



THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PARENTING AND PARENTING STYLES: IMPLICATION ON THE BEHAVIOURAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS

¹Nalong Henry Yale, ²Oyerinde Oyedoyin Abiola

¹Department of Sociology, University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. Email: nalongyale@gmail.com

²Department of Sociology, University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. Email: oyerindeoa@unijos.edu.ng

Abstract

The paper is primarily focused on the role of women in parenting and its implication on the behavioral and mental health outcomes of children and adults. It focuses on the effects of parenting styles on the behavior of children and their mental health. The study utilizes the qualitative explorative methods of investigation, where literature is explored from books, and articles published in journals and online media which were analyzed to arrive at a conclusion. The study shows a relationship between parenting style and mental health of both the children and their parents.

Keywords: Behavior, Mental Health, Parenting, Parenting Styles, Resilience.

Introduction

The woman has overtime proven to be the pioneer and pillar of every society from time immemorial. In most cases, she is the central personality in the home because she holds the key to sustainable development and the quality of life in every home. According to Malcolm X, a mother is universally considered the first teacher of the child. Through intimate bonding, she nurtures the child's distinct personalities (traits) and attitudes which play a vital role in shaping his/her character.

Biologically, a child is a person between birth and puberty. The United Nations convention on the 'right of a child' defines a child as a human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

Every society has great love for children; the variations are mostly in their political and economic system. For example, agricultural societies see having children as a good thing because they contribute directly to the economy of the family. Industrial and post industrial societies see children as objects and a source of affection and love, and a way to avoid loneliness because of the psychological benefits they provide their parents (Jones & Brayfield, 1997).

The value society place on having children is high. The Judeo-Christian traditions depict children as a blessing and childlessness as a curse or punishment that is why having children is portrayed as important to self fulfillment and necessary for the future survival of the society. (Newman & Grauerholz, 2002).

Oftentimes, the quality of life of any family is determined by the kind of mother it has. The entire burden of bearing children and larger part of training them lies on the woman. Because of her intimate and sustained contact with the child, she is the first to teach the child the laws of the land, the manner of men, their moral codes, their norms and values etc. Although children are socialized into the norms and values of the society by different agents, the mother plays the most important and impactful role in the lives of her children.

A mother is the female parent of a child. Mothers are women who inhabit or perform the role of being some relation to their children, who may or may not be their biological offspring. In other words, she can be referred to as a person who has given birth to a child or who has responsibility for the care of children. The mother usually stands to be the most influential person in the life of the



children.

The mother plays the role of a chef, teacher, event planner, laundry, counselor, finance manager, health care provider, et cetera. No wonder Chinweizu (1990) posits that a man is influenced as a child by his mother, as an adolescent by his girlfriend, as a husband by his wife. Having said that, it is important to note that every woman raises her children based on one among the four parenting styles postulated by Baumrind (1967) and each method has an implication in the life of the children. These parenting styles include Authoritarian, Authoritative, Permissive and Free Range.

What is parenting?

Parenting is a process where a child is nurtured, cared for, socialized and also prepared for their eventual roles as parents and members of the society. Becoming a parent can be considered one of the most treasured human experiences. Although women and men may experience parenthood differently, mothers are traditionally wired to take care of and nurture their children. (Stephens, 2009).

Newborns are not born humans; they have to learn proper behavior that is expected by the society they live in (Davis, 1940). Parents are saddled with the responsibility of transmitting their cultural norms and values from one generation to the other. These norms and values are the cognitive dimension of attitudes, guiding individual's behaviour and choices. When parents raise their children, they act and make choices for them following their own perceptions of what is desirable or what they positively value for their child's development (Goodnow & Collins, 1990). Parental beliefs are important aspects of parenting and family micro system, together with factors such as parent's history and education, socioeconomic status, and culture. Parents are to amongst other things protect, feed and provide personal care for their children from birth to adulthood.

Parenting paradigm is habitually based on how the parent was parented. Some could be derived

from self help books or formal/informal education. Hence, it is important to note that children require effective parenting and parenting style can affect everything about the child and influence him or her for the rest of his/her life.

The Role of Women in Parenting

It has been noted that there are significant gender differences in parenting. Although families have changed from the stereotypical 1950s stay-at-home mother and working father, and the shift has been towards egalitarian attitudes towards parenting, the woman still is in charge of the taking care of the household. The whole burden of child bearing and greater part of child rearing task are carried out by the woman in the family. Though mothers from the 1980s to today work outside the home, there is still what is called the second shift of housework and childcare when the woman gets home from a full day of work (Hochschild & Machung, 2003).

