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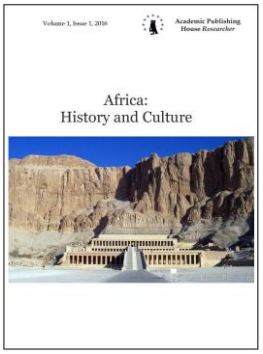

Casting a View at the Indigenous Ghanaian Parenting Styles: A Review of Variables, Outcomes and Trends

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Abstract

Parenting styles contributes to children's intellectual, social, and behavioural development. Culture is one key factor that affects the way parents train their children. This affects parent-child communication, how parents correct their children and even relate with them. This paper describes the specific variables, outcomes and trends within the indigenous Ghanaians parenting context. This paper reviewed the indigenous system of parenting in Ghana within its cultural context. Many books regarding childhood and parenting emanates from the Western world. Due to this, African cultural values like parenting styles are fading away with time. This paper therefore aims at helping readers and Africans to be cognizant of some indigenous Ghanaian parenting styles and how they can go a long way to help train children to become responsible adults. It will also add up to existing literature about African parenting styles with a special focus on Ghana.

Keywords: Indigenous Parenting Styles, Ghana, Culture, Community, Children.

Introduction

Parenting styles involves the various approaches parents use in bringing up their children. This refers to the parents' level of expectations, performance demands, and attention to rules as well as the style of discipline that the parents use to enforce their anticipations. Parents influence different aspects of their children's development in a variety of ways. This is because parents play significant roles in the upbringing of children.

According to Baumrind (1966), there are three types of parenting styles which include authoritarian parenting, authoritative parenting and permissive parenting. With authoritarian parenting, parents set rules and expect children to follow without exceptions. These parents give no reasons for the rules they set and mostly use punishment rather than consequences. Children have little or no involvement during challenges or problem solving. According to Baumrind (1991) these parents *"are obedience- and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation*" (p. 65). Although such children tend to follow rules, it is likely their self-esteem would be low; these children also tend to be hostile and aggressive because they might also be angry at their

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parents for punishing them rather than learning from their mistakes. They are also more likely to be anxious, withdrawn and unhappy (Baumrind, 1991).

Authoritative parents set rules for their children, expect them to follow but there are exceptions to these rules. They give reasons for the rules they set and mostly use consequences rather than punishment (Baumrind, 1966). These consequences are normally positive ones to reinforce good behaviour. This form of parenting encourages more freedom of expression which makes children more comfortable to express their opinions. Children are likely to develop a sense of independence, always happy and successful in life. It is also probable that such children will turn out to be confident and develop high self-esteem.

Baumrind (1966) explains permissive parents as parents who do not set many rules and therefore do not expect much from their children. They do not encourage their children to challenge themselves and are very lenient to their children which can lead to low persistence to challenging tasks. They encourage children to freely communicate with them about anything bothering their minds but they do not offer much discipline. They play more of friendly role than parental role and avoid confrontations. This according to Baumrind (1966) does not help children develop skills that can help them to solve problems and it leads to low level of academic performance. Such children tend to be rebellious and defiant. They are likely to also have poor emotion regulation.

Maccoby and Martin (1983) also discovered a fourth type of parenting style called Neglectful parenting. There is very little communication and these parents place few demands on their children. They are not involved in the lives of their children but provide them their basic needs. It is noteworthy that all the parenting styles have respective effects birthed within specific particular cultural settings.

Some studies have concluded that authoritative parenting style yields the healthiest and most emotionally and mentally stable children (Querido, Warner & Eyberg, 2002; Huang, & Prochner, 2003). However, Kelly and Tseng (1992), and Wang and Phinney (1998) found that Chinese mothers reported more physical punishment and yelling at the child. Chinese mothers were more authoritarian, not only with the use of corporal punishment, but also with directives or commands. Nonetheless, Chao (2001) explained that Chinese Americans use of authoritarian methods of discipline did not have any negative outcome on achievement. This was due to the community in which these children found themselves and how they had come to accept the training their parents give them as the best way they could grow up to become good and responsible adults in future. This also explains why Nyarko (2014) and Selin (2014) asserted that parenting styles were more socially constructed than Baumrind's perspective of universal constructs.

