

## Interrogating the Problems of Lone-living among Married Women of Absentee-Spouses in Benin City, South-South Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT** The paper was designed to investigate the challenges and coping strategies of married women, in Benin City Nigeria, whose husbands have traveled abroad for greener pasture. One-time Survey Design, with the aid of purposive sampling technique, was employed to sample women whose husbands are in abroad among the married women in Benin City for the study. 145 copies of questionnaires were administered and data was analyzed with the aid of simple percentage and frequency counts. Data revealed that the greatest challenge of these women is the problem of playing the role of parent-figures; and this affects decision-making and child upbringing. Loneliness, which generates emotional problems, creates the temptation to seek sexual gratification outside marriage among the women. Hence, individual coping strategies are cultural, socio-economical, psychological and religious. It concludes that constant communication can keep distant partners closer and partially helps the absentee spouse in making meaningful contributions to domestic decisions.

### INTRODUCTION

Marriage, in the African context, is a social phenomenon in which two hitherto strangers, of two different families of orientation, agree at a point to come together in order to establish a family of procreation, as a branch which links the two (2) families of orientation of the two (2) principal individuals. For many women, motherhood is very central to their lives and identities. Being married and becoming a mother is seen perhaps by many women, the world over, as one of the most valuable life goals; and as a vital rite of passage into adulthood, elevating social status, and continuing femininity (Bermudez et al. 2014). The same is applicable to men in traditional African setting. Socially, a man is more respected as responsible when he is married than when he is not. Except for religious reasons(s), an unmarried man is often time being derided by the society. This makes the institution of marriage an inescapable reality for the able-bodied men and women. However, the degree to which the society does this to the male individuals differs when compared to the pressure society consistently mounts on a spinster who is matured enough to marry. Her unmarried status becomes a source of worry not only to her but also to her family and her well-wishers.

While the pre-marital status of the young lady is full of stress and strain, her marital life is not devoid of challenges. Tradition and religion

have conspired to make a woman assume a subservient role in the traditional African family setting irrespective of her education. She is expected to be obediently and dutifully devoted to home keeping while the husband is expected to go out in search of a means of livelihood for the well-being of the family. It is this form of arrangement that would make the woman stay back in Nigeria while the husband emigrates to overseas for greener pastures. Consequently, such circumstance places on her shoulders the responsibilities of playing the roles of both the "mother figure" and the "father figure" at home. Even with the absence of the man, it is expected, in a typical African setting, that family ties would provide a bastion of protection for her and other members of the family. However, this is a function of the nature of the relationship that exists between the woman and her in-laws.

This paper is therefore designed to achieve, among others, the objectives of investigating the challenges, which women of absentee spouses face in Benin City Nigeria; and how they have been coping with these challenges overtime.

### Literature Review

Scholars have overtime generated volumes of work on both marriage and family institutions. Much of these studies reflect the influence of these great institutions on individuals' behavior as well as how human conditions, needs and

actions determine the form and interactions within these institutions.

### ***Marriage and Relationships***

Marriage generates new social ties and mutual rights between the two focal individuals on one hand, and each of the marital partners and the in-law family on the other hand. In pre-colonial Nigeria, for instance, the residence pattern of the newly married was based on patrilocal arrangement. The inter-tribal wars of this period conditioned the necessity for men, related by blood, to stay together to collectively prosecute any war. However, a new residence pattern, neo-locality, has emerged in tandem with the emergence of western education and rapid urbanization (Aluko-Arowolo et al. 2012) which have made it possible for people to seek jobs outside their traditional domains. However in the African setting, whether the couple stays with either of the families of orientation or not, there are often prescribed roles of behavior, which in one way or the other limit the possibility of awkward situations. One form of prescribed behavior is avoidance or respect. This is required at the outset from each spouse in relation to the other's parents (Aluko-Arowolo et al. 2012: 118).

The essence of such prescribed behavior is to sustain the social bond between the in-law families on one hand, and the family of procreation of the couple, and their respective families of orientation on the other hand. Such behavior helps in stabilizing the family of procreation of the couple.

