RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE SOCIAL CLASS MYTH OF COLLECTIVISM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CLASS ON FAMILIES' MEAL INTERACTION BEHAVIOUR

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Manuscript Info	*Abstract*
	The class distinction in the Sierra Leonean society is the primary determinant of families' access to a balanced diet as well as the level of social interaction at mealtimes. The income earned by families, their status in society, level of education and the type of job they do, significantly determines the type of food they consume. This implies that, social class can act as the arbiter to families' access not only to adequate, but quality food. It also influences the food variety available at mealtimes. The study shows that, many Sierra Leonean families experience the problem of daily food affordability challenges, which limits social interaction at the dinner table at mealtimes. Nevertheless, the findings also show that, irrespective of the social standing of families, table etiquette are important to the different social classes, as it provides the foundation for training and socialising children into becoming responsible adults.

Introduction:-

Suckling (2016) and Kakay (2017) claim that social class is founded on hierarchy and identity at the Sierra Leonean dinner table, and that it is largely responsible for constraints on food aspirations, tastes, social networks, and resources.Several academics claim that socioeconomic class differences influence the extent of parental supervision and children's autonomy during mealtimes (Albon& Hellman, 2019; Musher-Eizenman et al, 2019; and Rohit et al, 2019).This suggests that a family's food choices and diet are important in signalling identity and belonging (Ma & Ma, 2019), and that teenagers from high-status families in Sierra Leone sometimes make food choices outside of their parents' purview as a way of asserting individuality and fitting in with peers (Bischof, 2019).As a result of the social and economic developments that have occurred in Sierra Leone over the last two decades, there has been a considerable change in the way households dine together, with families gradually becoming more Americanized or Europeanized (Cooper, 2019; Estes &Sirgy, 2019; and Temudo, 2019).Sierra Leoneans place a high priority on social status and economic positions, which influences how society interacts with individuals and the types of food purchased and consumed by families at mealtimes (Abomaye-Nimenibo, 2018; Diggins, 2018; and Cohn & Blumberg et al, 2019).In a previous study, Kakay (2017) suggested that, regardless of their socioeconomic status, Sierra Leonean families' meal socialisation practises include respect for elders, obedience, and hierarchy observance.He emphasised that these characteristics are crucial in determining an individual's morals, ethical ideals, and character, and that their level of acceptability by others, both at mealtimes and outside of them, is influenced by these characteristics.

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The accumulation of high social status in Sierra Leonean society results in the use of Western lifestyles or values at mealtimes (Abraham et al, 2013; and Mfum-Mensah, 2018).In Sierra Leone, the ethnic group known as creoles, who are emancipated slaves from the United States and/or the United Kingdom, has a strong social class differentiation at mealtimes (Kakay, 2017).They have more individualistic and British or American thinking during mealtimes than normal Sierra Leonean families from other ethnic groups(Bulte et al, 2018; Ireson, 2018; and Kelly, 2019).This is due to the fact that they are becoming more self-reliant, autonomous, and independent than the average Sierra Leonean from other ethnic backgrounds (Abraham et al, 2013; and Mfum-Mensah, 2018).This is in line with the findings of Glennerster et al (2013), McFerson (2013), and Allen & McDermott (2018), who found that creole families are more independent at mealtimes than normal Sierra Leonean families, and that they are heavily impacted by British and American traditions.In conclusion, upper-income households, creoles, and elites are more likely to practise individualism; either because of their educational attainment or the influence of locations they have travelled/visited and/or lived(Kakay, 2017).He reiterated that in such cases, they are likely to absorb the individualistic culture of the places they have lived/visited. Regardless of their social status, however, some people within these groups still exhibits collectivistic tendencies.

Triandis (2018), Li et al (2019), and De Mooij (2019) conclude that there is little or no empirical evidence, models, or frameworks to explain the influence of social class on the meal social interaction behaviour of collectivist families.As a result, the purpose of this study is to collect empirical data that demonstrates the conceptualization of social class and its corresponding influence on family meal social interaction behaviour in Sierra Leone. In this paper, the author investigated the impact of education, income, occupation, and authority on the meal consumption behaviour of Sierra Leonean families and used them as benchmarks in assessing the behaviour of families (husband and wife) across religions (Islam and Christianity) and ethnic groups in order to highlight their effect on the meal social interaction behaviour of Sierra Leonean families.

Methods:-
The researcher performed semi-structured one-on-one face-to-face qualitative interviews with families to learn about the social class elements that influenced their dinner social interaction behaviour.This enabled families from various ethnic and religious backgrounds to express their views on the social class attributes that influence their meal social interaction behaviours using their own words. During the semi-structured interviews, the researcher established a theme and let the conversation flow naturally based on what respondents said about their families' meal social interaction behaviour.

