SECTION 3

WOMEN, MEN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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9 GENDER AND VULNERABILITY IN A DISASTER CONTEXT: THE SOCIAL SUPPORT ANGLE

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Abstract

Most disaster scholarship assumes that even though men are also affected by disaster, women are more vulnerable than men. This has led to more research concern on women's disaster experience and an almost dearth of literature on men's experience of disaster. This study seeks to investigate this assumption by examining the relationship between gender and the experience of social support in a disaster context. This nuance is explored because the experience of social capital has been underscored by scholars as central to the ability to cope and recover from disaster. A combination of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interview (KII) were used to elicit qualitative responses. Out of eight Local Government Areas in Anambra State that were adversely affected by the 2012 flooding, four were randomly selected for the interview. Two communities were also randomly selected from each of the four selected Local Government Areas. Eight in-depth interviews and two FGDs were conducted in each of the eight selected communities. Anchored on intersectionality theory, the chapter argued that gender identities and behavioural disposition ensured that women enjoyed institutional support from friendship circle, while men especially widowers were excluded by cultural expectations of masculinity from access to resources for surviving or recovering from disaster. This illustrates the need for context based studies to be undertaken before designing tools for mainstreaming gender in disaster risk reduction.

Key Words: Gender, Social Support, Disaster, Vulnerability, and Risk Reduction

Introduction

There is a near dearth of scholarship on gender as a factor in men's disaster experience owing to feminist epistemological insistence that women are more vulnerable to disaster than men. While this may not be true in all contexts, the result is that tool kits for mainstreaming gender in disaster risk reduction pay little attention to men's welfare while dwelling on women's disaster experiences and consequent need (Enarson & Pease 2016). Such document assumes a priori that women are more adversely affected by disaster than men. If this assumption is wrong, given the vast plethora of laws and policies that flow from mainstreaming gender scholarship, then men have been systematically disadvantaged by such scholarship (Mishra, 2009). In recognition of the necessity of social justice in disaster risk reduction, the objective of this study is to document the role of gender in determining the differences in access to social support by men and women in a disaster context. The fundamental argument is that a conspiracy of cultural stereotype of identities and behaviour disposition can, in some circumstances, favour women while harming men. The data for the study were generated in a-three month research project in 2016 on survivors of the 2012 flooding in Anambra State.

Setting and Method

The setting was eight riverine farming communities in Anambra State, which were affected by an unprecedented flooding in 2012 described by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA, 2012) as having far higher casualties than any other in the history of the country. These communities were Enugu Otu, Osamalla, Umunankwo, Umuoba, Umueze Anam, Umuolom, Anaku, and Mmiata. The flooding came just before harvest, devastating farmlands and living arrangements (homes) for almost three months. While the flood surged, the then Governor declared the affected communities disaster zone and some of the residents were evacuated to internally displaced camps while others moved into the homes of friends and relations. The uniqueness of this research setting is in the severity of the event, which resulted in loss of human lives, houses, livelihood and consequent indebtedness. This scenario highlights the centrality of social support to overcome the initial shock. Considering the gender dimension of this study, the patrilineal and patriarchal nature of Igbos in which these

communities are situated make them ideal for any study on gender issues. Four IDI sessions were held for women and four for men in each of the eight communities, making a total of 64 IDI sessions. Two FGD sessions were held in each of the eight selected communities for six purposively selected men and six purposively selected women, making a total of 16 FGDs and 96 discussants. The study population was made up of fathers and mothers who identified themselves as farmers, and as such lost their livelihood to the flood. They were aged 15 years and above at the time of the flooding and were residing in the above selected communities in 2012. Content Analysis was used to analyse the data.

Current Knowledge on Gender and Disaster

Gender and vulnerability to disaster

Unequal privileges and powers, which stem from gender socialisation mean that men and women have different and unequal access to resources to cope and to survive or recover from disaster (Ahmed & Fordham, 2013). The implication of this, spells different disaster outcomes for men and women (Pincha, 2008; Alston, 2010). Men and women, therefore, have different challenges and concerns in disaster contexts.