In terms of the relationship between the two couple at home, studies have shown that even in the modern world family, decisions in Nigeria are still, to a large extent, patriarchal in nature. For instance, according to the 2008 Demographic and Health Survey report in Nigeria, almost sixty-two percent of women in Nigeria reported that men make virtually all the decisions regarding household purchases, while 83.5 percent of male respondents submitted that men dominate the decision-making process at home (NPC 2009). Consequently, a woman who is used to waiting for the husband with respect to household purchases is likely to find it difficult playing such a role when the man is absent from the home. More so, regarding decisions on the health and education of the children, men alone are said to make such decisions in two-thirds of Nigerian house-

holds (SIGI 2012). According to the 2008 Demographic and Health Survey in Nigeria, almost fifty-six percent of women consented to this assertion (NPC 2009).

With reference to sexual relationship, sexual gratification is not just one of the functions of marriage but also a critical ingredient of a close and emotional relationship between couples at home. Osunde (2006: 226)'s argument that, 'sex without marriage is common, but marriage without sex is impossible' falls within this context. Sex is a vital part of marriage, and will continue to be strategic to spousal concern and conflict. This is so because, it does not only provide marital satisfaction, but also elucidates the effectiveness of gender relations in marriage (Kornrich et al. 2012). Sexual deprivation in marriage is an emotional deprivation for which marital disorganization is possible. According to Kornrich et al. (2012: 28), sexual frequency is positively linked to emotional satisfaction and physical pleasure, and couples with greater sexual frequency are less likely to divorce or break up. Emotional support helps in the stability of the family in the sense that it helps the family to provide 'the nurturance, love and emotional sustenance that people need to be happy, healthy and secured' (Olutayo and Yusuff 2012). This therefore requires that couple need to spend much time together in order to rekindle and sustain the emotional attachment that exist between them. The absence of this, according to Awodele (cited in Olanrewaju 2013), has contributed a lot to the failure of most marriages. In order not to encourage a situation of adultery, according to Delesolu (cited in Olanrewaju 2013), Islamic laws allow the sexually deprived woman to institute a divorce suit against the husband for failing to perform his sexual responsibility.

### ***Procreation and Child Upbringing***

Apart from relationships within the family, procreation and the socialization of the child are also crucial to both marriage and family institutions. Spouses make these important functions realizable through cooperation. Okwum and Siraj (2010: 238), for instance, observed that:

*In Africa and Nigeria in particular, pregnancy is considered a means of redeeming a woman's relationship with her husband and of protecting her against the risk of rejection and*

*abandonment and of maintaining recognized status as a wife and mother.*

Even the man is not spared of societal scorn and low esteem for his inability to have a biological child. Therefore, the coming of this God's inestimable gift to a home is not only being preceded by domestic preparation for its arrival but also parental preparation to assume a new status and role. Hence, the arrival goes with parental-figure roles and challenges. Part of these challenges is the enormous task of bringing up a child. Sheen (cited in Obi-Okwonkwo 2013:14) asserts that 'children come to parents as so much plastic material and the shape that they take later on in life is to a great extent the responsibility of the parents themselves.' This therefore shows that the family is the primary environment where the child learns the lessons of life, while the parents are the primary teachers who impart these lessons. According to Brown et al. (2015), parents do not only teach but also channel resources such as time and money towards their children's well-being and development.

According to Momoh (2013: 7), children need warmth, care and personal attention from parents to grow into emotionally stable, academically sound and morally upright children. However, parents who embark on numerous business trips for the sake of family prosperity are hardly available to answer to the multifarious development questions the children may ask, attend to their psychological, emotional and social needs. Consequently, this may lead to maladjustment on the part of the children.

### ***The Role of the Extended Family System in the Stability of the Family***

It must be quickly emphasized that though the family is a primary environment for a child's socialization, the community contributes to the child's upbringing in significant ways as well. This is where the extended family comes in. In supporting this claim, Dokpesi et al. (2003), asserted that even in the modern world, traditional welfare services are still being provided, especially in the local communities in Africa. It still provides a wall of protection, a leverage and platform on which members can reduce tensions of social life, individually and collectively. Some relatively well to do individuals still assist their siblings, sibling's children and other relatives financially in solving one or two challenges of

life and in realizing certain goals. The aged ones are still being taken care of by their children and/or relatives, orphans still receive succor from the extended family unit, and the family elders are still relevant in dispute settlement and other marital problems.

