



Gender Norms and Implications on Livelihood Patterns of the Riverine Community of Umuoba-Anam in Anambra East L.G.A of Anambra State

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present how the gender norms of the Umuoba-Anam people shape their daily life activities in the ongoing ethnographic research on 'gender norms, livelihoods, and access to healthcare among the riverine community of Umuoba-Anam in Anambra State, Nigeria'. Using functionalist and feminist approaches as explanatory frameworks, the study is based on a qualitative ethnographic research design involving participant observation (PO), In-depth Interviews, key informant interviews, and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) as methods of data collection. The study revealed gendered livelihood with notable differences in livelihoods, gender restrictions, patriarchy and male/son preference because it is a patriarchal community and the sexual dynamics. The study revealed that there is a clear gender division of labour in Umuoba, while men are involved in more strenuous and lucrative jobs, women take charge of the less strenuous with lesser income jobs. These are done according to the established laws of the land which prohibit women from performing certain tasks that when violated is seen as a contravention thereby limiting women from expressing their potentials. The study also found out that gendered norms of the Umuoba people favours the male folk more than the female especially as it concerns the male child preference and the case of sexual expressions which are not unconnected with the patriarchal norms because the community is a strong patriarchal one. The implication is that the situation created differential opportunities and privileges for men and women because women lack access to certain resources and opportunities as a result of the discriminatory gender norms.

INTRODUCTION

Every society has a peculiar/stratified way of doing things prescribed to particular gender, even the means of livelihood is socio-culturally constructed according to male and female sex and all these are enshrined in a term called gender norm. It is this gender norm that shapes what males and females do, how they do it, their behaviour, the roles of males and females concerning who will cultivate, who plants, who harvests, who does fishing, who makes a decision, the opportunity available to men and women and so on. Therefore, it is as a result of this issue of gender inequality as a problem across human societies and one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the United Nations want to curb by 2030 that this paper sets to explore the gendered norms of the riverine people of Umuoba-Anam to investigate the implications on their livelihood and the general well-being of both male and female. A report from rural riverine Amazonia supports the above fact and noted that gender simultaneously shapes what riverine livelihoods mean for men and women (Langill, 2020). Thus, gender norm breeds gender-differentiated vulnerabilities which according to (Ferdous & Mallick, 2019), results from norms that define roles and responsibilities, access to and control over resources, decision making, mobility, and opportunity to participate in public forums. In essence, gender norm shapes the livelihood pattern as well as the access to the healthcare system of the people of a community.

In south eastern Nigeria, differential gender norms shape daily life activities in both rural and urban settings. It is more compounded in riverine communities as there are many cultural beliefs associated with the expressions of gender norms. This is typical of the many riverine communities in Nigeria and Umuoba-Anam community in Anambra State Nigeria is not left out. This paper therefore is set to explore the gendered norms and how they shape daily lives, and livelihood patterns of the riverine people of Umuoba-Anam.

Gender Norms and Sex

Gender norm which is common across cultures play a vital role in almost all access-related issues among genders and this brings to the fore the issues of power dynamics. Gender norms define who occupies leadership positions, whose contributions are valued, whose needs are accommodated and so on in society. The term gender does not imply same thing as sex, because gender is socially constructed while sex refers to the biological process. Distinguishing gender from sex, Best, Griffiths and Hope in (Nnonyelu Au, 2009:193) refers gender to social processes that occur because of your sex, such as behaving in a feminine way if you are female. Human beings are mammals hence are born as male or female. But the process of bringing up of children converts them into gendered

beings. This social cultural machinery aims to turn them into men and women who are masculine and feminine respectively, they are therefore made to internalize the patterns of behaviours, thinking and feeling. Ezeh (2016) notes that while sex relates to the anatomy of a human person, the gender of a human person is socially constructed. He states that there is ample ethnographic evidence of societies where, depending on the cultural circumstances, someone of male sex maybe culturally constructed as feminine gender and vice versa. The binary, male/female, refers to sex. The binary, masculine/feminine, refers to gender and that the gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity are associated with gender; not sex. Femininity is a quality of being feminine whereas masculinity is mainly characteristics that distinctively describe men and boys and it is based on that that gender norms are socially established. The term gender norm answers the question, how would the life of a person born a male instead of a female, or a female instead of a male be different. It also addresses the issues of how the person's sex should be defined, constructed, constrained, or has expanded his/her opportunities and experiences.

