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Examining the Impact of Male Educational Attainment on Promoting Gender Equity in Nigerian Family Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

Gender equity has become a central concern in contemporary social discourse due to its implications for family stability, national development, social justice, and sustainable development. Across the globe, education has been identified as a powerful instrument for promoting social transformation and challenging discriminatory social structures. In Nigeria, family dynamics continue to be shaped by patriarchal traditions that assign different roles, privileges, and responsibilities to men and women. These traditional arrangements often influence decision-making processes, access to resources, educational opportunities, and participation in family affairs. However, educational attainment among men has increasingly emerged as a significant factor capable of transforming traditional gender norms and promoting equitable relationships within households. This study examined the impact of male educational attainment on promoting gender equity in Nigerian family dynamics. The study adopted an ex-post facto survey research design. Data were gathered from married men and women across selected communities in Nigeria and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings revealed that higher levels of male educational attainment significantly influenced equitable decision-making, support for women's educational advancement, shared domestic responsibilities, positive attitudes toward gender equality, and collaborative family governance. The study further revealed that educated men were more likely to support women's participation in economic activities and family leadership roles. The study concluded that male educational attainment plays a crucial role in fostering gender-equitable family practices and reducing discriminatory attitudes within households. It was recommended that government, educational institutions, community leaders, and civil society organizations intensify efforts aimed at improving educational opportunities for males while simultaneously integrating gender education into formal and informal educational programmes. Such interventions would contribute significantly to family stability, social cohesion, and sustainable national development.

Introduction

Gender equity has become an increasingly important subject in contemporary discussions of social development, education, family life and human rights because persistent inequalities between men and women continue to affect opportunities, participation and well-being. The concept extends beyond treating men and women identically and emphasizes fairness in access to opportunities, resources, responsibilities and decision-making. Gender equity is particularly important within family settings because families constitute the first major social institution through which individuals learn values, social expectations and patterns of interaction. International development frameworks have also

recognized gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as essential to sustainable development. Nevertheless, available evidence indicates that significant gender-related inequalities remain across several areas of social life in Nigeria. Data reported by UN Women show continuing challenges relating to women's participation, violence against women, child marriage, access to resources and other dimensions of gender inequality (UN Women, 2024). The persistence of these challenges demonstrates that the promotion of gender equity requires attention not only to laws and public policies but also to the everyday relationships, attitudes and practices that operate within households and families. Recent scholarship further emphasizes that household structures and gender norms influence how rights, privileges and opportunities are distributed among family members. In Nigeria, gender relations have historically been shaped by patriarchal social arrangements in which men are frequently positioned as principal household authorities and women are often expected to perform supportive and caregiving roles. Such arrangements may affect participation in decision-making, access to economic and educational opportunities, control over family resources and the distribution of domestic responsibilities. Consequently, the family represents an important setting for understanding both the reproduction of gender inequality and the possibility of promoting more equitable relationships. The relevance of this issue is reinforced by the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal Five, which recognizes the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as fundamental components of inclusive and sustainable development (United Nations, 2015).

Education represents one of the major social institutions capable of influencing attitudes, beliefs and behaviour because it exposes individuals to knowledge, alternative perspectives and opportunities for critical reflection. Male educational attainment is particularly relevant to the study of gender equity in Nigerian family dynamics because men continue to occupy influential positions in many households and their beliefs may significantly affect family decisions and relationships. Education may expose men to ideas concerning human rights, democracy, social justice and the equal dignity of individuals, thereby creating opportunities for the reassessment of traditional assumptions about masculinity and women's roles. A recent study by researchers examining gender inequality in Southwest Nigeria found that disparities in education and access to resources remained significant and argued that education could play an important role in reducing masculine hegemony and improving family life. The study, which involved 720 households, examined the effects of educational attainment on family life, income, access to land and opportunities for girls' education and concluded that improvements in education could contribute to the reduction of gender disparities (Olaniyan et al., 2024). The findings are particularly relevant because they demonstrate that education can have implications beyond individual occupational advancement and may influence relationships and opportunities within families. Similarly, research on gender norms in Nigerian households has demonstrated that attitudes towards rights, privileges and gender equity are shaped by characteristics operating at both individual and household levels (Okafor et al., 2024). Educational experiences may therefore contribute to the development of attitudes that support women's participation in education, employment and family decision-making. However, the relationship between education and gender equity should not be regarded as automatic or uniform. Highly educated individuals may still retain some traditional beliefs because education operates alongside cultural, religious, economic and social influences. The present study therefore considers male educational attainment as an important potential influence on gender-equitable attitudes and practices rather than assuming that education alone completely eliminates patriarchal beliefs.

