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RESEARCH ARTICLE

UNDERSTANDING THE COLLECTIVISM DILEMMA: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE ETHNICITY PLAYS IN PROMOTING THE COLLECTIVIST BEHAVIOUR OF CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM FAMILIES AT MEALTIMES

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Abstract

The findings show how ethnicity plays a significantly role in Sierra Leonean families' meal consumption behaviour. It defines the social grouping of families, and demonstrates how they align with the type of language spoken, their cultural beliefs, the region or community they come from and most notably the assumptions they espoused at the dinner table. These factors are symbolic in defining the character of families at mealtimes, but its significance vary from family to family based on their ethnic orientation and the degree of acculturation experienced by them. This paper evaluates the role ethnicity plays in promoting the collectivist behaviour of Christian and Muslim families when they interact socially at mealtimes. This is emblematic of the fact that the cultural behaviour of families is never sacrosanct and inflexible, but changes from time to time based on their level of exposure to either a new environment and/or a new social group. Consequently, this paper highlights the role of ethnicity on the behaviour of Christian and Muslim families (husband and wife) at mealtimes and draw attention to its significance as crucially element of collectivism, particularly in relation to its role in the social interaction between similar and dissimilar gender groups. The authors critically reviewed the role ethnicity has on families' meal consumption behaviour and presented a comparative analytical summary of how gender is critical to the meal behaviours of different gender and religious groups. The study evaluated the role ethnicity plays in families' meal social interaction behaviour and highlighted factors such as affection, gender differentiation, education and hierarchy, as prime factors of the collectivistic behaviour of families. However, it was evident from the findings that failure to demonstrate emotional ties at mealtimes can debilitate families' cohesiveness and display of common strength.

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Introduction:-

Sierra Leone is a multicultural and multi-ethnic nation with a very peculiar and complicated history, and has a diversity of kingdoms and traditional practices espoused by different ethnic groups, including Mende, Temne, Limba and Fulani (Thompson, 2013; and Akinsulure-Smith and Smith, 2014). However, its overall ethnic composition consists of more than 18 different ethnic-cultural groups mostly based on tribe, region, language,

religion and traditional beliefs (Akinsulure-Smith and Smith, 2014). Abraham et al (2013);Thompson (2013); and Wilkinson & Bristol (2018)proclaimed that there are between fifteen and twenty ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, depending on one's linguistic tendency to "lump" or "split" groups of people speaking different dialects. Albeit the distinctness of each of these ethnic groups, the majority of them are incline to speak Creole(Abraham et al, 2013; and Wilkinson & Bristol, 2018). However, it is important to realise that irrespective of the collectivistic culture of Sierra Leonean families, the meal consumption and social interaction behaviour of the various ethnic groups differs significantly (Kakay, 2017).

Cohen (2013);Million (2013); and Anderson (2019) suggested that, most Sierra Leonean villages, and sometimes families within these villages have specific taboos or proscriptions against eating certain foods. Abraham et al (2013); and Adjei& Sika-Bright (2019)attributes these taboos to laws handed down by ancestors or perhaps the founder of the village. Therefore, one can argue that,the food consumption behaviour of Sierra Leonean families acceptable in certain areas of the country by specific ethnic group is a taboo to others. This implies that, certain ethnic groups seethe social way of life of others as a taboo. Millan and Reynolds (2010); Parker and Grinter (2014); and Myers et al(2019) suggested that, there is limited knowledge of the implications of the interplay between ethnicity and family meal social interaction patterns. Fitzsimmons and Stamper (2014); Muk et al (2014); and Vora et al (2019) noted that, the interdependent self-concepts reflect internalisation of these ethnic values, which may therefore be a better predictor of consumption behaviour.

In Sierra Leone, individualism is also eminent among the ethnic group referred to as creoles, who are freed slaves from the United States and/or the United Kingdom (Kakay, 2017). He argued that, they have more individualistic and British or American thinking than the average Sierra Leonean from other ethnic groups. Glennerster et al (2013); McFerson (2013); and Liwin& Houle (2019), reiterated that, creoles practiced more independence than the average Sierra Leonean, and concludes by stating that, British and American culturesdictates their behaviour. In summary, upper income households, creoles and academics are more inclined to practice individualism; because of either their educational attainment or the inspiration drawn fromplaces, they have travelled/visited and/or lived (Kakay, 2017). He reiterated that, in such cases, they are likely to imbibe the individualistic culture of places lived/visited. However, he cautioned that, even within these groupings, irrespective of their social standings, collectivistic ethnic tendencies are still prevalent in their mealtime behaviours.

This paper presents a critical analysis of the role of ethnicity on families' meal social interaction behaviour and chronicle factors responsible for the display of such behaviour. Invariably, the findings of this study highlighted the role ethnic factors such as tribe, region of origin, cultural beliefs and assumptions have on families' meal social interaction behaviour and demonstrate how they symbolically play a part inindividuals' level of acculturation, when they either migrate to new social settings or interact with people from different ethnic backgrounds. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the ethnic factors that promotes collectivistic behaviour of Sierra Leonean families at mealtimes. Therefore, the study focuses on the following specific objectives:

1. Analyse the role of tribe in Sierra Leonean families' meal social interaction behaviour
2. Evaluate the role region of origin plays inSierra Leonean families' meal social interaction behaviour
3. Synthesise the significance of cultural beliefs in Sierra Leonean families' meal social interaction behaviour
4. Assess the role assumptive practices play inSierra Leonean families' meal social interaction behaviour

Methods:-

The researcher conducted one-to-one semi-structured face-to-face qualitative interviews with families about therole ethnicfactors plays in their meal social interaction behaviour. This is because they provide an enriched, detailed and dynamic information source that can help the researcher understand the 'lived experiences' of Sierra Leonean families' mealtimes' social interaction behaviours.This allowed families from diverse backgrounds, based on their perspective and own words elucidate their views of the ethnicattributes that affects their meal social interaction behaviours.The researcher during the semi-structured interviews introduced a theme and allowed the conversation to develop according to cues taken from what respondents said about their families.

The maintenance and practicalities of Research Ethics

Before going to the field to conduct the study, the researcher obtained ethical approval from the University of Salford Ethics Committee for the conduction of the semi-structured interview. After fulfilling the ethical requirements of the University, the Ethics committee granted approval to the researcher to conduct the study.

Before soliciting the participation of the respondents in the interview process, the researcher informed them that, participation is voluntary and that, there are no known or anticipated risks associated with their participation in the study. The researcher informed the respondents that, they were free to decline to answer any question(s) they are uncomfortable in answering. They were informed about the freedom to withdraw from the interview process at any time without any negative consequences or actions - but this must be communicated in earnest. In addition, they were informed that, all the information, including their personal data will be treated with strict confidentiality, except where otherwise agreed to, and that, the data collected will be kept in a safe and secured location and confidentially disposed of in three years after the study has been completed.

