

**PREVALENCE, DETERMINANTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF SPINSTERHOOD  
IN LAGOS, NIGERIA**

**BY**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the study

Two dominant features of Nigerian nuptiality are early and universal marriage. The most recent Nigeria's Demographic and Health Survey conducted in 2008 shows that 29.4 percent of Nigerian women age 15-19 are married, and 94.2 percent are married by age 30-34 (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009). Marriage remains the important marker of adult status in Nigeria (Smith, 2007; Agbasiere, 2000; Uchendu, 1965). Prolonged non marriage is essentially disapproved in any Nigerian setting, and permanent non marriage for women has no place in Nigeria's socio-cultural system, except for women who are religious celibates or espoused to "spirits" as priestesses (Ezumah, 2008; Otite, 2006; Agbasiere, 2000; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994a). Every woman is expected to marry and remain married all her life. Women derive their status basically from their dyadic roles of wife and mother. A study among the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria, for instance, observed that "a girl's life is essentially a preparation for marriage ... a woman's glory is her children, and to have children, she must have a husband" (Uchendu, 1965:53).

Nevertheless, changes that are transforming this characteristic nuptial behaviour have continued to take place at both the macro and micro levels. The process of modernisation has brought about increase in female age at first marriage among certain socio-cultural groups in Nigeria (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000). Selection of spouse is transforming from the traditional pattern built around kinship and communal goals to more individualistic pattern based on love and self selection (Smith, 2007), especially for educated and urban women. These and other modern trends have led to the emergence of an increasing number of women who, by choice or constraint, remain unmarried till later age. Though the number of these older never married women or spinsters is relatively low, they constitute a special category of women whose experience of singlehood differs qualitatively from the experience of other single women such as widows, separated, divorced and younger never married women (Ferguson, 2000). Furthermore, given the continued onslaught of social change, it is not unexpected that the number of spinsters will continue to increase in Nigeria.

In contemporary usage, spinsterhood describes older never married women, who are past conventional age for marriage. Conventional age for marriage varies across cultures and socio-economic classes. Nonetheless, because most women marry for the first time in their 20s, many demographers and family scholars use the age marker of 30 or 35 years to distinguish younger never married women from spinsters (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009;

Macvarish, 2006; Byrne 2003; Simpson, 2003; Ferguson, 2000). In societies where marriage is strongly associated with motherhood, marriage after age 30, which is the upper limit of the most fecund years, for women, is considered late.

In Nigeria, female median age at first marriage (the age at which one half of the women have married) is 18.6 years (NPC and ICP Macro, 2009), and female singulate mean age at marriage (the mean number of years spent in single state among women ultimately marrying) is 21 years (UN Statistics, 2009). Marriage for females is almost complete at age 30 for most ethnic groups in Nigeria (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000; NPC, 2009). Though any woman may marry at any stage in life, it is considered that at age 30, reasonable pressure for marriage would begin for any woman in any Nigerian setting, considering that pro marriage and family ideology, and traditional patriarchal structures are still prevalent. On the basis of the above, spinsterhood in this study is limited to heterosexual, childless and non cohabiting never married women, age 30 and above. This excludes never married women who are not married due to obvious physical handicap such as the lame or blind and those whose lifestyle preclude marriage such as Catholic reverend sisters and lay celibates.

From the literature, it is evident that the number of spinsters is increasing in many countries, especially among urban based highly educated and economically independent women (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009; Tanturri and Mencarini, 2008; Koropecykj-Cox and Call, 2007; Berg-Cross, et al., 2004; Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000). The location for this study is Lagos, Nigeria. Lagos is home to over 9 million Nigerians from various ethnic groups. It is the largest economy of Nigeria and therefore attracts job seekers from all parts of Nigeria. Female resistance to marriage is known to increase as other life opportunities become available such as higher education and career (Ferguson, 2000; Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000). Urban centres, such as Lagos, provide such opportunities due to their higher economic development, educational opportunities and social transformation; and rate of delay in marriage is known to be higher in such centres (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000).

Most Nigerian societies are typically patriarchal with persistent beliefs that perpetrate unequal treatment of women (Ezumah, 2008; Isiugo-Abanihe and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2007; FGNa National Gender Policy, 2006; Akpan, 2003; Okunna, 2002; Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000; Aina, 1998; Okojie, 1998). Despite legislations to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, studies show that gender inequality and stereotypes are still widespread in Nigeria (The Nigerian CEDAW NGO Coalition Report, 2008; Isiugo-Abanihe and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2007; Akpan 2003; Aina, 1998). The stereotypes and inequality are continuously reinforced by “agents of socialisation such as family, schools, religious institutions, and the

media which have become custodians as well as disseminators of gender roles, stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory cultures. ... and the patriarchal structure has become the unquestionable phenomenon” (The Nigerian CEDAW NGO Coalition report, 2008:23).

Due to the existing patriarchal structures in most Nigerian societies, which also promote marriage and family ideology, every woman is expected to marry (Akpan, 2003; Agbasiere, 2000; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994a). Remaining unmarried beyond a certain age is seen as negating the norms of femininity. Thus, spinsters are a marginalized and stigmatized category of women. As a marginalized group in the Nigerian society, a woman is confronted with more obstacles outside of marriage. Yet, there are a growing number of spinsters in the Nigerian society. Although the society has encouraged status enhancement for women through education and engagement in the workforce, the cultural milieu that still encourages early marriage and traditional mate selection denies many women the opportunity to marry on their own terms. Remaining unmarried by constraint or choice places such women on the fringe of life. Their reasons for non marriage and life style are often misinterpreted. Through direct inquiry from spinsters of diverse socio-economic background, this study examined the prevalence, causes and consequences of spinsterhood in Lagos using Sylvia Walby’s Theorizing Patriarchy, Barrett and McIntosh Anti-social family and aspects of Giddens’ Structuration theory on modernisation. This study contributes to existing literature on cross-cultural understanding of singlehood and nuptiality.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Spinsterhood is increasingly becoming a social reality in many societies. Albeit, it has been an essential part of the Western Europe Marriage Pattern; by 1946, Ireland for instance, had 26.3 percent of its women age 45 to 49 still single (Engelen and Kok, 2003; Hajnal, 1971). Research in developed as well as developing nations show that marriage rates are declining (DHS, 2011; Tanturri and Mencarini, 2008; Hertel, et al., 2007; UN Population Division, 2003; Ferguson, 2000) and “more and more people are spending longer periods of their lives outside the conventional family life” (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004:127). Median age at first marriage and singulate mean age at marriage for women are on the rising trend in most countries of the world (DHS, 2011; UN Statistics, 2009; UN Population Division, 2003). Secondary data from Nigeria’s population census and Demographic and Health Surveys show a rising trend in spinsterhood in Nigeria. Empirical studies in Nigeria indicate a change in the value and pattern of marriage that is likely to increase the prevalence of spinsterhood with time (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000, 1998; WaKaranja, 1987). This demographic shift away from traditional heterosexual early marriage pattern which is known to be more

prevalent among urban-based women (Berg-Cross et al., 2004; Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000), constitutes an obvious problem with consequences for nuptiality pattern, fertility levels, the social and economic well being of spinsters especially where marriage and family is still a cherished tradition (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000).

Spinsterhood or permanent non marriage is often not the deliberate choice of most women (Simpson, 2007; Byrne, 2003). Women who claim it is their deliberate choice were constrained to it by certain experiences. Research and interviews with single persons in some developed countries revealed that even those who are single by choice did not set out to be single (Burghes and Brown, 1995 in Haralambos and Holborn, 2008) Also, considering the perceived benefits of marriage (Simon, 2002; Waite and Gallagher, 2000; Waite, 1995; O'Neill, 2009), it remains a germane and interesting research question to understand the reasons why any woman postpones marriage or chooses non marriage. Scholars have attributed this shift away from the traditional pattern of early and universal marriage to demographic factors such as marriage squeeze, higher male age at marriage and reduced mortality. Non demographic determinants have also been identified such as expanded educational and work opportunities for women, economic decline, individualism, urbanisation, migration and a number of other socio-cultural factors. Nevertheless, only few of these studies (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009; El-Halawany, 2009) have examined the causes and consequences of spinsterhood in a developing society where elements of modernity exist alongside traditional patriarchal structures and strong marriage and family ideology. Women in such societies are caught in a web where modernisation offers them opportunities for personal enhancement whereas slow to change patriarchal structures and pervasive marriage and family ideology constrain some of them to involuntary and voluntary spinsterhood. This study examined the factors that result in spinsterhood in Lagos, a typical developing society where elements of modernism exist side by side with traditional patriarchal structures and pro-marriage ideologies.

Some positive attributions have been associated with spinsterhood. Malthusian theory of population proposes deliberate adoption of spinsterhood as one of the means of controlling rapid population growth. Davis (1963), in his multiphasic response theory, does not think spinsterhood has to be a deliberate state policy. To him, spinsterhood is a natural response of humans to sustained population growth caused by success in controlling mortality. Other studies that have established link between nuptiality pattern and fertility confirm the usefulness of spinsterhood in creating a minus effect on fertility especially if there is continence and use of contraceptives (Caldwell, 2001; Pollak and Watkins, 1993). A few

other studies found spinsterhood beneficial to enhancing the status of women in career and wage growth (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009; Loughraan and Zissimopoulos, 2004; Oderinde, 2002). In spite of this positive portrayal, singleness is still not an affirmative status especially for women who did not set out to be single. Widespread ideology of marriage and family creates an environment where those who for whatever reasons, find themselves outside marriage feel out of place, like dry and unwanted trees (Byrne, 2003; Barrett and McIntosh, 1998; Holy Bible Isaiah 56:3, 1994). Construction of an affirmative self identity is problematic for such women due to pervasive social stigmatisation of late and non marriage (Byrne, 2008, 2003, 2000; Hertel et al., 2007; Simpson, 2007, 2006, 2003; Macvarish 2006; Byrne and Carr, 2005; Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003; Sandfield and Percy, 2003).

Traditional patriarchal structures promote marriage and family ideology that expects every woman to marry (Byrne, 2008, 2003, 2000; Hertel et al., 2007; Simpson, 2007, 2006, 2003; Macvarish 2006; Byrne and Carr, 2005; Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003; Sandfield and Percy, 2003). The marriage completion rate of 30 to 35 years in Nigeria and female median age at first marriage of 18.6 years are strong indications that marriage and family ideology is still deeply entrenched in any Nigerian society. Marriage is seen as the norm and nobody questions it. Conformity to the ideology of marriage and family is rewarded with “economic, cultural, and symbolic privileges” (Byrne and Carr, 2005; Bourdieu, 1996:23). Women who for reasons of constraint or choice find themselves outside marriage at an older age face serious challenges. They are seen as failures and treated with disdain; they are considered irresponsible and reminded often to go and marry and have children (Obiefuna, 2011; Oderinde, 2002). Their life style is often seen as defying the norms of marriage and motherhood (Otite, 2006; Agbasiere, 2000). Traditionally, in Nigeria, a woman is accorded status on the basis of marriage and motherhood (Taylor, 2002; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1998; Aina, 1998). She is considered a guest in her father’s house who will soon go. If she does not go at a certain expected age, she becomes an enigma. This and other deeply entrenched pro family customs have persisted in spite of modernisation. Thus, being a spinster has continued to be a marginal position for any woman. It is fraught with the conflicts of liberty of individualism and the stigma of being unlike the other woman and being called a man. Not being married is considered their fault and failure. Unfair negative labels such as unmarriageable, prostitutes, bad character, unattractive, which is usually based on the perceptions and opinion of men and married women, are associated with spinsters. These make life even more difficult for spinsters and affect them in diverse ways. There is need to correct such labels against spinsters, not all spinsters are unmarriageable, dried up, frustrated, or women of bad

character. Research shows that most spinsters are women of high values, who could not compromise their values (Hertz, 2006; Byrne, 2003; Bock, 2000; Berend, 2000).

The privileging of marriage over singleness is problematic. It underscores a definition of womanhood that is dysfunctional. Women are not always wives and mothers; by fate, choice or constraint some women remain permanently single. Thus, being single is an identity that should not be inferior to marriage. Always single women should have a right to live free of discrimination of any form. This study investigated the effects of spinsterhood on spinsters and how spinsters cope with the challenges associated with their civil status. The research aimed to present an objective and empirical perspective on spinsterhood through a direct inquiry from spinsters, considering that “the best way to understand the meaning of being single is through the experiences of the singles themselves” (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009).

In spite of the increasing number of spinsters, this category of women has remained obscured in demographic and sociological studies especially in developing societies. This dearth of research on spinsterhood is probably due to pervasive pro marriage cultures, relatively low proportion of spinsters and because many researchers view spinsterhood as a passing state. Yet, experiences of different categories of women should be investigated for a full picture of the social world to be constructed (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). This study contributes to fill this gap in literature on singlehood, especially in Nigeria, where the fact of spinsterhood in its actual prevalence, determinants and consequences are virtually unknown through scholarly research. What is known about the phenomenon in Lagos, for instance, are largely deductions from related studies on female age at first marriage, polygyny, and marriage.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The issues raised above elicited questions for scholarly investigation. The questions are fragmented into the following:

1. How common is spinsterhood in Lagos?
2. Why do women postpone marriage beyond age 30 or not marry at all?
3. What are the social and economic consequences of spinsterhood on spinsters?
4. What mechanisms do spinsters employ to cope with the challenges of spinsterhood?

### **1.4 Research objectives**

The general objective of this study was to examine the prevalence, determinants, social and economic consequences of spinsterhood in a typical developing society within the context of traditional patriarchal system and strong marriage and family ideology.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the prevalence of spinsterhood in Lagos within the larger Nigerian context.
2. Investigate the factors determining the prevailing level of spinsterhood in Lagos.
3. Explore the social and economic consequences of spinsterhood on spinsters.
4. Investigate how older never married women cope with spinsterhood in a typical developing society with traditional patriarchal structures and pervasive marriage and family ideology.

### **1.5 Justification of the study**

This study on the prevalence, determinants and consequences of spinsterhood is of scholarly, demographic and practical importance.

Conceptually, there is a lack of consensus in explaining the causes and consequences of spinsterhood. Most definitions and explanations of spinsterhood phenomenon are characterised by stereotypes borne out of heterosexual cultural perspectives. Many scholars view spinsterhood as a temporary state hence there is something pathological about remaining in it for too long. Thus, spinsterhood is often interpreted as the failure or fault of the spinster. On the contrary, this study investigated spinsterhood as a marital status that is not inferior to marriage. Spinsterhood phenomenon was interpreted as a behaviour that is structurally linked to individual preferences and the prevailing social and cultural milieu.

Theoretically, this study is an attempt to construct and explain the determinants and consequences of spinsterhood in a context of modernity, patriarchy and anti social family ideology. The study proposed that the prevalence, causes and consequences of spinsterhood in a developing society will be better understood if viewed in the context of social transformation and culture lag.

The main preoccupation of sociology is to understand how and why one group of people differs in behaviour from another. Spinsters constitute a category of women whose experiences and lifestyle differ from those of other women. These older never married women have experiences that provide the much needed indication on actual reasons for marital postponement and non marriage. Also, they are more likely to experience the stigma associated with non marriage. A direct inquiry from spinsters provides useful insights on non marriage as a social phenomenon. Due to the widespread assumption that every woman should marry, spinsters have remained invisible and one of the least studied groups in sociology and demography. This study contributes to fill this gap in the research literature on spinsterhood particularly in Nigeria. In addition, the study provided an opportunity for never

married women to express their reasons for non marriage and experiences. Spinsterhood is shrouded in a culture of shame and misfortune, so, it is a phenomenon that is hardly subjected to positive and free discussion. Byrne (2008:40) argued that:

Silencing of singleness talk limits the opportunity for women to explore the narratives in public and private use. For example, women struggle with the conflict between woman identity as defined by ideologies and practices of familism and single identity based on experiential knowledge of the individual benefits and challenges of singleness.

The result of this investigation on spinsterhood, directly from spinsters, is useful for transforming the traditional negative construct of spinsters as old maids, deviants, independent, and unmarriageable. This study provided an apt opportunity to understand spinsterhood from the perspective of spinsters; an empirical framework for the much needed understanding of womanhood, and for more effective policies concerning women. A woman is not always a wife, some women remain permanently single; and womanhood is not totally akin to marriage and motherhood. The construction of womanhood as wife and mother only has restricted the expression of women's potentials over the years. Women's potentials and talents are often directed to bearing and rearing of children and pleasing men in domestic and public spheres. The result of this study raises women's consciousness to a feminist level - a level of consciousness that builds and promotes self-esteem and encourages a demonstration of inner strength in words and action.

Changes in marriage are a "ready barometer" of change in society (Goodkind 1996: p.718 cited in Coast, 2006). Spinsterhood is a shift away from the traditional culture of early and universal marriage. Therefore, understanding the prevalence, causes and consequences of spinsterhood in Lagos provided a necessary indication of what is happening to marriage, not only in Lagos but in Nigeria as a whole, considering that Lagos is the largest concentration of the multiple ethnic groups of Nigeria. This study therefore, added to the much needed substantive knowledge of nuptiality patterns which is relevant for more effective population policies. Marriage patterns play significant roles in determining fertility and population growth rates especially in non or low contracepting populations (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000). If more women are going into spinsterhood, it gives an indication that marital fertility will be lowered. It also provides an indication on the incidence of permanent non marriage which is also consequential for overall fertility rate especially if the spinsters remain childless. Increasing spinsterhood might be an indication of the Malthusian transition in which later marriage and moderately widespread spinsterhood replaced early and universal marriage.

“Good social science is a better guide to social policy than uninformed opinion or prejudice” (O’Neill, 2009:2). Identifying the determinants of spinsterhood provides useful insight into what relevant social and economic programmes to strengthen in order to reduce the incidence of early marriage across Nigeria. Understanding the forms of stigmatisation against spinsters and other challenges of spinsterhood in Lagos is relevant for policy formulations especially on issues of elimination of discrimination against women, gender equality and equity, and inheritance laws. The multi ethnic nature of Lagos makes any study in that location a relevant indication for trends to expect in the entire country.

Spinsters’ coping mechanisms is relevant to the understanding of family forms to expect in the future. If more spinsters are adopting the option of single motherhood, it means more households will be headed by mothers only, a phenomenon that research associates with poverty (Lamanna and Riedmann, 2003; Buvnic, et al., 1992). The result of this study is useful in establishing effective legislations on poverty alleviation and adoption.

Finally, this study is useful to stimulate more research interest in the lifestyle and experiences of spinsters in Nigeria.

### **1.6 Conceptual clarification**

**Spinsterhood:** Spinsterhood is conceptualised in this study based on Byrne’s (2003, 2000) four definitional criteria of singleness as never married, over 30 years of age, not cohabiting, and childless. The word “spinsterhood” is preferred to “singlehood” to distinguish the target population for this study from other single women (younger never married women, widows, divorced and separated women). It should be noted that the use of spinsterhood in this study is purely to portray the challenges of remaining single beyond age 30 in a Nigerian society. The singles in this study are by no means associated with such negative connotations of spinsterhood as being ugly, dried up, unmarriageable, bitter et cetera. The subjects in this study are women of good virtue, responsible and well cultured. Being currently a spinster does not fore close the possibility of marriage in future.

**Categories of single women:** Stein (1981 cited in Lamanna and Riedmann, 2003) categorised the heterogeneous population of singles into four, according to whether their singlehood is voluntary or involuntary, stable or temporary. This study adopted the following definitions based on the study context.

1. Voluntary Stable Singles: These are single women who choose to be single and are satisfied to have never married.

2. Involuntary Temporary Single. These are singles who would like and expect to marry but have not found a suitable partner. These include older persons who did not want to marry previously but now want to marry.

4. Involuntary Stable Singles. These are older never married persons who want to marry but have not found a mate, and have come to accept their state as a probable life situation.

**Marital instability:** Marital instability refers to a breakdown in communication between a couple resulting in steady arguments, verbal and physical violence, psychological ill health, emotional and physical separation and sometimes divorce.

**Familism:** “Familism is the ideology in which the marital family is treated as a social, cultural, political, economic and affective unit” (Byrne, 2003:2). Familism promotes the pervasive impression that heterosexual marriage and motherhood are the ultimate marks of success in a woman’s life.

**Patriarchy:** Patriarchy is a system of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex, whereby the father is the head of the family and men have authority over women and children. Men are provided material and relational advantages in the home whereas constraints are placed on the roles and activities of women. Men and masculine qualities are valued more highly than women and feminine qualities. Patrilineal descent and patrilocality are the rule in patriarchy. (Akpan, 2003; Aina, 1998; Walby, 1989)

**Marriage and family ideology:** This refers to the widespread acceptance of heterosexual marriage and family life as the norm. It is the belief that everybody wants to and will marry, which makes life outside the normative structure unsatisfactory.

**Singlism:** This is a term used by DePaulo and Morris (2005) to describe anti-singles sentiments. Due to widespread marriage and family ideology, single adults are targets of negative stereotypes, interpersonal rejection, economic disadvantage and discrimination.

**Culture lag:** Culture lag refers to a condition where one element of a culture or society changes more quickly than another. For instance, changes at the macro social and economic levels encourage singlehood, nonetheless the cultural ideals that elevate marriage as the ideal state is changing but at a slower pace. (Byrne and Carr, 2005).

**Outside wife:** This is a term used to describe the new form of de facto polygyny whereby a man legally marries one wife but forms an informal union with one or more women. The informal union is usually kept secret and in some cases a man keeps such outside wife with the consent of his extended relatives. Children born from such union are taken care of by the man (Mann 1994; Guyer 1994; WaKaranja, 1987).

**Poverty:** The United Nations defines poverty as:

a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation (UN Statement, June 1998 cited in Gordon, 2005:4)

In general, poverty is usually defined in absolute terms of living below a minimum income level of US\$2 or US\$1.25 per day, called poverty line.

### **1.7 Conclusion**

This chapter portrays older never married women as a marginal category in a typical patriarchal society with norms and values that favour marriage. Spinsters are thus a distinct category whose lifestyle and experiences deserve scholastic and practical attention. Hence, this study examined the prevalence of spinsterhood, the determining factors, and effects of remaining unmarried till later age in the most urbanised Nigerian state; and how spinsters cope with the challenges of the single status. Some of the key concepts in the study have also been defined. In the next chapter, existing literature on the prevalence, determinants and consequences of spinsterhood is reviewed. The theoretical framework to explain spinsterhood phenomenon in the Nigerian context is also presented.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Sociologists, demographers, family and women scholars have conducted several studies on singlehood particularly in developed societies. This section reviews some of the literature relevant to understanding the prevalence, determinants and consequences of spinsterhood in Lagos. The review is presented thematically. The theoretical underpinning of the study, as well as the conceptual framework is also presented.

#### **2.2 PREVALENCE OF SPINSTERHOOD**

Spinsterhood has probably existed as long as human history. In Western Europe, for instance, high prevalence of permanent celibacy and high age at first marriage has been the two distinguishing features of Western Europe Marriage Pattern (Engelen and Kok, 2003; Hajnal, 1971). Due to the predominant norms of marriage, the unique experiences and interesting lives of spinsters have not been documented as well as other aspects of family life. Nevertheless, the trend in spinsterhood has continued to rise in almost all countries including those known for conservative marriage cultures.

The rising trend in spinsterhood is evidenced by the rising age at first marriage in most developed and developing countries (DHS, 2011; Koropecj-Cox and Call, 2007; Loghran and Zissimopoulos, 2004; UN Population Division, 2003). Median and singulate mean ages at first marriage are also on the increasing trend (DHS, 2011; UN Statistics, 2009; NPC and ICF Macro, 2009). Female median age at first marriage in the United States has been rising steadily since the 1960s. In 1960 it was 20.3 years, by 2005 it has risen to 25.3 years (US Census Bureau, 2006). In Nigeria, median age at first marriage for women age 20 to 49 increased from 17.2 in 2003 to 18.6 in 2008 (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009). In the south west of Nigeria where Lagos is located, median age at marriage for women age 25 to 49 increased from 21.3 in 2003 to 21.8 in 2008. Female singulate mean age at marriage for Nigeria increased from 18.5 in 1981 to 20.4 in 1991 and 21 in 2003 (UN Statistics, 2009; Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000). SMAM as calculated in Isiugo-Abanihe (2000) shows 21.72 for women in urban areas, 22.19 for women of Yoruba origin, 22.97 for Igbo and 19.84 for other ethnic groups. These SMAM for women of Yoruba and Igbo origins are based on 1990 and

1991 data. Their SMAM then is higher than the 2003 national figure of 21. This is an indication that Lagos may currently be home for larger number of spinsters than recorded.

Though a higher percentage of people still enter into heterosexual formal marriage, marriage rates have continued to decline in most developed countries (UN Population Division, 2003). The proportion of never married women age 30 and above has tremendously risen in the USA, Britain and other developed and developing countries. In the USA, the percentage of never married women age 30 -34 years increased from 7 percent in 1970 to 22 percent in 2000 and 28 percent in 2008. Never married women age 35 and above increased from 7 percent in 1970 to 8 percent in 2000 and 10 percent in 2008 (PRB US Economic and Social Trends, 2010). In England and Wales, the proportion of women age 20 to 24 who are single (unmarried) increased from 73 percent in 1991 to 87 percent in 1999 and 92 percent in 2007. For older women age 35 to 44, the proportion single (unmarried, not widows) increased from 8 percent in 1991 to 15 percent in 1999 and 25 percent in 2007 (UK Office of National Statistics, Population Trends, 2009). In Malaysia, among the Malay Muslims, the total percentage of never-married women over the age of 30 increased from 3.1 percent in 1960 to 23.3 percent in 2000 and to 37.8 percent in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009).

In Africa, changes are taking place in union formation processes and marital behaviour of individuals. Union formation is going in the direction of integration of traditional and western modes (Meekers, 1992). Consensual unions are increasing. Individual marriage behaviour seems to be witnessing a new trend of increase in the number of never-married women. Some of the single never married women remain childless, and some become mothers outside of a legal marital union. Researchers think this phenomenon will likely continue given the considerable socioeconomic changes and influence of western individualistic tendencies in Africa (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000; Meekers, 1992; WaKaranja, 1987). Mokomane (2005) citing Meekers (1993) observed that there is a growing group of women in Africa who now try to escape male control by steering clear from bride wealth marriage. Rather than contracting a formal marriage, these women prefer unmarried cohabitation or to have lovers who do not live with them because this allows them to maintain their liberty. Meekers, (1992) and WaKaranja, (1994, 1987) have noted the tendency for an increase in the number of women who would prefer single family life. Demographic and Health Surveys conducted in various countries in West and sub-Saharan Africa reveal a rising trend in the proportion of never married women. Ghana experienced a consistent increase in the number of never married women age 30-34 from 1.3 percent in

1993 to 2.3 percent in 1998, 5.1 in 2003 and 5.7 in 2008; in Cote d'Ivoire never married women age 30-34 increased from 6.1 percent in 1994 to 7.7 percent in 1998-1999; and in Kenya 6.6 percent in 2008 (DHS, 2011). In Nigeria, never married women age 15-49 increased from 17.2 percent in 1990 to 25.2 percent in 2008. In the spinster's category, the percentage of never married women age 30 to 34 rose from 0.9 percent in 1990 to 5.8 percent in 2008 (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009; FOS and IRD Macro, 1992). The increasing proportion of never married women age 30 (which is the upper limit of the most fecund ages) and above is indicative of likely involuntary permanent singlehood.

Other studies indicate that spinsterhood is fast becoming a reality in Nigeria. WaKaranja (1987) concluded from discussions with female undergraduates in her studies of outside wives, that there is a definite shift in attitudes toward marriage in Lagos and Ibadan. Some of the girls she interviewed argue that it is better to seek a "mature" man, who will set them up "nicely" immediately after graduation than insisting on entering a first marriage with a "struggling" fellow. Many of these girls she noted are quite ready to remain in such unions as an alternative to marriage (WaKaranja 1987:256). A study of bride wealth and nuptiality patterns among the Igbo of Nigeria revealed that

rising bride wealth costs have meant that Ibo marriage has ceased to be early and universal. Directly or indirectly, high bride wealth engenders individualism and autonomy, which may increasingly induce Ibo women to remain single, especially if they can have children, comfort, security, and love without marriage (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994a:89).

Other related studies confirm this indication that spinsterhood phenomenon may increase in Nigeria with time. Olutayo and Akanle (2007:54) observed that the family institution is weakening, "extended family system is fast becoming a myth", individualism and single parenting is becoming trendy. Isiugo-Abanihe (1993) noted that declining polygyny and kinship control, and the replacement of parental choice of marriage partner by romantic and individual decision are indications that spinsterhood will increase in Nigeria.

### **2.3**

### **DETERMINANTS OF SPINSTERHOOD**

Although a larger proportion of women still marry, there is a clear change in attitude to marriage in many countries, and spinsterhood phenomenon is increasing. A number of demographic and non demographic factors have been employed by demographers, family scholars and other researchers to explain spinsterhood phenomenon. Some of the factors are reviewed in this section.

### **2.3.1 Demographic determinants**

#### **2.3.1.1 Spinsterhood as a response to sustained population growth**

Malthusian theory of population recommends deliberate adoption of marriage postponement as a means of controlling rapid population growth. On the contrary, Davis (1963) argues that spinsterhood does not have to be a deliberate state policy, “faced with a persistent rate of natural increase resulting from past success in controlling mortality, families tended to use every demographic means possible to maximise their new opportunities and avoid relative loss of status” (Davis, 1963:362). According to Davis, humans are not fixated on certain traditions or values, they respond naturally when there is sustained population growth. He argued that sustained population increase in any societies produces multiphasic responses such as induced abortion, out migration, and postponement of marriage. In both agrarian and industrializing societies, postponed marriage is one of the responses to sustained population growth. When the means of subsistence is rising (growing economy) people want to take advantage of the emerging economy to improve and enjoy better standards of living and opportunities, hence postponement of marriage becomes inevitable. To Davis, poverty is not a reason why people respond to control population growth; he cited example of Japan where the economy was growing at the same time the people responded to sustained population growth with induced abortion, out migration, postponement of marriage. In populations where the means of subsistence is growing at a lower rate than population, people will still respond with postponement of marriage to improve their lot. Nigeria partly fits into Davis thesis because mortality has been declining, although the current 17 deaths per 1000 population remains one of the highest in West Africa, and infant mortality rate is still high at 75 and total fertility rate has remained high at 5.7 (PRB Population Data Sheet, 2011). Nonetheless, Davis thesis provides insight into a possible demographic reason for spinsterhood in Nigeria.

#### **2.3.1.2 Marriage squeeze**

Marriage squeeze is sex imbalance in the number of marriageable persons. It is one of the determinants of spinsterhood in populations where women of marriageable age outnumber men of marriageable age (De Silva, 2000). Such shortage of men may be a result of factors such as severe war losses, sex selective differential mortality, out migration or endogamy.

UN population statistics (2008) reports sex ratio in Nigeria as 100/100. This indicates no sex imbalance; every Nigerian woman should have a man to marry; but, practically this is not the case. Demographically speaking, there is no marriage squeeze in Nigeria in terms of

sex ratio, nonetheless, there could be a non demographic form of marriage squeeze whereby suitable suitors are scarce. Education and economic autonomy raises the desiderata of women for desired husband. They expect to marry men of higher or equal status, whereas educated men are more likely to marry women below their educational and socio-economic status (Raley and Bratter, 2004; Lamanna and Riedman, 2003; Davidson and Moore, 1996). It is easier for men to marry below their status than for women. This leaves so many educated and urban based never married women whose standards of living have risen due to exposure to western values, without suitable suitors (Berg-Cross et al., 2004).

Nevertheless, there is a disproportionate size of males and females in the marriage pool in Nigeria, as in other countries where inter-spousal age difference is large. Nigerian men generally marry women who are five to ten years younger (Smith, 2007; Ekiran, 2003). This implies that a smaller cohort of males is selecting wives from a larger cohort of women, which leaves behind some women who may not be married or marry below status. In 2006 population census, for instance, there is numerical imbalance between marriageable men and the women they would typically marry. Never married women age 20-24 and 25-29 outnumbered never married men age 30-34 in Nigeria's 2006 population census.

### **2.3.1.3 Male age at first marriage**

The rising prevalence of spinsterhood in many countries is also associated with rising male age at first marriage. In the USA, the percentage of never married men age 30 -34 increased from 11 percent in 1970 to 30 percent in 2000 and 37 percent in 2008, and men age 35 and above increased from 7 percent in 1970 to 11 percent in 2000 and 13 percent in 2008 (PRB US Economic and Social Trends, 2010). This rises concurrently with female age at first marriage. Age at first marriage for men in Nigeria has been rising. Median age at first marriage for men age 30 -34 years increased from 25.6 years in 1999 to 26.4 in 2003 and 26.9 in 2008 (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009; NPC and ORC Macro, 2004). The percentage of men age 30 to 34 who married at the exact age of 25 years decreased from 45.8 percent in 1999 to 43.5 percent in 2008. In the south west where Lagos is located, median age at first marriage for men age 30 to 64 years was 27.8 years in 1999, and in 2008 it was 28.5 years for men age 35 to 39. In Nigeria, men marry at a considerable higher age than women. According to Ekiran (2003) spousal age disparity for a typical Nigerian marriage is 5.1 years. Smith (2007) found that men in Southeast Nigeria are typically older than their wives by 5-10 years. This means that men in Nigeria are usually 5 to 10 years older than the women they would marry. This is typical of male mating preference for younger women, and traditional patriarchal norm that expects men to be older than their wives (Berg-Cross, et al., 2004;

Ekiran, 2003). The longer men wait to marry the more drag effect it has on women's age at first marriage. Davis observed for Japan that "as the age at marriage gets later, and as mating becomes more a matter of individual selection, a rising contingent of women may never succeed in attracting a man they are willing to marry" (Davis, 1963:349).

Male age at first marriage rises due to macro factors such as economic constraints or opportunities, high cost of living, high bride wealth, and military conscription. Some micro factors such as reduced desirability for early and arranged marriage, non availability of preferred mates also influence rising male age at first marriage. As men postpone marriage to take advantage of the emerging economy or in response to economic decline, when they are ready to marry in later years, they will prefer younger women who are in their high fecund years (Berg-Cross, et al., 2004; Davidson and Moore, 1996) whereas the older never married women who also postponed marriage to take advantage of economic and educational opportunities find that the available suitors are few when they are ready to marry.

### **2.3.2 Non-demographic determinants**

#### **2.3.2.1 Modernisation and social transformation**

In the traditional African society, marriage is early and encouraged to achieve a large family size (Akpan, 2003; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1995). Marriage is usually a communal affair and a cherished institution that every adult male and female has to experience to gain respect and status in the society. "The woman is accorded a high status from the point of view of marriage and potential motherhood" (Taylor, 2002:429). Nevertheless, response to modernisation has brought about changes in marriage and individual marital behaviour. (Mokomanne, 2005; Bledsoe and Pison, 1994; Locoh, 1994; WaKaranja, 1994, 1987; Meekers, 1992; Obbo, 1987).

According to Davis (1963), from country to country, the process of modernization gives rise to social and economic conditions that elicit different kinds of demographic and behavioural changes in humans. Smith (1980) argued that although family systems worldwide are not changing in the direction of European/conjugal form as predicted by Coale (1977), one uniform result of social change is later marriage for both men and women in nearly every non-western socio-cultural context. Corroborating this, Isiugo-Abanihe (2000) observed that the tendency to postpone and reject marriage is structurally linked to economic development and social transformation. In a previous study he argued that, "historically, the transition from traditional to a modern society is usually accompanied by considerable social and economic changes which challenge cultural values and practices that had helped to sustain early marriage" (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1995:151). Giddens (2006) noted that some of the

outcomes of modernization are decline in kinship influence, a general trend towards the free selection of a spouse, increasing recognition of women's rights in respect to both the initiation of marriage and decision making within the family, and decline in arranged marriages. Free and personal selection of spouse and decline in kinship control encourage women to select "husbands who are better educated, wealthier, more romantic and companionable than those typically wished on them by parents in traditional societies" (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000:46).

All these modern changes take place within a culture of marriage that is evolving at a slower pace. Heterosexual familistic ideologies and patriarchy still support early marriage and traditional mate selection pattern, where men prefer women who are younger, attractive, less educated and earn less. Whereas women are imbibing goals such as education and career that prolong age at first marriage, through personal resolve encouraged by public policies, culture is pushing them into spinsterhood. In Egypt for instance, where there is a deep rooted belief that early marriage is better for women, there is currently a significant rise in the number of spinsters, especially in Cairo. Sociologists and Psychologists in Egypt attribute this to a change of mindset due to adherence to western lifestyle. In order to acquire education and career, so many Egyptian women postpone marriage. When they have acquired education and career, attributes such as independent, successful and smart are attached to them, qualities that scare an average Middle East man from a woman (El-Halawany, 2009). Cultural lag also exists between the changing domestic roles of women and men. Whereas women are positively embracing their new work and family roles, men are resisting participation in domestic chores (Fuwa, 2004). Whereas women seek men who support egalitarian family life, and are more romantic and companionable, men still prefer women who are domesticated and submissive. (Simpson, 2007; Byrne and Carr, 2005; Berg-Cross et al., 2004; Ferguson, 2000; Davidson and Moore, 1996). In Egypt, the educated and successful women crave for independence and equality in the home and so find the available men unsuitable for marriage (El-Halawany, 2009).

### **2.3.2.2 Expanded educational and work opportunities for women**

These are among the major factors found to promote spinsterhood in many societies. Studies in Nigeria, for instance, show increasing tendency for both male and female to postpone marriage in order to acquire higher education and establish career and earning capacities (Feyisetan and Bankole, 2002). Globally, much progress has been recorded in closing the gender gap in education, 96 girls are enrolled for every 100 boy in primary school. In the least developed countries, 81 girls for every 100 boy enrol in secondary school

and 58 girls per 100 boys in tertiary education (PRB World Population Highlights, 2010). In Nigeria the percentage of women with no education has been decreasing consistently (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009; NPC and ORC Macro, 2004, 2000; FOS and IRD Macro, 1992). In Nigeria, the net ratio of girls to boys who attend primary school for the period of 2003 and 2008 is 88 girls per 100 boys, and 87 girls per 100 boys for secondary school (UNICEF, 2010). The number of women participating in the labour force has been increasing consistently. One of the outcomes of the world war and the economic decline that followed the Second World War is entrance of many women into formal labour force. Though gender inequality is still obvious, men hold the highest wage and skilled employments, much room has been created for women to assert their potentials and pursue career and skills acquisition. By 2009, 52 percent of women in the world were employed (PRB World Population Highlights, 2010).

Unlike men, the more education and economic resources a woman has the more her likelihood of remaining single. Using empirical evidence from the USA, Germany, Poland and India Berg-Cross et al., (2004) argue that the globalization of economic empowerment of women through work has raised women's expectation and requirements for a suitable partner, thus decreasing educated and career women's chances of union formation. Further empirical evidence shows that "greater female attainment of secondary and tertiary education and female labour force participation in the modern sector of the economy delay marriage for women and even reduce its later incidence" (Isiugo-Abanihe 2000:45). Empirical findings from a study in the Netherlands confirmed that women who possess higher level of education and many economic resources are more likely to remain single than women who have lower education and few economic resources (Dykstra and Poortman, 2010). Alam et al., (2008) found similar evidence in Bangladesh. Berg-Cross et al. (2004) observed that the single professional woman is the first new global sociological phenomenon of the twenty-first century. Serial monogamy used to be the predicted future, but "now for a significant segment of the female intellectual community, the future is "sologamy" (Berg-Cross et al., 2004:35). Comparing prevalence and implications of childlessness in old age across nine major surveys in seven countries (Australia, Finland, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, the UK and the USA), Koropecj-Cox and Call (2007) found a strikingly similar pattern across countries (with the exception of Japan) that childless never-married women have consistently higher education levels than other groups of women. Meekers (1992) also noted that increasing consensual union in Africa due to decline in lineage control is expected to be more prevalent among women with modern characteristics such as education and formal employment.

As opportunities for education increase and work outside the home for women expands, women's desire and opportunity to marry becomes adversely affected. Having less desire to enter a partnership increases the likelihood of remaining single (Goldscheider and Waite, 1986 cited in Dykstra and Poortman, 2010). Carr (2002) noted that women's educational and occupational opportunities have expanded drastically over the past four decades, thus women's economic need to find a spouse has declined considerably. As more women enter the labour force compelled by necessity or in response to increasing economic opportunities for women, the more economically independent they become (Berg-Cross et al., 2004; Lamanna and Riedman, 2003; Bruce, 1995; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1995), a factor that "engenders autonomy and makes women less apt to marry" (Isiugo-Abanihe 1994a:86). According to Tanturri and Mencarini, (2008:64-65),

the factors associated with voluntary childlessness are also associated with never forming a stable partnership: single women are more likely to have never attended religious services and to have a higher level of education. One possible explanation is that highly educated women are self selected from backgrounds in which little emphasis is given to marriage as a source of personal fulfilment ....Women in this category also may have less economic incentive or need to enter a union.

Female education and employment reduces the desirability of early marriage. Increased education and employment of women are associated with increase in age at first marriage and the growth of never married women (Simpson, 2007; Raley and Bratter, 2004; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1995; Gage and Bledsoe, 1994; Adams, 1986). In a study of nuptiality patterns and fertility in Nigeria, Isiugo-Abanihe, et al. (1993) found that women with higher education – secondary to tertiary – marry later than those with primary or no education. They also found that women who worked before marriage marry later than those who did not, and those who worked in informal sector (crafts, farming and sales) marry earlier than those who worked in the formal sector (civil service, teachers) Linking education to late marriage and spinsterhood in Nigeria, it has been found that educated women marry later than other women, and high level of spinsterhood is more prevalent among highly educated women especially women of Igbo origin where bride wealth for educated women is high. Also, regions in Nigeria that pioneered and embraced western education tend to be the areas with fairly late female age at marriage (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000). Western Nigeria embraced western education earlier than other regions in Nigeria. They also pioneered free education from primary to secondary school, which still prevails in most western states including Lagos.

Education and the associated social transformations change women's perception of marriage and other alternative lifestyles. This results in more restrictive mate selection preference, a situation that reduces opportunity for marriage (Tanturri and Mencarini, 2008; Simpson, 2007; Koropecj-Cox and Call, 2007; Raley and Bratter, 2004; Lamanna and Riedman, 2003; Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000, 1995; Gage and Bledsoe, 1994; Meekers, 1992; Adams, 1986). Highly educated and professional women face the pressure of marrying men of equal or higher socio-economic status unlike highly educated and professional men. This reduces their pool of available suitors, thus creating a kind of marriage squeeze effect at their level (Berg-Cross et al., 2004).

Another factor that reduces the marriage opportunity of educated and working women is propinquity; a factor Ekiran (2003) noted affects marriage chances. Women, who have to leave their usual communities for other cities to work in the formal or informal sectors in pursuit of a desired career or to support natal families, get separated from familiar people. This reduces the pool of prospective suitors available to them (Ferguson, 2000).

It has also been found that the few "women who have successfully entered into positions of economic, political and social power with paid work in the formal sector act as trailblazers and role models" (Berg-Cross et al., 2004:34). The role model effect of highly educated and financially empowered women raises other women's personal goals and expectation of family life.

Whereas women are getting educated and employed outside the home, and their values and views are improving, the cultural ideals of early marriage and mate selection are only changing at a slower pace. Mate selection still tilts along men preferring women who are younger, less educated, domesticated, and of lower economic status (Berg-Cross et al., 2004; Lamanna and Riedman, 2003; Davidson and Moore, 1996). Thus, expanded educational and work opportunities for women is like a double edged sword which offers women improved status on one hand, and narrows their opportunity to marry on the other hand. They postpone marriage to get education and financial empowerment. By the time they are ready for marriage, available prospective marriage partners are few, and because many of the available men are unacceptable to them, and the men they would want typically prefer to marry women who are younger, they are constrained to spinsterhood (Davidson and Moore, 1996). Thus, spinsterhood is often an outcome of long waiting for suitable partner and not the deliberate choice of educated or career woman. Schmitz-Koster, (1993) cited in Macvarish (2006) concluded that voluntary single life can only be applicable to young women in pre marriage age and older women of post marriage age. Aside from these she does not think it is

a deliberate choice of any other single woman. For the women Macvarish (2006) interviewed, singleness is a problem because they wish to be married but do not know when, how or if their current single status will end.

There is a contrary emerging hypothesis that as gender role is changing and men's participation in housework increases, the negative effect of women's education and work on chances of union formation decreases (Oppenheimer, 1997 cited in Dykstra and Poortman, 2010). Some empirical findings show that the zero or negative effect of education and work in older cohorts has changed to positive for younger cohorts of women (Goldstein and Kenney, 2001; Sweeney, 2002 cited in Dykstra and Poortman, 2010). Urbanisation and rising standard of living make dual income family a necessity rather than an option, thus women's economic resources becomes more attractive (Kalmijn, 1998).

In Nigeria, how much gender role is changing is not certain; women still do much of housework and child care (Olu-Olu, 2007; Oderinde, 2002; Aina, 1998; Fapohunda, 1982), and men are still expected to be breadwinners. More women work outside the home albeit in low wage and informal sector employment (FGNa National Gender Policy, 2006), This partly explains why Nigerian women still expect their husbands to play the breadwinner role (Ekiran, 2003). Therefore, possession of higher education and economic means is likely to continue to engender negative effect on women's opportunity to marry in the Nigerian society.

### **2.3.2.3 Bride wealth and Dowry**

Bride wealth is one reason why some women are confined to spinsterhood. In societies where a man is expected to present material items and cash to the parents and kinsmen of a woman as part of marriage rites, it takes some men longer time to accumulate enough wealth to afford such payments and presents. Isiugo-Abanihe (2000:53) observed among the Igbo of Nigeria that "many late marrying women are educated, for whom the required bridewealth is even higher, a situation that has tended to give rise to high level of spinsterhood among highly educated Igbo women". Moebonam (1987), cited in Isiugo-Abanihe (1994:83), argued that "a new wave of women are suffering under the yoke of high bride wealth that has forced them to remain spinsters". He compares women to flower which fades with the passing of time. The more she fades the less her chances of getting married. The longer it takes men to acquire wealth for bride wealth, the more women remain unmarried till later age. On the other hand, some women are constrained to spinsterhood in societies where there is compulsory dowry for the woman. In this case women from poor families have to work in order to acquire enough money for the required dowry, in order not

to “shame” the family. High dowry is the common reason for rising trend of spinsterhood in Jordan (Mohammed, 2009) and in United Arab Emirate (Mohammed, 2012).

#### **2.3.2.4 Economic decline**

“Life course and economic factors are clearly major contributors to trends and differentials in marriage” (Raley and Bratter, 2004:168). When there is economic decline, age at marriage increases. Raley and Bratter (2004) associated the continued increase in age at marriage in the USA partly to economic stagnation. De Silva (2000) related marital postponement among men and women in Sri Lanka to prolonged unemployment, a situation that creates shortage of eligible marriage partners for women. Isiugo-Abanihe (1995:151) suggested that “economic constraints may act as a barrier to marriage as well, especially in societies where the requirement for bridewealth, dowry or other such cultural requirements increases the cost of marriage to the groom, bride or their parents”.

It is suggested that in Africa, social and economic factors are probably more important than demographic influences in creating an artificially imbalanced marriage market (Gage and Bledsoe, 1994). Particularly for Nigeria, economic decline is probably one of the strongest reasons for rising population of spinsters. Nigeria has experienced economic decline from the 1980s. Unemployment and under-employment have remained common features in Nigeria until now. Since economic potential takes longer time to establish than personality traits and physical attractiveness (Raley and Bratter, 2004), Nigerian marriageable men are waiting longer to establish their economic potentials (Feyisetan and Bankole, 2002). The attitude of most Nigerian men is akin to what Hajnal (1971) observed as the reason for late marriage in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

People married late because they insisted on a certain standard of living (a standard varying with the social position of the individual) as a prerequisite of marriage. More simply, men marry late because they cannot “afford” to marry young; they have to wait until they have a livelihood, a farmer till he acquires land, an apprentice till he finishes his apprenticeship (Hajnal 1971:143).

For Hajnal, it is tempting to see in this feature a key to the uniqueness of the European marriage pattern. In Europe it has been necessary for a man to defer marriage until he could establish independent livelihood adequate to support a family. This captures the pattern in the contemporary Nigeria. Men are not only waiting to get farmland and complete apprenticeship, male students wait until they graduate and secure good employment. Due to increasing neolocality and nucleation of the family unit, a man expects to have a stable livelihood before marriage. The high rate of unemployment and economic uncertainties have made this period of waiting uncertain and long for many men, thus pushing a number of

women to unplanned single life. According to Isiugo-Abanihe (1995) high bridewealth is a constraint to early marriage for the Igbo man who has to work for a long time to save money required for bridewealth and marriage ceremonies. The factor of high bride wealth does not apply to other ethnic groups in Nigeria where bride wealth is relatively low. Nevertheless, other factors such as men's insistence to establish independent livelihood and high cost of civil/church wedding ceremonies may apply to them at varying degrees. In Sri Lanka, De Silva (2000) found that marriageability for men is more related to their employment status than age or educational attainment. Men in Sri Lanka are unlikely to marry until they are employed and earn sufficient income to sustain a family.

As men are waiting long to get livelihood, women are waiting even longer to get married. This period of waiting promotes economic independence in women. For Hajnal (1971:143) "it is a period of maximum production capacity without responsibility for children, a period during which saving would be easy". Isiugo-Abanihe (1994) argued that marital delay caused by high bride wealth increases single women's independence and encourages lifelong singleness.

Another outcome of economic decline is cross-generational sex, which refers to intimate sexual relationships between older men and younger women. Gage and Bledsoe (1994:150-151) in their study of the effects of education and social stratification on marriage in Freetown, Sierra Leone found this behaviour prevalent in Freetown. They argued that economic conditions have put pressure on parents to allow their daughters accept school fees from sponsors or "supporters": men of wealth and influence. The school fees imply an investment of either a marital or sexual nature. "Sponsors" may include school teachers, or older wealthy bureaucrats in the urban area, called "sugar daddies". Although such support often excludes marriage plans, girls use such relationships to further their education or make job contacts. This phenomenon, according to Gage and Bledsoe has also been observed in Ghana. Obbo (1987) observed same in East Africa and Locoh (1994) in Togo. Mann (1994), WaKaranja (1994, 1987) and Guyer, (1994) found the same trend in Lagos and Ibadan. In Southeast Nigeria Smith (2007) observed that women who engage in "sugar daddy" relationships are not just women who seek poverty alleviation. They are usually educated and highly fashionable women who seek economic resources but also want to model a kind of modern femininity. A Population Reference Bureau review of research and programs on cross generational sex confirms the high prevalence of this form of relationship in sub-Saharan Africa (Hope, 2007). Some of these women end up as spinsters or mistresses to these older men. By the time they are ready to marry they may have become used to the

pleasures of wealth and being sustained by wealthy men. Unable to find younger men of same elite economic status to marry, they may prefer to remain spinsters. The social notoriety associated with this phenomenon also affects their chances of getting marriage partners.

Declining economy makes breadwinning more difficult and less attractive for men. Consequently, unmarried men may postpone marriage longer (Dowd and Pallotta, 2000 in Lamanna and Riedman, 2003). When men's economic contributions to their marriage decreases, women become "increasingly disenchanted with marriage" (Bleek, 1987 cited in WaKaranja 1994: 201), because the burden on them increases. It has been noted that when both wage earning and non-wage earning forms of economic activity are accounted for, it becomes evident that mothers provide substantial, primary or sole economic support to a large proportion of families in the world (Akorede, 2010; Bruce, 1995). The increasing economic contribution of women in homes is a factor that pushes many never married women into the drive for economic empowerment before marriage. While struggling to get settled in a career or livelihood skill before marriage opportunities are lost.

Economic decline as well as economic opportunities encourages women's participation in economic activities outside the home. When there is economic prosperity, Davis (1963) argues that humans would still adopt certain measures such as postponement of marriage in order to take advantage of opportunities in the emerging economy. In pronatalist societies, as men postpone marriage to take advantage of the emerging economy or in response to economic decline, when they are ready to marry in later years, they will prefer younger women who are in their high fecund years. On the other hand, the never married women who also postponed marriage to take advantage of economic opportunities or in response to economic decline find that the available suitors are few when they are ready to marry.

#### **2.3.2.5 Urbanisation and erosion of traditional values**

Changes associated with urbanization result in social disorganization (Pfohl, 1994). Akinsola (2006) noted that there is a gross erosion and decay of traditional values among Nigerian youths. Prominent among the outcomes of this erosion is the get rich quick syndrome among youths. The cherished value of becoming wealthy through hard work and gradual build up of wealth is no longer emphasised. Many youths want to get certificates without studying, get rich without working and get to the top without serving. Akinsola (2006) argued that parents and the society play leading roles in the decadence by failing in educating youths on traditional values. One reason why some parents may have failed in this duty may be because some parents have lost the moral justification to teach traditional values

being culprits of the widespread corruption and cultism in public places in Nigeria. Contemporary Control Theory, a social-psychological extension of social disorganization theory, posits that weakening socialization is one of the by-products of social disorganization. Social disorganization is the damage of the organized society's web of normative controls by rapid change. Breakdown in normative controls is accompanied by a similar breakdown in individual moral constraints in behaviour. This is because social disorganization disrupts socialization (the process through which one generation of people passes its beliefs, values, and normative constraints to another). When socialization is disrupted because traditional values and beliefs have been disorganized, internal normative constraints will be weakened (Pfohl, 1994).

The culture of parents seeking and encouraging their daughters to marry men who are from good families, diligent and of good character has waned with the get rich quick syndrome and corruption. Consequently, some female youths would aspire to marry wealthy men as means of economic status enhancement for them and their parents. Unmarried women who subscribe to "get rich quick culture" will align their mate selection preferences in that direction and may likely end up spinsters while waiting for rich men (Gage and Bledsoe, 1994; Wa Karanja, 1987, 1994; Obbo, 1987).

Isiugo-Abanihe (1995:515) argued that "urbanization provides an ideal landscape where both education and economic activities flourish, which therefore attracts women some of whom are freed from parental or kinship control, and prescription of when or who to marry" Available statistics for Nigeria show that spinsters are more prevalent in the urban areas, 41 percent of never married women reside in urban areas compared to 29.7 percent in the rural areas (NPC, 1998).

Another urban phenomenon that affects women's opportunity to marry is the sex imbalance in urban residence. More men than women reside in urban areas. In sub-Saharan Africa, it is found that more men than women migrate from rural to urban centres (Agesa and Agesa, 1999). This introduces a form of marriage squeeze among person of marriageable age in the urban areas. Sex ratio in Nigeria's 1991 census showed that rural areas have fewer males than females (98) whereas in the urban areas the reverse was the case (104). Age groups from 15-44, show rural sex ratios that are lower than 100, indicating fewer males. Thereafter, age groups from 45-85 show higher ratios, indicating a larger number of males. In the urban areas the ratios exceed 100 for age groups from 30-59 indicating the presence of more males. For age groups within 60-85 there are lower ratios with the exception of ages 70-74 where there is equality (NPC, 1998).

Another effect of urbanisation on union formation is implied in Dykstra and Poortman's (2010) notion that the economic contribution of women to household incomes makes marriage and particularly consensual union increasingly affordable for low income men. It goes to say that as poverty and unemployment increases in the urban areas, men's preference for cheaper unions such as consensual relationship will increase (Iwasawa, 2004). In a society where men still take pride in being the breadwinner, men in such consensual union may be reluctant to legalise the union.

#### **2.3.2.6 Individualism and influence of feminism**

Increasing spinsterhood has been interpreted as emblematic of increasing individualism, associated with profound changes going on in personal and familial relationships in late modernity. Individuals have more freedom, and personal relationships depend more on choice than fate or ascription (Giddens, 2006; Berg-Cross et al. 2004; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995 cited in Simpson, 2003). Stein (1976) cited in Adams (1986) listed the strong pulls for remaining single as: freedom, enjoyment, opportunities to meet people and develop friendships, economic independence, more and better sexual experiences, and personal development. Berg-Cross et al. (2004:35) conceptualised singleness as "the globalization of the American brand of individualism". To Berg-Cross et al., "more than any other export, the idea that one needs to be responsible, accountable, and focused on one's self, rather than on a community of others, has created a world-wide paradigm shift in how people mate". The pursuit of individual life strategies is seen as contradictory to marital fusion (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004; Bawin-Legros, 2004). Women who remain single till later age are said to hold more individualistic than familistic values; and the longer they remain single the more they intensify their individualistic attitude (Lamanna and Riedmann, 2003). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002:22) cited in Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) argued that "the ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society". They believe the desire to be

a deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his/her life is giving rise to unprecedented changes in the shape of family life. Family membership shifts from being a given, to a matter of choice. As social ties become reflexive, and individualization increasingly characterizes relations among members of the same family, we are moving into a world of the "post-familial family.

An implication of individualism is the widening of the gap between what men and women want in the marriage market. In the contemporary marriage market, women seek "domestic democracy" (Simpson, 2007), whereas men stick to traditional mate selection

pattern of preferring young, healthy, beautiful and dependent women (Berg-Cross et al., 2004). Individualism also gave rise to “the globalization of love as the primary stimulus for mate selection” (Berg-Cross et al., 2004:36). Women keep searching for men who are embodiments of the masculine ideals of strength, protectiveness, sound thinking and problem solving and satisfy their erotic needs (Berg-Cross et al., 2004); a search that oftentimes does not yield the desired result.

According to Haralambos and Holborn (2008) feminism has probably had more influence on the study of the family than any other approach to understanding society. Feminist theories conceptualize the family as an institution involving power relationships. They challenge the image of family life as being based on cooperation, shared interest and love. For them, men particularly, obtain greater benefits from families than other family members. Though their analysis of family life is in some cases critical but the propagation of their ideas in recent decades has probably influenced the marital concept and decisions of more women than could be imagined. The impact is more on highly educated women, who usually become role models and leaders of other women in most communities. Berg-Cross et al (2004) confirmed that highly educated women become role models and trailblazers for other women. Tanturri and Mencarini, (2008), found that one likely reason for spinsterhood is that highly educated women are self selected from backgrounds where marriage as a source of personal fulfilment is not emphasised; and they are more receptive to alternative values and to new cultural orientations, such as those emphasising autonomy and individualism. The attitude of these educated women gradually trickles down to even illiterate market woman.

Strong as the force of individualism is in accounting for the rising trend of voluntary spinsterhood, marital separation and divorce, it does not completely account for all singles who desire partnering but could not find “Mr Right”. Holmes (2004:256), based on her findings in a study of distance relationships (couples living distance apart), argued that “self-actualization and fusion are not inevitable opposites; individual identity is accomplished in relation to others”. Citing Duncan et al., (2003) she further noted that “connection with others may offer a fulfilment that individualized success does not”. The suffusion of kinship and friendship evidenced in Simpson (2006) study of single never married women also challenges the claims of increasing individualisation at the cost of commitments to family, relations and friends.

### **2.3.2.7 Marriage market and mate selection preference**

Marriage market and individual mate selection preferences play very significant roles in determining the probability of marriage for individuals. In the marriage market, individuals bring various personal resources for bargaining. Significant variables in the market usually include age, race or ethnic group, social class, religion, education, employment status and physical features (Ekiran, 2003). The exchange that takes place in the marriage market determines whether a union forms or stabilizes. The bargaining could be done by one's family in case of arranged marriage or by the person in case of free choice culture. Basically, marital exchange is traditionally related to gender roles. Women trade their ability to bear and rear children, domestic and sexual qualities, and physical attractiveness for masculine protection, status and economic support (Hakim, 2010; Berg-Cross et al. 2004; Lamanna and Riedmann, 2003). This traditional form of exchange still prevails in many societies though much has changed with regard to the resources men and women bring to the marriage market. In contemporary times, without marriage, men can have access to some of the traditional feminine resources like mothering ability, sexual and domestic ability and women can gain social and economic status without marriage. Therefore, the characteristics men and women bring to the market have extended beyond sex roles and continue to change. Other personal resources such as love, social class, education, age, religion, economic status, ethnicity and personal goals have become prominent.

Some researchers have predicted that as gender roles become alike, women gain occupational and economic equality with men, and kinship control wanes, exchange will be based more on expressive, affective, sexual and companionship resources, and earning potential (Buss et al., 2001; Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000). Corroborating this notion Berg-Cross et al. (2004) argued that erotic love has become a globalised primary stimulus for mate selection. Dykstra and Hagesatd (2007) argued that as more women enter into the labour force on equal footing with men, "fathering", the practice of care and relationship building with one's children, becomes more important for women in choice of suitable marriage partners, than men's economic ability. Hakim (2010) argues in her erotic capital theory, that physical and sexual attractiveness is a strong basis for mating and marriage in the modern self-selection marriage market. Women who are physically attractive attract men of higher status and marry younger. Hakim further argues that in the modern marriage market, men are also assessed by their physical attractiveness, although the standards are higher for women. Men who are not physically attractive "must offer substantial compensating benefits in wealth, effort, and willingness to please" in order to attract a suitable mate.

As the resources change, the nature of the marriage market also changes with more obvious disadvantages for women. Although men can have access to feminine roles without marriage, economic power still lies with the men. In general, men earn more income than women (PRB World Population Highlights, 2010; Bruce, 1995). It has been found that contrary to the traditional mate selection pattern where men prefer women who earn less, both men and women aspire to marry hypergamously (marriage to a partner of higher social class) to improve their economic wellbeing and status. Women's socio-economic resources have increasingly become important for the status of the family (Kalmijn, 1998; Dykstra and Poortman, 2010). If both men and women hope to improve their financial status by marrying a higher earning spouse, it will take longer time for both to find a suitable mate and more people will never marry (Raley and Bratter, 2004). "In Africa, as elsewhere in the world, marriage affords many women the opportunity of upward mobility" (Obbo, 1987:266). This tendency has been observed as part of the changing patterns of marriage in Africa. Gage and Bledsoe (1994:148) noted among other apparent trends in Africa, "greater instability of marriage, increasing fluidity and flexibility of sexual relationships, and women's increasing use of relationships with men to obtain resources and opportunities for furthering their own social and economic ambitions". It has been found that some women in Lagos and western Nigeria use marriage as a means of economic status enhancement (WaKaranja 1994, 1987; Mann, 1994; Guyer, 1987). Some of the women would prefer to remain in a non marital relationship with a wealthy man to marrying a young man who is not rich. In WaKaranja's (1987: 256) interview of undergraduate women, the girls believe it is better to remain an "outside wife" to "Mr Available" than to marry a "struggling" fellow. They differentiated between what they called "Mr Right" and "Mr Available. "Mr Right" should hold at least a first degree, be three to five years older, preferably from the same ethnic group and have a discernible potential for future success and single, whereas "Mr Available" are rich married men". Obbo (1987:266) argued that the reason for this tendency is

the economic reality of the uneven distribution of resources and power between men and women ... and all women, both the privileged few and the underprivileged masses, are constantly striving to transcend this condition. Of course, some elite women, while subscribing to these beliefs, often have affairs with elite men. However, this seems to be motivated more by the desire for sexual fulfilment or by boredom rather than economic need.

While seeking upward mobility, some end up spinsters, if they could not match their preferences to available men.

In addition to losing out in traditional sex roles resources, education limits women's age advantage in the market; and culture restricts women to only the pool of men who propose marriage to them. It is socially unacceptable for women to initiate marriage proposal to men of their choice. As women age, their physical attractiveness and pool of prospective suitors simultaneously decline, whereas it seems the pool of men's potential mates expands as they age. The balance seems to tilt against the women, so the bargaining power of women in the marriage market is limited, a situation that leaves many unmarried.

The characteristics of available partners (marriage market), the woman's desiderata for a suitable marriage mate and the influence of her peers and other significant persons, affect a woman's chance of getting married (Raley and Bratter, 2004). The least attractive people in the marriage market are most likely to remain permanently single (Dykstra and Poortman, 2010). Certain kinds of persons have been associated with certain types of preferences. South (1991) cited in Raley and Bratter, (2004) demonstrates that men and women with favourable socioeconomic profiles tend to have a more restrictive preference set with respect to family status (having had a previous marriage or a child), appearance, and earning potential. Men are found to be more willing than women to marry someone who earns less, has less education or who is five or more years younger. Women are more willing than men to marry someone who is five or more years older or someone unattractive (Raley and Bratter, 2004). It is found that persons with less competitive preferences have a higher likelihood to marry. For example, men who are willing to marry someone unattractive, with less earning and education have higher rates of marriage (Raley and Bratter, 2004). Those who are willing to adjust their preferences to fit the marriage market may also be more likely to marry. According to Raley and Bratter (2004) those who are in a marriage market that do not easily accommodate their preferences might respond by altering their preferences or delay marriage and continue to search. Thus, mate selection processes affect not only whom one marries but also affect the timing of marriage and whether one marries or not.

Altering one's preference downward may not be easy for women with high education and economic means. They, unlike men face a considerable level of pressure to marry within or beyond their socio-economic class (Berg-Cross et al., 2004). A research on the socio-economic characteristics of the never-married posited that the higher incidence of spinsterhood amongst women "of higher ability, education and occupation" maybe due to selectivity in the marriage market, whereby "men may have preferences for women of lower or equal status but not higher" (Kiernan, 1988:259 cited in Simpson 2007).