Participants and recruitment
The researcher used snowballing, convenience sampling, and experiential sampling to recruit families from various ethnic backgrounds from Sierra Leone's four regions, including the northern, southern, and eastern provinces, as well as the western region.The researcher focused primarily on urban areas, particularly the provincial headquarters towns, with approximately 20% of the families chosen in the north (Makeni), 20% in the south (Bo), 20% in the east (Kenema), and 40% in the west (Freetown).This means that four families were recruited in the north (Makeni), four in the south (Bo), four in the east (Kenema), and eight in the west (Freetown). Table 2 shows a sample representation and demographic information of families who participated in face-to-face semi-structured interviews (see appendix 1).A total of 20 families (20 husbands and 20 wives), for a sample size of 40, were approached from diverse houses across the country and given a detailed explanation of the study, including potential hazards of data disclosure, advantages to the country as a whole, and assurances of anonymity.The study's main participants were husbands and wives (married couples) from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. The researcher made sure that ten families from each of the denominations were chosen for the interviews, ensuring that there was a balanced religious representation (Muslim and Christian).To eliminate prejudice or the possibility of one pair influencing the other, the husbands and wives were interviewed individually. As a result, twenty families (20 husbands and 20 women) were questioned, with 50% of each religion represented (Muslim and Christian).Before the official scheduled interviews at their homes, the interviewees were given initial appointments and participant invitation letters, as well as the research themes to be covered and a participant information sheet outlining the interview protocol, commitment, benefits, risks, and confidentiality.

Interviews
To avoid inconsistencies in the research process, a guideline was developed for the entire research process, which was followed from the planning phase to the implementation phase.The identification of theories and ideas that were tested using data collected from the field was aided by a review of the literature. This was accomplished using a gap

analysis. The researcher relied on open-ended questions and themes to come to a broad conclusion.The themes included income, education, occupation, and authority. Each respondent's interview was scheduled for an hour, but it typically lasted between 50 and 55 minutes. The interviews were conducted at the interviewees' homes, and the conversations were recorded on a digital audio recorder.

Data analysis
To facilitate analysis and coding, the researcher transcribed all of the data verbatim and imported it into NVIVO 10. During the analysis, an iterative approach of reading and rereading the transcripts, identifying themes and patterns, and comparing across the data was used.Thus, consistency in the coding process assisted in identifying redundancies and overlaps in the scheme's categorisation, which was then grouped both sequentially and thematically. The usage of NVIVO 10 aided in the creation of an audit trail utilising memos, which served as proof of the Research findings.Following data collection and coding, the data was summarised and organised by comparing the responses provided by different family members (husband and wife) and conceptualising the interpretation of each category by each family member, as well as how they interact with one another.The researcher noted that there were sometimes differences in responses from different family members, which could have prompted the use of more than one code, resulting in the formation of different sub-categories. The researcher worked independently on the categorization methodology, code assignment, and interpretation and assessment of the transcripts.He made certain that any discrepancies in interpretations, as well as commonalities and distinctions, were detected and correctly rectified. As a result, the researcher used triangulation to improve the data's credibility.Furthermore, the audio recordings and associated transcripts (field notes) were transcribed as soon as the researcher returned from the field to avoid superfluous information and data accumulation as well as the loss of critical data.
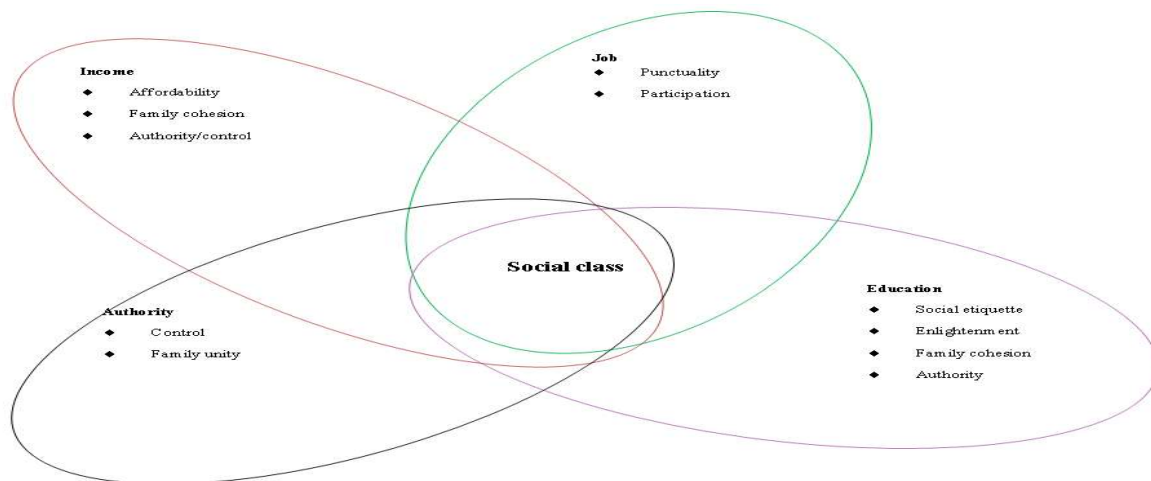
Results And Findings:-
In the one-on-one semi-structured face-to-face interview, the researcher used a sample of 40 respondents ranging in age from 18 to 65 years. Table three shows a tabular representation of the sample and personal data (see appendix). The researcher regarded the husband and wife (married couples) in each family as the primary interview participants.To ensure a fair response and interpretation of the results, twenty families (20 husbands and 20 women) were chosen. It was critical that the data was saturated after the twentieth family because the information gathered from the 18th, 19th, and 20th families (35th, 36th, 37th, 38th, 39th, and 40th interviewees) was identical tothose of previous respondents.

