



GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF AHOADA WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE

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Annotation: The marginalization and humiliation of women which was traceable to the pre-colonial period still persists in this contemporary epoch. This immensely has hampered the empowerment of women in politics of Ahoada East Local Government Area. This study investigates gender inequality and female political empowerment in Ahoada East Local Government Area of Rivers State. The study adopts the feminist theory in its interpretation. Quantitative methods of sourcing data were adopted in this study. Thus, the sample size of 399 was determined from the population of all the women in Ahoada East Local Government Area. Simple random and accidental sampling techniques were used to select the 99 women from each of the randomly selected communities. The findings thereof portray that, denial of land inheritance; abuse, widowhood practice, physical attacks and difficulty in labour markets etc. were some of the nature of gender issues faced by the women. There were cultural, economic, educational, male gender preponderance and other factors that influence gender inequality and female political empowerment in the study area. The study recommends amongst others that the National gender policy should be signed to laws to provide a legal framework for gender mainstreaming in the national development plans and strategies as this would lead to the abolishment of discriminatory practices such as denial of land share to women, unequal access to education, and discrimination in decision making etc.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Female Political Empowerment and Participation.

I. Introduction

In the world today, without doubt, most African society is patrilineal in nature. This simply means that, we Africans trace our descent from the male ancestors, which makes the male child to see themselves as first-class citizen (superior) because without him the lineage cannot continue. More so, even from the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era gender had never been equal (Haralambos & Heald, 1980). Agriculture was the mainstay of the Nigerian rural economy. Division of labour was majored based on sex (male or female). In the east, the males clear the farm lands, plant yam, climb palm tree and tap wine while the females weed the farm lands, carry harvested crops home. In the southern part of Nigeria which is occupied by the Delta of River Niger due to the ecological factor, the male and few female that are strong physically, are the ones who go into the Atlantic oceans to fish, more females are in charge of the cooking or if they want to fish they go to the smaller seas or swamp (Ifeanacho, 1998; Oke, 2015). All these proved that there have never being an egalitarian society in Africa. Precisely, the females are not adequately represented when it comes to do with issues of political power. In the north the males are the Emirs, Waziris, Galadimas, in the west, males are the Alaafins, Obas and in the East the Ofor title holders or Obis are all male (Ifeanacho, 1998; Ugoji, 2003). Even if females partake in policies they do not occupy the apex, a sensitive role and more so an ascribed position.

Narrow it down to local authority, in Ekpeye Kingdom of Ahoada east LGA, the men are the title holders which is the highest ruling council that comprises of high class chief and usually the

paramount rulers. It is forbidden for female gender to be part of this council, that is to say that female gender are not part of the decision making body in the local tradition. When important matters arises like leasing of lands, selecting traditional rulers, masquerade initiation, etc., female are giving no opportunities to interfere in the matter. In Ekpeye (i.e. Ahoada East LGA) communities, it is only the male members of the family that attend the meeting and conclude on a decision. No female member dare comes and it is rooted in the culture because it is a patriarchy society and the negative assumption like seeing the female folks as second class citizens and the male are automatic first class citizen. This assumption has faulty foundation because female are naturally gifted as their male counterpart and as such possess potentials that can transform the society and some female will even do more than the male folks if giving the opportunity.

Foreign governments, including Nigeria, have evolved strategies and programme to empower women politically, educationally and economically towards national development of the country. Indeed, many regions and towns that make up Nigeria have also benefited from these initiatives. Some of these programmes are organized by women themselves, government and non- governmental bodies at community levels to support other programmes at state, national and international levels. These initiatives include formation of women's organizations that engage in development oriented activities to tackle social problems such as in political, economic and educational sectors, male dominance and other related problems. The Umu-Ada group as a social cultural organization which is presented in Igbo land in the south eastern part of Nigeira is the organization that stood up for female right during the colonial era, the Aba women riot that took place in 1929 which Umu-Ada group was the brain behind it (Ifeanacho, 1998). Other approaches to this initiative include economic empowerment which focuses on improving women's control over materials resource. This could be achieved by organizing women for saving and increasing women's access to credits, income generation, skills training and other related activities. These empowerment initiatives also involve consciousness rising and accumulation of knowledge and ideas, this is achieved through education and other literacy related activity (Awofeso & Odeyemi, 2014).

