

Social Significance of Kinship in the Bemba Speech Community

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Abstract

This study investigated the social significance of kinship in a Bemba speech community by examining the concept from the linguistic and anthropological perspectives. It took a qualitative approach, in particular ethnographic research design. This study included family heads, spouses, children, dependents, area councilors, social workers in Mufulira District. In total forty eight (48) participants took part in the study. Family heads, children and dependents among others took part in the study. Two methods of sampling were used in this study: purposive and simple random. Data was collected through interviews, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and questionnaire. Findings indicate that many factors have certainly strained extended family ties to an extent that many people no longer honor the ideals of traditional family loyalty yet, such cultural ideals are as common to African societies as those of personal autonomy are in Western societies. Literature corroborates with the findings and establishes that the family is one of the key cultural strongholds in a Bemba community just like in many African communities. Unanimously, participants in the study point to the disintegrated social cohesion as one of the factors contributing to the increase in the number of people in need of care and support. There seem to be a general view from participants that initiatives to support the needy should be accompanied with efforts to ascertain their socio-psychological effects on those in need of care and support. Findings further reveal that majority of the people in need of support have relatives who could come to their aid but are unable due to, among other issues, economic hardships. This paper encourages the acceptance and support of extended family system in Zambia owing to its cultural compatibility with the community.

Keywords: Bemba, Community, Kinship, Language, Family

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Bemba language, on which this study is based, is also known as IciBemba. It is spoken by approximately 500,000 native speakers and by a considerable number of non-native speakers, making it relatively one of the largest linguistic unity in Zambia (Gordon, 2002).

This study was set to analyze key cultural strengths of Bemba and related families, premised on the assumption that they provide a solid foundation upon which to develop the kind of public policies and self-help initiatives that will genuinely promote the interests of Zambians and diverse peoples in need nationwide (Ferguson, 1999). Initiatives to accommodate orphans and senior citizens in institutions of care by some government agencies and Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) are worthwhile but have been met with various challenges (March, 1995). The objectives of the study were to:

1. establish the Bemba's understanding of kinship;
2. ascertain the significance of kinship in a Bemba speech community;
3. establish the extent to which kinship instills a sense of appreciation for one another;
4. identify factors weakening kinship ties and;
5. explore ways of strengthening kinship ties.

Theoretical Framework

The study is drawn from the family systems theory popularized by Dr. Murray Bowen. It suggests that individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but rather as a part of their family, as the family is an emotional unit. Families are systems of interconnected and interdependent individuals, none of whom can be understood in isolation from the system.

A family, as Powell and Cassidy (2007) put it, is a system in which each member has a role to play and rules to respect. Members of the system are expected to respond to each other in a certain way according to their roles, which are determined by the relationship agreements to maintain equilibrium and the status quo. Within the boundaries of the system, patterns develop as certain family member's behaviours are caused by and cause other family member's behaviours to manifest in predictable ways. Maintaining the same pattern of behaviours within a system may lead to balance in the family system, but also to dysfunction. In addition, the family is part of other systems in the community, so, changes in one family will create imbalance and lead to changes in other systems that surround that family (Powell & Cassidy, 2007).

Extended family ties and households have often proved remarkably adaptable to changing social conditions. It has been observed that the extended family is most likely to emerge in contemporary society when young adults face unemployment or divorce or when older adults become widowed or when their health declines (Hill, 1999; Lee, 1999). Modern day extended family networks are important in assisting such ones to cope with life's challenges. For example, support from the extended family has been portrayed as a significant factor in the successful integration of Vietnamese refugees into American life (Benson, 1990).

The importance of extended family households and networks has also been shown among low-income urban African Americans; considerable research points to the benefits of grandmothers in single-parent households and extra-household extended family networks as important mechanisms for coping with inadequate financial resources (Ford and Harris, 1991; Pearson et al., 1990). Interestingly, the frequency of extended family households has begun to decline in some Asian societies (Ogawa and Retherford, 1993), but has been shown to have increased for the first time in decades in the United States from 10 percent to 12 percent between 1980 and 1990 (Glick, Bean and Van Hook, 1997).

METHODOLOGY

This study used the qualitative design and particularly ethnography research tradition. This non-experimental research method allows the researcher to collect data from a wide range of sources of data so as to come up with a rounded view of the subject under study.

This type of research allowed the researchers to build a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2013; Punch, 2014; Banda, Mpolomoka, Mbono & Sampa, 2017). Creswell further explains that a qualitative research is a means of exploring and understanding the individual or group ascribed to a social human problem (Banda, et al., 2017). This implies that the focus is on an individual or a group and that was the case in this study as individuals and groups from various families were interviewed about the concept of kinship in a Bemba speech community.

Ethnographic research tradition was used in this study because it allowed for first hand sociological approach to data collection. It also helped in describing a culture and understanding a way of life from the point of view of its participants; establishing a picture of a 'way of life' of some identifiable group of people (Banda, et al., 2017). In this study, the focus was on the Bemba speech community. The researchers also spent an extended period of time in the community that was being studied, a practice that Punch (2014) emphatically highlights.

The sample for the study was drawn from Mufulira District. The District was chosen for its strategic location and of being a cosmopolitan town. That is why the researchers needed not go to Northern Province, the home of the Bemba speaking people, to find the Bemba since the town is host to Bemba speakers among speakers of other languages. Mufulira earned itself this cosmopolitan status by virtue of the pronounced mining activities, civil service among other occupants. So, the Bemba speaking people were easily accessible. Participants sampled comprised a combination of Bemba speaking people and speakers of other languages that share Bemba traditions or rather have become Bemba speaking people by intermarriage relations.

