

Age Difference between Spouses and Women Empowerment in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is the increased ability of women to make life choices, and it is a major challenge among couples in decision making process in sub-Saharan Africa. Women empowerment among couples in Nigeria is influenced by the variations in the age of husband and wife especially among women with older husbands. This study examined the influence of spousal age difference on women empowerment in Nigeria using NDHS 2018 dataset. Women empowerment was measured by decision on health, household purchase and visit to family. Women were considered empowered if they take at least two of the decision singlehandedly and shared one with her spouse. Data were analysed using descriptive and logistic regression at $P \leq 0.05$. Spousal age difference was found to influence women empowerment in Nigeria. Women who were same age with husband and 1-4 years and 5-9 years younger than husband were 2 times more likely to be empowered, while women 10 or more year were 1 time more likely to be empowered. Specifically, women were more empowered if 1-4 years younger than husband, as large spousal age difference limits women autonomy. The study has shown the implication of women marrying men who are far older than them and has given stakeholders a diverse approach toward empowerment of women and achieving SDG5.

Keywords: Age difference, Autonomy, Decision making, Spouse, Women empowerment, Younger.

INTRODUCTION

An empowered woman is an asset to development and the world has recognized that women empowerment is important for socioeconomic development. Women are considered empowered if they are able to make decisions [20] World organizations through Sustainable development goals five (SDGs 5) seeks to empower women through elimination of all forms of discrimination, violence and exploitation against women. [34]. African governments have over the years made efforts towards the empowerment of women. African leaders declared the year 2010-2020 African women's decade and 2015 the year of women empowerment and development towards Africa's agenda 206 – this was to fast track the empowerment of women in African continent [34].

Women empowerment sets the path towards gender equity as it affects health, nutrition and socio economic status of women and children as reported by [6]. If a woman is meaningfully empowered, it will affect positively her health and that of her child, contraceptive and antenatal use will increase as well as proper nutrition [11].

Women are universally oppressed through system of patriarchy Ritzer 2011; [3]. The issue of less or no

empowerment for women has become a demographic concern as it results to imbalance in power relation in determining family size, child spacing and contraceptive use [35]; as men dominate such decision while women bear the burden of not taking the decision. Women are in most cases limited or uninvolved in the decision regarding number of children they want to have as well as in many other issues. In order to have population control and sustainable development, women must be empowered to take decision on issues bothering them.

There are several factors influencing women autonomy and different literatures reports different factors such as education, wealth/ paid employment, prevailing gender norms/ patriarchy, age at marriage etc. Gage1997; Mason 1987; [25], [14], [5], [31], [1], [8], [32] said that early marriage influences women empowerment. However, while several scholars and previous literatures have associated women empowerment to the factors listed above, few scholars [16], [13] found age difference between spouses to be one of the factors that affects women empowerment.

Spousal age difference is most times accompanied by differences in life experience, education, finances etc. which makes the relationship unequal and detrimental for women the asymmetrical power relation hinders women decision making ability, ability to negotiate sexual behaviour [23], this limited decision making power for women in such setting hinders their empowerment.

The spousal age difference in sub-Saharan Africa is higher compared to other regions of the world, with a reported average of 5.4 years, United Nation 2000; [10] with Nigeria having 9 years spousal age difference, [3]. Where large age difference is found, the population is low in income and education because same age or small age difference is found among educated and high income population [21]. Spousal age difference is an observable feature of a typical Nigerian marriage, men are usually older than women in marriage and this age asymmetrical relationship may be a factor undermining the empowerment of women in Nigeria.

Considering that women involvement in decision making is lowest in this region [17], it may seem justified to assume a link between women empowerment and spousal age difference since several literature reports age difference between spouse as an indicator of inequality in marriage, for example [23]. It is against this background that this study assesses how age difference between spouses influences women empowerment (household decision making) in Nigeria.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the patterns women empowerment in Nigeria
2. Assess the influence of spousal age difference on women empowerment in Nigeria

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between spousal age difference and women empowerment among married women in Nigeria?
2. Does Spousal age difference influence women decision making in the family?
3. What are the patterns of women empowerment in Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women Empowerment

The central ideas of women empowerment are universal, although, there may be variations in its indicators and patterns across countries and within countries. Malhotra & Schuler 2005; [28] opined that an indicator of women empowerment in one region may not be in another region. As such, researchers should make effort

to use context specific indicators [28].

