Social Construction of Manhood in Nigeria: Implications for Male Responsibility in Reproductive Health

Janice E. Olawoye, Femi O. Omololu, Yinka Aderinto, Iyabode Adeyefa, Debo Adeyemo, Babatunde Osotimehin
Social Sciences and Reproductive Health Research Network, East Gate Road, University College Hospital, Ibadan, Nigeria[1]

Abstract

This paper examines social construction of masculinity and manhood and gender socialisation among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, with the aid of a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. The sample included male and female, young and old respondents, representing the Yoruba of the Southwest, the Igbo of the Southeast and the Hausa of the North. The study found that, in general, manhood is usually strongly associated with the social position in the family and the physical capability to satisfy the sexual needs of the female partner(s) and to produce children. Decision-making authority, including decision on reproduction, is largely vested in the man. Gender socialising for developing boys into men, including their sexual behaviour, is largely affected by instruction from the mother and the example of the father, while role enactment is closely monitored by the society. Even though significant socio-cultural differences between ethnic groups were found in gender socialising and the resultant roles, male dominance is pervasive and affects reproductive behaviour and health status of both males and females. Change in gender roles, including sexual relationships, will require enlightenment on the need for greater male responsibility in their relationship with females.

Introduction

In every society, gender relationships are determined by social norms, values and beliefs. The roles performed by males and females in the family and the community as well as the responsibilities ascribed to these roles are socially constructed and passed down by the socialisation process. For this reason, rights and obligations of males and females from different groups may vary. The domination of males over females is common in many societies, particularly in developing countries, and often forms the basis for gender relations:

> *Power … has been singled out as one important determinant of gender attributes, influencing the ways culture and society define what is masculine and feminine*" (Mundigo, 1998: 7).

The role of a male or female is also reflected in terms of the relationship of an individual to another. Females are usually described as the daughter of a particular kinship group, wife of a certain man or mother of someone, but hardly in her own individual capacity or achievements (Aig-Imoukhuede, 1990). In other words, society may not see the woman as having any value, except in terms of her ability to perform her traditional role in the household. As noted by one writer, "*a great number of barriers [for women] are rooted in social values, customs, beliefs and assumptions about the nature of a woman and her capability*" (Ahmed, 1990: 13). Males, on the other hand, are generally referred to as the head of the household or in terms of their position or occupation. These socially determined roles in the household have a significant effect upon the manner that decisions are made concerning the number of children that the woman will have and the type of social services she will be able to access and use.

The social pressure to conform to the social elements determining gender relationships is strong and deviance often carries a sanction, particularly for females. To resist one's socially prescribed position is to risk social disfavour which might not only affect one's position in the family, but also in social, work or religious groups, as well as in the community at large (Olawoye, 1996). In many societies, females are so thoroughly socialised to be dependent upon the males in their families or work place that they feel they are incapable of changing in the situation of male dominance. The irony is that females are the major socialising force in the family, usually reinforcing the traditional beliefs that males are more technically competent and better decision-makers than females and teaching the boys to be more aggressive and less sensitive to the reactions of others. In a situation where a young boy may be naturally timid and withdrawn, he may be derided as 'being too feminine'.

Males in the household usually have greater decision-making power than females. In many cases, sons may even make decisions for their mothers. When females are given greater independence to make decisions, however, they are sometimes not willing to take advantage of the opportunity. Karanga (1983) conducted a survey of households in Lagos, Nigeria, and found that, in most cases, the husband alone decided the most important issues affecting the family. The only issue that had support of the majority of the respondents for the wife to have sole decision-making power was on the domestic food menu. For most respondents, this arrangement was acceptable, not only to the man, but also to the woman.

Gender relationships and the social prescriptions for the roles of males and females are not static, however. Even in traditional cultural settings, gender roles have witnessed changes.

Among the major contemporary forces of change is the economic crisis in many developing countries. The decreasing standards of living in many societies over the past two decades have forced many traditionally single (male) earner / provider families to become 'two-earner' families (Wainerman, 1998). This trend has similarly caused a power shift in many households from the former patriarchal arrangement to a more egalitarian decision-making unit.

Recognising the dynamic nature of gender relationships, it is possible to direct the change in the roles of males and females in the society. The directed change, however, should be done in an enlightened way.

> *Cultural differences often lead to unequal education and, therefore, unequal development. Where social practices which debase womanhood and undermine the girl-child's confidence take place, conscious enlightenment programmes should be instituted* (Adegbola, 1996: 39).

