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Empowering Resilience Among Female Breadwinners in South West, Nigeria

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Abstract

The clamour for gender equality in many societies in Africa is ongoing. This task may seem herculean but it is achievable with constant enlightenment of both males and females alike. The indigenous woman is compelled to obey their husbands since the indigenous society is largely patriarchal. Thus, exposing them to persistent and uncontrolled violation of their rights, privileges and freedom. The significant role of the woman in the economic development of a Nation cannot be overemphasized. Unfortunately, women over time have been limited in their roles but rather confined to the traditional gender roles which prevent expression. This paper discusses the indigenous women as breadwinners vis-a-vis their roles and responsibilities in the family. It also sheds light on how the empowerment of resilience in women can be prioritised. Education, regular training and provision of resources by the Government and Non- Governmental bodies have been suggested as potent ways at empowering resilience in the indigenous women.

Keywords: Female breadwinners, Resilience, Gender, Africa.

Introduction

The obsession and preference for a male child in most African families has tremendously hampered the development and self-actualization of the African woman. Women over the ages have been known to be key players in the welfare of their children. The significance of African women in their communities cannot be overstated, but they encounter numerous obstacles that prevent them from carrying out their roles to the fullest extent possible. It is possible that women have been subjected to unfair treatment even before they were born. This is because, as observed in some African cultures, some may be killed by their spouses or aborted as foetuses due to their femininity. They may also be abused and sexually assaulted as children and teenagers, experience intimate partner violence as married adults, or grow up to be killed by their spouses (Williams, 2019). According to Gwandure and Lukhele-Olorunju (2023), women make up the majority of adults residing in rural and small towns. According to estimates from the United Nations Women (UN, Women, 2018), women make up over 50% of the population in Africa, and 80% of them reside in rural areas. Many of them are also found in semi-urban and urban areas, where they continue to use the indigenous knowledge they have acquired to improve their quality of life. Many governments have failed to take into account the growing involvement of women with indigenous knowledge when formulating policies aimed at providing rural women with economic empowerment (Esiobu, 2021). OECD (2021) notes that compared to men: *rural women oversee far smaller farms, own fewer animals than men, typically of lower quality*

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than males, such as chickens and goats, and as a result, receive significantly less money from their animals, devote more of their time to household chores like cooking and gathering firewood and water, leaving little time for other economic activities, and are less likely to buy agricultural inputs to boost output and productivity, possess less security for their tenure and property rights, as well as fewer incentives to develop their land, lack sufficient representation at the federal level, and, When working, they typically take "part-time, seasonal, and low paying jobs," and their pay is typically lower than that of men..

The gender division of labor is defined and maintained in part by social and cultural norms, particularly when it comes to the allocation of duties between productive (market) and reproductive (household) labor (Wanjala, 2021). Since the patriarchal society agrees to the fact that man rules in the affairs of women, and alludes to the traditional gender norm of inferiority in women, it may not be surprising to find that many believe that it is the right of men to punish women in certain situations (Williams, 2019). This is supported by a number of studies. For example, research by the Central Statistical Agency (Ethiopia) and ORC Macro (2012), Deribew (2007), and Semahegn & Mengistie (2015) found that eight out of ten women would tolerate their husbands or intimate partners beating them if they had at least one legitimate reason to do so, such as when they argue, burn food, neglect the children, or refuse to engage in sexual activity. Furthermore, according to Uthman, Lawoko, and Moradi (2009), 74% of Ethiopian women justified beatings; in contrast, women in South Africa and Nigeria are expected to submit to their husbands sexually and may be held accountable for their men's violent outbursts (Fakunmoju et al., 2018; Hargreaves, Vetten, Schnelder, Malepe & Fuller, 2006).