Cislaghi & Heise (2019) see gender norms as social norms that define the acceptable and appropriate actions for male and female genders in a given group or society. Gender norms play a role in shaping women and men's access to resources and freedoms, thus affecting their voice, power and sense of self. Pearse & Connell (2016) on the other hand noted that gender norms do not exist in vacuum but are embedded in every aspect of cultural life and institutions, and need to be understood as a set of inter-relationships between individuals and groups that have the power to both reproduce them and also exercise agency to change them. By conforming to the gender norms and expectations of their culture, people can gain several approvals as they convey and re-enforce their masculinity or femininity accordingly. The culture makes a gendered division of labour is one in which women and men are supposed to take up certain tasks. This association is further reinforced by the general idea of femininity which defines women as mothers, caring, nurturing, self-sacrificing, self-effacing etc. At the heart of this division of labour also lies the exploitation of women labours because most of the jobs are underpaid or not paid for and it is based on that, that (Fleming & Agnew, 2015) stated that gender norms can constrain people's power especially that of the women and limit their ability to take control of their health.

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In this way, discriminatory gender norms reproduce and strengthen power hierarchies, both between and among women and men, boys and girls, and gender minorities in society. The issue of division of labour, patriarchy, stereotypes, son preference among other gender norms deprive men and women of access to certain opportunities in life. It is also common knowledge in some parts of the Igbo land in South-eastern Nigeria among different families that some men whose wives are unable to give birth to a male child refuse to take their sick female child/children to hospitals especially if the man is the only son of the family and in Umuoba-Anam, a man cannot stay without a male child. Something must be done in order to get a male child who is considered to continue the family's lineage else, the marriage/family will be in shambles.

Functionalist and Feminist Approaches as Explanatory Framework

Functionalism and radical feminist theory form the framework of this research because they both seem to be more appropriate in the understanding of gender constructs and challenges posed by social and ecological structures like patriarchy, riverine environment, and gender norms.

Functionalism and Functionalist perspective and theory achieved its greatest popularity in the 20th century between 1940s and 50s and the major proponents of functionalism as used in this work are Emile Durkheim, Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. The main thrust of functionalism is that the society is made up of a system of interrelated parts that work together to maintain the smooth operation of society. They start their discourse with a basic postulation that everything in society whether positive or negative has a function (Nnonyelu Au, 2009).

Gender from the functionalists' perspective is something that comes with loads of roles and functions which we refer to as the gender norms. Therefore, for these roles and functions to be performed, they have to

be shared among the male and female genders for easy and proper flow of the work and hence, the need for the division of labour. Both males and females contribute to the overall functioning and maintenance of society, and that is why it appears that there are discriminatory gender norms. It is discriminatory in the sense that functions/roles have to be divided for each gender to know what to do at each point in time so that there will not be a gender role clash. Therefore, gender roles have to be discriminatory irrespective of society, whether pre-industrial, industrial, or post-industrial society according to the capacity and capability of males and females.

More so, from the feminist theory of gender inequality reviewed, radical feminism is adopted as one of the theoretical frameworks of this study because Umuoba-Anam is a patriarchal community and radical feminism best explains the subject. Feminism is in diverse forms. Ezeh (2016) states that there are probably up to 40 variants and Chandler and Munday in (Ezeh, 2016) enumerate nine common varieties; socialist or Marxist feminism, radical, cultural, liberal, psycho analytic, lesbian, black and postcolonial, ecofeminism and postmodern or poststructural feminism. Each of these reflects the concerns of particular theorists or advocates. In the course of this work, we are going to look at the radical feminism.

Radical feminism begins within the context of second wave feminism that started in the early 1960s and became famous in 1968. Andrea Dworkin, Valerie Solanas, Catharine Mackinnon and Alice Walker are notable among the radical feminists. They say that society is a patriarchy and that in patriarchy, men have more power than women. They harm women by oppressing them. They emphasize that patriarchy is the root of inequality between men and women, or more specifically, the social domination of women by men. They believe that men and women are situated in society not only differently but also unequally. Radical feminism contends that women are of absolute positive value as men and that women are everywhere oppressed-often violently-by the systems of patriarchy. To them, the reason for the discriminatory gender norms and practices is a patriarchal culture, so that men will continue to oppress women because women are treated as inferior beings. Women get less of the material resources, social status, power, and opportunities for self-actualization than men do who share their social location. In confirmation of the above, a study by (Ferdous & Mallick, 2019) reported that women are discriminated against and oppressed by the patriarchal norms and practices in accessing resources and opportunities in every sphere of life, which limits their capacity to respond to both climatic and socioeconomic stressors. This inequality results from the organization of society, for although individual human beings vary in their profile of potentials and traits, no significant pattern of natural variation distinguishes the sexes. Radical feminists view patriarchy as dividing societal rights, privileges, and