### **2.3.2.8 Homogamy and endogamy**

The tendency to marry within one's group (endogamy) and people close in status (homogamy) affect patterns of partner choice and eventual incidence of marriage (Ekiran, 2003; Kalmijn, 1998). It has been found that "social groups in society appear closed, in the sense that men and women more often chose partners within their group than one would expect under random mating" (Kalmijn, 1998:417). Heterogamy reveals the existence of interaction across group boundaries and shows the extent to which members of different groups accept each other as social equals. Homogamy and endogamy are forms of group closure. Intermarriage tends to increase the appreciation of cultural differences and individual distinctiveness within a different group, thus ultimately weakens prejudices and stereotypes about other groups. It reduces cultural distinctions in future generation because the children are less likely to attach to a particular group. Though intermarriage indicates open social groups, it is more prone to breakup in western countries.

Sociologists have developed theoretical and empirical perspectives about why people marry within their group and why others do not. The pattern of homogamous and endogamous marriage has been explained based on the interplay of three complimentary social forces: the individual preference for certain characteristics in a spouse, the influence of third parties and the constraints of the marriage market.

#### **Individual mate preference**

In mate selection, sociologists have often emphasised socio-economic and cultural resources in the marriage market. Socio-economic resources are resources that produce economic well being and status. Cultural resources refer to the preference to marry someone who is similar in cultural orientation. Although socio-economic and cultural resources do not necessarily result in homogamy or endogamy, they do play a significant role. Individuals prefer spouses with more attractive economic resources in order to enhance their economic well being and status. The preference to marry a resourceful person creates a pattern of homogamy whereby the most attractive persons select among themselves and the least attractive persons select among themselves. Ferguson (2000) found that parental and cultural expectation of Chinese and Japanese American women to marry men of the same social status and ethnic origin is implied in a Chinese saying that "a bamboo door to a bamboo door and a wooden door to a wooden door". A bamboo door refers to people of lower social status. This homogamous expectation limited the choices of some of the women in her study who remained unmarried till later age. Evidence of increasing tendency for educational

homogamy is found in Southeastern Nigeria, where the educational disparity between spouses is found to be small, though in favour of men (Smith, 2007).

Persons prefer to marry someone who has similar cultural resources. Endogamy is more a result of this than preference for economically resourceful persons. Cultural similarity leads to personal attraction and encourages people to form lasting relationships. Similarity of values and opinion lead to mutual confirmation of each other's behaviour and worldviews (Kalmijn, 1998). Since cultural similarity helps couples to develop common lifestyle in marriage, it may be part of the reasons why mixed marriages are volatile.

### **Third Party Influence**

Another proposition on why people marry within their group is the influence of third parties. Third parties refer to people who are not directly involved in the marriage. Third parties such as parents and religious groups act to prevent exogamy through group identification and group sanctions because mixed marriage threatens internal cohesion and homogeneity of groups.

Children are socialised to imbibe a sense of group identification, which takes the form of awareness of a common social history or the psychological sense of being different from others. "The stronger such feelings of group identification, the more people have internalized norms of endogamy, and the more likely it is that they marry homogamously or endogamously" (Kalmijn, 1998:400).

Living in a neighbourhood that is homogeneous with one's parent's social and cultural characteristics enhances the sense of group identity for the younger generation and reduces the opportunity to intermarry. Residential segregation in urban areas hinders opportunity to intermarry directly and reduces exogamy by escalating feelings of group solidarity. Endogamy should therefore be strong in urban centres in Africa where it has been observed that people of same origin cluster in particular residential areas, thus maintaining kinship ties and norms (Isiugo-Abanihe and Obono, 1999).

Group sanctions by families, church and state are another way third parties discourage exogamy. Parental control over children's marital decisions is being weakened by modernisation. Isiugo-Abanihe et al. (1993) argue that in Nigeria, parental choice of marriage partner is being replaced by a notion of marriage based on romantic attachment and individual decision on who to marry. Nevertheless, parents still exercise some influence through matchmaking, strong opinion on the partner's character and sometimes by outright withdrawal of support (Smith, 2007; Ekiran, 2003)

Perhaps the strongest prevalent group sanction is that provided by religious groups. Catholics and Protestant denominations censure interfaith marriages, though the nature has become more permissive. The Catholic Church for instance, permits marriage to Protestants but the children of such union must be raised as Catholics. Intermarriage means loss of current and future members, in order to maintain their numbers churches provide sanctions on inter-faith marriage. The level of intermarriage varies among different religious groups. Studies in the United States and some European countries show that both Catholics and Protestants tend to marry within their groups (Kalmijn, 1991b; Hendrickx et al, 1991, 1994 cited in Kalmijn, 1998). Among the protestant groups, it is found that denominations and religions that are more traditional in religious doctrine and have higher degree of church involvement among their members have highest degree of endogamy (kalmijn, 1998).

### **Marriage market**

The likelihood of endogamous marriage depends also on the regularity of meeting and daily interaction with people within the group. Opportunity for such meeting is determined by factors such as the group size, group geographical distribution and the local marriage market.

The likelihood of a woman in a group to marry a man from same group depends on the number of men in that group. Therefore, members of a small group will have lower chances of marrying within their group than members of a larger group. The more heterogenous a group is the lower the incidence of endogamy. This is probably one reason why there may be more spinsters in Protestant groups who strictly sanctions interfaith marriage. Such groups attract members mainly biologically and through people who seek spiritual help. Literature review and pilot study conducted by Oladipo (2007) reveal that more women than men seek spiritual help to cope with life's challenges. One inevitable effect of this gender imbalance and strict norms of endogamy is spinstership.

In addition to group size, the way a group is dispersed geographically affects chances of meeting people from same group. Groups that are concentrated in specific regions generally have more opportunity to marry endogamously.

Local marriage markets consist of places where unmarried people spend most of their lives such as schools, neighbourhoods, workplaces, bars and clubs. Such local marriage markets are often socially segregated; therefore produce different forms of homogamy and endogamy.

### **2.3.2.8 Family background**

In general, family background affects children's marital behaviour. Experience in the family gives rise to perceptions of marriage that may result in prolong waiting for a suitable marriage mate or non marriage. Research shows that the structure of parents' marriage and marital status of mother affect daughter's marital behaviour (Henslin, 2007; Kapinus, 2004; Kiernan, 1992; Buvinic, et al.,1992; McLanahan, 1988; Goetting, 1983). Females reared in a one parent family, whether it is the father or the mother; tend to remain single probably due to greater family responsibilities and recognition of the advantages of singlehood (Forsyth and Johnson, 1996). Home environment, father's absence, family income, and having overbearing parent(s) are linked to children's marital behaviour (Lleras, 2008; Menning, 2006). Other factors such as parents' marriage, parental influence on choice of marriage partner, birth order and family demands on one's wage labour affect children's desire and opportunity to marry (Ferguson, 2000).

Parents' marriage plays a major role in shaping a child's perception and experience in marriage. Conflictual parents' marriage results in same or even worse outcomes for children as divorce (Burghes, 1996 cited in Haralambos and Holborn, 2008; Lamanna and Riedman 2003; Goetting, 1983). Conflictual and unhappy parents' marriage is found to have negative effect on daughter's desire and opportunity to marry (Ferguson, 2000; Siegel, 1995; WaKaranja, 1987). Some never married women who became single mothers in Siegel's (1995) study attributed their low priority for marriage to disappointments in their relationship with their own fathers or unhappy parents' marriage they do not want to replicate. In a study of Chinese and Japanese American never married women age 30 and above, Ferguson (2000) found parents' marriage to be one of the most significant influences on a woman's perception of marriage and desire to marry. In Ferguson's study, 77.4 percent of the women described their parents' marriage as very unhappy and conflictual, based on duty and obligation instead of romantic love, and they thought their mothers suffered the most. As a result, though they consider marriage important, many of them did not want marriages like their mothers'. They would rather remain single. These Chinese and Japanese American women are comparable to middle class spinsters in nineteenth century New England, who as well as their married peers were found to take the ideals of love and marriage very seriously, such that spinsterhood was often a consequence of their adherence to those ideals. They considered a happy marriage the happiest condition of human life, and would rather have the "best or none" (Berend, 2000:935). The desire to have a better family life experience is partly responsible for resistance to male dominance in family life, rejection of early and arranged marriage and

insistence on personal choice of marriage partner. These factors result in a value conflict between cultural values of early marriage and motherhood, and personal fulfilment, a situation that invariably leads to prolonged waiting for suitable marriage partner.

Mother's position and experience in marriage is consequential in daughter's notion and expectation of marriage. Intergenerational transmission of behaviour is a phenomenon that has been supported by so many research findings. One's mother's marital behaviour such as adolescent pregnancy, single motherhood, divorce has been associated with similar outcomes in daughters. (Henslin, 2007; Kapinus, 2004; Kiernan, 1992; Buvinic et al., 1992; McLanahan, 1988; Goetting, 1983). A Population Reference Bureau study on domestic violence in nine developing countries found that women whose fathers abused their mothers are twice as likely to suffer domestic abuse themselves (Lalasz, 2004). Ferguson's (2000) study found that mother's marriage experience in an unhappy marriage is a significant factor for non marriage among Chinese and Japanese American spinsters. According to Ferguson, Chinese and Japanese American women have the second highest rates of non marriage among all US racial ethnic groups. Marriage and family culture of Chinese and Japanese Americans such as early and arranged marriage, stigma about divorce, male dominance, as described by Ferguson is similar to what is practiced in many ethnic groups in Nigeria. Unsatisfactory mother's experience in marriage is also a usual reason given by women who became outside wives in Lagos and Ibadan (WaKaranja, 1987). Misguided application of patriarchy in certain familial settings gives rise to unfavourable experiences for women in the home. Giddens, et al. (2003:21) submitted that, for women, the family is a "vital source of solace, comfort, love and companionship, yet it could also be a locus for exploitation, loneliness and profound inequality". Heterosexual marriage is not always a haven of social and economic welfare for women as often assumed. Feminist and other family scholars have argued that marriage could constitute a serious setback to self fulfilment in women. Many married women are not much more secure than they would be outside marriage, and some times, the home is a site of torture and cruelty to women (Bruce, 1995). Consciously or unconsciously daughters tend to identify with their mothers, who are usually their first image of womanhood. In order to have better experiences than their mothers, certain women resolve to postpone marriage in order to pursue better personal social and economic status through education, career and skills acquisition to a satisfactory level. By the time they are ready for marriage, available prospective marriage partners are few, because many of the available men are unacceptable to them (Davidson and Moore, 1996). In addition, mother's experience in marriage leads to restrictive mate selection preference in daughters. To avoid mother's

marital experience, they will seek men who are more egalitarian in family life affairs, romantic and companionable, and such men are few.

Experience of polygynous (de jure or de facto) marriage by one's mother, for instance, produces a tendency for daughters to emphasize and seek better self fulfilment in their mate selection preference. This tendency promotes cross generational sex ("Sugar Daddy" syndrome), a phenomenon that increases the incidence of eventual spinsterhood (Gage and Blesdoe, 1994). An interview with outside wives and female undergraduates in Lagos and Ibadan indicated that the experience of women in the domestic sphere have profound effect on their daughter's perception of marriage. One of the "outside wives" whose mother experienced de facto polygynous union said she decided to be an outside wife before she entered the university, with the knowledge of her parents, though her father objected to it. According to the outside wife, her mother did not only approve of her "husband" but encouraged her to continue the relationship. Her mother told her that being an inside wife means suffering. This mother told her daughter that all her friends who are inside wives are suffering too. They say "experience is the best teacher" (referring to her mother's experience, not hers). She recounted all the pleasures and good financial deals she has with her "husband" and said "my mother does not have such a deal". In the discussion with female undergraduates also, the girls pointed to the insecurities of church-type of marriage which they contend do not remain monogamous for more than three to five years. They argued that the man usually will get an outside wife who will get the better deal (in finance and romance). The girls claimed they knew from their friends who are married and personal experiences told by their mothers. A large number of the undergraduate females according to WaKaranja, have no qualms about becoming an "outside wife" before being tied down to a "proper marriage". Many are quite ready to remain in such unions as an alternative to marriage as long as they are viable (WaKaranja, 1987). As noted earlier, the result of this attitude is spinsterhood for most of such women.

Motherhood has always involved a number of other functions as well – notably providing economic support to dependent family members, especially children (Akorede, 2010; Bruce, 1995). Women have been found to contribute higher percentage, of their earnings (sometimes a larger absolute sum) to their household especially on food and child welfare than men (Akorede, 2010; Chindime and Ubomba-Jaswa, 2007; Bruce, 1995). Outside wife and concubinage phenomenon limits the financial resources a man commits to his nuclear family; thus increasing the financial pressure and contribution women in such homes have to make to the welfare of their homes. Some studies suggest that men in Africa

and Nigeria always take care of children born to them by “outside wives” or any other woman (Mann 1994; Guyer 1994; WaKaranja, 1987). Citing Bledsoe (1993), Bruce (1995) noted that one reason why father’s relative cash contribution to their household may be small is because some fathers contribute portions of their income to one or more other households in which they are supporting children of past or current sexual partners. WaKaranja (1994) argued that in Nigeria as elsewhere in West Africa, outside wives are financially maintained by their “husbands”. This certainly does not apply to all single mothers especially if the father did not accept responsibility for the child. Even for those whose children have known fathers, the level of support from the man will depend on his commitment to the relationship (Meekers, 1994) and sometimes on the sex of the child. Bruce (1995) also noted that in parts of West Africa, monetary exchanges are encouraged between blood kin – example between brothers and sisters – rather than between husbands and wives; thus a man may pay more attention towards the support of his sister’s children than his own. Constrained by this, many women join the labour force out of necessity as well as in response to new economic opportunities (Bruce, 1995). This issue of financial burden on married women spurs the determination of never married women for economic empowerment before marriage.

One of the recent developments in family and intimate relationships is a general trend towards the free selection of a spouse; parental choice of marriage partner is being replaced by self-selection (Giddens, 2006; Isiugo-Abanihe et al.,1993). Even though parental choice may have declined, parental influence on one’s decision on who to marry is still prevalent, and in some cases lead to spinsterhood (Ferguson, 2000). Among the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria, Smith (2007:999) argued that “the choice of a spouse based on love is, in almost all cases, still subjected to the advice and consent of families”. Parents’ stereotypes and cultural beliefs about persons or groups still have some influence on individual decision on whom to marry. Among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria, Ekiran (2003) observed that most young people do not marry anybody without the consent and traditional blessing of their parents

Birth order, particularly being a first daughter or first child/daughter and parental demands on daughter’s wage labour constitute other family background factors that result in postponement of marriage (Ferguson, 2000; Berend, 2000). In some poor families, the first daughter particularly if she is also the first child is sent out to work, in order to alleviate the financial burden on parents of training younger siblings. In societies where compulsory dowry is required for marriage girls from poor families have to work sometimes for many years to accumulate enough money for dowry.

### **2.3.2.9 Declining polygyny**

There is apparent decline in the prevalence of de jure polygyny in Nigeria as well as other Africa countries (DHS, 2011; Smith, 2007; Timaeus and Reynar 1998 cited in Coast, 2006; Meekers, 1992). Polygyny among married women in Nigeria declined from 41 percent in 1990 to 36 percent in 1999, 36 percent in 2003 and 33 percent in 2008 (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009; NPC and ORC Macro, 2004, 2000.). The decline is partly due to the exploitative nature of polygyny against women (Olusanya, 1970 cited in Aina, 1998). Polygyny increases financial strain on women. Empirical evidence from a research conducted among students of tertiary institutions in Ondo town, Ondo state, Nigeria, reveals that women in polygynous unions contribute more than fathers in finances for education and other welfare needs of children (Akorede, 2010). To men, polygyny is a proof of their dominance and superiority over women; it is a mark of a man's success (Akintan, 2002). In addition, polygyny "breeds conflicts and instability in homes as a man tries to distribute his attention between his wives and children" (Aina, 1998:7). Also, education, for both men and women affects polygyny negatively (Coast, 2006). In Nigeria, high level of female education and Christianity influence women against polygyny (Mann, 1994; WaKaranja 1994, 1987; Isiugo-Abanihe et al., 1993). Polygyny was depended on to absorb excess women (Gage and Bledsoe 1994; Mann 1994) but with the decline, many of such "excess" women are being pushed to spinsterhood.

Whereas de jure polygyny is declining, de facto polygyny is emerging in the form of outside wife phenomenon which has been found to exist in many African countries. (Locoh 1994; WaKaranja, 1987; Obbo 1987) Outside wife phenomenon is the practice whereby men marry one woman by statutory law and also forms extra-legal domestic and sexual unions with other women (Mann, 1994). According to Mann this phenomenon developed as a result of the contradiction which elite African men felt between monogamy and the pull of local domestic culture. Never married women who insist on ideal marriage would reject de facto polygyny as alternative route to marriage and will likely become spinsters.

### **2.3.2.10 Marital dissolution and marital instability**

Marital dissolution (divorce or separation) is one of the determinants of spinsterhood. High rates of divorce and conflicts in marriage instigate a feeling of uncertainty and fear about marriage in never married women (Lamanna and Riedman, 2003). Considering the costs and the consequences of divorce, some women would rather be single than have a marriage break up.

The trend of marital dissolution in the developed countries has been towards increasing divorce rates, though there are slight declines in some countries. Marital dissolution is also common in many less developed countries. In sub-Saharan Africa rates of divorce reported for women age 15-49 in Demographic and Health Surveys conducted in each country between 2005 and 2008 range from the lowest of 0.4 in Swaziland to 6.0 highest in Zambia (DHS, 2011). Divorce and separation rates for women are still low in Nigeria at 0.8 percent for divorce and 1.1 percent for separation (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009). Urban residence, high educational attainment and employment outside the home among women are associated with higher rates of marital dissolution through divorce and separation (Berg-Cross et al., 2004; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994a). Considering that these three indicators of modernism are increasing for women in Nigeria one would expect that divorce and separation rates would be increasingly simultaneously. Noteworthy is that many divorced and separated women would report themselves as married considering that divorce is still a stigmatised marital status in Nigeria. Also, the low national divorce and separation rates do not mean low rate of marital instability. The high prevalence of domestic violence in Nigeria partly indicates that women who are victims of violence will be dissatisfied in their marriages. In England and Wales, wives' dissatisfaction with marriage accounts for the rising divorce rates. In 2010, 66 percent of divorces were granted to wives, and in over half (55 percent) of those cases where divorce was granted to wives, the husband's behaviour was the reason for the divorce (UK Office for National Statistics, 2010). The restraint for women in Nigeria who are experiencing marital violence is the pervasive culture of concealment and stigmatisation of life outside the normative family setting.

Another trend revealed in Nigeria's Demographic and Health Survey is increasing divorce and separation rates as the women advance in age (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009; NPC and ORC Macro, 2004) Divorce rates increase from 0.3 percent for women age 15-19 to 1.2 for women age 45-49. This same trend applies to separation; it increases from 0.2 percent for women age 15-19 to 1.8 for women age 45-49. This might mean that women in Nigeria are more likely to translate dissatisfaction in marriage to divorce and separation as they grow older. It may also be an indication of increase in outside wife phenomenon, because the tendency for men to seek younger women as outside wives or mistress increases as the formal marriage advances; risking the stability of their formal marriages. At younger ages, Nigerian women may not be quick to opt out of a bad marriage because the hope of stability is still high. At mid age, they would do their best to bear and cope with any unacceptable husband behaviour to avoid the stigma of divorce and separation, at later age, they may have

stabilised economically and socially and have had children to lean on for emotional and financial support.

#### **2.3.2.11 Domestic violence**

Domestic violence is a confrontation between family or household members that typically involves physical harm, sexual assault, or fear of physical harm. Family or household members include spouses, former spouses, those in (or formerly in) a dating relationship, adults related by blood or marriage, and those who have a biological or legal parent-child relationship. Domestic violence can include physical and sexual abuse, emotional abuse, economic abuse, coercion and threats, intimidation, isolation, jealousy, and blame (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009).

Domestic violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon (PRB Data sheet, 2011; Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005; Summers and Hoffman, 2002). In many countries, both men and women agree that wife beating is acceptable under circumstances ranging from arguing with husband to refusal of sex (PRB Data Sheet, 2011). A Population Reference Bureau report on domestic violence in nine developing countries found that “more than one in six married women in each country that was studied reported being pushed, shaken, slapped, or targeted with a thrown object by their male partners. At least one in 10 has been threatened or publicly humiliated by their husbands” (Lalasz, 2004:1). The 2008 Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey found that 30 percent of women reported that they had experienced either physical or sexual violence. About one in five women experienced only physical violence, 2 percent experienced only sexual violence, and 5 percent experienced both physical and sexual violence” (NPC and ICR Macro, 2009:267). Other research in parts of Nigeria give higher rates, Odujinrin, (1993) cited in Aderinto et al. (2006) reported 81 percent of women being victims of one form of abuse or the other. An unpublished PhD study on domestic violence carried out in Ijeshaland in Osun state also found that 65 percent of female respondents have experienced at least an act of domestic violence by husbands; and 78 percent of these have had multiple types of intimate person violence (Ajala, 2008). The findings of Aderinto et al., (2006:73) in Delta and Edo States of Nigeria confirmed that women face violent situations in homes though they “prefer coping with the condition to home desertion – “for the sake of their children and the faith that the man will change”

A global study found that 40 to 80 percent of all physical abuse suffered by women takes place at the hands of a close family member (usually a husband) (Burich, 1991 cited in Bruce, 1995). In Nigeria, 45 percent of women who experienced physical violence

experienced it from their husbands or partner (NPC and ICR Macro, 2009). This high prevalence of perpetration of violence by husbands is indicative of a patriarchal system that encourages unequal power relations in the home (Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005). The woman is categorized with children as “subjects” who should be corrected or disciplined sometimes with violence (The Nigerian CEDAW/NGO Report, 2008; Orebiyi, 2002). In many societies, domestic violence is considered a private affair between family members. Viewing domestic violence as a private affair obscures the gendered nature of it; “women suffer domestic violence because they are women, and they suffer at the hands of their intimate partners” (Surtees 2003:33). Surtees argues that the conceptualisation of domestic violence as a private matter is common in many societies of the world and it is an obstacle to combating it. Understanding domestic violence as a public issue means that domestic violence will appear in its true light as one of the forms of social violence (Surtees, 2003). Domestic violence constitutes a flaw in the institution of marriage. According to Byrne, (2008) such flaws and inequalities entrenched in the practice of marriage should be seen as public issues rather than private troubles if the single status is to be accorded equal status with marriage.

Unknown to the perpetrators, domestic violence does not end with the victims; it has intergenerational effect such as spinsterhood (Lalasz, 2004; Ferguson, 2000). Never married women whose mothers, and other women known to them experience domestic violence learn their lessons by staying clear of men who they think possess similar traits with the perpetrators they knew.

Domestic violence is likely to be a major reason for marital dissolution in Nigeria. Demographic and Health Survey of 2008 reports that women who are divorced, separated or widowed are far more likely to have experienced violence than other women; 44 percent of them have experienced violence since age 15 compared to 25 percent of married women and 33 percent of never married women. This gives an idea that experience of domestic violence is inimical to marital stability. Experience of any form of domestic violence for a woman before or within marriage affects the stability of her union if she forms any. When marriage is no more a haven of physical protection for the women, other alternatives to marriage may become more attractive. Never married women would become more careful in their choice of marriage partner. By all indications women want and need satisfying sexual relationships and family life (whether by innate desire or socialization). Nonetheless, the issue for most women is not the value of these experiences but rather the conditions under which they experience them (Bruce, et al., 1995).

### **2.3.2.12 Deliberate choice**

Declining marriage rate, rising trend of alternatives to marriage, and the complexities and contradictions in marriage motivated some researchers to conclude that “fusion in love is a refuge aspiration but that it harmonizes badly with aspirations to autonomy and self development which are characteristic of our contemporary world” (Bawin-Legros, 2004:250). On this basis, some women actually decide to be single because they want to be, because they feel it would contribute to their growth and well being to remain single (Dykstra and Poortman, 2010; Tanturri and Mencarini, 2008; Lamanna and Riedman, 2003; Adams, 1986).

### **2.3.2.13 State policy**

State legislations encourage spinsterhood directly or indirectly. Legislations on issues such as female participation in labour force, compulsory education for women, age at first marriage, outlawing of early marriage and committed government have been instrumental to population reduction in some countries such as China and Tunisia (Eun-young, 2001; Duza and Baldwin, 1977). In China and North Korea, state legislations were instrumental to the substantial reduction of early marriage, polygyny and concubinage, and women became important segments of the labour force (Eun-young, 2001). In China marriage laws encouraged singlehood as an acceptable lifestyle for women. A reward system was attached to women who would serve the state single. Though Nigeria’s Child Rights Act and population policy do not encourage spinsterhood directly but the delimitation of 18 years as the official age for first marriage, even though it is not enforced, indirectly encourages women to resist early marriage. In addition, public policies that encourage improvement of women’s status through education and employment outside the home reinforce women’s resolve to pursue personal interests before marriage. The resultant effect in some cases is spinsterhood.

## **2.4**

### **CONSEQUENCES OF SPINSTERHOOD**

Being single for women beyond a certain age, with or without children has some implications for women. Due to pervasive marriage and family ideology singleness continues to be a marginal position for women (Simpson, 2007; Macvarish, 2006; Byrne 2003). Interviews conducted by Simpson (2007) with singles in Britain demonstrate the limited approved identities available to women in relation to motherhood, whereby both childlessness and having a child alone risk exposing women to charges of selfishness. No matter how much achievement a woman attains in public place and work, her achievements in private life still seems to weigh more in public eyes. For the single women in Macvarish’s

(2006) study, single women's attainments in the public sphere is denigrated, attention is still turned back onto achievements in the private sphere, where they risk being judged as failures; emotionally cold or dysfunctional.

Gage and Bledsoe (1994) cited Evans Pritchard (1965) describing marriage in "simple" African societies as a given. There was no such thing as unmarried adult woman or one who was childless by choice; companionship in marriage was weak and the concept of romantic love non-existent; and women could not choose a career instead of marriage. Most African societies had sanctions on childbearing outside marriage; in some East African communities, it was punishable by death, in other places in Africa it was abortion or infanticide. There was no place for single life of any form except for women who are espoused to spirits as priestesses. Isiugo-Abanihe (1994a) confirms this notion of marriage in his study of bridewealth and nuptiality patterns among the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria. He quoted Basden (1938) "It looms upon the horizon of every maid and youth as an indispensable function to be fulfilled with as little delay as possible after reaching the age of puberty. The idea of a celibate life finds no favour whatsoever to the Ibo it is rank foolishness as well as being utterly contrary" (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994a:75).

In the study, Isiugo-Abanihe (1994a) found that a large number of people (40 percent of males and 29 percent of females) regarded late marriage or remaining single permanently as a social evil. WaKaranja (1987:248), found from her interview with market women in Lagos that "marriage or wifhood is seen as most important single event in a woman's life. For a woman all forms of personal fulfilment and success were always defined in terms of legal marriage and ultimate motherhood. Unmarried women who become wealthy would still be less esteemed than men". Ekiran (2003) argued that a female headed family is an emergent phenomenon in Nigeria, which is an evidence of a broken home, or widowhood or absentee husband. Though female headed household is not new in Nigeria, Mann (1994) traced the history of outside wives to the early colonial days in Lagos. Ekiran's claim is from the perspective of a family ideology that imagines all women should be married. Therefore, he could not associate female headed households to spinsterhood or singleness by choice. The normatively accepted adult status for a woman is based on marriage and motherhood; outside these, she becomes a kind of societal misfit.

Nevertheless, the consequences of spinsterhood are not all negative, there are some positive outcomes for spinsters, their natal homes and the larger society. Some of the consequences are reviewed below.

### 2.4.1 Stigmatisation and marginalisation

Although the stereotypic images of never married women are changing, particularly in developed countries, stigmatisation and marginalisation are still the dominant marks of single womanhood (Hertel, *et al.*, 2007; Bryne and Carr, 2005; DePaulo and Morris, 2005; Sandfield and Percy 2003; Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000). Singleness is still seen as defying the norms of femininity - marriage and motherhood - hence it attracts many forms of social stigma and stereotypes (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009; Byrne, 2008, 2003, 2000; Byrne and Carr, 2005; Simpson, 2003; Adams, 1986). Singles are often seen as hostile to marriage or to men, lesbians, unattractive, unwilling or unable to date well, loners or swingers. Negative stereotypes and stigma against singleness is one outcome of the pervasive ideology that heterosexual marriage and motherhood are the ultimate mark of success in a woman's life (Macvarish 2006; Byrne, 2003, 2000; Adams, 1986). To DePaulo and Morris (2005), one of the most important implications of the ideology of marriage and family is anti-singles sentiment which they referred to as singlism. Singles are made targets of negative stereotyping, interpersonal rejection, economic disadvantage and discrimination. In DePaulo's book "Singlism: What It is, Why It Matters and How to Stop It" she cited the example of the USA Family and Medical Leave Act. Under this law, nobody in the life of a single person who has no child can take leave to care for the single persons if she is sick (Parker-Pope, 2011). The result of a research on the social perceptions of single women showed that age and gender are significant determinants of stereotypes of singles.

Being young, flexible, and independent is regarded as positive, being old and still without a partner as negative. Many people may have internalized these cultural expectations (one has to be married or at least has to have a romantic partner at the age of 35) and judge others and oneself in relation to these standards. It is true that singleness is still regarded and commonly accepted as a transitional state at a younger age. A forty-year-old single is much more stigmatized than a 25-year-old one (Hertel *et al.*, 2007:23).

Macvarish (2006) holds an exception to the above view. To the single women in her study singleness as defying the norms of femininity is not an issue. She argued that popular images of single women as career women have become more feminized in recent years. Macvarish concluded that internal sense of self may have some role to play in the way single women express their experiences with others – the married persons and the society. Sense of self certainly interferes with spinsters' perception of how they are treated by others. Nevertheless, sense of self is not an isolated phenomenon. It is an outcome of socialization, life experiences and social identity.

According to Byrne and Carr (2005), prejudicial belief about singles is not enough to conclude that singles experience stigma. To demonstrate stigmatisation against singles, the singles themselves must perceive the mistreatment. Byrne and Carr employed the following classical and contemporary conceptualizations of stigma to evaluate the extent to which singles in the United States of America meet the criteria set in those definitions. Stigma is “any personal attribute that is “discrediting” to its possessors and that reduces such a person “from a whole and usual person to a tainted and discounted one” (Goffman 1963:3 cited in Byrne and Carr, 2005). Stigma refers to “a social identity that is devalued in a particular context (Crocker et al., 1998 cited in Byrne and Carr, 2005). Stafford and Scott (1986: 80 cited in Byrne and Carr, 2005) describe stigma as “a characteristic...that is contrary to a norm of a social unit,” where “norm” refers to a “shared belief that a person ought to behave in a certain way at a certain time.” Link and Phelan (2001) cited in Byrne and Carr, (2005) argue that stigma exists when four interrelated components converge: labelling, stereotyping, separation, and status loss/discrimination. Link and Phelan (2001) further propose that a core component of the stigma process is that the labelled person experiences discrimination and status loss, which in turn may have harmful consequences for their life chances, including their psychological, economic, and physical well-being (Byrne and Carr 2005:4-6).

In order to examine singles’ experience of stigma, based on these conceptualizations, Byrne and Carr (2005) examined data from the Midlife Development in the United States survey (MIDUS). The survey used a set of questions to examine experience of interpersonal and institutional discrimination. Discrimination is defined as overt negative and unequal treatment of members of a given social group solely because of their membership in that group. Interpersonal discrimination involves experiences such as being treated with less courtesy than others, treated with less respect than others, receive poorer service than other people in restaurants, people act as if they think you are not smart, people act as if they are afraid of you, people act as if they think you are dishonest, people act as if they think you are not as good as they are, you are called names or insulted, you are threatened or harassed. Institutional discrimination consists of being discouraged by a teacher from seeking higher education, denied a scholarship, not hired for a job, not given a job promotion, were fired, prevented from renting or buying a home in the neighbourhood you wanted, were prevented from remaining in the neighbourhood because neighbours made life so uncomfortable, were hassled by the police, were denied a bank loan, were denied or provided inferior medical care; were denied or provided inferior service by a plumber, car mechanic, or other service provider.

On the basis of the above conceptualizations and their findings Byrne and Carr (2005) concluded that pro-marriage cultural beliefs are still widely prevalent in the United States of America and never married women are still stigmatized. At interpersonal and informal interaction level, never married women are much more likely than married women to report experience of discriminatory treatment. Also, in comparison with married women never married women were treated more with less respect, got poorer service at restaurants, called names, threatened or harassed.

Spinsters experience discrimination in places of work with regard to unusual and extra work assignments. Spinsters are usually seen as more available than married women for late night work, weekend travels and assignments (Stein, 2000 cited in Lamanna and Riedman, 2003).

#### **2.4.2 Identity challenge**

One of the problems of spinsterhood is identity (Byrne, 2008, 2003, 2000; Simpson, 2007, 2006, 2003; Macvarish 2006; Sandfield and Percy, 2003; Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003). Being single is represented with problematic polarised repertoires involving denigration and idealisation, Singleness is constructed as a personal deficit and social exclusion on one hand, and independence, choice, self actualisation and achievement on the other hand (Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003). Byrne (2008:35) argued that “in terms of social identities, single women have to negotiate between two strong conceptions of womanhood: a patriarchal conception as heterosexual, married and reproductive, and a conception of single womanhood as lack, as deviant and a threat to the patriarchal order”. This lack of cultural validation for singleness narrows women’s identity to marriage and motherhood, thus making it difficult for single women to accept their lifestyle as normal. Byrne (2003:15) also noted that “social identities for single women revolved around stereotypes of fussy, selfish, choosy, particular, spinsters, women who were dried up, 'staid, old, not living', single women who hated men, old maids, wallflowers, women who were left on the shelf and who had 'something wrong with them’”.

Nevertheless, spinsters’ response to this social identity is important. There are the options of accepting their social identity as true and build up a self identity that is flawed or reject the negative social identity and construct a positive self identity. Accepting singleness as an identity perhaps is more problematic for women in their late thirties and forties. Macvarish (2006) observed that never married women in this age category find it difficult to embrace singleness as a lifestyle even when they prefer singlehood. To Macvarish this ambivalence is because the late thirties and forties is a time of transition when never married

women have to make decisions about whether to pursue marriage and motherhood or to remain single. Byrne (2003) argued that construction of a positive self identity by single women is consequential for effecting transformation in social identities of single women and women in general. Byrne further opined that the effect of macro level ideologies on individual lives, or social identities on self identity are difficult to detail precisely. In response to this theoretical and empirical challenge she developed an investigative, empirical model of self identity and social identity using some theoretical works and life narratives of three groups of single women who were over age thirty, not married, not cohabiting with the opposite sex and have no children. To investigate the effect of stereotypical conceptions of womanhood on women's individual lives, Byrne's model emphasised four constitutive elements of self identity as "experiencing the self in interaction with others, developing the capacity for self knowledge, devising care and practices of the self, and being self-reflexive" (Byrne, 2003:11). Analyzing empirical narratives of Irish single women with this model Byrne concluded that creating a positive single self identity entails being one's self in reference to knowing one's own values and preferences and courageously accepting them against public social expectations. This is an important agency that will transform singleness from being a marginal position for women to becoming one of the acceptable identity options for woman.

#### **2.4.3 Emotional and health consequences**

Satisfaction with singleness is affected by whether the woman is single voluntarily or involuntarily. Voluntary and involuntary single hood are qualitatively different. Therefore, the emotional response of voluntary and involuntary spinsters would differ. Those who are single by choice report being happy and satisfied with their single status, but those who are single by constraint bemoan their status and so usually not happy (Lamanna and Riedman, 2003).

Nonetheless, most singles face the contradiction of being free from responsibilities and domestic demands and the pains of going through life childless. The often experience the painful thought of remaining single and childless for the rest of life and visions of loneliness in old age (Simpson, 2007; Macvarish 2006; Byrne, 2003). Permanent Singleness does not mean childless, but, research show that many single women conflate singleness and childlessness (Reynolds, 2009). This is partly due to preference for childbearing within marriage prevalent in many cultures and religion. Children born or adopted by unmarried women are stigmatised in many Nigerian societies, because of the high importance placed on membership of a descent group. Spinsters confront the feeling of being unloved and

unimportant to anybody, as no man considers them good enough for marriage. There is the uncertainty and pain of forming a heterosexual relationship with a married man who may coerce her to abort pregnancies and eventually leave for his wife (Simpson, 2007; Macvarish, 2006).

Another source of emotional stress is parental pressure to marry and parents' disappointment that the spinsters are not married (Sharp and Ganong, 2011; Lamanna and Reidmann, 2003). Sharp and Ganong (2011) found that some single women in their study are pressured by parents to enter into marriage at least to have a child and then get a divorce. In the USA, in general, the majority of young adults experience less parental pressure to marry, but a research found that "many American parents remain vexed when their offspring approach a thirtieth birthday without at least one marriage in the record" (Shostak 1987:355 cited in Lamanna and Riedman 2003). In Byrne's study, contemporary spinsters in Ireland reported that it is hard for them to make their parents understand their single status (Byrne, 2003). The women in Macvarish's (2006) study confirm that it was sometimes difficult to construct an adult status to their parents without marriage.

Some studies suggest that single women have lower self esteem than married women (Waite and Gallagher, 2000; Waite, 1995; O'Neill, 2009). To Byrne and Carr (2005) what accounts for this low self esteem and higher levels of depressed affect in singles found in these studies is the fact that the construction of self identity is basically influenced by prevailing macro level ideologies and the perception of significant others. Spinsterhood is often perceived negatively at the macro and micro levels, even though such negative perceptions are often outcomes of pro-marriage ideology rather than observable personal traits of individual spinsters. Faced with such negative social identity spinsters are more likely to construct an image of themselves that is low and depressed (Fuwa, 2004; Byrne, 2003).

Other studies suggest that singlehood has negative physical and mental health consequences (Gallagher, 2003; Waite and Gallagher, 2000; Waite, 1995). Waite (2009) concludes that marriage is beneficial for health of women in old age. A synopsis of conclusions from several research indicate that both married men and women enjoy better health on average than do single or divorced persons. Some longitudinal studies conclude that above and beyond selection effect, and controlling for race, income, and family background, married persons enjoy longer life than singles. This result is possibly due to the protective effect of marriage, the likelihood of married people to manage illness better and monitor each other's health. Unmarried women face risks about one-and-a-half times as great

as those faced by married women (Wilson and Oswald, 2005; O'Neill, 2009:2). Considering the prevalence of domestic violence the world over, it is contestable whether it is marriage itself that enhances the health of women who remain married or some other factors. The connection between marriage and health is complex because marital status can affect health outcomes and be affected by them. (Wood, Goesling and Avellar, 2007).

#### **2.4.4 Economic strain/reward**

Satisfaction with living single depends to some extent on income, for hardships can impose heavy restrictions (Lamanna and Riedman, 2003). Ability to get and keep a good stable job and steady income is a problem that confronts some spinsters. This results in inadequate financial resources, a situation that compels some spinsters to group residence. On the other hand, marriage and childbirth depresses the wage and career growth of women. After marriage “the careers of women take a backseat to the career of their husbands” (Loughran and Zissimopoulos, 2004:21). Delaying marriage and non marriage therefore is beneficial to some women in their career development and wage growth (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009; Loughran and Zissimopoulos, 2004; Oderinde, 2002). For such women finance would not be a problem, their challenge would revolve around constructing an acceptable self identity within pro marriage and family social structure, and finding a suitable mate if they want to marry (Berg-Cross, et al., 2004; Byrne, 2003).

Married couples build more wealth on the average than singles and cohabiting couples. This is not just a result of access to two incomes; it is also due to marital social norms that encourage healthy, productive behaviour and wealth accumulation such as buying a home. Married persons also receive money or gifts from grandparents more often than single persons (O'Neill, 2009:12).

#### **2.4.5 Care giving**

Care giving to kins and non kins is associated with spinsters (Byrne, 2008, 2003; Simpson, 2003; Trimberger, 2002). These studies have attempted to find out if this role is a result of spinsters' felt duty and obligation to family members or it is a duty forced on them by their single status. Both Simpson (2006, 2003) and Byrne (2008, 2003) found that some of the spinsters in their studies derived joy caring for members of their families such as sick or old parent or needy siblings. In other cases, the care-giving by spinsters was a mutual agreement with aging parents who provide housing in exchange for the spinster's care. In some cases it was the family's expectation for the spinster to take care of aging or ailing parents because they are single.

#### **2.4.6 Denial of inheritance rights in natal family**

Inheritance laws and traditions in many societies exclude women from inheriting family wealth. In the cases where married women have some inheritance right, single women are usually denied such rights even when they contributed to the acquisition of such property. In most Nigerian societies, though single women can use land while in their natal homes. They are not entitled to inherit land because they are regarded as temporary members of the family and community. Male siblings and relatives assumed any estate and, if a spinster is lucky they will provide her with a small income for her support (The Nigerian CEDAW NGO report, 2008). Research shows that many spinsters devote their time and finances to caring for aged parents and indigent relatives, (Byrne, 2008, 2003) but this does not earn them any inheritance right in many cases.

#### **2.4.7 Spinsterhood as a means of population control**

Late marriage as well as non marriage (both connote spinsterhood) has minus effect on fertility (Khatun, 2008; Yip, et al., 2006; Duza and Balwin, 1977; Davis, 1963). In addition to reduced birth within marriage, increasing later age at first marriage and non marriage are causally linked to fertility decline in countries that have completed or in phase three of the demographic transition (Khatun, 2008; Iwasawa, 2004; UN Population Division, 2003; Feyisetan and Bankole, 2002). Spinsterhood accounted for 56 percent reduction in total fertility rate in Hong Kong between 1976 and 2001 (Yip et al., 2006). Isiugo-Abanihe (2000:44) citing Olusanya (1982) observed that “marriage in Nigeria is so closely linked to childbearing that a change in the patterns of marriage necessarily influences the birth rate and hence the rate of population growth”. Feyisetan and Bankole (2002) confirmed that in spite of increasing teenage pregnancy and fertility, most birth in Nigeria take place within marriage. Using Bongaarts framework, Makinwa-Adebusoye and Feyisetan (1994) found that marriage was the second most fertility inhibiting factor among sub-population groups in Nigeria. The inhibiting effect of marriage in the entire country was found to be 25 percent, 45 percent in the southwest, 41 percent in the Southeast, 9 percent in the Northwest and 8 percent in the Northeast. They found the retarding effect of marriage on fertility to be 9 percent among non-educated women, 29 percent among women with secondary education, and 54 percent for women with secondary or higher education, 21 percent in the rural areas and 36 percent in the urban areas (Cited in Feyisetan and Bankole, 2002). For spinsterhood to produce the minus effect on population growth there must be continence outside marriage and or the use of contraceptives to prevent childbirth by the spinsters. However, studies show that pregnancy and childbearing outside marriage is more among adolescent girls than

spinsters (Murphy and Carr, 2007; Lamanna and Riedman, 2003). Also, spinsterhood has consequences for marital fertility due to the less number of years of fecundity for spinsters who will eventually marry. The late age at which childbearing commences for spinsters, who will marry or become single mothers by natural birth or adoption means large intergenerational gap between parents and children, which is also consequential for fertility reduction.

Nevertheless, as part of population control measures and status enhancement for women, societies encourage late marriage instead of permanent non marriage. This is because for any population to replace itself, the majority of women must marry: marriage being the socially sanctioned institution for procreation, socialisation and care of children in many societies (Bongaarts and Potter, 1983). If contraceptives are available and effectively used, fertility will rather be controlled within marriage than through permanent spinsterhood. Upholding increase in female age at first marriage to 18 years, the Nigerian population policy also indicates that ‘appropriate measures shall be taken to protect and support the family and the institution of marriage’ (FGNb National Population Policy, 2004:27).

## **2.5 SPINSTERS’ COPING MECHANISMS**

Spinsters employ diverse strategies to cope with challenges associated with singlehood. Available literature and research dealing on spinsters’ coping mechanisms are few. This is probably due to the conception of spinsterhood by some researchers as a passing stage of life and prolonged stay at that stage is viewed as private fault or failure.

### **2.5.1 Friendship and family network**

Non-sexual friendship provides an alternative culture of intimacy and care beyond the heterosexual or homosexual family types (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). Roseneil and Budgeon asserted that “some of those leading the most individualized existences are choosing to center their personal lives around friendship, and to decenter sexual partnerships, in ways which challenge the heterorelational social order” (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004:153). Trimberger, (2002) argued from her research and survey of other research, that network of friends provide significant help for adult singles in time of need. For Trimberger, the care provided by a network of friend is devoid of the loss of personal independence that care of family members often entail. To her, care provided within friendship network is more genuine and supportive. Simpson (2006) maintained that friendship as a source of intimacy and sense of belonging as well as care are particularly pertinent to single people: those who do not have one ‘significant other’ must rely on varied others for emotional and other support. The narratives of many participants in her research showed close, affectionate and

supportive relationships with both family and friends, and these were clearly important to the emotional and social lives of the women in the research. Ibrahim and Hassan (2009) also found that supportive family and friends help single women to cope with the challenges of negative perceptions.

Friendship provides one vital source of social support for single persons. Lamanna and Riedman (2003), on the basis of several research findings pointed out that supportive social network particularly same-sex friendship is vitally important in providing social support that singles need to cultivate and maintain a positive feeling about being single. Other identified sources of social support for singles are opposite-sex relationship, group living situation and volunteer work. Sociologists agree that singles need social support to handle issues of loneliness, acceptance and community (Lamanna and Riedmann, 2003). Putam (2000) cited in Haralambos and Holborn (2008) suggested that individuals with high levels of social capital tend to be happier than those with low levels. Social capital refers to connections among individuals- social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Putam, 2000:19 cited in Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). From the individual perspective, social capital is one's access to resources through reciprocal social networks. These resources can be in the form of social support or social leverage. Social support refers to ties that help individuals cope with the demands of everyday life and other stresses. These ties generally provide emotional and expressive support as well as certain forms of instrumental help like rides, small loans, or a place to stay in case of emergency. Social leverage refers to using network ties for social mobility (Ciabattari, 2007).

### **2.5.2 Work**

Byrne (2003) suggests that performing caring work, pursuing a career and showing interest in becoming married could counterbalance the stigma of singleness. Single women in Byrne's study particularly the carers (mainly older women) and professional women described their work as their identity, and were content being single. Commenting on Byrne's suggestion about work, Macvarish (2006) found that the single women in her study avoided speaking of their work as a significant part of who they are. To the women, after all, the spotlight is turned to one's private life. Macvarish attributed this to the trend where public portrayal of successful single women is disassociated from ambition and success in the place of work. That status is accorded to a woman in Nigeria on the basis of marriage and motherhood (Taylor 2002; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1998; Aina, 1998) also indicates that commendation of achievement in the public place is limited to the workplace. Outside the

office, one's private life is what counts. Therefore, work may provide some level of emotional stability for spinsters but would not eliminate the stigma of non marriage.

Employment, for many women, has been found to improve their psychological well being, self-esteem and self efficacy and gives them a feeling of being better role models for their children (London, Scott, Edin, and Hunter, 2004). Confirming this, Lleras' (2008) findings support the stress buffering model which suggests that some difficult family or economic circumstances may be offset or less detrimental for women who have access to greater economic or personal resources.

These researches suggest that spinsters need to be employed for personal psychological well being, if not for identity. How much education and qualification spinsters have to secure stable and high wage employment is a pertinent question. In Nigeria, Women constitute 87 percent of employees in the service sector, which involves mainly informal and unregulated forms of employment (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009; The Nigerian CEDAWNGO Report, 2008). This is an indication that women are more likely to be unemployed or in unstable jobs.

### **2.5.3 Motherhood by choice**

“Cultural and material changes have led to the possible separation between not just marriage and motherhood, but also partnership and motherhood” (Simpson, 2007:12). There are spinsters who take bold steps to redeem their reproductive years and actualise their naturalised maternal desires (Simpson, 2007; Siegel, 1995). These women constitute a sub group of single-person household and are called the “new single women”; most of whom are metropolitan, managerial/professional, educated and mobile (Simpson, 2007; Macvarish, 2006). Siegel (1995) noted that birth rate among never married college-educated women who work in professional and managerial positions doubled in the USA between 1982 and 1992. Hertz (2006), in an American study, referred to them as a class of elite women “creating the new American family”. According to Hertz, these are super-successful moms who decide they can no longer wait for love and marriage before they start pushing baby carriage. They adopted, conceived through artificial insemination, or conceived by a man who is not interested in parenting. These women, she found, believe in husband and co-parenting but just can no longer wait for “Mr Right”. The children of these super Moms are reported to be doing well as the ills associated with children raised in mono mother homes do not seem to apply to them. Other studies have found that when the single mothers are well educated, professionally successful, and financially responsible and have reliable social support network, their children turn out with no unusual disadvantage. Mothers with higher levels of

education may be more likely to value learning and have the skills (i.e., reading, writing) needed to foster cognitive development in their children, and they may have a better sense of self and display more maternal warmth than mothers with lower levels of education.(Lleras, 2008).

In Bock (2000), age was an important factor in the women's decision to become single mothers by choice. Majority of the twenty six middle and upper class single white moms were older than 35 years when they had their children. In Macvarish's (2006) UK study, these single women age 35 to 50 expressed interest in being partnered but do not know when it will come, how and if it will ever come. Unlike those who are locked up in the dilemma of waiting, these "super moms" have taken a bold step to at least have a child if not a husband. Byrne (2003) argues that spinsters adopt this strategy to protect themselves from the social stigma associated with both non marriage and childlessness in familist societies.

Though the number of these women may not be high, as the majority of non-marital childbearing in the USA and UK is by teenagers and the disadvantaged, the above findings are similar to what Gage and Bledsoe (1994:153-154) observed in Africa. According to them, unmarried motherhood is increasingly being accepted.

As indigenous forces loose their hold on women's conjugal behaviour, the prevailing urban attitude is that it is better for an unmarried woman to have a child than to be childless. Indeed although they prefer their daughters to marry, desperate kin may pressurize an educated woman who has passed the socially defined age at first birth to begin having children, even though no permanent husband is in sight.

In Nigeria, WaKaranja (1994:207-208) observed that having children for a rich man guarantees some financial security for the women because "whether the "marriage" remains extant or not, the man must support the children while he is alive and when he dies; the constitution guarantees that the children will have legitimate claim to the man's estate". Isiugo-Abanihe (1994) observed that the Igbo of Nigeria see marriage and motherhood as the ultimate measure of femininity. This implies that it is more acceptable to have a child without husband than to end up single and childless. Unlike the super Moms in the USA and UK who do not require financial input from biological fathers of their children, financial burden of lone parenting without marriage may discourage women of low economic status from adopting this mechanism.

## **2.6**

### **REVIEW OF RELEVANT THEORIES**

Theories in social research serve as guide to the social world. They do not determine how the researcher sees the world but help to develop questions and strategies for exploring

it (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000). This study adopts triangulation of theoretical perspectives for more productive interpretation of empirical data for this study. Aspects of modernisation theory, specifically Giddens's Structuration theory, are adopted to investigate spinsterhood in the context of particular features of modernity that affect individual choice and life experience. To investigate and appreciate aspects of women's experiences, feminist theories have been viewed as most appropriate and many previous researchers have used feminist theories to explain women's experiences including singlehood, in various societies. Feminist theories offer significant re-orientation of culture, language, morality and knowledge and how they affect women, her perception of herself in relation to the dominant culture in her psycho-social environment (Laurentis, 1998:2 cited in Akorede, 2011). One expected outcome of this research is to raise woman's consciousness to the feminist consciousness – a level of consciousness that builds and promotes self-esteem and encourages a demonstration of inner strength in words and action. To raise women's consciousness, analysis of patriarchy as a system of male domination is strongly advocated (Shiela, 1980 cited in Akorede, 2011). Hence, Sylvia Walby's *Theorising Patriarchy* and Barrett and McIntosh's *Anti-Social Family* provide appropriate feminist theories to investigate the prevalence, determinants and consequences of spinsterhood in a developing society such as Lagos.

### **2.6.1 The theory of structuration – Anthony Giddens**

Some aspects of modernisation theory as explained in Giddens's structuration theory are relevant to the understanding of spinsterhood in Lagos. In general, "modernisation refers to the development of social, cultural, economic and political practices and institutions which are thought to be typical of modern societies" (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008:473). Long (2009) identified the major assumptions of modernisation theory and the prerequisites for modernisation as follows:

- The world is a stable system of interrelated parts.
- All countries can become modern industrial societies like Europe.
- The primary characteristic of modernisation is differentiation.
- Development is an internal process in each society.

Two prerequisites for modernisation

- Institutional preconditions like democracy, anti-communism and laissez-faire government policy.

- Psychological change: People in developing countries have to develop values like individualism, personal achievement, desire to control one's destiny, desire for economic growth, willingness to become more mobile and deferred gratification.

Giddens (2006) addresses the contradictions in the modernisation process and explains the consequences of modernity for individuals in contemporary society. According to him, modernity is characterized by distanciation, disembedding mechanism and reflexivity. Distanciation refers to time-space separation. Disembedding is the breakdown of geographical and time barriers in social interactions. The two types of disembedding mechanisms that play vital roles in modern societies are symbolic tokens such as money, and expert systems. These two according to Ritzer (2008) can also be called abstract systems. Time-space distanciation, symbolic tokens such as money and expert systems in modern societies entail trust particularly in the expert systems. The basis of the trust is no longer personal knowledge. "We have no need to trust someone who is constantly in view and whose activities can be directly monitored" (Giddens 1991:19 cited in Ritzer, 2008).

Another important feature of modernity, according to Giddens, is the development of greater reflexivity. Reflexivity is the "way in which people reflect upon the institutions that are part of the social world and try to change them for better" (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008:513). As tradition loses its relevance in modernity, the operations and reformation of institutions and social life become more reflexive – based on reason instead of tradition.

### **2.6.2 Theorising patriarchy – Sylvia Walby (1989)**

Patriarchy is a word that has been used extensively in women and related studies. Aina (1998) defined patriarchy as a system of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex, whereby the father is the head of the family and men have authority over women and children. Several other scholars have conceptualized patriarchy from different perspectives. Walby (1989) pulled the different conceptualisations together to construct a dynamic model within which the patriarchal nature of a particular culture can be studied. Though Walby's "model was developed within the context of the last 150 years of UK history with some modifications, the main features are globally relevant" (Moghadam, 1996:25). Walby (1989) defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and practises, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. Her definition underlines the importance of seeing patriarchy as a structural phenomenon rather than a private issue. To Walby (1989), understanding patriarchy is central to the understanding of human societies particularly as regards gender inequality. Albeit Walby (1989) did not depict women as passive victims of patriarchy, she argues that patriarchal structures limit women and the choices available to

them and help to uphold male domination. Patriarchal structures, to her, are reproduced or changed by the actions of men and women. That the patriarchal structures can be replicated or transformed by the actions of men and women implies that spinsters are not passive victims of patriarchy. Their free will actions or inaction has its part in determining their spinsterhood status and how they experience it.

Walby (1989) acknowledges that patriarchy is not a fixed system; it changes and has been undergoing changes in its nature. But, the nature and extent of the changes differ across cultures and individual couples within the community (Fuwa, 2004).

### **Structures of patriarchy**

Walby contends that there are six structures of patriarchy namely; paid employment, patriarchal relations within the household or household production, culture, sexuality, male violence towards women, and the state. Each structure is relatively autonomous yet the structures interrelate to reinforce or weaken patriarchy. Walby as well identifies two types of patriarchy – private and public patriarchy.

#### **Paid employment**

To Walby (1989), paid employment is a patriarchal structure that limits women. According to her, in the nineteenth century Britain women were excluded from certain types of work but from the twentieth century women gained more access to paid employment. Nevertheless, men still dominate in the work place and in the best paid jobs. Men also earn relatively more income than women but women dominate in part-time employment and unemployment due to poor job opportunities. An International Labour Organisation (ILO) discussion paper on women, gender and the informal economy confirmed that although more and more women participate in paid employment, labour markets across all geographical regions are still sex-segregated, with women concentrated in lower quality, irregular and informal employment (Chant and Pedwell, 2008).

#### **Household production**

To Walby (1989), households sometimes involve patriarchal relations of production, where individual men exploit women by benefiting from the unpaid labour of women in the home. Women still do most of housework and child care and some women experience violence and abuse in marriages. Although women still bear much of household labour, not all women are violated in their marriages. To some women, marriage is a haven of protection, financial security and love. This is to say that marriage is not altogether an oppressive structure for all women. Nevertheless, Walby (1989) argues that divorce is easier today for women; therefore, they are not as caged in marriage as they were. This view on

divorce is true for the western countries but not in societies such as Nigeria where divorce is still stigmatised.

### **Culture**

Walby (1989) also observes that western culture distinguishes between male and female and different types of behaviour are expected for each sex. Nonetheless, she believes the gender behaviour expectation has changed. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, restricting one's work around the homes was considered more feminine in the UK. It was not womanly to engage in paid employment outside the home.

Walby further argues that the sign of femininity has changed from domesticity to sexual attractiveness to men. She believes that it is not only the femininity of younger women that is defined this way that of older women attracts the same definition. Hakim (2010) confirms this idea. She is of the view that the expectation of attractive appearance now applies to all age groups. Everyone is expected to develop and maintain erotic capital, not just before first marriage but throughout life. Sexual attraction has always been important in defining femininity in the past but Walby (1989) views that it is increasingly more important today. Hakim (2010) confirms that sexual activities and interests has increased dramatically especially in modern prosperous countries. Walby (1989) further asserts that women are no longer confined to domesticity but the novel culture of sexuality is not without its costs, such as pornography which increases the freedom of men but threatens the freedom of women. Pornography degrades womanhood as the female gaze rather than the male is the central viewpoint of pornography. This encourages sexual violence in homes, work and other places.

### **Sexuality**

Walby (1989) conceptualizes heterosexuality as a patriarchal structure, though to her, the nature has changed. According to her, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the sexuality of women was subjected to strict control in monogamous marriages. The husband's pleasure was supreme and of more significance than the wife's. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women's sexual freedom expanded due to the greater access to contraception and divorce. Walby (1989) believes that in general women have experienced sexual liberation but what she called sexual double standard is still prevalent. Young women who are sexually active are called "slags" by men and women who are sexually conservative are labeled "drags". In contrast, men are admired when they are sexually active and it is for men a sign of masculinity and sexual potency. To Walby (1989), women today face more pressure to service men by entering into heterosexual partnering. This heterosexuality to Walby (1989) remains patriarchal even though women have made some progress in achieving sexual freedom.

## **Violence**

Violence, to Walby (1989) is a form of power over women by men. Violence or the threat of it is employed to keep women in their place as subordinates to men and to discourage women from challenging patriarchy. In the United Kingdom, the state and the police are exhibiting more willingness to take action against the worst perpetrators, though such actions are not frequent. This situation leaves some women yet subject to violence while some women continue to dread violence.

## **The state**

Walby (1989) used the United Kingdom to demonstrate her model of patriarchy. To her, much has changed in relation to state gender policies. The legal backing for exclusion of women in certain employment has been lifted, divorce is easier, there is financial support for non-wage earners, removal of most forms of censorship on pornography, permission of abortion under most circumstances and other similar laws that favour women. In spite of these gains to women, Walby (1989) believes the state is still patriarchal, capitalist and racist. Even though state policies have liberated women from confinement to the domestic sphere, there is little effort by the UK state to increase women's position and to enforce gender equality in the public sphere. This line of thought is corroborated by Byrne (2008) who contended that the state promotes and perpetuates familism through several constitutional acts that constitute family identity as one of the most powerful principles of perception of the social world.

## **Private versus public patriarchy**

Walby (1989) states that patriarchy was predominantly private in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, partly as a result of the first wave of feminism, the structure changed to public patriarchy. In private patriarchy individual men such as the husband or father use their capacity as heads of household to oppress, subordinate and exploit women. Women are prevented from engaging in paid work. Walby (1989) posits that household production was the most important structure under private patriarchy. The first wave of feminism and the expanding capitalist economy compelled the capitalist to engage women in the work place. Men protested the entrance of women into the labour force but could not stop it. Consequently, male workers ensured that opportunities for women were limited.

Public patriarchy is a form where women have access to the public as well as the private spheres. They are no longer barred from the public sphere but are subordinated within. They are confined to certain jobs which are mainly low wage jobs. Hence, in the public patriarchy, the state and paid employment are the dominant structures but the other

structures remain significant. In the new structure of patriarchy women are collectively exploited and oppressed by men through subordination in the public sphere while exploitation by individual men in the private realm declines.

However, Walby (1989) notes that patriarchal exploitation has declined in certain areas due to changes in the structures. She further observes that the experience and effect of patriarchy varies across groups of women. For instance, younger women experience less oppression than the older cohorts, Muslim women are more restricted and subject to private patriarchy than other women. Afro-Caribbean women are more subject to public patriarchy because they are more likely to hold paid work and head their own households than women from other ethnic groups. Middle class women compete with men in the public sphere on less unequal terms than working class women. Though much opportunities have opened up for well educated women in the public sphere, working class and less educated women continue to confront patriarchal restrictions.

### **2.6.3 The anti-social family – Michelle Barrett and Mary McIntosh (1998)**

This theory is one of the earliest theories of family by difference feminists. Barrett and McIntosh argue that there is no one typical family type. To them, the extant idea of the family is misleading considering the wide variations that exist in life within families and varieties of household types. They argue that this variety voids the claim that family always performs certain functions for men and for capitalism.

Barrett and McIntosh (1998) posit that there is a very strong ideology supporting family life. This ideology is also referred to as familism, “the propagation of pro-family ideas based on an ideology of biological essentialism which seeks to justify and legitimate social and gender inequalities” (Barrett and McIntosh, 1982:26 cited in Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). They argue that the family is anti-social, not only because the structure exploits women and profits capitalism, but because the ideology of the family pales and makes life outside the family unsatisfactory. Persons outside the ideal family type suffer as a result. Family members are so enclosed in family life that they ignore social contact with others. Couples interact with other married persons, finding it difficult to fit in single people. To Barrett and McIntosh (1998), the ideology of the family devalues life in institutions such as old people’s homes and children’s homes.

Although Barrett and McIntosh (1998) acknowledged that some caring relationships exist in families, they challenged the idealised image of the family as involving love and mutual care. To them, this concept of the family obscures the violent and sexual crimes

against women that take place in family context. They argue that caring relationships can take place out of the family. But, the ideology of family “has made the outside world cold and friendless, and made it harder to maintain relationships of security and trust except with kin. Caring, sharing and loving would all be more widespread if the family did not claim them for its own (Barrett and McIntosh, 1998)

#### **2.6.4 Theoretical framework**

The process of modernisation has not worked in the direction of all the predictions especially in Africa, but the basic argument about the diffusion of western styles of living, technological innovation and individualistic type of communication has remained true to a good extent. African scholars acknowledge that exposure to western norms is a source of social change in Africa (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000, 1995; Meekers, 1992). As regards women’s status and rights, modernisation theory assumes that traditional values constrains women from possession of means of production and the products of their labour, and modern economic opportunities will free women from such traditional constraints. Western monogamous family system, religion and education are expected to liberate women from the burdens of polygyny, early marriage, domestic violence, denial of inheritance rights and exclusion from leadership roles. Contrary to these assumptions, it has been found that traditional patriarchy has similar features with capitalism the economic bedrock of western ideologies, in exploitation of women. Also, the introduction of the Victorian family structure of male bread winner and female housewife estranged women from the public sphere. Historical facts have shown that before colonialism, women in Nigeria as in some African countries had political and religious powers and were also accorded honour and high status on the basis of those public roles (Ola-Aluko and Edewor, 2002; Bateye, 2002; Aina, 1998).

The implication of Giddens time-space distanciation, disembedding mechanisms and reflexivity in modernity is that social practices will remain in a constant state of flux as new and more information become available. Reflexivity extends to all areas of social life including personal world views and decisions. As more and new information become available to people, it affects their views and personal choices such as whether to marry or not. Reflexivity also extends to creation of self identity. In the modern society, people are no longer confined to roles and positions embedded in traditions. “Within the limits of the opportunities available to them people can increasingly shape who they are and who they think themselves to be” (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008:513). Given the lapses of tradition today, the question “who shall I be” is inextricably bound up with “How shall I live”? This

agrees with Bruce (1995) who argued that the value of marriage is becoming as important to women as the conditions under which they experience it.

### **Theorising patriarchy**

In Nigeria, the labour act prohibits employment of women on night work except female nurses, and in underground work such as mining. Until recently women were not enlisted into the combatant arm of the Nigerian army. In the Nigerian police force women are often not permitted to participate in full drill training, and as a general rule, women are recruited into general services, and duties related to women and children. This discriminatory practice limits women from attaining their full potentials and getting to the top rank positions in the police force and military (The Nigerian CEDAW/NGO, 2008). In the government and private sectors there is still a wide gap in employment and wage between men and women. According to the National Gender Policy, a wide gap exists between the income generating and livelihood opportunities of women and men across multiple sectors in Nigeria. Women's participation in the industrial sector is 11 percent, compared with 30 percent for men. Women represent 87 percent of those employed in the service sector, which involves predominantly informal and unregulated forms of employment. In the Federal Civil Service which is the largest single-entity employer in Nigeria, men constitute 76 percent of the work force whereas women comprise 24 percent. Women hold less than 14 percent of total management level positions in the Federal Civil Service. In the medical field, which involves highly skilled and relatively well-remunerated work, women represent 17.5 and men 82.5 percent of those employed. The extractive industry with annual business volume of over US\$42m has almost zero level participation of women (FGNa National Gender Policy, 2006).

