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Analysis on the Level of Women's Empowerment in Nigeria: Emphasis on Participation in Household Decision Making by Currently Married Women In

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Abstract:

Although women constitute almost half of the country's population, their participation in matters such as decision-making in the family still calls for attention. Giving much attention to improving the rights, status of women is of great importance for the national growth and development of any nation since the issue of women empowerment is a global concern. Previous studies conducted on women's empowerment have shown that it is multidimensional, and as such there is no universally acceptable or general indicator of women's empowerment because it encompasses many dimensions such as economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal and the likes. This study seeks to look at women's empowerment in relation to some of their socio-cultural background characteristics of currently married women or women living with partners aged 15-49 in Nigeria. The study used women/individual data from the 2008 Nigeria Demographic Health Survey (NDHS), in which women's empowerment was measured by women's participation in household decision-making. The result obtained shows that women's age, age at first marriage, their level of education, place of residence (urban/rural), standard of living (low, medium and high) and the number of children have significant contributions in the women's ability to participate in household decision making or in general her empowerment.

Keywords: Empowerment, decision-making, household, status

1. Introduction

Women empowerment is receiving world attention as the United Nations has included gender equality and women empowerment in its development goals. Women's empowerment is an essential ingredient for achieving all the development goals, while, at the level of development bodies, the concept of empowerment was adopted after the Beijing Conference (1995), in its declaration of (section 13) at the conference, it presents women's empowerment as a key strategy for development. There are so many countries across the globe, including developing countries like Nigeria who are working tirelessly on track to achieve at least some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) at the appointed dateline of 2015, in which empowering women is among these goals. To achieve these, the countries involve here need to improve their economic growth, educational and health systems, putting these in place will improve the quality of life of the people (Zaid 2010, The World bank, 2007).

However, the concept of empowerment is not a new one, references to the term date back to the 1960s, particularly in the Afro-American movement and in Paulo Freire's theory based on the development of critical conscience. In 1985, popular women's movements in Latin America and the Caribbean as well as feminist movements have seen the notion of empowerment as 'being tied.' On the one hand, to the seizing of power, by emphasising mainly the improvement of self-esteem and self-confidence as well as the ability to chose what direction one's life should take; and on the other to the collective power to change gender relations in the economic, political, legal and socio-cultural spheres.

"Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace." Unfortunately, the approach as used by development bodies and the offered quantitative indicators tend to reduce its scope to women's ability to take individual responsibility on their own.

1.1. Why Women Empowerment?

In an effort to give an answer to the question why women empowerment, Ar kabrata (2001) in one of his presentation on "women empowerment," has quoted Sri Ravi Shankar's saying thus, "the role of women in the development of society is of utmost importance, in fact, it is the only thing that determine whether a society is stable and harmonious, or otherwise, women are the backbone of the society", which is in agreement with the popular saying that 'Educating a man means educating an individual, but educating a woman/female is educating a family,' women need to be empowered for the progress of a nation. However, there are so many other reasons why women need to be empowered, some of these reasons in addition to the above stated ones includes; educational problems, society, Gender prejudice, Low confidence, Lack of unity, Problem related with Health, Poverty and Ignorance, traditional barriers. These and many more reasons call for the need to empower women. Empowerment of women is also seen as an essential avenue for reducing the differences between the sexes that exist in nearly all societies. Empowerment can be defined in several ways depending on the purpose or usage. It can be referred to as "the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives.' Greater control over resources but also greater self- physically coercive acts used against adult and confidence and the ability to make a decision on an equal adolescent woman by current or former male intimate partners.

Kishor (2008) says empowerment has come to denote women's increased control over their own lives, bodies, and environments. In discussions of women's empowerment, emphasis is often placed on women's decision-making roles, their economic self-reliance, and their legal rights to equal treatment, inheritance and protection against all forms of discrimination, in addition to the elimination of barriers to access such resources as education and information. One of the significant and direct indicators of empowerment is the decision-making ability of women. Kabeer (2005) lists decision making power as one of the elements required to enable one gain power, authority and influence over others, institutions or society. In short, empowerment is the process that allows one to gain the knowledge, skill-sets and attitude needed to cope with the changing world and the circumstances in which one lives.

