

Cultural Practices of Male Child Preference as a Determinant of Psychological Trauma among Women in South Eastern-Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempted to make a connection between the maladaptive consequences and dangers faced by women in South-Eastern Nigeria who could not give birth to male children of their own. Literature reviewed in the study reveal that male child preference in Igbo tribe in South-Eastern Nigeria is a long held culture and conditioning that has continued to make women look like second class citizens in their own communities. It was evident from the literature that male child preference as a cultural practice leaves women without male children in dangers of losing their self-worth and life meaning. Thus, this paper has examined these literatures and connected the experiences of these women to those of psychological trauma. Informally, some informants were interviewed and their responses in respect to their own conditions of not having male children confirmed the connection made in this study that they experienced conditions that coincide with those of psychological trauma. Conclusions are made that psychological trauma may exist among women in South-Eastern Nigeria who do not have male children. Similarly, recommendations were made some of which included a call for researches to expose that silent-killer cultural practice in Igbo South Eastern Nigeria as a way of reducing the difficulties faced by women in those communities.

Keywords: *Cultural practice, Male child preference, Psychological trauma, South-Eastern Nigeria.*

This paper generally focuses on the South-Eastern people of Nigeria known as Ndigbo. Women are our primary population whereas the problem under investigation is the cultural practice of male-child preference as it impacts on the psychological life of women in South-Eastern Nigeria. Ndigbo accept children as gifts from God. Parents give birth to Children but God is ultimately the giver of Children. This belief arising from Igbo worldview, and its attendant spirituality and psychology is culturally expressed in Igbo names like Chinyere

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(God gave), Chinenye (God gives), Chinwe (God owns), Chinwetalu (God sent), Chikere (God created), Chimere (God made) and so on (Aligwekwe, 1991; Nwoga 1992). Whereas it is not contestable in Igbo Culture that children come from God, it is also a given fact that the tenets of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* to the effect that some animals are more animal than others obtains in Igbo Society as evident in the premium placed on the male-child over the female-child.

The people of South-Eastern Nigeria overtly, and in some instances, covertly live by the conviction that male children are more precious or of more value than female children. In the socio-political structure of the Igbo people, females are not recognized and welcomed in the assembly of men. When, for instance, the Ohaneze Ndigbo gathers in a true Igbo traditional setting women are not part of it (Aligwekwe, 1991). Families without male child are alienated in village and Community meetings where only males are recognized as bona fide members. The said premium placed on male children over and above female children is what this paper calls male-child preference.

Culture as a harbinger and vehicle of meaning

A people's perception of the world or their worldview is distilled into their culture. A people's culture in turn becomes the harbinger and vehicle of what is valuable and meaningful. What makes and what does not make meaning in life, as well as, what is of value or valueless are transmitted from generation to generation via a people's culture (Augsburger, 1986). Male Child preference among Ndigbo is rooted in their deeply religious worldview. Among the Igbo people like most African people, there is no separation between the spiritual world and the physical-material world. Constant commerce between the spiritual and the material realm of existence is axiomatic or normative (Milingo, 1986). In this exchange between the divine and the human, some significant roles are reserved for males, for instance, in offering sacrifices to the gods, male play more prominent and dominant roles than females. It is true too that there are deities which have women as priestess but generally, males perform most sacrifices and rituals in Igbo traditional religion as even evident in the worship of Ani in Chinua Achebe's popular novel, *Things Fall Apart* where the chief priest (*Ezeani*) is male.

Moreover, in the continuous transmission of life in the family lines, males play exclusive roles, as well as, reserve a pride of place for themselves in the whole dynamic interaction of family life. The reason for the vantage position of the male gender in Igbo Society is not unconnected to the patriarchal nature of that Society. Being a patriarchal society then, the males are groomed from their early stage in life to assume a position of importance, honor, and authority over and above their female siblings. Moreover, women gain and maintain their husbands' love when they deliver male children. It is unfortunate therefore that a woman's meaning and sense of significance in life is tied to her begetting male children (Ohagwu, Eze, Eze, Odo, Abu and Ohagwu, 2014). In moments of siblings' disagreements, it is not strange in traditional Igbo setting to hear a little boy remind his sister that she would soon be married

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off while he would own every asset of their parents. Some parents also patronize this *man of the house syndrome* – an expression which ingrains in the young boy's psyche a sense of superiority over his sisters.

