

THE FAMILY LIFESTYLE IN NIGERIA

By

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria families are patriarchal with extended family members having more say than usual in comparison to family setups in the westernized world. Although children are very important to Nigeria families because parents believe that their children will provide support for them in their old age, family relationships are mostly guided by strict system of 'seniority' and male tended egoistic values.

Emphasis has always been placed on male members of the family more because of their rights to both family inheritance and extension of family lineage and name. Embedded in the family system are social norms passed down from one generation to another. Most of these societal norms cut across the nation irrespective of age, educational achievement, religion, marital status and so on. With the gradual introduction of western lifestyle and religious virtues, one is interested in knowing if the Nigeria lifestyle trend is still the same.

This was a trial study that examined the Nigeria family lifestyle with emphasis on the South West population of the country, who are generally referred to as 'Yorubas'. Case studies of people interviewed were examined and reviewed based on the author's opinion and certain defined criterias. The cases were classified using both Africa (Nigeria) and westernized virtues as being blessing, if the lifestyle benefits the individual, curse, if the lifestyle does not benefit the individual, and mixed blessing if it is a fifty percent chance in both ways. Also the notion and act of patriarchal family setup and favouritism of male children above female children is examined.

The study was conducted sampling “Yoruba” men and women of different ages, social background and religious affinity, but all individuals are formally educated. The people interviewed were not necessarily couples although some of them are. The couples interviewed are of opposite sex and legally married (this is crucial to reduce biasness). For the couple, they are either both “Yoruba” or at least one of the spouse is “Yoruba”. If only one of the married couple is “Yoruba”, the other must necessarily be a Nigerian (this is also crucial to reduce biasness). The assumption that if one of the married couple is “Yoruba”, then the other can be assumed to be affiliated to the “Yoruba” lifestyle is based on a “Yoruba” saying that “if the leaf stays too long on the soap, it becomes soap”. Thus the non *Yoruba* spouse can as well be assumed to be Yoruba after being married for so long (say three years and above) to a Yoruba indigene. The individuals interviewed comprised of those living in the country and out side the country (such as in South Africa, England, Canada, United States and Ireland).

A small presentation of the information obtained was done using simple descriptive statistics such as bar charts and also Fisher’s test and Logistic regression. Findings are consistent with those in some existing literatures viz that while some Nigeria family lifestyle norms are good, so many have to be revised. Also that while some see the Nigeria family lifestyle as a curse, some also see it as a mixed blessing. And that women are the ones at disadvantage whether married or single. Further examination shows that despite an affinity to western lifestyle, the male counterparts still show some male egoistic traits common to Nigerian men, even for those living outside the country.

This study was conducted only on those with formal education and the response was rather too low in number, hence the results obtained can not be generalized as the ideal case for the “Yoruba” populace in Nigeria. Noting the lack of similar studies in the country for those with informal education, the paper calls for a similar research to be conducted on this group. The implication of the findings is the need for certain Nigeria family lifestyle to be totally abolished, and the need for the involvement of the religious organization and the women’s family to be emphasized. It is believed that if such measures are taken, then the Nigeria families can have balanced family lifestyle and hence, reduce the adverse effects imbalanced lifestyle causes, such as separation, divorce, non-communicable diseases (high blood pressure, depression and so on).

Keywords: women, culture, norms, westernization.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I acknowledge and thank Dr. O. A. Labeodan for his encouragement and persistence in making this trial study a reality and Mr. P. Igonor for his unrelentless help especially in analyzing the data, although the data set was very small, but still he was there to help.

Thank you so much.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, the family is extremely important. The Nigerian families are not the epitome of indestructible knit, but there is still that strong family bond which is mostly described by the saying that blood is thicker than water; and fuelled by strong societal traditional norms. Marriage which is a means by which a family is formed is viewed as a necessary but not sufficient condition to create a family. Most individuals aspire to marry especially before the age of thirty five (for women) and forty two (for men). Although there are exceptions to this, mainly the Christians striving to live a life of celibacy and some others who have either refused to marry for certain reasons or have been labeled in the society as “no-go-area” for marriage. Despite the westernized lifestyle slowly sipping into the community especially amongst the Yoruba tribe, the issue of marriage or even the family system at large is not a private one, these two institutions are rarely established without the interference of the extended family members (Boomie; Caldwell, Orubuloye and Caldwell, 1991; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994; Aluko and Alfa, 1985; Bascom, 1969).

