

Gender Differences in the Reasons for Participation in Spouse Sharing among the Okun in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This report examines the reasons for participation in spouse sharing among the Okun with a view to identifying some factors that may present particular obstacles to women and enhance their vulnerability to the practice. A total of 1029 sexually active respondents in 5 settlements where spouse sharing is being practiced participated in the questionnaire survey aspect of the study, while 82 respondents participated in the focus group discussions. About 65% of respondents reported having *ale* or *alase* and were involved in the practice of spouse sharing. Reasons for involvement in spouse sharing include the need for economic support, sexual satisfaction, increased social status, procreation, the problems of separation/divorce and widowhood. The focus group discussions revealed a possible exploitation of the gender-based economic weakness of the women by the men in the initiation and sustenance of the practice in the Okun communities. It is recommended that for any program to achieve a considerable reduction in the practice, differences in the reasons for participation in spouse sharing among the men and women must be documented with a view to solving those problems that compel women to participate. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2001; 5[2]:36-55)

RÉSUMÉ

Les différences basées sur les sexes dans l'explication des raisons pour la participation au partage d'époux chez les Okun au Nigéria. Ce rapport étudie les raisons pour la participation au partage d'époux chez les Okun afin d'identifier quelques facteurs qui peuvent poser des problèmes aux femmes et augmenter leur vulnérabilité à la pratique. Au total 1029 répondants qui étaient sexuellement actives, résidant dans 5 villages où l'on pratique le partage d'époux, ont participé à l'aspect de l'enquête à l'aide des questionnaires, alors que 82 répondants ont participé aux discussions à groupe cible. Environ 65% des répondants ont déclaré être en possession de *ale* ou *alase* et qu'ils sont impliqués dans la pratique du partage d'époux. Les raisons pour la participation au partage d'époux comprennent le besoin du soutien économique, la satisfaction sexuelle, le statut social haussé, la procréation, les problèmes de la séparation/du divorce et du veuvage. Les discussions à groupe cible ont révélé une exploitation possible de la faiblesse économique fondée sur le parti pris contre les femmes par les hommes en ce qui concerne l'initiation et le maintien de la pratique dans les communautés Okun. L'étude affirme que pour qu'un programme accomplisse une réduction importante dans la pratique, d'époux parmi les hommes et les femmes afin de résoudre les problèmes-là qui obligent les femmes à y participer. (*Rev Afr Santé Reprod* 2001; 5[2]:36-55)

KEY WORDS: *Gender difference, spouse sharing, Okun, Nigeria*

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Introduction

An analysis of the reasons for participation in spouse sharing by an average Okun could provide insight into some socio-economic dimensions of the practice. Such information is indeed very useful in identifying issues to be addressed when advocating for the empowerment of Okun women over their sexuality. The reasons that make women vulnerable to spouse sharing are largely different from those of the men. A woman's socio-economic status and her access to resources within the society will determine her ability to negotiate participation or non-participation in the practice. Gender bias, adverse socio-economic environment such as low income, infertility, unemployment, polygamy and illiteracy, which result to abandonment by husbands, family quarrels and incompatibility, may aid women's vulnerability to the practice.

An earlier study of *ale/alase* practice among the Okun by the author in 1994 touched generally on what is believed to be the traditional reasons for the practice. Findings from the study pointed out that the practice was done in response to the need for maintenance of the family unit, quest for and care of children, support for the sick and surviving spouse of a deceased relative, reduction in the rates of separation and divorce, and a means of keeping resources for seducing women within the extended family group. It was generally argued that in the past, material and financial gains, and not the motive, were only tangential to the initiation and sustenance of the practice.¹

The question now is: what reasons does an average Okun evoke for participating in spouse sharing? Is material and financial gain or support the primary motive for participation in the practice? Who, or what category of people, is advancing what reasons, and why involve in the practice? Are there differences between the men and the women in this respect? How can our understanding of these differences be used to empower the Okun, particularly women, to have more control over their sexuality, thus promoting sexual and reproductive health? The report presented here is a modest attempt at providing answers to these questions. It is hoped that the study will generate data that could be used for inter-

vention to promote the norm of having one sex partner, and the reduction and complete elimination of the practice of spouse sharing among the Okun.

Background Information

The Okun Tribe

The Okun tribe, variously described in literature as the Yagba, Owe, Bunu or Kabba,²⁴ are found within the middle belt of Nigeria, mainly in Kogi and some parts of Ekiti and Kwara States. According to the 1991 census, the tribe is made up of about one million persons. The Okun have continued to be affected by the dilemma of belonging to the "two Nigerian worlds". Politically they are regarded as part of northern Nigeria with its main streams of emirates and Islamic heritage, while sociologically and culturally they are contiguous with southern Nigeria.²⁵ This development has made them to be left out completely, or to be at the periphery in most major studies. Consequently, only few published works exist about the people, yet they occupy a unique place of their own in the political, economic and cultural life of Nigeria. However, as far back as 1919, an archival record had it that it was a taboo to marry from one's clan or family; and that a man's social status was reckoned according to the number of wives, concubines and children he possessed. Thus, polygamy is institutionalised in this society.

The Practice of Ale/Alase

The Okun believe that there are strong ties between members of an extended family and a whole clan. According to a 1994 study,¹⁹ family and clan members view themselves as one and consider what belongs to a kin as belonging to every member of the clan including their wives. Men, for instance, use personal pronouns such as "my wife" to address a lady that is married to their kinsman, while the ladies, according to Okun custom, consider themselves to be wives to male relatives of their husbands. In practice, men do have and maintain sexual relationship with their kin's wives without any conflict. The Okun call this practice of spouse sharing *ale* or *alase*.^a

^a *Ale/Alase* in Okun language literally means a cook. The name was probably derived from the fact that a man who maintains sexual relationship with a kin's wife enjoys, apart from sex, the privilege of having the lady prepare food for him. It is required that the man provides the woman foodstuff twice or thrice a week usually from his farm. Presently, it may just be occasional gifts of money for those who are not farmers. In return, the man would have a permanent ration every evening at the lady's place. Men refer to their partners as *alase* while the women refer to their male partners as *ale*.

In tracing the origin of spouse sharing, many informants who discussed what they believed gave rise to the practice in this society pointed out that extramarital sex affairs is as old as the Okun society, and that the society considers having sexual affairs with another man's wife a very grievous offence, like in other societies. They informed us that in the olden days, men who suspected that other men were having sexual affairs with their wives usually charmed their wives with *magun*, a charm that makes the lover man die instantly anytime he attempts to have sex with such charmed lady irrespective of where the act is to be committed. The informants also said this led to the death of many young promising men in the past, thereby causing enmity and war of vendetta between families and clans. At that time young men were not marrying very early and young girls were expected to remain virgins till their wedding night. However, since young men were expected to prove their potency and manhood before marriage, the only alternative for their sexual exposure was among the wives of their extended family or clan members. It was considered safer to restrict the extramarital sex affairs to the family or clan because no extended cousin, uncle or brother of a man would use *magun* on him because he is of the same blood, and blood they believed is thicker than water. If a man did not want his relative to have sex affair with his wife he would simply call him to order.

