

Women Career Advancement for Sustainable Development in Construction Industry in Nigeria

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Abstract:

Women in the construction industry found it difficult to break through in career advancement even with their knowledge, skills and experience, thereby constitute a small percentage at the top management positions. This study, therefore, analysed factors impeding women from attaining the top in their career. Data for the study were collected from contracting and consulting firms in Lagos State, Nigeria, through the administration of questionnaire to conveniently selected Architects, Quantity Surveyors, Engineers and Contractors. Analyses of data were carried out using Mean Score and Standard Deviation. Findings revealed that family/work-life balance, high degree of stress on the job and lack of flexible work hours and schedules are the most important factors that constitute a barrier to women career advancement. Better work/life balance and equality in career development opportunities for both males and females were the most important factors facilitating women's career advancement. The correlation coefficient indicated a strong positive relationship between factors constituting a barrier to women career advancement and factors that facilitate career advancement in the construction industry. The degree of agreement among the respondents in their judgments concerning their ranking of the factors was determined. The results indicated a significant degree of agreement among the respondents. Findings revealed that employers should establish flexible working practices and provide equality in career development opportunity for both men and women to be at par with men at the top managerial positions.

Keywords:

Career advancement, Construction industry, Lagos, Managerial positions, Women

1 Introduction

It is a known fact that there is significant progress in the pursuit of gender equality in the labour market over recent years (Obamiro & Obasan, 2013; Munn, 2014; Akomolafe & Muhammed, 2015). The increased engagement of women in the labour market is discovered to be closely linked with achieving the unique goals of the United Nations on the 2030 global agenda for sustainable development (El Arnaout *et al.*, 2019). The economic factors and continuous improvement in women's access to education and training have also facilitated their participation (Akomolafe & Muhammed, 2015; Masidah *et al.*, 2015). Women tend to be economically independent (Sazali *et al.*, 2014). Despite this development, professional women in Nigeria make up a small percentage at the highest cadre of authority in many industrial

sectors like building, financial, telecommunication, transportation, oil and gas, manufacturing and mining (Obamiro & Obasan, 2013; Rajkumar *et al.*, 2016). Akpinar (2012) found out that despite the penetration of women in non-traditional professions, they are woefully underrepresented at the top management levels and, in most cases, stuck at lower levels. Even in a woman, traditional jobs such as teaching, a higher percentage of teachers are female while most top management staff are male. A similar situation is reported in the medical sector; doctors and top hospital management staff are mostly men, while most nurses and support staff are women. Positions of authority in Nigeria are not left out. Currently, 36 states Governors are 100% male. Also, Deputy Governors are 91.7% male while females are only 8.3%. Even though the estimated population in Nigeria is 50.7% male and 49.3% female. Several female parliamentarians have also revealed the underrepresentation of women at the top management level in Nigeria. Women are far lower than men; only about 6% of members of the Nigerian Senate and House of Representatives are female.

According to Durasaro (2016), women can perform all tasks that men perform, but there has always been a role stereotype because of conventional, cultural, physiological, and religious perceptions of women. Women were perceived to be weak and therefore cannot and should not be seen performing some leading roles even if they can perform such roles. Women sometimes start their careers at the same level as men but gradually lose ground with time. This study, therefore, investigates factors impeding women career progression to enable them to reach the highest levels in their career.

Several women's organisations have emphasised how to overcome the discrimination that hinders women career progression (Salma *et al.*, 2014). The immediate past government of Nigeria advocated for up to 40% of women involvement in key positions. Still, the majority of the outcomes were far below what was expected (Akpinar 2012). Though some employers are beginning to promote women more systematically and are introducing family-friendly policies to attract and retain women in the various workplace, despite that, women in the construction industry found it difficult to breakthrough in career progression (Claudi, 2010; Mordi *et al.*, 2011).

