

**SOCIAL WORK, GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN
BENIN CITY, EDO STATE, NIGERIA**

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BENIN CITY, EDO STATE,**

AUGUST, 2025

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**BEING A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL
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CITY, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
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CERTIFICATION

We, the undersigned, certify that this research work was carried out by **Lisa Oghogho AGBON** with Matriculation Number **SSC2105997** of the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) Degree in social work at the University of Benin City, Nigeria.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty for His Grace that sustained me throughout my stay in the University of Benin.

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I give all glory, honor, and praise to God Almighty for His grace, strength, and love that saw me through this academic journey.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the intersection of social work, gender equality, and women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. It examines the role of social work in promoting gender equality and empowering women, highlighting the challenges and opportunities in this context. The study employs a Survey Research Design method of data collection. The findings reveal that social work interventions can significantly impact women's empowerment and gender equality, but face challenges such as cultural and societal norms, limited resources, and inadequate policy implementation. The study concludes that social work can play a vital role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Benin City, and recommends increased investment in social work programs, policy reforms, and community engagement.

Keywords: Social work, Gender equality, Women's empowerment, Benin City, Edo State.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Gender inequality is a pervasive issue that affects women and girls worldwide, manifesting in various forms and degrees across different countries and contexts. In developed nations, such as the United States, Canada, and countries in Western Europe, gender inequality persists despite significant advancements in promoting women's rights and equality. Women in these countries continue to face challenges such as pay gaps, with research indicating that women earn approximately 80 of what men earn for similar work (Hill & Silva, 2005; Catalyst, 2020). Women are underrepresented in leadership positions, holding only a fraction of executive and board positions in major corporations (Catalyst, 2020). Additionally, women in developed nations may face limited access to reproductive healthcare, with some countries imposing restrictive laws and policies that compromise women's autonomy and well-being (World Health Organization, 2019). These issues highlight the need for continued efforts to promote gender equality in developed nations. Women empowerment is a critical aspect of addressing gender inequality, and its manifestation varies across developed, developing, and underdeveloped nations. In developed nations, women empowerment is often reflected in

increased participation in the workforce, politics, and leadership positions. Women in these countries have made significant strides in education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, enabling them to make informed choices about their lives (Hill & Silva, 2005; Catalyst, 2020). However, despite these advancements, women in developed nations still face challenges in achieving equal pay, work-life balance, and representation in male-dominated fields.

In developing nations, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, gender inequality is often more pronounced and deeply ingrained in societal norms and practices. Women in these countries face significant barriers to education, with many being denied access to quality education and vocational training, limiting their economic opportunities and perpetuating poverty (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). Moreover, women in developing nations often encounter obstacles in accessing healthcare, including maternal healthcare services, which can lead to high maternal mortality rates and poor health outcomes (World Health Organization, 2019). Discriminatory laws and practices also limit women's autonomy and agency, with some countries having laws that restrict women's ability to own property, inherit assets, or participate in decision-making processes (OECD, 2019). For instance, in some developing countries, women are required to obtain permission from their husbands or male guardians to work, travel, or access healthcare, reinforcing patriarchal norms and

limiting women's empowerment (World Bank, 2018). In developing nations, women empowerment is often linked to access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Women's empowerment programs in these countries focus on building skills, promoting entrepreneurship, and enhancing access to resources, enabling women to break the cycle of poverty and improve their socio-economic status (United Nations Development Programme, 2020; World Bank, 2018). However, women in developing nations often face significant barriers to empowerment, including discriminatory laws, social norms, and limited access to resources.

In underdeveloped nations, such as those affected by conflict, poverty, and humanitarian crises, gender inequality can be particularly severe and entrenched. Women and girls in these contexts are often vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and abuse, including sexual violence, human trafficking, and forced marriage (UNICEF, 2019; UN Women, 2020). The lack of access to basic necessities such as food, water, shelter, and healthcare exacerbates the vulnerability of women and girls, compromising their health, well-being, and dignity (UNICEF, 2019). In these situations, women's rights and dignity are often compromised, and their ability to participate in decision-making processes and contribute to their communities is severely limited. The intersection of poverty, conflict, and gender inequality creates a complex web of challenges that require targeted interventions and support. While women empowerment in underdeveloped countries are

mostly hindered by extreme poverty, conflict, and lack of access to basic necessities. Women's empowerment programs in these contexts focus on providing emergency assistance, promoting livelihoods, and protecting women's rights, enabling women to survive and thrive in challenging environments (UNICEF, 2019; UN Women, 2020).

Gender equality and women's empowerment are critical issues in Nigeria, despite the country's ratification of several international and regional instruments aimed at promoting gender equality, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, women in Nigeria continue to face significant barriers to achieving equal rights and opportunities (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2018).

One of the major challenges facing women in Nigeria is the persistence of patriarchal norms and values that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and inequality. For instance, the traditional Igbo society in which Benin City is located is characterized by a strong patriarchal system that often relegates women to subordinate roles (Amadiume, 1987). This has significant implications for women's access to education, economic opportunities, and decision-making positions. Cultural and social norms that perpetuate gender-based violence and discrimination are also a major concern in Nigeria. For instance, a study by the National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) found that 28 of women in Nigeria have experienced physical violence, while 15 have

experienced sexual violence (National Population Commission, 2018). In Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, gender inequality and women empowerment are critical issues that affect every member of the community. Women in Benin City face significant challenges in accessing education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, which limits their ability to participate in decision-making processes and contribute to the development of their communities. The city's cultural and traditional practices often perpetuate gender stereotypes and limit women's empowerment, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to promote women's rights and empowerment.

The effects of gender inequality and women empowerment in Benin City are far-reaching, impacting not only women but also their families, communities, and the broader society. Empowering women in Benin City can have positive outcomes, including improved health, education, and economic outcomes, which can contribute to the overall development of the city.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Despite the country's ratification of several international and regional instruments aimed at promoting gender equality, women in Benin City, Edo State continue to face significant barriers to achieving equal rights and opportunities. One of the key manifestations of this problem is the low level of women's participation in decision-

making positions and leadership roles. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), women occupy only 6 of leadership positions in Edo State, while men occupy 94 (NBS, 2019). This lack of representation has significant implications for women's empowerment and gender equality, as it limits their ability to influence policy and decision-making processes.

Another key manifestation of this problem is the high prevalence of gender-based violence and discrimination. According to the Nigerian Human Rights Commission, women in Nigeria face significant barriers in accessing justice, including lack of awareness of their rights, lack of access to legal representation, and corruption within the justice system (Nigerian Human Rights Commission, 2020). Furthermore, women in Benin City, Edo State also face significant economic and social challenges, including high levels of poverty, lack of access to education and healthcare, and limited economic opportunities. According to the World Bank, Nigeria has one of the highest poverty rates in the world, with 87 million people living on less than \$2 a day (World Bank, 2020).

The persistence of these challenges has significant implications for women's empowerment and gender equality in Benin City, Edo State. It also highlights the need for effective interventions and strategies that can address these challenges and promote gender equality and women's empowerment. It also highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of the complex and interconnected factors that contribute

to the persistent inequality and disempowerment of women in Benin City, Edo State. This includes examining the social, economic, cultural, and political factors that shape women's lives and experiences. Furthermore, it also underscores the importance of developing effective strategies and interventions that can address the unique needs and challenges of women in Benin City, Edo State. This requires a nuanced understanding of the local context and the specific challenges that women face in this region. In addition, it also emphasizes the need for a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates insights and perspectives from various fields, including social work, sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science. This can help to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex issues surrounding women's empowerment and gender equality. Some of the key factors that contribute to the persistent inequality and disempowerment of women in Benin City, Edo State include: limited access to education and economic opportunities, high levels of poverty and economic inequality, persistent cultural and social norms that perpetuate gender-based violence and discrimination, limited access to healthcare and social services, lack of representation and participation in decision-making positions and leadership roles. These factors are interconnected and can have a compounding impact on women's lives and experiences. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and nuanced approach that takes into account the complex and interconnected factors that contribute to women's disempowerment.

1.3 Research Questions

This study seeks to address the role of social work in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo State. The following research questions guide the study:

1. What are the prevailing gender norms and stereotypes in Benin City, Edo State?
2. What are the most significant challenges and barriers to women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo state?
3. How do social work interventions contribute to women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo state?
4. What role can social workers play in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo state?

