

## **Socio-Cultural Perceptions and Gender Disparity in Civil Service Employment in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigated socio-cultural perceptions and gender disparity with particular reference to employment of many women in the civil service of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. It examined the perception of level of formal education on the employment of men and women and the perception of marital status and its influence on the employment of male and female civil servants in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service. After reviewing the background and the relevant literature together with the theoretical framework, conceptual and empirical information, the researchers adopted the ex-post-facto design for the study. The population consisted of all the civil servants employed by Akwa Ibom State Civil Service and they number 13,057 of which 6070 were female while 6987 were male. The study used a sample size of 1300 employees representing 10% of the total population with a research-made instrument to gather relevant information. The researchers, with the assistance of the secretaries to the permanent secretaries in each of the sampled ministries administered the instrument and retrieved them within one week. Data collected were analysed with the t-test statistics. The result revealed that the calculated t-test value of 1.25 at 0.05 level of significance was less than the critical value of 1.96, thus the null hypothesis 1 was accepted in favour of the alternative hypothesis. The same result was obtained for the second hypothesis. It was therefore concluded that the perception of formal level of education and marital status significantly influence the employment of male and female civil servants in Akwa Ibom State more particularly to the advantage of the men-folk. More preference in employment should be given to the women to bring them at par with their male counterpart.

**Keywords:** Civil Service, Gender, Employment, Employment in Nigeria

### **Background of the Study**

Women and gender balance advocacies have been agitating for the expansion of women's involvement in political, social, economic and particular employment opportunities in Nigeria. Gender disparity has a universal application as it is not limited to the developing nations alone, the difference lies in the relation to the degree of relegation. Patriarchy which is consistent domination of men over women is the main cause of gender disparity and inequality in Nigeria, as it is elsewhere in the world.

Robort (2006) observed that after almost five decades since Nigeria became an independent nation, and experimented with quota system and federal character, there can be absolutely no doubt that limited major opportunities have been available to women. This implies that prejudice still exists as does a "glass ceiling". Meharoff (2000), states that this has restricted women from enjoying truly equal opportunities with men in all spheres of human endeavours. Although the Federal Government created Ministry of Women Affairs in 2008, almost a decade ago, women's role in the Civil Service appears to be negligible. With respect to top positions in the public sector, gender disparity is evident. For instance in Nigeria, there are nearly five times as many male judges and permanent secretaries as there are female ones. Table 1 in the appendix shows the appointment of men and women in the public sector between 2001-2007 in Nigeria as reported by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2009.

Gender is central to understanding the process through which appointments are made to senior public management positions. Even though the government promote and patronize women in recent time, Nigerian women are still struggling to find ways to break the "glass ceiling" imposed on them through the practice of patriarchy in the society. Thus, attention to the impact of gender disparity on public institutions has focused largely on perceptions of discrimination, the notion of representation bureaucracy and equal opportunities policies.

Gender is not necessarily a direct product of an individual's biological sex. Giddens (2006) sees gender as a socially and culturally created concept which attributes differing roles and identity to men and women. Gender difference is a significant form of social stratification, a critical factor in structuring the type of opportunities and life chances faced by individuals and groups, and strongly influence the role they play within social institutions from the household to the public. Logically therefore, gender bias, marginality or such stereotype is a subtle discrimination against female based on the social roles differentiation and expectation constructed and created by men and society in the course of time.

Women suffer various forms of discrimination, objectification, inequality, exclusion and violence. Also

representative bureaucracy is not gender sensitive as undue preference is given to federal character in the recruitment, training and promotion of men in the civil service. Onwuekwe (2001) emphasized that the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria left women out completely. A few years back at the Beijing Conference in China, it was agreed that thirty percent (30%) of the elective post in every nation should be represented by the women. The extent to which this has been fulfilled in Nigeria remains questionable.

Socio-cultural perceptions like education, marital status, religion, ethnicity, parental family background and occupational segregation are instruments of gender disparity in various spheres of life. In the area of education, estimated 58% of women in Nigeria are considered to be illiterates (Agu, 2005). Such researches put the literacy rate at 72% for male but only 42% for females. Educational opportunities of women tend to be circumscribed by patriarchal attitudes. Lack of formal educational qualification has been a strong visible barrier to female participation in the formal sector. It has an adverse impact in the life chances, particularly in the sphere of employment, access to information, political, social and economic influences. While much has been achieved in primary education, the gender gap persists and has even widen in secondary and tertiary education. The table below shows that although the number of young women admitted into the University has more than doubled, the gender gap is still widening.