Men and disaster vulnerability

Mishra (2009) noted that the aftermath of disaster is usually characterised by heart wrenching pictures of crying and inconsolable women. She noted that in post Tsunami context, some Indian men sat together, crying and mourning their dead, on seeing them, rescue volunteers commented that they were crying to get the attention of the photographers. This is because of traditional gender stereotype, which expects a man to be strong and emotionally restrictive. She observed that restrictive emotions generate internal conflict expressed through fear, isolation, aggression, violence, stress related health issues, and even suicide. It blocks the expression of vulnerability. This, according to her, is problematic to the extent that help depends on others. Yet, men's pains and losses are denied in most disaster research and publications (Mishra, 2009).

Women and disaster vulnerability

Scholars have affirmed that even though men are also affected by disaster, women are more adversely affected (Pincha, 2008; Enarson, 2012; Hines, 2007). For example, during the cyclone disaster in Bangladesh in 1991, it was reported that 90 percent of the 140,000 of those who died were women (Department of Economic and Social affairs, 2008). The outcome of the Indian Ocean Tsunami, which affected some parts of Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka also showed that women are more likely to die in a disaster event than men. Women accounted for 70 to 80 percent of the total deaths in the Tsunami (United Nations Human Settlement Programme, 2007). The high number of female death in Indian Tsunami, led to a shift in gender ratio otherwise referred to as the gender breakdown (Hines, 2007). Similarly, in industrialised countries, more women than men died during the 2003 European heat wave. Also, during the Hurricane Katrina, African-American women, who were the poorest of the population were the most vulnerable to death (Enarson, 2012). To buttress this point, let us look at a review of discourses on gender as a factor in women's vulnerability in their access to social support during the recovery stages of disaster.

Social Resources and recovery

Aldrich (2015) noted the centrality of social support in post disaster recovery, which he defined as "the network of resources available to people through their connection to others" (pg 2). In examining the importance of social capital for disaster recovery, Aldrich (2015) argued that a higher level of social capital than factors such as economic resources is more crucial for disaster recovery because survivors with strong social network have access to required information, tools, and assistance, which facilitate their recovery.

In relation to gender, scholars have argued that women find it easier to turn to others for help than men. Women's role in the home gives them access to an extensive social network that is based on neighbourhood, school, work, and faith. They observed that the act of seeking help is incongruent with male gender stereotype, which discourages men from appearing weak and incompetent (Dasgupta, 2010; Aldrich, 2015; Mishra, 2009). They, therefore, inferred that gender norm is linked to impaired social capital for men. Morrow (1999) identified two types of social network in disaster recovery context.

They are: Informal kinship support system, which is often provided by family and friends on a voluntary basis and formal support services provided by formal institutions such as government and non-governmental organisations. She noted that women by their social positioning tend to depend more on informal network than formal network. Enarson (2012) added that in fact, women may not have more access to social resources than men because severe outcomes may overwhelm the capacity of informal social network to respond and function where network of relations and friends are affected the same way. Men, because of their financial, political, social, and educational positioning may be more likely to have access to institutional or formal network. This is because informal social capital functions better with those that have connection with external resources (Dasgupta, 2010).

Gender Differences and Access to Social Support

Institutional social support

a) Support from the church

After the Internally displaced people camp was officially closed, many families who had lost their houses as a result of the flooding were in dire need of food and shelter. Some churches responded by sharing food items to those that went for it. The Jehovah Witness sect particularly built houses for widows.

> *Churches shared food items to those that went for it. Jehovah witness church built houses for only widows. … of course not everybody went for the food. Men, really did not go because it is usually women that go for such items (*Focus group discussion with men in Mmiata)

Since the church only built houses for widows, widowers and married people who had lost their houses had no choice than to put up in the houses of friends and relations whose houses were not destroyed. This means that men and women's experience of loss of houses is mediated by gender and their marital status. To explain this, a 45-year-old woman articulated the problem:

> *My husband's brother's house was not spacious. But they evacuated one room for us. Even though I and his wife were not best of friends,*

> *we became friends because of what we have been through and the challenges of survival. We did house chores together, cooked together in one pot, and sometimes foraged for firewood and wild vegetable.*

Even though the internal organisation of the married woman's family is likely to have been upset by her having to live as a sub family, she was able to start a process of adjustment by performing her culturally scripted role as a wife and a mother. But not so for her husband, his reaction to living as the head of the household in a sub family was much different from hers.