Key findings of the study
Affordability, family cohesiveness, authority, punctuality, participation, social etiquette, and enlightenment were identified as key social class ingredients influencing families' meal social interaction behaviour in this study.The impact of each sub-theme on participating males and females was thoroughly evaluated and discussed. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the research are depicted in Figure 1 and Table 1.

Figure 1:- A diagrammatic representation of the factors influencing social class on collectivist families' meal behaviour.

Source: Kakay, S. (2017, p.429).

Table 1:- Thematic Analysis and schematic summary diagrams of the social class factors influencing families' meal consumption behaviour.

Interviews with Families			
Literature	**Questions**	**Field Themes**	**Sub-themes**
Social class	How does income/wealth affect the way your family interact socially at meal times?	Affordability	Happiness (MW, CW, MH, CH), food quantity (MW, CW, MH, CH), food quality (MW, CW, MH, CH), food variety (MW, CW, CH), participation/appetite (MW, CW, CH), accessibility, satisfaction (MW, CW, MH, CH), finance, money, cash, funds, survival (CW), meal frequency (CW, CH), healthy growth (CW, MH), earnings, salary, lifestyle (MH), scarcity (MH), living of standard (CH), sustainability (MH, CH), choices (CH), affordability (MW, CW, CH), family image (MW), modern foodstuffs (MW, MH, CH), savings (MH), investment (MH), status (CH)
		Family cohesiveness	Family unity/stability/peace (MW, CW, MH), continuity, love (CW), sharing (CW, MH), relationship building (MH), understanding (CH), planning (CH), development (MH),
		Authority	Control (MW, MH), respect (MW, CW), confidence, responsibility, management
	How does your job affect the way you interact with your family at the dinner table?	Punctuality	Timeliness (MW, CW, MH, CH), lateness (MW, CW, MH, CH), absenteeism (MW CW, MH, CH),
		Participation	Sharing, fatigue/tiredness (MW, CW, CH), stress (MW), happiness (CW, MH, CH), food quality (CW, CH), encouragement, togetherness/unity (MW, CW), relationship (CW, MH), peace (MH), love (MH), control, responsibility (MH, CH), friendliness, security (CH), hope, variety, interaction/participation/appetite (MW, CW, CH), appreciation (MW), hunger (MW), respect (CW), food variety (CH)
	How important is education in your family's meal social interaction behaviour?	Social etiquette	table manners/table etiquette/moral ethics (MW, CW, CH), hygiene (MW, CW, MH, CH),food quality/balanced diet (MW, CW, CH), affordability (CH)
		Enlightenment	Awareness (CW, MH), civilisation (MW, CW, MH), family history (MW), advice, mould behaviour, knowledge (CW, CH)), idea sharing/learning/enlightenment (CW, MH, CH), experiences, planning (MH), information/communication (CH), development (MH), direction (MH, CH), modernity, judgement (CH), better life, talent, rewards (CH), understanding, confidence (MW, CW), advice (MW), cultural/traditional values (MW, MH), division of labour (CW), decision-making (CW), religious values (MH), solution/troubleshooting (CH)
		Family cohesion	Meal sharing, happiness (MW), success (CW, MH, CH), humility (CW), harmony/stability/unity/cohesion (CW, MH, CH), decision-making, understanding, bonding, relationship, appreciation, tolerance (MH), peace, societal acceptance (MW),
		Authority	Guides behaviour/shapes behaviour (MW), refine character, family image (MW), obedience (MW), respect (MW, CW, MH), boundaries, correct behaviour, power, hierarchy/orderliness (MH), priority, responsibility (CW, MH, CH),
	How important is authority in	Control	Guidance (MW, CW), receptivity (CH), obedience (CW, MH, CH), rules/regulations (MW, CH), limitations,

