WOMEN’S FORMAL LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND ITS IMPLICATION ON THE FAMILY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The paper examines the involvement of women in the formal labour force sector in Nigeria and how it has imparted on the family. It was observed that the level of women participation in formal labour force is still considered relatively low. This can be linked to the monopoly of males constituting the main employers of labour. The paper recommends that government should design and provide educational programmes to raise awareness on non-stereotyped gender roles of women and men within the family. There should also be an enhanced level of education for women in order to increase their labour force participation.

INTRODUCTION
Women constitute about half of the world’s population. By the United Nations estimation, the world’s population was about 6.8 billion in 2010. Out of this figure, 3.47 billion was made up of males while females formed 3.41 billion. The estimated total population of Nigeria stood at 158.4 million as at 2010. Males constituted 80.2 million of this figure while 78.2 were females (Geohive, 2010).

The participation of women in the labour force in Nigeria is still considered relatively low. As pointed out by Effa et al (1995) in Nwakeze (2013), seventy five percent of male employers prefer employing the males to the females because the former are presumed more likely to ensure maximum productivity and efficiency. Such factors as childcare, domestic issues, maternity leave etc has been highlighted as other reasons for preferring males to their female counterparts. Researches have been carried out on women labour force participation and its impact on the family but most of these studies focused on women’s activities in the informal sector which is the area women traditionally have been very active especially in African communities. This includes agricultural activities especially subsistence farming, food processing, retail trade, home caring and other house-based informal activities. As such, women who work in the informal sector are able to combine their reproductive and housekeeping work with their income generating activities, but the same is not the case in the formal sector due to the strict regulation of labour time schedules.

But in recent time’s women in most part of Africa and Nigeria in particular have been involved in formal labour force sector. Education has been a major factor that has enhanced women labour participation especially with the introduction of the Universal Basic Education programme of the government in Nigeria. Okojie (1998) defines the formal sector as including government activities and enterprises in the private sector which are officially recognized, fostered and regulated by the state through various regulations. As pointed out by Omideyi (1998), in Nigeria, statistics shows that more females in the age bracket 18 – 25
years attained higher levels of education than males in 1991. This has shot up the participation of women in the formal sector labour force.

Though much research has been carried out on the economic advantages of women employment, little research have been carried out on the impact of women’s formal labour force participation on overall family income, control over resources and diversion of women’s time and attention away from home. This study therefore explores the relationship between women’s participation in the formal economy and women’s life in the household and family.

THEORETICAL POSITION
Patriarchy literally means the rule by the father but is taken to refer to the male dominance in society. According to German (2006) patriarchy refers to a specific society where the father (the Patriarch) ruled not only the women in the family but also the younger men. Such a society depended on peasant or artisan production based at least partly in the home.
Hartmann (1979) defines patriarchy as a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence of solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. That the material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men’s control over women’s labour power. It does not rest solely on childbearing in the family, but on all the social structures which enable men to control women’s labour. Control is maintained by denying women access to necessary economically productive resources and by restricting women’s sexuality. In denying women access to these economically productive resources, men form an alliance with capital. Evidence for this is cited in the development of capitalism and the working class response to its problems in the form of demands for protective legislation and the family wage. The patriarch’s power derived from his possession of the wealth produced and his ownership of land.

One of the most influential theoretical explanations of patriarchy is that of Marxism. The Marxist view is expressed by Engels. He put forward a Marxist interpretation in his “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State”, published in 1972. He traced the evolution of patriarchy to the development of private property and that in the early stages of society, productive resources were appropriated communally and there was a period of primitive communism. Both men and women had equal rights but with the development of productive resources came the production for exchange which began to overwhelm production for use. As a result of this development, the importance of women’s work began to decline into a necessary but socially subordinate part of production. Women’s status declined from that of adult members of society into wives and daughters which involves social dependence.

Families began to be perpetuated through time as a result of the inheritance of property. This required a control not only of women’s productive labour but of reproductive labour also. As such, some seize control through their control of property over other men and women. Engels therefore linked women’s subordination to the development of productive forces and property and tied women’s subordination to class relations.

WOMEN’S LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION
Globally, there has been a significant employment growth and increased participation in the labour force. A key change in labour force participation that has affected a number of families has been the increase in the participation of women. According to a report of the Australian government (2008), women’s labour force participation has grown over the past 30 years from 44% in 1978 to 58% in 2008 in Australia, although it remains substantially lower than men’s. Women’s labour force participation continues to be lower than men’s in all age groups except between the ages of 15 – 19 years. Women’s participation in the labour force has some distinctive characteristics. Labour force participation is highest among women aged 20-24 years in Australia and then declines during the peak child-bearing years (25-44years).
In Iran, a study by Nezhad and Hojat (2005) shows that women’s participation rate and employment rate in proportion to men are low. Furthermore, they noted that despite the related improvement in the last decades, the mentioned rates are still low and the fact that women’s participation rate has remained unchanged for forty years calls for serious attention.