However, it must equally be noted that because of the differences in human character and nature, extended family units do not provide these benefits to members the same way. Families where there are bad elements hardly realize these benefits for members. This is freely expressed especially when a breadwinner of a family dies. According to Osogbue (2003: 66 – 67), at the death of a man, his relations keep serious watch over his property. The intention is to get as much of the dead man's properties as they can, for the benefits of their own children and to the detriment of the immediate family of the dead man of which his widow is one. Generally, the widow of a customary law marriage is entitled, as of right, to occupy the husband's house and live there until she dies or remarries. However, this is subject to her good behavior. She has no right of succession to her late husband's properties even if she contributed to acquiring such properties (Osogbue 2003). Therefore, the relationship which exist between the woman, whose husband is in abroad, and the resident in-law family is a function of several factors that is, the character of the woman, the disposition of the in-law family toward the marriage, the in-law family's perception of this woman, the social-economic position of the emigrant husband, and the character of the individuals in the in-law family. All these will tell whether or not the wife will enjoy a marital relationship even in the absence of the husband.

### ***Family and Economic Relations***

It must be stressed that the stability of a home is not only a function of the cordiality in the relationship between the experiencing woman and her resident in-laws. The amount of money available is also very instructive. The availability of money either lightens or dampens the feelings of satisfaction within family relationships. Financial uncertainty makes a stable family life very difficult (Newman 2002). It can create room for temptation, which may disintegrate the family. According to Newman (2002), when the family economic foundations are weak, the emotion-

al bond that ties a family together can be stretched to a breaking point. In one of the FGD sessions organized by Oti (2011: 264), a participant reaffirms this assertion thus: 'having enough money in your pocket solves a lot of problems and makes a man to be calm. When you come home from a successful business you can talk to family members; if there is no money you will bark at everybody.' However, Newman's assertion is more applicable in cases where only one spouse works than in cases where both work, to pull resources together. The financial strains of modern life have made it difficult for young couples to survive on only one source of income.

Furthermore, the economic consideration, which provided the basis for the immigration of white settlers into Africa in colonial era, is equally a factor behind the emigration of Nigerians to Europe and America. The immigrants from the developing nations of the world often move to the United States and Europe, according to Hatton and Williamson (2005), because of better standards of living. These immigrants do all sorts of odd jobs to survive abroad and to remain relevant at home to both their families of procreation and orientation. The remittances they send home play crucial roles in facilitating and maintaining migration flow. Especially in the Nigerian case, where the values of the pounds and dollars far outweigh the value of the local currency, a little amount of the former currencies from an emigrant member of the family, in terms of remittance sent home, creates a lot of socio-economic effects in the receiving environment of origin.

### ***Family Role Assignments and the Perception of Womanhood in Modern Society***

Traditionally, the role of women is that of taking care of the bulk of routine housework as well as caring for others while men tend to spend their domestic work time on non-routine domestic work (Kan et al. 2011). Maternity, the natural biological role of women, has traditionally been seen as their ultimate societal role also. This is seen as primary in that whatever else she does is regarded as secondary and hence should be discharged simultaneously with the primary duty of childrearing. Besides being a wife, the African woman is equally the mother of children. If marriage makes her, child bearing and nurturing

make her a complete woman. Her social position is either enhanced or diminished by her ability or inability to bear children. However this primary role of childrearing, to some extent, keeps the women in subservient position. Hence, it provides enough excuse to limit the productive activities women engage in and this thus limits their economic power, which therefore makes them dependent on their spouses.

The emergence of the modern world, through industrialization and urbanization, relaxed the hard line posture and perception about woman's worth and traditional duties. Over the past fifty years, for instance, there have been significant changes in gender divisions of caregiving and breadwinning in several nations of the world. These changes are evident in the rising numbers of breadwinning mothers (Wang et al. 2013; Doucet 2015) and caregiving fathers, especially in developed societies (Livingstone 2013; Doucet 2015). Research has shown that, in the US, for instance, couples who have more equal division of labor are less likely to experience divorce than those where one partner specializes in breadwinning while the other specializes in domestic work (Kornrich et al. 2012). This perhaps explains why, over the years, some researchers have argued that an egalitarian division of domestic labor is the ideal model in the modern world (Hochschild 2012; Doucet 2015).

