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**THE INFLUENCE OF MOTHERS' LITERACY LEVEL AND GENDER ON ALLOCATION OF DOMESTIC CHORES IN THE HOUSEHOLD TO BOYS AND GIRLS IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA.**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the influence of mothers' literacy and gender on allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls, in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. Two research questions and three hypotheses guided the study, which used a survey design. A sample of 214 made up of 107 each for literate and non-literate mothers was randomly selected. The instrument of the study was developed by the researchers and validated. A reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained using Cronbach alpha procedure. Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) IBM Version 20. The results of the study indicated that allocation of domestic chores in the household of literate and non-literate mothers is influenced by gender. Both literate and non-literate mothers allocated more domestic chores in the household to girls than boys. The results also show that, literate mothers show more gender indifference to allocation of domestic chores in the household than non-literate mothers. Based on the results of the study, it was recommended among others that mothers should allocate domestic chores in the household to boys and girls regardless of their sex, and mothers should share all domestic chores in the household to boys and girls proportionately.

**Keywords:** Influence, mothers' literacy, domestic chores, household, sustainable development.

**INTRODUCTION**

Domestic chores are household tasks which are regarded as non-economics and tend to be hidden or unvalued (Spence, 2006) and are usually performed by boys and girls. Such domestic chores include: cooking, washing dishes, sweeping, making fire in the kitchen, gathering fire-wood, fetching water, washing toilet, looking after the younger siblings, hawking and helping on the

farm. Though boys also perform domestic chores, it seems most of the household tasks are performed by girls who have to combine them with schooling.

Girls who perform domestic chores before going to school are likely to be late for lessons and may likely miss some lessons, in particular English Language and Mathematics since these subjects appear first on school time-table. Similarly, girls who perform series of domestic chores after school till evening are likely to be too weak to study. This can reflect in their performance at class work in school and by extension drop out. Besides girls' non-economic activities or household tasks constitute a major setback to accelerating progress towards achieving gender parity and equality in primary and secondary school enrolment in 2015 (Spence, 2006).

Surprisingly, conventional measures of labour force work often ignore the household task which girls engage in that could potentially interfere with their schooling (Assaad, Levison & Zibani, 2001). Regrettably, since girls' domestic chores are often hidden under cultural norms as necessary and good for girls as wives and mothers of tomorrow, less attention is paid to their educational needs. For example, when faced with limited resources and competing financial demands, parents prefer to invest in the education of their sons and not lose their daughter's vital contribution to the household through domestic chores (Spence, 2006).

It is expected that when there is equal allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls, the heavy burden placed on girls by combining domestic chores with schooling will become less. It is also expected that literate and no-literate mothers are likely to differ in allocation of domestic chores to boys and girls because of the different levels of their education. Besides, there is overwhelming evidence that educating the girl-child correlates with sustainable development. Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) (FAWE, 2003) noted that the most developed countries show high levels of participation in education for both boys and girls, while the least developed countries show low levels of participation in education for boys and girls.

Hence, sustainable development is viewed as economic, social and environmental development that ensures human wellbeing and dignity, ecological integrity, gender equality and social justice for now and in the future (World Survey, 2014). It is very difficult to achieve sustainable development where gender inequality persists especially in allocation of domestic chores in the household. For inequality harms economic dynamism and poverty reduction can trigger economic crisis, creates social exclusion and feeds into political tensions and conflicts (World Survey, 2014).

In spite of the problem, many studies tend to focus more on labour market work, its implication for schooling, much less attention is paid to how literate and non-literate mothers allocate

domestic chores in the household to boys and girls, in particular, Kwande LGA. Therefore the main problem of this study which the researchers want to investigate is: How do literate and non-literate mothers allocate domestic chores in the household? Do allocation of domestic chores in the household is influenced by mothers' literacy, and gender?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general purpose of the study is to investigate how domestic chores are allocated in the household to boys and girls and to ascertain whether the allocation in the household is influenced by gender. Specifically, the study investigated:

1. How literate mothers allocate domestic chores in the household to boys and girls.
2. How non-literate mothers allocate domestic chores in the household to boys and girls.
3. The influence of gender in allocation of domestic chores in the household.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do literate mothers allocate domestic chores in the household to boys and girls?
2. How do non-literate mothers allocate domestic chores in the household to boys and girls?

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses guided the study.

