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Gender Stereotypes and Female Invisibility Amongst Hausa Women Migrants in Awka South LGA

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Abstract

In this study, we investigated perceived gender stereotypes and women invisibility amongst Hausa women migrants in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. The study explored the impact of gender stereotypes on Hausa migrant women and how these stereotypes contribute to the invisibility of Hausa migrant women in the study area. Using the snowball sampling technique, 20 Hausa women were selected from the Hausa communities in Awka and Amawbia. Semi-structured interviews were administered to the 20 selected women. The interviews were qualitatively analyzed and four themes bothering on education, early marriage, political participation and engagement with jobs or business activities were identified as common experiences amongst these women. The findings indicated that Hausa women migrants are subjected to stereotyping resulting from religio-cultural differences and this has led to their invisibility in the study area. We concluded that while it is pertinent and urgent to end Hausa migrant women stereotyping, interventions to address these issues must also target the underlying structural factors that shape these experiences.

Keywords: gender, stereotype, invisibility, Hausa-women, migrants

Introduction

Migration is a dynamic phenomenon that has many forms. Over the last decade, considerable attention has been given to international migration. More recently the pendulum has begun to swing back to internal migration. Internal migration is a global phenomenon that has always been part of human history (Muhamed 2016; Wakessa 2014). Internal migration is defined as a movement of people from one area of a country to another to establish new residence either temporarily or permanently (ACP Observatory on Migration, 2011). Internal migration in

Nigeria presents a rather curious but complex trajectory that involves rural-urban, rural-rural, urban-urban, and urban-rural dynamics.

In recent times, there seems to be an increase of migrants from northern Nigeria to other parts of the country. Among internal migrants that come to the southeast, northern migrants are among the highest. This may be due to the recurrent conflicts that have occurred in northern Nigeria for decades because of religious, ethnic, and social tensions. Clashes between farmers and pastoralists have been consistently fuelling violence (Conroy, 2014). But since 2009, the emergence of Boko Haram has radically changed the conflict landscape of northern Nigeria. As expected, these sociopolitical upheavals have resulted in massive displacement of people, and this has necessitated the influx of northern migrants to various regions of the country including the southeast. While it is expected that these northern migrants will strive equally, both male and female to survive, to contribute to economic growth and social interactions in their host communities, common observations seem to be in the contrary. This study explores perceived gender stereotypes amongst Hausa women migrants to understand the role gender stereotype plays in the invisibility of women.

Perceived gender stereotype

Gender describes the characteristics of women and men that are socially constructed. These characteristics include norms, behaviors, and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy. It is a culturally determined concept based on the beliefs and traditions of a given society or community. Gender stereotypes are roles, or a pattern of behavior placed on particular sex by the society, mostly beliefs, ideas, and false phrases. It is an overgeneralization, a category concept that is learned, factually incorrect, rigid, and

persistent (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). Gender stereotypes mainly focus on the place and role of women in the home and the role of men outside the home (Dovidio, 2010).

The gender stereotype of women as the primary nurturers, caregivers of children, and family members is entrenched in the patriarchal ideology of society. Most African countries are patriarchal in structure – a structure that is based on inequality and injustice. Patriarchal attitudes lead to gender stereotyping. Through socialization, the social norms which have aided these gender relations were culturally transmitted from one generation to another and as children move through childhood into adolescence, they are exposed to many factors, which influence their attitudes and behaviors regarding gender roles. These attitudes and behaviors are generally learned first in the home and are then reinforced by the child's peers, school experience, and the media. However, the strongest influence on gender role development seems to occur within the family setting, with parents passing on, both overtly and covertly, to their children their own beliefs about gender (Witt, 1997). Gender stereotype is therefore harmful when it limits the capacity of women and men to develop their attributes or professional skills and to make decisions about their lives. When individuals don't conform to gender stereotypes, the result can lead to discrimination and unequal treatment in different spheres of their lives. Without any doubt, these consequences usually have higher impact on women. The psychological effect of gender stereotypes and socio-cultural beliefs on the girl-child is the internalization of the low value accorded them by society (Ezeliora & Ezeokana, 2011). Nigerian women, like their counterparts, around the world, face a lot of discrimination that limits their opportunities. Nigeria has the highest population of any Africa country, with a population of about 200 million. Of this number, about 49% are female; however, 38% of women in Nigeria lack formal education as against 25% of their male counterpart. Likewise, Nigeria also has one

of the lowest rates of female entrepreneurship in Sub Sahara Africa; most women are concentrated in casual, low-skilled, low paid informal sector employment. Even though women are more than 50% of the world's population, they perform two third of the world's work, yet they receive one tenth of the world's income.

