



## Same-Sex Marriage in Igbo Culture: Implications for Children and Youth

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### Abstract

This essay is a discourse of same-sex marriage from the perspective of the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria. The Igbo people, like other African group, have their traditional way of contracting marriage which they take pride in. The legality and morality of same-sex marriage being an ongoing debate has created a divide in the academic world with some scholars arguing that same-sex marriage is an aberration, a distortion of nature and its cosmic balance, a spite on God's design for marriage and a deviation from the essence of marriage which revolves around procreation. On the other side of the divide are some scholars who hold that the conventional marriage known to us is a social construct that can be changed by anyone powerful enough to do so. Efforts are being made by homosexuals and their supporter to see the legalization of same-sex marriage and for such couples to enjoy equal rights and benefits as heterosexual couples. While some countries have legalized it, and are trying to impose or influence others (even with sanctions) to do same-sex marriage remains outlawed in Nigeria. This work explored the meaning and what marriage holds for the Igbo people and society, marriage practices among ndi Igbo, the practice of same-sex marriage in Igbo and the implications of same-sex marriage on the children and the youth. The work reveals that marriage between same gender, women and women existed; however, it was solely for procreation and preservation of lineage. The work concludes that same-sex marriage has far-reaching effect for both individuals and the society.

**Keywords:** Marriage, Same-sex marriage, Igbo people, Homosexuality and Procreation.

### I. Introduction

The term "Homosexuality" was coined by a German psychologist Karoly Marie Benkert in the 19th century. Homosexuality has been a feature of human culture in some societies in earliest history. Most famously in ancient Greek, certain

forms of erotic attraction and sexual pleasure between same-sex were often an accepted part of the cultural norms, though they do not have terms or concepts that correspond to the recent homosexuality and lesbianism. In the 20th century, sexual roles were redefined once again for a variety of reasons, premarital intercourse slowly became more common with the decline of prohibitions against sex for the sake of pleasure even outside of marriage; it became more difficult to argue against gay sex. These trends were mostly strong in the 1960's and it was in this context that gay liberation movement took off, seeking and advocating for formal and legal recognition of sex-same relationship.

In our present-day society, the issue of same-sex union has become a controversial moral issue which has attracted both the masses and the government in most countries of the world. Nigeria as a multi-cultural country rejected the practice of same-sex marriage because of the zero moral value it possesses and prescribed jail term for offenders. This for a fact, shows that Nigeria as a country holds the act of same sex marriage as a punishable offence. The role and importance of marriage is evident in the various cultural backgrounds in Nigeria. Family is known as the basic unit of a society which is made up of father, mother and children and it plays respective roles in different cultures in Nigeria. The law was passed to ensure that every citizen in this country learns and understand the role of each individual gender, notwithstanding the recent system in the world.

In Nigeria and elsewhere, Igbo people are known to have a powerful cultural philosophy and ideology, encapsulated in a world view (omenala or omenani) whose fundamental principles are truth, justice and equality (ofona-ogu, egbeberegobere) and which are the core of their national ethos, act as a cementing force that binds the people. The Igbo's are well known for their richness in culture and traditions. Every Igbo individual has a stipulated role to play in the community and these



roles are seen in the social structures which include family, the umuada, the age grade, the umunna, etc. Being a people with strong traditional marriage practices, the idea of same-sex marriage, though not entirely foreign to Igbo people, is not only obnoxious but also bereft of any moral justification. This work examines same-sex marriage in relation to the Igbo, exposing its implications for all and sundry.

### Meaning and Conceptions of Marriage

Marriage is as an institution acknowledged in a variety of ways. It is a universal human institution that formed the foundation of family throughout history. Most anthropologists, according to Peoples and Bailey (1997), agree that marriage ordinarily involves:

A culturally defined special relationship between a man and woman from different families, which regulates sexual intercourse and provides for procreation; A set of rights the couple and their families obtain over each other, including rights over the couple's children; An assignment of responsibility for enculturation to the spouses or to one or both sets of their relatives; and a division of labor in the domestic group (p. 170).

