

## The Girl-Child Situation in South Western Nigeria: An Assessment

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**KEY WORDS** the girl-child; institutionalized patriarchy; discrimination; sex preference; household chores; parents.

**ABSTRACT** The position of the girl-child is still nebulous in most African societies. As a result of Nigeria's social structure, largely characterized by the practice of institutionalized patriarchy and polygyny, the girl-child faces a lot of discrimination in many spheres of the society such as education, health, nutrition, household chores. Further, she is a victim of many harmful traditional practices. Following from this, the girl-child has a feeling of worthlessness, low status and negative self-esteem. Employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the paper tries to investigate the reasons behind the multiplicity of constraints that the girl-child faces. The results show that although there have been some remarkable improvement in the status of the girl-child, there are still discriminations manifest in the areas of sex preference, education, household duties and inheritance. Finally some suggestions have been made to ameliorate the problems.

### INTRODUCTION

The importance of the consideration of the well-being of children, and that of the girl-child in particular, in development planning is widely supported by many United Nations organizations. For children are both beneficiaries of and potential contributors to the development process. Active efforts to meet their needs are therefore essential. Indeed, several charters have addressed this importance. The United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, the African Charter on the Rights of Children and the United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF)'s report on the State of the World's Children, all have emphasized the right of every child to a fulfilling and enriching life.

However, recent decades have witnessed growing recognition that throughout the world women's status is lower than men's. The roots of the disadvantage faced by women lie in their

childhood. As babies, the differences between boys and girls seem small, but their opportunities for education and development become glaringly unequal. Reports have variously described the position in which many girl-children are weaned earlier than their brothers, and enjoy health facility less often both in terms of immunization and therapeutic treatment. By the time a girl goes to school she is discriminated against in more obvious ways, as she does not have the same opportunity to study as her brothers. Indeed, existing information on the attitude of parents indicates that the girl-child is discriminated against even before she is born. This is evidenced by the practice of specific abortion in China (Zeng Yi et. al., 1993). This attitude is also manifested in the preference for male children and treatment meted out to the girl-child as subordinate to her male siblings. Several authors have attested to the facts that in most countries of the world parents prefer male children to female children. As a result, the girl-child has often been seen as a "second - class citizen" and this perception, in fact, affects marital harmony. (Mundigo, 1995; Das Gupta, 1987; Adepoju, 1994; Kyung, 1990; Fapohunda and Todaro, 1988).

This pattern of discrimination is also reflected in the education of the young ones. For most women, going to school was, until recently, a matter of luck, for most parents preferred to send sons rather than daughters to school with the argument that there was no need to spend money in educating a girl who was destined to get married. Female education was, therefore, regarded as a waste of resources. Even now society still retains many attitudes and values of the past. For example, reports have shown that the gender gap exists and is continually

increasing in school enrolment at all levels of education in most developing countries. In Nigeria, Callaway (1984) reported that in some parts, parents feel that it is bad for society when girls get educated in Western Schools. Ali (1982) and Koko (1995) also corroborated the above view. For those who received western education, however, the gender gap has also been noted in the fields of science and technology in secondary and tertiary institutions. A number of studies, especially in Africa, have reported that girls are underrepresented in the fields of science and technology: Sierra Leone (Amana, 1985); Kenya (Eshiwani, 1983); Botswana (Duncan, 1985); Nigeria (Alele-Williams, 1987; Erinosh, 1994).

Other studies conducted by UNICEF and other United Nations agencies also report disturbing findings. According to a UNICEF's 1993 report, in 1990, 81 million out of 130 million children who had no access to primary school, were girls. This disparity increases at the secondary school phase where by age 18, girls would have received on an average a duration of schooling less than that of the boys by at least four and half year.

More alarming reports have been given by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Population Action International. The UNESCO report estimates that about 36 million African girls are out of school, while about 8.6 per cent of African girls who start schooling drop out before completing primary education. In the same vein, the Population Action International (1993) lamented that Africa is lagging behind other regions of the world in female enrolment ratios, where secondary school enrolment represents only 20 per cent of school age boys and 14 per cent of school age girls. With respect to domestic chores, while the responsibilities of girls include growing food and cooking, they do not have related rights in respect of its consumption. In many cultures, it has been observed that girls' need for food is considered subordinate to that of boys. Lack of nutrition thus affects pregnancy adversely. This cycle of malnutrition ultimately produces high death rates among mothers and babies. Girls' lower food intake affects not only their health but also their ability to learn. A World Health Organization research

has also shown that some of the health problems affecting girls are a direct result of the work they do.

