

Gender-Inclusive Decision-Making Process in the Family and Community to Achieve Gender Equality in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Gender inequality is a global concern. It underscores a wide gap in the political and economic relations among men and women across the world. This has necessitated the United Nations and other development agencies to make gender equality a top priority. This is exemplified by the inclusion of gender equality as number 5 goal of the sustainable development goals of the United Nations. As part of achieving sustainable development goal Number 5, gender-inclusive decision-making process within the family and community in Ebonyi State, Nigeria was examined.

The main thrust of the study was to ascertain how the educational level, income level and marital status of women influence their level of participation in the family and community decision making processes. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. A multi-stage sampling method was used to select households. Correlation and regression models were used for the analysis.

The main result revealed that gender inequality exists in families and communities: only married women or women with high incomes, and high educational level indicated an appreciable level of participation in family and community decisions,

In conclusion, the study highlights the significant role of patriarchal culture in perpetuating gender inequalities in decision-making within families and communities in Nigeria. It is recommended that government and NGOs implement targeted awareness campaigns to challenge observed negative cultural norms. Further research should explore the effectiveness of such

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interventions and examine other factors that may influence women's participation in decision-making processes.

Keywords: Decision making, family, gender equality, sustainable development goal, women.

1. Introduction

The cultural practice in Nigeria has created a niche for cultural and societal barriers in the form of underrepresentation and discrimination against women in key sectors of the economy, denial of women's access to family and community resources, women's marginalization, inequalities and a disproportionate access to quality of education. Patriarchal culture is a social framework that places men at the center of economic, social and symbolic authority, while women occupy subordinate position (Olajide, 2025). This assertion is similar to the view of Eteng (2011a) who notes that most cultures in Nigeria have this belief and idea that men must play dominating roles while women play subordinate roles in their families and communities. This is usually the case when the ruling patriarchy in a given community tends to manipulate the socio-culture in order to control various critical structures and processes within the community, to further their own interest. These have practically limited women's level of participation in family and community decision making processes (Goetz & Hassim, 2003; Kiamba, 2008; Ilesanmi, 2018; Akhtar et al., 2025)

Eteng (2011b) observes that gender inequalities constitute a problem and manifests in different societies, at the local, national and international levels with all its implications for discrimination, subjugation, exploitation and disempowerment of women.

Evidence from several studies on gender related issues show that gender inequality is strongly associated with income level, marital status and educational level of women over time and across the world. (Jan & Akhtar, 2008; Ortiz-Ospina et al., 2019; Aderonke et al., 2019). In view of this, the study observes that much work has not been done regarding gender inclusion in family and community decision making processes. In order to fill this gap, it became imperative to carry out this study. This will narrow the existing gap in literature regarding gender inclusiveness. Income generating capacity, marital status and educational qualification are variables that were investigated in this study. This is significant because it is important to unravel the dynamics of these

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variables in order to understand gender inclusiveness in decision making process. This is in line with the view of Holdnack and Weiss (2013).

The United Nations and the African Union as well as their various agencies have made issues of gender equality and the gender question top priorities. For instance, the issues of promoting gender equality and women empowerment are number three of the United Nations seven-point Millennium Development Goals and number five out of seventeen goals of the current Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. In the words of Payne and Nasser (2003) “International development agencies such as the US Agency for International Development, the World Bank and the United Nations have placed greater emphasis on the need to include more women in development and empowerment programmes particularly in the rural areas of developing countries” (p.207). Such programmes include decision-making processes within communities and families to afford women opportunities of making critical life-choices on matters that affect them and their families. A plethora of Non-Governmental Organisations and Non-State Actors both at national and international levels have also concerned themselves with gender equality and women empowerment through decision-making processes. It is a paradox that despite all these concerns about the inclusion of women in decision-making processes in order to achieve equality and empowerment, the problem of non-inclusion has persisted.

Ending social as well as gender inequality in all its forms is a prime objective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, women participation in household decision-making which is an indicator of empowerment and gender equality has received very little attention from scholars and as such, has been under-researched in Nigeria. Khan et al. (2013) contends that any acceptable definition of empowerment must emphasize the bringing of people once considered powerless into the decision-making processes of the wider society as well as the family. In fact, empowerment is the creation of access into the decision-making structures in the economic, cultural and political spheres of life (Khan et al., 2013). Every society is unique and the discriminatory experiences women endure can only be uniquely quantified by the standards of their own society. However, the underlying barriers that perpetuate gender inequality and prevent “women-inclusive” development are most often tied to patriarchy.

Historically, the authority structure of families has often taken a patriarchal leaning, especially in developing countries, and in Africa in particular. As such, the duties of managing the affairs of the household, and of raising offspring have been delegated to women (Henslin, 2002; Akhtar et al., 2025). Thus, the recurrent tussles over who does housework is in fact a tussle for control of the family’s restricted resources—time, energy and leisure to pursue personal

interests; which have often favoured men, and restricted women. Decision-making in the household is determined by who controls and apportions resources (whether tangible or intangible) within the family (Henslin, 2002). This control of resources within the family is mostly impacted by factors that revolve around, but however are not limited to, personal wealth, health, income, level of education, age of the woman, marital status, access to extended family fortune, and most importantly, the cultural preferences within the couple's society (Oyediran & Odusola, 2004). Stovell (2025) argues that couples rarely negotiate or explicitly discuss work-family scenarios during their critical life transition.

