

FAMILY MEAL-TIME AS A PIVOT OF GROWTH OF THE FAMILY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The practice of family mealtime in Nigeria is undoubtedly skewed in favour of the entire family members. The study examines the issue of family meal time within Enugu Metropolis, with a view to unearthing the idea of a family having meals together at the same time and on the same table representing an ambiance of joy, communication, grace, and thanksgiving. It is a time when members of a family can sit down together and enjoy conversation, laughter, concentration, good health, listening, great digestion, calmness and conviviality. The study adopts descriptive/exploratory research design conducted among 150 sampled families, using self administered questionnaire. The findings of the study show the usefulness of family mealtime together in the face of globalization, economic meltdown and pressure of work. The study therefore, recommends that families should take time to sit down and enjoy meal-time with both family members and friends even during simple meals. Make mealtime a very pleasant experience, not a time for discipline or arguing about problems at school or work. Time spent together during mealtime in families will help children form positive attitudes about food, eating and create fond family memories that will last a lifetime.

Keywords: Family, Children, Mealtime, Behaviour, Work

Introduction

Challenge is a fact of life. Making adjustments in each life stage, coping with unexpected setbacks, and handling the daily stresses of life can turn a crisis into an opportunity for growth (Silliman, 2006:45). Despite changes in their structure, families remain the most basic unit of society. There is a critical need to use the collective strengths of individuals, communities, organizations, and governments to respond to the stresses faced by today's families. Today's families need support to build the resiliency necessary to meet life's challenges. There is encouraging evidence that research and resulting programs can contribute to the strength and resiliency of all families.

Resiliency is the ability to bounce back from stress and crisis. It is displayed in individuals as optimism, resourcefulness, and determination. Individuals, families, and communities demonstrate resiliency when they build caring support systems and solve problems creatively. Because individuals, families, and communities show resiliency in unique ways, there are no universal rules for success. Resiliency is not simply the ability to cope with everyday stress. Because stress is inevitable, those who work hardest to escape it may be most vulnerable to its effects (Black and Lobo, 2008). Resilient behaviour is especially critical for the most vulnerable children and families. Today's societal challenges require education and service programs that help counteract the impact of poverty, illness, substance abuse, and violence. Prevention and early intervention efforts help build coping skills that can reduce expensive and crisis-level services. Family resilience enables success, cohesion and support in times of trouble and crisis and can be developed and fostered at any time in the family life cycle (Black and Lobo, 2008).

Spending time together is vital for a family and promotes continuity and a stable family life. Time spent together can range from having family meals, doing chores together, running errands, and having fun. Sharing family time together has been shown to reduce the chances that children will get involved in substance abuse, smoking and early sexual activity that can put their mental and physical health at risk, particularly in adolescence. Unfortunately, family time appears to be dwindling due to increased parental demands, responsibilities and time strain (a phenomenon that includes the lack of spontaneity to respond to children's needs, fatigue, and inability to disconnect feelings from work) (Tuffs University Health and Nutrition, 1991). Effective ways to reduce time strain and increase family time include: family housekeeping activities, utilizing quality time to have meaningful communication, discussing future plans, or participating in fun learning activities.

The late Catholic Bishop of Enugu Diocese, Bishop Michael Ugwuja Eneja (2007) of blessed memory stated that family mealtime is a time of reconnection and recollection. Eating together is one of the best ways for families to stay connected to each other. Meals taken together allow for open family communication and the chance to share what has been going on with each other in a social, family centered environment. According to him communication is the key to healthy family relationship and the best time to do this is at the meal table. During his lifetime, he always ate with his priests and the entire household. He would prefer to go hungry to eating without his priests. That contributed to the healthy relationship between him and all who came in contact with him. Mealtime is a perfect time to show the family they are your priority. Positive relationships within the family are the most important factor that leads to resilience and meal time together is of essence.

Happiness is about inspiring the other family member to be all that he or she can be. The idea of a family having meals together at the same time and on the same table represents an ambiance of joy, communication, grace, and thanksgiving. It is a time when members of a family can sit down together and enjoy conversation, laughter, concentration, good health, listening, great digestion, calmness, and conviviality. Sitting across the table is where and when you can find out more about what your spouse's day is like and what the children like or dislike. Having this information can help one direct one's children toward positive activities and behaviour, show more understanding to one's spouse and reduce the likelihood of the children getting involved with alcohol, tobacco, and/or illegal drugs (Levine, 1992).

