

Gender Stereotyping and Women Career Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined gender stereotyping and women career development in Ondo State, South-West Nigeria. Two hundred respondents formed the sample for the study. The sample was selected through a purposive random sampling technique, across the three senatorial districts of Ondo State, Nigeria. A Self-constructed questionnaire (GSWCDQ) was used to collect data for the study. Three hypotheses were generated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study showed that there was no significant difference between male and female, literate and non-literate in gender stereotyping of women career development. However, the study revealed that there was a significant difference between women with good knowledge in Mathematics and those without it, in gender stereotyping of their career development. Based on the findings, recommendations were made for cultural re-orientation for better valuation of girls and women among Nigerians. It was recommended too that girls and women should develop more interest in Mathematics for better career opportunities.

Keywords: Gender stereotyping, women, career development.

1. Introduction

Gender may be seen as not having a fixed identity but a multidimensional construct, depending on the expectations associated with being a male or a female in a particular society.

The concept of gender stereotyping could be viewed as relating to the general way people often devalue the performance of women who take on tasks supposedly reserved for men. In such instances, people appear unimpressed about women's achievement, success of women at work is often given to luck or chance rather than to women's hardwork and ability. This is a proven fact of men intimidation of women at workplace in order to frustrate and keep them low. This seems to be a common phenomenon in many societies of the world, Nigeria not being an exception.

Women career development could thus be viewed as having much to do with their ability to; prepare, enter into their chosen career fields, thrive and advance in such careers alongside with their men counterparts, without any stereotypical bias.

Culture in Nigeria is vital to women career development. This is based on the fact that Nigerian culture tends to believe in the inferiority of women relative to men. For this reason, career differential is often seen at play when it is time for the selection of courses in school, or its attending careers that follow after graduating from school. On this, Denga (1983) identified occupations such as; Engineering, Medicine, Law, Computer Science, and Skilled trades, as being adjudged as more befitting for boys. On the contrast, occupations considered as being more suitable for girls are Nursing; Secretarial work, and catering services.

The resultant effects of the stereotypical choice of career on girls and women is their avoidance of science-based courses particularly, Mathematics. This might be one of the major reasons why women are overwhelming found in traditionally female oriented occupations, in contrast to male-dominated ones in Nigeria. However, if Nigerian women must fulfill their career expectations, they cannot afford to remain trapped in the traditionally female oriented occupations for long. This is because, unlike in the recent past, the context of the woman in the family is fast changing. Specifically, the present economic recession makes it more imperative for women to have viable careers. For example, apart from the fact that women involvement in meaningful careers would enable them take good care of themselves without depending on their spouses, they would also be better equipped financially, to lend a hand to spouses in meeting the demands of the home. Furthermore, viable careers would offer women more opportunities to imagine better options for their self-actualization or achievement outside the home. Nevertheless, Chipman and Wilson (1985) Stated that, for girls and woman to enter into male-dominated careers, it demands that they have very good Knowledge in Mathematics. Regrettably however, it was noted at the same time too, that for girls and women to meet this condition seems to be an uphill task. This is because there seems not to be enough support given to them by significant others in their lives, in society.

To support this submission, the findings of the studies commissioned by the American Association of University Women (AAUW, 1999), showed that when young women enter college, the educational environment is often hostile and unsupportive. Also, a similar observation was made by Egunjobi (2006) in Nigeria. Egunjobi (2006) in her paper presented on the empowerment of the girl-child in Science and Technology at the First International Conference of the Forum for African Women Educationalist (FAWE), at the Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko (AAUA), Ondo State Nigeria, told a story to draw attention to the discouraging attitude of a male teacher to his female students. Thus, a girl, in response to her father's request that she should offer Additional Mathematics in place of Religious Studies, said that their teacher had warned them against

offering the course, as this may imply additional problems for them.

