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ASSIGNMENT: 1. WHAT IS FAMILY

2. DISCUSS THE FUNCTION OF A FAMILY

3. DISCUSS THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FAMILY

4. DISCUSS YOUR NUCLEAR FAMILY

5. DRAW YOUR FAMILY TREE

**INTRODUCTION**

Family communication is usually interface interpersonal communication. The family is the smallest segment of the society and the family members discuss various topics of interest sharing freely their thoughts - happiness, frustration, fear, pain and joy etc. This is possible because the pillar of trust develops right from the childhood when child interacts with father, mother and elders and as he/she grows the trust and topic they share change with time and family members. Similarly, the grown-up family members bonded by strong relationship communicate freely and discuss their topic of interest. The type of family communication varies within relations they maintain with one other.

Various mass media communication sources like-newspaper, magazines, radio and newmedia sources like- television, computer, internet and social media have eventually occupied both time and space in Indian households and has become the interface interpersonal communication in Indian family system today. New communication technologies have changed the communication media use in Indian family system. It is important to examine the impact of mass media technology in the Indian households and how it affects the communication within the families and its penetration along with time and space occupancy in the interface interpersonal communication in Indian family system today.

**WHAT IS A FAMILY?**

According to Sociologists, the family is an intimate domestic group of people related to one another by bonds of blood, sexual mating, or legal ties. It has been a very resilient social unit that has survived and adapted through time. So, the element of time referred to above, is again present here.

The family acts as a primary socialization of children whereby the child first learns the basic values and norms of the culture they will grow up in. a child needs to be carefully nurtured, cherished and molded into responsible individuals with good values and strong ethics. Therefore, it is important to provide them the best childcare so that they grow up to be physically, mentally and emotionally strong individuals.

Similarly, The United States Census Bureau (2007) defines the family as a relatively permanent group of two or more people who are related by blood, marriage or adoption and who live under the same roof.

Stephen (1999) defines the family as a social arrangement based on marriage including recognition of rights and duties of parenthood, common residence for husband, wife and children are reciprocal economic obligations between husband and wife.

The family is seen as the main pillar block of a community; family structure and upbringing influence the social character and personality of any given society. Family is where everybody learns to love, to care, to be compassionate, to be ethical, to be honest, to be fair, to have common sense, to use reasoning etc., values which are essential for living in a community. Yet, there are ongoing debates that families’ values are in decline. Moreover the same family is viewed as an ‘oppressive and bankrupt institution’.

George Peter Murdock (1949) defines the family as a universal institution. According to him, the family is a ‘social group characterised by common residence, economic corporation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship and one or more children owned or adopted of the sexually cohabiting adults’. However, K. Gough (1959) criticises Murdock definition and argues that the family is not universal. The critics were founded in the Nayar society.

In order to adequately examine the implications of mass media communication sources on interface interpersonal communication in family system, we must first clarify the definitions of each significant term. Though the majority of these terms are familiar but they were scientifically defined which explains its meaning, application and limitations in broad perspectives. Family is a multidimensional unit performing various functions in a society. It has been a great interest for sociologists to define it on the basis of its various aspects like size of the family, functions of the family, relationship between the family members etc. According to the classification by Wamboldt & Reiss, (1989); Noller & Fitzpatrick, (1993) ―Definitions of the word family generally fall into three categories: family structure, task orientation, and transactional process definitions‖.

Family structure definitions are based on number of family members, their blood relations and the hierarchy followed. According to Wambldt & Reiss, (1989) –―Family structure definitions surround the family of procreation (partners and children), relatives by blood, or individuals that have established biological or legal legitimacy‖. Census,(2000) describes family as an example of households who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption. These definitions help to divide the families on the basis of size like small, nuclear, large, combined etc. Though these definitions provide scholars with clear criteria for membership, but may not be as useful as the social definition of family continues to evolve. This categorization is beneficial for framing various policies concerned with population.

Task orientation definitions focus on whether certain tasks for family life are performed (Wambldt & Reiss, 1989). Families are described as a group working towards mutual need fulfillment. Lerner & Spanier, (1978) describe a family as working towards the socialization and nurturance of children. Thus the task oriented definition gives the impression of role and motto of family and its members. On this basis a family can be categorized under backgrounds like professional, educational, religious, economy based etc.

