

Guilty or not guilty? How Nigerian families impede the aspirations of Nigerian girls for higher education*

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Abstract: The females' relatively low participation in higher education is discussed within the Nigerian society in a way that such issues are discursively placed in often contradictory, as well as extremely complicated contexts. Dominant discussions draw on the interplay between gender and students' performance across subjects, as well as on the influences of the often patriarchal school environment on students' overall performance, which with little or no attention given to parental and domestic agencies. This paper is an account of the stories of the experiences of schooling about some Nigerian school girls from the perspective of their families. The larger study from which this paper derives, examined the gendered perception of schooling amongst some senior secondary school students in a Nigerian suburb. A number of discussions among the 25 girls (and 25 boys) who participated in the study were analyzed to understand how gender played in their perceptions of schooling influences upon their lives. As this project was grounded in the interpretivist qualitative research paradigm, discursive interpretivist approach was employed to interrogate how parental and domestic agencies, can play upon the aspirations of young girls for higher education in both complex and subtle ways. Recommendations for changes in policy and practice are made.

Key words: gender; higher education; girls' participation; parental agencies; domestic agencies

1. Introduction

An age-long belief arising from traditional bias within the Nigerian society is the strongly held notion that a woman's education ends in the kitchen. This notion has had very severe and unchecked implications on how most families especially in the rural places perceive the education of their female children. Thus, no matter what level of education the Nigerian women possess, it is expected that they recline on the domestic affairs. Such patriarchal and outdated thinking sort of permeates the understanding of the roles education should play in the lives and overall well-being of women, with the effect that within the rural populace such notion serves the role of control mechanism in the psyche of most rural families. Researches (Okojie, Chiegwe & Okpokunu, 1996; Iruloh, 2008) have also shown that some rural dwelling mothers have also used such mechanism against their own daughters. This paper comments on the highly problematic issue of the interplay between some family influences and the education of female children, and aims to contribute to the emerging literature on how the practices within the

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Nigerian families can impede the Nigerian girls' aspirations for higher education.

Despite massive federal, state and local governments' efforts towards the expansion of educational facilities, several empirical evidences (Okojie, Chiegwe & Okpokunu, 1996; Olubadewo & Ogwu, 2005; Ayodele, Popoola & Akinsola, 2006; Iruloh, 2008) have shown that quite a small number of girls than boys have enrolled into the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Studies (Okojie, Chiegwe & Okpokunu, 1996; Ahmadu & Tukur, 2007) have also noted that in some regions of the country, especially parts of northern Nigeria, a very large percentage of women and girls have never experienced formal education in the first instance. More so, further reviews of existing literature (Njoku, 1997; Nzewi, 1999; Indabawa, 2004; Ahmadu & Tukur, 2007; Iruloh, 2008) have also indicated that there are wide variations in terms of rural-urban dwelling girls' attendance to school. It would therefore seem that the issues around females' persistence low participation in normal education and higher education in particular in Nigeria, are profound. It is hoped that the contributions of this paper would assist families, policy-makers and various governmental agencies in Nigeria address the situation with the aim of empowering these young girls whose future is at stake for that matter.

But it is important to note that the situation is not peculiar to Nigerian women and girls. In fact, in stories emerging from studies across Africa and the Asian Continents, similar circumstances are being reported. For instance, Bunyi (2004a; 2004b) lamented females' low participation in secondary and higher education in Kenya. Earlier, Chimombo, et al (2000) discussed various practices in family, classroom and school environments that negatively impact on female education in Malawi. Similar cases have been reported in South Korea, China and India by Das Gupta, et al (2003) as well as by Fernandes (2006). In Pakistan, Hussain, Zakaria, Hassan, Mukhtar and Ali (2003) as well as Sandhu, Chaudhry, Akbar and Ahmad (2005) commented on the Asian females' very low participation at various levels of formal education. It would appear therefore that females' low participation in formal education and higher education in particular is a common scenario within developing countries and this could offer a very fertile avenue for investigation.

Women over the world constitute over 70% of the 1.3 billion world population (Indabawa, 2004; Ayodele, Popoola & Akinsola, 2006; Nadeem, 2007). Yet, their participation in education generally does not reflect the above figure; two-third of world illiterates is women (Hussain, et al., 2003) and "much of the illiteracy and lack of numeracy in Nigeria still centers around the women folk" (Iruloh, 2008, p. 93). However, education is arguably the only one instrument of social change and all other changes of mechanisms would seem revolve around it. The importance of female education is emphasized vividly in the words of Hussain, et al (2003, p. 306) in which the authors noted that the "Education of a girl is like educating a family while educating a boy is merely educating a person". So today's education of girls is fundamental to tomorrow's family and society because they are our future and thus hold the key to successful future. It is imperative therefore to provide girls of today with complete education that would enable them to successfully question what is in front of them, and how to be catalysts of change (Neumann & Dickinson, 2002) both in their families and in the larger society.

