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WOMEN SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS: THE REPERCUSSION OF ILLITERACY, CASE STUDY: CHARLOTTE, SIERRA LEONE.

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ABSTRACT

Illiteracy has affected women in Sierra Leone, by limiting their abilities to participate in governmental, domestic, and economic activities. As a result of the limited opportunities, women are faced with various challenges that impact their social livelihood. For example, women are deprived from making decisions in their homes because of low educational status. Sierra Leone has an adult literacy rate of 43.21%. The male literacy rate is 51.65% and the female literacy rate is 34.85%, creating a huge gap between both sexes (UNESCO, 2018). The impacts of illiteracy also affect youngsters, as early marriage takes the trend, and literacy programs become abandoned. This study examines the repercussions of illiteracy in the hamlet of Charlotte within Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. This study highlights the magnitude of the problem, the consequences of the problem, and make recommendations base on suggestions from the participants on how this problem can be resolved.

INTRODUCTION

Illiteracy is the inability to read or write, or the actual or perceived state of being uneducated (Gibbon, 1781). The rationale of this term implies the possible consequences it can have on a person's social wellbeing. The first few years of a child's life sets the foundation for most of his adulthood decisions. The qualities and opportunities available during a person's years of early childhood will most likely affect the likelihood of them being literate or illiterate (Garcia, 2017). The incapacity of parents to afford education for their kids is most times backed up by the fact that they too did not attain primary education, which leads to not knowing the value of education (Isaacs, 2012). Older people who missed out on education at young age are most likely not receiving necessary financial support in their latter days, making it impossible to even foster their young ones to go further in the opposite direction. Literacy, which is just the opposite of illiteracy creates a versatile and broad spectrum for decisions making in the larger society (Lind, 2008).

Research has shown that the economic status of the family influences their means of receiving quality education (Lv., 2017). Based on previous research done, it was been proven that by age 6, 50% of children living in poverty are not prepared for school; a condition which may lead to backwardness in their educational life (Isaacs, 2012). These children often fall behind into social wayward activities, repeating the illiteracy cycle from their parents. High illiteracy rate is a national crisis that affects every aspect of development in a society and the broader economy as well (Garcia, 2017). The scourge of illiteracy has left social and economic stain in every society (The National Academics of Sciences. Engineering. Medicine, n.d).

The need for girls to receive primary education has been on the table for centuries. Between 1800-1849, Bradford Academy in the United States, was the first higher educational institution to admit women to school in Massachusetts, and later became exclusively for women (Lewis, 2019). But even so, research has shown that women illiteracy is still an unsettled issue around the world, especially in developing countries (Kelleher, 2014). The Women World Study (2015), found that 496 million women are still illiterate, setting a hindrance for achieving the global goal of gender equality by 2030. Nearly two-third of the world's illiterate adults are women, a proportion that has remained unchanged for the past 20 years (Ford, 2015).

BACKGROUND

Sierra Leone as a republic was created by an English Humanist, Granville Sharp to repatriate former slaves; a multi-ethnic and multi-religious group of People. The country got its independence on April 27, 1961 from the Great Britain and its first Prime Minister was Sir Milton Margai. Sierra Leone is a small country with just



over 7 million people (World Bank, 2018), consisting of 190 constituent chiefdoms (Chiefdoms of Sierra Leone, n.d), and a composition of 16 different ethnic groups (Ethnic Groups in Sierra Leone, n.d). Its immediate neighbors are Guinea, with whom she shares boundary to the north and north-east, and Liberia to the south-east. It is bordered on the south-west by the Atlantic Ocean. For administrative purposes the country is split into three provinces and a fourth unit, formerly the Colony, now called the Western Area (World Bank, 2018).

