

WOMEN IN ACADEMIC DENTISTRY IN NIGERIA

A. A. Umweni and E. E. Ehikiamenor Abstract

Nigeria has an estimated population of about 130 million out of which about 49.9 percent are women. Increase in demand for dental care prompted the establishment of four dental schools, with the University of Lagos being the oldest that was established in 1966. This study ascertains the status of women in academic dentistry through an evaluation of female participation in undergraduate and postgraduate education. Data on full-time academic staff, students' enrollment, graduates, and residents undergoing postgraduate training in the four dental schools were collected and analysed. This study shows that there are fewer women in academic dentistry in Nigeria than men with 63.8 percent of lecturers in the dental schools being males and 36.2 percent females. Likewise 54.7 percent of the residents were male and 45.3 percent females. 64 percent of students enrollment were males and 35 percent females, and 66.5 percent of the graduates were males and 33.5 percent females. There is a reasonable number of women in the various dental faculties, but none has ever attained the position of Provost or Dean. The relatively high number of women in the residency program 45.3 percent suggests that more women will be in academic dentistry in the near future.

Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous African country with a projected population of about 123 million out of which 49.9 percent are women (Projected Nigeria 1991 Population Figure). There are about 250 tribes and linguistic groups in the country with more than 50 percent of the populace living : in rural areas.

Dental practice is not really new in Nigeria except that the methods used initially were not comparable to modern dental practice. Modern dental practice in Nigeria can be traced to 1915, when the first government dentist was employed in Lagos, then the country's capital (Nigeria Southern Province Annual Medical Sanitation Reports, 1915).

Dental disease has been on the increase with periodontal diseases taking the lead in the adult population (Peters, 1973) and dental caries among school children (Akpata, 1985). Analysis of patients' record of treatment needs at the University of Benin Teaching Hospital between June, 1995 and December, 1997, shows that 41.2 percent of the patients required treatment in periodontal diseases, 30.2 percent needed restorative procedures, 19.2 percent oral surgery and "other" treatments accounted for 4.9 percent. More females (52.6 percent) presented at the clinic than their male counterparts (47.4 percent).

The increase in demand for dental care prompted the establishment of four dental schools with the University of Lagos dental school established in September 1966 being the oldest. (Educational Tropical Dental Journal, 1990). Others are University of Ibadan Dental School (1975), University of Benin Dental School (1976), and Obafemi Awolowo University Dental School (1976). Even though there are 65 Universities in Nigeria, comprising of 27 Federal, 15 States and 23 Private licensed Universities as at 2005. Incidentally, the four accredited dental schools are located in Southwestern Nigeria.

The training of both undergraduates and post graduate students requires a highly skilled crop of academic staff so that the trainees will be better prepared to cope with the disease pattern and special needs of the Nigerian environments (Jeboda, 1997).

Comparism of the 1991, National Census and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey of 1999 shows that in Nigeria, literacy rate in English which is the official language declined from 57 percent in 1991 to 49 percent for adult population aged 25 and above while for women the rate declined from. 44 to 41 percent. The literacy gender parity index (LGPI) which measures gender equally is literacy remain about 0.8. The LGPI was also found to be lower in the rural areas (0.66) than in urban area' (0.78). 1991 census [NPopc, J-998]; MICS 1999 [FOS/UNICEF, A-2000].

Report of multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS) of 200_f reveals that highest illiteracy is found among older women. Less than 25 percent of women who are 45years and above are literate, which declined to 15 percent for women aged 55-65 and 7 percent for women above 65. There are also geographical disparities with a far higher population of men and women illiterate in rural than urban areas. 67 percent of adults in the urban areas are literate while only 42 percent of adults living in rural areas. (MICS 1999 [FOS/UNICEF, A-2000].)

Although more girls have been educated since the introduction of the free primary education in 1955, preference is still given to education of the male children (Maureen Koko D. 1994). Parents continue to withdraw their children especially female, from school for various reasons such as lack of finance, marriage and housework. Female enrollment drops as girls move up the educational ladder as illustrated by the Federal Ministry of Education Report, Statistics Division 1994, on enrollments in Nigeria's schools between 1984-1993, (FME/UNICEF/UNESCO/UNDP/E-2000).

