

Research Article

A Qualitative Study of Changes in the Traditional Roles of Housewives in Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria

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A B S T R A C T

Although hinged on the principles of patriarchy, the Nigerian society has witnessed appreciable changes in the roles of women. This change is noticed in marriage particularly among married women or housewives. Thus, the phenomenon of full housewife is gradually fading away due to the joint influence of westernization, globalization, and modernization. Thus, this study delved into interrogating the various changes that have taken place in the traditional roles of housewives in selected locations in Ibadan. This study utilized a purely qualitative method of research because the subject matter focuses on making sense of meanings people attach to gender, gender roles, and patriarchy. Data were purposively collected through in-depth interviews in Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria. A total of 40 interviews were conducted. This article makes an important contribution to the data and literature on feminism and gender studies.

Keywords: Women, Housewife, Roles, Gender, Feminism, Nigeria

Introduction

From time immemorial, the roles of women have been an issue of serious concern, attracting various debates and scholarly works in the area of gender studies. In traditional Nigeria societies, women are marginalized and viewed as weaker vessels due to the patriarchal nature of the society.¹⁴ In fact, some men in Nigeria believe that the role of the woman starts and ends in the kitchen, in other words, all that a woman was created to do is to be a caregiver. The traditional man is not meant to be involved in domestic chores, as such tasks are reserved for women. The man is classed as possessing qualities like courage, self-confidence, and vigor. This is because they engage in rigorous labour to provide for the family. (Asiyanbola, 2005).

Gender roles play significant roles in modern society. It controls everything about the woman- whether she will be allowed out of her husband's house or not, whether she will go to work or not and whether she will take care of the home or not. Gender roles are imposed by the society on

the basis of masculinity and femininity, leading to changes within the home and society (Ani, 2004).

Patriarchy has been a major characteristic of the Nigerian society. It is the basis for the domination of women in the society. Traditionally, men do not engage in domestic work, such tasks are meant for women. Men are believed to be virile, courageous, and powerful. They engage in "heavy labour".¹¹ Women, on the other hand, are believed to be gentle and caring. They take care of the home including child rearing.⁴

However, women roles in traditional Nigerian society has changed over time even in marriage. In modern contemporary societies, marriage has witnessed new changes in the role of husbands and wives. Today, we find women assuming economic leaderships as breadwinners, a role exclusively assigned to men in traditional society. With the presence of dual income households, we find working class women in many organizations in Nigeria. As such the woman performs both the roles of mothers in the home and

workers in the office.⁵ The economic condition of the day has necessitated the involvement of women to supplement whatever men can afford. Within the household, it is no longer common for a woman to assume the role of a full housewife, whether or not her husband is wealthy. In fact, women are proud to go to work in order to contribute to family income like their male counterparts.⁷

There are certain factors that have encouraged changes in the traditional roles of women in Nigeria. These are the forces of western civilization, urbanization, industrialization, and globalization. As a result of these forces, men are taking more responsibilities at home such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children when the women are delayed at work, work stress, or when they are caught up in a traffic.¹² This article therefore makes important contributions to the burgeoning literature and data on feminist and gender studies on the changes that have occurred among “stay at home” married women in Southwest Nigeria and how this have affected social dynamics within the household.

Methods

This study adopted an exploratory, non-experimental research design. We concerned ourselves in finding out how traditional women roles in marriages have changed over time and the dimension of such changes. Hence, we are also interested in understanding the challenges and coping strategies adopted by modern housewives in relation to their traditional roles. Both secondary and primary data were collected. Secondary data were derived from journal articles mostly and other relevant documents. Our secondary sources included research reports from representative survey data to complement our purely primary qualitative data. These included recent studies/works like those from Akanle O et al.² on “Men at Work Keep-Off: Male Roles and household Chores in Nigeria”, published by Journal of Gender and Behaviour and Yusuf OS and Ajiboye EO¹⁸ work on “Social Change and Traditional Gender Roles in Lagos State, Nigeria” published by African Journal for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. Even though gender studies often rely on large quantitative data, our qualitative data is to provide primary data on social relations and contextual elements and leverage on capacity to dig deeper into relevant subjects especially when we complement the qualitative data with quantitative secondary literature as mentioned above.

