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LAW

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY II: SOC 102

## **QUESTION 1: WHAT IS A FAMILY?**

A family is the basic structural unit of a society. Family is the as an institution is universal. Family is one of the most important social institutions. Most of the world's population lives in family units. Family is the most pervasive and universal social institution. It plays a vital role in the socialisation of individuals. Family is regarded as the first society of human beings.

The definitions of family are as diverse as families themselves and the situations they are found in. Viewed simply, the definitions can be categorized in two ways:

(1) Structural Definitions

(2) Functional Definitions

### **STRUCTURAL DEFINITION OF FAMILY**

Structural definitions of the family focus on the composition of families and characteristically define the characteristics of family members such as those who share a place of residence, or who are related through blood ties, marriage or legal contracts. That is to say, this definition specifies who is in the family and who is out according to certain characteristics of family members.

## FUNCTIONAL DEFINITION OF FAMILY

The functionalist definition of family focuses on the functions families perform. According to most functional definitions, a family is any unit in which there exists; sharing of resources and economic property, a caring and supportive relationship, commitment to or identification with other family members and preparation of children born to or raised by the members to become adult members of the society.

There is no universal definition of “family” as none of these two definitions is superior to the other, hence the term “family” is defined according to the particular issue involved.

## QUESTION TWO: DISCUSS THE FUNCTIONS OF A FAMILY

As a social institution the family has certain functions to perform for the society and the individual, and these include:

1. **Procreation**: Family is a unit through which procreation takes place. Marriage sanctions sexual relationships, and it also establishes a family, which is further reinforced with the birth of children. This is an important function of the family. The primarily relies on the biological reproduction of its own members. The family is an institution par

excellence of the reproduction and the rearing of children. It secures a legitimate and responsible basis for procreation by regulating sexual behaviour.

2. **Regulation and control of sex impulses:** This is the essential function which the family performs. The sex instinct is the natural and biological urge of human beings. The satisfaction of sex desire requires that male and female should live together as husband and wife. Hence, family is the only place where husband and wife can satisfy their sex instinct. Family satisfies sexual desires of male and female through the institution of marriage.

3. **Sustenance Function:**

The family provides the daily care and personal protection to its dependant members namely aged, children etc. The family is an insurance for the individual in times of crisis. A family fulfils the economic needs of its members.

4. **Provision of a Home:** Establishment of household life or provision of a home is another essential function of the family. The desire for a home is a powerful instinct for men as well as women. Family provides an opportunity for people to live together happily. The home

is still the heaven where its members find comfort and affection. Home is the foundation of family, the meeting place of husband and wife, the birth place and play ground of children. The family is a psychological relief station in which one can safely relax.

5. **Socialisation:**

Socialisation refers to the process through which the growing individual learns the habits, attitudes, values and beliefs of the social group into which he has been born and becomes a person. From the point of view of society, it is the process through which society transmits its culture from generation to generation and maintains itself. If a society is to endure and function successfully through time, it is to socialise the new recruits. The basic socialisation of the child takes place in the family. It carries out the socialisation of the individual. It hands over the social heritage to the generations to come. The family acts as the cultural mediator. The family teaches all the basic rules and norms of social life to a child.

6. **Provision of Opportunity for The Most Intimate Contacts:**

The family provides its members the opportunity to develop intimate relationships among themselves.

7. Provision of a social identity: the family provides individuals with a social identity. Every family has a name and this name is passed to each of its members, from generation to generation

## **QUESTION THREE: DISCUSS THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FAMILY**

Family plays a central role in African society. It shapes such daily experiences as how and where individuals live, how they interact with the people around them, and even, in some cases, whom they marry. It can determine a person's political identity and the way money and property are transferred. In rural areas, the family typically remains the basic unit of agricultural production. However, no single type of family exists in Africa. Societies have defined family in many different ways, and many bear little resemblance to the Western idea of the nuclear family.

According to marriage, there are three types of family; polyandrous, monogamous and polygamous family. African marriage can be polygynous—that is, a man may have more than one wife. In practice, though, only the senior or wealthy individuals in a society have been able to have multiple wives. When polygyny occurs, the family unit is based on mothers. Each wife has her own house and property that are generally transferred to her own children. The mother and child, rather than the husband and wife, thus form the basis of family

and kinship in such communities. Christian marriages in Africa, as elsewhere, are generally monogamous, with a man having only one wife.

### **Relationships of Descent**

Everyone is part of some sort of descent system, either patrilineal, matrilineal, or both. In patrilineal systems, property and political power pass through the male side of the family; the female side determines descent in matrilineal systems. In these relationships, senior generations have more power or status than junior ones. Younger people are expected to show respect toward older family members. In the past, this power could take the form of ownership. Among some peoples in the Congo Basin, for example, a man could sell his sister's child into slavery.

