

The Upbringing and Education of the Girl Child: Challenges of a Millennium Mother

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this study is to examine the upbringing and educational demands of the girl-child and the parenting challenges of the same in the new millennium with a view to making some useful contributions that would be of benefit to the same. Major institutions of education were referred to in drawing attention to the educational needs of the girl-child particularly with a view to more stringent demands of the new millennium. Not forgetting to draw attention to education as a human right, effort was made to suggest some strategies that would help women in general to realize their life potentials and aspirations as mother, wife and career women, or simply as career women when they are single.

INTRODUCTION

This topic has two parts. The first part demands a discussion of the rearing and education of the “girl child”. The second part seeks information on the challenges, or parenting demands on a millennium mother. In the researcher’s opinion, the topic demanded both the general and the specifics in the sense that in talking about the upbringing of the girl child, one could not but bring in some general notes on upbringing of all children while zeroing in on the girl-child. Again, in talking about the challenges of a millennium mother, one must inevitably talk about challenges of motherhood in general. To focus on the topic, one needs to first briefly talk about the major institutions or settings where this upbringing and education of the child takes place.

Family

Sociologists have always looked with great interest on the institution of the family. This is partly because the family is the most basic of all social institutions, and also because there are tremendous variations in family practices from one culture to another (Landis 1974: 165).

The family usually starts by marriage, but not always. The institution of the family exists in all societies in some form, and it has functions in all. The first obvious function is to provide for continuation of the species. The institution of the family functions to control reproduction.

A second function of the family is to control sex expression. The family institution attempts to deal with powerful sexual activity. The third function of the family is to care for and socialize the children. The first two functions are preparatory steps for the third. Socialization of the young, girl or boy child transmits the culture and prepares the child for participation in adult world. The family provides close affectionate and emotional ties for the child. The family also provides placement or status ascription. The child’s first religion and possibly lasting faith in life is guaranteed by family upbringing. This is to say that the child is likely to live in the belief system of his or her family in adult stage.

There are other institutions that serve some or same functions the family serve. The institution of education also deals with socialization of the child and transmission of culture. The institution of religion also does the same.

Religion

Religion is a unified system of beliefs, feelings and behaviors related to things defined as sacred. Religion like the family, serves a number of functions. It provides a way for man to deal with the unknown. It supplies some measure of certainty in an uncertain world. It provides a belief system to deal with situations difficult to accept. Religion provides a man a viewpoint, a perspective, and a way of looking at the world. It gives meaning to life. Religion promotes solidarity. People with similar beliefs and viewpoints

are drawn together, are more unified than those without this common experience. Religion is an agency of social control. The functions of religion as an institution, like those of the family cannot be underestimated.

Education

It has already been mentioned that education performs some of the functions the family performs.

EXPLANATION OF THE CONCEPTS OF TOPIC

Upbringing

The Oxford Dictionary (Wehmeier 1995) defined the term upbringing as training and education during childhood. The word education is derived from the Latin word: *educō, -are, -avi, -atum*, which means “to bring up.” The New Webster’s Dictionary (2000) defined education as instruction or training by which people (generally the young) learn to develop and use their mental, moral, and physical powers etc.

Any good education must involve ethical values. Peters (1974) opined that education has notions such as “improvement”, “betterment”, and “the passing on of what is worthwhile”, built into it. This idea of education by Peters was emphasized by Nwachukwu (2008:9) in her study on the concept of the family.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) also asserted that ‘Education is a human right’ (Nwachukwu 2008: 8). Both in traditional and modern concepts, education constitutes the internalization of social norms, values, rituals, skills and knowledge of a culture or socialization which makes one an effective and productive member of a class in his society (Achunine 2007). One could, therefore, summarize the term upbringing as the primary education of every living being starting from birth through early childhood into adulthood. Upbringing does not stop with childhood just as education is a learning process that continues through life. This life-long business of education and upbringing is summed up in Proverbs (22:6) which says, “train the child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will never depart from it”.

