

CONTEMPORARY FAMILY CHOICE: AREAS OF NIGERIAN FAMILIES' CHANGE LAG

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ABSTRACT

This 'high tech' era is marvellously impacting on all facets of life. The Nigerian family is no exception. Nigerian families are striving to keep pace with the changes which the globalized 'high tech' period is exerting on them. A good number of changes which have been brought to bear on the Nigerian families have been beautifully articulated in this paper. Broadly looking at the families in global perspective and the changes which they are currently experiencing, it is disheartening that Nigerian families are trailing behind the trends in changes in the families in the developed world. The areas in which Nigerian families are lagging behind in trends or developments in the families worldwide are pointed out and explained.

Keywords: Nigerian Families and Change Lag.

INTRODUCTION

Whatever family form or forms that is or are preponderating in any country or the family variance that may be found from one human group to the other, there is general agreement to the effect that "the family is universal" (Henslin, 2006 p.314). The globalization phenomenon has made the globe or the universe a federated world or global village in which a growing trend or practice in one part of the global village impacts on all the other sections even if in varying degrees. Nigeria is an integral component of the federated world. Invariably, Nigeria should be part of the contemporary global changes. While changing family practices in a good number of areas in globe have been tenaciously copied, there are some contemporary family choices and are trends that are conspicuous particularly in some or all of the developed parts of the globe but to which Nigeria has exhibited change lag in the sense that those family practices have not burgeoned in Nigeria as pervasive family practices. The burden of this paper, therefore, is to uncover those areas of contemporary family choices in the developed world to which Nigeria, as at today, have not changed to.

Conceptual Clarifications

The import of clarifying concepts in any communicative discourse that involves the communicator and the communicatee has been well made by Mezieobi and Ezeugo (2013) when they noted, quite emphatically that such definition of terms reduces ambiguities and possible misinterpretations that may blur effective understanding among the communicative dyad. In this end, therefore, three concepts desire some brief explanation in the context of this paper. They are: contemporary family choices, Nigerian families and change lag.

The Concept: Contemporary Family Choices

These refer to practices which families in most of the countries in the developed parts of the globalized village have adopted, leaned on and which are more or less pervasive and enjoying wide popularity.

The Term: Nigerian Families

While the family is considered “as the oldest social institution in human history” (Oloya, 2013 p.181) and, therefore, available in all corners of the globe no matter their forms, Nigerian families will refer to the families that are specific to Nigeria or that exist in Nigeria as a geo-polity.

The Terminology: Change Lag

This is conceptualized as trailing behind shift, modifications or alterations in relation to family practices in the world or not coping with or developing slowly with the pace of development.

Changing Nigerian Families

The wind of change which has affected all areas of life- the economy, political institutions, education, health, housing, transport communication, the human environment, population trends, religion, tourism, urbanism, industrialization, science and technology, has not spared the Nigerian families. Oloya (2013 p.18) gave credence to the changes impacting on the Nigerian families when he observed that “rapid social changes have directly affected ...the families in Nigeria...”

Changes even impacting on families vary from society to society. With specific reference to the changes in the Nigerian families, Mezieobi and Opara (2007) highlighted a good number of them. These include:

1. A shift from the extended family structure which used to be the dominant family system to the nuclear family system which has near almost completely insulated itself from the extended family which in practice is merely being paid a passing attention to in contemporary times.
2. The educated class is leading a change from large family size to small family size as it is becoming clearer that the production and maintenance of quality children in the end and in all its ramification is very cost intensive.
3. Nigerian families have embraced a 'quite revolution' in favour of the females where what used to be their predominant domestic chores and occupation or roles have given way to their becoming working mothers in white collar jobs on in private entrepreneurship.
4. The socialization roles of the family for which families in yester years were perceived as the basic social institution have near almost been completely jettisoned and have been farmed out to early childhood care centres as custodial institutions and nothing more, 'schools, peer gang, house help and older siblings'. The aftermath of this trend is that outside the absence of the parental care of the children -a value that used to be cherished, the families have been flung into anything -goes situation such that Nigerian families of today are breeding feral children and adolescents.

5. There is today an educational gender divide in favour of the female folk as “more females than males are in school today. The males are staying out of school... (for) businesses that would... yield quick money.” (Mezieobi and Opara, 2007 p7).
6. Some families in search of greener pastures have migrated from the rural areas to the urban areas where they have permanently made their settlement and resorting to their rural homes as a second home where some parents do not allow their children to visit let alone spend any appreciable time.
7. Family instability is on course in most Nigerian families as they are in truth troubled or 'diseased'.
8. Gender equity or egalitarianism is making an in-road into the families in terms of husband and wife power or authority sharing.

Parental role in mate selection for their children is virtually weakened and thinning out. In fact, the age at first marriage has shot up on account of prolonged schooling period and the fact that one who wishes to enter into the family entanglements must be fully ready for all it entails, financially and psychologically.

