

Lack of Parental Gender Socialization of Children at Family Level and its Effects on Adulthood Gender Discrimination in Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses holistic integration of gender concepts at tender ages. This study aimed to investigate parents' participation in socializing children to gender equality and assess the effect of lack of parental socialization of children to gender equality. Three hundred and fifty (350) respondents were purposively selected from Kicukiro, Bugesera, Musanze, Nyanza and Nyamasheke. Data were collected through questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussion and qualitatively analyzed using content analysis. Findings revealed that there is lack of parental gender socialization of children as it is negatively perceived in Rwandan families. Gender equality is perceived by 75 % of respondents to be the cause of family conflicts and violence. Furthermore, 69% of all respondents accuse the theory of gender equality to divert females from their responsibilities which results in family dysfunctionality. In addition, 42% of respondents consider gender equality as a way of western people to disorganize developing countries. Lack of parental gender socialization of children at family level affects children's adulthood. It presents enormous and long-lasting consequences to both females and males. Respondents confirmed that there is a considerable number of females who did not attend school because fees were reserved to boys. On the other hand, male respondents confirmed that being overpowered in childhood negatively affects adulthood relationship with their wives. Socializing children to gender equality at family level from their tender ages would be one of the best strategies to eradicate Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and discrimination.

Keywords: Gender Socialization, gender perceptions, gender discrimination

INTRODUCTION

Families provide a solid foundation on how children view, analyze and interpret the world. The child development is a continuous process even if it can change with time, education and other circumstances where a child establishes new ways of thinking, solving problems, developing relationships and decision making (Bukatko& Daehler, 2012). Families are able to provide to its offspring constructive or destructive cultural values and norms, among them gender social construct is a vibrant example (Muasya and Muasya, 2020). A stable life is constructed during children's socialization and influences the rest of their lives (Halpern and Jenkins, 2016; Halim et al., 2017). This socialization process is not only what is taught as 'do or do not do this'; it is mostly what children observe, touch, sense, see, hears around. The stability of children characters took its roots in family basic initiation. It is social integration that ensures continuity and consensus of shared values in the community (Giddens & Sutton, 2017).

Socialization is a process by which children learn cultural norms and values of the society into which they are born. It is a range of practices by which the child internalizes values of social system to conform and transform from an asocial being into a fully social adult. Though development of human personality is constructed in families, they accused to nourish at tender ages discriminating ideas. Human personality requires a certain level of stability to build up social relationship and to conform to the constraint of social-cultural context. Conflicted atmosphere at home becomes a handicap to its functions and a heritage to the offspring (Haralambos and Holborn, 2018; Kollmayer et al., 2018).

The notion of gender took its roots firstly in the family. It is an environment of trust where children are socialized with gender social construct. It becomes a legacy which dictates adulthood's behaviors which may not be easily changed with time. Children's gender identities and expressions are shaped within family interactions. It is transmitted throughout generations and accepted as a reality and this situation is not yet tackled. There is lack of parental gender education at tender ages (Eliot, 2010, Halim, 2016). Gender refers to rules, norms and practices by which biological differences are culturally constructed over time and results in unequal treatment and opportunities (Ogato, 2013; Babatunde, 2015; Bayeh, 2016). Gender is recognized as natural; it is considered as an identity and an expression of roles (Newman, 2016; Kroeger et al, 2019). It is socially constructed whereby norms, values and roles are

assigned to males and females based on patriarchal principles which create differences and form two worlds of masculinity and femininity. Male and female children are expected to identify and express themselves as such throughout their lives (Gunn & MacNaughton, 2007). Once children are not socialized with the notion of gender at young age, understanding and respecting gender equality norms and values in adulthood would be reluctant. Hence, gender violence and discrimination originate from lack of parental orientation to gender equality in childhood. Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable nation where females and males have equal rights. Equality does not mean sameness between females and males. This understanding is engrained in children's life through socialization to gender equality and complementarity (Amato, 2012; Baker et al., 2016; Cutas & Smajdor, 2017).

After the Beijing Platform of Action in 1995, all countries have been very sensitive to the problem of gender inequalities and its effect to social capital. This consciousness resulted in the formulation of National Gender Policy to eradicate gender discrimination and all forms of inequalities (Ferrant et al., 2015). It aims at increasing awareness on gender as a development concern, integrates women in decision making, promote their education and strengthening partnerships for the advancement of gender equality (Tundi, 2015). The policy itself does not mention clearly with specific context how to socialize children with values of gender equality it only defines child protection against GBV and the role of grassroots level committees (MIGEPROF, 2010; Bayer, 2016; Ekpe et al., 2016). The world tends to be divided into two major social groups (females and males). The relationship of these two is exploitation, domination, submission and overpower. It is a social hierarchy of power where the elite is reserved specifically to some outstanding men and to all men in comparison to women (Wilbourn & Kee, 2010; Patterson et al., 2017).

