

GENDER'S PERCEPTION OF GOVERNMENT AND ITS MANAGEMENT OF INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Nigerian industrial relations environment is not one that is envied by many, as it is filled with so many controversies, incessant disputes and strikes. This scenario has led many to call for an overhaul of the system, but before that is done, it will be most beneficial to seek the views of all stakeholders to ascertain the best path of action. In view of that, it becomes pertinent to seek the views of the different groups that constitute the work force, which is made up of 46% women and 54% men. The argument here is that the majority of women do not show interest in government and its policies, and this lack of interest may affect the way they view the government and its performance. To ascertain men and women's perception of how effective the process of managing industrial crises in Nigeria is, this paper used a time survey method to administer 507 questionnaires to both men and women. The data retrieved shows that 68% of females in the study do feel that the government is effective in its management of industrial disputes in Nigeria. This was in sharp contrast to 70% of the males in the study who feel that the government is grossly ineffective in its management of industrial disputes. This study therefore shows that the gender of an individual can affect the way the person perceives and evaluates issues. Women's position may have been influenced by gender roles assigned by society. It is recommended that parents should allow children to develop an interest in all subject matter, while women advocate groups should do so by encouraging women to take interest in matters pertaining to government, policies and trade unionism. Trade unions should regularly inform and educate their members.

Key words: gender; perception; government; interest

INTRODUCTION

Women, unlike men, are mostly not interested in politics. This can be seen from the number of women who occupy political positions. Men, on the other hand, always develop and display an interest in government, policies and politics. This may account for the low rate of female representation in all levels of political strata worldwide. According to Schaefer

(2006), in the middle of 2004 there were only 73 women in the United States Congress. They accounted for 59 of the 435 members of the House of Representatives and 14 of the 100 members of Senate. The situation is not different in Nigeria. In April 2015, there were only 7 women senators out of the 109 senators, and 14 women of the 360 members of the federal House of Representatives. These figures show that either women lack interest, or

they are not given enough opportunities to be involved in political issues (Premium Times 2015).

The argument put forward is that women's lack of interest in politics may be a result of their upbringing and training, which also affects their perception on such issues. Schaefer (2006) explains that this is so, because many societies establish social distinctions between females and males. This distinction makes the upbringing and training different. Similarly, Okaka (2015) stressed that women's lack of interest in government can also affect the way they perceive and evaluate government policies. Inevitably, the perception of women in government and their programs may differ from the way men see them. In Nigeria, for example, when men sit around the television set to watch news, women are more interested in watching soap operas.

Therefore this study examines the perception held by men and women on the same issue and how gender affects the perceptions held by these groups.

Conceptualization of gender

Gender roles and stereotypes affect men and women in different ways. The society may adjudge men and women by how well they conform to traditional stereotypes. Pleck et al. (1993) explained the theory of masculine gender role strain and asserted that boys and men are supposed to fulfil a standard of masculinity as determined by society. Boys and men for example, who do not fulfil the standard often suffer from low self-worth and are at times regarded as not masculine enough.

A person's sexuality comes from within him or her, making a person heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual depending on the partners he or she is (or is not) attracted to. Unlike sexuality, gender roles are imposed from outside. It is not biological, but happens through a variety of social influences, determined by society. These social roles are formed during the socialization phases of childhood and adolescence. These roles and the issues associated with such matters normally influence people throughout their lives. The parents are the first and one of the strongest influences on a person's perceived gender role. This is so because the parents are the first teachers – not only of such basic skills

as talking and walking, but also of attitudes and behaviour. Some parents still hold traditional definitions of what is considered maleness and femaleness and what kind of activity is appropriate for each person within the specific role (Kohlberg 1966).

The influence of parents on their child is so great because they start early in treating their baby boys and baby girls differently. Baby boys are more likely to die in infancy than girls, and are actually more fragile as infants than girls. Many studies have shown that parents are likely to respond more quickly to an infant daughter's cries than they are to those of an infant son. The boy is considered to be stronger. The girl is more likely to be cuddled by the parents than the boy. The boy is also more often allowed to try new things and activities – such as learning to walk and explore. Parents tend to fear more for the safety of their female child. But according to Ejifugha and Ogueri (2010), most parents in Africa would prefer a male to a female child and culturally this can affect the roles these may be assigned at home.

Naturally, people are more likely to appreciate a girl's beauty than the achievements of a boy. You often hear comments such as "You look so pretty!" for the clothes she may be wearing. Nothing is wrong with such a compliment, but it tends to send a message that the girl child is most appreciated for her looks and not what she can do. Boys on the other hand, are praised for what they can do. For example a boy is told "Are you not a big boy now? Stand up by yourself!" It is often the view of parents that boys need to be encouraged and they also expect them to be more active, and to be more rougher-and-tumble in their play and actions than girls. A boy who does not like horse-play (and so goes against the gender role he has been assigned) may be labelled as acting like a girl. When a girl prefers to be active she may be called a "tomboy".

