

Length of Marriage as a Predictor of Men's Attitude towards their Wives' Work Types in South-South Nigeria: Implications for Marital Counseling and Gender Equality

P. O. Ojiah; Y. Ahmadu; Dr. P. F. Tobins
Department of Guidance and Counseling, University of Abuja

Abstract

This study examined the extent to which the length of marriage predicts men's attitudes towards their wives' work types in South-South Nigeria, with a focus on implications for marital counseling and gender equality. The study was guided by one research question and one null hypothesis. A descriptive survey research design was employed, utilizing both simple random and purposive sampling techniques to select three states—Rivers, Bayelsa, and Akwa Ibom—and a total sample of 225 married couples. Data were collected using two researcher-developed instruments: Men's Attitude towards Wives' Work Type Questionnaire (MATWWTQ) and Influence of Wives' Work Type on Marriage Questionnaire (IWWTMQ). The reliability of the MATWWTQ was established through the test-retest method, yielding a coefficient of 0.74 using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. Data analysis involved the use of mean scores and standard deviation to address the research question, while the null hypothesis was tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at the 0.05 significance level. The study found no significant difference in men's attitudes towards their wives' work types based on the length of marriage. Based on these findings, the study recommended, among others, that guidance counselors, particularly those working in schools, religious institutions, and community centers, should actively incorporate gender equality education into premarital, marital, and family counseling sessions. , counseling interventions should be designed to promote positive perceptions of women's participation in various forms of employment, regardless of how long the marriage has lasted. Thus, the need for targeted marital counseling interventions to promote positive attitudes towards gender

roles in employment, thereby advancing gender equality within marital relationships.

Key Words:

Length of Marriage, Men's attitude, Wives Work Type, Marital Counseling, Gender Equality, South South, Nigeria

Introduction

Men's perceptions and attitudes towards the employment choices of their wives have continued to attract scholarly attention, particularly in relation to gender roles and family dynamics. Attitude, in this context, refers to an individual's acquired predisposition to respond either favourably or unfavourably to a particular object, idea, circumstance, or individual (Sarmah & Pari, 2014). These attitudes are not static; they evolve over time based on personal experiences and societal influences (Syyeda, 2016). Consequently, men's attitudes towards their wives' engagement in various work types may be either positive or negative, often shaped by the nature of the employment involved.

Kaufman and White (2014) classified men's attitudes towards their wives' employment into four distinct categories: traditional, expectant traditional, egalitarian, and expectant egalitarian. The traditional perspective is closely tied to the male breadwinner model, where men are perceived as primary providers, while women are expected to focus on domestic responsibilities, particularly child-rearing (Crompton, 2006; Salami, 2013). Within this framework, women's roles are predominantly confined to household duties (Nwosu, 2012). However, expectant traditional husbands, while ideologically favoring a stay-at-home wife, acknowledge the economic necessity of a second income (Kaufman &

White, 2014). Financial pressures and the need for additional household income often compel these families to rely on wives' contributions through employment (White & Rogers, 2000; Lyonette, Kaufman & Crompton, 2011).

Contemporary studies suggest that evolving economic conditions have reshaped men's attitudes towards their wives' participation in the labour force. Many men now recognize that wives with higher educational qualifications and stable economic empowerment are not only desirable but necessary partners in achieving family goals (Buss et al., 2001; Schoen & Cheng, 2006). Kaufman and White (2014) describe such husbands as egalitarian or expectant egalitarian. Egalitarian men view their wives' employment as beneficial, particularly for their children's well-being, while expectant egalitarian husbands go a step further by considering stay-at-home wives unnecessary, emphasizing instead the emotional and financial advantages of maternal employment (Stanley et al., 2005). These differing attitudes towards wives' work types form the central focus of the present study, particularly in relation to how they influence marital relationships.

In Nigeria, the employment of women, especially married women, has become a major topic of discussion, shaped largely by persistent gender expectations. The prevailing economic conditions—including declining living standards and escalating household expenses—have made it increasingly necessary for families to rely on dual incomes. As a result, more married women have sought opportunities in both the formal and informal labour markets, spanning public and private sector employment as well as entrepreneurial ventures.