In this study, women empowerment is measured by her decision making autonomy because Nigeria is a patriarchal society and traditionally, decision making power rest with men. What is considered women's empowerment in this work is the woman's ability and power to make decision in household. The decision making autonomy is if she takes most of the decision by herself and jointly take the rest with her husband. In Nigeria being a patriarchal society, it may not be realistic to say women should take all decision by themselves so in that case if she is able to single handedly take most of the decision and jointly take the rest with her husband she is considered empowered. So in the case of being denied autonomy and power to make household decision is considered not empowered.

There are several definitions of women empowerment, however, Kabeer 1999; [28] defined women empowerment as the process in which women have the increased ability to make life choices. Women empowerment is specific to context, Malhotara *et al.*, 2005; [28] and so the definition may defer based on context. The western idea of women having equal power with men and being autonomous may not be empowerment in some societies. In some societies, women may prefer respect and equality to autonomy, in a study conducted by Kabeer 2001; [28] in Bangladesh women wanted equality rather than autonomy.

The indicators of women empowerment may also be contextual (Ghuman *et al.*, 2006; [28]. Freedom to visit market alone is an indicator of women empowerment in many societies (Ahmed *et al.*, 2009; [28], yet Kabeer; [28], reported that it is rather a sign of low social class in Bangladesh. The empowerment of women has several dimensions including political, economic, control over one's life.

The Patterns of Women Empowerment

Several factors have been identified to play key roles in the empowerment of women, these factors determine how empowered women will be. Women exploitation, disempowerment, and subjugation, are caused by men who benefits from low empowerment or disempowered status of women [22]. However, women empowerment as shown by (Charmes *et al.*; Kabeer 2005; [27] is multidimensional, 'complex and specific to context, therefore there are variations in the empowerment of women across context. The empowerment of women cannot be the same across all countries and even within the same countries there maybe variation as what determines women empowerment in one country may not determine women empowerment in another country considering socio-cultural differences.

Education

Education plays an important role in the empowerment of a woman. A woman's decision making power is determine by educational attainment level between a woman and her spouse [19]. In emphasizing the importance of education to women empowerment, [31] said that education is the only pathway to women empowerment, thus emphasizing the spread of education among women so as to eliminate illiteracy and bring about empowerment.

However, considering the area where the study was conducted education may be the only way to eliminate women low or disempowered status, but in Nigeria several other steps may need to be taken such as closure of large spousal age difference, access to finance, elimination of patriarchy etc.

In a study conducted by [14] it is shown that in India, Bangladesh and Nepal women who reported to be highly empowered were more educated compared to women with low level empowerment. [14] went further to show that increase in education for women is a way towards achieving high and desired level of empowerment which will help influence her decision making power [27]. Similarly, [2] reported that higher education plays a great role in women decision making power, as women with higher education are likely to

participate in household decision making. This may be because education may expose women to better paid jobs and since education comes with knowledge they maybe more knowledgeable and can negotiate their autonomy.

[31], reported that the more educated a woman is, the more empowered she will be. This may be true in some context because educational pursuit delays early marriage and so closes spousal age difference and difference in educational attainment between spouses. It then offset the power imbalance that exists between the woman and her spouse making the woman to be more empowered compared to women with low or no educational attainment. So education determines to what extent women are empowered in household decision making.

Furthermore, in a study conducted by [30] it was shown that the higher the education the more empowered the women will be, as tertiary or secondary educated are more empowered when compared to women with primary or women with no educational attainment. Women empowerment is influenced by education and it is an important determinant, as education by itself impact on women's empowerment and also other variables [30]. [5], reported that education brings about change in power relation and so leaving the women empowered. Education enhances women capability to exercise control over their lives, resources and takes decision as a result of enhance self-esteem and educational skills [5]. Education is important for women decision making power but it is insignificant in decision that has to do with her marriage [15].

