

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Breaking Gender Walls: Understanding the Changing Roles of Women in the Nigerian Armed Forces

Kolade Gabriel Olubiyo*

History & International Studies Programme, Bowen University, Iwo Osun State Nigeria

**Open Access**

Citation: Olubiyo, KG., Breaking Gender Walls: Understanding the Changing Roles of Women in the Nigerian Armed Forces. *Gender and Women's Studies*, 2024; 5(2):2.

Received: July 11, 2024

Accepted: September 13, 2024

Published: September 20, 2024

Copyright: ©2024 Olubiyo, KG. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Corresponding author:

Kolade Gabriel Olubiyo, History & International Studies Programme, Bowen University, Iwo Osun State Nigeria
E-mail: kolade.olubiyo@bowen.edu.ng

Abstract

Women's underrepresentation in leadership positions and assigned roles has continued to dominate gender discourse in the military profession. In Nigeria, women have historically been excluded from combat positions due to socio-cultural norms. But recently, there has been a great expansion in women's roles in the Nigerian Armed Forces. Women have not only been visible in the country's ongoing counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism campaigns, but are major contributors to the warfare successes. This is considered groundbreaking amidst a male-dominated profession whose policy is largely reinforced by socio-cultural norms. This study examines the character and stimulus that influenced the increasing role of women in the Nigerian Armed Forces. The study adopts a qualitative approach using secondary sources - data from the literature on gender in the military and international conventions/protocols. It argues that historically, the Nigerian Armed Forces, possessed and perpetuated patriarchal values and biases, creating a culture that favours men and marginalizes women in the areas of enlistment, deployment and leadership positions. But, modern warfare and global concerns for women's inclusion in peace and security greatly influenced military organisations to relax some of their policies for women's expansion role in positions where they were hitherto culturally unacceptable.

Keywords

Armed forces, sticky floor, gender, patriarchy, leaky pipeline

Introduction

The Armed Forces of most nations enlist men and women; nonetheless, the military possesses an inherent culture of masculinity. Some nations through legislation restricted women's role in the military profession. Globally, most military activities including war are understood to have violence and brutal tendencies, which are culturally offensive attributes of a woman. Proponents against women in combat such as Creveld (2006), King (2013), Ana (2014), and Browne (2015) have argued that women are weak emotionally, and lacking in physical strength and courage to withstand the strains of war. The view is put forward to justify the centuries of men's dominant position in the military, meanwhile, this position has been widely challenged and discredited by modern scholars and researchers. Women have proven to be capable of equaling or surpassing men in various fields including the military. Global concerns for gender inclusion and mainstreaming appeared to be groundbreaking in the military profession. For instance, the historic United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 of 2000 emphasizes women's inclusion and wider participation in security and peacebuilding. The adoption of gender mainstreaming in the military has profoundly impacted the organisational structure of armed forces in some countries. By incorporating gender perspectives, military authorities have been able to reassess and relax rigid policies, leading to a significant increase in female participation through quota systems and the expansion of roles beyond traditional duties.

The Nigerian Armed Forces is an institution that possesses and perpetuates patriarchal values and biases, creating a culture that favours men and marginalizes women in the areas of enlistment, deployment and leadership positions. As of 2017, women constitute less than 6 percent of the Nigerian Armed Forces, and less than 1 per cent serve in combat (Olatunji

Olatunde, 2017 May 6). This is not unconnected with the agelong gender construction reinforced by patriarchy and socio-cultural norms. The adoption of gender policy within the framework of the UNSC Resolution of 2000 is gradually altering military conservative policy, thus, this enthused women to break ceilings of cultural barriers, demonstrating their potential in warfare.

Gender issues in the Nigerian military have been over-flogged by a plethora of scholarly works with much emphasis on women's underrepresentation in leadership positions occasioned by stereotypes. This paper takes a departure from such existing narratives, it however explores a trajectory of changing women's roles in the Nigerian military. The study's central argument is that women in the Nigerian Armed Forces are increasingly breaking through the glass ceiling, challenging traditional gender roles, and expanding their participation in combat, leadership, and decision-making positions. This is made possible due to the changing nature of armed violence and global concerns for women's inclusion in peace and security supported by the UNSC Resolutions 1325 of 2000. The dynamics have helped women in the Nigerian Armed Forces to increasingly break through the glass ceiling, challenging traditional gender roles, and expanding their participation in combat, leadership, and decision-making positions. It is also argued that despite the progress made so far, persistent gender biases, inadequate policies supporting work-life balance, sexual harassment and abuses, among others are the hindrances to gender mainstreaming in the Nigerian military.

This qualitative study addresses the knowledge gap in the empirical inquiry on the various stimuli vis-a-vis the changing pattern of women's roles in the Nigerian Armed Forces amidst socio-cultural encumbrances.

Conceptualising 'Women' and 'Gender'

A Plethora of literature exists on women and gender, this gives room for wider usage of the terms within the context of sociology, politics, economics, military, and a host of other spectrums. But for academic purposes, it has become expedient to conceptualise and provide an understanding of the terms within the study.