Transactional process definitions view the family as a group of intimates who generate a group identity (Wambldt & Reiss, 1989). Families therefore have strong ties of loyalty and experience a history and a future together. It concentrates towards various relations and their communication with each other. This type of definition is especially useful for communication scholars because of the strong emphasis on communication as the major vehicle in establishing intimacy (Caughlin, et al., 2011). The interpersonal relationship between the family members, their communication with each other and the social challenges they face as an integrated unit is the basis of this definition.

**FUNCTIONS OF A FAMILY**

Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) stated that families are goal-directed, selfcorrecting, dynamic, interconnected systems that both affect and are affected by their environment and by qualities within the family itself. The structure, function or relations within the family are often common within a society or a region. They decide the social structure and shape the culture of the society. It is noteworthy that both family and society affect each other. The words goal-directed, self-correcting, dynamic, interconnected etc give family a sense of life. It is only a good family that makes house ‗a home‘. In families goals for better living are set, the drawbacks or wrong traditions or superstitions are corrected. Love, compassion, trust and cooperation play positive role and fear, hatred and selfishness play a negative role thus giving family a dynamic look.

The family is the basic and important unit of society because of the role it plays ingeneration of human capital resources and the power that is vested in it to influenceindividual, households, and community behavior (Sriram, 1993). It is, therefore, a basicunit of study in most social sciences disciplines, such as sociology, psychology,economics, anthropology, social psychiatry, social work or human development.

The primary function of the family is to ensure the continuation of society, both biologically through procreation, and socially through socialization. Given these functions, the nature of one’s role in the family changes over time. From the perspective of children, the family instills a sense of orientation: The family functions to locate children socially, and plays a major role in their socialization. From the point of view of the parents, the family’s primary purpose is procreation: The family functions to produce and socialize children. In some cultures marriage imposes upon women the obligation to bear children. In northern Ghana, for example, payment of bride wealth signifies a woman’s requirement to bear children, and women using birth control face substantial threats of physical abuse and reprisals.

Producing offspring is not the only function of the family. Marriage sometimes establishes the legal father of a woman’s child or the legal mother of a man’s child; it oftentimes gives the husband or his family control over the wife’s sexual services, labor, and property. Marriage, likewise, often gives the wife or her family control over the husband’s sexual services, labor, and property. Marriage also establishes a joint fund of property for the benefit of children and can establish a relationship between the families of the husband and wife. None of these functions are universal, but depend on the society in which the marriage takes place and endures. In societies with a sexual division of labor, marriage, and the resulting relationship between a husband and wife, is necessary for the formation of an economically productive household. In modern societies marriage entails particular rights and privilege that encourage the formation of new families even when there is no intention of having children.

Recall that the functional perspective emphasizes that social institutions perform several important functions to help preserve social stability and otherwise keep a society working. A functional understanding of the family thus stresses the ways in which the family as a social institution helps make society possible. As such, the family performs several important functions.

First, the family is the primary unit for socializing children. No society is possible without adequate socialization of its young. In most societies, the family is the major unit in which socialization happens. Parents, siblings, and, if the family is extended rather than nuclear, other relatives all help socialize children from the time they are born.

Second, the family is ideally a major source of practical and emotional support for its members. It provides them food, clothing, shelter, and other essentials, and it also provides them love, comfort, and help in times of emotional distress, and other types of support.

Third, the family helps regulate sexual activity and sexual reproduction. All societies have norms governing with whom and how often a person should have sex. The family is the major unit for teaching these norms and the major unit through which sexual reproduction occurs. One reason for this is to ensure that infants have adequate emotional and practical care when they are born.

Fourth, the family provides its members with a social identity. Children are born into their parents’ social class, race and ethnicity, religion, and so forth. Some children have advantages throughout life because of the social identity they acquire from their parents, while others face many obstacles because the social class or race/ethnicity into which they are born is at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Beyond discussing the family’s functions, the functional perspective on the family maintains that sudden or far-reaching changes in conventional family structure and processes threaten the family’s stability and thus that of society. For example, most sociology and marriage-and-family textbooks during the 1950s maintained that the male breadwinner–female homemaker nuclear family was the best arrangement for children, as it provided for a family’s economic and child-rearing needs. Any shift in this arrangement, they warned, would harm children and, by extension, the family as a social institution and even society itself. Textbooks no longer contain this warning, but many conservative observers continue to worry about the impact on children of working mothers and one-parent families. We return to their concerns shortly.