**Table 1:** Admission Statistics into Nigerian Universities by Sex, 2000 – 2008

Year	Sex	Application by Gender	Total Application	Admission by Gender	Total Admission
2000	Male	238,456	416,291	26,665	45,766
	Female	117,835		19,101	
2001	Male	743,725	1,056,617	54,978	90,769
	Female	312,892		35,797	
2002	Male	580,338	994,380	31,942	51,845
	Female	414,042		19,903	
2003	Male	603,179	1,046,950	59,742	105,157
	Female	443,771		45,415	
2004	Male	486,539	841,878	69,715	122,492
	Female	355,339		52,777	
2005	Male	526,281	916,371	45,256	76,984
	Female	390,090		31,728	
2006	Male	456,953	803,472	52,413	88,524
	Female	346,519		36,111	
2007	Male	911,653	1,302,529	64,706	107,370
	Female	390,876		42,664	
2008	Male	598,667	1,054,060		113,100
	Female	455,393			

**SOURCE:** JAMB ANNUAL REPORT (2008).

Beside the lack of formal education, marital status and the need for childcare also deny most Nigerian women the opportunity for white collar job in the Civil Service. Participation in the labour force, by women increases as the woman advances in age before marriage. Early marriage before the age of twenty years means termination of the girl's child education, except where their husbands allow them to continue after marriage. This perhaps reinforces the practices of female seclusion because of early marriage. Some of the educated few are even disallowed by their spouses to work at all, thereby, confining them to being full time house wives, which consequently make them completely economically dependent on their husbands.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Rationalization for gender disparity in all aspects of social and public life is a global phenomenon. Every where in the world, women work both within and outside the home. International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2008) noted that three quarters of the working hours of the world is utilized by women. Half of the world's agricultural products are produced by women, and according to this source women account for two thirds of the world illiterate population. They work hardest but earn less than one third of the world income. Policies and decisions affecting women are controlled by men, which often result in disparity between the two sexes.

Gender disparity and subordination serve as the basis for social inequalities despite the advances that women have made in countries around the world. Women are victims of the five "faces of societal oppression" which Young (1992) listed to include discrimination, marginalization, exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. The prevailing division of labour between sexes has made men and women assuming unequal position in terms of employment, power, prestige, status and wealth. The society has a strong patriarchal

structure that maintained the gender division of labour right from the household to the labour force. This structure directly restricts women's availability for work and indirectly conditioned the term of employment for those who enter the civil service. Patriarchal nature of relationship between men and women in the society tend to capitalize on, and stem from socio-cultural matrix such as education, marital status, occupational segregation, parental family background, religion and ethnic beliefs. It is against the real and perceived discrimination suffered by women that makes the issues of gender disparity in employment a topic of interest worth investigating in order to contribute to the existing knowledge in the area.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to investigate "Socio-Cultural Perceptions and Gender Disparity in Civil Service Employment in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. examine the perceptions of level of formal education influence on the employment of women and men in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service.
2. ascertain the marital perceptions status influence on the employment of women and men in Akwa Ibom State civil service.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. To what extent have perceptions on level of formal education influenced women and men appointment in the different ministries in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service?
2. To what extent do perceptions on marital status influence men and women employment in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated for the study:

- Ho<sub>1</sub> Perceptions on level of formal education do not significantly influence the employment of men and women in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service.
- Ho<sub>2</sub> Perceptions on marital status do not significantly influence men and women employment in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study is significantly in the sense that its result will help to show the need to give additional educational opportunity to the gender (males or females) of Akwa Ibom State in particular and in Nigeria in general. This will help to close the existing gender gap in education. It will also reveal the proportion of males and females appointment to top positions in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service and the need for gender equality. The study will help to create the need for cooperation between spouses in sharing domestic household works in their marital homes to enhance women participation in formal employment.

More importantly, the study will give information, data and statistical figures to Economic planners, National Bureau of Statistic, Labour Force, Civil Service Commission, Economists, politicians, Ministry of Women Affairs and researchers. The study will help to mobilize women and Non Government Organizations (NGOs) at both state and national levels for gender balance. Within the educational system the study will help school administrators, school counsellors, admission units in the post primary and tertiary institutions to address the issue of male and female oriented subjects and courses like Mathematics, Engineering, Nursing, teaching and so on.

