Women and Power Transformation in Rural Households: A Case Study of Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study presents trends in household power sharing in farm households in Osun State, Nigeria and attempts to postulate changes based on some characteristics of the mother of the household. Primary data were collected through random sampling technique from 100 female respondents using structured questionnaires and analyzed using statistical tools such as frequencies, means and percentages, as well as logit regression model. An analysis of the personal characteristics of respondents shows 83% were Muslims, 74% belonged to polygamous households and the average age of respondent was 46.98 years. They were mainly illiterates with average years of formal schooling of 1.64years and a mean monthly income of US$45. The test result shows that men had more power in household decision-making, but women will be able to negotiate more power even in rural settings with increased capacity and age. Therefore, for increased in the participation of rural women in rural development initiatives, they should be empowered educationally and economically and older women should not be left out.

Key words: Women, power transformation, rural households

INTRODUCTION

Gender is the socially constructed and entrenched roles of men and women, which exist in relationship, which involve discrimination on the basis of sex[1]. Gender differences expressed in inequality in access to decision-making power, education and productive resources remain one of the facilitating factors of poverty in Nigeria[2]. The foundations of some communities are laid on the assumption that gender differences expressed in inequality are not only necessary, but also inevitable to the extent they are conceived as 'divinely sanctioned[3]. Francis[4] argued that 'cultural differences are sensitive not so much of themselves but on account of the asymmetrical power relations that they often correspond to and the arrogance of those advantaged by the asymmetries'. She further opined that, the issue of gender, itself an issue of power, gets caught in this other global power battle, partly because it challenges local norms, including male hegemony and adherence to traditional male and female roles. Local customs, traditions and tribal laws play a role in determining the status of women. The almost absolute uniformity, among communities in the West African sub-region on the issue of gender inequality remains one of the central challenges of the time, not minding that women constitute almost 50% of the population in most of these societies. Power transformation, which will include power shift and empowerment of women to make strategic life choices or decisions in contexts where the ability was hitherto denied is a necessary step towards development[5,6], though counter-cultural and norm challenging[7].

A critical aspect of every development effort is an examination of gender issues, gender being the socio-cultural and psychological patterning of differences between males and females. Gender, culture and government are widely recognized as prerequisites for sustained development[8,9]. Gender is a central factor in household power sharing, which affects productivity, time allocation and investment in developing countries. More men make decisions related to reproductive health, finance, children's education, the number of children to have and even the type of food eaten at home[2]. Gender based inequalities deprive women of their basic rights, dis-empower them and constraint their access to resources, opportunities and security. Inequality in household power sharing is embedded in the most fundamental ways (socio-cultural, political, economic and religious) in the decision-making structures and processes that affect women's lives.

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Generally, the study analyzed the role of women in the exercise of power in making strategic household decisions in rural communities in Osun state, Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined:

- The influence of some important characteristics of women on the exercise of power in her household.
- The relationship between some household characteristics and the access of women to decision-making power
- It also attempts to predict trends and transformation in household power sharing in rural communities in Osun state.
- The implications of transformation in power sharing in decision making at the household level on rural development was also addressed and recommendations made for policy implementation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study area: The study was conducted in Osun State, South Western Nigeria, where three (30%) out of a total of 31 Local Government areas were randomly selected. Osun state is central in Western Nigeria and shares boundaries with Oyo, Ondo and Ogun states .The Local Government Areas sampled were Iwo, Ayedire and Olaoluwa. The villages selected were typified by very poor or no access roads, lack of electricity and portable water supply. The population is mainly Yoruba speaking and the main occupations of the indigenous people are farming and trading. It is envisaged that these three Local Government Areas will provide representative features of household level power transformation in decision-making in rural communities in Osun State, Nigeria.

Data collection and sampling procedure: The population of the study consisted of all women in the rural communities of Osun State, where adequate sample was drawn randomly. Ten villages from the three Local Government Areas were surveyed, using a multi-staged random sampling procedure. The first stage consisted of the random selection of 10 villages, followed by the random selection of 10 indigenous households from each village to give a total of 100 households for the study. Only one female member was interviewed from each household. The survey instrument was structured interview schedule.

Analytical tools and model: Descriptive statistics involving the use of means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages are used to present data on personal and non-personal characteristics of the respondents. The analytical tool used is the logit regression model. This is given by:

$$Y = A + P_1X_1 + P_2X_2 + .. P_KX_K$$

Where A is the intercept

P's are the regression coefficient, expressing the extent of the influence of X_1 on Y when X_2 ...... X_k are held constant.

