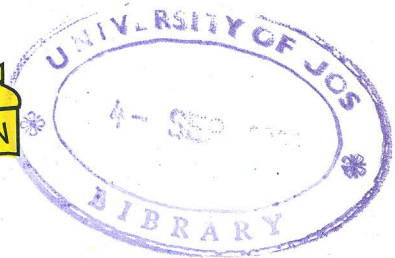
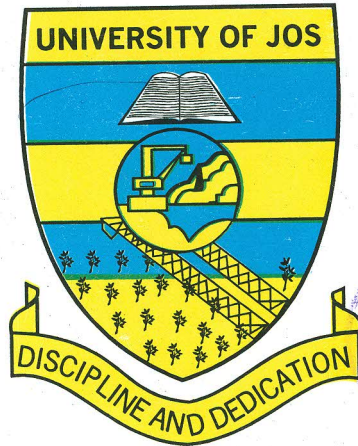


# UNIVERSITY OF JOS



## **THE NIGERIAN FAMILY IN HEALTH AND ILLNESS: ISSUES OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **INAUGURAL LECTURE**

**Delivered at the University of Jos  
On Thursday November 25th 2004.**

*By*

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**UNI JOS INAUGURAL LECTURE SERIES 17**

THE NIGERIAN FAMILY IN HEALTH & ILLNESS

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## **PROTOCOL**

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# THE NIGERIAN FAMILY IN HEALTH & ILLNESS: ISSUES OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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## PROTOCOL

The Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic and Administration), Principal Officers of the university, Deans of Faculties, Professors of various disciplines, Heads of Departments, members of the university community, distinguished visitors and friends of the university, great Josites, ladies and gentle men, I regard this occasion as one of great honor and privilege to be called upon to take up my seat among eminent scholars of inaugural lecture tradition of this university.

The Vice Chancellor, Sir, when I was invited to present the 17<sup>th</sup>. In the series of inaugural lecture of this great university, I did not hesitate to choose this theme: the family in Nigeria. My choice is informed by a number of considerations, top among which is that the topic gives me the opportunity to share my thoughts, research and clinical experiences on family issues with the audience. As products of the family, the theme is most likely to appeal to a larger audience as a public lecture. Another consideration is that family issues are central to many academic and

professional disciplines namely sociology, psychology, medicine, psychiatry, law, anthropology, history and education among others. The theme would obviously force me to reduce the usual jargons with which psychologists often express themselves or in other words bamboozle others. Finally, it is my consideration that the problems of the family in Nigeria rank top most perhaps second to crime and insecurity as critical social problems on the wheel of the country's national development. Our agenda in this journey is to examine the diversities in conceptual and contextual meanings, role, impact and the challenges of the family in health and illness in Nigeria. For a better appreciation, the text is divided into two parts: the socio-psychological and anthropological outlines of the family and the psychological orientations to family system maintenance and impact on human life and development.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Right from the dawn of creation, the family has remained the foundation of human life, and the cradle of human development. It has therefore continued to provide the environment for the attainment of lasting life experiences. As human organisms, we spend our total life in the family. One wonders whether the human specie could have survived without the continuing legacies of the family. This explains why the family remains the most significant and enduring human group, providing enduring social and

emotional relationships and security supports to its members. Indeed what we do in life, is to build on what the family thought us years past. For psychologists, the understanding of what happens in the family helps to buttress knowledge and understanding of human development in health and illness, (Cook and Goldstein, 1983; Belsky, 1984) Hartup, 1989; Cole and McPharson 1993; Fauber, and Long, 1991; Rutter, 1994, Brefoubrenner 1986).

Today, various stakeholders (parents, teachers, social scientists, policy makers, governments and members of the civil society) focus on the family as an important institution for the development of the individual, society and the nation at large. In all respects, the role of the family cannot be equated or substituted with that of any other human institution in advancing the course of humanity. It is also recognized that the nature of today's family predicts the nature of society tomorrow. It was in recognition of these challenges of the family in human development, and the need to gain greater understanding of family dynamics, its fortunes and predicaments in society that the American Psychological Association (APA) in its 1987 Annual General Meeting (AGM) created the Division of Family Psychology (Division 42). This was subsequently followed few years later with the founding of an academic journal: the Journal of Family Psychology to encourage the study of family systems and its impact on human health and development (Kaslaw, 1991). It must be noted that

psychology has not been alone in being sensitive to the problems and challenges of the family in society. Other disciplines have made their advances in the study and understanding of the role of the family in human development. It was under the same recognition, that the United Nations declared 1994 the International Year of the Family, calling the attention of the international community to focus on the role of the family in the maintenance of physical, mental and social health for its members. The American Congress had earlier called for a blueprint on family policy, which would recognize, accommodate and accept the realities and challenges of the contemporary problems of the family in the country's social policy developments (Schroeder, 1989). Unfortunately in most African countries, the issues of the family are hardly ever addressed by any meaningful social policies, yet the challenges are there. The fact remains that at present, there is little empirical work on the impact of the family in health and human development in most African countries compared with the huge literature from Europe and North America in particular.

