



# **Rivers Indigenes' Perception of Women Under-Representation into Elective Leadership Positions in Rivers State: Counselling Implication**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study investigated Rivers indigenes' Perception of women under-representation into elective leadership positions in Rivers state: counselling implications. The study utilized a survey design, the population is made up of all the indigenes of Rivers state, whose actual number cannot be determined due to the influx of Nigerians from other states and non- Nigerians in different parts of the state. The purposive quota sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of one thousand (1000) Rivers indigenes from ten (10) local government areas out of twenty-three (23) LGAs in the state. Nine hundred and fifty-four participants involving 456 males and 498 females, 625 married and 329 singles and 481 upland and 473 riverine dwellers of the state completed the questionnaire tagged 'Perception for women in politics questionnaire' (PWIPQ) with 15 items constructed by the researchers to collect data. The face and content validity of the instrument was established by test experts and guidance and counselling experts from the three universities in Rivers state while the reliability of PWIPQ was established in a test retest procedure using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and it yielded a coefficient of  $r = 0.78$ . Three research questions and three null hypotheses were raised. Data was analysed using mean and standard deviations for the research questions and z-test for all the hypotheses. Results reveals that there was a significant difference between male/female, married/singles, upland/riverine dwellers perception of women underrepresentation into elective leadership positions in Rivers state with regards to discrimination, women refusal to participate in elective positions and cultural stereotype. It was recommended that political parties should encourage female candidates about the electoral environment/processes and finance them while potential female candidates should be counselled to have self- confidence, be rugged and compete favourably with their male counterparts to bridge the gap, lastly government should make major cultural and political changes to encourage women participation in politics.

**Keywords:** perception, indigenes, women, politics, participation, counselling, under-representation.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since the creation of Rivers state, 27<sup>th</sup> of May, 1967 women occupied almost un-noticeable elective positions. Women vote, join political parties, run for elective positions and are represented in government yet they lag in elective positions of power and decision making. The continued underrepresentation of women into elective leadership positions in Rivers state calls for concern. Some states in the federation have produced democratically elected senators, deputy governors but the case was different in Rivers

state until 2015 when Rivers indigenes witnessed the emergence of Dr Ipalibo Banigo as the first female deputy governor in the history of the state. Out of 23 local government councils in the state you cannot talk of a single female council chairman who is democratically elected, 32 seats in the state house of assembly can only boast of a female in this current dispensation, Hon Victoria Nyeche, who has not even been sworn in after she was declared winner by an appeal court in a purported election she lost in April, 2015. The 13 seats meant for rivers state in the house of representative can only boast of 3 females, all the 3 senatorial seats meant for the state have been consistently occupied by men right from time immemorial, no female senator has ever emerged in the state whether presently or in the past. The percentage of female elective office holders as analysed above demonstrates that it is not only at the state level that rivers women are underrepresented. Larger gender disparities are also evident at the federal level where men occupy all the senatorial seats and almost all the house of representative seats allotted to the state.

McGhee (2013) believes that women are equally qualified as men in political affairs in most cases, even more qualified than their male counterparts; deficiency of political knowledge provides correlation between doubt women face and lack of political candidacy. Men express more comfort and felt greater freedom than women when thinking about seeking elective offices. Anigwe (2014) in a qualitative research study on 'the participation of women in political leadership positions in Nigeria' indicates that women are still underrepresented in the political sector of government and lack full political power as they strived for equality to become political leaders. Lawless and Fox (2001) unveils in a survey conducted in the United States that when women run for office, they perform just as well as their male counterparts. There is no differences in women and men fund raising receipts, vote totals, or electoral success. Yet women remain severely underrepresented in U.S political institutions.

