BEYOND CULTURE: DUAL-EARNER MIDDLE CLASS COUPLES AND HOUSE WORK IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Contemporary treatments of housework in the extant literature have generated a number of paradoxes and controversies. The dominant perspective sees housework broadly as asymmetrical and exploitative. The paper contends that the gendered interpretation of housework does not present a comprehensive picture of the place of housework particularly in the light of effects of globalization, modernity and social change in Nigeria. The paper therefore seeks to deconstruct housework as it affects middle class couples in Anambra state Nigeria. For dual-earner middle class couples, household responsibilities have changed over the years. Housework embodies love, care and mutual respect, not subordination as hitherto has been demonstrated. The paper reveals that ideas about gender are often incoherent, fractured and that contradictions abound between what people say they do and feel, and how these beliefs and feelings are reflected in household behaviour.

Keywords: Culture, Dual-earner Couples, Housework, Modernity and Social Change

Introduction
Over the years, traditional families have continued to witness remarkable changes in the way household responsibilities are shared (Naheed & Ghouri, 2010). This is even more so, given the effects of globalization, on traditional families in Nigeria. One of the most remarkable aspects of this change is the global transition from breadwinner husbands and home maker wives to dual-earner couples (see Winkler, 1998; Epic and Wallace, 2011), which has the potency to challenge the orthodoxy in household behaviour in Nigeria supported by patriarchy. Women engagement in paid employment outside the home was not contemplated in traditional Nigerian families, as dominant thinking and practice then situated their role in the home; more precisely, in the kitchen (see Animashaun, 2002). In response to the global conditions, colonization, urbanization, education (Anugwom, 2009), emergence of wage employment, technological, demographic and geo-political shifts (Flor and Meurs, 2009) gender roles and relationships have shifted grounds (see Abayomi, 2012). This shift has largely been undocumented or under reported as mainstream, family scholars continue to represent what used to be the status quo as current practice (see Hockschild 1990, Beck, 1985). The hitherto rigid division of labour in the family in terms of gender roles has virtually disappeared (Abayomi, 2012). These rather conflicting roles for men and women are daily becoming obliterated as a result of changing socio-economic circumstances (Hammed, Agofure and Adebugola,
2009:11). In several families, husbands are no longer the sole “breadwinners” (Wilkie 1991). Growing unemployment, increasing economic difficulties and financial burdens create the compelling incentive for families to aspire to become dual-earner (see Haddock, Zimmerman, Lyness and Ziembka, 2006). Bartley, Judge and Judge (2007) contend that two sources of income from the couple in a marriage relationship make for greater economic stability, greater protection from financial disaster. It also relieves husbands from the responsibility of being sole breadwinners with attendant anxieties and tensions, and provides wives with satisfaction and self-esteem from work outside the home. Although it may be reasonable and expected to canvass or conclude as Bartley et al have done, that dual earnings relieve husbands from sole financial burden, in practice, it may not be entirely correct as several men in dual-earner homes have testified to the contrary (see Nnonyelu, 2003; Chinweizu, 1990). The common saying that female income is not meant for the household is rampant among several males in Nigeria. Thus, “the perception of women as being merely at the receiving end especially in their domestic roles as wives, is however very superficial because wives, even in a patriarchal society like India constantly seek subtle ways to influence the process of family life in spite of the pervasive cultural inhibition and society’s expectation of them as obedient and dutiful wives” (Singh, 2012).

Among several African communities, women in reaction to the dominant behaviour of men have evolved some power strategies which have left the male folks threatened and uncomfortable (see Singh, 2012). Chinweizu (1990) identified other modes and centres of power outside the public sphere which women control including cradle, womb and kitchen amongst others. This negotiation and accommodation of dual roles and responsibilities within the household may have reduced over the years the tendency towards role conflict in the homes. Elsewhere, in a study of three countries of the Hispanic Caribbean, Safa (1995) even with contradictory observations, noted instructively that women’s emergence in the work world eroded male authority and restored women’s confidence to confront the myth of the male breadwinner. This has given women more negotiating power in the household than in other public spheres of life. This may have driven Young and Wilkmott (1973) to herald the emergence of companionship based relationships between middle class, heterosexual couples, even though, some dismissed it as hasty and speculative (Strangleman and Warren, 2008).

