

# SOCI 222

# Comparative Social Institutions

## Session 8 – The Family: Definitions and Forms in Different Societies

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# Session Overview

- The family is one institution which is referred to as a cultural universal because it is found in all societies the world over. This session focuses on the family institution as it is practiced in different African societies



# Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Topic one – Defining the family
- Topic two – Types of family
- Topic three - Changes in the family

# Reading List

- Nukunya, G.K. (2003). *Tradition and Change in Ghana (2<sup>nd</sup> edition): An Introduction to Sociology* Accra: Ghana Universities Press.
- Nukunya, G. K. (1974) The Family and Social Change. In *Colonialism and Change, Essays Presented to Professor Lucy Mair* (ed. M. Owusu) The Hague: Mouton
- Robertson, I (1987) *Sociology*. New York: Worth Publishers

Topic One

# DEFINING THE FAMILY



# Defining the family

- Family is the most basic of all social organizations since its age long institution found in almost all societies
- *Peter Murdock (1973)*, defines the family as a social organization characterized by common residence, economic corporation and reproduction
- It is made up of adults of both sexes at least two of who maintain socially approved sexual relations and one or more children own or adopted
- *Ian Robertson (1977)*, defines the family as a relatively permanent group of people related by ancestry, marriage or adoption who live together and form an economic unit and whose adult members assume responsibility for the group

# Defining the family

- *Bertrand (1994)*, defines the family as socially sanctioned group of persons united by kinship ties who generally but not necessarily share common residence and interact according to well defined social roles created by a common culture
- The African idea of family is extended and includes close and distant relations
- In the view of Nelson Mandela, *“in African culture, the sons and daughters of one’s aunts or uncles are considered brothers and sisters, not cousins. We have no half-brothers or half-sisters. My mother’s sister is my mother; my uncle’s son is my brother; my brother’s child is my son and daughter”*.

Topic two

# TYPES OF FAMILY





# Types of family

- **Nuclear family** which consists of a husband, a wife and unmarried children
- **Polygynous family** consists of a husband, two or more wives and their unmarried children
- **Polyandrous family** is made up a wife with two or more husbands and their unmarried children
- **Composite family** consists of at least two related nuclear families in one household or several related individual families living in a household

# Types of family

- **Extended family:** it has two forms or varieties:
  - **Residential extended family** its where members share common residence, participate in reciprocal duties, obligations and responsibilities
  - **Non-residential extended family** refers to a social arrangement in which an individual has extensive reciprocal duties, obligations and responsibilities towards relations outside his immediate nuclear family;
- **Family of orientation and procreation:** family of orientation is the one into which individuals are born and brought up while **family of procreation** is the one that an individual establishes upon marriage

# The family, domestic group and household

- **Family** is a group of people united by kinship, with a single head and occupy a common dwelling
- **Domestic group** is made up of persons occupying a particular dwelling unit
- **Household** is made up of a group of people who share the same housekeeping and eating arrangements and usually under a single head or they eat from the same pot

# Developmental cycle of the family

- The family has a growth or developmental cycle during which its composition changes
  - **Phase of expansion:** this first phase comes about through the marriage of a couple and lasts until they complete their childbearing activities
  - **Phase of fission/dispersion:** this second phase is marked by the marriage of the children and lasts until the last one marries out
  - **Phase of replacement:** this last stage is when one of the sons is expected to come and live in the parents home after their death.

# Sample Question

- At what point can the family be a domestic group and a household at the same time?

Topic Three

# CHANGES IN THE FAMILY



# Changes in the family

- Marriage without children
- Dual income families
- Single parent families
- Step families
- Adoption

# Sample Question

- Identify any five changes in the family institution of your society and give reasons for these changes





# References

- Nukunya, G.K. (2003). *Tradition and change in Ghana (2<sup>nd</sup> edition): An Introduction to Sociology*. Accra: Ghana University Press. Chapter on marriage and family (page 41-54)