More worrisome is the institutionalized patriarchy in Africa, which undermines basic human rights and also engenders a variety of other traditional harmful practices. Of all known harmful traditional practices which patriarchy has engendered in Africa, none incapacitates and deters the girl-child from achieving a truly fulfilling and rewarding life but female circumcision, referred to as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) (Myer et. al., 1985; WHO, 1986). This practice has been found to have serious implications for the physical, social and mental well-being of girls and women. Circumcised girls and women suffer from frigidity and may also experience painful intercourse. This incenses their spouses (men), who may in turn engage in extra-marital intercourse in order to achieve a truly fulfilling sex-life.

Since the socio-cultural environment within which the girl-child operates does not motivate her to attain her full potential, it is reasonable to deduce that her self perception may also be low. Indeed, a one time Executive Director of UNICEF depicts the situation of the girl-child as follows:

In the developing world today, many more boys become literate than girls. In some countries twice as many boys as girls are brought to health centres for treatment. Employment rights, social security rights, legal rights, property rights and even civil and political liberties are all likely to depend on the one, cruel chromosome distinguishing human male from human female (UNICEF, 1993:1).

Despite all these realizations, however, there has been a dearth of scientific inquiries into the problems of the girl-child. All that we know are based on observations about different cultures in Nigeria. Again, most of the studies on the girl-child were conducted in countries other than Nigeria, and the results of these studies have been held to be true for the girl-child in all African countries. While the similarities in cultures of African countries are well noted, there is a need to look into the peculiarities of the situation of the girl-child specifically in the Nigerian context.

Furthermore, research findings have consistently pointed to the need to reduce inequality of women and men in terms of opportunities,

motivation, resources, endowments etc. Apart from the discouraging picture presented by these findings, it is also a matter of concern that most of these studies have concentrated on the adult woman on the assumption that the problems of the girl-child are adequately addressed by solving those of her mother. Thus, there is a need for a well-grounded research to look into the peculiar situation of the girl-child. It was against this backdrop that this study is conceived. It looks into the situation and total life-ways of the girl-child in Oyo State. In nutshell, the study tries to provide answers to the following questions among others: are there discriminatory patterns against the girl-child in the study areas? why do they exist? what are the socio-cultural factors that reinforce this pattern? what are the feelings of the parents, community types etc. toward the girl-child?

#### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Following from the above, the main objective of this study was to assess the girl-child situation in Oyo State. These are broken down into a number of specific objectives:

1. To examine the girl-child status in Oyo State.
2. To identify the traditional practices which affect the well-being of the girl-child in these communities.
3. To identify the social, economic and cultural factors that encourage these practices.
4. To examine the attitudes of community leaders, parents and female children to these practices and the status of the girl-child.
5. To examine how the community and individual perceptions and attitudes to girl-child status can be amenable to policy manipulation.

#### RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

This study was conceived for many reasons. Firstly, it will help in broadening knowledge of the girl-child situation in Nigeria. Through this, information that may help solve some of the problems facing the girl-child will be gathered. This information will provide in its own small way, what could be done to alleviate the problem.

Furthermore, the importance of this study

also derived from the fact that the study population has hitherto been neglected in studies on social issues in Nigeria. All that we know about the girl-child situation are observations across cultures.

Finally, the research results will document and highlight the various socio-cultural factors which impede on the development of the girl-child and which are currently unavailable. This gap needs to be filled because in trying to alleviate a problem, knowledge of the causative factors is very necessary.

#### METHODOLOGY

##### Scope

The study centres essentially around an assessment of the girl-child situation in Oyo State. In this regard, it is limited to an examination of the socio-cultural and environmental variables that may affect the feelings and perception of parents, and that of the community members around the girl-child. Again, the study focuses on girl-children between the ages of fifteen and seventeen. Though the study is on the girl-child, views of some significant others are also sought. Boy-Children between fifteen and seventeen as well are involved for comparative purposes. Information is also collected from adult male and female from both literate and illiterate groups and in both urban and rural settings.

##### The Study Areas

Four Local Governments areas around Ibadan are used for the study. These are Akinyele, Lagelu, Oluyole and Ibadan South East Local government areas. In each of the first three local governments, respondents were picked from an urban and a rural settlement. The fourth local government area was chosen as a special area. It comprises the core indigenous areas of Ibadan, where most problems faced by the girl-child are well pronounced.

##### Methods of Data Collection

Four main methods are used for data collection. These are the questionnaire, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and observational methods.

In the survey, two separate questionnaires

were prepared for adults and children. In all, a total of two thousand, eight hundred and eight respondents were interviewed in Akinyele, Oluyole and Lagelu Local Government Areas (LGAs). In each of these LGAs, a sample of 40 literate male adults and 40 literate female adults were picked from rural areas. Furthermore, 60 non-literate male adults and another 60 non-literate female adults were also interviewed. In the urban centres, a total of 60 non-literate adult male and 60 non-literate adult female were included in the study.

