

# Advancing National Socio-Economic Development and Health Care through Women Education: Implications for Counseling.

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## Abstract

Every society considers the education sector as a necessary indicator of economic, social and health advancement. Moreover, in a nation fraught with poverty, hunger, illiteracy and diseases, education is one of the few weapons that can contribute to meaningful improvement in people's lives. Nigeria women seem to carry a disproportionate burden of poverty and landlessness that permeates developing societies so that any significant improvement in their role via education can have an important impact on breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and inadequate healthcare currently affecting the nation. Increased women education would not only increase productivity in the fields but also result in greater labour force, lower fertility and mortality rates and improved child health and nutrition which result leads to multiplier effects on the quality of a nation's resources. Women's education increases the equitability of the distribution of national wealth and opportunities for citizens regardless of gender. Women seem to be the pulse of the society just as the household is the index of a nation's wellbeing. A nation that fails to educate her women is running a marathon with one leg and may not go far. This paper focuses on women education and its significance for national socioeconomic development and health care. It also brings out some impediments, obstacles and barriers confronting women education. Thereafter counseling implications were geared towards the need to explicitly address and eradicate persistent gender stereotypes which hinder women from fully utilizing their potentials in national development.

**Keywords:** - Women, Education, Socioeconomic Development, Healthcare, Counselling Implications.

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and the 9th most populous country in the world, with an estimated population of 173.6 million. According to [13] the country has been undergoing explosive population growth and has one of the highest growth and fertility rates in the world. By UN estimates, Nigeria will be one of the countries responsible for most of the world's total population increase by 2050.

According to [14] Nigeria has one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Petroleum and oil resources play a large role in the Nigerian economy. The country is the 6th largest producer of petroleum in the world and it is the 8th largest exporter. However, while the revenues made from oil provide the largest source of income for Nigeria, the country has become overly-dependent on its oil sector whereas other areas of the economy such as agriculture, palm oil production, groundnut and coconut processing are in decline.

Nigeria seems to possess a stark dichotomy of wealth and poverty. In spite of the country's vast oil wealth, the majority of Nigerians are poor. According to [16], 71 percent of the population lives on less than one dollar a day and 92 percent on less than two dollars a day. Although the country is rich in natural resources, its economy cannot yet meet the basic needs of the people. Such disparity between the growth of the GDP and the increasing poverty seems to be indicative of a skewed distribution of Nigeria's wealth.

The 2012 United Nations Human Development Index ranks Nigeria 158 out of 177 countries; this is a significant decrease in its human development rank of 151 in 2004. According to them, about 64 percent of households in Nigeria consider themselves to be poor while 32 percent of the households say their economic situation had worsened over a period of one year. cursory observation reveals that poverty still remains one of the most critical challenges facing the country and population growth rates have meant a steady increase in the number of poor.

The majority of Nigerians live without indoor plumbing and electricity, and many lack access to clean water and sanitation facilities. This lack of infrastructure helps Nigeria's high infant mortality rate ranking the ninth highest of all countries. A few more statistics by [16] give a brief outline of the birth to death experiences: a full 24% Nigerians age 5-14 are involved in child labor; 70% of Nigerians between the ages of 15-24 has attained literacy (with many more males than females able to read and write); and life expectancy in Nigeria is 52 years.

Though Nigeria seems to be faced with a rising population and over exploitation of her natural resources especially in the oil sector, the governments seem to still focus on achieving short-term development objectives at the expense of long term sustainability. Nigeria's very existence is not only threatened by the prevailing socio-economic conditions but also by many poverty-related disease conditions among her citizens especially women and children.

Observing economic development from a human capital perspective [13], opined that growth should be measured by the capabilities and opportunities that people enjoy rather than through material output measures like Gross National Income (GNI) per capita. In line with Sen's opinion, [7] observed that economic development is best measured by institutional factors that support political economic, social and other human/social capital in a way that creates wealth. He opines that a country cannot be economically developed without corresponding improvement in its citizen's education and quantity of life.