Despite the improvements going on in the present days, independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), on April 2007 election shows the high level of female's marginalization in Nigerian politics. Example, the most recent election conducted by the electoral college, the independent National Electoral commission; 73 candidates were vying for the offices of presidency and 5 were women with the former minister, Oby Ezekwesili later dropped before the election day, while 20 women contested the office of the vice president. Also only 7 of the 109 senators are women, wile 31 of the 360 House of representative members are women and there are only 40 female members of the state Assemblies across the Nation. Looking at Nigerian's election which brought president Goodluck Jonathan into power in 2011, the presidential primaries of the people's Democratic party (PDP), was contested by three individuals which out of three one was a woman (Sarah Jurbil), while her single vote cast reaffirms the patriarchal nature of the Nigeria political system (National Bureau of statistics, 2016).

These feeling have being born by many silently, while those who can no longer contain it have made open protest or form feminist unionism like the "Better life programmes' headed by Maryam Babangida in 1987. This programme aims at organizing women as groups in other to liberate themselves from the shackles of marginalization to achieve desirable goals and balance the societal development. Even at the state level. Since the creation of Rivers State in 1963 till date, the state has produced only one female Deputy Governor Dr. (Mrs) Ipalibo Harry-Banigo, who is presently deputizing His Excellency. Chief Barr. Ezenwo Nyesom Wike, the Executive Governor of Rivers State.

Akudo (2012) has pointed out impediments to the political and socio-economic empowerment of the African women in the 21st century, with emphasis on Nigeria, and how to emancipate female Nigerians from political mediocre and stagnancy through education and participation in the socio-economic and political development of the Nation. For him, various factors impede the advancement of women in politics and other spheres of the society, these factors are partly contributed by female Nigerians. Whereas government has a role to play in changing the subordinate status of women in government

and decision-making, many actions have been taken by women in order to break loose from political backwardness and social subordination.

Oni and Joshua (2012) carried out a research on gender relations in Nigeria's democracy, and observed that, despite the increasing agitations for gender equality, the situation in Nigeria, following the demise of military rule in 1999, is nothing to write home about as women representation in national parliament in 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections recorded a dismal 6.3%, 8.8% and 7.3% respectively. They also pointed out that four major factors are responsible women's marginalization in political participation. The factors are namely; socioeconomic, cultural heritage, political acrimony and institutional design. They further argued that any measure directed towards redressing the low political participation of women in Nigeria will only be superficial unless the structural factors that impede women's political empowerment in the country are addressed.

Anigwe (2014) posited that despite international laws grant women political participation rights, Nigeria government has failed to protect women's right and advance gender equality in political leadership. The study identified six factors that limit women political participation resulting in female gender underrepresentation in Nigeria, namely; gender inequality, male dominance, women empowerment, spousal support/approval, financial support and legislation reform. The findings indicated that women were still underrepresented in the political sector of government and lacked political power as they strive for equality to become political leaders.

Focusing on the problems tackling women and their under representation in Ahoada East Local Government Area. "Nigerian women are grossly under-represented in politics and governance and in all spheres of human development (Nwosu, 1999)". It is worthy of note that in Ahoada East Local Government area, women are obviously underrepresented in the political governance of the council. Presently, in Barr Benjamin Eke's led administration, only few female constitute the legislative and the executive arm of government. By implication, the male gender preponderance or dominance in the political arena still plays out or applies hugely in Ahoada local government area, which of course, constitutes a problem in the study.

Literature abounds on gender inequality and female political empowerment in Nigeria, but none has captured the political underrepresentation of women in the political governance of Ahoada east local government area, evidently in figures and tables from 2010 to 2020, which forms the gap in this study. It is from this forgoing our study therefore aims amongst other things at examining the levels of marginalization of women in political empowerment of Ahoada East Local Government Area. The study therefore attempted the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. To what extent is gender inequality being perpetrated in Ahoada East Local Government Area?
2. What are the factors responsible for gender inequality in Ahoada East Local Government Area?
3. How does gender inequality affect female political empowerment in Ahoada East Local Government Area?

Objectives of the Study

1. The general objective of the study is to identify the impact of gender inequality on female political empowerment in Ahoada East Local Government Area. The specific objectives are as follows:
2. To examine the extent of gender inequality being perpetrated in Ahoada East Local Government Area.
3. Identify factors responsible for gender inequality in Ahoada East Local Government Area.
4. To examine the effect of gender inequality on female political empowerment in Ahoada East Local Government Area.