Furthermore, they informed us that where a man used *magun* on his relative because of his wife, whom they derogatorily referred to as *obirin* (a mere woman), then what they referred to as the god of *ebi* or *ajobi* (god of relation) would avenge the death of the deceased man. In addition, the social stigma would remain with the man, his wife and children forever. The participants said the practice of spouse sharing within the family originated and persisted till today partly in response to the need to curb the death of young men seeking sexual experience through extramarital sex affairs and who are exposed to the risk of *magun*. Men who were in need of sexual experience were therefore encouraged to look inwards among the family wives, mainly among the widows, women married to invalid men and old polygamists, or among women neglected by their husbands. They said the society believed such inward-looking by the young men would allow resources and energy, which oth-

erwise would have been wasted on outside women and/or increase outside children, to be used to cater for home wives, increase family children and care for other children of the family who may be unfortunate to have invalid, deceased or uncaring fathers.

The ethnographic aspect of the study, in addition, revealed that certain conditions would, therefore, facilitate and possibly encourage the practice of spouse sharing among the extended family and/or a whole clan in Okun land. These include, among others, where men marry many wives with intention to allow their grown-up male children produce more children through the younger wives; where old men in an extended family or clan marry younger ladies, such old men are usually unable to compete with younger men for the attention of their younger wives because the younger wives will normally prefer younger men of the clan. Other conditions are, a situation where a woman needs support because her husband is sick, poor or dead; where barren women marry younger ladies in order to raise children, such ladies become 'wives' to the barren women's relatives or the relatives of the infertile women's husbands; and where a man is impotent but has a wife with whom relatives help him to raise children.¹⁹ It was generally pointed out that Okun men consider a child fathered by their kin as theirs because they share the same ancestral blood. This condition, they said, generally leads to a reduction in the rate of divorce in the society and increases the stability of the marriage institution. It was reported¹¹ that if a woman were rejected by her husband but is still favoured by his family members, she would still continue to enjoy her marital privileges such as feeding, housing, regular sex, etc, until relationship between her and her husband was normalised through elders' intervention. Similarly, if a woman maintained cordial relationship with the husband's relatives she and her children would continue to live to enjoy their normal lives after the death of the husband, father and/or breadwinner. The same also applies to the man.

The way the society looks at the practice has further increased its permissiveness, its rate, and general acceptance in the society. To that extent it is not clandestine in nature. Results from this study and one conducted earlier show that between 60 and 65% of sexually active Okun, mostly in union,

participate in this practice. The practice encourages multiple sexual partnering and is capable of exposing the people to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.^{1,2} Similar practice involving sex with a relative by marriage was reported among the Ekiti (southern neighbours to the Okun),³ the Twana tribe of Botswana,⁴ and in some parts of Uganda.⁵ Similarly, Kakar,⁶ in a study conducted in a New Delhi hospital in 1984, found that half of the men in a group of 1000 had their first sexual experience with the wife of an elder. Commenting on how women in unsatisfactory relationships gratify their needs in the Yoruba society of the 30s, Fadipe⁷ reported that in situations where a husband proved unsatisfactory, and since a woman might be said to be married to her husband's relatives, she transfers her attention to the relatives even though nominally remaining the wife of the man to whom she was married.

Sex with a relative by marriage, therefore, is not new, what is of interest is the reason for its persistence till now among the Okun. In Nigeria, it has been pointed out that many people still elicit certain traditional justifications to protect their true specific values and beliefs. Attention has been drawn to several socio-cultural values, expectations and norms or practices that exist in many communities, influence people's attitudes and reproductive behaviours in varying degrees. Among such are male role in family life decisions, men's influence on women's fertility, social opposition to reproductive health and such like. It also includes the low status of women, women socialisation, women's self perception of their roles, rights, and empowerment, women's role in bringing up children, as well as the role of influentials and extended family members on marriage, reproduction and fertility decisions.⁸⁻¹⁰

Many of these inherited socio-cultural traditions are cited as examples in which their observance is still plausible and compelling to many Nigerians. There is need to find out how they actually operate among the Okun to facilitate and sustain the practice of spouse sharing, in order to determine how to address them using information, education and communication programs aimed at promoting sexual and reproductive health among the people.

The way and manner the Okun see themselves as a group, as well as their marriage custom,¹ for instance, probably facilitate and promote the prac-

tice of spouse sharing. In Okun community, formally expressed relationship between husband and wife emphasises the husband's and his relatives' legal right over a wife. According to an archival source, the wife recognises her husband as her owner because he paid her dowry, and she equally extends this to his relatives by calling them *olowo ori mi* – the payer of my bride price. A woman, in recognition of the authority of her husband and his relatives over her, considers members of the husband's paternal clan as her husband and call them *olowo ori mi*. This expression is usually restricted to the immediate paternal family members of her mother-in-law.¹¹ Thus, a man could choose *alase* from immediate wives of his maternal clan. Marriage to the family by women against the background of *ale* or *alase* practice means that women are exposed to the risk of being in sexual union simultaneously with more than one partner.

In all, these women are victims probably because of their role in the society. This calls for the need to better understand gender differences in this type of sexual behaviour. Gender roles and norms are culturally specific and thus vary tremendously around the world. Almost everywhere men and women differ substantially from each other in power, status and freedom. In virtually all society men have more power than women.¹²⁻¹⁶ Understanding gender differences provides insight into men's and women's behaviour, relationships and reproductive decisions. The influence of gender is similar in strength to that of religion, race, social status and wealth.¹⁷ Difference in power between men and women are not absolute or universal. Some men, especially the poor, illiterate or unemployed, have little power and few resources. Like a man, a woman's power is influenced by such factors as culture, age and education. Because gender lies at the heart of social organisation and distribution of power, any call for changes in gender roles, and hence behaviour, often touches emotional and political nerves. Some people see such change as threatening; others see it as part of global trend towards equality and justice. However sensitive the topic, taking a fresh look at how gender affects reproductive behaviour, particularly traditionally peculiar ones like spouse sharing, is a necessary step towards improving reproductive health for all.¹⁸

Against the background of the discussions so far, we examined whether the Okun men, as op-

posed to women, will be more likely to attribute their participation in spouse sharing to the more traditional reasons in support of the practice in the society. And whether men probably exploit the gender-based economic weaknesses of the women to initiate and sustain the practice of spouse sharing in today's Okun society.

Data and Methods

The study used data from a field survey conducted between October 1998 and January 1999 among the Okun in five selected communities – two urban and three rural – where spouse sharing is very common.¹ A reconnaissance survey in October 1998 preceded the actual fieldwork in November 1998 and January 1999. During the reconnaissance survey, the research team familiarised itself generally with the study area, determined the type of problems that may arise during the actual fieldwork, and evolved strategies to tackle them. The team also held crucial discussions with a wide range of people (village and ward heads, local government staff, and other significant individuals) concerning the project, thus notifying and mobilising them for the project. The team then pre-tested the survey instrument, namely, the questionnaire and the FGD guide.

The research team was made up of four social scientists from the University of Jos, assisted by 16 trained field assistants, who were either holders of a first degree in the social sciences or the National Certificate of Education. The research team carried out monitoring and supervision of data collection. The field assistants were trained for one week on the rudiments of completing survey questions and conducting a focus group discussion. The questionnaire survey usually preceded FGDs in the studied settlements. The questionnaire contained 107 questions divided into four sections. Section 1 contained information for identification, section 2 contained questions on the background characteristics of respondents, while section 3 explored sexual relations of respondents with particular reference to spouse sharing. Section 4 contained some set of questions designed to examine respondents' knowledge and experience of STDs including HIV/AIDS, perception of risk, and protective measures. Section 5 contained questions about their protective practices, knowledge and use of the condom.

