

Childhood and Negative Phenomena Spread in Light of Societal Changes

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Abstract

The challenges facing children in the present era are among the problems that concern state institutions in our Arab societies and our Iraqi society, due to their multiple societal dimensions that cause harm to the child's personal development and the social environment of the community. Childhood is the cornerstone of any society, and it is the foundation for building a person's character. This undoubtedly depends on the individual's compatibility with the stage they are going through, whether it is childhood, adolescence, or youth. In light of this, sociologists and mental health experts have recognized the importance of the problems faced by children, such as bullying, sexual harassment, violence, cyberbullying, begging, hazardous child labor, and more. With this understanding, our research focuses on the reality of childhood in our Iraqi society, which suffers from the spread of negative phenomena that require the concerted efforts of parents, educational institutions, and state institutions to address them.

The research consists of two chapters, comprising four sections. The first chapter discusses the general framework of the research, which includes two sections. The first section covers the research elements, including the research problem, its significance, and objectives. The second section focuses on the research methodology and defining the terms. The second chapter covers two sections. The first section addresses societal variables, while the second section highlights the most significant negative phenomena and their implications.

Keywords- Negative Phenomena, Childhood, Adolescence, methodology

Chapter One

General framework of the research:

Introduction: The truth is that every study must have a general framework to clarify to the researcher the problem that prompted the choice of research, its objectives, and the importance of the topic from various aspects. Then, the concepts and terms related to the sociological aspect are defined.

Section 1: Research Elements

1. **Research Problem**
2. **Research Significance**
3. **Research Objectives**

Section 2: Defining Concepts and Terms

Societal Variables.

General Framework of the Research:

First: Research Problem:

The initial step that researchers face is the research problem and selecting a topic that they believe is worth studying.

The topic of our study focuses on the primary structure of society and understanding the significant problems that children face, along with the underlying causes. Most of these problems are cumulative due to the failure of family roles, educational institutions, societal institutions, media, and other societal entities.

As for why we chose this topic, it is undoubtedly due to the increasing prevalence of this phenomenon in society and our personal inclination towards studying its social nature.

Research Significance:

The significance of the topic lies in the fact that children are the most deserving recipients of efforts by families, the state, and all institutions without exception. They represent the leaders and builders of the future, with their potential for construction and development. Therefore, there must be a safe and healthy environment to ensure their rights to grow and develop in a sound manner, free from societal challenges and problems.

Given that many Iraqi families suffer from various forms of social problems, poverty, or unhealthy environments, they are compelled to have their children work or beg to secure basic necessities of life. However, children engaging in work or begging on the streets inherently violate their human rights, exposing them to multiple risks. It is against this backdrop that the importance of our research emerges. Now, we will present some important dimensions of this research.

Economic Importance:

The economic importance is manifested in its impact on a specific segment of society, namely the early stages of childhood, which represent the human capital and the workforce relied upon by society for future economic development. Moreover, they are the leaders of the future and the creators of life. These challenges, in themselves, hinder economic growth and development.

Scientific Importance:

The significance of this research lies in providing explanations for various problems. Additionally, it contributes as an academic and scientific addition that can attract the attention of educational, cultural, and political institutions.

We are trying to shed light on the most important problems faced by children that may lead to their drift and consequently falling into the trap of crime, which costs the society and the state, in addition to the loss of one of its members.

Research Objectives:

1. To identify the reality of childhood in Iraq.
2. To identify the most significant negative behavioral phenomena of children.
3. To identify the important variables behind these negative childhood phenomena.
4. What are the phenomena affected by symbolic violence?
5. How can these negative phenomena be minimized?

Second Section: Research Methodology

The methodology is the approach used by the researcher to reach specific results. Some consider it the path followed by the researcher to reach the truth through rules that determine the workflow in order to reach results related to the research problem. In our study, we used the descriptive-analytical methodology, which is a comprehensive approach in analysis and interpretation, organizing ideas in order to determine the central role played by the family through its main task, which is socialization, followed by the role of institutions and means of social control in resisting foreign cultures that affect general behavior. Then, a scientific analysis of the phenomenon was conducted to understand its causes and how to confront it.

As for the research tools, we used the non-participant observation method, where the senses played a significant role in closely observing and monitoring behavior.

