Original scientific paper UDK:159.922.7:342.7-053.3/.6 DOI:10.7251/ZCMZ0122575B

THE EFFECT OF DECISION-MAKING ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROTECTION OF THE CHILD

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Abstract: Child development and protection can be affected in the parenting of a child. Parents' responsibility in the protection of children can positively or negatively impact the development of children. Research on the socio-cultural contributions of parenting involving parents' decisionmaking process has been few. This study explores the views and experiences of parents on how sociocultural values influence parents' decisions on the development and protection of the child. Using data collected in Benin City, Nigeria, the researcher looked at the influence of socio-economic factors on parents' decision-making process toward the child. A focus group discussion with five parents and an in-depth interview with four parents were utilised in the research. The investigation considers how cultural values influence the decision-making process of parents on the development and protection of the child. The study further investigates the impact of child rights law on the development and protection of children. While parent's responsibility is to protect the rights of their children until they are old enough to take responsibility for their lives, according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, however, investigation reveals that parents most often overlook the rights of their children and considers their own right due to the socio-economic influence on their decisionmaking process. Thematic analysis was employed in analysing the data. Improved understanding of the cultural norms involved in the decision-making process of parents in relation to the development and the protection of children was found to be relevant in the study. Government provision of inclusive support to parents to boost the economic stability of households is found to aid in implementing policies and practices that will improve parents' decision-making process in meeting the need for their children's development and protection.

Keywords: Child development, Child protection, Child rights, Decision-making process, Parental responsibility, Socio-cultural and Socio-economic values.

Introduction

Children are valuable assets and sources of joy not only for their parents and immediate families, but for society as a whole. They have rights that must be protected as the future hope and leaders of tomorrow. They must be cared for and nurtured in order to reach their full potential and contribute to the development of the society (Akwara, Soyibo & Agba, 2010). Children's rights are rights that ensure their survival, development, protection, and meaningful participation in society. These rights have been violated throughout history. Young children are employed in industries, recruited into the army during wars, trafficked in the commercial sex industry, and a large number have died as a result of malnutrition. These violations and abuses prompted the creation of the Child. The Child's Rights and Welfare Charter was established in 1990, and the Child's Rights Act was enacted in 2003 (Akwara, Soyibo & Agba, 2010). According to these statutes, children's rights have been established in order for them to have legal force. Prior to the passage of the Child's Rights Act in 2003, Nigeria's

legal framework for the protection of children's rights was weak and disjointed. Laws pertaining to children were not child-specific, nor did they adequately protect children's rights (Ladan, 2004). The federal constitutional arrangement places issues concerning children in state legislatures rather than the National Assembly, making it difficult to establish an adequate legal framework applicable throughout Nigeria (Akwara, Soyibo & Agba, 2010).

Children are generally not matured and are often unaware of some or all of their rights. Where they are aware that such legal rights exist, they must sometimes compete with adults who have the additional benefits of age maturity and increased knowledge, in comparison to exposure and income-generating abilities. Children who are mostly dependent, young in age, frail in frame rely on adults for food and care (Akinbola, 2007). In Nigeria, the most important legal recognition of a child's rights is that provided for in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999). It safeguards all Nigerians' fundamental human rights. Furthermore, the Child's Rights Act (2003) expressly states that all fundamental rights provided in the CFRN (1999) shall apply to the child, in addition to the specific provisions of the said Act. The Child's Rights Act of 2003 is Nigeria's most recent and comprehensive legislative attempt to protect children's rights. It aims to protect Nigerian children from all forms of child abuse, including child labour, child trafficking, and abuses not specifically mentioned in the Act. Other laws contain some provisions for the protection of Nigerian children. Examples of this can be found in various sections of the criminal and penal codes. These rights establish the necessary standards for human protection.

Parents encourage their children to think critically about moral and cultural values. The moral and cultural value of being obedient and respectful to adults in general, and especially to parents, encourages children to become involved in economic activities in order to positively contribute to the household (Boyden & Crivello, 2012). The delicate issues of differences in values and beliefs are an important part of community work that is negotiated within the community in most African societies (Axner, 2009). The need for a good understanding of issues relating to culture, traditions, and/or practises within the lived experiences of children involved in socio-economic activities is critical in helping to develop and implement policies that will improve the overall well-being of every member of a family and the people in a community (Maluleke, 2012).

