

THE NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

ISSN: 0331-4111

E-ISSN: 2736-075X

Volume 21, No. 1 (June, 2023)

DOI: 10.36108/NJSA/3202.12.0170

Dynamics of Gendered-Work Inequality in the Power Sector: A Study of IBEDC

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Abstract

This study explored gendered work inequality in the engineering and customer service departments of the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company (IBEDC), by investigating gender inequality forms and causes. The gendered organization theory framed the study, using a descriptive research design. Qualitative data from twenty-seven employee interviews and six management team member interviews were collected. Customer bias and positive discrimination emerged as significant gender inequality forms in customer service, predominantly affecting male workers. Harassment and work prejudice were significant forms in technical/engineering departments, mainly impacting female workers. Socialization and work prejudice were identified as the major causes of gender inequality in both departments. To counter socio-cultural influence, it was suggested that organisations adopt internationally standardised gender diversity policies and implement gender sensitivity training for all staff. Further research should examine gender inequality in two different gendered organisations for deeper insights.

Keywords: Gendered-work, power sector, gender inequality, forms and causes

Introduction

Gender inequality is a major issue that has been debated for many years (Eboiyehi, Fayomi & Eboiyehi, 2016). Due to its importance, the United Nations included it as one of the sustainable development goals. According to the 2020 global gender gap report, the global gender equality gap will not be breached for another hundred years at the current pace of change (United Nations, n.d.). Workplace gender inequality is a specific form of gender inequality that has been the subject of much discourse (Owoyemi & Olusanya,

2014). It occurs when people are treated differently in the workplace because of their sex. This can happen in areas such as recruitment, promotion, training and development, and remuneration. There are many forms of workplace gender inequality, including discrimination, harassment, and stereotyping (Eboiyehi *et al.*, 2016). The causes of workplace gender inequality are complex and varied. Some of the most common causes include gender stereotypes, organizational cultures, and laws and policies (Owoyemi & Olusanya, 2014). Organizational cultures are the values and beliefs that are shared by an organization. When organizational cultures are sexist, they can create a hostile environment for women and other underrepresented groups. Laws and policies can also discriminate against women in the workplace. Workplace gender inequality is a serious problem that has a negative impact on individuals, organizations, and societies (Eboiyehi *et al.*, 2016). By taking action to address this issue, we can create a more equitable and just workplace for everyone.

The concept of "Gendered Work" encompasses the intricate processes that shape the definition, organization, division, and valuation of work, reflecting the intricate web of relations between genders and the evolving connotations of "masculinity" and "femininity" within distinct socioeconomic contexts and timeframes (Chalmers, L., 2014). This study operates within a context where gender-dominated work perpetuates various inequalities for both sexes, driven by socio-cultural, economic, and religious factors. Gender disparities in Africa are evident in unequal prospects, conditions, privileges, earnings, educational access, and legal rights (AFDB, 2015). Organizational culture, deeply rooted in societal norms, fuels gender inequality, as highlighted by Pat O'Connor (2020) citing Acker (1990), showcasing the prevalence of gender segregation in paid and unpaid work, income disparity, cultural stereotypes, and personal gender identities within organizational processes.

The Encyclopaedia of European Social History (n.d) underscores that gender roles significantly mould societal behaviour, endowing men with qualities like emotional detachment and strength, while assigning women nurturing and compassionate attributes. These divisions have been reinforced by economic, technological, and cultural factors, extending their influence to family dynamics where fathers are providers and mothers nurturers, thus shaping gendered career choices. Defying these norms often triggers resistance, stigmatizing individuals as anomalies and leading to social and emotional consequences. Consequently, gender inequality permeates multiple dimensions of society, creating persistent challenges for equitable representation and opportunity.

Forms of inequalities in gendered work are diverse, ranging from employment to inclusion in training and promotion. USAID's (2016) survey identified key areas to base gender equality on, they include; recruitment and employment policies as well as work environment, retention, internships, and training. In the 21st century, it is important to investigate the forms gender inequality has taken, this is given the changing nature of work and the awareness of the populace of workplace inequality. Additionally, the discourse

on gender inequality focusing on just the issues affecting females can be considered an inequality in itself if there is discrimination against males which is unexplored especially in the twenty-first century rife with gender identity issues, which has shifted the discourse from just male and female to include other perceived gender types. The bulk of work done on issues of workplace gender inequality notwithstanding, there is a gap in knowledge on the specific forms of inequalities in gendered work in Nigeria.

Gender inequality in gendered work can be attributed to several factors. Several researches have posited that culture and socialization shape the career choice of an individual, this then creates and further propagates the basis for men's and women's work. According to Eboiyehi, Fayomi & Eboiyehi (2016), Gender-based roles that do not necessarily apply to the workplace are replicated because actors subscribe to Social and organizational reality. Another cause is the education level of applicants or the choice of career at the level of inception. Some occupations remained gendered because the people who gain education in that particular area remain a particular gender and this leaves a lack of balance in the available skilled manpower for certain positions. This causes a trend to emerge where there are only men or women available to fill certain positions and this can lead to gendered recruitment practices which further promotes inequality. Though data exist on the causes of workplace gender inequality, there is a need to obtain data on the gendered workplace.

Gender inequality has been at the forefront of most industry discourse, and notwithstanding, the area of inequalities in gendered work has not been sufficiently addressed and this can pose threats to the productivity, and wellbeing of marginalized staff and the organization at large. Therefore, the study examined the existence and the knowledge of members of the management team on the forms of gender inequality in gendered work. This paper examines the forms and perceived causes of gender inequality in gendered work in the Nigerian workplace. This discourse flows through sections, progressing from the reviewed literature to the methodology adopted, followed by the presentation and discussion of findings. The article rounds off with a summary of key points and recommendations for policymakers, organisations and further research.

