

Gender Equity in Nigeria: A Social-Psychological Explanation of Gender Prejudice



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ABSTRACT: Gender equity is a global phenomenon. One of the central aims of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to eliminate gender disparity, ensure equality and human dignity to all men and women. Promoting gender equity and equality is important part of the development strategy that seeks to empower people (both men and women), diminish poverty and improve the standard of living. However, gender inequalities have existed and still persist in most Africa countries and women are not adequately represented in many social, economic and political activities. Consequently, women particularly in Nigeria are among the most disadvantaged population group. This paper aimed at investigating gender equity, identifying forms and causes of gender prejudice in Nigeria and suggesting plausible efforts and remedies to address the intersectional gender imbalance in this country. To achieve this, the study employed the use of secondary sources data and content analysis as its method of data collection and data analysis respectively. To ameliorate gender inequalities toward realization of millennium goals, the following recommendations were put forward: the need for pragmatic and specific gender- focused policies, programmes and actions across all level of government, using multidimensional strategies in uplifting women in politics, education, administration and security outfits, creation of a special agency - equal opportunities commission under ministry of women affairs in every state to address the issue of gender imbalance and lastly ensuring adequate and sustained media campaign and consistent public sensitization on the issues of gender prejudice with a view to achieving the target of SDGs on gender equality in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Gender Equity, Gender Equality, Religion, Education and Culture

INTRODUCTION

Sociologists have long studied the ways in which inequalities of class, ethnicity and gender affect the overall life chances of individuals (Giddens, 2008). Being born male or female, working class or middle class, or part of ethnic majority or minority group can shape how healthy we are, what level of education we will reach or the kind of work we can expect to do, he asserted. The life span theories maintained a realistic view about gender inequalities, and that some development issues are more problematic for women than men. Whereas, for men, the age 30 transition might focus mainly on occupational concerns, for women it might concern whether and when to have children (Levinson et' al, 1978). Also, Bardwick (1980) and Scott (1986) among others have argued that women focus more on attachment and affiliation in their development, in contrast to men who emphasize separateness and achievement.

All over of the world, promoting gender equality has become a globally recognized and accepted reality. But the legacy of misogyny, chauvinism and suppression of the voice of woman permeates human history. Gender equality means that women and men enjoy the same status and have equal opportunities for realizing their full human rights and potentials, to contribute to national, political, economic, social and cultural development and to benefit from the results (Unterhalter, 2013). Furthermore, it entails that the underlying causes of discrimination are systematically identified and removed in order to give men and women equal opportunities (Adams & Olajumoke, 2016). Even though section 42 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria stipulates the right to freedom from discrimination on sex/gender as a fundamental right, inequality between the male and female sex continue to exist.

Gender inequality in Nigeria is influenced by different cultures and beliefs. In most parts of Nigeria, women are considered subordinate to their male counterparts, especially in northern Nigeria and many sectors. It is generally believed that women are best suited as home keepers (Olonade, 2021). This assertion is captured in Udegbe's (1998) statement when he averred that:

Traditional stereotype characterized women as a submissive ,illogical, passive, talkative, emotional, easily moved to tears etc. Men on the other hand are assumed to be competent, logical, and independent. These stereotypes tend to reflect men and women belonging to

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opposite ends of bipolar adjectives while women have undesirable ones....Societal norms and stereotypes also function as a traditional ideology that relegates women to housewife roles while promoting men as actors, provider and final authority

(Udegbe, 1998:3-4).

However, it is pertinent to note that a cursory look at the 17 action points of the Sustainable Development Goals (i.e. the most comprehensive global road-map to shared human progress) shows the centrality of its call for gender equality and reducing inequalities. In similar vein, Obiukwu (2019) asserts that it is improbable that the world could attain significant success in almost any action area of the SDGs without achieving strongly in gender equality and reducing inequalities. This is even more true for Nigeria, where the gender bias is not only keeping women down, but also restraining the country from nearing its massive potential. A McKinsey report once stated that Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) could grow by 23% or \$229 billion - by 2025 if women participated in the economy to the same extent as men (Obiukwu, 2019). Ultimately, whether in politics, corporate sector, health or across every other socioeconomic structure, a more gender-equal Nigeria will create a more prosperous country.

