



# A study of Proverbs 10:12–15 and family unity in the Nsukka local government area



## Authors:

Virginus U. Eze<sup>1,2</sup> 

Nduka A. Ncheke<sup>1,2</sup> 

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

## Corresponding author:

Virginus Eze,  
virginus.eze@unn.edu.ng

## Dates:

Received: 14 Jan. 2025

Accepted: 17 Mar. 2025

Published: 10 June 2025

## How to cite this article:

Eze, V.U. & Ncheke, N.A., 2025, 'A study of Proverbs 10:12–15 and family unity in the Nsukka local government area', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 81(1), a10500. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v81i1.10500>

## Copyright:

© 2025. The Authors.  
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Amid colossal family disunity among the Nsukka people, this article sufficed to interrogate reasons for family disunity among the Nsukka people and advance solutions using insights from the book of Proverbs 10:12–15. Scholars agree that the book of Proverbs contains wisdom collections that could help to form a united family. Proverb 10 is apt for this study because it includes the major collections of 375 Solomonic proverbs, which propose love, forgiveness, an understanding mind, and wisdom as a panacea for family disunity. The article adopted the rhetorical approach of exegesis in nuancing the text of Proverbs 10:12–15. Also, the article used the snowball referral method of sampling techniques to recruit 30 participants for the study and used a semi-structured method of interview to gather data from various agencies such as the Administrative Judge, Nsukka High Court, Enugu State, Nigeria; Nsukka Social Welfare; Area Command Headquarters, Nsukka; and Nsukka Urban Divisional Police Headquarters, Enugu State. The study revealed that there are many cases of family disunity in Nsukka. Among the factors responsible for these cleavages are the quest for resource control, unguided speech, divorce, diversity in beliefs, and failure to write a will. The article recommends the inclusion of Proverbs 10:12–15 in marriage course modules and secondary school schemes of work. Also, seminars and symposiums are recommended periodically by church leaders and policymakers to teach family unity using insights from Proverbs 10:12–15.

**Contribution:** This article is a contribution to theology and ethics. It nuanced the meaning of Proverbs 10:12–15 and uses its hermeneutical implications to advance solutions for family disunity among the Nsukka people. Therefore, it provides an interdisciplinary edge by cutting knowledge from the Old Testament literature of Proverbs and using it to solve societal problems of family dissension.

**Keywords:** Proverbs; family; unity; dissension; Nsukka.

## Introduction

The book of Proverbs is one of the books found in the Israelite corpus considered wisdom literature. Obiorah (2013) affirms that biblical wisdom literature includes the books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Wisdom Sirach, and Wisdom Psalms (cf. Ps. 49; 73; 112; 37), which, more than any other part of the Bible, deal with observable human experiences and teach human beings how to live humanely in the world. Odo, Uwaegbute and Eze (2020) observed that the book of Proverbs was the first in the class of wisdom literature to attain canonical status. The major themes of Proverbs 10:12–15 are forgiveness, love, knowledge, and wisdom, which could assuage family problems and birth of a united family. According to Thomas and McCeech (2011), Proverb 10 contains 375 Solomonic Proverbs collections and is considered the longest among other chapters. Obiorah (2018) maintains that the book of Proverbs is believed to be a father's advice to a son. In this case, the father offered his son useful advice on how to live humanely in society and form a united family. Similarly, Fontain (1993) shares the same sentiment when he noted that Proverbs 10:12–15 offers an excellent starting point for the consideration of a peaceful family.

From records, evidence shows that family problems abound in Nsukka Local Government Area. For instance, from the year 2020 to date, there are over 880 recorded family problems in Nsukka (Administrative Judge, Nsukka High Court, Enugu State, Nigeria 2024; Nsukka Social Welfare 2024; Area Command Headquarters, Nsukka 2024; Nsukka Urban Divisional Police Headquarters 2024). A quick survey reveals that one of the reasons for colossal family cleavages among families in Nsukka is because of a lack of forgiveness, love, knowledge, wisdom, and unguided speech.

Insights from the book of Proverbs will be used in this article as a model for addressing the numerous problems confronting many families in Nsukka. This is because wisdom literature in the Christian holy scriptures is rich with positive moral wits that parents and children could benefit

## Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

from in solving family and societal problems. Also, the article employed similar aphorisms from the Nsukka context to draw illustrations and make the proverbial lessons familiar to the readers. Therefore, this research explores the text of Proverbs 10:12–15 and uses its hermeneutical implications to assuage the problems besetting many families in Nsukka Local Government. Interestingly, the Nsukka Local Government Area is predominantly Christian, with a few exceptions of African traditional religion practitioners (Uwaegbute 2021). According to Ugwu (2024, pers. comm., September 2024), there is no family without a Christian in Nsukka; they are mostly syncretic. Hence, the scope of this article is Nsukka people.

This article adopted a rhetorical analysis. Rhetorical analysis presupposes that because the Bible is encoded in a persuasive nature, using the art of persuasion to decode the inherent meaning is apt. Rhetorical analysis means the act of persuasion (Eze 2023; Obiorah 2015; Pontifical, Biblical Commission 1993). The article also made use of primary methods of data collection such as semi-structured interviews. Using snowball or referral sampling techniques, 30 participants were drawn for the study (see Appendix 1). This method is preferred because it helps victims of family dissension to refer the researchers to others. Therefore, being a victim of a family crisis was a major criterion for qualifying a participant. The names of the participants are rendered in pseudonyms to ensure a privacy policy of correspondence. Also, the article made use of official documents from police headquarters, the customary court, and Nsukka Social Welfare. The thematic method of data analysis envisaged by Nche (2020) was used to analyse the data.

