Securing marriages from the strains of career imbalance – a case study of selected couples in Ogun State, Nigeria

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The propensities for globalization that has gradually and steadily crept into the African and Nigerian cultural and value system have brought about new challenges to marriage and the home front. One of such challenges is that of career imbalance. Having other implications for the Nigerian marriage and family within the Yoruba culture, this problem is further exacerbated by stereotyped classical conceptions of marriage and family roles. Literature review of this research traces the roots of career imbalance in the Yoruba culture and examines some of the challenges faced by selected married individuals in career pursuits in Ogun State (mostly women). The goal is to observe new implications of this situation and suggest possible solutions to the challenge of career imbalance amongst these selected couples in Ogun State, Nigeria. This study has as its objective to investigate career imbalance amongst selected couples in Ogun State, Nigeria; study the problems, resulting challenges and proffer possible solutions. It incorporates the qualitative methodologies of descriptive analysis and case study to interpret secondary data extrapolated from past related research to satisfy questions posed in this research, and propose solutions to mitigate the strains of career imbalance on marriages of the 21st century, beginning with Ogun State.

Keywords: Marriage, career, imbalance, globalization, Nigeria, Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The marriage institution established by God in Genesis 2:24 (King James Version, 2012), and in Quran: Surat Al-A’Raf, Ayat 198(The Holy Quran)as a gift to man has faced many challenges in the 21st century. One of such significant challenges has been the problem of career imbalance.

Career imbalance, as viewed in light of this research (contextually), is a situation that arises from a disparity or disproportion in career achievements or career goals among couples within a marriage institution. The extent of this disparity or imbalance could vary widely across various instances. Career imbalance typically occurs in a marriage setting when one couple has more career progress and achievements, resulting in possibly more financial income than the other. The nature of the marriage institution within the classical African setting has been largely patriarchal in nature. The men are usually the ones saddled with the responsibility of ruling the home, breadwinning and sustenance of the family members, while the women are the ones responsible for such roles as custodians of the children, maintenance of the home front, feeding and preservation of the family health, and in some cases, management of household resources; these are definitely aside their matrimonial requirements of being a wife to the husband and a mother to the children (Lasode & Awotedu, 2014).

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In classical and contemporary Africa alike, the stability of marriage may well depend on how well the spouses understand their various roles and the degree to which they can fulfill these roles (Omeou, 2004).

force (Jenson, 1988), some of the same marital arguments highlighted above still hold sway and pertinence when it comes to the issues of career imbalance in marriage (as more women now turn to career endeavours and as a path to self-confidence, (Mordi, Simpson, Singh, & Okafor, 2010) pleasure, societal relevance, and self-fulfillment (Okafor & Amayo, 2006)), and the mores in a geographic location like Ogun State, Nigeria, wherein the rather classical views of marriage and spousal roles still form the bedrock of traditional and cultural practices.

**Marriage in Yoruba Land**

In the classical culture of the Yoruba land (which still holds relevance in most Yoruba communities of the 21st century), of which Ogun State is a part, the man is the head and ruler of the home and the literal owner of the wife, as is confirmed primarily by the names husbands are called by their wives, which include: "olorimii", "olo won rimii", "orimii", etc. This is because upon payment of the bride price and successful completion of all other bridal rites, the man acquires total and exclusive rights to his wife’s sexuality, the children that are produced by her during the term of the marriage, as well as her labour [and the proceeds thereof] for the term of the marriage; and in fact, one of the major causes of divorce in Yoruba marriages from research have been attributed to the desire for or attainment of economic independence of the Yoruba wife from her husband (Lloyd, 1966).

In the Yoruba culture like in most African cultures, the case of the husband having a better career and earning more financial benefits than the wife usually brings no squabbles within the home because based on accepted societal norms and perspectives, this is the ideal; the salient issues in career imbalance in such cultures arise when the wife has a more excellent career and possibly more financially rewarding one than the husband.