2. Status of Women Empowerment in Nigeria

Although Nigerian women have been under the yoke of all forms of abuse meted out by men, even though fellow Nigerian women have been trying to get them empowered, with a view to liberating them, however, the women empowerment struggles have not yet yielded commensurate and significant results in Nigeria (Roseline et al. (2009). Unfortunately, in traditional African society norms, a woman is still not expected to be an equal to a man. Lack of adequate education, economic and political development has been identified as significant factors for poor performance at the level of women's empowerment programmes in Nigeria. This paper is designed to show and highlight the associations of some socio-demographic factors influence women empowerment in the Nigerian context. According to an assessment carried out by UNICEF (2002), the level of education of women is low in Nigeria most especially in Northern parts of Nigeria. The National literacy rate for female is only 56% compared to 72% for male. However, in Nigeria today, there is progress in women education with the exception of northern Nigeria. Although Nigerian women, still have a long way to go towards achieving equality with their male counterparts. A good number of Nigerian women nowadays are now found in all sorts of enterprising occupations such as Law, teaching, Medicine, Business, and the armed forces. Political empowerment of women has also been enhanced by the level of education. In Nigeria today, women are gradually occupying their rightful positions. However, Nigerian women have been holding various positions such as ministerial positions, senate, house of representative, state Houses of Assembly, as Deputy Governors, commissioners and various important political positions. During president Obasanjo first term in office (1999 - 2003), he appointed about seven women as ministers while, during the second term (2003 - to date), the president appointed more women into his cabinet. Women economic empowerment is low in Nigeria compared to their male counterparts. Many women still live on menial jobs. Most jobs performed by women do not have economic much values. All the work and activities that do not require financial reward are the responsibilities of women (Egunjobi, 2005). Women's empowerment goes a long way in reducing child abuse, if women are to be empowered; their children will receive more care and education, and Poverty has been a great hindrance to women education. Low education coupled with cultural discrimination against women is a constraint to women's empowerment. According to UNESCO statistics 31% of women in Nigeria are literate against 54% for men. Women made up to two thirds of illiterate adults, (Egunjobi 2005). It is believed that a woman's place is in the kitchen, and they are perceived as parts of husbands' properties. The goal of women's empowerment is to be directed towards restoring the dignity of womanhood as a sound, intelligent and functional members of the society. According to Sunita. K and Kamla G (2009), the two sets of indicators of evidence of women empowerment are; i). To measure the degree of control over their environment by measuring their participation in household decision-making and their freedom of movement, and ii). To measure women's attitudes with regards to gender equality. Two important factors Influencing Women's Empowerments are education and health; this is so because education has been regarded as a key to women's empowerment for its ability to raise awareness and open possibilities, as well as its instrumental link to economic growth and children's health, ; Health on the other side, according to research reported by WHO (2009), women live longer than men in most parts the world, but due to gender- based discrimination, female's life expectancy is less than that of men. HIV/AIDS crises are among the reasons for this situation. While the indicators show an even pattern of health outcomes for women in most developing countries, what still affects women's health in most developing countries is their lack of autonomy to make health decisions. About 50% of women have no say in their health care.

2.1. Constraints to Women Empowerment

There are several constraints that check the process of women's empowerment. Social and family structures in developing countries like Nigeria, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. For example, the preference for a male child over the birth of a girl child is present in almost all societies and communities. According to Seth (2001), the hold of this preference strengthened rather than weakened and its most glaring evidence can be seen in the falling sex ratios. The cause of this type of a biased attitude is rooted in the belief that male child inherits the home when his parents are no more. Poverty is another factor that poses a challenge in achieving women's empowerment. In poor community and family, females tend to be the main victims, in the sense that they are sometimes malnourished and are denied the opportunity of better education and other facilities. Another factor that hinders the process of empowerment is lack of awareness about legal and constitutional provisions and failure in realizing it. Most women are not aware of their legal rights and even those who are aware lack the courage to take legal step.

2.2. Data and Method

Demographic Health Survey is a nationally representative population based household survey that provides data on health indicators in most developing countries. This study made use of secondary data obtained from the measures DHS which is called '2008 Nigeria Demographic Health Survey (NDHS).' The 2008 NDHS is a two stage national level population and health survey. It was conducted by the National population commission of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Abuja and ICF Macro, in collaboration with other stakeholders in various sectors of government, and international partners such as UNICEF, USAID, UNFPA, ICF. The survey identified 33,385 women of age 15–49, out of which 23,428 currently married/living with partner women were interviewed. The NDHS provides information on women's ability to participate in making some major household decisions, among other things. This paper focuses on women who are currently married or living with a partner as at the time of data collection, which gives a sample size of 23, 428 currently married women at the period of the survey. The major variable considered in this study is the women's participation in decision-making, which was assessed through six measures, these include; involvement in decision making on women's own health care, major household purchases, household purchases for daily needs, her visits to family or relatives, decision making on the use of contraceptive and decision on how to spend money in the household. For each these six decision variables, currently married women or women living with a partner were asked who usually makes the decisions on the above mentioned areas in their individual households. Each of the questions asked had six responses: respondent alone, respondent and husband/partner jointly, respondent and another person, husband/partner alone, someone else, and others. For simplicity, these responses were grouped into two, in such a way that the first three responses in which women participate in decision-making either alone, with husband/partner or another person, as one group, coded 1, and the other responses in which women has no say or no participation in decision making as another group coded 0.