Temesgen (2008) says although gender inequality affect women disproportionately, the entire society pays a price for them. Dogonyaro in Oganwu (1996) finds that the number one problem confronting women in politics is women themselves. Women are not fond of the leadership of women, they are their own greatest enemies as they run each other down. A woman in politics will be an object of very uncomplimentary remarks and gossips. One begins to wonder what could be responsible. Lawless and Fox (2001) shows that the fundamental reason for women's underrepresentation is that they do not run for office. There is a substantial gap in political ambition; men tend to have it and women don't. Lawless and Fox (2011) conducted a similar survey after 10 years of nearly 4,000 male and female potential candidates- lawyers, business leaders, educators and political activist they arrived at the conclusion that the gender gap in political ambitions is virtually the same as it was a decade ago. In spite of the significant progress made for women's rights women are still confined to stereotyped gender roles such as responsibility for child care and household affairs, belief in their qualification for the position and confidence in their ability, these factors have confined them to the background in the scheme of things at the political arena. A survey conducted by the American University, Washington DC in 2001 as quoted by Gonzalez (2013) supports this fact.

The low numbers of women in elective political positions in Rivers state is glaring when we place them in context. Gonzalez (2013) quoting the survey conducted by the American University, Washington DC in 2001 reveals that the problem with women in politics does not lie merely in the presumption that women are burdened with family responsibilities but rather because there is a cultural idea for women to harmonize the role of "working women" with quintessential housewife. This desire to achieve a balance illuminates the complexity in choices faced by women, inapplicable to men. Again the survey carried out by the American University in 2011 as quoted by Pearson (2013) reveals that belief in political qualification provides the largest platform for the absence of women in politics, the study indicates that men are 60% more likely than women to believe that they are very qualified to run for office.

Several studies show that female interest in politics has increased, while their political involvement remains stagnant. The root of the problem according to Gonzalez (2013) does not necessarily relate to a lack of interest rather a lack of ambition to carry out political candidacy in a politically male-dominated world. In contrast to this view, Nebousa (2009) in his survey on women underrepresentation concludes that inspite of the numerous international laws that exist, women still are not recognised and given the

right to participate in politics like their male counterparts. In line with this view, Chuku (2009) believes that although there has been an increase in the number of women in legislative bodies. His research indicated that African women continued to be underrepresented in all structures of power and decision making.

Bernard & Jones (2008) concludes in their study that gender equality and women inclusion play a central role both as litmus test and as an active variable shaping in a more democratic, stabilized and developed society. In another survey conducted by Bernard & Jones (2008) It was indicated that Afghans generally were supportive of women's social and economic participation, while statistic data show that gender parity and women's participation in public life are significant contributors to stability not a risk factor. Bernard recommends that nation builders should work to reconcile traditional values with progressive ideas involving women's participation in the society.

From the foregoing, it is important to understand why so few women hold elective public offices in Rivers state and other parts of the world, what is responsible for this underrepresentation? Somewhat surprisingly from the reviewed literature 2 opposing answers emerged as to why few women are in elective political offices. The opinions are; women are not discriminated against rather they have consistently refused to present themselves for such positions due to childcare, household affairs, lack of confidence and so on. Secondly, women are being marginalised and discriminated against in a male dominated society, it is against this background that this research is conceived. This survey sought to address the perception of Rivers indigenes in women underrepresentation into elective positions in Rivers state: Implication for counselling. The researchers involved male/female, single/married indigenes of Rivers state from the upland and riverine communities. The study is only open to Rivers indigenes who are educated.

#### **Statement of the problem**

Studies have revealed that women are under-represented in elective leadership positions in most countries all around the world especially in Africa as indicated in the reviewed literature. Although some countries like Germany, Australia, india, United Kingdom, Liberia and some others have produced women into the highest elective positions (presidents, Chancellors and prime ministers, Governors) the story is far-fetched in Nigeria especially in Rivers State. The question is, why is it so in Nigeria and indeed Rivers State? What is responsible for the under-representation of women into elective leadership positions? Are the women not smart enough? Therefore, to understand women under-representation into elective leadership positions in Rivers State better, it is unavoidable for the researchers to investigate Rivers indigenes perception of women under-representation into elective leadership positions in Rivers State: Implication for counselling.

#### **Aim of the study**

The aim of the study is to investigate Rivers indigenes perception of women under-representation into elective leadership positions in Rivers State regarding discrimination, women refusal to participate in elective positions and cultural stereotype.