power primarily along the lines of sex as a result, oppressing women and privileging men. They, therefore, oppose existing political and social organization in general because it is inherently tied to patriarchy. They then sought a solution in the defeat of patriarchy, which must begin with a basic reworking or reorganization of gender norms that will be void of patriarchy. To them, men are not inherently bad or oppressive but it is those gender norms imposed on them by the society in form of patriarchy that made them oppressive, they, therefore, call for the abolishment of patriarchal culture for equal self-actualization of men and women. In a similar vein, from a functionalist perspective, the riverine environment provides a lot of opportunities for the members of the Umuoba-Anam community but also poses a great impediment in accessing livelihood strategies. The river presents unequal opportunities for both genders as it accords better livelihood opportunities for males than females. Many females find it difficult to navigate through the river except they are ferried by males. This is also dependent on the willingness of males to ferry such women across the river which could cost more monetarily for women who do not own canoes and other means of transportation.

Description of Study Area

Umuoba-Anam is a riverine community in Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra State, South Eastern Nigeria which is located in the town of Otuocha with part of the community known as Aboegbu-Anam residing across the river. The town consists of five villages which are Umuoji, Umuoke, Umuezeanya, Umuobalichi and Umuoche. It is among the eight villages that make up the riverine community of Anam, and these Anam people hail mainly from such towns as Umuenwelum, Oroma, Umudora, Umuikwu, Umuoba, Iyi-Ora, Otuocha, and Mmiata (Okonkwo, 2012). The Anam communities are surrounded by the lower Niger River and Anam River which they depend on for sustainable livelihood and a small income. The Omamballa River is located in Otuocha, Anambra state, in valley-like scenery. It is large and deep surface water, with its bank extending a long distance through Otuocha, Anam, Umuoba, Aguleri, Umuleri, and so on, all in Anambra State, Nigeria. All the Anam communities were situated across the river but Umuoba migrated to the hinterland in 1910 during the birth and reign of Umueze age grade, while part of their kinsmen known as Aboegbu-Anam still resides on the Ireland till date. They are hospitable people who welcome visitors but they do have problems with the Aguleri people who borders them. Their political organization is well structured in the sense that they respect their elders because they organize things with age grades. Formerly, the eldest man became their king but it is no longer that way now but they still accord great respect to the eldest man in the community. It is a low-lying riverine community with parts of its land covered by

water. As a result of its geographical position and socio-economic conditions, the community is mainly known for agriculture and trading whereby men and women perform different roles for their livelihood. They have about five farming camps: The Ebenebe, Mmánya, Oshii, Elopu, and Omagwu camp where their major farming activities take place. These camps are situated on the river banks very far away from the town which is why the farmers spend most of their lives there because they settle there with their families throughout the farming period till the flood time when they start harvesting to go back home before the flood devastation which normally occurs around September. The rest of the people left at home do their farming in Umuoba camp 3 and other communal lands also located across the river but the difference is that this group of people do not reside in the camp as they are situated close to the community therefore, they ferry back home once they are done with the day's activity unlike their other counterparts whose farming camps are located very far away from the community. They are also involved in fishing, trading, and so on. Most of their ceremonies including funeral rites are generally performed mainly from the ninth or eleventh month of the year depending on the environment when all the camp dwellers must have returned home and when there would no longer be issue of flood because it is a flood prone area because they are heavily affected whenever there is flood invasion almost annually and they are one of the most affected community this year.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on a qualitative ethnographic research design. The choice of the design is because the study is set out to give an in-depth and detailed descriptive account of the issue under study and ethnography as a form of qualitative research is used as the main data collection approach. Onyeme et al., (2019) noted that the qualitative method is a systematic and subjective approach used to describe life experiences and give them meaning as stated by Burns and Grooves (2003). This method produces non-numerical and descriptive data, which is often the in-depth data required. Okpoko & Ezech, (2011) in the same vein defined qualitative research as the collection and analysis of virtually any information that is not numerical.

The researcher used participant observation (PO), key informant interviews (KII), in-depth interviews (IDI), and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) as data collection methods because the study wished to examine and describe the gender norms, livelihoods, and access to the healthcare system among the Umuoba-Anam people. Thematic analysis was employed after the transcription of the recorded interviews. For this paper, the data used were those gotten from the above methods and the findings have been described in detail based on the paper's

objectives aimed at examining how the gendered norms of the riverine people of Umuoba-Anam shape their daily lives and livelihoods.

