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## **GENDER BIAS: AN IMPENDING FACTOR TO THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

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This study has investigated gender bias that is existent among the different socio-economic groups in the country, which may be detrimental to the attainment of the millennium development goals of the United Nations, particularly the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment. Using Lagos, a cosmopolitan city as study base, and parents of school age children as participants in a survey that has cut across peoples of diverse ethnic background and levels of academic attainment, the study revealed that there exist gender bias views among the parents in the society that may batch the realization of the United Nations millennium development goals in the country. The results of the Analysis of variance that was performed on the data gathered revealed however that significant differences existed between the means of the enlightened parents and those with very low education as well as between the means of parents on the basis of their ethnic background.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 2001, in response to world leaders' request, the UN Secretary General presented a Road Map towards the action and targets contained in the Millennium declaration that was adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 Heads of State and Government during the UN millennium summit in September 2000. There were eight Millennium Development Goals and their break down into 21 quantifiable targets that are measured by 60 indicators. The eight goals, which are deemed to be fully implemented by the year 2015 include:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and labour
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environment sustainability; and
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

Indeed, all 192 United Nations members States and at least 23 international organizations have agreed to achieve the goals by the year 2015.

The target 3A expected that gender disparity in primary and secondary education would be eliminated preferably by the year 2005, and at all levels by 2015. In this case, the UNDP works on pro-women's policy advice, capacity development and supports projects for gender equality in collaboration with UNIFEM. It is expected that these efforts would focus on the following targets:

1. Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education.
2. Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector.
3. Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament.

These goals are indeed laudable, and their attainment may not be too difficult in those societies where women are more equal, but in the poor societies, this may not be easy due to gender stereotype, prejudice and social capital at the household level, with little social



welfare programmes provided by the government for the advantage of the poor.

In many societies around the world on account of gender bias, the boy is given preference over the female in school attendance. Thus, the female gender seemed to have been reduced to oversimplified category. They seem to have been categorized, as individuals or as a group according to oversimplified standardized image or ideas. In our own society, the salient but ignored circumstances surrounding the schooling of the girl child that seems to go unnoticed include the extent to which parents and other care givers take responsibility for their schooling relative to the attention given to the male child. This study considers the relative gender bias that are existent in our polity but seem so subtle and goes unnoticed, but, which has the possibility of derailing the attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. These are social prejudice, gender stereotype, gender bias and female maladaptive patterns. Even teachers and school authorities are not helping matters as they contribute to gender bias, first by separating the names of boys and listing them before listing girls' names in the class register. It is believed, in the Nigerian society that a girl should be seen and not heard. According to Chapman (2010) assertive behavior from girls is often seen as disruptive and may be viewed more negatively by adults.

Obviously, the celebration that attends the birth of a male child cannot be compared with that of the female child as most men would prefer to have a male child. Writing on the mindset of Nigerians concerning the obstacles to equal opportunities between men and women, Akper and Gire (2007) suggest that the minds of men and women need complete overhaul. They view the problem of girls' illiteracy as an attitude problem. If the attitude of the public favours the education of the girl child, it is unlikely that any parent will give an underage child out in marriage instead of sending her to school. Human trafficking is another dimension of the abuse which the girl-child suffers. According to Effiom and Omoku (2002) human trafficking has forced some promising young women into prostitution. In the streets of our cities, it is common to notice that more girls are learning trades like fashion designing,

hair dressing and trading out of the formal school systems than the male. Even when the male child learns such trades, it is often taken alongside with their normal schooling schedules. Teachers and school authorities are not exempted from discrimination against the girl child. These observations form the impetus that has prompted this study. It is expected that the study would make us to discover the reasons why people may prefer the male gender to the female gender and what may be done to correct this. This is expected to provide a sound basis for our policy makers to understand such extraneous variables that may mar the attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals is paramount to a sustainable development and the realization of a world where everyone is free. The world would be globalized for good and there shall be greater peace. However, no matter how good a plan is, its implementation is subject to the development of the right kind of attitude by the people for which it is intended who are expected to make up for the kind of environment that would permit the good anticipated outcome to flourish. Unicef (2006) reported that between 31% and 50% of women 20-24 were married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Many of them would have been denied the chance of empowerment. The problem of this study therefore is our loss at identifying the behaviour pattern of peoples of different socio-cultural backgrounds in Nigeria, which may scuttle the attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals as it affects in particular, goal number 3: Promote gender equality and empower women. In other words, the problem that has necessitated this study is the inability to provide substantial and empirical information on all such factors in our thought patterns, with peculiarity to socio-economic groupings that may militate against the eradication of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by the year 2005, and at all levels by 2015. It is hoped therefore that doing this study will help us to have a better understanding on the matter.



### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to establish how gender bias may impede the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women in our societies. That is, to investigate stereotype behaviours such as the thought patterns, with peculiarity to socio-economic groupings within the different tribal or ethnic groups in the country that may both the attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which include the eradication of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by the year 2005, and at all levels by 2015.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the stated problem, this study provide answers to the following questions:

1. Do parents have preferential attention for children on the basis of the child's gender?
2. Why would parents not wish to send their children to school for higher education?
3. What alternative activities could children get engaged in apart from going to school?
4. What challenges do parents face in getting their children through school?
5. What perspective do parents hold concerning the education of the female child?
6. Are there differences between the highly educated parents and those with low education concerning the education of the girl child?
7. Are there differences between parents concerning the education of the girl child on the basis of their tribal or ethnic differences?

### HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were postulated:

1. There is no significant difference in the dimension of gender stereotype between the peoples of different tribes in Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference in the dimension of gender stereotype between the highly enlightened and poorly educated peoples in Lagos.

### SCOPE OF THE STUDY

In general, all the major ethnic groups and geo-political zones of the country should have been covered in the

process of making investigation for this study. However, survey performed in Lagos has been the source of data, which formed the basis for the generalizations that this study has made. It is considered that Lagos is the cultural melting pot of Nigeria where people of diverse cultures are aptly represented.

### METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quasi-experimental design. It was essentially a survey which employed both interview and questionnaires (Parental Perception of Children Schooling Inventory – PPCSI) to obtain pertinent information from the respondents. This was a 29-item instrument with test-retest coefficient = .87. A sample of 364 parents was served with questionnaires while 86 were interviewed. These were mainly those that have deficiency in reading and writing in English language. In most cases the items in the instrument were interpreted to them in Pidgin English or in their mother tongue. The participants were drawn purposively from identified locations where certain ethnic groups are resident within and at the outskirts of the city. These included Okokomaiko, Ajangbadi, Ajegunle, Ketu, Lagos Island, Ishasi, the Lagos State University and Oshodi. In each of the cases, care was taken to have people of different cultures and genders as well as those who fell within the different levels of education properly represented. The ethnic background of the respondents (Hausa/Fulani x Igbo x Minority Groups x Yoruba) as well as their level of education (High x Low) were the major factors for comparison. Seven research questions were asked. The study had hypothesized that the United Nations Millennium Development goals cannot be attained in the year 2015 as there are gender stereotypes among the different cultures in the country that militate against the education of the girl child and are yet to be thoroughly addressed by the respective authorities. In order to be able to test this hypothesis statistically, two null hypotheses were set. These were analysed using the Univariate Analysis of Variance. In each case, the findings were supplemented with descriptive statistics like means and percentages to complement the inferential statistical procedures that was applied.



Twelve proctors were used in this study. These were postgraduate students. The data collected were scored in compliance with the specifications in the manuals of the instruments. In scoring the data, special attention was paid to such variables as the gender, ethnic background and socio-economic status and level of educational attainment. Participants who did not go beyond primary school were classified as having low education while those that had a first degree or above were considered as being highly educated. These were the basis for scoring the data and the assignment of subject into groups for analysis of data provided.

### RESULT

The data was scored by classifying the whole group of respondents into two groups on the basis of level of educational attainment (low 1; high 2), and their ethnic background (Hausa/Fulani 1; Igbo 2; Minority Groups 3; and Yoruba 4).

#### Providing Answers to the Research Questions

Only factors that are supported by at least 70% of affirmation by respondents are cited here.