1. Literate mothers' allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls do not differ.
2. Non-literate mothers' allocation to domestic chores in the household to boys and girls do not differ.
3. Literate and non-literate mothers do not differ in allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls.

### **RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many studies that have analyzed household work find that domestic chores play an important role in lives of children in less developed countries. For example, Edmonds (2006) found that in Nepal the presence of younger siblings is correlated with more domestic work for older sisters and more market work for older brothers, the large differences observed in hours worked by oldest sisters are due to more time spent on domestic work. Kruger and Berthelon (2007) found

that in Nicaragua, the presence of pre-school children in the household reduce the probability that girls attend school but not boys. Besides, girls are adversely affected by an absent mother in the household, that the negative effect on girls is attenuated when stepmother is present, in effect when there is no stepmother, the girl must act as a surrogate mother and her education suffers (Ritchie, Lloyd & Grant, 2004).

Regrettably, Spence (2006) found that when faced with limited resources and competing financial demands, parents prefer to invest in the education of their sons and not lose their daughters' domestic chores, that the traditional thinking based on culture or religion may prevent girls from attending school because their labour has always been seen as necessary and respectable on the home front, and in some cases, parents may view education as promoting behavior considered unfavourable to girls' future marital prospects. Hence, according to Ritchie, Lloyd and Grant (2004) many girls who work would have remained in school had they not been working. They concluded that, though work is strongly associated with not being in school for both boys and girls, a strong causal relationship exists between work and lack of school attendance for girls.

According to Larson and Verma (1999) boys spend less time on domestic work as compare with girls. Similarly, in their study, Ritchie, Lloyd and Grant (2004) found that except in rural Nicaragua, for non-students in almost all cases, girls reported more total work hours than boys did whether or not they are students. The same study showed that girls spend much more time than boys on non-economic household task, the differences became substantial among girls who were not enrolled in school, that male students enjoy more leisure time than female students.

Another study by Buvinic, Guzman and Lloyd (2007) reported that as boys become young men, they increasingly concentrate their work time in economical productive activities while girls as they become young women, face the contradiction of having to maintain and often increase their time in domestic work while at the same time seeking to join labour market. Their study indicated that girls spend substantial amount of time daily on domestic chores that on average girls work a total average of 1 – 2 more hours a day than boys, if time spent on domestic chores is combined with time spent in economic activity.

In another study, Kruger and Berthelon (2007) reported that the data available for Latin America indicate that girls allocate more time to domestic chores than boys. Their study suggests that household work may be as strong a deterrent to schooling as market work since an equal proportion of children that do not attend school report not working in market activities. The same study using Brazil data also suggests that domestic chores may be a stronger deterrent to schooling of girls than of boys: 51 percent of boys do not attend school also do not work in

market activities compared to almost 70 percent of girls. The data also reveal that young girls in Brazil spend 5 more hours per week working domestic chores than boys.

Theoretically, it is expected that literacy may likely influence mothers' allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls. For study has shown that literacy influences human behaviors in many ways. For example, Attanasio and Kaufmann (2010) reported that parental education is an important determinant of probability of going to senior high school, but having a highly literate mother and father appears more important for girls than for boys. Besides, Surrender, Reo and Miranjan (1997) found in their study that illiterate women were more favourable to female foeticide than those women who were literate. In China, Poston (2001) reported that the hazard of having a second birth for women who have completed junior high school was 22 percent less than that of the illiterates, and those semi-illiterate women who have completed high school or more the hazard was 38 percent less. In their study, Chung and Das Gupta (2007) reported that education is strongly associated with sex-preference. Their study indicates that education reduces son-preference and leads to gender neutrality.

Lin's study (2009) found that in Taiwan 20 percent of women with high school education or more had son-preference as compared with 33 percent of women with less education, that 37 percent of women with high school education or more showed indifference about sex-preference, while 19 percent of women with less than high school did. The same study also found that high school education reduces the odds of son-preference by 50 percent and increases the odds of gender-neutrality by 45 percent.