your family's meal social interaction behaviour at the dinner table?		boundaries (MW, CW), headship, breadwinner, direction (MH), humility (MH), hierarchy, development/progress (MW, CH), law, responsibility (MW, CW, MH), Enforcement, respect (MW, CW, MH, CH), unity of command, subordination, orderliness (MH), appropriate behaviour, confidence, instruction, fear (MH), boss, progress, contribution, governance (CH), compliance (CH), leadership (MW, CW), success (MW), accountability, checks and balances (CH), control (MW, CW, MH, CH), good manners (CW), discipline (MW), age (CW), expectations (CW), centralisation (CH), penalty (CH)
	Unity	Unity/stability/peace (MW, CW, MH, CH), decision-making (MW, CW, MH, CH), bonding, peace, love, understanding, humility, cohesion, cooperation (MW), social etiquette (MW), happiness (MW), troubleshooting (MW), bonding (MH)

Key: CW: Christian wife; MW: Muslim wife; MH: Muslim Husband; CH: Christian Husband
Source: Kakay, S. (2017, P. 427)

Table 2:- A Summary of the social class factors influencing families' meal social interaction behaviour.

Theme	Sub-theme	Factor	CM in family	CF in family	MM in family	MF in family	Comment
Social class	Income	Food quality	☐	☐	☐	☐	Predominant in all families
		Food quantity	☐	☐	☐	☐	Predominant in all families
		Food variety	☐	☐		☐	Emphasised by a majority (CM, CF, MF), but less by MM
		Happiness	☐	☐	☐	☐	Predominant in all families
		Authority/control			☐	☐	Emphasised by a majority of Muslims only (MM, MF)
	Occupation	Lateness/time constraint	☐	☐	☐	☐	Predominant in all families
		Participation	☐	☐	☐		Emphasised by a majority (CM, CF, MM), but less by MF
		Absence			☐	☐	Emphasised by a majority of Muslims only (MM, MF)
	Education	Moral ethics	☐	☐	☐		Emphasised by a majority (CM, CF, MM), but less by MF
		Hygiene	☐	☐	☐	☐	Predominant in all families
		Knowledge			☐		Emphasised by a majority of MM only
		Civilisation		☐			Emphasised by a majority of CF only
		Balanced diet/food quality	☐		☐		Emphasised by a majority of males regardless of religion (CM, MM)
		Table etiquette		☐		☐	Emphasised by a majority of females regardless of religion (CF, MF)
		Family cohesion	☐		☐		Emphasised by a majority of

	Authority						
							males regardless of religion (CM, MM)
	Authority	Hierarchy/boundaries	□		□		Emphasised by a majority of males regardless of religion (CM, MM)
		Control	□	□	□	□	Predominant in all families
		Family unity/stability/peace	□	□	□	□	Predominant in all families
		Decision-making				□	Emphasised by a majority of MF only

Source: Kakay, S. (2017, p. 218)

Evaluating the influence of income on families' meal social interaction behaviour
Due to the prevalence of low earnings in Sierra Leonean families, income not only determines the quantity and quality of food available at mealtimes, but it also determines access to variety. Many families claimed that income influences their level of happiness and social interaction at mealtimes.They contended that the more food available at the dinner table, the better the discourse and orderliness at the dinner table, whereas a lack of food availability causes unhappiness, feuding, and discord among children during mealtimes.Many families, however, indicated that, despite the anxiety and discord caused by insufficient food at mealtimes, the fluctuation in income with the corresponding fluctuation in food availability at mealtimes is normal for their children.This implies that they are more willing to accept limited food availability at mealtimes and are increasingly understanding when their parents' circumstances change.Furthermore, the findings revealed that family income is not only used to purchase food but is also sometimes used to address extended family problems such as bereavement and other unforeseen problems.

"Well, as I previously stated, when you create western cuisine, you will notice that people are pleased and consume big quantities of the food; nevertheless, if you create our native food, such as potato leaves, they will eat, but they will not be truly happy". If your salary is good, as I mentioned most of the time, you will be willing to create largely western dishes, but we modify when there is less income in the house from time to time.Income has an impact on how people interact; as I previously stated, if you don't give them what they want, they will be unhappy, and their level of involvement will drop. If you have aenough income, you can always provide what the family wants, but if you don't, you'll have to make adjustments to ensure that food is provided to the family every day."(Interviewee 7, Christian, Female).

The findings also suggest that Muslim and Christian females were more concerned about the quantity, variety, and quality of food as the key influences of their families' mealtime interactions.Despite these similarities, Muslim females, unlike their Christian counterparts, were more likely to believe that income serves as an enabler in controlling their children's behaviour at mealtimes.This implies that income is important in ensuring a sustainable livelihood and, perhaps more importantly, in promoting orderliness and a sense of appreciation, particularly among children.

