17/ENG08/005

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SOC 102 ASSIGNMENT

What is family?

Discuss the function of family.

Discuss the African traditional family.

Discuss your nuclear family.

Answers

1. Family is a group consisting of two parents and their children living together as a unit.

Maclver has divided functions of family into essential and non-essential types. Under essential functions he includes mainly three functions such as, stable satisfaction of sex needs, production and rearing of children and a provision of home. But besides these Maclverian functions of family, family may also perform some other essential functions. But it must be remembered that essential functions are those functions which are basic or fundamental in nature and no other institutions can perform these functions so successfully as family can. However family performs the following essential functions:

#### (1) Stable satisfaction of Sexual needs:

This is the most important essential function of family. Family has been performing this functions since the inceptions of human civilization. It is a well known fact that sex urge is the most important and powerful instinct and natural urge of human being. It is the primary duty of family to satisfy the sexual urge of its members in a stable and desirable way.

Through the mechanism of marriage family regulate the sexual behavior of it’s members. Because satisfaction of sex instinct brings the desire for life long partnership of husband and wife. Satisfaction of this sex needs in a desirable way helps in the normal development of personality. Ancient Hindu Philosopher Manu and Vatsayan opines that satisfaction of sex needs is the primary objective of family. If it is suppressed it creates personality maladjustments.

#### (2) Procreation and Rearing of Children:

It is another important sectional function of family .Necessary arrangement of stable satisfaction of sexual urge resulted in procreation. Family provides the legitimate basis for production of children. It institutionalizes the process of procreation. By performing this function of procreation family contributes to the continuity of family and ultimately human race. Hence perpetuation of human race or society is the most important function of family. Not only the production of children but also child rearing is another important function of family. Family is the only place where the function of child rearing is better performed.

It provides food, shelter, affection, protection and security to all its members. It plays a vital role in the process of socialization of child. It provides healthy atmosphere in which the personality of the child develops properly. Family takes care of the child at the time of need. Hence it is rightly remarked that family is an institution par excellence for the procreation and rearing of children. It has no parallels.

#### (3) Provision of Home:

Family perform another important function of providing a home for common living to all it’s members. It is only in a home that children are born and brought up. Even if children are born in hospitals in modern time still they are taken care of and properly nourished in a home only. Because family and a home have no substitute. In a home all the members of family live together and a child is brought up under the strict vigilance of all it’s members.

All the members need a home to live happily with comfort, peace and protection. A home provides emotional and psychological support to all it’s members. Man’s necessity of love and human response got fulfilled here. Family provides recreation to it’s members. In a home family performs the role of a modern club. Man got peace by living in a home.

#### (4) Socialization:

It is another important essential function of family. It is said man is not born human but made human. New born human baby became human being after they are socialized. Family plays an important role in the socialization process.

It is one of the primary agents of socialization. Living in a family human baby learns norms, values, morals and ideals of society. He learns culture and acquires character through the process of socialization. His personality develops in the course of his living in family. From family he learns what is right and wrong and what is good or bad. Through socialization he became a social man and acquires good character.

### (B) Non-essential or secondary functions of family:

Famous Sociologist Maclver has divided functions into essential and non-essential functions. Under non-essential or secondary functions he includes economic, religious, educational, health and recreational functions. Along with the essential functions family also performs these non-essential functions. These functions are non-essential or secondary in the sense that these are also performed simultaneously by other social institutions in family. These functions are as follows:

#### (1) Economic functions:

Since ancient times family has been performing several economic functions. It is an important economic unit. In ancient time family was both a production and consumption unit. It used to fulfill almost all the economic needs of it’s members such as food, clothing, housing etc. In the then days family was self- sufficient. But now a days almost all the economic functions of family is performed by other agencies and family only remain as a consumption unit. It do not produce anything. All the members of family now working outside the home.

But in spite of all family still performing some economic functions of purchasing, protecting and maintaining property. It also equally distribute property among it’s members.

#### (2) Educational functions:

Family performs many educational functions for it’s members. As an primary educational institution family used to teach letters, knowledge, skill and trade secret to all it’s members. It looks after the primary education of it’s members and moulds their career and character. Mother act as the first and best teacher of a child. Besides he learns all sorts of informal education such as discipline, obedience, manners etc. from family. Of course at present many of the educational functions of family are taken over by school, college and universities sill family continues to play an important role in providing the first lessons and primary education to its members.

#### (3) Religious functions:

Family is the centre of all religious activities. All the family members offer their prayers together and observe different religious rites, rituals and practices jointly. All the members believe in a particular religion and observe religious ceremonies at home. Children learn different religious values from their parents. Living in a spiritual atmosphere spirituality develops among the children. Family transmits religious beliefs and practices from one generation to another. But at present family became more secular in their outlook. Common family worship became very rare and absolute. Still family continues to play an important role in shaping religious attitude of its members.

#### (4) Health related functions:

Family as a primary social group performs several health related functions for its members. It look after the health and vigour of its members. It takes care of the sick old and aged persons of the family. By providing necessary nutritive food to its members family takes care of the health of all.

Of course modern family delegates some of its health related functions to hospital. The child is born today in a hospital or in a clinic and taken care of by nurses.

#### (5) Recreational function:

Family-performs several recreational functions for it’s members by entertaining them in various ways. In ancient period family was the only centre of recreation. All the members together organize family feasts, visit the family relations, organize family picnics etc.

Family organize different festivals which is another source of recreation. The relationship between grandparents and grand children is another source of entertainment. After day’s work all the members used” to assemble and exchange their view. Of course modern club replaces many recreational functions of family. But at the same time it is said that present family acts as a modern club without its evil effects.

#### (6) Cultural functions:

Family also performs several cultural functions as well. It preserves different cultural traits. Man learns and acquires culture from family and transmits it to succeeding generations. That is why family is considered as centre of culture.

