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SOC 102

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY II

**THE FAMILY**

The family is an intimate domestic group made up of people related to one another by bonds of blood, sexual mating or legal ties. It is the smallest and most basic social unit, which is also the most important primary group found in any society. It is the simplest and most elementary group found in a society. It is a social group consisting of a father, mother and one or more children. It is the most immediate group a child is exposed to. In fact, it is the most enduring group; which has tremendous influence on the life of an individual from birth to death. It also accounts the most enduring social relationship found in the society.

The term ‘Family’ may seem like a simple concept, but there is no simple definition of a family. A family in its most basic term, is a group of individuals who share a legal or genetic bond, but for many people, family means much more, and can be more complicated than what it seems. However, the family has been defined by different social scholars. Some of these definitions are given below:

* “Family is a group defined by sexual relationship, sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children” - Maclver
* “The family, almost without question, is the most important of any groups that human experience offers…….. the family is with us always, or more precisely, we are with it”

-Robert Bierstedt

* “Family is a more or less durable association of husband and wife with or without a child, or of a man or woman alone, with children” - M.F. Nimkoff
* “Family is the biological social unit composed of husband, wife and children”

-Eliot and Merrill

* “Family is a group of persons united by ties if marriage, blood or adoption constituting a single household interacting and intercommunicating with each other in their respective social roles of husband and wife, father and mother, son and daughter, brother and sister, creating a common culture” - Burgess and Locke
* “Family is a group of persons, whose relations to one another are based upon consanguinity and who are therefore kin to one another” – Kingsley Davis

**CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILY**

Some of these characteristics include;

1. The family is a universal group. It is found in some form or the other, in all types of societies whether primitive or modern.
2. Every family provides an individual with a name, and hence, it is a source of nomenclature
3. It is the most important group in any individual’s life
4. It is the most basic and important group in the primary socialization of an individual
5. A family is generally limited in size, even large joint and extended families
6. The family is based on emotions and sentiments. Mating, procreation, maternal and fraternal devotion, love and affection are the basis of family ties
7. Each member of the family shares duties and responsibilities.

**TYPES OF FAMILY**

There are different types of the family each of which is equally viable as a supportive caring unit. They include:

1. Nuclear Family: Also called a conjugal family, a nuclear family includes the parents and their children living in the same residence or sharing the closest bond.
2. Extended family: This type of family includes all relatives in close proximity, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. In a family household that is extended, these relatives typically live together and all share daily household duties. This type of family is called a joint family or multigenerational family depending on which members are excluded.
3. Complex Family: This type of extended family has three or more adults including their children. This type of family may be formed through divorce and remarriage, or it may be formed through polygamy in societies where that practice is acceptable. Some families may be complex even without formal legal bonds between the adults.
4. Single Parent Family: This family type includes one parent and their children only. A single parent family could be the result of a divorce, the death of one parent, or even a single parent adoption.
5. Step-Family: This is a family where the adults have divorced and remarried, bringing children from other unions together to form a new nuclear family. The children may come from several different parents or be on one or both sides of the new union. Step-families are also referred to as blended families because they are a blend of two or more different families.
6. Traditional Family: This is a family unit defined in the classic sense as the father working outside the home to support the members financially, while the mother remains at home and tends to domestic duties and child rearing. This strict definition of family values is less and less common in modern societies.
7. Adopted Family: This type of family shares legal bonds but not genetic ones. Two parents may adopt a child to whom they share no blood relationship, or one parent may adopt the child of the other parent. Adopted families can also be defined in an emotional or spiritual sense where no formal legal bonds are present.
8. Foster Family: A foster family includes one or more adult parent who serves as a temporary guardian for one or more children to whom they may or may not be biologically related to. In time, more formal arrangements may be made and foster children can be legally adopted.
9. Childless Family: This type of family include a couple with no children. Couples may choose not to have children or may be prevented from having children biologically due to medical reasons. Some childless families might include pets such as dogs, cats, rabbits viewed as family members.

**\***SOCIAL FAMILIES FOR ADULTS

In many ways, different individuals relate to groups of people who provide them with emotional and spiritual connection as family; even if they share no legal or genetic bonds. For example, a church “family” has spiritual connections and shared values, even though it’s members are not formally related. Similarly, a work family has common experiences and share activities in long-term relationships without formal bonds.

**\***MODERN SOCIAL FAMILIES

College fraternities and sororities often share familial binds through experiences and consider one another brothers and sisters without formal relationships. With social networking technology, many people are even creating online or virtual families of individuals who share their beliefs, hobbies and values even if they have never met in person. These types of families are sometimes called **“Chosen Families”.**

**THE FUNCTIONS OF THE FAMILY**

While the direct legal and genetic relationship you share with others can help you create your definition of family, there is more to family relationships than these basic concepts. A true family provides it’s members with emotional and spiritual kinship through:

* Shared values, beliefs and traditions
* Common experiences and activities
* Unconditional, non-judgmental support

As a social group and as an important social institution, family performs Various functions that are as follows:

1. The process of reproduction is institutionalized, regulated and controlled in a family. The family legitimizes the act of reproduction.
2. Family helps in the propagation of human species and perpetuation of human race.
3. It is through the family that every family name is carried on from one generation to another.
4. Family is responsible for the production and upbringing of children.
5. Family is an important agent of socialization. The primary socialization of any individual takes place within the family. The immediate family members teach all the basic rules and norms of social life to a child
6. The family is also an important agent of cultural transmission. Culture is transmitted from one generation to another through family. All these aspects of culture are learnt within the family structure.
7. A family is a great source of strength, emotional and psychological for it’s members. All the member are aware that they can depend upon their family in the times of need.
8. The family is the basis of division of labor, where all members have their duties and obligations towards each other.
9. A family fulfills the economic needs of its members. This function has undergone transformation, with families moving from being in the production and consumption units in earlier times, to becoming more of consuming units rather than a producing one. Now-a-days, members of a family no longer produce things themselves; rather they go out and work for some monetary remuneration or wages
10. Family also has a recreational function. Earlier, most recreation was family-based. Family gatherings during festivals, functions, Family reunions, marriages bring the entire families together. Now-a-days, taking family members out on holidays or for movies, plays dinners or parties, perform the same functions.

**THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FAMILY**

The family is considered a basic cell of the society. All social and cultural practices find their connection with a notion of family, either supporting or distorting it. Family plays a crucial role in Africa. A sociologist “Mbiti” says that “each person live in OR is a part of the family”. Another sociologist “Kisembo” rightly puts that “the family community was the fundamental element of the African, this basic sphere of action, through which he become integrated with the larger, human community……… he always acted from within the sphere of the family”. The most preferred type of family include the African society is the polygamous family which consists of a man and several wives and children.

However, some sociological changes taking place in the contemporary society has affected the traditional wider family. African societies have been undergoing a process of profound changes affecting all aspects of its traditional life. A lot of these changes directly affect the family which is the logical outcome of marriages. For various reasons, natural and human, the standard of life in Africa, in many cases and for most people, either did not improve since independence or actually reduced, put together the ever increasing cost of life . It contributes to the fact that many people live in poverty as it prevents them from fulfilling their traditional obligations.

Christianity also brought some challenges to the traditional African practices such as polygamy by equating it with adultery and sin. It also promotes monogamy as the only morally accepted type of marriage. Monogamy, though present and practiced in traditional Africa, was not as widely spread as polygamy. Other changes that has affected the African family directly or indirectly are: Westernization of the African society with its stress on individual success, Competitiveness and financial gain, modern education that often promotes personal values at the expense of communal values, modernization of the society with an increased pace of life demanding more time to be dedicated to work.

Traditional African family patterns are slowly but progressively being altered as a result of

modernization. Sub Saharan Africa has one of the fastest annual urbanized population growth rate. The transformation of societies in the sub-continent from rural to urban settings has immensely

contributed in triggering changes in family structure. Despite the changes taking place in sub Saharan African societies due to the modernization process, the family still remains a prominent nexus in the social life of Africans. In Africa, there is still importance attached to the respect for elders and ancestors. The major features of African household is that they are mostly rural, patriarchal and hierarchical, polygamous and open to kinship and finally they attach substantial importance to lineage continuation. The social organization of most African families is embedded in a patriarchal and hierarchical system that excludes 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. In traditional rural societies in most sub Saharan societies, women were voiceless and powerless.

Marriage in sub Saharan Africa is universal. There is early and universal female marriage. 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. Marriage is still quite important in African communities, the age at first marriage ranges between 17 to 22 years for women. It varies

across regions depending on regional and ethnic practices. In traditional rural African societies, the contraction of marriage was dominated by arranged marriages whereby parents usually indulged in the selection of marriage partners for their children; this was mostly 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 some countries have adopted policies that strive to advocate for the consent of both parties that are to be married. In traditional societies in most sub Saharan African countries, there is a high value accorded to marriage; this has been marked by the practice of early marriages and childbearing which in most cases continues till the end of productivity age.

It can be inferred that the practices that depicted rural sub Saharan African societies are progressively being transformed, this is marked by the shift from polygamy marriages to monogamous marriage and the movement from large household to small ones.

**MY NUCLEAR FAMILY**

A nuclear family, elementary family or conjugal family is a family group consisting of two parents(father and mother) and their children either one or more. I come from a family of eight that is my father, mother and my five siblings. So our roles in the family varies starting from my dad who is the head of the family down to the very last child. For me, there is no right or wrong answer to the best structure of a family , but in my family, there is love and support for one another which my father encourages for us to be successful and thrive. I believe that a family should be able to do what they need to do for one another and themselves in order to achieve anything just like my family. My family, especially my nuclear family means a whole lot to me because over the years and over times, it has in one way or the other changed my perspectives about a lot of things.

Growing up in a nuclear home, gives me more chance to spend quality time with my family, our gatherings, the prayer altar, Family outing or recreation, our good and bad times is totally worth it. My nuclear family is one filled with joy because everyone knows their roles and duties and carry them out well and responsibly.

Respect in my family is like a treasure which my parents hold in high esteem and expects to inculcate this virtue. Secondly, our native language is a compulsory language at home so as not to forget our cultural background. Learning how to take care of the house and also to cook is also important in my home irrespective of your gender. Education is another key thing in the family, even my parents still gain as much information as they can even in their field of work . We believe in peace and unity as well.

My nuclear family is a family group consisting of two parents and their six children who have common goals, shared values and beliefs.

**OBIA-AMAUWA FAMILY KALU FAMILY**

**Pa James**

**Mama Felicia**

**Pa Gabriel**

**Mama Titi**

**Chika**

**Oluchi**

**Charles**

**Samuel**

**Steven**

**Susan (Mother)**

**John (Father)**

**OBIA-AMAUWA FAMILY**

**Benita**

**Susan**

**Jude**

**Jennifer**

**Joel**

**Jessica**