Empirical literature

Wacjman & Piasna's (2018) investigation of gender inequality in the evolving job landscape underscores the need to comprehend the origins of such inequality, enabling an understanding of digitalization's 21st-century impact on women's employment. The unequal distribution of unpaid domestic tasks, historically shouldered by women, reduces their availability for paid work (Eurofound, 2016a), leading to a devaluation of women's labour and an advantageous position for men in negotiations due to their greater availability for extended hours and overtime (Wacjman & Piasna, 2018). Struthers & Strachan's (2019) research on women's entry into male-dominated trades reveals harassment and intimidation as hindrances, creating a sense of

insecurity among females entering such fields. A study by Racusin, Davidio, Brescoll, Graham & Handelsman (2012) exhibits gender bias favouring male names in hiring decisions. The negative correlation between academic rank and being a woman (Santos & Van Phu, 2019) suggests women's limited advancement opportunities, fostering settings conducive to gender-based power imbalances (Pat O'Connor, 2020). Gender stereotypes propagated through socialization further infiltrate workplaces, with girls and boys internalizing distinct traits. Franks, Schurink & Fourie (2006) reveal the persistence of traditional gender roles in careers, placing additional burdens on women as they juggle nurturing roles with professional aspirations. Recognizing and addressing these underlying causes is essential for dismantling systemic gender inequality and fostering equitable workplaces.

Existing research explores various forms of gender inequality in workplaces. Essig & Soparnot (2019) identified gender inequalities in female-dominated work, including occupational choice conflict, work-life balance, positive discrimination, peer difficulties, and speaking up. Contrarily, Simpson (2004) found that men in nursing received preferential treatment and lenient standards. In their examination of the career barriers faced by female engineers, Du Plessis & Barkhuizen (2012) discovered inadequate training and mentorship as primary issues. Damaske (2011) highlighted the impact of gender inequalities, affecting women's migration between occupations. Martin & Barnard (2013) noted negative experiences in male-dominated fields, impacting women's feelings of bias and underutilization. Akinolu & Haupt (2019) uncovered gender-discriminatory interactions among university students in male-dominated disciplines, including the marginalization of feminine interests, gender-based requests, and belittlement.

Wacjman & Piasna's (2018) study on contemporary gender inequality reveals that understanding its persistent labour market presence is pivotal for comprehending the impact of 21st-century digitalization on women's employment. The unequal distribution of unpaid domestic tasks remains a concern (Wacjman, 2008; Piasna & Drahokoupil, 2017). Women historically shoulder unpaid work (Eurofound, 2016a), constraining their availability for paid employment. Consequently, labour's value differs, and men's extended work hours favour higher pay (Wacjman & Piasna, 2018). Struthers and Strachan (2019) pinpoint intimidation and harassment as causes discouraging women from entering male-dominated fields, fostering gender inequality. Female students express discomfort pursuing such careers due to low female representation, which may lead to teasing and mockery. Racusin *et al.*'s (2012) study reveals gender bias favouring male-named CVs, impacting hiring decisions. Santos & Van Phu (2019) highlight a negative relationship between being a woman and academic rank, potentially limiting leadership roles and fostering unequal gender dynamics (Pat O'Connor, 2020). Gender inequality's root in socialization permeates workplaces, with gender stereotypes influencing language and behaviour. Girls are taught nurturing traits, while boys learn assertiveness, both conforming to societal expectations (Ozkaplan, 2013).

Franks, Schurink & Fourie (2006) observe that women maintain traditional roles while building careers, leading to burdens and work-related challenges.

Gendered organisation theory

The gendered organization theory, developed by Joan Acker in 1990, asserts that work organizations are inherently structured with gender inequality. Acker's theory posits that gendered organizations are characterized by the differentiation of strength, control, emotion, and identity along male-female lines. The absence of women in historical contexts has led to masculine norms being considered gender-neutral, concealing the embedded gender biases within organizational structures. Acker (1990) highlights the concept of the 'ideal worker' centred on a male who relies on a woman to manage domestic responsibilities, revealing the gendered construction of professional sectors. Female managers and professionals often adhere to traditional domestic roles, maintaining a dichotomy between social roles (Gascoigne, Parry & Buchanan, 2015).

Acker's theory delineates five processes that perpetuate gender inequality within organizations: division of labour, cultural symbols, workplace interactions, individual identities, and organizational logic. The division of labour, primarily shaped by managerial decisions, sustains gender distinctions even as they evolve with technological advancements. Cultural symbols reinforce gender divisions, as exemplified by the use of "he" as a universal pronoun. Workplace interactions, through interruptions and conversational dynamics, can uphold gender inequality (West & Zimmerman, 1983; Acker, 1990). Individual identities manifest through choices in work, language, clothing, and presentation, reflecting gendered self-perceptions. Organizational logic, governed by policies and principles, can perpetuate gender biases through gender-stereotyped job descriptions and pay rates. Acker acknowledges that managers often perpetuate gender stereotypes, reinforcing masculine qualities in organizational hierarchies. Consequently, gender discourses become entrenched in organizational logic, leading to gender disparities (Williams, Muller & Kilanski, 2012). The gendered organisation theory relates to this work as an explanation for the persistence of gender inequality in gendered work as the organisational logic that shapes organisational culture and policies is gendered and perpetuates gender inequality practises. Though its examples are skewed towards male-dominated fields, it also explains the presence and persistence of inequality in female-dominated fields.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive design to explore the origins of gendered work inequality within the context of the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company (IBEDC). Such a design is suited for comprehensively summarizing specific events or phenomena experienced by individuals or groups. A semi-structured in-depth interview approach was utilized, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the subject. This method ensured alignment with

research objectives while accommodating respondents' personal experiences and insights. Additionally, key informant interviews were conducted with department heads and management team members to gather valuable perspectives from leadership roles. The research was conducted at the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company, intentionally chosen due to its substantial workforce size and the gendered characteristics inherent in the energy sector's labour dynamics. The study specifically focused on two key departments: the engineering and technical field operations department, and the customer service department of IBEDC. Established in November 2013 following Nigeria's electricity distribution services privatization, the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company operates across seven states, with a staff strength exceeding two thousand nine hundred. Its corporate headquarters is situated at the Capital Building, 115 MKO Abiola Way, Ibadan.

