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## **Reproductive Bargaining by Married Nigerian Women: Do Extra Household Environmental Parameters Matter?**

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### ***Abstract:***

*This research aimed to examine the influence of extra household environmental parameters (extra household assets) on women's reproductive bargaining with their spouses. Results suggest that having wealthy parents, salaried job or self-employment would not significantly help married women in negotiating reproductive issues with their husbands. In spite of having wealthy parents, salaried employment or self-employment, women would prefer, remaining in their marriage to divorce if the husbands impose unfavourable decisions on them. The choice of remaining in marriage seems to be mediated by social norms.*

***Keywords:*** Reproductive bargaining, women, gender, household, divorce

### **1. Introduction**

Historically, issues of reproduction (when to start childbearing, number of children to have and spacing of children) have been looked at by population policy makers and researchers from the perspective that women carry out the biological roles of pregnancy and childbearing. Therefore, women have been the targets of fertility control and family planning programmes (Barnett, 1988). Barnett further argues that this myopic focus on women ignores a very important reality, which is that women are not the sole decision makers on reproductive issues. Interestingly, like the population policy makers, researchers on population issues had for a long time run into the error of overlooking the social realities in which reproductive bargaining is played out.

Reproductive bargaining is defined in this study as the process of making choices concerning pregnancy and childbearing. Accordingly, reproductive bargaining is operationalised as making a decision on when a woman will become pregnant, making a decision on the number of children to have, and making decisions on the spacing of childbirths.

According to Makinwa-Adebusoye and Kritz (2000), in the context of the evolution of research in reproductive health in Nigeria, the period before 1974 (World Population Conference, Cairo) witnessed studies on reproductive decision-making which were largely knowledge, attitude and practices (KAP) surveys, and were focused mainly on women. These studies concentrated on demographic variables such as educational attainment, age and urbanization as the main determinants that affect family planning use. Many researchers, from 1975, started to take cognizance of the importance of understanding the dynamics within the household with respect to family planning (Makinwa-Adebusoye and Kritz, 2000). It is arguable that this is a minor shift because researchers directed their attention to the relationship between women's formal education as a socioeconomic factor within the household on the one hand and children ever born and family size preference on the other hand.

The need to examine the broader yet more contextual issues of intrahousehold gender relations and reproductive bargaining came up after the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (1994) and clearly marked a shift in paradigm in population and reproductive health research in Nigeria (Makinwa-Adebusoye and Kritz, 2000).

Gender relations refer to the social interactions between men as a sex and women as a sex. "Gender relations are simultaneously relations of cooperation, connection and mutual support and of conflict, separation and competition, of difference and inequality" (March, Smyth and Mukhopadhyay, 1999: 18). In this study, gender relations were operationalised in terms of the differences between husband and wife in ownership of assets within the household, especially with respect to how these influence women's power (relative to men's) in the reproductive bargaining process. This implies that ownership of household assets could be unequal. Further, gender relations were defined and examined from the perspective of the availability of other economic and social resources to the spouses in marriage, which a spouse may leverage as a fall-back in the reproductive bargaining process (Agarwal, 1997: 4). Following MCElroy (1990) these economic and social resources are termed extra household environmental parameters (McElroy 1990).

Gender relations influence reproductive outcomes such as the number of children borne by a couple by influencing reproductive bargaining between the spouses. For example, when gender relations are equal, there is likely going to be joint and equal bargaining on reproductive issues. In other words, husband and wife will mutually agree on when the woman will get pregnant for the first time after their marriage, how many children they will have and how to space their childbirths. On the other hand, when there are unequal gender relations, the choice/decisions on reproductive issues may not be consensual. One spouse, for example, the husband may be the major or the sole decision maker while the wife may have little or no say (Speizer, Whittle and Carter, 2005).

