# Implication of Extended Family Culture in African Nations on Youth Development: Evidence from Nigeria

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## Abstract

*The family is a longstanding and significant social institution worldwide. It can take the form of a small nuclear family or a larger extended family. Traditionally, Africans have held deep respect for and organized their lives around the extended family, which includes spouses, children, and other relatives of common lineage such as grandparents, uncles, aunties, nephews, nieces, and cousins. However, societal changes in modern times have brought about significant transformations in all aspects of society, including the family. This study examines the current state of the extended family amidst these societal changes. The findings of the study indicate that the traditional extended family has undergone several changes, with a shift towards a more modernized nuclear family structure. Despite this shift, the extended family continues to maintain a strong presence in Africa and fulfills important social welfare role during significant events like childbirth, marriage, and funerals. Furthermore, the study revealed that by implementing Guidance and Counseling programmes within African communities, both the family and the state can work together to mitigate the impact of modern trends on the extended family system. With concerted efforts, it is possible to improve African way of life and preserve the significance of the extended family in the face of evolving societal dynamics.*

*Keywords: Family, extended family, nuclear family, socio-culture*

## Introduction

Extended families encompass multiple generations of individuals, including biological parents, children, in-laws, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins (Hessel, 2023). Common in collective cultures, extended families exhibit interdependence and share familial responsibilities, including child-rearing roles (Qizi,2023). Typically residing together, extended family members pool resources and collaborate on family duties. Their multigenerational bonds and increased resources contribute to the resilience of the extended family and their ability to meet the needs of the children (Mohangi,2023). Risks and opportunities for children's well-being in resource-constrained multigenerational households during COVID-19: Implications for school psychology interventions. *School Psychology International*, *44*(2), 236-254. However, certain risk factors associated with extended families can diminish their well-being, such as complex relationships, conflicting loyalties, and generational conflicts.

The literature highlights several protective factors linked to extended families that aid parents and the family in addressing the diverse needs of the children. Extended families generally have more resources available to ensure the children's well-being (Devaney, Christiansen, Holzer, MacDonald, Matias & Salamon, 2023). When the family operates as a cooperative team, maintains strong kinship bonds, adapts flexibly to roles, and upholds cultural values, it serves as a lifelong buffer against stressful transitions. Kinship care, a valued aspect of extended families, is associated with positive outcomes for children (Edna, Samson, 2021 & Treleaven, 2023). However, when extended families assume responsibility for a child due to the parents' inability to do so, kinship care may resemble foster care. Such situations often arise from substance abuse, incarceration, abuse, homelessness, family violence, illness, death, or military deployment.

The extended family member who assumes the parenting role in kinship care often faces overwhelming stress resulting from new parental responsibilities, attachment difficulties, potential resentment and anger toward the biological parent, and the challenges of navigating traumatic transitions following the loss of a capable parent. Loyalty issues can also strain relationships between the new parent and other family members. In addition to complex relationships, changes in the child's environment require establishing new routines, setting new boundaries, and sometimes co-parenting with the biological parent, all of which can contribute to a less stable environment. (Hussain, 2023, Malik & Audu, 2024).

While assuming kinship care presents numerous challenges for the extended family member, positive experiences associated with such care can serve as protective factors that mitigate the negative effects of traumatic transitions (Budig, 2023). The transition may hold personal meaning for the new parent, providing a sense of purpose in their life, and the child may experience a feeling of security, consistency, continuity in family identity, emotional bonds, and familiarity (Odunsi & Hosek,2024)

**Statement of the Problem**

Complex intergenerational relationships can complicate the child–parent relationship as they can cause confusion regarding the identity of the primary parent. Such confusion can result in a child undermining the authority of her existing parent (Anderson, 2012) and feeling uncertain about her environment.

Extended families often prioritize the larger kin group over individual relationships, which may result in loyalty conflicts within the family. This can also create challenges in a couple's relationship, where a strong bond between a husband and wife might be perceived as a threat to the wider kin. Extended family relationships can be complicated, especially when trying to balance the expectations and needs of each member. This can also put strain on parent-child relationships (Strong et al., 2008; Langer & Ribarich, 2007).

Although children in extended care often fare better than children in foster care, various risk factors can have a negative impact on the children's well-being. Risk factors include low socioeconomic status, inability to meet children's needs properly. In the past, the father was indisputably the head of the family, and the mother a homemaker. Women had a rigid traditional role of keeping the home, undertaking domestic chores, take care of the husband by cooking delicious meals, and adequately socializing the young ones. The change in this traditional role has a great influence on the lives of the younger generations today. African societies recognize the diversity of family types and the evolving changing roles engaged in by men and women. It is apt to say that the traditional values of the African family have gone into extinction. Could this be a result of globalization? One can convincingly argue that African values like honesty, morality, respect, purity, caring, communality,

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social bond, and commitment are at the mercy of imperialism through the eye of globalization. Parents no longer play their traditional roles; children are disobedient and act brazenly against social norms and values.

