



The Status of Hausa Muslim Women in Northern Nigeria Today: A Three-Dimensional Perspective

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Abstract

Religion is a powerful tool often misused by men in Muslim Hausa communities of Northern Nigeria to ensure compliance and adherence to patriarchal cultural norms and practices which subjugate and exploit women. However, it has been observed that this practice is more prevalent in the rural communities than in urban areas. This paper therefore is an attempt to seek answers to the following questions: Why do Muslim Hausa women in rural communities of Northern Nigeria accept harmful patriarchal practices as a norm? Why do they remain oppressed and averse to the opportunities for self-development prevalent in modern age? Why is the situation different with women of the same religion and culture living in urban areas? Thus, the study examined deeply the status of women in rural and urban Muslim Hausa communities of Kaduna State in north-western Nigeria from three perspectives: Islam, Hausa culture and modernization. The study gave credence to the biological theories of gender as the basic determinants of the position of women in Islam. The paper also reviewed in relevance some sociological theories of gender role development and how these assigned roles determine the status of women in the societies under study. The research was qualitative and employed document review, in-depth and key informant interview as tools. Keeping religion and culture as constant factors and modernization as a variable, thirty (30) male and females respondents in selected rural and urban areas of Kaduna State were involved in the study. The study confirmed that the continued subjugation of women in the rural communities is associated with harmful practices developed and preserved by patriarchal values associated with the misconception of Islamic injunctions.

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However, in the urban areas, modernization, education and urbanization have played a vital role in the understanding of the diverging point between religion and culture and thus, in the appropriate application of Islamic rulings on the roles, rights, duties and responsibilities of both women and men and their coexistence in general. Consequently, women in the latter category have been found to be more enlightened on the teachings of the Religion and thus more liberated and empowered. It is envisaged that the findings of this study would be beneficial to Development Agencies, the Government as well as non-Governmental Organizations, in the formulation and implementation of policies targeted towards women liberation and empowerment, especially in the rural areas. To avoid any backlash and to ensure inclusion, the study recommends gender mainstreaming and active involvement of women and men in both rural and urban areas in the planning and implementation of socio-economic advancement programs especially those centred around education.

Key words: Culture; Religion; Education; Modernization; Urbanization.

1. Introduction

Religion is described by many scholars as a sacred, spiritual or divine worship to an Entity believed to be in absolute control of all. It is said to be a set of beliefs that binds the follower and imposes rules and regulations upon the believer's life. In Islam, followers believe in resurrection and account of one's deeds before the Creator, which determines one's final fate-either everlasting joy or grief [1]. Thus, the goal of any believer of the Islamic Religion is to strive towards gaining favour in the hereafter. It is therefore easy to use the doctrines of the Religion as manipulative tools or instruments to achieve any set agenda. Islam as a Religion came into Northern Nigeria in the 14th Century [2]. By the 15th Century, the Religion has spread widely within the Hausa States of North-Western part of the Country, mainly through Muslim male traders and a few scholars. As these traders have shallow knowledge of the Religion, what they passed on was therefore considered as rudimentary aspects of the Religion [3]. They taught the fundamentals of the Religion, while its principles which include its ideologies on coexistence, its rulings on the rights, responsibilities, and duties of women and men as well as the implication of some of the revelations, were sparingly explored. Thus, this gave room for the continued application of cultural values alongside Religious teachings during this introductory period [3, 4] mainly in areas that were advantageous to men and oppressive to women. This became the norm and was adopted in all Hausa-Muslim Communities, given that the channel of communicating the new Religion was "male"; from male foreign traders to their indigenous counterparts and subsequently to male heads of communities and households. The status of Hausa Muslim women was to be slightly transformed with the Islamic conquest (*Jihad*) of the Hausa States around the 19th Century by a renown Islamic Scholar, Usman Danfodio which led to the complete Islamisation of the Hausa culture. Many vices associated with traditional beliefs were abolished. Dan Fodio emphasized the importance of women leaders and women's rights within Islamic frameworks [5, 6]. He also encouraged the attainment of knowledge and education among women, setting examples within his immediate family [2]. However, the problem of proper application of the Islamic law still persisted. Many, especially among the ruling class, were unwilling to let go of some cultural practices that put them at a competitive advantage [5]. Moreover, ignorance on the teachings of the new Religion within the communities ensured the continuous adherence to practices that are detrimental to women [7]. In most cases, teachings of the Religion were manipulated to justify abuse and exploitation of women [8]. However, the transition of the Hausa

traditional rural societies to industrial and more urban States from the 19th Century onwards broadened the horizon and made it possible for individuals and communities to embrace new technologies which brought about improvements in communication and the transport systems. Thus, opening the doors for the exchange of knowledge and formation of alliances that would shape the perception of individuals on the doctrines of the Religion. The advent of Westernization further provided the opportunity for girls to explore their potentials through education [9]. Accordingly, the struggle to draw the line between religion and culture on the rights of women commenced. The educated and elite Hausa Muslim women began to build partnerships and coalitions to increase their knowledge in Islamic laws (*Shari'a*) and to propagate the true teachings of Islam concerning women [10]. This however, proved to be a herculean task, as women especially in the rural areas of Hausa Muslim communities, continued to suffer from deprivation, discrimination and oppression in the name of Religion, without any form of resistance or self-effort towards changing the situation. This study therefore attempts to find answers as to why the Muslim Hausa women in rural communities of Northern Nigeria accept harmful patriarchal practices as a norm; why they remain oppressed and averse to the opportunities for self-development prevalent in modern age and why the situation differs in the case of educated women of the same religion and culture, living in urban areas. Thus, the paper examines the status of Hausa Muslim women in rural and urban areas of Zaria, Kaduna State from the Islamic and Cultural perspectives; focusing on: Political and Legal Rights, Economic and Social Rights, Health and Reproductive Rights.