For the boy/girl, a total of one thousand five hundred and sixty were surveyed. This figure includes seven hundred and eighty, each of boys and girls, in and out of school.

In addition, eighteen focus group discussions and twenty-eight in-depth interviews were held with adults and children in all the LGAs. Tables 1 and 2 below show this.

#### Sampling Procedure and Data Collection

A combination of cluster, stratified and simple random sampling methods was employed. Each of the LGAs was first clustered into four contiguous areas. In each of the clusters, respondents were stratified on the bases of education and age. Equal numbers of respondents

**Table 1: Showing the Breakdown by Local Government Areas (Adult and Boy-Girl)**

<i>Adult</i>	<i>LGA1</i>	<i>LGA2</i>	<i>LGA3</i>	<i>Total</i>
Adult Male	R 40	R 40	R 40	
18+ Literate	U 80	U 80	U 80	360
Adult Male	R 60	R 60	R 60	
18+ Non-Literate	U 60	U 60	U 60	360
Adult Female	R 40	R 40	R 40	
18+ Literate	U 80	U 80	U 80	360
Adult Female	R 60	R 60	R 60	
18+ Non-Literate	U 60	U 60	R 60	360
<b>Total</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>1,440</b>
<i>Boy-Girl</i>	<i>LGA1</i>	<i>LGA2</i>	<i>LGA3</i>	<i>Total</i>
Girls out of School	R 65	R 65	R 65	
	U 65	U 65	U 65	390
Girls Literate	R 45	R 45	R 45	
	U 85	U 85	U 85	390
Boy out of School	R 65	R 65	R 65	
	U 65	U 65	U 65	390
Boys Literate	R 45	R 45	R 45	
	U 85	U 85	U 85	390
<b>Total</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>1,560</b>

Footnote: R = Rural U = Urban

**Table 2: Focus Group Discussion by Local Government (Adult and Boy-Girl)**

<i>Adult</i>				
Adult Male	IR	IU	IR	3
Literate				
Adult Male	IU	IR	IU	3
Non-Literate				
Adult Female	IR	IU	IR	3
Literate				
Adult Female	IU	IR	IU	3
Non Literate				
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>Boy - Girl</i>				
Girls Literate	IR	IU	IR	3
Girls Non-Literate	IU	IR	IU	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>

were then selected in each stratum.

To help us in data collection, thirty-two field assistants, i.e. eight for each LGA were recruited. Data analytical procedures were both quantitative and qualitative. The Quantitative method, utilizing data gathered from the survey, involved frequency distribution and cross-tabulation analyses. The qualitative analysis were based on data derived from the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Findings from these methods were then merged together and presented as a single whole analysis.

## RESULTS

### Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents

Results are presented here in terms of the characteristics of the boy/girl respondents and the socio-economic features of the adult male/adult female respondents.

The study was carried out in four local governments of Akinyele, Lagelu, Oluyole and Ibadan South East local governments of Oyo State, Nigeria involving 1,558 boys and girls constituting 52.7 per cent boys and 47.3 per cent girls. The age/educational level characteristics of the respondents are shown in table 3.

Table 3 depicts that all the respondents are of school age although more than half of them has little or no education (61.4%). Hence, literacy is low. Also, 49.8 per cent of the respondents dropped out of school for different reasons as shown in the table below.

**Table 3: Showing Age/Educational Level Characteristics of Respondents**

Age	Frequency	Percentage
10	5	0.3
11	6	0.4
12	33	2.2
13	55	3.5
14	88	5.6
15	421	27.0
16	430	27.6
17	513	33.0
Non-Response	7	0.4

  

Educational level	Frequency	Percentage
None	221	14.2
Primary not completed	44	2.8
Primary completed	242	15.5
Secondary not completed	450	28.9
Secondary completed	169	10.8
Teacher Training	2	0.1
Poly./College of Education	10	0.6
University	13	0.8
Others	6	0.4
No Response	401	25.7
Total	1,558	100.0

**Table 4: Showing Reasons for which Respondents are not in School**

	Frequency	Per cent
Not Applicable	635	40.8
Financial	753	48.3
Marriage	14	0.9
Pregnant	11	0.7
Parent's Decision	22	1.4
Parent's Deceased	38	2.4
Personal Decision	85	5.5
Total	1558	100.0

The findings also show that the males have a higher level of education than the females (table 5).

