

CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

What is Child Risk ?

Risk-In general use, the word 'risk' refers to the probability, likelihood or chance of an adverse outcome in the physical ,social and psychological wellbeing of children.. In risk management contexts, the word tends to include a measure of the seriousness of the adverse outcome, as well as its probability. Risk defined as the chance that 'somebody could be harmed by [a hazard] together with an indication of how serious the harm could be' (HSE, 2006). It is

- **chance of something going wrong:** the danger that injury, damage, or loss will occur.
- **hazard:** somebody or something likely to cause injury, damage, or loss.

Problems in defining risk

The assessment of risk of both adults and children has posed some difficulties in finding common definitions. In her review of the international literature on risk assessment for the Scottish Government, Barry (2007) suggests there is no clear definition of risk, and little consistency in defining high, medium and low risks. Low risks are often seen as a matter of professional judgment.

Risk Management is a term given to a set of practices that lead to minimizing possible harm to individuals/children. In this instance, individuals include children and persons with developmental disabilities who receive services through different humanitarian centers.

1.1 Children and Childhood

Each of us has experienced not one, but two childhoods: the first as a biological state of growth and development and the second as a social construction, which is to say as an institution that has been socially created. If this is true, then it follows that childhood is dependent on the nature of a society into which an individual is born and will vary from place to place and time to time.

Children without childhood?

If childhood is constructed then it must be possible for there to be children without childhood. The idea may seem extraordinary, but it is possible. We take it for granted in modern western

societies that there is a state we call 'childhood'. It is a commonplace of our language about the young and enshrined in law, both national and international, where special protection is offered to persons usually under the age of 18. In part, such persons need these legal protections because they do not have the full rights of a citizen: the right to own property, to be a legal entity who can go before the courts and to participate in such events as elections.

The invention of childhood

The issue of whether modern childhood is an invention began to occupy a number of historians from the 1960s onwards who, for the first time, began to seriously consider the history of children and childhood. The most important of these thinkers was the French medievalist Philippe Ariès whose investigations led him to state that in *medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist* (1962: 125). While infants had to be cared for by parents, nurses or servants, Ariès believed that the evidence suggested that once they were old enough partially to fend for themselves, children were simply treated as if they were smaller adults. Thus childhood, in the modern sense of a separate and protected state, did not exist. He argued it was not until the modern period that this idea of 'childhood' came to be significant

The fact that different societies in different times have distinct ideas about childhood indicates the ways in which childhood is contingent on the nature of a society and that the idea of childhood can be changed and reconstructed over time. What is important is to understand what those conditions were, how they came about and what forces led to that construction.

1.2: Social constructions of childhood

Examining the exploitation of child labour in the past is a reminder about why childhood might be constructed in a particular way. The key issue is who has to gain by regarding children from a perspective that makes useful their employment for very little or no wages, just as some might wish to be able to exploit the labour of women and the poor in general.

How childhood is constructed?

If we accept that childhood is a social construction we have to consider how it is assembled. The

term 'social constructionism' derives from the work of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967). Building on the ideas of Marxist thinkers they investigated the ways in which individuals and social groups participate in the creation of the reality they perceive around them. This is often carried out by a complex process by which ideas are originated, spread throughout society, become accepted and institutionalised, and rapidly move to be seen as traditional and therefore unchangeable.

Thus the contradiction that some commentators have noticed in more recent attitudes to childhood as the 'demon/doll dichotomy', by which children can be seen as either potential wrongdoers or helpless innocents, actually has its origins in an angel/devil dichotomy from at least the early medieval period (Pifer, 2000). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, positive images of children appear to have begun to win out over the negative.

If we consider childhood from the perspective of social constructionism we can gain a number of useful insights into the nature of childhood and how this affects the experience of individual children.

