

Repositioning the Family for Economic and Social Survival in our Changing Society: Research Imperatives

Michael Ezenwa

Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Lead Paper 2- Submitted - March 29, 2022, Revised and Accepted – April 11, 2022

Abstract

This paper discusses the concept of repositioning the family, the roles of family members and the various societal changes that are currently affecting the Nigerian family. To reposition, connotes rearrangement, the need to find new more workable approaches, to adjust, or place in another position. To reposition something becomes necessary only when the existing situation or circumstance no longer produces expected result or goal. The family is a sociological/socio-cultural creation that represents the smallest unit of the society often made up of father, mother and children. In most patrimonial societies, the father initiates the marital union between himself and the wife. He bears the cost and beholds the wife as a source of joy and pride. The mother assists the father in these duties but is also focused on care and nurture of the home. The family as a microcosm of the society is faced with many challenges. They include economic and social upheavals epitomised by increased rates of crime. Others include increase in poverty and unemployment rates, galloping inflation, low life expectancy, increase in mental and behavioural problems. A changing society might be associated with social and economic crises such as inflation, unemployment, and increase in crime and drug abuse rates. Many of the current generation of young Nigerians do not want to be patient with life. They are in a hurry, looking for shorter often unlawful corners to command wealth and influence. This is the crux of the challenges of our society that threaten economic and social survival. Therefore, there is a clarion call for empirically tested solutions as the way forward.

Keywords: Family, Economic Survival, Challenges, Contemporary Nigeria, Youths

Introduction

The word, reposition, connotes rearrangement, the need to re-strategise, to find new more workable approaches, to adjust, or place in another position. To reposition something becomes necessary only when the existing situation or circumstance no longer produces

expected result or goal. In the context of the title of this lecture, to reposition the family---, implies that the family is not achieving its goals currently and therefore the need for a change.

One can also ask: what is it that is not working in the current family situation or structure in our clime that requires

changing for effective economic and social survival? Is it in the roles of the individual components of father, mother or children? Is there the possibility that loyal and full performance of duties is unsatisfactory or lacking in or among the parties? Could it be in the communication among these components, their approach to issues or is there apparent misplacement of priorities in the leadership of the family? Are the parents especially the mother available at the right time? Is the protection of family values still a top priority among fathers, mothers and children or obsession for material and power accumulation and struggle?

To address this topic, we need to provide some responses around the above questions. More specifically, what needs to change and how, in order to guarantee or ensure economic and social survival in a dynamic society?

The Concept of the family

The family as we understand is a sociological/socio-cultural creation that represents the smallest unit of the society often made up of father, mother and children. Though there may be other individuals, friends or persons consanguineously related or not that live in a family, they are not strictly considered the members of the family unit. In the discussions that follow, we shall maintain this definition of the family.

Characteristically, the family is the mantle of socialisation. Another agent of socialisation is the school. However, we shall focus our discussion only on the family due to its uppermost and domineering influence on the development of the child. The family is usually housed in a home where basic

needs of life are met. In other words, every ideal family has a physical geographical root/location that is identifiable while the members may spread into far and near distances yet organically connected in their pursuit of development, emotional and social support, love, gregariousness, interdependence, mutual welfare, common identity and perpetuity. Family creates strong bonding among its members in such a way that each literally represents a part of a body that functions in a systematic and ecological pattern in tandem with other parts in a way that any challenge in one component is felt by all other parts. Family acts as a point of succour, recuperation and regeneration. In many African societies, individual family members have specialised roles.

The Father

The father is the head of the family that ensures availability of food, shelter, security and a symbol of confidence and authority. In most patrimonial societies, the father initiates the marital union between himself and the wife, bears the cost and beholds the wife as a source of joy and pride. The mother assists the father in these duties but is also focused on care and nurture of the home in addition to child-bearing and nurturing responsibilities. Let us look at the mother or generally the woman, what or who is she?

The Mother

A woman can be described as an adult female human being. She may be in marriage in such a case she bears the name wife and has a male counterpart described as her husband. A woman may also have children in which situation she is called a mother.