Paid Employment /Wealth

In several literatures and debate, economic participation, access to financial resources and paid employment are usually identified as determinant of women empowerment as that women with higher wealth index are more empowered than women with low wealth index. Labour force participation for women increases their decision making autonomy and freedom of movement thus making them empowered, World Bank, 1995; [4].

Mas bout & Van Staveran 2011; [19] recognized that women decision making power is influenced by her earned income/ wealth index. The difference between her income and that of her spouse influences her decision making power. For women to be empowered they must be employed (participate in labour market) as labour market participation will determine their empowerment by emancipating women for servitude brought about by patriarchy Engels1884; World Bank 1995; [4]. Women who are employed outside the homes have increased access to household decision making and such women are more likely to take part in decision making and be more empower than women lower wealth index [19].

According [19], the general idea is that if a woman is employed outside her home, she will have a source of income and financial stability which can lower her dependence on the spouse and which increases her decision making power in the family. Women are generally more empowered if they contribute and have control over their income as contributing to family income increases autonomy, [4]. Women who earn more contributes more and as such have are more empowered than women who earn less.

[7], reported that paid employment plays a positive role in the empowerment of women as women with paid jobs are more involve in decision making in household than women with no income. That is to say women with women with higher income are more empowered than women with lower income, [7] further said that paid employment and income influence positively on the empowerment of women. Income from paid employment determined women's household power in decision making.

Women's Age

The age is an important variable in the empowerment of women, as reported by [13] that in some societies

women are more empowered and participate in household decision making, simply because they are older than women who are not participate in such societies. In such societies older women get more position and power compared to younger women. [26] also found positive association between higher age and women empowerment. Women maybe more empowered as they grow old, as age is correlated with women decision making power, [27].

Women may gain decision making power and be empowered as they grow older in age. [27], suggested that it may be the reason gender based violence is reportedly high among younger couples and low among older couples because women in old age are more empowered than women in their young age.

Early Marriage /Age at Marriages

Safilios- Rothschild 1985; [26] found women decision making autonomy to be positively correlated with higher age at marriage. The higher the age at marriage the more empowered a woman will be, women who delayed marriage are more empowered than women who married early. Women in less developed countries women are not empowered because early marriage and teenage child bearing are high and it hinders human capital investment and ensure dependent on men [9]. The age at which the woman married determine the empowerment of women (her decision making autonomy) the age at which the women marries and the possibility with which the marriage can be dissolve is important for women empowerment [26].

Early marriage determine women empowerment in that large spousal age gap that accompanies early marriage for women indicate that the younger partner will have less decision making power in the marriage [16]. Delaying marriage means that women will have plenty time to develop personally. Between puberty and marriage, women build up and develop their knowledge and other qualities needed for empowerment. This is not usually the case for women who marry early in their early teens [16]. In a patriarchal society like Nigeria, patriarchy teaches men how to disempower, control and dominate women, it teaches men not to see and treat women not as fellow humans but weaker creature [29]. However it may be safe to assume that women who marry early, marry men who are older than them and so have little decision making power in their marriage. Early marriage has been one factor hindering women empowerment as reported by Gage1997; Mason 1987; [10].

Spousal Age Difference and Women Empowerment

Differential in spousal age determine women empowerment (decision making power). Traditionally, in patriarchal society, powers to take decisions both within households are vested on men and when couple with large age gap the power increases for men and drops for women as age is a bases for subordinate –ordinate relationship in many societies. [8], reported that age gap reduces spousal age communication between the spouses. This spousal communication is an important predictor of women decision making autonomy as the lack of free communication limits women decision making autonomy (empowerment).

Furthermore, age gap in marriage provides men with experience and resources that is in most cases disadvantageous to the empowerment of women, whereas if age gap is the same of very close there is likelihood for empowerment. This may be true in Nigeria because when age gap is close the subordinate-ordinate relationship resulting from age will be reduced. [23], reported that spousal age gap limits women empowerment in that it will limit spousal communication because of the age gap that exist between them. The age gap makes it difficult for couples to communicate freely and take decision together [8], some women may see their husbands as father figure and sometimes be scared to negotiate, object or argue, so men dominate the decision making process thus causing women to be not empowered [8].

