

Moral Perspectives of Stereotypes against Women on the Plateau, NigeriaTok, Bitrus Dung^[1] and Ahmed Elfaruk Ali (Ph.D)^[2]^[1]Department of Religious Studies,

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Abstract. In a democratic system, the issues of marginalization and wrong notion about women's right, empowerment and position are expected to be a thing of the past. Efforts have been made to reform the constitution, administrative policies and programmes so as to eliminate or minimize discrimination against women gender that have not been convincing to the feminine folks. Since morality is concern with the establishment good life, there should be no stereotyping against gender as the practice is in society especially among the Berom and Ron ethnic groups of Plateau State. It is obvious that gender stereotyping is common in the society and it has posed a lot of concern. The human race is influenced by gender as it tells of what is appropriate for boys and girls, men and women to do in society. Gender stereotypes have made girls and women often less valued and lowered their status. There has been gender discrimination, gender conflict, gender segregation and gender disparity going on globally. The gender stereotype has denied women some vital things in life such as education, political appointments, employment and skill development. This paper seeks to investigate gender stereotype in Plateau State with emphasis on Berom and Ron tribes. The analytical and observation methods were used to arrive at the findings in this paper. The paper shows how women have been stereotyped in life as they have been denied certain responsibility because of their sex with the view to bringing equality in sharing and giving responsibility wherever it may be since both men and women are all equal before God.

Key Words: Morality, Gender, Stereotype, Perspective, Disparity

Introduction

The debate that has been going on in this global world today is on human right issues in times of gender. Gender inequality, gender disparity, gender segregation, gender conflict, gender liberation and gender discrimination of all sorts. Although several documents have been drafted so that it would have a profound impact on all humans, yet the feminine gender continuously agitates for emancipation, empowerment and repositioning in various nations. Ogbaji (2010) reported that the Population Reference Bureau of year 2002 data sheet shows that gender inequality is highly pronounced in the poorest regions of the world.

It is expected that in a democratic system, the issue of marginalization and wrong notion about women's right, empowerment and position are expected to be a forgotten matter. All efforts at making reforms on constitutional, judicial, administrative policies and programs with the view to eliminate or reduce discrimination against women have not been convincing to the feminine folks. It has been noted that the strength of female educational managers cannot be ignored (Adadevoh, 2001).

With all the effort towards women empowerment, emancipation and placement in positions of leadership, the feminine folk is still struggling for better recognition. There is therefore, the need to give more opportunities to the female folk in education, decision making public life practices and policy formulation (Alade, 2012). On this note this work seeks to consider morality and stereotype against gender on the Plateau with emphasis on Berom and Ron tribes. Plateau State is one out of the 36 states of the Nigerian federation and has over fifty ethnic groups out of which Berom occupies about four Local Government areas

namely Jos North, Jos South, Riyom and BarkinLadi while Ron occupies Bokkos Local Government Area. The Berom and Ron people are both farmers and produce crops such as maize, Irish potatoes to meet their family needs and partly for commerce.

The Concept Morality

Morality has been defined by various people using different terms but yet referring to the same thing. Morality is seen as a code of conduct that would be accepted by anyone who meets certain intellectual conditions. It is also seen as what societies determine to be “right” and “acceptable”. Acting in a moral manner means individuals must sacrifice their own short-term interests to the benefit of society. Collins Dictionary (n.d.) defines morality as the belief that some behavior is right and acceptable and that it is a system of principles and values concerning people’s behavior which is generally accepted by the society or a particular group of people.

The term ‘morals’ however implies behavior and the adjectives ‘moral’ and ‘immoral’ suggest behavior which is acceptable respectively. The noun morality is concerned with the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behavior. Since norms and standards are established by society thereby linking value-judgment, values and morals. As society establishes its norms of good and bad behavior, it is making a value judgment. In essence it is showing that some forms of behaviors are more socially acceptable, more in the interest of the majority of others. Morality often requires that people sacrifice their short-term interest for the benefit of the society. People or entities that are indifferent to right and wrong are considered amoral, while those who do evil acts are considered immoral.

