Parental Caregiving Strategies and Personality Development of Children (5-12 Years): The Case of Selected Regions in Cameroon

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Abstract

Purpose: There seems to be a lot of challenges and crisis all over the world that is disturbing world peace. So therefore, almost every human being is going about looking for different ways to be happy and be at peace. Human flourishing achieves determinacy and reality only through a joint engagement of the individual's unique talents, potentialities, and circumstances with generic goods and virtues. Encyclopedia of applied Ethics 2nd Edition (2012). Flourishing is when people experience positive emotions, positive psychological functioning and positive social functioning, most of the time, 'living within an optimal range of human functioning.' Fredrickson (2005). This Study seeks to identify the ways through which parents care for their children and how it influences their personality development. It is believed that the more a person is shown love, the more he will feel secured and be happy thus develop a positive personality. Parental caregiving varies across cultures and beyond the survival of children, parents are fundamentally invested in their children's education and socialization as well as other social actors.

Methodology: This study made use of the survey research design and the method of data collection was through observation and the use of interviews and focus group discussions. A total of 220 children were randomly sampled drawn from different regions of Cameroon using 6 caregiving practices such as taking children out of the home, listening to children, spending time with them, buying them gifts, playing games and telling them stories and providing basic needs.

Findings: The findings of this study reveal that, the family background, social influence, socio-economic status, peaceful environment free from wars, stable marriage live of parents, providing for children's basic needs within their means and parents creating time for children out of their busy schedules will go a long way to bring out a positive personality in their children. Also, the findings indicates that other avenues and actors within the environment may provide the opportunity to promote the development of positive personality traits such as N.G.Os, the government and stake holders, parents themselves, extended family and the school community.

Recommendation: More broadly, the current results support continued efforts to incorporate personality constructs into developmental research involving children and adolescents. The findings of this study will be significant to Parents, children, and educators and will guide them on best ways to develop children's personality thus contributing to human flourishing.

Keywords: *Parental caregiving strategies, personality development, human flourishing*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this review is to reconstruct the image and the role of the parents as well as siblings on care giving strategies in the context of the Cameroonian family from scanty anthropological, sociological, clinical and current scientific European, American and Cameroonian research and literature. According to Nsamenang (2000), the traditional childcare role of the Cameroonian father is nonspecific and not routinized, whereas the mother's is to keep the home, perform other domestic tasks and, more importantly, to oversee and supervise sibling caregiving rather than provide direct childcare herself (Nsamenang, 1992c, p. 426). Thus, the extent of child-to-child caretaking and the socialization of children by other children in Cameroon is substantial far more extensive and perhaps developmentally more critical than direct maternal or paternal care. The extent to which current Eurocentric theorizing captures the peculiarities of this type of childcare is undoubtedly negligible.

Objectives

The main objective of this study seeks to identify the ways through which parents care for their children and how it influences their personality development. It is believed that the more a person is shown love, the more he will feel secured and be happy thus develop a positive personality.

Care giving Practices

1. Taking children out for visits, excursions, and leisure
2. Playing different games with children
3. Singing together with children
4. Telling stories and reading books to children
5. Providing basic needs to children
6. Listening to children
7. Eating with children
8. Praying with children
9. Teaching children basic gender roles and chores
10. Doing assignments with children

Human Flourishing Outcomes

1. Happiness and life satisfaction
2. Meaning and purpose
3. Physical and mental health
4. Character and virtue
5. Close social relationships.
6. Positive personality development
7. Emotional stability

8. Possible societal integration

The theoretical anchor-point of this review is that parenting always occurs in a specific ecoculture, defined by geography, history, and the sociocultural system (Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994). Whereas physical environments and the social field provide culturally meaningful experiences to parents, the cultural system offers parents the ideas and scripts that permit and foster the enactment of the parental role. Parents derive their ideas and values from folk wisdom, ontogenetic experience, and expert knowledge (literature and professional persons). The "directive force" of these sources of ideas and values varies across individuals and societies, depending on such background factors as worldview, social history, education, religion, and place of residence (Nsamenang et al., 1994), thereby fostering different roles and role changes for fathers over time and across societies. Cultures express the value of the family through the manner in which procreation and child rearing are inserted into family life (Nsamenang, 1996).

