

## Socio-Economic Poverty among Yoruba Women in Nigeria: A Qualitative Analysis of Structural and Cultural Determinants

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**Abstract:** This study examines socio-economic poverty among Yoruba women in the Southwestern region of Nigeria, with women as the main unit of analysis and Yorubaland as the socio-cultural context of the study. The aim of this study is to identify the structural, cultural, and economic factors that contribute to the sustainability of Yoruba women's socio-economic poverty, and to examine their implications for women's empowerment and national development. This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a critical analysis of academic literature, policy documents, and secondary data from international development agency reports, complemented by contextual observations of the socio-economic realities of the Yoruba people. The findings of the study show that the socio-economic poverty of Yoruba women is influenced by limited access to education, patriarchal cultural norms, economic inequality, government policies that are less favourable to women, the high cost of living, and lack of access to financial resources. These factors collectively limit women's economic participation, inhibit asset accumulation, and reinforce cycles of dependency and vulnerability. The study also found that unpaid domestic work and the exclusion of women from the decision-making process weakened their socio-economic progress. This article contributes to the study of gender and development by presenting a contextual analysis of women's poverty in Yoruba society and affirms the urgency of gender-sensitive policies as a sustainable development strategy in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Gender inequality; Patriarchal Culture; Socio-Economic Poverty; Sustainable Development; Yoruba women

### 1. Introduction

Women's socio-economic poverty remains a serious challenge on the development agenda in Nigeria, especially due to entrenched gender inequalities in social, economic, and cultural structures. National data show that women are a group disproportionately affected by extreme poverty; more than 60% of the poorest population in Nigeria are women, indicating that tens of millions of women live in conditions of extreme poverty, based on projections linked to the IMF and the World Bank (ONWUKA et al., 2019). In line with these national projections, the Federal Minister for Women Affairs reports that approximately 70% of Nigerian women live in conditions of extreme poverty, particularly in rural and marginalized communities where access to education, financial services, and economic opportunities remains severely limited (Abuja Favour Ulebor, 2025). This inequality not only reflects women's limited access to economic resources but also indicates the structural

vulnerability experienced by women in daily social life. Olajide asserts that women often face higher levels of vulnerability than men, especially as a result of social and cultural constructions that rigidly define gender roles without considering women's social and psychological realities (Grace O. Olajide, 2021). These constructed roles often place women in subordinate positions, limit economic mobility, and increase exposure to social and economic risks. In the context of the Yoruba community in Southwestern Nigeria, this dynamic is increasingly complex as patriarchal norms and traditional social structures shape women's experiences of poverty in specific and layered ways, requiring a more contextual and critical study.

Several studies have examined women's poverty in Africa and Nigeria from various perspectives, including development economics, contextual theology, and gender studies. Beegle (2016) and Fosu (2023) assert that poverty in Africa is multidimensional and is strongly influenced by inequality in access to education and economic opportunities from childhood (Beegle et al., 2016; Fosu, 2023). Siziba (2023) highlights that poverty is not only related to material scarcity but also to limited capacity, social relations, and access to resources (Siziba & Mapuva, 2023). In the Nigerian context, Genyi (2013) shows that women, especially widows, face poverty legitimized by patriarchal cultural practices and social structures (Genyi & George-Genyi, 2013). The study by Falola et al. (2020) specifically examined the economic contributions of rural women in the Yoruba region and found that education, access to credit, and entrepreneurship training play a crucial role in improving household welfare (Falola et al., 2020). However, literature trends suggest that most research is still macro-national or focused on economic indicators alone, while contextual analyses that specifically examine the socio-economic experiences of Yoruba women in cultural relations, policies, and social structures are still relatively limited.

Based on these social facts and literary trends, there are gaps in studies that need to be addressed, particularly in the contextual analysis of the socio-economic poverty of Yoruba women, which should comprehensively integrate cultural, structural, and policy dimensions. Many studies place women as statistical objects without exploring how patriarchal cultural norms, unpaid domestic practices, and government policies contribute to the reproduction of poverty at the local level. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze the structural and cultural factors that affect the socio-economic poverty of Yoruba women in Nigeria, and to examine their impact on their economic participation and social well-being. This research aims to move beyond the descriptive approach by providing a critical analysis of the power relations, culture, and policies that shape women's life experiences. Thus, this study aims to fill the existing literature gap that has overlooked the specific socio-cultural context of Yorubaland in the discourse on women's poverty and sustainable development.

