

WOMEN AND HOUSEHOLD POVERTY, FROM BREAST FEEDING TO BREAD WINNING (A CASE OF EKITI STATE, NIGERIA).

A Paper submitted

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Abstract

In traditional African society, women's roles as child bearers, caregivers to children, the sick and the elderly, and in food production are seen as very important to the health and survival of their immediate families. Women are also involved in petty trading and other informal economic activities that are lowly remunerated. However, in recent time women's responsibilities have shifted from these known roles to full involvement in formal economic activities. This paper focuses on women economic participation and the implication on household poverty/welfare. It argues that, increasing female formal economic engagement serves as a spring board for families to move out of poverty. This is because women re-invest a much larger part of their income in families and communities than men thereby spreading the wealth and creating a positive impact on future development.

Using random sampling, data were collected through questionnaire and in-depth interview from respondents in Ado Local government area of Ekiti State. Findings from the study revealed that westernization through education and religion are responsible for women's shift from their traditional role to formal economic engagement. Although this transition has some negative implications but the positive impacts which include improvement in family nutrition, children access to better education and educational facilities have strong influence on the households.

Keywords: Women, Household Poverty, Breast Feeding, Bread Winning

1.0 Introduction

Over the years, women are increasingly seen as an essential part of the international agenda for sustainable development. The issue of women's economic engagement and its importance in the economy have received attention for national and international debates with attention from the United Nations and other international bodies for increase in women economic opportunities and engagements (Population Reference Bureau, 2002). Women contribute significantly to their immediate families and the nation as a whole. They are responsible for the everyday well-being of their families, and as homemakers, they occupy a very important position in their households. They are caregivers to their families, food producers and home managers, whose responsibilities are primarily limited to household economic activities with no or little remuneration.

Care work for the family and the community is essential to human life and to the social and economic foundations of all economies. It enables the productive economy to function, as it supports the well-being of the workforce, children, older persons and people with disabilities and subsidizes the monetized economy. This was also noted by Moser (2003), where she identified the triple roles of women in the society to be reproductive in nature, this entails child bearing, rearing and caregiving to both old and young, the productive role which involves working for pay and caregiving for men that work and finally the community management role of taking care of the environment.

It is important to note that in recent times, women's economic engagement or disengagement outside the home goes a long way to determine the smooth running of the family. As women are important in the economic development of their countries, they are primarily the managers of their homes. The relationship between household poverty and women's paid activities has become stronger, partly in response to poverty owing to economic crises and the push into labour market and partly in response to new opportunities generated by globalization. Although, economic engagement may burden women with additional responsibilities because they are already responsible for running the household and this increasingly has to be combined with income generating activities. But some may not feel overburden by this additional responsibility, rather they enjoy having cash in hand which they can choose to spend on small purchases such as school books, cooking pots and other household's use in a bid to enhance family welfare.

Poverty is primarily a consequence of income inadequacies in Nigeria (Olowa, 2012). The poor in the country suffer from multidimensional poverty, which affects their nutrition, health and education among several other things. The alleviation of income poverty, which is a situation where members of a family live below the poverty line, does not always culminate in improvement in other poverty dimensions (World Bank, 2005; Maloma, 2016). Kabeer (2003) observed that women from poor households contribute more to income-generating and expenditure-saving activities, especially in the informal sector, than women from households that are better off. Thus, women's work is extremely important to the livelihood and security of poor households and a means by which poverty can be eradicated in the family. On some occasions, women's work complements spouses' contributions, while in other cases it is the main source of household livelihood. Invariably, poverty and women's disengagement are positively related, such that as women are engaged in paid jobs and their income increases, poverty goes down in the family. Notwithstanding, the relationship between women's economic engagement outside the home and household indicates differences in both local economies and local structures of patriarchy. In regions with female seclusion, women's economic engagement outside the home indicates household poverty. While in other regions, the category of work that men and women do is a powerful indicator of poverty than the fact that they work.

