

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE ROLES OF CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY: NIGERIA AND UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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### Abstract

*Children, deeply rooted in families, through blood ties or adoption are crucial assets for society's future. They inherit responsibilities and roles influenced by cultural norms and societal expectations. These roles, essential for familial and communal harmony, contribute positively to children's psychological and social adaptation as they navigate through life. However, socio-economic and industrial shifts have altered these roles, and have spurred diverse family setups, altering children's roles within them. The interaction between Nigeria and the United States of America (USA) has facilitated cultural exchange and redefined children's roles. While Nigeria traditionally upheld clear roles for children, the advent of technology and educational emphasis has led to a re-evaluation of these roles. Employing a doctrinal library-based methodology, this paper offers a comparative analysis of children's roles in Nigeria and the USA. It reveals that Nigerian traditional roles have evolved due to acculturation, social media influence, and the 'japa' phenomenon. The paper advocates for the implementation of policies aimed at educating parents and guardians about the*

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*significance of children's roles, balancing traditional values with the positive aspects borrowed from the USA. The paper suggests further research on defining child roles to promote societal growth and development. It suggests that religious communities should promote these roles, and national policies should encourage children's roles within families. It emphasizes the importance of families as primary architects of future generations.*

**Keywords:** Children's Roles, Family Dynamics, Cultural Exchange, Nigeria, Traditional Values, Societal Development.

## 1.0 Introduction

Children are treasures to be unveiled; they represent the future of any society. Children become members of a family either through blood relations or adoption. Each family member assumes specific responsibilities and roles, which are conveyed through norms, cultural education, and assimilation. The family serves as the cornerstone of any society and initial unit of socialisation. The nature of an individual's interactions within society is often shaped by their familial structure, whether it be nuclear or extended. Due to shifts in social, religious, industrial, and economic landscapes, various family models have emerged, altering the roles children play within these units.<sup>1</sup> The perception of children's roles within a family varies significantly between Nigeria and the United States of America<sup>2</sup>, reflecting divergent legal and social understandings of children's positions within the family. This paper aims to explore the roles of children within families in both Nigeria and the US, examining these roles through the lenses of law and societal views.

In recent years, children's rights have gained global recognition, promoting their importance in society. Children are vital to society,

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<sup>1</sup>Furstenberg FF. Family Change in Global Perspective: How and Why Family Systems Change. Fam Relat. 2019 Jul;68(3):326-341.

<sup>2</sup>Henceforth refer to as USA or US

starting their development within families. They are seen as a sacred trust<sup>3</sup> connecting generational divided. Children's rights have gained global recognition, leading to widespread approval of Declarations and Conventions in the society. There are several international treaties<sup>4</sup> that not only address children's protection but also "self-determination" insofar as children are given some degree of autonomy in exercising their rights.<sup>5</sup> These rights are recognised from their early years.<sup>6</sup> Nigeria also recognised the rights of children and enacted the Child Rights Act in 2003.<sup>7</sup> Nigeria made moderate progress in 2022 to eradicate child labour, with five governors endorsed the Child Rights Act and 180 new labour inspectors, increasing inspections from 10,526 to 17,026. Additionally, the government established 11 community child labour monitoring committees tasked with overseeing local child labour programmes and outreach initiatives.<sup>8</sup>

The UNCRC<sup>9</sup>, ratified in 1991 by Nigeria and UNICEF, is the most widely accepted human rights instrument, transforming children's perception and treatment. With 196 signatories, it's the most universally embraced instrument in history.<sup>10</sup> The US signed the United

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<sup>3</sup> The Bible, New Kings James Version, Psalms 127:3

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (CRC) African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Convention against Torture and other Cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (CAT).

