



GENDER INEQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION AFFECTING FEMALE HEADSHIP IN THE IGBO FAMILY STRUCTURE IN SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA: A DOMINANT TRADITION OF PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the challenges and possibilities of female headship within the patriarchal family structure of the Igbo people in Southeastern Nigeria. Grounded in social construction of gender theory, the study utilized in-depth interviews to gather rich, firsthand narratives from 6 men and 6 women, providing profound insight into how they navigate and contest deeply ingrained traditions of male dominance, patrilineal inheritance, and restrictive gender roles. The findings indicate that female leadership within the family is systematically hampered by economic dependence, cultural practices such as bride price, and limited participation in decision-making processes. Despite these significant barriers, the research also uncovers evidence of shifting perceptions and resistance, often driven by education and women's growing socio-economic agency. The study ultimately argues that dismantling these barriers necessitates concerted efforts towards legal enforcement of gender equality, educational empowerment, and cultural sensitization to reconcile tradition with the imperative for gender equity.

Keywords: Female Headship, Patriarchy, Igbo Culture, Gender Inequality, In-depth Interviews

Introduction

The Igbo people, residing in the South-Eastern region of Nigeria, have a longstanding tradition of a patriarchal family structure, where men hold dominant roles and decision-making powers. This tradition has perpetuated gender inequality and discrimination, particularly impacting female headship within families in context and in realities.

In the Igbo culture, the family head is traditionally male and resides over patrilineal families that place great emphasis on the inheritance of family lineage. The patriarchal system perpetuates the societal belief that men are the superior sex, and women occupy a subordinate role in the family. Household leadership is regarded as the preserve of men, with women playing household support roles, and cultural expectations enforce this practice (Agbo et al., 2020) which has evolved over time to be respected as the ideal and realistic family structure among the Igbo people dominantly found in the South-Eastern States of Nigeria.

In the Igbo family structure, inheritance is patrilineal, meaning that property, names, and lineage are passed to the male offspring. This inheritance rule tends to exclude women from leadership positions in their families and society at large, hence denying them equal opportunities and stifling their growth and development (Ahuya & Goodwin, 2019). Furthermore, the existence of patrilineal systems limits women's access to property and other resources that male heirs inherit, thereby perpetuating gender inequality. Thus, the patriarchal system in the Igbo society also shapes societal perceptions concerning gender roles and women's place in society, limiting their potential to achieve leadership

positions in households. In many cases, this leads to women experiencing distress as they struggle to conform to social roles with limited flexibility. As a result, women's aspirations for equality and dignity are suppressed, hindering their overall development (Chigbu, 2021).

From the above, it is obvious that the perpetuation of patriarchal and patrilineal systems in Igbo society hampers women's ability to realize their potential and achieve leadership roles especially in the family. Various cultural practices and expectations, such as early marriage, female genital mutilation, and witchcraft accusations also impact women's growth and development. They portray women as inferior beings incapable of taking up leadership positions which in itself amounts to discrimination and inequality against women.

Gender inequality and discrimination have long been problems affecting female headship in the Igbo family structure, largely due to the dominant tradition of a patriarchal system. In many Igbo communities, women are expected to be subservient to men and are excluded from decision-making and leadership roles, making it difficult for them to become the head of households. This has created a cycle of marginalization, poverty, and inequity for many Igbo women.

One of the significant problems facing female headship in the Igbo family is cultural norms that reinforce patriarchal practices. The concept of 'male chauvinism' is deeply embedded in Igbo culture, and women are seen as inferior to men and subordinate to them in all aspects of life, including family and society. Nwobodo (2018) who is an Igbo woman herself affirms that "our culture does not recognize the woman as head of the family or as a leader, but as an appendage of the man" (Nwobodo, 2018).

Another challenge is the lack of legal rights and protection for women in the Igbo family structure. Customary laws and practices, which are prevalent in many Igbo communities, discriminate against women in various ways, leading to gender inequality. For instance, women are not allowed to inherit property or hold traditional leadership positions in most communities, which makes it difficult for them to become head of households. Furthermore, women are often subjected to men's whims and caprices and may not have a say in their own lives.

