



## Marriage Systems and the Roles of Women in Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria

J. O. Okunlola<sup>1</sup>, O. B. Bello<sup>1</sup> and K. E. Owolabi<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Agricultural Extension and Communication Technology, The Federal University of Technology, Akure, ondo State, Nigeria.

### Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author JOO and OBB designed the study, wrote the protocol and performed the statistical analysis. Author KEO managed the analyses of the study while author OBB wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors JOO and KEO managed the literature searches and edited the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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### ABSTRACT

Marriage contract is a social institution that is of great importance among people all over the world. Yoruba traditional marriage system is in a state of continuous change due to influence of foreign ideas on the peoples culture and tradition with improvement in the quality of life of the people. Nevertheless, the responsibilities of women in the community towards social, economic and political development are the same regardless of their religion and form of marriage. It is in view of the foregoing that the study examined the marriage systems and the roles of women in Offa, Kwara State within the frame work of development efforts. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 100 married women in the study area. Data was collected using a validated and pretested interview schedule and data collected was analysed using means, frequencies, percentages and chi- square. Findings from the study showed that 28 percent of the respondents were above 45 years of age with a mean age of 48 years. The study showed that the husbands of 20 percent of them made farming decisions for them while 18 percent of them made farming decisions on their

\*Corresponding author: E-mail: [kennyoblow@yahoo.com](mailto:kennyoblow@yahoo.com);

own. The roles of the women included children training/development, house cleaning, washing, cooking, fetching water, collection of firewood for the family and family decision making. About 76 percent of them were involved in community development project activities. The result from the study revealed that there was no significant relationship between cooking ( $X^2=0.758$ ,  $P\leq 0.05$ ), decision making ( $X^2=0.284$ ,  $P\leq 0.05$ ) and level of education of the women. It is therefore recommended in view of the contributions made by women towards the nation's political, social, economic and cultural development that special women's developmental programmes should be set up in the country and traditional institutions should be modernized while new institutions should be traditionalized in order to bring the desired change into reality.

*Keywords: Marriage; women and roles.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage institutions are organized and established systems of authority and other phenomena and principles derived from socio-cultural and historical processes with deep origin from the culture of the people. Such indigenous institutions depict the knowledge, experiences, trials and level of development of the local people [1]. Modern marriage institutions and systems are time-bound on policies that are increasingly adapting to western systems and principles where indigenous practices are often neglected. Such marriage institutions are created and organized by forces that are outside the community and are characterized by both functional and structural arrangements that are fairly standard and reflect specific image of western development [1]. Marriage is held with a very high esteem and has a great social and moral importance among the Yorubas [2]. Here, the marriage is usually between both the wife and husband families and not just the man and woman who met somehow somewhere and think that they can live the rest of their lives as husband and wife. In most occasions it is the intending couples' parents who do the courtship on behalf of their son and daughter. It was even a forbidden act for the husband and wife to be, to meet even on the street before the marriage night after which the traditional marriage rights would have been carried out. This is because it is regarded as social and family dishonor and disgrace for a bride not to be found as a virgin on the night of the wedding [2]. As the marriage system continues to change women begin to see the need for them to earn equal recognition as their male counterparts. The roles of women in community development are now numerous and cannot be underestimated as they contribute immensely to national monetary economy (subsistence, agriculture, bearing children, domestic labour etc.) and play a significant role in the national monetary economy (trading, wage

labour, employment, etc [3]. Everywhere in the world, women are involved in both around the home and outside the home activities but [4], asserted that due to child-bearing, women mobility is low and therefore engage in activities that they can perform closer to their homes such as housekeeping, weaving, and midwifery and processing of food. In Nigeria today, especially in the Southern states more and more women are either engaged in private businesses as petty traders, or are in the paid employment with the result that they have less time to allocate to household activities. They all have the responsibility of managing a home, no matter their place of work. Therefore, for a woman to assume the mantle of leadership, the head of that house hold must be irresponsible, 'unavailable, lazy, or dead. When this is not the case, women are taken to be substitutes [5]. Men show dominancy over their women counterparts, thus socially, politically, economically and religiously women are to a very large extent, disadvantaged because the decision power mostly are vested on the men and most decisions were taken mostly by their male counterparts.