1.1 The Status of Women in Literature

1.1.1 The Islamic Viewpoint

This section gives an insight into the status of women based on Islamic law, termed the *Shari'a*. The *Shari'a* is basically the teachings of the holy scripture- the Qur'an and documented sayings of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, referred to as *AHadith*. The *Shari'a* serves as a guide to Muslims in all their undertakings; covering both the area of worship and worldly matters [11]. Islam views women and men as equal but distinct from each other due to their physiology. Proponents of biological theories posit that the differentiated gender roles which exist in our society are inextricably linked with abilities predominant in one gender or the other and that these abilities are determined biologically. That the roles prescribed for each sex are based on physical abilities and properties of that sex, such as intelligence, brain lateralization, and differing hormone levels. According to these theories, physiological differences in males and females are the bases for differences in their behaviour as well as their motivational background in terms of instincts, personality traits, needs and drives. Implicit within this view is the belief that distinct roles played by men and women are both desirous and immutable and this could be substantiated by looking at gender role similarities between animals and humans, and also by examining sex differences among infants [13]. Hinged from biological determinism therefore, it can be seen that roles and responsibilities for women and men are assigned equitably [12] based on their physiological and psychological make up. On the equality of all human beings before God, Nasab in [14] stated that the origin of the creation of all human beings, (men and women), is regarded as a "primordial ego" that is a sacred soul and that at the beginning of creation, all human beings are the same before God regardless of sex, religion or race. The only difference among humans is viewed in terms of who is better in the worship of the Creator. Thus, from the foregoing, it can be deduced that in Islam, a woman who is pious and virtuous before

God is superior to a man who lacks these qualities. This being the case, why is it assumed by many that Islam encourages discrimination, abuse and subjugation of women? One viewpoint was that the teachings of the Qur'an were misinterpreted by many Muslims due to the complexity and rich nature of Arabic; the language of the Quran [15]. In its analysis of women's rights within the Islamic context, The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative [16] views women's rights not as stand-alone claims made by women, but as claims arising from a system of mutual rights and obligations guaranteed by both religion and law. This is further supported by the Qur'an: *and women have rights similar to those of men*[1].

Some of the Rights of women in Islam as outlined in both the Qur'an and some related literature include:

1.1.1.1 Political and Legal Rights

Islam gives women the right to freedom from infringements by individuals or the community. Furthermore, Islam raises the status of women, recognizing them as individuals with self-identity and with rights to life and all that it provides. It was confirmed that for Centuries, Islam has made a positive impact on women; elevating them to a spiritual and legal status equal to men [17]. Islam recognizes women's contribution to public affairs and has given them the right to political participation [1] Furthermore, Muslim women have been given the right to participate in governance and to express political opinions as community members [18]. They are entitled to be consulted on decisions that affect them as individuals, family and community members. According to the Qur'an: "*True believers are those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation....*" [1]. In analyzing the above quoted verse of the Qur'an, Walker asserted that it lays down mutual consultation as the basic principle which should guide all Muslims in the transaction of their affairs, thus indicating that Islam gave women the right to inclusion [19]. The *Shari'a* stipulates that justice is all-encompassing and no distinction is made based on sex or gender [1]. Thus, the *Shari'a* gives women the right to access courts of law and the right to a hearing concerning all issues that affect their lives. This is confirmed in the Qur'an- in the case of a woman who sought redress in the Islamic court about her husband. She was given a fair hearing and justice was meted in her favour through a revelation [1].

1.1.1.2 Economic and Social Rights

Economic rights encompass the ownership of wealth and the freedom to utilize such wealth. A woman, whether married or not, is recognized by Islamic law as an individual with property rights; she can engage in business and acquire wealth in accordance with the *Shari'a*. Islamic history shows that even the Prophet's first wife- Khadijah, was a wealthy merchant and employer of labour [20]. The Religion also places men and women on the same social standing; each with a unique identity and responsible for his/her deeds [1]. Furthermore, Islam gave women the right to self-identification. A woman has the right to keep her identity just like her male counterpart. She is thus, not obliged to change her maiden name or adopt her husband's or his family's name after marriage [1, 21]. Education has been viewed as the most strategic form of empowerment you can give women and Islam makes education compulsory for all human beings, which makes the low level of education among Muslim women pathetic [22]. The first revelation of the Holy Qur'an urges human beings (both sexes) to seek knowledge: *Read.. in the name of your Lord who creates.....*[1]. This confirms that discrimination

against girl-child education is not rooted in Islam. Furthermore, history has shown the existence of many excellent scholars among Muslim women, who contributed to the spread and understanding of the Religion [23]. In its various rulings, Islam abhors exploitation, abuse and discrimination of any kind, gender-based, inclusive. In many verses of the Qur'an and other narrations of the Prophet, discrimination against the girl-child was prohibited. Many verses of the Qur'an were revealed to admonish the Arabs for their practice of female infanticide [1]. In divorce, Islam gives women the right to a decent living, as men are enjoined to pay some entitlements to the wife in addition to bestowing her a parting gift. Islam also permits a woman to initiate divorce. It rules that a wife can either ask the husband to free her from the marriage or she can terminate it by returning his dowry. The latter being what is referred to as "*Khul*"; in which case, she does not require the consent of the husband for the divorce to come into force [1]. Likewise, women are entitled to some portions of the wealth of a dead spouse, parent, child, siblings or relatives as outlined in [1]. She is also entitled to the custody of her children in the case of separation due to either divorce or death of the father [24].

1.1.1.3 Reproductive and Health Rights

Islam encourages marriage and procreation. In the same vein, it recognizes the importance of maternal and infant health. Thus, to ensure better nutrition for the baby and in some cases to serve as a birth-spacing method, it advises on breast feeding for a period of two years [1]. Furthermore, Islam permits the use of birth control measures for temporary child spacing. However, this is to be done in line with the *Shari'a* and with the consent of both the wife and husband. [25, 26]. Coitus interruptus called *Azal* in Arabic was available and in practice during the lifetime of the Prophet of Islam. Other modern methods of family planning approved by Islam, which are meant to safeguard the health of the mother among other reasons, include the ovulation period or hormonal method, temperature method, barrier methods and use of Intrauterine devices [27, 28].

