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## **In Their Husbands' Shoes: Feminism and Political Economy of Women Breadwinners in Ile-Ife, Southwestern Nigeria**

By Eboiyehi, Friday Asiazobor <sup>1</sup>; Muoghalu, Caroline Okumdi <sup>2</sup> & Bankole, Adeyinka Oladayo<sup>3</sup>

### **Abstract**

In a significant number of societies worldwide, the primary role of men is to serve as breadwinners in their households. However, in Nigeria, since the mid-1980s there has been a steady rise in the number of women breadwinners in many households. In spite of this, not enough studies have been conducted on this emerging phenomenon. Using feminist and political economy theories as explanatory tools, the study examined women breadwinners in Nigeria using Ile-Ife of Southwestern Nigeria as a case study. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were utilized to explore the circumstances leading to the rise of women breadwinners in the study area. The study showed that the increase in the number of women breadwinners was as a result of Nigeria's economic downturn, husbands' uncaring attitude and the need of women to properly bring up their children in line with societal norms. Breadwinning role was found to have impacted negatively on the women, a situation traceable to their socio-economic profiles such as low educational status, occupation and income which have made sustenance of the family very difficult. The paper concludes that the phenomenon of women breadwinners and the problems they encounter are due to economic recession and patriarchy in Nigeria. Governmental interventions that would primarily contribute to wellbeing of women breadwinners were suggested as a long term measure to ameliorate their peculiar problems.

*Keywords:* women breadwinners, political economy, gender, feminism, Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

In our recent in-depth interviews involving women breadwinners in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, a middle aged woman described the present-day husbands as "*Akuko o ko mo*" (meaning 'cocks are no longer crowing'), meaning "husbands are no longer living up to their responsibilities". The preliminary observation suggests that this assertion is not only the reflection of the interviewee, but explicitly captures the state of affairs in many households in the study area.

In virtually all human societies, the role of husbands in providing for the needs of their family members cannot be overemphasized. Mead (1988) and Odunaike (2012) for instance, observe that whether in the primitive or contemporary societies, a man's role from tender age had been defined such that providing food for the wife and children is an obligation. Their roles were primarily to serve as providers and the conveyers of moral values and religious education to their

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children. Mead (1988) and Eboiyehi (2013) also note that in African societies, the central role of a man was to serve as the major provider for his family irrespective of his wife's status. Africans believed that it was not normal for a wife to feed the husband. Thus, a woman who tries to combine men's role with her traditional role as caretaker of the home and nurturer of children is soon reminded that she is flouting the socially accepted norms. She finds herself in a seemingly no-win situation. The qualities associated with the role of wife-mother (nurturance, emotionality, responsiveness to people rather than ideas) are seen to be unsuited with those qualities associated with success in the occupational sphere (independence, rationality, and assertiveness). Other scholars such as Marecek and Ballou (1981) and Kasomo (2010) have also argued that African women have always been assigned the traditional role of the family caretaker and not of breadwinner.

The holy books of The Bible and The Koran also dwell extensively on men being the head and primary providers in the family. For instance, in the Book of 1 Timothy 5:8 the Bible states as follows:

But if any man provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel (Holy Bible, King James Version).

The book of Proverbs 31 also states that providing for the family is not primarily the role of the wife but that of the husband. Thus, from biblical perspectives, a man who makes no effort to provide for his family cannot rightly call himself a Christian. He does not deserve to be called a man.

Islamic religion also enjoins upon the husband, duties towards his wife and children. For instance, it is stated in al-Baqarah 2:233 that "the father of the child shall bear the cost of the mother's food and clothing on a reasonable basis".

It has also been argued that, Nigerian patriarchal society, a man is socialized to be the head of his family (Eboiyehi, 2013). He is also made to understand the definition of masculine roles during the process of socialization, which includes providing for his family irrespective of his economic status. As the head of the family, he is expected to earn the income and has the power to control the family resources. He is the father of all (the children, the wife or wives and anybody living under his roof). For these roles, he commands a lot of respect and high regard from his family and the community members.

However, it is important to note that women were not as docile as the above painted picture. Infact, Folola (2010) was of the view that in the traditional Nigerian economy, women were not as docile or powerless as contemporary literature tends to portray them and argues that ascribing the role of breadwinning to men alone may not be correct as the literature would want us to believe. In the Nigerian traditional societies, women have performed complimentary functions alongside their husbands. Evidences from anthropological and feminist writings on Nigerian women have shown that women played a major role in social and economic activities including local and long-distance trade for centuries (Leith Ross-Ross, 1982; House-Midamba, and Ekechi, 1995; Chuku; 1995; 2005 and Falola, 2010). Falola (2010) argues that among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, division of labour was along gender lines, and women controlled such occupations as food processing, mat weaving, pottery-making, and cooking. Also, among the Igbo of South East Nigeria, Chuku (1995; 2005) observes that Igbo women have played a very active part in agriculture which was divided along sex lines. The men cultivate yams while the women cultivate

cocoyams. Feeding their families and visitors adequately has always been the ultimate goal of Igbo women. It was the colonial administration's emphasis on male-oriented cash crops production in which men and European firm dominated rubber, cocoa, groundnut, palm oil business and which resulted in women shifting to subsistence crops production (Chuku, 2005).

