



## **Workplace Gender Inequality and Female Career Advancement in Selected Organizations in Owerri Municipal**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The issue of workplace gender inequality and female career development is not new as it has a considerably long history. Gender inequality has been found to happen in many ways among women who often receive lower pay for the same or comparable work made by men, and they are often limited in their chances for promotion, especially to top positions especially in Owerri Municipal. The researchers took into consideration, three objectives and three research questions using descriptive survey research design with a population of three thousand six hundred (3600) bankers shared among eleven (11) commercial banks in Owerri Municipal local government area using stratified sampling technique to select three commercial banks because of the heterogeneous nature of the organization and purposive sampling technique used to select one hundred and eighty (180) staffs from the stratified banks. The research instrument used was structured questionnaire with an observation checklist. The questionnaire contained 4 items designed to elicit information regarding workplace gender inequality and female career advancement. The study found out that respondents generally acknowledge the presence of gender inequalities and the impact of various factors on female career advancement in selected organizations in Owerri Municipal. The study recommended that Organizations should maintain transparency in their promotion processes and hold themselves accountable for promoting gender equality.

**Keywords:** Gender, gender inequality, career advancement, organization, organizational segregation.

### **Introduction**

Work is firmly laced into structures and it affects every aspect of an organization. It could take various nature and can vary substantially within and between organizations. Though, heterogeneous in nature, work can be comprehended, examined and associated in broader terms.

Workplace is a place where individuals work together to realize an established vision for the well-being of workers and the immediate community. It offers all members of the work force social, psychological, organizational and physical conditions that protect and promote health and safety. Also, it supports managers and workers to enhance control over their own health and to improve it, and become more energetic and contented (Okezie, 2013). In the views of Paul (2010) workplace is a place where someone works for his/her employer, which is also called place of employment. Such a place could go from a home office to a large office building or factory. In the case of developed societies, the workplace is among the most important social spaces other than the home, being made-up of a central concept for several entities: the worker and his/her family, the employing organization, the customers of the organization and the society as a whole; which gender posits the main factor.

Gender is a central organizing factor in societies, which can significantly affect the processes of production, consumption and distribution. Gender equality as the fairness of treatment for male and female according to their respective needs, it is the attitude of providing equal opportunities and rights to both males and females eliminating all forms of discrimination (Nwarieji & Azunku, 2017). Obasi (2006) also maintained that gender is the socially constructed characteristics of women and men in norms, roles and relationships. It varies from society to society and can be changed. While most people are born either male or female, they are taught to act either male or female through appropriate norms and behaviours-including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work place.

Obasi (2006) generally described the various roles of females for instance, women are usually expected to take domestic works and remain close to home without greater freedom to move around in public places. The women are often looked down upon by the society as not effective and efficient. Hence, situations arise where employers would not want to employ married women. The need to address gender issues has therefore, become pertinent that many development agencies have recognized that attending gender equity and equality conferences could lead to sound, social and economic development. In actual fact, the popular assumption is a key element to educational success taking cognizance of gender equality and special needs.

Almost all individuals supports gender equality because any one could give it any meaning. Gender inequality is a situation where equal rights and opportunities are granted to both men and women, it denotes equity in the lives of men and women in terms of employment, education, empowerment and opportunities. Offorma, (2014:20) highlighted that “gender inequality involves all underlying causes of discrimination in order to give men and women equal opportunities to survive in their given environment”. Gender inequality exists between men and women in rights, responsibilities and entitlements. It is a situation where men and women are not given equal opportunities to contribute and actualize their full potentials and capabilities in the society. Gender inequality means uneven or difference in treatment, access to provision or possession of materials or other resources.

Promotional advancement positions itself in gender inequality as it is used interchangeably with professional opportunities, professional development, and career advancement opportunities, or leadership development. A professional may be described as an expert in their occupational field, development may be described as growth or a consequence, and opportunity may be described as the chance for advancement in rank within that work field (Dictionary.com, 2012).