The selection of this study area was influenced by the company's prominence as a major electricity distribution entity in Nigeria, its geographical proximity to the researchers, staff strength and its gendered components. The energy sector, particularly within generation, transmission, and distribution companies, presents a pronounced gender inequality landscape. The USAID's 2016 report on Gender Diversity in the Power Utilities Sector highlights engineering and customer service as gendered fields. A global perspective, shared by the International Labour Organisation (2020), indicates disparities, with customer service jobs being 34% male and 64% female, while electrical and electronic trade workers are 91% male and 9% female. Science and engineering professionals exhibit a gender distribution of 72% male and 28% female.

The research population encompassed Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company employees, with the target audience consisting of select management members, engineering and technical field operations personnel, and customer service department staff. A sample size of 33 employees was purposively selected: nine (9) males and four (4) females from the customer service department (female-gendered work) were selected, and nine (9) females and five (5) males from the technical/engineering department (male-gendered work) were selected to participate in the in-depth interview. This male-to-female ratio was adopted to ensure a level of balance and objectivity. Furthermore, the study sampled the opinions of some members of the management team to supplement the data gathered from the in-depth interview. There were exactly six (6) participants from the management team, a mixture of managers and heads of departments from customer service, technical/engineering, and human resource departments, respectively. This sample size was chosen following Adler & Adler's (2012) recommendation of a mean sample size of thirty (30) for qualitative research. The purposive sampling technique was used to select those to be interviewed out of the available staff the researcher met in the office, especially in the technical department, where female staff were thinly spread across the company's various business hubs in Ibadan. The data for this study was gathered using in-

depth interviews and key informant interviews, which were thematically analyzed via the use of ATLAS TI version 9.0 and descriptive methods, employing ethnographic summaries.

Ethical principles and guidelines, particularly the Helsinki Declaration (1980), were adhered to, and formal permission was sought and received (see Figure 1) from the management of the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company after introducing the purpose of the study and the instrument of data collection before the commencement of the research. As such, the following fundamental principles were adhered to: voluntariness and informed consent; confidentiality; anonymity; non-maleficence; and objectivity.

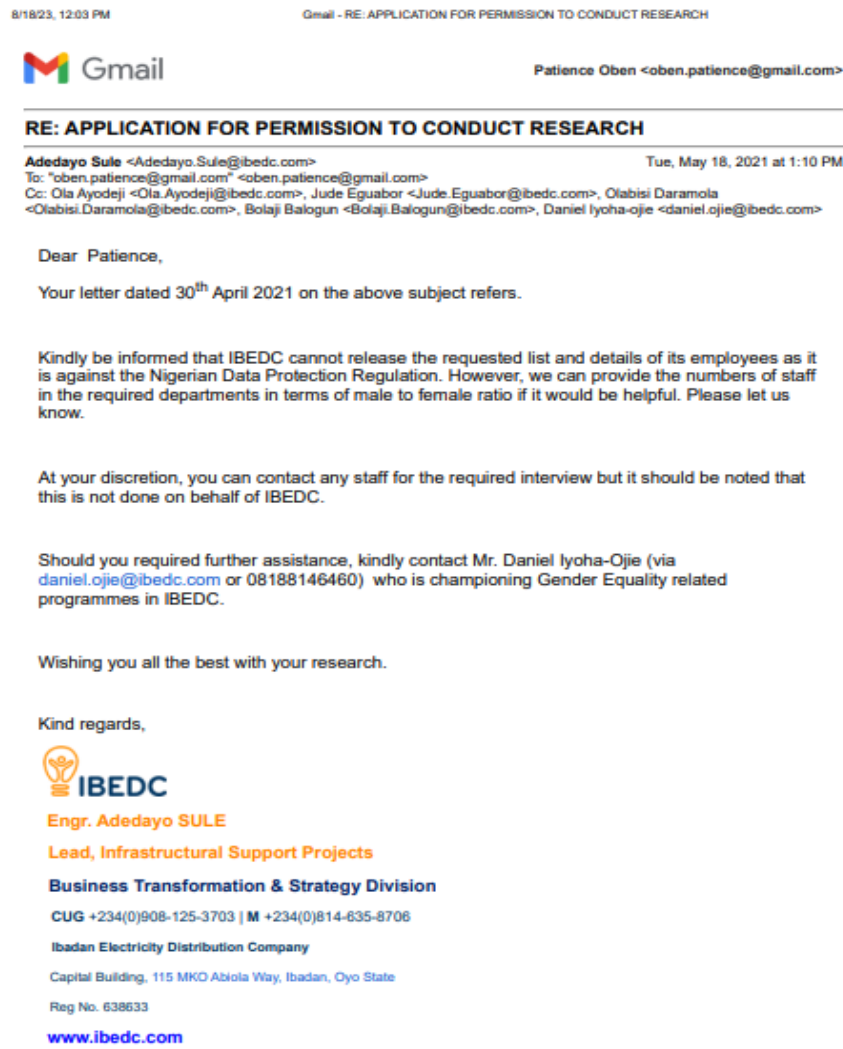


Figure 1: A picture of the email, permitting the researcher to conduct the research in IBEDC

Source: Field survey (2021)

Data presentation and discussion of findings

Forms of gender inequality

Gender inequality exists in diverse forms and according to the gendered organization theory, it is an inherent part of the formal organization. Directly or indirectly, males and females are treated unequally at work with the treatment often based on the kind of work. This section identified the forms of gender inequality existent in both the customer service department and the technical/engineering department in IBEDC. These different forms include; Customer bias, work prejudice, positive discrimination etc.

Customer bias

This form of inequality ensues from customers treating workers unequally because of their gender. This aligns with the work of Essig and Soparnot (2019) on rethinking gender inequality from the male perspective, where they identified occupational choice conflict as a form of inequality men face in female-dominated work which manifests in discrimination from clients who perceive the job as women's work. This form of gender inequality exists in both departments, the study identified themes here such as customer's preference for female customer service officers, customer's trust for female TECH/ENGR officers and customer's preference for male authority figures and disregard for female authority figures.