Socio-cultural values and child protection

Culture has different meanings in different contexts and is a complicated and potentially relativistic socially constructed issue (Asemah, Ekhareafo & Olaniran, 2013). The definition of culture shifts with the social and historical context of the time, and each individual is shaped by their experiences and interactions (Zou, Tam, Morris, Lee, Lau & Chiu, 2009). Parents' general attitudes, as well as specific beliefs, thoughts, and feelings activated during parenting, are a major determinant of their children's behaviour. These have a significant influence on behaviour (Grusec & Danyliuk, 2014). Researchers have revealed that what is considered a reasonable level of control varies depending on the socio-cultural context (Chen, Fu & Zhao, 2014).

Cultural patterns and local traditions are assumed to influence parental decisions (Webbink, Smits & Jong, 2012). Parents generally consider whether or not to involve their children in economic activities (Arat, 2002; Webbink, Smits & Jong, 2012). According to Webbink, Smits & Jong (2012), parents' decision-making processes are guided by the costs and benefits for the parents, their family, and the children on whose behalf the decisions are made. According to Fife (2013), parental power is the most sensitive issue in socio-economic discourse, and it is difficult for outsiders to understand the power dynamic between cultures. Fife (2013) described all children as being placed in a position of dependency and vulnerability within their family, which is reflected at all levels of society. The natural vulnerability of infancy gives rise to a structured vulnerability in early childhood that limits older children's familial and social position and independence. This socially constructed state of dependence continues to make children vulnerable, powerless, and potentially endangered (James & James, 2008).

Cultural practices are reflected in the values and beliefs that members of a community hold across generations, and there are specific cultural practises and values that are held globally by every social

group (Maluleke, 2012). Some of these cultural practises and values may be beneficial to members of each group, while others may be detrimental (Maluleke, 2012). Schwartz (2008) proposed a representation of shared ideas in the context of what society believes is good, right, and desirable when defining cultural values. Individuals' attitudes and behaviours are guided by their exposure to cultural values in their living environment, which provides incentives and disincentives (Schwartz, 2008). According to Fetuga, Njokama, and Olowu (2005), the influence of cultural values in childcare may also be used to explain the high prevalence of economic exploitation of children in some towns in Nigeria, in which the local people of those towns are known to be very hardworking. This attitude is shared by the majority of people in the country's south, where parents introduce their children to the family's business at a young age. This is because it is culturally significant for children to have knowledge and skills that will provide them with a secured future, just as it is culturally significant for children to be able to manage when they become adults (Kaomba, 2013).

Cultural values have the ability to shape the relationships of groups within a society by guiding the attitudes of every member of the group (Schiefer, 2013). Values are based on ethical actions that entail comprehensive preference centred on the right path towards successful action or outcome, reflecting a person's ability to distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong, beautiful or ugly, useful or useless (Ogbujah, 2014). While cultural values are assumed to direct the thinking of various individuals in society (Schiefer, 2013), individual values are perceived to provoke a specific type of attitude that results in specific types of behaviour (Ogbujah, 2014).

The influence of socio-cultural values on the decision-making process of parents

African traditional practice often encourages economic exploitation of children. This is because it is widely accepted in the developing world, particularly in Africa, that children are expected to work (Children and Childhood Report, 2008). People's activities are influenced by cultural traditions in general (UCW, 2007). Socio-economic activities of children are most often influenced by a variety of cultural values, one of which is religion. In Nigeria, there are various types of religion, each of which has different impact on individual cultural values. Individuals in the northern part of Nigeria have a more Islamic religious background than those in the south, which have a more Christian religious background (Suberu, 2009; Onapajo, 2012).

Umar (2006) and Aliyu (2006) argued in their separate studies in Northern Nigeria that the majority of children involved in socio-economic activities or child labour such as trading are from the Islamic religious group. While Omokhodion, Omokhodion, and Odusote (2006) and Omokhodion and Uchendu (2010) argued that children who engage in socio-economic activities in Nigeria are not always Muslims, Christians, or Traditional worshippers. According to Fetuga, Nkokama, and Olowu (2005), the percentage of children from Christian backgrounds involved in labour activity in the north is lower than in the south, and this has no relationship to the overall incidence and prevalence of child labour. Additionally, less value is placed on education for the girl child in the north as compared to the southern part of the country and in extreme cases, formal schooling is not expected of the girl child in many African cultures (Umar, 2006; UNICEF, 2007; Weimann, 2009).