A woman is a female human being. The term woman is usually reserved for an adult, while the term girl is typically used for a female child or adolescent. But on a wide scope, the term woman is sometimes used to identify a female human, regardless of age, as in phrases such as "women's role." Thus, women with typical genetic development are usually capable of giving birth from puberty until menopause. In the armed forces, women are enlisted to perform varying degrees of military duties not as their biological sex but according to the dictates of the military profession.

The concept of 'gender' is ambiguous with different denotations among scholars of different academic fields because it lacks the clarity to be deployed in clear and lucid language as a tool for contextual analysis. However, it is imperative to conceptualize the term 'gender' within its usage in this article. To Michael (2004), gender is a term used to differentiate human beings into either male or female. To him, gender is simply concerned with sex classification. However, scholars see gender far beyond sex classification because sex is referred to mean the biological differences and physiological traits between males and females. The biological characteristics including genetics, anatomy, and physiology are what generally define humans as either male or female.

Ivy and Korbla (2013) see gender as the social construction of roles between women and men as opposed to sex which is the biological constructs of male and female. This was also reinforced by Makama (2013) when he posits that gender is the socially and culturally constructed roles for men and women, for instance, the gender roles of men as owners of the property, decision-makers, and leaders of households are socially, historically, and culturally constructed and have nothing to do with biological differences. Eka (2012) sees gender as the social organization of the relations between men and women and between culturally defined norms of femineity and masculinity. In this case, gender is believed to have economic, political, cultural, and institutional attributes and opportunities associated with being a man or woman. In the understanding of feminist theories, gender is conceptualized as a social structure that governs societal beliefs, behaviours, and expectations resulting in different experiences for people of different genders. In the context of social construction,

Scott and Jackson (2002) succinctly put gender to mean “a division in the hierarchy between women and men embedded in both social institution and social practices”.

In other words, gender is the social construction of roles and products of socio-political and cultural dynamism. Thus, being a man or a woman is all about biological grouping while gender is a sociological, economic cum political classification of the roles of both men and women.

Theoretical Frameworks Underpinnings Gender Roles in the Nigerian Armed Forces

This study is anchored on two (2) related theories within the context of gender borders or inequities in society. These theories are gender or social role theory and occupational segregation theory.

Gender or Social Role Theory:

According to Eagly (1987), societal expectations shape individuals' behaviour, preferences, and career choices, influencing them to conform to traditional gender or social roles. Lips (2004) noted that these social roles are acquired through socialization and reinforced by cultural conditioning, resulting in distinct behavioural patterns between men and women. Specifically, women are often socialized to assume core domestic duties such as caregiving and nurturing roles, whereas, men are expected to fulfill breadwinning and decision-making responsibilities, perpetuating gender-based divisions in responsibilities and opportunities.

The far-reaching and multifaceted implications of gender roles in society give rise to a complex web of consequences that profoundly impact individuals, relationships, and the broader social fabric (Eagly, 1987). By restricting individuals from exploring their interests and abilities, gender roles stifle personal potential, leading to unfulfilled potential and stifled personal growth (Lips (2004). This, in turn, perpetuates systemic inequality by reinforcing gender-based discrimination, resulting in unequal access to education, employment, and resources. Moreover, gender roles influence career choices, leading to occupational segregation and pay disparities (Jacobs, 1996). The cultural norms perpetuated by gender roles dictate what is considered acceptable behaviour for men and women, thereby reinforcing these limitations and constraining social progress (Bem, 1981).

Occupational Segregation:

Reskin (1988) posits that occupational segregation is a gender-based segregation in the workforce that perpetuates gender roles and limits opportunities for women. Occupational segregation is a self-reinforcing cycle, with women's concentration in certain occupations perpetuating their undervaluation and limiting their opportunities for career advancement (Reskin, 1988). England (1981) further elucidated the theory when he noted that women are concentrated in certain occupations often characterized by lower pay, lower status, and limited career advancement opportunities. Women's occupational choices are influenced by socialization, steering them towards traditionally feminine occupations (Bem, 1981). Furthermore, gender stereotypes shape hiring decisions and job assignments, further entrenching occupational segregation (Valian, 1998).

According to Blau & Kahn, (2017), discrimination in hiring, promotion, and disparity in pay also contribute to occupational segregation, hindering women's career advancement. To Phillips & Taylor, (1980), the inherent structural barriers in occupational segregation include limited access to training and advancement and restrictions in occupational opportunities. The consequences of occupational segregation are far-reaching, resulting in pay disparities, limited career advancement, and the perpetuation of traditional gender roles (England, 1981).

The relationship between gender or social role theory and occupational segregation in the Nigerian military is deeply ingrained. According to gender or social role theory, individuals internalize gender roles and expectations through socialization, shaping their behavior and career choices (Eagly, 1987). This theory is particularly relevant in the Nigerian military, where men and women are concentrated in different roles and positions, perpetuating a long-standing male-dominated culture (Nwachukwu, 2018).

Socialization plays a significant role in this segregation, as women are encouraged to prioritize nurturing and caregiving roles, while men are steered towards leadership and combat positions. Gender stereotypes are also reinforced, with the military perpetuating traditional views of men as more suited for combat and leadership, and women as more

suiting for support roles. Consequently, women face limited opportunities for career advancement and training in male-dominated fields, hindering their ability to break into leadership positions.

