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**WHAT IS FAMILY**

When we talk about a family, what normally comes to our minds is a group of individuals living under one roof and usually under one head. Family may seem a simple concept but there is no simple definition of family. Family is the smallest unit of the society. The word family is gotten from the Latin word ‘’familia’’. In its most basic terms, a family is a group of individuals who share a legal or genetic bound, but for many people, family means much more, and even the simple idea of genetic bounds can be more complicated than it seems. In simple terms, a family is a group of people who are related to each other. In other words, a family is a group of people related either by consanguinity or affinity. In most societies, it is within families that children acquire socialization for life outside the family. Additionally, as the basic unit for meeting the basic needs of its members, it provides a sense of boundaries for performing task in a safe environment, ideally builds a person into a functional adult transmits culture, and ensures continuity of humankind with precedents of knowledge. Anthropologist classifies most families as matrifocal, patrifocal, conjugal, avuncular and extended. The word families can be used metaphorically to create more inclusive categories such as community, nationhood, global village and humanisim.

**FUNCTIONS OF THE FAMILY**

Family is the most universal and fundamental social institution which performs a variety of functions in human society. Different Sociologists have viewed or classified the functions of family into different types. According to Sociologist MacIver, he classified the functions of the family into two broad categories such as essential or primary and non-essential or secondary functions.

1. ***Essential or Primary functions:***

Under essential functions he includes mainly three functions such as, stable satisfaction functions 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 that are essential or basic.

**(1)Satisfaction of Sexual Behaviour**

Through the mechanism of marriage family regulate the sexual behaviour of its 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 opine 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 is the production of children but also child rearing another important function of family. Family is the only place where the function of child rearing is better performed.

**(3) Provision of Home:**

Family perform another important function of providing a home for common living to all its 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 its members.

All the members need a home to live happily with comfort, peace and protection. A home provides emotional and psychological support to all its members. Man’s necessity of love and human response got fulfilled here. Family provides recreation to its 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 MacIver 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 fulfil almost all the economic needs of its members such as food, clothing, housing etc. In the then days family was self- sufficient. But now a day almost all the economic functions of family is performed by other agencies and family only remain as a consumption unit. It does 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 its members.

**(2) Educational functions:**

Family performs many educational functions for its members. As an primary educational institution family used to teach letters, knowledge, skill and trade secret to all its members. It looks after the primary education of its 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 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 looks 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 its 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.

**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. Furthermore, throughout the continent, traditional family patterns are changing. Colonialism, [capitalism](https://geography.name/capitalism/), the growth of cities, exposure to Western culture, and increasing opportunities for women are some of the factors that are affecting the shape of family life.

**FAMILY STRUCTURE**

Each of the many family systems in Africa can be defined in terms of two broad kinds of relationships. Relationships of descent are genealogical—that is, based on the connections between generations. Relationships of affinity are marital—based on marriage. The interweaving of these relationships creates the family that an individual sees every day, as well as the wider network of [kinship](https://geography.name/kinship/) that surrounds each person.

**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](https://geography.name/slavery/).

**Relationship of Affinity**

[MARRIAGE SYSTEMS](https://geography.name/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](https://geography.name/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.

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.

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.

**Households**

In a household community, several generations and several nuclear families live and work together. In joint family households, all members live together in a single large homestead or compound. In extended family households, the nuclear families within the household each live in separate compounds. A joint or extended family is under the authority of its senior member, typically a grandfather or greatgrand-father. Such families may be patrilineal or matrilineal.

Most members of a joint or extended family household are born and raised within it or marry into it. Some, however, such as adopted children or adults, may be unrelated to the others. In sub-Saharan Africa, distant relatives are sometimes invited to settle with a household, but they usually have lower status than their hosts. A household might also include servants or, in the past, slaves.

The household functions as an economic as well as a family unit. It can be described in material terms—for example, by acres of land, number of buildings, or certain tasks performed by certain members. A family compound among the Tswana of Botswana might include the huts and grain sheds of a man and his wife (or wives) and children, an unmarried brother, and an elderly mother. In rural areas, household members work together to produce food and other goods; in a town or city, the members might work to pay rent and buy groceries. In either case, the household needs to maintain itself, which means that productive new members must be added to replace the elderly, the disabled, and those who die. In this way, households are more flexible and inclusive than other family groups.