Women empowerment is also correlated with age difference between spouses. In India and Nepal, a study by [13], reported that women empowerment is negatively affected by large spousal age difference, as this

large age difference is accompanied with differences in education, wealth, experience etc. However, when age difference is small or non-existing it positively determine women empowerment by making women more empowered [13].

Spousal age difference is noticeable large among early married women since men are generally older than women in marriage, early marriage make the age difference wide [13]. The urge to marry often expressed by women who did not complete secondary education corresponds with their need to leave their family, and start up their own family which often push them into early marriage [12]. This desire push them to marry men older than them, accompanied with lack of education, early marriage and age gap works to the advantage of men.

The age gap for men implies that they are better experience, economically better, likely more educated; the most dominated women are women with wide spousal age gap created by early marriage [12]. For women who get married early they are likely to marry men who are older than them and this early married women may not have gotten education, skills or financial resources which can help them overcome any form of subjugation. It is not uncommon to find men marrying women younger than them. The higher the age gap the less power the women will have, the power declines as the age gap increases and vice versa.

Spousal age gap is associated with women empowerment, in cases were age difference is much it indicates a relationship of subordinate and ordinate (male dominating women). Women having less power compare to men and less decision making autonomy [16]. As spousal age gap increases, value consensus decreases and so generate power imbalance, causing tension, reducing spousal communication and will consequently affect marital satisfaction, family planning and women's autonomy [18]. [21], reported the effect of spousal age differences in marriage to include power imbalance, divorce, fertility and child's birth.

[23], argued that when individual are married to people substantially older than them, apart from the differences in age, there are also differences in life experience, social position, financial resources, biological and physical maturity. [23], reported such relationship to be unequal and so exposes women to the risk associated with it such as violence, exploitation and low contraceptive use. Ramachandra, 2002; [18] made a controversial statement that in traditional societies, one way in which men ensure their domination against women is by marrying younger women. The idea is that the man being older than the woman gives him advantage in status, experience and power [18]. If men and women share same educational and occupational status the tie breaker that will give the man power over the woman is age difference (marrying younger women).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Modernization Theory

The modernization theory argues that through the process of modernization, traditional barriers to women empowerment (decision making power), self-actualization will be washed away, ushering in new ways of doing things and new way of thinking [26]. This new ways will lead to the empowerment of women, Kuznetz 1966, Inkeles and Smith, 1974; [26]. During the process of modernization women moves from being disempowered or lowly empowered to being empowered, this is made possible by vehicle of modernization (exposure to mass media, wide spread of education, urbanization, access to paid employment etc.).

However, since the modernization theory does not discriminate between men and women, the fundamental assumption is that innovation, opportunity and situations (vehicle of modernization) that moves society and individual towards empowerment (decision making power) are not patriarchal or gender specific in nature

[26]. The breaking away from traditional barriers and ways of doing things should ensure that both sex are equally empowered, it should bring empowerment to women just like it will for men.

The modernization theory argues that women disempowerment is as a result of unnecessary and irrational persistence of traditional values such as early marriage, wide spousal age gap, less education for women, patriarchy [24]. So the modernization is gender neutral, the argument means that women empowerment is a product of innovation, a response as well as a consequence of modernization which is not gender bias and so that embracing the vehicle of modernization is the way out of disempowerment. As such the following factor will influence women empowerment as shown by [26] age at marriage, spousal age gap, household socioeconomic status, husbands’ characteristic, cultural influence.

METHODOLOGY

This study used secondary data from NDHS 2018 (couples recode file) with 8061 respondent having obtained permission from ICF Macro Inc., USA to download the dataset. Different cases were selected and used, the selected cases were respondent age, husbands age, respondents place of residence, region, who takes decision regarding major household purchase, woman’s health, woman visiting her family and relatives.