**• Provision of Resources**

Providing resources, such as money, food, clothing, and shelter, for all family members is one of the most basic, yet important, roles within a family. This is primarily an instrumental role.

**• Nurturance and Support**

Nurturing and supporting other family members is primarily an affective role and includes providing comfort, warmth, and reassurance for family members. Examples of this role are a parent comforting a child after he/she has a bad day at school, or family members supporting one another after the death of a loved one.

**• Life Skills Development**

The life skills development role includes the physical emotional, educational, and social development of children and adults. Examples of this role are a parent helping a child make it through school, or a parent helping a young adult child decide on a career path.

**• Maintenance and Management of the Family System**

This fourth role involves many tasks, including leadership, decision making, handling family finances, and maintaining appropriate roles with respect to extended family, friends and neighbors. Other responsibilities of this role include maintaining discipline and enforcing behavioral standards.

**• Sexual Gratification of Marital Partners**

A satisfying sexual relationship is one of the keys to a quality marital relationship. This role involves meeting sexual needs in a manner that is satisfying to both spouses.

**AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FAMILY**

**Introduction**

Traditional African family patterns are slowly but progressively being altered as a result of the process of modernization which is exhibited through trends like urbanization. Family patterns that were the norm in traditional rural African societies are gradually being altered and substituted by modern values. Sub Saharan Africa has one of the fastest annual population growth rate (Merrick 202:41). It has the fastest rate of urbanization presently taking place in the world. The transformation of societies in the sub-continent from rural to urban settings has immensely contributed in triggering changes in family structure. This has triggered the distortion of cultural /traditional norms and values that characterized rural communities in the region.

African families are increasingly faced with the challenge and pressure emanating from the competition prevailing between traditional and modern family values. Hence, Contemporary family patterns in the region are increasingly subjected to transform and adapt to changing times. Discussions of family patterns in contemporary Sub Saharan Africa are usually made in reference to the process of acculturation, urbanization (the movement from rural to urban areas), which have helped to shape modern family structures, as well as fostered the prevalence of demographic changes (Kalu 1981:353). Family in sub Saharan Africa is experiencing changes which are felt in fertility rates that is the number of children women give birth to, and age at marriage to name a few.

 This article seeks to examine the trends that depict family patterns in most sub Saharan African countries. It aims at examining two key issues connected with African family patterns, that is; marriage and family size, with the goal of illuminating the changes that are characterizing their prevalence. Discussion on the latter will be limited to the discourse of fertility rate which in this paper encapsulates the number of children women in the region give birth to. In essence, it is centred on the discourse of childbirth that is number of children per woman. It is unconceivable to discuss family patterns in the region, without assessing the issue of marriage. The main interest is that of portraying the changes taking place in marriages in region, from which information can be derived on the changes that have so far been encountered in its contraction.

 Overview of family patterns in sub Saharan Africa

Despite the changes taking place in sub Saharan African societies due to the modernization process, the family still remains a prominent nexus in the social life of Africans. In Africa, there is considerable importance attached to the respect for elders and ancestors. African communities are characterized by the prevalence of collectivism as opposed to individuality. Paulina Makinwa-Adebusoye (2001:5) outlined the major characteristic features of African household to be that they are mostly rural, patriarchal and hierarchical, polygamous and open to kinship networks, and finally they attached substantial importance to lineage continuation.

These features in all play a pivotal role in influencing the number of children women give birth to. The social organization of most African families is embedded in a patriarchal and hierarchical system that precludes the possibility of women, who generally have lower status than men in the society to make deliberate choice on the number of children they want to have (Makinwaadebusoye2001:5). At marriage women tend to have lower status than all the members of their husband’s family (Makinwa-adebusoye (20016). In traditional rural societies in most sub Saharan societies, women were voiceless and powerless. According to Göran Therborn (2006) African societies have experienced slight distortion in the patriarchal tradition, following the advent of urbanization, as well as due to the drop in the importance attached to land and cattle in the economy. Male supremacy has also being altered a bit even though it still has a prominent strong hold in the society. There is the existence of substantial cultural importance attributed to fertility and lineage continuation, tight patriarchal traditions, wide rate of polygamy prevalence. These are the prominent features that characterized most traditional African societies.

