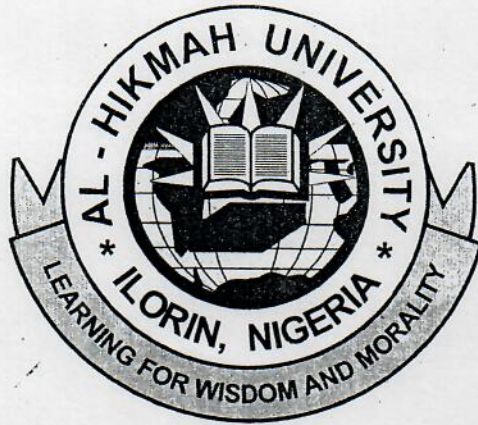




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CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF FEMALE GENDER MAGINALIZATION IN NIGERIA-IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

• L. A. AGUBOSI, A. A. SOLOMON & C. A. ANYANWU •

Abstract

This theoretical paper examined the causes and consequences of female gender marginalization in Nigeria. Marginalisation is a concept used to denote the process by which group of people or individuals are regarded as unimportant, relegated or second class citizens. The researchers identified the areas of marginalisation against female gender as in politics, governance, education, inheritance right and in social aspects of life. Effort is also made by the researchers to examine the causes of female gender marginalisation to be poverty, ignorance, cultural practices, greed, illiteracy and bias. The psycho-social effects of marginalisation on female gender were examined to be poor decision making, diminished brain functioning, aggression, shyness and poor mental health. The researchers identified the consequences of female gender marginalisation as it affects politics, governance, education, health and development in general. It is recommended that female gender marginalisation should be stopped. The female gender should be given equal opportunity with the male gender to take part in politics, education, governance, among others. They should be given the rightful position and be allowed to express their full potentials in the scheme of affairs in Nigeria in order to contribute their own quota in national development.

Keywords: *Causes, consequences, female gender, marginalization, counselling*

Introduction

Marginalisation is an act by which individuals or particular group of people are being regarded as less important, relegated or second class citizens. It is a social exclusion in which individuals, or group of people are subjected to progressive social rupture which result into detachment from social relation and institutions intended to destabilize them and preventing them from taking full participations in the normal scheme of things and activities in the society. Female gender as a group is marginalised. They are marginalised in the sense that they are regarded as second class citizens, relegated and not so important like her male counterpart. In the context of creation, according to biblical record in Genesis chapter 1 verse 28, God created man and woman and gave them the mandate to be fruitful and multiply, to replenish the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowls of the air and over every living thing that move upon the earth. An objective assessment to this statement is that God gave the man (Adam) and the woman (Eve) equal opportunity to harness the earth, conquer the earth and develop it. Why then should the women folk not given the full opportunity to show case their talent and expertise in the scheme of things like the men folk? Why are they marginalized? Why can't they be given equal opportunity with the

men? Bukoye (2007) stated that in many societies Nigeria inclusive, the gender hierarchy makes the birth of a girl child an unwelcome "social inferior" who is rather seen as a liability. She further submitted that female gender is perceived as subordinate and only an instrument of procreation from time immemorial. Even despite the fact that women give birth to children, in a typical society like the Igbos in Nigeria, women do not own children. The men are the owners of children. That is why the man takes children if marriage is broken and the woman is sent parking to her father's house without any child. Even if she is allowed to go with any, it is just for her to train the child who will eventually return to the man's house later in life.

Furthermore, economically, women are hiding under the umbrella of men. In as much as the husband is alive, the economy of the wife belongs to the man. There are some men who demand for their wives salary every month, even with force. While in some homes women are not allowed to work, they are to sit at home with children and wallow in poverty.

Politically women are nowhere compared with men. Adeniyi, Adedotun and Omoegun (2011) reported that, despite the fact that women out- number men during population census in Nigeria women representation at the various levels of Government is very low. They attributed this low representation to dominance of men in various political parties which gives them opportunity to influence the party internal politics. Cultural constraints and domestic affairs in the home deprive women the chances of active political participation. Additionally, some men are not in support of their wives taking part in politics due to some flimsy excuses that such women lack respect for their husbands and may even begin to sleep around with men.