Morals are formed out of a person’s values. Values are a foundation of a person’s ability to judge between right and wrong. Morals build on this to form specific, context-driven rules that govern the person’s behavior. They are formed from the person’s life experience and are subject to opinion. Whatever arguments are made about morals and morality, people still arrive at the same idea that morality, morals and moral codes are all concerned with the primary objective of establishing good life. Since morality is concerned with the establishment of good life there should be no stereotyping against gender as it is the practice in society and among the Berom and Ron ethnic groups of Plateau State.

What is Gender Stereotype?

Stereotype has been defined by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2013) as a generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by members of a particular social group or roles that should be performed by members of a particular social group. At the mention of the word gender it has generally been ascribed to women but gender is therefore, a social construct which is brought about by different societies ascribed to the two sexes. Gender can best be understood when sex is mentioned as it determines the characteristics and function of male and female. Gender refers to those characteristics and functions society ascribes to male and female (Alade, 2006).

The perception of gender by society has resulted in the categorization of roles, activities, responsibilities and careers suitable for male or female. This understanding by society has led to what is described as gender stereotype. Gender stereotype is the collection, commonly held beliefs or opinion about behaviors and activities considered by society as appropriate for male or female (Alade, 2012). Martins and Dinella (2001) see gender stereotype as the belief people have about the characteristics of males and females, it is therefore, clear that stereotype varies over cultures and time. These expressions are often related to the role that the sexes fulfill in their cultures.

The human race is influenced by gender as it tells of what is appropriate for boys and girls, men and women to do in society. Gender stereotype have made girls and women often less valued and have lowered the social status. It is clear that girls and women suffer most of the negative impact of rigid gender norms and roles as they experience restrictions of freedom to mobility, violence and harassment across the globe with fewer opportunities to choose how to live their lives and Plateau State is not an exception. It is considered odd for a female to cater for herself or engage in occupations or activities considered reserved for men such as apprenticeship in carpentry, dying and bricklaying. These impressions about women are however, fading away today as they are seen into various trades that were seen as only for men.

Denying people, the freedom of choice to the path in life prevent them from fulfilling and accomplishing their full potential. A gender equal world can be built by understanding the deep root of gender inequality and the discrimination that has eaten deeply in the way gender is perceived.

Gender Equality

Gender equality is described as a means where all humans have the same right irrespective of sex. It is clear that the world recognizes that gender issues are about the socially constructed part that reflects appropriate roles of both female and male in the society. The issue of gender discrimination becomes disheartening even with declarations made by various government, non-governmental groups and agencies.

Examples of gender equality might mean that women and men should be treated equality or differently, it may also imply that women and men should be paid the same for doing the same work or treated differently (Gender Equality, 2014). Gender discrimination occurs when an employer treats one employee differently base on his or her sex. Sometimes women are viewed negatively because of their sexual orientation, gender, identity or expression. Sometimes an employer may say that women cannot perform a certain duty because they are not as strong as men or because they are too emotional (Gender Stereotyping, n.d.).

The benefits of gender equality

- Gender equality prevents violence against women and girls. Gender inequality is the root cause of violence against women.
- Gender equality is good for economy. Every day that we fail to deliver gender equity, we pay the price.
- Gender equality is human right.
- Gender equality makes our communities safer and healthier (The benefits of gender equality, 2021). Gender equality is important because it ensures that every individual has are equal importantly to make the most of their lives and talents. It is also the belief that no one should have poorer life chances because of the way they were born, where they come from, what they believe or whether they have a disability (Equality and Human Rights Commission, n.d.).

