



THE CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS TO PROPERTY INHERITANCE: A STUDY OF THE NJIKOKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

Women's experiences in acquiring or inheriting properties such as land are filled with narratives of denials and marginalization orchestrated by numerous cultural practices designed in line with patriarchal society amidst existing legislation and policies that prohibit inequality on the grounds of sex and gender in Africa, most especially Nigeria. This has regrettably posed a strong threat to the development of women, thus giving rise to the feminization of poverty. Therefore, this study examined the cultural factors affecting women's rights to property inheritance in the Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State. The study adopted cultural feminist theory as its theoretical base. It also employed a cross-sectional survey design and multi-stage sampling technique, where a total of 204 respondents aged 18 and older were randomly sampled using a structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The collected data were presented and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency distribution tables. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed with the thematic method of data analysis. The study hypothesis was tested using the chi-square (χ^2) test of statistics. The study findings revealed that women having access to properties such as land are only considered if they have a male child in the course of marriage with their deceased partner. It was also found out that despite the high level of awareness among educated women about their legal rights to property inheritance, factors like traditional beliefs still hinder women from inheriting properties. It was recommended that there is a need for government intervention for widows in courts seeking to regain properties of their late husbands', amongst others.

Key Words: Land, Cultural Practices, Property Inheritance, Marginalization, Women

Introduction

Property, in all its forms, is valued and recognised in all societies as the principal asset or key factor influencing and enhancing an individual's socio-economic status (Udoh, Folarin, & Isumonah, 2020). Globally, property inheritance is essential for the economic empowerment of women across different cultural contexts. According to Kivaria (2020), property such as land is a pillar for household livelihood and supports poverty reduction. To Ericco (2021), property is a crucial asset for cultural identity and spirituality and an important source of political power and participation in decision-making. Hence, equitable and secure access, use, and control of property by male and female people are essential for socio-economic development.

Among developing regions, Latin America, South Asia, the Middle East, and North America, there are significant inequalities in property matters across diverse ethnic and religious divides, despite extensive mobilization for women's rights throughout the region (Naz et al., 2014). In



Sub-Saharan Africa, property matters are determined by a combination of residual colonial law and current constitutional law, the complexities of which often allow for loopholes or legal gaps that undermine women's property and inheritance rights. Worldwide, women remain a minority of owners of land and housing and often face discriminatory customs, laws, and institutional practices that severely restrict their ability to gain and control property (Naz et al., 2014). According to Makama (2013), women constitute about half of the population of African countries and are known to play vital roles as mothers, producers, managers, community developers, and organizers, amongst others. Their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is also greater than half as compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. Yet, their participation in formal and informal structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant (Makama, 2013). In Nigeria, women's experiences in acquiring properties such as land are filled with narratives of denial and marginalization (Ajayi & Olotuah, 2015). Being a culturally diverse country with over two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic groups that are divided into three major ethnic groups (the Igbo, the Hausa, and the Yoruba), patriarchal customs and traditions appear to be a recurring factor that unifies the experiences of their female population (Ekhaton, 2018). The patriarchal structure sets the parameters for women's unequal positions in families and markets by condoning gender-difference terms in inheritance rights (Kennedy & Eremie, 2016).

According to Ajayi and Olotuah (2015), women's rights to property and inheritance are restricted within natal and matrimonial families. In most Nigerian families, the natal family lays the foundation for sex preference. The birth of a son is usually celebrated more than that of a daughter because, above all, a male child guarantees the continuation of the lineage. The female children suffer real discrimination in terms of inheritance after the demise of their father. For instance, among the Igbo and some subcultures within the Yoruba ethnic groups, girls are not entitled to share in property inheritance at all (Udoh, Folarin, & Isumonah, 2020). For the Bini and Ishan People of Edo State, the oldest son inherits the entire father's property, leaving the female child with nothing; the Hausa folks, on the other hand, operate according to Sharia's laws, which give twice the daughter's portion to her brother (Udoh, Folarin, & Isumonah, 2020). Similarly, Kennedy and Eremie (2016) noted that there has been male dominance over the sharing of deceased people's property in all parts of Yoruba land. In relation to inheritance, it is held by the Yoruba that female children are not "real" members of their "original" family since they are expected to marry and move out of their father's household. Also, George (2010) further stated that in most cases, a widow may be denied access to her late husband's property, and in other circumstances, she is considered part of the property to be shared among old or young male relatives. For the Etulo and Idoma tribes in Benue State, property sharing is done along the matrilineal and patrilineal lines of the deceased man, respectively. For the Etulo, the implication is that, when a man dies, his property is transferred to the maternal relatives of the man, who decide what should be given to the wife if the widow has children. Needless to say, among this tribe, a barren widow has no right to inheritance (George, 2010).