1.1.2 The Cultural Stance

The Hausa is a tribe in Nigeria, and its folks are mainly domiciled in the North-Western part of the Country. They constitute the largest ethnic group in the Country with a population estimated at 70 million. The way of life of the Hausas is distinguished in their customs and traditions which determine their social behavior, way of dressing, language spoken and perhaps to a lesser extent, their physiology. Majority of the tribe practice Islam as a Religion. [29, 30]. To understand the status of women in Hausa culture, it is pertinent to understand the position of women in the Nigerian culture. The Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development summed it up when it referred to Nigeria as 'a highly patriarchal society, where men dominate all spheres of women's lives' [31]. The Hausa culture, like other Nigerian cultures, emphasized male supremacy and over-dependence of women on men for livelihood, direction, bearing, and progression. To further gain more power and control as well as solidify their supremacy, men take many women into custody as wives and concubines. [31, 32]. Thus, the women are socialized into a culture of gender inequality and from birth they were brought up to believe this, as a norm [32]. Similar to what obtains in most societies, this inequality could be attributed to the gendered division of labour among the Hausa community; with women taking up roles within the domestic sphere while the men took up instrumental roles outside the home. These traditionally approved pattern of behaviour, roles and responsibilities are defined, preserved and passed on from generation to generation [33].

The typical Hausa woman is therefore, endured in a culture of male supremacy [34, 35,36].Discrimination against women in a traditional Hausa community began as soon as they come into the world. The birth of a female is announced with such remarks *as an koma! Mace ta haifi mace!* Literary meaning it is not a piece of exciting news as another girl has come into the world! Symbolically, within the ancient Hausa culture, births are announced with an ululation, termed *guda*. The birth of a girl was usually announced with not as many as the number of ululations for a boy's arrival; meaning that in a tradition Hausa setting, boys are prized more than girls [37]. Additionally as a girl grows older, she is confined to the domestic sphere where she performs most of the household work with neither reward nor appreciation. Still at a tender age, she is given out in marriage, usually to a much older man, in a polygamous setting [38]. The stance of the Hausa Muslim women from a cultural perspective is further analyzed in some literature based on:

1.1.2.1. Political and Legal Rights

To a Hausa woman, the culture dictates that she remains within the private sphere, tending to family needs. She is not consulted on decisions that affect her life. For instance, even on issues such as choice of life partners; the culture gives her father the right to marry her off to any person of his choice; sometimes without any interest, commitment or obligation from the would-be husband; literary attaching no value to her person. [37, 38]. Studies have shown that in many cases, girls are regarded as only 'future housewives' and continue to be the caregivers of the family [17]. In marriage, Hausa women are not consulted on major as well as minor decisions that affect their lives; not even a simple decision as to the choice of a name for her offspring. Likewise, upon separation either due to divorce or death of the husband, she is in most instances denied custody of the children, though some studies have shown that in some cases, children are allowed to remain with their mothers until the age of seven [39]. Furthermore, the Hausa- Muslim woman is in some instances either cheated or deprived of her inheritance. This could be in case of the death of a spouse, father, mother or even siblings; where she is entitled to such. Likewise in divorce, she is in most cases denied her entitlements [[40, 41]. She is most often denied the right to fair hearing, as she is enjoined to endure, persevere and ensure that the marriage works out. *Hakuri*, meaning perseverance or patience in marriage is a word accentuated and etched in the psyche of most married women. Many women therefore remain in abusive marriages, and continue to endure (*hakuri*) which may sometimes leads to total mental and or physical breakdown. In other instances, women especially the older ones could exert power and authority within the domestic sphere, especially on their children and other younger women; and may sometimes indirectly influence the public domain though their control of resources within the domestic sphere [31]. This control and authority are in most cases bestowed on the first wife called *Uwargida*, literary meaning the female head of household.

1.1.2.2. Economic and Social Rights

Although Hausa women participate in petty economic activities, their earnings are usually minute. These meager earnings usually come from petty trading [34]. The culture recognizes and eulogizes polygamy and living within one compound with extended family members. It is not a surprise therefore to see a compound with over 20 women living together. Although the idea is to foster good relationship and strong kinship, the effect oftentimes is negative. Apart from infringing on the women's rights to space and privacy, most of the

times it creates ill feelings and ignites rivalry among members of the family [2, 8]. Furthermore, in a typical rural Hausa community, education is viewed with suspicion. Instead of going to school, children, especially girls are sent out to hawk on the street or in some instances they are sent out to cities to serve as domestic servants.

1.1.2.3. Reproductive and Health Rights

Within the culture, various social and cultural barriers play a pivotal role in preventing women and girls from accessing reproductive health. The culture encourages early marriage and recognizes it as a preventive measure against promiscuity, unwanted pregnancy and as a means of reducing the father's burden of providing livelihood to the family [42]. Child marriage has been shown to contribute to higher rates of morbidity for both the young girls and their children (e.g. the risks of low birth weights and stunting are higher for children born of adolescent girls) [43]. Furthermore, in most cases, health care is in the hands of native or traditional doctors thus, exposing the women to high risk of maternal and infant mortality and Vesicovaginal Fistula [44]. Additionally, the author posits that due to lack of access and control over reliable family planning methods, the women usually have many children; stretching their ability to provide adequate love and care to them. Another infringement of the women's right to health care has to do with seeking permission from husband to attend ante-natal care, use birth control measures [39] or visit the hospital for other ailments; in most cases, this permission is denied.

1.1.3 The Modern View

The transition of the Hausa land from a rural agrarian State to a secular and industrialized Nation from the 20th Century to date brought about changes related to economic advancement, technological break-through and educational opportunities. Thus, opening the doors for many families to move to the urban areas. Social dynamism and cultural transformations as a consequent of inter-ethnic and inter-racial mingling in the urban areas thus, impacted positively on the psyche of a typical Hausa Muslim man. This led to a better understanding of Islam as a religion and consequently to a change in the perception of the teachings of the Religion, especially as it relates to the position of women. It was viewed that Western civilization, which brought about advancement in technology, education, and human rights awareness and campaigns have had great impact on traditional social institutions in Nigeria. [45]. Thus, exposure to modernism resulted in the relaxation of some of the long-held beliefs concerning the value of women. One significant aspect of this change has to do with girl-child education. Many traditional monarchs encouraged the opening of girls' schools in their domains [9]. Thus, the beginning of a new era in the life of Hausa Muslim women in northern Nigeria. Education is regarded as the key to success; as it unlocks opportunities for development [46]. For the Hausa Muslim women, it opened the doors for acquiring more knowledge about the religion, mainly through regional and global contacts and interactions with people of similar faith. It also provided the basis for forming strong Alliances and Coalitions. The 20th Century, therefore, saw the establishment of some powerful Muslim women Associations such as the Federation of Muslim Women Organization (FOMWAN) and Women in Daawah. Some of their objectives among others were the creation of awareness on the true teachings of Islam in the Qur'an and Sunnah and encouraging women to live by those teachings. (FOMWAN). These and many other similar Associations succeeded in challenging the status quo through reforms, education, and enlightenment [47]. The declaration

and adoption of the Universal Human Rights and domestication of some international human rights instruments in Nigeria provided grounds for the abolishment of some practices that infringe on the rights of women [48]. Thus, paving way for the liberation of the Hausa Muslim women living in a patriarchal society. In summary, it was posited that Hausa women in the 20th Century, cannot be regarded as pawns in a patriarchal Islamic society [49].