The traditional practices of contracting marriage via exchange of consent between both families and the payment of dowry for young women to become wives have not helped to boost the psychological health of wives. Attempts have been made to defend the dignity of women by proffering clarifications on the distinction between the paying bride-price and *akunwanyi* (dowry). Yet this primitive and commercial conception of selling women off to men in marriage has persisted (Nwoga, 1984). Women are, as it were, sold off to men in order to make children especially male children. It therefore becomes compelling that we underscore the importance of the conclusion that Berger and Luckmann had reached in their social construction theory of 1967. According to them, it is within the socio-cultural milieu that the social as well as the cultural construction of reality is initiated and perfected (Lober, 2001).

Little wonder then, the Social Construction theorists of Feminist orientation sees gender as a social institution which determines the allocation of economic resources, privileges and power. Gendered expectations and norms get built into men's and women's sense of "self" as a certain form of human being, and alternative ways of acting and arranging work and family life are literally unthinkable (Lober, 2001, Raji, Muhammed, Adulbaqi, Sulaiman and Joseph, 2016).

In Igbo society as in most African traditional societies, it is the prerogative of the male gender to provide security. It is expected of males to join the military and to defend women, Children, the sick, and the weak. There are special privileges and honors reserved for persons and families whose male children are warriors. When a family has male children whose possess valor and prowess in security sphere of life and warfare, it gives such a family some bragging rights over other families that have no male children. In his classic novel, *Things Fall Apart*, which explored the contact between the Western and the Igbo Cultures, Religions, and Civilizations, Chinua Achebe's Chief protagonist known as Okonkwo received great respect on account of his wonderful exploits in wars. Even when Okonkwo breached the law of the land by committing murder, albeit, involuntarily his military and gallant exploits for his Community merited him some empathic honest sympathizers (Achebe, 1994).

The Igbo people place high premium on male children over and above female children on account of the expectations made of male children in diverse other areas of life apart from security and military spheres of life. Communities in Igbo land expect laurels from their male children in sports and entertainment. Families and Communities that have male wrestling champions are always proud of them. When male children from families or communities are successful in sports like wrestling, such achievements boost the sense of self-esteem of the members of those champions' families or communities. This is very true in the case of

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Amalinze the Cat, a renowned wrestler in one of Chinua Achebe's novels. It must be admitted that not all male children are preferred to female children in Igbo land. Male children that have reputations as failures or wimps are derogatorily referred to as women. That such big time losers like *Unoka* and *Obinna* are referred to as women speak eloquently and convincingly as to the preferred position of importance that Igbo Society has given to male children over and above their female counterpart (Achebe, 1994; Ubesie, 1982).

One must admit that this position of subservience forced on women or female children is not a special reserve of Igbo culture. The glass ceiling syndrome in terms of obstructing and giving full accent to the equality of male and female is a global phenomenon. When between 1929 and 1930, some Igbo women revolted against the unwholesome tax and leadership practices of the British Government, their successful revolt was derogatorily termed "women's riot". This was to create the impression that the revolts were mere disturbances which some illiterate, inarticulate, uncivilized, irrational, and disorderly women began after they woke up one morning on the wrong sides of their beds (Chigbo, 2011; Orji, 2000).

The hermeneutical misrepresentation of the phenomenological engagements of the female gender and its attendant extension in the denigration of the totality of the being of the female child is a trans-cultural and cross cultural oppression. This cultural oppression of the female gender is transmitted from generation to generation. A study done in the United States of America, Africa, and Asia which set out to find the reason behind male child preference found that overwhelming numbers of research participants chose male child over female child based on traditional cultural practices instead of on grounds of affection (Dinitz, Dynes and Clark, 1964; Augsburger, 1986).

