



## SURROGACY AND DISDAIN FOR MARRIAGE AMONG EDUCATIONAL-EMPOWERED WOMEN OF PORT HARCOURT, RIVERS STATE

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<p><b>Received:</b> 26<sup>th</sup> March 2022 <b>Accepted:</b> 26<sup>th</sup> April 2022 <b>Published:</b> 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022</p>	<p>Surrogacy is a process where a third party (woman) of childbearing age carries a pregnancy for a commissioning parent with the intention of relinquishing the baby after birth. The effect of this new style of life is mostly common among the educated-empowered women of Port Harcourt due to the forces of globalization, which have a negative impact on traditional African society. It has become a major source of concern among the inhabitants of Port Harcourt because it negates the social norms and values of the people. It is against this backdrop that this paper was undertaken to examine the growth of surrogacy and the increasing disdain for marriage among educationally empowered women of Port Harcourt. The paper adopted the Feminist theory. The population consisted of gynaecologists and educationally empowered women in Port Harcourt. 100 women and 6 gynaecologists were selected through a purposive sampling technique. The study revealed that couples adopt surrogacy when they lack the capacity to bear children. This could be due to the inability of the woman to conceive after many attempts by the couple. The finding also revealed that some couples adopted the surrogates' mother to give birth to children for the woman to maintain her shape, which the gynaecologists describe as "vanity surrogacy". Again, the study found no link between growing surrogacy and increasing disdain for marriage among educationally empowered women in Port Harcourt City, Rivers State. The study found that efforts are required to raise knowledge and comprehension of surrogacy, as this is vital not only at the level of educating infertile couples but also at the population level.</p>

**Keywords:** Growth of Surrogacy, Disdain for Marriage, Educationally Empowered, Women,

### INTRODUCTION

In general, children are very vital and desirable in society, as without them, couples will never achieve lifelong happiness and love (Nwaoga, 2013). They are believed to be the most valuable gift that God has given to man. Therefore, when they are born, numerous ceremonies are held to celebrate their arrival, during which many gifts are provided and God is praised for the new additions. The community firmly believes that a couple's marriage is not secure and safeguarded until they have children. It is also considered that pregnancy verifies a woman's social position and a man's virility (Owolabi, 2013). In reality, however, legitimacy is only accorded to children born in legally recognised marriages due to the assumption that only the institution of marriage grants a pair matrimonial rights, the result of which is procreation. However, some couples may endure pregnancy delays as a result of infertility several years after marriage (Ajayi & Dibosa-Osador, 2011). In such cases, the hope of procreation diminishes, leaving the couples in a state of anxiety, stigmatisation, and persistent pressure from their families and the greater society (Alabi, 2022). The right to have children involves the right to use advances in medical and technology to address the infertility issues faced by couples, particularly those with irreversible cases, so that they may have their own children. Lal (2018) noticed that the desire to have a child prompts many couples to seek alternative methods, and that surrogacy arrangements are a viable alternative. Surrogacy is a medical procedure in which, pursuant to a prior agreement, a woman or surrogate mother becomes pregnant, gives birth to a child or children, and then surrenders the kid or children, as well as her parental rights and entitlements, to the commissioning couple (Lal, 2018).

Since ancient times, the two most common ways for a couple to have children were through regular conception and adoption (Owolabi, 2013). However, recent advances in reproductive technology have broadened these possibilities to include artificial insemination, in vitro fertilisation, surrogacy, and womb transplantation as viable alternatives in cases of infertility (Cui, 2010). It is now possible for a woman, referred to as a surrogate, to rent out her womb to carry a kid who will eventually be adopted by a third party or couple. Throughout history, surrogacy has been a widespread practise; for example, Rachael permitted her maid Bilhah to bear a child for her husband Jacob. Likewise, Hagar, Sarah's maid, conceived Ishmael for Abraham. This assumes that reproductive services have been given on a commercial basis since the dawn of time (Saxena et al., 2012).