Before the semi-structured interviews and observations were conducted, the researcher ensured that all the families signed a consent form to ascertain their willingness to participate in the research process. The researcher ensured that enough time (at least one week notice) was given to the families to consider whether they were willing to participate in the research or not, or given the freedom and opportunity to ask further questions about the research on issues that were unclear. It was only when appropriate consent had been obtained that an interview was scheduled and conducted.

The researcher ensured that the purpose of the data was made clear to the families before the interview, and the consequences inherent in the processing of the data were clarified - an explanation provided about the people the data was likely to be disclosed to, including the likelihood of publication. In addition, they were informed that, it include details of any other information that might be appropriate under the circumstance of the research. All the respondents and geographic areas involved or included in the research were coded for anonymity and confidentiality by using an appropriate coding system and the original list consisting of the names of families, who willingly agreed to participate in the semi-structured interviews and observation, were only held and known by the researcher.

Participants and Recruitment

Snowballing; convenience; and experiential sampling techniques were used to recruit families from different ethnic backgrounds from across the four regions of Sierra Leone, including the northern, southern and eastern provinces as well as the western area. The data collection took place mainly in the urban areas, particularly the provincial headquarter towns, as their population mirrors the ethnic composition of the country. A Sample representation of the ethnic, religious and demographic composition of families who participated in the face-to-face semi-structured interviews are depicted in table 4 (see appendix). For fairness and consistency, approximately 20 percent of the families were selected in the North (Makeni), 20 per cent in the South (Bo), 20 per cent in the East (Kenema), and 40 per cent in the Western area (Freetown). This implies that, four families were recruited in the North (Makeni), four in the South (Bo), four in the East (Kenema), and eight in the Western Area (Freetown). A Sample representation of the religious, ethnic and demographic composition of families, who participated in the face-to-face semi-structured interviews are presented in the table four (see appendix). A total of 20 families (20 husbands and 20 wives), a sample size of 40, from various households were contacted across the country with a vivid explanation given to them about the study including potential risks of data publication, benefits to the country generally, and the assurance of confidentiality. The main participants in the study were husbands and wives (married couples) from diverse backgrounds. To enhance the validity and reliability of the data collected from the field, an equal number of participants for the interviews were drawn from the two religious sects (Christian and Muslims). This implies that, ten families were selected from each religious sect (i.e. 50 percent from each denomination). In order to prevent bias and/or reduce the couples (Husband and wife) influence on each other, the interviews were conducted independently and exclusively. Initial appointments and participant invitation letters; the research themes to be covered; and the participant information sheet detailing the interview protocol, commitment, benefits; and risks and confidentiality were issued to the interviewees at their various places of work before the official scheduled interviews at their homes were conducted.

Interviews

A guideline was developed for the entire research process from the planning onto the implementation phase to avoid any incongruity. The analysis of literature, guided the identification of theories and concepts, which were tested using the data collected from the field. This was done in the form of a gap analysis. The researcher used open-ended questions and themes, from which a broad conclusion was drawn. The themes included tribe, region of origin, cultural beliefs and assumptions. The interview for each respondent was scheduled for an hour, but on the average, it lasted between 50 and 55 minutes. The researcher carried out the interviews at the homes of the interviewees with the conversations recorded on a digital audio recorder. To get a clearer picture of the role of ethnicity on family meal

social interaction behaviour, the researcher focused on three major ethnic groups (Creole, Temne, and Mende) due to their dominance in the country and categorise all the other minority groupings as others. A tabular representation of the sample and personal data are depicted in the Table 3 (see appendix).

Data Analysis

The use of thematic analysis facilitated analysis of the data, as it is the most appropriate method for classifying word-based material by reducing it to more relevant, manageable bits of data. The process was invaluable in depicting the association between ethnic collectivism and family meal social interaction behaviour. In addition, the researcher transcribed all the data verbatim and imported them into NVIVO 10 to facilitate the analysis and coding. An iterative approach of reading and rereading the transcripts, identifying themes and patterns, and comparing across the data was used during the analysis. Thus, continuity in the coding process helped identify redundancies and overlaps in the categorisation of the scheme, and then grouped both sequentially and thematically. The use of NVIVO 10 facilitated the development of an audit trail using memos, providing evidence of confirmation of the Research findings. After collating and coding, the data was summarised and organised by comparing the responses provided by the different family members (husband and wife), and conceptualised the interpretation of each category by each family member, and how they interact with each other. The researcher noted that sometimes, there were variations in responses from different family members, which could have prompted the use of more than one code, which resulted in the building up of different sub-categories. The researcher worked on the categorisation scheme, assignment of codes, and interpreted and reviewed the transcripts independently. He ensured that, differences in interpretations, commonalities and differences were identified and modified appropriately. Therefore, the researcher used triangulation to enhance the credibility of the data. In addition, the audio-recordings and associated transcripts (field notes) were transcribed as soon as the researcher returned from the field to avoid unnecessary build-up of information and data and avoid loss of vital information.

Analysis of interview response - Thematic Analysis – Analysis of the association between ethnicity and families' meal social interaction behaviour

The researcher used thematic analysis to reduce the data into manageable form by which many words of texts are classified into much fewer content categories using the researcher's judgement. In addition, the researcher obtained invaluable feedback and advice of incident allocation to different categories from his supervisory team, who critiqued the analysis and identified shortfalls during the allocation process. Despite these shortfalls, the researcher used thematic analysis to identify themes and the frequency with which certain issues or themes appeared in the material collected. The Thematic analysis was very useful in looking for the association between ethnicity and family meal social interaction behaviour. The whole process started with the researcher segmenting the data into manageable analytical units. This included building a table by giving the various categories headings and sub-headings based on the themes and sub-themes used in conducting the interviews, the questions asked and the responses provided by the families.

The researcher carefully and attentively listened to and transcribed the audio-recorder to identify the major themes and issues, and this process was iterative and repetitive to make sure that no vital information was missing when transcribing. In addition, the notes taken during the interviews about observation were also used as a reference point. The codes were organised in hierarchical order to illustrate how some codes are subsets of the other, which allowed the thematic content analysis to be done at different levels using an aggregated approach. The researcher also used cross-references to make connections between disparate elements in the coded hierarchical structure that might be ignored using units of material allocated to appropriate codes. The use of the hierarchical and cross-referencing coding enabled the researcher to identify patterns, associations and connections between codes and use the connections to establish the commonalities based on the statement made by the families, which resulted in the establishment of the association between ethnicity and family meal social interaction.