Rwanda has approved ten years ago National Gender Policy that addresses gender inequalities and focuses on programs that empower women and girls. However, the organ in charge of its implementation has not yet reached family level (MIGEPROF, 2010). The culture of gender equality is not yet at its success stories in Rwandan families. Discriminating words and actions are still sensed among all categories of ages including children. They are still adapting discriminating behaviors from parents. The early socialization of gender equality at family level

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has been overlooked and this resulted in weak program at cell level to focus on program of gender equality in families as prevention to Gender-Based Violence.

Parents are not yet putting an effort to take advantage to socialize young children with values of gender equality. They are not yet active players in changing home environment of gender bias and discriminations as the ones who first inculcate cultural and social values to young children. Even though women have demonstrated power in different responsibilities at national level, it is not yet the case in families. There is still lack of parental education to gender equality. Families are tight to cultural background which has marginalized women and who in turn accepted passively (Debusscher&Ansoms, 2013, Ekpe et al., 2016). There is a gap concerning children's socialization to gender equality at early age which is a big challenge to the eradication of gender discrimination. From the highlighted gender inequalities which are still observed, there is a need of conducting a study which addresses the root causes of the issue.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of lack of parental gender socialization of children at family level on adulthood gender discrimination in Rwanda. It also highlighted the necessity of socializing children with gender equality as a way of eradicating gender discrimination. The study was motivated by persistent discriminating behavior observed despite Rwanda effort made to stamp it out. The specific objectives were to investigate parents' participation in socializing children to gender equality and assess the effect of lack of parental socialization of children to gender equality.

METHODOLOGY

The study aimed at examining the effect of lack of parental children's gender socialization on adulthood gender discrimination in Rwanda. It was qualitative in its design where researchers attempted to study human action from the perspective of social actors. The primary goal of studies using this approach is to describe and understand human behaviors (Babbie and Mouton, 2010; Neuman, 2011). It intended to address the roots causes of discriminating behaviors in Rwandan communities. Primary data were collected through questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussions from three hundred and fifty (350) respondents purposively selected from Kicukiro, Bugesera,

Musanze, Nyanza and Nyamasheke Districts. The five selected Districts covered urban and rural areas. Seventy respondents were selected in each including both males and females. Purposive sampling was used to select cases that would enable researchers discover information (Saunders et al., 2019). Content analysis was used to systematically categorize, classify and summarize data (Babbie & Mouton, 2010; Kitchin & Tate, 2013). Respondents' ideas were grouped, analysed and interpreted according to themes. In representing respondents' ideas, they were given unreal names for confidentiality.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The section presents and discusses findings related to the topic under study. It highlights respondents' views about the concept of gender discrimination, social construct and beliefs about gender equality. Collected data were related to parents' participation in socializing children to gender equality and effects of lack of parental socialization of children to gender equality.

Parents' participation in socializing children to gender equality

Gender is perceived differently; people misunderstand and misinterpret it. It is perceived as a political issue that has nothing to do with everyday life in the family; a western concept which cannot fit in Africa. A considerable number of respondents (42%) negatively stereotype the concept of gender. The following misconception of gender captures parents' bias on the idea of gender equality. Sharing his point of view, Mia articulated that:

Gender equality is a business of western people to disorganize underdeveloped countries. White people are imposing their culture to Africans; it is a feminist concern that incites African women to rebellion to their husbands. If there are men who are teaching gender equality, it is a way of gaining bread or they are weak men dominated by their wives.

This wrong perception of gender constitutes a barrier to gender education in families and this position has been significantly supported. Early children's education to gender cannot take place in families with such perceptions. Building strong foundation of gender equality necessitates parents' mindset change. Children's socialization to gender equality is not about telling them the ideal behavior. It is providing a good role model to imitate instead of telling them 'do or do not do this'. Children are great imitators, give them something great to imitate. It is mostly what children

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observe, touch, sense, see and hear around which shape their values and beliefs. The stability of children characters took its roots in family basic initiation. It is social integration that ensures continuity and consensus of shared values in the community (Giddens & Sutton, 2017). From this family environment where parents negate the essence of gender equality, they accordingly educate their children. Sharing her experience in group, Fides expressed that: *'My parents gave more value to my young brother and educated him. Discouraged by my parents, I did not attend school and I got married very early.'*