We also utilized the case study, which is a method that focuses on studying social phenomena through objective and in-depth analysis of individual or collective cases. We adopted this method to study and analyze each case separately.

- *Amar Bouhouch Mohamed, "Manahij al-Buhuth al-'Ilmiyya: Taraiq I'dad al-Buhuth" (Scientific Research Methods: Research Preparation Methods), Dar al-Matbu'at al-Jami'iyya, 3rd edition, 2003, p. 81.*
- *Al-Jawahiri, Abdul Hadi, et al., "Madkhal ila al-Manahij wa Tasmim al-Buhuth" (Introduction to Methodologies and Research Design), Al-Maktab al-Jami'i al-Hadith, Alexandria, 2006, p. 252.*
- *Muhammad Bahjat Kashk, "Tanzim al-Mujtama' min al-Musa'ada ila al-Difaa'" (Organizing Society from Assistance to Defense), Alexandria, 1996, p. 2.*

Then, random interviews were conducted with beggars, taking advantage of their willingness to receive small amounts of money. Questions related to the study, place of residence, and families were directed to them. This took place in (Antarah Square, where 12 children were met on different days, and 12 children were met at the meeting square). Naturally, the study cannot be considered fully fieldwork since the interviews were coincidental and focused on a single phenomenon, which is begging.

Concept Definitions:

1. Childhood: According to sociologists, childhood refers to the early stage of human life that is completely dependent on parents. It is the transitional phase through which a child goes to reach the stage of intellectual and physical maturity.

2. The age of childhood is typically defined as being under eighteen years old.

3. Socialization Process: Childhood is the developmental period that requires familial and educational support for the proper growth of an individual's personality.

4. Reflection: In the context of sociological literature, the term "reflection" is used depending on the research topic. There is no independent concept of social reflections. In our current research, social reflections refer to the factors and effects that are reflected by the realities of childhood in social, economic, political, health, and psychological aspects, which impact individuals, families, and society as a whole.

5. Social Reflections: It is synonymous with the term "social impacts" and refers to the effects caused by a particular problem and its subsequent social dimensions and consequences.

Procedural definition: They are the effects resulting from a specific problem that casts its shadows on a specific reality and affects all its aspects.

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Social Variables:

Here, we will discuss the most important variables that society experiences, which stand behind these challenges, including

1-Economic Variables:

One of the significant variables experienced by society is unemployment and the lack of job opportunities, especially among graduates who are outside the workforce. This increases the suffering of low-income families. The impact of unemployment varies from one society to another. In industrialized and advanced societies, its impact is less pronounced due to the presence of social security systems and ample job opportunities in the private sector.

Figures on the unemployment rate provided by a team of researchers from UNICEF in March 2015 exceeded 25%. This means that unemployment is much higher than this percentage, especially after the spread of the pandemic. Unemployment is one of the challenges faced by low-income families, pushing them to force their children to work, ultimately leading to dropping out of school to help their families financially. This is one of the outcomes of unemployment.

2 -Educational Variables:

Dropping out of school is one of the fundamental variables that pose a challenge to childhood. Children leaving their school seats can be attributed to the cost of purchasing school supplies and books, which most families struggle with due to low income levels. Additionally, high student absenteeism rates result in repeated failure, weakened academic performance, and engagement in the workforce, leading to increased illiteracy rates among children.

On the other hand, there is a prevalent notion of the futility of education due to the attitudes of parents towards it.

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-Mohammed Tarek Abdel Raouf, "Unemployment: Definition, Characteristics, and Arab Perspectives," Dar Al-'Ulum Publishing, Cairo, 2017, p. 173.

-Report by UNICEF researchers on the worst forms of child labor in Iraq, 2015, p. 12 .

The future of education is facing several challenges. One of these challenges is the lack of belief in the availability of job opportunities, which reduces the motivation of families to enroll their children in schools. In addition to that, the closure of schools during the pandemic has increased the number of children out of school.

There is also an important issue related to the prevailing culture among some families, who believe that children working are important for developing their skills and instilling in them the importance of taking responsibility in supporting their families. However, this often leads to the loss of the childhood period, which is a time for enthusiasm and energy for learning and studying.