#### **Research Questions**

To guide the study three research questions were raised.

- To what extent are the male different from the female in perception of women participation into elective leadership positions in Rivers state with regards to discrimination?
- To what extent are the married different from the singles in perception of women participation into elective leadership positions in Rivers state with regards to women refusal to participate in elective positions?
- What is the perceptual level of upland and riverine dwellers towards women participation into elective leadership positions in the Rivers state with regards to cultural stereotype?

### **Hypotheses**

Three corresponding null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance to give bearing to the study.

- There is no significant difference in perception between male and female indigenes of Rivers state towards women participation into elective leadership positions in Rivers state with regards to discrimination.
- There is no significant difference in perception between married and single indigenes of Rivers state towards women participation into elective leadership positions in Rivers state with regards to women refusal to participate in elective positions.
- There is no significant difference in perception between upland and riverine dwellers in Rivers State towards women participation into elective leadership positions in Rivers State with regards to cultural stereotype.

### **METHOD**

The study explored the survey research which systematically collects, analyses and synthesis quantitative data on a large representative sample of a given population to cross-sectional or longitudinally identify, describe and explain the interrelations of political, educational, etc. as well as other characteristics about the sample through data obtained for accurate generalization to cover the entire population.

The target population of the study is all indigenes of Rivers state whose number cannot be ascertained due to the influx of Nigerians from other parts of the state and non-Nigerians that dwells in different parts of the state. The sample of the study is made up of one thousand (1000) respondents chosen from ten (10) local government areas out of the twenty-three (23) LGAs in the state, five (5 ) upland and five (5) riverine local government areas. One hundred (100) respondents from each local government area were selected for the study.

The purposive Quota sampling technique was used to compose the sample. Certain quota from the diverse strata of the population in Rivers state was selected to compose the sample (Riverine and upland). Usually, the quotas are based on known characteristics of the entire population to which the findings can be generalised.

The perception of women in politics questionnaire (PWIPQ) was developed by the researchers through intensive literature search. Face and content validities of the instrument was established by SIX (6) experts in guidance and counselling and test and measurement from the three Universities in Rivers State. University of Port-Harcourt, Rivers state University of Science and Technology Nkpolu and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education all in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, two (2) from each University.

The test-retest reliability was employed to establish the consistency of the instrument (reliability). A coefficient of reliability  $r=0.78$  was obtained using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and it was considered strong enough to be used by test experts. The instrument has 4 sections. Section A; sought personal information such as sex, marital status and dwelling place, section B consists of 5 statements that sought the perception of respondents regarding discrimination of women. Section C; sought respondents' perception regarding refusal of women to present self for elective positions while section D sought respondents' perception regarding cultural stereotype with 5 items each. PWIPQ is rated on a 4-point scale, strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), strongly disagree (1). The minimum score obtainable for each section is 5points while the maximum score obtainable is 20points. A criterion mean of 2.5 was established to determine a negative or positive perception,  $(4+3+2+1=10/4= 2.5)$ . Any mean above the criterion mean of 2.5 was considered a negative perception while any mean below the set mean is considered a positive perception. The face to face method was used to administer the instrument, this was done by the researchers and research assistants chosen in different strata. Out of one thousand questionnaires administered only nine hundred and fifty- four (954) were successfully retrieved and conclusions were drawn based on this number.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) was used to answer the research questions while Z-test statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

**RESULTS**

The results of the study were presented in line with the research questions and the hypotheses.

**Research Question 1:** *To what extent are the male different from the female in perception of women participation into elective leadership positions in Rivers State with regards to discrimination?*

