



# **CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

ISSN: 1115 - 959X

**A JOURNAL OF THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

*Published in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria*



# **CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Volume 3, 2013 Special Edition

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# Living Arrangements among the Elderly in Kwara State Nigeria

By

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## Abstract

Living arrangement is somewhat crucial towards the enhancement of the lifestyle and wellbeing of the aged citizens, in the society. Hence, this paper therefore examines the living arrangements amongst the elderly population (64 years and Over) in Kwara State. Six LGAs of Baruten, Patigi, Asa, Ilorin West, Ekiti and Oyun were systematically chosen from the three senatorial zones (North, Central and South) of kwara state, from where 488 elderly respondents were systematically sampled through structured questionnaire and interviews. It has been observed that there is still a high regard for filial obligations across space, even though capacity to do so has been highly weakened, due to biting poverty, unemployment and the fast diminishing traditional communal lifestyle and family system. Hence, about 70% of respondents have in their children and spouse a safety net. Also, co-habitation with nuclear relation is most profound amongst majority (71.3%) of respondents across space. The study recommends a proper re-education of the citizenry towards the essence of communal living, reinforcement of the values and beauty inherent in the extended family system and qualitative geriatric care.

## Introduction

The term “living arrangements” or “co-residential arrangements” is used interchangeably to refer to the household structure of the elderly (Palloni, 2001). In the past, and still today in many less developed countries, the higher status of the elderly was tied partly to the fact that as old age approached, they were situated in their own housing unit. Even if they co-reside with their children, it was likely that the children (typically a son with his family) were actually living in the parental home, rather than the other way around (Kertzer, 1995; Weeks, 2005). The concept of filial piety, of respect for one's parents, has been a traditional value in most cultures, encouraging children to take care of their parents when the need arises (Holroyd, 2001). Of course, in high-mortality societies, the probability that parents would survive to old age (and the probability that their children would survive to assist them) was low enough so that relatively few people ever had to make good on that concept (Weeks, 2005).

In modern times, society after society has bemoaned the fact that the multi-generational family has been a victim of "the movement towards smaller families, the expansion of the female labour market, the geographic mobility of villagers, and the tendency of the young towards individualistic life styles" (Sung, 1995). To be sure, not all older people necessarily want to live with their children, especially if they are forced to be dependent on the offspring. Therefore, a global phenomenon of "intimacy at a distance" according to Weeks, (2005) has been emerging amongst our senior citizens. Those who co-reside with their children do so out of necessity, not necessarily because they prefer that arrangement (Da Vanzo and Chan, 1994). Although, some elderly people move around the time of retirement, most people age in place. This has led to the creation of what are sometimes called "naturally occurring retirement communities" (NORCs). A term originally applied to places that are attractive to older migrants, and then became retirement communities (Hunt, 1984), but over time it has been applied to any apartment building or neighbourhood where a high percentage (50% more) of the residents are more than 60 years of age. This is the spatial component of the life course. People are attracted to neighbourhoods and particular apartment buildings because of the similarity of other people's demographic characteristics, including the stage of life. Then, perhaps even without people realizing it, the population ages together and becomes a retirement community (Weeks, 2005).

It is probably most accurate to say that diversity in living arrangements is as much a part of the lives of older people as it is among the young. In more developed societies, the diversity of living arrangements among the elderly is compounded by patterns of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in combination with differences in mortality between males and females (Weeks, 2005). The unbalanced sex ratio at older ages in most societies signals a change in marital status, which in turn means a change in living arrangements for many people as they grow older. Hence, this article attempts a study of the living arrangements of the elderly population in Kwara state, with specific objectives of examining respondents' residences at present and; determining the coping strategies employed by them as regards their living scenarios.