The study revealed that based on the job requirements, Customer service officers are required to be patient, calm and empathetic, according to this participant:

“We are particular about the psychology of people during recruitment. Empathetic people are employed not minding the gender. Training also follows this route; people are trained to listen.” (*IDI /M/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ mid-level manager/ June 2021*)

However, due to the association of women with caring and empathetic personalities, there are expected to be the ones in this role. According to the Encyclopaedia of European Social History (n.d), popular beliefs have shaped roles; with the father being the provider and the woman being the nurturer and these expectations affect the way customers react to customer care officers. In corroboration with this perspective, these participants divulged thus:

“Half the time, people just want to speak with women when they come to make complaints because they feel they are more suited to listen to them and understand them.” (*IDI /M/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ CS officer/June 2021*)

“Some customers prefer dealing with females when they come to make inquiries or complaints. They will always demand to speak with the lady. I feel it is mostly a preference thing.” (*IDI /F/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ CS officer/June 2021*)

“From personal experience, customers are calmer when dealing with the female customer care officers.” (*IDI /M/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ CS officer/June 2021*)

“Sometimes when customers are coming to complain to a male customer care officer, they are usually more aggressive than when dealing with a female customer care officer. I have noticed that on more than one occasion. If the aggression is like 90% for the guy it is reduced to 60% for the female.” (*IDI /M/GEN Z/1-5yrs with COY/ CS officer/ June*)

From the excerpt above it can be deduced that distraught customers were calmer when speaking with female CSOs as opposed to their male colleagues. Due to their association of women with calm and empathy, the customers generally relate in a calmer manner with them, even when they are angry. Another dimension of this bias is the automatic trust customers have for female technical/engineering officers. Customers automatically trust female tech officers and believe that they are more truthful and they prefer dealing with them over their male colleagues. Also, due to the low number of females in the department, there is a level of fascination attached to them especially when they are out in the field.

“Personally, when I go out to the field they love it. Some of them even take pictures, especially when I am working on a transformer, they can even call their children to come see us. Also, they feel they can trust us more so they want to speak more to us than our male colleagues. Customers usually believe we will be more truthful with them.” (*IDI /F/GEN Y/6-11yrs with COY/ TECH/ENGR Mid-level manager/ June*)

However, the flip side of these for female workers is the disregard from customers for them as authority figures. This applies to both departments. The perception of females as empathetic and calm makes them disregarded as leaders or assertive. Participants revealed that women were often not given as much respect from customers as their male colleagues. Customers would rather relate with them when they have a complaint and need a sympathetic ear but when they wish to appeal to a higher authority they demand and expect to see a male lead or manager.

“As a matter of fact, at times when a woman is speaking to them, they do not take her seriously which is another bias from that

side. They start asking to speak to the boss, if the boss is a man, they acknowledge that the boss has come, but if she goes in and brings another woman, they just keep demanding to see the boss, and they will say, 'no, no I mean your boss'. So sometimes when there is a man at the front office, it works to our advantage." (*KII /M/Gen X/6-11yrs with COY/Senior manager/June*)

"I experienced a situation where a male customer tried slapping a female customer care officer but when I stepped in to address the issue, he was not as hostile towards me and I was able to calm him down." (*IDI /M/Gen Y/1-5yrs with COY/CS officer/June*)

"When female engineers try to apply alone for private external contracts they are often disrespected and their capabilities doubted." (*IDI /F/GEN Y/6-11yrs with COY/ TECH/ENGR mid-level manager/ June 2021*)

Customer bias is an external form of inequality in gendered work as the bias comes from clients and other externals. It applies to both the customer service and technical/engineering departments. It is apparent in the expectations and preferences of customers for certain sexes depending on their purpose in the organisation. Thus, this can inadvertently affect the recruitment, placement and role allocation functions in an organisation.

Work prejudice

This is an internal form of gendered work inequality. It refers to misconceptions that exist about certain types of work or aspects of work, in the context of it being fit for certain types of people or gender. The study revealed manifestations of these forms of inequality in aspects such as the disregard of technical female officer's capabilities by male colleagues, and the assignment of strenuous work to male staff. According to this participant;

"In my meetings with female engineers, there are complaints that have come up, not really of unfair treatment but of the culture in the workplace that views women and treats them like they do not belong in engineering." (*KII /F/GEN X/6-11yrs with COY/ HOD/ TECH/June 2021*)

Participants revealed the stereotypical views male staff held of their female colleagues regarding their capabilities. They revealed that females were automatically considered unfit or incapable of carrying out most of their job functions, especially when it had to do with heavy lifting or climbing.

“Generally in the technical department, the only possible instance of difference in treatment I can think of is in fieldwork. I have never heard of women climbing electric poles during maintenance or installations, because women are not meant to do that and you cannot even expect a woman to climb a pole. It is believed that women cannot do that and a man has the strength to face whatever challenges he might encounter while on the pole.”
(*IDI /F/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ Tech officer/ June 2021*)

Some of these stereotypes can also be promoted by the female workers as can be deduced from the above participant’s statement. However, the participant below posited that confidence and experience can foster respect from male counterparts and reduce such prejudices.

“Women face lots of challenges as engineers. Our male colleagues often look down on us and feel we cannot carry out most of the tasks, especially when it has to do with equipment maintenance and installation. In my early years, it was easy to be intimidated by them but over time I built up my confidence and I have gained their respect for my capabilities.” (*IDI /F/GEN X/6-11yrs with COY/ mid-level manager/ June 2021*)

Work prejudice can also occur due to chivalrous reasons or because females are believed to be fragile and therefore meant to be cared for. Participants in agreement revealed that;

“In engineering, the only time one notices a difference in treatment is when privileges are given to the woman like telling her to wait back and not go to the field, not to stress herself especially when it has to do with really strenuous tasks. This is a mindset many of us men have in tech.” (*IDI /F/GEN X/12yrs and above with COY/ Technical engineer/ June 2021*)

“Strenuous tasks are usually assigned to the males. For instance, working overtime or over the weekends is usually reserved for us males.” (*IDI /M/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ CS officer/ June 2021*)

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(*IDI /F/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ Tech officer/ June 2021*)

Though this participant was in agreement, a contrary view on the nature of work was stated thus:

“In my early years, it was easy to be intimidated by them but over time I built up my confidence and I have gained their respect for my capabilities. I can install a power transformer and I can wire an entire control room without help from anyone.” (*IDI /F/GEN Y/6-11yrs with COY/ Mid-level manager/ June 2021*)

Taking into consideration the years with the company and the latter participants' mention of early working years, it can be deduced that more expertise for more complicated work like the installation of transformers which will require hard lifting and climbing is gained with experience and time spent on the job.

