

The Impact of Bride Price Payment on Women’s Autonomy in Marital Relationship in Ankpa, Kogi State, Nigeria.

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Abstract. The universally accepted concept of marriage is that between a man and a woman or women, and it is a social institution that cuts across different cultures both developing and the developed world, though, in practice variation exist from cultures to cultures. This variations for example, in a multicultural and multi religious society like Nigeria, could be a mix between traditional marriages, English marriage, court/registry or church marriages, and Islamic marriages, in some cases, it could be a hybrid of more than one of these types of marriages. In this situation a traditional wedding process starts and ends either in the courts, or the church or before an Imam. In Nigeria, presenting and accepting gifts is central to any marriage, a critical perusal of the role of the bride price in a marital relationship could help understand the role of female autonomy and possibly reduce some of the challenge’s women face in this social union. Women’s autonomy is important for them to address matters affecting their status as wives, their health and access to health facilities when they need to, and generally their fundamental human rights as human beings not just as housewives. The study examined married women’s perspectives on bride price and its impact on their autonomy in Ankpa. Employing phenomenological qualitative case study, A total of 20 in-depth interviews (IDI) and 10 focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with married women in Ankpa. Rather than bride price, patriarchy, polygyny and gender role delineation, were responsible for the absence of female autonomy in marital relationships. Participants across all shades agreed that bride price was perceived as a necessary condition for validating marriages and according women respect as housewives and as a source of pride, rather than

being responsible for the lack of female autonomy in the home. To address female autonomy among married women in Ankpa, patriarchy, polygyny and gender role delineation must be addressed. A woman’s capacity to address her reproductive health needs and access health care when in need must be understood as an inalienable right. Therefore, training, capacity building and education that will help build women’s capacity for independent decision-making is recommended.

Keywords: Autonomy, Bride price, Culture, Gender, Multicultural, Patriarchy, Phenomenology, Patrilocal.

1. Introduction

The practice of dowry is contemporarily popular in South and Eastern Asia, Europe and some part of the Americas (Botticini and Siow 2003). In South Asia the term groom price can be used in place of dowry since payment is typically to the groom and family. Dowries exist in societies where group interests value the nature of wealth, and rights are negotiated and transferred (Fleising 2003). The dowry is dependent on the socio-economic status of the groom and the payment usually made to the family of the groom. However, family members of the bride can sometimes collectively help to pay dowry or meet the cost of payment.

Historically, bride-price is a normal practice in subsistence economies where horticultural or pastoral farming practices exist. For instance, in Uganda, and some parts of west Africa, including Nigeria, bride-price can involve payment of money as well as goods such as cows and goats to the family of the bride. The totality of the exchange

whether in cash or goods and services as compensation to the family of the bride constitutes bride-price. Gaulin and Boster (1990) suggested prevalence of bride-price in predominantly agricultural labor-intensive societies where the contribution of women and children is highly valued.

Therefore, the favored type of marital exchange practice is that of bride-price since wealth is owned by the family and cannot be transferred, regardless of gender. In certain parts of Africa, depending on the type of agricultural practices, bride-prices may be favored over dowries. For example, non-plow agriculture requires more labor, while plow agriculture requires less labor, hence the role and contributions of women to the labor force are more highly valued in the former than the latter. It is therefore not surprising that bride-price is common in non-plow system while dowry is favored in plow economies. Botticini and Siow (2003).

Individual wealth is more important than collective wealth, hence the absence of a dowry and bride-price in such economies as the United States. The significance of individual investment as dictated by market forces prevails over wealth accumulation within the larger family context of the bride. The dowry system is a complex process in stratified societies (Harrell and Dickey 1985; Fleising 2003). In India, the connection between dowry and social stratification is clearly discussed in the research literature (Goody and Tambiah 1973; Gaulin and Boster 1990).

In monogamous virilocal economies where subsistent -agriculture is predominant, children are valued assets and the need to remain in the family is a daunting reality. Technically, leaving home means that the daughter can no longer contribute to the wealth of the parents or family. Sons primarily receive inheritance while daughters receive theirs in the form of dowries (Goody and Tambiah 1973; Botticini and Siow 2003). Botticini and Siow (2003) predicted and justified the transfer of property rights and dowry in virilocal societies where married daughters are expected to leave home.

However, the exception to this was contemporary in sub-Saharan Africa where even though many economies are virilocal, bride-prices are preferred. However, in some contemporary sub-Saharan African countries, bride-prices are more prevalent than dowries. Botticini and Siow (2003) examined previous research done by Murdoch (1967) indicating that 7 percent of African societies with bride-prices are collectivistic instead of individualistic in terms of property rights. The study revealed that 66 percent of cultures practice bride-price while only 3 percent practice the dowry system.

