

Gender bias and barriers to women's career advancement in the civil service of Kebbi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates gender bias and the barriers to women's career advancement within the civil service sector in Kebbi State. Specifically, it examines the areas where women face unfair treatment in their professional careers, the obstacles they encounter while progressing in their jobs, and the coping strategies that could enhance their career development. The research adopts a cross-sectional descriptive design, involving 198 female employees selected from the ministries through random sampling. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to gather data and was analyzed using SPSS version 28.0. Three research questions and corresponding hypotheses were formulated to test the study's variables. The research questions were addressed using descriptive statistics, such as the frequency and percentage of cases. The Mann-Whitney U-test was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. The results of the first hypothesis indicated notable differences in experiences of gender bias between junior and senior staff, suggesting that job position influences how employees perceive and experience gender bias in their workplace. The second hypothesis revealed marked differences in cultural beliefs between junior and senior staff, indicating that job position affects how employees experience and perceive cultural beliefs regarding women's careers. The third hypothesis demonstrated no statistically significant difference between junior and senior staff regarding their perceptions of the impact of coping strategies on women's career progression, suggesting that both junior and senior staff generally share similar views on the role of coping strategies in career advancement. The study offers targeted recommendations to foster an equitable working environment for women in the civil service and to enhance their career prospects.

Introduction

Gender equality in the workplace remains a critical issue globally, particularly in public sector institutions such as the civil service, where disparities in career opportunities often persist. Despite the growing advocacy for women's rights and gender inclusivity, structural and cultural barriers continue to hinder women's career advancement, especially in developing regions. The civil service is essential for creating fair policies. However, gender bias within the system often impedes women's ability to attain leadership roles and professional growth, undermining organisational diversity and effectiveness. Globally, the labour force participation rate for women is below 47%, compared to 72% for men, reflecting a difference of 25 percentage points (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2022, p. 2). Sub-Saharan African countries exhibit a complex landscape regarding gender inequality in the workplace, characterised by both significant challenges and some progress. The region has maintained a relatively high female labour force participation rate, which stood at 62% in 2021 (Broccolini et al. 2024, p. 11). Despite these figures, women in Sub-Saharan Africa continue to face substantial barriers to achieving equality in employment and economic opportunities.

In Nigeria, the challenges women face in the workforce are well-documented, yet their experiences within the civil service – particularly at the state level – remain underexplored. Kebbi State, like many other states in the country, is characterised by a patriarchal society that reinforces gender-based stereotypes and limits women's access to equal opportunities. Kebbi State, located in the northwestern region of Nigeria, presents a unique context for exploring gender dynamics in the workplace. The state is characterised by strong patriarchal traditions that shape social and professional interactions. Women's empowerment is impeded by the absence of a regulatory framework that defends and protects their rights. Gender-based violence and religious misconceptions about their social status often confine them to roles focused on reproduction and domestic maintenance. This situation adversely affects their rights (Kebbi State Development Plan, 2022).

Though women play a vital role in public administration, there is insufficient empirical research identifying their specific challenges. Existing studies on gender inequality in Nigeria (e.g. Emeka, 2023; Oyoru, 2023; Oluwatoyin, 2022; Okoye et al., 2022; Ikwuegbu, 2022; Idike et al., 2020) focus on broader national issues, such as women in politics and political positions, leaving a gap in localised research on the experiences of women in state-level civil service. This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the prevalence of gender biases and identifying the barriers that restrict women's career progression within the civil service in Kebbi State.

1. Aim of the study

This study examines gender bias and the barriers to women's career advancement within the civil service in Kebbi State.

2. Research questions

1. What forms of gender bias are experienced in the civil service in Kebbi state?
2. What barriers do women face in career progression within the civil service in Kebbi State?
3. What coping strategies are adopted by women in the civil service in Kebbi State?

3. Research hypotheses

H₀₁: Gender stereotypes do not significantly influence women's career progression in the Kebbi State civil service.