The modern African woman is gradually rising up to meet and overcome barriers by being more proactive in taking their future and that of their children in their hands especially in the face of a dwindling global economy, where the man alone cannot provide and sustain the economic needs of the family. In the home, domestic duties are not weighed equally, with heavy share going towards girls and women. According to (Akanle, 2011), gender norms give both men and women distinct roles, responsibilities, tasks, and privileges. The UNESCO Report of 2017 states that women are the driving force behind minor changes that have a significant impact on their societies and communities. These changes include improving the standard of education and health care, fighting for their rights, actively participating in politics, and fostering peace, reconciliation, and development. In terms of the economy, women continue to face discrimination and lack of empowerment. Their inability to engage in economic activities is hampered by a number of factors, chief among them being the differences in access to financial resources and the range of industries in which they can choose (Jousse2021). Feminist theories that aim to dismantle gender norms and highlight their detrimental effects on men, women, and society are the foundation of O'Neil (1981b)'s gender role conflict. The socio-cultural norms that limit men's choices in the same manner that they limit women's choices are challenged by it. According to O'Neil et al. (2017), the fundamental tenet of gender role conflict is that people are unable to choose activities, behaviors, and values that align with their identity because of society's culturally embedded gender roles, which are restrictive. As previously stated, O'Neil (1982) pointed out that gender-role conflict and strain are a component of the gender reevaluation that is occurring in contemporary society; this gender reevaluation involves a critical evaluation of

masculinity, femininity, and androgyny as standards for the best possible functioning in a rapidly evolving society. It is important to highlight that the gender reevaluation has had a significant impact on modern society's conception of family life, with the idea of family now being formed and defined through interactions between partners rather than by adhering to rigid gender norms (Khosha-Nkatini, Buga&Achimana, 2023). According to the African Development Bank (ADB) (2015), women and men in Africa frequently face disparate opportunities, conditions, and privileges; they are not always treated equally in the legal system, earn different wages, and do not have equal access to education. The African woman has been known to take part and play a major role in the agricultural economy of the nation, though not without barriers (such as less access to land, credit facilities and all). This may cause a reduction in the general output from their farm produce; sufficient to cater for their families.

Indigenous Female Breadwinner: The phenomenology of vulnerability

Indigenous communities according to Izugbara, Schaub, Bhatti, Marlow, Anderson &Hinson, 2020 live in 35 countries in Africa and they are often hunter-gatherers, fisher folk, and pastoralists. The use of 'indigenous people' is sensitive in Africa; this is due to the early definition of indigenous people as being 'the first people' to inhabit an area, many African states have claimed that all Africans in Sub-Saharan Africa are indigenous (USAID, 2021).According to Idang (2015) and Spencer-Oatey (2012), some indigenous Africans feel insulted when they learn that the customs and cultural practices that their ancestors practiced are no longer accepted. This is because these practices and traditions are an integral part of who they are. Indigenous people struggle to hold onto their land, language, and way of life. They also face significant gaps in social and economic development and political marginalization (Pio, 2020). Although making up 5% of the world's population, 15% of the extremely poor are indigenous peoples (World Bank, 2016). Intricate and multilayered, with various forms of exclusion entwining and gravely affecting indigenous people's well-being in the widest sense, are the issues facing indigenous populations (Brougham, Haar& Roche, 2015; Lahn, 2018; Pio&Sign, 2017).Indigenous women depend on the natural environment for their health and sustenance, just like the majority of impoverished rural women worldwide. They are negatively impacted by environmental degradation and have limited access to natural resources (Mikkelsen, 2005). Indigenous women around the world are speaking up and demanding that their identities, rights, and aspirations be respected. They do this by highlighting the violence, exclusion, and discrimination they face and by insisting on their roles as actors and change (ILO, 2021). Because indigenous society is predominately patriarchal, women are forced to submit to their husbands. exposing them to the continual and unchecked violation of their freedom, rights, and privileges.For example, although Cameroonian indigenous women actively participate in a variety of roles in the home and community (including childrearing, providing care for the family as a whole, building family huts, and producing food), they are not entitled to own the land on which they produce food (Njieassam 2019).Men and women participate in the public sphere in different ways as a result of Cameroon's system of land tenure (Fonjong, Fombe, and Sama-Lang 2013).

