

Prevalence, Benefits and Challenges of Commuter Marriage among Married Staff Members of Universities in South-East Nigeria

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Abstract

This study focused on commuter marriage. Specifically, it determined the prevalence of commuter marriage, its benefits and challenges among married members of staff of Universities in South-East Nigeria. Cross-sectional survey design was used for the study. Population was made up of 25,334 married members of staff of universities in South-East, Nigeria. Stratified random sample of 2310 was drawn from the population. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Internal consistency of the instrument was 0.82. Data were analyzed using means, standard deviation, frequencies and percentages. Findings show that there was a high prevalence (41.5%) of commuter marriage in universities in South-East, Nigeria. Seven benefits of commuter marriage were identified. These include building trust and commitment, feelings of independence and personal fulfillment; with mean (\bar{X}) values of 3.09, 2.96 and 2.60 respectively. Nine challenges in commuter marriage include, financial burden of maintaining two homes, impatience and trust issues as well as difficulties in maintaining job and life with mean (\bar{X}) values of 3.45, 3.09 and 2.71 respectively. Commuter marriage has variables that can affect family stability such as finances and sexual intimacy; therefore, couples should be aware of the benefits and challenges of commuter marriage and be mentally prepared before they decide to embark on commuter marriage.

Keywords: Marriage, Commuter, Prevalence, Benefits, Challenges, Spouse.

Introduction

Marriage is the union of a man and a woman, who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other which is naturally fulfilled by bearing and raising children together (Girgis, George & Anderson, 2011). It is a union of a man and a woman to become husband and wife. For a marriage to be

statutory in Nigeria, it must be permitted or recognized by law, it must be with the consent of both parents and the parties involved, and it must adhere to a prohibited degree of consanguinity and affinity (Kalau, 2018). Individuals get married for different reasons such as for companionship, emotional support, sexual fulfilment and childbearing,

financial purposes, to acquire status in the society as well as proof of adherent to societal norms (Kariuki, 2014). According to Kalau (2018), there are different types of marriage in Nigeria today and they include customary marriage, traditional marriage, religious marriage, and civil marriage also known as court marriage.

Ideally, in marriages, couples live together geographically and emotionally and settle down to childbearing and parenting while still progressing with their careers. However, married couples have not always lived together. Spouses have lived separately for a variety of reasons, including war, military service, immigration, the demands of traveling occupations (such as sales work, seasonal labor, and construction work), incarceration, institutionalization, and marital discord. One type of relationship between husband and wife that has emerged since the 1970s involves relatively well-educated professionals who live apart in service to their careers (Lindermann, 2017; Oakes & Brown, 2016). This type of marital relationship is referred to as commuter marriage.

Commuter marriage is a marriage which occurs when two spouses in a committed marriage live in separate houses but travel to be together when possible (Oakes & Brown, 2016). It is a type of marital lifestyle in which married couples decide voluntarily not stay together with each other, and is separated by a certain distance in order to meet the demands of their work or profession (Nastiti&Wismanto, 2017). The couples voluntarily establish a

second household and spend at least three nights each week in different residences. This type of marriage are usually characterized by one spouse being resident in the family home, often with work and child-care responsibilities, while the other spouse works and lives away from home for extended periods (Glotzer&Federlien, 2007; Nastiti&Wismanto, 2017).

The trend of commuter marriage in the whole world and especially in Nigeria showed that the incidence of commuter families is becoming more common. It is difficult to estimate the number of commuter families in Nigeria because there are no official figures available and the research in this area is scarce in Nigeria (Ortega, Abdulla &Roslan, 2014). International data available reveal that since 1999, the number of commuter couples in the United States has increased from 700,000 to over a million (Jackson, Brown& Patterson-Stewart, 2000); and about a million married couples have opted to become commuter families (Magnuson &Norem, 1999) and these figure increases every year. According to Glotzer and Federlein (2007), the lack in data on commuters has made them an invisible group despite the increase in the numbers of commuters and commuter families. As a result, commuters and their families are still not regarded as distinct group in many countries.

Nigeria is a country with an estimated population of 182 million (National Population Commission (NPC) of Nigeria, 2011). Nigeria is currently undergoing broad economic changes. With increased

industrialization, that began to occur on a large scale in the 1960s, many people have moved to larger cities in search of employment and have established a migrant work pattern—where the man will leave his family for a period of time to search for employment, and the woman will stay in the family home and attend to child-care responsibilities (Schvaneveldt, Young & Schvaneveldt, 2001). South-East is one of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria comprising of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states (Ibenegbu, 2018). It is one of the educationally advanced areas in Nigeria and a home to many educational institutions including universities (Nwankanma, 2010; Ibenegbu, 2018). These institutions constantly create employment opportunities for individual in their environs. For this reason, there is a rapid influx of women in the workforce in South-East Nigeria (Perry, 2015).