Univariate and bivariate analysis was carried out using SPSS version 25. The Univariate analysis was the use of descriptive statistic to examine the patterns of women empowerment. The bivariate analysis was done using binary logistic regression to access the influence of spousal age difference on women empowerment.

Variable Measurement

Table 1 displays the measurements of dependent and independent variables of the study. This study consists of two main variables – spousal age difference being the independent variable and women empowerment being the dependent variable. Spousal age difference was computed by subtracting the age of the woman from the husbands age. This new variable was further categorized into “10 or more years younger than husband, 5-9 years younger than husband, 1-4 years younger than husband, same age with husband, older than husband”.

The dependent variable – women empowerment was measured by women’s decision making autonomy- women were asked question on who takes decision regarding her health, major household purchase and decision about her visiting family and friend and the pre-coded responses were Woman, Woman and Husband, Woman and someone else, Husband alone, someone else, other. Out of the three decisions used in the study to measure women empowerment (decision making autonomy), women who single handedly took all three decision or at least two and jointly took one with the husband were categorized as empowered while all other responses were categorized as not empowered. All responses were summed up and categorized into a dichotomous variable “Not empowered and Empowered” so the categories of women empowerment were “Not empowered coded as 0 and Empowered” coded as 1.

Table I Variable Measurements

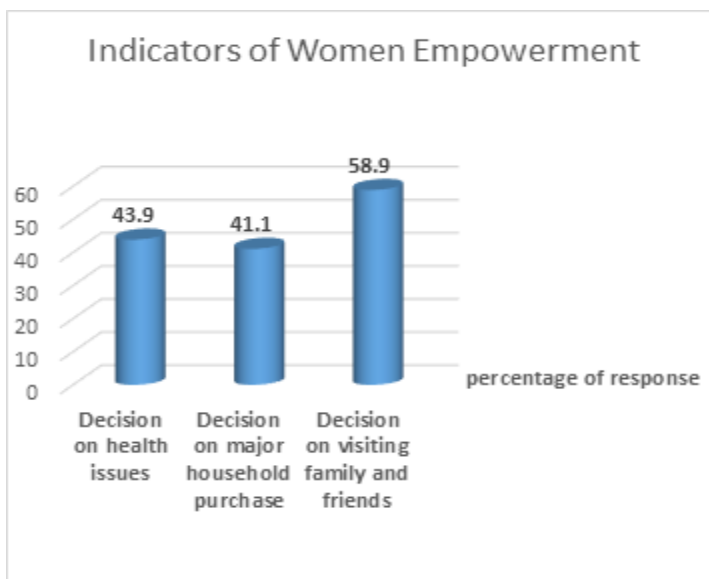
VARIABLES	RESPONSES	MEASUREMENT (response re-categorized into)
Background Variable		
Region	1)North Central 2)North East 3)North West 4)South East 5)South South 6)South West	Same as the responses

Independent variables		
Age a) Respondents age b) Husbands age	1) Age at last birthday. 2) Age of husband at last birthday.....	15-19(1) 20-24(2) 25-29(3) 30-34(4) 35-39(5) 40-44(6) 45-49(7) 50 and above(8)
Dependent variables	1) Woman 2) Woman and Husband	
a) Who takes decision about your health? b) Who takes decision about major household purchases? c) Who takes decision about your visiting of family and relatives?	3) Woman and someone else 4) Husband alone 5) Someone else 6) Other (specify)	Response 3-6 = Not empowered(0) 1&2 = Empowered(1)

RESULTS

Women Empowerment in Nigeria

Women were more empowered to take decision on visiting family and friends (58.9%) than they were empowered to take decision on their health and major household purchase.



Patterns of Women empowerment in Nigeria

Generally, Women in the Southern region of Nigeria were more empowered than women in the Northern region. Less than one percent (0.6%) of the women in the North East were empowered, while 6% of women in the South West were empowered. 5% of urban women were empowered, while 2% of rural women were empowered.

Women with primary education had the highest percentage (5%) of empowered women, while only 1% of women with no formal were empowered. Rich women were more empowered 4%, while poor women were the least empowered with 2%.

