

# Family and Kinship Classification Systems as Proxy Indicator of Support Networks in Nandi Culture, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

Families in all their configurations are the key social groups within which different generations are embedded and supported. Following the recent demographic trends and shifts in the traditional family types and relationships, there is a need to explore actual lived kinship relational and support dynamics. Every kinship relations of a society are sustained through sets of kinship terminologies or kinship terms of reference which are signals on role expectations of those with particular labels. Kinship terminologies classify the kinship universe which helps every individual to reckon his/her kin members. The kinship terms are the vocabulary of differentiations and classifications of kinsmen with attendant role relations. However, little is understood on the mapping of kinship terms and their appropriate symbolic roles within the context of support systems in the Nandi culture. This paper explores the understanding of the concept of ‘family’ and kinship terms as indicators of support contexts within Nandi community of Kenya. The study findings indicate that, among the Nandi, family relationships are often constituted by individuals with different generational identities and world views whose connections are interactional and transactional. In this study, one of the potentially most important domains that characterizes family relationships among the Nandi people is the support and assistance that is exchanged between individuals. At the family level, the relationships are based on reciprocity and exchange. The study findings further indicate diversity in definitions of family, kinship and the embeddedness of individuals in their social networks. The study contributes to debate on how kinship classification systems work in the new era of digitalization of kinship practices in contemporary families.

**Keywords:** Family, kinship, kinship terminology, support

## INTRODUCTION

Henry Lewis Morgan was the first anthropologist to use kinship terminologies in his pioneering work on Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family, published in 1871. The typology frequently used for kinship terminologies traces back to distinctions made by Lewis Henry Morgan. The typology is derived from difference in the ways that kin terms identify or categorize what are presumed to be primary genealogical relations. Morgan (1871) made a division between descriptive versus classificatory terminologies according to the way the terminology incorporates lineal and collateral genealogical relations. Descriptive terminologies were said to distinguish lineal from collateral relatives and classificatory terminologies were those that did not. However, ambiguity arises in this definition, as noted by Morgan in his discussion of Eskimo terminologies (pp. 267-277), when lineal and collateral positions are distinguished in the middle three generations but not for more distant generations so that, for example, the child of one’s ‘niece’/‘nephew’—a collateral relative, is referred to as ‘granddaughter’/‘grandson’—a lineal relative. (Lowie (1928), Murdock (1968) and Trautmann (1981:83) added a parallel/cross contrast derived from Kroeber (1909) to Morgan’s lineal/collateral distinction and worked out a four-part division of terminologies based on distinctions made in the parental generation. He referred to his four-part division by the expressions generation, bifurcate merging, bifurcate collateral and lineal terminologies. 1 of these, generation and bifurcate merging fit in with Morgan’s classificatory terminologies and bifurcate collateral and lineal with his descriptive terminologies.

Subsequently, Murdock (1949), building from the cross-cousin distinctions used by Lowie (1928) to form a typology of kinship terminologies, focused on the differences in kin terms for genealogically close kin in ego's generation. He added Sudanese and Eskimo terminologies to the four terminology types—Hawaiian, Iroquois, Crow and Omaha—discussed by Lowie. Murdock's six types are based on differences in kin terms for genealogical sibling and cousin relations, with each type named for an exemplar society having that kind of terminology. Despite explicit definitions, these typologies are based on only a few kin terms from one or two generations and so the same terminology may be classified differently, depending on the choice of the generation for the kin terms used in the classification. The intersection of Morgan's two types with Lowie's four groups and Murdock's six groups yields the following organization for these typologies: Descriptive—includes Sudanese (a bifurcate collateral terminology with different terms for each kind of cousin) and Eskimo (a lineal terminology with a single term for cousins who are all distinguished from siblings) and Classificatory—includes Hawaiian (a generation terminology in which siblings and cousins are not distinguished), Iroquois (a bifurcate merging terminology with parallel cousins distinguished from cross cousins), Crow (a bifurcate merging terminology similar to Iroquois, but without a distinction between father's sister and father's sister's daughter), and Omaha (a bifurcate merging terminology similar to Iroquois but one in which mother's brother and mother's brother's son are not distinguished).

Subsequently, the Iroquois class of terminologies in Murdock's (1949) classification was divided into Iroquois versus Dravidian terminologies based on an analytical (etic) difference in these terminologies between the way parallel and cross relations were distinguished. More recently, refined subdivisions of Murdock's six classes have been made (Dziebel, 2007:211-254) and (Pericliev, 2011:20-127), including Murdock's (1970) own, more extensive typology derived from over 1000 terminologies.

The classification system has substantial drawbacks since it is based on class definitions that incorporate a mix of structural properties such as lineal versus collateral relations and genealogical properties such as the way genealogical cousins and siblings are distinguished according to terminologies. Consequently, the commonly used method of distinguishing among kin terms by mapping them onto genealogical relations will group together as similar what are structurally different terminologies when different structuring processes yield kin terms with similar genealogical definitions. In addition, the genealogical distinctions may not be sensitive to differences in structuring processes. The Nandi culture practices patrilineal descent systems, therefore, this study focused on unraveling the Nandi family and kinship classification systems as proxy indicators of support networks.

