



### Gender issues in the Nigerian Armed Forces: A Literature Review

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#### **Abstract**

*In many societies, state security institutions have been created with the responsibility of defending a nation's interest from both foreign aggressors and internal strife, and this responsibility has been placed in the hands of those who identify as masculine based on physiological, biological and social perceptions of what poses as strong as opposed to weak. Within the Security sector, several gender issues have been identified that are discriminatory in nature, favouring one gender group over another. In Nigeria especially, there is an underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions in the public sector and the trend stays true, especially across different security sector organisations. This paper, therefore engaged in an extensive review of literature, to understand the underpinnings of gender issues in the security sector, from an internal perspective focusing on the recruitment of female soldiers in the Nigerian Armed Forces, and the services offered to them in terms of quality of service rendered to arrive at its findings and draw up its conclusions. The study found out that although women are now employed as infantry and special forces fighters and the Nigerian Military Academy accepts women as cadets, it does not afford them the same training as their male colleagues and only a few of them will likely reach the pinnacle of the military complex. It, therefore, recommends that the Armed Forces of Nigeria adopt a range of supporting activities to encourage equitable chances in career development, including deployment for women as much as it does for men.*





**Keywords:** Armed Forces, Gender Equality, Security, Gender Mainstreaming, Development, Inclusion

### **Introduction**

The link between women, gender equality, security, and development is more complicated than many are aware of. Before now, the study of gender-focused on women rather than on the intricate relationship between women and men, masculinities and femininities, as well as the link between gender and gender identity discrimination. Gender inequality and the negative effects of war on women, men, girls, and boys are not inevitable but rather the product of inadequate laws, policies, and practices.

Until recently, the concept of gender in the context of the armed forces and other military groups meant merely including women. Many defence agencies focus on what it means to mainstream gender in military operations and how gender dynamics affect civilian protection during the conflict. In the last decade, the usage of Women's Protection Advisers, Female Engagement Teams, Gender Advisers, and Gender Focal Points has increased in the armed services and other defence-related organisations. Women are slowly gaining authority globally in the military, the defence industry, and many security organisations (Watson, 2019).

The Nigerian Armed Forces, like most traditional militaries of state, excluded women from combat and combat-related roles from its creation in 1958 (Corps, 1992); until a policy decision by the Nigerian government in 2011 ordered the immediate inclusion of women in combat training in the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA), and a potential shift from the military's position of exclusion to one of inclusion of women in combat roles (Dogo, 2016). Before now, women in the Nigerian armed forces exclusively participated in non-combat and combat service support corps like Medical, Catering, and Administration (Corps, 1992). Because they were barred from combat and combat-reduced duties, this positioned them in second status within the profession (Ogbaji & Anna, 2015). This was gravely consequential because combat is the military's primary responsibility, and participation in battle is required for promotion to higher ranks and leadership positions. Hence, the armed services have long supported male domination due to the Nigerian military's stringent rules on women's involvement.

This domination by the men has been shown by their numerical superiority against women, as women are recruited in small numbers compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, most women who



choose to join the armed forces – army, navy or air force – are forced to accept early retirement because their Direct Short Service Commissions confined them to support jobs and hindered them from developing (Ogbaji & Anna, 2015).

More so, the Nigerian Armed forces have maintained a masculine ideology that portrayed the profession as ideally a man's profession by valuing masculinity as superior to femininity; stereotyping women as weak and incapable of combat-related roles through their continued deployment to traditional feminine roles such as nursing, catering, and administration (Ogbaji & Anna, 2015). Through military training programmes modelled around the idea of a belligerent masculine warrior, a hegemonic masculine image against which all troops, male and female, are assessed, the Nigerian military reinforced male dominance and subjection of women. Women comprise approximately 5 to 10% of the Nigerian military (Dogo, 2016), and they all work in support areas, including medicals, catering, supply and transport, and administration.

The 2011 policy change included women in combat training for the first time, implying their involvement in combat duties. It is, therefore, the hope that women in combat training might change the position of women in the Nigerian military. This policy reform has caused several gendered adjustments in the Nigerian armed forces. It may indicate a break from the male ethos that excluded women from combat-related jobs in the Nigerian armed forces if adequately implemented.