Biologically, women bear pregnancy for the full obstetric term of nine months. They undergo the processes of labour, childbirth and confinement to take care of the tender babies. Women also continue to take care of the young children (with some assistance from men) until they grow. These responsibilities may affect women in a number of important ways. For example, they may have less time for academic pursuits, employment/ income-generating activities, social networking, etc. (Speizer, Whittle and Carter, 2005). Consequently, it may reduce their economic opportunities (for example, household assets), their extra household environmental parameters (EEPs), and therefore, their bargaining power in the reproductive decision-making. As earlier mentioned, EEPs are the material and non-material resources available to a spouse, an which the spouse could rely on for survival and thriving in the case of divorce (McElroy, 1990). EEPs are different from the household assets, which may be individually or jointly owned by the spouses. Accordingly, EEPs may be available, to only an individual spouse, and this is usually outside the household. In the event of divorce, a spouse has access to EEPs without hindrance from the former spouse. It is hypothesized in this study that the availability of EEPs to a woman would strengthen her reproductive bargaining power. Bargaining power is defined in this study as the ability to assert oneself, to negotiate with one's spouse on crucial issues (such as reproductive issues), and to obtain favourable outcomes from the negotiation.

Bargaining power is influenced by the 'fall-back position' (Agarwal, 1997: 4), which refers to how well-off each spouse will be if divorce occurs. In furtherance to that, EEPs were operationalised as the availability, to a woman in the event of divorce, of any or combination of the following: parent's wealth, own salary/ wage, credit and small informal businesses/ enterprises (exemplified in this study by food stall). The study investigated the perceptions of Nigerian women on the influence of the availability of EEPs on reproductive bargaining. From the foregoing conceptualization of reproductive bargaining, it will be used interchangeably with reproductive decision-making in this paper. The research was guided by these questions: (i) How does the availability of extra household environmental parameters influence women's bargaining power in reproductive bargaining? (ii) How does the availability of extra household environmental parameters influence women's choice of divorce in the event of failure of bargaining on reproductive issues?

The following null hypothesis was tested 'There is no significant difference between the mean responses of literate and non-literate women on the influence of extra household environmental parameters on women's preference for divorce if bargaining for reproductive issues fails'.

## 2. Methods

This was a cross-sectional descriptive, population-based, questionnaire survey, carried out in rural and semi-urban communities in Enugu State, Nigeria. The respondents were women only as the research sought to assess the perspectives of women on the issue under exploration. The women were within the childbearing age range. Since the phenomenon being investigated was about intrahousehold gender relations between couples, only married women constituted the sample.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Additionally, to obtain the informed consent of the respondents, they were clearly told the objectives and methods of the study and were informed that they were at liberty to quit the study at any time without any implications whatever. They were also informed that participation was free and entailed no harm, that their responses would be confidential and analyzed only in the context of this research. No identifiers were included in the questionnaire. These ethical details given to the respondents were upheld throughout the research.

### 2.1. Sample and Sampling Procedure

One hundred and fifty women in conjugal relations were sampled through multistage sampling procedure. The LGAs were stratified into senatorial zones, and two LGAs were randomly selected from each of three senatorial zones. Communities in each LGA were stratified into rural and semi-urban communities. Further selection was through random sampling of in each of the rural community stratum and semi-urban community stratum. The next stage was the purposive sampling of 25 married women each from each of the stratum (giving 50 respondents per LGA).

### 2.2. Data Collection

The data collection tool was a two-part pre-tested questionnaire with Part A containing queries on sociodemographic variables while Part B had items with responses graded one (1) to four (4) corresponding to Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA) on a Likert-type scale.

Internal consistency of the tool was tested using questionnaires administered to respondents with similar characteristics in a Local Government where the research was not conducted. Data for the test were analyzed using Chronbach's Alpha reliability test. The reliability coefficient was 0.94. The first author alongside trained research assistants carried out the data collection with the questionnaires. The questionnaires were self-administered except for six non-literate respondents, whom the researcher assisted in the completion of the questionnaire by interpreting the information and helping them in filling the questionnaires. Data were analysed with SPSS v12 (SPSS Inc.). Descriptive statistics was done. This was followed by hypothesis testing through computation of the Critical Ratio (Z-score).

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents

All respondents were females because the study was conceptualized to elicit information from women only. The age range of the respondents was between 18 years and 53 years with a mean age of 34 years. Conceptually, though, the inclusion criteria allowed women of 15 to 59 years to participate.

