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## ASSESSMENT OF GENDER STEREOTYPE IN AKWA IBOM STATE, 1960–2000

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### ABSTRACT

*This study was carried out to examine gender stereotypes, role differentiation and its effect on the trend and pattern of social allocation to men and women in Akwa Ibom State area. The study revealed that even though biological categorization of humans is vital, in reality, it is the culturally constructed gender differentiation into masculinity and femininity that is most fundamental in defining what roles male and female play in society. It is obvious that male roles are highly valued and rewarded than female roles. This division of roles along gender lines placed women in under privileged position in terms of power, prestige and wealth. This paper therefore adopted a historical descriptive method as its methodology to highlight the practice in Akwa Ibom area and found out that gender stereotypes restricts the life chances of female. The study noticed that changing institutional arrangements occasioned by the gradual weakening of harmful cultural practices due to introduction of Christianity and western education, tends to alter the social structures in favour of women in contemporary Akwa Ibom Society. One of the recommendations made in the study was that, there is need for a change in the value system in order to improve the outlook of the female gender as a significant and major contributor to growth and development.*

**KEYWORDS:** Extended Family System, Changing Fortunes, Gender, Stereotype and Akwa Ibom State.

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### Introduction

Gender stereotypes are general statements, perceptions, or even preconceptions about the attributes or qualities of men and women, holding them as true without being proven. Typically, stereotypes work hand in hand with society's appropriation of gender roles (Reeves & Sally, 2000). These stereotypes come as a result of the cultural practices of a particular society. Traditional cultural practices highlight the beliefs and values held by the members of a social grouping/community for a period spanning generations. Culture is the totality of the life of a person which can be assessed and comprehended in terms of how they create and recreate their lives, both in the material and non-material sense of their social existence. Social groupings in the world have specific cultural practices and beliefs; some are beneficial to all members, while others are harmful to a specific group, such as women and girls (Saba, 1997). Kiragu sees culture as a part of the human environment and a product of history that forms strong images in the minds of the people concerned (Henlund, 2001). Culture is the sum total of a people's ways of life that evolved in response to environmental challenges. As a multicultural state, cultural practices change from community to community, reflecting the core values and beliefs of the indigenes of these communities, who have held on to these traditional

practices despite civilization and several campaigns by women's and human rights organizations.

Male dominance and gender inequality have been observed in almost all the traditional cultural practices in Akwa Ibom State. Women's marginalization, harmful widowhood practices, early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation, etc. are among most of the identified gender-related cultural practices expatiated in this work. Even today, a premium is placed on males, while females are regarded as household property which can be used at will. For example, the traditional bride's wealth confers property identity on a woman and also awards the husband with the implicit ownership of the wife (Obiano, 2000). In all cultures in Akwa Ibom State, women are especially expected to be submissive, obedient, and respectful to their husbands, no matter their level of education. Women's vulnerability to maltreatment in diverse forms is deeply rooted in the culture and tradition of their communities. Sometimes women themselves, in the name of tradition, perpetuate some of the most harmful cultural practices like female genital mutilation (FGM), widowhood practices, and female-female marriage. In all these, the victims may not openly report or discuss their experiences because society appears to justify and legitimize the practice. This culture of silence of the abused or victims may have been responsible for why the literature on harmful cultural practices (HCPs) is still evolving.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

This study therefore examines some topical issues involved in gender stereotyping in Akwa Ibom State.

Gender stereotypes are generalizations about the characteristics of men and women. In other words, they are general statements about the attributes or qualities of men and women, holding them as true without being proven. Reeves, Hazel, and Baden (2000) believe that stereotypes work hand in hand with society's appropriation of gender roles. The thing about stereotypes is that some encounters may witness them to be true, but this is not so in all cases, and yet they believe it in all instances, becoming universal truths in their owners' minds. For instance, popular gender stereotypes such as "women are emotional" have become part of the influencing factors behind societal patterns that see women denied sensitive or certain kinds of appointments. Gender stereotypes create justification for gender discrimination in the owner's mind, making him/her unlikely to perceive the discrimination in the contact. When stereotypes become deeply integrated into a society, its members accord them the status of a universal truth, and they govern the instincts and behaviors of members of that society.

