

Continuity and change in the perception of womanhood in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Similar to other women in other patriarchal societies, Nigerian women are still subjected to certain preconceptions that are harmful to the stability of their families. This study exposes the variables and also investigates how these ideas have changed or continued. It also highlights the influential factors that might possibly behind this adjustment in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu state, Nigeria. A qualitative methodology comprising direct observation and in-depth interviews with 22 participants from six purposively chosen communities within the study area was employed. A descriptive phenomenological approach was used in the data analysis to depict the research participants' life experiences. The results demonstrate that most patriarchal norms that subjugate women have been radically altered in recent times, especially in the areas of access to employment, education, decision-making in the

household, and marriage practices. This shift has been traced to advancement in education and age of the members of the society as well as the increase in the income of women. However, these factors did not influence any change in the area of inheritance, such as landed properties. The societal beliefs and practices concerning the inheritance of properties have remained the same to the present time. The study concludes that tradition/custom is the factor that kept the practice of women's exclusion from property ownership unchanged even in the twenty-first century. It, therefore, suggests that women's total liberation can be achieved through an intensified and sustainable advocacy against female disinheritance beyond Nsukka.

Keywords: Patriarchy, change, disinheritance, advocacy and women.

Introduction

Culturally, African women were the transmitters of the language, the history and the oral culture, the music, the dance, the habits, and the artisanal knowledge. They were the teachers and were responsible for instilling traditional values and knowledge in children. (Leith, 1967, p. 34)

Families in less developed countries, such as those in Africa and some Asian countries, have unavoidably been impacted by the decisions made by their citizens, particularly those that have to do with attitudes and behaviours surrounding womanhood. These are the opinions that people have on how women are regarded and appreciated simply for

being female, and these have been attributed to the culture of the people. The patriarchal culture that European settlers introduced into the system has shaped how people view women (Ugwu, 2023). Naturally, there are still stereotypes about women that are detrimental to the stability of their families in most patriarchal societies. In Nigeria, women are still perceived as weaker vessels than men. In the same vein, being a woman implied being weak and unimportant, vulnerable to whims and passions that paled in comparison to mental arrogance.

The way that colonial influences and indigenous cultural standards created the idea of womanhood was marked by conflicting gender roles, power structures, and social expectations in

several ways. According to research, gender identities and social structures were reshaped to support colonial rule and Eurocentric values by colonial influences, which imposed patriarchal, restrictive, and submissive duties on women, while indigenous views of womanhood emphasized autonomy, respect, and integrated societal responsibilities (Asakpa, 2025; Eche, 2024; Patel, 2023). However, it is interesting to note that the African woman was the one who held the power that united communities in many pre-colonial African communities. The African woman played a major role in both the family's survival and the marriage's destiny (Afisi, 2010). Normally, cultures anticipate that women will mature, marry, have children, and treat their husbands with respect and obedience (Tseer et al., 2023). But women are also supposed to be nurturing spouses and mothers, as well as caretakers of their offspring and even themselves. If a woman does not meet these standards, she will be treated with less respect and may face consequences like social exclusion or stigma. For these reasons, women must have access to money or aid to fulfil their aspirations without endangering their lives.

However, it is of essence to note that some of the colonial-era ideologies and perceptions about women, such as those related to gender roles in the home, family decision-making, access to education and work, and some cultural customs like widowhood inheritance have changed in the modern era, while others, such as inheritance of properties, have persisted, possibly for various reasons. In patriarchal nations, the colonial era brought new social, economic, and political systems that severely restricted women's traditional status and roles. Before the Europeans used African men who were avaricious for power and their sophisticated weapons to deprive women of their roles and maintain this deprivation with policies and other unequal ideas/structures associated with religion, education, agriculture, and other areas, Ugwu (2023) asserts that pre-colonial African society had women complementing men in various areas and were highly esteemed.

Nonetheless, the post-colonial era changed many facets of these ideas of how women were perceived. For example, an interesting previous study found that since independence, men's and women's attitudes about the proper roles for women in society and the proper division

of labour within the household have gradually been altered, which has affected decision-making inside the household (Haas, 1980). According to the study, these shifts reflect a new pattern of reported shared duties and collaborative decision-making, with men taking on more domestic responsibilities and women joining the workforce at higher rates. In a similar vein, the roles of housekeeper and breadwinner/provider, traditionally held by women and providers traditionally held by men no longer exist as separate and distinct positions within the family in this modern time. More recent empirical results corroborated this, as Nwosu (2012) observed that among men his study surveyed, 21% believed that big investment decisions were decided collaboratively in their childhood homes, while 28% thought the same in their present households. Fathers were considerably more likely than their mothers to have independent influence in a marriage, even though parents were more inclined to work together when making decisions for their children's health and education.

