
WORKING WOMEN AND THE CHALLENGES OF MODERN EMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *Modernization has presented Nigerian women with numerous job opportunities conversely to what was obtainable in the past. Economic opportunities available to women present gender equality perception and occupational competition between men and women in the work place. This development carries with it some challenges for working women. This research identified these challenges as laws impeding women's rights in the work place, sociocultural perception, lack of economic empowerment of women, social insecurity in the society, sexual harassment, gender inequality in the work place, work-family conflict and societal male dominance and chauvinism. Some recommendations were also proffered to help minimize these challenges which includes. They are developing and implementation of programs and policies to prevent sexual harassment and gender inequality in the work place, enhancement of female based specific laws, economic and educational empowerment of women in Nigeria, and maintaining harmony between work and family.*

KEYWORDS: Working-Women, Challenges, Modern-Employment, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Today in Nigeria, women have proved themselves useful in all fields of human endeavor such as; health, engineering, teaching, management, social work, agriculture and so on. But ironically, women employees are being discriminated by their supervisors, colleagues and even the society at large. They are still battling with a lot of challenges, issues and problems such as sexual harassment, verbal abuse, denial of opportunities, lack of good supportive working environment, lack of cooperation from colleagues, stress, depression, injustice and other forms of biases and discriminations (Chhugam & Tanes, 2012). They also face challenges in work-life balance because there are still beliefs that they are responsible for family related tasks. In many places, the prevailing environment is not favorable to women which in turn affects their active participation in the work place (O'Carroll, 2015).

Women are often dissuaded not to take up any task that will require abandoning their supposed natural roles. In the 20th century, the legitimacy of such regimented roles was questioned by some concerned individuals. The results of some studies has come to prove that the roles performed by men and women differ from place to place and no role is strictly gender specific. For example, a study by Oakley (1974) used a data from Murdock's (1949) data to

buttress her point. According to her, 14 of the 250 societies studied by Murdock showed that lumbering was exclusively performed by both sexes. In addition, her study of Mbuti pygmies of Congo rain forest showed that no specific roles exist for women, and so hunting and caring for children are performed by both men and women.

In Nigeria today, women are still left with the responsibility of the family chores in addition to their new work schedules. This makes being employed outside the home a lot more difficult as employers put these multiple roles into consideration before any job is offered to them. Some organizations often expect newly married women to defer childbearing until the time they considered ripe for such i.e. Financial institutions. Working women in today's labour force especially in developing countries are still battling with other forms of discriminations. Some measures have been put in place to curb these challenges i.e. The International Labour Organization (ILO) in which Nigeria is a member is set to promote labor standards, develop policies and devise programs promoting decent work for all women and men, its mission is to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on work related issues. But the issue is that these programs and policies are

not very effective in Nigeria and are yet to be implemented.

Although in Nigeria today, more women are now engaging in full time formal work because of increased access to education, women still face a range of obstacles in the workplace which often prevents them from realizing their full potentials. These includes wage parity, inadequate maternity leave, sexual harassment and slow promotions to top management positions (Adejugba & Adejugba, 2018). The effect of this is that women do not reach the top management positions where they are able to actively participate in decision making that enhances the process of inclusivity and diversity in the work place. Therefore, there is need to ensure that women reach top executive positions where they can navigate, negotiate and influence real change in the society.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

1. To explore the challenges faced by working women in modern employment in Nigeria.
2. To highlight the recommendations on ways to minimize these challenges.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Traditionally, given the nature of Nigerian' patriarchal society, men have always been assigned the role of the bread winner in the family while women have played the role of home keepers and child career (Adejumoke & Olowokere, 2012). The increasing participation of Nigerian women especially in Southern Nigeria in the economic engagements of formal employment have enabled women to exercise their choice independently.

Consequently, the idea of the 'male breadwinner' is becoming increasingly obsolete. The economic necessity of having more women engage in a corporate workforce built for men also has its own downside. Working women are been subjected to countless obstacles within their environment. These includes rigid hours of work, competitive growth opportunities and corporate culture (i.e. the way we do things here syndrome) that fails to consider integration. A woman in the corporate world in Nigeria today still battles with navigating an unfriendly work terrain with inadequate policies regarding maternity leave, entry following time off, sexual harassment and a whole lot of other forms of discriminations. Women unlike men thus, constantly face the dilemma of choosing between a career or

building a family as the two are often pitched as mutually exclusive or at least one taking priority over the other.

