



Poverty and Gender Role Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This work investigates the impact of poverty on gender roles development within nuclear families in Rivers State. This paper is theoretical in approach and draws its data from secondary sources. It brings to front burner the fact that spouses behavior towards gender roles development is not only explained in terms of hormones and physical appearance, but poverty. Implying that behavior of husband and wife can only be changed as against the claim of the biological explanation of gender role because culture has been seen to be highly valuable than nature. Gender roles are socially ascribed roles associated with men and women respectively in society. Consequently, for roles of husbands and wives to be said to be of great worth, it must add to their peace, prosperity in the society and the nation's economy at large. This paper utilizes cultural transmission theory to explain the symbiotic relationship between couples and the interconnections of the variables in the work. This research also reveals that if husbands and wives in a society hide under the guise of culture not to work hard, they would remain poor. In essence it is interesting to state that among other revelations, this paper establishes that gender roles development and complementarily is a new way of solving problems relating to gender roles in the 21st century families in Rivers State.

Keywords: Poverty, Gender, Roles, Nuclear Family, Development.

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INTRODUCTION

In modern human societies, gender role begin from conception, confirmed at birth, whereas through socialization, individuals acquire social roles which correspond with their biological make up. It is a universal phenomenon despite that it varies dramatically from one society to another due to selectivity of what is deemed appropriate for the socialization of male and female in the cultural practices. This raises some questions regarding the pros and cons of the universality and relativity of gender roles. A few proponents of gender roles instead of biological differences of man and woman emphasize physical differences and relate it to the allocation of social roles. In Africa male and female occupy different social roles to the extent that group members have their preferred sexes.

In Nigeria and Rivers State in particular, people prefer to be born either male or female with some preference in the upland and riverine areas respectively, in order to perform certain expected social roles in the

society. In Nigeria's traditional settings, when a wife puts to bed, the husband is usually informed by the traditional birth attendant. In a little while, the husband takes the information to his family members and neighbors. On their arrival, kola-nuts, palm wine and powder are presented. Relatives discern the sex of the new born from the facial expression the father based on his expectations. Family relationship is usually characterized with social roles which encouraged participation from family members to ensure its sustainability and survival. The roles include domestic work, socio-economic role, supports, reproduction, socialization, decision making, social placement of children, etc. my late father while alive, told us that when a man or woman gets married, has children, they become source of help and assistance to each other. Perhaps this is because husbands and wives need their wellbeing ensured in the family through the social roles they perform toward development of the family. Family is one legal avenue through which spouses as well as their children seek the support of their partner. No doubt most unmarried people desired to get married to

enable them get the support of their better half. This symbiotic relationship which exists between men and women in society are clearly manifested in the interdependence between men and women for one role or another. Gender relationship is expressed in various forms. When children are in need they meet closest parents to them of which the mother is at advantage as she spends more time with her children unlike the father, and if the wife is in need she approaches her husband for support and sometimes the husband goes to his wife. Husband and wife though biologically different but are socially one. What sets the pace for oneness of spousal relationship is an initial agreement between them to live as husband and wife, then their family in tandem with marriage customs. Unfortunately, not every man has the required resources to enter family life with either a woman within same ethnic group or another tribe due to poverty. This may be a reason most exogamous relationship between a man and woman do not consummate in marriage. Many people avoid marriage altogether. The number of educated women in society is increasing tremendously demanding to have equal relationship with men even though it is prohibited by culture.

