

Volume 2 Issue 1



International Journal of Social Work and Development Studies (IJSWS)



**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY**

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RIVERS STATE NIGERIA**

**International Journal
of Social Work
and Development Studies (IJSDS)**
Vol 2 Issue 1

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**COMMUNITY CULTURAL PRACTISES
AND GENDER BIAS AFFECTING WOMEN'S
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN
OYO STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of community cultural practises and gender bias on women's employment opportunities in Oyo State, Nigeria. The survey design adopted in the study was descriptive and the data were collected on 372 respondents, out of 384 sampled using a multi-stage sampling approach, including women in both formal and informal sectors, community leaders, and employers. The findings revealed that the socially internalised cultural beliefs imply the prioritisation of the positions of women as housewives and carers, through which the inaccessibility of education and learning and lack of formal employment become evident: 78.2% of respondents identified this prioritisation of domestic roles, and 65.3% reported that cultural practises favour male education and career advancement over that of females. Gender bias was extensively reported and presented in the form of occupational segregation, wage gaps, and a restricted promotion prospect, with 74.2% of respondents reporting that women are overlooked in hiring, 83.1% reporting that women are paid less than men for the same work, and 81.5% reporting bias in leadership appointments. The results reveal that all these factors severely limit the access of women to the formal workforce, nearly placing them in harsh employment terms within the informal industry, with 76.1% of women confined to informal employment and 82.3% reporting reduced access to formal opportunities. The paper concludes that women are restricted to feature in the economic process despite their ability to contribute immensely to the progress of the economy, through the interaction between cultural and gendered biases. It recommends policy implementation in the respective areas of discrimination in the workplace, gender-sensitive organisational reforms, publicity campaigns, and specialised empowerment programmes to enhance the employability and advancement of women.

Keywords: Community, Cultural Practises, Gender Bias, Women Employment Opportunities, Oyo State, Nigeria, Occupational Segregation

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Women involvement in the workforce is an important indicator of country and gender equality development. Globally, efforts are being made to enhance women's economic empowerment, recognising their significant contributions to societal progress and economic growth. Nevertheless, employers in most developing nations, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, place women with insurmountable odds against the attainment of equality in employment opportunities. Traditional norms, cultural practices and gender role biases defying women of educational access employments and resources reflect the barriers faced by women. Despite, Nigerian women are actively involved in different economics activities, they still experience wide range of employment barriers especially in informal settings. (Arum & Eze, 2022).

However, there are significant differences in formal organisation with variety of opportunities, they are still marginalise experiencing glass cliff, glass ceiling and so on. Women might also be limited to one or the other position by the culture and society that influences the choice of their career and its path (Nzasi, 2023). Despite increasing global advocacy for gender equality and women's economic empowerment, women in Oyo State, Nigeria, continue to encounter significant obstacles in accessing and retaining formal employment opportunities (Mascarenhas, Galvao & Marques, 2022). Existing literature emphasises the significance of gender discrimination across various sectors that results in less positive job attitudes, low work engagement and job dissatisfaction of female workers. This discrimination is often exacerbated by the patrilineal nature of Nigerian society, deeply ingrained religious beliefs, and traditional cultural practises that limit women's roles and opportunities.

Furthermore, traditional cultural values and conservative gender role expectations have a lot of impact on career choices and progression for women – even

amongst educated youth. Such norms tend to relegate women into certain professional fields or the informal sector, where women are more vulnerable to unstable job conditions and earnings imbalances. Gender bias and stereotypes in the workplace are a result of the undervaluation of women and the limited access to resources of a majority of them caused by the socio-cultural background of their respective countries, which best suits and gives preference to the male gender (Heilman, Caleo & Manzi, 2024). While studies have addressed gender inequality in Nigeria generally, there is a dearth of specific research focusing on the perceptions of community cultural practises and gender bias and their direct impact on women's employment opportunities within the unique socio-cultural context of Oyo State.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of community cultural practises regarding women's employment opportunities in Oyo State, Nigeria?
2. How do perceptions of gender bias influence women's access to and progression in employment opportunities in Oyo State, Nigeria?
3. What is the perceived impact of community cultural practises and gender bias on the types of employment opportunities available to women in Oyo State, Nigeria?
4. What effective strategies will mitigate cultural practises and gender role biases among women employment opportunities in Oyo state, Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate the perceptions of community cultural practises and gender bias affecting women's employment opportunities in Oyo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study will attempt to:

1. 1. examine the perceptions of community cul-

tural practises concerning women's employment opportunities in Oyo State, Nigeria.