Gender experts have sometimes been unfair in their analysis of the actions and perspectives of males concerning their responsibilities toward their female counterparts, especially in terms of actions affecting reproductive health. The typical picture of males as being domineering and irresponsible even in their sexual relationships has sometimes been found to be inaccurate even though it is commonly used stereotypic view. Such negative stereotypes, even if they are inaccurate, can have a reinforcing impact on the tendency to act irresponsibly:

> *Men are more concerned about their partners / spouses and children than the stereotypes would suggest. However, stereotypes are hard to change. The assumption of many health care providers that men are uninterested in taking responsibility for family planning has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Most reproductive health / family planning service delivery systems are almost entirely oriented to women and provide little or no information about male contraceptive methods. Health workers are sometimes poorly trained in counselling men about safer sexual practices and male methods, and may communicate negative rumours about them* (UNFPA, 1995: 1-2).

Recognition of the wide range of possible attitudes and behaviours of males requires research that takes into consideration the variations by socio-cultural group, age and locality, as well as other potentially significant differences. It is necessary for researchers and practitioners to go beyond the stereotypes of gender relationships that portray men as manipulative and authoritarian. This

study takes one step in this process of gaining an understanding of the levels and determinants of male responsibility enactment by studying the ways that males are socialised to fit into their culturally-prescribed gender position.

Focus of the Study

To determine the significance of socio-cultural factors upon gender relationships, a study was carried out at the Social Sciences and Reproductive Health Research Network, Ibadan. The major objective of the study was to investigate the process of the social construction of masculinity and manhood from the perspectives of both men and women from different socio-cultural backgrounds. From this study, a detailed, comparative description of masculinity and manhood in the context of the socially heterogeneous Nigerian society was derived.

Methods Used in the Study

Due to the realisation that the topic is still largely exploratory and relatively few studies have been conducted on male responsibility in Nigeria in 1998 when the data collection took place, the study relied heavily upon the use of qualitative data collection during the first stage of the study, but also made use of quantitative data collection in the follow-up study. Focus group discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews (IDI) were predominantly used to secure the views of both young and older Nigerian males and females, in addition to family case studies and a survey that involved 1,475 interviewees. In all, a total of 28 FGDs, 12 IDIs, 6 family in-depth case studies were conducted. In the case of the survey, an urban to rural ratio of about 60:40, a male to female ratio of 2:1, were achieved. The respondents were selected by purposive stratified sampling in each of the three zones with the major ethnic group of each zone. The sample of the study was also stratified to include male and female respondents as well as rural and urban dwellers. Table 1 gives an overview of methods used in fieldwork, while Table 2 provides the distribution of survey participants by zone and site. The methods complement one another, so that the principle of triangulation was used to verify the findings and draw inferences from the results.

Data Analysis

The data from the survey were analysed with the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented as frequencies and percentages. The qualitative data, on the other hand, were coded according to the responses offered by the respondents and discussants for each question. In this way, basic trends and ranking of response categories are determined.

Table 1: Overview of Methods Used in Fieldwork

Method	Number per zone	Respondents
Focus group discussion (FGD)	8 groups: 4 urban 4 rural (4 additional in the West)*	Males: 25-44 yrs Females: 25-44 yrs Males: 45-66 yrs Females: 45-66 yrs 1 group at each urban and rural site
In-depth case study	4 key informant 2 urban 2 rural	1 religious or community leader; 1 teacher at each rural and urban site
Family in-depth case study	2 cases per zone 1 urban 1 urban	Everyone in a small household
Survey Pilot Full	200 interviews 500 interviews	Men and women, aged 15-65 years

*The Four Additional FGDs Were Conducted in the Matrilineal Community

The surveys carried out during the first phase were complementary to the qualitative methods. Nearly all the questions in the surveys were open-ended. This was done because the initial phase of the study was exploratory and the widest range of responses was sought. Consequently, the findings of the surveys are reported qualitatively, and quantified where necessary.

