International Journal of Current Research and Review
DOI: https://doi.org/10.31782/IJCRR.2026.18901

Research Article

IJCRR
Section: Healthcare

Copyright@IJCRR

Gender Inequality and Psychological Well-Being of Female Faculty and Staff in Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria

Dorothy Ebere Adimora[1], Obiozor Ogechi Roseline[2], Janefrances Chinenye Adimora[3]

[1]Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria; [2]Adult and Continuing Education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria; Faculty of Health Sciences and Technology, Department of Nursing Sciences, Enugu Campus, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

Gender inequality is a social issue in which access to rights, resources, and opportunities is unequally distributed against certain genders, including women, girls, and other marginalised gender identities, leading to psychological distress. This study examined gender inequality and psychological well-being (PWB) among female faculty and staff in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of efforts to address gender inequality in HEIs and their impact on the PWB of female faculty and staff remain unknown.

Quantitative data from well-structured scales measuring gender inequality and psychological well-being were collected from faculty and staff across six higher education institutions in Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. A sample of 240 female academic staff and 240 female non-academic staff participated in the study.

Results show that across the six HEIs in the six geopolitical zones, 86 (84.3%) of top management positions are held by men, while only 21 (16%) are held by women. Most faculty (59.8%) and staff (68.3%) report poor PWB due to experiences of gender inequality. The study found that gender inequality is widespread in Nigerian HEIs, with a significant underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, which contributes to their poor PWB.

Key Words: Gender Inequality, Faculty, Staff, Psychological Well-being, Higher Education Institution

INTRODUCTION

Gender inequalities are widespread in higher education institutions, disadvantaging female faculty and staff and hindering their work, which may diminish well-being. Gender inequality is the unequal distribution of access to rights, resources, and opportunities across genders, including men, women, boys, girls, and individuals of other gender identities. This disparity arises from deeply ingrained social norms and power structures that sustain discrimination and the unequal distribution of power and privileges. Such inequality exacerbates the challenges faced by those already marginalised, making it a critical issue to address in the pursuit of social justice and equality[1]. The workplace for women has sometimes been perceived as inhospitable due to multiple forms of gender inequality[2]. For instance, the negative effects of workplace discrimination on women's earnings and opportunities include the gender wage gap, the scarcity of women in top leadership roles[3], and the longer time women often require compared to men to progress in their careers[4].

Gender inequality among female staff in Nigerian higher education institutions (HEIs) remains a significant concern, manifesting in various forms, including underrepresentation in leadership roles, wage gaps, and limited career advancement opportunities. Although women make up a substantial portion of academic staff, they are often underrepresented in senior leadership positions. Gender inequality is evident in actions such as refusing to hire or promote someone based on her gender, male senior colleagues taking advantage of or sexually harassing younger female colleagues who may be their supervisees or subordinates, unfair treatment, sexual harassment by male superiors, or gender-based underpayment. It also involves the disproportionate exclusion of women or their disadvantage in decision-making and in access to economic and social resources[5].

Corresponding Author:
Dorothy Ebere Adimora, Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.
Email: ebere.adimora@unn.edu.ng

ISSN: 2231-2196 (Print) **ISSN:** 0975-5241 (Online)
Received: 14.03.2026 **Revised:** 17.04.2026 **Accepted:** 03.05.2026 **Published:** 16.05.2026

In the workplace, gender inequality manifests in various ways, including unequal pay, disparities in promotions, incidents of sexual harassment, and racism. Moreover, patriarchal customs in Nigerian society have historically confined women's roles to domestic duties, thereby limiting their access to higher education and professional fields. These societal norms have contributed to the underrepresentation of women in academic leadership roles. For instance, it was not until 2004 that the University of Ibadan appointed Professor Abiola Odejide as Nigeria's first female Deputy Vice-Chancellor, illustrating the gender disparities in academic leadership. This shows the historical gender imbalance in academic leadership[6].

The deep-rooted cultural norms and societal expectations in Nigeria significantly contribute to gender inequality within academic institutions. For instance, traditional beliefs often prioritise male education over female education, leading to disparities in educational achievement favouring men. Nigerian society generally values male education more, reflecting cultural beliefs that women's primary roles are domestic. This perspective consequently results in fewer educational opportunities for women and their underrepresentation in academia[7].

Similarly, a 1991 population census revealed that 61% of Nigerian women suffer from intellectual poverty, underscoring the long-standing impact of cultural biases. Traditional views often relegate women to subordinate roles, limit their participation in decision-making, and hinder their professional growth. In Nigeria, cultural practices such as early marriage and domestic responsibilities often impede women's educational and professional advancement[7]. These societal expectations restrict women's access to higher education and their pursuit of academic careers. These cultural restrictions appear to significantly contribute to the disparity between male and female staff in HEIs [7].

Female faculty and staff in Nigerian HEIs face systemic barriers that restrict their access to leadership, decision-making, and professional development. Women are vastly underrepresented in key administrative roles such as Vice-Chancellor, Provost, and Dean, largely due to gender biases and cultural norms[8]. These issues are compounded by delays in promotion to senior ranks, such as Professorship, and by limited mentorship opportunities[9]. Women are often excluded from influential decision-making spaces, including university governance and hiring structures, which contributes to their marginalisation within institutional power hierarchies. They are also more likely to be concentrated in non-strategic, service-oriented roles and to shoulder disproportionate teaching and administrative workloads, which significantly reduce the time available for research and career advancement [10;11]. Inadequate institutional support for caregiving responsibilities, including limited access to childcare and flexible working arrangements, exacerbates these inequalities and contributes to heightened stress, anxiety, and constrained professional progression among female academics[11]. Gender bias in grant allocation leaves female scholars with fewer research and publication resources[12]. Misinterpretations of gender equality and persistent patriarchal ideologies continue to fuel resistance to women's advancement[13]. Recent events, such as the suspension of Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan after she reported sexual assault, indicate that institutional mechanisms still punish women who challenge male authority[14].

