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ASSIGNMENT

1. What is a family
2. Discuss the functions of a family
3. Discuss the African Traditional Family
4. Discuss your Nuclear Family
5. Draw your family tree.

WHAT IS A FAMILY

Family may seem like a simple concept, but there is no simple definition of family. In its most basic terms, a family is a group of individuals who share a legal or genetic bond, but for many people, family means much more, and even the simple idea of genetic bonds can be more complicated than it seems.

Families are legally bound through marriages, adoptions and guardianships, including the rights, duties and obligations of those legal contracts. A family can also be seen as a group of individuals who are directly related through a common ancestor which includes both close and distant relatives such as siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephew, and cousins to name a few.

In sociology, family can be regarded as the smallest agent of socialisation, in other words it is the simplest and most elementary group in the society.

Below are some ideas of family given by some sociologists;

Maclver views family as ‘the most important of any groups that human experience offers’ he the goes further to add that ‘the family is always with us, or more precisely we are with it.’

Robert Bierstedt views family as a more or less durable association of husband and wife, with ir without child, or of a man or woman alone, with children.

M. F Nimkoff defines family as ‘the biological social unit composed of husband, wife and children.’

Eliot and Merril throws more light on the concept of family given by the afore mentioned sociologists. They expalin that family is a group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood or adoption constituting a single household interacting and inter-communicating with each other in their respective social roles of husband, wife, father and mother, son and daughter, brother and sister, creating a common culture.

Burges and Locke view family as a group of persoms, whose relations to one another are based upon consanguinity and who are therefore kin to one another.

FUNCTIONS OF FAMILY

As a social group and as an important social institution, family performs various functions that are follows:

* Family is a unit through which procreation takes place. Marriage sanctions sexual relationships, and it also establishes a family, which further reinforced with the birth of children.
* The process of reproduction is institutionalized, regulated and controlled in a family. The family legitimizes the act of reproduction
* Family helps in propagation of human human species and perpetuation of human race.
* Family provides an individual with an identity
* It is through the family that every family name is carried on from one generation to another.
* Family is responsible for the production and upbringing of children
* Family is an important agent or socialisation. The primary soicialization of any individual takes place within the family. The immediate family members teach all the basic rules and norms of social life to a child
* Family provides an individual with a home, and establishes enduring social relationships
* Family is traditionally responsible for the education of the children
* A family fulfils the economic needs of its members. Thus function has undergone transformation, with families moving from being production and consumption units in earlier times, to becoming more of consuming units rather than a producing one. Now-a-days, members of a family no longer produce things themselves; rather, they go out and work for some monetary remuneration or wages

THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FAMILY

The diversity of family formations in Africa is clearly illustrated by the expansive definitions of family in African family charters, which accommodate both the traditional African family and emerging family forms. While “Family” and “household” are sometimes used interchangeably, because of their close relationship to each other, in most African societies they are likely not to connote the same social unit. It is common for members of the same family (including members of the same nuclear family or a member of an extended family that functions as a close unit) to straddle more than one household. In turn, members of the same household are likely not to be of the same nuclear family. In Black South Africa, for instance, children are taken care of by an extended family who are not necessarily biological parents. Thus, in 2012 some 531 000

orphaned children were cared for by foster parents, most of whom are members of the extended family who in turn receive social assistance from the government. According to the Department of Social Development, approximately 80% of foster carers are extended family members (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2013, p. 660).

Family in the African context often refers to what in western terms would be the extended family. A family is generally constituted by three processes, which are blood relations, sexual unions or adoption. Societally sanctioned sexual unions between (two and in cases of polygamous unions, which are not uncommon in Africa, more than two) adults, and on the other hand, blood relations in Africa typically constitute wider relationship than those that are characteristically in western nuclear families. African families are typically extended to aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins and other relatives that form a family that functions in unison. The broad concepts of family in many African societies is illustrated in Mandela’s autobiography “Long Walk to Freedom” where he states, “My mother presided over three huts at Qunu, which as I remember, were always filled with babies and children of my relations. In fact, I hardly recall any occasion as a child when I was alone. In African culture, the sons and daughters of one’s aunts and uncles are considered brothers and sisters, not cousins.” In several African communities, family is not limited to space and time, thus, it cuts across generations, relatives living far and near, the living and those who have joined the ancestors, as well as the ancestors themselves who continue to play a role in the lives of the living (Lugira, 2009). This may be viewed as a very inclusive family system, which models the broader inclusive nature and type of African communities, creating a family-like lens through which several social actors are included and relationships interpreted. Obligations to wider kin vary with time, and typically more widely invoked during times of crises, or during certain life cycle events such as funerals and this remains a common practice in extended families on the continent, despite social change.

Although the salience of family ties may be situational, they are rarely entirely lost, and often, take priority over certain kinds of ties in many instances, despite changes brought about by modernisation that sometimes create a rift between family members. The usefulness of these lasting family ties is often seen in the ways deportees are able to easily reintegrate into their families. Siegel (1999) cites the example of the over one million Ghanaian migrants deported from Nigeria in the 1980s, who, while western aids agencies planned intervention, reintegrated into their families and communities within two weeks. This is also seen among African deportees from several parts of the world.

As stated above, in recognizing both traditional and contemporary family forms, the charters did not imply a homogenous static institution but acknowledge that social changes have affected African family formations and structures over time. Thus, it expressed a need for family policies to acknowledge and embrace adaptations in families. The overview of families in Africa reveals that significant adaptations have happened over the years, brought about by a number of factors, which include globalisation, modernisation, migration and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. .

Increasing mobility and migration have been such that there are fewer co-residing primary family units. Thus, families may live far apart or be dispersed ‘across national borders and stretched kinship networks across vast geographic space’ (Turner, 2002, p. 397). As Richter and Amoateng (2003) urge “......[G]iven the range of possibilities for family formations, accepting this multiplicity of social relations within and across households would offer an improved understanding of livelihood strategies and more accurate theorising of contemporary South Africa’s social terrain.” Thus, it is important to analyse the ways in mobility is shaping African understanding of family.

MY NUCLEAR FAMILY

I belong to a family of 4, consisting of my father, mother, my younger sister and me. The family was formed after the marriage between both my parents who at the time were at the prime of their powers, was held in the late 1980s. I was born a couple years after my mom and dad had been married to each other while my sister was born in the early years of the 2000s.

In my nuclear family, we are religiously inclined people, we believe in the birth, death and ressurection of Jesus Christ who is the son of God. My family belongs to an orthdox denomination of the Christian church known as the Presbyterian Church, The Presbyterian church of Nigeria to be precise.

Other than having Christian values, we also have beliefs, principles and standards which has guided the family over the years in various endeavours of life. Some of these beliefs may include; education, sports, recreation, knowledge, healthy living, etc.

The picture attached below is The Oti Family Tree;

