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CONTENTS

	<i>Pages</i>
1. THE STRUGGLE FOR LANGUAGE: DIAGNOSIS, RELIEF FROM GRIEF OF URBAN PARENTS WITH CHILDREN WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD HEARING IN IBADAN METROPOLIS, <i>Olley, B. and Okhakhume</i>	3-20
2. EXECUTIVE CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT <i>Okafor E.E.</i>	21-41
3. CORRELATES OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE, SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT, LEARNERS' INTEREST AND SELF EFFICACY ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF POLICE CHILDREN IN IBADAN, NIGERIA. <i>Aremu, A.O. and Ogbuagu, V.E.</i>	42-57
4. GLOBALIZATION, GOVERNANCE AND ARMED CONFLICT IN AFRICA <i>Omobowale, A.O. and Olutayo, A.O.</i>	58-72
5. PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING SELF-DISCLOSURE IN MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS <i>Balogun, S.K. and Ojedokun, A.O.</i>	73-87
6. SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS AND LEADER POTENTIALS AS PREDICTORS OF LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS IN A MANAGERIAL POSITION <i>Okurame, D.E.</i>	88-101
7. AN APPRAISAL OF PUNITIVE TOTAL INSTITUTION <i>Omoniyi, C.O.</i>	102-113
8. COPING AMONG PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS: THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT, SELF ESTEEM, LOCUS OF CONTROL AND GENDER. <i>Olapegba, P.O.</i>	114-120
9. BEYOND NEGATIVE THINKING: ILLNESS COGNITIONS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH IN HIV/AIDS <i>Abikoye, G.E.</i>	121-131
10. PSYCO-CULTURAL IMPACT OF CYBERSEX ON SEXUALITY OF NIGERIAN YOUTHS <i>Lawal, O.A.</i>	132-153
11. PARENTAL BEHAVIOURS IN A CHANGING SOCIETY AND CAREER-RELATED ABILITY AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTHS. <i>Adejunwon G.A.</i>	154-171

REVISITING GENDER AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ANALYSES IN A GLOBAL AGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the extent that scholars are analysing gender and reproductive health issues in a global era. The examination is necessitated by existing data which indicate that African researchers are investigating these phenomena as static and monolithic. Their approach fails to view the concepts as embedded in complexity and as such require careful decomposition. It has, therefore, become necessary to deviate gender and reproductive health studies from traditional disciplinary insulation that secludes academic fields from other areas of knowledge. The present paper argues that a holistic analysis of gender and reproductive health issues is only achievable with interdisciplinary collaboration and in the context they are reviewed. Transdisciplinary analysis in this study involves understanding gender relations as a way of investigating whether household decisions are both democratic and all inclusive. By emphasising the inseparability of gender and reproductive health discourse, the paper makes important contributions to the theoretical and methodological interests of social research and advances insight on how scholars can adjust, analytically, to changing societies without at the same time infringing on the norms of the academic community.

Keywords: globalization, gender, reproductive health and interdisciplinary collaboration.

BACKGROUND

Women in Nigeria have less right to property than men; they do not enjoy the same protection and rights as men in the laws because of the overarching influence of customs and traditions, the greatest proportion of illiterates are women, there is still an unacceptable level of women drop-outs from schools, less than 2% are in parliament; they are disproportionately represented among the poor. The effects of globalisation, stabilisation, liberalisation and privatisation are more felt by women. Their low societal and economic status makes them vulnerable to violation of their basic human rights (Akande, 2000: 13 – 14)

Although the issues raised in the statement are located in the realm of gender analysis, a deeper examination shows that

the consequences of the above insight impinge evidently on the well being of women and by extension the entire society. It was demonstrated somewhere that feminizing poverty through policy/convention or culture or any instrument, for that matter, not only inflicts women with unquantifiable burden but also their men counterpart to the extent society "crashes" (Nwokocha, 2003). The global age characterised by the quest for appraisal and reassessment of events and phenomena necessitates a review of these assertions.

