FAMILY DYNAMICS AS A FACTOR IN PEACE BUILDING IN NIGERIAN FAMILY

By

ANICHE ALEXANDER (PH.D),
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY/PSYCHOLOGY
GODFREY OKOYE UNIVERSITY

AND

PRISCA ISIWU
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY/PSYCHOLOGY
GODFREY OKOYE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

Family dynamics are the patterns of relating or interacting between family members. Each family system and its dynamics are unique, although there are some common patterns. All families have some helpful and unhelpful dynamics. Family dynamics include family alignments, hierarchies, roles, ascribed characteristics and patterns of interaction within the family. Family cannot interact properly without peace in the family. Peace building applies to a situation of low conflict and this is why one cannot separate family dynamics from peace building. Peace is important for the survival of the family as a system. Peace generally is absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering, and violence and about peaceful co-existence. Peace building in the family dynamics is primarily concerned with creating and maintaining a just order in the family and resolution of conflict by non violent means.

KEYWORDS: Family, Dynamics, Peace building.

INTRODUCTION:

Family is not just a group of people. A special relationship distinguishes the family from other types of social groupings. To define those unique and special social relationships, however, is very difficult. Family is the smallest social unit yet the most important primary group in the society. When we speak of family, common sense suggests that a family is composed of a father, mother and their child(ren.). this definition does not include many familiar family patterns. This is because one may ask some questions as: what about the adopted children? What about single parent? What about older brother or sister now that he/she is married and have a family. Obviously, it is not simple and very easy to define family. According to Aniche and Onyia (2008) family is a social group of people related by ancestry, marriage or other committed sexual relationship or adoption and who live together. For Dubeman and Hartjen (1979) family is a universal institution whose most important functions are socializing and nurturing the younger generation. According to chambers 1st century dictionary, family means:
a)   A group consisting of a set of parents and children.
b)   A group of people related to one another by blood or marriage.
c)   A person's children.
d)   A household of people.
e)   All those descended from a common ancestor
f)   A related group, example, races, language etc.

Family dynamics are the patterns of relating or interactions between family members. Each family system and its dynamics are unique, although there are some common patterns. All families have some helpful and some unhelpful dynamics. Family dynamics include family alignments, hierarchies, roles, ascbribed characteristics, and patterns of interaction within the family. Even where there is little or no present contact with family a young person will have been influenced by dynamics in earlier years. Family dynamics often have a strong influence on the way young people see themselves, others and the world, and influence their relationships, behaviours and their well being.

According to Agu (2011) in psychology an understanding of the impact of family dynamics on the young person's self perception may help worker pinpoint and respond to the driving forces behind a young person's current need. Family dynamics determines how the family functions as a unit. Peace is important for family survival and social functioning. Peace is a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to family dynamics and it reduces conflict in the family.

Peace according to chambers 1st Century dictionary means:

a)   Freedom from or absence of war

b)   A treaty or agreement ending a war

c)   Freedom from or absence of noise, disturbance or disorder, quietness and calm.

d)   Freedom from mental agitation serenity (peace of mind).

e)   (Incompounds) usually referring to an organization, person etc promoting or advocating peace. Thus, peace building applies to a situation of low conflict and high prospect of positive family interactions. Peace is thus necessary in family dynamics.

This work made use of family systems theory.

Family systems theory view issues and problems within a circular fashion using what is described as a system perspective. Meaning that the event and the problem exist within the context of the relationship, where both influence the other. Family systems theory aims to assess these patterns of interactions, and lookout why things may be happening instead of why they happened. Family system theory considers the nature of relationships to be bidirectional and moves away from seeking blame of one person for the dynamic of the relationship(Bertalanffy,1954).

TYPES OF FAMILY STRUCTURES IN FAMILY DYNAMICS

Family Dynamics.

        According to Iffih and Ezeah(2004) there is a great deal of variety in the family as a social institution. The bases for such variation in family patterning include: size, composition and the prescribed functions for members of the family as they show mutual obligations and reciprocities for one another.

