

Male Colleagues' Attitudes and Professional Women's Adjustment Patterns in their Work Setting

Nonso N. Bisong, Abang J. Isangedighi and Florence B. Obi
University of Calabar, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

This study is a survey design set to determine the adjustment patterns of professional women to their male colleagues' attitude in their work setting. Data was collected from 450 respondents in Rivers state, using the stratified random sampling, and four variables were used to test the hypothesis. Results showed that there is no significant difference in the women's adjustment patterns to their male colleagues' attitude in their work place. However one of the variables (sexual advances) was significant, showing that women in the public sector adjust better than their counterparts in the private sector. Further analysis of the result in simple percentage show the adjustment patterns of professional women. It reveals that a higher percentage of professional women caution their male colleagues when they spite their authority, persuade them not to undermine their decisions, avoid their profane jokes and object strongly to their sexual advances.

INTRODUCTION

A good proportion of Nigerian women are professionals in their various fields. These professional women possess requisite educational and professional qualifications, and have taken up careers as well as made in-roads into top managerial positions, where they provide leadership. By virtue of their statuses, these professional women are vested with responsibilities in their work places some of which include policy decision-making, exercising authority, evaluation of job performance and ensuring compliance by workers to the corporate code of conduct. Like their male counterparts, they are expected to be efficient and effective.

However, they are often generally faced with numerous challenges and hindrances that tend to undermine their capacity to succeed. Prominent among these challenges is the discrimination they face from their male colleagues who tend to undermine them in the workplace. Most times, male colleagues see women through their "cultural glasses", and these result in negative attitudes towards them. These include undermining their suggestions and authority, just to prove that men ought not to be under women and take orders from them, but the other way round. At times some professional women are even accused of attaining professional heights through "other means" rather than merit. Any little mistake on their part, therefore, usually attracts heavy criticisms and sarcastic comments regarding their attempt to compete with men in their world. In spite of all these challenges, some professional women have been very successful in their careers, by devising ways of adjusting with this situation in their work places. It is against this background that this study is undertaken to determine professional women's adjustment patterns to their male colleagues' attitude towards them.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Functionalist Perspective

Talcott and Bales (1995), examined gender discrimination from the functionalist perspective and surmised that for efficiency in performance in society, there was a need to establish gender roles and division of labour among sexes. The traditional gender role stereotype requires that women work at home, while men engage in the occupational world outside the home. This relationship between males and females has positioned men to be superior, having dominance over women the "inferior partners". This cultural belief has further put the males in controlling position in the social structure. Generally, the Nigerian society is very much male dominated. Although women have made their impact and influence felt in the echelons of occupational structure, their achievements notwithstanding, their gender is still a major factor on how they are treated or perceived by their male colleagues.

Literature Review

Kaufman (1984) observed 174 male managers and staff personnel, whose attitude towards their female counterparts were negative, they perceived the women as unable to supervise men and as competitors in the professional world against men, who generally have full time wives like them at home. To them, professional careers are not designed for women especially those with families but for men, who are free from such obligations.

Henning and Jardin (1978) observed that twenty-five executive women in a private sector whom they studied, are faced with the reality of the need to cope with cultural and social bias they faced at work, because the executive role they play is seen by many people as an exclusive male role and no matter who the particular woman is, she is first and foremost regarded as a woman. In response, these executive women adopt a behavioural style in which they often become rigid as a means of coping with these biases. They prefer to suppress any hint of feminism behind a hard, authoritarian exterior. They develop a response pattern of behaviour, given similar stimuli and situations.

Gill and witty (1983), in another study on women's rights in the workplace, discovered that executive women in the labour force organize themselves into unions to formulate demands and protect their interests and also act as a pressure group in response to male exclusion and marginalization. They further observed the attitude of male colleagues in meetings, which is often manifest in their not giving women a chance to air their views, or just allowing them talk, but totally ignoring what they say and continuing as though they have not spoken at all.

Tallichet (1995), also carried out a research in West Virginia, to determine men's sexualization of work relations in a coal-mining place of employment and how it affected women who worked there. Ten (10) women plus the mine superintendents were interviewed; they confirmed that their male counterparts sexually harassed them. It took the form of profanity stories and sexual jokes that have made it

difficult for them to develop an egalitarian work relationship with them. They pressed their case home to the company manager, who now decided to include harassment in their policy. The company further decided that men employees would have to be taught what harassment was.

METHODOLOGY

Design and Study Area

The research design adopted in the study was the survey design. The area of this research was the Rivers State, one of the thirty six states of Nigeria. It is situated in the South-South geo-political zone of the country. The state has a total of twenty-three local government areas, with Port Harcourt as the state capital. The population of this study consisted of forty thousand, two hundred and twenty-two professional women in public and private sectors in Rivers State.

Sample and Instrumentation

The study sample consisted of four hundred and fifty professional women in the public and private sectors in Rivers State. They were selected through stratified random sample technique from four occupational sectors namely public/ private banks, schools, legal firm and cooperate organizations. The instrument used for data collection was a surveye questionnaire. Section A of the questionnaire, solicits background information of the respondents while Section B sought to find out the adjustment patterns of women to male colleague's attitude in their workplaces. The responses were subjected to t-test analysis to determine if any significant difference exists in their adjustment patterns to their male colleague's attitude and sample percentages were used to reveal the patterns of adjustment.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis formulated to guide this study states that there is no significant difference in the adjustment patterns of professional women in public and private sectors with regards to attitude of male colleagues.

