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## Career Paths of Women Academics in a Nigerian University

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### Introduction

As an institution of higher education (HE) and ‘an arena for ideological production’ (Pereira 2007:19), the university has been receiving attention in recent times in scholarly discourses not only in Africa but also other parts of the Commonwealth and beyond (see, for instance, Morley 2003; Crossman 2004; Morley *et al.* 2005; Verspoor 2008). In Africa, a lot of these literature have paid attention to diverse issues such as knowledge production and dissemination (Subotzky and Cele 2004; Teferra 2004; Owolabi 2007; Olukoju 2004; Mlambo 2007), job satisfaction of university academics in Africa (Ssasanga and Garrett 2005), crisis in HE in Africa (see Nyamnjoh and Nantang 2002; Vespoor 2008), among various issues.

Increasingly, the gendered nature of the university experience has, in recent times, been attracting the attention of scholars (see, for instance, Sall 2000; Odejide 2003, 2006; Odejide *et al.* 2006; Chesterman *et al.* 2003; Mama 2003, 2006; Morley 2003; Morley *et al.* 2005; Moultrie and De La Rey 2003; Gaidzanwa 2007; and Shackleton 2007). The presence of gender disparity in the working of Nigeria university system as Odejide *et al.* (2006) and Pereira (2007) have established, for instance, points to the reality of the need to problematise gender as a relevant issue of discourse in the dialogue on university education in Africa. Despite the prevalence of gender on the literature in HE in Africa, much is yet to be known on women’s career experience in this gendered terrain (see Tsikata 2007:27). This gap forms part of the neglected areas which, according to Morley, have created ‘limited opportunities to theorise structural and cultural barriers or indeed to analyse qualitative experiences of women in higher education on a transnational basis’ (Morley 2003:9). The implication, she further noted, is that the complex nature of

organisational culture and the gendered 'relays of power' are unrecorded, and this has negatively impacted on knowledge production and dissemination, scholarship, and literature in the field (Morley 2003). Obviously, there is a need to investigate women academics' experiences of the university in Africa in order to bring to the fore their career trajectories in different environments. Works like Chanana (2003) and Tsikata (2007) examined gender and women's career experiences in India, and Ghana, respectively. Chanana, for instance, has argued that organisational and management practices coupled with social constructions discriminate against women, and impact negatively on women's career in a university in India. On the study of University of Ghana, Tsikata explored how male and female faculty experience the university, contribute to shaping its gendered institutional and intellectual cultures and how these interactions contribute in structuring intellectual production and career trajectories. Taking these works into account raises the possibility of a similar study in Nigeria to fill the gap that may exist in the literature. Against this background, this paper sets as its general objective the investigation of the nature of the career paths of women academics in a Nigerian university. It focuses on the use of informal networks, the possible effects of these on the career advancement of women academics, as well as on the point of entry and career disruptions and how these affect career progression of women academics. Within these issues, we also locate faculty variations, constraints to women's career advancements and the place of gendered cultural ideologies in women's career pathways. The study addresses the under-listed specific objectives:

- i. Identify the point at which the selected women academics entered the academic profession and what they were doing prior to their recruitment
- ii. Identify if there are faculty variations in women's career experiences, and document the nature of such variations
- iii. Discover the constraints women encounter in the process of pursuing a career in the academia
- iv. Discover the extent to which the use of social networking or isolation has contributed to women academics' career experience.

### **Target Group and Research Methodology**

This micro-ethnographic research makes use of case study typology. Feminist qualitative methodology that allows the researcher to locate herself in the research process (Shackleton 2007:23) is employed in this study. As Shackleton suggested, the researcher consciously builds on and integrates her knowledge of the case institution into the study, thus providing insight as an 'insider' (Shackleton 2007:27). I am aware of the 'insider-outsider' debate in qualitative research (see Chavez 2008), which centres on whether an insider researcher can give objective assessment

of research subjects as she is an integral part of the researched issue, a major position in positivist scholarship. This study leans on the conclusion drawn by Chavez that 'Insiders can understand the cognitive, emotional, and/or psychological precepts of participants as well as possess more profound knowledge of the historical and practical happenings of the field' (Chavez 2008:481). Thus, as a Nigerian woman, and as an academic, I am well acquainted with my research field and I possess insider knowledge of my research subject and field. My position, therefore, offers me a good ground to grapple with my research subject, integrating my experience into my research.

Marxist feminist theoretical framework is used in the study. This perspective provides the platform to view many women academics' lower intellectual production (Schuster and Finkelstein 2006:89, 99 as cited in Aleman 2008:142) as the outcome of men's monopoly of social and cultural capitals rooted in the patriarchal post-colonial Nigerian society which has led to men's higher intellectual production, and women's marginalisation.