In the United States, there were three significant stages of women’s increase participation in the labour force. In the late 1920’s, very few women were engaged in labour force. Between 1930 and 1950, female labour force participation increased demand for office work, women participating in the high school movement,
and electrification which reduced the time spent on household chores. By the mid–1970s there was a period of revolution of women in the labour force. In the USA, the labour force participation rate rose from 59% in 1948 to 66% in 2005 with participation among women rising from 32% to 59% (Wikipedia, 2014).

As pointed out by Onyejekwe (2001) about half the Nigerian population are women and have always played important economic roles. These roles he asserted were negatively affected by earlier development schemes, particularly community development programmes which to a large extent ignored the potential of local knowledge systems for coping with change.

Lawanson (2008), further explain that there has been a long history of women participation in productive labour in Nigeria. In traditional communities, women like their male counterparts hold farmlands and assist their husbands in all farming activities. Besides working on the farms, women of Nigeria as elsewhere in West Africa, actively participate in non-agricultural activities such as craft and dying, weaving and spinning, food processing, retail trade and other and other home-based informal activities. Informal sector employment for women covers activities such as trading, domestic services, construction work, sewing, hairdressing as well as involvement in crafts and cottage industries. Though women constitute relatively low proportion of formal sector employment in Nigeria, their participation rate has been on gradual increase over the years.

Table 1 below shows the total number of employed persons according to gender in Nigeria at the Federal Civil Service between the period 1980 – 2005. The Federal Civil Service in Nigeria here is used to represent government employed staff in Nigeria and this is used as a proxy to depict formal employment situation in the country.

The number of males employed far outweighs the number of females during the period under investigation. In percentage terms the employment of males/females is in the proportion of 87% to about 13% during the entire period with little variations here and there. This simply shows that the level of female labour force participation is very low at the federal government level in Nigeria.

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FACTORS THAT HINDERS WOMEN’S FORMAL LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

There are certain factors that hinder effective women’s labour force participation in the society. These include the following:

**Discriminatory Employment Practices:** Most often, there are discriminatory practices in the labour market based on gender considerations. As pointed out by Nwakeze (2014), several practices, beliefs and stereotypes are held against the female gender as regards their suitability for certain jobs, eventual employment and advancement on the job. That it is extremely difficult in some societies for women to go beyond a particular career level. Some jobs are taken as the exclusive preserve of the male gender, while women are taken to be the weaker sex and therefore, should be employed in those areas where their weakness can be managed or tolerated.

These gender role standards are often transmitted in a subtle way from parents to children in the society. It is in line with this that Ogbuagu (2005) in Nwosu (2012, p.1240) posits:

*Gender is socially constructed for the purpose of allocating power, duties, responsibilities, statutes and roles in any given social milieu or context. It is universally conceptualized either as an organizing concept which can be innocuously interpreted as neutral (that is without bias) or as a value-laden concept which is applied to impose discriminatory practices against one group by another within a given setting.*

Morgan (1986) states that children’s identification with their parents influences their ideas about sex roles. Children of both sexes may initially adopt many traditional feminine and maternal behavior patterns but by the age of 4 or 5, boys have already began to show traditional male types of behavior. The toys they chose and the roles they play in games become increasingly masculine. At about the same age girls intensify the feminine sex type of their role. One reason for the divergence of boys and girls is that children pick up sex-typed behavior through observation learning i.e. boys observe and imitate males particularly their father while girls observe and imitate females, particularly their mothers.

Since gender role standards are enshrined in societal norms, most people still hold on to the view that the woman’s place should be in the kitchen and as such it is not traditional for women to engage in paid jobs outside the home. This therefore has imparted negatively on the rate at which women participate in the labour force as this influenced by the norms and stereotypes in society.

**Female Education:** From the colonial era, women education has been relegated to the background based on the stereotyped roles assigned to women. Mama (1997) opined that the political culture that emerged from the colonial orientation has been particularly patriarchal. As such, accessibility to formal education by the women folk is still limited even in this modern era.

In Nigeria, educational facilities are believed to be inadequate and access limited for many especially girls and women (Uku, 1992). This disparity in educational accessibility as explained by Omolewa (2002) has its root in the colonial system of education which was primarily channeled toward meeting the manpower need of the colonial government which alienated women from educational opportunities. Education has a positive effect on formal female labour force participation and an enhanced level of education for women can ensure higher wages in the labour market.

Emihe (1996) has also noted that in Nigeria, as it is also prevalent in other African countries, we live in a male dominated society where the males continuously and persistently relegate the female to the background because society has made it so. While the male child is encouraged to go to school, the female child is given out in marriage at an early age.
**Socio-Cultural Factors:** The culture and social structures prevalent in Nigeria encourages the uneven distribution of power between men and women. Culture is a set of values and beliefs, norms and customs, rules and codes that socially defines a group of people, binds them to one another and gives them a sense of communality (Trenholm and Jenson, 2000). The culture of the people in the Northern part of Nigeria of keeping women in seclusion has affected negatively women participation in formal labour force in that region.

