

SOCI 309/339

URBAN SOCIOLOGY

Session Six

Basic Structure of the Urban Communities – The Family and Social Change

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Session Overview

Introduction

In the preceding session, we discussed the political, religious and economic structures which regulate the orderly attainment of the basic needs of urban dwellers covered by these institutions

Given the large number of heterogeneous populations inhabiting the highly dense communities in the city, orderly behaviour is possible only when the full complement of the institutions which constitute the social structure are totally functional. This is what makes the whole life of man in the urban community organized.

In the last session we discussed the institutions which regulate the maintenance of law and order, the role of religion and of the economy. The current session focuses on the impact of social change on the family to explain the factors that influence the functions of the family in the wake of modernization – regarding its primary and secondary functions and its stability.

Session Outline

The main topics to be covered in this session are as follows:

- Topic One: Impact of social change on the primary functions of the family.
- Topic Two: Social change and the secondary functions of the family.
- Topic Three: Social change and the stability of the family.

Objectives/Expected Outcomes for the Session

On the completion of this session, you should be able to:

- Identify and explain the changes which have affected the traditional family as it undergoes modernization.
- Explain the nature of the changes influencing couples as they perform their secondary responsibilities in the family
- Identify and discuss the factors which explain the increasing rate of divorce in the wake of modernization.

Reading List

Abotchie, C., (2016) Sociology of Urban communities,
Accra, Olive Tree Printing and Publishing
Chapter Three – Five: pp 30 - 63



Topic One

The Impact of Social Change on the Family

Introduction

- The family continues to lie at the heart of social structures throughout the world, not withstanding social changes. It continues to perform its role in the urban area as the mother of all other institutions, providing the human resources required by all these other institutions to function.
- **As a social institution, the goal of the family has continued primarily to be the satisfaction of the sex drive of married couples, procreation, socialization and maintenance of the species.** However these functions have undergone some modifications in response to social change. The discussion in this section focuses on the extent of these changes as they are made manifest in the urban communities.

The Family - Definitions

Definitions

- The family according to Burgess and Locke (1961) refers to **a group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood or adoption, constituting a single household, interacting and inter-communicating with each other in their respective roles as mother and father, brother and sister, husband and wife.**
- Other definitions were provided by the anthropologist Lucy Mair and by Elizabeth Colson. Lucy Mair (1951) referred to the family as **a domestic group, in which parents and children live together, and in its elementary form, consist of the couple and their children;** and according to Colson, the family is **a group sharing a common residential space and cooperating for the purposes of daily life.**

Family - Characteristics

- Thus, in whatever form or manner the family is defined, it appears in all cases, according to Levi-Strauss (1969) that, the concept serves to designate a social group offering at least three characteristics, namely:
 - the family has its origins in marriage,
 - it is constituted by husband wife and children born out of their wedlock, and
 - it is united by both social and psychological bonds. The social bonds include (a) the legal bond (b) the economic bond (c) the religious bond and (d) a precise network of sexual rights and prohibitions. The psychological bonds include, love, affection, respect and awe.

The Family – Primary Functions

Functions

- The urban family continues to perform the traditional (universal) primary and secondary functions. **The primary functions universally performed by the family include reproduction, maintenance, status ascription and socialization.**
- **Reproduction**, the process through which childbirth occurs as a result of pregnancy in women has remained largely the same; namely, through what one might call the „old fashioned“ traditional method of lovemaking, to induce pregnancy. **It is noteworthy however, that as a result of the advancements in medical science, childbirth can take place without copulation – that is without the act of lovemaking.**

Primary Functions - In vitro Fertilization

- **Making babies in test-tubes is now possible as a result of the scientific process of in-vitro fertilization.** The process involves the fertilization of a female egg with a healthy male sperm primarily in a test-tube (i.e. in-vitro) and the transplantation, secondarily, of the fertilized egg in-vivo, (within a living organism) that is, into a woman.
- The natural growth and development of the baby takes place thereafter, in the womb, until it is born. In vitro fertilization however although commonly adopted by couples experiencing fertility problems remains an exception rather than the rule.

Primary Functions - Maintenance

Child maintenance

- The primary function of **child maintenance** – with reference to feeding, health care, clothing and shelter still remains the function of parents in the urban areas.
- The only exception being the periods during which the child leaves the custody of its parents to be at a crèche or day nursery during which the school provides the required maintenance –although parents ultimately pay for the service.

