

The Erosion of the Extended Family System: Social Disintegration in Cross River State Communities

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Abstract

The extended family system has long been the foundation of social organization in Cross River State communities, providing economic support, cultural transmission, child socialization, and care for the elderly. However, rapid urbanisation, economic pressures, modern education, and the influence of Western values have led to a significant erosion of this traditional structure. This study examines the erosion of the extended family system in Cross River State communities, with particular focus on its causes, manifestations, and societal consequences. Using a descriptive approach and relevant literature, the paper explores how the shift from extended to nuclear family arrangements has affected kinship ties, communal solidarity, cultural continuity, and social welfare in the region. The findings reveal that while the nuclear family model offers benefits such as economic efficiency, reduced household conflict, and greater personal autonomy, its rise has also contributed to the weakening of traditional support

systems. Key implications include the decline of indigenous language and cultural values, increased vulnerability of the elderly and orphans, greater burden on schools and government institutions, and rising cases of youth delinquency and social disconnection. The study further highlights how technology and community institutions can be leveraged to redefine kinship in a modern context. The paper concludes that the solution is not to reject modernization but to intentionally redesign the extended family system to fit contemporary realities. Through cultural education, stronger community institutions, supportive government policy, and a hybrid family model, Cross River communities can preserve core African values of solidarity and mutual care while adapting to modern demands. The study recommends collaboration among families, schools, religious bodies, and government to ensure that development does not come at the cost of social cohesion.

Keywords: Extended family, System, Social disintegration.

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Introduction

The family is universally recognised as the most fundamental unit of human society. It is within the family that individuals first learn values, norms, language, and social roles that guide their behaviour throughout life. In African societies, and particularly in Cross River State, Nigeria, the family has historically extended beyond the immediate parents and children to include grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and other relatives who share social and economic responsibilities [1]. This structure, known as the extended family system, was not merely a residential arrangement but a social institution that regulated relationships, allocated resources, and ensured the continuity of cultural practices.

In traditional Cross River communities among the Efik, Ejagham, Bekwara, Yakurr, and other ethnic groups, the extended family was the centre of community life. Compounds were built to accommodate several related households, and daily activities such as farming, cooking, childcare, and rituals were carried out collectively [2]. Elders served as custodians of history and morality, while younger members were socialised into communal values of respect, solidarity, and mutual aid. Land was often held communally, and major life events such as birth, marriage, and death were managed through the collective effort of kin [3]. In this context, the extended family functioned as a welfare system, an educational institution, and a cultural repository all at once.

However, the last three decades have witnessed a profound transformation in family structures across Cross River State. The extended family system is

gradually giving way to the nuclear family model, which consists of parents and their biological children living independently. This shift is most visible in urban centres such as Calabar, Ugep, Ogoja, and Ikoma, where housing, employment, and lifestyle patterns no longer support large kinship households [4]. Even in rural areas, the influence of the extended family is weakening as young people migrate for education and work, and as new values emphasising individualism take root.

Several interrelated factors account for this erosion. First, rural-urban migration has significantly altered household composition. With limited job opportunities in villages, many youths move to cities in search of better prospects. Urban housing is expensive and designed for small households, making it difficult to accommodate extended relatives [5]. As a result, migrants often live alone or with their immediate family, maintaining only occasional contact with relatives back home.

Second, Western education and Christianity have introduced new ideals about marriage, child-rearing, and personal autonomy. Schools teach students to pursue individual goals and careers, while many churches promote the nuclear family as the biblical ideal [6]. These institutions, which were once aligned with extended kinship, now encourage independence from extended obligations.

Third, economic pressure has made it increasingly difficult to sustain extended family responsibilities. With rising inflation, unemployment, and the monetization of social services, individuals struggle to meet the needs of their own household, let alone those of nephews, cousins, or aging parents [5]. The

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traditional expectation that “*family must help family*” is being renegotiated in light of financial realities.

Fourth, globalisation and social media have exposed Cross River youths to lifestyles that prioritise self-expression, privacy, and personal achievement over communal obligations [7]. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook celebrate individual success stories and portray extended family demands as outdated. This has contributed to a shift in value orientation, where many young adults now see extended kinship ties as a burden rather than a source of support [8].