The centrality of wives' work types in this study is also explained by the recognition that women possess distinct gender-related needs. Practical Gender Needs (PGNs) refer to immediate necessities that enable women to perform socially accepted roles within established societal frameworks (Moser, 2001). These needs typically do not challenge systemic gender inequalities, even though they stem from women's subordinate societal positioning. Conversely, Strategic Gender Needs (SGNs) require proactive measures to confront male dominance and privilege, focusing on transforming gender relations,

particularly concerning labour division, access to resources, and participation in decision-making processes (UNICEF, 2017). The distinction between PGNs and SGNs underscores the contrast between traditional family systems, which reinforce women's dependency, and contemporary family systems, which encourage greater female agency.

Historically, prior to the rise of industrialization, Nigerian families were predominantly organized around extended kinship systems with large households. This arrangement was primarily driven by the need for family labour, including the contributions of women and children. Social and cultural systems during this period positioned women as inferior, excluding them from political participation, formal education, and professional employment (Crompton, 2006; Onyemelukwe, 2015). The division of labour within these traditional households was rigidly gendered.

Industrialization and the growth of capitalist economies further entrenched the breadwinner ideology, positioning men as providers and relegating women to caregiving roles (Onyemelukwe, 2015). This separation between the domestic and public spheres contributed to the marginalization of women and influenced how men viewed their wives' involvement in paid work. In patriarchal societies like Nigeria, these dynamics continue to affect women's participation in formal employment, as many face systemic disadvantages related to education and professional training (Fapohunda, 2012).

Due to challenges in accessing formal sector employment, a significant number of Nigerian women, including those laid off from formal jobs, have turned to the informal sector as a survival strategy (Ogbomo, 2005; Odebo, 2006; Fapohunda, 2012). The non-agricultural informal sector, which engages around 5 percent of Nigeria's female labour force, typically consists of petty trading, home-based production, and small-scale manufacturing. However, women in this sector often lack access to institutional credit, social security provisions, and other support systems. Informal women workers have therefore formed associations and adapted traditional savings mechanisms to support their businesses. Despite these efforts, the absence of affordable credit, technical support, and

advisory services continues to constrain women's entrepreneurial growth (Fapohunda, 2012).

Work or employment generally refers to activities that provide value to others and for which individuals receive remuneration or compensation (Steers, 2001; Akpala, 2002). Employment encompasses various forms, including public sector employment, private sector employment, self-employment, and entrepreneurial ventures. Public sector employment, typically funded by taxpayers, offers greater job security along with retirement and healthcare benefits (Lazzari, 2019). Private sector employment, on the other hand, involves profit-driven enterprises operated by individuals or corporations. Self-employment describes individuals who operate their own businesses without relying on a specific employer (Dollarhide, 2020), while entrepreneurship involves identifying business opportunities and mobilizing resources to exploit them (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2017). This study specifically explores men's attitudes towards these various work types undertaken by their wives.

Marriage itself is a foundational institution within society, encompassing the legal, emotional, and social bonds between a man and a woman, with expectations for forming and sustaining a family (Animashaun & Fatile, 2011). It confers a range of rights and responsibilities as defined by both secular and religious laws. While healthy marriages have been associated with improved mental and physical well-being (Edinyang et al., 2013), marital relationships often experience interpersonal conflicts, particularly where traditional gender expectations intersect with evolving socio-economic realities.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the extent to which the length of marriage predicts men's attitudes towards their wives' work types in South South Nigeria, with specific attention to the implications for marital counseling and gender equality.

Statement of the Problem

In many patriarchal societies such as Nigeria, the issue of women's employment continues to generate significant discourse, particularly within the context of marriage. This is largely influenced by varying perceptions among men regarding the appropriateness of their wives engaging in paid work. While some husbands

hold the traditional belief that women should primarily focus on domestic responsibilities—raising children and managing the home—others adopt a more liberal stance, viewing their wives' employment as a positive contribution to the family's financial stability. Scholarly perspectives suggest that unemployment among women contributes to the perpetuation of poverty and economic dependence. Despite the growing number of educated and qualified women willing to engage in gainful employment, many encounter resistance from their spouses, particularly those with conventional gender role orientations. Conversely, men with egalitarian views are generally more supportive of their wives' participation in the workforce. Consequently, there exists a complex interaction between men's conceptualization of ideal gender roles within marriage and the practical realities of women's employment. What remains underexplored, however, is the extent to which the length of marriage influences men's attitudes towards the types of work their wives engage in, whether formal, informal, or unpaid domestic roles. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by examining how the duration of marital union serves as a predictor of men's attitudes towards their wives' work types in the Nigerian context.