This article argues that the socio-economic poverty of Yoruba women is not solely caused by individual limitations, but rather is the result of a complex interaction between unequal economic structures, patriarchal cultural norms, and public policies that are less responsive to gender needs. Cultural norms that limit women's roles in the domestic sphere, combined with limited access to education and financial resources, systematically hinder women's socioeconomic mobility (Carranza & Carranza, 2018). The main hypothesis of this study is that the stronger the dominance of patriarchal structures and the more limited women's access to education and economic resources, the higher the level of socio-economic poverty experienced by Yoruba women. In addition, this study also hypothesizes that the recognition and redistribution of unpaid domestic work, as well as the

implementation of gender-sensitive policies, have the potential to be a key strategy in reducing women's poverty. By testing these arguments, this article contributes to the development of a more inclusive analytical framework in gender and development studies in Nigeria.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Women's Socio-Economic Poverty in Development and Gender Perspectives

Women's socio-economic poverty, viewed from a development and gender perspective, is understood as a multidimensional condition that extends beyond low income, encompassing limited access to education, healthcare, productive assets, decent work, and participation in social and economic decision-making. Beegle (2026) and Fragoso (2025) define poverty as a lack of capabilities that affect an individual's life chances in a sustainable manner (Beegle et al., 2016; Pitasse Fragoso, 2025). In contrast, Lever (2013) emphasizes that poverty also encompasses relational and structural dimensions that trap individuals in a state of powerlessness (Lever, 2013). In gender studies, women's poverty is often categorized into absolute, relative, and multidimensional poverty, where women are more vulnerable to all three due to systemic gender inequality (Chant, 2006; Rustagi, 2007). This categorization shows that women's poverty cannot be separated from social structures that limit their access to equal economic resources and opportunities.

In the context of developing countries, including Nigeria, women's socio-economic poverty is often manifested in the phenomenon of poverty feminization, which is a condition where women are proportionally more affected by poverty than men (Usman, 2015). Cases in Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrate that women are more likely to be employed in the informal sector, characterized by low incomes, a lack of social protection, and a high unpaid domestic workload (Falola et al., 2020). In Nigeria, women—including Yoruba women—often face limited access to formal education and financial services, which narrows their chances of exiting structural poverty (Carranza & Carranza, 2018). These studies confirm that women's poverty is not just an economic problem, but the result of a complex interaction between unequal development structures and unequal gender relations, which is reflected in women's life experiences in various social and cultural contexts.

### 2.2. Patriarchal Culture, Social Structure, and Women's Economic Vulnerability in Nigeria

Patriarchal culture is a social framework that places men at the center of economic, social, and symbolic authority, while women occupy subordinate positions in decision-making and resource distribution. In the Nigerian context, patriarchy is institutionalized through customary norms, family practices, and social systems that limit women's access to education, inheritance rights, asset ownership, and formal economic participation (Genyi & George-Genyi, 2013). This kind of social structure shapes women's economic vulnerability from an early age, as their life chances are largely determined by family status, marriage, and relationships with men. The gender literature indicates that the gender-based division of labor, which confines women to the domestic sphere, contributes to low income and long-term economic dependence (Albelda, 2023). Thus, patriarchal culture serves not only as a cultural norm but also as a structural mechanism that reproduces economic inequality and strengthens women's poverty systemically.

Women's economic vulnerability in Nigeria is increasingly evident in concrete social practices, such as widowhood rituals, restrictions on land tenure rights, and the exclusion of women from community economic decision-making. Genyi (2013) notes that widowed women often lose access to family property and are forced to depend on male relatives, which increases the risk of extreme poverty (Genyi & George-Genyi, 2013). In Yoruba society, although women are actively engaged in trade and the informal sector, their economic contributions are often not structurally recognized and are not balanced by adequate social protection (Falola et al., 2020). Additionally, cultural norms that view men as the primary breadwinners perpetuate the marginalization of women in the formal labor market and their limited access to credit (Carranza & Carranza, 2018). These cases show that women's economic vulnerability is not individual, but rather is the product of an interaction between patriarchal culture and social structures that put women at a disadvantage in the Nigerian economic system.