Although Nigeria families are patrilineal, hardly can one observe remarkable difference between Nigeria families and some Africa countries whose families are matrilineal. Ogundipe – Leslie had the following stated as the general norm in most Africa communities.

African women are weighed down by superstructural forms deriving from the pre-colonial past. In most African societies, whether patrilineal or matrilineal, gender hierarchy, male supremacy or sex asymmetry (or whatever term we choose to use) was known and taken for granted. Even in matrilineal societies, women were still

subordinate to men, considered as second place to men; the only difference being that inheritance and authority pass through the women to the male of the line (rather than it passing through the male to the male line as in the case of patrilineal families). Men are still dominant in private and public life. The ideology that men are naturally superior to women in essence and in all areas, affects the modern day organization of societal structures. This ideology prolongs the attitudes of negative discrimination against women.

With the fast spread of education in Nigeria especially amongst the Yoruba tribes, one would think that the Nigeria families and even the society as a whole is being fastly westernized. This is far from the truth or what would be expected. Authors such as Boomie, Caldwell, Orubuloye, Ogundipe-Leslie to mention a few had in the past described the typical African societies of which Yoruba is not excluded. Ogundipe-Leslie painted the picture so well in her description quoted below.

... From the traditional past also came notions of the physical control of woman's body and its product. Under this issue came purdah, genital mutilation, the lack of control over her body's biology or its products such as children who are viewed to belong to the man's family (i.e. the couple's extended family on the husband's side). She is but a beast that produces the man's children on his behalf. These aspects of the oppression of women in Africa are very important to African women though they tend not to wish to emphasize the quest for sexual freedom and promiscuity which preoccupy the western feminist. Nonetheless, the African male fears the attainment of equal sexual freedom for women.

Emphasis has always been placed on the male especially in the family system; mainly because the families in Nigeria are patrilineal, the males are seen as continuity of both family name and lineage and the men are supposed to be dominant with women being subject to them. The males are described with strong adjectives such as perfect, strong, fit, authoritative, self sufficient etc (just think of adjectives in that line that can be used). Unlike the men, the women are described by their biological sex and family responsibilities and their beauty is only seen through these myopic lenses (Franklin, 1977). Franklin amongst many writers described the African (west) woman in non – compromising words:

... Beauty where life is marginal, as it is in much of Africa has a special meaning. The most beautiful thing of all is to survive. That which helps to survive is beautiful. Thus a woman may be beautiful because she has a strong back for farm, or the sturdy neck and shoulders which enable her to carry a larger and more profitable load to the market ... or the endurance to fetch water as needed. She is also beautiful if she is skilled in haggling, has relatives who can be hit for a loan if the need arises, or is blessed with the sort of hips that glorify a husband through frequent and easy childbirth.

Norms are strongly adhered to in Nigeria families. The woman either as a daughter or sister has more value, authority and even in many cases right to inheritance (Ogundipe-Leslie, Aluko). Immediately she marries, she is treated as one of the possessions, voiceless, without rights, with constrained freedom and without her own identity (since

she has to take up her husband's family name and drop her father's family name). She is treated as a nobody in her matrimonial home especially by her in-laws, with constraints which are not imposed on either their (in-laws) daughters or sisters imposed on her. She becomes the wife who is left to do all the house chores (which in her father's house is either shared or left for the youngest) and still go to a paid job and fulfill her sexual role at home. When it comes to social obligations such as marriages, meetings, naming ceremonies, chieftancies, funerals, birthdays etc, she is usually the first to get to the venues where these occasions are done, and most times the last to leave. The bulk of the preparation, cooking and cleaning is done by her with little time to enjoy the occasion (Aluko, Boomie). She is treated as a slave without consideration or feelings (after all that is how slaves are treated). In many cases, the mother-in-law and even the sister(s)-in-law mistreat the wives, forbidding their sons (or brothers) to do any house chores. These same in-laws in so many cases either rule and run the woman's home from theirs or even move in to live in their son's (or brother's) home.