Women's participation in decision making in the household or in their filial community is an important dimension of gender equality. Women's participation in household decisions can reduce observed gender inequalities (Saleemi & Kofol, 2022). Decisions such as how to feed the family, purchasing simple and major household needs, borrowing and lending money, paying fees for children, accepting and entertaining visitors and so on, constitute critical issues that should require women's involvement. They determine the level of power a woman holds in a household, and can impact upon her opinions of womanhood, self-respect and even domestic violence (Delbiso, 2013; Hagos et al., 2017). Women's opinions in their households are a viable dimension of their well-being, and by extension a means of achieving better outcomes for the women themselves and their offspring (Pambè & Kaboré, 2013). Consequently, when the interests and choices of women are neglected, their skills and experiences in handling household and community issues are also lost (Ogato, 2013). Evidence from studies have shown that the priorities of men are frequently different from those of women when it comes to household decision-making. Women generally give a higher importance to welfare related objectives and as such, are more likely to direct the family's resources towards the needs of the children. Thus, the empowerment of a woman within her household improves the chances of her children, particularly girl-children, to attend school (UNICEF, 2006). A study was conducted on 70 women who are skilled birth attendants and their level of participation in household decision making, revealed that those who lack participation were 20 per cent while those who moderately participated were 15 per cent. (Alam et al., 2025). The rationale for the lack of women participation was not mentioned. In order to fill this gap, this study therefore interrogates how income level, marital status and educational level of women relates to their participation in their families and communities in Nigeria.

Creating a balanced participation in decision-making in the household between men and women is crucial in the redistribution of power as well as in gear up interventions in achieving gender justice. This would above all

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maximize and mobilize the full potentials of the human race towards nation building and development (Pandey, 2016). Achieving a balanced gender contribution, however, is fraught with a series of challenges in view of the actual position of women in Ebonyi State and the challenges that prevent them from tunnelling out and mainstreaming their knowledge, skills and experiences, thereby liberating them from being a marginalised, oppressed and subordinated group (Shankar, 2016). Some of the challenges preventing a balanced gender participation in decision-making include: balancing between work and family life for women; restrictions on mobility (both physical and figurative) of women either for religious; cultural or economic reasons; poor or lack of education among the women population; age and marital status as well as overriding gender-specific stereotypes (Shankar, 2016; Singh, 2007).

This study investigates women participation in family/community decision-making in Ebonyi State, with a particular emphasis on its implication on achieving the Sustainable Development Goal number 5 which is gender equality. This is crucial to the discovering of workable solutions that could be exploited in creating a balanced participation in decision-making in the household. This study is thus significant for three reasons. First, it augments existing knowledge on women's vulnerabilities and relative powerlessness in making household/ community decisions. Second, it permits clarifications of the significance of sustainable development goal 5, and its mandate in improving women empowerment as well as enhancing gender equality, especially in Nigeria, and third, it affords new acumens into the stratagems societies may adopt in improving the conditions of gender relations and ultimately create a balance. Although this issue has been topical and has attracted attention by different scholars, women leaders and non-governmental organisations in Nigeria, a gap in knowledge such as how community resources are shared, and decisions regarding family needs and property still exists which this study intends to fill. Therefore, this paper sets out to examine the prospects of achieving sustainable development goal number 5, (gender equality), through gender-inclusive decision-making process within the family/community in Ebonyi State.

The study is designed to provide answers to the following research questions: (1) How does the income earning capacity of women determine their chances of equal participation in family and community decision making process in Ebonyi State? (2) To what extent does the marital status of women constitute a determining factor in equal participation in family and community decision-making process in Ebonyi State? (3) Is there any relationship between the educational qualification of women and their participation in the family and community decision-making process in Ebonyi State?

The general objective of the study is to examine the prospects of achieving sustainable development goal number 5, gender equality, through gender-inclusive decision-making process within the family and community in Ebonyi State, while the specific objectives are: (1) To determine how the income earning capacity of women could determine their chances of equal participation in the family and community in decision-making process in Ebonyi State; (2) to examine how the marital status of women constitutes a determining factor in equal participation in family and community decision-making process in Ebonyi State; and (3) to examine how educational qualification of women could influence women's equal participation in the family and community decision-making process in Ebonyi State.

Three hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study. These include: Hypothesis one, the income level of women does not significantly influence their level of participation in family and community decision making process in Ebonyi State; hypothesis two, the marital status of women does not have any relationship with their level of participation in family and community decision making process in Ebonyi State; hypothesis three, the educational level of women is not related to their level of participation in family and community decision making process in Ebonyi State.

The study promotes gender equality in Nigeria and provides valuable insights on gender inclusiveness of women in the decision-making processes of their families and communities. The study thus fills the gap that exists in the literature regarding gender inequalities at the family and community levels. The findings will benefit policy makers towards shaping their opinion regarding gender issues. It will also benefit community educators and advocators of gender equality at the community level. Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) will use the findings of the study to enhance the capacity of disadvantaged women and girls in various families and communities.

2. Literature review

The concept of women's participation in household/community decision making refers to the contributions of women and their involvement (whether solely or by complementing their husbands) in initiating and coordinating activities driven at making household-utility purchases, visiting and welcoming relatives or friends, catering for offspring, and controlling leisure. Hagos and colleagues (2017), commenting on this crucial phenomenon, contend that women's participation in household/community decision making affects their world view, motivations, and care for their children. As such, it impacts their relevance to sustainable development. This suggest that the status of women

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enhances their involvement in the decision making on the basis of their working conditions (Anwar et al., 2021).

