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GENDER PARTICIPATION IN CHURCH ACTIVITIES AND IMPLICATIONS ON THE FAMILY: THE EXPERIENCE OF SIX COCIN LOCAL CHURCHES IN PANKSHIN, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Managing the family is often very demanding and challenging yet women who are always left with such responsibilities in African societies are still involved with other church activities, one then wander how they are coping up with the family responsibilities and the church activities. Could it be that the men and women are sharing some of these family responsibilities that allowed women time to engage in church activities or what are the likely factors that make women to be deeply involved with church activities more than the men? The researchers want to empirically authentic the issue by conducting a research on the topic gender participation in church activities and its implication on the family: the experience of six Church of Christ in Nation local churches in Pankshin, Plateau State, Nigeria. The study was carreied out with the following objectives: making comparison on gender involvement in church activities, to rate opinions on why more women than men got involved in church activities and lastly the implications of women participation in church activities on the family. The study adopted the descriptive survey design method through the used of primary and secondary sources. Questionnaires were administered to 200 respondents' drwan from the six local churches which make up the sample of the study to collect original and first hand information on the topic while the secondary source was used to corroborate the views collected with those held by other scholars in other parts of the world. The findings indicated that the implication of active women participation in church activities have helped in moulding, shaping, guiding and directing their behavior toward commitment and respect to their husbands and the children. Despite the state of insecurity, discrimination and exploitation women should be encouraged to take active part in church activities as is found in advanced countries such as Canada and France.

KEY WORDS:

Men, Women, Gender gap, Exploitation, Discrimination, Church activities and the Family

Introduction

Historically; the church has her origin in Jesus Christ and the founding members were all men, the major saints and hero's were men, all the New testament books were written by men and several other early followers and leaders including

popes, bishops, reverends and pastors were men. However, the church is today not just witnessing an increase in the role played by women whether in Sunday church Service, revivals, prayer meetings, bible studies, concerts, crusades but also critical positions as church elders and preachers on pulpits. Some women are becoming reverends, bishops and founders of church denominations. This is made possible through Jesus Christ's mission of liberation which gave women chance to put into practice their God giving gifts to ensure the spread and continuity of the gospel throughout the world.

The books of Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24: 1-10 and Matthew 28: 10 all agreed that when Jesus resurrected, He first appeared and spoke with women. However, when women informed the disciples about his resurrection they refused to believe them, because of social and cultural factors based on the Jewish law which did not acknowledge the testimony of women. This explains why Peter had to personally go to the tomb to ascertain if Jesus Christ had actually resurrected. The knowledge that God entrusted the proclaimation of the resurrection to women tells us that while human beings discriminate God does not. Jesus inclusion of women in his discipleship and God's gender balance in the cosmos-changing event of the resurrection is consoling especially now when there is an apparent resurgence of fear of the feminine among male leaders in the institutional church.

When Jesus Christ finally appeared to the disciples, the men took over total control of the gospel and that marks the beginning of men domination. The male discipleship suppressed the female leadership because of tension in the early Church over Christian women exercising public leadership in a Greco-Roman culture that believed women's leadership was only appropriate in private settings (Schenk, 2011). Other reasons for the leadership of men in the church was based on the order of creation, fall and not just only on the temporary cultural circumstances. The leadership of men in the church was supported by Paul as cited in his letter in 1Timothy 2: 13-14 which says; “For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” The inherent patriarchal nature of Christianity was supported by Moore e'tal (2006) when they observed that “man was made in the image and glory of God and women for the glory of man”. According to Njoroge (2006), the deeply entrenched patriarchal, hierarchical and sexist attitudes and practices as well as the male-dominate leadership in many churches in Nigeria is enough for women to stand up and speak the truth for the sake of the integrity of the gospel.