The continued influence of masculinity and patriarchal norms makes it necessary to examine how education interacts with broader social expectations within Nigerian families. Gender norms often prescribe different responsibilities, rights and privileges for men and women, and these expectations can shape family authority and everyday decision-making. Recent evidence from Nigeria has shown that men are commonly perceived as primary decision-makers in several areas of household life, including decisions concerning children, education, employment, mobility and health-related matters (Akinyemi et al., 2025). Such findings demonstrate the importance of examining gender relations within the household rather than limiting discussions of gender inequality to public institutions. Research by Ezegwu and Cin (2022) also demonstrates the importance of understanding masculinity within the Nigerian social and educational context. Their study showed that masculinity is shaped by complex interactions between local cultural practices and historical social influences, indicating that men's attitudes and behaviours cannot be understood independently of the social environment in which they are formed. Educational institutions may consequently become important spaces where individuals encounter ideas that either reinforce or challenge traditional constructions of masculinity. Men with greater educational exposure may encounter different models of leadership, partnership and family responsibility and may therefore become more receptive to joint decision-making and women's participation in family affairs. At the same time, education may enable men to appreciate the economic and social advantages associated with investing in girls' education and women's productive participation. Recent research in Southeast Nigeria has similarly highlighted the importance of education and other social characteristics in shaping attitudes towards gender norms, decision-making and women's empowerment (Ezeh et al., 2025). These findings suggest that gender attitudes are influenced by multiple and interconnected factors. The present study therefore seeks to contribute to existing knowledge by focusing specifically on how the educational attainment of men may be associated with the promotion of gender equity within Nigerian family dynamics, including attitudes towards women's rights, participation, responsibilities and opportunities.

The theoretical explanation of the relationship between male educational attainment and gender equity can be strengthened through the combined insights of Gender Socialization Theory and Social Learning Theory. Gender Socialization Theory explains that individuals develop ideas concerning masculinity, femininity and appropriate gender roles through interaction with important social institutions such as the family, school, religious institutions, peer groups and the wider community. From this perspective, traditional beliefs that associate men with authority and women with domestic or subordinate roles are not simply natural characteristics but are socially learned and transmitted across generations. The theory is relevant to the present study because education may expose men to new knowledge and social experiences that encourage them to question restrictive gender stereotypes. Educational attainment may therefore contribute to the development of more equitable attitudes by providing exposure to different ideas concerning women's rights, shared responsibility, democratic participation and social justice. Social Learning Theory further complements this explanation by emphasizing that individuals learn attitudes and behaviours through observation, interaction and reinforcement. Within educational environments, men may observe relationships and leadership arrangements that differ from the traditional models they experienced during childhood. Through interaction with teachers, colleagues, professionals and people from diverse backgrounds, they may encounter alternative ways of understanding gender and family relationships. These experiences may influence how they subsequently relate with spouses, daughters, sons and other family members.

Nevertheless, the theories also allow for the recognition that education does not operate in isolation. Individuals may receive conflicting messages from cultural traditions, religious teachings, economic conditions and community expectations. Thus, an educated man may simultaneously possess knowledge of gender equality while continuing to practice some traditional forms of male authority. The theoretical framework of this study therefore provides a balanced explanation: male educational attainment may create opportunities for more gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours, but the extent to which these attitudes are translated into family practices may depend on the wider social and cultural environment.