**Past Related Researches**

A study examined the relationship that exists among non-traditional students on workload, social support, and work-school conflict. Using a cross-sectional survey of 126 non-traditional students, it was revealed that work-school conflict has a significant positive relationship with perceived workload and a significant inverse relationship with social support (Adebayo, 2006). A study involving 163 students was carried out to compare the rate of student development in non-traditional and traditional college students. Non-traditional students were defined by the degree to which they ascribed to a set of non-traditional characteristics. Student development was measured using the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (SDTLA) which measures three tasks – Establishing and Clarifying Purpose, Developing Autonomy, and Developing Mature Interpersonal
Relationships. The study found out that non-traditional students scored significantly lower than traditional students on all three tasks measured by the SDTLA and also that the more non-traditional characteristics the student ascribed to, the lower the reported level of development (Macari, Maples, & D'Andrea, 2006).

Research investigated the patterns of marriage instability in the modern African society, especially Lagos metropolis, and the implications on marriage counselling. The study incorporated and purposive and convenient sampling of 250 married individuals (111 married men and 139 married women) selected from within the Lagos metropolis. The study posited amongst other things that there was no significant difference in marriage instability among couples with different careers and educational backgrounds (Animasahun & Fatile, 2011).

A study was conducted to examine the effects of marital roles on career of women in selected universities in Lagos and Ogun States, Nigeria. A quantitative research method was used, involving a face-to-face structured interview with 386 respondents (women) that were randomly selected from four universities across all three tiers (federal, state and private) of the university system in Nigeria. The study posited amongst other things that emotional support from the spouse is a crucial factor in academic career excellence (especially for the few women that have excelled in their various careers) and marital peace. Also pointed out was the fact that emotional support from home-front as well as the workplace could help reduce workplace tensions and promote lasting marital relationships (Adesinaola, 2012).

A research involving two hundred selected, non-professional Igbo workers (95 males and 125 females) was aimed at examining the impact of work and family involvement in work-family conflict. Carlson, Kacmar and William's 18-item work-family conflict scale (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000) was used to assess the workers' experience of work-family conflict, and job involvement and family involvement questionnaires were employed to assess workers' level of work and family involvement. The results of the research revealed a significant interaction effect between work involvement and family involvement on work-family conflict, in relation to Nigerian work ethics and the Nigerian family culture where greater value is placed on caring for members of one's family than excelling in one's job duties. The research also further suggested that Igbo Nigerian employees pay more premiums to family roles and hence appear to be more immersed in family roles than work roles; a finding that is consistent with findings in countries like Malaysia which seem to have similar cultural (collectivistic) values (Amazue, 2013).

One research investigated age, gender and marital status as factors of job satisfaction among print-media workers in west Nigeria. The research incorporated the convenient sampling of 199 participants of the following distributions: 107 males and 92 females, ages between 20 – 67 years, 114 married, 78 never married, 2 divorced and 4 widowed, with the highest educational qualification as master's degree, and the least was ordinary level school leaving certificate. The results indicated that age and gender were significant factors of job satisfaction amongst the selected population while marital status did not significantly predict job satisfaction (Oladipo & Onuoha, 2013).

A study examined the extent to which couples are involved in the management of their family's finances as evidenced from the Ilishan-Remo Community of Ogun State, Nigeria based on the fact that finance has remained one of the major complex factors leading to suspicion, disagreements, fighting, or worst still divorce in many marriages and families that have been shattered by lack of/ineffective management of finance owing to misconceptions pertaining to who the family's financial officer should be. A survey of 71 married individuals was conducted, also incorporating secondary data. Results posited that although the husband the head of the family, decisions concerning the family (including management of family finances) should not be taken solely by him, but by both parties. Couples incomes should be viewed as a joint resource that should be pooled together for the smooth running of the family, while budgeting some portion of the income for savings (Amanze, Alu, Oyebode, & Donald, 2014).

A research was undertaken to review the development of working women in various corporate sectors in Nigeria through the use of data from various secondary sources. It was pointed out that in today's world, companies and industries require women to control a majority of their activities, since women tend to bring higher efficiency, effectiveness and peculiarity to the work they engage in. Suggestions were therefore made on how to encourage feminine participation in career pursuits, because their convincing power enhances the corporate atmosphere while providing extra financial benefits to the family budget (Dossumu & Olayemi, 2014).