### **Conceptions of the Family**

The general definition of the family is that it is a group of persons who are united and or related by blood, marriage, kinship, ancestry, love, common values and partnership. It represents the smallest and basic institution of the social structure that performs an aggregation of functions primary

among which is procreation. The family has a wide range of meanings and is seen in different lights by different professional affiliations involved in family issues. First to the sociologist: the family is the foundation of society and social structure and the major agent of socialization. It is through its socialization function that the family prepares the new generation of society to assume adult roles and responsibilities. The family is also an embodiment of the culture, attitudes, stereotypes and the mythology of the people. To the medical profession: the family, in the view of Dr Tomris Turmen former Director of the Division of Family Health of WHO Geneva, is the heart of health and human development (Turmen, 1993). It is the nurse, the nutritionist and the first “doctor”, continually taking care of its members in health and illness. In many respects, the diagnosis of certain medical conditions of a person is approached through the understanding of the person’s family history. To the educationist: the family is the first and perhaps the best teacher, teaching the child the ABC of life. The first language lessons and the first words of the language are taught by the family. To the legal profession: the family is the source of our inheritance. Through the development of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1970, and other statutes, legitimacy is brought to bear on marriage, family relations and inheritance in Nigeria (Nwogugu, 1996; Sagay, 1999). Under the marriage act, the law recognizes different marriages: traditional, Christian and Islamic. The provisions of the act are meant to protect partners in

marriage especially in cases of divorce, separation, widowhood inheritance and under-age marriage.

To the psychologist: the family is the corner stone of our social and emotional life, the source of our self-concept development, self realization or self identity and above all, the source of our social, emotional and material supports throughout life time. Nobody can do for the individual what the family does for him or her particularly in moments of grave personal and social circumstances even at death. To me as a psychologist, the family is a shield that shields its members from external harm and danger. This is illustrated in Fig 1. This conceptualization implies that if the family shield is strong enough, it provides strong protection as the boundaries of our life. On the other hand, if the family shield is weak, it provides weak support and protection. Thus the casualties of weak family shield are represented by all kinds of misfits in society: hooligans, miscreants, "area boys", criminals etc. In another context, the family can be likened to tea filter we use every day in our homes to sieve or filter tea. If the filter is tiny or small eye-holed, it filters sparkling tea which we enjoy drinking. On the other hand, if the tea filter is large eye-holed, it filters in dirt which prevents us enjoying the tea. A third analogy is that the family is a social contractor for society. The contract work is to build the child to assume adult roles and responsibilities in



society. We can predict the quality of the products of the family if we understand how the family fared with the contract work or the nature of family shields. It is when the family fails in its duties to its offspring through neglect, abuse, abandonment, insensitivity, disintegration etc that the family mortgages its primary duties and responsibilities to society.

Finally to every body here, what is family to us? Ideally, it is home, a secure and safe place to relax, take care of each other and protect each other from external hostility and where members are each other's guard and protector. Based on the above contextual meanings, the family can be illustrated by the story of the six blind men who went to see the elephant. The first touched the leg and felt the elephant is like a tree. The one who touched the body felt it is like a wall. The one who touched the ear felt the elephant is like a fan etc. The lesson here is that even though they did not comprehensively describe the elephant in terms of its complete picture, each was correct in his area of perception of the elephant and so all professions are right in their own conceptions of what the family is.

### **Traditional Functions of the Family**

The basic responsibilities or functions of the family are universal and cut across all human societies. The functions are biological, social and psychological. The biological functions relate to those of procreation while the social and psychological functions deal with the development of

human behavior patterns. The difference between and among families lie in the quality of social functions discharged to its members. These basic functions of the family can be outlined as follows:

- ◆Reproduction and perpetration of the human species.
- ◆Child rearing responsibility as the key agent of socialization and initial training centre where offspring are apprenticed for life skills and the art of living in society, particularly in moral, religious and spiritual life, political and citizenship education, social/communal living skills and above all the sense of responsibility and respect for others.
- ◆Shared social and emotional relationships where affection and co-operation are cultivated for the sustenance of life and well-being of members
- ◆ Provision of emotional security, safety and social supports for its members
- ◆Promotion, protection and health care for members.

### **Family Types in Contemporary Society**

There are many types of families. They vary in form, structure and dynamics. There are however striking similarities among traditional African families in Africa particularly in their structural features. To many African societies including Nigeria, the family is represented by two dominant

systems. These are the traditional and the modern family systems. The traditional African family system is supposedly an extension of the culture and tradition of the people particularly the kinship, sex role, socialization processes and communal child rearing practices Uka, (1966). The traditional family system is further represented by three family types.

- ◆ the monogamous or the nuclear family of western value orientation, where membership of the family constitutes the biological parents and the children. The practice of monogamy which is found largely among the Nigeria elite exists because of two major factors. First is the economic consideration, which in many cases compels the modern Nigerian elite to limit himself to one wife and so limit the family size for pure social and economic reasons. The second is the spread of Christian religious faith that preaches one man one wife as a religious obligation for adherents in accordance with Christian injunctions on marriage.

- ◆ the polygamous family allows for as many wives and as many children as possible that the man can afford. Under subsistence and agrarian, traditional African social settings, wealth, social and economic affluence are measured by the number of wives and children a man has. The number of wives and children also means the number of helping hands in the farm. This seems to justify the existence of polygamy among some rural and farming communities in Nigeria, though the realities of social change being enhanced by education and pursuit of middle class values

seem to be challenging polygamy in the country. Polygamous practice family system in Nigerian, includes the typical Muslim family set-up, where-by a Muslim man is allowed to marry up to four wives and raise as many children as possible with all living together in one homestead..