The Nigeria men once married has nothing to loose but all to gain (a wife, children, respect in the society and even a wife-personified-housekeeper). Demand is not placed on the man in anyway. The men argue that they are forcefully burdened with the financial responsibilities of their wives' family (especially in cases such as marriage, funeral, schooling etc). If they feel constrained and overburdened, what about the women (their wives) who have been demoralized emotionally and physically, forced into a purdah like life by the so called societal norms and customs, and made voiceless without any identity of theirs?

Nigeria families are also guided by the strict system of seniority (Fadipe, 1970). The issue of seniority cuts across the nation and it is so clear that it is mostly guided by male egoistic ideology. Older members of the family are never addressed by their first name. Instead they are addressed as mummy, daddy, uncle, aunty, brother, sister etc according to their sex, age and relationship with addressee. The married woman unlike her male counterpart is forced to continue with the family norm of seniority. She is forbidden to call anyone from her husband's side (extended family) by first name. She has to use the afore mentioned prefix or coined names for any family member such as *iyale* (senior woman), *baba oko* (father/brother-in-law), *idi leke* (one embodied in beads) etc; even if she's older than them in age or better than them in monetary and social status. On the other hand, as afore mentioned, the men have nothing to loose. He addresses only those older than him (from either his or her family) by the prefix (no coined names needed). He is not expected or demanded to use these prefix to address those younger than him or of same age as him.

With the wide fanatic spread of religion in Nigeria, one would presume that the family norms would have changed. Religion still has not been able to have an upper arm in the Nigeria family norms, hereby liberating the women. Islam is rather suppressive of women and some Christian leaders hide under the cloak of *Ephesians 5: 22 – 24*, using it as a suppressive weapon for the women in their denomination. Bearing all these in mind, one would not be wrong to assume or have the idea that the family lifestyle in Nigeria portrays women having stereotyped roles, limited/constraining freedom and they can only

exist in relation to men. Thus in this paper, the Nigeria family lifestyle is examined from a feminist side with the norms examined as either favourable to individuals especially the women or they have to be abolished. The consequences of the patrilineal family setup are discussed and data obtained from a small trial survey are analyzed. The author wishes to reiterate that the Nigeria family lifestyle and norms examined and discussed in this paper are neither exhaustive nor theories in their own. Thus the research is still open to further study (this is because this is a trial test to a big intended research) and opinion, ideas and contributions from readers are welcome.

2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Nigeria has been described as the most populous country in Africa with an estimate of 120 million people, and having 252 officially documented languages or dialects. In Africa, not only is she a country endowed with beautiful scenery and abundant mineral resources, but she also has the highest number of individuals with formal education and highest recorded number of individuals who have immigrated to other countries. The westernized lifestyle seem to have been embraced and is depicted in the mannerism, dressing, social life and even religious affinity (with Christianity fast spreading). Despite the fast spread of westernized lifestyle and easier access to formal education, the Nigeria family norms are still strictly adhere to. Studies showed that women are the ones at disadvantage in many Nigeria families. This research (trial study) addresses two areas namely: the Nigeria lifestyle and norms; and if it was true that women felt oppressed and what variables had significant effect on the oppression of women in Nigeria families.

3.0 YORUBA FAMILY NORMS AND LIFESTYLE

Nigeria families cannot be said to be westernized in comparison to families in the first world countries despite the extent of education in the country. Ingrained in the countries societal norms is the family lifestyle which generally speaking may appear explicitly the same amongst tribes but somewhat may differ across the nation. A family norm common to all tribes in the nation is the loosely used phrases such as uncle, aunty, brother, sister, mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, cousin etc. men and women in the society are addressed as these depending on their age and degree of closeness to the individual who is addressing them. These terms are mostly not used as defined in the English world (or dictionary). For instance I could decide to address my father's best friend mother as my grandmother. This is because she could also pass as my father's mother, maybe in the context of fosterhood, or more as the norm. Another would be the addressing of other mothers in a polygamy home as ones mother and giving the titles such as *iya mi agba* which literarily means the my oldest mother to the first wife of the family, and subsequent wives addressed as *iya mi keji*, *iya mi keta* etc (these means, my second mother, my third mother etc) as the case may be. This has become a very important and common norm in the country because the task of training and looking after a child in Nigeria is more a community work rather than a family or individual responsibility.