Selection of Respondents

The survey respondents were 1029 sexually active Okun men aged 16 to 60 years and ever married women aged 12 to 49 years. Three sampling stages were adopted to select eligible respondents. First was the selection of enumeration areas [EAs] in each settlement. This was followed by the selection of households in the selected EAs, then the eligible respondents in the selected households. Sampling was necessarily random at every stage. In each of the studied settlements about 20% of the estimated EAs and 50% of the estimated households in each EA were sampled. The field assistants compiled a list of sampled households and eligible respondents in each of the selected enumeration area and proceeded to select about 15–17% of the respondents, about half of which were women.

The questionnaire was administered to sampled respondents in a one-to-one interview. In all cases respondents and interviewers were matched by sex. A total of 1136 questionnaires were administered to the respondents, 529 in the rural and 507 in the urban areas.

Several studies have indicated the importance of FGDs in illuminating the explanatory variables that are associated with attitude and behaviour of human population. FGD has increasingly gained credibility in social science research.²⁰⁻²³ This technique pools respondents into a discussion group to give a spectrum of viewpoints on a specific topic of interest. Briefly, the merits of this technique are: it allows a wide range of viewpoints within a short period, respondents can correct or invalidate each other's points and supplement each other's information on the issue being discussed, it permits openness that is always absent at the level of individual interviews.

A tape recorder was used to record proceedings of the sessions. The purpose of the discussions was to present qualitative views on the reasons for participating in spouse sharing among the Okun, in order to add depth, clarity and a human face to the quantitative data from the structured questionnaire. The basic questions revolved around identifying who was involved in spouse sharing, i.e., their characteristics, their life, and why they participated in the practice.

Focus group discussions in each of the settlements were preceded by the recruitment of partici-

pants. There were no rigidly followed rules; between 6 and 10 persons participated in each FGD session. The composition of the group was done in such a manner as to reflect every stratum of the community. Two group sessions each, one with men and the other with women, took place in the selected rural settlements, while four took place in the urban area. During the course of this research a total of 12 group sessions were conducted involving 82 informants. The FGD was planned in such a way that women conducted women's groups and men conducted men's groups. The last discussions were held in the first week of January 1999.

The field assistants encountered very little interview resistance; however, where resistance occurred it was quickly broken. Some of the selected respondents were not available for interview at the first call. Those that were not available during the first call were either interviewed during second or third callback exercise. Field assistants worked closely with the supervisors during data collection. Completed questionnaires were checked at the end of every day and those found not properly filled were corrected occasionally by re-interviewing the respondents. The response rate to individual questions was high, but seven questionnaires were not properly filled; most of which were completed by respondents themselves. These were, however, removed from the total, leaving 1029 questionnaires for data analysis.

Variables

Reasons for participation in spouse sharing were treated as the dependent variable. It was made up of six categories, namely, need for economic and material support, sexual satisfaction, increased social status, procreation, and the problem of widowhood, separation/divorce.

Other variables in the data set measured respondents' background characteristics. This included locality status, a dichotomous variable reflecting a respondent's place of residence during the study, which could be either urban or rural. Childhood residence measured where a respondent grew up before he or she was 12 years old; there were two options, rural village or township. Age was a discrete variable that measured respondents' age in completed years, it was later categorised into two, those less or equal to 35 years and those who

were 36 years and above.

Respondents were placed into either of two educational status: no formal schooling and some formal schooling. Media exposure measured whether a respondent read a newspaper, listened to the radio, or watched the television at least once a week or not. Employment status involved placing respondents into one of three categories, namely, paid employment, self employment and unemployed, while income originally measured as a continuous variable was categorised into two, namely, low and high income. Those with income below field average of US\$238.1 per annum were categorised as low income earners. Respondents were classified into one of three religious groups – Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. By marital status there were married and unmarried (singles, widowed, separated or divorced).

Data Analysis

For intervention activities to be effective, it should focus primarily on those involved in the practice of spouse sharing and should address reasons for involvement. Thus, differences in the reasons for involvement in spouse sharing were explored in a tabular analysis between males and females based on the background characteristics of respondents.

All individuals that participated in the collection of information (moderators, observers and note takers) were involved in the analysis of individual FGD data. Each focus group adopted a uniform procedure in the analysis of a typical individual FGD transcript to produce transcripts of their discussion sessions. At the end of every session each team met to examine and discuss group activities and results. These discussions provided quick feedback information that were immediately acted and improved upon. The transcriptions session started as soon as the first set of FGDs were completed. Guidelines for analysis of individual transcripts included:

1. Keeping the study objectives fresh in mind. When a transcript had been completed it was read in several different ways to note general impressions and to identify major opinions and attitudes that were expressed by the group.
2. Each transcript was read looking for very specific issues (listed from the FGD guide) and based on the study objectives as well as other

areas in which we were interested. New areas that were important to the study objectives that emerged during the discussions were also noted.

3. The use of ethnograph greatly facilitated coding, retrieval and analysis of FGD data. Extracts from the transcripts were reported in appropriate sections to strengthen important findings.

Study Findings

Background Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 presents information on selected background characteristics of the respondents. There were slightly more men in the sample (50.3%), compared to women (49.7%). In the rural and urban areas the sampled population was 50.9% and 49.1% respectively. About 56.9% were less than 36 years old, with slightly more men in the sample than women, while those categorised as 36 years and above were about 43.1%, with women dominating. The sample generally consisted of young Okun men and women at the prime of their reproductive life.

About 35% of respondents had no formal education, made up of women (36.4%) and men (33.4%). About 67% of the men and 64% of women had some formal schooling. The newspaper reading habit of the whole population was generally average, about 53% reported reading or having someone read a newspaper to them at least once in a week. There was no much difference between men and women, 56.6% and 47.9% respectively. Most people (86.3%) listened to the radio at least once a week, but there was no difference between men and women. Television exposure was the lowest, as about 34.6% watched a television program at least once a week. The difference between men and women in this case is wide, 41% of men and 29% of women watched the television. The difference may be because television programs are usually in the evenings when women are mostly preoccupied with preparation of food for the family. Our data revealed that the Okun probably get their information from the radio, print media and television. Lack of exposure to these media was largely attributed to non possession (82%), lack of time (16%) and some other reasons (2%).

About 34.0% of respondents – 67.4% men and 35.4% women – were involved in salaried or paid employment. Most of the respondents (48.0%) were self-employed, they were involved in

traditional occupations such as farming, petty trading, traditional processing, services, arts, and crafts. The remaining 18% of respondents were unemployed.

Generally, the income level of respondents was low and there was a wide gap between the low and high income earners. The average estimated annual income of respondents was about twenty thousand naira (₦20,000 or US\$238.1), and about three quarters of respondents belonged to this income bracket. Majority of the women belonged to the low income group (82.8%) compared to the men (68.2%).

Most of the respondents (71.1%) were Christians, about 16% were Muslims and 10.3% were Traditionalists. There were more Christians among female respondents (73.8%) than males (8.5%), about 20% and 13% of the men and women were Muslims, while 7% and 13% of the men and women were Traditionalists. About two thirds of respondents (63.2%) were married, while others, which included singles (mostly men), widows, those separated and divorcees (mostly women), made up the remaining one third (36.5%). In terms of marital status there was no difference between men and women.

Table 1 contains information about the prevalence of spouse sharing among respondents; 672 (65.3%) out of 1029 interviewed respondents reported having *ale* or *alase* at the time. There was very little difference between men (65.0%) and women (64.9%), which means female Okun are equally involved in the practice like their male counterparts. This provided a good opportunity for comparison in terms of reasons for participating in the practice along gender line.

