

Chapter 6 Activities

Activities

The following activities are designed to help reflect back on some of the key concerns over the chapter as a whole:

Chapter activity 1

The chapter discusses the UK government's position as reflected in its guidance to parents on their responsibilities and notes that the responsibilities are largely in relation to ensuring children are socialized into the values of society and are provided for and protected. It goes on to say,

It is interesting that this list doesn't mention children's participation and there are 2 major instances where child participation is denied. It gives those with parental responsibility the authority to determine the religion of the child and choose their education, both of which are crucial decisions concerning the child's life about which s/he will have some view.

Review the list on page 138 and consider

- a. why you think these omissions occur, and
- b. what you think a different position might be concerning parents, children's rights and
Parental authority to determine the religion of a child
Parental authority to choose the education of a child.

In particular discuss factors such as age, maturity, power and culture in your analysis.

Chapter activity 2

The chapter draws on Archard's influential commentary on rights in relation to the following:

- Commitment to the importance of 'the best interests of the child'.
- Parent and carers have the right to autonomy (freedom to bring up their children as they see fit) and privacy (no one can intrude in the family without consent).
- There are clear conditions that identify when it is appropriate for the state to intervene.

Consider the issue of the state's position of the 'best interests' of a child being made by parents or adults working with children in relation to the research by Gorin on page 156.

How do children's rights relate to their involvement or non-involvement in decisions made about the services they receive?

Chapter 6 Example of research

Example of research: the effects of poverty

In reviewing the literature on the effects of poverty in industrialized countries Griggs and Walker (2008) found the following:

- Poverty impacts on children's self-confidence and their relationships with other children.
- Young people living in low-income households report a stigma attached to their circumstances, and feel at risk from exclusion and bullying which, in turn, impacts on school and community involvement.
- Some children feel embarrassed about their impoverished circumstances, particularly when a lack of money means they are unable to participate in social activities.
- Children growing up in poverty are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, to feel that they are 'useless' or 'a failure' and to be socially isolated.

Reflection on research

As well as 'relative poverty' the earlier list of factors affecting families included 'consumer society'.

Activity

How do you think that pressures to wear the 'right' sort of clothes, own the 'right' sort of technology and engage in the 'right' sort of activities might contribute to the effects of relative poverty described in this research?

Example of research: what do we mean by 'abuse'?

Mason and Falloon (2001) researched the views of children in Australia on what they thought constituted abuse. They found that the children identified a number of features that they associated with abuse:

- The emotional as well as the physical aspects of abuse, for example, 'like someone getting to you from your insides, like shredding something that really matters to you'.
- The abuse of the unequal power relationships between adults and children e.g. 'because you're not allowed to smack anyone else but children . . . I can't smack.'
- The fear of disclosing abuse and the children's limited agency: 'you and your parents have been like together and they support you and if you, if maybe you go against them then they'll go against you and you've got no-one to support you.'

Reflection on the research

What these children are referring to in the first two instances is beyond the scope of what is identified as abuse in legal cases. As such, Mason and Falloon believe that we shouldn't see abuse as being pathological but as something that takes place in all families to some degree because of the power relationships between parents and children.

Activity 1

What is your response to this point of view concerning abuse in families?

Activity 2

Perceiving abuse in this way would suggest that families have difficulty in protecting children. How would relationships between children and their parents need to change to avoid the abuse that the children in the research identified?

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Research example: poverty and child labour

Save the Children (2007) reported on the extent of child labour across the world and identify how family poverty can lead to eight particular forms of child slavery

- child trafficking,
- commercial sexual exploitation,
- bonded child labour,
- forced work in mines,
- forced agricultural labour,
- child soldiers/combatants,
- forced child marriage,
- domestic slavery.

One of the areas they report on is bonded child labour where the report describes how their parents take out a loan to pay for their home, medicine or maybe just food. They are then obliged to work for the money-lender in lieu of the money. The whole family, including children, must work until they have effectively paid back the money. This can take years for even the smallest amount. These bonded workers have no power to negotiate the repayment rate or the interest added to the original sum. Unable to earn money of their own, parents are often forced to take out further loans, increasing the amount they owe.

They found that

- In Nepal, there are approximately 200,000 bonded labourers, many of them children.
- In Pakistan's Sind province, almost seven million bonded labourers, including children, work for their landlords without pay.
- Around 250,000 children live and work in Pakistani brick kilns in complete social isolation.

Reflections on research

In all these situations children are being exploited: they are not working out of choice and they are not working in conditions where they are protected. The reason that they can be exploited in these ways is because their families are unable to protect them: their work may be the only means of keeping the family alive.

Activity

In concluding their report Save the Children asks the public to

- lobby their MPs to make the elimination of child slavery a priority,
- support fair trade initiatives that protect the rights of child labourers.

How do you think these things might make a difference to the lives of these children? What would be needed to enable the families to protect their children?

Example of research: rights, work and agency

Punch (2001) researched the lives of children in rural Bolivia where 'children are expected to work and are active contributors to the household from a very young age.'