Cultural and religious beliefs in Nigeria further entrench traditional gender roles, influencing the military's occupational segregation. As a result, the concentration of men in combat and leadership positions limits women's career advancement opportunities, perpetuating gender inequality in the military. This segregation reflects broader societal gender roles and expectations, underscoring the need for gender-sensitive policies and training to address these disparities. By understanding the relationship between gender or social role theory and occupational segregation, we can develop effective strategies to promote gender equality in the Nigerian military.

Contentious Issues Surrounding Women's Role in the Armed Forces

Globally, research shows that the armed forces of many countries has continued to maintain a rigid gendered divisions of labour between males and females. In this context, gender division restricted women largely to supportive roles in the non-combat units. Since the launch of global concerns for gender mainstreaming in the security sector, there has been an endless debate on women's role in the military. In this argument, there emerged two groups with opposing views; women in non-combat and women in combat.

The proponents of women in non-combat raised a wide range of issues about why they frown at women in the frontline. In their postulation, "the deployment of women in combat will lead to gender norming, a situation of lowering military training standards (Mitchell, 1989). Leon Panetta and Ryan Zinke, the former US Secretary of Defence and Former US Secretary of the Interior respectively expressed concerns about gender norming in 2013 when the ban on women in combat was lifted". Secondly, they expressed worries about women's physical ability to withstand the strains of war and the extreme violence that goes on at the battlefield. To them, "women are considered not to be as physically strong or emotionally aggressive as men to cope with the brutalities of war, and the presence of women will affect bounding, unit cohesion and full concentration at the war front" (Creveld, 2006; King, 2013; Browne, 2015). Also, women in combat would be a source of distraction at the war front as they could be captured as Prisoners of War, killed or wounded. In addition, women by their physiological frame or biological sex lack the physical toughness required during battles (King, 2013; Browne, 2015). Besides, women could also be unsteady at various times of the year particularly when they become pregnant or are nursing and this would reduce the numerical strength of combatants in case of emergency. They maintain that war has a devastating effect on the family particularly with the loss of the mother. It is argued that children can cope more easily with the absence of their fathers than that of the mothers. Therefore, exposing women to combat roles will have a far-reaching effect on them. expressed romantic or sexual relationships that may develop, and potentially inappropriate fraternization, sexual assault, or that a woman might get pregnant in the battlefield. (Lucy, 1992; Decew, 1995; Simons, 2014) Based on the above, the proponents of women in non-combat discourage the deployment of women to high-risk units of the military.

On the contrary, advocates of women in combat believe that both sexes possess the ability of combat. (Gordon, 2019; Friedman & Friedman, 2019) argued vehemently that modern technology in warfare has changed warfare from brawn to brains, and all that is needed is merely pressing a button to launch missiles against enemy positions and women can do so effectively. In addition, the proponents of women in combat deflate the arguments put forward by the exponents of women in non-combat that physical ability and emotion are not enough prerequisites for combat roles. To them. restricting women's roles in the military limits women's opportunities and creates barriers to career advancement. It is argued that centering combat opportunities and physical strength as a measure of leadership ability and competence kept women subordinate (MacKenzie, 2012; Alexievich, 2017). In their conclusion, they maintain that the denial of women in the combat role is borne out of the culturally defined roles for both sexes, therefore, in this changing time, the culturally defined roles for both sexes are also changing with constant redefinition.

Substantiating women's exclusion in combat based on sex and gender construction, Goldstein (2001) argues that the exclusion of women in the military is based on assumptions

of biological essentialism, stereotypes and generalizations around women, and a desire to protect the traditionally male space of combat.

The Nigerian Armed Forces is sensitive to women's deployment. One time Chief of Army Staff maintained that women in the military would maintain their traditional supportive role because of sociocultural norms in the country (Wushishi, 1987). Similarly, Brig. Gen. L. M. Domingo (Retd) was quoted when he gave a practical assessment of the future deployment of women in combat. He said, the constraints of deploying women as combatants did not lie in training or physical ability but the socio-cultural environment was the major obstacle (NAEC, 1994).

In furtherance of the military's sensitivity, to socio-cultural norms, Gen Yusuf. Buratai, an erstwhile Chief of Army Staff noted that the military is subtle to the cultural diversity in Nigeria as this has been one of the major controversies surrounding women's deployment in combat (Premium Times, October 9, 2016). It is noted that the restriction of women's roles forms one of the core gender gaps in the military, and the implication is that it limits women's advancement in the profession. Assessing the efficacy of women in combat in the global arena, women combatants have demonstrated in many countries that being a good soldier is not gender-based. A glaring example of the efficacy of combatant women is noted in one of the most vicious wars in contemporary times against the Islamic State (ISIS) who did not only capture prisoners but, took pleasure in slitting the throats of even hostages. It was against this brutal group that the female soldiers of the Kurdish Peshmerga fanned out in 2014 participating in the Battle of Mosul in Iraq and seizing the city from ISIS. Two years later, 1,000 female Peshmerga fighters trained and went into battle against ISIS leading to the liberation of Kirkuk and the nearby oil fields (Pearson and Shahidat, 2018).