According to scholars like Akpan (2019) and Para-Mallam and Olokeuyi (2011), women's expectations for their primarily

socially assigned roles, such as providing for their families, have not been altered substantially since independence. During the colonial era, people believed that females did not need to go to school because they would be married off to another family. Put another way, it is expected of female children to assist their mothers with household chores and cooking rather than to attend school. According to UNICEF (2008), a daughter is initially viewed as a domestic servant and thereafter as a dowry. Women's literacy rates are lower since the colonial government prioritized the education of boys over girls (Ugwu et al., 2018). Hence, a prior study predicted that a scenario in which a girl child is used as collateral for a loan obtained for title taking, training the male progeny, or celebrating funeral rites may occur (Mgbo, 2000).

However, evidence has proven that many females are enrolled in school by their parents, relatives, or advice, which has radically modified this attitude in the modern era. UNESCO (2017) reports that there has been a significant increase in the proportion of women enrolled in schools, with the global rate of female literacy rising from 64% in 1970 to 86% in 2016. Specifically, in South Asia, girls have a higher survival rate up to grade 8

(73.3%) compared to boys (72.1%) (Kathmandu, 2015). Based on the results, Kathmandu predicted that, since more girls than boys are currently enrolled in school, the proportion of female students will surpass that of boys by 2025, as more girls than boys are enrolled in all educational levels. In Nigeria, according to the State's Ministries of Education, the proportion of girls who completed primary and secondary school increased from 46.7 per cent and 47.1 per cent in 2010 to 48.3 per cent and 47.9 per cent, respectively, in 2015 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

Notably, the notion regarding women's employment implied that women's roles were limited to taking care of the home (Chaney, 2011). Stated differently, women are prohibited from taking any outside jobs. But with more family demands and economic challenges the role of women as stay-at-home wives began to change with more women taking gainful employment to support the family (Sanusi & Adelabu, 2015). Historically, working women have been viewed as second-class citizens, immoral, and unfeminine objects of pity because of this viewpoint, which stems from the idea that males are stronger and women are weaker vessels (Mahat & Aithal, 2022).

Also, the same traditional role that was orchestrated by the colonial influence has placed women as second fiddle, working against the type of job they take and even the remuneration (Sanusi & Adelabu, 2015). Thus, during the colonial era, women's employment opportunities were restricted, and their share of the labour force was underrepresented.

However, statistics have indicated that there has been a significant shift in this perception in the modern era. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2016), in Benue State, Nigeria, 83.4 per cent of women and 80 per cent of males were employed in 2015; in Ebonyi State, the proportions were 80 per cent and 75 per cent, respectively. Once more, in Ondo State, women make up 77% of participants, while men make up 69%. Similarly, in Kwara State, 80 and 79 per cent of women and men, respectively, participated in the labour force. Furthermore, academic institutions no longer view women as inferior; today, they hold positions as head of department, dean of school or faculty, director of institutes or centres, registrar, deputy vice-chancellors, vice-chancellors, and even pro-chancellors. Maybe the reason for all these changes is the

educational attainment of women in this modern period.

Concerning women's participation in inheritance, women are not expected to inherit assets like land, homes, or other productive resources in the majority of patriarchal nations. Previous research has shown that, simply due to the nature of society, widowed women without sons or widows without formal education are especially susceptible to losing their rights to properties they cherished while their husbands or fathers were alive (Rose, 2006; Olekel. et Al., 2005, Human Rights Watch, 2003). Cooper (2010), however, pointed out that due to the patriarchal nature of some communities, little has changed in this perception. Stated differently, most patriarchal societies are resistant to change towards women's involvement in inheritance because of fear of the unknown (as some believe their ancestral spirits may rise against them); hence, they hold onto the traditions and rituals of their ancestors.

Moreover, from the colonial to the post-colonial eras, there has been a significant decline in the expectations placed on women in marriage and marriage customs. During the colonial era, girls were expected to marry young in most African and some Asian countries. When

the time came for the girls to find a spouse, the parents of the girls would make the decision. If not, people will perceive you as a promiscuous woman (Ezumah, 2018). In addition, society anticipates that if females get married, they should have children. One consequence of childlessness in such settings is that the woman loses her socioeconomic rights and contributions to her family (Uzuegbunam, 2003). Again, it is expected that a childless woman may be able to have children through a woman-woman marriage that she might call her own. This may be the cause of researchers' assertions that woman-to-woman marriage in Africa is more of a social than a sexual tradition, motivated by social and economic factors, according to Obi (2000) and Titi (2001).