Objectives of the Study

The study is specifically designed to:

1. Examine the attitude of men towards their wives' work type in South-South, Nigeria.
2. Determine the influence of length of marriage on men's attitude towards their wives' work type in South-South, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the attitude of men towards their wives' work type in South-South, Nigeria?
2. What is the difference in men's attitude towards their wives' work type based on length of marriage in South-South, Nigeria?

Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in men's attitude towards their wives' work type

based on length of marriage in South-South, Nigeria..

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design, which enabled the researcher to systematically describe and analyze the variables under investigation. The target population comprised 37,326 married couples (husbands and their working wives) who were gainfully employed in either the public sector, private sector, or engaged in entrepreneurial activities. These couples were residents of Rivers East Senatorial District in Rivers State, Bayelsa Central Senatorial Zone in Bayelsa State, and Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial Zone in Akwa Ibom State. The population figure was obtained from official records of the respective State Marriage Registries (Rivers State Marriage Registry, 2019; Bayelsa State Marriage Registry, 2018; Akwa Ibom State Marriage Registry, 2020). Verification of the respondents' working status was conducted using employment details contained in these official marriage registry documents.

A total of 225 married couples (225 husbands and 225 working wives) constituted the sample for the study. Specifically, 75 married couples were selected from each of the three Senatorial Zones: Port Harcourt, Ikwerre, and Okrika (Rivers East); Kolokuma/Opokuma, Southern Ijaw, and Yenagoa (Bayelsa Central); and Uyo, Uruan, and Etinan (Akwa Ibom North East), with 25 couples selected from each location.

The purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting the respondents. This method was chosen because it allows the researcher to deliberately select participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the study.

Among the six states in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone—Rivers, Bayelsa, Edo, Delta, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River—three

states (Rivers, Bayelsa, and Akwa Ibom) were randomly selected for this research. The simple random sampling technique was utilized to ensure that each state had an equal chance of being selected, resulting in 50% representation of the South-South region.

Data for the study were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled "Men's Attitude Towards Wives' Work Type Questionnaire" (MATWWQ). The questionnaire was structured on a 4-point modified Likert scale, with response options as follows: Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (1 point).

The MATWWQ consisted of two sections: Section A elicited demographic information from the husbands, including details such as the length of marriage. Section B comprised 20 items designed to assess men's attitudes towards the work types of their wives.

To establish the instrument's validity, its face, content, and construct validity were reviewed by experts from the Department of Guidance and Counselling, University of Abuja. The reliability of the instrument was tested through a pilot study involving 15 male and 15 female respondents who were not included in the main study. The test-retest method was applied, and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to compute the reliability index, yielding a value of 0.74, indicating satisfactory reliability.

For data analysis, frequency counts and percentages were used to summarize respondents' demographic data. The research question was analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations. Additionally, the study's null hypothesis (H_{01}) was tested at a 0.05 level of significance using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