Marriage and family as epicentre of male child preference

The institution of Family and Marriage is very central to life in any human society or community. In South-Eastern Nigeria, marriages are entered in order to raise a family. A man or a woman does not enter a marital relationship merely for the sake of having a companion. In as much as having a companion and a workmate constitute some added reasons for entering into marriage, begetting children and raising one's own family is the cardinal reason for marriage among the Igbo people of Nigeria. A man and woman do not traditionally constitute a family in Igbo setting; there must be children in order to make for an authentic Igbo family. A man is not limited to one wife. Male children are preferred to female children because a man without a son is perceived as having lived a worthless life. His lineage is forgotten and at death his female children forfeit his own share of any landed property or asset which belongs to the extended family (Aligwekwe, 1991; Nwokocha, 2007).

When there is no male child in the family, the wife suffers the unmerited agony of not having a son. Her husband instead of sharing in her pains is often treated with empathy. Ebere is one of our informants in this project. She is a 36 years old mother of five children – all girls. Ebere met one of the authors of this paper in the latter's office. Ebere appeared interiorly

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battered and shocked. She seemed to be very distant and uncoordinated even as she sat and narrated her ordeal.

“I actually entered this marriage willingly. In the beginning my husband was nice and caring. My husband’s family members loved me until I had my first two daughters. Hell broke loose when I had two more children and they turned to be girls. My mother in-law called me witch. She claimed I ate my sons in my womb but left the girls to survive. Initially, my husband supported me. But when I had my fourth and fifth children all girls, I lost all my husband’s support and love”

When Ebere was asked how her experiences in her family and marriage made her feel, she said:

“I am not really alive. I do not know how I feel. I do not even know who I am any more. I am just floating. Nothing makes me happy anymore. I cannot sleep. I am completely ruled by fear of what might become my fate. I am really not coordinated anymore. I am not sure of myself and I lack inner peace. I fear almost everything. Initially I was shocked at the attitudes of my husband’s people towards me. Later on, I tried to stand my ground. But sometimes I prefer to escape from them. But now I do not even know what I am doing”

Stories like Ebere’s are not difficult to find in Igbo Society among women whose children are all female. The negative psychological impacts of the demand that a woman begets a male child are enormous and diverse. Outstanding among such negative psychological implications of male child preference are depression and trauma.

The negative psychological implications of male child preference on Igbo women are compounded by the extended family system which is actively practiced in most part of Igbo land. The existential psychology of *Igwebuiké*: ‘I am because we are’ which bespeaks of Igbo sense of Communalism (Onwubiko, 1988) has its downsides. It blurs healthy boundary lines and stifles the emergence of an individuated self. It promotes enmeshed relationship within the extended family system and thus leads to the syndrome of scapegoating because the whole problem of the entire family are blamed on one person as in the case of Ebere above. Once scapegoating creeps into the extended family system, it loses its power as a holding environment for meaningful and fulfilled life (Winnicott, 1951).

Conceptual connections between male child preference and psychological trauma

Literature on psychological trauma may be mountainous but it has specific attendant dependent variables that are examined in diverse contexts by psychology and psychiatry researchers. Our interest in the current paper is to make a connection between what is considered a cultural symbol of identity (having a male child) in South-Eastern Nigeria as highlighted in the background and the accompanying catastrophe (psychological trauma) that women in this part of the world experience when their husbands’ cultural symbol of identity

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is wasting time to arrive in the family. Psychological trauma has come to be among what people use to make sense of their lived experiences. This is of course true because epidemiological studies, as Lancaster, Rodriguez and Weston (2011) have noted, reveal that experiencing events that are traumatic is currently relatively common. Thus, exploring psychological trauma and how women without a male child in South-Eastern Nigeria are affected by its experience is the hub of what is considered in this paper.