Areas of Contemporary Family Choices or Changes that Nigerian Families are Lagging Behind

Given a bird's eye view of the changes that Nigerian families in contemporary times are experiencing, it is apt, at this juncture, to observe that there are a number of changes that have taken place or are taking place in contemporary globalized, particular the developed, world that Nigerian families have lagged behind. This change -lag as it affects Nigerian families are in the following areas, among others. They include:

Single-Parenting

Single-parent household of the newer married type is becoming the parenthood norm in the developed world. This is of two types, namely: the child-free option or remaining childless which is pervasive in the United States, Canada and Rhode Island for example, and the 'creative singlehood' type which Roger Libby in Mezieobi and Opara (2007 p.57) described as “state of availability to a variety of partners for companionship and sexual relationships”. Children may result from such sexual relationships or as Brinkerhoff; White; Ortega and Weitz (2002 p.286), put it “children are now born to single mothers” who have remained unmarried by personal choice. For now, in Nigeria, single parenthood is a social abnormality which is repugnant and culturally condemnable.

Non-Marital Birth

Akin to single parenthood, is that the rate of non-marital births from unmarried women or unmarried teenagers is experiencing a steady increase in countries such as United Kingdom, United States, France, Sweden, Canada and Denmark to mention a few. The children raised outside of marriage do not attract any reprehensible attitude of the public. Nonmarital childbirths in Nigeria are condemnable and no family wants to be associated with it by choice.

Cohabitation

In the developed world, cohabiting relationship or cohabiting as a courtship process, whether or not it will eventually lead to marriage or not is often a forerunner to actual marriage. Most cohabiters, if any, in Nigeria today do this in all secrecy, outside the knowledge of their parents, as it is condemnable by most religious adherents and their religions.

Delayed Childbearing

In today's Nigeria, no couple by their choice chooses to remain childless as children are revered and considered the fruit of marriage. The attraction of all Nigerian families to have children immediately after marriage is counterproductive to delayed childbearing. Consequent upon the fact that childbearing in the developed world is no longer seen as an inevitable consequence of marriage; childbearing is delayed or postponed to a period not less than between 5 to 10 years after the first marriage. We are yet to keep pace with this trend.

Technological Reproduction

Although a negligible number of couples that are childless have secretly resorted to reproductive technologies as an answer to their prolonged childlessness, the technological reproduction approach to childbearing which has gained grounds in the developed countries are yet to attract overwhelming attention in Nigeria. Perhaps the high cost of being a 'surrogate mother', 'in vitro fertilization' or inseminating a woman whose husband is infertile with another vibrant man's sperm, is the mitigating factor, coupled with its accompanying socio-cultural and ethical consideration and stigmatization.

Small Size Family

In the United States of America, for example, the small family size that is in vogue is no more than two children -the spreading small size family in the industrialized nations of the world, Bowman and Spanier in Mezieobi and Opara (2007 p.67) confirmed this claim when they opined that "the two-child family is becoming the norm in America and will likely remain so for some years to come." Mezieobi and Opara (2007 p.67) put the small size family in Nigeria as being made up of between 6 to 7 children which they observed "will not (drastically) change to an appreciable (low) level in the years ahead". In many European countries, only one child is the norm today.

Gender Equality in the Family

In the developed countries, husband and wife are enjoying equality in decision making or power sharing or in authority exhibition. In Nigeria, as at today, the supposed women emancipation, coupled with endemic cultural bottlenecks have not put women at par with their husbands in authority command in the families. Tolerant inequality is reigning supreme in Nigeria's family authority control.

Declining Marriage

While marriages in the United States of America, for example, are getting doomed and other living arrangements are springing up by bounds and leaps such as living alone, cohabiting and marriages are "no longer a viable social institution... (and have) become a quaint custom reserved for a few traditionalists." (Henslin and Fowler, 2010 p.388). As against this unavailability of marriages in the United States and perhaps Europe, marriages are still flourishing in Nigeria with their expectant germination of families.

Runaway Children's Phenomenon

Runaways exist in the developed parts of the globalized village. These runaways or 'pushouts' are either children whose parents have driven out of the homes or have taken a pilgrimage from the homes in order to escape from intolerable family conditions. In Nigeria, runaway children exist in secrecy but they have left their family to fend for themselves from questionable means like prostitution or doing ridiculous menial jobs for a small fee. The magnitude of runaway children in the developed countries can, however, not be compared with its low-level index in Nigeria.

Grandparents Care

In contemporary developed world, because the biological parents of children are busy in the labour market, or can no longer take care of their children, grandparents stand in '*loco parentis*', and adequately cater for these children that are ordinarily, subject to abuse and neglect. In Nigeria, grandparents are the least contemplated in terms of taking care of children neglected by their incapable parents.

Elder Care

When Oloya (2013 p.,180) observed that "today's society is inadequately prepared to take adequate care of the old," he was perhaps lamenting the change in the developed world which Nigeria and its families have not embraced. While the issue of elder care is given more priority attention in the developed world than even early childhood care, Nigeria has not come to terms with elder care. It is for now an individual family responsibility.

Recreation

Recreation promotes quality living and is everywhere pervasive in contemporary developed societies. Nigerian families in modern times have no time for real recreation as there are dearth of recreational facilities for children and adults.

CONCLUSION

The family is everywhere changing. Nigerian families of today have made drastic changes perhaps in the direction of family improvement. Nevertheless, there are an array of changes in the families in the developed world which Nigerian, families in contemporary times, have lagged behind in trailing. Families in Nigeria in the decades ahead cannot be eclipsed. Positive, not regressive, changes should be accepted and utilized in the interest of effective living.

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