

The socio economic network in zambia sociology essay



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To set the platform of discussion, it is significant to define the concept of the family and other related notions.

Giddens (2006: 206) defines the family as a “ group of persons directly linked by kin connections, the adult members of which assume responsibility of caring for children.” A family may either be a nuclear or extended family. A nuclear family comprises of two adults living together in a household with their own or adopted children. On the other hand an extended family is a group consisting of close relatives extending beyond couple and their children living together with the same household or in a close and continuous relationship with one another.

In addition, the family is one of the basic units of society whose function and contribution to society cannot be over emphasized. For instance, “ for a society to survive over time, certain basic needs must be met. New members must be added to the population to replace those members who have died or moved away. People must be clothed, sheltered and fed. Goods and services must be produced and made available to those who need and desire them. The young must be socialised into society. The elderly and the sick must receive care. Order must be maintained and power must be distributed among the members of society” (Thomas 1995: 294).

However, despite the significant role played by the family in society since its existence, it has not been spared from the changes affecting society. The process of social change has affected the traditional family patterns. Some of these changes have been gradual while some have been radical. On the other hand these changes have either been qualitative or quantitative in

nature. The changes have either brought positive or negative effects to the family. Among the significant changes that have markedly influenced the traditional family patterns are those associated with westernisation and modernisation which are closely linked? The process of industrialisation has also been critical to the primary function of the family both in the modern and pre- industrial societies.

According to Akuffo (2005: 18), he stated that the pre-industrial family consisted of “ the couple their children, a line of descendants, blood relations is taken seriously, the lived closely and cooperatively and were organized for mutual support and performed economic functions.” Thus, the pre-industrial societies system is based on kinship relations for social organisation. The family members had specific roles and responsibilities based on gender and age. For instance the parents played a critical role for the survival of its members. The main economic activity characterized by the traditional family was agriculture. As the name suggests (pre-industrial societies) the tools used for production were very simple. Besides the production of food for the family members, it was the sole responsibility of the parents to educate its members with skills for their survival. The parents also provided the emotional security and protection to the individual members of the family. In short, the family in the pre-industrial societies was for the individual's safety. The family perpetuated the values, norms and beliefs of society through the educating the members within the custody members. On the other hand, the changes that were precipitated by industrialisation had an impact on the traditional family system.

Industrialisation can be traced as far back as eighteenth and nineteenth centuries during the industrial revolution that took place in Europe and later spread to America. Giddens (2006: 39) observes that industrialisation refers to “ the emergences of machine production, based on the use of inanimate power resources (like steam or electricity). Significant changes were witnessed during this period that affected human society.

Furthermore, Industrialisation created changes in the roles of the family in society. For example in pre-industrial society, the family is the primary social institution. Production and education are the responsibility of the family.

The shift of roles from the family threatened the power and control of the parents on the family members. The role of education was assumed by the government. This created high demand for literacy among the population. The individuals were socialised on how they could adapt in the changing society. The change in the education system had both positive and negative influence on the traditional family system.

For example, the positive influence, in the industrial society was that it allowed the individual's movement in a social structure. Education provided for the upward social mobility. There was freedom of competition for social position. On the contrary, in pre-industrial societies most statuses are ascribed. This makes it difficult for the individual to work their way up the social ladder. The new education system also undermined some of the values, norms and beliefs of the traditional societies that in themselves contributed to the stability and continuity of society.

The other significant changes resulting from industrialisation was the nature of work. In pre-industrial societies, people were not specialised. They are characterized by low levels of division of labour. They conducted similar economic tasks for food production. According to Durkheim, he argued that, traditional cultures, with a low division of labour are characterised by mechanical solidarity. Because most of the members of society are involved in similar occupations, are bound together by common experience and shared beliefs. The forces of industrialisation and urbanisation however, led to a growing division of labour that contributed to the breakdown of this solidarity. (Giddens 2006: 14). This development saw a significant change in the production of goods and services. Industrialisation also changes the location of work activities. In pre-industrial societies, most of the economic activities are carried out within the family setting. With the coming of machines, however, production moves from the home to factories. This in turn encourages modernisation. This entails that people now moves off the farms and go to cities to be near the major sources of employment. (Thomas 1995: 78).

Apparently, the change of location of work created a totally different environment for the individual. In the extended family pattern the nature of interaction among members was primary. The members were closely related to each other through kinship relations. This interaction supported the individual's emotional security, protection and other physical and social needs. This change threatened the physiological and social needs enjoyed by the individual within the traditional family setting which increased vulnerability in this new environment. The individual developed new

relationships through the neighbours, friends and workmates. The individual depended upon this new system of interaction for support.