These inequalities are common in many developing countries and deeply embedded in institutional culture. Despite holding high academic qualifications, many women experience career stagnation[15]. Psychological effects include stress, anxiety, depression, PTSD, and poor well-being[16;5]. Workplace discrimination and exclusion from leadership positions lead to burnout, low job satisfaction, imposter syndrome, and mental exhaustion[17;18]. Women of colour often face additional marginalisation in unsupportive institutional settings.

Studies confirm that gender-based disparities in workload, access to promotion, and exclusion from decision-making processes increase women's distress. Cultural expectations regarding the balance between work and domestic roles further affect well-being. Subtle biases in research opportunities and conference participation foster self-doubt and reduce motivation[19;20].

Research shows that experiences of discrimination, including delayed promotions, sexual harassment, and exclusion from important meetings, have led to psychological distress, manifesting as low self-esteem, sadness, disinterest in work, and unexplained health issues. These adverse conditions affect productivity, job performance, and organisational commitment [21;22;23]. Understanding how gendered working conditions influence psychological well-being is crucial for developing inclusive, gender-sensitive policies in HEIs.

Psychological well-being (PWB) is generally understood as a person's overall life situation, characterised by positive feelings (such as high self-esteem) or the absence of negative feelings (such as symptoms of depression or anxiety). It is a dynamic concept that encompasses subjective, social, and psychological dimensions, as well as health-related behaviour [24]. PWB involves a sense of purpose, personal growth, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, autonomy in thoughts and actions, and positive interpersonal relationships [25;26]. Therefore, faculty members need to maintain good PWB not only for their health but also to be effective educators who model positive behaviour towards students and the wider community. Research shows that the PWB of faculty and staff is crucial to the quality of education they deliver, as it can influence students' motivation, engagement, and academic achievement, and significantly impact their performance and well-being[27]. This suggests that neglecting the

PWB of faculty members and staff could have deleterious effects on students' learning outcomes. For instance, a study indicates that good staff well-being is vital for fostering a mentally healthy school environment, retaining and motivating staff, and promoting students' well-being and attainment [28]. This aligns with the statement that "If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it usually to those closest to us: our family, our neighbours, our co-workers, and invariably, the most vulnerable, our children" [29]. In Nigeria, particularly within educational institutions, gender inequality remains a significant concern that could damage the psychological well-being of female faculty and staff. Research indicates that institutionalised gender inequalities, such as limited access to power, resources, and decision-making, can have adverse consequences for women's mental and emotional health. It further explains that when women are systematically excluded from social and economic opportunities, they are more vulnerable to stress, loss of autonomy, low self-esteem, and psychological distress [30]. Another study asserts that restrictive gender norms and inequalities can lead to negative health outcomes, such as mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and reduced well-being among women in various global contexts [31].

This study is grounded in a [32] multidimensional model of Psychological Well-Being (PWB), which outlines six core dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The framework suggests that psychological well-being is achieved when individuals experience balance and fulfilment across these domains. Gender inequality, manifested through unequal access to leadership, discrimination, limited career advancement, and exclusion from decision-making, disrupts these dimensions. For instance, autonomy is inhibited when women lack institutional power or voice. Environmental mastery is destabilised by workplace discrimination and limited control over professional environments. Personal growth is silenced by blocked career progression and limited opportunities. Positive relations may suffer due to workplace hostility or marginalisation. Purpose in life can be weakened when institutional systems devalue women's contributions. Self-acceptance may be undermined by internalised bias or imposter syndrome [26]. Thus, gender inequality in HEIs serves as a structural barrier to optimal psychological well-being. This framework helps explain how systemic gendered experiences translate into diminished mental and emotional health for women in academic institutions.

This study is deemed necessary because of the structural disadvantages inherent in the composition of female faculty and staff in HEIs in Nigeria and their impact on their PWB. This is especially relevant given that major efforts to institutionalise gender equality policies in most universities, particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria, have largely been unsuccessful.

Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of gender inequality on the PWB of female faculty and staff in Nigerian HEIs.

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of female faculty and staff in HEIs in Nigeria?
2. What is the gender distribution across different positions in Nigerian universities?
3. How do gender inequality and the psychological well-being of female faculty and staff relate?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study:

H_{01}: There is no significant difference in the distribution of positions held by male and female staff across Nigerian universities.

H_{02}: Gender inequality has no significant effect on the psychological well-being of female faculty and staff in Nigerian universities.

Problem

Gender inequality is a pervasive issue in academic settings, particularly in HEIs in Nigeria. Understanding the complexities of gender inequality is essential for developing targeted interventions that promote equality and inclusion and improve the PWB of faculty and staff in HEIs. This study examined the specific gender-related challenges faced by female faculty and staff in Nigerian HEIs and their impact on mental health and students' learning outcomes. By analysing the intricacies of gender inequality and its influence on PWB, this research aims to inform the development of evidence-based policies and interventions that address the unique issues faced by female faculty and staff in Nigerian HEIs and foster an inclusive teaching and learning environment for students. The study offers valuable insights to inform strategies for creating more inclusive and supportive academic environments, ultimately enhancing the PWB of faculty and staff.

