Barriers Faced by Women Journalists in North-West Nigeria: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Journalism as a profession is yet to provide an enabling environment for effective participation of women due to its male dominance. It has been a man's occupation for years or even decades in some places which makes it a male dominated job. This male dominance affects the status of women in the media as well as reflects their status in the society. The media often mirrors the society and perpetuates its norms and values to maintain the status quo. Societal positioning of women and cultural stereotypes are key factors in the barriers to entry, retention and progression of women journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is because gender roles assigned to both sexes are culturally imposed and gender inequality is perpetuated through gender stratification in the home, workplace and the society at large. In the case of women, gender stereotyping suggests that women belong in the home and are presumed home/family care givers who are generally discouraged from taking jobs outside the home, journalism inclusive. Contemporarily, most career women are left with the single option of performing their roles in the home together with their career roles. Thus, women are torn between two worlds, the world of the home and the world of work and they are expected to perform both exceptionally while they continue to occupy subordinate roles and perform gender assigned roles. Using focus group discussions and in-depth interview, this paper highlights the barriers faced by women journalists in the media in north-west Nigeria.

Keywords: Barriers, Inequality, Media, Society, Stereotypes, Women Journalists

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The world of media is still very much a man's world. Journalism is considered a man's work or the work of many men. Despite the fact that there is an increase in the number of female students in journalism studies, there is no significant increase in the number of women journalists. This is because women faced a lot of barriers that hinders their entry, retention and progression in the media. Also, women still have little decision-making power, both within media organizations and in political and economic relations. This reflects to a large extent the status and representation of women in the society as a whole.

According to Campbell, Martin & Fabos (2012), exploring the cultural context in which the media operate would enable us to understand the media's impact on our lives. To them, culture can be viewed as the ways in which people live and represent themselves at particular historical periods. Culture links individuals to their society by providing both shared and contested values and the mass media help circulate those values. Thus, the mass media are the cultural industries that produce and distribute cultural products to a large number of people. They pointed out that, despite selective exposure, whatever the media circulate can shape a society's perception of events and attitudes.

The media seem to reflect and endorse in many cases the attitudinal problems emanating from the customs, cultures and traditions of a male-dominated society where the woman's position is often regarded as inferior and subordinate. Globally, the media

maintain the status quo through excluding women, giving them little voice, demeaning them through various forms of behavior and promoting cultural stereotypes of women (Daniel and Akanji, 2011; AWIM, 2020).

Many scholars argue that the exclusion of women from the public realm of production is an important source of their diminished social status. Similarly, media institutions constitute a social system which is tightly integrated with the political, economic and stratification systems of societies. In a nutshell, men use their political and economic power to subordinate women in the society. And since women lack both economic and political power, they hardly own the media. In a situation where "who pays the piper, dictates the tune" women are relegated to the background in the media.

Accordingly, economic life conditions political, social and intellectual life. As such, the media is seen as being controlled and used to promote the interest of those who control the economic power. Since, it is rare to see female owners of media institutions due to lack of economic power, journalism is gendered in favour of the male folk. To a large extent, journalism is defined by political, economic and professional forces operating within the society which justify the relegation of women in all fields. Thus, women representation in the media is in line with their position and representation in the larger society and there are many barriers that hinder the progression of women journalists. Therefore, the study seeks to determine the following:

1. What are the challenges faced by women in entering journalism profession?
2. What are the challenges women journalists faced in media industry?
3. What are the barriers that hinder their career retention and progression?

2.0   GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE MEDIA

Allan (2011) defines stereotypes as consisting of "standardized mental pictures" which provide sexist judgments about women such

that their subordinate status within a male-dominated society is symbolically reinforced. Hermes (2011) sees gender stereotyping as preconceived ideas whereby males and females are arbitrarily assigned characteristics and roles based on their sex. Thus, gender stereotyping is one of the faces of gender discrimination which systematically attributes particular traits and competence to men and to women and qualifies or disqualifies them for public roles or demanding jobs.

Richardson (2008) is of the view that it is gender that creates sex because it provides the categories of meaning for us. Also, there exists a system of roles and relationships in the society that are determined by political, economic, social and cultural contexts which resulted into stereotypes towards men and women (Morna, 2001). Stereotyping, as a power play denies entire groups access to public fora. And every day stereotyping contributes to skewed notions of what is "normal and acceptable". However, stereotypes are not used with the intent to discriminate against others, but it keeps everyone who is not white, male and middle-class from gaining positions of power and prestige. Also, the perceptions of women in society are reinforced through the social and socializing institutions. Also, women journalists are judged by audience and male colleagues on the basis of appearance and personality rather than their professional accomplishments (AWIM, 2020).

