



**GENDER INEQUALITY: INVESTIGATING HOUSING ACCESSIBILITY
CHALLENGES AMONGST FEMALE NYSC CORP MEMBERS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA.**

By

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Abstract

The astronomical rise in NYSC Corps member population is likely to bring pressure on housing facilities available around the area, as most corps members would desire accommodation not too far from their PPA. Generally, securing accommodation in the Lagos metropolis is a Herculean task for prospective house seekers, especially women, in the category of single girls. Women generally, suffer inadequate access to providing accommodation to the corps' population are critical. It is on this note, that this study examines accessibility challenges to housing among Female NYSC corps members in Lagos State as a case study. A purposive sampling technique was adopted for the administration of the good structure questionnaire. The study found empirical support that a significant level of female corps members had experienced sexual harassment from landlords. It also revealed that the major forms of expressions of discriminatory practices they had experienced are religion, gender bias, sexual harassment, and discriminatory rent charges.

Keywords: Gender, inequality, housing, accessibility, challenges, female NYSC corp

Introduction

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme is one of the most effective and successful instruments in continuing effort toward achieving mutual understanding, trust, tolerance, and a common vision of the nation's destiny. It was greeted with numerous successes in its first few years of establishment (Ladele & Fadairo, 2018). Gowon (2015) and Okafor and Rasaki (2016) also posited that no one can speak of national unity or rural development without mentioning NYSC. This is evident in the number of various projects carried out by the Community Development Service Groups (CDS-Groups) of the NYSC and private projects carried out by philanthropic Corps members during their service year. Aside from this manifest function of promoting mutual understanding and unity; it is performing the latent function of providing the opportunity to have work experience in order to acquire some work skills and knowledge about the work environment.

Housing is a basic human need in all societies and the fundamental right of every individual. In advanced countries, housing is more accessible to all categories of people including the poor and the needy as a result of subsidies from the government. The situation is not the same in developing countries of the world. In Nigeria, for example, accessibility to housing by the poor is quite a difficult situation which is worsened by the harsh economic conditions and poor enabling environment. Likewise, accessing housing facilities by female NYSC is no exception

The provision of accommodation to the NYSC corps members' population takes different models. This includes; non-residential, where members source for their accommodation. Residential, where there is Corper's lodge for all its members. The experiences of corps members in sourcing and securing their accommodation around the communities are likely to be interesting and significant. Hence, this study examines the accessibility challenges to housing among the Female corps member in Lagos State, Nigeria.

The astronomical rise in NYSC Corps member population is likely to bring pressure on housing facilities available around the area, as most corps members would desire accommodation not too far from their PPA. This, however, is inadequate when compared to the teeming population of the corps member. Therefore, filling the gap created by a shortage of housing by the Directors of

NYSC are the private developers around their PPA Areas. These private developers build, fix rent prices and let out accommodation to corps members.

Generally, securing accommodation in the Lagos metropolis is a Herculean task for prospective house seekers, especially women, in the category of single girls (Omoluabi, 2015). Women generally, suffer inadequate access to providing accommodation to the corps' population are critical. Various strategies and struggles are usually adopted to ameliorate their hardship in accessing accommodation. Furthermore, the housing situations in Nigeria are deficient in quality and quantity (Oyebanji, 2016). There are arbitrarily and outrageous increases in house rents, a rapidly deteriorating urban environment, and the sheer physical expansion of the cities (Arimah, 2015). Also, the highly patriarchal nature of Nigerians and other intervening factors are likely to pose challenges to individuals, more in the categories of female corps members as the source for their housing needs.

The main objective of this study, therefore, is to examine accessibility challenges to housing among Female NYSC corps members in Lagos State as a case study. To address the identified problems, the following research questions underlie the focus of this study:

- To identify the strategies employed by Female Corps members in sourcing and solving their accommodation problems.
- To identify the gender that Landlords/landladies prefer in letting out accommodation to and state the reasons for their preference
- To examine the forms of discriminatory practices experienced by female corps members in solving their housing needs
- To identify the type of relationships that exists between the female corps members and the community Landlords/Landladies.

