

Towards Empowerment of the Nigerian Girl-Child, the Socio-Cultural Diagnosis

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Abstract *The study examined the socio-cultural factors affecting the girl-child and strategies towards the empowerment of the Nigerian girl-child. The population of the study comprised of all 228 female load carriers in three major markets in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. All the population was used for the study. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Data collected were analysed applying frequency counts and mean statistics. Findings revealed that early marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), taboos are some of the socio-cultural factors affecting Nigerian Girl-child. The findings of the study showed that poverty, physiological and psychological are effects of socio-cultural factors on Nigerian girl child. The findings of the study further revealed that empowering the girl-child in Education, vocational skills and establishing of girls' clubs in market places and schools will help the Nigerian girl-child in getting her full potentials in life. Based on these findings, the study recommended that Federal government of Nigeria should make sure that all laws prohibiting malpractices against girl-child and women are religiously implemented and anybody who goes against such laws should be sanctioned irrespective of their positions and society.*

Keywords: *empowerment, Nigeria, Socio-Cultural Diagnosis*

1. Introduction

According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1998), marginalization of the girl-child was due to cultural and economic constraints militating against women empowerment, thereby preventing them from participating in decisions that affect them. Odaga and Herald (1995) maintained that socio-cultural factors have led to low investment in female education and hence, low societal demand for female education. Socio-cultural factors refer to a range of factors working against an individual's ranking and or position in a society (Onwueme and Ugbor, 1994). Cultural factors are therefore reflected in the patterns of behavior, beliefs, preferences, customs and traditions which account for gender-based differences within a society. It has been observed therefore that the socio-cultural environment in which the girl-child operates does not motivate her to attain her full potential (Aderinto, 1991). Ogidi (1997) stated that girls are often seen as future wives and mothers and parental attitudes toward them are largely influenced by socio-cultural factors which could have negative impact on her well-being. Oladunni (1996) stated that a girl-child is a victim of customs and traditions which ensures that she remains permanently disadvantaged. These factors contribute to making a girl-child a second class citizen and more vulnerable. Longman dictionary defines empowerment as giving someone the power or lawful right.

Smith (1996) posited that empowerment is the act of encouraging people to become more involved in the decisions and activities that affect their lives. This means providing people with the opportunity to show that they can generate good ideas and that they have the skills to put these ideas into practice. Child empowerment involves giving disadvantaged group of children the ability to improve their situation. Empowering girls at an early age in life will enable them mature into

womanhood as complete beings. This will lift them out of the dungeon of illiteracy, poverty, diseases and death. Socio-cultural factors militate against girl-child empowerment and removal of the socio-cultural factors will further empower the girl-child in her ability to participate in development related activities.

2. Statement of the Problem

In major markets in Oyo State, Ibadan, Nigeria, the common feature which cannot escape one's notice is the female load carriers who run to buyers in order to assist in carrying loads. The buyers after engaging them pay them any amount they feel is good for the service rendered by these girls. These girls live and derive their means of existence on load carrying jobs. These girl children are physically, psychologically and economically deficient and exploited by adults. The researchers observed that the pitiable conditions of these girls in market places might be due to some socio-cultural factors which call for definite and drastic measures. In view of this, the researchers diagnosed the socio-cultural factors affecting girl-child and found some strategies for empowering them.

3. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to diagnose the socio-cultural factors affecting the Nigerian girl-child. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. determine the socio-cultural factors affecting Nigerian girl-child;
2. determine the effects of socio-cultural factors on Nigerian girl-child;

4. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the socio-cultural factors affecting Nigerian girl-child?
2. What are the effects of socio-cultural factors on Nigerian girl-child?

5. Method

The design adopted for carrying out this study was a descriptive survey. The study was carried out in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The population of the study was 228 comprising of all female load carriers who are in three major markets in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The population of the study is represented in the table below:

Table 1: Population of Respondents

S/NO	NAME OF MARKET	POPULATION
1.	Bodija market	91
2.	Sango market	78
3.	Ojo market	59
	Total	228

The entire population was used for the study and so there was no sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was used for collecting data. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Sections A and B. Section A was on the bio-data of the respondents. Section B was made up of items drawn from the research questions. The questionnaire was structured on a four point likert scale of Strongly Agree(SA), Agree(A), Disagree(D) and Strongly Disagree(SD). The instrument was validated by three experts in measurement and evaluation and adult education. The three experts were requested to validate the instrument in terms of:

1. clarity of instruction to the respondents
2. proper wording of the items and
3. appropriateness and adequacy of the items in addressing the purpose of the study.