 Contemporary African family patterns are subjected to changes that emanate as a result of the ameliorated economic conditions, education and health opportunities. These factors continuously exert tremendous impact on contemporary family patterns in the sub-continent.

Socioeconomic circumstances in the sub-continent are encountering alterations that have to a considerable extent triggered changes in the fundamental cultural values most especially in the domain of the family. The occurrence of competition between traditional and modern family patterns illustrates a dichotomy. There is a rise in the pace towards the abandonment of traditional practices for modern ones (western). However, the most popular trend is that of the prevalence of family patterns that are increasing merging traditional and modern marriage norms, values or practices (Kalu1981:2). The next section provides information on marriage; it is followed by information on family size.

Marriage

Marriage can be perceived from different facets, as an institution, a partnership, a lifecycle phase and as a role. Marriage as an institution is confronted with the process of adapting to the process of modernization which inherently helps to mold modern marriage structure. Wilhelma Kalu (1981) stated that the institution of marriage is considerably subjected to the trend of accommodation to the process of industrialization/modernization. Socioeconomic circumstances are encountering changes which forge alteration of the fundamental values of culture. Marriage constitutes a vital variable that is pivotal for procreation. The distortion of its structure tends to serve as a medium where socioeconomic changes associated with the main values of culture can be measured. Traditional tenets of African marriages are increasingly subjected to stabilize amidst sporadic societal changes emanating from modernization and globalization. This, Wilhelmina Kalu (1981:350) emphasized inherently brings in to perspective the need for the redefinition of the role and features of marriage unavoidable.

 Marriage in sub Saharan Africa is universal. There is early and universal female marriage (Caldwell and Caldwell 1987:411). The age at first marriage is experiencing slight delay than it was before. Marriage in Africa is subjected to the task of adapting amidst sporadic changes emanating from the society. This in essence set the pace for the redefinition of its role and characteristics (Kalu1981:350). Marriage is still quite important in African communities, the age at first marriage ranges between 17 to 22 years for women (Boogaarts et al 1984). It varies across regions depending on regional and ethnic practices. Göran Therborn (2006:36) portrays the fact that the age of first marriage has experienced a slight increase in most countries. It has risen since the 1950s to 1990s in Guinea from 16 to 19 years, from 15 to 18 years in Niger. In Nigeria it has risen from 19 to 20 years, Ivory Coast from 19 to 21 years and Zimbabwe from 19 to 21 years during the 1980s and early 1990s. Countries like South Africa and Botswana have much later ages of marriage which has rose from 26 to 27 years. The percentage of the female population that is married by age 20 was 82 percent in Mali, and 90 percent in Niger. Both of these countries have relatively high fertility rates (Makinwa-Adebusoye2001:5). Michael

Boogarts (1984) remarked that before, the average age of marriage in the sub-continent ranged between 15 years and beyond. Contrary to this, contemporary sub Saharan African countries are gradually experiencing slight changes in the age of marriage at which women get married.

 In traditional rural African societies, the contraction of marriage was dominated by arranged marriages whereby parents usually indulged in the selection of marriage partners for their children; this was mostly common for their daughters. This was done without the consent of the children. However, in contemporary African societies this has been altered to the extent that some countries have adopted policies that strive to advocate for the consent of both parties that are to be married as was the case of the Tanzania marriage act of 1971 and the Ivory coast civil code of 1964 (Therborn 2006:29). This does not imply that the involvement of parents in the marriage of their children has been halted. The adoption of these acts has helped to promote the recognition of the consent of the parties to be married, and as well as fostered the existence of the acknowledgment that it is the right of prospective partners to select their partners. Despite this development, the selection of marriage partners is still done with the consent of family members.