1.2 Where the problem lies- Between Religion and Culture

As mentioned earlier, Islam penetrated the Hausa States from several directions. According to the Kano Chronicle, Muslim Merchants and Clerics from Mali introduced Islam to Hausa land through Kano [41]. Although Islam seemed to have attracted important personages, it encountered serious opposition from the defenders of the Traditional Religion. Thus, many of the Traditional Rulers accepted Islam but continued to practice their culture, thus, infiltrating traditional beliefs in the practice of Islam [50]. It took the efforts of a renown Islamic scholar Usman Dan Fodio around the 19th Century before Islam was fully accepted in the Hausa States [7, 50 and 51]. Dan Fodio strived in the area of women education and condemned the attitude of the men who were only using and discarding the women at will [2, 7 Quick]. In his word: *Most of our educated men leave their wives, their daughters, and their female relatives ... to vegetate, like beasts, without teaching them what Allah prescribes they be taught and without instructing them in the articles of Law which concern them* [2]. It was further argued that some verses of the Quran were misinterpreted selfishly by men to support patriarchal values. Such misinterpreted messages were then used to deceive women into believing that they were God's words. [2]. Thus, the women remained ignorant of the true teachings of the Religion, as they were mostly taught the recitation and memorization of the Quran without understanding the language and as well as the correct interpretation of the verses they memorized. This was the situation among the Hausa Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria during the period of *Jihad*. In reference to this, Dan Fodio was quoted: *They deceive you when they preach obedience to your husbands, without telling you of the obedience, which is primarily due to Allah and His Prophet. They seek only their satisfaction, and that is why they impose tasks upon you, which the law of Allah and His Prophet never intended for you alone. These are the preparation of food, the washing of clothes and other duties they impose upon you, while at the same time they neglect to teach you what Allah and His Prophet have in truth prescribed for you.* [2, 7]. Conclusively, it has been pointed out that in Islam, protection of women's rights is an obligation imposed by the Qur'an on the entire Muslim community [21], however, this injunction has been misconceived and its place patriarchal cultural values have been instituted.

2. Materials and Methods

The study aimed at examining the status of Hausa Muslim women residing in urban and rural areas of Zaria, Kaduna State, North-Western Nigeria. This is with a view to establishing the role of civilization-education, urbanization and modernization- in the understanding of Islamic injunctions as distinct from cultural values on the rights and position of women. The paper attempts to answer the following questions: Why do Muslim Hausa women in rural communities of Northern Nigeria accept harmful patriarchal practices as the norm and remain averse to the opportunities for self-development prevalent in modern age? Why is the situation different with

women of the same religion and culture living in urban areas?

Zaria was chosen as a study area because of its large Hausa Muslim population and as an education hub, where the oldest and largest University (Ahmadu Bello University) in the North is located [52]. The Research was qualitative and employed Key Informant Interview (KII), In-Depth Interview (IDI) and Document Review as tools. The respondents were given the freedom and time to voice their opinions fully on each question asked. The KII for each respondent lasted for two hours and IDI, one hour. Thirty respondents were purposely selected for the study. Using Quota sampling, fifteen respondents each from rural and urban areas of Zaria in Kaduna State were selected. They were further sex segregated to fifteen females and fifteen males. The females were further categorized based on marital status- seven married women and four spinsters were selected, in addition to four representatives of Muslim women organizations. Similarly the Fifteen male respondents were selected based on their social standing; the sample in this regard was thus comprised of seven heads of household, four youth, two rural heads, and two Islamic scholars. The respondents in the categories mentioned above were then divided based on their knowledge and ranking in the society. Two Islamic scholars, four Muslim women group representative and two rural heads were purposely selected for KII. Random sampling using balloting was employed for the collection of data, using IDI. In the selection of the sample, Culture and Religion were held constant as all the respondents in both the rural and urban are Hausa by tribe and Muslims by Religion. The only variance is their level of exposure to modernization, which was based on their places of abode (rural and urban areas). All the respondents in the rural area were uneducated while the respondents from the urban area have all attained some level of formal education. Interviews were conducted in the local dialect mainly in the rural areas. They were recorded and transcribed into English. Explicit permission of all the respondents was sought before the commencement of the interview. The Study would have covered more communities or perhaps more States where Hausa-Muslims dominate, but for limited time and finance. However, the sample selected herein was deemed suitable as it reflects the views of all relevant stakeholders within the study Area. Thus, the results from this study can be generalized as a reflection of the true status of Hausa-Muslim women in Nigeria.

3. Results and Discussions

The Study attempted to provide answers to the two (2) questions raised; and results are presented herein:

3.1 Why Do Muslim Hausa Women in Rural Communities of Northern Nigeria Accept Harmful Patriarchal Practices as the Norm and Remain Averse to the Opportunities for Self-Development Prevalent in the Modern Age?

The study revealed the following major factors as responsible:

A. Ignorance and Poor Perception of the Religion: The study revealed that dearth of knowledge leading to poor conception of the teachings of Islam on the rights of women as the key factor influencing their acceptance of patriarchal norms. The study further confirmed that there is only one female Islamic scholar in the rural area under study.

Three key verses of the Quran that are often misinterpreted by men and misconceived by women were

identified:

Verse on Protection of women: Islam enjoins men to be the protectors of women, mainly due to the differences in their biological make-up. The Religion views women as a more delicate creation, mainly due to their physiology which may limit their ability to function at an optimal level, at times such as during the different stages of pregnancy, lactation or even menstruation. Thus, the verse: *Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means.* It was opined that women were not expected or required to earn a living; that men should be solely responsible for the upkeep of the family. Thus, the instruction and reminder to that effect [53]. All the respondents agreed that men are the protectors of women. However, women respondents in the rural areas conceived it as complete surrender of body and soul to their husbands, without regard to whether they fulfill the duties assigned to them, which is that of providing for the need of the family.

