

## **INSTITUTIONS, THE FAMILY AND MARRIAGE**

Institutions or otherwise known as social institutions can be defined as the social activities of a society which involves the values and norms to which the members of the society must comply. These values and norms are protected by various penalties which can be designated to a person whom goes against these values and norms. These values and norms as depicted and illustrated by the institutions lay the foundation for the society as they represent the age old accepted societal behaviour of the given society. (Joubert & Snyman 2011, 2011:8)

We can come to the conclusion that not any one single institution is able to function alone and therefore we encounter many different institutions such as the family, education and religious institutions which all have a vital role they play. The necessity of social institutions is the fact that they contribute to the overall flow between the generations of the society. (Joubert & Snyman 2011, 2011:8)

The institution of the family and marriage is currently under the spotlight due to the important function or role it has as institution in the society. As we know, the family plays an important role in the socialisation and the development of children and therefore also in the healthy and sustainable development of society. Due to all the drastic changes and deviations from the traditional norm which occurred over time and is drastically gaining speed within this institution brought the need to investigate this institution in order to determine the effects all of these changes and deviations may or may not have on the family, marriage and society. (Corbett, 2004:1)

The term family refers to a group or company of people whom have a biological linkage which is best described as the mother, father and their children. However this is not true to all families as some couples are unable to have children of their own and they therefore adopt children which replaces the biological link with a legal link. (Corbett, 2004:vi)

We can furthermore distinguish between two different types of families. The first type is the nuclear family which is the normal traditional family consisting of the parents and their children. (Corbett, 2004:2) The second type refers to the broader family which consists of the kin's which are the cousins, aunts, uncles and so forth. (Corbett, 2004:vi)

As mentioned earlier, the family has gone through various different phases and stages in order to be where it is today. Some of these phases and stages were good whereas others, or most, are bad for the family in general. Different aspects of the family was and is affected by the development of the family. Some aspects includes a change in values, form and structure of the family.

When we look at the biblical guide for a family it is evident that the Old Testament allowed for a form of marriage which is know as polygamy to take place. The basic definition for polygamy is when a person is married to more than one spouse at any particular time of his life. We can distinguish between two different forms of polygamy, the first and the most common form is that of polygyny which refers to a man being married to more than one women and the second form is that of polyandry which refers to a women being married to more than one man; this however is very unlikely to occur. (Zeitzen, 2008 :3)

Due to the fact that the practice of polygamy contributed to sexual sin and lust it was later banned. We read in the New Testament that Christ said that a man should love his own wife, and not own wives. Thus it is clear that this practice is no longer accepted by God. This opened the door and paved the way for the traditional style of marriage and family to emerge. This style is also referred to as the nuclear family. As humans who were born into the sinful world we go tend to go against the traditional or biblical style of marriage and introduced different styles in order to fulfil the need of all peoples. The traditional style is now replaced by homosexual partnerships, cohabitation and polygamy, not very common, to name a few.

Homosexual partnerships are an ever increasing sight all over the world and is a topic of discussion in all sociological and political spheres due to the power it has to influence so many spheres of the society. Homosexual partnerships are also known as same sex marriages, unions or relationships and refer to a romantic relationship between two people of the same sex. This type of relationship is highly discredited by most of the community and marrying a person from the same sex is against the law in most countries and therefore gay couples live together outside marriage. This drastic change in sexual orientation has a major influence on the changing family values within communities. However gay couples are allowed to adopt children if they don't have any children of their own, this is a point of concern as their children will learned that same sex partnerships are acceptable. (Newman & Grauerholz, 2002:14)

Cohabitation is yet another issue or form of family which was left to go on as it pleases and is acceptable by society as substitute for marriage. Cohabitation refers to a romantically involved couple living together as if they are married. (Joubert & Snyman 2011 ,2011:10) People choose cohabitation because they are afraid of marriage, because they see it as a step in the process of marriage or simply as an alternative for marriage or living alone. (Thornton, Axinn & Xie, 2007:5)

This type of family might have the same structure as a traditional family but is a form immorality. This form of family opens the door for a total crash of family and general values due to the fact that this allows for sex outside of marriage which is a point of concern due to the high rates of sexually transmitted diseases. This also opens the door for the partners to get out at any point of time without any hassle, this again leads to single parenting or the absent farther syndrome which are both part of the growing diversity of family forms and structures.

