

PROTECTION PRACTICES INFLUENCING GIRL-CHILD LEVEL OF EMPOWERMENT IN SELECTED AGRARIAN COMMUNITIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Assumptions about capabilities of females and males result in different opportunities, access to resources and benefits. The study assessed the existing pattern of girl-child protection practices and the prevailing socio-cultural practices that affect her level of empowerment. Multistage sampling technique was employed. Four United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) assisted States namely Oyo, Enugu, Kaduna and Bauchi States as well as Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja were purposively selected. Three Local Government Areas (LGAs) were selected from each of the four States based on level of food production, while one Area council was selected from Abuja. One community was randomly chosen from the LGAs. Ten each of girls, boys and adults were selected from the 13 communities to give a total of 390 respondents. Data were analysed using both descriptive statistics (percentages and frequency) and Pearsons Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). Only 68.20% of the respondents were between 10 and 20 years while 38.72 had no formal education. Significant relationship exists in Oyo State only between access to western type of education ($r=0.02$) and the level of empowerment of the girl child. In Enugu State, significant relationship exist between the girl-child level of empowerment and health care provision ($r=0.22$), nutritional care ($r=0.32$), parental support/care ($r=0.32$), protection from physical abuse ($r=0.30$), and protection from difficult circumstances ($r=0.35$) while in Kaduna State, significant relationship exists between the girl-child level of empowerment and their health care provision ($r=0.38$). In Oyo State, of the socio-cultural practices, the level of empowerment of the girl-child had significant relationship with male preference ($r=-0.30$), early marriage ($r=-0.24$) and in FCT, early marriage ($r=-0.44$) and female subordination ($r=-0.56$) express significant relationship with girl-child level of empowerment. Access of the girl child to protection practices such as education, health care provision, nutritional care, parental support, protection from discrimination on the basis of gender affect her level of empowerment. The removal of socio-cultural constraints such as lack of inheritance rights, nutritional taboo would enable her maximize her potentials. The socialization process needs to be modified to eradicate the gender division of labour.

Key words: Parental support, nutritional status, girl-child participation, productivity, and deprivations.

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INTRODUCTION

A lot of policies have been put in place in Nigeria by stake holders for children empowerment (Tomorrow, 2000). Such programmes include Child Care Trust Programme (CTP), Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation Programme (WOTCLEF), National Commission for Nomadic Education, Better Life Programme for Rural Women, Family Economic Advancement Programme, Cheap Aids Treatment Scheme, School Feeding Programme and Rotary Foundation 3-H Project. Smith (1996) posited that empowerment is the act of 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. The concept of empowerment according to Batliwala (1994) refers to control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. The material assets over which control can be exercised may be physical, human or financial, such as land, water, forests, people's bodies, labour, money and access to money.

Protection practices therefore refer to those things being put in place by the society as a way of ensuring the survival and development of its citizens. Such practices will enable them to reap the benefit of scientific and technological innovations, making it possible for them to grow more food, find and hold high remuneration and prestigious jobs and thus lift them and their children out of the merciless cauldron of illiteracy, poverty, diseases and death (Maduwesi, 1994). Society and parents have the obligation to maintain and protect children. Children should be protected from all forms of harmful practices. Most forms of abuse such as

child labour, street begging, early marriage, withdrawal from school, denial of food, sexual exploitation, gender discrimination and other violation of the rights of the child occur mainly at the family and society levels. This has effect on their survival and development, which are major challenges on their own. Therefore empowering girls at an early age in life will enable them mature into womanhood as complete beings. England (2000) associated women's empowerment with traditional demographic variables. He argued that the exercise of power affects outcomes such as food, medical care, shelter, income, respectful treatment for herself, job, property, privacy, freedom from violence, sexual pleasure and the desired family size. Gage (2000) stressed the importance of empowering women during adolescence, pinpointing the social costs of young people's inability to exert control over their resources. Such people, according to him, become socially and economically disadvantaged throughout their lives than those who delay child bearing until their twenties. They are less likely to complete their education, be employed to earn high wages and be happily married, as they are likely to have larger families and to receive welfare. Women are generally constrained in their ability to improve and sustain their economic enterprises and enhance productivity most especially in the agrarian communities where her fundamental role is conceived as that of bearing and raising children (Pace-setters, 2005). There is evidence from case studies supporting the relentless participation of women in agricultural workforce. They are responsible for the provision of more than fifty percent (50%) of the food grown worldwide (FAO, 1995). In realization of the belief that