### **2.3. Education, Economic Access, and Women's Empowerment**

Education and economic access are two key pillars in the process of empowering women and reducing socio-economic poverty. In the development literature, education is understood as a means of increasing individual capabilities to access economic opportunities, increase productivity, and participate in social decision-making (Feniser et al., 2022). A lack of formal education limits women's skills and work mobility, thereby encouraging them to rely on the informal sector, where they often face low incomes and lack social protection (Cameron, 2014). Economic access, encompassing asset ownership, financial services, and decent employment opportunities, is a crucial factor in breaking the cycle of women's economic dependence on men (Carranza & Carranza, 2018). In the context of gender, empowerment is not only measured by increased income, but also by women's ability to control resources and determine the direction of their own lives (Yigit, 2024). Therefore, education and economic access are interrelated in building women's socio-economic independence.

In Nigeria, women's limited access to education and economic resources remains a major challenge to empowerment efforts. Data show that women's literacy and educational participation rates are lower than those of men, especially in rural areas, which has a direct impact on women's underrepresentation in the formal labor market (AWOPETU, 2025). The study by Falola et al. (2020) revealed that Yoruba women with higher education, access to credit, and entrepreneurial training tend to make a greater economic contribution to household well-being (Falola et al., 2020). However, many women still face structural barriers such as high education costs, discrimination in access to credit, and unpaid domestic workloads that consume their productive time and energy. These conditions suggest that women's empowerment in Nigeria requires comprehensive policy interventions, including expanding access to education, reforming the financial system to be more inclusive, and recognizing domestic work as a significant contributor to women's economic contributions..

## **3. Methods**

### *3.1 Object of Research Material*

The material object of this research is the socio-economic poverty of Yoruba women in the Southwestern region of Nigeria. The focus of the study is on the social, economic, and cultural

conditions that shape women's experiences of poverty in their daily lives. Poverty is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses limited income, access to education, asset ownership, and participation in decision-making(Akinjole et al., 2024; Beegle et al., 2016). Yoruba women were chosen as the unit of analysis because of their position of being structurally vulnerable due to patriarchal norms and entrenched gender inequality in Nigeria's social and economic system(Falola et al., 2020).

### 3.2 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative design with a descriptive-analytical approach to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between culture, social structure, and women's poverty. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows an exploration of the meanings, contexts, and social dynamics that shape gender inequality and poverty, which are difficult to capture through quantitative methods(Bennett, 2024; Creswell & Poth, 2016). This design aligns with gender and development studies, which emphasize the importance of local contexts and interpretive analysis in understanding women's experiences in developing societies(Kabeer, 1999).

### 3.3 Data Source

The data sources for this research are primarily secondary, derived from international academic literature, including reputable journal articles, scholarly books, and research reports on poverty, gender, and development in Africa. Additionally, this study utilizes policy documents and reports from international institutions, including the World Bank, UNDP, World Economic Forum, and Transparency International, as contextual data sources. The use of secondary data is considered relevant for structural and comparative analysis in poverty and gender studies(Beegle et al., 2016; Bryman, 2016).

### 3.4 Data collection techniques

The data collection technique was carried out through systematic library research and contextual observation. The literature study was conducted by searching relevant literature based on keywords such as *women's poverty*, *gender inequality*, and *economic empowerment in Nigeria*, taking into account the credibility and relevance of the sources(Snyder, 2019). Contextual observations are used as a complement to understanding the social and cultural practices of Yoruba women as reflected in literature and policy reports. This approach is commonly used in context-based qualitative social research(Creswell & Poth, 2016).