	Rural (N=75)	Semi-urban (N=75)
	N (%)	N (%)
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	71 (94.5)	74 (98.7)
Traditional worshipper	4 (6.5)	0 (0.00)
None	0 (0.00)	1 (1.37)
<b>Occupation</b>		
Housewife	0 (0)	3 (4)
Farming	64 (85)	1 (1.3)
Civil servants	8 (10.7)	15 (20)
Self-employed	3 (4.3)	56 (74.7)
<b>Educational Status</b>	No. (%)	No. (%)
None	6 (8)	0 (0)
Primary school	39 (52)	28 (37.3)
High school	21 (28)	26 (34.7)
Post-secondary school	9 (12)	21 (28)

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents

Most of the respondents were Christians in both rural and semi-urban communities. This is no surprise given that it is fashionable to identify oneself as a Christian in the area as Christianity connotes modernity. In the rural area, the primary occupation of the majority of the respondents was farming (85 percent) with a few being self-employed. Literacy in this study was defined as having completed primary school education. By this definition, only 6 women (8 percent) were non-literate. And these were rural respondents. In the rural area, many respondents had primary school education while a good number had attended high school. Among the urban respondents, the numbers that had primary school education only, high school education, and post-secondary school education fairly evenly distributed (28 respondents, 26 respondents and 21 respondents respectively). Details are shown in Table 1.

### 3.2. Extra household Environmental Parameters and Reproductive Decision Making

Table 2 summarizes the mean responses of women on their perceptions of the extent that availability of extra household environmental parameters (EEPs) influence women's bargaining power in the intrahousehold reproductive decision making process.

Item No.	Influence of extra household environmental parameters on reproductive bargaining among women	Mean Responses		
		Non-literate	Literate	Total
1	A wife whose parents are wealthy is capable of negotiating with her husband over when to get pregnant.	2.01	2.16	2.09
2	A wife whose parents are wealthy is capable of negotiating with her husband over the number of children to have.	1.98	2	1.99
3	A wife whose parents are wealthy is capable of negotiating with her husband over the spacing of her childbirths.	1.97	2.03	2
4	A wife who has an employment with monthly salary is capable of negotiating with her husband over when to get pregnant.	1.84	2.07	1.95
5	A wife who has an employment with monthly salary is capable of negotiating with her husband over the number of children to have.	1.82	1.96	1.89
6	A wife who has an employment with monthly salary is capable of negotiating with her husband over the spacing of her childbirths.	1.79	1.93	1.86
7	A wife who has access to credit facility is capable of negotiating with her husband over when to get pregnant.	1.65	1.95	1.8
8	A wife who has access to credit facility is capable of negotiating with her husband over the number of children to have.	1.63	1.96	1.79
9	A wife who has access to credit facility is capable of negotiating with her husband over the spacing of her childbirths.	1.57	1.88	1.73
10	A wife who has a food stall is capable of negotiating with her husband over when to get pregnant.	1.56	1.95	1.75
11	A wife who has a food stall is capable of negotiating with her husband over the number of children to have.	1.61	1.88	1.75
12	A wife who has a food stall is capable of negotiating with her husband over the spacing of her childbirths.	1.53	1.87	1.7
Grand mean		<b>2.09</b>	<b>2.36</b>	<b>2.23</b>

Table 2: Influence of Extra household Environmental Parameters on Reproductive Bargaining among Women in Southern Nigeria

The analysis of the responses on influence of access to social and economic opportunities outside the household on bargaining power in reproductive decision-making was also carried out (Table 2). The mean response of each item was less than the decision point.

The grand mean for the entire cluster was 2.23 which was also less than 2.50 decision point. This suggests that participants felt that EEPs would not exert much influence on women's bargaining power in the reproductive decision making within their households.

Results of further analysis is shown in Table 3 which depicts the standard error (SE) standard deviation (SD) and Z-score as part of a test of the hypothesis that 'There is no significant difference between the mean responses of literate and non-literate women on the influence of extra household environmental parameters on women's bargaining power in reproductive decision-making'. This hypothesis was tested at  $p < 0.05$  level of significance (two-tailed). This hypothesis was tested using CR test to compare the mean responses of literate respondents with the mean responses of non-literate respondents. The calculated z-score is 0.60, which is less than the critical z-score value of 1.96. The hypothesis was accepted since the calculated z-score was less than the critical z-score.

	N	Mean	S.E	S.D.	Calculated Z- score	Critical Z-score	Decision
Literate Women	73	1.84	0.1	0.88	0.6	1.96	Ho not rejected
Non-literate Women	77	1.75	0.11	0.97			

Table 3: Z- test of difference between mean responses of literate and non-literate women on influence of EEPs on their bargaining power in reproductive decision-making.

