**EVALUATION OF THE PHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS OF YOUNG CHILDREN OR ADOLESCENTS IN RELATION TO THEIR ENVIRONMENT**

**INTRODUCTION**

“No matter how apparently smart or confident, each child is still a child first and foremost, with all the anxieties that go with being young, vulnerable, and inexperienced in life.”

(The Creativity Post, 2017, Online).

Whether some would readily admit it or not, a typical human environment surely plays a very large and indispensable role in influencing a considerable number of behavior in a male or female person. A person’s physical environment can be considered as major factor or aspect that deeply affects both the physiological and psychological well-being of every one of us. In relation to this assertion, one can see that humans have been biologically programmed right from birth to interact with their relative environment. In fact, this outrightly begins immediately a human foetus develops inside the womb of a woman. Whatever kind of activities the fetus, which would soon become what is known as a baby, gets from within the womb would be its first form of environmental interactions. These interactions could be the physical movements the developing baby is expecting from its mother or the voice of the mother in a form which the baby would eventually get to recognize. Also, the feeding pattern of the baby’s mother is also one of the physical interactions the child would begin taking note of due to its indispensable importance for its own nourishment and development in the womb. All of these are combined environmental interactions that affect the physical development of a human child as a baby. By the time the baby is finally born, he or she has expectedly become an interactive member of the physical works around him or her. Other environmental influences like speech, motion, body mannerisms, body etiquette and hygiene etc., would all be learned from the parents, family members, neighbors, playmates, school and technology.

Indeed, all of the above physical needs are already merged with other important needs of the child. These needs are the psychological and social ones. The native intelligence of the child would have to come into play with the way and level he or she is being receptive to the parental and academic education, social activities and other environmental influences. This points to the importance of all aspects in the life of a child before he or she graduates to an adolescent, and then finally into adulthood.

Therefore, this assessment is to evaluate each child’s needs in relation to imagined scenarios based on randomly elected environments and real life references.

**NOTE:** **Introduction, apart from quote, is originally written by the writer.**

**PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

“If you trust play, you will not have to control your child’s development as much. Play will raise the child in ways you can never imagine.” ~ Vince Gowmon

The United States National Academy of Sciences (2013), proposed that the behavior and traits of today’s children, along with their genetics, are determinants of their growth and development; their physical, mental, and psychosocial health; and their physical, cognitive, and academic performance. Technological advances of modern society have contributed to a sedentary lifestyle that has changed the phenotype of children from that of 20 years ago. Children today weigh more and have a higher body mass index (BMI) than their peers of just a generation earlier (Ogden et al., 2012). Behaviorally, most children fail to engage in vigorous- or moderate-intensity physical activity for the recommended 60 minutes or more each day, with as many as one-third reporting no physical activity in the preceding 5 days (CDC, 2012). This lack of participation in physical activity has contributed to a greater prevalence of pediatric obesity, a decrease in fitness (e.g., flexibility, muscular strength, cardiorespiratory capacity), and a greater risk for disease.

Growth occurs through a complex, organized process characterized by predictable developmental stages and events. Although all individuals follow the same general course, growth and maturation rates vary widely among individuals. Just as it is unrealistic to expect all children at the same age to achieve the same academic level, it is unrealistic to expect children at the same age to have the same physical development, motor skills, and physical capacity. Regular physical activity does not alter the process of growth and development. Rather, developmental stage is a significant determinant of motor skills, physical capacity, and the adaptation to activity that is reasonable to expect.

(United States National Academy of Sciences, 2013, pp. 1&3).

Young human beings are always full of energy and the zest to take on different hobbies and any playtime activities that indulge them to run around and make a rough tumble with their mates wherever they find themselves with other playmates. However, some parents do believe indulging their children in sports, playtime events or any physical hobbies is a mere waste of time. So instead of playing or getting involved in outdoor activities, some parents believe their children should instead focus most of their time on their homework or academic books. In fact, many parents are more happy when they see their child or children burying their heads in books or solving a tough mathematical problem and puzzle. And on the other hand, they willingly frown whenever they see their kid wanting to go out and play. But parents like that seemed to have forgotten the old saying which states that ‘all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy’, and hence why the participation in extracurricular activities like sports is very important to the mental awareness and health of any kid. It is noteworthy to point out that making a kid stay all day with only books or academic materials without making the child to relax or even take a break would surely result into devastating psychological stress and mental overload. Then on the long run, it definitely doesn’t take much to figure out that such a kid would be unhappy, dull, probably turn into a recluse, develop an aversion towards social interactions, etc., all which are psychologically bad for any child of any age.