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Survey Participants by Zone and Site

Zone	Site	No.	%	Zonal Total
North	Zaria	295	20.0	495(33.6%)
	Wanka	200	13.6	
East	Awka	295	20.0	489(33.1%)
	Achalla	194	13.1	
West	Oyo	308	20.9	491(33.3%)
	Ikereku	183	12.4	
Total		1,475	100.0	1475(100%)

Social Diversity of the Study Area

Nigeria is a cultural diverse country with some 389 different ethnic groups (Otite, 2000). To investigate the effect of socio-cultural differences upon gender responsibilities, the study was carried out using three major cultural groups; the Hausa in the northern zone, the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria (or the East) and the Yoruba of the southwest. One rural and one urban site were chosen in each area. On the basis of secondary data, each study area is ethnographically described in the following sections. The descriptions are mostly centred upon issues related to gender roles and the socialisation process, particularly affecting males. The responsibilities of males in their marital relationships are also focused upon.

The Northern Zone

The two research sites in Northern Nigeria were located in Kaduna State and predominantly comprising the Hausa / Fulani Muslims. In both the sampled urban and rural communities, Zaria and Wanka respectively, the influence of Islam is strongly felt at all levels of the socio-cultural and political life.

The people of this area live in extended lineages that form an *anguwa*, or quarter. Members of each *anguwa* usually claim common descent from one person. The majority of the houses in Zaria have one entrance hall that leads into the compound. The hall serves as a reception or visiting area for the head of the compound. Rooms for each of the wives are located further inside the compound. The number and size of rooms are determined by the number of wives and the status of the man. The household head has his own private apartment inside the house called the *turaka*. Each wife takes her turn to go there to meet with him and cook his food for a specified period.

Establishing a family is considered to be an important step in life. An adult male who has attained marriageable age - from about 18-20 years - but has not taken a wife is regarded as an irresponsible person. In the past, most marriages were arranged by the parents. Cousins are often the preferred choice. In more recent times, the prospective couples usually have more choice and flexibility in their marriage partners.

The marriage ceremony (the wedding *fatiha*) is usually an all male affair, lasting about ten to fifteen minutes. When the *fatiha* is over, the celebration becomes a female affair. After the wedding, the responsibility of feeding, clothing, educating and sheltering of the lady is shifted from her father to her husband.

Divorce is not forbidden in Islam, although it is seriously discouraged unless there are genuine reasons. The power of divorce is usually greater for the husband who may pronounce or write it to the wife. However, the wife may also initiate the divorce process within the family or report to the Shari'ah courts. At the court, both parties are heard and, in most cases, given two to four weeks to reconcile their differences. While many do reconcile, those marriages that cannot be reconciled during the period are dissolved.

Male and female children have similar opportunity for Islamic education beginning from the age of 3-4 years. While boys and girls have almost equal opportunity to primary education, more boys go on to secondary school or higher education than girls. This is partly because parents prefer for boys to have more education and partly because girls marry young.

Boys are circumcised between the ages of 5 and 7 years. Between the ages of 7 to 17 years, boys occupy themselves with three major activities: Koranic school and later advanced Islamic studies, western education and learning the family trade. The young men are expected to assist their families on the family farm. Every young man is also expected to make some effort to help himself financially in order to reduce the burden of his parents. The responsibilities given to girls differ from those given to boys. A little girl (from the age of 4 or 5 year) starts learning what is expected from her from her mother.

Women are accorded respect, but are always told to obey their husbands, as long as they are not maltreated. *The way of a woman to paradise is under the feet of her husband* is a popular religious belief. They are not allowed to go out without the husband's permission. When they do go out, they are usually veiled and in the company of relatives. Women are permitted to carry on two or more income-generating activities within their household. They rely upon their children to serve as a link to the outside market to sell their grains, cooked food or snacks and other goods (Bryant, 1960; Hill, 1972; Madauchi, 1968).

The Eastern Zone

The study areas in Eastern Nigeria were Awka (urban) and Achalla (rural), Anambra State, in the heart of Igboland. The social structure of the village group is based on agnatic descent, which regards each village group as a patri-clan (descendants of a common ancestor) and its component villages and their subdivisions as maximal, major and minor lineages of this clan. This correlation between the kinship and village structure is closer among the Igbo than among many other Nigerian peoples (Uchendu, 1965).

Like most other groups in Nigeria, the Igbo people are predominantly farmers. Their staple crops include yams, cassava and cocoyam. Other

economic activities are trading, local crafts, livestock rearing and small-scale industries. Due to the pressure of population on the land, farming alone cannot sustain most family units. Many people, particularly men, have migrated out, seeking wage labour or otherwise engaged in various commercial activities, sometimes leaving their wives and children behind to produce what they can, so that the cash income of the man can supplement their farming activities. In many rural households, women now take resource management decisions, which under traditional conditions would have been handled by their husbands.