Surrogacy is a practise in which a woman of reproductive age bears a pregnancy for a commissioning parent with the purpose of giving up the child after birth (Alabi, 2022). There are two types of surrogate pregnancies: gestational and conventional (William-Jones, 2002; Bromfield & Rotabi, 2014 cited in Alabi, 2022). The case of baby M in the United States of America in 1986 brought surrogacy worldwide attention. Mary Beth Whitehead, the surrogate mother who carried the child for Elizabeth and William Stern, refused to relinquish the infant (Tieu, 2009). Mary (the surrogate) demanded and retrieved the baby within less than twenty-four hours of handing it up; thus, the commissioning parent petitioned the court for legal possession of the kid. Therefore, the New Jersey Supreme Court established the surrogate arrangement between the parties and granted the commissioning parent custody of the kid. Critical assessment of the child's best interests informed the court's conclusion (Tieu, 2009). The case prompted discussions over the definition of motherhood, a woman's role in surrogacy, and the changing nature of family formation. The practise of surrogacy has been classified as traditional, gestational, and for altruistic or commercial purposes. Some nations, such as the United Kingdom and South Africa, regulate the practise of surrogacy, but others, such as Nigeria and India, do not (Tieu, 2009).

Obviously, surrogacy comes with significant dangers. The first risk is that the surrogate could subsequently renounce the agreement and assert paternity over the child. A first-of-its-kind case is being appealed to the Iowa Supreme Court following a surrogate pregnancy in which the surrogate's relationship with Paul and Chantele Montover completely dissolved (Nwaoga, 2013). Concerning a kid born through a surrogate arrangement, there is the possibility of stigmatisation for being born to a woman who will not be a part of the child's life, as well as the potential of denying the genetic mother access to the child (Uadia & Emokpae, 2015). Also, as against adoption, commissioning parents in surrogacy arrangements must accept liability for a surrogate child who is eventually born impaired.

### **Statement of Problem**

The links between women's education and changes in women themselves, such as increasing empowerment and delayed marriages, have been studied in research on women's attitudes. At least at the household level, the research on women's empowerment strongly hypothesises that educationally empowered women boost women's self-confidence and their ability to "have a voice" in decision-making. For example, women have gain voice on issues concerning when is due for them to marry, who to marry and how to marry (Diagne & Oxenham, 2001). Science has change a lot about the society and the influence is being felt among educated women across the globe.

Norton et al. (2013) in their studies discovered that the idea of surrogacy has caused delayed marriages and homosexuality in America. They noted that lesbians desiring to become fathers are limited by biological possibilities and thus always require a "facilitating other." This procedure requires careful planning and decision-making. Some lesbians and gay men have become fathers through lesbian adoption or co-parenting arrangements (Lal, 2018). In some instances, gay men can become "known" sperm donors for lesbian couples, whereas in others, there is no genetic connection between them and the children they co-parent. Research also indicates that gay men may donate spermatozoa to fertility clinics as a means of staking a paternity identity claim if they believe they have no other options (Dhont et al., 2011).

In Nigeria, the rate of women who are not interested in marriage is growing. Also, some of the women opt for children they could claim full ownership in single parent families. For instance, Ini Edo, a Nollywood actress noted that she accepted surrogacy because it gives her full ownership of child without sharing the child ownership with any man. She noted thus:

Another major reason I opted for a donor is that it scares me so much when I see banter and controversies between a mother and a father over a baby in public forums or when I see the man insisting he wants his child if things don't work out between both parties. For me, it's the fear of what that would mean for the child. Ideally, it's marriage then children but we are not living in an ideal world (Cited in Premium Times online, 2022)

Some women with higher level of education sought to eradicate the influence of men in their lives to enable them have absolute control of the daily activities. This quest to reduce the influence of men in the society has made many women in advance societies to remain single and opt for surrogacy. The effect of this new style of life is felt among the educated-empowered women of Port Harcourt during to the force of globalization. This pattern of life has become a major source of concern among the inhabitants of Port Harcourt because it negates the social norms and value of the people. It is against this backdrop that this study was undertaken to examine the growth of surrogacy and the increasing disdain for marriage among educated-empowered women of Port Harcourt.