FINDINGS

Gender Issues and Livelihoods

As a result of its geographical position and socio-economic conditions, the Umuoba-Anam community is mainly known for agriculture and trading whereby men and women perform different roles for their livelihood. There is a clear gender-based division of labour especially in agriculture whereby women cultivate vegetable crops, such as spinach, garden eggs, peppers, okra, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, maize, and so forth. These crops are planted either in more upland fields or planted after the receding Lower Niger River flood. The vegetable crops are harvested as they mature before the next inundation of the farming plains. The men are mainly known for fishing, cultivation of yam, sweet potatoes, rice, sand excavation and so on while women cultivate vegetable and groundnut and equally help the men with clearing of grasses. In addition, the women cultivate cassava which takes longer to mature and is often harvested last before the flood transgression. These are some of the excerpts from the IDI on activities of men and women of Umuoba:

A woman from Umuoche said that: *Men cultivate yam, they also excavate sand used for building from the river, women plant pepper and everything used in cooking food.*

Another woman from Umuezeanya said that: *man cultivates yam, and also engages in fishing, while woman plants pepper, groundnut, and vegetables but she does not engage in fishing because it is a man's job.*

Another man from Umuobalichi said that: *Umuoba is well known for agriculture, men cultivate yam, they do fishing, they cultivate rice, potatoes, while the women help in clearing/weeding the farm and also cultivate vegetables and groundnut.*

One key observation is that Umuoba-Anam is a patriarchal community. There is male dominance and clear gender division of labour whereby men's agricultural products are seen as superior while that of women as inferior. A woman from Umuoche attested to that and stated that yam cultivation and fishing are solely a man's job, that a woman can only put hook in the river and leave it there till the next day when she comes back to see if it catches any fish because it can only catch one fish at a time unlike the net that catches as many fishes as possible which is being used by men.

She also said that a man cannot relegate himself to cultivation of vegetable because it is a woman's job and that he cannot make any money from it.

Men cultivate yam and also very good at fishing. Groundnut and pepper do not give money and they are women's job because they are concerned with the cultivation of things used in cooking. They do not go fishing because they cannot cast net. They can only put hook in the river and leave it there till the next day, they now come back to check if it catches any fish. A man cannot agree to cultivate vegetable, he will tell you that he would not make any money from it that it is a woman's job.

It then means that women's economic activity or livelihood is such that is of lesser financial benefit and that is why men are assigned to more beneficial tasks in order to continue their domination of women being a patriarchal community. No wonder one of the study participants, a woman, said that a man cannot accept or relegate himself to the cultivation of vegetable.

Livelihood according to (Ajala, 2008) is an aggregate measure of how people or a given population (as small as a household of a single person) make their living within the limit imposed by the environment, social, economic and political conditions of the society in which they live. There are some notable differences in the peoples' livelihood and livelihood strategies, these activities are designed in such a way that each gender knows what is assigned and expected of him / her at each point in time. In farming, men are solely involved in the cultivation of yam and women need not to be reminded that yam cultivation is a man's job. Women can only help in doing other things like cutting of grasses, and any other thing that the man needs their help with but are forbidden from making yam ridges. On why women does not cultivate yam, the FGD participants noted that it is an abomination in their land for a woman to do so because yam is seen as a sacred thing and a woman who is usually unclean cannot do the job.

"It is an abomination for a woman to cultivate yam because she cannot make yam ridges unless after making the ridges, she may help in putting the yam. A woman does not cross a yam ridge, it is a taboo".

Potatoes, rice and so on are also cultivated by men, although women are not forbidden this time but they are majorly men's work. Women of Umuoba-Anam are saddled with the responsibility of cultivating vegetables, pepper, ground nut etc.

Fishing in Umuoba-Anam is done by men who catch fishes using net. They do this both for commercial and for their subsistence consumption on a daily basis except on Eke market days which is the day all

fishermen go to the market to sell their products. A woman in an interview (IDI) told me that women can only catch fishes using 'ngule' (hook), that they are forbidden from making use of 'iboro' (net) because according to her 'nwanyi ama efeni iboro' which means that a woman cannot cast a net that it is a man's job because it is tedious. In her words:

What we are known for is agriculture, men cultivate yam while women help in weeding the farmland, men do fishing while women do not because they are forbidden from casting net as such is a taboo. They can only put hook inside the river if they want to catch fish and go home till the next day, they return back to check if it catches any fish. They cannot cast net because it is strenuous, and hence, a man's job.

