Oluwaseun Olanrewaju

Academics Stand Against Poverty (Nigeria)

Omolara Awogbayila

Independent Researcher (Nigeria)

Traditional Gender Roles and Marriage: A Case Study of Residents in Maryland Lagos State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT. A recent report by the World Economic Forum on Global Gender Gap finds that the possibility of achieving gender equality is not in the offing. In Nigeria, discussions on gender inequality have gained more prominence in the last two decades, attracting the interest of policy makers, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), development experts as well as academics. This study was an attempt to evaluate the perception of gender by married men and women. Specifically, it focused on young married men and women between the ages of 25–40, residing in Maryland, Lagos state. The study adopts the primary research method through close ended questionnaires. Findings from the study reveal that majority of the respondents support traditional concept of gender. However, there is a decline in gender stereotype with respect to gender roles between husbands and wives. The study recommends that Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should adopt a more comprehensive approach of advocacy that will influence the orientation of the citizens on the benefits of achieving gender equality.

KEYWORDS: marriage, gender, perception, inequality, equality

Introduction

Gender is socially and culturally constructed and has nothing to do with biological differences. Several literature (Ajayi, 2008; Abegunde, 2014; Anyalebechi, 2016; Olanrewaju, 2018) have critically examined the subjugation of women through gender defined roles. Conversely, other scholarly works (Leith-Ross, 1939; Amadiume, 1987) have explored the strength of women as industrious, leaders and decision makers. Notwithstanding the above, women in various countries of the world are marginalized and subjugated. Critically, the need to change this narrative becomes impera-

tive considering the positive contribution of women to various fields of endeavour in recent years. Indeed, it can be asserted that the contemporary Nigerian woman is in many ways different from the traditional woman of old. In recent years, women such as late Professor Dora Akunliyi (former Director General of NAFDAC) Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala (Director-General of World Trade Organization and former minister of finance), Dr. Oby Ezekwnsili (former minister of education), reputable and successful businesswomen such as, Mrs. Ibukun Awosika and Mrs. Folorunso Alakija have held positions exclusive to men and contributed to the socio-economic development of Nigeria. Although, women are beginning to gain recognition and prominence, it should be noted that gender inequality has undermined the majority of women from contributing to the development of Nigeria.

Scholarly articles on gender have explored the concept from a wide range of perspectives, such as; gender and politics (Randall, 1987; Uku, 1992; Awofeso & Odeyemi, 2014), gender and culture (Para-Mallam, 2010; Makama, 2013; Neculăesei, 2015; Okeoma, 2017), gender and justice (Gheaus, 2012; Odiaka, 2013; Olanrewaju, 2018), gender and religion (Klingorová & Havlíček, 2015; Olasupo, 2016; Sibani, 2017), gender and leadership (Applebaum, Audit & Miller, 2003; Dunn, Gerlach & Adrienne, 2014; Górska, 2016), gender roles differentiation (Jolliffe, 1989; Fennell & Walker, 2003; Omadjohwoefe, 2011). This study attempts to interrogate the influence of gender on the marital roles and responsibilities of young couples. It evaluates the perception of gender by married men and women. Objectively, this study seeks to analyse how the perception of gender by married men and women within the age bracket of 25–40 years influence gender roles in marriages. Section one presents the background of the research. Section two conceptualizes gender and reviews relevant literature related to the research topic. Section three examines the research method. Section four analyses the research findings. Section five concludes the study and offers recommendations as well as issues for further study.

Conceptual Clarifications

Gender Power Relations

Gender power relations define the values attached to the respective roles of men and women in society. This power play between men and women often relegates women to subordinate roles. Gender power rela-

tions in Nigeria, just like in many other African countries take a patriarchal dimension that reinforces gender inequality against women (Abdullahi, Adekeye & Shehu, 2011). Gender inequality against women cuts across cultural, religious, educational, as well as professional spheres and set the doubt in motion with respect to the prospect of ever achieving equality between men and women.

Gender Roles

Gender roles are widely held beliefs and stereotypes about sexual and psychological differences between males and females. Gender roles encompass a range of behaviours that are generally considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for people based on their actual or perceived sex. Blackstone (2013, p. 335) elucidates that "Gender roles are the product of the interactions between individuals and their environments". Gender roles are socially constructed and have played significant part in creating structural barriers that enforce gender stereotype against women in Nigeria.