Social Variables:

One of these variables is family disintegration due to divorce, polygamy, or the death of one of the parents. These circumstances create an environment filled with social, economic, and psychological problems, including anxiety and a lack of security. Weak family relationships, especially between parents, and the breakdown of these relationships have a significant impact on the psychological well-being of children.

On the other hand, there is a failure in fulfilling the role of some families or educational institutions and other community institutions in their assigned roles.

Political Variables:

Political variables are crucial as they affect society as a whole, reflecting the conditions experienced by the entire age groups. The suffering is multiplied for the most vulnerable groups, including children, during times of war, conflicts, political failure, killings, abductions, and crime. These circumstances deplete the financial and human resources, as children lose their fathers, leading to a loss of job opportunities and livelihoods. Additionally, there is a decline in education, along with the shortcomings of social care services provided to families.

The second crisis that casts its shadow on families and individuals is displacement and forced migration. This hinders the human development of children as leaving their homes abruptly leads to economic, social, and psychological problems. The harsh conditions faced by families in tents under extreme cold or intense heat exacerbate the situation.

Hence, it becomes apparent that political variables such as wars, conflicts, and displacement affect all aspects of social, economic, and educational life. Children are often the most affected, given the increased population in areas of attraction at the expense of other areas, which affects the job market, increases poverty, lowers the standard of living, and reduces employment opportunities.

Another crisis that has an impact on the perpetuation of family problems and, consequently, on childhood is the weakness of the law resulting from a weak state and its inability to enforce its sovereignty. This is manifested in the inability of families to return to their homes .

The COVID-19 pandemic itself has posed an economic crisis and challenge for Iraqi families. The implementation of social distancing measures, curfews, and the closure of businesses, along with the necessity for children to support their families, have had a significant impact.

There have been negative phenomena that have emerged recently due to the widespread use of advanced technological devices without proper supervision, whether at the family or societal level. Dealing with new technology has become a kind of religion that must be spread throughout the world, disregarding values, customs, and religious principles. This rapid technological development has made it nearly impossible for less mature groups (children) to adapt, making it difficult to predict the future due to the social, cultural, and economic problems it carries.

The digital revolution and technological advancements have contributed to the spread of different cultures that differ from our society's values and traditions. This breach of cultural privacy weakened the role of the family in social upbringing, which is the primary responsibility of every family. As a result, children are more vulnerable to global control through what they publish on social media, as well as through electronic games that often promote violence and create a generation that rejects and rebels against reality, living in isolation away from the eyes of parents, weakening the family relationship between them.

On the other hand, the family plays a significant role in social upbringing, where any behavior exhibited by the parents directly affects the child's personality, whether it is guidance, education, or other forms of behavior. Psychologists agree that parenting styles have a profound impact on shaping children's independent personalities. Therefore, parenting styles must be sound in order to form the child's personality correctly. Neglecting social upbringing and education from an early age leads to the deviation of children and distances them from the healthy environment that affects their personal growth.

In light of the aforementioned, negative behaviors have emerged as a phenomenon in society, including:

1. Sexual harassment:

This negative phenomenon has spread in society due to the lack of awareness among children. Sexual harassment is one of the worst situations that a child and the family can experience, as it affects the child's

psychology and humiliates the family in front of society. Therefore, it is necessary to educate children properly to have the courage to react quickly and escape if necessary.

1. Cyber blackmail:

This is the process of threatening someone by publishing their private and confidential information in exchange for payment. Cyber blackmail usually begins with online gaming, followed by social interaction with the child through visual and recorded conversations, leading to the manipulation of the victim. This type of behavior is considered a cybercrime that has entered our society recently with the spread of globalization and technological advancements, affecting all segments of society, with women and children being the most common victims.

The goals of cyber blackmail can be material, seeking financial gain in exchange for not disclosing certain information or images, or they can be sexual, involving sexual exploitation, which is the most dangerous form of blackmail, as it involves sexual assault.

From this, we conclude that cyber blackmail has materialistic goals, aiming to obtain money in exchange for non-disclosure, as well as sexual goals, which are among the most dangerous forms of blackmail, as they involve sexual assault.

2. Begging:

Begging is a social problem that tarnishes the public image and cultural characteristics of any country. This phenomenon has become prevalent, not limited to children but also affecting all segments of society. When parents engage in begging, they assist their children in shaping their way of life and adapting to it, which means that the upbringing of children is intended for this purpose.