To a certain extent, the parental role is the formal expression of the function of the family (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1984). According to Kessel (1995), family contexts are often very important in determining what is normal and what facilitates and/or hampers effective parenting. The work of Hewlett, Shannon, Lamb, Leyendecker, & Scholmerich (1998), Nsamenang (1992a, 1992b) and Nsamenang & Lamb, 1993, 1994) identifies some of the conduits by which context influences parenting behaviors. The child, the parent, and the social and cultural context constantly interact with and, therefore, influence each other. Scarr (1985) in Goodnow (1988, p. 289), argued cogently that facts do not have an independent existence because the human mind is constructed in a specific cultural context. Thus, a "parental identity" is created, at least in part, by the cultural [family] context in which parents come to know their roles. Consequently, during ontogeny, Cameroonian males and females develop "a sense of group membership that carries with it some obligation to acquire the kinds of ideas and knowledge appropriate to being a mother or father" (Goodnow, 1988, p. 289).

This work has also been informed theoretically by the works of Bowlby (1982) on attachment. This work has formulated several key concepts for understanding relationships, especially parent-child relationships. The concept of attachment is the most widely recognized of these. Although attachment has entered the popular vocabulary as a synonym of bond, it has a technical meaning that refers strictly to behavior and behavior systems that elicit and depend on nurturance from a special caregiver. Caregiving is the corresponding technical term for a variety of nurturing behaviors and the behavior control system that produces them. In his analysis of attachment, Bowlby (1982) situated the human species in its "environment of evolutionary adapted ness" Axelrod, 1984 et al) that is, during the 2 million years of human evolution up to the introduction of agriculture 10,000 years ago.' In another place, Bowlby (1982) extended the period to include "pre-agricultural humans and ground-living species related to man," in which there is an "organized social group" (p. 63). Bowlby focused in particular on the danger of predators in this environment. Bowlby's partial answer to the question of how the human and primate species survived an environment of predators was that an attachment behavioral control system in the child (asking for protection) and a caregiving behavioral control system in the mother and other adults (giving protection) combined to protect human children effectively from predators. Attachment and caregiving behavioral control systems have been formulated in at least three distinct ways (Bell & Richard, 2000).

Initially, based on ethological analysis, Bowlby (1982) described a behavioral system of "proximity" caregiving. Both mothers (caregiving) and children (attachment) were said to desire to be close. Cries or other stimuli from the child, or the mother's perception of danger, would activate the mother's caregiving behavioral control system, and she would retrieve the child and maintain proximity. The child's survival was a predictable but unintended consequence of proximity. Later, Sroufe and Waters (1977) and Bretherton (1980) proposed an expanded model of "security" caregiving for humans. In this new model the child's goal was to achieve a psychological state of felt security, although the parent's goal was not specified. Bowlby (1982) ratified this new model in the revision of Attachment. In later work, Heard and Lake (1997), Solomon and George (1996), and George and Solomon, 1999) identified the parent's goal as safety for the child, a more purposive and aware goal than proximity, but less "psychological" than security. Attachment in each of its forms is a behavioral control system that depends on the nurturance of a caregiver who is "stronger and wiser" (Cassidy, 1999), whereas caregiving is a behavioral control system that provides such nurturance. As a result, there would be no survival advantage to an attachment system that evolved before a caregiving system on which it would depend.

Another theory which informed this study was the psychoanalysis theory of Sigmund Freud that arose from the 19th century, which focuses on the unconscious and dream analysis. According to Freud, the conscious mind is aware of the present perceptions, memories, thoughts, and feelings. It exists as the tip of the iceberg. Under this conscious mind, a preconscious mind carries the available memory. From this preconscious mind, a person can retrieve memories into the conscious mind. There is no dispute about the two layers of the mind. Freud's perception suggested that these two layers are only the smallest parts of the mind. The larger part is the unconscious of the mind. All the things, which are not easily available at a conscious level, such as our drives or instincts, memories, and emotions associated with trauma. Like an iceberg, the unconscious mind plays an important part of the personality. It plays as the repository of primitive wishes and impulses. These are mediated by the preconscious mind. Freud's psychoanalytic theory emphasizes the importance of the unconscious mind and it governs the behaviour to the greatest degree in persons.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

This study made use of the survey research design and the method of data collection was through observation, the use of interviews and focus group discussions with children aged 5-12. A total of 220 children have been randomly sampled, observed, put in focus group and a few interviewed from the population drawn from different regions of Cameroon. We used 6 parental caregiving strategies such as taking children out of the home, listening to children, spending time with them, buying them gifts, playing games and telling them stories and providing basic needs as indicators to find out from the children their feelings about caregiving practices of their parents. The focus groups were mostly organized from school during their break periods. The schools were visited each once each term for consistency and different sets of children were worked with to get varied responses. In terms of personality development of these children the researcher judged their different behavior based on observation over a period of 1 academic year. Their different family backgrounds and degree of care giving from their parents was also observed.