The role of motherhood is seen by society as central to a woman's identity. Parenthood is more salient for women's self-conceptions than for men's (Simon, 1992). Men perceive fathering as something they “do”, whereas women experience mothering as something they “are” (Ehrensaft, 1990). Women are often perceived as more nurturing in our society and many people think that women are better at taking care of children than men are. According to Stephens (2009), in traditional homes, most children felt closer to their mothers. Mothers on average spend more time with their children in general than fathers. Seeing as the woman tends to be much more available and closer to the children, her role in shaping the children's character is very essential for effective parenting. The woman is in most cases primarily responsible for the children's habits of self-control, orderliness, industriousness or honesty (Shuani, 2018). Her contacts with the children during their most formative periods of development set up their behavioral pattern. The woman is the first teacher of the children. She transmits social heritage to the children (Shuani, 2018). It is from the mother that the children learn the laws of the society, moral codes and ideals.



The mother because of her intimate and sustained contact with the children is able to discover and nurture the children's special traits and attitudes which subsequently play key roles in the shaping of their personalities.

The woman is the central personality of the home and the family circle. Women devote their time, labor and thought for the welfare of the members of the family. The woman performs various roles such as wife, mother, partner, organizer, disciplinarian, teacher in the family at the same time. Apart from this, the woman also plays a key role in the socio-economic development of the society seeing as modern education and modern economic life compel her to leave the narrow sphere of the family circle and work side by side for the enrichment of society.

Parenting Styles and the Effects on Children

According to Darling & Steinberg (1993), parenting styles are defined as the context in which parents raise and socialize their children, and they are distinct from *practices* that is, the distinct actions contingent to the child's behaviour. However, it is important to note that two main dimensions of parents' behaviours and their natural variations describe the parenting styles. These dimensions are responsiveness/warmth (involvement, acceptance and affection that the parent expresses towards the child's needs) and demandingness / control (rules, control, and maturity expectations for the child's socialization).

Baumrind (1967) postulated four types of parenting styles as

1. Authoritarian Style
2. Authoritative Style
3. Permissive Style
4. Uninvolved style

1. Authoritarian Style

This is also called the Disciplinarian Style. This is an extremely strict parenting style. It places high expectations on children with little room for responsiveness and flexibility. An Authoritarian Parent focuses more on obedience, discipline and control rather than nurturing the child. These

types of parents make rules and expect their children to follow them strictly. They do not involve their children in decision making and communication is mostly one way. According to Burch (2020), authoritarian parenting is a parenting style characterized by high demands and low responsiveness. Yelling and corporal punishment is also common with this style of parenting.

Effects on Children

According to Pinquart (2017), this form of parenting which involves harsh control and psychological control are the biggest predictors of worsening behavior overtime. Children subjected to this authoritarian style at one point tend to develop more externalizing behavioral problems at later time points. Dewar (2018) points out that although children's pre-existing behavior problems may provoke these authoritarian responses from parents, it should also be noted that authoritarianism makes children's behavioral problems much worse.

Dewar (2018) also notes that children from authoritarian families tend to show lower social competence. Studies by Steinberg, Lamborn et al. (1992) have reported that teens with authoritarian parents were least likely to feel socially accepted by their peers. They were also rated as less self reliant. In addition, a study by Georgiou et al. (2013) pointed out that there is a link between authoritarian parenting and bullying. In their study, they questioned adolescents about their cultural values and experiences with peers and found that children from such authoritarian homes were more likely to have experienced bullying- both as victims and perpetrators. In another study by Gomez-Ortiz et al. (2016), it was noted that high school students with authoritarian parents were more likely to be involved in bullying particularly if their parents attempted to control them through the use of punitive discipline. Garcia et al. (2020) report that authoritarian parents are more likely to have children with low social competence and the effects may last into adulthood.

Authoritarian parenting has also been linked with



childhood anxiety and a higher risk of symptoms of depression (King et al., 2016). Huang et al. (2019) state that children were more likely to suffer from mental health problems if they perceived their parents to be authoritarian.

Dweck & Kamins (1999) in their study have shown that a common tactic of authoritarian parenting – shaming a child for poor performance – can make children perform more poorly on problem-solving tasks. While on one hand, authoritarianism has been linked with poorer school performance, on the other hand, it has also been linked with higher school achievement (Chao, 2001).