Notwithstanding the importance of gender equity in national development, achieving gender equality in Nigeria has remained problematic and a herculean task for the government. Today, there are massive inequalities spiraling out of control across wealth, health, education and every other socio-political determinate in Nigeria. For instance, globally Nigeria rank 181st out of 193 countries as the country with lowest rates of female representation in parliament (UNESCO, 2019). Also, according to the 2019 UNESCO Institute of Statistics report, forty percent (40%) of girls are out of school in Nigeria. In health care, Nigeria women are significantly shortchanged in their reproductive rights, and they suffer one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. In financial realm, nearly 7 in 10 Nigerian women are unbanked, with more than half of them financially excluded. And across the legal institutions and family structures, socio-cultural determinants continue to lead to the treatment of women as being inferior to their male counterparts. All these research evidences quite suggest that the issue of gender equity and equality in Nigeria is a myth and restraining Nigeria's potential to unlocking the myriad of opportunities that the country possesses.

Consequently, to fully appreciate the scale of this societal phenomenon, there is need to carryout study focusing on the hurdles and hindrances that hold down women folk that represent roughly half of Nigerian people. Hence this study is set to address this emerging social-psychological issue. Therefore, this research work aimed at investigating gender equity in Nigeria, identifying forms and causes of gender prejudice, and suggesting plausible strategies to address the inter-sectional gender imbalances in this country. Against this background, the study will provide answers to the following research questions:

How could gender equity be achieved in Nigeria?

- What forms of gender prejudice exist in Nigeria?
- What are the factors responsible for gender prejudice in Nigeria?
- What strategic options can be put in place by the government and other state actors to reduce gender inequalities in Nigeria?

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS.

Gender

Osezua (2020) observed that the pervasive use of the term 'gender' raises questions on how it is often misunderstood as a concept. While some confuse it to be the same with the word 'sex' and consequently use them interchangeably, some on the other hand conceive it as an analytical tool used by activists to promote the course of women only. Ogundana (2020), defines gender as socially learnt behaviours and expectations associated with being male and female. According to her, once a person is labeled as a member of a sex category, he or she is morally expected to behave as persons in that category. Gender is therefore, not what we are but what we do and are socially expected to do. It is conceived as a social construct that emphasizes the expectations, capabilities and responsibilities of men and women which are not biologically but culturally determined (Olaniyan, 2020). According to WHO (2018), "gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men". This construction, as observed by WHO, varies from society to society and from time to time i.e. the term is not absolutely immutable: roles and responsibilities conferred on women in a particular society might be those assigned to men in another and these could change over a particular period of time.

Gender Equity

According to Ademuson (2021), equity is the moral imperative to remove unjust differences based on principle of fairness and justice. It requires a focus on the most disadvantaged, and in this case, women in the society. Gender equity on the other hand is used to connote or refer to fair treatment of women and men, according to their respective needs in the society. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities in society so as to ensure mobility. It also means addressing gender inequalities that limit a person's ability to access opportunities to achieve better health, education and economic opportunity based on their gender (United Way NCAs, n.d.).

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Gender Inequality

For the purpose of application, gender in literature, is often used in connection with an unequal opportunity between men and women (Osezua, 2020). This kind of relationship is referred to as gender inequality as it used to denote an implicit socially constructed inequality between women and men (Enemno, 2002). It is an unequal representation of male and female character based on the psycho-social and cultural conceptions of the society. While sex refers to the physical differences between males and females because of the constancy of individual biological make up across the world, gender inequality reflects the psychological, social and cultural differences between men and women which differ based on societal norms and values, and what is acceptable at a particular period of time. When these differences are avoidable and unfair, it is known as gender inequity.

Gender Prejudice

This simply means gender bias, a form of prejudice because of people's gender. That is, prejudiced actions or thought based on the gender - based perception that women are not equal to men in rights and dignity (IPS, 2016). Women still face prejudice and discrimination in the workplace. Most people still live with the mentality that certain businesses and tasks are better handled by men. Hardly you ever comes across a female auto technician, commercial bus driver, plumber, mason or welder. Why? The reason is because it is believed that the men are born to do it. This is totally wrong. Gender prejudice is viewed as intersectional issue which negatively affects trans- people and people outside the gender binary IPS, (2016) observed. Gender prejudice often results in gender discrimination.

Gender Discrimination.

Gender discrimination is any exclusion or restriction made on the basis of gender that create barriers for girls, boys, women and/or men in recognizing, enjoying or exercising their full and equal human rights(Save the Children, 2023). Similarly,Adejumoke & Olowookere (2012) defines discrimination as any distinction, exclusion or preference, whether in law or in administrative practices or in practical relationship between persons or group of persons made on the basis of race, ethnicity, disability, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, nationality or social origin which has the effect of nullifying or impairing the equal enjoyment of any rights in relation to right at work.`

The International Labor Organization (ILO) (2006) defines discrimination as "any distinction, exclusion, or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin that has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity and treatment in employment or occupation".