Gender Equality

Gender equality refers to achieving parity between men and women in every facet of human endeavour; politics, economy, education, marriage, religion, to mention but a few. It is an integral element of a development strategy that enables both men and women to contribute to the socio-economic development of a nation without discrimination. To this end, gender equality has the potential to reduce the level of poverty among women in Nigeria and improve their standard of living (Lawal, Ayoade & Taiwo, 2016). The concept of gender equality seeks to promote equal participation and representation of women in issues of national concern. Fundamentally, gender equality will ensure that the rights of women are respected and protected.

Research Questions

1. What percentage of the respondents supports traditional gender roles?
2. How does gender influence the marital roles and responsibilities of the respondents?

Literature Review

Traditional gender stereotypes promote patriarchy and shape gender roles in families and marriages. Several Scholars; Makama, 2013; Igwe & Akolokwu, 2015; Ume, Ali & Ashfaq, 2016; Mudau & Obadire, 2017 have all supported the view that cultural practices sustain gender roles and stereotyping in marriages. In their study, Thompson and Walker (1989) explicate that men and women are financially responsible for the family, however most men feel providing for their family is their sole responsibility and often make an attempt to resist their wives as co-providers. Loscocco and Walzer (2013, p. 1) emphasize that "marriages are situated in a highly gendered symbolic culture" and as a result, couples castigate one another for the problems faced in their marriages, without realizing that some of these problems stem from the social construction of gender and its influence on marriages (Stewart et al., 1997). In Nigeria, the cultural practice that endorses the man as the head of the family/breadwinner is more pronounced. For most men, providing for their families buttresses their level of success and reassures them of their male dominance in a society that promotes gender inequality. Aluko (2015) identifies that women contribute to the economic development of their respective communities; however this has not translated to equal decision making power between couples in the household. The belief in traditional cultures that assert the man as the head of the family promotes men to become domineering and authoritative husbands. Adams and Olajumoke (2016) support the view that patriarchal culture in Nigeria is deeply entrenched and confines women to traditional roles as house keepers, child bearers as well as child rearers, regardless of a woman's level of education.

Although, most literature on gender roles support the conventional argument that social construction of gender promotes inequality against women. In recent years, research works suggest that the inequalities witnessed as a result of gender roles have reduced as more women contribute to family upkeep. In their article, social change and traditional gender roles in Lagos State, Yusuf and Ajiboye (2014) opine that the traditional roles assigned to women, such as taking care of children and engaging in house chores are no longer the exclusive preserve of women because more women now seek employment to support their families. Akanle, Adesina and Nwaobiala (2018) note that there is an emergence of new gender roles in the family reconstructed by the social realities of urban settings. This paradigm shift has placed on women the sole responsibility of catering for

their families. However, catering for the family creates overbearing challenges for women that are less educated and earn meagre salaries (Eboiyehi, Muoghalu & Bankole, 2016). Drawing from this critique, the study builds on existing literature to unpack the subject matter of research.

Methodology

This study adopts the primary research method. Primary research produces first-hand information, because researchers gather data directly from the participants. Data were gathered through close-ended questionnaires and analysed using a quantitative approach to produce empirical findings. The empirical findings were examined in the context of existing literature on family and gender roles. Although, primary research ensures that data is derived directly from the respondents, however, it is pertinent to understand that a researcher's bias and interpretation of events may affect the outcome of the research. Hence, the researchers adopt the view which recognizes that researchers should be self-reflexive on their personal views to avoid bias. This research made use of close ended, check box questionnaires as its instrument of research. A close ended or structured questionnaire as Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) describe, ask questions that are accompanied by a list of all possible alternatives from which respondents select the answer that best describe their situation.

To draw its sample, this research applied the purposive sampling technique. Initially, 122 local residents in Maryland, Lagos were selected to participate in the research through the researchers existing contacts in their community. However, during the course of the research, 90 additional residents were contacted through snowballing technique, which enabled the researchers to establish contact with other residents that have the same characteristics with the initial contacts (respondents). However, of the 212 respondents, 5 did not complete the questionnaires. As a result, data analysis was based on the responses from 207 respondents. Statistical tools in the mode of frequency and percentage were applied to present results in tabular form. Although, Walliman (2006, p. 75) affirms that "to be able to make accurate judgments about a population from a sample, the sample should be as representative as possible". Nonetheless, the purposive sampling technique provides valuable data on the perception of gender by the respondents and its broader connection to gender roles between couples.

