

## **Culture of Survival: Determinants and Consequences of Surrogate Marriage Among the Igbo Southeast, Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** Marriage is a socially sanctioned union between spouses. Procreation is one major reason for marriage but in Africa, the choice of whom to marry is determined by culture. In Igboland, surrogate marriage which is propelled by procreation, causes psychosocial and health conflicts. In spite of this, no serious attempt have been made to determine why young girls enter into such marriage or its consequences among the Igbo. As a result, this study seeks to determine reasons for such marriage and its consequences. Therefore, the study adopted qualitative research design using in-depth interviews. The study conducted in Southeast Nigeria used a sample of 52 participants (women) selected through snowball sampling. The study revealed that surrogate marriage is being sustained by several factors including infertility. It was also found that young girls enter into such marriage as a result of poverty, physical or social challenges. The study has shown that wives of female-husbands do have sexual intercourse with multiple partners unprotected in order to get children. Therefore, surrogate marriage becomes the easiest conduit for the spread of STDs including HIV/AIDS. Surrogate marriage causes marital conflicts, psychological trauma and death. Its elimination will save humans from health, social and psychological problems.

**Key words:** Conflicts in marriage, consequences of surrogate marriage, the Igbo, marriage, surrogate marriage, HIV/AIDS

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Marriage is a socially or ritually sanctioned union between spouses which establishes the domestic and civic rights and obligations between them between them and their children and between them and their in-laws. The definition of marriage is usually culture specific. In Africa, marriage is a permanent relationship between a man and a woman. However, the relationship is in actual fact between the lineages of the spouses (Modo, 2016). Generally, marriage is quite difficult to define. This is because there are diverse systems of marriage throughout the world. However, marriage is part of our everyday life. It is marriage that attaches a child to a particular lineage with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities thereof.

People actually marry for procreation, religious, financial, emotional, libidinal, social and legal purposes. The choice of whom to marry in most societies especially in Africa is socially determined by rules of incest, prescriptive marriage rules, parental choice and individual desire. In some parts of the world, arranged marriage,

gift marriage, child marriage, polygamy, temporary marriage and forced marriage may be practiced as a cultural tradition (Haviland *et al.*, 2011; Anonymous, 2008).

Among the Igbo of Nigeria, marriage is a mark of responsibility and a symbol of adulthood (Modo, 2016). Marriage in Igboland in the pre-colonial days was not necessarily to unite two lovers but primarily to create a legal foundation for procreation which because of the emphasis on children, the Igbo believed is an obligation to both the living and ancestors. As a result, it was believed that those who are born owe the debt of begetting their offspring (Uchendu, 2007).

In Igboland, different types of marriages existed in pre-colonial era: normal marriage contract, marriage through pawning, exchange marriage and marriage by abduction. During this pre-colonial period, the major form of marriage was polygyny. This is because it was believed that the more wives a person has means more children, more hands on the farm and consequently more harvest/wealth (Talbot, 1967; Uchendu, 2002).

The other form of marriage practiced and still being practiced till today among the Igbo is surrogate marriage (woman-to-woman marriage). This form of marriage has been documented in approximately forty pre-colonial African societies and has endured to the present, especially in Igboland. It is for this reason that Greene (1998) did a comparative study of this type of marriage among the Igbo, Fon and Lovedu cultures. Therefore, surrogate marriage is the practice in which a woman marries one or more women with no intention of sexual relationship but with the utmost goal of producing children through the bride in the name of the female-husband. In this case, the bride may be handed over to the woman's husband or where the husband is dead; the young woman is allowed to sleep with any man of her choice in order to produce children, particularly male children for the female-husband's family (Nwosu, 2011; Nyanungo, 2014).

It should be noted that, surrogate marriage is not peculiar to the Igbo. Since, the beginning of the 20th century, surrogate marriage (woman-to-woman marriage) has been recorded among >30 different groups living in four regions of Sub-Saharan Africa. Kevane cited in Nyanungo (2014) estimates that approximately 5-10% of African married women are involved in woman-to-woman marriages. Samuels (2016) also reported woman-woman marriage among the Kurya tribe of Northern Tanzania which he noted is being revived by the people.

When the issue of surrogate marriage was first opened to the world, it confused and provoked most Westerners. Actually, marriage between women was unheard of in Europe at that time because one of the most important purposes of marriage there was regulation of sexual activity. For Europeans, marriage between two women in which the bride gives birth to children implied repulsive sex. There were questions about biological fatherhood, sexual rights and duties. Even Lord Lugard revealed that he did not regard women marriage in Nigeria as "normal". He regarded it as a form of slavery in British Africa, simply because he did not believe that young girls entered into such unions willingly (Kjerland, 1997).

This confusion and prejudice lasted for many years, until Krige (1974) came up with her article in which he argued that the institution of marriage had been imperfectly or incompletely understood. This fact was soon reflected in the writings of three scholars who took interest in woman-marriage in East Africa. These scholars, Oboler *et al.* were concerned with the ever-changing

motives of surrogate marriage. While challenging previous findings, they discovered young girls who preferred to marry other women (Kjerland, 1997).

