GENDER AND RURAL OUT-MIGRATION TENDENCIES AMONG THE OKPAMERI PEOPLE OF EDO STATE NIGERIA

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Keywords

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Abstract

Research Problem: *The study was informed by the continuing debate in migration literature on whether males or females migrate more, and whether gender significantly shapes migration intention. Against the background of persistent rural deprivation, limited employment opportunities, and growing attraction to urban centres, the study investigated how gender influences the decision, experience, and social meaning of out-migration among aspiring rural migrants.*
Methods: *The study adopted an exploratory, community-based survey design, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Structured questionnaires were administered to 302 respondents, while 12 in-depth interviews were conducted among selected participants. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi-square, while qualitative data were examined through thematic and content analysis.*
Results: *Findings revealed that 71.4% of respondents stated that their intention to out-migrate was not based on sex. Although 69.6% reported that males had migrated more in their families, the Chi-square result showed no significant relationship between sex and out-migration intention, with a p-value of 0.597. However, the qualitative findings showed that gender still shaped migration experiences.*
Conclusion: *The study concludes that gender does not statistically determine rural out-migration intention among the Okpameri, but it strongly influences the meanings, opportunities, constraints, and expectations attached to migration.*
Key Contribution to Knowledge: *Male migration is commonly interpreted through the lens of economic responsibility, resilience. Female migrationis linked not only to employment and education, but also to*

marriage prospects, social support, vulnerability, and self-respectability. ***Recommendation:*** *Special attention should be given to young women, whose migration may be shaped vulnerability, while young men should be guided against risky survival choices driven by pressure to succeed.*

Introduction

Rural out-migration remains one of the most persistent demographic and social processes in Nigeria, despite the harsh realities that often confront migrants in urban destinations. Many rural dwellers continue to move, or desire to move, from their communities to cities even when urban centres are already marked by unemployment, housing shortages, overcrowding, environmental pollution, insecurity, and rising cost of living. Poverty and hunger were once treated largely as rural problems, but rural-urban migration has increasingly transferred them into urban spaces (UNCHS, 1996; WRI, 1996; Mberu, 2010). Urban centres now contain many unemployed youths, underemployed migrants, women in precarious work, street children, and persons living in slum settlements. Odigie and Orobosa (2008) noted that urban populations are often characterized by idle young persons, children, and women from rural communities, contributing to unemployment, informal settlements, and other social pressures. Yet, despite these challenges, the desire to migrate remains strong.

Among the Okpameri of Akoko-Edo Local Government Area in Edo State, rural out-migration has become a common social practice. The Okpameri-speaking communities are largely agrarian, and many residents depend on farming, petty trading, craftwork, and other rural-based livelihoods. However, limited local opportunities, poor infrastructure, low income, and the attraction of urban life often shape people's desire to migrate. Although rural out-migration affects entire communities, it is not experienced in the same way by men and women. This gives the hunch that gender plays a major role in shaping migration intentions, decision-making, opportunities, constraints, and outcomes.

UNFPA (2006) observed that although migrant women contribute significantly through labour and remittances, policy makers often overlook both their contributions and the risks they face. Women may encounter exploitation, harassment, poor working conditions, social stigma, and limited access to secure accommodation in destination areas. Their migration decisions may also be more heavily controlled by family expectations, marriage norms, cultural prescriptions, and concerns about respectability. This study is therefore situated within the broader problem of rural out-migration, with particular focus on the gender dimension among the Okpameri people. By focusing on gender, the study moves beyond a general explanation of rural out-migration and provides a more grounded understanding of how migration decisions are shaped by social roles, expectations, opportunities, and vulnerabilities associated with males and females.