A common knowledge about Nigeria is the love for children. Families can go to any extent to have children. The extent they can go to have children include visits to diviners, shrines, *alaso adura* (white garment preachers) or even the practice of

polygamy. This is irrespective of being educated or not. To a mere observer, it would seem that both the educated and the uneducated have been reduced to the same without any societal class just because of the bid to have children or in some cases male children. Nowadays it is a common occurrence for the bride-to-be to be pregnant before the wedding (this is frowned at by the Christian sect and could lead to excommunication of such person or couples involved from the local church). This is assumed to be an insurance that the bride is not barren. Polygamy is widely accepted, but it is becoming less common amongst the formally educated. More because of either the economic strain or the emotional and psychological strain. Rather, illicit extra-marital affairs amongst the so called proclaimed elite monogamous people of the society is still a common sight (or maybe hearsay or gossips).

A common norm is the act of celebration. Parties are held for practically any event that occur in the home ranging from naming ceremonies to funerals. The unfortunate thing is despite the joy and undeniable spirit of celebration in the air, these ceremonies are usually very flamboyant, especially with the westernized lifestyle being imbibed. It has been observed that the more affinity the *Yorubas* have towards the westernized lifestyle, the more flamboyant they are in their lifestyle. This is rather surprising considering the fact that the western culture is rather self sufficient and enclosed with reservation especially to the outside community (i.e other families). People of the community argue that their flamboyant way of life is due to the fact that the society expects much from them, especially when one is well read. Is it not a fact that the society is actually made up we the same people, then why do these same people feel under constrained to live

flamboyant, expensive lives, especially in a country with practically everything (education, roads, health care services, water supply, electricity supply etc) deteriorating? I would want to believe that this is so because the *Yorubas* especially are rather epicureans naturally (author's opinion).

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Study Site

The *Yorubas* are the second largest ethnic group in Nigeria with them occupying the Southwestern area of the country. Although the *Yorubas* are virtually found all over the world, they are the indigenes of *Oyo, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Ekiti, Kwara, Ondo* state and a substantial part of *Edo* and *Kogi* state. They also inhabit the south eastern part of the country called the Republic of *Benin*. The *Yorubas* make up twenty percent (20%) of the Nigeria's population with more than twenty five million people. They have the largest number of people who are formally educated, and hence better able to cope with the changes brought about by contact with outside (or westernized) world. This was because they were the first to have Christianity established amongst them. And this also produced a population that is mostly Christian, although there exist a diversity of religion such as Islam, traditional religion etc amongst the *Yorubas*. According to Fadipe (1970), students of urbanization know them (*Yorubas*) for their traditional pattern of residence in large cities, a situation unique among the world's non-literate people. Settlements in the *Yoruba* land can be classified as urban, rural and semi-urban with the capital towns of each of these states being urban. And the *Yorubas* are extremely rich and varied culturally, religiously and verbally with the highest recorded number of dialects.

4.2 Data Description

This study was conducted on Yoruba men and women. The data used are primary data obtained from questionnaire interview administered mostly via the internet (sent to respondents' email addresses) and in some cases through the telephone. These questionnaires were either administered mostly through the internet (by emailing them to respondents) while some were posted. And the respondents were of different ages, religious background, social background, educational attainment etc. one common factor is that all respondents are formally educated with at least some form of primary education. The last educational qualification were used especially for those who are in the universities and undergoing a honours, masters or doctorate degree. For city of residence, the nearest city was recorded especially for those living at the outskirts of such cities. The people interviewed were not necessarily couples, although some of them are. Couples interviewed are of opposite sex, legally married and in monogamy marriages.