The major reason why women marry other women is mainly for social and economic reasons but never for sexual gratification. In most cases, women who married fellow women were either childless or had passed the childbearing age without begetting a male child. Sometimes, wealthy and influential women marry other women as a means of celebrating their wealth and for economic gains. Actually, surrogate marriage (woman-to-woman marriage) as a mark of wealth and for economic exploitation was popular in parts of Igbo land in the second half of the 19th century (Amadiume, 1987; Uchendu, 2007). From this point, it can be seen that the over-riding goal for woman-to-woman marriage in Igbo land is inheritance purposes.

Again, it should be noted that this practice of surrogate marriage is possible in Igboland because the Igbo do not believe so much in biological father but cultural father. This is based on the fact that whosoever pays a bride price over a woman and it is accepted by the woman's family, owns the woman and all her prospective children. That is why even if a woman pays the bride price over another young woman that young woman and her children belong to such woman who paid the bride price. It is as a result of this that the Igbo will say, "onye nwe aku nwe nwa" (he who owns the bride price owns the child).

The practice of surrogate marriage in Igboland goes into antiquity. No living person could tell exactly when it came into existence. This is why Uchendu (2007) posited that if it is considered that a normal marriage contract has generally been between a man and a woman, then the existence of surrogate marriage or its evolution in Igboland most likely must have been the product of cultural innovation that took place within the people's tradition. It has been pointed out that social systems and cultural practices were not static during the pre-colonial period due to the interpenetration of different societies and a history of cultural contacts. That surrogate marriage existed among the Kalabari (an Ijaw sub-group in the Niger Delta) by the first decade of the 20th century lends credence to the claim of interpenetration of societies. Therefore, it may be that the Kalabari borrowed the culture of surrogate marriage from the Igbo or vice versa. Again, it was found that the practice of woman-to-woman marriage did not exist during the same period among other Ijaw groups of the Niger Delta as it did

among the Kalabari. Therefore, it can be posited that the Kalabari could have borrowed the practice from their Igbo neighbours (Uchendu, 2007).

Another circumstance that laid the foundation of surrogate marriage was the fact that in the pre-colonial Igboland, agriculture was the major occupation of the people. And a man's success was determined by the size of his yam barns and the overall output from his farm. As a result, the Igbo favoured polygynous marriages because it allowed them to have as many wives as possible. The wives and sometimes with their children, make up a man's labour force. Men who for any reason were unable to marry more than one woman were in some cases assisted by their first wives to acquire a second wife. In such case, a woman would marry a wife and hand her over to the husband to be his second wife. This is with the aim of easing her (the first wife's) burden as well as to have assistance in farm work. This is why Price (1954) posited that any African marriage was a social investment, absorbing some resources and with prospects of replacing them at the end. Therefore, women who married wives for their husbands for the above reasons engaged in surrogate marriages which because of its various advantages to the man gained the support and approval of the society (Uchendu, 2007). Yet, another factor that possibly led to the evolution of surrogate marriage among the Igbo was the extremely high value that the Igbo placed on children, particularly male children. Another factor that led to surrogate marriage was the pattern of inheritance among the Igbo. In all parts of Igboland, women inherit from a deceased spouse only through their sons.

Generally, many scholars (Lugard, 1965; Herskovits, 1937) have written about surrogate marriage (woman-to-woman marriage) but most of these scholars were interested in the question of whom the children belonged to. For instance, O'Sullivan stated that the children resulting from woman-to-woman marriage belong to the dead husband of the female husband. In recent time, Kjerland (1997) studied surrogate marriage with the sole aim of providing a universal definition of marriage. However, she called for more studies to describe the change that has taken place over time in this aspect of marriage. Uchendu (2007) has also made an extensive study of woman-to-woman marriage among the Igbo. She was able to discuss the reasons for surrogate marriage among the Igbo, the origin as well as the contemporary situation of the practice. However, her work was not based on empirical study. Generally, it has been observed that no serious attempt

has been made to study those women who are currently involved in woman-to-woman marriage to find out why the practice has persisted in spite of modernity (Njambi and O'Brien, 2005). Again, no serious attempt has been made to find out why young girls would prefer to enter into such marriage and the consequences of surrogate marriage in Igboland. As a result, this study is aimed at the following:

- To find out the factors that encourages surrogate marriage among the Igbo
- To determine reasons why young females enter into surrogate marriages among the Igbo
- To identify the consequences of surrogate marriages among the Igbo

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Fieldwork for the study began with reconnaissance visit meant to find out the prevalence of surrogate marriage in different communities that make up Mbanjo in order to identify the most appropriate location for the study. As a result, eight communities were chosen for the study, namely; Umuozu, Obollo, Amaraku and Anara (Isiala-Mbanjo) as well as Umuihim, Umueze II, Umuezeala and Agbaja (Ehime-Mbanjo). Mbanjo is in Imo State, Southeast Nigeria. The study involved a qualitative research design. The instrument for data collection was In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) and the interview guide was constructed based on information gathered during the reconnaissance visit and review of literature.

**Participants:** The study was conducted in a rural residential setting among the people of Mbanjo in Southeast Nigeria. The people of Mbanjo are Igbo people and they speak Igbo language. In addition, the majority of the people of Mbanjo can understand English language. The sample (N = 52) included 30 female husbands and 22 wives to female-husbands. Participant's ages ranged from 18-75 years old with a mean age of 34.2 years.