Recently many families have failed in performing requisite roles for family upkeep by thinking that the only important gender role is the need for love, unknown to them that it is one of the many roles expected of husbands and wives if family must be functional. As it were today, there is role gap between husbands and wives which undermines their productive ability to providing for their family members and by extension, Nigeria. Most married people are yet to give themselves the permission to lead economically productive life, and be of assistance to their spouse. These cultural intricacies have made majority of wives do not wish to relate with their husbands on the basis of customary marriage or laws and therefore unwilling to submit themselves by marriage. These have become hurdles that inhibit married men and women from maximizing their potentials but become poor as a result. At a long run, the poor husband does not get expected loyalty, service, comfort and satisfaction from his wife, likewise the wife may not be satisfied as she can be counting on her many loses. Families that cannot provide for its members should expect physical illness, spouse abuse, teenage pregnancy, child abuse, separation and divorce. There are instances where husbands and wives live as cat and dog, always fighting one another, abusing themselves openly because of poverty related dissatisfaction. Couples who are facing poverty related challenges hardly do well socially. Most domestic violence that occurs in families is linked to poverty. Some matrimonial homes that were living peacefully, happily and united have separated and even divorced as a result of their inability to meet the family demands. Have you thought of how many women that can tolerate a poor man in marriage or a woman that spends her income on her household without thinking

otherwise?. Therefore, husbands and wives are trying to find a new way of relating or living together, both inside and outside of marriage. This leads to the changing of gender roles and adds uncertainty in the social life of poor couples.

According to Orisa (2016), traditionally, family life was characterized by affection and companionship rather than the exception. In the morning husbands and wives go to farm from which they get food stuffs needed for livelihood sustenance. At evening when they return, meal was prepared and served. Children were trained collectively with help of extended family and community members. This traditional practice has not been successfully replaced by the learning experience acquired in the school. This was possible because family members worked very hard fending for their selves, and were contented with what they had, and played their roles well to avoid being poor and stereotyped by other members of the society. Therefore families were properly managed and they did their best to live peacefully with one another as a family.

People did not complain of hunger as much as it is today because there was abundance of food to eat owing to availability and the fertility of soil. Households that run out of food stuffs got assistance from their extended family members which made for near absence of poverty.

According to Moses (2018), if a man visited his bosom friend in a nearby village, he was offered guard of palm wine, or hot gin, cola nuts containing dry fleshy fish as refreshment and other food served him subsequently to combat hunger. But the lack of the basic needs of life has brought stress and hardship on people, which in turn formed a cog in ensuring the wellbeing of family members thereby engendering conflicts between husbands and wives.

Hence this paper seeks to understand the relationship between poverty and gender roles in nuclear families, and also to examine the relationship between socio-economic provision and marital crises in nuclear families.

Based on the foregoing, it is pertinent therefore to ask;

- What is the relationship between gender roles and poverty?
- Does poverty influence gender roles in nuclear families in Rivers State?

Nmom (2002) described poverty as epidemic which instigates family problems which eventually jeopardizes wellbeing of family members. Those from poor families go to bed hungry and are not sure of getting the next day's meal. Poverty leaves family members in a condition where if they want to smile, they turn love to cry. At times the bread winner wants to provide but have to beg. They want to make choice, yet lack the purchasing power, love to be the best husband or wife

but have to steal and prostitute to be empowered. poverty has become an impediment in the development of human capacities in families, yet Nigeria seem not to appreciate the urgency of dealing with unemployment as indicative of poverty where people wake up each day not having or knowing what to do. And “the idle mind as they say is the devil’s workshop”. Unemployment and poverty seemed to be everywhere now compared to yesteryears in Nigeria. Today, families and marriages are collapsing and breaking up, school children dropping out, increase in slums and shanties, travelers avoid joining vehicle from motor parks for fear of not being able to pay their transportation fare. Unemployment and its concomitant Poverty evoke on family members a feeling of helplessness, dependency, inferiority, fatalism, child & wife abandonment, stress, child hawking and single parenting.

Such condition of unemployment and hardship strained material relationships but dependants continue to make demands from the husband as a head of the family without minding if he has money to satisfy their needs or not.

A poor husband or wife is more often described as a bad luck, and is nobody’s friend. And as Spencer in Haralambos (2007), observed that nobody shows sympathy to poor unemployed fellows who are living in poverty. He called the poor “bad fellows and good for nothing, criminals, men who share from ill-gotten money”. For him, the poor are lazy people who do not deserve any free food, materials and services from neighbors. Very likely they are responsible for their poverty, due to their immorality. The situation may not apply to all society, whereas families that such experiences sometimes break up as a result and usually have insufficient control over the behavior of their children which turn into street boys and girls, living in any way possible, indulging in criminal activities since children can easily fall into deviant behavior.

