Rural-urban Differentials in Sex preference as a Predictor of Marital Dissolution in Nigeria

By

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Background

Literature show that parental sex preferences influence marital stability (Bedard and Deschenes, 2005) just as it has shown that marriages are less likely to continue after the birth of daughters than sons (Dahl and Moretti 2008). Like most family systems in Africa, Asia, Middle East countries, patrilineal and patriarchal family systems are found in Nigeria. As such, the Nigerian male child is expected to inherit the family wealth and perpetuate family lines (Ushie et al, 2013; Fayehun et al, 2011). However, African marriages are generally associated with high rates of dissolution and remarriage (Goldberg, 2013a, 2013b). For instance, dissolution rates have been shown to be 9.1% in Zambia, 7.2% in Uganda, 6.7% in Botswana, while 20% of Ghanaian, Liberian, Namibian and Ugandan women experienced marital dissolution after their first marriages and with the lowest dissolution rates of 7.5% found in Nigeria (Odimegwu et al., 2017). Consequently, break-downs in family ties, separation, and divorce have been explained by the severe strain caused by the desire for a male child. In a study in Cross River State, the results showed that despite other determinant (economic and socio-cultural) which increased the rate of marital instability, male preference was a major determinant (Akpan, 1998). Thus, the high premium placed on sons in Nigeria has put married women under intense pressure to give birth to sons so as to satisfy their husbands and consolidate their marriages (Inyang-Etoh and Ekanem, 2016). Factors underlining male preference in Nigeria as well as other Africa countries encompassed a wide variety of historical, moral, ethical, social and economic factors. (Agbor and Gyong, 2014). However, there is death of research on the influence of community effects of rural-urban residence on marital dissolution in Nigeria. Moreover, nationally representative studies on the influence of sex preference on marital status is lacking in the country. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the rural-urban differences in the predictive influence of sex preference on marital dissolution in Nigeria and to appraise the mediating effects of socioeconomics characteristics on the predictive influence of sex preference on marital dissolution

Variables used in the study

The outcome variable for this study is marital dissolution, which was coded as either Yes (1) or No (0). Since no direct question on family dissolution is contained in the DHS datasets, the variables of current marital status, and the number of unions entered into by women were used to generate the composite variable of family dissolution. Based on the works of Thiombiano et al (2013) and Akinyemi et al (2017) women whose current marital status was divorced, widowed or separated were classified as being currently in marital dissolution while women who have never married were excluded from the study sample.The major independent variable for the study is sex preference. To assess the sex preference, we used two variables in the DHS that asked about (i) ideal number of boys, and (ii) Ideal number of girls needed by couples. Respondents whose ideal number of boys is equal to the ideal number of girls were categorized "no sex preference", those whose ideal number of boys were more than their ideal number of girls were categorized as

"male sex preference", while those whose number of girls were more than their ideal number of boys were classified as "female sex preference" . Other independent variables used in the study, and which were identified from previous literature that established their relationship with marital dissolution (Akinyemi et al., 2017; Odimegwu et al. 2017). These variables included wealth index, husband's education, age of woman, number of living children, sex composition of children, intimate partner violence (IPV) region, type of union, and woman's income relative to the husband.

Data analysis

The data were weighted for under sampling and oversampling errors as per the survey design using the stata svyset command before data analyses. All the analyses were based on rural/urban place of residence. Subsequently, the analysis of the data involved univariate analysis of the characteristics of the study population as well as the marital dissolution, and sex preference variables. In addition, bivariate analyses of all the explanatory variables and marital dissolution were carried out using Pearson chi-square test. Finally, binary logistic regression models were used to estimate the effect of sex preference and all the other explanatory/independent variables on marital dissolution in Nigeria.