◆the extended family can be regarded as an extension of the polygamous family type. Even though it seems to be collapsing under the pressure of social change, it remains a persisting family structure in many traditional societies in Africa (Delano, 1976), Asia (Chu, 1974), Latin America and black American communities (Dressler, 1985). The extended family is thus a vital and surviving way of life comprising families and relatives of immediate and distant blood relationships who may live together under one large family headship or in large communes and clans. In relating her family life experiences, Han Suyin, one of the world famous authors, observed that the extended family feature is one where distrust and fear have no part and there is no need for protection (Suyin, 1993). This in effect means that everybody is each other's protection conveying a deep sense of security and solidarity among members. The older generation of Nigerians who are products of the extended family would obviously appreciate the social and economic benefits of the extended family in the country.

Anthropological literature contains what may today be considered aberrations in the extended family structure. These include:

- levirate marriage where a man marries the widow of his late brother and raises children in the name of the late brother,
- inheritance marriage whereby a male kinsman such as the son of the deceased, an immediate brother or relative marries the wife of his father's or brother's widow and becomes her legal husband and the children belong to him. As the name indicates, this practice aims at protecting the family blood as well as not allowing the wealth of the family to pass to unwanted hands,
- ghost marriage where the younger brother of a dead bachelor is expected to marry and raise children in the name of the deceased brother. In effect, the woman is socially married to a dead person whom she probably never saw and the children belong to the man they never knew,
- sororate marriage where a man marries the sister of his late wife. The arrangement is perhaps that the children of the late wife and those of the new one share blood relationship and such there would be reductions of rancor and conflict. Because the nature of this discussion does not allow deep incursions into the anthropology of marriage and the family in Nigeria, suffice is to note that the presentation of these later forms of marriage is simply to buttress knowledge of the challenges in the composition of the typical family in Nigeria and which makes family relations more complex.

What is regarded as the modern family is indeed not a structural classification as in the case of polygamy. Rather it is a feature of family composition brought about by divorce, separation, re-marriage and adoption. Divorced couples may decide to remarry bring together children from previous marriages and rear them together as **blended family**. Thus the composition of the new family is blend of children of different biological parents. In another context, the increasing child adoption rate has meant bringing together children of different biological parentage and rearing them together as a family unit united by affection and the development of strong social and emotional relationships that may match any other family form in terms of the traditional functions of the family . A third type of the modern family is the **single parent family**. As its name implies, it is a family of one parent usually the mother and the children. Traditionally, the single parent family was known and acknowledged in many Nigerian societies by widowhood especially where the widow or widower decides not to remarry. ~~Today~~ a combination of factors **has** led to increases in the number and popularity of single parent family often headed by the mother. The first consideration is of women who remain unmarried but wish to have children of their own. Mack-Canty and Wright (2004) refer to such women as third-wave feminism adherents or women associated with the values of feminism. Such women may decide to have children but without a legal husband, marital ties and obligations attached. Teenage

pregnancy is another factor that has implication for the single parent family in many modern societies. This development explains the current controversies over abortion laws in the US and other western countries. Perhaps the psychological imperatives of the single parent family often headed by the mother is that the mother is alone with the difficulties and challenges of raising children especially during adolescence. Further more there is the danger posed by the absence of father figure as a role model and object of masculine identification.

### **Family Impact Studies**

In the 1950's family impact studies were dominated by the ethnographic research focusing on the role of child rearing practices and using socio-economic and cultural indices as structural variables and units of comparisons (Havighurst and Davis 1955). In Nigeria, the studies by Levine (1962) and Uka (1966) represent classic examples of ethnographic oriented studies of family impact. With the impact of modernization leading to changes in family structure and form, new challenges were created demanding shift of focus from child rearing practice to family dynamics. Because of the huge literature on family impact studies particularly draw from American and European studies, only the summary of major conclusions of research will be highlighted as follows:

- Generally, people tend to recreate their family dynamics in their daily lives and relationships with other people (Business Week, 2004), hence the popular adage “like father, like son”. Put in psychological perspective, the dysfunctional behaviors of the individual are traceable to family pasts .
- Divorce and separation have serious social, psychological and emotional health consequences on the development of the child. It can however be mediated by the understanding of the parents if they maintain continuing supportive relationship with the children (Burchinal, 1964; Garong and Coleman, 1968; Barrine, Hundal, Brown and Searight, 1991; Pruett, 2003)
- Single-parent families and families with biological mother and non-biological father tend to have low quality care giving environment than father-mother families. Single mother families with working mothers are at greater risk of poor care-giving. This undoubtedly affects the child’s overall behavior outcomes, (Landis, 1960; Thomas, 1968, Berger, 2004)
- Family poverty and destitution lead to greater risks of child maltreatment and abandonment. Family poverty increases risk and susceptibility to medical and other health problems as the family cannot afford quality health care for children (Wood, 2003).
- Affluent parents are more likely to provide offspring with money and material support, but these seem to have the opposite effects on children. In a study of university graduates of affluent families in the US, evidence



shows that only 20% of sample phoned parents regularly while 50% are less likely to pay them visits (Meesters and Muris, 2004).