In 1990, female enrollment in primary schools was 43-percent, 37 percent for secondary schools and 30 percent for Nigerian universities. Absenteeism and drop out rate in most communities in Nigeria are higher for girls than boys due to pregnancy, poverty, domestic obligation and parent's. poor perception of the benefits of education for women in performing their traditional roles (Fishe-Oridedi, 2001).

Many studies in Nigeria have also shown that girls prefer to study "soft" disciplines such as literature, arts and home economics while boys tend to go for mathematics, physics, engineering, dentistry and other science related subjects. (WORDOC, 1995). Dentistry being a science discipline may also follow the general pattern of male preference in the choice of dentistry as a career. The aim and objectives of this study are ascertain the status of women in academic dentistry, through an evaluation of female participation in undergraduate and postgraduate dental education in Nigeria and to make possible recommendation(s) on how to enhance the general and leadership status of women in academic dentistry.

Subjects and Method

Four Dental Schools in Nigeria were used for the study, the following data were collected and analysed;

- (a) The number of full-time academic staff, excluding visiting professors;
- (b) Total enrollment of undergraduates each year since inception, with the exception of Obafemi Awolowo University where data were obtained starting in 1987, because medical and dental undergraduates had to undergo the Bachelor of Science degree programme in Health Sciences before applying to dental schools, a requirement which was later discontinued;
- (c) Total number of graduates each year; and
- (d) The total number of residents undergoing postgraduate training in the dental schools.

Results

The total number of full-time lecturers in the four dental schools was 61, with 63.8 percent males, and 36.2 percent females (Fig 1). The total number of Residents in all the four schools was 83; 45 (54.2 percent) males and 38 (45.8 percent) females (Fig.2). The total enrollment in the four dental schools was 2,702 with 60.4 percent as males and 39.6 percent females, (Table 1). The total number of graduates was 1,424 with 66.5 percent males and 33.5 percent females, almost a ratio of 2:1 (Table 2).

Figure 3 shows the sex distribution of graduates from the University of Lagos between 1971 and 1979, the only dental school in Nigeria graduating students at that time. Total number of female graduates was 16 (8.24 percent).

Table 3 shows the leadership position among academic staff in the four dental schools. There was no female as either Provost and only 27.7 percent of the Acting Deans/Acting Heads of Departments were females.

Discussion

Female participation in dental education in Nigeria was very low before 1979. From 1971, to 1979, when the University of Lagos dental school was the only one, it graduated 16 female students (8.24 percent). By the year 2000, female enrollment in all the four Dental schools was 966, accounting for 35.8 percent and, female graduates was 477 (33.5 percent.)

Similarly, U.S. dental schools was male dominated until the mid 70s and pre-doctorate enrollment of women accounted for only 1.4 percent of the student population in 1970-71, (Annual Report on Dental Education Trend 1974).

Over the years the number of dental students has steadily increased to 23.8 percent in 1984-85, an rising to 38.71 percent in 2000-2001, (Sinkford, et al 2003) Reports from U.K (Drummand J, 2000) also showed an increase in the proportion of female students enrollment from 1983-1998. Currently, in most Canadian dental schools, women make up 50 percent of the students body (O'keefe, 2001).

In Nigeria, female participation in dental education was very low initially due to strong cultural values, which include:

- (a) The wrong perception that higher education reduces chances of getting married;
- (b) Unwillingness to stay long in school because of strong desire to have children early;
- (c) Family preference to train sons rather than daughters; and
- (d) Most parents send female children as domestic servants, house-help or as wives early in life (Adebajo, Eltah, 1992).

Postgraduate training through the residency programme shows that the percentage of female participation is only slightly less than their male counterpart, which is an improvement on the current number of female academic staff. This suggests that there will be more women in academic dentistry in the future.

There are significantly more male than female lecturers in all the universities, with the exception of the University of Lagos, where there are more females. Possible reasons for the difference are:

- (a) Lagos being a major cosmopolitan city private practice is more economically rewarding and the men prefer to establish dental practices;
- (b) Also many foreign trained male lecturers in the Lagos Dental school were able to obtain an academic appointment outside the country and left for greener pastures following the economic down turn in Nigeria; and
- (c) Women are not as mobile as their male counterpart because they place their families ahead of career, especially after graduation.

in 2000, U.S. Dental school full-time faculty staff was composed of 25 percent female while that of New Zealand was 34 percent (New Zealand and Workforce Statistics Date) which is comparable with the Nigerian situation. Female

participation in leadership position is very low in all the dental schools in Nigeria as shown in Table 3.