The consequences of this transformation are the subject of intense debate. On one side, scholars and commentators argue that the decline of the extended family represents progress. They contend that the nuclear family is better suited to modern economic conditions. It allows for more efficient allocation of resources, reduces conflicts that often arise in large households, and aligns with the demands of formal employment and urban living [8]. From this perspective, Cross River communities are simply adapting to global trends, just as families in Europe, America, and other parts of Africa have done [9].

On the other side, many cultural analysts view the erosion as a form of social disintegration. They point to growing problems such as elder neglect, as older people in villages are left without caregivers while their children live in cities [10]. There is also concern about cultural loss. Indigenous languages such as Efik, Ejagham, and Bekwara are no longer being transmitted effectively because children spend less time with grandparents and extended relatives [3]. Furthermore, the breakdown of extended ties has

weakened traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution, childcare, and mutual support during crises. Some studies have linked this to increased youth vulnerability, including cultism, substance abuse, and delinquency, as young people lack the supervision and guidance that extended kin once provided [7].

What makes the Cross River context particularly important is the role the extended family played in preserving cultural heritage. Festivals such as the Calabar Carnival, Leboku, and Ekpe rituals were not just community events but family affairs, organised and transmitted through kinship networks. Proverbs, folktales, and traditional governance systems were passed down within families. If these networks continue to weaken, there is a real risk that core aspects of Cross River identity will be lost within a generation [3].

At the same time, it would be simplistic to conclude that the extended family is disappearing entirely. Technology is creating new forms of kinship. WhatsApp groups, mobile money transfers, and video calls allow family members to maintain connections across distances [6]. Some families are redefining “*extended*” to mean emotional and financial support rather than co-residence. This suggests that what is happening may be a transformation rather than a total collapse.

Given these complexities, this paper seeks to examine the erosion of the extended family system in Cross River State communities through a conceptual lens. It does not rely on primary data collection but draws on existing literature to analyse the causes, evaluate the implications, and explore possible ways forward. The

central question guiding this discussion is: Does the decline of the extended family represent progress toward modernity, or does it signal social disintegration that threatens the cohesion and cultural identity of Cross River communities? To answer this, the paper will first clarify key concepts and present a theoretical framework. It will then analyse the factors driving the change, assess both the positive and negative implications, and finally propose strategies for redefining extended family ties in a way that preserves core values while accommodating modern realities.

Ultimately, the goal is to contribute to the ongoing conversation about family, culture, and social change in Nigeria. As Cross River State continues to urbanise and integrate into the global economy, understanding how family structures are evolving will be critical for policymakers, community leaders, and families themselves who are navigating the tension between tradition and modernity.

Conceptual clarification

The discussion on the erosion of the extended family system in Cross River State communities requires a clear understanding of the key concepts involved. This is necessary because terms like “*extended family*,” “*nuclear family*,” and “*traditional values*” are often used loosely in everyday conversation, but they carry specific social meanings that shape how we interpret the changes taking place. In the context of this paper, these concepts are examined within the cultural and social realities of Cross River State, where kinship has historically played a central role in organising community life.

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The extended family system refers to a kinship structure that goes beyond the immediate parents and children to include grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and other relatives who maintain close social and economic ties. In traditional Cross River societies such as the Efik, Ejagham, Bekwara, and Yakurr, the extended family was the basic unit of social organisation. Members often lived in the same compound or within the same village and shared responsibilities for farming, child-rearing, conflict resolution, and welfare support.

The oldest male typically served as the head, and major decisions regarding land, marriage, and community matters were made collectively. This arrangement was built on the principle of reciprocity, where those with more resources supported those with less, and where children were raised not only by their biological parents but by the entire kinship network. The extended family therefore performed multiple functions: it provided economic cooperation, offered social security for the vulnerable, transmitted cultural values, and served as the first mechanism for dispute resolution [1,2]. In this sense, the extended family was more than a household. It was a social institution that ensured survival, cohesion, and the continuity of cultural practices.