1.4 Aims and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate the role of social work in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo State. The aims and objectives of the study are:

1. To investigate the prevailing gender norms and stereotypes in Benin City and their impact on women's empowerment.

2. To identify the most significant challenges and barriers to women's empowerment in Benin City.
3. To examine the contribution of social work interventions to women's empowerment in Benin City.
4. To explore the role of social workers in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Benin City.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the body of knowledge on the role of social work in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Nigeria. Specifically, this study aims to provide new insights into the socio-economic and cultural factors that influence women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo State.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on gender equality and women's empowerment by providing a nuanced understanding of the complex and interconnected factors that shape women's lives and experiences in Benin City, Edo State. By examining the role of social work in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, this study adds to the existing literature on the importance of social work practice in addressing social and economic inequalities

The findings of this study have important implications for policy making in Nigeria. By identifying the socio-economic and cultural factors that influence women's empowerment, this study provides policymakers with valuable insights into the development of effective policies and programs aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

This study provides a foundation for further research on the role of social work in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Nigeria. Future studies can build on the findings of this study by examining the effectiveness of social work interventions aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

This study provides empirical evidence on the role of social work in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo State. The findings of this study are based on primary data collected from social workers and women's organizations in Benin City, Edo State, providing a nuanced understanding of the complex and interconnected factors that shape women's lives and experiences.

The findings of this study have important implications for theory formulation in social work practice. By examining the role of social work in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, this study provides insights into the development of

theoretical frameworks that can guide social work practice in addressing social and economic inequalities.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the role of social work in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. The study explores the socio-economic and cultural factors that influence women's empowerment, examines the current state of social work practice in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, and identifies the challenges faced by social workers in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The study also proposes strategies for strengthening social work practice to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. The scope of the study is limited to Benin City, Edo State, and focuses on the experiences of women and social workers in this region. The study uses a qualitative research approach, combining interviews and focus group discussions to collect data from social workers and women's organizations.

1.7 Definition of Concepts

Gender Equality: Gender equality refers to the equal rights, opportunities, and treatment of women and men in all aspects of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and decision-making positions (UN Women, 2020).

Women's Empowerment: Women's empowerment refers to the process of increasing women's autonomy, self-esteem, and ability to make choices and decisions that affect their lives, including their economic, social, and political lives (Kabeer, 2005).

Social Work: Social work refers to a profession that aims to improve the well-being and quality of life of individuals, families, and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable, marginalized, or oppressed (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014).

Patriarchy: Patriarchy refers to a social system in which men hold power and dominate women, often through cultural, economic, and political institutions (Walby, 1990).

Feminism: Feminism refers to a social and political movement that aims to promote women's rights, challenge patriarchal systems, and achieve gender equality and women's empowerment (Hooks, 2000).

Empowerment: The process of gaining power, confidence, and autonomy to make choices and decisions that improve one's life and circumstances.

Cultural Factors: The social, traditional, and values-based influences that shape an individual's or group's behavior, attitudes, and beliefs.

Intervention: A planned and intentional action or program aimed at addressing a specific issue or problem, such as promoting women's empowerment.

Challenges: Obstacles, difficulties, or barriers that hinder or prevent individuals or groups from achieving their goals or improving their circumstances.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Preamble

This chapter provides a review of the literature on social work and women's empowerment, with a focus on the Nigerian context.

2.1 Overview of Gender Equality

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of social justice (United Nations, 2015). It refers to the equal rights, opportunities, and treatment of women and men in all aspects of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and decision-making positions (World Health Organization, 2019). Gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also a necessary condition for achieving sustainable development, economic growth, and human well-being (World Bank, 2018). At its core, gender equality is about challenging and transforming the social, economic, and cultural norms and structures that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and inequality (Kabeer, 2005). It requires recognizing and addressing the ways in which gender intersects with other forms of social inequality, such as race, class, and disability (Hill Collins, 2000). One of the key concepts in understanding gender equality is the notion of "gender" itself. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, and expectations associated

with being male or female (Butler, 1990). Gender is not the same as sex, which refers to the biological differences between men and women (Oakley, 1972). Rather, gender is a social and cultural construct that shapes our experiences, opportunities, and outcomes in life.

Another important concept in understanding gender equality is the idea of "intersectionality." Intersectionality refers to the ways in which different forms of social inequality, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism, intersect and compound one another (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality highlights the need to consider how different forms of social inequality shape the experiences of individuals and groups in complex and nuanced ways. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of addressing "unconscious bias" and "microaggressions" in promoting gender equality (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; Sue, 2010). Unconscious bias refers to the automatic and unintentional ways in which our biases and stereotypes shape our perceptions and behaviors. Microaggressions refer to the subtle and often unintentional ways in which we communicate discriminatory or oppressive messages to others.

The concept of gender equality is closely tied to the idea of "gender mainstreaming," which refers to the process of integrating gender perspectives into all aspects of policy and programming (United Nations, 1997). Gender mainstreaming requires that gender be considered at all stages of policy and program development, from

design to implementation to evaluation. Another important concept in understanding gender equality is the idea of "gender-based violence" (GBV). GBV refers to any form of violence that is directed against a person because of their gender, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and harassment (World Health Organization, 2013). GBV is a major obstacle to achieving gender equality, as it undermines women's autonomy, dignity, and human rights. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of addressing "masculinities" in promoting gender equality (Connell, 2005). Masculinities refer to the social and cultural norms that shape men's behaviors and attitudes, including their attitudes towards women and girls. By addressing masculinities, we can work to challenge and transform the social and cultural norms that perpetuate gender-based inequality. The concept of gender equality is also closely tied to the idea of "human rights" (United Nations, 1948). Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that all human beings are entitled to, including the right to equality, dignity, and freedom from discrimination. By promoting gender equality, we can help to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their gender, are able to realize their human rights. Overall, understanding gender equality requires a nuanced and multifaceted approach that takes into account the complex and intersecting ways in which social inequality shapes our experiences and outcomes in life.

Women's empowerment is a complex and multifaceted concept that refers to the process of increasing women's autonomy, self-esteem, and ability to make choices and decisions that affect their lives (Kabeer, 2005). It involves challenging and transforming the social, economic, and cultural norms and structures that perpetuate gender-based inequality and discrimination. At its core, women's empowerment is about recognizing and addressing the ways in which women's lives are shaped by patriarchal systems and structures that perpetuate gender-based inequality (Walby, 1990). It requires a nuanced understanding of the ways in which gender intersects with other forms of social inequality, such as race, class, and disability (Hill Collins, 2000). One of the key concepts in understanding women's empowerment is the idea of "agency." Agency refers to the ability of individuals to make choices and decisions that affect their lives, including their economic, social, and political lives (Sen, 1999). Women's empowerment is about increasing women's agency and autonomy, particularly in areas where they have been historically marginalized or excluded. Another important concept in understanding women's empowerment is the idea of "participation." Participation refers to the involvement of women in decision-making processes and institutions, including economic, social, and political institutions (World Bank, 2012). Women's empowerment is about increasing women's participation and representation in these institutions, particularly in areas where they have been historically underrepresented. The concept of women's empowerment is also closely tied to the idea of "sustainable development."

Sustainable development refers to the process of promoting economic growth and development in a way that is environmentally sustainable and socially equitable (United Nations, 2015). Women's empowerment is critical to achieving sustainable development, as it is essential for promoting economic growth, reducing poverty, and improving health and education outcomes.

2.1.2 Social Work and Women's Empowerment

Social work has long been recognized as a critical profession in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality (Dominelli, 2002). Social workers play a vital role in addressing the complex needs of women, particularly those who are marginalized, oppressed, and vulnerable (Healy, 2001). By providing emotional support, practical assistance, and advocacy, social workers can help women to build their confidence, develop their skills, and access resources and opportunities that can help them to achieve their goals.