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Liberal Feminism and Equity Theory

This paper adopts the liberal feminism and equity theories. The liberal theory of gender concentrates more on issues of equality in education, political rights, workplace etc. From the perspective of liberal theory, the position of women in the contemporary advanced industrial society is meritocratic and women as a group are not less talented or less diligent than men but are denied the opportunities simply because of sex/gender (George & Jeffrey, 2014). This implies that women are very important in the socio-economic and political life of society. For a country like Nigeria, where more than 49% of population, over 90 millions people are women, the theory is relevant and indicates how women fold can be the springboard Nigeria needs to fulfill its socio-economic potential in a gender-equal nation context.

On the other hand, the equity theory is based on social justice according to which people perceive a situation as fair when their own ratio of outcomes to inputs is the same as those of others with whom they compare themselves (Colman, 2003). In terms of the theory, inequity is felt as uncomfortable and tend to generate behaviour aimed at resorting equity. This principle is evident in the widespread campaigns against gender discrimination in Nigeria.

As further support to the above theories, Davidson and Cooper (1992) asserted that there is no doubt that women are at a disadvantage relative to men in the labour market. The pertinent question is that to what extent do existing theory and practice reflect women's need and career problems?

METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive research design. Data were generated through secondary sources including textbooks, scientific articles, journals, published reports and publications on the internet to gain an understanding of the understudied variables. The literatures that were reviewed were selected based on their relevance to the research questions. These methods help to provide the basis and background of current information available and thoughts on the topic. Also, content analysis was used as method of analysis to analyze qualitative data that were collected.

FORMS AND CAUSES OF GENDER PREJUDICE IN NIGERIA.

Gender prejudice and discrimination is a common phenomenon in Nigeria like any other places globally. It is an occurrence that has defied all practical strategies and theoretical exposition. There are many forms of gender prejudice in Nigeria:

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Gender prejudice in workplace

The most common and feasible gender prejudice and discrimination take place in the workplace. According to ILO (2006), discrimination at work encompasses any “difference, exclusion or preference... that has the effect of nullifying or weakening equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation”. Hence, prejudice at work places occurs when individuals are treated differently than others because of attributes that are not essential for the individuals. For Sims and Dalal (2008), prejudice at work depicts set of behaviour that is motivated either directly or indirectly by the target’s group membership, which impact negatively on the target’s job and career. Obor and Okoebor (2021) differentiate between direct and indirect prejudice. Indirect prejudice that appear unbiased yet result in unequal treatment of people with certain traits. When a clear differentiation, preference or exclusion is made on one or more grounds, this is referred to as direct prejudice. Prejudice in workplace include documentation on ground of community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex/gender, religion, political opinion or circumstances of birth.

Gender prejudice in access to leadership position

Another major prejudice against women in Nigeria is women’s access to leadership positions (Ademuson, 2021). Various factors are at work in limiting women’s potential to aspire and access positions of leadership. In an attempt to explain this, a growing body of research has studied the barriers women face in accessing leadership and whilst filling their roles (White, 2003). Correspondingly, scholars have identified many factors that contribute to this, including bias in hiring and promotion practices (Early, 2020), fewer opportunities for advancement and mentoring (Acker, 1990) and a perceived mismatch between the traits of a leader and the traits of women (Schein, 2007; Heilman, 2001).

Goldstar, (2005) “showed that a high level of disparity exists in levels of gender diversity at top management positions in Nigeria. For instance, in Nigeria Federal Civil Service, which is the largest employer of labour in the country, 76% of civil servants are men, and 24% are women with women holding less than 14% of the total management level positions in the Nigerian public sector”. According to him, in Lagos State, Nigeria’s largest commercial hub, private sector involvement of women as directors and top management were 13.87% and 13.11% were recorded for women directors and top managers respectively in 2006, representing a slight decline of their involvement in the succeeding year (Goldstar, 2006/07).

Gender prejudice in Agriculture

Ademuson (2021) asserted that women’s engagement and contribution to the agricultural development can not be overemphasized in Nigeria and globally. Mehra and Rojas (2008) in their study noted that women provide more than half of the food that is being consumed globally. Fontana and Natali (2008) noted that 85-90% women devotes their labour on household food procession and preparation. According to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, despite the fact that women outnumbered males in the agriculture sector, their opportunities are limited by formal and conventional regulations (Sahel, 2014). This form of prejudice starts with the involvement in the kind of division and specialization of labour to each gender (for example, men execute the tedious tasks such as land clearing, making ridges and heaps, while women work on land clearing, tilling, weeding, planting and fertilizer application, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, milling, transporting and marketing among others.