### **The Study Area**

Kwara State is located between parallels  $8^{\circ}$  and  $10^{\circ}$  North latitudes and  $3^{\circ}$  and  $6^{\circ}$  East longitudes (Oyebanji, 2000). The state occupies an area of  $36,825\text{km}^2$  of land and shares boundary with Niger State in the North, Kogi and Ekiti States in the East, Osun and Oyo States in the South and an International boundary with the Republic of Benin in the West. There are sixteen LGAs in the state and of these; six were randomly selected across the three senatorial zones of the state. These includes: Asa, Baruten, Ekiti, Ilorin West, Oyun and Patigi LGAs (See Figure 1). The 2006 population census put the population of Kwara state at 2,371,089 people with 1,220,581 males and 1,150,508 females (FGN, 2007). When compared with the 1991

census which put the state's population at 1,548,412 people, of which 773,182 were males and 775,230 females (NPC, 1998; Oyebanji, 2000), a great increase in the population indicating rapid population growth could be observed.

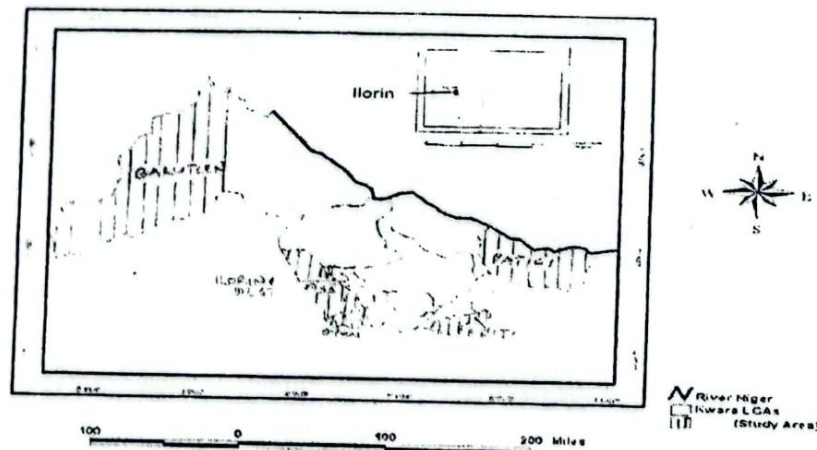


Figure 1. Map of Kwara State Showing the Study Area (Inset: Map of Nigeria Showing Kwara State and Ilorin)

The elderly population in the state according to census figures was put at 107,462 (NPC, 1991) and 116,099 (NPC, 2006) people. The state consists majorly of Yoruba, Nupe, Hausa, Fulani and Batunu speaking people in different proportions. The mainstay of the economy of the state is agriculture, where about 50% of her citizen are engaged in agriculture which is mainly at subsistence levels (NPC, 2009), and more than 90 percent of the state's rural population who form the bulk of her total population are engaged in farming. The annual rainfall ranges between 1000mm and 1500mm (Muhammad-Lawal and Omotesho, 2006), while average temperature ranges between 30°C and 35°C (Taiwo, 2005). Food crops such as maize, sorghum, beans, groundnuts, yam, cassava, sweet potatoes and guinea corn are cultivated in most parts of the state with the exception of some part of Edu LGA (Shonga and Tsaragi towns) where rice and sugar cane are mainly cultivated. Tree crops such as cashew, cocoa, oranges are also intensely cultivated in parts of the southern senatorial zone of the state.

### Materials and Methods of Study

Two data sources were used in this study, namely, primary and secondary sources. The primary source involves the use of structured questionnaires and FGD interview sessions to gather data on demographic and socioeconomic attributes of the elderly population. The

secondary data used were national population census reports, journal articles and other literatures. A multi-stage sampling technique was used for the questionnaire administration in the study area. In which case, a systematic sampling technique was used to determine sample size and locations from where every first and last LGA from each of the 3 senatorial zones making 6 were chosen. From these, a purposive sampling method was used in selecting every Local Govt headquarters from where 1% of their elderly population from the 2006 census figures was chosen. A total of 488 elderly respondents of age 60 years and over were systematically sampled via structured questionnaire. Descriptive analysis like simple and cumulative percentages, charts, tables of distribution among others was used for analyzing study results.