Statement of the Problem

The nature and extent to which gender shapes rural-migration among Nigerian, and the Okpameri people in particular has not been adequately empirically interrogated. The spatial and social system that systematically disadvantages rural populations tends to place women at the most vulnerable end of the inequality structure. Rural women often have less access than men to land, finance, education,

productive resources, essential services, and labour-saving technologies, making their empowerment more constrained than that of men (International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], n.d.; Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2024). In Nigeria, women's empowerment remains limited, particularly in rural areas where gender inequalities are reinforced by poverty, weak access to resources, and restricted decision-making power (Aluko & Mbada, 2020; World Bank, 2024). These disadvantages can follow women into migration, where they may face abuse, exploitation, discrimination, and violence at both places of origin and destination because of their intersecting vulnerability as women, rural dwellers, and migrants (UN Women, 2021). Women and men seem to migrate for different reasons, use different channels, and experience migration differently, since gender shapes access to information, mobility, employment, protection, and social support during the migration process (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; UN Women, 2025). It is therefore important to examine the relationship between gender and rural out-migration, especially in contexts where migration is shaped by rural deprivation, unequal opportunities, household expectations, and gendered social roles.

Gender and Rural Out-Migration

The issues of gender equality and migration are closely linked to development in Africa and increasingly considered one of its key indicators, women are at higher risk in the migration process. Understood as a social construction of femininity and masculinity and inequalities gender fundamentally influences migration and its impacts on societies and individuals. It shapes migration processes at different levels and stages as to who is migrating, possible destinations of migration and the consequences of migrating. Gender analysis could explain increasing feminization of migration as a result of reproduction of gender inequalities in the context of global capitalism.

Women in the rural areas occupy a vital position that directly determines the food security in all levels and tiers. Engaged in the agricultural sector around the world are 41 percent women compared to 59 percent men; and in many parts of the world, agriculture is the first sector of employment for women(Mishra, Maurya, &Arulmanikandan, 2023). It has been argued that to fight hunger, in the world, we will need the energies of both men and women worldwide, rural women are key to food security; they make up a significant share of agricultural producers and play a crucial role in feeding of their families and their nations (UN, 2009). This is evidently correct of the World Bank's (2008) observation that women perform more than 75percent of all agricultural labour.

Conducting a study on relationship between gender and rural out-migration among the Okpameri of Edo state, Nigeria, will not be completed without reviewing relevant literature that bothers on attendant gender issues. It is a statement of fact that all aspect of the migration processes as regards perception and behaviour are influenced by gender (INSTRAW, 2O07). Employing life history calendar (LHC) data from coastal Ghana and event history statistical methods to examine inter-regional migration for men and women, Reed *et al* (2010) found out that women are significantly less mobile than men, but the more educated women are, the more they are likely to move to urban areas than their male counterparts. Nwokocha (2010) implied that rural out-migrants are constituted by more young boys and men.

On the contrary, after examining effects of kin on odds of migration for men and women from a rural community in the commonwealth of

Dominica, it was note that women were more likely than men to migrate (Quinlan, 2005). The Nigeria Migration and Urbanization Survey 1993 showed that 51.1 percent of migrants are female (NISER, 1997). Globally, the proportion of female migrants has been rapidly increasing, rising from 41 million in 1975 to 95 million in 2005,and to 146 million in 2020 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2025). In Sub-Saharan Africa, the percentage of female migrants is increasing and it was 47 percent in 2000 (Zlotnik, 2003). Interestingly, Adesiji*et al* (2009) posited that there is no significant relationship between gender and out-migration in their study they foundthat just 51.7 percent of those who migrate are male. Resolving the above divergent views is one of the missions of this study.

Based on findings of FLACSO (2002) women have been living the rural areas in greater number at a faster rate. It was also found that patterns of migration seem to be primarily a result of push factors influenced by gender. Women have been more negatively affected by the shift from subsistence farming to intensive agricultural production. Also FLACSO (2002) noted that large scale land use is under the control of men. The management of land by women remains limited to households yards and family farms. These changes have caused women to be increasing seen as a financial liability for economical strapped rural families who in turn encourage girls to marry out or go live with relatives in the urban areas. (FLACSO, 2002). If this is true among Nigerians was what this present study would ascertain.

The social, economic and political factors that determine rural out-migration of men and women come in different complex make-up with vary degree of impact on the decision making process to out-migrate or not. Barbierra and Cabb, (2004) reported that men are more likely to move. Relative to men, younger women are more likely to out-migrate to urban areas. Similarly, Sridher et al (2010) opined that women are more likely to be pulled toward urban areas. These assertions were made based on studies carried out in other social spaces, since there is no evidence as to what the situation is like in Nigeria regarding who moves more between male and female, this study is conceived with one of its objectives addressing this.