Where Y= Household Decisions; $X1 ... X_k$ are the characteristics of the respondents.

Independent variables: These are the explanatory variables and it is hypothesized that transformation in power sharing in household decision-making depend on them. They include personal characteristics of the respondent such as age, number of years of marriage, education, income and socio-cultural characteristics such as religion, position as wife and number of wives in the household and primary occupation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Important personal, socio-cultural and economic characteristics of the respondents were identified and using the logit regression model, likely transformation in household gender power sharing was determined. The maximum age of respondents was 78years while the average age was 46.98years. The women were largely illiterate, with an average of 1.64 years of formal schooling, with a large average household size of 8 people and an average monthly income of $45. About 74 and 83% were from polygamous and Islamic households, respectively. On the average, respondents have been married for 25.80 years.

Characteristics of the respondents: Tables 1 and 2 give a summary statistics of the characteristics of the respondents.

The respondents were predominantly Muslims (83) and 74% belong to polygamous households. Five percent of the households had at least 4 wives each while 44% of the households had 2 wives each. The finding also shows that 74% of the respondents were the first wives while 21, 4 and 1% were 2nd, 3rd and 4th, respectively. About 56% of respondents engage primarily in trading, 33% are mainly farmers while 11% primarily engage in other activities such as food vendoring and government employments.

Logit model results for participation in household decisions: The effect of the independent variables on participation in household decision-making were further

Table 1: Summary statistics of important characteristics of indigenous women (N = 100)

Characteristics	Unit	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Age of respondent	yrs	25	78	46.98	10.90
Age of marriage	yrs	6	55	25.80	10.21
Income per month	$	3.5	107	45	21.04
Household size	actual no	2	15	7.53	3.33
Education	yrs	0	12	1.64	3.06

Source: Computed from field data, 2004.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of some selected characteristics of respondents (N = 100)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage%
Position as wife		
1	74	74.0
2	21	21.0
3	4	4.0
4 and above	1	1.0
Number of wives in households		
1	28	28.0
2	44	44.0
3	23	23.0
4 and above	5	5.0
Religion		
Christianity	17	17.0
Islam	83	83.0
Marital structure		
Polygamous	74	74.0
Monogamous	26	26.0
Primary occupation		
Farming	33	33.0
Trading	56	56.0
Others	11	11.0

Source: Field data, 2004

analyzed using the logit regression model to predict the transformation in household power sharing among the indigenous households in Osun state. The age of the respondent and her household size were significant factors in her participation in decision-making concerning the type of school her children attend at 0.05 levels with coefficients of 3.09416 and -1.26834, respectively, as shown on Table 3. This implies that if the age of the woman increases by 1, the probability that she will participate in this household decision will increase by 3.09416. The positive value of the coefficient shows that increase in age is associated with increase in participation.

It therefore implies that older women participate more in household decision making in the study area and that even in households where women are denied participation, they will eventually do as they get older. On the other hand, the negative value for the coefficient of household size shows an inverse relationship which implies that as the household size increase the probability that she participates in decisions on the school her children attend will decrease by 1.26834, as indicated on Table 3. Data on Table 3 also indicates that the age of the respondent, the number of wives in the household and the average monthly income of the respondent were significant factors in her participation in decisions on

Table 3: Summary of logit model results of gender power transformation in Selected household decision-making (N=100)