Indeed all over the world, the liberation of women was gradual; and even at that it was faster in some societies than others. African society seems to be slow in embracing these greater choices and autonomy for the African women. According to Ogba (2012: 270), the traditional role stereotyping of women is slowly fizzling away following increase in women involvement in labor force as more and more of them are taking up occupations which before now were considered to be male dominated. Regarding the factors responsible for this increase (Ogba 2012: 271) observed that, 'many women are becoming heads of their households, either because of the death of their husbands, separation or migration in search of jobs.' Consequently, modern women tend to have role strains as they try to concentrate on the performance of both the domestic and office roles at the same time (Odoemelam 2005).

Even in the modern world every typical household has two main pillars: that is the "breadwinner," who is usually the man and hence

occupies the “husband status” as well as the “father status”; and the “home organizer” who is the woman and hence occupies the “wife status” and the “mother status”. These roles and statuses are mutually reinforcing. The success or failure of the breadwinner directly or indirectly affects the woman as the organizer of the household. The resources with which she organizes the home are to be provided by the man. Traditionally, while it is his responsibility to source for such resources, it is the responsibility of the woman to utilize such resources in organizing the home. In this instance, the mother of a home ‘feels more responsive for the home’ (Hochschild 2012: 7).

However, the nature of the family structure in place to a large extent determines how these roles will be effectively carried out. In a study conducted among secondary students in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria, for instance, Sanni et al. (2010) differentiated a broken home from an intact home. According to them, while the former refers to children residing in single-parent households or any type of household other than a household in which both biological parents are present; the latter refers to a nuclear family arrangement in which both biological parents reside in the household with their biological children. Numerous examples abound in the modern world of families, which do not form household or only form household for a period of time because of the absence of the father figure more especially. This perhaps has generated a series of physical, socio-economic and emotional challenges for the affected women in a bid to meet with the enormous responsibilities entrusted on their shoulders. As Sanni et al. (2010) noted, the absence of an intact family creates the condition for gang affiliation to be more appealing because the delinquent succor in the presence of their group members and this helps reinforce the delinquent desire in them.

### ***Single Parenting***

A single parent faces multiple responsibilities so much so that less time is devoted to the child’s psychological wellbeing and education. This becomes worse when the father is absent and the mother is financially incapacitated. In this condition, assuming responsibility for the household’s basic needs as well as supervising the child academically becomes problematic.

Empirical studies have reported that, children from intact homes will be well taken care of and better socialized. This is due to the fact that the process of socialization depends on both parents playing complimentary roles in raising such children, which will definitely impact positively on the later during school years. On the other hand, children from single-parent homes are likely to suffer deprivations and denials of some rights and opportunities that will have negative psycho-socio impact on them in school years (Azuka-Obieke 2013: 113). This is so because, providing a supportive learning environment at home requires the time and financial resources of both parents (Ushie et al. 2012).

It must be emphasized that whether there is money or not, the absence of the father figure is a very critical problem in any home, not only in terms of decision-making but more specifically in the area of child upbringing.

### ***Theoretical Framework: Liberal Feminism***

This theory identifies gender inequality in sexual division of labor, the existence of separate public and private spheres to social activities in which men’s primary location is in the former while women’s is in latter, and the systematic socialization of children so that they can move into the adult roles and spheres appropriate to their gender (Ritzer 1988).

As Ritzer (1988) noted, for the liberal feminists, the private sphere comprises an unending round of demanding, mindless, unpaid, and undervalued tasks relative to housework, childcare and the emotional, practical, and sexual servicing of adult men. The true rewards of social life that is, money, power, status, and freedom, opportunities for growth and self-worth are to be found in the public sphere. The system, which limits women’s access to this sphere burdens them with private sphere’s responsibilities and isolates them in individual households. The main force in this system is sexism, which right from birth limits the chances of a woman especially virtually in all aspects of human activities.

In terms of marriage, the liberal feminist theory believes that institutionally, marriage empowers the role of husband with authority, freedom and the obligation, to move beyond the domestic setting, and mandates that wives be compliant, dependent, self-emptying, and essentially centered on the activities and chores in the do-

mestic household. On the basis of this, it identifies two marriages, that is, the husband's marriage in which he believes that he is constrained and burdened, while at the same time, experiencing and enjoying the normative provision of authority, independence and a right to domestic, emotional, and sexual service by the wife; and the wife's marriage in which she submits to the cultural belief of fulfillment while experiencing the culturally defined powerlessness, dependency and an obligation to provide domestic, emotional and sexual services and the gradual dwindling away of the independent young lady she was in pre-marriage times.

