

## Chapter Thirteen

# WOMEN MARGINALIZATION: CAUSES AND EFFECTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF THEIR SOCIO-SPIRITUAL FUNCTIONS IN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN NIGERIA.

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### Abstract

*The objective of the study was to investigate the causes of women marginalization as regards the performance of their socio-spiritual functions in Christian churches in Nigeria and the effects on the churches. Survey research design was adopted in the study. Self-administered questionnaire was administered to 345 women church members and 33 to Christian church leaders. Data were collected and analyzed descriptively in order to find out the causes of marginalization and the effects it has in Christian churches. It was observed that there are numerous causes of women marginalization in Christian churches which affect the growth of the churches adversely. It was also discovered that these causes varied from one denomination to the other. This was due to differences in social, economic and political situations where the churches are located. The empowerment of women on how they can participate fully in performing their socio-spiritual functions in Christian churches need to be enhanced. There is need for the cultivation of doctrines in order to create practice that educates for equality of both genders in the church. This study will also focus at identifying the effects of this marginalization on the performance of their spiritual functions. Despite the adaptation of the United Nations convention against women in 1985 and similar local policies such as the National Gender Policy of 2006, inequality still exists due to myriad of cultural and structural challenges. This has constrained women's participation in all spheres of life with serious implications.*

**Keywords:** *Women marginalization, Socio-spiritual functions, Empowerment, Gender, Christian churches*

### Introduction

Women marginalization in Nigeria points at gender imbalance, gender inequality, gender bias and gender discrimination. These put together mean the practice of favouring and giving preferential treatment to males at the expense of their counter parts. Okebukola (1). In a country like Nigeria, governance is dominated by men, who

use their status to accumulate power and wealth to the detriment of the deprived women. Women are not well represented in decision making positions. Women are more often than not discouraged from contesting for political offices. In Igbo land for instance, the positions of Head of the clan "*onyeisiala*" have remained under the custody of the masculine gender. Nowhere in Igbo history could one find evidence of a reigning queen or titular head. At the level of governance, women representation in leadership positions in the three tiers of government, including the churches has remained low. Election, appointment and nomination of women into political offices have been characterized and motivated by tokenism, and woman in government appointments work in groups that are predominated by male (Okonkwo 2).

To a greater extent, some women who gain positions in government are mainly used by the men folk to secure the sympathy of women in order to attract their votes and support. That is what Okebukola refers to as "*Rhetoric of women empowerment*" because, political offices created will not be for the poor and unskilled women. Economically, women have not received a fair share in Nigeria, in general and Igbo land in particular. Some inhibitory factors have created hitches to the economic liberty of the feminine gender. Okonkwo (2) identifies one of these inhibitory factors as "*denial of women access to good education*" which he claims has resulted in overconcentration of women on low income jobs like, nursing, secretarial job, typing and duty attendance. Okagbue (3) shares similar view with Okonkwo when he states that, "more women will experience poverty than the men as poverty level increases and that there are specific impacts of poverty on women."

In terms of security and the right to live, gender inequality in Nigeria, with particular reference to Igbo land has kept the feminine gender at the receiving end of violence against women. They are subjected to both physical and psychological abuse, and they are unable to seek redress. Alutulu and Ajakor (4) in recap of the agitations of early feminist theorists, assert that:

...women are excluded from some central activities crucial to humanity such as the defining activities of modern political identity, which men appeared to be granted by natural fiat. These included the right to take an active role in politics, government and leadership. The right to political representation, the right to education, the right to self-definition, the right to legal ownership and the right to bequeath an inheritance.

All these social maltreatments have prevented women from developing into whatever innate potentials their creator embedded in them. A point supported by Chukwukere (5) who asserts that: "In the universities, females avoid the first executive position in campus politics, but rather settle for the post of deputies. In a large-scale congregation made up of both the males and the females, the males always dominate the conversation". However, there are evidences of strong sentiments in support of gender equity. Presently, several international conferences have been held to inspire government in developing

anti-gender inequality policies. One of those conferences is the international conference on women in Beijing China in 1995 (1). The government has made several attempts to address the issue of gender inequality by appointment of women into political offices. They now assume the offices of Councillor, Chairperson of Local Government Areas, Commissioners and Special/Executive Assistants to the Governor or President, Deputy Governors, Ministers, Representatives in States and National Assemblies.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations 2003, proclaims that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Be that as it may, women's freedom, dignity and equality are persistently compromised by law, custom and religious traditions in ways that men are not. In most religions of the world, Kendall et al argue that "Women have less influence in church matters" (6). They further note that even when women and men belong to the same religious groups, their roles are not the same. Some Religions like African Traditional Religion have symbols and languages that marginalize women such as "Women are meant to be seen and not to be heard" and that kind of stuff. They go further to say that religious languages describe women as evil spiritual forces that often confuse men of God. Languages that are used to refer to women show that they do not exist as men in the world (Kendall et al 7).