Despite the fact that the male/female ratio of faculty staff in Nigerian dental schools are comparable with those in the developed countries, women participation in leadership is abysmally low. None of the academic women has ever risen to the position of a Deans, Provost of the College of Medical Sciences. Few have served as acting dean, and acting heads of department

Unlike the Nigerian case, in US and Canadian dental schools 14.5 percent and 10 percent respectively, of Deans were females (Sinkford, 2003). Also, in 1991-92, U.S dental schools had 28.5 percent as women associate and assistant deans (Directory of Institutional Members and Association Officers, 1991). By 2001-2002 it rose to 74.5 percent. Similarly, women departmental chairs rose from 44 percent in 1994-95, to 60 percent in 2001-2002, (Sinkford, 2003). The low participation in leadership position in Nigeria is a reflection of:

- (a) Delayed female involvement in dental education in Nigeria;
- (b) Absence of female role models;
- (c) Strain in childbearing;
- (d) Societal pressure to marry early;
- (e) Inability of the women to accommodate their choice of geographical location; and
- (f) Over-dependence on their spouses which tends to deflate their career.

However, as more women stay in academics, some may rise to the position of Dean and Provost.

Recommendations

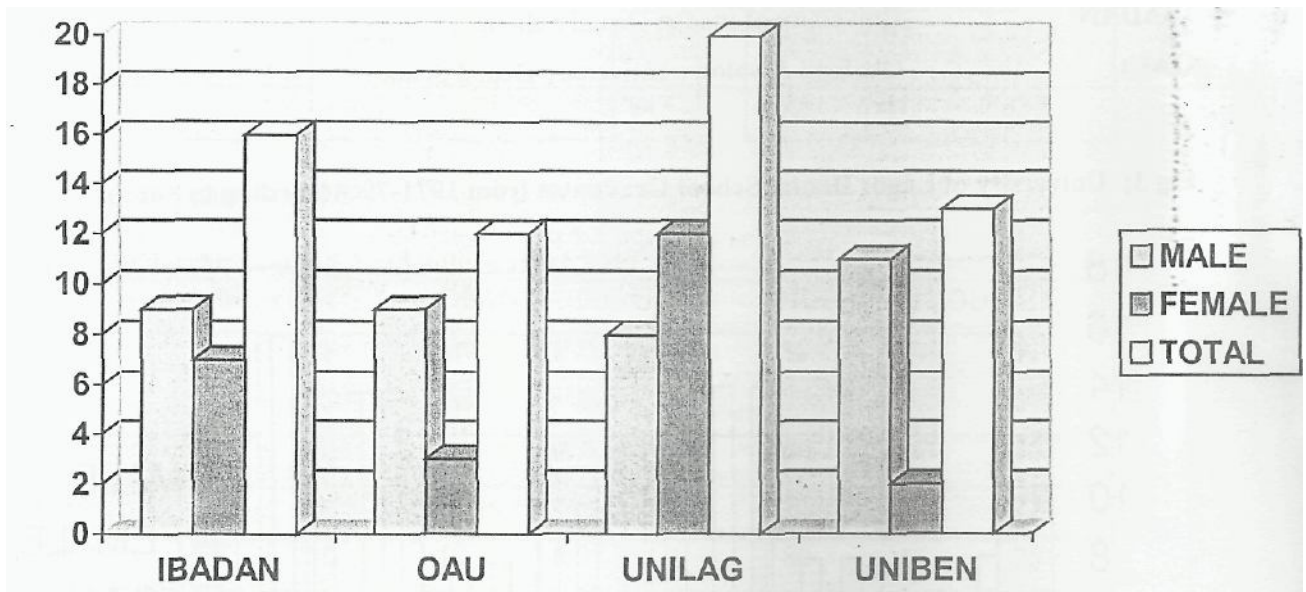
Status of academic women can be enhanced by the appointment of promising female graduates by their own schools, to encourage them in taking up academic career. The difficulty of job search due to family ties that may affect choice of job location will be reduced.