Gender is a social construct that is defined by different societies' attributions to the two sexes. It is a culturally determined concept based on the beliefs and traditions of a given society or community. It refers to the rules, behaviours, and qualities ascribed to males and females. Gender can best be understood when sex is mentioned. Sex is the biologically determined characteristics or functions of the male and female. Gender refers to the characteristics and functions assigned to males and females by society (Alade, 2006). The belief in the indigenous traditional Akwa Ibom community is that a woman's role is in the home, where she is a wife, a mother, and a housekeeper. On the whole, she is catered for by the male members of society, with her husband playing a major role. It is considered odd for her to cater to herself or engage in occupations or activities considered reserved for men, such as apprenticeships in carpentry, dying, and bricklaying. These impressions about women are, however, fading away today. The

cultural orientation in which the wife is perceived to be dependent on her husband for her upkeep provides some justification for her subordination and restrictions on her pursuit of education (Adamu, 1999). However, in indigenous societies, male parents frequently consider the girl-child as eventually going to parent someone as a wife, and thus it may not be wise to commit resources to her education, particularly higher education, as the economic returns on investment are unlikely to be realized as expected. In gender stereotyping, the socio-cultural conception that women's education ends in the kitchen, coupled with religious and economic factors, probably accounts for their low proportion in administrative positions and curriculum delivery in the Akwa Ibom environment.

Most cultures in the world today are based on a patriarchal system of power, which dictates who in society has access to and control over resources and political power (Kiragu, 1995). Culture is a part of the human environment and a product of history, which forms strong images in the minds of the people concerned. On the other hand, Ofonagoro (1996) viewed culture as the totality of the life of a person, which could be assessed and comprehended in terms of how they create and re-create their lives both in the material and non-material sense of their social existence. It encompasses and includes a person's entire way of life as they attempt to meet the challenges of their environment. These challenges include social, political, economic, aesthetic, religious, norms and modes of organization (Hernlund, 2000). Culture, being complex, has a compelling nature which regulates all aspects of human life, such as food, religion, dressing, language, rulership, housing, marriage, and family relations (Kisija, 2001).

In Nigeria, culture is viewed as supreme and uncompromising. This is due to the fact that most cultural and traditional practices in Nigeria are founded on their religions, which include the worship of some revered deities and dreaded unseen beings whom no mortal dares confront (Ilesanmi, 2001).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The evolution of human society has seen the birth and growth of many gender-related ideologies, such as the bourgeois, Marxists, totalitarians, and most recently, feminist ideologies. The fact that these are physiological and anatomical differences in the makeup of males and females has had little controversy, but how these differences have shaped social relationships between the sexes is the problem. Studies of human societies over the world have revealed that some degree of male domination, or "rule of the father," characterizes social organization. And it has given rise to the tendency of societies in Akwa Ibom to believe that the male sex is superior to the female. This is sexism and has been the ideological underpinning of the treatment of women as second-class citizens.

The structural-functional school of thought sees the role of women in the family as that of providing support and stabilizing male adults. They take care of children and ethnic members of the family. They hold and locate women's place in the home (Parsons & Bales, 1995). Gender differences help to integrate society. This is achieved through the complementary roles in the family unit. Distinctive socialization is therefore required for the two sexes to come up with an appropriate gender identity and impart skills needed for adult life. As a result, boys are told that it is feminine to cry, while girls are told that tree climbing is masculine. Other thinkers in this school have their own point of view (Freud, 1973), and women are viewed as men without

a penis who envy men who have one (Cixous, 1981). Freud's ideas are described as phallogocentric or male-dominated. She maintains that women must rise up to assert themselves.

The conflict school of thought believes that gender implies not only how people think or act but also inequities in the distribution of wealth, power, and privilege between the sexes (Engels, 1884). He traced the origin of sexual inequality to private property and the desire to pass this down through the male line in his origin of family. These led to the restriction of women's choice of sexual partners, the establishment of monogamous marriage, and the establishment of a patriarchal family. Through this, they accuse capitalism of being responsible for gender stratification.