<sup>5</sup> They are seen as a vulnerable group, that must be protected

<sup>6</sup> Berrin Akman, & Dila Yazici, 'Examining the Children's Perceptions of Child Rights', *İlkogretim Online*, 2021. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346392308\\_Examining\\_the\\_children's\\_perceptions\\_of\\_child\\_rights](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346392308_Examining_the_children's_perceptions_of_child_rights) accessed 31st March, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Child's Rights Act, laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2003; <https://placng.org/lawsfnigeria/laws/C50.pdf> accessed 31st March, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Child Labour and Forced Labour Reports on Nigeria [Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labour - Nigeria | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (refers to UNCRC or CRC hereinafter)

<sup>10</sup> Concerns persist regarding gender inequality, child marriage, and the impact of ethnic and religious violence on children. Nigeria faces violations of child rights, including child rape, sexual violence, and female gender mutilation. Education is often seen as a privilege rather than a right. According to UNICEF's report in 2015, Nigeria has the largest number of child brides in Africa, with over 23 million married children

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Nations UNCRC; however, it remains the only United Nations member state to have not ratified it.<sup>11</sup>

Globally and nationally, the rights and interests of children are increasingly being acknowledged. In *Odusote v Odusote*,<sup>12</sup> the court emphasised the importance of a child's best interest, which includes education, security, welfare, and holistic development, over any laws or customs regarding custody.<sup>13</sup> In *Theresa Temitayo Williams v Rasheed Ahmed Williams*,<sup>14</sup> the court considered the interests of children as the foremost concern when making decisions.<sup>15</sup> The US Supreme Court in the *United States v. Williams*,<sup>16</sup> affirmed the Protect Act, 2003<sup>17</sup> which makes it illegal to advertise, promote, present, or distribute child pornography, even if the material does not constitute child pornography.<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, these rights are accompanied by corresponding duties and responsibilities for children. Historically, the roles of children were implicitly understood, unlike today's technologically advanced era, where the primary emphasis is on education. In Nigeria, it is common for a child as young as five years to run errands, wash dishes, and assist

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from poor, rural communities and the third highest number of female genital mutilation. Six out of every 10 children in Nigeria experience some form of Violence. Check <http://www.unicef.org/nigeria/child-protection>

<sup>11</sup>Efforts by multiple organisations, including the American Academy of Paediatrics and the Campaign for the US Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, have all failed, and have been suspended. <https://www.humanium.org/en/how-do-us-states-measure-up-to-childrens-rights/>

<sup>12</sup> [2012] 3 NWLR (Pt1288) 478 at 457

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> (1987) LLJR-SC

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> 553 U.S. 285 (2008)

<sup>17</sup>Known as the 'Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to end the Exploitation of Children Today Act, 2003'

<sup>18</sup> 553 U.S. 285 (2008); decided 19th May, 2008

their parents in the farm or kitchen. These responsibilities equip them to manage their future households and businesses effectively.<sup>19</sup>

### 1.1 Definition of a Child

According to cultural definitions, an individual is considered a child as long as they remain under their parents' care, irrespective of their actual age. Unfortunately, this definition poses significant challenges in addressing legal issues; hence, it is unsurprising that the legal definitions of a child in various countries are now predominantly based on chronological age. However, these definitions vary not only from one country to another but also between different cultures. For example, in New Zealand and Zimbabwe, a child is defined as anyone under the age of 16 years.<sup>20</sup> In South Africa, the threshold is anyone below 18 years. Under Nigeria's Child and Young Persons Law, a child is described as a person under 14 years of age, with individuals aged 14 to 17 categorised as young persons.<sup>21</sup>

The age of criminal responsibility is delineated under the Criminal Code Act and Penal Code Act.<sup>22</sup> A child is specifically defined by the Administration of Criminal Justice Act<sup>23</sup> as an individual who has not yet turned eighteen. The conception of a child in customary law varies considerably across Nigeria's numerous ethnic groups, with each group adopting different criteria for identifying a child, such as the individual's financial independence or their initiation into an age group.