It is necessary to educate of parents and their daughters on how to overcome cultural barriers so that the girl-child is allowed the same privilege as the boys in the family. Workshops/seminars on leadership skills should be organized for women in academics to .encourage them to participate in decision-making in their various institutions. There should be concerted effort by Government, industries, Non Governmental Organisations and others to encourage women to achieve their goal. Funding female academic participation in conferences, academic and leadership seminars will go a long way to enhance the status of women in academic dentistry.

Conclusion

The status of women in Academic Dentistry in Nigeria is low. However the increase in female participation in the postgraduate residency and undergraduate programmes gives hope for the future. Increase in number of female postgraduate students is an indication that more women are likely to pursue a career in academics.

Fig 1; Faculty Academic Staff as at 1999).

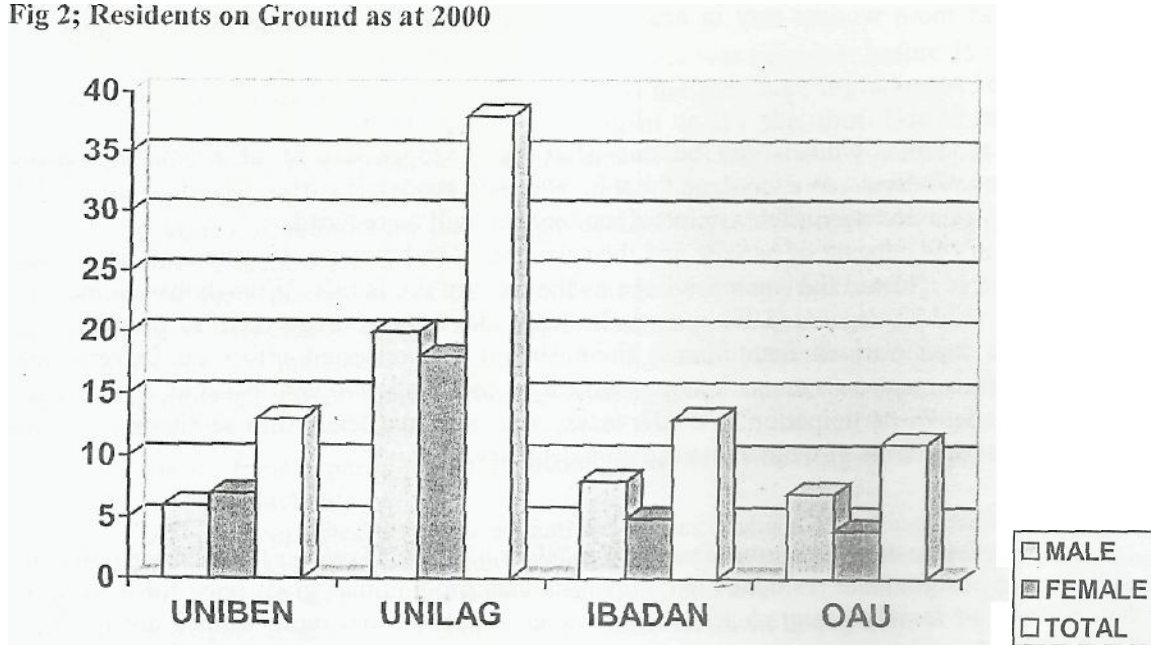


IBADAN: University of Ibadan Dental School

OAU: Obafemi Awolowo University Dental School

UNILAG: University of Lagos Dental School

Fig 2; Residents on Ground as at 2000