In the words of the respondents:

My husband is the head of this household, he takes all the decisions. He knows what is best for us and we can't question his actions (Source: IDI, rural area).

The problem is that some women experience exploitation and abuse all in the name of protection and maintenance. Some women are the bread winners in their homes but still some men turn blind eyes to the support these women give and take every opportunity to harass them in the name of protection (Source: KII, urban area) The male respondents in the rural area all agreed that women are under men so as to be guided and protected. They reported that without such guidance many may derail and be in an unfortunate situation as a result.

Verse on Polygamy: Another often misinterpreted and misconceived verse in the Qur'an is that which permits polygamy:..... *marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one*.....(Q4:3). Going further, it states: *You are never able to be fair and just as between women, even if it is your ardent desire*....(Q4:129).

Explaining the above quoted Qur'anic verses on polygamy, all the learned clergies contacted for the study, opined that, the precondition for polygamy in Islam, apart from the issue of justice, is the ability of the husband to provide for the needs of the family. This relates to good shelter, food, education, discipline and proper upbringing of the children. One of the clerics explained that:

Islam permits men to marry one, two and up to four wives, but directs that they do justice among them (the wives); meaning that there should be fairness and equality in terms of treatment of the wives. Thus, provision of basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing as well as education and moral upbringing of children from such unions are all preconditions for polygamy. It is however, unfortunate that some men turn blind eyes to these. (Source: KII, urban area).

Another Islamic Scholar explained that the equality or justice in polygamy, being referred to in the Qur'an, has

to do with all those things that are under the control of the husband, in other words, the material aspects. In his words:

It is humanly impossible to do justice on uncontrollable things such as emotions and love. Thus, the injunction in the Qur'anic verse refers only to those things that are under the control of the husband. Thus, the verse is not in any way setting an impossible precondition for polygamy as opined by some people. It simply means that polygamy is permitted but the husband should be fair in the treatment of his wives in terms of materials things and avoid showing open favoritism.
(Source: KII, urban area)

To majority of the other respondents, in the rural areas, agreed that polygamy is permissible in Islam and that is all there is to it. four (4) of the women interviewed were aged between 35 to 40 years, and three (3) of them have ten (10) children each with the fourth one having twelve (12).

One of the respondents reported:

I am entitled to four wives. And the prophet said Muslim men should marry and procreate, for he will be proud of us in the hereafter (Source: IDI, rural area).

The Study confirmed that all the male respondents in the rural area are peasant farmers, with very little knowledge of the Religion. All of them were also found to be practicing polygamy, with a large number of offspring. One of the respondents was quoted:

Presently, I have two wives and 27 children. I am a farmer and provide for them with the little I have (Source: IDI, rural area)

Furthermore, the rural women revealed ignorance on the subject of polygamy. Their explanation of the basis for polygamy in Islam showed that they did not comprehend the responsibilities attached to its permissibility. All they kept on emphasizing was that, it is the husbands' right to marry as many as four wives as stipulated by the Islamic laws. They reported attending traditional Qur'anic schools where they were taught to memorize a few verses of the Qur'an in the Arabic language with neither interpretation of their meanings nor any comprehension of the laws inherent therein. When asked about "maintenance" as the responsibility of the husband, the women respondents in the rural area reported that that they were content with whatever their husbands provide, even if it is not enough, which they confessed is the case most times. They reported supplementing this, by sending out their daughters to hawk. The study confirmed that the value of the daily hawked products in most cases was less than \$3.

He is entitled to four wives and whatever he gives, we collect with gratitude and supplement from the little we make through petty trading. Our daughters also help by hawking such trades. (Source: IDI, rural area).

Verse on Seclusion: Seclusion and veiling have been subjects of discussion among many scholars of Islam.

During the time of the Prophet, veiling or hijab was enjoined on women as a form of identification for free women, to distinguish them from slaves. It was also meant to protect the women from any abuse or exploitation in public places. This is contained in Qur'an chapter 33 verse 59: *Enjoin your wives and your daughters and the believing women, to draw a part of their outer coverings around them. It is likelier that they will be recognized and not molested.*

According to one of the Islamic Scholars interviewed:

Misinterpreting the verse on veiling in those days, many ignorantly believed that a good Hausa Muslim woman should only cross the boundaries of her matrimonial home on two occasions: when she is brought into the house as a bride and when she is taken out to her grave (KII, Urban area)

He further explained that Islam enjoins not only women but men as well to be modest so as to check immorality in the society. He stated that there is a corresponding verse which enjoins men to also lower their gaze... *"Tell the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty....."*(Q24:30). However, the latter verse, is mostly down played, while the one which addresses women is emphasized and a greater extent reached to ensure compliance. Sometimes even going beyond what the Religion enjoins, such as in situations where some men seclude women to the extent of denying them the right to medical care.

One of the female respondents in the rural area explained:

Although total seclusion is no more practiced, we still cannot go out without seeking permission from our husbands and we have to dress properly and cover-up. In my own case, I cannot even visit my neighbors without my husband's consent. (IDI, rural area)

All the respondents in the rural area agreed that total seclusion is rarely practiced now. Majority however, opined that women, especially the married ones should remain within their homes and only go for visitations where necessary with explicit permission of their husbands.

b) Customs and Tradition: Adherence to cultural norms, that have been engrained over a long period has been found to be one of the reasons why the rural women are averse to the opportunities for self- development. Most of the women interviewed believed in the preservation of their cultural values, which in most cases violate their rights. For instance, many of the women interviewed believed that a girl is better off being in her husband's house or even out hawking for the family's survival than pursuing education. They also perceived modern women as too liberal and independent, which they believed go contrary to Hausa culture and traditions.

There are certain things that we have inherited from our fore-fathers which have been preserved for generations. As such, we cannot just discard them for modern trends.. (Source: IDI, rural area)

Majority of the rural women interviewed believed that by conforming to such customs, they are adhering to the teachings of Islam.