Study Area

This study, seeks to explain the impacts of gender inequality on political empowerment of women in Ahoada East Local Government Area of Rivers State. Ahoada East Local Government Area has a total

population of 85,467 male and 80,857 female and a total population of 166,324 with a projection of 233,700 people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The study is limited to the challenges of women in political empowerment between 2010 and 2020.

II. Literature Review

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality refers to social or culturally learned characteristics associated with, and expected of males and females. Gender can be defined as the biological sex of an individual, as being masculine or feminine. Gender inequality refers to the disparity of treatment when it comes to issues concerning gender. It is the hierarchical placement of the male higher than their female counterpart, due to some sensitive factors, such as, continuity of the family lineage or because they are stronger.

Female Political Empowerment

Female political empowerment is the inclusion or involvement of the female gender into political governance of any Nation(s). Political investment in women or Empowering women is an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty. There is no gain saying, that empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families, communities and the nation. A critical aspect of gender equality is the equal participation of women and men in decision-making about societal priorities and development directions. Empowering women is rather, vital for securing sustainable economic growth and other development objectives.

Women Political Participation in Nigeria

Women Participation in Nigerian politics is an issue of great importance. Women have been put at the background politically for years; this has engendered a consciousness of women under-representation in public life. In order to improve the socio-political status of women in Nigeria, numerous women Nongovernmental Organizations (NGO's), have sprung up. They have embarked on campaigns to encourage women's participation in politics, although in reality, this campaign has not gone beyond the conference halls of hotels and pages of newspapers; that is it has not actually reached the grassroots. One of the strategies is to soften the ground for the female contestants by agitating for some concession. This is called affirmative action. It is aimed at increasing women representation in political offices

The various Nigerian constitutions guaranteed the rights of women to participate in active politics; however, the last decade has witnessed a relative increase in women's participation. This is only when we measure increase in participation with certain standards like the number of women who vote in elections; the number of public offices held by women; number of women related policies implemented by government etc. Over the years, there has been a remarkable increase in women's participation in politics in Nigeria considering these standards, yet there is inherently a pronounced level of under representation of women in politics when compared with their male counterparts (Nkechi, 1996).

The 1999 Nigerian constitution by virtue of Section 40 states the following: Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interests: Provided that the provisions of this section shall not derogate from the powers conferred by this Constitution on the Independent National Electoral Commission with respect to political parties to which that Commission does not accord recognition. Section 42(1) of the same constitution states further that: A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination. This further confirms that you can go to court to seek redress if as a woman your franchise is violated and that the constitution as a whole prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.

In actual practice, there is extensive discrimination. Few and almost insignificant number of women were elected into various posts in the 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections held in the country.

Men dominate most public offices till date. Female gubernatorial candidates have emerged but none has ever won and same goes for the Presidency. Legislative representation has witnessed the presence of women yet they remain under-represented when compared to their male counterparts. Following two decades of military rule statistics reveal that women only secured 3% representation in contested positions in 1999, 4% in 2003, while in 2007 they made with only 6%. Few and almost insignificant number of women were elected into various posts in past four general elections held in the country between 1999 and 2011. The result of the survey shows that no woman was elected as governor of any state in the federation. We only had few women as members of Houses of Assembly across the country and as members of the upper house (Senate) and lower house (House of Representative) of the National Assembly. Women are clearly, profoundly underrepresented in Nigeria; Gender stereotypes are holding women back. Nigeria tends to think of men as agentic, people who are assertive and take charge. They think of women as “communal” individuals who are nice, friendly, and caring, so Nigerians think of leaders as being more agentic than communal.

The Effects of Gender Inequality and Women Political Empowerment in Nigeria

Researchers have demonstrated through relevant literatures that the Nigerian government has failed to protect the right of women and advance gender equity in politics. Hence, women political empowerment remains optimally low. Improving gender equity in itself may be a goal with clear intrinsic value. Law-Remer (2012) argue that gender equity and the achievement of other development goals, such as health, education, social economic right fulfillment, and even growth are inseparable. For Law-Remer, higher level of female education and literacy has been found to reduce child mortality and improve educational outcomes for the next generation. The presence of women in political leadership positions appears to increase schooling for girls. Children’s health is influenced by women’s bargaining power in the home. Lower fertility rates, also associated with increase educational attainment for women, can have a positive effect on growth. Obviously, promoting gender equity can be a game changer. Closing the gap would mean higher growth and productivity, and greater economic stability. Nigerian women could help transform the economy given the chance to partake in governance. Nigeria suffers from widespread gender inequality, and therefore missing out on key ingredient to economic success.