Ibadan Southwestern Nigeria served as the study area for the research. Particular research contexts were Old Bodija/Bodija Estate, Sango, and Egbeda. Areas within the local government were purposively selected because they are occupied by lower and higher economic groups as well as semi-literate rural inhabitants. Our data and findings may thus be particularly more relevant to understanding changing gender roles among housewives in rural and urban

households. Ibadan is one of the most populous urban centers in Africa and is rapidly changing to suit modern day growth and development.³ The study population were mainly housewives because they are the primary focus of the study, and they were selected using non-probabilistic sampling method. We identified respondents who were vital to the study and individuals who linked us to other respondents who were willing and available to participate in the research.

The involvement of respondents was of their free will. The study was purely qualitative given the nature of research issues. A total of 40 interviewees who were housewives were selected for the study. Our intention was to include 80 interviewees but data saturation was reached at 40 and we had to discontinue the data collection at that point.

Data gathered were tape recorded and analyzed through content analysis and interpreted and presented as ethnographic discussions. Data collected were transcribed verbatim to protect data integrity and originality. Relevant non-verbal communications such as smiles, laughter, compliments, and pauses were also captured. Ethical issues were given important attention to ensure objectivity of the research process. The principles of informed consent, right of withdrawal, confidentiality, and non-maleficence were obeyed. All interviewees were adequately informed about the importance and purpose of the study.

Result

Of the socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees, 57.5% (23) of the interviewees were part-time housewives, while 42.5% (17) were full time housewives. Educational qualifications show that 17.5% (07) had primary education, 25% (10) had secondary education, while 57.5% (23) had tertiary education. Of the sex of the interviewees, all the interviewees in this study were females living as housewives. This is because they were the very focus of the research. The majority of the interviewees were highly educated as they have higher educational attainment and this was seen in their perception of gender changes within the household. Interviewees aged 21-25 comprised 15% (06) of the subjects; 15% (06) of the interviewees were between the age 26–30; those between the range of 31–35 constituted 17.5% (07) and this was the highest within the age distributions; 15% (06) of the interviewees were between the age ranges of 36–40; 7.5% (03) fall into the age range of 41–45; 7.5% (03) also fall into the age range of 46–50; those between the range of 51 and 55 constituted 10% (04); 2.5% (01) of the interviewees were between the age range of 56–60 and those between age range of 61 and above constituted 10% (04) of the total interviewees. This implies that majority of the interviewees were within the active age and they were actually engaged in one economic activity or the other. Overall, 62.5% (25) of the interviewees

were Christians while 37.5% (15) were Muslims; and 67.5% (27) were Yoruba, 15% (06) were Igbo, and 17.5% (07) were Edo, Urhobo, and Esan. This implies that the majority of the interviewees were Yoruba. This was due to the fact that the study was carried out in Ibadan. Although Ibadan is a cosmopolitan city, it is located in the southwestern region, a region predominantly occupied by the Yoruba people.

Changes in Traditional Roles of Women in Marriages

To have a robust view of the issues of interest in this article, we started our analysis from examining the changes that have occurred in the roles of married women. We decided to minimize our interpretative interference to allow originality. Interviewees gave different views of the changes in the roles of women within the household. The study revealed that some women combine their roles as housewives with involvement in small scale businesses to make ends meet. The small-scale businesses included selling biscuits, sweets and other condiments as such in front of the house, baking and sales of baked goods, buying and selling of clothes, buying and selling of goods. For instance, an interviewee maintained:

I am a part time housewife. I sell baked goods. I get customers from word of mouth and referral. I already have an oven at home, so all I do is bake the cake and deliver the product to the customer. I have a driver that was employed by my husband to make the work easier for me. This way I can take care of the children as well (IDI/42 years/5 years of housewifery/2 children/August 1, 2017)

In line with the above response, another interviewee made the following submission:

Women have always been doing more than looking after their kids entirely and exclusively because they needed to, because they wanted to and because they intuitively knew when to let go step by step. There is this modern-day phenomenon called "helicopter parenting" and I believe that it makes many kids weird and socially awkward and I believe that it is also the result of over-protective parents who underestimate the importance of autonomy for a child's development. As for me, I want to have it all! Why would I want to be at home 24/7 when everyone else leaves the house in the morning? It is very much about the money but it also is about fulfillment, recognition, success and fun - a lot of fun. Is it not lazy to stay at home 24/7 when your kids are already in primary school? You don't have to work from 9-5 every day, what about a part-time arrangement? I actually work full time at the moment with two children one not even yet in primary school so it is not like I keep defending stay-at-home mums because I am one. I would actually love to work part time maybe I will at some point if I find a job, but at the moment my role in my organization needs a full-time position (IDI/54 years/4 years of housewifery/2 children/August 1, 2017).

Indeed, there has been remarkable changes in the roles of housewives. There are housewives who regarded themselves as small business owners. They had cars or help at home which was either a grandparent or the sibling of either spouse to enable them have enough time to engage in their businesses. Being a housewife does not stop them doing engaging in other business activities.

One of the factors that has contributed to the remarkable changes in the roles of housewives, as revealed in the study, is advancement in technology. With the emergence of the internet it becomes easy for housewives to work online or engage in online transactions to supplement the family income. Thus, the role of a housewife has experienced drastic changes from that of a traditional housewife who stays at home to a modern housewife who works outside the home sometimes without leaving the comfort of her home due to internet technology. Against this background, an interviewee made the following submission:

Thank God for the internet. I use to work for Nigerian breweries before, it is not too far from here. But then it became difficult the more to take care of the house and children and my job as well, so I quit and retired home. But at the same time, it was getting boring, so I spoke with a few of my friends who advised me to start selling clothes. But who has the time to be running up and down with clothes and be looking for customers since there is even Jumia (online business) in Ibadan. I spoke with one of the agents there and that was how I started selling (IDI/45 years/5 years of housewifery/3 children/August 7, 2017).

We found that some husbands and other family member were in support of housewives engaging in means of livelihood to support the family. Unlike in the past where it was believed that only the man had the responsibility to care for the material needs of the family. One of the interviewees stated that her husband allowed her to keep busy to contribute to household finances. This way the housewife besides receiving capital from her husband would request less from her husband to take care of herself and small expenses. She averred thus:

My husband was the one that invited the carpenter to come and build a small kiosk for me in front of the house. I sell sweets, rice, soap, garri (cassava flakes), etc. The money I make from this small business together with my husband's money is what we use at home to cover expenses. It is also from my goods that my children pick their snacks, biscuits and sweets from school (IDI/49 years/9 years of housewifery/3 children/September 7, 2017).

The above finding shows that one of the factors that has necessitated the emergence of dual income households is the socio-economic conditions of families in Nigeria. Women are found performing the same roles of the men in the household to augment family income. A similar work by

Aniekwu NI revealed that the status of a full housewife has undergone significant changes.⁷ Women no longer want to be idle at home, waiting for their husbands to bring home the bread. Instead, they are now either self-employed or working on paid jobs.

Another housewife revealed that her mother encouraged her to put her skills to work and not stay idle at home. She gave her reason for not being a full-time housewife. For a working class married woman, she has her money to spend. She does not need to take permission to leave the house unlike a housewife who is always expected to be at home all the time. The respondent stated below:

I make beads and I have been making beads since I was young. I got married immediately after secondary school because I got pregnant and my parents did not want any 'bastard' child in their house. For the first year, I was just at home, cleaning and taking care of our son. Then my mom visited me and encouraged me to continue to make beads and sell. My husband does not provide for me most of the time so I have to use the money I make from the sales to take care of me and my son. If I am a full-time housewife, how would I manage? (IDI/37 years/4 years of housewifery/2 children/July 18, 2017).

