

Religion and labour force participation in Nigeria: Is there any inequality among women?

By

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Introduction

Since Beijing Declaration, emphasis has been placed on equal participation for both men and women in all spheres of life including economic activities. Although several measures have been implemented all over the world to enhance women's participation and ensure their access to labour market, women's participation in the labour market has not been commensurated with wages, job stability and social protection. It has been observed with dismay, that occupational apartheid and wage discrimination still affect women who are often exposed to the vagaries of unpaid work than men (United Nation 2010). Addressing this debilitating factor of women's economic disparity remains unalloyed focus of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in most countries of the world. However, these barriers which alienate women from participating significantly in economic activities are deeply rooted in traditional beliefs, customs and low level of female involvement in decision making. This act has contributed immensely to the perpetuation of robust gender inequality among developing countries. Inequality has been identified as a clog in the wheel of development which hampers social cohesion, trust and also marginalize the poor including women from political involvement especially in Africa (Worldwatch Institute, 2013). This inequality in the labour force participation is created by the colonial systems of education which was designed to meet the manpower needs that estranged women from economic and educational opportunities (Omolewa 2002). In the same vein, Aina (2008) explains that women fare worse than men in the economic arena, as a result of their exclusion from access to education and wealth-creating assets. This exclusion is borne out of the fact that women lack substantial capital to engage in large scale economic activities. Also, limited skills and information prevent their full integration into labour market, thereby creating vicious circle of female poverty which is prevalent in practically all sectors of the Nigerian economy. It has also been established that unequal participation in labour force costs women nearly twice the total GDP of Africa and the middle east (World Bank 2014). The gender inequality in the labour force participation has also been argued for the gap in the growth disparities of different countries in the world (Esteve-Volart 2004, Lamanna 2009). The restriction of women's access to job opportunities slow economic development and their capability in decision making as obtainable in developing countries like Nigeria.

Lim (2012) reveals that the nature of women empowerment depends on the income employment away from the home – particularly in non-familial enterprises; fruitful and remunerative jobs in the formal rather than in the informal economy and regular and full-time jobs that are permanent and secure. While it is not only entry into labour force but true economic empowerment that is linked with household decision making.

“There is mounting evidence that women's ability to fully enjoy human rights – indeed, even to demand such rights – is integrally linked to their economic empowerment. The ability to take such decisions requires a sense of personal autonomy, which develops in tandem with the knowledge that women can provide for themselves and their children. Their sense of personhood is sparked by motherhood and nurtured by participation in organized groups, but fundamentally depends on having incomes of their own” (UNIFEM 2000 Pg 18). To most of the women in Nigeria, means of support remains uncertain and economic empowerment is beyond their

control due to the rising cost of caring and lack of social services that can alleviate their burden. Couple with this, is their religious belief that debar them from standing up against their husbands, partners and in-laws. This does not allow them to assert their rights on, when to have the next child, have sex and to resist intimate partner violence. Ogunjuyigbe and Adeyemi (2003) in their study on women's sexual control within conjugal union in metropolitan city in Nigeria discovered that only few women could negotiate safe sex practices with their husbands/partners. Women empowerment through participation in economic activities does not only have consequences for women it also has effect on the wider economy. International Labour Organisation (ILO,2012) explained that proper value and reward of women's work both at home and away are the key to poverty and prosperity for all. They estimated that worldwide an additional US\$1.6 trillion in output could be generated by reducing the gap in employment between women and men It is therefore pertinent at this juncture to ask the following questions:Does religion influence female inequality in labour force participation in Nigeria?, Is there any regional differences in female labour force participation in Nigeria? Is there any occupational differences among religious women?

While studies have shown the effect of religion on female labour force in different countries and among Muslim countries, there are no significant studies on Christian women regarding labour participation in predominant Christian countries. Unfortunately, available studies on religion and female labour force have often lumped all the countries together and have not been able to specify the effect of different religious group on the labour force participation in each of the countries (Ghazal & Sylwester, 2013 H'madoun 2010, Pastore and Tenaglia 2013, Maciej Kus 2011). Also in Nigeria most of the studies were based on determinants of labour force participation (Fadayomi and Oluriola, 2011, Togunde 1999, Lawson 2008, Makuochukwu, 2013), labour force and fertility (Wusu, 2012, Okojie 1995). The above studies reveal that there is little or nothing documented on religion and the inequality in the female labour force participation. This study therefore, examines the influence of religion on female inequality in labour force participation in Nigeria using demographic data.

Methodology

This study was based on both quantitative and qualitative review of data and documents. For the quantitative data, Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) data sets were used. Three data sets were used (2003, 2008 & 2013) for this study. This is to provide a longitudinal trends for the past fifteen years. The data sets for women in age 15-49 years were downloaded after approval from Measures DHS, these represent the active population (see table 1). The data were weighted for national representation.