Charlotte, which is located within the urban Western Area along the Youyi Highway serves as the case study for this paper. It is approximately two miles out of the capital city, Freetown. Charlotte was created in the year 1817 AD to serve as a habitat for liberated freed Africans, the hamlet was named after Princess Charlotte of Wales (Ecosalone, 2016). Individuals in this area are mostly self-employed by doing small scale farming and other commercial activities, such as selling food, or doing land/construction care-taker jobs. The population of Charlotte is almost entirely from the Creole ethnic group (Visit Sierra Leone, 2010).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Amongst the key findings of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in most low-income countries, young women are less likely than young men to be in paid work. They are also less likely to complete secondary education (OECD, 2015). 34.85% of women in Sierra Leone are illiterate (UNESCO, 2018). The repercussion of illiteracy is hindering women from making financial contribution in their homes and hampering them from partaking in decision making while using them as instrument for fecundity in the hamlet of Charlotte (Zielinski, 2015).

RELEVANCE

This study focuses on the underlying drivers of high illiteracy rate in Charlotte. Previous studies in Charlotte have been mostly focused on environmental issues. Hence, this paper has set the benchmark for future evaluation in highlighting issues that can indirectly cause environmental problems. The rate of illiteracy in Charlotte has some long-term effects, and if it isn't dealt with now, can set as a hindrance to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Sierra Leone is one of the countries in the world with the highest illiteracy rate (education.stateuniversity.com, n.d). The country's overall adult literacy rate increased from 34.8% in 2004 to 43.2% in 2018 growing at an average annual rate of 13.18% (World Data Atlas, 2018). This present case study seeks to understand the consequence of illiteracy on women in Sierra Leone by examining Charlotte, a hamlet in the country.

The present study is guided by three research questions, as follows:

- What is the percentage of educated women against uneducated women in Charlotte?
- How do economic activities affect the social livelihood of Charlotte women?
- What is the age distribution and fecundity rate of women in Charlotte?

DELIMITATION

The population size of the study area was based on the Western Area Peninsula reports acquire from the World Wide Web, as it was difficult to get past literature on Charlotte from National Institutions.

LIMITATIONS

Interaction with the participants during the interview was a bit difficult because of the native krio language and their inability to speak the English language. The Researcher also faced difficulties in gathering information from the Statistician General Office due to lack of confidentiality (being that the researcher is a foreigner). There isn't much information on the web about the population of Charlotte, and this office is responsible for national census, hence information used for describing the population was gathered through interview with the participants.



LITERATURE REVIEW

The foundation for the present status core for African Women, was instituted by a Eurocentric educational body during colonialism. This system of governance was designed to prioritize the male gender, to nourish them for the seat of governance, thus giving leadership edge to one gender (Oyewumi, 2002). The voices of Sierra Leonean women are ignored in the debate of their own sexual and reproductive health. The country faces several problems regarding various forms of sexual violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, all forms of rape; women also suffer from genital mutilation (USAID, 2019). Low level of education has caused inability for women to obtain a better job, and earn more money (Sidh., et al. 2011).

There is no chance of reducing poverty without huge and speedy improvements to the well-being of women and girls globally (OECD, 2015).

SOME FACTS ABOUT GIRL'S EDUCATION (FACT SHEET, 2013)

Educated Women are less likely to die in childbirth.

Educating Girls can save millions of lives.

Mothers' education improves child nutrition.

Girls with higher levels of education are less likely to have children at an early age.

Educating Girls is a key factor in hastening the demographic transition to lower birth rates.

Girls with higher levels education are less likely to get married at early age.

WOMEN EDUCATION IN SIERRA LEONE

While some societies have experienced the fast-growing eradication of poverty from family lines through educated women, other societies still refuse to value these impacts (Puri, 2017). The government of Sierra Leone continues its fight against poverty, even as it struggles to deal with other significant issues like access to electricity, environmental hazards, disease outbreak (biological weapons) and other vices. But in the midst of all their crucial circumstances, women issues are on their priority list. In 2019, the first lady of the Country launched a campaign against rape (known as "Hands off our Girls"): a campaign meant to send caution to male abusers that find pleasure in sexually assaulting and harassing young girls (Sierra Leone State House). Alongside the Government of Sierra Leone, the Girl Child Network, a non-profit organization that works around the globe, has been able to implement the Girls Empowerment Villages project: an initiative that provide safe places for abused girls. The United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF) is another non-governmental organization that is supporting girls' education by providing annual support for girls' education week: which is run by the Ministry of Education. The effect of these ongoing events, as assessed by the Global Partnership for Education (GEP), have shown that the gender gap between primary enrollment and primary completion rate has decreased since 2012 (Montbleau, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