As the finding above reveals, some women in Nigeria do not rely on their husbands for their sustenance and welfare. Women are becoming self-reliant, rather than waiting for their men to take care of household expenses. Thus, women have become increasingly economically self-reliant, not depending on men. This is a new insight into gender inequality and the income attainment process. Scholars of gender inequality have generated a substantial body of empirical research to show that women's dependency on men's income has declined over time, however, it differs substantially across countries.^{16, 18}

From our data it can be deduced that the traditional roles of women in marriages had changed over time. The changes in the traditional roles of housewives are due to a number of reasons such as modernization, past experiences, and pride on the part of the wives. Being a housewife does not stop one from engaging in various activities to supplement the family income.

Challenges Modern Housewives Face in Relation to their Traditional Roles

Housewives in contemporary society face certain challenges as they perform their traditional roles. The study discovered that housework and childcare are the major challenges housewives face. However, the extent or degree of how challenging such roles are varies from one housewife to the other. An interviewee in the rural area who captured a modal view during in-depth interviews noted this in terms

of doing house chores which could lead to tiredness. She put it thus:

The house chores are much. I have to wake up very early in the morning to cook, bathe the children, and clean the house by myself. It is when I am done with all of these that I would then have time to go to my shop. Sometimes I would forget and sleep off because I am so tired from all the chores I have done (IDI/41 years/10 years of housewifery/4 children/July 18, 2017).

It was further revealed that some housewives do not have supportive husbands who could assist them with house chores. According to an interviewee, men believe that doing house chores is exclusively reserved for women, so they do all the house work alone without any assistance from their husband. This was encapsulated below:

My husband does not help me with the chores or with the children at all. He thinks it is a woman's job to handle that and whenever I try to talk to him about it, problems ensue. The work is a lot and it is not as if someone is getting paid for it (IDI/36 years/7 years of housewifery/3 children/July 12, 2017).

From the statement above, men have continued to exert their power and superiority over women due to a society rooted in patriarchy. This patriarchal dominance limits men's involvement in domestic labour, seeing such to be within the exclusive preserve of the women. A typical Nigerian man believes that as long as he goes out to fend for the family, the home chores, which include taking care of the home and child rearing, should be reserved for the woman.^{4, 11}

We found that friends and family members, especially those from the husband's family, showed disregard and disrespect for housewives because of the roles they perform at home. An interviewee, who faced one of such challenge, made the following submission:

Since I became a housewife, I almost cannot show my face around my old working place or hang out with friends. I also try as much as possible to avoid family gathering. They do not understand that I love my children and husband enough to put them before my career. They look down on me like I am a lazy person and even my in-laws think that I am just eating their son's money. Imagine! Like as if they do not know how hard it is to be a housewife. Anytime I want to start a side business, when I think of my children I just choose not to (IDI/29 years/4 years of housewifery/2 children/June 22, 2017).

The above response shows that housewives in modern times often face backlash and criticism for choosing to be housewives. Regardless of how hard they work in the home front and what sacrifices they make on their parts; they are seen as being lazy with no career only to feed

off their husbands. When women who have had careers outside the home choose to resign, those housewives are usually told they are making huge mistakes and sometimes people even go as far to suggest that they are suffering from mental breakdown.

According to the study, being “stay-at-home” wives gave men the opportunity to be promiscuous. Some respondents reported on their husbands being “wanderers”. Some reported that since they are already at home, it would give their husbands opportunity to lie to them using work excuses and stay out late engaging in extra-marital affairs as stated by one respondent below:

I have never worked outside the home before. When my husband started staying out later than usual, I never questioned it because I felt he was working harder than usual. Then I was even pampered more. Then I started noticing changes in his behaviour, which was when I started getting suspicious. I did not say anything to him. I just hired some boys to follow him and his girlfriend. I told them to beat her up and if my husband should try and stop them, they should beat him too and break his bones. I waited at home for him that day, immediately he came up, I noticed he was limping so I cooked his favorite food and served him. After he finished eating, I told him I was behind the beating and that next time it happens again, there would be more wahala (problem) than he can handle (IDI/35 years/10 years of housewifery/3 children/June 19, 2017).

Another respondent maintained:

Because you are a housewife, most people assume that you are stupid. I trust my husband but at the same time, I am scared that one day he will go with another woman. (IDI/31years/5years of housewifery/1 child/July 1, 2017)

We also found that because housewives have no time for themselves due to the work they do at home, there gradually lose their self-worth.

