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WOMEN'S LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN MENIAL LABOUR IN ABAKALIKI EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the relationship between womens level of education and their involvement in menial labour in Abakaliki. It reviewed literature which bordered on the manifestations and theories concerned with womens education and placement in culture and tradition and argued that the low level of education of women contributed substantially to their involvement in menial labour in Abakaliki. Related literatures were reviewed to give a better understanding of the nature of women's work load. As an empirical study, the cross sectional survey design was adopted and a total of 354 questionnaires were administered and completely retrieved from our respondents showing a 100% rate of respondents. A four Point Likert-scale method was also employed in structuring the questionnaire. The simple percentage was used to analyse the discrete data which also covered the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while, Chi-square (χ^2) statistical tool was used to analyse the research hypotheses. The study revealed that, women's involvement in menial labour in Abakaliki is significantly associated with their poor levels of education. This led to the conclusion that the denial of the girl-child access to basic education as a result of existing traditions, customs and belief systems was a primary factor responsible for women's involvement in menial labour in Abakaliki.

KEYWORDS: Education, tradition, customs, menial labour, socio-cultural issues.

INTRODUCTION

Historically speaking, the pre-colonial era in Nigeria, saw women playing collaborative and complementary roles with the men in indigenous Nigerian societies which based power on seniority rather than gender (Rojas, 1990). Women cultivated crops, as well as men did; land was communally accessible to men, women and children. In the act of governance, there were

establishments like *umuada* and *ndi ichie* for women and men respectively. These establishments collaboratively and complementarily governed the Igbo traditional societies. Therefore, this entails that there was respect and mutual understanding between men and women.

Consequently, following the emphasis on cash crops production introduced through the colonial policy, women were excluded from some

cultural privileges which had previously given them some measures of economic independence (Admin, 2011). This scenario could be likened to the then western-styled education which favoured boys over girls, at the same time, crippled and destabilised the girl-child's socio-economic standing and skill acquisition necessary for her to be employed in the white collar jobs. The prevailing social structure set in place by colonialism, inevitably met a lot of contradictions that gradually reduced its effects and influence on women. No sooner did women together with their children join their spouses in the urban area, than they eventually gained ascent into formal education, a move that informed the placement of women in some reputable positions in the society today.

Nevertheless, there have been divergent ideas and disconnections among scholars on the extent to which women are involved in labour force in Nigeria. For instance, Titi (2003) argued that *"by the virtue of the population of Nigeria the potential female labour force is 50% but the actual value is 31 %"*. This figure shows that, the population of females in the formal sector is very minimal compared to their male counterparts. Again, in terms of illiteracy in the rural area, women have the highest number. Conversely, Oyeyinka and Adeyinka (2008) posited that although in the past women were faced with higher employment discrimination than men and their place in paid employment remained severely neglected, but today, women have broken greatly into the masculine world of profession as well as in high level of educational attainment. In concurrence to Oyeyinka and Adeyinka (2008) assertion, Salami and Oladosu (2014) noted that female labour force participation in Nigeria has increased from 36 percent in 1990 to 39 percent in 2009. However, although the above was the status quo, they went further to underscore that still, most of the women are involved in low-earning and unsecured jobs compared to jobs considered as masculine in Nigeria.

There has been a concern about the rapid increment of female menial workers in Abakaliki, Ebonyi state. The predominance of this situation in Abakaliki became obvious in 1996 after the creation of Ebonyi state, which was accompanied by an unprecedented growth of urban centers, construction of infrastructural facilities such as roads, bridges etc. The above scenario negated the existing traditional labour practice instituted culturally in the area in terms of sex and age. Then, adult males engaged in outdoor productive activities requiring exertion of raw physical power such as soil tilling, stone crushing, blacksmithing, hunting etc, while, the women took care of the kids, joined their husbands relatively in both the subsistence agricultural farming system and in commercial agricultural productivity. This implies

that they also planted in the tilled soil, partook in the harvesting of farm products, and selling of them in the market. Most importantly, they had the primary role of preparing the family meals and other house chores. Children, on the other hand, are socialized into these sex roles.