One of the key ways in which social work can promote women's empowerment is through the use of empowerment-based practice approaches (Lee, 2001). Empowerment-based practice approaches focus on building the strengths and capacities of individuals and communities, rather than simply providing services or support (Gutierrez, 1990). By using empowerment-based practice approaches, social workers can help women to

develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to take control of their lives and make informed decisions about their futures. Another important way in which social work can promote women's empowerment is through the provision of education and training programs (Narayan, 2004). Education and training programs can help women to develop the skills and knowledge they need to access better-paying jobs, start their own businesses, and participate in decision-making processes (Chant, 2010). By providing education and training programs, social workers can help women to build their economic security and independence, which is critical to achieving women's empowerment. In addition, social work can also promote women's empowerment through the use of advocacy and community organizing strategies (Hancock, 2007). Advocacy and community organizing strategies involve working with women and other community members to identify and address the root causes of social problems, such as poverty, violence, and inequality (Pittinsky, 2009). By using advocacy and community organizing strategies, social workers can help women to build their collective power and influence, which is critical to achieving women's empowerment. Furthermore, social work can also promote women's empowerment through the provision of mental health and counseling services (Walker, 2017). Mental health and counseling services can help women to cope with the emotional and psychological impacts of trauma, violence, and oppression (Herman, 1992). By providing mental health and counseling services, social workers can

help women to heal and recover from their experiences, which is critical to achieving women's empowerment.

Moreover, social work can also promote women's empowerment through the use of feminist theory and practice (hooks, 2000). Feminist theory and practice involve working with women to challenge and transform the patriarchal systems and structures that perpetuate gender-based inequality and oppression (MacKinnon, 1989). By using feminist theory and practice, social workers can help women to develop a critical understanding of the root causes of their oppression, which is critical to achieving women's empowerment. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of addressing the intersectionality of women's empowerment (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality refers to the ways in which different forms of social inequality, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism, intersect and compound one another (Hancock, 2007). By addressing intersectionality, social workers can help women to develop a nuanced understanding of the multiple forms of oppression that they experience, which is critical to achieving women's empowerment.

In addition to these strategies, social workers can also promote women's empowerment through the use of technology (Chib, 2010). Technology can provide women with access to information, education, and economic opportunities, which can help to promote their empowerment. Social workers can work with women to develop

their technological skills and provide them with access to technology, such as computers and smartphones.

Community-based initiatives involve working with women and other community members to identify and address the root causes of social problems, such as poverty and violence. Social workers can work with women to develop community-based initiatives that promote their empowerment and address their specific needs. Moreover, social workers can also promote women's empowerment through the use of policy advocacy (Jansson, 2014). Policy advocacy involves working with women and other stakeholders to influence policy and legislative changes that promote women's empowerment. Social workers can work with women to identify and address the policy barriers that prevent them from achieving their goals and promote policy changes that support their empowerment. In conclusion, social work can play a critical role in promoting women's empowerment through the use of empowerment-based practice approaches, education and training programs, advocacy and community organizing strategies, mental health and counseling services, feminist theory and practice, technology, community-based initiatives, and policy advocacy. By addressing the intersectionality of women's experiences and promoting their empowerment in a way that is inclusive and equitable, social workers can help women to achieve their goals and promote social justice. Empirical studies have consistently shown that social work interventions can have a

positive impact on women's empowerment. For example, a study by Kim et al. (2018) found that a social work-led empowerment program for women with disabilities resulted in significant improvements in their self-esteem, social support, and community participation. Similarly, a study by Lee et al. (2019) found that a social work-led economic empowerment program for low-income women resulted in significant improvements in their financial literacy, economic stability, and overall well-being.

2.1.3 Gender Norms and Stereotypes

Gender norms and stereotypes are deeply ingrained in societies, influencing individuals' perceptions, behaviours, and interactions. In many cultures, gender norms dictate that women prioritize domestic roles, while men are expected to be the primary breadwinners (Kabeer, 2000). These norms are often shaped by cultural, social, and historical contexts and can vary significantly across different societies. For instance, some societies expect women to be submissive and obedient to their male counterparts, while others promote more egalitarian relationships (Connell, 1987). Gender stereotypes often accompany these norms, oversimplifying and inaccurately representing individuals based on their gender (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Women are often stereotyped as being emotional and irrational, while men are seen as logical and rational (Shields, 2002). These stereotypes can limit individuals' potential and reinforce harmful gender norms.

The interplay between gender norms and stereotypes can lead to limited opportunities for women and other marginalized groups. When individuals conform to traditional gender norms, they are more likely to be seen as fitting into societal expectations, while those who deviate from these norms may face social sanctions (Butler, 1990). This can result in women being excluded from certain roles or industries due to stereotypes about their abilities or interests (Heilman, 2001). Furthermore, the internalization of negative stereotypes and norms can have profound effects on individuals' self-perception and motivation. When women internalize these stereotypes, they may experience self-doubt, low self-esteem, and decreased motivation (Freire, 1970). This highlights the need to challenge and change these norms and stereotypes to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

In underdeveloped nations, the situation for women is often dire, with limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Gender-based violence and discrimination are prevalent, further exacerbating the challenges faced by women (WHO, 2013). The lack of access to education and economic opportunities can lead to a cycle of poverty, making it difficult for women to break free from their circumstances (UNICEF, 2019). Moreover, the cultural and social norms in these countries often perpetuate gender inequality, with women expected to prioritize domestic duties and childcare over personal development and economic participation (Momsen, 2004). The impact of poverty and

lack of access to resources on women's lives in underdeveloped nations cannot be overstated. Women in these countries often bear the brunt of poverty, with limited access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunities (World Bank, 2012). This can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including poor health, limited economic opportunities, and increased vulnerability to violence and exploitation (WHO, 2013). Furthermore, the lack of representation and voice for women in these countries can make it difficult to address these issues and promote gender equality (Kabeer, 2000).

In developing nations, traditional gender roles often persist, with women expected to prioritize domestic duties and childcare. However, there is a growing recognition of the importance of women's empowerment and economic participation in these countries (World Bank, 2012). Many developing nations are making significant strides in promoting gender equality, with initiatives aimed at increasing women's access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities (UNICEF, 2019). Moreover, the growing recognition of the importance of women's empowerment has led to increased investment in programs and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality (Kabeer, 2000). The economic participation of women in developing nations is crucial for the growth and development of these countries. Women's economic empowerment can lead to increased economic growth, improved health and education outcomes, and reduced poverty (World Bank, 2012). Moreover, women's participation in the workforce can also

lead to increased gender equality, as women gain greater autonomy and decision-making power (Momsen, 2004). However, women in developing nations often face significant barriers to economic participation, including limited access to education and training, discriminatory laws and policies, and social and cultural norms that prioritize domestic duties over economic participation (UNICEF, 2019).

In developed nations, while significant progress has been made in promoting gender equality, subtle biases and stereotypes persist. Women continue to face challenges in male-dominated industries, and the pay gap remains a pressing issue (Bettio et al., 2006). Moreover, the expectation of women to balance work and family responsibilities can limit their career advancement opportunities (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). However, developed nations have made significant strides in promoting gender equality, with strong laws and policies in place to protect women's rights (European Commission, 2019). The persistence of subtle biases and stereotypes in developed nations highlights the need for continued efforts to promote gender equality. Women in these countries often face challenges in male-dominated industries, where they may be subject to discrimination, harassment, and bias (Bettio et al., 2006). Moreover, the pay gap remains a pressing issue, with women often earning less than men for similar work (European Commission, 2019). However, developed nations have implemented a range of initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality, including laws and policies to protect women's

rights, programs to promote women's participation in male-dominated industries, and initiatives to address the pay gap (Hochschild & Machung, 2012).

Globalization has led to the emergence of new gender dynamics, with women increasingly participating in the global workforce (Standing, 1999). However, this has also created new challenges, such as the exploitation of women in low-wage jobs and the perpetuation of sex trafficking (Kabeer, 2000). The impact of globalization on women's lives is complex and multifaceted, with both positive and negative outcomes (World Bank, 2012). On the one hand, globalization has created new economic opportunities for women, particularly in the service and manufacturing sectors (Momsen, 2004). On the other hand, it has also led to increased exploitation and vulnerability for women, particularly in low-wage jobs and informal sectors (WHO, 2013). The exploitation of women in low-wage jobs and the perpetuation of sex trafficking are significant concerns in the context of globalization. Women in these situations are often subject to poor working conditions, low pay, and increased vulnerability to violence and exploitation (Kabeer, 2000). Moreover, the lack of regulation and oversight in these sectors can make it difficult to address these issues and protect women's rights (WHO, 2013). However, there are also opportunities for women to benefit from globalization, particularly through increased access to education, training, and economic opportunities (World Bank, 2014)

2.1.4 Gender Inequality in Nigeria

Gender inequality in Nigeria is a pervasive issue that affects various aspects of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and politics. According to a report by the World Bank, Nigeria has one of the highest rates of gender inequality in the world, with women facing significant barriers to economic participation and empowerment (World Bank, 2020). One of the key areas where gender inequality is evident in Nigeria is education. Despite progress in increasing access to education, girls and women in Nigeria still face significant challenges in accessing quality education. A study by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) found that girls in Nigeria are more likely to be out of school than boys, with 61 of girls aged 6-11 not attending school (UNICEF, 2019). This disparity in education can have long-term consequences for women's economic empowerment and overall well-being. In the realm of employment, women in Nigeria face significant barriers to economic participation. According to a report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), women in Nigeria are more likely to be employed in informal sectors, which often lack social protection and benefits (ILO, 2020). Moreover, women in Nigeria earn lower wages than men, with a study by the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) finding that women earn approximately 30 less than men in the same occupation (NISER, 2018).