In contrast, the nuclear family system consists of a husband, wife, and their biological or adopted children living as an independent household. This model emphasises autonomy, privacy, and the ability of the couple to make decisions without interference from extended relatives. The rise of the nuclear family in Cross River State is closely linked to urbanisation, formal education, and wage employment. In urban centres like Calabar, housing is designed for small

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families, and the cost of living makes it difficult to support extended dependents. As a result, many professionals and young couples now live separately from their kin and focus primarily on their immediate household needs such as rent, feeding, and school fees. The nuclear family allows for greater mobility and efficiency, since couples can relocate for jobs or opportunities without the burden of a large kinship group. However, it also reduces the communal safety net that the extended system provided. Support during illness, bereavement, or financial crisis is no longer automatic, and individuals must rely more on personal savings or formal institutions [4,8]. The nuclear family therefore represents a shift from collective responsibility to individual responsibility. Closely tied to both family structures are the traditional values that guided Cross River families for generations. These values were not written down but were taught and reinforced through daily interaction within the extended family. One of the most important values was communalism, the belief that the well-being of the individual was linked to the well-being of the group. This was evident in how people contributed to marriages, funerals, and community projects.

Another core value was respect for elders, who were regarded as custodians of wisdom and culture. Elders mediated disputes, told stories, and ensured that younger generations learned the language, proverbs, and customs of their people. Collective child-rearing was also central. Any adult in the community could correct a child, and children grew up with multiple role models within the kinship network. This reduced delinquency and ensured that values were consistently reinforced. Mutual aid and solidarity

were equally important. During times of hardship, family members contributed money, food, and labour so that no one was left to suffer alone.

Finally, cultural transmission took place informally through storytelling, participation in festivals, and observation of rituals. All of these values were sustained because the extended family provided constant contact between generations [3,5]. With the gradual shift toward nuclear families, these traditional values are being tested. Privacy and individual rights are now emphasised more than communal obligations. Many young people see extended family demands as a burden, and the time spent with elders and relatives has reduced significantly. While this reflects adaptation to modern economic and social realities, it also raises concerns about what is being lost. The erosion of the extended family is therefore not just a structural change in household composition. It is also a value change that affects how people relate to one another, how culture is passed down, and how communities maintain social cohesion [6,7].

Factors driving the erosion of the extended family system

The extended family system in Cross River State did not collapse overnight. Its erosion has been gradual and driven by a combination of economic, social, cultural, and technological forces. These factors have interacted to reshape how families in Efik, Ejagham, Bekwara, Yakurr, and other communities organise themselves. While some of these changes reflect adaptation to modern realities, they have collectively weakened the structures that once held extended

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kinship together. This section examines five major factors responsible for the decline.

Urbanisation and rural-urban migration

One of the most significant drivers of change has been the movement of people from rural villages to urban centres. Cities like Calabar, Ugep, and Ogoja offer better educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and employment opportunities that are largely absent in rural areas. As a result, many young adults migrate to cities in search of better livelihoods. Urban housing, however, is expensive and designed for small households. A single-room apartment or a two-bedroom flat cannot accommodate uncles, cousins, and ageing parents the way a traditional compound could. This physical constraint forces migrants to live with only their spouse and children, thereby breaking the residential pattern of the extended family. Even when migrants succeed economically, the distance makes it difficult to participate in daily family activities such as farming, childcare, and communal meetings back in the village. Over time, these physical separations weaken emotional and social bonds, and the extended family gradually becomes a network maintained only during major events like funerals and festivals [11].

Western education and religious influence

The introduction of Western education and Christianity has also played a major role in reshaping family values in Cross River State. Schools teach students to pursue personal goals, career advancement, and individual achievement. The curriculum emphasises self-reliance and critical thinking rather than communal obligation. Similarly,

many Pentecostal and orthodox churches preach the nuclear family as the ideal Christian home. Sermons often encourage couples to prioritise their spouse and children over extended relatives, and to set boundaries that protect the privacy of the nuclear unit. Traditional practices such as polygamy, bride-price negotiations involving large kin groups, and communal landholding are sometimes discouraged from the pulpit. As generations pass through schools and churches, they internalise these ideals and carry them into their own homes. Consequently, the authority of elders and the expectation to cater for extended kin lose their force, and the nuclear model becomes normalized [12].

