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ASSIGNMENT

1.] WHAT IS A FAMILY.

2.] DISCUSS THE FUNCTION OF THE FAMILY

3.] DISCUSS THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FAMILY

4.] DISCUSS YOUR NUCLEAR FAMILY

5.] DRAW YOUR FAMILY TREE.

QUESTION 1.

WHAT IS A FAMILY?

A family can be defined as a specific group of people that may be made up of partners, children, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. It is also the coming together of people related by blood, marriage, law and custom. They live together and do things together.

QUESTION 2

DISCUSS THE FUNCTIONS OF THE FAMILY

1.] PROCREATION OF CHILDREN; The family provides legitimate basis for the production of children. 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 especially the children.

2.] PROVISION OF HOME; The family provides a home for all its members including the children. It is the only home that the children are born and brought up. In a home all the members of the family live together and the child is brought up under strict vigilance of all its members.

3.] SOCIALIZATION; Living in a family, children learn norms, values and ideas of the society. The family is the first form of socialization that the children get, so they learn a lot and they spend more time at home than in school. They start to learn things first at home because that is the first place they know.

4.] EDUCATION; As an primary institution that the family serve as they teach the children the little they can teach them like letters, knowledge about things, skills and trades that they mother or father do or the family business. Mothers act as the first teacher to her children.

QUESTION 3

DISCUSS THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FAMILY

Introduction

Traditional

African family

patterns are slowly bu

t progressively being altered as a result of

the

pro

cess of m

odernization

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

.

S

ub 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

trigger

ing

changes

in

family structure. This

has

trigge

red 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 th

e region are increasingly

subjected to

transform and

ada

pt

to changing times.

Discussions

of family patterns in contemporary S

ub

S

aha

ran

A

frica are

usually made in reference to the

process of acculturation, urbanization (the movement from rural to urban areas), which have

helped t

o shape modern family structures

, as well

as

foster

ed

the prevalence of demographic

change

s (Kalu 1981:353).

Family

in sub Saharan Africa is experiencing changes which are

felt in

fertility rate

s

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 connect

ed 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 numbe

r 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 info

rmation can

be

derive

d

on

the change

s

that have

so far

been

encountered in its contraction.

1.2

Over

view of

family patterns in sub Saharan Africa

Despite the changes taking place in sub Saharan African

societies due

to the

mode

rnization

process

,

the

family

still

rem

ains 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 Ma

kinwa

-

A

debusoye (2001:5) outlined the major characteristic features of African

household

to be

that they are mostly rural, patriarchal an

d hierarchical, polygamous

and open

2

to kinship networks, and

finally

they

attached substantial importance to

lineage co

ntinuation

.

Th

ese features in all play a pivotal

role in influe

ncing the number of children wome

n

give birth

to

. The social organizati

on 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 (Makinwa

-

adebusoye2001:5). 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 exist

ence 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.

Conte

mporary

African

family

patterns

are

subjected

to changes that emanate as a result

of

the

ameliorated

economic conditions, education and h

ealth opportunities. These factor

s

continuously exert tremendous impact on contemporary family patterns in the

sub

-

continent

.

Socioeconomic circu

mstances

in the

sub

-

continent

are encountering alteration

s that have to a

considerable extent triggered changes

i

n t

he 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 th

at 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.

1.3

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 help

s to mold modern

marriage structure.

Wilhe

l

ma 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 al

teration of the

fundamental values of

culture.

Marriage constitutes a vital variable that is pivotal

for procreation. The distortion

of its

stru

cture tends to serve as a medium where

socioeconomic changes associated with the main

values of culture

can be m

easured

. Traditional tenets of African marriage

s are

increasingly

3

subjected to stabilize amidst

sporadic societal

changes emanating

from modernization and

globalization. This

,

Wilhelmina

Kalu (1981:350) emphasized

inherently brings in to perspective

the ne

ed for the redefinition of th

e role and features of marriage

unavoid

able.

Marriage in

sub Saharan

Africa is universal

.

T

here 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).

Ma

rriage is still quite important in African communities, t

he 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.

Göra

n Therborn (2006:36) portrays

the fact

that

the

age of first marriage has experience

d

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

-

Adebusoye20

01:5).

Mi

chael

Boogarts (1984) remarked

that before,

the average age of marriage

in the sub

-

continent

range

d

between 15 years

and beyond. Contrary to this

, contemporary

sub Saharan African countries

are

gradually

exper

iencing

slight change

s

in the age of marriage at which women get married.

In traditional rural African societies, the contraction of marriage was domin

ated by

arranged marriages whereby

parents

usually indulged

in the selection

of marriage

partners for

their

children

;

this was

most

ly 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 so

me 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 marr

iage act of 1971 and the

I

vory coast civil code of 1964

(Ther

born 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, t

he 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;

t

his 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

4

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 marria

ges that were

made up of t

wo or more wives. This is characterized

by the trend of early

marriage;

most of the

women go

t 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 gener

ation.

The practice of polyg

amy was centred

on the

notion

of

precluding

the

situation of husband shortage.

M

onogamous marriages have

become the

norm,

b

ased on the fact that the contrac

tion of marriage has substantially

dri

fted

from

polygamy to monogamy. T

his 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

,

t

o

a certain extend

has

a great role to play for this as well.

The contraction o

f

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 S

ub

S

ahara

A

frican

societies, where marriages between

one man and two or more wive

s

dominate

d

. U

rbanization

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

po

lygamy even though there existed

the

freedom

to

choose between mono

gamy and polygamy

.

According to

Wilhemin

a Kalu (1981:382

)

marriage

was contracted as a partnership rather than an organic union, sustain

ed

by reciprocal

desires and obligatio

n. The impact of acculturation stemm

ing from th

e 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 phys

ical

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 t

raditional African conceptualization. There is mounting pursuit for change

mostly amongst the younger generation. The practice of accultu

ration favours the adjustment

to

modern

times

(Kalu1981 358)

.

1.4

Family S

ize

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 charac

teristic of the

second demographic transition process (P

erelli

-

Harris

2005:57). It is marked by the reorientation of family

values

from extended families to smaller

family sizes.

According to Briennna P

erelli

-

Harris (2005) the shift in society is

inevitabl

e and

is

5

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 t

he 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 fa

mily 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 despit

e the advent of modernization

.

The main

reason for this has been linked to

th

e 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 chi

ldren

, 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 p

ra

ctice 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 method

s

of fertility con

trol

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

aro

und 6 to 8 children. There

were no interests

in reducing the family size beyond

the

s

e

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 ra

tes. 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 morta

lity, low contraceptive use, early marriage to cite a

few.

This is pla

gued with variation amongst

S

ub

S

aharan

A

frican

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 fa

ll 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. Decisi

on 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

6

reincarnated

through the birth of additional chil

dren (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(

Kalu

1981:2).

This paper has presented a

short description of the changes that are characterizing mar

riage and famil

y 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 com

munities to monogamous

marriage

and the movement from large

household to small ones

.

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(

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QUESTION 4.

DISCUSS YOUR NUCLEAR FAMILY.

My family consists of my father, my mother, my brothers and myself. We attend the redeemed Christian church of God. We are Christians. We do devotion in the morning and in the night. We are united, we have things in common and we have our differences too. When we quarrel we make sure we settle it before the day ends, we try to understand each other and stand up for each other in public places and we tell each other the truth about ourselves. We put God first in all we do. My father is a pastor and a lawyer while my mother is a business woman. I love my family, there are simply the best.

QUESTION 5

DRAW YOUR FAMILY TREE