

## ENHANCING THE DIMENSIONS OF FAMILY SOCIAL CLIMATE FOR THE WELLBEING OF THE NIGERIAN CHILD

**Edougha .E. Dennis**

Department of Educational Psychology  
School of Education  
Delta State College of Education, Mosogar

**Dike Ibiam D.**

Department of Educational Foundation And Counselling  
School Of Education  
Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo

*This paper focused on the family social climate as an important aspect of the psychosocial wellbeing of the child. It involves the shared perceptions and relationships that exist in the family. The goal is to enhance the dimensions of the family social climate for the well being of the Nigerian child. These dimensions are of two major categories: demandingness and responsiveness through which four parenting styles were identified. Researchers have established links between the psycho-social wellbeing of the child and family social climate. These include better psycho-social development, higher emotional wellbeing and better behavioral adjustment. A framework for enhancing the dimensions of family social climate was discussed by identifying the goal, the strategic direction, critical success factors (CSF) core processes, key target effective monitoring and effective feedback. The paper concluded that children who are fully supported and parents degree of involvement are likely to have a better psycho social well being, especially the authoritative parenting style. Parents should involve their children in decision making and communicate positively, and children should be given conducive social climate in the family so that they can develop positive psychosocial, emotional, self-esteem, social competence and better behavioural adjustments are among the recommendations.*

**Keywords:** Family Social Climate, Psycho- Social Wellbeing of the Child, Parenting Style, Dimensions of Family Social Climate.

### **Introduction**

The child experiences various parenting ways in the family social climate. The family is one of the factors that contribute to the general wellbeing of the child. A family is a group of persons directly linked by kin

connections, the adult members of which assume responsibility for caring for children (Giddens, 1997). The family is considered the smallest unit of any society. It is the family that is responsible for the wellbeing of the child that provides all the necessary needs of the child. The family plays a major role during the various stages of human growth and development. It is concerned with the development of the child's personality, internalization of values and norms of the society, which gradually make the child to regard himself as an individual that has developed all the characteristics to build the self concept. This processes involve the family psychodynamics. Psychodynamics is the psychology of mental or emotional forces or mental states (Webster, 2016). It is the psychology of mental or emotional forces or processes developing especially in early childhood and their effects on behavior and mental states.

These mental or emotional forces that the child experiences during socialization in the family can affect the child's behavior and mental state, depending on the type of family the child experiences, the parenting forms and the family social climate.

### **The Concept of Family Social Climate**

Family social climate comprises different forms of parenting styles and how the family, parents and children relate with each other. It reflects the shared psychosocial perceptions and relationships that exist in the family. According to Smith & Moore, (2012), family social climate is the way children relate to each other and their parents and the social climate they perceive in the family and the parenting approach.

The family social climate involves the quality and character of family life based on patterns of children, parents and other significant others experience of family life and reflects norms, values, interpersonal relationship and parenting approaches. The study of family climate using Moos' conceptualization, measure in terms of three dimensions composing the family construct; relationship, personal growth, and system maintenance (Moos, 1987b). Baumrind, (1971), also postulated two dimensions in parenting style. Findings from such studies provide an insight of how children feel about certain dimensions of the family social climate.

A sustainable positive family climate fosters the child's development. This climate includes;

- Values, expectations, and norms that support people's feelings, socially, emotionally and physically safe;
- Children are engaged and respected;
- Children and parents work together to develop lives and contribute to a shared family visions,

- Parents model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from experience;
- Each person contributes to the operations of the family and the care of the physical family environment.

A positive family social climate is the product of parents attention to fostering safety, a supportive warmth, acceptance, disciplinary and physical environment, and of respectful, trusting, and caring relationships (Baumrind, 1971).

The family is defined as the first unit with which children have a continuous contact and the first context in which socialization patterns develop Elkin &Handel,(1978P. 118). The family pediatrics report (2003), explained that the development of children is significantly influenced by interpersonal relationships within the family. Affection and protection are evidently crucial for the health of a child. Thus children need to receive love and protection for their healthy emotional development. This is critical to emotional needs of children which is the nature of family structure.

According to the family pediatrics report (2003) the risks for emotional, behavioural, and educational problems are lower among children in 2 – parent households on average. This facilitates effective parenting behaviours, but it does not guarantee success. A stable, well functioning family is potentially the most secure, supportive, and nurturing environment in which children may be raised.

