

CULTURAL DEGENERATION AND THE LOST HARMONY: A VIEW ON THE EROSION OF TRADITIONAL FAMILY SYSTEMS IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines the Cultural degeneration, as evidenced in the modern-day society of Nigeria, constitutes a significant socio-cultural and familial change; it presents the gradual dissolution of family systems that have conventionally served as strong bedrock for social cohesion and moral regulation. This paper examines the complex interplay of factors that shape this phenomenon: the processes of globalization, urbanization, and economic restructuring, and the strong influence of Western ideologies, which all combine to place individualism and consumerist culture above communal responsibilities. The social structures of the traditional Nigerian family, typified by extended kinship networks, intergenerational support, and the internalization of indigenous moral and cultural values, increasingly give way to nuclear family structures and modern ways of life. This cultural shift therefore has significant consequences in terms of weakened family ties, loss of social support systems, erosion of communal identity, implications for societal stability, and cohesion. It articulates, through a historical and sociological analysis, the dire need for the preservation and restoration of family values grounded in culture. It emphasizes the role of indigenous practices, communal engagement, and culturally informed policy interventions in fostering strong family systems that are resilient to contemporary socio-economic challenges. This research, in sum, highlights the need to maintain cultural heritage at the same time as allowing for various transforms in societal life. In the end, it is essential to address the erosion of traditional family systems in ways that may reinforce social stability, moral continuity, and long-term community resilience in Nigerian settings.

Keywords:

Cultural Degeneration,
Traditional Family
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Introduction

One of the most essential institutions in every human society to date, the family remains the major unit of socialization, moral training, cultural transmission, and social regulation. In the Nigerian context, the traditional family structure historically provided the basis for social life, social responsibility, and moral regulation. In this traditional arrangement, there were different forms of family structures, with the extended family structure being the most prominent and culturally defining, as they were the most representative of the communal nature of Nigerian society. In the context of the extended family structure, the members were not restricted to the parents and the offspring, as in the nuclear family, but included grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, among other relatives, united in their deep sense of family bonds. According to Okafor (2013), and Akinyemi, (2017), the extended family system offered emotional, economic, and social security to the members, ensured communal child-rearing, the care of the aged, as well as moral and disciplined upbringing. According to Olanrewaju (2019), the extended family system was the social security network that promoted communal well-being, being the realistic manifestation of the conventional family system in Nigeria, while the nuclear family essentially played the role of the sub-unit in the entire family structure.

However, the sustainability of the conventional family structure, especially the extended family, has increasingly faced challenges due to the changes in the social, economic, and cultural realities of the country. Economic restructuring and hardship have led to a tremendous decrease in the individual capability to bear the responsibilities of kinship ties. There have been, in the past years, decreased employment opportunities, inflation, and income volatility in the Nigerian economy, which has affected the functionality of the joint responsibilities of the family, which in the past facilitated extended living on the nuclear family structure. Economic hardship, according to Adebayo & Ogunlade (2020), reduces the sustainable functionality of prolonged responsibilities of kinship ties, which makes the nuclear family the only structure individuals can commit responsibilities to. Economic hardship, which has influenced the Nigerian economy, is closely related to the current instability of the family, the prevalence of marital conflicts, the breakdown of the family structure, and the deterioration of the entire social support system, which was responsible for the sustainability of the collective well-being of the entire population (Ukwuoma, 2021).

Alongside economic issues, Western education has, indirectly, brought about the destruction associated with indigenous family values and cultural identities. While formal education is a crucial aspect in developing any nation, it tends to focus more on international systems of knowledge, logic, science, and different ideologies, with little or no dimension of indigenous ideologies, African philosophies, or cultural morals. As argued by Nwosu (2018) and Falola (2020), this form of education has resulted in a generation gap, as young people have been oriented away from the indigenous social behaviors within society. Therefore, children systematically acquire academic knowledge with less understanding of cultural responsibilities, moral requirements, and collective values. There is, thus, a cultural deficit in which modern knowledge is acquired at the expenses of cultural embeddedness, where the

decay of oral cultures, communal learning, and cultural rites of passage, which in the past were crucial vectors in the transmission of values from one generation to another, symbolize this deficit. The role of the family, therefore, in cultural education has diminished.

