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* WHAT IS FAMILY?

According to Sociologists, the family is an intimate domestic group of people related to one another by bonds of blood, sexual mating, or legal ties. It has been a very resilient social unit that has survived and adapted through time. So, the element of time referred to above, is again present here. The family acts as a primary socialization of children whereby the child first learns the basic values and norms of the culture they will grow up in. a child needs to be carefully nurtured, cherished and molded into responsible individuals with good values and strong ethics. Therefore, it is important to provide them the best childcare so that they grow up to be physically, mentally and emotionally strong individuals.

* DISCUSS THE FUNCTIONS OF A SOCIOLOGIST
* **The Family and Conflict**

Conflict theorists agree that the family serves the important functions just listed, but they also point to problems within the family that the functional perspective minimizes or overlooks altogether. First, the family as a social institution contributes to social inequality. Because families pass along their wealth to their children, and because families differ greatly in the amount of wealth they have, the family helps reinforce existing inequality. As it developed through the centuries, and especially during industrialization, the family also became more and more of a patriarchal unit (since men made money working in factories while women stayed home), helping to reinforce men’s status at the top of the social hierarchy.

Second, the family can also be a source of conflict for its own members. Although the functional perspective assumes the family provides its members emotional comfort and support, many families do just the opposite and are far from the harmonious, happy groups depicted in the 1950s television shows. Instead, they argue, shout, and use emotional cruelty and physical violence. We return to family violence later in this chapter.

#### 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 the production of children but also child rearing is another important function of family. Family is the only place where the function of child rearing is better performed.

#### 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.

* Socialization

It is another important essential function of the family. It is said that man is not born human but made human. New born human baby become 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.

* DISCUSS THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FAMILY

Traditional African family patterns are slowly but progressively being altered as a result of the process of modernization patterns that were the norm in traditional rural African societies are gradually being altered and which is exhibited urbanization. Family substituted by modern values. Sub Saharan Africa has one of the fastest annual population growth through trends like rate. It has the fastest rate of urbanization presently taking place in the world. The transformation of societies in the sub-continent from rural to urban settings has immensely contributed in triggering changes in family structure. This has triggered the distortion of cultural /traditional norms and values that characterized rural communities in the region. African families are increasingly faced with the challenge and pressure emanating from the competition prevailing between traditional and modern family values.

Hence, Contemporary family patterns in the region are increasingly subjected to transform and adapt to changing times. Discussions of family patterns in contemporary Sub Saharan Africa are usually made in reference to the process of acculturation, urbanization (the movement from rural to urban areas), which have helped to shape modern family structures, as well as fostered the prevalence of demographic changes. Family in sub Saharan Africa is experiencing changes which are felt in fertility rates that is the number of children women give birth to, and age at marriage to name.

**Overview of family patterns in sub Saharan Africa**

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 considerable importance attached to the respect for elders and ancestors. African communities are characterized by the prevalence of collectivism as opposed to individuality. Paulina Makinwa-Adebusoye outlined the major characteristic features of African household to be that they are mostly rural, patriarchal and hierarchical, polygamous and open 2 to kinship networks, and finally they attached substantial importance to lineage continuation. These features in all play a pivotal role in influencing the number of children women give birth to.

The social organization of most African families is embedded in a patriarchal and hierarchical system that precludes 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. At marriage women tend to have lower status than all the members of their husband’s family Makinwa-adebusoye in traditional rural societies in most sub Saharan societies, women were voiceless and powerless. According to Göran Therborn (2006) African societies have experienced slight distortion in the patriarchal tradition, following the advent of urbanization, as well as due to the drop in the importance attached to land and cattle in the economy. Male supremacy has also been altered a bit even though it still has a prominent strong hold in the society. There is the existence of substantial cultural importance attributed to fertility and lineage continuation, tight patriarchal traditions, wide rate of polygamy prevalence. These are the prominent features that characterized most traditional African societies.

Marriage

Marriage can be perceived from different facets, as an institution, a partnership, a lifecycle phase and as a role. Marriage as an institution is confronted with the process of adapting to the process of modernization which inherently helps to mold modern marriage structure. Wilhelma Kalu (1981) stated that the institution of marriage is considerably subjected to the trend of accommodation to the process of industrialization/modernization. Socioeconomic circumstances are encountering changes which forge alteration of the fundamental values of culture. Marriage constitutes a vital variable that is pivotal for procreation. The distortion of its structure tends to serve as a medium where socioeconomic changes associated with the main values of culture can be measured.

