PERCEIVED EFFECT OF ECONOMIC RECESSION ON RURAL FAMILY RELATIONSHIP IN OBIO-APKOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined the perceived effects of economic recession on the rural family relationship in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers state, Nigeria. Specifically, the study was designed to: describe the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents; identify areas of effects of economic recession on family relationship; examine the perception of family relationships and identify measures on how to ameliorate the effects of economic recession on family relationships. A sample size of 49 respondents was used for the study. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Data obtained were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings from the study showed that 35.0% of the respondents were between the ages 20 – 30 years, married (75.0%); were females (53.0%), had tertiary educational qualification (66.0%), had between 1 – 3 children (54.60%), and were self-employed (49.0%). More than half (88.0%) had a monthly income of ₦5, 000 – ₦20, 000 and it was from one source of income. The effects of economic recession on family relationships included damaged interpersonal relationship, cancelled family vacation, among others. The respondents were of the view that family members must live together(x=3.27) and marriage is made up of father, mother, and children (nuclear family) (x=3.46). Measures of ameliorating effects of economic recession on family relationships were; keeping positive attitude (93.0%) and cutting down expenditure (81.0%). The study recommends that families should not rely on one source of income and as such, entrepreneurships should be encouraged to explore more than one stream of income.

Keywords: Perceived, effect, economic recession, rural family, relationship

Introduction

The peace and unity that characterized traditional Nigerian rural families have been challenged by the multiplier effects of austerity and recent bouts of economic recession. Nigerian rural families have come under severe threat as a result of the persistent austere economic conditions and its corollary, erosion of African family values. There is a nexus between pervasive rural family crises aggravated by low family status resulting from the low agricultural output and debilitating austere economic conditions. Pro-poor rural families in Nigeria have been torn asunder and are no longer nests of love, but centres of conflict and crisis-prone (Nnoyelu, 2012).

The rural family is an important setting within which the great recession can exert its influence. Although the downturn directly affected many workers by reducing their earnings or forcing them into unemployment, it affected the rural family indirectly by changing their living arrangements or family life. Further, the ways in which rural families were formed would also be broken up by the great recession, as it can alter the perceived costs and benefits of various rural family-relevant behaviours (Morgan et al, 2012).

Economic recession is not entirely a new phenomenon in Nigeria. Past experiences include the 1981-88 period (Bangura, 1989) and the 2007-2008 global economic meltdown (Demaki, 2012). Unlike the previous cycles of recession, the current one is particularly unique because it is occurring at a period that is also characterized by high cost of agricultural inputs, low agricultural produce, rising inflation, high exchange rate of Naira to Dollar and high unemployment rate (National Bureau of Statistics Quarterly Reports, December 2016). Whereby the usual panacea to the issue of reflation or increased spending has the capability to worsen the inflationary trend, the recessionary pressure is felt by all units of the society, especially the farm family is the first and most primary institution. When rural people who are employed by off-farm activities such as carpentry, mason, brick laying, and roofing, among others no longer have jobs to, do and have money to keep the family relationship on, the rural family gets disrupted because of conflicts arising from the inability to provide basic needs of the family.

Many rural workers have experienced unemployment, others have struggled to cope with not working enough hours to make ends meet, and others have felt compelled to undertake substantial paid and unpaid overtime. According to (TUC, 2012) in Nigeria over five million workers worked unpaid overtime by 2012, averaging 7.2 hours a week, the amount of unpaid hours worked equating to nearly a million jobs. While many rural workers have considered themselves fortunate to have a job, the realities of job insecurity and underemployment are likely to have placed additional strain on relationships. These varied experiences of recession have profoundly affected rural family relationships. The quality of the couple relationship is a critical factor in the rural environment in which children grow up and develop (Strong, Devault and Cohen, 2010). Children growing up with parents who have good quality relationships, with low parental conflict –whether within couples or between separated partners are happier than their other counterparts (Coleman & Glenn, 2009)

