

**EFFECTS OF MODERNITY ON FAMILY AND PATTERN OF PARENTING
IN IGBOLAND**

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Abstract

Modernity brought about changes in family relationships and patterns of parenting in Igboland. Prior to modernity, traditional Igbo family values of communalism, community-oriented enterprise were ripe, driven by the dictum, "I am, because we are; and since we are, I am" (Mbiti). In essence, anyone's burden or success is everyone's. The egalitarian spirit prevalent then is encapsulated in the saying of Chinua Achebe (1984) in the novel, Arrow of God: "no man however great was greater than his people...no one ever won judgement against his clan". This attitude was also evident in the pattern of parenting. The training of a child is seen as a corporate responsibility. Anyone's child is, more or less, everyone's. This is captured by the Igbo saying, ofu onye a naghi azu nwa (the training of a child is everyone's responsibility). Thus, any Igbo child could address an elder as nna or nne (father or mother); an elder could address any child as nwa m (my child). With modernity's trends of industrialization, urbanization, individualism and increased sense of personal autonomy, these traditional family system and parenting pattern are fast receding, especially in urban centres. Personal ambitions are pursued to the detriment of the community. Many parents abhor others interfering with their children's training and discipline. The society seems to be at crossroads. This paper examines this evolving trend in Igboland, with a view to unravelling its implications for the society and how best the society could be positioned to face the challenges more squarely and progressively.

Keywords: Modernity, family, parenting pattern, Igboland

Introduction

The human family is by far the most important unit of all human existence, of its experiences and of everything good in it. It has been in many ways referred to as the primary unit of society, the cell of the human community life, the individual's primary social support system, the primary unit of human socialization, the society in miniature, and others. The importance of proper nurturing and upbringing of the child in any society cannot be over emphasized. It is as a result of this that

traditional Igbo society became aware of the indispensability of the proper upbringing of the child. The cultural and traditional practices of the Igbo society do not allow individual to train the child alone since in their cosmology the child belongs to all. The Igbo believes that though a child is of a family descent, he does not belong to that family alone but to the entire community. Thus, the training of the child belongs to and is the responsibility of not just the immediate parents but the members of the Igbo community. This community consciousness is usually and always manifested through the way the people welcomes a new born baby in Igboland. Individualism is said to have no place in Igbo family system. The reality of this is found in the extended family system. As an integral part of Igbo family system, the extended family members include patrilineal and matrilineal uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces, nephew and in-laws. In Igbo family affairs, they have a say and have always made moral, social, economic and religious commitments to the growth of Igbo family system through the training of children born in the family and beyond. They have craved and encouraged traditional values of their family members and their firm grip on their members has promoted the traditional Igbo pattern of life.

The advent of colonialism and missionary activities in Igboland brought about western education and civilization. The advent of colonialism and missionary activities in Igboland brought about western education and civilization.

Conceptual Clarifications

Modernity

This is a condition of social existence that is significantly different to all past forms of human experience. It is the state of being current with the times. Oden (2021) defines modernity as an evolution of change in the human life. It brought about change in human application. This is the period beginning after the 14th

century and marked in part by technological innovations, urbanization, scientific discoveries, and globalization.

Family

Family according to Menssah and Amissah (2016) is define as the basic social unit. It refers to people living together by ties of marriage, blood, and adoption in representing a single household. He went further to define family as the most private and pervasive social institutions in society. It is private in that many of social activities (e.g. childcare and family education) are related to it; and pervasive in that it is the first institution in which individuals have be involved in during lifetime.

Pattern

This can be referred to as the repeated or regular way in which something happens or is done. It can also mean a form or model proposed for imitation. Something designed or used as a model for making things. However, Toussaint, E. R. and Toussaint, G. T. (2014) defines pattern as a certain number of objects connected together by a certain number of relationships.

Parenting

Amos (2013) defines parenting as the process of raising and educating a child from birth or before until adulthood. According to Hornby (2005), Parenting is defined as “the process of caring for ones child or children” (p. 1059). It is a term that emanated from the word parents, which means one's mother or father. It refers to the intricacies of raising a child and not exclusively for a biological relationship. Parenting which can also be referred to as child rearing, promotes and supports the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. It can simply mean the process or state of being a parent.

