
Is Childhood A Universal Condition?

Childhood is the time for children to be in school and at play, to grow strong and confident with the love and encouragement of their family and extended community of caring adults. It is a precious time in which children should live free from fear, safe from violence and protected from abuse and exploitation (UNICEF, 2005). (Giddens, 2005), has it that childhood has also been shown to be socially constructed, the experience of childhood and its meaning for the society are diverse, both in different historical periods and across geographical regions in the same time period. The piece below seeks to shade more light on whether childhood is a universal concept, or it is one that is understood differently in law, cultures, religion, and context.

According to (UNICEF, 2005), Childhood is more than just the space time before a person is considered an adult, meaning there is much more to childhood than just being a space between birth and the attainment of adulthood, childhood refers to the state and condition of a child's life to the quality of those years. From a study that was conducted by Dr. Kapesa on the child headed families in Mutasa district, this study showed that children who were meant to be catered for are forced to work and fend for their siblings because of circumstances (Kapesa, 2015). In some parts of

Africa children are taken to work in the minds away from their families and with no one to take care of them such children have been denied their childhood. The United Nation General Assembly passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states in Article 25 that childhood is a period where the child is entitled to special care and assistance. As the most widely endorsed human rights treaty in history, the convention on the rights of a child, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and ratified by all but two countries, in effect, represents the global consensus on the terms of childhood. Although there no absolute agreement on the interpretation of each and every provision of the convention, there is substantial common ground on what the standards of childhood should be.

Childhood is a changing social phenomenon, of continual fascination and concern. Looking at it from a cross-cultural perspective shows the wide variety of childhoods that exist across the world and warns against interfering in or criticising people whose lives, and understandings of the world, are very different to our own (Montgomery, 2013). Culture is how individuals understand who they are and how people give their lives meaning. Culture is understood as a set of practices, beliefs, plans and rules which a social group agree upon and mark them out as unique. Culture gives groups a sense of identity, belonging and pride, culture can be leaned, taught and acquired by members of a group. The recognition that societies differ in their cultural attitudes towards social phenomena and therefore no universal criteria can be applied to compare one cultural view with another. (Westwood, 2013) Culture can therefore only be judged through reference to their own standards. Having said this, individual's views of childhood might have formed within a particular cultural context and will therefore often be seen as how things are and should be. In line with the above childhood can be understood differently in different cultures. (Timimi & Leo, 2009), Illustrate the way in which Islamic cultural practices and traditions assist children through various stage of development. These stages have been lined to children developing an understanding of the importance of truthfulness and cooperation and the sophisticated cognitive abilities to discern, show respect and demonstrate social skills, once

these understandings are attained the child is deemed ready to enter the next phase of development.

In the western view of western countries children are protected to an extent where a parent does not beat a child in the name of discipline, while in Africa being beaten by one's parents is regarded as straightening a child so that they turn out to be well behaved and responsible adults. Therefore, one can say people of different cultures have a different understanding of the concept of childhood, some cultures like (male) circumcision, they circumcise their male children at a tender age which some cultures may regard as an evil act because it exposes children to pain, hence compromising an ideal childhood while to some cultures it is okay to do so. It is not secret that in the western countries children are treated with leniency and they are then taught how to behave properly at a later stage and in Africa children are disciplined from the onset, so in the west childhood can be said to be time of play, being free and doing as they please while in Africa childhood is a time to learn how to behave and a time where parents provide for the needs of the children, playing is also an important aspect of childhood in Africa.

A religion is a group of beliefs and rituals. It consists of rules, stories and symbols which are adopted by the society, a group or a person. Religion may be a way of life and or search for answers regarding life or death. There are seven major religions in the world and these are Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and animism. According to (Browning & Bunge, 2011), childhood appears in the scripture only a few times, most significantly in the books of psalms and Ecclesiastes. Otherwise the scripture rarely discusses children or childhood as an abstraction. The following verses are presented in conjunction with commentary on them in order to illustrate understandings of childhood. Ecclesiastes 11 verse 9 to 10 says oh youth enjoy yourself while you are in your childhood, let your heart lead you to enjoyment in these days of your youth. Follow the desires of your heart and the glances of your eyes, but know well that god will call you to account for all such things. (Browning & Bunge, 2011), outlines in the

Judaism teaches that childhood is characterised by happiness and enjoyment. Christianity views childhood as a model of discipleship. Letters from the earliest Christian communities follow the early Hebrew Scriptures in urging the children to honour their parents, but in addition advise parents to love their children and not provoke them to anger. Early Christian writers protested customary practice of abortion, abandonment and exposure of children and their sale into slavery and prostitution. Evidence from the texts and practices point to a positive evaluation of childhood from the early Christian community (Browning & Bunge, 2011).

Childhood is experienced differently there is no argument on that, clearly describing a child's contexts broadly offers a more meaningful and complete way to assess the circumstances in which the children are growing. Moreover public policies directed at influencing at-risk children's wellbeing are directed at children's context, things like the neighbourhoods where these children are coming from, the parent, the family environment and even the country in which they are coming from (Moore, Mbwana, & Theokas, 2011). On that note one can say that childhood is experienced differently, it is of no surprise to have different people describe their experiences differently an American child would tell a different story of their childhood and same applies to a child raised in the rural sector in Zimbabwe. Not only that but also children coming from poor families experience childhood from a different angle, same applies to children from rich homes.

In conclusion, the quality of children's lives vary extremely within the same dwelling, between

two houses on the same street, between regions and between industrialised and developing countries. The closer children come to being full-grown, the more cultures, countries, and even people within the same country differ in their views of what is expected of children. Despite intellectual debates about the understanding of the term childhood and cultural differences and religion about what to expect for and from children, there has always been a notable degree of shared understanding that childhood implies a separate and safe space, demarcated from adulthood in which children can grow, play and develop. Therefore childhood is a universal condition.

References

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