H₀₂: Cultural beliefs do not significantly influence women's participation in leadership roles in the civil service in Kebbi State.

H₀₃: Coping strategies do not significantly influence women's career progression in the civil service in Kebbi State.

4. Theoretical review

This paper is guided by liberal feminist theory and social role theory, which explain how women are viewed by society.

5. Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism seeks gender equality through legal and institutional reforms within existing societal structures, emphasising equal rights, protections, and opportunities for men and women (Jaggar, 1983). Unlike radical feminism, which calls for dismantling patriarchal systems, liberal feminism works within current frameworks to advocate for policy changes such as anti-discrimination laws, equal pay, and workplace protections. It focuses on merit-based access to employment and leadership roles, challenging gender stereotypes and supporting measures like gender-sensitive recruitment and leadership development programmes for women (Freedman, 2002). While liberal feminism has driven significant legal advancements, critics argue that it often overlooks persistent social and economic inequalities and has historically centred on the experiences of middle-class, educated women, neglecting intersectional concerns (Crenshaw, 1991). Despite these criticisms, liberal feminism remains influential in shaping workplace policies and promoting gender equality, especially in settings like the civil service, by advocating for reforms that foster equal opportunities for women.

6. Social role theory

Alice H. Eagly's social role theory (1987) explains gender differences as resulting from both biological and social influences, particularly the division of labour that arises from physical differences between men and women (Eagly, 1987; Eagly, Wood, 2016). This division fosters the creation of gender roles and stereotypes, which are internalised through socialisation processes involving

family, peers, teachers, and media. These roles and stereotypes significantly shape behaviour and expectations throughout an individual's life (Eagly, Wood, 2016; Krainc, Dance-Schissel, 2023). Societal beliefs reinforce these roles, linking women to caregiving responsibilities and men to leadership and competitive roles. This impacts occupational opportunities and contributes to gender disparities, particularly in management, where traits associated with leadership are often seen as masculine (Eagly, Steffen, 1984; Schein, 1973). Socialisation encourages adherence to these roles, thereby limiting opportunities for individuals who do not conform. However, critics of social role theory argue that it places too much emphasis on socialisation and cultural expectations, while neglecting institutional and structural barriers, such as workplace discrimination and unequal pay (Ridgeway, 2011). Despite these critiques, it remains essential to understand how gender roles and stereotypes influence workplace biases to develop policies that foster inclusivity and equal opportunities. Combining insights from social role theory with liberal feminist perspectives can aid organisations and policymakers in effectively addressing gender disparities in the workforce (Eagly, Wood, 2016; Krainc, Dance-Schissel, 2023).

7. Literature review

7.1. Legislative framework on gender inequality and women's empowerment

Nigeria is committed to promoting gender equality through various international and regional frameworks. It is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which emphasises the importance of providing equal opportunities for women in education and employment. On the continental level, Nigeria supports the African Union's Strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) for 2018–2028, designed to overcome barriers to gender equality and enhance women's empowerment throughout Africa. At the national level, the 1999 Constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex and ensures equality and justice for all citizens (1999 Constitution of FRN as amended). The Nigerian Labour Act outlines employment conditions and includes protective provisions for women (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). Additionally, the National Gender Policy (2006) aims to incorporate gender considerations into development plans, to boost women's participation and career advancement. Despite these legal and policy frameworks, challenges in implementation persist, particularly regarding budgetary allocations and monitoring mechanisms, which have often failed to adequately address women's needs. Nevertheless, Nigeria's commitments at international and national levels reflect its ongoing efforts to combat discrimination and promote equal career opportunities for women.

7.2. Women's career advancement: Barriers and challenges

The issue of women's career advancement has received considerable attention in academic literature. Scholars have explored various ideological perspectives, socio-cultural beliefs, organisational practices, and family responsibilities that influence career progression for women.