Biologically, she has a different constitution from the male counterpart. She is endowed with capacity to become pregnant and lactate as many female mammals. The human female is also said to have XX chromosomes while the masculine has X and Y chromosomes. These basic disparities have massive effects in determining crucial differences between male and female human beings such as in hormone production and use, sexual characteristics, development and use, cardiac activities including blood pressure and pulse rate, muscle strength and volume and fat tissues, immune response as well as in longevity. Generally, women outlive men. One reason for this is the fact that men have more cardio vascular morbidity and mortality than females (Ginter and Simko, 2013). This has been explained from the different nature of hormones in men and women for instance women are believed to have more immunity than male and that estrogen, a female sex hormone, tends to protect against cardiovascular diseases due to its regulatory effects on circulation of harmful cholesterol among other factors.

Beyond other differences between the man and woman, hormonal discrepancies have marked morphological impact on the human female such as development of breast, periodic menstrual flow and menopause all of these have marked effects on her behaviour and health. In addition, there appears to be some structural brain differences between men and women. Generally, men have more brain mass, about 11% higher than women (Xin, J. Zhang. Y. Tang. Y. and Yang Y. 2019). Incidentally, the smaller size of the female brain has the advantage of higher ratio of gray matter to white matter. It

also portends higher rate of communication or connection between and within brain hemispheres. Other structural differences in the areas that regulate emotions and other primitive functions may in part account for the cognitive, perceptual, problem solving pattern and other differences that exist between men and women. They may possibly contribute to the special nature of the woman.

The traditional Igbo proverb captures the duties of the woman/mother thus *Nwanyi bu ulo* (the woman is/makes the home). Due to her special nature and connection with children (capacity to conceive, breastfeed and influence etc), she has competence to provide most significant and fundamental positive or also negative control upon the child.

The mother is the first agent of socialisation through her ability to attend to the needs of the child from infancy. Indeed due to the strong bonding that results, her roles form the index impression upon the child whose brain is like a tabular rasa or photographic plate on which first exposure dominates all subsequent ones. In fact, a mother's control of the child cannot be fully estimated and this gives her the strongest reference upon which other impressions register. This naturally determining relationship makes the woman *primus inter pares* in determining the behaviour of the child. Therefore, if the child must be prepared for successful roles in life, the mother must lead, then the father, siblings and the larger society. In addition to the foregoing almost the entire human history described the woman as an exceptionally intuitive human being. Intuition sometimes called the sixth

sense could be described as the ability to correctly sense and be directed upon present and future events with the aim of guiding the individual away from danger in its largest connotations. Intuitive guidance may and in fact often fails intellectual calculation tests but, i.e. does not make much meaning at the surface but comes out to be true as events unfold. For instance according to a history, Julius Caesar, one of the strongest men in times past was stabbed by sixty conspirators including his close trusted friend, Marcus Junius Brutus. Indeed, it was the latter's stab that got to Caesar's heart which filled the latter with gross disgust that eventually killed Caesar, thus his lamentation, ..."even you Brutus". What is more instructive here is that on the eve of that fateful day of 15th March, 44 BC as reported, Caesar's wife warned him times without number to stay back home that he was to be in great danger but the fearless Caesar would not listen to the wife. The rest is now history.

In the Bible, according to the Gospel of Mathew, Pontus Pilate was seriously warned by his wife not to have anything to do with Jesus not to talk of condemning Him but Pilate would not listen. Many more examples of the intuitive nature of women abound.

Now how can we support the women and leverage on this special ability to improve the lots of our children, the youth and the larger society? One way I think is to appreciate the women folk and listen to their true counsel especially in matters that are not clear to us men. Husbands are quite critical in this direction to encourage the women to be at their best in their duty positions. Imperceptibly but steadily, we shall then make huge progress.

The Child

As a key member of the family, the child provides the parents with company and assists in family chores. He/she offers loyalty, joy and stimulation to the parents and larger society in addition to giving the parents hope for the continuity of the lineage. The child is also seen as the family investment for the future. He/she is expected to become the breadwinner when the parents have become retired and old. In this connection, the child is the hope of the parents for the future especially when the latter have become incapacitated by old age, disease or infirmity.

The Family in Contemporary Nigeria

The situation of the family in present day Nigeria can be summarised by the remark of the great Poet and Playwright Chinua Achebe in his book, *Things fall Apart*. Indeed, the Nigerian society is a highly dislocated and traumatised community. Things have fallen apart and the centre can no longer hold. In Nigeria since the recent past, no one can really guarantee tomorrow and an average citizen especially young people want to desert the country. The word desert absolutely captures the real context. The family as a microcosm of the society is faced with many challenges. They include economic and social upheavals epitomised by increased rates of crime, drug abuse, impunity especially by the political class, murder and ritual killings as well as spousal brutality and dastardly acts occasioned by unknown gunmen, herders-farmers clashes, Bokoharam insurgency, police and other security agencies brutality, extortion and corruption. Others include increase in poverty and unemployment rates, galloping inflation, low life

expectancy, increase in mental and behavioural problems as well as physical health challenges among others.