**Table 1; mean and standard deviation scores of male and female perceptions of indigenes of Rivers state with regards to discrimination**

| S/NO | ITEMS   | MALE |      |      | FEMALE |      |      | Mean set |
|------|---|------|------|------|--------|------|------|----------|
|      |   | n    | X    | sd   | n      | x    | Sd   |          |
| 1    | Politics is the right of men women's participation is an intrusion      | 456  | 1.8  | 0.54 | 498    | 1.6  | 0.48 | 1.7      |
| 2    | Women's desire shall be to their husbands and they shall rule over them |      | 2.8  | 1.34 |        | 1.4  | 0.42 | 2.1      |
| 3    | Women are not qualified for elective leadership positions               |      | 1.8  | 0.72 |        | 1.4  | 0.42 | 1.6      |
| 4    | Men and women are not equal or the same, women cannot rule men          |      | 2.8  | 1.34 |        | 1.6  | 0.48 | 2.2      |
| 5    | Women should only be followers not leaders                              |      | 2.2  | 1.28 |        | 1.4  | 0.42 | 1.74     |
|      | TOTAL   |      | 2.28 | 1.11 |        | 1.48 | 1.04 | 2.14     |

Total response  $456 + 498 = 954$

The data from table 1 above shows that all the mean scores of male and female indigenes of Rivers State are below the criterion mean of 2.5 save items 2 and 4 where the mean scores of males were above the set criterion mean, this indicates that some men still have discriminatory tendencies against women in politics believing that they are not equal with men, hence women should remain inactive in politics as they watch the men rule over them. Nevertheless, the overall mean for men is below the criterion mean which implies a positive perception, but the differences shown in the two items mentioned shows men and women are different in perception with regards to discrimination.

**Research Question 2:** *To what extent are the married different from the singles in perception of women participation into elective leadership positions in Rivers State with regards to women refusal to participate in elective positions?*

**Table 2: Mean and standard deviation scores for singles and married indigenes of Rivers State in perception with regards to refusal of women to participate in elective positions**

|   |   |     |     |      |     |     |      |      |
|---|---|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|------|------|
|   |   | 625 | 2.6 | 1.32 | 329 | 2.1 | 1.24 | 2.35 |
| 2 | Women lack self-confidence to step out in politics              |     | 3.1 | 1.41 |     | 1.8 | 0.54 | 2.45 |
| 3 | Women are not qualified to step out into politics               |     | 2.8 | 1.34 |     | 1.8 | 0.54 | 2.3  |
| 4 | Women run each other down in politics, they are not matured yet |     | 3.5 | 1.51 |     | 2.2 | 1.28 | 2.85 |
| 5 | Women cannot support fellow women to win elections              |     | 3.0 | 1.40 |     | 2.6 | 1.32 | 2.8  |
|   | TOTAL   |     | 3.0 | 1.3  |     | 1.7 | 1.00 | 2.35 |

Total responses  $625 + 329 = 954$

The data on table 2 shows that all the items for the married had mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.5 which means married indigenes of Rivers State believes that women do not have the courage to step out for politics due to the rigours involved in the process, lack of confidence and so on and this accounts for their underrepresentation while the singles consistently had mean scores below 2.5 safe item 5. They believe that the greatest undoing of women in politics is women themselves. The overall mean indicates a positive perception but the different perception expressed indicates that the married and singles are different in perception regarding women refusal to participate in politics.

**Research Question 3:** *What is the perceptual level of upland and riverine dwellers in Rivers State towards women participation into elective leadership positions in Rivers State with regards to cultural stereotype?*

**Table 3: Upland and Riverine dwellers mean and standard deviation scores with regards to cultural stereotype.**

| S/<br>N | ITEMS  | UPLAND |     |      | RIVERINE |      |      |          |
|---------|--|--------|-----|------|----------|------|------|----------|
|         |  | n      | X   | Sd   | n        | x    | Sd   | Mean set |
| 1       | Tradition forbids women in leadership positions  | 481    | 2.1 | 1.24 | 473      | 2.2  | 1.28 | 2.15     |
| 2       | Women entrance into politics would bring about conflict of roles                                   |        | 2.5 | 1.3  |          | 2.1  | 1.24 | 2.3      |
| 3       | Women should be primarily concerned with their marital responsibilities and leave politics for men |        | 1.8 | 0.72 |          | 2.6  | 1.32 | 2.2      |
| 4       | The customs and practices have inculcated a feeling of inferiority in the women.                   |        | 1.7 | 0.50 |          | 2.6  | 1.32 | 2.15     |
| 5       | Women are overwhelmed by the demands of parenting politics is a distraction.                       |        | 2.8 | 1.34 |          | 2.1  | 1.20 | 2.45     |
|         | TOTAL  |        | 2.2 | 1.02 |          | 2.32 | 1.3  | 2.26     |