### **Conceptual Discourse**

#### *Gender*

When the term "gender" is used, several factors become clearer. On the one hand, it refers to a population differentiated by sex, that is, men and women, even if only the female population is considered most time. Although the term does not try to equate or swap men and women as they are distinctly different beings, the term is often discussed in contrast to the belief that women are less likely to exhibit independence than men (Arteaga, Mayo, & Nieto, 2017). The biological connotation of gender and sex or sexual differentiation is distinct from the social connotation of gender (Lamas, 2000). The term first appeared during the mid-1970s among English-speaking feminists as the term used to refer to the differences between men and women. Over time, it has come to refer to the collection of body-



related happenings and the socio-cultural conventions derived from them (Arteaga, Mayo, & Nieto, 2017).

According to Rubin, gender is a by-product of human activity that transforms natural sexuality into social by-products (Ayus & Eroza, 2007). Organising such activities begins with defining society through kinship, separating men and women into marriable and non-marriable categories to meet societal needs. Men are converted into wishing creatures, while women are wished for. Harding (2000) says it explains the gendering of social life. This is demonstrated in gender symbolism, gender-based social structure, and gender identity creation.

On the other hand, Carrington and Bennett (1999) say that gender is a fabrication in which subjects are socialising actors. It comprises fractured identities and varied procedural pedagogies, whether institutionalised or not. According to some, it is a set of ideas, beliefs, representations, and social duties based on the sexual difference (Carrington & Bennett, 1999). These factors have led to inequality, marginalisation, and the subjection of women's interests to others. However, the misuse of the term "gender" has reduced it to the study of women's concerns (Arteaga, Mayo, & Nieto, 2017).

### **Gender Equality**

Gender equality, as a political issue, is key to improving sexual and reproductive outcomes for men and women (Rolleri, 2013). Unfortunately, in many societies, women and those deemed "feminine" are valued less than men and masculine traits. As a result, men have a stronger ability to regulate decision-making in personal, social, and governmental realms, while women's needs and interests are insufficiently addressed or managed. In some communities, the cultural belief that men should always be in charge endangers women's physical and mental health. In addition, men's health is harmed when they are encouraged to dominate others (Courtenay, 2000).

Societies that have minimised the power imbalance between men and women have better social, health, and economic outcomes (United Nations, 1995). Rolleri (2012a) defines gender equality as women and men having equal rights, authority, position, opportunities, and rewards. Gender equality is, therefore, 1) equitable access and utilisation of resources, 2) equitable involvement in relationships, the home, the community, and political arenas, and 3) safety or freedom from violence (Rolleri, 2012a).



To achieve gender equality, gender-fair behaviours must be in place. Interagency Gender Working Group (IGWG) defines gender equality as “being equitable to diverse genders” (Interagency Gender Working Group (n.d), 2022). If the system is not fair, people do not have equal access to resources and chances to operate as equals. The IGWG also notes that “to assure justice, procedures must be adopted to adjust for historical and social impediments”.

Equal treatment of the sexes requires sex equality. Feminist academics and political supporters use the concept to signify that women's and men's rights, obligations, and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Instead, their rights, obligations, and opportunities should be based on their physical and intellectual abilities. Gender equality, therefore, calls for recognising the similarities and differences of both men and women.

### **Armed Forces**

According to the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (2015), the state creates the institutions that make up the armed forces with the primary objective of defending the country from both foreign aggressors and internal strife. Depending on the situation, there is a lot of room for variation in the make-up of the armed forces. However, regular and auxiliary military forces are the most commonly recognised types of armed forces.

The regular military forces are military institutions whose primary goal is preparation for war. These include armies, navies, amphibious forces, air forces, border guards, and presidential guards, together with all of their military support tasks. Such forces may be professional, based on conscription, or include a combination of professional uniformed staff, professional civilian staff, and/or uninformed non-professional conscripts (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2015).