However, over the years, the traditional Nigerian family as described above has undergone significant transformation due to the introduction of cash economy and paid employment which resulted in absence of men from home and their inability to remit money to family resulted in many women becoming breadwinners. These major changes in the family structure have altered the relationship that once existed between the man (the breadwinner) and the wife/wives and the children. In recent times, husband's meagre income, the economic recession and the associated retrenchment of many male workers also forced many women to seek employment outside the home (Bankole, 1996, Eboiyehi, 2013). The introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) by the Babangida's government in 1986 ushered in liberalization, deregulation and devaluation of the Naira and led to the collapse of domestic firms which resulted in retrenchment of many male workers. Interestingly, the late twentieth century also witnessed competition between men and women in the field of professions. This has partly accounted for the increasing percentage of wives who earn more than their husbands, from 17.8 percent in 1987 to 29.3 percent in 2013 (US Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2015). This, perhaps, made Mead (1988) envision that the role of man in the society as a breadwinner might be lost. However, it is doubtful whether this will be the case in Nigeria in the near future.

Nigerian women have always been complementing the effort of the men in providing for the family. Importantly, there is a difference between these women's playing of complementary roles and their current complete breadwinning roles which has affected the women negatively and has constituted a social problem. Undoubtedly, women who play the role of breadwinners face many challenges. To worsen the situation, many of them do not have the skill or education that would help them to weather the storm. As they face the double burden of combining their traditional role of mother (cooking, washing, nurturing, and caring for family members) with men's role of providing for the family, role conflict may ensue.

A preliminary review of literature has revealed that not much work has been done in Nigeria on this emerging issue, hence, this study. The overall objective of this study, therefore, is to examine women breadwinners in Ile-Ife, Southwestern Nigeria and identify the circumstances leading to this phenomenon. The specific objectives are to: (1) examine the social and demographic characteristics of women breadwinners in the study area; (2) investigate the circumstances leading to women breadwinning in the study area; (3) examine the roles played by women breadwinners in sustaining their families; (4) examine the challenges women face as breadwinners; and (5) investigate how women breadwinners cope with the challenges.

## **Review of literature**

The common definition of a breadwinner is a parent that is responsible for the raising of children and represents the main source of economic support for the family (Glynn, 2014). Most literature are of the view that across many societies breadwinning was regarded as a distinctive male responsibility. It is not surprising that much of the discussions in the family literature focused essentially on husband as the "breadwinner" (Nock, 1998; Townsend, 2002; Castelain-Meunier, 2002) and wife as mere dependent. Bassey, et.al (2012) also believe that though, both male and female engaged in subsistence occupation in traditional African societies, male dominated all

occupational sphere controlling and directing the affairs of female. They therefore argued that women were working only for their husbands or other elderly male family members (Bassey, et. al., 2012: 240). According to Odunaike (2012) and Adu Okoree (2012) women generally, perform reproductive roles that ensure the welfare of households such as child birth, child upbringing, and meeting of nutritional needs of the households, environmental cleanliness, and maintenance of family values while men, on the other hand, are engaged in productive roles that provide the means for their wives to perform their reproductive roles.

It is not amazing that the World Development Report (2012) gave a vivid description of a good husband in some of the 19 countries studied as:

A good provider of food, clothing and shelter (Afghanistan); one who provides for everything and pays all the bills (Burkina Faso); one who earns income and keeps his family in comfort (Indian); a big provider in the home; the means for children education among others (Nigeria).

In the study among the Ikot Effanga Mkpa community in Nigeria using Focus Group Discussion and In-depth interview, it was indicated that though women participate in major occupations such as farming, fishing, trading, hunting, brace work, it happened only under the guidance of men (Bassey, Ojua, Archibong, Bassey, 2012). The gains derived goes to the household head – the men - that are culturally accorded headship of household. The major exception is in religious vocation where women do serve as priests without being under men. Similarly, Eboiyehi (2013) found an upsurge in the incidence of female-headed households in Nigeria.

Although little recognition has been granted to the various integral functions that Nigerian women have performed throughout history, some feminist and anthropological literature have demonstrated that from pre-colonial times to the early 21st century, Nigerian women were not docile economically (Chuku, 1995; 2005; 2015; Falola, 2010). Falola (2010) observes that in the pre-colonial period, women played a major role in social and economic activities. Among the Yoruba, women were the major figures in long-distance trade, with enormous opportunities for accumulating wealth and acquiring titles (Falola, 2010). The most successful among them rose to the prestigious chieftaincy title of *iyalode*, a position of great privilege and power. He laments that the most serious threat to the influence and privileges of women occurred during the 20th century, when patriarchy combined with colonial changes to alter gender relations.