EEPs = extra household environmental parameters; S.E = standard error; S.D. = standard deviation

This suggests that the literate women were of similar opinion to the non-literate women on the influence of extra household environmental parameters on women's bargaining power in reproductive decision-making. It could be recalled that earlier results indicate that the respondents were generally of the opinion that availability of extra household environmental parameters would not substantially influence women's bargaining power in reproductive decision-making.

### 3.3. Extra household Environmental Parameters and Women's Preference for Divorce if Negotiation Fails

The research also explored the respondents' perceptions on the extent to which the availability of extra household environmental parameters influences women's choice of divorce in the event of failure of bargaining over reproductive issues. The results show that the mean scores of responses on whether women whose parents are wealthy will prefer to divorce her husband if he imposes on her an unfavourable decision on when to get pregnant were below the decision point of 2.50. The mean scores of responses for the related issues of imposition of the number of children and imposition of childbirth spacing were also below 2.50.

Item No.	Influence of extra household environmental parameters on divorce in the event of bargaining failure	Mean Responses		
		Non-literate	Literate	Total
1	A wife whose parents are wealthy is capable of divorcing her husband if he imposes when to get pregnant on her.	1.92	1.89	1.91
2	A wife whose parents are wealthy is capable of divorcing her husband if he imposes the number of children to have on her.	1.88	1.95	1.91
3	A wife whose parents are wealthy is capable of divorcing her husband if he imposes the spacing of her childbirths on her.	1.84	1.87	1.85
4	A wife who has an employment with monthly salary is capable of divorcing her husband if he imposes when to get pregnant on her.	1.68	1.96	1.82
5	A wife who has an employment with monthly salary is capable of divorcing her husband if he imposes the number of children to have on her.	1.75	1.89	1.82
6	A wife who has an employment with monthly salary is capable of divorcing her husband if he imposes the spacing of her childbirths on her.	1.72	1.83	1.77
7	A wife who has access to credit facility is capable of divorcing her husband if he imposes when to get pregnant on her.	1.6	1.87	1.73
8	A wife who has access to credit facility is capable of divorcing her husband if he imposes the number of children to have on her.	1.51	1.89	1.7
9	A wife who has access to credit facility is capable of divorcing her husband if he imposes the spacing of her childbirths on her.	1.61	1.93	1.77
10	A wife who has a food stall is capable of divorcing her husband if he imposes when to get pregnant on her.	1.52	1.85	1.69
11	A wife who has a food stall is capable of divorcing her husband if he imposes the number of children to have on her.	1.45	1.84	1.65
12	A wife who has a food stall is capable of divorcing her husband if he imposes the spacing of her childbirths on her.	1.52	1.88	1.7
Grand mean		2	2.27	2.13

Table 4: Influence of Extra household Environmental Parameters on Preference for Divorce in the Event of Bargaining Failure

A set of three related items concerns whether a woman who has an employment with monthly salary will prefer to divorce her husband if he imposes unfavourable decisions of reproductive issues on her were analyzed. The results reveal that the mean scores of responses for both rural and semi-urban respondents were below 2.50 for each of the reproductive issues: when to get pregnant, the number of children to have, and spacing of child births.

In terms of access to credit facility and women's preference for divorce in the event of reproductive bargaining failure, the results show that the means of responses were less than 2.50 for both rural and semi-urban respondents across all reproductive issues (when to get pregnant, number of children and child spacing).

Results of perceptions of women on the influence of women's possession of food stall on their preference for divorce if their husbands impose unfavourable reproductive decisions on them shows mean responses lower than 2.50 for all the reproductive issues. The grand mean for all the items in this cluster (2.13) was below 2.50. This implies a general perception among the respondents that availability of extra household environmental parameters to a wife does not substantially influence her preference for divorce.

More indepth analysis involved testing of a hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the mean responses of literate and non-literate married women on the influence of extra household environmental parameters on women's preference for divorce if reproductive bargaining fails. This hypothesis was tested using the CR test at the  $p < 0.05$  level of significance (two-tailed). From the results (Table 5), it can be seen that the calculated Z-score (0.17) is less than the critical Z-score (1.96). Consequently, the hypothesis was not rejected.

