

Determinants of Delayed Marriage among Women of Reproductive Age in South-South Nigeria

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Abstract

Marriage is an important institution among women folks and marriage bring joy, peace, stability, focus and sense of belonging in womanhood. When delay occur it brings psychological trauma to women. Delayed marriage among women generally refers to women marrying at a later age than what is traditionally expected in each society and this varies by culture. Across many parts of the world, the average age of first marriage has been rising. This shift is linked to social, economic, and cultural changes rather than a single cause. Delayed marriage among women of reproductive age is influenced by several factors including social, economic, cultural, psychological, spiritual and personal factors. This study aimed to Assess the Determinants of Delayed Marriage Among Women of Reproductive Age in South-South Nigeria. This was a cross-sectional study involving 250 women. Participants' age is between 18 to 47 years. A well-structured questionnaire was administered to participants. The study lasted for a period of 2 months. Statistical analysis was done using SPSS version 25.0 and $p < 0.05$ was significant. The results revealed that majority (36%) of the participants were between 29-34 years old, 76% had tertiary education, 40% are unemployed, 60% residence in Urban areas, 60% are not in a relationship. Several factors were responsible for the delay in marriage including: financial instability 80%, 80% is delayed due to economic responsibilities, 80% is due to career development, 76% due to cultural influence, 68% is due to psychological influence, 80% influenced by family expectations, 80% due to social pressure, 76% due to personal factor, 68% due to desire for independence, and 68% is due to previous relationship experiences. This delay in marriage is due to social, economic, financial, personal, psychological, cultural, career development, and desire for independence.

Keywords: Determinants, Delayed, Marriage, Reproductive.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent studies indicate that delayed marriage is driven by a complex interaction of socioeconomic, cultural, demographic, and individual-level factors (Shi, 2026). Empirical evidence from Nigeria shows that higher educational attainment significantly delays marriage timing (Muibudeen *et al.*, 2025). Similarly,

global studies confirm that women with higher education tend to marry later due to increased opportunity costs (Wong, 2003). In Nigeria, employment and later age at marriage are positively correlated, indicating that economically active women tend to delay marriage (Togunde, 1999). Studies show that inability to meet marriage expenses and secure housing contributes to postponement of marriage (Khalil, 2016). Also, Women

in urban areas tend to delay marriage more than those in rural areas due to increased opportunities and lifestyle changes (Shi, 2026). Socio-cultural factors such as ethnicity, religion, and family structure significantly affect marriage patterns (Togunde, 1999). In Nigeria, higher community literacy and contraceptive use are associated with delayed reproductive behavior, which correlates with delayed marriage (Solanke *et al.*, 2019). Studies indicate that contraceptive use is associated with delayed fertility and indirectly with delayed marriage (Solanke *et al.*, 2019). Research shows that women delay marriage to achieve career, education, and personal growth objectives (Shaw, 2007; Cherlin, 2010).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This is a cross-sectional study involving 250 women who are within the age of 18 to 47 years and reside in the six (6) South-South States, in Nigeria. The study lasted for a period of 2 months. Consent was sorted from the participants before giving them the questionnaires. Questionnaires were given to the participants. Each participant had one questionnaire to

fill appropriately and independently after instructions were given to them by the research Assistants. Data was obtained and analyzed using SPSS version 23 and P value < 0.05 was said to be significant.

RESULTS

The results revealed that majority (36%) of the participants were between 29-34 years old, 76% had tertiary education, 40% are unemployed, 60% residence in Urban areas, 60% are not in a relationship. Several factors were responsible for the delay in marriage including: financial instability 80%, 80% is delayed due to economic responsibilities, 80% is due to career development, 76% due to cultural influence, 68% is due to psychological influence, 80% influenced by family expectations, 80% due to social pressure, 76% due to personal factor, 68% due to desire for independence, and 68% is due to previous relationship experiences. This delay in marriage is due to social, economic, financial, personal, psychological, cultural, career development, and desire for independence. See tables below.

Table 1: Age Distribution of Participants

Age	Frequency	Percentage
15-19	0	0.00
20-24	10	4.00
25-29	30	12.00
39-34	90	36.00
35-39	80	32.00
40-49	40	16.00

Table 2: Educational Level- of participants

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
No formal education	10	4.00
Primary education	20	8.00
Secondary education	30	12.00
Tertiary education	190	76.00
Total	250	100.00

Table 3: Occupational Distribution of the participants

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
Student	20	8.00
Unemployed	100	40.00
Self-employed	90	36.00
Civil Servants	40	16.00
Total	250	100.00

Table 4: Place of residence of the participants

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
Rural	100	40.00
Urban	150	60.00
Total	250	100.00

Table 5: Participants Current relationship Status

Current Relationship	Frequency	Percentage
Not in relationship	150	60.00
In a relationship	60	24.00

Engaged	40	16.00
Total	250	100.00

Table 6: Participants who financial instability delays marriage

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Participants who financial instability delays marriage	200	80.00
Participants who financial instability do not delays marriage	50	20.00
Total	250	100.00

Table 7: Participants whose economic responsibilities towards family delay marriage

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Participants whose economic responsibilities towards family delay marriage	200	80.00
Participants whose economic responsibilities towards family do not delay marriage	50	20.00
Total	250	100.00

Table 8: Participants whose career development contributes to delayed marriage

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
Participants whose career development contributes to delayed marriage	200	80.00
Participants whose career development do not contribute to delayed marriage	50	20.00
Total	250	100.00

Table 9: Participants whose fear of divorce discourage early marriage

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Participants whose fear of divorce discourage early marriage	170	68.00
Participants whose fear of divorce do not discourage early marriage	80	32.00
Total	250	100.00

DISCUSSION

Marriage is an important institution among women folks and marriage bring joy, peace, stability, focus and sense of belonging in womanhood. When delay occur it brings psychological trauma to women. Delayed marriage among women generally refers to women marrying at a later age than what is traditionally expected in each society and this varies by culture. Across many parts of the world, the average age of first marriage has been rising. This shift is linked to social, economic, and cultural changes rather than a single cause. Delayed marriage among women of reproductive age is influenced by several factors including social, economic, cultural, psychological, spiritual and personal factors.