However, in modern-day warfare, the removal of all social barriers against women in the military is imperative, as this will enable them to display their bravery and prowess since bravery is not a distinctive male endowment.

Women Enlistment and Their Utilization in the Nigerian Armed Forces

In the beginning, women's enlistment into the Nigerian Armed Forces was a function of the demand to replace the British women officers, following Nigeria's independence in 1960 (NAEC, 1994). Secondly was the urgent need for women's services during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967–1970 (NAEC, 1994 and Alabi, 2014). The above formed the basis upon which women were enlisted into the institution. Due to gender construction reinforced by socio-cultural beliefs, the earliest women enlistees were given basic military training such as tactics, foot drill, military law, administration, and logistics. These pieces of training did not make women combat-ready because they were generally considered unsuitable for the rigors of core military duties (NAEC, 1994). Thus, they were largely deployed to the units tagged non-combat which are medical, supply and transport, education, intelligence, administrative, etc.

The reorganization of the Nigerian Armed Forces in the post-civil war era was another phase in the journey of women in the military profession. The Armed Forces had a more comprehensive or broadened policy-trust in its operation for women. Not only did the reorganization exercise give room for more women enlistment, but it also opened other roles for women. For instance, quality training exercises, improved remuneration, career growth, and favourable conditions of service, were all essentials in the armed forces. According to Amakievi, (1992), women who were professionally qualified in the fields of medicine, legal, psychology, journalism, teaching, engineering, catering, and accountancy, among others, were enlisted into the officers' cadre through the Direct Short Service Commission (DSSC). At the same time, other women were recruited into the non-Officers' cadre through the Regular Recruit (RR)). The contents of training received by men and women were more elaborate and rigorous than the pre-1970 as it prepared them to be combat-ready. The new enlistees were given nine months of intense military training. Such training includes drill parades, map reading, signal, field craft, physical training exercises, internal security, obstacle crossing, military tactics, foot drills, military law, administrative, logistics, weapon handling, range shooting, hygiene, and boxing (NAEC, 1994). The implication of this is that they are trained to be combat-ready irrespective of where one is deployed. Even with elaborate training, the deployment of women into combat units remained a contentious issue

as the military continued to weigh the socio-cultural implications. The reasons given for their combat exclusion were based majorly on sociocultural and biological factors. Women continued to serve largely in the supportive traditional role as nurses, doctors, lawyers, accountants, journalists, caterers, teachers, etc. While their deployment remained in the supportive role, several of the women had risen in ranks to Brigadiers, Major Generals, and equivalents. In 1994 for example, Major-Gen. (Dr.) Mrs. Aderonke Kale, an amiable physician was the first female military officer to reach the rank of a Major-General in the Nigerian Army (Tell, 2013; Olatunji Olatunde, 2017). She became the Commandant of the Nigerian Army Medical Corps and School (NAMCS) before she retired in 1996. Similarly, Major General Abimbola Amusu rose in the ranks and became the Commandant of the Nigerian Army Medical Corps (NAMC) between 2015 and 2018 (Olubiyo, 2022). In the Nigerian Navy, Rear Admiral, Itunu Hotonu became the first female to be promoted to the highest rank in 2012 (Olubiyo, 2022).

It is also expedient at this moment to examine the level of education and awareness in Nigeria which has increased tremendously compared to what it was in the 1960s due to the launching of Universal Primary Education (UPE) by the federal government. The population of Girls/Female enrolment in education had gone up and most of them had attained higher educational qualifications (Abdulkareem, 2013). As such, women were beginning to break the shell of some societal socio-cultural and religious practices to pick up interest in some of the male-dominated professions.

Another factor that necessitated women's enlistment into the armed forces is the changing pattern of armed violence in many countries in the 1990s. The prevalence of armed violence and civil wars in some African countries necessitated peacekeeping operations, hence the peacekeepers were made up of the military and police force. The Nigerian military, through the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), played prominent roles in the peacekeeping operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, etc. The women soldiers performed their traditional duties as supportive in the frontlines, and also as welfare personnel to the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in their various camps. Their roles began to change from administrative, medical, transport, and logistics to humanitarian services and mediators. Those with longer years of experience have been at the frontlines, facing machine guns and grenade attacks along with their male counterparts. For instance, Bashmateka Madambo, one of the longest-serving female soldiers in the country, served in at least three major international operations, including the ECOMOG, mission in Liberia and Sierra Leone. (Olatunji Olatunde, 2017). She was also part of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Darfur, Sudan, where she surpassed the expectations of her male commanders.

It is pertinent to stress at this juncture, the impact of UNSC Resolutions 1325 of 2000 on the changing role of women in the military. In October 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted UNSC Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, this heralded a historic change in the global security agenda (Tryggestad, 2009). The resolution mandated all member states to ensure that women's and society's security needs are safeguarded through increased emphasis on the three pillars of prevention, protection, and participation. The prevention (of conflict and gender-based violence) and participation (at all of the decision-making related to peace and security) pillars recognize the fact that the effects of war and conflict on women and girls have been historically overlooked and that increased efforts are needed to protect their basic human rights (the third pillar). However, the main shift in the security agenda is that women are now seen as actors and active contributors in shaping their future and that of their nations through participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities (Tryggestad, 2009). Additionally, the resolution details some specific actions to be taken. For instance, more women are to be deployed in peacekeeping operations, and gender perspectives are to be part of all planning and execution of military operations.