Primary Functions – Status Ascription

- **Status ascription is the primary function under which parents - specifically the father – ascribes to his child the initial social class with which it begins social life.**
- This function will perhaps never change. This is because social stratification is inevitable given the biological and social inequalities that are manifested by human beings. **Thus, for as long as children are legitimately fathered by men who belong to various levels of social stratification, based on their wealth power and prestige, these children will inevitably be accorded their initial statuses based on those of their father.**

Primary Functions – Primary Socialization

- **Primary socialization** through which the child acquires language and the instinctual skills required for its survival from his parents has also largely remained the responsibility of parents, neighbors and peers in the urban area.
- However, as in the case of maintenance, children attending school very early in their lives get a part of this socialization from the school environment also.

Primary Function – Role of Modern Institutions

- The indication, ultimately, is that although the primary functions of reproduction, maintenance status ascription and socialization have remained predominantly the responsibility of parents, **modern urban institutions –specifically the health institution and the school- have taken a supplementary part of these functions, with the exception of status ascription.**

Question

With illustrative examples, discuss the extent to which the primary functions of the family discussed above find expression in your own family. Identify and explain any similarities or differences.

Topic Two

Social Change and the Secondary Functions of the Family

Introduction

- Because of its secondary functions, Mc Elmer likened the family, to a **concentrated nucleus of the larger society, maintaining and carrying on the procedures and processes of the larger group in a miniature and intensified form.**
- It is in this sense that the family in the urban area continues to perform social structural functions, namely, **political, religious, economic, marital, educational and health care.**

Secondary Functions - Political

Political functions

- As a result of the modernizing process however, all of these functions are in one way or the other being largely supplemented by modern institutional arrangements.
- The **maintenance of law and order** for instance, which is the political function, has become the joint responsibility of both the family and other modern institutions like the school, which not only teaches children to discipline themselves but also enforces discipline through sanctions, namely, rewards and punishments.

The family - Political Functions - Workplace and Judiciary

- Similarly, all formal organizations in the city, for example, business firms and manufacturing industries that employ workers maintain law and order within their working forces, also through sanctions i.e. rewards and punishments
- The judiciary, through both juvenile and adult courts interprets and enforces the laws of the land – meting out punishments or recommending compensations to those who are so deser|iŶĝ Thus, generally speaking, the political function is now no longer the sole responsibility of the family.

The Family – Religious Functions

Religious Functions

- In their homes, most families of various religious persuasions continue to inculcate relevant moral values in their children, often persuading them to come to places of worship with them on Sundays, Fridays or the Sabbath day.
- Similarly however, the family's responsibility of **morally educating and training of children** is now largely being supplemented by the variety of religious bodies in the urban area such as the Church, the mosque, Scripture Unions, Christian fellowships, whose main business it is to preach the scriptures and actively encourage their memberships to conform.

The Family – Economic Functions

Economic Functions

- **Economically**, the family was traditionally a productive and consumptive unit, producing and consuming the goods and services it required.
- As a result of modernization however, modern manufacturing and service providing industries in the urban areas both public and private are now largely producing most of the goods and services required by families, such as foods and clothing and other consumer goods.
- Thus the main economic objective of the family in the urban area is to concentrate on acquiring the means, that is, find work in industries to earn incomes, with which these goods can be obtained. This way the urban family is considered more as consumptive than productive.

Family Functions - Marital

Marital functions

- As a result of the presence in the cities of a variety of **marriage markets**, such as churches, mosques, shopping malls, night clubs and a variety of associations, the traditional role of the family of **finding suitable partners for its members (either through arranged marriages or betrothal of infants)** has been largely reduced – perhaps for better or for worse? This issue will be examined subsequently under **mate selection**
- A **marriage market is any place that large numbers of people congregate, at which the individual is likely to meet and make friends with the opposite sex.** Inter-ethnic or mixed uninvestigated marriages are consequently on the increase in the cities and with them an increasing incidence of divorces.

Marital Functions – Mixed Marriages

- **Inter –ethnic or mixed uninvestigated marriages** are consequently on the increase in the cities and with them an increasing incidence of divorces. Thus a significant challenge for parents in the urban communities is how to supervise the selection of mates for their children either by the parents themselves or based on the preferences of their children.
- Of relevance also, is the fact that most marriages are now monogamous and are being contracted under the Ordinance – preceded usually by the traditional customary engagement ceremony, and terminating ultimately with a church wedding.

Mate Selection -Postponement

Mate selection

- A combination of factors of social change and urbanization contributed to the shifts in mate selection. Among these is the **postponement** of marriages by both males and females in the urban area.
- **In traditional pre-colonial times, girls got married usually in their teens, that is, soon after their puberty rites, to suitors who may have expressed their interest during the rites, or soon thereafter.**
- However during the colonial and post-colonial (independence) era the need to go to school –sometimes up to the university level to acquire the first, second or sometimes even the third (doctoral) degrees by both males and females, meant that they should postpone their marriage until after they have attained the educational levels they are pursuing.