Haviland 1996, 2000, opined that Marriage is a transaction and resulting contract in which a woman and a man are recognized by society as having a continuing claim to the right of sexual access to one another, and in which the woman involved is eligible to bear children, while RAI, (1951) observed that Marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that the children born to the woman are recognized as legitimate offsprings of both partners. Though, universally marriage has become an acceptable institution Haviland (2000) concluded that marriage may not always, accomplish the following:

- Establish the legal father of a woman's children and the legal mother of a man's;
- Give either or both spouses a monopoly in the sexuality of the other;
- Give either or both spouses rights to the labor of the other;
- Give either or both spouses rights over the other's property;
- Establish a joint fund or property—a partnership—for the benefit of the children;
- Establish a socially significant "relationship of affinity" between spouses and their relatives.

Marriage as a religious invocation is a necessary requirement for the union of male and female sexes in Islam and the Quran sets out the conditions that must be met before marriage is considered legal and binding. Quran chapter 58 listed four conditions that must be met before a marriage is considered legal for consummation; these conditions are:

- The boy and the girl must be mutually attracted to each other;
- There must be parental consent from both parents;
- There must be exchange of gifts (bridal wealth);
- There must be witnesses at the marriage ceremony (no secret marriage).

While the bible expects that from a groom a certain portion of his wealth be presented to the bride as gift, the Quran set a minimal amount as bridal wealth, but no upper limit to be paid as a condition for the marriage to be legalized. Despite the universality with which marriage institution is accepted, the actual practice of marriage is as local as the people involved. Its conditions, cultural practices, and sociocultural recognitions vary from country to country as concluded by Rees et al. 2016; Walker et al. 2011. Traditional marriages and the church or English marriages were the more

diverse in practice than the Islamic and court marriages, especially, where the traditional marriage proceeds any of these types of marriages.

The sociocultural acceptance of giving and receiving gifts and bridal wealth in marriages in Nigeria, like other sub-Saharan African countries is a phenomenon that is as old as the practice of marriage itself. The exchange of the bridal wealth from the groom to the bride is the most significant event in traditional marriages. Depending on the cultural practice the bridal wealth can be paid in instalments before the actual day of the marriage ceremony, while in some other cultures once the bride price has been paid the couples can as well consummate the marriage and do not need any other ceremony (Ngutor, Yandev, and Arumum 2013; Rees et al. 2016). Marriage is not recognized Islamically and culturally, in countries like Nigeria, without the payment of a bride price (Irabor and Omonjezele 2009).

Irabor and Omonjezele (2009) reported that the exchange of gifts between groom and bride signifies a display of interest by the groom to seek the hand the bride in marriage according to established custom a formal recognition of the couple has begun, the payment of the bride price solidifies the marital relationship. The significance of the bride-price is such that when an unmarried woman gives birth to a child, the child remains with the mother until either the father or any other man wishing to marry her pays the bride-price (Orisaremi and Alubo 2012)

In Nigeria, like other sub-Saharan African countries the traditional marriage process starts with traditional procedure before the church and or Islamic rights and it's during these earlier procedure that the bride price is collected or how the payment will be made is concluded, as Mwambene (2010) pointed out marriages takes place after the bride price is paid supersedes any other form of marriage, such as the church or registry wedding, this position is also supported by the Nigerian marriage act which recognizes customary marriage with the exchange of gifts and payment of bride price, the Nigerian Marriage Act (2004).

The hadiths which form part of the Islamic jurisprudence establishes clear guidance for the exchange of gifts between groom and bride, the minimal amount of money to be paid as bridal wealth, the time of payment, and in the absence of money what alternative items can be used that are acceptable as bridal wealth. It also establishes clearly who has a right to the bridal wealth, and in case of the groom's inability to pay either all or part of the bride price what should be done:

- In Islamic marriage the bride price is called Sadaaqi and is exclusively the right of the bride and she can dispense with it as she likes;
- While there is no upper limit, the sharia fixes a lower limit for the sadaaqi which as at April 2023 is N25,000.00;
- The bride can decide that she does not want money as bride price and can ask the groom to pay her in intangible items;
- Where the bride's family decide they do not wish to collect the sadaaqi from the groom then they must pay the bride whatever she requires as sadaaqi;
- The bride price can also be paid in instalment if the bride agrees;
- If the groom is knowledgeable and the bride is not, she can also decide that he teaches her whatever she wants to learn as her bride price;
- The Islamic bride price therefore can be paid off once and for all or can be paid off in instalment throughout the lifespan of the marriage;

The Islamic sharia allows the groom to collect back the bride price as a right in the event of a dissolution of the marriage, especially if the marriage was not consummated. The shariah however advises that it will be better if he forgives or refrains from collecting it, unless the bride insist on returning it.

Unlike in the traditional, church and registry marriages exchange of gifts and payment of bride price varies from culture to culture, from church to church and from country or state to state, the exchange of gifts and payment of bride price in Islamic marriage is however, regulated and adherents are strictly encouraged to abide by the ruling of the shariah. Though documents are not given, the Nigerian Marriage Act recognizes both customary and Islamic marriages (with a bride price paid along with required gifts (2004).

