UNEMPLOYMENT AND LATE MARRIAGE: A STUDY OF POST GRADUATE STUDENTS’ OF UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT

NDUONOFIT, Larry-Love Effiong
Dept. of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
larrylove.nduonofit@gmail.com

NWALA-CADGER, Gold
Department of Sociology/Anthropology
Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Uyo
Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria
Chinedu11@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT
Marriage as an institution is what most, if not all young men and women hope to gain entrance into once they attain a responsible adult age. Yet, the story is quite different especially for the young men who come of age and are unable to perfect this hope quite on time. The study examined unemployment and late marriage, taking the post graduate students’ of the University of Port Harcourt as a case in point. Operationalising unemployment as poor socio-economic status, the objective of the study is to ascertain whether unemployment is significantly related to the age at first marriage. Theoretically, the work anchors on a micro-sociological paradigm – Rational Choice Theory. The primary instrument for data collection was the questionnaire (N = 126). The study employed a non-parametric statistical tool (Chi square) to test the hypothesis. Findings from the study however reveal a significant relationship between poor socio-economic status of eligible adult males and the age at first marriage. Using the Co-efficient of Contingency technique to determine the strength cum direction of the relationship, the study further shows a weak association between both variables. However, further findings reveal that unemployment is a necessary but insufficient condition affecting late marriage amongst eligible adult males. The findings of this study have also shown that parents/guardians of eligible adult males are rather interested in funding further academic pursuit than funding nuptial inclinations. The study contributes to a micro-level understanding of the determinants of late marriage. By using a micro sociological theory, the study has further enhanced the understanding of the role of decision-making in pre-nuptiality. The study recommends the introduction and institutionalization of employment benefits by the government, and the re-evaluation and reappraisal of the small and medium enterprise policy in the country.

Key words: socio-economic status, unemployment; marriage; late marriage; eligible age, marriage market.

INTRODUCTION
In Africa, marriage is seen as a permanent affair between a man and a woman. The relationship in actual fact is between the lineages of the couple who participate in the different rites that seal such a marriage (Modo, 1994: 54). Marriage has for ages been regarded as an acceptable way of adding more members to the lineage and at the same time expanding the scope of affinal relations. Marriage is uniquely beneficial to society because it is the foundation of the family and the basic building block of society as a whole. As a social institution which can be found in every human culture, marriage is peculiar and particular, though the forms and rules may differ. Marrying has historically been one of the clearest markers of adulthood.
and the most significant statement of independence from parents. Hartley (1992: 1) says it signifies the shift from family of origin to forming a household of one’s own. However, it was expected and still is in many African societies, that once a young man has left adolescence, marriage becomes the next priority (Okpala, 1987:48). Those who did not marry on time usually face social disapprovals. As such, a man who has reached the age for marriage in most traditional African settings looked for a “marryable girl”. Once he or the parents did, the two families agree, hence nuptiality was in full swing. Recent world dynamics especially globalization, urbanization and modernization as posited by Sathar and Kiani (1986) has interacted to postpone entrance into marriage such that young eligible men and in many cases women spend their twenties and early twenties cum thirties single. To many Malthusian scholars, this dynamics in nuptiality is good and is seen as a positive check on population control by reducing early fertility.

Statement of the Problem

Lehrer and Chen (2013) stated that there has been a steady increase in the age at first marriage in the United State, and this according to them is “one of the most significant demographic trends in the U.S landscape in recent times”. The median age for first marriage, they declared, rose from 20 and 23 for women and men, respectively, in 1950-1960, to 26 and 28 in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau 2010 in Lehrer and Chen, 2013). Many factors account for this transformation and according to (Cherlin, 2004; Goldin and Katz 2002; Greenwood and Guner 2008; Isen and Stevenson 2012) these ranges from the “development of oral contraception and the legalization of abortion, the growth in cohabitation, changes in household technology, and the decline in the male-female wage gap”.