Giddens, (1997), Apologun, (2012), identified various types of family which include, the nuclear family, extended family, monogamy, polygamy, polygyny, and polyandry types of family.

The nuclear family involves two adults living together in a household with their own or adopted children. According to Giddens, in most traditional societies, the nuclear family was part of a larger kinship network. Nuclear family is also referred to as monogamous family (Apologun, 2009).

The extended family simply means that when close relatives other than a married couple and children live either in the same household or in a close and continuous relationship with one another. This may include, grandparents, brothers and their wives, sisters and their husbands, aunts and nephews. This family setting is still very popular in some remote societies in Africa and in Nigeria.

The polygamy family on the other hand, is made up of one man and more than one wife or one wife with more than one husband and the children living together. There are two types of polygamy. Polygyny in which a man may be married to more than one woman at the same time, and polyandry, in

which a woman may have two or more husbands simultaneously (Giddens 1997) which is not common like the rest, but practiced in some part of world.

The organization of the family has direct effect on the children. The first social relationship of children is familial, where children acquire their first experiences of being treated as persons in their own right. Children receive care for their dependency and attention for their sociability. The kind of care and attention children receive during their early years of life affect their handling of important issues such as trust vs distrust and autonomy vs disunity. This ability equips children and their wellbeing.

According to the Family Pediatrics Report (2003), when the family environment enables their needs to be met, children generally turn out well, both socially and psychologically.

In all the above types of families, they all perform socialization and various forms of parenting in which the child experiences, that leads to the wellbeing of the child's psychosocial states, which largely depends on the family social climate. The family social climate environment vary greatly in how the child is giving opportunity to grow, pursue and achieve their goals in life. Various family social climate vary in their functioning mode, some are friendly, inviting, supportive, exclusionary, unwelcoming and even unsafe which might hinder or facilitate the wellbeing of the Nigerian child.

That is why this paper focuses on how to enhance the dimensions of family social climate for the wellbeing of the Nigerian child, taking into cognizance of the dwindling mental and emotional states of the Nigerian child. Therefore the paper will discuss this topic in the following objectives:

- i. The concept of psychosocial wellbeing
- ii. The dimensions of family social climate
- iii. The relationship between family social climate and wellbeing of the child.
- iv. Framework for enhancing dimensions of family social climate.
- v. Conclusion and recommendations.

### **The Concept of Psychosocial Wellbeing**

Psychosocial wellbeing is when individual facilities, or communities have cognitive, emotional and spiritual strengths combined with positive social relationships. The state of wellbeing motivates the development of life skills which enables individuals, families or communities to understand and engage with their environment and make healthy choice which leads to hope for the future.

The expression "psycho-social" is the close dynamic and interaction between psychological and social effects (each one influencing the other). A

child psychosocial wellbeing is the “balance” between the child mental statements and his/her wellbeing within his/her environment to ensure full growth and development and to achieve their full potential.

### **The Dimensions Of Family Social Climate**

Smith and Moore, (2012), posited that family social climate is the way children relate to each other and their parents and social climate they perceive in the family and the parenting approach.

Baumrind, (1971), postulated two dimensions in parenting styles; demandingness and responsiveness that further created the identification of three parenting styles;

Authoritative (when parents show high levels of demandingness and responsiveness), that means parents in this perspective are in strict control of their children and respond to their psycho-social wellbeing. Permissive (low levels of demandingness and high levels of responsiveness), Authoritarian (high levels of demandingness and low levels of responsiveness) and later Baumrind (1991) added neglectful (low levels of both dimensions).

However, parenting style is a constellation of attitude toward the child that are communicated to the child and that, taken together, create an emotional climate in which parent’s behavior is expressed. These behaviours include both specific and goal-directed behavior through which parents perform their role. (Darling & Steinberg 1993).

Darling and Steinberg, (1993); Baumrind (1991), describe parental responsiveness as the level of parents emotional responses to their children’s needs, sometimes seen as support, warmth, and acceptance. On the other hand, she describes parental demandingness as the parents expectations of more mature and responsible behavior from their children, sometime seen as control of the child.

### **The Authoritative Parent**

Attempts to direct the child activities in a rational, issue-oriented manner. She encourages verbal give and take, shares with the child the reasoning behind her policy and solicits his objections when he refuses to conform. Baumrind further affirm that she exert firm control; the authoritative parents affirms the child’s individual interests and qualities, but also sets standard for future conduct. Both autonomous self-will and disciplined conformity are valued by the authoritative parent.