On the other hand, 58 % of respondents clearly understand the concept of gender but supported its contextual consideration. To them, gender refers to socially constructed relationship between men and women where societies determine what deserves to men and women, separation of work, education, resources, family authorities, and so forth. People interpret differently this discriminating family environment because it finds its good reason in societal values and norms. Amongst those who support the genuine definition of gender (58%), a good number of them are female, 67% and males are 33%. Even though they give value to gender equality, they passively accept gender discrimination. Mat explained that: *'If gender discrimination finds its good reason in societal values and norms, there is nothing we can do to change this mindset.'* They are passive consumers of discrimination. Fils emotionally pointed out that: *'It is not good to be negatively labeled in the community. There is no reason to claim about what others have accepted.'* Change has to come from decision makers. This statement got applause in group discussion. Faz strongly supported this position uttering that *'wise wives keep quiet and are submissive to social norms and values in their families to get favor from their husbands.'* Reacting to this point of view, M₂ expressed that: *'Gender discrimination is a problem but time will resolve it, there is no need to fight for gender equality.'* They understand and interpret gender discrimination as a crucial problem, but they fear and negate their role in changing the situation. Families are the foremost actors for changes even though parents have not yet realized that they are engine of positive change. Perceptions of gender do not only consider how it is defined by both females and males. It also tackles how they value each other in family decision making. Gender is accused to have brought in families a strange situation where a husband cannot take decision and inform his wife. If husbands are

looking for the best of their families, there is no need of taking a long time to discuss and have consensus. It would take more time which would be used in implementing decisions. Ziz, quoting the Bible, he alleged that *'there is an exaggeration in gender equality consideration. Created different, gender inequalities is natural, not socially constructed. Before those theories were focused on, family decisions were taken by husbands and no problem was observed.'* To support this position, Xum underlined that: *'Family decision maker is the husband not the wife.'* Zuzu accentuated that: *'the reality is that husbands own the family authority.'* The discussion was too hot because women expressed their anguish to be considered as passive in family decisions. The question on how to change the situation through children socialization to gender equality that empowers family consensus in decision making is not yet clear. Nana articulated that: *'Some of the decisions taken at home affect children and wives are powerless to change them.'* It has been proved that most of family decisions are taken by men without informing their partners. Rwandan society is still tight to its cultural background which has marginalized women and who in turn accepted passively. Fifi emphasized that: *'mostly, what husbands fear to discuss with their wives has some discrete information they do not want to disclose.'* There is a hide and seek game between partners and it does not offer to children something great to imitate and develop a sense of gender equality. Articulating his view, Kin said that: *'Wives have good ideas; they are able to contribute to the development of the family but it is not a must to involve them in family decisions.'* Another issue which was raised by Chak n group discussion was: *'What can happen if the one who takes decision is a wife and informs her husband to adhere to the decision?'*

The question brought opposition between women and men. Men did not stand at the same point. They were in two opposing sides. One side of men (85 %) supported the fact that women have to be submissive to men's decisions. This matches with a Rwandan saying which states that *'when a family is led by a wife, it does not prosper.'* In the same line, men have been socialized from their early age with cultural background of gender discrimination and this tends to remain firm in most of families which is a barrier to children's socialization with values of gender equality.

Nik stated that: *'the ideal is discussing all family issues together and come up with a common decision. Otherwise, wives should also take decision and inform their husbands as they do.'* This position was supported by 15% of men. From the two polemic stands of male

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respondents, both do not reflect the real target and aim of family gender equality where parents give a safe platform to their offspring to learn from what they observe at home. On the other hand, Weno voiced that: *'family decisions have to be taken by husbands and inform their wives'* and this position was supported by the majority of female respondents (53%). Opposing this position, Yowe alleged that: *'family decisions have to be taken jointly'* and she was supported by 46% of women. Challenging the situation where a husband may take decision and inform his wife, Zetu expressed that: *'If my husband can take a decision and inform me, I am also able to do so'* and 1% of female respondents supported the position. The polemic discussion around family decision making revealed that gender equality is not yet well understood at family level which makes complex children's socialization to gender equality where family atmosphere vehiculates unequal power in family decision making.