Because of this dwindling away, according to this theory, women are exposed to stressful situations including heart palpitations, dizziness, headaches, fainting, nightmares, insomnia, and fear of a nervous breakdown. Marriage, then, is good for men and bad for women and will only cease to be so unequal in its impact when couples feel free enough from the prevailing institutional constraints to negotiate the kind of marriage that best suits their individual needs and personalities (Ritzer 1988).

If women are generally exposed to the above conditions of stress despite the presence of the father figure at home, what degree of stress are they exposed to in a situation where they have to play the roles of both the father and the mother at home? In other words, what physical, social, economic and emotional challenges face women whose spouses reside overseas here in Benin City? What nature of relationship exists between such women and their emigrant spouses on one hand, and between the former and their in-laws on the other hand? Are there differences in the coping strategies of these home-based spouses? What socio-economic effects are likely to result from the migratory decision of the emigrant breadwinners on their households of origin?

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Target Population

In order to address the above issues adequately, a study was conducted in Benin City, Nigeria, in 2012, among women whose spouses reside overseas. Benin City was selected because of the rampant nature of emigration in the city. The criterion for selecting respondents

for the study was based on the emigration of their spouses abroad, irrespective of all other affiliations.

### Method and Instrument of Data Collection

One-Time Survey Design was employed for the study. The essence of this was to enable the researcher sample some members of the target population, and administer the research instrument to them only once without having to go back to the same study population the second time. Furthermore, the instrument used for the study was a structured questionnaire. It was divided into two sections. While section 'A' contained questions on the bio-data of respondents, section 'B' contained questions relating to main the issues and objectives for which the study was designed. Questions were drafted to accommodate classified, close and open-ended questions in order to collect detailed information from the respondents for the purpose of analysis. With content validity, two competent academic experts verified the contents of the questionnaire-one in the field of Sociology of Marriage, and the other in the field of Migration-before the questionnaires were administered.

### Research Procedure

Because of the nature of the respondents needed for the study, the study used purposive sampling method in selecting samples. The essence of this sampling procedure was to isolate, from among the population of study, those whose husbands are abroad among the married women in Benin City. Through contacts with some part-time students of the Social Work Department, University of Benin, some women whose husbands reside overseas were identified within the Benin community. Using the snowballing method, those respondents identified, assisted the researcher in further identifying other lone-living women whose spouses live outside the shores of Nigeria. Although 145 copies of the questionnaires were distributed to the 145 respondents used for the study, 120 copies were available for data analysis. The distribution of the questionnaires was done in such a way that, literate respondents were given the questionnaires to fill while the illiterate ones were assisted to fill their questionnaires. The Data was collected, edited, coded and processed into a com-

puter. Analysis was done with the aid of a tabulation method with simple percentage and frequency counts. Discussions on the tables were done using commentary analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To properly establish the challenges lone-parenting women face as well as their coping methods, there is the need to examine some of the biosocial data of the respondents.

Table 1 shows that 72.5 percent of the respondents are within the young and productive age range of 21 to 40 years. Within this age range, women tend to be more involved in several activities in a very active manner. Sexual gratification is also relatively high among women of this age range. Marital maturity, to some extent, goes with age. The older women are more likely to cope better with marital challenges than the younger women because of the wealth of experience that goes with age and length of marriage.

Furthermore, the marriages of 67.5 percent of the respondents are over 5 years. This is indeed enough period for respondents to acquire adequate marital experience, and to strategize for a coping method to marital challenges.

In terms of the number of children that each respondent has, the study reported that while 6 (5%) respondents do not have a child, 69 (57.5%) have between 1-2 children, 39 (32.5%) have between 3-5 children, and 6 (5%) have between 6 and above children. This 57.5 percent majority

is an indication that because of the distance between the woman at home and her emigrant spouse there is little contact and hence less possibility of pregnancy and procreation. This may equally have a lot to tell on the experiencing woman's emotional and sexual challenges.