The table indicates that there is a significant correlation between sex and education. This is validated with the fact that school going boys outnumber school going girls.

The findings also involve the respondents' ethnic origin, parents' occupation and marital status as shown in table 6.

In table 6, "others" in the column for ethnic distribution represents ethnic groups such as the Urhobo, Ebira, etc. who reside in rural areas either as palm-wine tapers or farm-helpers' children. Also, in the distribution of parental occupation, the "others" represent those likely to be doing jobs relating to farming. The pattern of occupation of the respondents' parents reflects low level of education of respondents. And perhaps,

**Table 5: Sex by Level of Education**

Sex	None		Pry		Not Pry		Sec. completed		Not Sec. completed		Tic		Poly/Colle Ge of Educ.		Univ		Others		NR	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Female	137	62	26	59.1	132	54.5	170	37.8	69	40	1	50.0	1	10.0	5	3.5	2	33.3	254	63.3
Male	81	36.6	18	40.9	109	45.0	276	61.3	90	53.3	1	50.0	9	90.0	8	61.5	4	66.7	122	30.4
NR	3	1.4	-	-	1	0.4	4	0.9	10	5.9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	6.3
Total	221	100	44	100	242	100	450	100	169	100	2	100	10	100	13	100	6	100	401	100

**Table 6: Showing Ethnic Distribution, Parents' Occupation and Present Marital Status**

<i>Ethnic Distribution</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Yoruba	1006	68.4
Lgbo	37	2.4
Hausa-Fulani	218	14.0
Others	188	12.1
No Response	49	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,558</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Fathers' Occupation</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Farming	789	50.7
Artisan	75	4.8
Petty-Trading	268	17.2
Civil Servant	126	8.1
Business	86	5.5
Others	214	13.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,558</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Mothers' Occupation</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Farming	683	43.8
Artisan	80	5.1
Petty-Trading	318	20.4
Domestic work	100	6.4
Full-Time Housewife	83	5.3
Civil Servant	174	11.2
Business	60	3.0
Others	60	3.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,558</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Mothers' present Marital Status</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Married	1,213	77.9
Separated	144	9.2
Divorced	151	9.7
Widowed	28	1.8
Others	22	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,558</b>	<b>100.0</b>

due to this low level of education, the divorce rate is quite low as shown also in the table.

### Socio-economic Characteristics of Adult Male and Female Respondents

In all, 1250 male and female adult respondents were sampled. Of these, 629 adult males (i.e. 50.3%) and 621 female (i.e. 49.7%) were involved in the study. The findings are shown in Table 7 below:

The distribution of age by the sex of the adult respondents in table 7 depicts that about 90 per cent of the respondents are, indeed, adults who would have been involved in child-upbringing in one way or the other. Furthermore, gender factor was considered as can be seen from the same table. There is not much disparity in the representation of males (50.3%) and females

(49.7%) sample which, to a certain extent, reflects the Nigerian general population structure.

**Table 7: Showing Education Standard of Respondents in terms of Age Group and Sex**

<i>Age by sex of Adult Respondent</i>	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
<i>Age</i>	<i>Frequ-ency</i>	<i>Percen-tage</i>	<i>Frequ-ency</i>	<i>Percen-tage</i>
20-24	50	9.4	63	10.2
25-29	81	12.9	83	13.3
30-34	70	11.1	104	16.7
35-39	71	11.3	105	16.9
40-44	67	10.7	90	14.5
45-49	63	10.0	47	7.6
50-54	44	7.0	42	6.8
55-59	43	0.8	19	3.1
60-64	33	5.2	25	4.0
65+	98	15.6	443	6.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>629</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>6.9</b>
<i>Education by Sex of Adult Respondents</i>	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Frequ-ency</i>	<i>Percen-tage</i>	<i>Frequ-ency</i>	<i>Percen-tage</i>
No formal Education	172	32.6	207	39.4
Pry. not completed	32	6.01	53	10.1
Pry. completed	63	12.0	56	10.7
Koranic education	7	1.3	3	0.6
Sec./Technical not completed	17	3.2	15	2.9
Sec. /Technical completed	99	18.8	83	15.8
Teacher Training	28	5.3	22	4.2
Polytechnic/ College of Education	49	9.3	46	8.8
University	36	6.8	29	5.5
Others	18	3.4	4	0.7
No Response	6	1.2	7	1.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>525</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Highest level of Education of Spouse by sex</i>	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Frequ-ency</i>	<i>Percen-tage</i>	<i>Frequ-ency</i>	<i>Percen-tage</i>
No formal Education	182	38.2	136	28.1
Pry. not completed	29	6.1	13	2.6
Pry. completed	67	14.0	66	13.6
Koranic education	2	4	26	5.4
Sec./Technical not completed	30	6.3	41	8.5
Sec./ Technical completed	63	13.2	65	13.5
Teacher Training	21	4.4	24	5.0
Polytechnic/ College of Education	30	6.3	50	10.4
University	8	1.7	43	8.9
Others	9	1.9	9	1.9
No Response	36	7.5	10	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Also, the distribution of the educational standard by sex of adult respondents in the table shows that although educational level is generally low, the literacy level of the male respondents is higher than that of the females.