To that end, women only catch fishes for their immediate consumption because hook can only catch one fish at a time unlike the net that can gather as much as possible in one cast. This gender norm can be said to be a gender inequality against women because you cannot compare the financial power of a man who catches fishes with net to that of a woman who uses only hook. The implication is that the women will be dependent on men in certain things because they will lack the financial ability to take care of their needs.

Sand excavation and boat paddling are also among the Umuoba peoples livelihood. While sand excavation is peculiarly done by male members, boat paddling is also a means whereby young men make their living. Women may also decide to paddle their personal boat to the market or elsewhere but the males are the main boat peddlers both for private and commercial purposes.

Gender Restrictions Reinforce Inequality

This has to do with the 'dos and don'ts' of each gender in Umuoba-Anam which is called 'nso ala' in Igbo language (taboo). There are a lot of things the female gender is restricted from doing which when violated has repercussions. For instance, it is a taboo for a woman to catch fish with net and there is repercussion for whoever faults that although according to my study participants, no one would ever dare to try it because it is a well-established norm in their land and women are quite aware that they can only use hook if there is need to catch fish.

Moreover, a woman who is menstruating is denied of certain privileges. She is not allowed to enter the Okpala's house (the eldest man in the community) for whatsoever. In an interview with the Okpala, the researcher learnt that a woman in her menses cannot cook for her husband or even stay in the same room with him but that Christianity came and changed certain things and then some Christians stopped keeping such norm while others still do it till date.

In fact, a young man I was communicating with told me that the norm is still very strong till date especially among the traditional worshippers and even few Christians and that it should be encouraged because a woman in her menses is impure at the moment and should not interact with her man or enter into secret/sacred places until she is free/clean. He maintained that he as a pagan still hold tight to the tradition and on no account should his wife cook for him or stay in the same room with him during her menstruation. His exact words:

The truth is that a woman in her menstrual cycle is unclean, she is not supposed to come out and be interacting with people until she is clean. I am a core traditionalist, my wife does not cook food for me anytime she is in her period.

The researcher probed to know what happen when the man and his wife live alone in the house, who then cooks the food and she was told that there must be a neighbour or any available person to do that until the wife is 'pure' the researcher also faced such scenario the day she went to see the Okpala although she had already entered the Obi Okpala (Okpala's house) and started chit-chatting before the issue was raised and one of the men with the Okpala asked if I was pure that an impure woman does not enter the Okpala's house and I answered yes but what if I was not free what will happen since I had already entered inside the house and they told me that it would not be a taboo because I was a visitor and had no idea but that I had to leave at once. The same scenario greeted me, the day I went to the Obi Iwele's shrine. My research assistant who is from that community had already told me about it, so on reaching the entrance we stopped and greeted them and the chief Priest told us to come in if I was clean and so we entered. Moreso, women who are menstruating are prohibited from fetching water or even entering certain rivers in Anam such as the rivers owned by certain deities, the Okuiyi River and so on and whoever violates the norm gets drowned instantly. Excerpt from the FGD:

We have many rivers that we do not fish in except once in two years like the Okuiyi river, a woman in her menses cannot step inside it. If they do, the water deity will descend on them because we worship and respect deities. If she is inside the water and then notices that her menses is coming, she has to stand up immediately and leave the water. Any women in her monthly period is not supposed to be interacting with people, such women do not enter inside the Okpala's house, our people do not joke with such tradition, if you even go to the Bible, it is also there. A man cannot sit on same chair with a married woman or to cross a married woman but some of them have been

scrapped in order to avoid mass death. An unclean woman should keep herself pre until after seven days before she can start interacting with people. Is seven days too much? Such women should not enter or cross any water owned by any deity, and if she does, she will have the deity to contend with and that is how it is in our land.

This means that a woman who is menstruating is unclean and therefore not worthy to interact with people because according to them, Umuoba-Anam does not joke with such tradition/belief and that it is equally in the Bible. Unclean woman should stay away from people and certain rivers owned by the deities until she is free, else she will have the oracle to contend with.

Other restriction is that women do not make yam ridges (they do not cultivate yam) because it is a taboo for a woman to cross a yam ridge because of the biological process that made them to menstruate and thus the society sees them as the unclean beings. They do not also partake in making mask spirits (masquerading) just as it is found in some other Igbo communities and so on.

"Another taboo against women is that it is a taboo for a woman to cultivate yam because a woman cannot cross her leg over a yam ridge unless a woman who has reached menopause. A woman does not also partake in making mask spirit, it is a taboo in Igbo land".