The essence of revisiting human activities and the processes that introduce them is that adjustments in knowledge and interactions can be shaped to address the requirements of a particular period. Without such periodic examination, individuals would hardly appreciate the rate and direction of change and/or are deceived to perceive their conditions, in whatever circumstance, as normal; a perception borne either out of genuine ignorance or pretension.

Gender issues, for the most part, are analysed in the context of antagonisms between the sexes without adequate focus on their links with specific events that depend on family relations and spousal communication such as family planning, maternal health and reproductive health outcomes. The implication of this limitation is that the depth of knowledge inherent in gender discourse is not achieved. Analysing such a complex issue, with several underlying components, through linear approach and as a monolith presents a distorted view of social reality. Obono (2000) had observed that in reality, contemporary investigation of phenomena that are embedded in complexity requires interdisciplinary collaboration and multilevel analysis in order to achieve a holistic understanding. As a corollary, investigating a phenomenon that has several interacting units requires that a thematic issue be disaggregated into smaller elements so as to examine the influence of each part on the whole using the systems approach.

Gender and health research has received significant attention among scholars who, for most part, situate it within the realm of patriarchy, feminism and empowerment, inequality/inequity and spousal communication whose analyses are each further decomposable into smaller subsystems (see Catley-Carlson, 1999; Bouis *et al* 1993; Mbugua, 1997; Population Council, 1997; 2001; Adewuyi and Ogunjuyigbe, 2003). In the

end, an encompassing result can only emerge from integration of findings derived from each of these units of analysis. This study affirms the essence of such integration, that has been lacking in literature. Research findings from the thematic subject are at best sub-systemic which, notwithstanding their depth at that level, indicate inadequacy at the level of comprehensiveness. For instance, Zidar *et al* (2003) focussed on the pace of fertility decline and contraceptive use in different groups; Drennan (1998), Isiugo-Abanihe (2003); Adewuyi and Ogunjuyigbe (2003) and (SIDA, 1998) emphasized the need for increase in men's participation in reproductive health; the United Nations (2000) and UNICEF (2000) highlighted the relationship between socioeconomic status of women, in terms of education, and their reproductive health; Shah and Ahman (2004) and Berer (2004) examined patterns and national laws on unsafe abortion etc.

Similarly, in line with feminist view, the World Bank (1998) sees the patriarchal structure as an institutional mechanism that served to limit women's economic autonomy relative to men's. The result is that women unwittingly depend almost entirely on men, which has implications for the former's involvement in family decisions. It has also been noted that gender inequality is the antithesis of Nigeria's development and that any attempt at explaining any aspect of the Nation's social system that ignores the relevance of gender analysis is an invitation to an effort in futility (Nwokocha and Eneji, 2004), especially, in most African societies where women constitute almost 50 percent of the population (Nwokocha, 2003). These instances suggest that gender and reproductive health analyses have neither been undertaken to indicate sufficient systemism nor interdisciplinary collaboration. Each of these sub-systemic analyses reveals just a modicum of insight.

The inadequacy consistent with such lacuna negates the principle of systematic as well as comprehensive knowledge of current events that shape views and activities of individuals in society. The present paper revisits this approach through a baseline investigation of these phenomena – globalization, gender and reproductive health – in order to compare the perception and attitude of individuals in society toward these issues. In the end, data generated through transdisciplinary convergence of Demography, Psychology and History, in communion with the views of scholars, will advance the technical and theoretical

interest of these disciplines by demonstrating the essence of a holistic investigation of complex issues such as gender and reproductive health.

Globalization: are there Exceptions to its Analysis?