Christian View of Gender

The Bible says that God created man in His own image and likeness but man was lonely so God decided to create a woman using man's rib and she was purposely created to assist man. Though God created man first that does not mean man is pure and woman is evil but it was just God's will to do so. To show gender stereotype, Asagba (2005) says "men were said to be pure, not women, and the gods would need pure individuals to appear before Him to ask for favors'." The following Bible references have been used to support women's inequality, submissiveness, inferiority to man and subordination thus:

The head of every woman is the man and the Head of every man is Christ and the Head of Christ is God (1 Corinthians 11:3); let the woman learn to be silent with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the men, but to be in silence. For Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in transgression. Notwithstanding, she shall be save in child bearing if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety (1 Timothy 2:11-15); Let your women keep silent in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak, but they are commanded to be under obedience. And if they will learn anything let them ask their husband at home for it is a shame for women to speak in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34- 35).

Many adherents of religion have used these verses to deny women taken leadership positions in religious gatherings. In the same vein various views and publications have supported the above scriptural references that women cannot be ordained as priest, prophets, apostles, bishops, pastors and deacons (Egbomuche-Okeke, 2009). It shows that scripture records of Deborah as judge and prophetess (Judges 4:4-5), and Pheobe a deaconess in faith are ignored.

God would have created woman first if He had wanted and there is no scriptural passage that guarantees that a woman should be looked down upon. If not for the woman no other man after Adam would have come into the world as seen from the creation story. Woman have equal ability and capability of handling societal issues like their male counterparts. Another example is that of Esther who handled the issue of Hamman and Mordecai intelligently before King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) that was able to save her kindred from destruction. The woman is important in the family and spiritual matters despite the misconception of their status and some religious bodies are gradually accepting and repositioning women by ordaining them as pastors.

Gender Stereotype Against Women on the Plateau

Gender stereotype on the Plateau is characterized by a lot of in balance to the disadvantage of women. With progress and development in this twenty first century yet tradition, culture and religion have continued to widen the gap between men and women on the Plateau. "Gender equality is more than gold itself, it is a precaution for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance" (Kofi Annan former Secretary General of the United Nations).

Culture: Different cultures have different gender norms and Plateau State is not different because culture supports gender stereotyping. Culture plays an essential role in the formation of gender stereotyping. Culture affects how people make attributions. This gives rise to the series of injustices experience and the maltreatment women suffer on the Plateau. The women are characterized by low self-esteem since society regards them as not important and inferior to their male counterparts. This stereotyping is clearly seen in the preference of male children to female to the point that the men erroneously blame their wives for giving birth to female children. As a result, many women have put their lives on the line by giving birth to many children with the hope of getting a male child. This they do with the view of saving their marriage and remain relevant in the family. As the girl child journeys into adult life she faces a long time battle against harmful traditional and cultural practices that threatens her life such as early and forced marriage. A woman at an early age begins to think of a husband as she is always reminded of that since men are scarce. Remaining unmarried becomes a stigma that most women tend to overcome as they grow older. This is line with Ojiakor who states that "indeed, so constraining is society's emphasis on marriage for the female gender that and unmarried, a divorcee, or a spinster is a monstrosity" (77). Some women in the Berom and Ron communities have been denied rights to own, keep or inherit

property especially fixed property more so the women and the property belong to the men. This shows how culture has greatly discriminated women on the Plateau.

Family Upbringing: The way people are brought up causes stereotypes as it is difficult to change stereotype thinking embedded from childhood. Stereotyping is developed from childhood and gender is heavily influenced by social interaction and associations. The child on the Plateau is influenced by social factors and his personality is shaped by his /her parents' behavior towards him/her as society impacts greatly on parents' behavior. There is high tendency for boys and girls to be treated differently thereby exposing children to stereotyping at an early age. Parents behavior towards their children is usually affected economic, social, ethnic and religious factors.

Socio-Cultural Factors: Gender stereotyping is easily shown in order to maintain a social system and a status quo dominated by men. People stereotype because it is a convenient tool that gives room to blame the poor by stating that they are lazy and admiring the rich that they are hard working. People have thought that gender stereotype target women, stereotypes are also geared towards men where an employer believes that a woman is better for a job because the woman is more sensitive than men or because of the sexual appeal. In a situation where men are involved in doing what society sees as belonging to women these men are viewed otherwise by both their male and female counterparts. For instance, when a man studies home economics or midwifery he is considered a less man because the course is seen as meant for women. This therefore, shows that it is not only female gender that is stereotype but the male gender also experiences same.