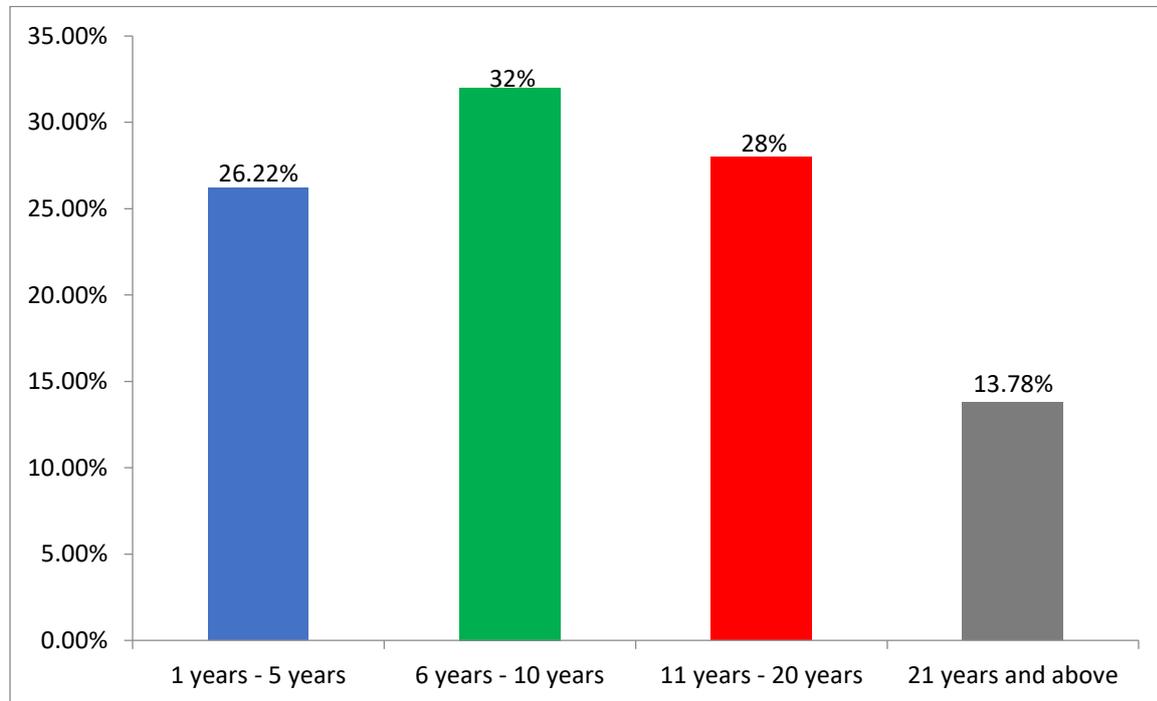
Data Analysis And Results

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents (couples) According to Length of Marriage

Length of Marriage	Number	Percentage (%)
1 year – 5 years	59	26.22
6 years – 10 years	72	32.0
11 years – 20 years	63	28.0
21 years and above	31	13.78
Total	225	100.0

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents by length of marriage. The results indicate that 26.22% of the couples had been married for 1–5 years, 32% for 6–10 years,

28% for 11–20 years, and 13.78% for over 20 years. Couples married for 6–10 years formed the largest group in the study.



Key:
 1 year to 5 years (Blue)
 6 years to 10 years (Green)
 11 years to 20 years (Red)
 21 years and above (Grey)

Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents (Couples) According to Length of Marriage

Research Question One

What is the difference in men’s attitude towards their wives work type based on length of marriage in South South, Nigeria?

Table 2: Analysis of Difference in Men’s Attitude towards Wives’ Work Type Based on Length of Marriage in South South, Nigeria

Men’s Attitude Towards Wives’ Work Types	(N = 225)	Length of marriage of Male Respondents	mean	S.D	Decision
Traditional Attitude	59	1 year – 5 years	2.07	1.08	Disagreed
	72	6 years – 10 years	2.08	1.00	Disagreed
	63	11 years – 20 years	2.10	1.04	Disagreed
	31	21 years and above	1.94	1.02	Disagreed
Section Mean			2.05	1.04	Disagreed
Egalitarian Attitude	59	1 year – 5 years	2.90	.86	Agreed
	72	6 years – 10 years	3.04	.82	Agreed

	63	11 years – 20 years	2.93	.89	Agreed
	31	21 years and above	3.00	.78	Agreed
Section Mean			3.00	.84	Agreed
Expectant Traditional Attitude	59	1 year – 5 years	2.80	.84	Agreed
	72	6 years – 10 years	2.83	.80	Agreed
	63	11 years – 20 years	2.80	.82	Agreed
	31	21 years and above	2.73	.90	Agreed
Section Mean			2.80	.84	Agreed
Expectant Egalitarian	59	1 year – 5 years	2.84	.81	Agreed
	72	6 years – 10 years	2.90	.92	Agreed
	63	11 years – 20 years	2.93	.84	Agreed
	31	21 years and above	2.92	.88	Agreed
Section Mean			2.90	.86	Agreed
Overall Mean			2.69	.90	Agreed

Table 2 presents the analysis of variations in men's attitudes towards their wives' work types based on the length of marriage in South-South Nigeria. The findings reveal a negative mean score of 2.00 for traditional attitudes, while positive mean scores of 3.00, 2.80, and 2.90 were recorded for egalitarian, expectant traditional, and expectant egalitarian attitudes, respectively. The overall mean of 2.69 indicates that the length of marriage does not significantly influence men's attitudes towards their wives' work types in the region.