Socially, women's movement is restricted by men. For example, as a wife, you do not just have to go anywhere without informing your husband about your movement. Some men seize their wives cell phone so that they can monitor the calls that come in. Female gender is really marginalized and it is a menace and violation of human right which hinders their active participation in national development.

Theoretical Background

This paper hangs on dependency theory as perceived by Bosemp (1970) and Harris (1979) In Anunobi (2002). This theory is introduced in 1950s by Raul Frebush. This theory is economic theory that believes in the financial dependence of poor countries on the rich countries. These rich countries increase in wealth at the expense of the poor countries. According to Frebush, these rich countries were achieving economic growth without contributing to the growth of the poor countries rather caused economic problems in those countries.

The choice of this theory is based on the fact that in virtually all the spares of life and

activities particularly in Nigeria and Africa in general, women have no power over economic, political, social and educational aspects of human activities. Male gender dominates in all these affairs while the female gender depends on them. Anunobi (2002) stated that African women are still suffering from the political economy of underdevelopment, marginalisation, dependency and gender inequality since their nation's independence. According to Anunobi [2002] relegation of women and subjecting them to the state of dependency dated back to the time of Colonialism when the Colonial masters did not give women chance to showcase their capabilities, hence they were left to totally depend on men. It is the opinion of Anunobi, (2002) that people cannot fully understand or explain the causes of underdevelopment and marginalization of African women based on orthodox approach because this approach has been biased by the bureaucratization of knowledge by disciplines, prevailing social and political ideologies and general ethnocentrism by Western School, experts and policy makers. Anunobi, (2002) further explained that the way out of this is to correct the distortions resulting from this situation and acknowledging the female gender economic dependence and subordination to male dominance. Strategies must be mapped out to make women economically and politically independent through self-sustained expansion devoid of male gender interference.

Causes of Female Gender Marginalization

Marginalization of female gender is caused by these factors:

- **Financial poverty:** Financial poverty is inability to meet with the financial obligations of the individual due to lack of money. When this type of scenario comes up the female gender will be at the receiving end. Obanya (2003) noted that it is a common practice in traditional societies to find girl children hawking wares throughout the day with the purpose to generate income for the family.

Furthermore, when the parents are faced with choice of who to send to school and who not to be sent due to financial constraint, 80% chances are in favour of the male child while the girl child is left with 20% (Anyanwu 1999). In most cases the girl child will be given out for early marriage.

- **Cultural practices:** Cultural practices in many of the societies including Nigeria do not attach much importance to the birth of girl child, for example the Igbo in the South Eastern Nigeria value male children more than female children. The birth of a male child attracts more hallelujah than the birth of a female child. Sirley Chrisholm in Clifford (2002) stated that the emotional, sexual and psychological stereotyping of females begin when the doctor says, it's a girl'. Men are happier when their wives deliver baby boys than when baby girls are being delivered. Male child preference is as a result of the cultural stipulation that the male child stays at home to continue the family lineage while the girl child is married out into another family hence has nothing to do with the continuity of the father's lineage. In fact it is a doom for couples to have only female children in Igbo land.

Selfishness: Women are marginalized due to selfishness on the part of the men in some ethnic groups like the Igbos, where female child has no right to her father's property. She is not associated with the inheritance of her father's property. When children are sharing the properties of their fathers like land, houses, cars etcetera, no properties get to the female children. However, the Yoruba culture in the western Nigeria allows the female child to get a share of their father's properties.

Illiteracy/ignorance: Female gender marginalization is also caused by illiteracy. Our fore fathers who initiated this marginalisation regarded women as inferior and second class citizens that have little or nothing to contribute in the affairs of the society were illiterates and were ignorant of the fact that women are not inferior beings that are worthless. This notion has continued to rear its ugly head on women folk to this present age.