Women's equality in the church can be achieved through long struggle and will come about through the grace of God at work converting male decision –makers.. Also through the liberation power of Christ upon humanity which granted men and women equality and access to him, this empowered women to speak and preach the gospel of Christ and also hold some essential positions in Church

leadership today.. For example, the story of the Samaritan women found in John 4:1-42. In Africa and Nigeria in particular women have taken bold steps to witness and spread the gospel of truth in their homes, churches and communities. While some have founded churches, preach, teach and are translating the scriptures into many African languages (Njoroge, 2006). Some of the women are ordained as reverends while others have continued to work in un-ordained capacities in the local, national and international churches. This situation is witnessed whenever Christians gathered, as women are always more in number whether on Sunday church services, revivals, retreats, concerts, crusades and prayer meetings. This is true even in the church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) where the church leadership structure, is all headed by men and lacks female representation or women ordained reverends or pastors, even at the committee levels. Out of seven members in a committee, one may have only or contributions may not have any positive impact to the growth of the church, because they are the minority in such committee or committees. However, of recent, the numbers of women representations in church committee have increases because the churches law says "at least two (2) women" which mean there can be more than two women in the committee. Some of the COCIN churches therefore have three or more women in the committee and on duty roster as they are allowed to preach on the pulpit.

The Pew Research Center (PRC, 2016) associated marginalization of women with social and cultural factors rather than biological factors. According to the pew research center religious gender gap is even more pronounced in the United States inspite of its literacy rate, practicing of advance democracy and being more religious than any other Country in the world. Pew statistics gave a vivid illustration when it reported that 64% of American women pray daily as against 47% of American men say their daily prayers. In Canada, 305 women and 28% of men wer said to be religious while 15% women and 9% men were reported in France. Zuckerman (2014) also observed the gender gap in religious activities when he quoted the Pew forum's religious landscape national survey which says that; "77% of women believe in God with absolute certainty, but only 65% of men do; 66% of women of pray daily; but only 49% of men do; 63% of women say that religious is very important in their lives but only 49% of men say so, 44% of women attend religious services on a weekly basis; but only 34% of men do." He concluded that whatever perimeter a researcher uses to evaluate religiosity between men and women, regularity in prayer, believe in God, church attendance or self-identification, women are more likely than men to be more religious. This claim was further corroborated by Mahlamaki cited in Zuckerman (2014, p.10) when he observed that:

> *Women participate in religious ceremonies more often than men, women pray more often than men; they are more likely than men to believe in God… They hold matters of faith and religion more important than men do. Women are more committed than men to their religious communities and are less to resign from them.*

On why women are more involved in church activities than men, scholars have come up with different possible explanations. Scholars like Greeley (1992), Glock and Stark (1969) who adopted the biological explanations argued that "Women have feminine traits such as affection, sympathy, compassion, tenderness and love for children." These traits made them to be more religious than men. However, scholars like Miller and Hoffman (1995) observed that "Women who are taught to be more submissive, passive, obedient and nurture (socialization) than men tend to be more religious." These traits are compatible with religiosity and often demanded by most religious leaders. This also applies to men who have the same qualities. They tend to be more religious than men who do not possess these characteristics.

Moore (1974) contended that women tend to be more religious than men because they are more deprived than men. The theory of women deprivation is supported by scholars like Wika & Gomos (2015) who through their studies showed that on global statistics women are place behind men in terms of health, education, nutrient ion, political rights and equal pay for equal work. On poverty 1.3 million people are living in absolute poverty of which 70% of them are women (World Bank, 2005). UNIFEM (2002) also maintain that women are more threatened by poverty than men because more households are headed by women without a partner. More so, women who worked in formal organizations earn less and work in the lowest paid jobs. These deprivations undoubtedly make women to turn to religion for compensation for things they cannot get from the society.

This view is supported by the sermon of Jesus which is found in Matthew 5: 3-11 that says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Though this teaching was not only directed towards women, it is clear that God has a special place and blessing for people who are oppressed and discriminated upon of which women are inclusive. Thus, Christianity tends to resonate with the powerless, lonely, sufferers, voiceless and oppressed in the society. Hence, religion becomes more appealing to these categories of people because of its social benefits. It enables them to overcome loneliness and get satisfaction. However, this is not without implications on the family.

This study has three specific objectives: (a) to find out which gender is more involved in religious activities in Pankshin LGA using six COCIN local churches (b) to examine the reason of the gender gap in religious activities (c) to determine the implications on the family.

Theory and Literature

This study adopted the liberal feminist school of thought which began with the rejection of the patriarchal political theory. As part of their opposition they advocated for the creation of social structure which can recognize the uniqueness of individuals and provide them with equal opportunity to pursue their individual interests. They tried to explain the course of gender inequalities largely from the angle of social and cultural perspectives. One of the prominent philosopher within this school of thought, John Stuart Mill, in his work titled "The subjection of women" (1869) called for legal and political equality between men and women. Scholars within the liberal feminist do not view women subordination as part of the larger social system, but tried to locate the different factor which contributes to inequalities between men and women.