"Culture is a way of life of a group of people - the behaviours, symbols, values, beliefs that people accept, not really thinking about them and are passed by mostly communication and imitation from one generation to another" (Amos, 2013, p. 65).

In the African culture, parenting styles takes different forms which help the child to grow up to become a responsible adult (Hofstede, 2011; Schwartz, 2006). Thus, culture seems to play a major role in parenting, and may affect the way parents adopt different methods in raising their children. Consequently, there is the possibility that African parents in America are more likely to adopt the American popular style of parenting than their own local approach.

This paper examines most parenting practices done in Ghana. It also sought to define its respective similarities when compared with other African countries.

Method

The sources of information for this paper include; scientific studies, essays, and books. I used systematic review analysis to situate Ghana's parenting styles, related outcomes within their cultural milieu.

Results

Indigenous Ghanaian Parenting Styles and Community Spirit

Hofstede (2011) and Schwartz (2006) labels West African countries like Ghana as collectivistic where much is placed on family, community relationships and respect for the elderly. Children are expected to show respect and to greet every elderly person they meet whether they know them or not (Salm, & Falola, 2002). In effect, Ghanaians raise their children, communicate with them and correct them in a similar fashion in general.

Parenting is incomplete without looking at the family system as a whole. There are two types of families in Ghana. They include the nuclear and the extended families. The nuclear family consists of the father, mother and children, while the extended family consists of grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and other relatives aside the ones in the nuclear family. Bringing up a child in the African culture does not depend only on the nuclear family but the extended family as well (Adinlofu, 2009). Aside these families, any elderly person in a collectivistic community is also responsible for bringing up and correcting children who are not their own (Schwartz, 2006).

Consequently, every child belongs to the whole community and can be corrected by anyone who sees the child doing the wrong thing. This explains the popular African proverb *'a single hand cannot nurse a child'* which literally means that not only parents are responsible for raising up their children, but everyone in the community is responsible in the upbringing of children. For instance, Imoh (2013) interviewed some Ghanaian children concerning the last time they were punished by their parents or caregivers. One of the children's response was *"I was beaten about a month ago. My grandmother called my uncle that I have become too stubborn and do not listen to her anymore. So he came and called me to the room and asked me if everything my grandmother has told him is true. I didn't answer, and then he started lashing me"* (p. 477). From this excerpt, it can be seen that the biological parents of the child were not even involved in punishing him. This shows how people in the Ghanaian community fully accept responsibility to partake in the upbringing of children.

Indigenous Mediums of Ghanaian Parenting

Some of the mediums used to train children to become responsible adults include proverbs, folk tales and songs (Ampofo, & Boateng, 2016). Children are told stories by older ones. These stories teach about lessons in life and shape these children to live upright lives. Some of these lessons include; consequences of love, humility, pride, selfishness etc. *"In almost all parts of Ghana, the general practice is for mothers and their female relatives to be responsible for the early care, training and discipline of children. From between the ages of six (6) and ten (10) boys are generally expected to be brought up by their fathers often outside the home. Girls are raised by their mothers in domestic spaces, especially the kitchen"* (Ampofo, & Boateng, 2016).

According to Ampofo and Boateng (2016), most Ghanaian adolescents are trained to see female or male roles as differing. Girls are raised to accept home roles and give due respect to every male. Boys on the other hand are trained to take care of their mothers and sisters and play dominant roles in everything. These forms of training are done through direct instruction, rewards and punishment and by observing adult role models.

Indigenous Ghanaian Parenting Styles and Modalities for Correcting Children

According to Rudy and Grusec (2006), in collectivistic cultures like that of Ghana, children see parental authority and control as the norm. This is very different from individualist cultures where children see such authority and much control of parents as intimidating and rejecting. Children have to follow rules parents set for them without complaining. Unlike western cultures, physical punishment is one way parents use to correct their children in Ghana and in most African communities. Most children have been socialized to accept it as one of the best ways in which parents use to train them to be good people and responsible adults in the future (Imoh, 2013).