Nsukka is one of the 17 local governments in Enugu State. Nsukka is the second largest city in Enugu State. Nsukka, Nsukka town is both a local government and a town: as a town, it shares a common boundary with Edem, Opi, Ede Oballa, and Obimo. As a local government, it shares a boundary with Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area to the north, Udeni Local Government Area to the west, Uzu-uwanni Local Government Area to the east, and Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area to the south. This article studied Nsukka as a town and a local government.

## A study of Proverbs 10:12–15

It is always important to start an exegetical work with proper contact with its original text (Eze 2023). Ska (1991:1) notes that ‘a close reading of the original text is an excellent start. The subsequent analysis will deepen this first contact and develop into real familiarity’. Suffice it to say that the analysis of this text is based on the canonical state or what Chinweokwu (2015) calls ‘final form’ (see Table 1).

## Delimitation of the text

Delimitation is the term used in biblical exegeses to designate the literary unit of a given text. It also takes into consideration whether such a text should be taken as a single unit. It differentiates also the chosen text from its previous and the

**TABLE 1:** Proverbs 10:12–15.

Hebrew text (Pr 10:12–15)	English rendition by the author
v.12: שָׂנְאָה תַעֲרֹר מִדָּמִים וְעַל כָּל-פְּשָׁעִים אֲהַבָּהּ: 12.	Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions.
v. 13: בִּשְׂפָתַי יָבוֹן תִּפְצֹא חֵכְמָה וְשִׁבְט לִגְוֹ חֵסֶד-לֵב: 13.	On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found, but a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding.
v. 14: חֲכָמִים יִצְטַבְּרֵנָּה וּפִי-אֱוִיל מִחֲתָה קָרָה: 14.	Wise men store up knowledge, but with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand.
v. 15: הֵן עֲשִׂיר קָרָתָה עֲצוֹ מִחֲתָה דֹלִים רֵישָׁם: 15.	The rich man's wealth is his fortress; the ruin of the poor is their poverty.

following units. The elements that are often used to describe and determine the delimitation of a biblical text, especially story text, include content, change of place, change of time, mood, change of characters, theme, and subject. In this case, the article made use of the subject and theme since the book of Proverbs is not in story form.

This study focuses specifically on the relevance of Proverbs 10:12–15 to family cohesion in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria. It is a sapiential teaching about ways of life and some of the inevitable life characteristics expected of all humans to enhance good relationships among relations in a family. Proverbs 10:12–15 offers timeless wisdom for building and maintaining strong, healthy relationships. It embodies a wise saying advising the son to shun hatred because hatred stirs up anger, disunity, and division. Given these, Proverbs 10:12–15 is, therefore, an independent literary unit because there is evidence of a change of subject because the preceding verse talks about the mouth of a righteous man different from the thematic hatred inherent in verse 12. Also, the theme in verses 12–15 underscores wisdom, saying that aims at family unity. This aligns with Ngengi's (2012:33) opinion that ‘a literary unit is a biblical passage that has significance in itself’. Beyond this reason, the choice of this pericope is because it serves the researcher's interest in this study.

## The structure of the text

The structure of Proverbs 10:12–15 is nuanced using change in theme as was envisaged by Ben Afrat (2006) and Eze (2021). According to them, the structure of a text could be deduced and signalled by a change of theme, character, or location. In this study, because the character, location, and theme remain the same (Thomas & McCreesh 2011), a change of subject is therefore used. In verse 12, both hatred and love, strife and transgressions were arranged chiastically with their implications emerging in the second line. While hatred gives rise to strife, love covers all transgressions. Therefore, this verse could be termed the implications of hatred and love. In verses 13 and 14, the theme changed to understanding, wisdom, disobedience, and foolishness. In the first line, understanding gave rise to wisdom, while a lack of understanding gave rise to a rod, otherwise known as a cane, to discipline a foolish person. In this regard, this verse could be termed relevant to understanding, disobedience, wisdom, and foolishness. These verses will be studied together because they bear similar themes of understanding, disobedience, wisdom, and foolishness in a clear antithetical structure. A summary of Pr. 10:12-15 is set out in Table 2.

**TABLE 2:** The summary of the structure of Proverbs 10:12–15.

S/n	Structure	Corresponding text
1.	The implications of hatred and love as seen in verse	v.12
2.	Relevance of understanding, and wisdom as seen in verses	vv. 13 and 14
3.	The encapsulation of the benefits of love, understanding, wisdom, and the effects of hatred, strife, a lack of understanding, and wisdom	v. 15

S/n, serial number.

Line 1 of verse 13 highlights the themes of understanding and the consequences of disobedience. These two themes were repeated in verse 14, line one, as understanding and wisdom, while line two of verses 13 and 14 inversely repeats the consequences of a lack of understanding and wisdom. According to the text, while understanding and wisdom will strengthen family ties, disobedience and foolishness will collapse cordiality and birth crises in a family. This verse could then be termed wisdom and foolishness.

However, in verse 15, the theme changes to the reward for love, understanding, and wisdom. According to this verse, the above-mentioned virtue could translate into wealth, while strife, a lack of understanding and wisdom will lead to poverty, an enemy of family relationships. Therefore, this verse could be termed the benefit of love, understanding, and wisdom, inter alia strife, lack of understanding, and wisdom.

## The literary techniques in the pericope

Proverbs 10:12–15 is classified under the genre of wisdom literature, specifically as a collection of proverbial sayings that convey moral teachings, advice, and insights on how to live a good life (Crenshaw 1998). Munde (2012) refers to the genre as the style of a biblical text and goes further to state that every literary genre has been produced from a concrete social context.