According to available data (NBS, 2021), 40 % or 80 million Nigerians live in poverty and it is feared that the figure may increase (World Bank Report, 2022). Data from National Bureau of Statistics (2022) showed unemployment rate at 33.3% and underemployment prevalence at 22.8%. Youth unemployment and underemployment rates stand at 42.5% and 21.0% respectively. These high negative economic indicators translate to worsening economic outlook with associated high level of crime and drug abuse especially among the youth population which compound family and social situations. An idle mind, they say, is the devil's workshop. When young people cannot find useful jobs to engage in, their energy is then spent in other non-socially acceptable ways.

Evidence (UNODC, 2018) from first comprehensive national household drug use survey in Nigeria showed the country has a drug use prevalence rate of 14.4% or that 14.3 million Nigerians aged 15 to 64 used drugs in the year of study, with male-female ratio of 3 is to 1 respectively. This epidemiological rate is considered high in Comparison with the 2016 annual global drug use rate of 5.6%.

What is more worrisome is that while participants aged 24 and below had the lowest rates of use in the previous year, drug use was most common among the age group of 25 to 39 years (UNODC, 2018) within the same period thus a great challenge to the country's active and productive workforce. Drug use is associated with decline in productivity, absenteeism and poor judgement.

In the preface to the Executive Summary of the 2021 World Drug Report, The Executive Director of UNODC has this to say.

Drug use killed almost half a million people in 2019, while drug use disorders resulted in 18 million years of healthy life lost, mostly due to opioids. Serious and often lethal illnesses are more common among drug users, particularly those who inject drugs, many of whom are living with HIV and Hepatitis C.

Source: Ghada Waly, Executive Director United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. World Drug Report 2021 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.21.XI.8)

Given that drugs negatively impact human physiology especially the Central Nervous System, users are more likely to be sickly and may take longer time to recover, are prone to addiction/dependence, are likely to experience disturbance in perception especially during the active phase of the drugs resulting in poor judgement, poor response and negative consequences for the individual (s).

Economic Survival

Economic survival in our context relates to the capacity to respond successfully to the competing forces of production in attending to the basic needs of life. This implies a situation that individuals creatively adjust to economic challenges by applying adaptive skills to cope with resource insufficiency to preserve self, given that survival is naturally non-negotiable. In a changing society as ours, economic endurance is challenging. A changing society is one in which things remain fluid such that long term planning, budget forecast and other futuristic activities upon which present decisions are taken become difficult or impossible to execute due to instability.

It is one in which economic and social indices cannot be predictable, especially in medium and long term bases. Due to its volatile nature, a changing society might be associated with social and economic crises such as inflation, unemployment, and increase in crime and drug abuse rates among others. At the moment, The Nigerian State typifies a changing society.

Although it has been argued that change itself such as in taste, style, fashion, art and music, architecture, technology or trade is part of human society, such changes occur imperceptible over time in a way that people often flow with changes without sharp transitions. However, when changes become immediate, unexpected, significant and swift, demanding sudden adjustments, it could become a source of disturbance given that many human persons cannot easily respond with the prevalent degree of dynamism especially older persons. Such a situation often results in high mental and behavioural challenges.

To survive drastic changes requires development of resilience. Unfortunately, many of the current generation of young Nigerians do not want to be patient with life, a step in resilience cultivation. Rather, they are in a hurry, looking for shorter often unlawful corners to command wealth and influence. In this way, any and every means to wealth seem to be accepted to many especially young Nigerians. There is little or no reference to parents nor fear of loss of their love since many of them may not have actually received real love and emotional care in their formative period. This in my view is the crux of the challenges of our society that threaten

economic and social survival not only of the youth but all ages.

Where and how did it all start?