It is natural for children to look up to their parents as role models. If a girl sees her mother taking part in physical activities that are considered male activities, she will grow up with the idea that it is alright for girls to be involved in such. If a boy sees his father helping to take care of the new baby and domestic chores, he will integrate this image of "daddy is always willing to help" and this

notion will develop into his definition of masculinity.

Just as parents can provide positive role models, they can serve also as negative role models. For example, children who grow up with parents, who are in an abusive relationship, have been found to repeat the same pattern as adults. Male children of abusive fathers often grow up to abuse their wives, and daughters of abused mothers can grow up to be victims of domestic violence, because their parents have shown them that this is "normal" (Okaka and Ugiagbe 2012).

There is also the effect of children growing up in a home dominated by one sex. For example, a girl growing up in a home amidst boys. Such a girl might grow up acting like a boy. The same goes for boys growing up in a female dominated home.

The role models created for the children tend to affect their interests later in life. Okaka (2015) stressed that it is not uncommon to see a father show an interest in sports, news and governmental issues, while the mother shows an interest in issues relating to the home, welfare of the family, home videos, soap operas, etc. This will definitely affect the perception of the child and create the impression that news, sports, politics and government policies are for men, while issues relating to the management of the home, soap operas, home videos etc., are female oriented. This might, for example, gradually discourage the female child to show interest and discuss such issues and conversely builds, in the male child, the interest in such subject matters, which are considered manly.

Definition of concepts

Gender: According to the World Health Organization (WHO 2016), gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as the norms, roles and relationships of (and between) groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and it can be changed. So it is socially constructed and not biological.

Industrial/Trade disputes: This refers to the total range of behaviour and attitudes that express opposition and divergent orientations between individual owners and managers on one hand and working people and their organization on the other (Otobo 2005). A

trade dispute can also be described as the conflict that takes place within an industrial organization where the parties, involved in competition, want to occupy the position of the other, irrespective of the fact that they are aware of the incompatibility of their interests. Fajana (1995) sees it as the inability of employers and employees to reach an agreement on issues connected with subject of employers/employees. However, for the purpose of this study, industrial conflict can be seen as the overt and covert antagonistic manifestation of grievance(s) in the work place between management and workers (mostly) arising from either management or workers non-compliance with (or misinterpretation of) the collective agreement jointly reached.

Government: In this context government refers to the body of persons charged with the duty of exercising authority over the actions of subjects in a particular geographical location with special reference to labour matters. Miliband (1973) explained that the state in this context includes a number of institutions which are the judiciary, the military, the police and other bodies used constantly to control trade unions.

Management of industrial conflicts in Nigeria

Industrial conflicts management in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. This is so because of the frequency and manner at which industrial crises occur in the country. Otobo (1988), in his analyses of management of industrial crises in Nigeria, opined that the industrial conflicts in the country are not managed properly, hence the industrial relations system has been besieged by woes of one industrial action or the other. Otobo (1988) asserted that the history of industrial relations is full of conflicts, crisis, and violence. In the same vein, Ubeku (1983) scores the management of industrial crisis low as he complained bitterly that the lack of confidence by stakeholders in the institutionalised process of resolving industrial disputes may not be unrelated to the delay in the process and failure of the process.

Another problem besieging industrial relations management in Nigeria is the inability of the system to resolve an industrial crisis at the conciliation stage. The inability

to resolve disputes at this stage may be traced back to a lack of qualified manpower to handle the industrial crisis. The public service has always been faced with manpower problems due to the embargo placed on employment by the Federal government, which was only recently lifted. This inability to handle issues is clearly seen in the number of industrial disputes that result in industrial actions, which have not been resolved at the conciliation stage.

The frequent industrial disputes can be traced back to what some writers call the lack of confidence in the process of settling industrial disputes (Odigie 1993). Onwe (2014) explains that the procedures for conflict management in Nigeria, which were drawn from the various labour reforms, are noted as being grossly characterized by preventive delays before and after mediation, conciliation and arbitration. These characteristics undoubtedly imply the untimely failure in the management of industrial conflicts.