The above conception of marriage has the virtue of defining marriage by its distinctive feature. From this perspective, sex constitutes an essential determination of marriage relationship. Nwogugu (1966) emphasizes that, "in order to establish the existence of a valid marriage, it must be proved that the persons involved are man and woman" (p. xxviii). Before now, marriage has been universally acknowledged throughout history as a legal contract between a man and a woman in which there is sexual fidelity, emotional support, along with childbearing. That is why anthropologists view marriage as "the more or less durable union between man and woman and marital and paternal care probably due to instincts once necessary for the preservation of the species" (Westernmarck, 1921, p. 23). In other words, marriage usually is the relationship through which new families of procreation are formed in a population, which is in tandem with the biblical injunction, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth..." (Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version, 1971, p. 2). According to Vatican Council II (1965), the "fruitfulness and offspring are the supreme blessings of God in matrimony so that by its very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children and find in them their ultimate crown" (No. 48). The religionist believes marriage to be "one of the

institutions established by God when He gave Eve to Adam to be a helper and companion. The plan was men and women should be united in the knowledge and fear of God, and to be a symbol of the union between Him and His church" (Huse, 1985, p. 105). Religiously, marriage is a relationship sanctioned by God and should last until the parties are separated by death. This implies that marriage takes place within the assumption of permanency.

From sociological point, marriage is defined as "a natural given requisite for the survival of society" (Borgatta&Borgatta, 1992, p. 1754). Onoka (2003) observes that, "customary law also recognized marriage as a union between a man and a woman or women as the case may be (p. 69). The conventional thought also believes that normal family is conjugal. A male, as husband and father, is the head of the household and the sole economic provider. Marriage, according to Eshleman (2000), "Marriage is an institutional arrangement between persons, generally male and female who recognize each other as husband and wife or intimate partners" (p. 41), where he addresses a female, as wife and mother, is a helpmate to her husband and a homemaker who is responsible for household duties, domestic care and the socialization of the children. Okoye (1972) defines marriage as "the state in which man and woman give themselves to each other and become helpmates to each other in their life together and in the procreation and training of offspring" (p. 9). Onuorah (2012) defines marriage as, "coming together of a man and a woman to live as husband and wife with religious, legal and cultural binding" (p. 18).

From cultural perspective, marriage in Igbo traditional culture is not regarded as a private affair between individuals; rather it is the establishment of a bond between two families. This social union of individuals in marriage creates kinship. The basic social unit in the African Igbo culture is the nuclear family, which consists of a man, wife and their children. Nuclear family is the basis for the formation of the family group, kinsmen, lineage and the clan. Marriage in Igbo tradition is indispensable factor for the continuation of the family line of descent. Children occupy the central point in Igbo marriage. In line with the above view, Hanlon and White (2014) observe that, "the origins of marriage might lie in a man's need for assurance as to paternity of his children. The man might therefore, be willing to pay bride price or provide for a woman in exchange for exclusive sexual access." The need to marry, to get married, and to have children remains as widespread and



strong as ever. Arthur (1986) avers that, "marriage is not on the account a matter of arbitrary will, but is a contract necessary in its nature by the law of humanity" (p. 78). Marriage from Igbo perspective looms upon the horizon of every boy and girl as an indispensable function to be fulfilled after reaching the age of puberty (Basden, 1966). An average Igbo youth prays to get married because marriage is understood as a formation of a new legitimized nuclear family. Parents also wish their children marriage. Marriage as an institution was recognized and respected globally. It was founded on and controlled by the social and religious norms of the society. The institution of marriage is unique. It is the only institution that binds man and woman together to form a family. The institution of marriage is historically filled with restrictions from age to gender, to social status. These restrictions are placed on marriage by societies for reasons of benefitting the children, passing healthy genes, to keep property concentrated, and because of prejudice and fear. Ele (2006) stresses that:

The individual person is the icon of his or her family whose history and respect he or she carries and represents wherever he or she goes. This informs the reason why marriage inquiry is taken seriously. The family backgrounds of the suitor and spinster are investigated thoroughly and respectively by each party before marriage (p. 84).

Societies have often placed restrictions on marriage relatives, though the degree of prohibited relationship varies widely. In most societies, marriages between brothers and sisters are forbidden, as well as marrying from one's kinsmen. In line with the family kinship and closeness, Kuper (1963) stresses that:

The term father is extended from one's own father to his brothers, halfbrother, and sons of his father's brothers. Similarly, mother embraces his own mother, her sister, her co-wives, and wives of his father's brothers. The children to these fathers and mothers are his brothers and sisters, and their children are grouped in the same category as his own grandchildren (p. 25).