Statistically, according to the Joint Publication by the UN Human Rights and UN Women (2014), over the past decade, at least 80 million hectares of the world's land have been acquired on a large scale, covering an area 20 times the size of the Netherlands. Yet, within this context, it is reported that only 1% of the world's women actually own land. According to Nigeria's 2016 Gender Policy in Agriculture, men dominate the agricultural sector regarding land ownership, access to inputs and outputs, benefits, earnings, and support services, even though



women working in the industry outnumber men. Significantly, the report states that women represent between 60% and 79% of Nigeria's rural labour force, but men are five times more likely to own land than women. Based on Nigeria's distribution of property ownership, as stated in the 2012 Gender Report, there is a wider gender disparity, with 7.2% of females owning properties compared to 38.1% of males. Also, in rural communities, the report shows that only 8.5% of women own properties such as land, compared to 46.1% of males (Sadiq, 2022).

Following the above, it is clear that regardless of the global commitment to eradicate gender disparity or discrimination and promote women's rights generally, women are still either marginalized or denied access to real property, which is part of their human rights (Stitcher&Parpart, 2019). Therefore, despite international and national legislations and policies that prohibits discrimination and inequality on the grounds of sex/gender, such as 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which viewed discrimination against women as an act against human dignity, and also, the 2014 Supreme Court ruling in Nigeria which affirmed that the Igbo Customary law of inheritance, that excludes female children from inheriting the property of their deceased fathers, was in conflict with the non-discrimination of Nigerian constitution of 1999 and therefore void; Women in Nigeria, of which the women of Njikoka LGA is not an exception, still experience systematic denial and marginalization with respect to property inheritance rights. Hence, it is pertinent to carry out a focused empirical study on various cultural factors affecting women's property inheritance rights in a bid to garner adequate information for a proper public and policy response to the social problem, which is repugnant to equity, fairness, good conscience, and justice, and develop a feasible framework for its reduction in the future. It is therefore against this background that this research paper is aimed at providing a comprehensive insight and assessment of the cultural factors affecting women's right to property inheritance in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Review of Conceptual Issues/Theoretical Literature

In this section, the opinions of scholars pertaining to the subject of this inquiry were reviewed under the following subheadings:

Concept of Women's Rights

Women's rights are defined as the freedoms, liberties, and opportunities that women have, especially the opportunity to be treated equally and given the same legal rights as men (Ajayi & Olotuah, 2020). Women's rights are the rights and entitlements claimed for women and girls worldwide. They formed the basis for the women's rights movement in the 19th century and the feminist movements during the 20th and 21st centuries (Agarwal, 2021). In some countries, these rights are institutionalized or supported by law, local custom, and behaviour, whereas in others they are ignored and suppressed. They differ from broader notions of human rights and seek to counter inherent historical and traditional biases against women's rights to own landed properties and build their own houses (Aluko, 2020). According to Baer (2021), other issues commonly associated with notions of women's rights include the right to body integrity and autonomy, the right to be free from sexual violence, the right to vote, the right to hold public office, the right to enter into legal contracts, the right to have equal rights under family law, the right to work, the right to fair wages or equal pay, the right to have reproductive rights, the right to own property, and the right to education.



According to Anyogu and Okpalobi (2021), women's rights are important as they give women the opportunity to get an education and earn a living. It makes women independent, which is essential for every woman on earth. According to Benschop (2020), women's rights are very important for everyone all over the world. It does not just benefit the woman but every member of society. When women get equal rights, the world can progress together, with everyone playing an essential role. If not for progressive policies and the push for women's rights, women would not have been allowed to do something as basic as vote.

