

FAMILIAL NEEDS: COMPARING TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL FAMILIES OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS

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Abstract

Background: Recognising traditional and non-traditional families in social policy is not sufficient if the policy implementation choices continue to accord more status to traditional families in comparison to non-traditional families. If unattended, this can create discriminatory practices, and human rights on an equal basis can be threatened between traditional and non-traditional families. This descriptive study compared traditional and non-traditional families of public officials with a focus on (1) form and income, (2) familial needs as per key propositions, (3) families perceptions/experiences at community and broader societal levels and (4) familial needs government must assist them with.

Methods: A quantitative research paradigm, a cross-sectional survey design was electronically administered to 600 public officials and culminated in a final sample of 70 respondents, was implemented. The study was contextualized within a contemporary family discourse, primarily influenced by a feminist perspective as well as a critique of the nuclear or traditional family grounded in functionalist theory.

Results: The study showed that traditional and non-traditional families of public officials are more the same than different. Public officials' families, both traditional and non-traditional families, are affected by their inter-connectivity with communities and broader society in terms of how they experience negative treatment/ discrimination on the basis of a variety of equality issues as well as fulfillment of their socio-economic rights as stipulated in the Bill of Rights as enshrined in the South African Constitution.

Conclusion: The study indicated that public officials, as members of families, live in both traditional and non-traditional families. Public officials have familial needs similar to any other family and are also influenced by similar factors in broader society. As both rights holders and duty bearers they can improve their own family lives and also better serve families in broader society. However they too need to be supported with their own family needs.

Keywords: family needs, traditional, non-traditional families, family policy, Human Rights, employee assistance policy

Background

Recognising traditional and non-traditional families in social policy is not sufficient if the policy implementation choices continue to accord more status to traditional families in comparison to non-traditional families. If unattended, this can create discriminatory practices, and human rights on an equal basis can be threatened between traditional and non-traditional family. The traditional nuclear family is often seen as the ideal family being centered on heterosexual, marital relationships in which roles are defined to strict gender norms (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2005). Non-traditional families on the other hand are defined as lone-parent and same-sex families, as well as those in which women and men do not conform to gender norms regarding care-giving roles (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2005). Familial needs, the need of care of family members, includes emotional, social, physical and financial factors. Family status, being in a parent and child relationship (Ontario Human Rights Code, 1982) or a parent and child type of relationship, embrace a range of circumstances without blood or adoptive ties but with similar relationships of care, responsibility and commitment. Therefore there cannot be a universal frame that fits all for family and family life. In this regard Chambers (2001:17) says, 'evidence of the widespread nature of divorce, marriage, post-divorce families, single parenthood, joint custody, abortion, cohabitation and career families can no longer be ignored'. Coleman (2000:241) cited in Burr & Jarvis (2007:266) says that,

the continuing adherence to a notion of a traditional family will not help young people, who are already much more accepting of different forms of family life. Barrett & McIntosh (2002) argue that by no means can it be judged on the form to be better than another.

Although public officials are often expected to change the world and/or to serve other families, they however, do not effectively reflect on their own familial needs or these needs are neglected. Within a human rights and family policy discourse in South Africa the public servant is central from two perspectives. Firstly, they are members of families in broader society and therefore also rights holder. Secondly, they are implementers of policy and also duty bearers in their role of serving all families in broader society. Thus, knowing one's own rights and familial needs as a member of one's own family must assist more effectively to instill the same understanding when serving families as a duty bearer in broader society.

The purpose of the study was to describe and compare traditional and non-traditional families of public officials as it relates to their experiences of defining their families, identifying their familial needs, their perceptions of how their families are treated at community and broader societal level as well as where social institutions such as the state/government should respond more effectively to their identified familial needs.

Methodology

The study used a quantitative research paradigm with a cross-sectional survey design which was electronically administered to a population of 600 public officials of the Department of the Premier of the Western Cape Provincial Government on salary levels 1-12 of the public sector pay structure. The survey was constructed based on the quality of life section, drawn from the South African Integrated Household Survey (1994), the Final Draft national Family Policy of South Africa (2004) as well as the right to equality and socio-economic rights as per the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996). The South African Integrated Household Survey (1994) is a nationally representative, multi-purpose household survey, which contains information on a series of subjects including (but not limited to) household composition, education, health, fertility, expenditures, employment and other income earning activities. Respondents were chosen, 'based on their convenience and availability (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Kagee, (2006) and a "single stage sampling procedure" was used meaning the names of all participants were available (Creswell, 2003:156) The questionnaire was electronically submitted, completed and returned by respondents who as public officials also served as members of individual families. The survey was electronically self-administered using g-documents to construct the questionnaire and for data collection. Only 70 respondents completed the questionnaire, thus a response rate of

12%. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data.

