

A STUDY ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study on women's rights and empowerment in Nigeria was conducted from May 2023 to January, 2024. The research was conducted due to the high rates of discrimination and violence against women in Nigeria. The paper has four main objectives, which are: to examine the legal frameworks for protection and promoting women's rights in Nigeria, to identify the forms of discrimination and challenges women are facing in Nigeria. The paper adopts primary and secondary sources of history. The paper discovered various ways women have been discriminated against or violated in Nigeria. Also, the study discovered the various legal frameworks responsible for protecting women's rights in Nigeria and that the implementation is not enforceable, prompting a requirement for legislative intervention. Moreso, the financial empowerment of women, education on matters related to the rights of women, and the abolition of harmful cultural practices were provided as recommendations.

Key words: Protection, Rights, Empowerment, Discrimination, Challenges.

Introduction

The perception of the struggle for women's rights, particularly in Nigeria, as a relatively recent phenomenon is alluring. Over the years, there have been significant efforts to address violence against women, gender inequality and promote women's empowerment. However, Nigeria continues to face persistent challenges, hindering the nation's overall development and social progress. Violence against women is a profound social and health problem for women in Nigeria (Nwankwo, 2008).

Women's rights in Nigeria are anchored in various international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Additionally, Nigeria has enacted several national laws and policies aimed at protecting and promoting women's rights, such as the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP Act) and the National Gender Policy.

Despite the presence of these legal frameworks, Nigerian women face notable gender imbalance and infringement. Traditional norms and cultural practices often perpetuate gender inequality and impede the realisation of women's rights.

Literature Review

Adebowale (2006) dives into the plight of widowhood in African society. The research described the agonies of widowhood, using literary elements to show the effects of unjust widowhood rites and rituals on women.

The present research focuses on Namibia and South Africa, which are lauded for having some of the most progressive laws and policies intended to advance women's rights and gender equality. Rustin (2021) stated that the Constitution provides the necessary framework for the enactment of legislation that would ensure that the principle of equality is advanced and that promotes the empowerment of women. But despite being ranked way higher in the gender gap index as compared to Nigeria and having laws in place, women in South Africa still suffer the same grievances as women in Nigeria. Women are disproportionately represented amongst the poor, the unemployed, and the hungry. Alarming high rates of gender-based violence make being a woman in South Africa more dangerous than being in some of the world's war-torn areas (OXFAM South Africa, n.d.). According to Spooner et al. (2023), South Africa has notoriously high levels of violence against women. The country has among the highest rape incidences in the world. Overall, there are laws set aside for the advancement of women's rights in South Africa, but just like Nigeria, the implementation and enforcement of those laws are an issue.

In terms of education, the Borgen Project (2023) reports that according to data from U.N. Women, the number of employed women in Namibia living under the international poverty line exceeds that of men (10.7% versus 7.7%). Additionally, in the adult population, females account for more than 70% of those experiencing severe food insecurity. Lastly, a number of interventions were undertaken to increase awareness and capacity for protecting the rights of women and girls. They include the development of the capacity for gender training through the development of gender syllabi for tertiary institutions, the establishment of a platform for engagement in the fight against Gender Based Violence through the development of the GBV Plan of Action and training of service providers (MDG Achievement Fund).

Research Methodology

Sources of data collection used in this research are Primary Sources and secondary sources, and rights activists also took part in the interviews, with attention on the live space hosted by 4 women's rights activists. The interviews depended mainly on scheduled Zoom meetings due to the distance between the activists.

This method of data collection adopted enabled the added advantage of re-living the experiences of these women's rights activists, how they dealt with challenges and how they sought to overcome those challenges. The use of interviews allowed the collection of in-depth data. The Interview method of data collection is useful as it encourages the discussion of issues involved in my research project. Each interview was recorded for knowledge purposes. Between May 20 and December 29, 2023, I interviewed 3 people: one on Zoom and two on

Google Meet. Aside from interviews, I attended an online discussion hosted by 4 people on X that spoke on topics related to my research. (See Table 1).