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Education and Gender Disparity in Employment**

Education brings benefits to the educated in the form of access to information, employment and more economic and political influences. Katarina (2003) observed that without education people are impeded from gaining access to employment, lower educational accomplishment reduces their career advancement and lower salaries negatively affect their security in old age. Mbilinji (1996) asserted that denial of right to education triggers exclusion from the labour market and marginalization into some forms of informal sector, accompanied by exclusion from social security scheme. Education becomes an end in itself rather than merely a means for achieving other ends. Ruwanpura (2004) opined that education is the key to public sector employment, a sector noted for suitable working conditions, fringe benefits and salary levels for male and female workers. Ojulape (2000) viewed Education as a fulcrum around which the quick development of economic, political, sociological and human resources of any country resolves. To Ojulape, the higher the level of education, the greater likelihood that a woman will stay in the labour force. The new interest in the education of women is part of a general awakening that has taken place during the last few decades. It is now realized that sustainable human and national development cannot be effective if half of the human race "women folk" remains ignorant, marginalized and discriminated against.

The importance of education to human beings generally and women employment in particular cannot be over emphasized. Studies by Ezeani (2000), Okojie et al (2001), and Ejike (2008) observed that female education is seen generally as an investment that yields high returns in terms of social and economic gain Ezeani (2000) asserted that the involvement of educated women in employment goes a long way in family and societal improvement. Thus, decent work and wages lift women and their family out of poverty and exerts a positive significant impact on the growth of the nation's economy. Okojie, Chiegwe, Okpoku & Edoja (2001) listed other benefits derivable from education and employment to include enhancement of the quality of life, housing, health, clothing and gainful use of leisure.

#### **Marital Status and Gender Influence on Employment**

Almost everywhere, majority of people have expressed support for gender equality and agree that women should be able to work outside the home. Most people find a marriage in which both spouses share financial and household responsibilities to be more satisfying than one in which the husband provides for the family and the wife only takes care of the house and children. According to Aniche (2008), there is an increased dignity that goes with being a woman, wife, mother and wage earner in a household setting. In subsistence agricultural earning, the wife's contribution is subsumed in the general household labour and not even acknowledged, given that men are the owners of land in Africa. In the condition of wage earner, women have a greater prestige in the family and are also likely to have more control on how their money is spent.

As opined by Kelkar and Nathan (2002) a comprehensive study of the labour force shows that women participation in the labour force exhibits a number of characteristics patterns. Marriage, child bearing and house care pose a serious constraint on women participation in labour force. Participation rates have gone up for single women, and there is evidence of an increase for older women.

#### **Empirical Review**

The relationship between high formal education and women employment has been buttressed by studies conducted by Leach (1998), Onah (2001), and Odora (2003). For example, Leach (1998) conducted a study using 700 women in Ibadan town to determine the relationship between high formal education and women participation in the formal work force. Data were gathered using structured questionnaire and interview. After using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to analyse the data, the author found a high correlation coefficient of 0.84 at 0.05 significance which showed that formal education is highly related to formal employment. The author therefore noted that high level of formal education exposes women to the use of contraception which increased the likelihood of being employed.

A study carried out by Onah (2001) used 1,500 male and female workers in Lagos State public service to establish how the level of education influences their employment and salary grade level prior to retirement. Data were gathered using questionnaire, primary and secondary sources. When subjected to t-test analysis, result showed that high formal education influence men and women employment and their terminal salary grade level at retirement. Odora (2003) conducted a study on socio-cultural determinant of women employment. The author used 500 women from different ethnic groups in Nigeria. After using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the data gathered using questionnaire, F-ratio of 29.447, significance at 0.05 showed a high influence of education on women employment in Nigeria. Another study carried out by Adeke in 2006 used 300 graduate women in Owerri town and utilized structured questionnaire to gather data which was analyzed using chi-square.  $\chi^2 = 9.37$  at 0.05 significant level showed no significant influence.

Adeke noted that majority of women who are highly educated do not have access to formal employment that is secured, and are therefore congested in the informal sector. But he further added that the environment of the study is basically business oriented, where people utilize their education in various kinds of business. Grint (2001) and Hanson (2003) see global changes brought about by industrial restructuring as giving rise to women involvement in paid employment instead of education. Isah (2005) found a no significant difference on a study of 'Gender and employment' in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State. Using 150 women, the data was gathered using questionnaire and analysed with a t-test. The result showed that level of education has no difference in women labour force participation. He rather noted that the impact of Structural Adjustment Programme have meant increased challenges of survival amongst families and have forced women to seek employment to ensure family survival. He added that majority of these women are occupying very low cadre in employment match with menial jobs and very low salary grade levels.

