

COITUS, GENDER CONSTRUCTION AND SPACE ALLOCATION AMONG A TRADITIONAL IGBO GROUP: SOME LINGUISTIC LEADS

By: P-J Ezeh, PhD (Dept of Sociology & Anthropology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, N-410001, Nigeria) A paper presented at the Union of African Population Studies (UAPS) annual conference, Ougadougou, Burkina Faso, 5 – 9 December 2011.

ABSTRACT. The study is a rare attempt to use linguistic evidence to access the traditional worldview of the Okposi, an Igbo of Nigeria's glottocultural group, on sex and sex-related matters. Understanding autochthonous sexual ideology of this group has important implications for reproductive health because studies by other researchers have suggested links between current sexual behaviour and autochthonous worldviews among related Igbo groups. Studies focusing on such interconnection between traditional ideologies and current social practices are even more familiar and more numerous. Investigations such as the present one is necessary because policies that ignore the influence of traditional systems on contemporary practices might be ineffective. Conclusions that are reached in the Okposi study may also be applicable to other Igbo groups with comparable social structure and linguistic strategy. Igbo language is spoken indigenously by up to 40 million people. The lexicons of its 300 odd dialects can differ markedly in many respects. There is also the *Igbo Izugbe* (Standard Igbo) which while being very useful in cross-dialectal communications does not always fully capture local nuances that are limited to particular localities, hence the advisability of using dialects in this type of study that aims to determine long-standing social ideology as fossilized in language. In an unhurried participant observation for the purpose spanning five years (2005 to 2010) I collected naturally situated utterances referring to sex. I am a native speaker of the dialect and a career anthropologist. **Space allocation** is used in this paper to refer to someone's assumed or actual role in sex or sex-related matters. While the Okposi may be described as largely practical in matters of sex, their dialect betrays a tendency to blame the female partner in matters concerning reproductive health problems. I suspect two factors: a patrilocal-patrilineal social structure that is hinged on polygyny, and limited knowledge of the biology of reproduction.

Key words: biology of reproduction, coitus, language, polygyny, sexual ideology, gender construction, space allocation