**Ethical considerations and data collection:** Serious considerations were given to the ethical issues involved in the current study. These include the rights of the participants to refuse to participate, the protection of confidentiality and the participant's right to be fully informed about the nature of the study before giving their consent. Despite the assurance that participant's responses would remain confidential and, that their anonymity would be respected, only 52 (i.e., 65%) of the

80 potential participants approached for the interviews agreed to participate in the study. For those who gave their consent to partake, the local vernacular (i.e., Igbo) through backward translation was mainly used to conduct the interviews.

**Procedures:** Data collection occurred from July, 2017 until January, 2018. Participants were selected through snowball or chain sampling in which the researcher approached village cluster settings across this rural area including families, market centers, health facilities and religious centres. From these settings, women who had married women or those who are married to women were approached. These individuals were asked to introduce us to other participants with similar characteristics for the interviews. All those who agreed to participate were given copies of the informed consent in both English and Igbo. Upon completing consent forms, the researcher visited each participant in her home for the interview at the participant’s convenient time (usually in the evening when they have returned from their various engagements). The researcher conducted the oral interviews using a self-prepared in-depth interview guide. While the researcher asked the questions in Igbo language, two research assistants (trained for the study) were on ground to assist. One operated the tape recorder used in recording the interviews while the other wrote down the responses on paper. This is to ensure that no vital information is lost. Each interview took approximately 50 min to complete. Data acquired through the in-depth interviews were transcribed from the recorded tapes and translated from Igbo to English language which is a necessary condition for the analysis and reporting. The obtained data were presented using descriptive and narrative styles. The presentation of data were done in such a way that headings were provided for each section to conform to the objectives of the study.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants:** Table 1 shows the percentage distribution of the participants by selected socio-demographic characteristics. Table 1 indicates that all the participants were female because the issue under discourse concerns primarily women.

Table 1 also indicates that 57.7% of the participants are female-husbands, while 42.3% are the wives of female husbands. Nearly, all the participants (94.2%) categorized themselves as Christians and an overwhelming majority

Table 1: Percentage distribution of participants by selected socio-demographic characteristics

Characteristics/categories	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
18-30	8	15.4
31-40	6	11.5
41-50	10	19.2
51-60	7	13.5
60-70	12	23.1
70+	9	17.3
<b>Marriage status</b>		
Woman-husband	30	57.7
Wife to a woman	22	42.3
<b>Religion</b>		
Roman Catholic	32	61.5
Anglican	14	26.9
Baptist	2	3.9
Pentecostal	1	1.9
Others	3	5.8
<b>Education</b>		
No. of schooling	15	28.8
Primary	21	40.4
Secondary	13	25.0
Tertiary	3	5.8
<b>Major occupation</b>		
Farmer	31	59.6
Civil servant/teacher	8	15.4
Business/trader	7	13.5
Skilled artisan	4	7.7
Others	2	3.8

N = 52 (Fieldwork, 2018)

of them (61.5%) are of the Roman Catholic faith. The age of participants ranges from 18-75 years with a mean of 34.2 years. Close to 60% of the respondents were farmers; the rest comprise teachers, civil servants, artisans and other occupational groups. About one participant in every three had only primary education, 28.8% had no formal education, 25% had secondary education and the remaining 5.8% has some form of tertiary education. The latter figure is above the national average of 5.3% which indicates that the area is a highly literate population.

From Fig. 1, it can be seen that 19 (63.3%) of the female-husbands had no children. However, it was revealed during IDIs that 4 of these female-husbands earlier had children, who died at tender ages and they could not bear any other children. That made them childless. It was found that 6 (20%) of the female husbands had between 1-3 female children, while another 2 (6.7%) had between 4-6 female children. Only 3 female-husbands (10%) had >7 children and all are female. In other words, none of the female-husbands had any living male child. It was also revealed that all the female children of these female-husbands are married to male-husbands.

Figure 2 shows that three of the wives of female-husbands (13.6%) had between 1-3 children. Two

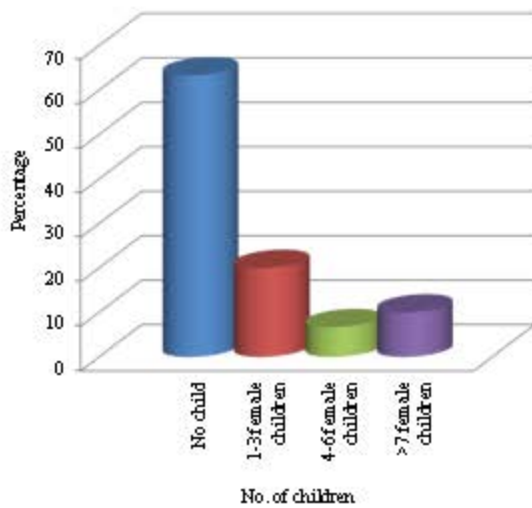


Fig. 1: Percentage distribution of female-husbands by number and sex of their children (Fieldwork, 2018)