Cultural And Societal Norms That Marginalize Women

Nigeria has been the most popular country in W/A, a country located in West Africa, and it is featured with a rich cultural history, and it has huge diversity along ethnic, religious and economic lines. The country's National Population Commission estimated the 2011 population to be about 168 million, with women representing about 49% of the total population (Abdul et al., 2011, p. 4). Women in Nigeria are a diverse group of individuals who have a wide range of experiences and backgrounds. They are mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, entrepreneurs, professionals, and activists.

Child Marriage

Child marriage is a human rights violation that prevents girls from obtaining an education, enjoying optimal health, bonding with others their own age, maturing, and ultimately choosing their own life partners (Nour, 2006). Early marriage for the girl child was observed to be rampant in Nigeria during the period of research. Child marriage can lead to girls having sex before they are physically and emotionally ready, and when they know little about their own sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Biologically, at a tender age, their bodies aren't ready to carry the burdens of pregnancy, which eventually leads to female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), which is a human rights violation and is damaging to girls' physical and mental health. Despite a steady decline in this harmful practice over the past decade, child marriage remains widespread, with approximately one in five girls married in childhood across the globe. Today, multiple crises are threatening to reverse progress towards eliminating this human rights violation. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals call for global action to end child marriage by 2030 (UNICEF, n.d.). In Nigeria, local customs obstruct justice and exacerbate child marriage, denying women access to rights supposedly guaranteed to them. The Nigerian case exposes social and legal dynamics evident elsewhere, for there are many countries in which cultural and religious forces coalesce to prevent the full enforcement of constitutional and legislated law (Obi, 2023). To stop child marriage, policies and programs must educate communities, raise awareness, engage local and religious leaders, involve parents, and empower girls through education and employment (Nour, 2006).

Widowhood Practices

A widow is defined as a woman whose husband has died, and who has not married again (Iloka, 2022). Widowhood occurs when a married woman becomes single as a result of the death of a spouse (husband). When a woman loses her husband and becomes a widow, she is usually subjected to severe social, cultural, and economic sanctions (Offiong, et al., 2021). In many cultures, widowhood in women is considered a stigma, and widows are considered

inauspicious. Various tribes and cultures in Nigeria have diverse ways of practising rites about burial, but traditions are particularly hard on women (Elochukwu, 2021).

This research recorded a wide range of widowhood with no hope for life sustenance, instability, and socioeconomic and psychological trauma. Widowhood practices in Nigeria involve dehumanising rites and rituals that women are mandated to follow (Elochukwu, 2021). Widowhood rituals also include the physical and emotional torture which a widow is subjected to. In Northern Nigeria, widowhood rites among Muslims are as stipulated by Islamic injunctions. Among other communities that are not Muslims in the north and middle belts, such as Adamawa State, Kogi State, Kwara State, Benue, and the Plateau States, several forms of widowhood rites exist, which are dehumanising to the women (Mojekwu-Chikezie, "ä2Íl"). The Northern Nigerian States ranked highest in this regard.

Domestic Abuse / Violence

Elochukwu (2021) showed that Domestic abuse is a pattern of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, stalking, physical, harassment, online or digital abuse, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. Oluremi (2015) describes Domestic violence as a pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. This behaviour was widely recorded in the course of this research.

Another form of domestic abuse is common among Nigerian men. Elochukwu (2021) views stalking as obsessive acts of jealousy, following and checking up on or embarrassing a person in public. The keyword here is obsessive.

Someone being abused constantly is prone to injuries. A woman carrying a child is prone to miscarriages if she's constantly abused by her partner. Psychological effects in the form of depression can be seen among victims. Victims who are still living with their perpetrators, high amounts of stress, fear and anxiety are commonly reported (Oluremi, 2015). Economic abuse is also an effect of domestic violence, and it is not talked about enough.