Another research was carried out to obtain empirical information on challenges faced by married female undergraduate students in Universities in Ogun State, Nigeria and the effects of these challenges on the students. The research involved a purposive survey of one hundred and fifty (150) married undergraduate female students from two (one Federal government-owned and one State government-owned) of the six Universities in Ogun State. A questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.80 was used for data collection. Descriptive statistics such as percentage and frequency were used to analyse the data collected (Lasode & Awotedu, 2014). The findings of this study revealed that for 83.1% of respondents, combining career work with family responsibilities and academic obligations result in stress that rubs off on their general life. However, this study did not cover aspects on how this relates to career imbalance, and
what new challenges could emerge when the realities of career imbalances are brought into the picture; this is where this research finds relevance.

The Root Cause of Career Imbalance

According to research, one of the earliest, ingrained causes of career imbalance is traceable to an age long worldview that has sustained existence in the African setting. These worldview insights a feeling of inferiority in the girl child in comparison to the boy child, especially in relation to the pursuit of career achievements. From basic (primary) up to grade (secondary) schools, girls grow up in an academic environment where the teachers prefer to call on to boys more often, spend more time with them, give them more praise for academic achievements, etc.; hence, the adolescent girl child develops the notion that she is valued more for her appearance than for her intelligence. Thus they begin at that young age to undervalue their academic abilities and career aspirations and focus more on their appearances (Hammer, Grigsby, & Woods, 1998). Award winning story teller – Chimamanda Adichie put the scenario in right perspective when she is quoted as saying: “We teach females that in relationships, compromise is what women do. We raise girls to see each other as competitors, not for jobs or for accomplishments – which I think can be a good thing – but for the attention of men... We teach girls shame. ‘Close your legs!’ ‘Cover yourself!’ We make them feel as though by being born female, they are already guilty of something. And so, girls grow up to be women who cannot say they have desire. They grow up to be women who silence themselves. They grow up to be women who cannot say what they truly think. And they grow up – and this is the worst thing we do to girls – they grow up to be women who have turned pretence into an art form.” (Adichie, 2013)

With this classical worldview roaming the minds of the native African married man and woman, the average African man tends to see every career accomplishment of his wife as a potential threat to his position and social responsibility as the head and breadwinner of the home, particularly when such accomplishments supersede his by whatever indices; and the average woman, being aware of this reality and the potential implications it could have on her marriage and her family, may decide to swallow her dreams and career aspirations so as to continually bask in the love, care and favour of her husband.

Purpose of the Research

This research seeks to probe some of the challenges faced by selected career couples (particularly women) in the 21st century Ogun State, Nigeria, and to propose some solutions that could help to mitigate the challenges and rancour that career imbalance could bring about in marriages.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is based qualitative analysis of secondary data that have been acquired, extrapolated and re-interpreted from surveys carried out in various past researches by (Lasode & Awotedu, 2014), (Amanze, Alu, Oyebode, & Donald, 2014), and (Okafor & Amayo, 2006). These researches are chosen because they involve data collected from couples and married individuals in various career pursuits and endeavours in Ogun State, Nigeria. Data from these previous secondary research sources are re-evaluated to chart a course for this new research.

Research Questions

Keeping in mind that career imbalance in Ogun State can traceable to ingrained role misconceptions and misunderstandings that are sometimes fostered by classical viewpoints on marriage and spousal roles/duties, this research would proceed by seeking answers to the following questions:

1. What are some of the challenges faced by women in career pursuits in Ogun State?
2. What are some of the factors that lead to some of such challenges faced?
3. What are some of the effects of such challenges on career pursuits?
4. Does the spouse who earns the higher salary (and possibly earns the higher salary) necessarily have to be the one in control of the family’s finances? If not, then who?

Research Findings

1. What are some of the challenges faced by married women in career pursuits in Ogun State?

In response to this question, the following was observed from data collected in (Lasode & Awotedu, 2014):

59.2% of the respondents pointed out the challenge of inadequate time to carry out career work at home without interruption; 60.8% also pointed out the challenge of having to manage multiple roles at a time; while 56.1% fingered the challenge of having limited personal free time. A minority 16.9% opined that poor study skills was a challenge. This is illustrated in figure 1.

What are some of the factors that lead to some of such challenges faced by married career women in Ogun State?

