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Family Functions in the Tasks of Values Inculcation and Character Development amongst Youngsters in Nigeria: A Sociological Perspective

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of the home/family in the inculcation of the right kind of values and character formation in a child. It also identifies the key factors militating against the effort of the family in fulfilling its role and recommends how this institution can effectively and efficiently play its role for a better Nigeria. The paper suggests a number of ways for overcoming this problem. For example, governments at various levels (Federal, state and local governments) should endeavour to properly execute the poverty alleviation programmes with a view to reducing poverty, which is one of the causes of decay and disintegration of family values in the society.

Introduction

The family is generally regarded as a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood, or adoption. It constitutes a single household; the members interact with each other in their respective social roles as husband or wife, mother and father and children. It also includes brothers and sisters at home. However, this description is not sufficiently broad enough to cover all types of families. This description refers only to the traditional family set up; be it nuclear or extended. The family or the home is an important agency of education and has been exercising an age-long and immediate influence on the behaviour, character, conduct and personality of its members. It is a place where we learn our first lessons of living together, working together, helping each other, and learning lessons of mutual help, cooperation and adjustment. It is generally said that 'charity begins at home'. This implies, in a nutshell that, the home lays the foundation as far as values acquisition and character development of a child are concerned. This paper examines the role of the family in inculcating the right, kind of values and the formation of good character amongst individuals in the Nigerian perspective. It is considered that these issues are necessary for the socio-economic and political development of the individual and the nation. The paper portrays the home as an agent of socialization; its role in the formation of values and character of individuals are considered. Factors militating against the efforts of the family/home in performing its role effectively and efficiently are also examined.

Theoretical Framework

Sociological theorists examine the functions of the family or the home from different theoretical perspectives. Among these perspectives are functionalism, the conflict theory and the Symbolic Interactionism. These theories provide valuable insights into the intricacies of the functions of the family or the home. Thus, Macionis (1989), maintains that the family performs several important social functions. He endorses that this is why the family is considered as the backbone of society. In this perspective, functionalists project the family as the first and most important agent of the

socialization process. Thus, personalities of each new generation are shaped within the family. Thus, children grow to be well-integrated into the family in order to contribute meaningful to the development of the larger society.

On the other hand, Macionis (1989), maintains that the conflict theory holds the view that the importance of the family derives from its contribution in the propagation of society. This theory explains how the family perpetuates patterns of social inequality. This implies that, rather than providing benefits to everyone, the family helps to maintain the social dominance of certain categories of people. In fact, patterns of social inequality among various racial and ethnic groups are perpetuated through the operations of the family. Macionis (1989), argued that the family helps to perpetuate the social dominance of males over females, which is the essence of patriarchy. Thus, he considered marriage to be the arena of an important class antagonism by which females have been socially (and often legally) defined as the property of males. Consequently, the theory seeks to establish a link between the traditional family and social inequality. It relates a number of conflicts and changes that are being experienced in the modern society, such as violence against women, social discrimination and so on, to the traditional pattern and function of the family set up.

However, the symbolic interactionists analyse the family differently; they suggest that various family members perceive marriage and family-life differently. The power of gender in society, according to them, implies that females and males learn to have different expectations and perceptions of the family because of their distinctive positions in the society, and the experiences and perceptions in it (Macionis 1989). They endorse further that, the experiences and perceptions of all family members may likely change over time, because of the changes of time, circumstances and situations.

By and large, three different sociological perspectives have been briefly identified and highlighted; showing how each of them visualizes the functions of the family. This paper is more inclined to the functionalist perspective of the analysis of the functions of the home or family. It portrays the family as laying the proper foundation for the inculcation of societal values and character development amongst young persons in the society.

The Home and the Socialization Process in a Child

The analysis of the family from a functionalist perspective is related to the question of the functions and roles performed by it as an institution or a part of it. In the family, this issue refers to the functions of individuals in the family. In the perspective of this exposition, socialization simply refers to the process whereby the child acquires the standards, values and attitudes of the group into which he/she is born; thus, becoming a functioning member of it. Functionalists, such as Parsons (1902–1979), argued that one of the basic and fundamental functions, which are common to the family in all societies, is the primary socialization of the children. Primary socialization refers to socialization during the early years of childhood, which takes place mainly within the family. There are two basic processes involved in primary socialization, the internalization of a family's culture and the structuring, shaping and moulding of the personality of a child. These occur mainly in order to enable the child fit into a particular or a given family.

