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APPRAISING PROSPECTIVE FEMALE GRADUATE PROFESSIONALS FOR CAREER IN NIGERIA'S CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This research identifies the constraints that are limiting the entry of female graduate professionals into the construction industry in Nigeria. The constraints include; sex related issues, lack of role models and socio-cultural/ traditional beliefs common to a developing country like Nigeria. The paper provides recommendations on how these barriers can be addressed to encourage more female graduates to enter the construction industry in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Productivity of the construction industry in Nigeria like in most developing countries has become a topical issue (Izam and Adeagbo, 1999). The industry is reported to have the challenging problem of productivity. This informed the observation by Ling and Poh (2004), that it is important to attract and retain graduate women with appropriate construction related qualifications and skills in the construction industry. If a substantial number of trained professionals do not enter the industry, the construction industry will suffer.

A salient question this paper is addressing is, what would constitute a barrier to the female graduate in Architecture and Building from entering or joining the construction industry in Nigeria? The answer is in form of identifying the challenges female professionals face in the industry. This was borne out of concern for female Architects, who upon graduation decline to join architectural practice. However, the observation is not peculiar to architectural practice but common in other professions in building industries across countries of the world.

BARRIERS TO WOMEN ENTERING THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Barriers to women entering and working in the construction industry have been identify by Bennett et al (1999) to include: the industry's masculine image, construction related career knowledge amongst students and adults, selection criteria for male dominated courses, recruitment practices and procedures, sexiest attitudes, male dominated culture, and the work environment.

Dainty et al (2000) In: Ling and Poh (2004) suggested that a woman's carrier strategy is influenced by external and internal factors. External factors includes; working conditions and sexist attitude among industry players that make a construction career unattractive, while internal factors relates to personal attributes, circumstances, characteristics and abilities. Bennett et al (1999) observed that in the construction industry, male values are considered, the 'Norm', a norm that is rewarded and constitutes among others, long working hours, competition, independence and full-time working. Women that join the industry are hence compelled to adapt. Dainty et al (2001) could not but agree with the statement "male values implies construction industry values" which is explained to mean that even among males, construction values may not change over night. Gale (1994) further explains that while males see it as "the norm", the female workers see it as being a "fit-in" situation.

While the aforementioned authors are concern with the identified common barriers, Mallon and Cohen (2001) in their findings discovered that some women do not see employment in the construction industry as means of career advancement. Another area of concern is the lack of role models that can be identified easily by the would-be professionals and where they do exist, they lacked the will to challenge the unfavourable system (Ellison 2001). Moreover, these barriers still exist regardless of the fact that there are a good number of women in the industry. However, Adeyemi et al, 2006 adduced that those notable barriers in the Nigerian construction industry are related to socio-cultural beliefs and values prevailing among the amalgamated multi-ethnic groups constituting Nigeria. Work conducted by Kranda and Rismussen (1993) In: Yates (2001) establishes that organizational structure is believed to affect career chances for women. This is on the premise that a flexible network is better than rigid hierarchical types.

METHODOLOGY

The research work was carried out mainly amongst female undergraduate students in Architecture and Building Departments of three Nigerian Universities, namely; University of Jos, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, and Ahmadu Bello University. These are students have gone through the Student Industrial Work Experience Schemes (SIWES) across all geographical zones of Nigeria.

Questionnaire is the instrument used to collect data on the barriers these prospective female professionals are likely to face in the construction industry. 70 questionnaires were administered to the female students. All questionnaires were returned but only 61 were useable, representing 87%.

Responses were rated based on SA = strongly agree, A = Agree, NS = Not Sure, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree and percentages of respondents were taken. The data collected from the respondents were analyzed based on the computation of mean rating (MR) of each variable by the respondents within a given range of rating from 1 to 5.

The mean rating (MR) is given as:

$$MR = \sum_{r=1}^{5} (Rp \times Pr\%)$$

Where, Rp = Rating point ranging from 1 5
Pr = Percentage response

The barriers that form the basis for this study were categorized into:

- Nature and condition of the industry
- Sex related barriers
- Lack of role model
- Socio-cultural and traditional beliefs
- Additional technical skills.

The MR was used to determine the most significant barrier considered a challenge to the female professionals in the construction industry. Moreover, apart from the above listed barriers identified for the study, a question was included requiring the respondents to indicate their interest in entering the construction industry upon graduation.

FINDINGS

The results of the field survey confirmed the five (5) major barriers as hindrances to the female graduate professionals in the construction industry.

