

Full Length Research Paper

Parenting dilemma: The Kenyan experience

Lewis Muli Ngesu and Mutinda Kyule

University of Nairobi

Scott Theological University

Corresponding author Email: ngesu2002@yahoo.com

Abstract: This article examines the parenting dilemmas that most parents face on a daily basis which is a significant departure from the past where parenting was a community affair. The current situation is complex with most parents busy at work place and home therefore leaving the young children under the care of house helps and consequently navigating through life on their own. The influence of Television and social media has aggravated the parenting matrix leading to indiscipline and this can be confirmed by the recent report in the media whereby teenagers were nabbed by law enforcement officers engaging in sex, drinking alcohol and abusing drugs on their way home for the school. Therefore, in the absence of parents the movies children watch, the music videos, the images they download and the online conversations they have on different social media platforms is causing them to think that sex, alcohol and drugs is 'the new normal' and for one to fit in, one must partake of the same.

Keywords: Parenting, Dilemma

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Introduction

Traditionally, it was the responsibility of the man to head his household. Even when a husband died, the widow was married to another man within the clan (Republic of Kenya, 1985). Consequently, women did not have the responsibility of heading households. This situation has changed tremendously as women become more educated, career oriented, and more financially independent, a larger majority marry while other do not marry at all (Republic of Kenya, 1985). According to Kevin (1989) this fact has meant that women in both rural and urban areas are now taking responsibilities which traditionally were no theirs. To provide continuity for young children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds, home, school and community partners must work to build a common understanding about the powerful influence of culture and the role of the family as the child's first teacher (Abraham, 1992). In all setting, and especially in multicultural setting constructive open attitudes towards race, ethnicity, gender, disabilities, income, family configuration and other characteristics of children and families should be the fountain for continuity created by home, school and community partnership

Parenting in African traditional societies

Kagendo (2017) observes that the process of parenting has changed with time. The researcher noted that in the past a child was raised by the whole community. The child belonged to the community and each member had a responsibility of teaching the growing child virtues and values of their society. Therefore, the family unity was evident in the traditional set up.

Parenting today

In both rural and urban areas, parents are spending too much time at the workplace, on plantations, in offices, factories, research laboratories "Jua kali" sheds or marketplaces, and street hawking just to mention a few. They have abandoned the moral and social upbringing of their children, first to poorly paid minders who harbour resentment against their charges, and later, to school teachers, who are just as pressured and economically challenged as the parents.

218. Sci. Res. Impact

According to Kindiki (2009), parents seem unable or unwilling to check and discipline deviant child behaviours. Family cohesion seems to have been threatened, if not eroded. Parental time with children has been drastically curtailed and, above all, parents seemed to have shirked their socialization role and relegated it entirely to the schools; and the school of today seems to lack the skills, the capacity and the necessary support to rear and nurture the well-disciplined and well-groomed young people expected by the society of today and tomorrow.

According to Ngesu (2016) there are a number of parents who are unable or unwilling to give enough personal attention to their children at home, virtually abdicating all parental responsibility and transferring it to the school teachers and head teachers. Such parents consider that, if they paid their fees promptly and authorized their children to be disciplined, then the child might perform well in a very competitive school system.

Parents are to blame for abdicating their disciplinary role and for pampering their children with unnecessarily large amounts of money, allegedly for private use, and providing unnecessarily luxurious transport to school (Ngesu, 2012; Kagendo 2017). It was also observed that some parents were delegating early child care to commercial home care arrangements and therefore denying the child basic parental care and love. This implies that some parents were abdicating their duty to counsel, discipline and bring up their children leaving strangers and, by extension, teachers, the school administration and the wider impersonal society to fulfil that role. These children are more at risk of militant behaviour or aggression because they experience more alienation, indifference and antagonism. This means that children who find school too boring, or think that the teachers are idiotic or oppressive, lose their minds due to fear of examinations and feel that they should not be forced by parents and pressurized by society to go to school.