Evidence from the text shows that Proverbs 10:12–15 is arranged using chiasmic parallelism. Chiasmic parallelism is the inversion or repetition of ideas in reverse order (Obiorah 2015; Okwueze 2001). This pattern runs throughout the study text. For instance, in verses 12–15, hatred, understanding, wisdom, and wealth are presented in the first line, and the inverted order – strife, a lack of understanding, foolishness, and poverty is repeated in the second line. Okwueze (2001) notes that the functional result of chiasmic parallelism in a text is that it reveals the inward and outward state of the characters in the play.

Another literary technique found in the text is repetition. Repetition serves to emphasise ideas in a text (Lambdin 2003; Obiorah 2015). This repetition goes further to cement the thought enshrined in the repeated idea(s) on the audience (Eze & Ugwu 2024). Evidence of this technique is found in all the verses in inverted order. Again, antithesis is found in the text and the entire proverb. Therefore, antithesis refers to the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas or phrases to highlight

their differences and create a striking effect. This literary device is used to emphasise the opposition between hatred and love (v. 12), wisdom and folly (v. 13), the wise and the fool (v. 14), and wealth and poverty (v. 15). Another literary style found in the text is metaphor. A metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things without using 'like' or 'as'. A rod is for the back of one who has no sense (v. 13). The rod is a metaphor for correction or discipline. The rod (a physical object) represents correction or discipline (an abstract concept), implying that those who lack sense or wisdom need guidance and direction. The rod is not meant to be taken as a physical punishment but rather as a literary expression meaning a symbol of guidance and correction. By using metaphor, the author of Proverbs creates a rich and dynamic language that encourages readers to think deeply about the nature of wisdom, folly, and human behaviour (Crenshaw 1998).

Another technique found in the text is symbolism. Symbolism is used to convey moral lessons and teachings. The entire study text is decoded in symbolism because they all serve a didactic purpose aimed at teaching young ones lessons on family unity. For instance, hatred in verse 12 symbolises destructive and divisive action while love symbolises healing, forgiveness, and unity. Also, in verse 13, wisdom symbolises insight, discernment, and good decision-making. Foolishness symbolises a lack of understanding, impulsiveness, and poor choices. Wealth in verse 15 symbolises security, protection, and influence, while poverty symbolises vulnerability, weakness, and destruction. And fortified cities symbolise strength, protection, and safety.

In the text, imagery is used to create vivid and memorable pictures in the reader's mind, conveying moral lessons and teachings. For example, in verse 12, strife is used to create a scene of turmoil. Also, in the same verse, 12, 'Love covers all wrongs' personifies an image of protection and shelter. Hyperbole emphasises the extent of love and forgiveness. 'A rod is for the back of one who lacks understanding' in verse 13 exaggerates the consequences of foolishness. Hyperbole is used to emphasise and drive home moral lessons.

Synecdoche is used to convey meaning and create vivid imagery. 'Love' in verse 12 represents the loving person's actions and behaviour. 'Hatred' in verse 12 symbolises the hating person's destructive actions. 'Lips' in verse 13 represents speech and wise words. 'Back' in verse 13 symbolises the person who lacks understanding, while 'wealth' in verse 15 represents the rich person's entire being.

## Close reading of the text

### The implications of hatred and love (v 12)

Verse 12 highlights the destructive power of hatred and the redemptive potential of love in a family, emphasising love's ability to forgive and conceal offences. The Hebrew word *sin'āl* implies intense dislike or hostility. Here the Hebrew word *sin'āl* (*sin'āl*) indeed conveys the concept of intense dislike or hostility, supporting the definition used in the



close reading of Proverbs 10:12–15. Eze and Ugwu (2024) and Okwueze (2001) note that hatred emerges to clarify the inward behaviour or feelings of the character. Toeing a similar line, Ehrlich (1910:58) in Eze and Ugwu (2024:3) avers that, ‘sin’āh [hatred] expresses the condition of the ill will and aversion towards the object of the hatred’. In verse 12, it is observed from the structural arrangement of the words that sin’ah שִׁנְאָה ‘hating, hatred’ מִדְּגִים meaning strife, or contention, are sandwiched with תַּעֲוֹרֵר, which means to raise, to stir up, Lambdin (2003) or suggest a warning that no one should hate or provoke strife against his brother, signalling the danger of hatred and strife in family relationships. While אֶהְבֶּה, which means love, will תִּכְסֶּה cover every כָּל-פְּשָׁעִים, all transgressions committed by the opposing behaviour, highlights the relevance of love in family cordiality. There exists a similar aphorism among Nsukka people that *èbè’mèhè adighî n’ ngba’aghari ama’ndi*, which means that without sin, there will not be forgiveness. This aphorism is always cited during the peace-making process, inciting the offended to shield war and embrace peace.

However, there is evidence of chiasmic parallelism in verse 12 because the Hebrew noun שִׁנְאָה in the first line is repeated in reverse order as אֶהְבֶּה [love] in the second line, while מִדְּגִים to rouse is inverted in the second line as תִּכְסֶּה to cover and מִדְּגִים, which means strife, is inverted in the second line as פְּשָׁעִים, meaning transgression. Therefore, verse 12 highlights the importance of love against hatred in family relationships.