## Research Questions

- i. What are the reasons that could lead to the adoption of surrogate motherhood in Port Harcourt City, Rivers State?
- ii. What is the nexus between surrogacy and the disdain for marriage among educated-empowered women in Port Harcourt City, Rivers State?
- iii. What are the socio-cultural and legal impediments affecting families who intend to use surrogacy in their marriages?

## Objectives of the Study

The broad aim of the study is to examine the influence of growing rate of surrogacy on the disdain for marriage by educationally empowered women in Port Harcourt City, Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the reasons for surrogacy among families in Port Harcourt City, Rivers State.
- ii. Examine the nexus between surrogacy and the disdain for marriage among educationally empowered women in Port Harcourt City, Rivers State.
- iii. Examine the socio-cultural and legal impediments affecting families who intend to use surrogacy in their marriages.

## II THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The chosen theory that best explains or analyses the concerns addressed in the study is the feminist theory, which arose during the 1970s women's liberation movement. The primary objective of the feminist perspective is to comprehend the evolving position of women in society. During the 1970s, when the political movement for women was thriving, the feminist theoretical approach evolved. The main objective of the feminist perspective is to comprehend the oppression of women in terms of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation and to determine how to alter it. Domestic violence is widely described as male coercion and oppression of women within the four walls of the house, according to proponents of this interpretation.

Feminist theorists support feminism, which is a movement advocating total equality between men and women in every respect. Feminism has always meant mental, spiritual, and physical autonomy. Feminists work to remove patriarchal dominance and insist on the eradication of women's exploitation and oppression in the framework of the home and all other personal relationships. At the heart of feminist theories is the belief that all violence is a reflection of uneven power relationships, and especially that domestic violence is a reflection of the unequal power of men and women in society or in their relationships (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004, p. 471).

Women's stigmatisation, according to proponents of feminist theory, is a systemic and structural mechanism of patriarchal control based on male superiority and female inferiority, gender-stereotyped roles and expectations, and the economic, social, and political dominance of men and women's dependence. The theory emphasizes that the liberation of women from illiteracy and poverty will guarantee them the opportunity to have multiple strategies to conceive and have children. The theory also emphasizes that women should have the freedom of choice either to remain single or married and opt to any method that is suitable for them to have children.

## III METHODOLOGY

This paper is qualitative, and its research approach is a descriptive survey. Utilizing a descriptive survey design, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with gynaecologists and women in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria to determine their perspectives on the practice of surrogacy and its influence on marriages. Descriptive qualitative research enables the researcher to acquire data from individuals with relevant information about a phenomenon and aids in constructing a composite account of the essence of their experience applicable to all individuals (Creswell, 2013).

The study population comprised of two participant groups. This includes six gynaecologists and one hundred (100) women with a college degree. This study was done in the city of Port Harcourt. Given that surrogacy is not a common practice in Nigeria, 100 women with a bachelor's degree or higher were selected using purposive and snowball sampling procedures. Purposeful sample was performed to find women who are attorneys in the Rivers State Ministry of Justice, whilst snowball sampling was utilised to locate additional women with an educational bent. During the selection process, efforts were made to discover single female attorneys, bankers, professors, and physicians.

Port Harcourt's University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital and Rivers State University Teaching Hospital provided the six gynaecologists. The University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital and Rivers State University Teaching Hospital is one of the leading fertility clinics in the South-South region of the country and is thus an appropriate venue for the research. In order to get participants' informed permission, the goal of the study and the techniques to protect their anonymity and confidentiality were discussed to them prior to the start of the study, following which they freely signed the consent forms. Participants might withdraw from the research at any time if they no longer felt comfortable, according to the informed consent. Using snowball and purposive selection, individuals were recruited for the study.

Six gynaecologists were interviewed in-depth face-to-face utilising a semi-structured interview schedule containing three sets of questions. The first set of questions examined the factors that lead to couples adopting surrogacy, the second set assessed the correlation between the rising rate of surrogacy and the disdain for marriage among educationally empowered women, and the third set assessed the socio-cultural and legal concerns surrounding the practice of surrogacy. The typical interview lasted between 30 and 70 minutes. Not all individuals solicited participated in the

research. Timing was a key restriction due to the nature of the medical profession; numerous gynaecologists rescheduled appointments more than twice, and others were ultimately not questioned.