Furthermore, findings show that educational level of the males is generally higher than that of their spouses.

It is necessary to add that the local governments under study are predominantly rural. Hence dwellers there always have one thing or the other to do as shown in table 8 below. The table also shows the respondents' employment status by sex, religion by sex and marital status of the respondents:

As shown in table 8, majority of the females is Petty-traders (48.5%); more males (23%) are in the civil service while more males (34.1%) are also into farming. The nature of occupation also reflects their employment status. It was found that more females (67.9%) are self-employed, while more males (26.1%) than females (13.5%) are in the wage earning profession. Furthermore, more females (6.5%) are unemployed and are more also into paid family workers (5.9%).

Majority of the respondents (both male and female) are Moslems and Christians, and have mostly stable marital unions.

#### Ethnic Origin of Adult Respondents

Expectedly, majority of the respondents belongs to the Yoruba ethnic group as per table 9. Hence the study elucidates the culture of the Yoruba with respect to the girl-child situation and as such help in comparative analysis with other cultures.

The presence of other ethnic groups, as shown in table 9, may also further enhance the effect of a dominant culture on the other.

Here "Others" represents ethnic groups such as Urhobos, Binis, Ebiras, etc.

### ASSESSMENT OF THE GIRL-CHILD

#### Girl-Child and Sex Preference

Contrary to the conventional exception the boy-child is preferable to the girl child. The respondents in the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews are of the view that there is no difference between a boy and a girl since

**Table 8: Showing Occupational Characteristics, Employment Status, Religious Characteristics and Marital Status of Respondents**

<i>Present Occupation by Sex of Adult Respondents</i>		<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
<i>Present Occupation</i>	<i>Frequ-ency</i>	<i>Percen-tage</i>	<i>Frequ-ency</i>	<i>Percen-tage</i>	
Farming	182	34.0	39	7.4	
Artisan	19	3.6	11	2.1	
Petty Trading	64	12.0	253	48.5	
Domestic work	19	3.6	13	2.5	
Full-time Housewife	2	4	49	9.4	
Civil Servant	123	23.0	77	14.8	
Business/Women	85	15.9	69	13.2	
Others	40	7.5	11	2.1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>522</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<i>Employment Status by Sex of Respondents</i>		<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
<i>Employment Status</i>	<i>Frequ-ency</i>	<i>Percen-tage</i>	<i>Frequ-ency</i>	<i>Percen-tage</i>	
Wage Earner	145	26.1	71	13.5	
Self employed	345	62.1	358	67.9	
Paid Family workers	16	2.9	31	5.9	
Employment of labour	91.6	15	2.9		
Unemployment	16	2.9	34	6.5	
Others	25	4.5	18	3.4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<i>Religion by Sex of Respondents</i>		<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
<i>Religion</i>	<i>Frequ-ency</i>	<i>Percen-tage</i>	<i>Frequ-ency</i>	<i>Percen-tage</i>	
None	41	7.2	29	5.1	
Islam	258	45.5	291	51.5	
Orthodox Christian	208	36.7	179	31.7	
Roman Catholic	14	2.5	16	2.8	
Pentecostal	39	6.9	35	6.2	
Traditional	6	1.1	3	0.5	
Others	1	0.2	12	2.1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>567</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>565</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<i>Marital Status of Respondents</i>		<i>Frequ-ency</i>		<i>Percen-tage</i>	
<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Frequ-ency</i>	<i>Percen-tage</i>	<i>Frequ-ency</i>	<i>Percen-tage</i>	
Single	270	66.5			
Married	831	3.8			
Separated	47	1.9			
Divorced	24	2.6			
Widowed	33	1.6			
Others	20	2.0			
No Response	25	100.0			
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,250</b>				

both are gifts from God. Some group members assert that it is God who determines the sex of the child, and as such it would be foolish act of anybody to give preference to a child over the

**Table 9: Showing Ethnic Origin of Adult Respondents**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Yoruba	961	76.9
Igbo	96	7.7
Hausa	38	3.0
Others	155	12.4
Total	1250	100.0

other. They believe that given the right education and moral training, the girl-child can be as useful as the boy-child. Contrary to this assertion however, the quantitative data show that more boys are given education than girls.