The above shows the interconnectivity of kinship and description of family closeness in African traditional society. All mainstream religions prohibit some marriages on the basis of the consanguinity (lineal descent, that is, blood relatives or people related by birth), and affinity (kinship by marriage, that is, in-laws or people

related by marriage) of the prospective marriage partners. In this view, Rutherford and Bone (1993) view marriage as:

The voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, subject to the rules as to consanguinity or affinity and capacity to perform the duties of matrimony prevailing in the place of domicile of the parties and subject to the formalities required by the law where the marriage takes places (p. 123).

Marriage typically requires consummation by sexual intercourse and non-consummation (that is failure or refusal to engage in sex) may be grounds for an annulment. Adultery (sexual relationship by a married person with someone other than his or her spouse) is also highly disapproved by the major world religions and forms a ground for divorce.

In this contemporary time, re-definition of marriage as any close or intimate union that includes same sex alters the cultural importance of marriage and leads to degradation and erosion of the standard nature, ethos, values and essence of marriage. There is irrefutable evidence concerning marriage and its role in producing social order and cultural prosperity. In some societies where marriage norms are not properly observed, children are being born outside of marriage; higher numbers of divorces and step families are created as people remarry for many times. These pose a negative effect on the main features of traditional marriage system, since it is marriage's roles that regulate sexual behaviors which history acknowledge as being instrumental in determining a society's condition depends on the future of marriage. There is need to embrace the socio-moral and cultural values of marriage.

Marriage is meant to exclusively involve two persons of opposite sex because it conforms to the biological design that fulfils the reproductive principles. This serves broad societal purpose in the sense that the future of the societal growth depends on the future of marriage. There is a need to embrace socio-moral and cultural values of marriage between members of opposite sex because it is the only way conjugal family of father, mother and children will be achieved. Specifically, the future of marriage depends on people's understanding of what the true meaning of marriage is, what the real institution of marriage is, the purpose of marriage and the functions marriage serves for the survival of human society. However, it is very unfortunate that issues concerning



marriage are left to be a legislative decision in this present day.

### What is Same Sex Marriage?

The issue of same-sex marriage is not new. In the midst of the controversy that has surrounded the issue of same sex marriage; different meanings are being given to the concept. It was earlier referred to as homosexual marriage. Homosexuality according to Wikipedia online Dictionary is:

A romantic or sexual attraction or behavior between members of the same sex or gender. It is equally one of the main categories of sexual orientation (the other two being bisexuality and heterosexuality) which refers to an enduring pattern of or disposition to experience sexual affection or romantic attractions primarily or exclusively to people of the same sex (Tell Weekly News Magazine, January, 2014).

Gay and Lesbian activists and their allies have been mounting test cases in various courts for years. In fact, in a landmark ruling, approved by the Vatican, Pope Francis said Roman Catholic Priests are allowed to bless same-sex union although such blessings does not make them a civil unions or wedded couples. Despite the above clause attached to the ruling, there has been controversy as to the real intention of the Pope and also because of different interpretations given to the Vatican ruling by people. TomashPeta, archbishop of Saint Mary in Astana, Kazakhstan, called the Papal stance on same-sex union a "great deception" (Mom, December 21, 2023). He maintains that any "effort to legitimize such blessings" will have "far-reaching and destructive consequences" (Mom, December 21, 2023). In consonance with Archbishop Peta, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria holds that "There is, therefore, no possibility in the Church of blessing same-sex unions and activities. That would go against God's law, the teachings of the Church, the laws of our nation and the cultural sensibilities of our people" (Mom, December 21, 2023). Malawian Bishops re-echoed this saying that "... for pastoral reasons, blessings ... for same-sex unions of any kind are not permitted in Malawi" (Mom, December 21, 2023).

Homosexual people are commonly termed lesbians for women and gay for men. Gay however is more generic to refer to both male and female homosexuals. By this understanding therefore, gay or homosexual marriage is a marriage that pursues partnership with a member of the same sex.

However, there have been some other twists to this whole concept of same sex because of the involvement of other people of divergent sexual orientation. The new dimension has now made same sex marriage a union between adults of the same sex. It could be between adults who are regarded as gays, lesbians, bisexual, and transsexual. In another sense, one of both partners may identify as gay or lesbian. What is obvious is that it is a union between people of the same sex. It is a union that is unconventionally contracted by people of the same sex with different orientations in sexuality.