Attempting to locate the point at which globalization-analysis terminates invites efforts towards re-examining the concept itself. This review raises the question of consensus among scholars on an acceptable definition. As Cooper (2001) has noted, globalization is synonymous with interconnectedness of different parts of the world, explaining new mechanisms, shaping the movement of capital, people, and culture, and for exploring institutions capable of regulating transnational movement. Adeboye's (2002) view of the phenomenon, which derives from a synthesis of opinions of some scholars, is that globalization is the broadening of linkages and integration of national economies into a world-wide market for goods, services and capital through technology. Spybey (1996) observes that more than ever before a global culture involving trends that have affected virtually everybody on the planet has emerged. Although the level of effect of this culture on people at different places is not the same, Taiwo (2004) maintains:

At the end of the last century... the burgeoning capacity of electronic communications to compress both time and space, changes in technology which are allowing production and culture to be divorced from place, the pervasiveness of global ideologies on subjects such as the environment and human rights, and recent seismic shifts in the world's geopolitical balance – the world is now thoroughly globalized. What happens in one place routinely affects perceptions, attitudes and behaviour, elsewhere (Taiwo, 2004: 243).

The impression created by the majority of these views is that globalization entails increasing international integration of market for goods, services and capital which influences virtually all other forms of social and cultural life at different locations. This, perhaps, explains the quest for a balance between globalization and localization among developing countries given the impression in some quarters that the concept 'global' derives from western perception, ideology and culture. Hence, Derefaka (2004: 240) cautions:

Globalization should not mean Americanization or Europeanization if it is to be acceptable to all mankind. Nigerians and other Africans need to participate in this seemingly inevitable or unstoppable process with a recognizable identity made up of constituent

identities so that they would not be swallowed up and experience, once more, a new round of neocolonialism.

The above statement re-echoes the apprehension in Adeboye's (2002) contention that globalization usually produces winners and losers – differentiated by their level of involvement in the trading of goods and services, on one hand, and the returns from these activities on the other – which evokes an inquiry into the justification for analyzing issues and events in society from a global perspective. This paper suggests that, assuming the latter observation is correct, there is even a greater need for these “losers” to be involved in the process for two major reasons. First, so that individuals and societies in this seemingly receiving end of globalization would understand the underlying politico-economic factors determining their power position within the global community. Second, following from the former is that participation enables stakeholders to define their participation within that emerging village by, where relevant, localizing globalization.

Although Adeboye's preceding argument and the corresponding quest for inquiry are compelling, they seem not to view globalization as an on-going process that, in reality, is bound not to affect every society uniformly, at the same time. This conception of the essence of equality of globalization-effects results either from inability to appreciate that societies have different orientations and histories or scepticism about the extent its introducer are genuinely committed to bridging the gap between the two worlds – developing and developed. The present paper argues that such suspicion, holding all other antecedents constant, pre-empts as well as impinges on the perceived teleological dividends of the phenomenon. Expression of ambivalence in accepting globalization or its processes, in some quarters, derive from outcomes credited to major historical events such as slavery, industrialization and colonization.

Although the poverty of historical determinism is well documented in the work of Karl Popper (Adesina, 2000), comprehensive knowledge and acceptability of globalization is hindered by the non-prioritization of the essence of de-briefing individuals and groups to sufficiently perceive globalization as genuine rather than extension of previous epochs. On the contrary, Copper (2001) noted that there is need to understand the historical depth of interconnections that created globalization as well as the structures that hinder connecting mechanisms. Our

position, in the present analysis, is that since the effects of globalization are no longer controvertible in all societies, though in different degrees, developing societies should be able to define their participation within the emerging global community without necessarily occupying the receiving position in the circle. Achieving that would require careful analysis of past major events to be able to overcome the inadequacies generated by earlier epochs on the part of developing societies.