Furthermore, Hermes (2011) argues that gender stereotyping depends on a set of social and cultural circumstances which limit the development of women's abilities. In the case of women, gender stereotyping suggests that women belong in the home. It is one of the faces of gender discrimination that works against significant number of women gaining social and political power. To Hermes (2011) stereotypes are part of how power relations in society are established and maintained. According to Hoobler, Lemmon and Wayne (2011) both male and female managers harbored family-conflict biases toward female employees, and that these biases substantially impeded women's career progress- a new explanation for the persistence of the glass

ceiling. Women are portrayed in the media often in stereotypical or negative way. Grjebine (1979) opines that media depict women as the lesser half of humanity. The media have been identified as some of the most powerful forces on earth for influencing societal attitudes and stereotypes. This power, according to Morna (2001), can be used constructively to shift societal mindsets that have become deeply ingrained structural barriers to the advancement of women in the society as a whole. Unfortunately, research shows that the media is only legitimizing and reinforcing those barriers.

According to Gallagher (2001), one of the major ways in which stereotyped attitude impinge on women journalists is in the assignment of work. She points out that a study of 10 countries in Europe, North America, Asia and Africa, writer Kate Holman found that 56% of responding journalists (male and female) believed that women are still directed towards topics which traditionally have had less status (human interest, social affairs and culture), rather than being steered towards the high-status topics such as business, economy or foreign affairs. This division has an impact on salary and promotion because it reduces women's chance of promotion. The earnings gap is related to the kinds of assignment given to men and women, the specific tasks they do and the valuation attached to them. Gallagher concludes that this process both reflects and constructs the power relations between women and men in journalism which depicts constrain on access to responsibilities by women in journalism.

Sharma (2014) argues that the overall media treatment of women is narrow and continually reinforces stereotyped gender roles and the assumption that women's functions are that of a wife, mother and servant of men. Further, the lack of gender sensitivity in the media is evidenced by failure to eliminate the gender-based stereotyping found in public, private and international media organizations. Thus, the gender roles stereotypes in the media appear to be functions of cultural norms and socialization, an indication of indirect efforts to bring working women into the marriage fold and

made them to conform to social norms. Mottaghi (2012) argued that media are part of the society and they are the transmitters of culture. It was observed that there is no part of society on which the media have not had an impact, although to a varying degree.

3.0   GENDER (IN)EQUALITY IN JOURNALISM

Oyekanmi (2004) states that most terms and definitions of gender inequality focus on three basic dimensions, namely inequality in prestige, inequality in power and inequality in access to or control over resources. In the case of women, their inequality is evident in all these three dimensions. In fact, gender segregation indicates the existence of two different social groups "men" and "women" that are the product of unequal relationships (Richardson, 2008). Richardson opined that women and men have different social status and value.

According to Gender theory a woman is assigned the role of a care giver in the society, who takes care of her brothers and parents as a girl and later her husband and children as a wife. Any woman seen to be more independent, exercising equal rights with the men is seen to be deviating from the norm. The man on the other hand is made to feel superior right from infancy stage, commanding his sisters and subsequently moving to his wife. Thus, the society gives him unlimited freedom to do as he pleases while he remains unquestionable in the home. Family members have the role of teaching and guiding children to adhere to the norms that prevail in society with regard to the appropriate behaviours, attitudes and roles of each sex (Egbujor, 2015). Thus, generally in the society, women are only meant to be seen but not heard making them the muted group especially in religious circles. This justifies the popular saying "we live in a man's world" (Okoro, Ajaero and Nwachukwu, 2015).

Gender inequality is as well evident in journalism practice around the world. It is a fact that the proportion of women finding employment in the media is by no means commensurate with the large number in

training. A six-country study by the Asian Mass Communication Research (AMIC) found out that in all the six countries (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Sri Lanka), there is a gap between the number of women who receive communication education and the number working in the media. Although part of the explanation lies in the fact that not all women actually seek entry into the journalism labour market after training, other factors play a role. For instance, Moslem (1989) points out that in Bangladesh, educational qualification is often not the main criterion for joining a profession. And men are more likely than women to enter the media through other doors than those opened by education and training.

The International Labour Organization in its documents titled "ABC of Women Rights and Gender Equality stated that "Gender equality does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female (IFJ,2009). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1 stated that:

> "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood".

Similarly, Article 2 added that:

> Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

According to USAID, gender equality is achieved when an individual's civil and human rights, social conditions and opportunities for realizing their full potential and for contributing to and benefiting from economic, social, cultural and political development do not depend on their sex (ECHO, 2011).

