

# Building on the Theory of the Comfort Zone of Gender Inequality: Analysis of Survey Findings.

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## Abstract

Despite centuries of efforts to end gender inequality (GI), the world is still not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. No country has achieved gender parity, and it is not likely that an additional 15 years at the end of 2030 (what can be called “Progressive Sustainable Development Goals – P-SDGs”) will do the magic by 2045. The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap report 2024 made it clear that at the current rate of progress, full gender parity will not be reached until the year 2158. Based on the foregoing, the central argument of this paper is that gender inequality has persisted because it is a comfort zone for men. It is a place where men prefer to stay because of the benefits to them, regardless of the consequences for the disadvantaged group (women). Two main research questions, among other questions, addressed in this paper are: is gender inequality a comfort zone for men, and if yes, what is your understanding of gender inequality in line with the comfort zone thesis? Using survey data, this paper builds on the theory of the comfort zone of gender inequality, which was first advanced by Osondu-Oti (2024) in an article titled “The Comfort Zone of Gender Inequality: A Reflection.” Findings from this survey affirm that gender inequality is a comfort zone for men, especially those with

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“authoritative power”- the main beneficiaries of gender inequality. In line with the comfort zone thesis, findings from the survey show that gender inequality is a rational choice because of men’s fear of losing power and authority in both private and public domains. Gender inequality also puts men in an advantageous position where they feel more at ease and in control, and being that it is familiar terrain, they are reluctant to leave their comfort zone. It is therefore recommended that more awareness be created about gender inequality being a comfort zone for “men,” so that advocates of gender equality, including feminist movements and scholars, can engage in a stronger push for equality. This is because these men are less likely to be committed to the struggle for gender equality, since they are in their “hegemonic palace” with the comfort therein. In addition, more practical commitments by organisations to the empowerment of women and girls are needed more than ever, especially investing in girl-child education. Education is power, and it remains the first and a crucial step that will guarantee more placement of women in positions of authority in the years to come, as authoritative power is still less available to women.

**Keywords:** Building, Theory, Comfort Zone, Gender Inequality, Analysis, Survey, Findings, Nigeria.

## Introduction

Gender inequality (GI) remains one of the persistent problems in our world. Year on year, global gender parity reports have not shown any promise that gender equality will be achieved in the 21st century. The World Economic Forum 2024 Global Gender Gap report says it will take 134 years to reach full parity in all regions, which is roughly five generations from 2024 (Piaget and Baller, 2024). Gender inequality has been with us for centuries. Feminist scholars such as Mary Wollstonecraft (the first feminist writer), through their writings, have campaigned for rights and opportunities for women that are equal to those of men. Although the feminist movement became popularized in the 19th century and their struggles were later described in the form of waves, starting with the first-wave feminism, and other waves (second, third, and emerging fourth wave- cyber feminism) that followed, the fight to

end gender inequality has been on as long as anyone can remember.

While in recent years the United Nations, with the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 and Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, has been calling on countries to work towards the realisation of gender equality, regional disparity is still huge. Progress to narrow the gender gaps, including education attainment gaps between girls and boys; the health and survival gaps; the economic participation and opportunity gaps, and the political empowerment gap, has not only been slow but uneven. Europe has continued to outperform other regions, occupying almost the top ten positions in the world rankings.

Iceland, for instance, ranked number 1 for the 15th time [in 2024] and is the only economy to have closed its gender gap by more than 90%, at 93.5% (Piaget and Baller, 2024). Other Nordic countries, such as Finland and Norway, occupy second (87.5%) and third (87.5%) positions. According to the World Economic Forum 2024 report, regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Asia and the Pacific, as well as Central Asia, still have a long way, as their years of projected parity have been put as 2125, 2205, and 2249 respectively (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Indeed, achieving gender equality has been daunting, and scholars have attributed the persistence of gender inequality to some factors such as religion, culture, and patriarchy. For example, UN Women (2017) argued that gender roles and the status of women and men in society are deeply tied to the manner in which religious texts have been interpreted for centuries by those in positions of authority - positions held predominantly by men. According to Larousse (2023), religious systems have contributed to the establishment of gender inequality, and this is not exclusive to monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, as all great religious traditions, including Tibetan Buddhism, are imbued with an ancient foundation of more or less latent misogyny. Masculine dominance is prevalent, “as religious systems are marked by patriarchal thoughts,

with women considered inferior to men, to whom they must be subjected” (Larousse, 2023). Proliferation of extremist political ideologies and movements has also strengthened patriarchal structures and instrumentalized religion to legitimize discrimination against women and girls (UN Women, 2017).

As noted by Etim-James (2024), while religion dictates the status of women and has been a foundation upon which gender inequality rests, culture has continued to be one of the major determinants of gender inequality, as gender roles and behaviour are firmly entrenched in culture. Patriarchy (male dominance) is a major hindrance to gender equality. According to Simon and Hasan (2025), gender disparity persists as a fundamental problem, rooted in patriarchy and discrimination. Patriarchy perpetuates gender inequality, leading to disparities in education, employment opportunities, and income (Peluso, 2023).

In the feminist theories that emerged in the 1960s, patriarchy became a crucial framework for explaining the persistence of gender inequality at a systemic level (Strid and Hearn, 2022). While factors such as religion, cultural beliefs, and patriarchy have been well established as contributing to gender inequality, this paper argues that gender inequality persists because it is a comfort zone for men, who are reluctant to leave their place of comfort. Two main research questions, among other questions, addressed in this paper are: is gender inequality a comfort zone for men, and if yes, what is your understanding of gender inequality in line with the comfort zone thesis?

With the use of survey data, this paper builds on Osondu-Oti’s (2024) article titled “The Comfort Zone of Gender Inequality: A Reflection”, where the theory of the comfort zone of gender inequality was first advanced. Following the introduction, this paper is sectionally presented as follows. The second section contains the research methodology. The third section is a brief clarification of the concepts of gender inequality, comfort zone, and authoritative power

as used in this paper. The fourth section is the data presentation and analysis, followed by the fifth section, which is the discussion of findings, in line with the main research question (s). The last section is the conclusion and recommendations.

## Research Methodology

This work used a quantitative research method, making use of a questionnaire (online Google form) to elicit opinions on “gender inequality as a comfort zone...” It targeted students (undergraduate and postgraduate) and staff in all disciplines in academic institutions (universities) in the southwestern region of Nigeria. The online survey questions were specifically administered in two universities - Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria, and Lagos State University, Ojo, Nigeria. The total number of responses received through the online survey was 246, comprising 154 female and 92 male participants. Secondary sources were used to consolidate the primary survey data. All data was analysed using descriptive methods, summarizing the attributes of a data set and highlighting key characteristics, patterns, and relationships. Percentages as well as bar/pie charts were used to further gain insights and analyse data effectively.

## Gender Inequality

To define the term gender inequality, it is important to first understand the concept of gender. Gender refers to social construction, which has to do with how a particular society structures our understanding of what it means to be a man or woman. The term gender has increasingly acquired a social meaning, defining how the male and female gender relates in a particular society and how duties or roles are

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\*\* Hegemony masculinity is used to explain men's dominance over women and the ways in which male dominance over women is perpetuated in a society.

†† This is a form of masculinity that has a lower position in a gender hierarchy, when compared to hegemonic masculinity. They often lack many of the qualities of hegemonic masculinity. For example, the dominance of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men.

‡‡ This form of masculinity does not align with the dominant masculinity (hegemonic) and are sometimes excluded from the dominant masculinity due to factors such as class, race, disability or other forms of social exclusion.

allocated based on one's sex. Gender role construction often creates gender stereotypes that limit individual potential and opportunities, ultimately leading to gender discrimination. Gender discrimination as defined in Article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women refers to:

“Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field” (cited in Osondu-Oti, 2024).

Gender discrimination is often perpetuated by entrenched social norms and power imbalances that privilege, prioritize, and benefit one gender while disadvantaging the other. Gender inequality occurs as a result of gender discrimination. Gender inequality means that men and women have no equal access to rights or opportunities. It is the opposite of gender equality, which aims at equal rights and opportunities for both sexes. Gender inequality is still deeply entrenched in many societies, and in all societies where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are largely discriminated against. While men also face the challenges of gender discrimination, women remain the most disadvantaged group.

## **The Concept of Comfort Zone**

A comfort zone is simply a zone where one feels safe or at ease. It can also be defined as a position in which one feels comfortable, secure, and in control (Osondu-Oti, 2024). Merriam-Webster dictionary defines comfort zone as the level at which one functions at ease and familiarity. Oxford Learner's Dictionaries defined it as a place or situation in which one feels safe or comfortable, especially when they choose to stay in that situation... instead of trying to do

better. Encyclopedia Britannica defines it as a place, situation, or level where someone feels confident and comfortable. Comfort zone is also defined as a “familiar psychological state where people are at ease and (perceive they are) in control of their environment” (cited in Osondu-Oti, 2024).

In regard to this study, comfort zone is seen as a place or situation where one feels comfortable, at ease, and in control. Based on the paper’s argument, gender inequality is comfort zone for men in the sense that (i) it is a place where they function at ease and familiarity, (ii) it is a situation where they feel confident and comfortable, and would rather choose to stay... (iii) it is place where they enjoy some form of benefits. The benefit that comes with the comfort zone is key. Because men enjoy some kind of benefit from gender inequality, especially being in control, they would rather “choose” to stay there (since they also hold the power and authority – authoritative power) in order not to lose the “benefits”. While this study is not in any way out to lump all men together (uniformization of men) as if all men hold authoritative positions or belong to the same dominant (hegemonic\*\*) masculinity (there are other masculinities like subordinate\*\* and marginalised\*\*), it is well established that authoritative power is more available to men, who dominate the state and society in general. Thus, clarifying the concept of authoritative power is extremely vital in the analysis of the comfort zone thesis.