There certain problems with gender inequality that shouldn’t be ignored by any society. Though usually viewed as a human rights problem, gender equality is vital for the attaining of progressive and sustainable economic development and a peaceful environment. This is even truer about Nigeria because women are about 50% of the population of the country; therefore, not allowing women to contribute to the country’s prosperity may as well become an economic self-termination (Chinasa, 2018). According to the United Nations Population Fund, gender inequality hinders the growth of countries, development of individuals, and the progress of societies, with both men and men losing out in the process. On the other hand, the contribution of women to a society is usually through the workforce. In situations when women aren’t included in the labour force, only a particular portion of the workforce is being used, thus leading to the wastage of economic resources, on a large scale.

III. Theoretical Framework

The selected theory that best explains or analyze the issues raised in the study is the feminist theory which emerged during the vibrant political movement for women back in 1970s. The fundamental goal of the feminist perspective is to understand women’s oppression in terms of race, gender, class and sexual preference and how to change it. Advocates of this theoretical explanation argue that domestic violence is broadly defined as male coercion and oppression of women within the four walls of the home. Rape, sexual assault, female infanticide, dowry-related cruelty, etc, are other forms of the violence against women in addition to domestic violence. The common elements in all these types of violence against women are gender and power.

Feminist theorists believe in feminism which means a movement for complete equality between men and women in every way. Feminism has always meant independence of mind and spirit and body. Feminist efforts to end patriarchal domination and insists on the eradication of exploitation and

oppression of women in the family context and all other intimate relationships. At the core of feminist explanations is the view that all violence is a reflection of unequal power relationship and specifically, domestic violence reflects the unequal power of men and women in society or within their relationships. (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004)

To depict more accurately the phenomenon of violence against women, feminist used the terms such as “wife-beating, battered women and women abuse” because they believe that the terms such as ‘family violence, spouse abuse’ marital violence’ and “conjugal violence shift the focus away from the concept of male coercion or oppression and away from the women. Feminists have pointed out that it is necessary to define and conceptualize domestic violence in this manner to raise the awareness of violence against women in intimate relationships and to integrate various violent behaviors into mainstream debates on crime. Feminist theorist asserts that the etiology of the domestic violence lies in the patriarchal structure of society in which systematic domination of females by males is of central concern. They point to male violence against women as central to male supremacy. According to such view, Domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment are all part of the systematic oppression of women, rather than isolated cases with their own psychological or criminal roots” (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004).

Advocates of feminist theory argue that domestic violence is a systematic and structural mechanism of patriarchal control of women that built on male superiority and female inferiority, sex stereotyped roles and expectations and economic, social and political predominance of men and dependency of women, along with verbal, emotional and economic abuse, violence is a means of maintaining male power in the family when men feel their dominance is being threatened. Economic dependence of female makes them unable to escape from the violence behavior of men. Men’s superior physical strength may enable them to dominate women through violence. A fundamental factor in any analysis of violence against women is that of gender. Violence against women refers to the determined gendered social structure. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behavior and expectation that are ascribed to men and women. It is also understood as a social structure of norms and institutions where women and men experience life differently because of the socially ascribed roles of gender. It is a salient and pervasive issue which responds appropriately to those women who experience violence in many forms.

Feminist see rape and sexual assault on women not as an act of passion but as a violent social statement, i.e., a means of controlling women. Rape and the threat or fear of rape is how men make women docile and ensure their dominance, men are taught to associate power, submissiveness, passivity, weakness and inferiority with femininity: In this process, men learn that they are the aggressors against the women. In the feminist view, the use of physical force or its threat against wives is an integral part of the institution of the family and is one of the means to control the family. Consequently, gender is the root of violence against women in terms of societal structure in camps and such an environment where both sexes exist.

IV. Review of Empirical Studies

Menhas et al. (2013) studied to find out the impact of cultural barriers on women empowerment in Pakistan. Pakistan follows the patriarchal family system and man is the head of the family. The study discovered that the income status of the women determine their decision making power in the household in terms of their empowerment. Again, the study discovered the age of the woman is also considered in issues of empowerment of the women. The unique here is that the study was conducted in a predominantly Muslim society. To this end, Omokojie (2013) critically look at the socio-cultural factors militating against the work performance and advancement of female executives in Nigeria public health institutions. Research findings show that the work performance of female executives in the institutions surveyed are significantly affected negatively by a number of socio-cultural factors such as biological nature of women, women’s role in children’s upbringing, extension of cultural practices to workplace, and so forth. Further findings regarding the perception of the work performance of female executives across gender was however found to be insignificant.

