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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Diaspora grand-mothering in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Leaving children in the care of grandparents is a fairly common practice in close knit societies such as Nigeria. This service of providing childcare by grandmothers is however taking a transnational form with the exportation of grandmothers from Nigeria to care for grandchildren whose parents, out of economic necessity, must work fulltime. This article explores the dynamics of Nigerian grandmothers providing childcare to grandchildren in the diaspora, using twenty-five grandmothers selected in Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria based on their experience of this phenomena. Study found that participants were motivated to undertake diaspora childcare out of empathy for the younger couples, the feeling of a sense of duty, perceived knowledge of childcare, self-fulfilment, cultural norms, and the need to minimize the cost of childcare for couples in the diaspora. The sense of being 'available' played a significant role in participants' decision to provide childcare abroad. The study equally showed that the practice had both emotional and social impact on the grandmothers involved. The research advances the significance of diaspora grandmother child care services as a critical part of the broader debate on companionship and gender roles in old age, especially in Africa, where elders remain key transmitters of societal norms and values.

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Introduction

Leaving children in the care of grandparents is a common practice in most societies although considerable variability and culture-specific beliefs and practices exist (Aubel, 2005, p. 2006; Martínez-Martínez et al., 2019; Smith & Wild, 2019). Numerous studies demonstrate the continuing importance of intergenerational relationships and exchanges in which grandparents are centrally placed (Aassve et al., 2012; Backhouse & Graham, 2010; Goh, 2009; Hank & Buber, 2009; Jenkins, 2010; Knodel & Nguyen, 2014; Lou & Chi, 2012; Settles et al., 2009). Perceived in some cultures as 'bonus parents' (Singh, 2014), grandparents who cross national boundaries to provide childcare have been described as 'diasporas of care' (Williams 2001; as cited in Lie, 2010). The need to explore and understand the dynamics of the engagement of grandparents has attracted significant scholarly effort. Singh (2014) posits that grandparenting is an overlooked aspect of the diasporic experience. He observes that seniors who engaged actively in

the care of grandchildren express happiness and satisfaction in their roles during the post-retirement years. In making the point that grandparental care is almost universal in migrant communities, Lie (2010) finds that grandparents are willing to travel across borders to help their children with childcare. Adopting the social network analysis to examine and compare the transnational dimensions of grandparenting in Chinese and Bangladeshi communities in the UK, Lie (2010) highlights that grandparental care is an essential element in childcare provision, regardless of whether grandparents co-reside with their children or visit them from abroad for a short period of time. Hence, in some immigrant communities, family reunion schemes in host countries are leveraged upon to import grandparental care (Singh, 2014).

Mitchell (2007) contends that the literature on grandparenting has not looked into the support needs of the grandparents themselves. This charge becomes particularly critical giving the condition of diaspora grandparenting. Among Chinese immigrants in Canada, Zhou (2012) submits that transnational care transforms the situation of grandparents from ageing 'in place' to ageing on the move. Moreover, while transnational grandparenting is indicative of the resource mobilization capability of skilled Chinese immigrants, he contends that the practice ruptures traditional trajectories of ageing of grandparents and complicates their experiences of inequalities (Zhou, 2012). Sometimes, grandparents leave their spouses behind, and it is also not unusual for them to leave their own elderly parents when they travel abroad to give care (Lie, 2010).

Apart from the care giving roles involved in grandparenting and the problems arising from the practice, feminist framing suggests that familism which constrains grandmothers to provide intergenerational care, reinforces traditional gender ideology (Lee & Bauer, 2013). However, that view has been criticized for excessively feminizing grandparenthood discourse so much that the role of grandfathers is underexplored. Mann (2007, p. 282) observes that there is a 'gendered understanding of grandparenthood drawn from the experiences of grandmothers ...' This is foregrounded by the fact that grandmothers play a more prominent role as caregivers than grandfathers (Lee & Bauer, 2013; Lie, 2010). Both positions are however central to our understanding of the dynamics of grandparenthood in general and diaspora grand-mothering in particular.

In Nigeria, the rate of grandmothers taking residency in their children's homes is high. This is in spite of urbanity and rise of the practice of nuclear family. Grandmothers relocate to their children's residence especially upon the delivery of a new-born in a practice known as *Omugwo*, *Ojojo Omo* and *Jago* within Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa cultures respectively. This indigenous postpartum care presents opportunity for younger mothers to learn from older women (Obikeze, 1997).

Consequent upon the social, economic and political changes that compelled many Nigerians to migrate outside the country, the discharge of this role has taken a transnational turn especially with the large and growing Nigerian diaspora communities in the Global North and many other countries in Europe (De Haas, 2006; IOM, 2014; James et al., 2014; Mberu & Pongou, 2010; Reynolds, 2004). However, studies are yet to examine transnational care giving among Nigerian grandmothers. Probing this phenomenon is essential since diaspora grand-mothering could be complicated given the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society. Transnational care giving that leaves husbands behind may rupture existing gender norms, including those related to household

chores (Akanle & Oluwakemi, 2012). If the husband is aged, loneliness may set in or worsen with the absence of other children or supportive relationships. Besides, libidinous husbands have to put their sexual desire on hold while those who fall sick may have to undergo treatment and recovery without the care of their long-term partners.