2. Assess how perceptions of gender bias influence women's access to and progression in employment opportunities in Oyo State, Nigeria.
3. Determine the perceived impact of community cultural practises and gender bias on the types of employment opportunities available to women in Oyo State, Nigeria.
4. Identify perceived effective strategies for mitigating the effects of community cultural practises and gender bias on women's employment opportunities in Oyo State, Nigeria.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Gender Bias and Discrimination in Employment

Gender bias and discrimination in employment are pervasive global issues that significantly impede women's economic empowerment and overall societal development (Gugan, Steward & Subhashini, 2024). Such biases occur in different ways that include either direct kinds of discrimination or indirect, unconscious ways that affect hiring, promotions, and even retention. Nigeria's preconceived notions about women's abilities and their societal roles often lead to occupational segregation, where women are concentrated in lower-paying jobs or informal sectors (Eke, 2023). This not only denies them potential sources of earnings but also deprives them of the privilege to enjoy benefits and employment security as well as career advancement. Heilman, Caleo and Manzi (2024) show that gender discrimination in the workplace can have extreme detrimental effects on female workers.

For instance, a study conducted by Tabasum, Akhtar, Gull, Umar and Akhtar (2025) revealed that gender discrimination contributes to less positive job atti-

tudes, reduced work engagement, and significant job dissatisfaction among female workers. Work environment discrimination accrue to psychological effect which affect productivity, turnover, work progress and loss of potential personnel, skill and organisational talents. This reflects that gender bias extend beyond individual but also affect the effectiveness of the workplace and the national economic development. Furthermore, gender bias is often deeply intertwined with societal expectations and cultural values. The concept of their contribution to the workplace being of lesser importance can be reinforced by the traditional rules and principles in the patrilineal societies and affects women in their field of work as the main participants of female households (Heilman, Caleo & Manzi, 2024). This cultural conditioning will be able to shape the attitudes of employers, where favour is given to male employees or women are given an easier task to do due to their lower qualification despite having comparable qualifications as compared to male employees.

2.2. Cultural Practises and Women's Employment

Cultural practises play a pivotal role in shaping gender roles and expectations, which in turn significantly influence women's employment opportunities, particularly in societies with strong traditional values like Nigeria (Adisa, Mordi, Simpson & Iwowo, 2021; Ajayi, Chantler & Radford, 2022). What should be viewed as a proper work of a woman, her access to education, as well as her general involvement in community life overall, are determined by these practises that are usually transmitted not only between the female generations but also between people of diverse genders, ethnicities, age groups, and social classes. In many Nigerian communities, traditional norms emphasise women's roles as carers and homemakers, often leading to the undervaluation of their economic contributions outside the domestic sphere.

These cultural values have been felt even in the case

of the younger generation. In Nigeria specifically, Ifegbesan and Azeez (2022) found that gender, educational background, and religion were significant predictors of perceptions of gender roles, with more egalitarian views associated with higher education. In a comparable study of youth in Moldova, Gagauz and Chivaciuc (2021) found a significant positive relationship between traditional values and conservative gender role expectations among youths. This implies that even after getting acquainted with contemporary concepts of egalitarianism, learnt cultural standards still influence the understanding of the role of women in society and the workforce. These norms can be in the form of social pressure on women that they choose the family over the career or the community disliking the women being in some line of work that is not supposed to be pursued by a woman. Further, culturally based reasons, including gender norms, male dominance, and acceptability of sons during the birth, have been mentioned to have played a role in the discrimination of women and restrictive opportunities (Togunde, 1999). These can limit the accessibility of women to the sources, land as well as capital, which is important in entrepreneurship as well as formal employment. Women tend to gravitate towards the informal sector, which has become the main source of activity, and hence are somewhat exposed to exploitation, and they also have no protection of a social form.

2.3. Women's Employment Opportunities in Nigeria

Nigeria has a complex women employment opportunities, and despite large women involvement in the workplace, their participation remain low in high status job and managerial positions. Women are considerable high in middle class and informal organisation with no insurance, underpayment, job insecurity, and partial benefits (Onwo & Ohazulike, 2021). This lowers the status of women workers to exploitation, low-paying and insecure employment. Despite the

challenges, there have been concerted efforts by the Nigerian government and civil society organisations to promote women's economic empowerment and address gender disparities in employment. They comprise legal reforms, education, and awareness campaigns designed towards more inclusive employment (Chikwe, Kuteesa & Ediae, 2024).