Access to employment and high wage jobs in the formal sector is limited for women partly due to lack of relevant education and certain persistent cultural beliefs that limit women to certain types of work and levels of education. Okojie (1998) noted that one of such cultural restrictions is patriarchy which she says is a common phenomenon in many Nigerian societies. To Okojie, "patriarchy restricts women's access to economic resources such as land, credit and extension services by giving preferential access to male" (Okojie, 1998:148).

In the marriage market, a woman's ability to earn income is increasingly becoming an advantage in finding a mate (Raley and Bratter, 2004; Kalmijn, 1998). Considering the financial demands in the urban areas due to higher cost of living, being economically empowered through a stable career or skill becomes an advantage to women in the marriage market. Financial security that marriage promises women is fast becoming a myth due to

economic decline, rising cost of living and other factors such as irresponsible fatherhood. Unemployed or low income women would have other complimentary qualities to be preferred in mate selection. However, while postponing marriage to secure means of livelihood some women end up spinsters.

Walby (1989) presents women's participation in paid work as a liberating factor for women from patriarchy; nonetheless, women's achievement in the public sphere such as work is still denigrated if they remain unmarried. In fact, high achievement works against a spinster's opportunity to marry because men still prefer wives who are dependent, albeit employed. Possession of many economic resources has been found to decrease women's likelihood of union formation (Dykstra and Poortman, 2010). In spite of her level of achievement, in a typical Nigerian patriarchal society, a never married is still seen as a failure and treated with less respect (Obefuna, 2011; Oderinde, 2002). Furthermore engagement in work in the formal sector introduces much stress to married women in a society such as Lagos, where the woman is still expected to bear and rear children according to the husband's desire, cook and keep the house (Olu-Olu, 2007; Fuwa, 2004; Fapohunda, 1982). Fapohunda (1982) observed this among married women in Lagos, and Olu-Olu (2007) found the same effect on married female employees in Ekiti state. Fapohunda (1982:277) argued that the challenge working mothers in Lagos face in child care is exacerbated by the separation of conjugal homes from extended family set up, and difficulty in finding reliable "parental surrogates". In the absence of domestic egalitarianism in housework, the liberating effect of women's engagement in full time paid work is neutralised by the burden of house work and child care (Oderinde, 2002). Also, most of these women do not have full control of their income; husbands still control their income (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009; The Nigerian CEDAWNGO, 2008).

### **Household production**

In Nigeria, the labour force excludes full time house wives, and house work by women is unpaid. Individual men as it were, directly benefit from the unpaid domestic services of women (Orebiyi, 2002). Gender socialization in many Nigerian societies prepares women to accept housework and child care as feminine duties; even when they are engaged in full time employment in the formal sector, they are expected to carry out their duties at home. This imbalance poses a challenge to the contemporary never married woman in a city such as Lagos, who may not be against housework and child care by women but seeks, if not openly, egalitarianism in the domestic sphere through her mate selection preference.

Nigerian women experience various forms of violence and abuse in marriage (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009; The Nigerian CEDAW NGO, 2008; Aderinto et al., 2006), but, for many it is not a reason for divorce; staying in a bad marriage is still preferred to divorce or separation (Aderinto et al., 2006 ) because divorce is still widely stigmatised. The process of securing divorce is not as easy as it is for women in the western societies. Women in Nigeria are to a large extent still trapped in marriage. This is attributed to the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society (The Nigerian CEDAW NGO, 2008). In some Nigerian societies such as among the Bini, a woman is not allowed the privilege of divorcing her husband except in the case of impotency, divorce is the exclusive right of men. A woman can be divorced if she does not cook well for her husband, if she does not satisfy him and if she does not accept the idea of her husband marrying other wives (Idumwonyi, 2002).

### **Culture**

The UK 19<sup>th</sup> century culture is prevalent in most Nigerian traditional societies, but much has changed as regards paid work by women. The expected behaviour of men differs from that of women. For instance, women are socialized to accept domesticity as a primary role of women. The woman is expected to be passive, gentle, dependent, hold supportive and subservient positions (Omokhodion, 2009; Oderinde, 2002). As regards paid work, in the traditional Nigerian society women were expected to engage in activities that revolve around the domestic sphere. If they engage in trading, it must be petty trading within the locality. The exception perhaps is the gregarious and independent Yoruba women who were known for long distance trading; even then such trading was done by women who have passed their child bearing age. Though independent economic activity is a mark of a complete woman in Yoruba land, men view her economic independence as a threat to their dominant rule in the home (Aina, 1998). Therefore, patriarchal structures were handy to limit such women. Until recently, professions such as teaching and nursing were considered ideal for women who must work outside the home, because such jobs would not constitute much threat to their domestic responsibilities, and will not take them far away from the domestic sphere. According to Sharif (2000) societal attitudes and norms give rise to a gendered occupational pattern in sub-Saharan Africa, in the formal sector, women work in sales and clerical positions, nursing, teaching, and in low wage public sector jobs.

Obviously, much has changed in the traditional definition of femininity in Nigeria. Paid work is no longer considered antithetical to the norms of femininity. Nevertheless, domesticity is still an expected behaviour for women. Whereas there is a transition from domesticity to sexual attractiveness in the western culture, in Nigeria and perhaps in other

developing countries, it is integration of domesticity and sexual attractiveness. The stronger factor of the two may be sexual attractiveness because the more sexually attractive a woman is the larger the pool of prospective marriage partners she attracts even without domestic skill. Male mate preference still favours young, attractive and healthy women (Hakim, 2010; McNulty et al., 2008; Berg-Cross et al., 2004). Sexual attractiveness is an element of erotic capital not only required to attract a spouse (Hakim, 2010), it is also vital to keep the spouse in the modern patriarchal culture.

Sexual attractiveness as a key sign of femininity in the traditional past and in contemporary time connotes the latent cultural interpretation of women's biology, and by implication womanhood, as primarily for men's sexual satisfaction and to procreate for men. This flawed cultural interpretation, and not the biology of women accounts for the universal oppression and degradation of women (Shery Otner, 1974 cited in Haralambos and Holborn, 2008) Traditional gender socialization prepares men to anticipate employment in the public sphere and return later in the day to a well kept home and into the warm arm of an attractive and smiling woman who should satisfy their sexual needs, bear and rear children as a necessary and required outcome of her sexual duty to the man. "Male sphere was traditionally accorded more value and prestige. A woman more often than not derived her social status from her two major roles of a wife and of a mother" (Aina 1998:6). Women who are not functioning in this cultural mould are considered unfeminine in spite of their achievement in the public sphere.

### **Sexuality**

How much gain women in Lagos and other Nigerian societies have made is uncertain as contraceptive use among women is still low at 15 percent for all forms of contraception, and divorce is not easily accessible as an option or a process. A woman would still be constrained to have as many children as her husband desires (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2003). Women's sexuality is controlled outside marriage, in monogamous as well as polygynous unions. Single women who are sexually active are labelled most unsuitable for marriage, whereas those who abstain from sexual relationships are suspected barren. Sexual infidelity by a married woman is a taboo which attracts instant divorce, ostracism or death penalty in some cases. Whereas married men are free to have as many sexual partners as they wish, it is considered their "nature", indeed as Walby (1989) described it a mark of masculinity. This is one of the reasoning behind polygyny, and even as polygyny is declining in practice, the principle remains intact. For social or religious acceptance, men in monogamous union would not bring in a second wife but they can have them outside as unofficial wives (Smith,

2007; Mann, 1994; WaKaranja, 1994, 1987). Women should not seek or crave sexual satisfaction, this is one of the reasons behind female genital mutilation. In fact, it is an abomination for women to demand sex or make sexual advances (Labeodan, 2002; Orebiyi, 2002). The culture of silence about sex means that “good” women should be ignorant about sex and passive in sexual relations (Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 2003). A study of men’s extra-marital sexual behaviour in Southeast Nigeria confirms this notion of double standard in extramarital sexuality. “In Southeast Nigeria, marriage is sacred, and yet men’s infidelity is common”. Majority of the men in the study engaged in extra-marital sex, which is found to be embedded in the socio-economic context and contradictory moralities. Instead of being interpreted as male intrinsic nature, this study found that work related mobility and migration, masculinity and socio-economic status symbol, and peer group affirmation are the major determinants of this behaviour by men. To protect men’s reputation in the larger family, village and church, it is common for men to keep their extra-marital affairs secret. Women hardly challenge extra-marital sex by their husbands even when they suspect, because of fear of losing whatever leverage they have with their husbands (Smith, 2007:1004). These findings in Southeast Nigeria confirm the findings of a similar study in Ado Ekiti, southwest Nigeria by Oruuloye, Caldwell and Caldwell (1995).

The pressure to enter into heterosexual union is high for Nigerian women. Marriage and motherhood remain highly valued. Connection with a man, particularly a husband, for protection and care, remains a basic feature of womanhood (Reynolds and Wethedrell, 2003) in Nigeria, as in other pro-marriage societies such as the USA as noted in Sharp and Ganong (2011). Women who are not in heterosexual union are labelled promiscuous, unmarriageable, dry, ill-behaved, rebellious and independent.

### **Violence**

Never married women who dread violence would dread men also or become more restrictive in their mate selection preference. Many Nigerian women, thirty percent, have experienced physical or sexual violence (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009). In Nigeria, there is violence against women (prevention, protection and prohibition Act 2002), but only four states of Nigeria including Lagos state have enacted the domestic violence laws. Many women are ignorant of such a law; and enforcement of this law is grossly made ineffective by cultural beliefs that view domestic violence as a private matter between husband and wife which should be settled at home. Women are considered inferior to men and a wife is part of a man’s property, use of violence is permitted to correct and keep her in check (Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005; Surtees, 2003; Orebiyi, 2002). There is the culture of secrecy about

domestic violence which pervades the Nigerian society. Sexual violence especially, is often concealed and many women would rather die in silence than acknowledge domestic violence in order to preserve their marriage (The Nigerian CEDAW NGO Report, 2008; Aderinto et al., 2007; Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005). Any form of violence is a means of asserting control, dominion and creating fear; and domestic violence produces same effect (Surtees, 2003). Domestic violence is therefore, a form of social violence and should be viewed as a public issue and not a private affair. Viewing domestic violence as a private affair promotes this form of violence and obscures its gendered nature (Surtees, 2003) and its intergenerational effect (Lalasz, 2004; Ferguson, 2000).

### **The state**

In Nigeria, legislations such as section 42 of the 1999 constitution and National Gender Policy 2006 are established by the Federal Government of Nigeria to address issues of gender inequality and discrimination on the basis of sex or circumstance. Despite government policies, and constitutional provisions against discrimination, discriminatory practices against women are still widely prevalent in Nigeria. These discriminatory practices are sustained by discriminatory legislation, policies, and societal and cultural agents; and sustained inability of government to enforce legislations. Legislation without enforcement and complementary programmes does nothing to die hard cultural beliefs. An example of state discriminatory policy in Nigeria is recruitment into the Nigerian police force which favours men. One of the requirements for women to be enlisted into Nigerian police is singleness and the woman must not marry three years after recruitment. On the contrary, there is no requirement for men to be either married or unmarried. After three years of service, when the single woman wants to marry she must apply in writing to the state commissioner of police. On approval, the prospective suitor will be subjected to interview; if he is certified of good character, then the marriage will be approved. Also, an unmarried female police officer who becomes pregnant will be discharged from the police force and shall be re-enlisted only with the approval of the Inspector General of Police (LFN, 2004). Single police men who wish to marry are not subjected to any such application, scrutiny and approval. The claim of security might be used to substantiate the existence of policies such as this in the Nigerian police force; but, it is an evidence of a state that is patriarchal. Men brought in by police women as suitors are viewed as security risk not women married by police men. Most men who are ready to marry may not be willing to wait for three years to marry a newly enlisted police woman, and some men will be quite unwilling to go through police scrutiny.

## **The anti-social family**

To Barrett and McIntosh, the heterosexual family structure profits capitalism, exploits women, pales life outside the idealised family unit and obscures other forms of household that also function as family. Byrne (2008:30) argues that familistic ideology

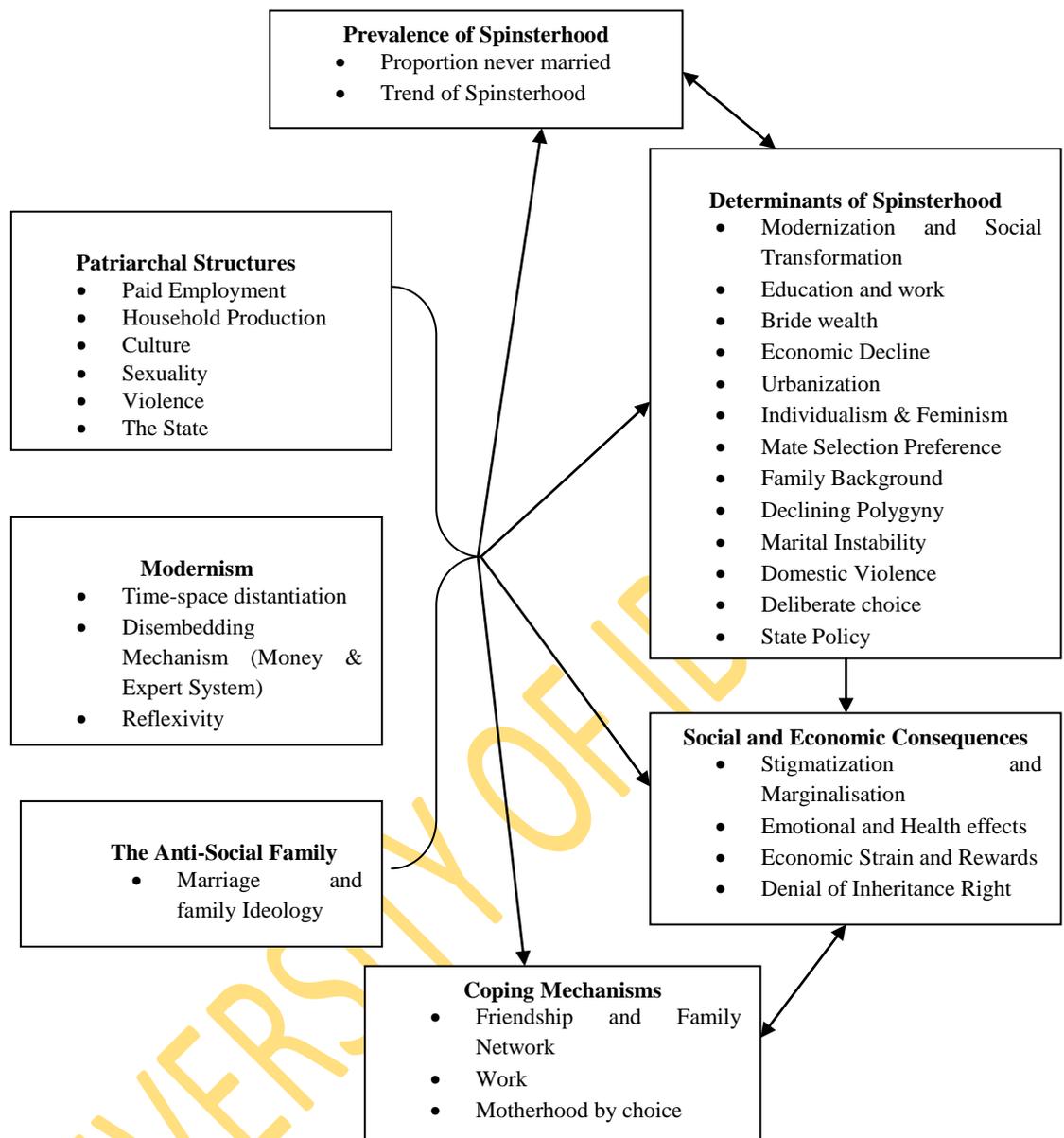
positively support constructions of womanhood as married and mother, a context in which singlehood and the opposition between woman identity and single identity are problematic. In the absence of positive and powerful counter narratives, singlehood is disparaged and stigmatized constraining the identity possibilities for all women.

The anti-social family encourages couples to concentrate on relationships with themselves, and single people find it difficult to fit in. Although this may not be the case in all situations, it is a common occurrence. Women who remain never married beyond a certain age such as thirty become misfit in their natal families and in the social circles of their married peers. Married women are accorded more respect and deemed responsible. In some religious groups there is a segregation of married and single women in seating arrangement. In some communities, single women are excluded from community meetings.

Barret and McIntosh argue that the ideology of the family obscures other caring relationships outside the idealised family unit. Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) corroborating this line of thought, argued for the decentering of the family if sociologists would understand how people organize their personal lives outside heterosexual and homosexual family. They argued that in contemporary time, “much that matters to people in intimacy and care increasingly takes place beyond the “family”, between partners who are not living together “as family”, and within networks of friends” (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004:135).

Marriage may not be as beneficial to all women as some studies claim. Some women may have been better unmarried but for family ideology. Familism constrains women to specific identity and denies spinsters the freedom to explore and enjoy other social relationships. Byrne (2003) argues that the respondents in her study described themselves as involuntary singles because they did not want to be seen as having anti family values. To Byrne, such claims serves as self protection against social stigma associated with non marriage.

## 2.6.5 Conceptual framework



**Fig. 2.1.** Conceptual framework  
Source: author, 2011

The intermingling of unemployment, underemployment, institutional restrictions, housework and child care, domesticity and sexual attractiveness, sexual control without and within marriage, domestic violence, male dominated state structure, and strong marriage and family ideology within the context of modernity, to a large extent create the environment for spinsterhood in developing societies and influence how women experience spinsterhood.

The extant patriarchal structures and pro-family ideology constrain never married women from marrying on their own terms and limits the choices open to them in terms of identity. Modernity influences patriarchal structures and anti social family ideology;

nonetheless, the effect is slow because these structures and ideology are based on deeply entrenched traditions and values. Time space distantiation and expert systems components of modernity offer the contemporary never married woman the opportunity to access, trust and imbibe individualistic orientation of the American or European woman as ideal. Thus, in her marriage mate selection preference, against communal or kinship goals, she emphasises personal need for intimacy, joy, acquisition of resources she could not get alone, and being in love. Although men also want to marry women they love, they still seek women who are domesticated, sexually attractive and dependent. In selection of marriage partner, the western woman seeks intimacy, joy, resources and love in a man she would marry because she has limited access to social support through kinship networks and is subject to less cultural constraints. On the contrary, a never married woman in Lagos who wants those same modern qualities still has access to a kinship and extended family system that would still meet part of her need for joy, intimacy and resources and love (not erotic love). This is the dilemma of the contemporary never married woman in Lagos; she aspires to marry a good man with whom she is in love and wants domestic egalitarianism in marriage but culture expects her to marry even if those terms are not fully met. Widespread cultural ideology about marriage still says that marriage is a wrapped gift with uncertain content. This connotes that a woman should not be too selective in her mate preference in order to marry. She is either married or faces a lifelong stigmatised single status. This is not to present a picture of women who are passive actors, who are coerced by a system they cannot control to act in certain ways. . Idealised image of marriage and unwillingness to accept compromise as a strategy for forming relationship inevitably give rise to spinsterhood. The decision to postpone marriage while pursuing personal goals such as tertiary education and economic empowerment in response to modernization is partly private, and in some cases spinsterhood is a deliberate choice.

#### **2.6.6 Conclusion**

Some of the literature and relevant theories for this study have been reviewed in this chapter. Building on these previous studies, as well as the theoretical framework, the prevalence, determinants and consequences of spinsterhood in Lagos were examined employing qualitative instruments and secondary data obtained from Nigeria's population censuses, and Demographic and Health Surveys.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research design**

This study is a descriptive and exploratory research involving never married women age 30 and above in Lagos metropolis. Qualitative method is considered apt for this study due to the need for in-depth knowledge or understanding of what propels spinsterhood, its consequences and coping mechanisms of spinsters. Moreover, most previous studies conducted in a similar topic used qualitative methods. The emphasis was to generate and construct meaning to spinsterhood based on secondary data and direct accounts of spinsters. Secondary data from Nigerian censuses and Demographic and Health Surveys were used to examine the prevalence of spinsterhood in Lagos and the entire country. In-depth semi-structured interviews, life history interviews, and focus group discussions with spinsters of different ethnic and socio-economic background were employed to investigate the determinants and consequences of spinsterhood. Explaining the importance of combining qualitative techniques in research, Morgan (1996) noted that in-depth interviews produce greater depth whereas Focus Group Discussion provide greater breath, and confirm results and conclusions from interviews.

#### **3.2 Study location**

The study location is metropolitan Lagos, Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa. Lagos is located in the southwest part of Nigeria. The state spans the Guinea coast of the Atlantic Ocean for over 180km., from the Republic of Benin on the west to its boundary with Ogun State, Nigeria in the east. It extends approximately from latitude 6°35'North to 6.583°North, and from longitude 3°45'East to 3.75°East. Of its total area of 3,475.1 km<sup>2</sup> (1,341.7 sq mi), about 22 percent is water. The metropolitan area, an estimated 300 square kilometers, is a group of islands endowed with creeks and a lagoon.

Lagos State was created on May 27 1967 by virtue of State Creation and Transitional Provisions Decree No. 14 of 1967. The State took off as an administrative entity on April 11, 1968 with Lagos Island serving as the state and federal capital. With the creation of Federal Capital Territory in 1976, the capital of Lagos State was moved to Ikeja. With the relocation of the Federal seat of power to Abuja in 1991, Lagos Island ceased to be the capital of Nigeria. Lagos remains the most economically important state in Nigeria. The city began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century as a Portuguese trading post exporting ivory, peppers and other commodities and has remained the commercial and industrial hub of Nigeria. Lagos has an annual GDP of about USD33.68 billion and per capita of USD3,649, which are considered far more than that

of any other West African country. Lagos is the most urbanized city in the South West of Nigeria. In Lagos, 91 percent of all households have access to electricity, the highest in the entire country. Also literacy rate is highest in Lagos with 90 and 96 percent respectively for all women and men age 15 to 49 (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009).

By land mass, Lagos is the smallest state in Nigeria, but by population size the second most populous state. According to Nigeria's 2006 population census, the population of Lagos State is 9,113,605 out of a national total of 140,003,542. The population of the metropolitan area is 8,048,430. By the 2007 United Nations' (UN) estimate Lagos population was 9.5 million, Lagos is the second most populous city in Africa after Cairo; and the UN projects Lagos population will be 15.8 by 2025 which will make Lagos the 12<sup>th</sup> most populous city in the world. The population density in Lagos is 2,594 persons per sq. kilometre. In the urban area, the average density is 8,000 persons per square kilometre on average (up to 55,000 inhabitants per sq. km. in the densest parts of the urban area).

Lagos is a Yoruba-speaking state. The official languages in Lagos are English and Yoruba. The indigenous inhabitants of Lagos, or Eko as it is called by the indigenous population, were of Benin and Awori Eko heritage. Others were the Ogus in Ikeja and Badagry and the Ijebus in Ikorodu and Epe regions of Lagos (absoluteastronomy.com). Large commercial activities in Lagos have continued to attract Nigerians from other ethnic groups and foreigners. Consequently, the current population of Lagos comprises virtually all the ethnic groups in Nigeria and foreigners. Lagos is a melting pot of cultures and classes in Nigeria. It is therefore, an ideal location for a study that targets spinsters. According to Isiugo-Abanihe, (1995:515) "urbanization provides an ideal landscape where both education and economic activities flourish, which therefore attracts women some of whom are freed from parental or kinship control, and prescription of when or who to marry". By virtue of being the microcosm of Nigeria, the result of any study in Lagos will provide useful indication for the entire Nigeria.

### **3.3 Study population**

The target population for this study is never married women age 30 and above. As noted earlier, marriage in almost all the ethnic groups in Nigeria is complete by age 30. Also, considering the female median age at first marriage of 18.6 years, and female SMAM of 21 years, age 30 is appropriate marker for spinsterhood in Lagos. By age 30, *ceteris paribus*, most women would have completed their tertiary education and worked for some years. Women in any Nigerian setting who desired marriage and it has not happened by age 30 would most likely become uncomfortable about the delay. The pressure to marry, from

parents, friends and neighbours would increase from this age. Therefore, studying spinsterhood with this age marker will generate reliable data on reasons and effects of late and non marriage.

The population of Lagos State by 2006 census is 9,113,605 with 4,719,125 male and 4,394,480 female. Women constitute 48.2 percent of Lagos state population, an indication of excess of males with sex ratio of 107.5 in the State.

### **3.4 Selection of research subjects**

The research subjects were selected through the snowball method. Friends, relatives, neighbours, churches and personal contact were the source of initial contacts with spinsters; then after interview the interviewees gave contact to other spinsters known to them. The group discussions were organized through personal invitation using the above contacts. Snowballing is deemed appropriate in selecting older never married women considering that such women are not easily identifiable and the subject of non marriage is personal and stigmatized. Single women scholars often use this method (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009; Byrne, 2008, 2003; Macvarish, 2006; Byrne and Carr, 2005; Simpson, 2003; Ferguson, 2000).

In all, twenty-five subjects from diverse backgrounds were selected for in-depth interview, four for life history, and seven focus group discussions comprising forty-one participants, were conducted. In all, seventy-four spinsters participated in the study. Generally in qualitative studies, there is an inverse relationship between the amount of data and the number of respondents (Morse, 1998 cited in Sharp and Ganong, 2011). This explains the relatively smaller sample in this study.

### **3.5 Methods of data collection**

Data for this study were generated from both secondary and primary sources. The secondary data were used to examine the prevalence of spinsterhood in Lagos and Nigeria. The secondary data sources were the 1991 and 2006 Nigerian population censuses, and Demographic and Health Surveys of 1990, 1999, 2003 and 2008. Statistics provided in Measure Demographic and Health Surveys were also used.

Primary data were obtained from in-depth interviews, life histories and focus group discussions with spinsters, conducted between May 2010 and August, 2011. Respondents were asked open ended questions relating to their experiences and decisions concerning marriage and family life. Questions on why they think women become spinsters, personal reasons for turning down previous marriage proposals, why they are not yet married and their mate selection preferences were asked. Additional questions were asked to probe how

education, economic empowerment, family background affected their decisions and opportunities to marry. Then, the spinsters were asked to recount the social and economic effects of their current marital status and how they cope with the challenges of remaining single. Before each interview or discussion, a socio-demographic data form, which contained questions on age, marital status, ethnic group, occupation, income, birth position and a few items, was given to each respondent. This was useful to confirm their age and marital status. All respondents speak English and the Nigerian Pidgin English version, so the interviews and group discussions were conducted in English except a few occasional comments and interjections in Yoruba, Igbo and Arabic for a Muslim interviewee, which were translated during transcription.

### **In-depth interviews (IDI)**

In-depth interview (IDI) was conducted with twenty five spinsters in Lagos metropolis. Care was taken to ensure selection of spinsters from various socio-economic backgrounds, ethnic origin and religion, though Muslims were relatively few. This ensured diversified views on spinsterhood. The characteristics of IDI subjects are shown in Table 4. The duration of each in-depth interview was between one hour and two hours. The in-depth interviews were conducted in the subjects' residences, offices or church. More Igbo spinsters were selected because of the highest prevalence of spinsters of Southeast origin reported in 1991 and 2006 population census. The IDI Guide is provided in Appendix C.

### **Life history (LH)**

Life history of four spinsters who have relevant experience in various aspects of this study was carried out. Life History (LH) 1 and 2 were selected based on their useful experience as regards determinants of spinsterhood. LH 3 has relevant experiences in consequences of spinsterhood and LH 4 typifies a spinster who has found viable coping mechanisms. These provided adequate insight into the various aspects of spinsterhood under investigation. The life histories were useful to corroborate data from in-depth interviews. Data was gathered in natural settings to allow free interaction. The interview for Subject 1 and 2 took place in their homes, Subject 3 was interviewed in her church compound, and interview for Subject 4 took place in her office, car and residence. The duration of life history interviews was between two and four hours. After the recorded session, discussions with Subject 1 and 4 continued for a few more hours, and a few more days for subject four. The Life History Guide is given in Appendix D.

### **Focus group discussion (FGD)**

Seven focus group discussions were conducted. The FGD Guide is provided in Appendix B. Participants in each Group were between 6 and 8. According to Isiugo-Abanihe and Obono (2002), effective focus group should comprise a minimum of 6 respondents and a maximum of 12. This allowed for better interactive discussion to elicit insight into the various aspects of spinsterhood which could not be generated at the level of in-depth interview. Data from focus group discussion were relevant to validate findings from in-depth and life history interviews. Groups were constituted on the basis of specific focus of ethnic origin, level of education and profession. The homogeneity of each group allowed free interaction and discussion; there was no participant with intimidating profile or views. It was also necessary to examine spinsterhood from various perspectives, since ethnic origin and level of education influence individual world view and interpretation of experiences.

Three groups were conducted on the basis of ethnic origin. FGD 1 was for spinsters from ethnic groups apart from Yoruba and Igbo. FG 2 was for spinsters of Yoruba origin, and FGD 3 was conducted for Igbo spinsters. Four groups were conducted on the basis of educational and professional sub-groupings. Two, (FGD 4 and 5) were among women who obtained secondary school education, and are traders or low class workers, and FGD 6 and 7 were among graduates of tertiary institutions and professionals. The duration of each focus group discussion was between two and three hours; and the sessions were held in comfortable venues to avoid distractions.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse data from secondary sources of population census, Demographic and Health Surveys, and to describe the characteristics of research subjects. Tables were used to present the prevalence of spinsterhood, with a few quotes from the primary data.

All interviews and group discussions were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Content analysis and coding with a qualitative data analysis software (Atlas-ti 6.2 ) was carried out to generate themes, concepts and patterns on the determinants, social and economic consequences of spinsterhood and coping mechanisms. Themes and concepts used for coding were derived from literature review, theoretical framework (deductive), and field data (inductive).

To investigate spinsterhood as a stigmatised status, concepts that define interpersonal and institutional discrimination were adapted from US Midlife Development Survey (MIDUS). Byrne and Carr (2005) used data from the US Midlife Development Survey

(MIDUS) to examine and confirm singlehood a stigmatised status in the USA. See section 2.4.1 for details of the MIDUS set of questions on interpersonal and institutional discrimination.

### **Atlas ti**

Atlas ti 6.2 was used to code responses from the interviews and focus group discussion. In this workbench, quotations are statements referring to a particular code. The codes are usually displayed with two numbers in a bracket, showing the groundedness and density, example Economic empowerment (53-5)~. Groundedness is the number of quotations associated with this code (above example: 53). Large numbers indicate strong evidence already found for this code. Density is the number of codes connected to this code, follows the dash (above example:5). Large numbers can be interpreted as a high degree of theoretical density. The tilde character "~" flags commented codes. It is used not only for codes but for all commented object (Atlas-ti User Guide, 2004). Density is more applicable in grounded theory research. The current study is theory driven, therefore, groundedness is more relevant. Groundedness is appropriate for the categorisation and presentation of responses in this study because respondents gave diverse reasons for their spinsterhood, account of the consequences and coping mechanisms. No respondent had just one experience with regard to spinsterhood. Moreover, in the focus groups, responses were more diffuse than specific. Therefore, determinants, consequences and coping mechanisms of spinsterhood were identified by deduction and direct reference from statements made by the interviewees and participants in the focus group discussion.

### **3.7 Ethical consideration**

This study adhered to the code of ethics in social science and qualitative research. The four main areas of ethical principles of informed consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality and accuracy (Clifford, 2000) were observed.

**Informed Consent:** The research subjects were informed about the nature, duration and purpose of the study. Each subject agreed voluntarily to participate. A written information and consent form was given to each participant to read and sign before each interview and discussion commenced. They were free to withdraw at any time or withhold response to any question they do not want to answer.

**Deception:** Informed consent was conducted and obtained without any deliberate misrepresentation. The persons who assisted the researcher with contacts to spinsters were duly informed about the research to eschew deception.

**Privacy and Confidentiality:** The subjects were assured that their personal identities will be protected. They were informed that names were not required and whatever reference will be made to any subject's comment publicly will be behind a shield of anonymity. Participants in the group discussions were earnestly requested to keep one another's comments confidential and avoid discussing it outside the group. All these were written in the information and consent form and emphasized before any interview or discussion was conducted.

**Accuracy:** Accuracy of data was ensured as much as possible. The interviews and group discussion were transcribed verbatim by the researcher alone to ensure accuracy.

### **3.8 Limitation of the study**

The strength of marriage and family ideology and the stigma associated with spinsterhood is so widespread and real that getting spinsters to interview was not easy. Getting them into a group was another herculean task. It took a long time to organize a group discussion. Spinsterhood is seen as a misfortune and spinsters are pitied and the spinsters know. Spinsterhood is so stigmatised that so many people were reluctant to discuss it or be associated with being the link to any spinster for a research that touches on their non marriage. Byrne (2008) noted in her study that women in Ireland are discouraged from talking about the experiences and meaning of singleness. Her study was one of the few occasions when women openly spoke about being single. Byrne argues that the silencing of singleness limits single women's opportunity to explore singleness as an identity. To most people the researcher met in Lagos, asking older never married women to discuss their spinsterhood is like mocking the spinsters. Some people think spinsters are usually aggressive and so did not want troubles with them by introducing the researcher to them. Ultimately, this was found to be a misrepresentation, spinsters are not aggressive, but their state is a stigmatized one and they are aware of it. This seems to keep some spinsters on the defensive and makes them appear aggressive.

Spinsterhood is quite a touchy issue to the spinsters themselves, who usually feel out of place in a pro-marriage society where marriage and motherhood define a "good" and "responsible" woman. For some spinsters, to talk about the reasons for their spinsterhood and their experiences as spinsters is like reopening an old wound or rather inflicting a new wound. So, quite a number of them declined to be interviewed. Some kept putting off the appointments until the researcher read between the lines and decided to give up.

Nonetheless, some spinsters eventually granted interviews and participated in the group discussion. Some of them were open and free from the beginning of the interview. The

interviews and discussions that began dry and impassive graduated into open and frank conversation that yielded useful information on the research subject. It proved to be so rewarding to the spinsters who have unburdened their hearts, that the researcher had to stop the discussions that were getting too lengthy, and some of the spinsters desired to keep in touch with the researcher.

Another limitation is that sample population in qualitative studies is usually not representative of the study population; therefore, results are not strictly generalisable. Nevertheless, the responses being real life accounts provide useful insight into spinsterhood phenomenon in Lagos and a guide for further research.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter presents a description of the research design, ethical considerations and limitations of the study. Application of the research design produced useful data on spinsterhood from both secondary and primary data. The results and discussions of the findings in relation to existing literature and theoretical framework for the study are the subjects of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

The results of this study are presented in this chapter based on the research objectives. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Examine the prevalence of spinsterhood in Lagos within the larger Nigeria context.
- Investigate the factors determining the prevailing level of spinsterhood in Lagos.
- Explore the social and economic consequences of spinsterhood on spinsters.
- Investigate how older never married women cope with spinsterhood in a typical developing society with traditional patriarchal structures and pervasive marriage and family ideology.

Data for the first objective were secondary, derived from the 1991 and 2006 population censuses, and Nigeria's Demographic and Health Surveys (NDHS). Primary data obtained from in-depth interviews, life history interviews and focus group discussions were employed for the other objectives. Responses from the in-depth interviews, life histories and focus group discussions showed similar outcomes in the determinants, consequences and coping mechanisms, with minor differences that will be discussed under each heading. For more robust analysis and to generate a general overview of the causes and consequences of spinsterhood in Lagos, the results from the various data collection method were pulled together as shown in Tables 7, 10 and 11 below. The Life histories which were thematically selected according to vital aspects of the study are presented separately under corresponding headings. The respondents are identified as IDI 1 to 25 in case of in-depth interview subjects, and Res (Respondent) 1 and so on for FGD participants. For Life History research subjects, pseudonyms as well as LH 1 to 4 are used to identify the respondents.

#### 4.2 PREVALENCE OF SPINSTERHOOD

The prevalence of spinsterhood in Lagos, Nigeria and the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria is shown in this section. The prevalence was calculated as the percentage never married among women age 30-85+ derived from the 2006 population census. The prevalence of non marriage among all women of marriageable age from 15-85+ is also shown for Nigeria and Lagos state (Appendix A, Table A2 and Table A3) to provide an overview of the trend and pattern of non marriage for the country and Lagos state.

#### 4.2.1 Prevalence of spinsterhood in Lagos

The percentage spinsters among women age 30-85+ in Lagos (Table 4.1) was derived from the national census conducted in 2006.

**Table 4.1.** Percentage distribution of spinsters in Lagos by age group

Age Group	Never Married
30 – 34	13.6
35 – 39	6.3
40 – 44	3.9
45 – 49	3.1
50 – 54	2.6
55 – 59	2.5
60 – 64	3.5
65 – 69	4.1
70 – 74	5.7
75 – 79	6.4
80 – 84	8.1
85+	7.1
Total 30-85+	7.0

Source: Nigeria 2006 Population Census

Prevalence of early marriage was very low in Lagos, only 7.4 percent of women age 15-19 were married (Appendix A, Table A8). This is partly due to relatively higher rates of literacy, educational attainment, and exposure to media by women in Lagos. The low prevalence of early marriage does not mean singleness is an acceptable lifestyle for women in Lagos, by age 30 over 86 percent of women resident in Lagos have entered into marital union. This is indicative of high incidence of marriage between age 20 and 29. Among all women age 30-85 plus, 93 percent have ever married. Among all women age 15-85+ in Lagos state, spinsters constituted 3.3 percent (Appendix A, Table A8). The prevalence of spinsterhood in Lagos was highest among women age 30-34 years. The pattern decreased from age 30-34 to age 55-59, then, it trends upward thereafter. In a pro-marriage society such as Lagos, it is not unlikely for never married women to continue to make effort to fix themselves in a heterosexual union as late as age 59. It is also likely that from age 60 never married women begin to accept their single status; and women who had unsatisfactory marriage or involuntary childlessness may describe themselves as never married.

The pattern of spinsterhood in Lagos was similar to the pattern in the nation, the geopolitical zones and the other south western states. The level remained highest between ages 30-34, decreased or stagnated from the late thirties to the fifties and increased from age

60. This common pattern is significant because it portrays similar nuptial behaviour across the country. Therefore, the findings on the determinants and consequences of spinsterhood, and the coping mechanisms of spinsters in Lagos may be reliably generalised to other parts of the country.

The 1991 census does not have a breakdown of population by marital status for specific age categories in the states. Therefore, there was no data to examine the actual trend of spinsterhood in Lagos. Available census statistics show that the number of all never married women (10-85+) decreased slightly from 46.7 percent in 1991 to 44.6 percent in 2006, the higher proportion being among the younger never married.

#### 4.2.2 Prevalence of spinsterhood in Nigeria

The prevalence of spinsterhood in Nigeria and the geo-political zones is presented in Table 4.2 below. Of all women age 30 to 85 plus in the country, 93.3 percent were in marital union, divorced, separated or widowed, only a marginal proportion remained never married. This high prevalence of marriage is confirmed by the latest Nigeria's Demographic and Health Survey conducted in 2008. Out of the 33,385 women age 15 to 49 in the survey only 1.3 percent were spinsters (Table. 4.4 below).

**Table 4.2.** Percentage distribution of spinsters by geo-political zone and the country

Age Group	NC	NE	NW	SE	SS	SW	Nigeria
30 – 34	9.9	5.7	4.1	23.5	19.8	13.2	11.8
35 – 39	5.3	4.1	3.1	11.9	9.7	4.7	6.2
40 – 44	4.0	4.0	3.3	7.4	5.6	2.9	4.2
45 – 49	3.6	4.3	3.8	4.9	4.1	2.3	3.7
50 – 54	3.6	4.0	3.8	4.2	3.6	2.0	3.4
55 – 59	4.1	4.3	4.4	4.0	3.5	1.9	3.5
60 – 64	4.4	6.4	6.0	6.0	4.0	2.5	4.5
65 – 69	6.2	7.9	7.2	4.8	4.9	3.0	5.0
70 – 74	6.1	8.5	8.3	6.3	6.8	4.2	6.7
75 – 79	7.5	9.8	9.3	8.5	8.9	5.4	8.0
80 – 84	8.1	10.4	10.5	9.1	9.9	5.9	9.0
85+	7.7	10.7	9.9	8.6	9.0	5.3	8.4
Total	6.1	5.2	4.3	10.6	9.3	5.7	6.7
30-84+							

Source: Nigeria 2006 population census

Note: NC – North-central, NE – Northeast, NW – Northwest, SE – Southeast, SS – South-South, SW – Southwest.

The prevalence of spinsterhood in Nigeria was 6.7 percent, with considerable variations across the zones and states. In particular, the Southeast and South-South had the highest prevalence rate of 10.6 and 9.3 percent respectively, whereas the lowest levels were

in the Northeast and Northwest zones. It is noteworthy that all the Southeast and South-South states, except Edo state, as shown in Table 3.3 below, had prevalence rates above the national average of 6.7 percent. The prevalence was highest in Imo and Rivers states (11.9), Anambra (11.1), Abia (10.5), Enugu (10.3), and Cross River (10.1). In the Southwest, rates above the national average were found in Ekiti (7.6) and Lagos (7.0). Only four states, Taraba (6.9) in the Northeast and Benue (7.0), Kogi (7.2) and Nasarawa (7.4) in the North Central had higher prevalence rates than the national average, apart from the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) with prevalence rate of 8.9 percent. The lowest rates (below 4 percent) were found in Jigawa (3.9) Zamfara (3.8), Katsina (3.7) and Kebbi (3.7) in the Northwest and Bauchi (3.9) in the Northeast. The actual figures are shown in Appendix A, Tables A1a, A1b and A1c by zones, the country and states.

In the North, Northwest had the least prevalence of spinsterhood. In the South, Southwest zone showed a relatively lowest rate of spinsterhood, and the least rates were found among the Southwest States. In all age groups from 40-85+ the southwest zones had the lowest rates of spinsterhood across all zones. The low prevalence in the Southwest was unexpected. The Southwest zone has high rates of literacy, educational attainment and employment of women. Female literacy in this zone is between 72.1 and 86.5 percent, and attainment of senior secondary and university education is between 2.9 and 4.2 percent (Appendix A, Table A10). Women of Yoruba origin, which is the dominant ethnic group in this zone, are known for independent economic activity. Also, female median age at first marriage in the Southwest has consistently increased from 19.7 years in 1990 to 21.8 in 2008 which is the second highest in the country (Appendix A, Table A12). Singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) for women of Yoruba origin is 22.19 (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000). It was, therefore, expected that the Southwest zone should have a high proportion of never married women age 30 and above. Nevertheless, this low spinsterhood pattern in the Southwest is likely to change with time; attitude of women in this region to early marriage and marriage in general is changing as observed in this study. This attitudinal change is captured in the response of a 32-year old never married Yoruba Muslim woman in this study. In response to why she is not yet married being a Muslim, she said: “Why? I am not a Northerner, I am a Yoruba girl and I went to school. I don’t sell fura du nunu [local spicy drink] on the street” (IDI 21). In the Focus Group Discussion conducted among Yoruba spinsters, some of the respondents argued that a lot of self realisation is going on among women; which is partly responsible for spinsterhood. They believed that currently, as well as in the future, marriage will be based on individual goals and gains, not just for social recognition.

**Table 4.3.** Percentage distribution of spinsters by states

<b>South East</b>		<b>South South</b>		<b>South West</b>	
Abia	10.5	Akwa Ibom	9.7	Ekiti	7.6
Anambra	11.1	Bayelsa	8.0	Lagos	7.0
Ebonyi	8.2	Cross River	10.1	Ogun	4.2
Enugu	10.3	Delta	7.9	Ondo	5.6
Imo	11.9	Edo	6.7	Osun	5.4
		Rivers	11.9	Oyo	4.1
<b>North Central</b>		<b>North East</b>		<b>North West</b>	
FCT	8.9	Adamawa	5.4	Jigawa	3.9
Benue	7.0	Bauchi	3.9	Kaduna	6.5
Kogi	7.2	Borno	5.3	Kano	3.9
Kwara	4.3	Gombe	6.1	Katsina	3.7
Nasarawa	7.4	Taraba	6.9	Kebbi	3.7
Niger	4.3	Yobe	4.7	Sokoto	4.2
Plateau	5.1			Zamfara	3.8

Source: Nigeria 2006 population census

The prevalence of non marriage in each state and zone among all women age 15-85 plus reflected a similar pattern as presented above. Of all women age 15-85+ in the country, 3.2 percent were spinsters. The lowest rates were found in the Northeast and Northwest zones whereas the highest rates were in the Southeast and South-South zones (See Appendix A Table A5).

In general, women in the Southern zones marry later than their Northern counterparts. Female median age at first marriage is 22.8 in the Southeast, 21.8 in the Southwest and 20.9 in South-South, whereas it is 18.3 in North Central, 15.6 in Northeast and 15.2 in the Northwest (Appendix A, Table A12). The southern states also have higher female literacy and educational attainment rates than the Northern states. Female literacy above 70 percent is found in all the southern states except Ebonyi state. These are the same states with the highest female attainment of senior secondary to university education. Female literacy in the northern states, with the exception of the FCT, is between 25.5 and 68.8 percent. (Appendix A, Table A10). The 2008 NDHS confirms the lowest levels of female literacy in the North, and reported relatively higher rates of current employment for women in the southern states (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009).

#### **4.2.3 Trend of spinsterhood in Nigeria**

The trend of spinsterhood in Nigeria was examined from the 1991 and 2006 national population censuses, and Demographic and Health Surveys conducted in Nigeria from 1990 to 2008. Table 4.4 below presents the percentage never married among women age 30-85+ in

each age category. The NDHS percentage distribution is based on the number of never married women in each age category of women age 30-49 years. The percentage of younger never married women (15-29) is included in this analysis due to its relevance to the understanding of the tempo of recent nuptiality in Nigeria.

The trend in non marriage and spinsterhood from the Nigerian Demographic and Health Surveys was comparable to that from the national censuses. Although NDHS provided more information in terms of the number of previous years covered, its data on spinsterhood are based on women age 30-49 years, therefore, do not give a clear picture of the overall occurrence of spinsterhood in Nigeria. Nonetheless, NDHS data are pertinent in predicting the likely trend and pattern of spinsterhood in Nigeria and to link non marriage to fertility and population growth.

**Table 4.4.** Percentage distribution of never married women by age group

Age Group	Census		NDHS			
	1991	2006	1990	1999	2003	2008
30 – 34	5.2	11.8	0.9	5.1	5.1	5.8
35 – 39	3.1	6.2	1.2	1.9	1.7	2.6
40 – 44	2.3	4.2	0.3	1.3	0.7	1.4
45 – 49	2.2	3.7	0.1	1.1	0.9	0.8
50 – 54	2.5	3.4				
55 – 59	2.5	3.5				
60 – 64	2.8	4.5				
65 – 69	2.5	5.0				
70 – 74	3.6	6.7				
75 – 79	3.1	8.0				
80 – 84	3.8	9.0				
85+	4.0	8.4				
Total 30-85+	3.4	6.7				
30-49(NDHS)			0.3	1.1	0.9	1.3

Source: Nigeria 1991 and 2006 Population census, and Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 1990-2008.

Table 4.4 shows that the proportion of spinsters among women age 30-85+ increased across all age groups between 1991 and 2006. For instance, the level of spinsterhood increased from 5.2 to 11.8 percent among women age 30-34, and from 2.2 to 3.7 percent among women age 45-49. The total percentage spinsters increased from 3.4 to 6.7 percent, which is about 65.5 percent increase over a period of 15 years between 1991 and 2006 census. The 65.5 percent increase in spinsterhood represents about 4.4 percent annual increase. The level of spinsterhood was consistently highest for women age 30-34, an

indication that many of them will still marry. The Nigerian Demographic and Health Surveys also showed consistent increase in the percentage of spinsters with a slight decline in 2003 in almost all the age groups. The percentage never married among all women age 15-85+ increased from 21.3 in 1991 to 30.2 in 2006. NDHS showed increase from 17.2 percent in 1990 to 25.2 percent in 2008 for never married women age 15-49 (Appendix A, Table A2).

The above trend suggests that the country will experience steady increase in the number of never married women in later ages. Other factors that indicate likelihood of spinsters such as educational and work opportunities for women, female median age at first marriage and male age at first marriage have continued to increase over the years. Selected details on female median age at first marriage and male age at first marriage are shown in Appendix A, Table A12 and A13.

In general, Nigeria is still a non-marital transition society; female median age at first marriage is barely over 18 years, which is the limit for child marriage. Nevertheless, women in the southern zones of Nigeria, urban areas, highest wealth quintile, and women who attained secondary/tertiary education, have transitioned to marriage at maturity and late marriage regime. More and more men continue to have their first marriage at later ages. Over 60 percent of men in Nigeria first marry after age 25. Considering the average spousal age difference of between two to ten years in Nigeria, women who are ready for marriage would have to wait longer to marry.

Another trend which is indicative of higher prevalence of spinsters in future was the declining tempo of current nuptiality in Nigeria. The percentage of women age 15-19 who enter into marital union is consistently declining, however, the prevalence of early marriage is still relatively high, 29.4 percent of women age 15-19 are married before age 19. In general, the percentage of women who are never married at the youngest ages of between 15 and 24 increased consistently from 1990 to 2008 (Appendix A, Table A2). This depicts declining tempo of recent nuptiality in the country.

The proportion of never married women age 45-49 increased 3.2 times in the fifteen year period from 1991 to 2006, though NDHS surveys showed slight decline in 2003 and 2008. If this rate of 3.2 continues, the proportion never married among women age 45-49 would be 3.2 times higher by 2021. The high proportion of never married in their forties was observed across all geo-political zones (Table 1), though not as high as in developed countries, it is indicative of increasing incidence of permanent non-marriage and a threat to the universality of marriage in Nigeria.

Another clear pattern was the wide gap between the proportion of never married women age 20-24 and 25-29, and never married women age 25-29 and 30-34 reported in 1991 and 2006 census and the NDHS data. For instance, in 1991, 13.3 percent of women age 25-29 were single; at age 30-34 only 5.2 percent remained single. In 2006, 27.9 percent of women 25-29 were single, at age 30-34 the single population declined to 11.8 percent. The details are shown in Appendix A, Table A2. The redoubled effort to fix oneself in a marital union continued, though at a slower pace, into the thirties, and became slower or steady from the forties into the fifties and declined from age 55-59. This pattern was prevalent in all the geo-political zones. The apparent drastic reduction suggests a tendency for never married women to redouble their effort to enter into marriage before age 30. It appears like at the verge of their 30<sup>th</sup> birthday many single women “try to do something” to ensure that marriage takes place sooner. This tendency was implied in the response of a 30-year old spinster in this study, who at that time of interview had no suitor and yet expressed optimism of being married by the year’s end. “By the special grace of God before the end of this year I will be getting married whether the devil likes it or not I will get married. I will definitely settle down” (IDI 9).

In both censuses, there was a pattern of increase in the percent never married age 60-64 which was also noticeable in all the geo-political zones and states except the FCT (Table 4.1 and Appendix A, Table A1c). This pattern was more obvious in the Northwest, Northeast and Niger state in the North Central, where the number increased by almost half the number in age group 55-59. The pattern of increase in prevalence from age 60-64 which was also noticeable in all the geo-political zones and states (Table 4.1 and Appendix A, Table A1c), may be due to the smaller number of women in these older age group. Apart from the effect of mortality, older women are less likely to remain single than younger women. Women who were age 65 and above in 1991 and 2006 were born before 1950, incidence of permanent singlehood should be lower among them. The pattern suggests a higher prevalence of incorrect age reporting and age heaping around numbers ending with zero among women in the Northeast and Northwest, where female literacy level is also found to be low. Age heaping or incorrect age reporting is likely to be more common among less literate women who may not have accurate record of their age. The pattern may also depict a tendency for women to begin to gain confidence to accept their never married status too late. This pattern also suggests that many never married women who were in their late forties in 1991 remained single after 15 years. Though the population in this age category increased in the 15 year period, it suggests increasingly declining likelihood of marriage for women who remain

unmarried till age 30 and above. In spite of modernisation, men in pronatalist society such as Nigeria would still prefer younger women whose procreative ability is certain relative to women who may have other good qualities but are older.

The overall picture of prevalence of spinsterhood in Nigeria and Lagos showed a rising trend across all geo-political zones. The next section examines why women remain never married till age 30 in a pro-marriage society. The results were generated from primary data obtained through In-depth interview, Life History and Focus group discussion with always single women of diverse socio-economic backgrounds, age 30 and above in Lagos.

#### **4.3 Characteristics of the subjects**

The characteristics of the research subjects in the In-depth Interview (IDI), Life History (LH) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) are presented in Tables 4.5. Lagos is located in a Yoruba speaking area; nevertheless, people from the various ethnic groups of Nigeria reside there. The subjects were therefore selected to include spinsters from various ethnic origins, and socio-economic background. Spinsters were selected from the high and middle class residential areas as well as the urban slums. Ethnic origin, culture, socio-economic background, and religion are underlying factors that are useful in explaining the spinsterhood phenomenon.

Five subjects in the FGD did not indicate their ethnic origin. The religious affiliation of the respondents indicates 72 Christians and 2 Muslims. Muslim spinsters were scarce. Confirming the rarity of Muslim spinsters, a Muslim who was contacted during the selection of subjects said: “any good Muslim girl should be married before age 30”. Also, applying the snowball method, it was found that Muslim subjects did not have link to any other Muslim spinster. The age of the subjects ranged from 30 to 48, 51 spinsters were within age 30 to 39 years and 23 were age 40 to 48 years. All the life history subjects were between 40 and 48 years old. All the subjects had attained secondary or higher levels of education. Tertiary education comprises those who have attained Ordinary National Diploma (OND), National Certificate of Education (NCE), Higher National Diploma (HND), Bachelors and postgraduate degrees.

**Table 4.5.** Summary characteristics of the subjects

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Distribution</b>
Total No of subjects	74
Mean Age	37.7
Mean Annual Income (n=48)	N689,000 (US\$4,593)
Ethnic Origin (n=69)	Igbo – 27 Yoruba – 23 Others – 19 (Others = Hausa – 1, Birom – 1, Tiv – 1, Ibibio – 2, Ogoja – 3, Urhobo – 4, Edo – 2, Efik – 1, Ijaw – 2, Idoma – 2)
IDI	Igbo – 12, Yoruba – 6, Others – 7
LH	Edo – 1, Yoruba – 3
FGD	Yoruba – 14, Igbo – 15, Others – 12
Religion	Christianity – 72 Islam – 2
Highest Education Attained	Tertiary – 47 Undergraduate - 1 Secondary – 26 Primary – Nil
IDI and LH	Tertiary – 22 Undergraduate – 1 Secondary – 6
Profession	Self-employed – 21 Professionals – 13 Others – 40
IDI	Self-employed – 5 Professionals – 5 Others - 15
LH	Self-employed - 1 Professionals – 2 Others – 1
FGD	Self-employed – 10 Professionals – 10 Others – 21
Birth Order (1 <sup>st</sup> daughter)	21

Source: Primary Data, 2011

Although the majority of the subjects had tertiary education and in paid employment, the low mean income is a reflection of the gender gap in wage and employment. Even with tertiary education, women are generally confined to low income jobs such as teaching, and low cadre administration work such as clerks, receptionists. These forms of employment usually attract less remuneration; therefore, the average woman in paid employment is still not as financially independent as expected. Twenty-one subjects were first daughters.

#### **4.4 DETERMINANTS OF SPINSTERHOOD**

What are the reasons why some women in Lagos remain unmarried till age thirty and above? Is it that they never wanted marriage or that they desired and wanted marriage but could not achieve it? What would make a woman in a society where marriage is still widely cherished in spite of modernity, to postpone marriage till age thirty and above? The findings in this study revealed that all the spinsters in this study desired to marry when they were younger, and still hope to marry and have children. The exceptions are IDI 1 and LH 1. IDI 1 never wanted to marry because of the conflictual marriage of her aunt who brought her up. On relocation to Lagos, she was exposed to better marriages and has since transformed from a voluntary stable spinster to an involuntary temporary spinster. LH 1 never wanted to marry young; her natural feeling was to marry after she has completed tertiary education and worked for some years. Why would women who desire to marry remain unmarried? Based on personal experiences and observations, spinsters in this study gave various reasons why women in Lagos become spinsters. The determinants were derived from responses to questions on why some women in Lagos remain unmarried till age 30 and above and why individual respondents turned down previous marriage proposals. Further insight on reasons for spinsterhood were provided from response to questions on whether it is better to remain single than to have a bad marriage, and whether fulfilled womanhood is equal to marriage and motherhood. Responses to these questions in the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions showed similar results which were confirmed in the two life history interviews on determinants. Noteworthy, analysis of data from the IDI and FGD showed difference in what the research subjects considered the major determinant of spinsterhood in Lagos. In the IDI, the major determinant is cultural beliefs and practices, whereas focus group discussants identified economic empowerment. This difference is probably because in IDI, interviewees gave more of personal reasons why they became spinsters, whereas in the FGD it was more of general views on causes for spinsterhood. As noted earlier, the results from all the primary data collection methods were collated to present a general understanding of

spinsterhood in Lagos, albeit the relevant differences in responses are reflected in the presentation.

Responses were coded based on themes and concepts derived from the literature review, theories and spinsters' narratives. The diverse determinants of spinsterhood were grouped into sixteen themes. The themes are presented and discussed as major headings, according to their groundedness – the number of quotations associated with a particular code. Large number indicates strong evidence found for the particular code.

**Table 4.6.** Determinants of spinsterhood in Lagos by groundedness

<b>Determinants</b>	<b>Groundedness</b>
Economic Empowerment	53
Mate Selection Preference	47
Marital Experience of other Women	45
Cultural Beliefs and Practices	43
Education	36
Other Modern Lifestyle	24
Personal Factors	24
Marriage of Significant Others	23
Differences in Religious Affiliation	23
Urbanisation	21
Aversion to Polygyny	20
Circumstantial Factors	11
The State	10
Objection by Parents and Near Relatives	8
Family Responsibilities and Obligations	8
Birth Order	7

Source: Primary Data, 2011

The major determinants of spinsterhood were economic empowerment, individual mate selection preference, marital experience of other women, cultural beliefs and practices, and education. Other strong determinants were other modern lifestyle such as intolerance for violence, personal factors, marriage of significant others and, differences in religious affiliation, urbanisation and aversion to polygyny. Birth order, family responsibility and objection by parents were the least mentioned reasons for spinsterhood in Lagos.

#### **4.4.1 Economic empowerment**

Economic empowerment through paid employment or engagement in income generating skill was found to be the most significant determinant of spinsterhood in Lagos. Women predominate in low wage employments in the formal and informal sectors; and constitute the larger proportion of the world poor. The struggle to come out of the web of poverty and domination imposed on women by patriarchal structures, encourage so many

contemporary never married women to insist on securing independent sources of income before marriage. While seeking economic empowerment some women postpone marriage, and having acquired sustainable livelihood their desiderata for an ideal partner are raised and marriage opportunity is reduced.

The need for financial security before and in marriage was found to be a common reason why respondents in this study sought economic empowerment before marriage. It was a common notion of many respondents in this study that marriage no longer provides economic security for women. The negative experience of other women in marriage as regards financial security seems to have driven a hard lesson into the minds of some never married women who would have marriage wait, until they have personal means of livelihood. For them, most women bear the major burden of household welfare needs. On account of this trend, never married women intensify effort to get employed or acquire livelihood skill, during which marriage is postponed, and when they have acquired the skill and are ready, the preferred suitors are not available. The need for financial independence is aggravated by economic downturn in the country, and rising standards of living in urban areas which have made it difficult for men to be sole breadwinners. To a 39-year old Hausa spinster, the current economic situation in Nigeria made it pertinent for women to have sustainable livelihood before marriage.

There are so many reasons why women don't get married early nowadays. One reason is the economy of the country ... those days when you want to get married, you get yourself few things and say OK let me go and manage with him but now you can't. If you do not have a sure means of livelihood, you won't find it easy (IDI 19).

In addition to financial independence, other reasons why the subjects seek economic empowerment before marriage were need to contribute to family economic wellbeing, to be a “deciding, shaping human being” rather than an appendage to a man, fear of loss of career after marriage, role model effect of successful women, culture, need for respect and advantage in power relations at home. A typical submission by the subjects is:

Let me say yes, actually I have a fiancé...So, to me, sometimes I feel scared of going into it [marriage] without getting something doing because it's not always easy. Even when a man tells you not to worry we can always manage, it's always easy to say, but by the time you go into the marriage and kids start coming it's not everything the kids want that you always run down to him and say give me. And there are times you might say give me this or that and he might tell you something that will provoke you. But if I am working, there are some things I can do on my own without his knowledge (IDI 15, 30 years old).

Her reluctance to wed was not only because of her need for financial independence, she was also afraid of losing her ambition and desire for a career, if she got married before employment.

Some men might say ok let her just stay at home. Some will say let her have the first child. First child, before you know it second and third, before you know it, age is no longer on her side, before you know it that drive for work is no longer there, and for you to get appointment in any establishment will be very difficult unless you have some connection

During one of the Focus Group Discussion sessions, an Insurance Executive pointed to the exigency of a woman's emotional and financial comfort in marriage, and also corroborated the perceived fear of losing one's career ambition after marriage.

And some women want to get a means of income because they want to build a home that they can call their home. If they depend so much on the man, it may not turn out as they want it financially, and emotionally. In terms of personal fulfilment, a woman who is educated for instance, would like to have a career. Some men are subtle, they will come and lure you into marriage, when you get there they cage you, and by the time you know it you are getting advise: he is your husband, do what he says. Because of the things we see in the society these days some women want to take their time. We are not ruling out the fact that early marriage is good, no, we are not saying that those of us who are still single that we are at the peak of it, no (Res 1, FGD 3, 44 years old).

Several respondents narrated encounters with women whose husbands work, yet the woman provides the bulk of their household needs. On the basis of this, some women in this study thought it will be foolhardy to enter into marriage without a sure means of livelihood, even if the man is working. On the other hand, participants in FGD 7 expressed an opinion that appeared contrary to the opinion of others on economic empowerment. To them, economic empowerment should not stop a woman from getting married if she meets a man who is ready to take up all the household bills. The number of such men seems to be declining by the day due to economic decline and rising cost and standard of living in urban centres. Therefore, more and more women will continue to seek economic empowerment before marriage; not only to contribute to family economic resources but to attain self-fulfilment. The specific ways economic empowerment affected marital decisions and opportunities for women who become spinsters as found in this research are discussed below.

### **Economic Empowerment affects women's desire to marry**

Economic empowerment of women encouraged spinsterhood in societies such as Lagos, where traditional patriarchal household production is still prevalent; men are still expected to be providers and main decision makers in the family. Thus, some of the women

who have become financially independent were not too keen to enter into marriage. A Sales Officer expressed her opinion this way:

Everybody wants to be high, to be reckoned with in the society. So, they [women] wouldn't want to marry, they want to get money from men, set up beauty salon or shops where they sell and make money. And because they make that money they wouldn't want to take any nonsense from any man. They want to be on their own (IDI 13, 40 years).

Noteworthy is that some women in this category make the money from men. To this category of women, men are to be used for economic enhancement only. Other affective needs such as sexual fulfilment and procreation can be secured as long as there is money.

Though her income is relatively low (basic salary N252,000 per annum), most likely due to the stability of her career in the Nigerian police force a Police, Constable expressed her declining desire to marry.

But I thank God that many single women don't even care. If you have work that can take care of you ...you will stay and do your work. Our prayer is for God to provide for us. Some men are not ready to take care of you, even when they marry you, they will leave you and go out [referring to extra-marital relationships]. You will be taking care of yourself, then, what is the essence that you are married (IDI 10, 45 years old).

To other interviewees, if spinsters can have adequate financial resources to meet their needs, permanent non marriage is not a problem especially if the single women are already discouraged by flaws in marital relationships known to them.

Mere looking at other people's marriage; in fact let me be frank with you, you won't even like to get married. Left to me I will not. The only thing I always tell God is just bless me, let me have money of my own, business of my own; I will be OK without a man (IDI 14, 40 years).

It was observed that more subjects of Igbo origin and those in their late thirties and forties expressed this notion of remaining single if they can have finances to meet their needs and other responsibilities.

Economic empowerment not only affected women's desire to enter into marriage, individual mate selection preference was affected in ways that narrowed marriage chances.

### **Economic empowerment affects women's individual mate selection preference**

Economic independence affected the spinsters' desire to marry men who are unemployed or earn less. Asked why she was not yet married, a Caterer who operates a personal restaurant replied:

Not that I don't want to get married. I actually want to get married but you know these days you see many men who are just handicapped - not doing

anything tangible for a living and they will come to you and say they are interested in having your hand in marriage. When you say OK I love you, I will marry you, before you know it they will be asking you how much you have in your bank account, and they will be coming close to you to eat food. When you find that out, like me when I find out that you are just an empty bucket, I will ask you to go your way. Until the day I find a man that suits me, then I will get married. I can't just get into marriage with all these men that are just walking about. So, that is why I am waiting for the will of God to be done in my own life. (IDI 23, 35 years old).