According to [15] estimated the total population of female in the world as 83,506,364 and 49.6% of world population. A ratio of 101 males to 100 females was also estimated. [4] observed that nearly six in ten poor adults are women. In the same vein, [7] asserted that women's poverty rates were substantially above the poverty rates for men. According to the [6] more than one in seven women-nearly 18million and about one in five children-nearly 14.7 million lived in poverty in 2013. Though women seem to have the potential to change their own economic status as well as that of the communities and countries in which they lives, more often than not, woman's economic contributions go unrecognized, their work undervalued and their promise unnourished. Unequal opportunities between women and men continue to hamper women's ability to lift them from poverty and gain more options to improve their lives and that of the nations in which they live.

In contemporary times, the economic well-being of women is often used as an indicator of overall advancement of a society. The better women fare relative to men, the argument goes,

the better the overall society is at creating equal opportunities and benefits for its entire people.

Throughout the world, women seem to make vital contributions to industrial output. According to [14], over 200 million women are employed across all industry sectors, with half of this number in developing countries. Their work not only sustains their families, but also makes a major contribution to socio-economic progress. cursory observations also reveal that most women are employed in low-skilled, poorly paid positions, where they are often exposed to health hazards. On the other hand, increasing the number of highly educated women into senior decision-making positions would go a long way to better the lots of women and the nation [4]. The creativity and talent of all women are invaluable resource, which can and should be developed both for their own self-realization and for the benefit of society as a whole.

The key to enhancing women's opportunities, and hence their position in industry and the economy, is to provide them with access to education. Training to upgrade women's technological capabilities and to enhance their entrepreneurial and business skills, whether in simple artisanal production or in high-technology industries, is the heart of allowing women to advance to more rewarding position to contribute to national economic growth

### **Nigeria Health Care System**

Cursory observations show that Nigeria's Health Sector aside the electricity problem ravaging the country is in shambles. In many towns and villages, most hospitals and primary health care's centers are just dilapidated structures where there are no electricity and water supplies. On many occasions, relatives have to buy water in jerry cans for patients use. Health workers in many cases wait endlessly for patients' relatives to purchase the required drugs and disposable gloves to treat their loved ones.

According to National Demography Health Survey, though immunization coverage in Nigeria has improved tremendously but only 13% coverage has taken place in the rural areas. This might be reasons why some Nigeria children are still dying of everyday preventable diseases. It is sad to note that Nigeria is losing her experienced health workers to developed countries as a result of neglect in their health sector. As a result of poor wages, poor motivation, persistent shortage of basic medical supplies, outdated equipment and limited career opportunities for health workers among others, there are incessant strikes and down-tools among medical doctors and nurses leading to the loss of many lives on such occasion.

The corruption and concomitant economic mismanagement in Nigeria have contributed to the poor health and socio-economic status of the citizens. The productive sector and social infrastructure have also deteriorated remarkably. Although time-series demographic data seems to be relatively lacking in Nigeria, there is overwhelming evidence that key health indicators have either stagnated or worsened in many states of the country.

Female education is of great importance in raising labour productivity and wages with a consequential rise in household income and a reduction in poverty. Female education also produces social gains by improving health (the woman's own health and the health of her children) increasing child schooling and reducing fertility.

Presently in Nigeria, Under-5 morbidity and mortality are still very high as shown in table 1 below.

**Table 1, Under Five Morbidity and Mortality rates in Nigeria.**

Cause	Infant morbidity Rate	Under Five Morbidity Rate	Infant mortality Rate	Under Five Mortality Rate
Malaria	38%	30%	27%	41%
Diarrhea	27%	22%	24%	24%
Acute Respiratory Infections	15%	19%	22%	15%
Vaccine Preventable Diseases	17%	16%	10%	15%
Others	3%	3%	5%	8%

**Source: National Development Health Scheme NBHS (2012)**

The major causes of morbidity and mortality in under- five children in Nigeria are virtually the same as those responsible for ill health and death in infants. Malaria, diarrhoea diseases, vaccine preventable disease and acute respiratory infections are responsible for 95% of morbidity and almost 90% of mortality in under-five children [16].