An impactful research design is intended to create a minimum bias in data and increases trust in the factuality of data collected. A qualitative research design was used for this study. When undertaking research, there are two kinds of data mostly available, primary and secondary. Primary sources cover observations, interviews, and questionnaire results, while secondary are previously published documents within the nature of your study (Kumar, 2011). Review of published related research papers, qualitative questionnaire and inductive reasonings were all patterned to formulate the desired evaluation of the research questions. To ensure more accurate data, an open-ended qualitative questionnaire was developed to meet the needs of the research questions. As referenced in the Appendix, the questionnaire answers the research questions and was utilized to acquire the results. The questionnaire being used in this study was examined and approved by one of the country's University (Njala). This questionnaire was open ended: some questions were not placed on the checklist, but information was gathered through discussions, like daily income, number of houses in the hamlet...etc.



SAMPLING

The Western Area (WA) covers a land area of 557 km², it is then divided into two districts (urban WA and rural WA), and further divided into 16 sub-districts. Charlotte is within one of the 16 sub-districts, along the Youyi Highway. Charlotte might just be approximately 5% of this land area. The total population of the Western Area (WA) is 442, 951 (Statistic Sierra Leone, 2015).

The population of Charlotte was approximately assumed by the participants as over 500 in numbers. 50 persons were used for the study through a random sampling design. Further stratified random sampling was made to target Women and Girls from age 18 to 45 in Charlotte. Interview was carried-on through group discussion and individual interview. Research participants privacy was protected based on ethical principles; these principles extended to all people regardless of their occupation, age, religion or educational status.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results of the questionnaires use in obtaining raw data from the target sample of 50 females in Charlotte and a chartable representation will be presented here. Analysis will focus on (i) the fecundity data (ii) their educational levels and (iii) the socioeconomic factors. This will follow an overall conclusion on other basic facts collected, like the way forward and recommendations that were proposed by the researcher, based on suggestions given by the participants.

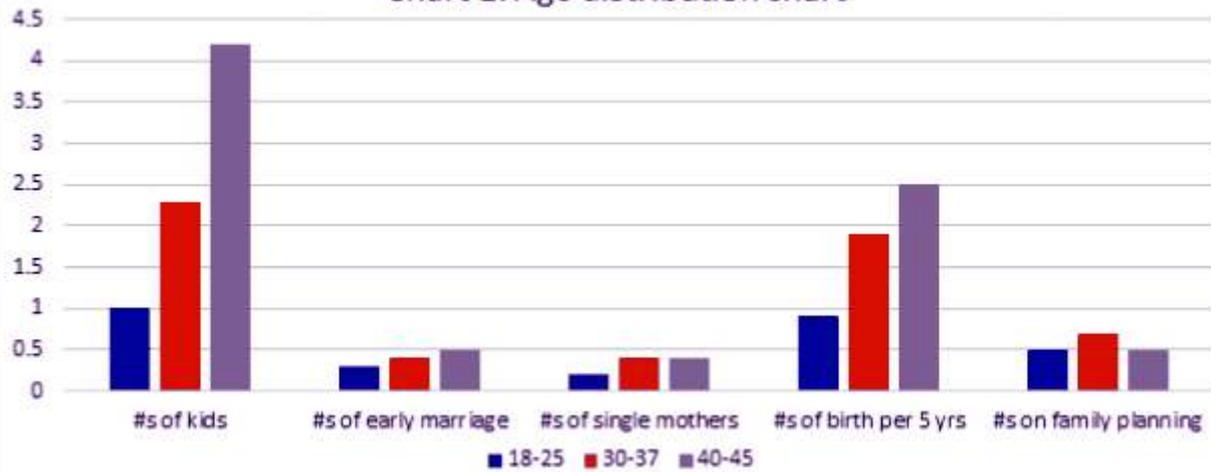
AGE DISTRIBUTION

As stated previously, the research statistics comprised of 50 target participants and a comprehensive-qualitative method for data collection was utilized. A descriptive statistic was use, since the research target was only 50 females between age 18-45. The age groups were classified as follows:

- 1 **18-25 years old:** This cohort was made up of 19 females, which represented 38% of the sample. This age group was easier to converse with and were able to understand the need to engage in some form of literacy program (for those that were not already schooling). Because of their more complex thinking they understood and weighed the immediate rewards of education against future consequences. Five were 18 years of age, five were 20 years of age, six were 23 years of age, and three were 25 years of age in this cohort.
- 1 **30-37:** The group of individuals found in this age range constituted of 17 persons which valued 34% of the sample. Females in their Prime are on a self-evaluation trend, they are capable of switching path in order to enhance their future (Jones, 2020). For this section: four were age 30, one was age 31, three at the age of 33, two at the age of 35 and seven were 37 years of age.
- 40-45:** The middle ages represented the lowest value of the target group, 28%. 14 Women who seemed a little bit older than their age (poverty stress can add years to the age of individual immune system cells (Woolston C., 2020): causing your physical body structure to wrecked up) was able to give much information on their cause of not being schooled: which was mostly due to low finance. Three were 40 years of age, two were 41 years of age, three were 43 years of age, two were 44 years old, and four were 45 years of age in this group.



Chart 1. Age distribution chart



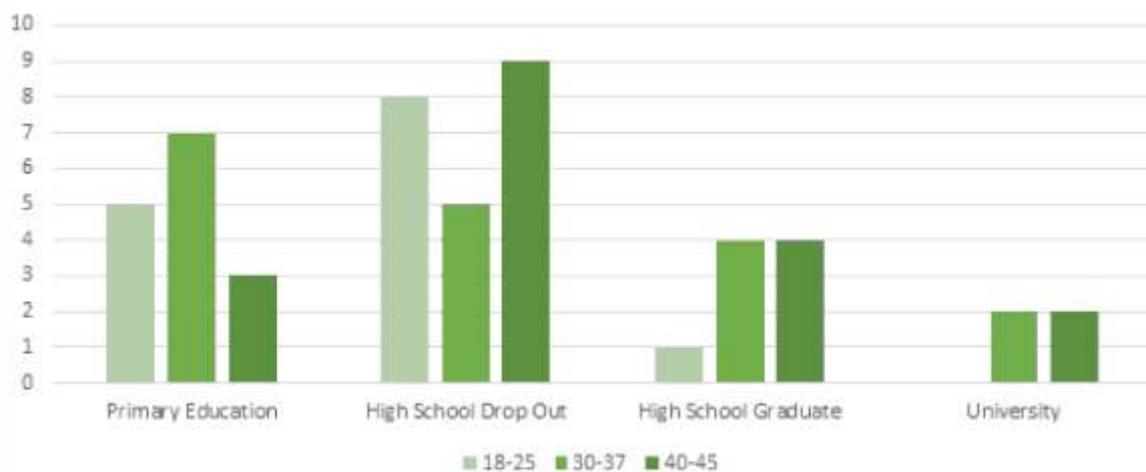
As can be seen from above, the cohort of age found between 40-45 are the most active in child bearing. This is as a result of no alternative social livelihood besides doing their small-scale businesses. Through data collection, it was stated by an elderly respondent that during the previous years, when the sun went down, and there was nothing else to do, having sex became their social alternative activity. Age 30-37 would have been on the same path, but through the introduction of family planning, the numbers were reduced for these prime ages. From the evaluation process, it is shown that the youngsters are much better off than all the three groups and with the amount of time in their favor, better decisions can be made.

SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

Socioeconomic factors cover three major areas: education, occupation, and income (pdhpe.net). The factors combine the total measure of a person's work experience, and a family's economic and social position in relation to others. When analyzing socioeconomic factors, the household earners, earners' education, and occupation are examined (Socioeconomic status, n.d.).