In most developing countries such as Nigeria, Cameroun, Niger, Mali, and many more, there evidently is a gender-based discrimination that typifies the challenges that women face in gaining access and control over the productive resources (such as land, funds, and inheritance) necessary for generating income (Nwokoro & Ogba, 2019; United Nations, 2008). This lack of access to productive resources in families/communities often stem from patriarchy. Patriarchy as discussed earlier is a socially created power structure, which creates a situation of dominance and control of resources by men, with women subjugated to background positions (Moore, 1988; Whitehead, 2002). In order to appreciate lucidly how patriarchy denies women's rights and entitlement to material goods in Nigeria, it is germane to illustrate the important role that kinship groups in patrilineal societies of south-eastern Nigeria such as Ebonyi state play in giving legitimacy and rights of property ownership such as lands, houses, and so on (Nwokoro & Ogba, 2019). The kinship group amongst the Igbo ethnic group of south-eastern Nigeria is the major unit that constructs, enforces and maintains ancestral laws, beliefs and practices (Ezeakor, 2011; Nwankwor, 2001). This hard situation is made clear through "repressive" norms, customs, and laws that refer to ownership of lands, estates, inheritance of properties and even farming as women in most African societies can only use lands through the permission of the husbands, fathers, brothers and so on (Ezeakor, 2011; Nwankwor, 2001; Nwokoro & Ogba, 2019).

As it concerns the income earning capacity of women and how this influences their level of participation in family/community decision making processes, it is believed that women with high income earning capacities attain a better social or economic standing. To this effect, they tend to be more involved in family and community decision making processes. A study carried out by Jan and Akhtar (2008) reviewed several studies in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia and came out with findings that 59 per cent of married women bear masculine decision-making powers for participation in income generating activity while 38 per cent of unmarried women hold non-specific decision-making power for participation in choice for income generating activity. The findings of Jan and Akhtar (2008) does not however provide an explanation of why married women participate more in family and community decisions-making processes than the unmarried. The findings of Mahmuda and Itohara (2008) suggest that women who have personal incomes, institutional participation and training are the most influential factors for increasing participation in family and community decision making processes. Arising from this, women who participate in decisions regarding income generating activities have income earning capacities. Women from families with high social or

economic standing often experience the weight of patriarchy differently from women from poorer families (United Nations, 2002). While it is true that women are affected by patriarchy, it is also fair to admit that the powers and freedom women enjoy can also be impacted upon by the social standing of their natal (birth) families. Similarly, a high-social-status woman with an income earning capability can afford to provide for herself and her offspring an acceptable degree of comfort including clothing, food, healthcare, electronics and contraceptives independent of her husband (Pandey, 2016; Shankar, 2016). When a woman can afford health services, she will be able to control the number of offspring she bears (Swirsky & Angelone, 2016). In most patrilineal societies in south-east Nigeria such as Ebonyi state, women especially, in the rural areas, are not in control of their own maternal health (Delbiso, 2013; Oyediran & Odusola, 2004). In extreme cases in Nigeria, young girls and women are forcibly confined in illegal maternity homes and clinics, where they produce babies to be sold to rich people in cities (Eteng, et al., 2021).

Educating women is essential to economic and political development. Education improves the status and wellbeing of women and their households, especially in the area of household and community decision-making. Gayatri (2020) observes that women's education was the strongest predictor of decision-making power. Higher educated and secondary educated women had higher decision-making powers when compared with primary or less educated women. Affirming this, Gomez-Valle and Holvoet (2022) opine that age and educational level of women are the strongest predictors in the analysis of women participation in the decision-making processes. Sydney and Tadese (1985, as cited in Anikpo, 2005) identified educational opportunities and economic empowerment as the two most pressing areas that must be addressed in Africa to improve women's status. In line with this, Goswami (2021) argues that educated working women enjoy more rights and privileges than the uneducated and unemployed. Education, employment and differential association make working women conscious of their rights and economic potentialities.

There is no doubt that education or literacy improves the wellbeing of women due to its positive influence on the socioeconomic status of women. Education empowers women to challenge traditional roles and determine actors in decision making issues critical to their lives and households. Wolf (1992) argues that education and increase in women's earning capacity give women some leverage within the home and expand their ability to make critical life choices and decisions in relation to issues such as timing of marriage, choice of partner, family health issues, education of children etc. Thus, the higher the level of educational attainment of mothers, the better their household welfare and the lower the level of their educational attainment, the poorer the

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household. It has also been noted that the perception of women and their roles in traditional societies are formidable barriers to gender equality (Payne & Nasser, 2003). Men have higher social status and as a result more access to schooling and training. Also, policy biases against women in most developing countries tend to undervalue their work and accessibility to labour and market in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy. Corroborating this, Morrison et al. (2007) note that the efforts of women to overcome poverty have been impeded by cultural factors. These factors include: patriarchal norms; discriminatory inheritance; traditional property rights; preference for male child education; deprivation of women from participating in community meetings and giving away of daughters for marriage at an early age (Dutse, 2024).

Women have thus been subjugated to all manner of ideologies, rituals, indignities as well as practices and ceremonies that negatively impact their lives (Morris, 2005). Moreover, discriminatory practices at all levels continue to prevent poor women from taking full advantage of economic opportunities that could pull them out of poverty (Morrison et al., 2007).