Another strong driver of changes in family life involves urbanization. Migration from rural to urban centers has significantly affected the living arrangements of individuals. Urban settings are generally characterized by a lack of space, increased cost of living, and the stress of finding jobs, and community interaction is reduced. Self-evidently, therefore, the extended family structure is hard to maintain. Families who live in urban centers tend to favour nuclear arrangements in which individual households, rather than an extended kinship network, take precedence (Agbaje & Omobowale, 2020). Some scholars, such as Aluko (2015) and Isiugo-Abanihe (2016), claim that urbanization loosens bonds between generations and erodes traditional communal structures that support cultural learning and social discipline.

The ramifications triggered by the disintegrity of the traditional family structure not only sway the whole of Nigerian society in wide-ranging ways, it continues to impact not just social stability and moral orientation. Many studies suggest that the disintegrity of family structure is linked to growing delinquency among the youth, moral decay, drug abuse, and ultimately, disrespect among the young ones. The disunity and deteriorated discipline that previously existed in society have worsened the feelings of seclusion among the rising generation and also exacerbated the effectiveness and susceptibility among the fraternity, while the broke effectiveness among the extended family support system has heightened the susceptibility among the senior fraternity and escalated the rate among lone parental-headed families. The disunity among the social grouping has further broke down the indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms that played an essential role in sustaining social togetherness.

Nevertheless, in spite of such difficulties, the traditional family system is very important for ensuring the sustainability of culture for the people of Nigeria. The promotion of indigenous values in culture enhances societal identity and morality in order to sustain a sense of togetherness in communities. It is recommended by Gyekye (2017) and Mbiti (2015) that African communities should adopt to changing conditions in order to develop and sustain their cultures. This can be achieved through initiatives to preserve language, family gatherings, community meetings, incorporating cultural knowledge within school programs, and promoting family-linked cultural activities such as festivals. Moreover, policies relating to provision for social welfare to sustain family well-being and improving community-based forms of social organization are important for promoting the role of family in culture within Nigerian society.

It is against this background that the research work explores the degeneration of culture in Nigeria and its influence on traditional family systems, within the context of sociology, anthropology, and history, focusing specifically on the circumstances surrounding the disruption of the cohesion of the family due to the deterioration of its societal influence. The work aims to offer a perspective on how cultural deterioration takes place, the rationale behind

its perpetuation, and how a harmony can be attained between modernization needs and the preservation of Nigeria's cultural heritage.

CULTURAL DEGENERATION AND THE LOST HARMONY

This study is grounded in the idea that the destruction of traditional family structures in contemporary Nigeria is primarily a result of accelerated cultural degeneration fueled by rapid urbanization, globalization, westernization, technology, and economic restructurings. In this context, cultural degeneration can be explained as a gradual decay or displacement of local traditions, values, norms, ideologies, or belief-sets, as well as indigenous behaviors, or practices previously giving meanings, directions, standards, or guidelines for organized family structures, orderly behavior, or collective living in Nigeria. It leads to a decay in shared morality standards, decreasing esteem for parental authority, weakening bonds of solidarity, or descent, homegrown responsibility diminishing or giving way to inappropriate or unhealthy levels of über-individualism.

The view taken from the findings of this research study is that the progressive erosion of indigenous norms, whether through choice or necessity, is weakening not just the fabric of the extended family system but the moral fabric of Nigerian society. While the erosion of the extended family system, the lessening of the responsibilities of society, the lessening role of the culture, and the rise of the individual lifestyle are enormous departures from the past, which were anchored in the values that held society's stability, the loss of harmony is specifically the erosion of the state of perfect social relationships within the framework of the family, where cooperation, social care, social identity, and peaceful social coexistence were the hallmark. With such an understanding, it is proposed within this research that the maintenance and restoration of the values of the family within Nigeria are key to the preservation of this country's cultural heritage. The restoration of harmony does not mean the disconnection from modernization but, in fact, the intentionally reintegrated use of native practices, communal support systems, and cultural policies into the contemporary framework. This is essential in helping the family systems in Nigeria develop the strength to resist the effects of modernization while maintaining their roots in their own cultural heritage. It is therefore pertinent to note, within the scope of this research, that Nigeria does not need to disconnect from their cultural heritage but incorporate it into the contemporary framework.