### 1.1 Statement of Problem

The numerous cultural and gender problems which Yoruba women have been facing can be traced back to their birth this is because in many homes, the birth of a baby girl does not receive the kind of warm reception that usually accompany that of a baby boy in any family [6]. [7], emphasized the importance and relevance of women in the society and asserted that "we cannot achieve anything without Women, therefore women must be given preference in developmental issues and decision making processes", in spite of the efforts of women to strive to the higher place of honour and recognition in the society, they are still at great disadvantage and seen as less important and

significant by their male counter parts. The Nigeria marriage before the advent of missionaries was majorly polygamy were women were regarded as machinery used for economic and social development of men but due to the influence of foreign ideas and forces on the peoples' culture with improvement in the quality of life, women have begun to see themselves as equal to men and want to be recognized and respected and given equal space in national issues. More women now identify themselves with the societal affairs; they form community associations which help pursue their common interest and goals and they have also stood up to take important roles in the socio economic development of their societies. The marriage system in Nigeria is tending towards the nuclear type rather than early practice of polygamy this is could be because the household is in a dynamic state as it continues to adapt to forces that are around or external to it. In a highly income centered society, the production of goods and services for household consumption, is a key household economic activity that involves the participation of household members in the labour force. In the past, the husband was usually the sole provider of the family income and the wife's contribution to family economic well-being was most of the monetary income from her household income generating activities [8]. But in recent times, there has been a positive change in the attitude of women and a recorded increase in the number of women joining the work force in one capacity or the order engaging in different kinds of income generating activities. It is in view of these changes in the society that the study attempted to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the existing marriage system in the study area?
2. What are the farming activities in which married women participate?
3. What are the household tasks carried out by the respondents?
4. Do married women participate in community development projects?

### 1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to assess marriage system and the roles of women in Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study was designed to:

1. Ascertain the existing marriage system in the study area.
2. Identify the farming activities in which married women participate.
3. Determine the household tasks carried out by the respondents.
4. Examine women participation in community development projects.

### 1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between level of education and women's household tasks

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between level of education and involvement in decision making.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out Offa town, Kwara State, Nigeria. The state is located in South Western Nigeria with forest vegetation. The people are mostly farmers cultivating food crops like cassava, yam, maize and tree crops like cocoa and kolanut among others. Offa town is located on coordinates: 8°9'N 4°43' E. A simple random sampling of 25 women was made from each of the four wards in the town namely: Balogun, Esa, Ojomu and Shawo making a total of 100 women that was used for the study. A Well structured, validated, pre-tested and well structured interview schedule containing both open-ended and closed-ended questions and interview schedule were used to collect primary data from the respondents with the help of trained enumerators. The secondary data was obtained from previous publications such as journals, conference proceedings, annual reports, etc. The instrument of data was reviewed by experts in the field of agricultural extension to ascertain the validity. Reliability test was also carried out with forty (40) respondents in a nearby community by administering the instrument at two different times to the same group of respondents. Consequently, analysis of internal consistency was carried out using split-half method and a reliability coefficient of 0.867 was obtained. Data collected from the study was subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics used include Frequency Count, Percentages and Means while the inferential statistic used was chi-square.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Socio-economic Characteristics of the Respondents

Fig. 1 below indicated that all (100 percent) of the respondents were females this was because the study was focused on the female gender. About 66 percent of them were Muslims while 30 percent belong to the Christian faith. This shows we have more Muslims as compared to the Christians in the study area. The results from the study revealed that the mean age of the respondents was 45 years with majority of them falling into the age brackets of between 41-50 years. Furthermore, 86 percent of the women were still living with their husbands while 14 percent of them were living outside their matrimonial homes the low rate of divorce is due to value placed on marital status in the study area. The study showed that 80 percent of the women have being married for more than 20 years. This shows that the women have lived longer in maintaining their homes and therefore have gained experiences overtime in the marriage institution. The study also showed that 58 percent of the respondents were literate having one form of formal education or the other. The literacy level may be found to affect the attitudes and responsibilities of the women in their matrimonial homes. This result agrees with the assertion that Nigerian women's access to formal education is still being constrained due to their unfair workload within the household division of labour [9]. [10] is also of the view that the lack of education and training has been identified as a key barrier to women's advancement in the society. She argues that in Africa, female illiteracy rates were over 60 percent in 1996 compared to 41 percent of men. Findings from the study revealed that majority (38 percent) were farmers while 34 percent engaged in trading as their primary occupation. This supports assertion that farming is the major livelihood strategy by most rural dwellers in Nigeria. Various studies [11,12,13,14] have shown that women have historically used agriculture as one of the strategies to address poverty and improve livelihoods, and also to maintain the stability and sustainability of their families.

