

Chapter 14

The Employment Status of Women and Marital Instability in Sokoto Metropolis

Ngozi C. Okolo

Introduction

Marital instability is a common phenomenon throughout the world and it happens widely in Nigeria, especially among the lower income people. The nature, causes and intensity of marital instability vary from one society to another.

The term marital instability is used to refer to the process whereby marriages breakdown through separation, desertion or divorce and the subsequent re-partnering of the individuals involved is possible. The concept of marital instability is confined here to desertion, separation and divorce. In the present economic hardship world over, Nigeria inclusive, a single income is no longer sufficient to run a family (Lupton and Smith, 2003). Wives' wages have become essential for couples to meet with the demands of the family. According to Wait and Gallanger (2000:123), 'when it comes to building wealth or avoiding poverty, a stable marriage may be your most important asset'. Also, it has become evident that the relationship between couples and the character of the family life have become more varied and complex than in the

previous generation. Now the nature of the dual earner-relationship and its implication on marital relationship may not only be determined by internal factors but also by many other external ones.

Despite the seeming insistence of men that the proper place of women in the society is their homes, as wives and mothers, women are increasingly gaining entry into the labour market outside matrimonial homes. This has made many men to argue that women are now taking up male professional roles, and consequently threatening their patriarchal power and causes marital instability. This perception that women's employment outside their marital homes is a threat to family stability has been dismissed by researchers. According to Robert (2002) and Rogers (2004) fulltime work for wives decreases the likelihood of divorce. They argued that wives' full-time employment tends to have a stabilizing effect. They thus see no consequences of wives' full-time employment for marital happiness, but that wives' fulltime employment decreases the risk of subsequent marital disruption. These days, conjugal roles are becoming increasingly mutual, decisions are based on consultation and power within the family is increasingly balanced between husband and wife. This has helped in strengthening the bond within the family.

Furthermore, the employment of women is no longer viewed as an act of disgrace to the family as noted by Robinson (1974:430), rather working wives now play vital roles not only in their respective families but also in the society at large. Indeed, women contribute tremendously to the economic welfare of their families. The median assets per person for the married people are about double the level for unmarried persons (Lupton and Smith 2003). It is a known fact that a lot of working wives contribute significantly to the upkeep of their families, and some families, even depend solely on their working wives' income. The questions one asks are, do working wives reduce the burden of

dependency on the head of the family by supplementing his income? Are working wives able to perform their dual roles effectively? Is the husband's authority, in the family, in the area of decision making affected by the employment status of his wife? This study attempts to answer these questions by examining employment status of women against marital stability in Sokoto metropolis. Accordingly the study aims to:

- (i) Find out if there is any relationship between working wives and the burden of dependency on the head of the family.
- (ii) Examine the effect of women's employment on the family in the area of conflict of leadership.
- (iii) Investigate if working wives are capable of combining their dual roles effectively.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of marital instability is associated with separation, divorce and widowhood. Separation and divorce are social phenomenon, which are created by the husband or the wife or both but widowhood is beyond the control of human beings. It is related to death and thus universal. Many marriages remain shaky for a long time; some of them recover equilibrium and become cohesive again. This shaky period may lead to separation. Separation is of two categories: where the husband and the wife reside separately without resolving their marital tie is called physical separation, and the situation where couple lives together in the same household showing external modesty but without having biological and psychological relations is called mental separation. In most of the cases of marital separation, the spouse remains detached from coitus and other sexual intimacies. This type of separation usually involves those

spouses to whom divorce would be a disgrace. On the other hand, when marriage is dissolved from a legal point of view it is called a divorce. But when it is dissolved by death it is called widowhood. The term marital instability is used to refer to the process whereby marriages breakdown through separation, desertion or divorce and, where relevant, to the subsequent re-partnering of the individuals concerned (Robert, 2002). The concept of marital instability denotes any or all of the cases of desertion, separation and divorce.

To explain the research problem modernisation theory of social change was used. Modernisation theory of social change is a structural functionalist theory of change. The structural functionalist theory preaches the replacement of traditional values with modern values under general terms called "Women and Development" (Haralambos, 1981). For the structural functionalist theory, change in a system is as a result of response to change in the environment. Change is a constant element. And for the system to survive it has to remain adapted to its environment. The current changes in the traditional role of women as full-time house wives to a dual role of house wives and office workers is a mode of adaptation to the exigencies of modern society.

Looking at the changes in the roles of women in Sokoto metropolis in the recent past from the functionalist perspective, one can argue that such changes are direct consequences of western education, globalisation, economic hardship and negative attitude from men being experienced by women. Thus women are forced to get involved in economic activities so as to contribute to family income and stability.