Although several studies carried out on career progression have focused on the ordeal of women at the highest cadre of their career in the organisations (Akunyili, 2006; Mordi *et al.*, 2011; Masidah *et al.*, 2015), little or no major studies had been done on women career progression in the Nigerian construction industry. Despite the important roles women play in all economic activities, they are still under-represented at the top management levels in the construction industry. For this reason, this study is being undertaken to address women career advancement in the construction industry. This study is useful to women and employers in the construction industry to understand how women career progression is influenced by some barriers and how to facilitate women to attain the top.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Career Advancement

Career can be explained as the particular occupation a person has been prepared for. In other words, this study defined career as the sequence of actions and roles that an individual performs during all his or her life. Mordi *et al.* (2011) conceptualised career as a sequence of professional experience and organisational objectives which an

individual goes through all his life. Therefore, Babatunde *et al.* (2012) described career progression as the long-term growth and development of individuals professionally in the organisation. The growth and self-esteem of employees are achieved by the availability of effective career development practices. This practice will enable them to update their skills and knowledge. Such motivated employees are encouraged to put in the best in their work. Availability of career development opportunities sometimes serves to keep the employees in the organisation. The decision made by the employees to remain in the organisations might depend on available career development opportunities (Claudi, 2010). The employers are therefore required to provide opportunities for continued self-development. This will be beneficial for both the individual employees and the organisations. Therefore, it was established that career development enhances individual work performance and satisfaction (Mordi *et al.*, 2011).

2.2 The Process of Women Career Advancement

Career is a life-long, uninterrupted experience of work that can be split into several stages of development, beginning with initial ideas about working and ending with retirement. According to Babatunde *et al.* (2012), career development practices are efforts made by organisations to enable the employees to progress in their careers and to assist the organisations to achieve their mission. Career development practices include strategies, policies and programs which may be formal or informal, structured, or unstructured.

Unlike men, a system of women's career progression is mostly affected by family and workplace responsibilities and commitment (Mordi *et al.*, 2011). According to Baker and French (2018), the underrepresentation of women in Australian construction and property development industries results from work practices, presenteeism and the filtering of personnel in recruitment and promotion practices. Therefore, it was proposed that career development programs should describe women's career separately from men's careers (Munn, 2014). Munn (2014) concluded that women career development practices must take account of the following factors: career preparation: this describes how women are brought up in a way to pursue a career; available career opportunities for women; effects of marriage on the career of women; effects of pregnancy and childbirth on the career of women; timing and age: women's careers do not follow the same chronological patterns as those of men regarding family responsibilities and commitment.

2.3 Women Career Advancement in Construction Industry

From a historical perspective, Nigerian women built their family homes with clay and thatched roofs, cultivated land for farming and made money to raise their children (Masidah *et al.*, 2015). However, quite different in today's construction industry, the industry is cautious in recruiting women. The construction labour market is now segregated into masculine and feminine jobs due to the prevalent social conditions. Most women employed in the industry undertake administrative responsibilities. Adeyemi *et al.* (2006) confirmed that women constitute about 16.3% of the total workforce in the Nigerian construction industry, of which 50% held administrative positions, 10% as professional and management staff, while only 2.5% as craftswomen. Construction industry Training Board (CITB, 2005) revealed a similar situation in the UK construction sector, women constitute only 9% of the total workforce, of which 84% are employed as Secretaries, about 11% held professional

posts while the remaining are craftswomen. The above findings revealed that modern-day women do not often take jobs that require much physical strength, operating machine, requiring precision, but rather associate with jobs in a clean and tidy work environment. This perception usually hinders efforts to attract women to take up manual work in the construction industry. Recruitment of women into the construction labour force is one side of the coin; career progression issues are the other.

2.4 Barriers to Women Career Advancement in Construction Industry

The barrier to entry of women into the construction industry starts from the low enrolment of female students into courses related to construction in higher institutions. Babatunde *et al.* (2012) asserted that professional women are confronted by difficulties joining the construction industry then followed by attaining the top management positions. Various studies were carried out to assess the barriers to women involved in the construction industry. According to Navarro-Astor *et al.* (2017), women in the construction industry are confronted by numerous barriers different from countries to countries. However, the more frequent are balancing work and family, gender discrimination and lack of professionalism in human resource management. Griffin (2013) identified that women in the construction industry are with poor career counselling because of the unavailability of role model. Most organisations' recruitment exercises are gender-biased to reduce women's participation in the industry, affecting career progression. Durosaro & Ogungbemi (2014) identified a high level of illiteracy among women, low self-esteem, feeling of inferiority complex and poor career aspiration. According to Akomolafe & Mohammed (2015), women are faced by several difficulties in joining the construction industry due to the image of the industry, career knowledge, family commitment, male-dominated culture and work environment, which made it difficult for women to capture the most senior position in the organisation's hierarchy.