> *My husband left home every morning to where I did not know and came back in the night. Each time I asked him where he went he would angrily reply 'rapumaka" (leave me alone). I was afraid for him because news about suicide was trending. Each time I had opportunity to talk to him, I would give him reasons why we should be grateful to God.*

Having been excluded from housing welfare that targeted only widows, he was left alone to resolve the difficulty of having lost his house and being a head of household of a sub family. Igbo society is patrilineal; therefore, owning a house is a sign of successful masculinity. He, therefore, isolated himself from his family as a reaction to the adjustment difficulties due to the challenge on his masculinity. Mishra (2009) had noted that men react in neurotic ways when their masculinity is challenged and this explains his aggression to his wife's attempt to query his reaction. Yet, he fared better than the widower because in spite of his reaction, his wife offered another way of interpreting his misfortune.

b) Social support from government

There was an influx of people into IDP camps; some people were brought by government officials, others came by themselves. Everyone hoped to get a sleeping space in the hall of the camps.

> *Government was trying, but nothing was enough. Preference was given to women and their children in allocation of living space* (IDI with a 52- year -old man from Enugu Otu).

Being a mother automatically guaranteed a living space in the hall of the IDP camp but not being a father. It did, only to the extent that the man could convince the authority that the children in his custody were his. Young widowers found it difficult convincing the IDP managers that they were parents and so were not easily allotted living spaces in the hall. A 33–year-old widower intoned:

> *Even after I managed to convince the authorities that the children I came with were mine, they still did not give me space because they were attending to women and women with children first. We slept on the corridor for one night before we were given a space.*

The then Chairman of State Emergency Management Agency explained that:

> *We concentrated on giving sleeping space to women and children because if worse comes to worst, a man will take care of himself.*

Gender stereotype depicts women as always vulnerable and needing support while men are seen as strong, competent and self-reliant. This explains why space allocation, which targeted the vulnerable group, bypassed men to the detriment of the widower and his children.

Informal social support

a) Social support from friends and acquaintances

The difficulty in accessing food in IDP camp was illustrated in an FGD with women in Umueze Anam:

> *……. some good people who were concerned by our plight were coming to see us in the camp. Each time they came, they gave money to children. It was this money we (mothers) used to buy food stuff from the nearest market. We shared stoves, spoons, plates and cups since some women did not come with their own. We shared ...our experiences and how best we could manage our meager finance so as to keep the body and soul of our family members together until our ordeal was over.*

Widows along with other women through collaborative and knowledge sharing mitigated the nutritional deficiency of their families. Those who had cooking utensils, cutleries, condiments and unique insight on how best to manage their finances shared with those who did not have. This exchange of materials and ideas were incentives for the weakest woman among them. Women were able to tap into collective good and intelligence to overcome hunger and malnourishment, thereby increasing their families' coping confidence. A married man remarked on the humiliation a man who has been socialized to be independent and self-reliant went through to secure welfare food and how fortunate he was that his wife was cooking:

> *Thank God my wife was cooking, because the terrain for securing food was not for men of my age where the back of dimkpa (a strong healthy and self-reliant young man) was slashed with razor blade while fighting for food.*

While the married man may not have to fight for food because his wife was cooking, the young widower had no choice but to go through the indignity of being an independent man all his life and the humiliation of fighting for government food, which was not enough and not easily accessible. A 39-year-old widower from Umuoba said:

> *...Even when I managed to secure food. It was hardly enough for my children not to talk of me.*

This implies that the widower hardly had enough food for his children not to talk of himself. The distress of the widower would also have been accentuated by the difficulty he also faced in securing other vital provisions such as mattress for his family. A widower intoned:

> *...The camp was fraught with strangers from other communities. My sister and her family were taken to another camp in Otuocha. So I could not see any one to trust with my children and luggage so as to secure food and mattress* (IDI with a 33-year-old widower from Umuoba).