The increased number of women in these fields of informal jobs according to Ezeuzo (2011) is attributed to the rate of increment in the number of women who have become the breadwinner of the family. This precarious situation could possibly be accounted for, by the death of husbands, increasing divorce rate and even the migration of some husbands to the city in search of greener pastures. In this light, Fapohunda (2012) opined that women increasing participation in this sector is to effectively combine their productive and reproductive roles. The sole, but main reason for this is the flexibility in relation to the hours of work inherent in the sector. Of course, it permits them to have time to take care of their children. In this trend of thought Rajanna (2015) discovered that women construction workers in Chimagalur District of Karnataka, in India, are faced with several problems such as job insecurity, unskillfulness, illiteracy, health problems, wage discrimination, sexual harassment etc. in the working environment. Following Rajanna (2015) argument, Gbadebo, Kehinde and Adedeji (2012) examined the participatory roles of women in quarry activities in Abeokuta and disclosed that majority of the women are from polygynous families and this has helped to exacerbate their impoverishment by limiting their access to financial resources. They further stated that women experience a form of deprived and marginalized status in terms of wages and working conditions. This study builds on the precedence of existing literature as it offers an empirical investigation of the relationship between the levels of women education and their involvement in menial labour, particularly as it is manifested in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Aim and objective of the study: The main aim of the study is to examine how a woman's level of education contributes to her engagement in menial labour in Abakaliki.

Research question: To what extent does the level of women's education contribute to their engagement in menial labour in Abakaliki?

Hypotheses: (H₁) the lower the level of female educational attainment the higher the chances of women engagement in menial labour in Abakaliki.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relationship between Women's Education and Menial work: Ezeani (1998) observed that few educated men who were already trained as teachers, clerks and catechist who understood the benefit of education on socio-economic development of an individual, encouraged their wives to go to school

at all cost. Though, they were given opportunity to study in the areas that will give them domestic skills to make them still better wives and good mothers and also to acquire skills for teaching and nursing professions. They were posed with a lot of obstacles. One of the major obstacles they encountered as stated by Anikpo (1998) was the social-cultural beliefs that women who become educated or display themselves beyond their traditional domain and activities which included, home, farm and market were seen as being of easy virtue.

Is in view of this that, Egwu (2009) asserted that “women’s role and their status all over the world are generally determined by social institutions and norms, religious ideologies, economic systems and by class positions”. This she noted adding that, strategies and programmes projected for development had largely overlooked the question of gender equity. Several projects initiated with the very aim of poverty reduction, commonly viewed the poor rural women as the recipient of benefits of development, instead of active participant. Contrary to the aim of the projects, poor rural women still have the least access to basic needs such as food, health and education. Uwalaka (2011) study on the impact of women education in national development in Aba North Local Government Area of Abia state; found out that certain factors responsible for lack of education among the women include: sometimes parents’ inclination to education of male children, harsh economic conditions and obvious belief that education is time consuming than early marriage. In addition to this, Odaga and Heneveld (1995) pointed out that threat to female chastity, women’s economic value in bride price and the fear that educated girls will not make controllable, obedient and subservient wives, the widely held belief that it is a waste of money to educate a girl who will leave home on marriage and not contribute to the maintenance of her natal home, limited the relevance of formal education for girls in Sub-Saharan Africa especially Nigeria.

Furthermore, on the notion that educated women could not make good wives and were therefore unmarriageable, made parents reluctant in sending their female children to higher education. In reaction to the above statement Eze (2012) in his work, Factors Affecting Female Education in Ohaukwu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, showed in similar findings. She listed that cultural beliefs and practices, early marriage and unexpected pregnancy, poor economic status of parents and guidance contributed to lack of or low female education. On a similar notion, Nnabia (2012) equally revealed on his study on Women Abuse and Neglect that the two concepts were challenges to women education. She observed that women abuse and neglect are social-cultural problems which are wide spread in the Nigerian

society and constitute serious impediments to women’s education. For Ugwu (2001) women’s neglect include all acts of omission or denial of the basic rights and needs of women, which invariably impairs her social, economic and mental wellbeing. This involves the absence of genuine efforts to create conditions that will enable the women to develop maximally. This implies that all forms of act that hinders among other things the physical, emotional, social, educational, economic and political development of a woman like wife battering, starvation, suppression and female genital circumcision which results to Vesico-virginal Fistula (VVF) should be frowned at and as such viewed as acts of women abuse and neglect. Needless at this juncture to argue the fact that women have taken a giant stride in their educational attainment especially since Nigeria gained independence in 1960. This therefore means that, most of the earlier prejudices against women’s educations have been dismantled (Anikpo, 1998).