Findings

Table 1. Information of the respondents based on attributes

Variables	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Sex		
Male	93	45.0
Female	114	55.0
Total	**207**	**100**
Age Category		
25–30	38	18.4
31–35	68	32.9
36–40	101	48.7
Total	**207**	**100**
Number of years married		
10 years and above	58	28.1
6–10 years	92	44.4
1–5 years	57	27.5
Total	**207**	**100**
Education		
Post Graduate	44	21.3
Higher Institution	129	62.3
Secondary School	34	16.4
Primary School	0	0.0
Total	**207**	**100**
Occupation		
Employed	198	95.7
Unemployed	9	4.3
Total	**207**	**100**

Table 1 above shows that respondents that have been married for 6–10 years have the highest frequency (44.4%), while those that have been married for 1–5 years have the lowest frequency (27.5%). Furthermore, more females (55%) participated in the study. With respect to age, 48.7% of the respondents are within the age bracket of 36–40 and 18.4% are within the age bracket of 25–30. 62.3% of the respondents attended higher institution, while 21.3% proceeded to post graduate school. Significantly, the

educational background of the 207 respondents exceeds primary school and majority (95.7%) are employed.

Table 2. Frequency of responses to questions on the perception of gender and gender roles by the respondents

S/N	Questions	Frequency	Percentages (%)
1	**Do you support traditional gender roles? (E.g. Men are the sole breadwinners and Women should take care of house chores)**		
	Yes, that should be the norm in every family	154	74.4
	No, it's 21st century. Women should support the family financially	53	25.6
	Total	**207**	**100**
2	**Who pays the bills for upkeep of the home?**		
	Husband	64	31.0
	Wife	0	0.0
	Both (Equally)	27	13.0
	Both (Husband pay more)	111	53.6
	Both (Wife pays more)	5	2.4
	Total	**207**	**100**
3	**Who does the house chores?**		
	Husband	0	0.0
	Wife	117	56.5
	Both (husband and Wife)	42	20.3
	Children	21	10.1
	House-help	27	13.1
	Total	**207**	**100**
4	**Who takes decisions on important family matters?**		
	My husband takes decisions on important family matters	68	32.9
	My wife takes decisions on important family matters	0	0.0
	Both of us take decisions on important family matters	139	67.1
	Total	**207**	**100**

5	Finally, do you think there should be absolute gender equality? (E.g. no job role restrictions and equal pays, equal house chore share at home.		
	Yes, there should be gender equality	179	86.5
	No, men should always be above women	28	13.5
	Total	**207**	**100**

As reflected in Table 2, a high percentage (74.4%) of the respondents supports traditional gender roles. It was also observed that both couples pay the bills for upkeep of the home. However, 53.6% indicated that husbands pay more of the bills for the upkeep of the home. According to 56.5% of the respondents, husbands and wives engage in house chores. Responses to the question on who takes the decision on important family matters show that 67.1% of couples jointly take decisions on important family matters. As evident from the responses, decisions on important family matters are not solely taken by the wives. Lastly, 86.5% of the respondents identified their support for gender equality.

Discussion

The study reveals that 74.4% of the respondents support traditional gender roles. As observed, most of the respondents believe that men should be the breadwinners of their families, while 25.6% avowed that women should work to support the family. This indicates that the younger generation of married men and women support the gender stereotype that bestows on the husband the financial responsibilities of providing for the family. The study supports the works of (Para-Mallam, 2010; Makama, 2013; Neculăesei, 2015; Okeoma, 2017) that the process of socialisation in every culture encompasses the cultural expectations of male and female behaviours. Gender stereotypes are derived from cultural values and the social construction of gender. Although majority of respondents reported that men should be the breadwinner of their families. However, responses indicated that women contribute to family upkeep. 13% of the respondents stated that both husbands and wives share the bills for the upkeep of the home equally, while 53.6% responded that the husbands bear more financial responsibilities. Sharing of financial responsibilities

between couples' benefits men and reduces their financial burdens. Conversely, receiving financial support from their wives creates in men the fear of losing their male ego and dominance (Zuo & Tang, 2000). The study reflects that 31% of men solely pay the bills for the upkeep of the home. As it appears, the social construction of gender more often depicted as promoting gender inequality against women also creates challenges for men. The idea of husband deriving his masculinity from providing for his family conforms to the traditional gender stereotype defined by society and places enormous responsibilities on the husband in the marriage. In this regard, Brown (2016) admits that the provider role of a man cannot be overemphasized, and young men should be nurtured in their transition to adulthood to understand their important roles as providers for their families.