What influences male and female to out-migrate varies. This is due to peculiar roles male and female play in every society, as well as specific expectations of the society from male and female at different time and space. To fully have a good grasp of gender issued in migration streams, the gender-based motivating factor for out-migration needs empirical attention. Nwokocha (2010) submitted that young boys and men escaping poverty and powerlessness in the rural areas, is responsible for their out-migration. In the Ecuadorian amazon, Barbieria*et al* (2004) reported that economic factors such as engagement in on- farm work, increasing resource scarcity measured by higher population density at the farm and reduction in farm land on forest and crops; and increase in pasture land are more associated with male out-migration to rural areas. From the above positions and arguments, it is clearly seen that gender-based motivating factor for out-migration is economical by nature.

On the other hand, Barbieria*et al* (2004) in the study in the Ecuadorian amazon, argued that increasing resources scarcity, higher population density and weaker migration networks are more associated with female out-migration to urban areas. Chant (1992) also suggested that in Costa Rica, there is a higher predominance of female rural-urban migration based on family pressure rather than individual needs and aspirations.

Young women are more likely than young men to leave their parents' household and to choose destinations in line with their aim to marry study or work (Laurian *et al,* 1998). In China, increasing number young rural women out-migrate, focusing on the fall of the marriage rates of Chinese rural males in their early twenties.

Furthermore, in rural settings, the travails of widowhood, traditional re-marriage neglect and abuse spur a distress coping mechanism in the form of the out-migration among young girls and women in large number to work for employers with whom there is no prior connection or relationship (Stites, *et al,* 2007). Radcliffe (1992) also suggested that women tend to out-migrate more from rural areas in the Peruvian Andes to larger towns in order to expose themselves to better marital and economic opportunities. Women form a large and increasing proportion of migrants in the OECD countries and exhibits higher skilled migration rates than men (Docquier et al, 2009). More and more women view migration into cities as an opportunity for jobs, social mobility and independence (FLACSO, 2002). These assertions are very tenable as over 80% of basic foodstuff is sub-Saharan Africa are produced by women who are now bored with agricultural ventures and wants to have avail themselves to the easy life and non-farm jobs in the urban areas (Madonsela,2002).

Methods

The study adopted an exploratory, community-based survey design to examine the relationship between gender and out-migration tendencies among the Okpameri people of Akoko-Edo Local Government Area, Edo State. To improve the depth and reliability of the study, quantitative and qualitative approaches were combined. The study area was the Okpameri-speaking communities of Akoko-Edo, a largely rural and agrarian area in northern Edo State. It shares boundaries with Etsako-West Local Government Area, Kogi State, Ondo State, and Delta State. Since many Okpameri communities are distant from major urban centres, out-migration to towns and cities has become a common social and economic response. The study population comprised male and female Okpameri indigenes aged 18 to 50 years who resided in the selected communities. A sample of 302 questionnaire respondents was determined using the minimum sample size formula for population surveys at a 95% confidence level, following Lemeshow et al. (1990). Twelve participants were also selected for in-depth interviews.

The sampling procedure involved purposive, quota, and simple random techniques. Okpameri communities were purposively selected because of their population size and relevance. Quota sampling ensured fair representation of males and females, while simple random sampling gave eligible respondents equal opportunity to participate. Interviewees were purposively chosen based on age, gender, educational status, socio-economic background, length of residence, city-visit experience, and migration intention. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, bivariate analysis, and chi-square tests. Qualitative interviews were transcribed, coded, and analysed through thematic and content analysis. Ethical principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation, privacy, confidentiality, and non-harmful questioning, were observed.