Psychological trauma

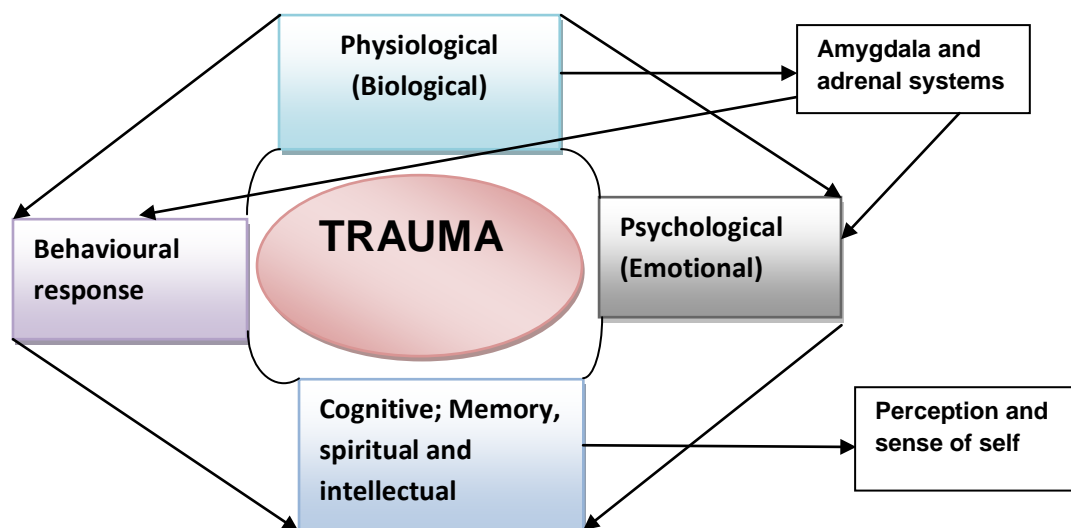
It is important that people are informed about psychological trauma and educated on how it can affect individuals in varying ways. As Bloom and Sarah (2008, p. 51) have noted, “being trauma-informed means being sensitive to the reality of traumatic experiences in the lives of most people, children, their parents, staff, administrators, state officials, police, courts, schools, and everyone else”. One may argue that because of the old notions of trauma, people tend not to be aware that experiences of trauma can occur in everyday situations. Just as Levine (1997) added, trauma has become a commonplace concept and no longer solely has connotations of war veterans or people who were severely abused as children. Similarly, Gold (2008) is of the view that trauma is now being recognised as part of human experience and is no longer a specialised area. The overarching effects and difficulties of experiencing events that trigger trauma is one reason why the world needs to be educated on how such experiences of trauma disconnects a person from their integral functioning. People experience psychological trauma in their everyday experience and it may just be that trauma is part of our experience as humans because Stolorow (2011, p. 220), argues that “trauma as a possibility and as an eventuality is in part what it means to be human and the possibility of emotional trauma is inherent to the basic constitution of human existence”. The implication of Stolorow’s assertion is that one way or the other we live to be traumatised by stressors in our environment.

Theoretical perspectives of trauma

Some attempt has been made from several dimensions on what constitute trauma and how it should be understood. However chief among them is the medical or disease oriented approach which Benight (2012) notes that such understanding of trauma arguably dominates the current primary focus on traumatic stress. There are other explanations away from the disease model because the works of Wilson, Hansen and Li (2011) clearly identified that trauma has been seen as affecting people cognitively, emotionally, physically and behaviourally. Therefore, people respond to traumatic experiences in a variety of ways such that both biological and psychological explanations are crucial. This is further shown in the diagram below. Although what constitutes trauma may be construed differently from diverse perspectives, what is primarily sacrosanct is how people who are affected by experiences that is life threatening negotiate their world and how they can be supported to go through their experiences in a self-enhancing manner. The different ways that trauma obstruct the coherence of human existence is represented in the diagram below.

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Fig. 1 Trauma link of effect



Source: Eze (2014)

The illustration above shows that trauma affects the entire integral functioning of a person since there is no part of human functioning that operates in isolation. The biological or physiological is affected and that in turn affect the psychological, the emotional, the social, the cognitive and even spiritual functioning.