In the context of our discourse on same-sex marriage, and throughout this paper, same-sex shall refer to two people of the same sex contracting a marriage. In this context, same-sex is not synonymous with gay, lesbian or homosexual, nor with bisexual, transgendered or transsexual, but "same-sex marriage" may, depending on the couple and the jurisdiction, refer to marriages between two adults from any of those groups, but of the same sex. Recently, the term "same-sex marriage" has been displacing "gay marriage" or "lesbian marriage" as the term is perceived as more value laden now, since it is involving more bisexuals and transsexual people.

### The Overview of Igbo Culture

The Igbo people are an ethnic group native to the southeastern part of Nigeria. They are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, with a rich cultural heritage that spans centuries. The exact origins of the Igbo people are not definitively known, but archaeological evidence suggests that they have been present in their current homeland for thousands of years. Theories about the migration patterns of the Igbo people vary, but it is generally believed that they migrated to their present-day location from the north and possibly from the Nri region. The Igbo society traditionally consisted of decentralized and autonomous communities. Each community had its own governing council, chief or king, and various age-grade associations. The Igbos were known for their republican system of governance, where decisions were made through a council of elders, and individuals had the opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process. The Igbo society was characterized by a mix of farming, trading, and craftsmanship. The Igbos were skilled farmers, cultivating crops like yams, cassava, and vegetables. Trade was a significant aspect of Igbo economic life, and long-distance trade routes connected Igbo communities with other regions in



Africa. The Igbos traditionally had a rich system of beliefs and practices. They worshiped a pantheon of deities and spirits, with a strong belief in a supreme deity known as Chukwu or Chineke. They also had a priestly class and sacred groves dedicated to various deities. The Nri Kingdom, in particular, was associated with religious and spiritual leadership. Today, the Igbo culture is a vibrant and dynamic blend of traditional practices and modern influences. The Igbo language, art, music, dance, and festivals continue to thrive. The masquerade tradition, with its colorful costumes and performances, is a notable aspect of Igbo cultural expression. The historical background of Igbo culture is diverse and reflects the resilience of a people who have navigated through various historical challenges while maintaining a strong sense of identity and cultural pride.

Among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, the institution of marriage was greatly regarded. Like in most other societies, marriage is believed to be as old as man. To the Igbo, it helped to propagate and perpetuate human life; it was revered and held sacrosanct. To them, "marriage represented the instrumentality for the realization, preservation, and the accentuation of the Igbo essence" (Nwoko, 2012a, p. 76). In fact, as Smith (2001) observed, the "stability and success of marriage remain embedded in webs of kinship and dependent upon fertility" (p. ). Among the Igbo, three different kinds of marriages exist, namely; heterosexual marriages, woman-to-woman marriages (the word is used this way because women were the only ones involved in same-sex marriages in Igboland), and Child marriage. While heterosexual marriage was the regular kind of marriage, involving an adult male and female, woman-to-woman marriages were common, but mostly contracted as a nonsexual union and a means of improvising the male child personality, with the inherent functions and responsibilities thereon in a patriarchal society. On the other hand, child marriages were often conducted, according to Uchendu (1965, p. 63), as the most common way of acquiring rights in women. According to tradition and practice amongst the Igbo communities, these three forms of marriage were acceptable and widely practiced in the pre-colonial, colonial times, and even a few decades after independence. The marriage rites and stages of these three forms of marriage were also the same, except that for child marriage, after the initial betrothal, the child bride was allowed to grow up to maturity before the traditional marriage rites were then observed.

### **Traditional Marriage Practices in Igbo Culture**

In human existence, every individual person, every family, every society has its peculiar way of life. Family is highly valued in Igbo culture. Extended families often live-in close proximity, contributing to a sense of community. Marriage is a significant social institution, involving elaborate ceremonies, customs and rituals. In Igbo culture, marriage is not just a union between two individuals but involves the merging of two families. Family and community play a crucial role in the entire process. Elders and extended family members often contribute to decision-making and provide guidance throughout the marriage process. Marriages were undertaken for very different reasons in different times and places. For example, in old Europe, marriages were made for dynastic reasons, to form alliances between families and for the production of heirs. Today Europeans have other perspectives - people prefer to marry for 'love', and some forgo marriage altogether. Likewise, in some cultures in pre-colonial and post-colonial Africa, marriages; be it woman to woman or opposite-sex marriages were often conducted out of family duty, most times for purposes of inheritance, and not so much motivated by love, or sexual orientation. Not that there is anything inherently wrong or right about 'loveless' marriages, they were the norm in most cultures of the world through most of history and are still popular today.