This article, therefore, explores the implications of Nigerian grandmothers providing child care services beyond the borders of Nigeria. Based on the experiences of twenty-five selected grandmothers who are based in Ibadan metropolis and who have at one point provided this diasporic service, the article identifies and explains the factors shaping their involvement in diaspora care giving to grandchildren, the benefits and challenges, and particularly how it impacts on their husbands. The study adds to the literature on the roles of grandparents and the participation of Nigerian grandmothers in transnational childcare. Important however is how we explore the issue within the precepts of symbolic interactionist role theory. The study engages diaspora grand-mother child care service as a critical part of the broader debate on companionship and gender roles in old age, especially in Africa where older people remain key transmitters of social values.

Grandparenting and diaspora grand-mothering

Globally, many grandparents are involved in the care of their grandchildren (Michel et al., 2019; Settles et al., 2009; Smith & Wild, 2019). A multi-country survey found that in Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, a substantial proportion of people aged 60 and above co-reside with grandchildren whom they care for (Knodel & Nguyen, 2014). Similar findings emerged in Xiamen, China, where grandparents form an integral part of grandchildren care and general family life (Goh, 2009). Many non-Western cultures justify grandparental roles in the promotion of family and collective well-being (Lou & Chi, 2012). Grandparenting is gendered involving mostly grandmothers, even in Europe where only a minority perform grandparental roles (Koslowski, 2009).

In Africa, proverbs reveal grand-parentage as a means of familial and community good. A Senegalese proverb, for instance, states that 'a house without a grandmother is like a road that goes nowhere.' Scholars too affirmed the significance of grandmothers in African cultures, their vast experience in child care, and their demonstrable commitment to the promotion of the well-being of whole families (Aubel, 2005; Michel et al., 2019). Young African women are socialized into womanhood by older women, with care giving and child nurturing roles forming the basis of their identity as wives and mothers (Afisi, 2010). This role is perpetuated later in life when as grandmothers themselves, these hitherto young women transform into transmitters of indigenous knowledge on childcare and development (Aubel, 2006).

The widespread involvement of grandparents in the care of grandchildren is not unconnected to the benefits accruing from the practice. Henderson et al. (2009) state that the process of raising grandchildren offers a new focus for family relationships and can rekindle previously lost intimacy across generations. Another view indicates that in caring for grandchildren, both grandparents and parents benefit: grandparents develop bonds with their grandchildren while the children in turn, benefit through the freedom and time flexibilities accorded to them by the presence of grandparents (Jenkins, 2010). In a large study conducted in 11 European countries, the availability

of grandparents to provide care giving assistance was shown to influence individual fertility decisions (Aassve et al., 2012).

Diaspora grandparenting, however, requires a grandparent to migrate to another country. Diaspora or transnational grandparenting is a response to the problem of international migration, family formation, childcare and cultural issues. According to Sigad and Eisikovits (2013), transnational migration of persons creates cultural gaps and emotional distance as grandparents may be unable to play grandparenting roles effectively because of geographical distance. Moving across national borders is often the only way to close the distance and bonding gaps. As a growing practice in immigrant communities, transnational grandparental care is valued as an obligation.

Multiple causes shape the phenomenon of transnational grandparenting, including 'migration status, cultural differences, family values, and gender role practices brought from the home country, as well as individual circumstances' (Da, 2003, p. 98). The role of grandparents in transnational childcare is also growing because of the increasing participation of mothers in the workforce and a general rise in dual-income households (Lee & Bauer, 2013; Singh, 2014).

Whatever the scale of involvement and drivers, grandparenting is fraught with many challenges. Lie (2010) alludes to the migration problems and powerlessness that grandparents feel in deciding whether to offer childcare transnationally. Based on the case of Chinese grandparents in Canada, he maintains that grandparents are often powerless to refuse invitation as they feel obligated for cultural reasons and because they perceive that their help is crucial for the proper adjustment of their children in a foreign country. In transnational grandparenting roles, some grandparents feel abandoned by their children (Singh, 2014). The problem of language is also not unusual in this circumstance. Grandparents, who are mostly elderly, often travel out of their countries of origin for the first time, usually alone and without requisite language skills. The differential of language competency has been shown to account for differences in adjustment and the feeling of homesickness among grandmothers from different countries of origin (Lie, 2010).