Education: 30% of the females interviewed were primary school drop-out, mostly between primary three to primary six; 44% of them were high school dropout, this seem to be the highest level of education that much of them attain. High school graduate and University students made up 18%, and eight percent respectively. Majority of the population that are found between age 30 to 45, that happens to be High School Drop Out, sees it difficult to return to classes because of their mother hood responsibilities, and the fear of being seated amongst children that are at their kids' age range.

Chart 2. Educational Level





Occupation: Only about 38% of the female population in Charlotte is bringing in household income. And the source of income for 98% of these Women are small scale community trade; which indicate that they are bringing less than SLL 100,000 Leones (approximately USD \$13) per month. Due to low level of education, they are unable to obtain a better job and earn more money (Sidh., et al. 2011). This situation affects their ability to claim their rights to decision making in their homes. From the 50 targeted Women, the questionnaire proves only ten ladies were earning money from their vocational skills.

Power Supply: The Charlotte Village Health Center and the house of the community chairman were the only places with electricity during the researcher visit to this community. These two sites use the solar panel renewable energy source.

Construction of community roads: Charlotte with its vast mountainous view and a whole lot of sparsely deforested forest, is very undeveloped. The hamlet is accessible but the quality of road is degrading.

With the presence of a community health post, Women in Charlotte has access to health care. The hamlet also benefits from the stream that passes through the middle of the community, making it less difficult to get water. Findings also convey that a Woman previously served as head of Charlotte over the past years.

CONCLUSION

Gender inequality in Sierra Leone is still high, even though there are measures being developed to hamper the effect. Women are still seen as sex instrument to men in Charlotte. The problem of illiteracy in the hamlet of Charlotte can be dealt with through enhancing and empowering the women population. Illiteracy has led to a normalized state of poverty and marital maltreatment for Charlotte women. Low economic status of rural families is the major cause of secondary school drop out in the country. The Ministry of Education (Sierra Leone) needs to promote adult literacy programs and provide identity protection for enrolled adults. Considerations and support need to be hastened, for progress in the process of combating illiteracy in Charlotte, Sierra Leone.

RECOMMENDATIONS

When women have equal opportunities in society, they can help in creating liberty for their fellow Women. Women with access to reproductive health services find it easy to break out of poverty, while the literate ones are best at using birth control, in order to regulate the population growth (Obaid, n.d). Illiteracy rate amongst Women in Charlotte can be changed by:

- 1 Assessing the baseline cause of Illiteracy amongst the Women in Charlotte. To ensure and hasten change in Charlotte, there's a need to understand the root cause of the issue. From data obtain through the questionnaire, it has proven that one major driver of illiteracy is high fecundity rate.
- 1 Starting a literacy program with the youngsters. It has been proven based on the data obtained through the questionnaire that vocational education pays off, and it is the major source of income for Charlotte Women.
- 1 Creating Social Alternative livelihood: the lack of alternative livelihood has led to idleness. Idleness, has made sexual activities to become an alternative livelihood. Hence, through the creation of social alternative livelihood, fecundity rate can be reduced, which will lead to lesser numbers of kids to provide education for.
- 1 Promoting Family Planning. By slowing population growth through the use of family planning, lower income family can satisfy their sexual desire, without getting pregnant. When unmet pregnancies are minimized, benefits like: more years for education, delayed marriage and child bearing can be achieved.



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QUESTIONNAIRES

Women Socioeconomic Status: The Repercussion of Illiteracy, Case Study: Charlotte, Sierra Leone-
Checklist.

This checklist was designed to collect data from the People of Charlotte, to carry on a research which tends to analyze the causative factor for low socio-economic livelihood of Women in Charlotte. These questions will be use to understand the community dwellers perspective in dealing with the population growth in Charlotte.

The questions within this paper are design in sections that requires your opinion on:

- The daily socio-economic activities and fecundity rate of Women in Charlotte.
- Critical issues that are hindering Women access to education in Charlotte.
- Point out major happenings and way forward in addressing them.

This report will serve as a reference for this manuscript and several other related paper works.