7.3. Gender stereotypes

The theoretical perspective of gender stereotyping explains the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles. Nartey et al. (2023) found that gender bias against female senior officers in Ghana arises from perceptions of poor personal-job fit, affecting performance evaluations and career advancement. This bias reflects societal resistance to women in leadership, as gender stereotypes link leadership skills with traditionally male traits (Eagly, Wood, 2016). Gender stereotyping also influences career choices, with professions often categorised as "male-dominated" (politics, engineering, finance) or "female-oriented" (nursing, teaching, administration), rooted in early socialisation. Sahumani et al. (2023) highlight cultural barriers that hinder women's career success at the University of Limpopo, South Africa. Despite legislative advancements since 1994, women remain underrepresented in senior management and academia, facing obstacles like the glass ceiling, which requires them to work harder than their male peers.

7.4. Glass ceiling

The glass ceiling phenomenon is a persistent barrier that hinders women and minority groups from advancing to leadership roles. Bermudez-Figueroa and Beltran Roca (2022) noted that both formal and informal workplace structures contribute to gender inequality in the Spanish public administration, with patriarchal cultures limiting women's professional growth. Orubu and Oboreh (2016) and Emeka (2023) conducted separate studies in Nigeria, that revealed women frequently experience exclusion, invisibility, and isolation, all of which greatly hinder their career advancement. A 2021 GAO report highlighted systemic discrimination against women, including being overlooked for promotions, receiving less recognition, and facing gendered stereotypes and harassment.

7.5. Family responsibilities

In many African societies, including Nigeria, deep-rooted cultural norms place domestic responsibilities on women, often at the expense of their careers. Kpanja and Umar (2018) observed that traditional expectations, shaped by moral and religious beliefs, reinforce the perception that men are natural providers, while women are expected to assume subordinate roles at home and in the workplace. This gendered division of labour often forces women to prioritise family obligations over professional aspirations. Muhammed and Usman (2007) examined female labour turnover in the Kebbi State Civil Service and found that family pressure was the leading cause of women leaving their jobs prematurely. Ngulube and Thelma (2024) observed in their study in Zambia that women in leadership often face significant challenges due to the combined pressures of family

responsibilities and societal expectations. The need to balance career aspirations with caregiving duties creates a constant struggle, as they navigate demanding professional roles while fulfilling traditional family obligations. There is a lack of knowledge about how gender biases and barriers impact women's career advancement in Kebbi State. Therefore, research is needed to unveil the social, cultural, family responsibilities, and organisational barriers that limit women's career advancement. This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the prevalence of gender biases and identifying the challenges to women's career progression within the civil service in Kebbi State. It also assesses coping strategies and potential policy interventions to foster a more inclusive and supportive work environment for female employees.

8. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate gender bias and barriers to women's advancement in the civil service in Kebbi State. The descriptive survey design is suitable because it facilitates the use of a questionnaire and the selection of a substantial sample size for data collection. The questionnaire comprised twenty items focused on gender bias and the obstacles to women's career advancement in the Kebbi State civil service. It was organised into four sections: A, B, C, and D. Section A contained items collecting personal data such as age, educational qualifications, years of work experience in the civil service, and job position. Section B included five items on gender bias experienced within the civil service, Section C contained five items addressing barriers to women's advancement, and Section D presented five items outlining women's coping strategies. The target population comprised civil servants working in the state, with 198 respondents selected as the sample size. Researchers employed a purposive sampling method to ensure adequate representation of different groups within the population. The population was stratified into senior and junior staff categories, and specific respondents were selected from two key ministries: Education and Health. To establish the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by two experts from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria. Their feedback on the content, relevance, and alignment with the research questions and objectives was incorporated to refine the instrument. A pilot study was conducted to assess the reliability of the research instrument. Fifteen respondents from the Kebbi State Ministry of Education took part in the pilot test. The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), and a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.82 was obtained. Given that a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is generally considered acceptable in social science research, this result confirmed that the instrument was reliable for the study. The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics to provide comprehensive insights into the research findings.

9. Data presentation and analysis

Research question one: What forms of gender bias are experienced in the civil service in Kebbi state?