In response to this question, the following was observed from data collected in (Lasode & Awotedu, 2014):

63.1% of respondents noted pre-occupation with one [marital] role while performing another as one of the factors leading to challenges they face in career
pursuits; 52.3% posit that they are often overwhelmed by numerous responsibilities which often take precedence over career work; 41.5% point out incompatible demands from two or more conflicting roles as a factor as well; 64.6% also say attribute the lack of special institutional / organizational support for married career seekers to the challenges they face as well. This is illustrated in figure 2.

What are some of the effects of such challenges on the career pursuits of married women in Ogun State?

In response to this question, the following was observed from data collected in (Lasode & Awotedu, 2014):

49.3% of the respondents agreed to occasional feelings of guilt about not having enough time for the children and the family; 67.8% noticed that they have little to no free time as a result of pressure and demands from many [sometimes conflicting] responsibilities; 83.1% submitted that combining commitments from family with work and career requirements and obligations frequently puts them under a lot of stress. This is visually illustrated in figure 3.

Does the spouse who has the better career (and possibly earns the higher salary) necessarily have to be the one in control of the family’s finances? If not, then who?

In response to this question, the following was observed...
from data collected in (Amanze, Alu, Oyebode, & Donald, 2014):
63.4% of the respondents disagreed that the spouse who earns the higher salary must be in control of the family’s finances; 77.5% of the respondents opined that financial responsibilities should be shared among couples, and according to a majority 60.6%, the formula for the sharing should be based on the earning power of the individual spouse; 64.8% of the respondents also posited that the responsibility of financial control within the home should be a joint endeavour of both husband and wife.

Discussion: New Implications and Realities Posited From Research Findings

It has become obvious that the reasons why married women do not excel as readily as their married male counterparts is not due to any form of malfunction in their abilities to successfully pursue a rewarding career, but due to some certain organizational, societal and marital factors that clog their abilities to do so. This suggests that some of these married career women may secretly and quietly nurture some career goals and ambitions that they may not be able to pursue effectively for the various reasons that have also been elicited from this study.

As has been re-emphasized in this study that some societal paradigms go a long way to foster issues of career imbalance amongst couples, the first step to seeking solutions to the career imbalance in marriages may well require a change in the worldview that has consistently sought to silence and clip the wings of the married [and even unmarried] career woman. Upbringing of children must be deliberately channeled away from this worldview, in order that the chains of classical dogmas that have for so long shackled the average African, Nigerian and Yoruba for many generations hitherto might be broken.

The findings of this research has implications for organizational policies as has been pointed out within; the corporate married career women may excel well within the organization is policies are reviewed with a better understanding of the many challenges and conflicting responsibilities that these women grapple with on a regular basis.

Courtships should involve more deliberate endeavours, much more on the part of the female folk in order to be able to discern amongst other things, the moral and traditional values held dear by their male partners. This definitely does not exempt the male folk from the same goal of discernment. Individuals are here again advised to seek partners that share their worldview on certain pertinent issues such as pertains to balancing careers and family / marital responsibilities for both partners within the home.

Marriage counsellors should also be watchful that such societal dogmas are not brought into their counselling rooms; and when they are, they must well be ridded of, especially when they have a case of career imbalance to deal with, as it would be difficult, and sometimes near impossible, for the counselling process to yield fruits when the minds of the couple are shackled by these deeply ingrained viewpoints.

On Securing Marriages from the strains of Career Imbalance: Solutions

In consolidating the various sections of this research to focus on its very core of securing marriages from career imbalance, the following summary highlights are proposed:

i. The root cause of career imbalance issues on the marital fronts of the African culture has been traced to the background patriarchy that underpins almost everything on the continent (Hammer, Grigsby, & Woods, 1998). This root cause issue can be addressed by re-orientation of the African mind, especially of the male folks; and this the feminist agenda has done quite well in pursing. Even though it may not be possible to completely exorcise patriarchy from the African culture, but then it could be tamed on the marital fronts. The male African mind should be trained from birth not to see the female counterpart as a threat in circumstances when career imbalance seem to be tipped against the male, but better still, as a motivation – not in the sense of competition though, but collaboration towards success. The female African mind would also do well to
see things from this same viewpoint; all both within and outside the home.