Total response  $481 + 473 = 954$

The response on table 3 indicates that the overall mean for both upland and riverine dwellers is below the criterion mean and this indicates a positive perception. However, the mean for upland dwellers in item 5 believes that women are overwhelmed by demands of parenting and should not be distracted by politics while the riverine dwellers had a mean above the criterion mean in items 3 and 4 that means, they believe women should mind their marital responsibilities and cultural impositions on them while they watch the men play the politics. This goes a long way to explain that there is perceptual difference between upland and Riverine dwellers with regard to cultural stereotype.

Ho1: There is no significant difference in perception between male and female indigenes of Rivers State towards women participation into elective leadership positions in Rivers State with regards to discrimination.

**Table 4: Summary of data and Z-test comparison on the significant difference between male and female indigenes of Rivers state with regards to discrimination**

| Sex    | n   | X    | Sd   | Df  | z-crit | z-cal | Sig level | Decision   |
|--------|-----|------|------|-----|--------|-------|-----------|------------|
| Male   | 456 | 2.28 | 1.11 | 952 | 1.96   | 12.6  | 0.05      | Reject HO1 |
| Female | 498 | 1.48 | 1.04 |     |        |       |           |            |
| Total  | 954 |      |      |     |        |       |           |            |

Result is significant

Table 4 shows that the calculated z-test value of 12.6 is far greater than the table value of z-test which is 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance thus hypothesis one which states that there is no significance difference in perception between male and female indigenes of Rivers state towards women participation into elective positions in Rivers State with regards to discrimination is rejected and the alternate hypothesis retained. It therefore suggests that the mean difference between male and female perception towards women participation into elective position regarding discrimination is significant.

HO2: there is no significant difference in perception between married and single indigenes of Rivers state towards women participation into elective leadership positions in Rivers State with regards to women refusal to participate in elective positions.

**Table 5- Z-test analysis of married and single Rivers indigenes in perception with regards to women's refusal to participate in elective positions**

| Marital status | N   | x   | Sd   | Df  | z-crit | z-cal | Sig-level | Decision   |
|----------------|-----|-----|------|-----|--------|-------|-----------|------------|
| Married        | 625 | 3.0 | 1.3  | 952 | 1.96   | 15.1  | 0.05      | Reject HO2 |
| Single         | 329 | 1.7 | 1.00 |     |        |       |           |            |

Total 954

Result is significant

Table 5 shows that there is a significance difference in perception between married and single indigenes of rivers state towards women participation into elective positions in Rivers State with regards to women refusal to participate in elective positions. This is because the calculated z-test value of 15.1 is greater than z-crit of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This result leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis that states that there is no significance difference in perception between married and single indigenes or Rivers State towards women participation into elective positions in Rivers state with regards to women refusal to participate in elective positions and the acceptance o the alternate hypothesis

Ho3: There is no significant difference in perception between upland and riverine dwellers in Rivers state towards women participation into elective leadership positions in Rivers State with regards to cultural stereotype.

**Table 6- Z-test analysis of upland and riverine dwellers of Rivers state in perception with regards to cultural stereotype**

| Dwelling place | n   | X    | Sd   | Df  | z-crit | z-cal | Sig level | Decision  |
|----------------|-----|------|------|-----|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| Upland         | 481 | 2.2  | 1.02 | 952 | 1.96   | 4.5   | 0.05      | Reject HO |
| Riverine       | 473 | 2.23 | 1.3  |     |        |       |           |           |

Result is significant

Hypothesis testing shows that there is a significant difference between upland and riverine dwellers in Rivers state towards women participation into elective positions in Rivers State with regards to cultural stereotype, this is because the calculated z-test value of 4.5 is greater than the critical z-value of 1.96 with a degree of freedom of 592 this leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference in perception between upland and riverine dwellers in Rivers state towards women participation into elective positions in Rivers State with regards to cultural stereotype and the subsequent acceptance of the alternate hypotheses.