Furthermore, research has indicated a decline in this view. According to Verma (2015), the percentage of child marriages has slowly decreased from 54% to 33% over the majority of the nation. An earlier report established that in North Indian rural areas, the age of marriage increased from under 12 years old before 1930 to roughly 19 years old in 1988 (Singh, 1992). This is supported by UNICEF's findings, which state that child marriage has decreased globally, especially in

households with higher income (UNICEF, 2023). The organization further posits that the income of a household plays a role, as girls from the poorest homes account for three times cases of child marriage than girls from the richest households (UNICEF, 2023).

Meanwhile, many nations that were influenced by European norms have changed in one way or another, but the key questions are: What are those perceptions of womanhood that have or have not undergone changes in Nsukka LGA, Enugu State, Nigeria? Again, what are the factors that affected the situation? The circumstance, however, motivates academics to look into the subject matter, and it is interesting to note that many researchers have looked closely at how women are viewed in many Asian and African countries, such as Nigeria (Chaney, 2011, Rose, 2006; Olekel. et. al; Human Rights Watch, 2003, & Uzuegbunam, 2003). Therefore, further research is needed to understand the underlying causes for the status quo when examining perceptions that have either remained the same or have changed. Only a small number of studies, including those conducted in Enugu state, Ugwu (2023), Akpan (2019), Kathmandu (2015), and Nwosu (2012), attempted to

do so but could not achieve more. Thus, the objective of this study is to find out whether the perception of womanhood has changed or remained consistent in Nsukka LGA, Enugu State, Nigeria.

Methods

Study design

A qualitative research design was used for this investigation. This was justified by the fact that it provides academics with an adaptable, affordable, and effective means of learning about the experiences of individuals with colonial and post-colonial perspectives on women in the Nsukka LGA, Enugu State, Nigeria.

Study area

The Nsukka Local Government Area (LGA) in Enugu State is the research area. The state of Enugu, which is in eastern Nigeria, contains 17 LGAs, including Nsukka. Nsukka is located between latitudes 6°45'N and 7°00'N and longitudes 7°15'E and 7°30'E on the Greenwich meridian, with an area of 1,810 km².

According to Iyiani et al. (2023), Nsukka is bordered by Igbo-Etiti L.G.A. on the south, Udenu L.G.A. on the east, Igboeze-North L.G.A. on the north, and Uzo-Uwani

L.G.A. on the west. The LGA comprises Nsukka town, as one urban zone with three autonomous communities (Ihe/owerre, Nru, and Nkpunano) and fifteen rural communities; namely Opi, IbagwaAgu, Eha-Ndiagu, Alo-Uno, Okutu, Anuka, Okpuje, Obimo, Ede-Obala, Edem, Ibagwa-Ani, Okpaligbo, Lejja, Obukpa, and Ehalumona (Asadu, Egbuche, Ajibo, 2019; Ozor, Ozioko & Acheampong, 2015). Most indigenous people in this region are traditional religious devotees, and the inhabitants of Nsukka are very devout (Uwaegbute, 2021). It had an estimated population of 444,100 in 2022 with an annual growth rate of 2.3% (National Population Commission [NPC], 2016; National Bureau of Statistics Estimates, 2022 & City Population Statistics, 2022). The bulk of Nsukka people are farmers, followed in employment order by the trade and civil service. It is, therefore, impossible to exaggerate the importance of understanding their disparate experiences regarding womanhood.

Participants' recruitment

Participants were chosen from both the rural and urban regions of Nsukka LGA using a stratified selection approach. Since Nsukka Urban, together with the communities of Nkpunano, Nru, and Ihe/owerre, is the only urban centre in the LGA, it was purposively chosen for

the first category. Out of the fifteen rural communities, three communities (Opi, Obukpa, and Okpuje) were also chosen purposively. In the second category, five individuals from each of the selected communities were also chosen, purposively, resulting in a total of thirty (30) participants.

These sample strategies were chosen in light of the study's objectives and participant socio-demographics. The study covered all male and female residents of the study region who were at least eighteen years old, married or never married, and educated or not.