Generalisability

The researcher used multiple approaches in collecting the data and embracing different approaches (clear description of the samples and rich description of the data collected, field sites and events) to enhance the generalisability of the research results beyond the geographical boundaries identified in the research. He ensured that different provinces and families of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds with differing social classes were involved in the interview process, which ensured that, the data was obtained from different perspectives. He further ensured that, each of the acclaimed generalisability approaches, including snowballing and convenience sampling for selecting families through established networks were of dissimilar backgrounds. This certified that the sampling process had a clear

description of the sample selection criteria and the samples included relevant families from the four provincial headquarters towns (Western Area, Northern province, Southern province and Eastern province) of Sierra Leone (i.e. Freetown, Makeni, Bo and Kenema), which are representative and mirror image of the country’s population. Thus, the samples and sites selected for this study are similar to the population across the country, which reflects their characteristics and behavioural patterns.

Results and Findings:-

The researcher used a sample of 40 respondents, who were between the ages of 18 and 65 years, as participants in the one-to-one semi-structured face-to-face interview. A tabular representation of the sample and personal data are depicted in table three (see appendix). The researcher considered the husband and wife (married couples) in each family as the main participants in the interview process. Twenty families (20 husbands and 20 wives) were selected in order to get a balanced response and interpretation of the results, and to reduce biasness to the bare minimum. It was imperative that, after the twentieth family, the data was saturated as the information collected from the 18th, 19th and 20th families (35th, 36th, 37th, 38th, 39th and 40th interviewees) were similar to those stated by earlier respondents.

Key findings of the study

The analysis of this study identified a number of themes and sub-themes, as key ethnic factors influencing families’ meal social interaction behaviour, including tribe, region of origin, cultural beliefs and assumptions. A comprehensive evaluation and discussion of the influence of each sub-theme on participating males and females was undertaken. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study are depicted in the Figure 1 and Table 1 below. The table 2 also provides a broad summary of the themes, sub-themes and the factors influencing families’ meal social interaction behaviour, and highlights the gender categories of the Christian and Muslim families, including comments made by each with regards the ethnic factors influencing their families’ meal behaviour.

Figure 1:- A diagrammatic representation of the factors influencing ethnicity on collectivist families’ meal behavior.



Table 1:-Thematic Analysis and schematic summary diagrams of the religion factors influencing families’ meal consumption behavior.

Interviews with Families			
Literature	Questions	Field Themes	Sub-themes
Ethnicity	In what ways does your tribe influence your family’s meal social	Identity	Tribe, dialect, language, ethnic background, Social group, region, sense of belonging (CH), cultural group, tradition, cultural values (MW), tribal values, kinsmen, social integration, acceptability (MH)
		Religious beliefs	Prayer, gratifying God (MW), Godly family, religion,

interaction behaviour at the dinner table?		provider, gratifying parents (MW)
	Food ethics	Hygiene (MW, CW, MH, CH), wash hands (MW, CW, MH, CH), silence (MW, CW, MH, CH), table etiquette (MW, CW, MH, CH), food wastage (MW, CW, MH, CH), food boundaries (MW, MH), left-hand forbidden (MW, CW, MH, CH)
	Education	Modernity (MW, CW, MH, CH), western culture (MW, CW, MH, CH), training, tribal education, tribal learning, freedom of expression (CH)
	Affection	Sharing (CH), eating together (CW, MH), unity CW, MH), tolerance (CH).
In what ways does your region of origin influence the way your family interact at the dinner table?	Food ethics	Quietness (MW, CW, MH, CH), gratifying parents (CW), appreciation, food boundaries, dish holding, modernity (CH)
	Religious beliefs	Prayer (MW, MH), provider, revered God, gratifying God, cultural beliefs ((CW, CH), religious values (CH)
	Affection	Sharing (CW, CH), unity (MH, CH), harmony, eating together
	Gender differentiation	Female subservience , gender separation (MW, MH), domestic chores, role definition (MW)
	Hierarchy	Respect (MW, CW, MH, CH), boundaries, kneeling down, rules and regulations, hierarchy (MH,)
In what ways does your cultural belief influence your family's meal social interaction behaviour?	Family religious beliefs	Food type (MW, MH), taboo, norm, religion, witchcraft, prayers (MW, MH), gratifying God (MW), God's existence, provider, way of life, Christian values (MW), religious practice (MW)
	Food ethics	Wash hands (MW, CW, MH, CH), hygiene (MW, CW, MH, CH), food boundaries, gratifying parents (MW), left-hand forbidden, modernity, table etiquette, acculturation,
	Gender differentiation	Domestic chores, gender separation, Female subservience ,
	Affection	Family unity (CW, MH), oneness, togetherness, sympathy, eat together, cordiality, friendly, peaceful co-existence, tribal belongingness, family belongingness, cooperative, modesty, sharing (CH),
	Hierarchy	Respect (MW, CW, MH, CH), sitting space, behaviour guidance/control (MW), responsibility, family image, family head, greetings, role definition, boundaries, rules and regulations, behavioural guidance, hierarchy (MH)
In what ways do these practices (assumptions) influence the way your family interact at the dinner table?	Family religious beliefs	Prayer (MW, CW, MH, CH), gratifying God, God provider (MW), God fearing, way of life, God's protection (MH), God's presence, traditional practices, family cultural values (MH),
	Food ethics	Gratifying parents (MW, CW), basic hygiene (MW, CW, MH, CH), morals, wash hands (MW, CW, MH, CH), quietness (MW, CW, MH, CH), sitting posture, table etiquette(MW, CW, MH, CH), food wastage, left-hand forbidden(MW, CW, MH, CH), appreciation,

	Gender differentiation	Female subservience, domestic chores, gender separation,
	Affection	peace, love, care, sympathy, belongingness, family unity (MW, CW, MH, CH), modesty, humility (CH), bonding, understanding, affection (CW), family image (CW), conformity (CH)
	Hierarchy	Respect (MW, CW, MH, CH), obedience (MW), kneeling down, eye contact, family image, behavioural guidance, role definition, hierarchy (MH)
	Education	Responsibility (MW, CW), behavioural conduct, politeness, basic norms, awareness raising, morals, adaptation, management, hygiene, learning culture, build confidence, education (MW)

Table 2:-A Summary of the ethnic factors influencing families’ meal social interaction behaviour