Assessing the effects of colonialism on the roles and statuses of women in the economy of Igboland, Chuku (1995; 2005 and 2015) also demonstrates women's roles in the Igbo economy which range from very active participation in agricultural cultivation and food processing to manufacturing and marketing. It was not surprising that Leith-Ross (1982) asserted: Igbo women, because of their economic importance both as mothers, farm cultivators and traders have rather more power than is generally thought.

According to Basden (1982), "Igbo women take their full share in farm work, assisting in the soil and moulding (mounding) up the yam beds. Thus, the gender division of labour in Igbo agriculture has been somewhat flexible in practice. According to Chuku (2005), the increased role of women in food production also continued in the post-colonial Igboland. For instance, during the war period (1967-1970), young and adult males were forced to direct their energy to war activities, leaving the women and children to take care of food production. The varieties of crops planted by women increased. Farmlands were also more available. To meet the challenge of

feeding, their work hours per day increased from 10-12 to 14-16. They cleared the bush, made mounds, planted seeds and seedlings, staked, weeded and harvested. Chuku (1995; 2005 and 2015) also observes that during the Nigeria-Biafra War, women took over the lead from men. They engaged in the ahia-ataki (smuggling) trade of the period, bringing in products such as stockfish, corn flour and salt. According to Chukku, (2015), the active role of Igbo women in trade as well as agriculture was paramount in sustaining the Igbo population during the war. Gender expectation has, thus, undergone fairly dramatic change from traditional to more egalitarian forms, the change which the women, the young, the well-educated, and the upper-middle-class dual-career couples were at the vanguard (Potuchek, 1997; Paterson, 2010).

The political economic theory and sphere theory also provide explanations for the phenomenon of women breadwinners. The political economic theory argues that the economic situation and government policies of any country impinge on the lives of the people within that context; their education, livelihood and even life chances. In applying this theory to our work, it can be argued that as the Nigerian economy entered into recession in the 1980s, which led to structural adjustment programmes that resulted in cut in government expenditures, folding up of companies and businesses, retrenchment of workers, among others, many men lost their jobs and their wives became bread winners. As Marx and Engels (1976) also posited, capitalist political economy entails the exploitation of many by a few and it breeds tensions and strains. Indeed, the nature of political economy of Nigeria created the situation in which few Nigerians pocketed the large chunk of the resources of the nation while the majority of them live in abject poverty. This political/economic scenario has generated very unfavorable economic conditions for the Nigerian people and has been a push factor in generating the phenomenon of women breadwinners in the country.

In the same vein, sphere theory is part of the feminist orientation; unearth cultural, socio-economic and political barriers against women capacity development, empowerment and involvement in different aspects of societal life (Bassey, Ojua, Archibong & Bassey, 2012). The sphere theory posits that the society divided its activities into the public and private sphere and assigned women to the private sphere and men to the public sphere (Cornelly et. al., 2000; Susen, 2011). In this paper, the sphere theory is used to explain the difficulty which women breadwinners encounter by going into the public space of earning money to provide for the family. It also explains the experiences of these women as they found themselves in their husbands' shoes of providing for their household; the physical exhaustion of their work, the emotional trauma of having to deal with their husbands' erratic behaviour. It also explains the role conflict women encounter as they must come home to face house work after doing their breadwinning work. The women must also deal with the fact that they are women and that the society regards them as inferior irrespective of how much they provide for their families. From the political economic and feminist theoretical orientations, we argue that increase in proportion of women breadwinners in Nigeria is a result of economic recession while the experience of women breadwinners is a product of the patriarchal gender roles and gender relations which are embedded into the fabric of the Nigerian society.

## **Methodology**

Feminist methodology encourages qualitative methods of data collection as a means of understanding women's images and preferences. The study combined qualitative and quantitative

methods to elicit information from women breadwinners ages 20 years and above in two selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) (Ife Central and Ife East) of Osun State.

In all, 160 questionnaires were purposively administered on women breadwinners using semi-structured interviews schedule. Women breadwinners were defined as those women primarily responsible for the upkeep of the household and women whose husbands provide little or no support for the family. Data collected centred on respondents' socio-economic and demographic characteristics: age, marital status, education, occupation, religious affiliation, and income; sources of finance, family size, gender composition of the family and circumstances leading to women breadwinning roles.

Thirty two (32) in-depth interviews were also conducted to further understand the circumstances leading to women breadwinning, and the roles they play in sustaining their families, the challenges they faced, and coping strategies. Due to the low literacy level of the participants, interviews were conducted in Pidgin English and Yoruba language. Interviews were held based on the willingness of the interviewees to participate in the study. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and translated for analysis. Verbatim quotations of relevant statements were done.

### **Contextualizing Women Breadwinners in Ile-Ife**

Ile-Ife is located in Osun State in Southwestern Nigeria. The city of Ile-Ife comprised of about half a million and they speak Yoruba language. By tradition, in Ile-Ife, women bore the domestic responsibilities while the men were entrusted with the responsibility of "breadwinning. Although the prevailing norm still states that a man is the family's breadwinner, recent events have shown that there is an increase in the number of women breadwinners. This study is an attempt to examine this phenomenon in Ile-Ife.