Breadwinning women in this context refer to the roles played by females in the home as result of their contributions tho the well-being and general socio-economic comfort of their households. This is consistent with Akanle and Nwaobiala's (2020) submission, which defined female breadwinners as women who earn and contribute the majority or all of the household income and means of subsistence.According to early writers, women in African societies were considered

"jural minors" for the majority of their lives, being under the guardianship of their husbands after their fathers (Sudarkasa, 1986). Men are expected to convert the traditional roles of headship into earning a living for their families, including providing for their wives, children, and in certain situations, extended families. This is true both culturally and practically (Akanle&Ejiade, 2012; Bammeke, 2007). This is anchored on beliefs, norms and practices which multiply poverty and ceaseless discrimination against women. The African man is the King of his family as long as he is able to provide for the needs of his home; a turnaround of the traditional stereotype may cause much instability to the existence of the family. In a patriarchal society, the notion of a woman providing the majority of the household income is frowned upon because African patriarchal gender roles and norms have structurally rendered female breadwinning unexpected, undesirable, and incompatible with the way societies are set up (Coleman & Frank, 2011; Doyle-Morris, 2011; Ntoimo & Abanihe, 2014). Thus, making it very difficult for women to be accepted as absolute breadwinners, since they are still under the authority of their husbands. In situations where women try to assert their authority as breadwinners, they are subdued using various methods, For instance, many of them experience spousal violence, forceful imprisonment and death may even occur. It is worthy of note that despite the inclusion of more women in the workforce in most societies for instance in Nigeria, the workload at the home front remains the same especially in situations where there is inadequate resources to hire maids. Generally, they continue to play the primary roles of homemakers and caregivers. It is now acknowledged that socially constructed gender roles play a significant role in the psychological, relational, and developmental well-being of both men and women (April & Soomar, 2013). Tension, stress, and other unpleasant feelings can arise when someone behaves contrary to their gender stereotype (Meisenbach, 2009). FBs' perception that their male partner did not perform their fair share of household chores was a recurrent theme (April & Soomar, 2013; Chesley, 2016). Among them were female wage earners who assumed the role of primary breadwinner early in their partnership, only for their male spouse to fall short of their initial commitments (April & Soomar, 2013).

Shared experiences and resilience of female breadwinners

Using a phenomenological approach, this study employed a qualitative, exploratory, descriptive, and contextual research design. It was possible to record the lived experiences of female spouses who are the primary providers for their families. This was achieved by using a descriptive phenomenological approach. The participants were drawn from two communities in Ogun state (Yewa and Imota) using convenience sampling. The researchers spent five weeks talking to this group of individuals living in two communities in Ogun state (Yewa and Imota). To gather information on the lived experiences of female spouses who are the primary breadwinners in their homes, in-depth, one-on-one phenomenological interviews and field notes were employed. The interviews, which lasted between thirty and fifty minutes, were audio recorded with the participants' consent.

The audio recordings were meticulously transcribed, and both the transcriptions and the field notes underwent thematic coding analysis process. The researchers received assistance from a third-party coder and a specialist in qualitative data analysis when co-coding. For analysis, he was given a clear set of field notes and transcripts. A consensus was reached by the researchers and the independent coder regarding pertinent themes regarding the lived experiences of female spouses who are the primary providers for their families. In the end, the results were placed in the context of the literature. Twenty of the Thirty five participants (57.14%) were the soul breadwinners of their homes because the earnings of the husbands are quite low and grossly

insufficient to cater for the family. Interviews were conducted and the participants were comfortable pointing to other women in the communities who suffered similar fate as them. They provide the majority of funding in the home. 7(20%) of the women have husbands who do not have jobs or businesses for a reason or the other ranging from domestic/workplace accidents that rendered them incapacitated to being laid off their jobs totally. When asked if they would not mind interviews with their husbands, 26(74.3%) of the women declined because they feel that it would be too shameful for the husbands to know that outsiders are privy to the knowledge that they are unable for provide for their families as husbands. This may not be too far from Chesley's (2016) results, which showed that only 38% of women who earned at least 80% of the family's income identified as the "provider;" Consequently, it is possible that a large number of these women experience role conflicts as a result of their behaviors outside of their internalized roles as mothers and wives (Carelock, Hinds, Lewis, Hoffman, Lurtz, 2022).