On the other hand, the auxiliary military forces are trained security personnel who may be called upon to support the regular armed forces in specific circumstances. Examples include constabularies, gendarmes, border guards, coast guards, close protection forces, merchant marines or navies, radio support, air patrols, specialised scientific information and intelligence services, organisational commands, logistics services, and institutions of higher learning. Such forces may have a military, civilian, or hybrid nature and might be governed by military law (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2015).



Each country's legal definition of "armed forces" dictates the precise make-up of that nation's armed forces. However, during times of war, customary international law, as well as the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, may define any armed group under effective command as part of a state's armed forces (Watson, 2019). This is true regardless of whether or not the group is defined as part of the armed forces under national law and whether they are regular military forces. This is because the armed forces are a component of the state defence sector, which encompasses all of the individuals and organisations engaged in supplying, administering, and supervising national defence (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2015).

### **Gender Issues in the Nigerian Armed Forces: A Literature Review**

In society, particularly in the workplace, most women have historically been constrained to the bottom rungs of the social ladder. For instance, only two women have ever held the position of Head of Service in the history of the Nigerian public service, Winifred Oyo-Ita and Folashade Yemi-Esan. The same is true with the Nigerian legal system, where no woman has held the position of Chief Justice of Nigeria since independence until Mariam Aloma Mukhtar was appointed in 2012. Unfortunately, this trend has continued to date (Adesanya & Bamidele, 2022).

When the story is extended to the Nigerian Armed Forces, which includes the Air Force, Army, and Navy, it becomes clear that the number of women serving is drastically out of proportion to the number of males. None has attained the highest rank in the military—Service Chief. While the first group of women, according to Gabel (1992), were recruited into the Nigerian Navy in 1967. Captain Josephine Okwuekeleke Tolefe, the country's first female commissioned officer, received a short service commission on February 7, 1961, as a second lieutenant. It is important to note that the first group of women to join the Nigerian Air Force in 1967 was made up entirely of nurses (Adesanya & Bamidele, 2022).

The aforementioned raises questions like Is the disparate number of women in the military a deliberate choice or an accident? Was it part of a plan to prevent women from joining the Regular Combatant Corps, eliminating their chances of ever becoming the Chief of Staff of one of the three branches of the Armed Forces, as well as the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) or National Security Advisor (NSA)? The concerns over a single-gender concept in the military—for example,



led the Nigerian Army to see all of its commanders and troops as gentlemen – have led to these questions.

This is true despite the fact that women are now employed as infantry and special forces fighter pilots, as Adesanya and Bamidele (2022) noted in their research. Moreover, even though the premier Nigerian military academy, the Nigeria Defence Academy (NDA), now accepts women as cadets and affords them the same training as their male colleagues, it is hardly fallacious to state that only a few of them will likely reach the pinnacle of the military complex. The fact that the status quo has remained unchanged in relation to women's advancement in the military is true, even though one might acknowledge that there may be covert efforts to change the situation.

Men, with a few exceptions, are seen as the "natural fit" for militaristic endeavours and the use of coercion in the wedge between security, stability, and coercion. This is especially true when it comes to war, which becomes the defining limit of security, particularly for those engaged in it (Adesanya & Bamidele, 2022). So, because these occupations are inherently designed for males, it becomes the norm that only men may be assigned to them in the military. Due to the fact that people chosen for the positions are reportedly men, the Nigerian military chose to refer to its members as "masculine" rather than using a term that would be gender-neutral. By extension, one speculates that the military leadership expects women to act as De Pauw's depiction of past instances of women disguising themselves as males to be soldiers depicted (De Pauw, 1981).

Due to the operations of Boko Haram/ISWAP, which has carved out a caliphate for itself out of Borno State, Nigeria is now dealing with a serious condition of insecurity. In addition, bandits and Fulani herders continue to attack and engage in violent behaviour in a number of the nation's states (Zacharias & Zenn, 2018). This unpleasant situation should have justified the recruitment of more young people and the inclusion of more women in the fighting corps of the Nigerian Armed Forces. However, the population of women who would be taken into consideration throughout the process could be unnoticeable, considering there have been advertisements for recruitment into the officer cadre based on the stereotyped procedure. Other factors influencing women's access to the military, aside from being recruited based on need, which has invariably resulted in the recruitment of women as nurses and various officers, include the configuration of national security, combat/support ratio, military accession policies, labour situation in the nation, family structure, social consideration of

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gender in the public domain, values, and purposes of the society (Adesanya & Bamidele, 2022).