Theme	Sub-theme	Factor	CM in family	CF in family	MM in family	MF in family	Comment
Ethnicity	Tribe	Food ethics	√				Emphasised by a majority of CM only
		Modernity		√			Emphasised by a majority of CF only
		Respect	√		√		Emphasised by a majority of males regardless of religion (CM, MM)
		Identity		√		√	Emphasised by a majority of females regardless of religion (CF, MF)
		Acceptance			√		Emphasised by a majority of MM only
	Region of origin	Food ethics	√			√	Emphasised by a majority (CM, MF), but less by CF and MM
		Respect	√	√	√	√	Predominant in all families
		Sharing	√				Emphasised by a majority of CM only
		Gender distinction			√		Emphasised by a majority of MM only
		Hierarchy			√		Emphasised by a majority of MM only
	Cultural beliefs	Food ethics	√	√	√	√	Predominant in all families
		Respect			√	√	Emphasised by a majority of Muslims only (MM, MF)
		Food type			√	√	Emphasised by a majority of Muslims only (MM, MF)
	Assumptions	Prayers	√	√	√	√	Predominant in all families
		Food ethics	√	√	√	√	Predominant in all families
		Respect	√	√	√	√	Predominant in all families
		Gratification				√	Emphasised by a majority of MF only
		Sense of responsibility		√			Emphasised by a majority of CF only
		God provider				√	Emphasised by a majority of MF only

Analysing the role of tribe in families' meal social interaction behaviour

Tribal sentiment plays a critical role in Sierra Leonean families' social interaction behaviour at mealtimes. It is through tribe that families are socialised into society, which determines their interaction at the dinner table. Inherently, most of the practices at the dinner table are inherited tribal practices cascaded down the line from one generation to another. Tribe fosters a closer bond between family members, and most especially, helps the children to cling together and become responsive to each other's needs in the future. In addition, tribe in some families is a precursor to protein access and predominantly used to limit children's access to protein at mealtimes. However, a significant number of the respondents do not see tribe as key to their families' interaction at mealtimes. Many see tribe and its inherent practices as retrogressive and traditional, as it adversely affects the families' socialisation process at mealtimes. This might be due to urbanisation experience of most families and the willingness of many to acculturate to their new environment. This implies that, some families tend to disavow their tribe and tribal practices when they migrate to urban centres; whilst an overwhelming others tends to be highly ethnocentric in their meal consumption behaviour.

"My tribe has a significant influence on the way we interact at the dinner table. Firstly, training the children and bringing them up the right way is very difficult, as we are in a volatile society today. Therefore, teaching them these tribal practices and influencing them to accept them is very important, as it will enhance their behaviour positively when they go outside or when they interact with other people. It also serves to bring unity in the family, particularly if all the children are speaking your dialect" (Interviewee 5, Female, Christian).

Despite the shared commonalities between the two faiths, an overwhelming number of Muslim and Christian females reiterated that tribe plays no role in their families' interaction at mealtimes. Urbanisation, education and acculturation are playing a significant part in promoting females' acceptance of tribe as a socialisation tool at mealtimes. It might also be due to the communication convenience gained from the use of the 'shared dialect'/creole spoken by many families across the country and the exposure to modern practices at mealtimes.

"No, my tribe does not in any way influence our interaction as a family at the dinner table" (Interviewee 1, Female, Christian).

The findings also show that, many Muslim and Christian males are sentimental about respect, as the key tribal factor promoted at their families' mealtimes. This might be due to chauvinism and male dominance, and the desire to demonstrate control and regulate the behaviour of the other members of the family, especially children, when interacting socially at mealtimes.

"Well, as I was saying respect is always given to the parents. There is always that sort of hierarchical structure in the family – father, mother, eldest son/daughter going down to the younger kids. So at least when you sit together in that hierarchical structure, respect goes round. The father gets more respect, he is more listened to, and next to him is the mother, then to the eldest son/daughter going down to the younger kids..." (Interviewee 32, Male, Muslim).

Evaluating the role region of origin plays in Sierra Leonean families' meal social interaction behaviour

Region of origin plays a profound role in families' social interaction at mealtimes and significantly determines the type of discourse held at the dinner table. Most families believe that, their traditional practices, family values and norms endorsed and practiced at the dinner table could predominantly be due to the region they came from. Region of origin fundamental teaches the children, especially the girl child, basic socialisation practices, including their roles, pre, during and post meal preparation. In addition, it teaches children the socialisation practice of obeying hierarchy and following orders, and most importantly respecting elders at the dinner table. However, a significant few emphasised that, their families' region of origin plays no role in their interaction at mealtimes. This implies that, despite the symbolism associated with region of origin in the ethnic domain, it plays an infinitesimal role in shaping the consumption behaviour of certain families.

"Just like I said about my tribe, the region I come from has a significant influence on my family as in my region irrespective of the tribe, we are expected to respect our elders when we sit together to eat. You are not expected, as a child to take meat, fish, or any protein food on top of the rice when you are eating with elders. You have to wait until when you finish eating and the eldest of the family will divide the meat or fish based on age and position in the family. However, in my family I do the same thing, I ensure that my children have adequate access to the meat or

fish without limitation because I know they need it for their growth, but I put a lot of emphasis on respect for elders and quietness over meal” (Interviewee 36, Male, Muslim).

The findings of the study show that, Muslim and Christian females shared commonalities in the area of respect as a major regional factor affecting their families’ meal behaviour. This implies that, respect is central as a socialisation practice to all families at mealtimes. However, a significant minority of Muslim and Christian females emphasised that their region of origin plays no role in their families’ mealtime behaviour.

“The region I come from makes respect for elders mandatory and sometimes if a child is too bold and talks to elders freely; it is seen as a sign of shorter life for the individual. So at the dinner table in my village, children are expected to be quiet and their presence must not be felt” (Interviewee 31, Female, Muslim).

“Well, I don’t see that having any effect. What I am saying is that we are trying to pass on what we have inherited from our own people, with the notion that that is the best way to behave as we deem it fit for the family. So being in association with other family members or groups or the region we come from have no effect on the way my family interact at the dinner table. If we see any slight deviation from what we are trying to pass on to our children, we always go out to correct them and tell them, no, you should not do this as it is not proper to do it that way” (Interviewee 7, Female, Muslim)

Akin to the Muslim and Christian females, their male counterparts (Muslim and Christian husbands) also emphasised respect as a key regional factor affecting the way their families interact at mealtimes. However, a significant number of Muslim and Christian males reiterated that their region of origin plays no role in their families’ meal behaviour. This implies that, irrespective of the religion, ethnicity and/or gender of a family, they share commonality and view about the role region of origin plays in their socialisation behaviour at mealtimes.