Economic pressure and cost of living

Economic hardship has made it increasingly difficult to sustain the financial demands of the extended family. In the past, subsistence farming and communal labour made it possible to feed and support many people within one household. Today, with monetization of goods and services, every expense must be paid in cash. School fees, hospital bills, rent, and transportation costs have risen sharply, while wages and job opportunities have not kept pace. In this context, many individuals can barely meet the needs of their own children. The expectation to pay school fees for a nephew, support an aunt's medical treatment, or contribute to a cousin's wedding becomes a heavy burden. To cope, people begin to limit their responsibilities to their immediate household. This shift is not necessarily due to selfishness, but to economic survival. The result, however, is that the mutual aid system that defined the extended family is gradually replaced by self-

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contained nuclear units that operate independently [13].

Influence of social media and global culture

Digital technology and global media have accelerated the erosion by introducing new lifestyles and value systems. Through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, young people in Cross River are constantly exposed to images of individual success, luxury, travel, and personal freedom. These platforms celebrate independence and often portray extended family obligations as outdated or stressful. Influencers and celebrities promote the idea of “*building your own brand*” and “*cutting off toxic relatives*.” This content shapes the aspirations of youths who now see marriage and career as personal projects rather than communal affairs. In addition, global television shows and movies normalize small-family living, dating, and decision-making without elder consultation. Over time, these media messages create a cultural gap between older and younger generations. While elders still value communalism, youths increasingly adopt individualistic orientations that are incompatible with extended kinship expectations [14].

Changing value orientation and individualism

Finally, there has been a fundamental shift in how people think about family and responsibility. The traditional value of communalism is being replaced by a growing emphasis on personal autonomy and privacy. Many young adults now believe that adults should be responsible for themselves and that parents should focus only on their own children. There is also

greater emphasis on romantic love and companionate marriage, rather than marriages arranged or approved by extended kin. Women, who were traditionally expected to care for in-laws and extended relatives, now pursue careers and assert more independence in household decisions. Men also feel less pressure to be the “*breadwinner for the entire clan*.” This change in mindset means that even when people have the resources to help extended relatives, they choose not to, because they no longer see it as a moral obligation. Individualism therefore acts as both a cause and a consequence of the erosion: as the extended family weakens, people become more individualistic, and as people become more individualistic, the extended family weakens further [15]. It is worth saying that the erosion of the extended family system in Cross River State is not caused by a single factor. It is the product of urban migration, educational and religious change, economic realities, global media influence, and a shift in values toward individualism. Together, these forces have redefined what “*family*” means and how responsibilities are distributed. The next section will examine whether this transformation should be interpreted as progress or as a form of social disintegration.

The erosion as a sign of progress

While many scholars lament the decline of the extended family system, another perspective views the shift as a necessary adaptation to modern life. From this viewpoint, the movement toward nuclear family arrangements in Cross River State communities represents progress. It reflects how families are reorganising themselves to meet the demands of education, employment, mobility, and

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personal development in a changing society. The erosion is therefore not only a loss, but also a transformation that has created new opportunities for individuals and households.

- i. **Promotion of economic efficiency and personal autonomy:** The nuclear family allows for more efficient management of resources. In an extended household, income is often stretched to cater for many dependents, including siblings, cousins, and ageing relatives. This creates financial strain and reduces the ability of parents to invest in their own children. With the nuclear model, couples can focus their earnings on feeding, housing, healthcare, and education for their immediate family. This leads to better planning, savings, and upward mobility. More importantly, it promotes personal autonomy. Adults can make decisions about career, residence, and lifestyle without seeking approval from a large kinship group. Young professionals in Calabar, for example, can accept job transfers or pursue further studies without the burden of negotiating with extended relatives. This independence is a key feature of modern life and is seen as a sign of maturity and self-determination [16].
- ii. **Reduction in household conflict and overdependence:** Large extended households often experience conflicts over authority, resources, and responsibilities. Disputes arise between in-laws, between co-wives, or between elders and younger members over how decisions should be made. The presence of many adults in one compound can also create tension regarding the discipline of children and sharing of domestic

work. By moving to nuclear arrangements, many of these sources of conflict are eliminated. Couples have more privacy and control over their home. Additionally, the nuclear system reduces overdependence. In the past, some able-bodied adults relied on extended relatives for food, money, and housing without contributing. The shift to smaller households encourages individuals to be self-reliant and to take responsibility for their own welfare. This change aligns with the demands of a market economy where productivity and personal effort are rewarded [17].