Reasons for Participating in Spouse Sharing

To avoid speculations on reasons for participation in spouse sharing, enquiries were made directly from those involved in the practice. Table 2 shows what respondents considered the most important reasons for participating in spouse sharing by sex. It is evident from the data that the reasons are not the same for all respondents, and that the important consideration for participation differs along gender line. The report presented here is, however, restricted to the 672 respondents (65.3%) who reported having *ale* or *alase* at the time of the study.

Table 1 Selected Background Characteristics of Respondents by Sex

		N	Male (518)	Female (511)	Total (1029)	
Locality	Urban	505	51.6	48.4	49.1	
	Rural	524	52.8	47.2	50.9	
	Township	385	42.3	32.5	37.4	
	Rural village	644	57.3	67.5	62.6	
Age	≤ 35 years	585	59.8	53.8	56.9	
	≥ 36 years	444	40.2	46.2	43.1	
Educational status	No formal schooling	359	33.4	36.4	34.9	
	Some formal schooling	670	66.6	63.6	65.1	
Media exposure	Newspaper	No	482	43.4	50.3	46.8
		Yes	547	56.6	49.7	53.2
	Radio	No	141	11.6	15.9	13.7
		Yes	888	84.4	84.1	86.3
	Television	No	673	59.1	71.8	65.4
		Yes	356	40.9	28.7	34.6
Occupation	Paid employment	350	67.4	35.4	34.0	
	Self employment	494	49.8	46.2	48.0	
	Unemployed	185	17.6	18.4	18.0	
Income	High	252	31.8	17.2	24.5	
	Low	777	68.2	82.8	75.5	
Religion	Christianity	732	68.5	73.8	71.1	
	Islam	169	19.9	12.9	16.4	
	African Traditional Religion	106	7.3	13.3	10.3	
Marital status	Others	376	37.6	35.4	36.5	
	Married	653	62.4	64.6	63.5	
Spouse sharing	Involved	672	65.0	65.6	65.3	
	Not involved	357	35.0	34.4	34.7	

Need for Material and Financial Support

The need for material and financial support represents the most commonly cited reason for involvement in spouse sharing among the Okun. Nearly half of the respondents (44.0%) attributed their involvement to this reason, with women dominating (50.6%). Attempting to link the need for financial and material support to the initiation and sustenance of spouse sharing, respondents in the FGD sessions discussed the common reason of poverty, which could result to the practice. They said some men are poor as a result of prolonged ill health, physical disability, or simply as a result of laziness. Some hard working relatives who are better financially usually identify women married to such men

to help and assist. The 'sympathetic man', they said, would continue to provide a lady in such situation with supplementary foodstuffs and other materials until they gradually become lovers. Younger wives of poor men whose poverty may have derived from ill health and old age, in an attempt to meet their own personal and family needs, may seek for help and assistance from their husband's relatives who may use the opportunity to start and sustain *ale* or *alase* relationship. Respondents said the practice was used in the past as a means of redeeming the distress of poor families whose poverty could be attributed to poor health, disability and even laziness.

Women also provide some form of economic support to their *ale* who may be in need of help on

the farm during harvesting season especially if such a man is hard working but unmarried, separated/divorced from the wife, or if the wife had died. Some of them explained thus:

"I do not currently have a wife with me. You see, I need someone to help in the farm to harvest my crops and to prepare my meals. It is not good for a man to stay alone without a woman to help or assist him." (A rural widower farmer)

*"In this harvesting season, my *alase* has been very useful to me. She harvested all my corn, threshed them and took them to the market. *Alase* are sometimes more useful than a wife, you know!"* (A rural separated man)

The Okun women traditionally have no access to land, and their labour is generally seen as a complement to that of men. Any condition, such as ill health, separation/divorce or death, that deprives a woman of the support of her husband is seen as a serious loss of income and would probably leave her in a bad situation, therefore, she will be more dependent and vulnerable to the practice of spouse sharing.

Table 2 Reasons for Participation in Spouse Sharing by Sex, 1999

Reasons	Male (N = 340)	Female (N = 332)	Total (672)
Economic and material support	37.6	50.6	44.0
Sexual satisfaction	42.4	27.7	35.1
Increased social status	7.6	4.8	6.3
Procreation	4.2	6.7	5.4
Widowhood	4.7	4.8	4.8
Separation/divorce	3.5	5.4	4.5
Total	100	100	100

$$\chi^2 = 22.13, df = 5, p < 0.001$$

Need for Sexual Satisfaction

About 35% of all the respondents attributed their reasons for participation in spouse sharing to the need for sexual satisfaction. The FGD sessions revealed that men who attributed their involvement in spouse sharing to the need for sexual satisfaction probably believed that a man could not be satisfied adequately by one woman.

"Our grandparents used at least three women in their lifetime. I mean when their first wife reaches menopause they get another. It is only on the third one that a man may no longer be active. A man can therefore not be satisfied sexually by one woman, that is the way God created it. To have one woman as dictated by modern society is to beg men to have other sex partners. One man, one wife is therefore not in our culture." (A rural man)

Reasoning along this line, many men go after another sex partner because they feel one woman cannot satisfy them. Many people are not aware that a woman can live a normal sex life after menopause. If sexual satisfaction is the issue and not procreation then a woman can adequately take care of a man's sexual needs even after menopause.

During the focus group discussion, some of the respondents pointed out that younger men usually identify women who have been neglected by their husbands and make advances to them with the intention of initiating *ale/alase* practice. Since these women are not satisfied with the inability of their husbands to meet their emotional, sexual and even material needs, they happily welcome love advances by the younger men. Men, by their action, are responsible for women's involvement in spouse sharing by not playing their roles as sex partners or breadwinners adequately.

Majority of respondents share the view that polygamous marriages have been a source of women who become *alase* to kinsmen in the past and even now. For example, they pointed out that in those days when children were symbols of wealth and affluence, an old and rich patriarch could marry as many as 10 to 15 wives. Such men were usually unable to satisfy all the women sexually, and probably materially, therefore, they rely on younger kinsmen to raise children that will assist them on the farm.

Increased Social Status

Closely related to the issue of sexual satisfaction is that of ego boosting; about 6% of respondents in the questionnaire survey attributed their participation in spouse sharing to this reason. A lady respondent in one of the groups said it is fashionable to have *ale* or *alase*. Respondents said they practiced spouse sharing because "I just want to belong" or "because it is our culture". Respondents told us that in the past, *ale/alase* practice was a

booster of personal social ego in the community. This is because the practice increases the number of dependants on a man and it serves to measure the level of responsibility he performs to his clan or extended family. A man with several *alase* is well recognised in the family because he cares not only for his wife(ves) and children but also for other family wives and children who are in need. In the home of an affluent man with several *alase*, food-stuffs were distributed in different directions in the evenings to the homes of his women. To become an affluent person and to be reckoned with in the society, a man must maintain several wives and *alase*. Thus, young men who are well to do strive to acquire as many *alase* as possible to boost their social ego.

To the women it is more sexual freedom in a supposed world of men. It could also be a retaliatory approach to men's extramarital affairs. A woman would usually involve in spouse sharing "because my husband has *alase*".

