

# Men's Income Levels and Attitude towards Spousal Employment in South-South Nigeria: Implications for Family Dynamics and Counseling Interventions

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## Abstract

This study examined the relationship between men's income levels and their attitudes towards spousal employment in the South-South region of Nigeria, highlighting the implications for guidance and counseling. One research question and one null hypothesis were formulated to direct the study. A descriptive survey design was employed, utilizing both simple random and purposive sampling techniques to select three South-South states—Rivers, Bayelsa, and Akwa Ibom—and a total of 225 married men from these states. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled Men's Attitude towards Wives' Work Type Questionnaire (MATWWTQ). The reliability of the instrument was established through the test-retest method, with a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient of 0.74. Mean scores and standard deviations were used to answer the research question, while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at a 0.05 significance level was applied to test the hypothesis. Findings indicated that men's attitudes towards their wives' work types did not differ significantly based on their income levels. In light of the findings, the study recommended, among others, that guidance counselors in schools, community centers, and religious institutions should develop and implement structured programs that challenge stereotypical gender roles and promote egalitarian attitudes toward spousal employment.

## Keywords:

Income Levels, Attitude, Spousal Employment, South-South Nigeria

## Introduction

The evolving attitudes of men toward their wives' employment choices have increasingly drawn scholarly attention, particularly for their implications on family stability and societal transformation. Attitude, conceptualized as a learned predisposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, event, or individual (Sarmah & Pari, 2014), is dynamic and subject to change over time (Syeda, 2016). Men's perceptions of spousal employment therefore fluctuate based on personal, socio-economic, and cultural conditions, including the type of work their wives undertake.

Kaufman and White (2014) identified four attitudinal categories toward spousal employment—traditional, expectant, egalitarian, and expectant egalitarian. The traditional view is rooted in the patriarchal "male breadwinner" model, which positions men as household providers and relegates women to domestic and caregiving duties (Crompton, 2006; Salami, 2013; Nwosu, 2012). Expectant traditional men, though subscribing to similar ideals, recognize the economic necessity of their wives' participation in paid work (Kaufman & White, 2014; White & Rogers, 2000; Lyonette, Kaufman & Crompton, 2011). In contrast, egalitarian and expectant egalitarian men increasingly value women's employment not only for its financial contributions but also for its positive impact on family well-being and child development (Stanley, Stevens, Yeatt & Seward, 2005; Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick & Larsen, 2001; Schoen & Cheng, 2006).

In Nigeria, the discourse on women's employment has gained prominence due to entrenched gender norms and economic pressures. Rising living costs and declining household incomes have compelled many families to rely on dual earners, thereby increasing women's participation in formal and informal economic activities. Nigerian women, who represent nearly half of the national population, play crucial roles in economic and social development, often balancing productive and reproductive responsibilities (British Council, 2012; Makama, 2013).

Historically, the pre-industrial extended family structure positioned women and children as sources of domestic labor with limited access to education or paid employment (Crompton, 2006; Onyemelukwe, 2015). The rise of industrial capitalism further institutionalized the breadwinner-homemaker divide, marginalizing women's economic participation (Onyemelukwe, 2015). This division remains influential in contemporary Nigeria, where patriarchal norms continue to restrict women's access to education, employment, and property ownership (Fapohunda, 2012).

Globally, and in Nigeria in particular, women remain underrepresented in formal wage employment (UNDP, 2008; NBS, 2011). Many are concentrated in informal sectors such as petty trading and small-scale enterprises, which offer limited financial stability and social protection (Ogbomo, 2005; Odebo, 2006; Fapohunda, 2012). Despite these constraints, women's economic participation remains essential to household welfare and poverty reduction. The 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey reported that although more than 70% of married women aged 15–49 were economically active, only a minority earned more than their husbands, and income control often remained male-dominated.

