

## **Influence of Age, Marital Status and Environment on Sexism in Nigeria**

**Adedeji J. Ogunleye and Sulaiman O. Adebayo\***

### **Abstract**

*This study attempts to find out the demographic factors for the ingrained sex discrimination in Nigeria. 779 research participants completed the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) developed by Glick and Fiske (1996). The independent t-test statistics was employed for data analysis and results showed that age, marital status and environment of living are significant factors influencing sex discrimination (sexism) in Nigeria. The findings were discussed in the light of available literature.*

### **Introduction**

The Social Dominance Theory, a major integrative framework seeking to understand and explain group-based prejudice and oppression (Pratto, 1999), postulates that every complex society can be characterized by the existence of group based hierarchy in which at least one group is dominant over others and enjoys a disproportionate share of privilege and at least one group occupies a subordinate position. The theory recognizes three basic types of group based social hierarchies which are: an age system, a gender system, and an arbitrary set system. The arbitrary set system consists of hierarchies of socially constructed groups based on any social relevant group distinctions. Such group distinctions may include, among others, marital status, employment or occupational status etc. These distinctions are environmental relative and may be different in their effects on social stratification but they, basically, influence sex discriminations.

The prevalence of sex discriminations (sexism) and its attendant gender role expectation is evident in most social institutions such as: the family, work environment, politics, the military, the Church, and even education and the milieu of the street (Connell, 1987).

Although the potential deleterious effects of sex discrimination (sexism) have been well documented the world over, less is known about the variables that affect the phenomenon (sexism) in Nigeria. Scholars (e.g. Leaper and Tenenbaum, 2002; Akrami, 2005) have classified some of the variables as 'person centered characteristics' or as 'contextual characteristics'. Person centered characteristics, in this context, include attributes as age and marital

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\* Department of Psychology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ado, Nigeria. Email: [lanryadd@yahoo.com](mailto:lanryadd@yahoo.com)

status while contextual characteristics refer to attributes of the situation or environment.

Glick and Fiske (1996, 2001b) differentiated between hostile and benevolent sexism. According to them, hostile and benevolent sexism are two forms of sex discrimination that originates and often follow from held sexist ideologies. The scholars argued that hostile and benevolent sexism are a predictable product of structural relations between men and women that is common to human societies. Whereas, patriarchy (i.e. the accord of more status and power to men than women) and competitive gender differentiation (i.e. differentiation of men from women in terms of social roles and trait ascriptions) are identified as creating and reinforcing hostile sexism (sexist antipathy towards women), benevolent sexism (i.e. subjectively favourable, yet patronizing beliefs about women) is seen as a subtle form of prejudice in which gender inequality is promoted through the appreciation of women as 'valuable resources' in the areas of child bearing, nurturance, and provision of sexual and intimacy needs.

Social psychologists generally regard sexism as a social psychological problem resulting from prejudice. According to them, the building of a healthy environment devoid of crime, hatred, violence, disorderliness, war, and genocide among others is resilient in the understanding of behaviours of organisms within the environment. Behaviour (B), according to Lewin (1936), is a function of the environment (E) and the personality predispositions of individual organisms (P) in the environment  $[B = f(P,E)]$ .

Building upon this formulation, Kelly, Holmes, Werr, Reis, Rusbult, and Van - Lange (2002) posited that socialization starts from a dyad, and if social psychology studies relationships between people within a social context, then to develop a truly social psychology will require attempts at understanding that interactions between persons is mediated by needs, thoughts and motives in relation to one another and in the context of the specific social situations in which their interactions transpire. Thus, where motives, needs and thoughts are coloured and blurred by socio-cultural leanings to the extent that persons feeling for, and perceptions of one another within a social context become rather negative, most especially as a result of belonging to an opposite sex, then it spells sexism (sex discrimination) and disrupts the peaceful co-existence of people within the social context as much as it is detrimental to society.

Upon this backdrop therefore, the present sets out to find out the influence(s) of age, marital status and environment on sexism in Nigeria. Specifically, the study is set to find out whether:

- i. Younger people (aged between 15-35 years) will be more sexist in their ideologies and behaviour than the older people (above 35 years).
- ii. People who are single will be more sexist in their ideologies and behaviour than their married counterparts.

- iii. That there will be a significant difference in the sexist ideologies and behaviours of rural and urban dwellers.

It is hoped that findings from this study will contribute appreciably to available literature sex discrimination (sexism).

## **Method**

### *Participants:*

The study was conducted in Ekiti State, Nigeria using a total of 779 research participants drawn from among the residents of the three senatorial districts in Ekiti State. The multi-stage random sampling technique was used to select sample localities and research participants.