Marginalization and inequalities of women in Africa has brought about fervent international discourse among policy-makers. Marginalization and inequalities in Africa are attributed to restrictive laws, cultural diversities and practices, institutional barriers, as well as disproportionate access to education, health care and resources which have remain a matter of international concern (Ilesanmi, 2018). It is pertinent to note that women empowerment and participation in different sectors of the society is sacrosanct for their overall development. Das-Gupta (1987) adds that studies in northern India as well as elsewhere in the world have shown that education enhances women's autonomy and increases their effectiveness even in the traditional roles assigned to them in their homes.

Regarding the nexus between the marital status of women and their participation in family and community decision-making processes, Tomar et al. (2021) suggest that marrying as adolescents places girls in even more disadvantaged positions regarding decision-making. The implication of this is that young women in marriage suffer more oppression and exclusion from family and community decision making regarding economic resources, family needs and other related family issues.

The findings of Alemayehu et al. (2020) indicate that married women participate in decision making that relates to family planning especially the number of children to bear, childbearing interval, type of contraceptive to take and where to get the family planning done.

Another crucial factor that has direct negative effects on women's level of education, access to resources and income level is poverty. This variable affects the household decision making power of women. In fact, the control of

resources plays a crucial role in the power distribution of the family (Henslin, 2002). It determines who makes decisions, controls family affairs and apportions leisure. This is influenced by factors such as: education; income; access to extended family wealth; health among others. Thus, poverty (which is the lack of access to resources) lies at the heart of family decision making, and since patriarchy creates an inherent disadvantage to women in the access to these factors, a ‘feminization of poverty’ is assured. As such, a wide gap between men and women in household decision making becomes the norm (United Nations, 2008). Indeed, increase in women’s earning capacity translates into their bargaining power as well as intra-household relations, especially in the area of decision-making (Eteng, 2011b). Acknowledging the dimension of poverty is very germane in the study of women empowerment if the world is to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal number five, which is gender equality. In this vein, any ameliorative proposals towards creating a balanced household/ community decision making index, must first seek to tackle the “gender-based” nature of poverty in the developing world. In fact, poverty creates inequalities in families where women face extreme discrimination in access to resources, employments, praise and basic support. This situation is compounded in very large families where women are laden with larger chores and scarce leisure time when compared to their male counterparts (Moghadam, 2005).

3. Theoretical framework

Radical feminism is the theoretical perspective adopted for this study. It is associated with the pioneer work of Friedan (1963), *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan’s work marked the beginning of radical feminist movement which advocates for the emancipation of women (Eteng et al., 2021). The perspective called for the re-ordering of the society where male dominance is eliminated in all social and economic contexts while acknowledging that women’s experience is affected by other social divisions like race, class and sexual orientation.

The rationale for adopting this perspective stems from the fact that the Radical Feminist perspective is considered adequate to explain how women in every society are oppressed by structural patriarchal arrangements of domination versus subordination. It will not only stop at explaining the power relation between men and women but also position a cause for women’s right and create an enabling atmosphere for women to make meaningful contributions to their families, communities and the society at large. The aim of the perspective is to liberate everyone from an unjust society by challenging negative norms and institutions that promote injustice against women. Some of

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their struggle centred on opposing rape and violence against women and other forms of injustice against women.

Additionally, this perspective is deemed appropriate because of its suitability in explaining the inequalities that affect women in the society. The feminist perspective as a general thought system acknowledges a system of unbalanced hierarchy between men and women in which women are almost always, and universally, exploited (Swirsky & Angelone, 2016; Walby, 1989). Despite the fact that there are differing factions of feminism (radical, liberal, black, Marxist/socialist) whose goals differ sometimes slightly and at other times radically, all evidence however, points to a consensus that feminism as a movement aims to end the social domination of women by men and in its place enthrone a system that inherently supports and maintains gender equality in the political, economic and socio-cultural spheres (Eteng et al., 2021; Swirsky & Angelone, 2016; Tong, 2009). In the discourse of empowerment, feminism acknowledges three broad goals: (1) that there is a strong need to identify and publicize the historical oppression, devaluation, and exploitation of women in every society; (2) to criticize traditional processes, norms, gender ideologies and even intellectual pursuits that trivialize, justify, normalize or perpetuate women oppression; and (3) to improve women's socio-economic and political positions, and also work towards equality for all groups (Acker et al., 1983; Singh, 2007; Swirsky & Angelone, 2016; Walker & Thompson, 1984).

Radical feminism blames the exploitation of women on men (Eteng et al., 2021; Haralambos, et al., 2008). This exploitation is made possible by patriarchy "a set of hierarchical relations between men, and solidarity between them, which enable them to control women" (Hartmann, 1981, p. 368). A woman that is deprived access to land and other economic resources by the husband; father or community leader has been oppressed. The situation is worse, and thrives, when such a woman lacks economic power and the educational know-how to challenge such a culture of silence. This is one of the reasons Radical Feminists see women as "an oppressed group" (Bryson, 1999, as cited in Haralambos et al., 2008).