Among the Igbo of south eastern Nigeria, the institution of marriage is very important and the Igbos avoided an incestuous relationship hence most of the Igbo villages were exogamous. Although monogamy was the practice, yet polygamy was appreciated as a mark of greatness and high social status. Inter-marriage with neighbours, on the other hand, was encouraged as it enhanced trade and travels. In the pre-colonial period, distant traders and polygamists usually take care to select their wives from geographically strategic and important communities along their business routes. This was of great implication; by marriage, such merchants enjoyed acceptability in their father-in-law's clan, most significantly where the father-in-law was from a respectable and influential family that could guarantee security. Furthermore, the father-in-law's house provided accommodation and warehouse facilities which were otherwise non-existent in the pre-colonial Igbo land. However marriages in Igbo land were not restricted to adult males and females alone. To a large extent, marriages were contracted between



two females and between underage children till they grew up. For the latter, it was for various reasons; to ensure the continued friendship ties of their families, and to protect especially the girl bride from any future suitor(s).

Undoubtedly, marriage in the Igbo world view represented the instrumentality for the realization, preservation and the accentuation of the Igbo essence. The agency of this preservation was child birth; hence infertility was considered a peculiar harsh misfortune and sometimes a punishment for one's misdeed or disapproval of a particular union by the gods. Children were considered the ultimate blessing of all and the best product of any marriage (Columbia Encyclopedia). This was demonstrated in popular names such as Nwakaego, a child is treasured more than money; Akuakanwa, no wealth is worthier than a child, or Nwabugwu, a child is the greatest honour (Columbia Encyclopedia). It was a popular practice in many parts of Igbo land to honour women who successfully delivered ten or more children; they were rewarded with the Lolo title, a special celebration and rite that venerated their hips (Uchendu, 1965, p. 50).

Furthermore, marriages amongst the Igbo, like other Igbo groups, were considered the most legitimate for procreation. Hence, the major reason for marriage among others was to propagate and perpetuate human life; it was, therefore, revered and held sacrosanct since it conferred legitimacy to the union of the couple and the children thereof, both in the eyes of the living and the dead. This belief in the conferment of legitimacy on the children in a union by marriage and ownership of such children by the father (both biological and sociological) was the basis upon which the Igbo society considered any child born outside marriage as illegitimate and therefore, had no rights to inheritance amongst his kinsmen if the child was male. Consequently, teenage pregnancy was considered disrespectful to the family of the girl and a taboo against the earth goddess. This was the reason teenage pregnancy was avoided. A girl who gave birth in his father's house and outside marriage was considered wayward by society and this stigma affected her chances of getting married later on in life. She could only get married to an older man or an older widower and in recent times to an outsider (especially a person from another ethnic group). This was because no family of any young suitor would allow their son to bring such a stereotyped woman home as his bride.

Undoubtedly, marriage among the Igbo represented the foundation of the social structure of

society. Hence it reflected in the arts, music, and general cultural practices of the people. Marriage defined relationships for both the bride and the groom as well as for their offspring. Therefore, marriage was regarded as an obligation, a duty to society. A man who was ripe for marriage was considered fully responsible when he took a wife, while a man who remained unmarried even when he had passed the age of marriage was considered an *efulefu* (worthless person) among his kinsmen. If a man remained unmarried till death, he was buried without the traditional rites accorded his peers. On the other hand, marriage was the ultimate expectation of every "ripe" woman. From the age of eighteen to about 25, a woman was considered "ripe" for marriage.

Beyond this age, anxiety, and stigma set in not only for the woman but also for the whole family, especially the mother. The anxiety and stigma derived from the belief that females from good and respected families easily attracted suitors. To a large extent, a "ripe" yet unmarried female was seen as lacking good character, home training, or not from a good family. This was considered shameful and an indictment on the mother, who was expected to give her daughter the expected "home training".

