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**QUESTIONS**

* WHAT IS FAMILY?
* DISCUSS THE FUNCTIONS OF FAMILY.
* DISCUSS THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FAMILY.
* DISCUSS YOUR NUCLEAR FAMILY.
* DRAW YOUR FAMILY TREE.

1. **WHAT IS FAMILY?**

Family is the smallest unit in a society and the most prominent agent of socialization. Mair (1972), defined the family as a domestic group in which parents and children live together, and in its elementary form consists of a couple and their children. A family can be defined as the most basic institution in any society and it is the social context into which members of a society derive their primary identity. Sociologists have come up with different definitions of the family and this is due to the fact that the family has various manifestations, organization and structures in various societies. Duberman and Hartjen (1979) defined a family as a universal institution whose most important functions are to socialize and nurture the younger generation. Similarly, Smith and Preston (1982) defined the family as a social group whose members are related either through common ancestry or marriage and are bound by moral and economic rights and duties. It can also be defined as a group consisting of two parents and their children living together as a unit. It can also be defined as all the descendants of a common ancestor. It can also mean an intimate domestic group made up of people related to one another by bonds of blood, sexual mating or legal ties.

1. **FUNCTIONS OF FAMILY**

* **Procreation:** The family through the regulation of sexual relationship function fulfills the biological need of reproduction and perpetuation of both the immediate family and the society as a whole (Okodudu 2010).
* **Nurture:** Every child is born into a family and every child is expected to be fed, clothed, educated and cared for. This responsibility lies in the hands of the family; hence the family ensures providing for the welfare needs of the children thereby ensuring the survival of the next generation.
* **Regulation of Sexual Relationships**: One of the paramount biological needs of a man in all society is sexual relationship. Such relationship is often protected with rules and regulations in all societies and it is the family that helps and enforces such rules. This is done to prevent incestuous relationships for example the need for one not to have sexual relationships for example the need for one not to have sexual relationship with a close relative or kin etc. The family also screens and approves sexual partners and spouses for members.
* **Affection and Companionship**: The family is expected to provide affection and companionship for its members. Children are given warm affection within the family to develop a positive self- image and adults in the family need intimate companionship to cope with life. This breeds a sense of belonging, (Ingiabuna and Obaro 2009).
* **Social Placement**: An individual acquires his identity and place in society through his family. The family ascribes many statuses to its members such as; race, ethnicity, affiliation, nationality, religion, royalty etc.

1. **THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FAMILY**

The subject of “traditional African family” is so broad that it cannot be adequately addressed in few words. 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).This will briefly explore traditional African family patterns describing the patrilineal and matrilineal families. The case studies presented will be those of the Baganda of Uganda and Bemba of Northern Zambia. Some of the major issues raised will include polygamy, tribe, clan, the extended family, bride price and the raising of children.

As the African society has not been static, changes in the traditional family patterns will be briefly alluded to. This will argue that the Eurocentric nature of the descriptions and characterization of the traditional African family patterns by earlier scholars has tended to distort and obscure many of the strengths of the African traditional family.

**Perversity of Polygamy:** Scholars of the African traditional family agree that the one widely known aspect that distinguishes the African traditional family, say from the European one, is the perversity of polygamy. Although polygamy is the act of an individual being married to more than one spouse at the same time, the more commonly practiced in Africa is polygyny “….the legal marriage of one man to two or more women concurrently – is permitted.” This argues that because of its perversity, the presence and absence of polygyny was a significant determinant and indicator of the nature of virtually every African social group; whether tribe, clan, or extended family, whether matrilineality or patrilineality was practiced, bride price existed, and how children were raised.

Polygyny was widely practiced in Africa and it often formed the backbone of the traditional African family patterns. According to Mair, “...the polygynous joint family, consisting of a man, his wives, and their children, is the ideal for most Africans.” Studies conducted from the 1930s to 1950s indicate that polygyny was common virtually in all regions of Africa. In the late and early 19th century, a detailed study conducted among the Baganda found that, “Polygyny, the type of marriage in which the husband has plural wives, is not only the preferred but the dominant form of marriage for the Baganda.” Commoners had two or three, chiefs had dozens, and the Kings had hundreds of wives. What was the structure of the polygynous family? Although among the Baganda, the nuclear family of the mother, father, and their children constitutes the smallest unit of the Baganda kinship system, the traditional family consists of “…… several nuclear units held in association by a common father.” Because the Baganda people are patrilineal, the household family also includes other relatives of the father such as younger unmarried or widowed sisters, aged parents, and children of the father’s clan sent to be brought up by him. Included in this same bigger household will be servants, female slaves, and their children. The father remains the head of the nuclear family units.

**MATRILINEAL TRADITIONAL AFRICAN FAMILY**

Among the Bemba people of Northern Zambia, marriage is matrilocal. “That is to say a man goes to live in his wife’s village, at any rate for the first years of his married life.” This is also true of marriage among other Zambian tribes like the Bisa, Lala, Lamba, Chewa, Kaonde, and many others. Among the Chewa of Eastern Zambia, the custom of man living with his wife’s parents temporarily or permanently was known as Ukamwini. During the period earlier than 1940s, marriages remained completely matrilocal during the couple’s entire life. But however, after a few years of contact with white civilization and subsequent social change, the custom has gradually changed. The husband could take his wife home if the marriage was thought stable especially after the couple has had two or more children.

The basic family unit among the Bemba was not the nuclear family. But rather the matrilocal extended family comprised of a man and his wife, their married daughters, son-in-laws, and their children. A young Bemba couple live in the same hut with a child of pre-weaning age whom they may have. But this is not an independent nuclear family unit. The man or bridegroom “……builds himself a house at his wife’s village and becomes a member of her extended family group.” The wife cooks at her mother’s house with other female relatives who are mainly unmarried and married sisters. Meanwhile, the husband works under his father-in-law’s orders with other young son-in-laws. “A matrilocal family of this kind forms the nucleus of a village community (umushi) which other relatives of the head of the family afterwards join.”

Polygamy or polygyny, which is a distinguishing feature in many traditional African families especially is patrilineal and patriarchal societies, is uncommon among the matrilineal Bemba. Whereas chiefs have a number of wives, it is very rare to find ordinary men who have more than one wife. Because of this, extended families among the Bemba are not really as large as those found, especially among patriarchal polygynous traditional families in other tribes be it in Southern, Eastern, or West Africa. “Polygamy is relatively speaking uncommon in this area and the institution is not an essential part of the Bemba family and economic life as it is among so many Bantu peoples.”

**CONCLUSION**

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 focused 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.

1. **DISCUSS YOUR NUCLEAR FAMILY**

My nuclear family is a nuclear polygamous family and it comprises my dad, my mum and my step mum with nine kids, me inclusive. I have four step siblings, a step brother and three stepsisters and they are all of the working class with the first three married with kids. The four of them no longer stay with us. My full siblings are five, I have a brother and 3 sisters, one married sister and the others being student which I am not an exception. It is a beautiful family that I adore.

MY FAMILY TREE

STEP MOM

FATHER

MOM

Moni

Muiz

Sherri

Sofi

Seki

HAJJIE

LADE

NIKS

DEMO

KAW

KHALEEZ

ZAY

IMAN