They put a lot of emphasis on trying to establish and protect equal opportunities for women through legislation and other democratic processes. They argued that by enshrining equality in law, it is a sure way of eliminating discrimination against women. For example, the church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) Constitution, section 13, subsection7, paragraph d (ii) states that two (2) lay persons (one of whom must be a woman) is to be appointed for a term of 3 years and such a person is eligible to be reappointed for another term. In sub-section 8 and 9 which deals with the composition of elders at the local church council and congregation committee, the law stipulated for 7 members to be elected with at least two(2) of whom shall be women. Thus, they are moderate in their aims, methods, approaches and strategies than many of the radical and social feminist who always called for a total overhauling or overthrowing of the existing social system. Contemporary liberal feminist scholars focused on gender justice by working hard to eradicate all oppressive gender roles. They fought to eliminate all legislation and social conventions which limits women and men the opportunities to compete for certain professions because of their gender. They supported affirmative action programmes, equal pay, and pregnancy benefits for female workers, maternity leaves and abortion rights as well as the establishment of child care centers. They believe that the treatment of women in contemporary society violates all political values, the values of equality, liberty and justice.

Methodology

The study was carried out in six (6) purposively selected church of Christ in Nations Local Church Councils in Pankshin Regional Church Councils namely; Pankshin Pada, LCC11 Fwor, Vel, Manung, Low Cost and Tingpol. The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. A total of 200 questionnaires were administered to 200 respondents drawn from the six churches which constituted the sample of the study. However, only 168 representing 84% of the

questionnaires were successfully completed and returned. The questionnaires have three sections which covered the specific objectives of the study. Section A deals with which gender is more involved with church activities? Section B why are women more involved with church activities than men and Section C what are the implications on the family? The questionnaire has multiple choice options and those that were constructed on 3-point likert scale and 5-point likert scales for comparison of gender involvement in religious activities and reason for involvement in religious and implication on the family respectively. The 3-point likert scale measured respondents opinion on yes=3, neutral=2 and no=1. The 5-point likert scale was rated as strongly agree (SA)=5, Agree (A) =4; Undecided (UN)=3; Disagree (D)=2 and strongly disagree (SD) =1.

Results

This section focuses on the presentation and analysis of the data which was collected in the course of this study. Social survey of a descriptive type was used for this study. Data for the study were generated through the purposive and random sampling technique through the use of self-administered questionnaire to 200 respondents, randomly selected among members of the congregation of the six local church councils in Pankshin Regional Church Council. The summary of the findings as it relates to gender involvement in religious activities is shown below

Table 1: Respondents comparison of gender involvement in religious activities in Pankshin LGA

S/N	Involvement in Religious activities:	Rating (%)			Mean standard	
		Yes	Neutral	No		
1	Women attend Sunday church services more than men	154(92)	10(6)	4(2)	2.89	0.80
2	Women attend Weekly Bible Studies more than men	142(85)	19(11)	7(4)	2.80	0.49
3	Men attend Mid-week prayer meetings than women	28(16)	38(23)	102(61)	1.56	0.76
4	Women more than men in choir group	151(90)	18(8)	4(2)	2.88	0.40
5	Women more in morning prayer than men	96(57)	55(33)	17(10)	2.47	0.67
6	Women more in Christian weddings than men	159(95)	7(4)	2(1)	2.93	0.29
7	Men more during Christian funeral services than women	33(20)	46(27)	89(53)	1.67	0.79

Six variables (see table 1 above) were used to rate gender involvement in church activities at Sunday services, weekly bible studies, mid-week prayers, choir groups, morning prayers, Christian weddings and Christian funeral services suggest that more women than men participate in religious activities. Women out spaced men in all religious activities percentage rating ranged from 92% at Sunday church services, 85% at Weekly Bible studies, 61% at Mid –Week prayers, 90% at attending choir group practices, 57% at morning prayers, 95% at Christian weddings and 89% at Christian funeral services. Beside respondents who were indifference in their opinion (undecided), these findings suggest that women are more involved in COCIN religious activities than men in Pankshin.