It is a general view from the observation that many of these women still hold on to the indigenous beliefs of their areas but they have also devised means of helping themselves economically without disrupting these beliefs. These women have braised up to the responsibility of looking after their families, while still holding tenaciously to the stereotyped gender roles expected of them. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's (SDG5) commitment to leave no one behind provides strong impetus to empower indigenous women and girls and advance the rights of all people (UNESCO, 2017). Unfortunately, this is far from being realized especially in the rural and semi-urban regions generally.

Drago et al, 2024 described three typology of female breadwinner families, which are:

- Families with a woman working full-time and earning more than her husband occasionally, but not consistently. Families with a woman earning the primary income may unintentionally become temporary female breadwinner families if the woman has exceptionally high earnings, the man has a brief unemployment period, or the woman receives low earnings for other reasons. Alternatively, they may also signify a deliberate reaction to economic unpredictability.

- Second, we think there are two types of persistent female breadwinner families. In one instance, which is best described as "economic," the family may become dependent on the woman as the breadwinner due to unfavorable circumstances that have an impact on the man, such as prolonged unemployment or consistently low income. It should be noted that these families do not necessarily reflect the woman's success in the labor market; the woman may have low income, but the man may have even lower.

- Some families with a long history of female breadwinners might be motivated by the idea of gender equity.

Most of the female breadwinners who took part in this study fall within the temporary female breadwinner families as described above. This is because they believe that things will get better soon and their husbands will re-assume the position of providing as the head of their families. The commitment to "leave no one behind" in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG5) offers compelling motivation to empower indigenous women and girls and advance the rights of all people (UNESCO, 2017). Sadly, this is still far from being realized, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas as a whole. Few excerpts of the respondents are revealed below:

I did not go beyond primary 3. I am 32years old. I grew up with my father, who was a local herb (Agbo) seller. My father had good knowledge of using different herbs to treat different diseases. Unfortunately, he died at the age of 85. Fortunately, I learnt about all these herbs from my father.

When I got married, I wanted to continue selling the herbs, but my husband was hostile about it. He forced me to stay at home to look after the children and him. He would always say that the place of a woman is in the kitchen and bedroom. Fortunately, all our children are boys. I prayed not to have a girl child because of this belief. Things became tough because my husband's carpentry work was not moving. I begged him to allow me start the herb selling business for only six months and he could shut it down if it is not profitable. He agreed and I started the selling of the local herbs. Within one month, I was able to make profit that was sufficient to pay the school fees of our teenage children and still put food on the table. My husband was excited, but he warned me not to forget that I am still expected to cook, clean and take care of the house. I agreed and do it with all joy, as long as he allows me to go out to the market to sell my herbs. Now I have a lot of customers who come home and also to my stall in the market. I am also teaching my children about the herbs because nobody knows tomorrow.

I did not know that my life will turn out this way. I have a child out of wedlock. This happened after I left secondary school. The man used to beat me because I told him to allow me work. My mother asked me to endure it because it is good to obey your husband and care for your family. She said she endured too. My child suffered a lot. I ran away from home one day and followed some women who used to come and sell fish in our market. I learnt how to catch fish from there and also met the man I married. He is also a fisherman. He does not have a problem with me catching and selling fish because other women do so too. I cannot sit in the house doing nothing. I must earn something so that my children will not suffer. The Government should help us modernize our fishing methods because the local way is too stressful.