Table 1

Survey Year	Female (Sample Size)
2003	7,620
2008	33,385
2013	38,948

From the data set, variables related to the study were identified these are religion, highest level of education, regions, age at first marriage, place of residence, current marital status, partners

education, total number of children (CEB), number of living children and proximate variables for participation in decision making (who has final say on your health?, who has final say on large purchases? and who has final say on family visits). For labour force participation, three variables were used these are; type of earnings, (this was recoded into two values 1 paid and 2 unpaid), work away or at home and whom the respondent work for (this was also recoded into self employed and employee)? Three levels of analysis were used in this paper, the univariate analysis is used to explain the socio-demographic variables and while bivariate relationships between the religion, socio-demographic variables of women and participation in labour force were examined using the cross tabulations and Chi-square test for significant association. Binary logistic regression was then used to estimate pseudo maximum likelihood of logistic regression models in order to examine the combined effect of religion on the indicators of labour force. Three models were developed based on the variables of labour participation that were identified in the data. These models were also adjusted with the confound variables (CEB, partners education, number of living children, current marital status, age at first marriage, participation in decision making, level of education and place of residence). The models were developed sequentially so that the effect of different combinations of factors on the labour force participation could be examined in detail. Other secondary data used are the employment, unemployment and labour force participation rate that were derived from National Bureau of Statistics and International Labour Organisation.

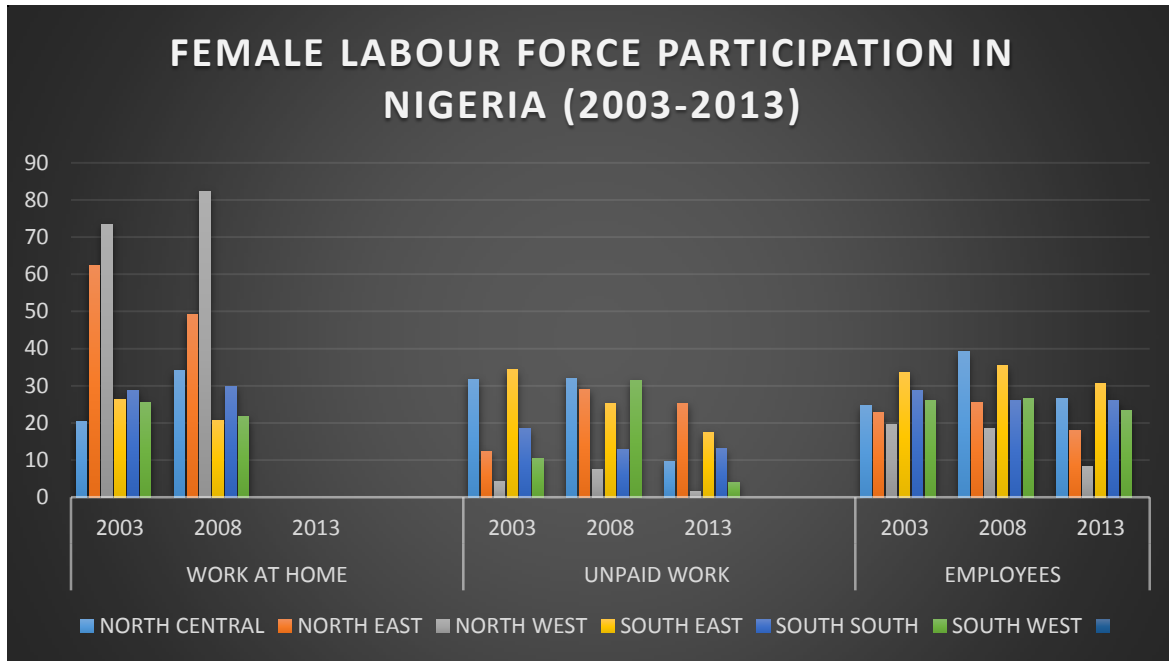
Results

The study reveals a regional differences in labour force participation among females in Nigeria (see figure 1). The Northwest has the highest percentage of women who are working at home in the last fifteen years while Southeast has the highest percentage of women in unpaid work in 2003, South south in 2008 and Northeast in 2013. There are also occupational variations among different religious groups (see figure 2). Among women who are not working and those who are engaged in sales activities in the data, Muslim women have the highest percentage in all the three data sets while Christian women are more into professional/technical/managerial jobs in all the three data sets. The study reaffirmed a significant relationship between the women socio-demographic variables (level of education, CEB, number of living children, place of residence) and labour force participation ($P < 0.001$). Positive significant effect of religion on female labour force participation was also established in the logistic models. In 2003, working at home remains significant with Moslem women alone ($\beta = .124, P < .001$), even with the adjusted model ($\beta = .127, P < .001$). While all religious groups are significant to unpaid work in 2013 in the study area and varies within the religious group, Moslem women more likely to engage in unpaid work (Catholic $\beta = 1.920, P < .001$) (Other Christians $\beta = 2.051, P < .001$) (Islam $\beta = 6.070, P < .001$) when compared with the reference category. Participation in the household decision making among women was validated and has a strong factor influencing female labour force participation among Muslim women in the study area.