Girl Child

First of all, the researcher knew that a child is a young human being. A child can be a son or a daughter of parents or a parent. Girl child belongs to the female young of human kind out of the two main groups of sexes (male and female). In procreating human parents beget either a girl child or a male (boy-child).

Challenges

Challenges in the context of this study can be defined as demands or demanding tasks on an individual. The challenges could be thrown to someone by individuals, groups, situations, etc. Challenge or its plural can be multifaceted. By the time to discuss the challenges of the millennium mother, it will become clearer what is meant by challenges wearing many faces. This means that even if one believes that the millennium woman has only one challenge, that one challenge wears many faces.

Millennium Mother

The concept of millennium mother is a tricky subject particularly in African/Igbo contexts. Are researchers talking of someone who becomes a mother in this millennium? What about other mothers that witness the new millennium who are still exerting their influence on their descendants? Have expectations of motherhood or mothering changed, because a new millennium has come?

Let us describe the millennium mother as every mother living and mothering in this new millennium, all mothers. The researcher has mentioned earlier that upbringing, likewise education does not stop with childhood. This is why in our society, a mother must go and take care of her daughter when she delivers a baby. “*Ìmugwí*” in Igbo is not just going to take care of a daughter that delivers a baby. There are learning processes attached to it. In traditional Igbo context, mothering, fathering or whatever term is used is supposed to be communal, for every child belongs to all members of the community.

UPBRINGING AND EDUCATION OF THE GIRL-CHILD

In every upbringing as the researcher mentioned above, all older members of the community are expected to participate. However, in the

family which is the primary institution, the mother is the first role model in the upbringing of the children in general, girl child in particular. This is because, not only that the mother is the first contact person starting from conception, but also because she is the same sex with the girl-child. Institutionally, the family, the church, the school and some other social organizations are partners in the upbringing of the child.

The upbringing of the girl-child should be targeted at realizing a well rounded individual, able to cope in today's society that is becoming more and more complex as the world goes global and too technologized. The girl-child is expected to be well equipped by the parents to face life and in turn to bring up own children well, or live life as a single fulfilled human adult. The researchers discussed some of the skills and knowledge expected of the girl child. After that we shall look at the girl-child in the job market, before we look at the millennium mother and the challenges facing her. The conclusion will be in form of suggestions and remarks.

Family, School, Church as Agents of Upbringing

For centuries, Igbo traditional upbringing and education in the family have been too gender specific that the girls were trained to do certain jobs different from the ones the boys were trained to do. This attitude is however changing in many families today. Even the expressions of emotions were expected to be different for both sexes, hence a boy-child was taught not to 'cry like a girl'. This suppression of emotion has posed problems for men. A girl-child was brought up in a way that she takes her mother as the sole role model. Modeling per se is not bad, but the upbringing and education of girls today is expected to be multi-dimensional and has already become so because today's girl-child is no longer restricted to the kitchen as in the olden days. Gender was a word used to designate the culturally defined, socially formed identities of men and women that are varied across cultures. These characteristics are continuously changing, hence the saying today that 'what a man can do, a woman can too'.

In the olden days women were not expected to have equal powers with men (Nwachukwu 2008:9). In the family, father and sons were expected to control the powers while mother and

daughters enjoyed less privilege. This gender segregation was peculiar to a culture of patriarchy that saw women as inferior to males. It is exactly this culture that the millennium upbringing of the girl child is poised to wipe out completely. Many people are today aware of the benefit of a girl child in the family. The agitation is not to train our daughters to be non-submissive to their husbands, but to accord them equal rights and opportunities in the society at large. A wise saying that to educate a woman is to educate a world makes it imperative for every society to pay particular attention to the upbringing and education of the girl-child. The celebrated Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen in his book *Life is worth living* has said that, "The level of civilization of any nation is the level of women" (Onoyima 2006: 12).