Methodology

In order to provide answers to the research questions raised, certain areas in Sokoto metropolis were selected systematically as the sample areas. They include Federal

Housing Estate and State Housing Estate (Gwiwa Lowcost). The choice of these areas was informed by the fact that they were predominantly occupied by civil servants. These two areas were subdivided into two zones each, totalling four sub zones namely Federal Housing Quarters, University Staff Quarters (Runjin Sambo) and Mangoro and Tanki Areas (Gwiwa Lowcost).

Forty families were selected. The families were selected randomly using every other five houses in all the areas till ten families were chosen in each area. Then questionnaires were administered to the selected sample population consisting of 80 respondents. These respondents were husbands and wives either married or divorced. Tables and percentages were employed in presenting and discussing the data collected from the field.

Employed women and Marital Instability: Data Analysis

This section deals with the presentation and the analysis of the primary data collected.

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 14.1: Sex distribution of respondents

Sex	Freq	%
Male	42	52.5
Female	38	47.5
Total	80	100

Source: Fieldwork 2004

Out of the 80 respondents that completed and returned their questionnaires 52.5% representing 42 respondents were males, while 47.5% accounting for 38 respondents were

females. This discrepancy in the male-female ratio is as a result of the households that were divorced or separated.

Table 14.2: Marital Status of respondents

Marital Status	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
Married	38	90.5	38	100	76	95
Divorced	4	9.5	-	-	4	5
Total	42	100	38	100	80	100

Source: Fieldwork 2004

Table 14.2 shows that 4 of the respondents are divorced or separated while the rest (76) are living with their spouses. All the divorced respondents are males. This indicates that a good number of the respondents are still living with their spouses.

Table 14.3: Educational qualifications of respondents

Qualification(s)	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
FSLSC	2	4.8	9	23.6	11	13.8
GCE/WASC/ Grade II	5	11.9	5	13.2	10	12.5
NCE/ND/OND	10	23.8	14	36.8	24	30
HND/GRADUATE	18	42.8	8	21.1	26	32.5
POSTGRADUATE	7	16.7	2	5.3	9	11.2
TOTAL	42	100	38	100	80	100

Source: Fieldwork 2004

Table 14.3 shows that 13.8% (11 respondents), both males and females are FSLC holders. Respondents holding either HND or Graduate degree account for 32.5%, while NCE/ND and OND holders represent 30% of the total respondents.

Those with post graduate qualification account for 11.2% of the respondents. It shows that that there are more couples with higher education than those without. It is also expected because the study areas are mainly where civil servants reside.

Husband's views concerning their working wives

The essence of obtaining the opinion of husbands concerning the impact of their wives' employment status is because Sokoto being a patriarchal society, men traditionally assume headship over the women. Also personal assessment by women may not be as objective as that of being assessed by men.

Table 14.4: Wives' working status

Working Status of Wife	Freq	%
Employed	27	71
Not employed	11	29
Total	38	100

Source: Fieldwork 2004

Table 14.4 shows that 27 (71%) male respondents acknowledged that their wives work outside the home, while the remaining 11(29%) respondents said their wives do not work outside their home. However, these 38 respondents do not include the 4 male respondents who earlier noted that they are divorced. The 11% of wives not working outside the home could be those with only first school leaving certificate.

Table 14.5: Husbands' responses on wives contribution to family Income

Does she Contribute	Freq	%
Always	20	74.1
Occasionally	2	7.4
Not at all	5	18.5
Total	27	100

Source: Fieldwork 2004

One of the questions this paper is out to address is, whether working wives significantly reduce the burden of dependency on head of the family. Table 14.5 shows that 20 male respondents representing 74.1% of husbands of working wives acknowledge that their wives contribute significantly to the family income, while 7.4% (2 respondents) said that their wives contribute occasionally and 18.5% said their wives do not in any way contribute to the family income. This table is based on the 27 male respondents who said that their wives work outside the home. The finding debunked the notion by some men, that working wives do not assist in the upkeep of the family. It has shown that working wives do assist their husbands in reducing the burden of dependency by contributing to the family income.

In fact, the desire of a woman to work outside the home becomes a criterion for marriage in most places since the income of the wife is required to supplement that of the husband, as well as, for the economic stability of the marriage and the family. In relation to this, we can conclude that working wives do significantly reduce the burden of dependency on the head of the family by contributing to the family income and consequently strengthens marital stability (Musa, 2004).