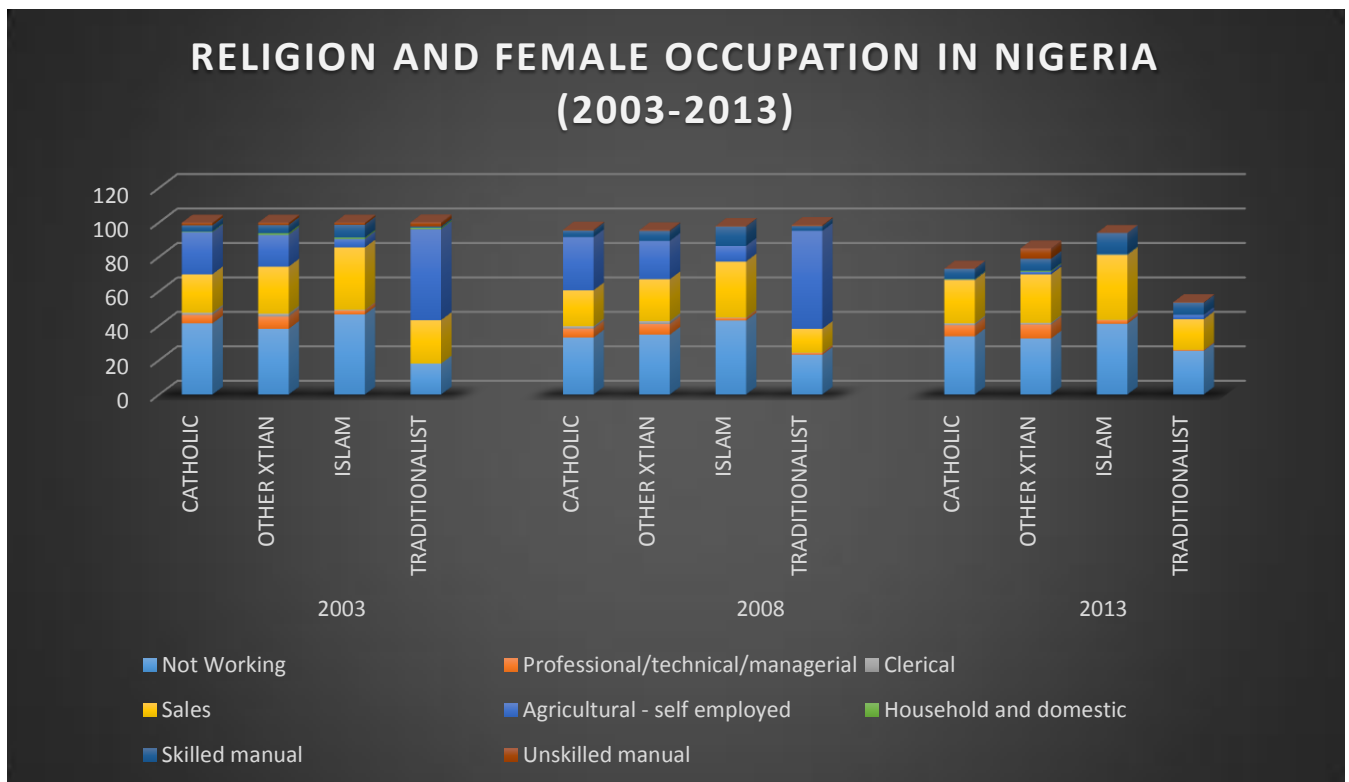
Conclusion and Recommendation

The study has reaffirmed the influence of religion on female labour force participation. The belief system has impact on the work entry and promote occupational inequality among women. Despite the decrease in unpaid work, inequality still exist among women of different regions group in Nigeria. There is need to promote female education especially among Muslims, this

will empower and emancipate them from the trap of poverty and give them a voice in decision making



COMPUTED FROM NIGERIA DEMOGRAPHIC AND HEALTH SURVEY 2003, 2008 & 2013 Fig 1



COMPUTED FROM NIGERIA DEMOGRAPHIC AND HEALTH SURVEY 2003, 2008 & 2013 Fig 2