Compared with other developing countries [9], the average birth per women in Nigeria is still very high as shown in table 2 below:

**Table 2. Average Birth Rate in Developing Countries**

Country	Average births per woman
Chad	6.3
Nigeria	5.7
Ghana	4.0
Egypt	3.0
India	2.7
Brazil	2.5
Iran	1.9

**Source: National Development Health Scheme NBHS (2012)**

Cursory observations show that women and girls are more likely to be impoverished than men and boys perhaps as a result of socialization processes. It should come as no surprise then that, in most regions of the world, female literacy and education fall far short of male literacy and education. While poverty and cultural factors must surely influence the extent of female deprivation, they do not explain it entirely.

### **FEMALE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA.**

Education, especially women education remains one of the major ways to advance the nation's socio-economic development and healthcare. An overview of Nigeria education system [8] still shows school enrolment statistics in favour of male as seen in table 3 below.

Since there are more male than female in the primary school enrolment it seems certain that with the prevalent cultural biases in favour of the male child, more male would be found in tertiary institutions and consequently in jobs requiring education.

As a result of these cultural biases and high illiteracy rates, when a boy is born in most developing countries like Nigeria, friends and relatives exclaim congratulations. A son means insurance and successor. He will inherit his father's property and get a job to help support the family. When a girl is born the reaction is different. Some women weep when they find out

their baby is a girl. Some husbands even abandon their wives in the hospital when they deliver baby girls because to them, a daughter is another expense; her place is in the home not in the world of men, a child that cannot propagate the family name is born. A girl may not be able to help feeling inferior when everything around her tells her she is worth less than a boy and declare her to be second-rate.

**Table 3. National Summary of Primary School Statistics (1999 - 2005)**

Year	Total enrolment	Male enrolment	Percentage	Female enrolment	Percentage	Remark
1996	15,496,074	8,935,865	57.66	6,560,209	42.33	more male
1997	17,496,553	9,837,394	56.54	7,560,159	43.45	more male
1998	16,045,567	9,232,885	57.54	6,812,682	42.45	more male
1999	17,907,010	10,058,434	56.17	7,848,576	43.82	more male
2000	19,158,439	10,745,128	56.08	8,413,311	43.91	more male
2001	19,263,534	10,805,722	56.09	8,457,212	43.90	more male
2002	19,861,682	11,070,610	55.73	8,791,072	44.26	more male
2003	25,772,044	14,433,764	56.0	11,338,280	43.99	more male
2004	20,037,480	11,141,614	55.60	8,895,866	44.39	more male
2005	20,951,818	11,712,479	55.90	9,239,339	44.09	more male
Total	191,891,201	107,973,895	56.26	83,917,306	43.73	more male

**Source: Universal Basic Education (UBEC) Abuja.**

These combination of extreme poverty, illiteracy and deep cultural biases against the girl-child creates a remorseless cycle of discrimination that keep girls/women in developing countries from living up to their full potential especially in the areas of education. Whereas education still remains the only tool that can help to break the pattern of gender biases and bring lasting change for women and indeed national socio-economic development in developing countries

### **Socio-Economic Benefits of Women Education**

While the economic benefits of educating girls are similar in size to the economic benefits of educating boys, recent findings seem to suggest that the socio-economic benefits from investing in female education are far greater than those from investing in male education.

### **HEALTH BENEFITS OF WOMEN EDUCATION**

Female education may have effects on the total fertility rate (and hence on population growth), the infant mortality rate, the female disadvantage in child survival, and on child health and nutrition. By contrast, for example, a study by [12] using national aggregate data from 72 countries regressed the total fertility rate of 1985 on the male and female secondary school enrolment rates lagged by 10 years, i.e. on the enrolment rates of 1975. The objective was to examine the effect of education on fertility, controlling for a number of other factors such as family planning service provision and per capita income. The results show that female secondary school enrolment (lagged by 10 years) is inversely correlated with the total fertility rate but that male secondary school enrolment shows no strong correlation. Similarly, a regression of the school enrolment rates shows that while female education is associated with lower infant mortality, male education has no statistically significant effect.