Again, Rubio (2018) understudy the trend and factors bedeviling the education of the girl child in Ghana. The findings of the study established that there is a cultural mind-set as the main factor that underlies the problem of girls' education in Ghana, rather than poverty. The study also highlights and analyses the cultural aspects of Ghanaian society that impede girls to enter schooling and break out of the cycle of poverty. Ibekwe et al. (2014) investigated the impact of socio cultural factors on women education and employment. It was a descriptive research that made use of 900 respondents as sample. Findings identified family background pregnancy and family responsibilities as factors influencing education and employment of women in Emohua local Government Area. To address these problems, he also suggested that government should improve on the already existing free education by helping parents to pay some of the fees they are still made to pay and employers of labor are encouraged to respect and allow nursing and expectant mothers.

Societies all over the world and at different times have never been egalitarian. Inequality exists in income status, race and ethnicity. The focus of this research therefore is on the issues of gender inequality that affect women in political empowerment and participation. Apart from the cultural factors affecting the women, some social factors were also seen. The theory of feminism was used to discuss the link between gender inequality and women empowerment in politics. No literature has provided an answer to the issues contributing to the empowerment of women in politics in Ahoada East Local Government. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap in extant literature.

V. Methodology

With reference to the aim of this study, the research employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive survey design. This research approach enabled data to be gathered from women on the influence of gender inequality on political empowerment of women in Ahoada East Local Government Area. The researcher chose this quantitative approach because it allows generalisations which can show the big picture while qualitative methods cannot. The study populations were the entire One hundred and thirteen thousand eight hundred and fifty-seven (133,857) women in Ahoada East Local Government Area (City Population, 2021). The sample size of this study is 398 female respondents from Ahoada East Local Government Area of Rivers State. The Taro Yamane (1967) was used to determine the sample size. Thus, the Mathematical equation is below:

N= Population

K= Constant (1)

E= Degree of error expected (0.05)

N= Sample size

$$n = \frac{N}{K + N(e)n^2}$$

$$\frac{133,857}{1 + 133,857(0.05)n^2}$$

$$\frac{133,857}{1 + 133,857(0.00250000000000000005)}$$

$$\frac{133,857}{1 + 334.64250000000004}$$

N= 398.80825580789076

Sample size =399

The simple random and accidental sampling was used to select the sampled communities and the respondents. Four communities such as Abarikpo, Akinima, Ahoada and Joinkrama were randomly selected among the many communities in Ahoada East Local Government Area while 99 respondents were accidentally selected from each of the big communities.

We involve the use of both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source of data generated through the research instrument of a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. To complement the data from the research instrument, the researcher, also conduct oral interview and observation. The secondary sources of data which complement the primary sources were drawn from different literatures such as textbooks, unpublished works journals, magazines, newspapers, bulletins and online resources. The research used content validity to achieve the validity of the instrument for the study. This research work employs the test-retest reliability method to ascertain the study’s instrument reliability. In analyzing the data collected for this study; the researcher employed descriptive statistics such as frequency tables and simple percent ages for the socio-demographic data. Also, the researcher used mean and standard deviation with the aid of SPSS version 26 to analysed the research questions.

VI. Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presented the result and the analysis of the results. Out of 399 questionnaires distributed, which represented 100%, only 384 which represent 97.2% of the total questionnaires distributed was retrieved. The percentage was considered suitable for the analysis.

4.1.1 Socio-Demographic Data

Table 1 Demographic Data of the Respondents

Age of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
18-27	11	2.9
28-37	107	27.9
38-47	203	52.9
48 years and above	63	16.4
Total	384	100.0
Occupation of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Farming	191	49.7
Trading	128	33.3
Fishing	31	8.1
Civil/public service	28	7.3
Others	6	1.6
Total	384	100.0
Marital Status of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Married	232	60.4
Single	76	19.8
Divorced	60	15.6
Widow	16	4.2
Total	384	100.0
Educational Qualifications	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	60	15.6
Secondary	222	57.8
Tertiary	98	25.5
No formal education	4	1.0
Total	384	100.0

Source: Fieldwork Survey (2022)