Gender-based violence is another significant challenge facing women in Nigeria. A study by the World Health Organization (WHO) found that 31 of women in Nigeria have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner (WHO, 2013). This violence can have severe consequences for women's physical and mental health, as well as their economic empowerment. In politics, women in Nigeria are underrepresented, with men dominating leadership positions. According to a report by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), women make up only 6.4 of the members of the Nigerian National Assembly (IPU, 2020). This lack of representation can limit the ability of women to influence policy and advocate for their rights.

Studies have shown that women in Nigeria face significant barriers to economic participation and empowerment, with limited access to education and job opportunities. A study on gender inequality in Nigeria using the Living Standard Measurement Survey Wave 3 (2017) found that income inequality is a significant issue, with sectoral trends indicating a wide gap between men and women in terms of earnings. This study highlights the need for policies and initiatives that address the root causes of gender inequality in Nigeria.

The Gender in Nigeria 2025 report provides valuable insights into the state of gender equality in the country. The report offers data-driven recommendations for policymakers, advocates, and development organizations striving towards Sustainable

Development Goals 5 (Gender Equality) and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). By analyzing the report's findings, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Nigeria. In terms of economic growth, research has shown that gender inequality can have significant implications for Nigeria's development. A study on the Granger-causality between gender inequality and economic growth in Nigeria found that addressing gender inequality can have positive effects on economic growth and development. This study underscores the importance of promoting gender equality as a means of driving economic growth and development in Nigeria.

Various studies have also explored the regional dimensions of gender inequality in Nigeria. For instance, research has shown that women in different regions of Nigeria face unique challenges and opportunities, requiring targeted interventions that address their specific needs. By understanding these regional dynamics, policymakers and practitioners can develop more effective strategies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Nigeria.

2.1.5 Intersectionality and Gender Bias

Intersectionality is a critical framework for understanding the complex and multifaceted nature of social identities and experiences. Developed by Kimberlé

Crenshaw, intersectionality highlights the ways in which different social identities intersect and interact to produce unique experiences of oppression and marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989). This framework recognizes that individuals have multiple identities, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability, which intersect and interact to shape their experiences and opportunities. Intersectionality is a useful framework for understanding the experiences of women in different contexts. For example, women of color may face unique challenges and barriers due to the intersection of racism and sexism (hooks, 1981). Similarly, women with disabilities may face additional barriers to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities due to the intersection of ableism and sexism (Lang, 2009).

Aspects of Intersectionality

Race and Ethnicity: Intersectionality highlights the ways in which race and ethnicity intersect with gender to produce unique experiences of oppression and marginalization. For example, women of color may face racism and sexism in their daily lives, which can limit their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities (hooks, 1981).

Class and Socioeconomic Status: Intersectionality also highlights the ways in which class and socioeconomic status intersect with gender to produce unique experiences of oppression and marginalization. For example, women from lower socioeconomic

backgrounds may face significant barriers to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities due to their limited financial resources (Kabeer, 2000).

Disability: Intersectionality recognizes that women with disabilities may face additional barriers to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities due to the intersection of ableism and sexism. For example, women with disabilities may face significant challenges in accessing healthcare services, which can exacerbate their health problems (Lang, 2009).

Sexuality: Intersectionality also highlights the ways in which sexuality intersects with gender to produce unique experiences of oppression and marginalization. For example, women who identify as LGBTQ+ may face significant challenges and barriers due to homophobia and transphobia (Awondo, 2018).

Gender biases refer to the prejudices and stereotypes that are directed towards individuals based on their gender. These biases can limit women's access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, and can perpetuate gender-based violence and discrimination (WHO, 2013).

Aspects of Gender Biases

Education: Gender biases can limit women's access to education, particularly in male-dominated fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). For

example, research has shown that women are underrepresented in STEM fields due to biases and stereotypes that suggest that men are more capable in these areas (Nosek et al., 2009).

Employment: Gender biases can also limit women's access to employment opportunities, particularly in leadership positions. For example, research has shown that women are underrepresented in leadership positions due to biases and stereotypes that suggest that men are more capable leaders (Heilman, 2001).

Healthcare: Gender biases can also affect women's access to healthcare services, particularly in areas such as reproductive health. For example, research has shown that women may face significant barriers to accessing reproductive healthcare services due to biases and stereotypes that limit their autonomy and decision-making power (WHO, 2013).

Intersectionality highlights the ways in which different social identities intersect and interact to produce unique experiences of oppression and marginalization. Gender biases, on the other hand, refer to the prejudices and stereotypes that are directed towards individuals based on their gender. When we consider the intersection of different social identities, we can see how gender biases can be exacerbated, leading to further marginalization and exclusion. For example, women of colour may face racism and

sexism, which can limit their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Similarly, women with disabilities may face ableism and sexism, which can limit their access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. In Nigeria, for instance, the intersection of different social identities can have significant implications for women's experiences and opportunities. Women from different regions and socioeconomic backgrounds may face unique challenges and barriers, requiring targeted interventions that address their specific needs. By acknowledging the intersectional nature of gender biases, we can develop more effective strategies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. This requires a nuanced understanding of the complex social, economic, and cultural factors that shape women's experiences and opportunities.

2.1.6 Challenges to Women's Empowerment in Nigeria

Nigeria, like many other countries, faces significant challenges in promoting women's empowerment. Despite efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, Nigerian women continue to face numerous obstacles that hinder their ability to achieve their full potential. This section provides a critical analysis of the challenges to women's empowerment in Nigeria.

One of the significant challenges to women's empowerment in Nigeria is cultural and social barriers. Nigerian culture is deeply patriarchal, and women are often expected to conform to traditional gender roles (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994). Women are often socialized to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers over their own personal and professional goals. This can make it difficult for women to pursue education and career opportunities, and to participate in decision-making processes. Cultural and social norms often perpetuate negative attitudes towards women, including stereotypes and biases that limit their opportunities and potential (Adeyemi, 2002). For example, women are often expected to be submissive and obedient, and those who challenge these norms may face social ostracism or even violence.

Another significant challenge to women's empowerment in Nigeria is economic barriers. Women in Nigeria often face significant economic challenges, including limited access to education, employment, and credit (World Bank, 2019). Women are often expected to prioritize their roles as caregivers and homemakers over their own economic empowerment. Furthermore, women in Nigeria often face significant barriers to accessing economic opportunities, including limited access to markets, technology, and other resources (IFAD, 2018). Women are often relegated to informal and precarious work, which can make it difficult for them to achieve economic stability and security. MIn addition to cultural and economic barriers, women in Nigeria also face significant

political barriers to empowerment. Women are often underrepresented in decision-making positions, including in government, politics, and other areas of public life (IPU, 2020).

Women are often excluded from decision-making processes, and their voices and perspectives are often marginalized or ignored. Women in Nigeria often face significant barriers to accessing justice and other legal remedies (Amnesty International, 2018). Women are often subjected to discriminatory laws and practices, including those related to marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Women in Nigeria also face significant education and health barriers to empowerment. Women in Nigeria often have limited access to education, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels (UNICEF, 2020). Women are often expected to prioritize their roles as caregivers and homemakers over their own educational and professional goals. Women are often subjected to discriminatory healthcare practices, including those related to reproductive health and rights.

Another significant challenge to women's empowerment in Nigeria is the lack of access to finance. Women in Nigeria often face significant barriers to accessing credit, loans, and other financial services, which can make it difficult for them to start or expand their own businesses (CBN, 2020). This can perpetuate poverty and limit women's economic opportunities. Women in Nigeria often lack access to financial education and training, which can make it difficult for them to manage their finances effectively and

make informed decisions about their economic lives (EFinA, 2019). This can perpetuate financial exclusion and limit women's economic empowerment.

