

Contemporary Family Structure of “Living Apart Together”: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

Family arrangements have become increasingly complex in the past years, with normal norms changing and new types of families emerging. The new trend among couple involves “Living Apart Together”. This study therefore investigated the challenges and prospects of contemporary family structure of Living Apart Together. Three research objectives guided the study. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of 400 academic and non-academic staff of FCT College of Education Zuba-Abuja with a sample size of 250 married teaching and non-teaching staff. A structured questionnaire titled “Contemporary Family Structure of Living Apart Together Questionnaire (CFSLATQ)” was used as the instrument for data collection. Test-retest method of reliability was used to obtain the internal consistency, showing an index 0.78. Data collected were statistically analysed, using the frequency and percentages. It was discovered that unemployment and marital crisis constitute the major reasons married couple live in different locations (35.6%), followed by workers transfer (34.3%). High cost of maintaining more than one home (39.4%) and problem of infidelity (30.9%) are the major challenges of Living Apart Together by married couple. Living Apart Together by married couple makes couples to be prudent in spending (37.3%) and it prevents women from being exploited by husbands (35.2%). The researchers recommended among others that couples “Living Apart Together” should have mutual trust, make every effort to keep their communication lines open and intact and be prudent in their financial spending. The conclusion is that family institution is dynamic and the idea of “Living Apart Together is a product of change from traditional family values. The recommendations are based on the need for mutual trust, family enhanced communication and family counseling.

Keywords: Traditional family, family structure, family arrangement, Living Apart Together, living together

Introduction

The family institution has been acknowledged as the oldest institution in the history of human existence and the most fundamental of a human institution (Enem, 2007). However, many families are now turned apart because of couples living apart in separate homes. Married couples are said to be people strongly united to live together with a cardinal objectives of security, feeding, companionship, education and procreation. These couples according to culture are meant to live together. But from the researchers’ observation, these

days, some married couples live apart and thus running into problems including cheating, divorce, psychological and emotional problems, flirting and alcoholism.

Recently, family living arrangements take on all forms, some of which are far from the traditional family structure. Some couples wait until after marriage to live together, some live together and never get married and some alternate living between two houses. This latter option is becoming popular that it has even earned its own acronym, LAT,

meaning “Living Apart Together” (Hartley, 2017). In Western countries, consensual unions are replacing marriages, families are formed at later ages, and newer forms of unions such as Living Apart Together emerging (Latten and Mulder, 2013; Fokkema and Liefbroer, 2008).

The traditional family arrangement which favors married couples living together in one place of abode, is now giving way for separate homes. The new trend among couple involves Living Apart Together. According to Caarls (2015), Living Apart Together is a situation whereby partners are geographically separated within or across nation or state borders. Couples are living apart but are still maintaining a close emotional connection. Caarls (2015) posited that job opportunities by either of the couple might cause Living Apart Together.

According to Levin (2004), the changing standards of family relations are the reason Living Apart Together has become an accepted form of living arrangement for married couples, however, Roseneil (2006) argued that these relationships deconstruct the role of intimate partnerships and family relations by increasing extramarital affairs. Upton-Davis (2015) added that “Living Apart Together” provides a way for women to subvert the traditional patriarchal division of power in the household such as divisions of wages and domestic labor, patterns of economic support and the routine everyday expectations of the family when they live together. Poeze & Mazzucato (2012) agreed that Living Apart Together by married couple often time do not function to the satisfaction of both spouses.

According to Liefbroer, Poortman & Seltzer (2015), *Living Apart Together* implies couples living apart in separate addresses but

having an intimate relationship. In the view of Levin & Trost (1999), Living Apart Together implies ‘a couple which does not share the same household; both of them live in their own households, in which other persons (either the husband or the wife) might pay irregular visit. Liefbroer, Poortman & Seltzer (2015) stated that distinguishing couples that run separate homes from couples that share a common household, shows that, for couple Living Apart Together, one or both partners leave together regularly for one or a few nights a week and return back to their individual homes.

According to Kariuki (2014), Living Apart Together means marriage where the spouses live in separate geographical locations in kilometers, country or continent for short or long durations. Kariuki (2014) added that Living Apart Together is fragile, delicate and if not handled with care, family members may be at crossroads in many aspects of their lives especially when making critical decisions. Mishandling of issues in these families can lead to irreparable damage to members.

Levin (2004) revealed that married couples *Living Apart Together* account for around 10% of adults in Britain, a figure which equates to over a quarter of all those not married or cohabiting. Similar figures are recorded for other countries in northern Europe, including Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden (Levin, 2004 and Haskey, 2005). In Australia, Canada and the US, representative surveys indicate that between 6% and 9% of the adult population has a partner who lives elsewhere (Reimondos, Evans, and Gray, 2011). Within Asia, especially in China, it is called “walking marriages.” A “walking marriage” refers to a type of temporary marriage formed by the

Mosuo of China, in which male partners live elsewhere and make nightly visits to the wife (Gargan, 2001). A similar arrangement in Saudi Arabia, called 'misyar' marriage, also involves the husband and wife living separately but meeting regularly.