In Islamic law, the transition to adulthood for females is marked by the onset of menstrual flow, whereas for males, it is signified by the commencement of "wet dreams." It is evident that this definition of a

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<sup>19</sup>Ihejieto, Chinyere, 'Child Labour, Child Education and Poverty: A Study of Children on the Street in Nigeria' (2020). A doctoral Thesis paper <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/323306827.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Societal Perception of Child Rights: A Case Study of Minna Town, James, Abiola, 2008

<sup>21</sup>Children and Young Persons Act 1943

<sup>22</sup> Penal Code (Northern States) Federal Provision Act, 1960(as amended)

<sup>23</sup> Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015 [ACJA]

child is not comprehensive and is susceptible to various interpretations, potentially undermining the protection of children's rights.<sup>24</sup>

In *Re Carlton*, Cohen J. established that the term "child" should be defined based on context.<sup>25</sup> Following the judgement in *Re Carlton*, the UNCRC defines a child as anyone under 18, unless majority is reached earlier. Many countries are revising legal frameworks to set the age of majority at 18 years, with all individuals under this age being classified as children.<sup>26</sup> This adjustment may be intended to align with the United Nations' principles, which identify a child as an individual under the age of eighteen.<sup>27</sup>

## 1.2 Family Set-Up

To comprehend the roles of children within the family, it is crucial to understand the family set-up in which they are raised and nurtured. Nigeria and the US exhibit different family set-ups, shaped by the social, cultural, and religious tendencies of each region.<sup>28</sup> Nigerian family structures are predominantly extended, hierarchical (in terms of age and sex), and patriarchal, with children expected to strictly obey their parents, influenced by the country's religious leanings. Hence, the cultural and religious beliefs of Nigerians impact the roles children assume within the family, leading to well-defined gender roles for male and female children. After a relatively carefree upbringing, children are socialised to adhere to these roles, resulting in early gender segregation.

In traditional societies, clans or extended families are made up of multiple households that serve varied tasks. In contrast, in modern societies, the nuclear family, which consists of a father, mother, and child(ren), is the only form of parenthood or alliance. The cultural and

<sup>24</sup> For instance, child marriage is legal in the northern part of Nigeria, where Islamic law operates.

<sup>25</sup> 'In re Carlton.' (1949) *Annual Digest and Reports of Public International Law Cases*, 12, pp. 195–196. doi:10.1017/CBO9781316151396.073.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - UNCRC

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ephesians 5:1-2

religious influences in a child's country or community define the nature of the family to which they belong. The twenty-first century has seen significant alterations in family structures in many countries, including an increase in single parenting, divorce and separation, baby mama and baby papa arrangements, and the prevalence of homosexual unions.<sup>29</sup>

Regardless of whether a family is nuclear or extended, children's roles remain applicable, albeit more specific and direct within nuclear families compared to extended family setups. The term 'role' implies that children serve specific roles in the family, which is becoming less clear as our understanding of the child evolves. Children's roles appear to be reducing as a result of globalisation and changing cultures, but their rights become more prominent in society.

### **1.3 Family Set-Ups in Nigeria and United States of America**

#### **i. Extended Family Set-Up**

Traditionally, the extended family in Nigeria includes not only the nuclear family but also blood relatives such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces, and nephews, living in close proximity. Although globalisation is leading to a decline in this setup, it remains prevalent. In contrast, this family structure is less common in the USA, as rearing children with extended families is uncommon in America. Overall, 8% of Americans aged 18 to 50 who have children live with their parents without extended family.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Alabi, Oluwatobi & Olonade, Olawale, 'Complexities, Dynamism, and Changes in the Nigerian Contemporary Family Structure' (2022), In book: Families in Nigeria: Understanding their Diversity, Adaptability, and Strengths Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research, Volume 18 (pp.99-112) [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359415237\\_Complexities\\_Dynamism\\_and\\_Changes\\_in\\_the\\_Nigerian\\_Contemporary\\_Family\\_Structure](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359415237_Complexities_Dynamism_and_Changes_in_the_Nigerian_Contemporary_Family_Structure) Accessed 31st March, 2024

