

Gender Issues, Family / Societal Role, Implication for Counselling In Nigeria

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to determine gender issues, family/societal role, and implication for counselling in Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of this study two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study. The stratified and simple random sampling techniques were adopted. The simple random technique was used to select the sample for the study. The research instrument, which was the questionnaire, comprised twenty (20) items, all of the Likert-type 4-point scale. The validity was determined by three experts in educational measurement, research and evaluation. It was affirmed that the entire instrument was suitable for measuring what it purported to measure. Using the split-half reliability method, the reliability index of the instrument was found to be 0.73. The result of the analysis revealed that gender issues significantly influenced family role. The result also indicated that gender does not significantly influence societal norms or roles. Based on the finding of the study it was recommended among others that the family (parents) should revisit and redress the issues of gender on its cultural and traditional bases, and also remove the stigmatization spill on women and the girl child. Government policy on gender issues should make meaningful development aimed at increasing the productivity of human resources.

Keywords: gender issues, family/societal role, implication, counselling, Nigeria

Introduction

Gender refers to the social and psychological dimension of being female or male. Gender roles are the behaviours, interests, attitude, skills and personality traits that a culture considers appropriate for males and females. While gender-typing is the process by which children learn behaviours that their culture considers appropriate for each sex. This process takes place in early childhood, but children vary in the degree which they become gender-typed. Gender stereotypes are preconceived generalization about male and female behaviour such as “all females are passive and dependent, all males are aggressive and independent”. Gender stereotypes pervade many cultures. They are seen to some degree in children as young as 2¹/₂ or 3 years, increase during pre-school years and reach a peak at age 5. Preschoolers and even much older children often attribute positive qualities to their own sex and negative qualities to the other sex (Egan & Perry, 2001). Still, among preschoolers, both boys and girls call boys strong, fast and cruel and girls fearful and helpless (Ruble & Martin, 1998).

Both nature and nurture probably play important parts in what it means to be male or female. Biological influences are not necessarily universal, inevitable or unchangeable, nor are social and cultural influences easily overcome. Gender not only varies from one culture to another, but it also varies within cultures over time. Culture is not static but evolves. As societies become more complex, the roles play by the family are not only determined by culture but by the society. In discussing the perception of womanhood, the idea refers to beliefs, notions and ideas people have about females in terms of expectation about appropriate female roles. Generally perceptions are culturally constructed and are therefore products of the socialization process (Antai in Denga & Okoro, 2006).

Globally, diverse descriptions of family exist from culture to culture. The family as a social institution is present in all cultures. There are certain, general principles that bring to light family composition, kinship patterns and responsibilities patterns that make any family functional or dysfunctional (Denga & Denga, 2007). A family can be defined as a set of people related by blood, marriage, adoption or other forms of agreed-upon relationships who share responsibilities to love, care and procreate for posterity (Schaefer, 2005).

Basically, family is the nucleus of the larger society. The strength of the society and its functionality depend on its nuclear families, how stable, economically, psychological, socially, spiritually and industriously they are. Thus, the types of families and marriages have strong ties to the child in terms of gender issues. Families differ from culture and even within the same culture, each society has its own unique culture which is developed throughout history and pass from one generation to another. Culture is not biologically inherited but learned. In Nigeria, the presence of male child signifies the head and continuity in the family cycle; while the female child right from infancy is seen largely by Nigerian society as a mistake and an undesirable addition to the family she will not be able to carry on the family name (Oroka, 1996). As a child, she is denied her rights, humiliated and seen as a mere house keeper or caregiver. No wonder, she is denied her right to decision making even when it concerned her getting married or education, the basic of every Nigeria child. Neglect, rejection,

abuse, violent and conflict reign in her mind and life, as she is not only seen as one that must receive instructions and directions but also one with no voice or right to act.