Socio-cultural values in the south reflect some religious influences, such as obedience and respect, which can be traced back to a Christian or other religious background. As a multicultural country, the socio-cultural values of the Nigerian people are not always the same and are commonly observed in different ways in different parts of the country. Because the northern part of Nigeria is more populated with people of Islamic background than other religions, Islamic religious values predominate in their culture (Suberu, 2009; Onapajo, 2012). In a study conducted in Zaria, Aliyu (2006) claims that the number of children involved in begging is higher than that of other labour activities such as trading. She also stated that all of the children in her study who were involved in child labour belonged to the Islamic faith. While this could be due to the Islamic religious group dominating the population in her area of study, it could also be due to the religious practise of women seclusion in the northern part of the country (Weirmann, 2009). In most parts of Nigeria, women are expected to support themselves and their children financially (Lamidi, 2016), but due to restrictions on women's mobility in the

northern part of the country, women are unable to do so (Lamidi, 2016). This is due to the cultural and/or religious practice of purdah, which encourages wife seclusion (Weirmann, 2009), which can affect women's economic status and often places a significant economic burden on children (James and Prout, 2006; Corsaro, 2011). Women (mothers) are more likely to involve their children in labour activities that endanger their children's lives in order to help their mothers provide for the household. Furthermore, some of these children are given to Islamic leaders (imams) who will teach Islamic laws based on the Koran. In return, the children (also known as almajiris) engage in begging. The profits from this activity are distributed to the imams (Aliyu, 2006).

The Christian religion dominates the southern part of Nigeria, particularly Benin City, and there are no restrictions on women's physical mobility (Suberu, 2009; Onapajo, 2012); however, women are also inclined to involve their children in socio-economic activities or exploitation because they are often motivated by their socio-cultural and socio-economic background. While the Christian religious emphasis on respect and obedience from children may influence the socio-cultural factor, the socio-economic factor, particularly inequality, may influence the socio-cultural factor.

The impact of decision-making on the development and protection of the child

The study of parent cognitions, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings can help in better understanding of child development. Childcare cognitions influence parents' actions toward their children, either positively or negatively. These beliefs have been found to be good predictors of parenting behaviour because they reflect the emotional climate in which children and parents operate as well as their relationship and health (McCarthy, Crouch, & Skowvonski, 2013). To understand parents' decision-making process in regard to involving their children in socio-economic activities, cultural values must be considered in the context of the complex environment that influences such decisions. Nigeria, as a country with multiple languages and ethnic groups, diverse cultures but shared cultural values, presents children with complex challenges (Agbo, 2014). These are specific to the children's geographical area, religious affiliations, socio-economic status, and family background. Parents play an important role in their children's development and education as a whole because it is the parents' responsibility to oversee their children's physical and intellectual development until they are independent and ready to face the challenges of the society in which they live (Ardita, & Rabije, 2016). Mothers, for example, are more likely to attribute negative traits to children who exhibit ambiguous behaviour and perceive this behaviour to be intentional (Grusec & Danyliuk, 2014).

In the data collected in Benin City and analysed thematically, majority of the parents in the focus group described how they helped their own parents when themselves were growing up as they were involved in assisting their parents with their business. They explained that in the same way they assisted their parents, they also expect their children to assist them in their own business so their children can grow up to become responsible parents that will adhered to what they have learnt and from the experience gained they can also teach their own children in turn. Some other parent participants, however, believe that children's participation in economic activities to help their parents at their young age can have a negative impact on their children are introduced to different kinds of deviant behaviour where the boys may become involved in criminality such as robbery and the girls may become involved in prostitution. According to the findings, parents are not the only ones who make the decision to send their children to trade.

Children's involvement in socio-economic activities were also blamed on extended family members, including grandmothers. The majority of participants referred to parents' decision to place some of their children with their grandmothers as being influenced by cross-generational household practises in which there is mutual support for the well-being of their children in the family. Some of the children may prefer to live with their parents and siblings instead of their grandmothers. Some participants admitted that threatening to send their children to their grandmothers if they do not help them with their business, had been used as a threat to get the children to be involved in the economic exploitation

of their children. When discussing assistance from her daughter, one participant acknowledged this fact. She stated that the daughter has always been very reluctant to go to her grandmother's house. She explained that her daughter complained that her grandmother was too strict.

The Nigerian community's collective responsibility system, in which everyone in the family is responsible for the overall upbringing of every child, influences parents' decisions to entrust their children to grandmothers or other extended family members for care. In exchange, children help the adults who look after them with their business or house chores. Other participants concluded that some parents believe it is better and more profitable for themselves and their children to run the business together or alongside each other so that the parent can keep an eye on the child so that her child do not end up with the wrong people. Participants stated that there is the believe that it is more beneficial and profitable when children assist their parents in business without their parents' perception that the children sell more when they run their parents' business on their own, as more goods are sold and more profits are made in a shorter period of time. Buyers/customers prefer to buy from children who trade rather than adults, according to participants. The majority of participants emphasised the positive impact that socio-economic activities have on children's lives.