In addition to the above, women are also under-represented in the political sphere; this can be seen in only 25 out of 360 members of the Nigerian House of Representatives being women. All these goes to show that women are highly devalued and considered to play second fiddle's role in the society. They are far from enjoying equal rights in the labor market, due mainly to their domestic burden, low level of educational attainment, poverty, biases against women's employment in certain branches of the economy or types of work, and discriminatory salary practices. More women than men work in vulnerable, low-paid, or undervalued jobs (ILO, 2012). To the present study, gender stereotype refers to socio-cultural beliefs and practices, which tend to limit women from attaining their full potentials and visibility.

Women Invisibility

In feminist discourses, invisibility is defined as an undesirable state or form of power for women, a state of being seen but not heard. It has also been used to describe the status of females in patriarchal systems. Globally, women are key contributors in the development of nations. However, the issues of women exclusion and low participation in politics and decision making have continued to generate attention worldwide, likewise, the phenomenon of invisibility and undervaluation of women's work and their contributions to the household economy. Identifying women works that are generally invisible, Waring (1997), Tirath (2012) pointed out that apart from their production in agricultural activities,

the most excluded and invisible works of women are household activities. Sadly, these jobs are most times not accounted for as part of economic productivity.

In view of the above problems still facing women in contemporary times, the following research questions were raised:

i. What are the perceived gender stereotypes that Hausa migrant women face?
ii. What are the causes of the perceived gender stereotypes among Hausa women migrants in Anambra State?
iii. How does perceived gender stereotype enhance the invisibility among Hausa women migrants in Anambra State?
iv. What can be done to reduce the perceived gender stereotypes among Hausa women migrants in Anambra State?

Theoretical Review

Social Role Theory

The Social Role theory was proposed by Alice Eagly & Wood (1999). This theory posits gender stereotype stems from the distribution of men and women into distinct roles within a given society. When people observe others, they pay attention to the social roles others occupy, such as their occupations and in doing so, they come to associate the characteristics of the role with the individuals who occupy it and that people behave differently in social situations and take different roles, due to expectations that society puts upon them. According to this theory, gender stereotype originates from individual's indirect and direct observation of men and women in their social roles. It further explains that gender role beliefs arise because people observe female and male behavior and infer that

the sexes possess corresponding dispositions. Thus, men and women are thought to possess attributes that equip them for sex-typical roles. These attributes are evident in consensually shared beliefs, or gender stereotypes. In daily life, people carry out these gender roles as they enact specific social roles such as parent or employee. Because gender roles seem to reflect innate attributes of the sexes, they appear natural and inevitable. With these beliefs, people construct gender roles that are responsive to cultural and environmental conditions yet appear, for individuals within a society, to be stable, inherent properties of men and women.

Research Design

The study adopted the qualitative research design to investigate perceived gender stereotypes and gender invisibility among Hausa migrant women living within the Awka Municipal of Anambra State.

Study Population

For this study, a total of 20 respondents were recruited through snowball sampling method. It is a non-probability sampling technique whereby existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among acquaintances. They are Hausa migrants who are resident in Awka and Amawbia within the Hausa settlements. The researcher chose the two settlements because of its proximity and accessibility. The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 40 years. 17 of them were married while 3 were single; one of the respondents was a Christian with the rest being Muslims.

Method of Data Collection

Data was collected from respondents through semi-structured interviews. The open-ended questions allowed respondents to express themselves freely and allowed the researchers to probe participants' responses for elaboration and to explore key issues raised by respondents, which were useful for the study. The consent of the respondents was sought before the interviews were conducted. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality regarding the information they provided. Each interview lasted an average of 20 minutes depending on the responses of the participant. The interviews were recorded with a digital device with the permission of the participants.