Traditionally in the South Eastern states of Nigeria, once a woman is married and has children, the expectation is that she stays at home and takes care of the children. This attitude is changing, however, because some women are involved in professional occupations and also choose to marry, have children, and maintain a career (Kumswa, 2018). Kumswa further noted that more often than not, the geographical locations of the work of these women do not coincide with that of their spouses. One spouse may be required to work in a city many miles from where the other spouse is required to work. Given the perceived benefits of such an employment, some couples decide to have two separate

living residences in order to maintain their careers and continue their marital relationship as well.

Studies have shown that there are many motivations and benefits for engaging in commuter marital relationships such as increased autonomy, career and educational achievement, less overall role strain, enhanced self-esteem and confidence, opportunities to develop self-identity and increase self-gratification (Anderson & Spruill, 1993; Bunker, *et al.*, 1992; Fulman, 1993; Jackson *et al.*, 2000; Magnuson and Norem, 1999; Rhodes, 2002). Other literatures on commuter marriage observed that commuter marriage affects the couples' quality of relationships among family member (Glotzer and Federlein 2007; Häfner 2011; Sahlstein 2006; Tarmuji *et al.*, 2016). This is because a family function is built to get happiness, peace, sharing the joys and sorrows, to help and complement each other. Unfortunately, some young couples have been compelled to live apart from the onset of marriage when they are expected to live together, share intimacy and building strong families. Thus, many people are married but remain strangers to each other. This is a serious threat to beginning families and family survival in many dimensions.

The drawbacks of living separately as a married couple as reported by researchers include feelings of loneliness and isolation, feelings of abandonment and guilt (especially parents), overall less satisfaction with life probably due to less emotional support on a day-to-day basis, and less satisfaction with partner and family

relationships compared to non-commuter couples (Jackson et. al., 2000; Landesman, 2013; Tarmuji et. al., 2016; Lee, 2018).

The trend of commuter marriage is now on the increase and has led to great concerns in relation to family stability. If this is allowed to progress, it is possible to experience more instability in families in the future. This is a challenge and there is need to remedy the situation or come up with coping strategies. This study therefore tries to ascertain the prevalence of commuter marriages in South-East Nigeria and identify the issues and challenges facing commuter couples with a view to finding solution to more stable and happier relationships in marriages.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the study was to ascertain prevalence, benefits and challenges of commuter marriage among married staff in universities in South-East Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined:

1. prevalence of commuter marriage among married staff in universities in South-East Nigeria;
2. benefits derived by couples practicing commuter marriages in universities South-East Nigeria and;
3. challenges encountered by couples practicing commuter marriages in universities in South-East Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the prevalence of commuter marriage among married staff in universities in South-East Nigeria?

2. What are the benefits derived by couples practicing commuter marriages in universities South-East Nigeria?
3. What are the challenges encountered by couples practicing commuter marriages in universities in South-East Nigeria?

Methodology

Design of the Study: The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study.

Area of the Study: This study was carried out in the South Eastern zone of Nigeria. South-East Nigeria is made up of five states namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states. The study was specifically carried out in the universities of South-East Nigeria. There are seventeen universities in South-East Nigeria made up of five federal universities, six state universities and six private universities.

Population of the Study: The population was made up of 25,334 married staff of universities in South East Nigeria. The distribution of the population is as follows: federal universities- 17,820, state universities- 6,360 and private universities- 1,154

Sample for the study: The sample size used for this study was 2,310 married staff of universities in South-East Nigeria. This was calculated using the formula by Daniel (1999). Simple random sampling technique and stratified random sampling technique were used for this study. The universities were stratified into Federal, State and Private universities. A total of six universities were selected from the strata for the study using simple

random sampling (ballot without replacement), selecting two universities from federal, state and private universities. Sample size was drawn for each stratum using stratified sampling technique. Thus, sample size of 1,635; 375 and 300 was drawn from federal, state and private universities respectively, making a total of 2,310 respondents for the study.

Instrument for Data Collection: questionnaire was used for data collection. It was designed to obtain quantitative data for the study. It was developed based on literature review and the research questions. It was validated by three University lecturers who are experts in Family Living. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient index was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. This result yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.85.

