

# The Role of the Family in Enhancing Peace in Nigeria

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## Abstract

This paper attempt to look at peace, family and to consider the attributes of the family, functions and changes that takes place in the Nigerian family. Peace as a necessary ingredient is needed for the survival, progress and development of any society. The family being the nucleus and foundation of the society needs peace. The paper discusses ways of ensuring lasting peace in the family which invariably translates to peace in the society. It also takes a critical look at the causes of the bridge of peace within the family. Recommendations of some measures towards solving these problems are also made.

## Introduction

There are many definition of peace. For the purpose of this write-up a few of them will be examined. According to Edinyang (2012) peace is the ability to get along with other people and having positive thoughts about oneself and other individuals in the society. It is more than absence of war or violence. Balasorija (2001), Dhokalia (2001) Harris and Morrison (2003), Timpson (2002) sees peace as the exhibition of love and care.

Generally speaking peace is seen as the absence of war. This invariably means that war is the absence of peace. Ibeanu (2011) argues that the above definition of peace is “tautological and circular in logic” (p3); he stated that there can be peace even when there is war. He cited the case of Palestine and Israel where there are peaceful interactions between the two nations but engaged in active war. Despite their differences, “the Palestinians and Israelis have been able to establish peaceful use of water resources, even as the war between them has ranged” (Ibeanu, 2011:1). In the same vein, it will be incorrect to say that a country that is experiencing social conditions such as intimidation, oppression, poverty, exclusion, want, fear and other forms of psychological pressure is being in peace because there is no open outbreak of violence and war. Infact, whenever there is oppression of the poor and women, intimidation of the ordinary Nigerian, Police brutality, monopolization of resources and power by some individuals or section of the country, it will be wrong to say there is peace in such an environment.

Peace is natural; it is more or less God-given state of human existence. It is a state of perfect rest. Politically speaking, peace is a political condition that makes justice possible. The interest of the writer as it relates to this work is the sociological perspective of peace. The sociological perspective of peace addresses the social context. From the sociological angle, peace refers to a condition of social harmony in which there are no social antagonisms in the family. A situation, where there is no conflict in the family; where members of the family are able to meet their needs and expectations. A condition where the family needs to educate its children, produce goods, govern its affairs, care for one another and provide security for its members as well as share the benefits.

The concept family like peace has been variously defined too, in most cases the family is a group united by marriage, blood and/or adoption in order to satisfy intimacy needs and/or bear and socialize children. The family, thus, is a crucial factor in both individual well being and social life. Nwobi (1997) sees the family as comprising of married couple, their offspring's and immediate kith and kin-brothers and sisters of the bride groom and their parents, relatives, in-laws, and any other dependents. This, of course, defines the extended family. The nuclear family on the other hand is seen as being made up of husband and the wife or wives and perhaps children if they are so blessed with. This definition of the writer is the definitional trend in the Western countries and indeed the developing countries of African including Nigeria. This definition has evoked some questions by Akinade (1997:2). Among there are;

1. Is it that married couple, living in their home but who are childless can not constitute a family?
2. Must the trio-married man, wife (wives) and the children of this union be physically present in a home for a family to result?
3. In a situation where an aged parent and some dependent relatives of either the wife or the man live in the home/dwelling with the members of family can this not be called a family/household?
4. If as we hold in this exposition that the definition of a family has a nuclear family flavor, what is the place of single parenthood in the overall definition of the family?

To comprehend the background of conflicts and lack of peace in the Nigerian family, it is pertinent to take a look at the features of the Nigerian family as briefly stated below:

### Features of the Nigerian family

In the Nigerian family;

- 1) Relatives other than husband, wife and their unmarried adopted children share residence or live together.
- 2) There is pooling or sharing or joint ownership of resources which is usually formalized or legally recognized and these resources include symbolic estates that are the inheritance of rights in relatives.
- 3) There is recognition of kin relationship either of linear or a collateral character, but usually both. People clearly can establish either genealogical or consanguine relationships.
- 4) There is recognition of common responsibility. Family solidarity makes obligations to one another a necessity.
- 5) There is allegiance to a common ancestor
- 6) There is reciprocal assistance pattern. (Ihejiamaizu 2002:183).

### Functions of the family

The functions of the family are numerous whether in the developed or developing countries, family perform the following functions to their members.