Method

The data gathered from the interviews were played and listened to several times before the actual transcription was done. The transcribed data was categorized into themes by looking for recurring patterns in the data. Thus data were analyzed using thematic qualitative procedure, whereby stem terms were deducted from the responses of the participants to form the themes.

Analysis

This analysis has been fragmented to address specific research questions. Data relating to specific research questions are analyzed in this section under each of the research questions for clarity and specificity.

Research Question 1: What are the perceived gender stereotypes that Hausa migrant women face?

The results show that three main themes emerged to answer the first research question. These themes showed areas where the participants feel that there are stereotypes and these include: education, early marriage, political participation and engagement with jobs or business activities.

i. Education

Our respondents identified assumptions of illiteracy and inherent apathy to education as one of the main stereotypes migrant Hausa women face in Awka. According to them, most people in the area generally assume that Hausa women are generally uneducated and do not like to go to school. Thus, the attitude and treatments they are given are based on these assumptions. They complained that people do not even given them the benefit of doubt but generally conclude that they are either not educated or unwilling to accept to be educated. One of them complained bitterly; "People here think we do not like school at all and that our family do not want us to go to school".

In terms of education, most non-northern Muslims seem to believe that the northern Muslim society is of the viewpoint that girls should be trained in terms of implementation of household responsibilities and school education should not be for them. This attitude may have contributed to the general perception that most Northern muslim women are not educated and that Muslim girls are forced into early marriages to elderly men for financial benefits to their parents. Our findings show that even though many of the women may not have gone to school, the assumption that they do not like school is warped and do not represent the truths of the migrant women. One of our respondents expressed herself thus:

> I did not go to school. I marry when I dey 13 years come go my husband house but I for like go school. My father marries many wives so he does not have money

> to send us to school not only the girls. But me my children go to school here, but if we move, they will stop (Personal communication, May 10, 2023).

Thus, not going to school is a factor of cultural and religious limitations placed mostly on northern Muslim women because of religion. Though many of them may not have had the opportunity of going to school in the North, many of the migrant women avail their children of the opportunities down south with less religious and cultural limitations.

More so, not going to school could have also been a function of poverty. Many of the parents of these women do not send them to school due to poverty, a reason the class gap between the elite and poor continues to widen in the country, a reality that is heavily present in the Northen part of the country. The implication is that the children of the elites irrespective of their gender are afforded the privilege of accessing education. The children of the poor, many of whom migrate from one part of the country to another do not enjoy such privilege and are hugely burdened by the dictates of culture and religion. Thus, the wide spread assumption resulting in stereotypes that characterize the migrant Hausa women as uneducated and averse to education only reinforces these limitations which many of these women have experienced as a result of their gender and placing in society. According to one of our respondents:

> In my state, girls from rich families go to school, but here people say Hausa do not go to school, Me I no go any school o because we are always moving from one location to another and I marry come begin born. I get 3 children now. (Personal communication, Feb 3, 2023).

Another respondent expressing poverty as her limitations for not attending school even while in the south has this to say: "I went to Arabic school, but my family move to Igbo land and no money to go to Igbo school, so I marry come go my husband house" (Personal communication, Feb 3, 2023).

From the above responses, it can be deduced that most of the Hausa women migrants are not given the opportunity to go to school, but rather are married off by their parents. Thus, the assumptions that they do not like to go to school only enforces a stereotype that underplays the limitations of gender and class in their inability to get proper education. Again their families are always on the move underscoring the negative impact of migration on education of the children as a whole and not only the girl child.

ii. Early marriage

Our respondents identified early marriage as a stereotype experience by most Hausa migrant women in the South. Early and forced marriage seemed to be the cultural norm in Northern Nigeria because of parents' fear of pregnancy outside of marriage. As a result, many girl children are forced into marriages as early as 12 or less to friends, benefactors, and clerics. Child marriage violates girls' rights to health, education, and opportunities. It may expose girls to violence throughout their lives and traps them in a cycle of poverty. Early marriage is both a cause and a consequence of many of the girls dropping out of school or not even going to school at all. Their education, if any, is most times disrupted since they have to take care of their husbands, do household chores and generally take care of the family. While this may be true, other people who do not understand this culture and the circumstances of these realities take it to negative dimension that

may cause negative feeling to the migrants. Most of the migrants feel bad about how people perceive them in that aspect. According to one of the respondents:

> "… to marry is what every parent wish for their girls and not to give your girl education or they bring shame for family. This is our culture, here you will see girls 30 years never marry, I surprise oo. This is my fourth marriage (Personal communication, Feb 3, 2023).