Conceptual Clarification

According to Gordon Marshall (1998), it was Ann that introduced the concept of gender to sociological studies and used it to mean a parallel and socially unequal division into masculinity and feminism. And she was able to draw attention of scholars into areas of social differences that exist between men and women. At the onset it seems like literal war for superiority between men and women. But now husbands and wives are beginning to see that no one person would always love to perform all the roles meant for husband and wife. And this shows how important husband or wife is in the family system. Kirst-Ashman (2010) defined gender roles as the attitudes, behaviours, rights and responsibilities which society associates with being a male or female respectively. Some refers to it as sex roles. It consists of manner, attitudes and behaviour that the society deem appropriate and desirable for a peaceful co-existence of a man and a woman in a

family. These roles are solicited for mainly on the basis of relationship that are social and relatively permanent which exist between and amongst members of a family. And the social roles people take in the society could depict the way people view such a person in connection with the cultural practice of the people. Gender roles owe their creation to human inventiveness rather than biological forces. Garfinkel in Ritzer and Stepnisky (2014), argues that women and men are not just a matter of sex and an ascribed status, but rather can be understood on the bases of accomplishment of a stipulated practices. The point he made here is that the roles we perform determine if the person is a man or woman in the family. His idea here is based on peculiarity of social environment. In some societies there is possibility of successful transplant of either female to male or female to male reproductive organ which occasioned their subsequent role change. That practice is strange to some Africans.

Theoretical Framework

According to Zandem in Wika and Ifeanchio (1998), the cultural transmission is a situation where individuals are essentially neutral at birth, but their biological differences are insufficient to explain later differences in gender roles development, yet explain how individuals acquire those social roles. Collins in Ritzer and Stepnisky [2014] observed that gender roles began from family. He further noted that variety of resources strong men have and their ability to satisfy physical needs of women has finally put them on the role of providing for their wives. Conversely Murdock in Haralambos and Holborn(2007),are of the opinion that physical manifestation in child bearing leads to gender roles. Traditionally, the Nigeria women are known to be dependent and receiving from parents, uncles and subsequently from their husbands because it is rooted in our culture. Therefore husbands go extra mile in ensuring that they provide for their wives and children. However, there are various types of nuclear families such as child headed family, foster family, adoptive family, step family, single parent family, polygamous family, to mention a few. And the contributions to be made by the man or woman in the family for its maintenance are based on available material and non material resources, including marriage type such as levirate and ghost marriage as identified in Okaba (1999). Lineage pattern such as matrilineal system and settlement pattern of husband and wife can affect their role performance. Language and communication are inexplicable elements in the cultural transmission and shaping of social interaction, as all socially ascribed roles are conveyed through spoken words.

Examples include, First Lady, even if there is nothing like First Gentlemen, Noble men, King, Queen, Chairman, etc. they depict one gender role or another depending on the way it is socially defined in the setting. Children answer or bear their fathers name as

surname in virtually every society, perhaps this is due to roles of men as heads of the family. And where the cultural practices of a people prevent or undermine either men or women from maximizing their economic ability, it would plunge such families and the nation into perpetual poverty and such a culture can be referred to as culture of dependency. It is therefore worthy of note that societies that do not keep to such cultural practices would become more economically prosperous.

Cultural Gender Roles of Nuclear Families

Ololube (2012), observed that in India the oldest man in the family make decision on production and allocation of resources and gives instructions on matters affecting the family and his wife has control over the kitchen, child rearing and minor religious rituals. In the absence of father, the oldest son assumed control of decision making, being guided by his mother and supported by his wife.

