
Tracking Women Empowerment: Marital Communication and Participation in Family Decision-making among Married Women Farmers in Ibadan, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequities are greater challenges in developing countries like Nigeria especially in rural communities where women are typically farmers. Gender inequality is inimical to optimal productivity and well-being among women, and marital household-based dynamics are indicators of inequities that women encounter in their lives. Hence, this study was designed to examine marital communication and participation in family decision-making among married women farmers in selected rural communities of Ibadan, Nigeria. The design of this study was cross-sectional survey. Multi-item measures were used to assess variables and simple random as well as systematic samplings were used to select 360 respondents from the target population. Closed-ended questionnaire administered via structured interview was used to collect primary data. One-way ANOVA was used to assess significant differences in mean scores of participation in family decision-making across sub-groups of education, age and religion. *Eta* and *Eta*² were used as measures of effect sizes. Pearson's correlation coefficient (*r*) was used to examine relationship between variables. Results show that marital communication is 'good' among 64.2% but 'poor' among 35.8% of respondents. Participation in family decision-making is 'high' among 62.2% but low among 37.8% of respondents. Education and age are significant independent socio-demographic factors affecting participation in family decision-making ($p < 0.05$) but religion is not ($p > 0.05$). There is a significant, inverse but weak relationship between marital communication and participation in family decision-making (Pearson's $r = -.112$, $p < 0.05$). Having no formal education and being aged 46 and above have significant effects on reduced and increased participation in family decision-making respectively. However, being Muslim, Christian or traditional religion practitioner has no effect on this participation. The lesser married women farmers share their concerns and other 'everyday issues' with their husbands, the more is women participation in family decision-making.

Keywords: Marital communication, family, decision-making, women empowerment, gender equality.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In virtually all human societies the traditional role and status of women have been known to be subservient to men's. Even in current times the opportunities to increase quality of life of the average woman is far

below an average man's. Human-social dynamics are replete with questions of gender inequities because of the consequences of same for productivity and well-being. Gender is foremost of the three bases of producing inequalities, social exclusion and discrimination in societies; the others being race and class (Van Amsterdam, 2012). The fifth of the United Nation's sustainable development goals is gender equality. This is obviously a strong advocacy for women empowerment by the United Nations. To understand empowerment, the concepts of change and power are essential because "power is *ability to make choices*" (Kabeer, 2005: 13, italics in original). It must also be noted that empowerment typically originates within (Ibid). This is important because social values do not characteristically uphold women empowerment. This presupposes that women's readiness and struggle to be empowered are always important ingredients in their being empowered, though interpersonal and societal support are always intensely required. When women get empowered, their traditional role especially at the household level will change. In other words, women participation in making family choices is an important indicator of how empowered they are. For instance, in the report of a qualitative study designed to explore gender subordination in a Yoruba community in Nigeria, Aderinto (2001: 176) stated that "perhaps the greatest pattern of subordination is in the area of 'who decides what'". In a similar vein, the scope of women's communication with their spouses indicates how less traditional and empowering their marital life is.

Women empowerment engenders gender equality and this is tremendously significant for several reasons. In the World Development Report 2012 entitled Gender Equality and Development (World Bank, 2011), it was asserted that:

Gender equality is a core development objective in its own right. It is also smart economics. Greater gender equality can enhance productivity, improve development outcomes for the next generation, and make institutions more representative Women now represent 40 percent of the global labor force, 43 percent of the world's agricultural labor force, ... productivity will be raised if their skills and talents are used more fully. ... Greater control over household resources by women can enhance countries' growth prospects by changing spending patterns in ways that benefit children. ... Empowering women as economic, political, and social actors can change policy choices and make institutions more representative of a range of voices (page xx).