BIOLOGICAL INSIGHTS TO TRAUMA

The biological or neurological perspectives of understanding trauma are of the view that the human body is affected in varying degrees by traumatic stress. As Solomon and Heide (2005) note, traumatic stress affects the bodily functions through a physiological demo effect process. The authors are of the view that the changes to the body initiated by trauma affect other body systems such as the cardiovascular system, respiratory system and muscular system (Solomon and Heide, 2005). Thus, research on these processes has been based on biological and neurological assumptions and understandings. In view of that Suvak and Barrett (2011) note that the biological or neuroscience model of trauma has a common hypothesis about traumatic and posttraumatic stress disorders (PTSD). They assume that the amygdala, a key brain structure in fear circuitry, is always hyper-reactive to incoming stimuli. During that process there is a contact disruption of homeostasis associated with fearful responses caused by the hyper-reactivity of the amygdala (Suvak and Barrett, 2011). The disruption in homeostasis is in part due to the amygdala being insufficiently inhibited by the cortex of the brain (Suvak and Barrett, 2011). Of course that is a system failure that distorts balance in a person's integral existence but it could be a short coming for the amygdala to be solely presented as specifically involved in fear during trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder. The implication of that is overlooking the roles of other intrinsic networks of the brain during trauma. This is further supported in the works of Suvak and Berrett (2011).

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Other contributors to the biological understanding of trauma (Thomas and Maggie, 2002) note that there are other changes in the physiological functioning caused by traumatic stressors, including the triggering of the body's stress-related systems. As Thomas and Maggie (2002) said, the system changes initiated by the above process occur at the hypothalamus–pituitary–adrenal cortex axis and may involve changes that affect the functioning of the medial temporal lobe and connected limbic networks of the brain. Thus, the brain, through its interconnected functions, biologically serves to provide neural activities that attempt to keep an individual safe, just as in the case of the amygdala during fearful and dangerous situations.

Contributing to the on-going discussion on the brain functions during trauma, Solomon and Heide (2005) also suggest that the hypothalamic-pituitary adrenal system is activated during stress which leads to cortisol levels being increased or heightened. The cognitive capacity of a person under trauma is hampered by these brain activities just as Wilson, Hansen and Li (2011) note that traumatic stress has a neurobiological effect that is likely to affect cognitive capacities. During such scenarios, emotional numbing and hyper-arousal experienced have the ability to disintegrate the memory functions of the individual. This will mean a deficiency in articulation.

FIGHT, FLIGHT OR FREEZE RESPONSE MECHANISM IN TRAUMA

During trauma, the body experience novel life threatening events that can initiate a fight, a flight or a freeze response. That bodily response during trauma explains the processes by which the amygdala part of the hippocampus in the brain controls fear and reactions to danger and threats to the body as a biopsychological (biological and psychological) process. The fight, flight or freeze mechanism is an involuntary response of the body to fearful situations which can also be seen as part of the body's unified defence system (Levine, 1997; Rees and Smith, 2007). The amygdala again is highly implicated in the process because the amygdala is activated when a person is faced with a fearful or threatening situation (Suvak and Barrett, 2011).

During the fight/flight or freeze response process, an individual experiences automatic arousal (Wilson, Hansen and Li, 2011) of the sympathetic system, which is controlled by the autonomic nervous system. Such activation sends signals to the adrenal medulla to increase the output of hormones called epinephrine and norepinephrine, which are discharged in the fight or flight response (Solomon and Heide, 2005). If the process is thwarted the individual freezes, leading to trauma (Levine, 1997). What causes the freeze is undischarged energy responsible for feelings of helplessness arising because the individuals coping mechanisms have been exhausted.

Rees and Smith (2007) note that the fight or flight mechanism is shared by animals and human beings as a natural physiological response to life-threatening events and experiences. It is considered an autonomic bodily response that is unplanned and a lifesaving mechanism..

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In this condition, there may be undischarged energy held in the body which manifests itself in series of symptoms that may signal other conditions. Just as Thomas and Maggie (2002) describe, it takes the process of the leaving the trauma individual or organism in startling freeze when the organism is being driven down the defence cascade where flight and fight becomes impossible. At this point, the startled freeze becomes what is left in the evolutionary repertoire (Thomas and Maggie, 2002). The amygdala is key to fight/flight or freeze process as it is anatomically connected to the hippocampus (Hatfield and McGaugh, 1999). This part of the brain has exaggerated activities and responses during traumatic stress because of abnormal cortical modulating effects which depress the immune system and increase hyper-reactivity and physiological hyper-arousal (Solomon and Heide, 2005).