Sequel to the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325, many countries have generated their National Action Plans (NAP) to detail and evaluate their efforts toward the aim of the women, peace, and security agenda. It was a unique response to a UNSC Resolution because it underscored political commitment to implementing this resolution. Further, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 was also adopted in 2008 due to weak areas concerning sexual violence prevention and response in the UNSC Resolution 1325. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 recognizes that sexual violence can impede international

peace and security, and therefore, requires a security response to protect girls and women from sexual violence during armed conflict. For the first time, sexual violence is not only discussed as an inevitable feature of conflict but as unacceptable and preventable. The resolution covers key elements such as; recognizing sexual violence as a tactic of war, allowing the intervention of the Security Council, and excluding sexual violence crimes from amnesty provisions. It also recognizes that sexual violence may be categorized as a war crime, a crime against humanity, and an act of genocide.

Nigeria as a member of the United Nations and a signatory to the protocols quickly adhered to the resolutions. In the first place, the Nigerian Armed Forces considered the protection and participation of women necessary as reflected in the increased number of women participating in the war and peace process in the war-torn countries. The UNSC Resolution 1325 was one of the stimuli that made the Nigerian Armed Forces relax some of its rigid policies on women in the area of deployment. Many women were deployed as intelligent officers, and arm bearers, while deployed to provide services to the victims of armed conflicts.

Enlistment of Women into the Regular Combatants Cadets

In 2010, President Goodluck Jonathan ordered the admission of the first female cadets to be trained as Regular Combatants Cadets (RC). (Vanguard, 2011; The New Valiant, 2016) President Jonathan's action is understood within the context of political will and commitment to breaking barriers against women's emancipation. The admission and training of female cadets in the Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna in 2011 altered certain military policies. This type of admission and training is remarkably different from the training of female cadets of the Short Service, Direct Regular, and Direct Short Service courses which the NDA has been undertaken since 1980. The female cadets were given five years of grueling military training as against nine months of training in the other courses. The first sets of female Cadets were admitted in 2011 and they passed out in 2016 (The Valiant, 2016). By implications of this development, Nigeria now has combatant female officers who would command troops. For instance, a good number of women have been trained in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations, thus, it is not surprising to see a sizeable number of women deployed for combat campaigns. In many of the States under serious security threats like Boko Haram, banditry, herder-farmer conflict, and kidnapping, Female combatants are visible in patrol vehicles and among gun-wielding soldiers manning checkpoints to fend off the armed groups. Female flying officers; Kafayat Sanni, Oluwabunmi Ijelu, and Tolulope Arotile (late) of the Nigerian Airforce were deployed for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) in the ongoing counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism campaigns (Olubiyo, 2022). The successes recorded by these female military personnel are testimony that they have proven themselves to be physically, mentally, and morally capable of leading and executing combat operations.

Another innovation in the attempt to mainstream women in the military was the establishment of the Nigerian Army Women's Corps (NAWC) in 2018. According to the former Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Yusufu. Buratai, "The Corps concept was to harness the potential of female officers and soldiers and to build a force ready to support Army operations and engagements". He added that "establishing the Nigerian Army Women's Corps is imperative because of the need to get all involved, irrespective of gender, to strengthen the security of the country" (The Punch, 2019 April 9). Since the existence of the Corp, it has handled women-related matters like negotiation for role expansion, training, among others. For instance, in 2021, Governor el-Rufai of Kaduna State received 300 female combatants to complement their male counterparts in securing the Kaduna-Abuja highway from the bandits. The Corps also conducted its maiden Inter-Battalion Obstacle Crossing Competition in 2022. The essence was to test both the mental and the physical alertness which are basic prerequisites for combat readiness. Goldstein (2018) argues that the formal inclusion of women in combat roles is crucial for integrating women at all levels of the military.

Given the journey of women in the Nigerian Armed Forces, it is safe to conclude that there is an increased participation than in the past, it has taken decades for women to advance to elite combat squadrons, with some roles remaining exclusively male despite the lack of policy barriers.

Challenges to Women's Inclusion in the Combat Corps of the Nigerian Armed Forces

Despite the remarkable feats recorded in the inclusion of women in the Nigerian Armed Forces combat corps, there is a barrage of problems confronting the expansion of women's roles to equal that of their male counterparts.

One such bottleneck is the socio-cultural norm of the Nigerian Society which is harsh to women. It set borderlines for females in many professions and stigmatizes them in professions believed to be for men. A military career is perceived to be a man's turf and should not accommodate women in many areas. The Nigerian military from the onset maintains a culture that is based on the patriarchal social system of Nigerian society, and it has been difficult to deviate from the masculinity culture despite the international convention and global advocacy on gender inclusion. Given the circumstances, Gen. Yusufu. Buratai noted that the Nigerian military is cautious of Nigeria's socio-cultural norms in the deployment and role assigned to women. Several women were trained at the Nigerian Army School Infantry (NASI) Jaji on Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Insurgency operations, however, only a few were deployed to the Northeast as stool pigeons and humanitarian workers at the IDP camps. (Daily Trust, December 17, 2017). In modern warfare, the military authority believes that prevention, and winning the enemies' minds through intelligence gathering can be more significant than confronting and dehumanizing the enemies. So, having female soldiers alongside the men in combat duties may have some benefits, particularly in information gathering, community relations, and humanitarian service.