Women in Nigeria often experience high levels of violence, including domestic violence, sexual violence, and other forms of violence (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). This can perpetuate poverty, limit women's economic opportunities, and undermine their health and well-being. Women in Nigeria often face significant barriers to accessing justice and other legal remedies for violence against women (Amnesty International, 2018). This can perpetuate impunity and undermine efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women. Women in Nigeria also face significant challenges related to limited access to education and skills development. Women in Nigeria often have limited access to education, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels (UNICEF, 2020). This can perpetuate poverty and limit women's economic opportunities.

2.2 Review of Relevant Theories

This Section is a review of the underpinning theories that form the basis of this study. The theories are briefly discussed below:

2.2.1 Empowerment Theory

Empowerment Theory is a social work theory that emphasizes the importance of empowering individuals, groups, and communities to take control of their lives and make

informed decisions about their futures (Gutierrez, 1990). This theory is rooted in the principles of social justice, equality, and human rights. Empowerment Theory recognizes that power is not equally distributed in society, and that certain groups, such as women, racial and ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities, are often marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes (Freire, 1970). The concept of empowerment is complex and multifaceted, and it involves various dimensions, including psychological, social, economic, and political empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995). Psychological empowerment refers to the development of a sense of self-efficacy, self-awareness, and self-confidence, which enables individuals to take control of their lives and make informed decisions about their futures (Bandura, 1997). Social empowerment, on the other hand, refers to the development of social support networks and relationships that provide individuals with a sense of belonging, identity, and purpose (Cohen et al., 2015). Economic empowerment is also a critical dimension of Empowerment Theory, as it refers to the ability of individuals and groups to access and control economic resources, such as education, employment, and credit (Sen, 1999). Political empowerment, finally, refers to the ability of individuals and groups to participate in decision-making processes and to influence policy and program development (Arnstein, 1969).

Empowerment Theory emphasizes the importance of self-awareness, self-efficacy, and collective action in the empowerment process. Individuals must develop a critical

understanding of their own strengths, weaknesses, and circumstances, as well as a sense of confidence and competence to take action (Bandura, 1997). Collective action, on the other hand, involves working together with others to challenge and transform the social, economic, and political structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression (Alinsky, 1971). In the context of women's empowerment in Nigeria, Empowerment Theory can be used to inform the development of programs and interventions that promote women's self-awareness, self-efficacy, and collective action. For example, empowerment-based programs might involve working with women to identify and challenge the social, economic, and political structures that perpetuate gender-based inequality and oppression, and to develop their own leadership and capacity for collective action (Adeyemi, 2002). As noted by Gutierrez (1990), Empowerment Theory emphasizes the importance of addressing the power imbalances that exist between men and women in Nigeria, and promoting the social and economic empowerment of women. This requires a critical understanding of the social, economic, and political structures that perpetuate gender-based inequality and oppression, as well as a commitment to challenging and transforming these structures. Empowerment Theory also emphasizes the importance of critical consciousness in the empowerment process. Critical consciousness refers to the ability of individuals to critically analyze and understand the social, economic, and political structures that shape their lives and opportunities (Freire, 1970). This involves developing a critical understanding of how power operates in society, and how it is used

to maintain social inequality and oppression. Critical consciousness is essential for understanding how patriarchal norms and structures perpetuate gender-based inequality and oppression. For example, women in Nigeria may be socialized to believe that they are inferior to men and that their roles are limited to domestic and reproductive work (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994). Critical consciousness involves challenging these norms and structures, and developing alternative perspectives and understandings that promote gender equality and social justice.

Empowerment Theory also recognizes the importance of collective action in the empowerment process. Collective action involves working together with others to challenge and transform the social, economic, and political structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression (Alinsky, 1971). This can involve organizing and mobilizing communities, building coalitions and alliances, and engaging in advocacy and activism. Collective action is essential for challenging and transforming the patriarchal norms and structures that perpetuate gender-based inequality and oppression. For example, women's organizations and movements in Nigeria have played a critical role in promoting women's rights and challenging gender-based inequality and oppression (Adeyemi, 2002). In the context of women's empowerment in Nigeria, addressing intersectionality is essential for understanding how different forms of oppression intersect and compound to produce unique experiences of marginalization and exclusion. For example, women with

disabilities in Nigeria may face unique challenges and barriers that are not addressed by mainstream women's organizations and movements (Eghosa, 2012).

2.2.2 Feminist Theory

Feminist Theory is a critical social work theory that emphasizes the importance of understanding and addressing the social, economic, and political structures that perpetuate gender-based inequality and oppression (Hooks, 2000). This theory recognizes that women's experiences and perspectives are shaped by their social, cultural, and economic contexts, and that these experiences and perspectives are often marginalized and excluded from mainstream society. Feminist Theory emphasizes the importance of challenging and transforming the patriarchal norms and structures that perpetuate gender-based inequality and oppression. This involves developing a critical understanding of how power operates in society, and how it is used to maintain social inequality and oppression (MacKinnon, 1989).

In the context of women's empowerment in Nigeria, Feminist Theory is essential for understanding how patriarchal norms and structures perpetuate gender-based inequality and oppression. For example, women in Nigeria may be socialized to believe that they are inferior to men and that their roles are limited to domestic and reproductive work (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994). Feminist Theory involves challenging these norms and

structures, and developing alternative perspectives and understandings that promote gender equality and social justice. Feminist Theory also emphasizes the importance of intersectionality in understanding women's experiences and perspectives. Intersectionality refers to the ways in which different forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism, intersect and compound to produce unique experiences of marginalization and exclusion (Crenshaw, 1989). In the context of women's empowerment in Nigeria, addressing intersectionality is essential for understanding how different forms of oppression intersect and compound to produce unique experiences of marginalization and exclusion. For example, women with disabilities in Nigeria may face unique challenges and barriers that are not addressed by mainstream women's organizations and movements (Eghosa, 2012). Feminist Theory also recognizes the importance of women's agency and autonomy in promoting gender equality and social justice. This involves recognizing women's capacity for self-determination and decision-making, and supporting their efforts to challenge and transform the patriarchal norms and structures that perpetuate gender-based inequality and oppression (Mohanty, 2003). Supporting women's agency and autonomy is essential for promoting gender equality and social justice. This involves recognizing women's capacity for self-determination and decision-making, and supporting their efforts to challenge and transform the patriarchal norms and structures that perpetuate gender-based inequality and oppression.

Feminist Theory also emphasizes the importance of challenging and transforming the dominant discourses and narratives that perpetuate gender-based inequality and oppression. This involves developing alternative discourses and narratives that promote gender equality and social justice, and that recognize the diversity and complexity of women's experiences and perspectives (Scott, 1988). In the context of women's World Bank (2019) and EFINA (2019) both emphasized the importance of women's economic empowerment in Nigeria, highlighting the significant barriers women face in accessing credit, loans, and other financial services, and the need to promote financial inclusion and economic opportunities for women.

2.2.3 Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality refers to the concept that individuals have multiple identities (such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability) that intersect and interact to produce unique experiences of oppression and marginalization. This concept recognizes that individuals are not defined by a single identity, but rather by multiple identities that shape their experiences and opportunities. Intersectionality theory posits that these intersecting identities cannot be understood in isolation from one another. Rather, they are intertwined and mutually constitutive, shaping individuals' experiences of privilege and oppression. This theory highlights the importance of considering the intersections of

multiple forms of oppression and marginalization, rather than focusing on a single form of oppression.

Intersectionality theory was propounded by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a critical race theorist and feminist scholar. Crenshaw's work built on the insights of earlier feminist and critical race theorists, who recognized the importance of considering the intersections of multiple forms of oppression.

Some basic components of intersectionality theory include:

- **Intersectional identities:** These refer to the multiple identities that individuals possess, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability.
- **Power dynamics:** It recognizes that power dynamics shape individuals' experiences and opportunities, and that these dynamics are often influenced by intersecting identities.
- **Contextual factors:** It emphasizes the importance of considering the social and historical context in which individuals' experiences are shaped.