Concept of Property Inheritance

First of all, inheritance refers to assets that an individual bequeaths to their loved ones after they have passed away (Ekhaton, 2018; Chibuzo, 2020). An inheritance may contain cash, investments such as stocks or bonds, and other assets such as jewellery, automobiles, arts, antiques, and real estate. According to Boniface (2021), people may name beneficiaries in their will whom they want to bequeath their worldly possessions to when they pass away. In other cases, assets are automatically passed to a spouse or children as heirs. Property inheritance is the acquisition of landed houses and buildings under the laws of intestacy and sometimes by will. It is the act of inheriting valuables, particularly landed properties, because the actual owner(s) are no more. Folarin and Udoh (2021) defined property inheritance as landed assets passed down to individuals after someone dies. Again, property inheritance connotes a process that involves the passing on of material property from one generation to another, usually within the family, generally from older parents (donors) to their adult or younger children (heirs), which more often than not occurs after the death of the older generation. Most property inheritances are documented in the deceased's will. However, in many traditional societies, property inheritances are shared by the elders of the kindred.

Kolapo (2019) stated that property inheritance can be shared among beneficiaries or heirs. Thus, there is a distinction between a beneficiary and an heir. Beneficiary refers to an individual or individuals named in a will, while heirs refer to people, such as a child or a surviving spouse, who are entitled to receive a descendant's property through a legal process known as intestate succession. Intestate succession is a set of rules created to sort out inheritance matters in the absence of a will. During the sharing of property inheritances, arguments, infighting, and fetish practices are common, especially in Southeast Nigeria, where land is in short supply.

Cultural Factors Affecting Women's Rights to Property Inheritance

Some scholars, such as Ogunleye (2021) and Nwobi (2022), assert that patriarchal systems and institutions are the major underlying cultural factors affecting women's rights to property inheritance. Patriarchal gender relations also bring out the denial and discrimination that women experience with respect to rights to property and inheritance in general. According to Osayimwese (2020), the promotion and protection of women's rights are determined by several factors, such as native customs and prevailing traditions, as well as the religious laws that control behavioural patterns in that society. In discussing factors affecting women's rights to property inheritance, Onyewere (2021) observed that the tenets of Christianity and Islam that govern women's rights to property should be re-examined.

In the Holy Books and many, if not all, cultures in Nigeria, women are viewed as inferior to men, and a male child is generally celebrated and allotted higher portions of land. That is why when a female child is born, families see it as a mild loss because she will grow up, marry, and leave the father's house someday in the future (Udoh, 2020). According to Ugochukwu (2021),



the right to property is one of the major elements in the empowerment of women globally, and the pursuit of gender equality is a step in the right direction. In other words, women's rights have been some of the focal points of global efforts aimed at enhancing the lives of women. However, despite several treaties that have been adopted, signed, and ratified by individual nations for the protection of women's rights, women are still subjected to varying degrees of discrimination on the grounds of religion and culture.

Effects of Cultural Denial of Women's Rights to Property Inheritance

There are many problems associated with the cultural denial of women's rights to property inheritance. Apart from the fact that it limits the economic potentials of many women in position to inherit their husband's properties, it also leads to the feminization of poverty, with many women from rich, poor, and middle-income families struggling to survive after the death of their spouses (Anyogu & Okpalobi, 2021). For instance, Akinola (2022) posits that the most important economic challenge that affects women is the gender gap in the control of land. The sequel to this position, the World Bank Report (2023), reveals that women in half the world are denied land and property rights. This cultural denial of women's right to property, among other things, hinders their access to credits and loans from financial institutions, as only assets could serve as collateral. Furthermore, the far-reaching effects of cultural denial of women's rights to property inheritance include rising poverty levels among women, depression, and an increase in incidences of gender-based violence. Also, it has been revealed that until gender equality includes land rights and ownership, the agenda for sustainable development by 2030 will become impossible because landlessness is among the best predictors of poverty (Ugochimere, 2022; United Nations, 2022).

According to Adewole (2019), despite the growing concerns for and efforts geared towards protecting women's rights to land and other tangible assets that possess economic value, various scholars such as Amadi (2019) and Adekile (2020) revealed that women still encounter challenges with respect to property inheritance. Generally, land and other forms of real estate are essential for the economic empowerment of women across different cultural contexts. Land in particular serves as a crucial element for cultural identity, participation in decision-making, political power, and protection against family dysfunctions. It is against this backdrop that various institutions, human rights' activists, and feminists across the world moved for the codification and implementation of laws that protect women's rights generally and, more specifically, ensure women's rights to acquire, inherit, use, control, and dispose of economic assets.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that anchors the analysis of this research is the cultural feminist theory propounded by Charles Fourier in 1837. The theory is aimed at understanding cultural factors encumbering women's rights to property inheritance in society. It postulates that women are more often than not victims of out-dated cultural norms and values in their social settings. Cultural feminist theory is considered apt and most appropriate for this study because it provides the historical context that establishes the basic assumptions upon which social conflict and marginalization of women in Njikoka LGA, Anambra State, are rooted. As such, the theory highlights human understanding of both internal and external factors that generate, promote, and sustain family conflicts, such as disagreements over women's rights to property inheritance among families in society.