Marriage and family are very important institutions among the Igbo (Basdem, 1921; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994a). From a very early age, Igbo boys and girls are taught that marriage is a must. Unmarried persons of either sex, except in special cases, are objects of derision. The Igbo who remains single does not do so out of choice, but because of economic necessity; that is, the inability to provide the bride-wealth payment (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994a). The unmarried adult male is referred to as *oke okporo* (male woman) while the unmarried woman is referred to by a descriptive phrase - *onweghi di* (she has no husband). Igbo has no concept of celibacy, but tolerates celibates as victims of economic forces (Uchendu, 1965). Marriage is seen as not only the means for ensuring the community survival, but also individual and social fulfilment. There are rules, however, regarding the selection of a marriage partner among the Igbo. Marriage between the *osu* (cult slave) and *diala* (freeborn) is taboo. While this caste system has been legally abolished, it is still a social reality and discrete investigation into family background by both sides is still commonly conducted. No matter how the Igbo man selects his wife, the process of betrothing and marrying an Igbo girl is a long, ceremonious one. It often takes years. Marriage is so important and central to the Igbo culture that no part of the process is taken lightly.

In spite of the enormous amount of time and money required to obtain a suitable wife (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1995), the only woman the Igbo man really trusts is his mother. It is believed that no man in his right senses would so compromise his dignity as to put himself in the power of his wife. Serious matters are not discussed with women.

In Awka, a young man that reaches marriageable age must first go through the ceremony of *iwa eze.* This is done by chiselling his front teeth to make an opening between the two upper teeth - a mark of endurance. After that, his father will allocate a portion of land to him so he can establish his compound. He will then build a house and put a wall around it. The Igbo people have sanctions that keep adult male children and their families in their father's compound. It is considered wrong for a son to establish an independent compound during the lifetime of his father.

The Western Zone

Most of southwestern Nigeria is inhabited by the Yoruba. The urban and rural communities selected were Oyo and Ikereku respectively in Oyo State.

In most of Yorubaland, as in several other traditional societies, there are social groups based on age. These groups form the nucleus of social dynamics in the communities. One of the functions performed by these age sets is to create awareness in young people about the roles they are expected to play as men and women, including their reproductive behaviour.

As in the North and the East, marriage is also a very important feature in the life of the Yoruba. The usual age for males and females to marry is 25 years and 18 years, respectively. A man who can provide for a wife and family is considered ready for marriage. The traditional standard was based on the man's ability to provide enough food through farming, but today, it is generally based on his ability to earn enough money. The only requirement for women is biological maturity. Every couple must seek the approval of their parents before they marry.

Yoruba men may take several wives, thereby hoping to have many children, especially sons. According to Isiugo-Abanihe (1994b), a man in the traditional Yoruba culture who died without a son lived a worthless life, since he could not perpetuate his linage. Infertility, however, is not usually attributed to the husband, but the wife. One measure of masculinity among the Yoruba is the ability to marry and sustain many wives and children. Men in such a position are highly rated and praised as *okunrin meta*, meaning one man having the strength of three men. Hence, Yoruba men prove themselves by fulfilling their responsibilities to their wives and children.

The Yoruba traditional political system of leadership with the *oba* (king) and his *baale* (chief), like the traditional leaders in other localities, is an important means of preserving cultural norms and values. Any proposed changes in the system would have to be legitimised by the traditional leaders who would then inform their people of the change. Alternatively, any change that is not sanctioned by the traditional leaders would likely be rejected.

Selected Findings of the Study

The findings presented in the following sections include the analysis of both the qualitative and the quantitative methods used in the study. The results first consider the process of gender socialising; that is, how males and females learn their gender roles. Part of this socialisation process for males in some localities includes initiation rites. A major manifestation of the gender socialising process

is the division of tasks in the household and in the community. From this generalised division of tasks, the analysis goes to the micro-level, looking at the man's role in the family and his responsibilities to his wife. Finally, the results focus upon the views of both men and women toward the characteristics of women. Wherever relevant, the findings are disaggregated by cultural group.

Gender Socialising

A number of general findings concerning the way that gender roles are socially constructed can be assumed from the FGDs. The view of manhood was perceived in progressive and developmental terms. There are events or stages that are considered to be 'social milestones' in the life of a man: the 'what', 'when' and 'how' in the development of manhood;

- what a male should be at different stages,
- when he should be performing certain roles or assuming certain responsibilities, and
- how he should accomplish each of the socially defined roles and responsibilities.