## **The Concept of Authoritative Power: Revisited**

Authority and power, though they may be viewed as the same, are two different forms of influence. Authority is power, but often attached to a position in a society. Authority is defined relative to a position; it is seen as the rightness of a request or command associated with another’s position, and the request or command is obeyed because it is thought to be legitimate (see Osondu-Oti, 2024). Authority

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\* The main objectives of the ICP is to The main objectives of the ICP are to produce purchasing power parities (PPPs) and comparable price level indexes (PLIs) for participating economies; and convert volume and per capita measures of gross domestic product (GDP) and its expenditure components into a common currency using PPPs.

has been defined as the formal and legal right that a person holds to make decisions and give commands to others (Perry, 2021). The notion of legitimacy is very important in defining authority. According to Emerson (1962), cited in Rummel (n.d), authority is a directed power employed (legitimately) only in channels defined by the norms of the group. Authority emerges as a transformation of power in a process called “legitimation” (Rummel, n.d, cited in Osondu-Oti, 2024). While Perry (2021) argued that the concept of authority is based on designation, [and/or role/position], scholars like Rummel (n.d) see authority as more than just role or position. According to Rummel (n.d), authority is not only associated with a role but with a situation and the individual. Rummel (n.d) clarified his definition of authority by arguing that authority has three key aspects - that associated with role, with situation, and with individual. He went further to explain these three aspects, using the following example.

A drowning person yelling to another for help is legitimate. In that drowning situation, he/she has authority, just like a reader in a library requesting that one refrain from disturbing. It is also legitimate for a recognized scholar of classical Greek to demand from another scholar the evidence for a critical comment made, for instance, on Plato, and the scholar who commented is obligated to respond. In addition, a mathematician (not by position, but by training) requesting the derivation of another’s theorem has the legitimate power to do so (Rummel, n.d).

Just like a police officer, a boss in the office or judge in a court who have authority to command or make request due to their role/position, the drowning person, a reader in a library or an academic scholar making a request also have authority because of the “legitimacy” (rightness) of their request/command. Authority can inhere in the individual who, because of his particular attainments



or image [in a society], can make legitimate requests or command (Rummel, n.d). Rummel's (n.d) broader definition of authority is in concert with the authors' idea of authority, which transcends role/position, but can be associated with a situation, and inheres in the individual.

In African society (Nigeria as a reference point), the image of a father/man and a mother/woman is not the same. A father referred to as "pater" in Latin, meaning head, chief, et cetera, is often associated with authority. Essentially, the father has the culturally accepted authority to command the mother based on the position/image that society has of him, as the head of the household. Authority by position (for example, in gender relations) is rarely available to women due to patriarchy, cultural and social norms, as well as religious beliefs that see women as subordinate to men. However, the situation of individuals can change, and that means the authority associated with a situation is dynamic. For example, some women, due to a high level of economic status, are being recognised as having the authority to make decisions in their families and societies today. Thus, such women can be said to have authority based on individual attainment and situational changes.

In essence, authority is not only role-specific (though important), but can also be situational. Authority is also not restricted only to organisations, as Perry (2021) argued, but can flow from other channels defined by the norms of a group or society. What must be noted in the definition of authority is the legitimacy of the power that a person has or has been granted to act over others. The "grantee" of that legitimate power could be the family, a group, an institution, or society as a whole. In simple terms, what makes authority different from power is the legitimacy that comes with authority. While power is something – anything – which makes or renders others able to do or capable of doing something (see Osondu-Oti, 2024), especially exerting their will over someone else, power is more informal. It does not have the legitimacy that authority enjoys.

In relation to gender inequality (GI), the gender of an individual plays a role in who is given or placed in a position of authority in several societies. In our part of the world, men are the primary holders of authority, and that gives them the power to command obedience from women. What makes authority different from power is that it is hierarchical. While anyone can have power, and power can also flow in any direction [depending on the situation], without any specific hierarchy (it could be a more “powerful” subordinate to a superior), authority flows downwards, from a superior to a subordinate (Perry, 2021).

One of the definitions of authority given by the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary is “a person or organization having political or administrative power and control.” Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary gave the synonyms of authority as the people in charge, the government, officials, the system, the administration, bureaucracy, the powers that be, the (men in) suits, Big Brother, among others. What can be deduced from these definitions is that a person holding authority is commissioned and has the right to command, rule, or govern (see Osondu-Oti, 2024). Authority can be called *de jure* power (see Osondu-Oti, 2024). Authority is the institutional code within which the use of power as a medium is organized and legitimized (see Osondu-Oti, 2024).

The basic argument here is that the actions or inactions of those with authoritative power can either make or mar the progress on gender equality. As Osondu-Oti (2024) posited, and it is further reiterated in this paper, authoritative power is largely in the hands of men. Thus, the “men” in the comfort zone, as used in this paper, refer to those in dominant positions of authority - economically, culturally, politically, and otherwise; men who wield authoritative powers, and are in charge/control in both private and public domains, as well as men who are gaining from women subordination. It is therefore based on the foregoing that this survey is carried out to test further the theory of comfort zone of gender inequality. The study aimed primarily to understand how gender inequality is viewed in African

society, particularly in Nigeria, and to gather opinions on whether or not gender inequality is a comfort zone for men. Using survey data, the study builds on Osondu-Oti's (2024) earlier advanced theory of the comfort zone of gender inequality. The next section contains the survey data presentation and analysis.

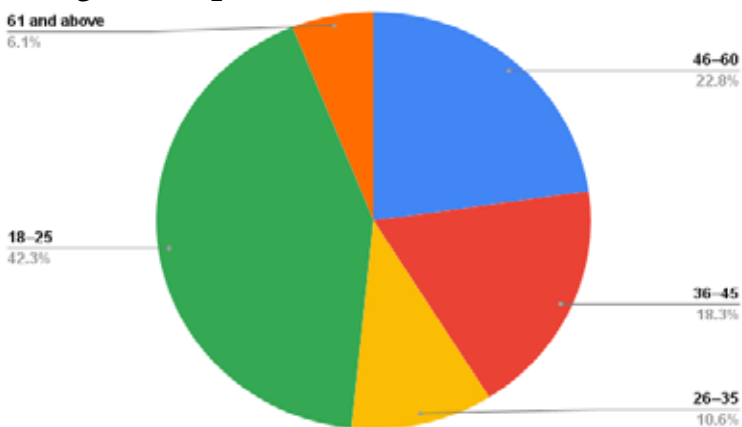
## Data Presentation and Analysis

The survey data is presented and analysed below.

### Summary of Socio-Demographic Distribution of Respondents

This section presents the socio-demographic data of 246 respondents who participated in an online survey conducted in April 2025. The survey aimed to gather opinions on the main theme of research, "Gender Inequality as a Comfort Zone for Men." Socio-demographic distribution as presented here includes age, sex, occupation, level of education, place of work/institution, academic status, and nationality. The survey targeted students (undergraduate and postgraduate) and staff in academic institutions (universities) in the southwestern region of Nigeria. This online survey was specifically administered to students and staff at Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, and Lagos State University, Ojo, Nigeria.

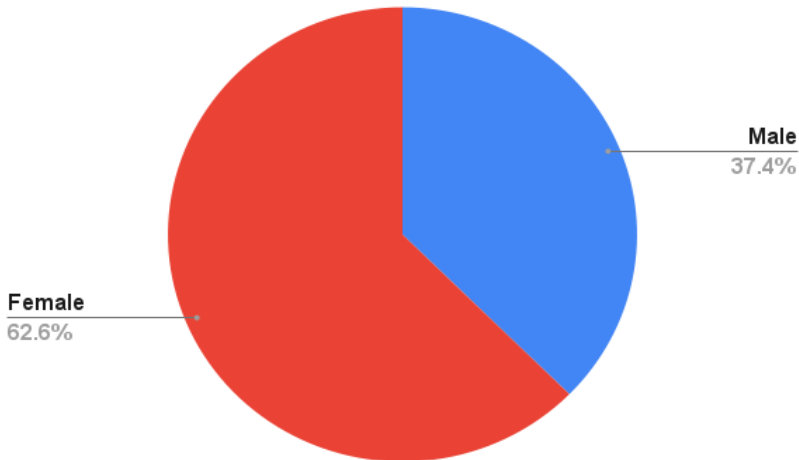
**Figure 1: Age of Respondents**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

Figure 1 provides insights into the different age groups that participated in the survey. Out of 246 participants, the majority of responses came from those aged between 18-25 years (42.3%). This was followed by those aged between 46-60 (22.8%), and those aged between 36-45 years (18.3%). Then, 26-35 years (10.6%), and 61 years and above (6.1%). It is obvious from this survey result that those between 18 to 60 years are interested in conversations around gender inequality, revealing great interests not only among students but also staff, who constituted the second (46-60 years) and third (36-45) highest numbers after the students (18-25 years), who topped the list. Obviously, students are more active on digital platforms.

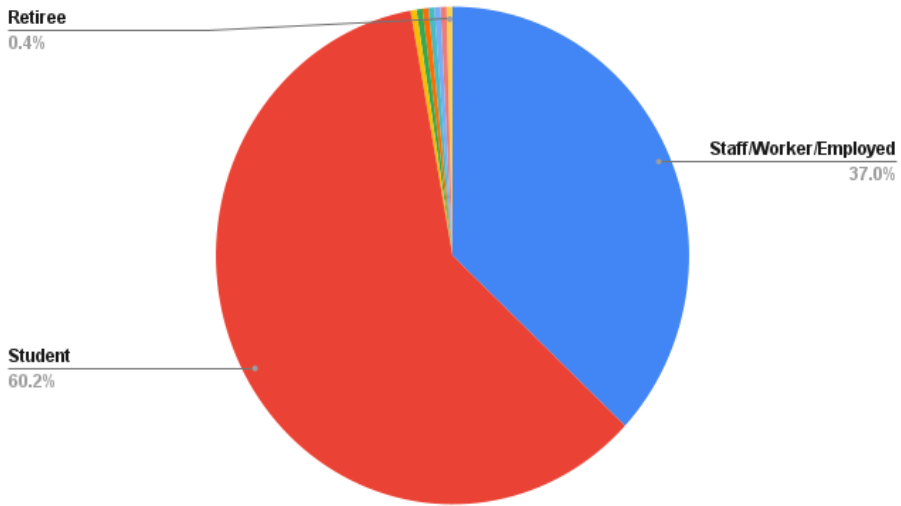
**Figure 2: Sex of Respondents**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

As illustrated in Figure 2, more females (62.6%) than males (37.4%) participated in the survey. The difference between male and female respondents may have been caused by the fact that women are more interested in sharing their experiences on this topic, since gender inequality is well-known to affect them more.