- iii. **Better focus on child development and education:** Parents in nuclear families can give more attention to fewer children. Resources that would have been distributed among many relatives can now be channelled into quality education, healthcare, and extracurricular activities. Children in nuclear households often have access to better nutrition, private schools, and learning materials because parents are not financially burdened by extended obligations. There is also more direct parental supervision. Mothers and fathers are present to monitor homework, guide moral development, and build closer emotional bonds with their children. In Cross River urban areas, this has contributed to improved academic performance and exposure to global opportunities. For many parents, this focused investment in children is the greatest benefit of the nuclear family model [18].
- iv. **Adaptation to Modern Housing, Work, and Social Structures.** Modern economic life is structured around the nuclear family. Work

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schedules, school calendars, and housing designs all assume a small household unit. Government policies on housing loans, tax, and social services are also designed for parents and children, not for large kinship groups. In Cross River cities, landlords prefer tenants with small families, and estate developments are built with two- or three-bedroom flats. Employment in banks, schools, and corporations requires mobility and long working hours that are incompatible with daily extended family obligations. When the nuclear model is fully adopted, families are able to fit into these modern structures without friction. This adaptation is not a rejection of culture, but a practical response to how society is organized today. It shows that families are capable of evolving while still maintaining their core identity [19].

- v. Encouragement of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. The erosion of the extended family has also created space for greater gender equality. In traditional extended settings, women were expected to serve the entire kinship group: cooking for in-laws, caring for nieces and nephews, and seeking permission for major decisions. The nuclear family reduces these demands. Women can negotiate roles with their spouse directly and have more time to pursue education and careers. Many women in Cross River now run businesses, hold professional jobs, and make financial decisions independently because they are not tied to the daily demands of an extended household.

The erosion as social disintegration

While the shift to nuclear families has brought some benefits, many scholars and community leaders argue that the rapid decline of the extended family system in Cross River State represents a form of social disintegration. From this perspective, the breakdown is not simply a structural change but a loss of the social, cultural, and moral frameworks that held communities together. As extended kinship ties weaken, the institutions that depended on them are also collapsing, leaving gaps that modern systems have not fully replaced.

- i. Weakening of Cultural Transmission and Indigenous Identity. In traditional Cross River societies, the extended family was the primary vehicle for passing down language, history, and customs. Grandparents and elders taught children Efik, Ejagham, Bekwara, and other local dialects through daily conversation, storytelling, and participation in rituals. With children now raised in nuclear homes in cities, often with caregivers who do not speak the indigenous language, this intergenerational transfer is breaking down. Many young people in Calabar can no longer speak their mother tongue fluently or understand proverbs, taboos, and traditional rites. Festivals like Leboku and Ekpe are still celebrated, but their meaning is diluted because the family context that gave them significance is missing. When the family stops being the custodian of culture, the community risks losing its identity within a generation [20].
- ii. Neglect of the Elderly and Loss of Gerontocratic Values. The extended family traditionally ensured that the elderly were cared for with dignity. Elders lived with relatives, received food,

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medicine, and companionship, and were consulted on community matters. Today, many elderly people in villages are left alone as their children migrate to cities. With no pension system and limited healthcare, they depend on occasional remittances that are often insufficient. Cases of elder abandonment, poverty, and loneliness are increasing. More than material support, the respect accorded to elders is also declining. Young people now make major decisions without consulting them, and gerontocratic authority has eroded. This not only affects the welfare of the aged but also removes a key source of wisdom and conflict resolution from the community [21].