Furthermore, traditionalist were more empowered with 8% of women, while other had the least empowered women less than 1% (0.0). Women who married from age 30 and above were more empowered 6%, while women who got married before age 20 were the least empowered with 2%. Women aged 45-49 were the more empowered with 6%, while women aged 20-24 were the least empowered with 1%. Women from female headed household were more empowered (6%) than women from male headed household (3%).

Table II Patterns of women empowerment in Nigeria

Variables	Women Empowerment Empowered (%)
Region	
North Central	3.0
North East	0.6
North West	1.0
South East	4.1
South South	5.2
South West	6.0
Place of residence	
Urban	4.7
Rural	1.6
Educational Attainment	
No formal education	1.0
Primary education	4.5
Secondary education	4.0
Higher Education	4.4

Wealth Index	
Poor	1.6
Middle	2.1
Rich	4.4
Religion	
Christianity	4.5
Islam	1.5
Traditionalist	7.7
Other	0.0
Age at marriage	
Less than 20	1.9
20-29	4.4
30 and above	5.9
Age in 5 Year Group	
15-19	1.8
20-24	1.4
25-29	2.1
30-34	2.6
35-39	3.7
40-44	3.7
45-49	6.3

Source: NDHS 2018 Raw Data

Spousal Age Difference on Women Empowerment

The logistic regression output (in Table III) helped to summarize the influence spousal age difference on women empowerment. In particular, the logistic regression output in Table III helped to show how spousal age difference positively (or negatively) influence women empowerment in Nigeria.

From table III, spousal age difference with p-value (for Wald) that is less than the threshold significance level of 0.05 factors influencing women empowerment. The spousal age difference was grouped and tested

as a whole (Grouped spousal age difference) and then Same age with husband, 1-4 years younger than husband, 5-9 years younger than husband, 10 or more years younger than spouse, were compared to the reference category(older than husband).

The odd ratio (Exp (B)) for women same age with husband is 1.755; 1-4 years younger than husband is 2.335; 5-9 years younger than husband is 2.054; 10 or more years younger is 1.480. This implies that those women same age with husband is about 1.7 (about 2) times more likely to be empowered compared to women older than husband; women 1-4 years younger than spouse are 2.3 times more likely to be empowered compared to women older than husbands; women 5-9years younger than spouse are 2.0 times more likely to be empowered compared to women older than husband, women 10 or more years younger than husband are 1.4 time more likely to be empowered compared to women older than husband. In other words, the odds of increase in women empowerment in Nigeria increases for women who are same age with husband, 1-4 years younger than husband and 5-9 years younger than husband.

A negative value means that the odds of women empowerment decreases. However, for this binary logistic regression model, the column headed B from table consist of only positive values, with 5-9 years younger than husband and 10 or more years younger than spouse each significantly different from zero (p-values are each < 0.05). For women same age with husband and 1-4 years younger than husband with P-value = .349 and .074 all >0.05. However, the spousal age difference as a whole is a significant predictor of the dependent variable, ‘women empowerment’.

Therefore, the research question was answered, that spousal age difference significantly influences women empowerment.

Table III. Logistic regression showing the influence of spousal age difference on women empowerment in Nigeria

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step1	Grouped spousal age difference			17.282	4	.002	
	Same age with husband	.563	.600	.878	1	.349	1.755
	1-4 years younger than husband	.848	.474	3.200	1	.074	2.335
	5-9 years younger than husband	.720	.181	15.851	1	.000	2.054
	10 or more years younger	.392	.163	5.818	1	.016	1.480
	Constant	-3.883	.123	1004.479	1	.000	.021

Source: NDHS 2018 Raw Data

- Variable entered on step 1: grouped spousal age difference

Measures of the Predictive Power of the Model: The model summary result presented in Table IV: shows that, between 0% and 0.1 % of the variability in women empowerment can be explained by the present

logistic regression model.

Table IV Model Summary

step	-2log likelihood	Cox & Snell R square	Nagelkerke R square
1	2036.765 ^a	0.002	0.010

- Estimation terminated at iteration number 7 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Discussion of findings on patterns of women empowerment

The study found that there are variations in patterns of women empowerment in Nigeria among women in the different socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.