A 37 year old qualified staff nurse emphatically said she would not dare enter into marriage with a man who has no sure means of livelihood.

I cannot see a man that is not working and he says he wants to marry me and I will agree because I know I won't cope. Not that he must be a millionaire or something but he must be doing something to earn a living. He must be doing something that he can feed himself and me. It's not that he will bear the whole thing, but from what I am seeing immediately he can feed himself and me. (Res 5, FGD 3)

Though the majority of women in this study would not mind marrying men who earn less (See 4.4.2), the patriarchal culture of male-breadwinner still influenced their concept of ideal husband. They wanted to be financially independent and also wanted men to play the provider role. The reasons women in this study gave for desiring economic empowerment seem more for personal security rather than as an agency to transform the social identity of women as dependent. It also does not seem to be a way of challenging patrilineal descent which denies women inheritance right even when they have contributed to the acquisition of household property. The influence of persistent household patriarchal structure intertwined with religion was evident in the quotation from this respondent.

I am a Muslim. In my Koran they said you are not going to a husband's house to provide. The man provides, but in a situation where maybe he is handicapped or maybe along the line he has an accident, you have to help him or support him; not that you go in there to enslave yourself for him. No, except he has problem that is when you will help him but if he does not have problem, it is his duty to provide all you need because he married you as a husband. You have to follow him, and obey him as his wife. But if he doesn't have and you have, you support him not that he will sit down there and you feed him, no (IDI 19, 39 years).

Economic empowerment raises a woman's expectation for a marriage partner. What an individual prefers in a desired spouse partly determines opportunity to marry. If her desires match the available pool, marriage takes place.

### **Economic empowerment limits marriage chances for women**

Engagement in some kind of work imposed restriction on women's opportunity to meet prospective suitors. Availability in the marriage market determines opportunity to be chosen. According to participants in the FGD, the long hours spent in some kinds of employment such as banking limits possible social interactions that may lead to marriage. Other respondents opined that engagement in professions that are considered un-feminine also limits women's opportunity to marry. The 45 year old Police Constable narrated how she was discouraged from joining the police and her experience as regards marriage since she joined. Being a police woman is considered unwomanly because such women may acquire traits that make them question men's authority.

Before I joined the Police Force, people told me that if I join I will not marry, that police women do not marry. People are usually afraid of police women; they say police women are this and that. I do not think my work should scare people. There was a time, early this year when I travelled home one man came to me [for marriage], when they told him that I am a police woman he said: police woman! He was somehow scared. He said aha aha can you be a good person? I said I don't think so oh you know whether I will be a good person or not. So, that kind person that reacted in such a way I don't think he will be a good person. To be sincere I didn't continue with that man, I don't want to continue with somebody that is asking such questions "will you be a good person". Is he good himself? (IDI 10, 45 years old).

This study found some evidence that women who possess many economic resources are likely to be preferred for marriage. Considering the rising cost and standard of living in the cities, being economically empowered through a stable career or skill becomes an advantage in the marriage market. Unemployed or low income women would have other complimentary qualities to be preferred in mate selection. Some of the respondents alluded to this trend in Lagos, in their narratives. A 31-year old spinster who lost her intended spouse and has not found (been found) another partner said:

Men are looking for a woman that has her own work or you are working to help him, not that you are not working, you are not doing anything. (IDI 20, 31 years)

To a discussant in FGD 7, economic empowerment was increasingly enhancing likelihood of being perceived as a suitable partner in Lagos. She spoke about her observation in Lagos and gave instance of her aunt in whose house she resided.

I think in Lagos most men want somebody that will deliver, they want a woman that will deliver, they even prefer a fifty-fifty thing. It is more of a contract in Lagos. It is more like a partnership, you drop something, then I drop too. In fact some men in Lagos prefer the woman being the one dropping

everything. They enjoy it. That's why most times women are like let me get what I need to get so that at least when the man comes. In fact, some women do not mind footing the whole bill, I have heard about women who bought their wedding gowns, bought their husbands' suit, funded the wedding and everything and even got the house. My aunt, who I stay with was in that shoe, she provided everything about the wedding and eventually she started paying the rent even up till now she is the one paying the rent, and they are married (Res 3, FGD 7, 38 years old).

The increasing trend of men in Lagos who want women who can take responsibility fifty-fifty or hundred percent was also mentioned in FGD 2 and 3. This trend increases women's drive to acquire many economic resources before marriage, a situation that increases the likelihood of remaining single.

Other narratives from the IDI and FGD revealed that possessing many economic resources as an advantage for women in the marriage market is more of the exception than a common occurrence. Many men still prefer women of lower or equal economic status to women of higher economic means. Economic independence makes a woman a less desirable partner. It reduces her pool of prospective suitors primarily to men of higher or equal status; who are usually few in the market because they marry lower status women, or less desirable men of lower status, either situation increases her chances of remaining single.

Economic empowerment and the drive for wealth by women are like a double-edged sword for women. On one side, men want women who are economically empowered for improved family economy. There are exceptional cases where men desire wealthier women for status enhancement. On the other hand, men are more reluctant to enter into marriage with women who are wealthy or wealthier than them for fear of losing their headship position to the woman. The ambivalence of economic empowerment in a socio-cultural setting pervaded by patriarchal structures creates a question of how women can determine the threshold of wealth a single woman should maintain to attract a suitable spouse in the marriage market. Concerning economic possession, a 43 year old professional in a Focus Group Discussion observed:

Sometimes men are intimidated or overwhelmed by the women's status or even things as simple or trivial as women's poise or self confidence. (Res 3, FGD 6).

Real or assumed high economic achievement works against a woman's opportunity to marry due to persistent cultural stereotypical beliefs about women of high economic means. Such women are often seen as unmarriageable, arrogant and too independent.

I think what we stand for [socio-economic status] at times might be an issue for us. Some guys really don't like a lady above them, I am not talking about age disparity here, but you being higher financially, in qualification, status in the society; some guys don't like that thing and some guys are destiny killers. Some guys are destiny killers and once they see that you are kind of adamant in achieving what you stand to achieve, they just go, and if you are not the type that likes bending your rules, you stay happy. If you can't take me for who I am then, bye-bye (Res 5, FGD 7).

A 45-year old spinster who doubles as a Social Development worker and university lecturer recounted her experience. Having a good job, a car and a rented flat makes her appear too expensive for a man to maintain. She wonders what gave them the impression that she will become dependent on a man financially after marriage.

Somebody once told me that the men in the church cannot maintain me, somebody voiced that out that they are afraid, you have a car, you live in a flat. So, what makes them believe that if I now marry I will no longer own a car, if I can get myself a car and maintain my car what makes them believe that I will depend on the man for my car, you understand (IDI 17).

Lamenting her dilemma, a 30 year old Front Desk Officer who is planning to buy a personal car recounted:

Like somebody said I can't buy a car since I am not married, if you have your car no man will take you serious. They will think you are richer than them, no man will come. The society should stop this ideology, that mentality should be stopped in this society. They should start seeing single women as people who are capable of making it not only when they settle down in marriage or when they have a man before they can achieve something in life (IDI 9).

In a kind of synopsis, this respondent said:

But to some men, mere looking at the achievement of the lady they assume this one is no longer marriageable ... I think it's sweeter when a lady is well made up before marriage because there is so much bills to pay. That's the kind of life Nigeria is heading to. Almost everything in Lagos is money. But when some men see a lady that has got to the glass ceiling they feel this one can no longer be married because she has made her money, she can no longer submit. When she dresses to look good, they will say no, she is too expensive. ... So when the younger ones [men] who have the guts approach such a lady they will say you are older than him (Res 2 FGD 2).

Respondents pointed out another way economic empowerment affects a woman's likelihood of remaining unmarried in Lagos. Possessing many economic means increases the number of men who take advantage of the woman's need for marriage, to defraud and deceive her. Two respondents, IDI 23 and Respondent 3 in FGD 3 had experience of prospective suitors who kept asking for the value of their stocks and how much they had in

their bank accounts. As long as the deceptive affair lasts, the woman lives with a false hope for marriage. When the man vanishes, she starts all over to seek another partner. IDI 13 has had such experience a few times, she said:

Another experience I have had here in Lagos is that some men will just come around you because of what you have and they would want to extort from you... So, because of that, I have been trying to be myself, I don't want to fall prey to them because they will come to you and say I want to marry you, you will be feeding them, you will be clothing them with the little money you have, at the end they will jilt you. They will start telling stories, because of that I want to be on my own. This is one of the reasons for delay in getting married. Because of this you wouldn't want to associate yourself so much with men, maybe when the real one comes, because you have had rough experience with them you wouldn't want to give that one a chance at all, thereby sending even the genuine ones away (40 years).

In addition to economic empowerment, individual mate selection preference was found to have strong influence on marital decisions that led to spinsterhood.

#### **4.4.2 Mate selection preference**

Individual mate selection preference is influenced by socio-economic and cultural variables such as dominant/prevaling socio-cultural beliefs, education, religion and economic resources. The narratives of women in this study confirmed the effect of these variables as well as modernism, feminism and individualism in the personal life choices of women. Tradition still has a place in their world view; although its influence is fast being eroded. The emphasis in their mate selection was no longer on communal and kingship goals, but individual values, gains and goals. The majority (n=16) of the twenty-nine women involved in in-depth and Life history interviews, who spoke directly about their particular reasons for remaining unmarried became spinsters partly due to insistence on personal values as regards a suitable marriage partner.

In respect with self-selection based on love and personal goals a discussant in a group discussion expressed an opinion which was corroborated by interviewees and other discussants.

I think the reason why some women these days don't get married on time is because we realise that in the time past our parents lived unfulfilled life .. But now we understand that marriage can only make or destroy you as a woman. There are so many women out there whose lives are in shambles by reason of marriage. When you get close to them you find out that they are supposed to be great women in different areas of life but because of marriage every vision, every gift is shattered. So now people are marrying based on you help me as a man I help you as a woman (Respondent 2 FGD 2).

Implied in the above statement is that romantic love is gradually being replaced by confluent love, which focuses on special relationships based on personal gains rather than special persons. The 39 year old Hausa Muslim said her case was not lack of prospective suitors, but she had not found what she really wants.

In my case I have had many of them [suitors] but they don't have the qualities I want and I want to be myself. I don't want anybody to select for me but I have not seen the person I want (IDI 19).

Unwillingness to compromise one's standard increases the likelihood of remaining single. The likelihood of marriage is higher for those who are willing to marry persons with less attractive qualities than those who are not. Those who are in a marriage market that does not easily accommodate their preferences might respond by altering their preferences or they might delay marriage and continue to search. Thus, mate selection processes affect not only whom one marries, but the timing of marriage and whether one marries or not.

One would expect that when a woman gets to age 30 in a society with strong marriage and family ideology, she will be more flexible and willing to adjust her personal preference to the available market resources. Unexpectedly, it was not the case with women in this study; none expressed desperation to marry to the point of compromising standard, particularly on personal and religious resources of a would-be spouse. Spinsters in this study were more willing to compromise values on economic, age, ethnic, physical, educational resources than personal and religious resources of a would-be husband. The resources that affected marital decisions of spinsters in this study are presented under the following headings: personal resources, economic resources, age resources or disparity, educational resources, ethnic/cultural resources, physical resources and religion.

#### **Personal resources**

Spinsters in this study articulated diverse personal resources they expect from a suitable marriage partner; that influenced their marital decisions. In a hierarchical order the qualities are being God-fearing, loving, caring, honesty/integrity, hardworking, and others. The most significant qualities, measured in term of groundedness ( $\geq 10$ ) are presented in table 4.7.

**Table 4.7.** Personal resources of a suitable marriage partner by groundedness

<b>Personal Resource</b>	<b>Groundedness</b>
Fear of God	37
Love	24
Care	23
Honesty/Integrity	15
Hard-work	13

Source: Primary Data, 2011

### **Fear of God**

Irrespective of socio-economic and religious background, always single women in this study were found to have strong preference for men who are God-fearing. The majority mentioned fear of God as a quality they desire in a marriage partner. The common concerns the respondents gave for their preference for God fearing men were related to occurrence of sexual infidelity, wife battering, irresponsible fatherhood, love and negative experience of married women. Expressing the strength of this quality in mate preference, a respondent in one of the group discussions said:

God-fearing that we are talking about is the one that really has the faith, not the one that will come today and shout Alleluia in the woman's house and after marriage he turns out to be unfaithful and irresponsible (Res 6 FGD 2)

To the 30-year old Front Desk Officer, the first quality she desires in a man is fear of God, but she observed that not all men who go to church are God-fearing.

I want a man who is God-fearing. You know men of these days most of them are not God-fearing; they prefer to go to church believing that when they go there they will meet single women who are God-fearing or who are good Christians. It's not all men that come to church that are God-fearing. They know what they are actually looking for. So, you should make sure you get somebody who is God-fearing, not only a church-goer; somebody who practices what is being taught (IDI 19).

Challenges in marriage affected these never married women in diverse ways, one of which is in restricting their mate selection preference. Hence, for instance, the endless search for men who fear God by whatever definition, to ensure marital bliss. Individual measures for fear of God differ, and these women may not all be God-fearing themselves.

### **Love**

Love, as a major criterion for modern marriage was consistently mentioned in this study. Most of the research subjects would not marry men they are not in love with, irrespective of other desired resources. Nevertheless, possession of other desired qualities may encourage one to fall in love. For instance, the 37-year old Nurse who said she would

never dare to marry a man who has no means of livelihood, by implication, if a man has sustainable livelihood the chances of falling in love might be there. In FGD 7, as noted earlier, the participants acknowledged the need for female economic empowerment before marriage, but they do not think it should hinder marriage if a woman sees a man who is ready to take up all the financial responsibilities. This view also indicates the significance of a man's economic means in encouraging a woman to fall in love.

The centrality of love in self-selection was found to be the same for spinsters who are in their late thirties and forties who one should think will be eager to marry men who show interest in marrying them in order to escape the stigma of singleness. In response to why women become spinsters in Lagos, a discussant affirmed:

I think another reason why some women are not getting married on time is love. Love is very necessary because if you don't love somebody and maybe you were forced by your parents or because of pressure then you marry somebody that you don't love...instead of waiting a bit for the right person you love. There is no way you will marry somebody you don't love and the marriage will work out. So, I believe another reason why people are not getting married in time is you have to endure to see the person you love. (Res 3, FGD 1)

Although erotic love has been found to wane in many cases, after few years in marriage it still remains vital for establishing contacts that lead to first marriages. Closely related to love in the priority preference of the spinsters is care.

### **Care**

To the subjects, care, beyond material provisions is a primary personal resource an acceptable suitor should possess. Some respondents gave anecdote about their father's care for their mothers, and expressed desire to marry men like their fathers. Asked what qualities she seeks in a desired marriage mate, a respondent replied:

The first quality I desire in a man is care. Every woman needs a caring man, a man that shows concern, a man that comes in and asks what is the problem if you are lying down. If you go out and he comes before you he will call to know where you are and what is happening, (IDI 25, 36 years).

In the group discussion, the issue of care featured consistently. One of the discussants commented:

I ask God to give me somebody who will be caring, not when somebody marries you he will not take care of his wife, he will go outside and be eating and doing everything, but when you ask for money he will not give you. (Res 4, FGD 5)

Another participant in the FGD for graduates and professionals wants a man who cares, but she explained what she means in the following way:

Someone I can lean on his shoulder when I am weak. I don't want someone who would want to solve my problems, no, but if I want to cry on your shoulder, please give me your shoulders to cry on. It is not necessarily for you to solve my problem for me I know how I can go about them but give me a listening ear, hear me out when I want to talk (Res 5, FGD 7)

Contrary to the notion that women are inclined to fall in love with men who are problem-solving, this respondent wants a man who will support her vision, care about her matters but not one who will solve her problems. Beyond fear of God, love and care, another personal resource that is of prime importance to these women is honesty and integrity.

### **Honesty/Integrity**

Honesty and integrity were among the personal resources expected in a prospective marriage partner, which had profound influence on the marital decisions of spinsters in this study. A respondent narrated how she called off a relationship because the man was dishonest.

I love an honest man. You know some men are not honest. They will tell you something and do another, like the last one I told you about, he was not honest at all. Even, he was still having affairs with others [women], and whenever I confronted him he denied it. His life style was not something I expected (IDI 4, 42 years).

Another respondent narrated how she once found a man she really loved and the man was in love with her also. When asked why she did not marry the man, she said:

Really, there was a guy that wanted to marry me. He is that kind of American type and he is an American citizen. He is good and I really loved him, but you know that time he was rich. He had bouncers, body guards, and lives a high class life. I was reliably told that his close friend used his girl friend for money ritual. I was scared he might also kill me for money ritual (IDI 2, 46 years).

In response to how she concluded the man might use her for money ritual, she replied:

I made inquiries. I asked many people about him and they confirmed he is also involved in money rituals. "Agaghi m ikwe si di di uko mu eje luru ojiabali aga" [scarcity does not justify wrong choice - an Igbo proverb that signifies the value of honesty and integrity].

This respondent values honesty and integrity so much that she declined a marriage proposal from a man she loved because his source of wealth is evil.

## **Hard-work**

Being hardworking was closely associated with qualities such as ambitious, drive, and enterprising power mentioned by some respondents. That this quality attracts high priority in the mate selection preference of women in this study was not unexpected, considering the persistence of household patriarchal culture that entrenches male-provider role in the home. As noted earlier, women in this study want economic independence but they also expect their husbands to play the provider role. This is a reflection of the deep rooted influence of patriarchal household production in the minds of these women in spite of modernity. Irrespective of the financial status of the respondents, hard work was still an expected quality of a desired husband. Four out of six who disclosed their income in one of the graduate/professional women discussion group, in spite of their relatively high income indicated hard work as a quality they want in a man. An interviewee gave a reason that is related to financial egalitarianism in the home, for desiring a hardworking man.

I do not want a lazy man. I do not want somebody that is looking for a woman to do all the work and earn all the money (IDI 6, 44 years)

Other important personal resources that affected mate selection preference of spinsters in this study were understanding, humility and good character. Some of the least mentioned qualities were subsumed in the five most preferred qualities of God fearing, love, care, honesty and hard work. Men who possess these prime qualities are likely to be friendly, trustworthy, kind, not hot tempered, not violent, act like a father/brother, brave, not a drunkard and be content.

## **Economic resources**

One's economic resources as well as the resources of people in the marriage market affect individual mate selection preference. Economic resources refer to resources that produce economic well being, such as engagement in paid employment and income generating skill. To examine the influence of economic resources on marital decisions, and spinsterhood, questions on willingness to marry men who earn less income and the reasons for such preference were asked. All the interviewees who responded to this question were unwilling to accept men who have no means of livelihood. One of the respondents gave this as her reason.

No woman wants to marry a man that will become a liability, a man who does not even have a job. It means the two of them have to struggle all through their life just to make ends meet (IDI 11, 33 years).

Out of those who responded directly on whether they were willing to marry men who earn less, the majority (n=17) articulated their willingness to marry men who earn less, whereas four think they cannot cope in such a marriage. Nonetheless, some of those who admitted willingness to marry men who earn less added conditions such as he must not be lazy. This level of willingness to marry men who earn less, even by highly professional respondents, is likely a compromise option to enter into a marital union, as implicated in this response.

From experience now that I am matured, I can marry a man who is not rich or even a younger man. But before now I could never try any of such (IDI 13, 40 year old).

### **Age resources**

In many societies, men prefer younger women for marriage whereas women prefer men who are older. In this study willingness to marry younger men was investigated to determine the influence of age disparity on marital postponement. More respondents expressed willingness to marry younger men (n=24) relative to those who expressed unwillingness to marry younger men (n=20). The narrow difference indicates the persistent influence of cultural expectation on individual mate selection preference. There was no significant difference between women who have attained tertiary education and those who have not. Some of the women turned down marriage proposals from men who were younger. LH 3, Ayo, broke her first date because she saw the man's birth certificate. She could not imagine marriage to a younger man. Asked if she would marry a man who is younger IDI 9 said:

That is out of it, I can't even settle down with somebody younger. I can't even go out with somebody [younger], though I tried it before but right now that I am more mature I don't think I can ever try it (30 years old).

Reasons bothering around emotion, respect for the man and culture were given by the women who would not marry younger men. IDI 14 avowed:

I prefer a man who is 10 to 12 years older than me. He will treat me like a baby because he has more experience than I. He will treat me like a baby. He will pamper me. Even if I do anything wrong he will put me through because he is more knowledgeable than I (40 years).

This respondent was one of those who want men like their fathers. Her preference for men who are older than her by 10-12 years seems to have influenced her preference to date married men. Later in the interview, she said single men are not faithful, she found elderly married men more faithful because they handle women with more tenderness and respect.

This position about elderly married men is corroborated by IDI 25. This is a contradiction in the marriage institution, women married to these elderly men complain about infidelity and loss of tenderness and respect from their husbands a few years into marriage, the outside sex partners eulogise such men's understanding and faithfulness. Another respondent gave a similar reason why she prefers marriage to a man who is older than her.

According to Islam, when Mohammed got married to his wife, he was 25, the wife was 40, that is according to Islam. But in my opinion I wouldn't want to marry a younger man, because he wouldn't know how to treat a wife. I rather marry a man who is older maybe like 5 to six years but at most ten years (IDI 19, 39 years).

Another respondent highlighted women's conscious or unconscious desire for male protection.

God forbid I will marry somebody who is younger than me, that has always been my prayer because I know people that do it and I do not like it. I always prefer the man to be older than me because I have always wanted a man who will be like a big brother to my siblings and then like a big brother to me... (LH 4, Ore, 48 years).

At age 48, this respondent was still very unwilling to marry a man who is younger. This attitude narrows her chances of getting married because most men who are older than her are married, and those who are never married will prefer younger women for certainty of procreation.

For women in this study who would marry older men, preferred spousal age difference was 1-12 years. The preferred age disparity for women who would marry younger men was between 1 and 3 years. Respondents who were willing to marry younger men gave reasons for their position. For some, age is just a number that should be underplayed if there is love.

We have many people who married men younger than them and you can't even know until you are told, and they are doing well. The basis of marriage is love, contentment and trust, fidelity, once you have that, all other things will fall in place (IDI 22, 33 years).

For others, they will marry younger men if the age disparity is not physically obvious and there is mutual respect. In response to whether she would marry a younger man, a 32 year old respondent said:

One to two years younger is ok but anything more, I don't want. I won't be another Mummy (IDI 21).

The impending likelihood of remaining permanently single affected the decision of some of the subjects who would marry younger men. Sixteen, out of the twenty two spinsters in this study who were willing to marry younger men were in their late thirties and forties. When they were younger some of them would never think of marrying younger men. One respondent said:

Well, before, I didn't like to marry somebody that is younger than me but later I realised that it doesn't really matter, I can marry somebody that is younger than me but not the one that people will see and know that this one is like 8 or 10 years older than the man. At least somebody that I am older than by one, two, three years will be OK (IDI 6, 44 years).

### **Educational Resources**

Educational resources preferred by a woman in a desired spouse affect likelihood of marriage. Inclination to marry less educated men was higher (n=22) than unwillingness to marry less educated men (n=16). But, 16 out of the 22 expressions of willingness to marry less educated men had provisos attached to their position. If those conditions are not met, the implication is that such women will not marry less educated men. In essence, it could be said that most women in this study were less willing to marry less educated men. Highly educated women - university graduates and professionals and two undergraduates - predominate in the group of women who emphatically said they cannot marry less educated men. In this category only one spinster did not have tertiary education. One of the respondents who has Master degree in Business Administration, said:

In as much as a lady is enlightened, she wouldn't want to get married to an 'ignoramus' or an ignorant person, somebody that is not up to her own level of education because that's basics. The bible says can two walk together except they agree? If we are not of like minds there is no way we can walk together. If I am enlightened and I get married to somebody who is not enlightened, there is no way we will not have clash in that marriage because our reasoning are far apart (IDI 11, 33 years).

This is the same reason given by many of the subjects for preferring men who are more or equally educated. When asked if she would marry a man who has other desired qualities but is less educated, the 30-year old University graduate who works as a Front Desk officer recounted her experience in a date with a less educated man.

Less educated, who has all other desired qualities? Well, some people can go ahead, but I cannot do that. I don't think I can do that. I have tried it once but it didn't work out. There are certain things he wants to, maybe he wants to say I love you, he will say I loves you. I kept on correcting him. I don't think I can try it again. I just used that as example. There were some things, little little

things that you can notice so I don't think I can try that, I don't think so (IDI 9).

To underscore the strength of educational resources in determining spinsterhood, a discussant said:

No matter how long I wait, I can't marry a man that is not educated because the problem will be unbearable. I don't mind a younger man but he must be educated (FGD 2 Res 2).

Only six respondents would marry less educated men without any reservation. One of them said:

Education or no education is no problem. The most important thing is love (IDI 19, 39 years).

The majority of the women who expressed willingness to marry less educated men gave conditions for such preference, such as if he speaks and writes well, is humble, intelligent and ready to improve on his level of education. It was also observed that the high level of willingness to marry less educated men was a compromise to quit spinsterhood, as is evident in the response of this interviewee.

When I was young I had laid down standards very well, like at least he must be educated, and he must be presentable. But you know when one gets to this stage you have to really come down a bit. At this stage even though I still insist he must be educated I can really see myself marrying somebody who is not really educated, I don't know how the marriage will work (IDI 5, 47 years).

### **Ethnic/Cultural resources**

Preference for persons who possess similar ethnic and cultural resources affects opportunity to marry. Lagos is a multi-ethnic society; single women resident in Lagos who insist on marrying from their ethnic group might lose chances of marriage. Except for ethnic groups who concentrate in same residential location, the likelihood of being found by a man from same group is low in cities such as Lagos. Nevertheless, women in this study were highly detribalized. The majority of them (n=39) did not have any reservations about marrying men from other ethnic groups even from when they were younger. A few of them were constrained by strict endogamous culture enforced by their parents, when they were younger. Some of the women expressed preference for men from their ethnic groups but were open to marry men from other ethnic groups. Only seven spinsters expressed disinterest in specific ethnic groups. A few (n=3) insisted on marrying men from their ethnic groups. Reasons such as cultural and language difference and endogamy were given for preferring

their ethnic groups. IDI 7 said she understands her Tiv culture and do not want to start learning another culture. IDI 21 insisted her desired marriage partner must be Yoruba. She explained:

Yes, because of language barrier. And we Ijebus believe in marrying from within ourselves (32 years old).

Similar to the findings on willingness to marry men who earn less, or are less educated, for some of the spinsters, willingness to marry outside their ethnic group was due to the need to quit spinsterhood. In the focus group discussion for spinsters of Igbo origin, a participant narrated how her strict preference for Igbo men made her loose marriage chances.

Let me use myself as an instance, I have missed two marriage proposals because I was looking for a man from my ethnic group.. One is from Calabar, one is from Benue State and they are all Christians. I missed two of them because I was looking for an Igbo man but I have come to realise that it doesn't matter (Res 4 FGD 3).

### **Physical resources**

Physical attractiveness was an important resource that affects patterns of union formation. It is usually the first resource that draws people into close contact that may result in marriage. Nonetheless, many women in this study did not attach much importance to this resource. Among those who consider physical quality an important component of their mate selection preference, certain qualities were found to be more desirable than others. Being tall or average height was a most preferred physical quality of would-be-husbands. A few spinsters turned down marriage proposals due to this physical quality. In response to why she turned down previous marriage proposals, a respondent said:

I had the case of somebody that came for marriage but sincerely speaking I didn't like the man because I don't have flare for short men. God forgive me, once a man is short it puts me off. Sincerely speaking, I don't know why, that's a personal thing. So that was the reason (IDI 4, 42 years).

Other preferred physical qualities that were important in the marital decisions of women in this study were handsomeness/good looks, fair complexion, neat/good sense of dressing, being presentable, slimness, and dark complexion.

### **Religion resources**

The feeling of religious group identification was strong among women in this study. The majority will not enter into inter-faith union. Only three spinsters would marry men who profess a different religion. One of them submitted:

Religion doesn't matter all that. Through love you can even convert a Muslim to a Christian or a Christian to a Muslim if there is love. So, there is nothing

like religion. Religion has nothing to do with marriage at all, likewise ethnic group (IDI 3, 30 years old).

#### **4.4.5 Marital experience of other women**

One issue that was ubiquitous in the narratives of the subjects in this study was their reference to the experience of other women in marriage. It consistently reoccurred in the interviews and Focus Group Discussions. What happens in the confines of a home go a long way to chart the future of others who are not even near part of that home! Responses from the subjects in this study disclose that women empathize with one another. The experiences and life of women affect other women's world view and expectations in life. From the experience of married women around them, respondents perceive marriage as demanding and quite challenging; and they want to avoid the mistakes of women who have gone ahead of them into marriage. Marital experiences that were mentioned in this study as strong influences on marital decisions of spinsters in this study included marital bliss, divorce and separation stigma, intimate partner violence, structure and power relations in the home, and irresponsible fatherhood.

##### **Marital bliss**

Unhappy and conflictual marital experience of other women send discouraging signals to never married women about marriage, and makes mate selection preference more restrictive. On the other hand, happy or blissful marriage experience of other women encourages marriage and raises the expectation of women about marriage and would-be marriage partners. This indicates that marriage is not altogether an oppressive structure for all women. To some women marriage is a locus for exploitation and profound inequality, while it is a haven of protection, solace, love and financial security to others. In her narration of reasons for spinsterhood in Lagos, a respondent observed:

There is this cat and mouse relationship between husband and wife, may be because of finances. Any single woman watching such a relationship will be scared. That person definitely has to be sacred because one is not sure what tomorrow will come out to be; and so you must take your time to make sure you don't rush into that kind of relationship; and then face the kind of thing you are watching. But, there are marriages you see and you will just be telling yourself if I am not into this business, then I am missing a lot, because you have seen that there is love and harmony in the home; everything is going fine. But, there are other marriages you will see and you tell yourself if marriage is like this I rather stay on my own (IDI 17, 45 years).

In some cases, married friends who were in unhappy unions advised their single friends to remain single or wait for a "good" man. Two spinsters narrated how their married

friends in unhappy marriage viewed them as lucky to be single still, and encouraged them to remain single or wait for the “right” man.

I have a friend who is married; one day she said to me: “I wish one day you will marry. I am praying that one day God will help you to marry so that you will see what we are seeing. If I advise you not to marry you will think that I am bad.” I thought that lady was joking. Eventually, her husband drove her out and married another woman. So, tell me, a woman who told me this kind of thing and became separated eventually, if she had been single she would have loved it (IDI 10, 45 years).

Respondents said their married friends disclosed that the character of their husbands changed negatively few years after marriage. It is likely that men also say the same thing to their friends about their wives. It appears that men, as well as women, put up their “best” to woo and wed; the true self is usually masked till after the nuptial cord is tied. Conceivably, if not for this “deception”, there may have been many more spinsters and older never married men than there are currently.

The effect of unhappy marital experience of other women on the marital decisions of never married women was concurred in the focus group discussions. In FGD 3 for instance, all the participants (n=6) mentioned the effect of unhappy marriage on their marital decisions. One of the discussants posited:

I learnt that marriage is an institution that fosters peace in a home. But this time around, there is no peace and love in many homes. At times if you see the things that are happening, you will be thinking, is this how marriage is, ... and there will be a kind of fear or something. Somebody may be coming for your hand in marriage, you will be like if I marry this person I don't know what will happen at the end. It will be like I don't know what this marriage will become in the next five to ten years ... Many things are happening; a man will present himself as very good, but later you will see that he is the opposite. So, if you rush into marriage and rush out which one is the better; is it to wait? One is waiting and time is going, so, you don't know which one to follow. So, all those things are causing delayed marriage (Res 5, FGD 3).

Unhappy marriage of other women and divorce instill fear and uncertainty about marriage in never married women. To another respondent, pressure to marry or stigma about non-marriage are irrelevant to her because of the negative experiences of other women in marriage.

When you look at it, you will see that some women are married but then you as a single lady are better off, better off. Looking at the way men treat them, you will say why, why would I go into this rubbish, I better remain like this, I think life goes on (IDI 19, 39 years).

To this respondent, as well as many other respondents, although they desired to marry, the flaws they observe in marriage encourage them to think of remaining permanently single. The respondents' preference for singleness was, nevertheless constrained by widespread familism and singlism as implied in this quotation.

But I believe this society doesn't allow a lady to be single. Whether you like it or not you have to be married; that is our mentality here. Our own culture does not permit that [permanent singleness]. So, we have to marry, but I don't think it's a do or die affair, when it gets to a level ... (IDI 21, 32 years).

### **Divorce and separation stigma**

Stigma associated with divorce and separation in Nigeria instills fear of divorce in never married women, and affects their decisions and opportunity to marry. A respondent thinks spinsterhood is linked to what she considers alarming rate of divorce.

Another reason why I think women are not getting married on time is divorce. It's very alarming. The rate at which marriages are crashing is very alarming and terrible. So, I think that is another reason why women are not getting married on time because you have to shine your eyes and look at the kind of man, if he is cool-headed so that you don't rush in and rush out (Res 5, FGD 2).

Although the most recent Nigeria's Demographic and Health Survey (2008) reports divorce rate in Nigeria as 0.8 percent and 1.1 percent for separation (NPC and ICP Macro, 2009), the perceived high rate of divorce by women in this study, encourages never married women to wait longer for the "right man" or prepare ahead for divorce through economic empowerment. The respondents claimed they know many cases of women who are divorced. This questions the reliability of Nigeria's official statistics on divorce and separation. There is likely a lot of under-reporting of divorce and separation in Nigeria because such women and even men are likely to report themselves as married, considering the stigma associated with non-marriage for both men and women who are past conventional age for marriage. It may also be that the rate of remarriage for divorced and separated persons is high in Nigeria.

### **Intimate partner violence**

Many respondents spoke about domestic violence experienced by women known to them and accounts of domestic violence in the radio and television. Intimate partner violence instigates fear about marriage in never married women and creates a tendency to prefer permanent singleness in some of them. A discussant narrated a tragic incidence of domestic violence in her neighbourhood.

In some marriages these days, it's either they beat the woman black and blue, or they beat the woman to the extent that she gives up and dies on the spot. I

have seen so many things. It's a lot in this environment. I have seen a lot because a hospital is located near my residence. In one case, a wife who was pregnant collapsed while being beaten by her husband. He rushed her to hospital for treatment, after everything, the woman gave up and he ran away (Res 1 FGD 4).

For other respondents, it is better to remain single than to marry and be violated in any way. Intolerance for intimate partner violence will be expatiated under other modern factors that determine spinsterhood in Lagos.

### **Structure and power relations in the home**

The marriage institution is laden with many flaws, introduced into it by patriarchal power structure that ascribes almost absolute power to men and relegates women and children to positions of mere subjects in the family "kingdom". This imbalance in power structure in the home, to some respondents, was partly responsible for the trend of aversion to early marriage and resultant spinsterhood. The respondents submitted that some women want to enjoy some time of freedom before marriage because they know that under the extant patriarchal household structure, they will lose control of their life affairs after marriage. Life History subject 4 said:

Some women do not want to be under a man who will be dictating to them what and what they can't do. My Mom for instance, would have been a very wealthy woman if not for my father who sort of used to curb her business activities and didn't allow her to get to the peak of what she could have become in life. And later on in life, my Mom was always so miserable. Any time they had a quarrel she will always say, see, you are the one that stopped my star (LH 4, Ore, 48 years old).

In the focus group discussion, the quote below represents a typical submission as regards the effect of power imbalance in the home.

I think of the reasons [for spinsterhood] is what happens in homes. Some women get into marriage saying ah this person is handsome, he is rich. When we get there, they [men] will use us as rags (Res 4 FGD 1).

Inequality in house work by women and men partly contributed to increasing spinsterhood in Lagos. In less gender egalitarian societies, women still do the bulk of house work. Unequal share of domestic chores and child care was one of the reasons why some women are reluctant to marry before education and economic empowerment.

Another aspect of power relations in the home that was highlighted is the control of women's sexuality in marriage. A respondent, whose mother and eldest sister married early and had ten children each, said:

You don't really have much say, it's whatever the man wants, if the man wants twenty children; and it affects a woman's health... (Res 2, FGD 3).

The narrative of the above respondent highlights the effect of patriarchal heterosexuality whereby men control women's sexuality in marriage. "You don't really have much say", especially for young brides, the number of children a woman has depends on her husband's desired family size.

### **Irresponsible fatherhood**

Other spinsters noted that irresponsible fatherhood was increasing. Women are becoming major contributors in the home, even when the man is working. In FGD 3, a respondent said she knew many dual income households where the women bear the financial burden to provide food, clothing and pay school fees for the children.

There are many things happening. In a family where a woman has 3 to 5 children, she will bear all the household needs. I have seen many; I mean everything ah ah! What of the man? What is he doing? Some of them that are working, where is the money? The woman will take care of everything in the house, including the children's school fees. Sometimes she will come and look for somebody to borrow money from for the children's school fees. I have seen it a lot even some of them come to me to borrow money. ... There are so many things you will see and you will say let me get a good job, let me get one thing or the other so that maybe if I marry I will start managing with all these things; because you don't know. Though one will not enter marriage with fear or something like that; but from experience of what is happening around, one begins to think of so many things, in case, one doesn't know what will happen. (Res 5, FGD 3).

Another respondent in that group has many near relatives and other men known to her who deserted their families and the women work day and night to provide the family needs.

Some married women lament and complain that their husbands are not meeting their financial needs. Spinsters, who like these married women, are raised in a patriarchal culture that promotes the illusion of financial security in marriage for women, get discouraged and intensifies their effort to meet an "ideal man" that gets scarcer by the day for spinsters. To sum up the influence of other women's marriage on marital decisions that may lead to spinsterhood, IDI 7 submitted:

There are some kinds of story you hear some married women tell, you are discouraged. Sometimes, you see some people, like some of my friends who are married, they complain. So, at times I will say: this marriage let it rest...that is how I think it is for some people like me. Because sometimes I see hardship in some marriages, they are not OK, they are still complaining. The same way I am complaining who is not married that I don't have money to eat, they too are crying. Then I say what is the point. Sometimes, I look at it that men are not even worth it because I don't know the love of man.

Sometimes I don't care much, I can't even explain but I don't care much, because women give more. Women will carry belly [pregnancy], you go to work, you come back, ah ah hardship, everything woman, woman, only you, it's not encouraging anyway; it's just that God has already from the beginning said that one should marry (35 years old).

In conclusion, the relationship between the marital experience of other women and spinsterhood suggests that even though women want to marry, the condition under which the union takes place is becoming more important.

#### **4.4.3 Cultural beliefs and practices**

Certain cultural beliefs and practices were found to hinder women's opportunity to marry at their own time and on their own terms. The cultural practices found to play prominent roles in determining spinsterhood were physical/sexual attractiveness, normative marriage processes, cultural stereotypes about women, ethnic prejudice and endogamy, high bride wealth, pronatalism, and gender socialisation. The findings on each practice and belief and how they affected the subjects' marital decisions and opportunities are presented below.

##### **Physical and sexual attractiveness**

Physical and sexual attractiveness were found to impose limitations on the marital chances of women in Lagos. Responses from the study indicated that the contemporary patriarchal culture in Lagos expects women to be both domesticated and sexually attractive, although sexual and physical attractiveness seems to be the stronger expectation. A 40-year-old fashion designer narrated painful experiences with men she dated, who preferred sexually attractive women to her domesticity. She provided domestic services such as cooking and laundry for the men, loved and respected them, yet they left her for younger and more physically attractive women. The 45-year-old social development worker/University Lecturer thinks her physical stature is one of the reasons why she was not yet married. To her, she is not physically and sexually attractive enough because of her diminutive stature.

Somebody like me, well, I am not beautiful to some people; that could be part of it (IDI 17).

The researcher responded, "but you have other good qualities", she replied:

Most times people are not looking at those other good qualities; they just look at how tall is she, how beautiful is she and all that...

A 47-year-old secondary school teacher thought poor dressing which made her physically unattractive contributed to her being unmarried. She was still expecting to marry and has since changed her style of dressing to what she considered attractive.

Another thing that can cause delay is when you don't dress well. I think I am a victim. You know those days I dressed anyhow. I don't even mind. There was one brother who later told me to go and learn how to dress well. Since that day I talked to myself and improved on my dressing. So, when you don't dress well it won't attract the right people. Your dressing matters. I noticed that most of these girls that dress well, you see them marrying the right men. Men will be flooding them (IDI 5).

The double standard observed in patriarchal sexuality is also prevalent in culture. Well-dressed women are found more attractive; at the same time, women who dress well are seen as too flashy and expensive; in fact, sometimes labelled promiscuous and desperate if they are spinsters. On the other hand, shabby dressing scares prospective suitors. Negative impressions about women whose dressing is considered too flashy and expensive discourage men from choosing such women for marriage. Some of the subjects recounted their experience in this regard. The double standard is evidently seen in the narration of a 36-year old successful trader who was advised by an elderly married woman to stop dressing in expensive clothes in order to attract a spouse.

When you have money, people will complain about your dressing. One woman called me and said: "eh it is good to dress but it's too much, you are not married, stop dressing like this. If men see you wearing all these expensive clothes, it will be very difficult for them to come to you for marriage. They will say ah this one who is wearing expensive clothes, if I marry her, and I don't have money to buy them, that will be a problem". She advised me to be managing second-hand or cheaper clothes, and said: "even if you have all those things be keeping them in your box, when you get a man to marry you, then start using all those things" (Res 4, FGD 5).

Good dressing by women was said to scare prospective suitors, yet, if a woman does not dress well, it will also be said that she scares men by her shabby dressing. All these are the creation of patriarchal structures in which women seem to be at a disadvantage head or tail.

### **Normative marriage processes**

Insistence on traditional prescriptions, processes and patterns of mate selection and marriage was found to be a determinant of spinsterhood among women in this study. Insistence on patterns such as the belief that men should be the one to propose marriage to women, payment of bride price, traditional marriage ceremony and church marriage before cohabitation resulted in loss of marriage opportunities for some of the respondents. A respondent narrated how her relative advised her to consider getting pregnant for a man in order to quit spinsterhood.

I can't go and hook up with a man. I don't want that type. I want a man that will come and plead, that is the thing I am telling you. You don't become half

kobo because you are desperate; no I don't want. When you enter their house they will say: did I marry you? Did I come for you? You are the one who came to me. So, I don't want that one. I don't want that insult. It's too much of men so I told her I don't pursue men, men pursue me (IDI 2, 46 years).

This respondent missed two marriage proposals due to her insistence on what is considered traditional standards - a man should look for the woman. She was unwilling to compromise traditional standards but she "envied" her cousin who entered into marriage out-of-wedlock, and has grown up children. When she narrated the effects of spinsterhood on her, she said sometimes she feels out of place because some of her mates who entered into marriage out-of-wedlock are grandmothers already. LH 4, Ore, lost an opportunity to marry because she refused to move into the man's house after the first marriage rite. She wanted church wedding before cohabitation. Urbanisation, economic decline and changing values create an environment whereby consensual union thrives over traditionally approved patterns and processes of entering into a union. Therefore, women who insist on such standards are unlikely to be chosen in Lagos marriage market. Another respondent insisted on bride wealth marriage. She finds it absurd to move in with a man who has not paid her bride wealth.

I found out in Lagos that so many men just want to get a lady and she will be taking care of them even sexually without paying her bride wealth. ... I know one woman who has given birth to a baby girl and the man has not paid her bride wealth and she is living there. I was told of another woman, the man has not paid a dime on her head and the woman has given birth to four kids. Such men will go out there and tell other men: "why waste your time paying bride wealth, look at my own, I have not paid anything, at the end, the children are mine, if she likes let her go" (IDI 13, 40 years).

### **Cultural stereotypes about women**

Stereotypes founded on cultural behavioural expectations affected women's opportunity to marry in Lagos. With modernisation, women's role is assuming dimensions that are not centred on the domestic alone. Educated, economically empowered and urban women no longer typify the appearance of passivity, gentility, subservience and dependence expected of a woman in the traditional Nigerian society. Nevertheless, in obvious and subtle ways, cultural stereotypes still persist about how and what a woman should be. The 45-year old Police Constable cited earlier was discouraged from joining the police because policing is considered unfeminine.

Women are still expected to be dependent on men. Women who work hard to secure sustainable livelihood risk being labelled arrogant, manlike and anti marriage. A respondent narrated her observation in church.

And in church too, you will see some women who are of age and they are due for marriage and maybe these women are looking towards what they want to achieve like in terms of education or some other things. They want to prepare themselves for marriage. Because of all these things they are trying to do, brothers in the church will be looking at them as if they are arrogant; they will count them as proud; even the pastors will say they cannot stand for them. They do not have any confidence in them again because the women want to achieve something before going into marriage, but they will count it as if you are proud, you don't know what you are doing (Res 3 FGD 2).

### **Ethnic prejudice and endogamy**

Ethnic prejudice and endogamy were significant cultural factors that affected marital decisions of some spinsters in this study. Some of the spinsters lost marriage opportunities because they wanted men from their ethnic group. Although many of them would marry from other ethnic groups, preference for men of similar ethnic origin persists. The major reason for this preference was prejudice about other ethnic groups. When asked if she will marry men from other ethnic groups, a respondent from North Central Nigeria replied:

That's always my point. I never like other ethnic groups. I like my ethnic group, that's the point I have. Maybe it contributes to my delay because I met a lot of people from other ethnic groups. Like Yoruba oh God ha, it's like if you give me a Yoruba man for free, I will tell you thank you.

Asked why, she said:

I don't know. I don't like their attitude; God, no no. Only thinking of Yoruba people my head aches. I don't know I don't like them for anything. Igbo people, I don't like them too, too proud and their mothers horrible. So when I now look round I say... (IDI 7, 35 years).

Other respondents who expressed preference for their ethnic groups had one prejudice or another against other groups. Endogamy was found to restrict women's opportunity to marry, especially if it is required for certain cultural reasons. A respondent from Anambra state narrated her dilemma as a first daughter who must not marry outside her state.

They are telling me that I will not go far, that as far as I am the Ada [first daughter] I will marry within ... There is one man who came to marry me, an Imo man, my parents refused. They said I will not get married to an Imo man, it's only Anambra, that's the delay now. Assuming I am in my husband's house now I would have finished giving birth because that was in 2001 and the man is living in China. He just came to marry me; they said he won't marry me unless he is from Anambra. (Res 3, FGD 5).

### **High bride wealth**

Bride wealth, presentations of materials and cash to parents and kinsmen of a woman as part of marriage rites, was found to be a determinant of spinstership, especially if it is

high. Economic decline and increasing acceptance of exogamy increases the likelihood for men to select spouses from communities with relatively lower bride wealth. The Igbo of southeast Nigeria are known for high bride wealth. Respondents, particularly those of Igbo origin, confirmed a trend of spinsterhood among the Igbo due to high bride wealth and the rising prevalence of Igbo men selecting spouses from other ethnic groups. Asked what she thinks are the reasons for spinsterhood, an Igbo respondent said

Some Igbo men are selfish. Some of them will tell you that the money to marry in Igbo land is too much. Many of them prefer going to Bini, Yoruba land, with the excuse that there is no money. ... (IDI 10, 45 years).

In the FGD for Igbo spinsters, although many of them agreed that high bride wealth is a challenge, one respondent differed. To her, high bride wealth should not stop a man who wants to marry especially if the woman in question has money to support him even though secretly or indirectly. Among the Igbo, a woman is not expected to contribute money for her bride wealth, at least openly. To the respondent, economic empowerment of women should offset the effect of high bride wealth on men.

High bride wealth? We are talking about women working, getting money, if I want to go into marriage and I meet a man who doesn't have money, what am I doing with my money, I will give the man. So, I don't think it's a problem. Bride wealth also differs with families. In as much as they will say this is what our people do, but it depends on your family, how you want your own to go, that's all. (Res 1 FGD 3).

She pointed out that high bride wealth is not a universal phenomenon among the Igbo. Some Igbo communities do not have high bride wealth. Even within the communities that have high bride wealth, individual families have significant control over what to accept. Spinsters in other ethnic-based discussion groups did not mention high bride wealth as a reason for spinsterhood among them. Nonetheless, a correlate of high bride wealth in contemporary Lagos is high cost of wedding, a trend that may be responsible for Lagos men's preference for casual and consensual relationship.

### **Pronatalism**

Marriage and family ideology is connected to pronatalism whereby biological offspring is preferred to adopted children or childlessness. Pronatalist culture keeps single women who have not proved their fecundity and older never married women in disadvantaged position in the marriage market. A respondent whose marriage was stopped because she lost the required pregnancy before marriage said:

The problem of spinsterhood nowadays is caused by men. Like my own experience, I am not yet married, I am still single; when men come to me, they

will want to have an affair with me just to know whether I can produce children ... I have a fiancé, really we tried, I got pregnant, not that I didn't get pregnant but mid way I had miscarriage, later on I had to wait (IDI 18, 39 years).

This respondent is still waiting to get pregnant; but she planned to quit that engagement at the end of the year (2010) if the man continued to insist on pregnancy before marriage.

The culture of pronatalism was connected to men's insistence on sexual intimacy before marriage particularly with spinsters whose fecundity is uncertain. A 42-year old respondent, who was obviously becoming apprehensive about menopause said:

The issue of age is very important in marriage. You know there is a certain age a woman will attain and some people might feel that ah this person is too old. The majority of men will prefer to go to younger ones. You know when a woman is above thirty, forty, they feel she might not be able to have children. You know menopause might be around the corner, all those things. So, some men put that into consideration except the few ones that will damn the consequences and just go ahead (IDI 4).

Other respondents narrated how they have been advised to enhance their opportunity for marriage by proving their fecundity through pregnancy. Men want to marry younger women for a certainty of having biological children. They are not sure a thirty-something or forty-something-year-old woman will still have a child. And in a culture where voluntary childlessness and adoption are not yet popular, a woman's pool of suitors reduces as she gets into her thirties irrespective of other advantages she may possess.

### **Gender socialisation**

Gender socialization in many Nigerian societies prepares the mind of women to accept marriage and motherhood as conventional feminine roles. When a woman does not see herself as different from men, it is likely to affect her interest in marriage. She might live with the illusion that she can always marry like the men. One of the interviewees was a tomboy; she played football and hunted with boys. In her words:

It did not bother me to think that I am a woman and I should be married... When I noticed I was a girl, some of my mates have started marrying... From age 30 to 35 it dawned on me that if I am not a man, I am a woman so I must marry, what is happening. Many of my friends started taking it up as a prayer point, and questioning me (IDI 2, 46 years).

### **4.4.4 Education**

One modernisation factor that is responsible for universal trend of later marriage is education. The trend of later marriage caused by education was confirmed in this study by the large number of quotations associated with education (n=35). Several spinsters referred to

education as personal or perceived reason for marital delay in Lagos. Education in this context refers to formal education, and informal education through literature and media. The length of time it takes to acquire education inevitably postpones marriage for so many women because they would not marry while attending school. In other ways, education refines women's world view, gives them a completely new value about life, ideal marriage and marriage partner. Speaking on this, an interviewee said:

From my experience and observation in Lagos, one of the reasons [for spinsterhood] is tertiary education. In the past, the majority of women did not attend higher institutions. After primary school at the age of 9 or 10, as soon as you get to puberty you get married. Those who attended secondary school marry immediately after, at age 16 or 17. But these days, I am talking from my experience; you want to go to higher school. Maybe by the time you graduate, you are 22 or 24, you go for National Youth Service, [compulsory one year service for graduates] at 25, and you start looking for a job because your taste is no more like when you were in primary school. ... You are now educated (IDI 13, 40 years old).

The various ways education affected marital decisions and timing for women in this study are discussed.

#### **Duration of education**

The length of time it takes to attain education, particularly secondary and tertiary education in Nigeria, during which most women postpone marriage, caused spinsterhood in Lagos. The long period it takes to get admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the incessant strikes by students and staff in tertiary institutions, and compulsory one year National Youth Service contribute to the long time it takes to attain tertiary education in Nigeria.

It was found that some of the respondents wanted to complete their education before marriage; and those who were currently enrolled in tertiary institutions of learning also wanted to complete their education before marriage. By the time such women are ready for marriage, available and suitable marriage partners are few, and because many of the few men would typically prefer younger women, some of these highly educated women are unavoidably constrained to spinsterhood. Inquiry into why the respondents wanted to complete education before marriage revealed that perceived difficulty of combining education, housework and child care, and the fear of losing educational ambition were behind this tendency. Due to unequal power relations in the home and perceived challenges of motherhood, some women prefer to take their educational ambition to a desired level before marriage.

A respondent had marriage proposals when she was in secondary school; she declined each proposal because she wanted to complete her secondary education, which according to her was an emerging trend in her village at the time.

When I was in secondary school, suitors came for me, but I was not ready for marriage then because I wanted to finish my secondary education (IDI 2, 46 years).

It took LH 3, Ayo, some years to get admission into a tertiary institution after her secondary education. She called off her first date with a man who was ready to marry her because she insisted on getting tertiary education before marriage.

Maybe, that is what happened to most of these other women [spinsters]; they wanted to be educated, but by the time you go through that, maybe you are already 30 or 28, you serve [compulsory one year National Youth Service] before you get somebody to settle down with (LH 3, 46 years).

Due to the high value attached to education as a means of status enhancement in Nigeria, women who come from poor families where there is inadequate finance to sponsor all the children through school, engage in self sponsorship to attain desired level of education. Such women work and go to school on part-time basis. This elongates the period they stay in school. IDI 1 and IDI 7 are examples. IDI 7 completed her secondary education at the age of 17; she could not go further due to inadequate family finance. She was currently studying part-time for a degree in Mass Communication in one of the Universities in Lagos. Nevertheless, she did not see education as a reason for her delay, but acknowledged that pregnancy and motherhood are difficult to combine with academic studies. IDI 16 was currently engaged in part-time study for National Certificate in Education (NCE) to qualify as a teacher; she was 35 years old, from a polygynous home where finance was not enough to train all children to their desired levels of education. Nevertheless, she insisted on getting education to a tertiary level and desired to complete it before marriage. Explaining why some women insist on a level of education before marriage, a participant in a group discussion said:

If we say let us marry, our husbands will train us in school, it's a lie oh. By the time we born one, two, three, [give birth to one, two, three children] education is finished. By the time we enter, [marital union] honey and sweetie will end, and I will not go to school again (Res 3 in FGD 4).

To IDI 7 cited above, education should have nothing to do with delay in marriage because it is a different program from marriage. She was probably trying to say that finding the right man, maybe a man whose gender ideology is more egalitarian, marriage would not hinder a

woman's desire to attain any level of education. The effect of education may not be as much in the time a woman spends obtaining education as in the influence of education on a woman's values and world view.

### **Education changes women's perception of marriage and ideal partner**

Education and the associated transformations raised the women's expectation of marriage and desiderata for an ideal partner, which led to delay in marriage. A respondent stressed the role of education in equipping women with their rights as individuals.

Another thing I think is that we (women) have been exposed at least to a level whereby we now know our rights (IDI 16).

Education raises a woman's expectation of a suitable spouse. The Social Development worker/University Lecturer observed that:

Education has contributed to it [spinsterhood] quite alright; a lot more women are more enlightened, they are more educated and so they know better... In as much as you know what comfort is, you know your level; those who are aspiring to something very high are those who also know they are there (IDI 17, 45-years).

Educated women have had their values refined, so they aspire and are expected to marry men of same or higher status. As noted earlier in mate selection preference, educated women in this study were quite unwilling to marry less educated men.

### **Education limits marriage opportunity**

Education limited marriage opportunities for women in this study. Whereas women are getting educated and their values and preferences are improving, the cultural ideals of early marriage and traditional mate selection preference are evolving at a slower pace. Male mate selection still tilts in favour of women who are younger, less educated, domesticated and of lower economic status. This was implied in the statement below by a 31 year old spinster.

Even sometimes when a woman is too educated it limits the number of men that will come around her because men have ego. They want a woman they can control, a woman they are more than, not a woman that will seem to rule over them (IDI 20).

This male need for women they can control is probably a reason why men feel more comfortable marrying women of lower socio-economic status. Some feminist perspectives posit that men enjoy the dominion they have at home which is said to be the origin of class distinction in the public sphere.

In Nigeria, more men than women attain any level of tertiary education. For instance, 2006 population census reports that 5.9 percent of all women of school age in Lagos are graduates of universities and polytechnic compared to 8.2 percent for men, though men who are of school age outnumber women by 7.9 percent. If tertiary education becomes a disadvantage to women in getting married it is because men with tertiary education do not insist on marrying women with same level of education, and the negative social identity of educated women persists.

### **Influence of Literature and Media**

Media and literature idealises heterosexual relationship, gives people utopian, individualistic values, and illusionary impressions that keep some women looking for suitable spouse for too long. IDI 2 had proposals for marriage but she was looking for a man as romantic and loving as the men she read about in romantic and marriage books. Narrating her experience, she said:

Another thing that destroyed marriage in African society is this American idea of marriage. We want to be like Americans. In our days we read a lot of Mills and Boons, Barbara Cartland, James Hardley Chase, and many romantic novels that make one think the people you are reading their stories all is well with them. And you want to be like that in an African setting; you think it should be like that in African setting. I remember two suitors came for me during my secondary school days I looked at them and asked myself, can this one be like those I have read about? I wanted to marry a romantic husband, fantasy kind of, so I shunned them off. I just wanted everything to be at the peak of American style. When I travelled home to the village I did not mix up with people I will carry novels and read and did not make friends (IDI 2, 46 years).

Aside from idealising heterosexual union, literature and media portrayal of challenges in marriage disseminate misleading information about marriage. A respondent thought it was better for her to remain single than have the kind of ill-fated marriages she hears about in the media. This respondent said one of the gains of her spinsterhood was staying alone in her apartment. She enjoys the freedom of staying alone, and takes pleasure in watching television. She said:

It's better to remain single. I am watching everything in the TV, women say it. It's better for me to stay single than to go into any marriage that is not going to last. Some marriages start very well but before you know it there will be a lot of conflicts. The man can do anything to you and before you know it the woman will die. So it's better for me to stay single than to go and marry the wrong man (IDI 20, 31 years).

## **Life History One – Edna**

The life experience of Edna (pseudonym) underscores that education, economic empowerment and individual mate selection preference are important determinants of spinsterhood.

### **Family background**

Edna is the third child in a family of four. Her father died six years after marriage to her mother. They had four children, three daughters and a son, before his death. Edna's mother did not remarry after her husband's death. She raised the four children as a single mother. She was a head teacher in a primary school in Benin, and made garments to supplement her income. The four children had university education. Edna does not remember any personal experience of a two-parent household; she was still an infant when her father died. Nonetheless, she saw her cousins and neighbours who had both parents alive. She did not think her family background affected her views about marriage. She recalled how her mother told them objectively that the six years she spent with her husband was blissful although mixed with challenges.

My Mom refused to remarry. We enjoyed our childhood days. People did not know that we didn't have a Dad because my Mom really tried in taking care of us. She was a headmistress. A lot of times it's only when people don't hear us talk about our Daddy that they say don't you have a Dad. Apart from that, you won't really know from looking at us that we don't have a Dad because my Mom was also a Seamstress.

### **Education and work life**

Edna is a lawyer by profession. After her National Youth Service, she was employed by a law firm in Benin, where she worked for a few years before moving to Lagos. She practices law and also works as a property agent. She resided in a three bedroom rented bungalow in one of the high class estates in Lagos Island with her mother. She did not give specific response to her level of income. She said "it depends; you know I am into private business". Asked to give an idea, she said "sometimes it can be as little as N50,000, other times it may be as much as over N500,000 per month, it depends."

### **Education and economic empowerment as determinants of spinsterhood**

Edna said she never liked to marry early. Even when her sisters and mates were getting married, she was not influenced to marry also. For her, completing their education and getting a good job was her priority.

Right from my first year in university, men were proposing marriage to me, but I didn't feel I should get married at that age because I thought I was young. I entered university at 16 and I was young in the university. Even after

I graduated I didn't still feel I should get married immediately. I just felt I should work and make some money. I have never felt like getting married early, I have never. I am one of those. Even when my younger sister was getting married I thought she was too young and many of us said: "don't you think you are too young". She said ah it's OK for her but not me, that is just the truth.

She started having marriage proposals from age sixteen, her first year in the university. She wanted to complete her education, get a job, work for some years and make some money before marriage. She assumed marriage will certainly come. While pursuing these goals she declined several marriage proposals, in many of the cases, she just gave flimsy reasons to refuse the proposal. She recalled having about twenty marriage proposals from her first year in the university.

Like the first proposal, he was already a graduate, an architect, who just left university. Then I felt he was short; and a couple of other proposals too, may be for different reasons too. At times I might say I don't like where you are from, I don't like you, you are not from my state. At that time maybe because of my age then, I said I want to marry from a particular place. Some people that came, I also turned them down because of their ethnic group. There was one that came that was too light-skinned and I say aha you are too light I don't like light-skinned men. It's just like that for different reasons ... The person that even was my friend in the university that I liked, by the time I was out of university I had grown out of him.

Asked what she meant by 'grown out of him', she replied:

Mmmm I was almost more matured than he was kind of. So we were not flowing any more. He's somebody I could have got married to. When I was in the Law School he still kept coming, but I just kind of withdrew.

Asked why working and making money before marriage is so important to her. Edna said:

I believe it is because if you are able to take care of yourself to an extent the pressure for you to just go into any kind of marriage or remain in a bad marriage is not there. That's why for some women, the pressure to remain in a bad marriage suffering is not as much as before... financial freedom for the woman gives her the impetus to say OK let me choose. That is not to say I encourage divorce or separation. Financial independence for the women encourages a woman who is in a very very bad marriage or bad situation to at least may be come out to take care of herself. That is why I said I never really wanted to marry very young like that, I have always felt that I should work and then have some kind of money or be rich before I get married, that's very true.

### **Individual mate selection preference as a determinant of spinsterhood**

The qualities she desired in a prospective husband were fear of God, care, kindness, intelligence, hard-work and she insisted the man must be a Christian. In addition to these, she said:

I have my preferences. I really would like somebody that is tall, dark and slim because I'm on the fat side. So, the person will just be like a good contrast. I really don't like men who are fat; I don't know why. From when I was young they don't really appeal to me. We will just be like two fat people rolling all over the place. But I'm more matured now and I have realised that looks are deceptive, it shouldn't be the only reason that ... you know. If I see somebody that doesn't have all the height and all the looks but has other qualities then I could go for such a person.

Although she has preferred physical resources for a marriage partner, she no longer insisted on them, probably to quit spinsterhood. Asked if she would marry a man who is less educated she replied:

If we flow yes, I won't mind. There are some people that are enlightened. There are some people that may not be educated but are enlightened. When you discuss with them, there is nothing wrong with their reasoning. One of the qualities I like in men is intelligence and intelligence does not have to do with being educated only. If I notice that you are extremely intelligent and then apart from that, there must be the willingness to improve yourself because I realise in life that we should not be stagnant. If he realises there is a need for him to improve his education and he is intelligent I can talk to him, I can marry such a person. But if the person is not intelligent enough, I can't flow with him, he is not enlightened I won't do that.

Inquiry into what other compromises she might be willing to undertake in order to marry, such as getting pregnant out-of-wedlock, she responded:

I really don't know why a woman would go out of her way to do some funny things; you trap a man with pregnancy because of ... Somebody that will marry you will marry you. If they won't marry you let them go that's not your own. I am not saying it because it's easy, I'm somebody that has not married early so I know, I'm talking from the point of experience, the pressure that one can face when you did not get married at a young age. There is a lot of pressure you know, emotional, a lot of pressure, there is so much that you might want to, you need strength through. One can easily fall prey and then make mistakes because it's really not an easy experience. You have to be a strong person to be able to marry late.

Even though she did not think getting pregnant to "trap" a man for marriage is ideal, she acknowledged that vulnerability of spinsterhood might make some women to give in to such behaviour due to incessant pressure to marry. At 44 years, which is considered late for

marriage, though she was willing to compromise her preferences on physical and educational resources, she still thought she has to be careful in selecting who to marry.

There is so much loss marrying the wrong person, anybody that comes your way you just marry say ah let them leave me alone ... I have this funny nature. I don't manage things. I know that if I am in a bad relationship that I will not like it and I can't manage. On my own I have always known that I have to be careful for me not to get into marriage and out of it because I'm somebody that really don't pretend and I really don't like to manage anything. If I'm doing anything and it's not OK, I am not comfortable with it, I don't want it.

Edna's spinsterhood was a case of deliberate decision to marry late, education, economic empowerment and personal mate selection preference. Edna's life history showed that focusing on education and economic empowerment before marriage and insistence on desired qualities in a would-be spouse increases a woman's likelihood of remaining single. During her undergraduate years, she dated a fellow undergraduate whom she loved; still, she did not marry him because her mate preference changed, even though the man was serious to marry her. After graduation, she began to desire older men. The issue of "outgrowing" a man who she dated as an undergraduate connotes the cultural notion of women marrying older men. Moreover, Edna said she fell in love with that young man because he dances very well. Out growing him means that with maturity, there was nothing concrete to sustain the "love". A respondent in FGD 7 confirmed that one of the reasons for spinsterhood is changing mate selection preference as a woman matures. She said:

And then, as you get older, what you look for changes from what you looked for as a younger person. You begin to look for a matured person, a more responsible person, and then it might so happen that the men you come across might not fit into that picture. It does not have to be economical, that the guy doesn't have anything; because you are older now your outlook about life is now different. You begin to want something more solid than what you wanted when you were younger. You begin to wait, hoping that one day that prince charming will eventually turn up (Res 2, FGD 7).

