

GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN'S CAREER PROSPECTS IN KEBBI STATE CIVIL SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequality has emerged as a critical global concern, attracting substantial attention and action from communities and organizations worldwide. One area where women experienced discrimination is the public service. Women occupy 38% representation in public administration across sub-Saharan Africa and 13.7% of executive positions in public service in Nigeria. Cultural beliefs and traditional practices have been implicated in reducing women's status such that it is difficult for them to fully participate in many social, political, and economic activities. The thrust of this paper is to examine the effects of gender inequality among women in the civil service in Kebbi State. Specifically, it examines the main challenges women face in the civil service and how cultural, social, and institutional dynamics impact the career prospects of women. This study followed a cross-sectional descriptive design involving 198 female employees randomly selected in the state. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to gather data. Data were analysed using SPSS version 28.0. The findings of the study reveal that sociocultural and religious beliefs significantly influence the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in the civil service of the state. Cultural norms and deeply rooted traditions appear to perpetuate gender biases, limiting opportunities for women to advance into higher roles. The analysis further demonstrates that gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion policies, while intended to address these disparities, are not effectively implemented, resulting in fewer women occupying higher positions in the civil service. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions that address sociocultural and religious barriers while strengthening the implementation of gender-equitable policies.

Keywords: Gender inequality, Women in public service, Career advancement, Policy gaps, Kebbi State

INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality remains a critical global issue, deeply affecting the lives of millions of women worldwide. Despite significant strides in promoting equal representation across sectors such as education, healthcare, employment, and politics, substantial disparities persist (Nartey et al., 2023; Ajaja, 2021). Increasing awareness of this issue has led to a growing consensus that empowering women and girls is essential for fostering inclusive economies and building resilient and equitable societies. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5, prioritise gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. This goal underscores the urgent need to elevate women's representation in leadership, particularly in political and public decision-making spaces, where their contributions have historically been marginalised (United Nations (UN), 2015). Targets under this initiative emphasise enabling women to participate fully and effectively in leadership roles across political, economic, and public domains.

One notable initiative in this domain is the Women in Public Service Project (WPSP), a global effort aimed at increasing the visibility of women in public leadership roles (Vital Voices Global Partnership, 2012). The WPSP promotes gender-sensitive policies and fosters pathways for women aspiring to leadership positions within governmental institutions. However, despite such initiatives, gender inequality persists, manifesting in wage disparities, limited career progression opportunities, and challenging working conditions for women compared to men.

Globally, women earn approximately 20% less than men for performing the same roles (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2018:27). In corporate leadership, women occupy just 29% of senior management positions (Grant Thornton, 2019:2). Barriers such as entrenched

gender biases, limited access to mentorship, and inadequate family-friendly policies disproportionately affect women, particularly in male-dominated industries like finance, energy, and technology (European Union (EU), 2021). Some European countries, such as Sweden and Norway, have made notable progress in workplace gender equality through measures like implementing 50% gender quotas for leadership positions and ensuring equal pay for equal work (ILO, 2018:27).

Women constitute a significant portion of the agricultural labour force in sub-Saharan Africa (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2015). Some studies have put this number at approximately 50% (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2015:2). Other reports have stated that women contribute 60% to 80% of the labour used to produce food (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2021:23); International Monetary Fund, 2021:1). According to International Monetary Fund (2021:1), a significantly larger proportion of women 83% than men 72% are informally employed in sub-Saharan Africa's non-agricultural sector. In public administration, women occupy 38% of representation across sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2021:3). Similarly, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, women made up only 38% of civil servants in Nigeria from 2010 to 2015, and less than 13.7% of executive positions in public service since the return of democracy in 1999 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021: xvii)

The employment landscape in Nigeria further highlights gender disparities. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023: xvi), male participants consistently out-number females in programs such as the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP). In 2018, males accounted for 54.8% of participants, increasing to 60.5% in 2019, excluding data from Edo and Yobe states. Similarly, recruitment trends within the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) show a persistent gender gap. In 2018, women comprised 26.53% of the Superintendent cadre, increasing slightly to 27.97% by 2020. The Female Inspectorate cadre experienced a similar stagnation, with representation fluctuating between 30.82% and 31.32% from 2018 to 2020. The Assistant Cadre showed even starker male dominance, with women accounting for just over 22% across the same period. These statistics underscore the entrenched gender imbalance in employment opportunities for women in Nigeria.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, combining legislative action, policy reforms, and initiatives aimed at increasing women's participation in governance and leadership. The growing global momentum toward achieving gender equality signals a commitment to dismantling barriers and creating a more equitable future for all.

