

Improving women's autonomy in
humanitarian crises through qualitative
research

Presented

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What are humanitarian crises?

They are events that threaten the health, safety, or well being of a community. These crisis could be internal or external and usually happen throughout a large area.

Why women's autonomy

- It is a man made internal crisis that emanates from culture and tradition
- It affects the individual concerned
- It affects the family
- It affects the society

Major objective

- To bring to the knowledge of policy makers, the Nigerian government and all stakeholders the plight of married women in Nigeria as regards their autonomy.

Research methodology

- Qualitative methods:
 - Purposive sampling (Snow ball)
 - Focus group Discussions (FGD)
 - In-depth Interviews (IDI)
 - 2 pilot IDIs
 - 34 IDIs (Pseudonyms were used for the the participants)
 - 6 FGDs (Described by age, marital, and educational status)

Study population

- **Study population:** Educated, semi-educated and uneducated married Ikwere women in monogamous and polygamous marriages.
- **Sample size:**
 - Thirty-four women of the study population were interviewed.
- **Recruitment:** purposive
- **Instruments:**
 - In-Depth Interview (IDI) using semi-structured questions.
- **Ethical approval** was obtained from the Ethikkommission Nordwest- und Zentralschweiz (EKNZ) and the Nigerian Ethics Committee.

Study site

- **Nigeria**
- **Rivers State**
- The seat of the Nigeria's oil industry
- Population is about 5 million
- Made up of 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs)



The Ikwerres

www.nairaland.com
Retrieved 09.10.15@12:44



- 1.5M population
- Own 20% of the arable land in Rivers State
- Occupy 4 out of the 23 Local government areas in Rivers State
- Predominantly Christians
- Practise monogamy and polygyny marriages
- Speak Ikwerre, Pidgin English and English Language
- 9% have not attended any form of school

Autonomy

- Dyson and Moore define autonomy as the ability to obtain information and use it as a basis of making decision about ones private concerns (Dyson and Moore, 1983)
- Beauchamp and Childress define autonomy as self rule or self governance (Beauchamp and Childress, 2009)
- The content and meaning of autonomy is the same in Africa and indeed Nigeria.
- Generally, Nigerians practice what could be termed as relational or social autonomy because of their communitarian lifestyle of living (Jegede, 2009)

Data Analysis

- All IDIs and FGDs were tape recorded with prior permission from each participant.
- Audio taped interviews were transcribed verbatim
- Transcripts and audio recordings were read several times
- Coding was done using MAXQDA version 11, a qualitative analysis software
- Analysis was descriptive and narrative

Sample population of the study

	IDI (n=29)	FGD (n=23)	IDI and FGD (n=5)	Total (n=57)
Marital status				
- Monogamous	20	15	3	38
- Polygynous	9	8	2	19
Education				
- Educated	18	5	4	27
- Semi-educated	6	6	0	12
- Uneducated	5	12	1	18

Some quotations from the participants

- “Once you are married, you become the property of your husband. You cannot do anything without his consent.” Nirvana, a 38 year old uneducated woman in polygynous marriage
- “My husband’s first wife married me for her husband to make babies. My husband only comes to me when they need babies. My children call me aunt, while they call my husband’s first wife mother.” A 28 year old semi-educated woman in a polygamous marriage
- “My husband rapes me constantly. He beats me if I refuse to have sex with him. Look, my teeth are gone due to constant beating. Look at my ear. But I must remain married because that is what my family and the society expects of me.” A 45 year old uneducated woman in a polygamous marriage

Quotations contd:

- *“It is the culture of absolute respect for men that has led to women’s diminished autonomy in the home. The men always say that this is how their fore fathers have been doing things. Therefore they have to uphold the traditions of the land.” (45 year old educated woman in monogamous marriage, FGD 1)*
- *“The society respects and protects the man. The woman is expected to obey and submit to the decisions of the man even to her detriment. But I do what I want because I am educated and strong willed, that is the only to survival this type of society.” (Natalie, 60 year old educated woman in polygynous marriage, IDI)*

Results

- Married women endure domestic violence to remain married because the society frowns at divorced, separated or unmarried women
- Married women accept rape because sex is seen as marital obligation
- Women are used as baby making 'factories'
- Women marry early to alleviate the family's financial status
- Most women get married not because they want to but because the society expects them to

Bad effects of women's diminished autonomy

- Autonomy is eroded
- Dignity is eroded
- Her identity is wiped
- Emotional trauma
- Psychological trauma
- Lack of access to quality healthcare

Who is responsible for this?

- The culture
- The society
- The family
- Women
- Men

What can be done?

- Education of women and men
- Financial empowerment
- Conferences, seminars, workshops, research
- Publishing academic papers in reputable journals
- Family values should be taught
- Implementation of laws in the Nigerian constitution that protects women

Who can help?

- Women
- Traditional leaders
- The government
- The politicians
- The civil society
- Individuals
- Everybody

Conclusion

- The level of injustice meted out to women in Nigeria in the name of culture and tradition is disheartening. These cultures help to enforce women's already diminished autonomy
- Women have to learn to value themselves and stand up for each other
- The Nigerian policy makers and indeed the government of Nigeria should implement the laws in the Nigerian Constitution that protect women
- Cultures and traditions that discriminate against the female gender and promote women's diminished autonomy should be abolished

Thank you very much indeed for
your attention.