The aforementioned attributes of old family values have been tossed into the garbage. Lately, families have been shattered by divorce and truth has been thrown out of homes due to the influence of the extended family. Parents today prioritize economic gain over traditional family roles, leading to disobedient children and lack of integrity. Youth are left at home to tend to themselves with help of grandmother/Father while parents are at work, premarital sex is accepted, truth is relative, and the focus is more on self-orientation rather than family orientation. There is no longer respect for lives especially as the media (smartphones and tablets, video, television, computer, and the internet) expose the future generation to crimes. Children are exposed to video and computer games that thrive on killing, rituals, and nudity. However, like the ideals of most ethnic groups in Africa, extended family values reflect many common goals and principles, but also vary according to location and cultural backgrounds. However, the problem confronting this research seeks to provide an assessment of implications of extended family culture in African nations on youth development: evidence from Nigeria.

## Review of Related Study

### Extended Families

Extended families composed of grandparents, aunts, and uncles can be protective of children, given a no abusive ideology. (Qizi,2023). If there is an abusive ideology, however, the extended family can pose as much a risk as a buffer to children. Simple generalizations, therefore, about features of family structure and their role in child maltreatment cannot be made. (Eguren, Cyr, Dubois-Comtois & Muela, 2023). There are widespread beliefs that the presence of grandparents is a buffer for children and probably inhibits abuse. However, research findings on the support provided by grandparents to young children are mixed. In one study of African-American extended families, children within single- or divorced-mother–headed households did show signs of better adjustment when a grandmother lived with them. However, this effect did not seem due to the grandmother's parenting skills or direct care to the child, but to the support these grandmothers provided their daughters. The daughters, therefore, became more effective and less stressed during their own parenting tasks, and the children subsequently benefited. When single mothers are nested in supportive extended family contexts, the children benefit from the direct aid offered to the mother (Qizi, 2023).

There have been some studies on what kinds of skills promote nonviolent and nurturant parenting. For example, researchers in child development found that mothers who are able to develop higher levels of attunement or synchrony when interacting with toddlers and who are able to establish a mutual focus with the child on some activity or thought have children who are more compliant and happier than mothers who are less attuned, so to speak, to their young children. Flowing with the child rather than against her or him seems to be the best practice for socializing cooperativeness and stability.

The indicators of nonviolent parenting seem to be lodged within parenting beliefs more than in the structure of the family. Coercive parenting engenders aggression in children, either through modeling parental aggression or through the development of an internal mental script or "working model" of antagonistic interpersonal relationships. Although there have been few direct studies to date, it appears that parents who espouse a "partnership model" with each other are more likely to raise children to do the same and to develop mutual respect for boundaries, opinions, and interests that

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will benefit the child, as well as the parents. The "dominator model," or the traditional patriarchal family, is a problematic environment for successful child rearing and, in fact, promotes "cycles of brutality and violence" (Eisler and Fry, 2019, p. 54).

**Family and Culture**

As inferred in the previous definitions, there are different types of families. The structure refers to the positions of the members of the family (e.g., mother, father, daughter, grandmother, etc.) and the roles assigned to the family members by the culture. For example, traditional roles of the nuclear family in North America and northern Europe in the mid-20th century were the wage-earning father and the housewife and child-raising mother. Cultures have social constructs and norms related to the proper roles of family members—that is, what the role of the mother, father, etc. should be. Family types or structures have been delineated primarily by cultural anthropological studies of small cultures throughout the world. However, family sociologists have also contributed to the literature on family typology, although sociology has been more interested in the European and American family and less interested in small societies throughout the world. There are a number of typologies of family types, but a simple typology would be the nuclear and the extended family systems. These can be added the one-parent family.