Contextually there seems to be a demarcation in the controlling variable between the U.S and Nigeria in terms of the age at first marriage. In Nigeria, there has been a consistent negative milestone in the age at first marriage both for males and females, and studies (Okafor, 2011; Alanana, 2003) have linked this to the poor socio-economic status of young eligible adult males. Many young men and women graduate from the University (ies) every year, and a greater percent of them however wind up in the unemployment market. Unemployment has continued to thrive in Nigeria, accounting for 12.4 percent in 2011 and 24 percent in 2013. Though official figures put unemployment in the country at 24 percent, there are however clear indications that actual estimate of unemployment rate in Nigeria is well over 60 percent (Oddison and Soji-Eze, 2013). According to Umo (1996) in Obadan and Odusola (2000: 189), an annual average of about 2.8 million fresh graduates enter the Nigerian labour market, with only about 10% of them getting employment, which of course has influence over life course transitions for young persons. Education cum academic qualification is supposed to generate employment so as to justify the many years of study, yet, the obverse is the case with Nigeria. The fact that young men are unemployed has gravely affected their socio-economic status, thus devaluing their worth in the marriage market; hence frustrating their possibility of getting married on time.

In contemporary Nigeria, female partners are not looking out for suitors whose socio-economic status is inappropriate. As a result, rather than getting married, young eligible adult males chose to elongate their academic pursuit. This elongation or the lengthening of education according to (Nyamongo, 2000; Rice, 1990; and Cherlin, 1980) has greatly influenced the delay in marriage. Thus, many if not most of the men who graduate from one programme (Post Graduate Diploma, MSc, MBA) still come back to school to pursue either just another PGD, Masters or PhD degree as the case may be. The explanation for this is basically that the qualifications they hold do not eventuate in decent employment that would have provided the support structure for the formation of marriage. Instead it is better to move on academically rather than remaining idle.

Many young men in the country feel threatened by the kind of job (menial) they do, as such do not make a rational decision as to getting married. Adult males are in an insecure employment that may barely last two to five years given the contractual nature of employment in the country. Such employments do not offer the right basis for marital decisions. As posited by Ekert-jaffe and Solaz (2001: 6),

*men with unsecured job definitely have odds of entering a union, the absence of material security usually prevent*
Many adult males who are without question potential husbands still leave with their parents. Adult males of eligible age who are unemployed stay put with their parents, and enjoy family support. In most cases, they equally undergo mental torture as their parents make unfulfillable demands on them, particularly to go get a job or get married. Some adult males in the post graduate hall of residence, as a result of fear of stigmatization have thus found it difficult going back home, and have transformed their hostel rooms to personal accommodations.

To a large extent, late marriage contributes to a long period of premarital sexual behavior (Bongaarts, 2007; Isuigo-abanihe, 1993) which along the line may end up in unwanted pregnancy and even HIV/AIDS. Various studies have been channeled in this direction, Abdelrahman (1989) was basically concerned with the interface between education and late marriage, Jensen and Nina (1990) studied the influence of male unemployment on marital dissolution. Others like Catalano (1999), and Bledsoe (2000) were more interested in understanding the impact of unemployment on the female partners of the unemployed, and the direction and patterns of marriages respectively, while Lehrer and Chen focused more on the effects of delayed entry into first marriage and marital stability.

This study is particularly concerned with the influence of unemployment of eligible adult males on their age at first marriage. Unemployment in this work is defined as poor socio-economic status, whereas late marriage is conceptualized as the age at first marriage (this is particularly, 37 – 40). The study is organized into eight segments. The first and second segment deals with the introduction and problem statement respectively. In the third segment the objectives and hypothesis of the work is highlighted. In the fourth segment we discuss the theoretical dimension of the study whereas the fifth segment deals with the methodology of the study and the sixth is however a discussion on the results. The test of the hypothesis of the study is found in the seventh segment while the last segment of the study is a general conclusion of the whole matter.

**Objectives of the Study**

The study generally investigates the relationship between unemployment and late marriage amongst Post Graduate Students’. It also has the following objectives;

- To examine the demographic characteristics of Post Graduate students’ resident in the PG Hall of residence
- To examine the influence of poor socio-economic status on the age at first marriage.