This study included family heads, spouses, children, dependents, area councilors, social workers in Mufulira District. In total forty eight (48) participants took part in the study. Family heads, children and dependents among others took part in the study. The table below presents demographical data of participants:

Table 1: Demographical data of participants

1. Gender
 - a. Male-20
 - b. Female-28
2. Marital status
 - a. Single-22 (8 males and 14 females)
 - b. Married-19 (9 males and 10 females)
 - c. Divorced-3 (1 male and 2 females)
 - d. Widowed-4 (1 male and 3 females)
3. Age group(s)
 - a. 14-25 years -16 (7 males and 9 females)
 - b. 26-35 years -10 (4 males and 6 females)
 - c. 36-45 years -10 (5 males and 5 females)
 - d. 46-55 years -7 (3 males and 4 females)
 - e. 56 years and above-5 (2 males and 3 females)
4. Tribe
 - a. Bemba-38
 - b. Non-Bemba-10

Total 48 Participants

Two methods of sampling were used in this study: purposive and simple random. These were used because on the one hand they did not require enumerating the entire population and on the other hand, they were cost effective. Best and Kahn (2009) explain that qualitative research uses purposive sampling, studying the real world situation as it unfolds naturally. The power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information for in-depth analysis related to the central issue being studied (Kombo and Tromp, 2009). This was important in this study because the researchers targeted the population due to its resourcefulness and richness in data needed for the study. The second method of sampling employed was simple random sampling. This sampling method was used to select the following categories of respondents: Area councilors, family heads, spouses, children and dependents.

Sources such as books, journals and theses were consulted in the study. The data obtained was corroborated by data collected from interviews, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and questionnaire. Interviews were conducted with selected individuals and households in Mufulira. The selection of the interviewees was based on, among other things, the position of individuals in the family and their roles in relation to family members. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) explain that interviews are preferred due to their room for probing, which yield in-depth responses about description of activities and actors, perceptions, experiences, opinions, knowledge and observation. Conversations were rich and detailed including the context and that added value to the data. FGDs were held with specific target households. These discussions allowed the researcher to assess the attitude of respondents to the concept of kinship. A note book was used for recording data from the discussions. The questionnaires enabled the researcher to obtain information patterning levels of understanding of the kinship concept and establish its social implication.

This research used semi-structured interviews. These were used because of their relative advantage over structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed respondents freedom to bring out their views as they understood the subject matter in line with the guide provided. According to Bryman (2008) semi-structured interviews refer to *“a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is able to vary the sequence of the questions”*.

These interviews were partially guided as opposed to the strictness of a structured interview. During interviews, the researchers had a choice to change questions depending on the responses of the participants. Five area councilors, five social workers, four boys and six girls were interviewed. The interviews, which lasted between 45 minutes and one hour, were conducted in the homes and offices of the respondents, depending on convenience, less distractibility and or availability of respondents.

In total seven FGDs were held with specific households. These discussions were used to establish families' understanding of the kinship concept and its social implication. A topic with a series of sub-topics was tabled before the individual families for discussion. Where family heads were present, they the heads took the lead while the members came in to make their contributions. The researcher conducted seven focus group discussions with 7 (seven) households.

The first two households were led by family heads, two males and the other five were led by females. In attendance during FGDs were guardians, children and dependents, who were central to the objectives of the study. The family heads took time to explain to the children the meaning of the topic under discussion. This allowed them to make meaningful contributions to the discussions. The FGDs were designed to seek information

relating to family backgrounds and their links within kinship structures. The other information the FGDs endeavored to bring out was how family members felt with regard to having links with the extended family system. Finally, the discussions allowed the researcher to draw out information on the sorts of benefits and challenges participants had in interacting with members of their wider families.

A questionnaire, which mainly had open ended questions, was used as one of the instruments of data collection. It provided the qualitative data for this study. According to Ghosh (2008) questionnaires are versatile, allowing the collection of both subjective and objective data through the use of open- or close-format questions.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part One was for adults or guardians and Part Two was for children and dependents. In both parts were the biographical data, which were meant for demographical features of the participants' gender, age, tribe, occupation, and marital status, number of children and dependents to get comprehensive data for the study. Both parts of the questionnaire comprised open-ended questions, which allowed the researcher to explore respondents' understanding of kinship and its social implication. The questionnaire was translated into Bemba to accommodate participants who were not conversant with the English language.

Data was analyzed as it was being collected and generated, according to emerging themes and patterns. Thematic analysis involved the identification of themes through careful reading and re-reading of the data. During this thematic analysis, the emerging themes became the categories for analysis (Rice and Ezzy, 1999). The researcher categorized the major themes and proceeded to identify other related issues arising from the data collected.

Ethical Considerations

The study ensured that respondents were respected and their rights not trampled upon during the course of the study (Cohen, 2007). Permission was sought from all the concerned gatekeepers prior to the commencement of the research. The families sampled were also written and talked to through family heads. Consent was sought from all the participants and their rights explained to them before they got involved in the research.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study according to the research questions. The questions were: (i). What is the Bemba's understanding of kinship? (ii). What is the significance of kinship in the Bemba speech community? (iii). To what extent does kinship instill a sense of appreciation for one another? (iv). What factors are weakening kinship ties? (v). What can be done to strengthen kinship ties?

The Bemba people's understanding of kinship

This thematic sub-section features information with regard to question one in this study, which was set to establish the Bemba people's understanding of kinship. Data were collected from among other sources, the unpublished thesis of Chisanga (1980), published works of Kingman, (1992), Fox (1977) and Foley (1997). Details from these sources were corroborated with by data from respondents. Chisanga's study of the Bemba (people) forms of address brought to the fore the way (the) Bemba people understand kinship. They emphasize relationships beyond nuclear family ties. The forms of address border on kinship ties on which the success of *ulupwa* thrives (Chisanga, 1980).

Studies indicate that the Bemba people's system is based on the principle of 'bifurcate' merging (Foley, 1997). Ego, that is, the person whose relationship to family is being discussed, distinguishes between relatives on his or her mother's side of the family and those on his or her father's side (bifurcation) and merges father with father's brother and mother with mother's sister. Accordingly, the father's brother's children and the mother's sister's children (parallel cousins) are merged as siblings. However, his or her father's sister's children and his or her mother's brother's children are considered cousins (Chisanga, 1980).

According to Chisanga, in the Bemba language, the extension of the terminology father to include the biological father's brothers and male cousins binds people who are addressed as 'father' by those who address them. This is also applicable to kin terms of 'mother,' 'grandparents,' 'uncle,' 'brother' and 'sister.' Thus, in the absence of one's parents or guardian there would be someone to assume the role of guardian or parent because, as Chisanga puts it, *ulupwa* in the Bemba community is much broader than the English one. Kingman's (1992) works on kinship showed that in some areas, members of a descent group are considered as close to each other as siblings.