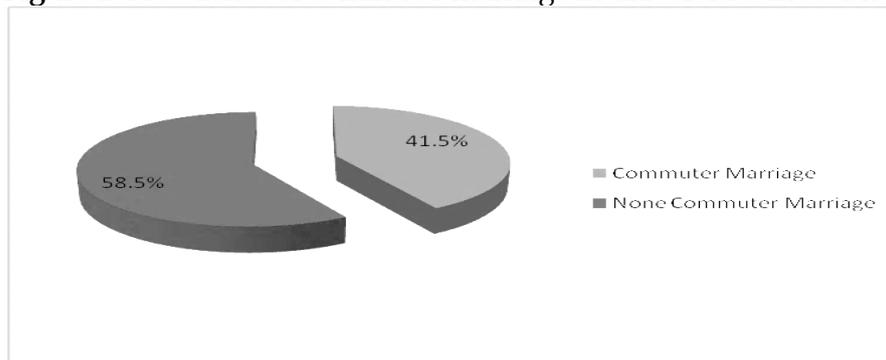
Method of Data Collection: A total of 2,310 copies of the questionnaire were distributed by hand to the respondents, with the help of research assistants. Only 2,218 copies were properly completed and returned. This represents 96.0% return.

Method of Data Analysis: Data on prevalence of commuter marriage (specific purpose 1) were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. Data on benefits and challenges of commuter marriage (specific purpose 2 and 3) were analyzed using means and standard deviation. Any item with a mean equal to 2.50 and above were accepted as agreed while means below 2.50 were regarded as disagreed based on the four-point rating scale.

Results

Prevalence of commuter marriage among married members of staff of universities in South-East Nigeria

Figure 1: Prevalence of commuter marriage in universities in South-East Nigeria.



Data analysis shows a prevalence of 41.5 percent of married members of university staff in South-East Nigeria were in commuter marriage.

Benefits derived by couples practicing commuter marriages

Table 1: The Benefits Derived by Couples Practicing Commuter Marriage.

Benefits of Commuter Marriage	\bar{X}	S. D	Remark
1. I feel independent	3.0	0.74	Agree
2. Enhances communication skill	2.3	0.61	Disagree
3. Enhanced self-esteem and confidence	2.4	0.89	Disagree
4. Improved relationship with children	2.7	0.86	Agree
5. Good financial stability	2.6	0.62	Agree
6. Personal fulfillment	2.6	0.61	Agree
7. Intense emotional intimacy	2.6	0.57	Agree
8. Lower anxiety and depression	2.4	0.57	Disagree
9. Building trust and commitment	3.0	0.72	Agree
10. Valuing our time together more	2.8	0.86	Agree

\bar{X} = Mean; S.D. = Standard deviation

Table 1 shows the mean ratings of the responses of married staff on the benefits they derive from practicing commuter marriage. Items 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10 were rated above the cut-off point value of 2.50 on a four-point rating scale while items 2, 3, 8 were rated below the cut-off value. This indicates that most married staff agree that there are some benefits which they derive from commuter marriage and they include feelings of independent (3.0),

building trust and commitment (3.0) valuing time spent together (2.8), improved relationship with children (2.7), personal fulfillment (2.6), good financial stability (2.6) and intense emotional intimacy (2.6). Generally, these respondents agree that there are benefits gotten from practicing commuter marriage (2.6).

Challenges encountered by couples practicing commuter marriages

Table 2: The Challenges Couples Running Commuter Marriage Encountered in South-East Nigeria.

S/N	Challenges of Commuter Marriage	\bar{X}	S. D	Remark
1.	Decreased sexual intimacy	2.8	1.21	Agree
2.	Impatience and trust issues	3.1	0.86	Agree
3.	Increased financial burden of maintaining two homes	3.4	0.57	Agree
4.	Increased anxiety and depression	3.0	1.16	Agree
5.	Loneliness and fear of growing apart	2.9	0.57	Agree
6.	Non-involvement in children's lives	2.5	0.92	Agree
7.	Stress from daily decision making	2.5	0.91	Agree
8.	Difficulties in maintaining family and job life	2.7	0.94	Agree
9.	Lack of communication	2.6	0.63	Agree
10.	Frequent conflict	2.1	0.86	Disagree

\bar{X} = Mean; S.D. = Standard deviation

Table 2 shows the mean ratings of the responses on the challenges facing

commuter couples in universities. The result shows that the challenges faced

by couples practicing commuter marriage include financial burden of maintaining two homes ($\bar{x} = 3.4$), impatience and trust issues ($\bar{x} = 3.1$), increased anxiety and depression ($\bar{x} = 3.0$), loneliness and fear of growing apart ($\bar{x} = 2.9$) and decreased sexual intimacy ($\bar{x} = 2.8$) amongst others.

