

**THE FUTURE OF THE FAMILY
IN NIGERIA.**

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ABSTRACT

The family is an important social institution with fundamental functions in the society. Its pervasive role on the lives of people in the society is being degenerating due to the serious fundamental changes it has undergone in many contemporary societies. These changes have been a cause of serious concern on the lives of individuals, groups and entire society which considerably tells more about the future of the family IN Nigeria. This paper examines the social functions of family in both pre-industrial and contemporary societies; changes within the family institutions; factors responsible for these changes; social problems emanating from the family transition and explores POSSIBLE ways of solving social problems arising from family disorganization. The conclusions drawn in the paper is that we need to ensure that relevant function associated with the family in the past do not suffer so that basic human needs will not go unmet. And more so, the family should necessarily be regarded as a sacred institution the survival of which should be the responsibility of every member of contemporary society.

Introduction

The family is an important social institution with fundamental functions in the society. Its pervasive role is manifested in the lives of people both in pre- industrial and modern societies. From cradle to grave the family leaves its impart on the social experience of the individual.

The concept of family varies from one society to another being closely associated with the accepted practice of marriage. Essentially it refers to those a socially patterned idea is and practices concerned with biological and cultural survival of the species. In this sense, the family designates a particular set of social practices concerned with procreation and child bearing, with hetero-sexual partnership as well as parent- child relationship (Keller 1971: 1)

The Family is one of the basic social institutions. It is defined as a kinship grouping which provides for the rearing of children and for certain other human needs (Horton and Hunt 1980: 217), It has the two aspects of a social and biological groupings, formed through or without marriage. It is manifested as "a nuclear family consisting of two or more nuclear families; a conjugal or family of procreation where one is a father/husband or mother /wife, and natal or family of orientation" where one was born. (Oтите and Ogionwo, 1979:88-89), Families could also be described as monogamous or polygamous consisting of one or many nuclear families. In this sense the family could reflect the kind of marriage contracted. All these showed the structural variability of the family.

Being the smallest and most personal of all social groups, the family existed in all known human societies. However, its actual form varies between societies. Membership of such social groups implies some duties and responsibilities as well as privileges.

The Family has evolved from three major historical phases, namely, the large patriarchal family characteristic of ancient societies, the small patriarchal family with

origin in medieval period and the modern small scale family (nuclear) which to a great extent is a product of economic and social trends accompanying industrial revolution. The nuclear and extended family systems represent the commonest two in contemporary society. A nuclear family implies a family based on a monogamous marriage and comprises of a man, his wife and children. The extended family system is based on polygamous marriage and comprises of a man, his wives, children, and relatives including their own wives and children (Laslett, 1972 : 24).

The Family Institution has undergone fundamental changes have been A cause of serious concern. More important considering the implications of the lives of individuals, groups and the entire society. This is to say that as the basic institution, changes within the family unit are bound to have spill-over effects on a larger segment of people in the society. Hence, tells more about the future of the family in Nigeria. This concern constitutes the main focus of this paper.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Objectives of this discussion include the following:

- To highlight the social functions of the family in both pre-industrial and contemporary societies.
- To examine trend in the changes within the family institution
- To highlight factors responsible for these changes
- To examine social problems emanating from the family transition and how it determines the future of the family
- To explore possible ways of solving social problems arising from family disorganization.

Theoretical Framework

The changes in the traditional family institution is best understood within the broad concept of social change. Social change theory explains the modification of cultural institutions through time. This change is a continuous process involving modification and significant transformation in the nature, structure, composition processes and functions of Institutions.

Rosser and Harris (1965) representing the evolutionary theorists of social change argued that all societies everywhere if not interfered will), develop through an ascending series of stages. On the opposite sides are the diffusionist who stressed that different cultures constantly borrow from one another so that most or all cultures and social phenomena were diffused from some common source (Herkovits 1976).

Other anthropologists spoke of cultural change in the context of contact. That is the contact of advanced complex and large scale western societies with technologically simple often pre-literate or recent literate small scale ones (Beattie 1964:242). This contact involves the transfer of ideas and artifacts from one group to the other. This is well represented mainly in the relation between European colonial powers and the various colonized indigenous people. The changes represent a radical alteration in the whole range of social and cultural institutions.

Functions of the Traditional Family

While it is widely acknowledged that family is an institution found in all societies, however, there are controversies on its composition and functions. For instance in the Euro American prospective, the ideal family is a co- residential group consisting of a married couple and their children. On the other hand, in Africa, family comprises of all individuals who have filial or blood relationship with one another.

Across cultures, family links households and communities and play a vital role in their social life .This is to say that despite some variations in this structure, there are some aspects of the family that ate universal across cultures. These are more evident in its functions.

Productive and economic activities are equally undertaken with in the family. In many societies, the family acts as the productive and economic unit. In several others, the institution also serves as the distributive unit.

One other important function of the family is that it provides social and psychological security for vulnerable members and groups. Kinship ties ensure that children, the aged and others without means of livelihood are adequately catered for by active members. While stressing on this' function performed by the family Ogunsheye (1978) contends

Strong family lies and feeling of identity with the group are some of the best features that the traditional society possesses.