4.3 Analysis

Table 1: Percentage Age Distribution of Respondents

Age	Male (N = 35)	Female (N = 43)	Total (N = 78)
20 - 29	8.97	12.82	21.79
30 – 39	21.79	29.47	51.28
40 – 49	5.13	6.41	11.54
50 – 59	5.13	2.56	7.69
60 – 69	1.28	1.28	2.56
70 – 79	2.56	0.00	2.56
80 - 89	0.00	2.56	2.56

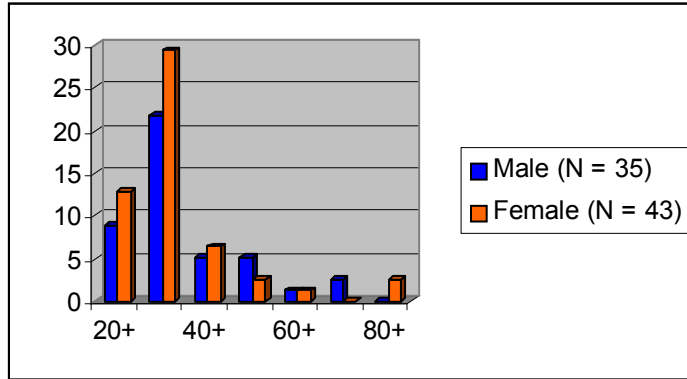


Figure 1: Bar Chart of Age Distribution of Respondents

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Religious Affinity of Respondents

Characteristics	Male (N = 35)	Female (N = 43)	Total (N = 78)
Religion			
Orthodox Christianity	10.26	11.54	21.79
Pentecostal Christianity	30.77	37.18	67.96
Roman Catholic	1.28	5.13	6.41
Islam	1.28	1.28	2.56
Others	1.28	0.00	1.28

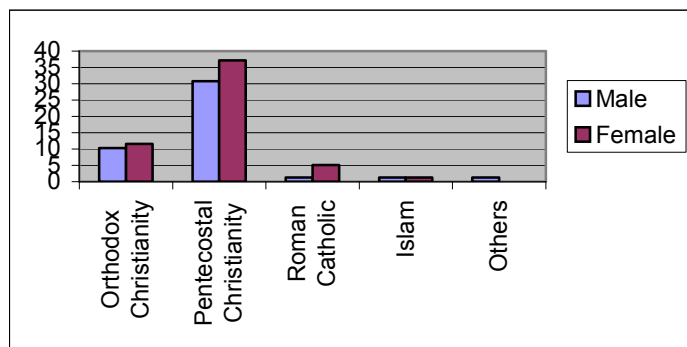


Figure 2: Bar Chart of Religious Affinity of Respondents

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Marital Information of Respondents

Characteristics	Male (N = 35)	Female (N = 43)	Total (N = 78)
Marital Status			
Single	15.38	21.77	37.18
Married	25.64	29.49	55.13
Divorced	1.28	0.00	1.28
Widowed	2.56	3.85	6.41
Number of Children			
None	21.79	25.64	47.44
One	3.85	7.69	11.54
Two	6.41	12.82	19.23
Three	3.85	2.56	6.41
Four	5.13	2.56	7.69
Five	1.28	1.28	2.56
Six	1.28	2.56	3.85
Eleven	1.28	0.00	1.28

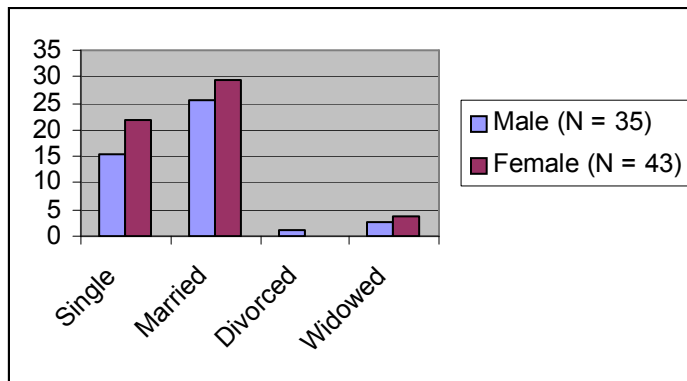


Figure 3: Bar Chart of Marital Status of Respondents

Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Educational Achievement of Respondents