There is a problem to initiate children to gender equality at early age. Eloy highlighted that: *'women are overloaded by housework without help from their husbands; they are there to give orders and children learn by observation. When they play at tender age, they imitate those behaviors.'* There is a saying supporting this trend which states that 'a man who treats himself as a dog can fetch water' (because fetching water in Rwandan culture has always been a role of women and children). Men could simply be finding a pretext to escape hard work in the name of culture. Fetching water in some rural areas in Rwanda is a very hard work reason why men abdicate the work to their wives. Women consideration did not change with empowerment of girls and women education, entrepreneurs, head of families and bread winners. The modern and postmodern eras still have and entertain gender discrimination (Shen-Miller et al., 2011). Religious beliefs, men selfishness, women's biological nature and passivity regarding their rights are barriers. Men's power to dominate and women's weakness to naïve submission to male's orders do not frame a safe platform for better children's education to gender equality. Passivity is understood and interpreted as a peaceful approach.

The necessity to socialize children to gender equality is not the focus in various families. Maz stated that: *'the theory of gender equality is the root*

cause of family conflicts because of none submission of women to men and lack of respect. Gender Based Violence (GBV) is the result of women's insubordination.' This statement has been supported by 75 % of respondents. In the same line, Lulu underscored that: *'If the government gives too much power to women than ever before, it is a way of inciting family divorce because two heads cannot be cooked in the same pot.'* This is a Rwandan saying that means two powers cannot be together; the subordination is compulsory. If changes that are taking place to promote gender equality are negatively considered, family initiatives may be limited to few that are active agent of changing behaviors. Jig said that: *'focusing on socializing children to gender equality in early childhood destroys calm and simplicity between girls and boys and affects their future families. As a result, any simple conflict in families leads to separation and divorce because they all have power.'* Gender equality is accused to be the root cause of family dysfunctions and divorce. The idea was emphasized by Kal who stated that: *'Gender equality is the origin of family disorder, instead of bringing complementarity, it has brought separation.'* This position was considerably supported by 69 % of respondents. Gender equality is accused to be the major cause of family dysfunction. *'If there is equality in families, it is hard to achieve consensus. One of partners should hold authoritative decision'* uttered Gaj.

Rwandan family environment is full of gender stereotypes and assumptions about gender equality. It continues to nurture gender discrimination and they have justifications. Gender equality is not yet well understood, parents have a lower level of understanding its necessity. This makes complex the application of gender equality in families. If parents themselves do not value gender equality in their families, children's socialization to gender is still far to be reached. Men are considered to be the ones who have power to change things. Discriminating women is an advantage to men; it is a weapon of domination and power. However, women have to peacefully fight for their rights instead of passively accept what is imposed to them. Thus, there is a need of sensitizing parents on the importance of mutually sharing ideas and responsibilities within families. This will help to create conducive family environment to socialize children with gender equality and eradicate gender discrimination.

Effect of lack of parental socialization of children to gender equality

Masculinity and femininity do not wait for formal education to emerge or to be taught. Children are born with physical differences and in relation with their parents; they internalize and socialize with these differences. Through social interactions and play, children set off activities and assert control over their surrounding world. They begin to explore their family environment, learn new concepts and actions (Coles et al., 2002; Alexander & Wilcox, 2012). Till this age, children are under their parents' influence. Negative early experiences of discrimination present consequences in adulthood behaviors. Regarding early children's socialization to gender at family level, Pinc pointed out that:

I grew up in family full of domestic violence, torture, exchange of frustrating words. I have never seen my parents together in sitting room. I considered it as normal till when I was eight years. I went to my uncle's family and I was surprised to see my uncle and his wife laughing, discussing and exchanging encouraging words. This intimidated me at the first time. I could not understand what went wrong in my family. Back home, I started to question my family environment as having a problem. This discriminating family environment has affected me and my brothers' gender identity. Educated, we are not gender sensitive and all the time my brothers consider female as not equal to them even if two of them are married. I do fight to understand what gender equality means but sometimes, I have a self-discriminating behavior.

Quality education at early children's life leads to continued success in their future families (Lancet, 2011). Gender education should start at early age to equip children with positive thinking regarding equal rights and opportunities between males and females. If not done, negative early experience of gender discrimination has long lasting consequences in future. Self-discrimination, insensitivity to gender equality and passive submission to male were acquired in the family atmosphere. At early age, children start to discover that girls and boys are different and if these anatomical differences are not transformed into complementarities by parents and family environment, they are used as a weapon to domination and discrimination. Fofu articulated that:

I am the first born in a family of six girls. My parents were unhappy since the third born and ignored our presence because of a desire to have a baby boy. Sympathizing with their worries, at four years I started behaving like boys. Fighting in vain to be a boy, I was frustrated and confused. I grew up with an inferiority complex in front of males.