women empowerment is a necessary tool for productivity and economic advancement, this study intends to access the protection practices being put in place to enhance girl-child empowerment in the agrarian communities of Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

There is an increasing awareness that boys and girls are treated differently throughout their lives which, according to UNICEF (1991, 1993) relate to cultural perceptions of both male and female responsibilities. Oloko (2000) opined that these negative attitudes and practices deserve documentation to facilitate change. The fact is also corroborated by Sharma (1995) who suggested an in-depth study of the situation to give an insight into gender differences with respect to the future leaders. There are also common sayings that educate a boy, and you educate an individual, but educate a woman and you educate a nation. Despite the contribution of women to national development including agriculture, gender issues remain unaddressed by stakeholders including agricultural technology developers (Miquel and Susanna, 1990). Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Children sets out the principle that every child has a right to survival, protection and that development applies equally to every child regardless of sex. There is therefore a need to assess the protection practices being put in place by the society at ensuring the survival and development of the girl-child most especially in the agrarian communities in Nigeria.

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant relationship between the existing pattern of girl

-child protection practices and her level of empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling procedure and sample size

Step 1: A multistage sampling technique was used. For the purpose of this study, the country was divided into 4 zones representing zones with UNICEF zonal offices and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

Zone A – South east zone covers Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Benue, Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and River state. Zone B – South west covers Delta, Edo, Ekiti, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Osun and Oyo. Zone C – North west consist of FCT Abuja, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Niger, Sokoto, Zamfara while Zone D – North east consists of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Nassarawa, Plateau, Taraba and Yobe states.

Step 2: Purposive sampling method was used to locate farm families in the food basket zones of the various states in Nigeria as suggested by Udo et al. (1993). Communities in three LGAs out of the existing 23 LGAs of Kaduna State namely Igabi, Giwa and Birnin Gwari were interviewed. In Bauchi state, three agricultural communities in three communities out of the existing 23 LGAs namely Misau, Toro and Bauchi were sampled. In Oyo state, samples were drawn from three (3) LGAs; Ibarapa, Oyo Central, Oyo North out of the existing 32 LGAs. FCT has 6 LGAs out of which one (1) was sampled namely Gwagwalada. Enugu State has 19 LGAs out of which 3 were sampled (Enugu, Nsukka and Orji river).

Step 3: Ten (10) each of boy, girl and adults were selected from each of the LGAs in each of the states using a household listing. This involves selecting the *n*th subject or item from serially listed population. This means, selecting every 5th or 10th household after the first, depending on the number of households in a community.

Step 4: In each of the households, the researcher identified a boy, girl and adult for sampling through systematic approach. At least 10% of the LGAs in each of the state was purposively selected based on the study of Udo et al. (1993) on the food basket zones in Nigeria.