Edna's reason for seeking economic empowerment before marriage highlights an important reason why women need economic empowerment. She said economic independence gives a woman the impetus to choose to opt out of a bad marriage. Women who have no sustainable livelihood may be constrained to bad marriage at least to have a livelihood, and some of them end up dead as in the case narrated by a discussant in FGD 4 under marital experience of other women (4.4.5 - Intimate Partner violence). Although Edna wanted to marry late, she did not plan to be 44 years without marriage. After working for some years it became more difficult for her to find a suitable mate. Even with this difficulty

in finding a suitable mate, Edna was not disposed much to compromise in her desired qualities for a would-be spouse. She expressed willingness to marry a less educated man with the proviso that the man must be intelligent and willing to improve on his level of education. This indicates an unspoken desire for a man of equal or higher educational attainment. One would think that with the extensive pressure on her, as well as other spinsters to marry, she will be ready to marry whoever shows interest at least to escape the stigma of non-marriage. This was not the case with Edna as well as many other spinsters in this study. In fact, Edna was not only unwilling to marry just any man, she will opt out of a bad marriage if she eventually marries. She attributed her tendency to leave a bad marriage to her nature, but from what she said earlier that financial independence gives a woman liberty to make a choice if she is in a bad marriage, it may also be a result of her high education and success in career. Also, Edna's family background may have influenced what she called her nature. She was raised by a widowed mother, which is likely to have influenced her view about female headed household as an alternative to a bad marriage.

#### **4.4.6 Other modern lifestyle**

In addition to economic empowerment, education, and urbanisation which will be discussed later, other modern lifestyles such as intolerance for early marriage, violence, and partner infidelity, and influence of western culture were found to be determinants of spinsterhood among the study population.

#### **Resistance to early marriage**

Although early marriage remains one of the features of Nigeria's nuptiality pattern, Demographic and Health Surveys show a decrease in the trend of early marriage among younger generation of women. For instance, never married women age 20-24 increased from 21.7 percent in 1990 to 38.4 percent in 2008. Nigeria's census shows increase from 30.2 percent in 1991 to 49.7 percent in 2006. Findings in this study showed that many spinsters do not consider early marriage ideal. Resistance to early marriage was an attitude found to cut across respondents from the various ethnic groups. Asked why she was not married at 39 years being a Hausa/Fulani Muslim whose menarche, traditionally should not be experienced in her father's house; this respondent attributed resistance to early marriage to education and the influence of western culture.

Actually it is before but now influence of the western world and education has changed all that. But in the typical, that's interior villages, they still practice it [first menstrual period should be in a husband's house] but not much, if the woman is not attending school (IDI, 19).

Rejection of early marriage is partly a result of expanded educational opportunities for women in Nigeria and a fall out of Nigeria's population policy that stipulates 18 years as the official age for first marriage, albeit not enforced. Talking about early marriage, a respondent in a group discussion said:

One of the reasons why women get to age 30 without marriage is that they want to get mature before they go into marriage, because marriage is indeed demanding and there are many challenges in it. From the marriages of the people that are before us we have come to know the things that are involved (Res 2, FGD 3).

Narrowing the discourse to her personal experience she continued,

If I may use myself as example, my eldest sister got married early and she has ten children. My Mom married early and she had ten children though one is late. Early marriage makes a woman to give birth to so many children. Our country's economy is not so good; even to train two, three children is hard then talk of six, seven children.

There is increasing awareness of the disadvantages in early marriage for woman, such as large family size due to longer exposure to sexual activity during the most fecund years. Therefore, never married women try to escape the disadvantages by postponing marriage till later years.

### **Intolerance for violence**

Dread for violence and outright intolerance for it limits women's opportunity to marry. Due to violence experienced by her mother in the hands of her husband, IDI 5 called off any date when she notices any trait of violence in the man. Respondents 3 and 5 in FGD 3, LH 4 and IDI 2 quitted dates that were planned to lead to marriage because the men displayed violence toward them. LH 4 said:

So, how I eventually broke up was when one day he turned on me; in fact, he didn't even know what he was doing. I seized his wrist watch and he wanted to collect it from my hand. So, he turned on me and was so violent... (Ore, 48 years old).

Others continue to dread violence. Another interviewee, IDI 7, dreaded violence so much that she would rather be single than marry a man who will violate her.

In some marriages they fight. I don't want oh, if it is only this type of marriage, God don't allow me to marry and my husband slaps me (35 years old).

### **Influence of western culture**

The narratives of women in this study indicated that women's perception of womanhood, marriage and singlehood is changing as a result of influx of western and

feminist ideals. The result of this study suggests that women want to be the best they can be, achieve what they can, still marry and have children. It is a struggle to marry on their own terms in a society where patriarchal structures are still traditional, and marriage and family ideology is still extensive. Some of the respondents attributed spinsterhood to the strong presence of western culture in Lagos. A discussant observed:

I also believe that one of the causes of spinsterhood in Lagos is that we have a lot of foreign culture in our midst; and we see how other nations are well developed. In our own culture it is believed that it's only when a woman is married that she is respected. When she is not married, she is nothing no matter what rank or position she holds in the country; it shouldn't be so. But it's beginning to dawn on Nigerian women now that marriage is not all. There is a better life out there other than marriage (Res 2, FGD 2).

Another respondent thought the weakening of the influence of tradition in mate selection was responsible for increasing spinsterhood.

In those days our parents married, they didn't have much problem. These days we are looking for compatibility, but I don't think there is something like that in those days. But we are looking for it; that is where the problem is, I think so. In those days, they will introduce somebody and their marriage will last but these days I don't know whether it because of over education (IDI 7, 35 years old).

#### **Intimate partner infidelity**

Intimate partner infidelity was the least of other modern lifestyles that affected the marital decisions of spinsters in this study. A respondent, IDI 4 (42 years old) broke up a marriage engagement when she discovered the man was sexually unfaithful to her.

#### **4.4.7 Personal factors**

Certain factors that were considered personal hindered some of the spinsters from entering into marital union before age thirty. Such personal factors found in this study included unwillingness to become single mothers, unwillingness to date men/sexual abstinence, preference for date with married men, deliberate choice, and personal character.

#### **Unwillingness to become single mothers**

In both the interviews and discussion groups, spinsters expressed unwillingness to become single mothers by natural or artificial means, and adoption. Only few respondents were thinking of adopting a child if the probability of marriage becomes very uncertain, others do not think it is ideal for them to have a child alone by any means. When asked if she will consider having a child alone, an interviewee responded:

I don't want to have a baby alone because I don't want to suffer alone. Adoption has not occurred to me (IDI 12, 36 years).

This respondent said she did not want to suffer alone. This is probably due to her income level. Her highest level of education was secondary school and she worked as a hair stylist. Financial security and age are important factors that encourage women to opt for single motherhood. This respondent, though 36 years old, was still optimistic about marriage. The majority of the ten women who mentioned adoption as a coping mechanism (See 4.6.5) were professionals and women in their forties and one who was thirty-nine years old. Nonetheless, financial security and higher education did not make much difference in the way single women in this study viewed single motherhood. The majority thought single motherhood is burdensome and not an alternative to marriage. The 44 year old Lawyer, LH 1, in response to whether she has thought of becoming a single mother said:

I have met single women who say OK if I don't get married at this age I will just have a child and they have done that. From their experience I have found out that it wasn't a good decision. A child is not equal to a husband. I know two of such women; if you look at their lives now, one has a daughter and the daughter is putting pressure on her to take her to her father. So, it's always a problem and then of course I think the agreement she had with the man was that he did not want his identity revealed (Edna).

Another respondent, a 42 year old university graduate avowed:

As a woman that is not married and you now decide to have a child outside wedlock, in Igbo culture for instance, it is a shame to the family. Though some ethnic groups may welcome it, but even if they welcome it, it is just few people that will accept it. Sometimes the woman's father will say make sure you don't come with that bastard into my house, just go and meet the man that impregnated you. And when people hear [that a single woman has a child] it doesn't sound well. It has side effects on the child. When the child grows up maybe the person she had a child for is a married man and the man may not tell his wife; especially if the child is male, he wants to find out who his father is. It's not good (IDI 4).

Even for women who would have considered this option, culture constrains them; being a single mother through other means apart from widowhood is still widely stigmatised. A respondent (IDI 9) said single motherhood by choice is a western life style. In her view, it is the joy of every woman in a country like Nigeria to have a man whether you are the second or third wife. Albeit for the western women, opting for single motherhood is still not an easy decision. It is not yet an acceptable alternative to normative heterosexual marriage among them. For others, religious sanctions and the need for social approval stopped them from becoming single mothers. The respondent (IDI 12) who said she did not want to suffer alone also said her Christian belief constrains her from becoming a single mother, otherwise when she gets to a certain age she would just have a baby. Perhaps as culture loses its hold on

people's worldview, older single women will gain more liberty to venture into single motherhood by choice even without much financial resource.

### **Unwillingness to date men and sexual continence**

Closely related to unwillingness to become single mothers was reluctance to date men and sexual continence. Due to past experience with men in heterosexual dates, some of the spinsters decided to stay off dates with men. Others insisted on sexual abstinence before marriage, a decision that scared some men away from them. To some men, women are seen as sex objects and any resistance to that identity attracts disadvantages such as non marriage in some cases. Moreover, in a pronatalist society where the certainty of a woman's procreative ability is an incentive to contract a marriage, women who insist on continence are likely to lose out in the marriage market. From the narratives of some spinsters, sexual relationship is important to men in every date. When IDI 14 and IDI 4 decided to stay off sexual relationship with their boyfriends, the men quit the relationships. According to IDI 25 (36 years old) for most men if they don't sleep with you, you are not complete. Another interviewee observed:

I know that some men are not sincere. Many of them will promise you marriage, but they are not sincere, they just want to be having sexual intercourse with you. If you know yourself, you will not allow them to mess you up. And you know in our society if a woman refuses sex with a man they say it is hard for the woman to get married. So, men are not going after women who don't want sexual relationship with them, they want women who they will have sexual relationship with (IDI 10, 45 years old).

Women's attempt or desire to control their own sexuality outside marriage resulted in not being selected in the marriage market. Some single women who engage in sexual relationship with men are also left for other women who are considered more sexually attractive or 'virtuous'. Spinsters in this study observed that some men date girls in Lagos, but when they want to marry they will prefer to select girls from the rural areas who they believe are not sexually loose like Lagos girls. The details on this finding will be discussed under urbanisation. A respondent narrated a radio call in programme on reasons for spinsterhood. Some men who called in attributed spinsterhood to sexual looseness by women, but this respondent did not see the sense in that when women who insist on non sexual pre-marital relationships are usually not preferred marriage mates as in her own experience. According to her:

Some of them will even say it is because they [spinsters] have dated so many men when they were young. They say, in fact, they were running up and down and forgot that they were supposed to get married and now that age is telling

on them they want to settle down. But it's not like that, for example, somebody like me I used to be the shy type and I'm not the type of person that easily gives in to men. Sometimes men tell me: 'you are just too rigid, leave all this rigidity'. It's not as if one grew up running up and down, no no, In my family it is not like that. But you find out that even after that I am still not married. God knows ... It [marriage] is not something you get because you are righteous or because you are unrighteous (IDI 4, 42 years old).

### **Preference for date with married men**

Some of the spinsters in this study held negative stereotypes about single never married men. This attitude hindered their opportunity to marry because they also do not want to enter into polygynous unions – official or unofficial. The common claim among such spinsters was that married men are more liberal with finances than never married men. A respondent who observed that many never married women around her prefer to date married men thought it is one of the reasons for spinsters in Lagos.

In this our generation, many girls have married men around them. They say married man take better care of them than single guys. A young guy cannot see you dating a married man and he will come close to you. Married men are deceiving young girls because unlike single men, they have the money. They will give the women everything to turn their heads. They don't know that such men are wasting their time (IDI 20, 31 years).

As observed by the above respondent, the social notoriety associated with cross-generational sex inevitably confines some women involved in such relationships to involuntary spinsters. This appeared to be the case with IDI 14, who unequivocally stated her preference for married men. She preferred such dates, and trained her younger siblings from the economic rewards she procured from relationships with married men.

I trust married men more than young men. I am telling you the truth. I love them more than young guys because they are there for you. They care for you, they give you advice, - the good ones. We have the good ones we have the bad ones. If you meet the good ones, they advise you, they take you like their own sister, I'm telling you. They tell you good things, not only to go to bed with you, they give you good advice. They tell you how you are going to live your life, even help you to build your future, I 'm telling you the truth. I have met that kind of a person. He helped me to build my future, he advised me. I am telling you the truth ... All these young men are not faithful at all. I will tell you the truth, they are not faithful. That is why you see so many women don't want to rush into marriage because they don't want to get hurt (IDI 14, 40 years old).

This respondent was conflating her married sexual partners' generosity with faithfulness. As noted earlier, engaging in extra-marital affair is unfaithfulness to their legal wives. Another respondent narrated how a married man was ready to give her N5,000 to style her hair

whereas his wife went about with the cheapest of braids. Preference for married men as one of the causes of spinsterhood in Lagos was corroborated in the focus group discussions.

### **Deliberate choice**

Only two research subjects said their spinsterhood was partly a result of deliberate choice. Life History Subject One, took a decision to marry late, albeit not as late as age 44. According to her, it was just her natural inclination, and she also felt she should complete her education, work and attain some level of financial security before marriage. As though to justify her decision to marry late, LH 1, Edna, made reference to a female relative of hers, who she was reluctant to introduce for interview because she thinks the relative might be offended. This relative does not want to marry. As a part of pressure on her to change, her parents gave her a period of time to change her attitude about marriage. On expiration of the time, she was ejected from her father's house. She currently resides in Lagos and is doing very well in her career and never talks about the need to marry. The second respondent whose spinsterhood was partly a deliberate choice decided to remain unmarried due to the conflictual marriage of an aunt in whose house she grew up. But, she has transformed into an involuntary temporary spinster. In the focus groups, some participants said spinsterhood in Lagos was a deliberate choice of some women. They believed there is an emerging category of women in Lagos who do not want anything to do with men.

Lesbians have a club, woman to woman; where women meet and talk about themselves. They do not touch men. There is a way they pat other women on the hip that shows the woman wants it (Res 8, FGD 1).

### **Personal character**

Some respondents in the IDI and FGD made reference to personal traits such as being untidy or hot tempered as reasons for spinsterhood. Two respondents had personal experience as regards personal traits. IDI 20 said she is quick tempered and men whom she dated previously complained, so she decided to keep off dates.

You know sometimes men are looking at the way you talk or to say you are too harsh or you get angry easily over small matters. I have hot temper, I don't even bother to have any boy friend. If God wants me to marry he will bring my own at the right time. So, to me I don't bother about marriage issue up and down ... (31 years old).

Another respondent, whose younger siblings have married, said people complain that she is too harsh and she knows it is true. She thought that is the reason why she lost a recent relationship with a man she would have liked to marry.

Like I met a man recently, I think maybe that is what scared the guy. We saw for the first time one evening, and after that he kept calling me. The second time we had appointment, as I got there he was not there and I left. He called me to come back I refused. He said I am so harsh. Another appointment, we met, he was happy to see me. He gave me drinks. He works in a ship ... He asked me to wait for him in his guest room that he will meet me in the evening after work, but I refused because I wanted to go. I don't pretend. He gave me transport money but up till today he has not called me again. If I call he will not pick (IDI 25, 36 years old).

#### **4.4.8 Marriage of significant others**

The marital decisions and opportunities of spinsters in this study were influenced by their families of origin in various ways. Prominent among the family background determinants was marriage experiences of significant others.

##### **Parents' marriage**

Responses from women involved in this study indicated that parents' marriage, whether happy or unhappy, cordial or conflictual, influences daughters' perception of marriage and mate selection preference. Nevertheless, some of the respondents were not influenced at all by their parents' marriage; they set their marital standards irrespective of parents' conjugal experience.

Blissful parents' marital union raised the women's desiderata for ideal marriage partner. One effect good parents' marriage had on some of the spinsters who claimed their parents had happy marriage was the desire to marry men like their fathers. Eighteen, out of twenty-nine in-depth interview and Life History subjects said their parents had good marriage; and some discussants made reference to their parents' good marriage. When asked if she thinks her parents' marriage influenced her desire and decisions about marriage a respondent said:

You know, like my parents' marriage, if I may say I will like to get married to somebody like my father; because my Mummy as well as others speak so well about him. My father was such a person that if he saw any man maltreating his wife or kids, that man is in trouble (IDI, 14, 40 years).

This respondent lost her father when she was still young, but the little experience she had of her father and her mother's narratives of him made her decide to seek a man like her father. According to her, her father believed women are created to be pampered by men; to him, a woman ought not to work even if she is educated. Her mother often recollected his love and their good times together. This notion of good marriage obviously gave this respondent an idealised concept of who a marriage partner should be. She sought physical and material

security in a man she would marry. As noted earlier, she revealed that she had found such love and faithfulness only in already married men who she dated. Another respondent, a 36-year old caterer, said her father was her model husband. In answer to what qualities she desired in a man she would marry, she just narrated how her father cares for his wife's welfare and never refuses to eat her food. To her, that is the kind of man every woman needs. Like IDI 14, this respondent also alluded that in her dating experience married men fit more into this picture of care and love than never married men. It is likely that the tendency to seek men like one's father leads to cross-generational dates, a factor that also causes spinsterhood.

Narrating how her parents' marriage affected her desire and opportunity to marry, a respondent in a focus group discussion said she wanted a marriage like her parents'. Her father loved and cared for his wife and children.

I want my marriage to be like my parents'. I like my parents' marriage because it was a very interesting marriage. I lost my Mom in 1985 ... My father did not remarry; he did not want to marry anybody else because he loved his wife. So, I want that type of marriage...My father stayed like that till he died last year November [2010], so I would like my husband to be like my father (Res 2, FGD 4, 30 years).

There was a tendency for the women who thought their fathers are ideal men to idealise marriage so much that they were unable to find the real and presumed qualities of their fathers in other men. Women who emphasise such "father" qualities are likely to become victims of endless search men who embody the masculine ideals found in their fathers.

On the other hand, conflictual and unhappy parents' marriage also raised women's desiderata for desired marriage partner. The tendency to be "careful" in mate selection increased when parents have unsatisfactory marriage. A respondent in one of the focus group discussions said:

It's not that they [spinsters] do not have suitors, but due to the unhappy experience of their mothers or other relatives in marriage. When your mother asked for money for food, your father will start shouting at her. When you are looking at all those things it pains. You are supposed to be educated today but there was no money to sponsor you because your father was not helping (Res 4, FGD 5).

Unhappy parent's conjugal union created fear and aversion to domestic violence in women, and in some cases led to a decision to remain unmarried instead of being violated in marriage. The spinsters whose parents have conflictual marriage whether in monogamous or polygynous union (n=7 of 29 in-depth and life history interviews) had inclination to avoid

men like their fathers. A respondent whose parents' conflictual marriage affected negatively submitted that:

It affected my choice. I don't like the way my father treated my mother. And my father always said my mother kept herself as a virgin, that he married my mother as a virgin. That thing made me to say if you marry somebody a virgin and you are beating her up, treating her like this; I made up my mind that I will not marry somebody like my father. So, anytime I see a semblance of my father in any man that comes around, that nullified it. Once I see a trait, I will say aha this is another Mr. ... (IDI 5, 47 years).

Parents' marriage did not affect some women's concept of marriage, desire and opportunity to marry. They formed their own opinion and set personal standards in spite of how well their parents fared in marriage. Life History three, Ayo, submitted:

My parents' marriage didn't affect me. I already got my own standards about what I want in my own life. So, I set my principles based on that. Their marriage did not influence me... Off and on, I won't say exactly, they fight, they settle. They fight in the presence of the children and we settle their disputes. But I don't use their marriage as a standard (LH 3, 46 years).

Another aspect of parents' marriage found to have significant impact on women's decision on whom and how to marry was mother's marital experience. The structure of mother's marriage, monogamy or polygyny, her marital status as married or single mother, and satisfaction in marriage affected opportunity and decision to marry. In the in-depth interview and life history interviews many (n=13) of the respondents said their mother's marital experience affected their impressions and decisions about marriage. From the narrative of IDI 5 above she believed her mother was unfairly treated. On account of her mother's marital experience she vowed to avoid any man who is like her father. Her father confessed that he married her mother a virgin yet she suffered terribly in the marriage. The cultural expectation for women to be sexually continent before marriage underscores the tendency for men to control women's sexuality before and within marriage. Sexual restraint by women does not attract any value to her position or pleasure in marital relationship. Respondent 4 in FGD 5 cited above made reference to her mother's experience in marriage as a reason for her delayed marriage. She was working hard to avoid replication of her mother's experience in her own marriage. Two, out of the four respondents in life history and in-depth interview whose mothers were in polygynous unions, reported that their mother's did not have it easy. Asked whether she thinks her parents had a happy marriage, IDI 3 sighed and said:

Anything polygynous marriage, there will always be a problem, you understand. There is no one from a polygynous family that will say it is not a problem (IDI 3, 30 years).

Polygyny does not always constitute a problem for women and their children. IDI 19 said her father married two wives, and they live like sisters. IDI 6 claimed that her parents' marriage influenced her positively.

My parents had good relationship. My father married 8 wives, my mother is the 7<sup>th</sup> and my father had good relationship with all of them (IDI 6, 44 years).

Mother's marital status and the effect were not direct questions; therefore, they were not raised in the group discussions. In the life history and in-depth interviews mother's marital status featured as an unplanned probe for family background effect. Five, out of the 29 in-depth and life history subjects were raised in single parent household: three by widows, one by a never married mother and one by an outside wife. The marital status of mothers who were widows did not affect the respondents' decisions and opportunity to marry but made them positively disposed to permanent singleness. On the contrary, the two respondents who were raised by single mothers admitted profound influence of their mother's status on their marital decisions. IDI 1 never wanted to marry due to the conflictual marriage of her near relative as well as her mother's experience, and LH 2, Titi, whose mother was an outside wife would rather remain single than replicate her mother's marital experience.

Closely related to parents' marriage as a determining factor of spinsterhood was the marriage of near relatives, such as guardians, siblings and other relatives. Res 3 in FGD 3 resided with her eldest brother for many years before she rented a personal apartment. Her brother ill treated his wife in ways the respondent did not like. She gave another instance of her elder sister whose husband was unkind and violent. On account of these, the respondent sometimes thought marriage is not worthwhile. In another focus group discussion, a participant said:

Let me cite my sisters as example. Many of them that are married, their marriages are not happy, the way I am seeing it. I have decided that my own will be different in the family. So that is the reason I said before I marry I will open my eyes, wash my eyes very well, so that my own marriage will be different in my family (Res 4, FGD 5).

## **Life History Two – Titi (pseudonym)**

Life History Two was a forty-year old spinster whose life exemplifies how family responsibility and parents' marriage constrain women to involuntary spinsterhood.

### **Family background/parents' marriage**

Titi's mother and father never lived together. Titi's father was a Muslim; he had a first wife, a Christian, whom he wedded in a church. Unknown to Titi's father, his wife had three children for another man before marrying him. After thirteen years, the three children visited her and openly challenged her for abandoning their father for a rich man. As a sort of reprisal Titi's father made secret arrangement to marry a younger woman (Titi's mother) since he did not want to divorce his wife and could not bring in a second wife officially. Unknown to his wife, he accommodated the new wife outside his house and had children with her. Titi said: "but it's like his wife knew" because all Titi's mother's male children died mysteriously one after another when they started crawling, "I think they were killing them because they didn't want any of them to survive because of his [Titi's father] property". Titi's father was a sailor, he was rich. He provided all the needs of the outside children; but, Titi and her siblings never entered his house until the day he died. They had television and refrigerator when so many people in their neighbourhood had not started using television. He bought them good clothing from departmental stores. In spite of this, Titi submitted that her father never had a relationship with her mother.

... and I watched my Mom, sometimes you know, I think that was around my father's death, I asked her: "why on earth did you choose to marry this man". I asked her that because of the experience she went through, not because of what she told me but the little I witnessed. I was young then, but if I look at it now, my Dad did not like my Mom, it's just, I don't know, in his own way he was trying to protect us [the children] because he hardly comes to my Mom. Sometimes, I witnessed one sad event, my junior sister died, that girl died and before my Mom could bury her, you know you cannot bury a child without the father's consent. And my Mom could not go to my father's house. She had to send one of her elder brothers to do that for her and sometimes they went to his house because he was a business man they hardly saw him at home. My Mom had to keep a dead baby in the house, in the same room with us, she kept it inside a bucket, covered it. I could not sleep as a child. Those things I watched, sometimes it affects me but thank God for Christ. I believe because of what my Mom went through, I have seen mistakes that I want to correct in my own marriage if I eventually get married. I think things happen for us to learn from and to correct mistakes. You don't say because something happened with somebody and then we are not going to try that thing,, it might work for us. ... But some times when I think about it, it was horrible. Whenever my Mom gave birth, sometimes you don't see my Dad until the eighth day, when they are supposed to name that child.

Titi's mother was an outside wife. In spite of her mother's horrible experience as she puts it, she still wanted to marry but would never repeat her mother's mistakes such as going into any form of polygyny and arranged marriage. Due to her family background, she believed a woman must know a man very well before marriage. She did not mind how long it takes her to ascertain details about any man she would marry, and sometimes her family life experience makes her skeptical of marriage.

So many experiences, sometimes you begin to ask yourself: is marriage worth it? Ok even if I am going into it let me be sure, you understand. Human beings cannot have hundred percent, but at least if he can just have 40 over 60, maybe I can stand ... One feels insecure because of past experiences and what you see around you; you want to be sure of who you are marrying and that the home you are going into is yours.

Commenting further on the effect of her family background on her she said:

So in his [her father] own way he was trying to protect us. It's just that all these things affect children more than parents. When you are from a polygynous home, the man may not even know what he is doing, he is marrying wives, he doesn't see it as anything, he is an African man, that's what he will tell you; but all these things affect the children most because they see more than their parents.

Her father died while they were still young. Being an outside wife with only female children, Titi's mother did not have access to any of her father's estate.

### **Education and work**

Titi's mother did not have enough financial resources to give all her children tertiary education. They benefitted from the free primary and secondary education in Lagos to attain secondary education. Through personal effort she attained a certificate in computer programming and was studying part-time for National Certificate of Education, to qualify as a teacher. She worked for a Non Governmental Organisation for some years and was currently engaged in trading.

### **Family responsibilities/obligation as a determinant of spinsterhood**

Asked if she had family obligations that may have affected her opportunity to marry, Titi said:

In fact, as I am talking to you I have; I think that's what kept me up till now. That is why I am not married up till now at 40. I had a sister who is late, while she was dying she handed her children over to me, five of them, four boys and a girl. I have their pictures here. And these are my sister's children, I cannot just leave them. Their father died before their Mom, you see why I cannot leave them. So, I had to take care of them... I am their mother, they don't have any other mother.

Titi was fully responsible for their education and everything about them. As at the time of interview, only the first child had completed university education, others were still in tertiary and secondary schools. She continued:

So, as I am sitting here no man wants to marry me with all those kids around me. I think that's what kept me up till this age, I know, I understand. No man, once they follow me home and see my responsibility, though some of them come back and we stay as friends but they will tell me they can't marry me. Nobody wants to marry a liability. That's what has kept me.

Titi has had many men who desired to marry her but were scared by her responsibilities. She had no regrets about it. In fact, sometimes she did not even think about marriage because she was thinking of the next meal to put on the table for the children.

You know sometimes I get carried away, it's like every day is a survival race. There are so many things for me to take care of that sometimes I don't even think of marriage. Too many things, like the basic things we need like food, shelter, family responsibilities, all these things are there. So, sometimes I get carried away being comfortable in a way. You run after food and shelter first before thinking of any other thing. It's when you have these two you think of marriage at times.

Titi's maternal bonding with the children affected her decisions about marriage; because she has been like their mother, they expressed jealousy when she was in a relationship with men. Sometimes they discouraged her from dating a man they think is not good for her; and their feelings and opinion affected Titi's marital decisions.

But now I think they have reached the stage where they tell me aunty we are now grown up please you have your life to live, don't worry we are OK now; we can start from here.

The children think they are grown up and can take care of themselves, and want Titi to marry. Titi also thought it was time to marry, but at 40, her probability of marriage is quite low in a society where younger brides are preferred.

Raising five children gave Titi a comrade attitude with married women. She dresses like them and joins in their social gatherings without feeling odd. Asked if she experienced any harassment from men, she replied:

Harass me? I have always been the tough type. You can't raise five children and not be tough. Nobody harasses me. I have not seen that man. They say boyfriends slap their girl friends; nobody has ever tried it with me.

Titi's life history confirmed the effect of mother's marriage and family responsibility on a woman's decision and opportunity to marry.

#### 4.4.9 Differences in religious affiliation

One of the causes of spinsterhood in Lagos was religion and other spiritual beliefs. Insistence on religious identification and values was found to be one of the reasons for prolonged delay in marriage for women in this study. The spinsters were very unwilling to enter into inter faith marriage; only three spinsters would marry a man who has a different religion.

Spinsters who belong to denominations and religions that observe more traditional religious doctrines are sanctioned from marrying men outside their group. IDI 4, for instance, attended a protestant church, she has met men who are Roman Catholics; in each case, she declined their marriage proposal. Others, in the in-depth interviews and group discussions, had similar experiences. In one of the group discussions, a discussant said religious doctrine is one reason for spinsterhood in Lagos.

Another reason women are experiencing delay in marriage is religion. Some denominations tell single women “you have to wait for the will of God”, will of God 30 years, will of God 35 years they are still praying. When they even have a man that approaches them for marriage, they will say brother go and pray oh. They are praying two years, three years and they are aging. I think that is one of the factors (Res 3, FGD 2).

An interviewee who was a member of a Pentecostal church but has returned to her parents’ denomination, Roman Catholic church; attributed her spinsterhood partly to her former church’s doctrine on marriage. Members are expected to ask God to reveal who their marriage partner is.

Most times it’s only single women who suffer that “have you received”? “Are you sure you have received?” But the men can just come out tomorrow and tell you I received that you are [my wife] do you understand. To them, it’s a lot easier, they can easily come out and tell you and they will be believed but you as a lady you just sit waiting. Even when you know you have received but then it’s not normal for a woman to propose and so you keep waiting, God helps you if he eventually comes... They [never married women] can’t get loose and move around anyhow, they are keeping to the church rule on marriage but the brothers in church are not looking at them (IDI 17, 45 years old).

The above statement highlights the interplay between religion and culture which sanctions women from proposing marriage to men of their choice and patriarchal structures that exalt men’s opinion above women. According to the above spinster, church authorities believe men who say God has shown them women to marry more than women who have such claims. Keeping to religious group sanctions was not without regret, a respondent who missed marriage chances as a result of church doctrine stated:

Another mistake I made is that I was looking for a “son of Judah”, you know I am “daughter of Zion”. So, my desire was to marry in my church because I know the type of teaching we have (IDI 2, 46 years old).

Unwillingness to leave one’s religion or denomination, limits women’s opportunities to marry, in a patriarchal society where women are considered part of a man’s property. Some respondents who were insisting on certain religious values or beliefs said their fathers seriously objected to such a stand. IDI 4 said:

My father kept saying a woman doesn’t have a church; you go to where your husband is (42 years old).

Nonetheless, this respondent believed her father’s idea is just tradition which she was not liable to follow. This result indicates that women who insist on marrying within their religious groups are more likely to remain single because women are likely to outnumber men in religious groups.

Other respondents attributed spinsterhood to spiritual and superstitious reasons. To some of the research subjects, there is a particular man meant for a particular woman; if she misses the opportunity to marry him, then she will be inevitably confined to spinsterhood. Others thought spinsterhood, in some cases, is a result of spell or curse placed on certain women by wicked people. In such cases, the single women will experience serial break up of relationships for no fault of theirs. Attributing her spinsterhood partly to strange forces, LH 3, Ayo, narrated how she experienced several break-ups in relationships and she could not pinpoint what was the cause. A few respondents mentioned evil family foundation as a reason for spinsterhood. To them, in the traditional African religion, some families entered into covenant with evil spirits which negatively affects their daughters’ opportunity to marry, because due to modernisation they no longer keep the terms of such covenants. One respondent emphatically said her remaining unmarried at 40 is because of the evil foundation of her family.

My own delay in marriage is not ordinary. It’s not my own making. It’s not as if I want to stay up to 40 without getting married but because of my background, where I come from. My parents dedicated me to one idol or the other. So, all of those things are kind of delaying my marriage. My foundation is not all that clean... (IDI 13, 40 years old).

In addition to the above, some respondents think spinsterhood is God’s will for them. This is suggestive of attributing spinsterhood to destiny, and a tendency to avoid blame for their single status.

#### **4.4.10 Urbanisation**

One of the strong reasons for spinsterhood in Lagos identified by the study subjects was the influence of urbanisation and city life. In the interviews and group discussions, urban factors such as urban men's preference for casual sexual relationships and consensual union, negative stereotypes about city women and urban environment were shown to have influence on women's opportunity to marry.

##### **Urban men's preference for casual sexual and consensual union**

Some respondents attributed prolonged singlehood among women to urban men's non-committal attitude to relationships. To most of the study subjects, men in cities such as Lagos prefer sexual relationships that will not end in marriage and at best a consensual union that will cost them nothing. Asked why she is not yet married, the 32-year old Health Insurance Executive who insisted on a Muslim spouse, repeated emphatically that both the Muslims and Christians she has met are not serious, she said:

The reason why I am not yet married, as I said they [men] are not serious. Let me just put it that way, they are not serious. They just want a relationship that will not end in marriage. I have been so lucky, most times I met Muslims, and maybe, two Christians but still they are not serious. They want to play around (IDI 21).

Other respondents narrated their experiences with men who come in the guise of marriage just to have free sexual relationship and food, and off they go. One of the respondents recounted her experience thus:

Since I live here, many men come to me. You know in Lagos some men are not truthful; some are just coming to eat. When some men know that you are struggling, that you are hard working, they will pretend they want to marry you. And when you receive them, it is to have sex, eat your food and off they go. So, because of that I struggle alone to get what I want and God is blessing me (IDI 24, 37 years old).

Another respondent thought it was becoming trendy in Lagos for men to prefer consensual relationships that do not require any commitment. They have children by different women with the hope of claiming the children in the long run, a kind of polygynous fatherhood. The trend of men's preference for casual sexual relationship or polygynous fatherhood encourages women such as the above respondent and a few others in this study to stay off dates with men, a decision that increases likelihood of remaining permanently single.

It was a common notion in the focus group discussions that men in Lagos prefer relationships that will not culminate in marriage. A respondent in one of the FGDs narrated her experience with two men who approached her for marriage. They met her uncle who is

her guardian in Lagos, to declare their intent to marry her. After the formal declaration, in each case, the men insisted on initiating sexual relationship with her, but when she insisted on further marriage rites they never came back. As noted earlier, women who insist on traditional marriage rites are likely to lose chances of marriage. This preference for casual relationship by men may partly be due to negative stereotype about city women, which is discussed below. It may also be a result of economic decline, high costs and standards of living in urban areas and difficulty with breadwinning, as indicated by a respondent whose observation concurred with other participants in FGD 7.

One of the reasons, I think, is some men are not just ready to accept responsibilities. There are a lot of guys of marriageable age; what is stopping them? They don't even necessarily have somebody, what is stopping them. Some of them, the ability to accept responsibility is just one thing (Res 1, FGD 7).

### **Negative stereotypes about city women**

Some spinsters observed that some men who live in Lagos prefer selecting marriage partners from their rural places of origin. To such men, never married women who reside in Lagos are bereft of good morals and so not good for marriage. They may date women in Lagos for other reasons but not marriage. Narrating her experience in this regard, a respondent said:

Another thing here in Lagos is that many men, especially Igbo, prefer going to the village to select a woman to marry. Some people tell me to travel every December [Christmas holidays], that I will get suitors. Some tell me to seek work transfer to the village so that I will marry. I don't believe in such ideas. Never married Igbo men in Lagos prefer going to the village to bring a lady thinking that those people in the village have good character, but when the women come here they become worse (IDI 10, 45 years old).

A respondent in the FGD who had experience in this regard affirmed:

I don't know how they see Lagos girls. It's like that, most men will befriend girls in Lagos but when they want to get married they will move down to the village to marry... They say Lagos girls are too exposed. I asked one man who went to the village to marry, what about those girls you have been moving around with, does it mean none of them suits you for marriage? He said: "aha Lagos girls, their eyes don't tear" [Lagos girls are too exposed and wild]. I reminded him that his daughters will be seen the same way; men will say aha she is a Lagos girl, she is not good for marriage. He said are you cursing me, I said no ... (Res 1, FGD 5).

Confirming this trend another discussant said:

Young men in Lagos want to have sex with everybody and they will go back to the village to marry their village girls. By the time you see them with the

girl, they will say, you know I already told you that I will not marry in this Lagos. (Res 2, FGD 4).

Urban men's preference for rural women in mate selection is a notion that was common among respondents with only secondary education and those who reside in low class areas of Lagos. This indicates that the mate selection preference of men of higher socio-economic status is not likely to be equally affected by any negative stereotype about urban women. It was also found that more respondents of Igbo origin mentioned stereotype about city women as a reason for spinsterhood. This is likely an indication that as regards preference for rural brides, Igbo and men of lower socio-economic status are more conservative in their mate selection.

### **Urban environment**

Urban environment was one of the reasons why some women remained unmarried till age 30 and above. Some of the respondents said Lagos is like a "no man's land"; social control mechanisms are limited. Women, as well as men have "too much" freedom. A respondent opined:

One of the major reasons for this late marriage in Lagos is that some people believe we are in a no man's land, so let's do whatever we want to do. Men date several women at a time and when they want to marry they will go to the village and pick the person they feel is local and untouched or go for the one their father or sister is recommending for them somewhere (Res 6, FGD 3).

Concurring, another respondent said urban environment provides cover for women to live without parental or kinship controls that are prevalent in rural settings.

Another one is the environment we found ourselves here in Lagos. Due to this environment, most women have seen that they can do it alone; they can even become single mothers. In the village it is very hard to see somebody that is a single mother. It was until I came to Lagos that I learnt that there is something like single mother ... In Lagos some women prefer being single mothers because they don't want to take any insult from any man, because it's in vogue in Lagos. It [single motherhood] is something one can do and get away with it unlike in the rural areas you don't do it there (IDI 13, 40 years old).

Some respondents said the heavy traffic in Lagos confines some never married women who are engaged in paid employment or business activities into a work life that begins at 5am and ends 10 pm every working day, including Saturdays in some cases. As their network of social interaction decreases, their opportunity to find suitable marriage partners also declines.

#### **4.4.11 Aversion to polygyny**

Although marriage and motherhood are still the dominant features of femininity in Nigeria; evidence from this study showed that the contemporary woman in Lagos may prefer

permanent singlehood to polygynous union. A respondent in a focus group discussion, whose statement is like a synopsis of other participants' opinion about polygyny said:

Getting involved in a polygynous marriage defeats the purpose of marriage, therefore, it is better to remain single (Res 2, FGD 6).

Due to modern monogamous marriage norm and individualism, most of the respondents were unwilling to become second wives – official or unofficial. Asked whether she would marry as a second wife, the Yoruba Muslim respondent replied:

I have something against polygyny. I can't share my husband; and I don't want anybody to share with me (IDI 21, 32 years old).

In addition to modern lifestyle, personal experience in a polygynous family of origin and the sad experience of friends and relatives who are in such union encouraged women in this study to avoid polygyny. Titi, Life History Two, whose mother was an outside wife, said due to her personal experience, the very day her husband decides to bring in another woman, she will move out. Other respondents in both the interviews and group discussions narrated how women known to them, who decided to end spinsterhood by entering into polygynous unions ended with sad experiences that range from regret and separation to death. In very strong terms, Life History subject 1 articulated her repugnance for polygyny.

For me, I don't like polygyny. I believe that no man is sufficient for two women, that's my belief. I believe they will not really get their expectations of fulfilment from such a marriage. Then the worst scenario is when you now go and be a secret wife for somebody, I mean that is what anybody should not just do. A woman should not degenerate or bring herself down to that level. It's not worthwhile (LH 1 Edna, 44 years old).

Only two respondents have nothing against polygyny. The Hausa Muslim respondent, and IDI 24 (37 years old) who is considering getting married to a man who has married twice but is not living with any of the wives. When asked if she would marry as a second wife, she said it depends on the circumstance.

#### **4.4.13 Circumstantial factors**

There were a few determining factors of spinsterhood which are considered circumstantial because they are caused by factors external to the spinsters. Such factors included disappointment or broken courtship, death of intended spouse, and zero marriage proposal.

Some cases of spinsterhood in Lagos were a result of broken engagement and disappointment in a relationship that was intended to end in marriage. LH 3 had several broken engagements. Speaking about it she said:

Then, disappointment can occur, that is my own case, like broken relationship. You start with somebody then you call it off. You meet another person, something like that occurs and looking at it it's not your fault (Ayo, 46 years old).

Some respondents said men keep multiple pre-marital sexual relationships with women; eventually they have to marry one, and the others will be disappointed. In the focus group discussions, disappointment was confirmed as a reason for some cases of spinsterhood in Lagos. The effect of international migration in confining some women to unplanned spinsterhood was highlighted. Women who are engaged in a relationship with men who migrated overseas tend to lose out in such relationship. Participants in FGD 7 observed that many of such women wait long for men who may never return to them. IDI 4 gave instance of a friend of hers who had such experience.

IDI 4 and IDI 20 lost their intended spouses through death. The aftermath of disappointment, broken engagement and death of intended spouses was profound on the women. Death of an intended spouse resembles disappointment and broken relationship in some ways, the difference is in the woman's tendency to compare the deceased with other men. They keep thinking the deceased was the best and it takes them time to come out of that grief. Death of intended spouse is somewhat similar to widowhood. The respondents in this study who had experiences with death of intended spouses, disappointment or broken engagement still mourned the loss of the would-be husband. It affected their zeal to start another union. IDI 4 said:

Everybody has different experience. I will talk about my own. In my own case it's not that suitors were not there, in fact I started having suitors at the age of 19. But what happened is that the one I really wanted, when I was 24, I was engaged to somebody, he was a journalist; but six months after we met he died (sighed). It wasn't an easy experience to start all over. ... After that, finding somebody for replacement it's like nobody is really like him. (42 years old).

IDI 20, who said she had no boy friend and was not looking out for one, admitted that the death of her intended spouse influenced that decision. IDI 7 met a man whom she loved when she was 17 years. At age 23, the man left her to marry another woman for reasons she has not understood till date. She thought it may be because she comes from a poor family and the man thought she and her family will be a burden to him. She did not seem to have overcome the shock. Expressing her disappointment, she said:

Men, I don't know what they want in a woman any longer. Me, I am tired of them... Oh no no I'm tired. I just looked at the whole thing, I said the day God

says this is my own, fine, congratulations. If no one mmm let it be. Maybe it's not everybody that will marry (IDI 7, 35 years old).

She was still in love with the man; and the man was unhappily married to another woman and called IDI 7 frequently to complain about his marriage. Respondents in the FGD confirmed the effect of broken engagement and disappointment on women's decisions and opportunity to marry. A participant observed:

Another thing that makes women remain single till age 30 and above is heart break due to broken engagement. Such women tend to lose interest in men. They will be chasing men away because of what they have passed through. So, before you realise it, time will be going, and one is aging (Res 1 FGD 5).

Spinsterhood could also result from lack of marriage proposal. Only one respondent said she has never had a proposal for marriage.

I don't really have any experience because nobody has really come to propose [marriage] to me (IDI 1, 44 years).

Although a woman can make her intentions known to a man in diverse indirect ways, the decision still remains the man's to initiate marriage proposal. Lack of cultural validation for proposal of marriage by women entails that women have to wait for men to find them; therefore, women such as IDI 1 will have no choice but to keep waiting.

Circumstantial factors such as broken engagement, death of would-be spouse and zero marriage proposals affect women's decisions and opportunity to marry in ways shown above. Similar to these circumstantial factors are government related factors that impinge on likelihood of marriage for women.

#### **4.4.14 The state**

The state is one of the patriarchal structures identified in Theorising Patriarchy. In spite of improvements in women's opportunities in domestic and public spheres the structures of state policies are still largely patriarchal. In this study, certain state factors such as economic decline, institutional constraints and state policies were found to impose constraints on the choice available to women as regards marriage.

#### **Economic decline**

Some respondents linked increasing spinsterhood in Lagos to economic downturn that Nigeria has experienced for a long time. Due to economic decline, it takes men longer time to be ready for marriage. As it is taking men longer time to establish financial resources expected for marriage, women who are in relationship with such men face the danger of

being dropped eventually. In response to the reasons for spinsterhood in Lagos, a discussant observed:

The economy, the situation of the country is a cause of spinsterhood. Some matured women were in a relationship for so long expecting that things will get better and they will wed. Probably, by the time things got better for the man, he discovered that the woman was not good enough for his new status (Res 2, FGD 7).

The longer period it takes in times of economic decline for men to secure desired economic resources introduces a kind of marriage squeeze. At each point in time, men who are ready for marriage in terms of economy are fewer than the women who are of marriageable age. Stressing this point, LH 1 said:

If the men are now saying I need to acquire so, so and so before I marry a woman, it will directly or indirectly affect the woman. It comes like that too because a man leaves university he can't get a job or he's still squatting with friends or he's still in his family house and then he's saying that I need money to have my own accommodation before I get married and time keeps flying. I believe the reason why there is so much pressure on women for marriage is because the number of women that have to be married at any point in time outnumbers that of men because men that are of marriageable age and in position to get married are few. Then, because girls mature in time you discover that there are so many women that are waiting to get married to less number of men (Edna, 44 years).

On the issue of economic resources required by men to marry, a participant in FGD 3 did not see it as a challenge if the woman has the wherewithal to assist the man in marriage requirements even though covertly. This happens, but not many men are willingly to have a woman pay all or most of the bills.

In another dimension, economic decline affects women who come from poor families; some of whom are compelled to migrate to urban areas to seek means of livelihood and achieve personal goals in education. One might think such women should be quick to seek financial and other security in marriage, but the findings in this study showed that it is not always the case. Modern lifestyle and the negative experience of other women in marriage spur this category of women into a personal survival race. IDI 16 is from Lagos state, but due to poor family background, she left her family house to secure employment in another part of Lagos. To achieve her personal goal of attaining tertiary education, she has to work and school part-time. IDI 7 also came to Lagos to seek employment to sustain herself and her family and continue her education. To women from poor socio-economic family background, ambition to attain tertiary education and employment before marriage is a long journey which may inevitably ends in spinsterhood.

To IDI 17 economic decline is the reasons for increasing marital dissolution which gives rise to increasing spinsterhood. To other respondents, economic decline encourages more women to go into marriage for economic gain. Women wait to marry men of high economic means, an attitude that prolongs period of waiting for a suitable spouse.

A respondent said:

In those days, women go into marriages for love not wealth but nowadays because of the economy they go for money, wealth (IDI 19, 39 years old).

#### **Institutional constraints and state policies**

There were institutional constraints found to hinder women's opportunity to marry in Lagos. One of such constraints is the Nigerian Police law on marriage. Women enlisted into the Police Force must not marry three years after enlistment. After the three years, whoever they want to marry must be interviewed and approved by the Police authorities. A respondent who was still a Police Constable, even though she holds a Higher National Diploma (HND) from a polytechnic, said:

In Nigerian police, if you are a police woman, after training, you will spend three years before you get married. If you get married before that time they will dismiss you. When you want to get married they will screen that man if he is not a police man. They will screen the person to find out if he is an armed robber. If there is anyway the person is convicted they will not allow you to marry the person ... they will not give you certificate. But if it is a person they don't like they may tell you I don't like this person, this person will not take care of you, don't marry this person. If you refuse and marry it is your own challenge, but it will not affect your work; but they will try to help you to marry a good person.

Though this respondent thought the law is made to help police women marry good men, it is more of a structure to protect the Police and the State than to help women in the police. It remains questionable why they screen men brought by women but do not screen women brought by men. This is one of the laws that remain patriarchal, men are judged to be capable of making rational decision about spouse selection while women are not.

#### **4.4.15 Objection by parents and near relatives**

Objection by parents and near relatives was found to have minimal influence on marital decisions and opportunities for women in this study. A few respondents lost marriage opportunities because their parents objected. A respondent narrated her experience in this regard.

If I have to tell you my own experience, when I was younger, my parents didn't want me to marry a Muslim and the men who came to me were mostly

Muslims, even married men do come to me but my parents kicked against it (IDI 18, 39 years old).

The respondents who lost opportunities to marry due to parental objection observed that it happened when they were younger. In the FGD some respondents recounted their experience with regard to parental objection. A respondent said:

I even wanted to marry a white man but my parents refused. If I knew I would have married him and be gone (Res 1, FGD 5).

In the FGD, respondents expressed their opinion about reasons for parental objection. Many parents have standards and preferences which they expect their children to comply with in marriage mate selection. In some cases, for female children, such standards are purely materialistic.

Most of our parents look for men who are rich. They want in-laws that will bring bags of rice, garri, and other material things for them. (Res 6, FGD 1).

To confirm this notion of materialistic expectation from children's marriage Res 4 in FGD 5 implied from her statement that she was waiting to get married to a man richer than her sister's husband who will provide her parents' material expectations. She said:

Like when my sister married my grandmother was very bitter about that wedding, they didn't buy any cloth for her. I said Mama don't worry if God keeps us alive you will tie better wrapper, not one, not two.

Parental influence on spousal selection has declined markedly in Nigeria, nevertheless parents still give advice and many people may not go ahead with marriage plans without the consent of their parents.

#### **4.4.16 Family responsibility/obligation**

Some families make demands on a daughter's wage labour and in some cases a woman decides to help her parents. Although many spinsters in this study have family responsibilities and obligations, as will be discussed under consequences of spinsterhood - spinsters as care-givers, only a few linked their spinsterhood to family responsibility or obligation. Life history 2 attributed her spinsterhood mainly to her family obligation. Respondents in the FGDs mentioned family responsibilities as a reason why some women delay marriage in Lagos, but, in most cases it was related to birth position as first child and first daughter.

#### **4.4.17 Birth order**

Birth order such as being the first daughter or first child, affects a woman's opportunity and decisions about marriage. In some cases, a first daughter is expected to

marry within her clan like the case of Res 3 in FGD 5 cited earlier. She was 30 years old and comes from a certain part of Igbo land where first daughters are not allowed to marry outside their community. She lost opportunities to marry as a result of this tradition.

Being a first daughter also imposes compulsory family responsibility on a woman especially if she comes from a poor or polygynous family. A respondent who comes from a poor and polygynous family was compelled to help her mother train her younger ones to an extent before she marries.

Like me I have responsibilities in my family. I pay fees for my younger ones in school. Anything that happens in the family they will say, “go and call her”. It is not only school fees; I take care of many things in the family. They feel that Ada [first daughter in Igbo] has the load (Res 4, FGD 5).

Due to poor parental background, being the first child and daughter, IDI 5 narrated how she got involved in trading from her youth to augment the family income. She gave so much attention to her family welfare that she had no time for her personal life. She attributed her spinsterhood partly to her role as first daughter.

One of the reasons why I said I was not dressing well was because I had my junior ones in school. Being a first daughter affected me. I had to use my money to solve some family/domestic problem in the family. I had to struggle to pay school fees for my younger ones. At that time I took my younger ones along and we sold different kinds of items just to make up for their school fees. At the end of the day, you see, I didn't have time for myself. All my attention was on my younger siblings (47 years old).

Other respondents highlighted the difficulty women experience meeting their natal family obligations after marriage. Res 4 in FGD 3 narrated how her family invested their meagre financial resources to train her eldest sister who married earlier than expected, and after marriage, she has not been able to help train her younger siblings. In FGD 4, a respondent said men's control of women's cash earning is the reason why women who have family responsibilities delay marriage because they do not know what kind of men they will marry.

Other first daughters have family responsibilities but they did not see their position and responsibilities as reasons for their spinsterhood. One of them submitted:

Anyway I don't think being the first daughter affected my not getting married up till now ... my being the first child does not have anything to do with the delay in marriage (IDI 10, 45 years old).

#### 4.4.18 DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANT OF SPINSTERHOOD IN LAGOS

##### Marriage squeeze

In addition to the above non demographic determinants, marriage squeeze was found a likely cause of the prevailing rate of spinsterhood in Lagos. Nigeria's population census conducted in 2006 indicates evidence of marriage squeeze among men and women of marriageable age in Lagos. Taking into consideration the spousal age difference in a typical Nigerian marriage of 5-10 years and the preferred spousal age gap of 1-12 years by respondents in this study; the population of never married men of marriageable age in specific marriage cohort is lower than the women they will typically marry.

**Table 4.8.** Ratio of never married males per hundred never married females by age group

5-year spousal difference		10-year spousal difference	
Sex/Age	Sex Ratio	Sex/Age	Sex Ratio
M(20-24)/(F15-19)	122.1	M(20-24)/(F10-14)	119.4
M25-29/F20-24	111.4	M25-29/F15-19	100.5
M30-34/F25-29	83.3	M30-34/F20-24	47.2
M35-39/30-34	102.7	M35-39/25-29	27.3
M40-44/F35-39	95.0	M40-44/F30-34	33.1
M45-49/F40-44	98.7	M45-49/F35-39	44.1
M50-54/F45-49	96.5	M50-54/F40-44	54.3
M20-54/F15-49	110.3	M55-59/F45-49	53.4
		M20-59/F10-49	79.3
		M20-59/F15-49	110.6

Source: Nigeria 2006 population census

Table 4.8 shows the ratio of never married males in a particular age group to never married women in the younger age groups. The age specific ratios show that there is more serious male scarcity than the overall ratio. For instance, for five-year spousal difference, there are 83.3 never married men age 30-34 per 100 single women age 25-29. Twenty-eight years SMAM for men and twenty-one years for women in Nigeria (UN statistics, 2009) means that age 30 is the likely age most men marry considering the longer time it takes to complete education and establish a means of income in the current Nigerian society. Women who are age 30 in 2010, when the majority of in-depth interview for this study were conducted were 26 years old in 2006. It means that some of them inevitably became spinsters due to shortage of men who would typically marry them. If the men age 30-34 would marry women who are ten years younger, women outnumber men by more than half. The percentage distribution of population age 10 year and above by state, sex and marital status for 1991 census is not

shown for specific age groups. Therefore, there is no data to trace the trend of marriage squeeze in Lagos.

In conclusion, evidence from this study showed that several structural and personal factors determine spinsterhood in Lagos. In addition to the effect of demographic marriage squeeze, the majority of women who remain unmarried by age 30 and above postponed marriage due to factors associated with economic empowerment. Although the cultural gender role dichotomy of male-breadwinner and female-housewife is still expected, for reasons of financial independence, autonomy, respect, and avoidance of other women's mistakes, women strive to secure sustainable livelihood before marriage. The drive for economic empowerment decreased likelihood of early marriage and increases probability of remaining single longer than one planned. Another significant determinant was individual mate selection preference. Personal, age, economic, educational, ethnic and religious resources expected in a would-be spouse affected the women's decisions and opportunity to marry. Also, cultural practices such as physical attractiveness, traditional marriage process, stereotypes about women, ethnic prejudice and endogamy had profound influence on the spinster's marriage chances. Education, marital experience of other women, modern lifestyles such as resistance to early marriage, parents' marriage, spiritual beliefs, personal factors, urbanisation, aversion to polygyny, among others were found to promote involuntary spinsterhood in Lagos.

Remaining unmarried for whatever reasons beyond the conventional age for first marriage has consequences on the well being of spinsters. Amidst a few positive effects, never married women in this study, probably because they did not set out to be spinsters, confronted several negative consequences such as stigmatisation of the single status and extensive pressure to conform to the normative adult status by marriage.

#### **4.5 CONSEQUENCES OF SPINSTERHOOD**

This section examines how marriage and family ideology interlink with patriarchal structures and modernity to affect the quality of life lived by spinsters in Lagos. There were positive and negative consequences of spinsterhood; albeit the challenges outweighed the benefits. That spinsters experienced many challenges may be a function of their being involuntary temporary spinsters. Involuntary singles are more likely to construct their single status more negatively and report that they are unhappy, because they did not set out to be spinsters. Hence, the spinsters were more inclined to talk about their pains and disappointments. Also, due to the extant socio-cultural system that has little or no validation for single adult status, spinsters grappled with a negative sense of belonging. Such a system

does not allow full manifestation of the positive consequences of spinsterhood for spinsters and the larger society. The positive consequences included freedom to be one's self, privacy, independence, and economic benefits to the spinsters' natal families. The spinsters were found to experience profound stigma. Irrespective of their positions in society, spinsters were often reminded of their 'incompleteness' everywhere and every time through extensive pressure to marry, deprivations, emotional and identity challenges. The social and economic consequences and their effects on the life of spinsters in Lagos are presented according to their groundedness – the number of statements associated with each concept.

**Table 4.9.** Consequences of spinsterhood in Lagos by groundedness

<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Groundedness</b>
Stigma	172
Pressure to marry	26
Self-enhancement	22
Identity challenge	21
Loneliness	18
Inadequate finance	16
Spinsters as care givers	14
Fear of permanent singleness and childlessness	12
Independence/privacy	7
Satisfaction with singleness	7
Frustration/depression	6
Unfulfilled sexual need	5
Late empty nesting	2
Regret	2

Source: Primary Data 2011

#### **4.5.1 Spinsterhood as a stigmatised status**

There was overwhelming evidence from the narratives of the respondents to confirm the existence of prejudicial beliefs and discriminatory treatment against spinsters in Lagos. Virtually all respondents talked about stigma, underscoring various dimensions of stigmatising experience. Responses from the group discussions did not show any variation in the experience of stigma across ethnic groups and socio-economic class. Stigma was a parallel experience of all spinsters and constituted a dominant issue in the discussions on the consequences of spinsterhood.

Commenting on the pervasiveness and perniciousness of stigma about spinsterhood a Life History interviewee said:

Consequences, as in maybe the stigma; it has a lot. In fact, I don't pray for my worst enemy to be single when she is in her forties. It's not a good experience to pass through. If anyone had told me I will be this late and not married I will say of course it's not possible. So, I know there are so many stigmas. They

look down on you as a spinster, the respect you should have in a lot of places you don't receive it; and there is a complex, sometimes you have a complex, you feel bad. You feel frustrated, there was a time I used to be frustrated and I tell people see I am really frustrated,... (LH 4, Ore, 48 years old).

In the FGD, a discussant affirmed the widespread stigmatisation of spinsterhood in Lagos.

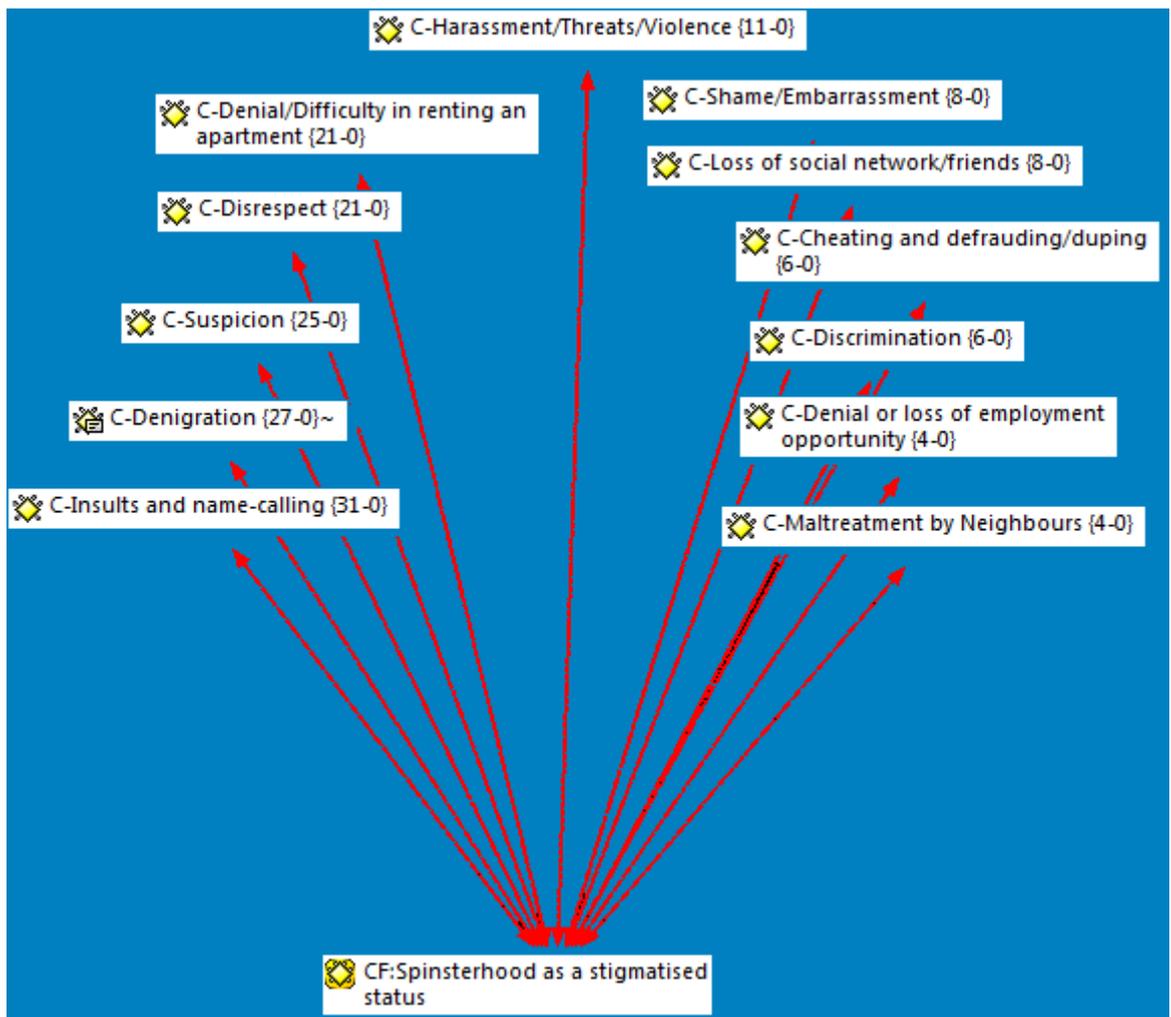
Every day it looks as if the whole world is against you. You will experience a lot of hatred even from your family. Though, it applies to unmarried men too. To the society you are a wasted human being ... (Res 6, FGD 3).

The whole world is certainly not against spinsters, but that is what it looked like to some of the spinsters. Remaining unmarried for too long; looks like the single woman is not good enough to be a very important person to any man.

Stigma about non marriage is not necessarily a feminine issue; men who remain single till later age are also subject to stigma but maybe not as much as women. Hence, a spinster thought stigmatisation of non-marriage is feminised.

Men in Nigeria who are not married are not facing any of such challenges, they move around their lives. I know some men who are up to 45, 50 that are not married but nobody is looking at them like that. It's a woman problem. (IDI 17, 45 years old).

Data from the IDI, LH and FGD indicated that spinsters in Lagos experienced insults and name-calling in their natal families, neighbourhood and places of work. The single status was widely denigrated. Spinsters were suspected to be physiologically or morally anomalous and disrespected. Difficulty in renting an apartment was a common experience of spinsters in Lagos. Harassment and loss of social network, shame and embarrassment, cheating and duping were usual experiences of spinsters. Some spinsters experienced discrimination in their offices; and many were maltreated by neighbours. Denial of employment opportunity and due positions and promotion were experiences recounted by respondents. Twelve concepts relating to interpersonal and institutional discrimination were derived from the narratives. The concepts are presented in the figure below according to groundedness.



**Fig. 4.1.** Network view of spinsterhood as a stigmatised status

Source: Primary Data (2011) - Generated from Atlas-ti - groundedness shown in bracket

### Insults and Name-calling

Spinsters in this study were insulted and called names on account of their single status. Many respondents articulated their experiences in this regard. They were subjected to insults and name-calling in their families of origin. A respondent narrated a typical experience:

They [spinsters] are insulted: are you going to stay here? You will stay in your parents' house and plant bottle [a way of expressing permanency, bottles made of glass do not change form]. Won't you get your own husband, your mates have all married, what are you doing here? (IDI 12, 36 years old).

Another respondent narrated her experience when she resided with her brother.

I remember when I was in the barracks, any little thing my brother's wife will say, old woman won't you go and marry your own husband, go and marry now, go now, witch. (IDI 7, 35 years old).

This respondent was called a witch because she was not yet married. Sometimes, insults were employed deliberately by family members to put pressure on a single woman to marry. Confirming this notion, and the negative effect, a participant in a group discussion observed:

Pressure from home makes a woman to marry somebody she does not like; because her mother and younger ones will be insulting her. They will talk to her anyhow because they want her to leave home (Res 2, FGD 4).

In places of work, people took advantage of any argument or dispute to insult spinsters with their marital status. A respondent recounted experience in her place of work.