Strides towards closing the gender gap of educational levels have been made; restrictions to this have consequently decreased such that women now have more opportunities in occupations that have been dominated by their male counterparts. Still, there is a difference in income, with women generally making less income compared to men in different jobs and industries. The types of employment opportunities available to women in Nigeria are often influenced by a combination of educational background, occupational segregation, and geographical location (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021). Although cities might present more opportunities in terms of formally employed positions, the rural women tend to be active in agriculture and small trades that tend to be relatively informal and lower-paid. The challenges are further compounded by the prevailing gender biases and cultural norms that dictate women's roles and limit their access to certain professions or leadership positions.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

The liberal feminist theory is guiding this study. One of the leading directions of feminism is liberal feminism, which underlies the issues of equality between men and women, based on political and legal reforms (Law, 2019). It is also concerned with the equality of men and women in the social and political system and order of the day and not with bringing a drastic change in the society. The most accurate principle of liberal feminism is that everyone, whether a man or a woman, can think and make their own decisions, and, thus, he/she must have equal rights and opportunities (Adenugba & Ademuson, 2019). In the context

of women's employment opportunities, liberal feminist theory posits that gender disparities are primarily a result of discriminatory practises, unequal access to education and resources, and societal norms that limit women's choices and participation in the public sphere. It concurs that when females receive equal opportunities and are not discriminated against through various forms of marginalisation, they can perhaps compete successfully with men in the job market, resulting in economic equality between the two genders.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study utilised descriptive survey research. This design is deemed appropriate, as it allows for the collection of data from a sample of individuals to describe the perceptions of community cultural practises and gender bias affecting women's employment opportunities in Oyo State, Nigeria. It is, in particular, the descriptive survey design that best fits the study, as it will enable the researcher to know more about the behaviours and the characteristic features of a population group or a phenomenon in its current form and give a picture of the present state and moods without the influence of variables.

3.2. Study Area

The study was conducted in Oyo State, located in the southwestern geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Oyo is rich in culture, traditional practices and a Yoruba historical land. Oyo is the capital of Ibadan (the biggest city in West Africa) with economic based on agriculture and cultural centres. Oyo is selected for this study for its complex socio-economic landscape with both rural and urban areas which allowed depth and comprehensive analysis of gender basis and cultural practices on women employments.

3.3. Population and Sampling

The population of the study consisted women with the age 18 and above living and working in formal or informal sectors within Oyo state, Nigeria. The other members of the study population included the community leaders (e.g., traditional rulers, religious leaders, executives of community development associations) in the local government areas of the selected regions and employers (e.g., business owners, human resource managers) in the same areas. A multi-stage sampling method was used to select the participants of the study. At the first stage, purposive sampling was used to select four local government areas within Oyo State, ensuring a representation of both urban and rural settings. At the second phase, a stratified but simple random sampling was adopted mainly in each of the chosen local government areas. By applying the formula of finite population by Yamane, this number was used as the final sample size of 384 respondents.

3.4. The Data Collection Instruments

The primary instrument for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire titled "Perceptions of Cultural Practises and Gender Bias on Women's Employment Opportunities (PCPGBWEO)". The questionnaire presented by the researchers was founded on the research questions and objectives and included closed-ended questions (e.g., on the Likert scale, on multiple choice), as well as open-ended questions. The questionnaire was divided into five sections: socio-demographic information, perceptions of community cultural practises, perceptions of gender bias, impact on employment opportunities, and strategies for mitigation.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

Before data was collected, ethical approval was first taken with the appropriate institutional review board. Provisions were also made to seek permission from the local government leaders and employers in the chosen local governments. All participants provid-

ed informed consent, which meant that they clearly understood the objective of the study, that they had the right to exit it at any given time, and that their responses would remain confidential. Taped data collection helped to facilitate the research since the questionnaires were administered by qualified research assistants in the form of face-to-face interviews over a period of six weeks.