Women academic staff in the University of Ibadan (UI), Nigeria, constitute the research population. There are 13 faculties in the university, and in line with the observation that 'sampling is an essential step in qualitative research process, and, thus, an important consideration that all qualitative researchers must make' (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2007), I selected 39 women academics from the 13 faculties of the University as my sampling units, adopting purposive sampling. In each of the 13 faculties, three women academic staff were selected for in-depth interview. The selection was based on two categorisations – the older and the emerging women scholars. From the older scholars' category, two groups were identified. The first comprised women who have risen to the position of Associate Professors or Professors while the second comprises those who are about age 50 but have not risen beyond Senior Lecturer grade. This approach enables the researcher to ascertain how those women academics who have reached the peak of academic career were able to navigate their ways to the top amidst the socio-cultural realities of the university space and the larger Nigerian civil society. And, for those who have not moved beyond Senior Lecturer grade at their age, it is necessary to understand their career history in order to document the possible constraints in their career pathways. Some respondents in this group also fall into the emerging scholar category as a result of their ranks. From the emerging scholars' category, I selected academics from among women of child-bearing age and those with dependent children. This gave us the clues on how historical and socio-economic realities are acting upon women's career experiences.

Data collection techniques, such as In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), unstructured interviews, and participant observation, were employed. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed. Journals, books, and the Internet were also consulted for documentary evidence. For data analysis, themes and sub-themes

were developed following the research objectives. Collected data were subjected to critical analysis using descriptive and interpretive techniques. Direct quotations have been included in the analysis to allow the respondents tell the story of their experience in the academia themselves.

### The Case Institution

The University of Ibadan was founded in 1948 as an affiliate of University College, London (Mellanby 1974; Akinkugbe 1999). At its inception, the university was, in the words of Morley *et al.* (2005), 'designed to train the local male population to manage the 'colonies'' (Morley *et al.* 2005: 45). UI became autonomous in 1963, and since then has been offering its own degrees. At its inception, the population of students was put at 104 students, out of which only three were female (Nzegwu 1981). Currently, there are 13 faculties, four institutes, four Centres, including the Distance Learning Centre, and many non-teaching units in the institution. At 2008/2009 session, UI has in its employment 325 female academic staff as against 889 male academics, which means that women constitute 27 per cent of the academic staff (UI Planning Unit 2009). A further breakdown of male and female academic staff representation in different designations as at July 2009 indicates that women constitute 12.1 per cent of all professors, 26.2 per cent of associate professors, 24.4 per cent of senior lecturers, 33 per cent of lecturers I, 32.3 per cent of Lecturer II, and 38 per cent of assistant lecturers (see Table I).

**Table 1:** UI Academic staff distribution by 2008/2009 session showing

DESIGNATION	MALE	FEMALE	Total No of Lecturers
Prof	181	25	206
Associate Prof.	54	19	73
Senior Lecturer	257	83	340
Lecturer I	192	93	285
Lecturer II	151	72	223
Ass. Lecturer	54	33	87

**Source:** University of Ibadan Planning Unit 2009.

Table 1 indicates that a larger percentage of female academics is concentrated at the lower levels, and when compared to the findings of Odejide *et al.* (2006), not much change seems to have taken place. The current women engagement as academics paints a picture of unequal gender representation, while the distribution of male and female in ranks also reflects this disparity. In its 60 years of existence, UI has had only one female Deputy Vice-Chancellor and not yet a female Vice-Chancellor.

### Pathways to Career Success: Women Academics in the Limelight

Although there are various explanations in the usages of the concept 'career' in the social sciences, Esseveld *et al.* observed that, in recent times, the concept has been broadened to encompass 'the individual's work career in the context of the totality of his/her life – family, social networks and community – or to an individual's movement through different familial life stages' (Esseveld *et al.* 2000:190). Viewing career from this perspective, this paper pays attention to the intersections of these complexities in women academics' career pathways and how they account for women's marginality, a fallout of low intellectual productivity and subsequent high representation at the lower cadres in the academe. The paper points out four main arguments as follows: (i) The university space is an arena where the gendered socio-cultural constructions in the Nigeria environment impact significantly on women's experience of the academe. (ii) Many women's inability to invest qualitative and quantitative time in research and the subsequent low intellectual productivity and inability to regularly meet promotion requirements are consequences of socio-cultural constraints that reinforce women's marginality. Here we link the domestic/public interface and networking and how they intersect with women's career, giving way for their dependent position, especially within the period of childbearing and nurturing of dependent children. (iii) Men's domination of the social and cultural capitals contribute to enhancing their intellectual production. (iv) Finally, this paper proposes transformative strategies to enhance women's participation in the university space.

To engage in this discourse, we locate this study within the Marxist feminist perspective that dichotomises the society into two: bourgeoisies/capitalists and the proletariats/workers, both of which have economic implications on the individual. Karl Marx in *Capital* (1973) posits that the employer/capitalist has the monopoly of means of production and is thus able to keep the employees exploited. Capitalist ideology, with its 'system of exploitative power relations' (Tong 1989:40-41), sustains unequal economic power relations, where a particular group has advantage over the other by creating a binary opposition in economic power. This paper relates this to exploitation of women in the organisation of production within the household and how this snowballs into low intellectual productivity in the academe. It, therefore, argues that just as the capitalist has monopoly of means of production in the employer/labourer relationship, which accounts for unequal income; in the academe, men have monopoly of social and cultural capital, which accounts for their more intellectual production and faster career progression, while many women are constrained by lack of this capital. This study is expected to reveal the undercurrents behind the everyday scenes in the women's career trajectories that are reflected in the bottlenecked representation of women in the upper hierarchy in academic profession. In this discourse, we view women academics in our university of study as a heterogeneous group even

though we recognise that those who successfully reach the peak of their career as professors are not excluded from those processes that marginally define the woman within the context of the contemporary socio-cultural ideological practices in Nigeria, which view the woman as the 'other' in the post-modern term which defines her position.