Additionally, socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, and low levels of education contribute to gender inequality and discrimination against women in the Igbo family structure. Poverty affects women more than men, as women are often excluded from formal employment opportunities and are left to depend on their male counterparts for financial support. This makes it difficult for women to become the head of households and effectively manage their family's affairs. Studies have shown that poverty affects female-headed households more than male-headed households (Okafor et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the lack of women's education is a significant barrier. Education provides women with the skills and knowledge they need to participate in decision-making, assert themselves as leaders, and challenge patriarchal practices. However, in many Igbo communities, women's education is not given the same priority as men's education. This limits their opportunities, making it difficult for them to become household heads.

In Igbo culture, women's reproductive roles often constrain their ability to achieve leadership positions in their families and communities. Women are expected to bear and care for children, which can limit their mobility and ability to participate in economic activities, hindering their potential to become household heads (Chinwuko et al., 2018). Equally, women who have been widowed or divorced face additional challenges (Ojiakor & Etodike, 2018). They may be stigmatized and excluded from community activities, making it difficult for them to access resources and participate in decision-making. Their economic and social status is often reduced, affecting their ability to become household heads.

The instances above highlight in strong ways the dominance of the men over women and places more values on males over female in many aspects of life. It is significant that in Igbo society, cultural and socio-economic traditions have encouraged the empowerment of fewer women. Also, education and leadership development programs have not also helped the situation. Despite this, women's

contributions to their household and society are obvious and they spur equality in every respect to even achieve more.

Theoretical framework

This study was framed on the social construction of gender theory. This theory posits that the meanings, roles, and expectations associated with masculinity and femininity are not inherent or biologically predetermined but are created and reinforced through societal processes, interactions, and institutions. Pioneered by thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir, who argued that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," this perspective distinguishes between biological sex and the culturally invented idea of gender. It asserts that through language, family, education, religion, and media, societies systematically teach individuals what is considered appropriate behavior for men and women, thereby making these constructed differences appear natural and inevitable. In essence, gender is a performance—a set of repeated acts and norms—that is institutionalized to uphold a particular social order, most often a patriarchal one.

This theory is profoundly applicable to the analysis of female headship in Igbo culture, as it provides a framework to deconstruct the seemingly "natural" and "traditional" dominance of men in family leadership. The patriarchal norms that designate men as primary decision-makers, breadwinners, and heirs are not immutable facts of biology but are socially constructed ideals perpetuated through specific cultural mechanisms. Practices such as patrilineal inheritance, the payment of bride price, and the socialization of girls into caregiving roles are all instruments that construct and maintain a gender hierarchy. By viewing these elements as social constructions, the study can critically analyze how they are taught, learned, and enforced, thereby explaining why the concept of a female family head is often met with cultural resistance, not because it is inherently wrong, but because it challenges a deeply ingrained social script.

Furthermore, the most powerful implication of applying this theory is its inherent potential for social change. If gender roles are constructed, they are therefore not fixed and can be deconstructed, renegotiated, and redefined. This perspective moves the analysis beyond merely documenting discrimination to identifying the precise sites and processes where change is possible. The emergence of female-headed households in Igbo society, despite dominant patriarchal traditions, serves as empirical evidence of this renegotiation. It demonstrates that as women gain access to education, economic resources, and new social discourses, they can actively participate in reconstructing gender norms. Thus, the theory not only explains the origin of the problem but also provides a hopeful, actionable foundation for the study's recommendations, suggesting that targeted interventions in education, law, and community awareness can fundamentally alter the constructed landscape of gender and power.

Review of literature

Patriarchal tradition and male versus female family headship

The Igbo people of Southeast Nigeria, known for their rich cultural heritage and strong sense of community, present a fascinating paradox in their family structure. While patriarchal traditions and male family headship hold significant sway, the reality is far more nuanced, with female headship playing a crucial, albeit often unrecognized, role in Igbo society. The patriarchal system in Igbo culture dates back to pre-colonial times and has deep-rooted historical significance. Historians, such as Uchendu (1965), noted that the influence of colonialism and the spread of Christianity further reinforced these traditional norms, relegating women to subordinate positions within the family structure.