Literature Review

- *Housing Situation in Nigeria*

Nigerians are confronted with a myriad of housing problems, which are essentially connected with the hardships they face in securing and retaining a residence. This situation is particularly evident

in Lagos state due to the cosmopolitan nature of the state, which has placed great demands not only on housing but also on physical and social amenities.

Egunjobi (2015) succinctly stated that there are twin problems of quantitative and qualitative deficiencies with respect to housing in Nigeria, especially in Lagos State. The efforts of governments at federal, state, and local governments to provide housing for the urban population have not yielded many fruits. Researchers have tended to draw a strategic link between urbanization processes in a country and subsisting housing problems. Thus, the rapid rate of urbanization and its attendant socio-economic and spatial consequences have been of tremendous concern to all professionals, policymakers, and analysts especially as it affects urban development and management (Olatubara, 2018). It should be noted that the problem of urbanization in Nigeria is not necessarily that of level but that of rate. For example, while the level of urbanization in Nigeria is put at 36%, that of South Korea is 79%, Mexico at 74%, and Columbia at 71% (Population Reference Bureau, 2016). While the rate of urbanization in Seoul is 7.8%, Mexico City is 5.5% and Bogota is 5.4%, and Lagos is 15% per annum (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2015). This rapidity in the rate of urbanization is so overwhelming that it generally far exceeds the speed with which governments can respond to the dynamics of urbanization due to inadequate facilities, resources, and capabilities at their disposal. To fill the gap of quantitative housing problems in Nigeria in general and Lagos State, in particular, are the private developers. These private developers according to Olatubara (2018) have as their motivation the desire to make a profit. Many of them capitalize on the acute shortage of accommodation by providing housing at exorbitant prices to prospective house seekers. Invariably, the majority of the houses provided by the private developers, besides being expensive are deficient in meeting the required minimum standards that make for a healthy and comfortable living

Also in housing policy, women or girls are often excluded or discriminated against as they do not fit into the traditional concept of a family (African Development Bank, 2015). Furthermore, Lawanson (2016) states that when housing programs are upgrading schemes present opportunities for the improvement of human settlement, women are often excluded. Projects are designed without reference to woman's economic, domestic, or community responsibilities. Policymakers focused on providing for the needs of the presumed male head of the house, virtually ignoring the large number of women who head or maintain households. Among the peculiar problems are the

patriarchal attitudes of men which see a woman who moves out of her accepted family role to source for accommodation, as a “loose woman”. Men may fall back on societal expectations and treat the woman as sexually available. In some instances, the housing needs of women may force some of them to stay in a hostile relationship, as some may perceive that they are likely to be denied accommodation elsewhere or be sexually harassed by house-owners.

Globally, studies had shown this trend as regards women securing accommodations on their own merits. For instance, the United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, Housing and Civil Enforcement Section (2015) reports states that sexual harassment is more likely to occur in rental properties, and among poor women who could not afford to pay market rates in a competitive housing market. These women often choose between being harassed at home or end up living on the street. The report also revealed that many of these female tenants sometimes were reluctant to report or challenge their landlords on their behavior. Instead, they move or simply put up with the harassment, as well as poor maintenance and services rather than pursue fair treatment and justice. Apart from this report, numbers of studies lend credence to the fact that the female gender is usually discriminated against in various ways when seeking accommodation. Seager (2016); Novac (2015) and Tester (2017) succinctly state that most migrant women who make up a larger proportion of international migrants are usually discriminated against especially in access to housing in a foreign land. Most of these migrant women are also harassed by the landlords and their agents as a result of the perceived traditional roles of women or girls.

What is certain from the literature is that poor or low-income women are likely to be subjected to harassment by landlords. Likewise, female students who move out of the societal expectations of their perceived roles may equally experience sexual harassment from landlords who may perceive them as being sexually available when trying to solve their accommodation problems.