Nevertheless, the fairly literate adult female respondents frowned at the second-role position given to the girl-child in the Yoruba culture. The same position was taken by the non-literate female group. Contrary to their men's position, they argued that just as the male child gives a woman a high chance of stability in the husband's house, the female child too is needed to help the mother with household chores as well as take care of the parents at old age. The argument was summed up by the Yoruba proverb that many respondent used: "Ko si bi obo se sori ti inoki o se", meaning "there is no difference between the monkey and the ape". The girls (both literate and non-literate) also thought positively of themselves. They believed that they could be as useful as the boys to their parents both now and in the future. For the male adults, especially the illiterates, the girl-child is as good as no child at all. To them, girls have no power and so can not help on the farm. In addition, they posited, women will marry and therefore, will not sustain the family name.

#### **Girl-Child and Education**

Perhaps, the preference of one child over the other based on sex will be clearly elucidated on how they are treated. As such, the level of education expected of either sex may be highly relevant.

While the non-literate parents in Lagelu Local government believe that the girls should be given minimal education, since "eyin aro ni gbogbo iwe t'oba ka ma pari sii", meaning "all the education attained will end up in the kitchen". However the literate respondents and non-literate girl-child believe that both the male

and female children should be given equal educational opportunities because "Olorun lo mo omo ti o sin eniyan", meaning "only God knows which child will properly take care of one".

In fact, they all believe that boys and girls should be given equal educational opportunities in spite of teenage pregnancy that adversely affects the academic career of girls. Almost 80 per cent of the respondents also believe that the girl-child should attain the highest level of education possible. From all these, one can conclude that society now accepts that girls should be given almost the same opportunity as boys to attain the highest level of education. As such, girls attending schools now constitute by 59.3 per cent. While this change in attitude is taking place, the girl-child often disappoints her parents by getting pregnant before completing her education, and thus ends up as a liability and an underachiever. Consequently, in the four LGAs, the respondents prefer to educate the boy-child. Tables 10 and 11 aptly capture the views of respondents on education.

**Table 10: Showing Respondents Views on the Education of the Girl-Child**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
None	5	0.4
Primary	50	4.0
Secondary	198	15.8
Tertiary	957	76.6
No Response	40	3.2
Total	1,250	100.0

#### **Girl-Child Early Pregnancy and Childhood Marriage**

Following from the position that both boys and girls should attain the highest level of education possible, it seems majority also agree that this would affect the age at which boys and girls should get married. There is marked difference among the various ethnic groups on the age at which boy and girl are considered matured for marriage. Although most respondents posited that their ethnic group stipulates that girls should get married earlier than boys, as many as 29.2 per cent of the respondent accept that girls can get married at the age of 30 or even later. The focus group discussions further confirmed the above. Most of the non-literate, both males and



**Table 11: Showing the Distribution of Adult Males and Females in terms of their Opinion on the Highest Level of Education a Boy Should Attain**

Sex	Highest Level of Education					Total
	None	Pry	Sec	Tertiary	No Res- ponse	
Count	(36)	(8)	(93)	(491)	(31)	
Row Pct	5.5	4.2	14.1	74.5	4.7	659
Col Pct	67.9	21.1	42.1	52.1	43.7	49.7
Male	(11)	(26)	(115)	(392)	(33)	557
Female	1.9	4.5	19.9	67.9	4.7	
	20.8	68.4	52.0	41.6	46.5	93.5
	(6)	(4)	(13)	(60)	(7)	
No	8.7	4.4	44.4	66.7	7.2	90
Response	11.3	10.5	5.9	6.4	9.9	6.8
Total	(53)	(38)	(221)	(943)	(71)	(1,326)
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	4	20	89	499	47	
	0.6	3.0	13.5	75.7	7.1	659
Male	66.7	39.2	44.1	54.1	32.4	49.7
	2	26	103	368	78	557
Female	0.3	4.5	17.9	63.8	13.5	
	33.3	51.0	51.0	39.9	53.8	43.5
	5	10	55	20	7	
No	5.6	11.1	61.1	22.2	7.2	90
Response	9.8	5.0	6.0	13.8	9.9	6.8
Total	0.9	51	202	922	145	(1,326)
	100.0	3.8	15.5	69.5	10.9	100.0

Whether many girls 16 years and below are not Attending School

	Fre- quency	Per- centage
Yes	509	40.7
No	741	59.3
Total	1,250	100.0

females assert that girls should be matured both physically and financially before getting married. This is corroborated by the literate who put the marriage age for girls somewhere between 25 - 30 and for boys, between 28 - 35, when both would have completed their education or learnt a trade that can sustain the family. This is supported by more than 60 per cent of the adult respondents.

