

# THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD REARING PRACTICES IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*The study critically examined the significance of effective child nurturing practices in Delta State and the consequences on the individual and the society in general. Also, it evaluated the place of the family and the community as catalysts in the whole process of raising a child from infancy. The study which adopted the Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs also utilized the in-depth interview, focus group discussions and the 51-item child-rearing practice scale for data collection. It, however, revealed that other members of the family shared in the task of child upbringing yet, the mother is seen as the primary caregiver for the infant. It further revealed that no agency can be a complete substitute for family life due to the care and training it affords the child. The study recommended that parents should be diligent in providing the basic needs of their children during the early years to enhance the overall development of the child. It further recommended that contemporary parents should embrace the traditional child-rearing practices, the constraints notwithstanding.*

**Keywords:** Rearing, Basic needs, development, parents, norms, Potentials, etc.

## **I. Introduction**

The importance of effective child-rearing practices and the place of families and parents in providing their wards with basic needs are very crucial for nation-building and sustainable development of a country and Delta State in particular. Since the family is the foundation of society the children nurtured in such families could have positive or adverse effects on the developmental tone of such a society. These children that will eventually become the youths have been differently referred to as the "leaders of tomorrow", 'future hope of the nation' and described as "the engine room of any society". Ovwigho and Ifie (2009) observed that the strategic roles of the youth in the national building cannot be overemphasized. This is because countries all over the globe depend on its youthful population to effect desired changes in their industrialization drive.

Many scholars have expressed concern about Nigeria's continued survival as a nation due largely to violence. Igbokeet. al. (2015); Ewnweremadu (2014); Vanguard (2014) and Abayomi (2003) have reported that most parts of Nigeria, particularly the Niger Delta region, have witnessed one form of violence or the other with dire impact on human life and the socio-economic development. The Militant Islamic Movement Boko

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Haram is active in northern Nigeria, the emergence of ethnic militias and self-determination groups such as O'dua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa People's Congress (APC), Bakassi Boys, Egbesu Boys, Niger Delta Volunteer force to name but a few. Very worrisome is the fact that significant populations of the youths have been recruited into these groups. A sound and proper child-rearing practice at infancy by parents and families will be a more sustainable and long term solution to building a violent free Delta state and Nigeria in general which will in turn usher in sustainable development, as no meaningful development can take place in an atmosphere of insecurity and violence.

Wendorf (2004) sounded a note of warning to parents, noting that they have in their hands the ability to create a peaceful culture or a violent one with the level of love and care that children are given during their early years; which determine the child's relationship to society and himself or herself. Wendorf stressed that the spate of avoidable violence in dates back to the socialization process of the child in the early years of life. The disruption done to economic activities, communication, loss of life, property and investment from within and outside is enormous. Yearly budgetary allocations for curtailing insecurity and crisis in Delta state are disturbing as this impede seriously on development efforts. The central role of child-rearing practice is responsibility training for the child so that the child will be useful to himself or herself and society. To achieve this aim, Ogunnaike (2003) asserted that caregivers should send their children on errands, which include fetching objects, purchasing items and assignment of household duties. Apart from instilling the sense of responsibility, it enhances the development of the cognitive, social and economic competences of the child.

## **II. Literature Review**

According to Okunola (2002), the child is highly cherished not only by parents and families but also by the community in general in Nigeria. It constitutes the most valuable resources to all because it is with the child that the continuity of the family stock is assured. Thus considerable premium is placed on children and their proper upbringing. Okunuola (2002) further observed that it is equally the cultural norm that the care and upbringing of the child are shared by all family members and the community alike. Super and Harkness (1997); Okunola (2002); Saramma and Thomas (2010) see child-rearing as the upbringing of children by parents or their substitutes and embodies practices that are culture-bound. Apart from describing the ways parents nurture their children, it encompasses the nature of control, level of care and emotional colour of the home (Iliya, 2000). He contended that child nurturing is the most daunting responsibility for a mother particularly in the infancy of the child through specific forms of behaviour. Evans and Myers (1994) observed that successful child-rearing is auxiliary to the child's total development and the realization of self-esteem.