Procreation and Continuity of Name

About 5% of respondents who were involved in spouse sharing attributed their involvement to the need for procreation. The society places high premium on having children who will bear their father's name. It is therefore believed that every adult male must have children, irrespective of whether the person is biologically or physically capable to do so or not. Three categories of persons, namely, men who are impotent or sterile, men who are slightly mentally handicapped or seriously disabled, and women who are barren, could have wives in their names through special arrangement and support from their family. Younger men within the extended family impregnate the wives of such people and make them to bear children who could answer the name of their cultural father through *ale/alase* practice. In the case of the barren woman, respondents said the children would bear the name of her husband but will be known and called the woman's children.

The ability to get a wife by incapacitated men depends on the level of their family wealth, connections and concerns. In some cases, it may be the degree of personal affluence or initiative of the man. For instance, respondents said a hard working impotent or sterile man may on his own and

with little support and understanding on the part of his family members acquire a wife and raise children, while a mentally retarded person would depend exclusively on his family members. Where the family members are capable, they are usually willing to help even if just to prove to the society that their son is normal after all, thus being rescued from the social stigma associated with having a handicapped child in the family. Respondents said women who are victims of these special marriage arrangements are usually the ones younger men of the family consider first when it comes to choosing an *alase*.

Similarly, barrenness among women and sterility among men would facilitate the practice of spouse sharing. When asked about her reasons for being involved in spouse sharing, a barren woman in one of the group discussions said:

"Unnh! It is this need to get children...I have been married for many years now without a child, may be God will bless me through my current ale." (32 year-old rural woman)

The Okun believe that a woman who has been married to a man for up to three years but fails to become pregnant does not have a compatible blood with her real husband. Consequently, she would be encouraged to look for another man (*ale*) within the family whose blood is compatible with hers. Some of the respondents said many women who were barren have begotten children for themselves, their husbands and their family through this practice. They concluded that children are conventionally considered the symbol of a successful practice of spouse sharing, thus, they see the need to beget children for oneself or for someone else, usually a relative, as the customary motive for starting *ale/alase* relationship. However, since men who biologically father these children cannot culturally claim them as their own, the children merely serve to remind them of the love they once knew with these women. Thus, men and women practicing spouse sharing strive to cement their relationship with the children.

In every case, women remain the victims of childlessness in a marriage relationship. For instance, the ability of a woman to become impregnated by a man other than her husband is an indication that the problem lies with her husband, but the women are made to bear the emotional trauma

and health risk that comes as a result of the problem.

Death of Spouse or Widowhood

Table 2 shows that 5% of respondents attributed their involvement in spouse sharing to the death of their spouse. There were no variations between the men and women. In the focus group discussion, respondents said if a spouse dies other family members rally round the surviving spouse to meet his or her daily needs. If she is a woman, the men would be expected to provide her regularly with foodstuffs to cushion the impact of her loss. If the woman has no standby *ale*, two of her husband's relatives may fill in the gap, thereby taking advantage of the death of her spouse to start *ale* and *alase* relationship. If, however, he is a man, wives of other members of the extended family make efforts to play the role of his deceased wife; they cook for him and take care of his children, and one or two may volunteer to further assist him on the farm. Respondents also said that some men and women could be so taken care of that they never consider remarrying after the loss of their spouse. They rely on *alase* to meet their sexual, emotional and psychological needs for the remaining part of their lives.

Decision on who should take over a surviving spouse among men and among the family wives is a question of who is more eligible or suitable. For men, consideration goes first to the bachelors and the widowers, then the hard working married men; and for women the widows, those separated, then those unhappily married. All these categories of relatives may start with a surviving spouse with intention of inheriting him or her, but they will eventually and informally step down for the person who is more eligible by family standards. For example, a woman with a more caring husband will step down for the one with a less caring husband if the family discovers they had interest in the same man. The more eligible person is usually known through gossips in the family and others will tactically withdraw for him or her. As pointed out elsewhere, involvement in spouse sharing arising from loss of spouse may have economic undertone for the women.

"After the death of my husband, I was left without a helper, my three children and I. You know it is not easy for a woman to take care of herself and her children

with the prevailing economic atmosphere in the country these days, I need support to feed, cloth and send my children to school, so I have ale who is currently assisting us." (Educated woman in urban area)

Separation and Divorce

In a similar manner, separation arising from incompatibility and quarrels that have economic implications for the woman encourages her to participate in spouse sharing. About 5% of those involved in spouse sharing attributed their involvement to the problem of separation, with women dominating.

"For many years now my husband has abandoned his responsibility of caring for me and my children. This prompted me to look for help elsewhere, my ale is the one giving us some materials and financial assistance now. That is why we are still surviving." (A rural woman)

Respondents said that within the society cases of quarrels and separation had always led to the initiation and sustenance of spouse sharing. Traditionally, when spouses separate in Okun community the woman does not go back to her paternal home, rather she goes to the house of the eldest member of her husband's family, or the father of her husband, who will be expected to call a meeting of elders in the family to intervene, with a view to resolving the problem and reuniting the erring partners. However, before the family's intervention the lady continues to stay with the eldest man in the family, and during the period of their separation the partners usually do not do things in common. The man on his part may approach any of the family wives that he considers suitable to take over the preparation of his meals while he provides the foodstuffs. If after intervention the two partners are proved to be incompatible, respondents said, the constant quarrels and separation usually predispose the woman to the attention of other younger men in the family, who would use the opportunity to establish *ale/alase* relationship with her.

Once married into the family, a woman who proves to be fecund, upon whom family resources have been expended, and who is generally acclaimed to be of good character by the elders would not under any circumstances be allowed to divorce. Respondents said in the past, if a quarrel

could not be immediately settled because the husband was adamant, elderly members of the family or clan would secretly encourage younger men to keep the wife of the adamant husband 'occupied' until the husband changed his mind. This they did believing that time heals the most painful wounds.

In order to provide more insight into gender and socio-economic differentials in the reasons for participating in spouse sharing among the Okun, we have in the remaining part of this article analysed reasons for participating in spouse sharing against selected background characteristics of the respondents with emphasis on gender differences.

Socio-Economic Conditions and Reasons for Participation in Spouse Sharing

Locality Status

Table 3 shows data on the reasons given by respondents for participating in spouse sharing by sex and locality. In the rural areas women are generally more likely to attribute their participation in spouse sharing to the need for economic support (49.4%) than their female counterparts in urban areas (30.5%) and less to sexual satisfaction (29.2%) than the men (37.8%). Rural women are more likely to mention the problem of separation and divorce (5.6%), in contrast to the men (2.4%). On the other hand, men in the rural areas (8.5%) are more likely than their female counterparts (7.8%) to attribute their involvement to the need for procreation and the problem of widowhood. The urban women (52.6%) are more likely than their men counterparts (44.3%) to consider their participation in spouse sharing as arising from the need for material and financial support. Also, urban women are more likely to consider their involvement in spouse sharing to be due largely to the need for procreation, the problem of widowhood, separation and divorce, unlike their men folks who would view it largely from the point of view of sexual satisfaction and increase in social status.

Childhood Residence

Table 4 shows that those who resided in urban areas before they were 12 years old tend to consider economic support as the most important reason for participating in spouse sharing than those who

lived in the rural areas. When broken down by sex, women who resided in the township (56.9%), compared with their male counterparts (42.6%), attributed their participation in spouse sharing more to the need for economic support. Similarly, urban women (6.1%) are more likely than the men (2.2%) to attribute their involvement in spouse sharing to the need for procreation, and to the problem of separation and divorce (3.1%) than their male counterparts (2.2%). However, reasons such as sexual satisfaction, increased social status and widowhood featured more among men who grew up in the urban areas, in contrast to their women counterparts.