### **Locating the Woman Academic in the Socio-cultural Space**

The history of women's career in HE shows that gender disparity, which exists in the civil society, has manifold effects on women's career experience in the university system. Within the Nigerian socio-cultural space, women academics suffer double invisibility – invisibility within the context of post-colonial Nigerian civil society and invisibility as female academics. For those women academics that manage to get to the upper ranks in the university, they occupy peripheral positions in decision-making (Odejide 2003, 2006; Chanana 2003; Mama 2003; Mama 2006; Pereira 2007; Morley 2003). As a respondent affirmed 'when it comes to leadership, men feel it is their preserve'. Scholars have argued that women's multiple roles affect their advancement in the academe; hence they are poorly represented as professors (Tsikata 2007). In Ghana, for instance, Lamptey (1992) submitted that women could not advance because of the multiple roles they perform (see Morley 2003). The author argues that teaching is perceived as being compatible with traditional female roles but not research. Indeed, women's involvement in research activities were limited as a result of their overburdened responsibilities and limited engagement with research (see Lamptey 1992). In a study carried out in Britain, it was discovered that women apply for smaller funds than men and conduct researches that require shorter time to complete (Morley 2005). This is not unconnected to the gendered nature of the society.

Indeed, the prevailing realities constitute part of the constraints women academics face in their bid to overcome the challenge of 'publish or perish' that characterises academic engagements. Ironically, despite the household labour, women are still expected to follow the same rules and are assessed by the same principles that apply to men during promotion; their equally demanding domestic engagements are not put into consideration while evaluating their contributions. The work pattern and environment in many HE also are not favourable to the childbearing women and those with dependent children, leading to the marginality evidenced in women in career ranking. According to Tsikata (2007), in the University of Legon, much of the problems women academics encounter in the pursuit of their career lay in the institutional culture's failure to distinguish between male and female academics. The author argues that in the university bureaucratic structure, an academic is seen as a gender neutral individual; hence there are no measures in place to support women academics during childbearing and the raising of young children, a factor which affects women's productivity (Tsikata 2007:35-36) and

subsequent promotion. A respondent narrated her experience which she describes as 'terrible'. Her words:

I was a Lecturer 1 for ten years before becoming a Senior Lecturer. Home front and children upbringing are the major challenges of women academics. When the children are very young is a period of low productivity for the woman. Two of my colleagues, women academics, told me their experiences. For some, it took ... up to 15 years to move from Lecturer 1 to Senior Lecturer. All my male colleagues are now professors. You see what I mean? One ought to be a professor long before now. It is frustrating (Interview, May 2009).

Indeed, the imbalance in the allocation of work and time within the home, and its rippling effects on women's intellectual productivity creates further imbalance on career progression of women and men. Ramsay and Parker argue that in patriarchal environment women have continued to be associated with domestic sphere which is accorded lower status, according to the value rationality of capitalism. They further note that the dichotomisation of the public and private spheres, the association of women with the latter and the higher status accorded to what men do in the public sphere has privileged men and led to the masculinisation of prestige and status (Ramsay and Parker 1992:260). Capitalist ideology, which is based on the exploitative relationship, manifests in the exploitation of the women's energy in supporting men's career progression while many women lag behind. The rise in world capitalist economy and colonial encounter provided a watershed in women autonomy in most African societies, leading to their subsequent subordination, and continued identification of the woman with the domestic space.

Women engagement with the private space has attracted the attention of the United Nations such that the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women stressed the importance of equal responsibilities for men and women in the context of family life (see European Commission 1997a). Again, in 1985, in the *Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies* this theme of equal responsibility in the domestic sphere was re-iterated. Paragraphs 18 and 59, in particular, reminded member states that, in spite of advances in a number of countries, women were still facing a 'double burden', often because of a lack of support services, and stressed the importance of all family members sharing domestic responsibilities (European Commission 1997b). Cultural ideologies that view domestic arena as women's space continue to inhibit their participation in the larger social and intellectual spaces. *The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action*, which 181 states adopted, suggests the need to develop policies to change attitudes in order to promote the concept of shared responsibilities in the home as one way in which family and work could be combined, and thereby reduce the work-overload women bear in their 'double shift' – the paid employment and household chores. Despite these documentations, women in Nigerian society still experience gender imbalance in the allocation of domestic chores. And so, women invest

quantitative time for labour that is not accounted for in promotion in the paid employment, and yet are expected to meet their professional requirements for career advancement. For women academics, inadequate preparation and lack of adequate rest contribute to low publication outputs. For many of my respondents, the aspiration is simply to have enough papers for promotion rather than writing to get involved in as many debates going on in their fields. Once promotional requirements are met, women have a sense of fulfilment. However, many women do not realise this ambition. Consequently, many respondents noted lack of time to engage in reflective activities that will yield intellectual production as part of the constraints they have in their career.