- Childhood and the lives of individual children are separate but related sets.
- There was a concept of childhood in the known past.
- However, this construction was not necessarily the same as the modern understanding of what childhood means.
- Childhood as an entity may be constructed by adults out of self-interest or because it fits into a prevailing ideology.
- The process by which childhood is constructed is complex, and is dependent upon a number of factors including economic, ideological, religious and social institutions and norms.
- Within a given society and even within a prevailing ideology differing and apparently contradictory views of childhood may coexist.
- At different times one view may dominate over another.
- Even in contemporary childhood, similar themes and dichotomies can be seen to exist.
- These tensions and the circumstances in which they exist help to create the prevailing construction of childhood in any society.

1.3: Living and learning in different communities: cross-cultural comparisons

The emphasis here, however, will be on comparisons of the lives of children and young people growing up in different communities, where variables such as social class, ethnicity, race, gender, culture and social policy are factors that influence how children learn and how their lives are shaped.

Social categories are dynamic forces that operate to produce particular patterns of behaviour that influence the child. The child might be viewed as an autonomous being who, according to social constructivists, such as Vygotsky (1930) and Bruner (1996) who have dominated theories of learning in the West since the 1960s, interprets the world around him/her, in order to make sense of it. The child interprets the world through language, a socially constructed sign system. So, while the child operates within social parameters and a culturally bound system of meaning-making, he/she is, nevertheless, an agent who is able to make choices.

1.4: Childhood in crisis?

The term ‘crisis’ is, of course, medical in origin and should denote an intense and limited period in which a patient, possibly painfully and uncomfortably, either conquers an ailment or suffers (perhaps fatal) the effects. This section has raised a series of questions around oftentimes controversial issues and viewpoints to challenge the ‘childhood in crisis’ thesis. The themes we have explored include childhood health and obesity, education and literacy, violence, and sexualisation. We have examined whether these different aspects of childhood contribute toward a shortening or fragmentation of the childhood experience, and question whether our perceptions of childhood may differ from reality.

1.5: Children and risk

In considering childhood and risk from a social-cultural perspective a number of useful insights can be gained regarding the nature of risks, the issue of who is at risk and whether all risks are merely negative. These include the following.

- In contemporary societies, risk is most commonly used to refer to danger, the chance of loss or the possibility of damage, but it may also have positive connotations.

- Being a child is a very different experience across cultures, with young labourers, early marriages and child soldiers not uncommon in some countries.
- From the late Middle Ages, a perceptual dichotomy has persisted of children as either innocents in need of protection or dangerous individuals in need of taming.
- Risk-taking can have positive outcomes for children, including fostering emotional engagement, facilitating identity formation and providing opportunities for skilled performances that challenge boundaries.

1.6: Childhood – past and present

Contemporary child development is the result of centuries of change in western cultural values. Philosophical thinking and scientific progress.

1. Medieval Times

Historical art crafts and writings show that child hood was regarded as separate period of life. This involves

- **John Locke- tabula rasa-** children came into the world a blank slate that the world and experiences write on to shape their character. Parenting needed to be rational tutoring to mold the child in the most positive way.
 - **Jean Jacques Rousseau- noble savages-** children are endowed with a sense of right and wrong and a positive plan for growth. This is the idea of **maturational-** that given a healthy environment, growth will unfold in a genetically determined, positive manner. He also saw children as directing their own growth in a self-determined way.
2. **Reformation in the 16th c** a revised image of childhood sparing from puritan belief in original sin. It was assumed that children were born evil and stubborn and had to be civilized. It was the idea that children were simply small adults, already formed. There were no laws to protect children. Puritans added the idea that children were afflicted by **original sin** and needed the devil beat out of them. Parenting was repressive, but education was stressed to teach morality.
 3. **Philosophy of enlightenment:** in the 17th c enlightenments brought new philosophy of reason and emphasized ideas of human dignity and respect Conception of childhood were more human than those of centuries before.

Scientific beginning : research on child development involved and this leads to early observation replaced by improved methods and theories.