Implications of Cultural Degeneration on Traditional Family Systems

This gradual erosion of indigenous cultural values portends great consequences for family life, social cohesion, and moral stability in contemporary Nigeria. With the breakdown of traditional family structures, those mechanisms that had hitherto ensured social order and communal resilience become fragile. This section contends that cultural degeneration disrupts family relationships but also diminishes society's ability for harmony, regulation of behaviour, and perpetuation of cultural identity. One of the key implications is that intergenerational bonding becomes weaker. The extended family, once heralded as the central institution for cultural transmission and social support, is gradually giving way to the nuclear family model that prioritizes independence over collective responsibility. This change diminishes opportunities

for intergenerational mentorship within which the elders customarily provided cultural wisdom, moral instruction, and social expectations to younger members of society. Strong intergenerational relationships, observed by Isiugo-Abanihe, U. C. (2016), ensure indigenous knowledge systems are passed on; otherwise, it causes cultural gaps in the identity and moral standing of youths.

Another major implication of the practice is the increasing rise of individualism, which then decreases communal responsibility. Each traditional Nigerian society has been organized on the basis of collective identity, shared labour, mutual support, and communal problem solving. However, cultural degeneration promotes self-interest and personal autonomy at the expense of communal welfare. According to Agbaje and Omobowale (2020), this individualistic orientation disrupts kinship obligations and reduces the extent of protective communal safety nets previously extended to vulnerable members like widows, the elderly, and orphaned children. Weakened communal obligations have pitched many into emotional isolation, financial hardship, and social neglect.

Cultural degeneration engenders the moral instability of families and society at large. The diminishing role of cultural practices in family life that emphasize discipline, respect, modesty, and interdependence contributes to the deviation in behavioral patterns in younger and adolescent generations. Works by Onyeka (2022) indicate that weakened structures of families correlate with increased juvenile misconduct, substance abuse, disrespect to elders, and increased social deviance. Traditional structures of discipline that were collectively enforced by parents, elders, and members of the community are now largely absent, leaving youth without the moral frameworks needed to handle social responsibility. Furthermore, the erosion of the traditional family systems has a destabilizing effect on communal unity and social cohesion. Where families function in isolation, rather than as interrelated networks, the communal spirit that once held Nigerian communities together is dissipated. A decline in communal gatherings, rites of passage, and collective celebration compromises cultural identity and a sense of belonging. According to Falola (2020), culture thrives through shared experience; where such experiences decline, communal bonds deteriorate, creating fertile ground for social fragmentation and cultural loss.

Economic vulnerabilities also increase with the collapse of traditional family support systems. The extended family system has often served as an informal social welfare structure where resources could be redistributed to ensure that no one went uncared for. Cultural degeneration weakens this structure and leaves nuclear families to struggle alone with their many economic problems. According to Adebayo and Ogunlade (2020), this shift exacerbates financial burdens, promotes marital conflict, and diminishes the ability of families to care for the aged or incapacitated. The financial burden taken on by isolated households reduces their participation in cultural activities, furthering the cycle of cultural decline.

Moreover, the loss of indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution significantly threatens harmony within the community. In their traditional setup, family elders played key roles in

mediating conflicts and disputes, reconciling enemies, and maintaining social decorum. With the weakening of their authority, communities are increasingly relying on formal systems devoid of cultural legitimacy or contextual understanding. Ojo (2020) suggests that the lack of culturally oriented ways of settling disputes has translated into increased communal conflicts, domestic disputes, and unresolved social tensions. This section, therefore, provides an argument that the implications of cultural degeneration go further beyond individual households: the weakening of the traditional family system upsets moral continuity and erodes communal resilience, thereby threatening the socio-cultural stability of the nation. Unless conscious steps are taken to rebuild cultural values and strengthen family structures, Nigerian society risks a loss of cultural identity and moral direction.