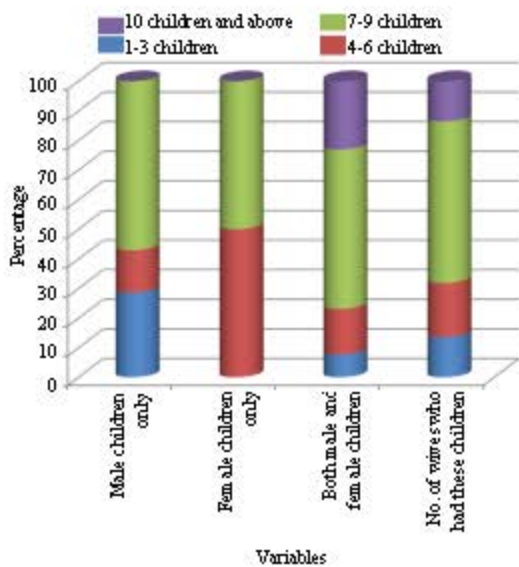


Fig. 2: Percentage distribution of wives of female-husbands by the number and sex of their children (Fieldwork, 2018)

of these women had only male children while the other had both male and female children. Those wives of female-husbands who had between 4-6 children were 4 (18.2%). Out of this number, one had only male children while the other had only female children. The remaining two had both female and male children. Majority of these wives of female-husbands (54.6%) had between 7-9 children. About 4 of them had only male children while one had only female children. This indicates that the

wives of female-husbands always attempt to produce as many children as possible to suit the wish of their spouses. In the process they tend to have more children than they can possibly cater for.

Only 3 of the wives of female-husbands (13.6%) had up to 10 children and above and all of them had both male and female children. Generally, 31.8% of the wives had only male children while 9.1% had only female children. The remaining 59.1% of the wives had both male and female children. The implication is that about 91% of these wives had fulfilled the expectations of their spouses (the female-husbands).

**Factors that encourage surrogate marriage:** Data have shown that the incidence of surrogate marriage is still present in the contemporary Igbo society. It is actually propelled by several factors. The major factor that has been adduced to encourage the practice has been infertility. In most cases, when a woman could not get a child and passed the child bearing age, this may push her to tell her friends to assist her in getting a young girl she could marry, who would help her to bear children in her name. In the case of Angela Igwe of Amarku, she had been married for over thirty years without having a child of her own. The husband, Linus, died 6 years before the period of the interview. Unfortunately, the husband was the only son of his parents. And so, she narrated the story, thus:

“Linus loved me so much. When we could not get a child, many people advised him to marry another wife but he refused, hoping that we will surely get our own children. I even encouraged him to take another wife but he refused. Unfortunately, 6 years ago, he fell from a palm tree and died. It became clear that my husband’s lineage has been closed. My husband’s kinsmen openly blamed me for engineering the closure of my husband’s lineage. I was devastated. One day, my friend, Paulina, advised me to marry a young girl who can take care of me at old age and also bear children for my family. After a long period of persuasion, I accepted the idea. Then, the search for a young girl that I will marry began. With the help of my friends, it took up to three months before we met Uloma, my wife, who I finally married. She has bore me three children, two boys and one girl. Even if I die today, I will die a happy woman. At least, my husband’s lineage is not closed”

Similarly, Adanna was a woman in her early 70s and she pointed out that she married a wife because of her

inability to have children. According to her, when she realized that she could no longer have a child, she married a young girl, Ozioma, who had four sons for her. Two of the sons are already married. These children respect Adanna so much and provide her with whatever she needs. For Adanna, it is dreams come true. She has no regret marrying her wife, Ozioma.

It was also discovered that another factor that encourage women to marry young girls is when they could not bear male children for their husbands. In a patrilineal society like Igboland, inheritance is through the male and as such daughters do not inherit their father's property. In practice, having only daughters in a family is as much as having no child when it comes to inheritance. It also indicates the extinction of a man's lineage. As a result, women with only daughters also engage in marrying young girls who they hope will beget males children for the family. In the case of Maria (68 years old woman), she had 2 daughters. All her daughters were already married. According to her:

"One early morning, my daughters woke me. I was frightened because I wasn't expecting them. I asked them what was amiss. They laughed and replied that there was no problem only that they came to know how I was faring. I did not believe them. I reflected on what would have brought both of them to my house so early. I could not fathom anything. However, I welcomed them. The younger one, Chioma, went to the kitchen and prepared breakfast. When we finished eating, they told me that their mission was to inform me that I should marry a wife so that their father's lineage would not close. I laughed and asked whether that was why they woke me so early in morning. They affirmed that that was their mission. After a detail discussion, I saw their reason and agreed. And my first daughter, Adaego, informed me that she had already seen one girl who had dropped out of school because she was pregnant. In less the two months with the assistance of my daughters, I married my wife, Ngozi and she has been a blessing to me and my family. She has given birth to two boys and one girl. Oh! I am very happy now. I am fulfilled"

Another woman, Mercy had four girls and one boy. Unfortunately, the boy (10 years old) was killed by a lorry when he was returning from Church one Sunday. So, Mercy was left with four daughters. The husband married another wife who bore him 5 children, 3 boys and 2 girls.

Along the line, Mercy's daughters got married and left. Then, her co-wife and her children began to maltreat Mercy. At a point, the husband also joined them to maltreat her. Therefore, as the woman was aging, so, also her agony was multiplying. She had no one to help her fetch water and nobody to help in washing her cloths. Then, people advised her to marry a young girl who would take care of her and also help her to bear children. Mercy agreed and married Margret who finally bore her 2 boys and 2 girls.