The sociological tradition has tended to equate families with co-resident kin, often members of the nuclear family. This focus on 'who lives together,' rather than 'who is a family member,' derives from the assumption that relatives beyond the household are largely irrelevant (Madhavan *et al.*, 2017; Furstenberg *et al.*, 2020). Many scholars, (Entwisle 2007; Mare 2011; Seltzer 2019), have called for demographers to move beyond the household and recognize more comprehensive definitions of family and kinship. Despite a growing awareness of the key role of kinship in demography, the centrality of these family systems is still not fully recognized, as argued by Furstenberg (2020). This study adopted Cox and Paley (2003) and Hareven (2015) definition of kinship, which refers to the social relationships that bind individuals together through culturally shared definitions of relatedness on biological, legal, or normative grounds, ultimately constituting family systems. Conversely, Furstenberg (2020) points out that family refers to the narrower group of kin given special privilege, which, among other things, organizes the provision of support, socialization, and social placement of its members. Schneider (1984) and Furstenberg *et al.*, (2020) indicated that families comprise ties that individuals recognize as kin, irrespective of whether a biological or legal connection exists. Lévi-Strauss (1971) and Reczek (2023) contend that whereas kinship configurations share some general traits, no particular configuration is universal or stable over time. This study sought to fill a knowledge gap on normatively defined and actual lived experiences of kin (primary, secondary and tertiary) and non-kin support networks among the Nandi people.

Studies in the Demography of kinship are often interested in documenting the prevalence and consequences of kinship inequalities. This term refers to the differences in kin presence, availability, and resources that create distinct environments for individuals to develop, support each other, and obtain a sense of shared identity (Chung, 2019; Furstenberg, 2020). Kinship dynamics shape and constrain the forms and levels of intergenerational transfers that can occur. As populations go through the demographic transition, kinship

networks change in both size and structure (Murphy, 2011). The assertions by Chung (2019), Furstenberg (2020) and Murphy (2011) are broadly in line with the current study, which focused on the rising complexities of kin and non-kin relationships and support transfers in contemporary families. In addition, the study sought to highlight the spatial distribution of kin, including extra-household kin and non-kin networks, which affect the way families function and provide support in the Nandi community. Allan and Crow (2001) contend that not only do people vary in the boundaries they draw around 'family' and in the inclusions and exclusions they make, but such boundaries are also often dynamic, shifting over time (Finch, 2007). Boundaries can be strong or weak, and can coincide with the residential unit or extend beyond it (Ribbens McCarthy *et al.*, 2003). Personal understandings of who 'family' includes might also depend on factors such as the quality of the relationship (Becker and Charles, 2006), having 'been there' at important times (Edwards *et al.*, 2006), or the frequency of face-to-face contact (Davies, 2018). Inclusions and exclusions also might depend on who else is available in an individual's support network. Charles and Davies (2008) found out that people who had close-knit and extensive blood or marriage networks tended to include fewer friends in their subjective definition of family, while those whose blood or marriage networks were more loose-knit or more geographically dispersed generally included more friends. Ribbens McCarthy (2012) noted that the overarching theme in sociological research seems to be that, regardless of the particular determinations that people make about whom to include or exclude, 'family' is generally understood as being about a feeling of belonging, being together, and exchanging care and support. Based on the literature review on boundaries of inclusions and exclusions in the conceptualization of 'family' by Ribbens McCarthy (2012), this study raises the question as to whether the social connectedness among non-kin groups can provide similar sense of relatedness and support exchanges as kinship networks would display. The integration of life course perspective and social network theory was adopted by this study in exploration of who is regarded as kin and non-kin in the context of support network exchanges. The study applied the principle of linked lives of life course theory to demonstrate that kinship relationships and support roles are continuously interdependent and reciprocally connected with past and future generations of their families. Social network theory captured the gender differences in reproduction of kinship relationships, filial obligations, responsibilities and cultural expectations around embeddedness in support networks and exchanges.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a larger study which aimed to analyse negotiation of family relationships in support systems among the Nandi of Chesumei Sub-County, Nandi County, Kenya. The study was conducted in rural areas of Chesumei Sub-County in Nandi County, Kenya. Nandi County is situated in the North Rift region of Kenya. The majority of inhabitants in the study site of Chesumei Sub-County in Nandi County are members of Nandi community. The Nandi community belongs to the Kalenjin community comprising eight major sub groups. The other sub groups include the Kipsigis, Keiyo, Marakwet (Merkwet), Terik, Tugen, Sebeei (Elgon Kalenjin) and Pokot (Chesaina, 1991). Most of these Kalenjin communities live in the Rift Valley region of Kenya. They share common history, culture, language and traditional religion. The Nandi culture is characterized by patriarchy, patrilineal (unilineal) descent system where descent, lineage and property are traced through the male line (father to son). Moreover, the Nandi people practice patrilocal pattern of residence after marriage.