Reasons for women involvement in church activities than men; the second objective of this study was to investigate the reasons behind women involvement in church activities. In order to do these respondents were asked to rate six variables (women are more exploited and discriminated against than men, hence they turn to church activities for consolation, eye service, high rate of poverty among women hence, turn to religion for psychological comfort and support, fear of insecurity, hence turn to religion which served as the voice of the voiceless, caregiver attitudes and the search for companionship) on a likert scale of five. These variables are underscored by the discourse of liberal feminism and the seminal work of John Stuart Mill (1869) which suggested that deprivations and poverty and the need for comfort can make women to turn to religion for compensation. Table 2 below provides a summary of respondents rating of the variables.

Table 2: Respondents' rating of opinions on why more women than men got involved in church activities

S/N	Opinions	Rating (%) SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean standard
1	Women are more exploited and discriminated against than men	44(26.2)	69(41.1)	2(2.4)	19(11.3)	32(19)	3.80 3.71
2	Eye service	34(20)	51(30.4)	19(11.3)	35(21)	29(17.3)	3.12 1.46
3	Psychological comfort due to poverty	38(23)	42(25)	15(9)	42(25)	31(18)	3.49 4.71
4	Fear of insecurity	29(17.3)	54(32.1)	17(10)	32(19.1)	36(21.4)	3.30 3.46
5	Care-giver attitude	66(39)	61(36)	8(5)	21(13)	12(7)	3.83 1.35
6	Search for companionship	13(5)	46(27)	8(5)	48(29)	53(31)	2.54 1.36

SA= strongly agree A=Agree, UD=Undecided, D=Disagree, SD= strongly disagree

As shown in table 2 above reasons for women involvement in church activities more than men vary. The mean rating suggests that care-giver attitude of mean (x=3.83, SD=1.35) was believed to be the most compelling reason for women's greater involvement in church activities. This was followed by exploitation and discrimination that women suffered in the society (x=3.80, SD=3.71). The need to seek solace in the presence of God and have the blessings influenced women attendance in churches.

Besides exploitation and discrimination, the need for psychological comfort due to poverty (x=3.49, SD=4.71) and fear of insecurity (x=3.30, SD=3.46) received high mean ratings. Under a 5=likert score, the mean scores of 3.49 and 3.30 respectively suggest the psychological benefits accruable to women from church membership. Many churches have women organizations which activities includes looking after the welfare of their members like widows. Church visitations and cooperative activities also seek to alleviate the poverty of members. Such cooperative attitudes also allay fears of insecurity and enhance sisterhood.

The rush to church by women as a function of "eye service" received a mean score of 3.12 and a standard deviation of 1.46. The law standard deviation suggests the

unity in opinion. There appears to be more fanfares in churches and the display of pomp such that members with new clothing and jeweler tend to display them during church activities. Majority of the respondents (85%) therefore argued that involvement of women in churches is motivated by the desire to do what other women are doing and not because of personal conviction. Hence, their activities are not deeply rooted in their minds, but are an expression of identity to be accepted within the group. To corroborate this position, Bang (2003) posited that the church today has become a place of show off for young people as they dressed in order to draw the attention of other members of the congregation.

Although the mean score for "search of companionship" (x=2.54, SD=1.36) was not as high as other mean ratings, the need for companionship such as friends, Christian sisterhood, spouses etc attracts women to churches as well. It is a known fact that church activities provide opportunities for the selection of spouses; and with the encouragement that members should marry within the same church, many young girls attend church functions regularly and in fine dresses to attract suitors. The need for companionship enhances support and assistance. This is a long known fact that received earlier empirical support in the work of suicide by Emile Durkheim with respect to social solidarity and integration that church membership seeks to enhance.

Implications of women participation in church activities on the family was assessed using five variables, viz: character and behavior at home, absence at homes chores, religiosity and commitment to family welfare, and obedience or respect at home. Respondents rating of these variables are reported in table 3 below.

Table 3: Implications of women participation in church activities on the family

S/N	Implications	Rating(%) SA A UD D SD	Mean standard
1	Character and behavior at home	38(23) 54(32) 20(12) 31(18) 25(15)	3.29 1.39
2	Absence at home chores	11(6) 17(10) 12(7) 58(35) 70(42)	2.05 1.22
3	Religiosity	50(30) 62(37) 14(8) 24(14) 18(11)	3.61 1.33
4	Commitment to family welfare	34(20) 65(39) 15(9) 25(15) 29(17)	3.30 1.40
5	Obedience and respect at home	71(42) 61(36) 9(5) 16(10) 11(7)	3.98 1.21

SA=strongly agree, A=agree, UD=undecided, D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree

Implications of women participation in church activities on the family was highly rated except for "absence at chores" (x=2.05, SD=1.22). The interpretation here is that inspite of women's regular participation in church activities; it did not adversely affect them from attending to duties at home. Although 7% of the respondents did not rate the question concerning church activities and home chores, majority of the respondents (N=112 or 77%) disagreed with the assertion that women used church activities to run away from house chores.