## **DISCUSSION**

The first finding indicates that there is a significant difference between male and female perception towards women participation in elective positions in Rivers State with regards to discrimination. This study agrees with Chuku (2009) whose work reveals that African women continued to be underrepresented in all structures and decision making although there has been an increase in the number of women in legislative bodies. It also agrees with the study of Nebousa (2009) which reveals that in spite of the numerous international laws that exists, women are not recognised and given the right to participate in politics like their male counterparts.

Hypothesis two also reveals that there is a significant difference between married and single indigenes of Rivers state towards women participation into elective positions in Rivers State with regards to women refusal to participate in elective positions. This study is in line with the findings of Dogonyaro in Oganwu (1996) which reveals that the number one problem confronting women in politics is women themselves, they run each other down because they are not fond of the leadership of women. It also agrees with lawless and fox (2011) which indicates that the fundamental reason for women's underrepresentation is that they do not run for office. Pearson (2013) also supports this finding by revealing that belief in political qualification provides the largest platform for absence of women in politics.

Hypothesis three also reveals that there is a significant difference in perception between upland and riverine dwellers in Rivers state towards women participation into elective positions in Rivers State with regards to cultural stereotype. This study is in line with the findings of a survey conducted by the American University, Washington DC in 2001 as quoted by Gonzalez (2013) which reveals that the problem with women in politics does not lie merely in the presumption that women are burdened with family responsibilities but rather because there is a cultural idea for women to harmonize the role of working women with quintessential housewife.

### **Implication for Counselling**

Counselling is a veritable tool that can enhance and encourage individuals' ability to take charge of their lives for a fulfilled living. Counselling in this wise can help women in Rivers State to reflect over their situation (under-representation in the political scene) and take appropriate action that can improve their access to elective leadership positions in the political arena in Rivers State. Anchored on this premise there is need for cognitive restructuring of women in Rivers state in terms of participation in elective leadership positions. Counsellors will assist women in utilizing Albert Ellis basic tenets in counselling to change irrational thinking about politics. Ellis believes that you become what you think, whatever you are is a product of your belief system. Many women in Rivers state believes that politics is a game for men and seeing themselves as not qualified. They irrationally feel that they don't have any business in politics but childcare and specified cultural roles to play, this is not invoked with the times and seasons. Counsellors are to redirect such belief system using ABCDE of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy. (A), Stereotyped culturally prescribed roles is the activating event (women should take care of children as a result refusing to present self for elective positions can lead to (B) that is, if they believe what society says about them, it will lead to (C) underrepresentation in elective positions whose consequence is crying out loud as been discriminated against or marginalised (D) counsellors are to help women to dispute this irrational belief by helping them to work towards transforming this unrealistic, immature, demanding and absolute style of thinking into a realistic mature, logical and empirical approach leading to (E) effective new life in the political landscape.

## CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study it can be concluded that;

- i. Male and female perception differs towards women participation into elective positions in Rivers state with regards to discrimination.
- ii. Married and single indigenes of Rivers state differ in perception towards women participation into elective positions in Rivers state with regards to refusal of women to participate in elective positions.
- iii. Upland and Riverine dwellers also differ in perception towards women participation into elective positions in Rivers State with regards to cultural stereotype.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are put forward in line with the findings of the study;

- i. Political parties should recruit, finance, encourage and inform female candidates about the electoral environment. This can help narrow the gender gap in ambition and increase women's representation.
- ii. Counselling should be organized for female politicians for cognitive restructuring to build self-confidence, ruggedness and the ability to compete favourably with their male counterparts to bridge the gap in underrepresentation in politics. In addition enlightenment campaigns should be organized to enlighten women on the need to belief in women and give them maximum support in politics whenever they present themselves for elective positions.
- iii. Major cultural and political changes should be made by government to encourage women in the political arena such as allocating a special percentage of representation to women at all levels of government. Childcare and household tasks should be collectively handled at the home front by spouses.

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