Moreover, cultural feminist theory is adopted for this study because it explains in very clear terms the reasons behind the denial of women's rights to property inheritance in Njikoka LGA. The theory maintains that men learn antisocial behaviours such as laziness, greed, and evil mindsets from improper upbringings during the socialization process. The theory postulates that unfair treatment and marginalization of women are learned behaviours that men acquire from their uncles, dragging landed properties into the community. In other words, there is likelihood that a child who witnessed his father abuse someone's wife or widow in the name of cultural norms or asserting male dominance will repeat the same behaviour in the future. This theory also assumes that gender inequality is embraced by elders and serves to maintain a patriarchal social order. It is therefore safe to state that cultural feminist theory is not only responsible for bringing the world's attention to the predicaments of women; it also provides alternatives to male dominance in society. These arguments and lines of thought make the cultural feminist perspective the most suitable and related chain of thoughts to guide this research.

Methodology

A cross-sectional survey design was employed for this research paper. The area of the study was Njikoka Local Government Area, located in Anambra State, with its headquarters at Abagana. Njikoka is predominantly inhabited by the Igbo ethnic group, who are mostly indigenous people of the area. The local government area is known for its rich cultural heritage, with various traditional festivals, dances, and customs celebrated by the people. The economy of Njikoka is primarily agrarian, with farming being the main occupation of the residents. It is an area known for the cultivation of crops such as yam, cassava, maize, and vegetables. Njikoka LGA has a vibrant trade sector and hosts a number of markets, such as the Enugwu-Agidi International Timber Market. Additionally, it hosts a number of hotels, banks, industries, and relaxation spots that contribute to the local economy. Njikoka LGA is made up of the following towns: Abagana, Enugwu-Ukwu, Nimo, Abba, and Nawfia. Njikoka Local Government Area has a total population of one hundred and forty-eight thousand, three hundred and ninety-four (148,394), comprising 73,869 males and 74,525 females. However, the target population for this study is adults aged 18 and older, with a total population of 77,839 people. Probability sampling techniques were used in the study because they give each element of the population an equal chance of being included in the sample. This study adopted the multi-stage sampling procedure, which includes systematic sampling and simple random sampling techniques, in selecting study participants. A total of 204 respondents randomly picked from Umuriam and Orofia communities, which were communities under Nawfia and Enugwu-Ukwu towns, respectively, were selected for the research, as it was assumed they were knowledgeable on the subject of discussion. The questionnaire and in-depth interview (IDI) guide are the instruments to be used for data collection. Finally, the quantitative data from the questionnaire was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, while the qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis. This involves a thematic method where the collected data are edited, coded, and organized in line with the objectives of the study.

Data presentation, Analysis and Findings

Table 1: Personal data of respondents

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender	Male	75	37.5
	Female	125	62.5
	Total	200	100.0



Age	18 – 27	33	16.5
	28 – 37	35	17.5
	38 – 47	50	25.0
	48 – 57	67	33.5
	58 and above	15	7.5
	Total	200	100.0
Marital Status	Married	114	57.0
	Single	19	9.5
	Widowed	27	13.5
	Divorced	15	7.5
	Separated	25	12.5
	Total	200	100.0
Level of Education	No formal education	19	9.5
	FSLC	45	22.5
	SSCE	60	30.0
	OND/NCE	29	14.5
	B.Sc. and above	47	23.5
	Total	200	100.0
Religious Affiliation	Christianity	167	83.5
	Islamic	2	1.0
	African Traditional Religion	26	13.0
	Atheists	5	2.5
	Total	200	100.0
	Occupation	Farmer	28
Trader		69	34.5
Civil servant		51	25.5
Artisan		39	19.5
Unemployed		13	6.5
Total		200	100.0
Place of Residence	Rural areas	105	52.5
	Urban areas	95	47.5
	Total	200	100.0