Lingam (2005:11) however argues that “regardless of whether women worked outside or not, they had to do housework; they reorganized, stretched their time and reduced leisure options so as to maintain equilibrium between being mothers and workers. Contrarily, Erinosho (2005) observes that a wife and mother who is in paid employment outside the home is inadvertently withdrawing from the care of her home and children, particularly her quality time and attention that the kids require. The point is, that both men and women in view of the emerging exigencies rearrange their time and priorities to accommodate the responsibilities and expectations at home. This is more so the situation with middle class dual-earner couples, given their socio-economic characteristics. The paper therefore seeks to unravel the changes that have taken place with regard to who does what, when, how and why as it pertains to housework. This is not to eliminate the genderisation of housework or to banish its resilient features, but to interrogate the dialectics and dynamics of housework division among middle dual-earner couples in Nigeria. Hockschild (1997) appreciated this flux when she noted that the workplace had provided men a convenient alibi or refuge for non-involvement in housework. With women increasing engagement in paid employment the workplace is also becoming a refuge for women. This may leave household chores in the hands of third parties (domestic househelps) particularly where husband and wife are, for much of the day not at home. This new scenario needs to be understood.

Given the cultural expectations and the common perceptions of appropriate roles for men and women, the demands of combining parenthood and marriage with career becomes a central concern for both spouses (see Adekola, 2010). This is further supported by Milkie and Peltola (1999) who contended that given also the primacy of the issue, it is not surprising that a neat balance, or seeking an equilibrium between work and family responsibilities has become topical in the lives of most modern couples particularly dual-earners. It may be interesting to take a second look again at the way work is apportioned in middle class dual-earner households, without indulging in a rehearsal of old practices and seeking to present them as ongoing, as if nothing has changed. That is the thrust of this paper. The paper tries to provide answers to the deluge of questions concerning how women and men in heterosexual relationships assess their own and their partner’s contributions to housework. Even in the literature, findings indicate that men do more housework than what their female partners readily acknowledge (Laurie and Gershuny, 2000). However, as
Strangleman and Warren (2008:239) advise, it may not be pertinent to dwell on the rightness or wrongness of the claims of either of the parties, work “sociologists should be interested in exploring how such perceptions are formed and how they play out in households. The objective of this study is to fully grasp couple’s experiences and perceptions of their dual involvement in paid employment outside the home and their engagement in housework. Arising from this is the fact that, work, whether housework or paid employment occurs in a socio-cultural milieu and inadvertently takes on different features according to the specific context in which it occurs.

Conceptual Discourse

**Housework:** Housework is defined in this paper as unpaid work within or outside the immediate vicinity of the home by any of the household members towards their wellbeing and maintenance of their home. It broadly includes manual and physical activities ranging from preparing meals, washing utensils, laundry and dry cleaning of clothes, shopping for consumable and non-consumable household items, cleaning the home, fetching water, disposal of household garbage and wastes, yard maintenance, mowing and cutting of grasses, car repairs, home repairs, dropping and picking children from schools daily, other emotional labour like child and elder care, and provision of needs of household members. Our definition of housework here is used interchangeably with domestic work.