<sup>30</sup><https://ifstudies.org/blog/what-do-we-know-about-extended-families-in-america-a-response-setodavidbrooks#:~:text=Raising%20children%20with%20extended%20families,is%20much%20higher%20than%20others>. Accessed 31st March, 2024

ii. **Nuclear Family Set-up**

It is the standard or basic family structure in the USA. A nuclear family is made up of the children's biological, adopted or fostered mother and father.<sup>31</sup> In Nigeria, this gained popularity as a result of industrialization. The extended family set-up, which was once common and seen to be advantageous, started to disappear as more and more locals started working in white collar positions. Nigerians' exposure to wages in place of shared resources and agricultural products handled by extended families forced them to reduce spending and maintain a modest lifestyle.

The average American family has classically been understood as a nuclear family (husband, wife and children) with the extended family living separately. When discussing family in the USA, this type of family structure seems to have been prevalent for the longest.

iii. **Single Parenthood**

A single parent family is one in which only one of the parents is responsible for living with and raising the child. The child's parents live with and raises the child without assistance from the other parent. Single parenthood has always existed in Nigeria, although the population of this form of family structure has expanded as a result of social and economic developments.<sup>32</sup> Divorce, separation, dissertation, death, unexpected pregnancy, and a desire for independence are all causes that contribute to single parenthood in Nigeria. In the USA, this is quite common as there have been high records of divorce and teen pregnancy there.

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<sup>31</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, (1<sup>st</sup> March 2024) Nuclear Family

<sup>32</sup>John, Wajim. (2020). Single Parenting and Its Effects on the Development of Children in Nigeria. The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention. 7. 5891-5902. 10.18535/ijsshi/v7i04.02.

A contemporary Nigerian version of single parenthood is what is known as ‘*Baby Mama*’<sup>33</sup> or ‘*Baby Papa*’. This family setup in Nigeria is the growing phenomenon of baby mama or baby papa, especially among celebrities.<sup>34</sup> In this type of setup, the child lives with a parent while the other is an absent parent who is financially responsible for the upkeep of the child, but not married to the partner or separated or divorced. This is a recent trend and is a crazy fad in Nigeria currently is to become a celebrity’s *baby mama*.<sup>35</sup>

**iv. Step-Family Setup**

In a stepfamily structure, a spouse from a previous marriage or marriages brings their children into their new marriage to form a new family, integrating the two families into one. This is clearly a result of divorce, and remarriage. Here, the children are always faced with the task of adjusting to a new parent and siblings.<sup>36</sup> The setup is both operative in Nigeria and the US, with greater numbers of step-family operative in the latter. A large percentage of marriages in America end in divorce, meaning that more than half of families have remarried.<sup>37</sup>

**v. Polygamous Family Setup**

In this family setup, a man is married to and lives with more than one wife and their children. In other circumstances, the wives may not dwell in the same location, requiring the man to rotate

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<sup>33</sup>the biological mother of a man's child, who is typically not in a relationship or married to the child's father

<sup>34</sup>Alabi O.J., OlonadeO.Y. ‘Complexities, Dynamism, and Changes in the Nigerian Contemporary Family Structure’ *In Families in Nigeria: Understanding Their Diversity, Adaptability, and Strengths* (2022) Emerald Publishing Limited.

<sup>35</sup><https://www.tekedia.com/the-societal-pressure-to-become-a-baby-mama-in-nigeria-the-pros-and-cons/> Accessed 31st March, 2024

<sup>36</sup>Wilcox B., Lippman L., Whitney C., Cid A. ‘Making the grade: Family structure and children’s educational participation in Colombia, Egypt, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Perú, and Uruguay. (2009) *In IUSSP conference in Marrakesh, Morocco*.

<sup>37</sup>PetrelliPrevitera, Divorce Statistics for 2022 [Divorce Statistics for 2022 \(petrellilaw.com\)](https://petrellilaw.com/)

his lodge across the wives' locations at agreed-upon intervals. This type of family setup is traditional to Nigeria and not readily operative in the USA. Polygamy is illegal throughout the U.S.

