

Parental Nurturing and The Girl-Child

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Abstract

With under-15 year old girls accounting for more than 20% of Nigeria's population, implies that the girl child is vital to our development as a people. Cultural misconceptions about females, inequitable access to quality education and social disposition towards the girl child have been key areas of research and discourse. For ages, society has nurtured the impression that the girl child is inferior to her male counterpart; this standpoint has had negative implications on her person, her perspectives, and expectations in life. Parents, guardians and other adults play significant roles in the growth and development of the girl child. In the first place, parents are the child's first socialization agents, and they serve as mirrors through which the girl sees life and relationships. For this study, the authors examined the role parents play in shaping the life of the girl child and how the relationship can be enhanced to help the girl child live a better and more productive life. Issues such as parenting styles and parental socioeconomic status are considered as they relate to girl child outcomes in terms of personality, education, and emotional capital. This study suggests that parents and would-be parents be re-orientated to understand the equality of male and female gender, and not to look down on their female children. Also, the authors advise that the Biblical Spiritual Parenting (BSP) model should be integrated into the curriculum of elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools.

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Introduction

The girl-child is described as a potential functional member of her society, who needs to be properly trained and built up to actualise her aspirations and function effectively and efficiently. For these dreams and aspirations to be attained, the girl-child needs proper and functional education and parental nurturing. Most societies, especially developing ones, limit the extent to which girls discover and maximise their full potentials because of the limiting perspective of whom and what a girl child should be and do (Odeleye & Odeleye, 2018).

Over the years, the girl child's access to education in pre-independence Nigeria has been limited for multifarious reasons. For instance, northern Nigerian leaders were negatively disposed to western education and the southern schools did not have the capacity to absorb all possible students. In the early colonial period, girls' education was not as strong as the education of boys

because the missionaries were not interested in educating girls and the colonial government did not value the education of girls as much as that of boys. This is mainly because in British culture at the time, training for professional jobs like public service and clergy work was limited to men and the necessary education to achieve these professional jobs was thought to be wasted on women who would have no use for it in the future. Where schools for girls were established, it was for the wives or fiancés of their male workers (Osinbajo, 2016; Adebajo, 2020 in Odeleye, 2021). Historically, the girl-child was considered inferior to her male counterpart, thus limiting her social mobility. The girl child has also been a victim of cultural prejudices and several levels of oppression. Western Nigerians began to enjoy limited (mostly male-dominated) equitable access to formal education when the Premier of Western Region, Chief Obafemi Awolowo introduced the free primary education scheme in 1955, and that situation persisted till shortly after independence from Great Britain (Odeleye, 2020).

When colonial education was introduced in Southern Nigeria it was initially the sons of the Obas and their chiefs that were given the privileges to attend the schools (Odeleye, 2021). The Catholic missionaries pioneered western education in Nigeria in the late 15th century in Benin. A school was inaugurated at the Oba's palace in 1551 (Obasogie, 1980 in Odeleye, 2021). However, the slave trade and its attendant dehumanisation of Africa obliterated the gains of that initial effort. From the 1840s up to the early 1900s, formal education in Nigeria was provided by voluntary Christian organisations. The Wesleyan Methodist Mission in 1842 and Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1845 established two secondary schools in Badagry. In 1846, Church of Scotland established Hope Waddell Training Institute in Calabar. Schools were opened by the Baptist Mission in Lagos, Saki, Igboho and Ilorin. The Roman Catholic Church started Missionary activities in Lagos in 1868, while Qua Iboe Mission founded a school at Old Calabar in 1878. Methodist Mission Society established schools at Calabar and Owerri in 1892 (Chukwu, 1980 in Odeleye, 2021).

Science has concluded that a child's intelligence is derived from her mother (Creative health family, online). This underscores another reason why the girl child's education should be a top priority for all governments and people. The girl child will soon become a woman and birth our Nobel Prize winners and best scientists. Even though the girl child has the potential of becoming mother to nations, she is often berated as suitable only for marriage and the kitchen. Both religion and society are culprits in the African girl child's challenge. In Africa, social misconceptions about the girl child have continued to work against her emancipation. Child marriage, poverty, poor infrastructure, cultural practices, inequitable access to education, violence among families and lately, terrorism have prevented the girl child from maximizing the opportunities that education provides (Odeleye, 2018; Olawumi et al., 2018; Adebajo, 2020).

Even though elementary education is free and compulsory in Nigeria, only 67% of children may attend primary school. UNICEF reports that 1 out of 5 of out-of-school children globally is a Nigerian, and the girl-child is the worst affected due to social perception, especially in northern Nigeria that her place is in the kitchen.

UNICEF records that only 41% of eligible girls receive primary education in the north-east Nigeria, while in the north-west, only 47% of the girls will go to school. The high attrition of girls in education, occasioned by forced marriages is also a challenge (Odeleye, 2018). If a child is out of school for even a short time there is only a low chance, only about 25 per cent, that the child will ever return to school.

Parents as Primary Socialisation Agents of the Girl Child

Several socialisation agencies influence the girl child's behaviour: family, school, peers, social media, internet, religion, and significant others. Of all of them however, the family is the most important. Father, mother, siblings, and other members of the family are key factors in the overall development of the girl child. If the child's parents are available, they may have significant influence on the child's life outcomes. Parents' values and perspectives influence their children to a large extent. Parents are mirrors through which the girl child sees the world around her. Hence, it is important for parents to be intentional and authentic in raising their children. While it is true that adults are responsible for their life outcomes, it is essential to note that parents have an unquantifiable influence on their children's choices and patterns of growth, especially in the first seven years of life. The nature-nurture challenge plays out well in the girl child's life. Most of the time, the girl child may become just like her parents and the community in which she is raised. Thus, the place of parents in the growth and development of the girl child cannot be underestimated or overemphasised. With the Boko Haram terror attacks leaving several millions of Nigerians in refugee camps, healthcare, education, water, sanitation, and hygiene are more inadequate. While it is difficult to ascertain the extent of the devastation, children may be more negatively affected especially the girls.