**Gender:** This refers to the socially and culturally constructed roles of, and relation between men and women. Gender refers to social processes that occur because of your sex, such as behaving in a feminine way if you are female (Best, Griffiths and Hope, 2000:169). The term gender therefore refers to the social aspects, differences and hierarchies between male and female. Gender is evident throughout the social world, shaping how we think about ourselves, guiding our interactions with others and influencing our work and family life (Macionis and Plummer, 2005:309). While sex is largely a biological or natural issue, which is universal, gender is not. It is mainly a social construct referring to the social meaning of masculinity and femininity. Gender is thus, a learned behaviour. People learn gender role play and judgement through socialization processes that pre-date them, but sex is not and people meet and are forced to accept their sex naturally (Akanle, 2011:26). In Nigeria, against the backdrop of westernization and globalization propelled by neo-liberal values, a lot of hitherto male dominated roles are increasingly becoming feminized. With Nigeria being a signatory to several International Treaties and Conventions relating to women empowerment and gender equality, several affirmative measures have been instituted to address the imbalance in the public sphere. This has increased women’s visibility in the public arena. This has rubbed off on the homes, with middle class homes displaying increased egalitarianism in household allocation of chores.

**Dual-Earner:** In this paper, dual-earner refers to heterosexual couples both of whom are in paid employment outside the home, or are engaged in socially approved means of livelihood that brings returns to the person in form of wage or profit. Dual-earner however may not necessarily translate to dual-income for income pooling has been a subject of controversy in most families. Although in some homes, it is a settled matter that men alone should bear the brunt of the financial burden that goes with family upkeep. However, it is conceded that dual-income couples evolve new patterns and traditions for family living and face challenges and opportunities not experienced by families with only one breadwinner (see Hughes, Kroehler, and Vander-Zanden, 2002:331).

**Middle Class:** This is seen as a collection of classes located in the middle of the social stratification system. Although there is no consensus on the boundary that exactly typifies where the class starts and ends, it is usually characterized by absence of manual work, populated by white collar workers or skilled professionals (see Best, Griffiths and Hope, 2000). An understanding of contemporary features of the Nigerian middle class is critical to having a balanced overview of dual-earner middle class couples in Nigeria. A 2011 Survey by Renaissance Capital covering 1004 middle class Nigerians in 3 Nigerian cities of Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt provide very fascinating findings. The middle class make up about 23% of the Nigerian population, with an average monthly income of 480 – 645 dollars, well educated, more than 92% have post secondary education and invest heavily in the education of their children, sending them to elite Government Colleges or private schools, and other institutions abroad, have 2 or more cars at home, have small family size, about a quarter of them have travelled overseas. Therefore, they are sufficiently exposed as they have access to new information technologies. The Nigerian middle class can be attributed to a decent standard of living, at least for Nigerian standard, that is notorious for colossal...
absence of basic amenities and poor governance culture. Not surprisingly, as the Human Development Index (2006) puts Nigeria among the twenty countries with the lowest human development index, being ranked 154 among 179 listed countries (UNDP, 2006). In the ensuing poverty that ravages the land and envelops a significant proportion of the population, the middle class stands out as a privileged group in Nigeria.

Theoretical Perspectives
There are several perspectives in the literature that offer fascinating insights into the nature of families, and doing work, or taking decisions, within the households. One of these is patriarchy. Patriarchy is defined as a general organizational feature of society that was initiated by men, continues to be maintained by men and has men as its principal beneficiaries. The term arises out of the traditional belief that men are the heads of the families and their wives are subordinate to them, and also, out of the traditional claim that women do not exist in their own rights but only in relationship to men either as mother, daughter, wife or mistress (Lanre-Abass, 2003). Therefore patriarchy is a “set of social relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them in turn to dominate women. The material base of patriarchy is men’s control over labour power. That control is maintained by excluding women from access to necessary economic resources and by restricting women’s sexuality. Men exercise their control in receiving personal service work from women, in not having to do housework, or rear children, in having access to women’s bodies for sex and in feeling powerful. The crucial elements of patriarchy include heterosexual marriage, female child rearing or housework, and women’s economic dependence on men (Hartman, 1997:103). It is therefore a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social and economic institutions. It therefore encompasses the systematic organization of male supremacy and female subordination. However, the theoretical premise of patriarchy does not grant it the latitude to comprehend the changing forms of the family particularly against the backdrop of the increasing number of women in paid employment and the attendant benefits or outcomes. It has been reported by many scholars that dual-earner couples may have vitiated considerably the hitherto extant political economy, where men’s corresponding involvement in housework has increased over the years (see Young and Wilmott, 1993)