Ever since I became a housewife, I am not happy. I thought with time, it would pass away but that feeling of dissatisfaction lingers on. I never thought I would be that kind of woman who will be a housewife. Sometimes I cannot help but feel disappointed in myself. This is because every time I want to do anything, I think of my husband and children first even when I want to buy clothes (IDI/31 years/5 years of housewifery/1 child/July 1, 2017).

The above statement shows that challenges housewives face sometimes are not external but internal. Some women are not happy being housewives but choose to do so for her children. Hersig JP characterized this as the problem that has no name.¹³ As housewives found no satisfaction, they kept asking themselves how long it will remain that way.

Another respondent talked on the pressure on housewives

to succeed in their roles as housewives. There was also was the ingratitude of husbands and children towards the roles of the housewife. She reported that:

The children have to look very neat and presentable. If not, people are very quick to judge and say is your mom not a housewife, how come you are looking like this and all sort of things. At the same time, these people you do so much for and sacrifice much for do not appreciate our efforts most times. My husband would complain about this and that about his clothes and the food, my children would whine and say mommy but you are not doing anything at home now. A simple thank you is all I need from time to time (IDI/40 years/9 years of housewifery/4 children/July 21, 2017).

Coping Strategies of Modern Housewives in Relation to their Traditional Roles.

Housewives face challenges as housewives especially in integrating their roles as modern women and traditional housewife roles. Coping strategies differ from respondent to respondent. The general consensus regarding the challenge of how tasking housework and child care was that there was some sort of help to assist the housewife. This help came in form of domestic servants, children, siblings of the spouses, and parents of the spouses. One of the respondents puts it thus:

I have two housemaids who live with me. I have my own personal driver. I have a cleaner that comes three times a week. I have a gardener that comes around every week. I have a nanny as well and a dry cleaner (IDI/40 years/9 years of housewifery/4 children/July 21, 2017).

This was further supported by another respondent thus:

My husband initially did not want us to have any help, until a period when I was really sick and he had to handle the chores and the children. He did not last for a week. He was the one that went to the village to get two girls to assist me at home (IDI/42 years/8 years of housewifery/2 children/July 19, 2017).

A respondent who coped through help from her sister-in-law and a drycleaner had this to say:

My husband does not want us to have any maid at home, so his sister is with us to assist me with the chores and children. I still have a washer woman who comes around (IDI/38 years/10 years of housewifery/4 children/July 7, 2017).

Another respondent revealed that she received help by joining an online blog which affords her the opportunity to communicate with other housewives like her. Her view is stated thus:

I joined a group online called Lagos Moms. I know I don't stay in Lagos but it was essential. It feels good to talk with other housewives about some particular feelings.

You will discover that you are not the only one feeling all those things. Since I joined, sincerely, I have been feeling better (IDI/30 years/5 years of housewifery/2 children/ July 7, 2017).

This respondent copes through the commendations she receives for being a housewife. She reported thus:

My eldest son has grown into a handsome responsible young man and I am the one who gets the positive comments and pat on the back for bringing up such a well-trained man especially in obodo oyibo (white man land) as they all say. When these kids get older, it is usually the mother that gets more gifts most times than the father. Go to the airport and see the number of grandmas travelling to obodo oyibo (white man land) because of their children compared to grandfathers. I often feel sorry for fathers because many of them were so busy bringing money home and putting food on the table, they did not manage to have relationships with their kids, the same kids that we say we gave them (IDI/40 years/24 years of housewifery/4 children/July 17, 2017).