Nonetheless, the age range was chosen since this specific group of individuals is best suited to provide relevant knowledge on the topic. However, before their involvement, the recruited participants were adequately informed about the study's objectives, advantages, and risks, and they gave their informed consent. The confidentiality of all the information they gave was guaranteed, and they were informed that they might withdraw from the interview at any moment if they so desired. As a result, 22 of the 30 people who were specifically selected for the study were used after eight of them declined. However, the total number of participants is adequate,

as the researchers' savings were the only source of funds used to carry out and execute the study.

Data collection

The data collection methodology took advantage of the scientific rigour of the qualitative research method.

However, both primary and secondary data were gathered in conjunction. Thus, the latter was compiled through book and article reviews to understand the present discourse on women's expectations and the elements that produced such status in specific cultural contexts. However, direct observation and in-depth interviews were employed to collect primary data. The interviews were conducted in both Nsukka dialect and English, depending on the interviewees' preferred language. Based on expectations of gender roles in the home, household decision-making, education, employment possibilities, inheritance, and other cultural practices, the interviews focused on people's thoughts about women.

We sampled the opinions of selected members of the community to ascertain what factors affected practices that subjugate women and whether they have changed at all. Every interview lasted roughly thirty-five minutes on average. In

the selection of the sample, consideration was given to the age, gender, and employment status of the respondents as these were deemed to be significant variables. The study participants were represented by pseudonyms that the researchers used to protect and preserve participant privacy and the confidentiality of the data collected. Each of the twenty-two participants received a pseudonym between P01 and P18 for identification and reference. P01 stood for Participant 1, P02 for Participant 2, and so on down to P22, which stood for Person 22. During the discussions, research assistants took notes. The discussions were taped using an electronic recorder with the participants' permission, adhering to the ethical guidelines for qualitative research (Bryman, 2016; Pittaway et al., 2010).

Data analysis

To analyze the data, a phenomenological method was applied. It was employed to explain the perspectives of participants and comprehend the interpretations made on field experiences (Bennett & Roth, et al., 2014). After the interviews, the researchers transcribed the information that had been captured on the audio recording. To link field notes containing both verbal and nonverbal

cues to the relevant individuals, identification codes were applied. By connecting the field notes, the researcher's recollection of the incident, and the audio-recorded interview, the researchers were able to record observations of non-verbal cues. Without any kind of modification, field data was manually analyzed.

In addition, the researchers examined the translation notes and the transcripts of the interviews while continuously playing the audio recorder. As a form of data analysis that aids in the discovery of important themes, the coded data were categorized to see that codes with similar features are grouped thematically (Umeifekwem & Okoye, 2023; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To identify the information's source, the participants' identifiers, gender, age, and employment status were used to code the data. This was demonstrated in the findings of the research via the use of quotes to elucidate respondents' opinions to

maintain participant anonymity and safeguard their identities.

Results

Based on the research questions for this study, two themes emerged from the interviewees' responses. These themes are covered in great length under the headings of the foundations that have shaped and continue to shape the way that women are perceived. Within each of the primary themes are several sub-themes that gave detailed experiences of the study participants.

Socio-demographic features of participants

In total, twenty-two (22) participants took part in the study. The sample of participants consisted of eleven men and eleven women, equally selected from the rural and urban parts of the LGA. Thirteen were married or had been married before, while only five had never married. Table 1 below provides more information on the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1: Socio-demographic features of the participants.

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Work Status
P01	Male	48	Married	Civil servant
P02	Male	27	Single	Student
P03	Male	62	Married	Trader
P04	Male	23	Single	Apprentice
P05	Male	72	Married	Retired Teacher
P06	Male	40	Married	Youth leader
P07	Male	57	Married	Civil servant
P08	Male	58	Married	Farmer
P09	Male	44	Single	Barrister
P10	Male	63	Married	Farmer
P11	Male	54	Married	Trader
P12	Female	75	Married	Farmer
P13	Female	53	Married	Civil servant
P14	Female	38	Married	Trader
P15	Female	22	Single	Student
P16	Female	63	Married	Farmer
P17	Female	58	Married	Women leader
P18	Female	37	Single	Civil servant
P19	Female	61	Married	Civil servant
P20	Female	28	Married	Student
P21	Female	56	Married	Farmer
P22	Female	58	Married	Farmer

Note: Fieldwork, 2024

Changes and continuity in the perception of womanhood

The field data analysis revealed that some of the participants, particularly those from metropolitan areas, displayed an understanding and awareness of the

expectations placed on women from the time of the colonial overlords. These comprise but are not restricted to decision-making within the family, gender roles in the home, educational opportunities, employment opportunities,

inheritance, and some cultural customs including widowhood inheritance and marriage customs.