Characteristics	Male (N = 35)	Female (N = 43)	Total (N = 78)
Educational level Completed			
Primary school	0.00	1.28	1.28
Secondary School	1.28	3.85	5.13
Tertiary	43.59	50.00	93.59
Educational Achievement			
PSLC ¹	0.00	1.28	1.28
WAEC ²	1.28	3.85	5.13
N.C.E ³	0.00	5.13	5.13
HDip	1.28	0.00	1.28
O.N.D ⁴	1.28	0.00	1.28
H.N.D ⁵	0.00	2.56	2.56
Bachelors Degree	24.36	28.21	52.56
Masters Degree	11.54	11.54	23.08
Ph.D ⁶	5.13	2.56	7.69
D.Sc ⁷	1.28	0.00	1.28

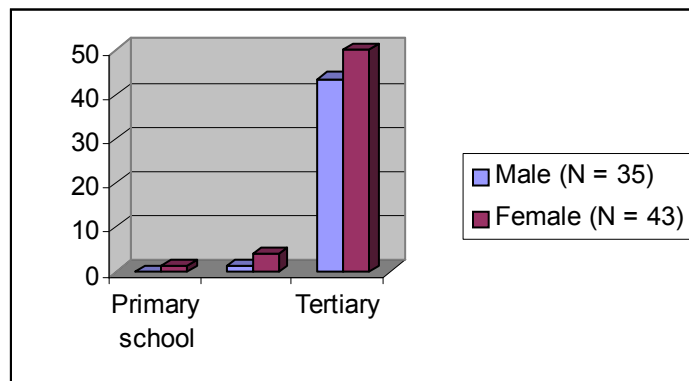


Figure 4: Bar Chart of Educational Level Completed of Respondents

¹ Primary School leaving certificate.

² West Africa Examination Council.

³ National Certificate of Education.

⁴ Ordinary National Diploma.

⁵ Higher National Diploma.

⁶ Doctorate of Philosophy.

⁷ Doctor of Science.

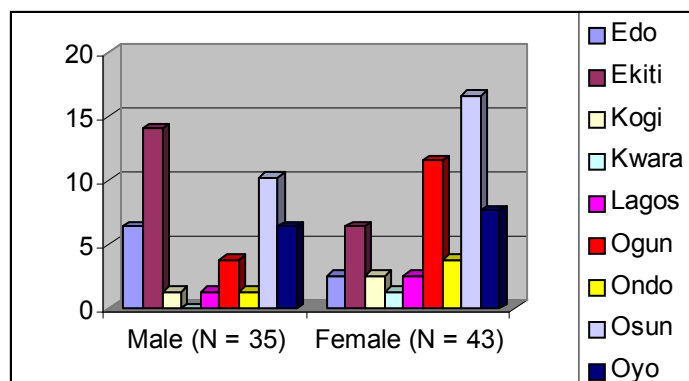


Figure 5: Bar Chart of State of Origin of Respondents

Table 5: Percentage Distribution of Nationality and Present Residence of Respondents

Characteristics	Male (N = 35)	Female (N = 43)	Total (N = 78)
Country of Birth			
Nigeria	44.87	52.56	97.44
United Kingdom	0.00	2.56	2.56
State of Origin			
Edo	6.41	2.56	8.97
Ekiti	14.10	6.41	20.51
Kogi	1.28	2.56	3.85
Kwara	0.00	1.28	1.28
Lagos	1.28	2.56	3.85
Ogun	3.85	11.54	15.38
Ondo	1.28	3.85	5.13
Osun	10.26	16.67	26.92
Oyo	6.41	7.69	14.10
Present Nationality			
Nigeria	41.03	47.44	88.46
South Africa	1.28	3.85	5.13
United Kingdom	0.00	2.56	2.56
United States of America	2.56	1.28	3.85
Present Country of Residence			
Australia	0.00	1.28	1.28
Canada	2.56	3.85	6.41
Germany	0.00	1.28	1.28
Lesotho	1.28	0.00	1.28
Nigeria	24.36	28.21	52.26
Saudi Arabia	1.28	0.00	1.28
South Africa	10.26	11.54	21.79
United Kingdom	1.28	5.13	6.41
United States of America	3.85	3.85	7.69