- iii. Collapse of Communal Support and Safety Nets: The extended family acted as an informal welfare system. During bereavement, illness, unemployment, or financial crisis, relatives automatically pooled resources to help. That safety net is disappearing. In nuclear households, people are expected to handle problems alone or seek help from government and NGOs, which are often weak or inaccessible in Cross River communities. As a result, many individuals fall through the cracks. Widows struggle to pay school fees, the sick delay treatment, and families cannot afford burial costs. The sense of “we are in this together” is being replaced by “*everyone for themselves.*” This has increased vulnerability, especially for the poor and marginalised [22].
- iv. Impact on Youth Socialisation and Moral Guidance. In the extended system, child-rearing was a collective responsibility. Any adult could

correct a child, and children had multiple role models within the compound. Today, with parents working long hours and relatives living far away, many children lack supervision. Some are raised by house helps or spend most of their time online. This has contributed to rising cases of cultism, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and other social vices among youths in urban Cross River areas. Without the guidance of uncles, aunts, and grandparents, young people are more exposed to negative peer influence and less grounded in community values. The moral authority that the extended family once provided has weakened, and other institutions have not filled the gap [23].

- v. Decline of Traditional Conflict Resolution and Community Institutions: Disputes over land, marriage, and inheritance were once resolved within the extended family by elders before they reached the courts. The authority of the family head and council of elders carried weight and helped maintain peace. As families fragment, people now rush to police stations and law courts for matters that could have been settled internally. This has increased litigation, broken relationships, and weakened community cohesion. At the same time, institutions like age grades, town unions, and kinship associations that depended on extended solidarity are losing members and relevance.

The way forward: Redefining the extended family in a modern context

The decline of the extended family in Cross River State does not have to lead to total social breakdown.

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The solution is not to return to the old compound system, but to intentionally redesign kinship so that it works in today's world of cities, jobs, and technology. A redefined extended family can keep the values of solidarity and mutual care while respecting modern needs for privacy and mobility.

The first approach is to use technology to bridge distance. Physical separation is now the norm because people work in Calabar, Lagos, or abroad. But mobile platforms can keep families connected. Family WhatsApp groups, Zoom meetings, and mobile transfers are already being used to send support during illness or school fees. Some Cross River families have started “*virtual family meetings*” every month where decisions about elders and communal projects are made online. This turns the extended family from a residential unit into a functional network that can operate anywhere [24].

Second, cultural education must be deliberate. Since children no longer live daily with grandparents, schools, churches, and community groups must teach language, history, and values. In Cross River, introducing Efik, Ejagham and Bekwara language classes in primary schools, and organizing cultural days in churches, can help children know their roots. Parents can also set “*culture days*” at home where folktales, traditional food, and dressing are practiced. Without conscious effort, cultural knowledge will disappear with the elders [25].

Third, community institutions need to take on welfare roles that families can no longer handle alone. Town unions, age grades, and faith-based organizations can create support funds for the elderly, widows, and orphans. In some parts of Cross River, town unions

already collect dues to assist members during funerals and medical emergencies. Strengthening these structures means no one is left helpless just because their immediate family cannot provide [26].

Fourth, government policy must provide a basic safety net. The absence of pensions, health insurance, and social welfare has forced families to depend entirely on kin. When the state provides healthcare for the aged, scholarships, and unemployment support, the pressure on nuclear households reduces. This makes it easier for people to still help extended relatives voluntarily, instead of out of desperation. Policy can therefore complement, not replace, family responsibility [27].

Finally, Cross River communities should embrace a hybrid family model. This means nuclear families maintain independence for daily living, but still recognise obligations to the larger kin group during major events. For example, a couple can live in their own flat in Calabar but contribute yearly to a family fund, attend village meetings, and care for parents during retirement. This balance protects autonomy while preserving the African ideal of “*we are because we are together*” [28]. In short, the way forward is not abandonment of the extended family, but its reinvention. Through technology, education, stronger institutions, government support, and a hybrid lifestyle, Cross River people can enjoy modern progress without losing the social fabric that made their communities strong.

Conclusion

The erosion of the extended family system in Cross River State communities is one of the most visible

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outcomes of social change in contemporary Nigeria. This paper has examined the transformation from two perspectives. On one hand, the shift toward nuclear family arrangements reflects progress. It has brought economic efficiency, reduced household conflict, allowed for greater personal autonomy, and enabled families to adapt to urban housing, formal employment, and modern education systems. For many young professionals in Calabar and other towns, the nuclear model provides the flexibility needed to pursue careers and invest directly in their children.

