**THE CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY**

The family is usually defined as a kinship group linked by blood and marriage and occupying a common household. A household is not the same thing as the family. It refers to all persons occupying the same house. These include relatives as well as lodgers. The family as a social group is made up of a man, his wife or wives and children living under a common roof, interacting and influencing the behaviours of each other in a more intimate manner than with others who do not belong to it. As a social institution the family entails the formalised, regular and patterned way or process by which family life is carried out. It involves:

• A set of common procedures such as betrothal or engagement, courtship, honeymoon, wedding

• A common set of values and norms e.g incest taboo which forbids sexual intercourse with blood relations thereby necessitating marriage outside the immediate family (exogamy), love between husband and wife in a way different from that which is expected between brother and sister. Marriage involves choice of mates. Marriage allows the social relationship in which sexual expression is expected to take place for the major purpose of procreation. But if much sexual expression within and outside marriage is for the purpose of sexual urge gratification rather than procreation, then sex plays an important role in self-fulfillment in both rural and urban areas. Marriage is sanctioned by the society. It provides the social systems within which social roles and statuses are prescribed.

**FEATURES OF THE RURAL FAMILY**

The rural family is characterised by many features such as familism, production and consumption of goods and services, continuity, size, child bearing and rearing, socialisation, participation in family decision making, marital expectations and evaluation. Familism could be described as the degree to which members of the family show solidarity in the process of performing the multifarious role of the family institution. It involves the following factors:

• The extent to which control is exerted over individual members so that family values are imposed on each member, who in turn accepts the values.

• Personal security of individual members of a family which shows familism is generated by members through their deep sense of integration into the family.

• It embodies an intergenerational family group in which many generations live under one roof near one another.

• Existence of family property such as land, house, shares in companies, animals and farm crops. This practice discovers age’s individualism among members.

• Continuity of the family ensures that members bring in their children into the fold so that it does not discontinue when certain members die.

• Mutual help exists among members who are assisted to set up their own farms, pay education costs, dowries, burial and other forms of expenses when the need arises. The advantages of familism include: • Keeping the children in greater contact so as to deepen affection for one another.

• Exercising control over members to protect the family integrity; ethnic and rural standards; apprenticeship in the family early occupation, which is frequently farming in the rural area.

• Assistance in financing early education, purchase of work equipment and marriage expenses, feeding, clothing and other personal expenses.

**The disadvantages of familism include:**

• Self centeredness, which makes a family to always look for the interest of its members, while it frequently closes its eyes to the consideration of other families.

• Members tend to be narrow-minded and parochial; the personalities of members are at about the same level.

• Families limit chances of allowing members in rural families to take up other occupations.

• The system of seniority frequently adopted lowers the rate of self realisation of talented family members.

• Whenever a family member violates the norms, the family image rather than that of the individual is considered as tarnished.

**FUNCTIONS OF THE FAMILY (SEE SOCIOLOGY OF THE FAMILY NOTES)**

**Stages in the Family Life of a Rural Farmer**

The family life and the farm business life of a rural farmer are intricately interwoven. The success of one highly influences the viability of the other. However, some stages are distinguishable in the life a farm family.

1. **Farm apprenticeship**: This stage commences as early as the child is able to walk to the farm himself. It begins about the age of three or four years and extends till the adolescent years when the young farmer is looking for a wife at the age of 15 – 20. Initially, the young child is taken to the farm and asked to watch the father as he operates the farm so as to inculcate the habit of preparing for work. At the age of five or six, the child is given farm implements with which to work. He is apportioned a small piece of land to work upon. He learns how to operate farm implements gradually. The apprentice turns to a skilled farm operator who continues to assist the father on a family farm.

2. **Operation of a farm business on a limited scale**: The young farmer opens up his own farm on a large scale than when he was serving the father, but on a limited scale when compared with that of a full-fledged farmer. He still gets advice from the father on how to operate his farm at his own discretion and as a mark of recognition of the father’s experience and to promote family solidarity. The enthusiasm of early independence from the family farm propels him to work. The encouragement obtained from the young wife also stimulates him to work harder. Unfortunately in south-western Nigeria, like in many developing societies where owner-operators of farms are predominant, this is also the period when many young farmers over socialise by attending many club meetings, parties, dances, funerals and marriage ceremonies which involve wastage of their resources which ought to have been wisely invested in farm business. This stage lasts till the age of about 30 years.