As a result of industrialization, the social structure and beliefs of society have changed drastically. This is understood that modernization describes the process of change from a traditional, Agrarian Society to a modern Industrial Society. According to Haviland in Abraham et al (unknown), Modernization defined as an all-encompassing global process of cultural and socio-economic changes, whereby the developing societies seek to acquire some of the characteristics common to industrial Societies. Modernization is the process by which cultures are force to accept traits from outside, and change their original shape. In the course of modernisation, traditional knowledge and techniques give way to the application of scientific knowledge borrowed mainly from the West. Modernisation creates the change in traditions and values due to modern technology. People have to accept this change because the progress is both necessary and beneficial to society and the individual.

However, under the impact of modernization today, people almost everywhere are witnessing the breakdown of the traditional extended family into nuclear families. This is not to say that the traditional larger kin groupings have vanished and families' function is changed and it's a negative impact on family. Every culture has its own family set-up. And modernization is also has an effect on family system and its traditions. Extended families' traditions have changed due to modernization.

Giddens (2006: 905) observes that “ men often go to work in towns or cities, leaving their family members in the home villages. Alternatively a nuclear family group will move as a unit to the city. In cases, traditional family forms and kinship system may become weakened.” This is true in the sense that in the pre-industrial societies roles were shared according to gender and age. For example, grandparents in this situation no longer played their role of providing care to the grand children as they were now separated. On other matters such as marriages, initiation ceremonies and other important rituals which were the sole responsibility of elderly people. All these values and beliefs were affected with these changes. For instance, in the pre-industrial societies, arranged marriages were preferred. The choice of one’s life partner rested in the parents and not the individual. This was viewed as one way of strengthening cultural values and norms of particular culture.

Therefore, with the development of towns and cities there has been a great shift in the way marriages are conducted and celebrated. This time an individual has the freedom to choose his/her life time partner irrespective of one’s cultural background. Today a Lozi can marry a Bemba; a Tonga also may decide to marry an Indian. Marriages are celebrated with modernity as opposed to the traditional way they used to be celebrated.

Dalouw & Edwards (1997: 499) states that “ among African families in South Africa, traditional values and customs which provided a basis for family structure have been eroded by rapid urbanisation and westernization. The problem has been made worse by the socio-economic hardship and low levels of education.” According to the National Child Policy of 2004, “ there are over 75, 000 street children in Zambia, while Child headed households

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account for an estimated 1-2 percent (about 20, 000) of all households in the country.

The extreme poverty and vulnerability in Zambia affecting the communities, households and individuals to a greater extent has been due to modernisation resulting in the disintegration and weakening of the extended family system a typical feature of pre-industrial societies. On the other hand, modernisation created employment opportunities for women as well. The idea of women being associated with domestic chores has changed.

In the recent years (decades) the idea of the male breadwinner heading the family is being increasingly challenged, an increasing number of women enter the workplaces and family structures continue to diversify. (Giddens 2006: 209). This has not just increased the income levels among the households, but it has also undermined the authority and control of the parents over the members of the family. They spend most of the time at work than at home which in itself has a negative effect on the development their children's personality development

Westernisation is also a change that has taken place in disrupting the extended family. The historical context of Westernization in Africa is the encounter with Europe, under the specific conditions of the Atlantic slave trade and the European colonial adventure. " Westernisation follows the adoption of different life styles, cultural ways, working styles, organising styles and even behavioural patterns of the western countries particularly" (Moonlight, 2009). People will take on the pattern and ways of the western countries and follow them in their working, thinking and living. Majority have

keen interest in western styles (dressing, housing, outing and partying etc) and attitudes (professionalism and individualism).

Consequently, westernisation in our African societies has an impact to the socio-economic activities. A Zambian family, like families elsewhere, can be thought of as a group which is responsible to reproduce, nurture, and educate the young to become productive members of the family and the society at large. Children are later taken to schools where traditional values and norms are eroded by new values of the west. The new fashions and styles have replaced the traditional aspect of dressing where one imitates what she/he sees or hear on the media. Some of the existing social problems experienced in our societies are as a result of new value.

In conclusion, it can be said that industrialisation, westernisation and modernisation had significant influence on the traditional family life patterns. In pre-industrial societies, the main economic activity was agriculture and the family was responsible for the provision of the basic needs to its members. The main concern of the pre-industrial societies was the maintenance of group stability and consensus. This was accomplished through their division of labour.