Supporting this same position, Akinwale (2011) asserted that the process of conflict management in Nigeria is characterised by what he called preventable delays before/after mediation, conciliation and arbitration. In Okaka's (2014) view, these procedures of managing industrial disputes should have merged. Merging them could reduce delays and ensure the timely management of industrial conflicts in the country. This kind of merger has yielded results in other countries such as China (the most populous country and one of the leading industrialised countries in the world). According to Okene (2008), the contemporary Chinese mediation is different from the alternative dispute resolution management (ADR) that operates in countries such as the USA and Australia. In these countries mediation is generally separate and distinct from court trials. Mediators do not operate with as much discretionary power as the Chinese judges (Huang 2006). In the Chinese system, if the mediation fails, arbitration or adjudication will follow under the same judge. Unlike in Nigeria, where conflicts move from mediator to different officials such as the conciliator, the Industrial Arbitration Panel Chairperson, and the National Industrial Court Judges. Allowing the same judge to continue will allow

for continuity; as that judge is already abreast of the issues at hand. In Nigeria, conflicts can linger for a long period (at times over two months or more) and may remain pending in the vicious cycles of adjudication. Industrial actions are considered illegal during adjudication and the law has apparently created a vicious cycle of compulsory arbitration from which workers cannot escape (Okene 2007).

These bottle-necks have seen many adjudge the management of industrial disputes in Nigeria as a failure, hence the calls for the restructuring of the entire process and procedures.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The survey research design was chosen, and this method is a systematic gathering of information from respondents for understanding some of the crucial aspects (Agbonifoh and Yomere 1999). The one-time survey design approach was adopted because the data retrieved can be more easily quantified and analysed than data generated by other research methods (Giddens and Duneier 2006). The public and private sectors were considered as areas where both males and females work, hence the study grouped the place of work of employees into two categories namely: government and non-government establishments. Fifty-nine establishments were identified from among government organizations in the study area of Edo South Senatorial District, Edo State, Nigeria. The systematic random sampling method was applied, and five organizations were selected out of the 59 establishments listed. For the non-governmental work organizations, 10 establishments where both sexes work were also identified. Three organizations among the ten were selected through the simple random sampling method, using the lucky deep system. The population size of the organizations surveyed was 6331 at the time of the survey. A total of 600 respondents and focus group discussions (FGDs) were selected. A total of four focus group discussions were formed. Each focus group had 10 members, which included both sexes, and were union members, workers and management staff.

Presentation and analysis of data

A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed to respondents in the 8 organizations selected for the survey in Edo South Senatorial District, and a total of 507 questionnaires (representing 84.5%) were retrieved. Fifty four (9%) questionnaires were not returned, and 39 (6.5%) questionnaires were not properly filled in and hence were discarded. This study therefore had to rely on the data derived from 507 questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to gender. This table is very important to this study, as it will assist in ascertaining the perception of both males and females regarding the issue at hand.

Table 1 – Percentage distribution of respondents by sex (n = 510)

S/N	Sex	Frequency	Percent
1	Male	239	46.9
2	Female	268	52.5
3	Not applicable	3	0.6
	Total	510	100.0

The data in Table 1 above shows that 46.9% of the respondents were males, 52.5% of the respondents were females, and 0.6% of the respondents' data could not be utilized because they did not state their gender. This clearly indicates that the study was gender friendly, as women were not discriminated against, and were even a majority in the study. As the study shows, female respondents were 6% more than their male counterparts. The equal opportunity given to males and females in the study was to enable the researcher to achieve the aim of the study.

The study went further to find out the general view of the respondents. The respondents were asked how they view the way and manner in which the government manages industrial crises in Nigeria, and in particular how the government endeavour to avert industrial disputes or manage them when they occur. The responses of those surveyed are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – Percentage distribution of respondents' responses on how they evaluate government's management of industrial disputes and strikes in Nigeria (n = 507)

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percent
1	Most effective	21	4.14
2	Effective	120	23.67
3	Ineffective	201	39.65
4	Most ineffective	71	14.00
5	Undecided	94	18.54
	Total	507	100.00

The data in Table 2 indicates that 4% of the respondents rated the management of industrial disputes in Nigeria as most effective, good and well. 24% of the others feel the same way as the 4% as they also agree that the management of trade disputes are just effective. The viewpoint of 40% of workers (both males and females) was that the management of industrial disputes is ineffective. Of the total respondents, 14% rate the management of disputes as most ineffective, and 19% of the respondents were undecided on the matter. The findings show that a total of 53.65% of those surveyed rate the management of industrial disputes and strikes by government as ineffective and these responses were made by employees irrespective of their sector of employment. This data shows that the majority of workers have passed a vote of no confidence on the government's management of industrial disputes in Nigeria. When you closely examine the data, it reveals that the majority of those who took this position are males (as Table 3 will show later). The number of male respondents may have affected the results found in Table 2. It will now be pertinent to examine the responses of the sexes in the study to determine how the position of workers was reached. This finding should serve as a wakeup call to the government to be alive to its responsibilities of providing an enabling environment for industries to strive.

The next data presented are the responses of the various sexes, as presented in Table 3, showing the level of confidence in the government to manage trade disputes effectively. This data is to help to find out

the various positions held by the different sexes and how their gender may affect their perception with regard to the confidence in the

government's ability to manage an industrial crisis effectively.