My husband worked in a glass cutting factory. I received a call one afternoon that he had a workplace accident and his right hand needed to be amputated as a result of the accident. It was painful to me because he was still managing very well to cater for me and the children. Things became so tough and I was a full time housewife. I borrowed money from a friend to buy grains and I began to sell grains. My husband was open to the idea and supported me though it hurts him that he cannot carry out his functions as the father or husband. I still carry out my duties in the home because that is what a good woman should do. I try to shield my husband away from the children, because I don't want them to know I am the one providing for the family. They may not respect him again.

I am from a polygamous family. My husband married four wives, I am the second. We have 6 children together. Four are girls but my husband did not want any of his female children to go to school. I circumcised all of them because my husband said they will be loose if I didn't. He wanted them to marry early because he said he has no money to send them to school. Most of his children from the other wives too are females. I used to admire the children from our neighborhood all dressed in their beautiful school uniforms. So I decided start a small cassava farm at the back of the house. I begged a neighbor for cassava sticks which I planted because I didn't have the money to buy. The first harvest yielded a lot. I was happy. I sold some of the cassava and made 'Garri' (a product from cassava) for the house. I used the profit made to send my first daughter to school. I have since succeeded in getting three of my daughters to school. The other wives too have started looking for what to do, so their children can go to school. My

Every woman must know how to cook. That is what my mother told me. She would always say "you are going to get married some day and if you don't know how to cook and take care of the house, your husband will send curses to us your parents" I learnt how to wake up early in the morning, sweep the premises and prepare food for the family. My husband is a businessman but business has not been so good lately. Many days he stays without customers coming to ask for him. I decided to be selling food 'little by little' in front of the house. People come to buy in plates and leave. After selling food for one year, I bought a bench where customers who may want to sit and eat can do so. That was when I saw the anger of my husband. He would beat me a lot because he claimed most of my customers were men. I endured it because the profit I make from selling the food. He stopped beating me the day I started to share the proceeds with him. Now I have a shop made from plywood and more customers too. At least my children don't have to stop going to school and my family cannot starve again. Of course, I still take care of the cleaning of the house and cooking. I dare not say no to sex when he demands it. He says a woman must never say no to her husband when sex is requested even if you are dying.

Defacto situation empowering resilience among female breadwinners

A patriarchal society like Nigeria is one in which men predominate in both interpersonal (home) and organizational power structures. Privilege and power are connected to male existence majorly. The major theme found in this study is tagged empowerment. According to Cornwall and Edwards (2010), women's empowerment is heralded in today's development circles as a means that can produce extraordinary ends. Women are vaunted as a "weapon against poverty". By 2030, efforts must be made in order to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN and improve everyone's quality of life (Williams, Väisänen & Padmadas, 2022). The United Nations (2015) states that SDG-5 is specifically focused on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. It emphasizes the need for equal access to economic resources, including the ownership and control of land and other property, as well as full and effective participation at all levels of decision-making. According to Cornwall and Edwards (2014), who define empowerment as a "journey" as opposed to a destination, empowerment is a process rather than a set state, status, or endpoint, let alone a quantifiable result that can have goals attached to it.

Social norms that require women to be the primary caregivers in the home limit women's access to education, the workforce, and decision-making opportunities, which contributes to many of the obstacles that prevent women from achieving economic empowerment (Kabeer 2009; Abril 2009). The unequal distribution of power between genders in the household restricts women's ability to make decisions on their own. As a result, women will have a greater chance of achieving economic empowerment outside of the home if these barriers are removed within the household (Williams, Väisänen, & Padmadas, 2022). Compared to men, women are less successful economically and educationally and are more susceptible to poverty; many sub-Saharan African nations have the lowest rates of poverty worldwide (World Bank 2018).