Table 1. Bias experienced by women in the civil service

Variable	N	Responses Percent	Percent of Cases
Bias in recruitment and promotion policies.	174	21.5%	87.9%
Unequal pay compared to male counterparts.	46	5.7%	23.2%
Exclusion from leadership positions.	139	17.2%	70.2%
The assumption that women are less competent.	170	21.0%	85.9%
Being assigned fewer challenging tasks.	168	20.8%	84.8%
Workplace harassment and intimidation.	112	13.8%	56.6%
Total	809	100.0%	408.6%

Table 1 above presents the frequency analysis of different gender biases experienced in the civil service in Kebbi State. It employs a dichotomous approach, counting responses if a person reports experiencing at least one type of bias. The total number of responses (809) is distributed across six categories of bias. The “Percent of Cases” column (408.6%) indicates that many respondents reported experiencing multiple biases. The most frequently reported biases include: (a) bias in recruitment and promotion policies (21.5% of responses, 87.9% of cases); (b) the assumption that women are less competent (21.0%, 85.9% of cases), and; (c) being assigned less challenging tasks (20.8%, 84.8% of cases). Other biases encompass exclusion from leadership positions (17.2% of responses, 70.2% of cases) and workplace harassment and intimidation (13.8% of responses, 56.6% of cases). The percentage of cases reporting workplace harassment and intimidation is lower than expected, given the prevalence of other biases. This may suggest underreporting due to fear or a lack of appropriate reporting channels. The least reported bias is unequal pay (5.7% of responses, 23.2% of cases), indicating that most respondents are unaware of pay disparity.

Research question two: What barriers do women face in career progression within the civil service in Kebbi State?

Table 2. Barriers faced by women in the civil service

Variable	N	Responses Percent	Percent of Cases
Limited recruitment and promotion opportunities.	175	23.5%	88.4%
Excluded from decision-making roles.	108	14.5%	54.5%
Lack of mentorship and professional support.	106	14.2%	53.5%
Gender stereotypes that limit leadership roles for women.	184	24.7%	92.9%
Unequal pay compares to male counterparts.	50	6.7%	25.3%
Balancing work and family responsibilities.	122	16.4%	61.6%
Total	745	100.0%	376.3%

Table 2 above shows the different workplace barriers that women face. The total percentage (376.3%) suggests that many respondents experience multiple challenges at the same time. The most commonly reported barrier is gender stereotypes that limit leadership roles (92.9%). Most respondents see this as the main obstacle, which may explain the low number of women in senior positions and the slower career progression they face. Another key issue is limited recruitment and promotion opportunities (88.4%). Many respondents feel that workplace structures make securing jobs and advancing their careers harder. Balancing work and family responsibilities (61.6%) is also a significant challenge, likely due to inadequate parental leave, limited childcare support, and inflexible work arrangements. Other concerns include exclusion from decision-making roles (54.5%) and a lack of mentorship and professional support (53.5%), which make career growth and access to leadership position more difficult. Interestingly, unequal pay compared to male colleagues (25.3%) is the least reported issue, suggesting that other workplace challenges are perceived as more urgent.

Research question three: What coping strategies are adopted by women in the civil service in Kebbi State?

Table 3. Coping strategies adopted by women

Variables	N	Responses Percent	Percent of cases
Seek support from colleagues, mentors, or women's networks.	109	20.7%	55.1%
Report discrimination to relevant authorities.	93	17.6%	47.0%
Work harder to prove competence and gain recognition.	119	22.6%	60.1%
Ignore challenges and focus on personal goals.	140	26.6%	70.7%
Consider leaving the job or switching career paths.	66	12.5%	33.3%
Total	527	100.0%	266.2%

Table 3 above presents how respondents handle workplace discrimination and bias. The total percentage of cases, at 266.2%, implies that many respondents employ multiple coping strategies. The most prevalent mechanisms include: (a) ignoring challenges and concentrating on personal goals (70.7%). This is the top response, suggesting that numerous women choose to disconnect emotionally and mentally from workplace discrimination; (b) striving harder to demonstrate competence and gain recognition (60.1%). This indicates that women feel compelled to excel and achieve career progression; (c) seeking assistance from colleagues, mentors, or networks (55.1%). This demonstrates that over half of the respondents depend on peer support or mentorship to manage workplace bias. Other less frequently reported strategies are reporting discrimination to authorities (47.0%) – hinting at fear or scepticism that complaints may not prompt meaningful action– and contemplating leaving their job or changing careers (33.3%), which suggests that organisations risk losing talented employees if they do not address bias and discrimination.