One of the respondents was quoted thus:

When we were getting married, the advice usually given to us is that we should worship God sincerely, obey our husbands in all matters and also respect his parents and relations. Paradise lies at the foot of our husbands and to attain that reward, we have to wholly obey them. (Source: IDI, rural area)

c) Male Supremacy: Majority of the women interviewed believed that a woman is answerable to a man and that his permission is needed before undertaking any given task, even if it is for her self-development. The study further finds out that in most cases, this permission is refused without any reason.

One of the respondents in the rural area reported thus:

Husbands are everything. Whatever they want us to do, we do and we follow them patiently (Source: IDI, rural area)

Confirming this, one of the respondents reported that the women in Daawah and FOMWAN were at the initial stage unwelcomed in many rural areas. Many of the rural men believed that they were Associations of 'liberated feminists' whose agenda was to 'instigate' their women to rebel against them. Thus, many prevented their wives and daughters from attending the lectures organized by such Associations.

Initially, when we started, there was skepticism and sometimes (outward rejection) among the rural populace, especially the men, on our activities but with time this has been improved upon. FOMWAN, in particular, has covered a lot of grounds. It has opened branches in many rural areas all over the country. Women in Da'awah is also making giant strides in the north. (Source: KII, urban area)

d) Poverty: The study revealed that most of the respondents in the rural area are peasant farmers with large families. Thus, with very low income it is difficult to access healthcare, education, communication facilities, transportation and other modern amenities, necessary for self- development, and advancement. Many of the respondents in the rural area reported lack of support from the Government as another reason why rural women find it difficult to explore some of the opportunities availed by modernization. Specifically, they listed out education and health care as the most affected areas:

In most cases, lack of adequate funds made us not to send our children to school. We send them out to hawk sometimes because we don't have any choice. Buying books and other materials require money. The government can do better in terms of proving these things free of charge. (Source: IDI, rural area)

During pregnancy, attaining healthcare for women is not free of charge. In most cases, one has to spend money for transportation and also in buying drugs. When you are struggling to feed a family, this added burden is not easy to shoulder. (Source: IDI, rural area)

These assertions tally with the finding of [17] that socio-cultural conditions are major determinants of the position of women. The study clearly indicates that the Hausa Culture has placed women on a low pedestal. They are assigned roles and responsibilities only within the domestic sphere and are supposed to be answerable to men in almost all aspects. Women in such communities where culture supersedes all other values, exist in oppression, remain economically backward and politically marginalized. The men as the 'beneficiaries', continue to uphold and relish such traditions and norms. Some of these supposed 'benefits' include the freedom to marry many women and treat them at will; indulge in immoral acts without inhibitions and remain the major decision makers in all aspects of women's lives. To ensure that women remain subservient, compliant and passive, they use the most revered relationship- that which is between human beings and their Creator (Religion). In this case, they misinterpret some Quranic verses to justify cultural norms that deny women the right to education; self- identity; participation in major decision making processes; access to healthcare; legal rights; economic rights, among others. Thus, the reluctance on the part of the women to readily accept Western Education and the opportunities that come with it could easily be attributed to the fear of going against what they 'wrongly perceived' as Islamic injunctions. Nevertheless, results from this study showed that some harmful patriarchal practices in the rural Hausa Muslim communities have given way for more liberal standards. For instance total seclusion of women called *purdah* or *kulle*; a practice whereby women were completely confined within their matrimonial homes has been abolished in most Muslim Hausa communities, rural areas inclusive. Strict and old fashioned widowhood rites that degrade women and subject them to physical and emotional strain have also been considerably reduced. Girls are now given the liberty to choose their life partners. The idea of "dashing out" girls in marriage is now a rare occurrence. Forced marriages have also been reduced drastically. The study further revealed that in rural areas, division of labour within households is still gendered. Women and girls perform most of the household tasks without commensurate reward. Cases of sexual abuse and exploitation remain prevalent. Decisions are still the preserve of the men and women are only "informed" after such decisions are made. Thus, they still remain voiceless. In terms of Legal Rights, however, there is a slight improvement as women now seek redress in courts in cases of abusive relationships. On Economic Rights, the rural Hausa Muslim women remain economically backward, as the income from the petty trading they engage in is only used to augment what the husband provides for the maintenance of the family. Education is still viewed with suspicion, as the female children in most cases are not allowed to go to school and where they are permitted, they do not go beyond primary school. There is a slight improvement in the area of reproductive health. Rural women are now more open to accessing basic health care during pregnancy. However, family spacing is yet to be fully accepted. Thus, some progress, even though insignificant has been made in terms of attaining social, legal, economic and reproductive rights. The stagnation, however, lies in the acquisition and application of women's political rights. as the women are not even aware of these rights. The typical Hausa Muslim woman in the rural communities of Northern Nigeria hardly challenged for relevance as she remains dependent, passive and invisible, opting not to tap into the opportunities availed by both her Religion and modern civilization .

3.2 *Why is the Situation Different from Women of the Same Religion and Culture Living in Urban Areas?*

The situation of the Hausa Muslim women living in the urban areas could be regarded as slightly better. Results indicate that education, modernization and urbanization have played a key role in liberating women and are in part responsible for the upliftment of the standard of women in Hausa land. What obtained in the traditional settings in terms of the position of women has changed over time. Strict traditional values have given way to a more liberal standard, especially in terms of social, economic and reproductive rights. Specifically, the difference in terms of the positions of the Hausa Muslim rural and urban women could be attributed to the impact of:

Education: Both the men and women respondents in the urban areas have attained some level of formal education and were found to be more knowledgeable in the teachings of the Religion. The women reported attending Islamic schools where the Qur'an is taught in a language they understand. They also reported being in schools where Arabic, being the language of the Qur'an is also taught and Islamic laws are correctly interpreted. Results indicate that many of the respondents belonged to Islamic Associations. They were quite knowledgeable in the teachings of the Qur'an and know the rights of women as daughters, wives, mothers and members of the society.

Once you know what the Qur'an says about your position and also about coexistence in general, it becomes easier to deal with any situation that comes your way (Source: IDI, urban area).

Their perception and understanding of the verse on polygamy is different from what obtained in the rural area. Findings revealed that majority of the men interviewed practice monogamy with limited number of children. They believed that is the only way they could carry out their responsibilities as parents and husbands.