**Question 1:** *Do parents have preferential attention for children on the basis of the child's gender?*

A careful analysis on this provided that parents have preferential attention for children on the basis of the child's gender (4.5/5).

**Question 2:** *Why parents would not wish to send their girl child to school for higher education. The reports obtained indicated that*

- Most girls in poor environments end up getting pregnant before completing their course of study thereby making parents' efforts a mere waste.
- Parents do not have sufficient funds to cope with all their children
- The periods within which most girls are relevant to their parents are limited.
- Going to school sometimes make children to become corrupt and indisciplined.

**Question 3:** *Alternative activities that children get engaged in place of going to school include*

- Children who do not go to school often learn a trade or skill from nearby shop/workshop

that cost less than the formal schools and has less duration of learning period.

**Question 4:** *Challenges parents face in getting their children through school include:*

- Struggling to pay school fees.
- Giving feeding money to the children every school day.
- Taking care of children's transportation to and from the schools.
- Having to deal with a number of new problem behaviours that come with the children from the school so often.
- Neglect of cultural practices and family traditions (inducing religion) by the school going children.

**Question 5:** *Perspective of parents concerning the education of the female child*

- The girl can go school to whatever level if the burden would be borne by the government or the spouse of the girl.

**Question 6:** *Differences between the highly educated parents and those with low education concerning the education of the girl child.*

- the low educated parents considered that girls do not need higher education beyond the primary school, and would not want to sponsor such endeavours while the highly educated ones consider higher education to be appropriate for girls too and would not mind to sponsor it.

**Question 7:** *Differences between parents concerning the education of the girl child on the basis of their tribal or ethnic differences.*

The Hausa/Fulani do not feel it is necessary for the girl child to proceed beyond the secondary school, the Igbo seems to be liberal to allow the girl to move on to the first degree level in as much as the financial involvement will not be borne by the parents. The Minority groups share similar opinion while the Yoruba does not see anything wrong with a girl going for even postgraduate studies even before she gets married.

#### Hypotheses Testing

A fuller assessment of the data was performed with hypotheses testing which involves the use of descriptive as well as inferential statistical measures.



*Ho 1:* There is no significant difference in the dimension of gender stereotype between the people of different tribes in Nigeria.

In order to test this null hypothesis, a One Way Analysis of variance was performed. This tested for differences between the means of dimensions of gender stereotype among the Hausa/Fulani x Igbo x Minority Groups x Yoruba peoples.

The results of the One Way Analysis of variance that was performed could not substantiate the null hypothesis as significant difference was found between the means. Thus the null hypothesis was rejected at the .05 level of significance,  $F(3, 324) = 28.757$ ,  $SS = 103.866$ ,  $MSE_{\text{Error}} = 34.622$ ,  $P > .05$ .

Table 1

Test of the Difference in the Dimension of Gender Stereotype between the Peoples of Different Tribes in Nigeria (Hausa/Fulani X Igbo X Minority Group X Yoruba Peoples)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	103.866	3	34.622	28.757	$P < .05$
Within Groups	390.073	324	1.204		
Total	493.939	327			

The analysis of variance performed was supplemented with a post hoc test, the Duncan Multiple Range Test, to help in determining the area of observed significant difference. The result showed that three homogenous groupings existed. The Yoruba were significantly different from all the other tribal groups for they are positive in their view with the schooling of the girl child. The minority groups were next to the Yoruba in their view though they stand as a homogenous group while the Igbo and the Hausa/Fulani made the third homogenous group as they showed not to be so keen about the education of the girl child and may not treat them equally as would a boy child see Table 2.

*Ho2:* There is no significant difference in the dimension of gender stereotype between the highly enlightened and poorly educated peoples in Lagos.

