

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PARADOXICAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN RIVERS STATE CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

The study looked at an Assessment of the Paradoxical Representation of Women in Rivers State Culture. It aimed at examining the variations which exist in the representation of women in Rivers State Culture. The study was anchored on the Feminist and Agenda Setting Theories, which underscored the intricacies and challenges associated with women devaluation in Rivers State. The study used the survey design in its methodology, where a population of 3, 793,780 was used to derive a sample size of 400, employing Taro Yamane formula. A total of 399 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and used for further analysis. Findings from the study indicated that women are offered political appointments and empowerment as a way of recognition in River State, that initiating and enforcing a legislation that allows women to inherit parental properties is one of the ways the government can create a balance in terms of proper representation of women in Rivers State Culture. It was however recommended for the government to initiate more empowerment schemes that better engages the female folks in the society, such that they are better valued economically and represented in Rivers State, and for the government, through media influence, initiate and enforce legislations that allow women to inherit parental properties as one of the ways the government can create a balance in terms of proper representation of women across cultures in Rivers State.

Keywords: Assessment, Rivers State Culture, Paradoxical, Representation and Women

INTRODUCTION

The representation of women all over the world, is such an important discussion that has formed part of public opinions and has caught media attention over the years. From one culture to another; from one religious sect to another; and from one traditional setting to another, women are represented and acknowledged in various forms. Sow (2019) provides that the representations of female identity are extremely important because they frame women's individual stories and their claims for social and cultural rights, for sexual and reproductive rights, for economic and political rights – those are the most common.

Rivers State, is a patriarchal society and traditional practices with cultural stereotype that placed women in a deplorable condition and perpetual bondage, since they are devalued and relegated to the background by the men; hence, women have been subjected to all sorts of maltreatment and torture (Olanipekun, 2019; Olanipekun & Onabanjo, 2020; Deedam, 2024). Still, the social construction of the female gender takes effects across the various sectors of the economy. This plays in terms of the positions and offices women are expected and allowed to occupy, as there are exemptions to authorities to which women are allowed to occupy. Interestingly, women seem to be worshipped and adored in the spiritual world, in what is referred to as 'mamiwater'; they have worshippers who are their subjects and followers, and who act in line with their instructions and guidance.

However, recent studies on gender equality, women representation and recognition across the private and public sectors show that women, government and non-governmental organisations are making tremendous efforts in bridging the gap that exist between these genders, through public

enlightenments on campaigns aimed at educating the girl-child on her rights and dignity of human person. Further, they have taken the advantage of the various declarations and blue points fashioned out by the United Nations; thus, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women; The National Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women in the year 2000 etc.; further, the above is supported by the United Nations Sustainable Development Growth Agenda of the 2030 with its second aim of looking forward to bridging the gaps on gender inequality.

As a bolster to the need for proper representation of women across cultures and to substantiate a law that validates the rights of women to family inheritance, the Rivers State Government, under the leadership of Nyesom Wike on September 25th, 2022, enacted a law that empowers women to lay claims to the properties of their families and to share in the inheritance. as reported by ThisDay's newspaper of 25th September, 2022; Vanessa Obioha writes that: *the government has formally enacted the law giving women the right to partake in the sharing of their family property; this was sequel to the signing into law the Rivers State Prohibition of the Curtailment of Women's Right to Share in Family Property Law No. 2 of 2022 by Governor Nyesom Wike. By enacting this law, Rivers is now the first state in Nigeria to achieve this feat.*

The woman is expected to remain unkept; she will do no manicure, pedicure, use of powder, perfume, keep bushy hair, remain in black clothes which will not be sewn in a beautifully designed manner, no jewelry nor makeup; she must remain moody and sad until the expiration of her mourning period, she must not sleep outside her husband's home, she must not have sex with any man within this period as it is considered a taboo, she must not be found pregnant within her mourning period, she must not sing and dance, she is also not expected to shout or quarrel (Lawrence-Hart, 2021). Another worrisome practice according to Lawrence-Hart is when the properties of the deceased is being misused or sold by the relatives without considering the upbringing and welfare of the deceased's children. These and many more constitute the various ways women are represented across cultures in Rivers State.