I have one wife and two children. I have a Certificate in Education and my wife has a diploma. I am of the view that giving my family sound education is the key to their success in life. That is why I made some sacrifices and ensured that my wife went to school and my children are now following suit (Source: IDI, urban area). Furthermore, it was revealed that most of the men are conscious of their responsibilities of providing shelter, food, education and security. One of the respondents reported that:

Nowadays, many men in a polygamous relationship are conscious of what Islam says about polygamy. For some, to avoid showing open favoritism and also give each wife and her children space, they make provision for separate dwelling places and visits each in accordance with agreed plan or guideline set by the wives. In some cases, the wives do not even reside in the same town, city or state. This is however, only common among the elites. (Source: IDI, rural area).

Regarding the verse on seclusion, both the men and women in the urban area agreed that it is not in practice now. Most of them reported that the women are allowed to work and earn a living, visit relations and hospital as the need arises.

They are only required to dress appropriately and in some cases, takes along a male legal escort, called mahram (KII, urban area)

However, an Islamic scholar interviewed explained that in accordance with the tenets of Islam, in a household where there are men, women should not be encouraged to go to the markets and other shopping areas. This, he said is a measure to further safeguard and protect them. On 'protection and maintenance' of women, results indicated a better understanding of the verse. However, cases of abuse of this right still manifest.

As one of the respondents reported:

Even in the urban areas among the educated, women are still dominated. We had a case of a woman who was given an ultimatum by her husband to either change her surname to his or pack out of his house. As the woman depends on him for social even if not economic reasons, she had no choice but to comply. (IDI, urban area)

Further results showed that some working Hausa Muslim women have become the breadwinners in their families. Taking up the responsibilities of feeding and maintaining the family.

In the words of one of the respondents:

Some women are the bread winners in their homes but still some men turn blind eyes to the support these women give and take every opportunity to harass them, and the women are helpless in such situations (Source: KII, urban area)

In spite of the negatives, it is still safe to assume that attainment of formal education (both western and Islamic) is the key to a better understanding of the true teachings of the Religion. Education has shown to be an important determinant of social class and social mobility. It has helped individuals to improve their life chances, secure better occupation and income and consequently higher status in the society. Thus, in line with the findings in [37 & 55]; education can be regarded as a key determinant of the position of women in the society and that western education has facilitated and enhanced women's social status; equipping them with knowledge, new skills and competences. It thus, can be deduced that education has changed the perception of the Hausa-Muslim woman and made her more enlightened about her Religion and what it says about her rights and position in the society.

Urbanization & Networking: Results indicated that women in urban areas have leveraged on technology and can therefore network and access information from around the globe more readily. This has helped in enhancing their knowledge on the teachings of Religion. The formation of groups and affiliations with common interests has also made a tremendous impact on women in terms of understanding their rights and status in Religion. Various reforms that saw the upliftment of Hausa Muslim women were developed in that regard. Most of the respondents agreed that urbanization has impacted positively on Hausa-Muslim women. Some of these impacts were listed by the respondents as the availability of facilities for self-development such as training and education, technology, communication, transportation among others, which all contributed to a better understanding of Islam and its stance on women's rights and consequently on gender role. It has also made it possible for the women to easily access literature on Islamic teachings such as the interpretation of the Quran and commentary in a language that is understood. It has also turned the world into a global village which made

it possible for Hausa Muslim women to participate in Islamic conferences, listen and watch Islamic scholars interpret verses of the Quran. Thus, widening their scope and delineating the line between culture and Religion.

In the words of one of the female respondents:

The formation of Muslim women groups such as FOMWAN and Women in Daawah has helped a lot in enlightening Muslim women on the true teachings of the Religion concerning women. Improvements in technology have made it easy for the many indigenous groups to network with learned scholars around the work and even bring them closer to the people here for enlightenment on the teachings of the Religion (Source: KII, urban area)

This is in line with the findings in [37 & 45] which state that urbanization and industrialization, as well as legal reforms, human rights activities and globalization have had positive impact on traditional social institutions. Urbanization, which brought together people from various backgrounds, according to the respondents however, also brought about changes that could be regarded as not entirely positive on the lives of the Hausa Muslim women. To them some of these negative influences include changes in the mode of dressing of women and social relationships in the public domain. These were deemed to have contributed to an increase in gender-based violence in the communities. In summary, the findings revealed that the modern and educated Hausa Muslim woman living in the urban area, understands her rights as enshrined in the Islamic law. In terms of Political and Legal rights, she is involved most of the time in decisions that affect her life, her family and even the society she lives in. She knows her legal rights and can seek redress in a court of law concerning divorce from an abusive marriage, child custody, inheritance, and forced marriage. She however, struggles to be heard politically. She also understands what the *Shari'a* says on family spacing, female genital mutilation, early marriage and reproductive health in general. She, can therefore, take advantage of health facilities at her disposal. Thus, being educated and supported by a network of women groups, a modern Hausa Muslim woman is in a better position to challenge some patriarchal values that have no basis in the *Shari'a*. However, these advantages she has are underutilized in most cases, as she remains vulnerable and helpless in a society that is ruled by patriarchy. Her fear of a cultural backlash and stigmatization as a consequent of her perceived “radicalism” or non-compliance, force her to remain a passenger in a jet she ought to pilot.

4. Conclusion

Islam is a religion that has been widely accepted among the Hausa tribe of Northern Nigeria. It has so permeated the Hausa culture that many assumed that all Hausas are Muslims. Furthermore, the Religion has made such a tremendous impact on the Hausa culture that it is sometimes very difficult to define the binary between the doctrines of the Hausa tradition and Islamic teachings. However, the truth is, each has its unique tenets, principles, and practices, which in many cases are not in tandem with each other. Contrary to most views, Islam has placed women on a high pedestal, by giving them rights commensurate with Fundamental Human Rights. However, ignorance and patriarchal standards inherent in the Hausa culture saw the distortion and misinterpretation of its teachings. Cultural values that favour men and subjugate women were enthroned as Religious injunctions to the unsuspecting women. In many cases, patriarchal interpretations are given to some