Parental Influence on the Girl Child

In many ways, children reflect their parents, so parents need to ensure they live authentic lives that their children can emulate. Odeleye (2020), posits that offspring are more likely to become who their parents are than what they do or say. This implies that apart from instructing children on what to do and how to do it, parents must intentionally live lives that are above board. Even though parents are expected to demonstrate humanity, they should endeavour to cultivate a lifestyle of integrity, honour and diligence, traits which if modelled may be helpful in the overall growth and development of their children. Here, we consider two factors that influence ways parents bring up their children, parenting approaches and parental socioeconomic status.

Parenting Approaches

Different cultures and societies might have adopted different nurturing approaches based on their varying experiences and exposure. For most Nigerian middle class up to the 1990s, parents tended to be stern with their children and had high expectations of their wards. It was not uncommon for parents to instruct children with the following statement, "Ranti omo eni ti iwo 'se.", meaning "Remember the child of whom you are." Such statements continued to reverberate in the minds of young people and enforced such reverence in them that incidences of deviant behaviour such as stealing, immorality and murder was rare. Child upbringing was also somewhat communal, as members of the community watched over the children, irrespective of who their parents were. Incidentally, that approach had some remarkable results in that it arrested youth restiveness and helped to engender some measure of peace and decency in the society.

With economic recession and globalisation, many parents may be too busy seeking for the good life, leaving their children to social forces. The implication of parental absence in the home is that the children may now need to discover answers to life's questions independently. Peers, social media, and teachers technically assume parental roles for the children. No wonder teenage pregnancy, depression, suicide, and internet fee fraud (Yahoo Yahoo) have become the order of the day.

Baumrind (1967) presented three parenting styles, namely Authoritarian Parenting Style, Authoritative Parenting Style, and Permissive Parenting Style. Authoritative parenting is characterised by democratisation of family life where the parents and the child take decisions together. The child is not coerced but is educated to understand the reason for parental action. The authoritarian parent also expects so much of the child and does not have patience for mutual discussion with the child. A child brought up by this kind of parent may be unsure of themselves. Permissive parenting as the name infers allows the child to have their way in many decisions in life. Such children may turn out to be socially immature and may exhibit some antisocial behaviour. Good as Baumrind's perspective seems, it is limited in the sense that God is not involved in the upbringing of the child.

Parental Socio-economic Status

Parents social class may also affect the way the girl child is raised. Parental socio-economic status has correlation with academic outcomes of children. Soharwardi et al., (2020) discovered that parents' socioeconomic status has positive impact on academic performance of students. Poor parents are limited in their provision for and protection of their children.

On another level, Odeleye (2017) suggested that the political class may only be a mirror of their respective parentage and education. For those at the echelon of leadership struggling with integrity issues, their home and/or school background experiences may be their encumbrance. A Yoruba parlance says "*Ohun ti eye ba je lo ngbe fo*" (Whatever the bird eats is what gives it strength for flight). One can give only what one has.

Asaju, Arome & Mukaila (2014) noted that moral failure cuts across the Nigerian society without gender discrimination. It was pointed out that most of our public office holders are not capable of running their own homes, but have manipulated their ways into high leadership positions through the already corrupt electoral process (Agomuo 2013). "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" When children are raised out of dysfunctional homes, it may be difficult for them to live functional lives as adults. Jenkins et al., (1993) submitted that adult children from dysfunctional families tended to adopt dysfunctionality as a way of life. The Holy Bible says that people aspiring to public leadership should be such that have their home under control and with well brought-up children (1 Timothy 3:4), because children would only become like their parents.

A Call for Godly Parenting

The Holy Bible attests to a divine conception of humanity, and that everything seen is ruled by the spiritual (Genesis 1:1). If the first humans were born by the Supreme Being (God), everything beyond the scope of humanity should be referred to Him. Odeleye (2017), suggested that parents should return to the Almighty God for succour and redirection on how to raise and nurture their children. While advocating for Biblical Spiritual Parenting (BSP) approach to parenting, he maintained that humanity is firstly spiritual, and that the spiritual rules the physical. He submitted that nurturing a child is the most important vocation for humans since it is at the heart of procreation and generational sustenance. Odeleye's BSP may be an answer to the "apparent failure of traditional parenting styles as presented by Diana Baumrind (1967) and Maccoby and Martin (1983).

BSP is the art of guiding one's offspring to live the total life incorporating the spiritual, the intellectual, the social, the emotional and the physical health. It is the utilisation of biblical ordinances and principles to train, disciple and establish the person being parented. The BSP is the Holy Spirit at work in human vessels to activate Jesus Christ of Nazareth for everyone to see (Odeleye 2014).

Since parenting is a high impact vocation and may be a key influencer of the girl child's life outcomes, it is expedient that parents and would-be parents be trained in the art of nurturing. However, such training should be founded on the Holy Bible which is the divine manual for humanity.

People get trained in many vocations in life, but parenting has not been one of those areas of concern for government and communities in Africa. Most of the time, parents begin to learn parenting on-the-job. As the children begin to come, parents begin to engage parenting patterns of their parents, which most of the time were not the best. It is reported that most Nigerian parents prefer authoritarian (also known as dictatorship) parenting style, which might have been handed down to them by their parents.

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