### **Findings**

#### *Social and Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

Tables 1 and 2 show the percentage distribution of respondents by the socio-demographic characteristics. Table 1 indicates that more than half of the women breadwinners fall within a wide range of age from 20 to 70 years or above. A total of 56.2 percent of the respondents falls within the reproductive age of 20 and 50 years. This age category could more critical and demanding for women in terms of children upbringing, especially feeding, clothing, schooling, etc that must be provided for by whoever is the breadwinner. The remaining 43.8 percent were aged 51 years and above. Also, 28.1 percent were between 41 and 50 years. Precisely one-quarter (25.0 percent each of the respondents were within the age range of 51 and 60 years and 31 and 40 years old; 12.5 percent were between 61 and 70 years old. Respondents aged 20 to 30 years and 70 years and above were 3.1 percent and 6.3% respectively.

Moreover, 40.6% of them had no formal education, 15.6 percent completed primary school, 24.2 percent completed secondary school education, and 6.3 percent completed tertiary education. The table also showed that 31.3 percent were widows; 28.1 percent were abandoned by their husbands; 21.9 percent were married while 18.7 percent were single mothers. The respondent's age at marriage indicates that 37.5 percent got married at the ages 15-20 years, and 28.1 percent who got married at ages 21-25 years which has implications for the level of income, occupation and the number of children they currently have. Also, 55.0 percent had their first child at ages 15-20 years, 32.5 percent had theirs at ages 21-25 years and majority of them had between 5 and 6

children. Furthermore, 46.9 percent of them were working in formal sectors; civil service (34.4 percent), banking/legal professions (12.5 percent) and 50.0 percent were petty trader (37.5 percent) and farmer (12.5 percent). The remaining 3.1 percent were beggars. Their income distribution showed 15.6% earning less than ₦20, 000 per month, 12.5 percent each earned ₦41,000 – ₦60,000; ₦61,000 – ₦80,000; ₦81,000 – ₦100,000 and ₦141, 000 - ₦160, 000 respectively. Less than 1.0 percent of the respondents earned more than ₦240, 000. This was followed by those earning between ₦221,000 – ₦240,000 (2.5 percent); ₦181,000–₦200,000 (3.1 percent); ₦161,000 – ₦180,000, ₦121, 000 - ₦140,000 and ₦81,000 – ₦100,000 (6.3 percent respectively). The implication of this was that these incomes of the respondents were too low to maintain their families. Further inquiry revealed that the majority of them spent their income on school fees, health, food and house rent. This was found to have negative impact on household food security, which further pushes most of them below the poverty line.

**Table 1: Social and Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (N = 160)**

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
<b>Age in years</b>		
<20	-	-
20-30	5	3.1
31-40	40	25.0
41-50	45	28.1
51-60	40	25.0
61 -70	20	12.5
71+	10	6.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Singled mother	30	18.7
Married	35	21.9
Widowed	50	31.3
Abandoned	45	28.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Age at Marriage</b>		
15 -20	60	37.5
21-25	45	28.1
26-30	30	18.8
31-35	15	9.3
36 +	10	6.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Age at First Child</b>		
15 -20	88	55.0
21-25	52	32.5
26-30	10	6.3
31-35	8	5.0
36+	2	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>



<b>Number of Children Currently Have</b>		
1-2	17	10.6
3-4	42	26.3
5-6	51	31.9
7-8	26	16.2
9-10	16	10.0
11+	8	5.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Level of education</b>		
No formal education	65	40.6
Primary school	25	15.6
Secondary school drop-out	20	12.5
Secondary school	40	25.0
Tertiary Institution	10	6.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Occupation</b>		
Civil Servant	55	34.4
Professionals (Legal Practitioner, Banker)	20	12.5
Farming	20	12.5
Business/ Petty Trading	60	37.5
Begging	5	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Level of Income per month</b>		
< ₦20, 000	25	15.6
₦21, 000 – ₦40,000	20	12.5
₦41,000 – ₦60,000	20	12.5
₦61,000 – ₦80,000	20	12.5
₦81,000 – ₦100,000	10	6.3
₦101,000 – ₦120,000	15	9.3
₦121, 000 - ₦140,000	10	6.3
₦141. 000 - ₦160, 000	20	12.5
₦161,000 – ₦180,000	10	6.3
₦181,000 – ₦200,000	5	3.1
₦201,000 – ₦220,000	0	0.0
₦221,000 – ₦240,000	4	2.5
Above ₦240, 000	1	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Religious Affiliation</b>		
Christianity	105	65.6
Islam	50	31.3
African Traditional Religion	5	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Fieldwork (2015)

Table 2 below shows data related to respondent's family. The Table indicated that 40.6 percent of respondents' children had no formal education, 28.1 percent of them attended primary

school, 25.0 percent attended secondary school and 6.3 percent attended tertiary institutions. These set of children were found to have been assisting their mothers to hawk goods to sustain the family thereby serving as the major economic contributors to the family. The occupation of respondent's spouses indicated that 59.4 percent of the respondents' spouses were unemployed; a major reason leading to majority becoming breadwinners. The data on respondent's family size reveal that majority of the respondents (43.7 percent) had family size that was more than five (5) persons, 37.5 percent had family size of between 3 and 4 dependants while 18.8 percent lived with between 1 and 2 dependants. Also, 31.3 percent of the respondents were living alone without husbands, 28.1 percent lived with their children, and 21.9 percent lived with husbands, 15.6 percent with husband and children while only 3.1 percent co-resided with other members of the family. Moreover, 25.0 percent and 18.8 percent had the presence of adult females and males respectively in their household while 56.2 percent have no other adult members.