Employment, broadly defined as activities that provide economic value or remuneration (Steers, 2001; Akpala, 2002; Anugwom, 2009), may take various forms—public,

private, self-employment, or entrepreneurship. Public sector jobs typically offer greater security and benefits (Lazzari, 2019), while private employment and entrepreneurial ventures often present higher earning potential but greater risk (Dollarhide, 2020; Gaddefors & Anderson, 2017). Understanding men's perceptions of their wives' engagement in these employment categories is crucial. The present study, therefore, investigates how men's income levels shape their attitudes toward spousal employment in South-South Nigeria and explores the implications for family dynamics and counseling interventions aimed at promoting gender-sensitive family relationships.

### Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's patriarchal cultural structure continues to influence perceptions of women's participation in paid employment. While some men endorse traditional expectations that women should focus on domestic responsibilities and child-rearing, others view spousal employment as a pragmatic response to economic realities. Scholars have emphasized that women's unemployment contributes to household poverty, particularly where women possess employable skills and qualifications but face restrictions from their spouses. Men's income levels may influence these attitudes: higher earners might prefer their wives' domestic roles to preserve traditional hierarchies, whereas lower earners may view spousal employment as vital economic support. This tension between cultural ideals and socio-economic necessity underscores the need to understand how men's income levels influence their attitudes toward their wives' employment in South-South Nigeria—a factor with significant implications for family cohesion, gender relations, and counseling practice.

### Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to:

1. Determine the attitude of men towards spousal employment in South-South, Nigeria, in relation to their level of income.

## 2. Research Question

This study is guided by the following research question:

1. What is the difference in men's attitude towards spousal employment based on their level of income in South-South, Nigeria?

## Null Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference in men's attitude towards spousal employment based on their level of income in South-South, Nigeria.

## Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design to investigate men's attitudes toward the occupational engagement of their wives. The target population consisted of 37,326 married couples—specifically, husbands and their employed wives—residing in three senatorial zones in Nigeria's South-South region: Rivers East Senatorial District (Rivers State), Bayelsa Central Senatorial Zone (Bayelsa State), and Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial Zone (Akwa Ibom State). Participants included individuals working in the public and private sectors as well as in entrepreneurial ventures. Population data were obtained from official records of the respective state marriage registries: Rivers State (2019), Bayelsa State (2018), and Akwa Ibom State (2020). Verification of employment status was conducted using occupational details documented in the marriage registry records.

A total of 225 married couples (225 husbands and 225 working wives) were selected for the study. The sample was equally distributed across the three senatorial zones, with 75 couples drawn from each zone. Specifically, 25 couples were purposively selected from each of the following Local Government Areas (LGAs):

Rivers East Senatorial District: Port Harcourt, Ikwerre, and Okrika

Bayelsa Central Senatorial Zone: Kolokuma/Opokuma, Southern Ijaw, and Yenagoa

Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial Zone: Uyo, Uruan, and Etinan

The study employed a multi-stage sampling procedure. First, three states (Rivers, Bayelsa, and Akwa Ibom) were selected from the six states that comprise the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria (Rivers, Bayelsa, Edo, Delta, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River) using simple random sampling, ensuring equal representation probability. This selection represented 50% of the total regional population. Subsequently, purposive sampling was employed to identify eligible married couples based on inclusion criteria, including verified employment and residency within the selected LGAs.

Data were collected using a researcher-designed instrument titled the Men's Attitude Towards Wives' Work Type Questionnaire (MATWWQ). The instrument utilized a 4-point Likert-type scale with the following response options:

Strongly Agree (SA) – 4 points

Agree (A) – 3 points

Disagree (D) – 2 points

Strongly Disagree (SD) – 1 point

The MATWWQ was divided into two sections. Section A collected demographic information, including variables such as the husband's income level. Section B contained 20 items designed to assess men's attitudes toward the occupational engagement of their wives.