From this, it can be realized that apart from infertility and lack of male children, death of one's children can be a major factor that can push a woman to marry a young girl. This was obvious in the case of Rose Nwigwe who had 3 children, 1 boy and 2 girls. All of them died before the age of twelve years. Every effort she made to get other children was fruitless. To make matters worse, she lost her husband. According to her, she made effort to have children through other men after the death of her husband. But there was no success:

"When I could not bear it again, I told my friends to help me look for a young respectful girl I could marry. It took almost one year before I got my wife, Chinelo. The girl behaves funny but I am tolerating her because she has already given me what I wanted. Through her I have got three boys and four girls. What else do I want? I am happy!"

These cases have shown some of the major reasons surrogate marriage is still surviving in Igboland till the present. This form of marriage has extended beyond having children for the childless women to include rescuing women without male children and women who lost their children through death. It also serves as a medium of companionship and assistance to lonely and aging women. In other words, it also implies provision of aide for the weak/handicapped, a service that the state should provide and acquiring mourners in preparation for one's death.

**Reasons why young females enter into surrogate marriages:** Usually, every girl hopes to marry a man some day. Therefore, the study sought to find out why some girls would agree to marry a fellow woman. It was found that the major reason why young females marry female-husbands is unwanted pregnancy. The study found that about 60% of the wives of female-husbands involved in the study married their female-husbands because they had premarital pregnancies. One of such women is Nkechi Uzogara of Obollo who narrated her case, thus:

“I was in SSI when one of my schoolmates forced me to have sex with him. After the incident, I did not tell anyone. About 2 months later, I began to feel weak. I felt feverish especially early mornings. But I never suspected anything. Few days later, I began to vomit. Yet, I thought I had malaria. Until one morning, my mother took me to a corner and questioned me if I was pregnant. And I told her no. After perusing all over my body, my mother insisted that I was pregnant but in my innocence, I refused to accept it because I never believed I was pregnant. My argument with my mother brought my father into the matter. My father warned me that if I refused to tell him the truth and he later find out that I am pregnant that he would throw me out of his house. Yet, stubbornly I refused to bulge. He dragged me to the nearby maternity. There, they confirmed that I was over 2 months pregnant. At that point, my father threw me out of the house. He insisted that I must never return. All pleas from relatives did not change his mind. Therefore, I went to stay with my aged grandmother at Anara. It was there that Nnem-ukwu (my female-husband) saw me and sought for my hand in marriage. I agreed because I was not comfortable where I was staying and I needed someone to take care of me and my baby. Initially, it was not easy but now I feel like every other married woman. I participate in all the women activities of this community”

When asked about the actual father (s) of her children. She frowned and replied with finality, “God is their father. And he is really taking care of them”. It was observed that some young girls agreed to marry fellow women because their chances of marrying men are very slim. This may be as a result of physical or social disabilities. In the case of Augustina Agwu of Umuozu, her wife (Amaka) was from a very poor home and could not complete her primary school education because of this. Amaka lost her father when she was 4 years. And her mother had 8 children who she could hardly feed. Amaka started fending for herself at the age of 10. For her, the journey of was unbearable. Therefore, when Augustina, whose daughters had made comfortable, approached her for marriage, she could not resist it. She saw it as an opportunity to taste a good life for the first time. The mother who also saw it as a relief supported her.

Another case was that of Agbonma. She had polio as an infant which affected her legs. She managed to walk

but only with the support of a stick. Her disability coupled with the fact that she did not attend any school made her a ready candidate for surrogate marriage. No man looked her way. Therefore, when Okachi Okoro of Umueze 2 approached her for marriage she and her parents were excited. As at the time of our interview, Agbonma had lived with her female-husband (Okachi) for 8 years and had bore her 3 children, all boys. It was also revealed during fieldwork that some young girls may become the wife of older women out of sympathy. This was the case with Cecilia Amajoyi of Umuihim. According to her:

“One day my mother sent to the market to buy food items. I left home with N2000 to buy the items. When I got to the market, I discovered that the money was lost. I began to trace back my way hoping to find the money along the way. I was sobbing as I moved. Then, one woman riding on her white bicycle met me and asked what my problem was. I told her. She took me on her bicycle to the market. She bought all the items I was supposed to buy and handed them over to me. She also gave me N50 to buy whatever I needed. She told me to come to her house any time I needed anything. It was when I visited her that she told me that she had no child. As a result, I visited her every Saturday to assist her in domestic chores and sometimes in her farm. She was also assisting me in school and buying clothes for me. The 3 years later, she told me that she will like to marry me. I was confused. I did not say anything. I did not tell anyone but I stopped visiting her. About 2 weeks later, I heard that the woman was sick. Then, I went to see her. I helped her to wash her clothes, cook and tidied up her house. She managed to get up from her sick bed and knelt before me begging me to marry her or else she will not survive in her illness. I could not control my tears and I said yes to her request. When I told my parents, they objected but I stood my ground. Before they could stop me, I had packed to the woman’s house. It was later that she came to pay my bride price. No, I have no regret because the woman treated me like a queen. I have given her five boys and one girl. She saw all her children before she died 2 years ago”

Another way through which young girls marry female-husbands is through the deceit and concealment of the real suitors. This usually involved the girl’s

parents. In such case, a man is presented as the person who wants to marry the girl. If the girl agrees, her bride price would be paid by the female-husband without her knowledge. It is only when she gets to the husband's house that it would be revealed to her that her actual husband is a woman. However, the man earlier presented to her may be helping her to produce children for her female-husband. In some cases, the girl may flee but in most cases, the parents usually encourage their daughters to continue.