Lone-parent or single-parent households refers to a household where only one parent is present and or involved in the raising of the child. The cause or causes for this type of family structure with all of its stigmas and problems is mostly attributed to the ever increasing divorce rates, other "bad" reasons which cause much pain to members of this group include cohabitation that went bad, sex outside the walls of marriage. People are classified into the sinful category due to the fact that they might have had sex outside the marriage, this is also the primary cause for single-parent households. (Dowd, 1999:xii) It must also be noted that these mentioned possible causes or contributing factors are not the only ones, death of a partner, the absence of a partner due to work or other factors or rape are also possible causes for this family structure, but is less known of.

This type of family has many challenges which it must face which may contribute to the decline in family values. Some of these problems may include a lack of discipline due to the fact that the primary parent might be afraid to implement punishment and reward systems out of fear of rejection and rebellion. This along with the possible cause of this situation in which they find themselves will determine the character of the child and may influence his or her sexual orientation due to the lack of a father or mother figure, his chance of success as well as what he or she does with the opportunities they have.

Remarriage and reconstructed families are mostly made up of people from lone-parent households due to the fact that parents of such households are attracted to each other and they need someone to help and support them in raising their children. This type of family refers to a family made up of a mother and father of which one of them or even both have children from previous relationships which they bring into this new family. (Joubert & Snyman 2011 :10) The effect this change in structure may bring is harsh in most cases as the bond that existed between the single-parents and their children is now weaker due to the new love relationship that was made with the new spouse as well as his or her children. This will inevitably result in conflict within the family as feelings of rejection or favouritism will be present. (Newman, 2008:210) Research also shown that this type of family is more likely to end in divorce due to the higher levels of conflict than first marriages. (Joubert & Snyman 2011 :10)

A commonality between most of the discussed types and structures of families is divorce. The higher rate of divorce all over the world undoubtedly play the biggest role in the changing demographics of the family and marriage. This is a privilege man has created for his own benefit and is now slowly but surely catching up with him and destroys lives and families along the way. The trauma and loss of values caused by divorce play a huge role in the society and is the most likely cause of all the problems and challenges which we uncover and discover within the sphere of family and marriage.

Family values have been challenged by humanistic values and open attitudes towards sexuality and divorce. The traditional family was made out as something which locks people in and disregards their human rights. And an outcry by advocates of family values was made even though they knew that the battle against humanistic liberals will make it almost impossible for their cry to be heard by the world. (Joubert & Snyman 2011 2011:11)

When we consider family values we think of things such as honesty, trustworthiness, faithfulness, obedience and self-control to name a few. All of these values and more is learned to members of the family by the process of socialisation. However in this day and age a Biblical principal know as spanking was removed from families by the law in order to prevent the beating of children. This is a good thing if it is applied correctly, however parents now are the ones who listen and the kids the ones who speak as the kids have more rights than their parents and this law is the way of imprinting discipline into children.

When I listen to the values my parents have had in their families and compare them to the values we have in our family it is quite clear that there are some differences but the basics remained the same. However if I compare the values of our family to those of other families within our society I notice that they vastly differ. This might be because of different cultures, religions or views or due to the total destruction of morals, norms and values. The call is made that the traditional family must be reinstated in its rightful place in order to bring back the balance in society and help combat things such as violence, gangsterism and various substance abuses.

Family values are at the centre of the institution of family and marriage and it is because of the fact that family values are becoming more and more outdated and no longer seen to have any use or value to us we become faced with the problems and deviations as discussed in this response. All of these problems has the potential to bring about a major change in how we as people see marriage, family and relationships as the image we as people created by our lack of interest to sustain good family values will vastly differ from the image which God has intended.

From what we have seen and uncovered it is quite clear that the changes present in the family and marriage structure, form and values may be behind the lack of discipline, respect, control and values of the youth and young people of today. They are deprived from the privileges and positives of a good and stable family environment. Urgent attention must be given and information must be made more readily and easily available to inform and educate people and especially the new generation whom is about to enter the institute of family and marriage so that they can be on the lookout for the dangers and warnings so they can help bring back the balance and traditional family structure, values and form.

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