The types of family structures include:

a.   Nuclear family: the nuclear family is the traditional type of family structure. It involves a man, his wife and children.

b.   Extended family: this is predominant in some parts of Nigeria and it consist of a group of brothers and sisters as well as their married sons and their wives and children. There is an emphasis on common residence. Members are highly supportive of one another socially economically and otherwise. Extended family consists of several related persons.

c.   Patriarchal family: this type of family refers to family patterns where men are the heads of the families and they are to dominate the family decision making. Any single parent (a man) family in any society is also a patriarchal family.

d.   Matriarchal family: in this kind of family patterns, it is the right of women in the society to dominate family decision making, living with their husband

notwithstanding. As the case may be any single (a woman) parent family in any society is also a matriarchal family.

e.   Egalitarian family: this type of family pattern is common among working class couples in modern societies. In these family pattern, responsibilities and power or decision making are shared between husbands and wives. Family decisions are made jointly by the couple in the family.

WHAT INFLUENCES FAMILY DYNAMICS:
According to minuchin(1974) some of the many influences on family dynamics include:
1.   nature of the parent's relationship
2.   having a particularly soft or strict parent.
3.   number of children in the family
4.   personalities of family members.
5.   an absence of parent.
6.   the mix of members who are living in the same household
7.   level and type of influence from extended family or others
8.   a chronically sick or disabled child within the family
9.   events which have affected family members, such as an affair, divorce, trauma, death, unemployment, homelessness.
10.   other issues such as family violence, abuse, alcohol, or other drug use, mental health difficulties, other disability
11.   family values, culture and ethnicity including beliefs about gender roles, parenting practices, power or status of family members.
12.   nature of attachment in family (that is, secure, insecure).
13.   dynamics of previous generation (parents and grandparents families).
14.   broader system – social economic, political including poverty.

DIMENSIONS OF FAMILY DYNAMICS.
According to Minuchin (1974) family dynamics include:
FAMILY ROLE:
People take on different roles or functions within the family systems. These roles may be the result of family dynamics. The way that people behave and interact in their roles may not be a result of conscious choice. Some of the more common roles that young people take on in a family are:

   i.   Peace keeper – A young person may be unintentionally playing a role, the role of peace keeper, mediating and educing tension between conflicting parents. Their behaviour may be in response to their unconscious anxiety about family breakdown. This role may lead them to stay as a child in their family rather than to move towards age-appropriate independence.

ii.   The problem as the role – Sometimes a young person's problems, for example, drug use may play a role in the family system distracting the family from other problems. One of the early family systems theories, Minuchin, identified that the negotiation of spouse stresses through the child serves to maintain the spouse sub-system in illusory harmony. Spouse may reinforce deviant behaviour in a child in order to allow them to avoid addressing their own relationship difficulties, thereby keeping the family together(Minuchin,1974).

iii. Scapegoat – Often a young person with difficulties is seen as the black sheep or the bad child within the family, while other children are seen as the good children. The young person has become the scapegoat for the family, or the visible symptom of a troubled family system. For example, the young person may be labeled as "mentally ill", although they may be behaving in a way that is actually adaptive and enables them to cope and function within a troubled family system. If the purpose or function of their behaviour is understood within the context of family dynamics, the young person can be supported to cope in less detrimental ways.

iv.   Ascribed characteristics – A family's attitude towards a young person has an important influence on their self identity and self worth. A young person's behaviour may at times be in response to labeling or being ascribed characteristics by the family. For example, a young person may be called a "sook" in a family where emotional toughness is valued. This may lead to certain responses by the young person, such as toughening up or managing low self worth in a destructive manner. The young person will benefit greatly from a worker who will assist them to identify their strengths and emphasis the value of their attributes.