In essence, there is a constant evaluation of the physical, physiological, social, emotional familial and political (in terms of decision-making and power) roles of a man in the society.

From the IDIs, the description of the man remained constant regardless of the position, locality or gender of the key informants. Men were most frequently described as the 'head', either of a family or a community. The concept of headship embraces other attributes such as dominance and decision-making capability, as well as the ability to provide for the family and protect its members.

There are several agents of socialisation, including family members, peers, teachers, religious leaders and law enforcement agents, that 'teach' an individual his or her position and role to be played. Masculinity and manhood are constructed through a gradual, timely and orderly process of socially prescribed, family-centred and community related roles and responsibilities. Through both formal and informal means, such as jokes, social ridicule and insinuations, a man is informed of what the society expects from him. A non-conformist is made aware of his difference. The society exerts strong pressure upon anyone that deviates from the socially accepted gender roles, letting a male know when he is failing to 'be a man'.

Men in the home and community serve as role models. While male children imitate their fathers and other significant males, it is the women who generally undertake the processes by which male children acquire and retain male values and attitudes. The role of men during children's formative years (1-9 years) was

reported by the respondents to be largely practical. Male children are actually shown, by direct instruction and devolution of authority and responsibilities, how to act, think and behave as a man. Women, in a sense, provide the theoretical instruction, while men provide the practical example by their behaviour in the home and community. From one of the in-depth family case studies, an eastern woman relates the way a mother will teach her son the meaning of 'being a man'.

> *Any mother of a male child will begin from the home to remind him of his status as a male child. When he is slow, she will shout at him and say, 'move fast, don't you know you are a boy?' As early as possible, he is made to understand that he is the leader in the absence of the father. His father tells him family secrets. Whenever you are giving instructions, you continue to emphasize, 'you are a boy'. So this way, the boy begins to internalise much of what is expected of him.*

To further illustrate the gender socialising of sons by their mothers and fathers, a key informant from Awka described the father to son instruction:

> *As early as possible, the father will be reminding the boy that he is a boy. As he goes for certain jobs, he would take the boy along. From that, the boy will be learning native ways of doing things. He will be showing the child things that belong to the family, such as parcels of land. The father will begin to show the child that he will someday become a family head.*

To collaborate with the qualitative findings, the survey further discovered that both mothers and fathers chiefly used counselling and advice to inculcate masculine characteristics into their male children. Some mothers also prevented their sons from doing 'female' household tasks. In trying to inculcate socially acceptable manhood characteristics, both mothers and father generally tell their sons to be hardworking, to develop a good character (to be honest, sincere and obedient), to be careful not to have casual sexual relationships, and to take care of their own family in future.

There is group consciousness of masculine responsibilities. The various members of the community contribute to create a sense of awareness of communal expectations in the male child. Through participation in age grade activities, in communal activities, relationships with siblings, through sustained gender specific activities, and through observed discrimination in the treatment of male and female children, a male child begins to assimilate the superior mannerisms in aggression and assertiveness that are associated with manhood. Some feelings of inevitability are associated with aggressive male behaviour in adolescents. This aggression is seen as a sign of masculinity. A male child is almost expected to become stubborn, partly problematic and rebellious. These attributes constitute signs of manhood. At a stage, he is expected to reject

errands and instructions that are considered demeaning to a male. A refusal or inability to demonstrate these rebellious traits invites closer scrutiny of the adolescent character. Women themselves, directly and indirectly encourage these mannerisms.

Gender Division of Tasks

The findings of the FGDs resulted in a consensus of what are 'masculine' and what are 'feminine' tasks in the household and the community as shown in Table 3. Despite the differences in gender and generation of the composition of different focus groups, the responses were still generally the same. The only major difference between the three areas at the household level was with the North where women do not generally fetch water and firewood, nor do they go to the market. This is due to the Islamic influence in the area and the restrictions to movement for married females. This denotes that religion has a strong effect upon the social norms of the people.

   The gender division of socially acceptable tasks is carried over into the views of which occupations are more suitable for males and females. The survey revealed that people consider some occupations, such as building / bricklaying, mechanic, palm wine tapper, fishing, security guard, rearing cattle, and so on, to be more appropriate for males. Similarly, some occupations like petty trading, food processing, nursing, food vending, secretarial work, hair dressing and food processing, are more suited to females. A man doing what is considered a female occupation was called 'lazy' by over 90% of the respondents. Other adjectives used included 'hopeless', 'shameless', 'irresponsible', 'an incomplete man', 'woman's slave', 'not worth his salt' and 'there is something wrong with him'. Some people considered that such people are desperate and have no choice.