Also, Kitterod and Lappergard (2010) elaborate discussion of theoretical perspectives explaining work-family arrangements among dual-earner couples in Norway may be very helpful. For instance the Relative Resources Perspective, according to Coltrane (2000) looks at the amount of resources marital spouses or partners bring on board the negotiating table as the determinant of the amount of housework to be performed by either of the spouses. Therefore, a partner that brings in most resources will definitely perform less chores within the household. It is therefore expected that in case of dual earnings, perhaps with comparatively equal pooling of incomes, housework will be shared more equally, or in a manner that does not generate bitterness. Similarly, for the theory on comparative advantage (see Becker, 1991), the choice on allocation of market work and housework between the spouses is premised on assessing husbands marginal productivity in the labour market and in domestic work with the wife’s marginal productivity in same areas (Kitterod and Lappergard, 2010:8). It is possible for the woman’s labour market participation to be negatively affected by the husband’s labour market resources. In the ensuing context, the spouse with fewer labour market resources is likely to perform most domestic work. It may be expedient in the circumstance to explore how doing gender in terms of housework is being reconstructed by emerging realities of access to market and family resources including income, education, time availability etc. With education, and assimilation of egalitarian western culture, with new exposures to modern lifestyles, men inadvertently participate in household duties, under several guises. It is therefore not surprising that a greater number of men in their private familial surrounding have increased the time, commitment and number of different household duties which were considered no go areas, and even abominable in the past. How this has played out among middle class dual-earner couples may be interesting to show.

Research Methods
This covers the scope of the study, the instruments used to collect data for the study, the target (study) population and sample size as well as data analysis.

Scope and Area of the study
The study was limited to Awka Urban. Awka is the capital of Anambra State in South-Eastern Nigeria. Traditionally divided into two sections; Ifite and Ezi-Awka was renowned in ancient Igbo land as the home of blacksmiths, and her artisans are still noted for their metal working and wood carving. Located along roads leading from other major cities like, Owerri, Umuahia, Onitsha and Enugu, and because of its status as a state capital, Awka has significant public and private sector presence in terms of ministries, agencies, parastatals, a government owned university, as well as banks, a central market, manufacturing and service companies and real estate investments. New residential areas have sprung up mainly along class differentials to cope with population growth and urbanization. These include Udo, Iyiagu, Ngozika, Real Estate, Ahocol, Government Reserved Areas (GRA) Adjacent Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Nwakpadolu etc.

Study Instrument
The study was based on a survey design, and involved the use of two qualitative methodologies namely In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The particular value of qualitative research is that, unlike quantitative analysis, it allows the researcher(s) to explore the reasons why something has happened or why individuals behave in certain ways or hold certain views. Structured guides were developed in English language for the IDIs and FGDs and pre-tested to ensure validity. Data from responses offered by respondents and discussants in the FGD and IDI guides were summarized using content analysis and grouping of relevant information. Four trained field research assistants were engaged for the field survey. All the interviews were conducted in English.

Study Population
The selection of the respondents for this study was purposive. The research focused on dual-earner middle class couples where both spouses worked either as employees or were self-employed. A total of 142 participants were purposively recruited on the basis that their self-reported socio-economic characteristics placed them in the middle class status. The eligible respondents involved in the study included public sector workers, drawn from Ministries, a Federal University and other government parastatals in Awka, private sector employees, drawn from four banks, two manufacturing and two service companies and from self employed business men and women as shown in the table below;

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<th>Table 1: Summary of IDI and FGD Sessions</th>
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<td><strong>IDI Respondents</strong></td>
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<td><strong>FGD Respondents</strong></td>
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Fieldwork
The main fieldwork (comprising 70 in-depth interviews and 12 sessions of focused group discussions) was carried out from April to September 2012. The IDIs and FGDs were held in the work or business location of consenting participants (rather than participants’ homes), the average IDI length was around 20 minutes. While the average FGD lasted about 90 minutes. The field work lasted for six months – April – September, 2012.