Controlling Women's Sexualities as Abominable Acts

Women's sexual activities are monitored and controlled using gendered taboos and norms. This is mainly strict for married women and unmarried girls. Female sexual activities outside established social structures are described as sexual contraventions. Adultery is sexual intercourse by a married person perpetuated with someone other than their spouse. In Umuoba-Anam, the first and major abominable act that comes to the mind of every member of the community both young and old is adultery. It is an established norm that a married man should not sleep with a woman that is not his wife and vice-versa. Below are some excerpts from the FGD attesting to the fact that adultery is a taboo in their community:

A woman from Umuoche: You do not have sex with a married woman, it kills the woman.

Another woman from Umuobalichi: If anyone engages in adultery, the land will deal with that person. A woman from Umuoji: For a married woman to commit adultery is an abomination.

A man from Umuezeanya: If a married man and woman commit adultery, it is an abomination,

the land deals with whoever that commits such act.

Another Umuoji man: A married woman should not commit adultery, and a man should not have sex with a married woman.

Whoever does that have committed a heinous crime against the gods and land. Almost all my study participants frowned at it and I was told that if a woman commits adultery and confesses her sin, that certain rites and sacrifices must be performed for her cleansing then she apologizes to her husband. But in a situation whereby a married woman committed adultery and failed to confess, that the wrath of the gods will descend on her which could either kill her or strike her with a strange ailment or it can equally affect the husband which will now signify that such an abominable act was committed. Once that is ascertained, the woman will be made to perform some sacrifices and after that the elderly women will roast 'uburu okuko' (a chicken) and cut it into seven (7) parts then give to the woman to eat for cleansing. She would then be dragged round the entire community with people chanting different derogatory songs for her and after that, she would be sent back to her parent's house except if her husband's family reaches consensus with her and accepts her back.

A married woman should not go and commit adultery, a man should not also have sex with a married woman, if a woman does that, she will have to confess and the elders will perform some sacrifices and cleansing in order to appease the gods and cleanse that woman. The woman in question will put on a small piece of cloth around her waist and nothing on top, then she will be made to come to the village square but nowadays, they no longer go to the village square. The elders will roast a chicken, cut it into seven parts and then use a broom stick and be feeding that woman with the roasted chicken. After that, they will drag the woman round the entire community singing derogatory songs while the children will be chanting iyoooo! When they are done with that, the woman will go back to her father's house from there unless she reconciled with her husband and he accepts her back. The roasted chicken signifies cleansing but if a woman hides her action or fail to confess, she may die or be afflicted with a strange illness.

The irony there is that a married man who committed the same adultery goes scot-free or is made to pay a fine which would be shared among the elderly women and part given to the husband of the woman he committed the act with for compensation or restitution. I found out that most of my study participants especially the older one's both male and female were comfortable

with the norm and this shows the gender inequality at play which could be as a result of their patriarchal culture. To my utmost dismay, a man from Umuoche one of my (FGD) discussants told me that it is always like that even in the Bible and gave me an instance of Mary-Magdalene when they wanted to stone her to death because of adultery and that nothing was done to the man she slept with.

According to him,

"A married woman should not go and commit adultery, a man should not also have sex with a married woman, if a woman does that, she will have to confess and the elders will perform some sacrifices and cleansing in order to appease the gods and cleanse that woman. The woman in question will put on a small piece of cloth around her waist, then the elders will roast a chicken, cut it into seven parts and then use a broom stick and be feeding that woman with the roasted chicken while the children will be chanting iyoooo! But a man who she committed the act with does not go through such process, he will only pay some fine and go free because if you go to the Bible, Mary-Magdalene the woman that was caught in the act with a man was said to be stoned to death while the man she committed adultery with was left unhurt and not even mentioned and that is what we are following because you know that we are the descendants of Israel."

A boy from Umuobalich also stated that: *"For a married woman to commit adultery is an abomination and may lead to her death if she fails to confess but if a man does that, it is not regarded as an abomination like that of a woman, he will go scot-free"*.

Another man from Umuoji: *"If a married woman and a man commit adultery, it is a taboo. The land will hold and punish such people, the man may go scot-free if he is lucky or vice-versa"*.

It was the youths that reacted differently to the level of inequality and preferential treatment given to the made offenders. While the females (girls) frown at the male's preferential treatment, they were of the view that there should be equal punishment for male and female offenders. The males (boys) on the other hand were not too comfortable with the situation but they admitted that, that is what made them men. That man must be man no matter what and should not be equal with or compared to woman.