When a family places greater value on female education, its efforts are made to provide the necessary material and social environment that would assist them to achieve their highest optimal education. This is the view of Cheung & Chan (2007) in their study on how culture affects female inequality. They also noted that "Individuals as well as groups have their own sets of values. Values are embedded in people's attitudes and beliefs; thus, they are also the essence of culture" (Cheung & Chan, 2007, p. 159). It is supposed therefore that there

would be corresponding effect of any gender-influenced value placed on the education of children by parents. That is why Indabawa (2004, p. 4) argued that, “Once girls are left behind in this process, they add to the burden of development of society and their positive roles and contributions are limited early”. In spite of the overwhelming evidence of the link between the family and the educational aspirations of children, still, researches in this area appear to be scanty within the Nigerian gender research tradition. What is more, the revelation here may obviously prove to be a fertile area for investigation into the relationship between female education and the position of the Nigerian families therein.

Meanwhile, attention is drawn to the fact that most Nigerian gender research efforts seem to be focused on issues around gender differentials amongst students across subjects mostly in mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology as well as on the increasing machismo nature of the school environment (Njoku, 1997; Nzewi, 1999; Okojie, Chiegwe & Okpokunu, 1996). Little if any attention has been directed towards the understanding of the contradictory and subtle roles that the Nigerian families play in the education of their (female) children. Common research practice appears to be over dependence on inferences from foreign literature. Therefore, while it is a known fact that Nigerian girls’ enrolment in higher education is at low level (Okojie, Chiegwe & Okpokunu, 1996), no study has really attempted any explanation from the point of view of the family. Previous efforts by Nigerian researchers in the direction of home-female education (Okojie, Chiegwe & Okpokunu, 1996; Indabawa, 2004; Olubadewo & Ogwu, 2005; Ayodele, Popoola & Akinsola, 2006; Ahmadu & Tukur, 2007; Iruloh, 2008) appear to over categorize factors in terms of socio-cultural, psychological and socio-economic status of families as explanations to why Nigerian girls’ participation rate in higher education is low. What is however currently missing in those studies is the absence of some sort of any sustained explanations of the roles played by various Nigerian families in females’ persistent low participation in higher education in Nigeria.

This paper, which is an account of the stories about the experiences of schooling of some Nigerian school girls, seeks to contribute to the body of international literature on discussions of how families can impede the aspirations of girls for higher education from the perspective of the girls themselves. The larger study from which this paper derives, examined the gendered perception of schooling amongst some senior secondary school students in a Nigerian suburb. Generally, this paper intends to contribute to sociology of education and gender inequality that is concerned with the development of an intellectual as well as sustained understanding on the issue of female participation in higher education. Specifically, the paper aims to add a voice to the issue of females’ relatively under-representation in Nigerian higher education industry and the roles of the Nigerian families therein.

2. Literature review: Some influential factors in the education of female children

The general trend in previous efforts to explicate causes for females’ low participation in formal education, and higher education in particular, has been classifying factors in terms of socio-cultural, psychological and socio-economic status. The effect of this seemingly over-simplification appears to be twofold. First, issues that play into females’ low participation in higher education appear to be categorized as if they happen in the lives of these young girls in a linear manner, and as a result, some of the issues have been taken for granted. Second, the categorization of factors in terms of socio-cultural, psychological and socio-economic status appear to make the explication of females’ low participation more problematic to solve than such studies. Such an approach also

appears to hinder the possibilities of some very important, however, highly neglected micro-level explanations of matters, which impinge upon female education. As such, there is a conscious avoidance of such approach by this author allowing for issues to be discussed, because they individually contribute to females' low participation in higher education and education in general.

Generally, empirical evidences have so far revealed that factors responsible for females' low participation in school are numerous and multi-dimensional ranging from: (1) the socio-economic status (SES) of the family; (2) birth order and family size; (3) early marriage and perceived notion on the age of marriage; (4) parental level of education; (5) the nature and level of parental aspirations; and (6) religious and cultural beliefs and practices. The subsections below would attempt to demonstrate how the above-mentioned variables function to discourage most rural dwelling young girls from keeping up with the pace.

2.1 The influence of socio-economic status of the family on female education

According to Demarest, et al (1993) and Delpit (1995), the socio-economic status of the family is calculated on the basis of family income, parental occupation, parental levels of education, family contacts with the community, the family group associations as well as on the community's perception of the family. Several studies have discussed the impact of the socio-economic status of a family on the education of their female children. For instance, Sandhu, Chaudhry, Akbar and Ahmad (2005, p. 41) noted that "Income, educational level of parents and occupation ... were associated with the female education". Parents with higher and better education are more readily disposed to provide social skills as well as problem-solved strategies (Blanchard, 2001; Forsberg, 2007; Laftman, 2008; Sandhu, et al., 2005). Given the fact that mothers influence their female children more as studies have suggested (Neumann & Dickinson, 2002; Akhter, 2006; Fernandes, 2006; Iruloh, 2008), it appears more likely that mothers whose educational level is low, would have little or nothing to offer in terms of encouragement to their female children.