**Hypothesis**

- There is a significant relationship between poor socio-economic status of eligible adult males and the age at first marriage.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study is anchored on the Rational Choice theory, popularized by James Coleman in the late 1980’s. Rational Choice theory is a strand of Atomistic Sociological Orientation. According to Ritzer (1996) Atomistic theories focuses on actors making decisions in isolation from others. As a micro-Sociological paradigm, it is used on two key elements – actors and resources. The idea underlying this perspective according to Coleman (1990, 1989) is that individuals act purposively towards a goal and this goal is also shaped by values or preferences. Meaning that in the process of decision making, humans are guided by what we call ‘considerations’. An action geared towards the fulfillment of a purpose is never predicated on assumptions but on definitive grounds of preferences and values.

It is expected that an educated person with qualifications would have access to a decent employment which would avail him the opportunity to be in control of resources, so as to eventuate in a rational choice of marriage. In contrast, individuals find themselves in uncomfortable situations where they are not in control of reasonable resources. Hence, their attempt to decide to get married becomes quite irrational given the fact that such a decision or choice is not utility inclined. Thus, Coleman (1990) asserts;
An actor evaluates the utility of alternative action partly in regard to his personal conditions or partly in regard to the condition of others" (Ritzer, 1996: 432).

The point is, since getting married when resources is insufficient and unavailable tend to be a burden, of what relevance is such a decision? The option or choice readily available is to stay away from such a choice, and this begets late marriage. In this dimension, one of such preferences available becomes the furthering of one’s educational career. Ipso facto, where does the resource for funding academic advancement come from? Coleman evinced that the interests of actors determines the course of events. It is in line with this preference of either advancing educational career or sourcing for resources that the age at first marriage is however magnified or even elongated.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

The study locale is the Post Graduate Hall of residence of the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The halls accommodate a total of 194 male and female post graduate students’, out of which 118 are males and 76 females. Sampling design for the study is probability sampling, whereas the Simple Random Sampling (SRS) method was used in selecting the sample population. The sample size was determined by the use of the YaroYamen formula, given as thus

\[
S = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2}
\]

This resulted into a total sample of 130. After the distribution and collection of data with the aid of the questionnaire, 126 questionnaires were retrieved and used in this study. A non-parametric technique (chi square) was used in testing the hypothesis, at 0.05 level of significance.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their socio-demographic characteristics (n = 126)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 – 34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 – 39</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 above</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>separated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programme of study</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSc/MBA/M.Ed</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGD</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Affiliation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Table 1 and Fig 2 show the sex composition of the respondents to be 77.7% males, and 22.3% females. Age distribution of the respondents as shown in Fig. 3 indicates that 23.8% of the male respondents make up the age range of 30-34 years. Most of the male respondents (46.8%) are within the age group of 35-39, which implies that a greater percent of the male population are almost 40 years old. As shown on the above Table, 1 (3.9%) and (0.8%) of male and female respondents are in the age group of 40 years and above. Also, the data further reveals that 63.5% of the male respondents (also see fig. 3) are single relative to 15.1% of the females. This implies to a large extent that majority of the male respondents who are between ages 35 to 40 years of age are obviously unmarried.
Figure 3: Marital status of male respondents

As shown in Table 1, majority of the respondents, 45.2% males and 11.1% females are in the Masters Degree programme, while 11.1% of the males and 4.8% of the females are in the PhD programme. The respondents are majorly Christians, while 6.4% of the males are Muslims.

Fig. 4: Employment status of respondents.

The employment characteristics from Table 1 and Fig. 4 show that 69.1% (87) of the male respondents are unemployed as against 8.7% (11) that are employed. This thus implies the bulk of the male respondents are clearly without one form of employment or the other.

Test of Hypothesis

\( H_0: \) There is no significant relationship between poor socio-economic status of eligible adult males and the age at first marriage.