Table 6: Percentage Distribution of Family Norms Information of Respondents

Characteristics	Male (N = 35)	Female (N = 43)	Total (N = 78)
Oppression of Women			
Agree	5.13	16.67	21.79
Strongly Agree	8.97	28.21	37.18
Disagree	15.38	2.56	17.95
Strongly Disagree	15.38	7.69	23.08
Norms as Blessing			
Agree	24.36	30.77	55.13
Strongly Agree	16.67	7.69	24.36
Disagree	3.85	7.69	11.54
Strongly Disagree	0.00	8.97	8.97
Norms as Curse			
Agree	15.38	23.08	38.46
Strongly Agree	3.85	16.67	20.51
Disagree	6.41	3.85	10.26
Strongly Disagree	19.23	11.54	30.77
Norms as Mixed Blessings			
Agree	26.92	32.05	58.97
Strongly Agree	1.28	3.85	5.13
Disagree	3.85	2.56	6.41
Strongly Disagree	12.82	16.67	29.46

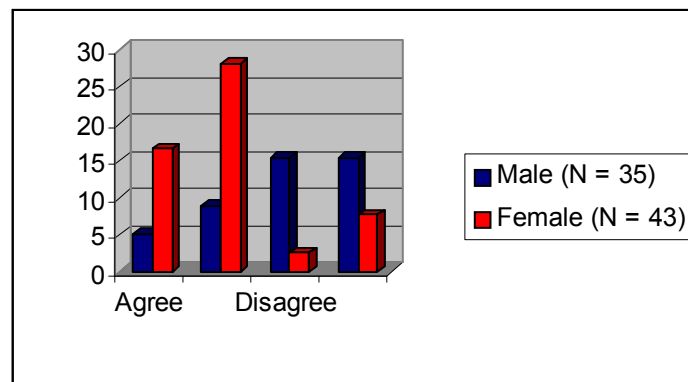


Figure 6: Bar Chart of Respondents on Oppression of Women

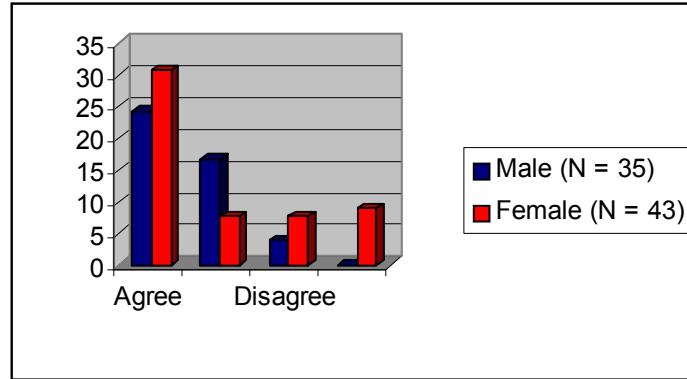


Figure 7: Bar Chart of Respondents on Nigeria Family Norms as Blessing

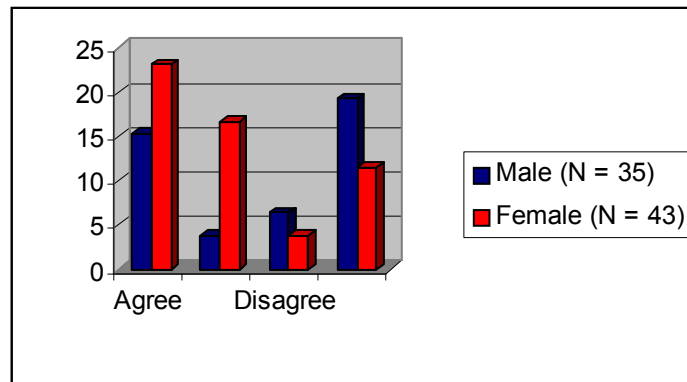


Figure 8: Bar Chart of Respondents on Nigeria Family Norms as Curse

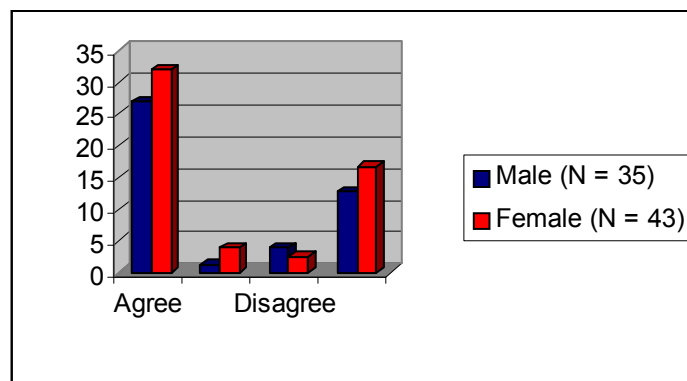


Figure 9: Bar Chart of Respondents on Nigeria Family Norms as Mixed Blessing

The Logistic Procedure

Type III Analysis of Effects

Wald			
Effect	DF	Chi-Square	Pr > ChiSq
SEX	1	1.1910	0.2751

Analysis of Maximum Likelihood Estimates

Parameter	DF	Standard		Wald	
		Estimate	Error	Chi-Square	Pr > ChiSq
Intercept A	1	-1.2994	0.2767	22.0473	<.0001
Intercept D	1	-0.4421	0.2341	3.5650	0.0590
Intercept SA	1	1.1761	0.2684	19.1943	<.0001
SEX Male		-0.2260	0.2071	1.1910	0.2751

Odds Ratio Estimates

Effect	Point		95% Wald	
	Estimate		Confidence Limits	
SEX Male vs Female	0.636	0.283	1.433	

4.4 Results

The Chi squared test could not be used because the expected cell count (also known as the expected frequencies) of most of the cells for each of the variables was less than 5, and grouping the cells could result in loss of data. Hence the Fishers' test was used to analyze the data. For the variables, there was significant association between the paired variables namely: oppression of women paired with the variables age, marital status, and years lived in present city of residence; blessing paired with age, marital status and years lived in present city of residence; curse paired with age, present country of residence, marital status and years lived in present city of residence; mixed blessing paired with

degree. The strongest association was between oppression of women and marital status giving p as 0.0140.