The form of gender inequality here is two-fold. As deduced from the excerpts, prejudice about work exist in both departments against women as their capability to handle the same work as their male colleagues is doubted. This is the first part, the second is it leads to the exclusion of female workers from some types of work which can reduce their productivity and threaten their career growth. Furthermore, the study revealed that some practices in the workplace feed into the existent societal expectations of men as assertive, leaders, protectors and providers and this place the male workers in the ‘male role trap’ coined by Essig & Soparnot (2019) where they are expected to be ‘able to handle more as men’. Findings from the study revealed that there is more pressure and higher expectation placed on males. Participants in agreement with this disclosed:

“Generally in customer service, the pressure on men is more and that on women is lighter at work.” (*IDI /M/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ CS assistant/ June 2021*)

“Strenuous tasks are usually assigned to the males. For instance, working overtime or over the weekends is usually reserved for us males.” (*IDI /M/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ CS officer/ June 2021*)

“I have noticed that when we are being reprimanded the words used on males are harsher than that used on females, because they feel we can handle it more. Females are spoken to with more diplomacy than guys. I remember an incident where really harsh words were used in reprimanding me but the same thing does not happen with female staff.” (*IDI /M/GEN Z/1-5yrs with COY/ CS officer/ June 2021*)

This is in corroboration with the study of Essig & Soparnot (2019) in their work on rethinking gender inequality, which revealed that male workers get

heavier workloads in female-dominated work. However, it directly contradicts the findings of Simpson (2004) which revealed that some men in nursing; a female-gendered role, felt they were subject to different, more relaxed, rules and expectations and often ‘got away with’ more mistakes than female colleagues. The findings from this study disclose that female workers in customer service departments get more diplomatic reprimands, attract less punitive charges and get away with more defaults than their male colleagues.

Positive discrimination

Due to the growing awareness of organisations of gender inequality, measures are being put in place to breach the gap, most of which could be regarded as ‘positive’ discriminatory tactics. Positive discrimination in this context refers to attempts employed to breach the gender gap in the workplace. This could be carried out in areas such as affirmative action in recruitment, more female training and development opportunities and programmes, etc. This becomes a form of inequality when the other gender’s needs are also not taken into consideration, especially in gendered work where there are males in customer service roles. According to this participant;

“Women are given more slots or opportunities to participate in external events and men are overlooked completely.” (*IDI /M/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ CS officer/ June 2021*)

This contradicts the work of Martin and Barnard (2013) that identified biased infrastructure and biased policies as forms of inequalities against women in male-dominated work, as the policy of more female-themed conferences and significantly higher involvement of female workers in external events is a form of inequality against male workers in female-dominated work instead. Positive discrimination is also apparent in female privilege which could be adopted as a measure of reaching equality or compensation for inequality, having it manifests as preferential treatment or favouritism towards a particular gender connotes gender inequality.

“In other companies, I have noticed that because of the time- off-work women take for childbirth and care, they are usually not considered for employment as much as men, but in IBEDC they treat them well and even give them medical benefits that include their children. Fathers do not get this though.” (*KII/M/GEN X/6-11yrs with COY/ HOD/ TECH/June 2021*)

“In my line of work, most times women are given preferential treatment. For instance, a woman can go on maternity leave for three months with pay some even six months, return and turn in a resignation letter without any punitive measures levelled against

them. Where men fear to tread, women do and come out unscathed.” (*IDI/M/GENY/1-5yrs with COY/CS officer/June 2021*)

“Women are given preferential treatment. In recruitment, a guy without 2:1 might not be recruited but a girl with 2:2 will be employed. I don't know if it is a statutory arrangement. I think it is done to balance out the gender discrepancies in the workplace.” (*IDI /M/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ CS officer/ June 2021*)

“They give me preferential treatment because I am a lady, like for instance, if I fall ill, I am given extra days to rest.” (*IDI /F/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ TECH officer/ June 2021*)

“For instance, in my experience in customer service with another company, a team was being denied remuneration and sought to lay a complaint but, every chance they got to do so was thwarted because they were being represented by guys but once a lady fronted the team, the matter was resolved within the week.” (*IDI /M/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ CS officer/ June 2021*)

It can be inferred from the aforementioned that, the privileges are such that should foster better work-life balance but due to the emphasis this places on women's needs it becomes disadvantageously unequal as it is not replicated with men. However, this contradicts the findings of Frome, Alfred, Eccles and Barber (2006), who opined that organizations are structured and function in ways that do not support women's career patterns and work-life integration. The study revealed that while some participants supported this view, they still commiserated with the practice. Participants that shared this view stated thus:

“As regards leave, I want to fight for paternity leave to be able to assist my wife when the time comes, as we don't have time off work to help out, although I feel women are more entitled to the privilege of maternity leave.” (*IDI /M/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ CS officer/June 2021*)

“Women are expected to handle family duties at home, so if we have to work late, they get the opportunity of leaving on time. I can relate, because, I also have a woman that has to go cook for me at home, so I understand.” *IDI /M/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ CS officer/ June 2021*)

It can be deduced from this that some organizational practices promote inequality and while some participants may seem impervious to them since they do not report or complain, they are still aware of it and feel slighted and discriminated against. This is in agreement with the work of Essig and

Soparnot (2019) which disclosed that positive discriminatory tactics which put females on the fast track can become discriminatory to men.

Harassment

Harassment in this context refers to verbal lashing and sexual objectification existent in the workplace. Study findings revealed this as forms of gender inequality existent in the technical/engineering department of IBEDC.

