

# **STRAINS IN TRADITIONAL FAMILY VALUES IN A YORUBA COMMUNITY: A STUDY OF FAMILIES IN AKOKO-LAND IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

The study examines the changes in Yoruba traditional family values, using Akoko communities as case study. Modernization theory was employed to explain how western culture has been diffused into the developing countries, now changing the Yoruba family values. Two hundred and fifty copies (250) of the questionnaire schedule which addresses bio-social variables, respondents' attitudinal change towards extended family relationships (affairs) were administered to randomly sampled households drawn from five (5) clusters within the Akoko South West LGA of Ondo state. The result shows that the emphasis on extended tie has drastically reduced. There is a popular clamour for women empowerment, and this has led to a dual-occupational system between couples. Also, there is a pervasive flair for either church/mosque or court/statuary marriages even after traditional 'idana' rite. The paper suggests that proper selection of mates through counselling and cultural practise(s) promises to drastically reduce the high rate of divorce in modern times. Finally, the issue of dual-occupation should be well managed, so as not to be at the detriment of the child(ren)'s up-bringing.

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**Keywords:** Values, Traditional, Family, Marriages

## **Background Information**

Social origin is truly "lost in mystery" (Sumner, 1940). In all societies in history, institution building began with the family. This has made the families the main vehicles of group identity, and the chief receptacles of vested interests. At the dawn of the twentieth century, major changes in the family structure were manifesting throughout the world.

Correspondingly, there have been strains in the family values than at the end of nineteenth century (Schoen, 1992). Family system is an institutionalized means whereby the human society organizes and carries out important activities, involving mating and reproduction among other things, familial institutions provide for legitimate rights to sexual access, the procreation and training of children, the organization of domestic work groups in accord with gender division of labour.

Akoko communities have four LGAs out of the eighteen LGAs in Ondo State. This community has been contending with some of the cultural changes that are sweeping through the Yoruba speaking states. The changes in family structure which is manifesting in alteration of cultural values are therefore a welcome relief to some Akoko youths. This is because, a section of the public believed that the old structure and its values did not favour some group of people in the society (e.g., women and children). Others believed that the new structure with its “fence phobia”, “individualism”, “dual-occupation” which are peculiar to western culture have been substituted for the Yoruba traditional virtue of openness, communalism and being one’s brother’s keeper (Olusanya, 1981). The controversies surrounding changes in the family structure were the motivation behind this research.

In Nigeria, the quality of communal life, which characterized the traditional Yoruba families, has faded away (Fadipe, 1970). Christianity, modernization, and the impact of western influence have had a tremendous effect on the traditional family values. The status of women has changed nation-wide. The young urban wives now prefer living away from their husband’s families, because, they are no longer willing to be treated subserviently in family-affairs. There has been counter current to the Yoruba ideology of kingship and marriage; women now compete favourably with their men counterparts in almost all sphere of life. There has been a change in economic value of children; and, hence, changing family priorities. Teenaged and young-adult sons no longer value working in their fathers’ farm. In short, individualism has virtually replaced communalism or dependence in human social relationships.

Unlike before, when men did have many wives under the same roof, the new pattern now is for men with monogamous home to have “outside wives”. While the existence of these women may not be known to the “inside” wives, this is because, the monogamy system is now seeing as one of the gift of European culture. The outside wives consider their children entitled to share in the inheritance of the father of their children. Another common pattern is for men to divide their time between wives and children living at different addresses.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the degree of cultural change in the traditional family values in Akoko community.

1. The paper will also discuss what really cause these changes in values of the family institutions.
2. The paper will identify who benefits from these changes in values.

### **Relevant Literature Review**

The issue of the structure and the changes that have occurred over the years in the family institutions seem to be predicated on the principles of ‘functionalist theory’. It sees various parts of society being interrelated and taken together, they form a complete system. To understand many parts of society as a whole, there is need for each part to be examined, such as family, in terms of its contributions to the maintenance of the society social system.