## **Data Analysis and Discussion of Results**

### **Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents**

The sampled respondents consisted of 56.6% males and 43.4% females. The age groups (using three widely recognized age brackets within the elderly population of the 'young old', 'middle old' or 'aged' and the 'oldest old' (Vierck and Hodges, (2003); Gavrilov and Heuveline (2003); Adebayo (2006) and Gondo (2012), of respondents are 88% within the 'young old' (60-74 yrs) population who incidentally are in the majority, the 'aged' (75-79 yrs) are 6.4% while 5.7% within the 'oldest old' (80+ yrs) group. Additionally, about 75.4% of respondents are still married, 19.3% are widowed, 2.5% are separated, 0.4% was single 'never married', while 2% are divorced from their different unions. The relatively high percentage of widows is to be expected given the age of respondents. Many would have lost their spouses by age 60 years. This finding agrees with that of Gavrilov and Heuveline (2003), (when stating a consequence of lower female mortality in the year 2000), where almost half of older women (45%) were widows, thus living without spousal support. Evidence of marital stability and the belief in the institution called marriage can be seen with just about 4.5% separated/divorce rate amongst respondents. Corroborating this fact therefore, evidence from the 1991 population census noted that the northern states, part of which Kwara State is, have higher percentages of married among both sexes (70% of females and 50% of males) compared with the southern states having between (40% and 45% of both males and females) as married (NPC, 1998). In addition, more than half (54%) of the respondents practice polygamy of which more than half of this group, that is 51.7% are males and 48.3% females. This fact was equally corroborated by Wahab and Isiugo-Abanihe (2010) in a study of elderly Ijebus in Ogun and Lagos State, where 67.4% of respondents were into polygamy and 32.6% in monogamy. Considering religious inclinations, greater parts (72%) are practicing Muslims, 23.4% Christians while 4% professed traditional believes.

## Respondents' Educational Attainments

Looking through respondents' educational attainment as shown in Figure 2, a high level of illiteracy was noted amongst respondents across the different LGAs. This fact is corroborated by NPC (2006) in which about 55.5% (Nigeria) and 71.8% (Kwara State) of the aged population are not literate (can neither read nor write with understanding of short statements in any language). By this, about 32% (155) mostly from parts of Oyun, Ekiti, Baruten, Asa and Ilorin West LGAs had neither Quranic nor Formal schooling experience before. However, 35.8% had been into a formal type of education, while 30.1% acquired just the Quranic form of education. Reason for this can be traced to the high influence of Islamic cultural beliefs and norm which enjoins the learning of Islamic studies from tender ages amongst adherents as seen in areas of Baruten, Asa, Ilorin West and Patigi LGAs respectively (See Figure 2).

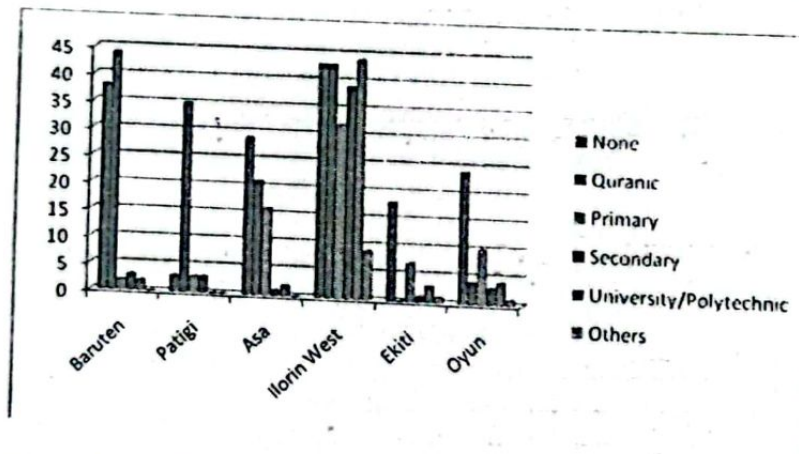


Figure 2 Distributions of Respondents by LGA and Highest Level of Education  
Source: Field Survey, 2012

Adult education, NCE, vocational skills learnt from artisanship, apprenticeship, culture and oral tradition among others, accounted for 2.3% of other forms of education acquired by respondents.