Analysis
The IDIs and FGDs were recorded, with the participants’ permission, and fully transcribed to allow for detailed analysis. Information from the transcripts was transferred to thematic grids, forming the basis of the analysis. The thematic grids were informed by the research objectives and notes from the fieldwork.

debriefing sessions. This approach allows for the rigorous and systematic interpretation of qualitative data. Second tier analytical grids were then produced, to structure the key themes for reporting. This information was used to write the report, where necessary verbatim quotes were utilized to illustrate some points during interpretation of results. Where quotations are used, attributes are given in the following order: gender, age, occupation.

Findings and Discussion
Management of Housework/Domestic Roles
Data from the IDI and FGD sessions reveal that most respondents in spite of their status as dual-earner couple had positive views about how they generally managed housework and domestic roles with their spouse at home. With both male and female respondents acknowledging that housework was hitherto a female responsibility. An IDI respondent had this to say;

We manage it very well normally you know women should have the larger part somehow, because some of the domestic things are usually done by them... I can always help in those things that I feel that are maybe so tedious for her, those things that need a male touch, yeah, in such duties I can come in (Male, 50s, Civil Servant)

Still on a positive note, another respondent from one of the FGDs comments thus;

We try, though for the major housework, especially when time is choking me, my husband helps me out. Somehow, we keep going as we understand ourselves very well. (Female, 30s, Civil Servant)

Few responses however reflected the traditional patriarchal family picture when it comes to housework, as can be gleaned from the straight response of an IDI participant;

I do all the housework alone; I do everything alone (Female, 50s, Civil Servant).

Most female respondents felt that in spite of earning income alongside their husbands housework is not equally distributed between them as shown in the chain of select responses below;

It is not evenly distributed but made possible with understanding and cooperation (Female, 40s, Civil Servant).

Even if my husband is not around I can do the housework all alone (Female, 40s, Businesswoman).

No, I perform most of the domestic work (Female, 40s, Private Firm Employee).

No, my husband shoulder’s more of the financial burden and I take care of more of the house chores at home (Female, 40s, Businesswoman).

No it is not rather he helps when I am tired (Female, 30s, Events Planner)

Male respondents however differed in their views as most appeared to be convinced that they make substantial input into housework at home as can be seen from the responses below;

No equally, equally, it is equally distributed (Male, 50s, Civil Servant)

...it is somehow specified, as the woman of the house, my wife has her roles, and myself I also have roles that I perform in the family (Male, 30s, Businessman).

Definitely it is equally distributed, once I am around, I get myself engaged at home (Male, 40s, Private Firm Employee).

Another male respondent contended thus:

These days do women even do much in the house? I and my wife leave early for the office and come back late in the evening. I virtually eat all my meals outside every day. What you know, with the arrival of fast food restaurants and other eating places, these things are made easy. It is only a stupid man that will wait for his wife to give him food instead of going out to have his meals and drink.

Few male respondents conceded that their wife did most of the housework as their jobs kept them away from home most of the time, in the words of an IDI respondent;

I wouldn’t say that it is equally distributed because most at times I travel to our head office in Lagos or in my leisure time I attend to other businesses, my wife does about 78 percent of the housework (Male, 40s private firm employee).