Shanmugam *et al.* (2006) identified women's lack of confidence, lack of competitiveness, failure to have their contribution recognised, not being taken seriously, and fear of failure as barriers to women entry into a leadership position. Salman *et al.* (2014) found that the most prevalent problem is sexual harassment, long working hours, isolation on the Jobsite, negative perceptions of women capabilities, expectations to mimic male's aggressive behaviours, lack of mentors/role models, small representation on the Jobsite, family/work-life balance, slow career progression, high degree of stress on the job, lack of encouragement from supervisors, limited training opportunities, unfair perception of women performance and pay gap compared to male counterparts. Radhlinah & Jingmond (2011) identified lack of training and hiring programs, working environment, lack of flexible work hours, and schedule issues confronting women carrier progression in the construction industry. Durosaro (2016) found out that cultural practices, norms, unwritten family codes are the most prevalent difficulties facing women entering the labour force.

3 Research Methodology

The preliminary data was gathered by performing extensive literature searches from published journals and conference proceedings in line with studies carried out by Amuday-yusuf *et al.* (2015) and El Arnaut *et al.* (2019). The questionnaire was used as a research instrument for this study and was designed to generate data in a simple, clear, and unambiguous manner to assist a continuous flow of thoughts required by

the respondents. The questionnaire has two main sections; the first section dealt with the particulars of the respondents such as gender, age, specialisations, academic qualification attained and years of experience in the industry; the second section focused on the study's objectives. Factors constituting barriers to women career advancement and facilitating women's career progression were extracted from the literature that formed the rudiments for the questionnaire. The questions were asked on a 5-point Likert scale rating, with 5 being the highest. Many researchers have replicated and confirmed the validity of the Likert scale, e.g., Babatunde *et al.* (2012), Obamiro and Obasan (2013), Amuday-yusuf *et al.* (2015) and Adebisi, *et al.* (2017). A digital copy of the questionnaire was administered to registered consultants and contractors in Lagos, Nigeria, via their e-mail's addresses with their professional bodies. The consultants include Architects, Quantity Surveyors and Engineers. A convenience sampling method was adopted to choose the appropriate sample size in the study area. The choice of Lagos as the study area is because it houses up to 60 per cent of head offices of both consulting and contracting firms in Nigeria (Babatunde *et al.*, 2012).

Furthermore, Lagos is very busy in terms of construction activities (Obamiro & Obasan, 2013). Data collected were analysed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) using mean score, standard deviation and Kendall coefficient of concordance. Mean score and standard deviation were used for ranking, while the Kendall coefficient of concordance determines the degree of agreement among the respondents in their ranking. A hypothesis was developed to establish a relationship between factors constituting barriers to women career advancement and factors facilitating carrier advancement in the construction industry. The strength of the correlation coefficient indicates a positive or negative relationship between the two factors. Alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted for a strong positive relationship while null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected vice versa.

4 Findings and Discussion

One hundred and fifty copies of the questionnaire were administered to consultants and contractors in the study area. A total of 95 copies representing 63% were retrieved and found suitable for the analysis. It was found that 70% of the firms surveyed are male-dominated and that about 82% of the respondents are above 40 years old. All the respondents are educated; about 86% are graduates. The findings from respondents' work experience indicate that majority of the respondents (60%) had been with the firm for more than ten years while 28% had been with the firm for between 6-10 years, only 12 per cent of the respondents had between 0-5 years of experience. The educational qualification and experience of the respondents provide reliability and credibility to the data collected.