The next section focuses on how informal social networks could intersect intellectual productivity and its possible effects on women's career progression.

### ***Women Academics and Informal Networks***

In the academia, for a woman to reach the top positions (professor or associate professor) entails breaking through many social and attitudinal barriers to create more time for research, integrating oneself in informal networks for necessary social capital needed to connect to the intellectual world, which has advantage of projecting one for possible collaborative researches, sourcing for grants and other career advancement opportunities. Attitudinal barriers, for instance, dictate where a married woman could go and at what time she could be seen outside without the husband, within the university space, without being stereotyped. A respondent affirmed:

As a married woman, you may not often work in the office till very late in the night. The man may do that, even sleep there if he wishes. It is not that there are laws or policies prohibiting you. No. But you know that people will frown at it, even if your husband doesn't mind. It is cultural construction of gender expectations (Interview, May 2009).

This view supports Tamale *et al.* (2000) that 'the environment of institutions of higher learning is dictated by patriarchal values and beliefs' (Tamale *et al.* 2000:12). The prevailing masculine school of thought in the HE environment makes it difficult for women to exercise their academic freedom without being stereotyped in the university space.

As an academic, social network could be a major key asset in accessing necessary information for career progress. However, evidence abounds that most women in HE hardly explore these resources as a result of gendered socialisation, stigmas and stereotypes and time overload that characterise the patriarchal values in African society, which also are obtainable in the university environment. As Diaw rightly noted, 'the university . . . houses men and women marked by cultures and specific memories which lead them to define their identity, to create relationships, to break or consolidate prejudices, and to transact so as to acquire power or exclude



others' (Diaw 2007:17). A respondent who was the only female lecturer in her department for a long time noted her predicament in trying to integrate herself in the department:

I discovered that I needed to be careful in order to avoid stigmatisation. When people see you often in male lecturers' offices they begin to assume that something is going on [between you two]. Meanwhile, the male lecturers are free. Eventually I had to withdraw in order to avoid suggestive gossip and consequently suffered isolation (Interview, July 2009).

Although this experience may not be generalised to all departments, unequal gender representation in many departments puts most women at a disadvantage. Many respondents, especially those at the professorial grade, submitted that they were the first females to reach the position in their various departments. Employment of more women in the departments can enhance women's participation both at the departmental level and the larger university space. Lack of networking both within the department and in the larger university space has implications for women career advancement. A senior lecturer expressing her views on the implications of lack of networking on intellectual production of women said:

Indeed, women academics suffer isolation. Women suffer for lack of networking. There is no time and this could lead to frustration. For men, every 3 - 4 years they get their promotion. It is not same for most women. Women find it difficult to participate in conferences especially outside the country. In my 21 years of lecturing I have attended only about 2-3 international conferences (Interview, May 2009).

Women academics in medicine and technology seem to have slightly different experience; hence they do not seem to suffer as much isolation as some in other disciplines. Again, departments with tradition of team work during the period of studentship show low signs of isolation of women as staff, as exemplified in medicine, and technology. There is the indication that in medicine, long period of training in the medical school created avenues for the establishment of closer ties among staff and students which make it easier for integration and collaborative work as academic staff. The nature of the discipline of medicine itself implies collaborative works. For instance, the treatment of a patient in a teaching hospital may require the contributions of a radiologist, paediatrician, surgeon, and even haematologist. In all these, the spirit of teamwork is necessary irrespective of sex identity. Although women in medicine do not also participate much in informal network, disciplinary culture and established ties during training bridge the gap that lack of informal network would have created.

Women's less frequent interactions with colleagues at the informal space contributes to slower career progress of many respondents. Such interpersonal contacts and conference attendance stimulate intellectual reflections. On informal

interactions, an emerging scholar who is the only female academic in her department recounted her experience thus:

We once had an external examiner, a professor, and my head of unit wanted as many of us in the unit who could to spend the evening with the visiting scholar in the staff club. I gently declined. Not that I did not know that such outing would be more of intellectual discussions on my discipline and exchange of experiences and possible career opportunities in my field across universities, but as a married woman I could not imagine being out with men late in the evening without my husband being there (Interview, August 2009).

Inclusion in important informal networks within the HE environment is advantageous in that it helps in knowing 'what happens where and when' than an institution's official bulletin may cover. Although women academics are excluded from male networks that could offer mobility opportunity due to cultural constructions, at the same time, they lack the time to establish women network ties. Bagilhole (2007) has noted that 'women have particular difficulty in securing access to academic networks, which are a crucial ingredient of professional career success'. Informal networks, according to her, 'bring mutual career benefits through collaborations, information exchange, contacts for research resources, career planning, professional support and encouragement' (Bagilhole 2007:25). This observation agrees with the conclusions reached by White and Moore that women are rarely central in informal elite networks (More and White 2000). Indeed, Bourdieu (1986) has rightly noted that 'network ties may be seen as social capital' (see Moore and White 2000:102). Cultural ideologies that place men at an advantage are part of the cultural capital available to men. Social and cultural capital constitutes assets needed for investment in the intellectual production economy. Hence, men's monopoly of social and cultural capital contributes to the disparity in the intellectual outputs of male and female academics.