### The relevance of wisdom and foolishness (vv 13 and 14)

The main Hebrew words in verse 13 are בִּשְׂפָתַי, which means lip, speech, or edge, and חֵכְמָה, which means wisdom. Based on the syntax, verse 13 implies that wisdom is found in the mouth of a man with a לִבּוֹן discerning, understanding lips, while a man without understanding lips births another word, רֹדֶף, which means rod or cane used for discipline. Verses 13 and 14 are sapiential because they place two sapiential words in antithetical structure: understanding and the consequences of a lack of understanding, which is folly, while in verse 14, wisdom is placed in antithetical arrangement with foolishness. According to Crenshaw (1998), wisdom is:

[T]he reasoned search for specific ways to ensure personal well-being in everyday life, to make sense of extreme adversity and vexing anomalies, and to transmit this hard-earned knowledge so that successive generations will embody it, wisdom is universal. (p.3)

Given this, therefore, wisdom exists to help humans assuage problems and difficulties involving cordiality within the family and society at large. Proverbs 10:13 notes that without wisdom, humans are destined to face strife in relationships. In Proverbs 10:13, the wisdom being advocated happened in the mind; hence, it could refer to psychological thinking. Accordingly, a lack of it births discipline, a correctional measure to put the ill behaviour back on the right track.

The text suggests that foolishness is the opposite of wisdom. Foolishness could be construed as a negative wisdom. According to Eze (2021), when wisdom is used to achieve a

negative ending, it means negative wisdom. Therefore, a lack of wisdom births foolishness, the opposite of wisdom.

Proverbs are very pervasive among Nsukka people, and a good knowledge of them is usually venerated. Proverbs found in verses 13 and 14 are synonymous with Nsukka adages that say that *èzì’òkwu nwere nwota na ènyè anwuri*, meaning that good words spoken with wisdom and understanding give happiness. This highlights the relevance of good words, understanding, and wisdom. Also, among Nsukka people, foolishness is an obscenity; hence, they say that *Okwu onye nzuzu na agba’agba na nti*, that is, foolish words are malicious in the ear.

### Juxtaposition of the benefit of love, understanding, and wisdom inter alia strife, lack of understanding, and lack of wisdom

Verse 15 brings out the underlying benefit of love, understanding, and wisdom to a particular city and the destructive consequences that await a city, town, or village without these virtues. Verse 15 is ethical because it places in antithetical structure the fact that good wealth is a benefit to a city while poverty ruins a city. In the ancient Near East, wisdom is both practical and retributive (Thomas & McCreesh 2011). Scholel (2012) observed that the sayings collection known as wisdom literature at its very beginning consciously relates three spheres of knowing, acting, and piety. Therefore, obedience to wise sayings, understanding them, and acting upon them will help the inhabitants to prosper, while refusal will bring about poverty. This verse is arranged in connection with an Egyptian god called *Maat*, which places retribution against any agent that breaks the orderliness established on earth during creation by God. Thomas & McCreesh (2011) captures this vividly when he opines that the theme found in verse 15 is generally about retribution. Worthy of note is that the length at which the people of a city heed to understanding and wisdom as against stubbornness and foolishness will determine the wealth and success of that city. Wealth and poverty in this syntactic structure refer to understanding, wisdom, stubbornness, and foolishness, respectively. Accordingly, verse 15 serves as the fruition purpose encapsulating all the virtues studied above. The dominant Hebrew words found in this syntax are הוֹן עֲשִׂיר, which means that the wealth of a town strengthens the city in the first line, and the opposing syntax is thus מִחַתָּה דָלִים with the nuance ‘poverty of a city leads to its destruction’. There exists a similar proverbial pattern among the Nsukka people that correlates the consequences of evil to a city and the reward for good behaviour. The proverb says that *aru’n’achu obodo*, that is, evil destroys a city, while *ezi’omume na ebuni obodo*, which means good behaviour exalts a community.

### Summary of exegesis

Proverbs 10:12–15 is a collection of wisdom sayings that contrast the consequences of wisdom and folly, love and hatred, and wealth and poverty. According to the text, these verses emphasise the importance of wise speech, the dangers

of foolishness, and the ultimate security found in wisdom. Emerging from the exegesis, in verse 12, 'love covers all wrongs while hatred stirs up conflict'. This verse highlights the destructive nature of hatred, which leads to conflict and strife. In contrast, love is portrayed as a healing and restorative force that covers past wrongs. The Hebrew word for 'covers', *ḥāṣar*, implies a sense of protection and shelter. This verse teaches that love is a powerful tool for building and maintaining relationships. In verse 13, 'Wisdom is found on the lips of the discerning, but a rod is for the back of one who lacks wisdom'. This verse contrasts wisdom and foolishness, emphasising the importance of wise speech. The phrase 'wisdom is found on the lips' suggests that wise words are a hallmark of discerning individuals. The rod is a metaphor for correction or discipline, implying that those who lack wisdom will face consequences. The Hebrew word for 'lacks wisdom' [*hākamāh*] implies a lack of moral discernment. In verse 15, the reward of wisdom is highlighted. 'The wise store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin'. This verse emphasises the importance of acquiring and storing up knowledge. The wise are portrayed as those who actively seek and accumulate wisdom. In contrast, the mouth of a fool is said to invite ruin, implying that foolish speech can lead to destruction. Verse 15 is about wealth and poverty. 'The wealth of the rich is their fortified city, but the poverty of the poor is their destruction'. This verse contrasts the security of wealth with the vulnerability of poverty. The image of a fortified city emphasises the proactive nature of wealth. However, this verse also implies that wealth is not the ultimate source of security, as it can be lost or taken away.

In conclusion, Proverbs 10:12–15 offers a rich tapestry of wisdom sayings that emphasise the importance of love, wisdom, and discernment. These verses encourage readers to cultivate wise speech, avoid foolishness, and seek ultimate security in wisdom. As a collection of wisdom teachings, the passage continues to offer valuable insights for modern readers seeking to live wisely and well.