Another respondent has this to say;

"…marrying out girls early bring fortune to the family and every family wants that, the girls have no choice this is our culture. But here people see it that it is a problem*"* (Personal communication, Feb 2, 2023).

When probed further to ascertain whether the males are equally expected to marry early, the respondent answered in affirmative. Many of the families and men who married young girls are being dragged here by human right groups. So, when they marry such very young girls, they send them back to the north where the practice is allowed. Sharing her experience, a respondence opined: "I marry at 13years but was not allowed to join my husband here until I was 18years because of Igbo troubles" (Personal communication, Feb 3, 2023).

iii. Political participation

Our respondents identified lack of interest in political participation as another stereotype experienced by many Hausa women in the south. According to them, there is a general

perception of the Hausa women down south as politically inactive. While it is true that many of these migrant women do not participate in elections either as agents or in their voting capacity, there are factors that may have contributed to their inability to fulfil their political obligations to vote in elections. Our respondents noted that their inability to vote in elections is not due to apathy or any cultural or religious restrictions, but due to the voting arrangement that requires voters to only vote in the polling units of their registration. They noted that while most of them have the requisite voting cards and are duly registered to vote, they are however unable to vote their families constantly move from one place to the other and are not able to return to the north to vote during elections.

In terms of political participation, women are poorly generally represented in Nigeria. The Nigerian society been patriarchal in nature, with cultural practices presenting many barriers to women's participation and representation in politics, women are mostly seen as belonging in the home, incapable of making decisions and the idea of women exposing themselves to public scrutiny in political activities such as campaign and rallies is seen as improper (Arowolo et al, 2010). Unfortunately, this is a general trend that is not peculiar to Hausa women in Nigeria. However, many people in the Southeast believe that Hausa women do not vote at all even in the north due to cultural and religious limitations. However, contrary to this, our respondents confirmed that most of them have their voter cards and are only unable to vote due to their inability to reach their polling unit during elections; "I have voter's card but I have not transferred my registration to the east so I cannot vote here" (Personal communication, May 10, 2023).

When asked whether other Hausa women who are 18 have voter's card she said;

"… yes most of us here have voter's card but we mostly use it as identity card so before we come down here we get our voters card" (Personal communication, March 14, 2023).

Contrary to popular perception of these Hausa women as non-participants in the electioneering process, our research showed that these women barring the limitations of geographical distance participate in elections.

iv. Engagement with jobs or business activities

Another area where people have stereotyped the migrant Hausa women in the South is engagement with jobs or business activities. According to our respondents only a very few Hausa women are beggars in the South East, most of them have their businesses from where they earn their living. She noted that indeed most of the beggars we see in South-East are not Nigerians but are migrants from neighboring countries such as Chad, Niger etc. Our respondents noted that the perception of the Hausa migrant women as jobless and unwilling to work is belittling and embarrassing. Reacting to this, one of our respondents has this to say:

> Me I have something doing, I sell food here at Hausa community because they are the people that can buy my food. But people here think we do not do anything to support our families. Look, we came here to make money to raise our families (Personal communication, Feb 3, 2023).

Another respondent:

> People here think we are lazy, look I only come here after planting season to sell my farm produce and make more money. I also help some Igbo traders here to buy foodstuffs from our farmers in the north (Personal communication, Feb 3, 2023).

It also seemed some of the Hausa family here are seasonal migrants and for some, their business is also seasonal.

> I am not a beggar, most people that beg are from Niger republic, they even beg in the north. I supply textile from Kano and my family are big distributor. But some people here think I do not do anything. I don't have shop like Igbos here I only supply to my customers (Personal communication, March 14, 2023).

Research Question 2: What are the possible causes of perceived gender stereotype among Hausa women migrants?