Rush, Oukrop and Sarikakis, (2010) maintain that it is obvious that the workings of the academy and the communications industry reveal inequality and discrimination in the more general and deeper structures of patriarchy, regardless of cultures and traditions. Similarly, corporate culture convention, such as association of leadership with male paradigms and inflexible work schedule are barriers to gender equality. Societal forces such as gender roles and societal expectations are also impediments. These include the belief that women do not want a career and the high burden of caring work that falls on them, even when they are employed in full-time work. Respondents to this study (CEDA, 2013) ranked workplace culture, lack of female leaders and gender stereotypes as the most significant barriers.

In many countries, particularly in Europe, gender equality remains a challenge. In law, men and women have equal rights. In everyday life, women are paid less than men for the same work, have less chance to be appointed on the basis of the same curriculum vitae, are less visible in public positions when they hold them, have a greater chance of being sexually assaulted and to be judged for their looks. Thus, the European news media have erected structural barriers which inhibit women entry and career advancement in the male dominated newsrooms.

Journalism is no exception to gender inequality because women still have very little real decision-making power in the media. Gender inequality is still quite visible in the media despite certain efforts to promote equality (Djerf-Pierre, 2007; IFJ, 2009; Rush, et al, 2010; Allan, 2011; Tomar, 2011; Gallagher, 2002, AWIM, 2020).

According to AWIM (2020) and IFJ report (2009) gender pay gap still exists in many countries despite the existence of gender equity policy in some companies. IFJ (2012) also indicates that women journalists continue to face persisting discrimination in wages and benefits.

4.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is premised on Radical Feminist theory. The theory focuses on the subordination of women to men due to universal patriarchy that exists across all

cultures and historical periods (Hines, 2008). The theory posits that male power must be analyzed and understood and not reduced to other explanations such as labour relations (Lay and Daley, 2013).

According to radical feminists, it is sexism and patriarchy that explain the problem of women in society (Ityvyar, 1992). This group views the subordination of women as the most fundamental form of oppression which cut across boundaries of race, culture and economic class. Radical feminists question why must women adopt certain roles based on their biology just as they question why men adopt certain other roles based on their gender.

Radical feminism also evaluates the role of patriarchy in perpetuating male dominance. In patriarchal societies, the male's perspective and contributions are considered more valuable, resulting in the silencing and marginalization of women.

5.0   METHOD EMPLOYED

The study employed a mixed-method approach, comprising in-depth interview and focus group discussions to obtain data. Babbie (2008) describes a qualitative interview as an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry including the topics to be covered. Further, Wimmer and Dominick (2011) suggest that in-depth interviews are a hybrid of the one-on-one interview approach which provides wealth of details and allow flexibility in question format.

Also, the study employed Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to compliment the in-depth interview adopted. Babbie (2008) says focus group method, which is also called group interviewing, allows the researcher to question several individuals systematically and simultaneously. Similarly, the subjects/respondents are selected on the basis of relevance to the topic under study and typically more than one focus group is convened in a given study. Also, Wimmer and Dominick, (2011) opine that FGD responses are more complete and tend to stimulate others to pursue a line of thinking that might not have

been elicited in a situation involving just one individual. Thus, FGD is a research strategy for understanding people's attitudes and behaviour. Gunter (2000) indicates that focus group discussion can be employed in diverse ways. They reflect the collective notions shared by members of the group. However, they lack representativeness as such their results cannot be generalized to the population as a whole.

A total of 29 IDIs were carried out in the three selected states comprising Kaduna, Kano and Sokoto, while six FGDs involving 21 participants were carried out in Kaduna and Kano. There was no focus group discussion in Sokoto State due to unavailability of respondents because of their few numbers.

6.0   RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study seeks answers to the three research questions formulated for the study. Data obtained from the in-depth interview and the focus group discussions will be presented and analyzed concurrently based on the three research questions thematically:

Women journalists who participated in the study were asked the challenges they faced while entering journalism profession. Findings indicate that the major challenge for women who aspire to be journalists is getting approval from parents and family members due to the societal stereotypical perception of women journalists. According to some of the respondents, there is the general notion that all journalists are flirts and they don't want to get married or stay in their marriages, so it is not every family that would want their daughter to choose journalism as a profession, especially if she is going to work as a reporter, because it will entail going out on daily basis, mixing with men and even working at night. Many of the respondents said they were discouraged from practicing journalism because people don't see it as an ideal profession for women. Respondents opine that some women faced opposition from family members or were even prevented from practicing journalism because women journalists are perceived as irresponsible, loose, flirts, not shy or those who don't want

to get married or stay in the marriages or even have time to take care of the family. Some parents disapprove their daughters to become journalists for fear of not getting a suitor. One of the respondents say "it is not every man that would want to have a journalist as a wife and it is not every family that would want to have a journalist as a daughter-in-law because they spend most of their time outside the home due to long working hours and are seen as not going to have time to take care of the family". These findings indicate that societal stereotypes are the major hurdles women have to cross to enter journalism profession.