Gender role with respect to house chores is gradually shifting from being the sole responsibility of women as more men engage in house chores to support their wives. In this study, 20.3% of the respondents acknowledge that both the husband and wife engage in house chores. This view supports the works of (Anderson 1999; Fernandez et al., 2016) that men are taking up increasing responsibilities with respect to house chores. Significantly, 56.5% of responses signified that performing house chores is the sole responsibility of the wife, while there was no positive response to signify that performing house cores is the sole responsibility of husbands. These responses agree with earlier submissions by Adesina (2013), Akanle (2014) and Cerrato and Eva (2018) that, although men participate in house chores, however there is no equilibrium with regards to the tasks performed by men/husbands and women/wives. In taking important family decisions, 67.1% of the respondents reported that couples take decisions jointly. The responses imply a shift from the gender norm that affirms the role of the man/husband as the sole decision maker on important family matters (Akanle, Adesina & Ogbimi, 2016). However, the above average response of 67.1% indicates that more effort is required to achieve gender equality with respect to decision making in the family. More so, 32.9% of the respondents acknowledge the man/husband as the sole decision maker. The percentage of respondents that acknowledge men as the sole decision maker is adduced to the stereotype gender role ascribed to men as the head of the family. Yusuf and Ajiboye (2014) emphasize that in contemporary Lagos, women are beginning to support with provision of family needs. However, the male is still revered as the head of the family.

As indicated from the study, 86.5% of the respondents express their support for gender equality. The percentage of respondents that support gender equality creates contrast when juxtaposed to the percentage (74.4%) of respondents that support traditional gender roles. Despite the advocacy for gender equality by Inter-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Women's Rights Movement, the socio-cultural construction of gender remains deeply rooted in defining gender roles in the society. Apparently, majority of people in society clamour for gender equality while their actions reflect and support gender inequality. Biased social attitudes strengthen gender inequality and impede the efforts made towards achieving gender equality.

Delimitations of the Study

The fieldwork faced several challenges which included a lack of co-operation by some residents who viewed the researchers as interlopers. Secondly, some of the residents refused to cooperate with the researchers for fear of revealing their identities and information. Thirdly, reliance on the meager resources of the researchers and the lack of external funding limited the depth of the research. In addition, some residents declined to participate in this research because of religious reasons. Their inputs could have widened the scope of the study. Lastly, the focus of this research on one particular locality (Maryland), limits the findings considering that they may not necessarily be applicable in other cases. Notwithstanding the limitations, the analysis of data gathered during the fieldwork provided considerable and deep insight into the subject matter of research.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As observed from this research, gender stereotype influences the roles undertaken by young couples in their marriages. Although, there is a variance in recent years considering that men partake in the responsibilities and tasks traditionally undertaken by women and women also participate in the traditional roles undertaken by men. However, what is yet to be achieved is a fundamental paradigm shift from the traditional gender

norm towards a more liberal and receptive orientation that embraces gender equality. Both men and women are not truly disposed to changing the narrative. Women are not willing to take financial responsibility with men equally for the upkeep of the home, even though this places enormous financial burdens on men. On the other hand, men will not share domestic chores with women equally because of their ego and pride. While gender equality may be achievable, there is no likelihood that the narrative will change anytime soon. This is particularly so considering that the social construction of gender has established a deeply rooted norm that defines the behavioural expectations of people.

In promoting gender parity, gender equality as a subject should be inculcated into the school curricula at both primary and secondary levels in order to sensitize children on gender equality at an early age. In advocating for gender equality, NGOs should adopt a more comprehensive and effective approach of advocacy that will influence the orientation of the citizens, more importantly the youths. This study exposes that the dimension of gender inequality is binary, and men are equally vulnerable to its consequences. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and NGOs should therefore focus on advocacy that recognizes gender discriminations against men, in order to achieve a balance in their advocacy for gender equality.

Issues for further study

Firstly, it is important to expand the scope of research to capture the subject matter of research from a broader study that will cover a larger population from multiple study areas. Secondly, it is suggested that research be conducted to assess the fulfillment of couples vis-à-vis the gender roles they are constrained to perform in their marriages. Thirdly, it is equally necessary to study how gender roles play out in homes where women are the sole providers for their families. Regardless of the above, this study is significant in lending a voice against gender inequality, as it exposes that gender stereotype remains a deep-rooted challenge confronting our society.

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