Table 3 – Respondents' sex and respondents' level of confidence in the government's ability to manage trade disputes effectively

Sex	Lack of confidence in on government		Total
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	
Male	168 (70.29%)	71 (29.71%)	239 (47.14%)
Female	86 (32.09%)	182 (67.91%)	268 (52.86%)
Total	254 (50.10%)	253 (49.90%)	507 (100.0%)

Note: $\chi^2 = (n = 507, df = 1) = 12.756, P > 0.00$.

Table 3 shows that 70% of all the male respondents in the survey agreed that the government is unable to manage industrial disputes effectively and 30% of them disagree that the government is able to manage industrial disputes effectively. This number may have influenced the position of workers generally, giving the numbers of males who took this position. Meanwhile, 68% of the females in the study disagree with the statement that the government is unable to effectively manage industrial disputes. In fact they believe that the government is able to manage disputes effectively. The position of 32% of female respondents is that the government should not be applauded for its management of industrial disputes in Nigeria as it has failed to manage industrial crises effectively.

The chi-square value shows that there is difference between the gender of the respondents and the perception of the governments' ability to handle industrial disputes and strikes effectively. Females in this study have the strong perception that the government can and are able to manage trade disputes effectively in Nigeria. Whereas the majority of the males hold the view that the government is unable to manage trade disputes effectively. These results show that females have more confidence in governments' ability to manage industrial disputes, and may be the reason why there are fewer women in leadership positions of trade unions in Nigeria. This shows that gender does affect the perception of the respondents in certain issues and this can mostly likely be traced to the orientation the individual may receive

depending on his/her gender. This may also explain why men are more active in agitations and union matters, while women play a more passive role.

The position of female members of the focus group was also quite different from the one held by males. Out of the 40 members of the focus groups, 18 were females and 22 were males. 14 (78%) of all females in the focus groups gave the government a clean health bill. While 18 (82%) of the 22 males in the focus group believe that the government has failed to manage the industrial relations crisis effectively in Nigeria. This goes to show that the perception of the male gender is quite different from the position held by females on this issue. Therefore the conclusion is that the gender of an individual does and can affect a person's perception on a particular issue.

The perception held by males and females in this study is an indication that the orientation a person is exposed to during infancy (and afterwards) does influence the way the individual grows up to assess issues. For example, males are generally more exposed to issues regarding politics, governance, policies and the economy than women. This, in most cases, influences their perception of matters in those mentioned areas. While women, who are less exposed to these matters, may find themselves inadequately equipped to address such issues.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The industrial relations system in Nigeria is full of woes and incessant industrial disputes

that lead to strikes in most cases. With the immediately suspended strike of Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), over the dismissal of teachers of staff at universities, which commenced on the 24th of December 2015, is one too many to mention that exemplify the instability in the industrial relations environment in Nigeria. Therefore examining the perception of the various groups that make up the Nigerian workforce becomes imperative.

The priorities set by society for male and female children, which are always different, go a long way in shaping their thinking and the perception they may hold in the future. Each society has given a set of dos and don'ts to the different genders, which include the areas of interest they should develop. This in most cases inadvertently affects the child as he/she develops into a fully-grown adult.

The Nigerian workforce is made up of men and women, and their views matters a lot. Women have shown less interest in the government and its activities, while men have proved not only to be interested in government activities, but also have taken an active role. These apparent positions of men and women, especially on industrial relations matters, may also affect the way they view and react to government and its policies. This study has shown that while men hold the view that the government is not doing well in its management of industrial relations, women feel that the government needs to be given a pat on the back. These divergent opinions may affect the way each group responds to issues in the industrial relations environment. Issues such as: responding to strikes, or willingness to call-off such strikes and active participation in negotiations. Thus the study showed that

the gender of a person does affect the way the individual views matters and responds to such issues. This was clearly displayed by the data retrieved from the respondents, as 68% of all the women in the survey completely supported the argument that the government is able to manage industrial disputes in Nigeria effectively, while 70% of the men in the study felt otherwise. They hold the position that the government is unable to manage industrial crises in Nigeria. This perception of women leaves a gap that other researchers can work on.

Irrespective of the sex of a child, parents should endeavour to allow them to develop an interest in all subject matters they desire to learn about. This will go a long way to developing the interest of males and females alike on subjects such as government and government policies.

Women advocate groups should encourage their members to show an interest in all subject matters (including issues that affect industrial relations) as women make up over 46% of the workforce in Nigeria, and their contributions matters a lot to the overall development of the industrial relations system in the country.

Trade unions should take the lead in providing the necessary information about the government and government policies as it affects workers and the economy in general. There is also a need for the unions to continue to educate its members by means of seminars and training programs.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflict of interest to disclose.

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