Many participants in the survey in spite of their middle class status did not employ paid domestic workers as at time of the survey, some had done so in the past, usually following the couple’s first baby, others had employed the services of an unpaid house help, usually from a poor background (a common practice in Nigeria), while most couples relied on relatives of either spouse or grown up children when available. For
some participants, the use of house helps (male/female) has drastically reduced the amount of housework performed by either of the spouses. One particular female respondent opined:

She cannot remember the last time she swept or cleaned the house, even prepare meals. This is now done by our housemaid and cook.

Majority of male participants see themselves as the breadwinner in their home, and this is largely supported by female respondents who concur that it is obligatory for the man to fend for the household. This finding may be a pointer to what occurs beyond public purview in the private confines of the matrimonial realm, it poses a question, does dual earning among modern couples really qualify both spouses as collaborating breadwinners for their family or is it a smoke screen?

One male respondent expressed his opinion thus

I still join my wife in doing some of the housework when I am at home, because my job takes me outside most of the time. However, my wife is happy because I meet all her financial needs. Even though she is working, my wife relies on me for every kobo spent in the house (Male 50s Professional Accountant)

Ironically, most female respondents saw themselves as “helpmate”, “supporter”, “homemaker”, or what the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria call “Odozi Aku” (manager of wealth), rather than the traditional “Oliaku” (consumer of wealth). But following the expositions of Chinweizu (1990) and Nnonyelu (2003), can this leaning adopted by womenfolk be tied to societal norms of subservience to male supremacy even when sharing similar economic power with them, or is a convenient ploy to perpetuate the shouldering of the bulk financial responsibilities on husbands in dual-earner homes. Findings below shed more light.

Housework Friction among Dual-earner Couples

Most participants in the study reported that housework does not cause friction between them and their spouse, suggesting that regardless of the housework arrangement they probably viewed it as normal. However there were few exceptions who reported otherwise as shown below;

You know women now, they normally behave as if they want to control the whole family, there are some certain areas that she may like me her husband to participate in which is not proper, so in the process we usually quarrel, but within a short time again we have to rectify things again and forge ahead (Male, 40s, Businessman).

It is not always like that but it can lead to friction, particularly when I begin to feel that the work is unbearable I begin to agitate, or even make some demands, though as a pastor he has little time for the family but God is helping us (Female, 30s, Civil Servant)

Respondents who did not view housework as a source of friction between themselves and their spouses cited understanding and culture as reasons; this negates the dominant postulation in the literature (Heckert, Norwak and Synder, 1998; Rogers and DeBoer, 2001; Floro and Meurs, 2009) where housework is reported to be a bone of contention particularly in dual-earner homes. It is indicative of the fact that traditional African norms on family life are yet to wear out completely as a result of western influence. This may be so, but the force of social change, modernity and socio-economic status may be central in understanding modern household behaviour among the couples.

Most respondents in both IDIs and particularly FGDs were divided on whether they felt that what applied in their home was also obtainable in other dual-earner homes known to them. Most felt that it largely depended on personalities of the couple in question, others contended that there was no general formula for marriage, a few female interviewees felt that housework friction though not present in their home was a source of conflict in other dual-earner homes because the husbands in such homes were male chauvinists and ego driven. Other respondents felt the true situation in other dual-earner homes could not be discerned by an outside observer.

Further discussions revealed that most study participants viewed wage disparity as a source of house friction in the home particularly when one of either spouses is not working or when the woman earns more than the man the response from a female FGD participant is instructive in this regard;

Yea, sometimes such complex can affect the relationship… even women some of them may be at the centre of the problem, just as the fault can also be from the man. It could be either way (Female, 40s, Civil Servant)
A male IDI interviewee also opined thus:
Where your wife earns more than you it always brings about problems... they use their husbands as rags or car washer, things like that... in the Nigerian or Igbo culture, we take it that it is the sole responsibility of the man to take care of his family, in a situation where you see your wife earning more than you it brings about disobedience... disloyalty... one of my friends whose wife is a manager with Zenith bank... and was given a car and other entitlements has been at war with her husband up till now because she tries to handle the husband as if he is a driver... (Male, 40s, Private Firm Employee).