Oyediran and Odusola (2004) opined that an interesting part of the poverty dimension in Nigeria is its intensity on women and children, thereby women engage in paid jobs to better their lots by complementing the declining income-generating power of men. Therefore, women's economic engagement in paid jobs outside the home and household poverty can be seen as household responses to crisis and insecurity. Economic crisis, poverty, and male unemployment/underemployment have forced/put pressure on women to earn an income. Thus, women's economic engagements in paid jobs are a means of smoothing household income flows when the usual sources of household income reduce or dry up. Women play a crucial role in managing various household contingencies.

According to the United Nations (2008), increasing the economic participation of women creates a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth. This is because when women earn income, it is invested in their children's wellbeing, education and also in their communities. Women usually reinvest a much greater part of their earnings in their families and communities than men, thereby spreading wealth and creating a positive impact on future

development (World Bank, 2009). Moreover, in a study conducted by the World Bank in 2011, it was discovered that the survival probability of a child increases by about 20 per cent when income is in the hands of women, because women invest more of their income in health and nutrition. Therefore, creating opportunities for women in the economy, particularly in developing economies like Nigeria, will improve their earning capacity, be a springboard for families to move out of poverty and contribute greatly to the overall economy.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, women are seen as wives who were expected to clean, cook and give care to the children and the extended family members as a whole. Women were not allowed to take up paid jobs except for petty trading, basically at the front of the house. However, in the contemporary world, women are assuming greater responsibilities along with their traditional roles. They are involved in both formal as well as informal sectors of the economy even in what was previously categorized as “male occupation” such as transport, policing and engineering work. This has helped to change the perception of women's roles in the economy. African women face a chain of barriers to achieving their full potential in the economy, some stemming from cultural beliefs such as gender norms, restrictive cultural practices, discriminatory laws and highly segregated labour market. Others are differential in educational attainment and quality, interruption of labour force participation related to fertility and child rearing, discrimination in term of employment practices and wage determination, relatively fewer role models, vulnerability and weak bargaining power, and environment that may be unfriendly to female membership of the workforce (South Africa Report, 2015). Yet, they seem not to be hindered or discouraged from transiting to formal economic activities or white-collar jobs.

Furthermore, for a greater percentage of women, their responsibility has shifted from their traditional roles to full involvement in formal economic activities. Amongst factors that could be responsible for this transition are poverty, unemployment, economic pressure and necessity which force women to find work, even after having children. In spite of the meager amount women receive, women joined the workforce to complement the financial efforts of their spouses and to reduce the financial burden of the family. The opportunity cost of educated women becomes higher compared to those who are not educated. Thus, women's transition to formal economic engagement can also be viewed as a product of contemporary urban environment and westernization. More importantly, is the changing nature of global economy which can be seen

through the growth of the world manufacturing sector and the shift to developing countries is responsible for this transition.

This study focuses on Ekiti state as it takes a critical and systematic look at women's economic engagement and household poverty. In other words, what factors are responsible for this transition? What are the effects of this transition on family welfare in terms of nutrition, health and shelter? To what extent does this transition negatively impact the household? The study focuses on Ekiti state for a variety of reasons, among which is the proximity to the researcher and the cultural homogeneity of Ekiti people within the Yoruba race.

3.0 Research Objectives

The broad objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between female economic engagement and household poverty. While the specific objectives are to:

- i. investigate the causes of female transition from their traditional roles to formal activities.
- ii. ascertain the effects of women's economic engagement on family welfare, in terms of nutrition, health, education and shelter.
- iii. investigate the negative impact of women's economic engagement on household wellbeing.

4.0 Literature Review

4.1 Conceptualizing Poverty

Poverty has different facets, and it has different meanings to different people depending on the context from which it is being viewed. World Bank (2011) defined poverty as deprivation in well-being and comprises many dimensions. It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also includes low levels of health and education, inadequate physical security, poor access to clean water and sanitation, lack of voice, and inadequate capacity and opportunity for individuals to better their lives. In Nigeria, not less than 60 percent of the population are living in poverty (National Bureau of Statistics NBS, 2010 in BBC News (2012). The World Poverty Clock has also indicated that the number of extremely poor Nigerians has risen to 91.6 million by the end of 2018 from 87 million as of June 2018 (Toromade, 2018, Akikuotu, 2019).