The study focuses on [33] Identity Theory, which holds that stress affects mental health by directly threatening salient identities, often leading to adverse mental health outcomes. When individuals assign personal meaning to a role, it becomes a fundamental part of their self-concept [34]. Identity theorists suggest that the importance of identity may influence the link between stress and distress, with stress in roles central to one's identity having a more harmful effect on mental health than stress in less relevant roles [35]. The significance of identity salience in relation to stress was also highlighted [36], providing evidence that roles that offer purpose and meaning to an individual's self-concept are especially vulnerable to stressors. In other words, gender relations in

leadership represent a crucial intergroup-relations context, as women's underrepresentation in leadership limits their economic and political power, reinforces gender hierarchies, and results in detrimental mental health outcomes. Therefore, it is vital to address these disparities through targeted policies and interventions to foster a more inclusive and supportive academic environment, in line with the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey research design to gather data on gender disparities in top management positions and their impact on the psychological well-being (PWB) of female faculty and staff in Nigerian higher education institutions (HEIs).

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised female faculty and staff across Nigerian higher education institutions (HEIs). Using purposive sampling, participants were selected based on their consent and relevance to the study's objectives. Specifically, 20 female faculty members and 20 female staff were selected from each of six HEIs, representing the country's six geopolitical zones. This approach yielded a total sample of 480 respondents, comprising 240 faculty members and 240 staff.

Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires designed to assess participants' experiences of gender inequality, intersecting identity factors, and aspects of PWB. This approach enabled a comprehensive analysis of the link between gender disparities in leadership roles and the psychological well-being of female faculty and staff in Nigerian HEIs.

Reliability

The reliability of the interview questions and questionnaire items was evaluated before the main study to ensure the consistency and stability of the tools. The overall reliability coefficient was 0.84, indicating high internal consistency. Furthermore, a test-retest analysis was conducted, confirming the stability of the tools over time.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Participation was voluntary, and informed verbal consent was obtained from female staff and students before their inclusion in this study. Reports of gender inequality were taken into account. Anonymity and confidentiality of information were assured before obtaining informed consent. Assistance was offered to respondents who needed help completing the questionnaire.

Measures

Demographic Characteristics

This study employed a quantitative research design, using structured questionnaires, to evaluate gender inequality and PWB among female faculty and staff across six HEIs in Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. A total of 480 participants were purposively selected, including 240 female academic faculty members and 240 female non-academic staff members.

The questionnaire comprised three sections: demographic information, a gender inequality scale, and a psychological well-being scale. Demographic data collected included age, marital status, educational level, job role, years of work experience, institution/affiliation, religion, and ethnicity. These variables enabled a nuanced analysis of how gender inequality and PWB may differ across social and institutional contexts.

Gender Inequality Questionnaire

The gender inequality among faculty and staff in HEIs in Nigeria was assessed using a 20-item researcher-developed questionnaire to gather information on women's representation in 12 key senior management positions, employing a four-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree).

Psychological Well-being (PWB) Questionnaire

A 28-item PWB scale with six subscales is a modified version of the original 120-item scale, measuring the six aspects of 'Eudemonic well-being' within PWB: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. It uses a 4-point Likert scale (from very often to rarely). This tool describes the nature of faculty and staff PWB.

Data Analysis: Frequencies and percentages were utilised to analyse the data and determine the impact of gender inequality on the psychological well-being of female faculty and staff in HEIs in Nigeria. The collected data were summarised using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. The analysed data were further presented clearly for better understanding.

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Variables of the Faculty and Staff

S/No.	Items	Frequency (%)
1.	Age group	
	20-29	21(4.4%)
	30-39	62(13.0%)
	40-49	81(16.9%)
	50 and above	316(65.8%)
2.	Marital Status	
	Single	81(16.9%)
	Married	256(53.3%)
	Widowed	125(26.0%)
	Divorced	18(3.8%)
3.	Educational Level	
	Bachelor's degree	61(12.8%)
	Master's degree	81(16.9%)
	Doctoral degree	132(27.5%)
	Professor	206(43%)
4.	Years of Experience	
	1-5	49(10.3%)
	6-10	72(15%)
	11-15	127(26.5%)
	16 and above	232(48.3%)
5.	Institution/Affiliation	
	Federal University, Kashere, Gombe State	80(16.7%)
	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	80(16.7%)
	Kogi State University	80(16.7%)
	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	80(16.7%)
	University of Calabar, Cross River State	80(16.7%)
	University of Lagos, Lagos State	80(16.7%)
6.	Religion	
	Christianity	216(45%)
	Islam	238(49.6%)
	African Traditional Religion	26(5.42%)
7.	Ethnicity	
	Hausa	124(25.8%)
	Yoruba	121(25.2%)
	Igbo	110(23.0%)
	Others (Efik, Ibra, Igala, Ijaw, Tiv, Nupe, Ibra, Urhobo)	125(26.1%)

The demographic profile of the 480 female faculty and staff participants offers valuable context for understanding the link between gender inequality and psychological well-being in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Nigeria. The study shows that a majority of participants (65.8%) were aged 50 or above, indicating a workforce mainly composed of older women, many of whom may have experienced long-term exposure to institutional gender dynamics. Over half (53.3%) were married, while a notable proportion (26.0%) were widowed, suggesting that many respondents are managing personal and professional responsibilities amid potentially challenging social expectations.

In terms of education, a significant proportion held advanced degrees: 27.5% held doctoral degrees and 43% were recognised as professors. Despite these high qualifications, earlier findings in the study show that most top management roles remain male-dominated, showing the gender inequality faced by highly qualified women.