A respondent noted that women academics experience a lot of stress as to being in the profession means more work: 'work at odd times, cutting out extra-curriculum activities, socials and doing away with friends as much as possible'. Ironically, while men academics establish informal networks, create and maintain ties within and across different HEi, women academics avoid these as such demands extra time schedules which their already-overstretched daily routines cannot accommodate if they must make progress in their career at all. Another respondent observed:

Networking? I lost a year in terms of promotion, not knowing that I needed to have some papers [published] abroad. I had publications abroad though, but I sent them to the wrong places – Canada, US instead of Britain, in fact instead of British Journal of Education. You know we run the same kind of educational system with Britain. So my paper was sent back to me with the comment that it was a fantastic paper but could be published in Canada or US. This kind of problem is avoidable if one utilises the advantages that social network which the institution can offer, proper networks among colleagues (Interview, May 2009).

Until recently, detailed promotion guidelines were published for public consumption in our institution. Consequently, what was expected for promotion, where one needed to publish for one's paper to count in promotion, and quality determinants were not clear and explicit. Informal networks were explored to fill this gap, and men had advantage of these. Another respondent narrated her experience before the institution published promotion guidelines:

Papers submitted for promotion were always rejected because of unspecified promotion guidelines. Now there is promotion guideline so people can consult it for clarifications. So, it is easier but before now these things were not properly explained. For ten years I was not promoted. One ought to be a professor by now (Interview, May 2009).

Many women academics suffered frustration and career stagnation during the period. But the publication of promotion guidelines has alleviated some of the constraints women face in this regard.

Technological advancement tends to offer a possible alternative platform for women to get connected among themselves and to the outside world through Internet. A professor affirmed:

Now, Internet is a great asset to every scholar and it is of an immense benefit to women in particular as it tends to bridge the gap that isolation has created. In our days, It was not there. So connection with colleagues was the sole thing (Interview, May 2009).

Although this conclusion was corroborated by many respondents, networking among colleagues can draw an individual's attention to a new development – conferences, call for papers or proposals than the Internet. So, the Internet may not really be an adequate alternative to interpersonal contacts and relationship ties or an antidote to isolation. As Bagilhole noted:

Women have particular difficulty in securing access to academic networks, which are a crucial ingredient of professional career success. Network connections are looked for in promotion decisions. They bring mutual career benefits through collaboration, information exchange, contacts for research resources, career planning, professional support and encouragement (Bagilhole 1993; cited in Bagilhole 2007:25).

Palgi has noted that one way of overcoming the barriers which lack of network has created is through the recruitment of mentors who help to pave the career paths (Palgi 2000:79). There is a need for mentoring in academics, particularly for emerging women academics. As Palgi also noted of women in politics and business, people who have reached top positions can empower those on the way to the top in many ways, among which is mentoring junior colleagues (Palgi 2000:86). In medicine, some form of informal mentoring seems to exist among staff. Most respondents in the discipline acknowledged that they enjoy a degree of mentorship in their career, especially those who have predecessors in their fields.

In other disciplines, although mentoring seems not to exist as such, few respondents affirmed that they enjoy mentoring. A respondent in Faculty of Social Science observed:

In my department, we have advantage of mentoring. For instance, Prof X helps many of us. When you write a paper he would help you go through and critique it before you send it abroad for publication. He also informs us, emerging scholars, of any career advancement opportunity. So, we really have mentors in my department (Interview, August 2009).

Generally, however, there is an indication in our study that many women seem to lack mentors. Indeed, mentoring could lead to collaborative works which helps to strengthen the research capacity of emerging scholars. Although collaboration and co-authorship do not necessarily mean the same, one could lead to the other. Collaboration helps to build capacity of younger faculty, but disciplinary and institutional cultures determine the popularity of the practice. This study discovered that collaboration is not a common practice among respondents from Faculties of Arts and Education, and to some extent among women academics in the Social Sciences. Since the emergence of the new promotion criteria that demands for the percentage contribution of each scholar in a collaborative work, academics have not been favourably disposed to co-authorship. A professor observed that 'co-authorship brings in interdisciplinary dimension to research, skills and acumen' however, she noted that most of her works have been sole effort. Another respondent, a senior lecturer, noted:

Personally, co-authorship has not helped me. I personally don't like it because it slows one down. I have not found it useful, though it is good in an academic setting. For it to work, you need a research partner with the same drive. We have deadlines to meet and excuses create loopholes.

The institution does not even encourage it by asking for the percentage contribution of individual authors, which now drive people to sole-authorship (Interview, May 2009).

Another respondent who did a collaborative work once observed that in her faculty (Agriculture), women do not collaborate among themselves. Rather, they may work more with men. This was confirmed by another respondent as she gave possible reasons for this, while confirming that institutional requirements make co-authorship unpopular:

It is because of time factor. Women keep on giving excuses why they will not be available for meetings and appointments. If it is a team of 3-4 women, for instance, you are bound to have each of them giving excuses at different times. But if it is only a woman to 3 men, it is easier to plan to suit her time as men are always able to adjust easily due to gender practices. For instance, I was to carry out an experiment with a female colleague, for two years we kept on postponing

going to the field. And that research never saw the light of day. But if you work with men they can adjust to suit your time or give you the portion of the work that suits your challenges, but you could get less points.