While some argue that transnational grandparenting is neither traditional nor modern, but a practice adopted to meet family needs (Da, 2003), it is almost impossible to explain the phenomenon outside dynamics of contemporary globalization and the immigration conditions of the contemporary world. In particular, migration, the transnational search for employment, and realities of urban living have led to changes in domestic economies and household decision making, while transforming traditional sex-based divisions of labour and power. Considering how international migration has transformed the modalities of family life and parenting, Nigeria makes a good case for sustaining this claim. Since the 1980s, the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) has contributed to state failure and led to a rise in social problems that resulted in out-migration from Nigeria (Akanle, 2011; Mberu & Pongou, 2010; Omobowale, 2013). Many of these Nigerian migrants travelled without their parents and eventually settled in the United States, Canada, and Europe. This settlement occasioned marriages and the production of offspring. In the United States, for instance, one commissioned study reports about 376,000 Nigerian immigrants and their children live there with about 163,000 US-born being second-generation immigrants (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). This figure is a significant increase from the estimated population of 25,000 in 1980. Mberu and Pongou (2010), citing the Annual Population Survey of the UK

Office for National Statistics, state that about 154,000 foreign-born Nigerians lived in the United Kingdom in 2009, which makes Nigeria the second top source-country for African migration to the United Kingdom. While this Nigerian diaspora continues to grow, there is a limited understanding of how traditional care resources are being transnationalized. Specifically, there is no clear understanding of how Nigerian grandmothers perform grand-mothering roles, nor is there much scholarship on the benefits of such engagement and its challenges.

However, even though grandparents generally have persistent feelings of obligation to, and care for, their grandchildren (Mitchell, 2008), Da, 2003; Lie, 2010 have argued that grandparents and their potential visits to provide care to grandchildren abroad are, constrained by immigration policies of destination countries and thus their movements are not framed only by their grandchildren's needs, resources and agency, but it is also driven by the migration policies and visa regimes of the countries of immigration. This is even more so in the era of covid-19 epidemiological uncertainty that has halted the outbound and inbound ban of all international travels and placed a restriction on intra-country human movements (Wyplosz, 2020)

Conceptualizing role theory

Role theory is a sociological perspective shaped by theorists working within the structural and symbolic interactionist traditions (Biddle, 2000). Role theorists observed a similarity between social life and the theatre wherein actors play predictable roles (Biddle, 2000). Some of its assumptions are traceable to earlier sociological and social psychological research, with the most critical formulations surfacing in the work of Ralph Linton from the 1930s, and Talcott Parsons who wanted to construct a framework of how the human society functions (Scott, 2006).

'Role' means the 'structured social expectations to which individuals orientate themselves' (Scott, 2006, p. 144). Linton identified two aspects of social roles; the static 'positional' aspect and the dynamic aspect which is the role behaviour (Scott, 2006). For Linton, the positional aspect of roles which has rights and obligations attached to it is defined by the cultural systems of the specific societies that people find themselves. Labels such as father, mother, son, daughter, worker, and others would have associated role behaviours as defined by the cultural system of the society. Position and role behaviours are, therefore, the essential constitutive elements of role theory (Scott, 2006). Biddle, 2000, p. 2415 summarises role theory thus:

... the tendency for human behaviors to form characteristic patterns that may be predicted if one knows the social context in which those behaviors appear. It explains those behavior patterns, (or *roles*) by assuming that persons within a context appear as members of recognized social identities (or *positions*) and that they and others hold ideas (*expectations*) about behaviors in that setting.

Hence, wherever social groups exist, norms that define roles for different categories of individuals in that group also exist. Such role definition is the basis of social differentiation and prescription of the part different individuals are expected to play during interactions and in social life generally.

The contribution of symbolic interactionists to role theory arose as an attempt to navigate the criticism of ideological bias levelled against the structuralist role theorists. Owing to its connection to structural-functionalism, structuralist role theory was charged with ‘promulgating a one-sided view of social behaviour emphasizing consensus, cooperation, and continuity in social life at the expense of disagreement, conflict, and change, and as rationalizing the subservience of persons to the social order’ (Stryker, 2001, p. 220). Critics criticized structuralist role theory as denying human agency in social processes, favouring instead a view of human beings as obedient and conforming or subservient to social norms.

Symbolic interactionist role theory on the other hand aims to transcend the deterministic view of structuralist by asserting simply that roles are ‘the shared and inherited ideas that guide and inform behaviour but do not determine it’ (Scott, 2006, p. 144). Even though people occupy positions which have associated role behaviours, they are nonetheless creative and innovative with individual agency and thoughtfulness of purpose which make it possible for them to reconstruct or transform social roles. Symbolic interactionist role theorists see:

... role as a line of action that is pursued by the individual within a given context. Roles are affected by various forces, including pre-existing norms applying to the social position of the actor, beliefs and attitudes that the actor holds, the actor’s conception and portrayal of self, and the “definition of the situation” that evolves as the actor and others interact (Stryker, 2001, p. 2417).

This view of role theory is particularly relevant to this study because it recognises the possibility of role reconstruction which can result from exercise of agency on account of conflict and incompatibility of roles in social life.