Occupational segregation detach females from the leadership opportunities. He and Xiaoping in Woods (2015) averred that, with the growth of the market economy, occupational segregation has not changed and few females enter certain male-dominated occupations, especially in white-collar occupations: as the number of blue-collar male occupations was increasing, the speed of the increase was much slower than in white-collar occupations. Woods studied the determinant of education to explain occupational segregation; that is, while the percentage of females obtaining education is increasing, the gap in the occupational status was increasing at a greater multitude.

Family-work Imbalance suggests division of labor inside the home hinder female’s professional growth. Although stay-at-home dads have become more common (Dunn, Rochlen, & O’Brien, 2013), females deciding to bear children face obstacles to be successful in the workplace. The barriers to female career success were due to a trifold responsibility: females are mother, wife, and worker, whereby family commitments have led females to leave their career to bear and care for children. Plicker and Sterling (2017) argued females are unable to remain committed to their job demands working part-time due to parenting responsibilities that delay career opportunities. Some have to struggle for the control of their bodies, and fight for equality in the face of domestic violence and trafficking (Jyrkinen, 2005). This above issue is applicable to female career advancement.

Career advancement refers to all the activities which an individual does in his/her lifetime. These activities could be personal, occupational and social life of the person. Thus, career refers to the life pattern of an individual. Advancement is the modification of behaviour as a result of growth and learning. It normally involves a progressive change (Ababneh, 2013). Thus, career advancement means the overall development in the life style of a person. It involves person’s experiences that contribute to the formation of his/her identity including life experiences, education, career choice, on the job training, level of professional achievement and degree of satisfaction.

It can equally be seen as a structured approach used to help employees fulfill certain requirements of various positions within the organization throughout their career lifespan, considering organizational needs and requirements. The purpose of career development is to enrich employees’ skills and knowledge in order to make them fit for future positions and emergent roles and responsibilities. Individual career development should emphasize the role of employees in honing their skills (Al-Asfour and Khan, 2014). Lysova, Richardson, Khapova and Jansen (2015) added that employees need to have a proactive behavior to attain the qualities essential for their career success. Against this background, this study examined workplace gender inequality and female career advancement in selected organizations in Owerri Municipal.

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## Statement of the Problem

As individuals put in their best to work, it reflects on their career advancement which involves person’s experiences that contribute to the formation of his/her identity including life experiences, education, career choice, on the job training, level of professional achievement and degree of satisfaction. However, career advancement in different workplaces has stumbling blocks for females and this has its grip on gender inequality. Gender inequality shows itself in how women often receive lower pay for the same or comparable work made by men, often limited in their chances for promotion, especially to top positions, some women continue to experience a glass ceiling in their workplaces. Hence, how females responded to gender inequality and perceived the lack of opportunity to attain leadership roles despite advances made in workplace is too alarming as it is a problem for females seeking leadership opportunities in their different workplaces.

The gap found within literature was the lack of information supported by women that work in some organizations in Owerri municipal with regard to their encountered issues of gender inequality and their perceptions of the barriers that exist to their professional advancement opportunities. Accordingly, there is a burning need to provide insight into the subject of gender inequality as it relates to professional advancement opportunities in relation with its preventing barriers. This formed the baseline of the study.

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## Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate workplace gender inequality and female career advancement. Specifically, the study will seek to:

1. To identify the factors that contribute to gender inequalities and how it hinders female career advancement in selected organizations in Owerri Municipal.
2. Ascertain if work/family balance is rooted in occupational segregation.

3. To determine if gender inequalities in the workplace is rooted in occupational segregation or organizational promotion policies.

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## Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study;

1. What are the factors that contribute to poor female career advancement in selected organizations in Owerri Municipal?
2. Is work/family balance associated with occupational segregation?
3. Do organizational promotion policies differ amongst employees based on gender?