Decision-making in the family

The findings indicate a notable increase in women's involvement and impact in family decision-making over the past few decades. Women are increasingly making decisions concerning home finances, children's education and upbringing, and other important family matters. Even still, some males, according to the participants, still get the final word in the household when it comes to major purchases. The participant's response is shown below:

In our case, my mother makes all decisions that concern our household finances and education because my father is not doing anything meaningful, and he does not even care about our education. However, there are some cases in which my mother has to involve my father, like an issue of landed properties. Outside of that, my mother makes all decisions for our family's well-being, and we are okay with her decisions. (P15, personal communication, 10th February 2024, Female, Single, 22-year-old, a student)

Furthermore, the results also show that some men do allow their wives to make decisions in most areas of their children without interfering. This was narrated by one of the participants, thus:

Yes, my wife decides on my children's education. Not because she is arrogant, but because of her level of exposure as a recognized teacher, and in the past 25 years of our marriage, we have been living happily as one family. That is to say that I involve my wife in our family decisions. (P08, personal communication, 24th March 2024, male, married, 58-year-old, a farmer)

Again, the findings show that in some families, husbands and their wives jointly make decisions, especially when it comes to children's health and investment. This explanation was supported by a participant's narrative:

It depends on the kind of one's partner. In my family, my wife and I jointly make all the decisions. But I will still be the one who will conclude and give approval before any decision can be executed. That is to say, I include my wife in all my

decisions, both personal and family decisions. (P01, personal communication, 11th February 2024, male, married, 48-year-old, a civil servant)

Gender roles in the household

The study shows that almost all the participants acknowledged that males and females in their household do eventually everything together.

Buttressing further on this, some participants stated thus: "My husband helps a lot when it comes to the issue of house chores. I even learnt how to do most things from him and I respect him for that" (P21, personal communication, 24th March 2024, female, married, 56-year-old, farmer). Other respondents narrated thus:

In my household, nothing like a separate role. I and my wife did house chores together when our children were still little until they got to a certain age and took over. Even now, I do make our family special food, so nothing is there, I am still who I am. (P07, personal communication, 18th February 2024, male, married, 57-year-old, a civil servant)

My father never engaged in house chores. My mother made me understand that house chores belong to women, not until I got married and found out that my mother's assertion is not always the case, because my husband does almost everything for me. (P20, personal communication, 10th February 2024, female, married, 28-year-old, a student)

Our parents do not allow us to do things separately, especially my father. Both males and females do all the household chores together in our family, such as cooking, washing plates, sweeping the compound, and washing my parents' clothes. I go to the market, buy foodstuffs, and make food before my sisters return from school. (P02, personal communication, 25th February 2024, male, single, 27-year-old, a student)

Again, another participant explained that "participating in household tasks is a choice, and domestic chores are not exclusively the responsibility of women. Therefore, I see no reason why a man would not assist his wife or sisters in doing so. In my home, my male children

prepare food for the family" (P11, personal communication, 4th March 2024, male, married, 54-year-old, Trader).

Further expressing gender roles in the household, a male participant admitted that gender roles in the family are much different and that they can never engage in roles that are not supposed to be done by men. See the narrative below:

In my family, my wife and daughters do all the house chores. I only provide money for them. Because it is our tradition that women cook and take care of the house chores, while responsible men provide for their families. (P03, personal communication, 11th February 2024, male, married, 62-year-old, a trader)

Access to education

We discovered that the number of women enrolled in education from primary to tertiary since after independence has increased significantly in Nsukka as against the rate of their enrollment before and during the colonial period. As one participant narrated thus:

In this 21st century, girls' education is very important. For

instance, my position in society was a result of my level of educational attainment, and I can say that education is the key to everyone's survival, especially female citizens. Therefore, I encourage every female child out there to be well educated, not even only for themselves but for the well-being of their families – society is fast growing, and soon, only people with quality educational backgrounds can fit into it. (P19, personal communication, 9th March 2024, female, married, 61-year-old, a civil servant)

Another participant supports girls' education as she explained thus:

My experience has shown me how crucial a girl child's education is, not just for her but also for the family. My cousin's sister is doing so well in her family, just because she went to university. Even though I was unable to attend university, I would ensure that all of my children, especially the girls, attend the best educational institution available to them. (P10, personal communication,

10th February 2024, male,
married, 63-year-old, a farmer)