ii. Because organizational policies have a part to play in assuaging career imbalance issues (Lasode & Awotedu, 2014), organizations could render support to also help in dousing this patriarchy especially in the minds of career men and women by intentionally structuring policies that put equal to greater amounts of females on the same corporate team with male counterparts. When the results and rewards of team activities and successes are such that they are equitably and cooperatively earned, the male and female folks may begin to relate more as team mates than rivals or competitors. This mind set could in turn also rub off on their marital lives.

iii. Also, and because career imbalance issues are usually not discussed and settled ahead of when they emerge in the classic African setting, this makes the issues more difficult to deal with. Marriage counsellors should ensure that pre-wedding counselling sessions include discussions about the potentials of career imbalance in the marriage, and how the couple intends to handle it should it emerge later on in the marriage. When this has been discussed ahead of time, it is easier to have an initial point of consensus and agreement to refer to in the process of settling later issues. Some of the questions that may be addressed in such sessions could include:

- How many hours daily (minimum) would each spouse be allowed some time of marital and matrimonial duties to give time to career activities? It would be preferable that these times are agreed on and taken simultaneously by both couples.
- What arrangements would be made to manage the children of the family during this period?
- The possibility of swapping financial roles in the event of a career imbalance tipped against the one who erstwhile bore the greater financial responsibility.

iv. Also, due to the confidential nature and privacy maintained in the African marital scene, it may be difficult for couples (especially females) facing persecutions and challenges on the marital front, as a result of career imbalance skewed in their favour, to open up about challenges faced. Most of these couples may not even know that the persecutions and challenges are facing are a result of this. Sometimes they tend to draw confidants from parents, colleagues, friends and associates – essentially the same deep running patriarchal system that is the root of the challenges they are facing. They usually either end up frustrated or misguided (Hammer, Grigsby, & Woods, 1998). As a result, we suggest a support network of counsellors and other couples either currently facing, or having in the past faced and effectively worked through, similar challenges and persecutions in their marriages. Within these support network, couples can draw inspiration and ideas for each other to guide them in their struggles.

Biblical Solutions to Career Imbalance in Marriages

Couples should see each other as collaborators and principal stakeholders in the success of their spouse. They should show constant, consistent support for the career goals of the spouse no matter the gender. The man sees that his wife has a more excelling and possibly more financially rewarding career than himself should not feel threatened but rather should consider the success of his wife as his own success and the success of the entire family. He should love his wife the more (Ephesians 5:25-28) (King James Version, 2012), and proudly identify with her success. Likewise, the woman who finds herself in such a position should demonstrate and unprecedented level of submission, support and cooperation with her spouse. She must understand that her success is a blessing from the Lord and not a tool with which to deride and rule over her husband (Ephesians 5:22-24) (King James Version, 2012). Such a man would derive joy and excitement in occasionally covering up for his wife in her duties and responsibilities at the home front as much as he can, while she is away on her career pursuits; and such a woman would never take that for granted in any way, but would express visible, constant gratitude and admiration for her husband; and vice versa.

Decisions on all matters pertaining to financial appropriation and control should be brought to the family table, and with prayer and thankfulness to the God who gave power to make wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18) (King James Version, 2012), such decision should be jointly arrived at with active participation of both husband and wife, taking into perspective the various individual needs of every family member as well as the collective needs of the family, with a structured budget as a guide. This practice would help to elicit financial responsibility and prudence on the parts of both partners and bring them to the understanding whatever successes or earning they make belong to the entire family and not for them alone.

Some researchers have also suggested the operation of a joint account by married career partners for all family finances as this would help to sustain trust between the couple and make them more accountable to each other for their spending habits.

CONCLUSION

Lest the purpose of this research be misconstrued to be a campaign for feminism, or a lobby for the emasculation of the husband figure and paternal roles in the trado-Nigerian setting, it must be re-emphasized that this research has only but attempted to proffer solutions to the challenge of career imbalance issues from secondary data collected in past related researches, as it affects selected couples and marriages in the context of the Yoruba tribe and society of Ogun State, Nigeria, and which findings and solutions could find applicability and relevance in other parts of Nigeria and Africa in general.

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