

Title

Family influence on the roles played by Nigerian women: an implication for national development

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Abstract

Globally, directly and indirectly women have actively played unique roles in national growth and development. Despite these roles carried out by women, various forms of inequalities still exist and the family which is the smallest unit of change and socialization in most cases propels these inequalities experienced. Women are disadvantaged in many ways within the family and this should not be so since the family is a major institution of socialization hence, human developers take into cognize all aspect of human life of which women roles and welfare in the society is inclusive. This study concludes that the factors hindering the roles played by African women can be harnessed properly to improve our economic growth and development as women need to be properly assisted and motivated to develop their full potential. In doing these, the African region will experience a new and better wave of development as women naturally nurture and this virtue in them will improve the society significantly.

Key words

women, family, national growth, development, Nigeria

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Background

Directly and indirectly women have actively played unique roles in societal growth and development. Naturally, women are associated with birthing children and this means that they can safely bring to life if given the necessary support and attention. The woman is seen as an agent of reproduction of life itself and this places her in the position of the life blood of the entire humanity. Again, they are the fundamental human reservoir of every society (Ogunjemilua, & Familugba, 2015) and these women are first formed and nurtured in the family. It is the family that first teaches how what to do and how to do it. A family which is seen as the smallest unit of the society plays a vital role in the formation and belief pattern of women and this goes a long way in influencing their roles in the society (Chukwu, Nnama-Okechukwu, & Ekoh, 2019). Again, it is assumed that all members of a family have different personalities, habits, perspectives and interpretations of events. What one member does or doesn't do affects not only him or herself but everyone else in the family as well. Thus, a woman will play her given role if the family has helped her attain that height.

Furthermore, despite these roles played by women in Africa there seems to be inequality and some forms of harshness that affects their productivity. In Nigeria women are still being seen as those who should not be allowed to explore their full potential and this limits them from play active roles as their male counterparts (Wole-Abu, 2018). These problems are of interest to social workers who are also developers. Social workers promote, develop and implement policies and programmes that guards and improves the rights of women. They enhance the capacity of women through empowerment programmes that seek to aid women become self-reliant (Kiboro, GakuruMisaro & Mwangi 2014). This research intends to add to academic literatures related mainly to the role of women in societal growth and development through identifying the challenges women face in and how these challenges can be controlled to enable women add to national growth and development.

Culture and the family

Culture is a way of life of a group of people which includes the behaviours, symbols, values, beliefs that people accept and are passed by mostly communication and imitation from one generation to another (Amos, 2013). Family on the other hand is a group defined by sexual relationship, sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children. The family is an intimate domestic group made up of people

related to one another by bonds of blood, sexual mating or legal ties. It is the smallest and most basic social unit, which is also the most important primary group found in any society. It is an important aspect of social change or development. Looking at the roles played by women, culture cannot be well understood without an in-depth understanding of the family. Family is the first agent of socialization and it influences the behavioural pattern of the family members especially women (Al Ubaidi, 2017). The family is the “natural and fundamental unit group of society” (Lalor, de Roiste& Devlin 2009:58). It is a group of people that “live together in a permanent arrangement, separated from the rest of the world by the walls of family-centred interaction” (Cheal 2002:4). In the family, children are formed as persons; they live and satisfy most of their important needs (Nnamma-Okechukwu, Chukwu, &Ekoh, 2017). The African child especially the girl-child is taught most of the things she holds in high esteem in the family. Hence, the family is usually the major source of the basic necessities of life and health; the love and tenderness, food, water, clothing, shelter and sanitation which are made possible by the socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions.

Conceptualization of women empowerment and gender equality

Across the world the issue of women's empowerment and gender equality is at the top of agendas, as gender inequality is widespread in all cultures (Bayeh, 2016). Women's empowerment is all about allowing and equipping women to make life-determining choices across different issues in the country. Empowerment can be defined as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives (Bayeh, 2016). It is a process that fosters power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important” (Page & Czuba, 1999:24).