Education of women was now seen as assets by the male counterparts. Writing on this, Onyeyinka and Adeyinka (2008) reported that women in Nigeria having limited access to education and formal employment does not hold water any longer. Several positive developments put in place for dealing with this challenge has led to an upsurge or increasing participating of women in both informal and formal sectors of the economy. Of course, discrimination of women at work place has also greatly reduced. This is the reason for Ezeani (2000), Okojie (2001), and Ejike (2008) to have noted that female education is seen generally as an investment that yields right returns in terms of social and economic gains. On a similar notion, Ezeani (2000) asserted that, the involvement of educated women in employment goes a long way in supporting family and social improvement. Therefore, when women are educated and are gainfully employed in white-collar jobs with an attractive salary, the family is lifted out of poverty and this exerts a positive, significant impact on the growth of the nation’s economy as well. Paradoxically following his observation Dankelman (1998) noted that although globally, women access to education has undoubtedly increased since the women’s decade (1975-1985), yet they still make up two-thirds of the world’s illiterates. World Bank’s (1985) report indicated that in many countries, enrolment ratios in primary and secondary schools show that girls have less access to formal education than boys and that drop-out and wastage rates are usually over three times greater for girls than boys. The report also indicated that girls are usually the first to be forced out of school, if there is any financial crisis in the family.

Some scholars have observed that education alone as it pertains to schooling or class attendance is not enough to change the status of

women in Abakaliki, Ebonyi state rather an outright change of mind-set, increase mobilization and other factors that borders around articulating the women's life chances for a better future development. Commenting on this Onwe (2009) disclosed in a work titled, the Persevering Daughters of Ebonyi argued that the problem of Ebonyi women is illiteracy, they haven't been properly educated and exposed (pg.). In agreement to this Egwu (2009) noted that majority of the Ebonyi women when you go to the interiors are still naked, not well fed, timid, haggard and underdeveloped (cited in Nwankpa, 2009). This is to say that the benefit of education as a determining factor in definition of adult roles and character formation cannot be over emphasized. Katarina (2003) observed that without education people are impeded from gaining access to better employment, bedeviled by lower salary and it negatively affect their security at old age. Thus, education becomes an end on itself rather than just a means for achieving other ends. Conclusively and for the elimination and extinction of all forms of socio-cultural practices that still militate against women's freedom and choice of education, Odey (2014) noted, thus: education is the key to knowledge. It is the key to success. It is the key to a meaningful exposure. It is the key to self-reliance. It is the key that unlocks the prospects for a brighter future. It is the key to self-assurance and self-confidence. It is the key that opens the doors of many opportunities. It is the key to freedom from fear of domination and intimidation. Most importantly, it is the key that opens an inestimable panorama for environmental and psychological liberation. Given the theoretical assertions above, some factors associated with outcomes of low women's (especially the girl child) training and education are also discussed as follows:

i. Traditions and custom: Tradition still plays a great role in the lives of Nigerians both male and female, and is one of the instruments that perpetuate inequality of the sexes. Some traditions require that only sons can perform certain functions under some religious and cultural practices such as death rituals for parents among the Igbos, the first son (Opara) by tradition inherits the Ofor tittle- the symbol of family authority and represents in the family religious matter (Oluduro, 2013). Izuagbara (2010) confirmed that this is found in cultural practices in Nigeria which tends to place male and female children as separate personalities with different capabilities, potentials and contributions. Thus, creating a gendered division of labour in favour of sons not only has negative implications for daughters but it affects her general human

capital development and future income-generating potential.

