

## GENDER EQUALITY IN OCCUPATIONS: AN APPRAISAL OF PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF GIRLS IN GOVERNMENT GIRLS' COLLEGE, SOKOTO

BY

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigated the parents' attitude towards occupational aspirations for girls within the context of single sex girls' school. The Data for the study was collected using a questionnaire, which was administered to a total of 96 parents of students at Government Girls' College (GGC), Sokoto. The study showed that parents attached great importance to occupations in the medical profession and as such gave recognition to occupational relevance of science subjects for their daughters. The study also noted the persistence of traditional views about women's role among a minority of parents, which is likely to conflict with any move to modify or change these views.*

### INTRODUCTION

Parents have enormous influence on the child's occupational aspirations. This influence may be positive or negative and as a result may either be in conformity with the school's definition of gender or in conflict with it. Yet few schools if at all have made any systematic effort to discover the parents' views, let alone attempt to modify them. In this regard the question of whether or not parental opinion places any constraint on the ability of the schools to influence children's gender roles thus remains largely unexplored. There seems to be a taken for granted assumption that the family and the school transmit the same definition of gender and that no conflict occurs between these two social institutions. But this is not necessary the case. Barly (1982) for example, explained how some head-teachers felt constrained by the enormous influence of parents which is usually stereo typed and old fashioned. Similarly, Junaid (1993) had shown how the belief's and prejudices of parents and husbands affected the educational and occupational life chances of girls and women in Sokoto State.

This means that there are many ways parents' beliefs or prejudices can operate in ways, which affect their children. For example the home, or parents may not want their children to take up roles different from those the school is preparing them for. In such a case, the school system may either adapt itself to

cope with these demands or enter into conflict with them. The success of any educational innovation will therefore depend, among other things on whether or not it gains the initial acceptance and support of parents.

The place of home and school in gender socialization cannot be overemphasized. Quite a number of social influence affect adolescents vocational choices and aspirations. Parents, siblings, peers and teachers are among those socialization agents that significantly affect the adolescents' view of vocation (Dusek, 1977). The family has an important influence on the child's academic performance and achievement. What the child learns at home and how his family motivates him towards education contribute to the child's success or failure in school. The parents' occupation and social status as well as their life-style have considerable influence on the child's schooling (Mahuta, 1998).

The success or any attempt by schools to socialize girls and women into taking up new roles in society will depend to a larger extent on whether or not parents are supportive of non-traditional choices being promoted by the schools. If the parents have narrow vision about the education of women in the society her chances of going to school will be limited and equally her access to jobs outside the home will be affected.

Many of the ideas women hold about themselves and consequently the ideas they develop about appropriate future jobs which are congruent with their self image developed with the family and peer group, and as Sharpe (1976) suggest, these reflect past experiences of women within the home and labour market.

The need for both the school and the home to work in harmony towards achieving the goals of equality between the sexes cannot be overemphasized. Parents have more weight than teachers and if their views are old fashioned, teachers' effort at providing equal opportunities to the children in the school may be frustrated. One sure way of achieving harmony between the home and the school is through a deliberate and systematic effort on the part of the schools to discover the parents' view on sex roles and to try and modify those that are found to be inimical to the attempt being made by the schools to promote equal occupational opportunity among the sexes.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The main thrust of this study was to examine the parental attitude towards occupational aspirations of their daughters in Sokoto, with particular reference to parents of students in Government Girls College, Sokoto. Specifically the major concern of this study was to address the following questions:

- i. What are the parents' occupational aspirations for their children?
- ii. What are their views on subjects the school is teaching?
- iii. What are their views on sexual equality?

### THE SAMPLE

The sample for this study consisted of 100 parents selected from the parents of students in Government Girls' College, Sokoto. But by the time of collection of the questionnaires, only ninety-six (96) were returned. Thus, the ninety six (96) constituted the sample that participated in the study.

### INSTRUMENTATION

Questionnaires were the main instruments used for the purpose of collecting data for this study. A total of one hundred questionnaires were distributed to the parents that constituted the sample of the study.

### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT OF THE STUDY

The analysis of the data and results of the investigation are presented under three major headings;

- i. Occupational aspiration,
- ii. Parental views on the subjects taught in school (curriculum) and
- iii. The theory and practice of equality.