Empirical studies on marital status and women employment focuses on the relationship between the involvement of women in employment and the husband cooperation and task sharing in the household. A study conducted by Izuh (2003) on women's employment in Rivers State of Nigeria used 500 women, data was collected with questionnaire and analyzed using multiple regressions. F-ratio of 26.788 at 0.05 alpha level indicated that spouse co-operation is highly related to women employment. Izuh further observed that the higher the age at marriage, the more likely that women will be employed, the larger the age gap between husband and wives the less likely

women will be employed. Another study conducted by Asiyanbola (2005) examined the relationship between wife's income earning and husband family work. The data was obtained using a questionnaire and analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Sample for the study was 150 married women in Abeokuta town. A correlation coefficient of 0.81 at 0.05 significant showed a high positive relationship. Asiyanbola further noted that most sex role orientation held by and about women are changing, becoming less traditional in the sense of less rigid sex specific definition and expectation.

However, one clear finding is that women even if employed and regardless of social class still do the greatest share of child care and household activities. This assertion is buttressed in the findings by Chukwezi (2010) in the study on women education, employment and participation in households labour in Nigeria Information was collected on some socio-economic variables which include age, income, educational level, household size. The data was analysed using analysis of variance and paired sample 't'. F.value of 4.704 not significant at 0.05 alpha level showed that despite the kind of profession, educational qualifications or contribution to household economy, women still carry the burden of childcare and household activities.

Nwanbani (2000) carried out a study in Imo State of Nigeria comparing homes where there is cooperation and sharing of domestic work between spouses, and another where there is no such cooperation. Nwanbani found out that in a household where there is no cooperation and sharing of work, the wife can hardly take to formal employment, whereas marriage characterized by cooperation and sharing of domestic work gives the wife opportunity to take formal employment in Niger State of Nigeria. Mamman (1997) conducted a study on single girls and married women employment using a sample size of 50 employers from different private firms. Data was obtained through structured interviews and analysed using simple percentage. It was found that employers have high preference for single girls in employment to married women. Ugwin (2010) in his study of employed 'Sandwich' Generation Women – household with mother in-law, husband and husband's siblings used a sample size of 147 women and gather data using questionnaire and interview. Analysis was done using chi-square and the result obtained showed that sandwich women that receive care giving support either from husband or form house workers and mothers in-laws experience less stress and cope very well with their employment.

Ekong (2008) examined the role of women involvement in national development in Akwa Ibom State. Using a sample size of 33,670 workers of which 19,941 (59.23%) were women in different administrative department, he found out that women dominated in teaching and nursing professions in the state, and form more than 40% of the workers in other profession. Ekong added that quite contrary to popular belief women form the nucleus of the State Civil Service economy. They form 59.28% of the total workforce of salary grade levels 07 and above and are in various capacities of responsibilities. Ruwanpura (2004) carried out a study and used 3000 women from two developing countries in Africa; Nigeria and Ghana. Data was gathered from the National Bureau of Statistics to compare the extent of gender based wage discrimination in the two countries. On using multiple regression to analyse the data, he found out that unskilled women workers such as street sweepers and office cleaners in both countries experience the worst wage discrimination, nurses experienced no wage discrimination while teachers experienced wage discrimination and lack of incentives.

### **Research Design**

The study adopted the Expost-facto design. Socio-cultural perceptions such as education, marital status, occupational segregation, influence the employment of men and women in the civil service and these independent variables are not easily manipulated.

### **Area of Study**

The area of study of this research was Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State is one of the states in Nigeria created out of Cross River State also of Nigeria on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1987. It is located between Cross River State in the east, Abia State in the north, Rivers State in the west deltaic coastal plain of the Cameroun in the south. It lies between latitude 4°32' and 5°53N, and longitude 7°25' and 8°25' south of the equator. It has a population of 3,920,208M people by 2006 provisional census figure. The state has 2.8% of the total national population. Of this figure, women constitute 47.85% which is 1.875.698 million. It has thirty one Local Government Area divided into three senatorial districts. The major socio-cultural groups in the state based on dialectal differences are Ibibio, Annang and Oron. There are a total of 438 secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, this is made up of 240 public and 198 private secondary schools in the state. Akwa Ibom State is basically a civil service state with predominantly civil, public servants and relatively few business men and women.

### **Population of the Study**

The population of the study consisted of all the employees in the twenty ministries in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service. The total population is 13,057 staff strength out of which 6,070 were females while 6,987 were males.

### Samples and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 1,300 employees representing 10% of the total population will be used for the study. A total of 15 ministries were sampled from which 86 employees both male and female were selected through simple random sampling technique.

### Instrumentation

The study used a researcher made instrument to gather relevant information. The instrument was titled SP-CDCSEQ- Socio-cultural Perceptions and Gender Disparity in Civil Service Employment Questionnaire. The questionnaire was made of two parts. Part A was to elicit demographic information on the respondents. Part of the demographic information measured education as one of the independent variables, while part B consisted of six (6) items each for the two socio-cultural perceptions variables under investigation, through which respondents expressed their level of agreement or otherwise to each statement based on a 4 point likert type scale response categories of Strongly Agree (SA) 4, Agree (A) 3, Disagree (D) 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1.