Psychologists believe that childhood is the most fundamental period of life and the critical moment to determine the course a person's behaviour will tread in adult life. Indeed, all other developments are unfolding of the prototype formed early in life and for Sigmund Freud, the first five to seven years. This early phase of life has undoubtedly the mother as the most critical factor of influence. Eric Erickson (1959, 1963) opined that childhood is the most critical period of life during which a child forms basic personality attributes such as trust, autonomy, initiative and industry. The formation of these core healthy personality attributes according to Erickson is a factor of how the needs of the developing child were attended to by the society epitomised by the mother. If the child perceives the mother's response as inadequate and unsatisfactory, the child develops negative personality traits of mistrust in place of trust, shame and doubt instead of autonomy, guilt instead of initiative and inferiority instead of industry. Many young people today probably developed these negative personality traits and have become terrors to the parents and the adult society, a huge indictment of the parents especially the mothers

Ladies and gentlemen, without further ado, you agree with me that the woman holds the key to a successful family beginning with childhood which forms the foundation for adolescence, adulthood and old age. Ericson (1959, 1963) noted that successful resolution of primitive developmental crises positions

the individual better to adjust to the challenges of later life.

In fact, childhood is the most important period in child formation and the woman is the most critical factor at that stage. One can safely say that the hope of a bright society depends on that duty-conscious-woman.

Furthermore, it is believed among the Igbo of Nigeria that the influence of the woman pervades everything from the child to the husband and unto the environment. Indeed, Igbos believe that the nature of the woman almost entirely determines the offspring thus the Igbo proverb *Aluhie nwanji, amuhie nwa* (A wrong woman is married, a wrong child is born). Also *Akiwe tosia, O la umurenne ya/ ikwunne ya* (When coconut matures, it returns to the mother's home.) It is important to emphasize here that coconut at this juncture figuratively refers to the human being meaning when the child grows, he/she behaves more like the mother. Again, *Nne egwu n'ata agba, nwa ya na ele ya anyal na-amuru.* (As the goat chews its cud, the child watches and learns). The woman is believed to have strength and resilience to overcome challenges much more than men.

Among the Igbo it is said that *A chuchie aja uzo, a choo nyanyi ka o nyu ya amari* (when a charm-like sacrifice is used to block the road, you look for a woman to urinate upon it and neutralise same. According to the tradition, it is only a woman's urine that has the capacity to neutralise charm. All the foregoing idioms of expression demonstrate the long known influence of the woman, which appears to have been jettisoned by present generation, thus our present challenges.

Available Options

In order to survive the present economic and social problems in Nigeria, there is need for a major change of attitude towards the family. Much attention is needed to focus not only on the family but on the woman and the child as key actors of the society while all others will ultimately fall in. There is need for official recognition of child tendering as work by the government/state which needs to be compensated just as the administrator, a Gardner, a clerk or a doctor. This investment in the family will make mothers to devote sufficient attention, love and care to the offspring till the last is seven years at which time the woman may decide to choose another out- of- the- house job. The beauty of this investment lies in assisting the families bring up better human beings that will contribute more productively to the service of the state. In addition, crime rate among young people will significantly reduce in the long run thereby plummeting government spending on internal security. Also, with improved security, economic activities, foreign direct investment, job creation and enhancement of quality of life of Nigerians will ensure.

On the other hand, mothers with children less than seven years who necessarily choose to work outside their homes will not exceed more than four hours a day for a maximum of five days in a week but shall be paid full salary as their male counterparts. This is predicted on the assumption that child care is service to the state and the society for which everyone needs to contribute. Government needs to ensure that the right legislation is made to compel organisations employ mothers whose

children are within the stated age bracket. This is where affirmative action is needed for the good of our children and the future of Nigeria.

Indeed, if by law, the foregoing is implemented, Nigerian society will have well bred children that transform into good brothers or sisters, husbands or wives, and fathers or mothers. The offspring will be framed in love and attention to activate their humanness including resilience as the surest way to guarantee economic, social and mental health survival despite the changing nature of any society.

These calls for more longitudinal research to add to the growing evidence that children can best be raised in an atmosphere of parental love, presence, attention and timely response to their needs if the future is to be guaranteed.

The huge investment on security can be channelled to family protection with strong measureable positive outcomes. In fact less and less number of people will have something to do with law enforcement agencies. Unfortunately, what we find in our society today is both parents are out there chasing money and power and the child is left in the hand of a fellow ill bred child from another absentee parent or in the care of television or other electronic devices. The child grows to behave like the electronic device(s) that mentored him/her. No emotions, no humanity, no love and the society turn round to blame the child.