But even as much as it is right to be concerned about the overall wellness of a kid in indulging in wasteful pastimes, then why not make him or her try out sports as a way to play and be active physically? Sports is a very good way to bring out other physical talents and qualities of a child, apart from the numerous health benefits it is going to bring to the child involved. Also, making children to become involved in sports activities will make them become fit starting from a tender age and also make their brains more active, and their minds happier and more focused. Thus, the enhancement of physical and mental development of children is certainly one of the very important contributions that sports or outdoor activities do give children. Making a child, no matter the age, to start getting involved in a sporting or physical leisure activity is very important for both the physical and overall mental well-being. The best advice for any parent or guardian on this is that they should start as early as possible for their children. It is scientifically proven that any form of sporting or outdoor activity, as long as it’s safe from causing bodily harm, truly goes a really long way in reducing stress and enhancing general body mood. Children, while growing up, easily adopt or soak in whatever they are thought as soon as they start walking or talking and this theory is equally applicable to the physical needs of a child. Sporting or outdoor activities surely help in increasing the physical alertness and fitness of a child or adolescent, aid in improving sleep patterns in a child’s body, help in building healthy bones and muscles, help kids or adolescents in easily integrating themselves in their respective social groups, help in improving their cooperation and analytical skills, help in boosting self-confidence and also importantly help in lowering the risk of getting unhealthy fats or becoming obese. In fact, the physical and social advantages of sports for kids are impressive.

“To children, play is just fun. However, playtime is as important to their development as food and good care. Playtime helps children be creative, learn problem-solving skills and learn self-control. Good, hardy play, which includes running and yelling, is not only fun, but helps children to be physically and mentally healthy.” MHA (Mental Health America), 2020, Online.

Other factors that contribute to creating a suitable physical needs for children are good food and appropriate nutrition (as stated earlier), good interpersonal communication with parents and the socio-economic status of the parents of the children involved. A family’s socio-economic status in this instance can also be determined by the mentality and view a mother and father have towards their way of life, income and societal beliefs. In fact, it is important to note that these three factors are what determine the physical wellness of a child in any stated environment. This is because the social and economic status or perspective of a child’s family would determine the environment in which that child would eventually grow up.

For instance, Simons and Granberg (2008), states that the rate of obesity among children has more than doubled the past 30 years (Berkowitz and Stunkard 2002) increasing concern about its physical and emotional health consequences (Braet, Mervielde, and Vandereycken 1997; DeJong and Kleck 1986). This increase has been especially marked among African-American children; rates of overweight and obesity among African American girls, for example, are nearly twice those of European American girls (Baskin, Ard, Franklin, and Allison 2005). Awareness of these trends has contributed to a growing interest in the social psychological causes and consequences of childhood obesity. One of the most active areas of research has emphasized the association between childhood obesity and dysfunctional family relationships.

Although there is ample evidence suggesting that stigma can interrupt relations between parents and children, concern about specific types of stigma varies by culture and sub-culture (Link and Phelan 2001). African Americans, for example, hold more weight-tolerant attitudes than European Americans (Crago, Shisslak, and Estes 1996; Nichter 2000) and are, in general, less concerned about body weight as a stigmatizing characteristic. For example, despite being heavier than whites, black women have higher self esteem and a more positive body image–patterns that have also been documented among adolescents (Cash and Henry 1995; Rucker and Cash 1992; Siegel 2002). African American girls are also more likely to receive positive feedback from family members about their appearance, regardless of their weight (Crago, Shisslak, and Estes 1996; Nichter 2000).

(Simons and Granberg, 2008, pp. 1&5).

**PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT**

“The work of education is divided between the teacher and the environment.” ~ Maria Montessori

“Psychosocial environment in early childhood influences the health and well-being of the growing individual, and may also impact the later development of emotional and behavioral difficulties in adults’ health. The causes of mental difficulties in childhood are numerous and inter-related. The individual and contextual factors, such as the family’s socioeconomic status (SES), parenting stress, and other environmental exposures, may influence children’s emotional and behavioral difficulties. Family climate has a significant impact in predicting behavior difficulties in children. There is some evidence that the impact of stressful parenting behavior on a child’s mental health might be associated with the child’s biological pathways through stress hormone secretion and genetic sensitivity. Stress and unfavorable environmental exposures may trigger epigenetic changes, leading to altered metabolic pathways involved in the etiology of chronic diseases.”

(Grazuleviciene and Andrusaityte, 2017, p. 1).

“It is easy for parents to identify their child’s physical needs: nutritious food, warm clothes when it’s cold, bedtime at a reasonable hour. However, a child’s mental and emotional needs may not be as obvious. Good mental health allows children to think clearly, develop socially and learn new skills. Additionally, good friends and encouraging words from adults are all important for helping children develop self confidence, high self-esteem, and a healthy emotional outlook on life.

Love, security and acceptance should be at the heart of family life. Children need to know that your love does not depend on his or her accomplishments. Mistakes and/or defeats should be expected and accepted. Confidence grows in a home that is full of unconditional love and affection.

Nervous mannerisms, shyness, withdrawal and aggressive behavior may be signs of childhood fears. A change in normal eating and sleeping patterns may also signal an unhealthy fear. Children who “play sick” or feel anxious regularly may have some problems that need attention. Fear of school can occur following a stressful event such as moving to a new neighborhood, changing schools, or after a bad incident at school. Children may not want to go to school after a period of being at home because of an illness.

In relation to this, always try to be firm, but kind and realistic with your expectations. Children’s development depends on your love and encouragement. Also, always try to set a good example. You cannot expect self-control and self-discipline from a child if you do not practice this behavior.” MHA (Mental Health America), 2020, Online.

Thus, all of the above analyses show how far any form of environmental influence, especially that which directly affects the mental aspect, can impact the overall life of a human right from childhood to adulthood. How a child is feeling is very important to observe simply because it is what is going to impact how well he or she is going to function on a daily basis. The feelings of a kid or adolescent impact his or her creativity, communication skills, behavior, productivity and mental well-being. The scientific fact is that a young child still growing will definitely have his or her own form of anxieties about the environment, still be vulnerable and totally inexperienced about life and the world around him or her. This is in regardless of whether the kid is actually smart or not in terms of cognitive development.

The positive and negative perspective of a child towards other people and the environment is determined by how well the parents have prepped him or her in accepting the daily challenges of life the kid would definitely face. It is important to remember here that children do have a clear, blank mind that is easily molded and rewritable with whatever they gain from the different stages of environment they shall experience or come across. These different stages of environment would always include the immediate (parents and siblings), the transitional or external (which includes peer groups, extended family members, random friends and strangers, academic and social colleagues, job colleagues, etc.), and the internal or personal environment (which is majorly the vivid thought processes, memories, and the personal views and beliefs which the child has made up as his or her own). This last environmental stage is very crucial to the child because it is basically fashioned from the sum total of everything the child has learnt so far from his or her interactions while growing up with the immediate and external environmental stages. So what all this means is that a child that has the golden opportunity of being tutored and brought up in the non-toxic versions of the immediate and external environments would have a very high probability of becoming a mentally happy and good-natured adolescent and adult on the long run. Children like this mostly grow up to possess a positive outlook on life with its human and natural challenges. And this means that whatever family the child forms on his or her own, or the environment he or she settles into would be better for it. In relation to this analogy, one can say the positive or negative psychological well-being of an individual from childhood would definitely create its own form of societal chain reaction in influencing or affecting others. This is because human beings, regardless of gender, religious beliefs, or socio-economic status, can never do without interacting with others in any environment. And both the philosophical and sociological truth is that every form of environment is always made up of people who have either been positively or negatively impacted psychologically from their individual childhood.

**SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

“To raise a child who is comfortable enough to leave you means you’ve done your job. They are not ours to keep, but to teach how to soar on their own.” ~ Anonymous

“Social development refers to the process by which a child learns to interact with others around them. As they develop and perceive their own individuality within their community, they also gain skills to communicate with other people and process their actions. Social development most often refers to how a child develops friendships and other relationships, as well how a child handles conflict with peers. Social development can actually impact many of the other forms of development a child experiences. A child’s ability to interact in a healthy way with the people around him or her can impact everything from learning new words as a toddler, to being able to resist peer pressure as a high school student, to successfully navigating the challenges of adulthood. Healthy social development can help your child

A child’s social development is a complex issue that is constantly changing. But the good news is that parents can have a big impact on how it progresses. By modeling healthy relationships and staying connected with your child, you can help them relate to the people around them in positive, beneficial ways. By encouraging them to engage with other children and adults, you’re setting them up to enjoy the benefits of social health—from good self esteem to strong communication skills to the ability to trust and connect with those around them.”

(SCAN of Northern Virginia, 2020, Online).

One of the thought-provoking realities of life is that today’s adults were indeed once children. During their own time, they must have passed through those delicate periods of their lives when they needed the guiding hands of parents to walk and talk. They have also passed through those transitional teenage years every person must biologically experience when the body hormones would start their natural rages and peaks of activity. This is the stage where many parents probably had it the most difficult. And the reason why that is asserted is because the teenage or adolescent periods is when a child is gradually starting his or her transition into adulthood. This is the period when children usually succumb to teen angst that is being fuelled by sexual curiosity, peer pressure, a rebellious attitude being motivated by a hurried sense of having their own way, the smug perception of already knowing it all, and having the perception of being able to do everything all on their own. These exhibited traits are understandable and expected within an adolescent child due to the necessary chemical phases their bodies are passing through as they physiologically develop and age more in years. Their entire psyche is already being shaped in preparation for a coming transition into adulthood in the nearest future and this can be stressful for both the child and parents. However, that doesn’t mean a parent or parents can’t still keep their child or children in check. In fact, this is the most delicate period for any child and parent interaction. Parents are tasked with accepting that their child isn’t a kid or toddler they used to know anymore, recognize their emotional struggles and social challenges as they are gradually becoming young adults amidst an ever changing environment, and the kind of adult they are gradually becoming. The irony presented by the emergence of this period is that parents too (at least the caring ones) would be psychologically tasked by being curious to know how well their child has soaked in all what they have been teaching him or her. Of course we definitely need to remember the influences an adolescent would already be getting from the elements of his or her external environment. The things observant parents would likely watch out for are the kind of attitude the child is likely willing to take into adulthood, the kind of social activities the child is adapting to or preferring, and the mental maturity of the child in question. But above all, it is very healthy and advisable to allow a child to explore his or her own environment (under good guidance and observation of course) so as to expose him or her to self navigation of life and the world around at an early stage. With this, a child through his or her adolescent years would have the high chance of being able to mingle with others, be able to learn about and face challenges from both people and the environment, and be able to learn and make decisions based on many experiences, particularly from his or her external environment.

In relation to this, Mental Health America confirms that it is sometimes very important for children to have time with their peers. By playing with others, children discover their strengths and weaknesses, develop a sense of belonging, and learn how to get along with others. Consider finding a good children’s program through neighbors, local community centers, schools, or your local park and recreation department.” MHA (Mental Health America), 2020, Online.

“Children often face uncertainties, have to cope with competitive environments or situations, or meet difficult expectations. Many kids struggle with confidence. Help them believe in themselves. Their self-regard is based on many factors—and these factors may be internal, external, big, small, anticipated, unforeseen, and so on. Reinforcement and encouragement from parents can go a long way toward strengthening children’s self-esteem, and instilling feelings such as optimism and relief.

It’s important that children receive the right kinds of supports at home, school, and within their communities in order to foster their experiential strengths and emotional literacy. When children’s emotional development is nurtured and reinforced, they’re more likely to feel good about themselves. And, those positive feelings are enabling, so kids can focus more fully on learning, interacting, creating, and succeeding. Helping children build upon their essential emotional capacities will enrich their lives and empower them—motivating them now, and into the future.”

(The Creativity Post, 2017, Online).