Critically, it could be viewed that, lack of support and mentoring from significant others, like the teacher, to girls and women is an indirect way of telling them that they do not belong particularly in fields that include Engineering and other physical sciences. At this juncture however, there is need to mention that in spite of the observed stereotypical barriers in the way of girls and women, the fact still remains that quite a number of Nigerian women have indeed gained access, and served the nation meritoriously in their area of specialties. Among such women is the former Director of the National Agency for Food and Drugs, Administration and Control (NAFDAC), in person of Prof Dora Akunyili. Indeed her tenure, was noted for a drastic reduction in the production or importation of fake drugs to Nigeria. Also, there is the female minister of Education in person of Prof Ruquayyat Rufai, and Dr. Ngozi Okonjo – Iweala, the present Minister of Finance.

It takes these Nigerian women whose names are mentioned here, a lot of courage and coping strategies to realize their set goals, either in their career fields, or in public service. Though, it could be argued that nobody disturbs women from gaining entrance into the male-dominated professions, in reality however, there is enough evidence which tends to show that their services are not required. (Fitzgerald and Harmon, 2001). This could be through series of unwelcoming attitudes of the male colleagues, ranging from being ignored to overt verbal harassment, or receiving no social support when it is needed by women.

The scenario being portrayed by Fitzgerald and Harmon (2001) could be said to be similar or applicable to Nigerian workplace situations. The observed oppressive and domineering leadership styles from the male professionals to their female colleagues, in many Nigerian organizations could be traced to the cumulative effects of Nigerian cultural background, which allows for male dominance. Critically, one could infer here that, attitudes do not often depend on the height of education, but on the socialization pattern of individuals.

Hence gender stereotyping of women in Nigeria is not limited to non-literate alone, but also to the perceived highly educated people in workplace, who seem to find it difficult to let go the ingrained idea that women are inferior to men. Men in this category therefore, are often skeptical and jittery whenever they see women grow or progress in their careers. What they often do is to try to pull such women down, employing different strategies, to ensure that the environment is made unbearable for such women to operate. According to Norton (2002) such strategies are termed “hostile environment harassment”. These may include blackmailing, persistent complaint of non-availability or non-performance at work, open verbal attacks, taunting, amongst others. All these actions are measures taken to frustrate and truncate women’s success in their career, so as to boost and justify men domineering power.

2. Statement of the Problem

Culture in Nigeria tends to favour the boys over the girls in terms of determining what is seen as being appropriate for them, in the choices of their career. The effect of the gender stereotypical bias on career aspirations of women may include the decline in women’s self-esteem and self – efficacy. If women should resign to fate, and do not make the needed efforts to face the challenges set as a barrier to their career development, they are likely to remain under-represented in the available, well-paid male-dominated occupational fields, and/or be denied of access to high level positions in Nigerian society.

3. Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were generated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant difference between male and female in gender stereotyping of women career development.
2. There is no significant difference between literate and non-literate in gender stereotyping of women career development.
3. Good knowledge in Mathematics among women will not bring any significant difference in gender stereotyping of women career development.

4. Methodology

Descriptive survey method was used. The research population consisted of all categories of people in varying career fields, including; Engineering, Medicine, Law, Lecturing, Clerical work, Farming, Gardening, among others, in Ondo State Nigeria. Two hundred respondents made up of one hundred males and one hundred females, were selected as sample for the study, through a purposive and random sampling technique, from across the three senatorial districts of Ondo State.

A self-constructed questionnaire titled “Gender Stereotyping and Women Career Development Questionnaire (GSWCDQ)”, was used to collect data for the study. The face and content validities for the instrument were obtained from scholars in Test and Measurement in the area of Counselling Psychology. The reliability of the instrument (GSWCDQ) was determined through a test-re-test method, involving 20 respondents from another State, (that is, Ekiti state, Nigeria), different from the state of the study. A reliability coefficient of 0.84 was obtained. This was considered high enough for the study.

Data collected were analyzed using t- test statistics. The three hypotheses generated were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

5. Results

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between male and female in gender stereotyping of women career development.

The analysis presented in Table 1 shows that the t-calculated of 1.55 is less than the critical table value of 1.96. Hence, the null hypothesis is not rejected, showing that there is no significant difference between male and female in gender stereotyping of women career development.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between literate and non-literate in gender stereotyping of women career development.

Table 2 shows that the t-calculated of 1.22 is less than the critical table value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This shows that there is no significant difference between literate and non-literate in their gender stereotyping of women career development.