### **The Permissive Parent**

Attempts to exhibit behaviours that highly supportive and very lenient to their children they behave in a nonpunitive acceptant, and affirmative manner toward the child's impulses, desires, and actions. She consults with him about policy decision, and gives explanations for family rules. She makes few demands for household responsibility and orderly behavior. She allows the child to regulate his own activities as much as possible, avoids the exercise of control, and does not encourage him to obey externally defined standards. She attempts to use reason and manipulation, but not overt power, to accomplish her ends.

### **The Authoritarian Parent**

Attempt to shape, control and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of the child in accordance with a set of standard of conduct, usually an absolute standard, theologically motivated and formulated by a higher authority. She values obedience as a virtue and favours punitive, forceful measures to curb, self-will at points where the child's actions or beliefs conflict with what she thinks is right conduct. She believes in keeping the child in his place, in restricting his autonomy, and in assigning household responsibilities in order to inculcate respect for work. She regards the preservation of order and traditional structure as a highly valued end in itself. She does not encourage verbal give and take, believing that the child should accept her word for what is right. Parents show how to support, control their children, and request them to follow specific rules.

### **Neglectful Parents**

Show behavior that is low in monitoring and low in supporting their children low responsiveness and low demandingness are two elements that characterize neglectful parenting. This parenting style has also been called rejecting-neglectful (Baumrind, 1991).

### **The Links between Family Social Climate and Well Being of the Child**

Nwolisa, (2011) posited that high quality parent adolescent relationship (authoritative parents) has been linked repeatedly to mental, social and emotional wellbeing but low parental monitoring (neglectful parents) or neglect leads to diverse risky sexual behaviours among adolescents.

The size of the family could influence the amount of care and concern given to the children. According to (Omeh, 2010) pupils with fewer siblings are likely to receive more parental attention and motivation and thus have more access to resources than children from large families.

Nwudu, (2014) posited that parental lack of control (permissive parents) in the behavior towards their children affects the behaviour of the child at school. However, Ipem, Paul Cookey, & Idris, (2014) opined that an unhappy child at home carries unhappiness to school and can act out at any slightest provocations as a depressed child cannot concentrate during learning.

Denga, (2007) posited that poor parenting, abuse and neglect wreak havoc on a child's life and a child exposed to harsh environment may not behave normally in any environment he see himself.

Parenting style as part of the family social climate has been studied for years (Demo & Cox, 2000). Recently scholars have reported that the four parenting styles identified by (Baumrind 1971) affect children's social competence and emotional coping and wellbeing generally (Mcwayae, Owsianik, Green and Frantuzzo, 2008).

The existing research (Baumrind 1996, Lamborn, Mount, Steiberg, and Dornbusch, 1991) suggests that an authoritative parenting style is effective because parents treat their children in warm ways. Two way discussions between parents and children help to minimize any problems that do occur. Most studies showed that the well-being outcomes occur when children are nurtured by authoritative parents (Furnham & Cheng, 2000); Sternberg, Knutson, Lamb, Bradaran, et'al 2004. These well-being outcomes that occur in families parented by authoritative parents may decrease children's stress and depression; hence the children are more likely to feel happy, respected and appreciated by their parents. (Barnmrind, 1966, 1971; Lamborn et'at, 1991; Steinberg et'al, 1994).

Taken together, the research regarding parental style suggests that an authoritative parenting style which combines warmth and support elements is mostly likely to fulfill a child's developmental needs (Brenner & Fox, 1999; Darling & Steinberg, 1993) and to develop psychological wellness among children (Slicker, 1998). Barnmrind (1996) found that the positive influences of authoritative parenting exist across gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, family structure and time.

However, Gfroerer, Kern, and Curlette, (2004) disagreed that authoritative parenting was not beneficial for children in all cultures and mostly in low income families.

Barnrind, (1991) also found that children raised by authoritative parents are better able to develop social competence compared to other children he added that when authoritatively raised children grow up, they become adults who are ready to adjust in the community and know what is socially acceptable. Once children develop social competence, they are better able to adapt to social adjustments in their life both in children and adolescents

(Jackson and Schemes, 2005). Lamborn et'al 1991) found that warmth and supportive parenting characteristics of authoritative parenting are important in increasing self-esteem and developing positive attitudes among adolescents.