Areas of marginalization against female Gender

Female gender is marginalised in education, politics, governance, inheritance right and social life.

Education: Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) stated that education is an avenue through which individuals can be developed to be useful to their family and the society at large. Education has a lot to do in the life of individuals. It is the medium through which the physical, emotional, intellectual and social aspects of the individual are developed to the fullest. Education builds the capacity, capability, potential and the ability of the individual. Bukoye (2007) opined that girl child education is geared towards the development of the total personality of the female gender in any society. He further stated that such education promotes the development of the whole nature of women physically, intellectually, morally, socially and politically which make them actively participating members of economic development.

Aliyu (2011) cited in Bukoye (2007) submitted that girl child education should be seen as a necessity not as a luxury because of the roles women play within the family, the society and the country at large. In spite of the importance of education and girl child education stated above, the female child is still marginalized in education. It is a common practice by parents to neglect female child education and show preference and support male child education. The girl child is seen as domestic helps to the family which culminates into early marriage, poverty and total incapacitation of the female child. Traditionally women are perceived as housekeepers in the family. The high illiteracy rate among women is caused by early marriage, sex stereo-typing and cultural discrimination. In the northern and southern parts of Nigeria many parents are reluctant about training their female children in schools due to old customs and values that see female education as unnecessary (Alhamandu, Nehemiah and Dzarma (2018). This trend is gradually fading in some parts of the country. Research has shown that enrolment figures into primary, Secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria favour the male child. Badejo (2002) in a survey of school enrolment in Yobe state discovered that

less than 40% of girl child were enrolled while the boys were over 60%. She also discovered that school dropout rate is more on the female children. It is a common practice by men to stop their wives from their educational pursuit.

Politics and Governance: Another area of female gender marginalisation is in politics and governance. Female gender is not adequately represented in politics and governance in Nigeria and some other countries of the world as the male gender. Women lag far more behind in political activities. Notable conferences and workshops have been held to facilitate women participation in politics and governance, yet much success to that regard has not been achieved. In 1995 a conference was held in Beijing (China) where issues pertaining to women discrimination and how to eradicate it were discussed. A call was made for 30% women representation in government (Jekayinfa, 2010). Other conferences were also held earlier than 1995 at Copenhagen (Denmark) in 1980 and Nairobi (Kenya) in 1985. Among the important issues discussed in these conference was on female gender discrimination and how to remove all forms of discrimination against women.

Women are not yet allowed to express their political will and power. It is only about 15% of women that take active part in politics in Nigeria and other Countries in West Africa. Nwachukwu (2010) in his report of the address of the immediate past first lady in Nigeria, Dame Patience Jonathan in her visit to Imo State, Nigeria, reported that the first lady expressed great dissatisfaction over how women have been left behind in the political development of the nation as a result of the repercussions of the social institutional hindrances that had persistently prevented them from expressing their potentials.

Elections held in Nigeria in 2015 testified that women participation in politics and governance is still very low. For example there is no woman governor in the whole 36 states in Nigeria, only two women are deputy governors, in the national assembly only about 1% of women are represented, in the ministerial appointment both federal and state women are few, about four women ministers out of thirty seven (37) ministerial appointments in the country.

Female gender marginalization in politics and governance cuts across other West Africa countries. For example Wangechuk (2010) reported that effort has been made by Royal Government of Bhutan to promote equal representation of men and women in public decision making, yet women representation mainly at the local level is still very poor.

Limiting Factors to Female Gender Active Participation in Politics and governance

The following factors are inimical to female gender participation in politics.