There are several factors ascribe for this trend in the society today. Sheri and Stritof (2012) found that the harsh socio-economic conditions in present day society have contributed largely to the incident of Living Apart Together by married couples. Many husbands leave wives and children behind at the family home, in search of work in distance places. Occupational mobility accounts for the major reason many married couples Live Apart Together. One of the spouses might get transfer from the place of work to another branch of the company or government ministries in another state, leaving behind the family. Rise in educational attainment and career development have also been found to be responsible for reasons married couples choose to Live Apart Together (Kariuki, 2014; Sheri & Stritof, 2012).

Meier, Minirth, Wichern & Ratclff (2004) see problem of sexual fulfillment as a major challenge of this trend of family arrangement. Unfulfilled sexual needs have been known to contribute to infidelity in marital relationship. When husband and wife live in separate homes, regular sexual fulfillment will be denied. Gichinga (1999) & Meier et al (2004) agreed that the challenge of parenting become difficult. A critical function of the family is parenting which must be undertaken by both husband and wife. The absence of a parent leads to formation of dysfunctional families. Communication problem and high cost of maintaining two homes are critical challenge for couples Living Apart Together.

Musa (2014) revealed that many of the alternative marital arrangements which have been invented to challenge traditional marriage where husbands and wives live together in the same home have generally been based on the notion of men being the main beneficiaries of the institution of marriage. Traditionally, housewives perform domestic functions essentially for the benefit of their husbands. Women are exploited, by working only for the subsistence provided by the husbands. Living Apart Together is seen as a way out for women who consider the husbands as part of the patriarchal proletariat who exploit the womenfolk.

According to Hartley (2017), it is vital for couples to have their own space, without it, they are unable to develop their own individuality and independence. Living Apart Together makes **living habits less annoying for the couples**. Living habits, and particularly unequal division of household chores, can negatively impact relationships, especially for women. If a spouse does not live with a partner, annoying habits can be more bearable and cause less tension between the couple. The partner only has to deal with the other's habits occasionally. Brodsky (2018) revealed that couples who choose to Live Apart Together feel they have more time for themselves to pursue individual interests such as hobbies and recreation. From the researchers' observation, these days, some married couples live apart and thus running into problems including cheating, divorce, psychological and emotional problems, flirting and alcoholism. It is based on this new trend of family arrangements and the observations made that necessitated this study.

Objective of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. Find out the factors responsible for Living Apart Together by married couples in the Federal Capital Territory.
2. Investigate the challenges of Living Apart Together by married couples in the Federal Capital Territory.
3. Ascertain the prospects of Living Apart Together by married couples in the Federal Capital Territory

Methodology

Research Design: The study adopted descriptive survey research design. This is popular research design in the social sciences. It seeks the opinion, perceptions, attitude and habits of people concerning an event or phenomenon. A target population is used after which there is generalization of the findings to a wider population.

Population of the Study: The population consisted of 400 academic and non-academic staff of FCT College of

Education Zuba-Abuja, one of the higher institutions located in the Federal Capital Territory. Abuja is a metropolitan city with all the features of a mega city.

Sample and Sampling Techniques: A simple random sampling techniques was used to arrive at the sample of 250 married teaching and non-teaching staff who served as the respondents for the study. All of the respondents are staff of the college.

Data Collection Techniques: A structured questionnaire titled "*Contemporary Family Structure of Living Apart Together Questionnaire (CFSLATQ)*" was used as the instrument for data collection. It contained 15 items that were related to the objectives of the study. Test-retest method of reliability was used to obtain the internal consistency. The reliability index was obtained through Cronbach's alpha (0.78). 236 questionnaires out of the 250 instrument administered were returned valid.

Data Analysis Techniques: Data collected were statistically analysed, using frequency tables and percentages.

Results and Discussions

Table 1: Factors Responsible for Living Apart Together by Married Couples

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Items		
1. Unemployment and/or marital crisis	84	35.6
2. Educational advancement	36	15.3
3. Workers Transfer/Mobility	81	34.3
4. Oversee career advancement	35	14.8
Total	236	100

Table 1 reveals that unemployment and marital crisis constitute the major reasons married couple live in different locations (35.6%), followed by workers transfer

(34.3%). Couple could also Live Apart together because of the need to advance their education and oversee career advancement.