Piotrowski et al. (2013) noted that children from authoritarian homes are less advanced when it comes to self regulation and moral reasoning. As these children get older, they are more likely to tune out their parents and are also more likely to engage in delinquency over time (Trinkner et al., 2012).

2. Authoritative Style

This parenting style is characterized by high responsiveness and reasonable demands. This approach combines warmth, sensitivity and the setting of limits (Dewar, 2017). Parents use positive reinforcement and reasoning to guide children. They avoid resorting to threats or punishments. These parents are flexible and welcome open communication. Although they set clear guidelines and expect the children to obey, they are also not overly strict or unreasonable (Higuera, 2019). According to Dashiell (2021), they are nurturing, responsive and supportive, yet they set firm limits for their children. The children's opinions are always taken into account. They validate their children's feelings while also making it clear that the adults are ultimately in charge. Authoritative parents invest time and energy into preventing behavior problems before they start. According to Dewar (2017), this form of parenting uses positive discipline strategies to reinforce good behavior, like praise and reward systems. Maccoby & Martin (1983) state that authoritative parents are highly demanding but are also responsive to their children's needs.

Authoritative parenting has been known to have a distinguished symmetry between structure and affection. Child development professionals generally categorize this type of parenting style as the greatest methodology to parenting.

Effects on Children

According to Baumrind (1966), children of authoritative parents are self-confident about their abilities to learn new things, develop good social skills, have good emotional control and regulation and tend to have happier dispositions. Dewar (2017) also points out that children with authoritative parents are less likely to report depression and anxiety, less likely to engage in antisocial behavior like delinquency and drug use. Since authoritative parenting encourages independence in children, it is also linked with more self reliance, better problem-solving and improved emotional health (Turkel & Tezer, 2008). An authoritative approach to parenting may also help to prevent aggression and reduce peer problems in children (Yamagata et al., 2013). Bednar & Fisher (2003) also note that children with authoritative parents are more attuned with their parents and less influenced by their peers.

According to Rego (2015), students with authoritative parents would have higher learning focused goals and earn higher results. This is because such children tend to be more proficient and successful. They are likely to believe that they have the ability to conquer new problems and complete new tasks. Children from authoritative homes blame their failures (if any) on their lack of effort rather than any lack of intelligence (Rego, 2015). This is as a result of having learning focused goals in which their main objective is ultimately learning from their experiences- school work for instance- rather than merely succeeding.

However, according to Perry (2019), authoritative parenting can be difficult and lengthy to implement because it requires a delicate balance of discipline and freedom. As children go through normal phases of rebellion, anger and apathy, these phases may be particularly difficult for authoritative parents who naturally have high



expectations of their children and have tried hard to raise their children the best way possible. Authoritative parents can undergo a few periods of trial and error before they find the strategies that work best seeing as their main objective is to produce resilient, confident, respectful and happy children.

3. Permissive Style

This is sometimes known as Indulgent Parenting. Permissive parenting is a type of parenting style that is characterized by low demands with high responsiveness. In this style of parenting, the parents make relatively few demands on their children. This type of parenting typically allows children a great deal of freedom to behave as they see fit. Permissive parents are usually lenient and are quite forgiving. Because these parents have low expectations for self control and maturity, discipline is a rarity. These parents tend to use reason or manipulation to get what they want but they avoid exercising overt power. Baumrind (1971) states that permissive parents are more responsive than they are demanding. Dewar (2010) also notes that permissive parents do not present themselves as authority figures or role models. These parents usually take on more of a friend role than a parent role. According to Cherry(2020), these parents do not expect mature behavior from their children and often seem more like a friend than a parental figure. They often encourage their children to talk with them about their issues but they typically do not put effort into discouraging poor choices or bad behavior.

This type of parenting is characterized by a lack of structure, consistency and limits when it comes to discipline and very little interference on the parents' behalf.

Effects on Children

Despite the appearance that permissive and authoritarian parenting styles are opposites to each other, in actuality they share the common outcome of minimizing opportunities for children to learn to cope with stress effectively. Authoritarian parents accomplish this by limiting autonomous decisions made by their children, Permissive parents accomplish this by failing to

implement standards for appropriate behavior thereby granting their children freedom to behave in any manner they please(Dalimonte-Merckling& Williams, 2020).