The patterns of women empowerment in Nigeria reveals that women with primary, secondary and tertiary education and higher education were more empowered than women with no formal education, it is seen that educational attainment plays a crucial role in women empowerment (decision making autonomy). [30], reported that tertiary or secondary educated women are more empowered when compared to women with women with no educational attainment. The more educated a women is, the more decision making autonomy she is likely to have. This may be because education exposes women to better paid jobs and since education gives knowledge, women may gain more and better knowledge that can help them negotiate their autonomy thereby offsetting the power imbalance in family relation and becomes empowered compared to women who had no education.

Similarly, findings by [19] reported that education is the pathway to women empowerment, thus emphasizing the spread of education among women so as to eliminate illiteracy and bring about empowerment. Furthermore, the assumption is that education gives women the cognitive ability and power to decide on most issues bothering them and should be able to give women the power to suppress the subordinate- ordinate relationship that may exist in the relationship due to the age difference or differences in life experience.

Rich women were more empowered than the poor and middle category women. Being rich enhances the empowerment of women (household decision making autonomy) in Nigeria. This finding is supported by finding of Masbout&VanStaveran 2011; [19] which reported that women decision making power is influenced by her earned income and wealth. Similarly, [7] further said that paid employment and wealth is necessary for the empowerment of women. Women are generally more empowered if they contribute and have control over their income as contributing to family income increases autonomy, [4].

However, the possible reason why rich women were more empowered in decision making is because the earned income/ wealth enables women to contribute meaningfully to the family expenditure and as such gained certain level of autonomy that will enable her take decisions. For example, since she contributes to family income, she may be able to decide on issues such as major household purchase and her health. When women do not have income, they becomes dependent on their spouse and that has the tendency of limiting their decision making autonomy since they do not contribute to the family income and as such may not decide on the expenditure, she may not be able to decide on house hold purchases expect otherwise.

The study found that age at marriage is associated with women empowerment in Nigeria as women who married from age 30 and above were more empowered than women who married before age 30. Previous study by [26] reported that the age at which the women marries is important for her empowerment. Safilios-

Rothschilds 1985; [26] found women decision making autonomy to be positively correlated with higher age at marriage, from the findings of this study it is shown that age at marriage is necessary for the empowerment of women. [9], reported that the reason why women in many less developed countries are not empowered is because early marriage is still very common in such societies.

More so, women who married early were not as empowered as women who delayed marriage, the assumption is that, if a woman marry early she is likely to marry a man older than her and the age difference will likely be large, as such, the bases for subordinate ordinate relationship is established. Therefore, because of the inequalities between the spouses accompanied with age difference, women who marry early are at disadvantage and so are at the risk of not being empowered. Avoiding early marriage is crucial to being empowered as women who delayed marriage were more empowered than those who married early.

Early marriage hinders human capital development so in delaying marriage, women will have enough time between adolescent and marriage to develop themselves either by getting education, acquiring necessary skills, getting employed or having income and all this is an added advantage and can help the woman to be empowered.

The study found that as age of women increases their empowerment also increases. The findings of this study is supported by [27], which reported that women were more empowered as they grow old, as age is correlated with women decision making power. However, the possible reason why age determines women empowerment in Nigeria may be that as women ages, some may lose their spouses because of high risk jobs and so becomes the household head as such have autonomy in household decision making. In Nigeria, according report by [33] the general life expectancy is 59, life expectancy base on sex as reported by [36] is higher for female 56.8 than male 54.8.

This means that women are expected to live longer than men and this may be partly due to difference in behavioural lifestyle of both sex. Furthermore, [26] said that age is a determinant of women empowerment; older women get more position and power compared to younger women. Women may get empowered as they grow old and this supported by the work of [7]. Age of the woman determines her empowerment status as she is likely to be more empowered as she grows old.

This study found variations in women empowerment across of residence in Nigeria. Women in Southern region of Nigeria were more empowered than women in the Northern region. However, the possibility of this is that since some regions are more developed than the other, some cultural practice that are antithetical to women empowerment are more common in some region than the other.