The findings of the research revealed three factors that entrench gender stereotype against the Hausa migrant. These include: Cultural Differences, differences in belief system and gender socialization.

i. **Culture Differences**

Our respondents identified cultural differences as one of the possible reasons why these stereotypes exist. Culture can be seen as a way of life of a group of people. Many cultures promote the belief that women do not have an identity of their own but those derived from men. Again, the expected discrepancy between the Igbo culture and Hausa culture may

have increased the perceived stereotype for the Hausa migrants. As expressed by one the respondents:

> We noticed that Igbo people way of life and cultural practices are different from our own. Most of them expect us to behave like them but that is not possible because there are things our culture expect from women to do which we must obey (Personal communication, Feb 3, 2023).

When we probed further on some of the perceived cultural differences, the respondent has this to say:

> … like the family can decide any time and give one out for marriage and your husband can marry more than three wives". The women are trained to be totally submissive to their husband and he has the right to divorce and remarry any time. Our dressing is different, and our women are expected to wear Hijab and we notice that people here are not comfortable with that (Personal communication, Feb 3, 2023).

Our findings support Amu (2005) assertions that customs and traditions have a major role to play when it comes to women's roles and participation, and it have been defined and shaped along biological and cultural lines. Therefore, it's arguable that cultural and traditional practices play an important role in the perpetuation of gender stereotype and inequality.

ii. **Differences in Belief System**

Another theme that follows from culture and tradition is issue of religion. Most of the Hausa women interviewed believe that the stereotype against them is as a result of their Islamic religious practice which significantly differs from Christian religious system in the South. They believe that many of the stereotypes arise due to the disparities in religious practices. Thus, many people in the Christian dominated South who do not understand some of these differences categorize these Hausa migrant women with it and sometimes from a negative perspective. Expressing this view, one of our respondents has this to say:

> Igbo people see us as enemies because some call us Boko Haram, they don't believe that Islam is a religion of peace and they think that our Islam is against women going to school, working or having our human rights. No I have my right (Personal communication, May 10, 2023).

Another respondent shared similar opinion:

> Everybody here thinks that we do not work or have right no we do work. Even though our religion expects my husband to provide all my needs, it does not stop me from working and providing for the family (Personal communication, May 10, 2023).

In effect, religion has been a major point of disparity between the Moslem dominated North and the Christian dominated South. Religion has continued to define relationships that exist between the two regions, and this extends to perceptions. Thus, most people in the South tend to relate to people from the North in line with these perceptions and vice versa. Unfortunately, these migrant women are categorized in line with these perceptions which sometimes could have negative undertones.

iii. **Gender socialization**

Our respondents also identified the difference gender socialization ideologies as a possible cause of the Hausa migrant women stereotype. According to our respondents, the girls in the North are trained to be more conservative and while the women in the South are trained with not much restrictions. The implication is that the Hausa women are more reserved and tend to associate mostly with their local migrant communities while the southern women tend to be more liberal in association. These differences according to them contribute to how the Hausa migrant women are perceived in the South-East and these perceptions are what result in stereotypes. One of our respondents expresses this opinion thus:

> There seem to be a big gap between how we train girls and how Igbos train girls. Here grown-up girls easily do things together in the public. There is restriction on that in our culture (Personal communication, May 10, 2023).

Socialization processes and belief systems have been shown to influence adherence to gender stereotypes and patterns of behavior. In most cases, the social norm, which supports these gender relations, is usually transmitted from one generation to another through the process of socialization. As children move through childhood into adolescence, they are exposed to many factors, which influence their attitudes and behaviors regarding gender roles. These attitudes and behaviors are generally learned first in the home and are then reinforced by the child's peers, school experiences, and the media. However, the strongest influence on gender role development seems to occur within the family setting, with parents passing on, both overtly and covertly, to their children their own beliefs about

gender (Witt, 1997). The expected gender role may contribute to the perceived gender stereotype.

Research Question 3: How does perceived gender stereotype enhance the invisibility among Hausa women migrants in Anambra State?