#### 3.2 Farm Size and Annual Income

The mean farm size was 1.3 Hectares Fig. 2 revealed that. About 96 percent of the respondents cultivated between 0.1-2.5 Hectares of land while only 4 percent cultivated between

2.6 -5.0 Hectares of land. This shows that the respondents were small scale farmers this is attributable to lack of access to land for farming in the study area. The finding corroborates with the assertion that in Africa, customarily and/or traditionally men manage land. Women only come to fore in exceptional cases, depending not on custom and/or tradition, but on individual families who try to be reasonable in granting positions to their sisters or mothers. Women are disqualified from the management of land because of the gender based division of labor that exists in customary and/or traditional communities [15]. The mean annual income of the women based on the results from the study was ₦125,000.00 with 94 percent of them having an annual income of more than ₦50, 000.00. This implies that the income of the women was relatively low, this is due to the fact that farming was the major means of livelihood among the respondents.

#### 3.3 Respondents Farming Activities

Fig. 3 indicated that 57 percent of the respondents were involved in planting of grains, 33 percent planted tubers while only 10 percent were planting vegetables. The study showed that the husbands of 20 percent of the women made farming decisions for them while 18 percent attested that they made farming decisions on their own but majority (60 percent) of them attested that decision about farming activities were made unanimously with their husbands. Farming decision includes the type of crops to plant, time of planting and harvesting. This trend indicates that the women had a say when it comes to decision making in their various homes. Furthermore, findings showed that 64 percent of the respondents were involved in marketing of farm products and 46 percent of them were involved in processing farm products. This trend agrees with the assertion that women contribution to the economic well-being of Nigeria is enormous and much greater than they are acknowledge for this is because women are majorly responsible for marketing of farm products and produces [16]. [16], also pointed out that some women help their spouses on the farm to cultivate cassava, while their husband are concerned with yam production. Also, the result from the study showed that 44 percent of the women were involved in processing of cassava into garri, fufu and cassava flour while 36 percent of them were involved processing of maize into pap and pulp corn. 92 percent of them attested that processing of farm products took them about 1-5 days.

