

INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL FAVOURITISM ON CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT: A CHRONOLOGY OF IKOT IDAHA COMMUNITY IN IBIONO IBOM LGA, AKWA IBOM STATE

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Abstract

Parental favouritism is an unspoken aspect of family vigorous actions that can jolt parents' children relationships or the well-being of children negatively. This study orients to elucidate the influence of parental favouritism on child's development. To achieve this objective, In-person survey method was employed, involving direct interactions with the respondents to enable accuracy and profound insights. The study amalgamated a synthesis of apropos information related to the subject team using search process that involved filtering through primary and secondary sources. Descriptive statistical procedures were used to illustrate the categories of respondents. Judgmental sampling was also exploited based on the nature of the study. This paper divulged that majority of parents treat their offsprings dissimilarly without ensuring them with the same prerogatives, endearment and succor. Favouritism often times leads to avoidable enmity among siblings and many other untoward outcomes. Therefore, this paper advocates that public awareness is the primal. There should be a strong and effective awareness sensitization campaign about parents' inappropriate behaviours to lessen the practice of favouritism in various families. Moreover, favouritism can be resolved through fairness and equity, admissible communication and adherence pattern of treating all children indistinguishably.

Keywords: Influence, Parental favouritism, Child Development, Chronology, Ikot Idaha Community.

INTRODUCTION

Parental favouritism simply entails brandishing preferential treatment towards one child over others. This treatment often display in heterogeneity forms, such as privileges or equal care attention. The signs of favouritism append giving special attention to a best-loved child, parents exempting their best-loved child from participating in household chores, the best-loved child needs been met when demanded sometimes that may erupt anger from other siblings and the best-loved child always having his or her choicest kind of food with the biggest portion of meat anytime meal is served. In Nigeria, the manifestations of parental favouritism in majority of homes are eye saw actions. The criterion that is generally common is the "ONLY SON OR DAUGHTER CASE", the "ONLY GIRL OR BOY CHILD" in the family, being a "BIOLOGICAL CHILD", being the "MOST BRILLIANT CHILD among others and etc. These sets of children are best-loved children and most preferred in various families while the unfavoured kids are sometimes been treated unjustly to serve them.

Same way favouritism is destructive to the emotional development of children and their physical growth; it's universally problematic and surprisingly common among families. Parent's attitudes toward parenting are a product of their knowledge of parenting and the expectations they have for their children's development, which in turn are informed by cultural, social, and societal images, as well as parents' experiences and their overall values and goals (Iruka *et al.*, 2015). Favouritism is not just a oddity of family life but also harmful to engaged on. Children who feel they are treated as second-best, its corollary can be profound because children easily rectify preferential treatment and by observing parents displaying more warmth to a best-loved child than others can be noxious to their well-being. Therefore, this study seeks to deepen the understanding about the influence of parental favouritism on child development.

Prevalence of Parental Favouritism in Ikot Idaha community of Ibiono Ibom LGA

Parental favouritism in this community in all its forms are daily reality for many children who are not their parent's favorite child and only a fraction haven't experienced it. The Akwa Ibom State Child Rights Law of 2008 affirmed the law to protect the growth of perceptual, emotional, intellectual and behavioural capabilities and functioning during childhood of Akwa Ibom children less than 16 years. The law protects the child from birth to adolescence and up to 16 years such a child is afforded the necessary parental protection, love, equal care and attention to enable the child fully assume its responsibilities within the community.

From conception, children bring joy and delight to their family and those around them. When they grow up, they serve an essential role within their community as they become the future leaders of the nation. However, despite the joy associated with the birth of every child yet many remain victims of parental favouritism. The unfavorable children are direct victims of favouritism because they are weaker in size, stature, emotional and in mental capabilities. In Akwa Ibom State, favouritism is rampant although it is largely under-reported. Under-reporting stems from cultural justification of certain cultural or deliberate practice and the reluctance of children to speak about prior the unequal treatment experiences.

Fear of their parent's reaction may be the cause of this reluctance. Also, some children may be either too young to understand their experience or unable to speak for themselves mostly those ones referred to as "step child or children", they are the direct victims of favouritism in many Nigerian families. In my perusal of the literature have discovered that parental favouritism is mortifying, meanwhile, children have their different thresholds for noticing significant differences around them. Children are very sensitive, they understand certain actions especially regarding who receives best prerogative in the family. Children are fast assimilators, they learn about their environment, what they see on daily basis, their relationships with parents, people around them and those that help them maneuver various life situations, these are the norms that shape their reasoning, that's why the influence of favouritism is detrimental to children's healthy development.

Parental Favouritism and Child Development

It may be one-sided for the analysis of parental favouritism to be confabulated without child development analysis been dissected in this study. Favouritism in families have a lifelong influences on children as well as their development. When children experience stressful events, they seems to bother themselves with the effect of the perceived unfair treatment, this

is highly detrimental to their healthy well-being. As children are concern, any action that distorts a child's emotional, social, psychological well-being tempered with the child healthy development. Randomized controlled trial interventions also found that favouritism displayed by parents plays untoward roles on children's development (Alkon *et al.*, 2014; Yousafzai *et al.*, 2015).