The next school of thought is the feminist school of thought. The feminist does not belong to a single school of thought; there are liberals, Marxist/socialists, radicals, and black feminists. They advocate the abolition of gender roles and family sharing; shared domestic roles; or payment of women for housework. They demanded the right to choose whether to keep a pregnancy or to abort; the right to choose between being married to a fellow woman (lesbianism) or to a man (heterosexuality); and many other rights.

Also, the Neo-classical Theory explains gender differences in employment in terms of differences in human capital, where women are disadvantaged because of their responsibilities, physical strength, expected education, training, hours of work expected of them, absenteeism, and tyranny. Putting this context aside, it follows that the traditional norms and practices of relegating women to taking care of only domestic chores and child rearing hinder their ability to take part in political affairs and in other decision-making spheres.

The neo-classical theory states that in competitive conditions, workers are paid according to their productivity. This therefore means that female-to-male differentials in earnings are due to either low productivity or market imperfections. This study will, however, adopt the structural functional and conflict theories as a framework for this study, as this fits into the scope of the study.

### **Determinants of Gender**

Gender is a multifaceted construct. It is composed of social roles, behaviours, values, attitudes, and social environmental factors as well as biological, physical, and hormonal attributes, yet the terms "gender" and "sex" are often used interchangeably as though psychosocial and biological attributes are inevitably covered. Gender refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Gender is relational. Gender roles and characteristics do not exist in isolation but are defined in relation to one another and through the relationships between women and men, girls and boys (Health Canada, 2000). Simply put, sex refers to biological differences, whereas gender refers to social differences. There are three main determinants of gender, and these are social determinants, economic determinants, and biological determinants.

#### ***Social determinants***

Social factors, such as the degree to which women are excluded from schooling or from participation in public life, affect their knowledge about health problems and how to prevent

and treat them. The subordination of women by men, a phenomenon found in Akwa Ibom, results in a distinction between the roles of men and women and their separate assignment to domestic and public spheres. The degree of this subordination varies by country and geographical or cultural patterns within countries. However, in developing areas, it is most pronounced.

### ***Economic determinants***

Productive labour is usually defined as labour performed outside the household in income-generating employment; reproductive labour includes work done within the household, such as food preparation, childcare, housework, care of livestock, and kitchen gardens. Reproductive labour, in addition to reproducing the daily conditions of domestic survival, also assures the reproduction of human values, attitudes, and culture. In both industrialised and developing countries, women spend considerably more time than men on reproductive, volunteer, and other unpaid labour, whereas men spend significantly more time on productive, remunerated work (Rathgeber & Vlassoff, 2002).

In Akwa Ibom, productive and reproductive activities are valued differently. Generally, earning an income brings greater autonomy, decision-making power, and respect in society. Given the greater involvement of men in the paid labour force and their higher earnings even when domestic and other activities of women are costed, they generally enjoy more autonomy and higher social status. Gender differences in economic status and purchasing power affect the health-seeking behaviour and health outcomes of men and women. Recent schools of thought have recognised that many types of non-market or reproductive labour are also productive. For example, gender-aware economics includes unpaid caring work in the home in the concept of productive labour and informal paid work, such as home-based income-generating activities and work in non-profit or non-governmental organizations.

### ***Biological determinants***

Gender differences in the biological determinants of health and illness lead to differential genetic vulnerability to illness, reproductive and hormonal factors, and differences in physiological characteristics during the life cycle. Until recently, a male model of health was used almost exclusively for clinical research, and findings were generalised to women, except for the reproductive period. Clinical trials typically exclude women to protect them and their unborn children from possible negative effects. However, research in the United States in the early 1990s seriously questioned the validity of a male model for female health issues and highlighted significant gender differences in the biological determinants of health and illness (Miller, 2001). For example, protocols for the diagnosis and treatment of heart disease, the number one cause of all deaths in the United States, were based upon findings from middle-aged white male patients. As a result, women were diagnosed with more advanced diseases, and it was consequently harder to treat them successfully.