Results

The demographic characteristics of individuals constitute the basis on which perceptions and social behaviours are developed. It is therefore pertinent for such characteristics as regards that of the respondents of this study to be presented and discussed. The targeted age structure of the study population used for this study was residing male and female natives of the the sampled Okpameri speaking communities. They were between ages 18 and 50 years. A majority of the repondents were in the 21 – 30 age group representing 48.7% of the total respondents (Table 1). The 20 years and below age group had the second largest number of respondents of 27.3% of the total respondents; while the 41 – 50 age group had the least number of respondents with 8.2% (Table 1). The implication for a age structure of this nature is that, the average Okpameri community has a young population which is also a microsm of the Nigerian population and by virtue of this a sizeable number of the indigenes in Okpameri communities are very likely to out-migrate.

The sex of respondents was systematically determined so as to ensure that the difference between male and female respondents was not excessively much. This was done to reliably produce data to ascertain the relationship between gender and rural out-migration tendencies. Females were 150 representing 49.3% of the sampled population and males were 154 representing 50.7% of the sampled population. These percentages are closely in line with male and female composition of the Nigerian population according to the 2006 population census.

Table 1 Distribution of respondents according to socio-economic background (N = 304)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group		
20 and below	83	27.3
21 – 30	148	48.7
31 – 40	48	15.8
40 – 50	25	8.2
Sex		
Male	154	50.7
Female	150	49.3
Highest Level of Education		
None	9	3.0
Primary	48	15.8
Junior secondary	42	13.8
Senior secondary	156	51.3
Tertiary	49	16.1
Marital Status		
Single	173	56.9
Married	75	24.7
Cohabiting	24	7.9

Separated	23	7.6
Widowed	9	3.0
Religion		
Christianity	291	95.7
Islam	10	3.3
Traditional	1	0.3
Others	2	0.7
Occupation		
Unemployed	45	14.8
Students	102	33.6
Self Employed	94	29.9
Farming	35	11.5
Paid Employment	3	1.0
Others	25	8.2

Most of the respondents sampled for this study had attained senior secondary school education meaning they had the SSCE certificate. These respondents represent 51.3% of the total respondents. However, only 3% of the respondents never acquired any form of formal education. Therefore, it can be seen that the youth in Okpameri communities are predominantly educated. This goes to show that they are well informed of the happenings within and outside their communities, thus putting them in a better stead to take rational social actions to improve their living conditions.

A majority of the respondents that participated in the survey were unmarried, as they constituted 56.9% of the total respondents sampled for this study. The least of the respondents were widowers representing 3% of the total respondents. Coming in between the singles and the widowers were the married, cohabiters and separated who constituted 24.7%, 7.9%.and7.6% respectively (Table 1). Being unmarried means lesser family responsibilities and weak family attachment; therefore making sudden decisions to migrate will not be much of a problem as an unmarried aspiring migrate has just himself and his/her luggage.

A very large number respondents sampled for the study were Christians, who made up 95% of the respondents as against 3.3%, 0.3% and 0.7% of Muslims, traditional worshipers and others respectively. This is a strong assertion that the Okpameripeople are predominantly Christians, therefore, the Christian doctrines and teachings are more likely to influence the social behaviours of the Okpameri as regards rural out-migration tendencies, in terms of being hopeful and optimistic of a positive outcome of their actions and decisions based on the promises of God in their holy book, the bible.

The occupational distribution of the respondents is composed mainly by respondents who were chiefly engaged in non-agricultural economic activities. Only 11% of respondents of the entire sampled population were engaged in farming as their main occupation. Students made up a larger percentage of the respondents with 33.6% followed by the unemployed who

constituted 14.8% (Table 1). The occupational group with the least number of respondents was paid employment, which comprised of civil servants, with 1%. The 'others' occupational group composed of tailors, *Okada* riders, barbers and hair dressers made up 8.2% of the respondents. It can be deduced from the occupational distribution table that about 49% of the respondents were not engaged in any form of economic activity as they were either unemployed or were students. Thus, almost half the respondents were inactive. This could be an impetus for out-migration.