Traditional tenets of African marriages are increasingly 3 subjected to stabilize amidst sporadic societal changes emanating from modernization and globalization. This, Wilhelmina Kalu (1981:350) emphasized inherently brings in to perspective the need for the redefinition of the role and features of marriage unavoidable. Marriage in sub Saharan Africa is universal. There is early and universal female marriage (Caldwell and Caldwell 1987:411). 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. This in essence set the pace for the redefinition of its role and characteristics (Kalu1981:350). Marriage is still quite important in African communities, the age at first marriage ranges between 17 to 22 years for women (Boogaarts et al 1984). It varies across regions depending on regional and ethnic practices. Göran Therborn (2006:36) portrays the fact that the age of first marriage has experienced a slight increase in most countries. It has risen since the 1950s to 1990s in Guinea from 16 to 19 years, from 15 to 18 years in Niger.

**. Family Size**

The advent of modernity has inherently fostered a progressive transformation of African family organization marked by the drift from larger family size to small size households. Demographers often identify the changes taking place in family patterns such as changes in family size to be a characteristic of the second demographic transition process (Perelli-Harris 2005:57). It is marked by the reorientation of family values from extended families to smaller family sizes. According to Briennna Perelli-Harris (2005) the shift in society is inevitable and is 5 part of the process of modernization. One major area that has encountered or is experiencing alteration is the size of family that is the number of children that married women give birth to. Discussion of family size here is made in reference to the number of children that are born in a family. It is imperative to highlight that family size discussions in the region is renown to be dominated by the extended family settings whereby a family is not made up only of a married couple and their children but also include uncles, aunties, grandparents to name a few. Extended families still have quite a strong hold in Africa despite the advent of modernization. The main reason for this has been linked to the role that extended family plays as social security in the society (Therborn 2006:13).

Family structures in sub Saharan Africa are experiencing changes which are felt in childbirth rate that is the number of children, and age at first marriage. John Caldwell and Pat Caldwell (1987:411) emphasized that in order to comprehend contemporary African fertility, one needs to understand that there has not been any traditional fertility control in the light of limiting family size, and also that the practice of female abstinence has been a vital feature of societies in the region. This, they identified as been the reason for the resistance and apprehension mounted by most people in the region to modern methods of fertility control which were perceived as being unnecessary in the region. The number of children women in the region are averagely giving birth to is progressively declining even though the rate is not quite significant. The locus of most traditional African countries is centered on the perception of large families as an asset especially in rural subsistence agricultural societies (Makinwa-adebusoye 2001:5).

African family patterns are increasingly faced with the challenge and pressure between traditional and modern family values and structure. There is the steady increase in the pace towards the abandonment of traditional practices for modern ones (western). However, the most popular trend is that of the prevalence of family patterns that are increasing merging traditional and modern marriage norms or practices(Kalu1981:2). This paper has presented a short description of the changes that are characterizing marriage and family size in contemporary sub Saharan Africa. There are other practices taking place such as non-marital childbearing, single parenthood, non-marital unions that were not discussed that are as well gradually gaining momentum in the region. It can be inferring from the information provided in this paper that practices that depicted rural sub Saharan African societies are progressively being transformed, this is marked by the shift from polygamy marriages that dominated rural sub Saharan African communities to monogamous marriage and the movement from large.

* DISCUSS YOUR NUCLEAR FAMILY

Nuclear family, also called elementary family, in sociology and anthropology, a group of people who are united by ties of partnership and parenthood and consisting of a pair of adults and their socially recognized children. Typically, but not always, the adults in a nuclear family are married. Although such couples are most often a man and a woman, the definition of the nuclear family has expanded with the advent of same-sex marriage. Children in a nuclear family may be the couple’s biological or adopted offspring.

Thus defined, the nuclear family was once widely held to be the most basic and universal form of social organization. Anthropological research, however, has illuminated so much variability of this form that it is safer to assume that what is universal is a “nuclear family complex” in which the roles of husband, wife, mother, father, son, daughter, brother, and sister are embodied by people whose biological relationships do not necessarily conform to the Western definitions of these terms. In matrilineal societies, for example, a child may be the responsibility not of his biological genitor but of his mother’s brother, who fulfills the roles typical of Western fatherhood.

Closely related in form to the predominant nuclear-family unit are the conjugal family and the consanguineal family. As its name implies, the conjugal family is knit together primarily by the marriage tie and consists of mother, father, their children, and some close relatives. The consanguineal family, on the other hand, typically groups itself around a unilineal descent group known as a lineage, a form that reckons kinship through either the father’s or the mother’s line but not both. Whether a culture is patrilineal or matrilineal, a consanguineal family comprises lineage relatives and consists of parents, their children, and their children’s children. Rules regarding lineage exogamy, or out-marriage, are common in these groups; within a given community, marriages thus create cross-cutting social and political ties between lineages.

The stability of the conjugal family depends on the quality of the marriage of the husband and wife, a relationship that is more emphasized in the kinds of industrialized, highly mobile societies that frequently demand that people reside away from their kin groups. The consanguineal family derives its stability from its corporate nature and its permanence, as its relationships emphasize the perpetuation of the line.



**FAMILY TREE**

Mother

Me

Mother

Mother

Father

Father

Father