Ndu in Wika and Ifeanchor (1998) asserts that gender roles in Igbo land is based on sex and age. Male gender go fishing, hunting and including war, but women do farm work, cook and trade, the nursing of babies were handled by elderly people mainly those who could not work as laborers in the farm. This custom was a way of ensuring production of food for their families. Traditionally, it was scarce to see men always cooking and women going for fishing in most upland areas. Again, every family has a portion of land to cultivate their crops which is regulated through land tenure system. Gender roles also serve as source of care and support to ones partners, parents, father in-law or mother in-law. Gender role is the socially ascribed leadership role through which management of the home, parental roles to children, and mutual respect to each other are implemented.

Poverty also reflects on the way members of such family talked, dressed as it can be mirrored from their faces. Poor health care, insufficient food, poor housing, unwholesome water and unemployment are some indicators of poor families. Those who lack the required money to buy those commodities mentioned earlier which are regarded as essential commodities to maintain an acceptable standard of living conditions are similarly poor. Another aspect of poverty include powerlessness, high level of illiteracy, high death rate, high infant mortality, Murdock in Haralambos and Holborn (2007), Observed that the roles of poor men and women in nuclear families include hunting, farming, fishing, palm wine tapping, weeding of grass around the compound, cooking, ironing of clothes, gathering of vegetable products, fetching of water, preparation of food, washing of clothes, washing of plates, sweeping of their rooms, bathing of children, feeding of children etc. This probably is due to unemployment or they can not fit in within the industrial setting as a result of illiteracy. He also noted that these roles changes once a woman is pregnant with child, during delivery process and after child birth since

she cannot do most of the roles that may be strenuous on her.

Odiike (2017) asserts that women play the roles of keeping the home, nursing and socializing of children in nuclear families. He holds that women owe their positions to assist, support and adorn the men with the aim of maintaining stability in nuclear families. But most wives find it very difficult to submit herself to her husband if he is unable to provide for her needs. He opined that in Tai Clan of Ogoni Ethnic nationality, bush clearing for farming is mostly a prerogative of the men, whereas in the Ibibio culture, bush clearing for farming is mostly done by women, although men also partake in clearing farmland especially when deforestation is required.

Some Sociologists maintained that a woman's role in Nuclear Family is to provide warmth, security and emotional support first to her husband and then her children. So that while the husband is away in search for daily bread to keep the family going, doing menial or casual jobs, a welcoming attitude of his wife relieves that tension and stress providing the tired husband with acceptance, courage and suitable atmosphere for harmonious co-existence for every member of the family.

The cultural transmission of gender roles contradicts the view by social biologists that there must be clear cut gender roles for nuclear family to achieve efficiency in performing its functions. For them, the role of man as breadwinner of the family and woman as provider of warmth complemented each other and promote family solidarity. They failed to take into cognizance the fact that most wives of poor men work as hard as their husbands or even more just to provide for their poor family. This shows that there is no hard rule on socially allotted roles in nuclear family both for men and women as either of them could take one social role or the other in the family, their sex notwithstanding. Although this is not always the case, a situation that evokes an atmosphere of conflict in most matrimonial homes, but couples are seeing the need to do so now with the hope to overcome poverty.

Sociologists believe that women are more vulnerable to poverty because of their roles in the family. They often suffer hidden poverty, a situation in which the husbands' wealth is not evenly distributed among family members, and does not reflect on the lifestyle of the wife and sometimes children. Instances abound when a man has money as a worker, yet the wife lacks good diet, clothes, medical care, personal item, offering during religious worship, to mention a few. Such family could be said to live in hidden poverty.

Gender roles vary from one society to another. And it implies that it is relative in nature. Peil (1977) holds that some roles are regarded as properly belonging to

either the husband or the wife. Others are shared between them. They include the role of child rearing, Domestic and economic roles, the economic support of the household, and authority and decision making.

A child may be reared by one, both or neither of the parents, but rearing by both parents is a most ideal except it is deterred by death, marital separation, divorce, custom and separate residence of spouse. In carrying out domestic and economic roles in family, men go out to farm or work near their home while women do cooking of food, clearing and washing at home.

For Peil (1977) the economic support of the nuclear family is mainly male responsibility however women have economic responsibility in most farming communities. Men prepare the soil and plant the crop while women weed and help with the harvest. Men also grow cash crops and the women food crops. In most families, power to make decision is given to the father or grandmother. And decision on a child welfare and education are normally a jointly decision. This reflects the social dynamics of male and female responsibilities in society.

