This chapter provides a detailed description and analysis of traditional and contemporary 
African family life with an emphasis on East African families. The opening section covers the 
traditional perspectives and universal family features applicable all over Africa, whereas the 
final sections cover contemporary and emerging perspectives on East African family trends: 
past, present and the future. The traditional East African concept of family extends from the 
nuclear to the extended family. This is a family system built upon mutual obligations that 
underlie the power and authority of an extended family ethos; however the ethos goes beyond 
blood, marriage and adoption. East African families include the living relatives as well as the 
unborn family members who will become the continuation of the family lineage. Marriage, 
sexuality, parenting and gender relations are covered in the context of modernization.

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