A similar pattern was observed among those who grew up in the rural areas. The women (46.5%) are more likely to attribute their involvement in spouse sharing to the need for economic support, compared to the men (34.5%). These women are also more likely to attribute it to the need for procreation (6.9%), separation and divorce (6.9%), and to widowhood (3.9%) than to similar reasons (procreation 6.1%, separation and divorce 4.9% and widowhood 2.4%) among their male counterparts.

Age

The respondents were categorised into two broad age groups; namely, those aged less than 36 years and those who were 36 years and above. Table 5 shows that about equal proportion of respondents in the two age groups attributed their involvement in spouse sharing to economic considerations. For both male and female, this is generally in the range of 40% to 56% except for the male respondents who were aged 35 years and below (34.5%). However, the need for sexual satisfaction was largely recorded among the later category (53.5%) compared with less than 40% among the other categories. Between 5 and 7% of respondents in the two age groups attributed their participation in spouse sharing to what could be described as the need to increase social status. This reason is however stronger among males aged 36 years and above.

About 6% of those aged 36 years and above and 5% of those aged 35 years and below attributed their involvement in spouse sharing to the need for procreation. This pattern is the same for

both men and women except for women who were aged 36 years and above (9%). Similarly, about equal proportions of respondents in the two age groups attributed their involvement in spouse sharing to the problem of separation and divorce. Male respondents aged 36 years and above did not, however, consider the issue of separation and divorce as very important for participation in spouse sharing. Women aged 36 years and above are more likely to cite the issue of separation and divorce as an important consideration for participating in the practice than younger women.

The data shows that those aged 36 years and above were generally less likely to attribute their in-

volvement in spouse sharing to the problem of widowhood (1.2%), compared with 8% among those aged 35 years and below. This may be the problem of age difference between spouses. Younger women and women who lost their spouses early may be preoccupied with finding another love than the older ones whose preoccupation may be how to cater for the children left behind. For instance, none of the women aged 36 years and above attributed involvement in spouse sharing to the problem of loss of spouse. In fact the issue is more pronounced among women who were 35 years and below (9.1%) as well as men in similar age group (6.9%).

Table 3 Locality Status and Reasons for Participation in Spouse Sharing by Sex

Reasons	Male		Female		Total	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Economic support	50 (30.5)	78 (44.3)	88 (49.4)	81 (52.6)	138 (40.3)	159 (48.2)
Sexual satisfaction	62 (37.8)	82 (46.6)	52 (29.2)	41 (26.6)	114 (33.4)	123 (37.3)
Increase social status	18 (10.9)	8 (4.5)	16 (8.9)	0 (0)	34 (9.9)	8 (2.4)
Procreation	14 (8.5)	0 (0)	14 (7.8)	8 (5.1)	28 (8.1)	8 (2.4)
Widowhood	16 (9.7)	0 (0)	0 (0)	16 (10.3)	16 (4.7)	16 (4.8)
Separation/divorce	4 (2.4)	8 (4.5)	8 (5.6)	8 (5.1)	12 (3.5)	16 (4.8)
Total	164 (100)	176 (100)	178 (100)	154 (100)	342 (100)	330 (100)

Table 4 Childhood Residence and Reasons for Participation in Spouse Sharing by Sex among the Okun, 1999

Reasons	Male		Female		Total	
	Town	Village	Town	Village	Town	Village
Economic support	76 (42.6)	56 (34.5)	74 (56.9)	94 (46.5)	144 (46.7)	152 (41.7)
Sexual satisfaction	74 (41.5)	70 (43.2)	28 (21.5)	64 (31.6)	102 (33.1)	134 (36.8)
Increased social status	14 (7.8)	12 (7.4)	8 (6.1)	8 (3.9)	22 (7.1)	20 (5.4)
Procreation	4 (2.2)	10 (6.1)	8 (6.1)	14 (6.9)	12 (3.8)	24 (6.5)
Separation/divorce	4 (2.2)	8 (4.9)	4 (3.1)	14 (6.9)	8 (2.5)	22 (6.0)
Widowhood	12 (6.7)	4 (2.4)	8 (6.1)	8 (3.9)	20 (6.4)	12 (3.3)
Total	178 (100)	162 (100)	130 (100)	202 (100)	308 (100)	364 (100)

Table 5 Age Group and Reasons for Participation in Spouse Sharing by Sex, Okun 1999

Reasons	Male		Female		All	
	≤ 35 years	≥ 36 years	≥ 36 years	≥ 36 years	≥ 36 years	≥ 36 years
Economic support	70 (40.6)	58 (34.5)	80 (45.5)	88 (56.4)	150 (43.1)	146 (45.1)
Sexual satisfaction	54 (31.3)	90 (53.5)	60 (34.1)	32 (20.5)	114 (32.7)	122 (37.6)
Increased social status	16 (9.3)	10 (5.9)	8 (4.5)	8 (5.1)	24 (6.8)	18 (5.5)
Procreation	8 (4.6)	6 (3.5)	8 (4.5)	14 (8.9)	16 (4.5)	20 (6.1)
Separation/divorce	12 (6.9)	0 (0)	4 (2.2)	14 (8.9)	16 (4.5)	14 (4.3)
Widowhood	12 (6.9)	4 (2.3)	16 (9.1)	0 (0)	28 (8.0)	4 (1.2)
Total	172 (100)	168 (100)	176 (100)	156 (100)	348 (100)	324 (100)

Table 6 Reasons for Participation in Spouse Sharing by Education, 1999

Reasons	Male		Female		All	
	None	Some	None	Some	None	Some
Economic support	70 (46.1)	56 (29.7)	92 (52.9)	76 (44.7)	162 (51.5)	134 (43.1)
Sexual satisfaction	40 (26.3)	104 (55.3)	28 (16.4)	64 (37.6)	68 (21.6)	168 (32.7)
Increased social status	16 (10.5)	10 (5.3)	8 (4.7)	8 (4.7)	24 (7.6)	18 (6.8)
Procreation	4 (2.6)	10 (5.3)	14 (8.2)	8 (4.7)	18 (5.7)	18 (4.5)
Separation/divorce	12 (7.8)	0 (0)	4 (2.3)	14 (8.2)	16 (5.0)	14 (4.5)
Widowhood	10 (6.5)	6 (3.1)	16 (9.4)	0 (0)	26 (8.2)	6 (8.0)
Total	152 (100)	188 (100)	170 (100)	170 (100)	314 (100)	358 (100)

Educational Status

In terms of education, our respondents were categorised into two – those with some form of education and those without any. Table 6 reveals that those without formal education were more likely to attribute their participation in spouse sharing to the need for economic support than those with some formal schooling experience. This pattern is the same among both men and women. On the other hand, respondents with some formal education (32.7%) were more likely than those with no formal education (21.6%) to attribute their reasons for participation in spouse sharing to the need for sexual satisfaction. This pattern is consistent among male and female respondents and is indeed probably more pervasive among the educated male respondents (55.3%). About equal proportions of those with some form of schooling and those with

none cited the need for increased social status as important consideration for participation in spouse sharing. A closer look at Table 6 also reveals that about 5% of the women with or without schooling and men with some schooling considered this issue as a very important consideration in their decision to participate in spouse sharing. This is about double among men with no formal education (10.5%)

About 6% of respondents with no formal education and 5% of those with some formal education attributed their participation in spouse sharing to the need to have children. This reason is strongest among women with no formal education (8.2%). This is closely followed by men with some form of schooling and probably least among male respondents with no formal schooling.