The leading sociological theorists from the late 1930s through the 1950s, such as Louis Wirth, Ralph Linton, and above all Talcott Parsons, generally endorsed the view that at some time in the past-which could be anywhere from the late nineteenth century to the late Middle Ages-people typically resided with extended kin. Moreover, most of these sociologists regarded the isolated nuclear family as an ideal form for modern industrial societies.

Parsons (1954) focuses on two ‘basic and irreducible functions’, which are common to the families in all societies. These are ‘primary socialization of children’ and, the ‘socialization of the adults’ personalities of the population of the society’. In the same vein (Carl, 1979), has commented that in a metaphorical sense, there are no separate individuals in the world, only fragmented families”. In other words, individual human beings are inextricably tied to the families. Carolyn (1982) opines that, when the family strengthens, networking, and when the individual has a problem, not only the family but, also the whole community, is often often involved in finding the necessary solution(s). This idea is concretized in the Yoruba principle of communal responsibility in the socialisation of the young “it takes a whole village to raise a child”.

The links among social change, the social organizations of families and family formation process have being of central interest to social scientists for some time. Moreover, as social scientist discovered the many changes that have occurred to the family structure around the world, the study of how social change promotes changes in family structure became a central focus of research (Goode, 1970). This work builds on the family mode of social organization approach to studying social change and the family.

Changes in family organization such as an increase in non-family work and education may stimulate new values of interaction, such as youth clubs. Such clubs serve as forums for social interaction for youths, where they may spend their spare time with other youths. These clubs increase social interactions among young people and, open opportunities for the spread of new ideas and creation of shared experiences. As individuals participate in clubs or move out of the local non-family living may alter individuals' attitudes and values in ways that promote new family structure across generations (Goldscheider, 1986)

In the developed parts of the world, the family appears to have lost its social, educational, economic functions, all having been taken over by the governments. The home many have observed is becoming little more than a place to eat and sleep. The factors of education, industrialization, and urbanization have been identified as causing social change. Wirth (1938) and Redfield (1947) pointed out long ago that these factors of social change influence behaviour, making it more modern and creating a kind of apathy in the individual towards traditional values.

Inkeles and Smith (1974) have asserted the existence of a "syndrome of modern man" which is founded on a set of characteristic attitudes, some of which include acceptance of new experiences, independence from parental control. Such change of attitude is attributed to education which is regarded as the strategic variable in modernization.

During the colonial era, Nigerians were subjected to forced acculturation. This was done through western education. Being educated and civilized meant the adoption of western ideas and values of love, marriage, family and life in general today, foreign values and lifestyles are being introduced into Nigeria with greater vigour. The cable networks, internet, cellular phone, international media with their local collaborators are bringing new ideas about all of life into the bedrooms.

In debate about community strength and decline, there has been a focus on the quality of family life, as strong as families are often seen as the foundation of strong communities (Bourdieu, 1993). It is therefore, not surprising that the changes that have caused strains on family values including declining marriage and fertility rates, increased participation in the workforce and, increased individualism in inmates' relationships- are seen as a threat to community. These trends have weakened family bonds and the quality of relationships within the families, and this is thought to weaken community.

The idea that the family is in decline has been put forth most prominently by American commentators such as Popenoe (1992). They argued that the changes that have occurred in family life have weakened the family as an institution, elevating in importance

individual needs, relationships and pursuits, outside the family, for example, divorce, and separation are seeing to represent the breaking of old bonds, trust, and reciprocity within the families, we no longer held together by law, tradition or financial necessity, relationships are inherently tentative and instable, and are only continued in so far as they are thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfaction (Giddens, 1992). Changes in gender roles are also seen as a threat to family relationships, as it limits opportunities for family interactions, create uncertainty about roles and lessen the need for women to form or maintain relationship with men.