Brief Ethnography of the Igbo

The Igbo are among the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. The word Igbo is used for both the people and their language. Some versions use *Ibo* or *Heebo*. However these were used by some foreign writers and Africans who were influenced by them. The indigenous Igbo scholars at present have resorted to the use of the version Igbo as understood by the people. According to Ogbajie (1995);

Igboland is bounded on the north by the Tiv and Igalla; on the south by the Ijaw; west by the Isoko; and east by the Ibibio. They are landlocked but there are good

river-ways which provide access to the sea. Such rivers are Niger and Cross river. Onitsha and Asaba are important Igbo towns that have developed on the banks of the River Niger. Afikpo, Abiriba, Ohafia, Arochukwu and Abam are served by the Cross River through these rivers. (p. 1).

They consist of many subgroups and are known to be socially and culturally diverse. Although Igbo people are mostly Christians, they have a deep and original culture. Igbo culture includes the various customs, practices and traditions of the people. It comprises also according to Okeke (2019), ancient practices as well as modern concepts added into the Igbo culture either through evolution or outside influences. The occupation of the Igbo before the advent of Christianity, and the British colonial rule was farming, trading, fishing, crafts. They paid more attention to farm work, even though there were professional medicine men or herbalists. The central social unit is the local patrilineage (*umunna*). This is a home for the descendants of the ancestors or the founder of the village. The Igbo generally live in compounds, villages and towns. A compound as explained by Ogbajie (1995) is a homestead which is sometimes surrounded by a wall containing male children of one man, the wives and their children. Thus, in a compound are brothers, cousins, wives and children of a common grandfather.

The Igbo are surrounded on all sides by other tribes (the Bini, Warri, Ijaw, Ogoni, Igala, Tiv, Yako and Ibibio). Igboland today in Nigeria is roughly made up of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and parts of Delta and River state. Small parts of Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Benue and Bayelsa states make up the rest of Igboland. According to Udezo and Nweze (2012); there are over 30 million people in Igboland and with a density ranging from 1000 per sq. mile in high density and 350 per sq. mile in low density areas; it could be the densest area in Africa after the Nile Valley. Together it has an area of some 15, 800 to 16, 000 square miles. (p. 92).

The Igbo are a politically fragmented group, with numerous divisions resulting from geographic differences. There are also various subgroups delineated in accordance with clan, lineage, and village affiliations. They have no centralized chieftaincy, hereditary aristocracy, or kingship customs, as can be found among their neighbours. Rather, the responsibility of leadership has traditionally been left to the village councils, which include the heads of lineage, elders, titled men, and men who have established themselves economically within the community. The Igbo people have very much respect for life. For them, blood is sacred and it is life. This belief forms part of the bases of their theology, and they like other

Africans believe in such concepts as sacredness, communalism, respect for life, dignity of the human person, sense of freedom, unity of purpose, sense of respect, fate and determinism, belief in one God, who however can be accessed through the intermediaries, who are minor gods or deities.

Igbo Family Model

Africans especially Igbo people are people of the family. Families mean a lot to the Igbo. Thus, people are defined, identified and accepted or rejected on the ground of their family. The Igbo, rely on their family for strength, count on their family for support and sustenance in every situation. According to Okeke (2002), "Others can go with us to a certain length but our family sticks with each and everyone of us to the end" (p. 7). In the traditional Igbo society, the family structure is a tie on the members. As a result of this, the family structure becomes a veritable instrument for the nurturing of the child. Family is a very important institution in the lives of Igbo people. All relationships, according to Igbo culture, emanates from the family. Every child birthed in any family begins to learn about human relationships from within the family.

Igbo family The view and understanding of the family unit in Igboland is quite very different from the Western world's view of family. The Igbo people believe in extended family system, they believe in relationship with their people. The concept of extended family system cannot be thrown away in Igboland; it is a highly recognized and well known system in the long years of Igbo culture and tradition.

Geyekye (1996) wrote that it is a common knowledge that when one speaks of the family in African context, one is referring not to the nuclear family but the extended family. According to Degbey (2012), the extended family system includes several generations plus cousins, uncles and aunts living in a compound or close to one another.