Although the concept of ‘role’ is used frequently in grandparenting literature, the word is rarely problematized. From the symbolic interactionist perspective of role theory, we can ask how the phenomenon of diasporic grand-mothering ‘freezes’ and transform roles between grandparents. We argue that ‘role freezing’ and ‘role transfer’ due to the role disruption caused by diaspora grand-mothering complicates gendered positions and expected role behaviours and social relations. This occurs because the participation of grandmothers in diaspora care giving potentiates role frictions which may challenge structured role expectations.

In Africa and for mothers especially, babies are a rare gift that serves a physical reminder of the love of parents. It is thus important that after delivery parents have a task to take care of the children in the best ways they can think of. However, for the first-time parents, challenges of taking care of newly born child can be daunting and often requires the assistance of families, friends and neighbours (Busari et al. 2017). In Nigeria, traditional postpartum care practises to welcome a newborn baby into the embrace of the family gives the new mother a ease into the new role through the experiences of her mother or her husband’s mother. Traditionally, postpartum care is the responsibility of the mother of the husband or of the wife. It is desire to assist put the new mother through nutritional needs to help with the production of breast milk for baby’s consumption.

Materials and methods

The study is an exploratory cross-sectional research conducted between October 2018 and July 2019 in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. A complementary qualitative research

technique, the In-Depth Interview (IDI) was deployed for data collection. This approach gives room for a detailed understanding of the topic under study and allowed for adequate forum for self-expression. We obtained data through in-depth interviews with Twenty-five purposively selected grandmothers in the Ibadan metropolis of Oyo State, Southwest, Nigeria. Interviews were conducted in person using a semi-structured interview guide in the language of choice i.e. (Yoruba, Pidgin English and English Language) of the participants. The interviews were back translated into English Language for the purpose of analysis. The study was conducted among Nigerian grandmothers, irrespective of socio-economic class status who had at one time or the other travelled abroad on account of going to help their 'Documented Migrant' children in the diaspora to tend their newly born babies. The purposive approach was utilized because the participants for the study are limited in number. The snowballing sampling technique was also employed in the identification of respondents as the technique benefits the exploratory studies to locate participants of the research population whom is known to them. The average age of the grandmothers was 60 years, while the oldest among them was aged 73 years. The average age of parents in the diaspora was put at 35. They had between one and two children who reside mainly in the United States and the United Kingdom. Their children were employed in professional occupations such as law, nursing, medicine other highly skilled professions. At one time or another, all participants had engaged in diaspora grand-mothering at the invitation of their children, spending a minimum of three months and a maximum of six months, with a few of them having travelled to provide childcare service more than once. Three, out of the twenty-five participants were retired from public and private establishments at the time of data collection. The other ten who were still in active employment were in the non-governmental sector and private school administration. We recorded and transcribed all interviews and observed relevant ethical principles throughout the research process, including the principle of informed consent and confidentiality. Data analysis involved thematic and content analyses. We reviewed transcripts and compared the cases to generate themes and identify patterns and divergences. Findings were presented using ethnographic summaries and direct quotes.

Results

Socio-demographic profile of participants

Participants comprised businesswomen, career women/employees, housewives and petty traders. Eleven of the women are full-time housewives; five are businesswomen, three are middle cadre civil servants and the others participants are not economically active.

All the grandmothers understand the value of education and would not like to see their children left out or become second-class citizens and so have invested heavily in the education of their children abroad. The participants enjoy a variety of hobbies and interests. Their common interests includes, watching movies (Nigerian home video mainly) and soap opera, listening to music, Singing, dancing, cooking, visiting friends and family occasionally, reading lifestyle magazines and novels (some), taking care of the home front, attending specific parties, swimming and enjoying time on the internet Majority of the grandmothers are (17) married, three are separated, and five are divorced. The

participants' have the dream of achieving greatness through their children and grandchildren. In their children's success, they are assured that they are good parents. They also see hope and assurance that they will be well taken care of in their twilight years. To this end, the grandmothers pay attention, within the family's means, to providing quality education to their children. They hope that these children will excel and achieve even greater heights and recognition than they have in society. In the words of one of the participants

My dream is to become a good mother for my children and a good grandmother for my children's children, a successful business woman and a good wife to my husband. (IDI, 52 years)

While another also buttressed the point by saying

My children and my children's children are my priority now and among my grandchildren, I pray to have lawyer, doctor and an artist ... I want to be international persons that will be announced wherever they go ... I want a brighter future for them and will sacrifice my happiness for theirs. (IDI, 57 years)

Travel expenses that are directly related to the trips that may include airfare, visa procurements and other expenses including the logistics are borne by the children. The availability for the role of grand mothering abroad however varies and discretionary than others across different points in the life of every participant. Thus, younger participants may wish to spend more quality time with the family at home because of their other younger children who are not married and their husbands who still requires their attention and love than the older grandmothers, who are either who either widowed or separated and no longer engage in sex with their husbands.