Refusing to or ignoring payment of the bride price has consequences for the woman as she is regarded by her culture as a concubine and not a wife, while in Islam she is regarded as an adulterer, in the eyes of both the grooms family and the society she is regarded as a concubine, and she and her children have no right to inheritance or any other privilege in the grooms family, this position is shared by Ndolo, 2011, Quran, and Hadiths, in fact in extreme situation the Bible and the Quran prescribes the death penalty.

Sections 10-13 of the Nigerian Marriage Act allows up to 3 months waiting period for any objection before concluding a registry marriage, this period is

intended for any person(s) who for whatsoever reason has objection to the couple being joined as husband and wife. While the payment of the bride price provides the groom unlimited access and right to the bride it however, does not in any way stop the man from marrying another wife should the man wants to practice polygyny and when a man has children outside wedlock as soon as the bride price for their mother has been paid, both mother and children enjoy equal status with those in the house. (Onyango and Mott 2011).

While in Islam children born outside wedlock do not enjoy same status with those born inside wedlock, but once the bride price is paid and marriage conducted according to Islamic rites the former concubine can enjoy the full status of a wife but the child(ren) born outside will not enjoy the same right and privileges as those born inside wedlock, whatever children born by the woman after payment of bride price and completion of marriage rites will enjoy all the rights and privileges denied these born outside wedlock. Bride price and the position of women in Nigeria.

The payment of bride price, though an accepted part of the marriage process in Nigeria and indeed Africa has been the subject of studies by scholars, Hague, Thiara, and Turner (2011) opined that the practice is gradually attracting negative sentiments due to unpleasant experiences associated with the unregulated practice of bride price payment in some cultures. Some researchers have come to associate bride price payment with reduced autonomy of women in marital relationships and have concluded that women are commodified as objects for sale (Kingah and Kingah 2010; Doodoo, Horne, and Biney 2014; Heenren et al. 2011).

Studies by Hague, Thiara, and Turner in 2011 hinted that when exorbitant bride prices are paid the grooms tend to be unhappy and so allow such bride limited freedom in the conduct of their own affairs in the union and this could be responsible for diminished autonomy of the women in marriages (Muthegheki, Crispus, and Abraham 2012). Earlier research work has however suggested that the reduced or diminished autonomy noticed by women is as a result of the role of patriarchy and other cultural practices inherent in the society in which they women find themselves (Fahmida and Doneys 2013; Rahaman, Mostofo, and Hoque 2014).

The payment of bride price among Ankpa people who are predominantly Igala speaking people of Kogi state takes one of two forms, a mix of traditional and either Islamic or Christian rites, or a mix of traditional, Christian and registry form. It is unlike the Indian subcontinent were the bride price

is paid by the bride's family to the groom's family, here the grooms family pays the bride pride to the bride's family but unlike in the Indian sub-continent the bride price paid is not perceived as diminishing the women's autonomy. (Arisi and Oromareghake 2011; Hague, Thiara, and Turner 2011).

2. Gender and Marriage in Africa

When we peruse gender relationship between the sexes in Africa, we come to the conclusion that there exist a subordinate relationship between the sexes from birth, Africa being a subsistent agricultural economy attaches significance to the birth of male children owing to their added value on the farm, the more male children one has means more able hands involved in farming activities. (Hussayn, 2017) To understand further the gendered differences between the sexes one must understand the persistent role expectation accorded the male child as the one to continue the family lineage (Hussayn, Rajwani & Baba 2016)

Despite the heterogeneity of culture in Africa, when it comes to the secondary role assigned the female gender from birth, there seems to be some common unspoken agreement in socializing the sexes differently, this according to (Alabi, Bahah, and Alabi 2014). The birth of a child naturally ushers in some form of joy to the family the level of joy often depends on the gender of the child. The mother of a male child is showered with gifts and in some cases (as in the eastern part of Nigeria) gunshots may be fired in honor of the arrival of a male child (Alabi, Bahah, and Alabi 2014). Kingah and Kingah (2010) reports the opposite in the case of the birth of a female child, which comes with a mixture of sadness and joy. (Kingah and Kingah 2010).

Marriage in most of West Africa is considered the only legal institution for bearing children (Nsirim-Worlu 2011). In an African marriage union, the husband is required to provide for every need of his wife and children. For this reason, the wife is expected to obey and submit to her husband's decisions and desires. However, in most cases, the wives are left to fend for themselves and their children (Frost and Doodoo 2010). For a married woman, once married, she is expected to surrender her sexual and reproductive rights to her husband; for fear of being thrown out of their matrimonial homes or being beaten (Ngutor, Yandev, and Arumum 2013; Nsirim-Worlu 2011). A typical Nigerian family would prefer that their daughter remains married to her husband irrespective of the condition of the marriage (Arisi and Oromareghake 2011; NsirimWorlu 2011).

3. Women’s Health and Lack of Autonomy

Having control over one’s life is correlated with ability to make decisions that affect one’s health, overall well-being and other several health issues (Whitehead et al. 2016). In sub-Saharan Africa, about a million women die each year from pregnancy and lack of access to adequate health care (Adjiwanou and LeGrand 2014). The limitations women face in highly patriarchal societies such as Nigeria erode their autonomy and restrict their lives (Ononokpono and Azfredrick 2014). According to Pennington et al. (2018), women depend on permission from husband or male figures in the family to access education, employment outside the home, health care for themselves and children. Patriarchal societies hinder women from participation in decisions that affect their health and overall well-being

(Adjiwanou and LeGrand 2014; Pennington et al. 2018).