Co-authorship is not so much popular now because of the requirement of percentage of contribution for promotion. Academics are not favourably disposed to it. This does not fetch much point (Interview, May 2009).

In a department in science, co-authorship was observed to be a common practice for men and women academics, despite the new promotion criteria. A respondent in the department observed that co-authorship enhances the quality of scientific paper and it is more or less the tradition in the discipline. In fact, according to her, no serious journal abroad will like to publish a solo-authored scientific paper. This was corroborated from many respondents from natural science-oriented disciplines.

Another type of collaboration seems to exist in the natural sciences, that is, collaboration with foreign scholars as a result of lack of adequate instruments and chemicals for research. Poor funding of the universities in Nigeria, inadequate power supply, and lack of instruments have contributed to this development. According to a respondent:

As a scientist, I need to do my analysis abroad because light, instruments – chemicals and equipment – are not available in the country. I have to collaborate with foreign partners in doing the analysis. This means doing more work, writing more papers to get enough points for promotion (Interview: May 2009).

In this department, evidence suggests that many male lecturers have migrated to the developed world. The department currently has more female lecturers than most departments. As Verspoor has rightly observed, the crisis in HE in Africa has manifested in such problems as overcrowding, inadequate staffing, deteriorating physical facilities, poor library resources, and insufficient scientific equipment (Verspoor 2008:2), which fundamentally is 'the crisis of quality'. Many male academics, especially in the sciences, Verspoor further noted, migrate to the developed world to be connected to the world's scientific networks. Consequently, such departments in Africa are left with more female lecturers, few younger male lecturers who are still searching for opportunities to migrate, and those older male lecturers that are too old to engage in career adventure or career-building having reached the peak of their career. This is the case in this particular department. For the women academics in the sciences, they need to connect with universities outside the country to carry out research analysis although they are aware that co-authorship attracts low points. Consequently, these lecturers are expected to work extra, writing more papers to get enough points for promotions. Indeed, the new assessment criteria have greater implications for scholarship in medicine, for instance. Not just in terms of extra work but also, according to most respondents; the quality of papers may be compromised by the preference for solo-authorship.

The next section pays attention to faculty variations and how points of entry into the academe, career disruptions and lack of cultural capital intersect women's career progress.

### ***Point of Entry, Career Disruptions and Career Advancement***

Evidence indicates that point of entry differs across many disciplines, depending on the length of years training lasts. Point of entry varies between Assistant Lecturer/Lecturer II to Lecturer I. In human medicine, for instance, most women academics, like their men counterparts, start their career as Lecturer I after residency training. This entry point compensates for the long period of training in medical school which also affects the age at which one joins the academic profession as a regular staff. In faculties of Veterinary Medicine and Law, without a PhD degree, the starting point is Lecturer II. In the two disciplines, one cannot go beyond the position of Senior Lecturer without a PhD. In these disciplines, career disruptions were not observed except that some of the respondents had worked briefly in private establishments before joining the academe.

In Education, findings indicate that some respondents had experienced career disruptions, particularly among those that are above 46 years of age at the period of this study. The age bracket of these respondents is significant in knowing how historical realities and, possibly, changing gender ideologies have brought about changes in women's experiences in the academe as evidenced in the experiences of younger women academics. Besides, many women academics in this faculty entered the academic profession relatively late in their career having spent a significant part of their career life at the lower level of education, such as at the secondary school (high school). For some respondents, this period lasted between 10 to 18 years. This is not considered at recruitment as academics as the nature and content of teaching at the two levels differ considerably. A respondent shares her career experience:

I taught for some years at a state university, was a Lecturer II, and the processes for promotion that would help me to move to Lecturer I had already started when, following consistent pressure from my family, as a newly married young woman, that was in 1984, I had to abandon my job in the state university to join my husband who is a lecturer in this university.

Besides the loss of my job, I also had to abandon the PhD I was pursuing in a federal university close to where I was working then, a PhD I had already put three years of serious work; had presented proposals, written and presented seminar papers. It was near completion. I was considering proximity to my new location, which is University of Ibadan where my husband works (Interview, May 2009).

The patriarchal familial ideology that emphasises patrilocal residential type means that the woman joins the husband after marriage. This relocation enshrined in cultural ideology has not, at the same time, provided alternative arrangement for

the women to be easily re-absorbed in employment when she gets to her new location. This is reflected in the career trajectory of this respondent:

My efforts at getting a job in UI did not yield any positive results. I thought it was going to be easy for me to be absorbed here as I had been an academic staff where I was coming from. As this was not forthcoming, I had to get a job at a secondary school in Ibadan where I taught for 16 years. It was not easy for me adapting to this new reality of demotion. After many years, my husband encouraged me to re-register for a PhD in Ibadan. I accepted. I started another PhD in the University of Ibadan while teaching in the secondary school because of proximity to my family, and I completed it.

As job in the university was still not forthcoming, I got a job with an NGO where I worked for 3 years. It was after these three years that I got recruited as a teaching staff in University of Ibadan as Lecturer I, a position I was due over 18 years earlier. Although I knew that if I had searched for a job outside Ibadan, I would not have taken anything below Senior Lecturer then as I had my publications and I had teaching experience in a university. But I had to consider my family, my children (Interview, May 2009).