## Occupational types of the Respondents

Numerous occupational types are engaged in by respondents. Chief amongst those identified are as shown in Figure 4. Trading/Business and Farming accounted for 67.6% (330) of all occupations which respondents engage in. Of these, 24% (46) of those into all forms of trade are men while 76% (146) of females engage in trading/business as occupation. In addition,

of the 28.3% (138) of those into farming, 76.8% (106) are males while 23.2% (32) of farmers are women. Interestingly, 96.8% of artisans in jobs like carpentry, tailoring, auto-mechanic, driver, hunting, plumbing, technician among others, are males and 3.2% are females.

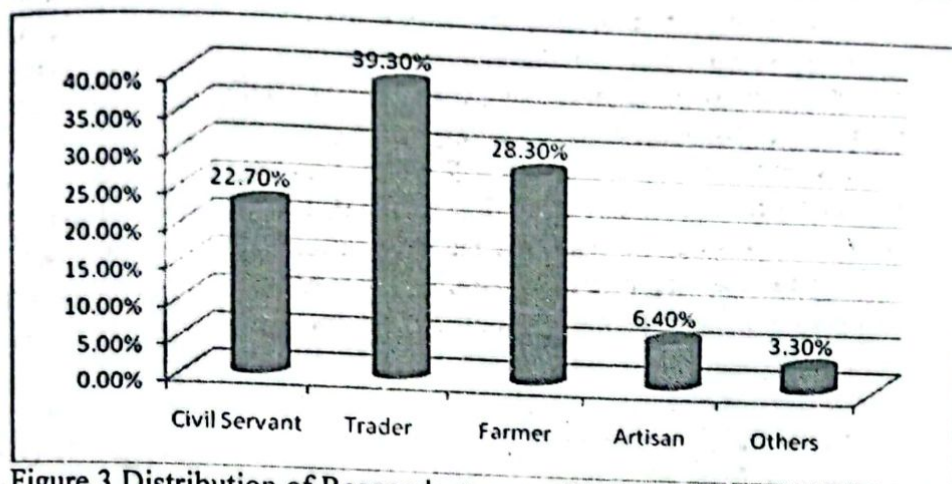


Figure 3 Distribution of Respondents according to Occupational Types  
Source: Field Survey, 2012

Fishing, hawking, cloth weaving, clergy, security guard, load carriers among others are some other jobs respondents are into accounting for 3.3% of all employments (See Figure 3).

Table 1 Distribution of Respondents into Occupational Groups by Local Government Areas

| LGAs                | Occupation        |                   |                   |                 |                 | Total      |
|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------|
|                     | Civil Servant     | Trader            | Farmer            | Artisan         | Others          |            |
| Baruten             | 10                | 15                | 64                | 0               | 0               | 89         |
| Patigi              | 4                 | 28                | 10                | 2               | 0               | 44         |
| Asa                 | 7                 | 30                | 26                | 5               | 1               | 69         |
| Ilorin West         | 74                | 89                | 22                | 14              | 11              | 210        |
| Ekiti               | 8                 | 11                | 9                 | 0               | 1               | 30         |
| Oyun                | 8                 | 19                | 7                 | 10              | 2               | 46         |
| <b>Total (%)</b>    | <b>111 (22.7)</b> | <b>192 (39.3)</b> | <b>138 (28.3)</b> | <b>31 (6.4)</b> | <b>16 (3.3)</b> | <b>488</b> |
| <b>Cumulative %</b> | <b>22.7</b>       | <b>62.0</b>       | <b>90.3</b>       | <b>96.7</b>     | <b>100.0</b>    |            |

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Moreover, 72.1% (80) of those in paid public employment or civil service are men while 27.9% (31) are women. In addition, the spatial and occupational distribution of respondents by Local Government Areas is as shown in Table 1. Farming accounts for 71.9% of all occupations engaged in Baruten L.G.A., 63.6% into trading in Patigi L.G.A, 43.5% and 37.7% into trading

and farming in Asa L.G.A, 33.7% and 41.3% into trading in Ekiti and Oyun LGAs respectively. However, trading and civil service employments accounted for 42.4% and 35.2% respectively as occupations with the most prominence in Ilorin West LGA. Incidentally, Ilorin West LGA is also the politico-economic capital of the state. These and more, probably helped in influencing the type and nature of activity respondents engages in whilst trying to earn a living.