Gender inequality exposes women to mental health risks, Banda et al. (2017), women’s lack of autonomy exposes them to maternal health risk because of gender inequalities. Previous studies have concluded that many married women have constrained reproductive and sexual autonomy, and this could cause serious health problems (Corroon et al. 2014; Ononokpono and Azfredrick 2014). Forced marriage can result in lack of autonomy as young girls do not have the needed RH knowledge to negotiate safe sex and cannot access family planning without their husbands’ consent (Gona and DeMarco 2015). In Nigeria, rape in marriage is not recognized because sex is obligatory in marriage. For in marriage a woman is not expected to refuse his sexual overtures (Okemini and Adekola 2012).

4. Purpose of the Study

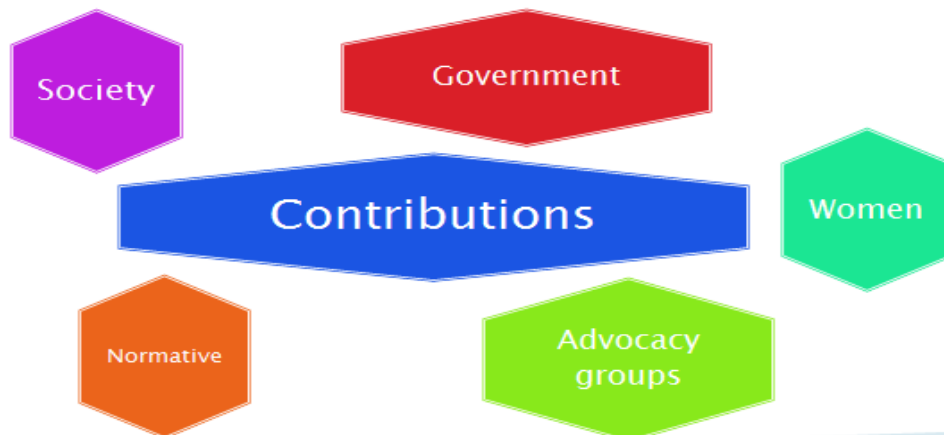


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This study adds value to the existing body of knowledge of the social development of the people in the study area because, despite a plethora of studies on issues of women, little has been done in the area of married women’s autonomy in marital relationship in the study area. The few studies include “Muslim Women’s Contribution to RHD in Ankpa LGA of Kogi state 2017”, “Women’s control over their sexuality implications for STDs and HIV & AIDS transmission in Nigeria” It is in the light of this that this research is being carried out in order to add to existing knowledge.

relations, role expectations and differentials, their influence and control on the behavior of male and female members of the community was also presented in the study.

This study addressed the overall exercise of autonomy by married women in their marital life on issues that concern their health and health seeking behavior in a society with differentiated gender roles and expectations and explained the relationship between women’s participation in family RHD process and their access to health in a culture that treats women as subordinates in power relations in marriage, the effect of gender

The area in which discrimination in the power relation process is most manifest was identified, and portrayed, whether the discrimination is located in the cultural, religious, and/or social sphere in the lives of the people and its implication for the exercise of autonomy by women was studied and explained. Another theoretical significance of the study is the issue of early marriage and its effects on how women exercise autonomy under the weight of religious and cultural role limitation.

It has been observed that most of the women in Northern Nigeria in general and Ankpa in particular marry early to people that are older almost like a father figure to their wives as a result of which spousal communication becomes a

problem, making it almost impossible for the women not only to participate in decision-making but to exercise autonomy on matters that concern them and their family. The significance of the study therefore lies on how to bridge the decision-making gap between couples.

Early marriage, a traditional phenomenon in the study area like most parts of Nigeria as shown in a 2007, 2016, 2017 study over 54% of girls from the North West, between ages 15 – 24 were married by age 15 and 81% were married by age 18 with little or no knowledge of RH including HIV & AIDS. (Population Council, 2007; NDHS, 2008, Hussayn & Ahmadu, 2016 Hussayn, 2017). The development of a communication model that facilitates quality communication for spouses, can help improve family discussion and gradually develop the rapport needed to engage in autonomous decision making.

In the area of practical contribution, it is hoped that this study will help in drawing the attention of policy makers on how to formulate policies regarding gender equality especially as it influences women in decision making and exercising autonomy on matters that affect their health. In addition to the above, the practical contribution of this study lies in drawing the attention of women in particular to identify and play their role in RHDM since it is important in reducing their vulnerabilities.

The overall aim of this study was to examine narratives from married Ankpa women on their perception of payment of bride price and factors that limit the exercise of their autonomy in marriage. For the purpose of this study autonomy is defined as the ability to make decisions and act on one's decisions without external interference (Beauchamp and Childress 2009). Finally, when women are involved in exercising autonomy at home the likelihood that family welfare and quality of life of women and children will be the better for it is enormous.