Data were coded, entered and cleaned using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 18 (SPSS). The cross tabulations in the SPSS software package were employed to assist with comparing traditional and non-traditional families in relation to different variable sets. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample and provide information with regard to respondents' families and their familial needs. These are presented as frequencies, means and standard deviation tables. All the results are presented as descriptive comparative analyses. The analyses were done according to variable sets e.g. in terms of demographics (1) position, age, race and gender in terms of respondents, and (2) form and income of respondents in relation to demographics of their families. In relation to traditional and non-traditional families of the respondents the following variable sets were used, (1) quality of life, challenges and strengths of relationships and affection as well as social problems, (2) perceptions of families' treatment at community and broader society levels as well as experiences of fulfillment of socio-economic rights, and (3) which categories of identified needs government must respond to more. Only six forms of family as part of traditional and non-traditional families were reflected on from a list of 12 as per the Draft National Family Policy (2007).

Results

The following hypothesis was presented: Familial needs of traditional and non-traditional families are similar, but their experiences are different. The full population of 600 was used in the main study, only a sample of 70 was obtained.

Demographic comparative description

For purposes of this study, the majority of participants are classified as traditional

families [40 (57.1%)] with nuclear families with children [25 (35.7%)]. Non-traditional families consisted of combined families [10 (14.3%)], extended families [9 (12.9%)], single families [7 (10%)] and other family forms [4 (5.7%)]. Within these families, the majority of participants considered their positions as mother or wife [31 (44.3%)]. The traditional family was considered as nuclear families with and without children, while the non-traditional family was considered as single parent families.

Table 1: Form of traditional and non-traditional families of the participants

Family form	Total Sample n =70 (100%)	Traditional n =40 (57.1%)	Non-Traditional n = 30 (42.9%)
Nuclear family with children	25 (35.7%)	25 (35.7%)	-
Nuclear family without children	15 (21.4%)	15 (21.4%)	-
Single parent family with children	7 (10%)	-	7 (10%)
Extended family	9 (12.9%)	-	9 (12.9%)
Combined family	10 (14.3%)	-	10 (14.3%)
Other	4 (5.7%)	-	4 (5.7%)

Familial needs identified by the respondents

The following section provides an overview of descriptive comparisons of traditional and non-traditional families with regards to quality of life in relation to safety, crime and economic condition for traditional and non-traditional families.

Table 2 emphasizes quality of life in terms of types of crime the families' experienced for traditional and non-traditional families. In addition, Table 3 compares the mean and standard deviation of challenges and strengths with reference to relationships and affection respectively.

Table 2: Quality of life

Variables		Total Sample n =70 (100%)	Traditional n = 40 (57.1%)	Non-Traditional N = 30 (42.9%)
Quality of life				
Families feeling safe inside the home	More	11(15.7%)	9(22.5%)	2(6.7%)
	Same	23(32.9%)	12(30%)	11(36.7%)
	Less	36(51.4%)	19(47.5%)	17(56.7%)
Families feeling safe outside the home	More	1(1.4%)	0 (0%)	1(3.33)
	Same	21(30%)	13(32.5%)	8(26.7%)
	Less	48(68.6)	27(67.5%)	21(70%)
Families victims of crime	Yes	55(78.6%)	30(75%)	25(83.3%)
	No	15(21.4%)	9(22.5%)	6(20%)
Families richer than their parents	Richer	44 (62.9%)	29(72.5%)	15(50%)
	Same	21(30%)		
	Poorer	5(7.1%)	10(25%) 1(2.5%)	11(36.7%) 4(13.3%)

Table 2 compares the quality of life of traditional and non-traditional families. In terms of feeling safe in and outside the home, more non-traditional families than traditional families felt less safe in their homes. They had also been more victims

of crime than traditional families. Furthermore, traditional families more than non-traditional families indicated that they were richer than their parents were.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of family challenges and strengths: parent/child relationships and affection between mother/father and children compared for traditional and non-traditional families.