Families that eat together are more resilient and better to view challenges and crises with confidence and to view challenges as opportunities to grow, heal and strengthen their relationships. During mealtime, the parents should get into the habit of talking with the children. As one builds closer relationship with them when they are young, it will be easier for them to come to you when they have problems and enable you to become more sensitive to their mood changes. Family table talk plays a vital role in rearing children. Family mealtime is the time when the whole family is likely to be together when children learn moral values, absorb family culture, and develop as individuals (Gardarino, 1992). The importance of regular family activities to share ideas and find out "what's happening" is a great way for a parent to be involved, discuss rules, monitor activities and friends, and be a good role model. The benefits of eating together will last long after the meal ends, especially if one makes family mealtimes a regular activity.

Therefore, this paper is a response to studies conducted among 150 families within Enugu Metropolis, Eastern Nigeria. It evaluates the usefulness of family mealtime together in the face of globalisation, economic meltdown and pressure of work. It tries to seek how to make families resilient in the face of trauma and global influence. In the traditional African family, mealtime

dovetails to story time and studies have shown that eating together keeps the doors of communication open and the family united.

Brief History of Family Meal Table

For the Christians, our Lord Jesus Christ introduced the concept of family meal table with his apostles and left us with a very strong admonition to do it in His memory. Ever since then it has been a source of unity, love, companionship and communication in the families that practice it. One of the things the Lord has introduced is the concept of the family meal table. It should be a regular event where Dad directs the discussions with emphasis on God's love and provisions for the family and impressing these virtues and commands of God on his wife and children and guests as they sit in their house, around a meal, full of fellowship and love for one another.

Theoretical Orientation

Family mealtime in Nigeria can be explained from the functionalist perspective. Functionalism is one of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology. It has its origins in the works of Emile Durkheim, who was especially interested in how social order is possible or how society remains relatively stable. Functionalism interprets each part of society in terms of how it contributes to the stability of the whole society. Each part of society is functional for the stability of the whole society (Egbue & Edokobi, 2002). The different parts are primarily the institutions of society each of which is organised to fill different needs and each of which has particular consequences for the form and shape of the whole society. The different parts of the society, namely the family, school, church, government and economy perform various functions towards the maintenance, stability and survival of the social system (Igbo, 2003). In other words, functionalism views society as constantly striving to be at a state of equilibrium, which suggests that there is an inherent drive within human societies to cohere or stick together. Applying this theory to this study, most families that make use of family meal time experience stability and equilibrium, not through dictatorial mandate but rather because the social structure of societies encourages equilibrium. In a typical African family where the children are brought up under the guidance and influence of their parents, the practice of how to work together for the upkeep of the family in order to achieve a common goal is inculcated in them. From this perspective, disorganization in the system, such as deviant behaviour, leads to change because societal components must adjust to achieve stability. When one part of the system is not working or is dysfunctional, it affects all other parts and creates social problems, which lead to social change.

Benefits of Eating Together

Family Connectedness

Family connectedness which generates feelings of warmth, love, and caring from parents is consistently related to healthy youth development and a reduced risk for emotional distress, substance abuse, violence involvement, and early sexual involvement. The act of sharing a meal together on a regular basis is a major means of developing and keeping strong parent-child bonds. It eliminates unnecessary frictions and crisis thereby making the family more resilient (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1988).

Communication

Regular conversation in a natural setting helps family members learn the give-and-take of effective communication. Some of the communication benefits associated with family meals provide:

- A regular time to meet each day and talk with each other about thoughts and feelings
- An opportunity to learn how to ask and respond to questions
- A chance to share stories and ideas from each family member's experiences
- A time to practice manners, listening and taking turns in conversation

In the study conducted, the respondents believed that the primary benefit of eating together was strengthening the family by providing opportunities for communication and building relationships. Other studies report similar perceptions on the part of parents. Not only do parents want to feel attached to their kids, kids want this too. Oprah Winfrey conducted a "Family Dinner Experiment" in 1993. Five families volunteered to accept the challenge to eat dinner together every night for a month, staying at the table for a half-hour each time. As part of the experiment, all family members kept journals to record their feelings about the experience. At first, sharing meals was a chore for many families and the minutes at the table dragged on. But, by the end of the month, the families were happy and planned to continue dining together most evenings if not every night. When the families appeared on the Oprah Winfrey Show at the end of the experiment, the greatest surprise to the parents was how much their children treasured the dependable time with their parents at the table.