Involvement in diaspora grand-mothering: motivations and drivers

Although Nigerian grandmothers participate in diaspora grand-mothering, little documentation exists on the factors that motivate them to participate. Motivation, therefore, was one of the issues we explored. Based on the frequency of mentions and the depth of explanations offered, participants were motivated to undertake diaspora grand-mothering because of empathy, a feeling of a sense of duty, perceived knowledge of childcare, self-fulfilment, cultural norms and the quest to minimize the cost of childcare for couples in the diaspora. On empathy, the respondents expressed concern about the well-being of their children and grandchildren. They perceived diaspora life as challenging and that couples have difficulty accessing social support necessary for coping with childbirth. Newly delivered mothers were thought to be physically weak and that in the absence of help, there is a possibility that her health would deteriorate.

I felt both new parents have no relative over there, and for them to be well catered for, somebody must be there with them, especially the baby and the mother. Because after delivery, the mother needs to rest, and not [to be] here and there to buy things or cook. Somebody must be on the ground to assist. (IDI 1, 68 years)

A fundamental understanding from this quotation is that even while abroad and embedded in a new cultural milieu, traditionally gendered roles are not frozen nor suspended for Nigerian women upon childbirth. If no one is around, new mothers are expected to keep up with chores such as cooking and shopping. Knowing that continuing

these activities during early periods after childbirth could have negative impacts on the mothers, grandmothers feel that they must be on hand to help alleviate the burden.

The second factor is the feeling of duty towards one's children and grandchildren. In spite of the distance, helping out with newborns babies is considered part of grandmothers' responsibilities. Some grandmothers recalled how they too benefitted from their mothers sense of duty towards them. One grandmother stated that 'as the mother-in-law, when your child gives birth, it is your duty to go and take care of the baby' (IDI, 68 years), another said she was motivated 'because my own mother came to stay with me when I had my children' (IDI, 73 years).

Third, the participants perceived themselves as possessing childcare knowledge that is worth sharing. While acknowledging that hospitals and live-in help can assist with the care of newborns, one grandmother pointed out that the knowledge of such carers is limited. Commenting on the inadequacy of nannies for instance, one participant insisted that even though it might cost more to invite grandmothers to a foreign country, it was worth the cost as a 'nanny may not take care of the baby the way I will like it handled' (IDI, 68 years).

A fourth factor is that grand-mothering is a means to achieve personal fulfilment. Grand-mothering is considered a role to look forward to as it signals continuity and familial perpetuation.

It is good to be a grandmother, to see your grandchildren and nurse them. To say 'this is my child, my own grandson or daughter' is what everybody is looking forward to achieving. It is a status that I enjoy. (IDI, 60 years)

On cultural norms, the involvement of a grandmother in the life of her child is an expectation for many women at a certain age or when such child starts to have offspring. One of the participants made an explicit reference to this cultural expectation (IDI 4, 60 years) as motivation, only that it meant going to the diaspora to fulfil the obligation. On minimizing the cost of childcare, participants admitted that while diaspora couples can recruit help in their countries of residence, they (the grandmothers) considered themselves to be a cheaper alternative. As one of them said, 'it costs a fortune to hire people to take care of the children ... it takes a fortune to nurture them most especially when they are very young' (IDI, 69 years).

'Nothing will happen if I decided not to go': agency and diaspora grand-mothering

While grandmothers have shared-motivations to engage in diaspora grand-mothering, the context of availability which is shaped by work status, grandmother's age, and grandfather's approval were prominent in the decision to provide childcare abroad. Availability is critical because grandmothers are social actors embedded in their respective environments. In the case of some of the participants in this study, they were still in active service when the need to care for grandchildren arose. In fact, one of them was still a serving school principal at the time of the interview and her work status had at some point inhibited her from travelling:

At the time my son had a baby in the US, it was his mother-in-law who was a university lecturer that could go. This was because of the flexibility in lecturers' schedule. (IDI 3, 69 years)

This implies some form of negotiation in who goes for the diaspora grand-mothering engagement. For instance, if both mothers of the diaspora couples are alive, a decision is made regarding who would go to care for the grandchild. This decision is also contingent on the preference of the couple, the occupation of the grandmothers, their age/health status and visa access:

It is the person that is available at that time [that would go abroad] ... some in-laws are very old [and] can't make the journey. So, the other parent will have to go. Not [that] she is not competent but because of age. (IDI, 60 years)

Although cultural expectations demand that couples and grandmothers become inter-dependent at the birth of a child, grandmothers possess agency through which they negotiate availability. One grandmother did not believe that grand-mothering assistance is forced. Ruling out the audacity of compulsion, another participant identified negotiation as the basis of diaspora grand-mothering. She said; 'nothing will happen if I decided not to go; ... there wouldn't be any cause for alarm. They can request for me to come, I can say I can't come.' (IDI, 60 years).