Consequently, children with permissive parents tend to be limited in their capacity to deal with difficult circumstances and may be unprepared to cope successfully with problems that arise normally in life. These children tend to make poor decisions since their parents do not set or enforce any type of rules or guidelines. They also struggle to learn good problem-solving and decision-making skills. Children reared in permissive families often fail to control their impulses and lack self-reliance (Steinberg et al., 1992).

They also tend to generally experience less academic success (Baumrind & Black, 1967), in part due to a lack of self-reliance and reduced persistence on tasks (Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993). Also because their parents have little to no expectations of them, the children have nothing to strive toward. They may be less academically motivated than many of their peers. According to Masud et al. (2019), permissive parenting has been linked to lower academic achievement.

Because permissive parenting involves a lack of demands and expectations, these children may be more prone to delinquency and substance abuse according to Berge et al. (2015). They tend to grow up without a strong sense of self-discipline and worse impulse control. They may be more unruly in school due to the lack of boundaries in the home.

Ehrenreich et al. (2014) note that these children also show more aggression and less emotional understanding. This is because they do not learn to deal with their emotions effectively, particularly in situations where they do not get what they want. Permissive parents do not control or regulate their children's behavior so they are less aware of the limits of acceptable behavior. They also exhibit worse impulse control and they may struggle when faced with stressful or emotionally difficult situations thereby resorting to aggression (Li, 2021). These children may also have less empathy



leading to worse social skills. They generally display anti-social behavior.

Despite the above discussed, it is important to note that permissive parenting may have some benefits as noted by some studies. According to Li (2021), permissive parents usually have better communication with their children. This is because they consider their parents as their friends and are comfortable sharing everything with their parents. Communication is two way, hence, it is beneficial. Li (2021) also notes that permissive parents love their children without conditionality and this helps them in building better self-esteem.

4. Uninvolved Style

This is also called Neglectful Parenting. This style of parenting is characterized by low responsiveness and low demandingness- a lack of responsiveness to the children's needs. Uninvolved parents make few to no demands of their children and they are often indifferent, dismissive or even completely neglectful (Cherry, 2021). These parents lack warmth, affection, structure and rules. They also do not set boundaries or discipline their children. This "hands-off" approach can range on a continuum from a lack of interest to significant child neglect. Children from such homes receive little to no guidance, discipline or positive reinforcement from their parents and are practically left to raise themselves. According to Green (2018), uninvolved parents are emotionally distant from their children. However it is important to note that this style does not promote ignoring the children's basic needs such as shelter, food and clothing amongst others. The children's well-being, at least for their basic needs, is still being addressed. In other words, this type of parents have the least involvement in the emotional, physical, academic or important aspects of their children's lives and they may just provide for the bare or basic aspects of their children's lives like food, shelter and clothing (Ramaiya, 2018).

Effects on Children

This approach to parenting can have several negative consequences for the children. Due to the lack of close relationship with the parents,

children of neglectful parents may seek substitute role models. This might be helpful if the role model can provide warmth, responsiveness and boundaries; however, sometimes unhealthy role models are chosen which can further impact children in a negative way (Guarnotta, 2021).

Children of uninvolved parents may also be more impulsive and aggressive which can lead to behavioral problems at home and school, as well as difficulty maintaining relationships with peers (Kopko, 2007). Like children coming from permissive families, lack of structure can lead to acting out, rebelliousness and a disregard for authority.

Since parental involvement in school plays an important role in children's academic achievement, neglectful parents put their children at an academic disadvantage (Aunola et al., 2000). Neglectful homes fail to teach the children the skills they need to excel in school like time management, organization and prioritization.

Uninvolved parents are unlikely to set or enforce rules with their children and as a result of this, without guidance, children are more likely to experiment and make poor decisions (Benchaya et al., 2011). The complete lack of boundaries in the home makes it difficult to learn appropriate behaviors and limits in school and other social situations, which is why children with uninvolved parents are more likely to misbehave.

According to Dhaliwal (2018), these children might feel unimportant and unattended to in their daily lives and because of this, may not understand the importance of the same in other relationships. They may feel unloved and this can have a huge impact on their self-worth and in future relationships.

Children learn everything about social behavior from the environment they are in at an early age. Due to the neglectful nature of their homes, and since they are always neglected at home, ignoring others becomes a part of accepted social behavior for the children. Knutson et al. (2004) point out that the absence of proper social interaction could



make such children withdraw socially. They may have antisocial behavior and may even become socially anxious.