Researches have also shown that the level of parental economic stability would tend to impact seriously on their choices of who should receive education within the family. As shown in Fernandes' (2006) study of parental attitudes towards their children's educational attainment in South Asia, parents with lower level of economic security may express attitudes favouring more education for boys than girls or less certainty regarding these attitudes. And Indabawa (2004, p. 5) also noted that the level of family poverty has been so influential on who should receive education in Nigeria, "When parents are faced with the choice of sending a girl or a boy to school, chances are that in 80% of cases, boys will be preferred". Moreover, studies have shown that lack of money to buy school uniforms and other school supplies account for the girls' non-enrolment in schools (Chimombo, et al., 2000); and that the need to have girls support the family household survival through street-trading and hawking have limited girls' participation in schooling (Ahmadu & Tukur, 2007). Specifically for Ahmadu and Tukur (2007, p. 83), "Most families in the rural areas rely heavily on their female children as house help, support on the farm and in the market. Often the support of children is required for additional income for the family".

What else can be said? If a family fails through ignorance, which can not be excused or through wanton adherence to some unconventional cultural behaviors to educate their female children, the future of such children are simply jeopardized, and they would be exposed to some countless constraints within the larger society. Is the socio-economic status of the family to blame for the females' low participation in higher education? Can this truly explain some rural families' indifference to the education of their female children? But what about the popular

saying: If education is expensive, will you go try ignorance? While the family socio-economic status may have some collective effect on how families and parents embark on the education of their female children regardless of gender as suggested by several studies (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Davis-Kean, 2005; Sandhu, et al., 2005), the big question faced by researchers is to revolve around why so many poor children perform very well at school. Perhaps researchers need more studies in order to establish whether low or poor socio-economic status can be taken as any explanation as to why some families neglect the education of their female children.

2.2 Birth order and the family size

Birth order and family size are variables, which are believed to exert some profound pressure on the development of the children. However, both of the two facts have generated some controversies amongst researchers (Hoffman, 1991; Harris, 1998; Rodgers, Cleveland, van den Oord & Rowe, 2000). Birth order refers to the position or rank of an individual within a family, and this position is simply based on age. On the other hand, family size is the combination of the number of siblings in a family including the parent(s), as well as other individuals whose daily economic sustenance is dependent on the net family income, together these make up the size of that family. The argument according to Sulloway (2001) is that birth order influences the development of personality while living some permanent impression on the way that the individual conducts his/her later life. This theory has however, received very few support from researchers (Blanchard, 2001). Although a number of studies have tried to suggest a link between birth order and the overall development of the child, it is however, not clear what link exist between birth order and the educational attainment of female children within the family.

There are two popular explanations on the link between family size and the family effect on educational attainment. The first is the so-called dilution theory, which argues that as the number of siblings in a particular family increases, the fewer the resources within the reach of that family to cater for all (KUO & Hauser, 1997). The second is the confluence theory, which appears to recognize that only by including variables as number of siblings, effect of child-spacing, birth order and parent-child interactions into data analyses can researchers begin to appreciate their unique effects on parental abilities to cater for their children's education (KUO & Hauser, 1997). Other studies have also tried to link family size to the family's ability to cater for the needs of every member within a given family. For instance, Sweet, Anisef and Walter (2008, p. 21) have noted in their study that "The presence of siblings has a significant impact on parental savings", which invariably hinders parental ability to sustain their children's well-being including their educational development. Hussain, et al (2003, p. 306) also noted in their study of parental attitudes towards their children's education that "Family size appears to affect the education of daughters" in Pakistan societies.

Both birth order and family size explanations hold that in any event when parental resources become overstretched (as is the case with low income earners) and parents are left with a choice to choose, preference has always necessarily been given to the male children at the expense of the female ones. Following that, it would appear if such parents should decide on who attends schooling first, the male children becomes the first option. But what happens within the female-only family where there are no male children? Research is currently scanty in that direction. Perhaps researchers need to investigate the impact of birth order and family size, on the educational development and attainment of girls within the female-only household in order to establish whether such variables can impinge upon parental ability to cater for the educational needs of their female children.

2.3 Early marriage and perceived notion on the age of marriage

Studies have also revealed a link between perceived age of marriage and the educational attainment of female children. For example, in their study of Kenyan girls' attitude toward schooling, Lloyd, Mensch and Clark (1999) discovered that the period a girl is expected to stay in school can actually affect girls understanding and willingness to remain in school. Lloyd, Mensch and Clark (1999) also noted that the Kenyan girls in their study were discouraged from continuing with schooling in a situation where longer stay in school meant marriage at an older age or no marriage at all. Several researches in Nigeria (Okojie, Chiegwe & Okpokunu, 1996; Indabawa, 2004; Ayodele, Popoola & Akinsola, 2006; Iruloh, 2008) have also noted that girls are not encouraged to stay longer in education as that may result in the person turning into the popular "old layer" (very old single lady) while still in the parents' home. It was therefore a general belief especially amongst low income families that attending and staying longer in school might cause a girl not to marry as she would graduate out of school as an "old" lady. Moreover, the girls in Iruloh's (2008, p. 93) study "were very much afraid that they may not be able to find husbands if they reach a certain level of education and if they allowed prolonged education to delay them". It is important to state that marriage is certainly a barrier to girls' education especially within developing economies.