Variable	Household Decisions	Regression Coefficient	S.E	Coefficient/ Standarderror
Age	Child's Edu	3.09416	1.26556	2.445**
	FPM	6.97108	1.57069	4.438***
	Child's trade	3.03995	1.46579	2.074**
	V-in-laws	1.74496	1.98366	0.880N/S
	Type of Food	-1.29998	1.57122	-0.827N/S
	Activities	5.31212	3.99561	1.329N/S
	Money	0.41922	1.66273	0.252N/S
	No of Child.	5.35258	1.42294	3.762***
No of	Child's Edu	0.16253	0.59721	0.272N/S
Wives	FPM	-0.29008	0.85784	-3.382***
in the	Child's trade	0.91492	0.71660	1.277N/S
HH	V-in-laws	0.13943	0.93237	1.495N/S
	Type of food	0.17866	0.78543	2.275**
	Activities	0.34460	0.18315	1.882*
	Money	0.34579	0.81237	0.426N/S
	No of child.	-0.23815	0.75452	-3.156***
Education	Child's edu	0.25034	0.56812	0.441N/S
	FPM	-0.48405	0.62880	-0.770N/S
	Child's trade	0.89086	0.68571	1.299N/S
	V-in-laws	1.41522	1.13082	1.251N/S
	Type of food	0.57577	0.68803	0.837N/S
	Activities	0.55611	1.44721	0.004N/S
	Money	0.57346	0.89281	0.642N/S
	No of child.	0.85638	0.63085	1.357N/S
Income	Child's edu	0.66518	0.42303	1.572N/S
	FPM	1.08719	0.48011	2.264**
	Child's trade	0.44461	0.442812	1.004N/S
	V-in-laws	0.49012	0.761015	0.644N/S
	Type of food	0.72054	0.475919	1.514N/S
	Activities	2.41063	1.697774	1.420N/S
	Money	0.16568	0.628166	0.264N/S
	No of child.	0.115948	0.414729	0.280N/S
HH size	Child's edu	-1.26834	0.53530	-2.369**
	FPM	-0.54273	0.50549	-1.074N/S
	Child's trade	-1.55000	0.79472	-1.950**
	V-in-laws	-0.25281	0.13495	-1.873*
	Type of food	-1.68811	0.85473	-1.975**
	Activities	2.828145	2.27214	1.245N/S
	Money	-0.562413	0.58786	-0.957N/S
	No of child.	0.6354493	0.49071	1.295N/S
Constant	Child's edu	15.3229	6.49313	2.360**
	FPM	-37.70393	8.7220	-4.323***
	Child's trade	-11.06728	7.4459	-1.486N/S
	V-in-laws	1.98009	9.7433	0.203
	Type of food	4.36122	7.93665	0.550N/S
	Activities	11.75806	15.6611	0.751N/S
	Money	0.462157	8.8873	0.052N/S
	No of child.	-23.11793	7.2509	-3.188***

*** Significant at 1%, ** Significant at 5%, *Significant at 10%, N/S = Not significant, Source: Computed from field data, 2004

family planning method to use at 1, 1 and 5% levels, respectively. The positive value of the coefficient for age implies that with an increase in age, the probability that she participates in this decision will increase by 6.97108; also with a unit increment in income, the probability to participate will increase by 1.08719. The number of wives in the household however, has an inverse but significant relationship with participation in decision making.

The age of the respondent and the size of her household were significant factors in the respondent's participation in decisions pertaining to the type of trade

her child learns at 5% level, with regression coefficients of 3.03995 and -1.55000, respectively. Of all the variables, only the household size was a significant factor in the respondent's participation in decisions on whether to visit in-laws or not and when to visit them at 10% level. The inverse nature of the relationship implies that the more the number of people in the household, the less the woman's participation in this decision. Therefore, as the household size increases there is the probability of a transformation in gender relations that will deny the woman equity in participation in certain household decisions.

Interestingly, the respondent's age, the number of wives in the household, her level of education, income and household size had no significant relationship with her participation in decisions pertaining to how money is spent in the household, with regression coefficients of 0.41922, 0.34579, 0.57346, 0.16568 and -0.562413 respectively. This could be because in Osun state, the male is seen as the 'Sole Administrator' of the household and he decides how much of the family income is spent and what it is spent on. This is in line with the Yoruba tradition and Islamic culture in which the woman and every asset she has belong to the man[2]. The age of the respondent and the number of wives in the household contribute significantly to her participation in decisions on the number of children to have at 1% level. The study agrees with SIDA[5,6] that empowerment of women to make strategic life choices or decisions in contexts where the ability was hitherto denied is a necessary step towards sustainable development. Transformation in power sharing at the household level will also allow the woman to participate more in community decisions and women's view in development interventions will enhance sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

The study area is largely traditional in setting with urbanization gradually encroaching into the social structure thus, introducing incisive changes. About 83% of respondents were Muslims, 74% belong to Polygamous households and the average age was 46.98 years. The average years of formal schooling were 1.64 years, with an average monthly income of US$45. Agriculture was the primary economic activity in the rural areas with other dominant activities being trading, food vendoring and government service. Although more men made decisions related to reproductive health, finance, children's education, the type of food eaten at home and the number of children to have, the study has shown that certain personal characteristics of women influence their social

status in the household and the power to contribute to key decisions on running the household. Inferring from the result of the logit regression analysis, there will be a transformation in power sharing in household decision making in favor of women, with an increased in the age of the woman, a larger household size, increment in income and an increased in the number of wives in the household. The study concludes that women will be able to participate more in household power sharing and in the power structure with increased capacity and age.

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