# AN APPRAISAL OF THE CHALLENGES OF WOMEN WITHOUT MALE CHILDREN IN IGALALAND, KOGI STATE, NIGERIA.

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## Abstract

This paper appraises the challenges of women without male children in Igalaland. It dwells on the analysis of the male child's preference over their female counterparts. This work also analysed the history of Igalaland and the challenges of women without male children. This research work constitutes the introduction, history of Igalaland, Igala linguistics, the religion of the Igala, as well as their political structure. The adopted methodology in this study is sociological, philosophical and analytical. In this work, there is an assessment of the Igala perspective of a woman without a male child, as well as the challenges of women without male children in Igalaland and discusses the Christian view on the male child syndrome.

## Introduction

Male child preference has remained one of the most lasting cultural values among others. The phenomenon is evident in societies where male children are accorded special recognition and or higher status relative to their female counterparts (Akpan and Nwokocha 18). In communities where such gender distinction is a norm, most important positions of authority and inheritors of position of authority and inheritors of immovable properties. A man who died without a son is often considered to have lived a worthless life; he is inherited by his brothers, and is soon forgotten. For a woman, the birth of a male child is of paramount importance as well, because it establishes her in the family. She is said to have taken root or 'established a solid foundation' when the son arrives.

Given the serious attachment that Igala have for male offspring, trauma inevitably exists for women who fail to give birth to male offspring for their husbands. The pain of not being able to give birth to a male child is next to that of barrenness, as both are traumatic. The challenge constitutes a lot of problems for the womenfolk, since they are not the ones to dictate the gender of the child. Christians do believe that children are gifts from God; male or female, they do not discriminate against any gender. In the same way, no individual (man or woman), no matter the level of desire or preference for a particular sex, can determine the sex of any child.

## A brief History of Igalaland

Igala (Igalaland), also known as the Igala kingdom, was a pre-colonial West African State, located at the eastern region of the confluence of River Niger and River Benue in the middle Belt or North-central

of Nigeria. The kingdom was founded by the Igala people, with the "Ata" serving as the Igala Emperor, national father and spiritual head, and the capital of Igalaland is at Idah. The Igala kingdom has been influenced by the Yoruba, Idoma, Igbo and Jukun, and is likely made up of the descendants of these groups who settled and mixed with the native Igala population (Boston 84).

The Igala kingdom is skirted on two sides by the great waterways that divide Nigeria into its major natural and cultural regions, the river Benue and the river Niger. In shape, it is roughly triangular, with the confluence of the two rivers forming the apex and the base extending irregularly into Idoma and Ibo country. Its strategic situation is of key significance in the historical development of the kingdom. Their geographical position has brought the Igala into contact with a wide range of peoples and a great variety of cultures, including contact with the Ibo, the Yoruba, the Edo-speaking peoples, and the Jukun, to name only the principal groups. Idah, the Igala capital, is situated on the river Niger, and it is clear both from written records of nineteenth-century exploration and from the traditions of the many peoples who trace their rulers' descent to Idah that the Igala kingdom has dominated the affairs of this riverain zone for many centuries (Okpe, 210)

### Igala Linguistic

The etymology of the term "Igala" itself may be derived from "Iga", which means a partition, blockade, a dividing wall, and "Ala", which means "sheep". Iga-ala thus becomes Igala. The reason for this form of self-identification is currently debated by scholars. However, a possible theory designates the citizens of the kingdom as the sheep and the state being the wall or defence that protects them (Abdullahi 241). In its native language, the people of Igala are known as "abo Igala", its culture is known as "Icholo" or Ucholo", and the Igala language is known as "ichi Igala (Abutu 84).

### The Religion of the Igala

The Igala traditional concept of God is a belief in the Supreme Being, whom they call Ojo. Ojo held so supreme that out of His supremacy, he gave powers and authorities to the gods and spirits over the different spheres of human life. These gods and spirits have practical dealings with human beings in their everyday life activities (Ocholi 38). Ifa is the traditional belief of the Igala and is still being practised currently by many. The system of worship is based on a belief in, and honouring of, ancestral spirits. Many communities, families and individuals maintain shrines for the worship of deities and spirits. The traditional worship is known as "Icheboeche" while the worshipers are known as "Amachichebo", the custodians who serve as medicinal practitioners, and are versed in oral traditional history and the use of herbs and plants to cure ailments (Negedu II).