Family Form		Parent/child relationships challenges	Parent/child relationships strengths	Affection between mother and children challenges	Affection between father and children challenges	Affection between mother and children strengths	Affection between father and children strengths
Traditional Families	<i>M</i>	2.52	1.87	3.00	2.90	1.67	1.98
	<i>N</i>	40	40	40	40	40	40
	<i>SD</i>	.88	.91	.78	.87	.83	.92
Non-traditional Families	<i>M</i>	2.60	1.77	2.73	2.43	1.57	1.67
	<i>N</i>	30	30	30	30	30	30
	<i>SD</i>	.86	.82	1.05	1.04	.77	.88
Total	<i>M</i>	2.56	1.83	2.89	2.70	1.63	1.84
	<i>N</i>	70	70	70	70	70	70
	<i>SD</i>	.86	.87	.91	.97	.80	.91

Table 3 shows that traditional families when compared to non-traditional families, experienced stronger parent-child relationships, but also experienced challenges between mothers and children as well as between fathers and children. Non-traditional families had more parent-child challenges than those in traditional families.

Families’ perceptions/experiences of how their families are treated/discriminated against at community and broader societal levels

Table 4 provides a description of the frequency that respondents felt their families ‘occasionally’ or ‘never’ experienced negative treatment/discrimination at the community

When comparing gender differences, affection strengths are higher between father and children ($M = 1.98, SD = .920$) than the affection strengths between mother and children ($M = 1.67, SD = .829$) for traditional families. The same is also evident in the non-traditional families when comparing affection strengths between father and children ($M = 1.98, SD = .920$) and affection strengths between mother and children ($M = 1.57, SD = .774$).

level for traditional and non-traditional families. The frequency ‘never’ is important in terms of improvement in the equality debate and is substantially more than the frequency ‘occasional’ across the various equality variables. Following however is only an interpretation of the frequency ‘occasional’ across the various equality variables as it reflects that families do indeed experience negative treatment/discrimination to some degree and needing intervention

Table 4: Community services level on the basis of families experience negative treatment/discrimination

Variables	Frequency of experience	Total Sample n =70 (100%)	Traditional n = 40 (57.1%)	Non-Traditional n = 30 (42.9%)
Families negative treatment on basis of race	Occasionally	26(37.1%)	14(35%)	12(40%)
	Never	42(60%)	25(62.5%)	17(56.67%)
Families negative treatment on the basis of gender	Occasionally	25(35.7)	14(35%)	11(36.67%)
	Never	45(64.3%)	26(65%)	19(63.3%)
Families negative treatment on the basis of disability	Occasionally	13(18.6%)	7(17.5%)	6(20%)
	Never	54(77.1%)	30(75%)	24(80%)
Families negative treatment on the basis of sexual orientation	Occasionally	13(18.6%)	5(12.5%)	8(26.67%)
	Never	56(80%)	34(85%)	22(73.33%)
Families negative treatment on the basis of religion	Occasionally	13(18.6%)	8(20%)	5(16.67%)
	Never	56(74.3%)	29(72.5%)	23(76.67%)
Families negative treatment on	Occasionally	11(15.7%)	8(20%)	3(10%)
	Never	56(80%)	31(77.5%)	25(83.33%)

the basis of language				
Families	Occasionally	19(27.1%)	12(30%)	7(23.33%)
negative	Never	46(65.7%)	24(60%)	22(73.33%)
treatment on the basis of age				

Twenty-five (35.7%) of families occasionally experienced race related negative treatment/discrimination. Twenty-five (35.7%) occasionally experienced gender related negative treatment/discrimination. Respondents indicated that 13 (18.6%) of their families occasionally experienced negative treatment/ discrimination in terms of

disability, sexual orientation and religion respectively. Respondents also indicated that their families occasionally experienced negative treatment/discrimination on the basis of language [11 (15.7%)] and age [19 (27.1%)].