In all, a total of one hundred and thirty (130) boys, girls and adults respondents were selected. Two In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted in each of the communities to give a total of 26 IDIs. Opinions of leaders and elites were sought on the social and cultural factors operating in the communities vis-à-vis the empowerment of the girl-child in the various communities

RESULTS

The mean age of the respondents is 23.08 years with the minimum being 10 years, and the maximum being 80 years. Table 2 shows that majority (68.20%) of the respondents are between 10-20 years, while 18.21 percent are between 21-30 years. About 6 percent of the respondents are over 50 years of age. The educational level as shown on Table 2 reveals that 38.72 percent of the respondents have no formal education, while about 52 percent attended primary school. Only 2.82 percent completed secondary school. Table 2

also shows that 57.95 percent of the respondents were Muslims while 38.46 percent were Christians. Table 2 indicates that 38.72 percent of the respondents are Hausas, 24.36 percent are Yorubas while 24.87 percent are Igbos. Other tribes identified by the study are Fulanis, Udomas, Egbiras, Jarawa, Kufai, Ribina, Ilimuro, Gusawa, Sanga, Buli and Gyerawa.

Table 3 shows that in Oyo State, 98 percent of the respondents believe that girls have access to health care provisions, parental support/care and protection from difficult circumstances (war). Table 3 further indicates that in Enugu State respondents felt that girls have nutritional care (98.89%), health care provisions (97.78%), parental care/support (97.78%), protection from psychological abuse (80.00%). Table 3 further shows that in Kaduna State, over 90 percent of the respondents believe that adequate health care provisions, nutritional care, parental support/care, protection from sexual abuse, and protection from difficult circumstances are available for girls.

The relationship between existing pattern of girl-child protection practices and her level of empowerment was also tested. Table 4 reveals that significant relationship exist in Oyo State only between access to western type of education ($r=0.02$) and the level of empowerment of the girl child. Table 4 further indicates that in Enugu State, significant relationship exist between the girl-child level of empowerment and health care provision ($r=0.22$), nutritional care ($r=0.32$), parental support/care ($r=0.32$), protection from physical abuse ($r=0.30$), and protection from difficult circumstances ($r=0.35$). The result further

shows that in FCT, healthcare provisions (r=0.42), parental support (r=0.49), protection from physical abuse (r=0.47), protection from psychological abuse (r=0.50), involvement in decision making at household level (r=0.52) and protection for difficult circumstances including war (r=0.53) are significantly correlated with girl-child level of empowerment.

DISCUSSION

As regards health care provision in Oyo state, the result obtained could be due to the fact that the people have access to health care delivery services put in place by the government at the Federal, State and Local Government levels. This means that people within this agrarian community avail themselves and their children (including girls) the benefit of such services. In the same vein, result obtained for parental support or care is an indication that most rural indigenes in Oyo State give adequate care to the young ones, including the girl-child. The girls in this community thus have good access to high nutritional status, health care, parental support and protection from psychological abuse.

Result obtained in Enugu state indicates that society cherishes the girl-child and allows them access to the institutions. The health and nutrition status of most girls in Enugu State is therefore good. This would have effect on girl-child participation in development-related activities in the agrarian communities, including agriculture. Result obtained regarding parental support is in agreement with the study of Meek (1971) who found out that discriminatory child maltreatment existed in the

past which included the destruction/ abandonment of twins and physically deformed children among the Igbo, Edo, Igbira and Nupe, as they are believed to cause calamities vented by the spirit of dead ancestors and nature gods. In-depth interview conducted revealed that women are often abused psychologically as discussants during the meeting re-iterated that

“women should not talk whenever the husband talks”

This norm has transcended across the families to the society. This has also traditionally excluded them from direct participation in decision making.

Since over 90 percent of respondents in Kaduna state viewed health care provision, nutritional care and parental support as in place for the girl-child, one can deduce the possibility that girls within these communities are well integrated into the community. This could indicate their acceptance as members of the community by the community members. This form of acceptance might therefore suggest their involvement in agricultural enterprises. This could enhance their performance in this regard. This might go a long way in ensuring survival, growth, reproduction as well as productivity at work.

As regards the test of hypothesis, result indicates that the more the girls in Oyo State have access to western type of education, the more their level of empowerment. With improved access of girl-child to education, her level of empowerment is likely to improve. This is in line with the findings of Work (1996), which reported that discrimination in education is one of the main causes of female poverty and under-

employment. Girls who are exposed to western education thus have more probability of being empowered.