**ISLAM AND FAMILY LIFE**

Islam has had a profound influence on family life in some parts of Africa. It has affected not only the ARABS, the majority population in North Africa, but also such non-Arab peoples as the BERBERS.

**Arab Families**

Arabs who live in rural areas tend to maintain more traditional customs than the inhabitants of towns and cities. Rural Arabs live in extended families, with three generations or more sharing a residence. Marriage is regarded not as the union of two individuals but as the joining of two families, often already linked by ties of KINSHIP. Family members are expected to stick closely to expected roles: fathers are stern disciplinarians, mothers are nurturers, and children become members of the family workforce who will one day provide for their parents in old age. Children of both genders are treated with affection, but boys have a higher position in the family and inherit more of its money and land.

The tight, traditional structure of rural Arab families is sometimes weakened when family members take on new roles—as when a son leaves to work in a city or a daughter decides not to marry the man chosen by her parents. Such breaks in traditional patterns occur most often in urban settings, where people have more job opportunities and can be more independent.

**Berber Families**

The Berbers are non-Arab peoples descended from the original inhabitants of North Africa. They have adopted the Islamic religion and some Arab customs. A traditional Berber household consists of father, mother, and unmarried children. Family descent is patrilineal. Today, however, with many men working away from home for long periods, more households are headed by women. Both the Berbers and the Arabs permit polygyny under Islamic law, but in practice only wealthy men can afford separate households for each wife.

**CHANGES IN FAMILY LIFE**

New social customs and the cash economy are changing the household structure. As senior members lose control over the marriages of junior members, and as younger people leave rural households to work in cities, the household weakens and becomes dependent on money sent home by members working elsewhere. One reason the household is still important, however, is that it is often the only reliable form of security in old age and sickness in fast-paced modern societies based on wage labor and competition.

Just as the household structure is changing, family is also being redefined in some parts of Africa. In some patrilineal groups, women who traditionally moved in with their husband's families now often remain with their own families or move back to them. Some studies show that women are becoming more reluctant to marry, perhaps because marriage may limit their control over resources or their access to education and jobs. Some women are raising children apart from the traditional family frameworks. Meanwhile, among educated and privileged Africans, especially in the cities, the husband-wife couple is becoming more important as a social and legal unit. This trend sometimes means that nuclear families are growing farther from their kinship networks.

The spread of Christianity has also affected families, sometimes introducing great conflict when one member of a family converts to Christianity but others do not. As tradition and modern life continue to combine in new ways, family life in Africa is likely to continue to change. (See also Age and Aging, Childhood and Adolescence, Gender Roles and Sexuality, Houses and Housing, Women in Africa.)

**MY NUCLEAR FAMILY**

My Nuclear family consist of a total number of five people. We all live in one household. I have two biological parents consisting of my Father and my Mother. In my nuclear family, we are three children in number and I am the second child of my parents. I have two siblings, a brother and a sister. Our family is recognized by our family name “The Henas”. My father is a Civil servant and my mum is a Lecturer. My elder brother is a post graduate and I myself an undergraduate. My younger sister is a primary school pupil. In my family, we have our advantages, disadvantages, strength and weaknesses though we are small in number. We incorporate our advantages to become a better family and to be brought closer together. In my family we are financially stable and comfortable. We have good communication skills and have fewer obstacles than can lead the family into crisis or misunderstandings. My parents are disciplinarians and strict when it comes to morals. We are Christians and we carry out what is expected of us as Christians. As a family, we do charity works and help the poor when their needs arise. My parents always encourage we the children in my home to always do the needful and obey laws not only in our society but the whole country at large to make it a better place. This is all I have about my nuclear family. Thank you.

**MY FAMILY TREE**

MRS NAH HENA

(MOTHER)

**MR AMINU HENA**

**(FATHER)**