Intersectionality theory is highly relevant to research on gender inequality and women's empowerment. By recognizing the multiple identities that shape women's experiences, intersectionality theory can help researchers and policymakers develop more effective strategies for promoting women's empowerment. This theory can also help to

highlight the ways in which different forms of oppression and marginalization intersect to produce unique experiences of disadvantage for women.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study will be guided by a theoretical framework that integrates Empowerment Theory and Intersectionality Theory. This combined approach provides a robust and nuanced lens for examining the complex relationship between social work, gender equality, and women's empowerment in the context of Benin City, Edo State.

Empowerment Theory will serve as the primary conceptual foundation for understanding the mechanisms of change. As a central tenet of social work practice, this theory posits that individuals and groups can increase their capacity to take control of their lives and influence the forces that affect them (Gutierrez, 1990). This framework is particularly relevant to the study's focus on social work interventions and will be used to address the following research questions:

To address Research Question 3 ("How do social work interventions contribute to women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo state?"): Empowerment Theory will be used to analyze how various social work programs—such as skill training, advocacy, and counseling—enhance women's psychological, economic, and social empowerment. The

study will seek to identify the specific components of these interventions that foster increased self-efficacy, financial independence, and collective action among women.

To address Research Question 4 ("What role can social workers play in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo state?"): This theory will guide the analysis of social workers' roles beyond direct service provision. It will explore how social workers can act as facilitators, advocates, and organizers to help women build their individual capacities and challenge systemic barriers, thereby fostering both personal and collective empowerment.

Intersectionality Theory will be employed as a critical analytical tool to provide a deeper understanding of gender inequality in Benin City. Developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), this theory highlights that gender does not exist in isolation but intersects with other social identities and systems of power, such as age, socioeconomic status, and religion. This framework is essential for avoiding a monolithic view of women's experiences and will be used to address the following research questions:

To address Research Question 1 ("What are the prevailing gender norms and stereotypes in Benin City, Edo State?"): Intersectionality Theory will inform the investigation into how gender norms and stereotypes are not experienced uniformly. It will allow for an analysis of how these norms might differ across various groups of women—for instance,

between educated and non-educated women, or between different religious groups—thereby revealing the unique challenges faced by specific sub-populations.

To address Research Question 2 ("What are the most significant challenges and barriers to women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo state?"): This theory will guide the analysis of the multifaceted barriers to empowerment. It will help to uncover how multiple forms of oppression and disadvantage—such as poverty intersecting with gender-based violence, or lack of education intersecting with cultural norms—create compounded challenges for some women that are not faced by others.

By integrating these two theories, the study adopts a holistic approach. Empowerment Theory provides the conceptual foundation for understanding the processes of change, while Intersectionality Theory ensures that this understanding is critically grounded in the diverse and complex realities of women's lives in Benin City. This dual-theory framework will allow for a comprehensive and sensitive analysis of the research questions.

2.4 Empirical Review

Adeoti (2018) explores the impact of microfinance on women's empowerment and economic development in Nigeria. The study aims to investigate the role of microfinance in improving women's livelihoods and promoting economic development in Nigeria.

According to the study, microfinance can be an effective tool for promoting women's empowerment and economic development, particularly in rural areas where women have limited access to formal financial services. The study found that microfinance can have a positive impact on women's empowerment and economic development, particularly in terms of increasing their income and enhancing their decision-making power. The findings suggest that microfinance can be a useful tool for promoting women's economic empowerment, particularly in rural areas where women have limited access to formal financial services. The study highlights the importance of microfinance in promoting women's economic empowerment and development in Nigeria. By providing women with access to financial services, microfinance can help to address the economic and social challenges that women face in Nigeria. Overall, Adeoti's (2018) study provides valuable insights into the impact of microfinance on women's empowerment and economic development in Nigeria.

Oluwatoyin (2020) conducted a study to assess the impact of women empowerment programs on economic development in Nigeria. The study aimed to investigate the relationship between women empowerment programs and economic development in Nigeria. According to the study, women empowerment programs can have a significant impact on economic development in Nigeria by increasing women's participation in the labour market, improving their economic status, and enhancing their decision-making

power. The study found that women empowerment programs can lead to increased economic growth and development in Nigeria. The findings suggest that empowering women through education, training, and economic opportunities can have a positive impact on the economy. The study highlights the importance of women empowerment programs in promoting economic development in Nigeria. The study provides valuable insights into the impact of women empowerment programs on economic development in Nigeria. By examining the relationship between women empowerment programs and economic development, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex issues surrounding women's empowerment and economic development in Nigeria. Overall, Oluwatoyin (2020) provides a comprehensive analysis of the impact of women empowerment programs on economic development in Nigeria, highlighting the potential benefits of empowering women for economic growth and development.

Adekunle (2019) explores the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting women's empowerment and sustainable development in Nigeria. The study aims to investigate the impact of NGOs on women's empowerment and sustainable development, with a focus on the challenges and opportunities faced by women in Nigeria. The study found that NGOs play a crucial role in promoting women's empowerment and sustainable development in Nigeria. The findings suggest that NGOs can provide women with access to education, training, and economic opportunities,

which can help to improve their socio-economic status and promote sustainable development. The study highlights the importance of NGOs in addressing the social and economic challenges faced by women in Nigeria. By providing women with the skills and knowledge they need to participate in the economy and society, NGOs can help to promote women's empowerment and sustainable development.

Nwankwo (2017) explores the role of entrepreneurship in empowering women in Nigeria. The study aims to investigate the experiences of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria, with a focus on the challenges they face and the strategies they use to overcome these challenges. The study found that entrepreneurship can be a powerful tool for women's empowerment in Nigeria. The findings suggest that women entrepreneurs in Nigeria face a range of challenges, including limited access to finance, lack of business skills, and socio-cultural barriers. However, the study also found that women entrepreneurs are able to overcome these challenges through determination, hard work, and innovative business strategies. The study highlights the importance of entrepreneurship in promoting women's economic empowerment and independence in Nigeria. By providing women with the skills and knowledge they need to start and run their own businesses, entrepreneurship programs can help to promote women's empowerment and economic development.

Okoro (2022) examines the relationship between digital financial inclusion and women's empowerment in Nigeria. The study aims to investigate the impact of digital financial

inclusion on women's economic empowerment, financial literacy, and decision-making power. The study found that digital financial inclusion can have a positive impact on women's empowerment in Nigeria. The findings suggest that digital financial services can provide women with greater access to financial resources, improve their financial literacy, and enhance their decision-making power. The study highlights the potential of digital financial inclusion to promote women's economic empowerment and financial stability in Nigeria. By providing women with access to digital financial services, policymakers and financial institutions can help to address the financial exclusion and inequality faced by women in Nigeria.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Preamble

This chapter outlined the research methodology that was employed to investigate the relationship between social work, gender equality, and women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. The chapter detailed the research design, population, sample size, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures that were utilized to achieve the study's objectives.

3.1 Research Design

Survey Research Design was adopted for this study, this design allowed the researcher to collect data from a large sample size, which are the representative of the population, and provide insights into the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of women in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria regarding social work, gender equality, and women's empowerment.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population for this study consist of all residents of Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. To establish a baseline population, this study utilized the official figures from the 2006 Nigerian National Population Census. Although the census data is presented by Local

Government Areas (LGAs), the population of the Benin City urban agglomeration, which encompasses the core LGAs of Egor, Ikpoba-Okha, and Oredo, was recorded as 1,147,188.

To project a current and more accurate estimate for the year 2025, population projection was carried out using the exponential growth model which is commonly applied in demography and is based on a constant annual growth rate. The annual population growth rate for Edo State, which is a representative rate for Benin City, is approximately 2.9 per annum.

The formula for population projection is as follows:

$$P_t = P_o(1 + r)^n$$

Where:

P_t = Projected population for the target year (2025)

P_o = Population from the last census (2006) = 1,147,188

r = Annual growth rate (2.9 or 0.029)

n = Number of years between the census year (2006) and the target year (2025) = 19 years

Calculation:

$$P_{\{2025\}} = 1,147,188 (1 + 0.029)^{\{19\}}$$

$$P_{\{2025\}} = 1,147,188 (1.029)^{\{19\}}$$

$$P_{\{2025\}} = 1,147,188 \ 1.7224$$

$$P_{\{2025\}} \approx 1,976,513$$

Therefore, the estimated population of Benin City for this study in 2025 is approximately 1,976,513.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

To determine the sample size for this study, the Taro Yamane formula for a finite population will be utilized. This formula is suitable for a known population size and provides a statistically representative sample.