 In traditional societies in most sub Saharan African countries, there is a high value accorded to marriage; this has been marked by the practice of early marriages and childbearing which in most cases continues till the end of productivity age. At marriage women tend to have lower status than all the members of their husband family (Makinwa-adebusoye (20016). Polygamous marriages dominated traditional societies. Paulina Makinwa-Adebusoye (2001 5) explained that as of 1999, in Nigeria, 32.7 percent of married women were in polygamous marriages that were made up of two or more wives. This is characterized by the trend of early marriage; most of the women got married quite young, mostly to older men. Polygamy constitutes a prime feature of rural Africa. Africa has the highest rate of polygamy prevalence in the world (Therborn2006:13).

Marriage in contemporary sub Saharan Africa is substantially marked by the movement from polygamous marriages to monogamous marriage. This is prominent in urban areas in the region mostly amongst the younger generation. The practice of polygamy was centred on the notion of precluding the situation of husband shortage. Monogamous marriages have become the norm, based on the fact that the contraction of marriage has substantially drifted from polygamy to monogamy. This however does not mean that polygamous marriages do not occur; its scale is smaller nowadays than it was before. The introduction of Christianity in most of the countries, to a certain extend has a great role to play for this as well. The contraction of marriage in the region is increasingly marked by the union of one man and one woman. This in principle has not been the case in rural Sub Sahara African societies, where marriages between one man and two or more wives dominated. Urbanization and modernization as well have been pinpointed to be responsible for these changes.

 Wilhemina Kalu (1981:351) study of marriage in Ghana amongst the Ga community in the 1980s illustrated it to be dominated more by polygamy even though there existed the freedom to choose between monogamy and polygamy. According to Wilhemina Kalu (1981:382) marriage was contracted as a partnership rather than an organic union, sustained by reciprocal desires and obligation. The impact of acculturation stemming from the process of urbanization, culminated from the trend of the movement from rural to urban areas, has helped to shape marriage structure. There is the emergence of elements or practices from abroad which did not prevail before such as love, romance, and physical togetherness in most African societies that have helped in altering traditional conceptualization of marital relationship. Wilhemina Kalu (1981) upholds that there is increasingly competition prevailing between western conception of marriage and the traditional African conceptualization. There is mounting pursuit for change mostly amongst the younger generation. The practice of acculturation favours the adjustment to modern times (Kalu1981 358).

 Family Size

The advent of modernity has inherently fostered a progressive transformation of African family organization marked by the drift from larger family size to small size households.

Demographers often identify the changes taking place in family patterns such as changes in family size to be a characteristic of the second demographic transition process (Perelli-Harris 2005:57). It is marked by the reorientation of family values from extended families to smaller family sizes. According to Briennna Perelli-Harris (2005) the shift in society is inevitable and is part of the process of modernization. One major area that has encountered or is experiencing alteration is the size of family that is the number of children that married women give birth to.

Discussion of family size here is made in reference to the number of children that are born in a family. It is imperative to highlight that family size discussions in the region is renown to be dominated by the extended family settings whereby a family is not made up only of a married couple and their children but also include uncles, aunties, grandparents to name a few.

Extended families still has quite a strong hold in Africa despite the advent of modernization.

The main reason for this has been linked to the role that extended family plays as social security in the society (Therborn 2006:13).

 Family structures in sub Saharan Africa are experiencing changes which are felt in childbirth rate that is the number of children, and age at first marriage. John Caldwell and Pat Caldwell (1987:411) emphasized that in order to comprehend contemporary African fertility, one needs to understand that there has not been any traditional fertility control in the light of limiting family size, and also that the practice of female abstinence has been a vital feature of societies in the region. This, they identified as been the reason for the resistance and apprehension mounted by most people in the region to modern methods of fertility control which were perceived as being unnecessary in the region. The number of children women in the region are averagely giving birth to is progressively declining even though the rate is not quite significant.

The locus of most traditional African countries is centred on the perception of large families as an asset especially in rural subsistence agricultural societies (Makinwa-adebusoye 2001:5). John Caldwell and Pat Caldwell (1987:412.413) stated that the ideal family size in the region stood around 6 to 8 children. There were no interests in reducing the family size beyond these numbers of births in rural communities. Limiting family sizes to four or five children was viewed to increase the potential of extinction in the face of high mortality rates. In Nigeria as John Caldwell and Pat Caldwell (1987:413) pointed, women had as much as twelve children and still had the desire to give birth to more children. A world fertility survey report on the proportion of women who had on average seven surviving children and who did not want to have more children, showed that the proportion was 33 percent in Kenya, 10 in Cameroon, 3 percent in Ghana. High fertility was perceived as a source of joy (Caldwell &Caldwel1987:413).