2.4 Parental level of education

Numerous empirical evidences have linked parental level of education to the level of education attained by children and female children in particular. For instance, Davis-Kean (2005, p. 294) has shown that "Parents' education is important in predicting children's achievement". It has also been discovered that "Parents' educational level influences their urge of making their children to learn". The argument is that if parents are educated, they would adopt a positive behavior towards the education of their children. Akhter (2006) has also suggested that parental supportive styles and attitudes not only influence the children's attainment level at school, but also it would constantly provide better help to the children's learning activities. Given that mothers are always closer to their female children, it is then argued that lack of education in them would almost certainly impact negatively on the educational attainment of female children in such families. This view is supported by Neumann and Dickinson (2002), who argued that the education children would receive is mostly dependent on the education of their parents. Particularly, the authors noted that the education of the mother has a significant impact on the education of her female children. Thus mothers with higher education qualifications would ensure their daughters receive the same level of education and vice versa. The position of this paper in this regard is that it is still unclear what the links are between girls' educational attainment and parental level of educational.

2.5 The nature and level of parental aspirations

A considerable body of researches has demonstrated a profound relationship between parental aspirations and their children's educational attainment (Wardle, Robb & Johnson, 2002; LI & Kerpelman, 2007). One relationship found to exist between parental aspirations and educational attainment is that it predicts achievements in children because they are related to other variables of achievement such as the children's aspirations, parental involvement, investment in education and parental interests. The individual's personal aspirations are the totality of his/her life plans or personal goals that she/he sets to achieve within a specific period of a life span. Empirical evidences (Finlayson, 1971; Hitlin, 2006; LI & Kerpelman, 2007) have linked parental aspirations to the level of parental education. It is then hypothesized that highly educated parents will have greater educational aspirations for both their sons and daughters. Given the fact that greater percentage of women in rural places of Nigeria are illiterate as studies have shown (Okojie, Chiegwe & Okpokunu, 1996; Indabawa, 2004; Ayodele, Popoola & Akinsola, 2006;

Ahmadu & Tukur, 2007; Iruloh, 2008), and given the fact that mothers demonstrate greater influences on their female children than fathers, it appears that rural mothers with little or no education would most probably have very low or no aspirations for their girls.

Much existing researches also link parental educational aspiration for their children to socioeconomic status already discussed by this article (Demarest, et al., 1993; Delpit, 1995; Hitlin, 2006). It is also suggested that “Parents’ aspirations stem from the culture, taste and values typical of their social position, and these aspirations encourage children to make similar educational and occupational careers in order to maintain the same position as their parents occupy” (Laftman, 2008, p. 759). However, it is the argument of this paper that if socioeconomic status of parents impinges upon their aspirations for their children, poor parents and mothers in particular would have little or no educational aspirations for their female children. Researches have also tried to link the level and nature of parental aspirations for their children to the structure of the family, arguing that the aspirations of teenage mothers for instance may differ from that of older mothers for their children (Biddle, 1979; Martinez-Pons, 1996). However, researches in this area are still very scanty and thus call for investigators’ attention. Other studies have also linked parental aspirations for their children’s education to the social norm theory (Valian, 1999; Blau & Lawrence, 2000; Kleinjans, 2005; Georgiou, 2007; Laftman, 2008). The argument here suggests that both parents hold different social norms for their male and female children, it is usually less strict for girls than for the boys. In the context of this theory, it is usually that the parents wish their children to become better by moving further up the social ladder. However, girls may be discouraged along the way as less rigid roles for the girls imply higher tolerance for them achieving a lower socioeconomic status than their parents do.

2.6 Religious and cultural beliefs and practices

Studies have shown that some religious and cultural beliefs and practices also impact on girls aspirations for education and occupation. Okojie, Chiegwe & Okpokunu (1996, p. 11) noted in their study that belief in the fact that “Education makes women to look down on men” with the effect that not too many rural men would want to marry the educated women, acted as a medium against female education within some rural places in Nigeria. For that reason, most rural parents might not be willing to invest in the education of their female children since such investment may well inhibit their chances of getting married on time. This view is also given credence by Sandhu, et al. (2005, p. 41), who indicated, “Old customs, traditions, caste systems, rural community and wrongly understood religious knowledge have denied the female education” in the rural places of Faisalabad, Pakistan. Bunyi (2004a, p. 55) argued that it is generally believed amongst rural Kenyan families that girls’ education “is considered an unwise financial investment. The logic being that they will become part of their husbands’ family on marriage and therefore, income accrued from their education will not be available to their (parents’) families”. Moreover, certain Islamic practices also functions to prevent young girls from schooling in some northern parts of Nigeria as studies have shown. Indabawa (2004, p. 5) linked this malfunctioning simply to “misunderstanding of the position of Islam on girls’ education—largely due to lack of sufficient knowledge of Islam, many parents think that formal education is not meant for Muslim girls”.