In the face of breakdown in kinship support framework, having a trusted person for child care was vital to secure necessary provisions. The widower's gender difficulties in seeking help made it difficult for him to secure the safety of his children and at the same time struggle for food and mattress with other men who were enjoying spousal support. Widows and widowers who did not have grown up children faced difficulties that were peculiar to their marital status and gender. Widows may have fared better than widowers in ensuring child care because of widely documented women's ability to relate with other women. A widow's major challenge would have been struggling with men who were physically stronger than her to secure provisions for her family. The widower's gender difficulties in seeking help will make it difficult for him to secure the safety of his children and at the same time struggle for food and mattress with men who had spousal support.

Not every community had the privilege of being evacuated by the government. For example, Enugu Otu community did not enjoy support from government during evacuation. When the water was rising, and it became obvious that help was not coming from the State government, the Chairman of the Local Government in desperation hired private boats to help evacuate the residents. The boats provided by the local government were barely enough for everyone in the community. As the flood surged, people began to seek for alternative means of evacuating the risky environment. A 28-year-old woman from Enugu Otu recounts her family's experience:

> *I, my husband with our four-day-old baby and two children scuttled into my husband's canoe and he started paddling to Otuocha (where his brother lived and where the IDP camp was). The water was rising as if something was pumping it under us. We were not even aware when we moved into Omambala River, we strayed and lost direction in the water (recognizable landmarks and communities had been covered by flood). My husband paddled the canoe for four days without food or water. There was no sign of life or residence. There was no tree; we were in the middle of nowhere. Corpses, mattresses, luggage were floating on the water. On the fourth day, we sighted what looked like a big box on the water and we paddled towards it and discovered it was the last floor of a two story building. The people inside helped us in*

> *through the window. The women in the building dabbed me and my children with hot water and gave us yam and oil to eat.*

This woman and her children were rejuvenated but her husband who had paddled for four days under bizarre condition without food or water received no support from the women and not even from his fellow men.

A 47-year-old woman from Umueze Anam summarised the experience of men who evacuated their families:

> *Some men who had paddled for days collapsed and died on getting to Otuocha (where there were IDPs camps). Many more died in their sleep in the IDP camp and after we returned home.*

These men managed to ferry their families to safety and died afterward. If death is an indication of vulnerability, then men were more vulnerable than women in this context.

Discussion

The study set out to investigate an assumption among feminists and in most disaster scholarship that women are more vulnerable to disaster than men, which has led to a disproportionate focus on gender as a factor in women's disaster experience. Focusing on men and women's experiences of social support during the 2012 flood disaster in Anambra State, the study rejects this conventional view and posits that a conspiracy of cultural stereotype of identities and behavioural disposition can in some circumstances favour women while harming men. To support this position, the study looked at institutional support and informal support. The indices of institutional support were church support and the support of government officials. The indicator of informal support was support from friends, acquaintances and relations.

Findings on how men and women experienced institutional support show that in response to the dire need for food and housing in post disaster context, the church shared food items to those that came for it and built houses for widows who lost their houses. Access to the food items was determined by gender and its implication depended on gender and marital status. Most men did not go

for the food items because of gender stereotype, which associates a woman with kitchen matters and also assumes that a woman is dependent and a man is independent and self-reliant. Women, which included widows, therefore, had no difficulty collecting welfare food items from the church while men were less disposed to it. The marital implication of this is that while the married man will be helped by the food his wife collected from the church, the widower was left forlorn. The church built houses for widows who lost their houses to the exclusion of married people and widowers. The way men and women experienced loss of houses and having to live as a sub family in someone else's house also depended on their gender and marital status. The married woman collaborated with the host woman in managing their families and in ensuring that the nutritional needs of their families were not compromised. The fact that they cooked in the same pot means that they pulled their resources (which included their energy, welfare food items and home management skills) together to ensure the survival of their families. This had a number of implications for her and her family. First, it reduced the dependent status of her family, increased the sense of belonging of her children, thus, ameliorating their minor status in someone else's house. It reestablished her individual identity and ensured that the problem of adjusting as a sub family was much reduced. This was because an Igbo woman is defined primarily in relation to her responsibility in the family. Her success as a wife and mother lies in her ability to show efficiency in home management even in difficult times (Arinze, 2008). Even though the internal organisation of the married woman's family was likely to have been upset with her having to live as a sub family, she was able to start a process of adjustment by performing her culturally scripted domestic roles.