In a study on priority patterns of working mothers in Nigeria, Udeagha, Uwaoma and Ezenwa (2011) found that 20% of career women would decide for career option if role conflict existed between family and work demands. If this study is repeated today, we may

perhaps have over 50 % deciding for career positions. How then can our children learn virtues of life if not taught or modelled by parents especially the mother?

Lamentingly pitiable over a lost virtue mimics the contemporary situation of the family which I tried to capture figuratively thus:

The family, that oasis which nurtures, protects, guides and recuperates, the dome of succour to all ages of humankind has been polluted. The prime virtuous vanguard, the gatekeeper, the WOMAN, has been diverted in her goal to the effect that avarice, imitation and vanity alluringly lurked, disguise in seeming emancipation, modernity and equality. The Pearl has been violated. The original elements have dislocated from the nucleus and in reverse action now float loathsomely as potentially harmful free radicals.

This probably explains why we now have children who do not behave like human beings, callous, traumatised and pro drug abuse spree. Psychologists have provided numerous evidences that childhood is the most significant period of life to groom and decide almost exclusively on the personality of an individual. When therefore this responsibility is negated by parents especially the mother, the society pays dearly for it. Till date many people believe that there is no alternative to parental especially mother love, attention and care. That parents especially women who abandon their children for other purposes pay very dearly for it later in life. It is believed that women who insist to nurture their children till at least five to seven years, who are present as and when needed

before taking formal engagements stand an improved chance of having better behaved, more productive, happier and fulfilling children than their counterparts. Indeed, if our society will become better, if the family must survive economically and socially, there must be state and parental investment in filial love, timely presence to the child and personalised attention to the child. In all these, the women must again lead the way.

The Youth as a Symbol of Contemporary Cacophony in Nigeria

Let us pay particular attention to the average young Nigerian out there. The dressing suggests a somewhat disorganised individual. The hair is deliberately made very unkempt, bushy, rough, and ugly formed in the name of fashion. The trouser is torn or cut open at certain locations of the body and made loose to slack from the waist area exposing not-so-neat underwear as the person walks especially the male ones. The female prides herself for being "braless" to advertise her lustful morphologic attractiveness in some occasions appears completely without inner wears. All efforts point to pleasure seeking. The skirt is deliberately made very short, tight-fitting and exposing when seated or bent. She is happy to share her experience with her contemporaries how she drew men's sexual attention to herself. The physical movement is inclined towards either the front or sideways in the name of trend. While on the road, the ear piece is fixed to the ear and he/she walks nearly though the centre of the road. The young youth cannot stay without the telephone even when eating. At night, the phone often drops off the hand when nature's

call for rest becomes overwhelming.

What is more, the energy is spent on games, betting, drug use and sexual engagement. School work is seen as tiresome and any opportunity to cheat is welcome. Yet he/she likes to be successful, loves pleasure, know the prices of latest vehicles in town, the richest man on earth, the newest music in town and the worth of the various artists around the globe. Food is essentially fast unhealthy meals with lots of artificial seasonings in addition to soft and alcoholic drinks. Everything is on the move now and cannot wait for tomorrow. It is a neglected generation that ought to be pitied.

References

- Ericson, E.H. (1950) *Childhood and Society*
Ericson, E.H. (1959) *Childhood and Society*
Ericson, E. (1963) *Childhood and Society*
National Bureau of Statistics, 2021
Ginter, E. Simko, V. Women live longer than men.
Bratisl Lek Listy. 2013; 114(2): 45-9. doi: 10.4149/bil_2013_011.PMID:23331196
Udeagha F. C.; Uwaoma N. U. & Ezenwa M.O. (2011) Contributions of career priority patterns and assertive behaviours in breaking glass ceiling among professional women. *African bulletin of Social Sciences Vol.1. Issue.1* December (2011), pp.7-21 (formerly *African Journal of Social Sciences*)
Xin, J. Zhang. Y. Tang. Y. and Yang Y. (2019) Brain differences between men and women: evidence from deep learning. *Frontiers in Neuroscience* 08 March
<http://doi.org/10.3389/fnins.2019.0018>
World Bank Report, 2022
<https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/#>
retrieved on 8.03.2022
World Health Organization (2019). Suicide, Newsroom, Factsheets. *Details*, www.suicide/newsroom/factsheet.