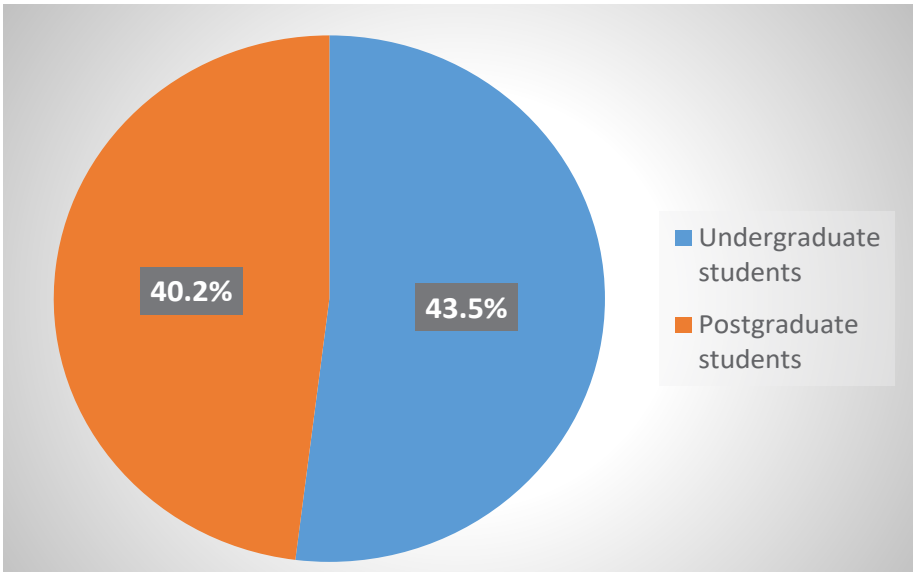
**Figure 3: Occupation of Respondents**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

Figure 3 shows the occupation of the participants. Out of 246 participants, 60.2% are students and 37.0% are staff/workers employed at the universities where the surveys were conducted. Retirees who account for 0.4% of the respondents must have been visitors who were at the universities when the questionnaire was administered. The reasons for the students (60.2%) being the major respondents are not far-fetched. The questionnaire was administered in two academic institutions (universities) in the South West, Nigeria. In recent times, students (the younger generation) are more interested in bringing changes to societal ills that impact their lives, as seen in the year 2020 EndSARS protest against police brutality in Nigeria, which was led by the youth. In addition, we cannot dismiss the fact that students are more tech-savvy, and being young, they are curious and more interested in understanding gender issues and how they impact them.

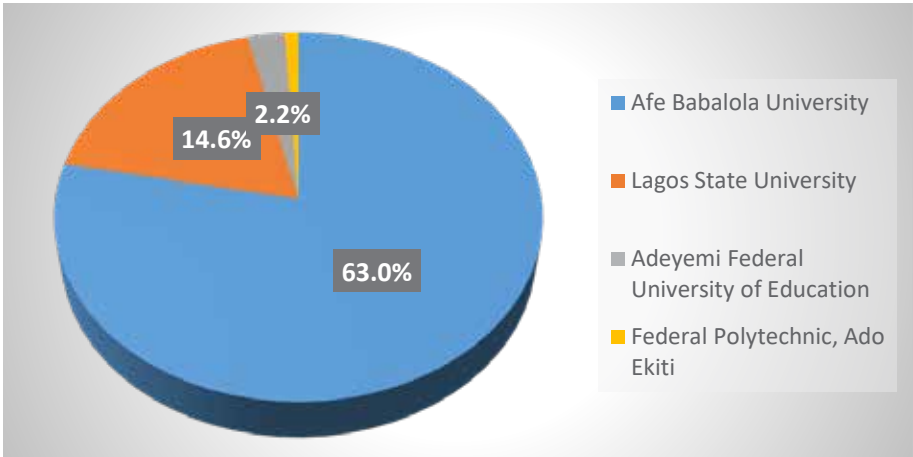
**Figure 4: Are you a Postgraduate or Undergraduate Student?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

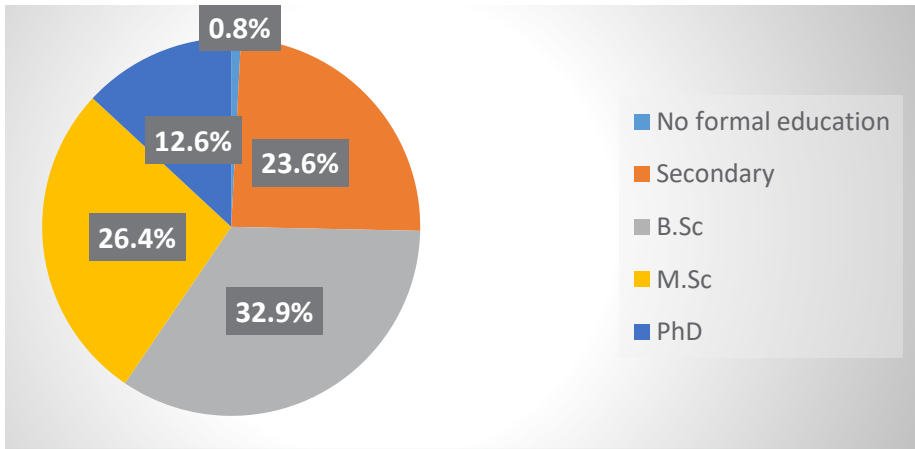
Figure 4 shows that almost equal numbers of undergraduate and postgraduate students participated in the survey. 43.5% of the respondents are undergraduate students, and 40.2% are postgraduates who provided diverse perspectives on issues of gender inequality. It is important to state that in both universities where the survey was conducted, postgraduate students include those pursuing postgraduate diplomas as well as master's and PhD degrees. Undergraduate means those pursuing their bachelor's degrees.

**Figure 5: Where do you work or study?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

Data in Figure 5 shows that 63.0% of the participants either work or study at Afe Babalola University, and 14.6% either work or study at Lagos State University. While the online questionnaire was administered at two universities- Afe Babalola University and Lagos State University, we discovered that there were participants from other academic institutions such as Adeyemi Federal University (2.2%) and Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti (0.8%), who we believe were either visitors or friends of the participants in the universities where the questionnaire was administered.

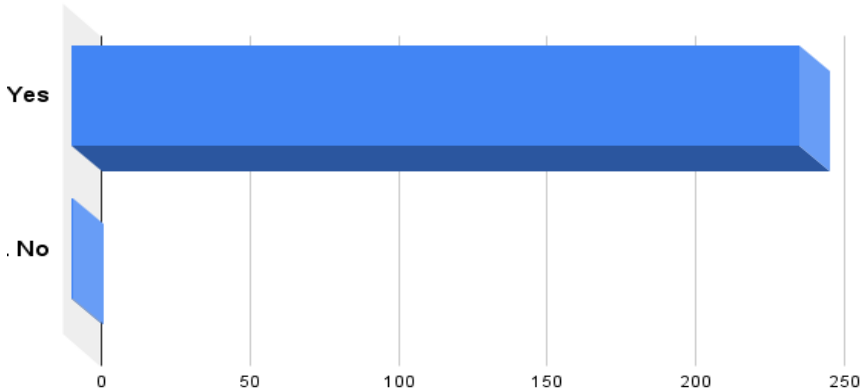
**Figure 6: What is your highest level of education?**

Source: Online Survey, April 2025

Figure 6 shows the highest level of education of the respondents. 32.9% of the participants have a Bachelor's degree (BSc.); 26.4% have a Master's degree (MSc.); 23.6% have a secondary school leaving certificate, and 12.6% have a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). While 0.8% presented themselves as those with no formal education, what is quite interesting is their willingness to participate in the online survey. In all, what is evident from the responses is that the majority of the participants are either BSc, MSc, or PhD holders, who provided informed and thoughtful responses to the survey questions.



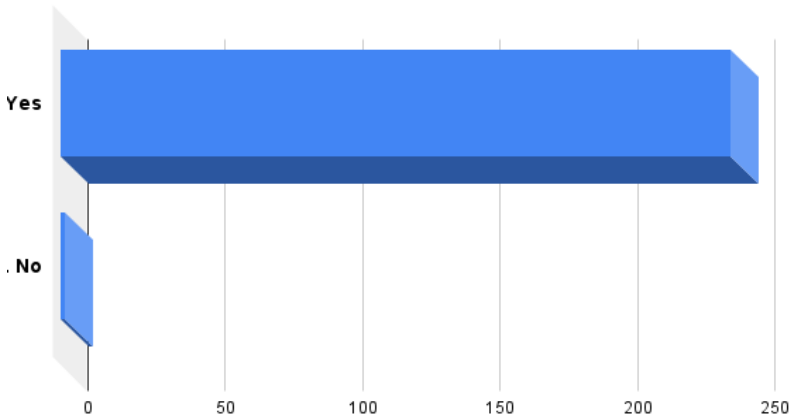
**Figure 7: Are you a Nigerian?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

As indicated in Figure 7, almost 100 percent of the participants (99.6%) are Nigerians, and only 0.4% (1) are non-Nigerians. This, no doubt, reveals that the responses on whether gender inequality is a comfort zone are based on Nigerians' experiences and knowledge of gender inequality, and their opinion on why gender inequality persists in the country, and by extension, in Africa.

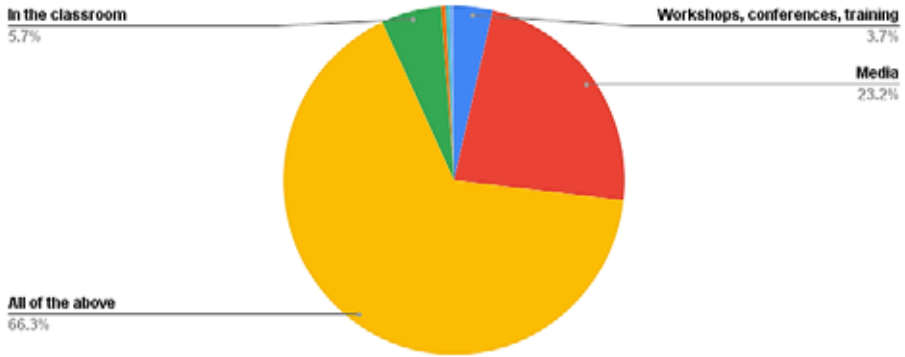
**Figure 8: Have you heard of gender inequality before?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

Data in Figure 8 reveal that 99.2% (244) of the participants have heard of gender inequality, while 0.8% (2) have not. This clearly shows that gender inequality is not an unfamiliar issue/topic to almost 100% of the participants.