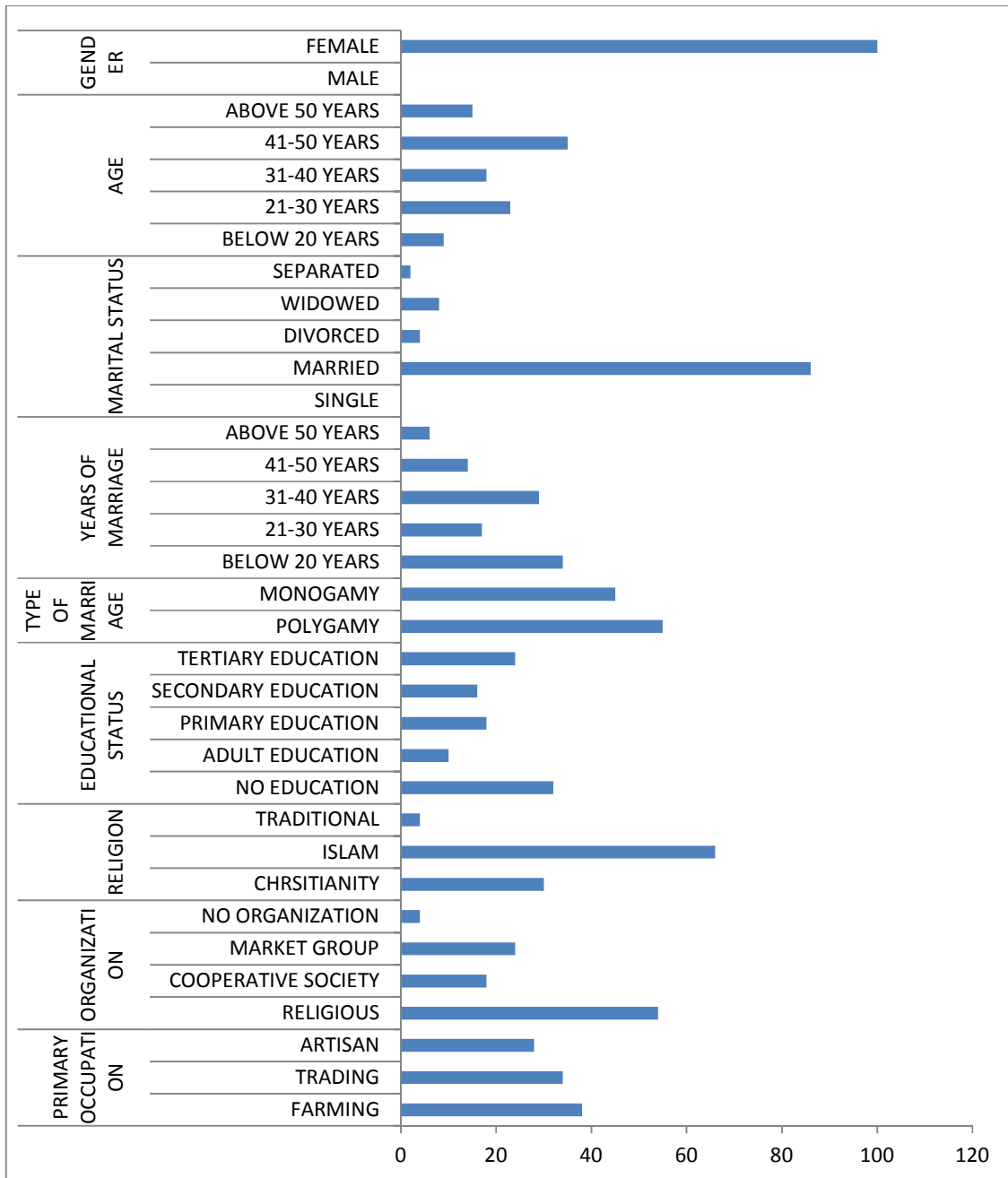


Fig. 1. Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

**3.4 Decision on Number of Children**

The result in Fig. 4 reveals that about 54 percent of the respondents attested that their husbands made decision about the number children they gave birth to while 42 percent indicated that the decision on number of children they gave birth to was based on agreement between them and their husbands. This shows that the women have

a say in any action that was taken in their respective homes.

**3.5 Domestic Activities Performed by the Respondents**

100 percent of the women interviewed revealed that they were involved in their children training

and development. Other domestic activities carried by the respondents range from cooking (95 percent, house cleaning (85 percent), washing of plates and cloths (78 percent), collection of fire wood (55 percent) and fetching of water (40 percent) as presented in Fig. 5. This finding corroborates with the assertion that women household responsibilities and activities are not limited and has no distinct starting and end points, with no assured space or time for relaxation Richardson and Robinson (1993). This shows that despite women are responsible for most domestic activities there are also involved in petty trades and paid employment.

### 3.6 Income Generating Activities

The study showed that the income generating activities of the women include trading (83%), farming (76%), weaving (24%) and dyeing (14%) as presented in Fig. 6. This shows that trading was the most common source of livelihood among the women. They were involved in small scale trade of their farm products such as sweet potatoes, yam, cassava and maize. Some of the women also had shops where they sell provisions, food stuffs, clothing materials e.t.c. Dyeing is done using vegetable dyes made from locally grown indigo and other plants.

### 3.7 Participation in Community Development Projects

The study showed that 76 percent of the respondents participated in various community development projects carried out in their community while only 24 percent of them did not participate in community development projects as shown in Fig. 7. This level of participation shows that the women in the community were aware of community development project carried out in their community.

### 3.8 Contribution of Respondents to Community Development Projects

Findings in Fig. 8 showed that 78 percent of the women who participated in community development projects contributed through labour including fetching of water, carrying of sand, carrying of cement and carrying of iron sheets. Also, 12 percent of them contributed by donating certain amount of money and 10 percent contributed by being involved in supervision and monitoring of the projects. This shows that the respondents were carried along and were fully involved at all stages of developmental projects carried out in their community. The results from the study agree with the assertion that rural women contribute immensely to the national growth, wellbeing and economy of developing countries [17,18].

