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SCaRPE-A

Strengthening Capacity for Research and Policy Engagement
on Notions of Motherhood and Fatherhood and Improved
Children's Wellbeing in Africa (SCaRPE-A)

POLICY REPORT

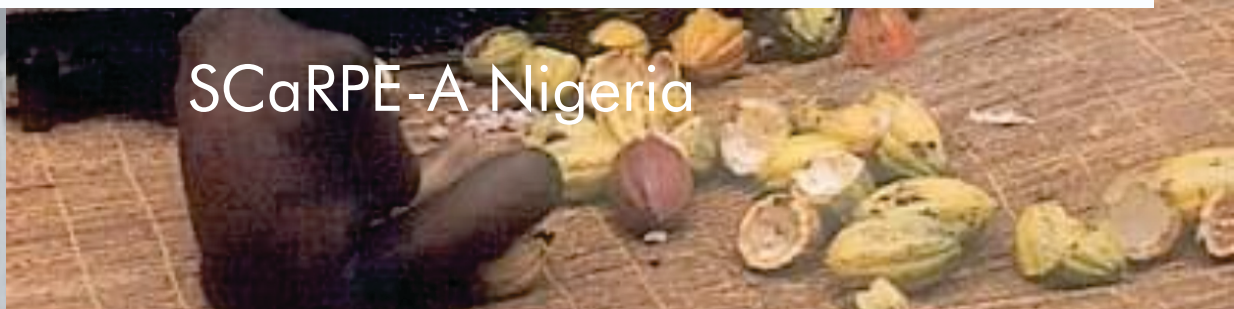
PARENTING AND CHILDREN WELLBEING IN NIGERIA:

DYNAMICS, INTERVENTIONS AND AGENDA FOR ACTION



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SCaRPE-A Nigeria



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parenting in Nigeria is characterized by social, political and economic changes in the society. Colonial modernity improved the sciences of childbirth and rearing, which led to a geometric population increase in the last six decades of Nigeria's history. However, there are enormous challenges hindering efficient child wellbeing in practice. Motherhood has been scientific, political and economical in Nigeria, but the notion of fatherhood is loosely constructed in the process of child wellbeing.

There exist sparse qualitative studies on notions of fatherhood and motherhood in Nigeria. This is the focus of this project titled 'Strengthening Capacity for Research and Policy Engagement in Shifting Notions of Motherhood and Fatherhood for Improved Children's Wellbeing in Africa (SCaRPE-A). The project was set up to interrogate family identity formation in order to account for the changing notions of parenting across Africa and enhance policies on family and parenting (where they exist) and/or recommend them (where they are missing). The project comprised six universities drawn from East Africa (Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, Moi University, Kenya and the University of Rwanda), West Africa (University of Ibadan), and Southern Africa (University of Witwatersrand and University of the Western Cape both in South Africa). Funded by the UK Research and



Innovation (UKRI), supervised by the African Research Universities Alliance's (ARUA) Center of Excellence (CoE) in Notions of Identity domiciled at the Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, the project commissioned a range of studies to underscore the changing notions of parenting, family identity, and motherhood and fatherhood practices across Africa.

The Nigerian team examined the dynamics of parenting with retrospect to the pre-colonial era to more recent changing family structures. The research interrogates varieties of factors challenging parenting in contemporary Nigeria, as well as the prevalence of new concepts which would define the future of parenting and family well-being. Children's wellbeing in Nigeria interfaces with Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) laws; child protection; social media; Child rights act and Widowhood and inheritance rights. Therefore, as is being done across the member countries on this project, the agenda for action is nuanced in strengthening advocacy and policy practice across Africa, and specific to this document, in Nigeria.

Introduction



Few studies focus on parenting in Africa due to more emphasis on the perspective of the global north. (Taylor, Spencer and Baldwin 2000) This calls for a deep reflection of the trajectories in Nigeria. In precolonial Nigeria, children were an integral part of everyday life. The African understanding of children regards them as part of the extended family system needed to increase empire and kingdoms. Children were fundamentally part of the family and are conceived from the reproductive culture peculiar to each society. A child born into the precolonial Nigeria era mostly socializes within the family and learns to survive based on the livelihood culture that features in such. The integration of children into the family is seen as a lifelong process meant to preserve the knowledge, skills, philosophies and heritage of the family. The existence of children comes with the cultural values and material cultures that form the identity of their parents. Hence, a strong foundational system manifests in lineage vocations, where the child learns to practice and continue the heritage.