Pattern of Parenting in Igboland

The cultural background in which a child grows, performs an important role in the child's development. Training of a child in Igboland is not done by the parents alone. The parents, siblings, peer groups and elders all have parts to play in the developmental stages of a child. Thus the birth of a new child is a thing of joy for the parents, relatives and the entire community. According to Nnokwe (2009), "the rites of childhood introduces the child to the community" (p. 53). It is

believed that a child would grow out of childhood and enter into adulthood physically, socially, mentally and religiously. In Igboland, it is a general belief that a child is owned communally. This is exemplified in some igbo assertions like "*nwa bu nwa ora*", which literally means a child belong to all. Supporting this notion, Mbiti (1982) states that "a woman suckling a child may be called upon to suckle someone else's child" (p. 120). Also Ogbalu (2006) states that "the caring and training of a child is everybody's responsibility and every person is expected to correct a child whether they are related or not" (p. 801). The kind of training given ensures that the child develops morally, physically, socially, emotionally and law abiding. According to Isidienu (2014), children are trained by there parents in general behaviour and particularly in socialization which is considered necessary for comfortable living. She went further to state that;

The child starts learning the meaning of gesture by observing the mother and other members of the family as they grow up, they learn how to live, how to do certain things and the importance of both traditional, religious and customary laws. The training which starts in the family later extends to the society, where both parents, elders and other members of the extended family are involved. (p. 801).

The type of training given to an Igbo child right from inception propels him wherever he goes; adapts to any situation and will never forget his people because of the bond in relationship. This relationship is seeing in the communal living among the Igbo as a against the individualistic nature of the Western culture. In establishing this community ownership of the child, Kanu (2015) wrote that the umbilical cord connecting the mother and the child is cut as a sign of the incorporation of the child into the community. This seperation from the mother through the cutting of the umbilical cord according to Mbiti (1982);

...is not final since the two are still near each other. But the child now begins to belong to the wider circle of the society...the child has however, began his journey of being incorporated into the community, so that the seperation between the individual mother and the child continues to widen as the child's integration into the wider community also increases. The child is near the mother and yet begins to get away from the individual mother; growing into the status of being "I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am". (p. 113).

The Igbo society is aware and conscious of the indispensability of the proper training and upbringing of the child by every member. Thus, the cultural and

traditional practices of the Igbo society do not allow individual to train the child alone since in their cosmology the child belongs to all. The communal training of a child in traditional Igbo society gives room for the proper nurturing of the child and helps to bring out the best in every child. This is because the child no longer sees himself/herself as just the son/daughter of a particular parents alone but belonging to the entire community and as such can be punished or praised by any adult member of the community. Based on this, Adibe (2009) argues that every adult is a teacher of knowledge and morals, that every child is a community pupil. That the child is educated by every person to do good and avoid evil. The societal vices such as rape, robbery, assassination, incest, kidnapping, etc which have bedeviled the contemporary society, was negligible in traditional Igbo days. However, Mbiti (1969) avers that "the child is ... public property, it belongs to the entire community and is no longer the property of one person" (p. 113). Different societies of the world have ways and manners through which they nurse their children. In Igboland, the basic cultural and traditional practices are not neglected by the members of the Igbo society in training the child. This is to ensure proper nurturing of the child and avoid bringing up those who may constitute nuisance and security threat to the society.

This community consciousness is evident in some of the songs that are usually sang at the birth of a new born in igboland. These songs always indicate the communal ownership of the new born in Igboland. One of such song is sang thus;

<i>O nuru akwo nwa e-a-e</i>	He who hears the cry of a child
<i>O nuru akwa nwa me ngwa bia</i>	He who hears the cry of a child should respond quickly
<i>O bughi otu onye nwe nwa.</i>	For the child belongs to all.

According to Eze (2012), the concept of *nwa bu nwa ora* (child belongs to all) is not only peculiar to the Igbo people. He states that in different cultures across Africa, many proverbs exist which convey similar understanding that the child is for all thus;

in Lunyoro (Banyoro) there is a proverb that says; "*omwana ta kulila nju emoi*", whose literal translation is "a child does not grow up only in a single home". In Kihaya (Bahaya) there is a saying, '*omwana taba womoi*', which

translates as "a child belongs not to one parent or home". In Kijita (Wajita) there is a proverb which says "*omwana ni wa bhone'*, meaning regardless of a child's biological parent(s) its upbringing belongs to the community. In Swahili, the proverb "*asiyefunzwa na mamae hufunzwa na ulimwengu'* approximates to the same. (p. 72).