Traditional marriage rites can be defined as the ceremonies surrounding marriage within a traditional setting according to the customary laws and tradition of the people involved. It involves series of negotiations, presentation of gifts, payments and in some cases divination. Brown and Forde assert that "No marriage was recognized as valid without fulfilling the customary conditions. Living together as "husband and wife" without performing the traditional marriage rites is not a recognized union" (p. 66). In fact, it is living in immorality, even contemporary society, in its seeming moral decline, and the church still recognize the importance of traditional marriage, which are mainly marriage rites, (even though they may not consent to some aspects of the rites as it was done in 18th to 19th centuries). The identity of an Igbo man lies in his custom and traditions and bringing same sex union with the help of situation ethics can't survive.

Some of the peculiar traditional marriage practices among the Igbo people are:

(1) *Iku aka* or *Ijuese* (marriage inquiry): When a young man finds a bride-to-be, he visits her immediate family alongside his father who introduces himself and their mission. The bride-to-be is invited and asked if she knew the young man



seeking to marry her. Her response determines what happens next.

(2) Seeking the consent of the bride-to-be's extended family (umunna): After this is done, the bride-to-be's family embark on inquiry into the family of their prospective in-law. They undertake a background check on the family's history of hereditary disease, bad behaviour, fertility, etc. This is a determinant of whether or not to proceed with the negotiation.

(3) Ime ego (bride price negotiation and payment): Satisfied with their findings, the prospective in-law's family is invited for the negotiation and payment of bride price. This is traditionally known as Ime ego isinwaanyi. The amount paid as bride price vary from community to community. However other gift items may make the money become huge. Equally, the bride-to-be's educational qualification and achievements may also affect the bride price. When this is done, a date is fixed for the wine-carrying.

(4) IgbaNkwuNwanyì and IduUlo (Wine-carrying ceremony): Igbankwunwaanyi and IduUlo is the last phase of traditional marriage practices in Igbo culture. The ceremony of Igbankwu is usually elegant and colourful with the bride and groom inviting their family and friends. The newlywed dress beautifully. In this ceremony, the bride is given palm wine by the father or eldest uncle (in a case where the father is deceased) to show the public the man she intends to spend the rest of her life with. She carries the wine, searches for the husband and when she finds him, she kneels and presents the wine to him. The husband accepts the wine and drinks from it. This symbolic act signifies the groom's acceptance of the woman as his wife. Afterwards, the bride's father or uncle as the case may be prays for the newlywed and bless their young family.

### Gender Roles and Norms

The Igbos considers the institution of marriage as foremost sacred and solemn institutions. This was so because of its interconnectedness with life and procreation as well as its acceptability and links with the world of the ancestors. Hence marriages were contracted not only amongst the living but also the dead, (in this case, the dead parents or guardians of the couple). Amongst the Igbo, the role of the parents in the union between couples in marriage was so important and ritually significant, especially the role of the father. Hence, even in a situation where the bride's father had been separated from the mother by any reason, or the fact that the bride had

grown far away from the father or in rare cases, a product of a single parent (in this case a single mother) during marriage ceremonies, the presence of the father, if alive, was ritually mandatory and of great significance: first, inheritance amongst the Igbo was patrilineal, therefore, culturally, the father owned the child. Secondly and resulting from the latter, the father had the final consent to any marriage proposal brought to his family. This arose from the fact that he was not only the head of his family but also represented the link between his family and the family's forebear. Third, women were not allowed to discuss issues relating to marriage proposals and bride price. In situations where the father of the bride was dead, the mother of any girl who received marriage proposals normally directed such suitors to the bride's most elderly uncles or male relatives as the case might be.

Even where these male relatives were not known to the single mother, she was culturally obligated to search for them. There must be a father figure to culturally legitimize the marriage. Culturally, these male relatives provided or were regarded as support and as a bulwark for their sister in case of any maltreatment later in the marriage by her husband. It was believed that the absence of the bride's male relatives could suggest that her in-laws were at liberty to maltreat her anytime they wanted since she did not have any male relative to defend or protect her.

While marriage qualified a man to be considered responsible amongst his kinsmen, it was also the first step to being considered an elder (other qualifications include age, a wealth of experience, the courage to speak the truth at all times, etc.). It was difficult to find an elder who was not married. Even when a man lost a wife to death, he was expected to have other wives, thanks to polygamy or re-marry if he had only one. A man ready for marriage was one who was considered economically capable of taking care of a woman, capable of shouldering responsibilities of both his family and his in-laws. Generally, amongst the Igbo, "the value of the bride price was usually determined by the township, social rank, and the personal qualities of the bride" (Afigbo, 1981, p. 136). In recent times, her level of education, institutions attended and profession all influenced the value of her bride price.