UNIBEN: University of Benin Dental School

UNILAG: University of Lagos Dental School

UNIBEN: University of Benin Dental School

IBADAN: University of Ibadan Dental School

OAU: Obafemi Awolovvo University Dental School

Fig 3; University of Lagos Dental School Graduates from 1971-79 According to Sex

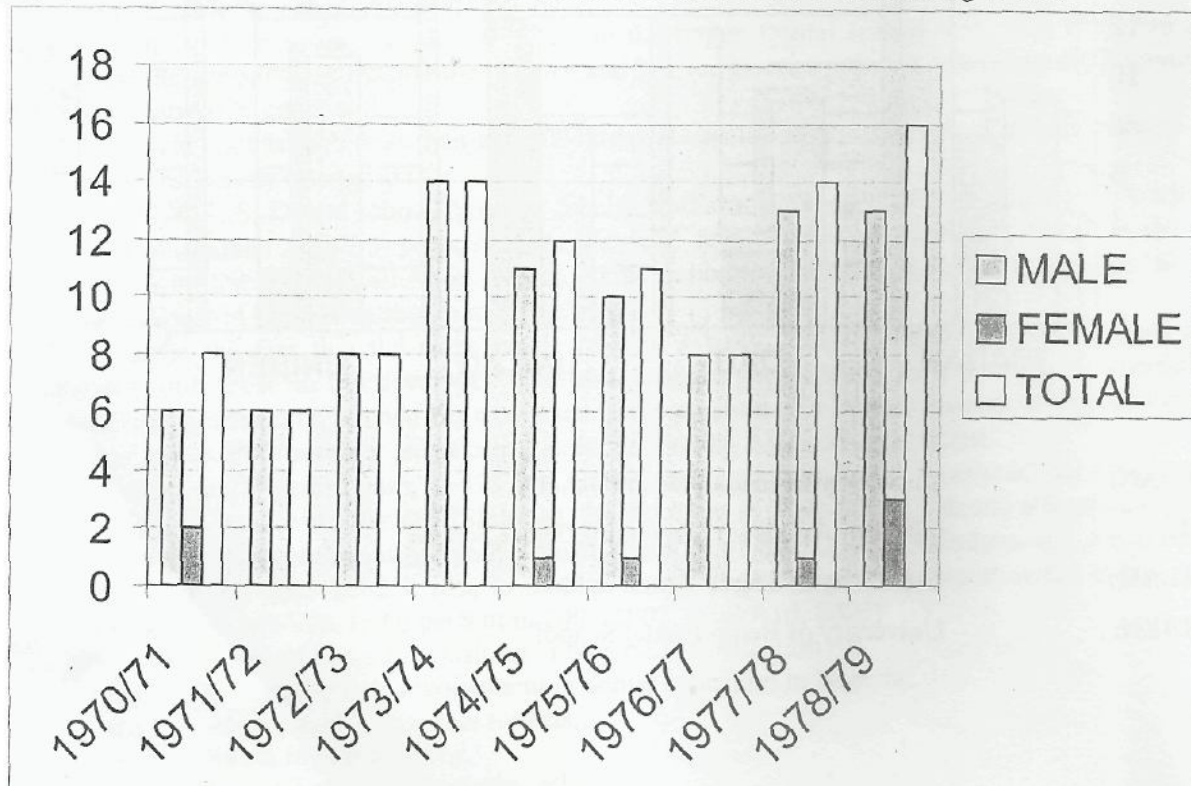


Table 1: Total no. Enrollment 2000

UNIVERSITY	NO OF STUDENTS	M	%	F	%
IBADAN	658	368	55.9	290	44.0
LAGOS	851	539	63.3	314	36.8
BENIN	1012	692	68.3	320	31.6
*OAU	181	138	76.2	42	30.4
TOTAL	2702	1732	64.2	966	35.8

Data collection started in 1987

Table 2: Total no of Graduates as at 2000

DENTAL SCHOOLS	No. of Graduated	M	%	F	%
IBADAN	319	189	59.2	130	40.8
LAGOS	556	391	70.3	165	29.7
BENIN	377	260	68.9	117	31.0
*OAU	172	107	62.2	65	37.8

Total	1424	947	66.5	477	33.5
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*Data collection started in 1987

Table 3: Leadership Among Academic Staff at 2000

	PROVOST		DEAN		HOD or Ag HOD			
	M	F	M	F	M	%	F	%
DENTAL SCHOOL								
LAGOS	0	0	1	0	3	60	2	40
IBADAN	0	0	1	0	3	75	1	25
BENIN	1	0	1	0	4	80	1	25
OAU	0	0	1	0	3	75	1	25
TOTAL	1	0	4	0	13	72.2	5	27.8

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