Work experience data indicate that nearly half (48.3%) have more than 16 years of service, suggesting that the sample comprises experienced professionals who can offer informed insights into long-term structural inequalities. Inclusion from six institutions across all six geopolitical zones ensures national coverage and diversity in institutional policies and cultures.

Religious and ethnic diversity were evident, with Islam (49.6%) and Christianity (45%) dominant, and ethnic groups including Hausa (25.8%), Yoruba (25.2%), Igbo (23%), and other minorities (26.1%). These factors may intersect with gender and institutional structures to influence psychological well-being, especially in regions where sociocultural norms reinforce patriarchal hierarchies. Overall, the demographic profile reflects a diverse yet often constrained reality, shaped by the intersecting factors of gender inequality faced by female faculty and staff in Nigeria's higher education sector. Despite possessing high qualifications and extensive experience, gender inequality persists, with intersecting factors affecting women at all levels or ranks, which may significantly impact their psychological well-being. This is precisely what this study aims to explore.

Table 2: Gender distribution in positions held in the Universities in Nigeria

Institutions	Federal University Kashere, Gombe State		Ahmadu Bello University Zaria		University of Nigeria, Nsukka		University of Calabar, Cross River State		University of Lagos, Lagos State		Kogi State University	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
VC	1(2%)	0	1(1%)	0	1(.1%)	0	1(.7%)	0	0	1(1.5%)	1(1.4%)	0
DVC Academics	1(2%)	0	1(1%)	0	1(.1%)	0	1(.7%)	0	1(1.5%)	0	1(1.4%)	0
DVC Administration	1(2%)	0	1(1%)	0	1(.1%)	0	1(.7%)	0	1(1.5%)	0	1(1.4%)	0
Registrar	1(2%)	0	1(1%)	0	1(.1%)	1(.1%)	1(.7%)	0	0	1(1.5%)	1(1.4%)	0
Bursar	1(2%)	0	1(1%)	0	1(.1%)	1(.1%)	1(.7%)	0	0	1(1.5%)	1(1.4%)	0
Librarian	1(2%)	0	1(1%)	0	1(.1%)	1(.1%)	1(.7%)	0	0	1(1.5%)	1(1.4%)	0
Deans of Faculty	6(11%)	0	10(8.3%)	2(1.7%)	14(8.8%)	3(1.9%)	16(10.5%)	4(2.6%)	11(16.9%)	2(3.1%)	7(10%)	1(1.4%)
HODs	32(60%)	0	71(58.7%)	11(9.1%)	90(56.3)	12(7.5%)	88(67.5%)	28(18.3%	25(38.5%)	10(15.4%)	40(57.1%)	12(17.1%)
Provosts of Colleges	1(2%)	0	4(3.3%)	1(1%)	3(1.9%)	0	5(3.3%)	1(.7%)	3(4.6%)	1(1.5%)	0	0
Provost of Postgrad. College/School	2(4%)	0	1(1%)	0	1(.1%)	0	1(.7%)	0	1(1.5%)	0	1(1.4%)	0
Dean of Students	1(2%)	0	1(1%)	0	1(.1%)	0	1(.7%)	0	1(1.5%)	0	1(1.4%)	0
Directors of Institutes/Centres	5(9%)	0	12(9.9%)	2(1.7%)	21(13.1%)	6(3.8%)	2(1.3%)	1(.7%)	6(9.2%)	1(1.5%)	1(1.4%)	1(1.4%)
	53(100%)	0%	105(87.8%)	16(13.2%)	136(85%)	24(15%)	119(77.8%)	34(22.2%)	49(75.4%)	16(24.6)	56(80%)	14(20%)
Total	Male						86(84.3%)					
	Female						21(16%)					

Table 2 displays the gender distribution of top management positions across six Nigerian universities. It features the six universities, one from each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, along with the gender split in these roles. The results show that 100% of top management positions at Federal University Kashere are held by males, with no females. At Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 105 (87.8%) of the top management roles are occupied by males, while only 16 (13.2%) are held by females. At the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, males occupy 136 (85%) of these positions, with females holding just 24 (15%). The University of Calabar, Cross River State, has 119 (77.8%) males in top management roles, and 34 (22.2%) females. The University of Lagos in Lagos State reports 49 males (75.4%) and 16 females (24.6%) in such roles. Kogi State University states that 56 (80%) of its top management positions are held by males, while only 14 (20%) are held by females.

Table 3: Gender inequality and psychological well-being of female faculty and staff.

S/No.	Psychological Well-being (six aspects)	Faculty (240)		Staff (240)		
		Positive PWB	Negative PWB	Positive PWB	Negative PWB	Total
1.	Sense of purpose	78(33.5%)	162(67.5%)	64(26.7%)	176(73.3%)	480
2.	Personal growth	86(36.8%)	154(41.2%)	78(32.5%)	162(67.5%)	480
3.	Environmental mastery	79(32.9)	161(67.1%)	77(32.1%)	163(67.9%)	480
4.	Self-acceptance	97(41.1%)	143(59.9%)	72(30.%)	168(70.0%)	480
5.	Autonomy in thoughts and actions	92(38.3%)	148(61.7%)	81(33.8%)	159(66.2%)	480
6.	Positive interpersonal relationships	93(38.8%)	147(61.2%)	83(34.6%)	157(65.4%)	480
		39.9%	59.8%	31.6%	68.3%	

Results in Table 3 show the psychological well-being (PWB) of female faculty and staff, shaped by their experiences of gender inequality within their institutions. The study indicates that factors such as sense of purpose, personal growth, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, autonomy in thoughts and actions, and positive interpersonal relationships influence their PWB. The findings reveal that 59.8% of faculty members encounter negative PWB more often than positive PWB (39.9%). Similarly, 68.3% of staff members experience negative PWB more frequently than positive PWB (31.6%).

DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis and findings of this study, gender inequality remains a significant concern because it impacts the PWB of female faculty and staff in HEIs in Nigeria. The focus of this study underscores the need to prioritise gender equality across sectors and institutions in Nigeria and globally.

The demographic component provides crucial insights into the lived experiences of female faculty and staff in HEIs in Nigeria, examining how these experiences relate to gender inequality and PWB.

The dominance of respondents aged 50 and above (65.8%) indicates that many women in academic and administrative roles have built long careers in institutions that have historically been male-dominated. Despite their experience and dedication, women remain underrepresented in top leadership roles, holding only 16% of such positions. This reflects a systemic gender imbalance consistent with long-standing observations by [37], who claims that women in African HEIs are often "locked out" of senior academic positions despite being equally or more qualified.

Additionally, the fact that 53.3% of participants were married and 26% were widowed highlights the dual burden many women face as professionals and caregivers, a factor associated with increased psychological distress in settings with limited institutional support [38]. This gendered division of labour and responsibility often leads to reduced psychological well-being, particularly when work environments lack equitable work-life balance policies.

Educational attainment was notably high among participants: 27.5% held doctoral degrees, and 43% identified as professors. However, these qualifications did not translate into equitable representation in leadership roles, reinforcing the "glass ceiling" effect, in which gender identity, rather than merit, influences career advancement in patriarchal institutional cultures [39].

Years of experience further intensify the issue: 48.3% of respondents have served for over 16 years, indicating that tenure and institutional loyalty do not protect women from systemic inequality. Instead, prolonged exposure to biased environments may erode psychological well-being. Research shows that ongoing exposure to workplace discrimination and marginalisation significantly contributes to psychological distress, including stress and anxiety, among female employees [40].

The religious and ethnic diversity among respondents also influences gender identity and well-being. Nigeria's patriarchal cultural and religious norms, especially in some conservative areas, often restrict women's agency and reinforce male dominance in leadership roles. As [41] notes, these sociocultural expectations intensify experiences of gender-based exclusion, particularly for women who do not conform to traditional gender roles. These demographic insights highlight the intersection of gender identity with institutional structures, cultural norms, and systemic bias, and their in-

fluence on the PWB of female staff and faculty in Nigerian HEIs.

Due to a combination of structural, cultural, and institutional barriers deeply rooted in the Nigerian context, gender inequality impacts female faculty and staff in Nigeria more profoundly than in many developed countries. Demographic features such as a high proportion of women in non-leadership roles, limited opportunities for promotion, and underrepresentation in decision-making positions signal systemic discrimination.

This is evident in our results, which show that only 16% of top management positions are occupied by women and that most female staff are within age ranges typically associated with caregiving responsibilities, further complicating the challenge of balancing work and family. For example, at the Federal University of Kashere, no women hold any of the top positions. Our findings support the idea that the under-representation of women in academia reflects not only ongoing inequalities between men and women but also missed opportunities for women to help solve humanity's most urgent issues [42]. This study aligns with existing research demonstrating that female academics are often excluded from key decision-making bodies, including governing councils and hiring panels, due to deep-seated gender biases and male-dominated institutional cultures [43;44;45]. Even when women are present, their voices are frequently marginalised, and they are assigned to less strategic committees, such as welfare, rather than to areas like development or finance. They are also often overburdened with teaching and administrative duties, leaving less time for research and career progression, thereby limiting their ability to meet promotion criteria that emphasise research output [46]. Our findings also concur with [43], who observed that in many Nigerian universities, female academics rarely hold high-ranking decision-making roles due to gender biases and cultural expectations. Likewise, in Nigeria, women often face delays in promotion to senior academic ranks, such as professorships, because of systemic barriers and a lack of mentorship opportunities [9]. This situation reflects Nigeria's deeply patriarchal norms, which reinforce male dominance in both public and private spheres and often frame leadership as a male domain. This contrasts with many developed countries where gender parity policies, legal protections, and institutional support systems (such as mentorship, maternity leave, and flexible work arrangements) are better established and enforced [13; 9].

Our study also found that female faculty and staff experience poor psychological well-being (PWB) due to gender inequality within their institutions. This finding supports the assertion that gender inequality worldwide has long-lasting consequences and increases the risk of mental health problems, including psychological distress, reduced PWB, and lower performance among women [47]. It also aligns with the claim that gender inequality against women can lead to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, post-traumatic stress disorder, and impaired PWB [16]. Furthermore, the study indicates that the constant struggle for equal opportunities in a male-dominated academic environment can evoke feelings of helplessness, anxiety, and depression. Gender inequality also adversely affects health, mental well-being, children's social development, the economy, and the future [48]. Female faculty members in Nigerian HEIs often face psychological distress due to exclusion from leadership roles and decision-making processes [49]. Furthermore, the lack of institutional support structures in Nigerian HEIs, such as inadequate protections against workplace discrimination and weak organisational support systems, leads to women's experiences of significant structural barriers and psychological burdens, including stress, anxiety, and diminished wellbeing [50; 51].