Financial stress and disagreements have been identified as a leading source of marital conflict in America. It is one of the most frequently cited problems for married couples (Noko, 2016; Morgan, and Swann, 2004). Amid the turmoil and economic upheaval in the wider economy, individuals and rural families go about their live, deciding to get married, suffering through breakups and divorces, planning families, and sorting out their living arrangements. The recession have major effects on all of these family processes. The deepening economic crisis is profoundly impacting children, youths and rural families. Its effects are rippling through the multiple contexts in which children and youths are situated. Within the nuclear family, stressors such as job loss, home foreclosure or loss in family savings place a strain on parental relationships and on the family as a whole (APA, 2016). Some rural families are passing through difficult times economically and no longer able to meet their current or traditional obligations as they fall due. At the rural family level, according to McLoyd (1990) and Njoku, (2013), poverty and economic loss diminish the capacity for supportive, consistent, and involved parenting and render parents more vulnerable to the debilitating effects of negative life events. Secondly, a major mediator of the link between economic hardship and parenting behaviour is psychological distress deriving from an excess of negative life events, undesirable chronic conditions, and the absence and disruption of marital bonds, thirdly, economic hardship adversely affects children's socio-emotional functioning in part through its impact on the parent's behaviour toward the child, and finally, father-child relations under conditions of economic hardship depend on the quality of relations between the mother and father.

The key *economic* function and purpose of marriage were to create a joint-production unit that raised efficiency and afforded rural family members a higher standard of living. Further, marriage generated economies of scale relative to living single; that also substantially boosted people’s standard of living. Conger & Conger, (2002) proposes that economic hardship or economic disparity leads to economic pressure, which is defined as the perceived inability to pay for basic needs, the inability to make ends meet, and having to cut back on necessary expenses. It predicted that when economic pressure is high, parents are at an increased risk for emotional distress, such as anxiety and/or depression which, in turn, leads to disrupted family relationships. For a typical rural African family, the above scenario always puts a strain on the comfort, and eventual cordial relationship, of members of the affected family. It is critically important that the concept of economic recession is understood and its influence is control and ameliorated in order to have a harmonious rural family; which forms the foundation of socialization in the society and rural development. Specific objectives were to:

i. determine the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents in the study area;
ii. identify areas of effects of the economic recession on family relationship/activities;
iii. examine the perception of family relationships in the study area; and
iv. identify measures on how to ameliorate the effects of the recession on family relationships.

Research Hypothesis

Ho_1: There is no significant difference between economic recession and family relationships.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (LGA). The LGA is located in the metropolis of Port Harcourt, Rivers state, Nigeria. Port Harcourt is one of the major centres of economic activities in Nigeria. Obio/Akpor is a major industrial centre as it has a large number of multinational firms as well as other industrial concerns, particularly business related to the petroleum industry. Vast majority of the indigenes work in these industries and others are engaged in agricultural activities. The study adopted the sample survey design. The target population comprises adult males and females who are married or have being in the marriage institute before in rural communities of the study area. Obio/Akpor is made up of four clans namely Akpor, Obio, Apara and Evo. From Evo (Oro-igwe, and Rumuwara), Apara (Eneka, and Rukpoku), Akpor (Choba, Rumuosi and Alakahia) and Obio (Mgbosimini, Ozuoba and Ogbogoro) were selected. The first stage of the selection involved the random selection of ten communities from the four clans for the study using purposive non-probability sampling method to select rural wards. Out of these communities, 10 respondents were sampled from each of the community which gave a sample size of 100 respondents. Respondents sampling was done using a non-probability sampling procedure which involved quota sampling technique. This technique considered certain characteristics such as age, ward of origin and marital status. Data were collected for this study mainly from primary source using interview schedule. Data obtained were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean score and t-test. A four-point Lekert- type scale with options Strongly Agreed; Agreed; Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed were used. Values ranging from 4 to 1 were assigned to the options. These values were added to get 10 which was further divided by four to give 2.50 which served as the decision rule. Variables greater or equals to 2.50 were seen and accepted as effects while variables less than 2.50 were regarded as not effective. This was used to determine the effects of economic recession and perception of respondents on family relationship. The t-test was used to test the only stated hypothesis. There is no significant relationship between economic recession and family relationship at 0.05 significant level.