This gives them a degree of mobility within the community that is rare for children in economically developed societies and they are away from adult surveillance. She argues that this enables them to be part of a 'complex process in which they assert their agency, creating time and space for themselves despite restrictions from a variety of sources, including adults, other children and structural constraints.'

The following is an example of a child–parent negotiation where mother (Dolores) and eldest daughter (Marienela, 10 years) share many of the domestic duties; in this case, Dolores wants Marienela to make the half-hour walk each way to take her father his lunch.

Marienela: I'm not going to go.

Dolores: Now you have to go. Can't you take my place for just one day?

Marienela: No I can't

Dolores: But I always do it during the week.

The result was that Dolores took the lunch but on condition that Marienela looked after her 2-year-old brother and kept an eye on the animals.

Reflection on research

This is a good illustration of children not being able to do what they want but being able to take part in the decision making of the family as a serious participant.

Activity

What do you think Marienela is learning about her status in the family and the interdependence of all family members?

Example of research: rights, families and religion

Horwath et al. (2008) researched the views of parents and children about religion and found that

most parents saw religion as a way of life that was transmitted between generations. They considered it part of their parenting responsibility to pass on their faith.

Although young people understood that formal worship could be an important shared activity in religious families and a duty for some of their parents, most thought they should not be forced to attend.

They also found that

parents acknowledged that as children grew up they had to make their own choices about their beliefs. However, there were differing views about the age at which young people could make informed choices, including whether to engage in religious activities. . . . Although some young people and parents from different faith groups claimed religious authority for strict views on issues such as sex outside marriage and homosexuality, parents often seemed more measured and tolerant about these issues than young people anticipated. More generally, young people and parents considered it was crucial that parents, from early childhood, begin to provide young people with the skills to resist external pressures on their religious way of life and choices.

Reflection on research

In this research parents acknowledge that when the child becomes an adult he or she should be able to make decisions about religion but are unsure what age that should be.

The research paints quite a positive view of parent–child relationships around religion, but there are issues concerning the difficult line between informing children about the religion of the parents and pressurizing them into conformity. The parents and children in the research thought it crucial for parents to provide young people with strategies to resist external pressures.

Activity 1

Do you think it is possible to bring a child up to believe in a religion in such a way that they are open minded enough at a later date to reject that religion?

Activity 2

A person's identity and culture are often closely linked with religion. How might rejecting the religion of your family have an impact on someone's sense of identity and their sense of belonging to a community?

Example of research: leading a double life within and outside the family

Ahmad et al. worked with 36 young people between the ages of 11 and 21 to identify their experience of living with two different cultures.

They found that while all the young people identified with the concept of a 'double life' 30 per cent felt they were trapped between the culture of their family and modern, Western society. Some examples of the comments made are:

My parents tell me to pray everyday five times a day but I don't want to.

Quite possibly with regards to marriage/marriage partners, clothes, education and work opportunities. Parents may want their children to act according to their culture and religion, while some South Asian Young people may not feel as much obliged to follow their culture, religion and family compared to their parents and may feel more inclined to the western society.

Equally they felt under pressure to conform to the accepted behaviour of the Western culture that they met outside the home, for example,

Yes, it can, a person could be pressured by friends, and it can be hard to say no as don't want to be left out.

Yes, because mates might want you to do something that you don't want to do.

Yes, because it is difficult to say no to friends because then they start back biting so you follow because you don't want that, you want to be like every body else.

Yes, they could be forced into smoking, boyfriends when you don't want to.

Yes, because friends might force you to do something against your religion and culture.

Unfortunately many of the young people felt unable to talk to their family about the difficulties because of the following:

Feel being judged

Fear of parents

Family might tell parents

Might have the fear of getting hit by parents

Feel they don't connect

Generation gap

Blackmailing by family, brothers and sisters

Culture and religion – you have to have two different personalities to be able to cope with life today.

As a result, the researchers identified a need for professional support for young people in this situation to help them to explore these conflicts and how to deal with them and made the following recommendations:

There is a need to educate professionals on cultural and religious issues and needs:

- Services need to meet the health and emotional well-being needs of South Asian young people through specialist services being developed.

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- Appropriate service development for young people from Asian communities requires their involvement in planning and implementation from the outset, rather than attempting to slot them into services that are not tailored to meet their needs.
- Professionals from schools, education, health and social services need to understand how ideas of parenting, childhood and 'youth' differ not only between ethnic groups but also within each sub ethnic group.
- Undertaking further evaluation and research with this group of young people with a focus on young South Asian males.
- Local authorities need to identify the cultural and social needs of this group in strategic documentation and identify clear needs.

Reflection on research

The results of this research emphasize more of the difficulties that young South Asians face than the previous research summary. This was a smaller scale study and was carried out by researchers who were young South Asians themselves.

Activity

How do you think this might have affected the findings?

The perceptions of adult professionals was included but not the perceptions of parents.

Why do you think this might have been the case?