Their recommendations served as guide to modifications of items in the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha method. The co-efficient alpha for the two sections were 0.96 and 0.95. These values indicate that the instrument was highly reliable. The questionnaire was collated and analysed through the use of frequency tables and mean scores. A mean score of 2.50 and above was regarded as accepted otherwise rejected.

6. Results

Section A which is the bio-data of the respondents are presented below:

Age Distribution	No	%
8-10	76	33.3
11-13	88	38.6
14-17	64	28.1
Total	228	

Table 2 above revealed that respondents were distributed in three broad age groups. 8-10 years 33.3%, 11-13 years 38.6 and 14-17 years 28.1.

Table 3: Respondents place of birth

State	No	%
Oyo	124	54.4
Osun	31	13.6
Ogun	12	5.26
Ondo	8	3.50
Ekiti	6	2.63
Kwara	2	0.88
Kaduna	32	14.03
Niger	13	5.70

From table 3 above, respondents to the item on place of birth were varied. Most of the respondents are from Oyo with 54.4%, Osun 13.6%, kaduna 14.03%. It is important to emphasize that a larger proportion of those born in Oyo are in the majority and many of them are from the rural areas and not necessarily Ibadan city.

Table 4: Educational background of respondents

Type of school	No	%
No formal school	205	89.91
Primary six	23	10.09
Total	228	

The table above shows that 89.91% did not go to school while 10.09% had primary six education. This shows that majority of the respondents are illiterates.

Table 5: Marital status of respondents

Marital status	No	%
Single	77	33.78
Married	65	28.50
Widowed	56	24.56
Total	228	

Table 5 revealed that 33.78% have not married. 28.50 are married while 24.56 are widows. The findings of the section B are presented in accordance with the research questions that guided the study.

Research Question 1

What are the socio-cultural factors affecting Nigerian girl-child?

Answers to this research question is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Mean Responses of the respondents on the socio-cultural factors affecting the Nigerian girl-child.

S/No	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Weighted mean	Mean	Decision
	What are the socio-cultural factors affecting the girl-child?								
1.	Early marriage	64	60	57	47	228	597	2.62	Accepted
2.	Female Genital mutilation	70	57	53	48	228	605	2.65	Accepted
3.	Widowhood practices	61	68	41	58	228	588	2.58	Accepted
4.	Taboos	65	62	55	46	228	602	2.64	Accepted

Table 6 shows mean responses on the socio-cultural factors affecting the Nigerian girl.

Research Question 2

What are the effects of socio-cultural factors affecting Nigerian girl-child?

Answers to this research question is presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Mean Responses of the respondents on the effects of socio-cultural factors on the Nigerian girl-child.

S/No	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Weighted mean	Mean	Decision
	What are the effects of socio-cultural factors on the Nigerian girl-child?								
1.	Denial from going to school	74	62	51	41	228	625	2.74	Accepted
2.	Physiological effects	73	61	58	36	228	627	2.75	Accepted
3.	Poverty	75	69	51	33	228	642	2.82	Accepted
4.	Psychological effects	69	68	53	38	228	624	2.58	Accepted

Table 7 reveals mean responses on effects of socio-cultural factors on girls is quite high because all of the items scores above 2.50 which means that all the respondents accepted all as the effects of socio-cultural factors affecting girl-child.

7. Discussion

The results from bio-data of the respondents revealed that poverty in the society is a major factor that made the girl-child not to go to school or stopped schooling. The prevailing economic hardship constrains parents' financial support for education. In such a situation, the overriding interest is on sustaining the source of livelihood rather than supporting girl child education. In essence, the girl child did not go to school in order to support parents and to fend for themselves. This falls in line with Udoh (2001) who stated that the girl-child is encouraged to prostitute her body for money does so either to regiment the family financial resources or to obtain some money so as to be independent of her poor parents.

