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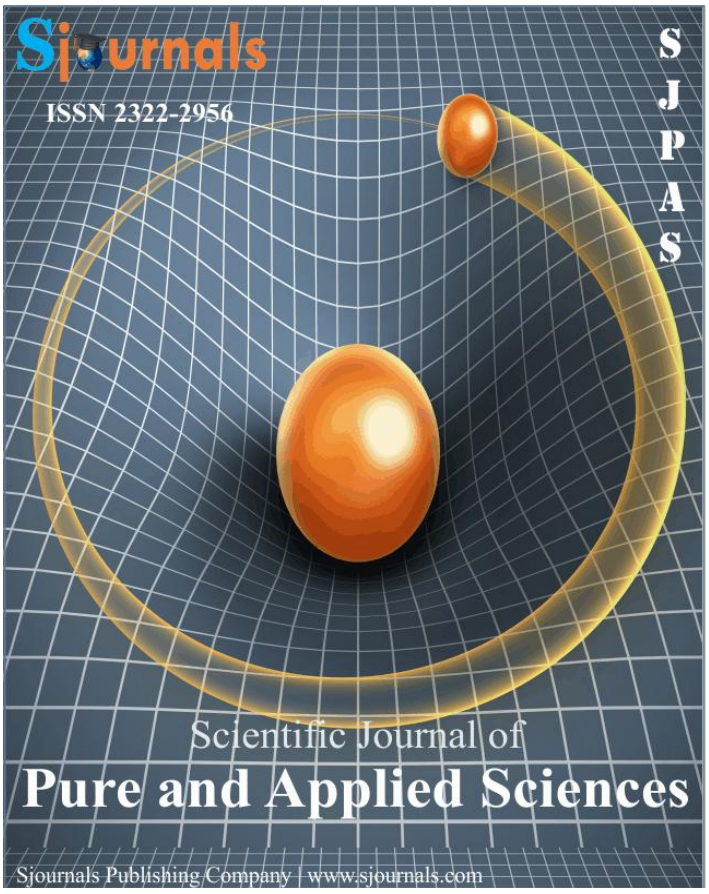

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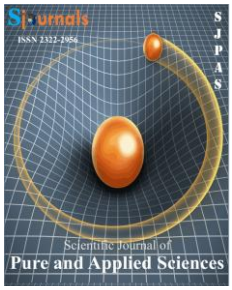

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Review article

The science and practice of parenting: Implications for peace building

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the science and practice of parenting. It unravels the system and process of parenting through exploration of various theories and strategies that are involved in the definition of ideal parenting. The article explores how parenting can either contribute to peace building or to violent behaviour in later life. The article critically considers the theories of parenting, which include the attachment and the social learning theories. In that context, various parenting styles are examined to establish best practices of parenting. Ideal parenting is perceived as one of the strategic factors in minimizing or promoting the prevalence of violence in community settings. This article implores how imperative it is for communities to deliberately invest in the natural and strategic institution of family by empowering contemporary parents and young people who are future parents in the science and practice of parenting. This leads to the conclusion that if the parenting processes are by and large positive, then they will automatically lead to a healthy living of the child in his or her later adult life. Such would manifest in a non-violent peace loving personality as a function of good, positive parenting. On the contrary, negative parenting is the major source of Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) which can be a barrier to peace building initiatives. In the ultimate, the article recommends the adoption of a holistic approach to parenting, that is, the merging of multiple theoretical approaches and practices. This recommendation is premised on the hypothetical notion that the ideal parenting style is one which draws from the various styles and theoretical models utilising the strengths of each as a way of coming up with the ideal strategy. It is further

recommended therefore that for parenting to be improved, it is important that a special academic discipline on parenting is created.

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1. Introduction

Parents play a vital and supportive role in social, emotional, psychological, and intellectual growth and development of their children (Knappe et al., 2010). Paradoxically, despite the fact that parenting plays a pivotal role in building characters of individuals, families, communities and nations, it has remained a neglected discipline. There is basically no school for parenting. Some on-the job kind of training is the usual approach. Depending on the style of parenting adopted or used, the parenting processes can either impact positively or negatively on the child's future life. It is a fact that children do not only inherit genetic characteristics from parents, but also through informal interactions, they learn social values. The primary purpose of this article is to explore parenting as a science. Styles and theories of parenting are examined in order to establish how parenting can either contribute to violence or to peace building in communities and across the globe.

