POSITIVE FAMILY DYNAMICS: THE ANTI-THESIS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

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ABSTRACT*: This paper explored the role of positive family dynamics on stress reduction, and improvement of the overall wellbeing of family members. Using the Christian and Igbo models of family roles assignment, and the Evolutionary theory as the theoretical background, the paper which conceptualized positive family dynamics as the situation in which every member is able to manage his/her role expectations, views incongruence of role expectations and role behaviours among family members as a major germinator of domestic violence, and that of the family head as catastrophic. Variables that affect family dynamics such as communication, value orientation and goals, and improper description of roles were also discussed. The paper adduced empirical evidence to strongly suggest that positive family dynamics not only relieves tension in the family, but also enable children to actualize themselves.*

KEYWORDS*: Family Dynamics, Domestic Violence, Value Orientation.*

INTRODUCTION

The persisting interest in family related studies by scholars, especially in psychology and other social sciences must have been necessitated first by the role of the family in supporting and giving impetus to efforts by members towards self actualization, then, the urgency to ensure the survival of human species on the planet earth, and the need to create awareness on the irrevocability of the family as the primary source of acquisition of education and its consequent role in determining the course of social events in society. Indeed, the family is one institution that has remained fundamentally important in the survival, sustenance and development of humanity from 'Adam'. Unfortunately, family members often injure one another intentionally – domestic violence.

Extensive studies have been carried out on this subject of domestic violence, hence Dahlberg and King (2002) imply that it is a global issue that cuts across all social, economic and cultural groups. In Nigeria, prevalence of domestic violence has become disturbing; hence the National Assembly is considering tougher laws against it. However, in the whole of Africa only very few incidences of domestic violence are reported (Aihie, 2009), the law therefore makes insignificant impact on the matter; after all the constitutions provided for freedom and protection of all citizens. Again, research had focused more on cultural and socio-economic factors that engender violence (especially against women) without paying due attention to the family as a unit. This paper seeks to contribute in closing this gap, more so since provocation of a family member by another may through misplaced/transferred aggression lead to violence against an innocent defenseless member, and a cycle may evolve. It becomes appealing therefore to reason that a comprehensive discourse on violence should put the family in perspective, in the light of which

this paper discusses the place of family dynamics in engendering social health among members, which is anti- thesis of violence.

THE CONCEPT OF FAMILY

A contextual meaning of family is the primary social group, comprising parents, their offsprings, and in some societies (especially African) other relatives sharing the same household (extended family); or more generally any group of individuals related by blood or descended from an identifiable common ancestor (Colman, 2003). This view was more clearly expressed by Uzoka (2005), who explained that The African concept of family is without doubt extended, in contrast to the widely orchestrated notion of nuclear or immediate family of father-mother-offspring of the western world. Among Igbos and other Africans, the family includes children, parents, grand parents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, brothers and sisters who may have their own children and other relatives. To people in this part of the globe, the family, includes the dead, designated as living dead, these people still influence family members thoughts, perceptions and behavior because of the belief that they are still interested in the affairs of the living that belonged to them when they had physical existence.

In its broadest perspective, the family consists of organisms that share several characteristics in common. It is in this broad sense that communities as families comes to mind. This discuss shall however concentrate on the family in its narrower sense as a socio-psychological unit, using the Christian model which has taken firm roots in Eastern Nigeria.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

This is an umbrella term used for any action or inaction on the part of a person which inflicts physical harm on one or more members of his/her family unit. Its usage includes behaviours such as battering (whether spouse, parent – child, or child – parent), other forms of child abuse, and elder abuse. In this context, domestic violence also includes actions that precipitate psychological pain among members of a family unit.

Clinical experience, supported by Ezeilo (2005), shows that violence in the form of battery and other forms of abuse are mostly blamed on frustration of economic and sexual needs, as well as disparity of values among family members. These factors may be understood by some social scientists as independent factors, but this paper views all as part of, or matters that fall into the larger frame work of family dynamics. Accordingly, it is believed that positive family dynamics is both preventive and 'mitigative' of frustrating levels of needs deprivation and distrust.

FAMILY DYNAMICS

The way and manner in which people behave and react or relate to one another consequent on their belongingness to the family is the force that produces action, effect and changes on the lives of the individual members, and the collective well being of the unit. In other words, family dynamics are the processes and feedbacks that determine the extent to which a family is psycho-

sociologically functional. This as a matter of fact is largely dependent on cultural and religious variables, which willy-nilly provide the norms on which roles are assigned in social groups.