Nonetheless, the focus group discussants believe that there have been early marriages in the communities due to teenage pregnancies. The discussants believe that various social factors influence the lives of the girls and make them go into adolescent sexual activities leading to teenage pregnancy. Table 12 below indi-

cates age at marriage for both sexes.

**Table 12: Showing the Age at which Boys and Girls Should Get Married**

	Girls		Boys	
	Fre- quency	Per- centage	Fre- quency	Per- centage
18	155	12.4	143	11.4
19	2	0.2	3	0.2
20	79	6.3	33	2.6
21	22	1.8	8	0.6
22	99	7.9	33	2.6
23	29	2.3	15	1.2
24	33	2.6	14	1.1
25	271	21.7	165	13.2
26	50	4.0	28	2.2
27	50	4.0	54	4.3
28	57	4.6	73	5.8
29	10	0.8	8	0.6
30+	365	29.2	659	52.7
No Response	28	2.2	14	1.1
Total	1250	100.0	1250	100.0

### Health Care and Nutrition of the Girl

In all the local government areas surveyed, the quantum of food given to the boy-child was more than what a girl-child got, although no specific delicious and nutritious food or high nutritious food is set aside only for boys.

The discussants in the focus group and in-depth interviews all referred to the prevalence of female circumcision. Though the literate believe that the practice should be stopped, the non-literate believe it performs two major functions:

- (1) It helps reduce sexual promiscuity among the girls, and
- (2) It averts accidental death as may be caused to the new born in the process of delivering when the baby's head touches the unre-moved clitoris.

When further asked to substantiate their position, tradition was the recourse, something far too grave to be challenged, considering the serious repercussions. Though some allegations were subjected to for verification, they are still not validated. About 62 per cent of the survey respondents also agreed that female circumcision is rampant in their areas.

However, only 27.8 per cent want the practise to continue while 38.7 per cent want it to be stopped. The no-response rate is as high as 33.5

per cent. This gives a cause to worry. Only 11.4 per cent think every female should be circumcised; 28.2 per cent do not think so while 6.04 per cent are indifferent. Summarily, majority of respondents (adults and children) do not want the practise to continue. This can be found in tables 13, 14 and 15.

**Table 13: Showing Prevalence of Female Circumcision**

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	357	28.6
No	220	17.6
No Response	673	53.8
Total	1,250	100.0

**Table 14: Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Female Circumcision**

	<i>Respondents' (Boys and Girls) Knowledge and Awareness of Circumcised Girls in their Community</i>		<i>Whether Every Female Child should be Circumcised</i>		<i>Whether the Practice of Female Circumcision should continue</i>			
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%		
Yes	1,112	71.4	Yes	547	11.4	Yes	347	27.8
No	446	28.6	No	810	28.2	No	484	38.7
Total	1,558	100.0	No Response	200	60.4	No	419	33.5
			Total	1,558	100.0	Total	1,558	100.0

**Table 15: Sex by Whether Female Circumcision Should Continue**

Count	Yes	No	No Response	Row Total
Males	174	262	223	659
	26.4	39.8	33.8	49.7
	47.5	51.0	50.0	
Females	178	210	189	577
	30.8	36.4	32.8	43.5
	48.6	40.9	42.2	
No Response	14	42	34	90
	15.6	46.7	37.8	6.8
	3.8	8.2	7.6	
X <sup>2</sup>	10.33193	158	Df = 4	.03519
		11.9		

In spite of the above position, it seems as if females still need to be further educated on the issue of female reproductive rights. This position is informed by the not too encouraging response of adult females with respect to whether female circumcision should continue. Results from the survey indicate that almost 50 per cent of the females still believe that the act should

continue while 41 per cent think to the contrary.

### Girl-Child and Household Chores

Culturally, tasks/roles are often divided between boys and girls. This, it is believed, is to socialise the children into their future roles. Boys are expected in the future to be heads of households, while girls would be wives fetching water for the husbands, cooking the food, taking care of the children, and performing other household chores.

Discussants in the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews assert that although household chores are shared both by boys and girls, still certain activities like cooking, fetching

water, washing plates and dish washing are mostly done by girls. On the other hand, boys wash cars, cut grass around the house and occasionally help the girl to fetch water, wash plates, sweep and fetch firewood.

However, a respondent in one of the FGDs believes that both boys and girls should be assigned common household chores.