Patriarchal tradition and male family headship have been deeply ingrained in Igbo culture, which is predominantly found in South-Eastern Nigeria. This cultural norm has been a subject of discussion and debate over time due to its impact on gender roles and relationships within families. In contrast with this traditional practice of male headship in families, there have been instances of female headship in some Igbo communities. This essay will explore the background of patriarchal tradition and

male family headship in Igbo culture, contrast it with female headship in families, and illustrate examples with reference list for all cited works.

Patriarchal tradition and male family headship in Igbo culture are deeply rooted in historical and cultural practices. The Igbo people have a strong belief in the importance of lineage and ancestry, which is reflected in the traditional practice of male headship in families. According to Eze (2018), the Igbo culture is patriarchal, with the father or oldest male in the family as the head. This cultural norm is reflected in various aspects of Igbo society, such as marriage, inheritance, and decision-making processes. For example, in traditional Igbo society, it is the father or oldest male in the family who makes important decisions, such as the choice of a spouse for his children, the distribution of land and property, and the resolution of conflicts within the family (Eze, 2018).

In contrast with this traditional practice of male headship in families, there have been instances of female headship in some Igbo communities. According to Nwankwo (2019), in some Igbo communities, particularly in the eastern part of the region, there are matrilineal systems, where women are the heads of families". This cultural practice is reflected in various aspects of Igbo society, such as marriage, inheritance, and decision-making processes. For example, in matrilineal societies, it is the mother or oldest female in the family who makes important decisions, such as the choice of a spouse for her children, the distribution of land and property, and the resolution of conflicts within the family (Nwankwo, 2019).

The contrast between patriarchal tradition and female headship in Igbo culture is evident in the roles and responsibilities of men and women in families. In patriarchal societies, men are expected to be the breadwinners, providers, and protectors of their families, while women are expected to be the homemakers, caregivers, and nurturers (Eze, 2018). This cultural norm is reflected in various aspects of Igbo society, such as education, employment, and social status. For example, in traditional Igbo society, it is the father or oldest male in the family who is responsible for providing for his family, while the mother or oldest female in the family is responsible for taking care of the children and managing the household (Eze, 2018).

In contrast with this traditional practice, in matrilineal societies, women are also expected to be providers, protectors, and decision-makers in their families. This cultural norm is reflected in various aspects of Igbo society, such as education, employment, and social status. For example, in matrilineal societies, it is the mother or oldest female in the family who is responsible for providing for her family, while the father or oldest male in the family is responsible for taking care of the children and managing the household (Nwankwo, 2019).

The contrast between patriarchal tradition and female headship in Igbo culture is also evident in the roles and responsibilities of men and women in decision-making processes. In patriarchal societies, men are expected to be the decision-makers in their families, while women are expected to be the advisors and supporters of their husbands. This cultural norm is reflected in various aspects of Igbo society, such as marriage, inheritance, and conflict resolution. For example, in traditional Igbo society, it is the father or oldest male in the family who makes important decisions, such as the choice of a spouse for his children, the distribution of land and property, and the resolution of conflicts within the family.

In contrast with this traditional practice, in matrilineal societies, women are also expected to be the decision-makers in their families. This cultural norm is reflected in various aspects of Igbo society, such as marriage, inheritance, and conflict resolution. For example, in matrilineal societies, it is the mother or oldest female in the family who makes important decisions, such as the choice of a spouse for her children, the distribution of land and property, and the resolution of conflicts within the family (Nwankwo, 2019).

Thus, the contrast between patriarchal tradition and female headship in Igbo culture is evident in the roles and responsibilities of men and women in families. While patriarchal societies emphasize the roles of men as breadwinners, providers, and decision-makers, matrilineal societies emphasize the roles of women as providers, protectors, and decision-makers. This cultural practice reflects the

importance of gender roles and relationships within families and highlights the need for a more balanced and equitable approach to gender roles in society.