## **Gender stereotypes in Akwa Ibom Area**

### **Instances and Practices**

As has been said in the early part of this study, gender stereotypes are general statements, perceptions, or even preconceptions about the attributes or qualities of men and women,

holding them as true without being proven. It is a culturally determined concept based on the beliefs and traditions of a given society or community. In the Akwa Ibom area, there are a series of such practices, which are highlighted and explained below.

**Membership of Cultural Societies:** The cultural practice in the Akwa Ibom area allocates membership of females and males to specific cultural societies. Females were barred from being members of societies such as Ekpo, Ekong, Ataata, Obon, Ekpe, Ekprik Akata, and so on. This could be due to the fact that women were seen to be fragile and lower in strength and mental capacity to match the rigorous nature, maintenance of secrecy, and attainment of the spiritual level/requirements of these societies. However, they were free to belong to relatively feminine societies like Ebre, Iban Isong, and so on, which were less rigorous in their approaches and activities.

**Orientation:** During his childhood, the boy was subjected to strenuous activities such as climbing and harvesting palm fruits and coconuts, tapping palm wine, sweeping the compound's frontage, participating in wrestling competitions, clearing bushes, and generally carrying out those activities designated for men by society. They were discouraged from crying or talking too much, as these were believed to be feminine attributes.

**Food preparation** as a result, one of the first things a mother teaches her female child is how to cook and manage the home, so that by the time she reaches adulthood, she has mastered the art of cooking as required by society. Inability to cook is a good ground for divorce in the Akwa Ibom area.

**Child bearing, rearing, and motherhood** were exclusively a woman's responsibilities. The mother takes full responsibility for any of the children's misdemeanors, while the father/entire family takes the glory of success and good behavior. That's why a bad child is named after the mother and a good one after the father.

**Farming,** usually males and females are engaged in farming, the males engage in long distance and rigorous farming types and aspects like clearing the bush, staking the yam tendrils, making the hips and harvesting the yams. While females most often farm near the house and on items like vegetables, should they follow their husbands to distant farms, they are engaged in less rigorous aspects like planting of yams, cassava and other things.

**Pounding** of palm kernel is the duty of men because it entails large amounts of energy, which men are believed to possess. They are restricted to cracking the kernel, which is less stressful and requires a relatively small amount of energy.

**Carving:** Carving was the exclusive preserve of men as it was believed to have a spiritual linkage, especially the carrying up of the mask (Iso Ekpo). Women were excluded from this business because they were believed to be unclean, especially during their monthly flow. Their touching or staying near the carving site will have a negative spiritual effect on the mask.

**Traditional Rulership:** In Akwa Ibom State, women operate within the private domestic sphere of the home and family, while men operate in the public world of politics, economics, and leadership in all settings. Women are nurturing, passive, and subservient, while men are expected to be aggressive, active, and dominant. These gender roles result from considerations based on the biological and physical nature of the feminine gender, notwithstanding the mental

proWess and endowment. Consequently, at the traditional level, women do not lead men. They can only lead their fellow women, no matter their social standing, but they have never heard or seen a female family, village, clan head or paramount ruler in Akwa Ibom State, for example. Because of their connections with certain deities and ancestral spirits, these traditional-oriented offices are strictly reserved for men (Chika & Nneka, 2014).

**Widowhood Practices:** This is a traditional practice in many parts of Akwa Ibom State where, on the death of a husband, the wife is inherited by one of the husband's relatives in order for her to still maintain the status of a wife in that family. She is given the privilege to make her choice of who will be her next husband. She is not restricted in her choice, provided the new male she chooses is a close relative of the deceased husband. It could be her son, a toddler or any man in the family circle. This will take place after the late husband's burial, in which case, she will have to return to her people's official before the next marriage rite is performed by the deceased husband's family, accompanying the new husband to be.