However, it is instructive to state that though the rituals originated with good intentions especially for the protection of the widow. It should be exercised with a high level of caution and moderation; there should be new ways of mourning deceased husbands, better still, it can be stopped as some in-laws use it to punish their late brother's wife (Lawrence-Hart, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Women are highly devalued and considered to play the second fiddle's role in the society; they are expected to perform the following jobs or responsibilities: produce children, serve as mothers and wives, cooking, cleaning, serving, washing, take care of men, be subordinate to males' authority and are excluded from high status occupation as well as position of power, while the men are expected to engage in high status occupation so as to provide the needs of the family (Haralambos & Holborn 2000: In Olanipekun & Onabanjo, 2020).

From time immemorial, all the cultures and ethnic groups in the world including Nigeria gave more power to the men, therefore, creating an unequal, imbalance and lopsided relationship between the men and the women in the society (Deedam, 2024). Continuing, the women folk had been greatly devalued by the men in all the ethnic groups in Rivers State; they were made to play subservient and subordinate roles, especially cooking, washing, of clothes, sewing, nursing and nurturing the children, keeping the house tidy, while their male counterpart dominate the political arena and engage in high status occupation so as to provide the needs of the family (Deedam, 2024).

Despite these perceived treatments and regard for the women, studies show the veritable roles played by women in the society. Irrespective of the various local and international regulations and legislations providing equal rights and recognition for both the male and female genders, there exist visible discrimination and inequality between both genders in terms of social, economic and political recognitions. It is against this backdrop that the study tends to assess the representation of women in Rivers Culture vis-à-vis their economic, political, social and cultural recognition.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of study were to:

1. investigate how women are recognised and treated across cultures in Rivers State.
2. examine some of the challenges associated with gender equality which leads to the clamour for male dominance.
3. find out factors responsible for improper representation of women across cultures in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. In what ways are women recognised and treated across cultures in Rivers State?
2. What are the challenges associated with gender equality that led to the clamor for male dominance in Rivers State?
3. What are the factors responsible for improper representation of women across cultures in Rivers State?

Review of Related Literature

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Theory

There exist a good number of feminist theories across the social, political, natural and behavioural sciences. A great number points to the issue of bridging the inequality that exists between the male and female gender in terms of awards, rewards, positions and right to inheritance from the cultural and traditional scenes.

The feminist theory, as espoused by Tong (2001) in the International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences, presupposes a range of ideas, reflecting the diversity of women worldwide. He opines that feminism counter's traditional philosophy with new ways of addressing issues affecting humanity, calling for replacement of the presiding patriarchal order with a system that emphasizes equal rights, justice and fairness. By implication, Tong holds the position of dissolution of traditional systems that place more importance and value for male gender while relegating the place of the female folks in the society; he offers the idea of a society characterised by equity and equal representation irrespective of gender and status.

It means that the various ideological constructs presented above as regards the feminist theory support women freedom, acceptance and proper representation among cultures and social environment all over the world, especially within the Nigerian society, and specifically in Rivers State. A meta-analysis found that this gender difference, with men interrupting women more than vice versa, was particularly strong when intrusive interruptions were made. Intrusive interruptions appear to be attempts to actually take over a conversation from the speaker (Leaper & Campbell, 1998: In Levine & Smolak, 2021).

Further, one set of cultural messages values a sexy, attractive female body while the other devalues women's power and voices. This raises the question of how women might most effectively gain power. For many women, appearance, including a sexualized appearance, has become the easiest way to gain power. There are certainly rewards for following societal rules, including those for gender roles (Murnen & Smolak, 2013; Smolak, Murnen, & Myers, 2014: In Levine & Smolak, 2021). This means that women representation in the society has yet taken another dimension with respect body shapes, skin tone/complexion and physique. That in a bid to feel accepted and valued in various social climes, women have taken to indecent appearance just to feel accepted in the society.