The results of research question one show that girl child responses on socio-cultural factors ranges from early marriage, Female Genital Mutilation, widowhood practices and taboos. These findings fall in line with the findings of Adebola (2009) and Udoh (2001) who opined that socio-cultural factors affecting girl-child involve early marriage, female Genital Mutilation and widowhood practices.

The result of research two showed the effects of socio-cultural factors on girl-child in Nigeria. This findings corroborates Udoh (2001) and Emegwa (2010) who stated that early marriage can deny a girl the opportunity of going to school. The findings of the study showed that socio-cultural factors can lead to physiological and medical effects of the girl child.

This finding is supported by Enukorah (1982) in Adebola (2010) who noted that physically, widows might be wounded which may lead to their deaths. Udoh (2001) and Emegwa(2010) also supported this view by stating that early marriage could cause Vesico Vagina Fistula (VVF) due to the fact that the birth canal, of the prospective mother is not matured enough for the baby's exist. In support of the effects of Female Genital Mutilation, Delano (1999) highlighted some of the effects which include heavy bleeding, acute infections like tetanus and HIV/AIDS, frequent in passing urine resulting in pain and infection of the bladder. The findings of the study also revealed that psychologically, girl-child is affected. This fall in line with Udoh (2001) who stated that the early responsibility of motherhood thrust on a girl would sentence her to life of slavery, a life without fulfillment, except to breed children. According to Ejiiofor (1991) in Adebola (2009), widows are meant to suffer psychological problems which amongst others is madness. The findings of the study showed that socio-cultural factors could have poverty effect on the girl-child. This finding support Udoh (2001) who stated that socio-cultural factors such as early marriage is as a result of poverty in the family.

8. Strategies

Education: The key to girl's progress is education and learning. Education is an indispensable means of realizing other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities.

Education has a vital role in empowering girl and safeguarding them from exploitative and hazardous labour and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment and controlling population growth. Adebola (1997) stated that the Millennium Development Declaration of 8th September, 2000 resolved that by the year 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike would be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys would have equal access to all levels of education. Education of girls should be made priority. This is because educational status of women in any nation correlates with its level of development. Consequently, the higher the level of girls' education status, the more developed the state or nation. It is through education that women can change their cultural inhibitions which adversely affects them and place them in inferior position. Education empowers girl-child by improving their living standard. Education should be made compulsory for everybody including the girls. If the Nigerian government is really committed to the welfare of the children, it has to provide free education. Poverty is one of the major causes of girls going into the business of load carrying. Majority of the girls went into this business of load carrying because of financial problems which have made them to abandon schooling or made them not to attend at all. It is imperative for the government to improve the standard of living of the citizens. Scholarships can be given to these girls too.

Vocational skills: Girl-child can be trained in vocational skills like fashion designing, hair dressing, soap making, interior decoration, bead making and so on. These vocational skills could generate higher income for these girls which is better than carrying loads for people in the market with a small money. Training these girls in different vocations of their choices will bring about positive changes in their lives.

Establishing girl's club in schools and markets: Girls clubs can be set up in schools and markets to educate girls about harmful effects of socio-cultural factors as well as importance of education. In these clubs, girls will be able to share and discuss issues relating to their lives and how to solve them.

9. Conclusion

This study has diagnosed the socio-cultural factors affecting Nigerian girl-child. It has been recognized that girls are affected by some socio-cultural factors. Faced with all these problems and predicaments, they cannot do so much as far as development of their communities and the nation is concerned. This situation therefore calls for a decision by the society to take adequate steps to eliminate these practices which affect girl child in order to achieve a gender fair and gender friendly society which will make it possible for girls to be integrated into the development process.

10. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, recommendations are made:

Nigerian girl-child should be sensitized about their rights. Many of them do not know their Fundamental Human Rights such as rights to education, right that could allow them to challenge and reject all conditions that seek to make them inferior, subjugate them, oppress and deny them equal access to policy and decision-making positions.

Federal government of Nigeria should make sure that all laws prohibiting malpractices against girl-child and women are religiously implemented and anybody who goes against such laws should be sanctioned irrespective of their positions and society.

Federal government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and philanthropists could support the education of the girl-child by giving them scholarships and free education.

Community heads or village heads should be aware that the world is moving fast and changing and that there are some certain beliefs and traditions that needed to be modified. Beliefs such as the place of the girl-child or women is in the kitchen because they will be married away.

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