## A descriptive survey of family disunity in Nsukka

Records show that family disunity is very high in Nsukka society. This article reviewed reports of family discords from different legal authoritative sources within Nsukka, and results show that family discord is very high. For instance, in Table 3, we have a total number of 214 family cases of disunity. Divorce cases are 82, while there are 136 cases of land disputes. Therefore, land disputes lead to a significant increase in family cleavages among family members. This is because the land is among the special economic assets in Nsukka which are shared among relations; in a situation of a lack of love and understanding, it could trigger cleavages and even escalate to fratricide.

Table 4 shows another feature of family disunity among the Nsukka people. For instance, within the years 2022–2024, records show a staggering increase in family discord. Most of the cases are divorce cases because Nsukka Social Welfare is predominantly responsible for marital issues.

**TABLE 3:** Evidence of family disunity in Nsukka LGA: Administrative judge, Nsukka High Court, Enugu State, Nigeria.

S/n	Years	Divorce cases	Land disputes	Remarks
1	2020	10	31	41
2	2021	16	21	37
3	2022	21	45	66
4	2023	17	16	33
5	First quarter of 2024	18	19	37

S/n, serial number; LGA, local government area.

**TABLE 4:** Evidence of family disunity in Nsukka LGA: Nsukka Social Welfare.

S/n	Years	Divorce cases	Remarks
1	2022	115	115
2	2023	197	197
3	2024	166	166

S/n, serial number; LGA, local government area.

**TABLE 5:** Evidence of family disunity in Nsukka LGA: Area Command Headquarters, Nsukka.

S/n	Years	Remarks
1	2020	26
2	2021	32
3	2022	38
4	2023	42
5	2024	33

S/n, serial number; LGA, local government area.

However, scholars agree that children of divorced parents are highly associated with violence, crime, drug abuse, delinquency, among others (David 2021; Pumariega 2016). Therefore, the number of divorce cases shows a high relationship between conflict and family disunity.

Another source of data for this research is the Area Command Headquarters, Nsukka Urban Divisional Police Headquarters (2024). Table 5 provides a summary of family disunity in Nsukka LGA. According to this source, between the years 2020 and 2024, there is a total number of 170 cases of family disunity. This record presented more flexible reasons for family cleavages. However, land disputes, conspiracy, stealing and armed robbery, cultism, kidnapping of family members, and assault are the major reasons for family cleavages in Nsukka environs.

Another source of data for this research is Nsukka Urban Divisional Police Headquarters, Enugu State. Information emerging from this source shows a significant number of family cases. There are 13 family cases recorded between the years 2020 and 2024. However, the police source noted that family cases are not within their jurisdiction except for escalated issues that require police intervention before referring them to the appropriate authorities in charge of family adjudication. Hence, 33 escalated cases were recorded, which shows a high increase in family crises within Nsukka. The cases recorded include stealing, armed robbery, arson, and assault.

## Causes of family disunity in Nsukka

A critique of available records revealed some causes of family disunity in the Nsukka area. We now discuss some of them.

## Struggle over resource control

From the study thus far, a significant proportion of the problems ravaging the unity of many families in Nsukka is the quest or struggle to control the common resources of the family. This is in agreement with the findings of Inyang & Edem (2012). His research also identified that disagreements regarding resource control could cause serious damage to family unity. This is aided by a long tradition in Nsukka that the first-born son is the rightful heir to inherit the entire family's common resources. So, in the case of the demise of the father, there is always this tension between the male children as to who will control the family resources. However, 96% of the data collected from Nsukka Social Welfare, 2024; Nsukka High Court, 2024; Nsukka Divisional Police Headquarters, 2024; and Area Command Headquarters Nsukka Police Station, 2024 agree that resource control is highly associated with family crises in Nsukka. Resource sharing between family members has proven to be problematic to family unity; in some cases, it has resulted in fratricide. The entire text of Proverbs 10:12–15 shows that those with wisdom, understanding, love, and a forgiving mind bring wealth to a city. Antithetically, strife, hatred, a lack of understanding, and wisdom bring poverty. Therefore, wisdom, understanding, love, and forgiveness could be used to form a united family when resource control becomes problematic.

## Failure of parents to assent to a will before their demise

According to participants and records, many family cases lean towards parental failure to write and document a will showing who gets what before their demise (Ugwu; Asadu; Idoko, pers. comm., 13 September 2024). Among Nsukka people, many believe that writing a will, especially in a family of one parent, could foster a sense of family disunity among the children (Ugwuoke; Okpe; Ukwueze; and Agbo, pers. comm., 13 September 2024). Therefore, many parents do not write legal wills before joining their ancestors, which has resulted in much family discord, revealed one of the legal participants (Agbondu, pers. comm., 20 September 2024). Although the text did not suggest or prescribe writing a will, parents' wisdom and understanding suggest that a will is important since it apportions assets to every child born in a family seamlessly.

## Diversity of religious beliefs within the same family

Another source of problems within the family is division in religious beliefs. This is often orchestrated by men of God who claim to possess spiritual insight. Among the participants, many believe that diversity in religious beliefs has led to disunity in families in the Nsukka area. 'Religion has disunited many families in Nsukka, tearing many marriages apart' is the assertion of many interviewees of this research (Ukeagbo; Chibugo; Adaeze; Amadi, Ugwueye, pers. comm., 27 September 2024). Similarly, Clifford (2018) shares common feelings when he notes that some negative prophecies may create negative thoughts and images. He further notes that 'it goes further to create negative emotional

states such as anger, depression, anxiety, guilt, and shame (par. 18)'. Such negative prophecy may even incite suspicion, blame, and accusations between relatives. In such cases, a threat to the living and an attempt to take another person's life will emerge. In this regard, religion, which ought to be a pillar of society, becomes a caterpillar wherewith the society is destroyed (Okon, Akpan & Ukpung 2011). Therefore, wisdom, love, understanding, and forgiveness offered in Proverbs 10:12–15 should always serve as a watchdog by families to assuage conflicts and disunity.