With regard to the participants' ages, 11(2.9%) of the respondents fall between the age bracket of 18 and 27, 107(27.9%) are between the ages of 28 and 37. 203 representing (52.9%) were in the 38-47 age bracket, while 63(16.4%) were between the ages of 48 years and above. The above table shows that 191(49.7%) of the respondents were engaging in farming business, 128(33.3%) engages in trading, 31(8.1%) of them engages in fishing, 28(7.3%) were civil/public servants while only 6(1.6%) engages in other form of employment. Out of the 384 participants, 232(60.4%) were married, 76(19.8%) were singles, 60(15.6%) were divorcees while 16(4.2%) were widows. As shown in the table above, 60(15.6%) had first school leaving certificate, 222 (57.8%) had secondary school certificate, 98(25.5%) had tertiary institutions certificate while 4 respondents representing (1%) had no formal education.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: Is there gender inequality in Ahoada East Local Government Area?

Table 2 *The Extent of Gender Inequality in Ahoada East Local Government Area*

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Denial of land inheritance to women	3.48	0.67	Accepted
2	Verbal abuse of women	3.45	0.67	Accepted
3	Not allowed to present kolanut	3.39	0.60	Accepted
4	Widowhood practices	3.32	0.71	Accepted
5	Physical attack	3.28	0.76	Accepted
6	Denial of opportunity to work by husband	3.21	0.93	Accepted
7	Lack of power to make decision at home	3.15	0.81	Accepted
8	Female circumcision	3.12	0.77	Accepted
9	Difficulty in labour market	2.94	0.73	Accepted
10	Restriction on freedom of expression and association	2.76	0.64	Accepted
11	Denial of education	2.47	1.07	Not Accepted
12	Unequal wage earning and status	2.28	1.01	Not Accepted
13	Early marriage	2.08	1.01	Not Accepted
14	Rape and sexual harassment	2.04	1.00	Not Accepted
Grand Mean				

Source: Fieldwork Survey (2022)

Table 2 above shows the extent of discriminatory practices in the study area. The practices are denial of land inheritance to women (Mean=3.48) response. Other discriminatory practices includes verbal abuse of women (Mean=3.45), Not allowed to present kolanut (Mean=3.39), widowhood practices (Mean =3.32), Physical attack (Mean=3.28), denial of opportunity to work by husband (Mean=3.21), Lack of power to make decision at home (Mean=3.15), Female circumcision (Mean=3.12), Difficulty in labor market (Mean=2.94), Restriction on freedom of expression and association (Mean=2.76). The study established that the women were not denied access to education which was indicated with a low mean of 2.47, there was no unequal wage earning (Mean=2.28), there was limited extent of early married (Mean=2.08) as well as low level of rape and sexual harassment (Mean=2.04).

Research Question 2: What are the factors responsible for gender inequality in Ahoada East Local Government Area?

Table 3 *The Factors Responsible for Gender Inequality in Ahoada Local Government Area*

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
15	Customs and beliefs	3.01	0.74	Accepted
16	Unemployment	3.00	0.58	Accepted
17	Weak community sanction	2.97	0.75	Accepted
18	Low income	2.93	0.69	Accepted
19	Attitudes	2.86	0.69	Accepted

20	Family condition	2.78	0.75	Accepted
21	Religious belief	2.76	0.74	Accepted
22	Educational backwardness	2.63	0.84	Accepted
23	Family history	2.61	0.85	Accepted
Grand Mean				

Source: Fieldwork Survey (2022)

Table 3 above shows the remote causes of gender inequality and discriminatory practices against women in political empowerment. Some of the factors are customs and beliefs which is indicated by (Mean=3.01) response. The mean ratio of 3.00 response indicated that unemployment is a major cause of gender inequality and discrimination against women, Mean response of 2.97 agreed that weak community sanction is another cause of gender inequality and discrimination against women. Other causes of discrimination of women include low income (Mean=2.93), attitudes (Mean=2.86), family condition (Mean=2.78), religious belief (Mean=2.76), educational backwardness (Mean=2.63) and Family history (Mean=2.61).

Research Question 3: Does gender inequality affect female political empowerment in Ahoada East Local Government Area?