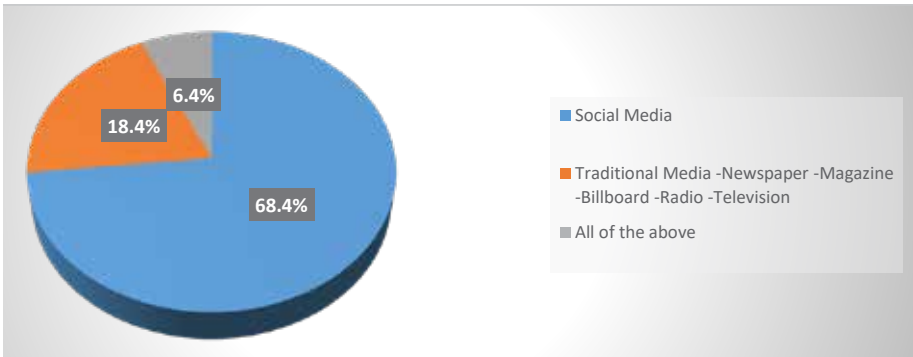
**Figure 9: How/where did you hear about Gender Inequality?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

As shown in Figure 9, the participants have heard of gender inequality via three main channels. These are the classroom (5.7%), workshops/conferences/training (3.7%), and the media (23.2%). However, the media topped the list with 23.2%. This indicates that the media plays a great role in creating awareness about gender inequality. However, 66.3% indicated that they heard about it through the three channels, but it is quite surprising to see that in a survey conducted in academic institutions, only 5.7% have heard about gender inequality in the classroom, revealing that not much is being done in the classroom concerning the teaching of gender inequality/gender issues in Nigeria's academic institutions.

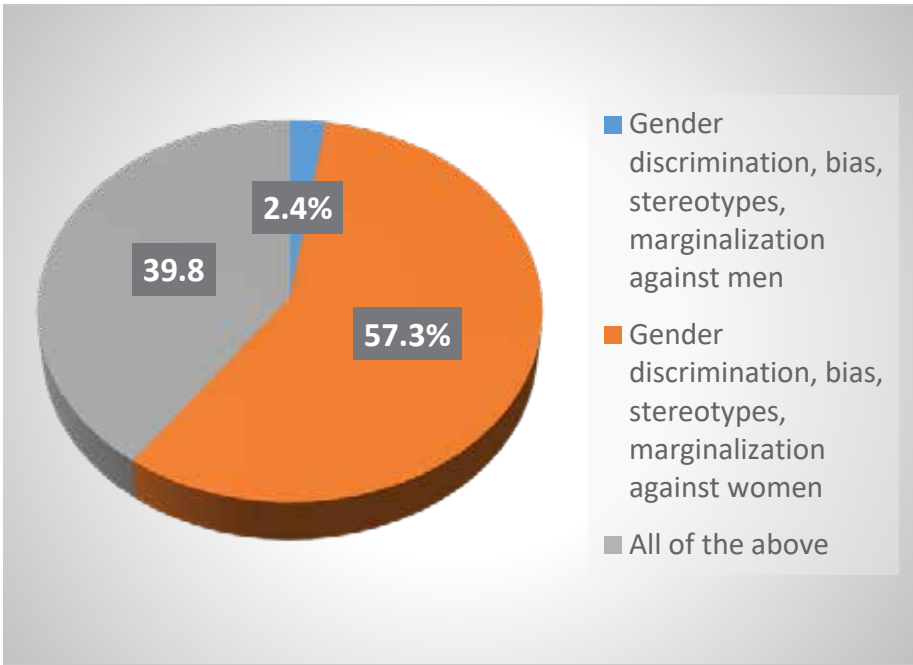
**Figure 10: If you selected ‘Media’ as the means through which you heard about gender inequality, please specify the form of media.**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

Figure 10 shows that out of 159 participants who selected media, 68.4% stated that they heard about gender inequality via the social media revealing the greater impact the social media has in creating awareness about gender inequality compared to the traditional media such as the newspapers, magazines, billboard, radio and television where only 18.4% participants indicated. In the era of digitization, social media has become a potentially powerful tool not only for raising awareness about gender inequality but also for mobilizing support, promoting advocacy efforts, and addressing gender issues.

**Figure 11: What comes to your mind when gender inequality is mentioned?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

As shown in Figure 11, when asked about what comes to their mind when gender inequality is mentioned, 57.3% of participants associated gender inequality with gender discrimination, bias, stereotypes, and marginalization against women, while 2.4% associated it with gender discrimination, bias, etc., against men, and 39.8% believe it is a combination of both. While insignificant number of respondents (2.4%) associated gender inequality with discrimination against men, the majority of participants (57.3%) believe that gender inequality affects women more.

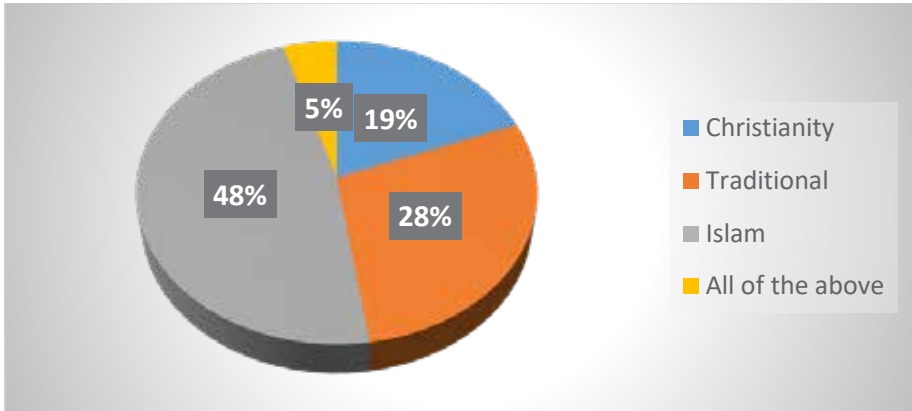
**Figure 12: What do you think are the main causes of gender inequality?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

When asked what they think are the main causes of gender inequality, Figure 12 shows that 22.8% of the participants indicated patriarchy (male dominance in positions of power and authority) as the main cause; 13% says it is gender bias and stereotypes against women; 7.3% says it is culture and traditions instituted by men and 3.7% says it is religion. While 1.6% say it is none of the factors presented, they failed to provide any other reason. Clearly, patriarchy (22.8%) has the highest number of responses when compared to other factors, but it is important to state that 48.4% (majority) of the patriarchy indicated that gender inequality is caused by a combination of several factors. The variety of responses on the causes of gender inequality reveals that it is a complex issue with multiple causes, requiring a comprehensive approach to address it.

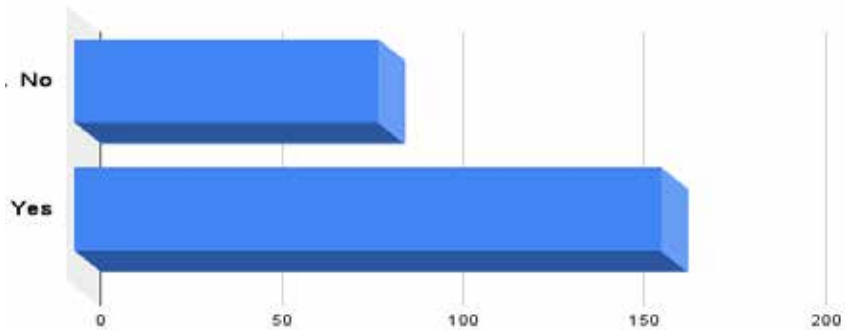
**Figure 13: If you selected religion as the main cause of gender inequality, please specify which religion (Christianity, Traditional, or Islam).**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

When asked to identify the particular religion that perpetuates gender inequality, Figure 13 shows that 48% of the participants indicated Islam; 28% said it is traditional religion; 19% indicated Christianity, and about 5% believe it is a combination of all these religions that perpetuate and encourage gender inequality. Although gender inequality is said to be prevalent in the Muslim-majority countries but this does not mean that women in the Western Christian-majority world enjoy equality (Oluwafemi, 2019), and this has been shown in this survey responses. Moreover, one factor that cannot be ruled out is the fact that this survey was conducted in a Christian-dominated Southwestern region.

**Figure 14: Do you believe that some cultural and traditional practices that hinder women's personal growth are comfort zones for men?**

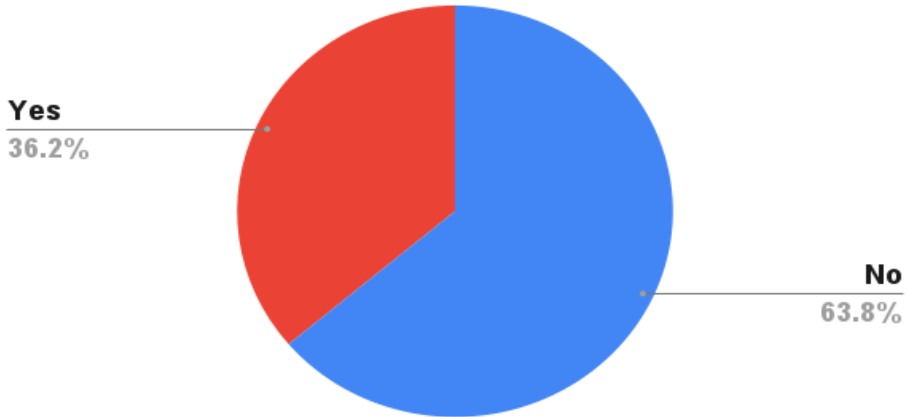


Source: Online Survey, April 2025

When asked if they believe that some cultural practices that hinder women's personal growth are comfort zones for men, Figure 14 shows that out of 246 participants, 162 (65.9%) agreed that the cultural practices that hinder women's growth are comfort zones for men, while 84 (34.1%) disagreed. Breaking it down by gender, 123 females and 39 males agreed that the cultural practices that hinder women's progress are comfort zones for men, while 53 males and 31 females disagreed. Interestingly, a great number of female participants, 123 out of 154 female respondents, and 39 out of 92 male participants agreed that cultural practices perpetuate gender inequality is a comfort zone for men. What is worth noting is that the number of male participants who agreed is greater than the number that disagreed.