### Validation of the Instrument

The researcher personally constructed the items for each variable in the study. But before the questionnaire items were administered, they were examined, reviewed, vetted and evaluation experts for face validity and appropriateness. During the process of vetting, some items which were not valid were discarded.

### Procedure of Data Collection

The researchers with assistance of the secretaries to the permanent secretaries in each of the sampled ministries administered the instrument. These secretaries were enlisted by the researcher as research assistance for the proper collection and collation of the relevant data from the respondents. The instruments were administered in two different ministries in a day such that the data collection lasted for one week.

### Method of Data Analysis

The data from the study were subjected to t-test Analysis in the two hypotheses, while the research questions were analyzed using mean and simple percentage.

### Findings

**Hypothesis 1:** This hypothesis stated that the perception level of formal education do not significantly influence the employment of men and women in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service.

**Table 2:** The perception level of formal education of men and women in the Employment of civil servants in Akwa Ibom State

Perception level of formal Education	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-value
Men	800	53.94	18.00	1.25
Women	500	21.28	9.07	

*Significant at 0.05 alpha level, critical  $t = 1.96$ ,  $df = 1298$   $N = 1300$*

The result revealed that the calculated t-value 1.25 at 0.05 level of significance is less than the critical value of 1.96; thus the null hypothesis accepted. Therefore the perception of formal level of education significantly influence the employment of men and women in Akwa Ibom State civil service in favour of the men.

**Hypothesis 2:** Hypothesis 2 stated that the perception of marital status do not significantly influence men and women employment in Akwa Ibom State civil service in Nigeria.

**Table 3:** The perception of marital status of men and women in the employment of civil servants in Akwa Ibom State

Perception of Marital Status	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-value
Men	748	58.46	17.42	1.36
Women	552	37.92	12.35	

*Significant at 0.05 alpha level, critical  $t = 1.96$ ,  $df = 1298$   $N = 1300$*

The result showed that the calculated t-value of 1.36 is less than the critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore the perception of marital status has influenced significantly the employment of civil servants in Akwa Ibom State civil service in favour of the men.

### Discussion of Findings

The result in Table 2 above indicates that the perception of formal education level of civil servants has significantly influenced their employment in favour of the men in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service. The result confirms the observation by Mbilinji (1996) that the denial of right to education triggers exclusion from the

labour market and marginalization into some forms of informal, accompanied by exclusion from social security scheme. Women in Akwa Ibom State were denied access to formal education based on cultural reasons, namely, that their official places of employment were the kitchens and that since they would eventually become the property of the husbands on marriage, there was no need to send them to school. These have gone a long way to deprive the womenfolk from employment compared to their male counterpart in the civil service and elsewhere. This present study is also supported by the findings of Leach (1998) who conducted a study in Ibadan Town using 700 women to determine the relationship between high formal education and women participation in the workforce in Ibadan town. After using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to analyse his data, the researcher found a high correlation of 0.84 at 0.05 significance which meant that high formal education was one of the major indices of women employment in the area. Isah (2005) who conducted a study on gender and employment Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State of Nigeria, using 150 women also discovered that majority of the women in Cross River State are occupying very low cadre in employment with very low salary grade levels due to lack of exposure of the womenfolk to formal education in the area. Isah (2005) study has further strengthened the findings of this present study that women are not only denied access to formal education but are also marginalized in the civil service employment scheme in Akwa Ibom State due to socio-cultural factors prevalent in the area.

The result in Table 3 above also indicates that the perception of marital status has significantly influenced the employment of civil servants in Akwa Ibom State in favour of the men. This finding is in line with a study by Adeke (2006) which discovered that majority of educated women are denied access to employment in the civil service in Owerri, capital of Imo State of Nigeria because of their marital status. The study also gives support to Ekong (2008) who also discovered that contrary to popular opinion that women constitute the bulk of the population in the civil service generally, they only form 59.28% of the total workforce of salary grade level 07 and above while the men take the lead. The researcher based his explanation on women's marital status and their domestic involvement in the family. Kekar and Nathan (2002) had earlier said the same. Therefore this study has confirmed the position by onlookers that women suffer discrimination in employment in the civil service due to their marital status when compared with their male counterpart.

### Recommendation

In line with the findings of this study, it is recommended that preference be given to the women in employment and education so as to bridge the existing gap between them and their male counterpart.

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