**vi. Same Sex Family Setup**

A marriage between two individuals who share the same biological sex is referred to as a same-sex marriage. This is a family where same sex are mother and father in a marriage. In 2015, the National Assembly promulgated the law prohibiting same sex marriage in Nigeria, which makes this family setup illegal in Nigeria.<sup>38</sup> However, this family setup is widely recognized and legally accepted in the USA. Same sex marriage is legally permitted across the United States of America since June 26, 2015, when the Supreme Court issued its decision in *Obergefell v Hodges*.<sup>39</sup>

**2.1 The Roles of Children in the Family**

The roles of children vary across different family setups and cultural environments. The expectations placed on a child also depend on their age or gender, as applicable in Nigeria. A child's role is continually expanding or evolving based on their age and the family's stage and setup. Every family member is required to perform the roles culturally, socially, morally, religiously, or otherwise assigned to them. For example, it is a child's duty to protect and uphold the family's reputation. A child's responsibilities towards their family, society, and nation are crucial for their dignity, future, and personal and social development. They must abide by rules, fulfil societal tasks, and be accountable for their actions within their power, control, or management.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international treaty adopted by the United Nations, ensures the protection, survival, and development of all children without discrimination, covering civil,

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<sup>38</sup> Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013. Chiroma, Magaji, and Awwal Ilyasu Magashi. 'Same-sex marriage versus human rights: The legality of the "antigay & lesbian law" in Nigeria.' (2015) (4) (1) *International Law Research* 11-23.

<sup>39</sup> 576 U. S. 644 (2015) a landmark case of the Supreme Court of US on the legality of same-sex marriage

political, economic, social, and cultural rights, ensuring equal rights for all children. However, children, like adult members of society, possess rights as well as duties and responsibilities. This demonstrates that their rights are not without limits, and in exercising these rights, a child must consider their duties and responsibilities within the family. Rights and responsibilities are intrinsically linked, meaning they go hand in hand.

As a child has the right to education, they also have the responsibility to attend school. A child has a right to healthcare, yet they are also responsible for their own health. A child has the right to freedom of expression, but in exercising this right, the child must respect the rights of other children and adults, especially the right to protect one's honour and dignity.<sup>40</sup> In essence, the rights of a child end where the rights of another child or an adult begin. The CRC empowers children to exercise their rights and carry responsibilities. This means that as the child grows, so does his right to decide for himself, as does the extent of responsibility.<sup>41</sup>

The emphasis on the roles of children within the family is diminishing, while their rights are becoming more prominent globally.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, a child's development is significantly influenced by the family environment in which they are nurtured, as it constitutes their initial and primary setting.

In Nigeria, the roles assigned to children within the family are often based on gender, in contrast to the United States. In Nigerian society, where men predominantly exert control, family responsibilities are traditionally seen as the exclusive domain of women and girls. However, with the advancement of civilisation and the recognised need to protect women, there has been reduction in domestic pressure on the

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<sup>40</sup> Jo Boyden and Andy Hudson, 'Children; Rights and Responsibility', Minority Rights Group Report No., 69 (1985) <https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/1985/11/Children-Rights-and-Responsibilities.pdf> Accessed 31st March, 2024

<sup>41</sup> Though their corresponding responsibilities are not specifically provided for in the UNCRC

<sup>42</sup> FF Furstenberg · 2019, *Ibid*

female child which has enabled women to realise their full potential and make substantial contributions to both their families and society at large.<sup>43</sup>

These are some examples of roles of a child in the family:

**i. House chores/Housekeeping**

Housekeeping encompasses the tasks required to maintain a house, contributing to its cleanliness and habitability. In the family set-up in Nigeria, it is considered inappropriate for parents to undertake cleaning tasks when there are children in the household. Children are expected to participate in chores suited to their age, gender and abilities. Naturally, there are certain demanding tasks that children are not expected to perform. In the United States, while children are also encouraged to engage in household chores, the expectations placed upon them are not as stringent as those in Nigeria.