According to Levine, Birdsall and Dayal (2003) mothers' literacy correlates consistently with fertility and mortality rates, that children of educated mothers have better opportunities to receive full attention in health and nutrition. Besides, FAWA, (2001) stated that educated mothers always want and encourage their daughters to emulate them by receiving good education and subsequently become economically empowered to earn a good living. El-Gilany and Shady (2007) reported that education is expected to make mothers less conforming to traditional roles assigned to women due to empowerment and enlightenment, that empowerment occurs because education provides better employment opportunities for women and educated women are becoming more and more enlightened through mixing with people of more equal gender beliefs such as informed teachers. It is therefore expected that literacy may likely influence mothers in allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted survey design because it is preferred where the respondents are allowed to answer questions administered through interview or questionnaires (Hale, 2011). The study was

conducted in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 425 literate and non-literate mothers. The literate mothers were women who acquired secondary school education and above, while the non-literate mothers were women who did not go to school and could not read and write. The population of mothers was identified at various meetings of Mothers' Associations in Kwande LGA. Mother-population was chosen for the study because children tend to help their mothers in domestic chores hence mothers should decide better what domestic chores are good for boys and girls. A total sample of 214 mothers comprised 107 each for literate and non-literate mothers was selected randomly.

### **Instrument**

The instrument titled, Influence of Mothers' Literacy and Gender on Allocation of Domestic Chores in the Household (IMLGADH) was developed by the researchers. It is a structured questionnaire also adopted for the interview schedule. The instrument is divided into two parts, A and B. Part A contains the bio-data of the respondents while part B has 17 items about the allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls. It is categorized into: Boy, Girl and Sex not Matter. The instrument was validated by three professionals, one each in Sociology of Education, Gender Studies and Measurement and Evaluation. Based on their suggestions and amendments, the new version of the instrument was structured. The reliability of the instrument was determined by conducting a trial-test on 30 mothers outside the target population, and adopting Cronbach alpha procedure, the reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained.

Four research assistants were employed and trained to assist in data collection. The research assistants administered the questionnaires to the respondents and interviewed them. The completed questionnaires as well as recorded interview schedules were collected on the spot. Hence, all the administered questionnaires were properly completed and returned, giving the retrieval rate of 100%.

Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Programs for Social Sciences (SPSS) IBM version 20. Percentages were used for answering research questions while t- tests were used for testing hypotheses at  $P>0.05$  level of significance.

### **RESULTS**

Results were presented based on two research questions and three null hypotheses in tables as follows:

#### **Research Question One**

How do literate mothers allocate domestic chores in the household?

**Table 1: Percentages of literate mothers' allocation of domestic chores in the household.**

Items	Domestic Chores	Percentages (107 literate)		
		Boy	Girl	Sex not matter
1.	Who do you prefer to cook in the household?	1.87	*87.85	10.28
2.	Who do you prefer to assist on the farm?	28.04	10.28	*61.68
3.	Who do you prefer to wash dishes in the household?	4.67	*85.055	10.28
4.	Who do you prefer to look after the younger siblings?	11.21	*48.60	40.19
5.	Who do you prefer to wash family's clothes?	24.30	37.38	*38.32
6.	Who do you prefer to fetch water in the household?	6.54	*63.55	21.91
7.	Which child do you prefer to gather fire-wood?	11.21	*70.09	18.69
8.	Which child do you prefer to make fire in the kitchen?	4.67	*85.05	10.28
9.	Which child do you prefer to run errands in the household?	35.51	14.95	*49.53
10.	Which child do you prefer to sweep compound?	*71.96	3.74	24.30
11.	Which child do you prefer to hawk goods?	*43.93	18.69	37.38
12.	Which child do you prefer to care for elderly persons?	22.43	34.58	*42.99
13.	Who do you prefer to bathe the younger siblings?	4.67	*61.68	33.64
14.	Who do you prefer to take younger siblings to school?	44.86	7.48	*47.66
15.	Who do you prefer to sweep the kitchen?	1.87	*93.46	4.67
16.	Which child do you prefer to wash family's toilet?	*64.49	7.48	28.04
17.	Which child do you prefer to purchase food items?	8.41	*71.03	20.56

\* The preference choice of literate mothers.

Table 1 indicates that literate mothers preferred to allocate three, nine and five domestic chores to boy, girl and sex not matter respectively. The table shows that the allocation of three domestic chores to boy and nine to girl is influenced by gender, while the allocation of five domestic chores to sex not matter, is not influenced by gender.

### Research Question Two

How do non-literate mothers allocate domestic chores in the household?