Furthermore, the extent of involvement of grandmothers in new mothers' pregnancy impact on the decision to partake in diaspora grand-mothering. The basic operant in this situation is information sharing in which the diaspora couple informs their parents about conception and child delivery date. This allows grandmothers to prepare for trips in advance:

They [diaspora couples] would have served a long notice when they get pregnant. ... So, you will have time to prepare and ask yourself: am I going or not? So, there is ample time for you to make the necessary arrangements. (IDI, 60 years)

Advance knowledge about conception becomes critical when it is interrogated along with the fact that some grandmothers must make proper pre-departure arrangements for their husbands. Most pre-departure arrangements revolve around gender roles associated with wifehood, such as house chores and feeding. On this, the husbands of grandmothers still have considerable influence on availability as grandmothers often seek approval from their husbands. This means that in many instances, grandfathers often play decisive roles in the availability of diaspora grand-mothers. One participant said her husband was 'the one that *sent* me. ... He is the one that would say these children need your help' (IDI, 60 years). Another participant said that her husband told her to:

"Go and help with the baby." He gave me every support to go there ... He understood that once you are married, you can call your mother to help with something like that [i.e. childcare]' (IDI, 60 years).

Another participant stated that 'my daughter requested for me to come, and *took permission* from daddy [i.e. grandfather]. [*Italicised texts for emphasis*] (IDI 3, 69 years)

Some grandmothers revealed that they would prefer to have their spouses with them when abroad. For instance, a 60 years old grandmother whose two children reside in the UK said she never travelled for childcare without her husband. On one occasion when she travelled alone, the logistics and timing of her grandchildren's school calendar were responsible. Worry for her husband's wellbeing while she was away and a deeper

concern that her absence could provide opportunity for extramarital affair and potentially threaten her marriage were her reasons.

Any child that needs you should bundle both of you because there have been cases where men stray. A man at his old age [referring to her husband] will need the comfort of a woman beside him. If the woman is not there, any other person can take advantage of that situation. So, when that situation arises, who is to blame? It is rampant all over the place that husbands derail before the wives return from nurturing grandchildren. Biblically, they [i.e. men] are not supposed to be left alone. (IDI, 69 years)

Practices and experiences of grand-mothering in the diaspora

Although most grandmothers travelled abroad after the birth of their grandchildren, one participant arrived before her grandchild was born. Regardless, the roles they played were the same. Importantly, it involved a combination of tasks and responsibilities which transcend beyond looking after newborns. For instance, when asked to describe her role, a participant replied that 'I do every other thing apart from breastfeeding the baby' (IDI, 60 years). Sometimes, they performed these roles under uncomfortable situations as in the case of the grandmother who resided along the US–Canada border during her visit:

I wake up very early in the morning, even before the mother wakes up. ... It was during the winter period. I wake up early to take care of the children – they were three then. ... I cook, we go shopping together. I take the children to school, welcome them home etc. On the baby, I wash and administer medicine to her, wrap her and put her to bed. (IDI, 47 years)

Besides serving as cooks, house cleaners and nannies, some played the role of counsellors to inexperienced mothers. With an understanding that the early post-partum period is tough on mothers, grandmothers also functioned as massage therapists and 'psychiatrists' when the need arose.

After delivery, I felt she needed to rest, so I assisted her in cooking, I massaged her stomach, bathed the baby, cleaned [the house]. At times when she is sleeping and the baby is crying, I'll pet the baby. At times when she is confused, she comes to me for information. (IDI, 68 years)

Also, the care provided to their grandchildren covers aspects of play, visiting parks and dropping school-age grandchildren at the school.

One fundamental question that arises from this is: would there have been a difference if they were in Nigeria? Some of the participants stated that different care regimens existed at home and abroad, with many favouring what obtains in Nigeria. They favoured the baby care practice in Nigeria despite their inability or unwillingness to apply a similar practice in the diaspora. For example, one grandmother talked about the use of local sponge and traditional black soup to bathe babies and the traditional massage of a new-born:

In our culture, when a baby is born [and] you don't want offensive odour, black soap must be used to bathe the baby. ... [When] the baby [i.e. her grandchild] was born [abroad], the nurses used little soap and wrapped the baby. In our culture, you take the baby to the bathroom and scrub the baby with a local sponge. After scrubbing, you stretch the legs and at times even mould the head. (68 years, Retired)

While the grandmother above insisted that ‘we cannot neglect our tradition because we are abroad,’ it is apt to point out that she did not use the local sponge and black soap while abroad. This suggests that while grandmothers knew and valued traditional childcare practices, they sometimes refrained from applying them in caring for grandchildren based abroad. Their refrain may be due to personal choice or individual experiences.