Other influential factors in the education of female children include gendered domestic responsibilities (Chimombo, et al., 2000; Nadeem, 2007; Iruloh, 2008), socialization processes in the family (Bunyi, 2004a, 2004b; Davis-Kean, 2005; Ahmadu & Tukur, 2007), lack of female role models (Bunyi, 2004a; Forsberg, 2007; Laftman, 2008), as well as the influence of opportunity costs of female training (Chimombo, et al., 2000;

Indabawa, 2004; Fernandes, 2006; Kobiowu, 2006). Specifically, Chimombo, et al (2000, p. 10) argued that “In dealing with both opportunity cost and the perceived net benefits of education, it has to be stressed ... the attitudes of parents who are the principal decision-making unit at the household level play a major role”. Generally, parents believe that the opportunity cost of educating girls is much higher given the nature of domestic duties that usually and necessarily await the girls. So given the choice of who should stop schooling, parents are more readily to succumb to the pressure of opportunity cost. Well, it is important to note that the list is not exhaustive, however further extension is almost made impossible by lack of space. More importantly, space has not allowed for the entire variables mentioned here to be discussed.

Meanwhile there is hardly any excuse for excluding girls from taking full advantage of formal education in any societies over the world. Educational attainment is a key component of children’s success as adults in multiple spheres including the labor market and later childrearing (Fernandes, 2006). It is a veritable tool to bring about the much-desired social, political, economic, scientific and technological development of any nation. And the role of women in such developmental scheme of affairs is not in doubt. According to Nadeem (2007), education for girls or boys boosts productivity and earning capability, however, educating the girls has a much greater impact on the health and well-being of their future families. At the micro level, Okojie, Chiegwe and Okpokunu (1996, p. 11) noted that: “Female education is beneficial to her children, they will be more enlightened and make progress educationally ... the educated woman will manage her household better”. The larger qualitative study, which has influenced this paper, was aimed to investigate the gendered perception of schooling amongst some senior secondary school students in a school located within a Nigerian suburb. Specifically, the larger study aimed to:

- (1) determine whether there was any gendered link in relation to the students’ reasons for being in school and their understanding of the subjects they offered;
- (2) determine whether there was any gendered link in respect of the students’ length of stay at school, interest in higher education, intended benefits, the students’ participation in school, homework and extramural classes;
- (3) finally establish whether there was any gendered link in relation to schooling and class attendance, truancy and absenteeism amongst the participants in the study.

3. Theoretical framework

Interactionists study about the self and presume that the self appear to be almost certainly shaped by influences from the outside (Stewart & O’Neill, 1999; Neumann & Dickinson, 2002; Tepperman, 2005). A symbolic interactionist studying how families impact on the education of young girls would ask several questions notably. How do parents perceive the education of their female children and what influence has this perception on the molding of the self-image of these girls? In fact, an interactionist would want to examine how the agencies of the family contribute to the shaping of the self-concepts of young girls in relation to higher education. Moreover, the interactionist would want to understand how young girls are pressurized into accepting their position as normal. Thus, it is emphasis on the meanings individuals attach to their actions that served a connecting link between this theoretical framework and the larger study that has informed in this paper. In line with such thinking therefore, this paper aims to illuminate how parental and domestic agencies impede the Nigerian girls’ aspirations for higher education.

4. Methods of data collection

This was a case study of about fifty senior secondary school students in a coeducational setting located within a Nigerian suburb. Equal representation of boys and girls were purposively obtained and so there were twenty-five girls in the sample and each actively participated in what they described as an interesting study. Four data sets were used in the study. The first set of data was obtained through the participant observation, which lasted for sixty-two days. Observation was guided by a number of areas and these included: the participants' pattern of school attendance, cases of truancy and absenteeism and whether there were gendered differences in these patterns. Observations also covered participants' involvement in school and classroom activities and extra-curricular activities such as manual labor, excursions trips and school-organized sports. The second set of data was derived from unstructured interview with the participants. Issues discussed in the interviews were the participants' reasons for schooling, their interests in the subjects they offered at school as well as interests in higher education. Participants were also asked questions bothering on the availability of school/career counseling and whether they engaged in studies outside the official school hours at home and elsewhere. Other issues discussed during the interviews were punctuality, the submission of assignments, truancy as well as the overall values, which the participants held for education generally.