For the strongest association, the logistic regression was applied to determine the direction of this strong association. From the above the result, the females are more likely to experience oppression than the men. This is obvious from the result of the point estimate which is 0.635. It is less than one, and this indicates that the denominator is higher in value than the numerator. This shows that the women felt oppressed in their families more than the men.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

All respondents agreed that the Nigeria family lifestyle (for the *Yorubas*) is rather too flamboyant. It was said that the society dictates the pace and there is uttermost pressure on the families to want to exceed their limit. They also strongly agreed that there is stiff competition amongst families and this is mainly because families (and individuals) are judged and ranked socially by their material possession and achievements such as number and type of cars owned, type of dwelling, clothing, shoes, amount of money spent on occasions such as weddings, birthday parties, chieftancy title ceremonies etc, schools/universities the children attend, jobs etc.

Although five of the married female respondents (not shown in tables) indicated that their partners sometimes made effort to help with domestic chores, all female respondents either wished their partners could help more often or pray to find partners who would

help them as much and as often as possible with the household chores. All the male respondents believed that their circular work was too hectic and time consuming for them to help with the household chores. And that coming home to them implied rest and not work (work as in doing household chores), while the women said they have over time psyched themselves that in Yoruba land, household chores will always be the woman's responsibility.

Most of the female respondents agreed that in Nigeria families, the women are mostly at disadvantage. Responses clearly show that many of them disagree with this and that they still much adhere to the Nigeria family norms (including some which the author feels are barbaric and rather uncouth and should be abolished). Although this study was a test study for the actual research, the number of respondents was rather too low and results obtained cannot be assumed to be a sample depiction of the *Yoruba* family lifestyle. In spite of this, the author advocates that similar or extensive study be carried out in the country as a whole for both formally and informally educated citizens of the country. Also the religious organizations must take positive affirmative actions towards liberating the Nigeria families especially the women, after all most religious organizations have the women as their major audience.

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APPENDIX

MAP OF NIGERIA