In the same way, Baker (1973) submits that extended family has proved marvelous security for those for whom otherwise there was no security at all. In his words:

It (extended family) is a net wide enough to gather the child, who falls from the feeble control of neglectful parents, receives the widows and gives status to grannies (p.492)

The first taste of socialization is afforded Individuals within the family. Through this process the family imparts to its young members its values and norms thereby preserving its cultural identity In addition to these, the traditional family also performs the spiritual function. In many communities the family units is also a religious group In which each member plays specific roles in the execution of rites, worship and religious obligations.

Worthy of mention is the legal function of the family institution. The child becomes a bonafide member of the society through its link with the family. The family is therefore in many respects a vital unit of social organization and social control and on and the whole an indispensable social institution. More important, in tribal societies where kinship is the basis of recruitment to all or most important social roles the family relate directly with dent groups and becomes A mechanism for continuous generation of new kinship ties.

Because of the immense importance of the family among human groups anything which tends to threaten its stability is then regarded as a serious problem. It is this perspective that in this paper, consideration is given to changes witnessed by the family in recent times as a critical social problem of dire consequence.

Changes of Family Institution as Social Problem

The structure and function of the family just explained have experienced fundamental changes over time. These changes which could be attributed largely to Euro-American influence has overbearing implications on the live of individual members and the entire society. The transition which has occurred in the traditional and contemporary societies, changes in the institution has attracted a wilder concern. More so, when many of these changes have led to some social problems which are detrimental to the corporate existence of the society.

The most noticeable aspect of this transition is in the structure of the family. The traditional extended family structure has given way to the western European style nuclear system. Specifically, the influence of Christianity tends to encourage monogamous marriage and by implication the nuclear form of family unit. Many couples now prefer smaller family. In many societies this change has taken place in all social orders though it is most pronounced among the upper and middle classes.

Factors that were responsible for the change in family size include extension of modern education, increasing affluence and spread of material attitudes, emancipation of women and wide spread contraceptive techniques (Barnes, 1985).

Urbanization also contributed to the changing structure of modern family. The character of the city with its anonymity, individualism and anomie provides very little chance for the growth of extended family structure. In addition, the separation of thousands of urban dwellers from their kin in the village serves to sever their links with the extended family. In essence, most people in the cities have lost touch with the extended family network (Parsons and Bales, 1955).

The greater mobility made possible by means of transportation also serves to accentuate the break-up of the larger family. Parsons (1959) however stressed the importance of high geographical and occupational mobility to the emergence of the nuclear family. Generally, the movement from the extended family to the nuclear is alleged to accompany the transition from a traditional subsistence economy to a western-oriented economy.

The disruption of the extended family structure created a number of problems to individuals, groups and the entire society. For instance, the escalating incidence of juvenile delinquency, crime, prostitutions and similar anti-social and immoral acts are results of break-down of the traditional hold of the family on the individual.

Like other units of the social structure, the family is also undergoing fundamental changes in its role and functions. First, the role of the family as the unit of economic production has drastically changed. In traditional societies, the home is also the base of economic activities. Again, in most cases the family decide for members the choice of occupational career. The stronghold which the traditional family wielded on members meant that compliance to family rules and norms was guaranteed. All these have changed. The family no longer plays the role of

economic determiner for its members. Also, it is no longer the self contained unit of economic organization. Rather, virtually every member of modern family is engaged in work outside home. However, it remains the basic consumption unit.

The social problem associated with the disruption of the extended family system is enormous. First the co-operative activities involved in the home production has shifted to the workplace. This has meant the transfer of loyalty from the head of the family to managers and other bureaucratic leaders. Again, people now spend the greater part of their lives at work thereby reducing the time spent at home with other members of the family leading to neglect of children and other dependent members.

The change in function of the family has also affected the moral and religious training the effect of which is detrimental to the social structure. These training are no longer the sole responsibility of the family. Rather, religious organizations, schools and other concerned groups now provide moral and religious instructions. Other interest groups also play significant role in the teaching of religious and moral values. More fundamental is that morality has been by a laissez-faire attitude on the part of government and the public. The result is the breakdown of the moral order in the society leading to immoral acts.

The economic and social roles of women in the family have also changed. The traditional role of the women was bid of a wife and a mother with sacred duty of serve the man.

The transition from pre-industrial to the modern (industrial) world has affected woman's role in family and in the entire society. First, it changed the character of domestic work so that women are no longer restricted to the kitchen or "home work". Increasingly more women are entering formal labour force (Malier and Rosser 1987-59).

The active participation of women in the labour force has some telling consequences on their health, the family and the entire society. For instance, many of these working women are exposed to unfavourable work environment which makes them prone to such occupational diseases as depression, anxiety and increased morbidity. More importantly, female workers face dilemma of split roles as working mothers who have to arrange for the care of their children during working hours and take on the role of mothers at home on return from work (Yusuf 1995:116). The nature of work has negative impact on women's family responsibilities. Specifically, child-caring role of women are adversely affected by their work role outside home. The situation is further made worse by the breakdown of the extended family system which in the past had been a source of assistance to mothers.