Similarly, the parenting patterns affect the behaviour and psychological development of the child and how he conducts himself in life later (Darling and Steinberg, 1993). Baumrind (1996) identified different strategies of child-rearing and typical parenting styles such as; attachment, permissive, authoritarian, authoritative and uninvolved parenting styles. Authoritarian parents are rigid and punitive and value unquestioning obedience from their children while the permissive parents outline laws or inconsistent directive and although warm, require little of them while authoritarian parents are firm and setting limits for their children. As the children get older, these parents try to reason with and explain things to them. Baumrind (1996)

however, contended that every style is associated with benefits and uses. He further asserted that while one style might be acceptable in a culture, no style is most appropriate in child-raising; as these styles are alternated as the case demands while the child grows. Harris (1998); Reeve (1992); Bruer (1999) warned that irrespective of the parenting style adopted by parents, the expectation in child-rearing, is for caregivers to meet the yearnings of the child.

In Africa particularly Nigeria, even though members of the extended family and community members also constitute vital persons in the child care process, the mother is the primary caregiver for infants (Arma-klemesu et al, 2000). The central issues in child-rearing revolve around maternal activities that promote the physical, intellectual and psycho-social development of the child so that they can grow up to express their full potentials. Akinware and Ojomo (1993); Saramma and Thomas (2010) summed up the major components of child-raising during infancy as bathing, feeding, protection against accidents and injuries, showing affection, socializing, monitoring and evaluation of growth and development. Babatunde (1992) and Zeitlin et al (1995) noted that child nurturing in Yoruba can be seen as a purposive attempt to inculcate in the child from infancy how to relate with others in society appropriately, to give helping hands to others and be respectful and responsible.

Avhurengwi (2018) stressed that at the core of traditional child-rearing practices was the firm belief that children that are properly raised should be identified with good morals, be respectful, be responsible citizens and should have the capacity to endure challenges. Evans and Meyer (1994) however observed that traditional childbearing practices have been changing due to cultural evolution, migration to cities, urbanization, foreign norms and values, western education, changes in the structure of the families and so on.

### **III. Theoretical Underpinnings**

#### **3.1 Abraham Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of Needs**

Human behaviours can be explained through the intricate processes of motivation. Human "drives" and "needs" are key components of this process because motivation encompasses an unsatisfied need that results, tension which provoke drives in an individual (Uhiara and Osuji, 2010 cited in Umera et al 2015). This theory recognizes sets of human basic needs and arranges them into a pyramidal hierarchy; noting two types of needs- the basic and meta-needs. The hierarchy of needs propounded by Maslow has been utilized in a variety of contexts and this study, applicable to a growing child focusing on five levels of human development; for the attention of parents particularly at infancy when incapable of making provision for these needs themselves (Maslow, 1970) and Cambell, 2014).

The place of parents in providing their children with these basic needs through child-rearing practices is very pertinent in nurturing the child. Wendorf (2004) identified this role and asserted that a baby whose needs are regularly attended to by positively relaxed parents; who also understand him/her, learns that he/she can rely on people. Also, the baby learns that he/she has a voice. As rightly noted by Igbokweet. al. (2015), this early parental safety attention builds trust, confidence and empathy. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is made up of two categories; the instinctual needs which include: physiological, safety and security, social needs, self-esteem and self-actualization while the social category is growth needs. Wendorf (2004) warned that parents have a

herculean task in their hands; the ability to produce a violent culture or a peaceful one that can be conducive for meaningful development or retard economic growth, depending on the way the children are nurtured. He further noted that our future rest in the hands of the children we raise, the values we inculcate in them and how they see their relationship with the world. The continued existence of the world is predicated on how we deem fit to raise the children.