4.2 Brief Literature Review

According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012) women's engagement in paid jobs and bridging the gender gap in employment will result in faster economic growth. Okunnu and Akinjole (2016) investigated the effect of female participation in small and medium enterprises on the poverty status of women's households in Lagos. The study used multi-stage sampling 114 of 56 participants and 58 non-participants. The study discovered that households with non-SME participants had a 60 per cent poverty incidence, and poverty incidence was less than 15 per cent in households with female participants. Usman (2015) emphasized the importance of women in poverty eradication and the positive future effects on the social order of a country. Also, Akinbode and Hamzat (2017) investigated the relationship between female ownership of assets and household poverty. They employed a women's asset approach to assess household poverty in South West Nigeria, and data were collected from 363 respondents. The study discovered that education, marital status and income were significant determinants of the poverty status of households in the study area. Oyediran and Odusola (2004) also investigated the effect of economic crises and their attendant consequences right from the 1980s, which had encouraged women's economic participation and in household decision making. The study used descriptive and analytical methods with a focus on women between the ages of 25 and 49 years. It was revealed that women participated more in household decision-making during the pre-Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) period than post-Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) period. However, the study discovered that poor women participate less in household decision-making relative to non-poor women. The factors responsible are women's education, women's employment status, religion and their husbands' educational attainment. This study portrays a shift from patriarchal tendencies to partnership and an egalitarian form of household relationship.

5.0 Methodology

5.1 Theoretical Framework: The Theory of Time Allocation

Becker (1965) emphasizes that there are many types of time use, just as there are many types of consumption goods and that different types of time use and consumption goods combine in different ways to yield commodities. Becker (1965) is not the first literature on time allocation in a home setting. Mincer (1962) illustrates an example of a trade-off between house chores and

paid work of a married woman. Also, there has been an earlier household production theory before Becker's theory of household production, popularly known as Gorman (1980), which was written in 1956. The difference is that Becker merged goods consumption with the time used in the production of household utility. Time allotted to each household member is allocated in a manner that individuals who are relatively efficient at market activities use less of their time at consumption activities than other members. According to Becker, when a member of a household has an increase in income, other members will need to give up their careers to devote themselves to consumption activities. This model overlooks the ambition of individual members in the household. A member of the household may be engaged in a low-paid job and may not be willing to give it up because of an increase in the wage of another household member. The theory of time allocation relies on the power of the patriarch as the decision maker who allocates labour time to each member of the household. Thus, the allocation of resources within a household is determined by the bargaining power of each household member. In the context of this study, when household income is low women tend to search for paid job to complement household income, hence, there is a trade-off between the traditional role of women in the society (as caregivers, food producers', child bearer and house chores) and women engagement in paid work outside home. Thus, women tend to use less time at consumption activities than other members of the household, and this is dependent on the power of the patriarch, who is the husband, as the decision maker who allocates labour time through his consent

5.2 Study Area

Ekiti State was chosen as the study area because it is one of the traditional towns of Yoruba land, which is located in the Southwestern part of Nigeria. In the early days, Ekiti State was known for farming and other agricultural activities. Due to Yoruba culture and beliefs, Ekiti women are basically less educated relative to their men, and they are expected to stay home as caregivers and sometimes engage in farming and petty trading. However, as a result of the spill-over effect of economic crises in the nation from the early 1980s, the female children started getting recognition to be educated by their fathers, with whom the household decision resides. The shift from an agricultural-based economy to a town where education is valued earned them the slogan, 'Ekiti, the fountain of knowledge'. Over a period of time, Ekiti became a civil servant state, and due to the recent economic recession in the country, although not peculiar to the State, workers are being owed several months of salary. Ado-Ekiti, the capital of Ekiti state, was chosen for this study as

this is where most government parastatals and educational institutions where women are gainfully employed are located.

The sample technique used is purposive random sampling of adults between the ages of 25 and 60 years. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires from higher educational institutions, namely, Ekiti State University, The Federal Polytechnic of Ado-Ekiti and Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti.

6.0 Results and Discussion

Here, we provide and discuss the results of the fieldwork on women and household poverty.

6.1 Findings from Questionnaire

The research objectives were achieved with the use of simple percentages. One-on-one interviews were also used to determine if there is a negative effect of this transition on household welfare.

Objective one of this study talks about the causes of female transition from their traditional roles to formal employment outside their homes.