### **Relationships of Affinity**

Marriage systems in Africa are highly diverse. In sub-Saharan Africa, some pairings of men and women are temporary, others permanent. Depending on the culture, a couple may live in the husband's home or the wife's home. Among some groups, such as the ASANTE, each spouse continues to live in the home in which he or she was born. Children may stay with their parents until they marry, or they may spend part of their adolescence in the home of another relative. In some cultures, young people leave their families at puberty to live in villages of adolescents.

In some African societies, nuclear families are contained within larger social groups that may include kinfolk, neighbours, people of the same age or gender, and others. The nuclear family does not always have its own property or decide what tasks its members will perform. Rather, relationships between husbands and wives and between parents and children often unfold within larger domestic units called households, which may consist of joint or extended families.

## **QUESTION FOUR: DISCUSS YOUR NUCLEAR FAMILY**

Nuclear family, also known as elementary or traditional family, is a term used to define a family group consisting of a father, mother and their unmarried children, natural or adopted. This type of family is based on companionship between parents and children and is the most predominant form in modern societies. It is more or less an autonomous unit that is not under the control of adults or elders of the family. It consists of two generations only.

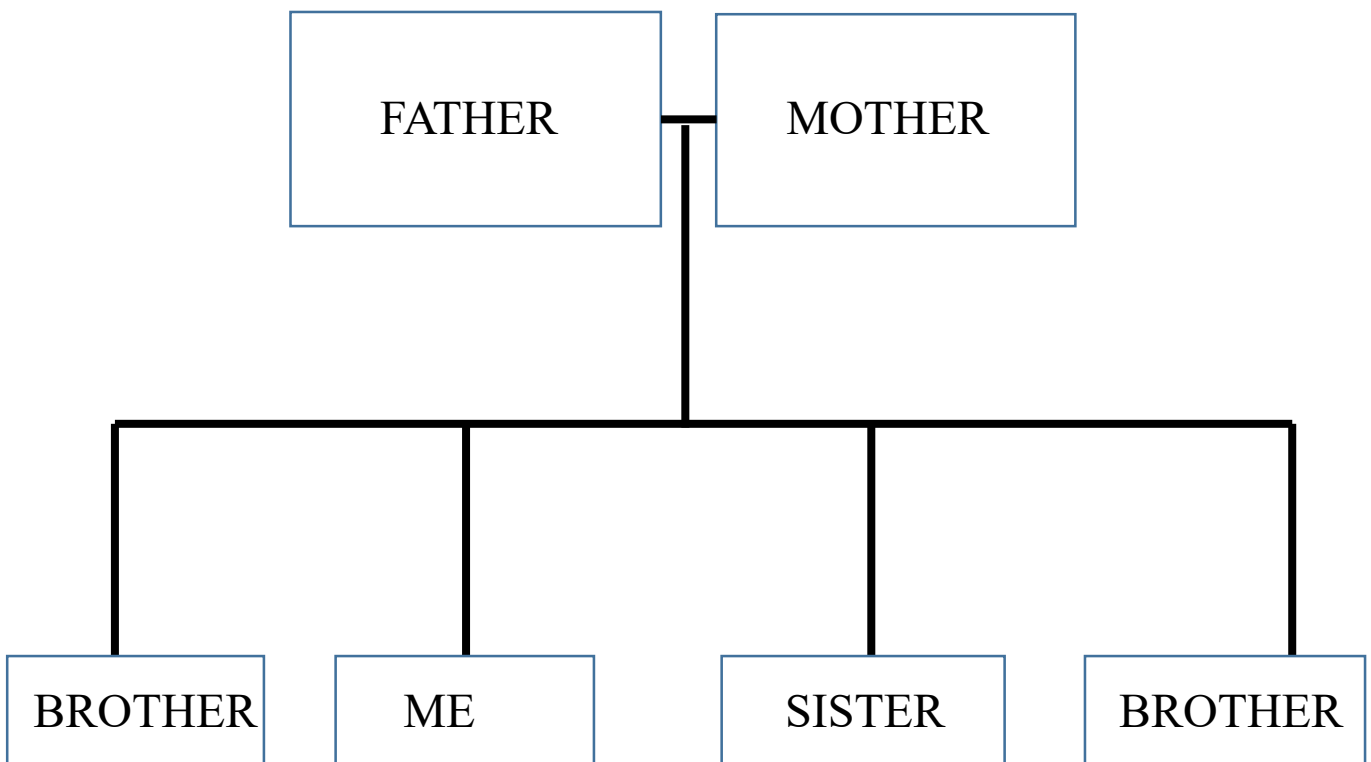


My nuclear family consists of my father, my mother, me and my three siblings. I have an elder brother and a younger sister and brother. My father is the head of the family and exercises authority in the country.