Objectification Perspective of Feminist Theory

Objectification theory is built on the assumption that society conceptualizes and treats men's and women's bodies differently (Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn, & Thompson, 2011; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Hyde & McKinley, 1996; McKinley, 2002: In Levine & Smolak, 2021). Women's bodies are seen and thought of as passive objects for the viewing pleasure of others, particularly men, whereas

men's bodies are seen as active, for accomplishing things such as sports or heavy labour; the fact that women's bodies are to be looked at means that they must be available as well as pleasant and even pleasurable to the eye; girls and women learn these lessons early and are reminded of them throughout their lives (American Psychological Association, 2007; Graff, Murnen, & Smolak, 2012; Smolak & Murnen, 2011: In Levine & Smolak, 2021). The objectification theory provides that women look to other people, particularly men, for approval of their appearance. That gradually, girls and women internalize the evaluative gaze of others, which leads adolescent girls and women to self-consciously monitor their own bodies from an outside perspective so as to better maintain an attractive appearance; a situation referred to as 'self-objectification or objectified body consciousness' (Levine & Smolak, 2021).

They (Levine and Smolak) share three components of objectification theory to include; the proposition that women's bodies are sexually objectified in modern societies. This objectification is pervasive enough to be taught to and to affect even relatively young girls; next is the evidence that self-objectification does occur, and the consideration of self-objectification theory's explanation of the development of negative body image, DE, and EDs. EDs is viewed as one of the major problems growing directly out of objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997: In Levine & Smolak, 2021).

Representation Women and Culture

Culture is the arts, customs, lifestyles, backgrounds, and habits that characterize humankind or a particular or nation. Simply, it is the people's way of life in totality. Causadias (2020) states that culture is a fuzzy concept without fixed boundaries, meaning different things according to situations; that is, it is a system of people, places, and practices, for a purpose such as enacting, justifying, or resisting power. It implies that the idea of cultures takes different shapes and function as you move from one region to another. The way and manner people live and engage in social economic, political and traditional activities differ. The representation of women, the production and construction of meaning to social situations takes different forms as we move from on cultures to another.

According to Madumere-Obike and Ukala (2011), cited in Rezaei (2022), women are culturally conceptualized as not being equal to males, and as a result, they are required to prepare for inferior positions than men; women are mostly responsible for the family's nurture. As mothers, they nurture their children, milk them, and teach them societal norms and values (Sani, 2001: In Rezaei, 2022). Continued (Sani), as wives, women are responsible for the well-being of the whole home, including extended family members. "Each culture has a dignity and value that must be maintained and conserved," according to the 1966 Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Cooperation, and "every people has the right and obligation to develop its culture" (UNESCO, 1966, Article 1: In Rezaei, 2022). In Afghanistan, women are considered as the weaker sex and are allocated minimal tasks, resulting in their restriction to household concerns; women often decline to do what they could do to follow the ideas of culture and tradition (Rezaei, 2022).

Socio-Cultural Representation of women in Rivers State

Women have received varying representations and regard within the socio-cultural spheres in Rivers State. Often times, they are seen as subjects to the male gender who are given a more superior and domineering looks and recognition. Dogo (2013) as captured in Ahiauzu et al. (2017), claims that women occupy a position of subordination to their male counterparts and have continually suffered discrimination based on sex in their bid to function in different spheres of society.

In Rivers state, this situation is further exacerbated by the existence of patriarchal societal system. 'A patriarchal system is a system of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex which provides material advantages to males while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of females' (Aina, 1998, p.6: In Ahiauzu, et al., 2017). A similar view which Dogo (2013) shares that it is a system where there are clearly defined sex roles with various taboos to ensure conformity with these specified gender roles; that there is no community in Rivers State

where the superiority of the male sex is not recognised; and gender roles, as prescribed by society, is not upheld.