Specifically, child development entails the growth of perceptual, emotional, intellectual, behavioural capabilities and functioning between child's birth and the conclusion of adolescence. Therefore, understanding child's changing development is an important aspect of parenting, the development in a child includes not only the physical changes, but also some changes in their emotions, behavior and thinking as they seems to understand the family, environment or the world around them.

Despite a potent social norm that parents should treat children evenly, beginning in early puerility and continuing through maturity, parents often differentiate among their children in such domain as equal treatment (Rowe *et al.*, 2015). Generally, the term childhood denotes a period in the human lifespan from the acquisition of language between one or two years to maturity between twelve or thirteen years. From this juncture, a child of twelve or thirteen years is able to detect when their parents indulges in favouritism and this seems to have negative impacts on their entire well-being.

Child development is a gradual unfolding of parental determined characteristics and traits that arise as the child learns from experiences especially were favouritism set into the picture. Bornstein and Leventha (2015), assert that human development is too complicated, nuanced and dynamic to assert that parents' actions determine the cause and the outcome of their ontogeny. Each generation view family in term of its own prejudice. Most parents lack the tendency to see their family in a positive light and minimise the differences between their family members because of their early experience in life. In the study location, parents seems to treat their best-loved child evenhandedly and other children unfairly. The concern is, should parents have best-loved child among other children, especially in their progressive stages and if they should, is it essential to showcase it to the deleterious of others. To enhanced a family congenial environment for children, parents should be able to create enfranchised environment in their homes were every child can thrive and develop to their full potentials.

According to Peng *et al.* (2018), favouritism began during betimes stages of life and continues through maturity. Knowingly or unknowingly, most parents prefer a particular child over another. Majority of children less than five years fail to reach their potential in social and cognitive developed due to perceived parental favouritism. Most of the unfavoured children are exposed to multiple risks including emotional trauma, poor school performance and unjustly home environment, which detrimentally affect their development.

Suitor *et al.*, (2017), also added that parents who favored their best-loved child over others are of the opinion that a particular child is more behaved, intelligence, only son or daughter, biological child, looks and other reasons beyond adequate explanations, some parents view their children as extensions of their own ego. Seol (2018), in his opinion stated that majority of parents have favourite child that conforms to their expectations over a child that does not.

The truth is that, children are personalities in their own right and as such need to be treated equally, guided and encouraged to fulfill their own prospect.

Influence of Favouritism on Child's Development

Peng and Gilligan (2018), aptly stated that parents who indulged on favouritism are not easily aware that they are displaying bias among children by having a best-loved child among other children. Notwithstanding, when parental favouritism is paraded in the family, having favourite choice of a child is inevitable. Suitor and Gilligan *et al.* (2017), asserts that children are dependent on the care they receive from their parents, it's known that a child's healthy development depends on the capacity of parents influences, intimacy and equal care attention provided as an important characteristic of family functioning aid development. Therefore, closeness between parents and children as well as expressiveness and openness in affection sharing, communication and fair relationships is characteristic of families which are functioning as a supportive unit not with an invidiously treatment (Jeannine and Leeuwen 2015).

Favouritism has a devastating influence on a child well-being and cognitive capacity. This study recognized however that there are compounding parental actions that influence children's attitude negatively as stated below:

Child's Temperament

Given the imbalance of parental favouritism, it was noted during fieldwork assessment that favouritism is a phenomenon that causes negative damage and often irreversible outcome on a child's temperament. Child temperament may be attributable to the way a child is been treated. It is generally known that the traits of temperament are mostly unconditioned traits of a child's nature, although a child temperament can be modified by their experiences but often parents favours a best-loved child over an aberrant child seems to trigger temper tantrums and such act is likely to exacerbate this issue. In blended families there is often a differential treatment accord to a biological child than a step child, amiable child than a deviant child, as such, children realising they are treated unfairly because of certain criteria pick point by parents is worrisome enough to trigger a child's temperament. I often wondered how parents concluded that this child was their favourite. My confusion was the fact that my parent did not show favouritism towards any of us. Therefore, I had no firsthand experience to fall back on. Not until I got an offer to work with Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare, based on my duty scheduled and as the work progresses, I began to notice some of the criterions that influenced favouritism and demeaning children healthy well-being.

A man respondent from Ikot Idaha village re-iterated:

am a victim of parental favouritism, feeling less-favoured can be provoking, am a native of Ikot Idaha village, my parent didn't love me, lot of people have same experience and there's no home in my village that parents don't have favorite child, my father didn't belief in me or love me the way he should have done, but when he died, I single handedly gave him a befitting burial, that's how far God can bless a downtrodden child of my kind.

A Woman Respondents from Ikot Idaha village further stated:

for me my parent didn't love me when I was young and their unfair treatment make my temper so proactive, there's nothing I did then that make sense to them and at some point I didn't bother myself anymore, although am being affected by their actions till now.