Roles are functions which someone undertakes because he/she is occupying a particular position in a relationship, in an organization or in a social group. VandesBos (2007) define role as a coherent set of behaviors expected of an individual in a specific position within a group or social setting; and suggests that individual actions are regulated by the part they play in the social setting rather than their personal predilections or inclinations. It is in this sense that the set of attitudes, behaviors and beliefs which are 'tied' to a 'title' or position is more often regarded as role expectations, while the actual way and manner in which the 'title' holder discharges the functions is referred to as role behavior. Thus in situations of incongruence, inconsistency or notable gaps between role expectation and role behavior, the 'title holder' becomes described in such words as incompetent, incapable or irresponsible, depending on the degree of variance.

In the family, positions and titles such as father, mother, child, first child, uncle, aunt, or grand parents have roles attached to them relative to each and every other position. That is, as parents have role expectations on their children, so also do children have role expectations on their parents, and the expectations of 'first child' may differ significantly from that of the next in relation to father or grand mother for instance.

Positive family dynamics could therefore be defined in terms of congruence between role expectations and role behaviors among members of the family. It connotes a strong relational system, and proper or adequate discharge of functions by members of the family, and it correlates highly with health and happiness (Obi-Nwosu, 2007). The concept of relationship role or socio-emotional role is germane to proper appreciation of the desirability of positive family dynamics. VandenBos, (2007) explains that relationship role is "one of several identifiable roles adopted by members of a group who perform particular behaviors to maintain or enhance interpersonal relationships within the group. Although studies have listed and labeled these roles in various different ways, some commonly cited relationship roles are *the gate keeper* who controls the channels of communication in such a way that everyone has a chance to contribute; the harmonizer; the compromiser; *the encourager*, who offers praise and support; and *the comedian*, who relieves tension and raises morale through humor 'pp785. It follows that roles are not only tangible (like paying school fees) but must envelop economic, emotional, political, and social roles.

The foregoing brings to perspective, the import of certain variables that influence family dynamics. That is, the factors or relationship qualities that necessarily engender high role performance. **These include: role clarifications, family values and goals clarifications, communication (including feedbacks) and recreation.**

Role Clarifications.

In many families that experience pathological disorganization, role expectations are implicit rather than explicit. This is akin to a situation of employment into an office without proper job description and responsibility connections. For example, in families where rules for children are

not clearly stated or the rules vary from time to time, children become confused and uncertain and this makes life difficult for them. It must be explained here that issuing orders to children calling for discipline while parents are overtly expressing opposite set or contradicting behaviors obviously cause the same problems for the kids after all, 'action speaks louder than words.' Even for couples, in-laws and other close relatives, *it is expedient that expectations should be gently but clearly stated, and time allowed for assimilation by family members so affected*. This is especially germane at this time when norms are fast becoming relative and permissiveness mistaken for expression of human (or child's) rights.

Family Value Orientation and Goals.

Values are beliefs about what is right or wrong, and what is important and useful in life, whether it be physical, psychological or emotional. Value represents the extent to which something (tangible or intangible) improves one's well being or sense of satisfaction or satisfies a purpose (Obi- Nwosu, 2009). Goals are highly related to values. They are things which people set for them selves to achieve. When values are clear, then targets for achievements are easier to set right, less confusion and conflict are experienced and people are better able to accomplish them. Goals must therefore be realistic, stratified or prioritized. Uzoka (2005) posits that establishment of values and goals, widely and communally known and shared by family members is an essential process for ensuring cohesion in the family system. These include achievement factors, religion and ethics, academic pursuits, extended family ties, and other value factors.

Communication

In this context, communication means the transmission and exchange of information, feelings, experiences or ideas which may be oral or written (verbal) or non verbal within the family. As in all settings, family members need to develop communication skills that engender clear comprehensible and unambiguous exchange. Choice of words and phrases, sentence construction (whether denotative or meta-communicative), and appropriate application of non verbal expressions (body language) are skills that engender positive out- comes within the family. Clinical experience has shown that obscure patterns of communication generate conflicts in families, just like confused and poor communication may culminate in chaos, masking of family problems and pathology. Communication difficulties might arise where the family head is non-responsive. The family head must therefore transcend such fears as fear of being hurt, of being seen to be alone or different or of distance, and foster open and clear communication among family members.

It must be stressed that it is the ability of each family member to express him or herself through sincere, open, clear and unambiguous communication and the ability of each member to frankly listen to and consider the others' point of view and needs that engender rational interactions, which optimizes family resources. Another point to note is that females are generally better than males in expressing and understanding non verbal cues, therefore males (especially husbands) should ensure that they don't contradict themselves before their family members by saying one thing and 'showing the opposite'. Males should avail themselves of the information passed by

females through non verbal language, since neglecting such cues consistently may be frustrating to them and translate to disharmony, pathology, or violence.