Patriarchal norms enhancing gendered inequality

Patriarchy according to (Lerner, 1986) is 'the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance

over women in society in general'. Most Igbo communities are known for their male dominance and Umuoba-Anam is not an exception. Men's opinion must first be sought for before any decision is being taken and their approval is of utmost importance from my observation, women are seen as the lesser being who are nothing without men. The norm is ingrained in the mind of every male both young and old and they will always remind you that they are male and should not be spoken to anyhow and the female folk do not see anything wrong in that especially the older women. They see it as a way of life.

Son Preference / Training Pattern

Son/male child preference syndrome is always obtainable in a patriarchal society. Some of my study participants told me that there is no preferential treatment in the training of a male and female child but that a male child is preferred over a female child while few participants were of the view that a male child deserves a better training because he is the one to continue the family's lineage while the female child will be married off to another family. Therefore, based on that, some families make sure that their male children get the best in life and the best education to any level they can afford while such a 'risk' cannot be taken for a girl child except if the family is well to do. Below are some of the IDI participants attestations, a man said:

The training pattern for boys is different from that of the girls, a boy is being trained well because the family look up to them as the heirs. They get the best education because they are the pillar of the family. If you train them well you know that you and your unborn generation will be happy. Another woman, nowadays, parents train their male child better than the female children because they are the ones to keep the family going.

In such situation, giving birth to numerous female children without a male child can be compared to being childless and peace and harmony lack in such families. Both husband and wife will be restless until an alternative thing is done in order to get a male child. Most of the (FGD) participants admitted that marrying another wife is the best option they consider.

A male participant said that:

If a man got married and the wife only gives birth to female children, such a man will never be happy because he will not have anyone to inherit his properties. It hurts both the man and the wife, sometimes it even brings problem between the husband and the wife. A woman who lacks moral will go and sleep with another man to see if she can birth a male child. Peace

and tranquility lack in such family but the best thing for such people is to get another wife.

Another male participant:

A male child is the foundation of the house, that is how it is because a woman cannot be addressed as "Obinna". A woman does not occupy the father's house, you can only find such in Onitsha.

A female participant:

Any child is good but a male child is better because of the family's lineage. A woman who does not give birth to a male child should discuss with the husband for him to get a second wife.

They maintained that, although every child no matter the sex is a gift from God, but that the value of a male child outweighs that of a female child and cannot be compromised. This gender norm however, made male children to always see themselves as the superior being while their female counterparts are the inferior ones. This, I observed from my experience and the daily chit-chats with some younger ones. A boy once told me that:

A man is extremely important because they are the ones that keep the family's lineage going, a family cannot stay without a male child and that is what made us unique.

Which means that a male child is very important and that a family cannot do without a male child, and that made them unique.

DISCUSSION

We have so far described in detail the gendered norms of the Umuoba-Anam people and their implications on livelihood pattern in an ongoing ethnographic research on gender norms, livelihoods and access to healthcare among the riverine community of Umuoba-Anam in Anambra East L.G.A of Anambra State, Nigeria. The study revealed that there is a clear gender division of labour in Umuoba, while men are involved in more strenuous and lucrative jobs, women take charge of the less strenuous with lesser income jobs and they are also restricted from performing certain tasks as a result of their gender. Heise et al., (2019) observe that discriminatory gender norm play out in a scenario whereby gender norms sustain hierarchy of power and privileged that typically favours that which is considered male or masculine over that which is female or feminine, reinforcing a systemic inequality that undermines the rights of women and girls and restricts opportunities for women, men and gender minorities to

express their authentic selves. Akeju et al., (2016) noted that the status of women is low and families are patriarchal with men responsible for key decisions. The patriarchal family structure rests on men's control over property which often extends to wife as his possession. It is within this cultural milieu of male dominance that women enter into marriage, child bearing, and child rearing in Nigeria, (Akeju et al., 2016). The patriarchal culture gives women little or no power to decide when they become pregnant or how, and when, and where to seek care during complications (Ambreen & Mohyuddin, 2012). In this village, girls and women are expected to maintain the household, care for children and old and sick members of the household (usually within the household) without remuneration. Men, on the other hand are expected to earn income and to protect the family from violence of the outsiders. Masculine norms and requirements govern and dominate the so-called feminine sphere. There is this age- old system of inequality and stereotyping of the women and son preference syndrome. This attitude prevents the parent from taking appropriate care of the girl child should she fall sick. More so, various studies have supported the prevalence of division of labour in creating gender stereotyping. The implication is that division of labour in Umuoba is done according to the established law of the land (gender norm) which prohibits women from performing certain tasks which when violated becomes a taboo thereby depriving the women certain opportunities.