Developments since the 1960s appear to reflect more subtle influences, and have been the focus of heated political debate. Divorce rates rose sharply, doubling between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s. During this period, family life was potentially altered by many factors: the rise of the women's liberation movement; the sexual revolution; the elimination in many states of fault-based divorce; and a sharp rise in women's labour force participation. Yet when viewed over a longer time period, we see that while the 1970s had exceptionally high divorce rates, the low divorce rates in previous decades were also somewhat exceptional, suggests that some of the run-up in divorce in the latter third of the twentieth century reflects the divorce rate simply reverting to levels consistent with earlier trends, following unusually low divorce in the 1950s and early 1960s (Fitch, Goeken, and Ruggles 2005). Indeed, based on extrapolation, family scholars as early as the turn of the last century had predicted future divorce rates like those actually witnessed in the 1980s (Coontz, 2005). While the 1970s overshot the trend, the subsequent fall in divorce has put the divorce rate back on the trend line, and by 2005, the annual divorce rate projected by the pre-1946 trend is quite close to actual divorce rates.

A large literature in labour economics has documented increasing wage inequality since the 1970s. These changes reflect several factors including skill-biased technical change, a declining real value of the minimum wage. Gould and Paserman (2003) argued that this change directly impacts marriage markets, raising the importance of "searching for Mr. Right." That is, rising wage inequality has increased the returns to further search and thus increased the option value of remaining unmarried. Gould and Paserman tested this effect of inequality on marriages rates by examining the consequences of differences across cities in the rates at which inequality grew through the 1970s and 1980s. They find that in cities in which wage inequality rose fastest, the proportion of young women who were married fell quite dramatically. Indeed, their estimates suggest that this rising wage inequality may account for up to one-third of the decline in the marriage rate of 21–30 year old women.

Another important change in the wage structure is the decline in the gender wage gap. Blau and Kahn (2000) describe these changes as emanating from a decline in explicitly sexist personnel policies; increased labour market experience among women; declining occupational segregation. In the face of these trends, the comparative advantage of wives in home rather than market production has declined; driving an increasing share of men into home production or reducing the value of specialization within marriage beyond possibly reducing the attractiveness of marriage, the reduction in the gender wage gap may have other, subtle effects. For instance, Becker, Landes, and Michael (1977) explained the historically younger age at which women married by noting that the specialized investments made by women in home economics were much less useful to singles. Indeed, as women have come to invest more in market skills, so too the age at which they choose to marry has drawn closer to parity with men. Caucutt, Guner, and Knowles (2002) argued that rising returns to labour market experience may also have important dynamic effects, raising the incentive for highly educated women to delay the timing of fertility in favour of developing stronger prospects in both labour and marriage markets.

The difficulty in empirically assessing the effects of changes in labour markets on family outcomes is that a strong reverse channel likely confounds any easy inference. For instance, women who forecast later or more fragile marriages may choose to invest more in their careers, leading to better labour force outcomes for women. As one example of such a dynamic, Johnson and Skinner (1986) find that women who anticipate a future divorce are more likely to participate in the labour market. Similarly, Stevenson (2006) finds that unilateral divorce laws led to an increase in labour force participation for both married and unmarried women.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Modernization Theory**

The process of modernization connotes, in other words, the sum of interconnectedness changes from which emerges a distinctive type of social organization and civilization- the ‘modern society’. The definition of this model, which necessarily draws upon the richness and variety of real social structures, can be based on a combination of analysis characteristics or shared essential aspects, that distinguish it from models of ‘traditional’ or pre-technological societies.

The essential aspects of the modernization process in diverse historical experiences can be summarized briefly:

- The establishment of values typical of modernity, in particular, individualism, rationalism and utilitarianism.
- Demographic disturbances that uproot millions of people from their ancestral habitat and the concentration of the majority of the population in urban environments that is functionally complex, culturally pluralistic, and socially heterogeneous if not chaotic.
- The privatization of family life, its insulation from the social control of the community and separation of workplace from the home, and the liberation of the women from patriarchal authority.