Mate Selection - Postponement - Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is another reason for the postponement.

- These apprenticeships became important for boys and girls who were unable to go to or find places in schools or opted directly to acquire their chosen skills in carpentry, masonry, tailoring, auto mechanics, or in catering, dress making, hair dressing, etc.
- A combination of both statuses (that is, being married and being in school, or being in apprenticeship at the same time) proved a deterrent to the ability to complete one's education or acquisition of skills on schedule.

Mate Selection – Marriage Markets

- Significantly, the school, and the workshops became new marriage markets in the sense that they afforded these students and apprentices the opportunity to shop for their potential partners within both the school or work place environments.
- This is in addition to several other such markets which were concurrently emerging; for example churches, fellowships, associations, club houses, discotheques, shopping malls, where, invariably, both males and females interact freely and make friends.

Mate Selection - Inter-Ethnic Marriages

- Because of the growing number of the markets for mate selection there was a greater probability that individuals were more likely to initiate friendships through a more frequent interaction with potential partners. This gave rise to a growing emphasis on the obligation of individual urbanites to find their own partners.
- **Ultimately, this meant that the traditional role of parents in selecting or preferring mates for their children began to be de-emphasized. Significantly also, the selection of mates from a wider marriage market led to an increase in inter-ethnic marriages.**

Family – Education and Healthcare

- **Educationally**, the urban area is dominated by a variety of secondary and tertiary training institutions which assist the family inculcate in its members, the kind of skills that it takes to place them competitively on the job market. **The main role of the family in the urban educational process is to provide the child with financial and emotional support.**
- Finally, the family's role of **providing healthcare** is now largely in the domain of modern scientific health institutions, given the easy accessibility of clinics and hospitals (private and public) to most urban residents. **The major responsibility however, still lies with the family to pay for the services provided by these health facilities.**

Question

How significantly different is the modern family from the traditional – with reference to their roles? Discuss with reference to any traditional and urban areas of your choice.

Topic Three

Social Change and the Stability of the Family

Stability of Urban (modern) Marriages

- Closely related to the issue of mate selection is the growing concern over the stability of marriages in the urban areas - specifically with reference to the declining traditional role of parents in the process.
- **Traditionally, when parents were involved in the selection of suitable mates for their children, they ensured that the background of the potential partners was thoroughly investigated before approval was given for the initiation of the procedural arrangements.**
- The bride or groom's background pertaining to infertility, congenital diseases, cruelty, witchcraft, exemplary character, hard work, etc., were investigated to ensure that the potential couple are from homes devoid of any suspicion or stigma.

Factors of Instability

- Basically, these background investigation sought to allay fears concerning some of the potential grounds on which divorces could be instituted in the future of the marriage. These potential grounds included:
- **Inter –ethnic or long distance marriages**
- **The absence of the traditional supernatural supervision of the marriage**
- **The economic emancipation of women**
- **Geographical mobility and promiscuity of couples**

Factors of Instability - Inter-Ethnic Marriages

Inter-ethnic marriages

- These refer to marriages initiated far from the home market that is not from the same ethnic group of the couple (as for example a marriage between a Fante and a Gur).
- In such a marriage, the background investigation become a difficult, because of the distance involved. This becomes a long distance marriage (an **nkwa tsen tsen aware**) as the Akan would describe it.
- The implication is that without these background investigations, inter-ethnic marriages in the cities could easily run aground when issues which could have been pre-empted through the investigations, surface soon after the marriage has been contracted.

Factors of Instability – Absence of Supernatural Supervision

Absence of supernatural supervision

- Marriages contracted in traditional societies were considered more stable because of the traditional controls which find expression in the **supernatural supervision** of unions and in the **traditional mechanism of arbitration**.
- The supernatural supervision of marriages was manifested variously through the belief that the invisible ancestors are generally interested in the behaviour of married couples and would visit infertility and other punitive measures on the couple if any one of them is seen to have violated the marital code.

Factors of Instability – Hexes of Chastity

Hexes of chastity

- **Additionally, traditional marriages were supernaturally supervised through hexes of chastity such as the psychic padlock, fia-te-kli and gbolo makpa - dreadful psychic traps which prevented the wife from making love to anyone else but the husband.**
- Through the traditional arbitration, the families of the couple ensured that there is reconciliation after any disagreement or dispute between the couple.
- Thus the apparent increase in divorce rates in the urban communities is attributed to a breakdown of these traditional mechanisms.