The third set of data was derived from the focus group discussions. Group discussions were mainly influenced by emerging issues from the observation and the interviews. Such issues included: medical profession and female participation therein, female education in general, subject preferences, participants' views on various school subjects, classroom duties and discipline, examination and examination malpractices. In all, three sessions of focus group discussions were held with the participants, each lasting for an hour. Finally, the fourth set of data was derived from the participants' diaries. The use of the diary instrument was informed by the author's understanding that it would enable the researcher to "assess phenomena, which are not amenable to observation because they are unfocused or take place outside set time or environmental boundaries, and are likely to be altered by the presence of an observer" (Elliott, 1997, p. 2). Two sets of diaries were used to obtain data from the participants. The first captured the participants' socio-cultural backgrounds, while the second set of diaries targeted the nature of activities participants engaged themselves outside the official school hours from the time they left school each day until they returned to school the following morning. Although the diary was unstructured, participants were asked to comment about how they lived their lives day after day, the things they did when not in school, academic and non-academic activities, and how many hours they spent during their private studies at home, from the 22nd until the morning of 29th, November, 2002.

5. Discussion of findings

Although many issues emerged from the four data sets in the larger study of the gendered perception of schooling, this paper has utilized emerging parental and domestic agencies-related issues to establish the themes and categories that enabled this author illuminate concerns for female education and how various practices within Nigerian families impede young girls' aspirations for higher education in a Nigerian suburb. This paper is somewhat unique in that it provides empirical evidence on aspects of parental/home involvement in females' persistent low participation in higher education and its corresponding antecedents within the Nigerian society at

large. Moreover, it is hoped that the revelations in this paper would provide fertile avenue for researchers interested in the study of the dynamics of home/parental interferences in the education of their children. The following subsections discuss the paradoxes underlying young girls' articulations of their participation in education and various roles played by their families therein. For the sake of anonymity, all names used in the following discussions are pseudonym.

5.1 The construction of medical profession and the relatively low female participation

Most of the girls in the study substantially maintained that, girls do not like to see dead bodies so they do not like to train as doctors. They also unanimously agreed that not too many girls are doctors in Nigeria because of certain constraints. Among these constraints, lacking of time, pregnancy, and that some parents are not willing to allow their daughters to stay in education for too long, are dominated. Following were the views of Angela, one of the girl participants in the study:

Girls have no time to study. To be a doctor you must study for a long time. But girls discontinue after a while. There are too many domestic works we girls do with our mother that we always do not have any time to study. In fact my mother always does not want to see me study. Only my brothers were allowed time to study.

Clara's story is also similar to that of Angela and according to her,

My mother told me that I must marry after my SS (senior secondary 3). She thinks I will be very old if I go to the higher institution and men will not come to marry me. My mother said that my husband can train me to the sky if I marry. My mother said female doctors do not marry at all because men will think they are too wise to obey their husbands.

As it would be argued, gender informed inequality is implicated in the statements of Angela and Clara above in relation to the conditions of study mainly at home and parental impression on various professions. The girls maintained that the conditions under which medical courses were organized in the universities called for direct contact with dead bodies, and some of them did not like to see. Dead bodies were pictured by the girls in the study as scary and disgusting, and the nature of the girls discouraged themselves from contacting either as medical students or as doctors. Other girls in the study agreed with Angela on invoking gender in their discussions as a major determinant of educational opportunities. Within the framework of the concept of self-fulfilling prophecy, individuals react to being labeled or singled out in a particular manner (Tepperman, 2005; Conger & Donnellan, 2007). Within most Nigerian societies and elsewhere girls and females are erroneously perceived as weaker gender, friends, parents and even the media are all implicated in this act. This is consistent with Bunyi's (2004a, p. 56) study, which noted that "Through the socialization process in the home and community, girls learn negative attitudes about their abilities ..." and also with that of Iruloh (2008). Furthermore, gender was also pictured in the same revelations as relevant to the nature of profession one may want to pursue. But are there replacements for dead bodies? If effigies or robots were put in place of dead bodies, could they have helped encourage girls in Nigeria to study medical courses? Perhaps these questions would require further studies as the study that influenced this article did not address such questions.

The girls in the study also frequently talked about how their parents especially their mothers often discouraged them from going into those subject areas traditionally regarded as male exclusive. They constructed the medical profession as well as other science-based professions including engineering, pharmacy and medical laboratory science through gendered vocabularies. Most of the girls in the study revealed through the focus group

discussions that such professional courses would keep them in school for too long thereby limiting their chances of early marriage or no marriage at all. Again here is how Chioma, one of the girls described the scenario.

Not too many girls are doctors today because of certain constraints: lack of time to study, pregnancy and that some parents are not willing to allow their daughters to stay in school for too long. To be a doctor you must study for a long time but girls discontinue after a while.

Angela was very quick to comment on the impression that she drew from her mother regarding the education of girls. This is how she puts it:

But my mother told me that girls are not good as doctors because men may be afraid to marry them. It is good to be a teacher if you like, but girls are mothers and so they must marry quickly to have their children before they are old. Men do not like to marry old girls. My mother told me that she married my father when she was 16 years old. She wants me to marry after my SS3 if a man comes.

