

GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN WARRI SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates gender inequality and women empowerment in Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. Two null hypotheses tested in the study were: there is no significant difference in gender access to education and women empowerment; there is no significant difference in gender participation in governance and women empowerment. Using the survey research design, data were statistically analyzed using the chi-square (X^2) with significance level at 0.05. The results showed that a significant difference exists between access to educational services and women empowerment; also, a significance difference exists between participation in governance and women empowerment. The study recommends, among others, that women should be allowed to engage in equal economic activities like their male counterpart outside their home in other to reduce dependency and poverty rate among them. Also women should be allowed to make decisions that affect them. It was concluded that gender inequality is a significant source of women disempowerment.

Keywords: Gender inequality, women empowerment, access to educational services, participation in governance.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, women represent about half of the population according to the 2006 population census (Rotimi & Agande, 2007 cited in Nwagbara, Etuk & Baghebo, 2012). Inequality between men and women varies depending on geographical settings, social class etc. However, the male sphere has traditionally been accorded more value in all part of the country. In Nigeria, a woman is socialized with a culture of female subordination, she is not only subordinated to her husband and men in her own family of orientation, but also to members of her husband's family. The kinship structure places men in an advantage position from historical past to present. Patriarchy in Nigeria subordinates the women and gives room for inequality into empowerment. Institutions of society such as family, religion, legal, political, educational, economic, media, socio-cultural practices, state policies and agencies have perpetrated the subjugation and disempowerment of women in Nigeria (Afolabi, 2003). For instance socialization process within the family, educational institutions among others conditioned boys and girls to behave in certain ways and to play different roles. Boys and girls are inspired to confirm to established cultural norms. Conditioning and stereotyping girls and women to perform certain tasks result to disempowerment among them.

Women empowerment is often poorly defined; hence remain challenging (Singh, 2016). Women empowerment implies "women's level of control in decision-making positions, control over the allocation of resource, the determination of policy, regulations and laws". It is a process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that women can take

decision to improve their life situation. “It is a process of transforming gender relations through groups or individuals developing awareness of women’s subordination and building their capacity to challenge it” (Women’s Empowerment and Reproductive Health, 2016).

Women Empowerment is the provision of adequate opportunities to women to develop their potentials and take part in local development in particular and world in general (Lasiele, 1999). It embodies effort by the women to perceive themselves as able to make decisions (Nwagbara, Etuk & Baghebo, 2012). As the power to access in every sphere transcending the very concept of gender biasness, it enhances women status and greater improvement in the participation ranging from economic to politics. However, this is affected by gender inequality.

Gender inequality can be addressed only when women are empowered because it manifests in unequal rights of women to access basic social services such as education and health; unequal opportunities for participation in political and economic decision-making nationally and at the household level; unequal rights for equal work; unequal protection under the law; preference for male children; high poverty rates for female –headed households; violence against women etc (Kiriti & Tisdell, 2003).

Women’s Empowerment and Reproductive Health (2016), affirms that in most developing countries especially Sub Saharan Africa education of boys is more likely valued than of girls. Most parents do not see the need for girls education, this is in dispute for women empowerment. There are tremendous gaps in school enrolment, while nearly all boys are in primary school only three (3) out of four (4) girls are in primary school. In many developing countries, fewer than half of all children continue onto Secondary School, and girls are far less likely than boys to do so. This repudiation has serious consequences for women empowerment.

Education is a corner stone of women’s empowerment because, it enables them respond to opportunities, challenge their traditional roles and alter their lives. Education is one of the most vital means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and ability necessary to participate fully in the development process. In many societies, parents see limited economic benefits to educating girls. Many parents, are of the opinion that daughters/girls attending school are less available to help with household chores and attending to younger siblings. Cultural norms presume that sons support parents in old age while girls marry out and leave parents. Gender disparity in tertiary education is still tilted in favour of men in Africa and women access to paid and gainful employment that is secured in the light of income and social importance is still very low when compared to men in all sectors (Women Empowerment and Reproductive Health, 2016; Ejumudo, 2013). Lopez-Claros and Zahidi (2005) cited in Nwagbara, Etuk Baghebo (2012) conducted a survey and found that the extent to which women have attained equality in the critical areas of economic participation, economic opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment, health and well-being and that no country has managed to eliminate gender inequality.