“I have just said it. Because my tribe as a Fullah, I have inherited most of the things from my father as to how we should respect food and how we should come together as a family and eat together...” (Interviewee 34, Male, Muslim)

“Well, I mean I came from the Kailahun district. Therefore, I believe in a way, it does not matter much because already we have a particular culture that is embedded in you, which you are expected to practice. So I don’t think the region has any influence on the way we interact at the dinner table” (Interviewee 12, Male, Christian).

The significance of cultural beliefs in families’ meal social interaction behaviour

Cultural beliefs are highly ingrained at Sierra Leonean mealtimes and acts as fundamental guide to the discourse at the dinner table. Many family members, especially children are socialised, trained and educated to accept and/or follow these practices at mealtimes to guide and shape their future behaviour, and most importantly teach them the family’s way of life. The transfer of these beliefs is useful in transforming children into better and responsible individuals in society. However, a significant few do not condone and/or follow these cultural beliefs when socialising at mealtimes. This implies that, despite the significance of these cultural beliefs across families, education and modernity have played a crucial role in the decisions made by a few, not to give credence to their symbolism at mealtimes.

“Well, like I said earlier, I was taught at a tender age to learn to share with other people and to also help people that are less privileged, we were also taught to pray before eating our meal and most times we ask God as a family to bless the food. These beliefs strongly influences the way my family interact at the dinner table” (Interviewee 30, Male, Christian).

The findings also show that, Muslim and Christian females share common cultural beliefs in the area of Food ethics such as hygiene/washing of hands before eating, silence at mealtimes, table etiquette, abhorrent of food wastage, food boundaries, and the forbidden use of the left-hand. However, many Muslim wives unlike their Christian counterparts emphasised respect and the type of food consumed as central to their families’ cultural beliefs. This implies that, despite the shared commonalities, there are certain cultural beliefs that do not cut across religious sects.

“Well, the common belief is that you should pray before eating and respect elders as I have already discussed. If you are sitting at the dinner table and you fail to provide sit to an elder, it might be seen as disrespectful and/or somebody

with short life. In addition, there is the belief that if you eat pork or monkey or drink alcohol, you will go to hell. So that is why we don't even encourage our children to join other families outside the home when having dinner" (Interviewee 31, Female, Muslim)

On the other hand, many Muslim and Christian males share common food ethics in terms of silence, and adherence to authority and hierarchy at mealtimes. However, unlike the Christian males, the Muslim males placed emphasis on respect and the type of food eaten as central to their families' cultural beliefs.

If the culture of eating and not talking was difficult to implement initially, but when we highlighted the danger of pepper going down the wrong part, they realise the significance of eating and not talking. Also, in my culture children are not allowed to take meat or fish on top of the rice when eating..." (Interviewee 6, Male, Christian)

"We believe that as Fullahs, we respect the two parents and be always thankful to them and look up to them as the provider of the food. We believe without these two people, we will not have food... Also, our belief as a Muslim is that we should not eat foods that are forbidden such as pork, monkey, alcohol, etc." (Interviewee 34, Male, Muslim)

Assessing the role assumptive practices play in Sierra Leonean families' meal social interaction behaviour
Many of the beliefs, practices, traditions and norms observed at the dinner table by families are unexplained and taken for granted, as they are part of their daily routines at mealtimes. Many families argued that, these assumptions improves the behaviour of their children both within and outside the home, and brings them closer to God. In addition, they mould the character of family members, especially children, to be respectful and responsible at all times and most importantly, cajole them into following and applying these practices in their own families when they become independent

"Well, in a way it ensures that the family is trying to keep its values together and ensure that they are adhered to. For example, adhering to these values/practices will allow everyone to reflect on the importance of what I tell them about prayers and other practices and see their significance in their lives. These interactions ensure that the children do not fear you as a father as it ensures that they know exactly what to do without you telling them what to do. We try to ensure that our children do not feel threatened and just try to remind them of the said practices if they forget. So that they will feel love and that they are learning a good culture when eating with their parents" (Interviewee 12, Male, Christian)

The findings also show that, the Muslim and Christian females share common assumptions in the areas of prayer before meal, respect for elders and food ethics, including basic hygiene/washing hands; silence; table etiquette; no food wastage; forbidden use of left-hand; and gratification. However, there are differences between the two denominations as the Muslim females were more emphatic about the need for gratifying parents, including the assumption that God is the provider of the food eaten by the family, whilst the Christian females were more inclined to emphasise orderliness and responsibility as key assumptive practices observed by their families at mealtimes.

"When we start eating, my children know that they are not allowed to talk because if you talk the food we get up your head. Therefore, after prayers, nobody is allowed to talk and we are all required to concentrate on the food. After eating, the younger ones will clear the table. This was the principle I met my parents implementing and I am doing the same to my children to make them more responsible and respectful to their elders. The place I grew-up in we all use to eat together and the younger ones are expected to clear the table, wash the plates and pans, and sweep the floor" (Interviewee 13, Female, Christian).

In the same guise, the Muslim and Christian males expressed similar views in terms of prayers, food ethics and respect as key assumptive practices their families must observe at mealtimes. Unlike their female counterparts, there were no observable assumptive differences between the Muslim and Christian males.

"...We normally pray before eating our dinner and I always ask my kids to pray, hold the dish when eating, wash your hand thoroughly before eating, you don't talk when eating, you don't take a portion of the food in front of your dad or an elder, you have to respect elders. For example, if we are all eating together from the same bowl and then you take portion of the food in front of me, it is translated as ill-mannered" (Interviewee 12, Male, Christian)

Discussion:-

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first to explore the role ethnicity plays in families' meal social interaction behaviour across Sierra Leone. The findings show that, tribe as an ethnic factor was highlighted by most Muslim and Christian females as well as Muslim males, whilst a few Christian males emphasised that tribe has no place in their families' discourse at mealtimes. A few Muslim and Christian males emphasised respect for elders is fundamental to their families' meal behaviour. Despite these similarities, Christian females were emphatic about modernity as key to the way their families behave at mealtimes; Muslim males were more emphatic about acceptance; and Christian males emphasised food ethics as a symbolic in the way their families interact at mealtimes. The results of the findings also show that, even within the same religion and gender groups, there are marked differences, including cultural values; respect; gratifying parents; food ethics; hierarchy; and family unity. Other differences that emerged from the result of the study among families of the same religious and gender groupings include authority; tolerance; obedience; sharing; freedom of expression; and politeness. This suggests that the interviewees held both negative and positive views of the role tribe plays in their families' meal behaviour, and that the difference in views could largely be due to modernity, civilisation and the acculturation of families to urban or western style of living. This trend is likely to continue in the future, when more families embrace urban life styles. Consistent with Peštek and Činžarević (2014); and Zeiders et al (2013), the findings suggest that tribal values are of particular relevance in explaining the identity of individuals, and that it can also be used as a discriminatory instrument and/or adherence to a group. This study highlights the declining significance of tribe due to acculturation among families.