Further examination of other background characteristics is shown in Table 2. Only 229 (75) out of the 304 respondents affirmed that they were engaged in farming, resulting to a 25% non- farming respondents. Among respondents who were engaged in farming activities, 25% of them were subsistent farmers producing food for personal and family consumption only, while 13% of them were commercially engaged in farming for the sole aim of selling their farm produce. However, 61.8% of them were engaged in farming both in subsistent and commercial proportions. Moreover, among respondents who were in engaged in farming, only 18% of them were involved on full-time basis as others constituting a majority of 81% were in engaged in farming at the part-time level. This is a clear indication that farming is becoming unfashionable and unprofitable to the respondents and efforts to seek alternatives to farming which is the main economic activity in the rural communities could lead to rural out-migration.

Table 2 Distribution of Respondents according to Other Background Characteristics

Other Characteristics	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Nature of Family		
Polygamy	222	73
Monogamy	82	27
Perceived Socio-Economic Status of Family		
High	37	12.1
Middle	209	68.8
Low	58	19.1
Average Daily Feeding Pattern		
Once	26	8.6
Twice	80	26.3
Thrice	190	62.5
Others	8	2.6
Housing Pattern		
Parents' house	193	63.5
Rented apartment	43	14.1
Own apartment	58	19.1
Nature of engagement in farming		
Subsistent	57	25

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Low	58	19.1
Average Daily Feeding Pattern		
Once	26	8.6
Twice	80	26.3
Thrice	190	62.5
Others	8	2.6
Commercial	30	13.2
Both	141	61.8
Level of Involvement in Farming		
Part-time	186	81.2
Full-time	42	18.8

The nature of family an individual comes from whether polygamous or not could be instrumental to how s/he sees life and behave in certain situation. When respondents were asked about the nature of their family, 222 of them equivalent to 73% responded by saying there were from a polygamous family and 82% equivalent to 21% said they were not from a polygamous family (Table 2). The nature of these responses was expected as the respondents were from typical agrarian rural communities. As regards their perceived socio-economic states of their families, 12.2% claimed to belong to a family with high socio-economic status, while 19.1% claimed to have come from a family with low socio-economic status (Table 2). However, majority of the respondents, 209 of them, representing 68.8% ascertained they were from middle range socio-economic family.

Okpameri communities are predominantly agrarian therefore availability of food should not be an issue. This was confirmed as 190(62.5%) out 304 respondents said they had a three squared meal on the average every day, while 26.3% and 8.6% of them said they eat twice and once respectively on the daily average. Others, who had a feeding pattern that exceeds the three squared daily average were 2.6%. In terms of house patterns, 63.5 of respondents lived in their parents building while 19.1% of them lived in their own building. Those living in rented apartment were 14.1% and 3.3% of the respondents lived either in friends' apartments where they were squatting or living in apartment which did not belong them but were domiciled there based on trust and brotherhood understanding.

There have been controversial assertions about gender issues in migratory behaviours. Some literatures have noted that males tend to migrate more than females; others have noted that females tend to migrate more. To give

credibility to other assertions, the different schools of thought have established relationship or no relationship between gender and migration. Whatever the reasons and data put forward to justify the positions of either side of the divide, this study, in respect to rural out-migration in the internal migration form, is making an attempt to resolve these opposing arguments.

Table 3 Perceived relationship between gender and rural out-migration

Perceived relationship gender and out-migration	Frequency	Percentage
Intention to out-migrate based on gender		
Yes	65	28.6
No	162	71.4
Family members who out-migrate more		
Male	160	69.6
Female	70	30.4
Gender with the less problem to out-migrate		
Male	113	49.1
Female	117	50.9
Gender that remits cash and other materials more		
Male	102	44.3
Female	128	55.7

Respondents with the intention to out-migrate were asked if their decision is taken or made based on their gender, and as can be seen in Table 3a minority of the respondents representing 28.6% said that they aspire to out-migrate based on their gender. However, majority of them which is 71.4% noted that their decision to out-migrate was not based on them being male or female. Increasing number of literature has noted that the number of males who migrate, in terms of internal migration, are in excess of the number of females who migrate. This was confirmed by the opinion of respondents when asked who, between male and female, have out-migrated more in their family and household. Respondents constituting 69.6% asserted that the males in their family had migrated more than females. However, 30.4% submitted that females had out-migrated more than males.