To reverse the destructive path facing our state today: kidnapping, corruption, fraud, violence, criminality, rape, armed robbery, violence and lawlessness, something urgent must be done. We must have value for our children, give proper nurturing and assist them in sustaining their link to humanity and the society (Igbokove, et al 2015). Prescott (2010) observed that the main cause of human violence is traceable to lack of "touching and stroking during the formative years of life". He, therefore, counselled that we must go back to our biological, natural and instinctive ways of parenting. The lesson drawn from the Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs is that the relevance of parents and families in providing basic care for their wards; for the future well-being of society cannot be overemphasized.

#### **IV. Methodology**

This study which was conducted in Delta State, utilized the in-depth interview, focus group discussions and the 51-item child Rearing Practice Scale (CRPS) adapted from the child Rearing Practice Scale formulated by Saramma and Thomas in 2010. This scale was used to assess child-rearing practices under the five domains of child nurturing. These domains during infancy include feeding, cleaning, protection, providing adequate infant stimulation, monitoring, growth and development. A sample size of 450 respondents was selected through random and systematic sampling techniques to guarantee adequate representation of all shades of the population size. Delta state has 25 local government areas with a significant population found in the rural areas and the few urban centres. Three local government areas from each of the senatorial districts in the state were selected for this study to make valuable generalizations on the entire population of the state. Data collected were analyzed using the simple percentage interpretation.

#### **V. Results/Findings**

The study showed that child-rearing is predominantly the family responsibility and depending on the family type, children are also cared for in day-care or child care centres. 78% of the respondents identified the family as the significant agent of child nurturing while 22% affirmed child care centres. Similarly, 75% of the respondents reported that no agency can be a replacement for family life due to the care, intimacy and the discipline it offers. However, 25% of the respondents ranked daycare centres as a replacement for the family because of the nature of their jobs and family types. A significant number of respondents noted that the overall development of the child is dependent on the successful child nurturing as indicated by 86% while 14% identified "destiny" as the major factor responsible for the overall development of children. 78% of the respondents observed that proper child nurturing practice is the answer to the building of a violent-free culture in Delta State while 22 % asserted that the degree of care and love a child had in early life, dictates the

relationship with the society. 64% of the respondents also noted that child-rearing has a significant influence on the attitude of the child towards accepting norms while 36% reported the significant influence of child-rearing style on children's attitude towards crime, violence and cultism in Delta State. Every person in the community is regarded as a parent in the traditional child nurturing setting; indicated by 76% while 24% reported that extended members of the family play insignificant roles in child upbringing, as most children reared by grandmothers and grandfathers including uncles and so on, never fare well in life. 35% of the respondents also reported that traditional child-rearing practices are on the decline.

## **VI. Discussion**

The findings showed that child nurturing is predominantly the family's responsibility and depends on the family type as well. This is in line with the findings of Saramma and Thomas (2010); Iliya (2000); Otite (2006) that child-rearing refers to the nurturing of the child by parents or parents' substitutes. Darling and Steinberg (1993) observed that infant parenting entails caring for the basic needs of the child but as the newborn grows from infancy, the parental care style differs among families. Baumrind (1966) noted that all parental styles of nurturing the infant has uses and benefits but vary from culture to culture. Prescott (2010) observed that when a child is born he or she is utterly dependent, cannot speak, eat or move without support. They are also emotionally dependent on their parents to affirm their existence, to guide their emotional responses and give required love and intimacy.

From the foregoing, the functions of the parents and families as caregivers to the children is imperative for the future wellbeing of society. Armar-klemesu et al. (2000) also stressed that the mother in the family is the primary caregiver to the child. Agbo (1997) also corroborated the findings by asserting that the family structure is the deciding factor, in a wide range of the child's behaviour which in turn impacts on; the academic performance, emotional and psychological stress, attention disorder, misbehaviour and so on.