The findings show that, region of origin plays a tremendous role in the ethnic mealtime behaviour of Muslim females, Christian females and Christian males, whilst a few Muslim males emphasised respect as the crucial regional factor being promoted at their families' mealtimes. Despite the unanimity, Christian males highlighted food ethics and meal sharing as the most symbolic; the Muslim females were more emphatic about food ethics whilst the Muslim males emphasised gender distinction and hierarchy as fundamental regional promoted at their families' mealtimes. Despite no obvious discriminatory issues or gender preferences, the findings show that, males and females eat separately in some families and the roles are different, as females are socialised/trained to prepare and serve food at mealtimes. The results of this study also show that regional differences exist even between people of the same gender and religious background, including attitude to: prayers; role definition; dialect; cultural beliefs; gratifying parents; family unity; modernity; cultural values; and family religious values. This suggests that, families have a positive view about their region of origin, albeit the negative perspective held by a few. This further suggests that, despite the symbolic role of acculturation or modernity in the lives of families, their region of origin still plays a role in their mealtime behaviour, due to the concern of losing touch with their cultural lineage and ancestral background. Consistent with Rampton (2014), the findings identified region of origin and ethnic social groups as primarily linked to ethnicity. The findings of this study highlighted respect; food ethics; hierarchy; gender distinction; and meal sharing as fundamental regional affecting the way families behave at mealtimes. This symbolically helps guide the upbringing of children and foster a sense of connectedness with where they come from. This implies that families' region of origin is fundamental to their way of life, as it helps them to keep tap with their regional values/linkage with their in-group for fear of being ostracised by their own people and the broader implications this may have on them in the long-term.

Cultural beliefs are central to the mealtime behaviour of most Sierra Leonean Muslim and Christian families and therefore, adherence to food ethics such as hygiene/washing of hands, silence at mealtimes, table etiquette, abhorrent of food wastage, observing food boundaries, and the forbidden use of the left-hand are fundamental to mealtime socialisation discourse. Despite the shared commonalities, the Muslim males and females highlighted respect for parents, and the type of food and drink consumed at mealtime, as crucial to their socialisation discourse. It is important to highlight that, unlike the Muslim families, these factors do not affect the mealtime behaviour of the Christian families – a few of whom indicated that cultural beliefs do not affect their families' social discourse behaviour at mealtimes. The results of the findings also show that there are cultural belief differentials between families of the same religious and gender groupings including gratifying parents; family norms/values; family religious beliefs; control; family unity; hierarchy; modernity; and meal sharing. This suggests that, most families have a positive opinion of cultural beliefs as significant in their meal behaviour, though a significant few indicated that, they do not affect their families' mealtime behaviour. This further suggests that despite the role urbanisation plays, including education and/or modernity, the rate of acculturation is slow, as cultural beliefs still determine families' mealtime behaviour. Consistent with Brice (2012); De Mooij (2013); and Vora et al (2019), the findings posit that, cultural beliefs are norms largely shared within ethnic groups with defined boundaries. This

study suggests that, food ethics, respect, the type of food consumed and prayers as key to Sierra Leonean families' meal behaviour. This implies that irrespective of the family background, differences in cultural beliefs are bound to exist due to the cultural orientation, cultural upbringing, emigration/migration, ethnic orientation and/or religious orientation. This is because the ethics of the group families come from, the groups they belong to, the religion they belong to and/or their movement from one geographic location of the country to another determines their meal behaviour.

The findings show that, most families take for granted prayer; respect for elders; and food ethics, including basic hygiene/washing hands, silence at mealtimes, table etiquette, no food wastage, forbidden use of left-hand, and gratification, as crucial to their mealtime discourse behaviour. These factors are inexplicit, but known by every member of the family, as part of the socialisation process. Despite these similarities, the Muslim females were more emphatic about the need, especially for the children, to gratify parents after meal and recognise that, God is the provider of the food the family eat, whilst the Christian females were more emphatic about sense of responsibility as essential assumptive practices in their families' meal behaviour. No assumptive distinctions emerged between the Muslim and Christian males. The findings also show that, there are differences in assumptive practices even between families of the same religious and gender groupings, including obedience; family unity; moral education; affection; family image; God's protection; family cultural values; hierarchy; conformity; and humility. This suggests that, most of these assumptive practices play a role in Sierra Leonean families' discourse behaviour at mealtimes, which are fundamental to their way of life. Mirroring the views of Bejanyan et al. (2014); and Johansson & Herz (2019), the findings suggest that, ethnic traditionalists are held together primarily by assumptive emotional ties due to history and children are socialised to internalise these cultural values. The findings of this study offers in-depth assumptive practices, including prayer, respect for elders and food ethics as essential ingredients to Sierra Leonean families' mealtime behaviour. This further implies that, despite the negative consequences of some of the assumptive practices such as the non-use of the left hand at mealtimes, it is an acceptable practice among families of the two religious denominations (Muslim and Christian).

Implications

It is evident from the findings of the study that, there are shared ethnic commonalities and differences between and within families in the demonstrable use of tribe, region of origin, cultural beliefs and assumptive practices, as guidelines to their socialisation behaviour at mealtimes. This is because society generally attached greater significance to ethnic values such as respect and politeness, which are fundamental to the way people communicate, treat or relate with other people, especially elders, irrespective of their cultural, and/or family background. This implies that, despite the aberrational differences between families, there are shared commonalities that shapes the way people behave at mealtimes. This shows that, despite the role of modernity, education and/or urbanisation, the typical Sierra Leonean family is not averse to employing ethnic practices that would help unify and reinforce behaviour at mealtimes, though others are inclined to renege and/or choose not to implement the same at the dinner table.

The findings of this study highlight the role tribe plays in families' meal social interaction behaviour and demonstrates that, modernity, education and urbanisation have caused families to acculturate, which significantly affect their socialisation at mealtimes. This implies that, the role tribe plays may vary from family to family, from social group to social group and from region to region, which may require further study to unravel the reasons for these differences and identify the true reasons for the distinction in the tribal practices among families when socialising at mealtimes. Consequently, undertaking further study to determine the role tribe plays can provide a broader picture of its impacts on families' socialisation discourse.