In a research by Duxbury and Higgard (1991), it is observed that unless adequate policies exist to close this gap, there will be negative results such as dissatisfaction, depression, anxiety and perception of lower quality of life. This is the story of a lot of working women in Nigeria today since they are not adequately protected by company policies and the law. There are little or no knowledge regarding the challenges Nigerian women face in modern employment. Nigeria is experiencing rapid growth in the numbers of women joining the work force. This calls for an increasing participation in economic and political development as well as a need for women to have access to information regarding strategies on how to cope with these daunting challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

This research is anchored on the Gender Schema Theory by Bem (1981). The theory asserts that children learn about male and female roles from the culture in which they live. They adjust their behavior to align with the gender norms of their culture from the earliest stages of social development. Nigeria being a nation with traditional culture often maintains strict divisions between men and women, such that women are expected to take care of the household and raise children, while men work outside the home and support the family. Children raised in such culture will develop gender schema in line with what they observe, and through their schema will develop an understanding of what they can do as a boy or girl. This theory therefore, can be used to analyze the behavior and attitude in the work place that can adversely affect working women in Nigeria.

Empirical Review

In a research conducted by Ogbogu (2009), it is found out that female academic lay behind in research with low publication rate. He attributed this to the double demands placed on women in the home and their work place which he termed dual role syndrome. Marriage and motherhood all add heavy responsibilities on the woman. A purposive sampling method aided in gathering information from questionnaires from 381 female academic staff members from 12 universities in the six geo-

political zones of Nigeria. Ogbogu (2009) found out that the research outputs of female academics were largely affected in the earlier stage of their marriage, owing to family constraints. Women in their fifties who had more time for themselves, published more books.

In another study, Okonkwo (2013) investigated perception of gender equality and educational attainment. He observed that in spite of the level of socialization and government policies, men regard women inferior and still subject them to role of care's in the family. Using participants comprising of 105 males and 105 female students graduates and professionals, Okonkwo (2013) reported that the result of the study showed that women have more confidence in themselves and their abilities than men had in them, thus proving that the traditional gender-role socialization skill influences how men view the subject of gender inequality.

Kolade and Kehinde (2013) in a study conducted to examine the glass ceiling phenomenon regarding women's career advancement in Nigeria using a sample of 120 men and women selected from 8 construction industries in southwestern Nigeria, observed that barriers and impediments to women's entry into the work place and career progression are characterized by the prevailing anti female work culture in the construction industry in Nigeria, These barriers include recruitment discrimination, lack of promotion, stereotyping and various forms of harassment.

CHALLENGES FACED BY WORKING WOMEN IN NIGERIA

Sociocultural perception: Culture is defined as a set of belief and assumptions that holds a group of people together (Greschi & Doherty, 2000). It is important to note that this set of ideas or beliefs shape the norms and values of a society. The primary role of Nigerian women is viewed to be solely procreation and child care. Top management has to a very large degree influenced the role women play in organizations. This is consistent with the work of Hofstede (2017). Okewoke (1997) pointed out that within the Nigerian society there is a general belief that some employment activities are only meant to be undertaken by men not women. Such views are shared by a large majority of the society.

Gender pay gap: This refers to a relative average difference between the remuneration for men and women. This sounds

like an over exaggerated feminist myth in Nigeria which is not true. Many believe this pay gap exists because women do not often negotiate their salaries well. Another cause of this pay gap can be attributed to occupational segregation where some jobs especially the high paying jobs are often dominated by men.

Sexual harassment: Over the last decade, the persuasiveness and the cost of sexual harassment a manifestation of sex-based discrimination has become a growing concern at the national and international level. ILO defines sexual harassment as a sex-based behavior that is unwelcome and offensive to its recipient. Behavior that quantifies as sexual harassment includes:

- i. Physical: Physical violence, touching, unnecessary close proximity.
- ii. Verbal: Comments and questions about appearance, life-style, sexual orientation, offensive phone calls.
- iii. Non-verbal whistling, sexually-suggestive gestures, display of sexual interests.

According to a report issued in Italy 2004, 55.4% of women between the ages of 14-59 age group reported being a victim of sexual harassment. One out of three female workers are subjected to sexual intimidations for career advancement with 15% blackmailed weekly by the same harassment. Furthermore, 55.6% of women subjected to sexual intimidation had resigned from the job. Research also shows that the type of women most vulnerable to sexual harassment are young, financially dependent, single or divorced women. For men those most harassed are young, gay and members of an ethnic or racial minority.