The result also shows that males believe that women having access to education contributes immensely to family and societal development. As one of the participants narrated, thus:

Female education is of great importance. Since I could not have the opportunity to further my education to the university level, I made sure that my wife became a university graduate. As she is working in a reputable federal organization, her contribution to the family is unquantifiable. To this effect, all my daughters must go to university to better their lives and those of their families. (P06, personal communication, 4th March 2024, male, married, 40-year-old, youth leader)

Buttressing further on this, another respondent stated thus:

As a woman leader in my community, I make sure that female children go to school by educating their mothers on the

importance of education. My experience as a wife, mother,

and daughter exposes me to the benefits of a learned citizen. (P17, personal communication, 4th March 2024, female, ever married, 58-year-old, and a woman leader)

Involvement in employment

The study also investigated women's involvement in employment and the result shows that there have been notable advancements and adaptations in the participation of women in the workforce after independence. This was supported by the opinions of some participants below:

Yes, ever since Nigeria got her independence, most women I know of have been involved in employment. This was possible due to their high level of educational attainment. Gone are the days when our people used to say that women's work ends in the kitchen. So, women should be allowed to be involved in the workforce. (P05, personal communication, 4th March 2024, male, married, 72-year-old, a retired teacher)

Another participant stressed that:

Women have been involved in the workforce even before Nigeria got her independence but it was not as high as it is in this 21st century. My great-grandmother and grandmother were teachers and my mother is presently a teacher. I will say that women are even of greater importance in the workforce than men because they are more organized. (P18, personal communication, 17th February 2024, female, married, 37-year-old, and a civil servant)

2024, female, married, 63-year-old, a farmer)

Buttressing further on this, another participant narrated thus:

Things have changed. Before 1960, women married as early as 13 years and gave birth to many healthy children, but now, a woman would like to finish university before thinking about marriage. For me, this era has killed us in many ways. (P12, personal communication, 24th March 2024, female, married, 75-year-old, a farmer)

Cultural practices

The findings pointed out some cultural practices that are harmful to women's health which include female genital mutilation (FGM), marriage practices like early marriage, and widow inheritance. The statement below reflects some of the participants' views:

Female circumcision was a good practice until small children started dying from heavy bleeding. So, in our community, the practice has been abandoned and forgotten. (P16, personal communication, 11th February

Again, another participant reported that:

Not at all, in our community in this 21st century, no man will agree to marry his brother's wife as it was before Nigeria was colonized. Even though the practice was a good one then, because it maintained peace and unity in the land before things changed. Now, which lady will agree to be a second wife and talk more about marrying her late husband's brother? (P07, personal communication, 18th February

2024, male, married, 57-year-old, a civil servant)

Issue of land inheritance

Women's rights to inherit property are essential to both self-development, family financial progress, and an equal society. However, the findings revealed that the issue of inheritance especially landed properties in the patriarchal area studied remains unchanged. The study shows that it is still very difficult for women to inherit landed properties. This is evident in the opinion of some participants:

Never, in my community, will a woman be allowed to inherit land in her father's house; it was not done during our forefathers and can never happen in our time. It is a taboo in our land for a woman to inherit any land. (P03, personal communication, 11th February 2024, male, married, 62-year-old, a trader)

Another participant narrated thus:

In most places in Igbo land, including Nsukka communities, an Ada does not inherit any land from her father's place, unless the land is bought by her husband.

Even now, my father, who is a barrister and the Igwe of our community, has approved women's involvement in land inheritance both from their father's and husband's families, as currently stipulated in the Human Rights Act, most of the elders are not in support of it. (P09, personal communication, 11th February 2024, male, single, 44-year-old, a lawyer)

Factors influencing change in patriarchal orientation and practices

As findings have shown, several practices that subjugate women have changed while few have persisted. The result also shows the complex interaction of cultural, social, and economic variables that have moulded the change as well as those perceptions of womanhood that refused to change. The factors identified in this study by the participants which influenced these changes include advancement in education and age of the members of the society as well as the recent increase in the income of women. However, the unchanged practice has been traced to cultural rigidity.