Contrary to developed nations like France, Germany, the UK, Norway, and Greece, where women are drafted into the military, particularly during times of war like during World War II, the Nigerian civil war, terrorist attacks, and bandit attacks in the country's northeast and elsewhere have not been able to convince the government to increase the number of women serving in the combatant corps (Adesanya & Bamidele, 2022). The recruitment of women into the corps that generated the armed forces' leadership was subtly prohibited prior to President Jonathan's demand, either by accident or purpose, leaving women off the military leadership radar. Since then, the President has ordered that all female citizens interested in joining the armed services as combatant officers be admitted to the NDA. As a result, an unprecedented 20 women were accepted into the NDA programmes in 2011 for the first time (Okunorobo, 2018).

Numerous arguments have been made in favour of or against including women in combat jobs in the military. According to one perspective, serving in the military necessitates being willing to put oneself at risk for the benefit of others while they are trying to kill you (Campbell, 2006). The majority of the time, fighting in battle comprises close quarters of arm-to-arm combat or offensive fire from warships, combat aircraft, infantry, armour, and artillery. Being murdered is more likely to happen here. It is more difficult for certain countries to incorporate women into their militaries due to the idea that women should be child-bearers rather than life-givers, which is another social viewpoint that supports the exclusion of women from combat duties (Guerrina, 2012).

Contrary to this rather popular belief, some believe that both men and women may develop the combat skills necessary for successful performance in battle. They contend that these skills can be developed via rigorous training (Mcsally, 2007). Additionally, by focusing more on training for women, gender stereotypes that have persisted through time may be dispelled, and women's alleged weaknesses can be turned into strengths (Holmes, 2001).

For the military to use all of the available abilities and talents of service members and the nation, women and men must be fully integrated. Additionally, women might provide military operations with certain operational benefits. For example, teams made up of men and women have been shown to boost force security, according to experience. Armed forces were able to get intelligence in



Afghanistan, for instance, through interacting with local women, thanks to female soldiers' involvement (Watson, 2019). A similar effect was seen when female staff members searched for and spoke with local women, reducing resistance to the mission.

The idea that the armed forces must reflect the society they are meant to protect is also crucial. Along with other human rights, the right to military service is a component of the individual's right to participate fully in society. The public is more likely to support a diversified defence industry that reflects the demographics of the nation it represents. In the past, the armed forces have contributed to the development of nations. Mobilisation brings together men from various social and linguistic backgrounds in nations like Switzerland and Singapore and aids in the formation of the state's collective identity. Armed forces are more dependable at home and more credible when promoting democracy and human rights abroad when they are diverse enough to represent all communities within their country.

Although they are frequently perceived as conservative, the military is ideally positioned to promote acceptance and gender equality. According to research conducted across various institutions, the ways in which the armed forces operate can foster environments that can lessen prejudice between members of various groups (Watson, 2019). This is because those who serve in the military:

1. engage in personal dialogue (in a shared workplace or living quarters)
2. are on the same footing (when they have the same rank)
3. Discuss shared objectives that can only be accomplished with the participation of two or more people or groups (as in teams where individuals perform different specialised functions)
4. Have the backing of the authorities, laws, and traditions they uphold (through military structures) (Watson, 2019).

Armed forces can serve as an example of how to maximise the potential of diverse teams that include men, women, and people from a variety of backgrounds by upholding the equal right of all citizens to serve. Armed forces leaders can serve as inclusive role models who positively impact both the military and civilian society (Adesanya & Bamidele, 2022).