Inhibiting laws and legislations: The prevailing laws of the country do not give wide coverage and recognition to the rights of women in the workplace. Where provisions are made, they fail to provide enough protection to address the wide range of needs. For example, in the manufacturing sector, the law impedes the appointment of female executives in core manufacturing roles which makes it hard for women to succeed in this field. Section 55 of the Labour Act 2004, for instance stipulates that women cannot undertake manual labour overnight. This law like a myriad of others seeks to offer women protection but in fact denies women the right to choose.

Work-Family conflict (WFC): Striking balance and maintaining harmony between work and family have always been a

great challenge for women in general (Adimikjiwa.et.al, 2021). WFC occurs when demands from one role (usually at home) affects one's ability to meet the demands associated with another role in another domain (usually at the work place) .Often times, care of issues at work clashes with family responsibilities, vice-versa (Leaptrohs, 2011).These conflicts if unaddressed will greatly undermine the level of job performance in the workplace for concerned employees. This can also affect the level of family happiness. In Nigeria, work-family conflict is on the increase today. As a matter of fact, there are contradicting role expectations that a career woman experiences while she is at work and at home.

On the professional front she is expected to be committed, dynamic, competitive, straight forward, non-emotional and act in a "business like" manner, and at home she is expected to be sweet, soft, sensitive, adaptable, gentle, unassertive and domesticated (Misra,1998).Therefore, women that assume multiple roles results in work-family conflict because time and energy are shared across the two spheres of activity, coping with the situation requires not only additional physical strength, personal ability and intelligence on the part of the working woman but also requires the members of her 'role set' (i.e, husband and the employer) to simultaneously make necessary modifications in their expectations(Allen et al,2000).

In Nigeria, studies have examined the effects of the work-family conflicts and job performance. Pock (2003) in his study, found out that work-family conflict alongside other variables like; leadership styles, self-efficacy, personality, job satisfaction and motivation jointly affect the efficiency of managing organizational resources by managers in work organizations.

Societal male dominance and chauvinism: Nigeria is notable for an extreme attitude of male preference at work involving an intensification of career barrier that reflects the entrenched and systematic nature of male dominance in Nigerian organizations. The dominant group supported by cultural norms and ideologies seems to gain disproportionate positive social value and material returns at the expense of the subordinate group (Toyin. et al (2020). A male dominated society is a society or system in which men hold power and

dominate roles in social, economic and political affairs. From time immemorial, Nigerian society has been a patriarchy society, (Ama,1998).

Patriarchy structure has been the major feature of the traditional society. It is a structure of a set of social relation with material base which enables men to dominate women (Stacy, 1993). It provides material advantages to male while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of females (Ama1998). Traditionally, men do not participate in domestic work including child rearing –such tasks are considered to be an exclusive domain of women while women are assigned to roles such as child rearing and cooking etc. A study conducted by (Derow,1977) reported that women even if employed and regardless of social class still do the greatest share of household and child care activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CHALLENGES

Developing and implementation of programs and policies on gender equality in the work place: One of the ways to curb or mitigate against the challenges faced by a working woman in Nigeria by developing and implementing policies that assists women with the transition and challenges in the labour market. (Okoyeuzu et al, 2012). Adequate projects and programs should be designed to assist women especially low-income earners in their effort to achieve economic independence in all spheres of life. The federal government must bear responsibility for the erosion or suspension of the rights of large section of the poor of whom majority are women.

Removal of gender pay gap: The gender pay gap must be removed. Employers must be transparent about the wages to ensure women aren't receiving less than men in equivalent roles.

Making work-life balance a priority: Improving work-life balance can benefit both men and women. Gender inequality widens considerably after women have children, an issue which can be tackled by shared parental leave policies and enabling parents to share caring of children equally. Marchant (2011). This also requires the members of her 'role set'(i.e, husband and the employer) to simultaneously make necessary modifications in their expectations (Allen et.al,2000).

Combating and preventing sexual harassment: A number of countries have adopted relevant legislative provisions that addresses sexual harassment in the work place, presently, there is no legislation present in Nigeria that covers work place sexual harassment. The employee Compensation Act of 2010 recognizes that mental stress may arise in the work place and provides that an employer is bound to pay compensation to an employee for mental stress. What it does not specify is that it could be mental stress related to sexual harassment in the work place. Even though there is no specific law for sexual harassment in the work place, criminal law in Nigeria recognizes on a general level sexual harassment as a crime that is liable to three years imprisonment upon conviction.

CONCLUSION

Many obstacles still exist on improving women's position in the work place despite efforts in promoting gender equality. This research therefore contributes to knowledge about women's challenges and to correct social inequalities against women in the work place.

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