"As I previously stated, if we have enough income, everyone will be happy, especially the children, because they will be able to access more food, and the quality of food at the dinner table will be of the type that everyone desires.We can also purchase a variety of foods. However, when our incomes are insufficient to obtain the appropriate quality and quantity of foodstuffs, our children may be sad because they are not adequately fed and are likely dissatisfied with the quality of the food, but regardless, we always stay together as a family and try not to show it outside."(Interviewee 19, Female, Muslim)

"Income is critical because we can only speak of having a stable and good family if we can provide for our children. It is tough to even control our children if we do not have the money to provide for them.When a family has aenough income, they will always be happy, and they will be admired by their neighbours and other people. Income is also important because it brings respect to the family. in Africa, if you do not have income, people will not respect you. Even your children will sometimes refuse to listen to you if you are unable to meet their basic needs."(Interviewee 37, Female, Muslim)

Like the Muslim and Christian females, their male counterparts identified food quality, quantity, variety, and happiness as the primary influencers of their families' meal behaviour. Unlike their Christian counterparts, however,

Muslim spouses see income as a critical instrument for regulating and reining in the behaviour of their family, particularly their children.

"First and foremost, it has an impact on the quality of food served and cooked for the family, and when the food is good, you can feel the kids' emotions, and they will be very happy. Furthermore, when there is enough food, they will not cry after eating because they will be satisfied and fed.However, if the food is insufficient and the children are not fed, the older children will complain while the younger children would scream since they require more. As a result, income influences the quality, diversity, and even the quantity of food available at mealtimes.And the meal is not only limited to the solid aspect, such as rice, but you must also include other ingredients or treats to go along with the food, so that they will enjoy the meal, which is influenced by the type of income you have."(Interviewee 34, Male, Muslim)

Analysing the impact of job on families' meal social interaction behaviour
Most families reported that their jobs had a negative impact on their families' socialisation during mealtimes. They claimed that their employment not only limit the amount of times their families dine together as a unit, but also affect the timeliness with which meals are prepared, delivered, and consumed.As a result, late meal preparation has a significant impact on the rate of participation, particularly among children, and causes loss of appetite, as it disrupts their consumption pattern, and sometimes even pushes others to seek alternative sources to satisfy their hunger. Furthermore, the findings reveal that families rely on their professions as a source of income.Implicitly, the money earned serves as a provision for better food at the dinner table, as well as a welcoming environment for effective socialisation and interaction at mealtimes. As a result, it promotes family unity and happiness, particularly among children during mealtimes.

"My job provides me with money, which allows me to support my family. As I previously stated, if I can give better food at the dinner table, the interaction will be much more successful and amicable since the children will be happy, as would everyone else at the table."(Interviewee 16, Male, Christian).

The findings also show that Muslim and Christian females shared a commonality in the areas of lateness/time constraint and absences from the dinner table as the primary impact their jobs have on their families' meal behaviour.Christian females, on the other hand, expressed concern about the impact their jobs have on their families' rate of participation or loss of appetite at mealtimes, an issue that Muslim females were less concerned about.

"...sometimes I come home late from work, and by then they have finished eating dinner, or sometimes I work so hard at my job that when I come home, I have less time, and feeling tired and losing appetite causes me not to want to share the dinner table.I just check on the kids to make sure they're okay and tell them to close the main gate and go to bed. And when my husband is out of town, I work a lot, which has an impact on my family when I get home."(Interviewee 3, Female, Christian)

Like the Muslim and Christian females, their male counterparts emphasised lateness, time constraints, participation rate, and absence at mealtimes as the primary influences on their families' meal behaviour.This means that, while jobs provide income for families' daily needs, they can also act as a deterrent to their socialisation and interaction at mealtimes, affecting family unity.

"I could come home and be at the dinner table when I get a call that something has gone wrong, and I'll have to leave the table abruptly to attend to the problem.Sometimes, even before we have dinner, I will get a call and leave the house before dinner is served. When I stay out longer than expected, my family starts nagging me to come home and join them for dinner. Sometimes I get lucky and get to join them, but other times they have supper without me, which has an impact on my participation."(Interviewee 14, Male, Christian)

Analysing the influence of education on families' meal social interaction behaviour
Education is critical to improving family mealtime behaviour and teaches children basic table manners and etiquette such as non-use of vulgarity, silence, respect, and politeness at mealtimes.Many families argue that it teaches basic hygiene, such as washing hands before meals and cleaning the dining area to reduce the spread of diseases, and that the dinner table serves as a forum for discussing historical events and stories, which significantly increases children's knowledge and understanding.Most significantly, knowledge instils confidence, improves a person's ability to talk in public, and adds value to table discussions. It contributes to the spiritual development of family

members by teaching them how to pray before and after meals and expanding their knowledge of how to seek God.Some have suggested that socialisation of girls into meal preparation, serving, and wiping the dining table after meals is an important element of lunchtime education. Many people believe that a young girl who has been socialised and schooled in how to cook and serve a meal at dinner has a better chance of finding a decent and stable husband/home than one who has not.