Appendix

Table 3:- Personal Data of Families

Family category	Age (years)	Gender	Occupation	Ethnicity	Luxury food defined	Examples of luxury food
01FFI	30	Female	Procurement officer	Creole	Any special food eaten once in a while	Foo-foo + sauce, cassava leaves, vegetable salad, groundnut stew, krain-krain, potato leaves
	36	Male	Banker	Mende	Costly food normally consumed for comfort	Vegetable salad, shrimps +chips

02FFI	35	Female	Business woman	Temne	Luxury food is anything very expensive	Meat, fish, salad cous-cous, jollofrice, juice
	47	Male	Builder	Temne	They are food we mainly buy from the super markets	Wine, juice, fruits and drinks, biscuits, ice cream
03FFI	32	Female	Nurse	Yalunka	It is food provided to the family on special occasions	Rose apple, banana, chicken, salad
	52	Male	Teacher	Kono	Those items that the family needs, but not available at all times	Salad, chicken, meat
04FFI	46	Female	Geologist	Temne	It is anything which you buy with an amount that far exceeds what you will spend on normal food	Pizza, grapes, chicken, macaroni
	48	Male	Banker – Director	Mende	The food which the family wants, but it is not available on a daily basis	Pizza, apples
05FFI	35	Female	Business woman	Mende	They are supermarket foods	Hamburger, salad, sandwich, stew and chicken, meat, sweet potatoes
	40	Male	Inspector of police	Mende	It is ostentatious food	Chicken, snacks, mayonnaise, cocoa
06FFI	28	Female	Teacher	Kono	It is a food that is not prepared every day and are special foods prepared for special days	Salad, dessert, jolloff, cous-cous, fried rice, fruits
	38	Male	Civil servant (Technical Coordinator)	Kissy	It is the food we do not normally eat, but eat once in a while with the appropriate ingredients	Meat, drinks, salad, rice, wine
07FFI	35	Female	Business woman	Temne	Food that doesn't get spoiled easily	Vegetables and fruits
	39	Male	Finance Officer (YMCA)	Kono	It is food that has all the nutrients to help the body grow	Ovaltine, cappuccino, milk, sardine, luncheon meat, salad cream, cornflakes
08FFI	46	Female	Social worker	Mende	A food that is not being purchased by everybody	Tin milk, eggs, vegetables, meat, chicken
	50	Male	Social worker	Mende	A food that makes you look special and you can't do without them	Hamburger, roasted chicken, ice cream
09FFI	49	Female	Mid-wife	Temne	It is when a sauce has good fish and meat as condiment	Jolloff, fried rice, cassava leaves
	59	Male	Business man (self-employed)	Madingo	Is food containing protein, vitamins to build the body	Fruits, chicken, fish, meat
10FFI	36	Female	Teacher	Koranko	Food which can make	Drinks, apple, fruits, meat

					the children grow well	
	45	Male	Civil engineer	Mende	Food used almost on a daily basis	Rice, foo-foo, cassava, potato, etc.
11FFI	38	Female	Teacher	Mende	Any food not always available to the family and very expensive	Fruits, ice cream, meat, milk, ovaltine
	43	Male	Civil servant	Mende	One though a staple, but not everybody can afford it every day or cannot afford it as a balanced diet	Rice, fish, meat, palm oil
12FFI	52	Female	Teacher/Pastor	Limba	Expensive foods	Meat, chicken, fish, salad, palm oil
	59	Male	Lecturer	Mende	It is something I eat and get good feeling from	Salad, meat, chicken, fish, rice
13FFI	26	Female	Nurse	Creole	Food that is needed at home for the daily sustenance of the family	Rice and provisions
	39	Male	Lecturer	Limba	Food that goes beyond your normal expenditure	Snacks
14FFI	42	Female	Teacher	Temne	It is food that is very expensive for the family to buy frequently	Salad, drinks, fruits
	50	Male	Agricultural Officer	Temne	Food that the family cannot prepare at home and the ingredients are not locally available. It is well balanced	Pizza, can foods, drinks
15FFI	59	Female	University Administrator	Creole	Very expensive foods that the family eat once in a week	Salad, hamburger, pizza, foo-foo and bitters
	64	Male	University Administrator	Creole	Foods that you don't eat ordinarily	Ice cream, sausages, bacon, pies
16FFI	42	Female	Principal	Mende	Any food that is expensive for a normal family to buy and it is usually outside the reach of a normal family	Pizza, meat, salad
	45	Male	Deputy Director (EPA)	Yalunka	They are delicacies eaten by the family	Meat, tin food, salad
17FFI	35	Female	Business woman (self-employed)	Temne	Food consume by the family with the right types of condiments	Stew Rice, salad, fruits, meat, chicken
	50	Male	Medical lecturer/tutor	Fulla	It is food that we eat every day at home	Rice and sauce, eba and okra, krain-krain
18FFI	43	Female	Teacher	Mende	It is everything you use as a family, including staple food	Rice, palm-oil, groundnut oil, onion, season, tomato, provisions

	52	Male	Businessman	Madingo	Food we eat in the home infrequently	Salad, fruits, drinks, sandwich
19FFI	45	Female	Housewife	Mende	Food that is purchased outside the home and are normally very expensive	Hamburger, sandwich, fruits
	52	Male	Civil Servant	Mende	Food that the family needs, but can only be provided on an infrequent basis	Meat, fish, drinks, salad
20FFI	40	Female	Social worker	Mende	Food that people buy from restaurants and stores	Milk, chicken, ovaltine, mayonnaise
	48	Male	Social worker	Madingo	Food that is needed by the family, but difficult to buy on a daily because it is expensive	Roasted chicken and meat, salad, provisions,

Table 4:-Sample representation of the ethnic, religious and demographic composition of families who participated in the face-to-face semi-structured interviews

Families		Demographic		
Family 001	Wife	Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: procurement office	
		Ethnicity: Creole		
		Family size: 3	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA	
	Husband	Religion: Christianity		
		Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: Banker	
		Ethnicity: Mende		
Family 002	Wife	Family size: 3	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA	
		Religion: Christianity		
		Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: Banker	
	Husband	Ethnicity: Mende		
		Family size: 3	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA	
		Religion: Christianity		
Family 003	Wife	Location: HQ03	Type of occupation: Businesswoman/self-employed	
		Ethnicity: Temne		
		Family size: 8	District/Provincial headquarter town: NP	
	Husband	Religion: Muslim		
		Location: HQ03	Type of occupation: Constructor	
		Ethnicity: Temne		
Family 003	Wife	Family size: 8	District/Provincial headquarter town: NP	
		Religion: Christianity		
		Location: HQ04	Type of occupation: Nurse	
Family 003	Wife	Ethnicity: Yalunka		
		Family size: 12	District/Provincial headquarter town: EP	