The positive effect of church activities was mostly seen in obedience and respect at home as was rated. In overwhelming number of respondents (78%) rated the assertion positively. This resulted in a mean score of 3.98 (SD=1.21) the standard deviation suggests that respondents were unanimous in their opinions; and under a likert scale of 5, the mean rating of 3.98 was significantly above average. The finding suggests that church activities impact positively on women behavior at home, especially with respect and obedience to spouses is concern. This is also shown when character and other behaviours of women were assessed. The mean score of 3.29(SD=1.39) supports the findings on "obedience and respect".

The mean rating on religiosity was high (x=3.61,SD=1.33).This finding suggests regular use of religious exclamations like, "it is well", "Jesus Christ", regular prayer at home and in offices and attributing every event or happenings to God's help. Although religiosity may not explain the extent to which practical Christianity can be demonstrated, it shows the use of religious symbols, like wearing of cross in necklaces, designer clothes with church name and insignia, celebration of marriage anniversaries, get involved in almost all church activities, thanksgiving, tithes and birth days in the church.

Commitments to family welfare received a mean score of 3.30 (SD=1.40). This finding suggests that women who participate regularly in church activities are also committed to family welfare. The teaching in church centers not only focuses on obeying the words of God, but also loving one another. This is demonstrated in the book of Titus 2: 4-5 where women are urged to love their husbands and children, have self-control, to be kind, to be busy at home and to be subjects to their husbands. Bang (2003) noted that regular attendance of church activities has the benefit of uniting family members. The family as the nucleus of the society represents the center of activities where love should be shown and the welfare of members taken care of. In many homes, therefore, women are regarded as the "mother" as well as wife. Those who have really imbibed the religious doctrine of Christianity are bound to practice and showcase such love among family members.

Summary of findings

The first finding of this study shows that women participate more in all church activities like Sunday church services, weekly bible studies, mid-week prayers, choir, morning prayers, Christian weddings and funerals than men.

The second finding indicated that women are more involved with church activities, because they are deprived, poor, exploited and discriminated against in every sector of life be it economical, educational, health, political, social and

legal. This made them to turn to religion for psychological comfort, companionship, support and a place of social identity. Thus, religion becomes more appealing to women because of its social benefits, as it enables them to overcome loneliness and get satisfaction.

The third finding shows that regular church activities have positive effect on the way women handled their home affairs with respect and obedience to their spouses, developed good character and behavior and become more committed to their family welfare. Thus, the word of God becomes a strong weapon of modeling, shaping, directing and guidance of women behaviour in the homes.

Conclusion

The study observed that women participate in church activities more than men because of their disposition to fear, deprivation, exploitation and discrimination they suffered from the male dominated society. Their participation in church activities have positive impact on the lives of the women, the family and the general society. However, this enthusiastically acceptance of the word of God sometimes is not allowed to grow due the shallowness of women's mind which prevented the word from penetrating deep into their minds. This becomes evident when the true cost of discipleship becomes apparent like hardship, for instance, the family of Job when his wife said; “are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die” (Job 2: 9) and the enticement of this world. for example, the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life prompted the woman to pluck fruit from the forbidden tree of life, ate and gave some to her husband which marks the beginning of separation between God and man (Genesis, 3: 6) women being the weaker vessels, when pressure is much on them they tend to fall or backslide.

Recommendations

This study wish to recommend the following:

More Church programmes should be organized so as to keep women occupy since it has practical impact in moulding, shaping, guiding and directing their behaviours toward obedience, respect and commitment to their husbands and family welfare.

Despite the state of insecurity, exploitation, deprivation, suppression and discrimination in the contemporary society, women should be more active in church activities as their counterparts in advanced countries such as of America, Canada and France.

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The Bye-Laws of Church of Christ in Nations which was enacted and duly approved in 2013