The economic, social and political transformations both influence and are influenced by transformations in cultural sphere, that is, by all those changes in conceptions of the world, man and society, and in the values and norms that orient individual and collective behaviour, that depict a real ‘culture of modernity’. Weber’s idea of modernization as accidental rationalization, empirically grounded in his comparative sociology of religion and his political sociology, was very influential.

The values of rationalism, individualism/subjectivity and utilitarianism have a central place in this culture. They orient the behaviour of institutions, groups and individuals and are internalized in the formation of process of the personality. These values are expressed definitely in the constitutional principles of the French and American Revolutions: liberty, equality, the pursuits of happiness, tempered by the principle of fraternity and solidarity (Martinelli, Salvati and Veca, 1989). The fundamental assumption of modernization theory is that there is a traditional or primitive society that will undergo development into new developed state, with more indices of western values and materials.

### **The Study Area and Methods**

The study area is Akoko south-west LGA. The local government is made up of five (5) towns namely, Oka, Oba, Akungba, Ikun and Supare. The entire population of the Local Government was 122,285 (Census, 1991). A large proportion of the indigenes engage in farming, tertiary activities like teaching surveying, legal and banking profession, bakery, carpentry, and local government jobs. The wind of modernization and civilization that is blowing in Nigeria has really affected family values in Akoko communities. This has been for years back but, presently, some of the cultural values that have not been seriously affected are now experiencing a total change. This drastic cultural change in the family values necessitates the choice of Akoko South-west.

The local government was divided into five (5) clusters. These are made up of the five major towns and their satellite villages and their farmsteads, where fifty (50) households were

randomly selected. Thus, a total of two hundred and fifty (250) copies of the questionnaire schedule were administered on these households of the respondents. Questions were focused on the following constructs:

- i. Biosocial data (sex, age, occupation, marital status).
- ii. Respondents relationship(s) with parents (extended family, and assessment of the modern family values and structures); and
- iii. Factors that exert influence on the traditional family values, such as religion, attitudinal change, etc.

The data obtained were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics such as simple percentages, frequency distribution, and chi-square, so as to determine the factors that are responsible for the changes in the values/structure of the traditional family in Akoko South-west LGA.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Bio-social Characteristics of Respondents**

Two hundred and fifty (250) copies of questionnaire were administered on the randomly selected households of the five (5) clusters in Akoko South-west, and One hundred and eighty-three copies were recovered, that is a response rate of 73.2%. Sixty-five respondents (35.5%) were between the age of 20-29years; Eighty-one (44.2%) between 30-39 years, and thirty-seven (20.2%) between 40-49 years. The male respondents were ninety-eight (53.55%), while the female were eighty-five (46.4%). The pattern of religion distribution is; 52(28.4%) catholic; 44(24%) Protestant/Anglican; 25(13.7%) white garment churches, and 29(15.9%) Islamic. The educational distribution is as follows: 37(20.2%) attained only primary school, 63(33.9%) Secondary/Technical schools, 30(19.3%) College of Education, 47(25.6%) have acquired University degrees, and 7(3.8%) attended some professional courses. Furthermore, the respondents marital status are 110 (60%) respondents were married, 41(22.4%) single, 22(12%) have divorced, and 10(5.4%) separated.

The results on child-parents relationship show that the relationships are in decline, as married couples, especially the wife, no more take it as mandatory to leave home with either their brother or sisters when thinking of settling down. The respondents' responses to questions asked on this are as follows: 4(2.19%) agree with this idea, 182(87.81%) disagreed. When considering where to settle-down after their marriage (i.e. nearness to ones parents) 47(26.15%) agreed to be closer to their relatives, while 136(73.85%) disagreed, and on the issue of parents rights in deciding whom their children get married to, 4(2.9%) respondents agreed, while 182(87.81%) disagreed.