Contrary to the majority of participants' perceptions, a few believed that such activity would have a negative impact on the children and could endanger their lives. Although participants do not directly attribute these dangers to their children, they do recognise the dangers involved in the lives of children who economically exploited. However, some participants had mixed perceptions generally about children's participation in socio-economic activities. The participants believed that it would be good for children to trade in order to gain the numerous positive behaviours that would make them responsible, but also referred to the negative impact and dangerous outcome when the children trade. A few of the participants further stated that due to this, their children assist them only when they (the participants) are in the market trading, so that their children can be monitored. On the other hand, participants referred to girls becoming involved in behaviours that can jeopardise their future lives. Participants discussed how some girls are raped, while others are lured into dangerous relationships. Others end up as victims of sex slavery. One participant in particular believed that trading was the primary reason her daughter became pregnant and dropped out of high school.

Conclusion

In addressing the dynamics of the socio-economic activities of children it was revealed that child rights were not considered in the decision-making process of parents. Although policies were documented and acknowledged, implementations were hampered due to the government's consideration of parents' cultural values. When policies are implemented, social work practitioners need all-inclusive perspectives for intervention to succeed. The implementation of these policies should be coordinated with the provision of alternative means for parents to deter them from sending their children for socio-economic activities. This can be accomplished by providing social security for families, as is done in the majority of developed countries. The study emphasised more sensitization programmes aimed at parents, with explanations of the negative consequences of their parental decisions, can lay the groundwork for systemic change in the family and community.

Unchecked obstructions to rights experienced by children who are economically exploited include a lack of parental awareness of children's rights, parents' perception of their own rights versus the child's rights, and family businesses. It has been argued that parents frequently use cultural values such as respect and obedience to make their children feel obligated to them in meeting their financial needs. It was acknowledged that when there are no checks and balances in place regarding children's issues, parents can exploit them through their socio-economic activity. It was also acknowledged that when there are no boundaries or restrictions and barriers are not checked, a child may be denied the opportunity to attend school. Furthermore, it is essential that the child's interests should take

precedence over the interests of the parents. This can be accomplished by constantly informing parents about the long-term negative impact of their decisions on involving their children in socio-economic activities. It is also relevant that government should be able to bridge the gap between existing policies and policy implementation.

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UTICAJ ODLUČIVANJA NA RAZVOJ I ZAŠTITU DJETETA

Sažetak: U roditeljstvu djeteta može se utjecati na razvoj i zaštitu djeteta. Odgovornost roditelja u zaštiti djece može pozitivno ili negativno utjecati na razvoj djece. Malo je istraživanja o sociokulturnim doprinosima roditeljstva koji uključuju roditeljski proces donošenja odluka. Ovo istraživanje istražuje stavove i iskustva roditelja o tome kako sociokulturne vrijednosti utječu na odluke roditelja o razvoju i zaštiti djeteta. Koristeći podatke prikupljene u Benin Cityju u Nigeriji, istraživač je promatrao utjecaj socioekonomskih čimbenika na proces donošenja odluka roditelja o djetetu. U istraživanju je korištena diskusija u fokusnoj grupi s pet roditelja i dubinski intervju s četiri roditelja. Istraživanje razmatra utjecaj kulturnih vrijednosti na proces donošenja odluka roditelja o razvoju i zaštiti djeteta. Studija dodatno istražuje utjecaj zakona o pravima djeteta na razvoj i zaštitu djece. Iako je odgovornost roditelja štititi prava svoje djece dok ona ne postanu dovoljno stara da preuzmu odgovornost za svoj život, prema Konvenciji Ujedinjenih naroda o pravima djeteta, međutim, istraživanje otkriva da roditelji najčešće zanemaruju prava svoje djece te smatra vlastito pravo zbog socioekonomskog utjecaja na njihov proces donošenja odluka. U analizi podataka korištena je tematska analiza. Poboljšano razumijevanje kulturnih normi uključenih u proces donošenja odluka roditelja u vezi s razvojem i zaštitom djece pokazalo se relevantnim u studiji. Utvrđeno je da vladina inkluzivna potpora roditeljima za jačanje ekonomske stabilnosti kućanstava pomaže u provedbi politika i praksi koje će poboljšati roditeljski proces donošenja odluka u ispunjavanju potreba za razvojem i zaštitom njihove djece.

Ključne riječi: razvoj djeteta, zaštita djeteta, prava djeteta, proces donošenja odluka, roditeljska odgovornost, sociokulturne i socioekonomske vrijednosti.