Better School Performance

Family meals appear to give children an edge in the classroom. In a 1994 Louis Harris and Associates survey of 2000 high school seniors, students took a test to measure their academic ability and answered a list of personal questions. Students who regularly ate dinner with their families four or more times a week scored better than those who ate family dinners three or fewer times a week. These results crossed racial lines and were a greater indicator than whether the child was in a one- or two-parent family.

In some of our analytical tests, it was found that children aged 7 to 11 who did well on school achievement tests spent a large amount of time eating meals and snacks with their families. Their achievement was not affected by their mother's employment status, full-time, part-time or not employed. Preschoolers had better language skills when the family ate together. Although the researchers believed that there was nothing magical about mealtime, it nevertheless served as the best opportunity for children to have longer conversations with parents and to hear words they rarely would hear other times of the day. The researchers believed that extended conversations provided young children with a chance to think, and that enhanced their linguistic development (Stanek, Abbot and Cramer, 1996).

Ability to Copy Better Attitudes from Parents

When you cook and serve meals at home, you have more control over the quality and quantity of your family's food choices. Kids tend to mimic their parents' attitudes about foods (Garbarino, 1992). Children would not perceive healthy eating as important if it is not something that they see you doing. Eat and serve sensible portion sizes and be open to trying new foods and new ways of cooking foods and the children will copy these attitude. Family meals should be dynamic with exchange of ideas, conversation and feelings. Turn off the television, the video games and the computer. Mealtime is a

wonderful opportunity to strengthen family ties and pass on family cultural traditions. Encourage your kids to help prepare meals, set the table and help with dishes.

Better Adjustment

Marino and Butkus (2005) in a study that followed 65 children over 8 years in Washington State University looked at activities that fostered healthy child development most: play, story time, events with family members and other factors. Family dinners won out. Well-adjusted adolescents and frequent family meals are linked. According to psychologists Bowden and Zeisz in a 1997 survey of 527 teens aged 12 to 18, the teens who were best adjusted ate meals with adults in their family for an average of 5.4 days a week, compared to 3.3 days for teens who didn't show good adjustment. The well-adjusted teens were less likely to be drug addicts or be depressed and were more motivated at school and had better relationships. The less well-adjusted teens were more likely to be involved with drugs, be depressed, exhibit difficulty getting along with others and have trouble in school. Adjustment was correlated more to shared meals than to any other factor including gender, age or family type. Bowden said that mealtimes were a sort of "marker" for other positive family attributes and seemed to play an important role in helping teens cope well with the stresses of adolescence.

Dr. Steve Wolin, co-author of the "Resilient Self," a practicing psychiatrist and a professor at the Family Research Center, George Washington University, claims that even if the family has serious problems, such as alcoholism, eating dinner together is still important for family structure. He asserts that children of alcoholics who had family dinners together were less likely to become alcoholics themselves. Despite potential problems, the stability and communication at the table remain important for kids. He advised establishing rules for dinnertime to avoid conflict, such as not discussing school or interpersonal problems and saving conflicts for another time and place.

Better Nutrition

Mothers in the Nutrition Education Network of Washington's focus groups said, "When we eat together, we eat better". Cullen and Baranowski (2000) found that students in grades 4 to 6 who ate dinners with their families consumed more vegetables, more fruit and juice, and less soda. When children ate with their families, they used more low fat practices (such as trimming fat from meat and using low fat foods at meals). Numerous studies have overwhelmingly pointed to the fact that families who eat together have better overall nutrition. In turn, this means they also have a lower risk of many diseases and of being overweight or obese (Tufts University Health and Nutrition, 1997).

