



Cultural Values and Gender Role Expectation in Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of traditional cultural values on gender role expectations among youths in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria. Amid shifting global and national discourses on gender equity, Nigerian youth are increasingly negotiating the tension between inherited traditional values and modern egalitarian ideals. Employing a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 384 respondents aged 15–35 using a structured questionnaire and analyzed through Pearson correlation and multiple regression. Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between traditional values and conservative gender role expectations ($r = .50, p < .001; \beta = .35, p < .001$), while higher educational attainment predicted more egalitarian views ($\beta = -.12, p < .001$). The study highlights the enduring impact of cultural norms on youth identity formation and gender perceptions, despite exposure to globalizing influences. It concludes that efforts to promote gender equity must engage cultural narratives and traditional authority structures to effect meaningful change. Recommendations include leveraging media and educational platforms to reshape gender perceptions and engaging cultural leaders in dialogue to modernize gender norms in contextually respectful ways.

Introduction

Today, gender role expectations influence every facet of society, from the family and schools to sports, leisure, the voluntary sector, politics, and even social media. The feminist movements and



increased advocacy for gender equality have challenged and redefined traditional roles, leading to more egalitarian practices in a global level (Connell, and Messerschmidt, 2018). Studies indicate that these evolving roles have led to more balanced partnerships and greater participation of women in the workforce, although residual stereotypes still persist in many cultures (Ridgeway, 2020). Contemporary research has also highlighted the intersectionality of gender with race, class, and sexuality, suggesting that gender roles are not monolithic but vary considerably based on broader social identities and contexts.

In Africa, gender roles are deeply intertwined with cultural traditions and social norms, but they are also undergoing transformation. African societies have historically maintained distinct roles for men and women. Men have been viewed as decision-makers and primary economic providers, and women as caregivers and custodians of cultural heritage. However, the continent's rapid urbanization and globalization have spurred shifts in these traditional paradigms. For instance, urban African women are increasingly pursuing higher education and participating in the labor market, challenging long-standing stereotypes (Johnson, 2014). At the same time, the influence of colonial histories and modern state policies have added layers of complexity to gender relations. Empirical studies suggest that while traditional gender expectations persist, there is a growing recognition of the need for gender equality to drive social and economic development (Amin and Omotayo, 2020). These changes are often met with resistance due to deeply embedded cultural practices, yet they also create opportunities for reimagining gender roles in more inclusive ways.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, presents a fascinating case for studying gender roles due to its diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural landscape. In Nigeria, traditional gender roles are strongly influenced by local customs and societal norms. Research in Nigeria has shown that many young Nigerians, especially those in urban centers, are questioning traditional norms and advocating for more equitable sharing of responsibilities in both public and private spheres (Uchendu, 2007). These shifts are evident in changing attitudes toward women's participation in higher education, professional work, and political leadership.

Despite these progressive trends, Nigeria still grapples with significant gender disparities. Women often face challenges in accessing resources, educational opportunities, and employment,



which are compounded by persistent patriarchal attitudes. Social work research highlights that these disparities contribute to broader issues of social inequality and impact the overall quality of life, particularly for women in rural and peri-urban areas. The tension between traditional expectations and modern aspirations creates a complex dynamic that influences not only individual behavior but also public policy and social development (Ibrahim and Olatubara, 2018).

Traditional values have historically provided the foundation for societal norms, shaping how gender roles are defined and expected within a community. In many cultures, these values prescribe distinct roles for men and women. For instance, in many parts of Africa and Nigeria, despite the persistence of traditional gender norms rooted in cultural and religious practices, modern influences such as education, media exposure, and economic development are gradually shifting expectations toward more egalitarian roles. This tension between the old and the new creates a dynamic social landscape where traditional values continue to exert influence, yet are also being transformed by the realities of contemporary life. Understanding this balance is crucial, as it not only impacts interpersonal relationships and family dynamics but also informs policy-making and social work interventions aimed at promoting gender equality and social justice.

Research on gender in Nigeria has largely addressed broad issues, i.e. unequal access to education, employment, and politics, while paying little attention to the interplay of culture and modernity among urban youth. Even as globalization and digital media expose young Nigerians to progressive views on gender, strong traditional and religious narratives continue to dominate family and community life, sending mixed signals that can cause internal conflict, shape academic and career aspirations, and strain interpersonal relationships. Within the broader Yoruba culture of Ibadan, conventional expectations persist despite women's growing educational and professional opportunities. This persistence poses challenges to gender equity: youths navigating both modern aspirations and inherited norms may feel pressured from multiple directions, influencing their self-concept and social cohesion and sometimes fueling generational tension. The specific experience of Ibadan's youth remains underexplored. To fill this gap, the present study investigates how sociocultural values inform gender role expectations among urban young adults, and how they reconcile these with contemporary influences.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate how traditional cultural practices and values influence gender role expectations among youths aged 15 to 35 in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria. A sample of 384 respondents was determined using Fisher’s formula for an infinite population. Data were collected through a structured, self-administered questionnaire, which consisted of sections assessing demographic details, cultural practices, traditional values, and gender role expectations. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The instrument was pre-tested for clarity and cultural relevance before full deployment. Data were analyzed using multiple regression to identify the predictive power of traditional practices and values on gender role expectations.