Further, women are generally not permitted to take part in activities which are considered as men's prerogative due to the various socio-cultural taboos militating against their participation within a male domain (WIN, 1985: In Ahiauzu, et al., 2017). Still, women, found it difficult to perform or engage in activities that were outside their considered sphere of endeavour; they had their own areas of perceived authority within the society; thus, Rivers' women therefore form community associations that are based on trade, age, and kinship; that through these associations, they collectively defended their complementary sphere of authority within the extended family and wider community (WIN, 1985: In Ahiauzu, 2017).

Continuing, Ahiauzu et al. (2017) share that in Rivers State, during the first ten years of its creation, women did not feature much in formal politics and governance or activities related to politics which were considered men's prerogatives. Stating that there were a few women who still made notable impact in the State; the likes of Miss Constance Saronwiyo who became the first female commissioner in the state. Others were Bene Willie Abbey and Nuka Julie Wika. Ahiauzu et al. reflect that these women were able to make the mark that they did because of their earlier contact with western education; that their number is few because of the prevalent societal system at that time which fostered restrictions on the activities of women; men went out to engage in such activities as politics women remained to take care of the family and keep the home.

Arowolo and Aluko (2010) cited in Ahiauzu et al. (2017), indicate that the involvement of women in Nigerian politics is largely more noticeable at the level of voting and latent support than in the actual governance itself. Abiola Akinyode (2010) in Ahiauzu et al. (2017), provides the report presented by the director of the Women Advocates Research and Documentation Center (WARDC) in Nigeria, in a recent discourse on gender ranking of political candidates and other issues on women's political participation, 'democracy is about fair representation of all interest groups in the society and the low representation of women is a violation of the principle of democracy.' With their long time of involvement, it is expected that the number of women in politics and governance would have continued to increase and that the presence of women in the field of politics would no longer be seen as an incursion.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the survey design to examine the paradoxical representation of women in Nigerian cultures. The survey design was used because of its effectiveness in studying the attitudes and opinions of the people. Also, the survey design affords the researcher the opportunity to rate the representation of women in Nigerian cultures and its corresponding effects. The population for the study is 3, 793,780, according to the United Nations World Urbanization Prospects and Macrotrends (2025). The study adopted the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula to arrive at 400. The study utilised questionnaire and question guide as the instruments for data collection and used simple percentage and explanation building technique as the methods of data analysis.

Research Question One: In what ways are women recognized and treated across cultures in Rivers State.

Table 1: Women are offered political appointments and empowerment as a way of recognition in River State.

Variables	frequency	Weighted Score	Weighted Mean Score	Decision
Strongly agree	150	600	1.5	
Agree	75	225	0.6	
Disagree	117	354	0.9	
Strongly disagree	50	50	0.1	
Total	392	1, 229	3.1	Accepted

Table 1 indicated that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that women are offered political appointments and empowerment as a way of recognition in River State. But a smaller group of respondents disagreed. Based on the responses, it was established that through political appointments and female empowerment schemes, women are recognized in Rivers State.

Table 2: Skill acquisition, widow welfare schemes, literacy programs etc. are part of the ways women are recognised and treated in Rivers State.

Variables	Frequency	Weighted Score	Weighted Mean Score	Decision
Strongly agree	215	860	2.2	
Agree	63	189	0.5	
Disagree	35	70	0.01	
Strongly disagree	79	79	0.01	
Total	392	1,078	2.7	Accepted

Table 2 **indicates** that a greater number of respondents strongly agreed that skill acquisition, widow welfare schemes, literacy programs etc. are part of the ways women are recognised and treated in Rivers State. But a smaller number of respondents disagreed. Thus, study findings underscores that skill acquisition, widow welfare schemes, literacy programs etc. are part of the ways women are recognised and treated in Rivers State.

Table 3: Women are primarily seen and treated as caregivers and homemakers in Rivers State.