Argument

The core argument that will be developed here is that the disintegration of traditional family systems in modern Nigeria is neither a natural nor a predetermined process of social evolution but a consequence of cultural degeneration induced by rapid urban growth, global culture, economic deprivation, and technological change. All these forces combine to displace traditional value systems at the heart of family cohesion, community obligation, and intergenerational succession. Consequences for social stability, moral development, and national cohesion will be quite serious. The first premise in this argument is that traditional Nigerian families served, and still serve, as pillars of moral instruction and cultural transmission. The extended family system allowed for collective mentorship in which children picked up values like respect, discipline, honesty, and communal obligation through shared experiences. Such a cultural grounding ensured that social behavior had already been kept in check long before the coming of modern institutions. Indeed, such scholars as Mbiti (2015) and Gyekye (2017) aver that African societies derive strength from communal structures that inspire unity and moral direction; the disintegration of such structures thus deprives them of the most vital means of ensuring cultural perpetuity, rendering individuals unanchored in their cultural identity.

Other premises in this argument are that modern socioeconomic pressures and global cultural influences foster patterns of individualism that run counter to the expectations of indigenous culture. Urban settings foster self-reliance, privacy, and personal achievement at the expense of communal interaction, weakening kinship ties in the process. Global media fosters lifestyles of personal gratification rather than collective responsibility. Research by Ofori Boadu (2021) indicates that young people nowadays are led by foreign ideologies that uphold autonomy and self-expression against cultural restraint. These new lifestyles create dissonance between modern aspirations and ancestral expectations, widening generational divides and weakening family cohesion.

A third assumption is that the rise of technology has introduced its own sets of communities into existence, rivaling physically established structures of community. Digital media forums shape opinions, values, and behaviour in ways that are often contrary to traditional cultural standards. Chukwuere (2020) describes how virtual communities create identity and belonging

for youths, growing increasingly detached from physical family interactions. This replaces the influence of parents and elders, hence compromising the role of the family in respect of being a cultural anchor. When children get more guidance from digital spaces than their homes, the erosion of culture becomes imminent. Besides, economic restructuring weakened the ability of the family to continue with their usual functions. Increase in unemployment, inflation rates, and altering labor relations began to leave people with no choice but to focus on economic survival rather than fulfilling cultural expectations. Adebayo and Ogunlade (2020) state that family life changed under the pressure of economic hardship, since many families lack the economic latitude or even emotional stability to maintain extended kinship relationships. This weakening of economic cooperation within the family structures directly impacts those communal support systems that kept society's balance intact.

The argument also holds that the erosion of traditional family systems contributes directly to the increasing moral and social instability observed in Nigerian communities. Research by Onyeka (2022) connects weakened family ties with increased youth disorder, poor moral judgment, lack of respect for authority, and heightened social deviance. Where families are unable to provide strong moral guidance due to cultural dislocation or economic stress, greater society pays the price in higher crime, violence, drug abuse, and declining civic responsibility. Traditional family systems stood as preventive structures against such social disorders; with their weakening come vulnerabilities across communities. This position paper, therefore, concludes that cultural revitalization holds the key to the restoration of stability and harmony to the Nigerian society. This is not a denial or renunciation of modernity but a tactical adjustment that would ensure that progress does not destroy culture. Falola (2020) insists that sustainable development in Africa requires a synthesis between indigenous values and recent innovations. Rebuilding strong family systems thus demands purposeful activities such as cultural education in schools, intergenerational relationship enhancement, support for community-based institutions, and promotion of cultural practices that enhance moral values. In sum, the argument put forward in this paper is that cultural degeneration has resulted in the erosion of traditional family systems and that cultural values must be restored in order to rebuild familial cohesion as a necessary precursor to long-term stability within societies. A society that lacks strong families risks losing its moral compass, its cultural identity, and even its social resilience. Nigeria thus needs to make conscious steps at reclaiming her cultural foundations, even as the country adapts to the realities of the modern world.

PATHWAYS ON THE EROSION OF TRADITIONAL FAMILY SYSTEMS IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

Any genuine attempt at addressing the loss of indigenous family systems in contemporary Nigeria must constitute a holistic, culturally sensitive approach—one that both respects the relevance of native values and acknowledges the realities of modern society. In this light, for cultural heritage to be preserved, there has to be strategic social reform to enhance family cohesion, reinforce communal responsibility, and ultimately restore the moral basis of Nigerian communities. This section describes useful directions that may lead national initiatives towards the rebuilding of cultural cohesion and the safeguarding of the integrity of the Nigerian family.