**Table 2: Percentages of non-literate mothers' allocation of domestic chores in the household**

Items	non-literate mothers allocation of domestic chores	Percentages (107 non-literate)		
		Boy	Girl	Sex not matter
1.	Who do you prefer to cook in the household?	7.48	*70.09	22.43
2.	Who do you prefer to assist on the farm?	22.43	5.61	*71.96
3.	Who do you prefer to wash dishes in the household?	5.61	*81.31	13.08
4.	Who do you prefer to look after the younger siblings?	12.15	*48.60	39.25
5.	Who do you prefer to wash family's clothes?	7.48	*56.07	36.45
6.	Who do you prefer to fetch water in the household?	5.61	*61.68	32.71
7.	Which child do you prefer to gather fire-wood?	6.54	*62.62	30.84
8.	Which child do you prefer to make fire in the kitchen?	1.87	*79.44	18.69
9.	Which child do you prefer to run errands in the household?	35.51	14.95	*49.53
10.	Which child do you prefer to sweep compound?	*65.42	6.54	28.04
11.	Which child do you prefer to hawk goods?	14.95	36.45	*48.60
12.	Which child do you prefer to care for elderly persons?	24.30	*42.06	33.64
13.	Who do you prefer to bathe the younger siblings?	3.74	*65.42	30.84
14.	Who do you prefer to take younger siblings to	*65.42	5.61	28.97



school?

15.	Who do you prefer to sweep the kitchen?	1.87	*90.65	7.48
16.	Which child do you prefer to wash family's toilet?	*74.77	7.48	17.76
17.	Which child do you prefer to purchase food items?	8.41	*61.68	29.91

\* The preference choice of non-literate mothers.

Table 2 indicates that non-literate mothers preferred to allocate three domestic chores each to boy and sex not matter, and eleven to girl. The table shows that allocation of three domestic chores to boy and eleven to girl is influenced by gender.

**Hypothesis One**

Literate mother's allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls do not differ significantly

**Table 3: t-test of literate mothers' allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls.**

	Allocation	Mean	Standard deviation	N	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>Literate mothers</b>	<b>Boys</b>	40.82	28.038	17			
	<b>Girls</b>	66.18	28.038	17	1.864	16	0.031

Table 3 indicates that the calculated t-value (0.031) is significant at 16 df ( $P > 0.05$ ), hence the null hypothesis is rejected. It is therefore concluded that literate mothers' allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls differ significantly. This means that literate mothers demonstrated gender inequality in allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls.

**Hypothesis Two**

Non-literate mothers' allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls do not differ significantly.

**Table 4: t – test of non-literate mothers’ allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls**

	Allocation	Mean	Standard deviation	N	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>Non-literate mothers</b>	<b>Boys</b>	39.24	26.638	17			
	<b>Girls</b>	67.76	26.6638	17	2.208	16	0.042

Table 4 indicates that the calculated t – value (0.042) is significant at 16 df ( $P > 0.05$ ), hence the null hypothesis is rejected. It is therefore concluded that non-literate mothers’ allocation of domestic chores to boys and girls differ significantly. This means that non-literate mothers demonstrated gender inequality in allocation of domestic chores to boys and girls.

**Hypothesis Three**

Literate and non-literate mothers do not differ in allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls significantly.

**Table 5: t – test of literate and non-literate mothers’ allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls.**

	Literacy	Mean	Standard deviation	N	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>Boys</b>	Literate	40.82	28.038	17			
	Non-literate	39.24	26.638	17	0.169	32	0.867 not sig.
<b>Girls</b>	Literate	66.18	28.038	17			
	Non-literate	67.76	26.638	17	0.169	32	0.867

Table 5 indicates that the calculated t – value (0.867) for literate and non-literate mothers is not significant at 32 df ( $P > 0.05$ ), hence the null hypothesis is accepted. It is therefore concluded that literate and non-literate mothers do not differ in allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls significantly. This means that literacy has no influence on mothers’ allocation of domestic chores to boys and girls.

## **DISCUSSION**

The main purpose of this study was to investigate how domestic chores are allocated in the household to boys and girls, and to ascertain whether mothers' allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls are influenced by literacy and gender. The findings of the study show that both literate and non-literate mothers allocate more domestic chores in the household to girls than boys (Tables 1 & 2).