The amygdala is thought to increase responsiveness during traumas and emotional events (Mahan and Ressler, 2012). Regardless that these activities are also influenced by cognitive brain functions that perceive and interpret stressful bodily experiences, the amygdala plays a special role in assigning emotional valence when it receives sensory input from stimuli and engages the body in a behavioural response to the threat during traumatic events (Wilson, Hansen and Li 2011). Bodily changes such as those above, affect both the emotions and cognitive activities. There is an interaction of cognitive effects and memory during coding of traumatic experiences. This is because McNally (2003) said that how the traumatic experience is coded in the memory determines whether an individual will recover from the trauma or not. The process occurs through an interactive process in that the amygdala also mediates memory consolidation during this process (McAllister and Stein, 2010). The memory consolidating role played by the amygdala involves “consolidation of emotional events and spatial learning (hippocampus), memory of emotional events and choice behaviours (orbital frontal cortex), autonomic and fear reactions (locus coeruleus, thalamus, and hypothalamus), and instrumental approach or avoidance behaviour (dorsal and ventral striatum)” (McAllister and Stein, 2010, p.49).

THE FLIGHT/FIGHT/FREEZE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN WITHOUT MALE CHILD IN SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA

The biological processes of understanding trauma in the discussion above has made considerable contribution in explaining what people go through physiologically when their experiences are life threatening and traumatic. It was evident that the entire biological process is linked with other processes such that a disruption in one is a disruption in all. Nnadi (2013) found that a woman who does not have a male child for her husband in South-Eastern Nigeria is inflicted with violence which is of course is a cultural practice in such patriarchal environment. In such conditions women are subjected to all forms of discrimination and ill treatment which sometimes leaves them helpless. Because of male child preference in Igbo land South-Eastern Nigeria due to both cultural and socio-economic factors (Nnadi, 2013), a handful of women are melted with emotional torture both from their own parents and from the parents and families of their husband. Meanwhile researchers (Ohagwu, Eze, Eze, Odo, Abu and Ohagwu, 2014) are of the view that it is not only in Igbo South Eastern Nigeria that

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such cultural practices exist as they noticed that in most of the Ugandan culture there exist gender bias in favour of male children whom are thought of as leaders of tomorrow. Such experience sometimes leaves the individuals in a fight/flight or freeze condition.

In the case of married women who do not have a male child, they are faced with the feelings of anxiety, depression, loss and helplessness, frustration and rejection from people. Under such conditions, their husband will threaten to bring in another woman who will bear a male child for him. The woman may try to resist that plans (fight), or attempt to leave the marriage (flight) or become helpless and remain in the marriage (freeze). The freeze condition imply that their existing coping skills have been surpassed by the threats and difficulties they face in their marriage for not being able to give birth to a male child. That freezing is trauma. They may begin to have cognitive failure and information processing difficulties occurring due to the consolidation of difficult emotional experiences that may affect the modulation of the hippocampus memory process influenced by the amygdala, as explained in the work of Hatfield and McGaugh (2012). Such women live in excruciating emotional and mental torture and a distortion in positive living. The resultant effect of this distorted process may affect the coherence of their other levels of functioning.

In this paper some informants provided information about how they are being abused both verbally and physically by their husband for not bearing them a male child. Some of the informants were married to husbands who are educated as one may think that such cultural beliefs are held by the non-educated husbands in Igbo South-Eastern Nigeria. The lives of the affected women are completely disconnected because of the violence and emotional challenges they face. Violence of course is associated with symptoms of psychological trauma (Singer, Angin, Song and Lunghofer, 1995) and exposure to conditions where life becomes meaningless can be a source of psychological trauma for these concerned women.