**IV DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

**Table 1**  
*Respondents' Demographics*

1	<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
	18-27	9	9.0
	28-37	50	50.0
	38 years and above	41	41.0
	Total	100	100.0
2	<b>Educational Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
	HND/B.Sc/B.Ed	38	38.0
	M.Sc/M.Ed/MBA/MA	35	35.0
	PhD	27	27.0
	Total	100	100.0
3	<b>Working Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
	No	2	2.0
	Part-time	39	39.0
	Full time	49	49.0
	Retired	10	10.0
	Total	100	100.0
4	<b>Own Children</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
	Yes	48	48.0
	No	52	52.0
	Total	100	100.0
5	<b>Do you know about surrogacy</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
	Strongly agree	28	28.0
	Agree	57	57.0
	Disagree	11	11.0
	Strongly disagree	4	4.0
	Total	100	100.0

**Source: Field Survey (2022)**

The gender of the participants was such that all the participants were female. The age distribution of the respondents was such that 18-27 years were 9 representing (9%), 28-37 years were 50 representing (50%), while 41 respondents representing (41%), were 38 years and above. The educational qualifications of the respondents were such that out of the 100 participants that responded to the questionnaire, 38 representing (38%) had first degree, 35 representing (35%) had master's degree from different field, while 27 women representing (27%) had doctorate degrees. The working status of the respondents was such that only 2 respondents representing (2%) engages in no functional employment, 39 respondents representing (39%) engages in part-time jobs, 49 respondents representing (49%) have full-time employment, while 10 respondents representing (10%) were retired. The study also revealed that out of the 100 educationally empowered women in the sample, 28(28%) strongly agree to know surrogacy, 57(57%) agree to know about surrogacy, while 15 respondents representing (15%) do not really know much about surrogacy.

**Research Question 1: What are the reasons that could lead to the adoption of surrogate motherhood in Port Harcourt City, Rivers State?**

**Table 2**  
*Reasons why people adopt surrogate motherhood to raise child/children*

S/N	Item	Mean	STD.	Decision
1	Surrogacy is growing because the commissioning individuals were unable to give birth to a child	3.20	0.71	Accepted
2	Surrogacy is growing because the commissioning individuals are too old to conceive	3.16	0.70	Accepted
3	People adopt surrogacy because they don't want to lose their body shape	3.14	0.76	Accepted
4	People adopt surrogacy because they have medical condition that will not allow them deliver successfully	3.07	0.43	Accepted
5	People adopt surrogacy because they don't want to marry	2.82	1.06	Accepted

Grand Mean 3.07 0.73 Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 2 shows the perceived responses of respondents on the reason why people adopt surrogacy in Port Harcourt. Most of the respondents with the mean ratio of 3.20 and corresponding standard deviation of 0.71 indicated that people adopt surrogacy because they were unable to give birth to a child. The mean ratio of 3.16 and corresponding standard deviation of 0.70 indicated that people adopt surrogacy because they are too old to conceive. Again, the mean ratio of 3.14 and corresponding standard deviation of 0.76 indicated that most of the respondents believe the people patronizing surrogacy do it because they do not want to lose their shape. Furthermore, the mean ratio of 3.07 and corresponding standard deviation of 0.43 indicated that people adopt surrogacy simply because of their medical condition which has made it impossible for them to bear children. To this end, the mean ratio of 2.82 and corresponding standard deviation of 1.06 indicated that people adopt surrogacy because they don't want to marry.

Research Question 2: What is the nexus between surrogacy and the disdain for marriage among educationally empowered women in Port Harcourt City, Rivers State?