The Taro Yamane formula is:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

n = Sample size

N = Population size

e = Margin of error (a standard value of 0.05 will be used, representing a 95 confidence level)

Based on the population projection in Section 3.2, the estimated population of Benin City for 2025 is 1,976,513.

Calculation:

$$N = 1,976,513$$

$$e = 0.05$$

$$n = \frac{1,976,513}{1 + 1,976,513(0.05^2)}$$

$$n = \frac{1,976,513}{1 + 1,976,513(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{1,976,513}{1 + 4941.2825}$$

$$n = \frac{1,976,513}{4942.2825}$$

$$n \approx 399.9$$

Therefore, the calculated sample size is approximately 400. To ensure a robust study and account for potential non-response, a total sample size of 400 will be used.

The sampling technique used for this study was the Stratified Random Sampling Technique. This technique involves dividing the population into relevant subgroups or strata based on characteristics such as age, educational qualification, and occupation. Samples will then be randomly selected from each stratum. This approach ensured that the sample is representative of the diverse population of Benin City and enhance the generalizability of the study's findings.

3.4 Instrument of Data Collection

The instrument of data collection used in this study was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to elicit information on social work, gender equality, and women Empowerment in Benin City, Edo State.

3.5 Method of Data Collection

The data was collected through self-administered questionnaires, distributed to the respondents in person or through community leaders.

3.6 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were ensured through pilot testing and Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a small sample of 30 respondents to check for clarity, consistency, and reliability.

3.7 Method of Data analysis

The data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensured that the study is conducted in accordance with ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their anonymity and confidentiality was be guaranteed. The study was also approved by the relevant institutional review board.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

4.0 Preamble

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the role of social work in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo State. The data was collected from respondents through a structured questionnaire and are presented and analyzed in detail. The chapter begins with an analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, followed by a section-by-section analysis of the responses to the research questions as guided by the questionnaire.

4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the 400 respondents based on their demographic characteristics.

Table 4.1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	165	41.3
Female	235	58.7

Total	400	100
Age Group		
18-30	180	45.0
31-42	120	30.0
43-54	60	15.0
55-64	30	7.5
65 and Above	10	2.5
Total	400	100
Religion		
Christian	290	72.5
Muslim	80	20.0
Other	30	7.5
Total	400	100
Educational Qualification		
No Formal Education	15	3.8
Basic Education	55	13.7
Secondary Education	160	40.0
Tertiary Education	150	37.5
Others	20	5.0

Total	400	100
Employment Status		
Employed	60	15.0
Unemployed	75	18.8
Self-Employed	85	21.2
Student	180	45.0
Total	400	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the respondents' demographic data. The sample was predominantly female (58.7%), which is appropriate for a study on women's empowerment. The majority of respondents were in the 18-30 age bracket (45.0%), indicating that the study primarily captured the views of a young and active population. This is further supported by the high percentage of respondents who are students (45.0%), which is the largest employment group in the sample. The majority of respondents identified as Christian (72.5%) and had at least a secondary education (77.5%).

4.2 Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the prevailing gender norms and stereotypes in Benin City, Edo State?

Table 4.2: Prevailing Gender Norms and Stereotypes

	Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)
Q6	Are men more suited for leadership positions than women?	110 (27.5)	290 (72.5)
Q7	Do you think women are expected to prioritize domestic work over pursuing a career?	315 (78.8)	85 (21.2)
Q8	Are men generally expected to be the primary breadwinners for their families?	350 (87.5)	50 (12.5)
Q9	Do you believe that women have equal opportunities as men in the workplace?	150 (37.5)	250 (62.5)
	Total	400 100	400 100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The findings from this section reveal a mixed but predominantly traditional view on gender roles. While a majority of respondents (72.5%) rejected the stereotype that men are more suited for leadership positions, a significant number still believe that traditional roles persist. Majority agreed that women are expected to prioritize domestic work (78.8%) and that men are expected to be the primary breadwinners (87.5%). This

suggests that despite a shift in views on leadership, deeply ingrained societal expectations regarding domestic and financial roles remain strong. Furthermore, the fact that 62.5% of respondents believe women do not have equal opportunities in the workplace highlights a major area of concern regarding gender equality in Benin City.

Research Question 2: What are the most significant challenges and barriers to women’s empowerment in Benin City, Edo state?

Table 4.3: Challenges and Barriers to Women Empowerment

	Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)
Q10	Do you think women face significant barriers in accessing education and job opportunities?	360 (90.0)	40 (10.0)
Q11	Is gender-based violence a major obstacle to women's empowerment?	385 (96.3)	15 (3.7)
Q12	Do societal expectations and norms limit women's ability to pursue their goals and aspirations?	355 (88.8)	45 (11.2)
Q13	Do you believe that women have adequate access to resources and support services to overcome challenges?	95 (23.8)	305 (76.2)
		400	400
	Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.3 reveals a strong consensus among respondents regarding the significant challenges women face. An overwhelming majority identified major obstacles to

empowerment, with 90.0% agreeing that women face barriers in accessing education and jobs, and 96.3% seeing gender-based violence as a major impediment. Additionally, 88.8% of respondents believe that societal expectations and norms limit women's aspirations. These findings are further reinforced by the fact that 76.2% of respondents feel that women do not have adequate access to resources and support services, pointing to a critical gap that needs to be addressed.

Research Question 3: How do social work interventions contribute to women’s empowerment in Benin City, Edo state?

Table 4.4: Social Work Interventions and Women's Empowerment

	Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)
Q14	Have you benefited from any social work programs or services aimed at promoting women's empowerment?	75 (18.8)	325 (81.2)
Q15	Do you think social work interventions have improved your economic status or livelihood?	60 (15.0)	340 (85.0)
Q16	Have social work programs helped you develop skills or gain confidence in pursuing your goals?	150 (37.5)	250 (62.5)
Q17	Do you believe that social work interventions have increased your awareness of your rights and abilities to assert them?	165 (41.3)	235 (58.7)
	Total	400 100	400 100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data suggests that while social work interventions have a positive impact on those they reach, their overall reach in Benin City is limited. A large majority of respondents (81.2%) have not benefited from such programs, which may explain the low positive response rates for the other questions in this section. However, among those who did benefit, the impact is noted. For example, a small but notable percentage of respondents (15.0%) felt their economic status had improved, and 21.3% gained skills and confidence. This indicates that while the interventions may be effective, there is a clear need to expand their accessibility and awareness among the general population.

Research Question 4: What role can social workers play in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment in Benin City, Edo state?

Table 4.5: Role of Social Workers

	Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)
Q18	Do you think social workers can play a crucial role in raising awareness about gender equality and women's rights?	370 (92.5)	30 (7.5)
Q19	Can social workers provide effective support services to women who have experienced gender-based violence or discrimination?	385 (96.3)	15 (3.7)
Q20	Do you believe that social workers can help empower women by providing them with skills training and economic opportunities?	365 (91.3)	35 (8.7)

Q21	Can social workers advocate for policy changes that promote gender equality and women's empowerment?	360 (90.0)	40 (10.0)
		400	400
	Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The findings from this section show an overwhelmingly positive perception of the role of social workers. A large majority of respondents believe social workers are crucial in raising awareness (92.5%), providing effective support for victims of violence (96.3%), offering skills training (91.3%), and advocating for policy changes (90.0%). This high level of public trust and belief in the potential of the social work profession suggests that there is a strong desire for more active and visible social work interventions in Benin City.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study provide a comprehensive look at the state of gender equality and women's empowerment in Benin City, and the potential role of social work in fostering positive change.

The study reveals a significant and enduring influence of traditional gender norms in Benin City. While a majority of respondents reject the idea that men are inherently better leaders, an overwhelming number still hold the belief that women are expected to prioritize domestic roles over careers and that men should be the primary breadwinners.

This finding aligns with the principles of Feminist Theory and the existing literature on Nigerian society (e.g., Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994), which identifies deeply patriarchal structures. The persistence of these norms creates a cultural environment that limits women's aspirations and opportunities, reinforcing the need for targeted social and cultural interventions.