 The factors that have been identified to be responsible for high fertility rates are extensive, they range from high infant and child mortality, low contraceptive use, early marriage to cite a few. This is plagued with variation amongst Sub Saharan African countries, with the total fertility rates in the region noted to have fallen from 6 to 5 children per woman. The number is estimated to fall to 2.45 children by 2050. According to Cheihk Mbacke (1994: 189) arguments have been put forth that economic hardship plays a pivotal role in the reduction of family sizes in contemporary sub Saharan African societies. Decision making pertaining to childbearing to a considerable extent lies on family status, and concerns surrounding the preservation of the lineage and respect for ancestors. This mode of reasoning rest on the belief, that ancestors are reincarnated through the birth of additional children (Makinwa-adebusoye 2001: 5). The locus of high fertility is perceived as a means of prolonging the lineage with the replacement of older members with new ones.

Conclusion

African family patterns are increasingly faced with the challenge and pressure between traditional and modern family values and structure. There is the steady increase in the pace towards the abandonment of traditional practices for modern ones (western). However, the most popular trend is that of the prevalence of family patterns that are increasing merging traditional and modern marriage norms or practices(Kalu1981:2). This paper has presented a short description of the changes that are characterizing marriage and family size in contemporary sub Saharan Africa. There are other practices taking place such as non-marital childbearing, single parenthood, non-marital unions that were not discussed that are as well gradually gaining momentum in the region. It can be infer from the information provided in this paper that practices that depicted rural sub Saharan African societies are progressively being transformed, this is marked by the shift from polygamy marriages that dominated rural sub Saharan African communities to monogamous marriage and the movement from large household to small ones.

**MY NUCLEAR FAMILY**

Nuclear family, also called elementary family, in sociology and anthropology, a group of people who are united by ties of partnership and parenthood and consisting of a pair of adults and their socially recognized children. Typically, but not always, the adults in a nuclear family are married. Although such couples are most often a man and a woman, the definition of the nuclear family has expanded with the advent of same-sex marriage. Children in a nuclear family may be the couple’s biological or adopted offspring.

Thus defined, the nuclear family was once widely held to be the most basic and universal form of social organization. Anthropological research, however, has illuminated so much variability of this form that it is safer to assume that what is universal is a “nuclear family complex” in which the roles of husband, wife, mother, father, son, daughter, brother, and sister are embodied by people whose biological relationships do not necessarily conform to the Western definitions of these terms. In matrilineal societies, for example, a child may be the responsibility not of his biological genitor but of his mother’s brother, who fulfills the roles typical of Western fatherhood.

Closely related in form to the predominant nuclear-family unit are the conjugal family and the consanguineal family. As its name implies, the conjugal family is knit together primarily by the marriage tie and consists of mother, father, their children, and some close relatives. The consanguineal family, on the other hand, typically groups itself around a unilineal descent group known as a lineage, a form that reckons kinship through either the father’s or the mother’s line but not both. Whether a culture is patrilineal or matrilineal, a consanguineal family comprises lineage relatives and consists of parents, their children, and their children’s children. Rules regarding lineage exogamy, or out-marriage, are common in these groups; within a given community, marriages thus create cross-cutting social and political ties between lineages.

The stability of the conjugal family depends on the quality of the marriage of the husband and wife, a relationship that is more emphasized in the kinds of industrialized, highly mobile societies that frequently demand that people reside away from their kin groups. The consanguineal family derives its stability from its corporate nature and its permanence, as its relationships emphasize the perpetuation of the line.

My nuclear family consists of my parents, my two sisters and I.

**FAMILY TREE**

**THE NWAONU’S FAMILY TREE**

GRANDPARENTS (MUM’S SIDE) GRANDPARENTS ( DAD’S SIDE)

Mr. Njoku Mrs Njoku Mr. Nwaonu Mrs Nwaonu

 Miss Njoku(my mum) Master Nwaonu(my dad)

 Mr. & Mrs Nwaonu

 (my parents)

 Kamsiyochukwu(male) chidera(female) delight(female)

 Nwaonu (child) nwaonu(child) nwaonu(child)