**Table 2: Respondent's Family Related Data (N = 160)**

<b>Educational level of Respondent's Children</b>		
No formal education	65	40.6
Primary school	45	28.1
Secondary school	40	25.0
Tertiary education	10	6.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Occupation of Spouse</b>		
Employed	65	40.6
Unemployed	95	59.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Family Size</b>		
1-2	30	18.8
3-4	60	37.5
5+	70	43.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Living Arrangement</b>		
Alone	50	31.3
With Husband	35	21.9
With Husband and Children	25	15.6
With Children	45	28.1
With Others	5	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Adult Composition of the Household</b>		
None	90	56.2
Presence of Adult Male	30	18.8
Presence of Adult Female	40	25.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Fieldwork (2015)

**Table 3: Circumstances Leading to Women Breadwinning**

<b>Circumstances leading to breadwinning</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Absence of husband	10	6.3
Burden to raise children properly	60	37.5
Husband's unemployment	35	21.8
Husband's meagre income	15	9.4
Laziness of husband	10	6.3
Polygynous marriage	30	18.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Fieldwork (2015)

Table 3 showed the circumstances leading to women breadwinning. The table showed that 37.5 percent of the respondents became breadwinners in order to cater for their children, 21.8 percent were as a result of unemployment of their spouses while 9.4 percent were due to husband's meagre income. As such, 68.7 percent of the respondents attributed their bread winning roles to the weak economic condition of their spouses. Other factors include polygynous marriage (18.7 percent), laziness of husband (6.3 percent) and absence of husband (6.3 percent). To corroborate the quantitative data, a 60 year old Odogbe market woman attributed her breadwinner status to husband's failure to provide for the family. She said:

*"Akuko ko ko mo"* meaning "the cock is no longer crowing." My husband is no longer living up to his responsibilities. Unlike in the earlier days of our marriage, he is failing in providing for the family due to his laziness. Nowadays, many women are becoming breadwinners because men are not performing their roles as husbands, fathers and heads of their households. In many homes, wives are now in their husbands' shoes taking over their roles" **Source: (Fieldwork, 2015).**

While some of the respondents complained of being abandoned by their husbands, others lamented that living with their husbands was as good as having no husbands. For instance, during the in-depth at Ife East Local Government Area, a woman aged 45 years and a staff of Obafemi Awolowo University with four children stated thus:

"I am married to one of the most irresponsible men on earth. I repeat, my husband is one of the most irresponsible men on earth. He has contributed nothing to the development of our family since we got married about twelve years ago. My first child is eleven years while the second one is eight years old. I have two other children. He ran away and abandoned us when I gave birth to my first child. He resurfaced three years later to apologize. I accepted him back. He again disappeared after my second child. I sponsored him when he was in the university. Up till this moment, he has no job and that does not bother him. As I speak, he has followed another lady who he is parading as his new wife. I have been the one providing for the family since we got married." **Source: Fieldwork, 2015).**

In Nigeria, as in many other West African countries, polygynous marriages are widespread. Desai and Ahmad (1998) in their study also observe that in most West African polygynous families, each co-wife maintains her own household and act as breadwinner. They note that as a patriarchal society, men have a unilateral right to marry another wife without seeking the consent of his wife. He may also divorce his wife without any reason. Such re-married husbands rarely support the first wives; hence, they start to take care of themselves and their children.

This study also found that some women became breadwinners when their husbands lost their jobs or got retrenched. For instance, a female banker in one of the new generation banks at Lagere, Ife Central Local Government Area (aged 40 years) and a mother of four said:

“I became the sole provider for my family for the past six years when my husband lost his job six years ago. My husband was working with AfriBank Plc. before he was retrenched. I advised him to go for his Postgraduate Degree. He took my advice and finished his Masters Degree in Agricultural Economics about four years ago. Since then, he has refused to look for job outside the banking industry.” **Source: Fieldwork (2015).**

Similarly, another 48-year-old trader with three children in the same Local Government Area had this to say:

“I got married about 18 years ago. Then, my husband was working in one of the private hospitals until he got a job with the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps about 6 years ago. We have three children (two boys and a girl). It was when I gave birth to my second child that my husband started smoking Indian hemp and drinking alcohol. He no longer cares about the family. Maintaining the family was so difficult for me that I sought the assistance of my Pastor and church members. They contributed some money which they gave me to start this business. I cannot sit down and fold my hands while my children are out of school.”