Our findings reveal a significant disparity in the ratio of men to women in top management positions at HEIs in Nigeria, a serious concern. The findings therefore advocate gender-sensitive reforms, leadership equity policies, and mental health support systems to improve working conditions and the well-being of women in academia. Undoubtedly, HEIs exemplify the pursuit of nation-building and sustainable development; women should be given a much more prominent role than they currently occupy. Addressing these structural inequalities will benefit personal well-being, enhance institutional effectiveness, and support the broader goal of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality, particularly in developing countries with high rates of discrimination and gender inequality against women.

Recommendation

This study, in line with prior research, has established gender inequality among faculty and staff in HEIs in Nigeria. The following recommendations are made to emphasise the need to adopt appropriate measures to prevent ongoing debates and the adverse consequences, such as:

- Development and enforcement of policies in HEIs that promote gender equity in leadership roles, ensuring fair representation of women in decision-making positions.
- Provision of mentorship programmes, leadership training, and workshops in institutions to enhance the skills and confidence of female faculty and staff, with the potential to prepare them for higher administrative roles.
- Establishment of gender-sensitive workplace policies, such as flexible work arrangements, maternity leave benefits, and childcare support, which can improve the well-being of female faculty and staff.
- Organisation of regular seminars and training to challenge deep-rooted gender biases and cultural stereotypes that contribute to discrimination and psychological distress among female staff.

- Enforcement of strict government policies against gender discrimination, harassment, and biases in hiring, promotions, and other professional opportunities in HEIs.
- Establishment of psychological support services by institutions, such as counselling centres and peer support groups, to assist female faculty and staff dealing with workplace stress and gender-related challenges.
- Restructuring recruitment and promotion procedures to ensure gender balance, with quotas where necessary, to encourage fair representation of women in leadership roles.
- Promoting ongoing research and data collection on gender disparities in HEIs to track progress and guide policy adjustments.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study documents significant gender disparities favouring men in leadership roles within Nigerian HEIs and the harmful effects on the psychological well-being of female faculty and staff. The findings underscore the urgent need for policies and interventions that promote gender equality, foster inclusivity, and strengthen workplace support systems. Addressing these inequalities through targeted policies and supportive practices will not only improve the well-being and professional growth of female academics and staff but also contribute to the overall development and sustainability of Nigeria's higher education sector, support the creation of an inclusive academic environment, align with global sustainable development goals, and enhance institutional effectiveness.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study support the creation and implementation of institutional policies that promote gender equality in recruitment, promotion, and leadership appointments within HEIs. Implementing the recommended strategies can foster a more inclusive and supportive work environment, leading to higher job satisfaction, lower turnover, and increased overall productivity among female faculty and staff.

Ethical Consideration/Approval

Ethical clearance and approval for the use of human subjects in this study were obtained from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka Research Ethical Clearance Committee (14 August 2023). The protocol and approval were granted under ethical approval reference no. REC/FE/2024/00022. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of the University's Research Committee on the use of human subjects and in line with the recommendations of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors acknowledge the immense help received from the scholars whose articles are cited and included in the references of this manuscript. The authors are also grateful to the authors/editors/publishers of all articles, journals, and books from which the literature for this article was reviewed and discussed.

Source of Funding

The author expresses deep gratitude to the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung for supporting this research, authorship, and publication of this article, and to the Margherita von Brentano Zentrum for Gender Studies for hosting and providing research facilities during this study.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author, D.E. Adimora, due to privacy and ethical restrictions. The data are not publicly accessible because they contain information that could compromise the privacy of research participants. Our policy is to share data on request.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Authors' Contribution

Conceptualisation: D. E. Adimora, O. R. Obiozor, J. C. Adimora

Data curation: D. E. Adimora, J. C. Adimora

Investigation: D. E. Adimora, O. R. Obiozor, J. C. Adimora.

Methodology: D. E. Adimora, O. R. Obiozor, J. C. Adimora

Resources: D. E. Adimora, O. R. Obiozor, J. C. Adimora

Software: D. E. Adimora, J. C. Adimora

Supervision: D. E. Adimora

Visualisation: D. E. Adimora

Writing original draft: D. E. Adimora, O. R. Obiozor, J. C. Adimora

Writing review & editing: D. E. Adimora, O. R. Obiozor, J. C. Adimora

REFERENCES

1. Plan International (2024). Gender inequality's meaning. *https://plan-international.org/learn/what-is-gender-inequality/*. (Accessed: 8 October 2025, 12:04).
2. Abrams, K. (1991). Social construction, roving biologism, and reasonable women: a response to Professor Epstein. DePaul Law Review. 41 1021–1040. (Assessed: 7 October 2025, 16:00).