3. Results

Table 1 shows the percentage distribution of currently married women or women living with a partner by their demographic and socio-economic characteristics. The analysis was carried out on currently married women or women living with a partner sample of size 23,428 women. The table shows that about 22% of women are in age group 25–29, 52% are not educated; 21% attended primary school; 20% have secondary education and only 6% have higher education. Considering the geographical location,, it can be seen from the table that the northern region of the country has higher number of married women, with 28% in the northwest , 22% in north-east, 18% in north-central as compared to the southern region which has 13% in the southeast , 10% south-south and only 8% southwest . Variations in terms of ethnicity shows that higher percentage of women (28%) are found in the Hausa ethnic group, and the lower percentage of women (1%) are in the Ekoi ethnic group. The wealth quintile indicates that approximately 49% of women are in a poor economic status, and 32% are in the richer status. By place of residence, however, only 27% of currently married women in Nigeria live in an urban area while about 73% live in a rural area, and about 56% of women in Nigeria have one or two children, 22% has no child, and 20% have between three to five numbers of children.

The six variables considered in the work showing the degree of participation of women in decision-making shows that 42% of currently married women in Nigeria have a say in their own health care, only 37% of them participate in making decision on major household purchases, 48% participate in making daily household purchases, 54% have a say on their visit to family or relatives, 82% make decision on their contraceptive use and 85% participate in decision on how to spend money in the household. However, women's participation in household decision is dichotomized into two for the purpose of this study, viz; High level of empowerment means women participate either alone or jointly in making decision, while low level of empowerment indicates that women does not participate in decision making or someone else takes the decision.

Table 2 shows the percentage of women who reported that they make particular decisions alone or jointly with their husband or partner that is women who have high empowerment. Cross-tabulation result shows that the socio-demographic variables were found to be significantly associated with almost all the women's decision making variables considered in this work except with the decision on spending money in the household. Participation in decision making in all the areas considered seems to be increasing by age as shown in table 2. That is like women's age increases, hers participation in decision making also increases. It can be observed from the table that women of age 30 years and below have lower percentages of participation in decisions regarding the household issues while those women above the age of 30years have higher rates of Participation all thru . Women's age at marriage also affects her participation in

decision making in the household. Those with lower age at marriage (20 years and below) have lower participation and those with higher age at marriage (above 20 years) have higher participation.

Comparing the geographical locations/zones in terms of women's participation in household decision making, women from the south west region participate more in making decision about their own health (70%), major household purchases (55%), visits to family or relatives (81%) as well as on the decision on spending in the household (86%). In contrast with this result, it can be observed from Table 2 that women from the north-west zone have low empowerment based of their lower percentages of participation in their decision making ability in the all areas considered in this study, 19% on decision on their own health care, 17% on major purchases in the household, 21% on daily purchases, 31% on visit to family/relatives, 17% on contraceptive use and 69% on spending household income. The high or low participation in making decision in the household by women might be associated with the cultural settings or background of the women in their respective geographical settings which lead to their high/low empowerment in the geographical zones.

It can be clearly seen from the table 2 also that urban women have the ability to participate in making decision on the household variables more than the rural women, which can be attributed to the fact that women living in urban settings have a better opportunity to for getting empowered than those women living in rural settings.

Comparing the ethnic groups reveals that the Igala women have higher (72%) participation in decision making regarding their own health, while only 19% of Hausa women participate in decision making over their own health. Women from Ekoi ethnic group participate more in making household decisions on major purchases, daily needs purchases, on a visit to family/relative as well as decisions on the use of contraceptive, more than women from other ethnic groups. In the area of making decision on spending family income, women from the Kanuri ethnic group have a higher percentage (96%) of participation. The Hausa women have lower percentages 19% participation in decision on their own health care, 16% on major household purchases, (21%) on decision making with regards to purchases for daily household needs, 32% on decision to visit family/relative and only 15% on contraceptive use. Women from the Fulani ethnic group have the lowest percentage of participation in decision making with regards to spending household income. The differences observed in the percentages of participation in decision making as shown in table 2 can be, as a result, of variation in cultural contexts that affect women's effective participation in decision.