In the Bemba speech community, lineal terms are extended to apply to the parallel relatives. This is explained by a rule called merging (Foley, 1997), which identifies father's brother with brother (FB-F), mother's sister with sister (MZ-M), the brother of a male ego with male ego and the sister of the female ego with female ego. Another rule is the half-sibling rule which states that "parent's son is a brother" (FS-B, MS-B) and "a parent's daughter is a sister" (FD-Z, MD-Z) (Ibid). These rules allow the Bemba people to treat parallel nephews, nieces and cousins as sons, daughters, sisters and brothers.

All the respondents were asked to explain their understanding of kinship and the common answer was, “*family ties involving biological relatives and extended family.*” Details about respondents understanding of kinship have been presented in the following excerpts from (the) FGDs, interviews and questionnaires:

“Kinship is a family involving blood relations apart from nuclear family.” [Female, aged 48]

“Kinship has to do with relationships as a result of a clan or one having ties with wider families through lineage or clan.” [Male, aged 53]

“Kinship involves aspects which bind people together in a family or family relationship whether nuclear, extended or clan.” [Male, aged 48]

“Kinship is a deep feeling of belonging to a chain of relatives who include sons, daughters, grandparents, nieces, nephews and so on.” [Female, aged 53]

“I think it is the relationship between members of the same family.” [Female, aged 16]

“I feel kinship is the situation where members of the wider family live together and help one another when need arises.” [Male, aged 19]

“Kinship is an aspect of family relationship that extends beyond nuclear family.” [Female, aged 36]

“Kinship is a kind of relationship based on blood relationship.” [Female, aged 15]

“Kinship involves blood relationship.” [Female, aged 17]

“Kinship refers to close relations or community sharing similar family values on the basis of clan.” [Male, aged 45]

“Kinship refers to the relationship between members of the family beyond biological connections.” [Male, 38]

“Ulupwa mu CiBemba lukulu ukucila kudasungu pantu abantu balicila palibalya mwafyalwa nabo.” [Female, aged 29 in IciBemba]

Kinship or family in iciBemba is much broader than it is understood in English because of extended relatives. [English]

Referring to the concept of *ulupwa* married women during FGDs observed that:

“Ukwangala kwacila ulupwa pantu abantu abansungila after batata baleka incito niba neighbour.” [IciBemba]

Bonds of kinship can be formed even with people who may not be blood relatives but simply because of being good neighbors as was the case with me. I was left to be looked after by neighbors when my parents retired. [English]

This woman’s sentiments were echoed by many during FGDs and interviews. 88 percent of respondents seemed to have understood the concept of kinship compared to 12 percent who expressed ignorance.

4.3 The significance of kinship terminology in iciBemba

The second question under this thematic subject matter investigated the significance of the kinship concept among the Bemba people. The Bemba people view kinship as a way of keeping family relations strong. According to Chisanga (1980) some kin terms have a linguistic significance in terms of the relationships they bear. For example, the morpheme *-fyala-* in *umufyala* (cousin) appears to be the form for cousins, *-abafyala-* (cousins) (Gordon, 2002; Chisanga, 1980; Van Sambeek, 1955).

Revelations from respondents indicate that *ulupwa* in the Bemba speech community is at the center of their

life. It is one of the key cultural strength in that it is crucial to the community's survival in the context of death and other destructive influences to disintegrate families (Chisanga, 1980). In response to the question on the significance of Bemba kinship, the following revelations from respondents indicate that among the Bemba people *ulupwa* (kinship), is highly regarded as a way to keep families close:

"Kinship compels relatives to provide care and support for others in need because if a person addresses you as father or mother by virtue of being related to the actual father or mother, you just feel obliged to care for such a one as if he or she were your biological child." [Male, aged 47]

"Ine ni nkula, lelo nalitemwa fintu abana bandi na bepwa bomfwane mukwafwa abantu besu." [Male, aged 62 in iciBemba]

Although I am old now I am proud to see how my 'family' interact even in helping one another. [English]

"Kinship makes social relationships strong. It plays an important role in liberating members of the wider family in need from poverty. It helps to trace the family origin, customs and culture." [Male, aged 50]

"Extended family plays an important role in our lives. It can be psychologically good grounding. We realize we're part of a larger group that has existed for hundreds of years before our time." [Male, aged 39]

"Cultural values are embedded in kinship as it accommodates family values and norms, having the aspect of inclusiveness." [Male, aged 48]

"Kinship gives one an opportunity to have experiences from people of varying traits and personalities." [Female, aged 17]

"There is a sense of caring for one another. I am being looked after by my mother's cousin because my mother cannot afford to provide for us materially. I have realized that kinship provides support and care for the under privileged." [Male, aged 18]

"Kinship compels family members to assist one another because of having the same blood. When members are supportive it brings about unity and oneness." [Female, aged 19]

"I do not have children of my own but those born from my relatives are always available and treat me as if I were their mother. Whenever I feel lonely I always feel comforted to know that I am surrounded by 'children' who are supportive. They regularly visit me and we are usually in touch even through phone calls." [Female, aged 54]

This woman was in employment and able to fend for herself materially. However, she narrated that the presence of her kinsmen added value to her life. Her experience was echoed by other women in similar situations during the interview sessions and the focus group discussions. They intimated that though they bore no children of their own they have had the privilege of bringing up their relatives' children and now enjoy the presence of 'grandchildren.'

Another respondent echoed similar sentiments when he said that the family that looked after him, when his parents left employment to settle in the village, were related to him only through the church. He went on to say that they were more than his relatives because he was treated just like a child of that household yet his only connection to the family was their faith in God.

Of all the respondents that were interviewed and those on whom questionnaire was administered, 59 % showed regard for the role of kinship in their way of life. This was followed by 31% of those who had had interaction with wider families by rendering support but not living with them; and 10% of the total respondents, who had lived with wider family members, were, by the time of this research, unable to accommodate them.

4.4 The extent to which kinship instils a sense of appreciation for one another

The sub-section mirrors information regarding the third question of the study which explored how kinship concept instilled the sense of appreciation for one another. Robin Fox (1977) states that:

"Psychologically, it is believed that there is security to be derived from sureness about one's ancestry and descent. In most societies relationships to ancestors and kin have been the key relationships in the social structure. Genealogical knowledge seems to define one's most significant rights, duties and sentiments in a community where kinship is supremely important."