ii. Early marriage: Early marriage is another serious problem which some girls, as opposed to boys, must face. The practice of giving away female children for marriage at the age of 18 years downwards, after which they must start producing children, is prevalent among certain ethnic groups in Asia and Africa (General Assembly Resolution, 1979). Young girls' involvement in early marriages is highly predominant in Nigeria such that they are sun still as fresh as life itself. Moreover, the principal reason for this act is based on the belief of retaining the girl's virginity and the bride-price. Early child marriage robs girls their childhood-time necessary for their development, considering that marriage is meant to be a permanent agreement or contract. Stressing more in this line of thought Obasi (2003) posited that a person entering into it is expected to be physiologically, psychologically and emotionally mature to accommodate all that marriage brings with it. It is based on the on-going that "The International Center for Research on Women, noted that "the education a girl receives is the strongest predictor of the age she will marry and is a critical factor in reducing the prevalence of child marriage (cited in Sarange, 2006). In addition to the above, Ojo (2002) identified lack of emphasis on female education and the prevalence of early marriage as the main factor to the high rate of poverty on women.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research design: This study adopted a cross sectional survey design, which is a research strategy that uses question-based or statistical tools to collect information about how people think and act. The reason for survey design is because it permits the application of natural setting and random sampling (Sekaran, 2003).

Population of the study: The population of the study was drawn from the total number of women that make up the selected sites or locations (ie places the women first meet before taking off for the day's job). This was derived through the head count of all the women found at a time in all the recognised sites within Abakaliki from where selection was made. A total number of One thousand, one hundred and seventy six persons (1176) were obtained.

Sample size/sampling techniques: The study comprises nineteen (19) sites selected based on the site/location that has a population of forty (40) women and above. The sample size for the study was therefore obtained by thirty (30%)

percentage of the total population. A total of three hundred and fifty four women (354) was finally realised as the sample size for the study. From each of the sites/clusters the Simple Random Sampling Technique was employed for the purposes of questionnaire administration to the respondents.

Questionnaires: Copies of questionnaire were distributed by hand on a face-to-face pattern to the respondents. The researcher trained four research assistants who are indigenes of Abakaliki that understands the indigenous language, since majority of the respondents are illiterates. Their duty was purely to guide the women on appropriate way of filling the questionnaires. Responses will be designed after the modified 4-point Likert-Scale (Agree-A; Strongly Agree-SA; Disagree-D; Strongly Disagree-SD) model, open and closed-ended questionnaire structure to facilitate coding and analysis of data.

Reliability: Basically, reliability suggests consistency and dependability of data. Hence,

testing for reliability further ensures that an instrument adopted would prove a similitude of results if repeated, hence, the consistency in the scores of a single measure rather than identical scores on two alternative measures. Therefore, it is better to test reliability through repeated applications of the same measuring instrument (Test retest). As a result, repeated measurements were very necessary for the instrument to be used in this study. In the light this, the test-retest method of determining reliability was used in this study

DATA RESULTS

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents: Descriptive statistics involving frequencies and their percentages were used to analyze data on demographic profiles of the respondents. The results of the analysis were presented in the following chart (figure 1)