4.1 Factors Constituting Barrier to Women Carrier Progression in Construction Industry

Twenty-eight major barriers that women mostly face in career progression in the construction sector were included in the questionnaire for the respondents to indicate their opinions on a five-point Likert scale, from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). In evaluating the results, Mean Score (MS) and Standard Deviation (SD) were used to rank the factors that constitute a barrier to women carrier progression in

the construction industry. Table 1 provides the summary of the statistical mean and standard deviation.

Table 1. Factors Constituting Barrier to Women Carrier Advancement in Construction Industry

Factor Constitute Barrier to Women Carrier Development	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Rank
Family/work-life balance	4.11	0.900	1
High degree of stress on the job	4.06	0.873	2
Lack of flexible work hours and schedule	4.03	0.822	3
Unfair perceptions of women performance capabilities	3.91	0.853	4
Gender biased recruitment	3.89	0.963	5
Lack of mentor/role model	3.83*	0.857	6
Male-dominated nature of the industry	3.83*	0.954	7
Harshness of job conditions	3.80	0.901	8
Poor career guidance	3.77	0.910	9
Unfair performance evaluations by male supervisors	3.74	0.950	10
Sexual harassment	3.71	0.860	11
Lack of support from the spouse	3.57	1.119	12
Failure to have women's contribution recognised	3.51	0.919	13
Lack of encouragement from supervisors	3.49	0.818	14
Career limited to clerical/administration duties	3.17	0.785	15
Traditional/Religious restriction of women to certain work types	2.94	1.027	16
Lack of confidence and timidity	2.91	0.781	17
Fear of failure	2.86	1.061	18
Feeling of inferiority complex	2.66*	0.816	19
Low self-esteem	2.66*	0.838	20
Macho behaviour of male colleagues	2.37	1.215	21
Lack of networking opportunities	2.34	0.968	22
Loss of sense of femininity and social rejection	2.14*	0.912	23
Slow career progression	2.14*	0.944	24
Poor career aspiration or focus	2.09	0.907	25
Limited training opportunities	2.03	0.954	26
High level of illiteracy among women	1.97	1.043	27
Lower salaries than male counterparts (pay gap)	1.91	0.781	28

* Same mean score, the standard deviation was used to rank

The table shows that family/work-life balance is the most significant factor contributing to women career development in the construction industry. It was ranked first with an MS of 4.11 and an SD of 0.900. The high degree of stress on the job was ranked second with an MS of 4.06 and SD of 0.873. Lack of flexible work hours and the schedule was ranked third, obtaining an MS of 4.03 with an SD of 0.822. Unfair perceptions of women performance capabilities and gender-biased in recruitments are other important factors constituting a barrier to women carrier progression, and they were categorised as fourth and fifth factors with MS of 3.91 and 3.89, SD of 0.853 and 0.963, respectively. These were considered the most significant in this research study. According to Adeyemi *et al.* (2006), employers on construction sites mostly do not consider women for hazardous, tedious, and dirty jobs with long working hours.

Nevertheless, it can also be seen from the table that traditional/religious restriction of women to certain work types, lack of confidence and timidity, fear of failure, low self-esteem and macho behaviour of male colleagues were also factors that constitute a

barrier to women carrier development in built environment albeit not significant. According to the findings, the least significant factors include lower salaries than male counterparts, a high level of illiteracy among women, and limited training opportunities for women.

4.2 Factors Facilitating Women Carrier Progression in Construction Industry

Mean scores and standard deviation of respondents' opinion concerning advancement on women's career revealed that better work/life balance was ranked the highest with an MS of 3.89 and SD of 0.896. This was followed by equal opportunity in career advancement for men and women (MS of 3.69 and SD of 0.834). The finding is consistent with the study carried out by Lingard and Lin (2004); the study revealed that access to career development opportunities is a major factor for women to improve their organisational commitment. Masidah *et al.* (2015) posited that most women were not considered for promotion to top positions due to low level of commitment, competence, experience and education. Flexible working hour, improved perception of the value of women's work and women participation in construction management were ranked third, fourth and fifth with MS of 3.53, 3.40, 3.35 and SD of 0.838, 0.706 and 0.861, respectively. Flexible working hour, improved perception of the value of women's work and women participation in construction management were ranked third, fourth and fifth with MS of 3.53, 3.40, 3.35 and SD of 0.838, 0.706 and 0.861, respectively.