- Cultural and traditional practices limit women participation in politics. Traditionally it is believed that women should be led by men and not vice versa. Because of this notion, women themselves abhor voting for their fellow women during elections.
- Despite the fact that women constitute the greater population during census, they are fewer in number during voter's registration and during election. They don't come out enmasse to vote for their fellow women.
- Women are not economically buoyant like the men to meet up to the demands of the electoral process.
- Some men will not allow their wives to take part in partisan politics so that such women will not be out of their control. Duke, (2010) and Obijiofor, (2010) in Adeniyi, Adedotun and Omoegun (2010) stated that most men do not allow their wives to take active part in politics because they believe that their wives may go into prostitution while abandoning their primary duty of taking care of their husbands and their children.
- Politics in the countries like Nigeria is a 'do' or 'die' affair. Political violence abound during elections, so women cannot withstand the political thuggery maiming, killings and character assassination that characterise electioneering campaign and election. Men have political thugs or are thugs themselves (Arowolo and Aluko, 2010).
- Many Nigeria cultures portray gender inequality and discrimination in their definition of power and roles, thereby rendering many women anonymous, deprive them of their right, reduce their self- esteem and exclude them from political participation, Ezeahurukwe (2011).

Other hindrances to effective women participation in politics include lack of access and control to over resources, lack of support, even from their fellow women and general bias on women. Female gender is seen as followers and never leaders.

Inheritance Right

Female gender Marginalization extends to inheritance right. Some ethnic groups exclude women from inheriting their father's properties. Family properties are meant only for the male children. For instance among the Igbos in Eastern part of Nigeria, women are not counted when the father's properties are being shared. They are expected to marry and be in their husband's house where they exercise little or no control to the husband's properties.

Psychosocial Effects of Female Gender Marginalization

No doubt, marginalization has negative psychosocial effects on female gender. Some of these effects are:

Poverty: Female gender does not command much economic power like their male counterpart. In Nigeria particularly among the Igbos, there is a popular adage that says "women's education ends in the kitchen". As funny as this statement sounds, some men adhere to it and disallow their wives from being educated and having gainful employment. Some lucky ones who have the opportunity to secure gainful and lucrative employment and probably earn salary more than their husbands are regarded as being above their husbands and thus show no respect to them. In order to avoid this negative label and dance to the tune of cultural practice of female subordination to male, many women lose their economic power and succumb to the dictates of culture. It is appalling that whenever poverty and disease are mentioned, women and children are at the receiving end. The women in the northern Nigeria experience this most. It is very common to see them on the streets begging for alms with dirty, tattered clothes and their children going around their vicinity also begging for alms.

Poor mental health/ Diminished brain functioning: Marginalization and social exclusion of the female gender may lead to diminished brain functioning. It is common to see women who are at their 50s' not coordinating well in their brain, which means that their brain functioning has diminished. A visit at the psychiatric hospital in Nigeria will attest to this assertion due to the fact that females far outnumber males who are having psychiatric case.

Poor Decision Making: Marginalization correlates with poor decision making. Many cultures do not give women power to contribute during decision making in the families or social gathering where men are. Some tribes in Nigeria example Igbos and Yorubas do not give women chance to take decisions for their families Oladipo and Owolabi (2007) stated that in Yoruba land, women are deliberately excluded from decision making. Hence women are not trained traditionally on decision making.

Prostitution: Many women that are into prostitution do so for economic reasons. Before they took to prostitution, they lack economic power to sustain themselves. Many parents would rather prefer to train their male children in school than female children. Moreover the rate of school dropout is higher in females than in males. Human trafficking that is on the increase is mainly perpetrated on female gender. These girls are transported abroad for prostitution which subjects them to human degradation and poor self-concept. This menace can also result from marginalization.

Aggression and shyness: Marginalizing female gender can also lead to aggression and shyness among women. It is a fact that some people become aggressive if they are denied of their right. Some men suppress women and such women adopt aggression as a coping strategy.

Consequences of Female Gender Marginalization on Development:

Female gender marginalization has severe negative consequences on national development in Nigeria. These negative consequences are felt in virtually all spheres. This paper will focus on some of them.