### Living Arrangements of Respondents

Adebayo (2006) reiterates that a very vital human need which provides both psychological relief and physical shelter is housing. The issue of housing has always been global, which could be because most human activities are done in, on or under it. Therefore, the type of housing arrangement amongst respondents is quite crucial towards the enhancement of the lifestyle and wellbeing of our elderly citizens. Thus, table 2 shows that as much as 60% (293) of respondents owns and lives in their personal buildings (with their spouse and children), which literally means they are 'landlords' (See Plates 1 and 2). Also, 24.6% (120) resides in their extended family houses, while only about 13.1% are tenants living in rented apartments.

Also, living 'alone' in rented apartments especially at older ages is not widespread amongst respondents. This is because as much as 84.6% (413) resides with either or both their extended and nuclear relations (Table 2). This finding is in line with that by Mosley *et al.* (1993) in which the elderly in most developing nations (with the extended family system still common) live under the same roof as their children and familial support remains their main source of funding. Besides, less than 20% of them regardless of the spatial location were found living as tenants. The highest number, which is 17.1%, was found in Ilorin West LGA, which might not be unconnected with its primate status which hitherto attracts more immigrants in search of better opportunities and tranquillity. The least, about 2.2% was found in Baruten Area (See Table 2). Besides, looking via the gender perspective, about 65.2% (180) of all males examined possess and reside in their very own homes, and so was 53.3% (113) of the females.

Table 2 Respondents' Present Residence According to Local Government Area

| Local Government Areas | Present Residence |                |              |              |        | Total |
|------------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------|-------|
|                        | No Response       | Personal House | Rented House | Family House | Others |       |
| Baruten                | 0                 | 70             | 2            | 17           | 0      | 89    |
| Patigi                 | 1                 | 19             | 5            | 19           | 0      | 44    |
| Asa                    | 1                 | 42             | 11           | 15           | 0      | 69    |
| Ilorin West            | 4                 | 121            | 36           | 46           | 3      | 210   |
| Ekiti                  | 0                 | 13             | 2            | 15           | 0      | 30    |
| Oyun                   | 2                 | 28             | 8            | 8            | 0      | 46    |

|              |         |            |           |            |         |     |
|--------------|---------|------------|-----------|------------|---------|-----|
| Total (%)    | 8 (1.6) | 293 (60.0) | 64 (13.1) | 120 (24.6) | 3 (0.6) | 488 |
| Cumulative % | 1.6     | 61.7       | 74.8      | 99.4       | 100.0   |     |

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Moreover, 20.7% and 29.7% of males and females respectively reside within their family houses. Interestingly, institutional residency i.e. public or privately owned geriatric homes/institutions were very unpopular amongst respondents.



Plate 1

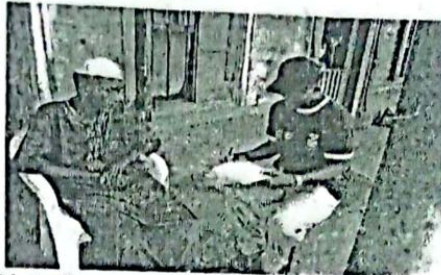


Plate 2



Plate 3

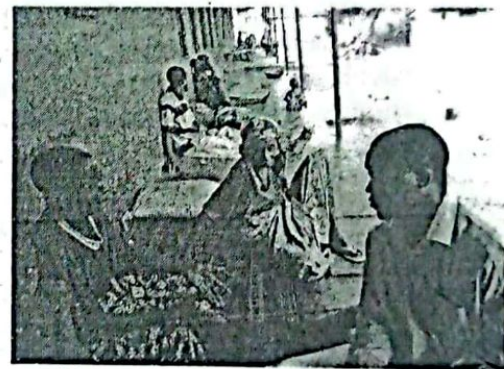


Plate 4

Plate 1. Researcher with a household head at home in Ijagbo, Oyun LGA

Plate 2. Researcher with a household head and spouse at home in Patigi, Patigi LGA