Ademuson (2021) listed a number of challenges and constraints faced by women in the agricultural sector. These challenges include: access to finance, access to land, market access and trading, access to inputs, information and training to mention a few.

Gender prejudice in the Formal Organization

It is obvious that Nigerian runs patriarchal social structure, men have traditionally been allocated the role of breadwinner in the household, while women have been assigned the roles of housekeepers and child care providers (Adejumokeye and Olowookere, 2012). Giving that women are still the major caregivers (Acker, 1990; Fuegen, Biernat, Haines and Deaux, 2004), women employ flexible work arrangements more often than men. The consequences is that women face career drawbacks because they score lower on face time (Glass, 2004). This biased criteria in performance evaluation policies can contribute to gender prejudice. Factors such as economic necessity and increased options have been identified by Aluko (2011), as leading to the rising number of women entering the labour force.

Cultural Prejudice Against Women

Obnoxious socio-cultural practices such as widowhood practices, female genital mutilation (FGM), restrictive religious practices (as observed in Northern geopolitical zone), and purdah system creates barriers to women empowerment and gender equality, thereby placing a clearly greater burden on women (Aina, 2012). The shrouding different exclusions and deprivations faced by women in cultural and traditional beliefs often deprive their access to information, education and wealth-creating assets, such as land, capital (including credit facilities), labour and entrepreneurial skills (Aina, 2012). These restrictions created by socio-cultural practices can be blamed for the poor participation of women in politics and organizational decision making process (Ademuson, 2021).

Marital and Professional Prejudice

Dehumanizing treatment of widows, wife battering and other subjugating tendencies can eventually make a women to lose self confidence, keep women ‘silent’ in the public sphere and also private domain (Aina, 2012). Poor access to education and

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scholarship facilities in various professions limits their capacity to compete effectively with their male counterparts in the labour market for lucrative and more fulfilling jobs (Aina, 2012). Also, according to the 2019 UNESCO Institute of Statistics report, forty percent (40%) of girls are out of school in Nigeria. And in health care, Nigeria women are significantly shortchanged in their reproductive rights, and they suffer one of the highest maternal mortality rate in the world.

Family Inheritance Prejudice

Exclusion of girls from obtaining their share of family inheritance commonly practiced in the south-eastern part of Nigeria is a clear evident of prejudice against women. In almost all the states of Nigerian federation, women have no right over land and landed property, as they cannot under customary laws inherit land/landed property, neither directly from their fathers nor from their husbands

Factors Influencing Gender Prejudice

Summarily, a review of literatures on gender inequality had revealed factors underlying gender prejudice in the society. From the definitions put forward by the ILO (2006), Adejumo & Olowookere (2012), Sims & Dalal (2008), the following under-listed factors were the bases of gender prejudice in human society: cultural influences, religion, education, ethnicity, race, disability, colour, sex, political opinion nationality or social origin, poverty, lack of adequate legal protection etc.

CONCLUSION

The unaddressed issue of intersectional gender inequalities can be considered as a main feature of Nigeria's problems of stagnating economic growth, slow development, an unstable polity, falling standards of living and weak institutions. And all that women in Nigeria need now, is a society that is more gender-equal and less discriminatory in how it treats and caters for women well-being, goals and aspirations.

Succinctly put, Nigeria could easily become more prosperous, if it adequately addresses the hurdles and hindrances that hold down roughly half of its population. Therefore, achieving the target of gender equity and reducing inequalities can pave way for eradication of poverty in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The followings were recommended based on the findings of this study:

1. There is a need for pragmatic and specific gender-focused policies, programmes and actions across every level of government.
2. Multidimensional strategies should be put in place for uplifting women in politics, education, administration and security outfits.
3. Government should embark on creation of a special agency – equal opportunities commission under ministry of women of affairs in every state to address the issue of gender imbalance.
4. Relevant MDAs should ensure adequate and sustained media campaign and consistent public sensitization on the issue of gender prejudice with a view to achieving the target of SDGs on gender equality in Nigeria.
5. To overcome societal discrimination women should stop perceiving their feminine gender as a weakness but rather as strength and prove themselves by striving to outperform their male counterparts in any chosen human endeavour.

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