Gender equality means that the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not be dependent on if they are born male or female (Warth Koparanova, 2012). Also, gender equality is seen as a situation where everyone is free to enhance their personal abilities and make choices without any form of limitation as a result of strict gender roles.

Roles played by women

An educated girl is likely to increase her personal earning potential, as well as reduce poverty in her

community. Educated women are empowered to take a greater economic role in their families and communities, and they tend to reinvest majority of their earning into their families. The roles of women whether socially, politically or economically role of women differs from country to country or from region to region especially (Klaa, 2020). For instance, in Tanzania, the roles of men and women are classified based on the local cultural context. While men are usually the breadwinners, women are traditionally responsible for most domestic chores (Dillip, Mboma, & Greer, et al., 2018). Even in Nigeria, the roles of women differ. Interestingly, in the Igbo culture it is believed that right from the day a woman starts to bear children in her husband's house, she becomes economically useful. This was because at the birth of every child, the woman acquires some of the family's wealth through the burying of her children's umbilical cords and first natural hairs (Udechukwu, n.d). Women are essential to family life as they are graced with being pregnant and child delivery. Also, the bulk duty of child upbringing is the take of women in almost all the cultures. It is the woman that carries the child to full term and even delivery and this child if properly nurtured and raised becomes a solution to the pressing needs of the society.

African women are guardians of their children's welfare and have explicit responsibility to provide for them materially. They are the household managers, providing food, nutrition, water, health, education, and family planning to an extent greater than elsewhere in the developing world. This places heavy burdens on them, despite developments such as improved agriculture technology, availability of contraception, and changes in women's socioeconomic status, which one might think would have made their lives easier (Udechukwu, n.d).

Problems faced by Nigerian women in carrying out their roles

Women are disadvantaged in many ways within the family, which is a major institution of socialization (Al Ubaidi, 2017). African women suffer from social and economic insecurity, living under severe psychological and economic pressures as a result of bearing the burden of family affairs (Klaa, 2020). Universally, the 21st century woman is faced with obstacles in political participation. Women around the world at every socio-political level find themselves under-represented in parliament and far removed from decision-making levels (Kumar, 2018).

Also, Nigeria is a patriarchal society and this leaves the decision making process totally in the hands of

men. Religion and culture demands total submission of women to their husbands and fathers. No matter how highly placed or educated a woman is, she has very little to say about her health, education, economic pursuits, and even the day to day running of her community (Nnamma-Okechukwu, Chukwu & Ekoh, 2017).

Implications for development workers

Professionally, development has an ardent commitment to human rights and it is a core value proposition for practice. Social developers especially social workers take into cognize all aspect of human life of which women roles and welfare in the society is inclusive therefore with this understanding development workers will be provided with an evidence-based practice forum where they are able to interact with professionals and stakeholders involved in working with women affairs to take up actions and programmes that help women actively carry-out their roles in the society. Development workers will be aware of the existing cultural differences and practices that encourage or discourage the roles played by women in the society. Development workers could take to culture re-orientation and sensitization to change gender perceptions and stereotypes, promotion of women's human rights, supporting new legislations and legal rights of women, promoting the empowerment of women, integrating gender balance within key sectors and encouraging women's political and economic participation.

Conclusion

Paying attention to women and their roles played is a necessity for growth and development. In order to improve their functioning, African women must be given the necessary support. Never has the African woman gained the full potential and ability to fully express what and who they are despite international and national efforts and attention given to them. Women experience inequality in various aspects of life. Educational, social, economic, religious, administrative, political and culturally factors that promote inequality are still strong. Thus, these factors if harnessed properly will improve our economic growth and development. Hence, women need to be properly assisted and motivated to develop their full potential. In doing these, the African region will experience a new and better wave of development as women naturally nurture and this virtue in them will improve the society significantly.

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