Decision making in the family and community lies at the heart of power relations between men and women, and Abbott et al. (2005) argue that there is a "feminine nature" that has been obscured throughout history; one that is in need of liberation and revaluation. As such, radical feminism does not merely aim to curtail the discrepancies in power relations between men and women, but, especially, to position a cause for women's rights. Creating an atmosphere where women would make meaningful contributions to their environments stems from a revaluation of the standards that women are judged with. This will garner momentum to address the empowerment of women in the society from the actual chances that women are given in their households/communities to

contribute to, or even independently make decisions that impact upon how goals in the family are achieved (Pandey, 2016).

Lerner (1986, cited in Eteng et al., 2021), contends that women in every society are oppressed by structural patriarchal arrangements of domination versus subordination. Since patriarchy rests on a domination of men in cultural and social processes, women always appear to be subordinates to them. In order to gain a clearer understanding and appreciation of the extent to which patriarchy affects women's economic rights in patrilineal or even double-lineal Nigerian societies like Ebonyi state, it is relevant to expound the significant role that kinship groups play in gaining access to family property such as lands, houses, and so on (Nwokoro & Ogba, 2019). The kinship group amongst the Igbo ethnic group of south-eastern Nigeria is the major unit that constructs, enforces and maintains ancestral laws, beliefs and practices (Ezeakor, 2011; Nwankwor, 2001). This gruelling situation is made clear through norms, customs, and laws that refer to ownership of lands, estates, inheritance of properties and even farming as women in most African societies can only use lands through the permission of the husbands, fathers, brothers and so on (Ezeakor, 2011; Nwankwor, 2001; Nwokoro & Ogba, 2019). Radical feminist theory is therefore especially relevant to the study of women empowerment and household decision-making.

Many radical feminists submit that patriarchy is often the least perceived form of social inequality, yet it is the most significant since it is deeply entrenched in the structures of society (Eteng, et al., 2021). Women empowerment literatures rarely discuss the dimension of household/community decision making as a valid arena where women are constantly oppressed by patriarchy (Pandey, 2016). Even the limited literature on women empowerment projects women as helpless (Nwokoro & Ogba, 2019; Young, 2006; Owen, 1996). Hence, taking a radical feminist leaning in this study, carves out a chief concern towards promoting a more "empowering" perspective of empowerment that dissuades the normative subtext of victimhood and helplessness of women and, as such, positions a perspective that promotes a challenge of the structures that have oppressed women.

At this point however, a review of the weaknesses of this perspective is important for a balanced and scholarly perspective of the subjects of discussion. Like other theories, radical feminism has been the object of much criticism. A foremost criticism is that the theory is often fixated on the negatives from the relationships between men and women and tends to ignore good experiences such as happy marriages and chivalry, thereby presenting it as a biased and a negative creed to "go-ahead" young women (Bryson, 1999). The theory's definition of patriarchy has also been criticised as "descriptive and a-historical". This stems from the claims that the theory creates an all-universal notion of the

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exploitation of women without differentiating the experiences of women from different classes and ethnic backgrounds. Also, the theory projects the underclass position of women without giving a historical explanation for it (Bryson, 1999; Burke, 2019). Likewise, regarding men as “all bad” and women as “all good” creates an inaccurate and biased view of men (the enemy), which suggests they cannot be trusted as lovers, fathers, friends or even political allies (Bryson, 1999, as cited in Haralambos, et al., 2008)

4. Methods/Materials

This study was conducted in Ebonyi State. Ebonyi is one of the States in Nigeria with a gender disparity that places women in a disadvantage position. It is the only state with an extremely high percent (79.1%) of women as the core poor according to the 2010 Nigerian poverty profile (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012). This poverty could be associated with families/communities denying women access to economic resources. The population of the study constitutes women in Ebonyi State. All women both single and married, those who reside in rural and urban areas, from the age of 18 years of age were considered during the selection process.

The design was descriptive survey research design and the approach quantitative. The design was considered appropriate for the study because it provides a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the research while being time and cost effective and pro privacy. Multi-stage sampling was adopted for the study. Multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to make it easy to get a representative and accurate data. Take for instance, the sampling of LGAs, communities and individual respondents from each community was made possible by this technique. In the first stage, one Local Government Area (LGA) was purposively selected from each of the three senatorial districts of Ebonyi State. Simple random sampling was used in the second and third stages to select the communities and respondents for the study. This is appropriate as it offers the respondents equal and independent opportunities to be selected for the study (Kumar, 2011). As a result, in applying the first stage, the researchers purposively chose Ohaukwu LGA in Ebonyi North Senatorial zone, Ezza North LGA in Ebonyi Central while Afikpo South LGA for Ebonyi South Senatorial zone was chosen. The communities and the respondents were selected using the simple random sampling technique.

The population of the study included women in the study areas. According to the Nigerian Population Census of 2006, the population of women in Ohaukwu LGA was 101,076, Ezza North was 76,808 and Afikpo South was 78,449. The 2015 population of women in the LGAs was estimated to be:

Ohaukwu LGA, 131,881; Ezza North, 100,217; and Afikpo South,102,358. The 2015 population of women in the LGAs was estimated to be: Ohaukwu LGA 131,881; Ezza North is 100,217; and Afikpo South 102,358. This estimation was derived using the formula: $P_n = P_o(1+r)^n$, where:

P_n = Current Population (2015);

P_o = Previous Population (2006);

1= Constant;

r =Population Growth Rate, which is 3% or 0.03 for Nigeria;

n =Number of years between P_n and P_o (i.e., 9years).

The 2015 projected population was further projected to 2025 to arrive at Ohaukwu LGA, 177,175; EzzaNorth, 134,683; and AfikpoSouth,137,561.