It is noted that though the chosen husband might not desire a sexual relationship with the woman, he or she has a full right to do so. There are several circumstances that will lead to the abovementioned consideration. However, the primary reasons for not demanding or demanding sexual affairs will depend on the widow's age and previous relationship with her new husband; a child will not demand such from her mother. It has been reported (Onah, 1992) that if a widow refuses to undergo this exercise, the spirit of the deceased husband will be having sex with her in her dreams, a situation that will result in complicated health challenges (Al-Barwani, 2001).

**Bride Wealth:** Bride wealth is the amount of money given to the bride's father by the husband-to-be during his daughter's marriage ceremony. The woman or girl is perceived as the purchased property of the husband by them the moment the bride's wealth is paid. In some communities, the bride's wealth can be as small as a coin, yet in others, it can be a fat sum of money. Giving a girl's child in marriage is a big business venture in some traditions within the Akwa Ibom. A lot of wealth is generated from the exercise, which accounts for the reason why they have so many grown-up spinsters.

Generally, a long list of items requested by the bride's parents and other extended family members is presented to the husband as a requirement for the marriage in addition to the bride price or dowry (Enemu, 2005).

Some families do not place a specific amount as the bride price, while others already have a specified amount as a standard in the family. The truth is, since the bride price must be refunded by the bride's family should the marriage crumble, some families are wise not to demand too much, so that they can afford it in case of divorce (Oreh, 2005). Contrary to what is obtainable under statutory marriages, where in the event of divorce, women are generally compensated by their husbands, in Akwa Ibom cultural practices-supported by customary law, the opposite is observed (Chika and Nneka, 2014).

**Inheritance:** a female child is grossly marginalized in Akwa Ibom State's traditional cultural practices. This is observed mostly when matters of inheritance are considered, especially when it has to do with land and landed properties of a deceased husband or father. That a female child does not have the right to inherit her father's property except otherwise stated by the father when he is alive is a custom that is supported by even the higher courts in Nigeria (Markinwa, 1995).

In most traditions in the area, a widow has no right to her late husband's estate. In a situation where a female member of a family is divorced and she eventually returns to her people, she may be considered by allocating some farmland and a plot of land to build upon, especially if she had no child. Furthermore, according to tradition, her children cannot make legal claims on such properties after her death. Consequently, in the event of conflict, they could be evicted (Ladman, 2000).

**Polygyny:** is a common practice in the Akwa Ibom area. This is a practice where one man is married to at least two or more wives at the same time (Nwanunobi, 1997). However, the existence of polyandry (a woman marrying more than one husband at the same time) in many parts of the country does. Ague (1999) states that polygamy brings about social order in the community and reduces prostitution and cases of unwanted pregnancies among women. It also helps in reducing the ratio of girls to boys in the community, giving no room for prostitution and other ills found among unmarried girls (Nze, 1999).

**Female-to-female marriage:** A female-to-female marriage is a type of marriage contracted between two women. This implies that a woman initiates and gets another woman for herself as a wife. Unlike lesbianism, in which a female engages in sexual acts with another female (Titi, 2001), female-female marriage is a social custom driven by economic and social motives. Obi (2000) opines that this cultural practice is basically necessitated by a situation where a woman is barren or has reached menopause without a child for her husband if she was married at all. Some may marry in order to have a son (Henlund, 2001). Childlessness is seen as a curse and a failure in traditional culture. Hence, if a woman is barren or has no male child, the husband is likely to react by divorcing or marrying another woman. In order for the wife to avoid this, she must marry her husband to bear a child for her. It is noted that the children of such a marriage belong to the woman's husband and not her wife (Amyisi, 1979; Onah, 1992).

According to Uzoegbunam (2003), single women nowadays, who are either divorced or barren, contract young girls to bear children for them. Such children are left without a social father to look up to for care and direction in life. As a result, most children with obnoxious and horrible characteristics are likely to be the result of such parenthood because their paternity cannot be determined (Mgboh, 2000).