3. *Eagly A. H., Carli L. L. (2007). Through the Labyrinth: The Truth about How Women Become Leaders. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing.* (Accessed: 17 September 2025, 10:22).
4. Blau F. D., DeVaro J. (2007). New evidence on gender differences in promotion rates: An empirical analysis of a sample of new hires. Industrial Relations, 46 (3) 511–550. 10.1111/j.1468-232X.2007.00479.x. (Accessed: 8 October 2025, 09:04).
5. Kashmir, R. (2022). Psychological effects of gender inequality. Rising Kashmir. https://risingkashmir.com. (Assessed: 12 October 2025, 08:00).
6. Okere, A. (2020). People asked who'd take care of my home if I became DVC - Prof Odejide, UI ex-deputy vice-chancellor. Punch Newspaper. *https://punchng.com/people-asked-whod-take-care-of-my-home-if-i-became-dvc-prof-odejide-ui-ex-deputy-vice-chancellor/*. (Accessed: 6 March 2026, 12:04).
7. British Council in Nigeria (2024). Women's education in Nigeria. *https://www.britishcouncil.org.ng*. Accessed: 18 October 2025, 07:18).
8. Igiebor, O. (2021). Women, academic leadership and the 'constricting' gender equity policies in Nigerian universities: an integrated feminist approach. Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 43(4), 338-352. *https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080x.2020.1836569* (Accessed: 16 August 2025, 18:09).
9. Adusah-Karikari, A. (2008). *Experiences of Women in Higher Education: A Study of Women Faculty and Administrators in Selected Public Universities in Ghana*. (Doctoral dissertation, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, United States). (Accessed: 10 January 2026, 12:04).
10. Shalaby, M., Allam, N., & Buttorff, G. (2020). Levelling the field: Gender inequality in academia during COVID-19. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 54, 4: 1-7. DOI: 10.1017/S1049096521000615. *https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351589688_Leveling_the_Field_Gender_Inequity_in_Academia_During_COVID-19*. (Accessed: 5 January 2025, 14:16).
11. Sebastián-González E, Graciá E, Morán-Ordóñez A, Pérez-Ibarra I, Sanz-Aguilar A, Sobral M (2023) Ten simple rules for a mom-friendly Academia. PLoS computational biology, 19(8): e1011284. *https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1011284*. (Accessed: 16 October 2025, 13:07).
12. Wijnen, M.N., Massen, J.J.M. & Kret, M.E. (2021). Gender bias in the allocation of student grants. Scientometrics 126, 5477–5488 (2021). *https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-021-03985-0*. (Accessed: 12 October 2025, 15:08).
13. Para-Mallam, F. J. (2017). Gender equality in Nigeria. In A. Ortenblad, R. Marling, & S. Vasiljevic (Eds.), *Gender equality in a global perspective* (23–53). New York, NY: Routledge.
14. Ukwu, J (2025). The Cable. Natasha Akpoti takes 'sexual harassment' case to Inter-Parliamentary Union in New York. *https://www.thecable.ng/natasha-akpoti-takes-sexual-harassment-case-to-inter-parliamentary-union-in-new-york-reports-suspension/*. (Accessed: 19 January 2026, 16:21).
15. Mott, H (2022). British Council. Gender equality in higher education: maximising impacts: https://www. britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/gender_equality_in_higher_education_ executive_summary.pdf. (Accessed: 8 October 2025, 12:04).
16. Leonard, J. (2021). What are the psychological effects of gender inequality? *https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/psychological-effects-of-gender-inequality*. (Accessed: 14 December 2025, 11:20).
17. Armato, M. (2013). Wolves in sheep's clothing: Men's enlightened sexism & hegemonic masculinity in academia. Women's Studies. 42 (5): 578-598. https://doi:10.1080/00497878.2013.794055. S2CID 144445995. (Accessed: 8 October 2025, 21:18).
18. Platt, M., Barton, J., & Freyd, J. J. (2009). A betrayal trauma perspective on domestic violence. In E. Tark & E. S. Buzawa (Eds.), *Violence against women in families and relationships* (pp. 185–207). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
19. Ifelunni, C. O., Ede, M. O., & Okeke, C. I. (2022). Rational emotive intervention for work-family conflict and female primary school teachers' well-being. *Current Psychology*. Advance online publication. *https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03704-9*. (Accessed: 8 October 2025, 10:41).
20. Gilbert-Ouimet, M., Brisson, C., & Vézina, M. (2020). Psychosocial work stressors, high family responsibilities, and psychological distress among women: A 5-year prospective study. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine, 63*(2), 170–179. *https://doi.org/10.1002/ajim.23070*. Assessed: 2 November, 2025, 17:21.
21. Aydogdu, S., & Asikgil, B. (2011). An empirical study of the relationship among job satisfaction, organisational commitment and turnover intention. International Review of Management and Marketing, 1, 43–53.
22. Colligan, T. W., & Higgins, E. M. (2006). Workplace stress: Etiology and consequences. Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health, 21, 89–97. *https://doi.org/10.1300/J490v21n02_07*. (Accessed: 8 October 2025, 12:06).
23. Judge, T. A., Thoresen, C. J., Bono, J. E., & Patton, G. K. (2001). The job satisfaction-job performance relationship: A qualitative and quantitative review. Psychological Bulletin, 127, 376–407. *https://doi.org/10.1037/0033 2909.127.3.376*. (Accessed: 13 February 2025, 12:04).
24. Adimora, D.E.; Romero, M.P.A.; Ohia, N.C; Onuorah, A.R.; Eze, M.I. (2022). Remediation for effects of domestic violence on psychological well-being, depression and suicide among women during the COVID-19 pandemic: A cross-cultural study of Nigeria and Spain. *International Journal of Current Research and Review, 14*(23), 5–15. *https://doi.org/10.31782/IJCRR.2022.142302*. (Accessed: 22 February 2025, 17:32).
25. Ryff C. D., Singer B. H. (2006). Best news yet on the six-factor model of well-being. Soc. Sci. Res. 35, 1103–1119. doi: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2006.01.002. (Accessed: 21 October 2025, 11:09).
26. Ryff C. D., Singer B. H. (2008). Know thyself and become what you are: A eudaimonic approach to psychological well-being. J. Happiness Stud. 9, 13–39. doi: 10.1007/s10902-006-9019-0. (Accessed: 22 October 2025, 15:16).
27. Glazzard J., Rose A. (2020). The impact of teacher well-being and mental health on pupil progress in primary schools. J. Public Mental Health 19, 349–357. 10.1108/JPMH-02-2019-0023. (Accessed: 29 October 2025, 21:19).
28. Anna Freud. (n.d.). Promote staff mental health and wellbeing. *https://www.annafreud.org/resources/schools-and-colleges/5-steps/supporting-staff/promote-staff-mental-health-and-wellbeing/*. (Accessed: 21 April 2026, 12:02).
29. Melkonian, L. (2021). What is emotional well-being? 8 ways to improve your mental health. BetterUp. https://www.betterup.com/blog/what-is-emotional-well-being. (Accessed: 22 February 2026, 18:14).
30. Kabeer, N. & Subrahmanian, R. (1996). "Institutions, Relations and Outcomes: Framework and Tools for Gender-Aware Planning." Institute of Development Studies.
31. Heise, L., Greene, M.E., Opper, N., Stavropoulou, M., Harper, C., Nascimento, M., Zewdie, D. (2019). "Gender inequality and restrictive gender norms: framing the challenges to health." The Lancet, 393(10189), 2440–2454.
32. Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. (1998). The contours of positive human health. *Psychological Inquiry, 9*(1), 1–28. *https://doi.*