About 5% of respondents with or without formal schooling mentioned separation and divorce as

responsible factors for participating in spouse sharing. To male respondents who were educated it is probably not an issue, as none of them indicated it in their response to this question. To the educated women it is probably a strong consideration, as about 8.2%, the highest in this category, considered it very important in their decision to participate in spouse sharing. The issue of widowhood featured equally among reasons for participating in spouse sharing among educated and non-educated respondents. When viewed in terms of sex, women who were not educated (9.4%) were more likely to attribute their participation in spouse sharing to widowhood than others, as well as their male counterparts (6.5%).

Media Exposure

In view of the wide coverage of radio broadcasting, and the fact that more people reported using it than any other media in this study, it is treated as a surrogate measure of the media exposure of respondents. Table 7 shows the radio listening habits of respondents in relation to their reasons for participating in spouse sharing. There is a sharp contrast between those who listened to the radio and those who did not among those who gave economic consideration as their reason for participating in spouse sharing. A larger proportion of those who listened to the radio (47%) attributed their involvement to the need for economic support (2%), compared with 27.7% among those not exposed to the radio. When viewed in terms of sex, the pattern remained basically the same; those who lis-

tened to the radio considered involvement to have been because of economic reasons irrespective of whether they were males or females.

Respondents who were exposed to the radio were more likely (39.0%) than those who were not (14.8%) to attribute their involvement in spouse sharing to the need for sexual satisfaction. The same pattern was observed among male and female respondents. About 6% of those who listened to the radio and 7% of those who did not reported that they were involved in spouse sharing to boost their social ego. None of the women who were not exposed to the radio gave this reason, while the highest proportion of those who gave the reason was recorded among men who did not listen to the radio. About 17% of respondents not exposed to the radio attributed their involvement in spouse sharing to the need for children, compared with 3.1% of those who were exposed to the radio. This pattern was the same among male and female respondents. It was probably more pronounced among female respondents who were not exposed to the radio (24.1%).

Those who were not exposed to the radio were more likely to attribute the reason for participation in spouse sharing to separation or divorce than those who were exposed. The pattern is the same for both men and women. A significant proportion of those who were not exposed to the radio (25.9%) attributed their reason for participation in spouse sharing to the problem of widowhood, again with more women (27.0%) than men (24.0%) among those who did not listen to the radio.

Table 7 Exposure to the Radio by Sex and Reasons for the Practice of Spouse Sharing among the Okun, 1999

Reasons	Male		Female		All	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Economic support	116 (40)	12 (24.0)	150 (54.7)	18 (31)	266 (47.2)	30 (27.7)
Sexual satisfaction	134 (46.2)	10 (20.0)	86 (31.4)	6 (10.3)	220 (39.0)	16 (14.8)
Increased social status	18 (6.2)	8 (16.0)	16 (5.8)	0 (0)	34 (6.0)	8 (7.4)
Procreation	10 (3.4)	4 (8.0)	8 (2.9)	14 (24.1)	18 (3.1)	18 (16.6)
Separation/divorce	8 (2.7)	4 (8.0)	14 (5.1)	4 (6.8)	22 (3.9)	8 (7.4)
Widowhood	4 (1.3)	12 (24.0)	0 (0)	16 (27)	4 (0.7)	28 (25.9)
Total	290 (100)	50 (100)	274 (100)	58 (100)	564 (100)	108 (100)

Table 8 Employment Status and Reasons for Participation in Spouse Sharing among the Okun, 1999

Reasons	Male			Female			All		
	Paid	Self	None	Paid	Self	None	Paid	Self	None
Economic support	10 (14.7)	98 (44.1)	20 (40.0)	16 (21.6)	116 (57.4)	36 (64.2)	26 (18.3)	214 (50.4)	56 (52.8)
Sexual satisfaction	40 (58.8)	84 (37.8)	20 (40.0)	54 (72.9)	38 (18.8)	0 (0)	94 (66.2)	122 (28.7)	20 (18.8)
Increased social status	10 (14.7)	16 (7.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0)	10 (4.9)	6 (10.7)	10 (7.0)	26 (6.1)	6 (5.6)
Procreation	0 (0)	10 (4.5)	4 (8.0)	0 (0)	14 (6.9)	8 (14.3)	0 (0)	24 (5.6)	12 (11.3)
Separation/divorce	8 (11.7)	4 (1.8)	0 (0.0)	4 (5.4)	14 (6.9)	0 (0)	12 (8.4)	18 (4.2)	0 (0)
Widowhood	0 (0)	10 (4.5)	6 (12.0)	0 (0)	10 (4.9)	6 (10.7)	0 (0)	20 (4.7)	12 (11.3)
Total	68 (100)	222 (100)	50 (100)	74 (100)	202 (100)	56 (100)	142 (100)	424 (100)	106 (100)

Employment Status

Respondents were categorised into three: those in paid employment, self-employment and the unemployed. From Table 8, those who were not employed (52.8%) were more likely to attribute their reason for participation in spouse sharing to the need for economic support than those in self employment (50.4%) and those in paid employment (18.3%). As pointed out elsewhere, paid employment probably brings in higher and more steady income than other forms of employment and those who were engaged in it were at higher economic advantage than others. This pattern is the same for the female respondents. It is different among male respondents, as those in self-employment were more likely than those who were not employed to mention economic support for the decision to participate in spouse sharing.

The need for sexual satisfaction was the most important reason given for participating in spouse sharing among those in paid employment (66.2%). This reason featured less among those in self-employment (28.7%) and those who were unemployed (18.8%). The pattern was the same between men and women. Increased social status was equally considered by the three groups in deciding whether to participate in spouse sharing. When broken down by sex, the issue did not feature among women in paid employment as well as

among men who were not employed. The data further revealed that those who were in paid employment did not participate in spouse sharing for the purpose of having children, unlike those in self-employment (5.6%) and the unemployed (11.3%). Similarly, the issue of procreation did not feature among men and women in paid employment, rather it was an important consideration for women who were not employed (14.3%) and those in self-employment (5.6%). It was similarly important to men not employed (8.0%) and those in self-employment (4.5%).

Separation and divorce were not considered to be important by any unemployed respondent, whereas it was an important consideration in the decision to participate in spouse sharing by those in paid employment (8.4%) and self-employment (4.2%). Men in paid employment as well as women in paid and self-employment were probably more affected by this issue than others. Paid employment sometimes involved a change of residence and separation from spouse and family members, thereby creating the need for another sex partner. Among this group, those who participated in spouse sharing because of the problem of widowhood were larger than those who were unemployed (11.3%) and those in self-employment (4.7%). This pattern was the same for women and men.

Income

Table 9 shows that a slightly higher percentage of those in low income group (45.2%) participated in spouse sharing for economic reasons than those in the high income group (38.5%). When viewed in terms of sex, the pattern was the same for the women. For the low income men, however, other social considerations probably competed with their low income status in their perception of the reason for participation in spouse sharing.

Among the high income group, sexual satisfaction was probably the most important reason for participation in spouse sharing. This was true for the women and slightly different for the men. Increased social status, procreation and widowhood, which represent some of the traditional motives for participation in spouse sharing, was not an important consideration for those categorised as high income earners, whereas they were important considerations among the low income group, and

these reasons featured in varying degrees in their decision to participate in spouse sharing.