The cultural practices of male child preference might be responsible for high mortality rate among married women in Igbo South-Eastern Nigeria because psychological trauma is a silent killer. A woman who cannot give her husband a male child in this cultural context do everything to please the husband but most of the times as our informants mentioned the husbands are never pleased. The man constantly regurgitates over his lineage and how he will die without a man of his blood to replace him. Sometimes the husband is also traumatised if his wife cannot give birth to a male child. Although it is a rare condition as many will take a second wife and if the second wife does not bear a male child, the man can take the third and even a fourth wife.

The traumatic experience of women in the condition above is one of pity because their personal lives become less meaningful for reason of both the physical and mental pains they are immersed in. Just as (Eckenrod, 2008) noted, experiencing such life threatening situations leads to bodily responses and immune system failures. These conditions are considered as the physiological effects (Cook, 2001), and causes emotional and psychological problems (Seides

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2010; Corbett and Milton, 2011). A common notion in the literature of trauma is that it is challenging and self-defeating. A woman naturally from the science of genetics is not the major determinant of the sex of a boy because she does not have the Y chromosome which is the male child chromosome. It is therefore inhuman for the man who is supposed to be responsible for giving the woman a Y chromosome that produces the male child to turn back and make the woman his scapegoat. The challenges faced by women in the condition being discussed in the paper as we observed sometimes leaves them in a state of mental instability. This is the resultant effect of prolonged traumatic life because Straker, Watson and Robinson (2002) note that when an individual is exposed to trauma he/she experiences a fault-line in their psychic functioning that is further exploited by other contingent experiences. The psychological explanation to this life-threatening experience is provided below so as to widen our understanding of what constitutes trauma and how it affects women without male children in South-Eastern Nigeria.

PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHTS TO TRAUMA EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN WITHOUT MALE CHILDREN IN SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIAN

Trauma also affects people's psychological functions in a variety of ways. As Hermann (1992) noted, among other effects and pathological symptoms, the psychological outcomes of trauma are emotional numbing, sadness, shame, helplessness, panic, anger, shame, aggression, depression and acute symptoms of anxiety. The author argues that experiencing a traumatic event alters an individual's perceptions of life (Herman, 1992). This alteration could make life uninteresting among other negative experiences. Stolorow (2007) describes this as threatening the individual's psychological organisation, something that maintains vitally needed ties in the life of an individual. Emotionally, a traumatic event shatters absolutism and creates a catastrophic loss which alters an individual's sense of being in the world (Stolorow, 2011). The psychological effects of trauma can lead to depression, anxiety, low self-worth and a faulted ego. In South Eastern Nigeria culture, a woman who does not have a male child for her husband is saddened with shame as she might be mocked by her fellow women during gathering. In such condition, one which they can't help, happiness eludes them and they live in constant worry knowing that their husband cannot endure for too long before taking actions against them. They panic at the slightest provocation and live in fear of what might be their fate if their male child is not coming forth. They experience trauma and are shattered when compared to their counterparts who have male children for their husbands.

The psychological assumptions of the aetiology and understandings of trauma see the individual in the situation as important as well as the event. Stressful events as defined by an individual's interaction with the environment could lead an individual to be traumatised, as shown in the works of Seides (2010). Similarly, Seides (2010) further argues that an individual's appraisal and interpretation of stressful events determine how to handle psychologically stressful situations. This probably might be the reason why some individuals have the same kind of experience but react to the experience in different ways. This view,

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however, has been argued against. For example, Sydney Philips rejected the idea that what made an event traumatic was determined by the meaning or appraisal the individual gave to such event (Bonomi, 2004). Although an individual's interpretation of an event is important, sometimes the situation may just be so overwhelming that meaning-making and appraisal of the situation becomes even very difficult. In that kind of situation a person's cognition is has already been disconnected by the weight of the difficult experience. Just like the experience of women without male children in South-Eastern Nigeria culture, it is not about what they appraise the situation sometimes, their pain comes from the knowledge that their husband will marry another woman and their own girl children if they have any will not inherit anything from their father. Such women are helpless even in their thinking.