Variables	Frequency	Weighted Score	Weighted Mean Score	Decision
Strongly agree	241	964	2.5	
Agree	132	396	0.3	
Disagree	13	26	0.1	
Strongly disagree	6	6	0.01	
Total	392	1404	2.9	Accepted

From table 3, majority of the respondents strongly agreed that women are primarily seen and treated as caregivers and homemakers in Rivers State. While a smaller group of respondents strongly disagreed. Therefore, the study investigation gathered that women are primarily seen and treated as caregivers and homemakers in Rivers State.

Research Question Two: What are the challenges associated with gender equality that led to the clamor for male dominance in Rivers State?

Table 4: Divorce in marriages may be associated with the thoughts of equality between the male and female gender in the society.

Variables	Frequency	Weighted Score	Weighted Mean Score	Decision
Strongly agree	195	780	2.0	
Agree	132	396	1.0	
Disagree	47	94	0.2	
Strongly disagree	45	45	0.1	
Total	392	991	3.3	Accepted

Table 4 shows that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that divorce in marriages may be associated with the thoughts of equality between the male and female gender in the society. However, a smaller number of the respondents strongly disagreed. By implication, the idea of equality between the male and female gender has resulted to lots of divorce in marriage.

Table 5: The struggle for top leadership positions in the political and economic spheres serves as one of the challenges associated with equality between male and female genders.

Variables	Frequency	Weighted Score	Weighted Mean Score	Decision
Strongly agree	266	1,064	2.7	
Agree	53	159	0.4	

Disagree	19	38	0.1	
Strongly agree	54	54	0.1	
Total	392	1318	3.3	Accepted

From table 5, a greater number of the respondents strongly agreed that the struggle for top leadership positions in the political and economic spheres serves as one of the challenges associated with equality between male and female genders. But a smaller number of respondents disagreed to that notion. Hence, the possible existence of power tussle between the male and female gender, is a major concern for equality between the two of them.

Table 6: The struggle for the possession of family inheritance and parental properties are visible challenges associated with gender equality in Rivers State.

Variables	Frequency	Weighted Score	Weighted Mean Score	Decision
Strongly agree	105	420	1.1	
Agree	119	357	0.9	
Disagree	88	176	0.4	
Strongly disagree	80	80	0.2	
Total	392	1,033	2.6	Accepted

Table 6 reveals that majority of the respondents agreed that the struggle for the possession of family inheritance and parental properties are visible challenges associated with gender equality in Rivers State. However, a smaller number of respondents strongly disagreed.

Research Question Three: What are the factors responsible for improper representation of women across cultures in Rivers State?

Table 7: Cultural and religious impediments are some of the factors responsible for improper representation of women across cultures in River State.

Variables	Frequency	Weighted Score	Weighted Mean Score	Decision
Strongly agree	274	1,096	2.8	
Agree	47	141	0.4	
Disagree	43	86	0.2	
Strongly disagree	28	28	0.1	
Total	392	1,351	3.5	Accepted

Table 7 reveals that a greater number of respondents strongly agreed that cultural and religious impediments are some of the factors responsible for improper representation of women across cultures in River State. But a smaller group of the respondents disagreed. Thus, responses provided supports the fact that cultural and religious impediments are some of the factors responsible for improper representation of women across cultures in River State.

Table 8: The fear of females' dominance in marriages is an attributive factor for improper representation of women across cultures in Rivers State.

Variables	Frequency	Weighted Score	Weighted Mean Score	Decision
Strongly agree	219	876	2.2	
Agree	45	135	0.3	
Disagree	73	146	0.4	
Strongly disagree	32	32	0.6	
Total	392	634	3.5	Accepted

Table 8 indicates that a greater number of the respondents strongly agreed that the fear of females' dominance in marriages is an attributive factor for improper representation of women across cultures in Rivers State. But a smaller number of the respondents strongly disagreed. It means that the thoughts of women dominating and acting authoritative is associated with the way they are treated by men in Rivers State.