Begging used to be limited to specific cases, such as disability or mental illness, but now it has become a profession that includes both genders, not limited to a particular gender.

The goals of begging are diverse, including the desire for survival and meeting basic needs, which are the primary motivators for living beings.

Begging may be practiced in order to obtain a livelihood, especially for those who suffer from low income. Some individuals beg with the aim of achieving material prosperity, which has turned this phenomenon into a profession for some. Therefore, it is necessary to find suitable solutions to this negative phenomenon and reduce its prevalence, as it reflects a backward and limited image of a country's reputation.

4-Bullying:

Another issue that children face is the problem of bullying, and it is important to understand this behavior and how to address it by presenting different perspectives.

Bullying is a social culture and repeated behavior that leads to harming a specific individual, often targeting children, which causes them significant problems.

School bullying is defined as repeated behavioral attacks and harassment, such as mockery and threats of physical violence by a bully towards another person with the aim of dominating and controlling them.

Some consider it as multiple negative actions by one or more students to harm another student through scolding, hurtful words, or insults. Bullying usually occurs from one person to another who is physically and psychologically weaker and happens repeatedly. The most severe form of bullying is cyberbullying because the pain continues, and apologies and regrets are ineffective.

Bullying takes various forms, including direct bullying, which involves physically attacking others or calling them inappropriate names with the intention of humiliating and demeaning them. There is also indirect bullying, which involves excluding the individual and consistently rejecting their inclusion in the group, making them feel

isolated and ostracized. Physical bullying attempts to undermine their dignity in front of others, often through the presentation of inappropriate images. This indicates the negative use of technology.

Social bullying involves social practices such as social exclusion and spreading rumors that affect reputation and interpersonal interactions with others.

The factors that contribute to bullying are:

1. Family factors: This is one of the main causes of school bullying, resulting from social factors, such as violence and aggression, which the child witnesses in their family environment. Exposure to violence and mistreatment becomes an experience for the child, leading them to engage in harmful behavior towards others. For example, physical punishment by parents, harsh treatment and upbringing, neglect, or parental conflict and fighting. The parents' lack of knowledge about modern parenting techniques, lack of understanding, and responding to children's misbehavior with violence instead of dialogue all contribute to negative behavioral tendencies .

2. Negative peer influence:

The importance of the school environment and its significant impact on students' behavior is evident in the influence of their interactions with each other and the educational process. This includes adolescent peers, from whom individuals begin to develop their own identity separate from their family and school environment. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the peers to whom a child belongs, and both parents should take an interest in this aspect.

3. Violence:

It is a negative phenomenon that children are exposed to, and it is noticeable in most families, schools, and even on the streets. This violence can manifest as physical or verbal abuse, such as insults and scolding. This phenomenon is dangerous and has severe consequences as it affects personal growth and mental health.

Dangerous work:

It refers to the type of work performed by children below the legal working age, known as hazardous child labor. This type of work poses risks to the children's health and safety, leading to health problems and potential disabilities. The definition of hazardous child labor encompasses work that is unsuitable for the child's age, harms their health, and causes fatigue and exhaustion that are incompatible with childhood.

In reality, children's work in unhealthy and hazardous environments inherently violates their legitimate rights as stated in human rights conventions. These rights include educational, social, psychological, and recreational aspects of their childhood. Additionally, children may also face mistreatment and violence during their work. Field studies have indicated that approximately 70.8% of child laborers experience injuries, with the most common being wounds and burns.

-Smoking:

This phenomenon has significantly spread among children, particularly in slum areas and in public view. The reasons behind this include parental neglect and failure in upbringing and social education from an early age, as well as bad company and lack of parental supervision over their children and their peers. These factors adversely affect the child's health and personal growth.

Interpretive theory of the research:

The Bourdieu theory of symbolic violence is one of the most important theories that address invisible and non-physical violence. French scholar Pierre Bourdieu, a prominent figure in intellectual media studies, argued that there is no independent subjectivity in understanding social reality. In other words, the subjective truth cannot be self-explained except through its connection to social reality. Bourdieu introduced the concept of symbolic

violence, which refers to non-physical and imperceptible violence often manifested through symbolic practices aimed at controlling and dominating individuals. The danger of this type of violence lies in its infiltration into social patterns and cultural norms, thus becoming an accepted and necessary practice. Bourdieu expressed this through the concept of cultural habitus, a set of conceptions held by social actors that are conveyed through socialization, shaping the individual's personality and understanding of their world, making them subject to their circumstances.