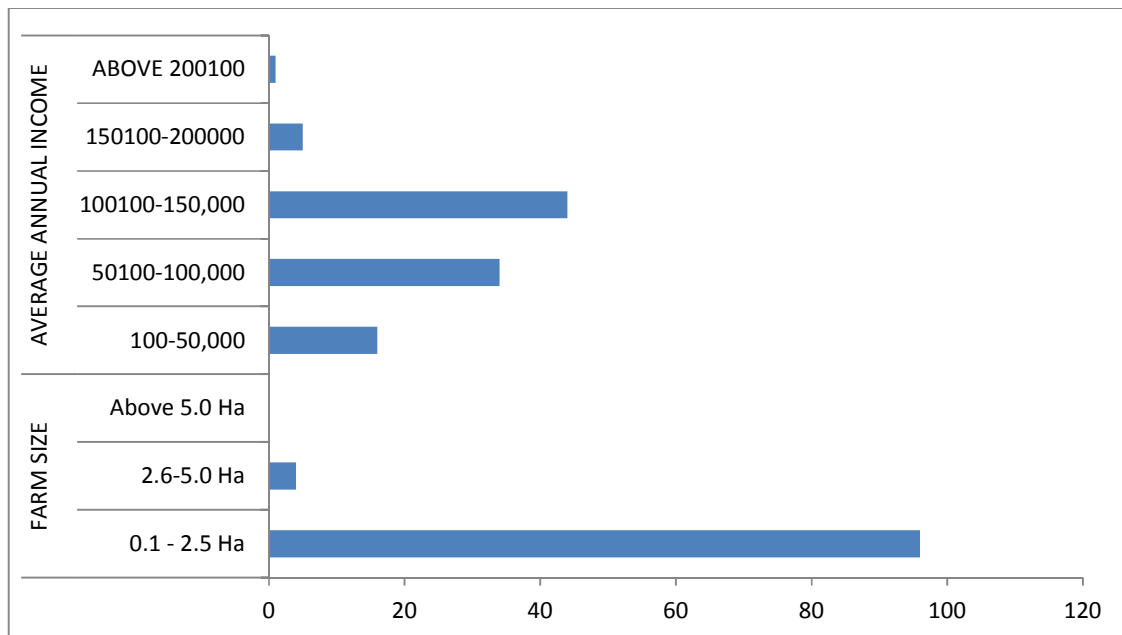


Fig. 2. Farm size and annual income (Naira)