This study utilized the ethnographic research design to gain in-depth understanding of normative expectations and actual lived experiences of giving, receiving and anticipating support among kin in Nandi families. A qualitative interpretivist paradigm was adopted to understand the lived experiences of women and men in negotiating kinship relationships, roles, obligations and support resources. This study adopted ontological relativism for nuanced understanding that the actual lived kinship relationships in support networks and exchanges are not fixed realities, rather they are constantly shifting necessitating negotiations, contestations and reproduction across diverse sociocultural contexts in Nandi families. The study purposively selected Chesumei Sub-County of Nandi County as the research site because it exhibits unique demographic characteristics which are directly related to intersections of kinship relationships and support systems. According to the Kenya Population and Housing Census data (KPHC, 2019), Chesumei Sub-County in Nandi County is ranked third (total population of 164,133 persons) among the most populated Sub-counties in Nandi County, reflecting a high density of residential and agricultural households. The 2019 Census report further indicates that while nuclear families (couples with children) are becoming more common, extended family structures (including multi-generational households) remain a significant part of the rural household composition in Nandi County. The

study adopted purposive and snowballing sampling techniques to select informants. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select villages in Kosirai and Lelmokwo/Ngechek Wards in Chesumei Sub-County of Nandi County as the research site. Moreover, the research site was purposively selected because of researcher's familiarity and interest to study negotiation of continuities, discontinuities and change in family relationships in support networks and exchanges from a relational ontological perspective. Whereas the Nandi people are the majority ethnic group in Chesumei Sub-county, there are other ethnic groups occupying the research site. Hence, Chesumei Sub-county in Nandi County is ethnically heterogeneous.

The researcher identified the key socio-demographic characteristics as the inclusion criteria in selecting informants. The attributes in which the researcher was interested in studying include; Nandi men and women across age who have multiple support exchanges with kin and non-kin networks, the Nandi families which exhibit demographic characteristics of living multiple generations, kinship ties based on blood, marital, adoption and other commitments, and single parenthood in the context of receiving, giving and anticipating support. Purposive sampling technique was used to identify initial men and women informants from a family setting who could voluntarily participate in the research process. Through the aid of local administration, specifically the area chief, researcher was able to identify the informants who had relevant characteristics that were important for the study. Snow balling sampling technique was employed to identify other informants to be selected for this study. Researcher began by purposively identifying and engaging an initial informant in a family context who fits the study criteria. The initial informant would then refer other individuals who also meet the criteria. This process continued with each new informant referring others until a saturation point was reached. The triangulation method, which involves using more than one method to gather data, was utilized. The data collection process utilized multiple methods including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, participant observation and document analysis. Analysed qualitative data has been presented in the form of descriptions and verbalized quotations in order to contextualize findings from informants. The study took ethical issues into consideration which included research approval, informed consent, voluntary participation, cultural sensitivity, anonymity and confidentiality of data. The researcher of this study is an insider to the Nandi community.

By taking a reflexive stance, the researcher acknowledged how her positionalities and characteristics affected the data collection process. The multiple positionalities of the researcher in terms of age, gender, marital status, and profession affected data collection among the elderly men and women in Nandi community. Therefore, in this context the researcher was perceived to be an 'outsider' based on inclusion and exclusion in social categories within her own Nandi community. Reflexivity in theory and methodology in this study has shown how the 'othering' of researcher in her own ethnic group affected knowledge production by the informants due to cultural sensitivity. This ethical dilemma was addressed by the researcher engaging a middle-aged adult Nandi male as a research assistant. He was a local to the research site and had the knowledge on cultural sensitivity of the local language, how questions are asked, cultural values, norms and beliefs of Nandi community. Therefore, data collection was supported by the research assistant, who had familiarity with the localities and he transcribed and translated the interviews from Nandi dialect to English. To uphold ethics and integrity, the researcher acknowledged sources of ideas and information to avoid plagiarism throughout the study. To enhance credibility of data the researcher has reported authentic findings from the research informants who are the knowledge owners and producers

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Conceptualization of 'Family' in the Nandi Community Context**

The concept of 'family' was left open to the informants' interpretation. With informants being asked to state their own understanding of 'family'. Responses from in-depth interviews emphasized the plurality of family forms and structures. The informants highlighted multiple meanings of 'family' which include members living in the same household for a long time, nuclear family of father, mother and children, nuclear and extended family members, family members living within and away from home, clan and lineage members, parents' in-law family and very close friends. Further, diversity of family formation was expressed by an old woman informant that;

“Myself as grandmother my children living within and away from home and even extended family members around here, we are all family and we help each other all the time. Extended relatives are also seen as family members for example nieces, nephews, cousins, uncles, aunties, in-laws’ family. Another way to know family is to have a home with a husband, wife and children. Other people may see family as members who share same residence and help one another. I can say even those members living away, are family, plus those who share lineage or clan (*Oreet*) these members are brothers and call themselves a family for they share a common ancestor. Friends and neighbours can also be so close and frequently meeting and supporting other families until they are considered family members.”

The findings above reveal insights into living arrangements and family dynamics based on an individual’s conceptualization of family relationships. The narrative shows that the understanding of family in Nandi community is defined in relation to living arrangements of common residence and non-residential networks which are outside the household. The findings point out on an increasing significance of inadequacy of using household composition as the decisive criterion when understanding the concept of ‘family’. Through participant observation living arrangements of common residence among many family members was observed and noted in Nandi community. This observation affirmed the findings on the definition of family by criterion of common household residence which were yielded through in-depth interviews. To demonstrate more variation and stability in the understanding of the concept of ‘family’, participants in a focus group discussion reported that;

“A family can be a group of people who are related or not by blood or marriage relations. They can form a family because they are helping each other in times of needs such as sickness, hunger, farming activities, doing ceremonies together, you see in our Nandi culture we are taught to help one another without looking at the characteristics such as who is a close family member or not. Our norms and expectations are good, for example a stranger who joins a family to live and work together for many years can at one point be initiated through some rituals to belong to the family. That is how our Nandi community is. To say we are a family, it is open to many understandings for different people. Adult Nandi men belong to various age sets and age grades systems who may or may not be related by blood but they refer to each other as brothers because circumcision rituals bind them to be one family. We have many ways of describing how a family looks like in Nandi community.”