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## Literature Review

World Health Organization (WHO; 2018) was apt in defining workplace as the place in which workers and managers cooperate to use a recurrent enhancement process to protect and promote the safety and well-being of workers and the sustainability of the workplace. Workplace is a domicile where individuals work together to realize an established vision for the well-being of workers and the immediate community. It offers all members of the workforce with, social, psychological, organizational and physical conditions that protects and promotes health and safety. Okezie (2013) states some features/characteristics of a workplace which are as follows:

- A workplace must be innovative
- A workplace must be open for communication
- A workplace must have a constructive feedback
- A workplace must have a clear purpose
- A workplace must have an autonomy
- A workplace must have a sense of fairness
- A workplace must have a community spirit.

Ridgeway (2014) states some advantages and disadvantages found at workplaces, which are as follows:

### *Advantages of Workplace*

- A workplace is a strong learning environment
- It gives productive information
- It also gives quality standards.
- Workplace gives information flow to improve recruitment

### *Disadvantages of Workplace*

- Workplace leads to diversity
- Workplace carries a bridge between workers interaction because you have different personalities working under the same root, there is bound to be friction from time to time.

Gender inequality is a situation whereby men and women in the society are not given equal opportunities and conditions to survive. It is a situation where men and women are not given equal opportunities to contribute and actualize their full potentials and capabilities in the society. Gender inequality means uneven or difference in treatment, access to provision or possession of materials or other resources. Gender inequality is the existence of unequal opportunities for male and female who are qualified to receive education (Mukoro, 2003).

### ***Perceptions about Gender Inequality***

Different perceptions of inequality in the society find its roots in several social psychological theories are relevant in underlying why people tend to perceive.

Firstly, cognitive dissonance theory of Festinger in 1957 is appropriate in elucidating why consciousness of gender inequality tends to disappear as long as it concerns tangible individuals. The concept of cognitive dissonance, which refers to an uncomfortable feeling caused by holding contradictory ideas concurrently, is the main element of the theory. According to the theory, people have a motivational intuitive drive to lessen dissonance by adjusting their attitudes, beliefs and/or actions. In line with the theory, people could believe that there is gender inequality somewhere in the society where they live but reject its existence in their own workplace. This belief may or may not be true, but it reduces dissonance and makes people feel better.

Secondly, attribution theory of Weiner in 1980 and 1992 could be appropriate in underlying why individuals tend to recognize gender inequality in society but reject its existence in their workplaces. According to the theory, individuals are strongly motivated by the pleasurable outcome of being able to feel good about them. People therefore; tend to interpret their environment and events occurring there in a way that maintains a positive self-image.

Sociometer theory of Leary in 1999 is appropriate for elucidating the phenomenon of gender inequality disappearance. Similar to attribution theory, sociometer theory assumes that people have an integral need to feel good about themselves, which forms the reason why they are so concerned about self-esteem.

### ***Area of the study***

Owerri municipal Local Government Area is a [local government area](#) of [Imo State](#) in eastern [Nigeria](#). It is one of the 27 local government areas created for the state. Its administrative seat is located in Owerri municipality. It has a total size of 109 square kilometers (42 sq mi). The total population in the area was last recorded at 638,360 people in 2011 from 538,558 in 2006. Owerri municipal local government area has several organizations ranging from multinational, national, state to local. There are about, 300 organizations of which 100 are state owned. The organizations in the area have considerable standard and equipped workplaces and female staffs. Females within this area are perceived to be acquainted with workplace, gender inequality and female career advancement.

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## **Methodology**

### **Design of the Study**

The design adopted in this study is descriptive survey which allows the researcher to study small sample and later generalized the findings on the whole population. Nwankwo (2016) was of the view that in a survey research, small sample is studied and the findings generalized to the population.

### **Population of the Study**

The population of the study comprised of three thousand six hundred (3600) bankers, in Owerri Municipal Local Government Area. There are 11 commercial banks in Owerri Municipal local government area.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

The sample size of three hundred (300) was used for the study. Stratified sampling technique was used to select three commercial banks because of the heterogeneous nature of the organization. Purposive sampling technique was used to select (180) staffs from the stratified banks which represents five (5%) percent of the population.