Girls in the study frequently talked about what they learnt from their families on how their investments in long-term education would act as hindrance to their eventual motherhood within the context of matrimony. Thus it would appear that the girls' families succeeded to impress upon them to believe that too much of education may work against them not getting married. Hence, the girls began to perceive education and professional courses as something meant for the boys. However, it would appear that this view may not be peculiar to the girls in the study. For instance, in their study of the attitudes of Kenyan girls toward schooling, Lloyd, Mensch and Clark (1999) discovered that the period one is expected to stay in school can actually affect girls' understanding and willingness to remain in school. Data from 600 participants sampled from 36 post-primary schools, enabled Lloyd, Mensch and Clark (1999) to discover that girls were discouraged from continuing in education because prolonged stay at school meant marriage at an older age. These revelations are however, consistent with Iruloh (2008), who noted in her study that both girls and their mothers were badly afraid that too much education may prevent the girls from getting married. Within the Nigerian families, marriage and childbearing for the girls are considered the pinnacle of female material achievement in life, hence the failure to get oneself a husband is considered monstrous, something that has ruined the happiness of too many Nigerian girls. Therefore, the girls hang around the school, but as soon as someone has asked their hands in marriage, they simply discontinued.

5.2 Parents' disinterestedness in the education of their female children

Although the girls in the study demonstrated an overwhelming awareness of the enormous benefits, which abound for both the girls and their families when they are properly educated, however, most of them still believed that it was up to their families to choose to educate them. Helen noted the reason why educating girls was important. According to her, "Even when the girl is educated and married, if the husband dies by chance, the woman will not suffer". However, this submission generated further discussions as Joy quickly rejected such ill-luck while stating, "No, I do not pray for such thing to happen. I think we must pray all the time to avoid trouble when we marry". For a number of girls in the study: Joy, Chioma and Helen, the females' low participation in higher education within the Nigerian society could be explained through a number of constraints exemplified in the manner and ways that some parents perceived of the education of their daughters. According to Joy:

The reason why some parents do not want to send their daughters to school, I think is when they marry, they will

forget their parents, brothers and other sisters and go to another family, and all the education will be useless. Therefore, some parents say that it is a waste of money. Some parents think that it is a waste of time and money to train girls. But the girls must be given proper education so that when they get married and trouble comes out of the family, but God forbid, they can have alternatives. They can move out of the house, find job and separate from the man. They can even divorce and save the money, train the children and take care of themselves.

Consciously or unconsciously, a vocabulary of empowerment through education is portrayed in Joy's statement. Here education is portrayed as a valid challenge to traditional and conventional matrimonial arrangement. Traditional and conventional matrimony operated under the principle of "for better or for worse" which Joy felt was to the disadvantage of the women. Although no one wishes to fall into trouble, nonetheless, Joy believed that, the fact that the victim had some form of education, positions her for a more positive living should occur. Education was therefore perceived by the girls in the study as an empowering tool for women in time of trouble because it could offer alternative routes. Education in this regard thus functions in the minds of the girls in the study not just as a passport for "good husband" as expected by their families, but also as an upward status mechanism, the denial of which may be very devastating and would also further intensify the unequal gender and social relations within the Nigerian society. That notwithstanding, it would appear as data have shown, the girls' families had a very different view. It would appear that the age-long belief that the "education of the Nigerian women ends in the kitchen", still functions within the families of the girls. Marriage and childbearing still take pre-eminence in designing the future of the Nigerian girls that whatever hinders, such ideology would be strongly resisted by the families. This practice explains why much attention is given to the education of the boys than that of the girls. This is a finding consistent with that of Indabawa (2004), Ayodele, Popoola and Akinsola (2006) and Iruloh (2008), which revealed greater emphasis on marriage and childbearing for the rural Nigerian girls and women.

5.3 The gendered domestic duties

The girls in the study noted that any opportunity for homework and private studies was further constrained by the nature of domestic duties, which were often mainly gender-informed. The girls in the study complained that there was hardly any time in their families for them to engage in any forms of serious academic work. For instance, Chioma, one of the participants in the study, stated the following in her diary on Tuesday, November 26, 2002.

When I wake up in the morning, I sweep the entire compound as usual and prepared for school. When I come from school, I go to the farm to uproot some cassava or to do something else in our farm. At home, my junior sister and I peel them. Then after that, I help my mother to clear one portion of land to plant vegetable. I go to the stream and fetch water. After that, I prepare supper. After doing all those above-mentioned things, I am tired so I go to bed and sleep until the following morning.

Most of the girls in the study complained that household chores were their basic responsibility. As a result, the girls complained of lack of time during examinations, which actually resulted in poor performance amongst them. For example, Helen noted that, "Exams are not good because we are not given enough time to prepare for them. During exams, most of us are sick. I do not want to die. If it is possible to stop exams I will be happy". She also noted that girls had numerous problems, which impacted upon their studies. Continuing, she said:

Girls have a lot of problems. My parents cannot let me read for a long time like the boys. A lot of things distract me.