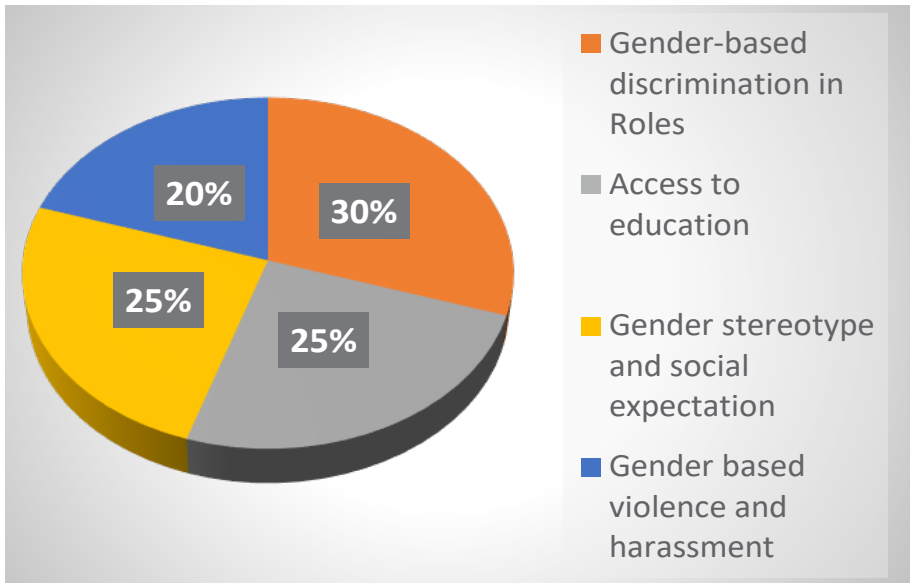
**Figure 15: Have you experienced gender discrimination or been impacted by gender inequality in any way before?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

As shown in Figure 15, a larger percentage of participants (63.8%) have not experienced gender discrimination or impacted gender inequality, while 36.2% have. This may be due to the respondents' socioeconomic status, as the majority are either employed (in academia), have access to education (education is power), or are young (students as seen in Figures 3 & 1). One of these reasons makes it less likely for them to have experienced gender discrimination personally, even though the majority (over 90 percent, as shown in Figure 8) of the participants have heard about gender inequality and see others experience it.

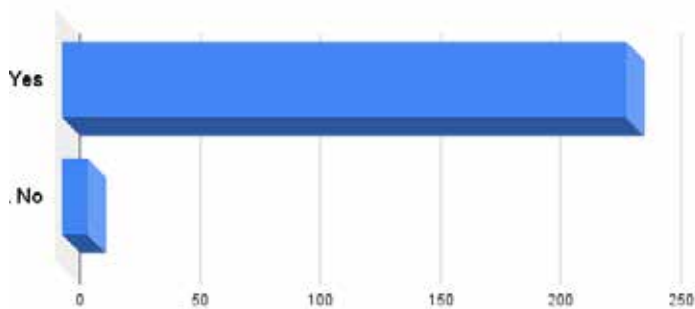
**Figure 16: If you have experienced gender discrimination, please specify the ways you have experienced it.**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

Figure 16 reveals the various ways in which survey participants experienced gender inequality. 30% of the participants indicated gender discrimination in societal assignment of roles; 25% said they have experienced a lack or limited access to education; 25% mentioned gender stereotypes and expectations, and 20% indicated gender-based violence and harassment. These responses highlight the multifaceted forms in which gender inequality occurs.

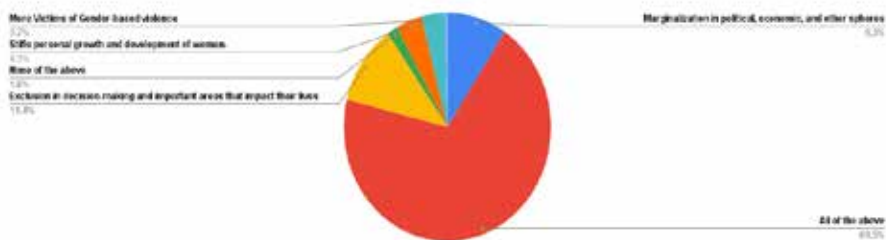
**Figure 17: Does gender inequality pose any challenges for women?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

As shown in Figure 17, 234 participants (95%) say that gender inequality poses challenges for women, while 12 (5%) believe that gender inequality does not pose any challenges for women. The result shows that a larger percentage of the participants strongly agree that gender inequality is challenging for women.

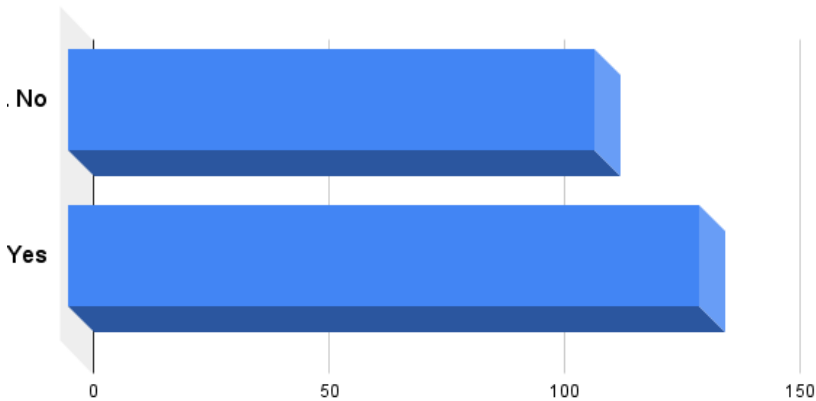
**Figure 18: What are the specific challenges of gender inequality for women?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

As seen in Figure 18, when asked about the specific challenges of gender inequality for women, 11.4% believe that it is exclusion in decision-making and important areas that impact their lives; 9.3% believe it is marginalization in political, economic, and other spheres; 4.1% says it stifle personal growth and development of women; 3.7% believe women are more victims of gender-based violence, 1.6% believe it is none of the above, and 69.5% say it is a combination of factors, revealing that women face diverse challenges due to gender inequality.

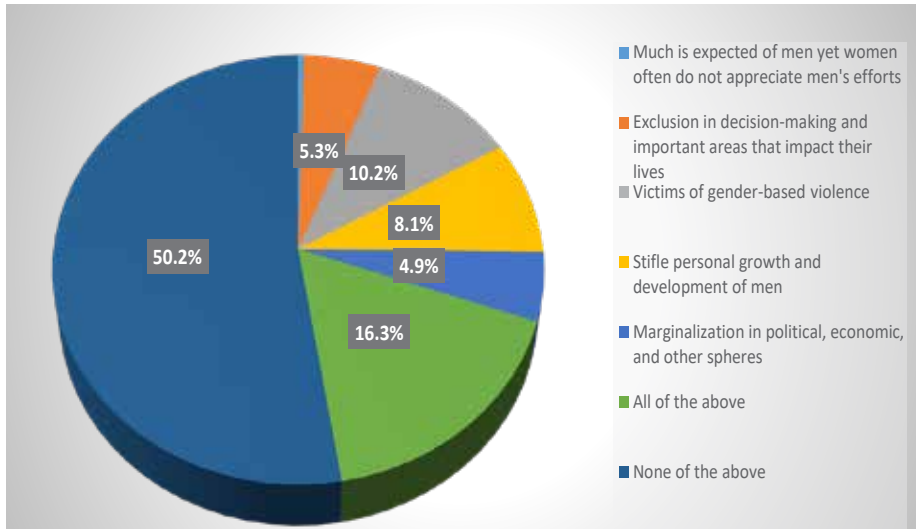
**Figure 19: Does gender inequality pose any challenges for men?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

Data in Figure 19 clearly shows the responses to the question “Does gender inequality pose any challenges for men?” While 134 participants (54.5%) agree that gender inequality poses challenges for men, a good number (112 participants) who constitute 45.5% disagreed, stating that it does not pose any challenge to men. However, the submission of a greater number of participants (54.5%) reveals that men are also impacted by gender inequality.

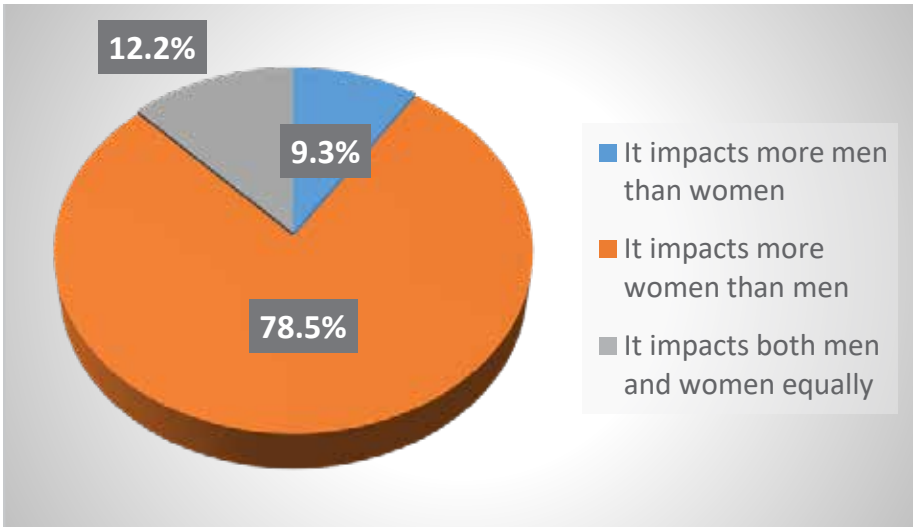
**Figure 20: What are the challenges of gender inequality for men?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

Figure 20 shows the opinions of the participants to the question: “what are the challenges of gender inequality for men?” 10.2% of the participants believe men are victims of gender-based violence; 8.1% believe that gender inequality stifle men’s personal growth and development; 5.3% believe men are excluded from decision-making and important areas that impact on their lives; 4.9% believe it is marginalization in political, economic, and other spheres; 0.4% believe that much is expected of men yet women do not appreciate men’s efforts, and 16.3% believe it is a combination of these factors. Interestingly, 50.2% of the participants, who constituted the highest responses, believe that men face none of the challenges presented. Although Figure 20 reveals varying perspectives on how gender inequality affects men, what is worth noting is that 50.2% do not believe men are impacted by gender inequality in any of the ways presented.