The ripple effect of women empowerment cum gender equality is overwhelming. Economic development is dependent on women empowerment because this empowerment engenders skill acquisition and promotes optimal use of same in women population. At the same time, economic development can tune down gender-based inequalities tremendously (Duflo, 2011; Razavi, 2012). This bidirectional approach signifies and recapitulates the notion that development and women empowerment are intrinsically tied. Incidentally, the challenge of gender inequity is typically more problematic as societies and communities are disadvantageously characterized. In essence, gender inequities are greater challenges in developing countries like Nigeria especially in rural communities where women are typically farmers.

"Throughout their lives, even before birth, women in developing countries are treated differently than their brothers, lagging behind men in many domains" (Duflo, 2011: 1051). Rigg (2006: 180) equated "the poor world" with the "rural world... where farming predominates". Rural population dynamics is more inimical to development when compared with urban's (Ibrahim, 2019). The implication is that being a woman in a developing country like Nigeria opens one to considerable gender-based inequities but this is even exacerbated if one's geographical location is rural and one is a farmer. Indeed, this draws attention to the state of empowerment among women rural farmers. As indicators of empowerment, marital communication and participation in family decision making will be more justifiably studied among married women.

Marriage can be empowering or otherwise for women. Nigerian women have been said to “gain respect, self-esteem and dignity” in marriage (Ola, Oni and Akanle, 2015: 64) but this certainly cannot be taken for granted. In a qualitative study that explored divorce outcome among 52 divorced Nigerian women, it was found that though the effect of divorce on women was diverse depending on religion, education and age, “overall, the outcome(s) of divorce was more disempowering than empowering for the vast majority of the divorced women” (Ibid: 65). So, empowerment status of married women will provide insights into what marriage translate to for rural women farmers in particular. Hence, this study is an attempt to examine marital communication and participation in family decision-making among married women farmers in selected rural communities of Ibadan, Nigeria.

The specific objectives were:

1. To ascertain the level of marital communication and participation in family decision-making among respondents.
2. To examine the extent to which respondents make decisions on certain family issues contained in the scale of participation in family decision-making.
3. To determine the influence of education, age and religion on participation in family decision-making among respondents.
4. To analyze the relationship between marital communication and participation in family decision-making.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design and instrument

The design of this study is cross-sectional survey that targeted married women farmers in selected rural communities of Ibadan, Nigeria. Structured close-ended questionnaire was used to collect data. This was translated into Yorubá language and administered via structured interview.

Population and Sampling

The study population was made up of the people of the six rural local government areas of Ibadan. These local government areas (LGAs) include Ido, Akinyele, Lagelu, Egbeda, Ona-Ara and Oluyole. Married women farmers were targeted in this population because the context of marriage is necessary to understudy marital communication. According to the National Population Commission (2007), the total number of women in these LGAs was 608, 247. This is taken as the N figure for this study. The sampling procedure featured multi-staged random and systematic sampling. Sample size calculator was used to determine the required sample size at 95% confidence level and confidence interval of 5.2. This was 355, but it was increased to 360.

From the six rural LGAs of Ibadan, two were randomly selected. These were Ido and Ona-ara. They comprise of ten and eleven wards respectively, including many communities/villages. The people engage in farming extensively. Four wards were randomly selected from each LGA and two communities were randomly selected from each selected ward. In Ido LGA, Akufo, Abegumrin, Elenusonso, Oganla, Ido, Onikedo, Omi-Adio and Bakatari were randomly selected. In Ona-ara LGA, Badeku, Jago, Ojoku, Adewumi, Gbedun, Araromi, Akanran and Ojebode were randomly selected. The total number of women in Ido and Ona Ara LGAs are 51, 511 and 133,588 respectively (National Population Commission, 2007). Therefore, more women were selected from Ona-ara LGA— systematic sampling principle was invoked to select twenty and twenty-five respondents in each of the eight communities selected at Ido and Ona-ara LGAs respectively. Hence, 360 respondents participated in the study. Data were collected between February and May, 2019 and response rate was 100%.