Men in traditional Igbo society assign certain responsibilities to men, such as farming, hunting, and leadership roles within the community. Men are often considered the primary breadwinners and are expected to provide for their families, they



are often involved in decision-making processes at the community level. While women traditionally take on domestic roles, including cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the household. In addition to their domestic responsibilities, women may also engage in farming and trading activities. This could be understood as division of labor for greater economic, social and political growth.

Elders, particularly the parents and other respected members of the community, play a significant role in the matchmaking process and the overall success of the marriage. Their blessings and approval are often sought, and they may offer advice and wisdom to the newlyweds. The Igbo culture values the extended family system, and the support of the extended family is considered essential for the success of a marriage. Marriages are seen as not just the union of two individuals but the integration of two families and their respective lineages.

#### No Room for Same-Sex in Igbo Culture

Igbo society is a patriarchal society; men are the heads of families. This is the major reason why wherever there is a gathering in Igboland, a man is asked *kedumakandi be gi? orkedumakandiulogi?* The question simply means how is your family? It keeps reminding men that they are regarded as *efuluefu* or *ofeke* (worthless human beings) until they fulfill marriage obligations. Family inheritance is shared among the male children of the family. The female children are excluded because when a female child is married out of the family, her position shifts from her father's family to that of her husband's family. Her position in her husband's family also depends on her bearing a male child for the husband. The implication of this is that a woman with no male child for her husband has no right of inheritance both in her father's and husband's house. This is why the birth of child brings joy and gladness to the family. However, this alone shows that the main idea of marriage in Igbo culture is for procreation and continuous protection of lineage. The deep-rooted culture of the Igbos has been the sole of their existence.

A culture where a man goes outside the community to marry a woman into his own community for the purpose of procreation, this literally means that marriage in Igbo culture is not the joining of two individuals but the joining of two families, communities for unity and pro-regression of the society. However, the role of every person in Igbo culture is well stipulated ranging from children to elders and one cannot take the form of

another; for instance, a female cannot be in the "Umunna" which is strictly for only males likewise the male who cannot join the "Umuada" which is for females only. The idea of two Igbo men or two Igbo women who are in love with each other or already in a sexual relationship coming together as one to live as one family is not only absurd but considered a taboo. Who will pay the bride price? Will an Igbo father collect money from a fellow man to take his son as a wife? Will an Igbo father take her daughter to pay the bride price of another girl to take her as her wife?

The above does not dispute or undermine the fact that women married women in Igbo land. Same-sex marriage among Igbo women was intrinsically for the purpose of procreation and preservation of lineage. Thus, Urama (2019) rightly asserts that:

Same-sex marriage among Igbo women solely is used to bridge the gap created by the challenges of the socially and culturally constructed gender roles with the aim of "male daughters" and "female husbands" becoming sons and husbands to wives for procreation and continuity of the family's lineage (p. 1).

Marriage between a woman and a woman in Igbo land was never for consummation or sexual gratification but to fill the void and absence of a male forebear. Urama (2019) further avers that "There is no erotic presentation of the sexual relationships between the "male daughters" and wives of "female husbands" and their lovers because in most cases the women are not allowed to choose their lovers" (p. 8).

#### Implications of Homosexuality and Same-Sex Marriage on the Children and Youth

Bearing in mind this insistence of homosexuals and their sympathizers, it is important to critically examine the implications of a law that may legalize same sex marriage in our immediate society, Nigeria in particular and Africa in general in future. The first implication will be on the family, the first and basic social unit of formation for the child, who may in future be a candidate for formation at any level. Growing up with same-gender parents leads to effects similar to what happens when children are raised by a single parent, rather than a heterosexual married. Former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger avers that:

The absence of complementarities in these unions (same sex) creates obstacles in the normal development of children who would be placed in the care of such persons. They would be deprived of the





experience of either fatherhood or motherhood. Allowing children to be adopted by persons living in such unions would actually mean doing violence to these children, in the sense that the condition of dependency would be used to place them in an environment that is not conducive to their full human development (Fitzgibbons, 2016).