In Enugu State, the result obtained shows that the more a girl has access to health care provisions, the more empowered she becomes. Hence, such girls would enjoy maternal and child care health delivery system. Also, the more a girl is exposed to high nutritional status, the more assured her survival, growth, reproduction and productivity at work. Also the more the parental support/care, the more empowered she becomes as she exhibits sense of security and belongingness. In FCT, the more girls' access to health care provisions, the more they are empowered. This implies her enjoyment of medical interventions in time of need. Also, the more she is exposed to parental care, the more empowered she becomes. Also, the more she enjoys protection from physical abuse, the greater her empowerment. Hence, she would have access to less deprivation. Furthermore, the more she enjoys protection from physical abuse, the more would be her level of empowerment. Thus, she would have good emotional and psychological make-up. Moreover, the more the girls' access to protection from psychological abuse, the greater she experiences empowerment. Hence, such girls experience less of psychological disorders such as low self esteem, loss of confidence, fear, regression, insomnia and hatred. In support of this fact, a women leader reported,

“there are cases of exploitation of women and girls by husbands and some women have been disabled by the criminal action of violent spouses.”

The result obtained indicates that

the more the males are preferred, the less empowered are the girls. This shows that preference of the male child leads to the neglect of the girls, which affect their empowerment. Also, the more the girls are exposed to early marriage, the less empowered they become. Such females may end up not having completed their education or having learnt a craft or trade, thus making them liabilities. Also, the more the possibility of female seclusion, the less empowered are the girls. This practice has the potential of excluding them from civilization.

The result obtained in Kaduna state is an indication that the higher the prevalence of these practices the lower the level of girl-child empowerment. These practices are therefore against the moral and psychological development of a growing child since the more she is exposed to it, the less empowered she becomes. Her dignity is thus affected. In FCT therefore, the more girls get married early, the less would be their level of empowerment. This shows that girls who marry early might not be able to take adequate participation in decisions affecting their lives, as they might not be well matured for this role. Also, the more a girl is exposed to female subordination, the less her level of empowerment. Thus such girls might end up as mediocre as she might not be economically self-sufficient.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Certain protection practices such as education and health, have been put in place by the society to protect children in general including the girl-child. Focussing on adequate functioning of these facilities would further empower the girl-child. Also, it shows that preference of the male child

leads to the neglect of the girls, which affects their empowerment. Also, socio-cultural practices such as early marriage and lack of inheritance rights affects the girl-child's level of empowerment. The more the possibility of female seclusion, the less empowered she becomes. The modernization of the civil laws and the eradication of major socio-cultural practices from the various communities would further empower the girl-child.

Since education is an important ingredient of empowerment, government should come up with policies that will bring about improvement in female school enrollment. Increasing education of girls in agrarian communities will assist in ensuring the next generation's stock of human capital. In areas where social and cultural barriers exists for girl-child's education, government should come up with mechanisms to increase girl's enrollment such as hiring female teachers, building separate schools for girls. Also books, uniforms and free education programmes will increase the number of females in school enrolment. The curriculum of such institutions could be structured in a way that would allow for flexibility taking into account the multiple obligations of females.

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Table 1: Composition of the sample based on the LGAs/Villages of the State