3.6. Data Analysis

The valid data that were received as a result of the closed-ended questions were coded and inserted into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0. The socio-demographic data of the respondents and their perceptions were summarised using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, standard deviations, and means). Chi-square correlation analysis, a type of inferential statistical testing, was used to test the relationship among variables. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data of the open-ended questions.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1. Socio-demographic Personality of Respondents

Out of 384 questionnaires distributed, 372 questionnaires were returned and completed; this is equivalent to a response rate of 96.9%. The largest percentage of the respondents (68.3%) fell within the 24-45 years old range. About educational attainment, 45.2% were tertiary education, 32.8% were secondary education, and 22.0% were primary and below education. In terms of the employment status, 52.4% worked in the informal sector, 28.8% in the formal sector, and the remainder, 18.8%, were unemployed and actively searching to secure a job.

4.2. Perceptions of Community Cultural Practises

The findings regarding perceptions of community cultural practises reveal significant insights into how traditional values influence women's employment

opportunities in Oyo State. Most respondents (78.2) pointed out that the ingrained cultural practises focusing on the role of women as housewives, mothers and carers still prevail in the societal demands regarding whether women should engage in the labour force. Specifically, 65.3% of participants perceived that cultural practises often prioritise male education and career advancement over that of females, leading to disparities in access to quality education and skill development crucial for formal employment. In comparing religious beliefs as a culture, 58.1 percent of the participants viewed religious interpretations as promoting a subsidiary role of women outside the home, whereas 41.9 percent of the participants held the view that women are endorsed by religious texts in their economic activities. The concept of male privilege, deeply embedded in cultural practises, was perceived by 72.4% of respondents as a significant barrier to women's employment. This is evident in men being favoured in terms of hiring (68.3%) and assumed to be more competent or worthy of leading roles (61.2%).

4.3. Perceptions of Gender Bias

Perceptions of gender bias were widely reported among the respondents across various aspects of women's employment journeys. The major majority (74.2) detailed that they have witnessed cases of women being ignored when it concerns opportunities to perform what could be considered the same job in favour of their male counterparts, despite their competence. In promotions, 69.1% said they were biased in promotions, and 81.5% said they were biased in the appointment of leadership roles. This discrimination seemed to be much more severe in male-dominated industries (85.2) and in those occupations where much authority or powers of decision-making were involved (79.3%). As far as differences in wages are concerned, most women were of the opinion that 83.1% of the respondents felt that women were paid less than men when doing the same work. This income

difference was explained by professional segregation (76.4%) and protection by outright discrimination in terms of payment (54.3%). The psychological impact of gender bias was evident, with respondents reporting feelings of undervaluation (71.2%), job dissatisfaction (64.0%), and reduced motivation (58.6%). Further, 59.4% reported that job descriptions may implicitly discriminate against male candidates, and 67.2% thought that the interview panel has a preconception about the commitment of females to work as a result of other relationships, like witnessing family issues.

4.4. Impact on Women's Employment Opportunities

The perceived impact of community cultural practices and gender bias on women's employment opportunities was found to be multifaceted and significantly limiting. This limitation of women to certain forms of work, mostly in the informal sector (76.1%), or to traditionally female jobs such as teaching (45.4%), nursing (38.2%), or petty trading (67.5%), was identified by 89.2% of respondents as the main effect. Eighty-two point three per cent of the respondents reported reduced access to formal employment opportunities. The interplay of cultural expectations and gender bias often results in fewer job offers for women (73.1%), even when they possess the requisite qualifications. This is further enhanced by reluctance among the employers to employ women because of maternity leave (56.2%), family matters (71.0%), or because the women are expected to concentrate on family life rather than their careers (68.5%). This implies negative contribution on upward mobility and career progression with respondents experiencing glass ceiling as a result of cultural practices and organisational structure accounting for 77.4% and 84.7% reporting downward employment opportunities for women in Oyo state.

5.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Socio-demographic Profile of Respondents

372 questionnaires were collated from the 384 distributed reflecting a 96.9% response rate. 68.3% of the respondents were within the age of 24 and 45 years, while 45.2% were graduate of higher institution and 52% of the respondents worked in informal organisation. This implies that employment and education intersect with gender and cultural dynamics.

5.2. Perceptions of Community Cultural Practices

Table 1 shows that 78.2% of respondents reported that women are primarily viewed as homemakers, while 65.3% indicated that male education and career advancement are prioritised. This aligns with Ajayi et al. (2022), who note that entrenched cultural values in Nigeria reinforce traditional gender roles. There was bias also based on religious interpretations with 58.1% having viewed the restraints of women roles outside the home. Such results highlight the systemic way women are disadvantaged by their cultural traditions regarding career opportunities even in the context of social reforms.