- 1) Sexual regulation: The family plays an important factor in regulating sexual behaviour, reproduction and rearing of children. Marriage is the only medium officially recognized by the society through which one can have sex, reproduce and rear children. Lack of sexual regulation and indiscriminate rearing of children are some of the causes of lack of peace and security.
- 2) Psychological functions: It is the duty of the family to show love, affection and companionship to one another. Psychologically stable family is bound to reflect on the offspring. If the family is the aggressive type, the family will be unstable and this will lead to lack of peace and harmony in the family and the society at large.
- 3) Primary group: It is the duty of the family to provide primary group for individuals. Cooley (1967:158) stated that "in these, everywhere, human nature comes into existence. Man does not have it at birth, he cannot acquire it except through fellowship and it decays in isolation.
- 4) Social functions: The social functions of the family are summarized below:
  - i) Provision of social security to their aged members.
  - ii) Encouraging its members to take part in community work, obey the laws and orders of the land, to ensure peace and to be good examples unto others.
  - iii) Socializing its members to the norms, values, cultures and tradition of the society.
  - iv) Educate the family members; and
  - v) Provide recreational facilities to its members, religious training and providing the necessities of life.

Once these functions are properly exercised, there is bound to be peace and decorum in the family and society at large.

As earlier stated, peace does not necessarily mean the absence of physical war or violence. In the same vein, lack of peace in the family does not mean the presence of physical violence but as Mezieobi and Opara (2007) rightly put it, the Nigerian family that does not have peace is stressful, problematic, conflict ridden, crises packed, troubled, unstable and socially disorganized (p.12). This type of "family environment is detrimental to the inmates of the given family" (Mezieobi and Opara, 1995:74).

### Features of a family that lack peace

- 1) High divorce rates.
- 2) Run away children and wives who abandon their husband and/or children.
- 3) Constant aggression or withdrawal.
- 4) Inappropriate antagonism towards children.
- 5) Divided interest.
- 6) Social problems
- 7) Drinking and absence of consistent affection.
- 8) Alienation, loneliness, depression, disillusionment.
- 9) Inadequate or absence of free flow of communication.
- 10) Displace aggressive behaviour.
- 11) Remarriages.
- 12) Children's divided parental loyalties, maladjustment and indulgence in delinquent acts (Mezieobi and Opara, 2007). However, Mezieobi and Opara (2007) thus correctly submit that the causes of family unrest and lack of peace are;
  1. Negligence of emotional, physiological, financial maturity of readiness and family/marital encumbrances

- before contracting marriage;
2. Negligence of pre marital and marital counseling;
  3. Negligence of family responsibilities;
  4. Negligence of societal or culturally established marital norms— violating the principle of incest avoidance;
  6. Negligence of the complexities and entanglements of marriage and family life;
  7. Neglect of the principles governing good mate selection;
  8. Negligence of marital incompatibilities (social characteristics, education, religion, interest, values); and
  9. Negligence of hereditary factors inimical to stable family life.

Aside these there are other causes which they categorized under sexual problems, incompatibility problems, psychological problems, social problems, addictive problems, economic problems, opposition and absence of consensual decision making, health problems and of course children caused problems.

The bridge of peace in the Nigerian family can according to Edinyang (2012) be attributed to the influence of industrialization, civilization and modernization. These variables have affected the traditional African family negatively. The changes occasioned by these variables are outlined below.

### **Changes in the Nigerian family**

**Early marriage:** Before now, people go into marriage when they are of age; and have gotten good means of livelihood that will sustain the upcoming family and its responsibilities. But now the reverse is the case.

**Divorced rate:** The above is responsible for why we have high divorced rate in Nigeria. For instance, the divorce rate in Nigeria rose dramatically after 1965, from 2.5 to 4.3 per 1,000 people in 1997 (U.S. Bureau of Census 1999e:110).

**Births that occur out of wedlock:** Since 1970s, the proportion of all birth that occurs out of wedlock had nearly tripled; more than 3 out of every 10 births is to an unmarried woman (U.S. Bureau of Census 1999e:79). This development was regarded as a taboo in those days and children that were born out of wedlock were regarded as vagabonds and they have very low social status in the society.

**Children living with only one parent:** This was unheard of in a typical Nigerian society. Children grow and develop well when they are nurtured by both parents. Now the story is different. In 1998 for instance, 19.8 million children under the age of 18, or 27.7 percent of all such children lived with one parent (Lugaila, 1998).

### **The way forward**

For peace to reign in the Nigerian family, the following fundamental conditions must be met:

1. The pursuit of collective and individual goals through a non violent means.
2. Democratic decision making in the family.
3. There must be justice and fair play in the family.
4. Amiable resolution and management of conflict in the family.
5. Respect for one another in the family.
6. There must exist the desire and culture of peace.
7. There should be marriage and family counseling.
8. There should be equitable distribution of power.
9. There should be family life education.
10. Smaller family size should be encouraged.

### **Conclusion**

Peace is the ability to live in harmony with oneself and others. Peace is a necessary ingredient needed for the smooth running of the family. The family is the foundation of the society. There will be no stable society without first having a stable family. Thus the Nigerian family needs peace and decorum for effective human and societal development. There will be absolute peace in the Nigeria family if members of the family perform their functions well. The negative influence of industrialization, modernization and civilization can not affect the Nigerian family to the extent of causing friction, tension, unrest and distrust if members of the Nigerian family are willing to pursue peace.

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