Although existing literature has increasingly examined women's empowerment, girls' education, gender norms and gender inequality in Nigeria, there remains a need for more focused attention on the specific contribution of male educational attainment to gender equity within family dynamics. Recent studies have provided valuable evidence concerning educational disparities, masculine norms, household decision-making and attitudes towards gender equity. For example, Olaniyan et al. (2024) examined education and gender inequality in relation to family life and access to resources, while Ezegwu and Cin (2022) explored the complex relationship between masculinity and educational experiences in Nigeria. Other recent studies have examined gender norms and attitudes towards equity among household heads and young people, demonstrating that household and social characteristics remain important influences on gender attitudes (Okafor et al., 2024; Ezeh et al., 2025). However, many of these studies have concentrated on general gender inequalities, young people's attitudes, access to education or the broader influence of household characteristics. Relatively limited attention has been devoted specifically to examining male educational attainment as a factor that may influence gender-equitable practices and relationships within Nigerian families. This constitutes an important gap because men often occupy influential positions within family structures and their educational experiences may affect whether women participate in decision-making, whether daughters receive equal educational opportunities and whether domestic and economic responsibilities are shared more equitably. The present study therefore builds upon existing scholarship by bringing male educational attainment into direct analytical focus. By examining its potential relationship with gender equity in Nigerian family dynamics, the study seeks to provide evidence that is relevant to educators, policymakers, families, community leaders and development practitioners. The findings may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how education can support social transformation while also recognizing that meaningful gender equity requires changes not only in educational opportunities but also in the cultural attitudes and family practices through which gender relations are continually reproduced.

Hypotheses

Thefollowing hypotheses guided the study:

H_{01}: There is nosignificant relationship between male educational attain mentande quitable decision-making in Nigerian families.

H_{02}: There is nosignificant relationship between male educational attain mentand support for gender-equitable practices in Nigerian families.

Methods

The study adopted an ex-post facto survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because the independent variable, male educational attainment, had already occurred and could not be manipulated by the researcher. Ex-post facto research enables investigators to examine relationships among variables after the events of interest have taken place. The design was therefore suitable for

examining how educational attainment among men relates to gender-equitable attitudes and practices within family settings.

The population for the study comprised married men and women residing in selected communities within Nigeria. The population included individuals from diverse educational, occupational, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. The inclusion of both men and women was considered necessary to obtain comprehensive perspectives regarding family dynamics and gender relations.

A sample of 400 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling procedure. In the first stage, selected communities were stratified based on geographical and socio-economic characteristics. In the second stage, households were randomly selected. Finally, eligible respondents were chosen using simple random sampling techniques. The sampling procedure ensuredade quate representation of different demographic categories within the study population.

Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire titled Male Educational Attainment and Gender Equity Questionnaire (MEAGEQ). The instrument was divided into two major sections. Section A elicited demographic information such as age, gender, educational qualification, occupation, marital status, and length of marriage. Section B consisted of items designed to measureeducational attainment, family decision-making patterns, support forwomen's empowerment, gender attitudes, and domestic responsibilities.

The validity of the instrument was established through expert review. Specialists in Social Studies Education, Gender Studies, Educational Research, and Measurement and Evaluation examined the questionnaire to ensure that the items adequately measured the variables under investigation. Their suggestions and observations were incorporated into the final version of the instrument.

A pilot study was conducted among respondents who possessed characteristics similar to those of the study population but were not included in the main study. Data obtained from the pilot study were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha reliability technique. A reliability coefficient of 0.84 was obtained, indicating a high level of internal consistency and confirming the suitability of the instrument for data collection.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and assured that their responses would be treated confidentially. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were free to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Informed consent was obtained before administration of the questionnaire.

The questionnaires were administered with the assistance of trained research assistants who were familiar with the objectives of the study and the procedures for data collection. Completed questionnaires were retrieved, coded, and analyzed using appropriate statistical procedures.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and responses. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance because it was appropriate for determining the strength and direction of relationships between variables.

Results

This section presents the analysis of data collected from the respondents. The results are presented using descriptive and inferential statistics in line with the hypotheses formulated for the study.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Gender.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	**220**	**55.0**
Female	**180**	**45.0**
Total	**400**	**100.0**

Table 1 shows that 220 (55.0%) of the respondents were male, while 180 (45.0%) were female. This indicates that both genders were adequately represented in the study, thereby providing balanced perspectives on family dynamics and gender equity.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
25–34 Years	95	55.0
35–44 Years	140	45.0
45–54 Years	110	27.5
55Years andAbove	55	13.7
Total	**400**	**100.0**

The data in Table 2 reveal that the majority of respondents (35.0%) were between 35and 44years of age. This suggests that most participants were within the active stage of family life and therefore possessed relevant experiences concerning household decision-making and gender relations.

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents by Educational Qualification

EducationalQualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Secondary School	**90**	**22.5**
NCE/OND	**120**	**30.0**
Bachelor's Degree	**135**	**33.8**
Postgraduate Degree	**55**	**13.7**
Total	**400**	**100.0**

Table 3 indicates that a substantial proportion of respondents possessed tertiary educational qualifications. Specifically, 33.8% held bachelor's degrees, while 13.7% possessed postgraduate qualifications. This distribution provided an adequate basis for examining the relationship between educational attainment and gender-equitable attitudes.