With hope for a better-gendered approach to armed forces participation, in April 2021, the Armed Services of Nigeria (AFN) under

General Lucky Irabor launched the Gender Policy to enhance gender mainstreaming in the armed forces. The AFN gender policy seeks to ensure 35% affirmative action for women and increase women's involvement in recruitment and enlistment, education and training, retention, promotion, posting, operations, logistics, accommodation, budgeting, and maternity and paternity leave for both men and women of the Nigerian Armed Forces (Samson, 2021).

As a result of this policy, this study hopes that, since the women of Nigeria's armed forces have participated professionally, and there is a surge in their numbers in the rank and file of the Nigerian military-industrial complex, their gender will be recognised and appreciated for their impact and contribution. Women should be given equal acknowledgement, rather than functioning under the assumption that "everyone is a soldier," which assumes that males and stinks of male chauvinism dominate the military. This paper suggests the proportionate recognition of both genders through the process of reweaving the web of integration in the military. Instead of running with the perception of "the just warrior" and the "beautiful soul," which presents men as those who have fought as avatars of the nation-sanctioned state's violence; and women as those who worked and wept and sometimes protested within the frame of practices that turn them out as Adesanya and Bamidele (2022) remark this study suggests the recognition of women and men through reweaving the web of integration in the Armed Forces of Nigeria to meet global standards.

### **Conclusion**

The research looked at the several aspects of the divide responsible for and contributed to the discriminatory modes practised against women in the Nigerian military-industrial complex. These modes normally result in the acceptance of maleness as the standard for all troops. It highlighted the multiple attitudes and situations that hinder the integration of women into the fighting corps, which would boost their advancement among the rank and file of the military. Consequently, it demonstrated how the minimum amount of leeway previously provided to females in the process of entering the combatant corps of the various armed forces units had inspired them to make sacrifices for the sake of the continued security of their homeland.

Women, who, like their male counterparts, are dissatisfied with the flow of events within and about the country, might offer better strategies and more efforts towards the resolution of the current spate of

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insecurity that bedevils the country, according to the conclusion of the study, which is based on the information presented above. In turn, additional space needs to be made available for the women serving in Nigeria's armed forces.

### **Recommendations**

The Armed Forces of Nigeria and its subsidiary defence institutions are thereby advised to adopt a range of supporting activities to encourage equitable chances in career development, including deployment for women as much as it does for men. This goal can be accomplished through a number of different means.

1. Conduct an investigation or research into the obstacles that prevent equal opportunities. These obstacles could be socio-cultural, economic, political or even policy-related.
2. Determine whether or whether women and men, in actuality, have equal access to the educational and training possibilities available to them. For example, there is a possibility that a disproportionate number of women are prevented from attending due to the accommodations provided or the absence of family support resources.
3. Confirm there is no gender bias in the promotion criteria by reviewing them to ensure that they represent the organisation's values and standards and that they have been updated. The AFN can include as promotion criterion abilities in working in and managing diverse teams, such as avoiding and correctly dealing with gender-related complaints.
4. Ensure that diverse individuals participate on the committees that make choices about access to essential career prospects such as education and training, promotion and advancement, and deployment. Equal representation of men and women needs to be ensured on panels that select personnel for recruitment in combat-related roles. Training on diversity issues and gender prejudice should be provided to decision-makers so that they are aware of the importance of diversity in the workplace as well as their own possible biases.
5. Consider time-limited quotas, promotion and deployment objectives, and other types of affirmative actions.
6. Establish specialised women's mentoring networks consisting (when practicable) of senior women from various backgrounds and deliberately encourage senior staff members to mentor more junior persons from backgrounds distinct from their own.

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7. Ensure that an inclusive culture prevails in the workplace by taking proactive measures, such as making it clear that any pictures or language that is sexist or racist will not be tolerated.
8. It is inappropriate for the military to make broad assumptions about the physical capabilities of women and then use those assumptions as a justification for excluding women from particular positions. For example, certain women are tougher and stronger than the majority of men; hence, if a woman chooses to join the combat arm, passes the training procedure, and signs the documents indicating that she understands the danger involved, then she should be given a chance to be a fighter.

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