Information from FDGs, interviews and questionnaires corroborate Fox's sentiments above. It was learned that genealogical knowledge moves people to fulfil their family obligations even when it was difficult to do so. In like manner, those in need of support and care were within their rights to demand such support because of the shared ancestry with those who should assist them. The following were protracted collections of viewpoints about what motivated respondents to embrace the concept of kinship:

“It is not the benefits I look up to but the self-esteem I realize from being of help to others especially those who cannot make ends meet yet I share blood ties with them.” [Male, aged 56, Family head]

“Extended family teaches us to get along with others. It also preserves history and memories for future generations. Even when an extended family member has been problematic, it offers valuable lessons.” [Male, aged 48, Family head]

“Our kinfolk will always be a part of us no matter how badly they behaved. Making peace with their memories and actions enables us to make peace with ourselves.” [Female, aged 68]

“Where kin ties are strong members are assured of sustenance and support. I come from a family of 7 (seven). My parents are in the village but my uncle took me over from my parents when I was 8 (eight) because my parents could not provide for our basic needs. My uncle has 5 (five) children and there are 2 (two) dependents from my aunt’s side. I am appreciative of my uncle and aunt because in the village I could have been married off by now.” [Female, aged 16]

Revelations by the respondents above corroborate with what Fox (1977) intimated that there is security to be derived from sureness about one’s ancestry. Similarly, one respondent intimated that his sister, though not the first born in the family, has had to look after family members in need: the elderly, orphans and those whose parents were irresponsible. In line with Fox’s sentiments, one family head acknowledged that

“It is my responsibility to look after my kinsmen. I have had an opportunity to look after relatives from both my father’s and mother’s families and now with marriage I have taken up responsibility to look after the needs of my wife’s relatives. Although most of these people I have looked after are distantly related to me, many of them have reciprocated my kindness and this makes me proud.” [Male, aged 47]

This man’s response is in harmony with the ‘Balanced Reciprocity’ (Foley, 1997), which applies to individuals who are more distantly related than are members of the same household.

Details from FGDs, interviews and questionnaires indicated that marriage is one of the factors that motivated people to uphold the concept of kinship. It was observed that the desire to maintain wholesome relationships, especially in a home where spouses tended to look after people from two different families, was a motivation to value kinship and failure to manage these relationships could lead to marital problems. In line with these observations a married couple stated, “*We had to raise four cousins after they were orphaned. In addition to our children, we had to raise seven children. Considering the fact that we were in our productive years, we had to undergo family planning for six years to accommodate the extra responsibility.*”

The wife in the experience above, despite the affinity with those orphans, had to make sacrifices because she was bound to accept responsibility by virtue of her marriage to that man. Two of the orphans are now independent. They derive a sense of pride from the fact that their extended family relations are still strong. Their story could have been different if they had been neglected. These orphans reported that they were delighted to tell others of their descent because their cousin took great care of them.

Revelations from the respondents seemed to indicate that there was also need to be supportive of one another when families disintegrated due to, among other things, divorce, death and economic hardships. The following excerpts depict experiences that compel kinsmen to render support to those in need:

“I am being looked after by my mother’s grandmother because my mother is divorced.

We are two in my family living with other relatives who include my mother’s sister with three children and my grandmother. My father is not supportive of us.” [Female, aged 19]

“I am being looked after by my uncle because my father died 10 years ago, leaving behind my mother and three of us.” [Male, aged 17]

The experience of the 19-year-old girl cited above was shared in one of the FGDs. It was revealed that life was difficult in the village for the girl but her uncle decided to take her so that she could be educated. Although the uncle was not financially sound, he had five children and three dependents to look after.

Following the interviews on how kinship instils a sense of appreciation for *ulupwa*, an elderly couple explained that they had to assume the role of parents when their daughter died at child birth, leaving behind a baby. They stated that the father of the baby was alive but led an irresponsible life. That prompted them to take custody of the baby. Their action was surely in the best interest of the child and, in any case, they had the obligation to look after not only their children but their children’s children as well.

Meanwhile a 19 year old Grade 11 boy narrated how his uncle took over the responsibility of looking after him when it was evident that his parents of eight children could not afford to look after them due to financial

hardships. The boy said that he was forever, indebted to the uncle as he would not have continued with school.

However, information from FGDs, interviews and questionnaires indicate that appreciation levels for kinship concept varied depending on individuals' experiences. For instance, there were people who said that they were not 100 percent agreeable to the idea that kinship instils a sense of appreciation for one another since others took advantage of the few relations that were very helpful and caring. Of the households and individuals who took part in the study nevertheless, 68% expressed respect for kinship relations, 18% were not sure and 10% were not for the idea.

4.4 Factors weakening kinship ties

This sub-section reflects details about question four in this study, which investigated the factors that weaken kinship ties. Despite 68% of respondents having expressed appreciation for kinship concept, the following facts on the thematic subject matter indicate that there were various factors weakening kinship ties, ranging from western culture and lack of reciprocity to socio-economic hurdles:

Western culture

The findings pointed to the proliferation of Western political and education models as well as industrialization to be among the factors weakening kinship. It was observed that western education usually emphasized individual aspirations and not so much on others (Gordon, 2002; Ferguson, 1999; Richards, 1969; Goody, 1963). Revelations by respondents indicate that wealth acquired through an individual effort led to isolation as some people contended that they could enjoy the fruits of their labour alone or possibly with only those close to them. The following views of the participants highlight the impact of western culture on kinship concept:

"It is rare to find the so called educated people with large families more so with extended families because the education they went through usually insists on budgets and planning. Therefore, issues arising from outside their budget may not be attended to as expected. That is why we now hear parents complaining that they can only visit their children's homes by invitation." [Male, aged 37]

"Extended families are no longer closely knit because some well-to-do families are looking down on those with little means while the latter sometimes feel inferior to interact with the former. There are noticeable signs of class distinctions in some families based on what one can offer. This is affecting social stability in that those with little means of survival are left out in important family matters." [Male, aged 53]

"When I got married, my husband and I used to differ because I was looking after my relatives at home. He said that he would be comfortable to support them if they left home. To address this problem we agreed to let them go but continued to provide what was needed until they were independent. Even if I consented I felt bad as if I was neglecting my relatives but for the sake of marital harmony, it was fine because my husband was more inclined to nuclear family orientation than I was." [Female, aged 48?]