Field Survey, 2024

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents show that 37.5% are males, while the majority (62.5%) of the respondents is females. With regards to age, 16.5% of the respondents are within the ages of 18–27, 17.5% are within the age brackets of 28–37 years, 25.0% are within the ages of 38–47, 33.5% are within the age categories of 48–57, and 7.5% of the respondents are between the ages of 58 and above. This means that the majority of the respondents are adults in their late 40s and late 50s. In terms of marital status, more than half (57.0%) of the respondents are married, 9.5% are single, 13.5% are widowed, 7.5% are divorced, and 12.5% are separated. This indicates that a good number of the respondents are married. The study examined the educational qualifications of the respondents, and the results indicate that 9.5% have no formal education, 22.5% are holders of First School Leaving Certificates (FSLC), 30.0% have senior secondary certificates, and 14.5% have a B.Sc. and



above. This implies that the majority of the respondents were WAEC holders at the time of carrying out this study in the Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State.

In a related development, the study examined the religious affiliation of the respondents, and it was obvious from the data in Table 1 that 83.5% of the respondents are Christians, 1.0% are Islamic followers, 13.0% of the respondents are worshippers of African Traditional Religion (ATR), and 2.5% of the respondents are theists. This reveals that a greater proportion of the respondents are Christians. This equally means that Christianity is the dominant religion in Njikoka LGA. With regards to occupation, data show that 14.0% of the respondents are farmers, the majority (34.5%) of the respondents are traders, 25.5% are civil servants, 19.5% are artisans, and less than a quarter (6.5%) of the respondents are unemployed. A look at the column for place of residence shows that 52.5% of the respondents live in rural areas, while at the same time, 47.5% live in urban areas. This goes to show that a slight majority of the respondents are residents of rural communities located in the Njikoka Local Government Area.

Table 2: Respondents' views on cultural factors affecting women's rights to property inheritance

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Feminization of poverty	39	19.5
Patriarchal structure	56	28.0
Traditional beliefs	43	21.5
All of the above	62	31.0
Total	200	100.0

Field Survey, 2024

With regards to cultural factors affecting women's rights to property inheritance, table 2 shows that 19.5% of the respondents identified feminization of poverty as one of the major factors affecting women's rights to property inheritance, 28.0% of the respondents indicated patriarchal structure, 21.5% identified traditional beliefs as another factor, and 31.0% of the respondents indicated all of the above. This implies that the majority of the respondents agreed that all the factors mentioned in Table 2 affect women's rights to property inheritance. This aligned with the in-depth interviews. One of the interviewees stated:

Traditional beliefs, male dominance in society, gender disparity, and out-dated cultural norms and values are some of the cultural factors affecting women's rights to property inheritance in Enugwu-Ukwu. As bad as it may seem, there are families here in Enugwu-Ukwu that have in many instances accused young and innocent widows of killing their husbands simply because they want to claim the landed properties of the deceased (Male, Married, 58 years, President General, Enugwu-Ukwu Community, Njikoka LGA).

One of the opinion leaders interviewed explained:

Many reasons have been theorized as contributing factors to women's denial of landed properties. Some of these reasons include wage differentials in the workplace, the relegation of women's role to housework, and male dominance in society. Here in the Nawfia community, it is obvious that cultural norms and practices, level of education, and ignorance of legal rights to property inheritance are some of the factors affecting women's rights to landed assets. Female, married, 55 years old, opinion leader, Nawfia Community, Njikoka LGA.



Table 3: Respondents’ views on the dominant effect of cultural denial of women rights to property inheritance

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Reduces standard of living	49	24.5
Emotional breakdown of women	27	13.5
Depression	28	14.0
Increase in poverty	61	30.5
All of the above	35	17.5
Total	200	100.0

Field Survey, 2024

In terms of the dominant effect of cultural denial of women's rights to property inheritance, 24.5% of the respondents said it reduces the standard of living; 13.5% noted that denial of women’s rights to property inheritance could result in emotional breakdown of women; 14.0% said that it may lead to depression; 30.5% said that it leads to an increase in poverty; and 17.5% of the respondents indicated all of the above. This implies that all the options outlined above are the dominant effects of cultural denial of women's rights to property inheritance. This aligned with data from in-depth interviews. One of the interviewees stated:

One of the negative effects associated with the denial of women’s rights to property inheritance is the high rate of poverty among women. Have you noticed that widows whose husbands left landed properties in their care are doing better than widows who have no access to property inheritance? This tells you that land is an asset that every young man should aspire to acquire for the betterment of his life, his family, and the future (male, married, 61 years, President General, Nawfia Community, Njikoka LGA).