Women and men experience poverty differently, (deprivation, powerlessness, vulnerability, it seasonality) this implies that poverty has gender dimensions (World Bank, 1996 cited in Kiriti Tisdell, 2003). Poverty is connected with lack of physical and human assets (World Bank, 1997 cited in Kiriti & Tisdell, 2003). Women are poorer because tradition gives them less decision- making power over assets than men, at the same time their opportunities to

engage in remunerated activities and acquire their own assets are more limited (World Bank, 1995, 1996; Blackden & Bhanu, 1998 cited in Kiriti & Tisdell, 2003).

In many developing countries, women are deprived of Human Resource Capital (HRC) compared to men. They have less access to education and experience less availability of food and medical services. This results to higher fertility and higher population growth reinforcing higher poverty among them (Kiriti and Tisdell, 2003). According to UNDP (1998) cited in Kiriti & Tisdell (2003), women not only suffer from income poverty but also human poverty. Human poverty occurs when opportunities and choices of most basic human development are denied. It involves the denial of choices and opportunities for basic human development that can lead to a long, healthy, creative life, acquire knowledge, and enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem and the respect of others (UNDP, 1998 cited in Kiriti & Tisdell, 2003). Until equal number of girls and boys are in school at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education, it will be impossible to eradicate poverty and hunger, combat disease, difficult for women to make decisions that affect them and ensure environmental sustainability. The bench mark for assessing the women empowerment includes enrolment in school at all levels, employment and also involvement in political decision-making. Most women are without economic and political strength. The family and the socially constructed norms prevent them from utilizing their full potentialities. When women are deprived economically, they face poverty and this exacerbates underdevelopment in society (Ejumudo, 2013; Singh, 2016).

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant difference in gender access to educational services and women empowerment.
2. There is no significant differences in gender participation in governance and women empowerment.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Marxist Feminist Theory

The proponent of the theory is Karl Marx (1859) (Ritzer, 1996). The theory maintained that gender inequality is a product of differential access to means of production in the society made possible by the dominant family system in the society. The social arrangement by man to create the family is the source of unequal relationship between men and women in the society because they were born free and equal (Charles, 2010). “The family creates a rational basis for women’s subordination and therefore the entrenchment of an overwhelming system of dominant and subordinates roles” (Ritzer, 1996 cited in Charles, 2010).

The structural arrangement of the family in Nigeria in general and Warri South Local Government Area in particular enables the men to be released to work and even to migrate to new locations in search of work in order to maintain the family. The man is seen as playing instrumental role as the breadwinner role. It centres around resources attainment, and interaction within the occupational system. The woman is relegated to performing the function that has to do with nurture, emotional satisfaction, and integration of the family (Charles, 2010)

METHOD

The study adopted the survey design. Here, the researchers attempted to use the independent variable (gender inequality) to observe the dependent variable (women empowerment) as it manifest.

STUDY AREA

The study area was Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. Its headquarter is in the city of Warri. The area is predominantly riverine with large expanses of mangrove forests and has a land area of approximately 1,520 square kilometers with a population of 303,417 at the 2006 census

(<http://www.deltastate.com.ng/local-government/warri-south-local-government.html>). It consists of 17 political wards: Ode-Itsekiri ward, Agbassa ward, Orugbo ward, Ogonu ward, Obodo ward, Igbudu ward, Okere ward, Ubeji ward and others. The Local Government harbors many industrial establishments and major oil companies operating in Nigeria.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of the study comprised all women in the seventeen (17) political wards. The target population was extracted from the overall population.

SAMPLING PROCEDURES

The seventeen (17) political wards constituted a cluster. One community was selected from each cluster, but for Ode-Isekiri cluster, Okere cluster and Ubeji cluster, two (2) communities were selected from each cluster because these clusters are more populated than others. Twenty (20) communities were selected from the re selected from the seventeen (17) clusters.

From each cluster, respondents were selected through the systematic random sampling technique. It involved the enumeration of the living houses in each sampled community into even and odd numbers. Only even numbered houses were selected and only adult female participated. The procedure was applied throughout the clusters and communities of the study area. Ten (10) respondents were selected and a total of two hundred (200) respondents were involved in the study.

INSTRUMENT FOR DATA COLLECTION

It was a survey study that relied on the questionnaire as the main instrument of data collection. The questionnaire was constructed with some open and close-ended questions. The close-ended questions were carefully structured to elicit information amenable to easy collection and test of hypotheses. The open ended questions were included to enable respondents express themselves in a free manner on the challenges of women empowerment in Nigeria with focus on Warri South Local Government Area.