2. Exploration of parenting styles

World over, adults experience both the reward and challenge of being parents. According to Saleem et al. (2017) parenting styles have a profound impact on child development. In this context, Lightfoot et al. (2009) define the phrase 'parenting style' as the set of specific behaviours and strategies used by parents to control and socialize their children. However, these styles are largely influenced by culture and philosophy. Similarly, Bonstern (2011) observes that parenting is a subject by which people hold strong opinions, but argues that too little solid information or considered reflection exist on the subject. Parenting as both a science and practice is therefore a job that has a child as its primary object of attention and action. It is not disputed that quite a number of theories have contributed to positive parenting and consequentially, the appreciation and knowledge of these theories is critical as it gives the insights into how positive parenting is brought about. Conversely, some parenting styles have equally contributed to the negative and violent behaviour that the world is experiencing at various levels.

Scholars like Huth-Bocks and Hughes (2008) concur on the understanding that the occurrence and prevalence of domestic violence in homes is partly a function of poor parenting. Domestic violence per se has detrimental long term effects on the development and well-being of children. For example, domestic violence forms a foundation for community and national violence and hence has propensity to negate peace building initiatives at both community and national levels. Subsequently, the parenting capacities of victims of violence are negatively affected. This can be linked to failed or to poor parenting styles. This understanding is echoed by Holt, Buttley and Whelan (2008) who observe that children and adolescents experiencing domestic violence are at an increased risk of experiencing emotional, physical, and sexual abuse which can escalate to a community or even national scale. As a result, the children, in their adult lives, develop emotional and behavioural problems leading to increased exposure to the presences of other adversities leading to a habitually violent community. Some of these behaviours, in the medium and long term have implications for national peace building efforts. This is because these children and adolescents have high propensity of themselves becoming violent later in life. The foregoing observations suggest that parenting that is characterized by violence is likely to influence and impact negatively on the lives of children in their adult lives and therefore on peace building at domestic, community and national levels.

Baumrid (1971) as cited by Saleem et al. (2017) establishes that there are four parental style dimensions, which are critical in parenting processes. These are authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and neglectful parenting styles. Each of these styles has different outcomes. And quite often parents do not consciously choose the style of parenting, but it is just facilitated by the character of the parent and the immediate culture or environment. Like earlier indicated, parenting is not formally learnt. Often parents adopt styles by which they were, themselves, raised by their parents. Saleem et al. (2017) further give a detailed explanation of these parenting styles. The authors define authoritarian parenting as rigid, strict, demanding and controlling parenting processes and less responsiveness, where parents exert control and children are expected to follow the instruction of their parents. Authoritative parenting on the other hand tends to exert control, but is open and encourages

children to give reason for their action and thus children have a right to argument. Contrary to authoritarian and authoritative parents, permissive parents tend to respond and express themselves without demandingness. This parenting style lacks in instilling discipline though. Later Maccboy and Martin (1983) updated Baumrind (1971) work on parenting styles and added the neglectful parenting style which refers to low demandingness and responsiveness from parents (Saleem et al., 2017) often leading to complete lack of discipline and appropriate enculturation.

These styles of parenting are by and large consciously or unconsciously applied by parents across the globe. Quite often, this happens unconsciously and the parent is usually unaware of the impact of his or her style of parenting on the child's life. Pomerantz et al. (2005) observe that a number of studies have been carried out and established that these parenting styles have great influence on the growth of children, whereby authoritative parenting for instance tend to result in stable emotional, social and academic competence. Antonopoulou et al. (2012); Martinez et al. (2007); Yang and Zhou (2008), Nyarko (2011); Seth and Ghormode (2013); Uji et al. (2014) and Lamborn et al. (2008) all concur that adolescence from authoritative and indulgent parenting styles have higher self-esteem, higher academic achievement, high social competence and have positive mental health compared to children from authoritarian and neglectful background styles of parenting. This analysis suggests that the corollary of these styles of parenting is quite different in many ways. Notably, this is premised on the way authoritative and authoritarian styles of parenting are orchestrated. In a way these are the two dominant styles which many parents in Africa use in raising their children.