Results

A greater proportion of the respondents in both 2008 and 2013 had no formal education while 59.80% and 59.12% of the rural women reported not having formal education in 2008 and 2013 respectively. More than half of the women had a job in 2008 and 2013 with more urban women 70.91% in 2008 and 77.25% in 2013 having jobs.In 2008, marital dissolution occurred more in rural (14.61%) than in urban (10.93%), and total (13.60%) populations and in 2013 a higher proportion of women experienced marital dissolution among the rural (13.62%), urban (9.29%), and total (12.16%) populations (Figure 1). A greater proportion of the rural (38.38%), urban (43.63%), and total (39.81%) populations in 2008 preferred to have more male children in 2008 compared to lesser proportion of women among the rural (31.81%), urban (39.69%), and total (34%) populations in 2013 (Figure 2)
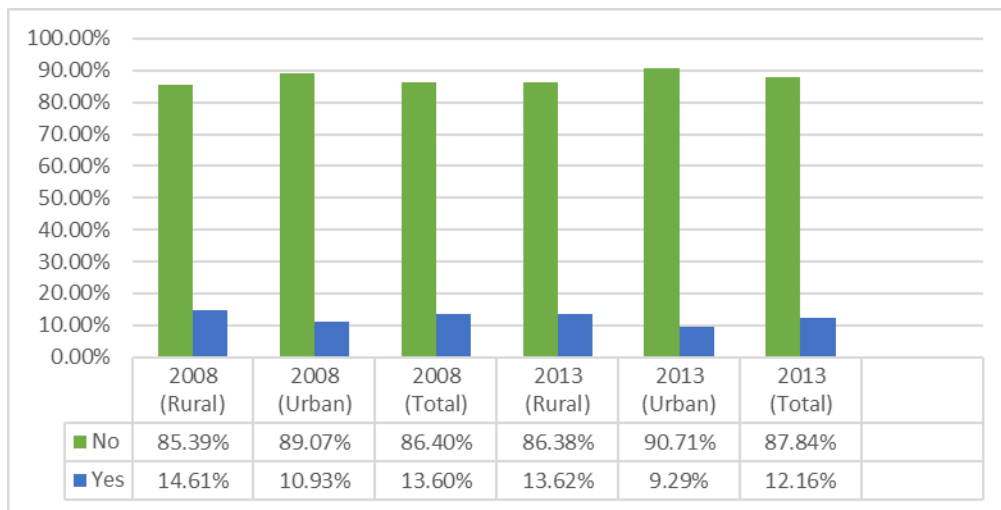
	2008 (Rural)	2008 (Urban)	2008 (Total)	2013 (Rural)	2013 (Urban)	2013 (Total)
No	85.39%	89.07%	86.40%	86.38%	90.71%	87.84%
Yes	14.61%	10.93%	13.60%	13.62%	9.29%	12.16%

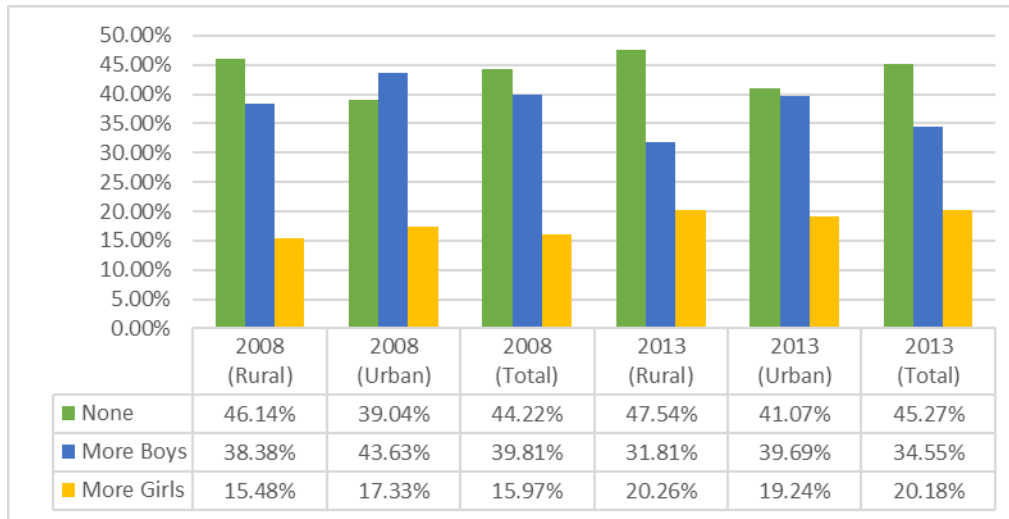**Figure 1: Marital dissolution in the study area**