During migratory stream and settling down in migration destinations, respondents were asked for their opinion as to who between males and females encounter less problems during and after migration. With the question, there was almost a balance in the number of respondents. That males encounter fewer problems in the migratory stream was supported by 49.1% of the respondents, while 50.9% of the respondents opined that the females had less problems out-migrating. The opinion of respondents on this question was based on their knowledge of the challenges their siblings and kinsmen who had out-migrated faced during the process of migrating. So they had a kind of second-hand experience of what faces the rural out-migrants in the migration stream.

Furthermore, respondents were made to give their view, based on their observation of the interactions between family members who have

migrated and those at home, on who tends to remit more money and other materials between male and female. This question was pertinent as it would add explanatory voice to what influenced and determined rural out-migration. Table 3 shows that55.7% of the respondents affirmed it was females who remit cash and other materials more than males, while 44.3% of the respondents submitted that the males remitted cash and other materials more than females.

Table 4 Intention to out-migrate and the intention to out-migrate based on gender

Gender based out-migration tendencies	Intention to Out-migrate		x^2; p-value
	Yes	No	
Intention to out-migrate based on gender			
Yes	65 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1.220 ; 0.220
No	159 (98.1%)	3 (1.9%)	
Gender of respondents			
Male	116 (75.3%)	38 (24.7%)	0.279 ; 0.597
Female	109 (72.7%)	41 (27.3%)	

Table 4 shows that there was no significant relationship between gender and rural out-migration intention. Cross tabulating data of the intention to out-migrate against data of the intention to out-migrate based on gender revealed that there was no significant relationship between them going by the result of the chi-square test that was run on the them which gave out a result with value of 0.269 that is higher than the standard *p-value* of 0.05. Furthermore, another cross tabulation of the intention to out-migrate and gender of respondents subjected to chi-square test produced a result with a *p-value*of 0.597 which was higher than the standard *p-value* of 0.05.

Inthe in-depth interview sessions, interviewees were asked questions that would bring out their perceived views on gender and out-migration, based on experience and their knowledge of what their relatives and friends who had out-migrated underwent in the process of their migration. These questions were specifically centred on who they think, between male and female, encounters less problems during and after out-migration, and gender based impetus of rural out-migration. These questions were pertinent because they aid the understanding of the social contexts within which males and females out-migrate, andhow values inherent in these social contexts influencebehaviour in the course of migrating. Some of the responses collected are as follow:

> *Male and female usually have the intention to out-migrate, but it is easier for the male to actually migrate. The lack of job in this community is what is influencing both the male and female to out-migrate. While the males are left with no option than to farm, the females are left with no option than to fry garri. For females, they also tend to out-migrate because they want to expose themselves to better and more marriage opportunities. Some girls would be 25, 27, 30 years old without husband so they have to migrate to look for husband* ***(24 years old female IDI respondent, Ibillo).***

It is easier for men to out-migrate compared to women. This is because men have the ability to withstand anything, that is, the rigours of migration and settling down in their new locations. Men are influence simply by economic reasons to migrate so as to provide adequately for their family, but females are usually not influence by economic reasons to migrate since they can be taken care of by their parents and other family members, until they get married. In terms of settling sown it is still easier for males as they can easily associate with people and make friends that would assist them. ***(23 years old female IDI respondent, Ibillo)***

This was corroborated by another respondent who submitted that:

As a matter of fact it is easier for males to out-migrate compared to female, because they can withstand pressure where a female will easily get frustrated. That is why the female get themselves involved in what they are not suppose to get themselves involve in. Before it will become so bad for the male to give up, the females must have chickened out. So it is easier for males to out-migrate than females. Though in terms of problems, males encounter them more but they have the ability to absorb the pressure in order to survive in that environment. But the females, though they encounter less problems, they have low pressure absorbing ability. Females are exposed to a lot of jobs out there which they can easily secure due to their sex ***(25 years old male IDI respondent, Ugboshi-Afe)***

The point made by the interviewee above as regard females facing more migratory problem, but were likely to settling down in destination faster than male was in agreement the comment of an interviewee as given below:

*I think the males find it easier in the process of out-migrating compared to the females. Because the male find it very easier to survive and absorb the heat and pressure that characterize the out migration from rural to urban centres. However, when it comes to settling down in out-migration destination it is easier for the females. This is due to the availability of several jobs that are meant for female only with only a few designed for males. Also, females can easily adapt to new environment and get the best out of it than the males (****30 years old male IDI respondent, Ugboshi-Afe).***

That some female migrants were instigated to out-migrate by the need to avail themselves to larger opportunity for suitors, was commented on by an interviewee who affirmed that:

*Between males and females, I think females encounter problems more than males because in this community, the females do not like going to school. If you take a count of the elite in this community all will be male. Single females definitely encounter problems when migrating from rural to urban centres, except on the ground when they are doing so by virtue of marriage to someone in the urban area. For males, I believe they do not have problems migrating from rural or urban centres****(35 years old male IDI respondent, Ibillo)***

In contrast to the views of other interviewee already presented here, this interviewee said:

*I think it's the males that encounter more problems in the course of out-migrating when compared to females. Since they are males they do not have or receive much help from the people they meet in the migration process. But for the females, it is easier, because they will surely have someone to help them since they are "females"****(20 years old female IDI respondent, Ugboshi-Afe).***

The above comment is similar to this view by another interviewee:

> *I would say that females found it easier to migrate and encounter lesser problem in the process of migration because females will always receive assistance from people by virtue of their feminine nature. For the males it is quite hard for them to get assistance in strange places. What is actually influencing me as a female to out-migrate is the need for me to get a good job and further my education thereafter* ***(18 years old female IDI respondents, Lampese).***

The qualitative data reveal that gender shapes the way Okpameri people understand and experience rural out-migration, although it does not affect males and females in a uniform manner. A dominant theme in the interviews is the belief that both males and females desire to out-migrate because of limited local opportunities. Interviewees repeatedly mentioned lack of jobs, poor livelihood options, and the search for better prospects as common reasons for migration. However, the motivations attached to male and female migration differ. Male migration was largely linked to economic responsibility, family provision, and the need to escape dependence on farming. Female migration, while also connected to work and education, is additionally associated with marriage prospects, personal exposure, and the search for improved social opportunities.

Another major theme is the perception that males find it easier to migrate because they are believed to have greater physical and emotional endurance. Several respondents described men as better able to withstand hardship, pressure, and uncertainty during migration and settlement. This reflects a cultural expectation that men should be resilient and economically adventurous. Yet, some respondents also noted that men may encounter more problems because they often receive less help in unfamiliar environments. The data also show mixed views about female migration. Some respondents believe females face more risks because of limited education, vulnerability, and social expectations. Others argued that females settle more easily because they were more likely to receive assistance and may find certain forms of urban work faster than males. These views suggest that female migration is perceived as both risky and potentially advantageous.

Discussion of Findings

The findings show that gender has a complex but not statistically significant relationship with out-migration intention among the Okpameri. Although public opinion within the study area recognizes gender differences in migration experiences, the statistical results suggest that being male or female does not, by itself, significantly determine whether a respondent intends to out-migrate. In Table 4.4, the chi-square result for sex of respondents and intention to out-migrate produced a p-value of 0.597, which is higher than the 0.05 level of significance. This means that the observed difference between male respondents who intended to migrate and female respondents who intended to migrate was not strong enough to be treated as statistically meaningful. In practical terms, both males and females among the Okpameri appear to share the desire to migrate when faced with limited rural opportunities.

This finding supports recent discussions that gender should not be treated as a simple biological category in migration studies. Boyd and Grieco (2003) argue that gender shapes migration at different stages, including the period before migration, the movement process itself, and settlement at destination. Their position is useful here because the Okpameri data show that gender may not strongly determine the intention to migrate, but it still shapes how migration is understood, justified,

encouraged, or restricted. For instance, 71.4% of respondents stated that their intention to out-migrate was not based on sex, suggesting that economic pressure, education, livelihood aspiration, and personal advancement may cut across gender lines. However, the interview responses clearly show that men and women do not experience the idea of migration in the same way. This agrees with Fleury's (2016) observation that migration is a gendered process because gender norms influence access to resources, social expectations, vulnerability, and decision-making power.