In my place of work, some of them will say, this one is old, what are you still doing? Did they place a curse on you? They say all these, may be over a little argument that has nothing to do with marriage. Every single woman that is old enough to marry and everybody is expecting you to marry and you are not showing any sign, if you just have any clash, like did you take my water there and for him to say no or yes, the next thing is “go and marry, your mates have married” (IDI 25, 36 years old).

Some of the respondents narrated the effect of insult and name-calling on them.

As a human being, somebody that blood flows in her body, you will feel it, you will cry. It will make you ask your God a question. I have had such experience. I started crying and said God what kind of insult is this. There was one experience I had, it was my brother who insulted me, and I felt like running away to where no member of my family will see me again (Res 1, FGD 5).

Many other participants responded to insults by weeping in their private moments, even though they might put up bold face at the moment of the insult. After weeping, some respondents decided to keep a distance from their natal families. IDI 2 moved away from her brother’s house due to incessant insults on account of her single status. To LH 3, spinsters receive insults and name-calling everywhere.

That one is everywhere. Wherever you live people will abuse you with that[spinsterhood], talk to you about that, it’s everywhere (Ayo, 46 years old).

Although insults and name-calling are common experiences of spinsters, some of the subjects were of the opinion that there are “wise persons” who understand the single status and give a lot of support to spinsters. The impression by LH 3 that insults on spinsters is everywhere was likely an effect of the perception that marriage and motherhood are the hallmarks of womanhood, resounded from homes to schools, places of work and worship in Nigeria.

## Denigration

Spinsters in Lagos experienced profound denigration of their status. People usually think spinsters are not as good as they are; spinsters were treated with less courtesy, mocked, belittled, and disdained. The exaltation of marriage-based family life experience over other forms of family experience impacted negatively on the social interaction of spinsters. IDI 1 for instance, lived in a home with her married brother, his wife and their children. She undertook daily care for her brother's children. Although she did not give birth to those children, she acquired ample experience in child care through baby-sitting and care of her brother's children. In spite of this, when issues of family life responsibilities and how women cope with work and family life are raised; her opinion is disdained by married women. To the married women, she has no experience and nothing to offer as regards family life. Discussants in the ethnic-based and status-focus groups disclosed similar experiences with younger sisters who are married, and married women in their offices. Married women in their offices usually sidelined them in family-related discussions because they think single women have no family and financial responsibilities like them. A participant in FGD 3 said:

The challenge of maybe you have contribution to make, they will say this one is not married, if we are complaining of life challenges she too? Does she know what we are talking about, not minding your age and status. They will be saying you don't understand, you are not in it, that kind of thing, these are the challenges we face (Res 1).

Another discussant narrated her experience with her younger sibling who is married.

My younger ones at times don't help the situation, most especially the one married. At times when I give suggestions she will tell me what do you know and I keep quiet. She just gave birth and I tried to make a suggestion, she said ah aunty... she tried telling me you are not there, what do you know, what kind of advise do you want to give me in that area, but I took it in good faith. In my place of work when married women are gathered, it got to a stage I don't go to their midst, because they will say, single what do you want and I know I am older than most of them, so I will just stay where I am. It used to bother me but I have come off it. I am ok, single but I think I am fulfilled (Res 5, FGD 7).

All her suggestions about child care and other issues of family life were treated with contempt because her sister thinks she has no marriage experience. In spite of the perceived denigration of her single status, she submitted that she is a fulfilled single. For other spinsters, disregard of their opinion due to their status increases their feeling of awkwardness. Most people view the single status as inferior to married status

notwithstanding the age of the single woman. A respondent recounted one of her experiences:

Even in the church, if we have a program where food is to be served; when it comes to serving, a married woman will just call, you come. They will look for those who are not married to do the serving. But those who are married nobody ask them to serve or to wash plates. In such cases you accept it because you are in the house of God, and you are not doing it for man, you do it for God, but such things happen often. ... Some of them that are married I might even be older than them (IDI 4, 42 years old).

Confirming this experience another respondent thought the single status is denigrated more by married women than men.

It is just as simple as that. And then the women are not helping matters. I think we are the ones contributing more to the problem of women than the men. It is the woman who will look at you that if you are not “Mrs” you are nobody, because she is Mrs. And that is why they want to remain there [in marriage] even with all the difficulties and challenges. In fact, the greater part of the problem is with the women, they are the ones that look at the spinsters as though they are nobody, and do not fit in (IDI 17, 45 years old).

Spinsters were mocked. An in-depth interviewee narrated:

People will make mockery of you. They will laugh at you, and say “see this woman, she is not yet married”. They speak rubbish, even somebody that is not up to your younger siblings will talk to you anyhow ... people will hit you with words that you don’t like, even your friends that are married. I had an experience. A friend’s young son called me aunty. And I said to the boy, call me Mummy, I am Mummy. His mother responded, call her aunty she is not Mummy, she is not yet Mummy so call her aunty. So, all those things upset one sometimes (IDI 14, 40 years old).

Although her friend may not have meant to ridicule her deliberately but IDI 14 felt ridiculed by the comment “call her aunty, she is not a Mummy”. She is not a Mummy because she is not married. In most Nigerian cultures, elders are not called by their names. Mature women, for instance, are called Mummy by children as a mark of respect.

Spinsters were treated with less courtesy and seen as irresponsible. To a large extent, many people ascribe the privilege of being responsible to married people. Irrespective of a single woman’s social status, in subtle ways she is still seen as irresponsible because she is not married. A respondent narrated her experience, she said:

For example, one of my younger brothers who is about to wed went to others by giving them invitation cards, and bought wine for them, I was the only one he informed on phone that 4<sup>th</sup> of Dec is his wedding day, just like that. I was like how I wish, had it been I am married at least the way he went to others by giving them drink and invitation card, he could have also come to me in the same way. This is one of the challenges of singlehood, but there is nothing

one can do. You have to cope with every situation you find yourself knowing that God's time is the best. We believe that it's not going to be like that forever. By the grace of God, one day things are going to change (Res 4 FGD 3).

### **Suspicion**

Suspicion was a recurrent experience of spinsters in this study, probably due to persistent negative social identity of older never married women. Their single status was usually misunderstood, and negative labels were associated with them. A respondent observed:

In our society they kind of look down on single women that maybe they hop from one place to another, even if they have just one person [one sexual partner] they seem not to believe them. They don't give them respect. They call them "ashowo" (prostitute), they say: this one does not have good character, maybe you are the person in charge, you always control your man, too choosy (IDI 9, 30 years old).

Women who remain unmarried till a later age are lumped into a category as sexually loose; and people attribute their remaining single to social notoriety associated with sexual looseness by women. A respondent observed that:

When you are of marriageable age and you have not got married; people look at you as if you are not serious. Then, it's like something is wrong with her. Maybe, when she was young she was promiscuous (IDI 22, 33 years old).

Spinsters were called old maids who are frustrated, desperate for marital relationship and they were often suspected husband snatchers.

You know many of them call us "agadi" [old in Igbo]. We are old; they don't want to marry us. Some even say that some of us have children whom we left in the village to come to Lagos. (IDI 10, 45 years old).

Whatever you do they will say it's because she is not married. If you talk, they will say she is angry because she is not married, it's because she is old and has no husband (IDI 13, 40 years old).

People do not view spinsterhood as a normal marital status that one may have chosen deliberately or constrained to by genuine causes. For many, there must be something physiologically or spiritually wrong with a woman who becomes a spinster.

If you stay longer than necessary and you are of age, [without marriage] men will look at you that this one is aged. They will be asking, what has kept her waiting for this long? They will think something is wrong with her. (IDI 18, 39 years old).

They will say what are you waiting for? Maybe you have disease in your body and you don't want people to know (IDI 16, 35 years old).

This was confirmed in the focus group discussions.

Then people will start looking at you as if something is wrong with you (other participants concurred) or like she has something that is not just normal about her, people start to question you (Res 3, FGD 7).

In this Lagos, some people see unmarried women as occultic. That is what I have also observed. Maybe if the lady is a graduate, has a good job, a car and is doing well; some ignorant people may be wondering, look at this lady she has a good job, she has money, she has car, but she does not have husband, maybe the cult she belongs to does not allow her to marry (Res 3, FGD 1).

### **Disrespect**

Many respondents have experienced one form of disrespect or another as a result of their marital status. For those who claimed to have experienced disrespect, it appeared to be a widespread attitude of people about singlehood. A respondent said:

At times they way some people will behave toward you, the way they will respect somebody who is younger than you that is married; and you look at it that it's because I am not married, that is why they are treating or looking at me that way. So, it happens everywhere (IDI 6, 44 years old).

A discussant observed that:

Any woman who has a husband tends to have respect from both old and young people unlike a woman who does not have a husband (Res 2, FGD 3).

Younger women who are married disrespect spinsters.

People don't give you your due respect. Even little girls that are married, when they see you they will look at you as if you are not their mate or what ...sighed (IDI 7, 35 years).

Some respondents acknowledged that spinsterhood attracts disrespect; but they think disrespect is associated more with personal comportment, dressing and poise than with spinsterhood. Spinsters who have this notion are likely to experience this form of stigma without noticing. A 33-year old interviewee opined:

I want to believe that when somebody gets married people want to accord you a kind of respect. You can't just tap a married woman anyhow. Though being single does not mean any man can just tap me anyhow, as I said, it depends on your comportment. I don't belittle myself, I respect myself and I respect other people irrespective of their age. So I wouldn't say there was never a time when people talked to me anyhow, people still talk to me in ways that sometimes I felt as if it is because I am not yet married. You know that is part of life, even people that are married, people still talk to them anyhow. There are some people who don't know how to talk (IDI 22).

LH Subject 1 acknowledged that married women are accorded more respect than single women, but she thought it is the marriage institution that people respect not the person. Respecting the institution of marriage more than singlehood is still tantamount to stigma against singlehood. LH1 said she has not experienced disrespect the way other spinsters recount it.

I have never really experienced it that way, I have never. They just assume that I am married and then when I say I am not married they still respect me because I don't know, I am somebody that should be respected. I just command respect. So people have never really looked down on me. It might be me that can even be embarrassed to say I'm not married but it's not the way around for people to start treating me [with disrespect] (Edna, 44 years old).

The reasons why LH1 had not experienced overt disrespect are obvious from her narrative. People assume she is married because of her mature look and she is plump. Also, her legal profession attracts respect. She is therefore, not likely to notice any disrespect on the basis of her non marriage.

#### **Denial/Difficulty in renting an apartment**

Spinsters experienced difficulty, and in some cases denial in renting apartments in Lagos. Many house owners prefer renting their houses to couples and single men. Some of the respondents recounted personal experience in this regard. Those who had no personal experience have heard or know single women who encountered such difficulty. A respondent stated that:

In getting accommodation, landlords don't really want to accommodate single women. I have experienced it myself. Whenever I wanted to fill a form for accommodation, they asked if I am married, or have a fiancé. They insisted that I should to put his name in the form. Then, they want to see him, they stress they want to see him. It is not even enough to write his name. So I had to get somebody to pretend to be my fiancé (IDI 18, 39 years old.).

Another respondent who lives alone told how she secured her current residence.

When I wanted to rent this place, I had to call one of my male friends to stand for me. Without that some landlords would not rent a flat to a spinster (IDI 24, 37 years old).

This experience was confirmed in the focus group discussion. One of the participants said:

It's like that in this Lagos; a young lady cannot rent a house. If you are not married you will go with your brother. If your brother is not here you have to plead with a man to represent you before the landlord. For an unmarried lady they don't give house like that. (Res 1, FGD 5).

Presenting a contrary opinion, LH 1, Edna, who also works as an estate agent said she did not think house owners in Lagos deliberately discriminate against single women in renting. To her, it depends on the personal idiosyncrasy, preferences and past experience of the house owner. In some cases, house owners might prefer a recent couple or persons from a particular ethnic group, and some may not want single men and women because single persons keep late nights. Although Edna's notion is true, and some house owners may require guarantors for single women due to security reasons, it does not rule out the strong evidence in this study that single women encounter difficulty in renting apartment in Lagos. It is never a strict requirement for men to fill their wife's name in a form for apartment renting, and single men are never asked to present a woman to stand for them. Patriarchal tradition entails that women are not treated as independent persons. At every stage of life, a woman is expected to be attached to a father, husband or son. Some of the respondents said house owners usually claim single women use the opportunity of living alone to keep multiple sexual partners which results in brawls between men. A respondent expressed her opinion thus:

I quite agree with them that some spinsters misuse such opportunities. They tend to bring in a lot of male visitors. Men do too, but then you know the society we are in, the man is an angel, he is not considered to be doing anything wrong. They will impregnate a girl, she drops out of school and becomes an outcast, whereas he continues with his life as if nothing happened but the woman suffers it all. It's the same thing that is happening, bachelors rent houses and tell you they are preparing for marriage, they want to settle down but a woman cannot say she wants to get a house because she wants to settle down; she wants to get married that's why she's getting a house. If she wants to settle down, she is expected to move in with the man she wants to settle down with and not rent her own house. So, these are issues that really need to be looked into. I'm not blaming them for putting the laws because some women abuse such opportunities by bringing in Mr. A today and Mr. B tomorrow which many people will frown at but then there are some decent spinsters who need some privacy, they need a space of their own to be able to move forward (IDI 17, 45 years old).

That some women abuse opportunity to live alone does not mean single women should be denied opportunity to live alone. Even if the discrimination is not targeted at single women alone as LH1 said, why would house owners prefer married persons? Does that not imply that marriage is associated with being responsible? Denial and difficulty in renting apartment is not only experienced by spinsters, other categories of single women such as younger single, divorced or separated experience similar form of difficulty.

## **Harassment, threats and violence**

Some spinsters in this study recounted experiences of harassment, threats and violence they had. An interviewee, IDI 13 was physically battered by an artisan once and a male neighbour at another time. She confronted the male neighbour for using her electricity line without her permission. The man felt insulted and wanted to throw her down from a two storey building. She said:

These are the consequences of spinsterhood because if I were married no one can come into my house to harass me. He was tapping light from my line and I asked why he was doing that. He has been doing that for some time and it inflates my electricity bill and I kept paying so much and he is using light free. He opened my gate and entered my room, carried me to throw me down from upstairs. If not for his sister who intervened I would have died ... if I had a husband you know men are scared of each other. Men respect fellow men; he would not come in just like that where a man like him is, because he knows if he comes in like that he had provoked the man. But he came in, pulled me out and wanted to throw me down ... (IDI 13, 40 years old).

Other respondents were sexually harassed by men who wanted to rape them, or take advantage of their singlehood to intimidate them into sexual relations in exchange for a favour. A respondent who resided with an elderly aunt narrated how her aunt's male friend came in her aunt's absence to rape her.

Like one day I was in our house... this man wanted to rape me in my auntie's house, I shouted and called the gate man ... (Res 3, FGD 5).

Other respondents said they experienced intimidation from men, especially in their places of work and residence.

The way people intimidate you out there is not funny; and you don't have anybody to turn to. When you look round it's only you (IDI 7, 35 years old).

## **Shame and embarrassment**

Some spinsters experienced shame and embarrassment as a result of their single status. A 44-year old secondary school teacher, IDI 6, recounted how her marital status became a subject of ridicule and argument among her students. She overheard the students arguing "she is Mrs., she is Miss", and one of the students came to ask her. A situation where the singlehood of spinsters becomes visible because they are the only older never married woman in a particular setting causes shame and embarrassment. IDI 1 is the only older never married woman in the school where she teaches. When she was employed newly, one of her colleagues openly embarrassed her. He saw her marital status in a form and shouted: "we

don't have anybody who is not married here". He meant it for a joke but IDI 1 said she felt very ashamed. She narrated another encounter she had in a job interview.

I attended a job interview, as at then I was 40, they asked for my marital status, I said single. The panel looked at me, 'single? At this age? Why? Or do you have children?' I said I don't have a child. It was strange to them. I even got surprised; does it mean there are no other people who are not married at this age? I had to tell them that there are other people who are even older than me who are not married. Still, the way they were looking at me, it got to an extent I was angry and told them please, this job is not meant for me, if it is meant for me I will get it, but don't intrude into my private affair and I left that place. (IDI 1, 44 years old).

LH 3, Ayo, said her marital status has caused her a lot of embarrassment in her place of work; as a result, she stopped attaching any title to her name. In the focus group discussion, a respondent speaking on the issue of shame said:

One of the challenges I face as a single person, from people around is humiliation. People tend to look down on you ... (Res 2 FGD 3).

### **Loss of social network and friends**

One of the stigmatisation experiences of spinsters in this study was loss of friends. As their friends marry, the spinsters' social network shrinks. Due to change in social network of the married friends and stereotypic beliefs about single women, some married friends desert their single friends. Narrating how her friendship network has become small due to marriage of her friends, a respondent recalled:

Some married friends will not even want to relate with you again because they will be looking at you as below their level, that they are in another world entirely. I have so many of them, even when I call them they don't want to answer, just because of that difference between you and them (IDI 16, 35 years old).

A 44-year old discussant said:

One of the challenges of spinsterhood is increasing isolation as friends get married, and many do not seek to continue the relationship (Res 5, FGD 6).

Respondents submitted that some married persons view friendship with spinsters as "risky" relationship because the spinsters might end up dating their husbands. As noted earlier, spinsters are labelled "desperate" for heterosexual coupling and "husband snatchers" therefore, older "wise" married women counsel younger married women to avoid friendship with never married women. In other cases, their interests become divergent and discussions do not flow any more. Speaking on the consequences of spinsterhood a respondent avowed:

The negative parts of spinsterhood are many. One of the bad ones that I have experienced is that you lose many of your friends. They just tend to fly away like that, because once they are married, even the very close ones. I have been chief bridesmaid for a couple of my friends, after that, when you visit their houses it is like your discussions don't go the way it used to. You tend to lose your friends (Res 3, FGD 7).

Not all the spinsters experienced loss of friends, some retained close contact with friends who are married. IDI 22 and IDI 14 narrated how they are still in touch and advise their married friends.

### **Cheating and defrauding/duping**

Some artisans and estate agents take advantage of the single status of some spinsters to cheat and defraud them.

Those wicked ones will think you are a single woman, like the one I gave money for window here, rain normally enters here. The guy did not come back till today. He took my money away. I said OK, you thought you will just take my money like that and go, you must bring my money back. When I threatened him he was not moved, when my brother spoke, then he sent the money. Now he heard a man's voice but when a woman was talking then it was nothing. The same thing happened about the house we [the respondent and her female single friend] paid for the first time, the guy ran away with our money and we didn't get the house till today, and he has not paid us the money. They feel you are a woman what will you do to them (IDI 7, 35 years old).

Some fraudsters take advantage of spinsters' need for marriage to dupe them. A respondent who has had experience with such men recounted:

Once or twice I was a prey to them, those ones that will come and say I want to marry you and want to borrow money from you. They will try to get something from you and run away (IDI 13, 40 years old).

In the FGD, a participant spoke from her personal experience and knowledge of what other spinsters' experience.

Some [men] will come but you will not know they came with evil purpose. Some will come to dupe you, or to use you and dump you. They will come presenting marriage before you but as you are going on in the relationship, you will later discover their purpose. So, we women have to be very careful and vigilant as well as prayerful because it's only God that can guide us through in life because there is a lot of temptation in this issue of marriage. You will even see a married man who will come to dupe a single lady just because he felt she doesn't have anybody to care for her, that he can do anything and get away with it (Res 2, FGD 5).

The false hope of marriage that such men give spinsters prolongs spinsterhood and increases the vulnerability of spinsters. Respondents who have no personal experience narrated

experiences of friends known to them who had experience with men who duped them in the guise of marriage.

### **Discrimination in office**

Spinsters experienced some form of discrimination in their places of work. Some of the respondents reported that certain privileges were given to married persons.

You know in the office, like medical insurance you can't bring your brother, you can't bring your mother but if you are married, they will do that. And sometimes they normally give a kind of yearly allowance in my former place of work to only married people and the ones that have children... They give them like little money for the year like to pay school fees. But you that are not married nothing for you (IDI 7, 35 years).

Findings from this study showed that spinsters have family responsibilities. Denying them dependant allowance or any allowance that is meant to relieve family responsibility is discriminatory. Another respondent spoke about discriminatory rules in office.

Let me use this office as example. At most end of the year party they tell single people to invite one person, which is not fair. Why would I bring only one person when I know I have many relatives? I go to other people's end of the year party and you can bring as many as you want, but here they will specifically tell you to bring one whereas the married ones can bring battalion. And they buy some gifts for the family and what about the singles, we don't have families, is that what they want to say? I only use this office, though in other offices they do the same thing in financial aspect and other things (IDI 9, 30 years old).

This form of discrimination, as she said, does not take place in all offices, but it does happen in some places of work. A top professional Insurance Executive spoke about her experience with regard to obtaining excuses from work. Single women are viewed as having little or no responsibility, therefore should be available at all times to work.

In terms of discrimination, they tend to lord it over you. There are some excuses you may give, if it is a married woman they will grant it with ease but you, they will make one comment or the other about it (Res 1, FGD 3).

Another form of discrimination spinsters experience in their places of work is denial of due promotion to certain positions. This discrimination was nonetheless rare among the study subjects. A respondent observed that women are denied certain positions in their offices because of spinsterhood.

Then some women also face emotional challenges even in their places of work. For example, some establishments in Lagos don't give respect to matured single women in hierarchy. Positions that are meant for them are sometimes diverted and given to the opposite sex, because it's being seen that a married lady is more responsible than the unmarried (IDI 11, 33 years old).

This form of discrimination against spinsters was also observed in the focus group discussion.

If they [spinsters] find themselves in a kind of setting where people do not understand what life is saying, they experience discrimination in so many ways like sometimes even in trying to get a job, to get to a certain position in life, they look down on spinsters. People don't want to look at what the spinsters can do but just the fact that they are not married. The fact that you are not married alone disqualifies you (Res 2, FGD 2).

This form of discrimination is the likely unofficial reason why LH 4 (Ore, 48 years old) was denied a position she was most qualified to attain in her organisation. Instead of confirming her as the substantive Registrar, a married man was posted to replace her, after she had acted in that office for several months, and no reason was given for her removal.

### **Denial or loss of employment opportunity**

Age limit expected in certain places of work made it difficult for some of the spinsters to get employed. The limitation of age in securing employment is nonetheless not peculiar to women; but it increases emotional and financial strain on spinsters. A respondent recounted her experience in job search.

There is this one experience I had; I submitted application for a job somewhere. On getting there I was told: madam you are too old. I had to leave the place. Job wise, spinsters experience denials (Res 16, 35 years old).

As noted earlier, IDI 1 was denied an opportunity for a job because the interviewers considered her strange to be unmarried at age 40. Spinsters who lost their jobs find it difficult to secure another employment. Res 6 in FGD 3 (39 years old) lost her job as a Secretary three years ago (2007), and has not succeeded in securing another employment. She was usually considered too old at 39 years.

### **Maltreatment by neighbours**

Neighbours made life uncomfortable for some the spinsters. A respondent narrated how married and younger never married women in the compound where she lives conspired against her, and one of them fought her.

When I opened the door to go inside, that lady fought me. She started insulting me that my mates have two or three children and you are still here making money, only money that you know (Res 4, FGD 5).

Other respondents had experience with neighbours who cash into any opportunity to make jest of their singleness.

To some respondents there is no obvious discrimination against them on the basis of their single status. Although, they have experiences that were discriminatory they did not notice or even regard it as discrimination. The respondent below did not recognise obvious discrimination but she noticed that spinsters are somewhat categorised in an unnamed class of their own, which is a form of discrimination, albeit unknown to her. Spinsters are unlike other women and are not in the normal single life course stage. She said:

But what I want to say is that people don't really discriminate, but they just put you in a class of your own. They don't want to step on your toes. They want you to be on your own. The best they can offer, they will offer it to you and make you see they are offering their best. Like some of our younger ones that are married, some of them will keep you in your place. They will respect you. Some of them will with their big tummies when they are pregnant, when you go out with them, they will say this is my big sister, my elder sister, they will so much stress it that the person will know that this one, it's only that she is not married. They may not say it but the way they will introduce you the person would have known that it's like she is not married. It's not that they discriminate, but to me in my own house everybody respects whatever I say. Whatever I say they hold it. They just feel if they don't take what I say I might feel bad and they don't want me to feel bad about anything; so that it won't add to my issue. But really to me, I want everybody to be real to me, though they say they are real to me, especially my Mom. If I say I have headache everybody will be running up and down. (Res 3, FGD 7).

To many people, spinsterhood is an abnormal state. Spinsters are treated as people who are losing out on the better side of life, therefore are to be pitied and treated with caution and care to assuage their frustration. In the search for contact with spinsters, this attitude was the usual expression about spinsters. In a certain church, the Pastor and women leader were so cautious to introduce the researcher to spinsters in the church to discuss issues about their singlehood. To them, it is a dicey area and one should be careful not to be seen as making a topic of their "misfortune". On the contrary, spinsters want to discuss their spinsterhood, they do not need pity or to be treated like a "special" group who should be handled with care. Spinsters want affirmation that is based on understanding and knowledge of their experiences.

#### **4.5.2 Pressure to marry**

Irrespective of background, respondents in in-depth and life history interview, and participants in the various focus group discussions experienced pressure from relatives, friends, office colleagues and even strangers to conform to the norm of heterosexual marriage. Even though she deliberately decided to marry late, Life History Subject one acknowledged the intensity of pressure to marry. Spinsters experienced serious pressure to

marry, from parents and other near relatives. Near relatives usually became unhappy with their prolonged singlehood, and in some cases unsolicited counsel was offered to spinsters on approaches to quit spinsterhood. A respondent submitted that:

There is so much tension from home, office and everywhere. Pressure at home, at times when I will go home my mother will start crying. Siblings have tried so many means, some have given so many counsel. One of my half sisters once said that maybe I should go and adopt a child, ... that day I felt so bad, I went home crying ...does it mean I am not going to marry, you know different suggestions. Somebody called me from home last month and we were just discussing about home matters and the person told me that time has gone that I should not mind even if it's just to have a child or two, that I should just marry anybody. I just laughed and said thank you but within me I know what I will do, by the grace of God I am not ready for all that (IDI 6, 44 years old).

Pressure to marry came in other forms such as casual questions: when are we eating your rice or cake? What is happening? Sometimes it came as confrontational as the experience Res 1 in FGD 5 had with an elderly woman in her family.

So, another one happened last year December. One of my in-laws made such a comment, an elderly woman. I didn't expect it from her. She said "you came back this time and didn't bring your husband." I told her my husband is coming. She said: "or you don't want to marry, you are of age to marry, this is your time oh, if you don't marry this time around, we will give you a farm or we will buy this one [locally made robe for climbing palm tree] for you so that you will be harvesting palm fruits. I talked to her about it, but inside me I felt so bitter that I couldn't eat, I was just crying inside me...

The effect of this kind of pressure on spinsters ranged from making light of it to deep anguish and despair. Some of the spinsters in this study recounted how they wept bitterly after encounters similar to the above. Pressures are constant reminders to spinsters that they are getting late. In some cases it was presented in form of comparison to married mates and relatives. Res 6 in FGD 4 narrated what has become like a daily torment to her. Her aunt, in whose house she resides, constantly compared the respondent to her own daughter who is married.

Nevertheless, not all spinsters experienced pressure from parents and near relatives. Some recounted how supportive and understanding their parents are. LH 1, Edna, said her widow mother married late, so she understands and puts no pressure on her to marry. Another respondent said:

Nobody is pressurising me. My mother is somebody that believes in God. She says: I know that God will give you your husband. My father is late now; he died quite some time now. But my mother that is still alive, she is not really pressurising me. Occasionally she will just call me and say she's sure God

will not leave me like this. She is always optimistic. Even when I went home this year, she still told me the same thing and her words challenged me. At my age, my mother is still optimistic that something good will still happen to me, it challenged me (IDI 5, 47 years old).

Some did not experience pressure from parents but they put pressure on themselves to marry, for instance, IDI 2 was not under any pressure to marry from her parents but she said:

But then we are human beings, sometimes I will cook food and I will say God this is how I should be cooking for my husband if my husband is here. Sometimes I sleep at 7 or 8 pm and I will say if my husband is around is it how early I will be sleeping? I have to get somebody who I will be caring for, so it is not easy (IDI 2, 46 years old).

In spite of the frequency and the profound emotional effect of pressure, spinsters in this study thought it is still better to wait than to be pushed into any kind of union due to pressure. Many of them cited instances of spinsters who were pressurised into taking decisions to marry just anybody and they are now full of regrets. A respondent said:

I have friends who were single like me but were pushed to marry the wrong men because their parents will not allow them to be. Because of the insults that come from parents and friends, they were rushed into marriage and they are already out. So, if you are late in getting married, you don't have any reason to rush in to it, you are late already, don't rush it, take your time, choose the best and do it well (LH 2, Titi, 40 years old).

In a focus group discussion, a respondent expressed an opinion which was concurred by others.

And most times the pressure will be so much that the lady will become confused and later end up marrying one below her standard. She ends up having a lot of problems in her life. She finds out that all her labour and effort cannot be appreciated rather it's a waste because when you are living below standard, in fact, you are worse than somebody in that state because you can't flow, you can't be recognised, you can't operate the way you ought to ... (Res 2, FGD 2).

### **Life History Three – Ayo**

The life experience of Ayo (pseudonym) highlights the effects of spinsterhood on the well being of a spinster in a society with pervasive marriage and family ideology and slow to change patriarchal structures.

#### **Family background, education and work life**

Ayo is the first child in a family of six. Her father is a civil servant and mother is a trader. All her siblings obtained University or Polytechnic first degree except one who chose to be a fashion designer. Ayo has Higher National Diploma (HND) and a post graduate

degree in Education. She is a senior teacher in one of the secondary schools in Lagos. She joined the teaching service after her National Youth Service.

### **Stigma and Identity challenge**

Actually, in my place of work, it causes a lot of embarrassment. It got to a stage I don't put my status, I just write my name and leave it there. So some people will assume I am married. In a case where it is official and it is very important you put your status there, I put it there. Some know that I am not married. I am in teaching profession; they believe that most of the people there are married. If you have spent some years in service, they will be asking about your children, your husband. I will say they are fine because I want husband and children, I claim them. I never tell them eh it's only those close friends. They call me Mrs. even in the church. Somebody stored my number and wrote Mrs., I said thank God. So it is only when it is necessary that I include my marital status in letters or official forms; because they will be asking you a lot of questions, embarrassing questions are what most of them will be asking you. I feel embarrassed so I leave it except it is very necessary. People still say ah ah why. It's not everybody I can be talking to and explaining what happened.

Her marital status became an embarrassment in her place of work because she has spent some years in teaching service. People assume she was married and addressed her with the title Mrs. even when she did not claim to be married.

### **Pressure to marry**

Ayo experienced a lot of pressure to marry, from her parents, siblings, office colleagues and other close persons. To help her get married, her parents suggested to take her to a witch doctor who will help her attract a husband.

They told me that they can take me to so many places - traditional - so that I can get husband. I said I can't do that...

When she turned down their offer several times, they felt she is not serious about marriage, and after a few more years they ejected her from her family house in Lagos.

I was sent out. I only came out with a bag, not as big as this [a medium-sized women's handbag]. My father stood at the balcony and said: go back to where you are coming from. I had to be squatting from one place to another. Eventually there was a cooperative society that the church introduced, I started selling klin [a brand of detergent], then it just came into the Nigerian market. I was selling it and trying to save N1000 every month while looking for a house. I got a house through a church member. I stayed there for two years before I moved from that place, problem from one place to another in Lagos. You know Lagos. It took the grace of God for me to save because my salary was nothing to write home about then. So, I collected loan from the cooperative in the church to pay my house rent. I think they took two years rent, yes they said I should pay for two years. I paid for two years, I bought a bed. Actually my parents thought I will come and beg them to take me back.

So, they were surprised when they didn't see me come back. They asked, you didn't come to ask for anything. I said what do you want me to come and ask for, you sent me away, so, what is the purpose of coming to ask you for anything...

Ejection from family house at a time she was not prepared to rent a personal apartment put her through several precarious situations such as squatting from one house to another. She left with just a handbag, so she had to source for clothing and other material needs. It affected her relationship with her parents. She found no support from them; therefore her family life commitment was with her friends instead of her family. Nonetheless, she visited her parents occasionally. In addition to pressure from her parents, she experienced pressure from other near relatives and office colleagues.

The pressure is so much; they will talk and talk and talk. My cousins who are the same age with me, even the men are all married; they will be asking what happened to you. So the pressure is there. In my place of work they will tell me ah ah it seems as if you don't want to settle down yet, you are still looking for Mr. Right? I will smile. It gets to a stage the burden will be too much.

As a way out of spinsterhood and to save some fecund years, some people suggested she should start sexual relationship with men.

Some people told me I should go and be having sex. And I say, will I just pick a man on the streets and start having sex. I have a moral standard, some things are not done, I can't be having sex all around so that I will not reach menopause ... just any man on the road, HIV/AIDS is around, ...

The constant reminder of the brevity of her fecund years, and the consequent intense pressure to marry instill deep fear in her and make her unhappy. She continued:

At times I get afraid. They tell me that before 45 or once you are 45 this and that and that. Those words normally enter and before they come out it takes the grace of God. It causes fear, and I discovered that fear and worry cause their own problem, worse than a disease. It makes you not to be happy. The pressure will keep coming from everywhere. You have gone to pray; you have done all you know how to do, yet no marriage partner ...

Ayo's life is typical of how marriage and family ideology controls a woman's experience of singlehood. There are constant reminders of her "failure" from her natal home to the place of work and worship. To her, the worry and fear that emanate from pressure to marry and the reality of her "biological clock" is worse than a disease. At 46 years, this respondent still hoped to marry and have children in a pervasive patriarchal and pronatalist culture. Her feeling of despondency will only keep increasing as she ages without marriage.

### 4.5.3 Spinsterhood and self enhancement

A common feature of the majority of spinsters in this study was the belief that they have to move on with their life plans even without marriage. In response to whether spinsterhood is affecting her pursuit of other life goals, a respondent replied:

You see, let's say, to me, marriage is secondary, because if you want to become something or somebody in life you don't wait for marriage. You have to pursue whatever thing you want to do. Why should I sit down waiting for one man who may never come. If you do that you are wasting your time and missing out on other goals you are supposed to pursue. If he comes fine, if he doesn't come life goes on. Life is so short so why don't you make use of the little one you have (IDI 19, 39 years old).

Another respondent who owns a nursery and primary school said:

The long waiting is not drawing me back. I opened my school. When I newly started, many mothers [of the children] asked after my husband. And I will say I am not married. They will reply eh eh, but I am not down cast by all that pity. I am also into decoration business. I decorate for people who are wedding. It [spinsterhood] has not affected my aspirations (IDI 5, 47 years old).

Stressing the reasons why one has to go on with career or business goals in spite of non-marriage, a respondent stated:

My future matters. Even if I don't marry, it's what I make now that I will eat in the future. I am still planning. When my mother died I know how much I spent, because of that my people respect me. When it [spinsterhood] will affect me and I begin to cry about it or cannot come out in the public is when I don't have money. I am not weighed down by it [spinsterhood]. I make more effort to increase my cash earnings. (IDI 24, 37 years old).

Many spinsters in the focus group discussion said they have gone ahead with their goals in business and career. For many, although spinsterhood has many challenges, it afforded them the opportunity to improve on their personal character as well as to strive for more achievement in other aspects of life.

Any way I won't say many negatives (laughter). Well, there are positive experiences in spinsterhood. You want to do more; you feel you have not tried enough in this and that area. You will always want to improve on yourself, especially if you have the right people around you. If you connect to the right people, you will not feel as if you are missing out on anything. What you will have inside of you is I want to improve on this and that; I need to work on this my character or other things (Res 3, FGD 7).

On the other hand, some respondents said spinsterhood limited their life pursuits. They have lost the drive to do more in their career and business. A respondent gave an elaborate account of the effect of spinsterhood on her personal productivity.

Spinsterhood limits people in our culture. There are a number of things you would want to do and one will look back; or people will ask how can she say so when she is not, [married]. People will always want to hear she is Mrs. so, so and so. If they are not hearing she is Mrs. so, so and so, I mean there is a limit to which they will believe or reckon with whatever the single woman says ... I know some of these things personally. I am now talking about myself, there are things I want to do even in my job as a social entrepreneur; and some times when I think of how people will look at me, like you are in the midst of three or more women and they are Mrs. this and Mrs. that and then you are Miss. It demoralises. Spinsterhood is not affecting my education but it's affecting my productivity. There are a number of training programs I would want to run for young people – female youths but then I am a little bit skeptical about how people will look at it. People may not understand. They might be saying she is Miss, so, what does she have to offer our girls, if she is not married? Why is she not married? Does she know better and she is not married. So, such things I know personally. It has had some negative impact in my productivity. I know about myself; I don't know about other people but I don't want to believe it is peculiar to me. You know in Nigeria we attach so much importance to Mrs. this, Mrs. that, so, if you are not Mrs., people look at you as if there is something wrong somewhere. (IDI 17, 45 years old).

Although she did not recount any experience of being challenged for conducting a program as a spinster, the salient point here is that she has begun to assess her self-image by the society's negative perception of older never married women and her productivity was negatively affected as a result.

Some spinsters curtailed their involvement in community social and economic activities, due to perceived stigma about their spinsterhood. IDI 1 withdrew from a cooperative society in her place of work, which would have benefitted her financially, because she felt stigmatised. LH 3, Ayo, withdrew from social interaction in her neighbourhood, because she wants her spinsterhood to remain invisible. Other respondents withdrew from active involvement in their religious groups.

In the focus groups, other respondents acceded to the negative effect of spinsterhood on their self-enhancement. A respondent in FGD 6 for graduate and professionals said there is the personal challenge of not reaching one's full potential as a person if a spinster feels she is incomplete as a single woman. Another respondent in the focus group for spinsters with only secondary education said:

It [spinsterhood] won't give you strength to move forward, because you don't have anybody who will inherit whatever you have made in life. It will make you to be withdrawing from certain pursuits (Res 1, FGD 5).

#### 4.5.4 Identity challenge

Spinsters in this study were encumbered with the challenge of identity arising from the pervasive concept of womanhood as wife and mother. Due to this prevalent social concept of adult womanhood, women who become spinsters are viewed negatively. This was the impression of most respondents. A respondent submitted:

I believe things are really changing; but in the case of Lagos and Nigeria as a whole, we have a long mile to go. There is this stigmatisation against singles even in churches. In our society, everywhere you go it's there, even in working places it is there, even in school. You will see the way those who are married pride themselves because some people see being married as the ultimate goal in life; that if you are not married it's like a taboo, it's like a curse. It's like you are living, no legs, no arms ... (IDI 15, 30 years old).

Another respondent added:

When you are single people think you are frustrated. They say maybe it is your bad character or some people see it as a curse from the village or some see it as you are not beautiful (IDI 10, 45 years old).

From the narratives of the subjects, the social identity of spinsters in Lagos included prostitutes, difficult, husband snatchers, old, too independent, choosy, too expensive, frustrated, aggressive, ugly, leftover, and bereft of good character, angry, occultic, cursed and even a witch. The respondents did not agree with these negative conceptualisations of singlehood; but the majority agreed with the social identity of a woman as mother and wife. Challenging the negative concepts of spinsterhood, one of the respondents recounted how she regularly mediated in constant misunderstanding between one of her neighbours and his wife who is very ill mannered.

If it's character, there are some women who are married that should not have married. It's just the grace of God (IDI 4, 42 years old).

As regards the identity of womanhood, a respondent observed:

Actually it's like that in our society today, despite the kind of money or level of education a woman has, if she is not married, they don't recognise her. So, the pride of a woman is her husband they say. Even though she is married and does not have children all her efforts and everything is in vain and many people will talk about her negatively (Res 1, FGD 5).

Although acceptance of singleness as a lifestyle is problematic for the subjects, many respondents thought it is better to remain single than to enter into a bad marital union. A respondent said:

It is better to stay single than to have a bad marriage. Some married women almost want to commit suicide because of bad marriage, why? It is better you

remain in your father's house and not marry. You will have peace even though people will talk, but that is people's talk, that's their business. It is better people talk than to have a marriage that you almost die in it. No, no, it's better you remain single (IDI 7, 35 years old).

Only one, out of 29 subjects for in-depth and life history interviews thought bad marriage is better than permanent singleness. The opinion of the FGD participants was nearly unanimous, irrespective of various socio-economic backgrounds, that singleness is better than a bad marriage. In FGD 6, for instance, six, out of the seven participants said lifelong spinsterhood is better than a bad union. The one respondent left neither disagreed nor agreed; she simply said she was not sure which is better. One of the respondents opined:

Life can become a living hell when one is in a bad marriage. It could lead to loss of life, loss of self esteem or even mental illness (Res 1, FGD 6).

Asked whether a woman can live a fulfilled life without marriage, IDI 7 above who said it is better to remain permanently single than to have a bad marriage said:

No, she can't. No matter what career you have, if you like be a professor, if you are not married wherever you go I bet you, you will not have the respect a married woman will have. That is just that, everybody knows that. Even if you are talking and you are not angry, they will say that one, frustration is telling on her. If you are a single mother, they will say she is a struggling mother, but at least you have a child. People know there is a man there for her; a man impregnated her; that man is still there even though they are not together. But if you don't have a child, you are not married, if you like have all the certificates, have all the money you will never live a fulfilled life.

The above narrative suggests that the preference for singleness to a bad union by the majority of respondents is like choosing a lesser evil not a sense of validating singleness. This ambivalence was common in the narration of many respondents. Unlike the above respondent, some respondents thought fulfilled womanhood is more of one's contribution to humanity than marriage and motherhood; but they still wanted to marry. This tendency to seek marriage for fulfilment even in late forties was attributed to the pervasive stigma of non-marriage by IDI 7 above. Another respondent averred:

No matter the level a woman attains in life, if she is not married, though some women might not bother, but it's just one in a thousand because sometimes the way people will even address you. They will say she has everything, she has a car, she even bought a building but no man is there. When you pass the way people will look at you. This kind of thing they say sometimes doesn't make one feel fulfilled. (IDI 4, 42 years old).

### **Title**

Another aspect of identity challenge experienced by spinsters in this study is the issue of title requirement in virtually every official and unofficial form; and the use of title Miss,

Ms and Mrs. People usually assume spinsters are married and will be quick to say you are Mrs. ... or how are your husband and children. For many spinsters, the Miss and Mrs title made their spinsterhood very visible; and when they use Ms their marital status became controversial and they were sometimes asked to clarify their status. IDI 17 thinks one's spinsterhood is better shielded if the woman has other titles such as Doctor or Pastor.

Men don't have that challenge, it is a woman problem. Women who have some other titles like Dr. seem to have overcome that kind of challenge (IDI 17, 45 years old).

The above respondent raised another issue that title challenge is a feminine problem. Men are always Mr. whether married or not. Even though LH 1 did not consider title a challenge, obviously because she is a lawyer, she has another title (Barrister). The usual assumption that she was married is challenging.

A lot of people just assume that I'm married may be because I dress in a responsible way. At times when I will go to an office they will say what is your name; they will say Mrs. ... They will already write it, so a lot of people just assume that I'm married, may be because I'm big... (LH 1, Edna, 44 years old).

In many cases women who have other titles such as Doctor or Pastor are still expected to add Mrs. Like Dr (Mrs.) ... whereas men do not have to be addressed as Dr (Mr.) ...

### **Marriage and engagement ring syndrome**

Engagement and wedding rings are some of the symbolic privileges of marriage found in this study. To some spinsters, wearing of rings in the fingers to symbolise engagement or marriage was a source of identity challenge. People seem to be on a continual look out for it. When it is not seen, they wonder and question one's marital status. If a spinster wears any other type of ring that is not the usual engagement and wedding ring her status becomes questionable; and in fact, some potential suitors might be scared away by that. If she wears a ring in the index finger, which is commonly believed to symbolise "I am searching", it still constitutes embarrassment to older spinsters especially. A respondent narrated one of her experiences in this regard.

In our society when people check your finger, they say oh she is not married. I had an encounter in a commercial bus, the woman looked at my finger and said go and sit down you are not married, so you can't talk to me. I told the person: must I wear a ring before you know I am married. Some churches don't even wear ring and some men don't even wear. Why are we women so particular about ring. (IDI 9, 30 years old).

The trend was confirmed in the focus group. A participant in FGD 7 said married women seem to flag their rings in ways that makes one's spinsterhood too obvious.

#### **4.5.5 Loneliness**

Some respondents, particularly research subjects in their late thirties and forties mentioned loneliness as one of the challenges they have as spinsters. In response to whether she experiences loneliness, a respondent said:

Definitely, there is loneliness. The way God has created us, when you get to a certain age; you are supposed to have somebody by your side as your husband, your companion, somebody you can share the remaining part of your life with. When you get to that age and there is nobody to share your experiences with, nobody to share your burdens with, one will feel lonely. There are some burdens you cannot share with your family members and friends. When you want to take decisions, you are taking decisions all alone (IDI 1, 44 years old).

Another respondent pointed out that financial challenge aggravates the feeling of loneliness for spinsters and that the lonely feeling increases with age.

Of course I feel lonely. Two heads are better than one. At times you want to be with somebody; you need somebody that you will share your problems with and all that. Then if there is a man there, it reduces financial pressure. For me, because I want to get married, I do feel it a lot. And with age it [loneliness] grows worse... (LH 1, Edna, 44 years old).

Closely related to financial challenge as a reminder to spinsters of their lone life, is sole responsibility for domestic maintenance. Some respondents made reference to this issue in their narration on loneliness. A respondent said:

Another consequence is loneliness. You are alone in the house, no one to talk to. The loneliness I am talking about is that of having a man in the house. If you want to lift a generator, for instance, which is too heavy for a woman to lift, there is no man in the house to help. There are certain things you want to do which men are supposed to do; but you will be doing them (IDI 13, 40 years old).

In the group discussion, a respondent further articulated the challenges of loneliness for spinsters.

You are sick, nobody to tell you sorry; you need help, nobody to help you (Res 3 FGD 3).

Spinsters confronted difficult times such as when they are sick and there is no one to sympathise with them. Spinsterhood is a period when most siblings and friends are married and occupied with their families and personal challenges. Spinsters only get residual

attention from close relatives, and few married friends who remain in the spinster's social network.

Nevertheless, not all the respondents feel lonely. In fact, some enjoy staying alone. In response to whether she feels lonely, a respondent answered:

Not at all, I prefer staying alone like this. I like it. I like the way I stay alone. Not that I don't like anybody to stay with me, but I don't want anybody to come and disturb me. I am not feeling lonely; I am 100 percent OK watching my TV (IDI 20, 31 years old).

One of the stereotypical beliefs about spinsters is that they are more lonesome than the married. Evidence from this study showed that not all spinsters feel lonely, especially those in their early thirties. To confirm that loneliness is not the reserved experience of single women, Life History Subject 4 narrated her encounter with a married woman who has been a full-time housewife even though she has tertiary education. Her children grew up, left the home to study overseas, and she was always alone in the house. She became so lonely that she desperately begged this spinster, who was a Personnel Officer at the time, for employment in her place of work.

Since that day I really stopped looking down on myself or pitying myself or feeling that my problem was the worst in this world. I talked with a married woman who was just at the end of everything; because she said her husband goes to work and then was a part time pastor. So, she was practically always all alone and her life was really miserable (LH 4, Ore, 48 years old).

#### **4.5.6 Inadequate finance**

Inadequate finance was one of the challenges of spinsterhood, though not many respondents pointed it out.

No, I am not finding it easy alone. My landlord is requesting for one year rent. I am living with my brother's daughter, all these are responsibilities. If I am married my husband will take care of some of these things. So, sometimes it makes me to be annoyed. If I am married all these responsibilities will not be on me alone (IDI 24, 37 years old).

Inadequate finance experienced by some spinsters is largely due to their natal families' demand on their wage labour. Apart from spinsters who were not employed, many spinsters who spoke about inadequate finances also related it to numerous financial responsibilities to close relatives. Spinsters played care-giving roles to close relatives. This role often involves a lot of financial expenses, which spinsters' were usually expected to meet not only as a duty but because they are single. In the focus groups a few respondents viewed inadequate finance as a challenge.

One of the challenges I have is in the area of finance. When one needs a hand to lift one up and you look around and there is nobody. At such times you wish you are married, at least there will be a supportive hand (Res 4, FGD 3).

#### 4.5.7 Spinsters as care givers

Spinsterhood is traditionally linked to caring for parents and other family members. Although only a few spinsters in this study currently reside in their parents' house, the majority undertook caring and support duties in various ways to parents, and relatives. They saw care-giving to family members as their responsibility.

There are many things I do in my family. I am the second child. I sponsor my senior brother's first child and my younger sister's second son in school. Then, I contribute to the education of my two younger siblings. I take care of my parents too (IDI 20, 31 years old).

My brothers trained me. They are married now; any time they have financial difficulty they call me, and I help them as much as I can. (IDI 24, 37 years old).

The responses of some spinsters indicated that the nature of care-giving and support demanded by their relatives was sometimes exploitative. Parents and married relatives took advantage of spinsters' single status to assume they have no responsibilities and should have a lot of cash and time to spare. A respondent stated:

If I talk of role in the family, I am like the man of the house. In fact, I don't even like discussing that part because it turns my head. Everybody calls me over any little thing: this person is sick oh, there is nothing oh; Mama doesn't have this one oh. My younger brother in school I pay his school fees. Everybody comes to me and I don't earn much. I end up in debts; really I don't like discussing that. My mother would have given birth to me as a man not a woman.... And the other one [elder brother] is married. He is married, so he doesn't help anybody. He spends his money on his wife and children. So, I am the only one that doesn't have a husband, doesn't have children, so everybody comes to me for finances. I said OK; maybe God did not want me to marry so as to help family or what. What is it (IDI 7, 35 years old)?

In the discussion groups some discussants pointed to the exploitative nature as well as the financial burden care giving imposed on them because they were not married.

I am not the first or even the second daughter, I am the third daughter but I contribute a lot in the family, more than what the first daughter does. Our first daughter is married and her husband is not well-to-do. The second daughter is married with six children. She brought me to Lagos; her husband does not earn so much. I even contribute to house rent and their children's school fees sometimes. For my younger ones I contribute a lot. Like when my father died in 2006 I know how much I spent. I am not the first or second daughter but I do more than them (Res 1, FGD 5).

#### **4.5.8 Fear of permanent singleness and childlessness**

Fear of permanent singleness and childlessness was found to be a major concern to older never married women. They wish to marry, but there was a looming fear that it may not happen. They were usually troubled by the thought of “who will take care of me in old age”, “who will inherit my property” and “who will bury me”? Articulating her worry, a respondent said:

But as a woman, I am now feeling it even to my bone. You know why, if I grow old who will take care of me? When will I start having children that will take care of me (IDI 2, 46 years old)?

To another respondent:

No matter what a man or woman possesses, without marriage and children, who will inherit your money? You came to this world to make money for other people. When you die people will be struggling for your cheque book. But when you marry and have children, then you will see somebody that will inherit your money when you die, somebody that will bury you in your old age. But when you are not married, you just came to this world make money and go; the person is gone for nothing (IDI 12, 36 years old).

Her opinion is influenced by the idea of marriage and motherhood as primary niche of women and the patriarchal mentality that one’s property must be inherited by an offspring or family members. In the focus group discussion, the issue of loneliness in old age was raised.

I can’t continue being single. It will get to a time, your father is dead, your mother is dead, and your siblings will get married. Will you be alone? (Res 6, FGD 3).

#### **4.5.9 Independence and privacy**

Freedom, privacy and independence were some of the positive sides of spinsterhood, as expressed by some spinsters. In fact, some viewed privacy and independence as the only benefit of singleness.

It is [spinsterhood] sweet the other way round. I come home, I don’t cook. I can sleep as long as I want (IDI 7, 35 years old).

Unlike participants in the lower status groups, the majority of participants in the focus groups for graduates and professional women admitted freedom and independence as one benefit they derived from being single yet. One of them noted:

Spinsterhood affords one freedom to pursue dreams which marriage responsibilities may not necessarily permit, and there is greater available disposable income (Res 4, FGD 6).

#### **4.5.10 Satisfaction with singleness**

Many respondents in the in-depth and life history interviews (n=24) expressed dissatisfaction with being single at their age. Participants in the various discussion groups corroborated this widespread dissatisfaction with spinsterhood. The feeling of dissatisfaction was primarily due to stigmatisation of non marriage. Their feeling of dissatisfaction with singleness was exacerbated by fear of permanent childlessness and concept of oneself as a failure in a society where marriage is the widely accepted adult status. Expressing deep dissatisfaction with her continued singleness, a respondent said:

Sometimes I remember my mates. When will I have a child who will call me Mummy one day? I am supposed to be a grandmother by now. Some of my mates who got pregnant out-of-wedlock are already grandmothers, yet I am not married. Whenever I think about it I cry (IDI 2, 46 years old).

A few spinsters (n=5) expressed satisfaction with being single but with a consciousness of the gap to be filled. They did not want their singleness to be permanent. A 33-year old Accountant, who said she enjoys her singleness stated:

I must not lie to you I enjoy my spinsterhood. I enjoy it. Yes, I know most of my mates are married and have children. I don't feel lonely, though within me I know there is still a gap to be filled (IDI 22, 33 years).

All the women who explicitly expressed satisfaction with their singleness were university graduates in well established jobs. Asked how she coped with singleness, one of this category of women, a 39 year old professional who earned a relatively high income said besides having her friends and family as support, "being single is not a challenge for me personally" (Res 6, FGD 6). Two of these women who were satisfied were in their early thirties, one was 39 years old, and two were in their mid forties. Those in their forties came to that state through personal resolve, counselling and determination to make it through life with or without marriage.

#### **4.5.11 Frustration/depression**

Prolonged marital delay and the attendant stereotypical attitude to spinsters led to frustration and depression among some spinsters. There was the feeling of: why am I not like others? Why is my own different? Why has nature and God decided to treat me differently? All these are partly, outcomes of pervasive anti social family ideology. If spinsters would have found life satisfaction through other life events and activities, pervasive stereotypes about non marriage made life satisfaction unattainable for some spinsters. IDI 19 knew a friend who became so depressed that she attempted suicide. She said: "I have a friend who

decided to take pills to kill herself". A respondent narrated how she became so frustrated with life after her fortieth birthday.

When I marked my fortieth birthday and I was still not married, then I had a broken engagement after my fortieth birthday; and I was not married, I became frustrated. (LH 4, 48 years old).

A respondent in a focus group admitted that she is so depressed that nothing attracted her fancy anymore.

As I am now, there is no gift anybody would give me that means anything good to me, as long as you have not given me what I want. I don't see any big deal about anything again. Even though I will appreciate any gift but it has not met my need (Res 6, FGD 3, 39 years old).

Asked what she wanted, she replied: "I want to get married. I want my own home".

#### **4.5.12 Unfulfilled sexual need**

A few spinsters spoke about unfulfilled sexual need as one of the challenges they have.

I said God I do not know where you are taking me to, but I am running out of patience. I am a human being, I am a woman; the feelings are there you can't deny it. When the heat is there, what do I do, do I continue like this? (IDI 4, 42 years old).

In the focus groups, unfulfilled sexual need was not raised by the participants as one of the challenges of spinsters.

#### **4.5.13 Others – regret and late empty nesting**

Other consequences of spinsters that reoccurred, though not frequently, were regrets, and empty nesting. A few respondents recounted their regrets about turning down marriage proposals.

Occasionally, I have regrets when I see the children of my younger siblings. At such times I will say, if I had known, maybe those men I was calling play boys I would have married one of them and at least have my children (IDI 5, 47 years old).

Late empty nesting or period of dispersion, when children are grown and have to leave their parents comes later for women who marry late. Two spinsters saw it as an advantage they stand to gain when they eventually marry. They will not spend their old age in loneliness.

Some of the consequences of spinsters elongate the period a woman stays in spinsters. Some consequences act as determinants of permanent non marriage. Negative experience with men such as rape attempts, duping/cheating, broken engagements open a window of fear and suspicion from which every other man is viewed. The more of such

experience a spinster has the more uncertain she becomes about entering into marriage with just any man. And since her pool gets narrower by the day, she is continuously in a dilemma of choice between likely permanent non marriage and imagined bad marriage.

In conclusion, amidst a few advantages such as independence and privacy, spinsterhood in Lagos was fraught with myriad challenges. Women who turn 30 without a sure marriage plan were stigmatised. They experienced extensive pressure from family and non-family to conform to the normative adult status, even though tradition constrains them to wait until a man seeks their hand in marriage. They confronted identity challenge, loneliness and the fear of imminent permanent singleness and childlessness, continual shrinking of social network through loss of friends and relatives who marry, inadequate finance and others. It was found that in spite of these challenges, some of the subjects have been able to get on well with life. The next section presents the various ways spinsters in Lagos manage the challenges that confront them as a result of their civil status.

#### 4.6 COPING MECHANISMS

This study showed that the proportion of women who become spinsters was relatively high in Lagos, and increasing in the entire country. Spinsterhood is arguably one of the most challenging lifestyles in contemporary Nigeria due to widespread stereotype associated with non marriage. The subjects were asked how they coped with the challenges of spinsterhood. They gave several responses which have been categorised into specific headings and presented according to their groundedness. In general, there was uniformity in the coping mechanisms adopted by spinsters of different ethnic and class backgrounds; but, in some cases, differences were identified on the basis of age, profession and ethnic origin.

**Table 4.10.** Coping mechanisms of spinsters in Lagos by groundedness

<b>Coping Mechanism</b>	<b>Groundedness</b>
Religion/Spirituality	24
Friendship Network	15
Preoccupation with work	11
Supportive Parents and Siblings	11
Adoption	10
Engagement in delightful activities	10
Cross-generational sex	4
Avoidance of title	3
Co-residence with friends and relatives	3
Support of male neighbours	2
Withdrawal from social activities and interactions	2
Police protection	2

Source: Primary Data 2011

#### **4.6.1 Religion**

Religion, specifically Christianity, provided solace and community for many spinsters in this study irrespective of ethnic and class background. This was expected considering that all the subjects still expected to marry; and surely needed help beyond the natural to get into a union of their choice, in a society where younger women are preferred marriage mates. Also, due to perceived or real social exclusion by married relatives and friends, spinsters turned to God and religious activities for succour. A respondent who mentioned religion as a way she coped with spinsterhood described how many spinsters known to her employ religion as a coping strategy.

They are praying like wounded lions, like a mad prophet. When you go to any Christian program you see them there; you come to vigils they are there praying. When you see them in the morning you will not know they are the people that were praying at the vigil. Some will deny and say: “no I don’t want to marry now” but they are crying in their house day and night: “God visit me with my own husband”. (IDI 12, 36 years old).

Emphasising the importance of religion to spinsters, a participant in a group discussion opined:

I think the best mechanism to cope is to encourage yourself. And then for me, it’s when you hold onto the promises God has given to you (Res 2, FGD 7).

Christian worship or fellowship provided a supportive and friendly forum for spinsters through preaching and counselling aimed at encouraging and comforting those who are expecting blessings from God. Spinsters got a feeling of acceptance in such gatherings through what may not be a typical friendship network but a network of friendly persons who from time to time may visit a spinster, or speak affirmatively about the single status.

#### **4.6.2 Friendship network**

Friendship with females especially, and in some cases with a couple, provided a major source of comfort and support for spinsters. Whereas some respondents maintained committed relationship with families and friends, others got support and encouragement from friends instead of family. One of the respondents articulated the strength of friendship in giving single women a positive feeling in their singlehood in this way:

As you see me now, I am very very happy. I have friends (IDI 10, 45 years old).

To confirm friendship as a coping mechanism, a discussant observed:

Coping with spinsterhood is based on the circle of friends one keeps. If you have good and understanding friends, it helps a lot (Res 2, FGD 6).

### **4.6.3 Preoccupation with work**

Engagement in paid employment or self employment shielded spinsters from visibility in their neighbourhood. It also served as a coping mechanism for loneliness in some cases.

I am coping fine. I am working. I don't have any business with anybody. If I am not working that is the wahala [problem]. But early in the morning 4am I wake up, 6am I am out of the house; and come back round 8 or 9pm, pray, eat and sleep. (IDI 20, 31 years old).

Work was found to be a preferred coping strategy for younger spinsters in their earlier thirties, and spinsters who are professionals. For the professionals, work provided a coping strategy probably because their work is likely to be a chosen career as well as a source of income. Acknowledging the positive effect of work, a professional observed that:

Engaging in a work or career path you like is a good coping mechanism even though one may still get despondent at times. Sometimes, support and comfort comes from family members (Res 2, FGD 6).

### **4.6.4 Supportive parents and siblings**

Not many spinsters counted on support from parents and siblings to cope with singleness. This is probably due to pressure to marry that comes from family members, as noted earlier. Nonetheless, some respondents found succour and support from their parents. A respondent in FGD 6 marked her fortieth birthday a week before the group discussion. She said she had to travel to where her parents reside because they are the only ones she has. When asked how she coped with being single, another respondent replied:

I am living with my parents. It [coping with spinsterhood] is not a challenge, they [her parents] have been there for me and they are always supporting me and they know I am good, so definitely my own marriage will come at the right time (IDI 21, 32 years old).

One of the supportive roles played by male relatives is to allow spinsters use them as guarantors when required such as in renting an apartment.

The low inclination to family for support does not mean that connection to family is waning. Spinsters who narrated supportive affinity with their parents and relatives cut across all ethnic and class groups, although more spinsters of Yoruba origin mentioned supportive parents as a coping strategy. This is an indication that family ties are still strong in Lagos.

### **4.6.5 Adoption**

Although many spinsters in this study did not think single motherhood is a way out of singlehood, some of them were considering adoption as an action they will take if the

likelihood of marriage is ruled out. Whereas some have either not thought about it or were disinclined to the idea of adoption. IDI 10 had started making inquiries about adoption. Others who were inclined to adoption have it as a future plan. IDI 2 desired to adopt a child but she was constrained by the discouraging signal it might give to men who may still be interested in marrying her. Another respondent who planned to adopt a child said:

To me, if I happen to stay on my own, maybe they say it is late for you, you cannot put to bed anymore. There are children all over to adopt; you adopt them, give them food, mother them, give them good home, treat them like your children and then they become your children. It's not necessarily the one that comes from my womb that is my child (IDI 19, 39 years old).

In the FGD, a discussant observed that:

If a woman gets to the age of menopause without marriage I think adoption can come in because of your future. Children you adopt in your name will grow up to answer your own name (Res 2, FGD 5).

One major reason the subjects gave for considering adoption was care or support in old age and inheritance. Nevertheless, adoption was not only a coping mechanism for fear of permanent singleness and childlessness; it was a way of satisfying one's maternal instinct as implied by IDI 19 above. Concern for inheritance was expressed more by Igbo respondents and discussants, probably due to strict patrilineal descent among the Igbo. It was also found that only one of the respondents and discussants who mentioned adoption as a coping mechanism was from the Yoruba ethnic group, and she did not think it is an option many spinsters want to take. The majority of the professional women viewed adoption is an option. All the subjects who mentioned adoption as a coping strategy were in their forties except IDI 19 cited above who was 39 years old. This is an indication that the likelihood of adoption rises with age.

In addition to cultural inhibitions about single motherhood, it was also found that official adoption process in Nigeria is stressful, long and expensive. IDI 10 found that she will need about N250000 (US\$1,667) to conclude the adoption process. She did not have such amount at the moment but still hoped to save enough money for it.

#### **4.6.6 Engagement in delightful activities**

To cope with the emotional challenges associated with spinsters, some spinsters engaged in activities outside formal employment that occupy their minds and make them happy.

I do things I like doing, and when you do things you enjoy doing and you are getting results, you are happy. I just love occupying myself with something. I don't like being idle. So, I always have something to do. We are told that an

idle mind is the devil's workshop. It is when you are idle that such thoughts [worry about marriage] will come to you. I am not saying such thoughts will not come, such thoughts will definitely come sometimes except that person is not OK. Like oh how I wish I am in my husband's house, how I wish I am in my bedroom (IDI 22, 33 years old).

In the FGD, a discussant narrated how she copes.

Then I won't say I am a workaholic; I don't have time for myself. I am a very busy person, so to think of anything is out of it but sometimes I do (Res 3, FGD7).

Elaborating on the issue of making oneself happy, a 39-year old spinster said:

You have to make yourself good looking. Don't look at your age; whoever sees me now will think I am still under 30; I am over 30. You have to make yourself happy no matter the situation and know that God is there. God will give you your own when the time comes (IDI 18).

Some of the activities mentioned were singing and dancing, cooking and other domestic work, good dressing and attending singles forum. Other delightful activities that provided effective coping mechanism for spinsters were reading inspirational books and articles in websites dedicated to spinsters. Inspirational books and websites dedicated to single women provided timely succor to spinsters in times of discouragement, and answered some of their questions. A respondent narrated how she visited a particular website which seems to touch on all issues in the life of a spinster; and she got encouraged each time she read their publication. A few discussants in the FGDs mentioned that reading good books is one of the ways they encouraged and made themselves happy.

#### **4.6.7 Cross-generational sex**

To cope with the challenge of prolonged waiting for a marriage partner, some spinsters engaged in sexual relationship with elderly married men. To these spinsters it served as support for financial needs as well as a source of sexual fulfilment. In response to how spinsters coped with the challenges of spinsterhood in Lagos, discussant observed:

Some spinsters in Lagos go out with married men. They date married men (Res 2, FGD 2).