- Billings and Moos, (1982) found evidence in support of family environment structural variable as accounting for much of the behavior of offspring. Using similar Moos adapted Family Environment Scale, a similar pattern of result was found among Nigerian adolescents (Nweze 1992,) Family environment belongs to two broad categories.
- On adoption, the research interest is largely on the quality of emotional attachment. In a study of 124 adopted families in America, Sharon (?) observed that the quality of emotional attachment varied among other factors on length of institutionalization before adoption, the characteristics of adopted children and the parents. Adopted children who felt less secure had more atypical behavior problems such as hypersensitivity, more developmental delays, the parents experiencing more parenting stress than children with high sense of security
- The transition from childhood to adolescent is a critical period marked by crisis and conflicts. Evidence shows that the child's relationship with parents changes with age, assuming greater complexity as the child approaches adolescence as a result of perception of parental authority and control. Authorities in the field thus argue that greater risks of disruptive behaviors during adolescence occur unless parents approach the issue with constructive parent/child influences (Zigler, Taussing and

Black, 1992, Davis and Leitenberg, 1987). In his own view Oputa (1975:23), argue that “no child enters the family as a social being. It is the family that moulds him to become what he is”.

The conclusions of research findings on family impact studies are that the family is very significant in determining the behavior of offspring in the areas of achievement orientation, self-esteem, personal controls and assumption of adult roles and responsibilities. The dynamic factors in the family, family communication, parental social and emotional supports and maintenance of conducive social and psychological climate play significant roles.

### **The Nigerian Family and its Features**

Since the past three decades, the rate of socio-cultural and technological changes has been astronomical particularly among developing countries. The changes have affected nearly all aspects of family composition: structure, form, social and sex role functions, kinship ties and obligations in Nigeria. Despite the changes, it may not be however easy to describe the Nigerian family as purely modern. This is because of the resilience of the traditional family values and kinship solidarity of extended family model. Further more, as observed by Delamo, (1976) and Mobagunje (1976), in their studies of Yoruba family system, the family remains the home and root of the culture, tradition and social life of the people. This is also true of other groups in Nigeria. Okediji (1975), has observed that

among rural communities in Nigeria, the extended family predominates. Thus, the extended kinship made up of large family groupings, has social, political and economic significance whether polygamous or monogamous. Thus, the wealth and affluence of patriarchal head of the family are usually measured in terms of number of children, wives and grand children who would immortalize his name when he dies. Because of the implicit economic value of the extended family in Nigeria, the wealth and affluence of the household is counted by the number of hands in the farm or the plantations for agricultural production.

Another important significance of the extended family is that it provides ancestral links between generations of kins both living and dead. It also forms the basis of the unity and solidarity among members. In his analysis of the social and psychological significance of the extended family among the Yorubas of Nigeria, Okediji [1975] views the extended family as having two important psychological features. First, it provides a sense of belonging and social and emotional security for its members. Second, it confers on members a sense of collective responsibility, commitment and obligation for the care of one another in the family. This is the basis of the social support which has in the past provided protection and harmony among members and which get translated in the collective or communal care and socialization system which, Esan [1973] called the "care syndrome" of the African traditional family system. The care

syndrome according to Esan is a grouping of collective responses to the care and welfare of children implied in the moulding of good behavior and respect for seniority and authority, compliance to social rules, ethics and norms of the society.

Yet another feature of the extended family in Nigeria is that it provides for division of responsibility as far as child care is concerned. While the woman dominates in child care and upbringing, the man takes little responsibility especially at the early stages of the child development. In a workshop on child rearing practices and their associated beliefs in Sub-Saharan Africa, the role of the father came under focus,

Akinware and Ojomo [1993], observed that fathers in the extended family set-up, got minimally involved in the socialization of the child especially in the early years. In contrast, the urban family, the fathers got more involved since there were fewer extended kin members available to help provide the care.

Because space does not permit extensive elaboration of the traditional features of the extended family in Nigeria, suffice it to maintain that the erosion of its cultural significance has brought with it a lot of social and behavioral problems especially among the new generations of the Nigerian society. This has meant the destruction of the distinctive features of African epistemology which emphasizes that no one person owns the

child, where every member of the family or community is a guardian, adviser as well as pupil of one another depending on their generational differences. In the real nativity contexts, the root of African child's identity is affected by the changes in the African/Nigerian family.

The urban family in Nigeria though retaining some extended kinship relationship values, has largely succumbed to the pressures of modernity. The realities of the impact of western education and economic forces of work life have collectively affected family size. Family size has meant greater emphasis on monogamy or reduction in the number of children the family can cope with. The pursuit of Western Education by women has delayed their marriage and helped to reduce the fertility rates. With more and more women taking to professional careers and paid employment outside the home, the direct consequence is enormous in family life. The situation whereby most husbands and wives take up paid employment and become career men and women, many Nigerian mothers and fathers are becoming absentee parents as they are being forced by the demands of their jobs and professions to spend less time at home with the children. It has been earlier pointed that parental absenteeism is giving rise to the growing wave of adolescent maladaptive and delinquent behaviors in many urban Nigeria families (Nweze 1995, 1996).

The conflicts being generated by the clash between modern and traditional family values have given rise to family crises that lead to

increase in divorce and separation among urban couples. The phenomena of divorce and separation have in themselves led to the creation of new family forms earlier unpopular in many Nigerian communities. Single parent family system give rise to increases step parents and step children. The new family forms seem to be generating more family conflicts and coalitions and affect the emotional and social well-being of the children.