Views of the respondents above provide corroborative evidence for what anthropologists like Mair (1953) and Richards (1969) observed. Changes in marriage and family patterns were noticeable such that those who still honour their family obligations could do so out of a mixed sense of dread and guilt (Gordon, 2002, Hill, 1999; Mair, 1953; Richards, 1969).

Lack of reciprocity

Views about how damaging lack of reciprocity can be with regard to kinship have been presented in the following transcribed recorded material from FGDs:

"Our parents gave us an impression that all the people they looked after were close relatives. For this reason, we made many sacrifices in order to accommodate members of our *ulupwa* in need of support and care. However, we experienced a bitter reality when we visited our parents' village. Those whom we had hosted and sacrificed for were not there to welcome us. Most of them were just a 'hi and how are you' relatives. Since our kindness was not reciprocated, our affiliation to *ulupwa* has been damaged. We are of the view that it is better to live in a nuclear family arrangement than in an extended family situation in which we were raised. We have been disappointed and have learnt that only members of the nuclear family should benefit from what we have." [3 members of the family whose kindness was not reciprocated]

"I regret that my efforts put in place in helping people were never appreciated. Given an opportunity I wouldn't open my doors to distant relatives." [Male, aged 54]

Experiences cited above indicate that people are negatively affected when those they had fully supported

did not reciprocate. The respondents who were affected expressed regret that some members of their kin folk had failed to reciprocate kindness when there were people whose only connections were the church or work related activities, yet kinfolk were more available for them in times of need than were their members of their kinfolk's relatives. What is more is that 50% of the respondents who participated in the study cited lack of appreciation for one another's efforts as a factor in weakening kinship relations.

Socio-economic hardships

Respondents unanimously revealed that economic issues made it difficult for big families to survive because everything - from education to health - hinged on money and so, having big families suggested working for more money. Information from focus group discussions also cited reports of family disputes because some relatives were accused of failing to honour their obligations while others complained that some demands were unbearable because of hard-hitting economic situations.

FGDs further mentioned family relations who were supportive of their kinsmen:

"When my husband was out of employment, I was compelled to request financial support from the parents' of the children we were keeping to supplement school fees. However, the parents concluded that we had neglected their 'children' and so, decided to recall the children back home. As a family we were disturbed when we were accused of neglect. I personally, came to realize that our relatives were taking advantage of us and can say that the concept of kinship encourages begging and destroys the spirit of self-reliance."
[Female, aged 58]

During the interviews, one of the respondents explained that she believed in kinship which, she said, "*Borders on family ties*". However, she went on to say:

"Fulfilling my obligation to *ulupwa* has been a challenge due to lack of finances and also there has been issues to accommodate relatives whose moral standards are questionable for fear of disintegrating my immediate family." [Female, aged 58, Family head respondent]

The excerpts below bring out respondents' viewpoints in focus group discussions:

"I am one of those shunning to live with extended families for fear that the morals we are imparting in children can be compromised if they are exposed to dependents of different moral background." [Female, aged 49]

"Economic problems, indiscipline among young ones and segregation in *ulupwa* are factors weakening the culture of kinship." [Male, aged 39]

"The idea of kinship is slowly getting out of fashion due to economic hardships we are facing today." [Male, aged 40, Family head]

"A lot of families are opting to stick to nuclear family arrangement due to the cost of living as well as to avoid unforeseen problems that come with extended families."
[Female, aged 38]

"The concept of kinship is moving towards western culture which promotes a system of nuclear families." [Female, aged 40 Family head]

58% of the respondents indicated that moral break down and financial constraints were a hindrance in upholding kinship concept. It was reported that the idea of kinship presented a challenge in that material constraints prevented many from fulfilling their obligations to their relatives. It was observed that many households were limited in what they could offer due to economic hardships but the community viewed them as irresponsible once discovered that they were failing to fulfil their obligation to their kin. Consequently, there were reports of *ulupwa lwapatukana*, that is, strained kinship ties, in some households leading to the disintegration of the social cohesion.

4.5 What can be done to strengthen kinship ties?

The final thematic sub-section investigated the last question in this study, which explored ways of strengthening kinship ties. As earlier indicated, there are various factors impacting on kinship relations, among them our education system, which is western oriented yet, many people would like to uphold these relationships. The following excerpts from FGDs, interviews and questionnaires bring out respondents' viewpoints on what can be done to sustain the Kinship ties / relationships:

"School curriculum should embrace culture and significant traditional aspects from pre-

school to university. Storytelling and writing competitions should carry such cultural aspects as kinship and family sustainability. Documentations of positive aspects of kinship should be encouraged. Additionally, the church can play a big role since most households claim to be Christians and religious values especially those bordering on looking after the needy are taken so serious that neglecting a member whether from the nuclear, extended could attract condemnation from the church and ultimately failure to inherit God's kingdom." [Male Teacher, aged 54]

"Kinship concept should be taught in Zambian schools to help children grow up knowing its significance in our society. Dependents should learn to behave and appreciate persons looking after them. [Female, aged 48]

Sensitization on the importance of upholding family ties should be done through social media and television programs since many people especially the youth enjoy getting information from such media." [Female head of the household]

"Provision of guidance and counselling services to the general public should be done in liaison with the Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare and the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) that provides information that is taught in schools. The Ministry of Local government should come on board to facilitate community sensitization on the concept of kinship." [Female, aged 46]

"Strengthening kinship ties should start from our elders who should bring us together and explain the importance of this culture. Wider families should be open about current socio-economic trends affecting most households in Zambia thereby failing to fulfil their responsibilities to extended families. The government should empower families in dire need of resources by offering long term projects, unlike handouts, to generate income to enable them accommodate and support relatives in need." [Male, aged 47]

"To restore the culture of kinship there was need for government ministries to work hand in hand with traditional leadership and the church discuss how best they could strengthen the slowly-degenerating kinship ties which are often confused with western education. We tend to be copying everything we are watching on social media as if we do not have our own cultural values worth of nurturing. There are people who think that Western culture is devoid of kinship ties. This is not often true as every community has its own cultural values and kinship is respected in their own way." [Male, aged 41, head of the family]

60% of the respondents indicated that something could be done to strengthen kinship ties if stakeholders were engaged at every level. They had reported that some civic leaders were engaged to empower them in various areas and be able to pay school fees for their dependents and sustain their families.

