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According to Elliot and Meril, “Family is the biological social unit composed of husband, wife and children.

Biesanz writes “The family may be described as a woman with a child and a man to look after them”.

The word family first referred to the servants of a household and then to both the servants and the descendants of a common ancestor. It comes from the Latin word familia, meaning 'household; household servants', which came from another Latin term famulus, or 'servant'. It was not until 1667 that the term was used specifically for the group of persons consisting of parents and their children. The word daughter is a very old English word, first recorded c. 1000 as dohtor. It descends from Old English and is related to words in many other Indo-European languages, such as Greek thugater. The modern spelling daughter was first used in a 16th century Bible and was popularized by Shakespeare. The word son is quite a bit older, found in Beowulf in 645. It also descends from Old English and is related to words in many other Indo-European languages, such as Greek huios. Mother is one of the surviving words from Anglo-Saxon (starting as modor), which are among the most fundamental words in English. Mother has many cognates in other languages, including Old High German muoter, Dutch moeder, Old Norse mothir, Latin mater, Greek meter, and Sanskrit mat. These words share an Indo-European root. Mother is one of the Anglo-Saxon nouns that has an Anglo-Saxon adjective as well as a Latinate adjective - motherly and maternal - and motherly also came from Old English (modorlic). Mom, a shortened form of momma, was recorded in 1894; momma was first used in 1884. Both are chiefly North American uses. Mamma and mama, created by children reduplicating an instinctive sound, are much earlier terms, showing up in the 1500s.

Father is derived from Latin pater and has cognates in many other languages; the word entered Old English as feder and foeder (among others).

Types of Family:

Though family is a universal institution, its structure or form vary from one society to another. Sociologists and anthropologists have mentioned about different types of families found in different cultures.

Classification of families is generally done on the basis of organisation (nuclear and joint), forms of marriage (monogamous or polygamous), authority (matriarchal or patriarchal) and residence etc. Classification of families on different basis is given below.

1. On the Basis of Organisation:

In terms of organisation families may be of two broad types; the nuclear family and the extended/joint family.

(i) Nuclear Family:

The nuclear family is a unit composed of husband, wife and their unmarried children. This is the predominant form in modern industrial societies. This type of family is based on companionship between parents and children.

While discussing the nature of nuclear family in India, Pauline Kolenda has discussed additions / modifications in nuclear family structure. She has given the following compositional categories.

(a) Nuclear family refers to a couple with or without children.

(b) Supplemented nuclear family indicated a nuclear family plus one or more unmarried, separated or widowed relatives of the parents, other than their unmarried children.

(c) Sub-nuclear family is defined as a fragment of a former nuclear family, for instance a widow/ widower with her/his unmarried children or siblings (unmarried or widowed or separated or divorced) living together.

(d) Single person household.

(e) Supplemented sub-nuclear family refer to a group of relatives, members of a formerly complete nuclear family along with some other unmarried, divorced or widowed relative who was not a member of the nuclear family.

The size of the nuclear family is very small. It is free from the control of elders. It is regarded as the most dominant and ideal form of family in modern society. The nuclear family is based on conjugal bonds. The children get maximum care, love and affection of the parents in nuclear family. The nuclear family is independent and economically self-sufficient. The members of nuclear family also enjoy more freedom than the members of joint family.

(ii) Extended / Joint Family:

The term extended family is used to indicate the combination of two or more nuclear families based on an extension of the parent-child relationships. According to Murdck, an extended family consists of two or more nuclear families affiliated through an extension of the parent-child relationship … i.e. by joining the nuclear family of a married adult to that of his parents.

In an extended family, a man and his wife live with the families of their married sons and with their unmarried sons and daughters, grand children or great grant children in the paternal or maternal line. Different types of extended family are still common in Asia, says Bottomore.

The patrilineally extended family is based on an extension of the father-son relationship, while the matrilineally extended family is based on the mother-daughter relationship. The extended family may also be extended horizontally to include a group consisting of two or more brothers, their wives and children. This horizontally extended family is called the fraternal or collateral family.

In India, the family weather extended vertically and/or horizontally is called the joint family. Strictly speaking it is a property-sharing unit. The joint family consists of a man and his wife and their adult sons, their wives and children and younger children of the paternal couple, says M.S. Gore.