State	No of LGAs	LGA selected	Village	Communities	No. of in/out school respondents		No of adult respondents	No of IDI
					Female	Male		
Kaduna	23	Igabi	Turunku	Old Turunku, New Turunku	10	10	10	2
		Giwa	Giwa	Giwa	10	10	10	2
		Birnin Gwari	Birnin Gwari	Birnin Gwari and Anguwar shitu	10	10	10	2
Bauchi	23	Misau	Misau	Beti and Shalludi	10	10	10	2
		Toro Bauchi	Toro Bauchi	Toro Tsakani and Gwalameji	10	10	10	2
Oyo	32	Ibarapa	Eruwa	Old Eruwa and New Eruwa	10	10	10	2
		Oyo West	Oyo	Fashola and Jobele	10	10	10	2
		Oyo North	Saki	Ilua and Igbo Odogwu (Ifedapo LGA)	10	10	10	2
Enugu	19	Enugu	Enugu	Camp 2, Iva valley, Ugbo Odogwu	10	10	10	2
		Nsukka	Nsukka	Obukpa and Eden	10	10	10	2
		Orji River	Orji river	Agbalaeyi and Orji-nato	10	10	10	2
FCT	6	Gwagwalada	Gwagwalada	Pikon-kore and Dobi	10	10	10	2
TOTAL					130	130	130	26

Table 2: Frequency and percentage distribution of respondents by demographic characteristics

	OYO (n=90)		ENUGU (n=90)		KADUNA (n=90)		BAUCHI (n=90)		FCT (n=30)		TOTAL (n=390)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Age (years)												
10-20	62	68.89	63	70.00	61	67.78	60	66.67	20	66.67	266	68.20
21-30	15	16.67	6	6.66	7	7.77	6	6.67	4	13.33	38	9.74
31-40	10	11.11	5	5.56	9	10.00	7	7.78	2	6.67	33	8.47
41-50	3	3.33	8	8.89	7	7.77	10	11.11	2	6.67	30	7.69
>50	0	0.00	8	8.89	6	6.68	7	7.77	2	6.67	23	5.90
Total	90	100.00	90	100.00	90	100.00	90	100.00	30	100.00	390	100.0
Education												
No formal education	30	33.33	31	34.44	33	36.67	48	53.33	9	30.00	151	38.72
Pry. Uncompleted	11	12.22	20	22.22	30	33.33	20	22.22	4	13.33	85	21.79
Pry completed	39	43.33	34	37.78	22	24.44	15	16.67	10	33.33	120	30.77
Sec. Uncompleted	2	2.22	3	3.33	4	4.44	3	3.33	2	6.67	14	3.59
Sec. Completed	6	6.67	2	2.22	0	0.00	2	2.22	1	3.33	11	2.82
Poly/technical/ university	2	2.22	0	0.00	1	1.11	2	2.22	4	13.33	9	2.31
Total	90	100.00	90	100.00	90	100.00	90	100.00	30	100.00	390	100.0
Religion												
No response	2	2.22	2	2.22	3	3.33	7	7.78	0	0.00	14	3.59
Islam	69	76.67	0	0.00	74	82.22	68	75.56	15	50.00	226	57.95
Christianity	19	21.11	88	97.78	12	13.33	15	16.67	15	50.00	149	38.46
Total	90	100.00	90	100.00	90	100.00	90	100.00	30	100.00	390	100
Marital Status												
No response	2	2.22	0	0.00	4	4.44	5	5.55	0	0.00	11	2.82
Single	60	66.67	60	66.67	51	56.67	51	56.67	18	60.00	240	61.54
Married	27	30.00	24	26.67	25	27.78	27	30.00	9	30.00	112	28.72
Separated/widowed/ divorced	1	1.11	6	6.67	10	11.11	7	7.77	3	10.00	27	6.92
Total	90	100.00	90	100.00	90	100.00	90	100.00	30	100.00	390	100
Ethnic background												
No response	3	3.33	0	0.00	5	5.56	12	13.33	1	3.33	21	5.38
Yoruba	87	96.67	1	1.11	2	2.22	1	1.11	4	13.33	95	24.36
Igbo	0	0.00	88	97.78	2	2.22	6	6.67	1	3.33	97	24.87
Hausa	0	0.00	0	0.00	79	87.78	70	77.78	2	6.67	151	38.72
Others	0	0.00	1	1.11	2	2.22	1	1.11	22	73.33	26	6.67
Total	90	100.00	90	100.00	90	100.00	90	100.00	30	100.00	390	100.00