Being a child in Nigerian society is being part of others. The identity of the child is not separate as he/she is part of a whole. In the words of Okoro, (1993) a Nigerian child belongs to the world of “Being-with-Others”. Thus, the self in a Nigerian child is essentially towards others, that is, a self in relation to others. Therefore, the community makes the child and a child is only real when seen within a group or community.

By implication, without the community, it is difficult to imagine an identity for the Nigerian child. However, such notion is tensioned by colonial and postcolonial changes. African communalism is questioned by the structural frameworks of urbanization and city development in recent times. Such changes made a notion of fatherhood and motherhood highly individualistic, thus, the child in such circumstances belongs strictly to the nuclear family. Therefore, the children of this era perceived life in individualistic ways.

PERSPECTIVES

KEY FACTORS IN MOTHERHOOD

- ▶ **Matri-centric sphere of child care:** Anna Hinderer, a female missionary in (Ibadan) Nigeria of the nineteenth century discovered how children flocked around family houses and are usually in care of mothers. She witnessed this when she met children in the house of Iyalode Subuola in Ibadan in 1854. The intention of the visit was to create awareness for enrollment in missionary school.
- ▶ **Contracepting Motherhood:** This discovery was at a period when the Malthusian economists believed that the world population should be controlled in the nineteenth century. This thought is profound in the Darwinist notions of superiority in the struggle for survival of the human race. Hence, the use of contraceptives was recommended for selective population growth. The Nigerian experience of reproduction during colonialism however differed because the colonialists wanted population growth in the empire and colonies, since four-fifths of the world was yet to be occupied in the late nineteenth century. This led to the beginning of the fight against infant

mortality. (Davin, 1997:87-88)

- ▶ **Reproductive Nationalism:** While the theorists on population and economics were concerned about global population control in the nineteenth century, precolonial reproduction system in Nigerian societies was structurally not monitored nor control. Colonial Nigeria was mainstreamed into the British plan of reproductive imperialism for its colonies. As such, infant and maternal health were given priority. This was the evolution of scientific motherhood. Invariably, Nigerian mothers were mainstreamed into the sciences of mothering



and child care from 1900.

▶ **Wartime Motherhood:** The process of nation building in Nigeria experienced crisis that marred family systems. Post independence era in Nigeria was turbulent due to ethno-political incongruences. For example, the Nigerian civil war led to identity crisis for children and mothers during wartime. Motherhood and child identities had wartime implications. The demography of early motherhood was profound. A lot of casualties and fatalities were recorded in the Nigerian Civil War. (Nwoko, 2014) The majority of fatalities being men meant that a lot of young girls were left open to sexual exploitation. (Obikeze and Mere, 1985) Girls between ages 10 to 15 who were exposed to the civil war became mothers before the end of the war (Nimoh, 2018:3) Furthermore, boys were integrated into the Biafran armies to fight in the war. A life experience narrative of a grown-up man shows how the mother was panicky about his decision. Yet, the boys were considered useful as fighters in the crisis.

▶ **Early Motherhood in Wartimes:** This was inevitable due the realities of war such as rape, sexual assault, poor living conditions

among others. Another significant factor that contributed to the early onset of motherhood was the fact that schooling was disrupted during the period. Crisis situations aggravated poverty and it became obvious that armed conflict situations led to difficulties and distorted mobility. In other words, as there were increased teenage pregnancy in the war times, women who were mothers before the war innovatively devised coping strategies to survive while the war lasted. This is more specific to the Nigerian civil war and the recent Boko Haram crisis. Terror induced marriages during the peak of Boko Haram crisis stimulated early motherhood.

▶ **Fictional Travails of Motherhood:** Nnu Ego's experience of being a mother in Buchi Emecheta's *Joy of Motherhood* (Emecheta, 1979) features the precarious milieus of women's family life and survival in the colonial era. After raising children, mothers are abandoned and left her uncared for, with dashed hope that the older children would care for the younger ones.