Figure 2: Sex preference for children in the study area

The results of the 2008 regression analysis in Models 1 showed that sex preference significantly reduced the likelihood of marital dissolution in the rural, and the total populations. (Table 4). With the introduction of other explanatory factors in the models 2, sex preference had no significant effect on marital dissolution even though preference for more boys increased the likelihood of marital dissolution in the rural and total populations. In addition, preference for more girls increased the likelihood of marital dissolution in the urban and total populations. Other variables which significantly increased the likelihood of marital dissolution in the rural area were women aged 25-34 years (OR=2.956; p=0.000), aged 35+ years (OR=6489; p=0.000), respondents in polygamous relationship (OR=3.057; p=0.000), women from the North East region (OR=2.383; p=0.000), North West region (OR=1.666; p=0.001), and South South region (OR=1.784; p=0.05). In the urban area, women aged 35+ years (OR=0.3.170; p=0.001), IPV (OR=2.496; p=0.05), polygamous union (OR=3.204; p=0.000), and women from the South South region (OR=2.131; p=0.05) were significantly associated with increased the likelihood of marital dissolution. In addition, women aged 25-34 years (OR=2.754; p=0.000), women aged 35 years+ (OR=5.815; p=0.000), respondents in polygamous union (OR=3.104; p=0.000), women in North East region (OR=2.282; p=0.000),North West region (OR=1.658; p=0.001),and South South region (OR=1.901; p=0.001) were associated with increased odds of marital dissolution in the total population (Model 3).

The results from 2013 dataset indicated that preference for more boys significantly decreased odds of marital dissolution in rural, urban and total populations. (Table 4). In the full models (Models 2), preference for more girls (OR=1.358; p=0.05), women aged 25-34 years (OR=1.621; p=0.05), women aged 35+ years (OR=4.000; p=0.000), women in polygamous union (OR=2.701; p=0.000), and North East region (OR=1.563; p=0.05), significantly increased odds of marital dissolution in the rural area. For the urban population, women aged 25-34 years (OR=2.789; p=0.001), women aged 35+ years (OR=6.223; p=0.000), women in polygamous union (OR=2.731; p=0.000) and women in South West region (OR=2.439; p=0.000) significantly increased odds of marital dissolution. In the total population (models 3), women aged 25-34 years (OR=1.929; p=0.000), women aged 35+ years (OR=4.600; p=0.000), women in polygamous union (OR=2.700; p=0.000), North East region (OR=1.432; p=0.05), South South

region (OR=1.468; p=0.05), and South West region (OR=1.768; p=0.000) significantly increased the likelihood of marital dissolution.The findings of this study show that in Nigeria, marital dissolution occurred more in the urban than in the rural areas in both 2008 and 2013. In 2008, more respondents indicated more preference for male children but in 2013, more respondents showed no preference for either male or female children. Place of residence (rural/urban) also influenced the predictors of marital dissolution in both 2008 and 2013. Generally, the study also found out older women, women who had experienced IPV, women whose income are more than the income of their husband, household with more female children, polygamous unions, and region of residence significantly increased the likelihood of marital dissolution.

Based on the outcome of this study, anti-dissolution enlightenment programmes and strategies that reduce incidence of IPV should be pursued, especially in urban areas and in regions with relatively high levels of marital dissolution. Efforts should be made to ensure that women achieve higher levels of education as a mitigate measure against marital dissolution. Furthermore, enlightenment campaign highlighting that female children are as useful as male children should be implemented. Finally, since religiosity exerts influence on marital dissolution, religious leaders should use the religious medium to dissuade couples from marital dissolution.

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