The table equally shows that majority of the respondents' spouses have been overseas for a period not less than 5 years now. In terms of how often these emigrant spouses visit their families back home, 45 (37.5%) of the respondents asserted that their emigrant spouses visit them once in every year, 36 (30%) asserted that their spouses pay visitation twice in every year, 18 (15%) asserted that their spouses visit them quarterly, while 18 (15%) of the respondents asserted that their spouses come once in several years. However, only 3 (2.5%) did not respond to this question. Such infrequent visitation and regular absence at home has the tendency of affecting the father figure role(s) and the husband figure role(s) at home. Such absence can equally generate an emotional crisis for the experiencing marital partners. This explains why majority of the respondents, that is 90 (75%), submitted that they prefer to see their spouses every day, if possible, while 21 (17.5%) want to see them once in a while. 9 respondents, representing 7.5 percent, did not respond to the question of how often respondents would want to see their spouses. Among the 90 respondents who submitted that they would prefer to see their spouses every day if possible, 69 (76.7%) of them asserted that they needed their spouses around them for them to perform their roles as husbands, breadwinners and fathers, while 9 (10%) of them claimed that they prefer to see their spouses every day so that a close relationship could be established between father and children. However, 12 (13.3%) of the respondents claimed that the feeling of love is the primary reason why they need their spouses every day if possible. Among the 21 respondents who submitted that they would prefer to see their spouses once in a while, 9 (42.8%) of them asserted that they want the situation to be so in order for the spouses to be more focused over there, 6 (28.6%) claimed that it would afford them the opportunity to learn to cope with their absence, 3 (14.3%) adduced financial implication of traveling every time as the main reason, while 3 (14.3%) did not give reason why they want their husbands once in a while.

**Table 1: Respondents' bio-social data**

| Bio-social data                                   | Classification   | Frequency | %    |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------|------|
| Age                                               | 21 – 30          | 48        | 40   |
|                                                   | 31 – 40          | 39        | 32.5 |
|                                                   | 41 – 50          | 27        | 2.5  |
|                                                   | 51 – above       | 3         | 2.5  |
|                                                   | No response      | 3         | 2.5  |
|                                                   | Total            | 120       | 100  |
| Length of Marriage                                | Less than a year | 6         | 5    |
|                                                   | 1 – 4 yrs        | 33        | 27.5 |
|                                                   | 5 yrs and above  | 81        | 67.5 |
|                                                   | No response      | -         | -    |
| Number of Years Migrant Spouse Has Spent Overseas | Total            | 120       | 100  |
|                                                   | 1 month – 1 yr   | 6         | 5    |
| Number of Years Migrant Spouse Has Spent Overseas | 2 yrs – 4 yrs    | 45        | 37.5 |
|                                                   | 5 yrs – 10 yrs   | 63        | 52.5 |
|                                                   | 11 yrs and above | 6         | 5    |
| Number of Years Migrant Spouse Has Spent Overseas | No response      | -         | -    |
|                                                   | Total            | 120       | 100  |

In the Table 2, each respondent was allowed to list as many problems as she could remember. The result shows that the greatest challenge of these affected women is the problem of playing multiple roles as father and mother at home, in which case the women are confronted with the idea of having to take unilateral decisions on family issues. This assertion is listed 75 (37.9%) times by the respondents. This is not surprising given the fact that even in this modern era, women are said to be waiting on their husbands for household decisions on issues like household purchases, children's health and education as found in the literature (see NPC 2009; SIGI 2012). Following closely is loneliness and emotional problems listed 57 (28.8%) times by the respondents. This finding corresponds with Azikiwe's (1997, cited in Ogba 2012: 271) observation that, 'many women are becoming heads of their households, either because of the death of their husbands, separation or migration in search of jobs.' More so, the listing of loneliness and emotional problems as parts of the challenges of lone-parenting justifies the earlier argument of Olutayo and Yusuff (2012) that emotional support helps in the stability of the family by ensuring happiness, health and security, while the absence of this according to Awodele (cited in Olanrewaju 2013) has contributed a lot to the failure of most marriages.

In terms of the effects of these challenges on the family, 9 (4.5%) of the respondents believe that sexual abuse, misunderstanding and childbearing problems can sour relations between a woman and her in-laws. For 33 (27.5%) respondents, absence of the man may lead to lack of familiarity and an emotional bond that is supposed to exist between children and their fathers; and according to Momoh (2013: 7) in the literature, children need this bond in order to