Some researchers such as Martínez and García (2008); Erozkan (2012); Ostrov and Crick (2006); Brand et al. (2009); Lipps et al. (2012); Muris et al. (2004, 2006) have identified the dysfunctional negative consequences of psychosocial functioning of children. They observe that authoritarian and permissive styles of parenting have produced low level of self-esteem, high levels of anxiety, depression and aggression. Thus, high level of parental control, low level of emotional warmth and rejection has been associated with anger, hostility and violence. This observation suggests that the combination of authoritarian and permissive styles of parenting results in a negative outcome of parenting (Martínez and García, 2007; Erozkan, 2012; Ostrov and Crick, 2006; Brand et al., 2009; Lipps et al., 2012). Clearly, these early behaviours which manifest as functions of parenting styles influence conditions for peace or violence respectively. Thus, sensitivity to right parenting styles should be informed by the understanding that future peace building efforts at community and national levels are pillared on the separating styles at family level. This understanding should be grounded on theoretical predictions.

3. Reflections on the theories of parenting

The outcome of parenting styles has been influenced to a certain extent by some theories such as the social learning theory and the attachment theory. Scholars, in the likes of Gardner, Gardner et al. (2006); Hood and Eyberg (2003); Kazdin (2005); Patterson et al. (1989); Scaramella and Leve (2004) and Stormshak et al. (2000) subscribe to the proposition of the social learning theory that children's real life experiences directly and indirectly influence and shape their behaviour in adult life. This suggests that the child develops the mechanism of managing emotions and conflicts from his or her experiences and the primary source is the child-parent and family relationship. The socialization of a child will contribute to the behaviour of his or her adult life. Some people seem to be aggressive and violent in their lives simply because they were socialized in that aggressive manner. This has significant implications for peace building even at national and global levels.

In a similar manner, the attachment theory has been used by parents in bringing up their children. Sroufe et al. (1999) assert that the attachment theory is an alternative model for understanding nature and origins of parent-child relationships and the mechanism by which these relationships shape the psychological development of the child. This implies that children are able to develop a secure internal working model for self and others as a function of the fruitful attachment with the parent during childhood. From this analysis, O'Connor (2002) postulates that the social learning and attachment theories do overlap and their difference is more on the conceptual than on the empirical levels. Both theories propose that parenting is a structured parent-child relationship in which the child is moulded into a personality that reflects on parental behaviours thereof.

The attachment theory and the social learning theory are therefore critical in the processes of parenting. Sroufe et al. (1999) analyses Bowlby (1951) attachment theory and argues that it is a theory of psychopathology as well as a theory of normal development. The attachment theory contains clear and specific propositions regarding the role of early experience in developmental psychopathology. The importance of this on-going context and the

nature of the developmental process underlying pathology explain why certain personalities have high propensities for violence for example. Thus, children adapt to particular behaviours as exhibited in the parent-child relationship. In particular, Bowlby (1951) argues that adaptation is always the joint product of developmental history and current circumstances (never either alone) suggesting how a violent or peaceful disposition is mainly a product of early childhood parenting conditions, strategies and styles.

On the role of culture on parenting Rubbin and Chung (2006) argue that parent child-relationships are about the heart of the ecological contextual view that reflects on culture as well. However, parent child-relationships are themselves embedded in a microsystem of broader context, such as the extended family, peers, school and neighborhood. In its turn a macro-system of values, laws social class and culture supports and encourages parenting cognitions and patterns of parent child interactions. This argument reflects quite fundamentally on the collective orientation of parenting which was practiced by traditional African communities. From this observation it is clear that culture is very important in the shaping of one's behaviour. The culture of one's context plays a pivotal role in shaping one's social interactions and therefore violent or peaceful disposition. For that matter, the social learning theory is particularly relevant in that the ecological context of parenting is firmly embedded in the cultural patterns, practices and orientations of a particular community. These analyses project parenting as a valid social science and as a foundation for future peace building trajectories.