Table 4 *The Impacts of Gender Inequality on the Women Participation in Ahoada East LGA*

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
24	Emotional trauma	3.25	0.62	Accepted
25	Lack of confidence in women	3.21	0.64	Accepted
26	Unemployment of women	3.20	0.69	Accepted
27	Low self esteem	3.18	0.66	Accepted
28	Increased poverty level	3.17	0.70	Accepted
29	Divorce	3.16	0.67	Accepted
30	Infant and maternal mortality	3.16	0.67	Accepted
31	Personal isolation	3.02	0.87	Accepted
32	Total dependence on husband	3.01	0.70	Accepted
33	Illiteracy	2.92	0.80	Accepted
Grand Mean				

Source: Fieldwork Survey (2021)

Table 4 above reveals the effects of gender inequality on women participation in politics. The discrimination of women have caused emotional trauma as indicated by (Mean=3.25). It can also be seen that gender inequality and discrimination leads to lack of confidence in women as indicated by (Mean=3.21). Another effect of gender inequality and discrimination of women is unemployment of women as revealed by (Mean=3.20). Other effects of gender inequality and discrimination against women political participation and empowerment are; Low self-esteem as indicated by (Mean=3.18) response, increased poverty level as indicated by (Mean=3.17) response, divorce as indicated by (Mean=3.16) response, infant and maternal mortality as indicated by (Mean=3.16) response, personal isolation as indicated by (Mean=3.02) response, total dependence on husband as indicated by (Mean=3.01) response and illiteracy which is indicated by (Mean=2.92) response.

VII. Discussion of Findings

Research question looked at the extent of gender inequality in Ahoada East Local Government Area. The study established that the women are denied access to land inheritance, verbal abuse, unfairly treated through the widowhood practices, physical attacked, denied the opportunity to work by husband, lack the power to make decision at home as well as female circumcision. Also, it was established that the women face difficulty in labour market, restricted on freedom of expression and association at homes and in political sphere as well as public offices. The study established that the women were not denied access to education which was indicated with a low mean ratio of 2.47, there was no unequal wage earning, there was limited extent of early married as well as low level of rape

and sexual harassment with mean rate of 2.04. The above findings are in line with Okafor and Akokuwebe (2015) who observed that parents' reluctance to educate their daughters has its roots in the situation of women. Foremost is the view that education of girls brings no returns to parents and that their future roles, being mainly reproductive and perhaps including agricultural labour, require no formal education.

Mckay et al. (2018) also indicated that women face lots of inequality and discrimination, some of which are abortion of female gravid with the help of scanning, foeticide (the act of aborting a foetus because it is female), by pressing the face with pillow or by breaking the baby's neck, not giving enough and nutrition's food, denial of education, not giving needed healthcare while in ill health, early marriage, eve teasing, rape and sexual harassment, dowry, divorce, destitution even for silly or without any reason. Predispositions against females carry on several aspects that take account of employment and economic gains. Again, female workers are not given similar wages as male for some labour in some companies. Women tend to be concentrated in less prestigious and lower paying occupations that are traditionally considered women's jobs and these are also referred to as pink collar jobs. This is also in line with Agbaje *et al.* (2015) who stated that the practice of inheritance in all kinds of movable and immovable parental property is a global practice but some of the traditional societies are characterized by gender inequality and discrimination in the form of either total deprivation or partial deprivation.

Research question 2 seeks to answer questions on the causes of gender inequality in Ahoada East Local Government Area. Table 3 was used to present the response of the participants on the causes of these discriminatory practices against women. Some of the factors are customs and beliefs, unemployment, and weak community sanction. Other causes of discrimination against women include low income, attitudinal problems, family condition, religious belief, educational backwardness and family history. This is in line with the views of Okafor and Akokuwebe (2015) who stated that India's population still leads in traditional lives in rural area. Religious laws and traditions still determine the lives of many people particularly women. Even of women are formerly entitled to own land and resources, social and religious factors make many women refrain from this right in order not to cause distortions within the family. This is also in line with Ibekwe et al. (2014) who stated that the traditional and cultural practices reflect the values and beliefs held by the members of a community for periods of often spanning generations. Some of the traditional cultural beliefs are beneficial to members while some are harmful to women. He mentioned some of the practices that are harmful to women to include; early and forced marriages, virginity testing, widow's rituals, female genital mutilation, etc.

Research question 3 was used to assess the views of the respondents on the impacts of the discriminatory practices on the extent of women political empowerment. Table 7 above was used to present the views of the participants on the effects of discrimination of women on women participation in politics in Ahoada East Local Government Area. The discrimination of women have caused emotional trauma as indicated by most of the respondents and this has created fear in the women in terms of participating in politics. Discrimination of the women also leads to lack of confidence in women in participating in Politics. For instance, in the previous elections, majority of the women population were seen to be less interested in supporting their fellow women who indicated interest in contesting elections.