The size of joint family is very large. Generally, the eldest male is the head of the family. The rights and duties of the members in this type of family are laid down by the hierarchy order of power and authority. Children of the joint family are children of all the male members in the parental generation.

Emphasis on conjugal ties (between husband and wife) is supposed to weaken the stability of joint family.

The father-son relationship (filial relationship) and the relationship between brothers (fraternal relationship) are more crucial for the joint family system than the conjugal relationship (husband-wife relationship).

The essential functions of the family are as follows:

1. Satisfaction of Sex Needs:

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. Without family the satisfaction of sex needs is impossible. The modern family satisfies sex instinct in a greater degree than the traditional family.

2. Reproduction:

The task of race perpetuation has always been an important function of the family. A ongoing society must replace its members. It 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. It provides care and personal protection to the newly born human beings and children.

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. Family provides protection and shelter to orphans, widow and her children.

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 a opportunity for husband and wife to live together happily. Man after the hard work of the day returns home where in the presence of his wife and children he sheds off his fatigue.

Although there are hotels and club which provide recreation, 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.

**The Structure of the African family**

The structure of the family varies from society to society. Family is a concept that is referred to as a universal precedence because it is generally recognised and highly important to the African society. The family is also regarded as a vital aspect of African livelihood. It is important to Africans because it is what unifies us, but in recent times, it has started to lose its meaning and value in the modern society.

I believe that in examining the structure of the African society, we should consider the earlier structure and present day function. Looking at the earlier structure of the African family which is also referred to as the traditional aspect of the structure of the African family, the word family had a much wider circle of members than the word suggests in other continents of the world. In the then traditional society, using the Nigerian society as a case study, the members of a family had their own compound. The compound consisted of various huts for the head of the family and his wives and their children. Then, most Nigerian men married many wives because they were unaware of the concept of civilisation. They also married many wives in order to prove their manhood while some married many wives as result of inheriting the wives of their dead older brother which was practised in Edo. Another reason for the marriage to many wives was because in those days, farming was their main source of income. So, they married many wives who will give them children blessed by the gods who will work on the farms, fertilizing, cultivating and performing other farm processes.

The family structure in the early times consisted of the father, the mother, the children, uncles and aunts and their children and the grandparents (polygamous marriages). This was preferable as it created more bonds and as it contributed to the extension of relationships of the family by incorporating more people.

In addition to this structure, the Igbo family structured comprised of; two or more adult models, the father was viewed as the patriarch, mother takes on a matriarchal role, expectation of children; which turned out to be a huge problem if the wife was termed to be barren as in most cases the mother- in- law seemed to turn out to be a problem as she expects the wife to give her grand-children, the other members of the family were to worship the father as a god; be respectful and obedient as he was superior to them, polygymy was very natural for them.

In recent times, the African family unit is much more different in as the African family unit is much more different. A family unit is constructed within the extended family and most aspects of the family life is shared by both, extended and immediate family members, this aspect is referred to as the modern structure of the African society. An example of this would be if I were to get in trouble with my parents, I would also have to deal with my aunts, uncles and even grand-parents. Family issues do not stay within the confines of the household, but rather they are extended and dealt with by all members. Now, imagine trying to explain this to for example, a non-African friend, “Oh, yeah I got grounded by my aunt last night.” They will look at you in complete and utter shock at the thought a family member other than your mom or dad having the power to ground or punish you when your parents are not doing so because they are used to only their parents and no other person punishing them or querying them for their wrong deeds.

We can appreciate the African understanding of family as it is rather important as well as beneficial to be able to develop a lasting bond and relationship with your cousins, aunts and uncles, but when it comes to dealing with household issues instead of being caricatures of hybrids by unjustifiably copying the culture of the white man which can neither be juxtaposed with ours or be in relation to ours. The Western notions of isolating the family is dynamic to solely include the main actors, that is; the mother, the father and the children helps build a stronger bond amongst the immediate family.

**My Nuclear Family**

My family consist of my mother and father with four children. That makes us a family of six which is a fairly small family size.

MY father is an architect and my mother is a teacher. I have a senior sister who is the oild3est of my siblings, I am the second and only male child of my parents, I also have two younger sisters.