Nature and Structure of Industry: The nature and structure of the construction industry in Nigeria scares the respondents the most, with an alarming 78% strongly agreeing to it. This also has the highest MR

value as shown in table 1, which is perceived to be the most significant barrier that hinders female graduates from entry into the construction industry in Nigeria.

Sex Related Barriers: Those who considered sex related barriers a hindrance seem to vary in their opinion. About 44% of the respondents strongly agree, closely followed by another 34% who disagree to this barrier. This varied opinion is justified by the low rating of this factor by the respondents, which resulted in having the least MR value.

Lack of Role Models: Since the nature and structure of the construction industry is such that the female professionals always frown at, it is difficult to find them as role models. The data in table 1 shows that 65.5% of the respondents strongly agree that lack of role models is a barrier to the female graduate professionals.

TABLE 1 Barriers Hindering Female Graduate from Entry into the Construction Industry in Nigeria.

Rating Point (RP)	5		4		3		2		1				
BARRIERS	**SA**	**Pr %**	**A**	**Pr %**	**NS**	**Pr %**	**D**	**Pr %**	**SD**	**Pr %**	**MR**	**RO**	**TR**
Nature and Structure of Industry - Its masculine nature - Tedious and stressful - Long working hours - Low level image	48	78.1	9	14.7	4	6.5	0	0	0	0	4.69	1	61
Sex Related Barriers - Fear of Sexual harassment - Male domination - Stereotyping etc.	27	44.2	8	13.1	0	0	2.4	39.3	1	1.6	3.54	5	61
Lack of Role Model - Fewer women in the industry - Inability of women to change the industry.	40	65.5	13	21.3	1	1.6	7	11.4	0	0	4.40	3	61
Additional Technical Skills	10	16.3	36	59	5	8.1	10	16.3	0	0	3.75	4	61
Socio-Cultural and Traditional Barriers - Subordinate treatment to to women - Unlikely to get suitors - Family comes first.	44	72.1	10	16.3	0	0	6	9.8	1	1.6	4.47	2	61
General Question - Are you joining the construction industry upon graduation?	9	14.7	12	19.6	38	62.8	2	3.2	0	0	3.45	6	61

Degree of Rating: Strongly Agree = SA; Agree = A; Not Sure = NS; Disagree = D; Strongly Disagree = SD. MR = Mean Rating; RO = Ranking Order; Rp = Rating \Point; Pr = Percentage of Respondents; TR = Total Respondents

Source: Field Survey

Additional Technical Skills: Additional technical skill recorded 59% who agree, while 16% strongly agree having the same percentage as those who disagree. However, five females who represent 8% were not sure and 16% disagree. From the MR value, this barrier is as significant as the nature and structure of industry, and lack of role models.

Socio-cultural and Traditional Barriers: This is ranked as the second most significant barrier to the female graduates. Socio-cultural and traditional barriers seem a very strong barrier to the respondents as a high percentage of about 88% seem to agree while, only 11% of the respondents disagree. Even as socio-cultural and traditional belief recorded a high percentage but it is also observed that the number of women in the construction industry is on the increase. However, the current increasing trend in the level of participation of women in the Nigerian construction industry may not necessarily translate into adequate representation.

The general question asked was meant to ascertained level of interest of the female undergraduates in the construction industry. From the investigation, 62% of the respondents were not sure of joining the construction industry. This indecision resulted from the impact of such barriers as; the nature and structure of industry, socio-cultural and traditional barriers, and lack of role models. In addition, the respondents consider the industry unfriendly in nature due to the long working hours; low-level image and the stress associated with working with their male counterparts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Female undergraduate students in Architecture and building departments in the Nigerian Universities, who are prospective professionals for the construction industry, are very much aware of what constitutes barrier and the extent these barriers will prevent them from entering the construction industry. The nature and structure of the industry is the most critical of these barriers while sex related barriers are the least. The study also reveals that more females are not likely to join the construction industry upon graduation. This call for concern and the basis for the following recommendations;

- There is the need to improve the nature and structure of working condition in construction companies. They should minimize labour intensive nature of professionals' work by employing the use of mechanization and the application of information technology (IT).
- The management of companies in the industry should tackle sex-related issues more seriously, by the use of punishment to offenders. Constant self-audit to ascertain whether such practices exist would help check this impediment.
- Male professionals should be encouraged to serve as mentors to the young female entrants and help to break the stereotype being experienced in the industry presently. The female professionals in management position of the industry should take the issue of role models seriously.
- A female professional with requisite qualifications, should be seen as a capable hand until proved otherwise.
- Female professionals should avail their practices to younger female professionals for tutelage and further exposure and experience which will enhanced their readiness for the construction industry.

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