Influence of Spousal Age Difference on Women Empowerment

However, the study found that spousal age difference has a significant influence on women empowerment in Nigeria. This finding was in consonance with previous findings, [23] reported that spousal age gap limits women empowerment. The age difference between spouses significantly influence women decision making autonomy, the age difference in marital relationship tells whether or not women will be empowered. This finding is further supported by the finding of [13], which reported that women empowerment is negatively affected by large spousal age difference. If age gape is wide, the empowerment of women reduces. Furthermore, spousal age difference has a predictive influence on women decision making autonomy and for women who were 1-4 younger than husband were 2 times more likely to be empowered.

Being the few years younger or same age with husband means that the bases for subordinate- ordinate relation will not exist or maybe reduced as inequalities in social and economic status that accompanies age difference will not be found. So spousal communication improves and it is advantageous to women as

women will be able to take decision on major issues bothering them. The difference in age also means a difference in life experience, education, finance and makes the relationship unequal, detrimental and disadvantageous to women and such unequal relationship hinders women decision making autonomy making them dependent on men for major decisions. Spousal age difference hinders intimacy as reported by [10].

[16], reported that when there is a large spousal age gap, women are seen to usually have less decision making power. The reason is that spousal age gap is accompanied with inequality in education, economic resources etc. and that since age in most societies is the bases for subordinate- ordinate relationship, a large age difference in marital relationship coupled with inequality in education and financial resources makes the woman subordinate and make her not to be empowered. If the age gap were bridged, the women are more empowered (autonomous in decision making) this shows that large age difference is antithetical to women decision making autonomy.

Women who were same age with husband is about 2 times more likely to be empowered compared to women older than husband; women 1-4 years younger than spouse are 2 more likely to be empowered compared to women older than husbands; women 5-9years younger than spouse are 2 times more likely to be empowered compared to women older than husband, women 10 or more years younger than husband are 1 time more likely to be empowered compared to women older than husband. The more the age gap increases the likelihood of women being empowered drops, this means that the closer the age gap the more empowered a woman will be.

In a patriarchal society like Nigeria, the power to take decisions is traditionally conferred on men simply because they are of male sex and men naturally dominate over women even in marital relationship [3]. Also, in Nigeria, age is a bases for stratifying relationships into subordinate-ordinate relationship, and with the power to take decision already conferred on men, the age difference between the husband and wife make the relationship more detrimental to the women. The age difference if large is another bases for an unequal relationship and this age difference will also come with a lot of differences among the spouse which makes the relationship unequal and gives men more power to dominate the relationship by taking almost if not all the decision in household.

More so, if the woman is about 10 years younger than her spouse, she becomes subjugated in double front, first as a woman, second as subordinate (junior) and this affects her empowerment. In such cases, women have very minimal or no decision making autonomy and are not empowered. Women who were 1-4 year younger than husband were more empowered in this study than women in all other category of spousal age difference.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on the influence of spousal age difference on women empowerment, spousal age difference was found to significantly influence women empowerment as women who were 1-4 years younger than husband were more empowered women in all other category of spousal age difference. In fact, the closer the age the more likely for a woman to be empowered. In marriages were men are 10 or more older than women, the age gaps provide men with resources and experience that work against the empowerment of women, due to age difference, subordinate – ordinate relationship is established and men dominates the relationship and such relationship becomes detrimental to the empowerment of women. Therefore, being 1-4 years younger than spouse is more ideal for women empowerment as the closure in age gap will mean that spouse were of the same generational and age group, the same social, economic and educational background, as this will aid in the empowerment of women.

Women should be adequately sensitized on the implications of marrying men who are 10 or more years

older than them. Women need to be encouraged through adequate policy intervention to get formal education as this will help subdue the subordinate-ordinate relationship that may exist due to age differences. Relevant stakeholders should discourage women to avoid early marriage so as to close the age gap in marital relationship and use adequately the time of adolescent to get education and a source of income; Policy on early marriage should be well enforced.

Men should be sensitized on the need to let go all behavior and attitude that work against the empowerment of women as the empowerment of women benefits not only the women but their children and society at large

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