#### 1. Occupational Aspirations of Parents for their Children.

One of the major concerns of the study was to investigate parents' occupational aspiration for their children. Parents were required to rate on 1-5 scale the suitability of various occupations for their children. The results are shown below:

Table 1: Mean Parental Rating of the Suitability of Various Occupations for their children:

OCCUPATIONS	BOYS	GIRLS
Nursing	3.1	3.9
Medical Doctor	4.0	3.2
Engineering	*3.9	1.9
Secretary	2.8	1.9
Managerial Position	*3.8	2.0
Social Work	*3.7	2.6
Electrician	*3.3	2.0
Shop Assistant	1.2	1.0

Factory Work	*3.2	1.1
Hair Dressing	1	1.0
Teaching	3.8	3.8
Computer Operation	3.2	2.7

occupations are sex-stereotyped.

The results presented above, showed that parents attached great importance to medical profession for both boys and girls. This seems to fall in line with parents' inclination for the study of science subjects, which are basic conditions for entry into medical profession and related areas. The teaching profession was accorded the next highest priority in the rating of jobs for both boys and girls with the mean of 3.8 each.

The result presented in table has further shown the emergence of sex stereotyping of occupations. The occupations that were sex-stereotyped were shop Assistant and Hairdresser for boys and Engineer, Managerial position, Social work, Factory work and Electrician for girls.

Parents were also asked what sort of jobs they would like their children to get. The results are shown in table 2 below;

Table 2: Percentage of Parents Job Preferences for their Children by sex

OCCUPATIONS	BOYS	GIRLS
Medical Doctor	41.7	15.6
Nursing	13.5	45.8
Engineering	17.7	5.2
Managerial position	6.3	11.5
Teaching	20.8	21.9

The results presented above showed that majority of parents (41.7%) wanted their sons to become medical doctors while on the other hand majority of parents (45.8) wanted their daughters to become nurses. In view of this therefore, it can be stated that the parents have recognized the importance of the study of science subject.

## 2. Parental Views on the Subjects Taught in School (Curriculum)

Another important aspect of this study was to seek for parents' views on the school subject taught to their children. In view of this, parents were asked what they thought the school should be teaching. The first question, which enquired as to the most important subjects for the child to learn, produced an

almost unanimous response. Religious Studies, English Language and Science and Technical Education (see table 3 below);

Table 3: Parents' Responses on Subject The School Should be Teaching

SUBJECT	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Religious Studies	96	100
English Language	80	83.3
Science and Technical Education	86	89.6
Business/Commercial	10	10.4
Total	272	283.3

Parents were further asked to indicate, whether the scheme operating at G.C.C. Sokoto where all female students study science subjects through their secondary education was desirable, unanimously Eighty-four parents said yes.

The importance of specific subjects was further explored more systematically in another question. Parents were asked to rate on a scale from 5 (extremely important) to 1 (waste of time on how important they thought it was for their children to study various subjects when they were made optional. The results are shown below:

Table 4: Mean Parental Ratings of The Importance of Various Subjects for Their Children.

SUBJECTS	BOYS	GIRLS
English	3.8	3.8
Math's	3.7	3.7
Social Studies	3.1	3.1
Integrated Science	3.9	3.9
Home Economics	*2.1	3.8
Religious Studies	5	5
Hausa	2.2	2.3
Arabic	3.2	2.1
Agric. Science	*3.9	2.1
Biology	4	4
Chemistry	4	4
Physics	4	4
Business Studies	*3.2	2.1
Technical Drawing	*3.1	2.1
Wood Work	*3.1	2.1
Metal Work	*3.1	2.1

\*These subjects are sex-stereotyped.

From the results above, religious studies is the most popular form of instruction among parents.

### 3. The Theory and Practice of Equality.

Parents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each of the statement on a 5 points scale. These statements were intended to assess parents' theoretical position on sex roles, for comparison with the practical examples set by their behaviour and attitudes towards their children. The responses were analyzed and presented in table 5. High scores on the mean indicate agreement and low scores are suggestive of disagreement. Conversely, low scores on the standard deviation indicate general consensus of parents on the view in question and high scores are indicative of parents' expression of varied opinion.

Furthermore, high scores on the mean indicate more traditional views about sex roles than low scores. As the figures in the table show, only two of the eleven statements (4 and 7) indicate agreement. This may be explained by the fact that all the statements were made in the extreme form.

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation of Parental Rating of Sex Roles.