There are cultural values that have come up with myths that portray women image negatively, leading to negative perceptions of their performances and denial of opportunity to participate in the church activities. Meyer (8) opines that women in some churches are not allowed to participate in liturgical services. Through socialization process, the widely held belief that women are inferior before men is passed to young girls and boys. This implies that women are not accorded the same rights as their men counterparts in Christian churches. In the words of Trigs, women have been marginalized for a long period of time. Due to marginalization, women lack opportunities to learn leadership skills (9). According to Charon (10), women had been degraded and not respected for long. Women are discriminated against in all areas of life and therefore, there is need for a research on the causes and the effects.

African religion had a lot of influence on the foreign religions that were established in African. The African culture put a lot of emphasis on the divisions of labour where women are supposed to participate in lesser roles in the society. Nigerians who were converted into Christianity still continue to be influenced by their tradition and that could be the reason for the subservient roles played by Christian women in their churches. Women listen to the gospel preached by men; clean the churches officiated by men and cook during ceremonies officiated by men. These call for concerted efforts to try to find out exactly what went wrong that a part of humanity has been

condemned to the status of slaves, even in the house of God, where all are supposed to be equal in the quest to find common salvation for all. To that effect, Robertson has this to say, "Religion has been unfair to women since its beginning" (12). Christian Religion for example, value men more than women. The ancient Israelites valued men more than women and it is said that a Jew man thanked God every morning for not creating him a woman (13). The bias to Christianity through the teaching reserves the priesthood and some positions in the church for men.

Henslin (14) posits that "in history, religion has justified the oppression of women: the Bible glorifies male characters like Moses, Abraham, Solomon and Elijah as it ignores women like Esther, Elizabeth, and Hannah who played great roles in the history of human salvation. The teachings in the Old Testament discriminate against women. Women were referred as unclean, especially during menstrual cycle and after giving birth to a child. During this period, they would not play spiritual functions in the temple or even attend the temple teachings. Today, some religious leaders are using such teaching to undermine women in the Christian churches.

Based on the reviewed literature, it is obvious that women face a lot of marginalization in almost all the religions in Nigeria. This means there is need to establish the causes of marginalization of women in our Christian churches

### **Methodology**

This study has a design of cross sectional survey. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (15), the survey helps in gathering facts and characteristics of a certain population. This word involves 20 denominations found in Eastern States. The researcher used cluster sampling which involves dividing the population into small units called clusters. This way 20 Christian churches were sampled. This cluster contained both men and women. The gender connotation was important so as to identify gender-balanced thoughts from the churches. The researcher further used random sampling to select 375 members from Christian churches. Purposive sampling was used to select 34 religious leaders. They were selected because they assumed to understand the church doctrine more than the other church members (16).

The study used open-ended questionnaire. Open-ended questionnaire allows the respondents to give their responses in clear terms (17). The validation of the research instruments were verified by experts in the Department of Religion in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the research instruments was checked through pilot study. Pilot study was done on 10% of the sum of the population. Piloting helped in changing items that were ambiguous. Here data was collected, put into themes and analyzed descriptively indicating frequency and percentage.

**Findings**

Questionnaire with 382 questions were returned which is 93.4% response rate. Out of it, 349 were church member's response while 33 were church leader's response. The findings of this research are depicted on table 1 and 2 respectively.

**Causes of Women Marginalization:**

The researcher found out that there are numerous causes of women marginalization in the Christian churches in Nigeria. This is shown in the response rate of the respondents where 80(20.9%) indicate culture as one of the causes. 61 (16.0%) identified strenuous family responsibility as another cause of women marginalization. 52 (13.6%) noted that insufficient leadership skills contributed to this cause of marginalization: 46 (12.0%) talked of illiteracy while inadequate resource was noted by 32 (8.4%) respondents. 28 (7.3%) respondents identified poverty as a cause, ignorance was noted by 22 (5.8%). Women social stratification was mentioned by 17 (4.5%) as domestic violence was noted by 15 (3.1%). Health problems were identified by 12(3.1%) respondent. Insecurity was highlighted by 10 (2.6%) while lack of time was mentioned by 5 (1.3%) and discouragement from men was 4 (1.0%) respondents.