To establish content, face, and construct validity, the instrument was reviewed by experts in the Department of Guidance and Counselling at the University of Abuja. For reliability testing, a pilot study was conducted in Rivers State, involving 30 participants (15 husbands and 15 wives) who were excluded from the main study sample. The instrument was administered twice at a two-week interval using the test-retest method. Data were analyzed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, which yielded a reliability index of 0.74, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and temporal stability.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics (frequency counts and percentages) were used to summarize demographic data. The research question was analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations, while the null hypothesis was tested using analysis of variance (ANOVA) at a .05 level of significance, aligning with conventional thresholds for inferential decision-making in educational and behavioral research

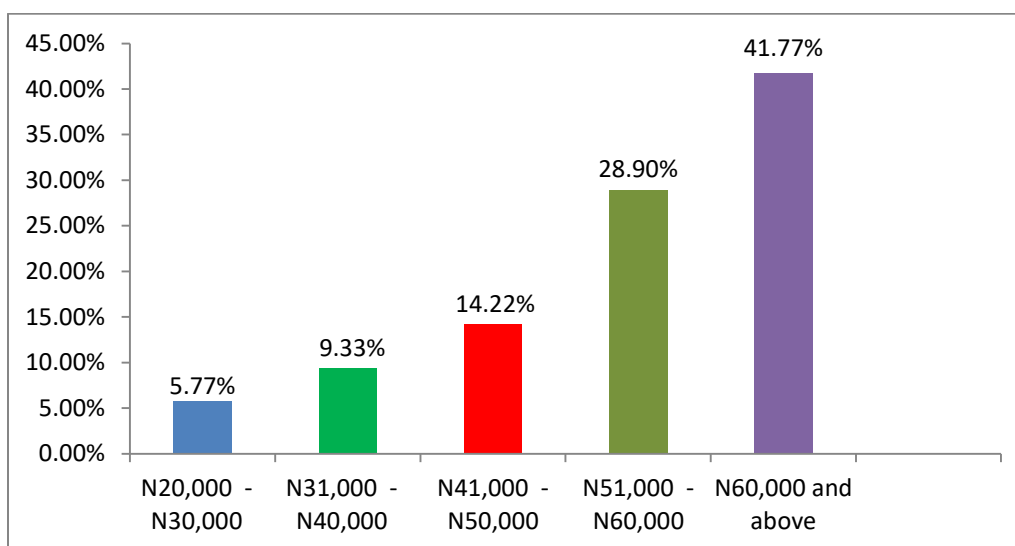
## Data Analysis And Results

**Table 1: Distribution of Male Respondents According to Level of Income**

Level of Income Per Month	Number	Percentage (%)
₦20,000 – ₦30,000	13	5.77
₦31,000 – ₦40,000	21	9.33
₦41,000 – ₦50,000	32	14.22
₦51,000 – ₦60,000	65	28.90
₦60,000 and above	94	41.77
Total	225	100.0

Table 1 presents the distribution of male respondents by monthly income. The majority (41.77%) earned ₦60,000 and above, followed by 28.90% earning between ₦51,000–₦60,000. Smaller proportions earned ₦41,000–₦50,000

(14.22%), ₦31,000–₦40,000 (9.33%), and ₦20,000–₦30,000 (5.77%). These results indicate that higher-income earners were more represented in the sample.



**Key:** ₦20,000 – ₦30,000  
 ₦31,000 – ₦40,000  
 ₦41,000 – ₦50,000  
 ₦50,000 – ₦60,000  
 ₦60,000 and above

**Figure 5: Percentage Distribution of Male Respondents According to Level of Income****Research Question**

What is the difference in men's attitude towards their wives work type based on level of income in South South, Nigeria?

**Table 2: Analysis of Difference in Men's Attitudes towards Wives' Work Type Based on Level of Income in South South, Nigeria**