Violent conflict along religious and ethnic line in the country has also been an ongoing feature of Nigeria society since independence, and continues to this day. There is diversity of ethnic groups and northern Nigeria is predominantly Muslim, while southern Nigeria is predominantly Christian (BBC, Nov 2011). Nigeria also has a national gender policy which focus on women empowerment while also making commitment to eliminate discriminatory practices which are harmful to women (JICA, 2011). These notwithstanding, significant gender gaps in education, economic empowerment and political participation remain in Nigeria. While progress towards parity in primary school education has been made, there remains a significant wage and labour force participation in gender gap (World Economic Forum, 2010).

Consequently, discriminatory laws and practices, violence against women and gender stereotypes hinder greater progress towards gender equality in families and society. Nigeria has a particularly high maternal mortality rate and women access to quality health care is limited particularly in rural areas.

Literature review

The problem of gender segregation and subjugated position of the woman in the family and Nigeria society promoted the researcher to adopt conflict theory for this study.

The Marxist or conflict theories attributes to society the characteristic of coercion, division, hostility, dissension, conflict malintegration and change. The theory emphasizes the significance of interaction of power and asserts that special change is as a result of shifting balance of power between conflict groups (Njama-Abang, 2006). It is argue that far from being harmonious balance, societies are usually experiencing conflict particularly conflict of interest. Thus, instead of consensus, the basic conflict for power and advantage between the different groups, the dominant social process is the endless struggle between those without advantages – women/children-girls who which to secure them, and those with privileges who wish to get more or prevent others from taking what is available. Exponents include Karl Marx, Ralf Danrendorf and Lewis Coser, among others. According to Marx, a society is a system of contradictions characterized by the struggle of opposite (lie is a compromise of interest).

Accordingly, Schaefer (2005) affirmed that, conflict theorists have it that family does not contribute to social stability, but it is a reflection of inequality in wealth and power seen in the larger society. This means all over the world, male dominance is legitimated. Women and children are seen as men's property. It is the man that takes decisions in the home. Some husbands use domestic violence to exercise power and control over their wives and control particularly girls. They also view the family as economic unit that signify the societal injustices.

In Nigeria, the constitution of 1999 prohibits discrimination on the ground of gender, but customary and religious laws continue to restrict women's right (Section 42 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 in CEDAW, 2006). The combination of civil, customary and religious law makes it very difficult to harmonize legislation and remove discriminatory measures. Moreover, certain states in the north follow Islamic (sharia) law, Muslims make use of Islamic court (US Department of State, 2011). Adherence to Islamic law reinforces customs that are unfavourable to women such as early marriage at 11 or 12 years; no girl child education, which in April 2014 has led to the abduction of over 200 Chibok girls/women in Borno State to an unknown destination including restriction of movement and inheritance. With all these, in 1985, Nigeria ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Optional Protocol in 2004 (UNTC, 2011). The country ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Right on the Right of Women in Africa in 2005 (African Union, 2010). Even with all these, Nigeria's Human Development Index score for 2011 is 0.459, placing it in 156th place (out of a total of 187 countries) (United Nation Development Programme, 2011). The country is not ranked in the most recent gender inequality index for 2011. For Global Gender Gap Index, 2011, Nigeria is ranked 120th out of 135 countries with a score of 0.6011 (Word Economic Forum, 2011).

On issues of marriage, the Child Right Act of 2003 amended the constitution to set minimum age of marriage at 18 years of age, but only 16 of Nigeria's 36 states have adopted the Act (Child Right Act, 2003). As a result there is variation, in the south the minimum is 18 and 21 years of age while in the north it ranges from 12 to 15 years. hence the 2003 Demography and Health Survey (DHS) estimated that 33.2% girls between 15 and 19 years of age were married, separated, divorced or widowed (Demography Health Survey, 2003). Additionally, the DHS found that nearly 22% of married Nigerian women were betrothed by age 15, a figure that rises to 46% by age 18 (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009).