### 3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted through a thematic analysis with an interpretive approach. The collected data is coded and grouped into key themes such as patriarchal culture, access to education, economic inequality, public policy, and unpaid domestic work. Thematic analysis was chosen because it was effective in identifying patterns and relationships of meaning in qualitative data(Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, findings are critically analyzed by linking empirical data and theoretical frameworks of gender and development to produce a comprehensive and policy-oriented interpretation(Kabeer, 2005).

## 4. Result

### 4.1 Structural Factors Causing Socio-Economic Poverty of Yoruba Women

The results show that the socio-economic poverty of Yoruba women is strongly influenced by structural factors embedded in the economic system and public policies in Nigeria. Analysis of international development reports reveals that women have more limited access to formal education, decent work, and productive asset ownership compared to men (Beegle et al., 2016). These limitations have a direct impact on women's low capacity to participate fully in economic activities that generate sustainable income. In the Yoruba region, most women work in informal sectors, such as petty trade, subsistence farming, and domestic services, which are characterized by low wages and a lack of social protection (Falola et al., 2020). This gender-segmented labor market structure narrows women's economic mobility opportunities and makes them more vulnerable to economic shocks, including inflation and the cost-of-living crisis. These findings indicate that women's poverty is not solely due to a lack of individual efforts, but also due to structural limitations that hinder access to strategic economic resources.

Additionally, Nigeria's economic and fiscal policies have also exacerbated women's economic vulnerability. The literature shows that gender-neutral policies often disproportionately impact women because they do not consider their initial position as economically vulnerable (Kabbeer, 1999). The rising cost of living, the elimination of subsidies, and the tax burden on micro-enterprises have a direct impact on Yoruba women who depend on small trade and household economies for their livelihoods. A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018) reveals that women in the informal sector have a lower economic adaptation capacity than men, primarily due to limited access to capital, networks, and credit (Gannon et al., 2022; Odusanya et al., 2018). In this context, non-inclusive economic policy structures magnify gender inequality and strengthen women's socio-economic poverty. These results confirm that policy reform is a crucial factor in addressing systemic poverty for women.

The structure of inequality of opportunity from childhood also contributes to the poverty of Yoruba women in adulthood. Beegle et al. (2016) emphasize that inequality in access to education and investment in human resources from an early age creates a cycle of intergenerational poverty (Beegle et al., 2016). Education data indicate that women, particularly in rural areas of Nigeria, continue to face challenges in accessing secondary and tertiary education, which has a significant impact on their limited formal employment opportunities later in life (Oladokun & Olubunmi O., 2024). In Yoruba society, women's limited education is often attributed to family preferences for boys' education, especially in limited economic conditions. These findings show that the structural factors that cause women's poverty operate in layers—from households, labor markets, to state policies—that collectively limit women's opportunities to get out of poverty.

### 4.2 The Influence of Patriarchal Culture on Women's Economic Access and Participation

The results of the study show that patriarchal culture plays a central role in shaping the economic vulnerability of Yoruba women. Social norms that position men as the primary breadwinners and women as household managers restrict women's opportunities for participation



in productive economic activities(Adjei, 2012; Genyi & George-Genyi, 2013). The gender literature emphasizes that this gender-based division of roles is not just a cultural construct, but also a social mechanism that regulates the distribution of power and resources(Kandiyoti, 1988). In Yoruba society, although women are actively involved in trade and agriculture, these roles are often viewed as complementary to family income and are not considered a significant economic contribution. As a result, women have low bargaining power in economic decision-making, both at the household and community levels. These findings suggest that patriarchal cultures limit women's access to economic control, even though they contribute significantly to domestic sustainability.

Certain cultural practices also have a direct impact on women's loss of assets and economic security. Genyi's study (2013) shows that the practice of widowhood rituals and restrictions on inheritance rights causes women to lose access to family land and property after the death of their husbands(Genyi & George-Genyi, 2013). In the Yoruba context, land ownership and productive assets are still dominated by men, while women often only have the right to use without legal certainty. The international literature confirms that inequality in asset ownership rights is a primary determinant of women's poverty in developing countries(Doss et al., 2018). Without asset ownership, women struggle to access formal credit and establish productive businesses. These findings reinforce the argument that patriarchal culture operates not only through symbolic norms but also through material structures that limit women's economic capacity.