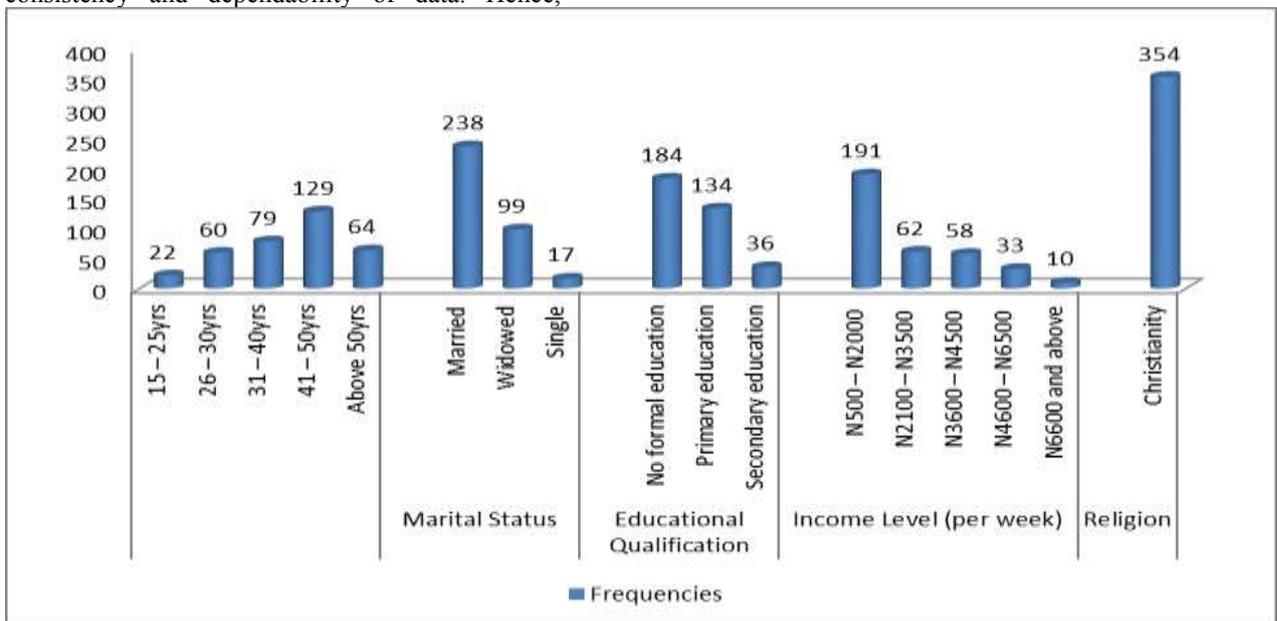


Figure 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

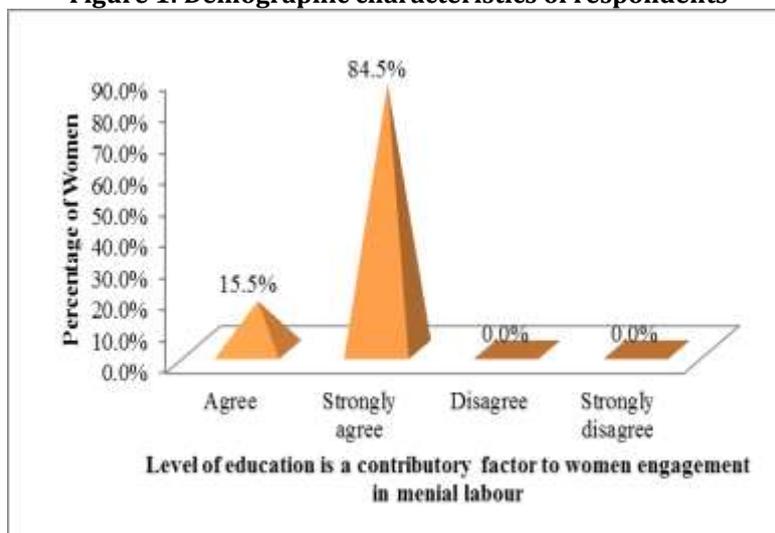


Figure 2: Level of education acts as a contributory factor to women involvement in menial labour in Abakaliki.

Out of the 354 respondents interviewed 299 (85.5%) strongly agreed that it was due to lack of education that they chose to be involved in this

kind of job, while, the rest 55 (15.5%) completely acknowledged that a woman’s level of education contributes to women’s engagement in menial labour in Abakaliki. As can be observed from the above graph, none of the women disagreed or strongly disagreed to this view.

Table 1: Were you sent to school at childhood

Educational Level and Engagement in Menial Labour	No of Respondents	Percentage
Were you sent to school at childhood?		
Yes	150	42.4%
No	204	57.6%
Total	354	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2016

On whether the respondent was sent to school at childhood, 150 (42.4%) of them said yes, while 204 (57.6%) of them said no.

Table 2: Reason why the respondent discontinue schooling

Reason for Discontinue Schooling	No of Respondents	Percentage
If yes, why didn’t you continue your schooling?		
My father trained the boys because he doesn’t have enough money	94	62.7%
I got married early because I wasn’t going to school	14	9.3%
I lost my parents	10	6.7%
I lost my father	9	6.0%
My parents wanted to train my brothers and I dropped-out	4	2.7%
Nobody to train me	4	2.7%
My parents did not value education	4	2.7%
Guardian did not train me	2	1.3%
I lost my mother	3	2.0%
I was hidden from teachers by my parents	3	2.0%
Others (I can’t continue, forced to marry, training of girl child is irrelevant)	3	2.0%
Total	150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2017

Out of the 150 women who said they were sent to school at childhood but they discontinued, most of them 94 (62.7%) said it is because their father chose to use the little money he had to train the

male children, so I dropped-out of school, while 14 (9.3%) of them said they got married at early age, 10 (6.7%) of them lost their both parents, and 9 (6.0%) lost their father.