Results

Table 1: Pearson Correlations of traditional values endorsement predicting gender role expectation

Variables	1	2	Mean	SD
1. Traditional Values Endorsement	-		3.82	0.67
2. Gender Role Expectation	.50**	-	3.4	0.72

Traditional values endorsement has significant positive relationship with gender role expectation ($r = .50, p < .001$). Similarly, the average rating on the traditional values (mean 4.15, $SD = 0.58$) lies well above neutrality, again with a large effect. Most respondents agree with statements upholding elder authority, male decision-making, and marital customs.

Table 2: Multiple Regression showing traditional values endorsement predicting gender role expectation

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	R ²	F	p
Traditional Values	0.41	0.06	0.35	6.83	< .001	.35	30.27	< .001
Gender	-0.05	0.04	-.05	-1.25	> 0.05			
Education Level	-0.10	0.03	-.12	-3.33	< .001			

The result in Table 4 of regression reveals that each one-point rise in endorsement of Traditional Values corresponds to a 0.41-point uptick in conservative gender-role views ($\beta = .35, p < .001$). In contrast, for each step up in educational attainment, there is a 0.10-point decrease in gender-role rigidity ($\beta = -.12, p = .001$). Once culture and values are in the model, neither age nor being female versus male contributes significantly to predicting gender-role expectations ($p > .05$).

Discussion of Findings

Third hypothesis confirmed that endorsement of traditional values is statistically significant. First, the positive correlation between traditional practices and traditional values endorsement suggests that youths who participate in cultural rituals and customs are more likely to endorse traditional values. This supports the idea proposed by Oyěwùmí (1997), who emphasized that the performance of cultural identity often goes hand-in-hand with the internalization of communal norms and ideologies, particularly around family structure and gender hierarchies in Yoruba society and other Nigerian cultures. The relationship between traditional practices and gender role expectations indicates that engagement in traditional practices tends to align with stronger beliefs in conventional gender roles. This is consistent with findings by Eze and Nwangwu (2022), who found that cultural rituals in southeastern Nigeria often reinforce patriarchal expectations among youth participants. These social practices, including festivals, initiation rites, and family ceremonies, function as socializing agents that transmit and preserve gendered norms. Similarly, the positive correlation between traditional values endorsement and gender role expectations



implies that internal acceptance of cultural values significantly predicts stereotypical beliefs about men's and women's roles. This pattern mirrors what Nwankwo and Okafor (2021) reported in their study of Nigerian university students, where a strong commitment to indigenous values was linked to more rigid beliefs about appropriate gender behavior. In contrast, youths who question or reject traditional values tend to hold more egalitarian views, particularly when exposed to critical thinking in educational settings. These findings, collectively, reflect what scholars like Adedoyin (2023) have called the "cultural continuity hypothesis," where even in urban or semi-urban settings like Ibadan, traditional practices and values remain influential among youth, shaping their gender ideologies despite modernization pressures. Youth may feel compelled to express adherence to prevailing norms even if personal beliefs are evolving. Consequently, future research should incorporate qualitative measures to disentangle publicly expressed values from more privately held attitudes, potentially revealing an emerging trend toward renegotiating certain cultural prescriptions.

Conclusion

The study revealed that endorsement of cultural values are significantly associated with gender role expectations. These cultural factors emerged as strong predictors, while education level was the only sociodemographic variable that showed a significant inverse relationship, suggesting that higher education may promote more flexible and egalitarian gender views. These results suggest that gender role expectations among Nigerian youths are not merely individual beliefs but are deeply rooted in the broader cultural environment. While tradition continues to offer a sense of identity and belonging, it may also perpetuate stereotypes that limit personal and social development. Therefore, any efforts aimed at promoting gender equality must take into account the cultural context and address the subtle ways in which traditions influence the attitudes and behaviors of young people.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:



- Media content should be leveraged to challenge stereotypical gender portrayals and offer balanced representations of both men and women in diverse roles. Radio, TV, and social media can be powerful tools for reshaping public attitudes.
- Highlighting stories of individuals who have successfully challenged traditional gender roles can inspire others. Schools and communities should celebrate both male and female achievers in non-traditional roles to expand the scope of what is considered acceptable.
- Cultural leaders should be engaged in dialogue to explore ways in which cultural practices can be modernized or reinterpreted to support gender equity. Respectful engagement with tradition is more likely to produce lasting change than outright rejection.

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