Another feature of the modern urban family in Nigeria is that because urban residence implies settlement of families of differing social, ethnic and traditional culture, there is an apparent breakdown or loosening of the link between the family in the urban community and the kin in the rural areas. This implies in many instances a severing of the source of traditional social and economic support to the urban family which come readily to the family in distress in the rural setting where the extended kinship system predominates. This can explain the seemingly greater stressful and conflict experiences of urban family life in Nigeria.

The question has severally been addressed in many seminars and workshops on youth and adolescent crime in Nigeria as to how the changes in the structure and form of the modern family in Nigeria have affected children and adolescent socialization and consequent behaviors. The questions are raised in the light of current experiences of the phenomena of street and 'area boys ' in Nigeria. The 'area boys' concept

in Nigeria depicts a large number of homeless teenagers and youths who live on the streets of major cities in Nigeria threatening the security of life and property wherever they drift to. Many of them are school dropouts, drug and alcohol abusers and whose infestations of the social and economic environment spell social malady yet they are children of homes and families in Nigeria. The empirical question is: what type of families do these children come from? What aspects of their families do their behaviors constitute reactions to? Given the paucity of data in this area, the question can only be addressed and answered by empirical work such as the present study seeks to pursue.

This study is therefore a survey of the family profiles of adolescents in the secondary schools some of whom exhibit varying degrees of delinquent and uncompromising behaviors at school. The theoretical assumption is that the behavior of such adolescents can only be understood in the context of their family types and environments. Being part of an ongoing study whose objectives are comparative analysis of adolescents in a remand house and those in normal classroom, the data for this analysis is simply based on the result of survey carried out in five secondary schools in Jos metropolis.

## **Challenges to Family Development**

The family in Nigeria faces tremendous challenges on its attempts to realize the ideals of family development and obligations to its members and society. As has been noted in earlier paragraphs, the challenges are induced by rapid societal socio-economic, political and technological transformations. Traditional social theory holds that social change and modernization in one hand lead to improvements in the fortunes and lives of people (Bohmer, 1980). On the other hand, social change has some deleterious effects especially when the impact of change induces severe stresses and strains that become difficult to manage or make immediate adjustments and adaptation. This is true of the impact of change on the modern family in many countries of Africa. Notable among the immediate challenges of the impact of change facing the Nigerian family today are increases in marital problems, family conflicts and violence, decay in traditional family values, increasing austere economic conditions etc. All these directly impact on the quality of parental care and overall material and social wellbeing of members of the family. We now consider some of the major factors

### ***Family Poverty and Destitution***

It is difficult to arrive at a reliable index of family poverty in Nigeria ie what percentage of the national population live below what may be considered poverty line in the country, how many children are really destitute by family



circumstances and therefore in need of help This is largely because of poor demographic data base in the country. Despite this, it is estimated that well over 60% of Nigerian families live below the national minimum wage, particularly among rural Nigeria. According experts in the field, family poverty is defined in economic terms depicting a state of affairs that does not allow for the provision of basic family and child's needs especially in the areas of adequate nutrition and food security, clothing and health care (Wood, 2003). Psychologically, it can be looked upon as a condition of misery, helplessness and perhaps hopelessness brought about by parents feeling unable to discharge their obligatory roles to the young ones in particular. One can only appreciate the realities and significance of family poverty in Nigeria by appreciating the number of destitute children on our roads, streets, motor parks and inner city slum areas where environmental deprivation even helps to create and sustain the vicious culture of poverty.

In a recent study of the role of the family in sustainable human development in Nigeria (Nweze, 2004), evidence shows among other things that family poverty correlates highly with a number of development issues. These include that:

- poverty in many cases predicts and places limits to the educational attainment of children. In the same vein the educational level of parents is also low. This implies that children of poor and destitute families are more

likely to go into the vicious circle of poor educational standard unless there is meaningful intervention

- poverty directly affects the living standards of the family including type of home stead and location of house. Poor families are more likely to live in shanty, high density housing areas of the urban city.
- poverty has both explicit and implicit impact on family health placing limitations of accessibility to medical and health services
- nearly all the street children ( street hawkers, beggars and motor park touts) surveyed in the study being reported came from poor family backgrounds.

Beyond the findings of the present study, there are strong indications that the victims of female trafficking in Nigeria and the increasing number of “area boys” on major Nigerian cities are fallouts of poverty stricken families. In the United States of America, recent studies on the relationship between family background and uncompromising children and juvenile behaviors show that the culture of poverty is exacerbated by deprived physical, social, economic and psychological family environments that also promote failing in school, dropping out of school, joining gangs, drug world and violence ( Corcoran and Chaudry, 1997; Wood, 2003). The studies also showed that poor parents are more likely to abuse their children.

### ***The Changing Role of Women***

In global perspectives, the status, rights and opportunities for women have changed enormously. This can be considered part of the gains of feminist and gender equality movements in the last two and half decades. To a very large extent, Nigerian woman of today, no more feel constrained or limited in access to education, basic human rights, employment, family rights and inheritance and other areas that they were in the past oppressed, denied and subjugated. The Nigerian women have tremendously gained in ascendance to leadership positions in industry, commerce, education, the civil service, religion, politics and the professions. Thus, the development and realization of the potentials of womanhood enjoys greater opportunities in the country today than ever before. This is not however a green card indicative that all aspects of women rights avocation has been satisfied, rather a substantial achievement has been recorded.