Operational definitions and measurement of variables

Marital communication was defined as the degree to which respondents share their concerns and other 'everyday issues' with their husbands. The three-item open communication sub-scale of the Dutch marital satisfaction and communication questionnaire (Troost *et al.*, 2005) was used to assess marital communication. The scale assessed the extent to which respondents talk to their husbands about 'personal problems'; 'things in which they are both interested'; and 'the nice things that happen in a day'. Response options included 'never, almost never, sometimes, fairly often, and very often' and were scored 0-4, such that obtainable total score could range from 0 to 12. The Cronbach alpha was 0.852. *Participation in family decision-making* was defined as extent of respondent's involvement in deciding about issues in respondent's family. It was assessed with a 10-item author-constructed scale assessing the frequency to which respondents and/or respondents' husbands decide over ten family issues (see table 3 for these issues). Responses included 'myself, most of the time', 'myself, sometimes', 'myself and my husband, most of the time', 'my husband, sometimes', and 'my husband, most of the time'. The Cronbach alpha was 0.668. Items were scored 0-4, such that greater scores implied greater participation of women in family decision-making, lower score signifying greater participation of husbands in family decision-making. Total score could range from 0 to 40.

Study hypotheses

Ho¹: There is no significant difference in the mean score of participation in family decision-making across sub-groups of education, age and religion.

Ho²: There is no significant relationship between marital communication and participation in family decision-making.

3. DATA ANALYSES

Frequency counts and percentages were used to show data distributions. Kolmogorov Smirnov test (for normalcy) indicated that all interval-level data did not deviate significantly from normal distributions ($p > 0.05$). Homogeneity of variance across sub-groups of education, age and religion were assessed with Levene's test. One-way ANOVA was used to assess significant differences in means across sub-groups of education, age and religion. Test for linearity was conducted to examine appropriateness of using Eta and Eta², which were used as measures of effect size. Post hoc test (LSD) was used to identify homogenous sub-groups. Pearson's *r* was used to assess relationship between marital communication and participation in family decision-making. All data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 21).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Almost half (49.4%) of respondents were holders of secondary school certificate. More than a quarter of respondents (25.3%) were primary school certificate holders. This signifies a good level of basic education among married women farmers in the study area. However, up to a fifth of respondents (19.7%) had no formal education while just 3.6% of respondents have tertiary education. Educational achievement among women farmers in the study area could certainly be better. A good majority of respondents (58.3%) were aged between 26 to 35 years. This distribution was closely followed by the 36-45 age sub-group which constituted 24.4% of respondents. Most respondents are therefore in active life. Christianity appears to be more popularly practiced in the study area because Christians were more represented among respondents (53.9%) than Muslims (41.7%).

Traditional religion practitioners were 4.4%, signifying some measure of cultural survival among married women farmers in the study area. The distribution of socio-demographic characteristics among respondents is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (N= 360)

Socio-demographic profile of respondents		n (%)
Highest educational qualification	No formal education	71 (19.7)
	Primary School Certificate	91 (25.3)
	Secondary School Certificate	178 (49.4)
	Tertiary Certificate	13 (3.6)
	Missing	7 (1.9)
Age (in years)	16-25	50 (13.9)
	26-35	210 (58.3)
	36-45	88 (24.4)
	46-55	12 (3.3)
Religion	Christianity	194 (53.9)
	Islam	150 (41.7)
	Traditional	16 (4.4)

Univariate analysis of marital communication and participation in family decision-making among respondents

Table 2 shows that marital communication was good among 64.2% of respondents but poor among 35.8% of respondents. This is an indication that respondents are largely empowered marital-communication wise. On the other hand, the proportion of those maintaining poor marital communication is fairly large. Close to 4 out of every 10 married women farmers exhibit poor marital communication with their husbands. Invariably, close to 4 of every ten married women farmers in the study area are disempowered marital-communication wise. Hence, there is a fairly large pool of married women farmers in the study area whose communication with their husbands are disempowering. Table 2 also shows that participation in family decision-making is high among 62.2% of respondents, indicating that married women farmers in the study area are notable contributors to family decision making. This is probably a reflection of a good level of empowered status of married women farmers in the study area.