In 2017, it was alleged that the government would stop training female cadets in the Nigerian Defence Academy and they would be restrained from combat because of socio-cultural, and religious sentiments (Bature, 2019). This did not sail through as the government considers meeting global best practices on gender policy.

The institution of patriarchy in Nigerian society for ages is also identified as a major obstacle to women in combat. Patriarchy is a sexual system of power that is 'male-identified', male-controlled, and male-centered where masculinity and masculine traits are valued over femininity and feminine traits (Makama, 2013). It is also a societal system of structure and practices that foster men's domination, oppression, and exploitation of women. Dogo argued that the system informs a hierarchical structure in which women are subordinate to men (Dogo, 2017).

Another problem for women in combat is the difficulty in balancing family life. While this affects men also, this is more precarious for women given their biological configuration and societal responsibility as mothers and caregivers. Women are forced to leave their children and spouse and this can cause a great deal of anxiety for both parents and sometimes, it results in divorce. Many marriages had been dissolved as a result of the inability of some women to balance their family and work demands. Women's situations get complicated especially if they become pregnant during service which can be stressful.

Lack of political will by the Nigerian government to implement gender policy in the military. The UNSC Resolution 1325 came into effect in 2009, but the Nigerian government found it difficult to domesticate the protocol (Ikpe, 2010). The only area where the government has shown partial commitment is the development of a Five-Year National Action Plan (2014-2019) by the Ministry of Women Affairs. Almost a decade after the Action Plan was to commence, no concrete achievement has been recorded in terms of gender integration.

Those challenging women in combat identified sexual harassment, assault, and rape as latent problems that would affect troops bonding at the war front. There are tendencies that troops in combat would want to satisfy their sexual desires. Sexual harassment is one of the heinous issues alleged to be happening in the Nigerian Armed Forces mostly between the male superior and the female subordinates. In African society, sexual harassment or abuse is grossly underreported because of fear of stigmatization, reprisal, or victimization. According to a discreet survey conducted in Nigeria, although 78 per cent of female recruits claimed to be satisfied with their military service, 17 per cent said that they had suffered sexual harassment mainly in the form of inappropriate looks, comments, and gestures, and 5 per cent reported serious incidents of harassment (Ezeajughu, 2021). Sexual harassment is a societal problem that has crept into the Nigerian military system, and it is being addressed through a disciplinary measure as contained in the Armed Forces Acts. Thus, it is an offence

punishable under military law, with conviction by a court-martial, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years or any less punishment provided by this Act. Women continue to face several barriers and challenges in serving, such as sexual harassment and restricted career opportunities, especially in key leadership positions.

Arising from the challenges highlighted above, the military profession in Nigeria is seen as a sticky floor for women. This is because they face serious challenges ranging from mentorship to networking opportunities in an attempt to advance from entry-level to mid-level positions. In addition, women in the Nigerian Military often have limited access to workplace authority and low gender representation, with men dominating leadership positions and decision-making processes. This restricts women's ability to influence policy and decision-making.

The above challenges also make women the leaky pipeline in the Nigerian Military, a situation where women retire more voluntarily than men, particularly at mid-career levels. This could be due to various factors such as lack of career advancement opportunities, gender discrimination, or family responsibilities.

Recommendations to Strengthening Expansion of Women's Role in the Nigerian Armed Forces

The challenges facing women in the Nigerian Armed Forces are soluble, it requires policy reform, ideological changes, adaptation of equal representation of both genders in the security sector, or a consideration of enlarged involvement of women in the security governance. The challenge of the gender gap created by the patriarchal structure of the Nigerian military service could be solved through gender balance.

In the first place, the socio-cultural and religious beliefs of Nigerian society which restrict women from participating in military activities must also give way. The sustainability of this belief system may not last because society has changed over a long period, and in no distant period, external influences, political development, education, technology, etc would no longer place women as subordinate.

Secondly, there is a need for the Nigerian Armed Forces to modernize its operations as well as relax its rigid policies which restricted women in many areas, this can be done through legislation as it was done in many countries like the US, UK, Israel, Afghanistan, South Africa, etc.

In addition, the Nigerian government should domesticate the international laws and protocols that promote gender equality in every sphere of life. The government should criminalize individual, group, or corporate organizations that violate the gender equality protocols. By so doing, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 can be effective.

Government should go beyond the narrative and rhetoric on gender inequality in every sphere of the society. Thus, political will is urgently required to implement a gender policy for mainstreaming. Security sector reforms will give room for women's leadership, and realization of their potential.

Lastly, there is the need to strengthen women's corps in the military to handle issues distinctly related to challenges facing women on the job. Such may include promotion, deployment, sexual harassment, and family matters among others.