Also, the result on the assessment of the traditional family structure shows that the authority of the ‘baale’ (head of a compound) over the inhabitants of his compound has drastically declined, 15(8.20%) of the respondents still agreed that the ‘baale’ still has every right (traditionally) to be in control of their compound, dictating and controlling both parents and their children, 168(91.80%) did not see any reason why the ‘baale’ should be the controlling them. On whether women need to absolutely depend on their husbands, and not to take-up any job outside home, 15(8.20%) were of the opinion that this traditional value should be upheld, while 91.80% of the respondents disagreed. On the need for birth control/family planning, 174(95.08%) agreed that it is very essential for couples to plan their family in terms of number of children to give birth to, while 9(4.91%) did not see reason why birth should be controlled.

### Testing of Hypotheses

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant relationship between exposure to modern values and the attitudinal change towards extended family relationship.

QUESTIONS	RESPONSES							
	SA	A	DNK	D	SD	Row Total	X2 Cal	X2 Tab
*You are still responsible to your extended family	14 (8.5)	46 (23.8)	15 (25.3)	70 (74.9)	33 (50.6)	183	112.9	21.0
*The Baale still have some authority over you	2 (8.5)	15 (23.8)	12 (25.3)	83 (74.9)	71 (50.6)			
*When chosen where to settle down, it is compulsory you consider other family members.	18 (8.5)	30 (23.8)	37 (25.3)	58 (74.9)	40 (50.6)	183		
*It is mandatory for a child when going out of his parent’s house to go with his /her young ones.	0 (23.7)	4 (25.1)	37 (25.1)	88 (74.4)	53 (74.4)	182		

	(8.5)	)	)	)	(50.3)			
Column total	34	95	101	299	202	731		

From the table above, the value of chi-square calculated which is 112.9 is greater than the table value which is 21.0. The hypothesis is hereby rejected at 0.05 significant level. It shows that there is a significant relationship between exposure to modern values and the attitudinal change towards extended family relationship.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant relationship between exposure to modern values and the attitudinal change towards marriage

QUESTIONS	RESPONSES							
	SA	A	DN K	D	SD	Row Tot	X2 Cal	X2 Tab
* The pride of man in the number of his wives/children	94 (85.5)	67 (82)	10 (7.5)	11 (7.5)	01 (0.5)	183	12.8	9.49
* parents still have every right to decide on who their sons and daughter get married to	77 (85.5)	97 (82)	5 (7.5)	0 (0.5)				
Column Total	171	164	15	15	1	366		

From the table above, the value of chi-square calculated which is 12.8 is greater than table value which is 9.49. We equally reject the hypothesis at 0.05 significant relationship between exposure to modern values and the attitudinal change towards marriage.

**Discussion**

From the findings above, the real crisis in the increasingly inability to function, as haven or refuge, a destructive of the nest. The family seems to be increasingly losing its capacity to shelter the young and the adult, makes from the pressures of competition in an advanced capitalist civilization, and it is exposing the women more and more to these pressure. Surely, this has major implications for the psychological well-being of individuals in modern society, as well as for the whole tone and character of social life.

The search for wage-labour outside the family and community has made it impossible for children to in the same compound with their parents. The extended family tie in Akoko communities is gradually breaking down, as people now focus on their immediate relatives at

the detriment off extended kin. People are no more kin in having a large family, comprising of wives and children. The old value of rating man's socio-economic status according to the number of his wives and children is no more acceptable. People are now being rated based on their achievements. Also from the findings, it was revealed that the value attached to the issue of mate selection which gave room for the parents to dictate to their children on whom to marry has also changed; parents now play an advisory role when it comes to marriage. In the five selected towns, the respondents widely accepted the new value of dual-occupation; they argued that this will go a long way in generating adequate income for the family to meet the increasingly high living standard.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Based on the findings above, one can say that the general family traditional structure and its values in Nigeria have changed drastically from what it used to be, and the changes are seriously affecting all the stakeholders in the family institution. For the family institution, which is the nucleus of every society not to wither away, the following recommendations are made. Parents should still try as much as possible to advise their eligible children on mate selection, but they should not deliberately interfere in their children romance. The issue of dual-occupation among the couples should be well handled, so as not to neglect their primary collective responsibility to one another and their children's upbringing.

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