5. Methodology

This study was conducted in Kogi State, which is one of the 36 states in Nigeria. It is located in the confluence area where the River Niger and River Benue met, the area from which lord Lugard first set up government in Nigeria, the state is host to the Ajaokuta steel complex which at inception represented Africa's quickest route to industrialization. It has a population of about 5.5 million and a HIV prevalence of 5.4% above the national average of 4.7%. (National Population Commission 2010, NACA, 2007, NACA, 2009).

The Igala people live in 9 out of the 21 Local Government Areas (LGA) of Kogi State, namely: Ankpa, Idah, Igalamela/Odolu, Dekina, Olamaboro Omalla, Ibaji and Ofu LGAs. The Igala make up 57 percent of the total population of the state (National Population Commission 2010). They are in the majority and own more than 60 percent of the arable land in Kogi State (Okemini and Adekola 2012, Hussayn 2017). The Igala starting originally as animist have embraced both Islam and Christianity (Imaa 2004, Hussayn, 2017).

Traditionally, Igala women marry at a young age. However, the average age of marriage varies from state to state. A 2007 study showed that 54% of girls between ages 15–24 from the North West, where the study was located were married by age 15 and 81% were married by age 18. The study showed that when girls marry early, they have little knowledge of reproductive health and reproductive life including lack of knowledge on reproductive health rights (Population Council, 2007). This practice can contribute to the lack of spousal communication because men who are considerably older are likely to have been involved in multiple sexual partnering and therefore involved in concurrent and serial multiple sex with all the attendant's risks (NDHS, 2008).

Findings have also shown an increasing polygynous family system in the study area. The Igala people are predominantly Muslims and the majority ethnic group in the study area, incidences of polygynous marriage is on the increase (NDHS, 2003, 2008). Polygyny, cultural heterosexual relationships, poverty and the lack of empowerment of girls and early marriage result in lack of autonomy by women in sexual relationships in both developed and developing countries (Bureau of Global Health, 2003; Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, 2003, Hussayn, 2017).

5.1 Eligibility Criteria.

Only Igala women aged 18-60, married and residing in Ankpa at the time of the study were eligible to participate in the study. Participants were purposively selected across the seven districts of Ankpa LGA of Kogi State. They were reached through trusted designated women leaders who then recruited participants. The support of the community leaders was sought because of the sensitivity of the research topic and because participants would only participate in the study if their husbands gave informed consent.

The objectives of the study and all other information necessary for the conduct of the exercise were explained first to the women leaders and then to the participants after which a list of

about 45 women was provided from amongst whom 30 women were selected as participants in the research. If two or more women were married to a man, only one was chosen to avoid any conflicts that might arise in the house. They received informed consent documents to read and sign.

Participation was entirely free and participants could withdraw at any time from the exercise if they so choose and that data generated for the exercise was to be used purely for the research exercise. Participants' recruitment for in-depth

interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) followed the same procedure. Participants have different educational backgrounds and were from both monogamous and polygynous marriages.

While 10 participants indicated interest in participating in the FGDs, 20 agreed to participate in the IDI. They were informed that some of the IDIs and FGDs would be conducted in the presence of a male supervisor so that he could observe and ensure that the various interview were carried out according to established procedure.

Study design



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5.2 Data Collection

The method employed for data collection for this study was the collective/multiple case study described by Stake (2000). Collective case study involves the investigation of more than one case in order to “study a phenomenon, population, or general condition”. The assumption of this approach is that investigating a number of cases leads to better comprehension and better theorizing (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005, Hussayn, 2017).

Miles and Huberman (1994) contended that studying multiple cases gives the researcher reassurance that the events in only one case are not “wholly idiosyncratic”. Furthermore, studying multiple cases allowed us to see processes and outcomes across all cases and enabled a deeper understanding through more powerful descriptions and explanations.

This study identified the extent to which women perceived their role as married women in marital relationships involved in decision-making in their homes and how this perception contributes to their day-to-day life amidst the power relations and the cultural expectations that dictated the gendered roles, role delineation and expectations under which they operate. The construct of the research study is that of a phenomenological qualitative design. As defined by Creswell (2007, Hussayn, 2017), “phenomenology is a research strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the

essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants”.

As also described by Moustakas, 1994, Hussayn, 2017 Phenomenological content analysis seeks meanings from appearances and arrives at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience, leading to ideas, concepts, judgments, and understandings. As such, the focus of this phenomenological research study was to, through QCA, attempt a holistic understanding of the extent to which the gendered role design and expectations in Ankpa LGA and indeed rural areas in Kogi state Nigeria provided an environment in which women cannot engage in spousal communication that allowed them exercise autonomy within their matrimonial set-up.

A QCA research design provides an understanding of the themes and patterns portrayed by the study's participants. The participants in the study were asked open ended interview questions, such that their specific experiences can be identified. Hussayn (2017) stated, “The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provided the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience”.

