Analysis of socioeconomic variables influencing male and female participation in labour force of agricultural establishments in Cross River State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

The focus of this study was to ascertain the influence of socio-economic variables on the labour force participation of male and female in agricultural establishments in Cross River State. The study focused on selected agricultural establishments in the state. The population of the study comprised 2216 staff, while the sample consisted of 193 randomly selected respondents. Data were collected using a validated semi structured questionnaire and analyzed using frequency count, percentages, mean and chi-square statistics. The results of analysis revealed that the labour force participation of male and female was generally influenced by sex, age, marital status, level of education, number of children, working experience, income, employment status and family size. Specifically, the labour force participation of the male was not influence by their sex, marital status, family size and level of education. It was recommended among others that sex discrimination at workplace should stop and staff in service training emphasized.

Keywords: Socioeconomic variables, labour force, gender

Introduction

The dichotomy in the male and female participation in the labour force has historically been one of the most intractable challenges besieging the Nigerian development experience. While feminist ideologies have continued to ventilate public discourse on gender and human-right related issues, balancing the gender equation in the labour force participation remains a monumental challenge to government, private sector, experts and observers. Gender disparities and gaps in labour force are equally gaining profound attention.

Recent studies by the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2017) found that women will have to wait 217 years before they can earn as much as men and have equal representation in the work place. Using data from institutions such as International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and World Health Organization (WHO), Saadia (2017) WEF (2017) reported a worsening economic inequality – calculated by

measuring how many men and women participate in the labour force, their earned incomes and their job advancement. In all the parameters used – education, health and survival, economic opportunity and political empowerment, WEF (2016) asserts that women would achieve economic equality in 170 years, down from 118 years in 2015.

Since the recognition of the principle of equality of men and women by the United Nations Charter (1945) and subsequently the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the issues concerning gender equality in the labour force has assumed new trends and received a plethora of treatments by government, non-governmental and international agencies. These interests are growing because gender interactions in the labour community have become some of the determinants of productivity and growth.

Specifically, sex restrictions on women's mobility in many agricultural and non-agricultural establishments and societies, coupled with gender prejudice associated with many employers mean that women are likely to have limited access than men to labour market opportunities. They are equally constrained to certain economic activities derogatingly classified by the society as "women's work." While researchers and social commentators have continued to water the gender dimensions of labour force participation, some of these efforts have merely sought to mobilize public sentiments in favour of a perceived systemic objectification of women (Cohen and House, 2003, Evans and Kelly, 2004).

Also, most research activities on gender problems in the labour force have not fully adopted a scientific approach in determining the socioeconomic underpinnings of labour force participation. Women, unlike men still suffer some varied forms of stereotypes both within and outside agricultural labour sector. The women interests and needs are hardly represented in the administration and policy making arenas of agricultural establishments despite constituting over 80% of rural farmers. This is largely because the social and cultural stereotypes that undermine social justice for women in particular are reflected in the agricultural organizations with implication that the men dominate in terms of numerical strength, positions held and decision making capabilities (Anugwom, 2009; Maurice and Fred, 2009).

Unfortunately, the much ignored gender gaps and imbalance enshrined in most agricultural organizations has affected the development of agricultural sector with grave consequences

for food production and distribution, farmers' wellbeing and socioeconomic development of the state. Local research undertakings have not shown sufficient interest in finding out how gender interactions in the labour force of agricultural establishments impact agricultural development and food production in Cross River State. It is against the foregoing that this study was conducted to ascertain the socioeconomic underpinnings of male and female participation in the labour force of agricultural establishments in Cross River state.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were to;

i. Ascertain the influence of socioeconomic variables on male participation in the labour force of agricultural establishments in Cross River State,
ii. Ascertain the influence of socioeconomic variables on female participation in the labour force of agricultural establishment in Cross River State, and,
iii. Examine the extent to which socioeconomic variables exert combined influence on male and female participation in the labour force of agricultural establishments in Cross River State.

Hypothesis

H_O: There is no significant relationship between selected socioeconomic variables of the respondents (male and female) and their level of participation in the labour force.

Methodology

This study was carried out in Cross River State and covered some selected agricultural establishments – both public and private. The population of the study consisted of 2216 staff of the establishments used and the sample comprised 193 respondents selected using random sampling technique. Data were collected using a validated semi structured questionnaire administered by the researchers. Data obtained were analyzed using frequency count, percentage, mean and the chi square statistics.