#### (7) Social functions:

Family performs a number of social functions. It teaches about social customs, mores, traditions, norms, etiquette to the coming generations. Family exercises social control over its members and bring them into conformity with accepted standards. Senior members of family directly control the behaviour of children and thereby they became a good citizen.

The African traditional family

Family is considered a basic cell of the society. All social and cultural practices find their connection with a notion of family, either supporting or distorting it.

Family plays a crucial role in Africa.  Mbiti says that “each person in African traditional life lives in or as a part of the family” (1975, p. 175). Kisembo asserts that “the family community was the fundamental element of the African, this basic sphere of action, through which he became integrated with the larger, human community… he always acted from within the sphere of the family” (1998, pp. 202-203).

In this work I will try to provide a description of the wider family and its functions in the traditional African society. After that, I will focus on some sociological changes taking place in the contemporary society in order to find out whether those changes affected the traditional meaning of wider family.

Traditional understanding of family

Shorter defines family as a “minimal effective group of relatives by blood and /or marriage and analogous groups” (1998, p. 83). By analogous groups he means those members who are not related by blood or marriage, e.g. adopted children.

Nuclear family would consist of parents and their own children. Shorter (1998, p. 83) sees such a family as autonomous and operating without reference to other relatives. Often their place of residence would be neolocal.

Extended/wider family comprises more people. Mbiti says that “for African people the family has a much wider circle of members than the word suggests in Europe or North America. In traditional society, the family includes children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who may have their own children and other immediate relatives” (1969, p.106). The relationships within extended family would be based on kinship (biological or putative blood relationship) and affinity (relationship between blood relationships of one marriage partner and those of the other marriage partner). Such a family would include adopted and fostered children.

In the traditional society polygamous marriages were a preferred form of marriage (Waruta, 2005, p. 105). Such marriages contributed to the extension of relationships of the family by incorporating more people.

Mbiti (1969, p.107) and Shorter (1998, p. 84) assert that a wider family would include the deceased members of the family as well as those who are yet unborn. The unborn children were an important element in such a family, because they were assuring the survival of the family.

The members of the extended family could live together in a traditional compound consisting of several houses, live close to one another or be separated by some distance. In case of geographic separation, they would gather together to make important decisions concerning the family. Usually the members of the wider family would belong exclusively either to a paternal or maternal descent.

Functions of the wider family

Ayisi sees the extended family as forming raison d’etre of all social co-operations and responsibility (1992, p. 16). The wider family was the primary place where an individual exercised his freedom.

An individual existed in connection with a larger group, including his or her wider family. He acquired his identity from that group. He depended on that group for his physical and social survival. Through various rites of passage he progressively became a fuller member of that community and took on a role in ensuring the survival of that group through marriage and procreation. Mbiti says that “in traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people… The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual… Only in terms of other people does the individual becomes conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people” (1969, p. 108).

The extended family was providing an individual with a personal and corporal identity. One was associated with a particular community with clear roles that were assigned to him at various stages of his life. The cultural and moral norms of the community, that were applied within the extended family, helped an individual to grow into a productive and respected member of the community. Those norms served as a blueprint for his life.

The extended family was the first religious community to which an individual belonged. It was through grandparents, parents and other members that one learned about religious and spiritual heritage. It was most probably the first place where one heard about God, spirits, ancestors and afterlife.

The extended family was as a means of mutual support. Since ‘one was because others were’,  members of the extended family supported each other psychologically and practically, e.g. in farming, rearing of children, supporting elder persons and the sick. In case of any need, an individual could count on support within his extended family. It was also a means of ensuring security, since usually a number of members of the extended family would live in the same compound or close to each other.

Changes in the contemporary African society

African society has been undergoing a process of profound changes affecting all aspects of its traditional life (Kisembo, 1998, p. 208, Vahakangas, 2004, p.43, O’Donovan, 2000, p. 40). I would like to, generally, mention just few of them that in my view are most relevant to the topic. A lot of these changes directly affect the family which is “the logical outcome of marriage” (Ayisi, 1992, p. 15).

For various reasons, natural and human, the standard of life in Africa, in many cases and for most people, either did not improve since independence or actually reduced. Put together with an ever increasing cost of life, it contributes to the fact that many people live in poverty. It prevents them from fulfilling their traditional obligations (Timberlake, 1985; Wasah, 2008).

Christianity brought some challenges to traditional African practices such as polygamy by equating it with adultery and sin. It also promotes monogamy as the only morally accepted type of marriage. Monogamy, though present and practiced in traditional Africa, was not as widely spread as polygamy (Waruta, 2005, pp. 108-109).

Other changes referred to by various authors that affect directly or indirectly the concept of wider family are: westernization of the African society with its stress on individual success, competitiveness and financial gain, modern education that often promotes personal values at the expense of communal values, modernization of the society with an increased pace of life demanding more time to be dedicated to work, the process of globalization that increases the gap between the rich and the poor and the process of urbanization that encourages many people to move to cities in search of work and contributes to the phenomenon of slums (Timberlake, 1994, Kisembo, 1998, Vahakangas, 2004, Magoti, 2004, Waruta, 2005, Wasah, 2008).

MY NUCLEAR FAMILY

My nuclear family comprises five people. My father and mother and their five children. My father, the head of the family, is responsible for the payment of bills, the provision of food, and provision of security. My mother is responsible for the cooking of food, feeding of the baby. The children are responsible for conducting house duties, like washing plates, washing cars, and fetching water.

We’re an Christian Igbo family whose relationship to God is very pivotal to our lifestyle, going to church on Sundays and paying taxes on observance of the law. The bulk of responsibility will fall on the shoulders of the firstborn, and when the females get married they will bear the last name of their husband.