Hypothesis 3: Good knowledge in Mathematics among women will not bring any significant difference in gender stereotyping of women career development.

The analysis presented in Table 3 shows that the calculated table value of 2.23 is greater than the critical table value of 1.96. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that there is a significant difference between the gender stereotypical challenges being faced by women who have good knowledge in Mathematics and those without it, in their career development.

6. Discussion

The result of male and female respondents, t-test for hypothesis one indicates no significant difference in their gender stereotyping of women career development. The calculated t-value was 1.55 while the critical t-value was 1.96 at df of 198 and 0.05 level of significance.

It should be hardly surprising that even women respondents shared the same view with the male respondents in the study, that there should be gender differential in women career choice and development. This is a confirmation of the fact that people's socialization pattern often affect their ways of reasoning and thinking. Many people in Nigeria are yet to be convinced that even the few female professionals in areas of Engineering, Architecture, Medicine and others, can equally perform excellently well, or even better than their male counterparts. The finding of the study is in agreement with Denga (1983), Egunjobi (2006) and the AAUW (1999).

Denga (1983), referred to the critical importance of Nigerian culture in the choice of career by girls and the boys. This draws attention to why people often devalue the performance of women who take on tasks supposedly reserved for men in Nigeria. Furthermore, Egunjobi (2006) and the AAUW (1999) dwell on the intimidating attitudes of teachers to their female students. These also have a far reaching implications for girls' and women's exclusion from the fields that have to do with Engineering and other physical sciences.

Hypothesis two shows no significant difference between literate and non-literate respondents, in their gender stereotypical perception of women career development. This submission is not surprising too, it only confirms further that culture often takes priority over whatever status one holds. In other words, people often react first in terms of acceptable ideology of their culture, rather than in terms of their status.

The finding related to hypothesis three shows a significant difference between women that have good knowledge in Mathematics and those without it, in the challenges they face, especially in science-based career fields. In line with this result, Chimpman and Wilson (1985) were of the same opinion that it is women who lack the mastery of Mathematics that often experience more hardship in accessing viable careers or development in their careers.

7. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it could be concluded that career women in Ondo State, South-West Nigeria, are over-whelmingly present in traditionally female oriented career fields like nursing, Catering, teaching, Catering services, based on their cultural orientation.

If career women in Ondo state, Western Nigeria must grow and progress in their career fields, it calls for a positive re-assessment of Nigerian cultural values and beliefs. This is to enable women in Nigerian, and Ondo State in particular, contribute their own quota to their career fields and the nation's development, like their men counterparts.

8. Recommendations

Women like men need meaningful employment to provide additional source of social support to increase their well being. For this reason, the following recommendations are made.

1. There should be cultural re-orientation towards the value of girls and women. Gender typing in girls in particular is not good for their career development and general wellness.
2. Parents to encourage their children particularly girls, to develop interest in Mathematics so that there would be no limitation to the choices of their career.
3. Men, who are looked up to as mentors at workplace, should use their positions to assist women.
4. Career women are encouraged to develop effective coping strategies for good adjustment at workplace.
5. Finally, all existing policies bothering on gender equality should be fully implemented by both the state and federal government of Nigeria.

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Table 1 t-test, mean, standard deviation, showing Differences between Male And Female Respondents in Gender Stereotyping of Women career Development.

Variables	×	N	SD	Df	t-cal	t-cri
Male	108	89.23	7.98	198	1.55	1.96
Female	92	91.01	8.21			

Not Significant P> 0.05

Table 2 t-test, mean, SD, showing Differences Between literate and non-literate in gender stereotyping of Women career Development.

Variable	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-cri
Literate	63	88.61	9.05	196	1.22	1.96
Non-literate	137	90.72	7.56			

Not Significant P>0.05

Table 3 t-test, Mean, Standard Deviation, Showing The Difference between Women With Good Knowledge In Mathematics and Those Without, In Their Gender Stereotypical Challenges In Career Development.

Variables	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-cri
Women with knowledge of mathematics	170	140.82	15.40	198	2.23	1.96
Women without Maths	30	147.60	15.40			

*Significant P<0.05