Religious Background

Table 10 shows that those who were Christians were more likely than those who were not to give economic support as reason for involvement in spouse sharing. There were no differences between the Christian men and women in this respect. In contrast, the need for sexual satisfaction featured prominently among respondents of other religions and the pattern remained the same in terms of sex. Other reasons for participation in spouse sharing, according to Table 10, did not follow any particular pattern among the two groups and between the men and women. Reasons for participation among Christians was probably more varied than for other religions.

Table 9 **Income Group and Reasons for Participation in Spouse Sharing by Sex among the Okun, 1999**

Reasons	Male		Female		All	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Economic support	102 (34.4)	26 (59.1)	150 (57.3)	18 (25.7)	252 (45.2)	44 (38.5)
Sexual satisfaction	126 (42.5)	18 (40.9)	50 (19.1)	42 (60.0)	176 (31.5)	60 (52.6)
Increased social status	26 (8.7)	0 (0)	16 (6.1)	0 (0)	42 (7.5)	0 (0)
Procreation	14 (4.7)	0 (0)	22 (8.4)	0 (0)	36 (6.4)	0 (0)
Separation/divorce	12 (4.1)	0 (0)	8 (3.0)	10 (14.3)	20 (3.5)	10 (8.7)
Widowhood	16 (5.4)	0 (0)	16 (6.1)	0 (0)	32 (5.7)	0 (0)
Total	296 (100)	44 (100)	262 (100)	70 (100)	558 (100)	114 (100)

Table 10 **Religious Background, Sex and Reasons for Participation in Spouse Sharing among the Okun, 1999**

Reasons	Male		Female		All	
	Christian	Others	Christian	Others	Christian	Others
Economic support	92 (42.5)	36 (6.4)	122 (58.1)	46 (37.7)	214 (50.2)	82 (33.4)
Sexual satisfaction	70 (32.4)	74 (59.6)	48 (22.8)	44 (36.1)	118 (27.6)	118 (47.9)
Increased social status	18 (8.4)	8 (6.4)	16 (7.6)	0 (0)	34 (7.9)	8 (3.2)
Procreation	14 (6.4)	0 (0)	16 (7.6)	6 (4.9)	30 (7.0)	6 (2.4)
Separation/divorce	12 (5.6)	0 (0)	8 (3.8)	10 (8.1)	20 (4.6)	10 (4.1)
Widowhood	10 (4.6)	6 (4.8)	0 (0)	16 (13.1)	10 (2.3)	22 (8.9)
Total	216 (100)	124 (100)	210 (100)	122 (100)	426 (100)	246 (100)

Table 11 Marital Status, Sex and Reasons for Participating in Spouse Sharing among the Okun, 1999

Reasons	Male		Female		All	
	Married	Others	Married	Others	Married	Others
Economic support	100 (42.3)	28 (26.9)	106 (52.4)	62 (47.6)	206 (47.0)	90 (38.4)
Sexual satisfaction	68 (28.8)	76 (73.1)	62 (30.6)	30 (23.1)	130 (29.6)	106 (45.3)
Increase social status	26 (11.0)	0 (0)	16 (7.9)	0 (0)	42 (9.5)	0 (0)
Procreation	14 (5.9)	0 (0)	8 (3.9)	14 (10.7)	22 (5.0)	14 (5.9)
Separation/divorce	12 (5.1)	0 (0)	10 (4.9)	8 (6.1)	22 (5.0)	8 (3.4)
Widowhood	16 (6.7)	0 (0)	0 (0)	16 (12.3)	16 (3.6)	16 (6.8)
Total	236 (100)	104 (100)	202 (100)	130 (100)	438 (100)	234 (100)

Marital Status

Table 11 shows that respondents in marital union (47.0%) are more likely than those who are not (38.4%) to attribute their reason for participation in spouse sharing to the need for economic support. This pattern is the same and indeed more so for the women than men. Those who are not in union (i.e., single, separated, divorced or widowed) are more likely to give the need for sexual satisfaction (45.3%) as reason for participation in spouse sharing than the married (29.6%). Interestingly, however, married women currently participating in spouse sharing are more likely (30.6%) than those who are not (23.1%) to attribute their participation in spouse sharing to the need for sexual satisfaction. This could mean that most of these women are in unsatisfactory marriage relationships, indicating that there are other more basic marital problems existing in the society.

Our data revealed that apart from increased social status, which did not come up as an important consideration for participation in spouse sharing among those categorised as not married, other reasons (procreation, problem of separation and divorce, and widowhood) did not vary considerably by marital status. However, when viewed in terms of sex, male respondents who were not married did not attribute their participation in spouse sharing to the need for procreation, problem of separation and divorce, or widowhood, unlike their married counterparts. The picture is however different among the married women; the problem is probably that of increased social status (7.5%). For the unmarried (i.e., separated, divorced or wid-

owed) reasons given for participation included the need for procreation (10.7%), separation/divorce (6.1%) or widowhood (12.3%).

Conclusion

The need for material and financial support was the most important reason the Okun gave for participating in spouse sharing. This reason was more pervasive among the women than men irrespective of their socio-economic background characteristics; this is probably a reflection of deeper gender-based differences in access to resources among the Okun. Okun women are not great traders like their counterparts in the south western part of the country³ largely because they are not located in a big centre of commerce as it is obtained in the south west. Okun women, like other women in Nigeria, also do not own lands, yet their major occupation is farming; consequently, women labour is still seen as mere help, to complement that of their husbands. This development has probably left Okun women poorer than their male counterparts and has also left them dependent and tied to the economic fortune of their husbands. In a situation where the husband becomes incapacitated, dead, or deliberately decides to withdraw his support, the women become prone to the practice of spouse sharing with all its associated risks.¹⁹

Our analysis showed that the need for economic support is very important in the decision to participate in spouse sharing among all groups of women except those in the high income. It is possible that men exploit the economic weakness of women to perpetrate and sustain the practice of

spouse sharing. This finding is a clear indication of the need for economic emancipation of Okun women as a way of promoting sexual and reproductive health in the Okun society.

Although the need for children, the problem of widowhood, separation and divorce were reasons given by both men and women for participation in spouse sharing, women gave these reasons in relation to issues of economic support that are provided by the men. This indicates that gender-based social and economic problems are present in the society.

Our data also shows that men gave the need for sexual satisfaction and increased social status as major reasons for participating in spouse sharing. This finding suggests a need for educating Okun men on the need for keeping to one sex partner if the success through economic emancipation to reduce vulnerability to the practice of spouse sharing must be realised.

Recommendations

In view of the study findings the following recommendations are made:

1. The underlying reasons for participation in spouse sharing is probably economic and partly social. Programs that will tackle this problem must focus on how to improve the economic base of the people particularly women. Thus, as a means of promoting the practice of having one sex partner among the Okun thereby reducing women's vulnerability to participation in spouse sharing as a result of economic reasons, the women should be encouraged and assisted to participate in poverty alleviation programs in their locality.
2. The finding that the Okun practice spouse sharing to satisfy their sexual needs underscores the need for marriage counselling among them to improve conjugal relationships. This will probably reduce retaliatory involvement in spouse sharing. The reason also suggests a need for educating the people on the importance of sex with emphasis on reproduction, safe sex and reproductive health as against the prevailing perception of enjoyment, satisfaction and pleasure.
3. The Okun should be encouraged and assisted to form reproductive health clubs where they

can discuss the interplay between their economic and health problems. The activities of such clubs may be coordinated by a non-governmental organisation with focus on reproductive health within the area.

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