Test of Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in men's attitude towards their wives' work type based on length of marriage in South South, Nigeria

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

Variable	Groups	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Sig.
Length of marriage	Between Groups	2198.497	3	732.832	3.249	.061
	Within Groups	49838.962	221	225.516		
	Total	52037.459	224			

In Table 3, the p-value of 0.061 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is no significant difference in men's attitude towards their wives work type based on length of marriage in South South, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The result of this study indicates that the length of marriage does not exert a significant influence on men's attitudes towards the types of work undertaken by their wives in South-

South Nigeria. This finding is consistent with that of Adam et al. (2021), who reported a significant association between women's employment and men's attitudes when examined in relation to the duration of the marital union. However, their study further revealed that the supposed relationship between women's participation in the public sphere and men's attitudes based on the length of marriage was largely illusory. This suggests that while societal assumptions often link marital longevity to shifts in gender role

perceptions, empirical evidence remains inconclusive, thereby reinforcing the complexity of gender dynamics within marital relationships.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that the length of marriage did not significantly influence men's attitudes towards their wives' work types in South-South Nigeria. Specifically, the study established that the duration of marriage had no meaningful effect on whether men exhibited traditional, expectant traditional, egalitarian, or expectant egalitarian attitudes regarding their wives' employment.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. Guidance counselors, particularly those working in schools, religious institutions, and community centers, should actively incorporate gender equality education into premarital, marital, and family counseling sessions. , counseling interventions should be designed to promote positive perceptions of women's participation in various forms of employment, regardless of how long the marriage has lasted.
2. Guidance counselors, in collaboration with relevant government agencies, should advocate for the development and implementation of workplace policies that support women's right to work in any field of their choice. Since men's attitudes remain constant irrespective of marriage duration, proactive efforts must be made to reshape perceptions of women's work through coordinated counseling efforts and policy advocacy.
3. Guidance counselors should provide economic empowerment education during couple and family counseling sessions. These sessions should emphasize joint financial planning, shared responsibilities, and the benefits of supporting women's participation in income-generating activities.
4. Counseling professionals should partner with cultural and religious leaders to develop counseling programs that reinterpret traditional gender roles in favor of women's employment rights. Since marital duration does not influence men's views, changing attitudes requires the active involvement of community influencers supported by

structured counseling efforts and government-driven advocacy.

Implications for Marital Counseling and Gender Equality

1. Focus on Value Reorientation Beyond Marital Duration

The finding underscores the need for marital counseling programs to prioritize value reorientation rather than relying on the assumption that attitudes will naturally change with the passage of time in marriage. Counselors should design structured interventions that directly address deep-seated gender role ideologies, irrespective of how long couples have been married. This approach will encourage critical self-reflection among men, challenging rigid traditional beliefs about women's work roles and promoting sustained attitudinal change.

2. Development of Context-Specific Counseling Modules

Given that length of marriage does not predict men's attitudes towards their wives' work types, marital counseling interventions should be tailored to contextual socio-cultural factors rather than generalized marital stages. Gender equality advocacy within counseling should therefore integrate culturally sensitive modules that tackle localized beliefs, community expectations, and occupational stereotypes affecting women's employment choices in South South Nigeria.

3. Integration of Gender Equality Education in Premarital and Postmarital Counseling

The absence of significant influence of marital length on attitudes suggests that early intervention is essential. Counseling frameworks should embed gender equality education from the premarital stage, continuing systematically into postmarital counseling. Early exposure to egalitarian ideals can foster mutual understanding and reduce potential conflicts regarding wives' occupational aspirations, irrespective of how long the marriage lasts.

4. Promotion of Couple-Based Participatory Counseling Approaches

Since men's attitudes appear relatively stable across marital durations, counseling practices should adopt participatory and dialogical approaches that actively engage both spouses

in conversations about gender roles and work-related expectations. By facilitating joint exploration of shared values and aspirations, counselors can promote collaborative decision-making and mutual respect, thereby advancing both marital harmony and gender equality within the household

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