Results and Discussion

Social Economic characteristics of Respondents

The result showed that age range 20-30 has dominating frequencies of 35.0% meaning majority of the respondents are of working and energetic age; who can easily find jobs in the face of recession and take up any form of job irrespective of the stress involved. This finding is in line with that of Linos, Slopen, Subramanian, Berkman, Kawachi (2013) who opined that workers who lose job in their fifties and sixties find it increasingly difficult to reactivate themselves and continue their careers. A good number (75.0%) were married, this suggest that there might be high demand for social amenities and need for additional income to cater for the increasing family size. This will likely have a strain on the family income and finances. This collaborates with the finding of Kalunta-Crunpton, (2013) who stated that dominance of married households increases a family quest for ensuring food security, income generation and reduced vulnerability within households. Majority (66.0%) of the respondents had tertiary educational qualification. This shows highly literate households who would not find employment or income generation difficult. More than half (56.0%) of the respondents have just one stream of income. With one income, a family is bound to be impacted most by the negative effects of economic recession, this finding collaborates with the finding of Bohn and Schiff (2011) in times of constricted labour market opportunities, income from other sources rather than wages can compensate for decline in family income. Also, 88.0% of the respondents earned between N5000 to N20000 per month. This amount is too minimal to sustain a family of four considering the inflation rate in the country today. More than half (54.0%) of the respondents had a household size of 1 to 3 persons and they are self-employed (49.0%).

Table 1: Distribution of correspondence by Socio-economic characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean
Age			
20-30	35	35.0	
31-40	20	20.0	
41-50	30	30.0	42yrs
51-60	10	10.0	
61-70	5	5.0	
Marital status			
Married	75	75.0	
Divorced	17	17.0	
Widow/widower	8	8.0	
Gender			
Male	47	47.0	
Female	53	53.0	
Educational qualification			
No formal	2	2.0	
Primary	6	6.0	
Secondary	26	26.0	
Tertiary	66	66.0	
No of Children			
1-3	54	54.0	
4-6	39	39.0	
7-9	3	3.0	4 persons
10 and above	4	4.0	
Occupation			
Farmer	10	10.0	
Public servant/civil servant	41	41.0	
Self employed	49	49.0	
No of Income stream			
1	56	56.0	
2	35	35.0	
3	8	8.0	1.55
4 above	1	1.0	

Source: Field survey, 2016

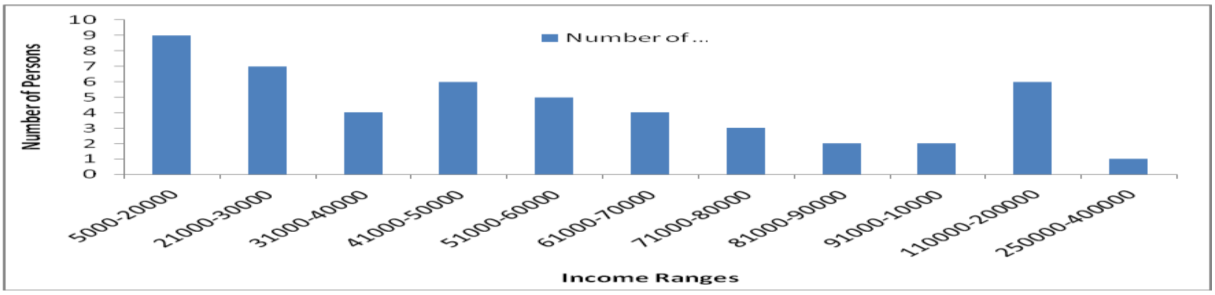

Figure 1: Monthly income of respondent

Effects of economic recession on family relationships/activities

Table 2 shows that late payment of bills (x=2.84); frequent borrowing (x=2.68); reduced meals (x=2.65); children stopped school (x=2.81); reduced social life (x=2.81); abandoned project (x=2.81); children sent to cheaper schools (x=2.78); inability to save (x=2.68); damaged interpersonal relationship (x=2.65); and poor academic performance of children (x=2.76) were the effects of economic recession on family activities.

Economic recession has led to damaged interpersonal relationship, cancelled family vacation, changing of children schools to cheaper schools, change in feeding pattern and family social life, and difficulty in helping in-laws in the study area. According to the result, domestic violence was not an effect of economic recession. This is contrary to the assertion by most studies that economic recession leads to rise in domestic violence in the family (Kerr, 2000; Scott, 2005; Kalunta-Crumpton, 2013; Nwogwugwu 2010).

Table 2: Economic Effects of recession on families

Effects	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed	Total Mean	Mean (*x*)
Late payment of bills	42	20	18	20	284	2.84
Selling of family properties	4	24	27	45	187	1.87
Inability to invest	13	24	26	37	213	2.13
Frequent borrowing	33	22	25	20	268	2.68
Unemployment	26	25	20	29	248	2.48
Reduced meals	32	22	25	21	265	2.65
Children stopped school	41	20	25	21	281	2.81
Reduced family social life(cancelled vacation)	41	20	25	21	281	2.81
Abandoned project	41	20	25	21	281	2.81
Children sent to cheaper schools	40	20	18	22	278	2.78
Inability to save	33	22	25	20	268	2.68
Poor academic performance of children	40	19	18	23	276	2.76
Poor productivity of husband	16	25	25	34	223	2.23
Gambling	16	25	25	34	223	2.23
Sales of properties	25	23	22	30	243	2.43
Domestic violence	26	25	20	29	248	2.48
Damaged interpersonal relationship	32	22	25	21	265	2.65