Having said the above, we want to come back to the primary duties of the family in the upbringing of the girl child because the first learning starts in the family. The mother is the role model of the girl-child but not the sole agent of upbringing in the family. The girl-child learns from the mother as soon as she reaches the age of reason. There are features God used to differentiate between girls and boys. These are important in determining the etiquettes to inculcate in children like the manner of sitting, comporting oneself in general etc. As irrelevant as this may appear before many, this is very important because the negligence of this contribute to wrong sitting posture and dressing of our girls today. The differences in the biological features of male and female were made by God and not man. Our struggle for equal rights is not about those issues. A mother and indeed both parents should be more concerned about what their girl-child grows to become in terms of character and not necessarily profession. Such basic consideration would determine the kind of teaching, training, corrections they give to the child. The acquisition of strength of character takes years of conscious learning and practical experiences. Mothers should start early in life to teach their girls how to sit, walk, dress, and indeed generally behave like a well brought up girl. Mothers should forestall on time negative influences of wrongly brought up children on their girl-child. A mother should start sex education even as early as the age of nine. Many mothers neglect this and it is very unfortunate. The researchers would like to inform that concep-

tion at the age of nine has been recorded in history. Mothers are advised to ensure that their girl child learns about sex, including information about menstruation and everything concerning them. Those should be learned first from mothers as role models before they are heard from outside sources by their children. There is need to observe the girl child well, her going out and coming in especially from the age of nine. Parents should pay announced and unannounced visits to their daughters in boarding schools. It has been discovered that some girls have two sets of clothes, one for the home and one for the school. Unannounced visits have been used to discover girls who took off from schools when they should be attending classes and lectures. Parents should teach their girl child and also boys, ethics and the importance of gratitude. Older girls in the family should be so trained that they become models for younger ones in the absence of mother. Parents should spend as much of their job-free time as possible with their children to make up for the time the job outside the home takes from them in caring for the children. The girl-child by nature of biological make-up, is the more affected by lack of parental care. Mothers should make it a point of duty to sit and interact with their girls; find out their interests, and problems to suitably advise them accordingly. Some parents have also tended to leave the upbringing of their children to school authorities. The school can only complement the education of the family but does not replace the family. In the school, the children are faced with peer group pressure and it is only a girl-child, and indeed any child brought up in a good family background that can say no to irregular peer activities like drug abuse, wrong fashion fads, early sex activities and, thereby, serve as a model for others. The school should be a true complement of the family by ensuring proper counseling of children, proper and early sex education, teaching of morals and ethics, thorough supervision of children while in school, to monitor their attendance at school activities.

Parents, especially mothers should live what they preach to their children. A mother's upbringing of her daughter should not be 'do as I say but not as I do'. A girl-child should see in her mother a perfect role model, an epitome of a rounded woman, good in character and other virtues. To achieve all these, the parents', especially mothers' attitude to religion is very impor-

tant. The church provides very fruitful ground for the achievement of a morally sound and ethically rounded personality. One should emphasize the virtue of chastity. Our girl-child should learn as a child that her body is the sanctuary of God and, therefore, should be kept as such. Parents should teach the children about God early enough as soon as they are able to understand the language. The book of proverbs chapter 22:6 states, "Train up a child the way he should grow and when he is old, he will never depart from it..." One should not expect to get the result one has not instilled in children and that is why, when an Igbo sees a child badly behaved, he exclaims, "*azaghÈ nwata nke a azà*" (this child is badly brought up). To summarize the importance of religion in upbringing, the narrative example below suffices. Colonel Allen was a literal giant who took pride in his work and took time to display them before any distinguished guest who visited his house. He knew so much about many things, but next to nothing about Christianity. In fact, he hated Christianity with a passion because he was an avowed atheist. Ironically, he married a devout Christian and has an only child, a daughter whom they both loved and adored. He did everything to make his daughter an atheist. The poor girl was confused. In her late teens she became terminally ill. During her last hour on earth she requested to talk to her father. He was shaken and had to go with a guest. The dying girl said to him, 'father, I am about to die. Tell me, should I believe in the principles you have been teaching me, or should I believe what my mother has taught me? Agitated and shaken to the core, after a pause, the man replied "believe what your mother has taught you" (Nebo 2006: 13).