These participants summed it up thus:

“At times we can be spoken down to and shouted at because there are so few of us. They believe we are senseless and it happens more if a woman has not learned her work properly, but it does not happen with men. When I attend meetings of the women in engineering association, we usually get reports from young female engineers of sexual harassment and also bullying and oppression - their male colleagues shouting on and verbally harassing them.” (*IDI/F/GEN X/6-11yrs with COY/mid-level manager/June 2021*)

“Men can enter any office and speak to anyone without facing issues, especially when it relates to getting information or help with work, but women are limited because it often leads to sexual harassment or rumours with sexual connotations. This makes us not to be able to ask for help from our senior colleagues, so we end up not having a lot of guidance at work as we cannot get mentorship.” (*IDI/F/GEN Y/6-11yrs with COY/mid-level manager/June 2021*)

It can be construed from this that female workers in the technical/engineering department face verbal harassment and bullying, especially when they are new entrants into the profession and are still gaining expertise. Participants also indicated the existence of sexual objectification attached to them at work, which prevented them from seeking mentorship from their male senior colleagues and generally made for an uncomfortable working environment. These findings agree with the work of Egbuta (2018), where one of the categories of gender discrimination provided was harassment at work, specifically sexual and verbal harassment, bullying and incivility.

Preference and reward for masculinity

Masculinity refers to attributes or characteristics which are attributed to males. This can be apparent in the manner of dressing, speaking, strength, capability etc. The study revealed that males are valued more in the technical/engineering department and masculine qualities and traits are respected and preferred. Participants who responded in accordance revealed thus:

“Well, there is no way to escape differential treatment at work. Personally, I have experienced just one instance of this treatment. In my own department in my branch, I am the only female and in my unit we are just two, my colleague is a male. When there is any opportunity for any award and recognition it always goes to him though it was done by both of us and we are both on the same level. He is valued more and given more recognition because he is a male.” (*IDI /F/GEN X/6-11yrs with COY/ Tech officer/ June 2021*)

“A female engineer has to zero herself like a man, so she can be taken like a man and prove she can do what the man does, this gradually takes away challenges.” (*IDI/ F/GEN X/6-11yrs with COY/ mid-level manager/June 2021*)

“I don't see myself as a female. I see myself as a male, and when we go out to the field, I ask my male colleagues if I can climb the poles and they let me do so.” (*IDI /F/GEN Y/1-5yrs with COY/ Tech officer/ June 2021*)

A deduction can be made from here that the efforts of male workers are recognized more in the technical/engineering department and masculine traits are respected when shown by women and therefore encouraged. This corroborates the findings of North-Samardzic & Taksa (2011), which brought to light the organizational culture that encourages women to conform to masculine traits. It also agrees with the study of Kübler, Schmid & Stüber (2018), which revealed that due to the masculine nature of the work environment, women intentionally try to appear more masculine when applying for jobs and at work.

Causes of gender inequality

Workplace gender inequality is a complex issue that is influenced by a variety of factors. The causes of gendered work inequality include socialisation, patriarchal acquiescence, male chivalry, and organisational gender equality strategies, among others. All of these are discussed below.

Socialisation/staff orientation

Aspects of the organisational culture that are hinged on sociocultural factors often influence the perception and value placed on men and women in the workplace. Study findings revealed that males and females are treated differently in the engineering and customer service departments because of cultural and religious orientations and also because of the pre-existing work culture in IBEDC when the power sector was still government owned. A large part of the workforce stayed on after the company was privatised, and so did its gendered attributes. These workers, having worked in the former climate where

gender segregation was observed and celebrated, had difficulties adopting a gender-balanced outlook despite gender equality strategies implemented in the organisation. According to these participants;

“What also may cause gender issues is; you know how people say this is a man's role and this is a woman's role, so from the home front where it spirals into religion and this is all a melting point in determining who we are. A lot of these issues can be traced to the Orientation of the staff; where the knowledge and culture of the staff can cause gender insensitive behaviours, some of these issues occur most among those who have been with the company since when it was government-owned.” (*KII /M/Generation X/6-11yrs with the COY/ senior manager/June 2021*)

It is a cultural thing the way women are being treated in engineering, as it is seen as a man's job. Externally, differing treatment and the low number of women in engineering are caused by the stereotype of viewing the job as a men's job viewing and being too stressful for a woman. Even parents play a role in this, for example, if some parents want to buy toys for their children, they will buy a car for the male and a doll or kitchen utensils to play with this socialization affects their mindset and their career choice in future. (*KII /F/Generation X/6-11yrs with the COY/ HOD/June 2021*)

Nurture and religion play an important role in an individual's orientation, which is then brought into the workplace. This agrees with Owoyemi & Olusanya's (2014) study, which found cultural and social factors, and religious, psychological, and biological constraints as some of the contributing factors to women's discrimination practices in Nigeria. Though in this study it applies to both sexes. The findings from this study also support those of Ozkaplan (2013), which revealed that socialisation is a cause of gender inequality permeating the workspace.

Patriarchal acquiescence

The Nigerian culture is patriarchal in nature; thus the males are regarded as the heads of the family and society; they are responsible for making important decisions and are deferred to. This system has seeped into the modern workplace as organisations have mostly men in positions of authority. In IBEDC, it was observed that there were more males in the engineering department and a handful of females in leadership positions; the opposite was noticed in the customer service department, where there were more women and few men in leadership positions. However, participants from both departments admitted that gender inequality, especially in leadership, reflected the patriarchal nature of men in leadership positions. Even customers expected

male leaders and often required male staff when they had major issues to clear with both customer service and the technical department. According to this participant, "As a matter of fact, at times when a woman is speaking to them, they do not take her seriously, which is another bias from that side. They start asking to speak to the boss; if the boss is a man, they acknowledge that the boss has come, but if she goes in and brings another woman, they just keep demanding to see the boss, and they will say, No, no, I mean your boss'. So sometimes when there is a man at the front office, it works to our advantage." (KII/M/Gen X/6–11 yrs with COY/Senior Manager/June). The cause of the existence and continued persistence of gender inequality is the acceptance of the patriarchal culture; this makes even staff push back on gender equality strategies. Participants who shared this view revealed thus:

“Even the women sort of sit back and expect that to happen, they have resigned themselves to such behaviour. So when we are preaching the gospel of gender equality, we get as much pushback from women as well as men. So on either side of the divide, they are both men and women; those who are pro-gender equality and those who are anti-gender equality. So friction does happen in that regard but it is more of a personal issue and not an organisational one.” (KII /M/Generation X/6-11yrs with the COY/ senior manager/June 2021)

“We women, because of our culture regard the man as the head, and some men take advantage of that to lord it over the women and some female engineers also believe that so much that they let themselves be oppressed by male engineers at work.” (IDI /F/Generation X/6-11yrs with the COY/ mid-level manager/June 2021)

The socialisation of individuals in patriarchy and its accompanying factors inspire and promote value orientation of workplace gender inequality.