### **Instrument for Data Collection**

The research instrument used was structured questionnaire with an observation checklist developed by the researcher, titled "Workplace Gender Inequality and Female Career Advancement (WGIFCA)". The questionnaire contains 4 items designed to elicit information regarding workplace gender inequality and female career advancement. Items on the questionnaire will be scored on four-point rating scale of: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Strongly Disagree (SD) (2), and Disagree (1). To get the criterion mean for scoring the questionnaire, all the points of the alternative responses will be added up and divided by 4, that is  $(4+3+2+1)/4 = 10/4 = 2.5$ . Thus, any mean value from 2.5 and above will be accepted and any mean value below (2.5) was rejected.

### **Validation of the Research Instrument**

The instrument was validated by five experts, the researcher's supervisor, an expert in the field of Gender and Women Development Studies and three other experts in measurement and evaluation, Federal Polytechnic Nekede. These experts evaluated the items of the instrument in positions of content validity, clarity of language used, items clarity, as well as to ascertain if the items are related to the objectives of the study. The corrections made by the experts were effected at the final construction of the instrument.

### **Reliability of the Study**

To determine the internal consistency, the researcher administered the instrument to twenty (20) female staffs that are not part of the sample of the study. Split half method of determining the internal consistency of the instrument was used which generated the reliability index of 0.76. This will make the instrument reliable for the study.

### **Method of Data Collection**

The Researcher sought the permission from the Heads of the various selected organizations by writing a letter requesting for their permission to sample their staff. After which the questionnaire was administered personally by the researchers to the respondents at their different offices. They were instructed on how to complete the various sections of the instrument, while completed instruments will be retrieved immediately by the researchers to ensure hundred percent return rates. Also observation checklist was used by the researcher to determine the female career advancement loopholes in their various offices.

## Method of Data Analysis

The Mean and Standard deviation was used to analyze the five research questions. The hypotheses will be tested using Chi-square test, one sample T-test and independent sample T-test. Chi-square will be used to test hypotheses 2 and 5, one sample T-test was used to test hypothesis 1 and 4 while Independent sample T-test was used to test hypothesis 3.

**Research Question 1:** What are the factors that contribute to poor female career advancement in selected organizations in Owerri Municipal?

		Mean	Std	Remarks
	lack of access to education and training lead to poor female career advancement	3.19	0.80	Accept
	lack of job opportunities lead to poor female career advancement	3.10	0.86	Accept
	I have personally experienced or observed gender-based obstacles to career advancement within my organization	3.00	0.90	Accept
	lack of confidence contribute to poor female career advancement	3.44	0.81	Accept
	Gender inequalities exist in my organization	3.34	0.83	Accept
	<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.21</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>Accept</b>

Table 1 shows that Lack of access to education and training lead to poor female career advancement has a mean of 3.19 with a standard deviation of 0.80, lack of job opportunities lead to poor female career advancement has a mean of 3.10 with a standard deviation of 0.86., "I have personally experienced or observed gender-based obstacles to career advancement within my organization" has a mean of 3.00 with a standard deviation of 0.90. "Lack of confidence contributes to poor female career advancement has mean of 3.44 with a standard deviation of 0.81, gender inequalities exist in my organization has a mean of 3.34 with a standard deviation of 0.83. The Grand Mean of 3.21 with a standard deviation of 0.84 suggests that respondents tend to agree with the statements related to gender inequalities and obstacles in female career advancement.

**Research Question 2:** Is work/family balance associated with occupational segregation?

		Mean	Std	Remarks
1	quantity of hours worked contribute to occupational segregation	3.24	0.97	Accept
2	sick and holiday leave provisions lead to occupational segregation	3.27	0.94	Accept
3	lengthy commutes lead to occupational segregation	3.21	0.96	Accept
4	management issues contribute to occupational segregation	3.30	0.96	Accept
	<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.26</b>	<b>0.96</b>	<b>Accept</b>