The domestic role of women has therefore changed especially in the cities where the traditional role of providing for the family no longer holds. Many women were equally forced to engage in economic activities outside home in order to supplement the family income which has suffered from economic recession and inflation.

Another important feature of the change is instability in marriage brought about essentially by rising incidence of divorce. Social workers have focused

increasingly on the problem of divorce and its effect on individuals, the family and the society.

Another major aspect of the family transition is the loss of psychological support which the extended family provides for its members. Such as traditional family structure guarantees for members adequate emotional and psychological protection. Grief's, sorrow, joy, achievement and well as failure were shared by personal problem. The decline in the importance of the traditional family has been associated with the growth of industrialization. The social changes occasioned by the industrial have gradually caused relatives to become separated from each other. To that extent, in modern societies the primacy group is much more significant to many people especially in the urban areas, in these tight settings, children may come into contact with grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins only on rare occasions and at times, not at all. Urbanization has therefore meant that the erstwhile social bond which existed among the extended group has weakened.

It must be stressed that the change experienced in the family institution has some positive impacts despite the enormous problems it has created. According to Heslin (1980), modern family with its nuclear structure promotes innovation and creativity among members, experience an improved standard of living for its members and ensures effective parenthood. In specific terms, he argues that good mothering was an invention of modernization. That in traditional society, parents viewed the development and responses of infants with indifference. The child-rearing practices consist of flogging, abandoning children for long period alone and lack of emotional at the child's death. On the other hand, modern society places the welfare of their small children above anything else.

The improvement in woman status equally has a number of implications first it has meant that women now have the same political, educational, occupational and property right as men. They are also free to decide for themselves whether to marry or not and enter into it on same terms with their husband.

The family in Future

In the previous discussion, it was shown that the family is in double everywhere in the world in which change has been massive and rapid. A great number of marriages have ended in divorce with damaging consequences on the children. The traditional functions of the family have been taken over by other agencies while the moral sentiment which in the past bound members together have been severed by the increasing spate of individualism and materialistic values of contemporary society. The glooming economic climate in many countries has meant that individuals could not fulfill their legitimate responsibilities as father, mothers and even as responsible children. In all, it seems that the social importance of the family relative to other significant social institution is increasingly declining. Again, though the family is still extolled, as supreme social and personal goal, it seems that it is no longer indispensable for a meaningful human existence. This is because modern men have placed more emphasis on science, politic and sports at the expense of the family.

This situation has posed serious challenges to the family institution especially as it concerns its relevance in contemporary and future societies, Suggestions for a viable family must therefore entail the realization of a setting in which children can be successfully reared to become capable and responsible adults and where marriage partners will have enduring relation.

Since it may not be feasible to suggest that people should revert to the past, for instance by forcing women back into the kitchen, we nevertheless need to ensure that relevant functions associated with the family in the past do not suffer so that basic human needs go unmet. In this regard, necessary measures need to be taken towards festering family stability, establishing new bonds between families and communities and on the whole restoring hope in the family so as to make living in the family a worthy effort.

In the immediate future, there is the need to support every legislation which aimed at providing adequate belt for the family so that members can live decently and safely and prepare children for a proper life. Such measures include:-

- Program for day care and after school care for children of working mothers and working parents. In addition are social support measures, like provision of breast-feeding breaks for working mothers and part-time work during extended child rearing period. Again is the need to grant working mother paid sick leave to take care of their sick -children as well as for their health care. Also guaranteed non-dismissal and right to return to the same and similar work with equivalent remuneration.
- Provision of facilities where in a crisis period, parents can safely leave their young children for short periods.
- Provision of Social Welfare Centres where the elderly can be cared for without being isolated from the rest of the society.
- National Health Insurance Scheme which will take care of the health needs of families.
- Family counseling clinic: This implies marriage guidance against family trouble through education and counseling during early period of life, since most families problems result from coming together of the wrong combination of people.

Conclusion

In this paper, the importance of the family institution in the lives of members of human society has been stressed. Further we highlighted on changes that have occurred in its structure and functions with emphasis on the social problems that result from the transition.

In essence, it was noted that the form of family has a determining influence on the outlook of individuals and the structure of the society. More important, that a society experiences changes in its stun hue and functions along the same pattern experienced in the family.

It therefore becomes imperative that one cannot ignore the potential implications of unrestrained non-challant attitude towards the family institution by

members of contemporary society. Again, it needs to be stressed that the shift in public concern away from the family as the central pre-occupation of individuals' life is detrimental to their wellbeing and that of the corporate survival of the society.

Finally, it is contented that the family should necessarily be regarded as a sacred institution the survival of which should be the responsibility of every member of contemporary society. More important, since problems related to the family and the larger society especially as it concerns education, nutrition, health care, child care, housing and poverty are closely interlocked; they must necessarily be solved through combine efforts since the concern cuts across the whole society.

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