10. Research hypotheses

1. Gender stereotypes do not significantly influence women's career progression in the Kebbi State civil service.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U-test on variation in gender stereotypes based on job position

Variable	Job Position	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	W	Z	P
Gender stereotypes	Junior Staff	47	79.73	3747.5	2619.5	3747.5	-2.815	0.005
	Senior Staff	151	105.65	15953.5				

The Mann-Whitney U-test was conducted to test the null hypothesis that gender stereotypes do not significantly affect women's career progression within the Kebbi State civil service. The analysis revealed notable differences in experiences of gender bias between junior and senior staff; the mean value for senior staff (105.65) was higher than the mean value for the junior staff (79.73). The results demonstrated a statistically significant distinction between the two groups ($U = 2619.5$, $p = 0.005$), suggesting that job position influences how employees perceive and experience gender bias in their workplace. The negative Z-score (-2.815) from the Mann-Whitney U test indicates that junior staff face a greater degree of gender bias compared to their senior counterparts. The significance level ($p = 0.005$) reinforces that this observed difference is unlikely to have occurred by random chance. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected.

2. Cultural beliefs do not significantly influence women's participation in leadership roles in the civil service in Kebbi State.

Table 5. Mann-Whitney U-test on variation in cultural beliefs based on job position

Variable	Job Position	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	W	Z	P
Cultural beliefs	Junior Staff	47	68.35	3212.5	2084.5	3212.5	-4.529	0.001
	Senior Staff	151	109.20	16488.5				

The Mann-Whitney U-test was conducted to test the null hypothesis that cultural beliefs do not significantly influence women in leadership roles in the civil service in Kebbi State. The analysis revealed marked differences in cultural beliefs between junior and senior staff. The average value for senior staff (109.20) surpassed that of the junior staff (68.35). Since the senior staff had a higher mean rank, they perceive a substantial influence of cultural beliefs on women's careers, unlike their junior counterparts. The results demonstrated a statistically significant distinction between the two groups ($U = 2084.5$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that job position affects how employees experience and perceive cultural beliefs regarding women's careers. The negative Z-score (-4.529) from

the Mann-Whitney U-test indicates a substantial difference between the groups. The significance level ($p = 0.001$) suggests that we reject the null hypothesis, indicating that junior and senior staff significantly differ in their perceptions of how cultural beliefs affect women's careers. Senior staff recognise that cultural beliefs impact women's career progression more strongly than their junior counterparts.

3. Coping strategies do not significantly influence women's career progression in the civil service in Kebbi State.

Table 6. Mann-Whitney U-test on variation in coping strategies based on job position

Variable	Job Position	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	W	Z	P
Coping Strategies	Junior Staff	47	108.88	5117.5	3107.5	14584	-1.32	0.187
	Senior Staff	151	96.58	14583.5				

The Mann-Whitney U-test was used to test the null hypothesis that coping strategies do not significantly influence women's career progression in the Kebbi State civil service. The analysis revealed slight differences in coping strategies between junior and senior staff. The average value for junior staff (108.8) was slightly higher than that of the senior staff (96.5). The results ($U = 3107.5$, $p = 0.187$), demonstrated that there was no statistically significant difference between junior and senior staff in how they perceive the impact of coping strategies on women's career progression. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. The negative Z-score (-1.320) from the Mann-Whitney U test indicates only a small difference between the groups, suggesting that both junior and senior staff generally share similar views on the role of coping strategies in career advancement.