She went further:

“I am the one responsible for the payment their school fees. I am also the one paying for the house rent including electricity and medical bills and all he does is to smoke, drink and run after women. I have completed a two bed room apartment without him contributing one kobo. It is not easy living with a man who does not know his responsibilities. At a point, I wanted to divorce him but for my children. Sometimes, I curse the day I got married to him. That day has brought me nothing but pains, suffering and regrets. My only consolations are the children God has blessed me with.” **Source: Fieldwork (2015).**

Widowhood was also found to be the primary cause of female breadwinning. A 56 years old interviewee from Ife East presents the story of her widowhood which forced her to take charge of her family:

“When my husband was alive I never knew what it was to fend for myself and the children. He was a good man who never joked with his family’s welfare. He was the one responsible for feeding, house rent, children’s school fees, medical bills and all we needed at home. My only duty was to cook and look after the children. Since his death, I have been the only one fending for the family. None of his family members is interested in our welfare. I have no choice but to start doing all kinds of odd jobs. This is the only way we can survive” **Source: Fieldwork (2015).**

Husband’s disability was also one of the reasons attributed to the increase in the number of breadwinners in the in the study area. In this respect, one of the respondents in Ife Central Local Government area, aged 43 years affirmed:

“My husband was a driver at the Obafemi Awolowo University. We were doing fine until he had accident which incapacitated him and was retired prematurely. Since then he has not been able to do anything. We had to move from two room apartment to a single room. It was very difficult for me to run the family without him because I did not go to school. What I was doing was to go to the streets, market places and front of churches and mosques to beg for alms with my last born. When my elder brother heard about my predicament, he was unhappy and sent for me. He gave Two Hundred Thousand Naira (₦200, 000) with which I started this business. I supply semolina and semovita” (**Source: Fieldwork, (2015).**)

**Table 4: Roles Played by Respondents in Sustaining Their Families**

Role Played	Yes		No		Total
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Payment of house rent	100	62.5	60	37.5	160
Payment of school fees	89	55.6	71	44.4	160
Buying of clothes for children	92	57.5	68	42.5	160
Provision of food for the households	120	75.0	40	25.0	160
Payment of medical and electricity bills	90	56.2	70	43.8	160
Involvement in buying of land and building of houses	10	6.2	150	93.8	160

Source: Fieldwork (2015)

Table 4 showed that 75.0 percent indicated provision of food for their households. Others include payment of house rent (62.5 percent), buying of clothes for the children (57.5 percent), payment of school fees (55.6 percent) and financing expenditure on medical and electricity bills (56.2 percent). The only areas where women provide least than men were purchasing of lands and building of houses. Only an insignificant proportion of them (6.2 percent) own land and houses. This is a reflection of a typical patriarchal society where women are not expected to own property.

Interviews also indicated that the women breadwinners play various roles ranging from payment of house rent to children school fees and medical bills. The in-depth interviews with some of the women further demonstrated that they now play the role of both the husband and wife. One of the interviewees in Ife East Local Government, aged 52 years said:

“I am the one paying for the house rent. I am also the one responsible for the buying of my children’s clothes. I provide money for their feeding. Despite from these roles, his mother, brothers and sisters are always coming around to ask for one thing or the other.” **Source: Fieldwork (2015).**

Another interviewee in the same Local Government Area, aged 46 years also stated:

“When our landlord kept increasing the house rent on yearly basis, I decided to buy a piece of land on which we are building on now. I am also the only one paying the children’s school fees. I have since stopped asking my husband for any financial assistance.” **Source: Fieldwork (2015).**

Yet, another woman aged 54 years asserted:

“I can do anything for my family particularly, my children. Since my husband lost his job, payment of house rent, school fees, clothing, medical and electricity bills have become my responsibilities” **Source: Fieldwork (2015).**

Another woman affirmed:

“Since I started this business, my husband has left the payment of house rent and children’s school fees for me. I cannot remember when contributed to the feeding of his children. I do not want my children to be like me so; I have decided to invest on their education to secure their future.” **Source: Fieldwork (2015).**

**Table 5: Challenges Facing Respondents**

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Inability to get loan	80	50.0
Frustration as a result of combining domestic work with work with breadwinning	30	18.7
Struggling to procure food	22	13.8
Challenges of being a single parent	28	17.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Fieldwork, 2015).