S/NO.	STATEMENTS	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
1.	A woman's place is in the home	2.2	0.79
2.	Boys are usually better than girls in Mathematics	2.0	0.63
3.	Men who do house work are a bit soft	2.3	0.95
4.	Boys make better leaders than girls	*4.7	0.30
5.	It is more important for boys to get a good education than for girls	1.2	0.41
6.	Women's liberation is all nonsense	2.2	0.92
7.	A man should always be boss in his home	*3.9	1.4
8.	Western Education has done more harm than good and therefore is not necessary for our children.	1.9	0.90
9.	Girls are usually better than boys in English	1.2	0.69
10.	Greatness does not depend upon schooling or education. No parent can do anything about it for his children	2.3	0.89
11.	Schools is, for the boys, female education is a waste of time since they are better off married under the care of their husbands	1.9	0.41

\*Indication of agreement of parents with the statement.

Table 5 above shows a clear picture of parent's general view of sex roles. The results revealed that parents were in agreement with the researchers postulation that woman's place is in the home with the mean of 2.2 and standard deviation of 0.79 indicative of varied opinions of parents. This clearly shows that their views and actions were contradictory. This could be explained in the view of the parent's reaction when they were asked on whether or not women should be allowed to work. 88.5 % of parents agreed that women should be allowed to work.

## DISCUSSION

The enormous importance, which the home plays in the educational and occupational aspirations of girls and women as postulated, by Dusek (1977) Junaid (1993) has been confirmed by the findings of the present study. This has clearly manifested in the way parents have shown high occupational aspirations for their children irrespective of sex type.

The research findings also revealed that parents had recognized to a greater degree the occupational relevance of science subjects for girls. Parents advocated strongly that the school curriculum should include science and technical education subjects. They also attached great importance to trades or occupations in the medical profession. However, this trend of affairs may not be unconnected with the parental inclination for the study of science which are necessary pre-requisites for entry into medical profession and related areas. This could further be stated that parents were in the affirmative with regard to exposing boys and girls to the same forms of socialization at school, with the implication that girls and women may take up new roles in society, which were hitherto, regarded as men domain areas.

This development may not be unconnected with the fact that parents were fully aware of the curriculum operating in the school under study which is science oriented. This of course might have influenced the responses of parents in this regard. Another reason could be religious motivated reason. Parents are not unaware of the paucity of Muslim women in the medical profession an area where their services are highly needed especially in cases that involve obstetrics and gynecology.

The findings of the study indicated that majority of the parents accepted uncritically that men and women should do different jobs. Majority also said they would be disappointed if their children took jobs stereotypically associated with the opposite sex. In the works of Hoebel and Weaver (1979) they observed differential treatment of boys and girls and identified three trends in this regard;

- i. A high degree of separation of men and women in space work and leisure activities.
- ii. Status inferiority of women relative to men and
- iii. Women's spheres of interest and influence limited to domestic work.

Such trend may not be unconnected with the way society sees men and women as being different by way of physiological criteria in what is observed as sexual stratification. This observation seems to fail in line with the research finding and is further reinforced by what roles society recognizes as masculine and feminine. Such a trend may have its origin in societal values and beliefs.

The research findings also indicated that most parents were committed to some form of sexual equality. They wanted their daughters and sons to study the same subjects at school and they generally rejected the idea that boys' education was more important than girls'. In the light of this, parents were of the view that there are no differences in the mental capabilities of sex-types. What a male can do by the exertion of mental efforts, the female counterpart is equally. There is thus a successful competition in the exercise of mental faculties for females' vis-à-vis their male counterparts despite observable physiological differences. The Canadian Council for International Co-operation (1991) however, observed that women constitute only 2.5 % of people in higher positions that require the use of brains in Africa and 8.9 % in the industrialized countries of the west. Again the council made the observation that women constitute 78 % of the illiterates in the world. What could be the underlying factor to this trend of events could be attributed to the fact that women are not given the opportunities to rise to such positions which in turn can find bearing in other societal indices, rather than the exercise of their faculties.

## SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are made;

1. Since the research findings indicated that parents are supportive of the innovation at G.G.C. Government should therefore, extend the innovation to other areas of the State without fear of parental opposition.
2. Government should start a move towards providing orientation to teachers in G.G.C. Sokoto and teachers of other girls' institutions in the Sate on the need for the teachers to be supportive of the innovation in G.G.C. and the effects of sex stereotyping.
3. Since the research findings has shown that majority of parents accepted that men and women should do different jobs and that they would be



disappointed if their children took jobs stereotypically associated with the opposite sex. Parents should therefore, be educated about the confining effects of sex stereotyping.

4. More job opportunities should be created for women to enable them take new roles in the society. Thereby participating in the developmental schemes of the society.

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