Purdah is a religious and social practice of female seclusion. It is the practice of preventing men from seeing women which takes two forms: physical segregation of the sexes and the requirement that women cover their skin and conceal their form. A woman’s withdrawal into purdah usually restricts her personal, social and economic activities outside her home. Furthermore, some scholars argue that purdah was initially designed to protect women from being harassed, but later these practices became a way to justify efforts to subjugate women and limit their mobility. Others argue that these practices were always in place as local customs but were later adopted by religious groups. By restricting women’s mobility, purdah places severe limits on women’s ability to participate in gainful employment and to attain economic independence. The ideology of purdah constricts women in the domestic sphere for reproductive role and places men in productive role as breadwinners who move through public sphere. It has been observed that purdah still plays a significant role in women’s decisions to participate in workforce, often prohibiting them from taking opportunities they would otherwise (Wikipedia, 2014).

**Perception of the Employers:** As a result of family burdens and the responsibilities of which married women shoulder, it is widely held by most employers that women lack commitment and are less productive when compared with their male counterpart. They are perceived as spending most of their official time engaging in frivolous telephone conversations and as such are not meant to work in profit oriented organizations (Nwokeze, 2013). Also, women workers are perceived as not stable in some jobs in terms of building a career because they quit more easily from the job to get married and have children. Furthermore, some of them absent themselves often from official work because of domestic duties, marriage and child birth. Employers are of the view also that women lack the emotional stability required for some jobs and tasks. Based on this fact, most employers are reluctant to employ, train or promote women in some organizations.

**WOMEN’S FORMAL LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON THE FAMILY IN NIGERIA**

Research has indicated that there are variation in labour force participation and the control and distribution of family income. Gammage (1997) explain that when women work, they exercise control over resources allocation in the family which in turn is beneficial to the children as women are more prone to spend on children than men. Changes in women’s participation in formal labour force have had a big impact on the structure of the Nigerian family. The traditional model of a male breadwinner supporting a wife and children, once considered the norm, no longer describes most families. Instead, there is considerable diversity in how families participate in the labour force. Many fathers are also combining work and care.

The most common working arrangement for couples with dependent children is now a “two earners” arrangement, comprising a father and a mother working full time. The traditional male breadwinner arrangements are declining over time. This change has significant implications for how people think about and structure working life. The increase in women’s formal workforce participation, the number of families with two earners and concerns about the impact of long hours on families brings with it increased challenges in terms of the daily balancing of work and family responsibilities. The time schedule in paid employment tend to reduce the time that family members have to attend to family, household and caring tasks. Along with flexible working arrangements, access to quality childcare is an important mechanism for helping parents balance work and family. As women’s labour force participation has increased, there has been a corresponding increase in the demand for child care places.

Fapohunda (1982) asserts that research has shown that in an urban industrial centre such as Lagos, mothers are confronted with a dilemma not experienced by women in the past or their contemporaries in agricultural communities. As a result of staying away from home for a significant portion of each day, working mothers are faced with the difficulty of finding parental surrogates at non prohibitive expense to care for the children. Women are dominated within the family due to their lack of economic independence. French and Raven (1959) posits that with the family, the one who control the financial resources on which the other depends can usually dominates by threatening to withdraw support in a form of reward or coercive power. As such,
in order to liberate themselves from economic dependence from their husband, women are attracted to outside paid work and also to empower themselves within the context of the relationship with their spouse. Women’s employment contributes to family well-being in a number of ways. It increases the economic resources available within the families, protects against social exclusion and significant negative effects on children’s developmental and social outcomes.

CONCLUSION
Women’s participation in formal labour has not always had the desired results. Despite after securing employment, women are often discriminated at in the work place relative to their male counterparts. Such discrimination may be in terms of remuneration or in terms of the choice of employment. Fapohunda (1982), further explain that even in situations where outside work has been financially rewarding to the women, they have found that this does not automatically lead to the strengthening of conjugal bonds, in which case men have not reciprocated by sharing in the performance of domestic tasks. The increase participation of women in formal labour in Nigeria has imparted on the family life. The traditional model of a male breadwinner supporting a wife and children is no longer the norm. The increase in the number of couple families with two earners combined with the diversity in working hours has major implications for both families and the workplace.

RECOMMENDATIONS
There should be a socio-cultural re-orientation of both men and women. This is to change the erroneous belief that women are meant for domestic activities. This will give women the opportunity to realize their potentials in the formal sector of the economy. Flexible working hours should be arranged for nursing mothers to enable them take time off work to care for their children. Child care services and facilities should also be provided by government and private organizations in order to improve the concentration of the women at work.

Female children should be encouraged to acquire higher educational qualifications especially in the northern part of Nigeria to enhance their involvement in the formal sector of the work force. Government should design and provide educational programmes through innovative media campaigns in schools and community education programmes to raise awareness on non-stereotyped gender roles of women and men within the family in order to provide support services and facilities such as on-site child care at workplaces.

REFERENCES