Apart from church activities, many of our folk-tales were used in the olden days to instill some sense of morality in children. Parents should get back to the old ways of sitting with children and narrating folk-tales to them. These tales serve many functions including entertainment, instruction in ethics, etiquettes etc. There are books containing many of these folk-tales even in translation for those who claim they cannot read their mother tongue(s)! Some of these tales are also directed to sexual demands, the dos and the don'ts, and are better alternatives to television programs which corrupt our children. Parents should also censor the films the children watch at home, and if possible watch

with them to be able to discuss the theme(s) and the benefits of those films after watching.

The importance of ensuring that our girls get good education in schools and universities cannot be overemphasized. Without good secondary and possibly tertiary education, today's girl-child cannot cope in the new technologically advanced world. She will continue to play a second fiddle. By carrying our spouses along in the upbringing of our children, working and collaborating mutually with all partners in the education of our children, we definitely will get good results.

Going to the second part of this topic which says "The challenges of a millennium mother", we have to assume that we have succeeded in bringing up our daughters to become mothers. We also want to believe that we would always succeed in training our daughters to the level where they will be competent to face the millennium job market. Bearing this in mind, we shall now look at our girl-child in the job market and what our roles should be, bearing in mind that no matter the traditional values or our thinking, our girl-child today, more than yesterday faces the possible challenge of living her entire life as a well rounded and fulfilled single girl. There is need for mothers, fathers and indeed our entire society to be re-educated on the attitude towards unmarried daughters for, to quote Onoyima, "Women should realize how preciously important they are. Those married should see their home as nuclear church.... Those that are not married should know that if it is God's will, they shall get married; if not let them ask God to talk to them because joy can be seen outside marriage." He advises parents and the society at large to see Goddess in our unmarried girls (Onoyima 2006). Marriage is good, ordained by God, but human mortals should know where to let go in marital matters in order not to make a hell of people's lives on earth by insisting on a marriage.

The Job Market and the Girl-child

The girl-child continues to need our protection and direction even when we have trained her to the point of looking for a job. We should also bear in mind that every child of ours may not be material for tertiary institutions, and for modern types of white collar jobs. Such daughters who could not make it as university graduates should be trained in other jobs, trades and

self employable jobs. We are also aware that even graduates should be trained in other jobs, trades and self employable jobs. We are also aware that even graduates find it difficult today to secure jobs in areas they are trained. We as mothers should also encourage all our daughters, graduates and non-graduates to learn some useful trades that would help them be on their own, to be able to support themselves and dependents in the absence of government and other public service paid jobs.

Our unmarried daughters need our continued support when they are facing the job market so that they do not make a regrettable mistake of their life at a late hour because they are single and looking for, or are already pursuing a career.

Mothers need to device a forum to address the problems of our girls in their bid to secure a job; the types of questions they are asked in job interviews by prospective employers and the discrimination they face based on their responses to those questions, as well as the temptations they face on employment. It should be made of an interview question like, "Are you married or single?" Securing a job should be on merit and competence and not on whether one is married or single. Government, if not aware of such problems should be alerted to this type of situation, so as to look into the possibility of enacting laws to protect the girl-child during job experiences. In the case of our married daughters, we would not take it that they no longer need our parental advice. Their problems are many in the job market as in the case of single girls. The researcher believed that in discussing the second part of this topic, "challenges of a millennium mother", we would be able to address some of the problems of our married daughters in the job market as mothers. It will also be possible to show that our children continue to need our support and direction even as married adults, thus, the point mentioned before which says that education is a lifelong process.