Nwaham (2006) argued dispassionately that the family environment has great consequences on the performance of both children and parents. That many children perform exceedingly well in life because their home and family environment, have afforded them with the needed care and preparation. The findings of this study also lend credence to the findings of Oduolowu (2000) that no agency can be a complete substitute for the family with regards to the intimacy, education, care, discipline and training it offers. This conclusion was based on his research in Akwalbom state in Nigeria, where he conducted a study on how family type and parent type affected child-rearing practices of parents with children in daycare centres in the state. He further noted that while parents are at work (in offices, in the markets, in industries or on the farm), daycare centers cannot replace parents when it comes to providing adequate care and supervision for the children.

The findings of this study are supported by the findings of Ajiboye (2012) that even if a child is born by different biological parents, every individual in the community is seen as a parent. Ajiboye noted that many African nations have similar aphorism, which speaks about the child being the child of the community. All hands must be on deck to raise the child appropriately (Ajiboye, 2012). Wusu and Isiugo- Abanibe (2006) noted that in the extended family system in Nigeria, child nurturing support, are offered by close relations in terms of finance, time, emotion and maternal support. The cost of child-rearing and training is the concern of family

members while in contemporary society with the nuclear family system, family members no longer contribute to child-rearing thereby leaving child nurturing costs to the biological parents.

The findings of this study are further supported by Enweremadu (2014) who reported that since 1999 several parts of Nigeria, particularly the Niger Delta region have contended with one violent conflict to another; occasioned by devastations effects on life and property and socio-economic development. Vanguard (2014) reported the emergence of Boko Haram while the Center for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN) Foundation (2014) viewed domestic violence as another aspect of violence in Nigeria and by extension, Delta state. Abayomi (2003) also reported the emergence of ethnic militias and self-determination groups such as O'odua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa People's Congress (APC), Bakassi Boys, Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA) and so on. The disturbing dimension of this development is that a significant population of the youths has been absorbed into these violent groups in Nigeria, particularly in Delta state. Wendorf (2004) warned that parents have in their hands the capability to create a violent culture or a peaceful one.

The answer to building a violent-free culture in the study area rests on sound and proper child-rearing practices at the early stages of the child by families and parents. Hoffman (1963) and Bornstein (2002) asserted that the bad fruits and disappointment being reaped today can be traced to bad seed sown by parents during the early stages of the child growth; rather than bemoaning the disruptive behaviour of children of today.

Evans and Myers (1994); Harris (1988); Reeve (1992); Bruer (1999) also supported the findings of this study with their reports that successful child nurturing is vital for the overall development and self-esteem realization of the child. Hamza (2011) averred that parental background, inadequate oral instructions at home and the way the child is raised, could be critical factors in joining cult groups. Too much control by parents with myriads of rules could bring about tension and anxieties while a child with too much freedom could be prey for cult membership and other social vices. Caldwell (1990) cited in Maliki, (2009) noted that in the past, societal norms and values pervaded the society through the upbringing of infants and adults in the family, schools and religious institutions.

## **VII. Conclusion**

At the fore of traditional child nurturing practices was the firm conviction that children properly raised should have good morals, be respectful, be responsible citizens and should have the capability to meet challenges in life. In Nigeria particularly Delta states, even though other members of the family share in the responsibilities of child upbringing, the mother is considered the primary caregiver for the newborn. This maternal responsibility promotes the child's physical, intellectual and psycho-social developments to enable the child to realize his or her full potentials later in life. Apart from consisting of practices derived from cultural dictates and beliefs, it is seen as the most challenging responsibility for a mother during the early years of the infant. It is pertinent to note that no agency can be a complete replacement for family life as it affects the education given to the child, care, training and the counsel it offers the infant.

Families and parents have in their hands the capability to create a violent culture or a peaceful one depending on the ways they raise their wards. It, therefore, behooves on parents to cherish the young, nurture

and assist them in sustaining links to humanity to change the current negative and destructive path of some of our youths.

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