## **QUESTION FIVE: DRAW YOUR FAMILY TREE**

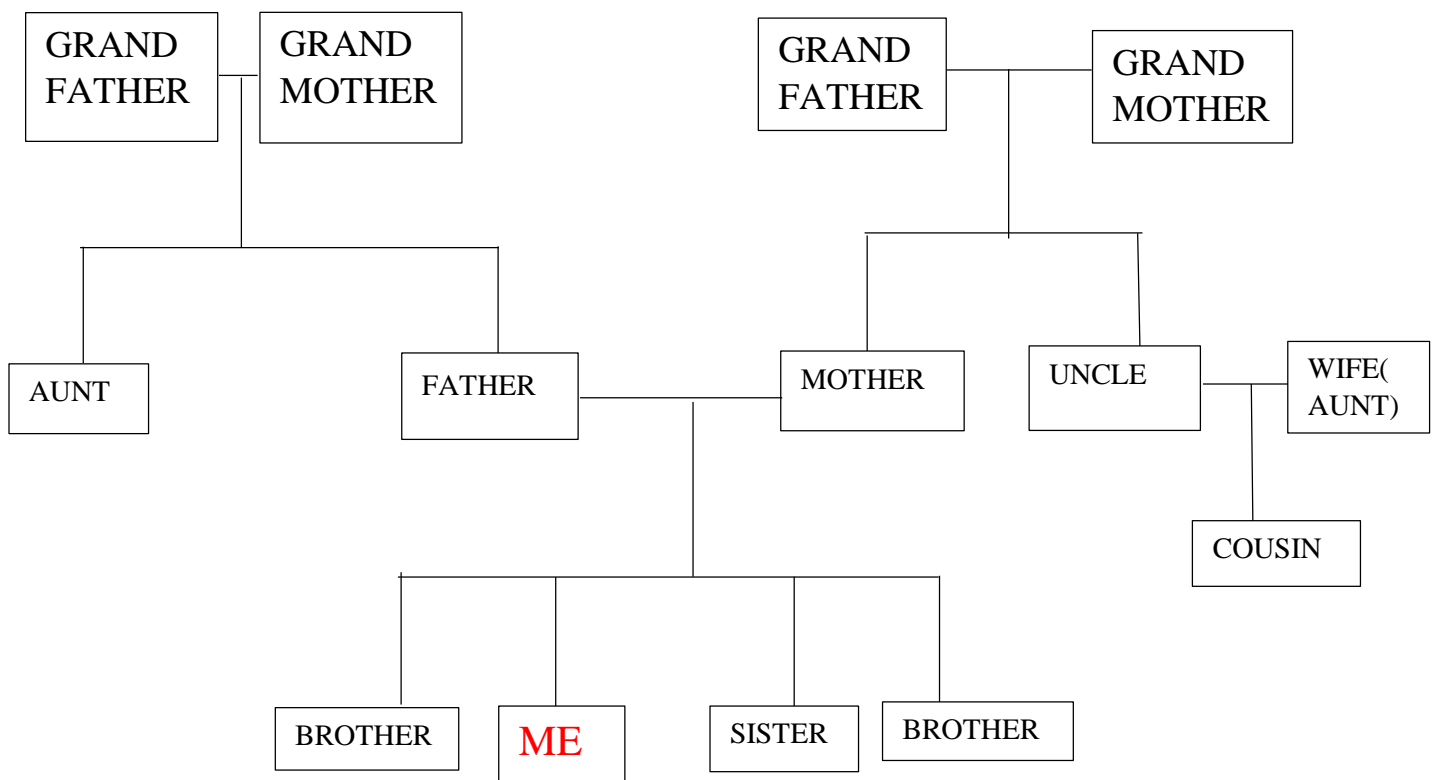
A family tree also called family chart, is a diagrammatical illustration of the relationships that exist between members of a family. As there are two types of family, family trees exist in two types. The following are illustrations of my family tree:

- Illustration of Nuclear Family



This illustration confirms what was stated in the discussion of a nuclear family in the previous question.

- Illustration of Extended Family



The illustration above shows what an extended family looks like. The extended family is also known as undivided family or joint family. It normally consists of members belong to two-three generations: husband and wife, their married and unmarried children and their married or

unmarried grandchildren. The joint family system constituted the basic social institution in many traditional societies. The joint family is a mode of combining smaller families into larger family units through the extension of three or more generations. In joint family the members are related through blood and spread over several generations living together under a common space and work under common head.