3. The third stage is that of **the owner-operator of a farm business on a large scale with his family.** At this stage, the farmer has now raised his children to maturity as he was raised by his father. The children now assist him on the farm. He thus opens up large areas of land using family labour. It is the period when farmers become most prosperous in farming. The farmer is primarily concerned with maintenance operations, and opening up of some new farm projects. This lasts up till the age of about 45 years to 50.

4. **Owner-operator of a farm business on a small scale without the family**: The farmer is now declining in energy. He depends on hired labourers to carry out much of his farm operations if he has a large farm. His returns from the farm start to decline because of greater investments in running the farm which had been previously supplied via family labour. Hardworking farmers would have built houses in the village by the end of the third stage. They actually would have started to build the house in the town, which they would complete early in the fourth stage of life.

5. The fifth stage is that of **retirement from active farming**. The farmer has attained the age of seventy and above. Those who have succeeded in building their own houses in the town spend much of the time in town. Those who have not built their personal houses in the town spend much of the time in their village houses and visit the town as occasions demand (Jibowo 1992). This farm has now turned into a bush with spots of tree crops growing here and there on the farm. The farmer that is still energetic manages to maintain the tree crops which remain productive through spot-weeding. He tries to grow some annual crops for his subsistence and also depends on the support of prosperous children for his sustenance. He remains a partially active farmer until he dies, unless old age makes him unable to go to the farm. The foregoing stages in the life-cycle of a typical farmer in southwestern Nigeria are similar to the situation in many other societies where family-sized farms predominate.

**Forms of Marriage**

It was earlier said that marriage involves choice of mates. This may be done outside one’s group or blood relations in which case it is described as exogamy, or within some specified group, the case of which could be described as endogamy. Where one man and one woman are involved, the marriage is described as **monogamy**. Where more than two people are involved, it is called polygamy. **Polygamy** can assume three forms. One is the case of one man married to two or more women. This is called **polygyny**. This is most common among traditional villagers and Muslims in Nigeria.

This second form of polygamy is one involving one woman and two or more men. This is known as **polyandry** and has been identified among very few tribes in the world. The Todas of southern India are known to accept fraternal polygamy in which one woman is married to two or more brothers. The offspring of a such union belong to the extended family directly rather than to a particular father.

The third form of polygamy is what is known as   
**group marriage** and involves several men and women in marriage relationships with one another with no sense of exclusive ownership. Murdock (2002) in his study of 250 societies found that only 43 (17%) practised monogamy as a rule while the rest (8.3%) allowed different forms of polygamy.

• **Levirate Marriage** This is a type of marriage which involves the inheritance of a widow by the deceased husband’s male relations. This form of marriage is based on reasoning that a wife is part of the possessions of the husband which are passed down the extended family line on his demise. Levirate marriage is a secondary form of marriage and entails no elaborate ceremony.

**Factors Associated With Polygamous Marriage in Nigeria**

Polygamous marriage in Nigeria could be attributed to many factors. Significant among these are:

1. **Economic Reasons**: In societies where little mechanisation is practised, most economic production is carried out manually. Therefore, the greater the number of hands available, the larger the productivity of the family. People who have large areas of farm land usually marry more than one wife so as to enhance the available free labour force.

2. **Religious Beliefs**: The Moslem religion permits its adherents who are able, to take as many as four wives. The well-to-do among them have married more than one wife.

3. **The Need for Children**: Sometimes a man may take a second or third wife if the first is not productive or fruitful. In the traditional Ibibio of south eastern Nigeria, a barren woman in fact, went out of her way to marry another woman for her husband. In addition, in the traditional society a man’s prestige was enhanced by the number of children in his compound and so the more women he acquired, the larger his compound grew. In some cases, the need for a male child who would inherit the property of the family also encourages men to take additional wives.

4. **Social or Cultural Obligations**: Some men in Nigeria have found themselves with more than one wife purely due to social or cultural reasons. A successful businessman or traditional leader may be given a girl gratis by someone who desires to pay homage, indicate respect, seek favour or just seek a closer relationship with him. Culture warrants that such a “gift” be accepted gratefully. Similarly, tradition may require that the widows of a relative be inherited by the surviving next of kin. The man may have married his own chosen wife already, thus he becomes obliged by tradition to take on the widows of his relations.

5. **Gratification of Sexual Needs**: Men’s sex needs are known to be more imperious than women’s sex urge. Thus, men who desire socially approved sexual outlets when their wives are either pregnant or menstruating take on additional wives.