A similar exercise by [5] in India using district level aggregated data shows that whereas the district female literacy rate had a strong inverse correlation on the district average total fertility rate, on under-five child mortality rate, and on female disadvantage in child survival, the district male literacy rate had no significant effect on each of these outcomes. Moreover, according to him, district per capital income, urbanization, and the spread of medical facilities were not statistically significant determinants of total fertility rate. While these latter three

variables do have positive effects on child survival levels, their effects were relatively small compared with the powerful effect of female literacy.

According to [1] household survey data shows an inverse correlation between female schooling and fertility in virtually all of the countries, though the relationship is non-linear: female primary schooling has an inverse relation with fertility in about half of the countries only but female secondary schooling is universally associated with lower fertility, and the strength of the correlation increases with increasing years of schooling. Among married women, husband's schooling has no significant relation with fertility in about one-third of the countries. Moreover, in cases where both women and men schooling matters, women's schooling exerts a much larger negative effect on fertility than men's schooling. Education of women improves child health because of educated mothers' greater knowledge of the importance of hygiene and of simple remedies [2]. All this lower infant mortality. This in turn means that a family does not need to have a large number of children in order to hedge against the possibility of premature death of some children. Further, it appears that education of female's increases the age at marriage (or at cohabitation) and through this delay, lowers the total fertility rate, i.e. number of children ever born to a woman.

Simulations show that the benefits from expanding female education are far greater than the benefits from other public interventions such as improving family planning service provision or increasing the number of physicians in the population. For example, [12] found that a doubling of the 1975 average secondary school enrolment ratio in the 72 sample countries from 19% to 38% would have reduced the average number of births in 1985 by 29% compared to the actual number in 1985, whereas a doubling of the family planning provision would have reduced the number of birth by only 3.5%.

The gains in term of deaths averted are also striking, stimulations by [12] also predict that doubling the female secondary school enrolment ratio from 19% to 38% in 1975 reduces infant deaths in 1985 by 64% while doubling the number of physicians reduces the number of infant deaths by a mere 2.5%. Doubling per capita income (or GDP) from the average of \$650 in the 72 sample countries to \$1300 would have no effect on the number of infant deaths [11]. [12] also reported data on desire family size from the world fertility survey for 37 countries. Econometric analysis of this data suggested that after controlling for per capital income, female secondary school enrolment was a highly significant determinant of desire family size (and therefore of the total fertility rate and population growth rate). Male school enrolment ratio however, had no impact on desired family size.

### **ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF WOMEN EDUCATION**

Human capital theory suggests that just as physical capital (machines) augments person's economic productivity, so human capital acquired through education improves the productivity of individuals. Studies of the sources of economic growth demonstrate persuasively that education seem to play a major role as a factor in the rise of output per worker. The new growth theories in economics place education and human resource development at the center of their explanation for long-term economic growth. Confidence seem to have grown in the belief that education affects economic growth because many studies have shown the positive correlation between a country's educational effort and its economic status, and causality has been attributed to education.

If female schooling raises human capital, productivity, and economic growth as much as male schooling does, then women's disadvantage in education is economically inefficient.

Researchers world-wide seem to agree that, in general, the economic benefits from women's education calculated as the economic rate of return to education are comparable to those from men's education. Thus, from the point of view of economic efficiency, the gender gap in education is undesirable.

A large body of microeconomic research evidences seems to agree that increase in women's education generally lead to increase in their labour force participation as well as in their earning. Educated women's greater participation in labour market work and their higher earnings are thought to be good for their own status within the household, and are good for their children because it appears that a greater proportion of women's income than men's is spent on child good rather than capital projects. On the down side, it may be thought that educated women's greater labour force participation takes them away from their children for longer periods of time (than is the case for uneducated or less educated women) and this may disadvantage educated women's children through neglect. At present this is a relatively unresearched area. However, limited evidence suggests that children whose mothers work have just as good or better educational outcomes than children whose mothers do not work. Moreover, women's educational empowerment in reducing desired family size, fertility, population growth, child morbidity, child mortality, and gender-bias in child mortality, are important to a nations socio-economic and health advancement.