Table 5: Broader societal institutions level on the basis of families experiencing negative treatment/ discrimination

Variables	Frequency of experience	Total Sample N =70 (100%)	Traditional n = 40 (57.1%)	Non-Traditional n = 30 (%)
treatment on basis of race				
Families	Occasionally	23(32.9%)	12(30%)	11(36.67%)
negative	Never	31(44.3%)	20(50%)	11(36.67%)
treatment on the basis of gender				
Families	Occasionally	24(34.3%)	9(22.5%)	15(50%)
negative	Never	42(60%)	30(75%)	12(40%)
treatment on the basis of disability				
Families	Occasionally	9(12.9%)	6(15%)	3(10%)
negative	Never	59(84.3%)	33(82.5%)	26(86.67%)

Families negative treatment on the basis of sexual orientation	Occasionally	13(18.6%)	5(12.5%)	8(26.67%)
	Never	56(80%)	34(85%0	22(73.33%)
Families negative treatment on the basis of religion	Occasionally	17(24.3%)	11(27.5%)	6(20%)
	Never	47(67.1%)	21(52.5%)	21(70%)
Families negative treatment on the basis of language	Occasionally	16(22.9%)	7(17.5%)	9(30%)
	Never	47(67.1%)	30(75%0	17(56.67%)
Families negative treatment on the basis of age	Occasionally	20(28.6%)	9(22.5%)	11(36.67%)
	Never	45(64.3%)	26(65%0	19(63.33%)

Table 5 more non-traditional families occasionally experienced race, gender, sexual orientation, language and age discrimination when compared to traditional families. More traditional

families however experienced more negative treatment in terms of disability.

Families' perceptions on government's focus in assisting and supporting identified familial needs

Table 6

Variables	Total Sample n =70 (100%)	Traditional n = 40 (57.1%)	Non-Traditional N = 30 (%)
Identified needs where government must assist most			
Improving living conditions	44(62.9%)	22(55%)	22(73.3%)
Assistance with family challenges	19(27.1%)	10(25%)	9(6.3%)
Assistance with building on strengths of family	22(31.4%)	10(25%)	12(40%)
Assistance with family social problems	26(37.1%)	13(32.5%)	13(43.3%)
Assistance with families negative experiences at community and broader societal level	33(47.1%)	20(50%)	13(43.3%)
Assistance with socio-economic rights fulfillment	46(65.7%)	23(57.5%)	23(76.7%)

In Table 6, non-traditional families indicated that government should assist and support family needs in terms of improving living conditions, strengthening families, assisting with family social problems and the fulfillment

of socio-economic rights. Traditional families believe that government should assist families with negative experiences in communities and society as well as with family challenges.

Discussion

The study showed that respondents were more the same than different in terms of position, age, race and sex when comparing them with reference to the form of family they lived in spread across all the family types and linked to traditional and non-traditional families. Families can no longer be seen as a static social entity (Allan, et al., 2001). There is 'an increase in modern times in the number of single people who live with their parents with the reasons varying between postponement of marriage, cost of education, unemployment, divorce, needing help with

Familial needs identified by the respondents

In the human rights context a focus on quality of life, social problems, challenges and strengths in relation to relationships and affection, how families are treated in communities and broader society and possible experience of discrimination was explored. The study showed that traditional and non-traditional families of public officials are more the same than

Challenges and strengths in relation to relationships and affection

The challenges and strengths of families showed that when comparing traditional and non-traditional families the parent/child relationship challenges were higher for traditional families than that of non-traditional families. Walsh (1993:195) is of the opinion that for families, to successfully maintain their stability, families need to balance cohesion and

infants' (Defrain & Olson cited in Sussman, et al, 1999:309-316). Public officials, as members of both traditional and non-traditional families, are no exception. Although the majority was confined to the traditional nuclear family, non-traditional families were not far below. A need for an openness and acknowledgement to new forms of the family rather than seeing it as social problems that disturb the status quo exists. Barrett & McIntosh (1991), cited in Steel & Kidd (2001:159) suggest that since there is no common form how can we say which family type is better.

different when comparing their families against feeling safe inside or outside their homes, in terms of their family being victims of crime and their families being richer or poorer than their parents in comparison to five years ago. Robbery was seen as the crime most family members experienced and which emanate from both traditional and non-traditional families.

conflict, maintain attachments and bonds and arrive at consensus about family values. In this context the issue of challenges that confront and strengths that build families and its bearing on relationships and affection within the family become critical.