In the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a fiction framed in the context of the Nigerian Civil War feature characters of Odenigbo and Olanna his partner (who later became his

wife) both of whom are university lecturers. Shortly before the civil war commenced, Odenigbo's mother criticises the choice of a woman he intended to marry. She does not conceal her dislike for the values instilled in Olanna (Odenigbo's spousal partner). (Adichie, 2006:110) Odenigbo's mother expects him to marry a woman with a conservative cultural disposition and orientation. She is disturbed about the future of motherhood as she holds the view about whether the "too educated a woman" would conceive grandchildren for her. This thought reveals how a woman's life is entangled to the expectations of motherhood.



KEY FACTORS IN FATHERHOOD

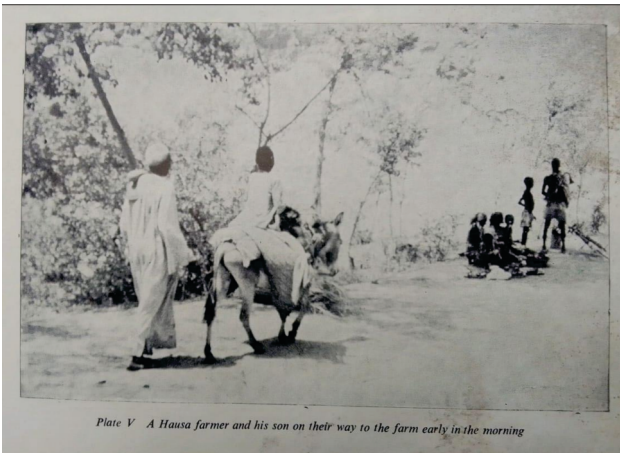


Plate V A Hausa farmer and his son on their way to the farm early in the morning

- ▶ Fatherhood in historical context is understudied. Biographies and autobiographies of men make reference to what it means for ‘a specific man’ to be a father. In the biographies of Nigerian men, fatherhood is explained as an accomplishment, wherein it is viewed from the prism of success attained in the professions of biological children. Fatherhood in the communal sense as

portrayed in biographies are philanthropic as wealthy men display public fatherhood

- ▶ Fathering a child is multifaceted in Nigeria and as prescribed under the Child Rights Act (CRA), it goes thus: that once a child bears the name of a man, he becomes the father, even if not married to the mother or not the biological father of the child; when the man admits he is the father of the child, or when the father is presumed to be the father of a child and when a woman can prove by scientific test (DNA).
- ▶ The CRA stipulation considers the Nigerian realities rooted in precolonial ways of life as fatherhood is communal, thus could be presumptive. However, fatherhood in precolonial Nigeria structurally excludes name identity, but in terms of roles, it is considered all encompassing.



DYNAMICS OF PARENTING IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

1 British colonialism: The dynamics of parenting and children was upset by British colonialism in Nigeria. This led to new ways of understanding family dynamics in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. Therefore, shifting notions of motherhood and fatherhood were informed by changes precipitated by colonial modernization and urbanization. By independence, expanded education opportunities and increased school enrollment created new ways of being modern. Meredith in explaining the postcolonial state of Nigeria articulates how difficult it was to define Nigerian nationhood due to its vastness, by which constitutions were constantly amended to reflect diversity (2006:75-77).

2 Education as Investment: In colonial Nigeria, parenting of children was taken as an investment. Then, education introduced by the colonial state enticed new ways of life often associated with classroom learning. In the categories of education, this type of education is often referred to as formal education as it deviates from the non-formal mode of learning prominent in precolonial societies. In the words of Ekundare, (1973:356-357) schooling was a culture adopted as an investment to yield dividends.

The dividends are expectations of new life. Education as a dividend and investment influenced how parenting was constructed. The process of getting educated was a long one based on a structured curriculum where parents are also immersed in studies that leave child care to fosters, especially,

- 3** Nigerians in Diaspora.
3. Overseas Education and Child Fostering: Notions of parenting Nigerian children in Diaspora of the colonial and immediate postcolonial era involved child fostering with British parents. In this case, the biological parents in Britain leave children in the care of fosters, while they concentrate on studies. This scenario created a generation of children that struggled with identities of being Nigerian and British. The awkwardness created a sense of confusion in national belonging and acceptance in the diaspora. The aftermath for children in this
- 4** generation is psychological.
4. Science of motherhood: Nigerian health system in the colonial era also shaped the perspective of parenting. In several accounts of the colonial health interventions, baby shows were held in urban areas to enlighten mothers on the sciences of infant care and ultimately reward babies well catered for.