be emotionally, academically and morally upright and sound. According to 15 (12.5%) of the respondents, this may affect upbringing of the child, as parental figures are very important in the early socialization of the child. A defective socialization is likely to produce individuals with deviant or sub-cultural behavior, and this affects not only social relations within the household but also the entire society. For 15 (12.5%) of the respondents, playing the double role of a mother and father can create the inability, on the part of the woman, to meet family responsibilities especially when remittance is not coming regularly from the emigrant husband and the woman does not have any efficient means of livelihood to augment what comes from the emigrant husband. More so, unilateral decision-making on the part of the experiencing woman may lead to inappropriate decision, especially when the woman is inexperienced. This has a way of affecting the home administratively. The absence of the man, according to 21 (17.5%) respondents, generates loneliness, which affects the emotional component of the relationship between the husband and the wife. This, by implication, has a way of affecting the state of mind of the woman thereby influencing how she plays the double roles which fate has assigned to her; as well as exposing her to bad friendship influence and sexual pressure. However, 27 (22.5%) of the respondents did not state the effects of such challenges on the family.

The data in Table 3 shows that married women whose husbands are overseas may be tempted to seek sexual gratification outside because of the physical absence of their marital partners. Among the 78 respondents who asserted that women with migrant husbands are tempted to seek sexual gratification outside their marital homes, 36 (46.2%) asserted that this is due to the loneliness created by the absence of the marital partners with whom they share emotions,

**Table 2: Distribution by problems of lone-living faced back home by women of absentee-spouses**

| <i>Challenges</i>                     | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|----------|
| Insecurity/sexual abuse               | 27               | 13.6     |
| Loneliness and emotional problems     | 57               | 28.8     |
| Playing both father and mother roles. | 75               | 37.9     |
| In-laws' problems                     | 24               | 12.1     |
| Misunderstanding                      | 9                | 4.5      |
| Debt                                  | 6                | 3.0      |
| Total                                 | 198              | 100      |

**Table 3: Distribution on whether or not women with emigrant husbands are tempted to seek sexual satisfaction outside the home**

| <i>Response(s)</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>%</i> |
|--------------------|------------------|----------|
| Yes                | 78               | 65       |
| No                 | 30               | 25       |
| Don't know         | 12               | 10       |
| Total              | 120              | 100      |

6 (7.7%) respondents believed it is due to poor upbringing, 15 (19.2%) respondents looking at it from a religious perspective believe that it is due to lack of knowledge of Christ, while 3 (3.8%) respondents saw this as a function of excessive sexual desires. However, 18 (23.1%) out of the 78 respondents did not give reasons why they believe that the situation is so.

To investigate further, respondents were asked if they have heard of such cases of sexual gratification outside the home of women of emigrant husbands in the past. The result shows that, while 75 (62.5%) of the respondents claimed that they have heard of such cases of extramarital affairs in the past, 42 (35%) claimed they have not heard of any. However, 3 (2.5%) of the respondents did not respond to this question. Among the 75 respondents who agreed that they have heard, 30 (40%) claimed they have heard of one or two cases, 12 (16%) claimed they have heard of three to five cases, 6 (8%) said they have heard about six to nine cases, and 24 (32%) have heard about more than ten cases. However, only 3 (4%) of the respondents agreed that they had been involved once. The implication of this relates to Osunde's (2006) argument that 'sex without marriage is common, but marriage without sex is impossible.' It may not be impossible but it is very difficult not to have sex for a long time in a marriage relationship. Although sex instinct underscores the animal in man, and our socio-cultural environment modifies this instinct, our actual sexual behavior is a product of the interplay between nature and the environmental situations we found ourselves.

**Table 4: Distribution on how respondents have been coping with sexual and emotional desires**

| <i>Coping strategies</i>       | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>%</i> |
|--------------------------------|------------------|----------|
| Reflection on good times       | 15               | 12.5     |
| Occupied with job and children | 15               | 12.5     |
| Self discipline                | 30               | 25       |
| Frequent communication         | 21               | 17.5     |
| Religious devotion             | 39               | 32.5     |
| Total                          | 120              | 100      |

More so, in the Table 4, according to 15 (12.5%) of the respondents, any time they feel emotional and sexual desires they reflect upon the good times they have had already with their emigrant husbands and watch their video clips as a coping method. For 30 (25%) of the respon-

dents, they have been coping because of their upbringing, which provides the basis for discipline. However, for majority of them, that is 39 (32.5%), the grace of God is what is sufficient for them to cope. This, therefore, shows that individual's coping strategies are cultural, social, psychological and religious.