Patriarchal culture also influences the internalization of women's values and mentality towards their economic roles. Some studies show that women who grow up in patriarchal systems tend to internalize economic dependency as a "normal" social norm(Adjei, 2012; Kabeer, 1999). In the Yoruba context, literature findings suggest that some women limit their economic aspirations due to social pressures and cultural expectations. This has an impact on the low participation of women in higher education, economic leadership, and large-scale entrepreneurship. Thus, patriarchal culture not only creates external barriers but also forms internal barriers that reinforce the cycle of women's poverty. These results confirm that economic intervention alone is not enough without a transformation of cultural norms and gender relations.

#### **4.3 The Impact of Socio-Economic Poverty on Women's Lives and Empowerment**

The results of the study show that socio-economic poverty has a wide impact on the quality of life and empowerment of Yoruba women. Economic limitations restrict women's access to advanced education, quality health services, and skills development opportunities, ultimately hindering their social mobility (UNDP, 2003; World Bank, 2020). International studies show that poor women are more vulnerable to health risks, including maternal mortality and nutritional problems, due to limited access to health services (WHO, 2019). In the Yoruba context, weak economic conditions also affect women's ability to invest in children's education, thus reinforcing the cycle of intergenerational poverty. These findings confirm that the impact of women's poverty is not individual, but has implications for the well-being of families and communities at large.

In addition, socio-economic poverty reinforces the unpaid domestic workload borne by women. The literature shows that women spend much more time on reproductive work such as childcare, caring for family members, and managing households, without economic compensation (ILO, 2018). In Yoruba society, this unpaid domestic work reduces women's time and energy for engaging in

productive activities or acquiring skills. A study by UN Women (2020) reveals that redistributing domestic labor can significantly enhance women's economic participation. These findings suggest that women's poverty is not only related to a lack of income, but also to an unequal distribution of time and work.

Socio-economic poverty also limits women's empowerment in social and political decision-making. The World Economic Forum (2021) noted that low economic independence is strongly correlated with women's low participation in political and community leadership. In the Yoruba context, economic limitations result in women being underrepresented in local decision-making forums, and their interests are rarely accommodated in public policy. These findings strengthen the argument that economic empowerment is a prerequisite for women's social and political empowerment. Therefore, reducing women's socio-economic poverty is crucial to achieving inclusive and sustainable development in Nigeria.

## 5. Discussion

The results of this study show that the socio-economic poverty of Yoruba women is a multidimensional phenomenon produced by the interaction between structural, cultural, and public policy factors. Key findings indicate that women's limited access to education, decent work, and productive assets is a major determinant of their low economic independence (Beegle et al., 2016). In addition, patriarchal cultural norms limit women's participation in economic decision-making and weaken their control over resources, although women contribute significantly to the informal sector and unpaid domestic work (Falola et al., 2020). The study also found that gender-insensitive economic policies, such as the tax burden on micro-enterprises and the rising cost of living, disproportionately impact women. The impact of poverty is not only felt by women as individuals, but also affects family welfare and the sustainability of socio-economic development in Yoruba society. Overall, the study's results confirm that women's poverty cannot be reduced to an individual problem; rather, it must be understood as a structural issue that requires a comprehensive policy response and social transformation.

The findings of this study reflect that the poverty experiences of Yoruba women reflect a broader pattern of gender inequality in the context of development in Nigeria. The results reveal a paradoxical position for women: they are expected to contribute economically through trade and agriculture, but these contributions are not balanced by structural recognition or social protection. This condition creates a double burden, where women have to manage productive and reproductive work simultaneously without adequate support (ILO, 2018). This reflection also highlights that women's poverty is often normalized through culture and social practices, so that it is not perceived as a structural injustice, but rather as a "natural" consequence of gender roles. Thus, the results of this study prompt us to reconsider the development approach that has thus far emphasized macroeconomic growth without considering the equitable distribution of benefits based on gender. This reflection reinforces the argument that development that ignores the gender dimension has the potential to reproduce inequality and deepen women's poverty.