**Early and forced marriage:** Nwanunobi (1997) sees marriage as a good social union that is well entered into by people who are mature and have a good understanding of what marriage is all about. But, when marriage is contracted by teenagers and people who are not mature, with or without the consent of the parents, it is called an early marriage.

Early marriage can also be seen as a marriage contracted before the full or average development of the economic, social, educational, and political potential of the couple. In other words, couples who enter into such marriages are not educated and groomed in knowledge to ensure the full responsibilities of family maintenance, which may also be due to a lack of prior knowledge about each other (Obilade, 1998). In Akwa Ibom State, dropping a palm kernel in a bowl before the girl's family signifies engagement of the toddler by the husband-to-be, who might even be an old man. The young girl will be raised by her mom as that man's wife throughout her growing up stage until the full marriage rite is performed, at which point she will move in to live with her husband (Titi, 2001). This practice is not common any more.



**Male preference syndrome:** Male children are given high preference in Akwa Ibom. Hence, the birth of a male child into the family calls for great celebration and jubilation. According to Chika and Nneka (2014), the girl child is practically forced to perform all the chores for the simple reason that she is a girl and her place is in the kitchen.

In times past, when there was no free education in Akwa Ibom State, even primary education was denied to girls in some families for the reason that they would be married off. Some female children are even trafficked by their parents for economic gains while the sons stay back to attend school or learn any form of trade.

**Circumcision:** The practice of circumcision dates back to the Bible's days as recorded in the book of Genesis 12. It can be defined as the cutting off of some flesh from the sex organ. It was instructed by God that all the males in Israel be circumcised as a token of the covenant between God and Abraham (Mbagwu, 2005).

The origin of circumcision in Nigeria has not yet been established, but it is assumed that the practice predates the Christian and Islam-practicing communities of today. Male circumcision is a practice in all parts of Akwa Ibom except by a small number of males who belong to the Faith Tabernacle Church who believe that circumcision is unnecessary. The origin of female circumcision, which is called female genital mutilation in Akwa Ibom, is not known. It is performed both by traditional birth attendants and in government health centers.

The concept of FGM was defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1998 as one of several practices embraced, practiced, and institutionalized in many societies around the world, deeply rooted in their traditions and carried out for several reasons. This practice involves the removal of the external female genitalia partly or wholly for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons.

Female Genital Mutilation could also be regarded as an equivalent of the male circumcision referred to in the Holy Bible (Gen.17:10-14), but the difference is that, in FGM, part of the organ (the clitoris) is chopped off. In most cases, this results in serious medical complications. The specific age that this is performed on the girl differs from culture to culture. Some perform it on infants as young as a few days old, some between 7 and 10 years of age, and some in adolescence.

The justification for the practice is that virginity in young girls and fertility in marriage are revered attributes which most women try to ensure and preserve for their daughters, hence subjecting them to FGM (Mbagwu, 2009; Akumadu, 2001).

**Nutritional taboos/myths:** In Akwa Ibom State, like in other parts of the country, some foods are forbidden to be eaten by some people, especially pregnant women. Just like it is taboo for women to watch the Ekpo masquerade in Ibibio and Efik culture. These practices have a superstitious background rooted in the culture and traditions of the area.

In Ibibio culture, during funerals, certain food items, drinks, and animals are demanded by tradition to be given to the elderly by the deceased family before the event can be conducted. In this case, if a goat is to be given, some occasions will demand a he, while some will demand a she goat. Whatever the case, if you slaughter a cow or a goat, the head of that animal must be presented to the elders compulsorily during the mourning period.

## **The Changing Fortunes of Gender Stereotype in Akwa Ibom State**

The responsibilities and limitations of being female in male-dominated societies are realities that are constantly in the consciousness of every Akwa Ibom woman. In a culture where sterile role differentiation was and still is strongly encouraged, particularly in adulthood, the female is constantly reminded of her so-called natural roles as a wife and mother. This leaves her with the responsibilities of producing, nurturing children, and caring for the entire family. From childhood, she is always reminded of these duties so that by the time she reaches adulthood, she comes to accept them as a way of life.