Groenewald, (2004) opines that “The operative word in phenomenological research is “described”. The aim of the researcher was to describe as near accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining

from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts. The phenomenologist is concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of the people involved". A variety of methods can be used in phenomenological research that includes but not limited to QCA, Ethnographic Content Analysis, and the Grounded Theory, for this study the researcher employed the QCA and the techniques of interviews, observations and focus group meetings.

The object of QCA can be all sort of recorded communication (transcripts of interviews, discourses, protocols of observations, video tapes, documents ...). Content analysis analyzes not only the manifest content of the material—as its name may suggest. Becker & Lissmann (1973), Hussayn (2017) differentiated levels of content exists: themes and main ideas of the text as primary content; context information as latent content. The analysis of formal aspects of the material belongs to its aims as well.

Accordingly, Hussayn (2017) opined that QCA as an approach of empirical, methodologically controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification and listed the following steps:

Fitting the material into a model of communication: the determined on what part of the communication inferences shall be made, to aspects of the communicator, respondent's opinions, experiences, and feelings, to the situation of text production, to the socio-cultural background, to the text itself and to the effect of the message;

The next step the researcher determines the rules of analysis: The material was analyzed step by step, following rules of procedure, developing the material into content analytical units;

Categories in the center of analysis: This aspect of text interpretation, was guided by the research questions, as they are put into categories, which were carefully founded and revised within the process of analysis (feedback loops).

For QCA the criteria of reliability and validity have the pretension to be inter-subjectively comprehensible, to compare the results with other studies in the sense of triangulation and to carry out checks for reliability. For estimating the inter-coder reliability used in this QCA (contrary to quantitative content analysis) only the researcher conducted the coding as a result of the small sample size and produced the standards of coder agreement this is supported by (Hussayn, 2017).

For this research study, the researcher conducted an in-depth interview and focus group discussion with

women aged 18 – 60 in their matrimonial homes in Ankpa LGA. The interview questions were directed at the participant's experiences and feelings. At the root of phenomenology, "the intent is to understand the phenomena in their own terms to provide a description of human experience as it is experienced by the person allowing the essence to emerge" (Cameron, Schaffer, & Hyeon-Ae, 2001, p. 34, Hussayn 2017).

This research method correlates well with the intent of the study to understand the experiences of women as they meander their way through the dual role of productive and reproductive activity in Ankpa LGA with a view to achieving family and personal goals under the weight of all forms of inequality in the society in which they live, operate and try to claim their rights. Though small qualitative studies are not aimed at generalization in the traditional sense, some have redeeming qualities that set them above the requirement for generalization (Myers, 2000).

The research value of qualitative studies is based on the participant's responses in context to the research questions, as such; the issue of generalization of the research finding needs to be explored. According to Yin (2003) "Qualitative research can be generalized. Analytic data can be generalized to some defined population that has been sampled, but to a theory of the phenomenon being studied, a theory that may have much wider applicability than the particular case studied.

In this, it resembles experiments in the physical sciences, which make no claim to statistical representativeness, but instead assumes that their results contribute to a general theory of the phenomenon" (Yin, 2003). As the construct of the research study would be that of a qualitative phenomenology design, the focus of this research was to understand how effective current practice affect women's effort to exercise autonomy in a society where polygyny/multiple sexual partnering, serial and concurrent extra-marital relationship, girl child marriage result in wide spousal age gaps and communication between spouses (Sen, 2000).

Detailed notes were copiously taken to collect the participants' responses. To compile and analyze the data, all of the responses were appropriately coded. Though the responses were qualitative, a classification coding system was designed and developed that represented a theme for the responses, thus offering the ability to create a coding table allowing for data aggregation and analysis as was consistent with the research each theme and the sub-themes were assigned a code and the transcribed interview analyzed under code

on the basis of the frequency in which each responses followed.

The research data was identified through various data collection methods. Open-ended questions and written comments were solicited from the above-mentioned participants as well as testimonials through FGD to produce data elements, comprehensive data journals were kept through which all raw data can be identified and used for coding and data aggregation.

6. Data analysis

Data analysis process is a way to discover “patterns, coherent themes, meaningful categories, and new ideas and in general uncover better understanding of a phenomenon or process” (Sutter, 2006, p. 327, Hussayn, 2017, Patton, 1990, Creswell, 2007). While Creswell (2007), suggested that content analysis categorizes, synthesizes and interprets qualitative text data by describing the phenomenon being studied. This study employed an open-coding system to carry a content analysis of participants’ narrative responses line-by-line, phrase-by-phrase and word-by-word (Creswell, 2007; Sutter, 2006).

The analysis identified patterns or similar ideas relevant to the participants’ experiences and perspectives about the effectiveness of their participation in the exercise of autonomy in decision concerning their health and health seeking behavior. The final analysis led to the development of a report presenting the interpretation of results, limitations, individual and independent insights, and generalizations of the study.

Ethical considerations and approval

This study protocol was certified by the Faculty of Education, University of Jos Ethics committee and approved by the UJ/JUTH, University of Jos, Nigeria.