(Oladejo, 2020, Aderinto, 2012) These shows created a form of enlightenment on new ways of being a mother. To the colonial state, it was a form of mothering that fulfilled aspects of imperial expansion. Included in the curriculum was the science of domesticity

5 organized solely for girls.

5. **Domesticity and Motherhood:** Domestic science training curriculum was designed to also fulfill imperial expansion by promoting the Victorian ideals of child care. Girls were trained in the art of infant care in domestic science schools established across Nigeria. (Denzer, 1992, Oladejo, 2019) The making of domestic sciences left out the roles of fathers in child rearing. Domesticity made motherhood a distinctive role that is not required for fatherhood. The terms of engagement in child upbringing were left out

6 in the gender dynamics of child rearing.

6. **Masculinities and Fatherhood:** Masculinities were defined by ability to make money. (Lindsay, 2003: 140) The adult masculinity in the Nigerian colonial setting was expected to be productive to make money and this was crucial for public perception and social standing. In a study of Nigerian men in the colonial railway service, the family is well constructed along modern identities as the regular paychecks of men sustained the marriage and family. The children from such settings grew into middle-class life in the city thereby existing as a perfection of the modern family system. While money made men

masculine, the question of fatherhood remains hanging, and masculinity is society-specific. Non-salaried men in colonial Nigeria, tend to be hugely polygamous and this also puts the role of fatherhood at risk. The features of masculinity are not fixed nor general across societies. It is what the society accepts as the expression of maleness.

7 (Whitehead, 2002:4, Uchendu, 2008:3)

7. **Free Education:** To a certain extent, the introduction of free primary education in western Nigeria of the 1950s was a social welfare approach that enabled children to enroll in formal schools. (Ajayi, 2008) The free education scheme undoubtedly created a new class of elites as the education scholarships snowballed into access to higher education. The new elite constituted the middle class. Education as it were from the immediate postcolonial era created upward professional mobility, and recreated the thinking about motherhood. The old thinking about motherhood was to train mothers to adopt the sciences in mothering for imperial expansion. The new thinking was influenced by neoliberal capitalists' formation that trained mothers to adopt infant formula in

8 baby feeding. (Oladejo, 2019).

8. **Industrial Baby-Foods:** Multinational companies campaigned to mothers to use baby foods. The science of mothering was entangled in the neoliberal interest of making third world economies as spaces of consumption. Education and employment



uptake by mothers was enhanced by the neoliberal advantage of baby food in urban areas. However, it created incongruent sciences, as lower-class mothers tend to compose baby food locally, due to low purchasing power. Institutional criticisms of the industrial baby foods were profound in the research uptake of the Institute of Child Health at the College of Medicine, University of Ibadan. (Oladejo and Omobowale, 2020). On the other hand, baby-food consumption frees women from long-time commitment to breastfeeding, thereby granting them more time to commit to the productive economy. For city women, Baby-foods could therefore be seen as liberating from the unpaid labor of breastfeeding.

9

1. **Early Childhood Schools:** For mothers to cope with the neoliberal economy, early childhood care schools are profound in the cities. The schools were designed to relieve mothers from taking infants to work. Women's increased enrolment in schools in the early post-independence era increased the

patronage for early care schools and it also served as spaces for subversion of natural breast milk substituted with industrial baby foods.

10

2. **Delayed Parenthood:** An aftermath of neoliberalism is the contemporary challenges of delayed parenthood often associated with masculinity and prosperity. Smith (2020) study revealed delayed parenthood in southeast Nigeria and attributed it to the cosmological thinking of being "man enough". This phenomenon is not peculiar to the region but across Nigeria. Being "man enough" is the ability to provide for family and sticking to the gender roles of having the man as the sole breadwinner.

11

3. **Early Motherhood:** In the conservative cosmology of northern Nigeria, girls become mothers early by marriage, based on the notions of enabling control from waywardness. The culture tend to open up girls to serial divorce situations in a lifetime, children from the several unions are kept in the care of the biological father's family, step mothers and/or mainstreamed into the

almajiri system, which appears uncoordinated, such that children are left to roam on the street for survival. In other places, early motherhood features out of

12 wedlock.