Conclusion

The study discussed the changing pattern of women's role in the Nigerian Armed Forces from the context of breaking gender boundaries. Traditionally, patriarchal institutions and the sturdy belief in the military profession as man's turf formed the basis for the low enlistment of women and their deployment to non-combat areas. But over time, women were not only enlisted but have continued to mark their presence significantly in the combat unit. The changing roles of women in the Nigerian Armed Forces signify a profound shift towards gender equality and inclusivity. As women break through the glass ceiling, they bring unique perspectives, skills, and strengths to the military, enhancing its effectiveness and responsiveness. The paradigm shift was occasioned by both internal and external influences, among the internal influences are the reorganization of the Nigerian Armed Forces after the civil war, intense military training for both men and women, admission and training of women into NDA as Regular Combatants Cadets in 2011, among others. The external influences

include the changing nature of armed violence globally, which influenced the adoption of the UNSCR 1325 of 2000 and 1820 of 2009. Nigeria as a member and signatory to the resolutions adhered to the resolutions, particularly the aspect of protection and participation. Since 2011, sizeable numbers of women have been trained in core military warfare and deployed to the conflict areas. Also, some women military officers have ascended in ranks which allowed them to occupy leadership positions such as head of corps or battalion. Their presence in previously restricted domains signifies a breakthrough, shattering the glass ceiling and transcending traditional boundaries within the organization. By venturing into areas once deemed off-limits, they are redefining the possibilities and expanding the horizons for women in the Nigerian Armed Forces.

However, the expansion of women's roles is challenged by Nigeria's socio-cultural norms, patriarchy, lack of political will, and sexual harassment, among others. These challenges can be overcome with continuous sensitization of Nigerian society to overcome socio-cultural norms and patriarchy, advanced military technology, domestication of international protocols on women, legislation, and criminalization of gender discrimination, among others. Addressing the persistent gender biases, structural barriers, and cultural norms that hinder women's progress is crucial. By doing so, the Nigerian military can tap into the full potential of its personnel, fostering a more diverse, adaptable, and resilient force. Overcoming the age-long gender barrier in the military and other spheres is a strategic imperative for national security and development.

References

- Abdulkareem, A.K (2013). Girl-Child Education in Nigeria: Policy Issues and Challenges Seminar Paper Presented at the University of Ilorin. Retrieved from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication>. Accessed December 23, 2023
- Alabi, G. I. (2014). *The Tragedy of Victory: On-the-Spot Account of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War in the Atlantic Theatre*. Ibadan: Spectrum Publishers.
- Alexievich, S. (2017). *The Unwomanly Face of War*. Translated by R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky. Random House.
- Amakievi, G. (1992). "Women in the Military: A Study of the Nigerian Army, Navy and Air Force". *Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities* 1(6). 45–55
- Anna Simons (2014). Here's why women in combat units is a bad idea. War on the Rock; National security. For insiders. By insiders. <https://warontherocks.com/2014/11/heres-why-women-in-combat-units-is-a-bad-idea/>
- Bature, E. A. (2023). Combat Operations in the Nigerian Armed Forces: Issues and Way Forward. *Arts and Social Science Research*, 9(1), 19. Retrieved from: <https://fassjassr.com.ng/index.php/assr/article/view/22>
- Bem, S. L. (1981). Gender Schema Theory: A Cognitive Account of Sex-Typing. *Psychological Review*, 88(4), 354–364.
- Blau, F. D., & Kahn, L. M. (2017). The Gender Wage Gap: Extent, Trends, and Explanations. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 55(3), 789–865.
- Browne, J (2007). *The Future of Gender*. Cambridge University Press.
- Browne, K (2015). "Co-Ed Combat: The New Evidence That Women Shouldn't Fight" Sentinel.
- Campbell, D. (1993). Women in Combat: The World War II Experience in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and the Soviet Union. *The Journal of Military History*, 57(2), 301–323. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2944060>
- Carney P. C. et al. (2003) "Women in the Gulf War: Combat Experience, Exposures, and Subsequent Health Care Use." *Military Medicine*. 168(8). 654–661. <https://academic.oup.com/milmed/article/168/8/654/4820298>
- Chandler, J., Bryant, L., & Bunyard, T. (1995). Women in Military Occupations. *Work, Employment & Society*, 9(1), 123–135. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23745903>
- Creveld, M.V (2006) "The Changing Face of War: Lessons of Combat from the Marne to Iraq" Presido Press.

Daily Trust Newspaper: "Army trains female soldiers in counter-terrorism operations" Dec 17, 2017. Available at: <https://dailytrust.com/army-trains-female-soldiers-in-counter-terrorism-operations/>

Decew, J. W. (1995). The Combat Exclusion and the Role of Women in the Military. *Hypatia*, 10(1), 56–73. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810458>

Dogo S. O. (2017). "Exploring the Impact of Gender Integrationist Policy in the Nigerian Military", A Ph.D. Thesis in Politics, University of Exeter.

Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex Differences in Social Behaviour: A Social-Role Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Eka, S.M (2012). "Gender Equity and the Challenges of Nation-Building in Nigeria" in Afaha, P.(ed) *The Nigerian Women; Essays in Honour of Dame Patient Jonathan*, Abuja Makurdi: Aboki Publishers.

England, P. (1981). Assessing Trends in Occupational Sex Segregation, 1900-1976. in I. Berg (Ed.), *Sociological Perspectives on Labour Markets*.273–295. New York: Academic Press.