	N	Mean	S.E	S.D.	Calculated Z-score	Critical Z-score	Decision
Literate Women	73	2.17	0.12	1.09	0.17	1.96	Hypothesis: not rejected
Non-literate Women	77	2.08	0.14	1.18			

Table 5: Z- test of difference between mean responses of literate and non-literate women on influence of EEPs on women's preference for divorce if bargaining for reproductive issues fails.

EEPs = extra household environmental parameters; S.E = standard error; S.D. = standard deviation

This suggests that both literate and non-literate respondents had similar perceptions on the influence of extra household environmental parameters on women's preference for divorce in the event of failure of reproductive bargaining. And this perception was that wives even if they had extra household environmental parameters, would prefer not to go for divorce in the event of failure of reproductive bargaining. These results suggest that the respondents perceived that availability of extra household environmental parameters to a married woman does not significantly influence her bargaining power in reproductive decision-making.

#### 4. Discussion

This study sought to contribute to improved understanding of intrahousehold gender relations in the context of reproductive decision making. McElroy postulates that making of decisions within the households is akin to bargaining because the household members to a larger or lesser extent engage in negotiation (McElroy, 1990). In McElroy's view, the individual selfish/ self-centred likes and dislikes, world-view, choices about reproduction and family values, and other social and economic inclinations of the partners are not only brought into the marriage but also persist in the marriage. This therefore creates tension between the spouses in arriving at decisions on critical issues such as childbearing, leading in some instances to divorce. The findings in our study arguably contrast with McElroy's postulation. In our study, the respondents were of the opinion that even if women in their communities have wealthy parents, they may still not be willing to divorce their husbands if they (the husbands) impose unfavourable reproductive choices on them.

Our study findings also suggest that while the pursuit of selfish agenda within the household, as opposed to common and mutually beneficial interests (cf. Becker, 1976, 1981) may lead to conflicts in the bargaining process, women would usually not prefer divorce even when they have access to extra household environmental parameters.

Thus, the study findings suggest that unfavourable reproductive bargaining and availability of extra household environmental parameters are less powerful social factors in women's consideration of whether to remain in the marriage or to go for divorce.

These findings are similar to those obtained in Odebode's (2004) research in Ibadan, Nigeria. Odebode found that although they have economic opportunities outside their households, the majority of women in her study preferred to remain in their marriage despite unfavourable marital experience (including reproductive bargaining with their husbands).

Exploration of the reasons why married women in the study area may not wish to go for divorce even if they have wealthy parents or economic opportunities outside their households was beyond the scope of this study. However, in the study area, anecdote suggests that strong social norms override the effect of EEPs. This is because social norms on gender relations dictate how divorced women are treated in the communities. And in these communities, divorced women are not accorded positive regard. That is, they suffer stigma and discrimination within their communities and they find it very difficult to remarry. In contrast to McElroy (1990) and Haddad, Hoddinott and Alderman's (1997) view that the preference to remain in marriage is because women consider that it is more beneficial, in the communities where this study was carried out, it is the social force of cultural norms that compel women who otherwise would go for divorce to stay in their conjugal relationships.

The responses are contrary to the propositions of McElroy (1990) and Agarwal (1997) who espouse that EEPs increase women's bargaining power resulting in better and favourable outcomes from the reproductive decision-making process. But according to the respondents, this is not necessarily the case in their communities where they stated that extra household environmental parameters will not increase women's bargaining power.

The finding that availability of extra household environmental parameters has no substantial influence on women's attitude to divorce implies further weakening of women's bargaining power over reproductive issues. It implies that most women will prefer enduring very unfavourable choices imposed on them by their husbands to divorce despite the fact that they can take care of themselves by their parental wealth/support and /or their economic activities outside their households.

## 5. Conclusions

The lack of ability of women to convert parental wealth and economic opportunities into an increase in their bargaining power implies that, in the study communities, bargaining power involves more than women's access to parental wealth and extra household economic opportunities. Social norms on gender relations seem to exert more influence on reproductive decision-making than EEPs, and since the norms favour men, they deepen the inequality in gender relations within the household. Women's preference for remaining in the marriage instead of divorce despite being subjected to oppressive reproductive decision-making process does not augur well for gender relations and women's wellbeing (including their reproductive health).

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