Table 3

The relationship between surrogacy and the disdain for marriage among educationally empowered women

S/N	Item	Mean	STD.	Decision
6	The idea that another woman can help you give birth is making women disdain marriage	1.90	0.78	Not accepted
7	The stress people go through in marriage from in-laws is the reason why some women don't like marriage like before	2.96	0.81	Accepted
8	There are too many couples who are unhappy in their marriages due to domestic abuse	3.02	0.73	Accepted
9	Some women are not marrying because they don't want to submit to a man	1.94	0.81	Not accepted
10	Some women are not going into marriage because of the pains people go through in carrying pregnancies	1.89	0.80	Not accepted
11	Some women avoid marriage because it will affect their career	2.05	0.78	Not accepted
12	There is reduction in the rate of responsible men who are interested in marriage	2.84	0.95	Accepted
13	The rate of divorce cases is scaring educated women from marriage	3.18	0.77	Accepted
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.47</b>	<b>0.80</b>	<b>Not accepted</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The table above was used to analyse the views of the respondents on the relationship between the growing rate of surrogacy and the disdain for marriage by educationally empowered women. The mean ratio of 1.90 and corresponding standard deviation of 0.78 indicated that the knowledge of surrogacy does not increase the disdain for marriage among educationally empowered women. Further, the mean ratios of 2.96 and 3.02 and corresponding standard deviation of 0.81 and 0.73 indicated that stress from in-laws and the growing rate of unhappy marriages as a result of domestic abuse constitutes some of the reasons for educationally empowered women disdaining marriages. Again, the mean ratios of 1.94, 1.89, 2.05 and corresponding standard deviation of 0.81, 0.80 and 0.78 indicated that some women avoid marriage because they don't want to submit to a man, because of the pains in pregnancies, and because of their career. The mean ratios of 2.84 and 3.18 and corresponding standard deviation of 0.95 and 0.77 further established that there is growing disdain for marriage due to reduction in the rate of responsible men who are interested in marriage and the growing rate of divorce cases.

Research Question 3: What are the socio-cultural and legal impediments affecting families who intend to used surrogacy in their marriages?

Table 4

The socio-cultural and legal impediments limiting people from opting for surrogacy

S/N	Item	Mean	STD.	Decision
14	Stigmatization of commissioning parents	3.20	0.81	Accepted
15	Religious barriers	2.75	0.94	Accepted
16	The cost is too high	2.97	0.94	Accepted
17	Surrogacy has many risk	1.76	0.65	Not Accepted

18	Lack of legislation to protect the surrogate mother and the commissioning parents	2.58	0.71	Accepted
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.65</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2022**

Some of the socio-cultural and legal impediments limiting people from relying on surrogacy were assessed. The finding revealed that majority of the respondents believed that stigmatization (mean 3.20, std. 0.81), religious barriers (mean 2.75, std. 0.94), and the high of cost of engaging a surrogate mother (mean 2.97, std. 0.94) were some of the challenges deterring people from using surrogacy in Port Harcourt. Again, the mean ratio of 1.76 and standard deviation of 0.65 indicated that surrogacy has some risk and that has scared some persons away from using the approach for their child birth. The mean ratio of 2.58 and corresponding standard deviation of 0.71 further established that lack of adequate laws to protect the surrogate mothers and the commissioning parents has hampered the acceptability of the surrogacy method.

**V DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The study aimed to reveal the link between the growing rate of surrogacy and the increasing rate of disdain for marriage among educationally empowered women in Port Harcourt City. Three research questions were used to sort responses from one hundred women in Port Harcourt. The educational qualifications of the women were such that out of the 100, the majority of them were first degree holders, followed by master’s degree holders, while the remainder were PhD holders. An effort was also made to sample the opinions of women who are educationally inclined and are yet to marry. The first objective of the study reviewed the perceptions of the respondents and some gynaecologists on the reasons why people adopt surrogacy to raise children. A majority of the participants and the gynaecologists agreed that medical conditions and the fear of losing one shape through pregnancy could result in a couple opting for surrogacy in Port Harcourt. One of the gynaecologists working with Rivers State University aptly noted that:

Some of the reasons why women need surrogacy in Nigeria include being born without a uterus or having an atrophic, poorly developed uterus as in Turner syndrome; loss of the uterus at childbirth, for example, following hysterectomy for severe postpartum hemorrhage from poorly managed labor and delivery; and badly damaged uterus following open myomectomy for large, multiple fibroids, which is relatively common in these parts. (Gynecologists, M, 48 years)