12. Baby Factory and Anonymous Biological

Parenting: There are illicit economies of trade in reproduction. This economy is demographically rampant in south eastern Nigeria and some border areas in southwestern Nigeria. (Survivors of Nigeria’s ‘baby factories’ share their stories | Human Trafficking | Al Jazeera) Girls are lured into home camps where they are sexually abused until they get pregnant, give birth and the child is taken away. The series of sexual encounters makes it impossible to identify the biological father. Afterwards, the mothers may be released. Thus, the real

13 biological parents remain anonymous.

13. Vaccine Hesitancy: In northern Nigeria, vaccination campaigns for smallpox and treatment camps for cerebrospinal meningitis were introduced by British health officials during the colonial period (1903–60) and vaccines used were generally imported from Great Britain.

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THE NIGERIA COLONY WELFARE DEPARTMENT BOYS CLUB.
FRON/9/1.- The Clubs are open from 4. 0. p.m. until 7. 0. p.m.
A group of boys waiting to go in.
ISSUED BY THE WEST AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHIC SERVICE, REGIONAL INFORMATION OFFICE,
ACCRA, GOLD COAST, BRITISH WEST AFRICA.


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However, interventions since then, have been viewed with suspicion for fear they hinder future reproductive abilities. In this circumstance, mother’s power to take a child for vaccination was troubled in the conservative patriarchal settings of the family. Father’s approval has to be sought before immunization procedures for children. There have been changes in recent times.

IMPLICATIONS

The dynamics of motherhood and fatherhood pointed out are consequences of factors that shaped Nigeria's social, political and economic milieu. These factors are impliedly embedded in how gender relations are constructed in marriage, technological changes, urbanization and economic realities.

- ▶ **Breadwinners' paradox, Troubled Masculinity and Family Creation:** The neoliberal features of contemporary economies stifled the masculinity of being man enough as there are unemployment and extreme scarce resources to make a decent livelihood. However, female breadwinners had always existed in varying ways since precolonial Nigeria even with the presence of a male breadwinner. Lineages had father and mother being capable to hold forth as breadwinners because women engage in income-generating activities. The neoliberal economy in Nigeria portrays an outlook where young men and women delay parenthood and/or entangle in separate parenting. Separate parenting conceptualizes a situation where both parents don't live together, but there are terms and conditions agreed for co-parenting. It is a situation that exists irrespective of marital status. The neoliberal implication deviates from the precolonial making of families where the family was closely knit together and life was communal. Marriage in the neoliberal era is costly and embedded in cultural bottlenecks that made it impossible to have unionized parenting.
- ▶ **Modernisation and Technology:** This creates paradox to issues of fatherhood, motherhood and children's wellbeing. The importation of household electronics into Nigeria, have enabled women to define domestic roles and enhance the chances of working outside the home to earn money. Technology appears as a threat to fatherhood as constructed by religion and cultural norms. Fatherhood is almost blurred in contemporary Nigeria as men nurse the belief that traditionally they are not expected to be in the social life of their children; lay hands on household appliances to enable child welfare in the home; men tend to want polygamy which often shifts their focus away from child wellbeing; men prefer women to be subjugated in the equation of marriage, hence mentally, most of them feel uncomfortable having working class wives; generally, men have the traditional thoughts that allowing women to get educated, work, access technologies among others are dangerous to their masculinity. These and others affect the notions of fatherhood and motherhood. For example, the recently concluded Big Brother Naija, 2022 where contesting housemates were put to a task to talk about their parents, almost all twenty-eight of the Gen Z were raised by single parents and mostly their mothers. They were very emotional about how they don't know what it means to have a father around them while growing up.