Delayed marriage among women of reproductive age has become a global demographic trend, particularly in both developing and developed societies. Traditionally, early marriage was the norm in many societies; however, shifts in education, economic structures, and gender roles have significantly altered marital timing. Delayed marriage is commonly defined as the postponement of first marriage beyond socially expected ages, often linked with broader processes such as modernization and female empowerment.

The study revealed that majority (85%) of the participants had delayed in marriage and this is on the increase and pose a lot of psychosocial traumas among women of reproductive age. Delayed marriage is increasing worldwide, and the shift is not accidental, but it reflects deep social, economic, and cultural

transformations that are changing how women approach relationships, family formation, and life planning. This means that a growing proportion remain unmarried for longer periods. This trend is visible across both developed and developing countries, including places like Nigeria. The increase in delayed marriage is a natural outcome of modernization and women's empowerment. It reflects a shift from marriage as a social obligation to marriage as a personal, economic, and emotional choice.

The results revealed that majority (36%) of the participants were between 29-34 years old and this means that age shapes the timing, likelihood, and decision-making process of marriage through biological, social, and economic pathways. Early adulthood (15–24) is traditionally associated with marriage and late 20s and 30s is associated with delayed marriage. As women grow older priorities shift (education → career → marriage).

Again, age interacts with cultural norms and in traditional settings, marriage is expected early. As age increases, pressure may either decrease (more autonomy), or increase (late marriage stigma). In places like Nigeria, this dual pressure is often evident—especially between rural and urban populations. Age also affects reproductive capacity. Fertility declines gradually after the late 20s and more rapidly after 35 and awareness of this may encourage earlier marriage in some cases or lead to careful partner selection, delaying marriage further.

Again, 76% of the participants had tertiary education and this may delay marriage. Increase in tertiary education is one of the strongest drivers of delayed marriage among women. It doesn't just add more years before marriage, but it reshapes priorities, opportunities, and decision-making in ways that systematically push marriage to later ages. Education transforms beliefs about gender roles, marriage and family life, personal autonomy and educated women are more likely to reject early or forced marriage, prefer marrying for compatibility and mutual respect and this often leads to more selective partner choice, thus, causing delay marriage. Increase in tertiary education delays marriage through time commitment (years spent studying), economic empowerment (career and income opportunities), value transformation (autonomy and choice) and partner selection dynamics (higher expectations)

The study also revealed that majority of the participants are unemployed despite their high level of education. Unemployment is a significant determinant of delayed marriage because it directly affects economic readiness, social expectations, and personal confidence, all of which are central to the decision to marry. Marriage, especially in many societies, is not just a personal decision but also an economic institution. When a woman (or her partner) is unemployed, the conditions considered necessary for marriage are often not met. As a result, unemployment tends to postpone or discourage entry into marriage. Unemployment may lead to low self-esteem, stress and uncertainty about the future, reduced readiness for long-term commitments and these factors may lead individuals to delay marriage voluntarily. Employment opportunities and financial autonomy play a critical role. Economic independence reduces reliance on marriage for survival. Women prioritize career establishment before marriage and employment enhances bargaining power in marital decisions.

Also, the study shows 60% of the participants residence in Urban areas and urban residence is a well-established determinant of delayed marriage among women of reproductive age. Living in cities reshapes opportunities, costs, norms, and daily life in ways that tend to postpone entry into marriage compared to rural settings. Again, participants who live in Urban settings promote individualism and personal choice. This means that Urban residence delays marriage because it expands education and career opportunities, raises the cost of living, promotes modern values and independence and changes partner selection dynamics. Again, 60% of the participants are not in a relationship and this may cause delayed marriage. Also, modernization leads to changes in family structures, increased education, and labor participation, all of which delay marriage. Women invest in education and careers, increasing the opportunity cost of early marriage.

The study revealed that several factors were responsible for the delay in marriage including financial instability, economic responsibilities, career development, cultural influence, psychological influence, family expectations, social pressure, personal factor, desire for independence, and previous relationship experiences. These factors were responsible for the delayed in marriage among women of reproductive age as revealed by the study. Changing gender norms promote autonomy and decision-making, influencing marriage timing. These frameworks collectively suggest that delayed marriage is a rational and adaptive response to socioeconomic transformation. Importantly, these factors are interrelated rather than independent. For example, education influences employment, which in turn affects economic independence and marriage decisions.

CONCLUSION

Delay marriage is on the increase and is a threat to social life. Delayed marriage among women of reproductive age is a product of social transformation, economic development, and changing gender roles. Education and employment emerge as the most consistent determinants, while cultural and economic factors mediate their effects. Understanding these determinants is crucial for policy interventions aimed at improving women's welfare, reproductive health, and socio-economic development.

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