Results and discussion

Table 1 shows the influence of socioeconomic variables on the participation of male in the labour force of agricultural organizations. The result revealed that income ($\bar{x}$= 2.84; rank 1st), level of education ($\bar{x}$ = 2.59; rank = 2nd) and employment status ($\bar{x}$ = 2.46; rank = 3rd) have the highest influence on the participation of male respondents in the labour force of agricultural organizations. However, sex ($\bar{x}$ = 0.76), marital status ($\bar{x}$ = 1.27), number of children ($\bar{x}$ = 1.56) and family size ($\bar{x}$ = 1.67) had less influence on the participation of male in the labour force. A closer examination of

this result revealed that the male respondents' labour force participation was not influenced by all the household-related or family-associated variables. This agrees with the findings of Charlton (2010) that men are not affected or influenced by the mere fact of being a man to participate in labour force. Men similarly, are rarely the custodians of child care and household responsibilities apart from providing the money, hence their labour force participation is not influenced by issues of marriage and number of children. In fact, Appleton *et al.* (1999) opined that the men are only 10% involved in child care and their labour force participation is not determined by spousal influence. However, Macdonald (2008) indicated that the labour force participation of both men and women is influenced by the income they are paid, their work experience, level of education and employment status.

Table 2 shows the influence of socioeconomic variables on the labour force participation of female respondents in agricultural organizations. The result revealed that all the variables recorded mean scores above the decision rule of 2.00, which mean all the variables influenced female labour force participation. Specifically, income (rank = 1^{st}), level of education (2^{nd}), working experience (rank = 3^{rd}) and sex (rank = 4^{th}) have the highest influence on female labour force participation.

The implication of this result in comparative terms is that the labour force participation of women is more defined by their socioeconomic characteristics than the labour force participation of men. The result agrees with Sackey (2005) that the labour force participation of women is a function of expected or available wage, education, age, marital status, family size and work experience. Women frequently face sexual harassment and discrimination on the basis of their gender and this can affect their labour force participation. The findings confirm the position of Portes (2009) that women's marital status affects their labour force participation because married women have family burdens of caring for their husband, children and extended family members. Similarly, spousal influence on career choice and work involvement affect the women more than the men. Husbands can quite easily ask their wives to stop work or relocate to join them in new place of posting. This and other related domestic matters can truncate a women's labour force participation (Oyebade, 2001).

The extent to which the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents influence

their participation in the labour force is presented in Table 3. The result revealed that all the variables identified recorded means scores above the decision rule of 2.00, which means that all the variables influenced the labour force participation of men and women. Specifically, the study noted that level of education (rank = 1st), sex (rank = 2nd), marital status (rank = 3rd) and number of children (rank = 4th) had the highest influence on the respondents' participation in the labour force.

The implication of this result is that the participation of male and female in the labour force was probably influenced by a combination of variables. Labour force participation is influenced by a person's level of education and employment status, in the first instance, people are employed into organizations based on their qualifications which also influence the rank or position they are employed into (Kundi, 2007; Dilkman *et al.*, 2003). The workers with higher qualifications are likely to occupy higher positions and be in position to better participate in the various activities in the organization, including managerial decisions. Similarly, workers on part time or adhoc employment status are less likely to take active part in policy issues and management board decision making, thereby having a reduced participation rate. Agarwal (2006) noted that the influence of marital status, sex, family size and number of children on employees labour force participation is particularly severe among women than men. He maintains that women frequently have their labour force participation obstructed by domestic concerns such as childcare, food preparation, pregnancy and maternity leaves among others. These variables sometime act as denominator of female employment since employers frequently take into account all these concerns before engaging women. Similarly, as Anker (1997) puts it, women themselves take labour force participation decisions after taking into account their endowment levels, marital status, and family interest. The men are less affected by these variables. Studies by Mohiuddin (2001) and Sackey (2005) found that sex of workers, age, marital status, level of education and income regime can influence labour force participation.

Table 4 presents the relationship between selected socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents and their participation in labour force. The result showed that gender, number of children and grade level had significant relationship with the participation in labour force of agricultural organizations in Cross River state. Specifically, the number of children was significantly related to involvement in corporate social responsibility

and public/community relations. The chi-square (X^2) value for the variable was 20.086 and 15.461 and were significantly at 5% and 10% level of significant respectively. Gender was also significantly related to staff promotion at 10% level of significance, while grade level was significantly related to staff promotion at 10% level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between selected socioeconomic variables of respondents and their participation in labour force was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis that labour force participation is significantly related to employees' socioeconomic characteristics.

The implication of this result is that the participation of male and female in labour force generally is influenced by their socioeconomic characteristics but to varying extent. This result confirms the findings of Davis (2007) that gender is still a dominant factor in labour force participation. The findings also reveal that employees in higher grade level are likely to be more involved in organizational activities especially decision making activities than employees at lower grade level. Similarly, the result corroborates Charlton (2010) that the number of children can be a factor in labour force participation. Charlton (2010) maintains that this variable (number of children) affects the labour force level of women more than men since women share greater child care responsibility than men. Experts however believe that age, marital status, employment status and working experience can significantly influence labour force participation.