The undulating nature of the foregoing discourse indicates that globalization is a complex phenomenon with several analytical parts. What then are the lessons to be drawn from our excursion into the Sociology of globalization? Is it a concept embedded in holism whose investigation de-emphasizes selectivity or are there exceptions to its analysis? The question of whether selective analysis of globalization leads to a comprehensive knowledge of the phenomenon necessitates a peep into the status of the concept. In other words, to examine the conceivability of globalization as an era/epoch. Understanding its status in epochal terms allows for an objective appraisal of the consequences related to the phenomenon in time and space. Ekeh (1980) had observed *inter alia* that:

...the most outstanding characteristic of epochs is that they introduce qualitative social change – which differentiate the future from the past in kind, not simply in degree. The twin prototypes of epochs of the modern world, namely the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution, provoked social changes that transformed Western Europe and eventually the world – so much so that the new additions to the human experience cannot be correctly represented as mere quantitative amendments to feudal Europe. They represent changes in kind, not simply in degree... but ordinary, non-epochal, change is episodic and its direction cannot be fully predicted... while social change continues to be registered, as ever before, an epoch gives change a predictable direction... the social structures and the social processes that are formed from epochal movements retain their significance in the arena of human action and thought long after the epochs as such have ebbed away... epochal movements touch the lives and conduct of all persons in the areas covered by them... epochs serve to integrate their regions of impact into a consolidated world system... (Ekeh, 1980:7 – 8)

The above thesis supposes that epochs do not necessarily amplify alterations in existing structures but rather introduce significant change different in form and magnitude. Also distinctive in any classification of epochs is teleology, which uplifts it beyond

episodic status without predictable direction – a kind of flash in the pan from which history and historiography would not derive exciting meaning. Does globalization share these attributes? To what extent does it possess these burgeoning features that characterise epochs such as Industrial and French Revolutions and Colonialism?

Conceiving the scope and dividends of globalization, from the outset, makes its direction in time and space predictable. Agreeable is that globalization evolved from the idea of integrating national economies into a unified system, however, other aspects of human activity including culture, attitude and behaviour, communication and technology have been progressively incorporated into this phenomenon, as it were, in a noticeably revolutionary fashion. In addition, for globalization to affect the life of every individual in all the areas covered by it, beyond the choice of these individuals, makes it supra-individual.

The foregoing establishes that globalization is an era conjuring to itself some notable features that confirm its epochal status. The implication is that the scope of the phenomenon should neither be disciplinary/sub-disciplinary-selective nor should fields of knowledge be secluded from the contributions of others in examining the phenomenon. In essence, achieving comprehensive analysis of events, in an era of interconnections and collaborations, requires that every aspect of human activity finds meaning within the scope of globalization and its analysis. The re-visitation suggested by the present paper in gender and reproductive health studies implies an invitation to a broader analysis of these issues through transdisciplinary convergence

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework for this paper relies heavily on Bertalanffy's Systems theory to highlight the links between variables in order to review the inseparability of gender and reproductive health analysis in a global age. The framework enables the study demonstrate diagrammatically interactions among variables that influence comprehensive investigation of gender and reproductive health issues in the global era.