\( H_1: \) There is a significant relationship between poor socio-economic status of eligible adult males and the age at first marriage.

The above null hypothesis was tested with the data collected from the questionnaire and the result is as presented in Table 2. The respondents were asked if a high or poor economic status has influence on the age at first marriage.
Table 2: Observed and expected frequencies for Socio-economic status and age at first marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>4(8.56)</td>
<td>7(89.44)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>94(2.44)</td>
<td>21(25.56)</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At 1 degree of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance, the calculated Chi square ($X^2$) was found to be 80.13, whereas the table value is 3.84. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This Means that a significant relationship exists between poor socio-economic status of eligible adult males and the age at first marriage. Our finding was further subjected to another test, this time to determine the strength of the relationship. This was done by the application of the Co-efficient of Contingency technique, given thus;

$$C = \sqrt{\frac{X^2}{n - X^2}}$$

Co-efficient of Contingency was found to be 0.6. This obviously indicates a weak relationship or association between the variables. From the presentation and analysis of the data for this study, the test of hypothesis revealed a highly calculated chi square ($X^2$) value of 80.13 which made us to accept the alternate hypothesis as against the null. It was discovered that poor socio-economic status of adult males increased the age at first marriage.

The onus lies in the situation where eligible adult males have no employment or financial status; they are incapacitated from making a rational choice decision of marriage. In the absence of a decent employment, the choice of being married is however postponed, which readily and equally necessitate the extension of the age at first marriage. Our finding corresponds with those of Hertrich (2004) and Rattaroli (1990) carried out in other settings. The strength of the relationship between the variables was found to be a weak one. This indicates the presence of certain stochastic variables, which may include personal decisions, family/parental influence, uncertain spousal choice, tribal issues, etc. The study also showed that unmarried adult males who are advancing their academic inclination enjoy financial support for their studies from their families. It was discovered in this study that most families rather prefer to sponsor the furthering of education than marital decisions.

CONCLUSION
Contemporary society is dynamic, social pattern and social arrangements of this era are quite distinct from what use to be obtainable. Today’s young men and even women can be said to be existing in a more complex society that seems to negate traditional patterns. Yet, whatever the case may be the institution of marriage cannot be obliterated. This study was conducted to examine the interface between unemployment and late marriage. We started out by conceptualizing unemployment as poor socio-economic status and late marriage as the age at first marriage. Though unfortunately majority of our respondents were never married who had gone pass age 37. It was observed in the study that unemployment which translates to poor socio-economic status is a major setback to the decision to enter into a marriage union. This however undermines the age at which eligible adult males enter into marriages. An unemployed status creates difficulty in the direction of choice and decisions. Hence a basic contribution here is that before young men become settled in life maritally, they would have become quite advanced and unfit for certain things. For instance, how long would a young man (of about forty) stay on in civil service if he happens to find a job there at a later age, considering the retirement age? From every indication, late marriage in Nigeria today is as a result of unemployment of eligible adult males. And in many ways, post graduate studies programme is an escape route for many young men in Nigeria. The conundrum is the continuity in academic pursuit which requires funding; this study discovered that unmarried eligible adult males still had their parents financing their academic inclination as opposed to financing a marital union.

We recommend the introduction and institutionalization of employment benefits by the government, this will go a long way to aid the youths on social survival. There is every need for a better and greater
partnership between the public and private sector, mainly to strengthen the environment for active private sector participation in youth entrepreneurial developments, to bolster employment in the country. Again, it is necessary at this point to mention that there should be a re-evaluation and reappraisal of the small and medium enterprise policy. Essentially to determine to what extent it has added value to the lives of young men and women in the country. The shortcomings of this study are basically in the quantitative instrument utilized and the rather infinitesimal nature of the samples. This study particularly focused on respondents in an academic institution (students in a post graduate hall of residence), which is why the sample is rather small. More studies are necessary in this area, and we recommend the application of macro-sociological theories and equally recommend a broader study with broader samples and better quantitative instruments.

REFERENCES