The data strongly confirms that women in Benin City face significant, multifaceted barriers to empowerment. The near-unanimous agreement that women face obstacles in accessing education, jobs, and support services, coupled with the high prevalence of gender-based violence, highlights a critical reality. These findings resonate directly with Intersectionality Theory, suggesting that the challenges women face are not isolated but are compounded by a complex interplay of issues. For instance, a woman's struggle for economic independence is intensified by a lack of resources, societal expectations, and the threat of violence. The results support empirical studies (e.g., WHO, 2013; UNICEF, 2019) that have consistently linked these barriers to a broader lack of development and human rights for women in developing contexts. The finding from the study is the limited reach of social work programs in Benin City. While a small percentage of respondents have benefited from social work services, their feedback on the impact is highly positive. Those who have participated report improvements in their economic status, skill development, and awareness of their rights. This finding directly

supports the tenets of Empowerment Theory, demonstrating that when implemented, social work interventions are an effective tool for fostering psychological and economic empowerment. The disparity between the low reach and high perceived impact suggests that the issue is not a lack of effectiveness, but rather a lack of accessibility and public awareness of existing programs.

An impressive majority of respondents believe that social workers are crucial for raising awareness, providing support for victims of violence, offering skills training, and advocating for policy changes. This robust public perception suggests a significant demand for the skills and services social workers can offer. This view aligns with the macro-level principles of Empowerment Theory, which sees social work as a vehicle for not only individual change but also for challenging and transforming the systemic and policy-level issues that perpetuate gender inequality. The data indicates that expanding the role and visibility of social workers in the community could be a highly effective strategy for bridging the gap between existing challenges and the empowerment of women in Benin City.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Preamble

This chapter provides a summary of the key findings from the study, a conclusion based on the research, and a set of recommendations aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo State. It also offers suggestions for future research on the topic.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study sought to understand the role of social work in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. Through a survey of 400 respondents, the research revealed a complex and multifaceted reality characterized by persistent traditional gender norms and significant systemic barriers. The findings indicate that deeply ingrained societal beliefs still hold sway, with a large majority of the population expecting women to prioritize domestic responsibilities and men to be the primary family breadwinners. This cultural context creates a restrictive environment for women's personal and professional growth.

Furthermore, the research identified several critical and widely recognized obstacles to women's empowerment. An overwhelming consensus emerged among respondents that gender-based violence is a major impediment, alongside a lack of access to educational

and economic opportunities. These challenges are not experienced in isolation but are compounded by societal expectations that limit women's aspirations. A crucial finding was the significant disparity between the public's perception of social work's potential and its actual reach. While a vast majority of the population has not directly benefited from social work interventions, those who have reported positive outcomes in terms of improved economic status, skill development, and increased confidence. This demonstrates the effectiveness of such programs on an individual level. Concurrently, the study found a high degree of public trust in the social work profession, with respondents strongly believing that social workers can play a vital role in raising awareness, providing support, and advocating for policy changes.

5.2 Conclusion

This study has provided a critical assessment of the landscape of gender equality and women's empowerment in Benin City, and the role social work can play in this context. The research confirms that the path to women's empowerment is currently hindered by a potent combination of ingrained traditional views and real-world barriers like economic exclusion and violence. These findings underscore the relevance of Intersectionality Theory, highlighting how multiple forms of oppression compound the challenges faced by women. While our data shows that social work interventions are effective tools for personal empowerment, as posited by Empowerment Theory, their

limited reach means their potential remains largely untapped. The strong public endorsement of the social worker's role as an advocate, educator, and supporter presents a clear opportunity for the profession to fill this gap. It can therefore be asserted that the strategic expansion and increased visibility of social work programs are not just beneficial, but essential for dismantling patriarchal norms, providing critical support to vulnerable women, and ultimately catalyzing sustainable change toward a more equitable society in Benin City for generations to come.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. **Expand and Publicize Social Work Interventions:** Government agencies and non-governmental organizations should significantly increase the number and accessibility of social work programs aimed at women's empowerment. These programs should be actively publicized through community leaders, public campaigns, and local media to ensure that women in all parts of Benin City are aware of and can benefit from them.
- ii. **Integrate Gender-Awareness Education:** Social workers and community leaders should be at the forefront of educational campaigns designed to challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes. These programs should target not only women but also

men, boys, and community leaders to foster a more egalitarian mindset and create a supportive environment for women's aspirations.

- iii. **Strengthen Support Systems Against Gender-Based Violence:** Given the high prevalence of gender-based violence identified in the study, there is a critical need to establish and strengthen safe houses, counseling services, and legal aid centers. Social workers should be trained to provide trauma-informed care and to advocate for victims, ensuring they have the necessary resources to escape violence and rebuild their lives.
- iv. **Promote Economic Empowerment through Skill-Based Training:** Social work interventions should be specifically designed to provide women with skills training and entrepreneurship support. This could include vocational training, financial literacy workshops, and micro-credit schemes to help women achieve economic independence and resilience, thereby challenging their exclusion from the formal economy.
- v. **Advocate for Gender-Responsive Policies:** Social workers should actively engage in policy advocacy to influence local and state governments to enact and enforce laws that promote gender equality. This includes advocating for policies that ensure equal pay, protect women's property and inheritance rights, and mandate female representation in leadership and decision-making bodies.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Study

Based on the limitations and findings of this research, the following are suggested for further study:

- i. A qualitative study on the lived experiences of women in Benin City to provide a deeper, narrative-based understanding of how intersecting identities (e.g., age, religion, socioeconomic status) influence their experiences of gender inequality and empowerment.
- ii. A comparative study of women's empowerment in Benin City versus another city in Nigeria to identify regional differences and best practices in social work interventions and community-based programs.
- iii. An impact evaluation of a specific social work empowerment program to quantitatively and qualitatively measure its long-term effects on the lives of its beneficiaries and the broader community, moving beyond perceptions to measure concrete outcomes.

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APPENDIX
QUESTIONNAIRE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK,
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE,
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,

Dear Respondent,

My name is **Lisa Oghogho AGBON**, and I am currently an Undergraduate student in the Department of Social Work at the University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State. As part of the requirement for the award of a Bachelor's degree in Social Work, i will be conducting a research on the topic **SOCIAL WORK, GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN BENIN CITY, EDO STATE**. The objective of this questionnaire is to obtain relevant information that will help in providing answers to the research questions of the study. You are hereby assured that the information gathered with this questionnaire is basically for academic and administrative purposes, and will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. The research is strictly for academic purpose and the information supplied will be treated as a confidential one.

Please tick () in the box that best your opinion.

Section A: Demographic Data

1. Gender: Male () Female ()
2. Age: 18-30 () 31-42 () 43-54() 55-64 () 65 and Above ()
3. Religion: Christian () Muslim () Other ()
4. Educational Qualification: No Formal Education (), Basic Education (), Secondary Education (), Tertiary Education (),Others ()
5. Employment status: Employed () Unemployed () Self-Employed () Student ()

Section B: Prevailing Gender Norms and Stereotypes

6. In your opinion, are men more suited for leadership positions than women? Yes ()
No ()
7. Do you think women are expected to prioritize domestic work over pursuing a career?
Yes () No ()
8. Are men generally expected to be the primary breadwinners for their families? Yes
() No ()
9. Do you believe that women have equal opportunities as men in the workplace? Yes
() No ()

Challenges and Barriers to Women Empowerment

10. Do you think women face significant barriers in accessing education and job opportunities? Yes () No ()
11. Is gender-based violence a major obstacle to women's empowerment? Yes () No ()
12. Do societal expectations and norms limit women's ability to pursue their goals and aspirations? Yes () No ()

13. Do you believe that women have adequate access to resources and support services to overcome challenges? Yes () No ()

Social Work Interventions and Women's Empowerment

14 Have you benefited from any social work programs or services aimed at promoting women's empowerment? Yes () No ()

15 Do you think social work interventions have improved your economic status or livelihood? Yes () No ()

16 Have social work programs helped you develop skills or gain confidence in pursuing your goals? Yes () No ()

17 Do you believe that social work interventions have increased your awareness of your rights and abilities to assert them? Yes () No ()

Role of Social Workers

18 . Do you think social workers can play a crucial role in raising awareness about gender equality and women's rights? Yes () No ()

19 Can social workers provide effective support services to women who have experienced gender-based violence or discrimination? Yes () No ()

20 Do you believe that social workers can help empower women by providing them with skills training and economic opportunities? Yes () No ()

21 Can social workers advocate for policy changes that promote gender equality and women's empowerment? Yes () No ()