Children are very active players in their life development but it is the family environment that equips them with social constructs and ways of thinking, feeling and communicating (Bukatko & Daehler, 2012; Muasya & Kahiga, 2018). If gender bias has to be eradicated, it has to take place firstly in the family to reflect deeply parents' understandings of gender equality. Parents can make more informed decisions and create opportunities to address gender inequalities and biases at family level. Wenu sharing his tender age socialization, expressed that:

I was born in a family of four boys, the whole village named my family to be blessed. I started mistreating girls in nursery school. Even if I received several times teachers' punishments, I felt confident because my Dad addressed ladies as weak and not intelligent. This has affected the relationship with my wife. I am still struggling to adjust my behavior.

When parents consciously or unconsciously engage with children, they are constantly emitting delicate beliefs and values on gender. Ms's parents did not directly address discrimination to their children, but their family discussion has nourished gender discrimination to them. Physical differences are transformed into constructed weakness to make girls inferior and boys superior.

Due to cyclical gender discrimination encountered in families, Chichi expressed that *'The problem of gender discrimination has become so natural and sometimes we do not feel it. As children grow, the sense of self, autonomy and belongingness would pave a way of understanding the opposite sex with mutual respect. Children reflect in the community the language and behavior from parents.'* Family gender expressions affect children's way of thinking, reacting and interacting in adulthood (Bjorklund, 2012). The point was highlighted by Ian stating that: *'at young age, children play and project their future roles. The kind of role they play is grounded on what they observe in their families. A male child may play giving orders to a female child reflecting how his father gives orders to his mother.'* In the same views, Hab described that:

Discriminating words and behaviors are commonly observed. Females are frequently embarrassed by words and behaviors displaying that they are not like males, they cannot be equal to them, they have to be protected and secured by males. In many cases, these behaviors, words are considered to be normal and once you consider them as part of gender discrimination, mostly you are not understood, you become a problem. The language people have got from their families continues to stress them.

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Describing endured gender inequalities, Biya stated that: *'In our family, we were many ladies and two twin boys who were the last born. All of us (ladies) did not complete high school. Parents said that they are keeping school fees for boys. That is the reason why I dropped out school.'* From this shocking family experience, those privileged boys were initiated to give much value to boys than girls and during their adulthood, they are likely to do the same. To illustrate this point of view Quata highlighted that:

Parents who discriminate their children are paving to them a wrong path to follow in their future families. Overpowered by my dad, my sisters were doing everything for me. Once I got married, the first year I struggled to understand some of my wife's behaviour because she was very sensitive to gender equality.

Fata fights to understand his wife's behavior was not easy as he was still viewing her using the eye glasses of his family environment where boys were seating and watching movies and giving orders to their old sisters. He said that:

What makes the situation worse is when women claim for their rights and raise their voice to educate their daughters as equal to boys; they are negatively labelled as masculinised. My wife had a conflict with my parents relating to how she socialized our three children to gender equality. My Dad was unhappy of the situation and started blaming me. 'You are no more a husband. When did you decide to be feminine? You have lost your identity. You are dominated, powerless in your home. Think about it.

Parents who understand, defend and socialize their children to gender equality are considered to be masculinised (wife) or feminized (husband). From the analysed cases, it has been observed that gender socialization is still an issue to be debated on. A good way of gender discrimination eradication should start at early age when children are still in their parents' hands for guidance and imitation.

CONCLUSION

Parents play a big role in shaping children's ways of thinking, norms and values. The way they have been socialized to gender is replicated to their children. This lack of parental socialization to gender equality at tender age constitutes a barrier to a good understanding of gender concept. Risk factors of being socialized with gender discrimination continue to be entertained in families and local communities. Approaches that are essential to ensure children's family gender socialization that may create protective factors in the environment are not utilized and less exploited. Children are raised up with potential vectors of gender discrimination such as words, behaviors, beliefs, games, initiation to home activities and all this expose them to gender bias and discrimination. During the period where children are not able to logically understand and manipulate received information, family has substantial influence on the language to use, behavior, not only using their authorities but also parents' behaviors and family environment. Parents are not yet active players in changing home environment of gender bias and discriminations as the ones who first inculcate cultural and social values to young children. There is a need of sensitizing parents and make them understand their role of empowering girls and boys equally in education that reduces and eradicates gender inequalities. Gender does not separate family responsibilities as two blocs. It focuses on human rights and respect; gives responsibility to each family member and being accountable to each other. It reinforces saying 'we' than 'I' in family unity.

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