Table 3: The rating of you would have loved to go to school or further your education if the opportunity was given to you

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	156	44.1%
Strongly agree	11	3.1%
Disagree	3	0.8%
Strongly Disagree	23	6.5%
No response	161	45.5%
Total	354	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2017

On whether you would have loved to go to school or further your education if the opportunity was given to you, 156 (44.1%) of the respondents agree with this statement, but 161 (45.5%) of them did not give any response.

Hypothesis: The lower the level of female educational attainment the higher the chances they are engaged in menial labour in Abakaliki.

Table 4: Computation of Chi-square observed/expected values for educational attainment

Response	O	E	O – E	(O – E) ²	$\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$
Agree	55	88.5	-33.5	1122.25	12.68
Strongly agree	299	88.5	210.5	44310.3	500.68
Disagree	0	88.5	-88.5	7832.25	88.5
Strongly disagree	0	88.5	-88.5	7832.25	88.5
$\chi^2 = 690.36$					

Source: Fieldwork, 2017

Calculated $\chi^2 = 690.36$

Level of Significance = 0.05

Degree of freedom (df) = $k - 1 = 4 - 1 = 3$

Decision rule: The accepted decision rule for the application of chi-square (χ^2) test states that; you accept the null hypothesis if the calculated value is less than the table value and reject the null hypothesis if the calculated value is greater than the table value. In the hypothesis, the calculated $\chi^2 = 690.36$, is greater than the Tab $\chi^2 = 7.815$. In effect, the difference between the observed and expected frequencies is statistically significant. Hence, we accept the alternate hypothesis (H_1), which states that the lower the level of female educational attainment the higher the chances they are engaged in menial labour in Abakaliki. The result indicates therefore, that the lower the level of female educational attainment the higher women are to engage in menial labour in Abakaliki. In other words, it gives credence to the result realized on educational attainment of the respondents in our questionnaire. Further more, this situation led to increase in the girl-child early marriage engagement in the study area.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study sets out to examine the issue surrounding the the level of womens education and women menial labour in Abakaliki, Ebonyi state, of which, the aim is to investigate how several womens level of educational attainment in Abakaliki influence or contribute to women’s increasing involvement in menial labour. The study offered a discourse of related literatures, derived from and in consonance with the formulated objective and hypothesis guiding this particular study. The study revealed the family as a major primary institution through which the dominating power of men over the women is perpetuated, maintained and reinforced. This is so, because, it is in the family that child's training takes place through the process of socialisation. The study unveils also that some of these cultural exigencies if not properly checked and harmonised hinder and limit women’s effectiveness; hence, propels them to take up any available job within their social milieu.

This study concluded that early-girl child marriage must be discouraged through the intensification and sustainability of education in Ebonyi state as a whole. In addition to the above major findings, the study also found that women do the most strenuous part of the menial jobs at building construction and quarry sites. According to most of our respondents, their husbands do not support them in providing basic needs of the family, of which, some attributed it to poverty, while, many described it as an act of negligence. This scenario was not in exception of both pregnant and old women, who as a matter of fact, are not strong enough to pick up one stick of broom due to their age and disposition. The quarry miners and stone crush industrial workers also lamented of the tedious nature of these jobs. They complained of incessant coughing, waist pains, constant headache, going through hard labour during child delivery and payment of a pittance at end of the day’s work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. *Intensification of Family Planning Campaign:* Family planning campaign in both rural and urban areas, which will involve the men who decides the numbers of children a woman gives birth to in the family, should be intensified in Abakaliki.
- ii. *Educational Sustainability and Continuity:* Government should encourage more female enrolment and academic sustainability of the girl-child through scholarship grant. This is because secondary school education does not hold water in Nigeria today.
- iii. *Intensive Skill Acquisition Programme:* This study also recommends the initiation of an intensive, participatory skill acquisition programme and aftermath empowerment, during which the women are to be paid some amount of money on a daily basis for the support of their families.

- iv. *Sustained Sensitization of Women*: The organisation for the elimination of all kinds of discrimination against women (CEDAW) has to be particularly involved in sensitizing the women on the need to eschew by standing against some unnecessary cultural practices that are inimical to their general wellbeing especially, the issue of large family size and women menial labour participation in Abakaliki.

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