According to Ngesu et al (2013) and Ngesu (2012) majority of students in Kenya live in constant fear. Many are surrounded by a hostile environment. At home, they are continually harassed by their own parents and siblings and in some cases their extended family. Some parents cannot provide their children with food, and beat them up in the name of instilling discipline. At school they are exposed to humiliation, both overt and covert, by their teachers and peers. Corporal punishment, despite being prohibited, is the order of the day in most schools. Some teachers feel insecure when stripped of their power to administer corporal punishment. Hence the infliction of corporal punishment becomes virtually part of the school timetable and is often used arbitrarily, and at times brutally leaving children permanently disfigured and disabled.

The result according to Ngesu et al (2014) is that our environment, both at home and school, deny the majority of our children human dignity and physical integrity and the lack of equal protection under the law that is accorded to adults. Such denial of human rights leads to anger, rape, aggressive behaviour, drug abuse and juvenile delinquency.

The social and physical environment in which children grow up has long been linked to their social adjustment in later life, and so the schools they go to form a large part of this socializing environment. In addition to their overt role in education, schools play a central role in the transmission of the norms and values of our society. The finding concurs with Kimu (2012) who established that parents benefit from an improved parent-child relationship. According to Kimu (2012) a sound parent-child relationship leads to increased contact with the school and to a better understanding of the child's development and educational process involved in the school could help parents to become better persons at home. Students who come from abusive, hyper-critical families tend sometimes to be withdrawn. They mostly meditate about the possible panaceas to their social problems but their lives become more and more meaningless with each passing day. However, armed with a denial skill, they learn to get emotional support by anti-social means. The research findings show that hyper-critical family interaction patterns and parental

disciplinary practices strongly influence the development of aggressive behaviour in their children (Szyndrowski, 2005). According to the social learning theory, peers learn to maintain their relations based on some core modelling, which promotes certain behaviours in the child and in the wider child-community relationship that cause the development of certain characteristic emotional regulation processes.

These findings are corroborated by a report entitled, "Society paying dearly for ignoring the parental role" (*Sunday Nation*, 2008) that revealed that children were growing up unattended or left to the mercy of frustrated minders, who are themselves craving for parental love and have none to give to their charges and are at worst hooked on violent television shows. The report further revealed that, in both rural and urban areas, parents were spending far too much time at the workplace, in offices, factories, research laboratories, *Jua Kali* sheds, marketplaces, or street hawking. They seem to have transferred the moral and social upbringing of children, first to the poorly paid child minders, who themselves harbour resentment against their charges, and then to school teachers who are just as pressurized and economically challenged as the parents.

Effects of social media on parenting

Parenting mostly involves good care and bring up of children done by parents, teachers and members of the community. It can be done at schools where teachers assume the role of surrogate parents or at home or at both places. Parenting also can be done at religious centers however parenting is an activity which has been highly influenced by the social media today. There are many social media platforms today namely; Face book, Twitter, Instagram, Snap chat, and you tube.

In their core responsibility of bringing up responsible children, parents find it difficult to mitigate the negative effects of social media. Most youths are at ease watching television or using mobile phones at the expense of spending quality time with their parents who have a moral responsibility of guiding them. The teenagers are likely to be

found watching television programmes and listening to songs which are morally degrading. Some imitate these singers and their dancing styles which are also pathetic and an insult to parenting obligation. An attempt by parents to correct these forms of indiscipline is met with hostility, with some children openly defying their parents, and labelling them as old fashioned. Ngesu and Gichohi (2018) points out that parent have a crucial role to play in promoting moral values among the youth. A critical reflection of this obligation points out a sorry state of affairs whereby teaching of these values at home and school seems not to be happening, as evidenced by the attitudes and behaviours of many youths and young parents in our current Kenyan society.

Conclusion

Parenting is an uphill task today with many questions begging for answers about where the rain started beating us. The media reports and parents own confessions depict a sorry state of affairs on whom to blame for this confusion. Open rebellion to parents and teachers, addiction to social media, drugs and substance abuse, and a don't care attitude towards life have made some parents to openly question the genesis of parenting dilemma. To address this, parents and other agents of socialization are encouraged to play their role faithfully in order to salvage this generation from ultimate destruction.

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222. Sci. Res. Impact

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