Legalizing same-sex marriage would lead to the "indoctrination" of children. Some well publicized research reveal that children raised by same-sex couples face more problems than children raised by opposite-sex couples. A study by University of Texas researcher, Mark Regnerus, shows that children raised by at least one gay or lesbian parent had more problems later in life than children raised by heterosexual couples. The problems include poorer mental and physical health, poorer relationships with partners and lower incomes. If the children brought up in a family of same sex parents could be influenced and indoctrinated and are likely to face a lot of Physical, moral, psychological, mental and social problem, it will be difficult to have well-formed individuals or even vocations from such families. Worried about the decline of shared intact biological family due to rise in homosexuality, Mark Regnerus (2012) concluded his research stating that:

...Intact, biological mother/father families continues to shrink in the United States, as it has, this portends growing challenges within families, but also heightened dependence on public health organizations, federal and state public assistance, psychotherapeutic resources, substance use programs, and the criminal justice system (p. 766).

Further research by Sirota (2009) reveals that women raised by gay or biological fathers had difficulty with adult attachment issues: "(1) they were less comfortable with closeness and intimacy; (2) they were less able to trust and depend on others; and (3) they experienced more anxiety in relationships compared to the women raised by heterosexual fathers (and mothers)" (cited in Fitzgibbons, 2015). Children raised by gay parents are found to suffer attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder more than their counterparts raised by heterosexual couples. (Sullins, 2015, cited by Fitzgibbons, 2015).

In traditional African Societies, the child is not born for one family alone; he is born into a society where you may have both heterosexuals and homosexual families. Through peer group

influence and family interactions, there is a likelihood of children from heterosexual home to be friends to those from homosexual home. In this scenario, you cannot rule out indoctrination and influence from the children raised by homosexuals on those raised in a traditional family setting, who are likely going to be well integrated personalities and candidates for formation to the priesthood and religious life. If that is the case, it means that our traditional reference point for the recruitment of students will also be affected. This will make the work of formation more difficult not only for the formators, but also for the other students who are in danger of being further indoctrinated and influenced into the act.

If homosexual "marriage" is universally accepted as the present step in sexual "freedom," what logical arguments can be used to stop the next steps of incest, pedophilia, bestiality, and other forms of unnatural behaviors? Indeed, radical elements of certain subcultures are already advocating such aberrations. If same sex marriage is allowed to prevail in modern societies there is the likelihood that the advocacy for other forms of sexual aberrations as mentioned earlier may increase. This will spell doom for the wellbeing of the family and societal life. If individual and sectional interests are brought into the realm of sexual morality and family life, the very cord and bond of family life are likely to be broken and thrown overboard. Again, homosexuality has become the breeding ground for many dangerous diseases. Homosexuality is also a public health issue, not just a civil right issue. Some of these diseases such as Hepatitis B&C, Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS can be spread increasingly through this means. Therefore, for the protection of the sanctity of marriage, family life and the society, homosexuality should be shunned or at least, legally discouraged.

## II. Conclusion

In modern times, many scholars of various disciplines have joined in the call for the legalizing of homosexuality. Many have espoused same-sex marriage without due consideration of its impact on people's cultural heritage. Transversing the idea of marriage in Igbo culture, we come to the realization that the Igbo people understand marriage and the family unit as a fundamental for the survival of the community. Hence, the Igbo see marriage as a duty that every man and woman who has come of age must perform; a duty for oneself and for the community. Thus, it is the joining together of a man and a woman, a family and a family, a



community and a community; the purpose of which is to perpetuate oneself and the community by bringing forth offsprings who ensure such continuity. It is with this understanding of marriage that the idea of same-sex marriage sounds blizzard and is awkward for an average Igbo man. This being the case, the idea of same-sex marriage in the Western sense, is totally extraneous to the Igbo people. It is an aberration, a moral violation, a taboo and a violation of the child raised in such homes. This is because the child belongs to the society and must partake in perpetuating it. In Igbo land, every child is a social responsibility and every action, partaking to the life of that child affects the society both positively and negatively. The implications as well as the health hazards involved in the practice of same sex marriage leaves nothing to the imagination.

The vicious circle of the implications of same-sex marriage begs the question: should same-sex marriage become a universal practice? If the purpose of marriage is not tied to procreation as some advocates of same-sex marriage say, why do they go about adopting children produced in heterogeneous marriage? Also, if truly the homosexuals are particularly attracted to persons of the same gender, why do they dress like the opposite gender that doesn't elicit them? Why does a partner in a gay marriage dress and act like a woman and a partner in lesbian relationship dress and or act/ behave like a man? What would be the fate of our world should everyone practice same-sex marriage?

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