To understand a man's reaction to loss of house and putting up as the head of his household in a sub family, one must appreciate the residential pattern among the Igbos. The Igbo society is patrilineal. Therefore, owning a house is a sign that a man has come of age. Owning a house is being a man, which is an important part of the cultural expectation of safety that a man is to provide for his wife and children (Arinze, 2008). A man's house is his primary locus of authority. It is his "*obi"* (personal palace). Loss of house, therefore, challenges his identity on multiple fronts. First, having lost his livelihood and indebted, the hope of rebuilding his house is very slim. This gives him a

sense of downward mobility, threatens his identity and heightens his fear of never recovering his status. This explains his depressive mood and aggressive response to his wife. Second, Patriarchy, through polygyny creates space for a woman, which includes a widow, to put up with another family but the role of a man in another man's family is unscripted. This makes a married man, a head of a household, who loses his house and puts up with another family to be personally displaced. The Igbo society confers a certain level of independence and self-sufficiency on the masculine gender, which explains why a woman would adjust to a new life, while the man would walk away in the morning and come back in the night to avoid the humiliation of being dependent and a burden to the host family. The man's situation would likely have been ameliorated by the assurance that his children were under the care of his wife. A widower shared in the experience of the married man, but his situation was worse off in a number of ways. He described his experience as a head of household in a sub family:

> *My house was destroyed by the flood. I and my children moved into my brother's house. Food was scarce and people were hungry. My brother's wife tried a lot because women were collecting welfare food items here and there. Whatever she put together as food, she also gave my children. I was a farmer and I used to have more than enough food. I lost everything to the flood; I also lost my wife so I could not contribute anything to feeding the children. I tried to please her by doing what I should and what I should not do, but you know women, she was irritable. A man with nothing who is helped by a woman, his mouth is always full of sand.*

Having lost his livelihood, he could not contribute to the upkeep of his children neither could he collect welfare food items. Even though he had no wife to collect his own family's share of welfare food items, cultural expectation of masculinity did not exonerate him from appearing effeminate if he went for it. "Doing the one I should do and the one I should not do" meant that to earn his keep, he was pushed beyond the boundary of socio-cultural expectation of his gender. Since he had no wife to help in the running of the home, he had to face the humiliation of filling up his wife's space in the domestic sphere. Taking care of his children was humiliating enough but

performing other forms of domestic chores in another man's house stripped him of his identity and eroded his self-worth. Caught between the paradox of engaging in domestic chores in another man's house and living up to the expectation of a successful masculinity, he compared himself to a man whose mouth was full of sand. While the married man enjoyed spousal support and could also walk away from the scene that degraded him, the widower had no support and could not walk away. He therefore, suffered more adjustment difficulties compared to his cohort. The above discussion shows that, if vulnerability was the criterion for the provision of post disaster houses, then, the widower was marginalised. This questions scholarly endeavour, which separate widows from other women in their vulnerability analysis but lumps both married men and widowers together, representing them as brave, strong, and competent to the detriment of the widower.

In the allocation of sleeping space in the IDP camp, being a woman with children was a sufficient credential for a space in the IDP camp but not a man with children. Young widowers had difficulty convincing the officials of IDP camp that the children they came with were theirs. The Chairman of State Emergency Management Agency explained that:

> *We concentrated on giving sleeping space to women and children because if worse comes to worst, a man will take care of himself.*

This means that the authorities in the IDP camp did not question the parentage of children who came along with women in the allocation of living space but questioned those of men. This was because of gender stereotype, which assumes that women are sole custodians of children. Thus, a man with children drew suspicious attention and had more questions to answer than a woman with children. Since the provision of security for one's family is an important part of the cultural expectation of a man, the married man was relieved seeing that his wife and children were settled. The young widower was disenfranchised as a result of difficulty in explaining to the authority that the children he was with were his, such that he had to sleep on the corridor with his children before a bed space was allocated to him. This could jeopardise the health of his children, increase his child care burden and compromise his coping confidence. This unintentional injustice questions the

phrase "women and children", which systematically excludes the widower and his children from the list of the vulnerable, thus, relegating them to the background.