4. Discussion, conclusion and recommendation

The purpose of this review was to explore and establish how the science and practice of parenting could contribute to either violence or peace building. Parenting as an on the job training phenomenon is critical in shaping people's lives. Paradoxically, and unfortunately parenting is not regarded as a specialized discipline and is characterised by paucity of literature, especially in the developing world. Knappe et al. (2010) observe that studies indicate that Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) aggregates in families and has its onset in early adolescence as a function of poor or dysfunctional parenting. Given the family as an important context for children's cognitive, emotional and behavioural development, familial risk factors could be expected to significantly contribute to the reliable detection of populations at risk for SAD. Following this context, Mahmood (2012) concludes that parents play a vital and long lasting role in the psychosocial and emotional functioning of a child. This leads to the conclusion that if the parenting processes are by and large positive, then they will automatically lead to a healthy living of the child in his or her later adult life manifesting in a non-violent peace loving personality. This is only likely to result from good, positive parenting. The same is equally true for negative dysfunctional parenting. When the child has experienced negative parenting, he or she will mostly likely suffer from the SAD in his or her adult life as expressed and observed by Knappe et al. (2010) and may become a violent character devoid of peace loving.

It has also been noted from the review that among other psychological constructs, the experience and expression of parenting can be structured along theoretical bases and that it is culture specific. This suggests that culture in a given context is important in shaping an individual and as such, other cultures may not be used as a standard for understanding parenting patterns in a particular culture. In light of the parenting styles (authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and neglectful) as expressed by Saleem et al. (2017), the tendency of such variation is therefore influenced by the dictates and fundamentals of cultural diversity and cultural pluralism that informs parenting. Thus, similar parenting styles in different cultures may give rise to varying outcomes. However, it is true that punitive parenting and controlling parenting are likely to produce aggressive children who are likely to be violent in their adult lives. Such parenting styles are better set off through caring and affectionate parenting which can be achieved through a multi-modal approach to parenting. The recommended parenting style is one which draws from the various styles and theoretical models utilising the strengths of each as a way of coming up with the ideal strategy. In other words, parents should prioritize parenting and carefully nature it as it has long-term effects on behavioural dispositions that are implicated in peace building initiatives.

The theories of parenting that have been reviewed suggest that there are many factors that are involved in parenting. These factors contribute to the behaviour of a child. Scholars, such as Garner et al. (2006); Hood and Eyberg (2003); Kazdin (2005); Patterson et al. (1989); Scaramella and Leve (2004) and Stormshak et al. (2000) have explained how the social learning theory proposes, that children's real life experiences directly and indirectly influence and shape their behaviour in adult life. Whereas the social learning theory emphasizes the sociological influence, the attachment theory emphasizes the psychological aspect. However, the two theories could not be treated in isolation as their differences are limited more to the conceptual than the empirical level. It became clear

from this narrative that while parenting styles affect the behaviour of children in one way or the other the styles are in turn influenced by theories. Hence, it is imperative for any adult who is privileged to be a parent to be wholly mindful in executing this important responsibility. This is because parenting outcomes have both direct and indirect implications for peace building both at community and national levels. Effectively, society and the environment are important in influencing and shaping the child's behaviour and character. Actually, parenting is supposed to be a complex yet structured activity that involves many personal, social, and cultural factors that would eventually initiate children and adolescents into peace loving and well-groomed adults. Researchers have explained parenting in terms of child rearing practices rather than merely biological relationship between a child and parents (Lightfoot et al., 2009). Factors such as care, nurturance and protection which are products of good parenting will always determine the peacefulness and violence freeness of future communities and societies into which the children become members as future adults. On these bases it is further recommended that for parenting to be improved, it is important that a special academic discipline on parenting is created. This will improve the lives of people and minimize the prevalence of violence in many communities and nations.

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