Men's Attitude Towards Wives' Work Types	(N = 225)	Level of Education of Male Respondents	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Decision
Traditional Attitude	13	₦20,000 – ₦30,000	2.07	1.12	Disagreed
	21	₦31,000 – ₦40,000	2.00	1.10	Disagreed
	32	₦41,000 – ₦50,000	1.94	1.13	Disagreed
	65	₦51,000 – ₦60,000	1.90	1.07	Disagreed
	94	₦60,000 and above	2.02	1.15	Disagreed
Section Mean			2.00	1.11	Disagreed
Egalitarian Attitude	13	₦20,000 – ₦30,000	2.94	.87	Agreed
	21	₦31,000 – ₦40,000	2.92	.89	Agreed
	32	₦41,000 – ₦50,000	3.04	.79	Agreed
	65	₦51,000 – ₦60,000	3.02	.78	Agreed
	94	₦60,000 and above	2.90	.88	Agreed
Section Mean			2.96	.84	Agreed
Expectant Traditional Attitude	13	₦20,000 – ₦30,000	2.82	.85	Agreed
	21	₦31,000 – ₦40,000	2.74	.91	Agreed
	32	₦41,000 – ₦50,000	2.80	.89	Agreed
	65	₦51,000 – ₦60,000	2.72	.84	Agreed
	94	₦60,000 and above	2.83	.82	Agreed
Section Mean			2.80	.86	Agreed
Expectant Egalitarian	13	₦20,000 – ₦30,000	2.93	.79	Agreed
	21	₦31,000 – ₦40,000	2.92	.82	Agreed
	32	₦41,000 – ₦50,000	2.90	.84	Agreed
	65	₦51,000 – ₦60,000	2.84	.93	Agreed
	94	₦60,000 and above	2.95	.87	Agreed
Section Mean			2.91	.85	Agreed
Overall Mean			2.67	.92	Agreed

As shown in Table 2, men in South-South Nigeria generally disagreed with traditional attitudes toward their wives' work types ( $M = 2.00$ ), but agreed with egalitarian, expectant traditional, and expectant egalitarian attitudes across all income levels. The overall mean score ( $M = 2.67$ ) indicates that men's attitudes toward their wives' work types do not significantly differ based on income level.

### Test of Hypothesis

$H_{01}$ : There is no significant difference in men's attitude towards their wives' work type based on level of income in South South, Nigeria

**Table 3: Analysis of Variance in Men's Attitude towards their Wives Work Type based on Level of Income in South South, Nigeria**

Variable	Groups	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Sig.
Level of income	Between Groups	2687.502	3	895.834	4.585	
	Within Groups	43179.295	221	195.381		.097
	Total	45866.797	224			



In Table 3, the p-value of 0.097 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted implying that there is no significant difference in men's attitude towards their wives work type based on level of income in South South, Nigeria.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicate that men's attitudes toward their wives' occupational roles do not significantly vary according to their income levels in the South-South region of Nigeria. This outcome aligns with the research conducted by Adam, Ahmad, Khan, Ali, Bibi, and Abdullah (2021), which revealed a notable link between men's income levels and their attitudes toward women's employment. Furthermore, their study suggested that the perceived connection between women's engagement in the public sphere and men's attitudes based on income may, in fact, be misleading or unfounded.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made :

#### 1.Design and Implement Value-Oriented Guidance Programs That Address Socio-Cultural Attitudes towards Women's Employment

Guidance counselors in schools, community centers, and religious institutions should develop and implement structured programs that challenge stereotypical gender roles and promote egalitarian attitudes toward spousal employment. Since men's attitudes are not influenced by income levels, counseling interventions must focus on reshaping cultural perceptions, emphasizing mutual respect, shared aspirations, and the psychosocial benefits of dual-income households. These programs should incorporate storytelling, role-playing, and real-life case studies to effectively address underlying value systems and encourage behavior change.

#### 2. Institutionalize Pre-Marital and Marital Counseling Services that Promote Constructive Spousal Support for Women's Careers

Government agencies, in collaboration with professional counselors, should mandate standardized pre-marital and marital counseling curricula that promote gender-inclusive values. These services should aim to foster attitudinal change by guiding couples to develop joint career and family life goals, highlighting the importance of emotional support and shared responsibilities irrespective of economic status. Special attention should be given to reaching rural and semi-urban communities through mobile counseling units and culturally sensitive messaging.

#### 3. Formulate Inclusive Policies that Address Non-Economic BarrierstoWomen's Employment

Policymakers should recognize that men's support for their wives' employment is not necessarily determined by economic need. As such, policies must go beyond poverty alleviation and job creation to tackle socio-cultural resistance. This includes integrating gender equality education into national development strategies, enforcing workplace equity laws, and supporting media campaigns that portray positive narratives of employed women and supportive husbands. In addition, gender audits of existing employment policies should be conducted to ensure they account for attitudinal and relational dynamics within households.