Example of research: time poverty and income poverty

Burchardt (2008) identified the importance of time poverty as well as income poverty. She points out that, while some parents work long hours in order to provide a good standard of living for their family, this may result in 'time poverty' where they don't have time to spend with their children. For many of these families there would be an option of reducing working time in order to have more time to spend with their children. She was particularly interested in those families who had to work long hours in order to provide a basic standard of living and who would fall into poverty if they reduced their working hours. For these families the choice was between being 'time poor' or being 'income poor': there wasn't any other option. She researched the effects of policy on these families and found that around half (between 42 and 56 per cent, depending on the poverty definition used) of lone parents are not in a position to generate sufficient income to be above an income poverty line while still meeting basic obligations (e.g. to ensure their children are looked after, by themselves or someone else), however long or hard they work.

She concludes that the government's welfare reform and child poverty agendas risk freeing lone parents from income poverty only at the price of deepening their existing time poverty.

Reflections on research

Activity

What do you think this says about the state's attitude to lone parents?

What could policy makers do to support lone parents in a way that would ensure that they have both the time and money to support their children?

How would this be funded?

What objections would be raised by those who believe that the state has a minimal role to play in family life?

Example of research: participation and protection

Research by Gorin (2004) for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, identifies how children who are living in families where parents have some sort of mental health problem are often ignored in discussions about their parents.

She found that children wanted to be informed about their parent's problems in a way that they could understand and gave the following illustration:

People tend to protect children and young people. For me, this translated into ignoring my need to be informed and involved. My life was affected anyway and if I had guidance it might have made the experience more positive. I needed good, age-specific information about my mother's condition and its consequences. And I needed someone to talk to who would listen in confidence and help me to express and explore the complex feelings and situations I was dealing with.

(Marlowe [1996], cited in Gorin, 2004).

Reflections on the research

The research highlights the difficulties in balancing children's rights to be protected with their rights to be informed and participate in decisions that affect them. The social worker is likely to have the parent as his or her main focus and may feel that the child needs to be protected from the realities of their parent's problems.

Activity

Look at the key points in the previous box. These were concerned with the relationship between family and state but may also be applicable in this case. Go through the points and think about how the child in this research might have benefited from their application.

Chapter 6 Key points

Key points: UK government's position on rights and parental roles

The list of responsibilities can be linked with the key areas of children's rights to draw out where the government's priorities might lie.

Type of right	Role of parent
Provision – survival	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● providing a home for the child● protecting and maintaining the child● agreeing to the child's medical treatment
Provision – development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● having contact with and living with the child● disciplining the child● choosing and providing for the child's education● determining the religion of the child● agreeing to the child's medical treatment● determining the religion of the child
Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● protecting and maintaining the child● accompanying the child outside the United Kingdom and agreeing to the child's emigration, should the issue arise● being responsible for the child's property● appointing a guardian for the child, if necessary● allowing confidential information about the child to be disclosed● disciplining the child
Participation	There is no indication that parents have any duty to support children's participation

Key points: the family and provision rights

The family's ability to provide for children's rights to survival and development are affected by

- absolute and relative poverty,
- armed conflict

and the effects of these can be made worse by the emphasis on consumerism in industrialized countries.

Key points: the family and protection rights

- The circumstances of families in economically developed and developing countries are very different and lead to different issues for the family in protecting children.
- In economically developed countries attempts to protect children from external hazards may lead to situations where children's freedoms are restricted unnecessarily.
- Definitions of what constitutes 'abuse' affect the experiences of children in families.
- Absolute poverty and armed conflict affect the family's capacity to protect children from exploitation.

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Key points: families and participation

- Children's ability to participate in decisions within the family depends on the kinds of relationships that exist between family members. This may be influenced by the economic status of the child.
- Carers have a very difficult task in enabling children to develop their own identity and beliefs while giving them the security of belonging within a family and community with its own culture and beliefs.

Key points: relationships between family and state

Research into parental response to services across a range of provision found that parents wanted:

- services that are targeted at the whole family, not just the child;
- interagency services that are well co-ordinated;
- services that offer a combination of practical and emotional help;
- services that are offered in a welcoming, non-stigmatizing manner;
- family centres that combine referred and non-referred cases and offer open access to a range of services or activities;
- transparency about the purpose and expected outcomes of services; and
- social workers who are approachable, honest, understanding, reliable, helpful and have time to listen.

Aldgate and Statham, 2001: 81

Chapter 6 Overprotection

Overprotection

The UK Children's Commissioners' report identified

there is evidence of an over-protective attitude towards children that reduces their opportunities for play, leisure, recreation and healthy development. This may be fuelled by parental fears or by institutional avoidance of any risk that might lead to liability. In Scotland, research has shown that adults fear contact with children in case they are accused of harming a child. This very wide-spread and significant fear has created an unhealthy climate that limits opportunities and hampers development.

(Marshall et al., 2008, 7)

These fears of external dangers are real: children can be in danger from such things as increased traffic, people who may harm them, exposure to images and 'grooming' on the Internet and media images and pressures. However, to live in a risk-free environment is impossible.

Activity

Can you think of some of the restrictions that parents might put on a child because of this type of fear? What effects might this have in the short term? What effects might it have in the longer term?