

Mothers' Socioeconomic Characteristics and Child Behavior

Background

Child upbringing in the African setting used to be a communal one. Every member of the community, particularly members of the family, had the authority to call an erring child to order. That was when the extended family system was in operation. But as the society transformed into a modern one, the nuclear family system replaced the extended system. One fact that emerged with this development is that the upbringing of a child no more belonged to the society at large but the parents. Another fact is that women are able to acquire western education which consequently offers them the opportunity to engage in economic activities outside the home. Mothers' engagement in economic activities diminishes the time they spend with their children. This may have some effect on the child's behavior. Sivakami(2000) states that time put into child care is substantially affected by maternal employment. That is working women spend much less time on child care than non-working women. Among other factors that affect a child's behavior are the type of house the parents live and the type of family in the household.

This paper examines mothers' socioeconomic characteristics such as occupation, education, type of family and the type of house they live in on child's behavior.

Methodology

The data for this study were obtained from Children Remand Home in Lagos State, Nigeria. The home was established by the Lagos State Government as a reformation center. It is situated at two different places. One is for boys only and the other for girls. The age of the children ranges from 10 to 19. These children got to the home through different reasons. Some of the children were taken to the home by their parents or guardians. Others were taken from the streets by the police. Apart from the educational training that they receive, the children are exposed to some vocational training such as tailoring and shoe-making. There are about 70 boys and 39 girls in the home.

Results

Most of the children are between 14 and 17 years of age. There are more males than females among the children. Also there are more Christians (65%) than Muslims. Despite the fact that most of the children are between 14 and 17 years of age, majority of them have primary education. The reason for this is that some of them have spent a long time outside before they were brought to the remand home. They were away from school during this period and have lost contact with their level. Most of the children's mothers have primary education. While more than one-quarter of the children are of the view that their mothers have no education at all, only 27% claim that their mothers have postsecondary education. About 60% of the children are from monogamous home. Most mothers of the children engage in economic activities (96%). While 10% are artisans, close to three-quarter of the mothers are engage in trade. The salary earners are less than one-quarter. About 64% of the children live in a face-to-face apartment. More than three-quarter of the children are of the opinion that their mothers do not spend enough time with them at home. Most of the children engage in stealing. A small proportion confessed to have been involved in murder. A large number of the children (29%) got to the home because of their stubbornness. Relationship between child's behavior and mothers' education shows that apart from children who engage in stealing, majority of the children have mothers with no education at all. Also majority of the children who steal have mothers who engage in trade. Child's behavior by type of house indicates that most of the children who engage in one form of bad behavior or the other live in a face-to-face apartment.

Conclusion

The study reveals that mothers' education has a significant effect on child's behavior in that most of the children's mothers have primary education. Most of the children hail from monogamous home. This is in contrast with the general belief that children from polygynous home are more wayward. It is also interesting to note that the type of house the children live in has a great impact on their behavior. About 64% of the children live in a face-to-face apartment. A face-to-face apartment is a common phenomenon in many urban areas in Nigeria. In this type of apartment, there are free interactions between and

among tenants and children are easily influenced by co-tenants, most especially when parents are not always around. In fact, the responses of the children on the source of their bad behavior support this. Majority of the children claim that they were initiated into bad habit by friends and neighbors. More than three-quarter of the children posit that as a result of their mothers' occupation, little or no time is spent with them at home. More than half of these children believe that if their mothers had spent quality time with them, they would not have been involved in bad behavior.

Based on the findings above, it is suggested that mothers should endeavor to spend much time with their children and should not allow their occupation to impede this. At the same time, female education should be emphasized as this would have a positive effect on the child's behavior. Living conditions of people with respect accommodation, particularly in the urban areas, should be improved.