evacuation during the Second World War brought urban poverty and childhood psychological suffering to light, but the underlying issues remained. It is possible to create a straightforward history of child welfare that concentrates attention on adult-led, public, and immediate responses to newly identified threats because modern childhood has become increasingly sharply and uniformly defined by age-specific schooling, welfare, and regulations. (Sian, 2022)

Key Elements

Children's wants and experiences are influenced by their families as well. The child's health and well-being are the responsibility of the family. Family is a concept that is constantly evolving in the UK. Changes in society also affect families.

Since many cohabiting couples are raising happy, stable families, there is no longer a stigma associated with having children outside of marriage.

Same-sex couples have children as a result of increased acceptance of homosexual lifestyles. There are more children with mixed heritage in the UK as a result of immigration and increased

cultural variety. Grandparents and other relatives are included in extended families, some of whom live in the same home. (McDowall Clark, 2013).

In recent decades, women's roles have evolved. Contraception, legalised abortion, divorce law reform, greater equality for women - more access to higher education, better professional aspirations - are all contributing factors. Women are more likely to wait until their careers are established before having children, which allows them to stretch pregnancies out and reduce family size. When women are more financially independent, they are better able to exit unhappy relationships.

Women are delaying marriage and childbirth since they now have occupations and access to equal work options. Due to the Equal Pay Act, women can now work and make the same amount of money as men, making divorce more affordable.

Nowadays, getting a divorce is simpler than when a judge had to authorise it. For instance, you can now file for divorce based on an irretrievable breakdown. Couples can now wait until they are ready to have children because of medical advancements. Men and women can now have a variety of relationships without having to worry about having children or getting married.

People's attitudes regarding religion have changed, and as a result, the family is no longer seen as a significant social institution and some behaviours are now more acceptable. For instance, marriage, cohabitation, and same-sex partnerships are no longer significant.

Nevertheless, despite inclusion policy papers, families with disabled children are less visible in society at large and frequently go unnoticed (McDowall Clark, 2013).

Policy and Legislation

Since Victorian times to the present, a number of developments have improved the lives of children, including changes in legislation and policy, social developments, and the emergence of child development and neuroscience.

For instance, policies and laws pertaining to work, education, children's health and safety, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child have been enacted in England (UNCRC, 1991).

The 1833 Factories Act in the 19th century (the National Archives, 2021), which outlawed child labour before the age of nine, and the current law regarding child employment, states that children can only be in full-time employment only from the age of sixteen, are the two main pieces of legislation related to child labour/work that has changed the lives of the children (GOV.UK., 2021). The laws governing child labour made sure that kids were safe from damage, abuse, and exploitation and that they got an education (UNICEF, 2016).

The laws pertaining to education are among the most significant laws or elements that have changed the lives of children. The Education Act of 1880 made all children between the ages of 5 and 11 required to attend school. In the UK nowadays, all children must attend school until they are 16 and must participate in training until they are 18 years old (GOV.UK., 2021). Because of schooling, compulsory education has helped to transform children's lives.

legislation that limits access to alcohol until the age of 18 and requires consent for sexual activity starting at 16 years old in order to protect youngsters from injury and abuse. According to the NHS, this legislation has helped to enhance the lives of children.

As sex with a kid under the age of 16 is illegal because they lack the capacity to provide permission, laws are in place to protect minors from sexual abuse.

The effect of the Child Rights Conventions of the United Nations (UNCRC, 1991). In order to guarantee that every child has the right to life, education, non-discrimination, protection from damage and abuse, and healthy development, it was crucial that this Convention be established (Save the Children, 2021).

The necessity of giving every child a good childhood has been highlighted by the creation of child development as a subject and discipline of study, emphasising the effects of adverse experiences on a child's future development. The harm to children's brains brought on by adverse experiences throughout the first five years of life is demonstrated by neuroscience. Since these fields emphasise how important it is to give all children a happy upbringing, excellent experiences, and a decent environment, they have helped to change children's lives.

As more parents spend more time with their kids and governments invest more money in child-related programmes, this has an impact on sociological aspects. The NHS offers free medical care.

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, various factors outside of the family have an impact on a child's development. The five systems upon which this idea is founded. The child is the microsystem, whereas the family, day-care, teachers, playground, and interactions make up the mesosystem.

Exosystem is made up of local residents, family members who live nearby, and friends. macrosystem law, governmental regulations, and social norms.

Another significant idea influencing services for families and children was Maslow's theory. Maslow's hierarchy of needs hypothesis. Maslow asserts that for a human being to reach self-actualization, or reach their full potential, other prior wants must first be satisfied in a hierarchical order. Food, water, and the toilet are physiological needs. Safety needs include a home and protection, relationships that make us feel safe, and love/belonging needs include forming friendships and partnerships. Self-assurance, self-worth, and respect for others are all aspects of esteem. The realisation of our potential is self-actualization.

Children should not be separated from their parents or guardians for their social, emotional, and developmental well-being. (Karl, 2015)

Children should be Safeguarded from domestic abuse and exploitation. (National Statistics, 2021)

Vulnerable families especially those with kids should be given the required help they need in order to protect and safeguard the kids. (Petra and Christine, 2016)

Children's right to education and play should be preserved. (United Nations, 1989)

Conclusion

Moreover, even though children's lives have changed and become better, many kids in the UK still live in poverty. The Rowntree Foundation estimates that 2.8 million children are living in poverty as of 2021.

Free school meals do not reach all kids who are in need, and local governments, schools, and community organisations cannot resolve this issue on their own. Government leadership is necessary. Contribute to that by:

Getting in touch with your MP and requesting that they support the National Food Strategy's recommendation to extend free school meals to all children from households receiving Universal Credit as well as the #EndChildFoodPoverty campaign's call for a thorough review of school food policy. Can they bring this up in a legislative question or, as an example, in a letter to a minister? This how-to writing to your MP instruction may be useful. (Sustain, 2021)

When parents make more money, they ought to be capable of keeping more of it. To assist in combating poverty among those who are employed, JRF is urging reform of the Universal Credit programme.

The government may provide low-income working families with a much-needed budget boost by raising the work allowances for families with children to their original levels. This would help about 4.9 million working-class parents and kids, with 300,000 of them completely exiting in poverty. (Katie, 2018)

Children should not be separated from their parents or guardians for their social, emotional, and developmental well-being. (Karl, 2015)

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