One of the participants who wished to be anonymous noted thus:

Women in Ahoada East Local Government Area (Ekpeye women) don't aspire for leadership positions, they believe that electoral positions and contest are made for the men. The women that per take in politics are always playing a supportive role or a second fiddle and it is generally believed such women are prostitutes, women make the numbers for the men to win elections and attain leadership, or electoral positions. The number of appointed women into political positions is very infinitesimal compared to the male gender. Obviously, women are underrepresented in the polity. The female gender always thought they will not win elections; that electoral positions are for men.

Agunbiade (2019) further argued that political parties make pronouncements on their commitment to gender equality; prevarication becomes the order of the day. They do this overlooking the fact that within their leadership structures, women do not hold any positions apart from the familiar “women leader”. There is a great gap between what they profess and the reality, none of the major political parties live up to the recommendation of the 2008 electoral reform committee of 20 percent of women in governing boards of political parties.

Another effect of gender inequality on women political empowerment is the problem of unemployment, low self-esteem, increased poverty level, and increase in divorce, infant and maternal mortality, and personal isolation, total dependence on husband and illiteracy which is indicated by mean rate of 2.92. This is also in line with the report of the UNO (2006 cited in Onyema, 2012) which says there is a proven link between a lack of education, underdevelopment and poverty and the abysmal rate of women participation in politics. Early marriage deprives young women of the opportunity to educate and develop themselves. The research also indicates that majority of the women that are victims of early marriage are from poor families; their lack of education due to early marriage deepens their poverty and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. The danger of the discriminatory practices are that children and adolescents whose rights to personal safety and wellbeing are violated are at increased risk of long life developmental challenges, HIV infections and other physical, emotional and social problems. These outcomes compromise national and international development goals. The traditional and social practices as well as role stereotypes confined women to the home as house wives and children bearers; hence, they were largely economically dependent on their husband, and by implication subservient to them (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015).

To confirm the above, another participant also noted that most of the key and sensitive positions are given to the men. She noted thus

The posts of chairman, vice chairman etc. are the exclusives for men. This cuts across all the major or prominent political parties. Consequently, the women Ahoada East are relegated to a post which focuses on mobilization for rallies, distribution of resources such as food, fabric, entertainment (singing and dancing) and fund raising. This discrimination keeps women at the bottom level of the party hierarchy and outside of the circles where decision are being made on candidate nomination/selection. Hence, in Ahoada East women, few women have been carried along, or involved in political administration of the local government. The researcher through relevant documents from the local government council records presented hereunder female empowerment and political involvement in governance of Ahoada East Local Government Area.

The tables in appendix 1 demonstrates that 84 caretaker members were appointed into Ahoada East local government area from 2010 to 2020, 68 members were Male gender, which is 81% of the total caretaker committee (CTC) members, while 16 members were female gender representing just 19% of the total CTC members. The total number of elected councilors that represented the 13 wards of the LGA from 2010 to 2020 was 26, the Male gender was 24, representing 92% of the total sum, while the female gender were just 2, representing 8%. More so, 15 advisers were appointed, between 2010 and 2020, the Male gender appointees were 14, representing 93% while their female counterparts was 1, representing just 7% of the total advisers. There is no gain saying that the Female gender despair is gargantuan in political representation and empowerment in Ahoada East local government area of Rivers State.

VIII. Conclusion

The marginalization and underrepresentation of the female gender in the political arena cannot be over emphasized. The women are obviously relegated to playing a second fiddle or supportive role to their male counterpart. The low level of female representation is consequent upon Male gender preponderance over their female counterpart in the political Arena. Culture has contributed immensely to the poor participation of the female gender in the Ahoada East. Women are made to believe that their responsibilities are to care for children, perform menial duties at the home. The men have socio-economic power that keep them privileged to having political power.

IX. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The National gender policy should be enacted into laws to provide a legal framework for gender mainstreaming in the national development plans and strategies. This would lead to the abolishment of discriminatory practices such as denial of land share to women, unequal access to education, and discrimination in decision making etc.
2. Also, there should be the re-orientation of men's mind set on religious and cultural factors limiting the growth and development of women. This could be achieved through seminars, training and workshops. There is also need to educate the women on practices that are inimical to their growth and development such as patriarchy.
3. Government should pay critical attention to women education in order to increase the population of women who would understand the implication of most of the practices and the impacts on the women. There should be coalition among women organizations and groups. This will help them share experiences and be able to tackle problems facing women. Women groups could be used as an effective mechanism for information dissemination, social and mutual learning, institutionalized process for capacity building and empowerment.

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