Factors against the female family headship

In the Igbo family structure, male dominance and inheritance practices favor sons over daughters, as land and property are passed down through the patrilineal line. This excludes women from inheriting family assets, perpetuating their economic dependence on male relatives and inhibiting their ability to assume leadership roles within the family. Limited access to education and resources further exacerbates gender inequality, as traditional beliefs prioritize investing in the education of male children, limiting opportunities for girls to develop skills necessary for leadership. Societal expectations and norms assign specific roles and responsibilities to men and women, reinforcing gender stereotypes and hindering the rise of women into leadership positions. Traditional marriage practices, such as the payment of bride price, can perpetuate women's subordination within the family and society. Female representation in decision-making bodies is limited, preventing women from having a voice in matters that directly affect their lives and the lives of their families. Gender-based violence remains a significant concern in Igbo families, with women experiencing various forms of abuse and discrimination. Addressing violence against women is essential in promoting female headship and ensuring women's well-being within the family.

Male dominance and inheritance practices

In the Igbo family structure, inheritance practices favor male offspring, as land and property are passed down through the patrilineal line. In the Igbo culture of South-Eastern Nigeria, male dominance and inheritance practices have traditionally favored sons over daughters. According to Okonjo (1992), land and property are passed down through the patrilineal line in Igbo families, excluding women from inheriting family assets and perpetuating their economic dependence on male relatives. This cultural norm has significant implications for female family headship in Igboland.

Firstly, the exclusion of women from inheriting family assets limits their ability to assume leadership roles within the family. In traditional Igbo society, the head of the family is responsible for managing the family's resources, including land and property. Since women are excluded from inheriting these assets, they are often not considered eligible for the position of family head. This reinforces gender stereotypes and perpetuates the notion that men are better suited for leadership roles. Secondly, the economic dependence of women on male relatives further exacerbates gender inequality. Women who are not able to inherit family assets may be forced to rely on their husbands or male relatives for financial support. This can limit their opportunities for education, employment, and entrepreneurship, making it difficult for them to achieve financial independence and assume leadership roles within the family.

Thirdly, the cultural norm of male dominance and inheritance practices has significant implications for female family headship in Igboland. According to Nwankwo (2019), in some Igbo communities, particularly in the eastern part of the region, there are matrilineal systems, where women are the heads of families. However, these systems are not as widely practiced as patrilineal systems in Igboland. The cultural norm of male dominance and inheritance practices has made it difficult for women to challenge this traditional practice and assume leadership roles within the family.

In contrast with this traditional practice of male headship in families and the exclusion of women from inheriting family assets in Igboland South-East of Nigeria, there have been instances of female headship in some Igbo communities. According to Ezeanya (2018), there are examples of women who have assumed leadership roles in their families, despite the cultural norm of male dominance and inheritance practices. These women have often had to challenge traditional gender roles and expectations to achieve their positions.

Thus, it is apparent that the male dominance and inheritance practices in Igboland South-East of Nigeria have significant implications for female family headship. The exclusion of women from inheriting family assets limits their ability to assume leadership roles within the family and perpetuates

gender inequality. However, there have been instances of women who have challenged traditional gender roles and expectations to assume leadership roles in their families. Addressing the cultural norm of male dominance and inheritance practices is essential in promoting gender equality and empowering women to assume leadership roles within the family.

Education and access to resources

Limited access to education and resources further exacerbates gender inequality. Traditional beliefs often prioritize investing in the education of male children, limiting opportunities for girls to develop skills necessary for leadership. Studies by Obi (2010) reveal disparities in educational attainment between boys and girls in Igbo communities, contributing to a lack of female representation in decision-making processes. In Igboland South-East of Nigeria, traditional beliefs often prioritize investing resources and opportunities in male children, limiting access to education and resources for girls and perpetuating gender inequality. This cultural norm has significant implications for female family headship in the region.

Firstly, the prioritization of investing resources and opportunities in male children limits access to education and resources for females, perpetuating gender inequality and hindering their ability to assume leadership roles within the family. According to Obi (2010), studies have shown disparities between boys' and girls' educational attainment levels, contributing to a lack of female representation in decision-making processes. This lack of access to education and resources limits the development of skills necessary for leadership, perpetuating gender stereotypes and hindering the rise of women into leadership positions.