However, a Social Welfare Officer who sought anonymity said that even as much as the department of Social Welfare had Social Welfare funds to give to the needy, especially the orphans and widows, it did not give directly to the intended recipients. He added that Social Welfare was about promoting family unity saying Government alone could not address problems of the needy unless families took the responsibility of providing care and support for the needy seriously. He called for the promotion and establishment of a culture to promote extended family values. He went on to say that sensitization should be emphasized to encourage families to stay close. This was shared by respondents who indicated that the concept of kinship should be part of the curriculum from the elementary school to tertiary education.

One Area councilor spoken to revealed that he had taken advantage of the Social Cash Transfer program to identify individuals and families in need of relief fund. He reported that he had been working with schools and the Social Welfare department, which were used to identify families in need of support and care. He found this to be one way of supporting extended families. The Councilor stated that the Social Cash Transfer program was not unique to Zambia. He went on to say that working in tandem with the Transfer Project was the 'From Protection to Production' (PtoP) project, implying that recipients of the cash needed to venture into sustainable projects. This is probably what Zambia needs as long term measures to address issues of the needy.

The Councilor mentioned that the PtoP Project is a collaborative effort between the FAO, UNICEF, and national governments, which explores the linkages between social protection, agriculture, and rural development by assessing the impact of cash transfer programs on productive outcomes and the local economy (UNICEF, 2012). However, he was quick to point out that many families opted to have their dependents registered as if one or both of their parents were dead since the program was aimed at reaching out to orphans. This goes to

emphasize the provision of social security programs targeting families in need because even those whose parents were still alive found it difficult to make ends meet, hence resorting to acts of fraud.

Views from respondents suggested ways to strengthen kin ties, indicating that there must be orientation for dependents with regard to the rights and obligations in a home to avoid conflicts. It was further pointed out that there was need to have a balanced view of individual aspirations and that of a wider kinship community. Such a balanced view, as observed by respondents, would help to address challenges arising from some family members who expect a lot more than one could provide.

The excerpts below bring out respondents' viewpoints about what should be done when households cannot accommodate kinsmen for fear of moral decadence:

"Members of the families can still fulfil their obligations either through material, emotional and spiritual support. Parents should teach their children the importance of embracing other families as their own. In order to inculcate the culture of kinship in my family, I allow my children to visit freely other families during holidays but I am selective as to which families they go to avoid indiscipline." [Female, aged 48]

"Faith Based Organizations should be brought on board in this regard as more and more people were creating kinship ties even with those they associate with in these organizations. We have seen many people especially young ones being supported by members of their religious organizations. The government can come in to regulate and monitor such ties." [Male, aged 55]

68 % of respondents indicated that sensitization alongside government's empowerment projects could be key to safeguarding the culture of kinship. The respondents that were included in the study were of diverse backgrounds in terms of occupation, marital status, age group and to some extent tribe due to intermarriages. In terms of age the respondents were aged between 14 and 70, with the majority coming from the age group 14 to 25 years.

An analysis of participants' understanding of Bemba kinship and its social implications revealed that all age groups understood the concept of kinship. This was evident in that in all age groups response to the significance of kinship was given from their concept of kinship. Those who were 14 years to 25 preferred the idea of kinship with little regard to social implications. However, those who were 26 and older preferred the idea but expressed concern about sustenance of kinship amidst socio-economic challenges.

Meanwhile 12 out of 15 respondents between 36 years and 55 preferred to provide support to their relatives rather than accommodate them at home. 35 out of 48 respondents between the ages of 19 and above observed that something should be done to sustain kinship. It was noted that the concept of kinship was also popular among non-Bemba respondents in that 6 out of 10 (60%, representing 6) in this category settled for ways to strengthen kinship ties. In terms of gender, it was also clear that females valued kinship more because 20 (71.4%) out of 28 in this category bemoaned destructive influences affecting the concept of kinship. Meanwhile 75% (representing 15 out of 20 respondents) of the male respondents valued kinship and those in intermarriage relationships (60%, representing 6).

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion takes into consideration the literature on the Genesis of kinship, existence of kin terms and the concept of kinship in general. This chapter discusses the findings according to the objectives of the study. The purpose of this study was to establish the social significance of kinship in the Bemba speech community. Its specific objectives were:

1. To establish Bemba's understanding of kinship;
2. To ascertain the significance of kinship in a Bemba speech community;
3. To establish the extent to which kinship instil a sense of appreciation for one another;
4. To identify factors weakening kinship ties and;
5. To explore what can be done to strengthen kinship ties.

5.1 The Bemba people's understanding of kinship

The first objective under this sub-section sought to establish how well participants understood the concept of kinship. Based on the findings, it is clear that 88% of respondents understood kinship to mean family relations even beyond biological ties. There was an emphasis on family values and the need to be there for one another. From the findings it has been deduced that kinship relations are so complex that they include members of the clans even those one could have formed social connections through church, school and work related background. The study further indicates that although the Bemba people are matrilineal, their kinship system in some ways is bilateral in nature. The kin group to which a person constantly refers in everyday affairs is *ulupwa*, a bilateral group of near relatives on both sides of his family (Chisanga, 1980).

The study has revealed that all kinship is said to be bilateral in the sense that, whatever the principle of descent, an individual has kinship ties to and through both parents. The Bemba kinship system is classificatory with complex relations (Chisanga, 1980). As pointed out by Kroeber (1929, 1939, 1948b), kinship systems that subsume a large number of kin types have a way of dealing with the mass of kin terms from different groups. For instance, findings have revealed that *ulupwa* (family) in Bemba community include large extended families yet they have a way of accommodating complex relations. That having been said the concept of kinship can be used as a form of social integration to bind people together even in times of need (Schwimmer, 2003; Slaski, 1950).

Findings further show that kinship terminologies exist in all languages and almost universally people have terms of address for relatives that differ from terms of reference (Fox, 1977 and Keesing, 1975). This suggests that the concept of kinship is not unique to the Bemba people. Everywhere people have modelled their relations on biological connections and their terminology shows that they make a distinction between relatives of descent and relatives of marriage (Kingman, 2001). It appears that even bonds of relationships follow a similar pattern of whether one is a relative by descent or marriage.