   The acceptability of men engaged in what is considered to be female occupations differed between the zones. The most intolerant position was from the North, where over 97% of the surveyed respondents thought it was unacceptable, compared to the West where 45% think it is acceptable. The acceptability of women doing 'male occupations' followed a similar pattern.

Table 3: Gender-related Division of Household and Community Tasks

Male Household Tasks	Female Household Tasks
- Provide for family - Maintain house walls and roof - Remove cobwebs - Fetch firewood - Split firewood - Pay school fees - Iron clothes - Wash cars - Fetch water (mostly only in the North - Discipline children - Dig wells - Cut grass around compound - Pay medical bills - Buy food / bring home (North only)	- Cook - Sweep the floor / compound - Bath small children - Fetch firewood (except in North) - Fetch water (except in North) - Discipline children - Wash dishes and pots - Wash clothes - Grind pepper / process grains - Nurse babies / care for small children - Cut vegetables - Lay beds - Go to market (except in North) - Process agricultural products - Care for small livestock in household

Male Community Tasks	Female Community Tasks
- Settling disputes - Repair / maintain / footpaths - Attend ceremonies - Pay taxes and levies - Dredge gutters - Attend community meetings - Defence / security of town - Naming babies - Arranging wedding contracts - Lead prayers - Teach Koran (for Muslim communities) - Harvest crops - Carry masquerades	- Cook at ceremonies - Sweeping market - Cleaning village square, town hall, church or mosque - Visiting the sick or bereaved - Teach children - Drying cocoa or other agricultural produce - Singing and dancing at ceremonies and festivals

Initiation Rites into Manhood

Patterns of socialisation are more entrenched and formal in Eastern Nigeria, where a young man develops a sense of manhood through a series of initiation activities, i.e. 'rites of passage'. Among the Eastern respondents, 54% stated that boys have formal initiation rites into manhood. The passage to manhood is concluded with elaborate initiation ceremonies to formally mark the change in his social status. According to the respondents from the East, each young man belongs to a number of age-set groups. He is expected to be a member of either

the wrestling or the masquerade group or both. The difference in the socialisation of males and females among the Igbo is further manifested during adulthood by the taking of chieftancy titles. Such titles are highly stratified and their progressive acquisition confers a corresponding higher social status on the holder. Some titles are exclusively for males.

In Western Nigeria, there are no such initiation ceremonies, except for a few families in the rural areas, where males may be initiated into cults like *orisa ogiyan* or *orisa egungun masqurade.* Only 4% of the respondents stated that there are initiation rites into manhood in the West. In general, however, manhood is defined in more subjective terms. Marital status, to a large extent, and initiation of sexual activities to a lesser extent, are some of the objective social indicators of manhood. In the North, marriage also serves as an objective indicator of manhood. Only 13% of the respondents stated that there are any ceremonies for initiation into manhood in the North.

Importance of Sexuality to Social Perception of Manhood

It was generally noted in the FGDs that sexual performance and ability are important. Lack of satisfaction with the man's sexual performance is a widely recognised reason for marital dissatisfaction and adultery, and can be used as ground for divorce. An impotent male is considered 'not a man'. Regardless of how successful a man is in other areas of human endeavour, if he is unable to father a child, he is considered as having lived a wasted life.

A man's biological or physical characteristics are important attributes for describing him. From the IDIs, the following statements were extracted:

> *At first instance, I am made to understand that he must be well mature in his genital organs; he will be able to impregnate a woman if given to him in marriage.* (respondent from the East).

> *A man is someone who can bring a child to life through sexual intercourse with his wife, since no one can have a child independent of another.* (respondent from the West).

Some women participants in the FGDs, especially in the West, associated masculinity with sexual prowess. Ability to initiate sexual relationships with several women is a sign of masculinity. A proven *Casanova* is a *man* among his peers, though perhaps not a responsible man. This distinction is important. The ideal is the responsible man, but in a society where children are highly valued, a man who can attract a lot of women is admired. Men speak proudly of their 'conquests'.