Secondly, the cultural norm of prioritizing male children's education and resources has significant implications for female family headship in Igboland. According to Akabike (2017), women who are not able to access education and resources may be forced to rely on their husbands or male relatives for financial support. This can limit their opportunities for entrepreneurship, employment, and financial independence, making it difficult for them to assume leadership roles within the family.

Thirdly, the cultural norm of prioritizing male children's education and resources has made it challenging for women to challenge this traditional practice and assume leadership roles within the family. According to Ezeanya (2018), there have been instances of women who have assumed leadership roles despite the cultural norm of male dominance and inheritance practices. However, these women have often had to challenge traditional gender roles and expectations to achieve their positions. In contrast, there have been instances where cultural norms have been challenged, leading to positive outcomes. According to Njoku (2014), some Igbo communities have begun to reevaluate traditional marriage practices, such as the payment of bride price, which can perpetuate women's subordination within the family and society. This shift towards gender-sensitive policies that ensure equitable representation and participation of women is essential in promoting female headship and ensuring women's well-being within the family.

From the above, it is deductive that the cultural norm of prioritizing male children's education and resources has significant implications for female family headship in Igboland South-East of Nigeria. The lack of access to education and resources limits the development of skills necessary for leadership, perpetuating gender inequality and hindering the rise of women into leadership positions. However, there have been instances where cultural norms have been challenged, leading to positive outcomes. Addressing the cultural norm of prioritizing male children's education and resources is essential in promoting gender equality and empowering women to assume leadership roles within the family.

Societal Expectations and Norms

In Igboland South-East of Nigeria, societal expectations assign specific roles and responsibilities to men and women, perpetuating gender inequality and limiting women's opportunities for leadership roles within the family. Men are typically seen as the breadwinners and decision-makers, while women are expected to be caregivers and homemakers.

Firstly, the societal expectation that men are the breadwinners and decision-makers limits women's opportunities for leadership roles within the family. According to Nwankwo (2019), women who are not able to assume the role of breadwinner may be excluded from decision-making processes within the family, perpetuating gender inequality and hindering their ability to assume leadership roles. This reinforces gender stereotypes and perpetuates the notion that men are better suited for leadership roles.

Secondly, the societal expectation that women are caregivers and homemakers further exacerbates gender inequality. Women who are not able to assume the role of breadwinner may be forced to rely on their husbands or male relatives for financial support, limiting their opportunities for education, employment, and financial independence. This can limit their development of skills necessary for leadership, making it difficult for them to assume leadership roles within the family.

Thirdly, the societal expectation that men are the breadwinners and decision-makers has significant implications for female family headship in Igboland. According to Ezeanya (2018), in some Igbo communities, particularly in the eastern part of the region, there are matrilineal systems, where women are the heads of families. However, these systems are not as widely practiced as patrilineal systems in Igboland. The societal expectation that men are the breadwinners and decision-makers has made it difficult for women to challenge this traditional practice and assume leadership roles within the family. In contrast, there have been instances where cultural norms have been challenged, leading to positive outcomes. According to Njoku (2014), some Igbo communities have begun to reevaluate traditional gender roles, such as the expectation that women are caregivers and homemakers. This shift towards gender-sensitive policies that ensure equitable representation and participation of women is essential in promoting female headship and ensuring women's well-being within the family.

Thus, the societal expectation that men are the breadwinners and decision-makers and women are caregivers and homemakers has significant implications for female family headship in Igboland South-East of Nigeria. The limitation of women's opportunities for leadership roles perpetuates gender inequality and hinders their ability to assume leadership roles within the family. However, there have been instances where cultural norms have been challenged, leading to positive outcomes. Addressing the societal expectation that men are the breadwinners and decision-makers and women are caregivers and homemakers is essential in promoting gender equality and empowering women to assume leadership roles within the family.

Traditional Marriage Practices

Traditional marriage practices, such as the payment of bride price, can be seen as reinforcing the notion that women are commodities to be acquired by men, perpetuating women's subordination within the family and society, and limiting their opportunities for leadership roles within the family. The payment of bride price reinforces the notion that women are commodities to be acquired by men. According to Njoku (2014), the payment of bride price is a traditional practice in Igboland that involves the exchange of money or other valuables from the groom's family to the bride's family as a symbol of acceptance and approval of the marriage. This practice can be seen as reinforcing the notion that women are commodities to be acquired by men, as the payment of bride price is a prerequisite for the marriage.