Socialization is the process of interaction among members of the society through which the young learns the culture of the society including its ways of thinking and doing things that are considered by the society as right, proper and acceptable. According to Macionis (1989), culture implies the

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beliefs, values, and behaviour and material objects shared by a particular people. Thus, culture is the total way of life of a people. It includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, language, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society. It is not out of place to mention that for an individual to be socialized, it therefore means that, he has to learn the norms, values and attitudes of the society to which one belongs. The transmission of culture involves the introduction of the young to the ethical principles and moral values of the society.

The Role of the Home in Value and Character Formation

Culture is not simply learned, it is internalized as part of the personality structure of an individual. The personality of a child is shaped and moulded through vicarious learning and internalization of the values of the family and that of the society at large (Aggraval, 1981). This is with a view to enabling him become a useful and acceptable member of his society; thereby, making him fit into the culture of the society in which he finds himself. Families are important centres for shaping human personalities, which are essential for a useful living in the society.

To the functionalists, the home plays a crucial role in values and character formation of a child. As in the past and in the present era, the home is expected to play the following three major roles, which are capable of inculcating the right kind of values and character moulding and development among children and youths in the society.

- Centre of moral education
- Source of religious education
- Provision of social training.

These three major roles are briefly and concisely discussed respectively.

Centre of Moral Education:

The older members of the family are usually eager that their children should conform to certain moral codes; so they often set good examples before them. In this way they serve as role models for the younger ones in the family. They are very desirous in endorsing that nothing should be done, which, could bring or cause shame to the name of the family. The elders used to narrate stories of great men who always stood for higher ideals in life and thereby exhorted the youngsters to adopt exemplary behaviours, such as that which are exhibited by saints, warriors, political leaders, wise men, and so on. The home constitutes a proper moral environment for the children; since morality cannot be taught, it can only be learnt. It is, therefore, essential that the older members of the family set good examples of moral behaviour before the younger ones.

However, as a child grows older, he requires discipline and guidance, which are necessary throughout childhood and adolescence for his/her personal and social development. Parents and elders of the family are expected to behave and conduct themselves properly, so that the younger children can learn from them. Character formation of a child could be morally reprehensible in such families where there is a chronic misunderstanding and lack of affection between parents, or where parental social adjustment is not congenial. This therefore, means that the family might produce good or bad children, depending on the type of up bringing received by them. This also implies that a child's morality or otherwise is largely determined by his home or family background.

Source of Religious Education:

By participating in the religious activities of the family, children are exposed to the opportunities for acquiring spiritual development. This implies that the home provides the basic religious education for its children and youths. To Durkheim (1858 - 1917), a functionalist, a source of social cohesion and unity is religion. Through religion, people could experience collective and a high degree of a sense of shared belonging and understanding that helps to foster social cohesion, unity and solidarity. Durkheim disclosed that religion plays an important role in holding the family together and the society at large. Through religious teachings, children are taught to be spiritually sound-minded and grow into people of good values and character. They are made to uphold the ideals in becoming loyal, and people of right values and character, who are capable of upholding the good virtues and cherished cultural norms of the family and society at large.

Provision of Social Training:

The home or family is a sub-social institution of the society, which is a microcosm of the larger society. Children learn social behaviour in the family. The family develops a code of conduct and behaviour, which tends to regulate the interaction of its members. This code of conduct and behaviour is also meant to be observed by members within and outside the family. This is because, as we noted above, the family is a representation of the larger society. Thus, the family is an important agency for developing social behaviour and attitude, which are capable of making a child to be effectively prepared to live in the family and in the larger society.