Like in every aspect of life, whatever that is good has its negative consequences. Developments in the circumstances of women generally pose serious social and psychological challenges to family life experiences, personally to mothers of babies and young children who have to combine their roles of motherhood, family/child care with paid employment and interest in professions. It is argued that because of new demands and changes in role functions, that working women need some

“extra” or “borrowed” 50% time in order to be capable of effectively accomplishing the duties and responsibilities thrust on them by the new roles (Scarr, Philips and McCarthy, 1989; Matthew and Rodin, 1989). Even without the new roles, globally women are known to work longer hours than even working men as they go extra time at home when others are relaxing attending to family chores. Indeed, since the 1980's, the challenges posed by increases in the dual or triple roles of women in contemporary society have been the theme of intensive research, policy development and program intervention (Hoffman, 1989; Starr, Philips and McCarthy, 1989; Anderson-Kulman and Paludi, 1989; Barglow, Vaugin and Molitor, 1987). In pursuit of this challenge and in order to create awareness and disseminate information about the impact of changing role of women on the Nigerian family, Women in Nigeria (WIN) organized its 1983 national conference on the theme: Women and the Family in Nigeria, which is also the title of the book of readings of the conference (Imam. Pittin and Omole, 1989). Contributors to the conference deal with a wide range of issues relating to women health and social well-being in the family.

The impact of changes in the new roles of women relating to combining child -care, home keeping and devotion to paid employment and attainment of professional standards can be listed as including:

- those affecting quality of parental care and house keeping duties.

- increased family stress
- increased health risks of mother to cardiovascular and other related illnesses that have their roots in emotional stress experiences.
- risk of Increasing family conflicts

### ***Difficulties of Child Upbringing: Absentee Parenthood***

Many Nigerian parents are facing difficulties of child care largely because of their commitments outside the home. The increasing erosion of the extended family values entrenched in collective and communal responsibility for the child has invariably deprived young families the helping hands of grand parents, aunties, nieces, and relations etc who traditionally took active part in providing care for the young in the family. Their positions are rather being taken over by nannies, maids and other forms of house helps. Unfortunately the qualities of child care under these hands seem to bring in many cases sorrows and disappointments to families. Relating her experiences, a young mother revealed how she wept on coming back from work to see her 3 year old child abandoned by the nanny. The most critical issue that has come to affect the Nigerian family is the increasing quality of child care. Child care is considered as consisting of the actions necessary to promote growth, survival and development. Thus, caring for the child, means responding to the basic needs. The basic needs of development go beyond mere protection, provision of food and medical care. It revolves more importantly on need



for affection, interaction and stimulation, security, constant and continuing emotional support. According to Myers (1991), these constitute the embodiment of parenting which may be difficult to be accomplished by substitute or surrogate mothers.

A second challenge to family child care beyond the absence of mother at substantial hours of the day is that of the absence of the father. Parent-absent family has been precipitated by problems of children of divorced parents, children of hospitalized psychiatric patients and children orphaned by death of parents ( see, Rosenfield and Resenstien, ( 1973). These children are often raised in difficult social and emotional circumstances that leave severe effects on their psyche and overall adaptation.

In Nigeria, the elite parents in particular have added to the problem of absentee parenting beyond what the circumstances of death of parents, divorce and separation cause. By virtue of life style, pursuit of material things and undue devotion to professional calling, they tend to neglect or deemphasize primary family obligations. They are not home much of the waking hours of children at home especially when the children are young to smell their bodies and enjoy the warmth of physical touch with parents. They are not there to help the child resolve the many conflicts with siblings and peers. They are not there to offer security and protection etc. Many think that lavishing money and other material supports are close

substitutes for warm physical, social and emotional relationships that can only be established with physical presence.

### **Family Systems Maintenance and Impact**

How the family maintains itself in order to perform its social responsibilities is of key interest to the understanding of its role in human development, health and social well-being of individuals in society. Family system maintenance implies the ability of the family as a social system to maintain itself from the predicament of disintegration. This is with the understanding that to effectively perform and discharge its primary functions and obligations to its members and society at large, the family must be together. This represents the most difficult and challenging aspect of family development anywhere. Thus, as the foundation of society, the first primary group and one closest to the individual, the key responsibility of the family is nurturance and care, apprenticing its young ones to undertake societal responsibilities. In this respect, the key difference between the human family and that of the animal kingdom is indexed by the long period of gestation needed to ensure that offspring are sufficiently equipped and apprenticed before being discharged to appropriately take their positions in society. In order, therefore, to accomplish the tasks of apprenticeship, the family must first maintain itself i.e. must maintain some measure of stability, cohesion, unity of purpose, love, understanding, emotional and material support and above all pursuit of family values and

objectives. One can assert that a broken family or one torn by constant chronic misunderstanding and difficult to manage crises and conflicts represents a unit that cannot hold together and as such unable to discharge the obligations entrusted to the family.

The mechanisms for the achievement of family system maintenance and those of discharging the social responsibilities to its members and society are intricate involving qualitative human relations in the family setting.

### **Family Relations**

Family relation is an omnibus concept that includes the dynamic forces, the family structure, the environment and the process factors in the various relationship models in the family. Family relation actually centers essentially on family communication between and among family members: parent-child communication and mother-father communication. It is through communication and the subsequent relations that family values ( Economist, 2004) emotional support and solidarity and family sentiments are transmitted for the identity of members.