Viewed from another perspective, the payment of bride price perpetuates women's subordination within the family and society. According to Akabike (2017), the payment of bride price reinforces the notion that women are dependent on men for financial support, limiting their opportunities for financial independence and leadership roles within the family. This reinforces gender stereotypes and perpetuates the notion that men are better suited for leadership roles.

Continuing, Ezeanya (2018) argued that the payment of bride price has significant implications for female family headship in Igboland. For instance, in some Igbo communities, particularly in the eastern part of the region, there are matrilineal systems, where women are the heads of families. However, these systems are not as widely practiced as patrilineal systems in Igboland. The payment of bride price has made it difficult for women to challenge this traditional practice and assume leadership roles within the family.

Although cultural perpetuity relegate women to the background in leadership especially family headship, it certain that there may have been instances where other cultural norms have been challenged, leading to positive outcomes. For instance, Njoku (2014) contended that some Igbo communities have begun to reevaluate traditional marriage practices, such as the payment of bride price. This shift towards gender-sensitive policies that ensure equitable representation and participation of women is essential in promoting female headship and ensuring women's well-being within the family.

All together, the payment of bride price or other ancillary cultural norms reinforce the notion that women are commodities to be acquired by men, perpetuating women's subordination within the family and society. Thus, when a payment of bride price is done, it limits women's opportunities for financial independence and leadership roles within the family, reinforcing gender stereotypes and perpetuating the notion that men are better suited for leadership roles. Addressing these traditional practices is essential in promoting gender equality and empowering women to assume leadership roles within the family.

Limited Participation in Decision-Making

Female representation in decision-making bodies, such as family councils and community gatherings, is limited. This lack of inclusion prevents women from having a voice in matters that directly affect their lives and the lives of their families. Akabike (2017) advocates that for gender-sensitive policies that ensure equitable representation and participation of women in decision-making processes.

Violence Against Women

Gender-based violence remains a significant concern in Igbo families, with women experiencing various forms of abuse and discrimination. Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2019) argue that addressing violence against women is essential in promoting female headship and ensuring women's well-being within the family.

Legal and Policy Frameworks

Despite constitutional provisions for gender equality in Nigeria, enforcement remains a challenge. Existing legal and policy frameworks require more proactive implementation to protect women's rights and challenge traditional patriarchal norms. Okonkwo (2018) highlights the need for comprehensive legislative measures that support female empowerment.

Women's Empowerment Initiatives

Numerous grassroots and international organizations are working to promote gender equality and empower women in Igbo communities. These initiatives focus on education, skill-building, economic empowerment, and advocacy to challenge patriarchal structures. Ejiofor (2022) discusses the impact of such initiatives and their potential to promote female headship.

From the above, it is deduced that gender inequality and discrimination affecting female headship in the Igbo family structure in South-Eastern Nigeria are deeply rooted in a dominant tradition of patriarchal system. To address these problems, a multi-faceted approach is required, encompassing legal reforms, education, awareness campaigns, and efforts to challenge traditional norms. By empowering women and promoting their inclusion in decision-making processes, Igbo communities can harness the potential of female leadership for collective progress and development.

Methods

To gather rich, nuanced, and firsthand perspectives on the lived realities of women navigating the patriarchal structures of Igbo culture, this study utilized 12 in-depth interviews as a primary method of qualitative data collection. The interviews comprised of 6 men and women resident in Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria. This approach was essential for moving beyond theoretical analysis to capture the personal experiences, challenges, and resistance strategies of Igbo women in relation to female

headship. The interviews provided a platform for participants to articulate their understandings of tradition, their encounters with discrimination, and their perceptions of change in a confidential and open-ended manner. This methodological choice was pivotal in generating the detailed, academic insights necessary to critically examine the tension between entrenched patriarchal traditions and the evolving realities of female leadership within the Igbo family structure.