Table 5 revealed that their challenges were inability to get loan (50.0 percent), having to combine domestic work with the breadwinner’s role (18.7 percent), single parenthood (17.5 percent) and struggle to meet food need (13.8 percent). Although women breadwinning has begun to be accepted in the study area, majority of the women breadwinners in the in-depth interview

claimed that breadwinning was tedious and frustrating. A 60 year old woman from Ife Central said thus:

“I have had the opportunity to interact with other women who are solely fending for their families. What I found out was that most of us are suffering in silence. That is why divorce is rampant nowadays because they are experiencing what they did not bargain for. One cannot blame such women because combining male and female roles is difficult particularly in homes where men do not care about their families.” **Source: Fieldwork, (2015).**

She stated further:

“A man is supposed to be a major provider in a home, but when a woman takes over that role of sole provider, it becomes very frustrating because no woman goes into marriage expecting to play the role of her husband.” (**Source: Fieldwork, 2015).**)

Another woman in Ife East, aged 62 years also stated:

“A man who cannot provide for his family has failed as a father as well as a husband. That is why it is stated in the holy Qur’an that a man should marry according to his ability. I marry my husband thinking that he should be able to take good care of me and my children. It is very discouraging when opposite is the case. As far as I am concerned he has failed in his duties as the head of the household. Honestly, I feel very bad about it. Several times I had borrowed money to pay children’s school fees, medical bills. How long should I continue doing this? If I continue this, I will die before my time.” **Source: Fieldwork, (2015).**

Yet another interviewee in the same Local Government Area said:

“I went into marriage with great expectations. I never thought life would turn out like this. Taking over the responsibilities of a husband can be traumatizing, especially, when he is still alive. It is more traumatic if one was brought up in a home where the father is the sole breadwinner. My father took care of my mother and all the children despite the fact that he was not rich. I have developed high blood pressure in the process of trying to make ends meet. It is sad that the so-called men of nowadays are no longer living to their responsibilities. It is a shame that women are now doing what men are supposed to do.” **Source: Fieldwork, (2015).**

She stated further:

“When men fail in their duties, they are telling their wives to go and die because we have to combine our traditional work with theirs. Combining domestic work with those of breadwinning is affecting my health. I just can’t understand why the

so-called husbands should fold their hands and expect their wives to be feeding them. It is a shame.” **Source: Fieldwork, (2015).**

These assertions are indications that many women are finding themselves in their husbands’ shoes in the study area. This new role comes with a lot of difficulties as many of them are overwhelmed by the double responsibility. In this respect, being a breadwinner in the family was found to be a daunting task for most of the interviewees as they had to contend with combining housework with income generating activities. One of the interviewees in Ife Central said:

“Upon all this, my husband is always complaining that I no longer give him food on time. He snaps at me and reads meanings into every word I utter and everything I do. You cannot imagine that when our first daughter was hospitalized, my husband said he had no money. Since I could not watch her die, I had to go and borrow money from cooperative. He always beat me. He told our neighbours that I don’t respect him because I did not give him the money **(Source: Fieldwork, 2015).**

Similarly, a middle age woman in Ife East stated:

“You may not believe it that in the last five years, I have been the only one fending for the family. I am the only one paying children’s school fees, paying electricity and medical bills. As I am talking to you, I have not been able to complete the payment of my children’s school fees. In spite of all these, my husband still calls me a bad woman and beats me up with any slightest provocation.” **Source: Fieldwork, (2015).**

**Table 6: Coping Strategies**

<b>Coping Strategies</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Assistance from relatives	60	37.5
Assistance from cooperative society/town’s meetings	30	18.8
Assistance from church/other religious organizations	35	21.9
Assistance from “good Samaritans”	10	6.2
Self efforts	20	12.5
Others	5	3.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Fieldwork, (2015).

As indicated in Table 6, the major coping strategies employed by the respondents include assistance from relatives (37.5 percent), church and other religious organizations (21.9 percent), cooperative societies/towns meetings (18.8 percent), self efforts (12.5 percent) and other sources such as sending children to hawk or live with relatives (3.1 percent). The interviews revealed that some relatives, religious organizations, “good Samaritans” and home town associations were important source of social support for women breadwinners in the study area. A 54 years old mother of three from Ife East said:



“My brothers have been of immense assistance to me and my children. They send money and other materials to support me. They have not forgotten me in spite of Nigeria’s economic situation. For example, my younger brother in Port Harcourt is sponsoring one of my children in the university.” **Source: Fieldwork, (2015).**

Another interviewee in Ife Central (aged 52 years old) affirmed:

“My brothers and sisters have been assisting us by sending money, foodstuff and clothes regularly. They were the ones who assisted me to set up this business. My first daughter is living with my elder sister. She is the one sponsoring her education.” **Source: Fieldwork, (2015).**

The study found that in the absence of support from the family members, some of the women relied on informal social networks such as town’s meeting, weekly or monthly contribution, cooperative societies among others. For instance, a 40-year-old mother of four children from Ife Central acknowledged:

“Our cooperative Society) has been of tremendous assistance. When I came to Ile-Ife, the first thing I did was to look for my town’s people and join their meeting. One of the objectives of the meeting is to assist members particularly those with brilliant children whose parents cannot pay their school fees. My daughter has been a beneficiary since her Part One in the university. When I have any problem I run to them and they always bail me out by lending me some money with little interest.” **Source: Fieldwork, (2015).**

An interviewee (aged 47) with five children at Eleyele in Ife Central Local Government Area also asserted:

“I would have since died of trauma and frustration if not for my pastor and some of my church members. They have been assisting me with food, clothes and money. It is the church that is paying two of my children’s school fees. Our church members also support us financially and materially. The church employs me as a cleaner and pays me a monthly salary of Fifteen Thousand Naira (₦15, 000) per month.” **Source: Fieldwork, (2015).**

Some of the interviewees in the two local government areas who did not have anybody to support them resorted to alms begging. According to a 36 year old mother of 3 from Ife East:

“I beg for a living since there is nobody to assist me. Sometimes, I stay in front of churches, mosques and market places with my children. Good Samaritans have been supporting us by giving us money and clothing materials.” **Source: Fieldwork, (2015).**

## **Discussion of findings**

The study examined women breadwinners and identified the circumstances leading to women breadwinning, their roles, challenges, and coping strategies in Nigeria using Ile-Ife of Southwest Nigeria as a case study. It demonstrated that since the pre-colonial period, women have been playing a major role in social and economic activities in Nigeria. It also showed that in traditional Nigerian society the division of labour has always been along gender lines, and women were controlling such occupations as food processing, mat weaving, pottery-making, and cooking. Although a man was the head of the household in a patrilineal system, older women had control of the labour of younger family members.

Demographically, the study found that majority of the respondents got married early, had low educational attainments and had between five and six children to cater for. This finding has implications for the challenges they face as breadwinners. Early marriage debarred them from schooling and made them to have many children with no empowerment to cater for them. As such, early marriage and having so many children which are product of patriarchal values and practices constitute barriers to the women's development. This finding is in line with Bassey, Ojua, Archibong & Bassey (2012) that there are barriers against women development and empowerment in Nigeria.

Also, poor state of the Nigerian economy, husbands' uncaring attitudes, polygyny and the commitment of wives to bring up their children were identified as reasons for emergence of women breadwinners. The current economic recession has made it difficult for many men to cater for their families. It is important to note the role of polygynous marriages (in which a man marries two or more wives and leaves every wife to cater for her own children) in creating women bread winners. Furthermore, the women's bread winning roles were payment of school fees, electricity and medical bills, house rent, buying of clothes for the children and providing feeding money. These findings are in line with Eboiyehi (2013a) that the widespread economic depression and the sudden retrenchment of many male workers forced many wives to take over the role of breadwinners in many Nigerian families.

Inability to access loan, difficulty in combining two roles and single parenthood were major challenges facing the women. This is expected because in Nigeria, women do not have access to loan especially if their husbands cannot stand as surety. The coping strategies showed that the women were not coping effectively as they only struggled to survive in harsh Nigeria's economic environment.

## **Conclusion**

This paper examined the emergence of women bread winners, the challenges and coping strategies employed by the women. It was established that the burden on wives to raise their children properly in line with the societal norms in the absence of their husbands, being single parent and the effects of economic recession were the push factors in the emergence of this phenomenon. Polygyny and husbands who are able but not willing to work have also contributed to the increase in the proportion of women breadwinners in the study area. The women pay school fees, house rent, feeding and other expenses. This responsibilities result in enormous challenges such as frustration as they combine male and female roles and bringing up the children alone. It is not surprising that they relied on assistance from relatives, churches, borrowing money from informal associations and begging as their coping strategies. One can draw from these findings that women breadwinners is a product of widowhood, abandonment by husbands and political

economy of Nigeria which breeds economic recession, massive unemployment and poverty. Importantly, societal changes that breed single parenthood also constitute a push factor. That the women are not coping effectively is attributable to the fact that Nigerian majority of the breadwinners do not have the skills and empowerment that would enable them cope successfully with the burden of breadwinning role. The situation is more complicated due to the fact that women were not socialized for breadwinning roles.

The paper concludes that the phenomenon of women breadwinners and the problems they encounter are due to economic recession and patriarchy in Nigeria. This is part of the issues that feminism had been arguing about that social and cultural barriers debar women from being empowered thus reiterating the argument of the paper that the experience of women breadwinners is a product of the patriarchal gender roles and gender relations in Nigeria.

Based on the above findings it is recommended that:

- There is the need for interventions aimed at reducing the burden and enhancing the well-being of women breadwinners. For instance, the majority of the respondents in the survey and in-depth interview are of low educational and occupational statuses. In this regard, there is need for women to benefit from free education and vocational training which is globally accepted as a tool for women development and empowerment;
- There is the need for interventions aimed at reducing the burden and enhancing the well-being of women breadwinners especially widows and single mothers by providing access to soft loans to women in order to ease their frustration;
- Employment is a key to eliminating most of the contemporary social vices. It is therefore, suggested that Nigeria government should provide employment opportunities for its citizenry particularly, men who are supposed to be household heads. There should be a framework to sanction any adult male who is able but not willing to work;
- Given the findings that access to loan is one of the major challenges facing women breadwinners in the study area, it is recommended that government should create platforms through which access to loan on affordable terms as well as health and other social security benefits for women can be guaranteed;
- Given the contributory role of polygyny in the upsurge in the number of women breadwinners, it is recommended that public enlightenment should be mounted through the mass media and community based association to discourage men against the practice.

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