Organizational Culture: Organizations play an important role in influencing stereotypes though stereotypes are formed in childhood and school, work places demonstrate stereotypes through recruitments, promotion and culture of the organization. Today on the Plateau stereotypes against women is clearly practice as they are perceived as emotional, illogical and intuitive decision makers. The embedded social stereotype of women as intuitive decision makers and the overstated beliefs about how women are perceived to perform in the work place continuously recount, produce or sustain stereotypical attitudes and the impact of this stereotype limits people's potential and negates their individual abilities.

Political Factor: This is an area where women on the Plateau are greatly stereotype because their male counterparts do not give them the opportunity to contest for political positions. That can be seen clearly from the number of women in the State House of Assembly. Out of the 24 House members for now in the Plateau State of Assembly only one woman was elected all the 23 others are men. In the National Assembly members there is only one woman as well who was elected to the House of Representative while in the Senate there is not elected from Plateau all are men. There was a woman who was nominated as a commissioner in the State but her husband was not satisfied so he asked her to decline the nomination or leave his house. According to him the position was not meant for her but for him. When it comes to choosing party leaders the women are most given the position of women leader and possibly that of Treasurer which is an evidence of gender stereotype. The women themselves discriminate against themselves by not voting for their female colleagues who contest electoral positions.

Educational Factor: Education is another area that women have been stereotype on the Plateau because most families have refused to train their girl- child beyond the Secondary School with the belief that she will not be useful to the family but to her husband. They allowed the female children to get married after primary school at most Secondary school. The female child either struggle to source for the funds to train herself in school or get married which is quite unfortunate. The concentration of parents is on their male children and they can go any length to get money to train them as long as they want to study. There is a

need for change of attitude towards the girl child education because they have equal opportunities with male child and should be treated equally.

Implication of Gender Stereotype

From this discussion it shows that there is gender discrimination against women in education, employment, politics and society in general. This is largely due to societal beliefs, perception and attitudes about them. With all the stereotyping against gender education is still the best way of preparing women to respond positively to opportunities and challenge traditional values that perpetuate their subordination in all sectors.

The effect of gender inequality has taken such deep roots that in some family circumstances, women are automatically forced by both men to bear the blame for many problems and failure in the family even before the fact is known. In the case of childlessness hardly blame the male partner for childlessness. Women are usually blame for poor performance and behavior of their children, teaching them bad habits, not taking time to look after the children, for all marital infidelity even of their husbands because they did not do enough to keep them at home, for financial problems because they are wasteful or contribute nothing to the family (Okafor, 2015). The weight of socio- cultural anger, condemnation, blame and punishment is on the women.

Christian Approach on Gender Inequality

Women being a very large group of human race in society have suffered the issue of equality considering the so much noise on the proclamations that everyone is equal, the attainment of such truth is hindered by culture and tradition. Most often women's rights are often curtailed or violated in the name of religion as stated by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (2005). The philosophy that we are all equal before God is simply lip service. However, today in both mainline and liberal branches of protestant Christianity women are ordained as clergy. As seen in Galatians 3:28 Paul the apostle states that "there is neither male nor female for all are one in Jesus Christ". Although there are still arguments raised by many Cleric to this effect. McClain (2000) says that the Organization of Women Living Under Muslim Laws argues thus:

It is only when women start assuming the right to define for themselves the parameters of their own identity and stop accepting unconditionally, and without question what is presented as the "correct" religion that they will be able to effectively challenge the corpus of laws and gender construct thrust upon them.

The above does not mean all women must feel the same way or hold the same view within a religion. Everyone is at liberty to choose what they believe in and exercise their religious rights as it relates to them.