**Table 1**

**The analysis on the causes of women marginalization in Christian churches in Nigeria**

Frequency Causes	Out of 382	Percentage
Culture	80	20.9
Strenuous family responsibilities	61	16.0
Insufficient leadership skills	52	13.6
Illiteracy	46	12.0
Inadequate resources	30	7.9
Poverty	28	7.3
Ignorance	20	5.2
Women social stratification	17	4.5
Domestic violence	15	3.9
Health problems	14	3.7
Insecurity	10	2.6
Lack of time	5	1.3
Discouragement from men	4	1.0
	382	100

**Effects of Marginalization of Women**

In reference to the effects of marginalization of women, 146 (38.2%) respondents noted that marginalization of woman leads to irregular performance of their socio-spiritual functions in the churches, while 107 (28.0%) posit that women tend to avoid performing socio-spiritual functions due to marginalization. In the same vein, 82 (21.5%) of respondents assert that it leads to delayed competition of socio-spiritual roles by women. 47 (12.3%) noted that marginalization of women leads to low equality of performance of socio-spiritual roles by woman

**Table 2**  
**Effect of women marginalization on Christian churches in Nigeria,**

Effects of woman marginalization	frequency	out382 percentage
Irregular performance	146	38.2
Avoidance of performance	107	28
Delayed competition	82	21.5
Low quality performance	47	12.3
	382	100

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings of the study displayed that culture is a major cause of women marginalization in Christian churches in Nigeria. This could be associated with the cultural beliefs and practices from the church members. The findings are in line that socializing agents like schools, family and religion emphasize the belief that women are inferior to men. Culture portrays women as weak and not ambitious. This cultural belief has been transmitted into the church and that is the reason why women are denied churches to perform socio-spiritual roles to their potential.

Moreover, 16 percent of the church members noted that women were unable to perform socio-spiritual functions effectively due largely to sonorous family responsibilities. This is because sonorous family responsibilities consume women’s time and hence deny them energy and opportunity to be in the church to perform socio-spiritual roles. This could also be attributed to the fact that women are involved in domestic work and manual jobs that are lowly paying. As the findings of the study indicate, 13.6 percent of women are unable to perform socio-spiritual functions in the churches due to illiteracy.

This implies that they cannot read or write religious materials. The study found out also that illiteracy among the women was high.

Furthermore, it was discovered that when women fail to perform their spiritual function in the churches due to marginalization, the church is affected. In small percentages insufficient leadership skills, illiteracy, inadequate resources, poverty, ignorant, women social stratification, domestic violence, health problems, insecurity, lack of time and discouragement from men affect the performance of socio-spiritual roles by women in Christian churches in Nigeria. The study equally noted that 38.2 percent of the church members asserted that marginalization of women in churches leads to irregular performance of socio-spiritual roles. They are not able to perform their socio-spiritual roles due to the challenges they face. This could be viewed to the fact that women spend a lot of their time taking care of their families or performing manual jobs. These activities exhaust them or deny them the chances to perform spiritual functions in the church.

The outcome of the study also reveals that marginalization of women in Christian churches makes them to avoid performing socio-spiritual roles (3). This shows that women keep off from the performance of the socio-spiritual roles in Christian churches. This is one of the reasons as to why women avoid performing liturgical roles like preaching in the church or celebrating masses. Again, marginalization of women in churches leads to delayed competition of their performance of the socio-spiritual functions. This equally implies that marginalization of women affects the growth of the churches adversely.

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria, as one of the African countries is culturally more male chauvinistic. Some foreign countries have successfully battled with inequality, through human rights laws and women regained their freedom and dignity. The findings of the study indicate that women face numerous challenges as they execute socio-spiritual functions in the churches. Marginalization of women in the churches does not only affect them but it also affects the whole church at large. Christian churches should give women a chance to practice their talents within the church. In addition, Christian churches should encourage enculturation and emphasize priesthood for all. The outcome of the study will assist the Christian churches to come up with doctrines that will lead to church growth. It will also help the churches in Nigeria to formulate the gender policies that provide equal opportunity for all the genders.

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