Table 4: Respondents’ views on measures that would help to increase women’s rights to property inheritance in Njikoka LGA

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Government intervention to widows in courts seeking to regain properties of their late husband’s	40	20.0
Public sensitization on women’s rights to property inheritance	37	18.5
Free education of girl child	11	5.5
Promotion of gender inequality	29	14.5
Developing and strict implementation of policy initiatives that would to increase women’s rights to property ownership	54	27.0
All of the above	29	14.5
Total	200	100.0

Field Survey, 2024

In terms of measures that would help to increase women’s rights to property inheritance, table 4 shows that 20.0% suggested government intervention to widows in courts seeking to regain properties of their late husbands, 18.5% indicated public sensitization on women’s rights to property inheritance, 5.5% of the respondents suggested free education for girls, and 14.5%



recommended the promotion of gender inequality. Similarly, 27.0% of the respondents recommended developing and strict implementation of policy initiatives that would help to increase women's rights to property ownership, and 14.5% indicated all of the above. This implies that the majority of the respondents believed that in order to increase women's rights to property inheritance, there is a need for effective development and strict implementation of policy initiatives that would help to increase women's rights to property ownership in Njikoka LGA. This aligned with in-depth interviews. One of the interviewees stated:

When it comes to strategies that the government and policymakers should adopt to help increase women's rights to property inheritance, first of all, there is a need for political will, followed by the inauguration of a team that will ensure that the rights of women living in Njikoka LGA and the Nawfia community in particular are protected (female, married, 55 years old, opinion leader, Nawfia Community, Njikoka LGA).

Table 5: Respondents' views on strategies that will help to increase the rights of women to property inheritance in Njikoka LGA Anambra State

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Abolishment of cultural and traditional beliefs that promotes gender inequality	31	15.5
Will of properties to every girl-child by their parents	26	13.0
Sensitization of elders and stakeholders on the importance of granting women access and rights to property inheritance	53	26.5
All of the above	90	45.0
Total	200	100.0

Field Survey, 2024

Table 5 shows that 15.5% of the respondents noted that in order to further increase the rights of women to property inheritance, there is a need for the abolishment of cultural and traditional beliefs that promote gender inequality; 13.0% supported the willingness of properties to every girl child by their parents; and 26.5% suggested the sensitization of elders and stakeholders on the importance of granting women access and rights to property inheritance, just as a majority (45.0%) identified all of the above. This goes to show that all the options outlined in Table 5, if and when carefully implemented, can go a long way towards increasing the rights of women to property inheritance in Njikoka LGA of Anambra State. This agrees with data from in-depth interview sessions. One of the interviewees stated:

Traditional rulers in Njikoka LGA should do well to abolish cultural and traditional beliefs that support and promote gender inequality. Men should be re-oriented or educated on the importance of granting women, including their wives, access and rights to land in their communities. That way, it will be a lot easier for rigid and closed societies in Enugwu-Ukwu to permit women's rights to property inheritance in their localities (female, married, 49 years old, opinion leader, Enugwu-Ukwu Community, Njikoka LGA).

**Table 6: Cross-tabulation between place of residence and the likelihood of denial of access to property inheritance in Njikoka LGA**

Place of Residence	Likelihood of denial of access to property inheritance in Njikoka LGA			Total	
	Response	Yes	No		
		Yes	No	Don't know	
Rural areas	93	8	4	105	
Urban areas	85	7	3	95	
Total	178	15	7	200	

$$\chi^2 = 19.114 (df = 2, n = 200), P = 0.000$$

Table 6 shows that a positive relationship ($= 19.114$; $df = 2$, $n = 200$; $p = .000$) was found between place of residence and the likelihood of denial of access to property inheritance in Njikoka LGA. The stated alternate hypothesis was accepted, and the null hypothesis was rejected. The conclusion is that women who live in rural areas are likely to be denied access to property inheritance more than their counterparts who live in urban areas in Njikoka LGA. This implies that a positive relationship exists between place of residence and the possibility of denial of access to property inheritance in Njikoka LGA of Anambra State.