Igala regard God as Ojo-chamachala as all-knowing and all-seeing. However, to access this God and to ascertain what He is saying per time, Ifa needs to be consulted (Ottah 4). Another aspect of faith amongst the Igala is the Ibegwu, Ibo (people) egwu (dead). The spirits of the departed souls play an important role in the various clans. There is the belief that they see everything and know everything, hence they are good at arbitration. The Ibegwu judges the actions of the living, especially in the cases of land disputes, family disputes and general conduct regarding sex and security. Ibegwu forbids sex in daytime, oral sex, brothers sharing the same sex partners and so on. However, Ibegwu is only potent on individuals whose family are connected to it. Families that have no ties with Ibegwu do not usually

feel their impact. When Ibegwu judges a person of wrongdoing, the consequences are the manifestation of diseases that defy medical solution (Achadu 10).

## Political Structure of the Igala People

The "Ata's court is known as the Ogbede, which is the building where Ata hears cases within, with its head being known as the Ogbe or president of the court. The Amedibo are the royal servants, and the Amonoji are Atas eunuchs. The symbols of power are the royal objects, including the Oka (beads), Okwu (necklace), robe (Olawoni), red cap (Olumada), and Otihi (flywhisk). Other sacred objects are the ejubejuailo( The Ata pectoral mask), Onunu-Ere (royal crown ), Unyiale Ata (royal umbrella), OdechiOkakachi ( royal band), Oka Kpai Okwu (royal beads) and the Akpa-Ayegba (the stool) (Negedu 116). The Ata is in charge of the major sacred objects, shrines and festivals of the Igala people. The Achadu serves as the Chief. Another title associated with this post is Oko-Ata (Ata's traditional husband. Achadu itself means Prime Minister (Abdullahi 241)

## Igala Perspective of a Woman without a Male Child

Generally, in the Igala race, it is believed that once a woman has no male child, even if she has ten (10) other female children, they amount to nothing. This is simply because the Igala people (Men) have the understanding that at death or sometimes when even alive, there must be someone to take over from them to ensure continuity in their lineage. The worst case is the fact that women who give birth to numerous female children are still regarded as being barren in some cases; the husbands in question may tend to understand to a certain degree. Notwithstanding, some of the family members would take it upon themselves to oppress and pressure the women concerned. Therefore, the trauma comes from different angles. If their particular scenario is left unattended to or if serious attention is not paid to this ugly situation, some woman may not like to marry, and some may be forced out of their husbands' homes (Ocholi 20).

## Challenges of Women without Male Children in Igalaland

Here are some challenges that women without male children face in Igalaland. Trauma:

i. Women without male children face trauma in Igalaland due to the societal preference for male children, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.

ii. Social stigma: Women without male children are often viewed as outsiders in their communities and are perceived as not meeting the expectations of womanhood.

iii. Linguistic stigma: Language and other ideas create a stigma that degrades women who are childless. Degrading discourse strategies that are language-based have a significant impact on how childless women are viewed.

iv. Semantic derogation: This is the purposeful use of words, phrases, or clauses to denigrate another person in order to negatively affect how they are seen.

v. Argumentation strategies: The canons of rhetoric, strategic maneuvering, and persuasion techniques are used to stigmatize childless women.

vi. Negation strategies: Negation is a logical technique that demonstrates that an object lacks a property that it would ordinarily have. In this case, childless women lack the property of being feminine.

vii. Obligation strategies: A sense of duty is used to emphasize the necessity or significance of something in one's life, using the grammatical components that make up modality.

Addressing the Challenges of Women without Male Children in Igalaland. Cultural and Societal Attitude.