However, the proportion of respondents (37.8%) maintaining low participation in family decision-making is strongly noticeable and inimical to gender equality in the study area. The proportion of respondents maintaining high and low participation in family decision-making (62.2% and 37.8%) closely resemble the distribution of women's attitude towards gender role in Ibadan, Nigeria as reported by Ibrahim *et al.* (2015)— 60.9% and 39.1% of their respondents were reported as maintaining egalitarian and traditional attitude towards gender role respectively. Given that egalitarian and traditional attitude towards gender role among women are reflective of their empowerment versus disempowerment status, the ratio of 6 to 4 appears to arbitrarily depict the distribution of women's empowerment versus disempowerment status among women in Ibadan axis of Nigeria.

Further, the fairly high proportion of respondents exhibiting good marital communication and high participation in family decision-making appears to reflect improved attitude towards women empowerment and gender equality in the study area. Omadjohwoefe (2011) expounded that though women typically maintain underprivileged position in society, there are now considerable changing institutional arrangements

that direct women's social mobility in positive direction in modern Nigeria. Interestingly, increased women participation in household decision-making bears positive outcome like improved nutrition (Piesse and Simister 2002) and increased spending on human capital development of children (Browning and Chiappori 1998; Bussolo, De Hoyos, and Wodon 2009). The distribution of dimensions of marital communication and participation in family decision-making showcases partly decent status of women empowerment and gender equality among married women farmers in the study area.

Table 2: Distribution of dimensions of marital communication and participation in family decision-making among respondents

Variable*	Dimensions**	N	%
Marital communication	Poor	129	35.8
	Good	231	64.2
Participation in family decision-making	Low	136	37.8
	High	224	62.2

*Mean \pm standard deviation of marital communication = 9.41 ± 2.73 (min.=0, max.=12.0). Mean \pm standard deviation of participation in family decision-making = 17.19 ± 5.21 (min.=0.0, max.= 38). **The means (below the mean; mean and above) of summary scores were used to categorize respondents into two.

Descriptive analysis of items in the scale of participation in family decision-making

The descriptive analysis of items in the scale of participation in family decision-making shows that decisions regarding visits to family or friends, family recreational activities, purchases for daily needs and children discipline are issues that respondents contribute mostly to in the household. Visit to family or friends was the greatest of these four issues and this is very interesting because it indicates a high level of freedom of movement for women farmers in the study area. Freedom of movement bears positive outcome for women, such as increased contraceptive and condom use (Corroon *et al.*, 2014; Upadhyay and Karasek, 2012; Stephenson, Bartel and Rubardt, 2012; Rahman, 2012). Increased used of contraception and consequent lower fertility is a developmental achievement (Young, 2019). Contraceptive use also aids child survival (Adedini *et al.*, 2015) and prevents maternal and child mortality (Chola *et al.*, 2015). Freedom of movement also enables women create and maintain networks (Klugman *et al.*, 2014). It is also instructive that married women farmers exercise higher liberty in matters of recreation, household daily needs and children upbringing. These issues are traditionally assigned as women duties.

Women and children's healthcare ranked 5th and 6th, indicating issues that respondents have middling power over. The selection of children's name ranked 7th, portraying the idea that women have little to contribute in selecting the names their children bear. This is surely a reflection of patriarchal character of the study area in particular and the African society in general. Finally, financial supports to husband's and respondent's families ranked 9th and 8th. In addition, major household purchases ranked 10th. These are strong indications that financial matters are much less within the purview of married women farmers in the study area speaks not well of their economic empowerment. Economic empowerment is tremendously beneficial for women. For instance, it can predispose them to uptake of family planning methods (Reed *et al.*, 2016). The summary of descriptive analysis of items in the scale of participation in family decision-making is shown on table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of items in the scale of participation in family decision-making