Table 9: The need to exercise control and authority over the female gender is a known factor responsible for improper representation of women across cultures in Rivers State.

Variables	Frequency	Weighted Score	Weighted Mean Score	Decision
Strongly agree	74	296	0.8	
Agree	234	702	1.8	
Disagree	74	148	0.4	
Strongly disagree	33	33	0.1	
Total	392	1, 179	3.1	Accepted

From table 9, a greater group of the respondents agreed that the need to exercise control and authority over the female gender is a known factor responsible for improper representation of women across cultures in Rivers State. But a smaller number of the respondents disagreed with the notion. That is to mean that need to be in charge of every human activity in the society is related to how females are treated in Rivers State by the men.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: In what ways are women recognized and treated across cultures in Rivers State?

Findings from the study revealed that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that women are offered political appointments and empowerment as a way of recognition in River State. This means that within the political settings, women are given a voice and opportunity for representation. Ejekwue (2025) has it that the quest for a fair and equitable society has been on the front burner of global discourse. Stating that several world agencies have been making concerted efforts by expending funds, time and energy in the sensitization of the populace on the need to allow gender balance and allow female folks to contribute effectively to the growth and development of society. She maintains that one such way is to allow for equal participation of women in the decision-making process of society through the government. That globally, there has been steady but slow progress in the role played by women in politics because of men's nature and domination, thereby systematically outnumbering the women folk, especially in developing nations in Africa. By implication, the recognition of women in Rivers State via political appointments is to help reduce, if not minimize this domination that tends to exist.

Again, findings from the study revealed that a greater number of respondents strongly agreed that skill acquisition, widow welfare schemes, literacy programs etc. are part of the ways women are recognised and treated in Rivers State. This means that as a way citizens' engagement and empowerment, especially on the side of women, different economic empowerment schemes and programmes are initiated by the government. Empowerment refers to increasing the political, social or economic strengths of individuals and Communities; it often involves the empowered developing confidence in his or her capacities; empowerment has been defined as a "process through which individuals, local groups and communities, identify and shape their lives and the society in which they live."(Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia, 2007, Slocum, et al., 1995: In Kobani, 2014). Further, among the most recent efforts is the Empowerment Support Initiative (ESI); an initiative of the Wife of the former Governor of Rivers State, Judith Amaechi, committed to empowering women and youths of Rivers State with skills for wealth creation through basic education and capacity in modern techniques, skills acquisition which includes the training of lady cab drivers and to build relevant institutional capacities and networks to enhance opportunities and address the needs of target groups (Kobani, 2014).

Also, findings from the study indicated that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that women are primarily seen and treated as caregivers and homemakers in Rivers State. The National Partnership for Women and Families (2018) shares that caregiving is a major part of life for millions of women, with women of color and immigrants taking on a disproportionate amount of both paid and unpaid family caregiving. Stressing that more than 25 million women – almost one in seven – provide care to family members or friends. That the average family caregiver is a 49-year-old woman

caring for her mother; she typically works full-time as well as providing caregiving support. This seems to be the perceived case of women in Rivers State.

Research Question Two: What are the challenges associated with gender equality that led to the clamor for male dominance in Rivers State?

Findings from the study revealed that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that divorce in marriages may be associated with the thoughts of equality between the male and female gender in the society. Micklin (2024) provides that gender roles have profoundly influenced the dynamics of marriage and divorce. Stating that traditional roles assign men as breadwinners and women as homemakers, shaping expectations and responsibilities within a marital relationship. He stressed that while these roles can provide structure, they may also contribute to imbalances and conflicts, impacting on marital satisfaction and stability. It means stressing gender roles and couples' duties is associated with the struggles and misunderstandings that result in divorce in modern day marriages.