**Consequences of surrogate marriage:** Reasons have been adduced for the practice of surrogate marriages among the Igbo. In spite of the numerous merits and the arguments in favour of this type of marriage, it has been found to have a lot of consequences. Sometimes, the female-husbands may choose male partner who would be assisting their wives to produce children. It was revealed during fieldwork that most times, these wives do not have a single sexual partner. The major concern of their female-husbands is to have children. Therefore, they are free to have sexual intercourse with any man of their choice as far as they are able to produce children, particularly male children. This situation allows for Multiple Sexual Partners (MSP). And because they are seeking for children, they sleep with such men unprotected. This is actually an avenue for unbridled prostitution among young women who are wives to female-husbands. This practice in actual sense promotes the spread of HIV/AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) which is already a scourge among women in Africa. In other words, these wives of female-husbands are exposed to dangerous sexual habits which have serious health implications (Nwosu, 2011).

It was also found that the female-husbands have no sexual or romantic relationship with their wives. The wives get their sexual satisfaction from men, usually other women's husbands. The sexual alliance that such men have with the wives of female-husbands most times make these men not to take care of their own wives/children but they focus more attention on these wives of female-husbands. This leads to psychological trauma for the wives and children of such men. The wives of female-husbands use different strategies to attract and retain caring and wealthy men and are willing to drop them when they become stingy. This usually results to dislocation in the families of the co-opted men. In some cases where young bachelors are involved in this relationship with wives of female-husbands, the bachelors may be carried away with the relationship that they may not think of marrying their own wives. All his income may

be spent on the wife of a female-husband and her children. Such young men end up becoming nuisance and social misfits to the society.

Another major consequence of surrogate marriage is that there is no guarantee of permanence in the relationship, when compared to male-female marriages. Findings indicate that female-husbands do send away their wives for failing to give birth to a male child. There were also cases in which a young pregnant girl who married a female-husband flees from the marriage immediately she delivers her baby. Some returned to their parent's homes. This was the situation in the marriage between Akunna and her wife, Eucheria. However, Uchenna, the product of that marriage is still with Akunna. When Eucheria put to bed, 2 months later, she realized that she is still a young girl and abandoned her baby (boy) and went back to her parent's house. Every effort by her parents to bring her back to her female-husband failed. At last, she returned back to school. After her secondary education, she got married to a man from Umuezeala but she still visits her son, Uchenna.

Another issue that may result as was revealed during the study is that in some cases, the wives of female-husbands may pay more attention to their co-opted men than to their own children. This results in her children transferring their natural affection from their biological parent to a surrogate even when they are living in proximity to each other.

The study also revealed that sometimes when the children of this form of marriage grow up, they may attempt to dissuade their mothers from their sexual relationship with their co-opted men. Where the mother refused, this may lead to severe quarrel between such children and their mothers. Some may become rebellious to their mother's female-husbands as a means of registering their displeasure and the embarrassment they feel over the union, especially, for being victims of peer group ridicule. Even though the present study did not assess the depth of psychological trauma faced by such children, it is obvious that such relationship is indeed traumatic for the resultant children. Again, the absence of a real father-figure in surrogate marriage may make it possible for children of such marriage to develop deviant behaviours.

Surrogate marriage among the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria is a form of traditional marriage among the people. The implication of this is that the definition of marriage as a permanent relationship between a man and a woman can no longer hold. As a result, we would prefer to define marriage as a relationship established between a man or a woman with one or more spouses which offers a child



born to the man or woman under circumstances accepted by the society's rules of the relationship full birth-status rights obtainable in such society. This definition is believed to be comprehensive and inclusive because it covers various forms of marriages found in various parts of the contemporary world. This conceptualization is an attempt to address the confusion and imperfect understanding of woman-to-woman marriage that Krige (1974) mentioned.

The study has revealed that surrogate marriage has lasted for a long time in Igboland and is still being sustained till the present period. Data have shown that one of the major factors that encourage women to engage in surrogate marriage is infertility. This supports the view of Nwosu (2011) when he reported that the most frequently used option for infertile women when treatment for infertility fails is surrogate marriage. Several studies have explained the reasons why women engage in this type of marriage. Hasanpoor-Azgydy *et al.* (2015) in their study of Iranian women found that infertility leads to psychological and physical violence against women, instability and uncertainty for women as well as social isolation and alienation. It is as a result of this that Enache and Matei (2016) pointed out that the psychological experience of infertility is similar to the death of a beloved person or to a chronic disease diagnosis. The infertile women in this case go through several emotions associated with the mourning period, after diagnosis-denial, shock, fury, negotiation, depression and acceptance. With surrogate marriage, they go through the cycle of hope and possibly fulfillment. In their own study, Wiersema *et al.* (2006) noted that the consequences of infertility in developing countries range from economic hardship to social isolation, violence and denial of proper death rites. According to them, many families depend on children for economic survival especially in old age. The future of women depends on their children. Again, Hasanpoor-Azghdy *et al.* (2015) noted that the major causes of distress on infertile women are the social pressure by community members. With this continued pressure due to infertility in the absence of quality support from society, a number of infertile women may resort to some strategies to help them overcome their challenges (Fehintola *et al.*, 2017). One of such strategies among the Igbo is surrogate marriage. In other words, surrogate marriage has persisted in Igboland because of the presence of infertility and its devastating consequences against women. Therefore, infertile women always try to rekindle their hope by marrying young women who would beget children in their name.