In 2008, DHS found that 33% of married women were polygamous unions. Hence in civil marriages, parental authority is shared by mother and father, but in two-thirds of Nigerian households, husband alone make decisions about health and education of their children. These notwithstanding, the Chronic Poverty Research Centre reports that in Nigeria 27.87% of widows inherited majority of assets in 2007 (Chronic Poverty Research Centre, 2011). While some states have enacted laws protecting the rights of widows, for example the Prohibition of Infringement of Widower's and Widow's Fundamental Human Rights Law, No 3 was forced in 2001 in Enugu State (JICA, 2011). While female genital mutilation (FGM) was prohibited in eleven (11) Nigerian states as of 2008, but such laws are difficult to enforce. On the national scale, nearly 30% of women aged between 15 and 49 years have been subjected to it.

Women freedom of movement is restricted in some cases where they are obliged to obtain permission from their husband to obtain a passport or travel outside the country. Women in Purdah (Muslim communities in Nigeria states) cannot leave their homes without permission from their husbands or being accompanied by a man at all times. Also there is restriction in their dressing – they must be veiled in public. Freedom of speech, assembly and association are protected in the constitution; although journalists are sometimes faced with harassment and threat in reporting on issues such as corruption or conflict.

Besides, there is an active and vocal women's movement in Nigeria, who provides practical support for women as well as advocating women's rights at the national level in regard to productive health, marriage, education, employment and political participation; and pushing for changes to discriminatory legislation.

On education before now male are given preference in over girls as female education was regarded as a little step to make a good husband and also restricted to a level so as to achieved being married not becoming too smart. In the south, restricted course or career were line out for women, which still stands the girl child on the disadvantaged side. In the private sectors many employers force young single girls and married women to sign jobs contract stipulating that they will not get pregnant for the first three years of their employment.

In this study gender issues are greatly jeopardized by the family and societal influences and preference, in terms of social institutions, family code (marriage, rape, domestic violence and inheritance), freedom of speech/movement, education and political right of the girl child and women in society.

From the foregoing, it is vividly clear that women/girls need appropriate and adequate awareness creation of the policies and constitution of Nigeria on the right of women and all its citizens and work towards achieving their freedom. This is because, all is like living in a society or family of oppression, discrimination and lip-service system.

Statement of problem

The growing echo of crying in homes, streets, villages, and states on the issues of abuse, rejection and neglect of the female child and women in our society call for immediate attention for researchers and the societal concerned. Women are not only seen as caregivers but as tools to be used and dump when necessary. There reflect the ancient saying that "women are only to be seen and not heard". This discrepancy continue to lingered on in our families and society to the extent that, even at the birth of a child, the joy of the motherhood is sadden by what the sex is; and if it be female, the sound and joy of the long expected baby is deaden by why not a boy? Who will be my heir apparent to the dynasty or throne? The female child is picture as shameful badluck to the family and society. The emotions of women are threatened with dangerous, hostile, unpleasant, unfriendly and uncertain place to live. She is seen as belonging to another family, and had no place in her father's house, also seen as a second class citizen by her younger siblings who happen to be males.

Besides her emotional and psychological torture, the family and society denied her the right of her freedom and taking up her responsibilities, even when formulated policies are stated for her benefits. The girl child and women are abuse sexually – rape, sent for prostitution for family upkeep, use for ritual killing, kidnapped and used as tools of enslavement in all odds. These incidences are alarming and embedded in our system and remained features of life for the contemporary Nigerian woman.

Consequently, the danger of the situation is that they invariably pave way for further family/societal conflict and unrest which poses threat to the female child/women, home, school and society. Attempt to reverse the issues should begin with the identification of the source of the problem in the family, culture and traditions that holds the society.

Therefore, the researcher is motivated in this study to identify relevant variables of gender issues on social institutions, family code and societal policy as they influence the girl child or women position in our system.