Boys do not like to work at home. In my family, I do all the domestic work and my brothers just playing. They have more time to read at home. So if they do not pass more exams, they do not know anything. As girls, we are affected by so many things, other things you suppose to know, you know, like biological. But we will continue to try.

The vocabulary of constraint was substantially invoked within the revelations above. The girls confirmed that the problems surrounding them were both domestic and biological. This is consistent with the revelation made by Chimombo, et al (2000, p. 55) which noted specifically that within most African household, "Division of labor is in the way that the girls do most of the bulk of the household chores". It would appear that these problems were inimical to the educational progress required of the girls. For sure, these revelations raise serious questions over the education of the girls.

Moreover, within the statements of the girls, it would appear that a prescriptive and stratified duty arrangements powered by some sort of traditional gendered role model were made manifest. Within these statements, the girls were pictured as prototype mothers (since marriage and husbands were always considered very important) responsible for all domestic duties with or without the help of the boys. Thus it would appear that for the parents of the girls, education had value to the extent that it would assist them to become responsible housekeepers, such responsibility does not require any form of higher education. In terms of responsibilities, the girls invoked gender in prescriptive terms stating what were supposed to be "proper" girl and boy's duties. Thus within the household, the girls appeared to be engulfed in a form of routine domestic lifestyle that was fed consciously or unconsciously by some sort of patriarchal dynamics. Within this framework, a model is presented in which the girl is pictured as an object of dominance whose education must end in the household domestic matters.

The concern of this paper following revelations from the study therefore is that, it would appear that rural-dwelling Nigerian girls' aspirations for higher education is jeopardized by the non-supportive home environment in which they operate. The aspirations of the Nigerian girls in the study appeared to be at the opposite ends with their parental aspirations for schooling. Although the girls may have reasons for being insufficient with education in preparation for their roles as wives, their mothers thought that education was only useful to the extent that it prepared their daughters as future wives. Perhaps those explained why they were over-burdened with domestic duties even at periods when those girls were supposed to be finishing their examinations. This is an important revelation, for while researchers and educators cannot influence the economic well-being of the rural families, it is possible that they may improve girls' chances of higher education by suggesting intervention strategies that can help improve other mediating processes contingent upon girls' educational aspirations.

6. Conclusion

It is important to note at this point that, girls of today are a fundamental aspect of tomorrow's society because they are the future mothers. Obviously, education begins with that all the children learn from their parents who themselves had also been at age of boys and girls. Given the fact that parents are the most powerful first teachers with whom a child comes into contact from the beginning of his/her life, it is important that if parents were given education when they were boys and girls, after they become fathers and mothers, they would develop the urge to positively influence their children's educational growth. There is no doubt that numerous advantages will be

derived from the education of girls and women. For instance, it is true that the educated woman will be better manager in her household; she can be a better wife than the illiterate one; she can help the husband financially; she will be very supportive of her paternal family too; she can care for her children's well-being better; and finally, she will have a broadened horizon about the world in totality. It is important to recall Davis-Kean's (2005, p. 295) argument that "Maternal education has the most consistent direct influence on children's cognitive and behavioral outcomes with some indirect influence through a cognitively stimulating home environment". That is why educating girls will bring the highest returns of any investments available to any nations over the world.

Even though it has been revealed that the Nigerian families and parents have developed and adopted attitudes and practices that impede their female children's aspirations for higher education. This is therefore a guilty verdict on the Nigerian families. There were very strong evidences in the stories told by the girls in the study that, there were some cultural attributes and parental attitudes, which deeply affected their chances of acquiring education for sustainable growth. Education begins in family, and parental supportive styles as well as their attitudes towards that will be highly influential in how children approach such process. It is therefore suggested that if parents adopt positive and effective attitudes towards their children's learning at home, it would go along way to assisting the children to make better progress at school. The challenge therefore for every educator, researcher and policy-maker interested in the education of young girls and children in general, would be how to design strategies that would encourage Nigerian parents to pay more attention to the education of their female children.

To this end, both the government and the general public would have some duties to perform. Perhaps this offers a very fertile avenue for more researches. However, in the interim, various local, state and federal government agencies would have to step up enlightenment campaign aimed at encouraging parents and mothers in particular, to begin to appreciate the benefits of higher education for their daughters. Policy-makers are equally challenged to develop gender responsive educational policies that would be female-friendly in order to encourage young girls to benefit from higher education. This is particularly important since pregnancy is revealed in the study as an impediment to the girls' quest for higher education. The introduction of students' loans repayable on employment may go a long way towards releasing rural girls, poverty from the shackles of parental poverty, which also informs their negative attitudes to their daughters' education. The media including the television, print-media and radio should be co-opted to design enlightenment programs in local languages as familiar as possible that would help capture parents' interests with regards to the education of their female children. Finally, various religious groups such as Muslim and Christian associations should be encouraged to develop programs that would assist parents and families in educating their daughters.

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