A respondent recounted from her personal experience that date with married men provide better financial benefits.

Some women go out with married men because most single young men don't want to spend their money. They will say: "I am just watching you" Like a single man I was going out with, I call him 300 hundred Naira, because he gives me just transport fare to and fro his house ... But married men are ready to give you N20,000 just to sleep with you (IDI 25, 36 years old).

#### **4.6.8 Avoidance of “Miss” title**

One of the ways spinsters coped with the challenge of identity and stigma was to avoid the “Miss” prefix before their names. A typical behaviour by those who considered avoidance of title a coping strategy was:

Like if I want to write my name I remove the i and one s in “Miss” and just put “Ms” (IDI 18, 39 years old).

For others, the use of “Ms” draws attention to one’s marital status, so they avoided use of title completely.

#### **4.6.10 Co-residence with relatives and friends**

Some respondents adopted co-residence with friends or family to cope with inadequate finance. Asked if she lives alone, a respondent replied:

I am not living alone. I am living with my younger brother because of financial difficulty (IDI 1, 44 years old).

Co-residence helped to assuage financial burden, and provided emotional succour sometimes, but not in all cases. IDI 7 for instance, shared apartment with a female friend, due to inadequate finance, but she did not find co-residence a coping strategy for loneliness.

My friend and I stay here but it’s not every time we are together. Even if you are with friends, the same sex, you still feel lonely definitely. That’s why some girls get aggressive at a certain age if they are not married. Even if you have hundred girlfriends, but you know it is like something is lacking (IDI 7, 35 years old).

IDI 6 resides with a couple who are her friends not for financial reasons but to cope with the challenges of loneliness.

I have been staying with them and it has been helping me. At times when I am down with they encourage me (44 years old).

#### **4.6.11 Others**

Support of male neighbours was relevant for spinsters in coping with sole responsibility for domestic maintenance. In some cases, police protection served as a way to cope with threats and physical harassment. IDI 13, for instance, resorted to use of police protection after she was physically harassed by her male neighbour. Other coping mechanism employed by spinsters in this study was withdrawal from social interaction.

## **Life History Four**

Ore (pseudonym) was a forty-eight year old spinster. Her life experience demonstrated how a woman who is going through unplanned spinsterhood handles the challenges associated with single status.

### **Family background**

She is the first child in a family of four. All her younger siblings are married. Her parents were civil servants. Her father is late but her mother is retired and alive. She resides with her mother and a few distant relatives in a family house in one of the middle class residential areas in Lagos. She had a memorable childhood growing up in Lagos. One experience that made a memorable negative impact on her was the sudden death her elder brother, whom she loved so much. After his death, she looked forward to marrying a man who is older than her; partly to fill the gap her brother left; and to play the role of an elder brother to her and her siblings. This dream eluded her until the time she was interviewed.

### **Education and work**

She has Master degree in Public Administration and works as a top Public Servant in one of the Federal Government organisations in Lagos.

### **Coping with spinsterhood**

Ore has experienced two broken engagements. She attributed her spinsterhood to these “unfortunate events”. Nevertheless, she has learnt to cope with the situation. Speaking about her life, she said:

It's not only when you are married that you are fulfilled. I used to think that not being married is definitely the worst problem one could have and I used to see myself as somebody to be pitied. I used to feel frustrated until recently, maybe because of the job I do, I am doing a job I love so much. I am so much into that job, I am happy. So, I got to know that it's not until you are married actually. And I also know that even though it's also good to have kids, there are so many women that are married without children; and some tie down their lives to the fact that until they have children. But a lot of women have also realised that they could go and adopt children and that way they are fulfilled. Some, also, who do not want to adopt just get on with their lives.

She came to this realisation and has got on with her life even though she still expects to marry. As cited earlier in this study, she met a married woman who is more frustrated and lonely than she is. This encounter helped to strengthen her resolve to get on with her life in spite of marriage.

### **Friendship Network**

What I discovered is that life is what you make out of it and I realised that the days I go out and I am in the midst of people I am happy. When I am alone I

am not so happy. So, last year or so I figured out that you better be with the people that make you happy. So, I started doing that and I have been able to counsel one of my friends who is also my age mate and not married, who each time I go to her place she is not too happy. I told her to make sure she goes out, go and see people. She too started going out, she even travels, she is the type that will travel to Ibadan for weekends and she is happier too.

Ore goes out to meet friends who understand her and make her happy. She found little or no such support at home with her mother. At home, she ate and resorted to her room to read and sleep. Her elderly mother understands her but worries about her continual non marriage.

Speaking further on how she coped, she confirmed the major coping mechanism of religion, especially when the activity is with other women.

Then also you make sure you are always in church/fellowship. The more of the word of God you hear the more you are encouraged and the more you are with people of God the more you are happy. You feel you are in the midst of people who understand what you are passing through because they also have their problems. It might not be in the area of marriage like yours but they also have problems and issues and you are with them, nobody looks down on you, you are with your fellow women.

Her notion of womanhood:

I believe a woman should be married and have children but I also know that the fact that you are not married or doesn't have children doesn't mean you shouldn't be fulfilled at any stage where you find yourself in life. It is not only when you are married or have children that you can be fulfilled. There are so many other ways. By being who you should be, successful, not a liability, not a dependant so to say, you make yourself useful. If it's business you get doing, if it's job you get doing. You should have a career as a woman, and a sense of responsibility to people around you.

And I also believe that we need to move away from the stereotype that only a married woman can be fulfilled because since I am passing through it I know that. Of course there are many times I do feel "oh my God why did my life turn out this way" that I had disappointments in the past and I am not married now. Many times I still have cause to thank God because I am happy within myself. I really feel happy and fulfilled.

Ore's experience underscores the importance of friends in providing support and comfort for spinsters. Her friendship coping style elaborates the issue of choice instead of fate. She goes to people who make her happy. Her work serves as a coping strategy because she enjoys the type of work she is doing. Perhaps the reason why many spinsters do not find their work a source of comfort is because, unlike Ore, many women engage in work, more for economic reasons than self-fulfilment. Ore finds religion, especially Christian fellowship with other women, a very useful source of support and comfort in spinsterhood.

Even though Ore believes in marriage and motherhood, she does not see these dual roles as the ultimate mark of fulfilled womanhood. Her life experience with regard to spinsterhood helped her to form a notion of womanhood that revolves around career and selfless service to humanity. Spinsters who find workable coping strategies like Ore are likely to conceptualise womanhood outside marriage and motherhood. Emergence of such women is a likely agency for the transformation of the social identity of women in general.

One would think that spinsters in a society where patriarchal structures and pervasive marriage and family ideology exist would be very miserable. On the contrary, not all spinsters are miserable as might be expected. Some of the spinsters in this study have found ways to cope very well with the challenges of spinsterhood. Some have found joy and fulfilment in other life activities such as work and friendship network; and others found solace in religion and supportive natal family. Nevertheless, some of them still thought the only way out is to marry. Such spinsters did not view anything as a coping mechanism.

There is nothing, you just stay in your shell, what again will you do. If there is anything that challenge [spinsterhood] will not allow you to do, you leave it undone or pass it on to somebody else to do (IDI17, 45 years old).

To Res 6 in FGD 3 (39 years old) the only way out is to keep making effort to terminate the spinsterhood through marriage.

#### **4.7 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Data generated from secondary sources and a triangulation of qualitative techniques of in-depth interview, focus group discussion and life history produced insightful findings on the prevalence, causes, and consequences of spinsterhood in Lagos, and how spinsters cope with the challenges of single civil status. This section presents a synthesis of the results in relation to the theoretical framework for the study as well as empirical evidence from previous studies.

##### **4.7.1 Prevalence of spinsterhood**

The study revealed that the prevalence of spinsterhood in Nigeria was 6.7 percent, an indication of persistent strong marriage and family culture in the country. Based on 2006 population census, only 11.8 percent of women age 30-34 remained unmarried compared with 28 percent in the USA in 2008 (PRB US Economic and Social Trends, 2010). For older women age 35-44, the proportion never married increased from 2.7 percent in 1991 to 5.3 percent in 2006 (Appendix A Table A7) compared to England and Wales where the proportion never married of same age group rose from 8 percent in 1991 to 25 percent in 2007 (UK Office of National Statistics, 2009). Demographic and Health Surveys conducted

in African countries showed that in Nigeria, 5.8 percent of women age 30-34 were spinsters in 2008, 5.7 percent in Ghana for the same year, 6.6 percent in Kenya for 2008-09, and 7.7 percent in Cote d'Ivoire for 1998-1999 (DHS, 2011). In comparison with these African countries, Nigeria is still largely pro-marriage.

Highest prevalence of spinsterhood was found in the Southeast and South-South zones, whereas the lowest rates were found in the Northwest and Northeast. Cultural and religious differences may be accountable for the variation in prevalence between the North and South zones. The Northeast and Northwest zones have predominantly Hausa/Fulani and Muslim population. The Hausa/Fulani in Nigeria have a culture of early marriage, and Muslim women enter into marital union earlier than Christians (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000). The cultural expectation on women to marry is usually strong in societies with early marriage culture (PRB Policy Brief, 2011; Jensen and Thornton, 2003; Akpan, 2003). In cultures where there is a strong demand for young brides, delaying marriage attracts several disadvantages to parents and the daughters such as less bride price, higher dowry and less attractive marriages (Jensen and Thornton, 2003). Parents and their daughters are compelled under such circumstances to comply with the early marriage tradition even against their wish. The variation may also indicate a tendency for Southern and North central women to acknowledge their singleness more than women in the Northeast and Northwest where Islam is the dominant religion and women are less literate. In her analysis of private and public patriarchy, Walby (1989) argues that Muslim women are more subject to private patriarchy than other women. They are therefore, more likely to show restraint in acknowledging singleness in public. These partly account for why only a few women remain unmarried in later age of 30 and above in the Northeast and Northwest zones.

In addition, the southern states predominate in certain other conditions that increase the incidence of spinsterhood such as female education, employment, and media access. Education and employment affect women's desire and opportunity to marry. Economic empowerment of women through employment raises women's desiderata for suitable marriage partner (Berg-Cross et al., 2004), a situation that positions women at a disadvantage in the marriage market dominated by traditional pattern of preference for dependent women. Empirical research shows that attainment of higher secondary and tertiary education delays marriage for women and increases the likelihood of eventual non marriage (Tanturri and Mencarini, 2008; Koropecj-Cox and Call, 2007; Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000, 1994; Isiugo-Abanihe et al, 1993).

Cultural reasons may be accountable for the high rates of spinsterhood in the Southeast. Prevalence of high bride wealth in the Southeast, for instance, was found to be a factor that limits women's opportunity to marry (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000, 1994). The findings on determinants of spinsterhood in this study confirm the limitation imposed on women by high bride wealth culture. The respondents who mentioned high bride wealth as a reason for spinsterhood were either Igbo or spoke about it in reference to the Igbo. In addition, some of the Igbo respondents in the In-depth Interview and Group Discussion argued that there is a trend among Igbo men to marry from other ethnic groups where bride wealth is lower. A trend of interethnic marriage by Igbo men breaks down Igbo endogamous culture and makes it more difficult for Igbo women to find suitable Igbo husbands. In addition to persistent high bride wealth among the Igbo, high prevalence of spinsterhood in that zone may be due to high prevalence of Catholic religious celibates in that zone. It is also likely a cumulative effect of an Eastern Nigeria government legislation in 1956 that abolished child marriage;. Uchendu (1965) noted that age at first marriage for both men and women began to rise from that time.

Paradoxically, the Southwest zone had the lowest rate of spinsterhood not only in the Southern zones but in all age groups from age 40-85+ across all zones of Nigeria. This is contrary to the findings that link higher incidence of non marriage to higher prevalence of education and economic activity for women (Koropeckyj-Cox and Call, 2007; Berg-Cross et al., 2004; Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000). The Southwest zone has high rates of literacy, educational attainment and employment of women. The low pattern of spinsterhood in this zone may be due to cultural and religious reasons. Unlike the Southeast with predominantly Christian population, the Southwest has a mixture of Muslims and Christians. Catholic and protestant Christians in Nigeria have been found to marry later than persons of other religions, having SMAM of 21.1 and 22.4 respectively (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000). It is therefore, likely that the Islamic culture of early marriage has a strong influence in the Southwest zone. In addition, although women in the Southwest are highly literate, educated, and economically independent, NDHS (2008) report on women empowerment gives an indication that the socio-cultural system in the Southwest remains strongly patriarchal (Aina, 1998); a situation that fosters stronger stigmatisation of late and non marriage. Compared to other southern zones, the least percentage of men who think their wives should participate in decision making is found in the Southwest zone. Men in the Southwest who think their wives should participate in all decisions are only 5.6 percent compared to 17.1 percent and 24.4 percent in the Southeast and South-South zones respectively. Also, in the South zones, men in the

Southwest have the least positive attitude towards wife beating and refusal of sexual intercourse with husband. Across all geopolitical zones, men in the Southwest are least likely to agree with all the reasons that a wife is justified in refusing sex (44 percent). It is also likely that the Yoruba have stronger sense of group identification which supports marriage completion even if late. “The stronger such feelings of group identification, the more people have internalized norms of endogamy, and the more likely it is that they marry homogamously or endogamously” (Kalmijn, 1998:400). Ekiran (2003) noted Yoruba parents’ intolerance for any infringement of Yoruba codes of respect, and that most Yoruba young people do not marry anybody without the consent and traditional blessing of their parents. These are trends that are likely to make the Yoruba group more endogamous than other Southern ethnic groups. A trend of pervasive endogamy is likely to promote early and universal marriage.

Nevertheless, spinsterhood prevalence in the Southwest is expected to increase with time. Median age at first marriage is consistently high in this zone, and the attitude of women in this zone to early marriage and marriage in general is changing as evident in the narratives of spinsters of Yoruba origin both in the interviews and focus group discussion. To them, personal goals and gains should take precedence over social recognition in marriage decisions. Giddens in his Structuration theory argues that in modernity the choice of who to marry will be based on reason instead of tradition. Implicit in the attitudinal change noticeable among Yoruba spinsters is that romantic love is gradually being replaced by confluent love as argued by Giddens, which focuses on special relationships based on personal gains rather than special persons.

The current 7 percent prevalence of spinsterhood in Lagos, even though it is slightly higher than the national average is indicative of a slow to change marriage ideology and stable nuptial behaviour. The prevalence of spinsterhood in Lagos decreased from age 30-34 to age 55-59. This indicates a penchant for women in Lagos to seek marriage even in old age. A 67 year old woman in Lagos joyfully recounted how she received a proposal for marriage. She had never been married even though she has a 48 year old son and two grand children. She had always desired to marry but the opportunities eluded her in the past, and at age 67 she was still seeking spiritual help to get married when the proposal came (Singles and Married, 2009). Nonetheless, because women in Lagos have high exposure to educational and work opportunities, and media access and are quite well empowered in terms of status and autonomy (NPC and ICP Macro, 2009), spinsterhood phenomenon is expected to continue to rise in Lagos.

The trend of spinsterhood in Nigeria examined from 1991 and 2006 census, and Demographic and Health Surveys conducted in 1990, 1999, 2003 and 2008 showed a rising trend in spinsterhood. This suggests that the country will continue to experience steady increase in the number of women who remain unmarried in their thirties and above. Older never married women age 45-49 increased 3.2 times over 15 years. This is indicative of increasing number of women who will remain permanently single. Previous studies show that women who are in their forties, close to the end of female reproductive years, are most likely to accept permanent singleness (Dykstra and Poortman, 2010; Macvarish, 2006; Smith, 1980). It is expected that these older never married women will continue to increase in number with time and may remain childless, or become single mothers, a situation that will alter Nigeria's extant family structure. This trend supports Isiugo-Abanihe (1998:33-34) that "though marriage is relatively stable and universal in Nigeria, there is an increasing tendency for Nigerian marriages to depart from their traditional form and cohesiveness"

#### **4.7.2 Determinants of Spinsterhood**

Several factors were responsible for the prevailing rate of spinsterhood in Lagos, the major determinant being economic empowerment. Paid employment according to Walby (1989) is a patriarchal structure that restricts the choices available to women. Berg-Cross et al (2004) argued that the globalization of economic empowerment of women is one strong reason why women postpone or reject marriage the world over. Economic empowerment fuelled by individualism raises women's expectations and requirements for a desired partner. They found evidence for this assertion in the USA, Japan, Germany, Poland and India. Alam et al., (2008) found women's participation in work a major determinant of later marriage in Bangladesh. These previous findings are confirmed by the highest number of quotations (n=53) associated with economic empowerment found in the present study as a reason or motivation for prolonged marital delay among women in Lagos. The major reasons why women in this study sought economic empowerment before marriage were economic decline, financial independence, domestic egalitarianism, and the need to be a "deciding, shaping human being" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:22 cited in Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004) rather than an appendage to a man, and the role model effect of successful women.

For some of the spinsters economic empowerment is necessary to avoid the mistakes of women who lost opportunity to secure sustainable livelihood and career after marriage. This supports a research finding that women's wage growth is adversely affected by marriage because the woman's career usually takes a back seat after marriage, if the man also has a career (Loughraan and Zissimopoulos, 2004).

Some respondents attributed their need for economic empowerment to culture. To them women in most Nigerian cultures are not usually full time house wives. They work to support their husbands in various ways. So, they do not want to be “liabilities” to their would-be husbands. Previous studies confirm this cultural connotation of economic empowerment. The Nigerian woman is active and has always contributed to family economic well being through involvement in agricultural and trading activities (Oluwasola, 1998). It is in fact, a mark of a complete Yoruba woman to have an independent economic activity (Aina, 1998). Nevertheless, due to patriarchal household structure, women may not have full control of the cash earned from their economic activities. When they have considerable control, a large proportion of their cash earning is spent on household needs (Akorede, 2010; Bruce, 1995). Some subjects in this study believed that having a means of livelihood ensures a happy marriage and assures a woman of some level of respect from her husband and in-laws. Nonetheless, possession of means of livelihood does not guarantee marital bliss. Previous studies in Nigeria show that engagement in paid employment does not guarantee marital happiness or stability for Nigerian women. Marriage and work imposes much stress on married women in Nigeria due to the persistent unequal share of housework by women and men, and difficulty in finding reliable domestic servants (Olu-Olu, 2007; Oderinde, 2002; Fapohunda, 1982).

Economic empowerment to the research subjects was also considered a means of securing advantage in household power relations. Walby (1989) observed that the experience and effect of patriarchy varies across groups of women. To her, middle class women confront less patriarchal restrictions than working class and less educated women. Nevertheless, possession of individual level asset such as income does not necessarily guarantee benefits in power negotiation in the home, for women in less gender-egalitarian societies (Fuwa 2004). This previous finding suggests that economic empowerment may not translate into respect and freedom for married women in Lagos, and by extension, Nigeria, if macro level gender inequality persists.

The spinsters submitted that the need for economic independence is not just about financial security; it is also about the need to be “a deciding, shaping human being” who exercises control over her choices and life (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002:22 cited in Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). In case of a conflictual marriage for instance, the woman can make a choice to leave if she has independent livelihood. Surtees (2003) argued that young brides who have no independent means of livelihood are trapped in abusive marriages because they depend on the men for livelihood. Buss (2003) found that women who are more

successful than their husbands are twice as likely to leave their husbands if they are unhappy (cited in Berg-Cross, et al., 2004). Also, due to widowhood right challenge, and lack of strict alimony laws in Nigeria, in case of marital dissolution through death, divorce or separation, an economically empowered woman can survive on her own. Economic empowerment introduces resistance to the patriarchal structure that views women as dependent attachment to men, and the husband-breadwinner and wife-house wife role dichotomy. In the modern time, the ascribed role of wife and mother works side by side with the need to be a deciding person (Giddens, 2006).

Economic empowerment was found to affect some spinsters' desire to marry, especially if they have sure and stable means of livelihood. Previous research show that economic opportunities and independence for women leads to reduced desirability of marriage (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000, 1998; Ferguson, 2000). Having less desire to enter into a union increases the likelihood of remaining single (Goldscheider and Waite, 1986 cited in Dykstra and Poortman, 2010). As more women enter the labour force compelled by necessity or in response to increasing economic opportunities the more economically independent they become (Llyod and South 1996 cited in Lamanna and Riedman, 2003; Bruce, 1995; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1995), a factor which according to Isiugo-Abanihe (1994a) engenders autonomy and makes women less apt to marry. Previous studies found that the desire to enter a marital union declines considerably for women of economic means, partly due to less economic need to find a spouse (Tanturri and Mencarini, 2008; Carr, 2002).

In the marriage market, socio-economic resources are important because both men and women prefer to marry resourceful spouses, independent of one's own socio-economic resources (Raley and Bratter, 2004; Kalmijn, 1998). Nevertheless, it was found in this study that actual or assumed possession of much economic resources limits a woman's opportunity to attract a suitable spouse. This confirms a research finding that whereas possessing many economic resources increases men's likelihood of union formation; it decreases likelihood for women (Dykstra and Poortman, 2010). This finding also confirms other research findings that men prefer women of lower or equal status but not higher as marriage partners (Kiernan, 1988:259 cited in Simpson 2007; Berg-Cross et al., 2004; Raley and Bratter, 2004). What men seek in a prospective wife is influenced by prevailing macro level factors such as gender norms and ideologies. In Nigeria, a woman is socialised and expected to be dependent and docile (Omokhodion, 2009; Oderinde, 2002). Wealth and independence are closely associated with masculinity in Nigeria (Smith, 2007), which accounts for why financial

independence is a hindrance to women's opportunity to marry. The rising number of spinsters in Egypt is attributed to similar finding (El-Halawany, 2009).

Engagement in employment considered un-feminine, such as policing, and work that involve long hours limited opportunities to marry for the spinsters. Walby (1989) argues that much has changed in the patriarchal culture that expects different behaviour from men and women. This is true to an extent in Nigeria, however, as in other sub-Saharan African countries, the cultural notion that women should be in certain kinds of work such as teaching and nursing still persists (Sharif, 2000).

Individual mate selection preference was found to be one of the significant factors that determine spinsterhood in Lagos. Many of the study subjects turned down marriage proposals due to their personal mate preference. That mate selection preference was a major determinant of spinsterhood in Lagos was not unexpected considering the increasing decline in arranged marriage, parental and kinship control in spouse selection in Nigeria (Smith, 2007; Ekiran, 2003; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1995) The diffusion effect of modernity has meant that individuals tend to insist on personal values, goals and gains in selecting a suitable mate (Giddens, 2006). Giddens's structuration theory posits that as more and new information is made available, individuals will exhibit greater reflexivity in all aspects of life including choice of marriage partner.

It was found that personal, economic, age, educational, ethnic, physical and religious resources expected of a would-be spouse influenced the marital decisions of spinsters. The subjects were less inclined to compromise on personal and religious resources of a suitable suitor than on other resources. Preferred personal resources of a would-be spouse were fear of God, love, care, honesty, and hard-work. The high preference for men who fear God was not unexpected in a society with pervasive imbalance in power relations in the home, and high prevalence of extra-marital sex among men (Smith, 2007; Orubuloye et al., 1995; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994b). Wives rarely challenge extra-marital sex by husbands because confronting the man may end the marriage or limit the benefits a woman gets from her husband (Smith, 2007). Perhaps men who fear God are less patriarchal and more sexually faithful than men who do not. However, if fear of God is based on active membership and attendance of religious activities, it is likely that many Nigerian men may not possess this highly desired personal quality. Active membership and attendance of religious activities is associated with more women than men (Awe, 2002). A study conducted in Ibadan by Oladipo (2007) concluded that more women than men seek spiritual help to handle life

challenges. Seeking spiritual help in churches or mosques is one of the ways religious bodies attract membership, it is therefore likely that less men attend religious activities.

Love was a personal quality that affects the acceptability of a would-be spouse to the subjects in this study. This finding is similar to the finding in Berend (2000) that in the nineteenth century New England, single as well as married women take the ideals of marriage and love seriously, and they considered a happy marriage the happiest condition of human life. The attribution of the rising prevalence of single professional women to the globalisation of love as a primary factor in mate selection by Berg-Cross et al (2004) finds support in this study. Although many subjects would marry a man they love irrespective of shortcomings in other desired resources, it was found that the possession of other desired qualities will encourage them to fall in love. This confirms the argument in Berg-Cross et al., (2004) that women are more inclined to fall in love with a man who they perceive embodies the masculine qualities of strength, protectiveness, clear thinking and problem-solving; and are less inclined to fall in love with men who will be economically dependent on them or not an equal contributor.

Women's need for care in marriage was clearly exemplified in this study. Desire for men who are caring is a quality that was expressed by all categories of women in this study. They want men who would care for their emotional, physical as well as economic welfare. Conflictual parents' marriage where mothers were uncared for was a reason why Chinese and Japanese American women reject and delay traditional heterosexual marriage. They desired marital union better than their mother's (Ferguson, 2000). The tendency of some husbands to be uncaring is also a reason why some never married women were encouraged to become outside wives in Lagos and Ibadan (Wakaranja, 1994, 1987).

Most respondents expressed unwillingness to enter into inter-faith or denominational marital union, to marry men who are younger, less educated or earn less. It is apparent from the findings on mate selection preference that idealised image of marriage and unwillingness to accept compromise as a strategy for forming relationship is a reason for spinsterhood in Lagos. This agrees with the findings of Berend (2000) that women who become spinsters are those who are less willing to compromise their values on marriage and family life. Idealised image of marriage and unwillingness to accept compromise are found to be reasons for increasing number of single never married mothers (Siegel, 1995), and spinsters in countries such as Egypt, USA, Poland, Germany, India, where educated and highly educated women do not want to lower their desiderata for an ideal marriage mate, just to marry (El-Halawany, 2009; Berg-Cross et al., 2004).

Closely related to mate selection preference was differences in religious affiliation. Insistence on intra-faith marriage resulted in spinsterhood for some of the study subjects. Sanctions on inter-faith marriage by some denominations, and insistence on such doctrines by individual women resulted in spinsterhood. Some of the subjects lost marriage chances because they insisted on marrying within their religious groups. Kalmijn (1998) argued that perhaps the strongest group sanction against exogamy is that provided by religious groups. Kalmijn (1998) also noted that among the protestant groups it is found that denominations and religions that are more traditional in religious doctrine and have higher degree of church involvement among their members have highest degree of endogamy. Respondents who belong to conservative protestant denominations were found to insist on marrying within their groups, others regretted and blamed their spinsterhood on such conservative doctrines.

Another significant determinant of spinsterhood among the study subjects was marital experience of other women. Specifically mentioned were marital bliss, divorce and separation, intimate partner violence, unequal power relations in the home, and irresponsible fatherhood. Blissful marriage encouraged marriage and raised the women's desiderata for an ideal partner and expectation in marriage. Conversely, unhappy marriage discouraged marriage, created fear of marriage, and made never married women to be very restrictive in mate selection. In Walby's (1989) analysis of household production, she argues that divorce is easier today for women; therefore, women are no longer caged in marriage as they were. She as well as other feminist scholars view divorce as a liberating factor for women from patriarchal household exploitation. True as this is in some cases, due to widespread marriage and family ideology still prevalent in many societies, women who are single by way of divorce and separation are still subjects of stigma (DePaulo and Morris, 2005). Social Scientists still find more positive outcomes for women who become single by widowhood than women who are single by divorce or separation. Such social science findings are not unlikely to be influenced by the marriage and family ideology that marriage is the ideal adult status. Divorce and separation are still viewed as failure just like spinsterhood. This was the impression gathered from the responses of women in this study, some of whom would rather choose the "lesser failure" of remaining single than enter a bad union. This confirms that marital dissolution through divorce or separation instigates a feeling of uncertainty and fear in never married women (Lamanna and Riedmann, 2003). Some spinsters reported being counselled by friends in unhappy union to remain single and counted them lucky to be single still. This finding is similar to Sharp and Ganong's (2011) finding in the USA that divorced or married friends in unhappy marriage consider their single friends wise, strong and lucky to

be single. Perhaps, the pervasive cultural stereotyping of divorce and separation, accounts for the current low divorce rate in Nigeria. That some women who are in unhappy union prefer singleness indicates that as culture loses its grip on individual values, there will be increase in the number of women who will opt out of a bad marriage. In England and Wales, wives' dissatisfaction with marriage accounts for the rising divorce rates. In 2010, 66 percent of divorces were granted to wives, and in over half of the cases, husband's behaviour was the reason for the divorce (UK Office for National Statistics, 2010).

Spinsterhood is often interpreted as the failure or fault of the woman. Spinsters are viewed as women with some fault who could not meet up with the acceptable norms of dating and marriage (Sharp and Ganong, 2011; Macvarish, 2006). The strength of the influence of failed or conflictual marriage of other women found in this study shows that spinsterhood is as much a consequence of the flaws in marriage/family institution and patriarchal system as it is of individual choices. Thus, Byrne's (2003) position is strengthened, that the flaws and contradictions in the marriage institution should be seen as a public issue rather than a private issue. Flaws in marriage are as much the failure of the society as that of the individual persons involved in the marriage; household patriarchal structure that disfavours women continues to exist in Lagos as well as many societies. The experience of a woman in marriage produces a ripple effect on other women. With time-space distantiation and experts systems the effect goes beyond the local context of affecting only the woman's daughters and near relatives, it transmits into tangible evidence for other women to adjust and readjust their views on marriage and family life.

Another related factor that was found to have influenced never married women's marital decisions in ways that lead to spinsterhood was marriage of significant others such as parents, guardians and other close relatives. The influence of family background on marital behaviour is well established in several empirical studies (Lleras, 2008; Henslin, 2007; Menning, 2006; Lalasz, 2004; Kapinus, 2004; Kiernan, 1992; Buvnic *et al.*, 1992; McLanahan, 1988). Result from this study showed that blissful or conflictual parents' marriage affects daughter's perception of marriage and her mate selection preference. Ferguson (2000) found a similar outcome among Japanese and Chinese American never married women. Some of the subjects in this study whose parents had good marriage viewed their father as their model husband; and those whose parents had conflictual marriage avoided men like their fathers. This attitude prolonged marital delay. There were others whose perception of marriage and ideal marriage partner was not influenced in any way by their parents' marriage. Specifically, the structure of mother's marriage, monogamous or

polygynous and her satisfaction in marriage affected marital decision of some spinsters. Many interview respondents admitted that their mothers' experience in marriage affected their perception and decisions about marriage. Not many respondents were raised by single parents. Among the few raised by single mothers, only those who were raised by single never married and outside wife mother expressed the profound negative effect of their mother's marital status; and those raised by widows admitted no negative effects on their marital decisions, even though they were inclined to positive disposition about permanent singlehood and female-headed household. This is consistent with previous studies. A research found that females reared in a one parent family, whether it is the father or mother, tend to remain single probably due to greater family responsibilities and recognition of the advantages of singlehood (Forsyth and Johnson, 1996). Living with a widowed mother is not different from living in a two-parent family in terms of outcome on children's marital behaviour (McLanahan, 1988).

The experiences of women in this study revealed that cultural beliefs and practices such as sexual attractiveness, normative marriage processes, ethnic prejudice and endogamy, high bride wealth and pronatalism affected the women's opportunity to marry. In *Theorising Patriarchy* Walby (1989) argues that culture imposes constraints on women through gender based behavioural expectations. The cultural transition from domesticity to sexual attractiveness or rather an integration of domesticity and sexual attractiveness in the case of Lagos, constrained some women in this study to spinsterhood. It was found that women who are not considered physically or sexually attractive or whose dressing is viewed as shabby lost marriage chances. Previous studies show that physically attractive people tend to be judged more positively than less physically attractive persons, connecting them to several desirable rewards including marriage (Hakim, 2010; Langlois et al., 2000 cited in McNulty et al., 2008). Sexual attractiveness and social presentations which includes style of dressing are part of the elements of erotic capital identified in Hakim (2010) that attracts advantage with the opposite sex. Male mate preference is known to favour young, attractive and healthy women (McNulty et al., 2008; Berg-Cross et al., 2004; Raley and Bratter, 2004; Orubuloye et al., 1995). That sexual attractiveness is a key sign of femininity connotes the hidden cultural interpretation of women's biology, and by implication womanhood, as primarily for men's sexual pleasure and to procreate for men. Women have to be physically and sexually attractive to be chosen and to sustain their marriages.

Experience of women in this study indicated that women who are unwilling to cut corners, circumvent traditions on marriage, who insist on 'right' tradition, and uphold the

sanctity of matrimony are less likely to marry, especially in urban centres such as Lagos where some men prefer casual/consensual union. This supports Berend's (2000) finding that spinsters tend to be women who have high value for marriage and would have the best of it or none. Ethnic prejudice and endogamous cultural practices limited the opportunity of marriage for some of the respondents. Some of them were constrained by prejudicial beliefs about other ethnic groups or the strict endogamous culture of their clan such as in the case of first daughters in certain parts of Anambra State. A previous study gave indication that most Nigerian marriages are ethnically homogamous (Ekiran 2003). High bride wealth and pronatalism were found to engender spinsterhood in this study. Previous studies linked likelihood of spinsterhood in Nigeria to these cultural factors (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000, 1994).

Gender socialisation was the least cultural factor that affected marital decisions and opportunity of women in this study. It is an indication of persistent and universal socialisation along gender lines in Nigeria. Nigerian women are socialised to expect and accept marriage and motherhood (Otite, 2006; Aina, 1998). Although some of the spinsters in this study perceived womanhood beyond marriage and motherhood, none objected to marriage as an expected mark of adult status for women.

Education, in terms of duration, influence on worldview and status enhancement, constituted one of the primary reasons for marital postponement that resulted in spinsterhood in Lagos. It was found that some subjects deliberately postponed marriage to compete desired level of education. The tendency to postpone marriage to achieve desired education supports the notion that the pursuit of individual life strategies is seen as contradictory to marital fusion. (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004; Bawin-Legros, 2004). In some cases, it was their parents' desire for them to complete education before marriage. This is similar to Ferguson's (2000) findings among Chinese and Japanese American never married women, whose parents expected to work hard, do well in school, obtain a higher education and profession and also become wives and mothers. This parental expectation also resulted in non-marriage for some of the women in Ferguson's study.

Education not only resulted in postponement of marriage for some of the research subjects, it raised their perception of marriage and ideal partner. This finding confirms previous studies that relate education to personal transformations that lead to delay in marriage (Tanturri and Mencarini, 2008; Koropecykj-Cox and Call, 2007; Raley and Bratter, 2004; Lamanna and Riedman, 2003; De Silvia, 2000; Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000, 1995; Gage and Bledsoe, 1994; Isiugo-Abanihe et al., 1993; Meekers, 1992; Adams, 1986). The change in values that accompanies education results in a form of marriage squeeze. Unlike educated

men, highly educated women face the pressure of marrying men of equal or higher status. Given the characteristic spousal age differences, this reduces the number of available suitors even when the population of highly educated men outnumbered educated women in a given society (Berg-Cross et al., 2004).

Also, respondents observed that highly educated women are disadvantaged in the marriage market because they are viewed as independent, not submissive, and smart, qualities that El-Halawany (2009) said scare an average Middle East man. Previous studies show that educated men prefer women who are less educated than they are (Berg-Cross et al., 2004; Lamanna and Riedman, 2003; Davidson and Moore, 1996).

Other modern lifestyle such as resistance to early marriage, intolerance for violence, influence of western culture and intolerance for infidelity by intimate partner were found to propel spinsterhood in Lagos. There was increasing awareness of the perniciousness of early marriage on women. To Walby (1989), violence is a patriarchal structure used by men to keep women in their subordinate place and to discourage women from challenging patriarchy. Display, traits and inclination to violence in men discouraged some of the women in this study from entering into marital relationship. There is research evidence to substantiate avoidance of men with violent traits. A Population Reference Bureau study on domestic violence in nine developing countries found that women whose fathers abused their mothers are twice as likely to suffer domestic abuse themselves (Lalasz, 2004). On the contrary, already married women in Nigeria are found to tolerate intimate partner violence; violence is not considered a reason for marital dissolution (The Nigerian CEDAW NGO Report, 2008; Aderinto et al., 2007; Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005; Orebiyi, 2002). This result and the findings about married women suggest that women in Nigeria are less likely to be tolerant of intimate partner violence before marriage than after marriage.

There is a lot of infiltration of western culture in almost all facets of life in Lagos. Some respondents thought it accounts for spinsterhood in Lagos. This supports Berg-Cross et al., (2004) that high prevalence of singlehood is a result of globalisation of American and individualistic ideals. Intolerance for intimate partner infidelity was the least modern lifestyle found to cause spinsterhood. This result was expected considering previous research that show high prevalence of extra-marital relationship by men in Nigeria, and women never see it as a reason for divorce or separation (Smith, 2007; Orubuloye et al., 1995). Extra-marital affair by men is never questioned. In fact, as Walby (1989) posits, sexual virility by men is viewed as a sign of masculinity. This notion of masculinity in Nigeria was confirmed by Smith (2007) in a study on extra-marital affairs in southeast Nigeria.

Some personal factors such as unwillingness to become a single mother or date men, sexual abstinence and preference for dates with married men resulted in spinsterhood among the research subjects. Bock (2000) argued that women who have paid their dues to some extent (having built a career and financial security), waited for suitable spouse for a long time resort to single motherhood by choice when it appears their biological clock is running out. Other studies found that never married women resort to single motherhood to redeem their reproductive years and actualise their maternal instincts (Simpson, 2007; Hertz, 2006; Siegel, 1995; Gage and Bledsoe, 1994). In contrast with these findings, women in this study did not see single motherhood as a way to quit spinsterhood. Only few were considering the option of adoption if it becomes certain that marriage will not be realised. This was expected considering that marriage is still widely regarded as the ideal setting for childbearing in Nigeria (Feyisetan and Bankole, 2002; Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000). In many Nigerian societies, women have no inheritance right and patrilineage is the prevalent custom. Children born or adopted outside of wedlock by women in Nigeria have the problem of legitimacy and acceptance into the woman's lineage, unlike in societies such as among the Mende in Sierra Leone where children born outside wedlock are accepted into the woman's father's family if there is no paternal claim on the child (Little and Price, 1967 cited in Gage and Bledsoe, 1994).

Unwillingness to date men, sexual abstinence and dates with married men were other causes of spinsterhood in Lagos. Women who want to control their sexuality by avoiding sexual relationship with men are suspected to be barren. In a pronatalist society such as Lagos, such women risk being left on the shelves as found in this study. The social notoriety associated with dating married men prevents single women in such relationship from being chosen for marriage. This finding confirms Walby's (1989) notion of contradiction in sexuality as a patriarchal structure. Women who engage in active sexual relations with men are labelled "slags", while those who do not are labelled "drags" by men. The phenomenon of "Slags" or "drags" results in disadvantage for women in the marriage market.

This study found that urbanisation and city life give rise to spinsterhood in diverse ways. Urban centres are like "no man's land", and social controls are lacking. Pfohl, (1994) noted that breakdown in normative controls is accompanied by a similar breakdown in individual moral constraints in behaviours. Cities, thus, provide a cover for both men and women to live in unrestrained freedom. Isiugo-Abanihe (1995:515) aptly noted that due to educational and economic opportunities in urban areas, urbanisation "provides an ideal

landscape” that “attracts women some of whom are freed from parental or kinship control, and prescription of when or who to marry”

City men in Lagos were found to prefer relationships that will not end in marriage. Some respondents observed a trend of polygynous fatherhood in Lagos, where a man will have children by more than one woman but is neither married nor cohabiting with any of them. This trend is a concomitant of polyandrous motherhood found in Lagos by Guyer (1994), where some women expand their social network by bearing children for different men. Increase in consensual unions has been observed in many African cities (Meekers, 1992). The trend of preference for casual sex and consensual union is likely men’s way of resisting breadwinning in a declining economy. Dowd and Pallotta, (2000), in Lamanna and Riedmann, (2003), argued that declining economy makes breadwinning more difficult and less attractive for men and makes unmarried men to postpone marriage longer. Dykstra and Poortman (2010) implied in their study that the economic contribution of women in household incomes makes consensual union increasingly affordable for low income men. This suggests that men’s preference for consensual or casual relationships will keep increasing with increasing poverty and unemployment in the urban areas (Iwasawa, 2004), and an inevitable consequence will be rising spinsterhood. In addition, the spinsters reported that women who reside in Lagos are labelled too exposed, sexually loose and independent to make good wives. City men date them but when they are ready for marriage they return to their rural communities for “more virtuous women”. Whereas the modern trend of sexual freedom and choice reinforces masculinity, sexual freedom works against women’s opportunity to marry. This, according to Walby (1989), is emblematic of patriarchal control of women’s sexuality. Nevertheless, as noted by some respondents not all city women take advantage of the sexual liberty in modernism, so they cannot all be conflated into the “slags” category.

In some countries such as Cambodia, though the status of second wife is less valued, women still prefer to be second and third wives instead of remaining unmarried, due to strong privileges attached to the roles of wife and mother (Baldwin et al., 2000 cited in Surtees, 2003). On the contrary, a majority of spinsters in this study irrespective of socio-economic background expressed strong aversion to polygyny. The avoidance of polygyny stems from the negative experiences of mothers and other women in polygynous union. Previous studies in Nigeria point to the ill effects of polygyny on women. Aina (1998) argued that polygyny promotes conflicts and instability in homes as a man tries to give his attention to his wives and children. She further cited Olusanya (1970) that polygyny is an exploitative

structure against women. Polygyny imposes financial stress on women. Unlike women in monogamous unions, women in polygynous union contribute more to children's welfare needs including education than their husbands (Akorede, 2010).

Polygyny was considered a way to absorb excess women (Gage and Bledsoe 1994; Mann 1994), but it is fast losing its fancy among women as shown in this study. Previous studies show that the prevalence of polygyny in Nigeria as well as other African countries is declining (DHS, 2011; Smith, 2007; Timaeus and Reynar 1998 cited in Coast, 2006; Isiugo-Abahine and Obono, 1999; Meekers, 1992). It has also been found that elite women do not generally accept de jure polygyny (Mann 1994; WaKaranja, 1987), education and Christianity also influence women against polygyny (Coast, 2006; Mann, 1994; WaKaranja 1994, 1987; Isiugo-Abanihe et al., 1993). Considering these previous findings and the aversion to polygyny by spinsters in Lagos, the most likely option to excess women is single hood.

Circumstantial factors such as broken engagement, death of would-be spouse and lack of marriage proposal were also determining factors of spinsters in Lagos. Respondents who experienced death of would-be spouse found it difficult to be impressed by other men because they keep thinking the deceased is the best. Emotional shock arising from broken engagement or disappointment in a long-time date led to disinterest in men and dates.

Walby (1989) conceptualizes the state as a source of public patriarchy that limits women. State issues that were found to affect marital decisions and opportunity for women in this study were economic decline and discriminatory legislation on marriage in the Nigerian police force. Due to increasing family nucleation and neo-locality, and rising standards of living in Lagos, it takes men who desire marriage in its traditional and conservative form, longer time to acquire the requisite wherewithal for such marriage. The result is that at each point in time, men who are economically ready for marriage are fewer than women who are ready for marriage. In a Sri Lankan study, De Silva (2000) found a similar shortage of eligible marriage partners for women. Other studies show that economic decline increases men's as well as women's age at first marriage, more so in societies where requirement for bride wealth and dowry is relatively high (Mohammed, 2012; Raley and Bratter, 2004, Isiugo-Abanihe, 1995). Late marriage in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe was attributed to economic decline and people's insistence on attaining a certain standard of living before marriage (Hajnal, 1971).

Other determinants of spinsters in Lagos were parental objection, family obligations and birth order. Some women were found to have become spinsters because of

their felt obligation to their natal families. A few who are first daughters were laden with family responsibilities, especially those from polygynous and poor family background, that limited their marital decisions and opportunity. In a USA study among Chinese and Japanese American never married women Ferguson (2000) found birth order one of the major determinants of singlehood among her subjects because of family dependence on their wage labour.

This study provides empirical evidence to authenticate the notion that the universality of marriage in Nigeria is being threatened. Isiugo-Abanihe (2000) noted that nuptiality pattern in Nigeria is changing. He attributed the change to breakdown of traditional pattern of mate selection and norms of early and universal marriage, increasing female education, migration and social emancipation. The reasons for spinsterhood found in this research confirm his observation, indicating that traditional pattern of early and universal marriage in Nigeria will continue to disintegrate, as the factors that give rise to spinsterhood continue to expand.

In addition to the above non-demographic determinants of spinsterhood in Lagos, evidence of demographic marriage squeeze was found in 2006 population census. Spousal age difference in a typical Nigerian marriage is 5-10 years (Smith, 2007; Ekiran, 2003), and preferred spousal age disparity by subjects in this study was 1-12 years. The five-year or ten-year spousal difference showed that men who are of marriageable age were fewer than the women they would typically marry. The shortage of marriageable single men may be due to out-migration of men from Lagos to foreign countries considering that in sub-Saharan Africa more men than women migrate to urban centres (Agesa and Agesa, 1999). One major consequence of marriage squeeze is increase in the number of spinsters and likelihood of permanent non marriage for females. The squeeze can be reduced if spousal age gap is reduced, or women marry men of same age. De Silva (2000) found a similar outcome in Sri Lanka.

The study revealed that the prevailing rate of spinsterhood in Lagos was a result of marriage squeeze and several non-demographic determinants. Analysis of both the primary and secondary data indicated that marriage is the expected ideal adult status. Therefore, women who remain unmarried at age 30 and above confront several challenges in their natal families, residential neighbourhood, places of work and worship.

#### **4.7.3 Consequences of spinsterhood**

There was profound evidence from the narratives of the study subjects that spinsterhood was a stigmatised status in Lagos. The evidence is based on perceived and

direct experiences, as well as observations of the spinsters. Byrne and Carr (2005) argued that singles themselves must perceive the discriminatory action for it to be termed stigma. But, DePaulo and Morris (2005) argued that it is still discrimination albeit unnoticed. The overwhelming evidence could be attributed to the fact that all the subjects were involuntary temporary single women; who are more likely to report dissatisfaction with their civil status (Lamanna and Riedmann, 2003). The pervasive negative social identity of always single women also means that these women will construct their image more negatively and are more likely to interpret unintended attitude and actions as stigma. In spite of this, the large evidence is suggestive that single womanhood is highly stigmatised.

Name-calling and insults were found to be common experience of spinsters in this study. More often it was a hard way of reminding them to conform to the norm of marriage and motherhood in spite of their achievement in the public sphere. This supports previous Nigerian studies (Obiefuna, 2011; Oderinde, 2002). The spinsters' status and opinion were denigrated by family members and office colleagues, especially married women who think spinsters have no family experience. Family life experience and knowledge of family issues are not confined to experience in heterosexual partnering. Research have shown that single women construct meaningful family life outside heterosexual coupling, through caring commitments to parents and children (Simpson, 2003), and through friendship (Simpson, 2006; Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004; Trimberger, 2002). The findings on denigration of spinsterhood in Lagos confirms previous studies that single womanhood is still viewed as a denigrated status (Byrne, 2008, 2003, 2000; Hertel et al., 2007; Macvarish, 2006; DePaulo and Morris, 2005; Sandfield and Percy 2003). Spinsters were usually suspected to have something physiologically, spiritually or morally wrong with them. This finding was expected considering that among the Igbo of Nigeria for instance, remaining unmarried permanently is regarded as a social evil (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994a). Spinsterhood attracted disrespect in Lagos irrespective of age and achievement in the public sphere.

Spinsters in Lagos experienced difficulty in renting residential apartment. Asking a woman if she is married or engaged before renting a place to her is an expression of the ideology that a woman should be under a man at every stage of her life course. Renting an apartment alone is a deviation from that norm and exposes women to independence and personal control of their sexuality. That some landlords accept a single woman's rent offer only if she presents a man as a her husband or fiancé shows that they are acting out the patriarchal culture of sexuality and upholding the pervasive marriage and family ideology. This finding confirms previous studies. Isiugo-Abanihe and Obono (1999) observed that in

sub-Saharan Africa, female-headed household is viewed as a direct challenge to patriarchy, and women who live alone are scorned and labeled sexually promiscuous. To confirm that singles in the USA experience discrimination in house rental Morris, Sinclair and DePaulo (2007) conducted multiple experiments. Participants in each experiment consistently preferred married couples to the various types of singles. The results of their study suggest that landlords prefer renting properties to married couples. Though the reasons could range from religious beliefs to preference for dual income family, that there is strong preference for married persons is attributed to the pervasive marriage and family ideology in the USA.

Many spinsters reported loss of friends who got married; only a few of the respondents maintained close relationship with their married friends. Loss of friendship ties following partnership and marriage, exclusion of singles from activities involving married persons all indicate the privileging of marriage over other relationships. In Sharp and Ganong (2011) loss of friendship was found to be one of the experiences of single women as their friends get married. Some spinsters in Lagos were found to experience harassment, threats and violence from male neighbours, and maltreatment from neighbours. Others encountered situations where their marital status became an issue of shame and embarrassment. The vulnerability of spinsterhood gave some men opportunity to cheat and defraud spinsters, especially in the guise of marriage proposal. Discriminatory regulations in medical allowance, end of the year gifts, excuses from work, exist in some offices in Lagos on the basis of civil status. Married persons receive more favourable treatment than the single. Spinsters were found to experience denial of employment opportunity, due promotion and positions, on account of their singlehood.

In spite of gains that have been made in the social identity of women, due to the feminist movements and legislations, single womanhood has remained a stigmatised status in many societies. Recent empirical studies in the USA show that in spite of the growing number of never married women, spinsterhood remains a stigmatised status (Sharp and Ganong, 2011; Morris, Sinclair and DePaulo, 2007; DePaulo and Morris, 2005; Byrne and Carr, 2005) because of persistent ideology that defines femininity in terms of connection with a man (Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003) and portrays compulsory heterosexuality as normative. In Ireland, Byrne (2008) found that spinsters are stigmatised. In Britain, in spite of public de-stigmatisation of spinsterhood, that status is still seen as a failure, achievement in the public sphere is still denigrated if one is not married (Simpson, 2007, 2006; Macvarish, 2006). In Malaysia, older single women experience stigma (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009). In support of these previous studies, spinsters in this study experience all types of interpersonal

and institutional discrimination which signifies that spinsterhood is still a stigmatised status in Lagos and perhaps the entire Nigeria.

In addition to stigma, women in this study were found to experience extensive pressure to enter into a heterosexual union for marriage or to have a child. In previous studies, spinsters experience pressure to marry in diverse forms (Sharp and Ganong, 2011; Macvarish, 2006; Byrne, 2003; Gage and Bledsoe, 1994). In the USA, the majority of young adults experience less parental pressure to marry, nonetheless, “many American parents remain vexed when their offspring approach a thirtieth birthday without at least one marriage in the record” (Shostak 1987:355 cited in Lamanna and Riedmann 2003). DePaulo and Morris (2005) argued that women experience more pressure to marry than men. This is confirmed by the narrative of some respondents who thought the pressure to marry and stigma associated with non marriage is more of a woman issue. They know many men who are in their forties and fifties but the spot light is never on them to marry as it is on women. The common responses to pressure to marry found in this study were weeping and a firm decision to keep waiting for the right man instead of marrying just anybody. Waiting for the right person amidst pressure to marry is a response similar in previous studies (Sharp and Ganong, 2011; Byrne, 2008, 2003; Reynolds et al., 2007; Macvarish, 2006).

Though the subjects wished to marry, and perceive that their womanhood is validated through marriage and motherhood; some of them would go ahead with their life goals even without marriage. Going on with their personal goals in education, career and business indicates that older never married women can validate their womanhood through other means besides marriage and motherhood. This is similar to the finding among Malay Muslim single women in Malaysia (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009). This finding is also an indication that singlehood would be a positive identity for older never married women if the macro level gender ideology transforms and if there was any form of cultural validation for single status. In India, though over 80 percent of women marry, and only 2.5 percent are never married but their culture affirms a woman who remains unmarried to take care of aged parents; and their religion exalts sexual celibacy. In a way single women in India are not as stigmatised as expected in societies with conservative marriage ideologies (DePaulo, 2008).

One of the consequences of spinsterhood that was obvious from the narratives of the respondents in the interviews and group discussions was the issue of identity construction. There is no cultural validation for spinsterhood in most Nigerian cultures. Marriage and motherhood remain the normatively accepted adult status for women in Nigeria (Smith, 2007; Taylor, 2002; Agbasiere, 2000; Aina, 1998; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1998). The narratives of

the subjects indicated that spinsterhood is negatively constructed in Lagos. The social identity of spinsters in Lagos included prostitutes, difficult, husband snatchers, old, too independent, choosy, too expensive, frustrated, aggressive, ugly, leftover, and bereft of good character, angry, occultic, and even a witch. This finding confirms Byrne (2003:15) that

social identities for single women revolved around stereotypes of fussy, selfish, choosy, particular, spinsters, women who were dried up, 'staid, old, not living', single women who hated men, old maids, wallflowers, women who were left on the shelf and who had 'something wrong with them.

Cultural norms such as this inhibit the development of positive self identity of women (Orebiyi, 2002).

In spite of modernity and the declining influence of tradition on individual intimate life choices, there was obvious influence of tradition in the self identity construction of spinsters in this study. Irrespective of the majority view that singleness is better than a bad marital union, the subjects in this study were still expecting to validate their womanhood through marriage. Only a few of the respondents viewed singleness as an acceptable alternative lifestyle. This confirms Byrne's (2003) argument that the prevalent social identity makes it difficult for single women to accept singleness as a normal lifestyle. The majority preference for singleness to a bad marriage probably portrays the increasing importance of the conditions of marriage to women (Bruce, 1995) rather than a rejection of marriage or acceptance of singleness. It is also likely that these women who were still expecting to marry in their forties want to marry for cultural conformity rather than the perceived value of marriage. Nevertheless, a few who were in their late thirties and forties were considering quitting marriage pursuit and settle for lifelong spinsterhood. In Ferguson (2000), the women who no longer desire to marry were older than forty five years. To them, having passed the age of thinking about marriage and having children, they did not want to unsettle their comfort of living alone.

The issue of ambivalence of desiring marriage and acquiescence of singlehood was also found in the narration of single women in previous studies; whose narration of their self identity was like a dance between choice and chance (Reynolds et al., 2007; Macvarish, 2006). Reynolds et al. (2007) concluded that even though the respondents worked with new resources that allowed them to appear active and empowered, they continued to draw on older discursive resources of a woman wanting a relationship or waiting for a man. Ambivalent response about identity is a reflection of the effect of macro-level marriage and family ideology, which, according to Barrett and McIntosh's (1998) anti-social family

perspective, makes life outside the assumed conventional heterosexual coupledness pale and to seem out of course (Byrne, 2008, 2003; DePaulo and Morris, 2005). Even though women in this study would rather stay single than get into a conflictual marriage, the majority did not think singleness promises any life fulfilment.

The narratives of spinsters in this study on why they have remained unmarried and how they experience singleness did not portray the contemporary spinster in Lagos as yet in the identity “dilemma of representing oneself as a powerful woman with agency and control in her intimate relationships” (Reynolds et al., 2007). They were still locked up in the patriarchal conception of womanhood as heterosexual, married and reproductive, and the cultural representation of singleness as a personal deficit (Byrne, 2003; Reynolds and Wetherell 2003). Byrne (2003) argued that the acceptability of singleness by single women is an agency for change of their social identity. Nevertheless, the narratives of women in this study do not position them as having agency to transform the choices open in intimate relationships or the prevalent social identity of spinsters.

Loneliness was one of the challenges of spinsters in Lagos, but not all of them experienced it. Spinsterhood is a period when most siblings and close friends are married, thus, spinsters’ social network is greatly diminished. This confirms Barrett and McIntosh’s (1998) position in their *Anti-social Family* that family members are so enclosed in family life that they ignore social contact with others. Couples interact with other couples, finding it difficult to fit in single people. To some, their feeling of loneliness was aggravated by financial challenge and sole responsibility for domestic maintenance. Sole responsibility for domestic maintenance as one of the challenges of spinsterhood was identified by single women in Byrne (2003). Nonetheless, research also shows as confirmed in his study, that loneliness is also reported by persons who are currently in marital union (Cargan, 1981 in Hertel, et al., 2007). Giddens et al. (2003) argued that the family could also be a locus for loneliness for married women.

Although spinsterhood enhances wage and career growth for some women (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009; Loughran and Zissimopoulos, 2004; Oderinde, 2002) inadequate finance has been identified as one of the challenges of single women, especially those who do not have steady and good jobs (Lamanna and Riedmann, 2003). Lamanna and Riedmann (2003) noted that satisfaction with singleness depends to some extent on income; hardship can impose heavy restrictions on such women. This notion was confirmed by the narratives of respondents who said they were not finding spinsterhood easy because of heavy financial responsibilities.

The preoccupation of spinsters in care giving found in this study confirms previous studies that associate spinsterhood with caring for family and non-family (Hassan and Ibrahim, 2009; Byrne, 2008, 2003; Simpson, 2003; Trimmerger, 2002). In the USA, for instance, 84 percent of never married women help their parents compared to 68 percent of married women (Gerstel, 2011). One of the previous studies argued that marriage and family ideology entail that single women are more likely than their married siblings to be expected to provide care to aging parents because they do not have husbands and children to care for (Byrne and Carr, 2005). Spinsters in this study confirmed the exploitative nature of care-giving to relatives. Relatives expect that spinsters have excess cash and time to spare being single; and many respondents provided more financial care to relatives than their married siblings.

Fear of permanent singleness and childlessness was one of the consequences of spinsterhood found in this study. Fear of permanent singleness and childlessness was found in a recent study in the USA by Sharp and Ganong, (2011). It was also found with spinsters interviewed by Macvarish (2006), and Simpson (2006) in the United Kingdom. To some of the women in Macvarish's study, in as much as they enjoyed some pleasures living single they still struggled to end their single status because of the painful fear of remaining permanently single and childless. The single women worried about who inherits their property after death. Some spinsters enjoyed caring for relatives but resented the idea of having another person's wife or husband be the beneficiary of their property after death.

A recurrent phrase used by the research subjects in articulating their experiences as spinsters was "it is not easy". Spinsters, like widows have a common deficit status - lack of connection with a man in a heterosexual union (Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003). Thus, many of the research subjects weep and bemoan this lack, irrespective of their socio-economic status. The few women who expressed satisfaction with their single status were in their thirties and forties. Previous studies found that unlike single women in their 20s and 30s, never married women in their mid thirties and older express less dissatisfaction with singlehood and are less hopeful about marriage (Davies, 2003 cited in Sharp and Ganong, 2011; Byrne, 2003).

Widespread dissatisfaction with singleness found in this study, underscores the strength of a cultural system that upholds marriage as the normative adult feminine status, in shaping the quality of life lived by individual women who are spinsters. Previous studies show that in spite of success in career or other public activities, never married women express dissatisfaction with singleness, mainly because remaining single is like disappointing

their near relatives, and the widespread anti-social family ideology that secludes unmarried persons and pales their life (Sharp and Ganong, 2011; Byrne, 2008; Macvarish, 2006). Five spinsters in this study who claimed satisfaction with their current civil status are graduates of Universities and Polytechnics who were currently in stable employment. Although they were few, their satisfaction with singlehood suggest a likelihood of a future trend of acceptance of “sologamy” as a lifestyle among highly educated women in Nigeria. Berg-Cross et al. (2004) concluded from studies in various countries on single professional women that for a significant segment of the female intellectual community – highly educated women- the future is sologamy. The finding also confirms Tanturri and Mencarini’s (2008:64-65) notion that women from high social background have less incentive to enter into marriage, because they are “more receptive to alternative values and to the new cultural orientations, such as those emphasising autonomy and individualism”.

Some spinsters in this study reported experiences of frustration and depression. Some studies suggest that single women have lower self esteem than married women (Waite and Gallagher, 2000; O’Neill, 2009). To Byrne and Carr (2005) what accounts for this low self esteem and higher levels of depressed affect in singles found in these studies is the fact that the construction of self identity is basically influenced by prevailing macro level ideologies and the perception of significant others. Faced with such negative social identity spinsters are more likely to construct an image of themselves that is low and depressed (Fuwa, 2004; Byrne, 2003).

One of the positive consequences of spinsterhood identified in this study was independence and privacy. Spinsters were able to engage in certain activities that marriage may not have permitted. Also, they relished freedom from routine domestic activities such as cooking even when one is indisposed to cook. This finding confirms previous studies that single women recognise independence as one of the advantages of singleness and many of them value their independence (Byrne, 2008, 2003; Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003).

In conclusion, the negative consequences were more because all the spinsters in this study were involuntary spinsters. Lamanna and Riedmann (2003) observed that involuntary spinsters are qualitatively different from voluntary spinsters; and are more likely to report that they are unhappy. This also means that they are more likely to construct their single status more negatively. Macvarish (2006) argued that internal sense of self may have some role to play in the way single women express their experiences with others – the married persons and the society. Due to inner sense of failure, spinsters are likely to misinterpret well-intended actions or words by others. Albeit, inner sense of failure due to non marriage

or delayed marriage is fuelled by the macro ideology that idealises marriage as the perfect adult status if one is not a religious celibate. Also, that an action is not intended to stigmatise or pressure a spinster to marry does not make it less offensive if the spinsters perceives it as stigma.

The last objective of this study was to investigate what mechanisms spinsters employ to cope with the challenges of spinsterhood in a society with pervasive pro-marriage culture. It was found that although there were some variations in preferred coping mechanisms according to age, class and ethnic origin, certain strategies were commonly employed by spinsters of diverse backgrounds.

#### **4.7.4 Spinsters' coping mechanisms**

Religion, especially Christianity, was a foremost coping mechanism of spinsters in this study. Hope, comfort and welcoming environment provided by religion was found be vital ways these involuntary spinsters cope with the numerous challenges of spinsterhood. A previous study confirms that religion provides solace and community for single women (Hills, 2003). Other studies found that women are driven to religion due to their sense of unworthiness and inferiority complex, so they search for people who can pray for them (Oladipo, 2007; Awe, 2002). Although for older cohorts of women born between 1890 and 1930, Dykstra and Hagestad (2007) found from studies conducted in Australia, Finland, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Spain and Israel that never married childless women were particularly likely to be active in church and to attend religious services more frequently.

Although Anti-Social Family perspective posits that familism pales life outside the normative family form and makes it difficult for relationships of trust and security to be formed outside of one's kin, this study found that single women form caring and supportive relationships outside the family. They maintained close, affectionate and caring relationships with their families and friends. This underscores the suffusion of family of fate and family of choice in the role of support and comfort (Simpson, 2006; Pahl and Spencer, 2004). Previous studies report that family and friendship are central in the emotional and social lives of never married women (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009; Simpson, 2007, 2006, Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004; Trimmerger, 2002). The trend in a place like Lagos may not be away from family of fate (origin) but a choice of who to maintain intimate non sexual relationship with based on need for affirmation and support. The vital role of non-sexual friendship as family, and source of social support especially for single women has been shown in previous studies (Simpson, 2006; Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004; Phal and Spencer, 2004; Lamanna and

Riedman, 2003; Trimberger, 2002). Though friendship is not culturally recognized as a valid source of intimacy, yet it served as family for some of the spinsters in this study. For some, their commitment was more with friends than family in cultivating and maintaining a positive feeling about being single. This supports the notion that individuals choose who becomes priority for them, how much commitment they give to a relationship (Pahl and Spencer, 2004). That it is family of fate does not make it less subject to choice when it comes to provision of support and comfort for spinsters. This finding counters the notion that singleness is emblematic of individualism, and anti family, and underscores the potency of Roseneil and Budgeon's (2004) argument that sociologists may not appreciate the various forms people are organizing their personal lives if the conservative idea of family is not decentred.

Engagement in paid or self employment served as a major coping mechanism for spinsters in Lagos, especially for those who enjoy their work. In spite of the patriarchal nature of paid employment, Walby (1989) observed that work is a liberating factor for women. Employment improves psychological well being and self esteem for many women (London et al., 2004). In a previous study, career and work offer single women alternative identity (Byrne, 2003). On the contrary, the single women in Macvarish (2006), most of whom are in professional and stable careers, made effort to disassociate their identity from their career, to avoid the stigma associated with career woman as anti-family. Even though work is a coping strategy for single women, ultimately the spotlight is turned on one's private life (Macvarish, 2006), and such women are often reminded of their "incompleteness" (Sharp and Ganong, 2011; Oderinde, 2002).

Adoption, especially of a female child, was a coping mechanism some spinsters were planning to adopt if the likelihood of marriage is ruled out for them. The major reasons why these spinsters considered the option of adoption were care in old age, inheritance, and to satisfy maternal instincts. Other research on single women found similar outcomes (Simpson, 2007; Bock, 2000; Siegel, 1995). Professionals and women who were in their forties and late thirties constituted the subjects who were either planning to adopt a child or thought adoption is a course spinsters can adopt to satisfy maternal instinct or avoid lack of care in old age, and uncertainty about who inherits their property. This finding supports past studies. Bock (2000) in his study of middle and upper class white single mothers by choice in the USA found that they constitute women who have paid their dues in waiting for marriage for a long time, and have attained enough financial stability to maintain a lone family. Most of the women in Bock's study were over 35 years old when they decided to become single mothers.