Specifically, 290 research participants were drawn from Ekiti Central Senatorial District comprising of Ado, Efon, Ijero, Ekiti West and Irepodun/Ifelodun Local Government Areas. 284 research participants were drawn from Ekiti North Senatorial District comprising of Ikole, Ilejemeje, Moba, Oye and Ido/Osi Local Government Areas while a total of two hundred and five (205) participants were drawn from Ekiti South Senatorial District comprising of Ikere, Ise/Orun, Gbonyin, Emure, Ekiti South-West and Ekiti-East Local Government Areas of Ekiti State.

Sample selection for this study is based on parameter of population distribution figures where total figures were 461, 686; 553, 257 and 614, 219 respectively for Ekiti South, Ekiti North and Ekiti Central Senatorial Districts (NPC, 1991).

Altogether, 427 (54.9%) of the research participants were males while 352 (45.1%) were females. Three hundred and ninety three (50.5%) were single and three hundred and eighty-six (49.5%) were married. A total of five hundred and twelve (65.8%) of the participants lived in the urban places in Ekiti State while two hundred and sixty-seven (34.2%) were rural dwellers.

Urban Centers, in this study, are the state capital and local government area headquarters in the state. These places are classified as urban because of the presence of basic amenities and infrastructures that may, in their selves, be educative to dwellers in the towns.

A total of 426 (54.74%) of the research participants are young (i.e. below 35 years old) while 353 were old (i.e. above 35 years). Participants' mean age was 31.91 years with a range between 15 and 69 years.

### *Variables:*

#### **Independent Variables**

The independent variables are Age, Marital Status and Environment. The influences of these variables were considered on sexism (Sex Discrimination).

**Dependent variable**

Sexism (the exhibition of sexist ideologies and behaviour) constitutes the dependent variable of this study. Glick and Fiske (2001) in their ambivalent alliance postulated two dimensions of sexism as being hostile and benevolent. Therefore, the effect of each of the independent variables on each of the dimensions of sexism was considered in this study.

*Research Design:*

The survey research design was employed to investigate the influence of age, marital status and environment of living on the acquisition of sexist ideologies and behaviour. The overall design of the research incorporates the two independent groups' design in order to achieve the objectives of the study. Thus, it was possible to compare research participants on their sexist ideologies and behaviour along the lines of their age (young / old), marital status (married / single) and environment of living (rural /urban) using the two independent groups' design.

*Research Instruments:*

A questionnaire tapping research participants' biographic information was used to determine participants' age (in complete years), marital status and environment of living. Standardized psychological measure was also used to measure sexism (the dependent variable). The psychological measure of sexism is the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI). This measure is a 22 item self report measure developed by Glick and Fiske (1996) to measure sexist ideologies and attitudes of men and women and their relationships in contemporary society. ASI is a Likert measure with separate eleven items each for hostile and benevolent sexism scales.

**Procedure**

Copies of questionnaire containing ASI together with biographic information eliciting items were given to 960 respondents to complete. Of these 960 distributed copies, 779 were properly filled and these were analyzed for this study.

**Results**

From the table above, it is clear that rural and urban dwellers differ significantly in hostile sexism [ $t(777) = 3.21, P < .01$ ]. However, no significant differences exist between the rural and urban dwellers in benevolent sexism. A comparison of the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) scores revealed that rural dwellers are more sexist in their ideologies and behaviour ( $\bar{x} = 36.75$  and  $39.58$  respectively for hostile and benevolent sexism) than their urban dwelling counterparts.

Also, it can be seen from the table above that although the married individuals are more hostile in their sexist ideologies and behaviours ( $\bar{x} = 36.09$ ) than their single counterparts [ $t(744) = -2.23, P < .05$ ], no significant difference exists between the two categories in their benevolent sexism [ $t(744) = -1.39, P > .05$ ]. It is shown, however, that the married individuals are more sexist in their ideologies and behaviour than their single counterparts ( $\bar{x} = 36.09$  and  $39.69$  respectively).

**Table 1: Independent t-test table showing the effects of environment of living, marital status, and age on sexism.**

Variables		N	$\bar{X}$	SD	SE	df	t	P
Hostile Sexism	Urban	512	34.54	9.12	0.40	777	3.21	<.01
	Rural	267	36.75	9.15	0.56			
Benevolent Sexism	Urban	512	38.89	8.46	0.37	777	1.07	NS
	Rural	267	39.58	8.90	0.53			
Hostile Sexism	Single	361	34.59	8.71	0.46	744	-2.23	<.05
	Married	385	36.09	9.65	0.49			
Benevolent Sexism	Single	361	38.82	8.09	0.43	744	-1.39	NS
	Married	385	39.69	8.94	0.46			
Hostile Sexism	35yrs & below	427	34.33	8.78	0.43	777	-3.24	<0.1
	Above 35yrs	352	36.47	9.53	0.51			
Benevolent Sexism	35yrs & above	427	38.70	8.29	0.40	777	-1.53	NS
	Above 35yrs	352	39.65	8.99	0.48			