Economic Development: Researchers have discovered that educating women and not marginalizing them will not only improve economic growth, but will benefit the society at large. Ensuring greater recognition for the female gender is necessary for them to realize their full economic potential and become partners to economic development. Oyewo, Ayeni, Adesina (2007) opined that in most societies gender roles have shackled women to the background, preventing them from participating in and benefiting from developmental efforts. It is the observation of Aubres (2001) in Oyewo et al (2007) that countries that have raised the status of their women educationally, socially, economically and politically enjoy a high standard of living. It should be noted that the type of standard of living in any nation is being determined by the type of economy prevalent in that country. Countries where their women are relegated suffer from economic hardship because there is little or nothing their women could contribute, rather the women beg and some go into prostitution.

This type of scenario is inimical to economic development. Nigeria is an example. It is always on the news that the rate at which Nigerian women travel abroad for prostitution is very high. I believe other countries in Africa are in the same shoe.

Politics and governance: Marginalization of female gender is inimical to political development and good governance. Women are not represented well in politics and governance like their male counterpart. The percentage of women in politics and governance is very low. Women's political participation should be seen as total involvement of women in policy and decision making and in the implementation of such policies and not only giving them the right to vote during elections. William Earho (2010) in Ezeahumukwe (2011) concluded that political participation is the effective involvement in the formulation and implementation of public policy at all levels of Society, community, local, national or international.

Sarho (2010) further concluded that when such involvement is not allowed for a group or particular people, protest, resistance, agitations and resentments become part of political process.

Active women involvement in politics and governance can be a tool to salvage the nation from corruption and poverty. Segun (2010) submitted that corrupt and irresponsible leadership are the key factors that have hindered the development of Nigeria as a nation and I believe West Africa in general. Onifade (2010) was asking for the people to trust in

politics and governance, one of his questions was, where are the women politicians? Can they make a difference? Yes, "they can" he said but added that "the establishment is too convulated and patriarchal now, to give them a chance." For West African countries to mark the dawn of a new era where values of patriotism, hard work, integrity and commitment to good governance are in operation, female gender must be fully involved in the political process of the nations.

Education: There is gender imbalance against women in education. Oyewo et al (2007) observed that there is general assumption that female gender cannot be taken seriously hence not intellectual beings in academics like their male counterpart which means that woman don't need education. This assumption is supported by the slogan "women's education ends in the kitchen, so they don't need education to be in kitchen. Does women education really end in the kitchen? No. There are women who are educated and are making immense contributions to the Society. Examples are Dr. Ngozi, Okonjo Iwuala, former minister of finance in Nigeria, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, The president of Liberia, among others. There is an adage that says 'educate a woman and educate a nation and next generation of men and women'. Conversely, it means, do not educate a woman and do not educate the nation. If a wife is a University graduate, all her children will also like to be University graduates. A nation who marginalizes their female gender in education will have a lot of illiterate individuals.

Health: It will not be an overstatement to say that marginalization is inimical to healthy living. Marginalization of women affects their mental health. If a woman is mentally unhealthy, her family is affected. Somebody with ill mental health will not be able to contribute to national development.

Conclusions

Female gender marginalization is a social exclusion of female gender which hinders them from expressing their full potential in different spheres of man's endeavour. Marginalization has negative consequences on women and development in general in Nigeria.

Counselling implication

Female gender marginalisation has counselling implication. Marginalisation is dehumanizing and a deprivation of human right. It has not allowed women to showcase their full potentials in the development of the country. The Nigerian society should be counselled to see marginalization of female gender as a social evil that should be stopped. There is also the need to counsel women to be awake and to reject every form of marginalization against them and at the same time the menfolk should be counselled to value women and see them as able human beings as themselves.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in order to stop female gender marginalization.

1. Counsellors should mount up campaign against female gender marginalisation in Nigeria.
2. The female gender should be given equal opportunity with men to take part in politics, governance, education, social life, among others.
3. They should be allowed to contribute their quota in national development.
4. Parents should be counselled to give their male and female children equal right to education and inheritance.

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