Table 1: Causes of female transition to formal economic engagement

	Agree	Disagree	Total	% Agree	% Disagree	Total
<i>Poverty and Unemployment</i>	72	33	105	68.6	31.4	100%
<i>Modern urban environment</i>	93	12	105	88.6	11.4	100%
<i>Westernization</i>	102	3	105	97.1	2.9	100%

Source: Authors' (2019)

The result from Table 1 shows that westernization through education and cultural transfer is the major factor responsible for women's transition from their known roles to economic engagement outside their homes. 97.1 per cent of respondents supported this. This is followed by a modern urban environment (88.6 per cent) and poverty and unemployment, with 68.6 per cent.

Table 2: Effects of Female Transition to Formal Economic Engagement

		Agree	Disagree	Total	% Agree	% Disagree	Total
Nutrition	Affordability of nutritious meal	72	33	105	68.6	31.43	100%
	Food stability	93	12	105	88.6	11.43	100%
	Decision on family diet	102	3	105	97.1	2.86	100%
Health	Increase in children's survival probability	78	27	105	74.3	25.71	100%
	Better medical facilities	84	21	105	80.0	20	100%
Education	children education improve	99	6	105	94.3	5.71	100%
	Mothers spend more on their children's education than fathers	102	3	105	97.1	2.86	100%
Shelter	Improvement in shelter	66	39	105	62.9	37.14	100%

Source: Authors' (2019)

The effects of women's transition to formal economic activities are depicted in Table 2. It was discovered that the most pronounced effect of female transition is the ability of women to make decisions on family diet (97.1 %), Mothers expend more on children's education than fathers, access to better medical facilities for the children (80%) and improvement in shelter (62.9%)

Table 3: Implications for Households

	Yes	No	Total
<i>Does this transition have negative implications for households</i>	72	33	105
<i>Total %</i>	68.57%	31.43%	100%

Source: Authors' (2019)

The result from Table 3 shows that out of 105 respondents, 68.5 per cent of the respondents concluded that there are negative implications of women transitioning from their traditional roles to formal economic engagement. While 31.4 per cent still believe that there is no negative implication on household welfare.

6.2 Findings from Personal Interview

The response obtained from the interview conducted with some respondents revealed that women's economic engagement outside the home tends to reduce the bond between mothers and their children. Morals and etiquette are traditionally meant to first be instilled by the mothers. The evidence of this responsibility being shifted to housemaids or other family members is seen in today's society. This ranges from loss of family and cultural values to loss of confidence in the children to share their experiences and fears with their parents, and an increase in the crime rate.

Interview conducted on men's view shows that they are not happy with the new role women are assuming; however, given the situation of the country, the economic situation of the family will be in comatose if women do not complement the family income. They also emphasized that men may need to assume some roles that are traditionally women's (like housekeeping, child discipline and rearing) to prevent the manifestation of the negative effect of this shift on the home and the society at large.

7.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

The transition from women's traditional role to full economic engagement in Ekiti state is discovered from the findings to be a consequence of westernization, education, religion and a new way of doing things (that is, a paradigm shift in culture and cultural practices). Furthermore, the transition of women from breastfeeding to breadwinning has resulted in enhancing the ability of women to make decisions on family diet (nutrition), children's education and access to better medical facilities for the children. It was discovered that when women are gainfully employed outside the home, there is always a considerable improvement in the nutrition of the family, children will be given better access to education and educational facilities and finally, the health of the family will improve. Although, this transition that seems to have a lot of positive impacts, it is not without its negative implication of neglecting child rearing responsibilities by leaving such for the aged parents, after-school facilities and/or nannies. This neglect of the children has resulted into poor moral upbringing which has led to lack of morals and etiquette and increase in crime

rates among others. Despite this identified negative implication, the positive impacts are not something that can be ignored or done away with.

Based on the conclusions, it is therefore recommended that women should be encouraged to pick-up more economic engagement outside the home as this will help in alleviating household poverty thereby leading to improvement in the family welfare. Also, to reduce crime rate which was a consequence of women's neglect of their traditional child-rearing roles, a traditional childcare beyond schools 'after school clubs' could be also organized where the society like before will be involved in proper upbringing of children.

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