Economists tend to focus on the role of incentives as a way of understanding phenomena. They reason that female education lowers the fertility rate by reducing desired family size and that this, in turn, is because education raises the value of women's economic activities by raising the labour market rewards from going out of the home for work. In other words, the opportunity-cost of staying at home for child bearing and rearing increases as women become more educated, women then tend to desire smaller families. Education may also change women's preferences about the quantity versus the quality of children, with educated women choosing fewer children but of better "quality". Increase in women's income would appear to have particular benefits for child quality.

Cursory observation shows that mother's education has a greater impact on the educational attainment and school achievement of their children than father's education. This is plausible given the greater interaction between mother and children in most families since, in most countries, fathers are usually the main earners in the household. In this way education of females contributes more significantly to increases in human capital, productivity, and economic growth not only in their own generation but also in the next generation.

Equality of the sexes-in terms of men and women's command over resources, their access to education and health, and in terms of freedom to develop their potential – has an intrinsic value in its own right. The equal treatment of the sexes for intrinsic reason is, in the parlance of welfare economics, the equity reason for reducing gender-imbalances is what might be termed the instrumental reason - that is the gains to be had from granting equality. For example, if with equal education, women's contribution to economic development (or to other desirable goals) is comparable to men's, and then reducing gender-imbalances in education will enhance women's capacity to contribute to economic progress. This is the efficiency reason for reducing gender inequality in areas where women are currently deprived. Both the intrinsic (equity) and instrumental (efficiency) based reasons for gender equality must be emphasized.

## COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

Women as mothers play a great role in socialization process all over the world. They are the bearers and rearers of children. They nurture the children for the future of the nation passing on the norms and values of the society for its continue survival. Women's participation in the economic, social, political and cultural transformation of the world is the central issue of our time. The new world environment depends upon access to knowledge about greater participation in civil life. Thus, ensuring the right to education of the girl child is a matter of morality, justice and economic sense. According to [18] the denial of the right to education hurts people's capacity to work productively to sustain and protect. Denial to the girl child harms the cause of democracy and social progress and by extension global peace and security. Illiteracy makes it difficult for the girl child to make her way in the society as adult in a spirit of understanding, peace and gender equality among all peoples and groups.

Reading, writing and arithmetic are useful to people in many ways. According to [3], literacy should be used to develop people interdependence, confidence and the ability to cope with everyday life. Literacy enables the recipients to analyse things more clearly and to bring the recorded experience of people to bear on the problems. Thus literate persons are better able to cope with the modern world. Nigeria require both socio-economic policies geared towards sustainable development to enhance the human capital of the women in particular, priorities for education reforms therefore should be made in the area their basic education, and vocational training.

The issue of women schooling have important policy implications. First, they suggest the need for public education about the intrinsic and instrumental value of women's education. Such a policy step would aim to change conservative attitudes towards girls' schooling.

Secondly, it is counselled that public policy should be made to compensate parents especially in the education backward states by giving extra subsidies for girls' schooling. This seems to make sense because many of the benefits of girls' education are for public benefits, i.e. they accrue not only to the educated individual and her family but also to society in general- for example, lower infant mortality and fertility rates. One further policy suggestion is that governments should improve the economic incentives for women in the labour market.

It is counseled that national and international organizations concerned with issues involving women education and development should take urgent measures towards correcting education gender inequalities and subsequently promote the role of women in advancing national socio-economic and health status.

## CONCLUSION

Female education is of great importance in raising labour productivity and wages with a consequential rise in household income and a reduction in poverty. Education of women also produces social gains by improving health (the woman's own health, the health of her children and husband) increasing child schooling and reducing fertility. Inferentially therefore, education of females contributes significantly to increase in health status, human capital, productivity and economic growth not only in their own generation but even in the next.

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