Table 2 showed that quantity of hours worked contributes to occupational segregation" has a mean score of 3.24 and a standard deviation of 0.97. "Sick and holiday leave provisions lead to occupational segregation" has a mean score of 3.27 and a standard deviation of 0.94. "Lengthy commutes lead to occupational segregation and management issues contribute to occupational segregation" has a mean score of 3.30 and a standard deviation of 0.96. The grand Mean of 3.26 with a standard deviation of 0.96 indicates a general agreement among respondents with the statements related to factors contributing to occupational segregation. While there is some variability in responses, the overall trend is towards agreement

**Research Question 3:** Do organizational promotion policies differ amongst employees based on gender?

		Mean	Std	Remarks
1	Religious freedom influence gender-based promotion policies amongst employees	3.24	1.05	Accept
2	lack of bodily autonomy influence gender-based promotion policies amongst employees	2.50	1.07	Accept
3	Age and geographic location influence gender-based promotion policies amongst employees	2.55	1.05	Accept
4	Gender identity and sexual orientation influence gender-based promotion policies amongst employees	3.47	0.70	Accept
	<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>2.94</b>	<b>0.97</b>	<b>Accept</b>

Table 3 shows that religious freedom has an influence on gender-based promotion policies among employees with mean of 3.24 and standard Deviation of 1.05, lack of bodily autonomy influences gender-based promotion policies, with relatively amongst employees has the mean of 2.50 with standard Deviation of 1.07, age and geographic location influence gender-based promotion policies among employees has the mean of 2.55 with standard deviation of 1.05 and gender identity and sexual orientation have an influence on gender-based promotion policies amongst employee has the mean of 3.47 with a relatively low standard deviation of 0.70 indicating a high level of consensus. The Grand Mean of 2.94 with a standard deviation of 0.97 reflects an overall agreement among respondents that various factors, including religious freedom, lack of bodily autonomy, age and geographic location, and gender identity and sexual orientation, influence gender-based promotion policies among employees, with some variability in responses.

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## Discussion of Results

### The factors that contribute to gender inequalities and how it hinders female career advancement

Analysis in Table 1 showed that lack of access to education and training leads to poor female career advancement with mean of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 0.80 suggests that respondents tend to agree with this statement. The relatively low standard deviation indicates a consistent belief among respondents that limited access to education and training can hinder female career advancement. This highlights the importance of educational and training opportunities for gender equality in the workplace. Lack of job opportunities leads to poor female career advancement obtained a mean of 3.10 with a standard deviation of 0.86. This shows that respondents tend to agree with this statement, but there is slightly higher variability in responses. The findings emphasize the significance of creating equal job opportunities for female career progression, although opinions on this may vary to some extent. "I have personally experienced or observed gender-based obstacles to career advancement within my organization" has the mean of 3.00 with a standard deviation of 0.90. This indicates that respondents tend to agree with this statement, but there is higher variability in responses. This highlights the existence of varied personal experiences and observations related to gender-based obstacles in career advancement. Addressing these challenges may require tailored strategies based on individual experiences. "Lack of confidence contributes to poor female career advancement" has the mean of 3.44 with a standard deviation of 0.81. This implies that respondents generally agree with this statement, and the low standard deviation suggests consensus among respondents. This underscores the importance of boosting confidence among female employees to support their career development. "Gender inequalities exist in my organization" received an average score of 3.34 with a standard deviation of 0.83. Respondents tend to agree with this statement, and there is relatively low variability in responses. These results emphasize that most respondents perceive the existence of gender inequalities within their organization. The grand mean of 3.21 with a standard deviation of 0.84 reflects a general agreement among respondents with the statements related to gender inequalities and career advancement obstacles. While there is some diversity in responses, the overall trend is towards agreement with the statements. The results showed that respondents generally acknowledge the presence of gender inequalities and the impact of various factors on female career advancement in selected organizations in Owerri Municipal. These findings underscore the need for organizations to address these factors and promote gender equality to support the career progression of female employees in the workplace.