The verbatim expression above shows that there are notions of social inclusion and exclusion occurring in the process of family conceptualization among the Nandi people. The study findings illustrate the diversification of what families look like, how families are created, and how family is “done” every day. Hence, from the study findings, a family in the Nandi community can include more than one household, and family members are linked not only by biological ties, but also by social ties outside the nuclear family. Therefore, the findings inform that membership in a family is subjective, fluid and can change over time and space. The findings on the diversity in meaning of family concur with Seltzer (2019), who argued that not only has the structural family composition undergone major changes, so have family members’ perceptions of who is part of their family, where and how family is done, and what family relationships mean to them. Moreover, another dimension of household complexity was found when informants included people who are not necessarily related to the nuclear family through kinship to be family members, for instance close friends and neighbours. Key informants were in agreement that these connections among kin and non-kin are recognized as central to the functioning of the family and societal well-being in the Nandi community.

Key informants in this study reported that some individuals may creatively turn to their ‘chosen family’ (non-biological kinship bonds) for mutual support and care, a social practice that has implications for policies that define family as related by blood or marriage. The family formation processes and performative notions have implications for social science research and family policies. The findings have affirmed that household composition and common living arrangements have become inadequate criteria for defining what constitutes a family and for understanding the meanings assigned to being a family by its members. Therefore, it is important to understand family diversity as variations and stability in family composition through an interpretative lens in conceptualizing family relationships (Harris, 2008). The Constitution of Kenya (2010) Chapter 4, article 45 recognizes the family as “the natural and fundamental unit of society and the necessary basis of social order, and shall enjoy the recognition and protection of the state.”

The family formation diversity largely remains undocumented. It is observed that the definitions of family for legal purposes may not always match biological or social definitions of family in the Nandi community. Hence, it appears that there is a cultural lag between alternative pathways to family formation and the traditional Nandi normative understandings of what a family is. The observed trends in family formation diversity also raise family policy-related questions, such as which types of families are or should be privileged by government support. Thus, the term 'family' opens the door to the temporality of family relationships, which appear different on spatial contexts. The working definition of family adopted by this study is 'what we do or practice' using the 'doing family approach' conceptualisation. The findings on multiple redefinitions of family are consistent with Widmer (2010), who argues that families are best defined as configurations created out of the interdependencies between family members. Thus, the meaning and definition of 'family' change with time and space.

### **The Nandi Kinship Terms and Family Relationships as Support Networks and Exchanges**

The study findings show that the concept of 'family' in the Nandi community is contextual and subjective. The study findings reveal how the notion of 'family' is understood in people's everyday lives in the Nandi community. In-depth interviews confirm that family in the traditional Nandi is defined as a grouping of the nuclear family comprising the husband, wife or wives, and children, including extended kindred of close relatives who are connected through blood and marriage relationships. The Nandi word '*tiliet*' translates as 'personal kindred', whereas the term, '*tilianutik*' refers to 'kinsmen' or 'relatives'. In-depth interviews showed that in the traditional and modern Nandi community, marriage, '*katunisiet*', is seen as a defining marker in the transition from childhood to adulthood. The marriage institution is considered as significant in displaying how relationships and kin networks are formed. It was noted that the Nandi cultural norms, beliefs, and values set the rules for all aspects of marriage, which include who to marry, when to marry, how to marry, and what is expected of individuals in a marriage. The Nandi people uphold incest taboos, which prohibit marriage between two close consanguineal and affinal relatives, hence the Nandi culture encourages exogamous marriages. In the traditional Nandi community, marriage between a man and a woman who belong to the same clan was strictly prohibited. In contemporary Nandi community, the study reveals that significant changes have occurred to the extent marriage within one's clan is now culturally permissible.

In reference to marital relationships, a Nandi man, a husband, is '*boiyo*' if he is of respected elder category in terms of social age, which implies that he performs significant roles, responsibilities and obligations as a household head, decision maker, provider, negotiation of bride wealth and mediation role in conflict situations. He is also expected to actively participate in family ceremonies and community events as well as passing cultural values and traditions to younger generations. In addition, a married man can be called as '*manong'otio*' if he is a young man, of reputable character and responsible over his family. Nandi men or husbands are expected to be household heads and responsible for providing all the basic needs of their children and wives. As household heads and fathers, the Nandi men are expected to provide leadership, security to family and property, basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, school fees, farming and livestock keeping, love, care, guidance and advise their family members. Whereas a wife is '*kwondo*' if she is young in age and within the child-bearing social category and therefore, Nandi culture confines her roles and obligations within her household.