The sample size that was used for each LGA was derived using the Yaro Yamani formula:

$$\frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

- N = Target population of study (i.e., the estimated number of women);
- 1 = Constant;
- e = Error Margin which is given as 5% or 0.05.

$$\text{For Ohaukwu LGA} = \frac{177,175}{1 + 177,175(0,05)^2} = 400$$

$$\text{For Ezza North LGA} = \frac{134,683}{1 + 134,683(0,05)^2} = 400$$

$$\text{For Afikipo South LGA} = \frac{137,561}{1 + 137,561(0,05)^2} = 400$$

This implies that a total of 1200 respondents constituted the sample for the study.

Data collection started with training of research assistants. These were drawn from the department of Sociology, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike (FUNA), where the study is domesticated. The principal investigator, a development sociologist and specialist in gender studies and the lead researchers, development sociologists, conducted the training. The justification for the training was to help the research assistants to familiarize themselves with the instruments. After the training, a pilot study was done to pre-test the instruments and ascertain how well they understood the instruments. The pre-test was also to ensure that the instrument used for the study was reliable. Debriefing session followed after the pilot survey was conducted, to discuss the challenges that were encountered. Thereafter, data collection commenced.

The questionnaire, the instrument for data collection, contained different sections that elicited information on marital status, educational qualification, income level and accessibility to communal resources such as land etc. The

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analysis of quantitative data was done using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and involved data management and data analysis.

In managing and handling the quantitative data, editing was carried out by scrutinizing the completed questionnaire to identify and minimize errors, incompleteness, and gaps in the data collected from respondents. After thorough scrutiny of the completed questionnaire, it was entered in SPSS, edited and then analysed. Statistics adopted for the analysis of the quantitative data were inferential statistics: bivariate correlation and regression model. The rationale for the choice of these models was their suitability in explaining how income, marital status and educational qualification relate to women participation in family/community decision making process. The choice of the regression model was, especially, to ascertain the correlation between the income levels of women participation during decision making processes. Correlation matrix was used to measure how the sub variables of marital status such as single, married and widowed, relates to women participation in the family/community decision making process. This method was chosen because the analysis was multivariate in nature involving multiple independent variables. A multivariate analysis involving correlation matrix was used to ascertain the correlation coefficient of the variables. The regression model was used to determine the relationship between educational attainment of women and their level of participation in making critical life choices in their families and communities.

5. Results

5.1 Hypothesis one

The result in table 1 regarding how income the level of women determines the level of their participation in family and community decision making indicates that women in the income category of ₦51,000 and above representing 458 (38.4%) with 1 as a perfect correlation coefficient with the p-value of .000, have high participation in family and community decisions related to land. Those within the income level of ₦40,000-₦50,000 representing 446 (37.4%) also recorded high participation. Responses regarding the involvement of women in decision making process as it relates to the type of school their children attend reveals that women with income range of ₦40,000 - ₦50,000 and ₦51,000- & above with coefficient of 895**, appeared to be more involved in taking decision concerning their children schools.

Further study reveals that women within the income level of ₦40,000, ₦50,000 and ₦51,000 and above with the coefficient of .870**, representing 441 (37%) and 451 (37.8%) respectively, participate and contribute during family and community meetings.

Women with high income also have high participation in decisions in the family concerning who their children marry. In line with this, 417 (35%) and 432 (36.2%) fall within the high-income earners who agreed that they are involved in marital decisions affecting their children. This is significantly shown with the correlation coefficient of .804**. Regarding the purchase of property in the family, respondents who agreed that they are involved in family decisions that concern purchase of household property fall within the income category of ₦40,000-₦50,00 and ₦51,000 and above respectively. This recorded coefficient value of .785**. Regarding family investment, 421 (35.2%) and 445 (37.3%) agreed that they participate in family investment decisions with the corresponding correlation coefficient of .837**. In view of the coefficient values for income level and decision concerning land, income level and decision concerning who marries their children, income level and purchase of family property, income level and family investment, with the p-value of .000 which is lower than the significant level of 0.01, we reject the null (H₀) and accept the alternate (H₁) which states that women with high incomes are likely to participate more in family and community decision making in Ebonyi, Nigeria.

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Table 1. Income level and women participation in family/ community decision making

