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Children in the corona pandemic

>> Childhood is historically and culturally changeable. Since the time of the Reformation at the latest, the construction of childhood has become a construction of childhood passivity and children have been defined to a considerable extent by what they are not allowed to do or where they should not be. At the same time, the concept of childlike ‚innocence' was combined with the demand for ‚protection' from the dangers of the adult world.

In recent decades, the fixation on children in the western world has increased significantly, think of ‚helicopter parents', ‚tiger mums' or ‚America's Worst Mum', who earned this title in 2008 by letting her 9-year-old son ride the underground alone in New York.

The current epidemic of ‚overprotectorism', which is supposed to protect children from any external danger and which bypasses children's basic intrinsic need for development towards increasing autonomy, which necessarily includes mistakes and failure, serves the fears of parents and thus fulfils the needs of adults. At the same time, however, it deprives children of the opportunity to make their own experiences, to explore their own limits and, last but not least, to develop in free play with other children.

In many Western countries, it is apparently precisely this attitude that has paved the way for political decision-makers to treat children as if they had neither needs nor rights in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In this regard, the UN stipulated more than 25 years ago in Article 1 of the Commission on the Rights of the Child that: ‚In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private institutions (...) the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration'. However, throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, we have not seen a single political decision in Germany and Austria in which the best interests of the child were not a secondary consideration. In Austria, for example, schools were closed in spring 2020 and playgrounds were ‚sealed' with police tape, while DIY stores were open. In winter 20/21, children were not allowed to attend school, but ski instructors were allowed to pursue their training. In spring 2021, children were not allowed to go to school, even though they would have worn masks at all times and been tested three times a week in many places, while their parents were still able to work untested and without a mask in the open-plan office and their grandparents, who had already been vaccinated, were able to go on holiday again.

Of course, such decisions can only be made if, as was largely the case during the Covid-19 pandemic, evidence-based action is dispensed with and ‚evidence' is primarily ‚proclaimed' in the media by the experts in the respective region.

In the natural sciences, evidence is generated from empiricism. Empiricism, in turn, is primarily the result of direct perception, and it usually takes at least a few months between the emergence of new findings and the first scientific publication in this regard. In this respect, it is surprising that, especially in such a volatile situation, those who were in direct contact with patients were hardly ever listened to. Countless doctors who work with children have constantly pointed out the negligible risk posed by the virus for children who were not specifically pre-ill and the massive consequences for the mental health of minors, which became apparent very quickly. However, they were all ignored or, worse still, discredited. Meanwhile, the (popular evidence-generating) media field was left to modellers and microbiologists who - sometimes without ever having stood at a sickbed - proclaimed relevant ‚scientific truths'.

The idea first expressed by Jean-Jaques Rousseau in 1762 that ‚a child is valuable in itself and not merely as a means to an end' was not (or no longer) much in evidence during the Covid-19 pandemic. Instead, political decisions were apparently made according to the path of least resistance - and this naturally leads via the weakest members of society.

This was mainly made possible by a combination of targeted and, as far as children are concerned, largely unfounded fear-mongering and the fertile ground created by those parents who live in the hope that they can keep any dangers away from their children forever.

With regard to the fundamental approach of political decision-makers to the massive restrictions on children's fundamental rights, which were unreflected and at no point evidence-based, but were always more stringent than for adults, it can certainly be argued that they were motivated by an excessive need to protect children. However, it is to be feared that this was simply due to the fact that children have no lobby and could therefore be treated as compliant pawns.

Essential aspects of the political decisions affecting children in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic strictly speaking fulfil the criteria of child abuse as ‚non-accidental, conscious or unconscious, mostly repeated, physical and/or psychological harm to children and adolescents through actions or omissions' and the two politically popular disciplines at the time of ‚deliberately and consciously protecting the welfare of children in order to assert or promote one's own interests' and ‚wilfully causing fear' also represent varieties of psychological violence.

Children are in need of protection and at the mercy of adults. Not only were they not protected during these years, they were repeatedly used as pawns, even when the massive effects of the various measures had long been well known. This treatment of the weakest members of society is an ethical and moral fiasco.

How could it come to this? Why did so many people accept everything in silence? We can no longer undo anything, but we owe it to our children to address these questions! <<

Citation

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