Also, contrary to what obtains at home, diaspora grand-mothering is mostly a lonely and challenging activity. In Nigeria, even in situations where grandmothers are caring for a newborn, other family members or hired help are at hand to provide additional support. Diaspora grandmothers on the hand receive little assistance outside of what couples provide. In some cases, help is lacking because couples are caught up in other day to day activities.

When children are brought to their grandparents in Nigeria, you are with them and also get helpers – some people have as many as two houses helps. So, you are not alone. ... There [in diaspora], you don’t have [helpers]; you will do everything: taking care of the baby, the mother, and maybe preparing food for them, most especially if both of them work. (IDI, 69 years)

The subversive labour regime of the western society has exposed the changes in modern family structure and encouraged grandmothers to take up the responsibility of tending to grandchildren when they ought to be receiving care. While we do not suggest that grand-mothering is new or wholly a consequence of the industrial complex of globalization, there is no doubt that the cycle of interdependent care giving across borders under a condition of up rootedness is unique to this era.

Although grandmothers are respected in the family and enjoy much influence over their children’s homes and general affairs, diaspora grandmothers are more cautious while abroad. For instance, grandmothers take explicit instructions from the grandchild’s parents, especially on health matters. When probed to know whether she administers medicine on her grandchild, a participant replied that:

I don’t use any medicine on them. I only take care of the baby, to bath, to make sure everything is in order. If they need anything to treat the child, the parents will give me money to buy. ... I don’t give them anything on my own. (IDI, 60 years)

This contrast with the influence grandmothers have over their grandchildren in African societies. The caution participants exercised may be due to the differences in rules whereby what is considered care giving in Nigeria may be categorized as illegal or abusive in the diaspora.

Benefits and challenges of diaspora grand-mothering

Diaspora grand-mothering is not all about grandmothers serving grandchildren and couples in the diaspora. Grandmothers too derive some benefits. The first benefit mentioned was that diaspora grand-mothering provides an opportunity to bond with grandchildren. While distance denies grandmothers the joy of helping to raise grandchildren, short travels for grand-mothering purposes affords them the chance to partake in such grandparental joy.

Another benefit is that it offers opportunities for tourism. The practice allowed some grandmothers to explore and observe ‘how things are done there [abroad]’ (IDI 1, 68

years). Besides, grandmothers that require medical attention were able to receive care in high-quality health facilities. Hence, giving childcare and receiving medical care is perceived as a better alternative. Indeed, some grandmothers reside abroad for an extended period in order to receive medical care (IDI, 60 years).

The practice also makes it possible for grandmothers to be a part of their grandchildren's socialization. Through socialization, one of them came to value the opportunity to contribute to the spiritual life of her grandchild at the early stage. In her words: 'You are able to bring them up in the way of the lord, knowing that you are sowing seeds in their life at that early stage' (IDI 1, 68 years).

Material gain is one of the fundamental benefits of diaspora grand-mothering. For the assistance offered, grandmothers get material gifts which sometimes percolate to persons who also helped them keep their own homes running in their absence: 'as much as they [diaspora couples] can, they appreciate, they even send gifts through me to people especially to those who are of help when I am not around' (IDI 5, 60 years). This statement reveals the contexts of social exchange in diaspora grand-mothering arrangement. In addition, being abroad provides opportunity to 'forget about stress at home' (IDI 5, 60 years). On a psychological plane, the process provides grandmothers with the opportunity to provide assistance when needed the most. A participant noted that:

The benefit is the joy attached to it. You are happy, and they also are happy. ... That joy comes to the heart of the grandmother that she can perform her social responsibility. (IDI 3, 69 years)

Despite the benefits, these grandmothers experience some challenges as the process has emotional and social implications. Some of the participants have more than one child with other grandchildren and not all of them reside abroad. So, while providing grand-mothering assistance abroad, their responsibility or commitment in other places is affected. Conflict in diaspora households is another challenge wherein grandmothers become parties to conflicts between couples. While they are expected to be impartial, a grandmother might struggle with the responsibility of a conflict manager because her objectivity in such matters could easily be misinterpreted. The case of one of our participants, a 73 years old grandmother suffices to capture this challenge. While visiting her son and his wife in the US, she was caught up in a spousal conflict over having a pet. Her son loved dogs but his wife did not. According to this participant,

a pet dog in the house was common for her son as they had such pets since his childhood. The effort of this grandmother to encourage the wife to tolerate the pet was misconstrued as being biased in the son's favour.

The transnational exportation of grandmother services disrupts other interactions that grandmothers have always been a part of. Some grandmothers have to suspend church networks and personal responsibilities to religious organizations on account of being away. Those in regular employment at home also temporarily lost interactions with co-workers. Most of the women complained that their church commitments and responsibilities suffered while they were away to care for their grandchildren. Nevertheless, telephone and social media applications remained useful in helping them stay connected and maintain significant ties while away.