Human Rights and Gender Stereotype

The concept "rights" has been defined by (Asogu-Allen, 2008) as certain privileges that every citizen can enjoy in society and are documented in the constitution as civil and political rights. Considering how such rights are not given at all Norberg (2003) has pointed out one of the world's crudest injustice is the oppression of women where the discrimination and oppression are rooted in cultural beliefs as practices regarding the different gender role.

Rights are legal entitlements of all citizens in a state or nation regardless of gender and are to benefit every citizen of a country in the law court if violated by an individual or government. Citizens of any nation regardless of gender are expected to benefit the fundamental human rights as citizens thus:

- Right to dignity of human person;
- Right to fair hearing;

- Right to private and family life;
- Right to freedom of thoughts, conscience and religion;
- Right to freedom of expression and the press;
- Right to peaceful assembly;
- Right to freedom of movement;
- Right to own property (Nigeria Constitution 1979 and 1985, chapter iv).

It is important to note that the stated human rights do not discriminate or benchmark women irrespective of gender stereotype as it done in society today. Despite the cultural believe and impression about gender, women especially in most developing nations of the world continue to face various forms of discrimination and development problems in terms of economic factors. To buttress this, Egbomuche-Okeke (2009) declares that in Nigeria, discrimination laws and practices against women and the refusal to recognize the value of their contributions to society is rampant. Therefore, the concept of stereotype by society to a great extent does not favour women. In view of this, women and girls do not enjoy fundamental human rights and are yet to compete appropriately with their male counterparts in politics as such the male counterpart out-weigh them in political campaigns and positions thereby violently abused (Ogbaji, 2010).

Women Empowerment

Considering the lingering discrimination and violence against women after several years of Human Rights declaration women struggle to improve their status world over on politics, economy, education, social recognition and acceptance among others. This has resulted to a development strategy with a view to transforming the doctrine of subordination through changes in legislature, property rights and distribution which are male dominance. As a result of the ideologies of dominance, gender marginalization and subordination, the United Nation stakeholders in their Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) have target provision for women empowerment. Goal three of the MDGS is to “promote gender equity and empower women”. Target four (4) of the MDGS is to eliminate gender disparity in primary, secondary and in all levels not later than 2015.

The empowerment of women is aim at increasing women access to factors of production such as credit facilities and modes of financial access (Yero, 2000). With the empowerment of women, it is belief it will reduce poverty among women if well developed and managed thereby increase employment and household income for sustainable development.

Conclusion

The man and woman are seen to equal because both of them are from the image and likeness of God (Genesis). Gender equality is not about biological sameness but about equal opportunities for men and women on the basis of their various gifts rather than sex. Naturally man and woman are complementary and interdependent beings that are indispensable for the survival of humanity. If given the same opportunity some women do better than the men as such gender stereotyping against women should be stop and let there be level playing ground for all. Therefore, women empowerment is a very effective step towards gender equality. The intensification of education and enlightenment of the individual woman can make discover her abilities and overcome the low-self-esteem that society sees her with and is characterized by lack of confidence, self-pity and disillusionment.

Recommendations

Girl's self-esteem, ambition expectations are the first victims of gender stereotypes. Eradicating such clichés and their associated behaviors should be a priority for any society and should begin in schools. Introduce female role models into the classroom as a first step.

The seed of stereotype is sown in education and education is where the solution lies. Curricula, textbooks and teacher training programmes should be periodically reviewed to ensure that gender stereotypes are not perpetuated and apprenticeship programmes, tutorials or scholarships should be considered to promote and to encourage the incorporation of women.

School teachers should provide quality, gender neutral education that promote students' welfare and respect for professional standards without any discrimination.

Issues of equality should be dealt with without complexes that is ignoring third party criticisms or pressure in addressing equality issues.

There should be join forces for equal educational opportunity as more people are involve in this type of education the more effective it will be.

There is the need to think literallyby reinforcing children on their preferencesregardless of whether or not they correspond to what the stereotype makes us expect.

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