org/10.1207/s15327965pli0901_1. (Accessed: 31 October 2025, 17:24).
33. Pearlin, L. I. (1999). The stress process revisited. In C. S. Aneshensel & J. C. Phelan (Eds.), *Handbook of the sociology of mental health* (pp. 395–415). Springer. (Accessed: 27 February 2025, 12:04).
34. Stryker, S., & Burke, P. J. (2000). The past, present, and future of an identity Theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 63*(4), 284–297.
35. Marcussen, K., Ritter, C., & Safron, D. J. (2004). The role of identity salience and commitment in the stress process. *Sociological Perspectives, 47*(3), 289–312. https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2004.47.3.289. (Accessed: 16 February 2025, 13:09).
36. Thoits, P. A. (1991). On merging identity Theory and stress research. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 54*(2), 101–112.
37. Morley, L. (2006). Hidden transcripts: The micropolitics of gender in Commonwealth universities. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29(6), 543–551.
38. World Health Organisation (WHO). (2021). Gender and mental health. *https://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/genderwomen/en/*. (Accessed: 13 December 2025, 16:01).
39. Connell, R. (2009). *Gender: In World Perspective*. Polity Press. (Assessed: 14 November 2025, 06.11).
40. Keller, E., Guardiano, M., & Li, J. (2024). Discrimination in the workplace linked to psychological distress: A longitudinal study in the United States. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 1; 66*(10), 803–809. *https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0000000000003175*. Epub 2024, 28. PMID: 38942613. (Assessed: 2, November, 2025, 13:02).
41. Amadiume, I. (1997). *Re-inventing Africa: Matriarchy, religion and culture*. Zed Books. (Assessed: 2, November, 2025, 13:02).
42. International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2003). Gender, poverty, and employment: Issues, Trends and Approaches. Geneva.
43. Igiebor, O. (2021). Women, academic leadership and the 'constricting' gender equity policies in Nigerian universities: an integrated feminist approach. Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 43(4), 338-352. *https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080x.2020.1836569*. (Accessed: 12 February 2025, 12:07).
44. Kaymakcioglu, A. G., & Thomas, M. (2024). *Gender inequalities and academic leadership in Nigeria, South Africa and the United Kingdom: A systematic literature review (2013–2023). Social Sciences & Humanities Open, 10*, 101066. *https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101066*. (Assessed: 5 November, 2025, 10:23).
45. Omotoso, S. A. (2022). Barriers to middle-level academic leadership for female academics in Nigerian higher education. Journal of Higher Education in Africa, 18(2). https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v18i2.1879. (Accessed: 16 February 2026, 19:05).
46. Odejide, A. (2014). *What can a woman do? Gender norms in a Nigerian university*. OpenDemocracy. *https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/what-can-woman-do-* (Accessed: 29 January 2025, 19:13).
47. Zugman, A., Alliende, L.M., Medel, V., Bethlehem, R.A., Seidlitz, J., Ringlein, G., Arango, C., & Crossley, N. A. (2023). Country-level gender inequality is associated with structural differences in the brains of women and men. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 120*(20), e2218782120. *https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2218782120*. (Accessed: 27 February 2025, 12:04).
48. Women's Health Goulburn North East (2025). Gender inequality is bad for your health. *https://www.whealth.com.au/research/gender-inequality-is-bad-for-our-health/*. (Accessed: 09 February 2026, 11:08).
49. Okafor, E. E., & Akokuwebe, M. E. (2015). Women and leadership in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *Developing Country Studies, 5*(4), 1–10.
50. Agbaje, O.S., Arua, C.K., Umeifekwem, J.E., Umoke, P.C.I., Igbokwe, C.C., Iwuagwu, T.E., et al. (2021). Workplace Gender-Based Violence and Associated Factors among University Women in Enugu, South-East Nigeria: An Institutional-Based Cross-Sectional Study. BMC Women's Health, 21(1):124. doi: 10.1186/s12905-021-01273-w. PMID: 33757498; PMCID: PMC7988966. (Accessed: 20 November 2025, 12:04).
51. Oti, A. O. (2023). *Psycho-social and organisational climate factors as predictors of female academics' career growth and leadership position in Southwest Nigerian universities*. Dakar: CODESRIA. *https://doi.org/10.57054/codesria.pub.1464*. (Accessed: 18 March 2026, 19:09).