5.2 The significance of kinship in a Bemba speech community

The second objective was to ascertain the significance of kinship among the Bemba. The literature revealed that kinship is crucial to the community's survival in the context of death and other factors to disintegrate families (Chisanga, 1980). In the absence of a care giver one was assured of receiving support from relatives. From the findings it was established that kin terms such as mother, father, brother and sister are not restricted to biological relations to serve the cultural ideals of extended family arrangement.

It has been revealed that Bemba kin term for 'mother' is used most, especially to mean 'origin' as in one's lineage since Bembas are matrilineal. From the findings the role of a female figure seems to have great significance in providing social security for the needy in a family.

The findings further revealed that over 60% of households with surviving maternal grandparents or with a male head who had many sisters, female cousins or nieces were significantly more likely to provide care and support to the needy. This implies the significance of 'mother' or 'matrilineal' in Bemba culture and matri-focal families were common due to among other issues divorce and death of spouse. The reviewed literature aspect of the matrilineal bond, seems to suggest the lasting mother-child bond that birth produces, and which may explain the importance of the matrilineal aspect among the Bemba people. From the findings it was deduced that most extended families with female relatives were generally in support of the extended relations. These findings support the critical role that women play especially in poor countries and highlight the importance of policies aimed at empowering women.

Literature also supports the idea that in Africa, the extended family was the traditional social security system. The findings seem to suggest that this type of family arrangement still provides security to its members. Revelations from respondents indicate that extended family members were responsible for protecting the vulnerable, caring for the poor and the sick, and passing on traditional social values through education. Families, particularly in traditional societies, comprise large networks of people, extending, through varying degrees of relationship over multiple generations and wide geographical areas, and involving reciprocal obligations (Hill, 1999; Merrifield, 1980; Carsten, Janet, 2004; Guest, Kenneh, 2013; McConvell, Patrick, 2013). This was confirmed from the findings whereby respondents felt that cultural values and etiquettes are best transmitted from one generation to the next through a tightly held kinship.

Some respondents, whose basis for attachment to *ulupwa* was merely awareness of their links to a clan but felt obligated to their kinsmen and others, though born from a polygamous marriage, still enjoy meaningful family relations long after their (parents) and grandparents are dead. Such experiences go to indicate that when family members have regard for one another there is a likelihood of them forming close ties. For instance, if one's cousin's son or step brother's son addresses one as 'tata' (father), one responds in a fatherly way as expected by the needs of the 'son'. Their bond of relationship will, no doubt, grow strong. This can (also apply to other relationships within the family structure.

The literature described a more flexible view of kinship by indicating that it provides relative stability of institutions and communities against processes of change and conflict (Kronenfeld, 2012; Malinowski, 1922, 929). The study indicated that the stability brought about as a result of kinship ties seem to have compelled some to support the arrangement. From the literature, one can tell that traditional African extended families were looked upon as a source of social security and this is what has been brought out from the findings. It has been established that modern day extended family networks are important in assisting young adults and the elderly ones to cope with life's challenges (Vermeulen, Han and Frederico Delgado Rosa, 2022). In Europe, as indicated from the literature, there is a great emphasis on kinship care other than orphanages (Kronenfeld, 2012; Shapiro, 2012; Sahlins, 2011b).

Therefore, if close family ties are sustained in our society, tendencies of abandonment and neglect could be brought under control. From the findings it was revealed that those who have had sound relationship with their

kinsmen are very proud to be associated with distant relatives as if they were siblings.

5.3 The extent to which kinship instils a sense of appreciation for one another

The third objective was about establishing how kinship instils a sense of appreciation for one another. The findings revealed that about 68% of the respondents felt that family members provided a safety net and could lend a hand should the need arise. The reviewed literature has showed that the concept of kinship could be used as a form of alliance to bind members of wider families together. The literature seemed to indicate that, kin terms, in most African traditional families, as the case is among the Bemba people, carry with them all the expected social obligations demanded of those referred to by such terms and ultimately act to reinforce cultural expectations about how kin should behave toward one another (Siegel, 1996; Just, Peter, Monaghan, John, 2000; Stone, Linda, 2001; Goody, 1963; McConvell, Patrick, 2013).

It has been disclosed that in cases where the needy were offered to be accommodated in institutions of care, many of them shunned the offers because their wish was to be cared for in a home environment. The principle element in any person's environment is the family, which is the first unit where life is shared (Hill, 1999; Merrifield, 1980). The findings further indicated that there was security from knowing one's ancestry and the idea of one being surrounded by members of wider families whom one could share one's joys and sorrows. It was also established that having the knowledge that there is someone to look up to when need arises instils a sense of appreciation for one another among kin folks.

The study has established that in stable kin relations one is guaranteed of support and care in times of need even security is assured if one loses one's source of livelihood because relatives feel duty bound to provide sustenance and coverage if need be. It has been appreciated that maintaining close family ties enables kin groups to fulfil their responsibilities to one another. However, based on Foley's principle of reciprocity, 50% of respondents felt that it was much easier for people to assist others if they expected something in return because failure to reciprocate kindness might strain kinship ties (Foley, 1997).

5.4 Factors weakening kinship ties

The fourth objective was to identify factors weakening kinship ties. From the reviewed literature and the findings it is evident that social change has affected people's view of kinship as many are more inclined to western culture. Others have been badly hit by what is obtaining in the socio-economic arena. The change has largely been attributed to western education and industrialization. The western industrialization seems to suggest that the nuclear family arrangement is much more sustainable in the present economy than the extended family system.

The study revealed that the wealth acquired by an individual is not usually shared among kinsmen as people become isolated in an effort to safeguard what they feel should only belong to themselves and to those very close to them. The western culture seems to suggest that people should only plan their life centred on themselves and on those very close to them. This is probably a way to go round the high cost of living.

The high cost of living appears to compel some people to relinquish their responsibility to extended families as they can only manage to fend for nuclear families (-) even though with difficulties. Western education and politics are said to have brought in value changes in direct opposition to the extended family life since they emphasize individualism over collectivity (Ferguson, 1999; Parsons and Bales 1955). The findings confirmed that the majority of those who have acquired the existing education insist so much on their rights), and privacy as they want to live as they please. So, they may not be open to embracing the concept of kinship.