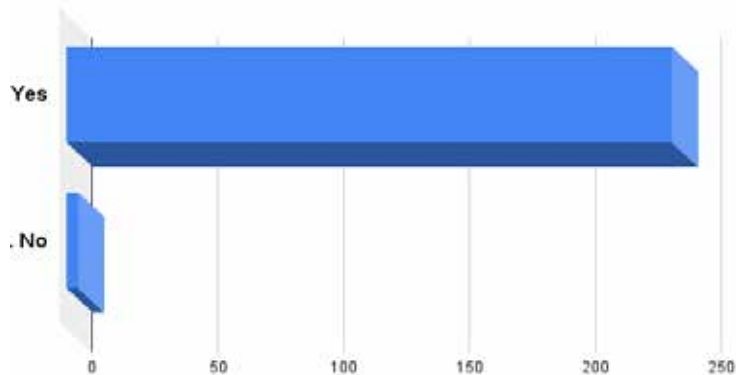
**Figure 21: Does gender inequality impact men and women in the same way, and equally?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

When participants were asked whether gender inequality impacts men and women in the same way and equally, Figure 21 shows that 78.5% indicated that gender inequality affects women more than men; 12.2% said it impacts both men and women equally, and 9.3% said it affects men more than women. From the survey result, it is obvious that gender inequality affects women more than men (78.5%), although men are also impacted by gender inequality, but to a lesser extent (9.3%), compared to women, as shown in the responses.

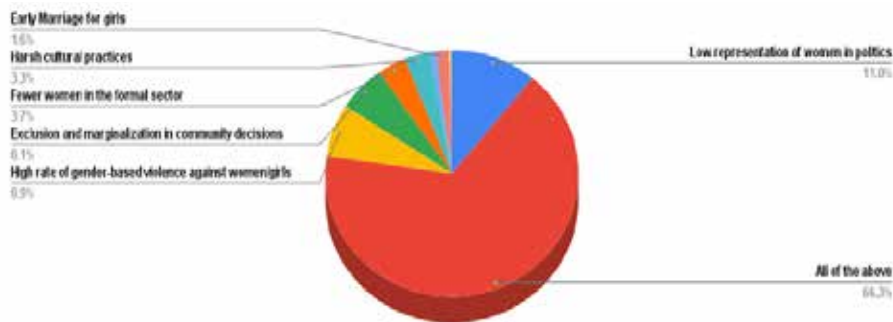
**Figure 22: Does gender inequality exist in your particular community and state of origin and residence?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

As shown in Figure 22, 98% (241) believe that gender inequality exists in their communities and state of origin and residence, while 2% (5) disagree. The overall responses show that gender inequality exists in Nigerian communities and states, and it is widely recognised by virtually all the participants.

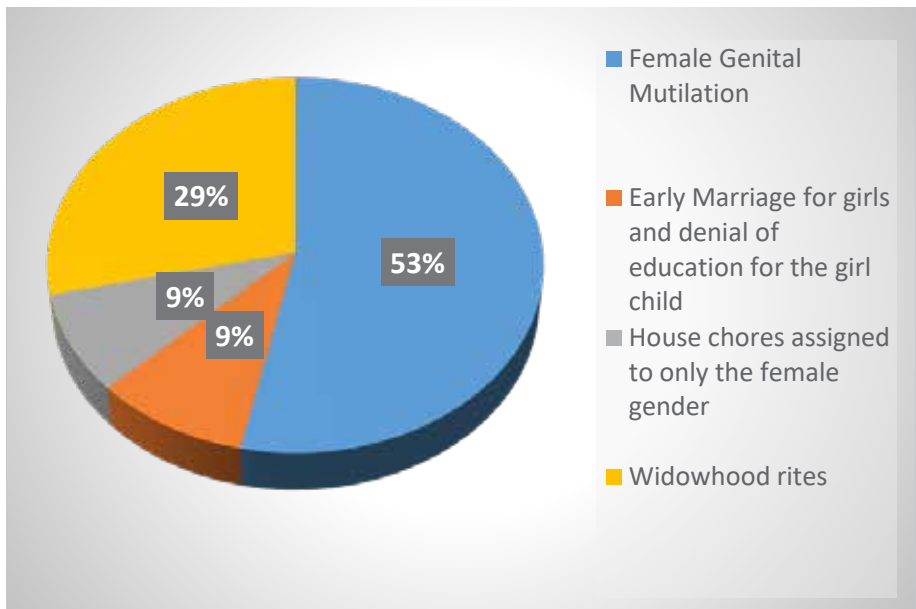
**Figure 23: In what ways does gender inequality manifest or exist for girls/women in your locality, home, or community?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

As shown in Figure 23, participants indicated that gender inequality manifests for girls/women in their locality, home, or community in several ways. 11.0% says it manifests via low representation of women in politics; 6.9% says it is through gender-based violence against women and girls; 6.1% says it manifests through women exclusion and marginalization in community decisions; 3.7% indicated fewer women in the formal sector; 3.3% indicated harsh cultural practices against women, and 1.6% indicated early marriage for girls. Notably, 66.3% of participants believe that gender inequality manifests through a combination of all these factors. These multifaceted responses stem from the complex and interconnected forms in which gender inequality manifests for women.

**Figure 24: If you selected ‘harsh cultural practices’ as a way in which gender inequality manifests for women/girls in your community, please give an example of such practice (s).**

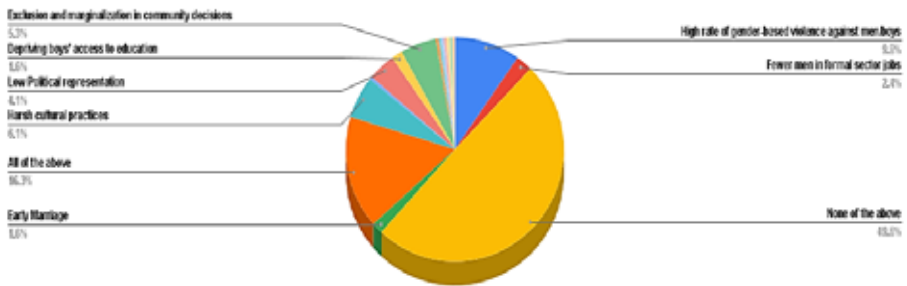


Source: Online Survey, April 2025



As shown in Figure 24, participants who chose harsh cultural practices as the way gender inequality manifests for women/girls in their community cited some examples of such practices (s). 53% of the participants (the highest number) indicated female genital mutilation (FGM); 29% say it is widowhood rites; 9% say it is early marriage for girls and denial of education for the girl child, and 9% believe it is domestic chores assigned to the female gender. These responses show that there exist various harmful cultural practices in Nigerian communities/states that perpetuate gender inequality, but for those in the Southwestern region, FGM is more prevalent.

**Figure 25: In what ways does gender inequality manifest/exist for boys/men in your locality, home, or community?**

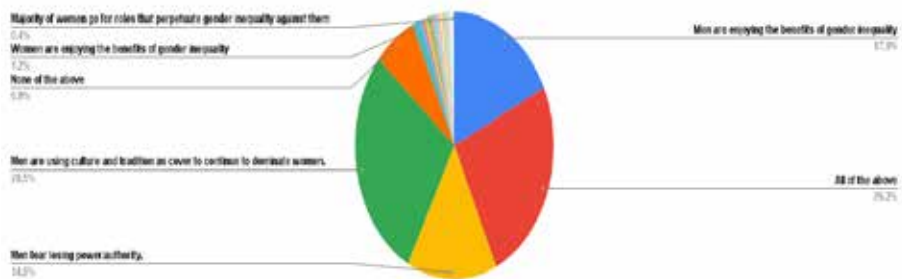


Source: Online Survey, April 2025

Figure 25 shows that the majority of the participants believe gender inequality does not significantly manifest for boys/men in their locality, home, or community. Only 4.1% believe gender inequality manifests for boys/men via low political representation; 1.6% through early marriage for boys; 2.4% through fewer men in the formal sector; 9.8% through gender-based violence against men/boys; 5.3% through exclusion and marginalization in community decisions and 6.1% through harsh cultural practices. While 16.3% say that gender inequality manifests for boys/men through a combination of ways, 49.6% of participants believe gender inequality does not manifest

at all, meaning that most respondents do not believe boys/men are victims of gender inequality. Regardless, boys/men, though not as much as girls/women, still face gender inequality, such as gender-based violence (9.8%), and should not be ignored.

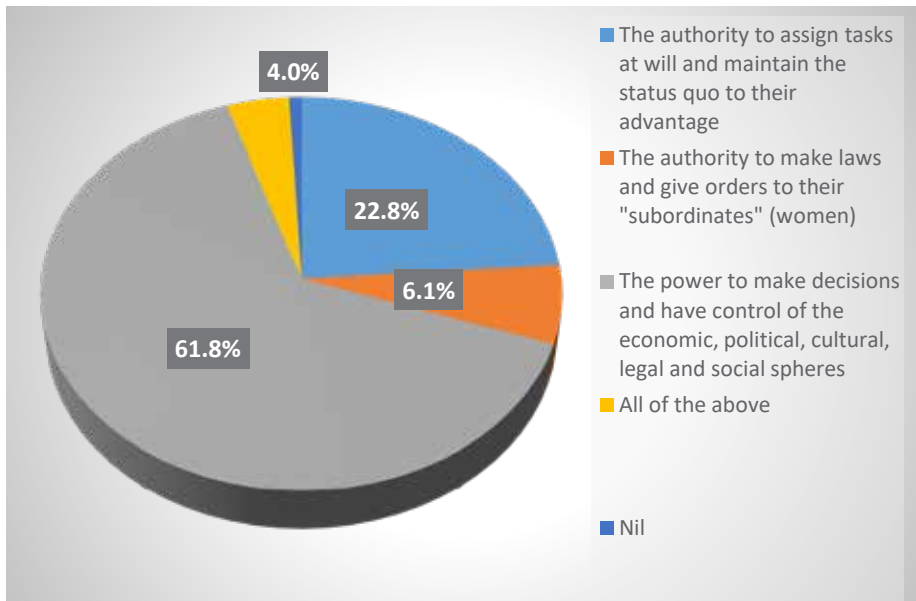
**Figure 26: Gender inequality has existed for a long time, despite centuries of efforts to end it. Why do you think it persists?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

Figure 26 shows the responses of the 246 participants to the question “gender inequality has existed for a long time...why do you think it persists?” 28.5% of participants believe that men are using culture and tradition as a cover to continue to dominate women; 17.9% says men are enjoying the benefits of gender inequality; 14.6% believe men fear losing power/authority; 1.2% says that women are enjoying the benefits of gender inequality and 25.2% says it is a combination of these factors. While 6.9% believe it is none of the above, they failed to state their reason. It is obvious that the persistence of gender inequality is attributed to various factors, with the leading factor being men’s use of culture and tradition to dominate women (28.5%), followed by a combination of all the factors presented (25.2%).