The nuclear family consists of two generations: the wife/mother, husband/father, and their children. The one-parent family is also a variant of the nuclear family. Most one-parent families are divorced-parent families; unmarried-parent families comprise a small percentage of one-parent families, although they have increased in North America and northern Europe. The majority of one-parent families are those with mothers. The extended family typically includes three or more generations, including grandparents from both sides, the mother and father, and their children. In addition, it may include relatives from the wife's and husband's side of the family. Different cultures have various forms of extended families throughout the world. The following is one taxonomy:

i. The polygynous family consists of one husband/father and two or more wives/mothers, together with their children and kin. Polygynous families are found in many cultures. For example, four wives are permitted according to Islam. However, the actual number of polygamous families in Islamic nations is very small (e.g., approximately 90% of fathers in Qatar, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia have only one wife). In Pakistan, a man who wishes to take a second wife must obtain permission from an arbitration council. The council requires a statement of consent from the first wife before granting permission.

ii. In a few societies in Central Asia there are polyandrous families, in which one woman is married to several brothers and thus land is not divided. However, this is a rare phenomenon in cultures throughout the world.

iii. The stem family consists of the grandparents and the eldest married son and heir and their children, who live together under the authority of the grandfather/household head. The eldest son inherits the family plot and the stem continues through the first son. The other sons and daughters leave the household upon marriage. The stem family was characteristic of central European countries, such as Austria and southern Germany. The lineal or patriarchal family consists of the grandparents and the married sons. This is perhaps the most common form of family and is also found in southern Europe and Japan.

iv. The joint family is a continuation of the lineal family after the death of the grandfather, in which the married sons share the inheritance and work together. Joint families were found south of the Loire in France, as were patriarchal families, whereas the nuclear family was

predominant north of the Loire. Joint families are also found in India and Pakistan.

v. The fully extended family, or the zadruga in the Balkans countries of Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria, had a structure similar to that of the joint family but with the inclusion of cousins and other kin. The number of kin living and working together as a family numbered in the dozens.

A point needs to be made regarding the different types of extended families. Historical analyses of the family by anthropologists and sociologists indicated that people considered being members of a family, or a household were not necessarily kin. For example, in central European countries until the 18th century, servants (who were often relatives), semi-permanent residents, visitors, workers, and boarders were members of the household. The term familia was used to denote large households rather than "family" in the modern sense. Until the 18th century, no word for nuclear family was employed in Germany but the term "with wife and children." Frédéric Le Play, considered to be the father of empirical family sociology, discussed the emergence of the nuclear family as a product of the industrial revolution. He also characterized the nuclear family, as unstable in comparison with the stem family.

**Benefits of an Extended Family System**

The following are the benefits of an extended family system (Chukwuemeka, 2022, Mikucki-Enyart, Rose, & Conrad 2023):

i. It is Economical: An extended family system is economical as it helps saves resources and promotes pooling of resources thereby reducing the financial burden on one person as all adults in the family contributes in one way or the other to the livelihood of the family. It

ii. promotes Unity: When people are living together and sharing a good relationship with one another, there is usually peace and unity and this is fundamentally the case in an extended family system, unlike a system where Families live apart from each other, misunderstanding usually sets in and this results to normal fights amongst relatives common in many countries of the world today.

iii. Building Family Bonds: An extended Family system does not only promote peace and unity in the family, but it also builds a strong family bond amongst each and every member of the family. By living together, cooperating with one another, effectively communicating with one another, helping one another, working towards a common goal and maintaining a good relationship the bond between the members of the family naturally tightens.

iv. Inculcates Values: This extended family system inculcates family values, culture and traditions on the children and each member of the family and it results in the proper upbringing of children with values, morals and a sense of responsibility.

v. Promotes Child care support: One major advantage of an extended family system is that a child is not trained by only one person, each and every adult in the family contributes one way or the other in the training of the child and this produces a more redefined Child. Asides from the training of a Child, an extended family system provides child care support by taking some workload of the parents a child, helping the children with their assignments, teaching them valuable things and collectively providing some of their needs. Thus, providing a much-needed support to parents in training their children.

vi. Promotes Cooperation: Importantly, an extended family system breeds cooperation as each member of the family shares responsibilities both in performing house chores to providing the financial needs, to working together towards a common goal. All these breeds a much-needed cooperation amongst members of the family.

vii. Promotes Socialization: Socialization is the ability to interact with other people and maintain a good social relations, and being raised in an extended family will help you to know how to interact well with people who you come across as in an extended family system you will be raised in a larger family system with many people, characters and visitors, and won't be strictly restricted by your parents to the confines of your home.

viii. It curbs loneliness: With the presence of numerous people and characters around you, you may never feel lonely in an extended family system unlike a nuclear family wherein they can be only 3 – 5 persons in the house and most times just 1 or 2 or even only you if you are the only child. In this situation most often than not you will feel really lonely, but this cannot be the case in an extended family system.

ix. It builds understanding: From living together, doing things together and consistently interacting with each other, an extended family system builds a great understanding between each member of the family; it also breeds cooperation, feeling of oneness, sharing, and caring for each other.