Authoritarian parenting on the other hand and its effects on children's emotions and behaviours, (Hoeve et al 2009) suggested that authoritarian parents control toward their children. Steinberg et al (1991) describe authoritarian parents as those who monitor their children's behavior, restrictive, rigid and primitive where parents pressure children to follow their directions and to respect their wards and efforts (Timpano et'al 2010).

Most researchers found that authoritarian parenting style results in negative outcomes including low self-esteem, decreased happiness, low success and increased nervousness (Baumrind, 1966; Furnham and Cheng 2000; Kamfinann, Gesten and Santa-Lucia, 2000, Wolfradt, Hempel, and Miles, 2003).

Thompson, Hollis, and Richards (2003) also found that depression occurs among children between the age of 5 and 10 if they live in an authoritatrian home, children of authoritarian parents learn to depend on their parents rather than thinking for themselves, they have low confidence and hesitate to do things on their own. This reaction by children disturbs their cognitive, emotional, and social development. (Groluck and Pomerantz, 2009) stated that this parenting style is unfair to children because they have no choice and have to obey their parents even though they don't like it.

Several studies have also demonstrated that there is a relationship between low self-esteem and authoritarian parents among children. (Martinez and Garcia, 2008). Other researches found that compared to children who received warmth and acceptance behavior from their parents, children who are controlled by their parents may display low self-esteem (Barnow, Lucht, and Freyberger, 2005).

On permissive parenting style, Hoeve et al (2009) found that permissive parents show high responsiveness and support for their children, while at the same time having low or little control of their children. They are liberal and give full autonomy to children and support what children like to do.

Researchers found that permissive parenting contributes to antisocial behavior among children (Knutson et al, 2004) and depression (Milevsky et al 2007). While neglectful parents show low support and low control of their children (Hoeve et al 2009), they show low control, warmth and responsiveness to their children (Suldo and Huebner, 2004). They also pay less attention and give little care to their children (Kim and Rohner, 2002).

Milevsky et al (2007), in their study on the relationship among mothers' parenting styles, depression and life satisfaction revealed that

adolescents who receive neglectful parenting from their mothers obtained lower scores on both self-esteem and life satisfaction and got higher depression scores than children receiving the other three parenting types as postulated by (Baumrind, 1971).