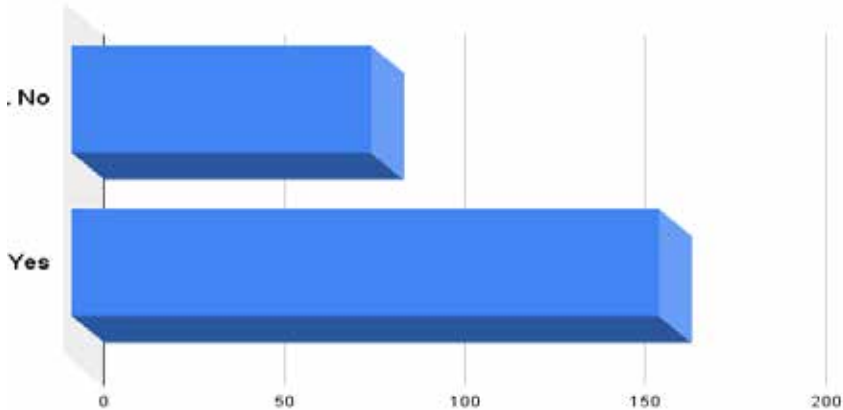
**Figure 27: What kind of benefits do men get from gender inequality?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

Figure 27 shows the responses to the question “What kind of benefits do men get from gender inequality?” Out of the 246 participants who answered this question, 61.8% say that one of the benefits men get is that they have the power to make decisions and control the economic, political, cultural, legal, and social spheres. 22.8% indicated that the authority men have to assign tasks at will and maintain the status quo is a key benefit. 6.1% believe that the authority men have to make laws and give orders to their “subordinates” (women) is part of the benefit, and 4.0% believe it is a combination of these three. From these responses, there is an agreement among the participants that men benefit from gender inequality.

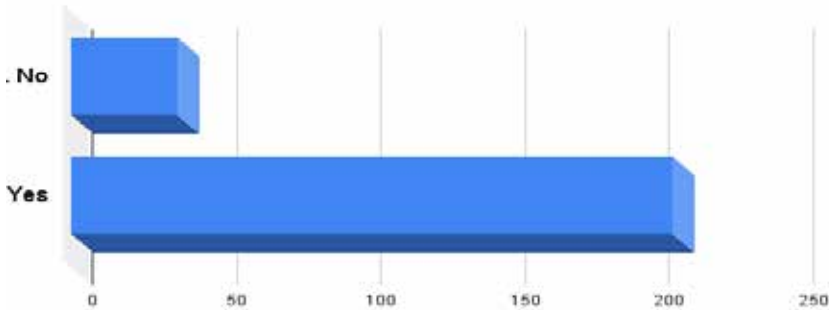
**Figure 28: Is gender inequality a comfort zone (a place or situation of ease and control) for men?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

As shown in Figure 28, 163 participants (66.3%) say that gender inequality is a comfort zone for men, while 83 participants (33.7%) believe that gender inequality is not a comfort zone for men. Among the participants, 41.9% of men (39 out of 92) and 80.9% of women (123 out of 154) indicated that gender inequality is a comfort zone for men, while 58.1% of men (54 out of 92) and 19.1% of women (30 out of 152) disagree. This result not only shows that a greater number of women participants agree that gender inequality is a comfort zone for men, but a good number of men (41.9%) affirm that gender inequality is a comfort zone for them as well, with just a few numbers of objections.

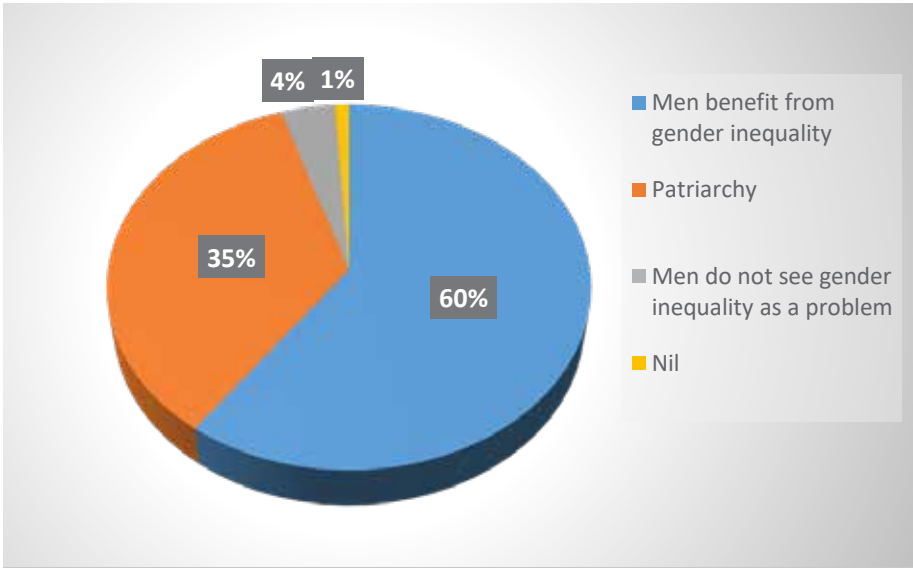
**Figure 29: Gender inequality persists because it is a comfort zone (a place or situation of ease and control) for men, especially those who have the authoritative power (legitimate power to command). Do you agree?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

As shown in Figure 29, 209 participants (85.0%) agree that gender inequality persists because it is a comfort zone for men, especially those who have the authoritative power, while only 37 participants (15.0%) disagree. The sex breakdown reveals that out of 246 survey participants, 144 women (58.5%) and 65 men (26.4%) agree that gender inequality persists because it is a comfort zone for men in positions of authority. Only 27 male participants (11.4%) and 9 female participants (3.7%) disagree. This shows that the majority of participants (85.0%) not only believe that gender inequality persists because it is a comfort zone for men who occupy positions of authority, but a great number of male participants (65 out 92 male participants) believe strongly that gender inequality persists because it is a comfort zone for them, while only 27 of them objected.

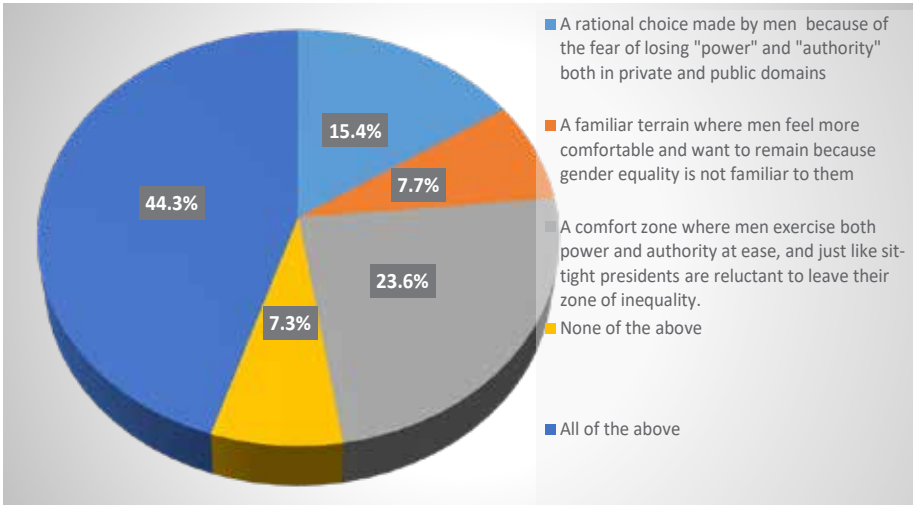
**Figure 30: Why do you think most men are not interested in gender equality? Share your personal opinion.**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

As seen in Figure 30, about 60% of the participants say that most men are not interested in gender equality because they benefit from it. 32% believe it is because of patriarchy (male dominance in all societal spheres) and 4% believe it is because men do not see gender inequality as a problem, either for themselves, for the women, or the society in general. Only 1% did not share their opinion on this. Overall, the responses reveal that most participants (60%) believe most men are uninterested in gender equality because they benefit from gender inequality, revealing a self-interest factor in men's attitudes towards gender equality.

**Figure 31: In line with this study's central thesis that gender inequality is a comfort zone for men, do you agree that gender inequality is....**



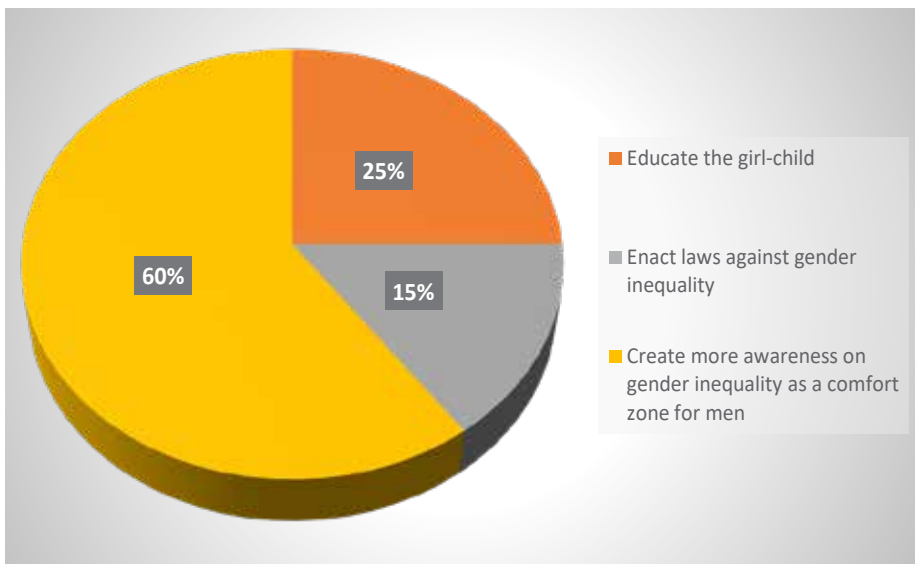
Source: Online Survey, April 2025

As shown in Figure 31, 23.6% of the participants believe that gender inequality is a comfort zone where men exercise both power and authority at ease, and just like sit-tight presidents are reluctant to leave their zone of gender inequality. 15.4% believe it is a rational choice because of fear of losing “power” and “authority” both in private and public domains. 7.7% believe it is a familiar terrain where men feel more comfortable and want to remain because gender equality is unfamiliar to them. 7.3% believe none of the points presented explained gender inequality.