Decision Variables	Income level	Frequency %	rl. coefficients	P-values
Participation in decision regarding family/community land	Less than ₦10,000 (code 1)	52 (4.4%)	1.00	.000
	₦11,000-₦19,000 (code 2)	64 (5.4%)		
	₦20,000-₦29,000 (code 3)	58 (4.9%)		
	₦30,000-₦39,000 (code 4)	115 (9.6%)		
	₦40,000-₦50,000 (code 5)	446 (37.4%)		
	₦51,000 & above (code 6)	458 (38.4%)		
Involved in decision regarding Children's school	Less than ₦10,000 (code 1)	74(6.2%)	.895**	.000
	₦11,000-₦19,000 (code 2)	78(6.5%)		
	₦20,000-₦29,000 (code 3)	63(5.3%)		
	₦30,000-₦39,000 (code 4)	105(8.8%)		
	₦40,000-₦50,000 (code 5)	428(35.9%)		
	₦51,000 & above (code 6)	445 (37.3%)		
Contributions during community meetings	Less than ₦10,000 (code 1)	52 (4.4%)	.870**	.000
	₦11,000-₦19,000(code 2)	76 (6.4%)		
	₦20,000-₦29,000 (code 3)	58 (4.9%)		
	₦30,000-₦39,000 (code 4)	115 (9.6%)		
	₦40,000-₦50,000 (code 5)	441 (37.0%)		
	₦51,000 & above (code 6)	451 (37.8%)		
Participate in decisions on who their child should marry	Less than ₦10,000 (code 1)	87 (7.3%)	.804**	.000
	₦11,000-₦19,000 (code 2)	85 (7.1%)		
	₦20,000-₦29,000 (code 3)	67 (5.6%)		
	₦30,000-₦39,000 (code 4)	105 (8.8%)		
	₦40,000-₦50,000 (code 5)	417 (35.0%)		
	₦51,000 & above (code 6)	432 (36.2%)		
Women Participation in a decision to purchase family property	Less than ₦10,000 (code 1)	58 (4.9%)	.785**	.000
	₦11,000-₦19,000 (code 2)	67 (5.6%)		
	₦20,000-₦29,000 (code 3)	63 (5.3%)		
	₦30,000-₦39,000 (code 4)	115 (9.6%)		
	₦40,000-₦50,000 (code 5)	440 (36.9%)		
	₦51,000 & above (code 6)	450 (37.7%)		
Women involvement in family decision concerning family investment	Less than ₦10,000 (code 1)	71(6.0%)	.837**	.000
	₦11,000-₦19,000 (code 2)	80(6.7%)		
	₦20,000-₦29,000 (code 3)	63(5.3%)		
	₦30,000-₦39,000 (code 4)	113(9.5%)		
	₦40,000-₦50,000 (code 5)	421(35.2%)		
	₦51,000 & above (code6)	445(37.3%)		

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Notes: N=1193. ** P <.01, two-tailed.

H0: Women's income level does not determine their participation in family and community decision-making process in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

H1: Women with high income are more likely to participate in family and community decision-making in Ebonyi, Nigeria.

5.2. Hypothesis two

The result in table 2 shows a significant relationship between marital status and women participation in family and community decision making processes. The findings indicate that married women stand a chance to participate in family and community decision making processes at the significant level of 0.01. This can be seen from the correlation coefficient values from the multivariate analysis. The implication of this is that women who are married stand a better chance of participating in family and community decision making processes than their unmarried or widowed counterparts.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix of marital status and women participation in decision making process

Variables	1	2	3
I am single and less opportunities are given to me to participate in family and community decision-making process	1.00		
I am married and have a chance to participate in family and community decision-making processes	.557*	1.00	
I am a widow. I am not given equal opportunities as others to participate in family and community decision-making	.639*	.872**	1.00
N	1193	1193	1193

Source: Field Work,2025

Notes: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

H0: Marital status is not a determinant factor for women participation in family and community decision making processes.

The result in table 2 shows a significant relationship between marital status and women participation in family and community decision making processes. The findings indicate that married women stand a chance to participate in family and community decision making processes at the significant level of 0.01. This can be seen from the correlation coefficient values from the multivariate analysis. The implication of this is that women who are married stand a better chance of participating in family and community decision making processes than their unmarried or widowed counterparts.

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5.3 Hypothesis three

The findings in table 3 reveal that educational qualification is an influential factor in women participation in family and community decision making processes in the society with the regression coefficient (r) of .501 at 0,05 significant level. The result recorded 25.1 per cent explanatory power of the influence of educational qualification and women participation in family decision making process towards property acquisition. This suggests that the 74.9 per cent remaining is attributed to other factors that were not considered in this study, but which could exert an influence on women participation in family decision making.

Table 3. Educational qualification of women and their participation in decision making

Model	B	SE	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	2.187	.068		32.351	.000
Education qualification	-.221	.0	-.501	-8.112	.000
R	.501a				
R-SQUARE	.251				

Notes: Dependent variable = participation in decision-making. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; Beta = standardized coefficient; Sig. = p-value significance level = 0.05.

6. Discussion of findings

The findings from hypothesis one showed that income level is a determinant factor for women participation in family and community decision making processes. It was revealed that women with high incomes agreed to have participated more in family and community decision making process than their counterparts with low-income earnings. Women with incomes ranging from ₦ 40,000 and above recorded higher participation in family decision making. It can be argued that women with high incomes have great purchasing power thus can influence decisions in their homes and communities. These findings therefore corroborate the findings of Oheneba-Sakyi and Awusabo-Asare (1999) who observed that the level of autonomy of women in Nigeria is inextricably linked to their socio-economic status. Dikito-Wachtmeister (2001) also corroborates this. His study reveals that women who actually emerge as decision makers in their families are generally old and rich women whose

husbands do not drink, or who have jobs. The implications of these findings are that women with low incomes, or poor family backgrounds are likely to have low participation in the family decision-making process regarding the type of school the children attend, the type of family property to buy, land use, family investment and decisions on who marries their daughters or who their sons should marry. This is in line with the observation of Boateng et al. (2013) who state that women's empowerment and socio-economic status at the village level are crucial to the continued operation of the family, and their socioeconomic status will greatly improve their participation to ensure the effectiveness of sustainable development strategies of good household decisions. Consistent with this, Amugsi et al. (2016) observe that financial autonomy has positive influence on women's nutrition. This is because higher financial autonomy gives women more negotiation powers with regard to food purchases.