Economic Abuse

Generally, women lack the prowess for economic emancipation (Abubakar. 2023) Financial abuse is a form of domestic violence that can take the forms of taking full control over one's finances, financial lies, manipulation, and refusing to discharge financial obligations in a marriage while also indirectly taking control of the partner's finances and 'borrowing' money with no intention to return them (Abubakar, 2023). Abubakar (2023) stressed that the ability to take money from the other partner without paying back is usually achievable because of the knowledge that the partner cannot get it back due to power imbalance and social expectations. Statistics derived from this research complement the work of (Abubakar 2025).

Even with this law in place, there are still a series of unreported cases of economic abuse in marriages. It is very important for all women to be financially stable before getting into a relationship, not relying solely on their partners for money.

Femicide

October 22, 2023, was a normal day in Nigeria with the average man's challenges. But for Justina Nkang, it was to be the worst day of her life — the day she was to be murdered by her boyfriend and dismembered (Dike, 2023).

Femicide is the intentional killing of women or girls because they are female. It is a gender-based crime that often stems from gender inequality, discrimination and power imbalances between men and women (Abatta, 2023). Femicide, which is a serious human rights violation, takes various shapes, some of which include domestic violence, and energy into teaching boys to be better humans (Omotesho, 2023).

Sexual Exploitation

Sexual exploitation is defined as an actual or attempted abuse of someone's position of vulnerability (such as a person depending on you for survival, food rations, school, books, transport or other services), differential power or trust, to obtain sexual favours, including but not only, by offering money or other social, economic or political advantages (The UN Refugee Agency, n.d.). It includes trafficking and forced prostitution. The terms "victim" and "survivor" are sometimes used interchangeably in the context of sexual exploitation. Both terms are important and have different implications (The Global Fund, n.d.). The term "victim" is a term used to describe a person who has suffered harm and is generally used in legal language or by law enforcement, while the term "survivor" is generally used in civil society and similar organisations that provide support services to recognize the strength and courage it takes to overcome sexual exploitation/abuse (The Global Fund, n.d.). This phenomenon is greatly observed in this research.

Recommendations for Future Action to Promote Women's Rights in Nigeria

1. A very important aspect of human life is money. Although money isn't everything, we need money to survive. There's a popular saying, "Money stops nonsense". With this, the first step towards promoting women's rights is working towards the financial empowerment of women.
2. There is the importance of education. By this, I don't refer to the education of females in schools, as that is already being established. By education, I refer to the introduction of women's rights in the school curriculum. I've gone through the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. Not once have I learnt about women's rights in Nigeria. By

properly educating the masses on matters related to women and their rights, it might lay the foundation for better living conditions of women in Nigeria and the promotion of their rights.

3. The laws to protect women should be reviewed with the intent of proper implementation.
4. Quota systems should be established to ensure adequate representation of women.
5. Cultural practices that discriminate and harm women should be abolished. These practices affect women in rural areas and doing so would go a long way in promoting the rights of women in rural areas.
6. For proper representation of women in politics, political activities should be carried out peacefully, with proper attention to equal representation of the sexes.
7. The media is very powerful, and the earlier the bloggers, writers and influencers speak more on matters related to the promotion of women's rights in Nigeria, the better.

Conclusion

It has been established that Nigeria is a traditional and patriarchal society, it is dominated by men. The cultural and societal norms have discriminated against and frustrated the lives of women and their development in Nigeria. Women remain neglected, shunned and unrecognised in the country. Although the government has provided the laws for the protection of women, implementation remains to be seen. The Nigerian system is made of men who look down on women; thus, the only way to break free from the shackles of the patriarchy is to fight. Women should fight for their human and national rights as they travel down their respective paths (Fehintola, 2022). Lastly, the women themselves, the police, the court, and other state agencies should be willing to assist victims of such discrimination and, where necessary, punish or heavily fine the perpetrators to deter others from committing the same offences (Offiong, et al., 2021).

References

Oral Interview

Phase	Date	Google meet interviews	Zoom interviews	Online Discussions	Physical discussions	Place
1	May 29, 2023	1				Rivers
2	June 4, 2023	1				Rivers
3	June 10, 2023			1		Lagos
4	September 18, 2023				1	Rivers
5	December 28, 2023		1			Rivers

Table 1

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