The likes of Anele (2004) and Mitchell (2019) agrees that husband and wife owe themselves certain social functions or right in the family as soon as they are married. They include sexual rights, child bearing and economic obligation. For them gender roles are captured in what they called uxorial and genetrical rights – they are roles and responsibilities enjoyed in a dyad relationship between spouses. They maintained that these symbiotic social roles between spouses are only possible because they are husband and wife which engender kinship and affinal relationship between the spouse and their families. They both alike admitted that gender roles include domestic services, and economic services one to another. The moment a woman get married there are several social roles she enjoyed under her father which are now to be provided by her husband, as well as she owes her domestic and economic roles to her husband. The wife must perform series of domestic cum economic duties to her husband which include cooking, fetching of water, and mending of his clothes and care for him during illness, because marriage is involved, it becomes culturally legal, otherwise it may breed conflict. The Ijaw women do fishing work while their husbands sip hot gin and guard of palm wine at home, yet they remained loyal to their husbands. And they enjoy, observe and maintain it as their culture.

The other role (genetrical right) refers to the formal acquisition of child bearing capacity of a woman from her parents in order to perpetuate their lineage. Here, there is a transfer of reproductive capacity of a woman to her husband's group. It involves sexual role of spouse to each other. It is expressed as the exclusive access to a wife by her husband. It is an obligation of

his wife to have children from her husband. Mitchell (2019) noted that such rights are personal rights and duties of the spouses to each other, whereas the outcomes of these roles are important because no group want their lineage to go into extinction. There are families in which mother in-laws and other members have posed some problems because of childlessness. Husbands are to support their wives economically, provide her with shelter; protection and comfort which can enable her achieve her personal development or dreams as a person. Until marriage is formalized through bride wealth transfer, these respective social obligations remain with the man and woman or her people. Matrilineal descent does not imply matriarchy as men still control and exercise authority as leaders. Although, it affects settlement patterns as men leave their village to settle in their wives village while the women in the man's village bring other men into the community.

If the sexual right of the husband or wife is flouted, he or she is entitled to certain amount of compensation. There was a man in Ubie Clan who lost his sexual right of his wife due to illness, but as soon as she recovered, he made an open summon in a juju to town cried in the community requesting that those who had sexual intercourse with her while he was on sick bed should pay him compensation in order not to incur the wrath of the deity. After compensating the man, the choice to continue in the marriage is theirs. The formalization of marriage contract is encouraged to avoid losing one's rights to another man or woman. In Northern Nigeria, women roles are to be performed in their husband's kitchen and the other room and not to meddle with his office affairs. When president Bahari made a similar statement to his wife three years ago, he was talking from cultural point of view, even if he is not poor given his position as president of Nigeria. Poverty of the mind sometimes stem from culture and breeds social exclusion to members of the society.

The Relationship between Gender Roles and Poverty

In explaining how gender roles leads to poverty, the social structure of family are of sociological importance, including personal factors. This is mainly because the social structure shaped by leadership and distribution of few resources does not give equal opportunity for every member of the family.

Poor couples do all dirty and menial jobs requiring much energy, labor and those posing more danger to their health are sometimes unknown to them. However as bread winners, they have no choice, especially in an ethnic group where their culture spell it out that either men or women are to provide for the family. He or she must do all manner of tedious labour as bread winner even at the point of dying to put food on their table for family upkeep. This promotes poverty and discourages saving habit since it is mainly to keep body and soul together.

Family Size: Large family system and dependency for livelihood on the head of the family places much demands on the bread winner. It impoverish him or her as it becomes near impossible to save and embark on any development oriented project. Most culture in Rivers State encourage the man to marry as many wives as he desires and gives birth to as many children as possible. There are instances where children born by either husbands or wives out of wedlock are also part of the nuclear family thereby increasing the number of dependants. In such families, the head of the family is responsible for their feeding and provides their basic needs. But due to the large family size, he hardly can afford to provide the basic needs for all the numerous family members, thereby depriving such children access to basic education, good food, quality accommodation, health care, etc and this is responsible for the poverty in most family, and by extension the communities.