Satisfaction with the Organisation of Housework
Most respondents in the study, both male and female, indicated that, given the circumstances, they were satisfied with the way housework was organized in their homes. However, a few male participants expressed dissatisfaction with the organization of housework in their home remarking that they had to step in at times to ensure that nothing is left undone, some others hoped that with improved income in the near future they could hire more hands (driver, cleaner) to ease the burden of housework at home. Similarly most respondents did not feel cheated when it comes to sharing of domestic roles or housework in the home. With regards to care-giving at home a male respondent opens up;
No, no, it gives me pleasure, when I take my children to the bathroom to bathe them, take them to school... I don’t want anything to separate me from my children... I do it with joy (Male, 40s, Businessman).

A few female respondents felt cheated with respect to sharing of household duties as this IDI respondent explains;
Well I feel cheated anyway because both of us work in the same organisation. By the close of work at 5pm, I have to go to the market, by 6pm I am through with shopping and I return home. On getting home he will be relaxing and I will get down to preparing supper, and we have supper around 9pm and it is the same thing in the morning when I wake up, I wash the plates, do everything...well I just don’t know culture is wicked (Female, 50s, Civil Servant)

On decision making with regards to allocation of household duties, findings reveal that most respondents were of the view that decision making on housework was a joint affair in their home. This suggests that among dual-earner middle class couple in the study area, there is the tendency for the decision making processes to be democratized.

Involvement in Housework/Domestic Roles
In line with most studies on housework (International Labour Organization, 2008; Floro and Meurs, 2009) participants in this study differed in the total amount of time spent daily on housework mainly along gender lines. While most male respondents put in an average of 1 hour 30 minutes daily into house work, most female respondents spent a minimum of 3 hours on housework daily. In terms of routine or daily domestic tasks, participants also displayed gender as most reported performing traditionally gender delineated tasks. Most women were daily involved in “feminine” tasks like cooking.
cleaning of the house, laundry, fetching water and care giving (where the kids are still very young), while male participants were preoccupied with masculine tasks like, security, car washing and maintenance, house maintenance, providing the material needs of the family. There were however exceptions where, some male respondents indicated crossing gender lines to help out in cleaning of the house, washing their own clothes and other heavy clothing belonging to family members, fetching water, and care giving for young children (bathing the kids and going on school run). However no female respondent reported performing rigid masculine tasks like, family security or house maintenance. Likewise no male respondent indicated helping out with cooking on a regular basis, even though one indicated that he likes cooking at least once in a while. “My cooking is usually a family treat and a source of fun and joy” (male 40s, public servant)

Study participants also provided an interesting representation of the household task they find most agonizing. Such responses are reproduced below;

Well I would tell you, honestly, bringing out the money, the cash is not always easy, that is the most agonizing task for me (Male, 50s, Civil Servant)
Fetching water from the well, how can an old woman like me be fetching water, every morning, every evening? (Female, 50s, Civil Servant).

Cloth washing, I am not the washing type, my finger nails make washing uncomfortable for me (Female, 40s, Civil Servant).

If we have a new baby my wife would always want to sleep at night so if the baby in question wakes up at night she will bring it to my room, I find it somehow agonizing, but I can’t help it I have to pamper the baby because in the morning again it would be her turn (Male, 40s, Businessman).

Sweeping the entire compound (Female, 40s, Businesswoman)
It is only fetching of water especially during the dry season (Female, 30s, Civil Servant).

I find it difficult to go into the kitchen and cook (Male, 40s, Civil Servant)

However most respondents across gender lines indicated that they found it difficult to wash their clothes, this is indicative of two facts, firstly, most study participants in spite of belonging to the Nigerian middle class do not have washing machines at home and even if they do, its use maybe hindered by frequent power outages which Nigeria as a nation is still grappling with.