**Table 5: Distribution as to whether or not, education, remittances and job can make a woman cope better**

| <i>Categories</i>                | <i>Responses</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>%</i> |
|----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|----------|
| <i>Education</i>                 | Yes              | 75               | 62.5     |
|                                  | No               | 39               | 32.5     |
|                                  | Don't know       | 3                | 2.5      |
|                                  | No response      | 3                | 2.5      |
|                                  | Total            | 120              | 100      |
| <i>Remittances from Overseas</i> | Yes              | 48               | 40       |
|                                  | No               | 63               | 52.5     |
|                                  | Don't know       | 6                | 5        |
|                                  | No response      | 3                | 2.5      |
|                                  | Total            | 120              | 100      |
| <i>Job</i>                       | Yes              | 81               | 67.5     |
|                                  | No               | 15               | 12.5     |
|                                  | Don't know       | 18               | 15       |
|                                  | No response      | 6                | 5        |
|                                  | Total            | 120              | 100      |

In order to determine the effects of certain factors on their coping strategies, respondents were asked whether or not education, money and jobs could make a woman cope better (Table 5). The findings presented in the above table, show that both education and a job could make a woman, whose husband is in abroad, cope better. However, waiting for the emigrant spouse to send money regularly may not help the woman in coping. Knowledge makes an individual understand life and its challenges better. It gives an individual confidence and hope for a brighter future even when challenges are enormous today. Above all, education creates jobs for an individual, and this is likely to keep the experiencing woman, who has an emigrant husband busy and hence keeps her away from idleness and negative influences. A working woman copes better than a full housewife in that, the demand of the work environment keeps the woman occupied and ever busy. This has the power of taking her mind off irrelevant things. More so, job involvement, on the part of an experiencing woman, can provide additional income to augment spouse remittances in order to be able to cope with the ever-increasing demands of family life. While work outside

the home is seen by the findings of this study as psychologically beneficial to the woman whose husband is abroad, previous studies in the literature show that it generates role strains. Odoemelam (2005) assertion, for instance, that modern women tend to have role strains as they try to concentrate on the performance of both the domestic and office roles at the same time becomes instructive in this context.

Remittances from overseas may not totally help the woman in coping, if the money remitted is not enough to take care of family necessities and when the experiencing woman does not have additional means of augmenting such remittances. It is equally possible for remittances to disintegrate the social bond or ties of the family, in terms of generating bad blood emanating from mutual suspicion between a daughter-in-law and the family of orientation of the emigrant spouse.

### CONCLUSION

Unlike in the traditional Nigerian society, the modern husband and wife are mainly brought together by love. The way a gardener cares for his garden, those in love ought to care for each other. Marriage is a very important institution to both the man and the woman in a marriage relationship. Man's prestige and pride can equally be lowered by the absence of a wife. Whether couples live together or not, there are bound to be challenges in marriage. However, the ability of a couple to manage or overcome such challenges makes a stable home. The mutual cooperation of the focal persons in marriage determines the mutual benefits they will derive from their marital relationship.

Modern marriage is about pulling of resources together. This is necessary given the fact the economic distress in Nigeria has aggravated the cost of living. Therefore, in order to strengthen the economic foundations of the household there is a need for the woman to augment the spouse's income in order to prevent emotional breakdown, as stated in the literature.

The study therefore discovered that education helps the woman to cope better, job involvement keeps the woman busy and hence copes better, while remittances from the migrant husband may not help the woman to cope because it may not be enough and may generate crisis between her and the in-laws.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, for a woman to cope better there is need for job involvement and industry. This will augment whatever amount the husband sends from overseas and hence help the woman be relatively comfortable and relax with respect to meeting domestic needs. It equally helps to psychologically engage the woman back home in order to forestall the consequences of idleness.

Increase in faith in God and consistent prayer is also needed as a religious coping strategy. This helps the woman not only to persevere but also to curb anti-religious excesses like the spirit of adultery.

More so, there is the need for consistent communication between the woman and her husband. This can solve emotional problems, helps the woman to consult with him on major family decisions back home and can stop whatever suspicion a communication gap can generate. Constant communication can be accompanied by frequent visitation. The emigrant spouse should endeavor to visit home frequently to spend some quality time with the family any time he is on leave. More so, an opportunity should be created for the whole family to visit the father abroad at least once in a while, depending on the man's financial capability. This will enhance love and oneness, solve the problem of abandonment and loneliness, and create room for physical interactions between the husband and wife, and between the father and children.

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