Hence, particularly at the early stages of a child's development, parents may find it necessary to undertake certain chores themselves, guiding their children in learning how to perform these tasks effectively. This approach does not detract from the fundamental responsibility of housekeeping assigned to children; rather, it is their most primary duty. Many families adopt the practice of assigning household chores to children as a means of instilling responsibility. Engaging in such activities enables children to develop life skills and a sense of duty that will serve them well throughout their lives. Research has concluded that children who are given responsibilities tend to perform better in adulthood.<sup>44</sup> Teenagers who perform household chores have the potential to demonstrate increased self-worth, increased responsibility, and enhanced resilience to frustration, hardship, and postponed reward.

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<sup>43</sup>Hairullah, 'The Important of the Family Roles in Building the Children's Character'.2023 IJSR Vol. 5, No. 1, 100-106,<https://influence-journal.com/index.php/influence/index>

<sup>44</sup>American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 'Children and Chores', (2019) Facts for Families > [https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/FFF-Guide/Chores\\_and\\_Children-125.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Chores_and_Children-125.aspx) Accessed 31st March, 2024

Gaining these abilities can help teenagers succeed more in relationships, the workplace, and education.<sup>45</sup>

The role of housekeeping significantly contributes to the psychological and social adaptation of children as they grow and integrate into the world around them. Through engaging in household chores, children acquire maintenance and managerial skills. Beyond merely shaping their character and contributing to their development as individuals, housekeeping stands as a fundamental responsibility of children within the family.

A study conducted in the USA involving 9,971 children found that performing chores in kindergarten positively correlated with their social, academic, and life satisfaction competencies by third grade. This correlation was independent of gender, family income, and parental education. Regular chore-participation significantly improved self-reported social, academic, peer relationship, and life satisfaction scores in individuals who participated in chores infrequently.<sup>46</sup>

The findings of another study suggested that involvement in self-care chores (for example, preparing a meal for oneself) and family-care chores (such as preparing a meal for someone else) significantly predicted improvements in working memory and inhibition, even after adjusting for factors like age, gender, and the presence or absence of a disability.<sup>47</sup> However, developments throughout the 20th century have altered the traditional roles expected of children.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup>Elizabeth White, &Mark Deboer, & Rebecca Scharf, (2018). Associations Between Household Chores and Childhood Self-Competency. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioural Paediatrics*. 40. 1. 10.1097/DBP.0000000000000637.

<sup>47</sup>DL Tepper, TJ Howell, PC Bennett. 'Executive functions and household chores: Does Engagement in Chores Predict Children's Cognition?', *AustOccupTher J*. 2022 Oct;69(5):585-598

<sup>48</sup>Fredericko WichmannI; LLetícia Dellazzana-ZanonII; &Ors. 'Relations among adolescents' life purpose, household chores, and school performance,' (2019), PTP, Vol. 2, No. 1 <http://dx.doi.org/10.5935/1980-6906/psicologia.v21n1p220-235>

**ii. Duty to Honour and Respect the Parents/Elders**

In light of the religious context prevalent in the southern part of Nigeria and in the United States, certain biblical roles are expected of children within the family. As outlined in Ephesians 5:1-2, children are tasked with the duty of honouring and respecting their fathers and mothers. This directive is the first commandment among the Ten Commandments that is accompanied by a promise. Honouring one's parents encompasses a variety of actions, including listening to and following their instructions, caring for them in their old age, and upholding godly values, among other responsibilities. In the US, filial responsibility or obligation laws mandate adult children to care for indigent parents when they cannot afford it. This includes expenses like food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. As of 2016, 30 states have filial responsibility statutes, but there's no uniformity in terms of support duration. This obligation can be enforced through statutes or cultural beliefs.<sup>49</sup> In Nigeria, it is more of a moral duty with no specific legal framework to ensure compliance.