Table 3: Respondents' view of existing pattern of girl-child protection practices

	OYO (n=90)		ENUGU (n=90)		KADUNA (n=90)		BAUCHI (n=90)		FCT (n=30)		TOTAL (n=390)	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Health care provision	89	98.89	88	97.78	81	90.00	85	94.44	21	70.00	364	93.33
Nutritional care	90	100.00	89	98.89	86	95.56	84	93.33	25	83.33	374	95.90
Education – access to western type	71	78.89	86	95.56	68	75.55	35	38.89	23	76.67	283	72.56
Parental support/care	89	98.89	88	97.78	84	93.33	82	91.11	26	86.67	369	94.62
Protection from sexual abuse	85	94.44	69	76.67	85	94.44	75	83.33	20	66.67	334	85.64
Protection from physical abuse	68	75.56	68	75.56	77	85.56	75	83.33	17	56.67	305	78.21
Protection from psychological abuse (threats, abuses, harassment)	75	83.33	72	80.00	73	81.11	61	67.78	16	53.33	397	76.15
Protection from discrimination on the basis of gender	83	92.22	52	57.78	56	62.22	69	76.67	16	53.33	276	70.77
Protection from forced and early marriage	72	80.00	51	56.67	57	63.33	69	76.67	16	53.33	265	67.95
Protection from exploitation (taking advantage of children)	85	94.44	54	60.00	75	83.33	76	84.44	24	80.00	314	80.51
Involvement in decision making at household level	85	94.44	47	52.22	48	53.33	61	67.78	17	56.67	258	66.15
Involvement in decision making at community level	85	94.44	18	20.00	20	22.22	19	21.11	12	40.00	154	39.49
Protection from difficult circumstances (war)	89	98.89	87	96.67	84	93.33	85	94.44	24	80.00	269	95.62

Table 4: Relationship between existing pattern of girl-child protection practices and her level of empowerment

	OYO		ENUGU		KADUNA		BAUCHI		FCT	
	R	p	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p
Health care provision	0.17	0.11	0.22	0.03*	0.38	0.00*	-0.06	0.59	0.42	0.02*
Nutritional care	-0.10	0.35	0.24	0.02*	0.26	0.01*	0.00	0.97	-0.33	0.07
Education – access to western type	0.23	0.02*	0.16	0.13	0.08	0.46	0.16	0.13	-0.17	0.38
Parental support/care	-0.07	0.53	0.32	0.00*	0.44	<0.00*	0.04	0.71	0.49	0.00*
Protection from sexual abuse	0.07	0.54	0.06	0.58	0.24	0.02*	0.05	0.63	-0.33	0.08
Protection from physical abuse	0.10	0.37	0.30	0.00*	0.22	0.03*	-0.02	0.86	0.47	0.00*
Protection from psychological abuse (threats, abuses, harassment)	0.06	0.59	0.04	0.70	0.14	0.18	0.02	0.86	0.50	0.00*
Protection from discrimination on the basis of gender	0.11	0.29	0.13	0.22	0.32	0.00*	0.06	0.59	-0.22	0.23
Protection from forced and early marriage	0.09	0.38	0.13	0.23	0.36	0.00*	0.11	0.29	-0.04	0.83
Protection from exploitation (taking advantage of children)	-0.11	0.31	0.00	0.97	0.09	0.41	0.03	0.77	-0.34	0.07
Involvement in decision making at household level	-0.01	0.90	0.20	0.06	0.47	<0.00*	0.13	0.22	0.52	0.00*
Involvement in decision making at community level	0.02	0.82	0.07	0.54	0.25	0.02*	-0.01	0.92	-0.34	0.07
Protection from difficult circumstances (war)	-0.13	0.24	0.35	0.00*	0.04	0.72	-0.06	0.61	0.53	0.00*

r= Correlation coefficient
 p= level of significance
 * = Significant at 0.05