This narrative reflects the nature of disruptions that may characterise the career history of some women academics, particularly those who had started their career prior to marriage, reflecting, at times, circular career pattern. For many respondents, the need to be closer to the home and children is often the fundamental consideration in the search for employment and career development opportunities. Some respondents noted that although they had ambition of taking up academic job at a university, they needed to cater for their children's upbringing first, and this contributed to their working longer at the secondary school and thus entering the academic profession relatively late.

There is indication that younger women scholars have less evidence of career disruptions. For instance, younger women whose husbands work in other HE institutions acknowledged that their husbands opted to work and reside in another university while they keep their jobs in UI. Certain reasons can be advanced for this. First, the prevailing harsh economic realities in the country cannot be unconnected to this. Secondly, greater gender awareness created among the younger generation could also account for less career disruptions. Moreover, the position of UI as one of the first-class-rated universities in Nigeria also implies that such husbands lecturing elsewhere could hope to transfer their services to UI in the nearest future. There are also husbands that left UI for other universities for faster career mobility, while their wives keep their jobs in UI, reducing career disruptions occasioned by domestic consideration. Also, those whose husbands work in UI keep their jobs when such husbands go on sabbatical or leave of absence to any part of the globe, hence experiencing less career disruptions. However, most women with adolescent children forgo their sabbaticals when they cannot get a

space in a closer university. It was also observed that many parenting younger scholars relocate with their children when they get job opportunity for sabbatical in neighbouring African countries while the husbands stay back in the country.

Findings also indicate that delayed completion of PhD programme was responsible for delayed promotion to the rank of Senior Lecturer at a point in the career history of many older scholars. Lack of sufficient time for research was advanced for this. However, a few respondents in this category noted that the economic condition in the 1970s when they started their career was more favourable than now and this made some of them complacent in publishing at a point in time. According to one respondent, the value of the naira against the dollars, for instance, was high and with one's salary one could travel abroad with the children for a holiday. So, there was not much urge to publish. For younger women academics, there is the indication that they view the completion of PhD programme as very important issue to be tackled in their career life and a major determinant of their progress in the university space. Hence, much importance is laid on this, and its completion given prime of space. As a professor noted, 'the younger scholars are more 'pushful' than the older generation of scholars'. Yet, another senior lecturer noted:

The younger scholars are different from the older generation. Their orientations are different; they are not as attached to the family as the older ones. They can put their children somewhere and pursue their ambition (Interview, July 2009).

Although this 'somewhere' was not explicitly explained by the respondent, there is the possibility that it could mean with friends, as another respondent submitted, or boarding schools. Many younger academics make use of boarding facilities for their children in secondary schools, as boarding system for primary school children are also emerging. Thus, attachment to the home and children may be waning gradually for this category of scholars. Career wise, however, there is the indication that lack of PhD may not be a hindrance to their career progression in the nearest future. This development may not be unconnected to gender awareness that is gradually having rippling effects in the civil society, and the economic hardship in the country, leading to more cooperation among spouses to enhance family income.

Nevertheless, for most respondents, home and children care remain major constraints in their career advancement. As Drew noted, societal expectation are placed on the women in relation to their primary responsibility for rearing children, caring for relatives and housework (Drew 2000:63), which have negative effects on women's career. Social construction of a trajectory for women and of their workplace identities, she observes, can only be understood via an appreciation of women's double lives (Drew 2000:51). As Esseveld and Anderson rightly noted, men and women's attachment to and embeddings in the worlds of paid work, career and family differ significantly. Compared to men, they observed, women are more family-oriented, while men are more work-oriented. In a



patriarchal society, Seymour (1992) observed that women and children are expected to serve the dominant man, and the refusal to provide such services 'challenges not only familial authority but also the socio-political order that is imbued with such patriarchal ideals' (Seymour 1992:191). Any attempt by women to claim time for themselves rather than spend it in service to the household, she noted, are viewed as abnormal, rejecting the established order, 'selfish' and 'unfeminine'. This binary opposition in attachment to work and home becomes more significant in career progression of men and women, career development, and self-realisation, especially in the academe where flexibility characterising academic job has meant more work for the women. Men's longer attachment to formal labour force by dedicating qualitative and quantitative time to research and establishing and maintaining social networks, facilitates their advancement, allowing many men to attain higher ranks faster than most women. According to a respondent who is a consultant and a Senior Lecturer in Medicine,

I had to slow down my career pursuit to allow my children to gain some level of independence. My two children are already in the university while the last one just finished the secondary school. I'm freer now to pursue my career. All my male classmates who are also my colleagues have all become professors since (Interview, July 2009).

Gender ideologies encoded in cultural constructions of 'the right thing to do' constitutes a major constraint for the woman academic as she battles between meeting societal expectations and professional expectations. Also, the number of children a woman has determines when she gets back to serious scholarship. The more the number of children, the longer time it takes to return to serious research. For this reason, there is delayed PhD completion, less number of publications and slower career progression for many respondents. This scenario creates a disconnect between the career aspiration of many women academics and their achieved positions.