Coming to the challenges women faced in the industry, findings show that women faced gender roles assignments, sexual harassment, lack of/inadequate representation at leadership positions, lack of family support facilities and a level playing ground for career progression. Respondents indicate that major beats considered as hard beats like governance and politics are still dominated by men, while sport beat remains men's enclave. Most of the respondents said women are assigned to cover soft beats. The only exception is *Cool/Wazobia FM* in Kano where women were assigned to cover governance, politics, health and war, crime and violence beats. Women were also allowed to cover religious beat in Sokoto which indicates public acceptance of women in such circles.

The issue of sexual harassment seems to be a major challenge to women journalists. Findings indicate that women journalists were exposed to sexual harassment both within the industry by male colleagues and superior officers as well as outside the industry by audience and news sources.

According to the respondents women are sexually harassed due to societal negative perceptions such as having a wrong notion that all women journalists are flirts or loose which made people to see them as cheap especially the way they mingle with men in the course of their work. However, respondents said women hardly report cases of sexual harassment within their organization because they feel they would end up creating more problems for themselves than getting a solution to the issue. Some respondents said fear of sexual

harassment prevents them from going to some places to work unless they are accompanied by their male colleagues.

Similarly, respondents opine that women journalists are not adequately represented at management and leadership positions in the media. It is a fact that most positions of authority in the media are occupied by men, they are the ones who assign responsibilities and they tend to assign better responsibilities to men or take a decision concerning women without even consulting them to find out their opinion. Men are the majority at the top and some use their positions of authority to perpetuate male dominance in journalism practice and also to keep women at the lower rung of the ladder as well as deny them opportunity to occupy leadership positions. Some respondents see lack of women in leadership positions as a factor in not having family support facilities in the media.

Coming to the barriers women journalists faced in the industry that affects their retention and progress include the following factors as stated by the respondents:

- Combining family responsibilities and journalism practice is quite a task especially if a woman does not enjoy family support and understanding which could prevent her from reaching her peak in the profession.
- Lack of paid maternity leave provision in most private media organizations is a great challenge for women as well as lack of family support facilities in their organizations including night shift facilities.
- Religious and cultural restrictions are barriers to effective participation of women in journalism practice especially the "no go areas" for women which make women feel like in the waters.
- Obstruction from male colleagues especially if they perceive a woman journalist would outshine them. While seeing women journalists as incapable or not intelligent especially by their male colleagues affect their morale.
- Societal negative perceptions such as perceiving women journalists as loose,

wayward, irresponsible or unmarriageable make some women feel uncomfortable and curtail their activities. These perceptions also exposes women journalists to sexual harassment within and outside the media organization and instilled fear in them concerning their safety which sometimes prevent them from going to some places or even quit the job.

- Long and inflexible working hours contributes to pushing women away from news and current affairs department in order to avoid family issues. Most respondents opine that a woman can only survive in journalism and progress if she has a strong family support to take the home front on her behalf and as well having a supportive and understanding husband.

6.0   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that women journalists still face a lot of challenges and barriers from the point of entry, retention as well as progressing in a career that is yet to provide an enabling environment for them mostly due to strongly ingrained cultural stereotypes, societal positioning of women and male dominance in the industry. Barriers to effective participation of women in journalism such as long, odd and inflexible working hours, lack of paid maternity leave and family support facilities can be described as institutionally instituted barriers. These institutional barriers determine whether a woman succeed as a journalists or not. Thus, gender equality is important in enhancing the status of women in the industry and in media leadership in order to facilitate the implementation of women enabling policies. The study, therefore recommends the following:

1. There is need to revise institutional policies in media industry so as to incorporate gender policies that can help to set organizational standards and processes to create an enabling environment for women journalists.

2. There should be more gender conscious approaches to leadership to ensure assignment of roles and responsibilities is based on capacity not gender. This will go a long way in creating a level playing ground for women journalists in media industry.

3. Media should champion a change in the societal positioning of women which can enhance the status of women in media industry and beyond.

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