Thus, the home, where a child spends most of his time, constitutes his entire social environment. He acquires certain habits, attitudes and ideas from the home. The home offers the social and psychological security, which are essential for the growth and development of moral character in children. It is generally said, as we have noted earlier that, "Charity begins at home". This implies that when a person behaves in a particular manner; it is usually attributed to his/her family background. Thus, the family is the first and most important place where a child learns good manners and the necessary home training, which to a large extent influences his/her behaviour later in life.

Factors Militating Against Efforts of the Home in Fulfilling its Role of Fostering Values and Good Character Development amongst Children

The home, which is generally believed to be a giant and reliable agent of sound moral and character development for children and youths, could be handicapped in fulfilling this task. A number of factors are considered as being responsible for poor or inefficient parental efforts in instilling the right kind of values and character development among children and youths in Nigeria. Some of these factors are listed as follows, namely:

- Poverty, including low socio-economic status of parents.
- Effects of broken homes.
- Effects of unemployment.
- Negative attitudes of parents towards the training of their children.
- Lack of, and or inadequate role models
  The effects of these factors are briefly considered below.

Parents, who are unable to cope with the financial demands of their homes, might find out that they lacked the ability and resources to take responsibility for instilling the right kind of values and good character development amongst children and youths. In the homes, where there is no

peaceful co-existence between parents (Father and Mother), such a situation could affect the upbringing of children and consequently, the inculcation of good values and good character amongst them. Children and youths learn to copy and imitate parents and elders. Hence, the way parents live in the home often affects the behaviour and character of their children.

In a society or nation that is characterized by large scale unemployment, indiscipline and corruption, it could be very difficult to instil moral values and ensure good character development amongst young people. Unemployment, which consequently could lead to corruption, is capable of disintegrating the rich values of our Nigerian society. Parents' negative attitude towards their sons and daughters is one of various factors that militate against their roles in ensuring good moral values and character development amongst them. Parents are likely to encounter this problem when they entertain negative perception about their children. This attitude makes parents not to make provision for the much needed care and concern for the children.

The family or the home is a miniature society. This implies that the family is a microcosm of the larger society. As such, a society that is characterized by indiscipline and corruption is unlikely to provide the much needed role models for its members. Children require elders, who they would observe as role models. These are the well behaved and disciplined elders and people who are free from corruption. Through this calibre of people, the young ones could be expected to learn good behaviour as they observe these elders display their roles in society.

Recommendations
In order for the family/home to play its role of values inculcation and character development effectively amongst young persons, the following recommendations are suggested:

The government at various levels (Federal, state and local governments) should endeavour to execute poverty alleviation programmes effectively with a view to reducing poverty, which is one of the causes of decay and disintegration of the value-system in the society.

Since the family or the home is an important agent of socialization with regard to values inculcation and character development amongst children, its stability, as a social institution, should be maintained and fostered. This is with a view to entrenching into the minds of children the desired norms and values for good character development and for a better society.

There should be a connection between the family code of morality and social code of morality to ensure moral education for the child. Morality is a major subject-matter in education, whether formal or indigenous type of education. For the continued existence of any society, morality should not be compromised at all. There is an inextricable link between the concepts "good family or home", "society" and "morality" through the process of education; education is employed as an instrument used in teaching the values embedded in these concepts.

The home and the school should have a common outlook and commitment to making an abiding or lasting coherent impression on the character development of children. Schools, colleges and other educational institutions should be responsible for socializing children, by inculcating in them, appropriate values, behaviour patterns and knowledge so that they could conform to the norms and aspirations of society.

Proper social education should be provided to parents so that they would understand and appreciate the significance of the socialization process of their children. This could ensure that many parents become committed in the development and formation of good character amongst their children.

Conclusion

The task of socialization of a child by his/her family is not an easy issue. This idea largely derives from the view that a child belongs to the family and the larger society. However, the family or home is the original social institution from which all other institutions developed. In spite of its limitations, the family still remains one of the most fundamental agencies of socialization and character development for a child. The interactions between parents and children are often very educative to their children. By and large, parents influence their children towards embracing the right or wrong directions. It is the home that determines the quality and direction of a child's life. In the home a child is provided security or denied it. It is in the home, that a child's emotional needs are satisfied or starved; and it is also in the home that a child is cherished with a creative discipline or neglected to become a spoilt person.

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