Data have revealed that another major factor that has helped to sustain surrogate marriage in the study area is

the absence of male children in the family. In a patrilineal society like Igboland, inheritance is through the male and as such daughters do not inherit their father's property. In practice, having only daughters in a family is as much as having no child when it comes to inheritance. It also indicates the extinction of a man's lineage. In other words, when women could not get male children, they may be forced to marry other women in order to beget male children for their husband's families. This is why Elele (2018) posited that the birth of male children is still the source of pride and honour in Nigeria, while that of female children is seen as failure. It is on this basis that the wife of the female-husband is allowed to sleep with any man of her choice in order to produce children, particularly male children for the female-husband's family (Nwosu, 2011; Nyanungo, 2014).

Closely related with the issue of male child inheritance. Results show that inheritance among the Igbo is only through the male offspring. That is why Onyemelukwe reported that among the Igbo a widowed woman cannot take possession of her husband's land or belongings because she herself is part of his possession that needs to be inherited. "Can a property inherit another property?" Similarly, the girl-child in Igboland traditionally does not have inheritance right. Data supports the view of Awa and Udejah (2016) that the boy-child and girl-child in a traditional Igbo society are not treated equally because the girl-child is assumed to be in transit as she would eventually marry and thus lose all identities that make her a member of a certain family. And even in the case where a married woman returns to her father's house which is considered an abomination, she still does not have the same rights and privileges as her brothers or stepbrothers. However, this tradition of allowing only the male child to inherit property in Igbo society have been proved to contradict Section 42 (1a and 2) of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution (as amended).

Recently and perhaps to stop this age long discrimination, the Supreme Court, in a case filed by Mrs. Lois Chituru Ukeje (wife of the late Lazarus Ogbonna Ukeje) and their son, Enyinnaya Lazarus Ukeje against Mrs. Cladys Ada Ukeje (the deceased's daughter), voided the Igbo custom which forbid a female from inheriting her late father's estate, on the grounds that the practice is discriminatory and conflicts with Section 42 (1a and 2) of the 1999 Constitution. Expressing his views on the discriminatory practices and the Supreme Court ruling, Chief Michael Oditia of Ahiara, said this is not the first time Supreme Court would be ruling on Igbo customs and practices. He recalled that the court at a time repealed against Osu caste and high bride price in some communities, yet the practices still exist (Awa and

Udejah, 2016). Based on this fact that it is sometimes difficult to even implement the provisions of the constitution or the judgments of courts of the land, women in the area try to find a way to maneuver the customary laws and practices. One of these ways is by engaging in woman to woman marriage, not in the sense of same sex marriage but a woman using the name of a man to marry. The woman marries to have children and raise children for the late husband's family.

Therefore, the major factors that have sustained surrogate marriage are infertility, lack of male child, death of one's children and pattern of inheritance. Among the Igbo, a man's property belongs to his lineage. He only holds it in trust for the lineage. In the event of his death without a male child, such property falls into the hands of his kinsmen and not his wife or daughters. As a result, surrogate marriage is welcomed in Igboland because it a way that both men and women use to solve their social problems. This is also in line with the view of Nyanungo (2014) when he noted that among the Nandi people of Western Kenya older women marry younger women because they want an heir to inherit their name, wealth and property.

It was found from the study that there are some young girls who were in different difficult situations that bring stigmatization and/or make it impossible for men to marry them. This is why Cadigan (1998) noted that woman-to-woman marriage may also be beneficial to the other persons involved other than the female-husband. Similarly, Kapoor (2017) pointed out that the concern of most parents of disabled daughters is who could marry their disabled daughter. As a result, such parents simply resign to the fact that their daughters are their responsibility and will continue to live with them for the rest of their lives, thus, absolving themselves the need to find them a partner. On the other hand, such parents may lay down rules for who their disabled daughter can marry a person with a disability or someone who is willing to marry their disabled daughter as a compromise. It is on these bases that parents of disabled daughters agree for their daughters to marry older women. However, according to Kapoor (2017) while these situations may appear an ideal one in the minds of such parents, it takes away the decision of autonomy of the woman with disability. This does not only damage their sense of self but also takes away an essential element of their lives.

In other words, data have shown that disability of the girls is one of the factors that make the parents of disabled daughters and even the disabled girls to agree to marry older woman. This supports the view of SGR (2017) when it posited that many girls with disabilities face challenges of getting married and finding the right

spouse. As such marriage among the people with disabilities continues to be a social and humanitarian issue. Again, Anonymous (2017) went ahead to report that Jawaher Al-Hulaibi said that a disabled woman faces several obstacles when she wants to get married. Al-Hulaibi also advised any disabled woman who wants to get married to win her family's support because it only her family that will support her hundred percent and stand by her. The second thing is that she should choose a person who believes in her and understands her condition. It is as a result of this that most disabled girls go ahead to marry a fellow woman when their families propose the idea. Ideally, most of them may not wish to marry fellow women but they do so in order to continue to enjoy their parent's support and approval. Again, they enter into such marriages because the female-husbands already understood their plight and only wanted children from them and nothing more. On the contrary, male husband may want her to perform more duties other than child bearing and if as a result of her disability she could perform such duties, conflict may arise.