Methodology

This study was essentially an Ex-post facto. The target population involved in this study consisted of all adults in Nigeria. The accessible, population which the researcher believes typified and reasonably represented the target population, consisted of all adults in Cross River State; one of the 36 states in Nigeria. The stratified and simple random sampling techniques were adopted. The stratification was based on gender. The simple random technique was used to select the sample for the study.

The research instrument, which was the questionnaire, comprised twenty (20) items, all of the Likert-type 4-point scale. The respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement for each statement.

In terms of validity three experts in educational measurement, research and evaluation, affirmed, that the entire instrument was suitable for measuring what it purported to measure. Using the split-half reliability method, the reliability index of the instrument was found to be 0.73. Data were collected through the use of questionnaire from the sampled institutions. Through a very rigorous approach, and with the assistance of some persons, all the 753 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved, and they were all properly completed, thus giving 100% return rate. The following hypotheses were tested in the study.

1. There is no significant influence of gender issues on family role.
2. Gender does not significantly influence societal norms or roles.

Results

Hypothesis one

There is no significant influence of gender issues on family role.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is gender issues (High, Moderate and Low); while the dependent variable is family/societal role. To test this hypothesis, family/societal role of respondents from High, Moderate and Low were compared using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The result of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
 Summary data and one-way ANOVA of the influence of
 gender issues on family role (N=753)

Gender issues	N	\bar{X}	SD
High 1	249	68.41	3.74
Moderate	402	61.65	5.31
Low	102	76.57	3.51
Total	753	69.64	5.38

Source of variance	SS	Df	Ms	F	Sig of F
Between group	5672.576	2	2837.850	132.777*	.000
Within group	16032.893	750	21.373		
Total	21705.469	752			

* Significant at the .05 level, critical F=3.00, df= 2, 750.

The result on Table 1 revealed that the calculated F-value of 132.777 is higher than the critical F-value of 3.00 at .05 level of significance with 2 and 750 degree of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis which stated that gender issues have no significant influence on family role was rejected. This result therefore implied that, gender issues significantly influenced family role. Since gender issues have a significant influence on family role, a further pattern of influence was employed using Fishers' Least Significant Difference (LSD) multiple comparison analysis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
 Fishers' Least Significant Difference (LSD) multiple comparison
 analysis of the influence of gender issues on family role

Gender issues	N	High 249	Moderate 402	Low 102
High	249	68.41 ^a	-0.25 ^b	-8.17
Moderate	402	-0.67 ^c	68.45	-7.92
Low	102	-15.03*	-15.43*	76.57

MSW=21.373

* Significant at .05 level, critical t=1.96, df= 751.

a = Group means are placed along the diagonal

b = Difference between Group means are placed above diagonal

c = Fishers' t-values are placed below the diagonal

* = Significance at .05 level (critical t=1.96).

The result of the analysis in Table 2 indicated that respondents from moderates are significantly different in their family/societal role from students from Low. Also students from High are not significantly different from those in moderate and Low in their family role.

Hypothesis two

Gender does not significantly influence societal norms or roles.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is gender (male and female); while the dependent variable is society norms or roles. To test this hypothesis, society norms or roles of male and female students were compared using Independent t-test analysis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
 Independent t-test analysis of the influence of gender
 on societal norms or roles (N=753)

Gender	N	\bar{x}	SD	t-value
Male	453	69.89	5.548	
female	300	69.26	5.082	1.61

Not Significant at .05, critical r = .062, df = 751

The result of the analysis as presented in Table 3 revealed that the calculated t-value of 1.61 is lesser than the critical t-value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance with 751 degree of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant influence of gender on society norms or roles was retained. This result indicated that, gender has no significant influence on society norms or roles.

Discussion

The result of the analysis revealed that gender issues significantly influenced family role. The result also indicated that gender does not significantly influence society norms or roles. The findings is in line with the view of Egan & Perry (2001) who observed that gender stereotypes are preconceived generalization about male and female behaviour such as "all females are passive and dependent, all males are aggressive and independent". Gender stereotypes pervade many cultures. They are seen to some degree in children as young as 2¹/₂ or 3 years, increase during pre-school years and reach a peak at age 5. Preschoolers and even much older children often attribute positive qualities to their own sex and negative qualities to the other sex. Still, among preschoolers, both boys and girls call boys strong, fast and cruel and girls fearful and helpless.