"Most of what we teach our children serves as a forum for learning, a forum for improving their behaviour, and a forum for teaching them basic life ethics. Education provides the proper foundation for any family to learn, as our children can learn and understand our values through education, without which it will be very difficult to unite your family.For example, at the dinner table, we teach them not to talk while eating because the pepper will go to the wrong part of their mouth, we teach them the concept of respect for elders, which is critical in shaping their behaviour in the eyes of the general public, and we use education to help them learn and understand the difference between right and wrong. As a result, education is critical"(Interviewee 28, Male, Christian).

The findings also demonstrate that Muslim and Christian females were equally strong in citing civilisation, table etiquette, and sanitation as important educational aspects influencing their families' mealtime interactions.This demonstrates that education is a key aspect of Sierra Leonean families' meal social interaction behaviour, regardless of ethnic or religious background, and that children are socialised to ingest these behaviours in their own families as they grow into adulthood.

"Because it teaches basic etiquette and values, education truly offers the light to civilise behaviour in our household. For example, education explains why people wash their hands before eating, why they don't talk while eating since the pepper will go to the wrong part of their mouth, why they respect elders, and so on.Children learn how to act in public as part of their education. Children learn to treat one another and respect elders even while watching television. As a result, if these fundamental educational topics are taught to children in both school and at home, their dinner table interactions will be polite and courteous to others."(Interviewee 21, Female, Muslim).

In line with the Muslim and Christian females, their male counterparts stated that moral ethics, hygiene, knowledge, a well-balanced diet, and family cohesion are important educational factors that influence their families' social interaction at mealtimes.This demonstrates that education is a valuable platform for knowledge sharing, storytelling, teaching basic hygiene practises, and, most importantly, it provides an enabling environment that brings the family together around a common goal.

"Education enables us to make the best use of our God-given talents. Typically, discourse or learning begins at the dinner table, with schools and our vocations serving as a supplement.Only through education at the dinner table can we teach our children basic life ethics such as hygiene and appropriate behaviour in and out of the home. Education brings the family together on a common front."(Interviewee 30, Male, Christian)

Evaluating the impact of authority on families' meal social interaction behaviour
At the dinner table, authority is the foundation for peaceful coexistence, cooperation, and stability, as well as the driving force behind ensuring that children are humble and respectful of other family members.Most importantly, it assists the family in uniting behind a shared mealtime course/agenda. Many claims that it helps to steer family members' behaviour and ensures adherence to good ethical conduct during mealtimes. It shapes and controls children's behaviour at mealtimes, resulting in attentiveness to the chain of command and decision-making.

"It's critical because following directions creates a calm atmosphere at the dinner table. It ensures that utensils at the dinner table are clean, and it shapes behaviour at the dinner table.Furthermore, it is critical since authorising someone to do something makes the person who gave the order proud when his or her request is followed, particularly at the dinner table. Authority guarantees that work gets completed even if you are not present, because everyone understands what is expected of them.If you don't offer orders and keep your family in line during mealtimes, the whole family will fall apart since everyone will be free to act in whatever way they want. As a result, authority helps to bring the family together in a single direction because everyone understands what is expected of them."(Interviewee 5, Female, Christian)

The data also demonstrate that Muslim and Christian females have comparable perspectives on the role of authority in meal socialisation, citing control, family unity, stability, and peaceful coexistence as major factors at mealtimes.In

terms of decision-making, however, the Muslim females were more prone to claim that it is the primary influencer of their families' behaviour during mealtimes, whereas the Christian females placed less weight on it.

"Well, in order to have law and order at the dinner table, there has to be someone that everyone respects and fears, who is usually the figurehead. If there is no leadership, just as there is no decision-making, the entire family will be in disarray because no one listens to anyone.For example, when my husband is not present at the dinner table, the children will occasionally dispute with one another; yet, when my husband is present at the dinner table, they will be afraid to even speak. As a result, power at the dinner table promotes order and control. It also secures family togetherness, stability, and harmony by ensuring that the correct thing is done all of the time."(Interviewee 31, Female, Muslim)

As the key authority factors influencing their families' meal social interaction behaviour, the male counterparts shared commonalities with the Muslim and Children females in the areas of hierarchy, control, and family unity.The data also suggest that Muslim and Christian males have similar mealtime customs and behaviours, regardless of ethnic or religious variations. This means that their mealtime socialisation behaviour is unaffected by cultural or religious differences.This also implies that male dominance and chauvinism are part of Sierra Leonean mealtime socialisation practise and discourse.