Gender Discrimination: In enforcement of right of inheritance and possession of farmland and other properties, most culture do not allow men and women equal access to the resources needed to keep or lift a family out of poverty. The Ikwerre ethnic nationality have rich cultural heritage, with some impoverishing practices. In Ikwerre culture, all farmland are owned and controlled by the family. In the family, the men are considered first in farmland allocation during farming season. However, the women may be given small portion if the farmland remains after extensive sharing among the men. In most cases, the women are not considered at all, despite the available quantity of farmlands for the season. On event of death of the head of the family (husband), only the male children are recognized and considered to inherit the farmlands and other properties of their father, with the first son possessing the largest portion of the farmlands and the highest properties. The female children, irrespective of their number and age are landless members of the family. This socio-cultural practice accounts for the deprivation and subsequent poverty of the women and female children in rural Ikwerre communities, particularly the widows in rural Ikwerre communities.

Settlement Pattern: The place of residence of spouses can affect their roles as husbands and wives. According to Igbani, (2005), there are patrilocal, matrilocal, avunculocal, virilocal and uxrilocal settlement patterns. If spouses live anywhere other than their own home or private apartment, it affects their roles as one or both may be frustrated in the relationship as a result of interference from in laws.

This can eventually result to poverty, especially if they do not have access to family farmland and other resources to support them economically, because the culture does not allow it. When a family is no longer able to sustain itself and can hardly provide basic physical needs such as shelter, food, clothing and medical care for its members due to their cultural limitations, we can term the family to be poor and

dysfunctional. This can further escalate into physical illness, spouse abuse, child abuse, divorce and separation.

Effects of Poverty on Gender Role in Nuclear Families

Poverty has the following effects; loss of traditional technology, loss of family land, loss of decision making power, leads to conflict in families, hunger and malnutrition, illness and death, overcrowding in homes, poor housing etc.

Poverty disrupts family functioning

The concomitant hardship of poverty strain social relationship and influences the manner in which men and women perform their social roles. According to Iwarimie-Jaja (2013), over 65 percent of Nigerian population lives below the poverty line and half of them are poor. The echoes of poverty have increased in recent times. Iwarimie-Jaja (2013) opines that the poor masses in Nigeria suffer from socio-economic exploitation and have the highest infant mortality rate compared to the rich families. This follows the lack of access to medical services and healthcare they can get as compared to rich families. The poor cannot afford quality healthcare but the rich can afford such to their family members as part of their social role more easily even when it requires travelling to another country by Airplane.

Poor housing – The poor families are known for their low quality housing such as shanties, and slums which expose poor people to pollution, as the sanitary conditions in such areas are not good enough to promote a healthy living. This may explain why most poor people suffer illnesses and malnourishment. And those husbands or wives who feel they cannot bear the situation either resort to divorce, or abandonment. Asthana and Asthana (2013) observe that most of the reported cases of cholera have to do with unhygienic and life style of poverty. Poor people harvest rain water and store it for drinking, water from stream and river, etc. Poverty is also blamed for the uncontrolled reproduction in many poor families, ill health, and morbidity in women and children. It is believed that while the rich families get richer, the poor families rear children. And series of conception, year after year for a dozen times result in shattering effects on women's health. It could result in abortion, bleeding or having many of children which in turn become difficult to feed and manage, hence malnutrition, child hawking, child abuse, and juvenile delinquencies in our street.

Loss of Decision Making Power: Chinwe, Ngozi and Prince (2017) asserts that decision making power is culturally in the hands of men (husbands), no matter how highly educated and placed a woman is, she has very little to say about her health, education and pursuit due to cultural inclination, her social status notwithstanding. And that the role of the woman in the home as the giant social engineer and one that is

submissive in family is permanent. But the likes of Goldthrope in Haralambos and Holborn (2007) observe that decision making power in families is now based on the man or woman who has the greatest resources and is more committed to the upkeep of the family. A married man who specialized in building houses in Ahoada East lost his wife to a male civil servant in 2014, because her former wife felt life would be better with the other man.