UN Women (2011) states that enabling women to fully engage in the economy at all levels and across all sectors is crucial to achieving the following objectives: establishing more stable and just societies; advancing businesses' operations and goals; improving the quality of life for women, men, families, and communities; and achieving internationally agreed-upon goals for development, sustainability, and human rights. According to Nwogwugwu (2019), women are better equipped to make autonomous decisions about their personal health and to participate in

the processes involved in formulating policies that impact them, the more educated and economically empowered they are. Many detrimental practices that favor men are carried out, but gender equality cannot be achieved as long as women's basic human rights are consistently violated (Hannum, 2015; United Nations Economic and Social Council Preliminary Report, 1994). Increased gender equality generally improves the health of both men and women and decreases violence against women (Flood et al., 2021). (King et al., 2020). Resilience was defined by Colloff et al. (2017) and Folke et al. (2010) as the ability to withstand shocks, adjust to changes, and undergo transformation to veer off course.

As previously stated, Alessi et al. (2020) define resilience as a multifaceted concept that spans multiple levels and interacts with the social, political, economic, and environmental systems that people live in, as well as their communities, regions, and nations. According to UNESCO (2023), the capacity to overcome challenging circumstances on a group and individual level is the essence of resilience. The resilience of a community, society, or system is contingent upon the treatment of its members, their access to resources, and the opportunities presented to them. UNESCO (2023) argues that any economy or society that restricts or discriminates against certain of its citizens, like women and people of gender diverse backgrounds, to second-class citizen roles or that hinders them from realizing their full potential in the social, political, economic, or educational domains, will probably be unable to become resilient. Being employed can lead to financial independence and a rise in self-esteem, which are two benefits of employment (Krauss & Orth, 2022a; Willis et al., 2019). Being employed is fundamental to resilience. In spite of hardships, a large number of the women who took part in the study showed resilience. The majority of these difficulties were linked to the gender norms that the male gender is culturally expected to follow. Despite everything they faced in their communities and with their spouses, they persisted and took the initiative. These participants' success stories boosted their confidence, and they felt that if the government and other organizations that support women's and girls' empowerment could support them, they could achieve even more.

Women must be economically empowered in order for them to engage in, contribute to, and profit from growth processes on conditions that respect their dignity, value their contributions, and enable them to bargain for a more equitable share of the gains made possible by growth (Kabeer, 2009). Equal rights and opportunities, safe access to resources, and control over them are all necessary for societies to flourish. Women, girls, men, and individuals from diverse gender backgrounds must all have the agency, social support, and systems necessary to make their own decisions and live free from abuse and violence (USAID, 2023). According to a 2017 statement from the US government, societies cannot develop to their full potential when leaders do not treat women fairly. Economic empowerment for women results in a multiplier effect that promotes economic growth and supports peace and stability on a global scale, as well as increased business effectiveness, stability, and reinvestment in oneself, families, and communities.

Limitations to the study

A major limitation to this study was disclosure on the part of the women. Cultural sensitivity and traditional beliefs prevented most of the women from 'wanting' to expose themselves as the sole breadwinner. They believed it would be a shameful thing for anyone to recognize them as the breadwinner as this will surely bring disgrace to their husbands. Most were also worried about the negative consequences this may have on them if it becomes known to the husbands that any discussion of this nature took place with an outsider. The researchers assured of confidentiality and privacy of information divulged by the women, thus preventing potential harm against the women.

Recommendations for recognition and equal opportunities policies

The significant role of women in promoting the economic development of the society cannot be overemphasized. Many women have remained ineffective in their homes and societies because they have not been given the opportunity of expression. Therefore, there should be a balance in the integration of women productive work and their roles as home makers and builders. The need for constant education for both male and females is also a very necessary ingredient in building resilience in women. Regular education and training help to improve lives, communities and the nation. Education advances women in knowledge and skill acquisition skills. Government should as a matter of urgency take up regular workshops and training on how the women can be more productive without necessarily depending on their husbands for their daily upkeep. Women's access to capital, upgraded needed equipment, markets and networks, should be prioritized without prejudice to the cultural and traditional beliefs of these women. Every woman must be given the opportunity to exercise regularly their basic human right fully, as this will improve the decision making in their families, communities and also promote self-reliance of the women. Thus, making salient the submission of Cornwall and Edwards (2014) that, empowerment is a complex process of negotiation rather than a linear sequence of inputs and outcomes.

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