FINDINGS

The findings from the field were presented and discussed below.

Table 1: Shows Chi-square (X^2) statistical analysis of the relationship between gender inequality in access to educational services and women empowerment.

Variables	Responses		Total	X^2 -value
	Yes	No		
Gender Inequality in access to educational services	30 (48.10)	100 (81.90)	130	17.26
Women empowerment	44 25.90	26 (44.10)	70	
Total	74	126	200	

Source: Fieldwork, 2016

*Figures in bracket represented the expected values.

Significance at 0.05 level, $x^2 = 3.84$, $df=1$, $X^2 = \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$ **Result**

Level of significance = 0.05

Degree of freedom = 1

Critical value = 3.84

Calculated value = 17.26

From table 1, given a degree of freedom of 1 and level of significance of 0.05, the calculated x^2 value 17.26 was found to be statistically greater than the critical value; we accept the alternate hypothesis which states there is a significant difference between gender inequality in access to educational services and women empowerment.

Table 2: Shows Chi-Square (X^2) statistical analysis of the relationship between gender inequality in participation in governance and women empowerment.

Variables	Responses		Total	X^2 -value
	Yes	No		
Gender inequality in participation in governance	125 (114.75)	10 (20.50)	135	4.60
Women empowerment	45 (55.25)	20 (9.75)	65	
Total	170	30	200	

Source: Fieldwork, 2016

*Figures in bracket represented the expected values.

Significance at 0.05 level, $X^2 = 3.84$, $df=1$, $X^2 = \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$ **Result**

Level of significance = 0.05

Degree of freedom = 1

Critical value = 3.84

Calculated value = 4.60

Respondents' responses in table 2 shows that gender inequality to a large extent led to poverty among women. The computed value of X^2 of 4.60 in table 2, given a degree of freedom of 1 and level of significance of 0.05, was found to be statistically greater than the critical value of 3.84. Based on this, we uphold the alternate hypothesis, and reject the null

hypothesis, which states there is no significant difference in gender in participation in governance and women empowerment .

DISCUSSION

From the study, the result in table 1 shows a significant difference between gender in access to educational services and women empowerment. This view is supported by Kriti & Tisdell (2003), they maintained that gender inequality is generally manifested in unequal rights of women access to basic social services such as education and health; unequal opportunities for participation in political and economic decision-making, nationally and at the household level; unequal rights for equal work; unequal protection under the law; preference for male children; high poverty rates for female – headed house-holds; violence against women etc. Equally, the findings agree with Lopez-Claros & Zahidi (2005) cited in Nwagbara, Etuk & Baghebo (2012), they conducted a survey and found that the extent to which women have attained equality in the critical areas of economic participation, economic opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment, health and well-being and that no country has managed to eliminate gender inequality.

The result in Table 2 rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternate hypothesis. The result shows a significant difference between gender in participation in governance and women empowerment. The findings are in agreement with World Bank (1995;1996) and Blackden & Bhanu (1998) cited in Kiriti & Tisdell (2003) which maintained that women are poorer because tradition gives them less decision-making power over assets than men, while at the same time their opportunities engage in remunerated activities, and to acquire their own assets are more limited. These findings are also in consonant with Ejumudo (2013) and Singh (2016), they argued strongly that until equal number of girls and boys are in school at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education, it will be impossible to eradicate poverty and hunger, combat disease, difficult for women to make decisions that affect them and ensure environmental sustainability among women.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Achieving gender equality and women empower demands participation and partnership by all sectors in the society. Activities of various government, ministries, governmental and non governmental agencies should be strengthened, synthesized, integrated and well focused to facilitate the attainment of gender equality and women empowerment. Women empowerment is the power to access in every sphere transcending the very concept of gender biasness. It rise women status and greater improvement in the participation ranging from education, economic to politics. Gender inequality can only be address when women are empowered. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Women should be allowed to engage in equal economic activities like their male counterpart outside their home in other to reduce dependency and poverty rate among them.
2. Women should form and maintain effective network especially at the grassroots, in other to encourage wide spread involvement and participation among them in women empowerment activities.
3. Women should be allowed in decision making that affect them.
4. There is need for modification or total eradication of cultural barriers which impedes the chances, and opportunities among women.

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