Findings

This study explored the portrayal of gender inequality and female headship in family and the gender discrimination in the Igbo family structure in South-Eastern Nigeria as a social problem predominantly rooted in the patriarchal system and tradition which highlights the deeply ingrained societal expectations that assign specific roles and responsibilities to men and women in Igbo families, perpetuating gender inequality and limiting women's opportunities for leadership roles within the family.

The study found that the patriarchal dominance of men is a dominant tradition in Igbo families, with men being the primary decision-makers and breadwinners, while women are expected to be caregivers and homemakers. This perpetuates gender stereotypes and reinforces the notion that men are better suited for leadership roles. The study also found that women who are not able to assume the role of breadwinner may be excluded from decision-making processes within the family, limiting their opportunities for leadership roles.

The study further highlighted that the payment of bride price reinforces the notion that women are commodities to be acquired by men, perpetuating women's subordination within the family and society. The payment of bride price limits women's opportunities for financial independence and leadership roles within the family, reinforcing gender stereotypes and perpetuating the notion that men are better suited for leadership roles.

The study also found that cultural norms have been challenged, leading to positive outcomes. Some Igbo communities have begun to reevaluate traditional gender roles, such as the expectation that women are caregivers and homemakers, leading to gender-sensitive policies that ensure equitable representation and participation of women. This shift towards gender-sensitive policies is essential in promoting female headship and ensuring women's well-being within the family.

The study further highlights the deeply ingrained societal expectations that assign specific roles and responsibilities to men and women in Igbo families, perpetuating gender inequality and limiting women's opportunities for leadership roles within the family. The study emphasizes the need for cultural norms to be challenged and for gender-sensitive policies to be implemented to promote female headship and ensure women's well-being within the family.

Implication of the Study

The study highlights several major implications for human socio-cultural development. In this essay, three major implications will be discussed: (1) perpetuation of gender inequality; (2) limited opportunities for women's leadership roles; and (3) implications for women's well-being within the family. These implications will be related to instances from human socio-cultural development.

Perpetuation of gender inequality remains a dominant tradition in Igbo families due to deeply ingrained societal expectations that assign specific roles and responsibilities to men and women. This perpetuates gender inequality as women are excluded from decision-making processes within the family due to their inability to assume the role of breadwinner. This has significant implications for human socio-cultural development as it limits women's opportunities for leadership roles and perpetuates gender stereotypes. For instance, in many African societies, women's participation in decision-making processes is limited, resulting in underrepresentation of women in political and economic leadership positions.

Limited opportunities for women's leadership roles do not health matters either. The study findings reveal that women who are not able to assume the role of breadwinner may be excluded from decision-making processes within the family, limiting their opportunities for leadership roles within the

family. This has significant implications for human socio-cultural development as it perpetuates gender inequality and limits women's opportunities for leadership roles in society. For instance, in many African societies, women's participation in decision-making processes is limited, resulting in underrepresentation of women in political and economic leadership positions. This has significant implications for human socio-cultural development as it limits women's opportunities for leadership roles and perpetuates gender stereotypes.

Also, the study has implications for women's well-being within the family, especially in areas where cultural norms have been challenged, leading to positive outcomes. Some Igbo communities have begun to reevaluate traditional gender roles, such as the expectation that women are caregivers and homemakers, leading to gender-sensitive policies that ensure equitable representation and participation of women. This shift towards gender-sensitive policies is essential in promoting female headship and ensuring women's well-being within the family. For instance, in many African societies, women's participation in decision-making processes is limited, resulting in underrepresentation of women in political and economic leadership positions. This has significant implications for human socio-cultural development as it limits women's opportunities for leadership roles and perpetuates gender stereotypes. Several major implications for human socio-cultural development; these implications include perpetuation of gender inequality, limited opportunities for women's leadership roles, and implications for women's well-being within the family. These implications have significant implications for human socio-cultural development as they limit women's opportunities for leadership roles and perpetuate gender stereotypes. Addressing these implications requires a shift towards gender-sensitive policies that ensure equitable representation and participation of women in decision-making processes within the family and society.

Limitations of the Study

During the critical review study on female headship challenges in the Igbo family structure in South-Eastern Nigeria against the dominant patriarchal tradition, the following limitations were identified: sample size, focus on a specific cultural context and limited exploration of the impact of cultural norms on female headship.