While numerous studies on gender inequality in Nigeria have focused on women's political participation (e.g., Oyoru, 2023; Oluwatoyin, 2022; Okoye et al., 2022; Ikwuegbu, 2022; Idike et al., 2020), fewer have explored women's representation in civil service (e.g., Emeka, 2023; Bermudez-Figueroa and Beltran Roca, 2022; Umukoro, 2020; Orubu and Oboreh, 2016). These studies highlight significant barriers women face in achieving leadership roles due to cultural, religious, and institutional biases. However, little attention has been given to the unique cultural, social, and institutional dynamics affecting women in civil service in Kebbi State.

This study aims to fill this gap by providing localised insights into how gender biases manifest in Kebbi State, examining specific barriers and their impact on women's career advancement in the civil service. Moreover, it seeks to propose actionable solutions tailored to the region's unique context, thereby contributing region-specific findings to the broader literature on gender inequality in Nigeria.



Concepts of Gender Inequality

The concept of gender inequality was notably addressed by First-wave feminism in the early 20th century, focusing on the disparities related to property ownership and voting rights. However, various interpretations of this concept exist. According to Baoping (2002: 23), gender inequality is defined as "part of gender gaps driven by gender bias and unequal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities," distinguishing it from mere gender gaps that may not indicate inequality. The European Institute for Gender Equality (2016) defines gender inequality as a legal, social, and cultural condition where sex and/or gender dictate disparities in rights and dignity between women and men. This is reflected in unequal access to or enjoyment of rights, alongside the reinforcement of stereotypical social and cultural roles. Similarly, Emeka (2023) posits that gender inequality involves the unequal treatment or perception of individuals based on their gender, which limits certain genders' access to opportunities for developing their inherent talents and enhancing their natural abilities. This restriction perpetuates traditional gender roles and stereotypes, constraining individual freedom to make choices beyond these predefined norms.

From these definitions, it can be deduced that gender inequality is a social phenomenon where individuals are treated unequally based on gender, leading to one gender being privileged over the other. Gender inequality is a societal issue marked by the exclusion of women from decision-making processes and limited access to resources. Achieving gender equality necessitates empowering women, addressing power imbalances, and ensuring their autonomy in managing their lives (UN, 2015). This perspective highlights that gender equality is not about making men and women identical but about providing equal opportunities regardless of gender. The UN views gender equality as a fundamental human right essential for building peaceful societies and achieving sustainable development. It emphasises that equality between men and women is crucial for shared power and influence, financial independence, access to education, and freedom from violence. The organisation notes that when women are prevented from realising their full potential, societal progress is hindered, illustrating that gender equality benefits everyone. Consequently, it advocates for gender mainstreaming in policies to address systemic inequalities and foster equitable relationships between genders.

Legislative Framework on Gender Discrimination and Women's Empowerment

Nigeria is a signatory to various international laws and conventions by the United Nations and Africa Union (AU), which supports and encourages governments to play a vital role in empowering, encouraging, and supporting females when climbing the ladder in their careers. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a landmark international treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979, which aims to end all discrimination against women. Article 10 affirms women's equal education opportunities and career guidance. Moreover, Article 11 demonstrates equal employment opportunities, the same rights to work, promotion opportunities, and the same working conditions. (UN, 1979). The African Union's (AU) Strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) 2018-2028 is a transformational policy designed which aims to mitigate the main constraints hindering gender equality and promoting gender equality and empowering women across the continent over ten years (African Union Commission, 2019).

In Nigeria, several legislative and policy frameworks are in place to support women's empowerment, for example, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria sections Chapter 42 underscores the right to freedom from discrimination (1999 Constitution of FRN as Amended). The Nigeria Labour Act (Cap L1 LFN 2024, highlights comprehensive legislation and conditions of work with provisions that restrict women's employment in certain areas (e.g., night work and underground mining) (ILO, 2020). Moreover, the National Gender Policy (2006) is another policy framework that promotes gender equality and empowerment of women across

sectors in the countries, and it emphasises strategies for integrating gender considerations into the national development plans.