On the other hand, the rapid decline of extended kinship ties without adequate replacement structures has also produced signs of social disintegration. The weakening of cultural transmission, neglect of the elderly, collapse of communal safety nets, and reduced supervision of youths all point to gaps that modern institutions have not fully filled. In Cross River communities where culture, language, and identity were historically preserved within kinship networks, this loss is particularly significant. The challenge is therefore not simply about family structure, but about what happens to the values and functions that the extended family once performed.

The evidence suggests that the issue is not whether the extended family should survive in its traditional form, but how its core functions can be preserved in a modern context. Complete reversal to the old compound system is neither realistic nor desirable given current economic and social realities. At the same time, total individualism threatens the communal values that have long defined Cross River societies. The middle path lies in redefinition. Through technology, cultural education, stronger community institutions, supportive government

policy, and a hybrid approach to family life, it is possible to maintain solidarity, respect for elders, and mutual support without sacrificing personal autonomy. Ultimately, development and cultural identity do not have to be in conflict. Cross River State can modernise while still honouring the principles that made the extended family a resilient institution. What is required is intentional action by families, communities, religious organisations, and government to ensure that progress does not come at the cost of social cohesion. If this is done, the people of Cross River can build a future that is both modern and rooted, where families are small in size but large in support, and where tradition and change exist side by side.

Societal Implications of the Study in Education

The erosion of the extended family system in Cross River State has significant implications for education because the family has traditionally been the first and most important agent of socialisation. In the past, children learned language, values, discipline, and cultural practices long before they entered the classroom. Grandparents taught proverbs and stories, uncles and aunts modelled behaviour, and cousins provided peer interaction. With the shift toward nuclear households, many children now grow up with limited contact with extended relatives. They are often raised by one or two parents, sometimes with the help of house helps, and spend more time alone or on digital devices. As a result, teachers at nursery and primary school levels in Calabar and other towns have observed that pupils are arriving in school with

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weaker communication skills, shorter attention spans, and less understanding of respect and communal behavior. Schools are now forced to teach basic social skills that families used to handle, which reduces time available for academic instruction and places additional pressure on teachers [29].

Another major implication is the decline of indigenous language and cultural knowledge. In the extended family, children acquired their mother tongue naturally through daily interaction with elders and relatives. That daily exposure is disappearing. Many children in urban Cross River homes now speak mostly English or Pidgin, and cannot hold a full conversation in Efik, Ejagham, Bekwara, or other local languages. This makes it harder to implement mother-tongue instruction in early grades, even though research shows that learning in a familiar language improves comprehension and academic performance. It also means that cultural content is no longer brought into the classroom by students. Teachers have to teach culture as theory rather than lived experience, and students graduate with limited connection to their heritage. Over time this creates a gap between academic achievement and cultural identity [30].

The weakening of extended family support has also increased the welfare burden on schools. Previously, if a child could not pay fees or needed food and clothing, relatives would intervene. Today, many nuclear families are financially overstretched and cannot meet those needs, so schools and teachers are expected to step in. Counselors, class teachers, and principals now deal with issues of hunger, absenteeism, emotional distress, and lack of mentoring that were once managed within the kinship network. This expanded

role affects teacher morale and instructional quality because educators are doing social work in addition to teaching. Without stronger community and government support, the education system will continue to carry responsibilities it was not designed for [31].

Despite these challenges, the situation also creates opportunities for educational innovation. Since the family can no longer perform all socialisation functions alone, schools can intentionally design programs to teach values, character, and community responsibility. Some schools in Cross River have introduced cultural clubs, peer mentoring, and “*family life education*” classes that teach respect, cooperation, and identity. Inviting elders and community leaders to speak in schools can also help reconnect students with their heritage. These initiatives show that schools can adapt to fill the gap, provided they have the resources and training. The goal should not be to replace the family, but to complement it [32].

The overall implication is that education in Cross River State can no longer operate in isolation from the family and community. A collaborative model is needed where schools, parents, town unions, religious bodies, and government work together. Parents need support to balance work and child-rearing. Schools need funding for counselling and feeding programs. Communities need to be involved in curriculum and cultural activities. When these stakeholders take shared responsibility, the negative effects of family erosion can be reduced. Education can then continue to produce learners who are academically sound, socially responsible, and culturally aware [33].

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