Each family was visited twice at their home within the year of assessment. The purpose of two visits was to distribute the data collection and reduce respondent fatigue. During the first visit, the

children responded to a set of questions on the interview guide focusing on family processes, individual family member characteristics, and socioeconomic circumstances. On average, the first visit took approximately two hours. Between the first and second visits, family members were interviewed by the interviewer. These questions dealt with information concerning the parents' parents, beliefs about parenting, and plans for the future. The data collected from each child was collected by the interviewer at the time of the second visit. The second visit usually occurred within two or three weeks after the first visit and began by having each individual complete a short interview designed to identify issues of concern that prompted disagreements within the family (e.g., chores, recreation, money, etc.). The family was then videotaped while engaging in four separate structured interaction tasks: a family discussion task (task 1), a family problem-solving task (task 2), a marital couple task (task 3), and a sibling interaction task (task 4). Tasks 1 and 2 were used in the present analyses. To start the process, interviewers explained task 1, gave the task cards to a family member, and then left the room while the family members (mother, father, the target children, and sibling) discussed issues raised by the task cards such as how the family spends time together, enjoyable experiences they have had, and household rules. The family members were given 30 min to complete this task (task 1). The second task (task 2), 15 min in length, also involved the same family members. For this task, the family was asked to discuss and try to resolve issues and disagreements they had cited as most problematic in the questions they had completed earlier in the visit. The second visit lasted approximately 2 hours.

Data Analysis

A total of 220 children were randomly selected from different family backgrounds and interviewed. The collected data was analyzed statistically using the descriptive statistics method of data analysis. Both the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and interviews were transcribed and then major themes were identified from each of the transcripts. The findings from the FGDs and interview data for each of the thematic area were summarized on the degree of agreement or disagreement to a given idea by the participants. The focus group participants were grouped into different categories. Those who were from homes that they leaved with foster parents, those that have lost their biological parents, and those who were from rich family backgrounds living with their parents. The children were categorized into focus groups and also interviewed and the participants were asked a series of questions with regards to the above 6 parental care giving strategies. The researcher deduce the following which indicated from our exchange with the children;

Children who lived with Foster Parents

From the discussions from the FGD participants, it was generally indicated that children who lived with foster parents enjoyed very little of the parental warmth and love that the normally expected. For some more attention was given to biological children than to them in terms of listening to their problems and challenges, spending time with them and taking them out of the home for visits and excursions. But when it came to buying gifts, telling stories and playing games, the treatment was almost equal for most of the participants we spoke to because the foster parents tried to avoid discrimination whereas for some the reverse was true, they did not bother how the children felt or what the society had to do but they prioritize their biological children more over the adopted or foster children. In such a case we found the children were reserved could not express themselves

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freely, had a reserved and introvert personality and were often unhappy. This discourages human flourishing because they cannot fully integrate into the society.

Children who have lost their Biological Parents

Concerning this group of children the responses we got were so touching this is because of the psychological imbalances which the children face already from losing to death of their biological parents, separation due to socio political crisis or divorce. When they were asked a series of questions based on the 6 different parental caregiving strategies which we came up with they had the following negative statements to say since the loss of their parents:

- Ever since my parents died, I have lost hope of life and live by the Mercy of GOD.
- Most of the days I go hungry or I can barely eat once a day.
- I beg on the streets to survive.
- I lack clothes to wear that's why I always look dirty.
- I stopped going to school since I lost my parents.
- I don't have all my school needs because my foster guardians cannot afford.
- I have almost nobody to play with me since I look unkempt and unhappy most of the time.
- I am very aggressive most of the times towards my peers because of the anger I feel after loosing my parents so little friends because they avoid me.
- My performance in school is very poor since I can't concentrate, I cry often for my parents, I have nobody to help me with my assignments.
- It is difficult to help each other especially in times of need because my guardians spend little or no time with me.
- I cannot remember the last time I received s gift from someone since I lost my parents to accident.

The above negative feelings have a lot to play on the personality of these children as they are the ones often involved in most of the negative vices plaguing our society today. Surprisingly, some other kids had a better life to live after the death of their parents and they had this to say;

- My parents were always quarrelling and fighting but since they got divorced, I have been living in peace in my aunt's house without witnessing a tensed environment always since they are more God fearing.
- We live in an orphanage where we are sure of food every day unlike when I was living with my poor late mother who could not afford a daily meal for us most of the time.
- I received a scholarship from an N.G.O. to pay for my schooling expenses till I complete high school which was difficult for my father to do since he abandoned us and lived with his mistress.
- I have nobody to listen to my worries since I got separated from my parents due to the crisis. I lack parental love and warmth from my guardians.

