

CHANGING FAMILY PATTERN IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

All societies have families, but their form varies greatly across time and space. Traditional African family patterns are slowly but progressively being transformed as a result of the process of modernization which is exhibited through trends like urbanization. Family patterns that were the norm in traditional rural African societies are gradually being changed and relieved by modern values. African family patterns are increasingly faced with the challenge and pressure between traditional and modern family values and structure. However, the most popular trend is that of the prevalence of family patterns that are increasing merging traditional and modern marriage norms or practices.

Keywords: *Family, Traditional Value, Modernity etc.*

I. INTRODUCTION

All societies have families, but their form varies greatly across time and space. The history of the family is thus one of changing family forms, which result from the interplay of shifting social and economic conditions, diverse and contested ideals, and the attempts of ordinary people to build their lives amid the constraints of their particular time and place.

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II. TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETIES

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 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. In traditional rural societies in most sub-Saharan societies, women were voiceless and powerless. 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 can be perceived from different facets, as an institution, a partnership, a lifecycle phase and as a role. Marriage is still quite important in African communities, the age at first marriage ranges between 17 to 22 years for women. The age at first marriage is experiencing slight delay 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.

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 renowned 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.

III. CHANGE IN FAMILY PATTERN IN AFRICA

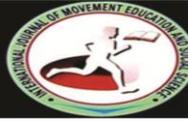
One of the major changes in the family system of Africa has been in the division of labour. Most traditional were complementary in nature. They were based on age and sex differences. A discussion of three aspects of change which have had impact on the family system is presented. These include industrialisation, urbanisation and formalisation of services.

HOUSEHOLD SIZE

African Household size is shrinking. Household size has decreased significantly in most parts of Africa. In the 1990s, the average household size in sub-Saharan Africa was about 5.3 with about 2.5 adults. This has decreased to less than 5 in most countries. During the last two decades. The changes are more pronounced in rural than urban areas. As the number of households in Africa is soaring, their size is dwindling.

FEMALE HEADSHIP

Female-headed households are emerging but with failing poverty. Nearly one in four households in Africa are headed by a woman. This figure is not the same in all countries. Countries in Southern Africa have substantially high rates but households in Western Africa are least likely to be headed by a woman. The general picture is of



an increase in the prevalence of FHHs for most countries. Declines are evidenced only for Ghana, Chad, Congo and Lesotho, although the change is small for the latter three. What is true in all other countries is that female headship is increasing. For instance, the proportion of female headed household in the last two decades has increased by 30% in Nigeria and Namibia. The same proportion has increased at least by 25% in urban areas of Kenya, Nigeria and Zambia. Even in rural Namibia, the percentage of female-headed household increased by about 56% between 1992 and 2013. This means that more and more women are shouldering responsibilities of household headship in Africa.

MARRIAGE

In urban areas, age at marriage was low and similar to that in rural areas in 1950 (17.6 years in urban and 17.3 years in rural areas). Thereafter, age at marriage increased more in urban than in rural areas. In urban areas, it increased especially after 1965, reaching 20.9 years in 2005; in rural areas, it increased especially after 1975, reaching 18.4 years in 2005. Since 1990, the increase in median age at first marriage among women 25-49 years was 1.7 years in Kenya and 1.4 years in Nigeria. The increase was higher in urban areas than rural areas (1.2 Vs. 1.7 in Kenya; and 0.3 Vs. 1.8 in Nigeria). There is a clear increasing trend of age at first marriage among women by educational status. As a result, nuptiality patterns in Africa have been marked by a general increase in the age of women at first marriage and a narrowing of the age difference between the sexes at first marriage.

The impact of acculturation stemming from the process of urbanization, culminated from the trend of the movement from rural to urban areas, has helped to shape marriage structure. There is the emergence of elements or practices from abroad which did not prevail before such as love, romance, and physical togetherness in most African societies that have helped in altering traditional conceptualization of marital relationship. Wilhemina Kalu (1981) upholds that there is increasingly competition prevailing between western conception of marriage and the traditional African conceptualization. There is mounting pursuit for change mostly amongst the younger generation. The practice of acculturation favours the adjustment to modern times. So, the marriage system is also changed in rural as well as urban area.

FERTILITY

As a result of changes in marriage patterns, women education and increased access to modern contraceptives, fertility rate in Africa has declined. Yes, it has declined but at a rate of 1 less child in a decade. During the last two decades, Kenya's TFR decreased from 6.7 to 3.9 (about 2.8 less children per woman) while Namibia's TFR decreased from 5.4 to 3.6 (about 1.8 less children). However, in Nigeria (the most populous country in Africa), TFR has decreased from 6.0 to 5.2 (only 0.8 less child per woman).

SINGLE-PARENT HOUSEHOLDS

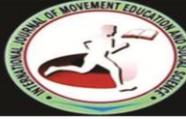
Single-parent households on increase – but these are not necessarily bad. About 15% of children live in single parent households worldwide, and women head approximately 85% of these households. Across the industrialized world, about 16% of children live in single-parent households.



There is limited data about the magnitude of single-parent household in Africa. However, in some countries, like South Africa, single parent household is becoming a norm. Only a third of children are growing up living with both of their parents. About 48% of children are growing up with absent but living fathers. Single parenthood—motherhood, mostly—has been on the rise around the continent. Single mothers tend to be economically disadvantaged and single motherhood is strongly associated with greater poverty. Moreover, while single mothers are it can be hard for them to find reliable childcare. But even more counter-intuitively, living with one parent may not necessarily a negative experience, and children may actually benefit from living with a single mother, compared to having both parents. This is because mothers who have more decision-making power and more control over resources in 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 (Kalu 1981:2). 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 infer 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 household to small ones. Reference the family as single mothers typically do have more freedom to invest in their children's educational outcome

IV. CONCLUSION

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. 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 infer from the information provided in this paper that practices that depicted rural 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 household to small ones. These questions point to how intertwined and reinforcing social changes have created new opportunities, but also new insecurities, dilemmas, and controversies. Twenty-first century citizens face family options that their parents and grandparents could barely imagine; the future of family life will depend on how individual and collective actors respond to the inconsistencies and contradictions of change.



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