A major stride in this direction is the revitalization of cultural education at all levels of society. Cultural knowledge needs to be consciously transferred from older to younger generations by structured mentorship, community activities, traditional storytelling, cultural clubs, and the use of the indigenous languages in the home and in schools. All schools would need to include African cultural studies, moral instruction, and indigenous history in their curriculum to ensure that children leave school with an understanding of their cultural identity. Cultural awareness is the very foundation for social stability, states Falola (2020), and should be systematically engendered.

Another avenue for implementation involves the development of intergenerational relationships within the family and community. Elders were supposed to play the central role in moral instruction, conflict resolution, and cultural transmission. Reviving these relationships would mean developing more opportunities for shared activities by families, community gatherings, and intergenerational dialogue. Isiugo Abanihe (2016) emphasizes that families thrive when they function as cohesive units where wisdom, experience, and cultural memory flow freely and naturally from older members to younger ones. In this regard, the encouragement of this bond is about strengthening the cultural backbone of Nigerian society. Another critical step is economic empowerment. Many extended family responsibilities have consequently weakened due to economic hardship. Strengthening small businesses, promoting family enterprises, supporting traditional crafts, and providing financial support for low-income households can help families regain stability. When families are economically secure, they are more capable of maintaining cultural obligations, supporting elders, and participating in communal life. Adebayo and Ogunlade (2020) observe that economic resilience contributes directly to the preservation of cultures since it allows families to actively engage in support systems for the community.

Community-based institutions must also take a refreshed stance to ensure that cultural identity prevails. Activities of traditional councils, community associations, religious organisations, and cultural groups should act as sites for rejuvenating values such as honesty, respect, self-discipline, and communal cooperation. These institutions can organize cultural activities, coming-of-age events, or community programs that create harmony and promote indigenous values. Ojo (2020) observes that community structures are responsible for the survival of culture systems and should be empowered towards accomplishing their duties effectively. The other sure way forward in development and modernization is culturally sensitive media and communication. In any case, the intervention of modern technologies should be used to support, rather than destroy, cultural values: producing movies, music, digital content, and literature expressive of Nigerian culture and highlighting positive values. Media campaigns can emphasize family cohesion, respect for the elderly, and the beauty of communal life. According to Chukwuere (2020), technology becomes a means of cultural renewal when it serves to reinforce identity rather than replace it.

Policy intervention is also necessary. The government must recognize cultural preservation as paramount in national development planning. Policies aimed at supporting family welfare,

cultural education, traditional leadership structures, and community cohesion must, therefore, be pursued. Such policies include the establishment of cultural centers, the development and support of indigenous knowledge systems, and funding programs aimed at cultural revival. This would help in restoring the social fabric that has largely been eroded by modernization through policies that protect vulnerable families, support elderly care, and promote community-based conflict resolution mechanisms. According to Gyekye (2017), the nation flourishes when it secures its cultural foundations through deliberate policy support. Above all, there needs to be a national cultural reorientation that valorizes unity, respect, and responsibility towards one another. This should happen through public campaigns, school programs, religious initiatives, and community activities that boost cultural pride and moral responsibility. Cultures that cherish their heritage better operate through times of change without erasing their identity. Combining cultural revitalisation, economic support, policy reform, intergenerational bonding, and culturally grounded education will be the way forward in protecting the family systems of Nigeria. These pathways offer sustainable solutions capable of restoring harmony, strengthening families, and ensuring the continuity of Nigeria's cultural identity in a fast-changing world.

Conclusion

This research examines the erosion of traditional family systems in contemporary Nigeria as a direct consequence of cultural degeneration due to rapid urbanization, globalization, economic restructuring, modern education, and technological influence. Analysis demonstrates that the weakening of extended kinship networks, decline of communal responsibility, and transformation of societal values have collectively disrupted the cultural structures that used to maintain social stability and moral integrity within the social entities at the core of Nigerian Society. The traditional family system served as the primary institution for cultural transmission, moral instruction, and social discipline that provided cohesion to the community. Its gradual decline has resulted in weakened intergenerational relationships, rising social deviance, diminishing respect for elders, and increased emotional and economic vulnerability among households. The loss of native mechanisms of conflict resolution, the adoption of individualistic lifestyles, and the increasing effects of global media have further complicated the cultural landscape.