Social Beliefs about Women

The responses to questions concerning the general character of women (Table 4) shows that in most cases, men had less confidence in women than the women had in themselves. There is also a difference in most aspects between the confidence levels of men in urban areas compared to those in rural areas. Urban men had more positive views about women than rural men. A noticeable, but variable difference can also be seen in the responses of women in rural and urban areas. The findings in Table 4 are disaggregated by zone and by rural and urban areas, as well as by gender. In some categories, a sizable number of respondents did not offer a response.

Table 4: Opinions about Character Women by Site and Gender

Zone	Site	Male Respondents		Female Respondents	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
Question: Are women trustworthy?					
North	Urban	21.7	76.6	59.3	33.9
	Rural	16.1	83.1	58.2	41.8
East	Urban	42.3	51.2	63.0	35.9
	Rural	34.4	65.6	57.8	40.9
West	Urban	7.1	91.8	30.3	67.2
	Rural	7.6	90.5	59.0	7.7
Question: Are women capable of keeping secrets?					
North	Urban	19.4	78.3	52.5	44.1
	Rural	13.7	85.5	28.2	71.8
East	Urban	35.6	59.1	44.6	55.4
	Rural	25.4	72.1	33.8	64.8
West	Urban	7.1	91.8	28.7	68.9
	Rural	11.4	86.7	60.3	38.5
Question: Are women capable of taking rational decisions?					
North	Urban	42.5	56.3	42.2	56.0
	Rural	12.8	84.6	48.1	51.9
East	Urban	60.5	30.3	67.1	27.1
	Rural	69.8	30.2	89.7	10.3
West	Urban	44.4	54.4	54.6	44.5
	Rural	24.0	75.0	59.0	41.0
Question: Can women be trusted to be chaste and sexually upright?					
North	Urban	47.0	46.4	86.1	13.0
	Rural	29.3	67.2	74.7	25.3
East	Urban	29.4	56.9	42.5	48.3
	Rural	9.3	89.8	30.0	68.6
West	Urban	19.3	77.4	41.7	55.0
	Rural	12.5	82.7	68.0	30.8

The significance of these findings relates to the fact that the attitudes that men have concerning women in general will affect their relationships with their wives, sisters, co-workers, and so on. It is interesting that in most cases, however, men have a tendency to believe that their mothers are not like other women and so they may make an exception 'to the rule' when they consider the virtues of their own mothers. Negative views about the trustworthiness, capabilities and behaviour of women will not be a favourable condition for attempting to encourage social change in gender relations.

Role of a Man toward his Wife and Family

The importance of marriage and procreation was underscored throughout the various FGD sessions. A mature, but unmarried man is viewed with suspicion and generally precluded from occupying certain social positions. He is also viewed as irresponsible, unreliable and perhaps a homosexual. In the Eastern zone, the consequences of not marrying are very serious for a man. He is forbidden to hold certain titles and in the event of his death, he cannot be buried like a married man. The following view captures the importance of marriage in Igboland:

> *A wife in Igbo culture is very important. She is regarded as the foundation on which the home is built. A man who is not married has no place in Igboland. Having a wife is a symbol that he is a worthy man.*

The family context is where a man's image, masculinity and manhood are most clearly defined: by himself and by others. The images and behaviour of masculinity and manhood that are acquired outside are carried home and applied there. However, since the culturally prescribed and socially desired male attributes are well known both at home and in the community, attempts by any man to introduce extraneous traits into family relationships are quickly noticed and evaluated.

In a male-dominated, patriarchal society, any family without a mature male adult is at a very distinct disadvantage. The hallmark of masculinity and manhood is the perceived ability of a man to hold sway in his household. He is expected to maintain discipline, provide leadership, settle disputes and ensure that his family is well behaved. Having a quarrelsome wife or unruly children is perceived as a sign of failure for the man. His manhood is threatened. One recurring adjective used to describe the man in most of the sessions held across the regions was that the man is the 'pillar' of the house and of the society because he shoulders the family responsibilities.

Respondents were asked, without prompting, to list the man's responsibilities/duties to his wife. The findings indicate that the primary

obligations that a man has to his wife are, in order of importance, to feed his wife, to clothe her and to house her. After this came the need to meet her health needs and then to meet her sexual needs. Providing companionship, meeting her emotional needs or owning property jointly were the least frequently mentioned. Table 5 shows the results of this analysis.