Gender Inequality and Challenges Faced by Women in the Workplace

Despite several laws and policies that prohibit gender discrimination and are aimed at equality, covert and overt forms of inequality exist in the civil service. Due to the complicity of gender inequality in the workplace, this study will touch on a few of the contentious areas. A study conducted by Kpanja and Umar (2018) in Nasarawa state, Nigeria, on the impact of gender imbalance on civil service productivity observed that gender imbalance persists in the civil service and it is a serious phenomenon that could endanger the smooth delivery of services in the state. The study noted that gender inequality is rooted in the culture and traditions of the people and, thus, influences their working conditions. Similarly, a study by Muhammed and Usman (2007) on the impact of non-work factors and labour turnover among female employees in Kebbi State Civil Service observed that family pressure is the main non-work factor responsible for female labour turnover. In another study by Orubu and Obore (2016), it was noted that gender inequality was responsible for the poor performance of women in workplaces, especially as they face barriers in the attempt to move up in the organisation hierarchy. The authors emphasised that women experience invisibility, exclusion, isolation, and lack of support due to the glass ceiling in the workplace.

A glass ceiling is the existence of an unacknowledged limitation or barrier preventing the upward advancement of women or minority groups along the organisational hierarchy (Orubu and Obore, 2016). Bermudez-Figueroa and Beltran Roca (2022) observed in their study in a Spanish city that formal and informal dynamics contributed to gender inequality in the state. The authors expressed the persistence of inequality in employment despite the institutional efforts to apply gender equity norms and public policies in the administration. Emeka (2023), in a study titled "Gender Inequality in Government and National Development: A study of Enugu State", noted that gender inequality has a significant effect on the human development index in Enugu State. Gender inequality reduces women's ability to perform executive functions in governance and also affects the quality of life of women in society. The findings revealed that inequality had restricted women from being involved in certain decisions that affect their lives.

According to a report by the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) (2021), women are more likely to face different forms of discrimination, including being overlooked for promotions, receiving less recognition for their contributions, and encountering stereotypes that question their leadership abilities and experience sexual harassment and assault. In many African societies, cultural norms prescribe that women prioritise domestic and family responsibilities, often at the expense of their educational and professional aspirations. Kpanja and Umar (2018) observed that these expectations stem from moral beliefs and superficial misconceptions that men and women are born different. Consequently, women frequently subordinate their careers to support their husbands, adhering to traditional views that designate men as the primary providers and women as subordinate; this results in men's professions being prioritised over women's, leading to significant career sacrifices by women. Gender stereotypes surrounding which jobs are 'suitable' for men and women mean that men and women frequently occupy different kinds of work. From a young age, girls are socialised into traditional roles distinct from those of boys. Sahumani et al. (2023) note that girls are encouraged to be modest, submissive, affectionate, and nurturing, while boys are taught to value leadership, assertiveness, task orientation, and competitiveness. The socialisation process creates barriers for women whose traits do not align with traditional masculine characteristics.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to examine the specific gender-based barriers that hinder women's career advancement in the civil service of Kebbi State and to analyze their broader implications on professional growth and opportunities for women.

Research questions

- i. What challenges do women face in the civil service in Kebbi state?
- ii. To what extent do cultural, religious and institutional barriers hinder women's career advancement?

Research hypotheses

Following the reviewed literature and the research questions raised, the following research hypotheses were generated:

H₁: Cultural norms in Kebbi State civil service significantly influence women's underrepresentation in leadership positions.

H₂: Religious beliefs in Kebbi State significantly influence the acceptance of women in leadership roles within the civil service and

H₃: There is a significant influence of gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion policies on women in the civil service of Kebbi State.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey design. This study's target population comprised Kebbi State civil servants. One hundred and ninety-eight (198) respondents were drawn from the population to form the sample size. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that different groups in the population were adequately represented in the sample. The population was divided into senior and junior staff categories. Purposive sampling was employed to select specific respondents for the study across the selected Ministries. All the respondents involved in the study are employees working in the two selected Ministries – Education and Health in Kebbi State. The research instruments were given to two experts from the Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria, requesting their vetting of the contents of the questionnaire, the appropriateness in respect of the research questions and the title. Their corrections and comments were utilised accordingly. A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability of the research instrument. The research instrument was administered to fifteen respondents drawn from the Kebbi State Ministry of Education, the result of the pilot test was subjected to Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computation and the Cronbach alpha value of 0.82 was obtained. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered to be appropriate in most social science research situations. This result, therefore, considered the instrument reliable for this study. Data collected for the study were analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question One: What challenges do women face in the civil service in Kebbi state?