Within the theoretical framework of gender and development, the results of this study can be interpreted as strong evidence of the feminization of poverty, which occurs due to structural inequality and gender-based power relations (Kabeer, 1999). Limited access to education and



economic assets reduces women's ability to make their own life choices, as described in the capability approach (Sen, 1999). Patriarchal norms that limit women's roles in the domestic sphere can also be understood as a form of "patriarchal bargain" that places women in a weak bargaining position within the economic system (Kandiyoti, 1988). This interpretation suggests that women's poverty is not just a lack of resources, but also a loss of agency and control over their lives. In addition, unpaid domestic work, which is predominantly carried out by women, can be understood as a form of economic contribution that is often unrecognized, thereby obscuring the real role of women in development. Thus, the results of this study confirm the importance of an analytical framework that integrates economic, cultural, and power relations dimensions in understanding women's poverty.

The results of this study are in line with the findings of previous research that highlighted the role of patriarchal culture and structural inequality in strengthening women's poverty in Africa and Nigeria (Genyi & George-Genyi, 2013). The study of Falola et al. (2020) also found that access to education, credit, and entrepreneurial training has a significant effect on the well-being of Yoruba women, which corroborates the findings of this study (Falola et al., 2020). However, unlike some studies that focus solely on economic indicators, this study incorporates contextual analysis of how cultural norms and public policies interact to shape women's experiences of poverty. Compared to global studies on the feminization of poverty (UNDP, 2003; World Bank, 2020), this research makes a specific contribution by highlighting local dynamics in Yorubaland. Thus, this study expands the existing literature by combining structural, cultural, and policy perspectives within a single, contextual analytical framework.

Based on the above findings and analysis, this study has important implications for policy and further research. First, it is essential to have a gender-sensitive development policy that considers the structural position of women in the economy, including the recognition and redistribution of unpaid domestic work (UN Women, 2020). Second, improving access to education and financial services for women must be a priority to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Third, transforming patriarchal cultural norms through education and social advocacy is a crucial step in strengthening women's agency. From an academic perspective, further research is needed to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches, incorporating field data, to deepen the understanding of the varying experiences of women's poverty in different Yoruba communities. Thus, this research creates an opportunity for more inclusive academic and policy dialogue in poverty reduction and sustainable development efforts in Nigeria.

## 6. Conclusion

This study confirms that the socio-economic poverty of Yoruba women is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the complex interaction between structural, cultural, and public policy factors. Key findings suggest that women's limited access to education, decent work, asset ownership, and financial resources undermines their sustainable economic independence. Patriarchal cultural norms and unequal division of gender roles limit women's control over economic resources and reinforce dependence on men. In addition, gender-sensitive economic policies and the high cost of living worsen the condition of women who depend on the informal sector. The impact of this poverty is not only experienced by women as individuals, but also affects family welfare and strengthens the intergenerational cycle of poverty. These findings confirm that Yoruba women's poverty is not just

an individual problem, but a structural problem that requires a comprehensive and gender-equitable development response.

The primary contribution of this research to the advancement of science lies in enriching gender studies and development through the contextual analysis of women's poverty in Yoruba society. This study expands the literature on the feminization of poverty by showing how economic structures, patriarchal cultural norms, and public policies interact with each other in reproducing gender inequality. Unlike previous studies, which tended to be macro and quantitative, this study adopts a qualitative approach that emphasizes women's social experiences and cultural dynamics. By integrating Yorubaland's development, gender, and local contexts perspectives, this article provides a more comprehensive analytical framework for understanding women's poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa. This contribution is important not only to Nigerian studies but also to the global discourse on inclusive development and gender justice.

This study suggests several directions for further research. First, subsequent studies should combine qualitative and quantitative approaches by incorporating field data, such as in-depth interviews and household surveys, to enhance the empirical validity of the findings. Second, comparative cross-regional or interethnic research in Nigeria can provide a broader understanding of the variation in women's experiences of poverty in different cultural contexts. Third, further research is needed to examine the impact of public policies and women's empowerment programs on improving women's economic well-being at the local level, more specifically. Thus, future research not only deepens theoretical understanding but also contributes practically to the formulation of more inclusive and sustainable development policies.

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