Children, akin to adults, are required to show respect towards adults, which includes parents, grandparents, peers, school teachers, and other children. This principle is crucial, as mutual respect and consideration for the wishes of others constitute one of the foundational tenets for society's harmonious coexistence.

**iii. Duty to Take Care of Siblings**

Children bear the responsibility of caring for their siblings, especially the younger ones. This role serves as an early lesson in humanity, teaching children how to relate to others in society and fostering love and peaceful coexistence within the family. Mastering this role equips children with a social skill invaluable throughout life; such as social skills, empathy, patience, and responsibility, shaping them into compassionate individuals.

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<sup>49</sup>S Kethineni,., & G Rajendran,., (2018). Article: 'Elder Care in the United States: Filial Responsibility Laws, Judicial Decisions, and Enforcement Issues'. Journal of Criminal Justice and Law. <https://doi.org/10.21428/b6e95092.56ca6762> Accessed 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2024

This expectation is particularly strong within Nigerian families, as communal living is prominent in the country. However, in the United States, the emphasis on caring for younger siblings is not as pronounced, based on the concept of individualism.

#### **iv. Duty to Shield and Uphold the Family Image**

Children are tasked with protecting and upholding their family's image, a role that is both delicate and often implicitly understood. Following the standards set by their parents, children are expected to maintain and protect these values. By demonstrating characteristics such as love, obedience, respect, and godliness both at home and in society, children contribute significantly to the family's reputation. In essence, the behaviour of the children often serves as a measure of the family's overall character. This abstract responsibility, in both countries, requires children to always consider their family's image in their actions and decisions, embodying the principle of "*think home*."

#### **v. Role of Sustaining the Family Lineage**

In the Nigerian family setup, a pivotal role of children is to ensure the continuation of the family lineage, often through procreation. In cases where there is only one male child, there may be pressure to marry early, sometimes to the extent of arranging marriages. Where there are no male children, adoption or other means, such as a female child bearing children in her father's name, may be pursued to continue the lineage. Conversely, in the United States, sustaining the family lineage through biological means is not seen as critically, with adoption often regarded as a viable alternative.

#### **vi. Duty to Learn**

Another fundamental role of children within the family is their obligation to learn. Children are expected to embrace education, be receptive to instruction, and open to correction. With the right to education comes the duty to attend school, thereby expanding their mental capacities. Beyond formal education, children should be eager to absorb life's lessons, including acquiring soft and hard skills that can be learnt within the family setting.

## 2.2 Ideal Expectation of Children's Role or Abuse

It is crucial to differentiate between appropriate household tasks assigned to children and the abuse of children through child labour. Child labour, distinct from suitable duties, is a global health concern due to its potential detrimental effects on children. Human rights activists, nations, and the international community have expressed disapproval of child labour. Child labour is a global health concern with potential detrimental effects on children.

Despite laws against it, children continue to work, often enduring long hours and low pay. In Nigeria, 20-30% of the population are child labourers, with urban areas like Lagos seeing a significant increase in working children under 15, indicated by an increase in beggars, street children, child hawkers, and child sex workers.<sup>50</sup> Child labourers often come from rural areas, conflict zones, and natural disasters in the Niger Delta, Plateau State, Benue, and regions affected by Boko Haram terrorists. Despite global decrease in child labour, it continues in Nigeria due to the lack of well-defined criteria for child labour and accurate national statistics.<sup>51</sup>

Child labour also persists in the US. The Department of Labour reported resolving 765 child labour cases between October 1, 2022, and July 20, 2023, identifying 4,474 children working in violation of federal child labour regulations, and imposing fines on businesses exceeding \$6.6 million. This marks an 87% increase in penalties and a 44% increase in minors working unlawfully compared to the previous year.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Hon. Justice Zaynab Bashir, 'An Evaluation of The Impact of The Child Rights Act in Regulating the Rights of a Child in Nigeria,' 2023. [https://www.iawj.org/content.aspx?page\\_id=2507g&club\\_id=882224&item\\_id=460](https://www.iawj.org/content.aspx?page_id=2507g&club_id=882224&item_id=460)