Table 14.6 Husbands' responses on wives' ability to combine dual roles

Ability to combine	Freq	%
Very well	22	81.5
Not very well	5	18.5
Total	27	100

Source: Field work 2004

The second question this paper addresses is whether working wives are able to combine their dual roles effectively. According to Table 14.6, 81.5% of the respondents (22 husbands) said their wives are performing their dual roles very well/effectively, the remaining 18.5% (5 husbands) said their wives do not perform their dual role effectively.

Montagu (1999) shed more light on the ability of working wives to effectively perform their dual roles. In his words, 'the married working woman has generally learned to systemise her work so well that she experiences no difficulty. Many of these working women had learned the value of order and routine so well that their homes in this respect could compare favourably with the best run homes of full-time housewives' (pg 23). This view is in line with the result shown in table 1.6 above. According to Oakley (1970) working wives still attach importance to their role as wives and mothers. Their status as workers have not affected or made them neglect their function as mothers and wives. In her words:

"work does not have central importance in lives (working wives), than it does for men. Their most important role is that of wife and mother. In as much as they still see the importance of their housewife role, there is every possibility for them to combine their dual role effectively without neglecting either of the roles. In this case, the perceived dissatisfaction and instability can

only occur in families where the wives work mainly to achieve their own status and recognition rather than for the economic benefit of the family" (pg. 129).

Table 14.7: Husbands' response on who takes decisions in the home

Who makes decision	Freq	%
Husband	12	44.4
Wife	-	-
Both	15	55.6
Total	27	100

Source: Fieldwork 2004

The third and final question this paper addresses is whether husband's authority in the family, in the area of decision making, is affected by his wife's employment status. Table 14.7 shows that 12 husbands constituting 44.4% of husbands of working wives said in spite of the fact that their wives work outside the home and contribute to the family income, they are solely responsible for taking decisions in the family, while 15 respondents said they share decision making responsibilities with their wives, that is, decisions are taken based on consultation with their wives. None however said the wife takes decisions alone. This finding is similar to what Scazoni and Scazoni (1980) and Musa (2004) reported on the impact of the changing roles of women. Scazoni and Scazoni argued that the possibility of a wife becoming a wage earner gradually become part of the sole right of the wife-mother, hence, putting married women in a position where they had the capability of bargaining instead of yielding to their husbands out of a sense of helpless dependence on male economic support. Rather, wives could offer suggestions, disagree, counsel and advise, even try to insist on a particular course of action. They noted that the rising authority of working wives in the

family is due to their economic contribution. Also Salzman (2002) in his study of Bangladeshi urban women is of the opinion that their changing role as wage earners may be crucial for redefining their marital stability.

The above explanation agrees with the result in Table 14.7 which shows that husbands' authority in the area of decision making is slightly affected by the employment status of his wife. However, this slight change does not cause instability within the family, rather it has aided in establishing a balance of power between husband and wife, as well as consultation between couples.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The following recommendations have been made based on the results and discussion of this study: The society, husbands in particular, should endeavour to give much support and encouragement to their wives in whatever career/job they engage in, as this cannot erode from them the status of head of the family. Women should be encouraged to take up employment outside the home, because this will go a long way in helping both women and men to contribute their own little quota to the development of the family in particular and society in general. Also, it will help in maintaining a stable family. Research should be done specially on the changing roles of women, with particular emphasis on nuclear family and its stability, comparing it with those families with housemaids or full-time house wives. This, I believe, will go a long way in showing the true situation and picture of the nuclear family on its own without any housemaid.

The legislation on women's work need to be amended, especially in the area of remuneration and time spent in the office so that they can have enough time and resources to assist their families and children in particular. For example the provision of after school centres where children can go

and keep themselves busy instead of roaming the streets when they return from school while their parents are still in the office. Such centres may be youth clubs, which should be able to take care of the child and provide filler for the gap between the times the parents arrive from work. Also, both government and non-governmental organisations should enlighten married working women not to see their work outside the home, as an opportunity to underrate their husbands, by not heeding to their decision. Since he is the head of the family, that mutual respect and obedience to his authority has to be maintained. This does not in any way suggest that the wife is inferior to the husband.

In conclusion, it will be justifiable to state that work outside the home has not in any way impeded married working women's ability in performing their traditional role of being wives and mothers. This is contrary to the general belief that employment outside the home will hamper the ability of women in performing their traditional role at home, which can lead to family instability. This has been the most often stated reason for restricting women from work outside the home. However, it is presumed that, with the result of this research it is realised that the conflict alleged to exist is rather imaginary than real. .

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