However, '*chepyoso*' if she has attained social age of a non-childbearing period and respected, carries more roles, obligations and responsibilities within her family as well as community level.

These findings illustrate that the Nandi culture puts more emphasis on social age, rather than chronological age of an individual when describing the life course transitions occurring in families. The in-depth interviews responses point out that family and kinship by blood relationships in the Nandi community context can be demonstrated as a network of multiple relationalities. A father is named as '*kwanda*' while a father's brother is also referred to as '*kwanda ne oo*' (if elder) and '*kwanda ne ming'in*' (if younger than the father). Hence, a father and his blood brothers will always perform similar roles, obligations and responsibilities within the family and community networks. Furthermore, in the Nandi community, a father's elder or younger brothers, or cousin brothers (paternal and maternal), are considered to be like a father in terms of being role models to sons, performing filial obligations and support roles. For a Nandi man, the children of his blood brothers and cousin brothers are considered to be like his own children (sons and daughters). In addition, 'a father of' can be referred

by others as 'kon', a kin term which signifies that he is the giver of everything or the chief provider for his family members. A Nandi father is expected to possess wealth in terms of land and cattle which are very instrumental resources for providing and supporting his family members. The wealth in form of cattle is a symbol of being a responsible Nandi man and source of bride wealth for his sons during their transitions into marriage.

The study revealed that the Nandi fathers are responsible for active participation in practical, spiritual, financial, emotional and material support during ritual ceremonies in families. They are involved as key decision makers in the organization of any cultural activity for instance, male circumcision (*yatitaet*), male circumcision rituals (*tumdo*), marriage and bride wealth negotiations (*koito*) family meetings, community meetings, community security, fund raising events, and communal farming activities among other responsibilities. During seclusion, the Nandi circumcised males/sons are taught by their fathers and paternal uncles (brothers and cousin brothers to fathers) on many skills of life and cultural values of normative expectations on gender roles of a man, co-operation, endurance, aggressiveness, courage, kindness, communal living, tolerance, to be responsible, to work outside the household, farming, provide finances and steady food supply for family, family security, fatherhood and sex education. This kind of socialization is expected to be continuous throughout life course transitions of sons in Nandi families. A mother is termed as 'korge' or 'kaamet'. A mother's sister is referred to as 'korge/kaamet' ne oo' (if elder) and 'korge/kaamet ne ming'in' (if younger than the mother). Among the traditional Nandi, women were confined in the home spaces performing household chores and farming activities. In traditional Nandi community, mothers or wives are expected to provide practical and emotional support such as cleanliness of the homestead, looking after the young children, sick and elderly, milking cows, cooking food, and cutting grass for house construction, farming in gardens. They are expected to continuously teach and guide girls on good morals, gender roles, filial obligations and responsibilities across life course transitions of daughters. The study pointed out that among the Nandi people, mothers, their sisters and cousin sisters provide continuous practical and emotional support by teaching and guiding daughters/girls on their expected gender roles and norms governing behaviour and interaction, to work within and around household, care for the sick and elderly, child rearing, good morals, provide emotional support, empathetic, kindness, helping others, preparation for marriage and motherhood, Nandi cultural values, responsibilities.

The study showed that the Nandi mothers or wives are also expected to participate in ritual ceremonies for instance during child birth and naming, marriage and bride wealth negotiations (*koito*), male circumcision (*yatitaet*) among other family events and activities. However, the Nandi women are expected to be passive in their involvement because Nandi community is highly patriarchal and patrilineal where more power and authority is vested upon Nandi men. Whereas a mother's elder or younger sisters, or cousin sisters (paternal and maternal), are considered like a mother, who act as being role models to daughters by playing filial obligations, responsibilities and support roles expected of a mother to her children and other extended family members. Among the Nandi women, the children of their blood sisters and cousin sisters are considered to be like their own children (sons and daughters) and the role expectations are similarly the same. These insights reflect on the continuities of family relationships and kinship support networks from generations to generations among the Nandi families. Moreover, among the Nandi siblings' terms such as 'brother or sister would refer to each other as 'tupcheet' regardless of the gender distinction. In addition, paternal and maternal cousins in Nandi blood kinship terminologies remain 'tupcheet', the same kin term that blood sisters and brothers would refer to each other. In addition, in some instances, a sister or cousin sister (paternal or maternal) would be distinguished as 'chapkaamet' whereas a brother or cousin brother (paternal or maternal) is referred to as 'arinyo'. Focus group discussion reported that the normative expectation of parents among the Nandi families is to guide on the family relationships, kinship networks, gendered roles and filial obligations, decision-making process, roles in community work and set household rules and regulations for their children. The parents teach and guide their children on family roles which help maintain harmony and filial responsibilities among siblings. Elder siblings care and support younger siblings and teaches them family tasks and roles which enable them grow into responsible adults. Siblings are expected to share tasks and responsibilities, become role models to younger siblings, protect siblings and parents, resolve conflicts and problems, help those in need, respecting parents and elders, show kindness, compassion and obedience which build strong family relationships. Children in a family are expected to provide practical, financial and emotional support to other children, parents and grandparents within and beyond their household units.