Table 5: Prioritisation of Man's Responsibilities to his Wife

Most frequently mentioned (%)	Less frequently mentioned (%)	Least frequently mentioned (%)
• Feed wife (94.7) • Clothe wife (80.5) • House wife (63.4) • Meet Health needs (50.4)	• Meet sexual needs (31.7) • Discuss family matters (27.5)	• Meet emotional needs (19.5) • Own property jointly (16.0) • Provide companionship (14.1)

The findings reported in Table 6 disaggregate the responses and show significant male-female differences within each zone and among zones in responses concerning the views of men and women about the responsibilities of a man toward his wife.

Table 6: Man's Responsibilities toward his Wife by Gender and Locality

Responsibility	Gender	North	East	West
Feed wife	Men	98.0	86.3	92.2
	Women	100.0	96.7	97.1
Clothe wife	Men	87.0	93.3	51.0
	Women	96.9	100.0	60.0
Provide shelter for wife	Men	74.1	73.3	29.4
	Women	81.3	83.3	45.7
Pay for health needs	Men	51.9	55.0	19.6
	Women	84.4	76.7	31.4
Sexual needs	Men	44.4	25.0	27.5
	Women	15.6	43.3	34.3
Emotional needs	Men	31.5	5.0	15.7
	Women	9.4	63.3	34.3
Discuss family matters	Men	25.9	26.7	15.7
	Women	9.4	63.3	34.3
Own property jointly	Men	7.4	23.3	7.8
	Women	0.0	46.7	17.1
Provide companionship	Men	13.0	11.7	13.7
	Women	3.1	26.7	20.0

To a large extent, respondents felt that a man who has lived a satisfying life centres mostly on his ability and success as a family man and the extent to which he has been able to fulfil his obligations as a husband and father. At the same time, fulfilment is also seen in terms of the ability of a man to prove

himself in his vocation, to influence others to continue the work / trade / profession he was engaged in, as well as having many children. There were some differences between the zones as to what constituted success, however. In the East, rural respondents focussed more upon meeting family obligations, while in the urban areas, eastern respondents agreed, but added the taking of chieftancy titles and having a good job. In the West, there was similar emphasis upon meeting family responsibilities, and having a good job and wealth. It was also found that having authority over one's wife and children was also important for fulfilment. The responses in the North were quite different. For rural inhabitants, fulfilment was related to wealth, Islamic education, a bumper harvest and being able to meet the social expectations during the first daughter's marriage.

From the IDIs, respondents noted that the major reason why men fail in fulfilling their duties to their families and communities is lack of money. Little wonder men work extra hard to have wealth, some through dubious means. Illness, laziness, nonchalance, misplaced priorities and lack of education were other commonly reported constraints to males for fulfilling their family roles. Respondents in all zones stated that the sanctions attached to non-performance of masculine responsibilities included: loss of respect, stigmatisation, mockery and social exclusion.

Conclusion

From the findings of the FGDs, IDIs and household surveys, several conclusions can be drawn with respect to how the man is culturally perceived:

1. A man is evaluated from his social position in the family and his physical characteristics of sexual capability to satisfy his female partner(s) and produce children. This cultural expectation, as well as the decision-making authority of the husband over the wife, will affect the number of children that the couple will have, particularly with the need to have a male child.
2. In each locality, local tradition demands that certain stages have to be fulfilled to achieve manhood.
3. In the study areas, marriage is the culturally accepted status for an adult male or female. Men or women who are unmarried are considered irresponsible and socially deviant.
4. The gender socialisation process of developing boys into men and girls into women, including their perspective concerning sexual activity, is strongly encouraged in the home. Boys are taught by their mothers and shown by their fathers how to be a man.
5. The respondents concentrated more attention to the obligations of the man to feed, clothe and house the wife, with little priority to meeting her emotional or companionship needs.

6. The degree to which a man felt fulfilled was closely related to the extent to which he was able to meet the socially determined expectations of his family and the community.

From the findings, it is apparent that despite the socio-cultural differences among ethnic groups, there is a strict delineation between gender roles, which are carefully transferred within the family and monitored by the society. To effect any change in these gender roles will involve fundamental modifications in the social norms, social values and social beliefs regarding the relationships, including sexual relationships, between males and females. Social change cannot be achieved easily or quickly, neither can it be imposed upon an unwilling populace. Only with intensive enlightenment campaigns can the social ideas concerning male responsibility be modified. At the same time, care must be taken to ensure that such changes will result in a better and healthier way of life for both men and women in the society.

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