11. Discussion of the findings

The study investigated the pervasive gender bias and obstacles to advancing women's careers within the civil service sector of Kebbi State. Eight hundred and nine responses were collected on gender bias experienced in the civil service, categorised into six distinct types. The "Percent of Cases" column indicates a cumulative figure of 408.6%, suggesting that many respondents reported experiencing multiple forms of bias. The most notable biases identified include: (a) biases in recruitment and promotion policies, accounting for 21.5% of the responses and reported by 87.9% of the cases; (b) beliefs that women are less competent, comprising 21.0% of the responses and prevalent in 85.9% of the cases; and (c) the assignment of fewer challenging tasks, reported by 20.8% of respondents and noted in 84.8% of the cases. These findings revealed the existence of entrenched gender biases within the workplace, necessitating substantial policy reforms, cultural transformations, and heightened accountability among those in leadership roles. This finding aligns with Nartey et al. (2023), who discovered, among other things, that gender bias against female senior officers is significantly influenced by perceptions of a poor alignment between

personal attributes and job requirements, adversely affecting performance evaluations and career advancement of women.

Regarding the different workplace barriers that women face, many respondents (745), with a total percentage of (376.3%), experienced multiple challenges simultaneously. The most commonly reported barrier is gender stereotypes that limit leadership roles (92.9%). Many respondents regard this as a significant hurdle, which could account for the limited number of women in senior roles and the gradual career advancement they experience. Another main barrier is limited recruitment and promotion opportunities (88.4%). The respondents feel that workplace structures make securing jobs and advancing their careers harder. Balancing work and family responsibilities (61.6%) is also a significant challenge, likely due to inadequate parental leave, limited childcare support, and inflexible work arrangements. This finding underscores the importance of recognising workplace barriers as a significant hurdle to women's career advancement. The result is consistent with Emeka's (2023) research, which noted that discrimination against women limits their involvement in decision-making roles and consequently lowers the Human Development Index (HDI) of Enugu State. Similarly, Sahumani et al. (2023) found in their study on the barriers that influence women's career success at the University of Limpopo in South Africa found that women were underrepresented in senior management and academia.

The coping strategies employed by the respondents include: (a) ignoring challenges and concentrating on personal goals (70.7%); this is the top response, suggesting that numerous women choose to disconnect emotionally and mentally from workplace discrimination; (b) striving harder to demonstrate competence and gain recognition (60.1%). This indicates that women feel compelled to excel and achieve career progression; and (c) seeking assistance from colleagues, mentors, or networks (55.1%). The findings generally reveal that many women navigate workplace discrimination by overworking, ignoring challenges, or seeking peer support, while relatively few report issues or consider quitting. However, low trust in the management and the risk of talent loss underscore the need for stronger organisational policies, fairer evaluations, and better support systems. The study corroborates the Sahumani et al. (2023) in South Africa, that women were underrepresented in senior management and academia due to the glass ceiling and gender stereotyping, necessitating that they work harder than their male counterparts.

The Mann-Whitney U-test was conducted to evaluate the null hypothesis that gender stereotypes do not significantly impact women's career progression within the Kebbi State civil service. The analysis revealed notable differences in the experiences of gender bias between junior and senior staff. The mean score for senior staff (105.65) was higher than that of junior staff (79.73). The results demonstrated a statistically significant distinction between the two groups ($U = 2619.5$, $p = 0.005$), suggesting that job position influences how employees perceive and experience gender bias in their workplace. The senior staff's belief that cultural norms significantly affect women's careers implies that deeply entrenched cultural attitudes may influence career advancement. Ngu-lube and Thelma (2024) also observed in a study on obstacles to women's leadership advancement in Zambia that societal norms, biases, and cultural expectations frequently reinforce gender stereotypes, resulting in systemic challenges for women seeking leadership positions. A similar

study was conducted by Kpanja and Umar (2018) in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, regarding the impact of gender imbalance on civil service productivity. The authors noted that gender imbalance persists in the civil service and is deeply rooted in the culture and traditions of the people, thus influencing their working conditions.