Education

The study finds that there is a connection between the education of individuals and

their views about womanhood. As some of the participants believe that education changes one's actions, one of the previous participant's responses explained that his wife's level of education contributed to her involvement in family decision-making. See the narrative:

Yes, my wife decides on my children's education. Not because she is arrogant, but because of her level of exposure as a recognized teacher, and in the past 25 years of our marriage, we have been living happily as one family. (P08, personal communication, 24th March 2024, male, married, 58-year-old, a farmer)

Again, the study finds that education is a great tool for development, as a participant explained that through enlightenment both informal and formal, FGM which used to be a common practice has been reduced or stopped in their community:

Yes, education contributed to the reduction/stoppage of FGM in my community. I remember in the 1970s in my village, a learned woman stopped her mother-in-law from performing FGM on her

daughter and ever since then, her age mates and many other women followed her decision. (P12, personal communication, 24th March 2024, female, married, 75-year-old, a farmer)

On the contrary, another participant believed that women with high levels of education disregard their husbands' directives, but still pointed out how women contribute essentially to the family's well-being from their higher education acquisition:

In this 21st century, I will support women's education, because the world has changed. Though education is a tool that most women use to disrespect their husbands but a good woman with a high level of educational attainment helps in the development of her family. (P03, personal communication, 11th February 2024, male, married, 62-year-old, a trader)

Income

The study reveals that higher earnings for women result in better living conditions for the family, self-empowerment, and closer bonds among people. A participant believed that when a woman earns high

income, the whole family/community gains from the financial support of such a woman. A participant opines thus:

I believe that a woman who earns income gains respect not only from her nuclear family but also from her extended family. As such women will be allowed to contribute to the family decision-making. I use myself as an example, my opportunity to be involved in my family's decision-making is a result of the huge salary that I bring into the family. (P13, personal communication, 4th March 2024, female, married, 53-year-old, a civil servant)

Furthermore, the results showed that women who earn income attract respect and attention from their family members. One of the respondents said:

Of course, women who bring income to the family are more respected and allowed to participate in any decision in their family. Again, in this century, most men give maximum attention to a working woman. As I said before, my wife and I did house chores together. Because both of us are civil servants, and I

even have more time than her, so I help out with the house chores. (P07, personal communication, 18th February 2024, male, married, 57-year-old, a civil servant)

Further expressing women's income as a factor that molded the perception of womanhood, a participant explained that it affects their social life and consequently takes some psychological toll on the men's well-being.

Different sources of income in a family are very important, especially in this hard time. However, women who earn a huge income disrespect their husbands or disregard the values and norms of their communities. For me, my wife's level of income/education cannot make me do house chores when she is still alive or make major decisions with/for me – I remain an African man. (P03, personal communication, 11th February 2024, male, married, 62-year-old, a trader)

Age

The results demonstrate that age has had a big impact on how societies view

womanhood. The answers from the participants made clear that the age of an individual determines how he/she views women's roles and abilities, constrictive gender norms, and women's limited rights in many traditional communities. One of the participants (22 years) view reflects thus: "For me, women should be allowed to make decisions in their household. As I said, my mother takes all the major decisions that concern our household, and things are moving on well" (P15, personal communication, 10th February 2024, female, single, 22-year-old, a student)".

Another older participant (75 years) noted thus:

For 30 years now, members of my extended family have stopped practicing FGM as a result of sensitization by one of our women against FGM. But if not that, I have witnessed some of the implications of FGM before the sensitization, I would not have listened to the woman and her group. As an elder, therefore, I will continue to support the eradication of FGM. (P12, personal communication, 24th March 2024, female, married, 75-year-old, a farmer)

A 62-year-old participant opines thus:

Women should be allowed to be involved in the decision-making of their families. When I was young, I used to think that women did not have anything to offer, but not until I got married and understood that without my wife being involved in my family decisions, even in the acquisition of our landed properties, I would not have been where I am today. (P03, personal communication, 11th February 2024, male, married, 62-year-old, trader)

Culture

The study finds that culture can be a formidable obstacle to shifting ideas about womanhood because it is deeply rooted in beliefs, and social standards. Cultural narratives and expectations impede women's ability to question the status quo; hence, reinforcing traditional gender roles and numerous expectations of women. This opposition to change can take many different forms as explained below:

As I said earlier, in my community, a woman will never be allowed to be involved in decisions that concern land,

especially the ones that belong to kindred. For our ancestors forbid it, not now, not in the future. (P03, personal communication, 11th February 2024, male, married, 62-year-old, a trader)

Women in my community do not inherit landed properties, especially ones that do not give birth to a male child. My mother experienced this because she had only three daughters but I thank God we survived after the death of my father. I advise every woman to educate their children more especially the female children. (P18, personal communication, 17th February 2024, family, single, 37-year-old, a civil servant)

Discussion

The socio-economic status of African women has been significantly shaped by a complex combination of colonial and post-colonial experiences. Because of the patriarchal structure of a culture that was infused into the system by colonial orientations, different perspectives of womanhood have affected women in one way or another (Ugwu, 2023). The study shows that since the colonial era, perceptions concerning female roles in

the home, family decision-making, access to education and employment, and specific cultural customs like FGM, marriage practices, and widowhood have changed drastically, while that of inheritance has persisted.