In the Igbo culture the training of children is the work of both men and women, within the family and outside it. Neighbours often look after youngsters while parents may be busy with other chores. It is not strange to see a man disciplining a child who is not his own. The uniqueness of the extended family system in Africa and Igboland in particular with regards to parenting is that the responsibility in taking care of the child is not only to the biological parents. This is shared by all in the extended family. This however, is buttressed by the African proverb on parenting which says that 'a single hand cannot nurse a child'. The extended family is also a strong tool in parenting in Igboland. This is because it helps to develop a strong sense of social responsibility in the child from his/her early years as he/she learns to be respectful, responsible and supportive member of the extended family and society. In Igboland, the physical environment makes it possible for children to play in the village squares under the moonlight, and to be reared by all adults in the village. Thus according to Okafor (2003), the African adage "it takes a village to raise a child" was borne out of this concept of the whole village as a playground for the growing child. Parenting in Igboland is the responsibility of both the immediate and the the extended family group, and all the elders in the extended family participate in the training of the child to fit into the culture of the people. Children are taught to be obedient, respectful and to obey instructions given by elders without questioning the reason or rationale. In Igboland, the child should be seen and not heard. Children are taught not to look older people straight in the eye, and are to only speak when they are spoken to.

Effects of Modernity on Pattern of Parenting in Igboland

The Igbo culture is not like the type that is obtainable or practised in Europe, America and other Western world where they believe in me, my wife and children only. However, the traditional system as described above have gone through the influence of external systems and forces which has transformed the rich communal pattern of parenting in Igboland. The advent of colonialism coupled with the missionary activities in Igboland brought about western education and civilization. The Igbo family in modern time has witnessed

conflict of cultures. The acid of modernity does not only pollute Igbo system, but appears to bring about negligence and disregard on the Igbo value system.

Modernity has impacted both negatively and positively on Igbo family. Paramount among the negative effects of modernity on Igbo family discussed are individualistic spirit, ill-training of children by some parents and some good traditional values such as morality, good sanctions and taboos, respect for elders, decent dressing, etc. positively, modernity has brought about western education and eliminated some of the harmful cultural practices of the Igbo like human sacrifice, killing of twins and slave trade. The extended family, which was regarded as a social dynamism in the family and helped in developing the child's social responsibility and respect among other values, has greatly been affected by modernity. The study observed the Igbo community and family values have changed and given way to new elements such as individualism, new beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles. Another unfortunate finding is a reasonable percentage of Igbo parents are not teaching their children how to behave well for several reasons. The parents are busy and lack time for interaction even to observe their children's actions or are ignorant of much coveted parenting skills among other reasons. According to Wachege and Rugendo (2017), left alone, children and especially the youth have multiple teachers including the social media which seems to speak to them loudest, teaching them to embrace freedom without responsibility. Individualistic life style has hampered communal mentoring of children and often a neighbour or friend who tries to correct a child will be confronted in the course of time to his or her embarrassment.

The Igbo patterns of parenting are slowly but progressively being changed as a result of the process of modernisation. Mensah and Amisah (2016) states that families are faced with the pressure resulting from the competition prevailing between traditional and modern family values. The importance of proper training of the child cannot be over emphasized. In traditional Igbo environment, the indispensability of proper training of the child stems from the fact that every parent wants to be taken good care of at old age, and also to maintain good family name and lineage. Civilization has brought change in the pattern of Igbo traditional life. Civilization brought urbanization. This has made majority of the Igbo people to live in the cities where individualistic life style has become the tradition. Such method of living does not give the opportunity for the igbo pattern of parenting. Every family stays on its own and does her child's training the way it best suits it. Lamenting the effects of civilization, Nnadi (1991) posits that;

This strange ways of life created a new image, especially among the modern generation with respect to morals. Anew era began which made inroads into the customary ways of life and completely changed the notion of everything traditional. The youths in particular started feeling emancipated from the traditional customs especially those in township where they have alienated themselves from their homes and live free from parental control. (p. 16).

Modernisation has changed the understanding and the meaning of family by the contemporary Igbo society. Family relationship now in most cases do not go beyond the nuclear family. One is not to give the chance to share in nurturing and training the child due to present culture of individual life style. The Igbo society in recent times is filled with deviant and ill cultured children as a result of the effect of modernisation on Igbo pattern of parenting.

Conclusion

Modernity is not evil in itself, but it has been used in propagating disobedience to African Traditional rules and regulations. Modernity has swept us away from almost all traditional types of social order and ethical values, in quite unprecedented fashion. With the growing threat of individualism this study conclude, as many other studies have previously done, the present and future family risks being dysfunctional and thus creating a shaky foundation for society. Therefore, other adult members of the society should be allowed by parents to join hands with them (especially teachers) in training their child. This is because the traditional old Igbo pattern of parenting which allowed for every adult member of the community to join in training a child has been found to be more rewarding than the individualistic method orchestrated by modernity. In Igbo land/community only one person does not own a child and therefore only one person cannot and does not train a child.

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