Poverty Leads to Conflict in Families: Since the man is culturally seen as the provider of economic resources in the family, when demands are continuously put on him even when the money is not available to satisfy such needs, it could be annoying and results to quarrel between the man and woman especially when both of them are not willing to tolerate the other person for peace to reign in such family. Because experience has shown that poverty affects the level of understanding and reasoning of an individual in society. A hungry woman or man is an angry person.

Hunger and Malnutrition: the lack of food and lack of balanced meal or diet does not enhance role play of husband and wife in the family. Women and children fear hunger a lot. This is because hunger makes people vulnerable and very prone to anger which eventually hinders effective performance of social roles in the home. Many married women are bold to say that sexual intercourse as a social role is not food that is required to nourish their body and make them healthy. The implication is that most women would not submit themselves to their husbands for sexual intercourse or even wash their clothes if she is hungry. To most women, it is the lack of those basic needs that lure them to indulge in extra marital relationship as a means of getting money, clothes, and other personal items since their husbands cannot afford to provide for them.

Poverty Leads to Illness and Death: The malnutrition, illness, hunger and poor housing conditions most often result to death.

Poverty makes it Difficult for Members of the Family attain Self Actualization. It impacts negatively on children as most of them drop out of school due to non-payment of school fees since they cannot fend for themselves. Hence their wellbeing is undermined, compromised and such children cannot fit into the modern scheme of things in the society and they grow and become poor as well.

Overcrowding in Homes: Families that are poor have many children and it makes social or physical distancing near impossible during outbreak of contagious infections. The practice of large number of people sometimes living in one room apartment is believed medically to be injurious to their health. It is a situation where too many people live in a room due to poverty. Many of the inhabitants of such overcrowded household are made up of unemployed and dependents. Where cultural practice does not encourage many

people to live together in one, unemployment does and is responsible for the sharing of a room by many other people. Overcrowding constitutes social problem such as respiratory health problem because the air is already contaminated and stuffy for the consumption of healthy people and requires urgent attention. And if delayed to be addressed, the occupants may lose their lives thus marriage is hardly becomes enjoyable, peaceful and attractive in condition of absolute poverty.

CONCLUSION

This work on impact of poverty on gender roles in families has brought to limelight the fact that culture and socialization are the major determinants of the roles men and women accept to perform in their respective families and not merely an issue of biological programming or greater physical strength of men in the society. And that the roles are relative as they appear differently in different cultural areas. While men are the bread winners in Ekpeye, Ogoni and Ikwerre ethnic groups, the women are the bread winners in some Kalabari area of Rivers State. Globally, both men and women are involved in sports, driving, farm work, fishing, to mention a few, there is no restriction but poverty limits couples capacity to perform their social roles in society. It shows that most poor couples are responsible for their poverty because of wrong attitudes towards gender roles since there are no fast and hard rules anywhere specifying what social roles a man or woman must perform in the family, rather it is a matter of mutual understanding between them; thus roles are not by hereditary but by ascription. In a way if couples are poor, it shows that, either they are not motivated by their culture to work, or are not working very hard to overcome the scourge of poverty. Although a man cannot breast feed a child, neither a woman produce the millions of sperm that is needed to make a woman pregnant, yet the roles husbands and wives perform in the matrimonial home are fluid, symbiotic and can be adjusted, in ensuring gender roles cooperation, complementarities or reciprocity to enable spouses to reduce the strains of poverty on their marital relationship, improve their quality of life and enhance their wellbeing in other to fit into modern arrangement.

Therefore cultural practices that encourage gender discrimination and unequal access to traditional life support system or means of livelihood should be eliminated.

Men and women should both be engaged in meaningful productive activities and support each other to live fulfilled lives.

Potential husbands and wives should possess skills and gainfully employed before consummating the relationship in marriage.

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