## Challenges of an Extended Family System

Mikucki-Enyart, Rose, & Conrad, (2023) revealed that the following are some of the challenges of extended Family system in Africa.

1. No Independence: Living in an extended family system can limit an individual's desired level of independence. In such a system, family members depend on each other's efforts for survival. As a result, no one is on their own journey, and you have to walk with other family members, share resources equally, and cooperate with each other.

2. Breeds Laziness: The lack of independence that arises from relying too much on well-to-do family members can often lead to laziness, particularly among younger family members. They may become accustomed to receiving financial assistance from their aunts and uncles and begin to believe that they don't need to work hard to support themselves.

3. Often leads to misunderstanding: An extended family system can be both beneficial and challenging. While it builds understanding among family members, it can also result in misunderstanding, especially due to the age gap between members. Grandparents and uncles may view and understand things differently from teenagers, which can lead to disagreements and conflicts within the family.

4. Often breed Conflicts: An extended family system can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts among its members. This is often due to power struggles and disagreements over the distribution of the family's properties and inheritance.

5. No personal space: In an extended family, personal space can be hard to come by since there are usually many people in the house, which can be distracting when you need some alone time. Additionally, family members may interfere in your activities and business, especially if they feel you are doing something wrong. To make matters worse, there are often many visitors or guests present in the house, which can make it challenging to find some privacy and personal space.

6. Leads to Interference: Living in an extended family system can often result in members of the family interfering in your personal matters and choices, such as your work, personal activities, relationships, and marriage. Family members may involve themselves in disagreements and misunderstandings between a husband and wife, often giving unsolicited advice.

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## Findings

The implications of extended family culture in African nations, specifically in Nigeria, on youth development have been examined in this study. The findings shed light on the significance of the extended family system and its influence on the well-being of young individuals. The extended family culture in Nigeria provides a strong support system for youth, encompassing emotional, financial, and practical assistance. This social support plays a crucial role in youth development, offering guidance and mentorship in education, as well as contributing to their overall cultural preservation and identity.

Despite the age-old importance of the extended family structure, modernization has led to changes in family dynamics, with a shift towards nuclear families. As a result, the extended family's involvement in providing guidance and counseling interventions for its members has diminished.

## Conclusion

There is limited empirical knowledge regarding transfers between extended family members, despite their significant role in many individuals' lives. The extended family culture in African nations, including Nigeria, has profound implications for youth development. Recognizing and preserving the extended family system's importance is crucial for ensuring the well-being and growth of young individuals. By providing support and implementing policies that address the specific needs of the extended family. African nations can harness the potential of the extended family system to empower young individuals, preserve cultural heritage, and foster positive youth development. It is through the collective efforts of communities, governments, and stakeholders that the extended family's invaluable contribution to the growth and well-being of African youth can be sustained, ensuring a brighter future for generations to come.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that African nations, including Nigeria should take the following actions to address the implications of extended family culture on youth development:

1. Strengthening the Extended Family System: Efforts should be made to reinforce and support the extended family system. This can be achieved through community programs, awareness campaigns, and initiatives that highlight the importance of the extended family in youth development.

2. Policy Development: Governments should develop policies that recognize and accommodate the extended family structure. Family-friendly policies should be extended to include the extended family, ensuring that it receives the necessary support and resources to fulfill its vital role in guiding and counseling young individuals.

3. Education and Awareness: Educational initiatives should be implemented to raise awareness about the importance of the extended family system and its positive impact on youth development. This can include school programs, community workshops, and media campaigns that promote understanding and appreciation of the extended family's role.

4. Intergenerational Collaboration: Encouraging intergenerational dialogue and collaboration is crucial. Creating platforms for older family members to share their knowledge, experiences, and wisdom with the youth can enhance the role of the extended family in guiding and counseling young individuals.

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5. Resource Allocation: Adequate resources should be allocated to support the extended family system. This includes financial resources, access to educational opportunities, and social welfare programs that cater to the needs of the extended family and facilitate its active involvement in youth development.

By implementing these recommendations, African nations, particularly Nigeria, can ensure that the extended family system remains a strong support network for youth. This will contribute to their overall well-being, cultural preservation, and positive development, enhancing the potential for a thriving future generation. To ensure the continued positive influence of the extended family system on youth development, it is imperative for African nations to recognize, preserve, and strengthen this age-old institution. Policies need to be developed that acknowledge the extended family structure and extend support mechanisms to cater to its unique needs. Educational initiatives and intergenerational collaboration can promote understanding and appreciation of the extended family's role, while resource allocation ensures the provision of necessary financial and social resources.

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