However, the highest percentage (44.3%) of participants believe that, in line with the theory of comfort zone, gender inequality is a combination of the above three mentioned points. Aside from noting that gender inequality is a combination of the three points stated above, the highest number of participants (23.6%) based on specific answers given, say that gender inequality is a comfort zone where men exercise power and authority at ease, and just like sit-

tight presidents are reluctant to leave their comfort zone of gender inequality. Figure 31's result reveals not only the various perceptions of the participants on gender inequality, but also clear positions on what gender inequality means when analysed in line with the comfort zone thesis.

**Figure 32: If gender inequality is a comfort zone for men, what do you think is the best strategy or approach to addressing gender inequality against women and realizing gender equality?**



Source: Online Survey, April 2025

Figure 32 shows participants' suggestions on ways to address gender inequality. 60% of the respondents believe that there is a need for more awareness on gender inequality as a comfort zone for men. Such an awareness will help gender equality advocates to be more committed to gender equality, knowing fully well that those who enjoy the privileges of gender inequality may be reluctant to leave that zone. 25% recommended education for the girl-child, and 15% of participants suggest the enactment of laws by the Nigerian government to address the diverse areas where gender inequality exists.



## Discussion of Findings

Findings from this study first revealed the basic understanding of gender inequality (GI) among the survey participants. Gender inequality, according to the survey results, pointed primarily to gender discrimination, bias, stereotypes, and marginalization of individuals on the basis of sex and/or gender. Treating men and women, under similar circumstances, differently and disadvantageously captures the idea of gender inequality, as revealed in the study findings. Nigeria is a gender unequal society, as affirmed by 98% of the survey participants. The survey's findings on the participants' understanding of gender inequality align with the definitions of gender inequality put forward in several reports and studies, such as the European Institute for Gender Equality and Plan International. For example, the European Institute for Gender Equality defined gender inequality as;

The legal, social, and cultural situation in which sex and/or gender determine different rights and dignity for women and men, which are reflected in their unequal access to or enjoyment of rights, as well as the assumption of stereotyped social and cultural roles (European Institute for Gender Inequality, 2025).

Plan International (2025), on the other hand, defined gender inequality as the condition in which access to rights, resources, and opportunities is unequally distributed between genders, including men, women, boys, girls, and individuals of other gender identities. The survey result also shows that in all areas where gender discrimination occurs in Nigeria, women are the disadvantaged group. There is a consensus among the majority of the survey participants that gender inequality affects women/girls more than men/boys. For example, while 78.5percent of the participants agree that gender inequality impacts women more than men, only 9.3percent believe that gender inequality impacts more on men than women. Even though a number of the survey participants (12.2percent) agree that

gender inequality impacts men and women equally, findings, for the most part, revealed that gender inequality is against women.

Findings also show that patriarchy (male dominance in positions of power and authority) is a major obstacle to gender equality. In fact, patriarchy (22.8%) was indicated as a major cause of gender inequality, in addition to gender bias and stereotypes against women (13.0%), culture and traditions instituted by men (7.3%), and religion (3.7%). While gender inequality is known to have been perpetuated by power imbalances and entrenched social norms that privilege one gender over the other, this survey revealed once again that the privileged gender is the male gender, who creates and holds gender bias against women and also institutes cultural practices to the disadvantage of women.

However, while recognizing that not all men perceive themselves to be in authority, the dominance of men in virtually all sectors of Nigerian society must have contributed to the responses gathered. For instance, in the area of politics, Nigerian women have less than five percent representation at both the Senate and the House of Representatives. In the area of education as well, many girls are denied the right to education and forced into early marriage, especially in the Northern part of the country. Female genital mutilation is indicated as a major issue for girls in the southern region of Nigeria. This is confirmed in the UNICEF (2022) report, which stated that “the prevalence of female genital mutilation is 30% in the southwestern region of Nigeria” (cited in Joshua-Raji and Dave-Agboola, 2024).

As the survey further revealed, gender inequality (GI) also poses challenges to the male gender, particularly in the area of gender-based violence. Men suffer physical, verbal, emotional, and psychological violence from their female partners, friends, or colleagues. In Lagos state, Nigeria, for instance, report shows that the state recorded 388 female and 144 male cases of gender-based violence between 2021 and 2024 (Ishola, 2024). This report aligns with the survey findings, which show that women face greater impacts of gender inequality

(as 95percent of participants indicated), even though men are also victims of gender-based violence.

In addressing the first main research question posed to the participants on “whether gender inequality is a comfort zone for men”, the survey findings revealed that a greater number of participants (80.9percent), and women in particular, agreed that gender inequality is a comfort zone for men, particularly those with the authoritative power. Comfort zone as used is seen as a place or situation of familiarity where men feel at ease and in control. Although 58.1percent of male participants did not agree that it is a comfort zone for men, what is striking is that a good percentage of men (41.9percent, just 16.2percent less than those who objected) agreed that gender inequality is a comfort zone for them (men). As further shown in the survey result, 85percent of survey participants also affirmed that gender inequality is a familiar terrain where men not only benefit but are in no difficulty (imagined or actual) and have control over women. Retaining dominance (hegemonic masculinity) over women or being in control makes gender inequality an acceptable zone for men.

As the study gathered, men benefit from gender inequality in three key ways. First, they have the sole power to make decisions and control the economic, legal, political, and social spheres (61.8% participants indicated). Second, they have the authority (rightness of command) to assign tasks at will and ensure that the status quo is maintained (22.8%). Third, they have the authority to make laws (traditional and/or statutory) and give orders to their “subordinates” (women). Essentially, gender inequality is the “keeper” of men’s power and authority. In other words, gender inequality preserves men’s “hegemonic palace” (leadership residence).

As indicated by the survey participants, cultural practices such as female genital mutilation, early marriage, and widowhood rites are gender-biased practices against women and girls. Such cultures that stifle the personal growth and development of girls/women

are instituted by men in authority to keep women in a subordinate position. Thus, for men to successfully hold on to authority, “marks” (including rules, decisions, et cetera) of hegemony (leadership/dominance) have to be made, regardless of the negative impacts on women.

Indeed, this study showed how the system of capitalism not only makes gains from women, but through patriarchal dominance (patriarchy and capitalism are intertwined), maintains power structures to men’s advantage. Several other cultural practices, such as the widowhood cleansing as seen in Luo communities in Kenya (where a widow is culturally bound to sleep with a male stranger after the demise of her husband) and the Trokosi practice in some West African countries like Ghana, Togo and Benin are often to the disadvantage of women. While a widow is meant to undergo a purification ritual upon the death of a spouse (widowhood cleansing) and a virgin girl is meant to pay for a crime committed by a family member by being sent to the shrine to serve the chief priest (who is a male) and also perform sexual acts with the priest (Trokosi), these cultural/traditional practices are rarely performed by a male partner or a virgin boy.

What is interesting to point out as this study revealed, is that beyond the factors (see Simon and Hasan, 2025; Etim-James, 2024; Larousse, 2023; UN Women, 2017) known to perpetuate gender inequality such as culture, religion, patriarchy (which were also affirmed in this survey as significant), this survey has been able to establish that gender inequality is a comfort zone for men and it is the main reason behind the persistence of gender inequality. Being in the comfort zone, men do not see gender inequality as a problem either for them, the other gender (women), or society at large.

In analyzing the second research question, three key points are deduced from the survey results on the question, “what is your understanding of gender inequality in line with the comfort zone thesis?” First, gender inequality is a comfort zone where men exercise

power and authority, and just like tight presidents are reluctant to leave that zone. Second, maintaining gender inequality is a rational choice because of men's fear of losing power and authority in both private and public domains. Third, gender inequality is familiar terrain, where men feel more comfortable and want to remain there because of the benefits to them. There is no gainsaying that gender inequality "keeps" men in a comfortable "hegemonic palace" (leadership residence) and with all the attendant benefits (capitalism at work), men therefore, have little or no interest in the struggle for gender equality.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Gender inequality has persisted not just because of culture, religion, or patriarchy, but because it is a comfort zone for men. It is a familiar terrain where men feel at ease and in control. Gender inequality, as this survey revealed, keeps men's dominance and authoritative power intact. Men benefit from gender inequality in several ways, such as the "sole" authority to make decisions and dominate the economic, cultural, political, and social spheres. Given the benefits (actual and imagined), men are reluctant to leave their comfort zone (gender inequality). While this study did not ignore the fact that not all men can successfully claim authority, and that some men are also part of the feminist movement, the snail-speed progress to gender inequality today has been attributed to the actions and inactions of men who are in their comfort zone.

Essentially, the theory of the comfort zone of gender inequality established that; (i) gender inequality is a comfort zone where men feel at ease and in control, (ii) gender inequality benefits men, (iii) gender inequality is a keeper of men's authoritative power, (iv) gender inequality is a familiar terrain for men, while gender equality is unfamiliar to them, (v) the fear of losing the comfort zone or moving into an unfamiliar terrain causes men's lack of commitment to gender equality, (vi) gender inequality is a rational choice made by men to remain in their "hegemonic palace".

Against these backdrops, it is therefore recommended that more awareness be created on gender inequality being a comfort zone for men. Understanding gender inequality as a comfort zone will help the feminist movements and gender equality advocates to push harder (relentlessly) for equality because those in the comfort zone would not willingly want to leave the zone or accommodate others when they fear losing power and authority. Thus, just like sit-tight presidents who are unwilling to leave positions of power due to the gains that come with it, leaving the comfort zone of gender inequality is not likely to be a choice for men.

Moreover, as revealed in the survey findings, men in the comfort zone do not even see gender inequality as a problem, either for themselves, for the women, or the society at large. It is also recommended that non-governmental organisations and groups working in the area of women's rights make a more practical commitment to women's empowerment, especially investing in girl-child education. Education of the girl-child will, in the long run, open greater doors of opportunities for women, thereby making authoritative power more available to women.

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