RESULTS

Table 1: Independent t-test analysis: A comparison of the adjustment patterns to attitudes of male colleagues of professional women in public and private sectors

Attitudes/ reactions of male colleagues	Organizations	N	\bar{X}	SD	T
Spite of Authority (1)	Public	117	2.05	.70	.285
	Private	195	2.03	.66	
Undermining interest and decision at work (2)	Public	156	1.58	.76	-.164
	Private	171	1.59	.75	
Sexual jokes (3)	Public	178	2.13	.87	2.387*

	Private	211	1.94	.76	
<i>Making advances (4)</i>	Public	179	2.41	.78	.885
	Private	206	2.34	.84	
<i>All Subjects</i>	Public	149	7.69	1.75	.512
	Private	157	7.59	1.84	
	All Subjects	306	7.16	1.80	

Four variables were used to determine if any significant differences exist in the professional women's adjustment patterns to their male colleagues' attitude. Variable 1 above, shows that women in public and private sectors do not significantly differ in their adjustment pattern with regard to spite of authority by male colleagues ($t=0.285$; $p>0.05$); undermining interest and decisions at work by male colleagues ($t=-.164$; $p>0.05$); making advances by male colleagues ($t=.885$; $p>0.05$); but professional women in public sector have a significantly better adjustment pattern than their colleagues in the private sector with regards to sexual jokes ($t=2.387$; $P<0.05$). However, the overall adjustment pattern of professional women in public and private sectors do not significantly differ concerning attitudes/ reactions of male colleagues ($t=.512$; $p>0.05$). With this, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the adjustment patterns of professional women in public and private sectors concerning attitude/ reactions of male colleagues is upheld at 0.05 level of significance.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Adjustment Pattern</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Reaction to Male Colleague's Spite of Authority (1)</i>	<i>I simply ignore them</i>	21.0
	<i>I caution them</i>	54.0
	<i>I Insist on their carrying out my order</i>	25.0
<i>Attitude to Male colleague's Tendency to Undermine Interest/ Decision at Work (2)</i>	<i>Persuade and press our points until it prevails</i>	57.8
	<i>Rally around female colleagues</i>	6.2
	<i>Ensure female representation</i>	26.0
<i>Reaction to Sexual jokes of Male colleagues (3)</i>	<i>I ignore them</i>	31.6
	<i>I Avoid them</i>	33.9
	<i>I Show Strong Objection</i>	34.4
<i>Reaction to Male Colleague Advances (4)</i>	<i>I Try to avoid them</i>	20.5
	<i>I Make light the whole matter</i>	22.3
	<i>I firmly reject the advances</i>	57.2

Variable 1 above reveals that the lowest percentages of professional women, who ignore male colleagues who spite their authority, are 21%. A higher percentage of 54, caution their male colleagues, while 25% insist on their carrying out their orders.

Variable 2 shows that 58% of professional women persuade their male colleagues to ensure they do not undermine their interest and decision, 6% rally around female colleagues, while 26% ensure female representation.

Variable 3 reveals that thirty two percent (32%) of professional women ignore sexual jokes, while thirty four percent (34%) avoid it, and show strong objection to it respectively.

Variable 4 shows that twenty one percent (21%) of professional women try to avoid male colleagues, when they make advances to them. Twenty two percent (22%) make light of the whole matter, while fifty seven percent (57%) firmly reject the advances.

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis tested shows no significant difference in the adjustment patterns of professional women to attitude and reactions of male colleagues. This result suggests that professional women adopt the same patterns of adjustment. Irrespective of their work setting; of the four variables that were used in testing the hypothesis (see table 2), only sexual jokes reflected a significant difference in the adjustment pattern among professional women. It showed that professional women in public sectors adjust better than their counterparts in private sectors to sexual jokes. The more relaxed work setting of the public sector helps them to be a bit friendlier and tolerant among themselves and hence may explain why they adjust better to sexual jokes. This agrees with Henning and Jardin's (1978) observation of executive women in the private sector, who adopt a rigid behavioural style in order to cope with these biases, hence this may account for their being a bit intolerant to sexual jokes.

The adjustment patterns reveal that a higher percentage of professional women, caution their male colleagues when they spite their authority, persuade them to ensure they do not undermine their interest and decisions, avoid them when they indulge in sexual jokes and firmly reject their sexual advances. This may imply that professional women are conscious of the socio-cultural biases of their gender and the fact that their work environment is not "female friendly" hence the adjustment patterns depict a "no nonsense" approach to defend their gender and cope with their male counterparts. This pattern of adjustment agrees with the findings of Henning and Jardin 1978; Gill and Whitty 1983; Tallichet 1995. Secondly the professional women in line with the functional perspective of Talcott & Bales (1995), are aware that they have "trespassed the occupational barrier" and are therefore perceived as competitors by their male colleagues in the professional world, who feel that women are unable to supervise men. The only survival strategy is to adopt an authoritarian exterior (Henning and Jardin, 1978); since they are seen to be playing male role.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- A comparative study should be carried out to identify the factors responsible for the non-difference in adjustment patterns.
- The ministry of women affairs and women commission should embark on an awareness programme to enlighten the public on the role and responsibility of professional women in the productive sector, this will go a long way in

improving relationships by changing the attitudes and perceptions of male colleagues to them.

- The ministry of women affairs with the assistance of women commission should ensure the execution and implementation of policies that will enhance better adjustment to work and protect the interest and welfare of professional women in the labour force.

References

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