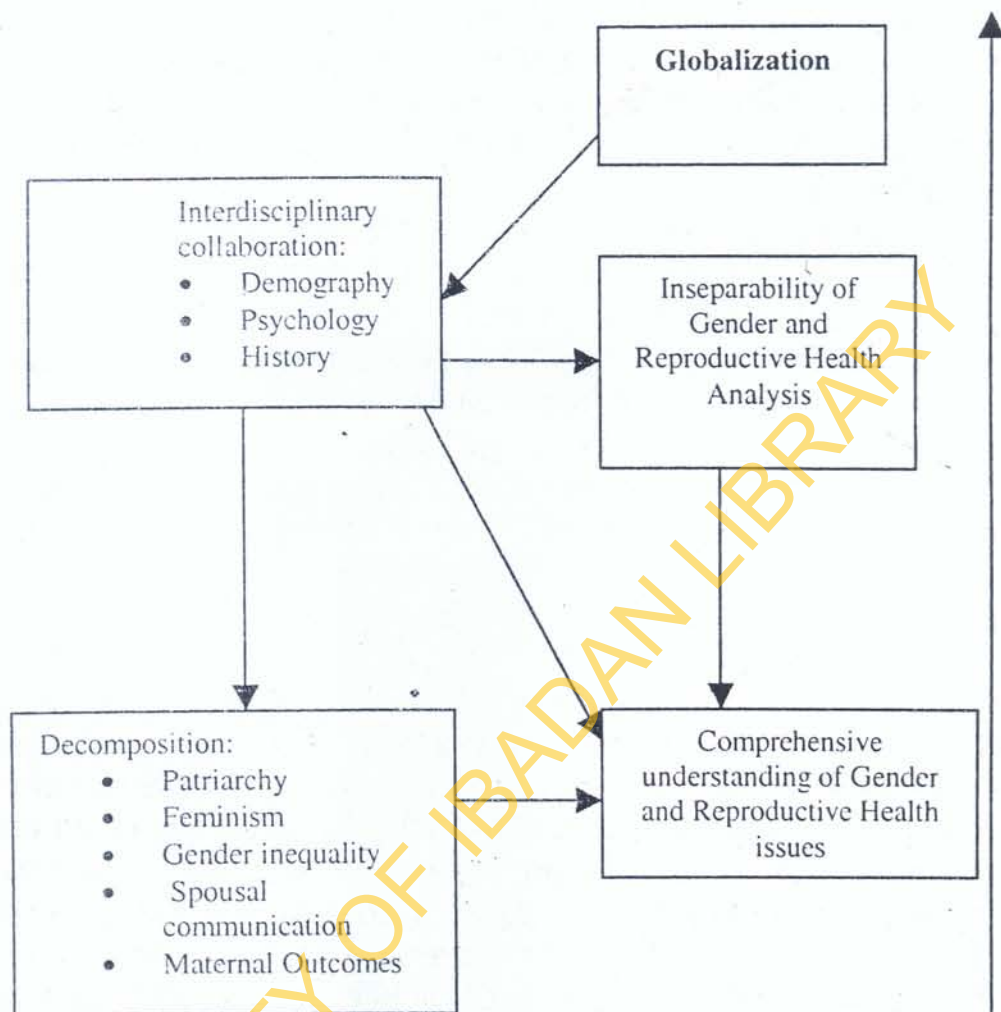


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Study.

Source: Nwokocho, 2004

The framework shows that understanding globalization requires interdisciplinary collaboration, and in the instant analysis, among Demography, Psychology and History. While Demography and Psychology deal directly with psychosocial issues related to gender and reproductive health, History on the other hand allows for epochal comparison and assessment of factors that affect knowledge of changes in society and individual adaptability. Transdisciplinary collaboration facilitates decomposition of a phenomenon into smaller units of investigation which ordinarily activates underlying features of relevant concepts towards a comprehensive analysis. Employing the systems perspective, for instance, for investigation of sub-systems such as patriarchy, feminism, gender inequality, spousal communication and maternal

outcomes individually and collectively affect knowledge of gender and reproductive health.

The position of Systems theory by Bertalanffy (1968) is that the activity of any part of a whole affects the activity of every other part and the whole in general. In the same vein, the impact of any decomposable part affects in varying degrees, every other part and gender and reproductive health in general. Onyeonoru (2000) observed that a system is portrayed as an entity made up of interrelated and connected parts. Systems of various orders are understood by investigating their respective parts as making a whole. This is irrespective of whether inanimate things, living organisms, or social phenomena are the objects of focus. By using the organismic analogy to explain the social system Bertalanffy noted:

It is necessary to study not only parts and processes in isolation, but also to solve the decisive problems found in the organisation and order unifying them, resulting from dynamic interaction of parts, and making the behaviour of parts different when studied in isolation or within the whole (Bertalanffy, 1968:31)

The implication is that parts of a whole exhibit features consistent with individual units as separate parts which are, usually, quite different from when these parts are linked to one another. At another level, systems theory emphasizes communication and feedback in the analysis of a whole. The implication of this analogy is that systems involve the stimulus-response relationship. In essence, input (cause) must precede output (effect). In other words, the definition or design ascribed to gender and reproductive health analysis by globalization affects the extent to which these concepts are understood. Feedbacks are necessitated by the effects recorded at the end of a sequence of activities. The need for feedback is in its ability to give some signal to the stimulus so that equilibrium is either maintained or adjustments are made.