In Nandi kinship terms, the paternal and maternal great grandfather, grandfather as well as their brothers and cousin brothers, are all termed as ‘*agui*’ whereas their sisters and cousin sisters are referred to as ‘*kogo*’, grandmothers. Therefore, they are all expected to perform their filial obligations and act as support systems within families and communities. Among the Nandi people, a great grandfather and grandfather hold very revered positions in the family. They are considered the most significant members of a family because of their leadership position which is highly respected as a key connection to the living lineage and ancestry. Hence, they are highly regarded as symbols of respect, unity and lineage continuity. Great grandfathers and grandfathers are sources of wisdom and guidance for younger generations, offering advice on important life choices, family and community matters. They help preserve the Nandi community's history, values, and identity by passing down knowledge, language, and traditions to their grandchildren and great grandchildren. Great grandfathers and grandfathers are custodians of culture, traditions, values, history and identity. They are responsible for passing down these cultural knowledges to younger generations through oral traditions. Therefore, they ensure families and communities’ history, traditions, values and identity are preserved and perpetuated.

Based on seniority, Nandi community recognizes the great grandfathers and grandfathers as spiritual figures in family and community cultural matters. They act as mentors and advisers to family and community members. As significant spiritual figures, the Nandi elders (great grandfathers and grandfathers) are actively involved in important ritual ceremonies such as male circumcision (*yatitaet*), marriage and bride wealth negotiations (*koito*), peace and conflict resolution, family and community events and activities, sickness and death rites among others. They possess power and authority to offer blessings, advice, reprimand wrong doers and pronounce curses in specific sociocultural contexts. The study insights display great grandfathers and grandfathers as intermediaries and support systems within families across generations in traditional and contemporary Nandi community. The findings show that great grandfathers and grandfathers in Nandi community provide emotional, spiritual and practical forms of support to families and communities. While a paternal and maternal great grandmother and grandmother, including their sisters and cousin sisters, are referred to as ‘*kogo*’, their brothers and cousin brothers are referred to as ‘*agui*’, grandfathers. This illustrates that the Nandi community has a classificatory kinship system of using the same kinship terminology for both lineal and collateral kin regardless of seniority on the family structure. Bound by kinship ties and obligations paternal and maternal great grandmothers and grandmothers, their sisters and cousin sisters are expected to perform fairly the same filial responsibilities and support exchanges based on seniority. In traditional and contemporary Nandi community, great grandmothers and grandmothers are respected elders who act as custodians of culture, caregivers to grandchildren and great grandchildren, and keepers of indigenous knowledge. They provide emotional support through mentorship to younger generations and more especially to granddaughters and great granddaughters (paternal and maternal). The study revealed that great grandmothers and grandmothers act as trusted confidantes, offering wisdom and guidance to their (male and female) adult children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Among the Nandi people, great grandmothers and grandmothers have the filial obligation of teaching granddaughters and great granddaughters about their expected gender roles and norms, household chores, morals, respect for men and elders, care for the sick and elderly, child rearing and nutrition, marriage and motherhood, kindness, compassion to family and non-family members.

In Nandi community, great grandmothers and grandmothers are respected for possessing spiritual authority in providing healing through traditional medicines and rituals. Therefore, great grandmothers and grandmothers are respected because they are repositories of knowledge about traditional herbal remedies for illnesses. The study points out that transfer of indigenous knowledge on herbal treatment and healing is embedded in the close relationship of reciprocity and care between great grandmothers, grandmothers, mothers, grandchildren and great grandchildren in Nandi community. Thus, great grandmother and grandmothers are instrumental in passing down practical knowledge on herbal medicine and healing practices to mothers, granddaughters and great granddaughters. Great grandmothers and grandmothers act as intermediaries among generations by serving as family anchors who are key in passing down cultural knowledge, beliefs, and customs. They are crucial in maintaining intergenerational connections and emotional stability to both their adult children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. This involvement strengthens family bonds and helps transmit cultural values and history across generations. The study showed that great grandmothers and grandmothers are peace makers and play key roles during conflict and reconciliation processes in Nandi families and community.

The study demonstrates how great grandmothers and grandmothers are instrumental in providing spiritual and emotional support to their adult children, grandchildren and great grandchildren across gender. The Nandi great grandmothers and grandmothers have specific roles during childbirth and naming, male circumcision (*yatitaet*), initiation (*tumdo*) and marriage and bride wealth negotiation rituals. Generally, great grandmothers and grandmothers actively participate in rituals related to procreation. The study established that among the Nandi community, most rituals pertaining to procreation are performed by women, on women or for women. The study affirmed that an elderly grandmother of reputable character (*chepyoso ne libwoob*), who is past the child bearing age is allowed by the elderly Nandi men to play particular roles in male dominated spaces such as male circumcision ritual ceremonies (*tumdo*). This indicates some fluidity of gender roles in specific sociocultural context in Nandi families. The findings on the Nandi community's common kin terminologies for both paternal and maternal grandmothers as well as grandfathers are signifiers of intertwining expectations of support and intermediary roles to their adult children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Therefore, the aforementioned Nandi consanguineal kinship terms are consistent with the works of Radcliffe-Brown (1941), who presented kinship classificatory terminologies in which distinctions are created according to age, gender, and seniority as well as using a single kin term to refer to diverse categories of relatives. The findings affirm that the Nandi community exhibits the classificatory system of kinship in which the same kinship term is used for direct and collateral kin.