Almost 80 per cent of the respondents do not perceive their roles as being specified by the society. When sex was cross-tabulated with roles being performed, it was also discovered that there is no correlation between sex and roles performed at home. This reflects even the seeming contradiction the discussants imputed when they stated that boys could perform same household chores as girls. On the whole, it seems that the "straight-jacket" assumption that household chores are sex-biased is breaking down.

### Girl-Child and Social Interaction

Perhaps related to the complete state of well-being and social health is the possibility of

social interaction for the girl-child. Such interaction may be culturally limited for girls than for boys. For instance, it is often believed that girls should be under greater control so as to limit their level of promiscuity. They are expected to be more reserved in order to be perceived by the perceived by the patriarchal society in approving terms. This is because of the social images of women as complaint mothers and docile wives require "modesty and reserve" as necessary pre-conditions. Contrary to this position, parents believe that both girls and boys should be allowed to play, eat and even sleep together. At a certain state, at teenage, however, such interactions are closely monitored and, if possible, stopped. This, they argue, is to avoid incest between them because, they say, the children now know what sexual relationships are all about.

In Islam the respondents argued, though not substantiated, that the moment a girl starts to menstruate, she should not be allowed to sleep with a male. In two of the local government areas surveyed, some respondents argued that separate accommodation might be impossible for parents to afford. They believed that if the children are well brought up morally and are taught the words of God, they would not have carnal feelings towards each other. A respondent summarized this by saying "Incest manifests evil tendencies in those who commit it".

These patterns of interaction under debate do not include the habit of boys and girls eating together from the same plate. Indeed, about 60 per cent of adult male and female respondents believe that this practice should be encouraged. This is further combined by the discussants in the qualitative methods that such association breeds mutual love and closeness. Furthermore, almost all the respondents believe that both girls and boys should be allowed to play and study together as a process of future socialisation. As mentioned above, however, the parents should monitor these associations.

#### **The Girl-child and Inheritance**

Again, as in the previous discussion, discussants differ from the responses collected through the survey. Traditionally, females are not expected to inherit properties from their par-

ents since they are, themselves, "properties" to whom they are eventually married. They are properties in the sense that they can be transferred from one husband to the other (the husband's brother) in the event of the former's death. As such, like land, they can be inherited. This, it seems is the position of the discussants who believe that:

- (a) girls will marry and drop the father's name;
- (b) girls have nothing to do with farmland;
- (c) girls can inherit in the husband's house, but they have no claim over their father's property.

Even when the last assertion is not right, they insist that it is the boy-child who should share the father's property according to former's discretion and as per the guidance of the father's relations. Where there is no boy-child as inheritor, the father's relations take charge of the property and share among themselves in the manner, as they deem fit. To the contrary, the female respondents in the surveyed local governments believe that a girl-child has a right of inheritance of her father's property as long as the father concedes her this right during his lifetime.

The latter view is amply reflected in the data collected from the survey. Most adult males and females (67.2 %) believe that females should inherit a portion of their father's property. Only 30.8 per cent asserted to the contrary. Indeed, from the reasons given by the father, only 0.2 per cent perceive females as "another man's property" and about 50 per cent only gave "cultural reasons" for this view. Only 15 per cent believe that parental property is meant for the male children. When sex is correlated with responses on whether it is proper for females to inherit property, an interesting trend was noticed. It is ironical to observe that a higher percentage of males opine that females should inherit a portion of their father's property.

#### **CONCLUSION**

It can be asserted that the reasons for girl-child deprivation are embedded in the social structure. The poverty situation is high in south-western Nigeria. Most of the adults are primarily producers for subsistence. The literacy level is very low among the indigenous population.

As a result of the patriarchal nature of these societies, the limited resources available are utilised in a way to perpetuate and sustain this inclination. Hence, greater value and attention is paid to the boy-child at the expense of the girls. The following recommendations are important to improve the situation of the girl-child:

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Firstly, there should be an institutionalization of sustainable adult literacy programme incorporating, apart from basic literacy, dissemination of information to promote equality among boy and girl-child.

Secondly, in view of the fact that religion is a significant force in attitude formation and that most people in the study areas believe that it is God who determines the sex of a child, the religious leaders should be effectively involved in propagating the message of equality of sexes.

Again, there is the need for government to urgently address the dwindling prospect of national economy. This will enable parents to give equal educational opportunities to their children irrespective of sex.

Finally, priority interventions should take the form of concrete and goal-directed attitudinal changes, particularly in practices affecting adversely girl-children and women. Strategic programme identifications should take the form of public enlightenment not only through the media but also through personal contact with men and women. People should be convinced about the need to retain salutary traditional practices and to eradicate adverse ones such as female circumcision. Women should be encouraged to form a virile force in eliminating adverse socio-cultural practices in the community.

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