There are also discrepancies observed in the wealth quintile, where lower percentage participation in household decision making was found in the women in the lower quintile (40% below) and high percentage participation in all the decision making variables is found in the women of the higher quintile (Above 50%). Educational and work status as well. It can be observed from table 2 that, participation in decision making have a direct relationship with wealth, i.e., the richer women have high participation in decision than the poor women. Same can also be seen in the education hierarchy, where those women with higher education participate more in decision making than those with low or uneducated women. Similar pattern observed among the working women and women who are not working, where those working participate more (49%) in decision making than those who are not working (29%).

Table 3 present results from binary logistic regression for the levels of women's empowerment on different covariates among currently married women in Nigeria. From the table, it is found that women belonging to age group 18-24 years and age 24 and above have more autonomy than those below age 18, which can be clearly seen from the values of their odds ratios 1.546 for age 18-24 and 2.044 for age above 24, On looking at women's residence, the result on table 4 shows that type of place of residence has no much significant effect on autonomy the of women.

Women's autonomy is seen to have increased as the level of education increases among the Nigerian currently married women. In the case of standard of living, women's autonomy increases with their standard of living in Nigeria. Looking at the women's parity, autonomy decreases with an increase in the number of children in the Nigeria. Currently, married women in Nigeria with age at first birth 19 and above have greater autonomy than those having age at first birth less than 19 years as can be seen from their odds, though not much significant to women's autonomy. Age at marriage also is seen to exhibit a positive effect on the autonomy of women, in that women with higher age at marriage (18 and above) are more autonomous with odds ratio=1.373 than those Below 18. Working women have more autonomy than women that are not working, which can be observed from the values of their odds ratios in table 3.

4. Conclusion

This paper has investigated and analyses the level of women's empowerment in relation to their degree of participation in household decision making among women in Nigeria. The study has found from the analysis that women with formal education participate more in household decision making than women with no formal education. This result can be attributed to the fact that educated women are likely better able in terms of knowledge to negotiate their involvement in household decision-making ability, and also they are in a better position to have a well paid work, which could be true because education is an important catalyst for empowerment.

The study also shows that women living in the richest households were mostly involved in the entire decision making in the household than women living in the poorer households. It has also revealed that variation in cultural contexts affect women's effective participation in household decision making in almost all the six decision variables considered in the study. In addition to this, the result also reveals that women with no or lower number of children have a higher percentage of participating in decision than women with a higher number of children.

Findings in this study confirm the important role education plays in the area of empowering women. The level of empowerment of women in Nigeria especially in the north-eastern region can be improved if greater attention is given to educating women and girls for improving their status. As countries around the world work hard to promote gender equality and empower women as part of achieving

the Millennium Development Goals, it is important to assess how far this goal has reached in the process of actualising it by the year 2015.

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Characteristics	Percentages	Total number of women
Background characteristics		
Age:		
15 – 19	8.3	1950
20 – 24	15.4	3619
25 - 29	21.6	5083
30 - 34	17.3	4071
35 - 39	15.1	3542
40 - 44	11.6	2720
45 - 49	10.6	2494
Region:		
North Central	18.8	4404
North East	21.8	5123
North West	28	6584
South East	8	1874
South South	10.1	2362
South West	13.3	3132
Residence:		
Urban	27.4	6430
Rural	72.6	17049
Ethnicity:		
Ekoi	1.2	285
Fulani	9.9	2320
Hausa	27.6	6438
Ibibio	1.4	330
Igala	1.3	313
Igbo	10.2	2383
Ijaw	2.5	555
Kanuri	3.3	769
Tiv	2.6	616
Yoruba	12.8	2987
others	27.1	6322
No. of children:		
0	22.7	5337
1	28.2	6627
2	28.2	6625
3	12.3	2885
4	5.4	1264
5	2.1	483
6	0.6	131
7	0.4	83
8	0.1	35
9	0	9
Socioeconomic status		
Wealth quintiles:		
poorest	26.7	6259
Poorer	22.9	5385
Middle	18.7	4402
Richer	16.5	3863
Richest	15.2	3570
Education:		
No Education	52.1	12229
Primary	21.2	4986
Secondary	20.5	4813
Higher	6.2	1451
Paid work:		