Table 2: Challenges of Living Apart Together by Married Couples

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Items		
1. Problem of infidelity	73	30.9
2. Problem of child bearing	12	5.1
3. High cost of maintaining more than one homes	93	39.4
4. Poor parenting	12	5.1
5. Problem of sexual fulfilment	40	16.9
6. Communication problem	6	2.5
Total	236	100

Table 2 reveals that high cost of maintaining more than one home (39.4%) and problem of infidelity (30.9%) are the major challenges of Living Apart Together by married couple. Respondents equally agreed that problem of sexual fulfilment

may arise when married couple Live Apart. Child bearing, poor parenting and communication problems were identified as insignificant problems of Living Apart Together.

Table 3: Prospects of Living Apart Together by Married Couples

Items	Frequency	Percent
Prospects of Living Apart Together are		
1. Makes couples to be prudent in spending	88	37.3
2. Prevents women from being exploited by husbands	83	35.2
3. Protect spouse from abusive wife or husband	31	13.1
4. Gives the couples more time for themselves	21	8.9
5. Makes couples to fight and argue less	13	5.5
Total	236	100

Table 3 reveals that Living Apart Together by married couple makes couples to be prudent in spending (37.3%) and it prevents women from being exploited by husbands (35.2%). Respondents equally agreed that Live Apart Together protect spouse from abusive wife or husband and it gives the couples more time for themselves.

Discussion

Table 1 reveals that a large number of the sampled respondents are in agreement with the identified reasons married couples are Living Apart Together in the Federal Capital Territory. Majority of the respondents (35.6%) identified unemployment and marital crisis as the

main cause, followed by (34.3%) who attributed the cause to transfer of workers. (15.3%) were of the view that the need for educational advancement is the reason behind married couples Living Apart Together. Few respondents (14.8%) agreed that oversee career advancement is responsible for couple Living Apart Together. These supported Sheri & Stritof (2012) that many husbands live their wives and children behind at the family home and go out in search of work in distance places as possible. Some men who secured a job far away from their family homes may decide to rent apartment closer to their place of work. It also agreed with Kariuki (2014) who asserted that occupational mobility

account for the major reason many married couples leave in separate homes. One of the spouses might get transfer from his/her place of work to another branch of the company in another state, leaving behind his/her family to settle in the new working place.

On challenges of Living Apart Together by married couples, majority of the respondents were in agreement that high cost of maintaining more than one homes (39.4%), problem of infidelity (30.9%) were the major challenges of Living Apart Together by married couples. It was also found that problem of sexual fulfillment (16.9) is another challenge of LAT by married couples. Few respondents agreed that challenges of child bearing (5.2%), poor parenting (5.1%) and problem of loneliness (2.5%) constituted challenges to Living Apart Together by married couples. These findings are in line with the assertion of Meier, Minirth, Wichern & Ratcliff (2004) that unfulfilled sexual needs of couple Living Apart Together have been known to contribute to infidelity in marital relationship. Harley (1994) found that the importance of sex in marriage cannot be overemphasized given its critical role in marriage. Sex is not just a physical act but a process of intimate communication with the act of physical intercourse (Boehi, Nelson, Schulte and Shadrach, 1997). But when husband and wife leave in separate homes, regular sexual fulfillment will be denied.

On prospects of Living Apart Together by married couples, majority of the respondents (37.3%) agreed that LAT makes couples to be prudent in spending, (35.2%) were of the view that LAT prevents women from being exploited by husbands. Few respondents (13.1%) believed that LAT protect spouse from abusive wife or husband, (8.9%) believed

that LAT gives the couples more time for themselves and (5.5%) believed that LAT makes couples to fight and argue less. These findings are in line with the findings by Musa (2014) that traditionally, housewives perform domestic functions essentially for the benefit of their husbands. Women are exploited, by working only for the subsistence provided by their husbands. Living Apart Together is seen as a way out for women who consider their husbands as part of the patriarchal proletariat who exploit the womenfolk. Roache (1991) believed that one of the truisms for women's movement is that "the home is a prison for women, trapping them in housework and childcare, frustrating them and distorting their need for fulfillment as whole persons". Living Apart Together is seen as a way of overthrowing patriarchy and challenging the existing family relationships which subordinate women to exploitation by men.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The conclusion reach here is that family institution is dynamic. It changes proportionate to innovations in modern world. Thus the idea of Living Apart Together is a product of change from traditional family values to modern family values but with implications such as; infidelity and the critical challenge of cost of running two homes. Although running separate homes by married couples will make them to be prudent in financial spending and also, prevent women from being exploited by husbands, nevertheless, mutual trust and regular communication are essential for couples Living Apart Together.

Based on the major findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were suggested:

1. Couples Living Apart Together

should have mutual trust. They should not take the advantage of the absence of their spouse to begin to engage in unacceptable behavior. Improve communication is also important.

2. Family life educator and counselling is critical for families making such arrangements.

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