Qur'anic verses to coerce women into compliance. Particularly the interpretations given to the verses on 'protection/maintenance'; 'seclusion/veiling' and 'polygamy' were skewed to emphasis men's control over women; whereas in truth, the teachings are deeper than that. For instance the verse on 'seclusion/veiling' emphasized morality for men as well (lowering of gaze); the verse on 'polygamy' specifically outlined stringent conditions for its practice (justice) and the verse on 'protection and maintenance' enjoined men to provide full support to women (security/physical, emotional, financial, moral). These parts are however, too often ignored. Additionally, the Religion has given women rights (commensurate with fundamental human rights) and has enjoined fairness, justice, equity and consultation in all human relations, with women inclusive. However, due to cultural influences, discrimination, exploitation and abuse became the order of the day. Instead of men being the "maintainers and providers of women" as the Religion preaches, women are too often turned into properties to be used and discarded at will, in most cases without any consideration for their feelings as human beings. Cases of fathers 'selling' their daughters to the highest bidders became rampant; intimate partner abuse and wife battery abound in many homes; polygamy without justice and fairness became institutionalized; divorce without following due process thrived; denial of entitlements due to divorced women became an accepted norm; deprivation of the right of custody of children in cases of divorce became the order of the day and where this right is granted, financial support is often refused. Yet, in many homes both in the rural and urban areas, women are not only the primary care givers but are saddled with the full responsibility of providing for the needs of the family. Sadly, in spite of these contributions, women in the aforementioned communities are continuously being disrespected and their full rights as declared in the Qur'an are mostly denied. Degrading remarks such as "*after all she is a woman, what do you expect?*" or "*that is a woman's perspective, it cannot be relied upon*"... remain common phrases among men in both rural and urban Hausa Muslim communities. The study further concludes that Hausa Muslim women in the rural areas continue to uphold cultural values that are detrimental to their development mainly due to ignorance and poor perception of the teachings of Islam concerning their rights, obligations and relationships with the opposite sex. Thus, abuse and discrimination against the girl-child still exists. Girls are denied the right to education, while their labour is continuously exploited to maintain households. Maternal and infant mortality is still high, as rural women lack access to health care facilities. The situation of the elite women however, is different. Being educated, enlightened and supported by a network of women groups, most urban educated Hausa Muslim women can challenge some patriarchal values that have no basis in the *Sharia*. However, as the elite Hausa Muslim woman struggles to break away from the clutches of patriarchy and self-identify as an independent and righteous woman, she faces the challenges of acceptance, cultural backlash and or stigma that may be triggered by their perceived "activism", both in the private and the public sphere. In the domestic sphere, she is in some cases compelled to bow to male supremacy even in areas where Islam has explicitly stated such rights. In the public sphere, she is faced with abuse and discrimination based on stereotype. Thus, most often the advantages she has are underutilized. The study concludes that education, modernization and urbanization have shaped the perception of the Hausa Muslim community on the rights of women and have made positive impact on the position that women occupy in the society today. On the other hand, ignorance, poverty and male supremacy continue to blur the line between Religion and culture on the status of women in both rural and urban areas, with the impact being felt more in the rural areas.

5. Recommendations

The study recommends as follows:

1. **Education:** It is recommended that Government Agencies responsible for Education as well as Non-Governmental Organizations should focus more on eradication of illiteracy in the rural areas through the establishment of Adult Literacy Classes as well as making education compulsory for all. To achieve this, it is essential to get the buy-in of the men. Incentives or other forms of motivation could be used to entice them to permit the participation of women in such classes as well as the enrolment of their children especially the girl-child into formal schools. Respected and established educated Hausa Muslim women could be used as role models to encourage the rural women to embrace education and take its advantages for self-development.
2. **Enlightenment:** Islamic Religious Bodies and other relevant Non-Governmental Organizations should intensify efforts towards propagating accurate and unbiased teachings of the Quran, especially with regards to the status of women in Islam. The Mass-media could also play a vital role in this regard. Additionally, it calls for the engagement of more women in both Western and Islamic scholarship as well as the formation of more Affiliations to work in the rural areas, especially, for reorientation, upliftment, and improvement in the standing of women.
3. **Advocacy:** The support of Traditional Rulers and other custodians of Hausa traditions and customs is important in the eradication of undesirable and harmful cultural values that have no basis in Islam. They should therefore be an integral part of the plan. To influence attitudinal change, workshops seminars and conference on the dangers of upholding such values should be arranged on a regular basis. Incentives should also be used to encourage participation and compliance.
4. **Synergy:** The Paper calls for synergy amongst all the stakeholders- relevant Governments Agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations, Religious and Traditional Institutions- to ensure that Hausa-Muslim Communities in the rural Areas accept education as the key to development and also ensure the abolishment and eradication of all harmful traditional practices especially those misconstrued in the name of Islam and particularly those bordering on violation of human rights in general.

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***Relevant Quranic Chapters and Verses**

Equality of Human Beings, Social and Economic Rights

Chapter 2 Verses 228 – Same Rights

Chapter 2 Verses 282 – Equality of justice

Chapter 4 Verses 1 and 32- Equality of human beings before God

Chapter 6 Verses 137, 140 and 151- Discrimination against girl-child

Chapter 7 Verse 189- Equality of human beings before God

Chapter 15 Verse 29- Equality of human beings before God

Chapter 49 Verse 13- Equality of human beings before God

Chapter 42 Verse 11 -Equality of human beings before God

Chapter 16 Verses 58 and 59- Discrimination against girl-child

Chapter 17 Verses 31 - Discrimination against girl-child

Chapter 24 Verse 69 – Equality of justice

Chapter 33 Verse 5- Identity

Chapter 65 Verses 1 and 2

Chapter 81 Verses 8 and 9 Discrimination against girl-child

Chapter 96 Verse 1 to 5- Seeking Knowledge

Chapter 2 Verse 236 - Discrimination

Chapter 4 Verses 11 and 12- Inheritance

1. Political and Legal Rights

Chapter 9 Verse 71- Political participation for women

Chapter 42 Verse 38- Right to consultation

Chapter 58 Verse 1- Justice and fair hearing for all

2. Reproductive and Health Rights

Chapter 2 Verses 187 – Procreation and 233 Breast feeding

Chapter 4 Verses 1 and 24 Marriage and Procreation

Chapter 24 Verses 32-33- Marriage and Procreation

Chapter 30 Verses 21. Marriage and Procreation

3. Polygamy

Chapter 4 Verses 3 and 129

4. Protection and Maintenance

Chapter 4 Verse 34

5. Seclusion, Veiling, Modesty

Chapter 24 Verses 30 and 31

Chapter 33 Verse 59.