		Religion: Christianity	
	Husband	Location: HQ04 Ethnicity: Kono Family size: 12 Religion: Christianity	Type of occupation: Teacher District/Provincial headquarter town: EP
Family 004	Wife	Location: HQ04 Ethnicity: Temne Family size: 7 Religion: Muslim	Type of occupation: Geologist District/Provincial headquarter town: EP
	Husband	Location: HQ04 Ethnicity: Mende Family size: 7 Religion: Christianity	Type of occupation: Banker District/Provincial headquarter town: EP
Family 005	Wife	Location: HQ02 Ethnicity: Mende Family size: 5 Religion: Christianity	Type of occupation: Businesswoman/self-employed District/Provincial headquarter town: SP
	Husband	Location: HQ02 Ethnicity: Mende Family size: 5 Religion: Christianity	Type of occupation: Police Officer District/Provincial headquarter town: SP
Family 006	Wife	Location: HQ02 Ethnicity: Kono Family size: 5 Religion: Christianity	Type of occupation: Teacher District/Provincial headquarter town: SP
	Husband	Location: HQ02 Ethnicity: Kissy Family size: 5 Religion:	Type of occupation: Civil servant District/Provincial headquarter town: SP

		Christianity	
Family 007	Wife	Location: HQ02	Type of occupation: Businesswoman/self-employed
		Ethnicity: Temne	
	Family size: 4	District/Provincial headquarter town: SP	
	Religion: Christianity		
Husband	Location: HQ02	Type of occupation: Finance Officer	
	Ethnicity: Kono		
	Family size: 4	District/Provincial headquarter town: SP	
Religion: Christianity			
Family 008	Wife	Location: HQ02	Type of occupation: Social worker
		Ethnicity: Mende	
		Family size: 10	District/Provincial headquarter town: SP
	Religion: Christian		
Husband	Location: HQ02	Type of occupation: Social worker	
	Ethnicity: Mende		
	Family size: 10	District/Provincial headquarter town: SP	
Religion: Christian			
Family 009	Wife	Location: HQ03	Type of occupation: mid-wife
		Ethnicity: Temne	
		Family size: 4	District/Provincial headquarter town: SP
	Religion: Muslim		
Husband	Location: HQ03	Type of occupation: Businessman/self-employed	
	Ethnicity: Madingo		
	Family size: 4	District/Provincial headquarter town: NP	
Religion: Muslim			
Family 010	Wife	Location: HQ03	Type of occupation: Teacher
		Ethnicity: Koranko	
	Family size: 10	District/Provincial headquarter town: NP	
Religion: Muslim			

	Husband	Location: HQ03	Type of occupation: Civil engineer
		Ethnicity: Mende	
		Family size: 10	District/Provincial headquarter town: NP
Family 011	Wife	Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: Teacher
		Ethnicity: Mende	
		Family size: 8	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA
	Husband	Religion: Muslim	
		Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: Civil servant
		Ethnicity: Mende	
Family 012		Family size: 8	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA
		Religion: Muslim	
		Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: Teacher/Pastor
		Ethnicity: Limba	
		Family size: 6	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA
		Religion: Christian	
Family 013	Wife	Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: Lecturer
		Ethnicity: Mende	
		Family size: 6	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA
	Husband	Religion: Christian	
		Location: HQ04	Type of occupation: Nurse
		Ethnicity: Creole	
Family 014	Wife	Family size: 4	District/Provincial headquarter town: EP
		Religion: Muslim	
		Location: HQ04	Type of occupation: Lecturer
	Husband	Ethnicity: Limba	
		Family size: 4	District/Provincial headquarter town: EP
		Religion:	
Family 014	Wife	Location: HQ03	Type of occupation: Teacher
		Ethnicity: Temne	
		Family size: 5	District/Provincial headquarter town: NP
	Husband	Religion: Christian	
		Location: HQ03	Type of occupation: Agricultural Officer

		Ethnicity: Temne	
		Family size: 5	District/Provincial headquarter town: NP3
		Religion: Christian	
Family 015	Wife	Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: University Administrator
		Ethnicity: Creole	
		Family size: 4	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA
	Husband	Religion: Christian	
		Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: University Administrator
		Ethnicity: Creole	
		Family size: 4	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA
		Religion: Christian	
Family 016	Wife	Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: Principal
		Ethnicity: Mende	
		Family size: 8	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA
	Husband	Religion: Muslim	
		Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: Deputy Director (Civil Servant)
		Ethnicity: Yalunka	
		Family size: 8	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA
		Religion: Muslim	
Family 017	Wife	Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: Businesswoman/Self-employed
		Ethnicity: Temne	
		Family size: 9	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA
	Husband	Religion: Muslim	
		Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: Medical Lecturer
		Ethnicity: Fullah	
		Family size: 9	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA
		Religion: Muslim	
Family 018	Wife	Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: Teacher
		Ethnicity: Mende	
		Family size: 8	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA
	Husband	Religion: Muslim	
		Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: Businessman/self-employed
		Ethnicity:	

		Madingo	
		Family size: 8	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA
		Religion: Muslim	
Family 019	Wife	Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: Housewife
		Ethnicity: Mende	
	Family size: 12	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA	
	Religion: Muslim		
Husband	Location: HQ01	Type of occupation: Civil servant (Deputy Director General)	
	Ethnicity: Mende		
	Family size: 12	District/Provincial headquarter town: WA	
		Religion: Muslim	
Family 020	Wife	Location: HQ04	Type of occupation: Social worker
		Ethnicity: Mende	
	Family size: 3	District/Provincial headquarter town: EP	
	Religion: Muslim		
Husband	Location: HQ04	Type of occupation: Social worker	
	Ethnicity: Madingo		
	Family size: 3	District/Provincial headquarter town: EP	
		Religion: Muslim	

Codes:

Freetown: HQ 01; Western Area: WA; Bo: HQ 02; Southern province: SP; Makeni: HQ 03; Northern Province: NP; Kenema: HQ 04; Eastern province: EP

Please note that, HQ means – Headquarter town

Conclusion:-

This study highlights the significance of affection, gender differentiation, education and hierarchy in families' meal consumption behaviour. It was evident from the findings that, individuals' failure to adhere to ethnic sentiments, including tribal, regional, cultural and assumptive values at mealtimes, can affect families' cohesiveness and display of common strength. Most families argue that, it helps to strengthen the bond and unifies them around a common goal. This is important because it can help foster oneness, happiness and harmony within the family, which is essential for stability, progress and sustainability of the family overtime. The implications are that, it ensures every family member demonstrates concern about the welfare of others at the dinner table. In addition, it shows the symbolism of affection in the ethnic discourse, as it helps enhance and prolong the knowledge of individuals about their family lineage. It is important to emphasise that despite the findings of this study are generally compatible with those of earlier researchers, they result does not support the notion that tribe is a key ethnic factor, as most families highlighted its inconsequentiality in their meal interaction behaviour.

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