The domestic chores, which both literate and non-literate mothers allocate to girls are: cooking, washing dishes, looking after the younger siblings, fetching water, gathering firewood, making fire in the kitchen, bathing the younger siblings, sweeping the kitchen and purchasing food items in the market. This shows that gender exerts influence on allocation of domestic chores. Generally, there is gender inequality in allocation of domestic chores to boys and girls. Literate mothers allocate three domestic chores to boys and nine to girls, while non-literate mothers also allocate three domestic chores to boys and eleven to girls.

In spite of the influence of gender on allocation of domestic chores to boys and girls, literate mothers demonstrate some gender indifference, that is, sex of the child not matter, by allocating five domestic chores that both boys and girls can perform irrespective of their sex. The domestic chores are: assisting on the farm, washing family's clothes, running errands, caring for the elderly persons, and taking the younger siblings to school. While literate mothers allocate five domestic chores to children regardless of the child's sex, non-literate mothers allocate only three domestic chores to sex of the child not matter. The domestic chores that non-literate mothers allocate to the child regardless of its sex are: assisting on the farm, running errands in the household, and hawking goods. This finding of the study suggests that, mothers' literacy may be responsible for the difference in gender indifference. However, this study also shows that mothers' literacy has less influence on allocation of domestic chores in the household, for their allocation to boys and girls do not differ significantly (Table 5).

The finding that mothers' literacy has less influence on allocation of domestic chores to boys and girls is contrary to a study by Attanasio and Kaufmann (2010) who reported that parental education is important determinant of the probability of going to senior high school, but having a highly literate mother and father appears more important for girls than boys. Also, Chung and Das Gupta (2007), and Lin (2009) reported that education reduces son preference and leads to gender neutrality. Though the influence of mothers' literacy is not felt in domestic chores allocation to boys and girls, it is felt in gender indifference.

The finding of this study suggests that socio-cultural practices, religious beliefs and attitudes still remain strong and play important role in preventing girls from going to school. These may

include beliefs that education of a girl ends in the kitchen (FAWE, 2001), girls are mainly for the purpose of reproduction and domestic chores (Karo, 2005), and girls' job is in the home and need not go to school and learn (Obidigbo, 2005).

Further, this study reveals that girls are allocated more domestic chores than boys. The result of the study is similar to Spence (2004) who reported that parents prefer to invest in education of their sons and not lose their daughters' domestic chores, that the traditional thinking based on culture or religion may prevent girls from attending schools because their labour has always been seen as necessary and respectable on the home front. Hence, allocation of more domestic chores to girls will likely prevent many girls from attending schools. For example, Ritchie, Lloyd and Grant (2004) lamented that many girls who do domestic chores would have remained in school had they not been working. Similarly, Assaad, Levison and Zibani (2001), reported that girls' domestic chores is regularly ignored, in particular the potential for housework and child-care responsibilities to interfere with educational attainment has been overlooked.

This portends danger for sustainable development. According to FAWE (2011), lack of sustainable development of the third world countries is attributed to low participation of girls' in education. For example, of 7 million children in Nigeria of school age, who are not attending schools, 62 percent of these figures are girls (World Education News, 2004). UNICEF (2002) said that the numbers and proportions of girls out of school present a human-right tragedy and a downwards spiral in development. Hence, gender inequality in any forms including allocation of domestic chores to boys and girls will likely impede sustainable development. For inequality harms economic and poverty reduction, can trigger economic crisis, creates social exclusion and feeds into political tensions and conflicts (World Survey, 2014).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are made:

- Mothers should allocate all domestic chores in the household to boys and girls regardless of the child's sex.
- Mothers should share all the domestic chores to boys and girls proportionately.
- Mothers should be encouraged to attain high level of education, for education reduces gender inequality and increases gender indifference.
- All cultural norms or practices that allocate domestic chores to boys and girls on the basis of their sex should be discouraged.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of mothers' literacy and gender on allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls. The study finds that the allocation of domestic chores in the household is influenced by gender, for both literate and non-literate mothers allocate more domestic chores in the household to girls than boys. The study also finds that literate mothers show more gender indifference to allocation of domestic chores in the household than non-literate mothers. This suggests that literacy may have some influence on allocation of domestic chores in the household to boys and girls. Based on the finding of the study, some recommendations are made to reduce gender inequality in allocation of domestic chores in the household in order to achieve sustainable development.

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