Table 1: Challenges Faced by Women in the Civil Service

		Responses N	Per cent	Percent Cases	of
	Gender discrimination in promotions	166	22.0%	83.8%	
	Unequal pay compares to male counterparts	46	6.1%	23.2%	
	Lack of leadership opportunities	122	16.2%	61.6%	
	Sexual harassment and workplace abuse	93	12.3%	47.0%	
	Balance work and family responsibilities	160	21.2%	80.8%	
	Limited access to training and career development	168	22.3%	84.8%	
Total		755	100.0%	381.3%	

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Table 1 above offers a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced by women in Kebbi State civil service and underscores several critical issues within the civil service environment based on survey responses. A considerable number of respondents reported facing multiple challenges, with an average of 3.8 challenges per individual. This multiplicity suggests a complex and interwoven set of barriers hindering women's professional experiences. The most frequently reported challenges are (1) Limited access to training and career development (84.8%), (2) Gender discrimination in promotions (83.8%), and (3) Balancing work and family responsibilities (80.8%). These findings indicate systemic issues related to professional growth opportunities, equitable treatment in career advancement, and the need for supportive work-life balance policies. However, other challenges, such as lack of leadership opportunities (61.6%) and sexual harassment and workplace abuse (47.0%), are also notably prevalent, suggesting areas that require targeted interventions to foster a more inclusive and safer workplace. The challenge of unequal pay compared to male counterparts with 23.2% of respondents, though less reported, remains a critical issue.

Relationship between sociocultural factors and Women's career advancement

H₁: Cultural beliefs in Kebbi State civil service significantly influence women's underrepresentation in leadership positions.

Table 2: Job Position * Extent to which cultural beliefs influence women's underrepresentation in leadership positions.

			Not at all	To a minimal extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	Total
Job Position	Junior Staff	Count	15	16	8	8	47
		Expected Count	7.1	7.4	21.1	11.4	47.0
		Residual	7.9	8.6	-13.1	-3.4	
	Senior Staff	Count	15	15	81	40	151
		Expected Count	22.9	23.6	67.9	36.6	151.0
		Residual	-7.9	-8.6	13.1	3.4	
Total	Count	30	31	89	48	198	
	Expected Count	30.0	31.0	89.0	48.0	198.0	

Source: Field survey, 2024.

The above crosstabulation shows that for junior staff, a notable proportion of members (15 out of 47) reported that cultural beliefs do not influence women's underrepresentation in leadership positions. This count is significantly higher than the expected count (7.1). Conversely, only eight junior staff members perceived that cultural beliefs influence women's underrepresentation in leadership positions to a moderate extent, lower than the expected count (21.1). Similarly, only eight respondents rated cultural beliefs as influencing underrepresentation in leadership positions to a great extent, slightly below the expected count (11.4). Moreover, for the senior staff, only 15 out of 151 respondents indicated that cultural beliefs do not influence women's underrepresentation in leadership positions, which is substantially lower than the expected count (22.9). A higher proportion of senior staff (81 out of 151) rated the influence of cultural beliefs as moderate, which exceeds the expected count (67.9). Furthermore, 40 senior staff members perceived cultural beliefs as influencing women's underrepresentation in leadership positions to a great extent, slightly higher than the expected count (36.6).

Table 3 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	36.756 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	35.430	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	22.384	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	198		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.12.

A chi-square test of independence was calculated to test the association between job position and perceptions of the extent to which cultural beliefs influence women's underrepresentation in leadership positions. A significant interaction was found ($\chi^2 (3) = 36.756, p < .05$), indicating a statistically significant association between job position and perceptions of the extent to which cultural beliefs influence women's underrepresentation in leadership positions. With this result, the hypothesis is accepted.

H₂: Religious beliefs significantly influence the acceptance of women in leadership roles within the civil service.

Table 3: Job Position * Extent of religious beliefs influence women in leadership roles within the civil service.

			Not at all	To a minimal extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	Total
Job Position	Junior Staff	Count	0	8	24	15	47
		Expected Count	6.9	10.9	10.9	18.3	47.0
		Residual	-6.9	-2.9	13.1	-3.3	
	Senior Staff	Count	29	38	22	62	151
		Expected Count	22.1	35.1	35.1	58.7	151.0
		Residual	6.9	2.9	-13.1	3.3	
Total	Count	29	46	46	77	198	
	Expected Count	29.0	46.0	46.0	77.0	198.0	

Source: Field survey, 2024.