Conclusion

Generally, men and women especially in Africa have culturally differentiated roles, but the emergence of western education and civilization have attempted to break these walls and create an unrestrained access and opportunities for both male and female to contribute to development and to realize their potentials. This study has revealed that although the socioeconomic variables influenced both male and female in terms of their participation in the labour force, the participation of female was particularly more defined than male. This indicates that creating gender equality in labour force participation required addressing more specifically some of these social variables like domestic burdens, religious and cultural bias and attitude that affect women's self-expression and freedom, without ignoring the fact that men are also frequent victims of gender–based discrimination and harassment in many establishments.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made in line with the findings of the study:

I. Sex discrimination or stereotypes should be criminalized in workplace through appropriate laws.
II. Special childcare allowances should be provided for married women.
III. The income and welfare of workers should be given special attention and upward reviews regularly.
IV. Special in-service educational programmes should be provided for employees.

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Table **1**. Male respondents on socio-economic variables that influenced their participation in labour force (N = 102)

Variables	**N**	□	**Remark**	**Rank**
Sex	102	0.76	Less influence	9th
Age	102	2.07	Influenced	5th
Marital status	102	1.27	Less influence	8th
Level of education	102	2.59	Influenced	2nd
No. of children	102	1.56	Less influenced	7th
Working experience	102	2.35	Influenced	4th
Employment status	102	2.46	Influenced	3rd
Income	102	2.84	Influenced	1st
Family size	102	1.67	Less influenced	6th

Source: Field Survey, 2018; Decision rule = 2.00

Table **2**. Female respondents on socio-economic variables influenced their participation in labour force (N=91)

Variables	N	X	Remark	Rank
Sex	91	2.75	Influenced	4th
Age	91	2.32	Influenced	9th
Marital status	91	2.64	Influenced	6th
Level of education	91	2.93	Influenced	2nd
No. of children	91	2.59	Influenced	7th
Working experience	91	2.86	Influenced	3rd
Employment status	91	2.43	Influenced	8th
Income	91	2.97	Influenced	1st
Family size	91	2.74	Influenced	5th

Source: Field Survey, 2018; Decision rule = 2.00

Table **3**. Male and Female respondents on socioeconomic characteristics that influence their participation in the labour force of agricultural organizations in Cross River State

Variables	Extent of effect/influence				Remark	Rank
	High extent (3)	Low extent (2)	Less influence (1)			
Sex	187(561)	4(8)	2(2)	2.96	Influenced	2nd
Age	74(222)	67(134)	52(52)	2.11	Influenced	8th
Marital status	99(297)	80(160)	14(14)	2.44	Influenced	3rd
Level of education	190(570)	3(6)	-	2.98	Influenced	1st
No. of children	111(333)	40(80)	42(42)	2.46	Influenced	4th
Working experience	69(207)	82(164)	42(42)	2.14	Influenced	7th
Employment status	57(171)	121(242)	15(15)	2.22	Influenced	5th
Income	81(243)	60(120)	52(52)	2.15	Influenced	6th
Family size	70(210)	91(182)	32(32)	2.10	Influenced	9th

Source: Field survey, 2018; Decision rule = ≥ 2.00 = influence; < 2.00 = Less influence

Table **4**. Chi-square analysis between selected socioeconomic variables of respondents and participation in the labour force of agricultural organizations in Cross River State.

Area of participation	Age	Marital status	Gender	Employment status	Number of children	Grade level	Work experience
Goal setting/implementation	37.246	3.581	2.153	7.315	3.825	11.504	29.437
Policy making/formation	33.115	5.312	0.616	6.969	4.226	11.402	19.522
Personnel recruitment/emolument	33.743	1.052	0.031	1.979	6.512	11.520	21.161
Project/programme design	40.535	3.434	1.035	2.821	11.327	17.609	14.026
Project monitoring/implementation	42.175	3.012	1.288	8.199	12.934	21.129	19.437
Project/programme evaluation	39.027	2.516	0.534	2.639	10.441	20.237	27.846
Benefit sharing/disbursement	42.611	0.243	1.288	1.074	10.919	11.784	21.168
Staff promotion and transfer	35.416	3.105	0.283	3.860	5.126	26.449*	21.399
Corporate social responsibility	32.229	2.083	0.046	1.171	20.086**	15.030	19.425
Staff welfare/entitlements	44.171	3.992	0.152	5.738	10.317	17.516	19.491
Financial management	34.035	3.594	0.088	3.723	13.115	11.256	19.193
Public/community relations	44.775	5.586	0.960	3.605	15.461*	21.687	16.831
Supplies/logistics	28.967	1.569	2.915*	3.608	7.541	11.148	19.930

Value represent the estimated chi-square