A study on Children's perceptions of physical punishment in Ghana, revealed that, children believe it is the responsibility of their parents to punish them physically when they *go wrong although they felt pains during the punishment. During the study, a child stated that "If we are not punished as children we will become bad adults"* (p. 479). Another child stated that, *"Physical punishment is used to correct children who go wrong. If it is not used, children will grow up to become corrupt adults, so it's good for parents to physically punish their children"* (p. 479). According to other Ghanaian children, if parents punish them physically, it shows they love them and want the best for them in future (Imoh, 2013).

Parents who do not punish their children in such ways are mostly seen not to be carrying out their duties as parents and in a way spoiling their children (Imoh, 2013). Parents have control over their children even when they become adults. To the African community, a child will continue to be child as far as his or her parent is alive and must always adhere to their parents' instructions without complain (Gyekye, 1996).

Discussion

Most of the ways in which African countries train their children are very similar. From the explanation of Baumrind's theory of parenting, it can be stated that most African countries use authoritarian parenting style, Selin (2014) posits that, the preferred Ghanaian parenting style is the authoritarian parenting style. According to Stevens, Vollebergh and Crijnen (2007), Moroccans are categorized as collectivistic and insists on submission to parents and the elderly without complain.

This explains why Pels and Nijsten (2003) assert that, most parents in Morocco use authoritarian parenting style. Oburu (2011) also points out that most parents in Kenya use authoritarian parenting style in bringing up their children. Most Nigerian parents physically punish their children by spanking them when they do the wrong thing (Soyingbe, 2014) which is similar to what most parents do in Ghana.

In most African countries like Ghana, Tanzania, Nigeria and Kenya, parents do not play friendly roles with their children as it is done in most part of the Western world. There is a limit to how a child can relate with his parent especially his father. Mostly boys are able to relate well with their fathers and girls are able to communicate easily with mothers than fathers. However, it is not easy at times for children to approach their fathers as they do with their mothers. This is because fathers are seen as the head of the family and everyone has to respect him and obey his commands without any complain. Communication with mothers is done easily because of the frequent contact children have with them.

It should be noted however that the effects of authoritarian parenting style outlined by Baumrind (1966) do not apply to all children. This is because of the culture they find themselves and how they have come to accept authoritarian parenting style as the best way their parents can train them to grow up to become responsible and respected adults.

Conclusion

This paper reviewed the indigenous system of parenting in Ghana within its cultural context. Many books regarding childhood and parenting emanates from the Western world (Tomlinson & Swartz, 2003). Due to this, African cultural values like parenting styles are fading away with time. This paper therefore aims at helping readers and Africans to be cognizant of some indigenous Ghanaian parenting styles and how they can go a long way to help train children to become responsible adults. It will also add up to existing literature about African parenting styles with a special focus on Ghana.

Implications

Studies about parenting should be done with regards to the culture in which the people find themselves. This will help to understand why people from different cultures use different ways in the upbringing of their children and how that affects their development. Story telling which depicts a lot of moral lessons should be re-visited including television programs like "by the fireside, concert party" popularly known in Ghana and other educative African cultural values that help train children to grow up as good adults. Most of the movies and story books are more focused on the western culture and gradually children are picking up with them.

One may ask, if these parenting practices still exist in Ghana and Africa as a whole? Due to the gradual infiltration of Western culture into the African setting, most of these parenting practices discussed above are fading away. Parents and neighbours in the community do not get time to tell children stories they can learn from because of their busy work schedules in order to cater for the needs of the family. On the other hand children have come to like the media than listening to stories. They rather prefer social media for instance Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter to name but a few. In recent times, I will like to hypothesise that most parents are more likely to strictly use authoritative parenting style in training their children which does not advise punishing children by using physical punishment.

Another possible thing researchers may like to look at is the existing socioeconomic impact on the indigenous parenting and family system. Most children grow up not knowing most of their extended family members because the socialization process that used to exist between the nuclear and extended family is gradually disappearing. Notwithstanding all these, some parents still go by the African cultural system of parenting. One aspect that is also fading away is the corporal punishment parents used to correct their children. This sometimes hurt the children and leaves

marks on their bodies for a long time. Some parents have realized that its negative aspect overweighed its positive aspect and have put a stop to it.

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