Another factor that was revealed to make younger women marry older women was poverty. It was found that some the girls were forced by abject poverty to marry fellow women. This is in line with the view of Glinski *et al.* when they posited that where poverty is acute, giving a daughter in marriage allows parents to reduce their burden and expenses: one less person to feed, clothe and educate. They also added that in cultures where economic transactions are integral to the marriage process, a bride-wealth is often a welcomed income for poor families. This view is also falls in line with the idea of Green (2014) when she pointed out that for a poor woman, deciding whether to get married or not will be a big part of shaping her economic future. As a result of this, there is a cognitive dissonance in Ehrenreich's straight-up dismissal of the economic benefits of marriage (Green, 2014). As such, it can be said that marriage has some economic benefits for the partners, especially in Africa as it forms a factor that helps to reduce poverty.

From the foregoing, it is believed that disabled girls are rescued from being perpetually unmarried through the process of surrogate marriage. In other words, surrogate marriage can be seen as a symbiotic relationship between the female-husbands and their wives in most cases. The wife helps the female-husband to get male children while the female-husband helps the girl to remove shame or stigma that is attached to unmarried pregnant ladies or disabled ladies who never married. This negates the views of Amadiume (1987) and Uchendu (2007) when they noted that women marry wives as a mark of wealth and for economic exploitation of their wives. In the study area,

there is no evidence to show that women marry wives just to show off their wealth. Again, female-husbands did not engage in surrogate marriage in order to economically exploit their wives. All female-husbands used for study had issues other than prestige or economic exploitation. The only thing noticed was that it is only those women who are economically buoyant that can afford to engage in woman-to-woman marriage. Their primary goal was not to display wealth or to exploit their wives as was feared by Lugard (1965). They were out to solve other social problems particularly, inheritance. In other words, the over-riding goal of surrogate marriage in Igboland is for women to have children through other women for the purpose of inheritance.

This study has also answered the question that earlier scholars like O'Brien raised concerning who the children resulting from surrogate marriage belong to. The study revealed that such children belonged to the person who paid the bride price of their mothers that is the female-husbands. Similarly, the children bear the names of the husbands of the female-husbands. Therefore, the children belong to the lineage of the husbands of the female-husbands and inherit their property. This supports the view of Samuels (2016) when he noted that the younger woman takes a male partner and potentially give birth to male heirs on behalf of the older woman. All the children of the younger woman then belong to her female-husband and her husband's family.

While the gains and reasons for engaging in surrogate marriage are obvious, the risk factors are also glaring. The study has shown that since the wives of the female-husbands are sometimes permitted to have sexual intercourse with any man of their choice, it is obvious that they have great chance of engaging multiple sexual partners. This makes surrogate marriage the easiest conduit for the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STDs. This supports the view of Globe Afrique when it noted that with multiple sexual partners, the risk of acquiring infectious diseases is high. In this case, the wife of the female-husband has sexual intercourse with her partner (s) unprotected because she actually wanted children. Even where she maintains a single partner, such a partner may have wife or other sexual partners. In either case, her health is highly compromised. Similarly, the results is in line with the position of Sherma (2016) which states that having more sexual partners leads to a greater risk of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) such as HIV/AIDS, other life threatening conditions like prostate cancer, cervical cancer and oral cancer. If the person has HPV (Human Papillomavirus), it can lead to cervical cancer oral or throat cancer. Data also agree with the position of World Health Organisation (WHO) when it pointed out

that those who have Multiple Sex Partners (MSP) possess a higher risk of HIV transmission than individuals that do not have multiple sex partners (Anonymous, 2015a, b; Exavery *et al.*, 2011). Generally, the result of the study did not depart from the position of scholars who agree that women with MSP increase risk of developing bacterial vaginosis, HIV/AIDS and other STIs (Teachman, 2003; LeMay, 2016; Whitbourne, 2013; Buddy, 2018).

Surrogate marriage may cause marital conflicts in the families of those men who are co-opted to help the young wives produce children. The trauma faced by the wives of such men as well as their children can only be imagined. This psychological trauma also extends to the children who result from this form of marriage as they sometimes face serious problems of identity and ridiculing from their peers. This is contrary to the findings of Ramrakha *et al.* (2013) when they reported from their cohort study that there was no relationship between number of sex partners and anxiety/depression. They did not assess different forms of MSP. The present study has shown clearly that a lot of conflict, anxiety and depression arise from multiple sexual partnerships which are the bedrock of surrogate marriage. These psychological problems do not affect only the wives of female-husbands. It extends to the men who are usually co-opted/their wives and children as well as children that result from this surrogate marriage arrangement.

## CONCLUSION

Generally, in spite of the deducible merits of surrogate marriage, its negative consequences are by far weightier. Beyond the fact that these young wives of female-husbands and their co-opted men and their spouses face serious health challenges and possibly avoidable death, the social costs of having children who do not belong to their biological father or even identify with him is enormous and also have genetic implications. Surrogate marriage can also be said to constitute an infringement on women rights and dignity by fellow women.

From demographic perspective, surrogate marriages are difficult to be included in social statistics because the marriage is never recorded at the marriage registry. Even the children of such relationship may have some difficulty in registering their birth. And this invariably affects the demographic permutations of any society.

The cumulative effects of all these identifiable demerits perhaps explained the reason why the practice of surrogate marriage should be discouraged. Its elimination will save human race from associated health, social and psychological problems.

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