20 women participated in the IDIs, while 10 participated in the FGDs, providing data from a total of 30 married women. The study’s response rate was 75% percent. More than half of the participants were educated and some of the participants were in polygamous marriages.

6.1 Participants’ Understanding of Autonomy

All participants defined autonomy as having the power and will of independent thought and action, implying that they do not need to seek for permission from any one before taking action if truly they are autonomous beings. They also, agree that being Muslims and Christians, their religious and cultural obligations as married Igala women

places a burden of acting in consonance with the dictates of their husbands. More than half of the respondents wish they could have and exercise certain level of autonomy but do not agree that it was necessary for women to have full autonomy on all issues concerning her and her family. A small number however believes that seeking for autonomy for women will amount to placing women on equal pedestal with their husband.

Despite their educational level respondents seemed to have a consensus of opinion on the kind of autonomy women need to exercise without recourse to their husbands, on household chores, issues of what to cook, the general issues of the home where men are less concerned, women feel they can exercise autonomy without necessarily waiting for permission from husbands. I know that autonomy means to be in control of one’s self. But as a married woman I cannot do that because that is not our culture, and that is not how God designed it to be. The man is the head of the woman. Therefore, the woman should submit to the man and not equate herself with her husband.

6.2 Justification for bride price

Bride price payment has been an acceptable part of the Igala culture prior to the advent of the textual religions, it is a necessary condition for any form of relationship with the bride. It is important to the point that once an amount is paid to the bride’s family as part of the bridal wealth no other person can be allowed as a suitor for the girl again unless the first person withdraws and collects the money. Marriage confers on the girl security, deductions from IDI and FGD suggests that once the bride price has been paid even if marriage ceremony has not been conducted the status and carriage of the girls change automatically, she is no longer like any other girl around.

Apart from changing the girl’s status, the honor and respect she has brought to her family by the presence of her in laws and the transfer of her responsibility and welfare to the groom relieves her family of catering for her. The level of a woman’s education and her social status enhances her bride price, as a cultural and religious obligation which over shadows whatever upward mobility the woman has achieved. The bride price must not necessarily be paid by the groom, the mother, the uncle, his father or even the bride’s family may pay it as the case be, what is most important is that it must be paid.

6.3 Societal status

All the FGDs and IDIs were unanimous on the fact that woman’s status in the community, among her

peers, and indeed her family is raised appreciatively when her bride price is paid rather than just eloping and living with a man, the status of the bride age wise, previously married, widowed, or had children outside wedlock, working class, highly educated or already living with and had children for the groom is immaterial as long as she is getting married the bride price must be paid. Women face serious social stigma and discrimination for living with men when their bride price have not been paid.

6.4 Perusing the bride price from the point of view of the family and the society.

The bride price has undergone series of modification since the cultural contact occasioned between Igala culture with Islam and Christianity, this contact rather than discourage the payment of the bride price has not only strengthened it but modified it as a moderating societal and family value that must be constantly progressively reviewed, stressing that emphasis should not be placed on the monetary value of the amount paid but on the significance of the symbolism of the amount paid represents to the society.

When a woman elopes to live with a man, she is not only disobeying the traditional laid down ritual of the processes the marriage procedure should follow, after payment of the bride price, the bride will be formally handed over to the in laws in the presence of witnesses in a formal colorful ceremony. By eloping she is truncating the procedure and denying people opportunity for merry making involving many other members of the community marriage in Ankpa is not an individual affair, the society and the family therefore treats such intransigence seriously with sanctions were possible.

6.5 Patriarchy

From birth, male and female children have been socialized differently of role expectation and role delineation along gender lines in Igala society and Ankpa in particular, girls are socialized to gentle, meek, shy and submissive while boys are socialized on the hand to strong, bold domineering and aggressive. Participants in IDIs and FGDs reported that what seems to have an impact on how wives exercise their freedom with regard to their autonomy is not that the man paid a bride price, but it is rather more of a cultural practice whereby the woman, whether married or not, is expected to be totally submissive to male authority. Like most Nigerian cultures, the Igala, Islamic and Christian culture's is patriarchal and emphasizes absolute respect for men. In such an atmosphere, a woman's autonomy is necessarily compromised if not diminished

6.6 Male Child Preference

Participants brought out a culturally sensitive issue, which is at the core of patriarchy in most African societies, the emphasis on male children who are seen as the only way of guaranteeing the continuity of the family lineage. A woman without a male child is not 100% comfortable in the marriage. Being able to produce a male child is one way of proving a husband's masculinity and exercise of authority in his home. This is culturally a disconcerting situation that has compromised women of their autonomy, as women in polygynous relationships compete to produce male children.

6.6 Polygyny

Multiple marriages and serial polygynous relationships have affected women's display of autonomy greatly, in a society where the right of the man to marry more than one wife is not only accepted but is encouraged as a requirement and proof of his masculinity. Women in monogamous marriages are equally constrained from any exercise of autonomy as their husbands can without consulting them take another wife or concubine. Cultural polygamy as well as the negative perception of divorced women, as women who are not able to hold onto a husband has gone a long way to force women to bear with stoic patience their married situation.