0 Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2024

<sup>51</sup>Ihejieto, Ibid

<sup>52</sup> CNN, 'Illegal Child Labour on the Rise with Nationwide Violations Found', 2023 [Illegal child labour on the rise with nationwide violations found, Labour Department says | CNN Business](#)

### 2.3 Roles of Children in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The roles of children have become more complex due to changes in childrearing practices and the significant rise in dual-earner families in Nigeria and the United States in recent decades. The importance of the roles of children to their development cannot be denied. Historically, children have contributed to housekeeping and education, incorporating essential skills for growth. However, modern society prioritises education over practical skills; homework over domestic tasks, limiting children's self-motivation and initiative. Also, technological advancements prioritise academic tasks over children's overall development, potentially affecting their ability to contribute to household tasks. The increasing industrialization and technology breakthroughs in the society have had a profound impact on childhood rearing that have always been important to children's development, such as children helping out around the house, respect for parents/elders, a sense of communal living and responsibilities. School work and house helps (domestic workers) are a major competing force to children's participation in housework.<sup>53</sup>

The complexities of contemporary life and the pursuit of respecting children's rights have impacted the roles of children within the family. Contemporary life's complexities and respecting children's rights have impacted traditional African culture, reducing opportunities for children to perform household duties. Parents now often view housework as a distraction from schoolwork or assignments, thus depriving children of the chance to develop self-motivation and initiative. Parents and educators have not fully recognised the impact of housework on a child's overall growth, including academic

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<sup>53</sup>Ambetsa, E.K., 'Children's Perspectives on Involvement in Housework and Its Effect on Academic Performance in Early Childhood at City Primary Schools, Nairobi, Kenya', 2016 *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 3(11) 223-233.

achievement. Cross-cultural research has demonstrated that children who are expected to perform chores necessary for their family's survival tend to act more responsibly and exhibit less antisocial behaviour compared to children in cultures where such work is not expected of them.

Studies on household activities from an ethnographic perspective reveal that domestic chores, such as caring for siblings, running errands, fishing, weaving, and farming from a young age, help define family roles and responsibilities. In the US, children from dual-earner and single-parent households are often expected to contribute regularly to household tasks. Such parents believe that assigning chores to their children will aid in developing them into competent, self-reliant, and responsible adults. However, in families where domestic helpers are employed, children are often exempt from participating in household chores, which could be to their detriment. As children naturally engage in work at home, observing and mimicking their parents, older siblings, relatives, and other adults, they improve their overall development.

### **3.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

Children are valuable assets for any nation, acting as catalysts for change and nurturing national cohesion, economic growth, and political stability. Their duties towards families should be instilled at all levels, and the international community should promote children's development through positive engagement within the family framework.

Children's roles within the family are crucial for preparing the next generation and maturing into responsible society members. However, it is observed that while numerous papers, proposals, research articles, and legal frameworks focus on children's rights, there is a notable lack of research and documentation on the specific duties of children. While parents are legally obligated to fulfil their duties towards their children, there is no robust legal framework when a child fails to fulfil their roles.

This paper advocates for further research into the feasibility of establishing a minimal framework defining a child's roles in Nigeria, aiming to bolster societal growth and development, as seen in some US legal frameworks. Furthermore, as nations and custodians of religious principles—which are pivotal to any society's development—the religious community should amplify teachings on children's societal roles. While religious organisations have consistently promoted these values, heightened awareness of these roles will benefit society broadly. Lastly, national policies should be developed to encourage children's roles within their families. It is essential to formulate public policies that recognise and support the contributions children make to their families. Policies across all tiers of governance should be designed to enlighten parents and guardians about the critical nature of a child's role within the family, acknowledging that families are the primary architects of the forthcoming generation, with the state playing a supportive role.

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