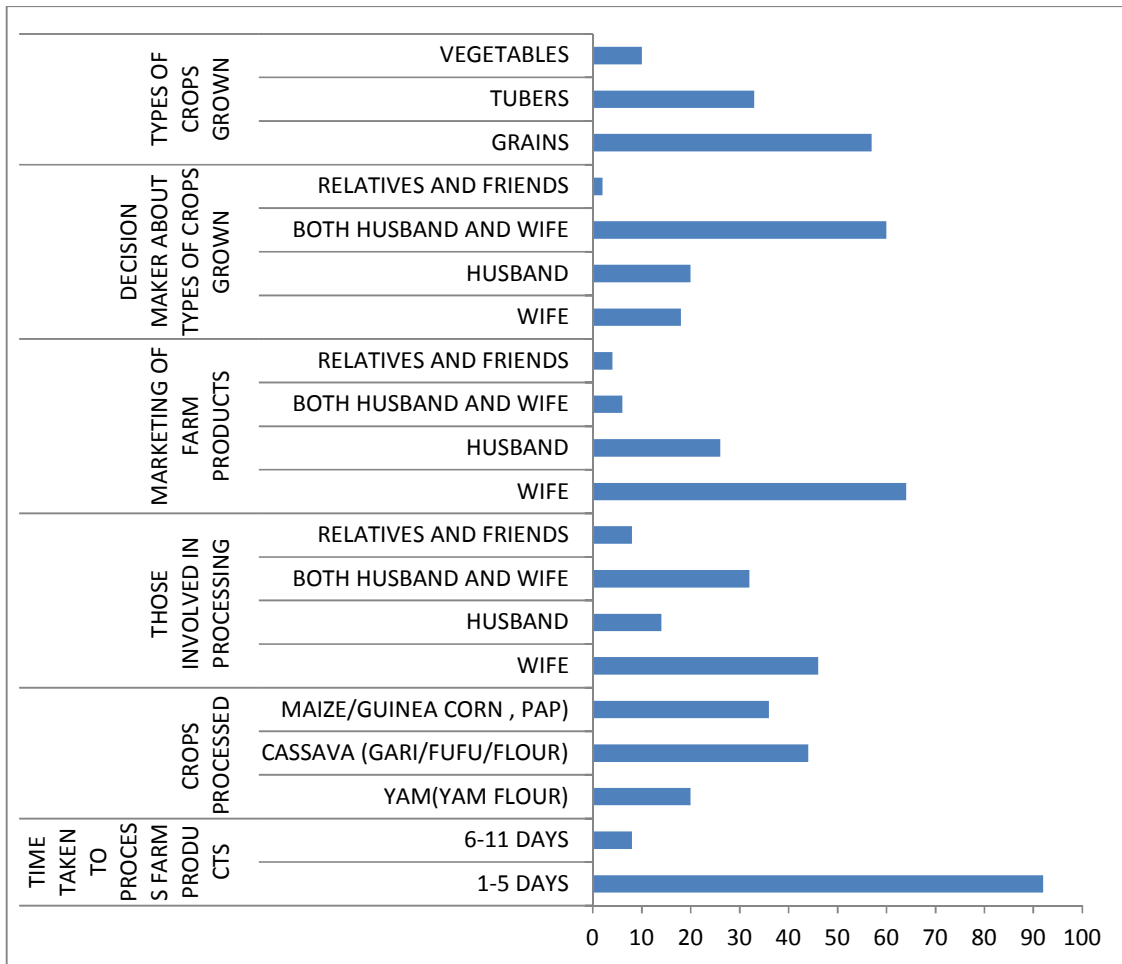


Fig. 3. Respondents farming activities

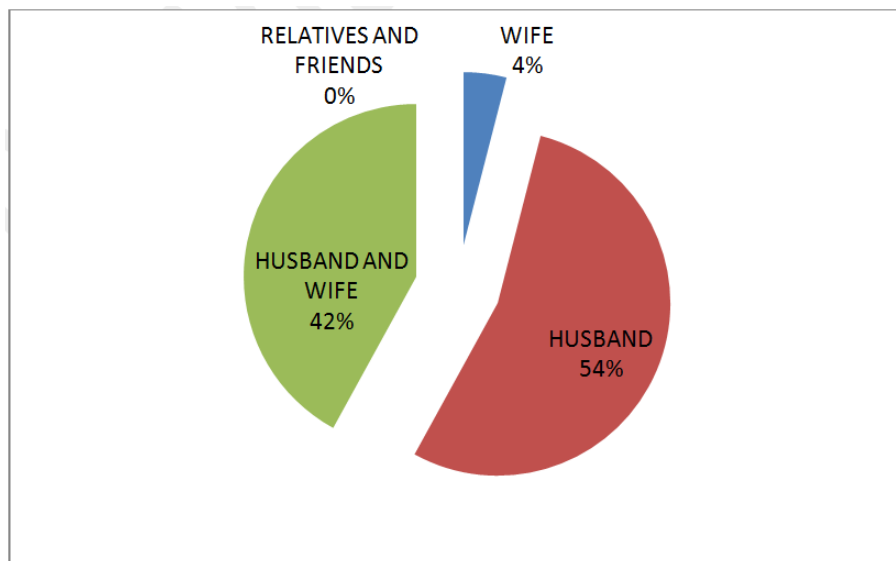
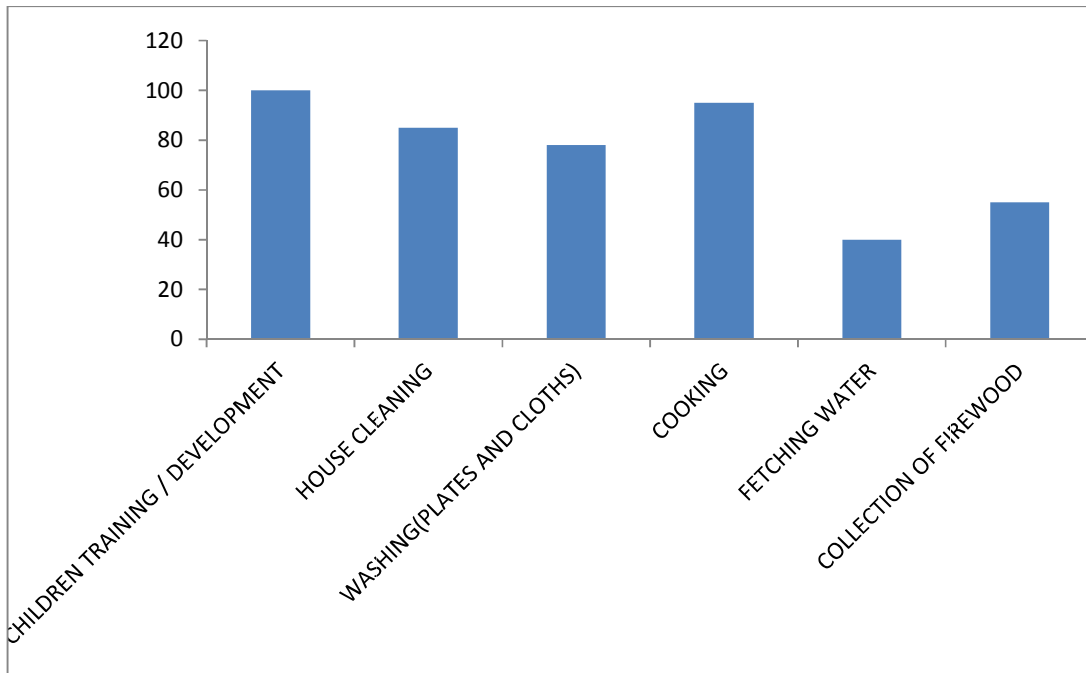
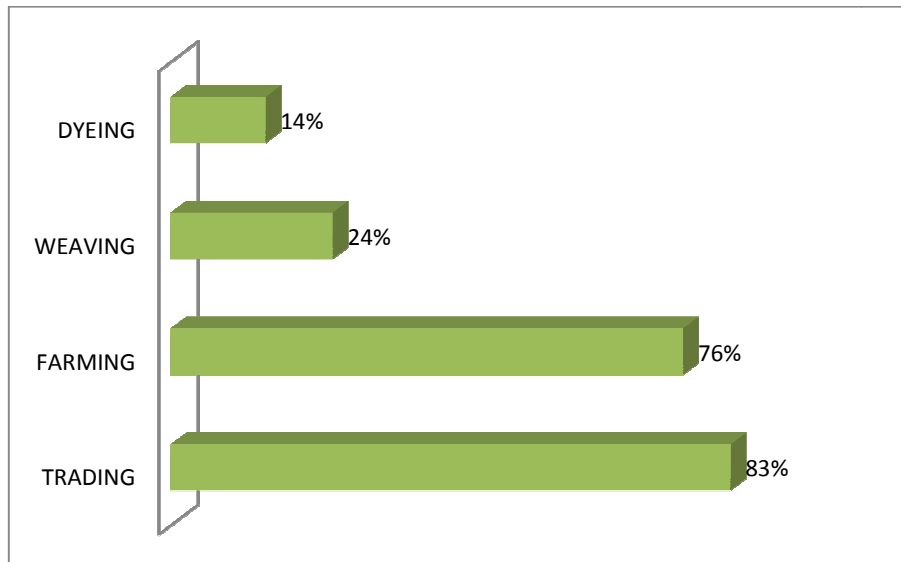


Fig. 4. Decision on number of children



**Fig. 5. Domestic activities performed by the respondents**



**Fig. 6. Income generating activities of the respondents**

**3.9 Chi Square Showing the Relationship between the Level of Education and Participation of Women in Household Tasks**

The study established as shown in Table 1 that there existed no significant relationship between the educational status of the respondents and their participation in household tasks. There was

also no significant relationship between the respondents' educational status and their involvement in decision making. This implies that whether a woman is educated or not she performed household tasks which include cooking, house cleaning, washing of plates and cloths, collection of fire wood and fetching of water. The women were also involved in decision making regardless of their educational



attainment. The decision making include decision on number of children, types of crops to plant and other family related matters. The results contradict the findings of [19], that showed that a significant difference exists between the educational status of women who are civil servants and the type of household

responsibilities they are involved. This implies that the economic activities and income of women do not deter them from contributing their own quota to household labour in societies where marital power, financial and other resources remain under the control of their male counterpart.