The implications of stereotypes on the lived experiences of these migrants are quite enormous. Stereotypes sometimes determine the systems of relationships and affect how people are treated in society. As for the migrant Hausa women in South-East Nigeria, ranging from non-inclusion in labour environments, to market segregation to general public attitude, the implications are gross on the lives of these women. These stereotypes results to invisibility. The effect is that these women are seen all around the locality but are hardly heard nor involved in the local activities of the people. The effect could be traumatic and the implication on their psychological well being is gross. One of our respondents has this to say:

> As of now nobody want to employ me at the private organization and allow me wear my hijab to work so if I cannot start my own business I cannot work (Personal communication, Feb 3, 2023).

Gender stereotype has led to prevalent gender inequality and this manifests itself in a number of spheres within the family, labor market, political structures. Gender stereotypes may influence women's and men's choices of studies and jobs and may lead to a gender-segregated labor market. These stereotypes influence the unequal sharing between women and men of working time, income and family responsibilities; they also constitute barriers to women's career advancement and appointment to decision-making positions (European

Commission, 2009). Scholars have argued that women are most often valued not according to their personal abilities but following the settled stereotypes that they possess poorer abilities and they are not able to perform work that requires responsibility.

Moreso, most of the participants highlighted how the perceived gender stereotype led to perceived invisibility.

> People rarely patronize us in open market because of our religion and ethnicity here, even to get space for business is not easy for us and our business is always within this Hausa community (Personal communication, Feb 3, 2023).

For some of them that have either obtained their voter cards here in the south or been able to migrate their polling units to the south, these stereotypes also affect their dispositions to even participate in elections and express their voting rights.

> During national election the tension is always high coming out to vote here is dangerous, so most of us including our men don't even bother to vote here (Personal communication, Feb 3, 2023).

Thus, stereotypes create distrust and exacerbate tension between the migrant communities and their host communities. Due to the ensuing misunderstandings that arise because of stereotypes, people are most likely not to function in their optimal capacities. The implication is significant as it amplifies the invisibility of Hausa women migrants who are already passing through series of religion and culture induced subjugation.

Research Question 4: What can be done to reduce the perceived gender stereotypes among Hausa women migrants in Anambra State?

Reducing the stereotype against the Hausa women will boost their ego, help them to contribute positively to the socio-economic development of the state and guarantee them increased balance of mental health. Thus, one of the goals of this research is finding practicable ways of reducing the perceived stereotype against Hausa migrant women in the South.

Our respondents noted that having education facilities situated either in the Hausa communities or very close to these communities will encourage many of them to send their children to school and this will go a long way in addressing the education stereotype.

> Even though I did not go to school, but I know that if we have free and nearby schools for Hausa community, I will send my children to school. Schools are far from where we stay and my children can't be going that far (Personal communication, Feb 3, 2023).

Thus, these stereotypes can be addressed if schools are situated in or close to their communities so that they can access better education.

Our respondents also noted that they are hardly treated equally by locals who most times refuse to rent their properties to them.

> The only place we have business space is at Hausa community outside here people hardly rent shops to us and even when we have shop people don't patronize us well (Personal communication, Feb 3, 2023).

To address issues of discrimination, there must be a policy action towards the criminalization of discriminatory practices that tend to alienate a section of the public and treat them unequally. This policy action must also be geared towards a reorientation of the public to eliminate distrust that arise out of cultural and religious diversities. As one of our respondents noted;

> Once people here see you observe your Muslim prayer, the next thing they will ask you is to pack out of the area. They should allow us to practice our religion freely (Personal communication, Feb 3, 2023).

Thus, this reorientation attempt will provide the necessary background for public appreciation of the socio-religious diversities that exist amongst the many nationalities that make up the country.

Conclusion

Gender stereotype if not properly managed could escalate into fully blown prejudice, xenophobia and inter-ethnic strife. Theearly management can start with proper identification of the forms of stereotype that exist between host communities and migrants. The current study has identified education, employment, marriage, culture and political alienation as areas the Hausa migrant women perceive as being stereotyped. These stereotypes also contribute to their invisibility. However, managing these identified factors timely can reduce invisibility and increase socio-economic activities of these migrant

women which will in turn increase the development of the host communities. Further studies can confirm these factors by including the host community's perspectives about gender stereotype of the Hausa migrant women.

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