Table 1. Perceptions of Community Cultural Practices (n = 372)

STATEMENT	AGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)
Women's roles are mainly homemaking and caregiving	78.2	21.8
Male education and career prioritised over female	65.3	34.7
Religious beliefs restrict women's roles outside home	58.1	41.9
Male privilege gives men advantage in hiring	68.3	31.7
Men assumed more competent in leadership roles	61.2	38.8

These results confirm earlier research by Togunde (1999), which highlighted the role of socio-cultural factors in limiting women's employment. Even among educated respondents, cultural expectations continue to shape labour participation.

5.3. Perceptions of Gender Bias in Employment

Table 2 illustrates the widespread perception of gender bias. Over 74% reported women being overlooked in hiring, while 83.1% believed women were paid less than men for the same work. The highest perception of bias was in leadership appointments (81.5%), reflecting the persistence of the "glass ceiling."

Table 2. Perceptions of Gender Bias in Employment (n = 372)

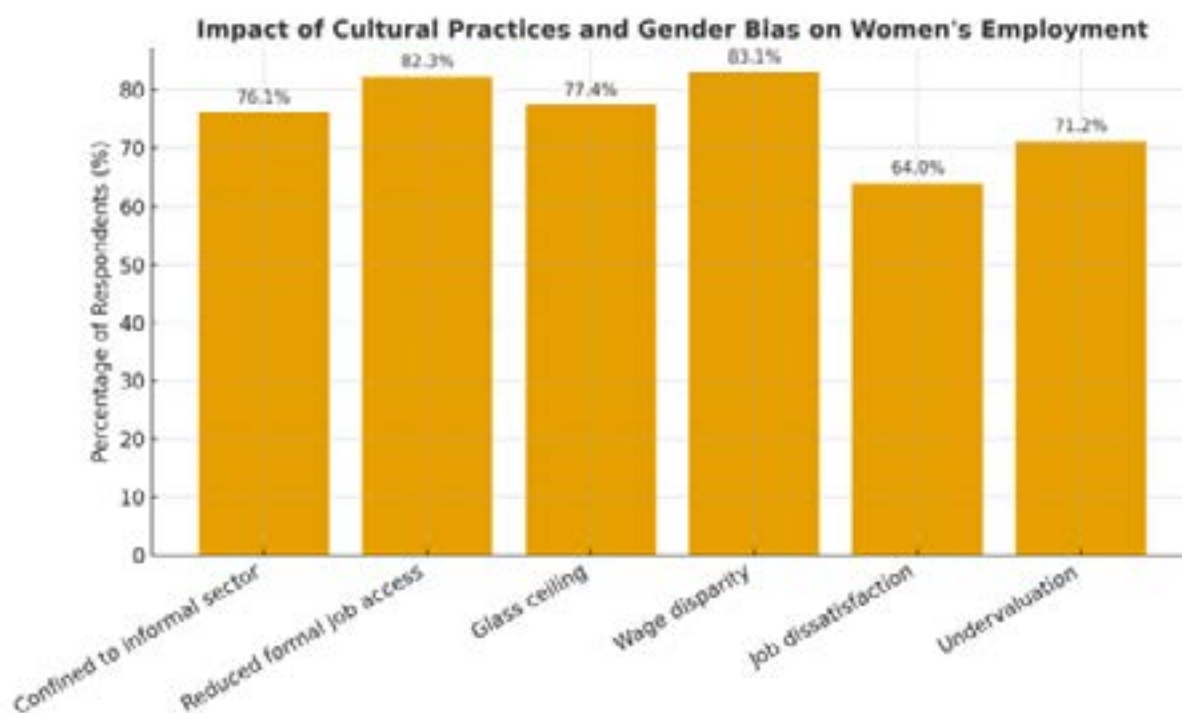
STATEMENT	PERCENTAGE (%)
Women overlooked in hiring decisions	74.2
Gender bias in promotions	69.1
Bias in leadership appointments	81.5
Men receive high pay that women on same category of job	83.1
There is high gender discrimination on job role selection	76.4

These findings align with the study of Heilman (2024) which posited that employment discrimination is affected by women's competence stereotypes.