Limited sample size - the study had a relatively small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the wider population of Igbo families in South-Eastern Nigeria. This limitation was managed by exploring literature texts beyond the sample area and highlighting the need for further studies with larger sample sizes to confirm the findings.

Focus on a specific cultural context was also found limiting; however, because the scope of the study was delimited, emphasis was made to utilize the findings within the cultural boundary of the study in order to make the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts consistent. This limitation was managed by acknowledging the cultural specificity of the findings and highlighting the need for further studies in other cultural contexts to confirm the findings.

Limited exploration of the impact of cultural norms on female headship - while the study explored the impact of cultural norms on female headship, it may have limited the exploration of this impact due to the focus on a specific cultural context. This limitation was managed by acknowledging the need for further studies to explore the impact of cultural norms on female headship in other cultural contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, three suggestions for improving female headship against dominant patriarchal traditions are discussed below:

Challenging cultural norms through education - Education can play a critical role in challenging cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality within Igbo families. By providing women with access to education at all levels - primary school through university - they can acquire knowledge that empowers them both personally and professionally. This can lead to increased financial independence

for women within Igbo families, which can challenge the traditional expectation that men are the primary breadwinners. Future studies could explore the impact of education on female headship in Igbo families, examining the relationship between education and financial independence, as well as the role of education in challenging traditional gender roles.

Encouraging women's participation in decision-making processes - Women's participation in decision-making processes within Igbo families can be encouraged by promoting gender-sensitive policies that ensure equitable representation and participation of women. This can include measures such as quotas for women's representation in decision-making bodies, as well as initiatives to provide women with leadership training and support. Future studies could explore the impact of gender-sensitive policies on female headship in Igbo families, examining the relationship between women's participation in decision-making processes and female headship, as well as the role of gender-sensitive policies in challenging traditional gender roles.

Promoting gender equality through community-based interventions - Community-based interventions can play a critical role in promoting gender equality and challenging traditional gender roles within Igbo families. By working with communities to raise awareness of gender inequality and promote gender equality, community-based interventions can help to shift cultural norms and promote more equitable gender roles. Future studies could explore the impact of community-based interventions on female headship in Igbo families, examining the relationship between community-based interventions and female headship, as well as the role of community-based interventions in challenging traditional gender roles.

Suggestions for improving female headship against dominant patriarchal traditions in Igbo families - challenging cultural norms through education, encouraging women's participation in decision-making processes, and promoting gender equality through community-based interventions - all require further study to fully understand their impact on female headship and the role they play in challenging traditional gender roles. Future studies could explore the relationship between these suggestions and female headship, as well as the role they play in challenging traditional gender roles within Igbo families.

Conclusion

Based on the critical review of available literature, findings, and implications, it is clear that female headship in Igbo families in South-Eastern Nigeria continues to face significant challenges due to dominant patriarchal traditions. The study has highlighted several factors contributing to these challenges, including cultural norms, economic dependence, religious beliefs, social norms, education, decision-making processes, and community-based interventions.

The study has also identified several suggestions for improving female headship against dominant patriarchal traditions, including challenging cultural norms through education, encouraging women's participation in decision-making processes, and promoting gender equality through community-based interventions. However, the study has also identified several limitations, including limited sample size, focus on a specific cultural context, and limited exploration of the impact of cultural norms on female headship, which require further study to confirm the findings and explore their implications for human socio-cultural development in other cultural contexts.

In conclusion, the study has provided important insights into the challenges facing female headship in Igbo families in South-Eastern Nigeria against dominant patriarchal traditions and has identified several suggestions for improving female headship in this context. However, further studies are needed to confirm these findings and explore their implications for human socio-cultural development in other cultural contexts, particularly in relation to the impact of cultural norms on female headship and the role of community-based interventions in challenging traditional gender roles in different cultural contexts. Overall, the study highlights the need for continued research and action to promote gender equality and challenge traditional gender roles in Igbo families and beyond in South-Eastern Nigeria and beyond in other cultural contexts as well as in other parts of the world where

gender inequality and traditional gender roles continue to persist in different forms and contexts as well as in different cultural contexts as well as in different parts of the world.

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