Discussion

The results of this study revealed a 41.5% prevalence of commuter marriage among the respondents. This is considered a high prevalence and could be attributed to the increased number of dual earner couples in the modern society. This finding is similar to the findings of Schvaneveldt *et. al.* (2001) who reported that 41% of married couples in Thailand were in commuter marriage. Jackson *et. al.* (2000), reported that the prevalence of commuter marriages in United States increased from 39% in 1970 to 61% 1993 and attributed it to the increase in the proportion of women in the workforce. This suggests that the number of couples living apart for the sake of their jobs is expected to be on a steady rise as more women join the workforce and earn a living.

This study has identified several benefits commuter couples derive while in commuter marriage. The identified benefits include feelings of independence, personal fulfillment, good financial stability, intense emotional intimacy as well as building trust and commitment. These items identified are in line with reports by Jackson *et al.*, (2000), Oakes and Brown (2016) and Ortega *et. al.* (2014). These authors agree that through personal

fulfillment, an essential part of the commuter couples were been expressed. The significant factor in experiencing greater personal fulfillment was furthering one's education and obtaining a position that matched the individual's knowledge and skill. Thus, prospects in employment required some individuals to commute to obtain the personal fulfilment that they desired.

Furthermore, in line with Ortega *et. al.*, (2014) and Oakes and Brown (2016), couples more intentionally engage in activities and behaviors that demonstrated love, respect, trust and appreciation for each other. Respondents also noted that time spent with each other had increased in its purposefulness and importance due to the limited time they had with each other. Couples who had lived the commuter lifestyle longer believed that their appreciation of each other had grown stronger over the years and have the impression that commuting helped in this growth.

The challenges faced by commuter couples include difficulty in maintaining family and job life, loneliness and fear of growing apart, increased financial burden of maintaining two homes, increased anxiety and depression as well as impatience and trust issues. These challenges have contributed to the negative perception of this lifestyle. Wismanto and Nastiti (2017) stated that commuter couples face difficulties in bearing the family alone, suffer stress from daily decision making and have difficulties in maintaining family and job life. This is because roles and responsibilities are much heavier in

commuter marriages and couples do not face these together unlike couples who live together. Again, Jackson et. al. (2000), in line with the findings of the study, revealed that the feelings of loneliness and fear of growing apart manifests during the absence of the commuter partner whenever the family needs them and they are not there. Thus, husbands and wives have come to experience the other's presence as anomalous. Swastiningsih (2014) also reported that loneliness opens the possibility for interest in people other than their partners. Furthermore, researches by Glotzer and Federlein (2007) and Tarmuji *et. al.* (2016) supports the findings of this study as they reveal that commuter couples are weighed down by the financial cost of maintaining two homes. This is because the employers of these couples do not support everything they spend to live away from home. These couples spend monthly earning on cost of living, travel, utility, maintenance of two residences and other miscellaneous expenses. This however tends to defeat the aim of being financially stable which is one of the reasons stated in this study for embarking on commuter marriage.

In addition, Rhodes (2002), in line with the findings of this study, reported that commuter marriage increases anxiety, depression, and impatience and mistrust in marital relationship. This is because when couple maintains a schedule that keeps them apart for more than a month at intervals, they begin to develop separate worlds, fall out of touch with each other and their relationship might no longer provide security and stability for their lives. The

couples are also more likely to imagine unrealistic expectations and fantasies about their time together. These expectations results in disappointment, frustration and resentment. These issues have a negative effect on the relationship between the husband and wife in commuter marriage and thus increase the risk of separation and divorce in the society.

Conclusion

Commuter marriage seems to be a common phenomenon in universities in South-East Nigeria due to work obligations which force the couple to be away from each other for weeks. From this study, it can be concluded that there is a high prevalence of commuter marriage among staff of universities in South-East Nigeria and the trend is expected to continue to be on the increase. The marital life style comes with various benefits which include feelings of independence, personal fulfillment, building trust and commitment as well as intense sexual intimacy. It is also associated with various challenges which could thwart the purpose of marriage if not properly handled.

Recommendations

Following the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- ❖ Couples should be aware of the benefits and challenges of commuter marriage and be mentally prepared before they decide to embark on commuter marriage. This is to ensure that the couples enjoy their marriage and have a better quality of life with their family.

- ❖ Further research is recommended to determine the impact of commuter marriage on marital satisfaction as well as on family relationships in Nigeria by comparing the lives of commuter couples with that of non-commuter couples.

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