In another perspective, 'although family is made up of individuals, a family is a unit. What affects one member, affects the others' (Emergency Management Branch Operations Divisions to National Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry 2006). Therefore, family unity depends largely on the ability to maintain cohesion.

## Parental special treatment

Another source of problems in a family is when any of the parents show preferential treatment towards one person against the other. This is usually observed in favour of male children, as parents (especially fathers in Igboland and Nsukka inclusive) see their male children as superior to their female counterparts (Ugwueje, Ozioko, Ngwoke, Ezea, pers. comm., 06 September 2024). According to the participants, this has resulted in many family crises in Nsukka. Udoh (2024) notes that parents sow a seed of family crises in their family when they show preferential treatment to their children. This is because family is a compass of one group and can maintain cohesiveness only when the parents show equality in social and economic status to their children and eschew special treatment towards some persons based on gender and position.

## Unguided speeches among family members

There is power in human speech that can heal wounds and can also escalate problems. More than 80% of the participants in this research believe that unguided speeches contribute to family cleavages. Unguided speech has caused so many divorces as well as crises in the family. Accordingly, proper speech can help to unite a family just as an unguided one can escalate differences (Eze 2016). Therefore, most crises can be averted when people select their words carefully with an understanding mind (Arinze, Ogbu, pers. comm., 07 September 2024). Speech, especially among adults, should show evidence of knowledge, wisdom, and carefulness, such that it should unite rather than divide.

## Divorce of parents

Divorce is a major source of cleavage within families, and it is becoming a norm, especially in the 21st-century Nsukka society. According to Animba (2021), Nigeria has witnessed an increase in divorce because of its embrace of Westernisation, globalisation, urbanisation, and industrialisation. The data from welfare shows an increased rate of divorce caused by



many factors. Although the objective of this article is not to investigate the root cause of the increased rate of divorce, the assertion makes it clear that divorce is increasing. Unfortunately, this has resulted in the reduction of family unity because the children will grow to see discord as a way of life.

## Proverbs 10:12–15 and family disunity in Nsukka

From the text and the context, it is obvious that many families seeking to assuage family disunity can benefit from Solomonic collections of sayings encapsulated in Proverbs 10:12–15 and beautiful aphorisms enshrined in the Nsukka language. This is because Proverbs 10:12–15 offers a unique mode of didactic teaching on how to form a united family. The affinity and relationship emerging between the text and the context are nuanced under the following headings.

### The negative influence of hatred on family unity

The book of Proverbs, although written many years ago, can be used to deploy moral messages to any culture and society. This is because of its rich moral values. Although a collection of wise sayings, it can help us to form a united family devoid of family crises. Therefore, Nsukka people struggling with family cleavages can benefit from the rich moral values enshrined in the book of Proverbs. From the text, we see that the book of Proverbs advocates that hatred should be eschewed in forming a united family. Hatred is chiasmatically placed along with strife to show that love, when withdrawn, will birth disunity and strife in a family. The chiasmic method continued in the same verse in reverse order in the second line with love and its benefits of covering offences placed under hatred and strife. This implies that hatred leads to strife, and love fosters unity in a family.

The article shows that hatred and partiality shown towards children could birth family cleavages. From the data, about 72% of the participants agreed that partiality and hatred shown differently towards the children is highly associated with family disunity (Onah, 28 September 2024; Ugwundu; Amechi, 2024, pers. comm., 04 October 2024). Therefore, love, forgiveness, and a shred of understanding, as evidenced in the text, should be adopted by families in Nsukka to assuage conflicts. Also, there exists an Nsukka aphorism that venerates love and condemns hatred. By extension, Nsukka people are already advised to shun hatred and display love in forming a united family.

### Need for an understanding and wisdom speech

In verses 13 and 14, the text highlights the need for and importance of understanding and wisdom speech, noting that unguided speech could birth family disunity. According to these verses, understanding and wisdom should guide a person's speech to form a united family,

while fools could derail family unity with unguided utterances. The wisdom saying enshrined in Proverbs therefore recommends a guided speech for family unity. Results show a high relationship between unguided speech and family disunity. According to Amandu (pers. comm., 14 October 2024), unguided speech has prevented many families from living together in Nsukka, while agrees that speech should be used carefully to avoid misunderstanding among brothers.

### Effects of understanding and wisdom

The poetic device evidence in verse 15 of the studied text shows that the ability to heed understanding, knowledge, and wisdom will birth wealth, peaceful coexistence, and harmonious relationships among relatives, while refusal will result in poverty and broken relationships. Wealth and poverty, as used in verse 15, antithetically represent the benefit of accepting wisdom and the cost of rejecting it. While rejection will bring poverty, acceptance will result in wealth. In Nsukka, many people agree that understanding and wisdom are very necessary in managing a good relationship among relatives (Eze; Amoke, 11 October 2024; Ukweze; Aruma, pers. comm., 12 October 2024).

## Recommendations

According to the text (Pr 10:12–15), hatred stirs up conflict, while love covers all wrongs. It is essential to cultivate love, forgiveness, and wise communication among relatives, especially siblings, to prevent discord and promote a peaceful and harmonious family environment. Therefore, the church should include the text of Proverbs 10:12–15 as part of their module teaching for the marriage course.