The study also found out that the gendered norms of the Umuoba people favours the male folk more than the female especially as it concerns the male child preference and the case of adultery which are not unconnected with the patriarchal norm because it is a strong patriarchal community. A study by (Ferdous & Mallick, 2019) supported the above finding and also revealed that asymmetrical gender divisions make women disproportionately vulnerable and decrease their coping and adaptive capacity in changed situations. The study showed that women are the most vulnerable amongst vulnerable groups, not simply as a result of their gender roles and responsibilities, but more as a result of discriminatory social norms and practices such as lack of property ownership, lack of education, early marriage, the dowry system, and acceptance of domestic violence against women, which further create barriers to women's mobility and economic empowerment. Women are conditioned to remain at home and not participate, or to wait for men to accompany them to most activities taking place in the public space. Again, the few women the first author met on her various visits in the area were not free to say anything against or for their men. Similarly, in line with findings of this paper, (Okorie & Williams, 2009) reported that there exists cultural belief that tends to prohibit women in menstruation from accessing anywhere near the lake as they would provoke the anger of the river deity and consequently affect the lake's productivity. These prevailing culturally imposed

gender inequities in African communities reduce the efficiency of labour and allocation of resources, both within the households and within the community. Gender inequality exacerbates poverty among the women, particularly widows and single, separated, and divorced women.

The paper reported that the study is based on a qualitative ethnographic research design. The choice of the design was because the study sets out to give the descriptive account of the issue under study and ethnography involving participant observation (PO), In-depth Interviews, and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) as methods of data collection. The findings so far revealed gendered livelihood with some notable differences in the peoples' livelihood and livelihood strategies and gender restrictions as among the gendered norms of Umuoba-Anam people. These have great socioeconomic implications on women as it has been reported that such women in riverine communities hardly have access to river resources (Shitima, 2018). The paper also highlighted that patriarchy was an issue, especially in limiting women's rights, privileges and opportunities as proven from the case of male child preference, subjugation of the women who are menstruating, the preferential treatment given to a male adulterer and so on. The implication is that the situation created a differential opportunity for men and women because women lack access to certain resources and opportunities due to their poor living standards and male dominance and this weakens women's position in society and makes them vulnerable to violence (Hadi, 2017). Generally, embodied identities impact negatively on women (Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989). Issues of unequal access to healthcare for both genders (Onyima, 2019), especially as it pertains to access to reproductive health information (Carroll & Kapilashrami, 2020) crop up in riverine communities. Put differently, in certain riverine geographies, women's access to river resources are limited (Shitima, 2018). Even in decision making, age and gender rear up when decisions are to be taken because women are not supposed to talk in the presence of the elderly and when men speak in many traditional rural communities in Nigeria (Shitima, 2018). All these put together affect women's health and there is need to address issues around the rights and healthcare of vulnerable populations in riverine communities (Tangcharoenathien et al., 2018). Efforts need to be continuously made to bring lasting solutions to inhibitions triggered by embodied identities in women (Yacob-Haliso, 2016).

CONCLUSION

So far, we have been able to present some of the gendered norms of the riverine community of Umuoba-Anam and their implications on livelihood and have also made an input on gender, sex and livelihood discourse of Umuoba-Anam. The researcher faces

some challenges in the course of this ethnographic work and some of them border mostly on security and finance. There is an age long dispute between Aguleri and Umuleri, in which the Umuoba-Anam normally join forces with Umuleri and you must pass through these warring communities before you get to Umuoba-Anam except you travel on water. It also happened in early 2021 at the beginning of this research work and also, there was a murder case around Awkuzu in Oyi L.G.A which led the Anambra state government to issue curfew within the environment, therefore, getting to the study area became a very big problem due to security.

Again, means of transportation to travel across the water to get firsthand information to ascertain whether there is any relationship between gender norms, livelihood and the entire life pattern of the people living at the farming camps was a problem. This is because to travel to the farming camps using government speed boat costs a huge amount of money according to the residents because the camps are located very far away and to travel by local boat/canoe can take up to three days depending on the camp.

The water level at the moment has started rising as at the time of writing this paper because the community is prone to flood devastation and people have started running helter-skelter. Therefore, all these have affected the processes and outcomes of the research of ethnographic research in one way or the other because it will be difficult to give an accurate report on the ways of life of the people especially those residing in camps if they are not closely observed but the objective of this paper which is to investigate the gendered norms of Umuoba-Anam people was not affected.

Government, stakeholders, and other organizations are thereby advised to join efforts and support researchers by providing adequate security and transportation means that would be affordable to be able to study the entire sample of the population for a better result and for the eradication of some harmful practices or discriminatory gender norms that are harmful/detrimental to the female gender.

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