A Girl Child Respondent also added:

my mother always lament whenever my sister isn't around that if only my sister "was around" she would have been more comfortable, as if my presence in our house is meaningless, anytime she makes such degrading statement am always hurting.

Triggered Anger

Nobody likes to feel angry, but the unfavorable children who are direct victims of parental favouritism experience the emotion from time to time. It's unsurprising that when children feel cheated by parents, outburst of aggressive behaviors can interfere. Favouritism is capable of triggering anger on children and can impose conduct disorder that enhances aggressive and antisocial behaviors, depression and learning problems. In some cases, the unfavoured child could feel resentment on their sibling for being the best-loved child in the family. Naturally, anyone who feels unloved are bound to feel angered, unfavoured child may feel same at their parents for indulging in favouritism. Research shows that how we get along with others is about the fit of personalities, same way we find one person more interesting than another, the same holds for parents and children.

Jeannin *et al.* (2015), posits that although most parents love and nurture all their children but, they will inevitably find that they are more in tune with one child than another. One child is perhaps a bit more social, another is more ready to anger, a third finds learning easier, this interchanges or varies in different families. Nonetheless, favouritism seems to instigate anger on children and this often happen because the unloved children may not know how to deal with their frustration or other uncomfortable feelings they may be faced with. Anger problem on children stemming from favouritism enable them to be victims of uncontrollable emotions. Dennis Sukhodolsky a clinical psychologist added that for children whose anger tantrums continue as they get older and become something that is not developmentally appropriate, then parenting should be questioned about children oppositional defiance disorder.

A Child Respondent said:

anytime am angry over what my step mum have been doing to me, my heart beats faster and my stomach churns.

Age and Personality

This is another driver that births favouritism in most Nigerian families. Parents interact with and discipline their children based on changes in developmental capabilities as they grow. Age and personality explain the differences in the parental treatment that children perceived. It also play a role on why one child is best-loved or gets more affection from a parent than another. This factor is associated with siblings division. Disconnection from siblings later in life is another common outcome of favouritism in a family. Specifically, children who felt they were treated differently by parents struggle to forget their early experience (Peng *et al.*, 2018)

A Father Respondent pointed that:

my first and eldest son is my favorite, I treat him based on his age among others, my own parent did same, I can't treat all my children the same.

A Mother Respondent also postulated that:

my first girl is a little girl and she's the spitting image of me. as she grows into a young lady, I realized her behaviour and attitude reflect my own. I am proud to see myself in her. And, though i may not mean to best-loved her among others, I can't but make her my favourite.

Pessimism

It's noticeable that unfavoured children who are faced with the challenges of parental favouritism cannot be optimists based on their experience. Favouritism encourages pessimism attitude in a child, who's less likely to become depressed or anxious and can't do better in school, also aren't resilient. Pessimism is an outcome of a child who has been challenged with horrible or uncherishable situations that hinders their self-esteem. Additionally, children who experience depression, anxiety and more serious psychological disorder are bound to be pessimists. A Well balanced, nurturing, loving parents doesn't practice child favouritism over another. It likely comes as no surprise that the influence of parental favouritism adversely have negative impact on child development.

A Child Respondent from Ikot Idaha Village noted:

I don't need my parent's love, they were not there for me when I was much smaller, is it now? I would have been a better person if my parent had showed me small love and care.

Another Girl Respondent said:

I am the black sheep in my family, all the blame is always mounted on me even when am not wrong, have become a different person based on how unfair am been treated by my parent.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, it's perhaps obvious but equally true that the end of this investigation gave salient search for absolute reality in this study. Majority of families displays favouritism among their children that has influenced children development as mentioned above. Favouritism is by no means a general human pattern that has become a culture for parents in the study location. In summary, the influence of parental favouritism on children's development is problematic. Children who felt they are not as loved by their parents are facing emotional, psychological and mental imbalances even as they become adults. This increased risk-taking parental behaviour is also capable of ruining siblings relationship, mother-child or father-child relationship as life progresses. The facts remains that children who have a good start in life will be healthier adults resulting in a better social, economic, physical and cognitive and they live better for their families, their communities and promoting Gross National Happiness of the country at large. Therefore, this study intends to be useful for individual understanding on the influence of parental favouritism on child development.

It is therefore recommended that parental favouritism can be resolved through overt communication and a commitment to treating all children equally. The Internet is awash with parenting tips and strategies to meet every conceivable exigency, parents should be fully informed about parenting and parental care equality need to be ensured for optimum physical, mental, social and cognitive development that will prevent adverse impacts on children.

Awareness - self-awareness is an important measure all parents should adopt. Be honest with yourself about how you feel about all your children and create an awareness that would open door for family therapy. Parents should watch their words, listen to what you say, don't compare children. "Daddy's girl" "Mommy's boy" "Most brilliant" "My little baby" can become unhealthy alliances if other children are left out, therefore, parents be watchful with your choice of words, while it may be a natural tendency to say "why can't you be more like your brother or sister" this sets up an unfair comparison, find out what each child does well and appraise them coequally.

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