The current understanding of the role of family relation from a psychological preservative is that:

- family structure: nuclear, single- parent, extended, blended, small versus large and family with only child, determine to a large extent the nature of family relation and its impact on members ( Billings and Moor,1982).



- internal family characteristics other wise dynamic factors identified by heightened tension and conflict, perceived overly parental control, and coalition, hierarchical power and authority exercise, physical abuse, neglect, discriminatory relationship, insufficient parental concern to the welfare needs of the child etc impact negatively on the offspring and affect quality of family relations.

- family relations impact on the emotional, health and social, wellbeing of members either positively or negatively

- more specifically, dysfunctional behaviors such as revolt against authority, aggressive response at the slightest provocation, substance abuse and dependency behaviors are linked to the early experiences of authoritarian and overindulgence relationships in the family particularly with children and adolescents. Jerry Dodwell a marriage and family therapist from Upland California, noted in a recent public debate on parental control noted that the number of adolescents ages 12 to17 admitted to substance-abuse centre in the municipality increased by 65% between 1992 and 2002. This, he attributed to development of faulty family relationships (American Newsweek, 2004).

The position of psychologists is that no child is born “bad”. Rather it is the environment of parental relationship that creates problems for children. Permit me to share with you clinical cases I have been involved with.

**Case 1** John K. ( not real name), was a 17 year old boy who habitually stays away from home even at late hours. There had been series of quarrel between him and parents sometimes getting really hot. Parents had disagreed over inviting help perhaps from a psychologist. Eventually I was called in to help. I took the boy out for a walk and engaged him in a serious clinical interviewing. The boy had the following expression: I wonder whether that man is my father. I rarely have any discussions with me. His habit is to walk in eat and over his business----- . There is no television in our house whereas the family can afford one. I go out to watch films in the neighbor's house. That is why I come in late.

## **Case 2**

Mrs. Adamu (not real name) was a 26-year-old housewife. She has been married to a man much older than her. The husband has two other older wives. Her parents pushed her into the marriage. Even though she has two children by the marriage, she has never been happy. She seemed locked in the cycle of depression in an effort to adjust to the marriage. She started having problems of pains all over her body, constant headaches, inability to sleep well and loss of interest in sex with the husband. "I have been to some doctors but none seems to help me", she complained. The client showed a high level of preoccupation with body sensations similar to what has been referred to under the DSM-IV and ICD-10 as hypochondriasis, (Kaplan and Sadock 1997, pg. 163)

## **The Family and National Development**

Through out this discussion, the point has been made that the family is the foundation, structure and miniature of society. It is an “organ” system like society itself identified with functional parts which work together to bring unity and harmony within the organ system. This analogy implies that any functional part that does not work well renders the system ineffective. It also implies that the health of the family portends the health of the nation. The increasing levels of family poverty and destitution, growing number of street children and area boys, rising youth crimes and restive youth revolts in the country, are evidence that not only the psych of the nation but also the health of the nation is at stake. Implicitly, it is the unfortunate victim of the adverse family circumstances in Nigeria that get carved out as destitutes, street children, school drop-outs and area boys. The imperatives of these phenomena are clear and obvious in any analysis of the challenges of national development.

### **Conclusion**

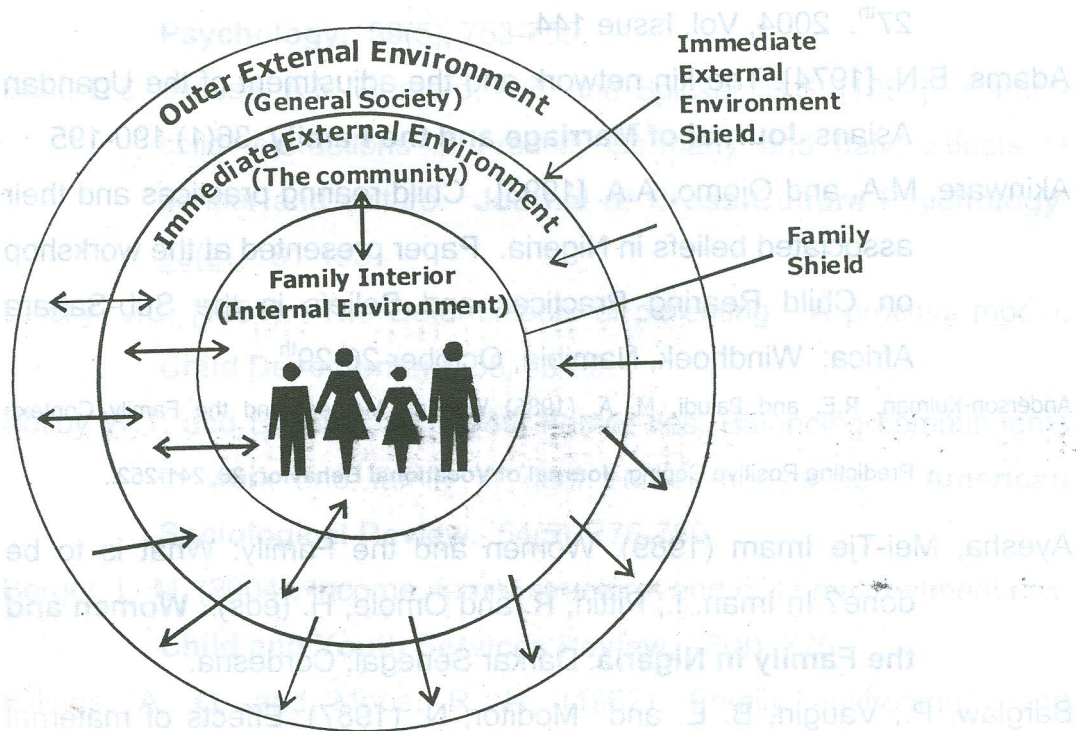
The discussion has taken us to various conceptions of the family starting with the anthropological/sociological definition of the family as the basic unit or structure of society to the psychological view that looks at the family as the foundation, security shield and source of human health and social well-being. The dynamic forces that operate in the family act collectively to influence and shape the behavior of offspring including the