The literature pointed out that by 1935, anthropologists like Mair and Richards and, no doubt, many others had been noticing change in marriage and family patterns such that those who still honour their family obligations might have done so out of a mixed sense of dread and guilt (Mair, 1953; Richards, 1969; Goody, 1963; Guest, Kenneh, 2013; Peel, Elizabeth., Riggs, Damien, 2016). Divorce rates and deaths of guardians had contributed to change in family patterns. Findings showed that some children were being looked after by relatives because their parents had divorced or [had] died (Ferguson, 1999; Hill, 1999). In other instances parents were working away from home.

What is documented about the impact of the Western culture on the kinship concept corroborated the views of the respondents. There were reports that some members of the wider families demanded more than was reasonably possible by the members of the nuclear family. Such expressions suggested that independence from the extended family responsibilities would bring an individual a measure of freedom and prosperity, yet factors on the ground indicated otherwise as proved by a number of people whose wish was to sustain kinship ties. Thus, instead of families working towards unity and interdependence, what was revealed was that they were moving towards social disintegration as more and more families opted for Western model of a nuclear family arrangement. It appeared that the nuclear family system was becoming more popular than the traditional extended family system because it seemed easier to manage in the midst of socio-economic hardships.

58% of the respondents cited moral decadence as one of the factors weakening kinship relations. During the discussions and the interviews, it was learned that some families refused to accommodate or be accommodated by relatives. This probably explained why there was disintegration in the kinship ties. The issue of morals and

squabbles seemed to be a thorn in the flesh, but that was not unique to extended families and therefore, the families concerned needed to address the problem openly rather than leave it to chance or else silence would promote negative influences besides defilement and abandonment.

5.5 What can be done to strengthen kinship ties?

The fifth and final objective explored what could be done to strengthen kinship ties. Literature about developed economies such as Japan and China indicated that kinship was viewed as important despite except seemingly few factors which suggested otherwise. Numerous examples remained of the resilience of extended family networks such as in Taiwan (Stokes, Leclere & Yeu 1987), Japan (Morgan and Hiroshima, 1983), India (Ram and Wong 1994), and China (Tsui, 1989; Zhang, 2001), to cite but a few. In Africa, researchers have portrayed the persistence of extended family networks as cultural bridges in modernization rather than impediments (Silverstein, 1984). The researchers posit that at being the case there is need to take a leaf from nations such as Japan, China and India to address the current status quo.

The study seemed to suggest that a new form of kinship was emerging as people formed close ties with those they had had links through church, politics and merely being good neighbours. This corroborates with what Wierzbicka, Anna (2016) and Birenbaum-Carmeli, Daphna; Inhorn, Maria (2008) seemingly posit. Such relations need to be nurtured in that if properly handled they could contribute to social stability and harmony within communities. If kinship ties contribute to cultural stability in contemporary society, then it is imperative that research be done to investigate what the aforementioned nations are doing to keep extended family networks alive.

Many families were among other things reportedly failing in their duty due to socio-economic hardships. However, 87% of the respondents seemed to intimate that extended relations were worth nurturing because they kept families united and interdependent. This was extrapolated from the interviews and discussions whereby kinship connections were appreciated for what they could offer in terms of emotional and moral support - and not always in terms of for financial support. Where kinship ties are appreciated, issues of loneliness and neglect can be addressed. It appears that there is an assurance that in time of need someone will have a shoulder to lean on. The respondents seemed to indicate that where there was need for relief funds, cash transfer programs became a key means of social protection and the programs expanded dramatically partly due to, at least, the convincing evidence of their effectiveness.

It should be noted that the objective of cash transfer programs as shown by the study was to protect individuals or households from the impacts of socio-economic shocks and support the accumulation of human, financial, and productive assets (UNICEF, 2012). Given this objective, the Transfer Project supported the assessment of program impact on key social outcomes in conjunction with a broader range of indicators. A key initiative under the Transfer Project is the 'From Protection to Production' (PtoP) project. From the findings, the evidence of the effectiveness of the cash transfers, provided through government programs in Zambia, had not been substantially documented.

The study revealed that there was a gap between the social protection being provided in Zambia and the ability to be productive on the part of recipients. Although the government of Zambia had exhibited political will in providing the social cash transfer to improve the livelihood of families in need, it had been observed that the cash given was not enough and consistent enough to meet the various needs of the target households. Many of the beneficiaries were reportedly in need of projects or small scale businesses as a long term measure to address their needs. In some cases, there were reports of those who would have been recipient target households having been left out of the program. This was one of the serious issues that needed to be addressed if the social cash transfer was to serve its intended purpose.

CONCLUSION

Kinship as understood by the Bemba people foster family ties where members appreciate the value of belonging to a wider family. This is supported by Bowen's family system's theory that families are systems of interconnected and interdependent individuals, none of whom can be understood in isolation from the system. In addition, the family is part of other systems in the community, so changes in one family will create imbalance and lead to changes in other systems that surround that family (Powell & Cassidy, 2007). This is what has been established by this study and that is why mitigating measures to preserve family unity are a must.

The findings brought out concerns, however, about whether relationships based on kinship could be sustained as understood by the Bemba people since there was a growing trend towards people forming kinship relations without biological or affinity connections. Socio-economic hardships were cited as having made it difficult for many households to fulfil their obligations to those who belong to them. The levels of needy people in society continued to increase as they had little or no support from family members. On the other hand, in countries where the government of the day was obliged to support the native people with various social needs such as employment and economic empowerment there were success stories. Perhaps this is what Zambia needs

instead of giving out cash, which is too little to start a sustainable business.

The study has established that those who need care and support depend mostly on their immediate and wider families including those they could have developed a relationship by merely being good neighbours or workmates. This goes to suggest that the family unity is still regarded as the primary provider of security to individuals despite changes in family patterns due to, among other things, Western culture and socio-economic issues. Therefore, to create more accommodating, safe and supportive families, there is need to promote economic empowerment at family level for all especially women, who seem to be readily available to provide the needed care and support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Traditional leadership and the church should work closely on rigorous sensitization programs for families to stay together.
2. The government should implement new holistic form of public policies and self-help initiatives that will genuinely promote the interests of diverse people in need nationwide while maintaining the cultural infrastructure.
3. The legal framework and religious organizations should be active to look into the reported negative influences such as moral decadence that has contributed to weakening kinship ties.
4. The Curriculum Development Centre should embrace the culture on kinship in curriculum design right from kindergarten to tertiary education.

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