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COURSE: SOCIOLOGY (SOC 102)

**Question**

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

**Answers**

1. A family is the basic unit in a society consisting of two parents rearing their children. Family is the group of people who share common ancestors.
2. The family performs several essential functions for the society, some are;

* Procreation of children: The primary function of the family is to ensure the continuation of the 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 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. Thus, it is the family which ensures the continuity of human race.
* Basic needs: It is the responsibility of a family to provide basic needs to its members. These include; food, shelter, clothing, health and education. The head of the family, whether male or female, is expected to provide these to the members till they attain adulthood.
* Marriage: 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 the 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 asexual division of labor, marriage, and the resulting relationship between a husband and a 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.

1. The African Traditional family

The subject of “traditional family patterns in Africa” is so broad that it cannot be adequately addressed in one chapter. The cultural and physical diversity added with the dramatic social changes of the last three decades on the continent makes the family pattern situation so variegated as to defy any sweeping generalizations. This difficulty in generalization bone of diversity was already apparent to many early scholars of the African traditional family like Mair(1) and Goode(2). The traditional African family is a very broad concept which has challenging variations across the continent. These variations are caused by differences in tribal customs or culture according geography, history, religion, external influence of colonialism, inter migration, political and economic structures and influences. Because of this wide spectrum, it is not possible to explore all aspects of the traditional African family.

This chapter only focussed on the matrilineal and polygynous patrilineal African traditional family patterns because they seem representative of the broad patterns that exists on the continent. It must be emphasized, however, that these were traditional patterns as far back as late 1800s up to as late as 1960s. The dramatic social changes in Africa during the last three decades of political independence from European colonialism have obviously affected the traditional family. Explaining these changes would require a different chapter.

Footnotes

1 Lucy P. Mair, “African Marriage and Social Change,” in Survey of African Marriage and Family Life, Edited by Arthur Phillips, (London: Oxford University Press, 1953) pp.1 – 177.

2 William J. Good, “Changing Family Patterns: Sub-Saharan Africa,” in World Revolution and Family Patterns. (New York: The Free Press, 1963.) pp.164-202.

3 Lucy P. Mair, “African Marriage and Social Change,” in Survey of African Marriage and Family Life, edited by Arthur Phillips, (London: Oxford University Press, 1953) p.1

1. My Nuclear family is made up of Father, Mother, Two Sons and a Daughter.