The Mann-Whitney U-test was conducted to assess the null hypothesis that cultural beliefs do not significantly influence women in leadership roles within the civil service in Kebbi State. The analysis revealed notable differences in cultural beliefs between junior and senior staff. The average score for senior staff (109.5) was higher than that of junior staff (68.3), indicating that senior staff perceive a greater impact of cultural beliefs on women's careers than their junior counterparts. The results demonstrated a statistically significant difference between the two groups ($U = 2084.5$, $p = 0.001$), implying that job position affects how employees experience and perceive cultural beliefs regarding women's careers. The negative Z-score (-4.5259) from the Mann-Whitney U-test signifies a substantial difference between the groups. The significance level ($p = 0.001$) indicates that we reject the null hypothesis, highlighting that junior and senior staff significantly differ in their perceptions of how cultural beliefs influence women's careers. Senior staff acknowledge that cultural beliefs impact women's career progression more than their junior counterparts. Junior staff may be less aware of cultural barriers, as they have not yet encountered challenges related to leadership roles and promotions; thus, senior staff aspiring to higher positions may be more aware of how cultural beliefs influence career progression among women. Women's career advancement has faced challenges, including formal and informal dynamics that undervalue women's work (Bermudez-Figueroa, Roca, 2022; Muhammed, Usman, 2007).

The Mann-Whitney U-test was conducted to evaluate the null hypothesis that coping strategies do not significantly influence women's career progression within the Kebbi State civil service. The analysis disclosed slight variations in coping strategies between junior and senior staff. The average value for junior staff (108.8) was slightly higher than that of the senior staff (96.5). The results ($U = 3107.5$, $p = 0.187$) indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between junior and senior staff in their perceptions of the impact of coping strategies on women's career progression. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. The negative Z-score (-1.320) from the Mann-Whitney U test highlights only a minor difference between the groups, suggesting that both junior and senior staff generally share similar views on the role of coping strategies in career advancement. This implies that coping strategies are crucial across all career levels. Women possess an innate understanding of the strategies that can aid them in navigating career challenges, regardless of their experience and positions. Networking emerges as a vital tool, enabling women to forge significant connections that could yield new opportunities, insights, and support systems. Through shared experiences and collaborative efforts, these professional networks nurture a sense of community and belonging. Mentorship is fundamental in this context, providing guidance and encouragement from individuals who have traversed similar professional paths (Ekiye, Wechi, 2023). The insights offered by mentors play a significant role in fostering personal and professional development, empowering women to build confidence, define objectives, and develop the skills required to overcome obstacles. Furthermore, resilience is another

pivotal characteristic nurtured by women. This attribute exemplifies their capacity to persevere through adversity, often rooted in past experiences that demanded adaptation and overcoming challenges. Such experiences enable women to emerge with enhanced strength and determination to attain career success and fulfilment.

Conclusions

In this exploration of gender bias and the obstacles faced by women in pursuit of career advancement within the civil service sector of Kebbi State, the study revealed that entrenched gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs play a substantial role in the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within this context. The presence of cultural norms and longstanding traditions appears to sustain gender bias, thereby constraining the opportunities available to women for progression into elevated positions. Furthermore, the analysis showed that gender stereotypes have a significant impact on women's career trajectories within the civil service, emphasising that the specific position an employee occupies influences their perception and experience of gender bias in the workplace. The prevailing belief among senior staff members that cultural norms considerably affect women's careers underscores the notion that deeply rooted cultural attitudes may impede career advancement for women. The study also found that coping strategies do not significantly affect women's career progression. This observation highlights only a marginal difference in opinions between junior and senior staff, suggesting a consensus regarding the limited role of coping strategies in facilitating career advancement. Therefore, the study advocates for policymakers to create a more equitable environment for women in the civil service, ultimately enhance their career prospects and contributions to society.

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