Recreation

Generally, recreational activities reduce tension, anxiety and word off boredom. Recreational activities offer opportunity for relaxation and giving attention to other things about life outside of work, and by reducing the chances of break down due to stress they enhance physiological health as well. If such activities are in the form of physical exercises, of course additional health gains are achieved through improved blood circulation and elimination of waste materials. (Lewin,1995).

Involving family members in recreational activities create good non-formal, less strict and free interactive atmosphere, which helps to create warmth and joy that grease the family mechanism. Uzoka (2005), rightly recognized the family as an enterprise, of which the participants willingly got involved so as to optimize their existence. He further posits that excessive seriousness and harshness are the purveyors of family induced stress. Recreation and outlets for vicarious relief are essential in making family life pleasant. Indeed, whole family games like table tennis, dancing or the likes are like magic wands in improving family warmth and joy, seemingly inconsequencial games like card and ludo games among others are also quite effective.

FAMILY DYNAMICS FROM THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The fact that religion is the single most important environmental determinant of behavior in Nigeria (Okoye, 2003), and that most marriages and family re-unions are celebrated based on religious prescriptions, underscores the need for this section. The Christian perspective is however chosen because of the explicit injunctions it offers to faithful in terms of roles, and because it is the dominant orientation in this Eastern Nigeria.

The Christian faith concedes the headship of families to the man. From the story of creation in Gen.2 to the teachings of the Christ (matt.19) to those of the early church in Eph.5:21-6:1-4, 1Cor. 7 and 11, and 1Timothy 3 (to mention but a few), the Holy Bible sets forth the hierarchy in the family. Accordingly, during Christian marriages, among others, the man vows to love his wife and to give up his life if need be for her sake, while the woman vows to obey and submit to her husband in all things (lawful). From the fifth to the tenth commandments in Exodus 20 through the Proverbs, and the epistles just referred to above, the Holy Bible also prescribed the relationship that should exist between parents and children in a nuclear family. The Bible also demands that extended family relations should be cared for, and this was demonstrated by Jesus Christ himself when He visited Peter's house to heal his mother in law. It is deductible from the foregoing that if the Christian family were to be an enterprise indeed, the man would be the chief executive, the woman be the general manager, the children be the managers, while extended family members become 'dedicated staff'. It is in this light that it often said that Christian family leadership is authoritative (not authoritarian)

In concrete terms, the father is expected to provide the bulk of material recourses needed by the family, the mother is expected to organize the family (Prov. 31), ensure that all members are cared for and help her husband in any other way he may request. The children's responsibilities would be to take up assignments in obedience to the directives of their parents. These roles are tasking, and in some cases the pressure may be so much as to exceed a family member's capability, leading to a breakdown in the production line, stress, and disharmony. This is why the factors that promote positive family dynamics were discussed extensively in earlier paragraphs. Granted that Christians have the additional benefit of pastoral counseling on weekly basis, it must be stressed that genuine effort is required especially on the part of family heads and their assistants to adopt pragmatic approaches to dealing with every family issue.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Although many religious and cultural practices do not scale through scientific scrutiny, the evocation of psychological theories to explain even the most complex of such practices afford the scientific world clearer appreciation of relatedness of variables, as well as possible sustaining factors. One theory that comes to mind for the explanation of the aforementioned model of role distribution in the family is the **Evolutionary Theory.** This theory holds that the retention of genes and species in an ecosystem depends on 'natural selection', which is a mechanism whereby individuals in a population that are best adapted to the environment survive and produce more off springs than others, thereby altering the composition of the population, and eventually the characteristics of the species (Colman, 2003). Evolutionary psychologists theorize how evolution might have predisposed gender differences in behaviors, such as aggression and sexual initiative. Nature's mating game, they suggest favors males who take sexual initiative towards females especially those with physical features suggesting fertility and who seek aggressive dominance in competing with other males. Females, who have greater stake in not squandering their fewer reproductive chances place greater priority on selecting males with the ability to commit resources to protecting and nurturing their young (Myers,2005).