5.4. Impact on Employment Opportunities

Fig 1 reveal the effect of cultural practices and gender bias on women employment opportunities. The figure indicate that 76.1% women are confined to informal organisation, 82.3% reduced access to formal settings and 77.4% perceived glass ceiling. Adeosun and Owolabi (2021) identified that structural barriers translate into precarious employment challenges.

Figure 1. Impact of Cultural Practices and Gender Bias on Women's Employment Opportunities



The result aligned with the report of World Bank (2022) which posit that institutional and cultural bases are fundamental to exclusion of women from formal sectors in sub-Saharan Africa.

5.6. Discussion

Results from the findings in this study reveal the influence of gender bias and community cultural practices on employment opportunities of women in Oyo state, Nigeria. 78.2% of respondents indicate that cultural norms recognised women as component of household. 65.3% respondents pointed that career advancement and male education are embodied in patriarchal structure of the society which is common among Nigerian society. Therefore gender discrimination is a factor that is influenced by patrilineal Nigerian society. 58.1% respondents indicated that religious faith shape women employment opportunities based on the interpretation to gender role in the society.

Gender bias is perceived in different employment settings ranging from 74.2% in hiring, 69.1% in promotional decisions, and 81.5% in leadership appointments, reflecting the discriminatory nature of employment in Oyo state. This study is in-line with the study of Adeosun and Owolabi (2021) who posit that discrimination and gender bias are factors perpetuating women employment opportunities.

Women securing jobs at entry level is high, however, there are limited opportunities in career development which account for 81.5% bias level at the leadership position. 64% respondents reveal high job dissatisfactory level and undervaluation feelings of 71.2%. This affect the psychological aspect of women and their lifestyle towards productivity of the organisation and the national economic development. 76.1% reflect the restriction of women to informal sector employment and traditional female roles indicate occupational segregation that identified Nigerian employment among women. This reflect Togunde (1999) observation on

socio-cultural factors influence on women participation in the labour force.

The vulnerabilities and social provision related to employment informality affects women employment. Glass ceiling affect 77.4% of women seeking career advancement which reflect how gender biases and cultural practice create structural barriers to professional women growth. This is consistent with the study of Adenugba and Ademuson (2019) which demonstrates how socio-cultural backgrounds which favours men affect gender stereotypes and prejudice. 59.4% subtle nature of gender bias implying job discrimination bias and preconceived perception on work commitment of women account for 67.2%. These interventions eliminate subconscious attitudes that are widespread in the recruitment practises and organisational cultures and not to neutralise overt types of discrimination.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusion

This study has thoroughly investigated the perceptions of community cultural practises and gender bias affecting women's employment opportunities in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study reveals deeply entrenched cultural norms, traditional values, and pervasive gender biases significantly constrain women's access to, and progression within, the formal employment sector. These perceptions assume various forms and shapes including occupational segregation, low wages and poor career advancement chances that finally lead to occupation vulnerability to a significant proportion of women. This study reveal the increase efforts and awareness towards Oyo state women realities and gender equalities which is influenced by societal expectations which prioritised male contributions and role. Such prejudices and the subsequent psychological impact of job dissatisfaction and disengagement also demonstrate the necessity to introduce specific interventions as soon as possible. Therefore,

it is concluded in by the study that Oyo state women possess the desire and potential for economic participation, their opportunities are systematically curtailed by a complex interplay of cultural and gender-based prejudices.

6.2. Recommendations

The following are recommended based on the findings from the result of the study;

1. There is a need for the government to review and enforce policies and established rules and regulations that prohibit gender bias and discrimination in employment.
2. Public awareness campaigns should be continuously carried out to oppose and reform the traditional cultural norms and gender stereotypes. Such campaigns need to utilise multiple media outlets and involve communal leaders, religious organisations, and schools.
3. Specialized empowerment programs need to be created in the development of women with the appropriate skills that could make them more employable across various fields. Entrepreneurship training, monetary literacy, and microfinance accessibility should be mentioned in these programmes.
4. Organisations are recommended to promote gender-sensitive policies and practises such as equitable hiring procedures, equal pay and benefits on equal work, and flexible working agreements.
5. Community and religious leaders should take an active role in discussions and activities that will be conducted to advance gender equality, as this is essential in altering the perception of society.
6. There is a need to constantly undertake research and collect data towards gender differences in the field of employment to track down progress and to use this data to inform policy interventions

based on evidence.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare
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