### Work/family balance is rooted in occupational segregation

The analysis in Table 2 showed that the respondents to agree that the quantity of hours worked contribute to occupational segregation. This suggests that there is a perceived association between the number of hours worked and the types of roles or occupations individuals are engaged in. Longer working hours might limit individuals' choices regarding the types of jobs they can undertake, potentially leading to occupational segregation. Respondents also agree that sick and holiday leave provisions lead to occupational segregation which implies that the availability of leave provisions, or perhaps the lack thereof, could play a role in determining the types of roles individuals are able to access. Those with limited leave options might be constrained in their choice of occupation, potentially contributing to occupational segregation. The findings also show that respondents agree that lengthy commutes lead to occupational segregation. This suggests that the time and effort required for commuting can influence the types of jobs individuals are willing or able to take on. Long commutes might deter individuals from pursuing certain job opportunities, thus contributing to occupational segregation. In addition respondents agree that management issues contribute to occupational segregation. This implies that issues related to management, which may include policies and practices affecting work/family balance, could impact the distribution of individuals across different roles or occupations. These findings imply that work/family balance policies and practices, as well as factors such as working hours and commute times, should be considered when addressing occupational segregation. Organizations and policymakers should take into account the potential impact of these factors in shaping career choices and opportunities.

### Gender inequalities in the workplace are rooted in occupational segregation or organizational promotion policies.

The analysis of Table 3 indicates that respondents agree that religious freedom has an influence on gender-based promotion policies (Mean: 3.24). While there is some variability in responses (Standard Deviation: 1.05), the general consensus is in favor of the idea that religious freedom affects promotion policies. Respondents also agree that the lack of bodily autonomy influences gender-based promotion policies (Mean: 2.50). However, there is a relatively higher level of variability in responses (Standard Deviation: 1.07). This indicates that while there is agreement, there is also diversity in opinions. With a mean score of 2.55, respondents agree that age and geographic location influence gender-based promotion policies. Some variability in responses is evident (Standard Deviation: 1.05), indicating that opinions on the impact of these factors vary among respondents. Respondents strongly agree that gender identity and sexual orientation have an influence on gender-based promotion policies (Mean: 3.47). The relatively low standard deviation (0.70) suggests a high level of consensus among respondents regarding the impact of these factors on promotion policies. The grand mean of mean of 2.94 with a standard deviation of 0.97 shows that various factors, including religious freedom, lack of bodily autonomy, age and geographic location, and gender identity and sexual orientation, influence gender-based promotion policies. This implies that there is a perception among respondents that promotion policies may differ based on factors related to gender, such as religious freedom, bodily autonomy, age, geographic location, and gender identity.

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## Recommendations

1. Organizations should invest in gender sensitivity training programs to raise awareness and eliminate gender-based biases in the workplace. Training should focus on issues such as religious freedom, bodily autonomy, and gender identity, ensuring employees and management understand the importance of inclusivity and equitable promotion policies.

2. Organizations should develop and implement robust diversity and inclusion policies that account for various factors influencing promotion policies. These policies should be designed to address age, geographic location, and gender identity, ensuring that all employees have equal opportunities for career advancement.
3. To mitigate the impact of factors like long commutes and excessive working hours, organizations should consider flexible work arrangements. This can help employees, especially women, better manage their work-life balance and pursue career advancement without the undue burden of time constraints.
4. Organizations should maintain transparency in their promotion processes and hold themselves accountable for promoting gender equality. This includes ensuring that promotion decisions are made based on merit and not influenced by discriminatory factors.

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## Conclusion

To foster a workplace characterized by gender equality and support the career advancement of women, organizations must take deliberate steps to address these issues - promoting gender sensitivity, implementing diversity and inclusion policies, supporting work-life balance, and ensuring transparency and accountability in promotion decisions are crucial steps in this journey.

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## Funding:

This research work was funded by Nigerian Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) through Institutional Based Research (IBR) Project Grant 2023.

## Acknowledgement:

The authors acknowledge TETFund for the financial support of this work. We are also grateful to the Management of Federal Polytechnic Nekede and staff of Research, Innovation and Development of the institution.

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