This research highlights that cultural revitalization will help restore family bonding and foster a strong social fabric in Nigeria. The preservation of indigenous values does not oppose modernization but offers a balanced framework that enables society to engage with global changes while safeguarding cultural identity. The role of rebuilding cultural resilience remains highly important at the level of families, communities, educational institutions, government bodies, and cultural organizations. Culturally grounded policies, promotion of intergenerational relationships, support for cultural education, encouragement of economic empowerment, and engagement of the media in the promotion of traditional values will help Nigeria regain the harmony and moral stability that once characterized its family systems. The future of Nigerian society depends on how well it can balance the cultural heritage against modern realities to protect identity, promote unity, and ensure long-term social cohesion.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis presented in this research paper, recommendations that would help halt the erosion of traditional family systems and strengthen cultural resilience in Nigeria today include the following. These recommendations highlight a needed synergy at the levels of individual families, the community, educational institutions, government agencies, and cultural organisations.

1. There should be deliberate integration of cultural studies into the national educational curriculum. All levels of schools should be made to teach indigenous history, moral instruction, traditional customs, and communal values as part of formal learning. Cultural clubs, language preservation programmes, and community-based cultural activities should be introduced in order to reinforce cultural identity among children and adolescents. In this way, younger generations will grow with a strong appreciation for their cultural heritage.
2. It is important that families are motivated to revive cultural practices that enhance active intergenerational relationships. Parents and elders should involve children in storytelling, communal activities, indigenous games, and cultural mentorship. Values regarding respect, cooperation, integrity, and social responsibility should be upheld consciously within the family circle. Additionally, families should be encouraged to promote the revival of indigenous languages in homes for purposes of strengthening cultural connection and identity.
3. Community-based institutions should take an active role in promoting cultural renewal. Traditional councils, religious organisations, and local associations should be involved in the organisation of cultural festivals, public lectures, rites of passage, and community service programs that reinforce collective identity and unity. Support should also be extended to conflict resolution mechanisms that reflect indigenous norms and practices.
4. The government should formulate and implement cultural preservation policies that promote family stability and community cohesion. This involves setting up cultural centers, traditional leadership systems, encouraging indigenous knowledge research, and funding programs that enhance family welfare. It is also critically important that the current government interventions provide economic supports to low-income families to reduce the financial pressures that undermine extended kinship structures.
5. The media should be involved in promoting culture. Local content developers, film producers, broadcasters, and digital platforms must ensure that cultural education, positive values, and traditional family ideals are advanced. Public awareness can be raised on matters such as how important cultural heritage, respect for elders, and family issues contribute to national development. Technology should be utilized in preserving cultural knowledge through documentaries, audio recordings, and digital archiving.
6. Economic empowerment programs should be prioritized to enhance the capacity of families to fulfill their cultural obligations. Programmes focused on support for small-scale enterprises, vocational training, agricultural development, and youth employment will lead to increased household economic stability. When the family is economically secure, they can more easily support extended kin and fully engage in the expectations of cultural practices.

7. A cultural reorientation programme entrenching unity, moral responsibility, and communal consciousness should be championed at the national and community levels. To be precise, it should encompass campaigns in the public domain, leadership training, youth empowerment programs, and cultural advocacy that encourage citizens to embrace their culture and support family cohesion.
8. It is expected that academic researchers and cultural scholars will further research the dynamics of cultural change and develop evidence-based strategies to strengthen traditional family systems. Collaboration between universities, cultural groups, and policy makers will ensure that interventions are informed by cultural realities and social needs. If these recommendations are successfully put into practice, they will aid in the rebuilding of traditional family structures, strengthen cultural values, and bring stability to Nigerian society in the long run. They offer a route toward cultural renewal that respects the past, while also meaningfully dealing with the challenges of contemporary society.

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