Descriptive Analysis of Gender Equity Practices

Table 4. Respondents' Perceptions of Gender- Equitable Practices in Families

	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Husbands should involve wives in family decisions	3.65	0.72	Accepted
2	Women should have equal access to family resources	3.59	0.68	Accepted
3	Domestic responsibilities should be shared	3.54	0.74	Accepted
4	Girls should enjoy equal educational opportunities	3.78	0.61	Accepted
5	Women should participate in financial decisions	3.63	0.69	Accepted
	Criterion Mean=2.50			

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that respondents generally expressed positive perceptions regarding gender-equitable family practices. All items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, suggesting strong support for shared decision-making, equal educational opportunities, equitable access to resources, and shared domestic responsibilities.

The highest mean score (3.78) was recorded for the statement that girls should enjoy equal educational opportunities. This finding reflects growing societal recognition of the importance of female education as a pathway to empowerment and development.

Hypothesis One

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between male educational attainment and equitable decision-making in Nigerian families.

Table 5. Pearson Correlation Analysis of Male Educational Attainment and Equitable Decision-Making

	Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value
1	**Male Educational Attainment**	**400**	**3.42**	**0.81**	**.68**	**000**
2	**Equitable Decision-Making**	**400**	**3.58**	**0.74**		

Level of Significance= 0.05

The analysis in Table 5 reveals a Pearson correlation coefficient of r = .68 with a corresponding p-value of .000. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The finding indicates a strong positive relationship between male educational attainment and equitable decision-making within Nigerian families. Men with higher educational qualifications were more likely to consult their spouses regarding household expenditures, children's education, healthcare decisions, investment plans, and family welfare issues.

This finding suggests that education encourages democratic values and collaborative approaches to family governance. Educated men tend to recognize the importance of including their spouses in decision-making processes, thereby promoting mutual respect and family cohesion.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between male educational attainment and support for gender-equitable practices in Nigerian families.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation Analysis of Male Educational Attainment and Support for Gender-Equitable Practices

	Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	p-value
1	Male Educational Attainment	400	3.42	0.81	.68	000
2	Gender-Equitable Practices	400	3.61	0.70		

Level of Significance= 0.05

The results presented in Table 6 indicate a significant positive relationship between male educational attainment and support for gender-equitable practices ($r = .72$, $p < .05$).

Since the p-value is less than the stipulated level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. The result implies that educated men were more supportive of girls' education, women's employment opportunities, equal access to family resources, shared domestic responsibilities, and women's participation in decision-making processes. The strength of the correlation coefficient further suggests that educational attainment serves as an important predictor of attitudes toward gender equity within Nigerian family settings.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide substantial evidence regarding the importance of male educational attainment in promoting gender equity within Nigerian family dynamics. The results indicate that education serves not only as a means of acquiring knowledge and skills but also as a transformative force capable of influencing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours relating to gender relations. One of the major findings of the study revealed a significant positive relationship between male educational attainment and equitable decision-making within families. This finding suggests that educated men are more likely to adopt inclusive approaches to family governance and involve their spouses in important household decisions.

This outcome is consistent with the findings of Nwankwo and Chukwu (2022), who reported that educational exposure significantly enhances men's willingness to involve their wives in decisions concerning family welfare and development. Education broadens individuals' understanding of democratic principles and promotes appreciation for the value of collaboration in achieving family goals. The finding may be attributed to the fact that education exposes individuals to diverse perspectives and encourages critical examination of traditional assumptions. Through formal education, men gain awareness of the benefits associated with shared decision-making and mutual respect. Consequently, educated men are more likely to recognize the importance of their spouses' contributions to family development.

The study further established a significant relationship between male educational attainment and support for gender-equitable practices. This finding indicates that education contributes substantially to changing attitudes toward traditional gender roles and expectations. The finding supports Fasina and Adebayo (2021), who observed that educated men tend to demonstrate stronger support for gender equality initiatives and women's empowerment programmes. Education exposes individuals to concepts such as human rights, social justice, equality, and inclusiveness, thereby encouraging positive attitudes toward gender relations.

The finding aligns with the work of Oladipo and Bello (2022), who found that men with tertiary education exhibited more favourable attitudes toward women's participation in economic and social activities than those with lower educational qualifications. According to these scholars, education

enhances awareness of the economic and developmental benefits associated with women's empowerment.