"Everyone knows that the father is the family's leader, followed by the mother. As a result, everyone in the family must realise that those are the family's hierarchy or chain of command or authority, and that you must respect them.You will be severely penalised if you do not respect them. The family's unity and stability are ensured by authority. As a result, you must respect authority not only at the dinner table and at home, but also in the workplace and at school. Don't talk to authorities as you please, particularly your mother and father..."(Interviewee 14, Male, Christian)

Discussion:-
This is the first study in Sierra Leone to investigate the impact of social class on family meal social interaction behaviour. The findings indicate that food quality, food quantity, and happiness are income factors that influence the meal discourse behaviour of all families, including Muslim and Christian females and Muslim and Christian males, and determine the level of satisfaction that families experience at mealtimes. Despite these apparent similarities, differences emerged as Christian females and their male counterparts, including Muslim females, emphasised food variety as key income influencers of family mealtime behaviour.Furthermore, Muslim females and males regard income as an important factor in controlling their children's behaviour at mealtimes, a factor that Christian females and males place less emphasis on.Even among families of the same religious and gender groupings, there is divergence in views on topics such as affordability, satisfaction, family unity/stability, family image, respect, modern foodstuffs, participation, love, appetite, survival, meal frequency, healthy growth, sharing, lifestyle changes, saving, investment, development, relationship building, peace/stability, scarcity; planning; understanding; better standard of living; status; and choicesand sustainability.This implies that families see income as a facilitator of their access to not only abundant food, but also variety and a balanced diet, both of which are essential to the family's stability.The findings, which are consistent with Peacock et al (2014), show that social class is evidence of income inequality, which determines the type of food consumed by individuals. However, this study identified control, affordability, food quality, food variety, food quantity, and happiness as major influences on the meal social interaction behaviour of Sierra Leonean families.This implies that income is symbolic in ensuring families' access to a balanced diet and is necessary for the stability, unity, and happiness of the family, as well as the smooth operation of the dinner table.

Most families, including Muslim and Christian females and Muslim and Christian males, emphasised lateness and time constraints as important occupational factors influencing their families' meal social interaction behaviour.Despite these similarities, most Muslim females and males were emphatic about absenteeism as the most important factor influencing their families' meal behaviour, whereas Christian females and males were less emphatic.Furthermore, most Christian females and males, including Muslim males, reported loss of appetite as the primary job factor affecting their mealtime participation, which was less emphasised by Muslim females.The findings also demonstrate that even among families of the same religious and gender categories, disparities in opinion exist, including fatigue, participation, family unity, appreciation, stress, hunger, respect, a better relationship, control, love, responsibility, peace, and security.This implies that a majority of the interviewees are negatively impacted by time, absenteeism, and lateness at their families' mealtimes, which can have a significant

impact on how they relate to their children and potentially impede proper meal supervision.Consistent with the views of Moran-Ellis and Sünker (2018), the findings show that families in collectivist societies demonstrate a unit of stratification, and that the occupation of the family head depicts their social class.This study identified tardiness, absenteeism, and timeliness as important occupational factors influencing Sierra Leonean families' meal interaction behaviour. This implies that, in a country like Sierra Leone, where work-life balance is unimportant, a family's occupation can have a negative impact on their family's meal behaviour, and potentially on organisational growth.Muslim and Christian females and Muslim and Christian males agreed that hygiene is the most important educational factor influencing their families' mealtime behaviour.Despite their commonalities, Christian females, Christian males, and Muslim males all emphasised the symbolism of moral ethics as a crucial educational aspect that influences their families' eating behaviour; a factor that Muslim females emphasised less.Furthermore, most Christian and Muslim males emphasised a healthy diet and family togetherness as significant educational aspects that influence their families' mealtime behaviour, but Muslim and Christian females placed less importance on these factors.Furthermore, the findings revealed that Muslim and Christian females were more concerned about table etiquette as a symbolic educational factor influencing their families' meal behaviour, which may be due to gender roles in socialising, teaching, and disciplining children; a factor less emphasised by their male counterparts (Muslim and Christian males).Furthermore, the findings show that, while Christian females emphasised civilisation/modernity as influencers of their families' meal behaviour, Muslim males were more emphatic about the knowledge it fosters in the family, which was less emphasised by Christian males and Muslim females.The findings also show that differences exist even among families of the same religious and gender groupings in areas such as confidence, societal acceptance, family history, advice, family image, obedience, respect, balanced diet, happiness, control, cultural/traditional values, success/progress, harmony/unity/stability, division of labour, responsibility, decision-making, knowledge, humility, and awareness.This suggests that families see mealtime education as a transformational tool that can have a positive impact on their families' mealtime behaviour, which may help keep their families healthy and disease-free.Consistent with Ghosh and Galczynski (2014), the findings show that societies classify people into strata and emphasise that in economically conscious societies, in the absence of wealth, people are classified based on their educational background.In the Sierra Leonean setting, this study reveals that moral ethics/table etiquette, civilisation/modernity, a balanced diet, family togetherness, and hygiene are educational aspects that influence families' meal behaviour.