Plate 3. Some female respondents living with extended household members in Patigi

Plate 4. Researcher with respondents (husband & wife) with eldest son's household in Patigi

However, the living arrangement of respondents was examined further (Table 3). Here respondents' present habitation was looked into, so as to discern their living scenarios which is also a very vital coping strategy. Living alone, co-residing with the nuclear family members, with extended relatives as well as with non relations were the noted living arrangements (See Table 3).

Table 3 Distribution of Respondents' According to Whom they Reside With

| LGAs         | Who You Reside With at Present |              |                |                    |               | Total |
|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|-------|
|              | No Response                    | Living Alone | Family Members | Extended Relatives | Non Relatives |       |
| Baruten      | 0                              | 22           | 42             | 24                 | 1             | 89    |
| Patigi       | 1                              | 5            | 37             | 1                  | 0             | 44    |
| Asa          | 0                              | 7            | 53             | 7                  | 2             | 69    |
| Ilorin West  | 5                              | 15           | 156            | 28                 | 6             | 210   |
| Ekiti        | 0                              | 3            | 27             | 0                  | 0             | 30    |
| Oyun         | 2                              | 3            | 33             | 3                  | 5             | 46    |
| Total (%)    | 8 (1.6)                        | 55 (11.3)    | 348 (71.3)     | 63 (12.9)          | 14 (2.9)      | 488   |
| Cumulative % | 1.6                            | 12.9         | 84.2           | 97.1               | 100           |       |

Source: Field Survey, 2012

As noted in the study, almost 70% of respondents have in their spouses and especially children their main source of material support. Table 3 depicting who they presently reside with shows cohabitation with nuclear relations as the most profound. Here, about 71.3% (384) lives with one or more of their family members, while 12.9% (63) stays with one or more member of the extended family and probably (as shown in Table 2) within their personal or family homes (See Plate 3). This finding actually agrees with those of Kertzer (1995) and Weeks (2005), in which it was reported that, even if the aged live with their children, it was likely that the children (typically a son with his family) were actually living in the parental home, rather than the other way around. Those residing alone were 11.3%, while a few, 2.9% resides totally with non family members, which could be house helps, nurses or even neighbours as the case may be (Table 3). Furthermore, about 24.7% (22) reside 'alone' in Baruten L.G.A; incidentally the highest (40%) in all locations, followed by Ilorin West (7.1%) and 27.3% over all was noticed. Also, almost 3% of respondents cohabit with one or more non-relation. Of this number therefore, close to 11% and 2.9% are from Oyun and Ilorin West LGAs respectively (Table 3).

### Recommendations and Conclusion

It is no gainsaying that for the enhancement of the lifestyle and wellbeing of our senior citizens, the type of housing arrangement amongst them is quiet crucial. Hence, of essence was the need for a study into their living scenarios. The target respondents were mainly within the

age cohort 60yrs and beyond all randomly chosen from six LGAs of Kwara state. However, the study discovered that marriage amongst the seniors is still widespread, in which about 75% are still in wedlock. Moreover, more than half (54%) are in 'multiple wife' unions. The Islamic faith is the most prominent amongst 72% of the studied aged of which about 30.1% are educated only in Quranic instructions. Also about 32% illiteracy rates were generally noted. The 'young old' (60-74yrs) population are also in majority, while as much as 60% can be termed 'landlords' because they own and reside in their personal houses. Regardless of this however, more than 71% co-resides with family members, while living in rented apartments are not very widespread amongst their ranks. The study thereby recommends proper re-education of the citizenry towards the essence of communal living, reinforcement of the values of the traditional extended family system and qualitative geriatric care. A reformulation of policies toward promoting adequacy of space and privacy especially during building construction should be enjoined. This will reduce waste of living space, scarce resources, reduces boredom and loneliness at old age and ultimately breeds sense of brotherliness amongst the citizenry.

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