In Nandi culture, a father's sisters and cousin sisters (paternal and maternal) are referred to as '*sengee*' while a mother's brothers and cousin brothers (paternal and maternal) are named '*maama*', hence such kin terms reveal the classificatory kinship system in the Nandi community. The Nandi consanguineal kinship terms display the application of one kin name/term to different blood relationships across age which display filial obligations and support networks entanglements in Nandi families. The study established that among the Nandi, maternal uncle, '*maama*' plays a significant role, particularly during the male circumcision ceremonies of his sister's sons (nephews). The boys seek consent from their maternal uncle, '*maama*' before going through initiation rituals referred to as '*tumdo*'. Moreover, during life course transition into marriage, maternal uncle's nephews (his sister's sons) and nieces (his sister's daughters) have the normative obligation to seek for consent from maternal uncle before initiating marriage ceremony preparations. The Nandi culture dictates that the active involvement of maternal uncle, '*maama*' and paternal aunt, '*sengee*' during important ritual ceremonies is mandatory. It is believed that the absence of maternal uncle and paternal aunt makes the ritual ceremony unsuccessful because it would lack the blessings from the two significant family members. Therefore, the maternal uncle, '*maama*' and paternal aunt, '*sengee*' hold distinct and privileged positions in Nandi families reflecting their relevance as revered and powerful figures with significant ritual and social authority. Essentially, such extended family configurations play critical roles of bonding and bridging social capital in consanguineal and affinal family relationships in Nandi community. According to Nandi culture, the study insights reveal that maternal uncle, '*maama*' acts as the social father of his never married sister's daughters (nieces) in the context of marriage and bride wealth negotiations (*koito*). Furthermore, maternal uncle, '*maama*' has the role of being the social father of his nephews (his sister's sons), whose mother was never married, in the Nandi sociocultural contexts of male circumcision, marriage and dowry negotiations rituals.

The study insights illustrate the key father figure role provided by maternal uncle to his never married sister's sons and daughters during ritual ceremonies. In the Nandi families, the maternal uncle's support role is viewed as fluid and dynamic in the sense that he moves from being a biological father to his own children to a social father to his never married sister's children. Hence, the authority and father figure role over his sister's children, maternal uncle, '*maama*' is viewed as revered and critical support system in Nandi families. In Nandi culture, the older maternal uncles tend to hold higher social status and more authority than younger ones. The seniority in terms of age is treated with more reverence among the Nandi people. The study reveals that the maternal uncle is a primary network of financial, social, and emotional support for his sister's children. The study affirmed that in the normative and actual lived realities, a mother's brothers and cousin brothers (paternal and maternal) named '*maama*', play more or less same support roles to their sisters' sons and daughters depending on seniority. Maternal uncle is a symbol of peace and reconciliation in Nandi families because he mediates disagreement and conflicts among family members.

In Nandi kinship terminologies, a father's sisters and cousin sisters (paternal and maternal) are referred to as '*sengee*'. In the Nandi ceremonial contexts, the paternal aunt's presence and authority are respected by family members including male relatives. The paternal aunt, '*sengee*' is a highly revered and authoritative figure in patrilineal Nandi community. The paternal aunt, '*sengee*' together with maternal uncle, '*maama*', have the filial obligations to mediate disputes among family members. She acts as a significant female figure for her brother's daughters (nieces) and sons (nephews) by helping to transmit cultural values, providing advice, and often playing a key role in the Nandi traditional ceremonies. During marriage ceremony preparations, paternal aunt's nephews (her brother's sons) and nieces (her brother's daughters) would always seek consent from paternal aunt, '*sengee*'. It was reported that paternal aunts are trusted female figures and close confidant for their nieces and nephews concerning matters that they would not discuss with their parents. In the actual marriage and bride wealth negotiation rituals (*koito*), the paternal aunt occupies very privileged position in a male dominated traditional ceremony in patrilineal Nandi community. Paternal aunts, '*sengee*' are the most significant female figure in Nandi families as they perform rituals and processes that make ritual ceremonies complete. The study insights inform that although Nandi men dominate ritual ceremonies such as male circumcision (*yatitaet*), and marriage and bride wealth negotiation rituals (*koito*), paternal aunts are present and active in those sociocultural spaces in Nandi community. Consequently, paternal aunts serve as a key link between the male-dominated spaces and female sociocultural settings during the Nandi ritual ceremonies where women's power transcends normal gender boundaries. Paternal aunt accompanies maternal uncle to play vital roles in marriage and bride wealth negotiations rituals (*koito*) of their nieces and nephews who in turn must reciprocate by providing very special gifts to paternal aunt and maternal uncle.

During marriage celebrations, the paternal aunt and maternal uncle are accorded high privileges more than other family members to provide marital advice to the newly married couple. In Nandi families, when a woman marries paternal aunt's brother, she is referred to as '*kamati*' (sister-in-law) by paternal aunt. Paternal aunt, '*sengee*' plays a pivotal role in guiding her on how to understand her role within the new family. She provides the induction processes to adequately introduce to all family beliefs and values. When paternal aunt's nephews marry new women into the family, they are termed as '*tibiikab yugoi*' (daughters in-law).