The food in the camp was not enough and not easily accessible but women organised themselves in their friendship ties such that they were not just able to augment the food given to their families in the camp but their collaboration acted as an incentive to women with more difficult conditions such as widows. Women shared their experiences, exchanged services, and assisted each other with tips on coping thus increasing their coping confidence. Enarson (2012) had noted that disaster strains family and friendship ties which women depend on. This study agrees with her but observed that women, unlike men, form friendship ties quick enough to increase their ability to manage the initial shock of disaster, which is critical for disaster survival. Women's care and support for their families augmented their diet, making it easier for their family members to recover from the initial shock. While married men enjoyed the extra support, which their wives derived from their collaboration with other women, widowers were left out to their detriment and that of their children. Since the food provided by the government was difficult to get, the widower hardly had enough for his children not to talk of himself. Since he lost his livelihood to the flood, his position was made worse by lack of purchasing power to secure private alternative to public food. This means, he often went to bed hungry. This can significantly undermine his coping capacity. This finding does not agree with previous studies (Seage, 2014; Dankelman, 2012; Pincha, 2008) that observed that women eat least during food scarcity. Rather than women, widowers ate least during the time of food scarcity in this study.

Findings also highlight the challenges that the widow and the widower confronted in securing vital provisions such as mattress and food for their families. In the face of a breakdown in kinship support network, widowers were forced to depend on trusted persons to help them take care of their children so as to secure mattress for their families. Married women cared for their children while their husbands secured these vital provisions. Widows may have fared better than widowers in ensuring child care because of widely documented women's ability to relate with other women. Established male

gender identity, which discourages them from seeking help and appearing weak and incompetent, posed a challenge to the widower in seeking help for child care so as to secure food and mattress for his family.

Gender has been typified to be a problem to women and a privilege to men in disaster context but this study shows that it is not the rule in all contexts. The intersectionality theory explains that gender is not a fixed status. Its experience by men and women depends on context. Women's gender identity and behaviour disposition have typically been seen as disadvantages to them. In this study, women's gender identities, which typify them as dependants and confer them with the privilege of home management skills and friendly behaviour disposition, gave them access to welfare food items from the church. Women whose families lost their houses and became sub families were able to contribute both food and home management skills to their host families. This reduced the dependency status of their families, reestablished their individual identity, and reduced the minor status of their children. Women's behavioural disposition enabled them to form friendship ties, which provided an alternative source of food to their families in the face of food scarcity in the camp. Since women are socially depicted as weak and vulnerable, government authorities at the internally displaced persons' camp prioritised women in the allocation of bed spaces. The Church housing programme, which targeted the most vulnerable favoured only widows.

Widowers who lost their houses to the flood were left to live as sub families. They could not help in the domestic sphere in their host family without losing their self-identity. Men, unlike women, were not disposed to queue for post disaster food relief from the church neither could they form friendship ties to ameliorate the nutritional condition of their families in the camp. While married men benefited from their wives' share of welfare food items from the church and the dividend of their wives' collaboration with other women in the camp, the widowers were left forlorn. Men, especially the widowers, therefore, received less support from the church, government authorities, friends and acquaintances. They were victims of prevailing notions of gender, which typify them as strong, self-reliant, competent, and not needing help. Men, especially widowers were thus not considered within the scope of fairness by the church, government officials at the IDP camp, friends and

acquaintances. If social support is a key factor in coping and recovering from disaster, women may in fact be more likely to cope and to recover faster than men.

Conclusion

Gender identities and behavioural disposition ensured that women enjoyed institutional social support and informal social support more than men. Men's gender stereotype, which typifies them as strong and not needing help undermines their access to these supports such that men, especially widowers were pushed outside the moral boundary of fairness. Therefore, feminist scholars who assume that women's prevailing notions of gender automatically render them more vulnerable than men in disaster context are not representing the real world accurately. This is because, sometimes in circumstances where men have lost their livelihood, women, due to their gender identity and behavioural disposition, enjoy more social support, which increases their coping confidence.

Recommendations

Context based studies should be undertaken before designing tools for mainstreaming gender in disaster risk reduction. Disaster responders need to develop strategies to recognise and respond not just to men's and women's needs but also to complex patterns produced by the interaction of gender with other prisms of difference such as widowerhood.

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