Muslim and Christian females, as well as Muslim and Christian males, emphasised hierarchy/control, as well as family unity, cohesion, and stability, when determining the influence of authority on their families' meal behaviour.Despite these similarities, some Christian and Muslim males were emphatic about the symbolism of hierarchy and boundaries as critical authoritative factors influencing their families' meal behaviour, which is less emphasised by their female counterparts (Muslim and Christian females).Furthermore, Muslim females emphasised decision-making as a fundamental aspect of authority, whereas Christian females, Christian, and Muslim males did not.The findings also show that there are differences between families of the same gender and religious groups in areas such as respect, cooperation, development, success, social etiquette, responsibility, discipline, happiness, boundaries, troubleshooting, leadership, rules and regulations, obedience, age, expectations, decision-making, good manners, civilisation, humility, direction, bonding, fear, and reception.This indicates that families were more likely to endorse control and family unity/cohesion/stability as important characteristics of authority that influenced meal behaviour.The findings, which are consistent with Hofstede's (2003) and House et al (2013), show that power distance among families is hierarchical and power is centralised at the top, with the power holders receiving greater favour, status, privileges, and/or material reward, and that a clear distinction exists between superior and subordinate.The findings of this study show that, family unity, stability, cohesion, peace, and decision-making are important authoritative factors that influence family behaviour in Sierra Leone.This implies that children in autocratic families have very little say in the decisions made by the family's head at mealtimes and do not have the freedom to question those decisions, which can sometimes limit their access to aenough quantity and quality of food.

Implications
The study's findings shed light on Sierra Leone's social stratification and highlight how class disparity influences families' interactionat mealtimes.In terms of how income, occupation, education, and authority affect their families' eating behaviour, significant social, economic, and cultural similarities and differences exists between and within families of the same religious and ethnic groups.This shows that, despite similarities, the concept of social class can vary from one family to the next due to social and economic divisions in society, which impacts consumption and meal interaction behaviour.The study shows that, while social class differences affect how families interact with one

another, they also provide a perfect platform for nurturing and developing children's behaviour, and most crucially, for refining their characters for the greater good of society.

Specific factors such as food quality, food quantity, food variety, happiness, and control influence social class distinction at Sierra Leonean mealtimes, but lateness, low participation rate, absenteeism, moral ethics, hygiene, family unity, knowledge sharing, and hierarchy have been highlighted as key influences on families' meal social interaction behaviour.This means that, as a result of class stratification, Sierra Leonean families suffer economic hurdles in terms of not just access to sustainable food, but also face every day social challenges in maintaining a healthy, cohesive, and happy family.Future study should build on these findings to highlight the difficulties that the government faces in resolving these social and economic shortcomings that families face. Understanding the impact of civilisation and/or modernity in deepening the class divide and its repercussions on families' meal social interaction behaviour should also be a priority.

Conclusion:-
The findings of this study show that, social class distinction can be detrimental to families' meal social interaction behaviour because it limits access to not only affordable meals, but can also negatively affect their meal interaction patterns, especially if parents continue to uphold the tenet of frequent absences and lateness at meal times.This means that frequent absences/lateness create a social distance between parents and their children, as well as other family members, which can have a negative impact on the parenting, control, and regulation of children's behaviour. However, it is worth noting that social class fundamentally ensures the instillation of appropriate social etiquette.This demonstrates that respecting table manners at mealtimes is symbolic in the meal behaviour of many families in Sierra Leone throughout the social spectrum, as it serves as a springboard for instilling the proper sorts of behaviour in children.The significance of this is that the dinner table can be a great place for information sharing and/or transfer, allowing parents to teach their children how to behave appropriately at mealtimes. As a result, it provides a conducive environment for children to learn and instil good table manners and basic family ethics, which may guide them in the long run.Adherence to these social etiquettes can significantly reduce family contact with diseases and other health-threatening illnesses. It also implies that following proper social etiquette teaches families the social rights and wrongs, which guides them in learning new things and possibly revisiting old ones.

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