The affection challenges and strengths between mother and children of traditional families were higher than that of non-traditional families. The affection

challenges and strengths between father and children of traditional families were higher than that of non-traditional families. When comparing gender difference it was interesting that affection strengths were higher between father and children than that between mother and children for both traditional and non-traditional families. Treas & Lawton cited in Sussman, et al (1999:447) indicates that data from

Families' perceptions/experiences of how their families are treated/discriminated against at community and broader societal levels

Families across traditional and non-traditional families still experiences negative treatment/discrimination at the community and broader society levels on the basis of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, language and age. Some families across both traditional and non-traditional still do not experience socio-economic rights fulfillment in terms of access to jobs, health services, housing, land and education. Uttal in Lloyd, et al (2009:145) emphasised that communities can also be conceived of as a family's relationships with neighborhood and neighbors, connections with social services, and connections between work and family, family and schools. It is

children confirm the differential involvement of mothers and fathers in parenting, even though children report similar quality relationships. Mothers and fathers do gender in a way they connect to each other as parents and to their girls and boys (Treas & Lawton cited in Sussman, et al., 1999:451-447).

therefore about manipulating the environment to the benefit of the family and as a result the community also changes in response e.g. through the creation of economic work, care-giving work and child socialization thus interlinking the quality of community with that of the family. In South Africa, the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which forms part of sound human resource management and development policies of the public service provides employees the only option to focus on their families. It is aimed at improving the quality of life of officials and their families by providing greater support and helping to alleviate the impact of everyday work and personal problems. Public officials are members of both traditional and non-traditional families as was shown in the study thus need to also benefit from family policies that address non-discrimination and equality.

Families' perceptions on government's focus in assisting and supporting identified familial needs

Descriptive comparisons between traditional and traditional families as to which categories of identified needs government must assist them was more the same than different for both traditional and non-traditional families. In both instances they indicated socio-economic rights fulfillment as the highest priority followed by improving living conditions for both traditional and non-traditional. The third most important area of identified needs where families required assistance was with their negative experiences on the basis of race, gender, disability, age, religion, sexual orientation at the community and broader societal level. Social problems were fourth and strengths and challenges in terms of relationships and affection scored fifth and sixth places respectively.

A fresh approach to policy development and implementation choices, which is able to effectively assist government to respond to the diverse categories of needs identified by respondents, is required. Harding (1996:211) highlights family policy 'as being choice in pursuit of family well-

being as its goal. It is both a perspective for looking at policy in relation to families and a field comprised of many different kinds of family-related programs'. Silva & Smart (1999) indicates that a lack of congruence between policies based on how families should be and how they actually operate exists. Policy frameworks that enhance autonomous choices in living arrangements should support many forms of family experiences. Harding (1996) highlights that there is ambivalence about rights and responsibilities, while families changes have produced new needs and commitments focusing around employment, (re)-marriage, family diversity, childcare and ageing. She also highlights the control/no control effect of policies on individuals and their families in relation to especially the fact that certain groups could be enhanced by chosen policies at the expense of others. Also, that policy has the danger of enforcing conformity and authoritarianism, which could lead to marginalization if there is no compliance. A balance must however be sought as, policies which either seek to restore traditional roles or to transform them might equally be authoritarian in their implications for the state-family relationship (Harding 1996:202).

Conclusion

The study showed that public officials are members of families too, which live in both traditional and non-traditional families. It was established that the familial needs of respondents traditional and non-traditional families were more the same than different in terms of the variable sets used in the survey, but did differ in terms of frequency. The study also showed that respondents' families' are influenced by the same theories entrenched in modern society for example the functionalist theory, which supports and promotes the traditional nuclear family. This is especially evident in the fact that most families are still the nuclear family with or without children. The study also showed that public officials' families are not static as was demonstrated by way of the many non-traditional families it represented.

Public officials' families are affected by their inter-connectivity with communities and broader society in terms of how they experience negative treatment/ discrimination on the basis of a variety of equality issues as well as fulfillment of their socio-economic rights as stipulated in the Bill of Rights as enshrined in the South African Constitution. Their equality and fulfillment of especially socio-economic rights experiences and highlighted in this study in particular showed that there are still much to be done to close the gaps. Thus, public officials as member of families do not function in isolation or broader societal influences. The public official also have needs as a result of these and as both rights holders and duty bearers they can improve their own family lives, but also serve better if they are supported.

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