The text also teaches that love and wisdom are essential for building strong and peaceful families. To achieve this, families in Nsukka should prioritise love, understanding, and decision-making, letting go of hatred and conflict, and embracing forgiveness and reconciliation. Policymakers and those responsible for curriculum implementation should ensure that Proverbs 10:12–15 is adopted into the secondary school curriculum in Nigeria, especially in the Nsukka education zone where the teaching of the numerous virtues found in Solomonic collections could be applied to younger generations.

Proverbs 10:13 underscores the importance of understanding and wisdom among siblings. The text reveals that a lack of wisdom and discernment can erode family bonds, leading to disunity. Consequently, cultivating an understanding spirit and seeking wisdom are essential for fostering a united and harmonious family. By embracing wisdom and discernment, families can strengthen their relationships, promote peace, and build a lasting legacy of love and unity. In this case, religious organisations should periodically organise seminars and symposiums where moral values found in Proverbs 10:12–15 will be taught.

## Conclusion

The poetic device enshrined in the book of Proverbs provides insights into how a united family can be formed. Belief in family values such as love and unity, have been passed down by ancient man hence providing sound advice in forming an integrated family. The studied text highlights the importance of love, understanding, knowledge, and wisdom in forming a united family. Chiastically, the same text underscores that hatred, unguided speech, strife, and a lack of wisdom lead to a disunited family and hence should be avoided. Similarly, in Nsukka, there are many family problems such as divorce, assault, fratricide, and resource control which have resulted in many unhealthy relationships among relatives. This underscores the very importance of this article as a panacea for family unity among the Nsukka people.

## Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge those whose works are cited in this article.

## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contributions

V.U.E. provided the Hebrew reading and/or exegesis, nuanced the method, and contextualised it. N.A.N. was responsible for language editing.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Ethics and Research Committee of the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria, on 14 January 2025.

## Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or non-profit sectors.

## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article, as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, or agency or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings, and content.

## References

- Animba, E.I., 2021, 'Factors militating against effective teaching and learning of history among junior secondary school students in Enugu State, Nigeria', *Sapiential Foundation Journal of Education, Sciences and Gender Studies* 3(1), viewed 18 September 2024, from [https://www.google.com/search?q=animba+2021%2C+factors+militating+against..&rlz=1C1CHBF\\_enNG1101NG1101&oq=animba+2021%2C+factors+militating+against..&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYODIBCTEONzk2ajBqN6gCALACAA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=animba+2021%2C+factors+militating+against..&rlz=1C1CHBF_enNG1101NG1101&oq=animba+2021%2C+factors+militating+against..&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYODIBCTEONzk2ajBqN6gCALACAA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8) and Obiorah thus "www.saintleo.edu/~/international-journal-of-african-catholicism.aspx.
- Bar-Efrat, S., 2008, *Narrative Art in the Bible*. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989 In Ronald, H. Van Der Bergh, *A Narratological Analysis of Time in 2 Samuel 11: 2-27a*. University of Pretoria, Pretoria.
- Clifford, R.S.J., 1998, *Deuteronomy with an Excursus on Covenant and Law Old Testament Message, a Biblical-Theological Commentary*, Delaware Michael Glazier INC, Wilmington.
- Chinweokwu, O.A., 2015, *Critical introduction to the tradition of Jesus*, AP Express Publishers, Nsukka.
- Crenshaw, J.L., 1998, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky.
- David, E., 2021, *National academy of child and adolescent psychiatry*, MJH Life Sciences, Philadelphia, New York.
- Ehrlich, E., 1910, 'The Book of Samuel', in H.W. Hertzberg (ed.), *A commentary on the Bible*, pp. 392–398, Double Day Publishers, Philadelphia, PA.
- Emergency Management Branch Operations Divisions to National Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2006, viewed n.d., from [https://www.google.com/search?q=what+is+the+correct+web+address+of+Emergency+Management+Branch+Operation+Division&rlz=1C1CHBF\\_enNG1101NG1101&oq=what+is+the+correct+web+address+of+Emergency+Management+Branch+Operation+Division&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQIRiPATiBCTUzNjg4ajBqOagCALACAFUfR0VuvjzqY&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=what+is+the+correct+web+address+of+Emergency+Management+Branch+Operation+Division&rlz=1C1CHBF_enNG1101NG1101&oq=what+is+the+correct+web+address+of+Emergency+Management+Branch+Operation+Division&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQIRiPATiBCTUzNjg4ajBqOagCALACAFUfR0VuvjzqY&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8).
- Eze, V.U., 2016, 'A study of Gen 45:1–15 and national re-integration in Nigeria', in *A Seminar Paper Submitted to the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies*, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Eze, V.U., 2021, 'Re-reading 2 Samuel 13:3–5 and Evil Council Esah and Jacop among youths', *Sapiential Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS)* 4(2), 504–513.
- Eze, V.U., 2023, 'Exegetical perspectives of Deuteronomy 19:15–21 on jungle justice in Nigeria', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 44(1), a2948. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v44i1.2948>
- Eze, V.U. & Ugwu, C.I., 2024, '2 Samuel 13:1–22 and the psychological effects of rape in Enugu State, Nigeria', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45(1), a3066. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.3066>
- Fontain, C., 1993, *Wisdom in Proverbs*, John Knox Press, Louisville, KY.
- Inyang, U.C. & Edem, I.D., 2012, 'Relationship of Landscape Positions with Properties on Maize (Zeamays L.) Yield in Ultisol', *Basic Research Journal of Agricultural Science and Review* 1, 69–76.
- Lambdin, T.O., 2003, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, Sheffield Academic Press LTD, Sheffield.
- Munde, N., 2012, *Handbook on African approaches to biblical interpretation*, Kolbe Press, Limuru.
- Nche, G.C., 2020, 'Beyond spiritual focus: Climatic change awareness, role perception, and action among church leaders in Nigeria', *Journal of American Meteorological Society* PG 12(1), 149–169. <https://doi.org/10.1175/WCAS-D-19-0001.1>
- Ngengi, A.M., 2012, *A handbook on African approaches to Biblical interpretation*, Kolbe Press, Limuru.
- Obiorah, M.J., 2013, 'Wealth and divine blessing: A study of the theological correction in Proverbs 10:22 in the Nigerian context', *International Journal of African Catholicism* 4(1), viewed 17 September 2024, from <https://www.saintleo.edu/~/international-journal-of-african-catholicism.aspx>.
- Obiorah, M.J., 2015, *Bibliotheca: A basic introduction to the study of the bible*, University of Nigeria Press, Nsukka.
- Obiorah, M.J., 2018, 'Wisdom literature', in *Lecture Note UNN*, Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Odo, D.O., Uwaegbute, K.I. & Eze, V.U., 2020, '"A good name is better than wealth" in Proverbs 22:1 vis-a-vis the related Igbo Maxim "Ezi Afa Ka Ego" (Integrity Surpasses Wealth)', *Journal of Old Testament Essay* 33(3), 428–444. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2020/v33n3a5>
- Okon, F.I., Akpan, E.O. & Ukpog, O.U., 2011, 'Financial control measures and enhancement of principals' administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State', *African Journal of Scientific Research* 7, 335–342.
- Okwueze, M.I., 2001, *The Old Testament as history, religion and literature*, African First, Onitsha.
- Pontifical, Biblical Commission, 1993, *International of the Bible in the church*, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, Rome.
- Pumariega, A.J., Cagande, C. & Gogineni, R.R., 2016, 'Child and adolescent psychiatry', In N.R. Rao & L.W. Roberts (eds.), *International medical graduate physicians: A guide to training*, pp. 185–202, Springer International Publishing/Springer Nature.