#### 4. Strengthen School-Based and Community Counseling Platforms to Foster Positive Attitudes toward Women's Employment from an Early Age

Government education authorities, in collaboration with guidance counselors, should integrate gender-sensitive counseling modules into the basic and secondary school curriculum to shape young people's attitudes before they are fully socialized into rigid gender roles. Early interventions through school counseling programs should encourage both boys and girls to value shared economic and domestic responsibilities within future family life. In community settings, trained counselors should lead awareness programs and family dialogue sessions that encourage openness to women's

employment, emphasizing the emotional, social, and developmental benefits for families and society at large. These efforts will gradually cultivate a generation of men whose attitudes are formed by principles of equity and respect, rather than income-based assumptions.

### **Implications for Family Dynamics and Counseling Interventions**

#### **1.Reframing Gender Role Ideologies Through Culturally Sensitive Counseling Interventions**

The finding that men's income levels are not predictive of their attitudes toward spousal employment underscores the need for counseling interventions to focus more critically on the ideological and cultural underpinnings of gender roles within marriage. This calls for the development of culturally responsive counseling frameworks that interrogate and deconstruct patriarchal norms, traditional masculinity constructs, and communal expectations that perpetuate gender asymmetry in family settings. Counselors should design interventions that create safe spaces for men to critically reflect on how inherited societal values shape their perceptions of women's roles, particularly in economic participation. Such programs must integrate discourse on evolving masculinities and promote the legitimacy of shared economic and domestic responsibilities, independent of the male partner's financial status. By addressing the ideological roots of resistance to spousal employment, counseling can foster transformative changes in family dynamics, encouraging more egalitarian partnerships.

#### **2.Attitudinally Segmented Counseling: A Shift from Economic Stratification to Psychographic Profiling**

Given the empirical evidence that attitudes toward wives' employment are not correlated with men's income levels, counseling interventions must pivot from class-based segmentation to a more nuanced, attitude-based framework. Rather than assuming economic class as a primary determinant of receptivity to counseling messages, interventions should distinguish among typologies such as egalitarian, expectant egalitarian, and expectant traditional men. This psychographic profiling

enables counselors to deliver more targeted and context-sensitive support. For example, interventions targeting expectant traditional men should be designed to gradually dismantle rigid gender role expectations through cognitive restructuring, motivational interviewing, and exposure to alternative gender narratives. Conversely, for expectant egalitarian men, counseling efforts should reinforce emerging positive attitudes through peer modeling, mentorship, and affirming feedback mechanisms. Such differentiated strategies increase the likelihood of attitude change and sustained behavioral shifts across diverse demographic groups.

#### **3. Enhancing Marital Communication and Negotiation Skills as a Preventive Counseling Strategy**

Irrespective of income, men's attitudes toward their wives' work can generate marital tensions if left unarticulated or unresolved. Therefore, counseling interventions should prioritize the cultivation of effective intra-marital communication and negotiation skills, particularly in the context of decision-making around career and household responsibilities. Structured couple-focused sessions can be employed to facilitate open dialogue where partners articulate their aspirations, role expectations, and concerns related to employment. Utilizing tools such as role-playing, reflective listening, and collaborative problem-solving, counselors can enhance couples' capacity for empathy, shared understanding, and joint decision-making. Strengthening these competencies not only reduces potential conflict but also supports more adaptive and resilient family functioning in the face of evolving gender norms and economic pressures.

#### **4. Psychoeducational Approaches to Gender Equity and Family Wellbeing**

The non-significance of income in shaping men's attitudes toward their wives' employment further highlights the importance of integrating psychoeducational content into counseling programs. These interventions should aim to challenge entrenched myths that frame women's employment as a threat to male authority or

family cohesion. Instead, educational modules grounded in empirical research can elucidate the positive implications of gender equity for marital satisfaction, financial stability, and overall family wellbeing. Through workshops, seminars, and group counseling forums, counselors can disseminate knowledge that repositions spousal employment as a shared investment in the household's economic and emotional sustainability. Emphasizing the benefits of collaborative partnerships and co-parenting models can serve as a catalyst for attitudinal change and the normalization of dual-income family structures.

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