This analysis is an attempt to relay some feedback to stakeholders in globalization analysis on the incompleteness inherent in approaches that lack comprehensiveness as a result of linearity and disciplinary insulation. In other words, there is a clear connection between inputs to the system and its performance (Stoner *et al.*, 2000; Hodge *et al.*, 1996; Griffin, 1993). In the instant analysis, the extent that interdisciplinary collaboration and

decomposition of gender and reproductive health components account for comprehensive understanding of these issues makes for an assessment of as well as demand on globalization.

Globalization Analysis: towards Comprehensiveness

The preceding sections have shown that globalization is an epoch possessing attributes consistent with major events in history. This section attempts to examine the feasibility of achieving comprehensive analysis of gender and reproductive health in a global era. In Nigeria, in particular, the challenge is deepened by the socio-economic and political situation characterized by uncertainty, which has accounted for brain drain among academics leaving relevant analysis of major events and phenomena in the hands of a few.

Although this discourse recognises the consequence of "brain drain" on a country like Nigeria, it argues that emigration among academics does not explain sufficiently failure at comprehensive analysis considering that "brain drain" in the context of this paper is not synonymous with "brain dry" – the latter meaning a state of complete evaporation. The major reason for the analytical inadequacy of gender and reproductive health issues is the inability of scholars to prioritize interdisciplinary research which necessitates decomposition of complex phenomena into sub-systems before findings are finally synthesized. This implies that the contributions of a plethora of latent variables that determine the essence of manifest factors of globalization are not appreciated. For instance, a large majority of analyses pertaining to the thematic issue arrive at the conclusion that gender situation in society, in terms of equity/equality or otherwise, affects reproductive health without, most times, exploring other possible factors that can be implicated in the issue. (IFPRI, 1998; Akande, 2000; Population Council, 2001; SIDA, 2003).

The present paper shares the consistency inherent in that conclusion at the manifest level but observes the contradiction in failing to investigate, separately and collectively, some latent factors that shape these observables. A deeper analysis of complex phenomena makes for an understanding of the strength of each contributory variable by holding all other variables constant. At another level, it is notable that analysis of human activities in a global era should avoid generalizations across settings because of variations at different locations – yet

recognizing the existence and effects of globalization in these societies.

Conclusion

This discourse has shown that gender and reproductive health analysis requires systematic as well as holistic approach in order to achieve comprehensive understanding in the global age. It became necessary to question the relevance of investigating a complex phenomenon like globalization as a monolith that is examinable only by a few disciplines. The limitation presented by that linearity signals a need for interdisciplinary collaboration, on one hand, and outright rejection of seclusion of academic fields from other areas of knowledge that could introduce some virility into social analysis, on the other.

Although consensus on the epochal status of globalization is far-reaching, historical account of its exact emergent-date has remained heuristic. This in-exactitude arises due to differences in antecedents among different societies leading to historical distortions and ambiguity. Consequently, globalization has become embedded in and analysed within the epistemological convenience of scholars. Hence, sub-systemism was adopted by a very large majority of researchers as a methodological path to investigating the thematic phenomenon. Lopsidedness inherent in such unit analysis not only mystifies the scope and direction of globalization but also encourages ignorance related to it.

Circumventing this incompleteness, presented by non-articulation of disaggregated findings, necessitated the adoption of systems approach which is the trajectory for incursion into a comprehensive analysis of globalization. The present study concludes that identifying interconnections among variables as separate and collective whole in the analysis of a complex phenomenon like globalization is only achievable with the systemic technique. The realm within which this holism is suggested is transdisciplinary convergence and decomposition of variables that impinge indirectly on our understanding of the phenomenon and linkages that shape human activities in time and space.

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