Therefore, symbolic violence is the invisible and imperceptible violence that makes the victim accept the situation without resistance. This is manifested in practices imposed on children as social norms with binding legitimacy. Families, for instance, may mold their children according to their own ways, leading them to beg or engaging in work, abandoning their education. In this context, children do not see any problem with such practices, and thus violence becomes symbolic and acceptable, although in reality, it is nothing less than an infringement and violation of children's rights. It steals their childhood and is no less damaging than physical violence and visible forms of violence.

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Second Topic

Results:

The most important results we have reached through analyzing the reality experienced by children and the most prevalent negative behavioral phenomena in society, especially after 2003, are as follows:

1. Most of the researchers studying children who have been subjected to field studies, in addition to our observations of these phenomena, found that the majority of them have been influenced by their familial and social reality, which resulted from their marginalization and exclusion from society. As a result, each of them felt a lack of achieving their own position, both internally and within their community. This led children to engage in deviant behaviors such as bullying, begging, smoking, and more, in order to feel social integration.
2. The majority of these negative phenomena were concentrated in urban areas more than rural areas. This is because rural areas have simpler ways of life and small communities where children are constantly under the supervision of their extended families. On the other hand, urban society provides suitable conditions for these negative phenomena, such as begging, electronic extortion, and bullying.
3. These negative phenomena were not limited to one gender over the other but affected both males and females.
4. We observed that most of the child beggars were accompanied by their parents, who taught their children the habit of begging. This phenomenon is linked to the economic situation.
5. Most children who are subjected to bullying come from poor families.
6. The prevalence of cyberbullying, especially among school students, has led some children to leave school in order to avoid hearing hurtful words. The truth is that cyberbullying has psychological and

social effects and is the most damaging and widespread, as remorse, retreat, and apologies are not effective because the harm continues.

7. Children leaving school and spreading in public spaces to sell tissues and cigarettes due to the unemployment and low income levels that families suffer from, which leads parents to rely on these children to help them financially.
8. Children being exposed to sexual harassment and online abuse.
9. Children's tendency towards violence due to the influence of electronic games, which promote violence and aggression.
10. Some children under the age of eight resort to smoking, possibly due to imitation or a sense of challenge.
11. Addiction to social media or electronic gaming devices, such as Xbox or PlayStation, isolates the child from their family's attention.

How to address these negative phenomena:

1. Creating a calm family environment free from violence and loud noise, based on understanding, clarity, and avoiding interference from others.
2. Establishing an educational atmosphere in schools through educational and psychological counselors who are close to the students.
3. Developing the personal aspects of students to broaden their horizons through extracurricular activities.
4. Emphasizing competition, dialogue, and instilling moral values. Encouraging sports activities within the school as a means of releasing negative energy.
5. Organizing educational seminars in schools and public places to raise awareness and monitor the children, as well as instill positive values in them.
6. Combating begging through strict legislation as a deterrent, while providing support to families by establishing small economic projects to improve their living standards.
7. Emphasizing the importance of education and providing free education to support low-income families and reduce the burden on them.
8. Raising awareness among parents about using dialogue and avoiding authoritarian methods that push children towards rebellion and oppositional behavior.
9. Providing education and support for children, especially those who have dropped out of school, by opening special classes for them to rejoin their peers. This can be achieved through cooperation with civil society organizations and government institutions.
10. Reducing unemployment, which casts a shadow on families, in order to prevent sending children to work
11. Many seminars have been held to raise awareness among families and parents in order to protect and immunize their children from the influence of satellite channels and social media, which have become mostly akin to nightclubs.
12. It is essential to monitor children's devices to protect them from sexual exploitation.
13. Providing support and being close to children, avoiding prolonged isolation.
14. Encouraging technology specialists to develop applications that provide accurate information and control over channels.
15. Offering more dynamic and advanced programs that meet children's preferences, reducing their exposure to foreign satellite channels.

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