Children from Rich Family Backgrounds Living with their Biological Parents

Even though the children from this category are expected to have the good live shockingly it is not the case for all children. The children living a good life had the following to say;

- My parents often take us out for outings to different nice places at least twice a month and most weekends or Sundays to the bakery after church.

- Our parents give us gifts each time we perform well in school or whenever they had extra benefits at their place of work.

- We have a big court yard with different games like basketball, football court and a swimming pool where we play different games with our parents most weekend.

- My mother reads story books to us at bed time and tells us different stories at our family time.

- We pray together with my family every morning and evening and it makes me to be morally upright and to improve upon our spiritual lives.

- I have many children who come close to me because I always have a lot to eat in school.

- I exhibit my skills and talents by participating in different activities during holidays like karate, dance and music classes.

- Because my parents take me to the village once in a while and register me for my dialect classes I am able to learn and promote culture.

- We collaborate, cooperate and share ideas with each other in everything they do.

- In our family we portray, defend and protect each other's interest.

- The love and attachment we get from our parents help to improve upon our socio-emotional, moral and personality development.

- Since we are Jehovah's witnesses, we study the bible together with our parents and conduct evangelization activities through preaching, distribution of tracks, choral singing and dramatization.

- I am able to do all my assignments and perform well in school because my parents provide all my school needs.

On the other hand, some of these children from rich homes were depressed because of the following;

- My parents spend little time with me and my siblings because of their busy work schedule.

- My mum works in a bank while my father is a doctor they come home late. I count the number of times I see them and so they know little about me.

- Our nanny is the one who stays in the house most times with me because my parents are busy and she maltreats me so I feel very unhappy and lack warmth from my parents.

- My parents are always travelling for work so most times I take my own decisions without their guardians and it often leads me to trouble.

- My parents buy me story books but rarely read it to me because they come home late most times from their job side when I and my siblings have already slept.

Implications of Positive Parental Caregiving Strategies for Parenting and Teaching

- Parent education courses as well as sex Education lessons may assist contemporary family set-ups as early intervention especially at the pre-adolescent stage of a child's development stages. The idea may facilitate proper identity formation (Erikson`s theory concerning identity formation), which emphasizes the provision of parental support in an effort to develop a child's identity, just before they get into the psychosocial crisis of Identity versus Role confusion.

- Parents and teachers should teach children academic and prosocial skills as early intervention. Talk of sympathy, empathy, etc. because such characteristics are vital in developing a positive self-concept, which may facilitate learning.

- Discipline at school can be enhanced by home based contingencies i.e., a behavior changes intervention strategy to allow pupil's classroom behavior to earn reinforcers provided by parents.

- Parents and teachers should model and enforce appropriate behaviors. The environment at home and the entire school community, if conducive enough, can allow the African child to learn effectively because they need to learn not only their school curricular but their cultural values. These values if well imbibed by the child at an early age will help to foster a balance personality in the child.

Some of the Guidelines Parents can utilize in Building a Child's Personality and Self-concept.

- Encourage creativity by raising children for trying, using their imagination intelligence and playfulness.

- Encourage children to talk about their feelings and ideas even if they are different from ours.

- Make children feel special by spending time doing things with them and reminding them that they are special.

- Help children do assignments in order to re -enforce school work.

- Help children to feel wanted by showing them love such as in hugging.

- Make them feel important by sharing your feelings and ideas with them. Discuss family and community events with them.

- Give them tasks to do at home so that they feel important as part of the family. Involve them in planning family activities and outings.

- Give them chances to make choices and assist them to understand what happens when they make choices.

- Involve children in doing basic chores in the house and to fully participate in family projects.

● Link children back to their cultural background and instill values in them that can transform them into culturally balanced humans. By doing so they will flourish and be self -actualize. These include teaching them the dialect, customs and traditions which will form their identity and personality.

● Discuss your beliefs with them so that they also understand what they believe.

● Help them to set goals and discuss what they want out of life.

● Be consistent in having family time and meetings whereby they are always reminded of their expectations as members of that family and try to discuss any change of a family rule with them.

Conclusively, consistent with recent work proposing links between parenting and personality development (Pomerantz & Thompson, 2008). The researcher proposed that parental warmth and support would promote positive personality development during child development and thus promote human flourishing. The current findings suggest that both parent personality and the quality of parenting behaviors may play an important role in personality development during childhood.

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