Factors of Instability – Economic Emancipation of Women

Economic Emancipation of women

- Further, it is argued that **women in contemporary urban communities** - both the educated, the semi-educated and the illiterates who are married but are engaged in various professions or careers in the service or manufacturing industries, in self –employment or in market trading, **have become economically emancipated, that is they have acquired economic power.**
- **This has tended to make them less submissive to their husbands, than hitherto for their marriages to be stable.**
- The submission of women, traditionally, to their husbands has been a condition dictated by their dependence on them economically.

Economic Emancipation – Repudiation of Husbands Authority

- Given the increasing education of women and the availability to the educated and the illiterate of an increasing number of economic opportunities (the Quiet Revolution) women are now in regular income earning positions –sometimes earning more than their husbands.
- **Given their economic empowerment, most urban women are now economically independent of their husbands and are in a position to repudiate their authority. Surely, this produces insubordination, which is frequently contributory to divorce**

Factors of Instability – Geographical Mobility

Geographical mobility and infidelity

- Other factors associated with urbanization, is the geographical mobility of both wives and husbands in response to their duty obligations.
- As an illustration, husbands or wives may have to travel away from home for a few days, say from Accra to Kumasi, on official duty, to attend a conference, workshop or business meeting.
- **The predisposition of these geographically mobile couples to get romantically hooked or attached to male or female friends wherever they travel to, has been blamed for some divorces based on infidelity.**

Geographical Mobility – Use of Birth Control Devices

- Related to this phenomenon is the indirect contribution of condoms (or other birth control devices) to divorces. The use of these devices by married couples is said (according to research findings) to remove the fear of unwanted pregnancies and could therefore predispose couples to promiscuity, to satisfy their sex drives outside of the marriage.
- **The research finding, is that during these deviant sexual escapades, the man or the woman may discover a sex partner who is terrific in bed i.e. a more exciting sexual partner than his marriage partner.**
- Having this **sweet bedfellow** constantly in mind, the husband or wife tends to be easily irritable and stingy and overreacts during minor misunderstandings, making **mountain out of molehills!** The marriage soon goes sour, and divorce ensues based on incompatibility.

Decline of Polygyny

Decline of Polygyny

- **Polygyny, the polygamous form of marriage under which a man got customarily into a union with more than one woman, was a common basis for acquiring prestige in traditional societies.** As Nukunya (2003) explains, a man who managed to marry two or more wives was respected because, not only did he have more than one woman at his disposal, but was also able to muster marriage payments for marrying them.
- **In traditional societies this was an important criterion for assigning status to individuals. Further, it was economically expedient to be polygynously married, since a multiplicity of wives meant a multiplicity of children which, in turn created a greater labor force for a variety of economic activities.**
- **With the inception of Christianity however, polygyny began to decline in response to the Christian doctrine emphasizing monogamy.** In its place, other sources of attaining prestige began to be sought, namely, making a showy display of oŶ's means of life through the building of palatial houses, acquisition of posh cars, establishment of businesses, education of oŶ's children abroad and philanthropy (donation of funds to charity)

Decline of Polygyny – Pressure on Incomes

- Given the high rate of urbanization and the concomitant rising standard and cost of living in the urban areas, another significant reason for the decline in the fortunes of polygyny is the pressure on a husband's financial resources in the urban environment. **It is hard, and often near impossible, for working class and middle class people - given the level of incomes in Ghana – to be able to pay the bills for large families.**
- Such bills often include, in the urban areas, expenditure on rent, food, clothing, school fees, health, household furnishings and utility bills. etc. Thus, given the economic exigencies of modern living, men are increasingly under economic compulsion to abandon polygynous marriages for monogamy.

Nucleation of the Family

Nucleation of the family

- In response to the economic conditions described under urbanization, other adaptations or coping mechanisms adopted by urban residents has been what Nukunya (2003) calls the compression of genealogical ties in kinship behavior.
- This is a process by which the network of relatives normally considered important for one's extended family obligations is narrowed or scaled down to make the harsh economic conditions in the urban areas which make it increasingly difficult for urban residents to honor their obligations, manageable.

Nucleation of the Family – Spouses and Children Only

- This pressure on incomes has resulted in the increasing nucleation of the family. In other words, compelled by the inadequacy of incomes in the urban areas, migrants prioritize their expenses, concentrating on providing only for their spouses and children to the exclusion of aunts and uncles at home, or nephews, nieces cousins or brothers.
- As Nukunya (2003) has suggested, those who can afford to go beyond satisfying their nuclear families are often only able to remit their own parents. This has led to the gradual weakening, but not the demise, of the extended family institution.

Question

With reference to any urban area of your choice, discuss with illustrative examples, the extent to which the secondary functions of the family discussed above find expression in your own family. Identify and explain any significant differences.

References

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