“The "magic" of literature for children is necessarily bound with the nature of their development. Research in past decades reflects our changing view of how children develop and learn. Children have their own unique needs, interests, and capabilities. We are born with the ability to organize, classify, and impose order on our environment, resulting in the construction of our own unique theory of the world (O'Donnell & Wood, 1999; Wood, 1988). Very little of the content and order of our theory is the result of direct instruction; rather, it is the interaction of biological, cultural, and life experiences that greatly affects the substance of our theory and the way we organize our experiences. As children encounter new experiences, existing memory structures in the brain or schema are reshaped, impacting the linguistic, cognitive, social, and emotional development of children over time. Therefore, "knowledge cannot be given directly from the teacher to the learner, but must be constructed by the learner and reconstructed as new information becomes available" (Ryan & Cooper, 2000, p. 346). From this point of view, learning is not the result of development; rather, learning is development. "From this perspective, which places instruction at the heart of development, a child's potential for learning is revealed and indeed is often realized in interactions with more knowledgeable others" (Wood, 1988, p. 24). For example, not too long ago, I visited my friend Diane who has a 4-year-old daughter. We were sitting in her living room talking when her little girl, Rachel, came running into the room with show up next, with a repeated, rhyming, patterned text. She proceeded to crawl into Diane’s lap, open the book, and start reciting the text, pointing and commenting on the various illustrations. Anyone looking at this scene would know that Rachel has been read to many, many times and finds great joy in the experience crawl into Diane's lap, open the book, and start reciting the text, pointing and commenting on the various illustrations. Anyone looking at this scene would know that Rachel has been read to many, many times and finds great joy in the experience.”

(Dennis, 2003, pp. 4-5).

All what the above citations are stating is that children would eventually have to interact with their environment in a social way eventually. This is why it is very dangerous and unhealthy for any parent or family to forcefully indoctrinate their child or children with overly harsh and restrictive lifestyles or parental teachings. Children are naturally going to be very curious of their environment once they are out of the womb and this curiosity would still keep on peaking late into their period of adolescence. Being in the age of a rapidly evolving world of technology, culture contact, and economic changes, it is expected that the social lives of children would ever be dictated by the aforementioned. And the result of this is seeing kids growing into adolescence trying to explore more and more of whatever is trending around them. Now social media and internet has been enabling this for a very long time now. But while it is very important for parents or guardians to discipline their kids in a progressive and appropriate way whenever necessary, it is very inadvisable to go to the extreme in trying to repress their social curiosities. This has been backfiring on both the parents and children of overly repressive families over the years. Another example are families who believe that their children shouldn’t be involved with social media activities or even some sports because of their too conservative beliefs of turning them immoral or wayward. Some have even banned their children from playing video games at all due to the paranoid fear of them getting violent from whatever they play on television.

In most modern African societies for instance, children, especially females, are still being taught to always shun being curious about anything related to sexual education or activities. However, this family practice is very common among Islamic families. As a result of this, many teenagers later find themselves lost and marginally uninformed about the biological changes they experience in their bodies during puberty. Yet, this wrong move has given way to many cases of teenage pregnancies and misguided sexual activities. Though this is also happening in advanced countries where more liberal views of parenting are being applied to children upbringing, but they are not as prevalent as that of the overly religious and conservative societies in Africa and Middle Eastern countries.

“Adolescents continue to refine their sense of self as they relate to others. Erikson referred to the task of the adolescent as one of identity versus role confusion. Thus, in Erikson’s view, an adolescent’s main questions are “Who am I?” and “Who do I want to be?” Some adolescents adopt the values and roles that their parents expect for them. Other teens develop identities that are in opposition to their parents but align with a peer group. This is common as peer relationships become a central focus in adolescents’ lives.

As adolescents work to form their identities, they pull away from their parents, and the peer group becomes very important (Shanahan, McHale, Osgood, & Crouter, 2007). Despite spending less time with their parents, most teens report positive feelings toward them (Moore, Guzman, Hair, Lippman, & Garrett, 2004). Warm and healthy parent-child relationships have been associated with positive child outcomes, such as better grades and fewer school behavior problems, in the United States as well as in other countries (Hair et al., 2005).”

(Lumenlearning, 2020, Online).