4.3 Degree of Agreement among the Four Groups of Respondents with respect to their Rankings of the Factors

Kendal Coefficient of Concordance was used to quantitatively determine the degree of agreement in ranking among the respondents, i.e. Architects, Quantity Surveyors, Engineers and Contractors. Kendal Coefficient of Concordance is a measure of association among many variables. Table 2 revealed a degree of agreement among the four groups of respondents with respect to their rankings for factors constituting barriers to women career advancement and factors facilitating the advancement in women career advancement and computed value χ^2 and χ^2 critical table.

Table 2. Computed Value χ^2 and χ^2 Critical Table

Factors	Kendal Coefficient of Concordance (W)	Chi-square statistic as $\chi^2 = k(N-1)W$	Computed Value χ^2	Critical table χ^2 at 0.05	Inference
Barriers	0.6671	4(28) 0.6671	75	41.33	Significant
Facilitators	0.7330	4(21) 0.7330	62	41.33	Significant

The Kendal coefficient of concordance (W) for factors constituting barriers to women career advancement and factors facilitating advancement are 0.6671 and 0.7330, respectively. The high value of Kendal's Coefficient of concordance indicates strong agreement among the respondents on the ranking of all the factors. A similar test by Gearhart *et al.* (2013) reveals Kendall Coefficient of Concordance ranges of 0.00 to 0.9208, which suggested high validity of the instrument. Therefore it was concluded that the degree of agreement among the respondents with respect to how the factors were ranked is reported to be significant.

4.4 Relationship between Factors that Constitute Barrier to Women Career Advancement and Factors that Facilitate the Career Advancement in Construction Industry

A hypothesis was developed to establish a relationship between factors that constitute barriers to women career advancement and factors that facilitate career advancement in the construction industry.

Hypothesis:

H_0 : There is no relationship between factors that constitute a barrier to women career advancement and factors that facilitate career advancement in the construction industry.

Vs

H_1 : There is a relationship between factors that constitute a barrier to women career advancement and factors that facilitate career advancement in the construction industry.

The correlation coefficient indicates a strong positive relationship between factors that constitute a barrier to women career advancement and factors that facilitate women career advancement in the construction industry, with a 51.9% correlation. Gasparyan *et al.* (2019) emphasised the importance of a hypothesis as an essential research tool to determine the relationship between factors.

The p-value was revealed to be statistically significant at a 1% level of significance with the p-value <0.05. The null hypothesis (H_0) is hereby rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted (H_1). This implies a strong relationship between factors that constitute a barrier to women career advancement and factors that facilitate women career advancement in the construction industry. So, therefore, to eliminate barriers to women career progression, factors facilitating career progression can be applied.

5 Conclusion and Further Research

This study reviewed various literature on women's career and leadership to examine the representation of women at the top management level in the construction industry. Findings from literature revealed that women found it difficult to break through in career progression, especially in the construction industry, thereby constitute a small percentage at the top management positions. This was found to be a result of conventional, cultural, physiological and religious perceptions of women. The challenges that women face in career advancement were discussed in the literature. The mean score ranking revealed that family/work-life balance, high degree of stress on the job and lack of flexible work hours and schedule were the major factors responsible for the low representation of women at the top management positions in the organisations. Considering these challenging factors, it is felt that reducing or eliminating them is an important step that led to analysing factors that can facilitate the career development of women. The mean score ranking also revealed that better family/work-life balance, equal opportunity in career development for men and women, flexible working practices, and improved perception of the value of women's work could increase the rate of women career advancement.

Moreover, Kendall's coefficient of concordance indicates strong agreement among the respondents on the ranking of all the factors. To develop a high-quality workforce at the top management level that is motivated and skilled, employers in the construction industry need to facilitate women's career advancement. This study recommends a further study on the challenges facing the effective performance of women at the top management level in the organisations.

6 References

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