Male chivalry

An accompanying factor of patriarchy is chivalry, where males are expected to protect females from stress and danger, taking on such responsibilities themselves, and females are to avoid strenuous tasks and stick to nurturing roles. The issue here is twofold: one is the expectations of males to take up major and more demanding roles and to protect the females, and the other is the acceptance of this position and treatment by the females. Participants that responded to this revealed thus:

“There is also the feeling that women are meant to be cared for and this is brought to the workspace where men are expected to handle more tasks, and are assigned more tasks so as not to stress

the women.” (*IDI /M/Generation Y/I-5yrs with the COY/CS officer/June 2021*)

“Culture influences the way women are regarded. I believe they have family duties and should be given privileges to go meet up with them. Also, the respect not to be assigned strenuous task.” (*IDI/M/Generation Y/I-5yrs with the COY/CS officer/June 2021*)

“Another cause of differing treatment between female and male staff in engineering is when the woman keeps accepting the privileges being handed to her. For instance, if her colleagues keep telling her not to stress herself and to exclude herself from physically tasking work, and she always accepts this and pulls back, the respect for her drops and she will keep being excluded from work. What I am saying in essence is, it is the function of the attitude of the woman that determines if she is treated differently or not in engineering. This is because, due to her physiological features, human beings will always want to pity the female and tell her to relax and if she keeps on accepting to be pitied and sit out when jobs are tasking, it will create chances for unequal treatment.” (*IDI /F/GEN X/12yrs and above with COY/June 2021*)

“Women are treated differently when they do not have confidence in their abilities, are scared and feel their male colleagues should handle the risky part of the job or are lacking in the skills needed in the field.” (*IDI/F/Generation X/6-11yrs with the COY/mid-level manager/June 2021*)

It can be inferred that both females and males are responsible for promoting the cultural dictates of patriarchy in the workplace. These findings corroborate the findings of Franks, Schurink and Fourie (2006) in their study on the social construction of life roles of career-oriented women. They reported that men and women extend and continue to play traditional roles in the workplace, with women playing nurturing roles and men playing assertive breadwinner roles; the fact that women and men maintain these stereotypical roles while pursuing careers places a burden on them and their productivity.

Work prejudice

Work prejudice refers to unconscious bias people have in the workplace relating to or about work. These biases are both internal—between colleagues—and external—from customers and other stakeholders to the staff. The study identified that gender inequalities are often caused by biases people have about the job. Participants revealed that customers often shunned the male customer service agents in favour of the female ones. Customers expect customer service representatives to be caring and nurturing, and thus women,

so when they get a male, they are not as receptive towards him. This bias is also promoted by female and male staff when they assign strenuous and risky jobs to male staff, both in customer service and engineering. Participants revealed that;

“Well, women are seen as too weak to function properly in Engineering and this sometimes causes them to be regarded differently.” (*IDI /F/Generation Y/1-5yrs with the COY/ Tech officer/ June 2021*)

“It is assumed that engineering is meant for men and that women do not have the right to be in this profession, and this might contribute to differing treatment.” (*IDI/F/Generation X/6-11yrs with the COY/Tech officer/June 2021*)

“It is an unsaid rule that women are meant to be in customer service or administration, and it's usually easier for them too. For instance, most support assistants are females and they feel they are entitled to certain things more than I am, even when it comes down to sharing information.” (*IDI /M/Generation Y/1-5yrs with the COY/ CS officer/ June 2021*)

“Women are treated differently when they do not have confidence in their abilities, are scared and feel their male colleagues should handle the risky part of the job.” (*IDI/F/Generation X/6-11yrs with the COY/mid-level manager/June 2021*)

Work prejudice is informed by societal gender roles and physiological traits. This prejudice is also propagated by the targets, as deduced from the excerpts: male customer service officers are treated unequally by their female colleagues because the female CSOs feel more suited to the role and are therefore entitled to information and other perks of the job. In engineering, the job is considered physically demanding and therefore more suited to males; this causes female technical and engineering staff to be treated unequally.

Domestic and family responsibilities

The study revealed that since females are socially and culturally responsible for domestic tasks like chores and caring for children, they often opt out of strenuous tasks to attend to their domestic tasks. This commitment also causes unequal treatment as they are left off important duties. This is in line with the study of Piasna & Drahokoupil (2017), which posits that time spent on housework reduces women's availability for paid labour, thereby affecting their negotiating power with their employers. This participant summarized it thus:

“Also because of responsibilities at work, some women fail to upgrade themselves and improve on their skills. In our profession, there is always new equipment coming in, so engineers always have to keep studying and upgrading their skills. Also, another issue is family and work. Women have so many responsibilities and we can be marginalized due to this and excluded from tasks if we do not know how to manage our time properly. At times this unequal treatment comes up because the women cannot manage their time effectively to balance their life outside work with that at work but, they expect to be considered for that and this leads to issues for them.” (*IDI /F/Generation X/6-11yrs with the COY/mid-level manager/June 2021*)

“There are limitations on female engineers, especially the married ones. Our domestic commitments make us fall short at times when we have difficulties balancing them with work and this can cause unequal treatment.” (*IDI/F/Generation Y/6-11yrs with the COY/mid-level manager/June 2021*)

Work-life balance is difficult for female staff; on the one hand, it leaves them off important duties, but it also places unequal pressure on male employees as they are left to pick up the slack. The findings from the study are in agreement with Olusola, Olubola & Akintayo (2012) in their study on career development among female professionals in construction, which revealed work-life balance, apathy, and time constraints as impediments to the career growth of female professionals in a male-dominated industry.