Trauma exposure creates a fault-line in the thought processes of the trauma individuals. What happens is that people in trauma situation begin to see the world as an unsafe place for their existence. Brewin and Holmes (2003) refer to this psychic dysfunction as a mental defeat situation where an individual experiences helplessness in a profound state that makes categorisation of either their emotions or their beliefs difficult. This situation, as supported in the above authors' work, could drive an individual to lead life through an irrational lens since their psychological well-being is altered by traumatic experiences. Women without male children in South Eastern Nigeria are sometimes seen as witches who eat up their male children in the womb. As our informants informed sometimes their immediate family deny them and join hands with their in-laws to refer to them as witches. Under this condition, the woman involved has no trust from her own home as well as from her husband's home. She is helpless as she cannot even comfortably go back to her parents since they have also accepted that she is a witch. Betrayal trust trauma (BTT) is very challenging and experiences like this can be seen a near death experience because the affected women may have suicide ideations.

Psychological effects of trauma and reactions to traumatic experiences may differ across individuals because, as Levine (1997) notes, trauma affects people in different ways. What happens during a period of intense emotional disruption is that people experiencing trauma tend to bring in different defence mechanisms to avoid traumatic memories. However, as Brewin and Holmes (2003) argue, a traumatic memory breaks into consciousness and intrudes in different forms, such as flashbacks and nightmares. Thus, avoiding traumatic memory may not help the trauma victim since these experiences keep surfacing into awareness. Avoidance can be a worthwhile memory defence mechanism but when the experience becomes self-defeating repressed memories will be forced into consciousness. For women without male children in South-Eastern Nigeria, they are always forced by insults, violence, emotional torture and guilt to remember their predicaments each day of their life because they are always unfulfilled.

Furthermore, psychological and mental functioning is disorganised during trauma as the situation makes connections between the inner world and the person's outer world difficult (Naso, 2008). Levine (1997) also notes that articulation and having a felt sense of self

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become disconnected. The disconnected sense of self in trauma, constituted in an intersubjective context, as Stolorow (2011) notes, causes effects and pains because it cannot find a relational home in which to be held. Again, this coincides with the inability of victims of trauma to articulate and integrate their sense of cohesion because both their inner worlds and their relationships with the outer environment are affected. This may also explain why some of the women without a male child in South-Eastern Nigeria shut down contact with the outer world because even the outer world of their cultural context see them as incomplete solely on the basis that they do not have a male child of their own.

CONCLUSION

Igbo South-Eastern Nigeria has a cultural practice that places preference on male children to females. This cultural practice as our research has shown is a long held value that is rooted in their traditional religious worldview. It is a patriarchal society where the birth of a male child brings loud joy and fulfillment to the family than that of a female child birth. The male child preference cultural practice leaves women without male children in excruciating conditions that makes life meaningless to them. This paper has shown that some of the reasons why the affected women go through conditions of agony are because sometimes they cannot find a relational home to rest their emotions since almost everyone believes and agree that they should have a male child. This of course has been shown to lead to suppressing their emotions which Stolorow (2007) saw as a mediator of trauma. This study has therefore shown that the experiences resemble those of psychological trauma since it disconnects the affected women's integral functioning and affect their sense of self construction. As informants in the research reported, they were losing life meaning and experiencing betrayal trust trauma(BTT) owing to the rejection that sometimes come from their own original family. This further justifies the psychological trauma experience orchestrated by a feeling of helplessness from people who should have served as a relational home for their painful experiences to be held.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In our literature search on the topic under discussion in this paper, we have realised that the traumatic and painful experiences of women who do not have male children in South-Eastern Nigeria are not illuminated. This of course is inhuman because the affected women's existence is threatened. Therefore our first recommendation from our window view of this cultural practice which we consider barbaric is for more researches to be done in this area so as to bring the agonies of these women to the world knowledge. Secondly, our experience from this research shows that there are individuals who are treated without recourse to their feelings. Therefore, community legislature in Igbo South-Eastern Nigeria should consider enacting some laws that will benefit the female child and help to reduce the emotional torture women face when they have no male children. We also recommend government intervention in adequate education of the female child so as to equip them to stand up in defence of their right and dignity in their communities.

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