Discussion

The study revealed that the traditional roles of women in marriage have changed. This verifies Udegbe B study that social change had affected traditional gender roles among couples at household levels.¹⁷ First, it was revealed that some housewives engaged in other businesses while performing their role as housewives. This they do in order not to “lay idle”. Some of them had their businesses where they sold certain goods for people to buy. In the same vein, Aluko-Arowolo and Jegede (2012) stated that women go out to engage in different kinds of work that would fetch them money for the upkeep of the family. This scenario can only be explained in terms of their changing roles. Even when the man remains the bread winner, the economic condition of the day has necessitated the involvement of women to supplement whatever men can afford. Also, it was revealed that education and industrialization had played an important role in the changing role of housewives. This corresponds with Conversi D who was of the view that education had afforded women the opportunity to change their roles in the family.⁸ Similarly, the emergence of the modern world, through industrialization and urbanization relaxed the hardline posture and perception about women's worth and traditional duties.¹⁰

It was revealed that most of the educated housewives saw being a housewife as something they cannot do as long as they were educated just like their husbands. To them, being a housewife is too much work. This validates Ogunboyede and Shittu (2009) who opined that education brings about a change of attitude towards obnoxious traditions and modernizes women so as to be fit for the modern-day reality. Information gathered from this study revealed that most of the housewives were part-time housewives who did

not exclusively depend on their husband. They had other source of income. According to Ogba IM, the traditional role stereotyping of women is which is that of fully caring for the home when the man is away is slowly fizzling away following increase in women involvement in labour force as more and more of them are taking up occupations.¹⁵ It was also revealed that the employment of housemaids to carry out domestic activities in the house had replaced the role of housewives in the family. Some of the respondents had housemaids who assisted them to carry out the daily activities of their homes. Adesina JO buttressed this finding when he stated that many Nigerians now have housemaids, despite the risks involved, who helped them to take care of their homes.¹

One of the challenges faced by some housewives is ingratitude from their husbands and children. Also, some of the housewives were under pressure of performing their roles as housewives, since they will not be treated well if they fail to do so. In the same vein, Cotter D et al. indicated that women who failed at their roles were bound to feel guilty about their failure as a result of the hostile reception they would receive from people.⁹ Furthermore, the respondents saw the responsibilities of being a housewife as too much work which took a great deal of their time. Some faced the challenge of having husbands who were promiscuous while others were experiencing difficulties in carrying out their roles as housewives.

The respondents devised some strategies to cope with the problems they faced. They got support from their husbands, children, family members, in-laws while others perceived being a housewife as a duty they cannot do without. Some in the urban areas, joined some online groups that comprised of other housewives to learn from them on how they cope with their responsibilities as housewives. To some, the smile on their children's faces was enough to help them carry on in their duties.

Conclusion

From this research, it was discovered that there are changes in the traditional roles of married women in Ibadan. From the responses of the housewives who have been interviewed, the dimensions of change varied from individual to individual based on certain factors such as education and religion. It was discovered as well that housewives faced challenges in relation to their traditional roles and had a number of mechanisms to cope with these challenges. Changes in traditional roles of married women in Ibadan exist. Married women modify their roles according to the situation that they find themselves. The patriarchal society has assigned these roles based on gender.

The study has explored and discovered the socio demographic and economic characteristics of married women in Ibadan, if traditional roles have indeed changed,

the dimension in which these roles have changed, and the challenges modern housewives face in relation to their roles and their coping strategies. The findings that were got were based on a sample size that was used. Hence, responses got from respondents might not be true and applicable for the entire population. Thus, it was observed that housewives in modern times choose to be housewives and face challenges that are not only physical but emotional. Findings of the study revealed that housewives in the rural area still adhered, to some extent, to their traditional roles while housewives in the urban area did not really subscribe to being full-time housewives. It was also revealed that women who were high income earners were more likely to stay at home than the low-income earners.

Modern marriage is about pulling of resources together. This is necessary given the fact the economic distress in Nigeria has aggravated the cost of living. Therefore, in order to strengthen the economic foundations of the household there is need for the woman to augment the spouse's income while performing her role as housewife in order to prevent emotional breakdown. The conclusion of the study therefore is that measures be put in place to help cope with these challenges.

Table 1. Key Concepts Derived from the Content Analysis

1.	Housewife/ Stay-at-home wife	A married woman who stays at home and does not have another job outside the home
2.	Part-time house wife	A married woman who stays at home and does business to supplement household income
3.	24/7	Staying at home 24 hours every day

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