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- ▶ **Religion and Family Structure:** Religion has toned down the construct of extended family systems as the growth of Pentecostalism made nuclear families more fashionable and conspicuous. The introduction of Christian and English court marriage systems from the colonial era transformed extended families into nuclear families. This also reflected in the urban housing systems where architectural designs were meant for nuclear family structures.
 - ▶ **Divorce and Separate Parenting:** The problems of gender inequality in marriage and extremely patriarchal resurgent position of men have collapsed the nuclear family systems through incessant separation and divorces. In such circumstances, single parenting is a new normal where either the father or mother single-handedly raise children. It is important to note that such children have grown up to be the popular Gen Z.
 - ▶ **Ripple Effect on Gen Z:** The Gen Z and upcoming children tend to opt out of the institution of marriage and thus look out for new ways of fatherhood and motherhood via assisted reproductive technologies. Or make decisions not to set up a family, rather focus on life goals.
 - ▶ **Social Media Parenting:** The trend of children consulting with unknown entities on social media for counsel and mentorship has devalued real-time parenting and it is fast breeding a generation of hybrid cultures and mixed values. This is why questions are being raised about the sufficiency of societies' enlightenment level with media usage (Omotoso, 2018)
 - ▶ **High Cost of Living:** The growing cost of living in Nigeria threatens the nuclear family systems as both parents find it difficult to maintain a family. Hence, women indirectly take up responsibilities of financing households including children's education. Among Muslims, there are notions of family putting much expectations on men as fathers to take responsibilities, but, the high cost of living tends to affect them, such that a considerable number could rarely afford paying for children's education and other necessities. Few Muslim women who break out of subjugating stereotypes to work and earn better income end up separated or divorced and thus raised children from their income.

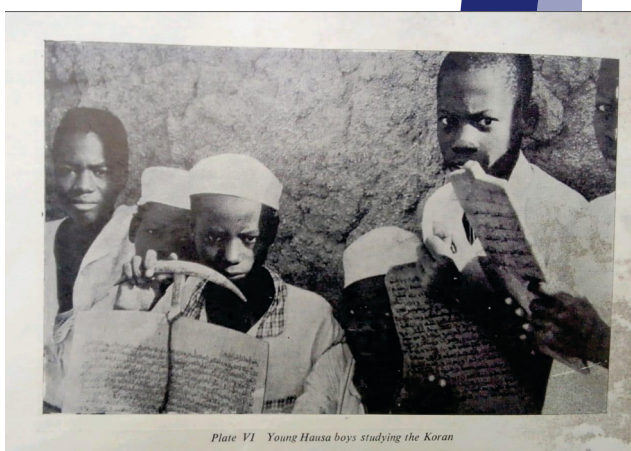


Plate VI Young Hausa boys studying the Koran

INTERVENTIONS

The Nigerian government enacted the Child Rights Act (CRA) in 2003. However, little has been achieved in addressing parental effectiveness. In the implementation of CRA in Nigeria, the family court exists in some states in Nigeria, but its essence is not significantly explored. Also, childhood issues are neglected in governance as it is considered subliminal in the core governance procedures. Issues related to children are considered an appendage of the ministry of women affairs.

In strengthening capacity for research, training and workshops have been carried out within the SCaRPE-A Nigeria project 2021-2023. Also recently published are fieldnotes of four early career researchers reflecting on thematic issues such as albinism, children in cross border trade, widowhood and post Boko Haram integration in northern Nigeria. These activities note government's neglect of their roles to support parenting. For example, recent trends of shutting down children's recreational spaces and converting them into housing estates do not reflect states' commitment to child-friendly policies.

AGENDA FOR ACTION

SAFE MOTHERHOOD:

Safe motherhood is a continuous process and studies have shown that it requires policy attention in Nigerian society (Shiffman and Okonofua, 2007) Fostering policy window for politically induced interventions for effective mothering practices for improvement of mother and child health, mother empowerment and enabling environment to enhance child care for working mothers.

RESPONSIVE FATHERHOOD:

reorientation of masculinities to enable men integrate fatherhood plans in child upbringing. Deconstructing the notion of men that fatherhood is only by finance, whereas, there is more to it. Also, denouncing the notions of father heroism in child existence, whereby success is considered the only expectation of the father from the child. Granting paternity leave to fathers



Safety and security of children working in/for family business by ensuring equity for child labour in family businesses or in employment

- ▶▶ **Attention to special and physically challenged children**
- ▶▶ **Restructuring the almajiri system**
- ▶▶ **Attention to children in ethnic crisis situation**
- ▶▶ **Attention to parenting in crisis situation and children born in terrorist marriage captivity**
- ▶▶ **Social reengineering of marriage systems to reflect notions of effective parenting**
- ▶▶ **Safe spaces for enjoyable childhood**
- ▶▶ **Child-friendly social security systems**

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