Findings from the study revealed that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the struggle for top leadership positions in the political and economic spheres serves as one of the challenges associated with equality between male and female genders. Badom and Ndueue (2024) share that gender inequality is endemic in Rivers State, and women are treated as Cinderella in peace processes, decision making and active political participation, and have thus been shackled in diverse ways, but behind the pretext of being otherwise engaged with culturally attributed motherly roles. They further state that gender discrimination had thus lingered with solipsistic men who occupy positions of authority in the majority, and inured the women to the condition, apropos of gender inequality, as the elephant in the living room. Also, Amadi (2017) shares that several macro and micro-economic programmes and policies were set up by the Federal and the State Governments, Non-governmental Organizations(NGOs), and Donor Agencies, such as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) 2004, Rivers State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (RIVSEEDS) 2005, The Adolescent Programme (TAP) 2001, the Empowerment Support Initiative (ESI) 2008, the Young Women Economic Empowerment Programme (YWEENP) 2012, Growing Girls and Women in Nigeria Initiative (G-WIN) 2013, Micro-finance Scheme, Women's Health Intervention Scheme, among others. That women have benefited from these programmes and projects in Rivers State and many more will.

Findings from the study showed that majority of the respondents agreed that the struggle for the possession of family inheritance and parental properties are visible challenges associated with gender equality in Rivers State. It clearly looks at the fight that exists between female and male genders in terms possession of family inheritance. Tribune Online (2023) reports how four sisters on Wednesday, March 29, in Port Harcourt became the first beneficiaries of the Rivers State Prohibition of the Curtailment of Women's Rights to Share in Family Property Law No. 2 of 2022 as a Port Harcourt High Court ruled in their favour in a case between them and their three brothers. The report further states that four sisters had instituted legal action against their three brothers for discriminating against them in the inheritance of their father's estate. The judge in his final decision concurs with the Governor's statement that, "we have even found out that women are more useful to us than even the men; that the day you're getting old and dying, you'll know that you need more daughters than men. That they will leave their husbands' houses and come to take care of you." By implication, it offers insights into the need to recognize and allow female children in their parents' wealth.

Research Question Three: What are the factors responsible for improper representation of women across cultures in Rivers State?

Findings from the study revealed that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that cultural and religious impediments are some of the factors responsible for improper representation of women across cultures in River State. That is, cultural sensitivity and impediments are notable factors

associated with poor representation of women. SHS Web of Conferences (2024) presents that the pervasive underrepresentation of women in the upper echelons of political power and in leadership roles across sectors is an issue that stubbornly persists in societies worldwide. Stressing that despite increased awareness and numerous initiatives designed to level the playing field, a complex web of ingrained systemic barriers and deeply rooted sociocultural norms continues to thwart the efforts of women to participate fully and equally in the political arena. Also, cultural factors, deeply rooted in patriarchy and traditional gender roles, remain significant impediments to women's political participation. Stating that patriarchal ideologies and practices, such as early marriage, polygamy, and societal expectations of domesticity, position women in subordinate roles within both the family and the community, limiting their agency. Stressing that cultural norms are further reinforced by religious beliefs that often intersect with traditional practices, exacerbating the challenges women face in pursuing political ambitions (Adedokun, 2021: In Dutse, n.d).

CONCLUSION

Based on the outcome of the investigation, it makes sense to state that giving room for women to occupy top elective political positions in the state would help create a balance in terms of proper representation of women across cultures in Rivers State.

Also, the way women are represented in Rivers State is a traceable factor resulting to divorce in marriages. But initiating and enforcing a legislation that allows women to inherit parental properties is one of the ways the government can create a balance in terms of proper representation of women across cultures in Rivers State.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are made with respect to the outcome of the study, thus:

1. That the government should initiate more empowerment schemes that better engages the female folks in the society, such that they are better valued economically and represented in Rivers State.
2. More strict legislations should be initiated, enacted and enforced by the government to help curb emerging issues and obvious challenges associated with male dominance in Rivers State; and this mantra should be championed by the media through it agenda setting and framing of issues that calls for participatory communication. Cultural impediments like exclusive right to land ownership/possession, reserved for only the male folks, should be revisited to include both genders

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