**CONCLUSION**

The easiest way of ensuring a good psychological, social and physical well-being for any child is to always endeavour to watch them closely, understand them and try to teach them about what they do not know. A parent might easily discard something that he or she deemed unimportant at face value only to discover too late that that same problem has caused far reaching negative effects on the psyche of the kid involved. Parents can use anything to teach their kids. It could be from animations, movies, nature or anything fun they can be happy to learn from. Doing any of these is good for bonding and better understanding between your child and you as a parent.

Another very important thing to note from all the analysis is that the economic and educated levels of parents are major determinants in ensuring the appropriate needs of a child at the psychological, social and physical levels. This is saying that if a caregiver or parents are not doing well in terms of financing the family, they wouldn’t be able to provide suitable food, good living environment and proper education for their child or children. Apart from that, the overall bodily stress such impoverished parents would incur from such socio-economic disadvantages would definitely have a deep negative impact on the kids within the family. This is saying that the quality level of the social, financial and enlightened state of the parents of a child is highly instrumental in shaping the needs of such child. Though there are isolated cases of parents with good socio-economic status that still neglected their children, but they are not as significant as that of parents with less suitable socio-economic conditions. So the verdict is that a child or children with parents having adequate education, finances and social exposure would have a better chance of getting to grow in appropriate environments where their psychological, social and physical needs would be met.

But in most cases these days where most people, including parents and family members, are desperately running the race of getting their own quota of social acceptance with no time for caring whether a sixteen year old is frantically telling them about an important or personal issue that needs urgent attention from loved ones. Indeed saying positive words of encouragement to your child during his or her teenage years are as important as trying to provide for their needs as babies, if not more important. This is because a baby child or a small onecan still be taken care of from the perspective of physical care alone, but when dealing with teenagers child care and support is on another level entirely. A teenager, as mentioned above, is at that delicate crossroads of human life either as a male or female due to being a person in between that psychological position of a child and a budding adult. In short, a teenager is like a child trying to pay his or her rites of passage into adulthood and failure to pay that rite successfully or completely according to what her or she has been let to perceive and believe according to many societal norms would likely lead to an adult forever stuck in the mind of a child afraid to grow or move forward, or an embittered adult grown into a social recluse or even a grown child forever with the mind of a self-imposed psychotic mind or psychological break down with a twisted mind about society. Indeed there are lots of factors that usually contribute to these various issues according to teenage growth and social interaction patterns across most societies.

As mentioned earlier, many West African countries, for instance, have a culture of imbibing strict social discipline and guidelines to their teenagers due to the long held beliefs of never seeing teenagers as still capable of totally taking care if themselves. Though of course the economic factors of these societies play a major role in the way African parents bring up their kids, but many of the African societies mostly still view their teenagers as kids or just slightly grown child with developing adult hormones that still need lots of strict monitoring and chastisement. Though this used to work at a time but the effects of evolving social patterns, economic situations and culture contact, especially from Western influence have made most families too to start adapting the method of the Western societies, albeit in a subtle manner in order not to look like neglecting parents. But the general situation now as observed across the world is that teenagers and young children, either left alone or too strictly monitored, are highly likely turn out less than the way their parents and families envisaged.

But not only in Africa, parents from other climes also make the mistakes since time immemorial to desperately try to mould their teenagers into the adults that are deemed capable and presentable according to societal standards. They have forgotten that their teenage kids are also well aware, if not more about those standards due to their closer connection to the modern trends of the society and thus would also want to fit in. This in turn results into a huge amount of emotional and psychological pressure for the kid because he or she would be tackling to meet up to his or her own social standard and that of the parents. Now teenage years are the most fragile as mentioned earlier and this is where parents have their work cut out for them because their child or children is no longer a mere baby to be just patted and given some food to calm down or lure in with sweet words and fairy tales, no. This is about a child that is still young but trying to grow into adulthood. Many teenagers are trying to come to terms with having their first sexual growths (biologically and emotionally), growing up gradually towards their independence and meeting up to societal and parental expectations. Now this is where it is very important for parents to keenly monitor their teenagers but not in an extremely strict and unending way, and also not in a too carefree or careless manner. Every parental care and guidance at this point must be balanced and encouraging in order to make a better and responsible adult out of any teenage child that will be confident of him or herself without having to meet up with the expectations of others or the society.

**NOTE: Conclusion originally written by the writer.**

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