In a Harvard study, children who ate family dinners most days consumed more fruits and vegetables and less fried foods, saturated fats and trans fats and soda than children who ate dinner with family members. Children who ate dinners with family members most days had substantially higher intake of dietary fiber, calcium, iron, foliate, and vitamins B-6, B-12, C and E. No differences were found for whole grain foods, whole dairy products, red and processed meat or snack foods. An interesting finding was that children who ate family dinners more frequently had more healthy eating habits than food eaten away from home. The researchers found that the effects of family dinners were similar for both younger and older children. Their results didn't change after adjusting for physical activity, hours of television watched, household income or mother's employment. Similar findings have been found in other studies (Gillman, Rifas-Shiman, Frazier, Rockett, Camargo, Field, Berkey and Colditz, 2000).

Help Your Kids Develop Language Skills

When it comes to family events, family dinners were the most important in contributing to children's language development, according to a Harvard University study. "When there is more than one adult at the table, it tends to make talk richer. Topics are established by adult interest and can be extremely valuable opportunities for children to learn," said Dr. Catherine Snow, professor of education at Harvard and the lead researcher of the study (American Dietetic Association, 2008).

Obstacles to Family Mealtimes

Conflicting schedules

Several studies on work, social/personal activities, kids' activities and community activities supported the view of parents that complained about the hectic lifestyle that reduces time spent for family dinners. The 1996 Washington state focus group study of Food Stamp families also found that varied schedules of family members interfere most with family meals, especially with adolescents (Miller, McClusky-Fawcett & Irving, 1993). But with today's busy schedules, maybe we can make some adjustments by letting breakfast the family meal or start a new tradition of eating a small evening snack together.

No Time to Cook

With already busy schedules, parents feel they don't have time to cook dinner. A Fast Food Centre in Enugu Metropolis, CRUNCHIES, reported that take-out food was used by more than a quarter (29%) of families for the evening meal once a week but 20% said they used carryout twice a week and 12% said three times a week. The survey found that the meal preparer spends an average of 35 minutes fixing dinner. That survey also stated that about 30 minutes is spent at the table.

Child nutrition expert Elyn Satter says that she often gets resistance when she presses for family meals. People tell her that they just don't have enough time to shop and cook. Her response is that eating well is one of life's important issues, and parents need to be willing to devote time and energy to it.

Don't know how to cook

Because of the widespread availability of convenience foods, ready-prepared foods and quick serve restaurants, cooking is no longer a needed skill.

Would rather watch television

About half of all families always have the television on in the background during dinnertime, and about a third of the families usually ate in front of the television. This survey found that some parents actually preferred eating in front of the television to eating at the table with their families.

Unfortunately, today's family meal table is all but missing from the home. We have sacrificed our family table for all manner of activities and way too often, our meals are situated around the blue glow of the family television. Conversation is limited to pass the salt while the glare of TV fills the room.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In order to be successful, family dinners must be enjoyable for you, for your spouse, for your kids. If everyone is tense, irritable or unhappy, there won't be a lot of conversation, bonding or other

benefits. So, in order to ensure that family dinners are beneficial, be careful of what you speak of. "It's not the time to talk about cleaning their room or curfews, says Susan Moores, a registered dietitian. Instead focus on open-ended questions about things your kids are interested in or things that will get them talking. Also, stay away from the "clean your plate" mentality. Allow kids to serve themselves and just take a little bit. Forcing a child to eat everything on his plate will teach him to ignore his body's cues that he's full. Remember that it's OK (and probably necessary) to keep things simple. Have grilled or baked chicken with a salad, or throw meat and veggies in a crock-pot in the morning for a warm meal after work. You can also try meals that your kids can help prepare, like indomie noodles or individual soups they top themselves. Remember also that you can still sit down for a family meal even on those nights when you do order pounded yam or other take-out food.

The bottom line is, do what works for you, whether that's cooking extra meals on the weekend to serve during the week, preparing meals in the morning or eating simpler meals, like sandwiches and soup, sometimes so that you are able to sit down and enjoy the meal too. At the family meal table, never keep saying, "Right, right..." when your child or spouse is talking. Once in a while say, "I agree. That's so exciting," makes the dialogue such that the person talking to you feels valued. You'll be remembered with positive visual imageries when the family dinner is remembered by your child 50 years later, with a pleasant smile. You'll be treated by family members exactly how you treat them with words, gestures, and that smile with a glint of recognition of the good in your children and spouse in your eyes.