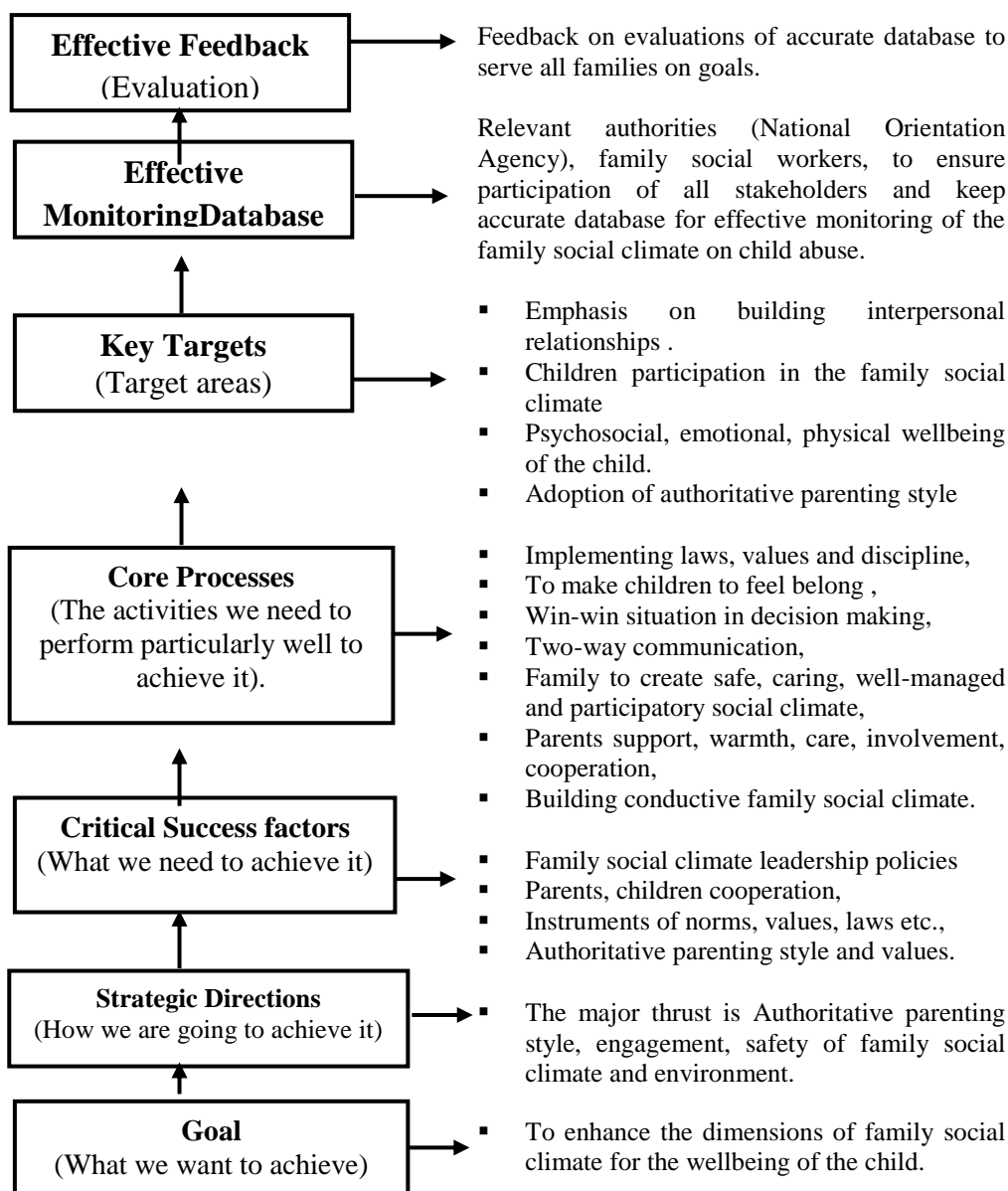
Researches also linked neglectful parenting style and children's aggression and antisocial behavior (Knutson, DeGarmo and Reid (2004). It also leads to predictive delinquency, school disciplinary difficulties, and later leads to criminal behavior (Widom, 1998); delinquent behavior such as pick pocketing (Hoeve et al, 2008).

Neglectful parenting style has an effect on depression, life satisfaction, aggression, antisocial behavior, delinquency, bad attitudes and worsens children psychological development. However, according to Steinberg et al (2006), adolescents from neglectful homes exhibit less desired attitudes such as disrespect, immorality, aggression and violence and have low conflict with their peers because they spend more time with peers than with parents.

Research indicates that development of a child's behavior is strongly influenced by how well his or her family functions. A study of college students found that the more positive the family experience, the more likely the students were to have a positive attitude and believed they were in control of their lives (Goldsmith, 2000).

Denton(1952), on the other hand reported that "perceptive parents know that a child, in order to develop emotional health, needs both firmness and gentleness. He needs discipline, meted out with firmness and consistency, warmth and love" (p.108)

**Framework for Enhancing Dimensions of family social climate for the well being of the child.**



**Source:** Adopted and adapted from Oakland, 1999.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The dimensions of the family social climate play a vital role in children emotional, physical and psychosocial wellbeing as identified by various researches. Therefore, children who experience or are raised by the authoritative parenting are better able to develop social competence, positive attitudes, increasing self-esteem, better behavioural adjustment, higher emotional wellbeing. While the authoritarian parenting children, learn to depend on their parents, have low self-confidence, low self-esteem, decreased happiness, low success and increased nervousness. Also, permissive parenting produce children that are anti-social and depression. Neglectful parenting on the other hand, obtained lower scores on both self-esteem and life satisfaction and higher depression. This paper therefore, took the position of authoritative parenting style to enhance the family social climate for the wellbeing of the Nigerian child, and proffer the following recommendation:

- The family social climate should maintain a win-win situation in negotiations among parents and children.
- Bottom-up decision making process should be adopted in making decisions in the family social climate because the identified problems or challenges lies with the child.
- Children should be made to involve at various levels of engagement and connectedness in the family social climate in order to minimize antisocial behavior.
- Children should be given conducive social climate in the family so that they can develop positive psychosocial, emotional, self-esteem, social competence and better behavioural adjustment.
- The authoritative parenting style should be adopted, that is when parents have a clear cut rules and regulations for children to obey and respond to their psychosocial wellbeing.

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