Results from the table also shows that young and old people differ significantly in their hostile sexist ideologies and behaviour [ $t(777) = -3.24, P < .01$ ]. From a comparison of mean scores, it is shown that older people (i.e. aged above 35 years) are more hostile in their sexist ideologies and behaviour than their younger (i.e. below 35 years) counterparts whose mean scores is 34.33. No significant difference exists however, between young and old people in benevolent sexism [ $t(777) = -1.53, P > .05$ ].

### **Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendation**

Klonoff and Landrine (1995) alluded to the fact that age, marital status, ethnicity etc. could predict sexist events and Lott (1987) submitted that single women may behave in assertive and independent manner that elicit gender discrimination.

Results of this study, however, showed that married people are more hostile in their sexist ideologies and behaviour ( $\bar{x} = 36.09$ ) than their single counterparts ( $\bar{x} = 34.59$ ). This result suggests that the married people, while trying to assert their gender identities and ascribe gender roles will tend to be hostile to forestall a sudden usurpation of powers by the opposite sex; most especially in marriages. That the singles are less sexist may be due to changes that are continually occurring in the society in which case the unmarried people marry more lately nowadays than it was before. These singles may have learned to be less sexist in order that they could readily get partners to marry and settle down with. After all Elder (1995) argued that adaptations change with time, changing life circumstances and role expectations.

Leaper (1994) and Tenenbaum and Leaper (2002) argued that rural-urban living affects the process and acquisition of gender stereotypes. These scholars posited that children in the urban centers become more increasingly influenced by extra familiar factors (e.g. the media) and as such they do not adopt traditional beliefs but are largely egalitarian in their beliefs and orientation. Findings from this study confirm the positions of Leaper (1994) and Tenenbaum and Leaper (2002) with regard to hostile sexism because results of the study revealed that rural dwellers are more hostile in their sexist ideologies ( $\bar{x} = 36.75$ ) than their urban dwelling counterparts ( $\bar{x} = 35.54$ ).

With regard to benevolent sexism, however, no significant differences were found between the rural and their urban dwelling counterparts. These results suggest that irrespective of the environment of living, women, for example are regarded as nurturers and are expected to perform integrative, expressive and emotional roles while men are expected to be task oriented, dominant and concerned with status and independence. This position was alluded to by Aries (1996) in her reconsideration of the differences between men and women in interactions.

On the whole, both as posited by Leaper (1994) and Tenenbaum and Leaper (2002) and as is evident in the comparisons of mean scores ( $\bar{x}$ ) of the two groups

in this study, where the rural dwellers' scores on hostile and benevolent sexism are 36.75 and 39.58 respectively as against mean scores of 35.54 and 38.89 respectively for urban dwellers' hostile and benevolent sexism, rural dwellers are more sexist in their ideologies and behaviour than their urban dwelling counterparts.

That the rural dwellers were more sexist can be understood on the basis of the possibility that they are more traditionalist in terms of gender roles and they are most likely to jealously guard and guide against the occurrence of role reversals as may be occasioned by western education and modernization.

That younger people (i.e. aged between 15-35 years) will be more sexist in their ideologies and behaviour was not confirmed in this study. Results from this study showed a significant difference in hostile sexist ideologies of young and old respondents; and no significant difference in the benevolent sexist ideologies of the groups.

A comparison of mean scores of both the old and young respondents showed that with regard to hostile sexism, older respondents (i.e. aged above 35 years old) are more sexist ( $\bar{x} = 36.43$ ) than their younger (i.e. below 35 years old) counterparts ( $\bar{x} = 34.33$ ).

This finding suggests that as one grows older, he acquires more knowledge and understanding of relationships between sexes. Such understanding may be more male chauvinistic and therefore tend to aggravate hostile sexism the more. One may be right to reason that sexist ideologies that were acquired in early adolescence may have become highly internalized and unchangeable at adulthood when peer influence becomes rather minimal if there were no structural changes to dissuade sexist ideologies and behaviour acquisition from adolescence.

Conclusively, results from this study have showed that age, marital status and environment of living significantly influence the process of acquisition of sexist ideologies and behaviour. It therefore becomes imperative that Nigeria government should make concerted efforts at ensuring the provision of an environment that will promote psychologically well-adjusted individuals who will be good examples to upcoming generations in terms of value judgments and moral rectitude.

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