S/No	Issues*	Mean ±standard deviation**	Rank
1	Your healthcare	1.99±1.3	5 th
2	Major household purchases e.g. television	.72±1.2	10 th
3	Child healthcare	1.81±1.2	6 th
4	Financial support to my husband's family	.82±1.1	9 th
5	Purchases for daily needs	2.37±1.1	3 rd
6	Children discipline	2.02±1.0	4 th
7	Financial support to my family	1.63±1.2	8 th
8	Visits to family or friends	2.74±1.0	1 st
9	Family recreational activities	2.59±1.1	2 nd
10	Selecting children name	1.76±0.7	7 th

*Respondents were asked, "who makes decisions regarding the following issues in your family?"

**The minimum and maximum possible score for each item was 0 and 4.

Socio-demographic characteristics and participation in family decision-making

Education and participation in family decision-making

Respondents with tertiary education participate best in family decision-making (mean ±standard deviation = 18.01±6.10). This was closely followed by those with primary education (mean ±standard deviation = 18.00±4.79) and then those with secondary education (mean ±standard deviation = 17.53±4.11). Respondents with no formal education participate the least in family decision-making (mean ±standard deviation = 15.41±7.35). Result of ANOVA shows that these means are significantly different ($p < 0.05$) and Levene's test indicates the validity of these significant differences ($p > 0.05$). Hence, H_0 is rejected. Education has a main effect on participation in family decision-making.

Result of post-hoc test shows that the no formal education sub-group is significantly different from all other education sub-groups ($p < 0.05$). Hence, having no formal education is significantly associated with reduced participation in family decision-making. This finding adds to evidence indicating that education bears positive outcome for women. Omadjohwoefe (2011) asserted that education is prerequisite of social mobility among women in Nigeria. Kabeer *et al.* (2013) also asserted that education is protective against intimate partner abuse among women. Test for linearity indicates that the effect of education on participation in family decision-making is non-linear ($p > 0.05$).

The extent of the association between education and participation in family decision-making as assessed with Eta is .178, Eta² is .032. Hence, just 3.2% of the variation in participation in family decision-making is accounted for by education. The summary of the analysis of education and participation in family decision-making is shown on table 4.

Table 4: Effect of education on participation in family decision-making

Socio-demographic variable	Sub-groups	Mean \pm standard deviation	Levene's test for homogeneity of variances		ANOVA		Test for linearity		Eta	Eta ²
			Levene's statistic	<i>p</i> value	F statistic	<i>p</i> value	F statistic	<i>p</i> value		
Education	No formal education	15.41 \pm 7.35	10.863	.066	9.71	.000	2.89	.056	.178	.032
	Primary	18.00 \pm 4.79								
	Secondary	17.53 \pm 4.11								
	Tertiary	18.01 \pm 6.10								

Age and participation in family decision-making

Respondents in the oldest age sub-group (46 and above) participate best in family decision-making (mean \pm standard deviation = 20.92 \pm 5.70). The participation in family decision-making of respondents aged 16-25 (mean \pm standard deviation = 17.54 \pm 5.19) and 36-45 (mean \pm standard deviation = 17.16 \pm 5.09) are very similar. These differential means are significantly different ($p < 0.05$) and Levene's test indicates that there is homogeneity of variance across subgroups of age ($p > 0.05$). Hence, H_0 is rejected; age has a main effect on participation in family decision-making.

Result of post-hoc test shows that the 46 and above age sub-group is significantly different from all other age sub-groups ($p < 0.05$). Hence, increased age, specifically being aged 46 and above has significant effect on married women farmers' participation in family decision-making. Angel-Urdinola and Wodon (2010) similarly found that women's involvement in household decision-making increases with increased age. In this study, the effect of age on this participation is non-linear ($p < 0.05$). The extent of the association between age and this participation is 14.4% (Eta = .144) while the just 2.1% of the variation in participation in family decision-making is accounted by age (Eta² = .021). The summary of the analysis of age and participation in family decision-making is shown on page 5.