THE MILLENNIUM MOTHER: MOTHERHOOD AND CAREER CHALLENGES

The Herculean tasks of a millennium mother will be presented in one simple sentence and the elaboration will show the hydra-headed parts of those challenges. A millennium mother is one saddled with the tasks of fulfilling her roles as a

good mother, a good wife and a good public servant. In a magazine of women organization Nwaozuzu said, "... *Everyday in the life of a Christian woman, she faces so many challenges some of which border on making choices. As a young woman, she has the choice of being a full-time house wife or a working mother. To be a full-time house wife is no longer a fad, as more and more women are finding fulfillment in working in corporate environments....*" (Nwaozuzu 2000: 5) These are not just challenges for a Christian woman but for all contemporary women. Nwaozuzu also mentioned the need for a mother to contribute to the ever-increasing demand on the family purse, also the wish of many modern mothers not to be over-dependent on the husband. Her ideas in this research are good. However, the researcher wanted to inform that being a housewife is also a full-time job which mothers should as much as possible make men, who pretend not to understand, or who do not understand need to be told. Many men already appreciate housewifery as a full-time job especially in families where both man and wife are in full-time jobs that take a toll in their upbringing of their young children. What is needed is for man and wife to plan their family together, work mutually to lighten the burden of each other as they struggle to make ends meet in their bid to live a successful married life.

Having said this, the researcher liked would like to share a millennium anecdote with us to strengthen the above point, more so for the benefit of today's mothers who may want to work outside the home but could not secure any meaningful job. The anecdote is titled:

Last Night

A man was sick and tired of going to work everyday while his wife stayed at home. He wanted her to see what he went through so he prayed, "Dear Lord, I go to work everyday and put in eight hours while my wife merely stay at home. I want her to know what I go through, so please create a trade in our bodies", God in His infinite wisdom granted the man's wish.

The next morning, sure enough the man awoke as a woman.

He arose, cooked breakfast for his mate, awakened the kids, set out their school clothes, fed them breakfast, packed their lunches, drove them to school, come home and picked up the dry cleaning, took it to the cleaners and stopped at the bank to draw out money to pay the pow-

er bill and telephone bill, drove to the power company and phone company and paid the bills, went grocery shopping, came home and put away the groceries. He cleaned the cat's litter box and bathed the dog.

Then it was already 1.00 p.m. and he hurried to make the beds, do the laundry, vacuum, dust, and swept and mopped the kitchen floor. He ran to the school to pick up the kids and got into argument with them on the way home. He set out cookies and milk and got the kids organized to do their homework, then set up the ironing board and watched TV while he did the ironing.

At 4.30 p.m. he began peeling potatoes and washed greens for salads, breaded the chops and snapped fresh beans for supper.

After supper, he cleaned the kitchen, ran the dish washer, folded laundry, bathed the kids, and put them to bed. At 9.00p.m. he was exhausted and though his chores weren't finished, he went to bed, where he was expected to make love, which he managed to get through without complaint.

The next morning, he awoke and immediately knelt by the bed and said "Lord I don't know what I was thinking. I was so wrong to envy my wife's being able to stay home all day. Please, O Lord please, let us trade back".

The Lord, in His infinite wisdom, replied, "My son, I feel you have learned your lesson, and I will be happy to change things back the way they were. You'll have to wait 9 months though. You got pregnant last night!!!" (<http://us.f414.mailyahoo.com/ym/compose?YY=4851>).

Indeed, housewives need to be paid monthly wages by their working husbands. All of us need re-education to stop seeing housewives as over-dependent. The researcher had a personal encounter with a couple; both man and wife are well educated. They decided between them, and the woman stayed home to keep the home while the man worked and paid her monthly wages. This should not be seen as far-fetched. The researcher continued saying "what a man can do, a woman can too." A young millennium family may even find itself in a situation where the man of the house loses his job. The woman should gladly work while the man keeps the home, why not? It depends on the couple. Under such circumstances, the woman should gladly pay the husband and not continue to stress herself because she is a mother, until the man secures a new job. Time has changed. People

should no longer see the man as the sole breadwinner. Both or either of the couple could be.