Another gynecologist noted thus:

In Nigeria, unsafe termination of pregnancy is relatively common because abortion is not legal in this jurisdiction. This is another cause of uterine damage because conditions such as Asherman syndrome may result. Severe Asherman syndrome may not be amenable to treatment, and surrogacy may be an option for such woman. (Gynecologists, F, 50 years)

Other reasons for the growing rate of surrogacy in Port Harcourt include medical conditions such as severe hypertension or heart diseases, advanced maternal age, and desire for a certain gender child after having completed childbearing. To support this view, one of the gynaecologists working with the University of Port Harcourt explained that:

One postmenopausal woman who had two girls and one boy (who was her last child) wanted surrogacy and sex selection for another male child because her only son had a life-threatening health challenge. Another woman wanted surrogacy because of repeated miscarriages and several failed in vitro fertilization (IVF) cycles where a uterine factor was strongly suspected. (Gynecologists, F, 50 years)

The age of the women and their choice of surrogacy was another factor considered. Most of the respondents agreed that the age of a woman could hamper her chances of conceiving and that could determine her choice for surrogacy. In a study conducted by Musavi et al. (2020), 1359 aged infertile women indicated that they used surrogacy as an option to deliver their children. The gynaecologists also agreed that the use of surrogacy among aged women in marriages has become common in Nigeria in recent times. Aged women who could have struggled for years to have a child may benefit from a third-party reproduction method to have families with children. The majority of the respondents represented by the mean ratio of 3.14 indicated that women adopt surrogacy because they don’t want to lose their shape. The gynaecologists noted that though "vanity surrogacy," which gives women the opportunity to use a surrogate mother to retain their body shape,

The second research objective sought to reveal the link between the growing rate of surrogacy and the increasing rate of disdain for marriage among the educationally empowered women in Port Harcourt City. The mean ratio of 1.90 and corresponding standard deviation of 0.78 indicated that the knowledge of surrogacy does not constitute one of the growing disdain for marriage among the educationally empowered women in Port Harcourt City. On the other hand, respondents believed that stress from in-laws in marriages, the rate of unhappy among married couples as a result of abuse, the high divorce rate, and the problem of men's lack of interest in marriage are some of the factors contributing to the growing rate of disdain for marriage among educated women.

The participants' perspectives on the prevalence of surrogacy varied. Some of these appeared to be affected by their personal ideas, religious and cultural attitudes, and knowledge of the practise. A detailed assessment of the comments revealed complicated narratives that further bolster the disputes in the literature that surrogacy raises numerous legal, sociocultural, and ethical issues. The majority of gynaecologists expressed support for the practise of surrogacy, despite noting that it is a difficult terrain to navigate, whereas the respondents believed it to be a practise that undermines normative reproductive processes and a concept that could commercialise babies and the woman's body. In discussing surrogacy as a reproductive procedure, the majority of women in the sample relied heavily on religious and cultural views. One of the gynaecologists mentioned that:

Surrogacy in Nigeria is not a popular practice, it is not that popular because when viewed from a socio-cultural lens, there are lots of beliefs, controversies that surround surrogacy. In most quarters in Nigeria, surrogacy is not popular at all and I will say the popularity and acceptance of the practice are hugely influenced by socio-cultural, legal, and spiritual factors. The legal space has not created platforms that support or regulate the process and the socio-cultural and religious aspects of our society are not in favour of such acts that distort natural order. (Gynaecologist, M, 48 years)

All of the gynaecologists interviewed believe that surrogacy will increase in popularity as time passes and the country continues to evolve. However, they consider that it is still in its infancy and is currently largely disliked. In addition, they emphasised that the process's popularity is hindered by sociocultural attitudes and ideals governing reproduction in the sociocultural setting of Africans. Despite this, they observed that surrogacy is flourishing in large urban centres including as Abuja, Lagos, and Port Harcourt, even though the legal environment in which it functions is unregulated.