Women have been socialized to accept that marriage is about pleasing the man, culturally men are expected to come into marriage more experienced than their brides and women are expected as much as possible to come into marriage with little or no RH health experience, she, therefore, enters the most important aspect of her life ill prepared, naive and meek. This background implies that the man must provide the needed knowledge and leadership for the couple, albeit, she is prepared to depend on him on any and all issues.

7. Discussion

The culture of the Igala people of Ankpa is the subject of this paper on phenomena of bride price among the Igala people with respect to its effect on the exercise of autonomy on issues concerning women, particularly their health and health seeking behavior, in a cultural setting that places significant emphasis on her subordinated relationship to her husband. The voices of Igala women presented in this paper substantiate that payment of a bride price was necessary to accord them respect and recognition as wives in their marital homes and in the society (Lanre-Abass 2012; Ndolo2011).

The FGD and IDI showed good of autonomy and its different implications participants, what however came out from the various interviews and discussion was that salient cultural issues in the socialization of males and females in Igala society more than bride price payment was more correlated to women's diminished exercise of autonomy than the payment of bride price.

The findings of the paper therefore agree more, (Lanre-Abbas, 2012; Ndolo, 2011; Hussayn and Ahmadu, 2016; Hussayn, 20217) and differ significantly from (Turner, 2011; Dodoo, Horne and Biney, 2014; Hague, Thiara, and Turner 2011; Muthegheki, Crispus, and Abraham 2012; Rees et al. 2016) that linked married women's diminished autonomy to the payment of a bride price.

While the payment of dowry in the Asian sub-culture to the man does not diminish the autonomy exercised by the man it must be perused in the same way that payment of bride price to women should also not diminish their autonomy. What paying the price does is to simply legitimize the marriage and confer societal recognition on the bride and groom as couples. Women's diminished autonomy is perused as a broader cultural issue affected by patriarchy, lack of tolerance for single motherhood, and any attempt to reduce the cultural disparity between men and women.

The subordination of women is a cultural practice noticed from birth as agreed by participants in the study as well as studies by (Hussayn and Ahmadu, 2016; Hussayn 2017; Alabi, Bahah, and Alabi, 2014; and Kingah and Kingah 2010). When they noted that the subordination of women is not only in marriage, as female subordination can be seen in the preferential treatment accorded male children from birth and in the family. Thus, in a patriarchal society which emphasizes having male children, a wife will sacrifice her autonomy to remain married.

The threat to a woman's life is heightened by the fact that she is expected to have a large number of children in rapid succession in a cycle that begins with pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding and back to pregnancy without any break and consideration for her health. Family planning and child spacing are considered at all, researchers like Arisi and Oromareghake 2011; Jeyaseelan et al. 2015; Nsirim-Worlu 2011, and Hussayn 2017 concluded that a woman's health can be jeopardized to satisfy husband's desires.

8. Study limitations

The fact that only married Igala women living in Ankpa at the time of the study were the focus of this study, thereby excluding non-Igala married

women living in Ankpa, or other Igala women living in the remaining 8 LGAs of the Kogi state, obviously limits the responses. Married men were also excluded from the study, knowing fully well that being the object of the whole discussion about gender their views on female autonomy in marital relationship is of equal importance. It is therefore possible that all these population that were conveniently excluded may have different perception of the impact of bride price on female autonomy

Further research is therefore advised since even the perceptions expressed by the Igala women of Ankpa in Kogi state is not the exclusive preserve of Igala woman since they form part of a larger culture. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the views of husbands on pride price and women's autonomy. Finally, social desirability cannot be excluded because female participants may have provided responses that were influenced by their understanding of what the research topic was.

9. Conclusion

Power relations in the home diminishes a woman's autonomy as women are expected to carry out roles reserved for them by culture which is their way of life just as the man goes about fulfilling his own roles of taking care of the home and providing for every need of the family so woman should accept her subordinate roles entrusted on her by the society, this erodes her individual identity. Based on the findings of this study to conclude that the diminished autonomy of the women is resulting from the payment of bride price will be a fallacy.

Women's lack of autonomy impacts their RH as she can neither ask her husband to use condom nor can she refuse to have sex with him despite knowing that her husband is involved in multiple sexual partnering as he enjoys the support and protection of the society. The life of women is controlled and influenced by the role of the men in their lives.

In the case of the women's health seeking behavior, the women cannot initiate any action without their husbands' express consent, consent in this case could be providing the needed logistics as well as permission to leave the house, the implication of this has grave consequences for women's health. Women need good health to engage actively in positive development of the family.

Therefore, the cultural practices that erode women's decision-making rights need to be addressed. Creating awareness at the grassroots level on the importance of women's autonomy

could help to enhance and promote the exercise of women's autonomy. Further studies involving larger samples of married and unmarried men and women would give balanced knowledge on the reasons for Igala women's diminished autonomy and the perceived effect of bride price.

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