For there to be a change, the university must initiate institutional transformative policies that could enhance women's participation in the university space. In our institution of study, subtle processes of inclusion have begun to emerge through deliberate strategic plans for women inclusion through provision of opportunities. According to a respondent:

Well, there seems to be subtle encouragement of women now especially when an advert or call for proposal is put up. There is this tag that says 'Female faculty are particularly encouraged to apply'. Although, adverts that have this tag tends to come from outside, for instance, Mac-Arthur Foundation Grants. But generally, this is an encouragement of a sort. It is a reflection of the effect of gender discourses and awareness, which is an encouraging development.

As a strategic plan, in our department we have employed in recent times more female assistant lecturers to correct gender imbalance (Interview, May 2009).

This was also corroborated by many respondents, some of whom gave other instances of career advancement opportunities for women academics outside the country. As encouraging as this development sounds, it still remains inadequate. The deconstruction of societal attitude to women and their interaction in the university social space will also contribute in furthering this project of inclusion, and create space for their utilisation of such opportunities.

Some respondents, especially of the older generation of scholars, seem not to envisage much possible alterations in cultural attitudes. Rather they advise a 'wiser' utilisation of time by women academics. They argue that women academics should be able to integrate the home front and the career pursuit. One of such respondents advised: 'Woman academic has to keep her home. There must be a balance; she has to be on her toes to do it even better than the male folk' (Fieldwork 2009), a corroboration of the conclusion that women work more than men in order to attain equivalent positions. Evidently, women academics are aware of the challenges they encounter in navigating their career pathways, particularly the disparity inherent in men and women's access to cultural resources. A professor observed:

For promotion, you need the number of papers required. To make impact, one has to balance everything. Research and lecturing are official, so being an academician affects home front. So, it depends on how one manages them. The problem is that younger women scholars don't have as much assistance at home as we the older generation had (Interview, May 2009).

Increasingly, the complexities of modern society have contributed to the problem of lack of household assistance for childbearing women academics. With the implementation of universal basic education and laws against child trafficking, there is an upsurge in the number of children, especially girls, attending both primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. Although this is quite a positive development, it has rippling effects in the career of working women. To cope with the new challenges, some younger women academics with children below ten years of age employ the services of qualified personnel paying reasonable amount of money for the services. Still, others keep their children longer in school at extra cost, causing further strains on the household income. All these are done to prevent the frustration that accompanies low intellectual productivity and subsequent denial of promotions.

### **Conclusion and the Way Forward**

This paper has explored the career paths of women academics in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Certain conclusions emerge from our analysis. First, many women academics' career trajectories indicate that the complexities of their family and work lives and the effects of socio-cultural ideologies at the informal level within the university space and the larger Nigerian society give men more social and cultural capital to the detriment of women. Such, obviously, has effects on

women's intellectual productivity, leaving many women at lower cadres, privileging men's position and, subsequently sustaining the asymmetric power relations in the university space. It is on this imbalance that the university system and its criteria of evaluation as it is constituted today is built, on a larger socio-cultural structure that overlooks inequality, maintains and re-enforces men's power in the public space and women's marginality.

Isolation and lack of informal social networking, as identified in this study, should not be seen in isolation; it is deeply rooted in the capitalistic and patriarchal ideologies that characterise the larger Nigerian socio-cultural landscape. Although UI cannot be said to harbour discriminatory gender policies, men and women within the institution are products of culture, which influences interactions and utilisation of space within the institution, and affects intellectual productivity of men and women differently. As Mama (2006) has rightly observed, it is, indeed, the social responsibility of the university to 'provide critical analysis and solutions to the continent's many challenges – whether or not these require science and technology, social scientific or cultural work' (Mama 2006:298). The fact remains that the university space remains the fundamental arena to articulate the processes of women inclusion, and a leading vanguard in its practicability. As our analysis above indicates, women's constraints and their winding career pathways are fundamentally rooted in lack of social and cultural capital needed for investment in the knowledge production economy.

To redress the imbalances identified in this study, transformative policies are needed. Processes of transformation include the deconstruction of those ideologies and stereotypes that marginally define the woman and affect women academics' intellectual productivity and career advancement. For instance, the impact of career disruptions as a result of marriage and relocation to join the husband can be addressed by including in the conditions of service a provision that gives priority consideration to the automatic absorption of such women academics into faculty of the nearest university in their new location either immediately or as soon as there is vacant position. Although there seem to be no evidence of career disruptions among the younger scholars from our sample, there is the need for policy to be in place to address possible occurrences.

Currently, in Nigeria, academic staff occupying senior lecturer position and above receive Steward Allowance. This policy could be extended to women academics below senior lecturer grade with nursing and children below ten years, to alleviate the financial burdens of paying qualified children personnel to take care of their children while creating more time for research.

Also, research agencies administering postdoctoral research grant should factor the impact of child bearing and nurturing and the subsequent delay women experience before acquiring their PhD and their age at the time of completing the PhD programme when considering candidates for postdoctoral opportunities to ensure that women are not excluded as a result of overage.

Finally, a platform for women academics needs to be established in HEi or revived if moribund to create a network and space for emerging scholars to interact and receive mentorship from the older generation of scholars. This will create alternative platform for networking among women academics locally without fear of being stereotyped.

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