Other challenges include not having familiar local food to consume, incompatible weather conditions, loneliness, too much work, and lack of freedom to do what they

have interest in such as attending church whenever they liked. In dealing with loneliness, some grandmothers engaged in local tourism through neighbourhood walks and visits to public recreational spots. The use of automated equipment such as washing machine for carrying out routine tasks like laundry helped to reduce the stress of childcare.

Discussion

Our case study showed that Nigerian grandmothers valued their involvement in diaspora grand-mothering. The visit of grandmothers as caregivers to the diaspora often coincided with the arrival of a newborn. Care giving journeys were undertaken to help new mother rest and recover. This observation is similar to the pattern reported among Chinese grandmothers who felt that the postpartum period is a period of recovery from heat (Lie, 2010). We also found that previously documented factors motivating diaspora grand-mothering among other nationalities were similar to those motivating Nigerian grandmothers, especially cultural norms and work circumstances of diaspora couples (Da, 2003; Lee & Bauer, 2013; Singh, 2014). Also, like Aubel (2005, 2006) and other scholars have shown, women's roles transcend beyond giving care to their children and grandchildren. The participation of Nigerian grandmothers in diaspora childcare helps diaspora couples to navigate the demanding neoliberal labour regime. Many scholars have argued that the demands of modern work life in the globalized world impacts on the capacity of young mothers to provide childcare, thus necessitating the practice of grand-mothering in the diaspora (Cost et al., 2017; Kerig, 2019; Ma, 2018; Vermulst et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, Nigerian grandmothers valued their role as it allowed them to be close to their grandchildren despite the distance. While abroad, however, diaspora grandmothers multitask, from doing chores to helping mothers carry out every day work around and outside the house. They also perform the role of informal counsellors to new mothers. These tasks go beyond the childcare role that grandmothers are expected to play. Their involvement in all these activities underlines why grandmothers remain critical in many African cultures (Michel et al., 2019).

More than this, we should reiterate the place of empathy in the motivations for transnational grand-mothering. As the most mentioned among our participants, empathy is rarely amplified as a distinct motivation in diaspora grandparenting. By not paying attention to this, there is a tendency to deny the agency of grandmothers to sometimes choose to be part of transnational childcare activities based on their evaluation of the situation. The issue of agency becomes more important when we consider how grandmothers decide whether or not to travel abroad for childcare. As our findings reveal, even though all the grandmothers were happy to support diaspora couples, they expressed a rare agency that is absent in other studies. For instance, contrary to Lie (2010) who found that Chinese grandparents in Canada felt powerless and obligated, Nigerian grandmothers were free to either accept an invitation or refuse it. With their elaborate discussion on 'availability', Nigerian grandmothers anchored their participation on reasons that were indicative of personal will. This claim holds even though patriarchal power and other circumstances of 'availability' play mediatory roles.

The literature on grandparenting, especially the transnational kind, has mostly been silent on the place of grandfathers. When they mention them, the contention is often

about how scholars have focused too much on grandmothers and neglected grandfathers who are also increasingly providing care to grandchildren under certain conditions (Mann, 2007). These concerns are genuine. However, we observed that grandfathers occupy a more crucial position in the calculations of diaspora grandmothers. The significance of grandfathers is not just in terms of their place in approving care giving journeys but also in the ways diaspora grand-mothering practice affects them. Grandmothers put grandfathers into consideration, precisely because transnational care giving can pose a threat to grandparental marital relations.

Finally, our case study confirmed the assumption of symbolic interactionist role theory; most prominently in respect of how role expectations often appear fixed but are made flexible by role behaviours. Grandmothers, as social agents, often reinterpret their roles even when they simultaneously value those roles as responsibility. Ironically, we observed a deliberate effort on the part of grandmothers to fit in and fulfil multiple gender roles by the way they negotiated with grandfathers in the course of their diasporic childcare engagement.

Conclusion

This study explored the phenomenon of diaspora grand-mothering among selected grandmothers in Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria. We explored factors shaping grandmothers' involvement in diaspora care giving and what they perceived as benefits and challenges. Factors like empathy, a feeling of a sense of duty, and cultural norms were essential motivations for grandmothers. The study identified different regimens of childcare in Nigeria and abroad, but most of our participants preferred the regimen in Nigeria. Although many of them felt that they have a responsibility in caring for their grandchildren, they were not victims of culture given their agentic capacity. Grandparental negotiation was essential as grandfathers partook in the decision of whether or not grandmothers go abroad to give care. Despite the social and emotional challenges of the practice, diaspora care giving had the benefit of helping grandmothers to bridge the distance between them and their grandchildren, improving bonding and providing opportunities for medical tourism.

This study adds value to diaspora and grandparenting literature as it unveils a crucial practice in African diaspora experience. Future studies will benefit from collecting data from more grandmothers who participate in transnational childcare. Importantly, studies that take account of, and compare the opinions of different categories of participants, especially diaspora couples and grandfathers, can generate a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of diaspora grand-mothering.

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