Most of the women viewed marriage as a good thing and said it was already part and parcel of life. Issues in marriages such as domestic violence, change in status, sexual incompatibility, infertility and medical reasons have resulted in too many divorced cases in Nigeria. These issues are mostly common among educationally privileged couples. According to research conducted by Eyo (2018) on the causes and consequences of divorce, more educated women seek divorce than less educated women. This ugly trend has raised a lot of questions about the issues. The findings of this study revealed that, despite the challenges, educationally empowered singles are still very interested in marriage. As such, surrogacy can only be an option in marriage and not outside of marriage.

Some of the participants noted that the failure of a woman to fulfil her cultural role as a woman creates a void that another woman will fill, either for altruistic reasons, e.g., helping the woman fulfil her social expectations of becoming a mother, or for financial gain, despite the fact that this concept is still unpopular in Nigeria. Intriguingly, the majority of participants consider commercial surrogacy to be difficult and in need of a more critical discussion. Moreover, findings from this study suggest that surrogacy as it is practised is new to Nigeria but might start to become entrenched because of the premium placed on having children, but it does not affect the rate of women interested in marriages. One gynaecologist working with the University of Port Harcourt stated that while the practise will not cause a disdain for marriage among educated women, it will fulfil a cultural goal of helping other infertile couples build a family:

In my own view, how it affects the definition of womanhood is; it depends on how you look at it, especially in an African setting where it is believed that if a woman does not bear a child then the woman is not fulfilled. Interestingly, now we have women coming out to help women in the actualisation of their desire to have a baby, so I think this has really gone a long way and has put a smile on the faces of lots of females around the world and it as really makes womanhood more appreciated than what you can ever think of (Gynecologist, M, 39 years).

The third objective of the study analyses some of the barriers to the adoption of surrogacy in relationships among the educationally empowered women in the Port Harcourt Metropolis. A majority of the respondents believe that stigmatization, barriers from religion, the high cost of the system, and the issue of lack of legislation constitute some of the barriers limiting women from opting for surrogacy. Most of the respondents also disagreed that the process is risky and that the risk could hamper people adopting surrogacy. The opinions shared by respondents elaborated on the religious and socio-cultural factors influencing the popularity of surrogacy in Port Harcourt, discussed in the previous section:

Our prayer is that this act won't gain prevalence and acceptance in this country, because it is anti-cultural and anti-religion. God has established a process for that and no one or advancement should change it. It is a devilish act championed by the western world and it won't succeed in our land. How do you expect a woman that did not gestate a child to know the real worth and value of that child? Or how does the child become a true member of the kin when another woman gestated him/her. God forbid, it won't work here. I have heard people are doing it already, but God will destroy their plans (Anonymous Respondent, F, 48 years).

The majority of respondents agreed that surrogacy is becoming a societal issue in Nigeria. However, they believed it would not flourish in the country since it violates cultural and religious reproduction standards. Among their objections to the practise is the fact that the surrogacy procedure would ruin the entire process of regular reproduction, which includes pregnancy, attachment, and the value put on children. Indeed, the landscape of surrogacy is extremely complicated, but it is now not a prominent topic of public discourse. The definition and societal acceptance of surrogacy

vary across cultural and socioeconomic borders. It is obvious from the tales of the participants that the topic of surrogacy raises a number of issues that are frequently impacted by the social, cultural, and religious views of the society.

Another participant believes that surrogacy provides support for married couples and does not promote a lack of interest in marriages among the majority of educated women. Though some of the families are in need of a solution, they often choose to adopt or use illegal means of buying from baby factories because of stigmatisation from family members and friends. One of the participants noted that:

Surrogacy redefines the whole essence of the family and parenthood. It makes us think of a woman beyond just bearing children. It reminds us there is more to a woman than just bearing children because at the end of the day even if there is a problem with the man, everybody stigmatises the woman in a childless union. It means a woman can be a woman without necessarily bearing a child (Legal professional, M, 34 years).