Addressing the challenges of women without male children in Igalaland requires an approach that involves changing cultural and societal attitudes. Here are some strategies that can be employed:

1. Education and awareness: Educating the community about the importance of gender equality and the value of all children, regardless of gender, can help change cultural and societal attitudes (Adeoye 34).

2. Community engagement: Engaging with community leaders and influencers to promote gender equality and challenge harmful cultural practices can help shift societal attitudes (Nwosu 25).

3. Support groups: Establishing support groups for women without male children can provide a safe space for them to share their experiences and receive support and empowerment (Okonkwo 20).

4. Economic empowerment: Providing economic opportunities and resources for women can help them achieve financial independence and challenge patriarchal norms (Eze 10).

5. Legal protections: Strengthening legal protections for women's rights, including inheritance and property rights, can help address the marginalization of women without male children (Igboin 8).

6. Media campaigns: Utilizing media platforms to raise awareness and challenge harmful cultural norms and stereotypes can help shift societal attitudes (Ogbomo 23).

7. Religious leader engagement: Engaging with religious leaders to promote gender equality and challenge patriarchal interpretations of religious texts can help influence community attitudes (Nwabueze 60).

8. Community-based initiatives: Implementing community-based initiatives that promote gender equality and empower women without male children can help create positive change at the grassroots level (Okoro 85).

9. Policy reform: Advocating for policy reforms that protect the rights of women without male children and address gender inequality can help create systemic change (Igbo 74).

10. Empowerment through education: Providing educational opportunities and resources for women without male children can help empower them to challenge patriarchal norms and improve their socioeconomic status (Eze 60).

11. Challenging patriarchal norms: Encouraging men to challenge patriarchal norms and advocate for gender equality can help create a more inclusive and equitable society (Nwosu 65).

12. Support for widows and single mothers: Providing support and resources for widows and single mothers can help address the marginalization of women without male children (Okonkwo 50).

## The Relevance of Women in Society

Women play a vital role in society, and their contributions are essential for the well-being and progress of communities. Here are some aspects of the relevance of women in society:

1. Reproduction and childrearing: Women are the bearers of children, and their role in childrearing and nurturing is crucial for the continuation of human society (Hardy 40).

2. Economic participation: Women's participation in the workforce and economic decision-making is essential for economic growth and development (World Bank 2019).

3. Social cohesion and community building: Women often play a key role in building and maintaining social relationships and community cohesion (Ehrenreich 60).

4. Caregiving and healthcare: Women disproportionately provide care for the elderly, children, and the sick, and their role in healthcare is vital (Horton 60).

5. Political and social leadership: Women's participation in political and social leadership is essential for promoting gender equality and challenging patriarchal norms (Paxton 30).

6. Education and knowledge transmission: Women play a crucial role in transmitting knowledge and values to future generations through education (UNESCO 2017).

7. Food security and agriculture: Women are essential for food security and agricultural production, particularly in subsistence farming (FAO 2017).

8. Conflict resolution and peace building: Women play a crucial role in conflict resolution and peace building, and their participation in peace negotiations is essential for sustainable peace (UN Women 2018).

9. Environmental sustainability: Women are key actors in environmental sustainability, and their knowledge and practices are essential for managing natural resources (WEDO 2019).

10. Cultural preservation and transmission: Women play a vital role in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage, traditions, and values (UNESCO 2019).

11. Social entrepreneurship and innovation: Women are increasingly involved in social entrepreneurship and innovation, creating solutions to social and environmental problems (Schwab Foundation 2020).

12. Mental health and well-being: Women's mental health and well-being are critical for individual and collective well-being, and their experiences and perspectives are essential for developing effective mental health interventions (WHO 2019).

13. Disaster response and recovery: Women are crucial in disaster response and recovery, and their participation in decision-making processes is essential for effective and inclusive disaster management (UNISDR 2019).

14. Access to justice and human rights: Women's access to justice and human rights is essential for gender equality and the rule of law, and their participation in the justice system is critical for addressing gender-based violence and discrimination (OHCHR 2019).