In order to test this null hypothesis, a Univariate Analysis of Variance was performed. This has the measures of the gender stereotypes as the dependant

Table 2

Duncan Multiple Test on Pairwise Comparisons Regarding the Difference in the Dimension of Gender Stereotype between the Peoples of Different Tribes in Nigeria (Hausa/Fulani X Igbo X Minority Group X Yoruba Peoples)

Ethnic Group	N	Subjects		
		1	2	3
Yoruba	82	2.1951		
M/Group	82		3.000	
Igbo	82			3.4756
H/Fulani	82			3.6463
Sig.		1.000	1.000	.319

variable while the level of academic attainment was the independent variable. The univariate test report provided that a highly significant difference existed between the means,  $F(1, 320) = 17.885$ ,  $SS = 20.500$ ,  $MSE_{\text{Error}} = 20.500$ ,  $P > .05$ . Thus the null hypothesis was rejected at the .05 level of significance. See Table 3. The estimates revealed that the Low educated parents are not so keen about girl child education as much as the highly educated ones.

Table 3

Test of Between-Subjects Effects on the Difference in the Dimension of Gender Stereotype between the Highly Enlightened and Poorly Educated Peoples in Lagos

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Contrast	20.500	1	20.500	17.885	$P < .05$
Error	366.780	320	1.146		

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggested that

1. Parents have preferential attention for children on the basis of the child's gender? (4.8/5).
2. Most girls in poor environments end up getting pregnant before completing their course of study thereby making parents' efforts a mere waste.
3. Parents do not have sufficient funds to cope with all their children.
4. The periods within which most girls are relevant to their parents are limited.
5. Going to school sometimes make children to become corrupt and indisciplined.



6. Children who do not go to school often learn a trade or skill from nearby place that cost less than the formal schools and has less duration of learning period.
7. Struggling to pay school fees.
8. Giving feeding fees to the children every school day.
9. Taking care of children's transportation to and from the schools.
10. Having to deal with a number of new problem behavior that come with the children from the school so often.
11. The girl can go to school to whatever level if the burden would be borne by the government or the spouse of the girl.
12. The low educated parents considered that girls do not need higher education beyond the primary school, and would not want to sponsor such endeavours while the highly educated oneness considers higher education to be appropriate for girls too and would not mind to sponsor it.
13. The Hausa/Fulani do not feel it is necessary for the girl child to proceed beyond the secondary school, the Igbo seems to be liberal to allow the girl to move on to the first degree level in as much as the financial involvement will not be borne by the parents. The Minority groups share similar opinion while the Yoruba does not see anything wrong with a girl going for even postgraduate studies even before she gets married.

*So also the results of the study revealed that*

14. Significant difference in the dimension of gender stereotype between the peoples of different tribes in Nigeria.
15. There existed significant difference in the dimension of gender stereotype between the highly enlightened and poorly educated peoples in Lagos.

The results obtained had shown that enlightened parents have positive stance concerning the education of the girl child. This is in spite of financial constraints faced by these parents; some realize that the only way out of pervasive poverty that has enveloped the country

is the education of their daughters, since according to Ogbuagu (2000:17) "education is a sine-qua-non for self-actualisation and betterment". On the other hand, parents with low education, mainly because of poverty, misinformation and negligence of the respective governments in making adequate provision for the schools and scholars have possibly exasperated the peoples. This is tantamount to abuse (Kendal-Tackett, & Eckenrode (2009), which may have serious repercussions on the life of the peoples (Hill: 2005). Many graduates are truly roaming our streets without job. A large number of jobless people in our country are parents and there are no social welfare programmes that can assist them in caring for their children too. In the light of these findings, it is considered that unless drastic measures are taken by the respective agencies, the realization of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals may remain a mirage.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has exposed that gender bias, which is rooted in gender stereotype that is counterproductive and rooted in the culture of poverty is a potent threat to the realization of the United Nations Millennium development goals in our country. The desired equal access to education may not be attained if the mental set and the social economic situation of parents are not properly addressed and aligned positively. Thus, it is herein recommended that

1. Public enlightenment on the importance of training the girl child should be made across the nation.
2. Sex education must be taken seriously while parents should as well be enlightened on the need to provide proper guidance to their children rather than apathy.
3. Government should provide education to the girl child up to the university level.
4. Discipline in schools should be taken more seriously.
5. More trade centres and continuing education centres should be provided.
6. Government should provide free transport for school children as it is done in other developed countries.



7. Government should provide more employment opportunities for its citizens so that they may be able shoulder their responsibilities as parents.
8. Educated women in the society should eschew self-imposed humility so as to serve as worthy models to the upcoming generation.

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