Working and living in harmony with her husband, the millennium mother could fulfill her role as mother, wife and public servant. Both man and wife should device a way of ensuring that the children are not neglected. Every free time should be utilized in interacting with the children, and the couple should as much as possible take turns in attending social activities outside working hours so that one parent should be with the children each time, especially when the children are still small. This will enable them to assist the children in their school work, curb the time they spend on handsets and internet, using them for good and foul plays. This will also enable them attend to their other needs, including moral and ethical formation. This is the time to ensure that the children grow up as God-fearing. Once they are missed at this early stage, it becomes a problem.

Grandmothers as indicated in the beginning also qualify as millennium mothers. They face the onerous task of ensuring that the good upbringing and education they gave their daughters would not be in vain. They should expect their daughters to do for their own children what they did for them. This is why there is need for mothers to assist in finding trusted hands who could help their married daughters in their absence from the home. In the immediate past century, when parents lived near their children, they babysat for their children when they were away. Today, it has become more difficult with families living far apart in distant cities. Parents should counsel married daughter on the need to reduce stress by evaluating their choice of career from time to time. Older mothers should form groups to address the plight of working mothers. This is no longer the age when people retire on one career. The millennium mother should think of change of job when necessary. The role of a mother has not changed even when we are in a new millennium. The millennium mother should still strive to be a good mother, a good wife and self fulfilled career woman, when she places God first in all her daily activities.

CONCLUSION

The researcher has attempted in this research to discuss aspects of upbringing and education of the girl-child and at times children in general.

The researcher has also looked at the challenges facing every millennium mother. This discussion has led us into an overview of marriage as a vocation and also into seeing as major challenges of the millennium mother the following three onerous tasks namely: to be a good mother, a good wife, and a successful career woman. The first two challenges have always been before every married woman from time immemorial. They are the roles expected of every married woman and the bible contains many inclusions on those roles. However, one could say that the pursuit of a career as a demand on a married woman is relatively new and a welcome, and many times inevitable demand. Human rights movement today demand that women exercise their rights as individuals in the society like their male counterparts, hence women are expected to be educated like men and to practice their trained profession like men. Nigerian women are being called to join politics and governance today.

While the Westerners have long realized the need to address the issues of career women by enacting laws to take care of some problems, women in our own part of the world have only realized that women should enjoy equal rights with men, but they fail to address the repercussions of those equal rights in some spheres, like the problems facing working mothers. Our daughters are suffering today because they are struggling to succeed as a mother, wife and career women.

In National Association of Working Women, the plights of working mothers in America were presented. Individuals fighting for equal rights of women in work places are at the same time addressing the problems facing working mothers and struggling to get their government to enact laws that will handle issues of wages of their women, denial of work rights on account of motherhood etc. There is an online organization that aims at improving the lot of working mothers. The above initiatives are what our millennium mothers and grandmothers should emulate because our daughters are dying in the bid to succeed as mothers, wives and career women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We should inform NGOs that would make Government aware of the plights of our young working mothers. They need to be helped to succeed in contributing their quota in building the nation. Laws should be enacted, where by, a

mother in child bearing age should be encouraged to work in any profession, or public offices if qualified, but for a reduced number of hours a day so as to go home on time to take care of the family. If an establishment has office hours of 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m., a law could be enacted to allow a young mother to work for example from 9.00 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. This is the type of fight women concerned with human rights are carrying out in some other countries. It is not enough to give our girl-child the best education training and upbringing which she will not utilize in life. Their dreams should not be left unfulfilled. All hands should be on deck to help our millennium mothers to succeed.

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