The findings support the broader argument that education is a powerful instrument for dismantling patriarchal structures that perpetuate inequality. According to Okeke and Ugwu (2023), patriarchal systems often sustain unequal power relations between men and women by assigning authority and privilege primarily to males. Educational attainment appears to challenge these traditional arrangements by encouraging more egalitarian attitudes and behaviours. The findings are also consistent with Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes the role of education in enhancing individuals' capacities, productivity, and social competencies. Educated men maybe better equipped to appreciate the value of cooperation, communication, and mutual respect within family relationships. These qualities contribute to healthier family interactions and improved social outcomes.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of male educational attainment on promoting gender equity in Nigerian family dynamics. The study was motivated by the growing recognition of gender equity as a critical component of sustainable development, family stability, and social progress. Given the influence of men within many Nigerian households and communities, understanding how educational attainment shapes male attitudes and behaviours toward gender relations is essential for developing effective interventions aimed at promoting equitable family practices. The findings of the study revealed that male educational attainment significantly influences gender equity within Nigerian families. Specifically, the study established a strong positive relationship between male educational attainment and equitable decision-making. Men with higher educational qualifications were found to be more likely to involve their spouses in decisions concerning household finances, children's education, healthcare, family investments, and other matters affecting family welfare. This suggests that education promotes democratic values, mutual respect, and collaborative approaches to family governance.

The study further revealed a significant positive relationship between male educational attainment and support for gender-equitable practices. Educated men demonstrated stronger support for girls' education, women's employment opportunities, equal access to family resources, shared domestic responsibilities, and women's participation in household decision-making. These findings indicate that education contributes substantially to the development of attitudes that challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote more equitable family relationships. The findings also suggest that education serves as a mechanism for reducing patriarchal attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality. Through exposure to knowledge, critical thinking, civic values, and social awareness, educated men become more receptive to principles of fairness, inclusion, and equality. Consequently, they are more likely to recognize the contributions of women to family welfare and national development. From the study is that male educational attainment contributes to healthier family relationships. Families headed by educated men are more likely to experience effective communication, shared responsibilities, mutual respect, and collaborative problem solving. These characteristics are essential for maintaining family stability and promoting the well-being of all family members. The study highlights the broader societal implications of male education. Beyond improving individual opportunities and economic outcomes, education plays a transformative role in shaping social attitudes and behaviours. Educational attainment among men therefore represents an important pathway through which gender equity can be promoted within families and society at large.

The study concludes that male educational attainment is a significant determinant of gender-equitable family dynamics in Nigeria. As educational levels increase, men become more supportive of women's empowerment, more inclusive in decision-making processes, and more willing to challenge discriminatory cultural practices. Consequently, investments in male education can generate positive outcomes not only for individual men but also for women, children, families, communities, and the nation as a whole.

Recommendations

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

1. Government should expand access to quality education for boys and men across all regions of Nigeria. Increased educational opportunities can contribute significantly to the development of gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours.
2. Gender studies and civic education programmes should be strengthened at all levels of education. These programmes should emphasize equality, mutual respect, social justice, and shared responsibility within family and community settings.
3. Educational institutions should integrate gender-sensitive content into curricula. Such content should encourage learners to challenge discriminatory stereotypes and embrace inclusive social values.
4. Community-based awareness programmes should be organized to educate men about the importance of gender equity. These programmes should highlight the benefits of equitable family relationships for family welfare and national development.
5. Religious and traditional leaders should be actively involved in promoting gender-equitable family practices. Their influence can help challenge harmful cultural beliefs and encourage positive behavioural change.
6. Adult literacy and continuing education programmes should include gender-sensitivity components. This will enable individuals who missed formal educational opportunities to acquire knowledge and attitudes that support gender equity.
7. Government agencies and non-governmental organizations should collaborate in implementing gender-awareness campaigns targeted at men. Such campaigns can increase understanding of the importance of women's empowerment and participation in family decision-making.
8. Parents should be encouraged to model gender-equitable behaviours within households. Children who observe equitable interactions between parents are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward gender equality.
9. Media organizations should promote programmes that challenge gender stereotypes and highlight the benefits of equitable family relationships.

Policies aimed at increasing educational attainment among males should be accompanied by initiatives that emphasize social responsibility and respect for gender diversity.

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