Drawing from the result in table 2, it has been noted that there is a significant relationship between marital status and women participation in family and community decision making processes. In view of this, one can say that marital status is a determinant factor in women being given a chance to participate in family and community decision making processes. Married women were indicated to have more chances of participation in family decision making processes. It was also discovered that widows and singles (not yet married) were not given equal opportunities to contribute to family and community issues. Family related decision-making issues are: type of house to build; number of children to bear; type of school for the children; type of car to buy and several others. The community related decision-making issues are land allocation, sharing of economy resources and leadership.

Findings regarding how educational attainment influences women involvement in the family and community decision making processes indicated a significant influence of educational qualification on women participation in decision making regarding acquisition of property. From this, one can deduce that women with poor or low educational qualification will have low level of participation in family decision making processes concerning acquisition of property such as land, automobile, furniture or other household equipment. Women in Nigeria face discrimination regarding decision making because the educational status of women is far below that of any other developing country (Acharya, 2012). To further corroborate these findings, Darley et al. (2010) note that people with lower socioeconomic statuses have less access to education and are therefore subject to making unreliable decisions. The findings of Council of Europe (2020) also reveal that it is extremely difficult for women to defend their own interests both locally and nationally as their influence on the system of governance and the decision-making process is limited.

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Decision making is critical in the development of human societies. When people are allowed to participate in the decision-making process, they make decisions for themselves and provide immediate solutions to their problems. Women participation in decision making is not just a right, but also a key to sustainable development (Asuako, 2020). Women are seen as development collaborators in the society. Therefore, there is a need to involve them in leadership development skills and capacity building (Ukah et al., 2023)

From the multivariate analysis, it was discovered that there is a significant relationship between educational level and the degree of women's participation in making critical life choices. Investigation reveals that 70 per cent of the respondents could not make a choice of the number of children to have in the family, 70.3 per cent had no part in decisions on family planning methods in the family, while 76.3 per cent did not participate in decisions on the type of property to acquire for the family. Part of the findings of Melak (2019) it was observed that secondary and tertiary education level as compared to primary education level positively and significantly affects the participation of women in decision making on household income.

The empowerment of women through education has far reaching implications for economic growth, gender equality, and social equity (Payne & Nasser, 2003). Education of women improves their status. Educated women have the intellectual capacity to challenge their traditional roles in the society and this challenge tends to weaken men's control over them. This concurs with Uli (2000) assertion that education empowers women, encourages economic growth, engenders social equality as well as challenges traditional and customary rules. Education of women thus improves their capacity to participate in the decision-making process at the family, compound and community levels. When women are not availed the requisite education, they lose the capacity for personal decision making. This is in tandem with Abara (2012) observation that in most traditional societies, women lack autonomy and the ability of self-determination because they have been socialized into acquiescence and acceptance of a subjugated status. The denial of access to women for decision making does not only increase poverty for the women and the family but also for the society. Anikpo (1996) observes that "the more the people are removed from their decision-making processes, the larger the number of people who become poor and also the more antagonistic the manifestation of poverty" (p.27). The fact that majority of our respondents, 60%, had little or no education, and close to 30% had low education explains the level of poverty among women in the study area.

7. Conclusions

From the forgoing, it is evident that income level of women, marital status and educational level have influence on their degree of participation in family and community decision-making processes. To this end, women with high income generating capacities stand a higher chance of participating in family decision making processes. Women with high incomes assume a good socio-economic status in the society and can command power and influence in the family and community. Also, married women stand a better chance of participating in family and community decision-making processes than single women and widows. This is possibly because of the traditional view of married women as helpers to their husbands. Some of the areas they participate in making decisions include: type of schools their children attend, who their child marries or is married to, type of household property to buy and sharing of community resources such as economic trees, land and mineral resources. Women with high educational qualifications appear to participate more in family and community decision- making than those with low education level. Educated women are more enlightened and also know their right. They therefore have a voice in their families and communities.

This study has implications for policy makers to design policies and programmes through which the issues of single women, widows, women with low income and low level of education can be addressed. Family heads and community leaders will be re-orientated through the recommendations of the study to grant women access to community resources to empower them and also allow them to participate in making critical decisions regarding their families. Regarding the theoretical implications, the findings of this study can lead to formulating new theories in gender studies and also serve as reference material when published for other researchers. For purposes of advancement of knowledge, the study can be replicated by other researchers in a different dimension. In conclusion, the study highlights the significant role of the patriarchal culture in perpetuating gender inequalities in decision-making within families and communities in Nigeria.

8. Recommendations

To address this, it is recommended that government and NGOs implement targeted awareness campaigns to challenge and change obnoxious cultural norms. Further research could explore the effectiveness of such interventions and examine other factors that may influence women's participation in decision-making processes.

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To narrow the educational qualification gap that exists between males and females in Nigeria, the government needs to establish scholarship schemes to empower the girl child. A girl child who has been denied access to education by their parents can be assisted and awarded a scholarship by the government from the primary school level to higher institution. This will raise the consciousness of women towards formal education and equip them with the requisite knowledge to challenge the institutionalized discriminatory practices against them by a patriarchal society. Education guarantees Women access to their inheritance, communal resources and participation in the decision-making process. In order to achieve gender equality in Ebonyi State and Nigeria in general, single women and widows should be given opportunities to freely participate in family and community decision making processes, especially on the issues that concern them. Through this, critical decisions that will improve their socio-economic well-being will be taken.

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