Source: Field data, 2016 ≥2.50= Accept; <2.50= Reject

Perception of family relationships in the study area

Table 3 shows the perception of respondents on family relationship in the study area. Entries in the table showed that all the variables presented were accepted by the respondents as family relationships. They are: marriage is made up of father, mother, children and in-laws (x=3.46); family members must live together (x=3.27); adequate finances enhances family bond (x=3.58); husband should cater for financial needs of the family (x=3.39); both parents have the responsibility of family needs (x=3.48) and where love, unity and understanding are experienced, mutual assistance is found (x=3.55). The result indicates that there is a shift from the traditional idea of marriage in Nigeria that marriage involves the couples, in-laws and other members of the larger community. This is apparently due to the fact that majority of the respondents are well educated and have reasonable exposure to westernization on the premise of their educational qualification. This is in line with the finding of Whisman, Vebelacker and Bruce (2006) that changes in the family structure can be traced to the impact of education and formal occupation that separate a couple from the extended family. Western civilization and women liberalization movements are also crucial causes of the changes.

Table 3: Perception of family relationship amongst respondents

Family Relationship	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed	Total Mean	Mean (x)
Marriage is made up of father, mother, children and in-laws	65	21	9	5	346	3.46
Family members must live together	55	25	12	8	327	3.27
Adequate finances enhances family bond	70	20	8	2	358	3.58
Husband should cater for financial needs of family	63	20	10	7	339	3.39
Both parents have the responsibility of financial needs	65	21	11	3	348	3.48
Where love, unity and understanding are experienced, mutual assistance is found	70	20	5	5	355	3.55

Source: Field data, 2016 ≥2.50= Accept; <2.50= Reject

Measures on how to Ameliorate the Effects of Recession on Rural Family Relationships

The result shows some of the ways to cushion or ameliorate the effects of economic recession in the study area. The measures are taking more than a job (65.0%), family staying together no matter what (69.0%), prioritizing expenditures (63.0%), members of family supporting each other financially (55.0%), cutting down on expenditures (81.0%), not helping non-family members (65.0%), and keeping a positive attitude (93.0%).

Table 4: Measures of ameliorating effects of economic recession on rural family relationships

Coping strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1. Taking up more than one job/income streams	65	65.0
2. Borrowing money	2	2.0
3. Family to stick or stay together	69	69.0
4. Use the opportunity to spend more time in the house	11	11.0
5. Prioritize expenditures	63	63.0
6. Members forming a support network	55	55.0
7. Cutting down expenditures	81	81.0
8. Not helping non-family members	65	65.0
9. Taking loans for investment	6	6.0
10. Keeping positive attitude	93	93.0

Source: Field survey, 2016. Multiple Responses

The result in table 5 shows that there is no significant difference between economic recession and family relationships since t_{stat}(13.6509) $>t_{crit}$ (1.6608), at P<0.05*: P-value*=0.00000001.61. is greater than the probability value of 0.05,Therefore, the null is rejected**.**

Table 5: Result of t-test of economic recession on family relationships

	Family Relationship	Economic Recession
Mean	33.44898	61.79592
Variance	18.50255	192.7908
Observations	49	49
Pooled Variance	105.6467	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	96	
t Stat	13.6509	
P(T<=t) one-tail	1.61E-24	
t Critical one-tail	1.660881	
P(T<=t) two-tail	3.23E-24	
t Critical two-tail	1.984984	

Source: Field survey, 2016

Conclusion and Recommendations

The economy undoubtedly impacts the family as a unit of interconnected relationship, from social, financial, emotional and psychological to inter personal relationships. Decisions regarding the family cannot be taken in its entirety without economic considerations. The economic effects of recession cuts across board in the family; from parents to children. For families to overcome the effects of economic recession, members have to stick together and support one another through financial and economic difficulties. This is part of keeping a positive attitude in the face of economic down turn. The study recommends that families should not rely on one source of income and as such, entrepreneurships should be encouraged by the government by providing micro credits facilities to enable families explore more than one stream of income. Finally, Families should spend within the confines of their income to avoid indebtedness.

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