Antai in Denga & Okoro, (2006) also stated that biological influences are not necessarily universal, inevitable or unchangeable, nor are social and cultural influences easily overcome. Gender not only varies from one culture to another, but it also varies within cultures over time. Culture is not static but evolves. As societies become more complex, the roles play by the family are not only determined by culture but by the society. In discussing the perception of womanhood, the idea refers to beliefs, notions and ideas people have about females in terms of expectation about appropriate female roles. Generally perceptions are culturally constructed and are therefore products of the socialization process.

Schaefer (2005) also affirmed that, conflict theorists have it that family does not contribute to social stability, but it is a reflection of inequality in wealth and power seen in the larger society. This means all over the world, male dominance is legitimated. Women and children are seen as men's property. It is the man that takes decisions in the home. Some husbands use domestic violence to exercise power and control over their wives and control particularly girls. They also view the family as economic unit that signify the societal injustices.

Also in line with the United Nation Development Programme (2011), women and men have the same rights to vote and stand for election in Nigeria, women comprise a small percentage of official in Nigeria. As of March, 2010, there are 25 women in 358 house of representative and 9 senators out of 109. Out of 40 ministers nominee for the current cabinet, 13 are women showing progress in Nigeria. Women campaigns for equal political participation. Also employed women are entitled to maternity leave of twelve weeks at state level and four months at national level with 100% of their wages - which is agreement with the second hypothesis which states that gender does not significantly influence societal norms or roles.

Counselling implications

The following counselling implications are made

1. Counselling awareness should be created on the attainment of equal rights by women in family, social institutions and society; and must become a central feature of democratic and participatory pattern development.
2. The family (parents) should revisit and redress the issues of gender on its cultural and traditional bases, and also remove the stigmatization spill on women and the girl child. This is to be done by peaceful conflict resolution of pointing out to the true of creation as all are seen equal before the creator.
3. There is also need for the promotion of positive aspects of the perception of womanhood such as self-control, industry and resourcefulness. Such attributes would promote women chances of attaining self actualization in the development process. While the harmful ones should be eliminated.
4. Public enlightenment efforts are needed to sensitize the populace that child mining and domestic responsibilities are not women's problem, but should be undertaken through concerted efforts of both genders.
5. Curriculum for gender equality and quality basic education should give clear gender equitable education to be possible for all across the nation – particularly in the northern part of Nigeria, religious reforms not to form hindrance to the girl child. Finally, girls and boys must be consulted and work must occur with counselors, teachers, parents, policy makers and the wider society.
6. Greater participation and consensus building in the policies at all levels, including the identification and elimination of laws (religious practices) and bureaucratic procedures should be curtailed.
7. There is an urgent need in softening the ideological and legal frameworks of patriarchy and shaking off traditional beliefs that are hindrances to development and politics especially the customs and cultural practices that undermine the status of the women in family/society.
8. To encourage the exchange of information and communication between women and change the stereotypical image of women and improve their knowledge and self awareness and actualization. Above all, women should realize their worth and stand to defend it anywhere, anytime, and at any moment.

Recommendations

Based on the result of the findings of the study and their implication for counselling services for gender issues in Nigeria, the following recommendations were made:

1. There should be a participatory development strategy for women to enable them contribute more effectively to the satisfaction of their families basic needs as well as their traditional responsibilities. Intimidation, violence and discrimination should be shun.
2. Government must create an enabling environment to facilitate broad-based participation on the decentralized and gender-sensitive basis in accordance with the March 24 2014 European Women and Federal Government of Nigeria signed agreement for the programme aim at promoting women engagement in peace and security in northern Nigeria and across.

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