v.   Reinforcing patterns –Interaction between family members and behaviours surrounding a problem such as drug use may inadvertently serve to reinforce or engage problem behaviour. A parent may pay a fine for example, in an effort to avoid a particular negative consequence of a young person's drug use, such as a police record. This may unintentionally enable or encourage the drug use in a young person, as it can be seen to prevent them experiencing and learning from the consequences of their actions. If parents are able to agree together on an approach to be taken in relation to a young person's behaviour, using warmth firm boundaries, the young person usually respond well.

vi.   Family alignments(family structural issues) and Hierarchies(positions of power) – Families also form alignments and hierarchies which may or may not serve the young person well. For example, families may form alignments across gender, or one parent may align with and have a closer relationship

with a child than with their partner, including sharing secrets from the other parent. Parents should share the power in a family and support each other in decision making and appropriate discipline of children. There are times where instead a child carries the power in the family, for example, when there is conflict between parents or when parents are busy or non effective in their boundaries with the child. These inappropriate alignments and hierarchies can have a negative influence on a young person's functioning (Minuchin,1974).

PEACE BULDING IN THE FAMILY LIFE:
According to Hobbs and Blank(1975). For building peace in the family, knowing the values that a family cherishes, helps increase harmony and peace among all family members. An essential part of family life is to reflect on what is valued in the family. Children are not confused when they understand and know what is most important, and feel respected.

METHOD OF BUILDING PEACE IN THE FAMILY:
According to Robert and Robert,(1985). There are two major methods of building peace in the family.
  The first is the proactive method which is a method to prevent the occurrence of conflict in the first instance before it occurs. For example, trust and confidence building measures, improving communication among the family members.
  The second method of building peace is reactive method. Here conflict has already occurred among the family members. You deal with the responses to situations that have already turned conflict, or are potentially to cause it. Examples of this metod include third party intervention, like mediation, conciliation etc. in all the methods of building peace in the family, the role of communication can not be over emphasized.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN PEACE BUILDING IN THE FAMILY
  Communication is an important ingredient of peace building. Communication relates to the presence sharing of accurate information about a conflict situation in the family, being able to talk about feelings and concerns of parties speaking about what parties would like to change and discussing the nature and type of the conflict, touching on the positions, interests, needs and fears of parties. Poor communication or the absence of communication about these and other subjects, or a misinterpretation of the needs and feelings of one another by conflict parties or family members can easily lead to the escalation of conflict.

According to Becvar and Becvar(2002) the role of communication in conflict prevention and crisis in management in the families steams from the fact that most conflicts have to do with perceptions, assumptions, stereotypes and attitudes which have been developed by conflict parties vis-à-vis others.

Thus communication is invaluable for conflict prevention in the first instance and then for conflict resolution in the family dynamics. Communication has come to represent a key strategy of conflict management in the peace building. Most of the non-violent methods of peace building, such as a collaboration, negotiation and dialogue as well as third party intervention like mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication are largely dependent on effective communication.

CONCLUSION

Family relationship is the most difficult you do not choose your family. Family dynamics is the ways in which family members relate to one another and because human beings are capable of change, and family members take part in different experiences, the dynamics within a family never remain the same. The important of peace building in the family cannot be over emphasized.

Family dynamics and peace building are inseparable in our modern day social life.

References

Aniche, A and Onyia, P.(2008) Sociology: the scientific study of society.

Duberman, L and Hartjen, C(1979) Sociology: focus on society, New York: Foresman and Company.

Agu, S (2011). basic experimental design in psychology. Enugu: El-Felys creations.

Minuchin, S (1974). families and family therapy. Cambridge: Massi Harvan Univ. press.

Iffih, B and Ezeah, P. (2004). Sociology of the family. Enugu: John Jacob's classic publishers ltd.

Hobbs, D and Blank, S (1985). achieving cooperation under anarchy. World politics. 38, N0. 1 October

Bertalanffy, L(1954). family systems theory. https://en.m.wikipedia.org.>wiki