Table 5: Effect of age on participation in family decision-making

Socio-demographic variable	Sub-groups	Mean \pm standard deviation	Levene's test for homogeneity of variances		ANOVA		Test for linearity		Eta	Eta ²
			Levene's statistic	<i>p</i> value	F statistic	<i>p</i> value	F statistic	<i>p</i> value		
Age	16-25	17.54 \pm 5.19	.085	.968	2.53	.047	1.26	.262	.144	.021
	26-35	16.90 \pm 5.18								
	36-45	17.16 \pm 5.09								
	46 and above	20.92 \pm 5.70								

Religion and participation in family decision-making

Participation in family decision-making are very similar among Muslims (mean \pm standard deviation = 17.20 \pm 5.28), Christians (mean \pm standard deviation = 17.19 \pm 5.14) and practitioners of traditional religion (mean \pm standard deviation = 17.11 \pm 5.79). There were also no significant differences in means across sub-groups of religion ($p > 0.05$). Hence, H_0 is accepted. Religion has no effect on participation in family decision-making. Hence, being Muslim, Christian or traditional religion practitioner has no effect on participation in family decision-making among married women farmers in the study area. Table 6 is a presentation of analysis regarding religion and participation in family decision-making.

Table 6: Effect of religion on participation in family decision-making

Socio-demographic variable	Sub-groups	Mean \pm standard deviation	Levene's test for homogeneity of variances		ANOVA	
			Levene's statistic	p value	F statistic	p value
Religion	Islam	17.20 \pm 5.28	.307	.736	.002	.998
	Christianity	17.19 \pm 5.14				
	Traditional	17.11 \pm 5.79				

Relationship between Marital communication and participation in family decision-making

The Pearson's r in table 7 (-.112, $p < 0.05$) indicates that there is significant, inverse but weak relationship between marital communication and participation in family decision-making. The significant relationship between the two variables indicates the intrinsic connection between the two. Meanwhile, decreased marital communication bears increased women participation in family decision-making. This is very instructive. Participation in family decision-making is measured in this study such that lower score implied greater participation of husbands in family decision-making. So, by implication, decreased marital communication is significantly associated with increased husband participation in family decision-making. The lesser married women farmers share their concerns and other 'everyday issues' with their husbands, the more is women participation in family decision-making. This is very revealing. When it happen that women find little or no communication partner in their husbands, the more they will have to make family decisions alone. Result of this bivariate correlation is shown in table 7.

Table 7: Pearson's r indicating relationship between marital communication and participation in family decision-making

		Marital communication	Participation in family decision-making
Marital communication	Pearson Correlation	1	-.112
	p value		.033
Participation in family decision-making	Pearson Correlation	-.112	1
	p value	.033	

5. CONCLUSIONS

The univariate distribution of dimensions of marital communication and participation in family decision-making showcases partly decent status of women empowerment and gender equality among married women farmers in the study area. Among other issues, the descriptive analysis of items in the scale of participation in family decision-making indicates a high level of freedom of movement, but speaks not well of economic empowerment among married women farmers in the study area. Education and age have main effects on participation in family decision-making ($p < 0.05$) but religion did not ($p > 0.05$). Having no formal education and being aged 46 and above has are significantly associated with reduced and increased participation in family decision-making respectively. Being Muslim, Christian or traditional religion practitioner has no effect on participation in family decision-making among married women farmers in the study area. The relationship between marital communication and participation in family decision-making is significant, inverse but weak. The lesser married women farmers share their concerns and other 'everyday issues' with their husbands, the more is women participation in family decision-making.

6. FUTURE WORKS

Future works may involve other indices of women empowerment and report pattern of same especially in Ibadan axis of Nigeria to ascertain the ratio of 6 to 4 as the distribution of women's empowerment versus disempowerment status.

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