The above cross-tabulation reveals notable variations in the perceptions of religious beliefs' influence across job positions. Among junior staff, none reported that religious beliefs did not influence them at all, while the majority indicated a moderate (24 responses) or minimal (8 responses) extent of influence. In contrast, senior staff exhibited a wider distribution, with 29 respondents indicating "Not at all" and 62 reporting "To a great extent," suggesting that senior staff experience more polarisation in their perceptions compared to junior staff.

Table 4: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	31.368 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	34.892	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.200	1	.040
N of Valid Cases	198		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.88.

A chi-square test of independence was calculated to test the association between job position and the extent to which religious beliefs influence women in leadership roles within the civil service. A significant interaction was found ($\chi^2(3) = 31.368, p < .05$), indicating a statistically significant association between job position and the extent to which religious beliefs influence women in leadership roles in the workplace. This shows that the hypothesis is accepted.

H₃: There is a significant influence of gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion policies on women in the civil service of Kebbi State.

Table 5: Job Position * Gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion policies

Job Position		strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree	Total
Junior Staff	Count	7	12	4	5	19	47
	Expected Count	8.8	8.5	4.5	13.3	11.9	47.0
	Residual	-1.8	3.5	-.5	-8.3	7.1	
	Count	30	24	15	51	31	151
	Expected Count	28.2	27.5	14.5	42.7	38.1	151.0
	Residual	1.8	-3.5	.5	8.3	-7.1	
Total	Count	37	36	19	56	50	198
	Expected Count	37.0	36.0	19.0	56.0	50.0	198.0

Source: Field survey, 2024.

The distribution of responses for Gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion policies reveals notable differences between Junior Staff and Senior Staff. For Junior Staff, the majority of responses fall under the strongly disagree category, with (19) responses and (5) under disagree. Fewer responses are recorded in the strongly agree (7) and agree (12) categories. Negative residuals are observed for both the disagree (-8.3) and strongly disagree (-8.1) categories, indicating that these responses are underrepresented compared to what was expected. In contrast, Senior Staff show a greater tendency to choose to disagree (51) and strongly disagree (31). The disagree category has a positive residual of 8.3, suggesting it is overrepresented relative to its expected count, while the "strongly disagree" category has a negative residual of -7.1, indicating it is slightly underrepresented.

Table 6:

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.784 ^a	4	.005
Likelihood Ratio	15.637	4	.004
Linear-by-Linear Association	.473	1	.491
N of Valid Cases	198		

a. 1 cells (10.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.51.

A chi-square test of independence was calculated to test the association between job position and gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion policies on women in the civil service of Kebbi State. A significant interaction was found ($\chi^2 (4) = 14.784$, $p < .05$), indicating a statistically significant association between job position and gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion policies on women in the civil service in the state. This shows that the hypothesis is accepted.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to investigate the specific gender barriers and their impact on women's career advancement in the civil service in Kebbi State. A significant majority of respondents reported facing multiple challenges, with an average of 3.8 challenges per individual. This multiplicity suggests a complex and interwoven set of barriers hindering women's professional experiences. The most frequently reported challenges are (1) Limited access to training and career development, (2) Gender discrimination in promotions, and (3) Balancing work and family responsibilities. These findings indicate systemic issues related to professional growth opportunities, equitable treatment in career advancement, and the need for supportive work-life balance policies. The results are in line with Bermudez-Figueroa and Beltran Roca (2022), who observed in their study in a Spanish city that formal and informal dynamics contributed to gender inequality in the state. The authors noted the persistence of inequality in employment despite the institutional efforts to apply gender equity norms and public policies in the administration. The findings also corroborate Orubu and Oboreh (2016), who noted the glass ceiling as a major barrier preventing the upward advancement of women in a workplace environment. A study by Muhammed and Usman (2007) on the impact of non-work factors and labour turnover among female employees in Kebbi State Civil Service found that family pressure is the main non-work factor responsible for female labour turnover.

Moreover, a chi-square test of independence was calculated to test the association between job position and perceptions of the extent to which cultural beliefs influence women's underrepresentation in leadership positions. A significant interaction was found $\chi^2 (3) = 36.756$, $p < .05$), indicating a statistically significant association between job position and perceptions of the extent to which cultural beliefs influence women's underrepresentation in leadership positions. These findings suggest that cultural beliefs may pose greater challenges as women progress in their careers, potentially due to increased exposure to systemic or entrenched cultural norms at higher levels of authority. The influence of cultural beliefs as an impediment to women attaining leadership positions has been observed in other studies (Sahumani et al., 2023; Emeka, 2023; Kpanja and Umar, 2018).