It is the filial obligation and responsibility of paternal aunt to provide guidance on the values and customs of the family, fostering respect and harmonious relations between the new brides and her in-laws. In the Nandi male initiates' graduation festivities, integral role of giving advice and mentorship on new transition into responsible adulthood is granted to paternal aunt and maternal uncle. This gesture demonstrates their revered relevance, power and authority in Nandi families. Therefore, paternal aunts, '*sengee*' and maternal uncles, '*maama*' act as complementary sources of support networks in the extended Nandi family systems.

The study recognizes paternal aunts, '*sengee*' as vital kinship resources who bring female agency practices in to the dominant patriarchal space in Nandi traditional ceremonies. Therefore, the paternal aunts use their power and privilege to exercise autonomy and agency as Nandi women in a highly patriarchal Nandi community. These celebrated female figures, paternal aunts provide emotional support, guidance, financial and practical assistance their nieces, nephews and the entire family. In Nandi marital kinship system, a father-in-law and his brothers and cousin brothers (paternal and maternal) are generally termed '*kapyugoi*'. In specific context, a father in-law and his brothers are referred to as '*boiyob yugoi*', whereas a mother-in-law and her sisters are named as '*karucho*'. A son-in-law and his brothers are signified as '*sandet*' or '*sandana*' or '*saanik*' (plural), while a daughter-in-law and her sisters are known as '*cheptab/tibiikab yugoi*'. Depending on context a sister-in-law or brother-in-law is referred to as '*bamuru*'. A married man refers to his wife's sisters and cousin sisters as '*bamuru*', sisters in law. While a man's wife refers to her husband's brothers and cousin brothers as '*bamuru*'. Among the Nandi people, in-laws are a crucial support system, offering guidance, advice, financial, material and emotional support. A close relationship with in-laws can provide extended family bonding and a deeper sense of connection and belonging. These findings show insights into the normative expectations of relatedness based on marital ties in the Nandi community. The Nandi marital kinship terms are multiple and exhibit overlapping identities which imply that marriage is social and collective phenomenon of embedded affinal relationships and filial obligations. The consanguineal and affinal kinship networks depict multiplicities and similarities in Nandi kin terms. These findings are pointers to intertwining expectations of filial obligations and support exchanges. The study confirms that the Nandi kinship terminologies have relatively few kin terms, for instance, siblings and

paternal and maternal cousins are not distinguished or separated. In every day practice the same kin terms are used for both types of cousins. Furthermore, the Nandi kinship terminologies do not differentiate between lineal relatives (those related directly by a line of descent) and collateral relatives (those related by blood, but not directly in the line of descent).

## CONCLUSION

The term and usage of the word 'family' among Nandi people is not simply a matter of definitional concept, but a space of contested values and power relationships. Family and kinship relationships embeddedness have displayed the normative and actual lived functional connections among spouses, parents-children, siblings, paternal and maternal uncles and aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews, grandparents, in-laws and other relatives living in a variety of households. The Nandi community kinship terminology systems have illustrated interlocking ties of kin naming which reflect overlapping and shared roles expectations and filial obligations in relationships with other kin members. These findings on kinship terminologies are consistent with a George Murdock (1949) ideas on the Hawaiian kinship terminology systems which was found historically in Hawaii.

Murdock argued that in Hawaiian kinship terminology, there are a smaller number of kinship terms and they tend to reflect generation and gender while merging nuclear families into a larger grouping. Gendered negotiation of power and interdependence was exemplified by an intermediary position and role of paternal aunt, '*sengee*' and maternal uncle, '*maama*' within family networks related by blood as well networks related by marriage in Nandi community. Maternal uncle and paternal aunt are symbols of power, authority and completeness in Nandi culture.

The study findings on the significant support roles and filial obligations of maternal uncle (*maama*) among the Nandi families are in concurrence with the Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1924) work on the mother's brother (*malume/umalume*) in South Africa. Furthermore, paternal aunts (*sengee*) in Nandi families perform very critical support roles, responsibilities and obligations among consanguineal and affinal networks. These insights are similar to Mdhluli, *et al.*, (2024) assertions on unveiling the role of *hahani* (paternal aunts) in the VaTsonga Culture of South Africa. Life course framework has been applied to understand grandparents' prospects of also occupying significant bridging positions between unconnected family members in Nandi families. Findings show that family configurations that include friends and in-laws are associated with bridging social capital where networks are characterized by high individual autonomy. The insights from key informants showed that support interdependencies among in-laws is culturally acceptable to be continuous so as to maintain the affinal relationships among the Nandi families. Conversely, the normative expectations of the support exchanges amongst in-laws in Nandi culture dictates that this mutual assistance should be practiced infrequently on specific contexts of needs. Normativity on support exchanges among in-laws' configurations in the Nandi families display a sense of autonomous relationships for mutual respect and harmony. Whereas family configurations based on blood ties are associated with bonding social capital which feature densely connected networks with a low level of individual autonomy. The study concluded that kinship should not be traditionally viewed primarily as a structure instead it needs to be understood as a form of negotiated relationships and support networks which are (re)created, multiple, fluid, continuous, contested, interdependent and sustained through contact, conversation and performance of common life practices over long periods of time. The study recommends for further research on the dynamics of digitally mediated kinship practices and support networks exchanges in contemporary families.

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