Christian View of Women without Male Children

The Christian view of women without male children is one of compassion, love, and equality, and according to Christian belief, all individuals, regardless of gender or family status, are created in the image of God and are valued and loved by Him.

Here are some key principles:

i Equality: Galatians 3:28 states, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

ii. Compassion: Jesus showed compassion and kindness to women, including those who were marginalized or childless, such as the woman at the well (John 4)

iii. Value and worth: Women are valued and loved by God, regardless of their ability to bear children. Their worth and identity come from being created in God's image, not from their reproductive abilities.

iv. Support and care: The church is called to support and care for women, including those without male children, as an expression of Christian love and compassion (Acts 4:32-37, 1 Corinthians 12:22-23).

v. Spiritual motherhood: Women can still experience spiritual motherhood through their roles as mentors, teachers, and caregivers, even if they do not have biological children (Titus 2:3-5).

Remember, these principles are based on biblical teachings and may vary in interpretation among different Christian denominations and traditions.

vi. Singleness and Celibacy: The Bible recognizes singleness and celibacy as viable and valuable states for women (1 Corinthians 7:7-8, Matthew 19:12).

vii. Women's Roles in the Church: Women have important roles to play in the church, including teaching, leading, and ministering (Romans 16:1-3, Philippians 4:2-3).

viii. Equality in Salvation: Men and women are equal in salvation, and both have equal access to God through faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:8-9).

ix. Gender and Identity: A woman's identity and worth are not defined by her gender or reproductive abilities, but by her creation in God's image and her redemption through Jesus Christ (Genesis 1:26-27, 1 Peter 3:3-4).

x. Compassion and Support: The church should provide compassion and support for women who are struggling with infertility, singleness, or other challenges (James 1:27, 1 Thessalonians 5:14).

 **Conclusion**

In conclusion, women without male children in Igalaland face significant cultural, social, and economic challenges. They are often marginalized, stigmatized, and excluded from inheritance and decision-making processes. However, it is important to recognize that these women are not defined solely by their reproductive roles. They have agency, resilience, and contribute significantly to their communities.

Efforts to address these challenges must involve a multifaceted approach that includes:

i. Cultural sensitization and education to challenge harmful gender stereotypes and norms.

ii. Economic empowerment programs to support women's entrepreneurship and financial independence.

iii. Legal reforms to protect women's inheritance and property rights.

iv. Community-based initiatives to promote social inclusion and support networks.

v. Encouraging men to advocate for gender equality and challenge patriarchal norms.

By working together, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society where women without male children are valued, respected, and empowered to reach their full potential.

**Recommendations**

**i.       Cultural Sensitization:** Organise community-based cultural sensitization programmes to challenge harmful gender stereotypes and norms, promoting gender equality and inclusivity.

**ii.       Economic Empowerment:** Establish vocational training and entrepreneurship programmes to support women's economic independence and financial stability.

**iii.       Legal Reforms:** Advocate for policy reforms to protect women's inheritance and property rights, ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities.

**iv.       Social Support Networks:** Create community-based support groups for women without male children, providing a safe space for sharing experiences and receiving emotional support.

**v.       Education and Awareness:** Implement gender-sensitive education programs, highlighting the value and contributions of women without male children, and promoting gender equality.

**vi.       Male Involvement:** Engage men in gender equality advocacy, encouraging them to challenge patriarchal norms and support women's empowerment.

**vii.       Community Engagement:** Foster partnerships with local leaders, religious authorities, and community influencers to promote gender inclusivity and challenge harmful cultural practices.

**viii.       Psychological Support:** Provide access to counselling services, addressing the emotional and psychological impacts of marginalization and stigma.

**ix.       Policy Implementation:** Ensure effective implementation and enforcement of policies protecting women's rights, holding accountable those who perpetuate discrimination.

**x.       Research and Monitoring:** Conduct regular research and monitoring to assess progress, identify challenges, and inform data-driven solutions.

By implementing these recommendations, we can work towards a more inclusive and equitable society, addressing the challenges faced by women without male children in Igalaland.

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