Findings

Cultural denial of women's rights to property inheritance is a serious social problem in Southeast region of Nigeria. It is an act that is against good moral conscience and promotes feminization of poverty in the region (Anorue, Obayi & Onyebuchi, 2020). This study investigated cultural factors affecting women's right to property inheritance in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State and findings revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that women have rights to property inheritance such as land. However, because of male dominance in the society, most respondents perceived property inheritance as an act that is only accepted or considered if the woman has a male child.

It was found that cultural factors affecting women's rights to property inheritance include feminization of poverty, patriarchal structure and traditional beliefs in various communities in Njikoka LGA. This is consistent with the study by Alagoa (2022) which examined women's rights to property inheritance. The major objective of the study was to find out the immediate cultural factors affecting women's rights to property inheritance in Badagry area of Lagos State, Nigeria. The study found amongst others that male dominance in the society, feminization of poverty and traditional beliefs are some of the major factors affecting women's rights to property inheritance. In agreement, another study by Adewole (2019) reported that cultural factors affecting women's rights to property inheritance in Ondo State include male dominance, gender norms, traditional beliefs and cultural inequality in social roles between men and women in the society.

This study discovered that there are effects of cultural denial of women rights to property inheritance in Njikoka LGA. Increase in poverty was found to be the major effect of denial of women's rights to property inheritance. Other effects include reduced standard of living, emotional breakdown of women and depression. This supports previous study by Amadi (2019) which found that major effects of cultural denial of women's rights to property inheritance



include emotional breakdown of women and a sense of hopelessness. Further results indicate that denial of women's right to property inheritance encourages poverty. Furthermore, another study by Anorue, Obayi and Onyebuchi (2020) investigated the effects of cultural denial of women's rights to property inheritance in Emene, Enugu State and found that women's experiences in acquiring properties such as land are filled with narratives of exploitation, denial and marginalisation. It follows therefore that male dominance in the society sets the pace for women's unequal access to land properties.

The study also revealed that there are certain measures that can be put in place to increase women's rights to property inheritance in Njikoka LGA. These measures that can be put in place to increase women's rights to property inheritance in Njikoka LGA include: developing and ensuring strict implementation of policy initiatives that would help to increase women's rights to property ownership, government intervention to widows in courts seeking to regain properties of their late husband's, public sensitization on women's rights to property inheritance, free education of girl child and promotion of gender inequality, abolishment of cultural and traditional beliefs that promotes gender inequality, willing of landed properties to every girl-child by their parents, sensitization of elders and stakeholders on the importance of granting women equal rights to property inheritance. This aligns with the study by Abara (2019), which recommended that the best way to ensure women's rights to property inheritance is through the creation of awareness about the need to abolish obnoxious cultural norms and practices such as denial of property inheritance and harmful widowhood practices. Other measures include the need to ensure proper training of children in the family without reinforcing gender norms, the provision of free education, and public enlightenment on the importance of gender equality in society.

Concluding, the hypothesis confirmed that women who live in rural areas are likely to be denied access to property inheritance more than their counterparts who live in urban areas in Njikoka LGA. This means that a positive relationship exists between place of residence and the likelihood of denial of access to property inheritance in Njikoka LGA of Anambra State.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In Nigeria, women's experiences in acquiring landed properties are filled with narratives of denial and marginalization. This is because male dominance in society sets the parameters for women's unequal positions. Property inheritance is recognized in every society as the principal asset influencing and enhancing the socio-economic status of its citizens. That is why women who have limited access to landed properties are at risk of generational poverty. Scholars such as Kivaria (2020) argue that property inheritance is the pillar for improved living conditions. Hence, women's rights to property inheritance are crucial because they give women the opportunity to improve their socio-economic status. Based on the findings of this study, the following appropriate recommendations were made:

1. There is a need for government intervention for widows in courts seeking to regain properties of their late husbands' in Njikoka LGA of Anambra State.
2. There should be public sensitization on women's rights to property inheritance in all communities in Njikoka LGA of Anambra State.
3. The government should provide free education for female children. This will help to promote gender equality and create more awareness about women's rights to property inheritance.



4. Traditional rulers should abolish cultural and traditional beliefs that promote gender inequality in the Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State.
5. There is a need for sensitization of elders and stakeholders on the importance of granting women access and rights to property inheritance in Njikoka LGA of Anambra State.

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