On the other hand, this form of parenting has been said to promote an overall better development of children's scholarly and comprehension skills (Green, 2018). Since the children are left alone most times at an early age, they are forced to learn and provide for themselves to a certain degree. Parents allow the children to grow on their own. This form of parenting teaches the children to be more self-reliant.

Conclusion

From the above, it can be seen that parenting styles play important roles in family relationship and have an effect on mental health and resilience of an individual's later development (Zachari et al., 2010). Thus, every child needs the ability to form healthy relationship with others. If a child is to develop properly, the parents must pay attention to their socio-emotional development which if impaired can affect the mental health of their children. The interaction between parents and their children and the way the children are treated by their parents plays an important role in the children's mental health (Fadlillah et al., 2020).

The pattern of treatment and attitudes of parents influence the social emotional development of early childhood; it has a direct impact on mental health. Mental ill health can occur as a result of chronic stresses of role strain. These role strains are issues like unwanted roles, rapidly changing roles and conflicting roles (Pearlin et al., 1990).

Another factor that contributes to the poor mental health of children is the parenting style that is not commensurate with the developmental stage of the child. Proper parenting is critical during the early infancy and early life of children if they must have healthy physical, psychological and social development (Mental Health Foundation, 2015). The period between birth and 8 years is critical for the development because the environment and the people around the child have significant effect on their mental health. (Hughes

et al., 2017). Another dimension to this argument is that early experiences with parents have been shown to impact the well-being of elderly persons (Anderson & Steven, 1993). The success of aging among older adults has to do with one's ability to cope with pressure most especially the ones that have to do with an individual's children (Young et al., 2009). They further gave three dimensions to successful aging, as: physiological (having to do with diseases and functional impairment), psychological (emotional vitality), and social (which has to do with spirituality and adaptation through social support mechanism). There are evidences previously in research that shows that successful aging had focused more on biological and socio-demographic contributors which has to do with physical health without paying attention to the importance of psycho-social resources needed for mental and holistic well being. (Ng et al., 2009).

According to Wagnild (2003), mental resilience promotes successful aging. Mental resilience is a process of effectively negotiating, adapting and managing significantly sources of stress or trauma, assets and resources of individuals, their lives and the environment to adapt properly in the face of adversity (Wells et al., 2012).

There are many studies that have noted the authoritative form as the best form of parenting. This is because it has a perfect balance of responsiveness and demandingness. According to Zhong et al. (2016), they posit that adults whose parents were authoritative have higher level of mental resilience and a lower level of depression and anxiety, while adults whose parents were authoritarian have a higher level of depression and anxiety associated with a low level of mental resilience. Another study by Steinberg (2001) shows that children from authoritative parenting are more successful adults in western cultures, while children from authoritarian parents show more internalized behaviors and psychiatric problems. Authoritative parents have positive impact on children's mental health while authoritarian parents have negative impact on children's mental health and development. Also, greater parental care and lesser parental over-



protection have been shown to contribute to increase resilience (Shixius et al., 2012).

Research has also shown that the authoritative parenting styles are related to higher levels of mental resilience in children, even in late adolescence and young adulthood. (Zachari et al, 2010, Zhang et al, 2013).

A relationship has also been noted between psychological wellbeing and depression symptoms in mid-later life. Individuals who remembered authoritative parents reported greater psychological well-being and fewer depression symptoms than those who remembered having authoritarian or uninvolved parents. Hence, parenting styles may be highly correlated to mental health in a person's whole life (Rothrauff et al., 2009). Parents who have mental health issues also influence their children's mental health (Mental Health Foundation, 2015).

In conclusion, parenting styles have been strongly linked to the mental health outcomes and behaviors of children and subsequently their adult lives and also parents having mental health issues may be as a result of how they were parented and this can also influence their children's mental health. The following are recommended:

- Parents should opt for authoritative style of parenting since it balances out in accordance with the needs of the children
- Parents should spend more time with their children because it can reduce the probability of unwanted behavior and delinquency
- Parents should be continuously involved with their children so that they will be able to watch and teach their children accordingly

As earlier noted, women play a central role in the parenting of the children and because women are important in shaping the lives of children, the following are recommended:

- Even if a woman was not raised properly, without any support, control and needs not met, it is essential that she nurtures and cares for her own children.
- Every woman's vision for her children should be centered on what they will become in future.
- Every woman must live respectful and well guided lives as children tend to emulate them.

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