Ezeajughu, Mary C. (2021) "Gender Inequality in Nigerian Army", Shikshan Sanshodhan: *Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*. 4(3) 81–85.

Friedman, G & Friedman M (2019). *The Future of Warfare: The Revolution in Military Affairs*. Doubleday.

Goldstein, J.S (2001). *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. Cambridge University Press.

Gordon, M.R. (2019) *The Technological Revolution in Modern Warfare*. Oxford University Press.

Ikpe, E (2010) "Nigeria and the Implementation of UNSCR 1325". in: F. Olonisakin, K. Barnes, & E. Ikpe (eds.) *Women, Peace and Security: Translating Policy into Practice*. Routledge.

Ivy, D. A and Korbla. P. P. (2013). Women in Agriculture: An Assessment of the Current State of Affairs in Africa. Zimbabwe. *The African Capacity Building Foundation*.

Jackson, S. and Scott, S. (2002) *Gender: A Sociological Reader*. London: Routledge.

Jacobs, J. E. (1996). Gender and Academic Achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88(2), 324–333.

King, A (2016) Women in Combat. *The RUSI Journal*. 158 (1) 4–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2013.774634>

Kristi, N (2011). Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries. A Comparative Perspective in Kristi Niskanen (Ed.) *Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries*. Oslo; NIKK Publications 2011.

Lips, H. M. (2004). Gender Roles and Socialization. in M. A. Paludi (Ed.), *Praeger guide to the Psychology of Gender*. 45–62. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Lucy V. K. (1992) Free a Man to Fight: The Exclusion of Women from Combat Positions in the Armed Forces, *Minnesota Journal of Law & Inequality*, University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing 10(1) LAW & INEQ. 1 Retrieved from: <https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/lawineq/vol10/iss1/1>

MacKenzie, M. H. (2012). Let Women Fight: Ending the U.S. Military's Female Combat Ban. *Foreign Affairs*, 91(6), 32–42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41720932>

Makama, G. A. (2013) "Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria: The Way Forward". *European Scientific Journal*. 9(17) 115–144. ISSN: 1857 – 7881 (Print) e – ISSN 1857-7431

Micheal, K (2004) *Women and Development in Africa: How Gender Works*. USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004.

Mitchell, B. (1989) *Weak link. The Feminization of American Military*, Gateway Books. ISBN: 0895265559

NAEC, (1994). *History of the Nigerian Army*, Lagos: NAEC.

Nwachukwu, C. (2018). Women in the Nigerian Military: An Examination of their Roles and Challenges. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(3), 259–271.

Olatunji Olatunde (2017 May, 6) "If I die, I die", The Nation Newspaper.

- Olubiyo, K. G. (2022) "Gender Issues in the Nigerian Military; Developments, Policy Change and Implementations on Women in the Military Profession" Okpeh, O. Okpe J, *et al.* (Eds.) in *Military Leadership, Service, and National Development*. 701-724.
- Phillips, A., & Taylor, B. (1980). Sex and Skill: Notes Towards a Feminist Economics. *Feminist Review*, 6(1), 79–88.
- Pearson, E. and Shahidat. W (2018) "Boko Haram, the Islamic State, and the Question of the Female Suicide Bomber" in J. Zenn (ed) *Boko Haram, Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency, Combating Terrorism Centre*, Pearson.
- Premium Times "Nigerian Army to deploy female soldiers to intelligence, signal, ordnance corps" October 9, 2016 - *Agency Report*.
- Reskin, B. F. (1988). Bringing the Men Back in Sex Differentiation and the Devaluation of Women's Work. *Gender & Society*, 2(1), 58–81.
- Sasson-Levy O (2011). Research on Gender and the Military in Israel: From a Gendered Organization to Inequality Regimes. *Israel Studies Review*, 26(2). 73–98
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41804763>
- Scott, S and Jackson, S (2002). *Gender: A Sociological Reader*. Psychology Press.
- The Punch, (2019 April). "Why Nigerian Army created female corps – Buratai" Available at: <https://punchng.com/why-nigerian-army-created-female-corps-buratai/>
- The New Valiant; "Pioneer Female Regular Combatant Cadets; The Journey So Far." A Magazine of the Nigerian Defence Academy, 45 edition, September 2016.
- Tryggestad, L.T. (2009). "Trick or Treat" The UN and Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 in "Women, Peace, and Security" in *Global Governance*. 15. 539-557.
- Quester, G. H. (1977). Women in Combat. *International Security*, 1(4), 80–91. Retrieved on December 22, 2023 at <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538624>
- Valian, V. (1998). *Why so Slow? The Advancement of Women*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Vanguard Newspaper. "Jonathan orders admission of women into NDA as regular combatants" February 14, 2011. Retrieved from: https://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/02/jonathan-orders-admission-of-women-into-nda-as-regular-combatants/#google_vignette
- Wushishi, M.I. (1987). "The Nigerian Army - Growth and Development of Combat Readiness" in T.A. Imobighe (Ed.) *Nigerian Defence and Security: Issues and Options for Policy*. Nigeria: Nigeria Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies. Kuru- Jos, Nigeria.