Ska, J.L., 1991, *Our fathers have told us: Introduction to the analysis of Hebrew narratives*, Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, Roma.

Thomas, P. & McCeesh, O.P., 2011, 'Proverbs', in E.B.S.S. Raymond, A.F.S.J. Joseph & E.M.O.C. Roland (eds.), *New Jerome biblical commentary*, pp. 453–488, Schuster Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

Scholel, L.A., 2012, *A manual of Hermeneutics*, Bloomsbury Academic Press, Toronto.

Uwaegbute, K.I., 2021, 'Christianity and masquerade practice among the youth in Nsukka, Nigeria', *African Studies* 80(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2021.1886049>

Udoh, E.K., 2024, 'Influence of parental favouritism on child's development: A chronology of Ikot Idaha Community in Ibiono Ibom LGA, Akwa Ibom State', *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies (IJMSSPCS)* 7(2), 151–157.

Appendix 1 starts on the next page →

## Appendix 1

**TABLE 1-A1:** List of interviews.

S/n	Names	Age (years)	Date of interview	Place of interview	Researchers
1.	Arinze, P	72	07 September 2024	Eha-Alumona	Researcher
2.	Ogbu, K	62	06 September 2024	Eha-Alumona	Researcher
3.	Ukwueye, F	65	06 September 2024	Eha-Alumona	Researcher
4.	Ozioko, O	43	06 September 2024	Eha-Alumona	Researcher
5.	Ngwoko, O	49	06 September 2024	Eha-Ndiagu	Researcher
6.	Ezea, F. D	52	07 September 2024	Opi-Nsukka	Researcher
7.	Ugwueke, U	49	13 September 2024	Opi-Nsukka	Researcher
8.	Ugwu, I	62	13 September 2024	Opi-Nsukka	Researcher
9.	Asadu, I. k	67	13 September 2024	Edem-Ani	Researcher
10.	Idoko, w. O	71	13 September 2024	Edem-Ani	Researcher
11.	Ugwuoke, O	52	13 September 2024	Edem-Ani	Researcher
12.	Okpe, A	47	20 September 2024	Alo-Uno	Researcher
13.	Ukweze, D	63	20 September 2024	Alo-Uno	Researcher
14.	Agbo, U.	63	20 September 2024	Alo-Uno	Researcher
15.	Agbondu, H	54	20 September 2024	Alo-Uno	Researcher
16.	Ukaegbu, J	44	27 September 2024	Obukpa	Researcher
17.	Chibugo, V	47	27 September 2024	Obukpa	Researcher
18.	Adaeze, N. G	43	27 September 2024	Obukpa	Researcher
19.	Amadi, F	62	28 September 2024	Ede-Obala	Researcher
20.	Onah, C	52	28 September 2024	Ede-Obala	Researcher
21.	Ugwundu, C	73	04 October 2024	Ede-Obala	Researcher
22.	Amechi, w	63	04 October 2024	Nru-Nsukka	Researcher
23.	Eze, S	51	11 October 2024	Nru-Nsukka	Researcher
24.	Amoke, R	48	11 October 2024	Nguru-Nsukka	Researcher
25.	Ukwueze, L	74	12 October 2024	Nguru-Nsukka	Researcher
26.	Aruma, A	61	12 October 2024	Ede-obala	Researcher
27.	Odo, N	56	14 October 2024	Agbanni-Nsukka	Researcher
28.	Amandu, V	71	14 October 2024	Agbanni-Nsukka	Researcher
29.	Francis, A	67	15 October 2024	Obimo	Researcher
30.	Omeje, B	54	15 October 2024	Obimo	Researcher

S/n, serial number.