The results, however, were consistent with research by Nwosu (2012), which found that, in their childhood homes, 21% of decisions about significant investments were made jointly by men and women, while 28% of respondents thought the same thing happened in their current households. Most of the participants in this study indicated that women make most family decisions. According to a related study by Haas (1980), decision-making within a household has evolved since independence due to a slow change in men's and women's perceptions of the proper roles for women in society and the proper division of labour within the household. According to the earlier study, fathers were significantly more likely than mothers to exercise influence in marriage, but the both parents were more likely to work together to make decisions regarding their children's health and education.

Furthermore, the report on access to education revealed that more women

have gained access to education after the colonial era, as against the colonial era, as was reported by Ugwu et al. (2018), who noted that the colonial administration favoured the education of boys over girls, leading to lower literacy rates among women. Once more, the findings support UNESCO's (2017) results, which show that the proportion of women enrolled in school has significantly increased and that the global rate of female literacy has risen from 64% in 1970 to 86% in 2016.

Regarding women's employment, the study finds that women have been fully engaged in the workforce ever since Nigeria gained its independence. This corresponds to data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2016), which showed that 83.4 per cent of women and 80 per cent of men were employed in 2015, and the proportions were 80 per cent of women and 75 per cent of males. Based on the orientation of womanhood on certain cultural practices, such as widowhood inheritance, marital customs, and female circumcision, the results showed that most of the cultural practices have been eliminated in the research area as a result of women's involvement in education and employment. This was supported by a

study by UNICEF (2023), which reported that the practice of child marriage has continued to decline globally.

The study finds that the perception of women's participation in land inheritance mainly remained unchanged from the colonial era to the present. Cooper (2010) found that little has changed due to the patriarchal nature of their societies, which corroborated our findings. In other words, the study showed that some parts of Africa are resistant to changing their perception of womanhood, particularly in Nsukka villages where members of the society uphold the traditions and rituals of their ancestors.

Finally, the study pinpoints the cultural and social elements that altered those beliefs about women. According to the findings, the primary drivers of the transformations were advancement in education and age of the members of the society as well as the increase in the income of women ; nonetheless, the culture of the people was what kept the assumption that women should not inherit land unchanged, even in the twenty-first century. The origin of this orientation is rooted in enduring societal norms and practices that have been in existence for many years. Despite statutory improvements, cultural

traditions have continued to impede real change in women's inheritance rights even in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion and recommendations

In Nsukka LGA, Enugu State, the investigation of the changes and continuity in the perception of womanhood reveals a complex interplay between colonial and post-colonial experiences. Even though there have been some improvements, such as both men and women being involved in gender roles in the family and family decision-making, more women have had access to education and career possibilities lately. However, societal norms and traditional cultural ideas still have a big influence on how people view women, especially regarding women's involvement in the inheritance of properties. This implies that the awareness about gender equality and women's rights is increasingly gaining ground in Nsukka LGA, which is one of the biggest shifts. Nsukka women are also becoming more vocal about their demands for fairness in all areas of life, including gender roles, access to education and the workforce, and the cessation of some detrimental cultural traditions in diverse patriarchal civilizations.

Nonetheless, one major obstacle to women's involvement in land inheritance continues to be the enduring influence of conventional cultural beliefs and social standards. The study, therefore, recommends a multimodal strategy that incorporates cultural awareness, social assistance, and governmental measures required to address these issues.

Specifically, engaging with traditional leaders and community members is important in challenging negative gender norms and advancing positive views about women. This can be achieved through local cultural brokers or community educators to lead discussions and impart knowledge to the indigenous citizens, thereby assisting men and women in understanding and promoting women's participation in all facets of development in ways that are sensitive to cultural differences.

In addition, interventions and support services should be offered to cater for the unique needs of women, especially those who are experiencing psychological distress and an inferiority complex. This will be achieved by maintaining the government's initiatives and policies that support women's involvement. Hence,

women's total liberation can be achieved through an intensified and sustainable advocacy against female disinheritance beyond Nsukka. Therefore, the last recommendation for further research is the limitation of our study.

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