It is deductible from the foregoing that role expectations of family members as assigned by Christian religion satisfy the expectations or the propositions of the evolutionary theory. Strict adherence to monogamy, vehement opposition to both homosexuality and abortion are further evidence that retention of the human species in the ecosystem is guaranteed by the Christian family model. Furthermore, the injunction on children to obey their parents seems also to be related to the overall safety of the children so that they survive to maturity and become able to carry on the reproduction cycle. Even in contemporary period, there is strong evidence that obedient children refrain from behaviors risky to health such as early involvement in sex, substance abuse and exposure to extreme environmental conditions, much the same way they engage less in risky unguarded and under age use of automobiles, expeditions and curios adventures, that could lead to accidents, deformity, and untimely death.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The perceived effects of role performance on children's eventual achievement of socio-economic independence was studied by Obi-Nwosu (2010), using parental attribution of their children's

success to characteristics depicting levels of role behavior in accordance with the dominant Christian/cultural model among the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria.

Fifty couples (all retired civil servants) who have had at least two of their children economically independent were first required to choose which of three characteristics of

    a. Obedience and humility,
    b. Assertiveness and having a mind of his/her own, and
    c. Adventurousness, they would use to describe the children considered to have succeeded in their endeavours.

They were also required to select which of the following role behavior descriptions they felt was instrumental to their children's success:

(a)   The father stamped his feet strong to give direction to the children
(b)   Father and mother worked harmoniously though father had the final say
(c)   More of prayers and God's grace.

Results obtained were as follows:

Table 1: Parents' Attribution of Success to Children's Characteristics

.	N	OBEDIENCE & HUMILITY		. STRONG WILL/. ASSERTIVENESS		ADVENTURUOS	
M	50	38	76%	9	18%	3	6%
F	50	33	66%	12	24%	5	10%
T	100	71	71%	21	21%	8	8%

The table above shows that 38 male parents and 33 female parents representing 76% and 66% respectively attributed the success of their children to obedience and humility on the part of the children, 9(nine) of the male parents and 12 of the females, representing 18% and 24% respectively felt that their children who succeeded did so because of their strong will, while 3(6%) of the male parents and 5(10%) of the females attributed their children's success to the children's ability to explore the world on their own. If gender is collapsed, the result shows that 71% of parents attributed success to children's obedience and humility, 21% to strong will/assertiveness, and 8% to adventurousness (other factors).

Table 11: Parents' Attribution of Children's Success to Parental Role behavior.

.	N	FATHER STAMPED FEET HARD		. FATHER&MOTHER WORKED HARMONOUSLY		'PRAYERS'	
M	50	20	40%	28	56%	2	4%
F	50	13	26%	34	68%	3	6%
T	100	33	33%	62	62%	5	5%

Results shown in the table 11 indicate that 20 male and 13 female parents, representing 40% and 26% respectively attributed success of children to the ability of the father to give direction unequivocally; 28 of the male parents and 34 of the females, representing 56% and 68% respectively attributed children's success to both parents playing their roles effectively; while 2(4%) of the males and 3(6%) of the females attributed the success of their children to divine intervention. If gender is collapsed, then it shows that 33% of parents attributed children's success to the ability of their fathers to give leadership, 62% of the parents attributed success to joint effort of father and mother, while only 5% attributed success to 'divine' intervention.

If these results are paraphrased, it shows that most parents (71%) hold that children's eventual success in life depend on positive family dynamics (Obedience being the substance of role expectation for children); a few parents(21%) did not see success as absolutely dependent on strict observance of role expectations, (although psychological literature hold that good family environment engender assertive behaviour in children), while only 8% seem not to relate family role functions to children's success. Also, 33% of parents believe that fathers must be able to play their roles effectively to enhance the chances of their children succeeding in life; 62% hold that both parents must equally play their roles well to facilitate children's eventual success. While only 5% of respondents believed that even permissive parents could have successful children.

Although this study may not have met all the requirements for scientific generalization, it provides strong evidence that positive family dynamics provides strong motivation needed by children to excel and overcome developmental odds. This is of course in tandem with the thought expressed by Eya (2005), that positive parental and family roles functioning minimizes stress among adolescents and children, and enhances their healthy development.

CONCLUSION

The family has remained the most fundamental of all agents of socialization across all cultures. Although family sizes differ significantly across civilizations and economic classes, cultural and religious practices seem to be the most potential variables that determine the width of families. These variables also define role expectations of family members. Although family membership in the Igbo culture includes the living dead, this discourse restricted itself to the role expectation

and behavior of living family members, but this does not suggest that the 'living dead' play insignificant roles.

Since proper roles functioning is a prelude to marital satisfaction, and positive family dynamics, psychologists posit that couples, especially family heads must take the family as a serious enterprise so as to give it all the care it requires to yield desirable profits. Frank, unambiguous but gentle communication of needs and desires as well as joint relaxation by family members go a long way in improving family dynamics, which eventually culminates in happiness and longevity to the couples, and proper development of children.

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