Organisational gender equality strategies

To address the issue of gender inequality, organisations frequently undertake empowerment and capacity-building programmes aimed towards women, who are recognised as the most likely victims of gender inequality. Study findings revealed that gender equality techniques are incorporated into hiring, training and development, and even promotion. To encourage female involvement, concessions are made. Yet, when the rewards favour one gender over the other, these goals can become discriminatory.

“The only differing treatment is just the preference given to women and that is because of the need to achieve gender equality.” (*KII/M/Generation X/6-11yrs with the COY/ Assistant technical engineer/June 2021*)

“It’s unfair the number of programmes and training that are just for females, it’s like we are not even here. They even have a quota for employment!” (*IDI/M/Generation Y/1-5yrs with the COY/ CS officer/June 2021*)

This is in collaboration with Essig and Soparnot's (2019) study on re-thinking gender inequality, where they found that positive discriminatory tactics that put females on the fast track can at times become root causes of gender inequality against men.

Discussion of findings

The theory of gendered organisation was utilised to elucidate the reasoning behind the existence and persistence of gender inequality within gendered workplaces. This theory posits that gender inequality permeates all aspects of formal employment and is unavoidable. It asserts that formal organisations inherently adopt a gendered perspective favouring the attributes of the "ideal worker," which are often masculine and aligned with traditional male gender roles. This perspective can be employed to explain the bias and recognition of masculine traits within the engineering department, leading to gender-based inequality.

The theory outlines specific processes entrenched in organisational structures that propagate gender inequality. The division of labour is a process present in gendered organizations, segregating roles based on perceived gender appropriateness. This is in line with findings from studies indicating a preference for recruiting females in customer service due to their anticipated empathetic nature, and some males for their assertive roles. Another process proposed by the theory involves cultural symbols that reinforce gender-based disparities. For example, the use of terms like "manpower" in workplace communications and recruitment perpetuates such inequalities. Workplace interactions further solidify and disseminate the gendered nature of organizations. As posited by the theory, portraying executives or leaders as embodiments of forceful masculinity maintains the gendered organizational framework. Consequently, deviations from this established image result in unequal treatment. This dynamic can elucidate the divergent treatment of female customer service staff based on customer needs. Participants acknowledged instances where customers dismissed female staff in leadership roles, instead requesting assistance from male staff. Conversely, in situations involving complaints or inquiries, customers preferred and responded more positively to female staff, expecting empathy. The study's findings also revealed scenarios where female supervisors who displayed assertiveness faced criticism, as their qualities aligned with leadership expectations but contradicted the anticipated submissive and nurturing roles.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study examined the forms and causes of gender inequality existent in gendered work. Notwithstanding the awareness of gender inequality raised by international discourse across different sections of society, the issue persists, evidenced in the continued segregation of work between genders, the dearth of the alternate gender involved in gendered work and the leadership gap between

males and females in the workplace. The study gathered responses that were used in pulling together the views and opinions of participants while the literature was reviewed along the objectives of the research. In identifying the forms of gender inequality in the customer service and technical/engineering department of the Ibadan electricity distribution company, the study revealed that both male and female workers face inequalities in both departments from customers, colleagues and organisational practices. However, it was deduced that male workers face significantly more gendered inequalities than females in the customer service department. This differed with Simpson's (2004) study on men in female-dominated occupations, which revealed the lack of inequality experienced by male nurses despite the female gender-dominated nature of the job. On the other hand, in the technical/engineering department, female workers encounter significantly more gendered inequalities than male workers. The examination of the causes of gender inequality in gendered work revealed several causes that applied to both departments including Socio-cultural factors, domestic and family responsibilities, work prejudice, attitude to work and consequences of organisational gender goals. The major causes of gender inequality as provided by the participants were socio-cultural factors like socialization, cultural orientation and patriarchal acquiescence and domestic and family responsibilities, mostly related to inequality against women. The major cause of gender inequality as disclosed by participants that applied to male workers is organizational gender goals.

Gender inequality exists in both gendered departments in the Ibadan electricity distribution company, though the gender effect varies in both departments. The causes range from socialization to organisational gender goals and the policies which should play a part in balancing these gendered inequalities are also gendered as disclosed from the findings on the knowledge of policies and their effects. This study has identified the forms of gender inequality and examined the perceived causes of these inequalities in gendered work as well as the knowledge and understanding of the gender-based policies in the Ibadan electricity distribution company. From the survey, it was established that customer bias and positive discrimination were the major forms of gender inequality in the customer service department and it affected the male workers more. Additionally, harassment and work prejudice were revealed as the major forms of gender inequality in the technical/engineering department and it affected female workers more.

The study ascertained the major causes of gender inequality in gendered work as socio-cultural factors affecting women and work prejudice affecting men. Workplace gender inequality in gendered work is a menace to work as it affects organisational productivity, puts a strain on a section of the human capital, is psychologically scarring and leads to high employee turnover. According to Damaske (2011) gender stereotyping and discrimination in male occupations, caused female workers to exit to gender-neutral or female-dominated occupations. This reduces diversity in the workplace which further

affects productivity. It is therefore imperative to breach the gender equality gap in gendered work so much so that they become inclusive.

The following recommendations are given which with the proper application should mitigate gendered workplace inequality.

- Organizations should ensure that the recruitment process in gendered work is gender-sensitive, gender-neutral language should be used for the attraction and selection process. This will lead to a balanced gender mix of employees being commonplace which will, in turn, reduce work prejudice and customer bias.
- Organizations should ensure all workers are trained equally on gender sensitivity in the workplace.
- Gender equality programs and sensitivity training should involve both male and female workers.
- Punitive measures should be set and strictly adhered to, to deter non-compliance with human resource policies.
- Organizations should ensure that their gender diversity strategies are of international standard so they won't be bound by sociocultural stipulations.

Further studies should focus on the study of gender inequality in two distinct gendered companies or industries, and the relationship between organisational equality goals and gender inequality.

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