**Domestic expectations and Improving the Management of Housework**

On management of domestic roles or housework between themselves and their spouses most respondents were of the opinion that given the prevailing circumstances in their home they were satisfied with the way housework was managed in their home, but were unanimous that there was room for more improvement, some hoped that with factors like; increased marital experience, more children (for younger couples), and improved income and more household appliances, that they could improve upon management of housework in their home.

Respondents also displayed gender with regards expectation from spouse when it comes to housework or domestic roles, with most male respondents expecting their wives to be “feminine” and to play traditional feminine roles like, cooking, cleaning, washing and care giving, while most female respondents expect their husband to play time-honoured masculine roles like meeting up to the major financial and material needs of the family and securing the family. Conversely few male respondents were of the view that they did not expect much from their wife for financial upkeep of the family but that when she did so voluntarily it was welcome. Similarly few female respondents did not indicate expecting their spouse to bear the bulk of the family financial burden, but rather would step in to assist when he can not meet up financially, and would expect him to help instead in other less genderized areas, in the words of an FGD participant:

Well I am always conscious of his state of things, if he is financially down, I assist, in the area of food items which is what I trade in I also assist. My main area of expectation from him is in assisting the children with their homework which he does sometimes (Female, 40s, Businesswoman).

Data from the study also reveal that most respondents feel that the understanding that exists between them and their spouse when it comes to management of housework was based on factors like love, respect for each other, religious teachings, cultural values and general life experience. The representation is that of
relative tranquillity in the home front rather than a persistent conflict situation stemming from uneven disaggregation of housework along gender lines even when both spouses are income earners in the family.

**Measures to address problems of Equal Sharing of Housework among Dual-earner Couples**

In response to questions on how to manage housework among dual-earner couples, most respondents from IDIs and FGDs were unanimous on the need to promote egalitarianism in our culture particularly among dual-earner couples as an FGD participant advises;

_We must take it that we are all equal, and with God being on our side, such are little matters that can always be resolved (Male, 50s, Civil Servant)_

Similarly another IDI respondent feels that such problems emanate from income gap between dual-earner couples and proposes thus;

_It depends on the amount both are earning, if the wife is earning more than the husband then she has to contribute more than him to family upkeep (Female, 30s, Civil Servant)_.

Some others are of the opinion that such housework related problems can be resolved through dialogue or mutual agreement and understanding. an FGD participant emphatically opines that;

_Everybody has a hobby, in this part of the world most women have cooking as their hobby, for me washing clothes is my hobby, I can sit down in an hour and finish a mountainous load of clothes, I enjoy washing clothes, you need to find out from your husband the area he likes helping out with at home, you guys then agree upon it (Female, 30s, Civil Servant)_.

Some other respondents advocated for greater love and tolerance among dual-earner couples, submissiveness on the part of wife, the need for proper role play among spouses, adoption of the best possible initiatives by the man as the head of the household, employing more domestic workers where possible, seeking the counsel of older couples or professional counsellors, as well as through prayers and faith in God.

**Conclusion**

For decades, since the seminal and incisive work of Oakley, family scholars have written voluminous articles depicting the home front as a battle ground between the sexes. This situation is changing remarkably with the entry of women into paid employment culminating into a new category, commonly called dual-earner couples. This has brought different outcomes in the way housework is done. Thus the representation in the literature, of what may be described as common characteristics of dual-earner couples may not be entirely correct, given cultural variations across the global order. Besides socio-economic status of couples, also play a determining role in the nature of household allocation of duties

This study has revealed among other things the foremost attributes of dual-earner middle income couple in South Eastern Nigeria. Clearly findings contravene the dominant depiction of perpetual conflict among dual-earner couples, but rather suggest that in spite of differences which couples may naturally experience as a result of coming to live together, the family situation in middle class dual-earner homes in South East Nigeria may not be characterized by conflict or a bout between the sexes. Housework is largely a cooperative and complementary venture where spouses carry out their duties with love, care, empathy and mutual respect.
References