Most families do value shared mealtime and are frustrated with their hectic lifestyles that prevent them from cooking and eating together enjoyably. While eating together nightly may be a rigid and unrealistic goal, especially for families with teens, a target of 4 or 5 times a week would provide the benefits known so far. The data suggest that children in families that eat together 3 times a week or less are more prone to trouble in school, poorer diets, behavioral problems and more. Simply sitting at a common table does not automatically mean that the family dinner is nutritious or that the family members communicate well. To be a positive experience, some families may benefit from meal planning advice and tips for conversation. In rare cases, perhaps skilled guidance by a therapist would be warranted if an overly controlling parent may be driving the child toward an eating disorder. Certainly there is room for research on the impact of family mealtime on a child's nutritional status, subsequent eating behavior, emotional health, sense of attachment, academic performance and so on. Virtually no studies have looked at the impact of family mealtime on parents' physical and emotional health.

We should take the time to sit down and enjoy it with our family and friends even during simple meals. Make mealtime a very pleasant experience, not a time for discipline or arguing about problems at school or work. Time spent breaking bread with friends and family will help our children form positive attitudes about food and eating and create fond family memories that will last a lifetime. The simple practice of making a menu each week will not only help you provide some structure to the family dinner hour, but will also save you a lot of money on your food budget. A simple thing like keeping a running grocery list on the fridge will help you avoid last minute trips to the grocery store. Your family will be eating healthier and you won't be as stressed out because you know what's for dinner Tuesday night. Menus aren't just for restaurants. They deserved a special place of honor on every family's fridge door.

It is our job to instigate this type of conversation. We have to lead the family, be the role model, show character of the family and prepare in advance some question that are fitting for the great meal table. Ask questions that will encourage conversation such as:

- What was the most interesting thing that happened to you today?
- What did you do today that showed (insert character trait the family is studying) you are a good person?
- What are you reading at the moment?
- What should we do for our family vacation?
- Discuss the current character trait we are studying –
 - Review the definition and opposite trait
 - Discuss application in the family and for the individual
 - Discuss the rewards that are ours when we choose character
 - Offer praise for good character seen (in the family, in books, in movies, in other people)
- What could I help you with tomorrow?
- What has God been saying to you?

We can make charts and hang them beside our dining room table. This is to help on those days when tiredness abounds and we do not know how to turn it to edifying conversation. With this, there will be a healthy balance between the structure and flexibility in the family meal table, meaning that the family meal may be structured but the activities during the meal flexible. This will inadvertently make the family resilient to all the pressures and crisis we are facing in the world today.

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Dec 9, 2018 - Want a balanced Nigerian food time table for a family or students? Here's a meal plan and detailed healthy Food timetable for a week. I can't wait to get up from bed. No, I'm serious. There are plenty of things I need to do during the day. One of the main reasons why I get. Honolulu MedSpa Healthy & Delicious. Balanced Meal Plan. Balanced Meals. Balanced Diet. Nigeria Food. Spinach Bake. Childrens Meals. Family Meal Planning. Breakfast Lunch Dinner. Home Food. Family Meal Time. More exercises available: Exercise 4 Allergies. Exercise 4 Citizen Scientists. Exercise 4 Cooking. Exercise 4 Family Meal Time. Exercise 4 Medical Gadgets. Exercise 4 Reducing Noise Pollution. Exercise 4 Shipwrecked. Exercise 4 Travel Writing. When learning vocabulary, especially helpful are exercises that are focussed on a theme or topic as these provide word retention practice so you can be confident to read, write, speak and listen successfully. Food and Drink Exercises and Puzzles. Here you can find more ways to practice the sport topic with various activities. Family Meal Times The family meal time is one of the most valuable routines to establish in the life of a family. Research has proved that children who eat at least one meal a week with their families benefit greatly in terms of social skills and acceptance of shared responsibilities. They learn simply and directly through their own experience, the importance of family interactions and the value of close friendship, support and loyalty. The meal should be quite a tasty and popular one as an inducement to keep the kids away from computers and TV sets! It is important that shared meals should not be the setting for trying to deal with family disputes. There will always be arguments from time to time " even in the happiest and closest families.