No		34.2		7983			
Yes		65.8		15342			
<i>Table 1: Percentage distribution of currently married women in Nigeria by measure of background characteristics and socioeconomic status, NDHS 2008</i>							
Characteristics	Decision on her own health	Decision on major household purchases	Decision on purchases for daily needs	Decision on visits to family or relatives	Decision on the use of contraceptives	Decision on how to spend money in the household	Number of women
Background characteristics							
Age:							
15 – 19	23.4	20.5	25.9	35	67.5	90	1941
20 – 24	34.4	30.3	40	46.8	78.5	83.5	3607
25 – 29	43.1	37.3	47.8	54.4	83.1	85	5078
30 – 34	44.3	40.7	51.1	56.1	83.4	85	4065
35 - 39	46.9	41.9	52.4	58.5	79.3	86.4	3534
40 - 44	48	42.7	54.5	58.9	83.8	87.4	2710
45 - 49	48.2	41.5	53	59.5	80.2	86.7	2487
Region:							
North Central	55	54.6	64.6	66.4	79.8	81.2	4395
North East	27.9	23.7	29.4	39.4	83.7	84.4	5116
North West	18.9	17.4	30	31.2	67.5	89.8	6564
South East	56.9	50.8	67.4	64.9	72.7	64.9	1863
South South	64.6	54.6	81.4	78.6	85.3	85.9	2352
South West	69.7	55	71.8	80.6	85.3	94.2	3129
Residence:							
Urban	52	44.2	57.2	61.6	82	86.4	6413
Rural	38.3	34.5	43.9	50.6	81	84.9	17006
Ethnicity:							
Ekoi	70.5	70.7	94.7	90.8	94.4	93.7	284
Fulani	23.4	19.4	23.7	34.3	70.4	82.8	2314
Hausa	18.6	16.3	20.6	31.8	77.2	89.6	6422
Ibibio	64.2	46.8	86	73.3	88.8	89.7	329
Igala	72.1	64.1	79.7	80.4	80.9	92.6	312
Igbo	61.2	54.7	70.1	69.7	76.3	71.8	2371
Ijaw	54.1	48.1	77.9	70	77.1	74.3	587
Kanuri	22.7	17.1	24.1	33	96.4	76.3	767
Tiv	52.5	51.3	70.7	68.8	85	80.5	616
Yoruba	67.7	54.6	71.6	80.7	85.1	89.9	2983
Others	49.7	46.7	55.9	59.5	80.1	86	6308
No. of children:							
0	49.1	43.5	55.4	59.6	82.6	85.5	5318
1	46.1	40.5	51.6	56.9	80.9	85.8	6611
2	40.2	35.2	45.9	52.4	80.5	86.2	6615
3	35.4	31.6	41.9	48.8	82.6	84	2873
4	25	19.9	26.4	38.1	88.7	84.6	1263
5	28	22.6	29.4	39.6	89	78.4	482
6	28.2	22.9	25.9	35.4	88.3	94.2	130
7	20.5	13.2	25.3	30.1	92.9	71.4	83
8	8.6	14.3	14.3	30	84.6	94.6	35
9	55.6	44.4	55.6	53.6	33.3	99	9

Socioeconomic status							
Wealth quintiles:							
Poorest	27	24.6	30.9	38.7	85.9	80.3	6251
Poorer	34.8	31.3	39.5	47.9	78.8	96.7	5366
Middle	44.7	41	51.6	57.8	79.8	84.6	4392
Richer	54.9	46.9	60.9	65	82	86.1	3853
Richest	62.1	52.9	69.5	70.9	81.9	89.2	3557
Education:							
No Education	27.3	24.2	29.5	40	81	80.7	12195
Primary	42.1	46.6	60.6	63.8	81.9	83.4	4977
Secondary	60.6	53.1	68.7	70.4	80.8	86.3	4802
Higher	70.1	61.7	76.3	78.4	82	89.6	1445
Paid work:							
No	28.8	26.4	31.5	39	41.1	87.9	7965
Yes	48.9	42.8	55	61.3	34.4	85.3	15313

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of women's participation in five dimensions of household decision making among currently married women by measure of socioeconomic status and background characteristics, Nigerian demographic health survey

FULL AUTONOMY	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
RESPONDENT AGE		
less than 18 (REF)		
18-24	1.546*	0.083
25 AND ABOVE	2.044*	0.122
TYPE OF RESIDENCE		
RURAL (REF)		
Urban	1.011	0.042
LEVEL OF EDUCATION		
No education (REF)		
Primary education	1.862*	0.084
Secondary/Higher education	2.874*	0.141
STANDARD OF LIVING		
Low (REF)		
Middle	1.311*	0.062
High	1.480*	0.075
PARITY		
No Child (REF)		
1-2 children	1.071	0.075
Above 2 children	0.916	0.067
AGE AT FIRST BIRTH		
less than 19 (REF)		
19 and above	1.037	0.046
AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE		
Below 18 (REF)		
18 and above	1.373*	0.062
RESPONDENT WORK STATUS		
Not working (REF)		
Working	1.353*	0.052

Table 3: Logistic Regression Of Level Of Empowerment On Various Covariates For Currently Married Women In Nigeria