A chi-square test was also calculated to test the association between job position and the extent to which religious beliefs influence women in leadership roles within the civil service. A significant interaction was found ($\chi^2 (3) = 31.368$, $p < .05$), indicating a statistically significant association



between job position and the extent to which religious beliefs influence women in leadership roles in the workplace. The results indicate that job position significantly influences perceptions of the extent to which religious beliefs impact women in the workplace. Senior staff are more likely to perceive either no influence or a great extent of influence, while junior staff predominantly report moderate influence. This variation may reflect differences in job responsibilities, exposure to workplace norms, or the capacity of senior staff to navigate or mitigate such influences. These findings concur with the study of Kpanja and Umar (2018), who argued that beliefs and traditions place gender roles on males and females in society, indicating men being prioritised over women, leading to significant women's careers being sacrificed.

Another chi-square test of independence was conducted to test the association between job position and gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion policies on women in the civil service of Kebbi State. A significant interaction was found ($\chi^2(4) = 14.784, p < .05$), indicating a statistically significant association between job position and gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion policies on women in the civil service in the state. This study aligns with Sahumani et al. (2023), who argued that women are underrepresented in senior management positions in all sectors, including academia. In a 2023 study, Emeka found that gender inequalities in government significantly affect the Human Development Index (HDI) in Enugu State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that inequality had restricted women from being involved in certain decisions that affect their lives.

Implications of the Findings

The findings present several significant implications that could contribute to the advancement of women's professions and careers. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms and specific programs designed to create a fair workplace, enhance professional development opportunities, and eliminate obstacles hindering women's advancement in their field of careers. By implementing evidence-based strategies, organizations can improve gender equity and facilitate the successful progression of women in various career fields. Regarding specific gender barriers and their impact on women's career advancement in the civil service, the following recommendations could help policymakers in addressing the gender-related challenges confronting women in the workplace: (1) implementing robust training programs and clear pathways for career advancement can mitigate the high incidence of reported barriers to professional growth. (2) Establishing transparent and equitable promotion practices is essential to combat gender discrimination in career progression. (3) Developing policies that support flexible working arrangements and acknowledge familial responsibilities can alleviate the difficulties women face in balancing professional and personal roles. (4) Enforcing strict anti-harassment policies and fostering a culture of respect is imperative to reduce instances of workplace abuse.

On the first hypothesis, the acceptance of this hypothesis indicates that cultural beliefs are significant factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. This underscores the pervasive influence of socio-cultural norms and practices that shape workplace dynamics and hinder women's career progression. The findings suggest that addressing women's underrepresentation in leadership roles cannot rely solely on policy changes or institutional reforms but requires a cultural shift within the civil service and broader society. This includes challenging stereotypes, biases, and societal norms that define leadership as a male-dominated space.



On the second hypothesis, religious beliefs in Kebbi State significantly influence the acceptance of women in leadership roles within the civil service; religious beliefs may serve as barriers to gender equality, requiring policymakers to design and implement measures that promote inclusivity while respecting cultural and religious sensitivities.

The acceptance of the third hypothesis that says there is a significant influence of gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion policies on women in the civil service of Kebbi State demonstrates that the implementation of such policies plays a critical role in enabling women to achieve higher positions. It emphasises the importance of institutional frameworks and policies that address systemic barriers women face in career progression. Organisations and policymakers should continue to prioritise and strengthen gender-sensitive policies to promote inclusivity in leadership roles.

Conclusion

The paper investigates the specific gender barriers and their impact on women's career advancement in the civil service in Kebbi State. The findings reveal that sociocultural and religious beliefs significantly influence the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within the Kebbi State civil service. Cultural norms and deeply rooted traditions appear to perpetuate gender biases, limiting opportunities for women to advance into higher roles. Similarly, religious beliefs play a critical role in shaping attitudes toward women's participation in leadership, often acting as a barrier to their acceptance and inclusion. The analysis further demonstrates that gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion policies, while intended to address these disparities, are not effectively implemented, resulting in fewer women occupying higher positions in the civil service. This indicates a gap between policy intent and practical outcomes, highlighting structural and systemic challenges that perpetuate gender inequality.

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