health and social well-being of other members, In effect the structural characteristics of the family provide explanations of how differences in the way the members respond to family relationships and adjustment.

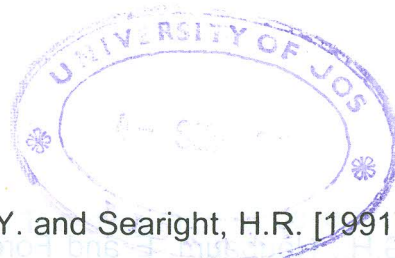
Modernization is one major factor that has been responsible for a lot of structural changes in family composition and dynamics. It has led to the emergence of new forms of family. The changes in family structure in contemporary society call for more process/ empirical research to determine the relationships between and among family forces and human development. In the face of socio-cultural, political and economic changes, the Nigerian family has been at the receiving end of the adversities of these transformations in society. The various social problems trailing national development particularly the restiveness of youths, juvenile crime, increasing menace of the area boys phenomenon, street and destitute children are all traceable predicaments of family poverty in the country. The discussion calls for a consistent and systematic study and analysis of the Nigerian family that would in the end lead to the development of family policy for the country.

**Appendix A: Family Shield** illustrating the internal and external boundaries of the family.



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## **BIOGRAPHY OF THE Author**

Professor Amechi Nweze was born on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1942 in the ancient city of Nri, the ancestral homeland of Ndi Igbo. The ancient city of Nri is located in the central heartland of Anambra state. Professor Nweze had his primary and post primary education in Nri and neighboring town Agulu between 1948-1956 and 1958-1962 respectively. He had a brief stint with the teaching profession (1963-1965). In 1966, he gained admission to study political science and history at the University of Zambia, East Africa. His ambition was caught short by the outbreak of hostilities that led to the civil war in July 1967. He had to transfer his admission to his Alma Mater, the University of Nigeria Nsukka, finishing with a Bsc (Hons.) second class upper degree in 1973. Professor Nweze was a recipient of University of Nigeria awards: 1972 annual foundation award for the best student in class, Certificate of Merit and Prize as the best student in 1973 graduating class. As pioneer member of the NYSC batch, he served briefly with Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School, Ayangba in the then Kwara state, before being recalled by the University of Nigeria to serve as a junior research fellow (1973-1974).

In September 1974, he proceeded to Canada on Federal Government scholarship for his post-graduate work with Queens University Kingston



Ontario. He obtained his MA and Diploma in Clinical Psychology in 1977 and 1978 respectively before returning to the country in December 1979. He enrolled with the University of Lagos for his PhD which he completed in 1989.

Professor Nweze joined the services the University of Jos in March 1980 and was raised to the elevation to the professorial chair of Psychology in 1992. He has been a long member of university Senate serving in her various committees. He has served the university in various administrative capacities: Acting Head of psychology. (1988-1989); substantive head of psychology, (1991-1993); Sub-Dean and Acting Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences (1993-1994), Dean Faculty of Social Sciences (1995-2001). He has also served the University system in Nigeria as two time member of NUC Accreditation team to various universities.

Professor Nweze's research and clinical interest areas include among other, family and adolescent psychology, stress management, conflict and internal population displacement, forensic psychology, police law enforcement and security administration. He has published well over 50 academic works in national and international journals and publication outlets. He is a member of many academic and professional psychology associations and also serves in the editorial board of two international and three national journals in psychology, education and social work.

Currently Professor Nweze is consultant to various governmental and non-governmental organizations in the country: the Nigeria Police, African Refugee Foundation Lagos, and NNPC. Above all he is a catholic knight of the Order of the Knights of St Mulumber. He has recently worked out and signed on behalf of the University the MOU for partnership between the University of Jos, University of Jyvaskyla Finland, University of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, University of Education Winneba and Olabisi Onabanjo University Ago. Iwoye, The partnership is for a period of five years and involves collaborative research on issues of education and sustainable development in Africa including possible exchange programs among the partnership institutions.

Professor Nweze got married to his better half Clara Chizube nee Emedolu from neighboring Adazi-Ani in September 1974. They got wedded at Patrick's Church Kingston, Canada on 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1975. The marriage of 29 years and nine months and blessed with ~~three~~ children has continued be a source of joy, comfort and relish for the family.

Professor Nweze has traveled extensively to parts of Europe and Africa in pursuit of academic career which he enjoys more than any other past time. His travels have taken him to the USA, Spain, Turkey, Senegal, Ghana, Cameroon, Tanzania, and Ivory Coast, where he participated and

presented papers on aspects of psychology at international conferences. He is a well recognized international scholar belonging to many professional associations.



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