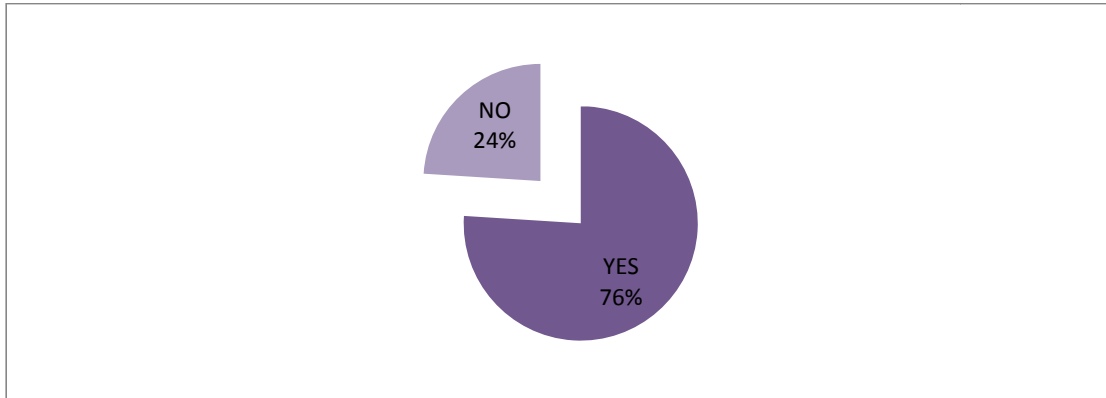


Fig. 7. Participation in community development projects

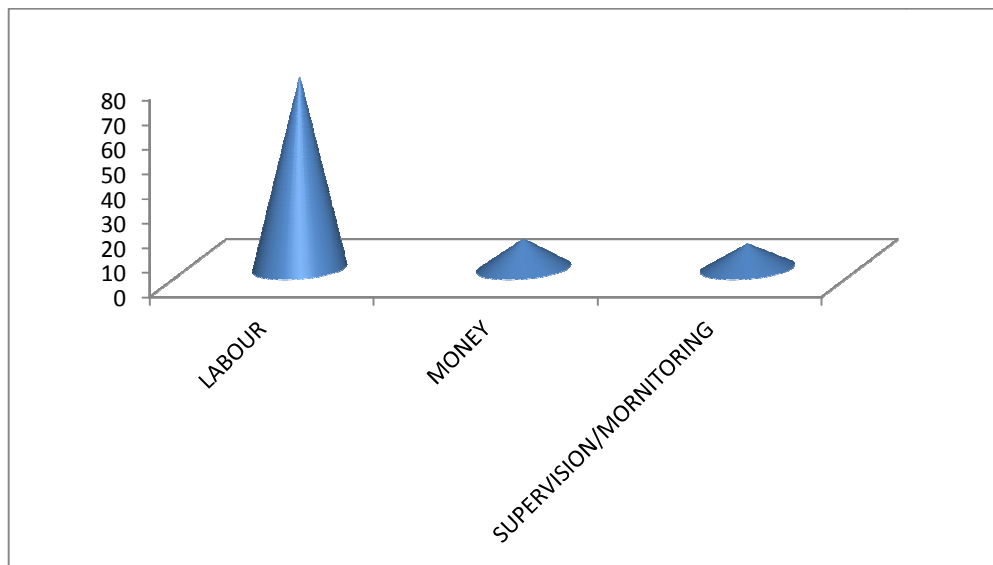


Fig. 8. Contribution of respondents to community development projects

Table 1. Chi square showing the relationship between the level of education and participation of women in household tasks

Variables	Chi-square calculated value ( $X^2$ )	P-value	Decision
Educational status versus involvement in household tasks	0.095	0.758	Non significant
Educational status versus involvement in decision making	5.03	0.284	Non significant

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The study has established that the women in the study area were engaged in both polygamy and monogamy. The study has shown that although all the respondents were married but some of the women were no longer living with their husbands while some of them were polygamists. The study also showed that the husbands of some of the women made farming decisions but many of them made farming decisions on their own. The roles of the women included children training/development, house cleaning, washing, cooking, fetching water, collection of firewood for the family and family decision making. They were also actively involved in community development project activities.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from this study it is recommended that:

1. In view of the contributions made by women towards the nation's political, social, economic and cultural development that special women's developmental programmes should be set up in the country
2. Traditional institutions should be modernized while new institutions should be traditionalized in order to bring change into reality.
3. Discriminatory interpretation and implementation of laws relating to women must be removed.

#### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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