A woman is regarded as unnatural or unfortunate if she passes through life without experiencing both wifehood and motherhood. However, things have changed somehow from what they used to be to a situation where the stereotypes and their effects are gradually fading, society is getting freer, and women are gradually coming up. We shall discuss below the reasons for these changes.

### **The Decline of the Extended Family System**

The emigration of a large number of people to the town for their means of livelihood has adversely affected the cohesion of the family. It is difficult and expensive for town-women to attend family meetings at home. Many family heads also left the villages for the city. All these and many more have contributed in no small way to weakening the extended family system, which in turn has weakened the people's adherence to their culture.

The family still performs the vital function of socialization, but a great portion of this function is being gradually removed from the family to formal institutions such as schools and churches. The organization of the family itself has changed. Ibibio society recognizes only three types of marriage, but three other types of marriage have been added. That is the church and statutory marriages, which may require parental consent, and the marriage that does not require parental consent. The implication now is that the male, not the parents, is responsible for finding their spouse, though some parents still find a bride for their son.

The second point is the DECLINE OF MALE DOMINANCE OVER WOMEN. The coming of Christianity, urbanization, western education, improved transport and communication have all, to varying degrees, uplifted the status of women. Many women are now educated and have attained a higher status in society. Some are ministers, permanent secretaries, senators, captains of industry, and some even own churches. In fact, there is a popular slogan now: "What a man can do, a woman can do also, even better. Some women are even breadwinners in their families. Despite the changes in the educational and economic status of women, the majority of them still submit to their husband and see him as the head of the union despite their general standing.

Among the Western-educated Ibibio, marriage is becoming more founded on romantic love and there is a move toward monogamy. The responsibility of a father is now beyond the mere provision of shelter and farm land for the wife and children to include good education, medicine, good clothing, and so on, and this has forced the reduction of the size of the family. A man's prestige no longer consists of the number of wives he has but of other achievements and contributions to the progress of this community. Pregnant women today receive prenatal care in hospitals, be it mission, private, or government, instead of going to traditional birth attendants

or medicine men, thereby destroying our traditional medical institutions, which have been useful for decades. The tradition of secluding a new mother is still practiced, but instead of making her debut in the market place, as she used to go to church.

Among the educated Ibibio, their children pay occasional visits to their grandparents rather than live with them in the same compound, as it used to be. Because of Christianity, there is a total abandonment of sacrifices to the ancestors and the belief of Ekpo Nka Owo is relegated, thereby liberating women to indulge in adultery with little or no fear of repercussion as in the past. Divorce under customary marriage is still easy to obtain but relatively more difficult in church and statutory marriages. However, the act of marriage in Ibibio land has so far been restricted to the educated and church marriage is imposed on church members.

### **Conclusion**

Sharp beliefs and practices inherent in the largely stereotypic value system still exist in Akwa Ibom State. At the moment, only limited success has been achieved in doing away with these practices. This, however, has a negative effect on the life chances of females as individuals or as a group. The implication burdens their chances of upward movement to achieve their potential for the benefit of society at large. Since the female gender are also stakeholders within the Akwa Ibom social system, their continual marginalization will continue to have a negative impact on the Akwa Ibom social structure. This will also have a negative impact on substructures such as health, family, education, economy, and politics, which may have a long-term negative impact on Akwa Ibom's growth and development, eventually leading to increased poverty, family disintegration, child abuse and child trafficking, prostitution, crime, corruption, and many other vices. All these vices hinder the socio-economic development of the state.

### **Recommendations**

1. There is a need for a change in the value system in order to improve the outlook of the female gender as a significant and major contributor to growth and development.
2. Efforts should be made to empower women and children by granting them equal access to education, occupational and employment opportunities, equal income rights in politics and access to the public sphere. This will enable the wide gap in role differentiation between males and females to be bridged. This will enhance their life chances and guarantee them an opportunity for upward mobilization.
3. Also, women need to have control over their health, especially their reproductive health, as this would help both females and males to utilize their potential and contribute their quota towards achieving stability, growth and development in Akwa Ibom State.

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