Further reiterating this line of thought, another participant noted that:

Hmmm....Well the definition of womanhood generally around here is complex because in the real sense being a mother is not about giving birth like we also say being a father is not about fathering a child, but the roles and responsibilities assumed. However, we find out that being a woman has been defined with being able to conceive in the African sense, so surrogacy thus affects this definition of womanhood. Not being able to conceive is more or less like you are less than a woman, in fact, I have seen where people have written that if you give birth through caesarean operation (CS) then you are not a true woman. So, I can imagine that in that circle giving birth through a surrogate tampers with the traditional definition of womanhood, however, the world is evolving and people are defining motherhood and fatherhood by roles and responsibilities assumed in the life of a child. (Legal professional, F, 35 years)

While some participants discussed surrogacy from a very positive perspective by emphasising the fact that it helps individuals fulfil the normative social expectations of raising a family in which children are valued highly, they failed to contextualise the exploitation, complexities in parentage, and other ethical concerns inherent to the practise. The landscape is extremely difficult to navigate due to the contradiction between a child's right to be a product of this process and the women who are frequently entangled in a complex web of unequal power relations. In addition, it reiterates the need for comprehensive reproductive laws in Nigeria to protect women and children from all sorts of exploitation and abuse.

## VI CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has unpacked the various perceptions of women on the link between surrogacy and disdain for marriage among educationally empowered women in Port Harcourt City, Rivers State, Nigeria. Through painstaking interviews with women, gynecologists, and legal professionals, we learned that people opt for surrogacy for many reasons. Couples adopt through surrogacy when they lack the capacity to bear children. This could be due to the inability of the woman to conceive after many attempts by the couple. The finding also revealed that some couples could adopt the surrogates' mother to give birth to children due to the fact that the woman is maintaining her shape, which the gynaecologists describe as "vanity surrogacy." The analysis of the study found no link between surrogacy and the growing disdain for marriage among the educationally empowered women in Port Harcourt. The gynaecologists agreed that the system would grow in the coming years. The study revealed that the system is still unpopular and it does not affect educated women in their choice of being single. Rather, it was revealed that the rate of domestic violence and divorced women are some of the factors promoting disdain for marriage among the educationally empowered women in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

In addition, the study revealed that a number of sociocultural and theological variables governing the reproductive realm in Nigeria make it impossible for surrogacy to flourish. The pervasive effect of sociocultural ideas on topics such as infertility makes it exceedingly difficult for unnatural practises such as surrogacy to flourish. The data demonstrated that there is a sociocultural and theological prism through which women are regarded, neither of which condones surrogacy. As part of the explanation of what it means to be a woman, gestation and bringing a kid to term are cited as significant aspects. It is considered that pregnancy creates a particular relationship between the mother and infant, which is essential for kinship development. Intriguingly, the absence of a legislation regulating surrogacy in Nigeria makes the procedure exceptionally difficult and exposes mothers and newborns to the risk of abuse and exploitation. This legislative void has also contributed to the proliferation of illegal baby factories in Nigeria. In the framework of this study, the social and cultural environment is not conducive to the development of surrogacy. However, the importance put on fertility and having children enables the expansion of illicit baby factories.

Based on the highlighted findings, the study made the following recommendations:

1. Efforts are required to increase knowledge and understanding about surrogacy. This would be necessary not only at the level of educating infertile couples but also at the level of the overall population. This would help people understand and agree that surrogacy is a good idea, not just for couples who can't have children but also for fertile women who are willing to be surrogate mothers.
2. Efforts to reduce cases of domestic violence should be implemented by the government and all relevant stakeholders. Religious organisations should play an important role in preaching peace among couples in order

to encourage women to enter into marriage. The government should also implement policies that would create jobs for the teeming youth population so that more young people will engage their loved ones in marriages.

3. The necessary legislation should be enacted to protect all parties involved in surrogacy in Nigeria. This would help reduce the cases of illegal child adoption and baby factories. The lack of legislation in Nigeria has significantly contributed to the proliferation of baby factories, resulting in the abuse and exploitation of women and children. In order to safeguard women, children, and infants from abuse, exploitation, and commercialization, it is necessary to adequately regulate surrogacy and create a comprehensive legal framework for reproduction.

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