When spinsters in this study actualise their adoption plans, these women will fit into the super mom category identified by Hertz (2006) who can no longer wait for marriage before they start pushing baby carriage.

Another coping mechanism spinsters adopt was engagement in activities that make them happy such as singing, cooking, reading inspirational books and articles. This mechanism was helpful in dealing with anxiety and loneliness.

Cross-generation sex was found to be one of the mechanisms spinsters in Lagos employ to cope with inadequate finance and unfilled sexual need. Nevertheless, in general, sexual relationship with men as a coping strategy was quite unpopular with spinsters in this study. Byrne (2003) suggested that the stigma of singleness can be reduced if single women show interest in becoming partnered. Some of the spinsters in this study reported being advised by people to engage in sexual relationship with men to demonstrate their willingness to marry and to elongate their fecundity. Even though this counsel is understandable, one wonders how many sexual relationships is enough to demonstrate a woman's interest in marriage. In fact, some respondents thought it is futile engaging in such relationship with never married men because they will eventually leave them for younger women. These older single women did not want to engage in sexual relationship with men just to satisfy men or even themselves sexually. They want a relationship that will end in marriage. It seems these older women are resisting the identity of women as sex objects. There are women known to them who have had sexual relationships with men and even got pregnant but were disappointed after all. Therefore, they are not ready to engage in such relationships just for the purpose of luring men to marriage or to demonstrate their fertility.

Even though titles and marital status are required in almost every official document, where possible, some spinsters avoided use of title before their names. Requirements of titles and wearing of wedding or engagement rings increased the spinsters' feeling of embarrassment and awkwardness. Although not mentioned in Sharp and Ganong's study in a similar form, titles and marital status magnify spinsters' social reality and acts as a constant reminder that they are on a deviant life pathway (Sharp and Ganong, 2011).

To cope with inadequate finance and loneliness, some spinsters shared residence with friends or relatives. Co-residence with friends and family was found in Byrne (2003). Some of the women in her study decided to share residence with others partly to alleviate the burden of domestic chores but also for companionship and communication.

The study found that some spinsters withdrew from social interactions in their neighbourhood and places of work, to cope with the mounting pressure to marry. Withdrawal

from social interactions implicates anti-social family that makes no social room for persons outside the family. Police protection and counselling were other coping strategies that assuaged the challenges of spinsterhood for the research subjects.

#### **4.7.5 Demographic implications of the findings**

This study found substantial evidence of marriage delays and non-marriage at advanced ages among women in Lagos. This is expected to continue in Lagos as well as other Nigerian cities, especially in the southern and central parts of the country. Female education and employment in the formal sector will continue to increase, and the world view, life style and perspectives of women would continue to conform to those of the West, exacerbated by globalisation. As women move up in the career ladder, the incidence of involuntary as well as voluntary spinsterhood would increase, and more women would start to question and challenge patriarchal structures on which marriage is anchored. The tendency toward delayed marriage and extended periods of spinsterhood would affect fertility negatively, almost in line with the Malthusian proposition although for a different motivation.

Timing and late or non occurrence of marriage are substantially different but interlinking demographic variables. Delayed marriage results in spinsterhood and permanent non-marriage (Dykstra and Poortman, 2010). Historically, the fertility decline in Europe (Khatun, 2008), and some countries that have recently completed the demographic transition, is largely a function of delayed marriage and non-marriage. The average age at first marriage in some of the western countries was 30 years. (Engelen and Kok, 2003; UN Population Division, 2003; Hajnal, 1971). In addition to decreasing high-order births within marital unions, late and non-marriage are found to be instrumental to the transition in all developed and a few developing countries where cohort and period fertility rates are below replacement level, (UN Population Division, 2003). The drastic decline in Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in Japan was attributed to increasing non-marriage, rising age at first marriage and preference for childless non-cohabiting unions (Iwasawa, 2004). Increase in the number of spinsters accounted for about 56 percent of decline in TFR in Hong Kong between 1976 and 2001 (Yip et al., 2006). Changes in the proportion married, rising age at first marriage and the concomitant retarding effect on fertility are inevitable consequence of development and modernisation, (Giddens, 2006; Smith, 1980; Davis, 1963).

The study found a strong abhorrence of pre-marital childbearing by spinsters. In other words, there is still a strong belief in Nigeria that childbearing belongs to the domain of marriage. This finding supports previous studies (Feyisetan and Bankole, 2002; Isiugo-

Abanihe, 2000). Isiugo-Abanihe (2000:44) citing Olusanya (1982) noted that “marriage in Nigeria is so closely linked to childbearing that a change in the patterns of marriage necessarily influences the birth rate and hence the rate of population growth”. Increasing number of spinsters would invariably lead to reduction in fertility and population growth rates, as these women remain childless.

In addition, late marriage is associated with reduced fecundity; spinsters who eventually marry have fewer fecund years left. This will therefore reduce marital fertility as happened in Japan, Hong Kong and other places (PRB The World at 7 Billion, 2011; Yip et al., 2006; Iwasawa, 2004; UN Population Division, 2003; Hajnal, 1971; Davis, 1963) Even if such women attempt to ‘catch-up’ by having children in quick succession, they have fewer years to do so. And because of their modern lifestyle and career, they are more likely to desire a small family size anyway. Thus, Nigeria’s TFR of 5.7 children per woman is expected to decline as more women delay marriage until age 30 and above.

A rather surprising finding of this study was that few spinsters appeared to be inclined toward child adoption, an indication that many of them were still expecting to marry. Conceivably, many of them may resort to adoption as the chance of marriage dims with increasing age. In other words, those who would adopt do so at fairly old age; this will result in large intergenerational age difference between mothers and children, which is nevertheless a positive sign for fertility transition.

Also, as educated and employed women are less likely to enter polygynous unions, the excess of unmarried women ordinarily absorbed by polygyny will remain unmarried as the number of both voluntary and involuntary spinsters increase with time. The likelihood of cohabitation, entering consensual union, or becoming ‘outside wives’; may increase, but these aberrations generally do not support high fertility.

The relatively high prevalence of spinsters in Lagos and rising trend in Nigeria portrays obvious nuptiality change in Lagos and Nigeria. Evidence of nuptiality change enhances understanding of other social change (Van de Walle, 1993). Changes in marriage are said to be a “ready barometer” of change in society (Goodkind 1996:718 cited in Coast, 2006). The rising prevalence of spinsters suggests positive change in the status of women and reduced kinship and family control on women’s decisions not only about who and when to marry but on other aspects of life. Resistance to early marriage, drive for economic empowerment, intolerance for intimate partner violence, insistence on personal goals and gains in mate selection, found in this study attest to this fact of positive change in the status of women. Improved status of women is a factor that is vitally linked to positive effects on

demographic indices such as fertility preference, maternal and infant morbidity and mortality (PRB Data Sheet, 2011; Bandarage, 1997).

Rising prevalence of spinsters implies that more and more single never married women will become household heads in childless households or always single mother household, a transformation in household structure in Lagos as well as Nigeria. The primacy of economic empowerment as a determinant of spinsterhood points to the emergence of more female bread-winners, a variable that is demographically relevant with respect to family pattern and fertility. Bandarage (1997) links the feminisation of poverty to high fertility. To her, poor women will depend on children for self-esteem and economic security. Women who are not economically empowered will accede to their husband's fertility preference and have children to retain livelihood from their husbands. Therefore, the more the number of economically empowered women, the more control women will have over their reproduction outside as well as within marriage.

Total Fertility Rates in the South and North Central zones showed consistent decline from 1990 to 2003 and slight increase in 2008 for the south zones (Appendix A, Table A16). These zones have TFR between 4.5 and 5.4, below the country rate of 5.7 children per woman. Although the declining trend of TFR in these zones is not attributed to spinsterhood alone, that these zones also have high prevalence of spinsterhood indicates the obvious link between reduced nuptiality through spinsterhood and fertility rate. The exception is the Southwest which shows a pattern of low spinsterhood and lowest TFR of 4.5. The Southwest pattern suggests that despite the strong patriarchal culture in that zone, the high level of literacy, education and economic empowerment among Southwest women affects their fertility preferences and control. The fairly widespread spinsterhood across the country indicates that as spinsterhood increases, the inverse effect on fertility rates will be more obvious even in the conservative Northeast and Northwest.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides summary of findings of the study, together with the conclusions, recommendations and contribution of the study to knowledge.

#### 5.1 Summary of findings

The summary of the study is presented following the study objectives.

**Prevalence of spinsterhood** - The key findings on prevalence of spinsterhood in Nigeria include the following:

- i. The prevalence of spinsterhood among all women age 30 and above in Lagos was 7 percent and 6.7 percent for the entire country. Southeast zone has the highest level of spinsterhood at 10.6 percent and the lowest rate was found in the Northwest at 4.3 percent. In the South, southwest has the lowest prevalence of 5.7 percent.
- ii. Marriage was still trendy in Lagos. Prevalence of spinsterhood decreased from age 30-34 to age 55-59, indicating a tendency for women who have passed their fecund years to still seek marriage.
- iii. Spinsterhood increased from 3.4 percent in 1991 to 6.7 percent in 2006. Nigeria's Demographic and Health Surveys show increase in spinsterhood from 0.9 percent in 1990 to 1.3 percent in 2008 among women age 30-49 years. Spinsters age 45-49, the most likely group to remain permanently single increased 3.2 times between 1991 and 2006, from 2.2 percent to 3.7 percent. The rising trend of spinsterhood in Nigeria is expected to continue, given that conditions that engender spinsterhood such as education and economic empowerment will continue to expand.
- iv. **Determinants of spinsterhood** – The following findings emerged with respect to the determinants of spinsterhood in Lagos.
  - i. Women who sought to attain desired economic empowerment and education before marriage were more likely to become spinsters in Lagos. Being economically empowered and educated reduced the women's chances of being considered a desirable marriage partner. Economic empowerment and education increased the tendency for women to seek suitors of equal or higher status.
  - ii. Individual mate preference has shifted away from communal goals to personal gains and goals, from parental control to self-selection, thus increasing the likelihood of women waiting too long for desired spouse. Women who were less sexually attractive albeit domesticated; who insisted on traditionally accepted marriage processes such as church wedding and payment of bride wealth; and those who were unwilling to

compromise on personal and religious qualities of a would-be spouse were more likely to become spinsters in Lagos.

- iii. Flaws in marriage and marital relationships of other women and significant others encouraged never married women in attitudes and decisions that increased the likelihood of remaining single till later age in Lagos. Blissful marriage raised the desiderata for an ideal marriage partner thus prolonging the period of waiting for marriage. The type of one's mother's marriage such as single never married mother or an outside wife negatively affected the concept of marriage and who an ideal partner should be.
- iv. Modern lifestyles such as intolerance for early marriage, intimate partner violence, and aversion to polygyny promoted spinsters among the study subjects. Polygyny will continue to decline even among Muslims whose religion permit it, and with the apparent shortage of eligible men caused by both demographic marriage squeeze and economic decline more excess women will become spinsters.
- v. Unwillingness to become a single mother, to date men/sexual continence, and preference for married men hindered marriage opportunities for never married women in Lagos.
- vi. Urban residence, especially for Igbo and women of low socio-economic background led to spinsters, due to negative stereotypes about city women observed among these groups by the research subjects.

### **Consequences of spinsters**

- i. Irrespective of background, spinsters was a stigmatised status in Lagos; and extensive pressure to conform to the normative adult status – marriage – was commonly experienced by spinsters.
- ii. Construction of self identity was problematic for spinsters in Lagos due to the negative social identity of spinsters. The social identity of spinsters in Lagos included being seen as prostitutes, difficult, husband snatchers, old, too independent, choosy, too expensive, frustrated, aggressive, ugly, leftover, and bereft of good character, angry, occultic, and even a witch.
- iii. The negative social identity of older single women increased desire to be married even in late forties. Thus, marriage will continue to define acceptable womanhood in the near future, considering the spinsters' widespread dissatisfaction with singleness and lack of readiness to accept singleness as a lifestyle.

- iv. Loneliness was one of the challenges of spinsterhood in Lagos. The feeling of loneliness was aggravated by financial difficulty, sole responsibility for domestic maintenance, and times of ill health.
- v. Although only a few spinsters in this study currently lived in their parents' houses, the majority undertook caring and support duties in various ways to parents, and relatives.
- vi. Fear of permanent singleness and childlessness was a major concern to older never married women in Lagos. They were usually troubled by the thought of "who will take care of me in old age", "who will inherit my property" and "who will bury me"?
- vii. Freedom, privacy and independence were positive sides of spinsterhood in Lagos. Spinsterhood allowed the women to engage in self-enhancement activities that may have been hindered by marriage.

#### **Coping mechanism of spinsters**

- i. Religion, especially Christianity, provided solace and community for spinsters. Social exclusion of spinsters by married relatives and friends made religion a viable source of succour for spinsters.
- ii. Same sex friendship and family were important in the emotional and overall well being of women who become involuntary spinsters in Lagos. Co-residence with friends or relatives provided a coping strategy for inadequate finance as well as emotional comfort.
- iii. Work was found to be a preferred coping strategy for younger spinsters, in their earlier thirties, and spinsters who are professionals. For others, engagement in paid employment or self employment shielded them from visibility in their neighbourhood.
- iv. Being in the late thirties and forties, educated and engagement in a professional career increased inclination to adoption in spite of cultural constraints. Some of the reasons for this strategy were care in old age, inheritance and satisfaction of maternal instinct.

#### **5.2 Conclusions and recommendations**

The study set out to examine the prevalence, determinants and consequences of spinsterhood in Lagos metropolis. Secondary data from census and Demographic and Health Surveys showed that spinsterhood was a social reality across all zones and states of Nigeria. The least percentage of spinsterhood found in any state was 3.7 percent. The trend and

pattern showed that the spinsterhood phenomenon and incidence of permanent non marriage will continue to increase in Lagos as well as other parts of Nigeria. The rising prevalence of spinsterhood observed across all zones of Nigeria implies that more and more always single women will become household heads as permanent childless singles or lone mothers. There is need for the government to establish family-friendly old people homes and social security scheme to take care of childless single women in old age. Social science research associate many negative outcomes to the female-headed family structure. Children raised by female heads of homes, except widows, are more inclined to divorce and more likely to be female household heads themselves; poverty and inter-generational transmission of poverty is associated with female headship of households. There is need for more research to unveil the peculiar intricacies of female-headed households in Nigeria. Government should outlaw any form of discrimination on the basis of marital status with respect to renting homes, purchasing homes or land and employment. Poverty alleviation programs should be designed to accommodate the needs of always single women who live alone or will become single mothers.

The study unfolded the composites of modernisation, cultural, institutional, personal, religious, circumstantial and demographic factors that caused spinsterhood in Lagos. The major reasons why women in Lagos became spinsters revolved around economic empowerment, individual mate selection preference, marital experience of other women cultural beliefs and practices, and education. Other determinants of spinsterhood were modern lifestyle such as resistance to early marriage and intimate partner violence, marriage of significant others, differences in religious affiliation, personal factors such as unwillingness to become single mothers or sexual continence. Urbanisation and city life, and aversion to polygyny were other causes of prolonged marital delay. The study found that some women were constrained to involuntary spinsterhood by circumstantial factors such as death of intended spouse, broken engagement and state regulations such as the one in the Nigerian Police. Objection by parents and near relatives, family obligations, and birth order played minimal roles in determining spinsterhood. It was observed that no one factor is specifically responsible for individual cases of spinsterhood. Marital decisions and lost opportunities that led to spinsterhood were usually a result of more than one factor. For instance, a woman who lost her intended spouse at one time also turned down marriage proposal at another time due to her mate selection preference.

Marriage is an important marker of adult status; it is vital for the survival of any society, and to maintain cohesion and social order in basic organisation of the human society.

Nevertheless, women do not have what it takes to make marriage happen to them at their own time and term. The study shows that spinsterhood in most cases is an outcome of the intermingling of modernism with patriarchal structures that limit women and the choices available to them. Patriarchal culture still promotes early marriage and women's dependency on men. Postponing marriage to acquire modern features such as economic empowerment and education puts women at a disadvantage in their local marriage market. Women are restricted by culture to men who seek their hands in marriage. If the pool of prospective suitors matches her preferences, then she marries, if not, she inevitably waits for "Mr. Right" who may never come. The study recommends that the extant patriarchal structures that limit women such as paid employment, household production, culture, control of women's sexuality, violence against women and discriminatory state policies, should be altered through government legislations in order to reduce incidence of involuntary spinsterhood.

The findings on economic empowerment as a prime determinant of spinsterhood in Lagos indicate the emergence of more women bread-winners and erosion of the notion that marriage provides economic security for women. Though for a few "lucky" women, marriage may enhance their economic status, but going by the responses of women in this study, women no longer view marriage as a haven of financial security. The norm of male-breadwinner and female-housewife is under severe pressure to vanish with time. Bruce (1995) argued that there is an increase in the proportion of mother-supported families in the world. She averred that in dual income households, though men earn more income than most women, yet mothers usually contribute a larger proportion of their income to family needs. There is need for more social science research on the phenomenon of female bread-winning and its implications for family structure. Deliberate policies to alter macro-level ideology about the domestic roles of women are needed to encourage male involvement in housework and other domestic activities culturally considered feminine. The effect of other women's marriage experience on the marital decisions and opportunity of never married women underscores the importance of enhancing the status of women. All forms of social and cultural norms that undermine and restrict women in the home should be eliminated, because what happens to one woman affects other women. Domestic violence should to be treated more as a public issue and a form of social violence than a private affair. The violence against women (Prevention, Protection and Prohibition Act 2002) should be domesticated in all States and effectively implemented.

The study found that women who become spinsters by any cause experience more challenges than benefits. The only positive outcomes of spinsterhood that spinsters in this

study identified with were independence and privacy, and late empty nesting. Apart from these, their life experiences were replete with all forms of stigma, pressure to marry, identity challenge and loneliness. Although many of the subjects were determined to go on with their life goals in spite of marriage, spinsterhood slowed down the productivity of some of the subjects in their chosen career. Inadequate finance, exploitative care-giving, fear of permanent singleness and childlessness were common features of spinsterhood in Lagos. The study unveiled that only a few spinsters were satisfied with singleness, albeit with a consciousness of a gap in their lives to be filled by marriage. Frustration and depression, unfulfilled sexual needs and regret were other challenges spinsters in Lagos confront.

Gender inequality in family life, intimate life choices and marriage have not received due attention in research and civil policies due to pervasive and persistent marriage and family ideology. Thus, all forms of discrimination still exist against women on the basis of marital status, as shown in the consequences of spinsterhood unveiled in this study. Marriage has remained the only acceptable adult status. One's marital status is required in many official and unofficial issues. The prefix Mr./Mrs./Miss is normally seen in any form one has to fill. Marital status is usually omitted in policy statements and legislations aimed at eliminating discrimination such as the National Gender Policy and Section 42 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which guarantees all Nigerians right to freedom from discrimination. The findings on the determinants of spinsterhood reveal that spinsterhood is not always the personal fault of an individual woman, neither is it as a result of a flaw in a woman's life. Thus, the single status should not be considered inferior to the married status. Spinsterhood is not a failure. This study advocates the acceptance of singlehood as an acceptable adult status. The study recommends the exclusion of the requirements for marital status in all official forms and applications, and the inclusion of marital status in policies and legislations such as the ones mentioned above, aimed at equity and equality of life chances and freedom. The inclusion will encourage de-stigmatisation of spinsterhood and draw more research and government attention to the plight and peculiar experiences of spinsters.

Self-identity is one of the problems of singleness because there is no cultural validation for single status, even if women were to choose singlehood as a deliberate lifestyle. Spinsters struggle between their social identity which is usually negative and self-identity based on personal traits and goals. The ideologies that inform social identities can change and do change. The more the macro-level ideologies about singlehood change, the more spinsters will identify with singleness positively. Single women's acceptance of their

singleness is noted to be an agency for this change. Byrne (2003) argues that single women must accept their single status before the society will recognise it as an acceptable identity for women. To help spinsters positively identify with their single status, there is need for a re-definition of womanhood in the social sciences and deliberate government policies are needed to de-emphasise marriage and family life as the acceptable adult status. The current presentation of single status as dysfunctional should be totally done away with. Social studies curriculum should be revised to expand the definition of family to include permanent single womanhood. Non-governmental organization should initiate enlightenment and advocacy programmes aimed at encouraging de-stigmatisation of spinsterhood as an acceptable adult status in all contexts.

In spite of the myriad challenges, spinsters in this study adopted diverse strategies to cope with singleness. Prominent among the coping mechanisms was religion. Spinsters of diverse socio-economic backgrounds adopted this strategy. Same sex friendship was found to be a major coping mechanism among spinsters in Lagos. Work, especially for younger and professional spinsters provided a source of comfort and shield from visibility for other spinsters. Many spinsters found comfort and support in their parents and siblings. Single motherhood by choice was not a popular idea among the subjects in this study; although some of them were considering the option of adopting a child to satisfy their maternal instinct, for old age care and inheritance purpose. Other coping mechanisms that were helpful to spinsters in Lagos were engagement in delightful activities, and cross-generation sex especially to cope with inadequate finance. The use of “Ms” instead of “Miss” or “Mrs” was found to be one of the ways to cope with the challenge of identity. Some spinsters moved in to live with friends or relatives to cope with inadequate finance and depression. Inspirational books and media, support of male neighbours and police protection were other ways spinsters coped with the challenges of spinsterhood

The fact of spinsterhood implies that singlehood is more of a lifestyle to spinsters than a life course. When a woman turns 30, singleness assumes a novel definition that is shrouded in stigma and imminent permanent spinsterhood. The identified coping strategies provide insight on what constitutes alternative lifestyles to spinsters. Preoccupation with work, for instance, counterbalances the effects of stigma, provides alternative identity for professional and younger spinsters, and helps to improve the psychological well being of spinsters. Therefore, women need employment, and more involvement in high-wage jobs. This study recommends more pragmatic policies to bridge the gender gap in tertiary education and paid employment. The importance of family and friends in providing support

and comfort underscores the need to strengthen the family, and to understand family beyond the conventional family of fate.

That religion provided a major coping strategy for spinsters in Lagos highlights the need for religious bodies to validate single womanhood beyond the clergy. Women who are single in old ages should be assured of God's acceptance as they are, and given more obvious acceptance in religion.

The need for care and support in old age, to have a progeny, and satisfy maternal instinct propelled some spinsters to think of adopting a child. Due to cultural inhibitions such as patrilineage, high cost, lengthy and rigorous process of adoption in Nigeria, not many subjects were considering adoption. Adoption process should be made easy and affordable to accommodate always single women who wish to become single mothers by adoption. Even though womanhood is beyond marriage and motherhood, the notion of Tang Min, a Chinese writer is helpful to elucidate the issue of adoption.

Having children appears to be the fundamental duty of woman. If a woman can't have a child herself, she must at least have one to adopt. Women and children, mother and child – these belong together as naturally as heaven and earth (Activated Magazine, 2003).

Women who become permanently single should be granted right of inheritance with their brothers and their children adopted into her paternal lineage.

Increasing spinsterhood, low inclination to single motherhood, and the effective coping mechanisms of spinsters in this study challenge the traditional definition of womanhood as wife and mother. There is an impending tendency to redefine womanhood outside the domestic, a situation that will expand the productivity of many spinsters as well as married women and enhance their potentials in the public sphere.

Considering that most of the spinsters in this study were still expecting to marry, one may conclude that in spite of the fairly widespread spinsterhood across the country, the strong values on marriage are still intact. There is no much value shift as indicated in WaKaranja's (1987) study. Nigerians still value marriage; what is changing is the terms and conditions for marriage. Any change in nuptiality pattern may not be attributed to changing marriage ideology. The rising trend of spinsterhood is not because women prefer singlehood to marriage. It is significantly the outcome of the interplay among modernisation, patriarchy and anti social family structures.

The prevailing rate of spinsterhood in Lagos and other parts of the country, and the determining factors indicate clearly that spinsterhood will continue to rise in Lagos, as well

as other parts of Nigeria. The retarding effect on fertility will become more obvious with time even in the conservative Northwest and Northeast. The determinants and coping mechanism found in this study provide insight to socio-economic issues to be strengthened by civil policies to encourage later female age at first marriage. This study recommends strict implementation of the aspect of National Population Policy that delimits age for first marriage at 18 years. Women should be encouraged to serve the nation as single, as in the example of China, and those who do so should be rewarded and acclaimed publicly. This will encourage de-stigmatisation of single womanhood; enhance the effect of marriage reduction on fertility, and the social identity of women in general.

Finally, Secondary data from Population Census and Demographic and Health Surveys reveal that there are many never married men age 30 and above in Nigeria and across the states. In fact, there are more never married men at age 30 to 49 in Nigeria, in Lagos never married men outnumber spinsters from age 30 to 85+ except at age 70-74. (NPC, 2009; NPC and ICF Macro, 2009). Considering the trend of polygynous fatherhood and urban men's preference for relationships that will not culminate in marriage observed by some spinsters in Lagos, there is need for research to investigate why men postpone marriage and the peculiar experiences of such men.

### **5.3 Contribution to knowledge**

This study fills the existing lacuna on a topic that has been considerably well researched in developed countries, but has received little research attention in the developing countries. The study, therefore, contributes to the existing literature on cross-cultural understanding of singlehood and scholarly appreciation of spinsterhood phenomenon specifically in Lagos, and Nigeria by extension.

The triangulation of Structuration theory, Theorising Patriarchy and Anti-Social Family theoretical perspectives to explain data generated from primary sources reveal how persistent patriarchal structures, widespread marriage and family ideology intermingle with modern, and personal factors to foster spinsterhood, stigmatization and dissatisfaction with single status, and stunt the positive outcomes of spinsterhood.

This study provides general insight on the determinants of marital postponement by women, and the experiences of women whose marriage delay beyond the conventional age for marriage. The study gives some insight into the current nuptial pattern and behaviour in Lagos, and will be useful for effective policies on marriage, family life and women.

Even though spinsterhood is now a social reality in Lagos and Nigeria, most people do not have sufficient understanding why it is so; and this leads to various misconceptions

about it. There is a general concern about the number of women who are single at later ages, and these women are not usually viewed positively by the public. This study provides salient answers to why there are many women who are spinsters. It reveals their real life experience and how they cope with it.

This study shows that spinsterhood is a phenomenon that is structurally linked to individual preferences as well as the prevailing macro social and cultural environment in the society. Therefore, spinsterhood is not abnormal. The results and conclusions from this study are thus useful to encourage a feminine consciousness among spinsters built around positive self-esteem and demonstration of inner strength in words and actions despite marriage.

In addition to the above contributions, the study provided spinsters a voice to express their peculiar lifestyle and experiences. After interviewing IDI 2, she expressed delight in the research in the following words: “This type of project makes us [spinsters] feel that somebody cares”

According to Max Weber, every scientific accomplishment raises new questions; and asks to be surpassed and outdated. This study generated several issues on prevalence, determinants and consequences of spinsterhood, and coping mechanisms of spinsters in Lagos. Thus, grounds for further research on singlehood have been created, especially as regards the lifestyle and experiences of spinsters.

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## APPENDIX A

**Table A1a.** Actual number and percent distribution of spinsters by geo-political zone

Age	North Central			North East			North West		
	AW	NM	percent	AW	NM	percent	AW	NM	percent
30-34	691,899	68,541	9.9	628,215	36,115	5.7	1,213,548	49,993	4.1
35-39	487,407	25,634	5.3	414,509	16,890	4.1	782,150	23,868	3.1
40-44	401,771	16,061	4.0	371,085	14,792	4.0	713,318	23,484	3.3
45-49	252,065	9,069	3.6	208,314	8,916	4.3	372,124	14,172	3.8
50-54	234,025	8,502	3.6	225,651	9,057	4.0	433,319	16,493	3.8
55-59	104,790	4,329	4.1	82,810	3,579	4.3	145,224	6,367	4.4
60-64	139,013	6,060	4.4	130,476	8,291	6.4	240,355	14,501	6.0
65-69	54,853	3,374	6.2	50,050	3,949	7.9	80,675	5,833	7.2
70-74	71,485	4,327	6.1	73,172	6,239	8.5	139,697	11,573	8.3
75-79	33,371	2,505	7.5	26,955	2,653	9.8	44,667	4,154	9.3
80-84	46,314	3,750	8.1	45,754	4,778	10.4	93,675	9,799	10.5
85+	44,079	3,382	7.7	36,325	3,878	10.7	74,250	7,348	9.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,561,072</b>	<b>155,534</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>2,293,316</b>	<b>119,137</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>4,333,002</b>	<b>187,585</b>	<b>4.3</b>
Age	South East			South South			South West		
	AW	NM	percent	AW	NM	percent	AW	NM	percent
30-34	592,537	139,285	23.5	766,899	152,117	19.8	1,069,254	141,260	13.2
35-39	494,216	58,780	11.9	632,960	61,677	9.7	859,380	40,786	4.7
40-44	407,480	29,971	7.4	503,123	28,199	5.6	664,204	19,245	2.9
45-49	317,379	15,576	4.9	383,723	15,838	4.1	496,162	11,255	2.3
50-54	266,044	11,100	4.2	317,908	11,352	3.6	408,335	8,216	2.0
55-59	146,523	5,894	4.0	167,519	5,807	3.5	229,611	4,475	1.9
60-64	119,912	7,179	6.0	183,184	7,308	4.0	235,914	5,977	2.5
65-69	92,134	4,385	4.8	99,793	4,848	4.9	133,362	3,940	3.0
70-74	81,649	5,184	6.3	85,373	5,778	6.8	113,233	4,702	4.2
75-79	42,935	3,666	8.5	45,521	4,061	8.9	58,973	3,187	5.4
80-84	45,241	4,118	9.1	50,546	4,985	9.9	69,843	4,125	5.9
85+	41,791	3,609	8.6	48,728	4,397	9.0	66,031	3,532	5.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,686,054</b>	<b>285,898</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>3,285,277</b>	<b>306,367</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>4,404,302</b>	<b>250,700</b>	<b>5.7</b>

Note; AW is all women, NM is never married

Source: Nigeria 2006 population census

**Table A1b.** Actual number and percentage distribution of spinsters in Nigeria

Age Group	All Women	Never Married	Percentage
30-34	4,962,352	587,311	11.8
35-39	3,670,622	227,635	6.2
40-44	3,060,981	128,903	4.2
45-49	2,029,767	74,826	3.7
50-54	1,885,282	64,720	3.4
55-59	876,477	30,451	3.5
60-64	1,087,067	49,316	4.5
65-69	522,612	26,329	5.0
70-74	564,609	37,803	6.7
75-79	252,422	20,226	8.0
60-84	351,373	31,593	9.0
85+	311,204	26,146	8.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,574,768</b>	<b>1,305,259</b>	<b>6.7</b>

Source: Nigeria 2006 population census

**Table A2.** Percent distribution of never married women by age group

Age Group	Census		NDHS			
	1991	2006	1990	1999	2003	2008
15-19	63.9	75.6	61.4	72.5	66.7	70.6
20-24	30.2	49.7	21.4	36.5	36.1	38.4
25-29	13.3	27.9	7.9	13.0	12.2	16.2
30 – 34	5.2	11.8	0.9	5.1	5.1	5.8
35 – 39	3.1	6.2	1.2	1.9	1.7	2.6
40 – 44	2.3	4.2	0.3	1.3	0.7	1.4
45 – 49	2.2	3.7	0.1	1.1	0.9	0.8
50 – 54	2.5	3.4				
55 – 59	2.5	3.5				
60 – 64	2.8	4.5				
65 – 69	2.5	5.0				
70 – 74	3.6	6.7				
75 – 79	3.1	8.0				
80 – 84	3.8	9.0				
85+	4.0	8.4				
15-85+	21.3	30.2				
30-85+	1.6	3.2				
15-49			17.2	26.0	25.3	25.2
30-49			0.3	1.1	0.9	1.3

Source: Nigeria 1991/2006 population census and Nigeria demographic and health survey 1990 - 2008

**Table A3.** Percentage distribution of never married women in Lagos by age group

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Never Married</b>
15-19	92.6
20-24	68.7
25-29	36.4
30 – 34	13.6
35 – 39	6.3
40 – 44	3.9
45 – 49	3.1
50 – 54	2.6
55 – 59	2.5
60 – 64	3.5
65 – 69	4.1
70 – 74	5.7
75 – 79	6.4
80 – 84	8.1
85+	7.1
<b>Total 15-85+</b>	<b>36.9</b>
15-29	33.6
30-85+	3.3

Source: Nigeria 2006 population census

**Table A4.** Percentage distribution of spinsters in the south west zone by states

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Ekiti</b>	<b>Lagos</b>	<b>Ogun</b>	<b>Ondo</b>	<b>Osun</b>	<b>Oyo</b>	<b>South West</b>
30 –34	23.9	13.6	8.1	14.7	15.4	9.7	13.2
35 - 39	5.7	6.3	3.4	4.9	3.9	3.0	4.7
40 - 44	2.7	3.9	2.6	2.8	2.2	2.2	2.9
45 - 49	1.7	3.1	2.3	2.1	1.7	1.8	2.3
50 - 54	1.3	2.6	2.5	1.8	1.5	1.6	2.0
55 - 59	1.3	2.5	2.5	1.8	1.4	1.5	1.9
60 - 64	1.7	3.5	3.0	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.5
65 - 69	2.2	4.1	3.4	2.6	2.1	2.4	3.0
70 - 74	3.5	5.7	3.9	3.2	4.0	3.6	4.2
75 - 79	5.5	6.4	4.4	4.4	6.1	5.3	5.4
80 - 84	4.9	8.1	4.3	6.1	5.7	5.4	5.9
85+	4.4	7.1	4.5	5.4	5.1	4.7	5.3
Total	7.6	7.0	4.2	5.8	5.4	4.1	5.7

Source: Nigeria 2006 population census

**Table A5.** Prevalence of spinsterhood among all women age 15-85+ within geo-political zones/states (actual figures)

<b>Geo-Political Zone/State</b>	<b>All women</b>	<b>All women age 15 – 85+</b>	<b>Never Married women age 30 – 85+ (Spinsters)</b>	<b>Percent spinsters</b>
<b>North Central</b>				
FCT Abuja	673,067	401,297	15,293	3.8
Benue	2,109,598	1,160,364	37,448	3.2
Kogi	1,641,140	915,561	30,755	3.4
Kwara	1,171,570	674,441	14,047	2.1
Nasarawa	925,576	509,272	16,623	3.3
Niger	1,950,422	1,049,744	19,831	1.9
Plateau	1,607,533	909,563	21,537	2.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,078,906</b>	<b>5,620,242</b>	<b>155,534</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<b>North East</b>				
Adamawa	1,571,680	883,207	22,549	2.6
Bauchi	2,283,800	1,222,666	21,198	1.7
Borno	2,007,746	1,097,480	26,718	2.4
Gombe	1,120,812	603,397	16,578	2.7
Taraba	1,122,869	619,783	19,336	3.1
Yobe	1,116,305	605,662	12,758	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,223,212</b>	<b>5,032,195</b>	<b>119,137</b>	<b>2.4</b>
<b>North West</b>				
Jigawa	2,162,926	1,178,702	21,519	1.8
Kaduna	3,023,065	1,649,343	48,030	2.9
Kano	4,453,336	2,396,894	42,907	1.8
Katsina	2,853,305	1,517,322	25,819	1.7
Kebbi	1,624,912	861,804	14,328	1.7
Sokoto	1,838,963	1,000,496	19,910	2.0
Zamfara	1,637,250	881,020	15,072	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,593,757</b>	<b>9,485,581</b>	<b>187,585</b>	<b>2.0</b>
<b>South East</b>				
Abia	1,415,082	926,225	49,353	5.3
Anambra	2,059,844	1,343,401	73,792	5.5
Ebonyi	1,112,791	671,698	27,746	4.1
Enugu	1,671,795	1,100,540	57,433	5.2
Imo	1,951,092	1,269,910	77,612	6.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,210,604</b>	<b>5,311,774</b>	<b>285,936</b>	<b>5.4</b>
<b>South South</b>				
Akwa Ibom	1,918,849	1,222,240	59,916	4.9
Bayelsa	830,432	521,829	20,969	4.0
Cross River	1,421,021	890,768	43,878	4.9
Delta	2,043,136	1,299,908	52,059	4.0
Edo	1,599,420	1,028,583	34,623	3.4
Rivers	2,525,690	1,627,404	94,922	5.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,338,548</b>	<b>6,590,732</b>	<b>306,367</b>	<b>4.6</b>
<b>South West</b>				
Ekiti	1,183,470	758,429	28,402	3.7
Lagos	4,394,480	2,910,037	96,703	3.3
Ogun	1,886,233	1,185,052	25,991	2.2
Ondo	1,715,820	1,080,426	32,060	3.0
Osun	1,682,810	1,078,736	29,846	2.8
Oyo	2,778,462	1,758,949	37,698	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,641,275</b>	<b>8,771,629</b>	<b>250,700</b>	<b>2.9</b>
<b>Nigeria</b>	<b>69,086,302</b>	<b>40,812,153</b>	<b>1,305,259</b>	<b>3.2</b>

Source: Nigeria 2006 population census

**Table A6.** Percentage distribution of spinsters population and actual figures by states & zones

<b>Geo-Political Zone/State</b>	<b>Never Married women age 30 – 85+ (Spinsters)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>North Central</b>		
FCT Abuja	15,293	1.2
Benue	37,448	2.9
Kogi	30,755	2.4
Kwara	14,047	1.1
Nasarawa	16,623	1.3
Niger	19,831	1.5
Plateau	21,537	1.7
Total	155,534	11.9
<b>North East</b>		
Adamawa	22,549	1.7
Bauchi	21,198	1.6
Borno	26,718	2.0
Gombe	16,578	1.3
Taraba	19,336	1.5
Yobe	12,758	1.0
Total	119,137	9.1
<b>North West</b>		
Jigawa	21,519	1.6
Kaduna	48,030	3.7
Kano	42,907	3.3
Katsina	25,819	2.0
Kebbi	14,328	1.1
Sokoto	19,910	1.5
Zamfara	15,072	1.2
Total	187,585	14.4
<b>South East</b>		
Abia	49,353	3.8
Anambra	73,792	5.7
Ebonyi	27,746	2.1
Enugu	57,433	4.4
Imo	77,612	5.9
Total	285,936	21.9
<b>South South</b>		
Akwa Ibom	59,916	4.6
Bayelsa	20,969	1.6
Cross River	43,878	3.4
Delta	52,059	4.0
Edo	34,623	2.7
Rivers	94,922	7.3
Total	306,367	23.5
<b>South West</b>		
Ekiti	28,402	2.2
Lagos	96,703	7.4
Ogun	25,991	2.0
Ondo	32,060	2.5
Osun	29,846	2.3
Oyo	37,698	2.9
Total	250,700	19.2
Nigeria	1,305,259	2.7

Source: Nigeria 2006 population census

**Table A7.** Never married women by age group

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Population of all women</b>	<b>Population never married</b>
<b>1991</b>		
15-19	4,806,977	3,071,658
20-24	4,357,267	1,315,895
25-29	4,006,952	532,925
30 – 34	3,105,298	161,475
35 – 39	2,008,062	62,250
40 – 44	1,874,721	43,119
45 – 49	1,061,602	23,355
50 – 54	1,182,149	29,554
55 – 59	481,394	12,035
60 – 64	791,573	22,164
65 – 69	357,400	8,935
70 – 74	394,116	14,188
75 – 79	156,368	4,847
80 – 84	222,627	8,460
85+	194,404	7,776
<b>Total 15-85+</b>	<b>25,000,910</b>	<b>5,318,636</b>
<b>30-85+</b>	<b>11,829,714</b>	<b>398,158</b>
<b>15-49</b>	<b>21,220,879</b>	<b>5,210,677</b>
<b>2006</b>		
15-19	7,362,887	5,563,554
20-24	7,197,530	3,576,762
25-29	6,676,968	1,861,188
30-34	4,962,352	587,311
35-39	3,670,622	227,635
40-44	3,060,981	128,903
45-49	2,029,767	74,826
50-54	1,885,282	64,720
55-59	876,477	30,451
60-64	1,087,067	49,316
65-69	522,612	26,329
70-74	564,609	37,803
75-79	252,422	20,226
80-84	351,373	31,593
85+	311,204	26,146
<b>Total</b>	<b>40,812,153</b>	<b>12,306,763</b>
<b>30-85+</b>	<b>19,574,768</b>	<b>1,305,259</b>
<b>15-49</b>	<b>34,961,107</b>	<b>12,020,179</b>

Source: Nigeria 1991/2006 population census

**TABLE A8.** Distribution of never married women in Lagos by age group

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>All Women</b>	<b>Never Married</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
15-19	442,629	409,718	92.6
20-24	538,119	369,532	68.7
25-29	543,299	197,531	36.4
30 – 34	387,474	52,606	13.6
35 – 39	290,529	18,338	6.3
40 – 44	210,459	8,199	3.9
45 – 49	150,453	4,613	3.1
50 – 54	116,788	3,068	2.6
55 – 59	67,055	1,679	2.5
60 – 64	57,365	2,006	3.5
65 – 69	32,941	1,346	4.1
70 – 74	26,318	1,489	5.7
75 – 79	14,566	927	6.4
80 – 84	16,293	1,316	8.1
85+	15,749	1,116	7.1
<b>Total 15-85+</b>	<b>2,910,037</b>	<b>1,073,484</b>	<b>36.9</b>
15-29	1,524,047	976,781	33.6
30-85+	1,385,990	96,703	<b>3.3</b>
15.29	1,524,047	976,781	64.1
30-85+	1,385,990	96,703	6.97

Source: Nigeria 2006 population census

**Table A9.** Percent distribution of never married women age 10-85+ in Lagos

<b>Age Groups</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
10-14	12.52
15-19	12.26
20-24	11.05
25-29	5.91
30 – 34	1.57
35 – 39	0.55
40 – 44	0.25
45 – 49	0.14
50 – 54	0.09
55 – 59	0.05
60 – 64	0.06
65 – 69	0.04
70 – 74	0.04
75 – 79	0.03
80 – 84	0.04
85+	0.03
<b>Total</b>	<b>44.6</b>
10-29	41.7
30-85+	2.9

Source: Nigeria 2006 population census

**Table A10.** Female literacy and educational attainment (senior secondary to university) by states

<b>Geo-Political Zone/State</b>	<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Educational Attainment</b>
<b>North Central</b>		
FCT Abuja	71.0	3.5
Benue	49.4	1.7
Kogi	68.8	2.7
Kwara	57.8	2.3
Nasarawa	47.6	1.8
Niger	34.8	1.1
Plateau	53.3	1.9
Total	56.6	
<b>North East</b>		
Adamawa	44.4	1.4
Bauchi	38.5	1.0
Borno	26.9	0.8
Gombe	45.4	1.5
Taraba	40.7	1.5
Yobe	27.5	0.6
Total	36.8	
<b>North West</b>		
Jigawa	49.9	1.2
Kaduna	57.9	2.1
Kano	55.9	1.6
Katsina	56.3	1.5
Kebbi	25.5	0.5
Sokoto	32.3	0.6
Zamfara	41.2	0.8
Total	48.6	
<b>South East</b>		
Abia	82.9	3.6
Anambra	86.1	3.9
Ebonyi	59.2	2.1
Enugu	74.7	3.1
Imo	85.6	4.0
Total	79.6	
<b>South South</b>		
Akwa Ibom	81.6	3.5
Bayelsa	70.1	3.0
Cross River	71.0	2.9
Delta	74.3	3.0
Edo	71.7	2.9
Rivers	83.7	4.1
Total	76.8	
<b>South West</b>		
Ekiti	85.9	3.9
Lagos	86.5	4.2
Ogun	72.6	2.9
Ondo	75.8	3.0
Osun	79.4	3.3
Oyo	72.1	2.9
Total	79.4	
Nigeria	62.4	24.3

Source: Nigeria 2006 population census

**Table A11.** NDHS data - number of spinsters in survey

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1990</b>
30-34	269	48	58	13
35-39	102	14	19	11
40-44	42	5	9	3
45-49	23	5	6	1
Total	436	72	92	28

Source: Nigeria demographic and health survey 1990 - 2008

**Table A12.** Female median age at first marriage 25-49 years (NDHS 1990-2008)

	<b>1990</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2008</b>
Nigeria	16.9	17.9	16.6	18.3
South West	19.7	20.4	21.3	21.8
South East	18.3	20.9	21.7	22.8
South South	-	19.5	19.2	20.9
North Central	-	18.2	17.7	18.3
North East	15.2	15.8	15.0	15.6
North West	15.4	14.5	14.6	15.2
Secondary/Tertiary	22.2	22.1	22.0	23.3
Urban	19.0	19.4	18.9	21.1
Highest wealth Quintile	19.4	-	21.8	23.1

Source; Nigeria demographic and health survey 1990-2008

Note: In 1990 South South zone was part of the South West and South East, and North Central was part of North East and North West.

**TABLE A13.** Male age at first marriage (men age 25-54) – NDHS 1999-2008

	<b>Exact age at first marriage</b>		
	<b>20</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>25</b>
Year			
1999	16.4	28.0	45.7
2003	17.7	28.2	45.7
2008	12.9	22.7	39.7

Source: Nigeria demographic and health survey 1990-2008

**Table A14.** DHS conducted between 2005 and 2009 - never married women age 15—49 in sub *Saharan Africa*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Benin	20
Congo Brazzaville	29.5
Congo Democratic Republic	24.3
Ethiopia	25
Ghana	32.4
Guinea	16.5
Kenya	32.2
Liberia	26.1
Madagascar	18.1
Mali	11.8
Namibia	57.9
Niger	9.9
Nigeria	25.2
Rwanda	35.2
Senegal	27
Sierra Leone	19
Swaziland	49.9
Uganda	23.4
Zambia	26
Zimbabwe	27

**Source:** Macro International Inc, 2011. MEASURE DHS STATcompiler.  
<http://www.measuredhs.com>, April 8 2011

**Table A15.** Prevalence of spinsterhood for selected sub-Saharan African countries

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Ghana (2008)</b>	<b>Cote d'Ivoire (1998-99)</b>	<b>Kenya</b>	<b>Benin (2006)</b>	<b>Sierra Leone</b>
30-34	5.7	7.7	6.6	1.5	6.8
35-39	3.4	4.9	6.5	0.8	1.8
40-44	1.6	1.2	7.3	1.0	2.6
45-49	0.5	0.7	4.7	0.9	1.3

**Source:** Macro International Inc, 2011. MEASURE DHS STATcompiler.  
<http://www.measuredhs.com>, April 8 2011

**Table A16.** Total fertility rate by geo-political zones (NDHS)

<b>Zone</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2008</b>
Northeast	6.5	6.8	7.0	7.2
Northwest	6.6	6.5	6.7	7.3
North Central	-	-	5.7	5.4
Southeast	5.6	4.6	4.1	4.8
South South	-	-	4.6	4.7
Southwest	5.5	4.5	4.1	4.5
Nigeria	6.0	5.2	5.7	5.7

Source: Nigeria demographic and health survey 1990-2008

Note: In 1990 and 1999, North Central was part of Northeast and Northwest; and South-South was part of Southeast and southwest.

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**Table A17.** Prevalence of spinsterhood/total fertility rate by states

Geo-Political Zone/State	Prevalence of Spinsterhood	Total Fertility Rate (TFR) NDHS 2008
<b>North Central</b>		
FCT Abuja	8.9	4.0
Benue	7.0	5.9
Kogi	7.2	4.2
Kwara	4.3	4.5
Nasarawa	7.4	4.7
Niger	4.3	7.5
Plateau	5.1	5.3
Total	6.1	5.4
<b>North East</b>		
Adamawa	5.4	6.8
Bauchi	3.9	8.1
Borno	5.3	7.1
Gombe	6.1	7.4
Taraba	6.9	5.9
Yobe	4.7	7.5
Total	5.2	7.2
<b>North West</b>		
Jigawa	3.9	7.1
Kaduna	6.5	6.3
Kano	3.9	8.1
Katsina	3.7	7.2
Kebbi	3.7	6.0
Sokoto	4.2	8.7
Zamfara	3.8	7.5
Total	4.3	7.3
<b>South East</b>		
Abia	10.5	4.4
Anambra	11.1	5.0
Ebonyi	8.2	5.6
Enugu	10.3	4.4
Imo	11.9	4.8
Total	10.6	4.8
<b>South South</b>		
Akwa Ibom	9.7	4.0
Bayelsa	8.0	5.8
Cross River	10.1	5.4
Delta	7.9	4.5
Edo	6.7	5.3
Rivers	11.9	4.3
Total	9.3	4.7
<b>South West</b>		
Ekiti	7.6	5.0
Lagos	7.0	4.0
Ogun	4.2	5.4
Ondo	5.6	4.9
Osun	5.4	4.0
Oyo	4.1	5.0
Total	5.7	4.5
Nigeria	6.7	5.7

Source: Nigeria 2006 population census and Nigeria demographic and health survey 2008

## APPENDIX B

### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

#### Section A

##### **In your opinion, what constitutes fulfilled womanhood?**

Probes

Career and wage growth

Financial independence

Education

Marriage and motherhood

##### **What does the society around you regard as fulfilled womanhood?**

Probes

High achievement in career and wage

Political appointment

Wealth

Marriage and motherhood

Ability to read and write

Tertiary Education

#### Section B

What qualities do you prefer in a man you would like to marry (e.g. Honesty, Diligence, Loving, etc.)

Would you marry a man who

Is less educated than you

Is younger than you

Earns less income

Comes from another ethnic group

Of a different religion

Of a different Christian denomination

Is already married

##### **Why do you think so many women in Lagos remain never married till age 30 and above?**

Probes

Tertiary Education

High Bride wealth/cost of wedding

Declining economy

Parent's marriage

#### Section C

##### **What experiences do you think matured single women in Lagos are likely to have?**

Probes for stigma

- **Interpersonal:** Like treated with less courtesy and respect than others, receive poor service than others in restaurants, people act as if they think you are not smart, afraid of you, you are dishonest or not as good as they are, called names or insulted, threatened or harassed.

- **Institutional:** Like prevented from renting or buying a home in the place you wanted. Given inferior service by a plumber, carpenter, car mechanic or other service provider. Discouraged by a teacher or anyone from seeking higher education. Not given a job, scholarship, denied promotion, fired, denied a bank loan. Neighbours made life so uncomfortable for you.

**What other challenges do single never married women have**

**What benefits do single women have over married women**

**How do you think single never married women in Lagos cope with the challenges of singlehood?**

Probes

Commitment to work and career

Friendship network

Support and Comfort of Family members

Adoption of children

Involvement in religious activities

**Do you think it is better to remain single than to have a bad marriage**

**Is it better to remain single than to enter into a polygynous union** (marriage between one man and more than one woman)

## APPENDIX C

### IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What are the reasons why women remain unmarried at age 30 and above?
2. Why did you turn down previous marriage proposals?

**Probes**

Expanded educational and work opportunities for women, Mate selection preference, Family background factors – parents' marriage, birth order, influence of parents on mate selection, family obligations/responsibilities

3. What qualities do you prefer in a man you would like to marry (e.g. Honesty, Diligence, Loving, etc.)

Would you marry a man who

Is less educated than you

Is younger than you

Earns less income

Comes from another ethnic group

Of a different religion

Of a different Christian denomination

Is already married

4. Non marriage at age 30 and above has some consequences, what do you think these consequences may be?

5. Are spinsters treated differently from married women?

In what ways?

6. Have you ever been treated differently because of your marital status?

In what ways?

### Probes for Stigma

**Interpersonal:** Like treated with less courtesy and respect than others, receive poor service than others in restaurants, people act as if they think you are not smart, afraid of you, you are dishonest or not as good as they are, called names or insulted, threatened or harassed.

**Institutional:** Like prevented from renting or buying a home in the place you wanted. Given inferior service by a plumber, carpenter, car mechanic or other service provider. Discouraged by a teacher or anyone from seeking higher education. Not given a job, scholarship, denied promotion, fired, denied a bank loan. Neighbours made life so uncomfortable for you.

7. What roles do you currently play in your natal family such as taking care of aged parents, sending financial support regularly, sponsoring younger ones etc.
8. What benefits do single women have over married women
9. How do you cope with the challenges of spinsterhood

### Probes

Commitment to work and career

Friendship network

Support and Comfort of Family members

Adoption of children

Involvement in religious activities

10. Can a woman live a fulfilled life without marriage and motherhood?

11. Do you think it is better to remain single than to have a bad marriage

## APPENDIX D

### LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Biographical Information
2. Religion
3. Family
4. Childhood
5. Youth/Schooling
6. Work/Income
7. Did you have marriage proposals when you were in school – secondary or tertiary?
8. How many of them?
9. Tell me about the men and why you turned down their proposals.
10. Tell me about the proposals you have had since after leaving school until now. Why did you say no in each case?
11. Do you think your parents' opinion affected your decisions about marriage? Tell me about other things such as parents marriage, religious beliefs that may have affected your marital decisions.
12. What qualities do you prefer in a man you would like to marry (e.g. Honesty, Diligence, Loving, etc.)
13. Would you marry a man who
  - Is less educated than you
  - Is younger than you
  - Earns less income
  - Comes from another ethnic group
  - Of a different religion
  - Of a different Christian denomination

Is already married

14. What do you think are the reasons why other women get to age 30 and above without marriage?
15. Is there any pressure from your parents, other relatives, friends, colleagues etc on you to marry?
16. What roles do you currently play in your natal family such as taking care of aged parents, send financial support regularly etc.
17. Stigma/Marginalization.
  1. Have you been treated differently because of your marital status?
  2. In what ways?
  3. Tell me about other spinsters you know, do they experience these same things, do you remember any case?

### **Probes**

#### **Interpersonal stigma/marginalization**

Like treated with less courtesy and respect than others, receive poor service than others in restaurants, people act as if they think you are not smart, afraid of you, you are dishonest or not as good as they are, called names or insulted, threatened or harassed.

#### **Institutional stigma/marginalization**

Like prevented from renting or buying a home in the place you wanted.

Given inferior service by a plumber, carpenter, car mechanic or other service provider.

Discouraged by a teacher or anyone from seeking higher education.

Not given a job, scholarship, denied promotion, fired, denied a bank loan

Neighbours made life so uncomfortable for you.

18. What other challenges do you experience as a spinsters?
19. What benefits do single women have over married women
20. In a society like ours, it may not be so easy living alone all through life, what do you plan to do, may be to have a child at least?
21. How do you cope with the challenges of being single at this age?
22. Do you have any regrets about not marrying till now?
23. Can a woman live a fulfilled life without marriage and motherhood?
24. Do you think it is better to remain single than to have a bad marriage

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## ABSTRACT

The high prevalence of spinsterhood among urban-based women in Nigeria constitutes a deviation from traditional early marriage pattern. This demographic shift has profound negative consequences on nuptiality, fertility and social status of women. Although the population of spinsters in Nigeria is increasing considerably, negligible attention has been paid to this emerging social reality. This study, therefore, examined the prevalence, determinants and consequences of spinsterhood in Lagos, Nigeria's most urbanised state and home to spinsters of diverse backgrounds.

Giddens' Structuration Theory, Walby's Theorising Patriarchy and Barrett and McIntosh's Anti-Social Family perspective provided the theoretical framework for the study. Secondary data from Nigeria's 1991 and 2006 censuses and Demographic and Health Surveys (1990-2008) were used to determine the prevalence of spinsterhood in Lagos and larger Nigerian context. Primary data drawn from twenty-five In-depth Interviews, four Life Histories, and seven Focus Group Discussions with never married women aged 30 and above, were used to determine the predisposing factors, consequences and coping strategies of spinsters. Respondents were selected from diverse ethnic, educational and occupational backgrounds through the snowball technique. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the secondary data on prevalence. The qualitative primary data on determinants and consequences were content analysed.

In the Nigerian context, rate of spinsterhood among women aged 30-85 was 6.7% for the entire nation, and 5.7% in the Southwest geopolitical zone where Lagos is located; whereas the prevalence in Lagos was 7.0%. Prevalence of spinsterhood in Lagos was highest among women aged 30-34 (13.6%) and lowest at 2.5% for women aged 55-59. The most likely group to remain permanently single were women between 45-49 years, and prevalence of spinsterhood among them was 3.1%. Involuntary spinsterhood was predominant (97%) among the respondents. The determinants and consequences of spinsterhood, and coping strategies of spinsters were similar across the diverse ethnic, educational and occupational backgrounds. The major determinant of spinsterhood was drive for economic empowerment and financial independence. Other factors included mate selection preference, negative marital experience of other women, cultural practices, higher education, differences in religious affiliation, urbanisation, and aversion to polygyny. The majority (83%) expressed dissatisfaction with their prolonged spinsterhood. The consequences of spinsterhood included profound stigma, intense pressure to marry, identity crisis, loneliness, fear of permanent singleness and childlessness, among other challenges. The major advantage of spinsterhood was the opportunity to be independent. Coping mechanisms among the spinsters included recourse to religion, friends, supportive family members, devotion to work, and adoption of children.

The high prevalence of spinsterhood in Lagos is occasioned by economic, personal and social factors. The phenomenon could become one of the most important components of demographic transition in 21<sup>st</sup> century Lagos. Social acceptance of spinsterhood as a non-derogatory adult status could help to mitigate its negative effects on spinsters.

**Key words:** Spinsterhood, Delayed Marriage, Economic Empowerment, Stigma, Coping Mechanism

**Word count:** 454

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to:  
The Lord JESUS CHRIST whose grace made this degree attainable.

My parents Theophilus Ejimadu and Sussana Ada Adindu Korie of blessed memory whose love and sacrifice gave me and my siblings quality education.

My siblings and their spouses  
Theophane/Ijendu Korie, Patrick/Ijeoma Korie, Ada/Calistus Amadi and Ebere/Maureen Korie  
who, like my parents, have shown so much love and care for me.

and  
All spinsters who participated in this study, their courage and cooperation made this work worthwhile.

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Ntoimo, Favour Chizomam

## CERTIFICATION

I certify that this study was carried out by F. C. NTOIMO in the Department of Sociology,  
University of Ibadan.

Signature ..... Date .....

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85+	5,517	608	3,184	382	5,019	551	13,115	847	11,624	517	10,269	1,492	48,728	4,397
Total	616,430	59,916	262,161	20,969	435,454	43,878	660,100	52,059	516,524	34,623	794,608	94,922	2,527,777	213,367

	FCT		Benue		Kogi		Kwara		Nasarawa		Niger		Plateau		North Central	
	AW	NM	AW	NM	AW	NM	AW	NM	AW	NM	AW	NM	AW	NM	AW	NM
30 - 34	59,199	8,371	136,721	14,840	113,253	16,470	81,266	7,038	62,965	6,873	131,759	6,705	106,106	8,844	691,899	68,541
35 - 39	39,868	3,138	94,912	6,496	82,439	5,067	60,348	1,913	43,456	2,856	89,088	2,771	77,296	3,387	487,407	25,634
40 - 44	25,833	1,242	84,594	4,358	68,738	2,715	51,908	1,191	35,172	1,843	72,498	2,432	63,028	2,280	401,771	16,061
45 - 49	15,634	701	51,413	2,449	43,938	1,424	33,826	713	21,803	1,063	43,100	343	42,322	1,376	252,065	9,069
50 - 54	10,674	530	51,591	2,388	40,015	1,190	31,005	742	20,184	943	42,000	1,400	38,554	1,266	234,025	8,502
55 - 59	5,238	300	21,318	1,159	17,882	584	15,658	345	8,740	560	17,117	696	18,837	685	104,790	4,329
60 - 64	4,642	251	35,310	1,745	23,638	840	18,540	509	11,370	600	22,938	216	22,575	899	139,013	6,060
65 - 69	2,693	155	14,502	797	11,554	457	9,618	281	5,713	380	13,190	727	12,322	577	54,853	3,374
70 - 74	2,563	154	17,297	1,076	10,638	622	9,353	445	5,953	400	11,564	920	14,117	689	71,485	4,327
75 - 79	1,246	117	7,741	513	4,817	427	4,709	284	3,056	274	7,003	493	6,714	397	33,371	2,505
80 - 84	1,734	201	11,705	845	6,434	519	5,694	316	3,979	428	7,994	876	8,774	565	46,314	3,750
85+	1,824	133	10,642	782	5,951	440	5,410	270	3,725	382	7,702	803	8,825	572	44,079	3,382
Total	171,148	15,293	537,746	37,448	429,297	30,755	327,335	14,047	226,100	14,523	461,075	19,831	420,100	21,537	2,561,072	155,534

	Adamawa		Bauchi		Borno		Gombe		Tara		Yobe		Northeast	
	AW	NM	AW	NM										
30 - 34	105,705	8,036	152,859	5,025	139,974	7,137	73,657	5,906	78,825	7,273	77,195	2,738	628,215	36,115
35 - 39	73,580	3,507	102,404	2,640	88,480	3,573	50,756	2,619	53,580	3,224	45,709	1,327	414,509	16,890
40 - 44	65,142	2,471	88,646	2,668	84,501	3,587	42,735	2,311	42,735	2,284	45,415	1,851	371,085	14,792
45 - 49	39,799	1,413	50,894	1,892	43,693	2,071	25,976	1,109	26,276	1,296	21,676	1,065	208,314	8,916
50 - 54	41,060	1,548	53,918	1,686	51,843	2,443	25,821	910	24,836	1,184	28,173	1,278	225,651	9,057
55 - 59	17,559	679	19,011	632	16,959	820	10,100	421	10,484	574	8,287	453	82,810	3,579
60 - 64	24,767	1,271	29,843	1,752	30,635	2,139	17,709	901	14,593	1,030	16,049	1,198	130,476	8,291
65 - 69	11,546	726	11,038	887	10,022	877	6,311	488	6,358	510	4,769	461	50,050	3,949
70 - 74	15,623	1,090	15,860	1,312	16,470	1,486	8,265	759	7,662	648	9,292	944	73,172	6,239
75 - 79	6,243	486	6,208	606	5,413	598	3,330	344	3,235	322	2,526	297	26,955	2,653
80 - 84	9,249	727	10,766	1,146	10,478	1,155	5,705	640	4,694	546	5,562	624	45,754	4,778
85+	7,459	595	8,737	952	7,872	622	3,916	472	4,268	445	4,073	522	36,325	3,878
Total	417,732	22,549	550,184	21,198	506,340	26,718	278,877	16,578	279,457	19,336	268,726	12,758	2,293,316	119,137

	Jigawa		Kaduna		Kano		Katsina		Kebbi		Sokoto		Zamfara		Northwest	
	AW	NM	AW	NM	AW	NM	AW	NM	AW	NM	AW	NM	AW	NM	AW	NM
30 - 34	157,618	4,842	201,546	18,481	300,901	10,354	193,115	6,213	109,165	3,100	131,242	4,043	113,961	2,960	1,213,548	49,993
35 - 39	95,637	2,471	140,932	7,713	150,941	5,102	127,277	3,204	70,352	1,625	82,505	2,199	69,406	1,554	782,150	23,868
40 - 44	92,539	2,691	117,054	5,285	182,100	5,448	112,642	3,200	64,953	2,046	78,404	2,790	65,579	2,024	713,318	23,484
45 - 49	44,680	1,684	72,138	2,022	93,011	3,375	62,021	2,188	31,977	1,107	37,273	1,631	31,024	1,155	372,124	14,172
50 - 54	56,183	1,996	68,442	3,012	99,979	3,880	68,030	2,062	39,646	1,523	49,857	2,307	41,182	1,713	433,319	16,493
55 - 59	16,163	655	30,941	1,481	34,804	1,510	22,911	797	13,304	514	15,763	830	12,238	580	145,224	6,367
60 - 64	31,910	1,984	35,560	2,100	59,718	3,423	38,195	2,031	23,132	1,308	28,848	2,037	23,045	1,546	240,355	14,501
65 - 69	8,992	675	16,633	984	18,993	1,378	12,856	963	7,864	550	8,642	700	6,695	583	80,675	5,833
70 - 74	18,249	1,580	21,400	1,709	37,223	2,948	21,089	1,710	12,853	1,020	15,792	1,348	13,087	1,168	139,697	11,573
75 - 79	4,964	449	6,814	897	10,851	976	7,280	752	3,954	311	4,471	416	3,833	353	44,667	4,154
80 - 84	12,880	1,471	14,410	1,661	26,354	2,552	13,892	1,593	7,797	726	9,794	953	8,546	843	93,675	9,799

85+	8,954	1,021		14,312	1,513		21,765	1,961		10,419	1,106		5,453	498		7,186	656		6,161	593		74,250	7,348	
Total	548,769	21,519	3.9	741,735	48,030	6.5	1,097,787	42,907	3.9	689,727	25,819	3.7	390,450	14,328	3.7	469,777	19,910	4.2	1,757	1,072	3.8	4,333,002	187,585	4.3

Nigeria

	AW	NM
30 - 34	4,962,352	587,311
35 - 39	3,670,622	227,635
40 - 44	3,060,981	128,903
45 - 49	2,029,767	74,826
50 - 54	1,885,282	64,720
55 - 59	876,477	30,451
60 - 64	1,087,067	49,316
65 - 69	522,612	26,329
70 - 74	564,609	37,803
75 - 79	252,422	20,226
80 - 84	351,373	31,593
85+	311,204	26,146
Total	19,574,768	1,305,259

Source: Nigeria's 2006 population census. Note: AW means all women, NM is never married.

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