The finding that 69.6% of respondents believed males in their families out-migrate more than females supports earlier Nigerian migration literature which shows that male migration has historically been more visible, especially where migration is linked to work, wage labour, and family breadwinning. Mberu's study of rural out-migration in Nigeria, for instance, shows that rural migration patterns vary across ethnic, religious, educational, and destination lines, and that members of the Edo-related ethno-linguistic groups were significantly associated with rural-urban migration patterns (Mberu, 2005). In the same direction, Bloch et al. (2015) report that men were historically more likely than women to migrate in Nigeria, although later data suggested that the gender gap in migration propensity had reduced over time. This supports the present finding: male migration may be more common in family memory, but current migration intention is no longer strongly male-dominated.

The qualitative findings deepen this interpretation. Several interviewees stated that it is "easier" for males to out-migrate because men are believed to withstand hardship, pressure, and uncertainty better than women. This reflects a culturally produced idea of masculinity, where men are expected to be mobile, economically adventurous, and responsible for family provision. However, such views do not necessarily mean that men face fewer problems. Some respondents even admitted that males may encounter more hardship, but are socially expected to endure it. This supports the argument that migration decisions are not purely economic; they are also shaped by gendered expectations about courage, endurance, respectability, and family responsibility.

At the same time, the finding that 50.9% of respondents believed females encounter fewer problems during and after migration complicates the common assumption that women are always more disadvantaged in mobility. Some interviewees felt that women receive more assistance in destination areas because of their "feminine nature," while others argued that women settle faster because certain urban jobs are more available to them. This partly supports research showing that women's migration may open access to employment, education, and stronger personal agency, although it may also expose them to abuse, exploitation, and trafficking when movement is poorly planned or socially unsupported (Fleury, 2016). Therefore, the Okpameri evidence does not present women only as passive or vulnerable migrants. Rather, it shows that female migration may involve both opportunity and risk.

The remittance finding is particularly important. A greater proportion of respondents, 55.7%, believed that females remit cash and other materials more than males. This finding contrasts with Rufai, Ogunniyi, Salman, Oyeyemi, and Salawu's (2019) gender analysis of migration, labour mobility, and household poverty in Nigeria, which found that although labour mobility increased remittances, the increase was higher among male migrants than female migrants. In that study, males were more likely to migrate for employment, while a

sizeable proportion of female migration was associated with marriage arrangements. The difference between that evidence and the present finding may be explained by context. In Okpameri families, women who migrate may be perceived as more emotionally attached to household needs, more consistent in sending food items or small cash, or more responsive to family welfare obligations. Thus, while men may remit larger amounts in some national datasets, women may be viewed locally as more dependable or frequent remitters.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the relationship between gender and rural out-migration among the Okpameri is more complex than a simple comparison of male and female migration rates. Gender does not have a statistically significant relationship with out-migration intention. Both male and female respondents expressed the desire to migrate, and most respondents stated that their intention was not based on being male or female. Hence, rural out-migration among the Okpameri is largely driven by shared socio-economic pressures such as unemployment, limited rural opportunities, poor infrastructure, and the desire for improved livelihood.Male migration is commonly interpreted through the lens of economic responsibility, family provision, resilience, and the expectation that men should endure hardship in search of success. Female migration, on the other hand, is linked not only to employment and education, but also to marriage prospects, social support, vulnerability, respectability, and family expectations. While males are perceived to have migrated more in many families, females are often viewed as stronger remitters of cash and material support. Thischallenges the assumption that men are always the main economic contributors after migration. It is recommended that migration-related policies and community interventions among the Okpameri should be gender-sensitive rather than gender-neutral. Since both males and females show strong out-migration tendencies, but experience migration through different social expectations, risks, and support systems. Special attention should be given to young women, whose migration may be shaped by education, work, marriage prospects, vulnerability, and dependence on informal assistance, while young men should also be guided against risky survival choices driven by pressure to succeed.

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