- *Development of the NYSC*

In looking back at the rationale for the national youth program, the man who set it up, General Yakubu Gowon, stated 21 years after that the goal was to set up ‘an enduring scheme for the edification of our youth, which would offer them the opportunity to learn and know more about their country and the higher ideals of service to the community beyond the thought of reward. We also saw it as an abundant source of high-level manpower to be put to the service of the nation and

the community. The scheme which started with 2,117 members in 1973 rose to 46,685 in the first decade and over 50, 000 in its second decade (Enegwea & Umoden, 2015). In its third decade, it now boasts 85,000 members. This phenomenal increase in the number of participants, coupled with the need to address emergent lapses and reassess the program, has necessitated some changes in the structure of the scheme.

Currently, the four steps of the service year have been refined. The orientation course is designed to give corps members ‘a proper understanding of the scheme’s goals and ensure that they internalize its ideals. It is also designed to familiarize them with their new environment, prepare them for their unique roles during the service year as well as instill discipline, inculcate the spirit of national consciousness and promote a sense of collective responsibility and esprit de corps among all members’ (Ibid, 2015).

Last but not the least, the orientation is also geared towards giving corps members adequate physical and mental training and equipping them with practical, social, and leadership skills to enable them to meet the varied challenges of the service year’ (Ibid, 2015). This phase comprises the swearing-in ceremony where they take the oath, general orientation, professional orientation, and terminal parade. Primary assignment and community development that comes after the one month (later three weeks, now two weeks) of intensive training constitute the two most important and demanding aspects of the scheme.

- a. Primary assignment is carried out in a specific institution, either in the public or private sector. This is where the corps member would serve the length of the year. Community Development Service (CDS) in which the corps member participates once every week, away from his/her place of primary assignment involves ‘projects aimed at harnessing the skills, creativity, and innovativeness of the youths into an effective machinery for national development and is discharged to the corps member’s host community’ (Ibid, 2015). It used to be concentrated in a six-week program but is now all-year-round. Its objectives, among others, include:
 - a. Harnessing the knowledge and skills of corps members into an effective machinery for achieving self-sufficiency in the priority areas of food production and provision of agro-based raw materials for industry, economic recovery, and self-reliance;

- b. Providing on-the-job training and experience for corps members in the areas of Health, Engineering, Agriculture, Education, and Social Services, among others;
- c. Providing a forum for corps members to experiment with ideas and translate them into concrete achievements toward national development; and
- d. Developing the spirit of entrepreneurship in corps members thus deemphasizing dependence on public service employment and promoting self-employment ventures (Ibid, 2015).

This phase of the program is very crucial because it taps into the practices in traditional African societies in their regular resort to meeting common challenges through common efforts (Ibid, 2015). This practice of practical communal work to build communities and confront communal challenges from the road network to traditional physical infrastructure, which has been eroded by urbanization and modernization, was reconstructed and injected into the scheme.

Research Methodology

The study site is situated in the Lagos metropolis, which accommodates people of diverse ethnic groups. This study is descriptive in nature. It utilized both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative method consists of the structured questionnaire: This consists of close-ended questions meant to elicit information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents as well as information on their access to housing/accommodation in Lagos state. The qualitative method consists of in-depth Interviews: Interview sessions were conducted among the landlords/landladies in the communities. The questions were semi-structured. The questions were about their roles in providing accommodation to female corps members. Case Studies: A few case studies were included as well in the study.

A purposive sampling technique was adopted for the administration of the well-structured questionnaire. Since there was no database of the corps members living within the study area. The fifteen Landlords/Landladies included in the study were picked through the Multi-Stage Sampling Technique in the community. We solicited the cooperation of the landlords/landladies by explaining to them the importance of the research.

Data Analysis/Critical Discussions

The data generated from the survey was analyzed using the content analysis of the qualitative data gathered from the survey. Quotations from respondents were recorded verbatim. The interview was done in English.

- *Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

Table 1
Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	7	44.7
Female	8	55.3
Ethnicity		
Igbo	5	32.6
Hausa	3	26.86
Yoruba	7	40.5
Age Group		
18-24yrs	2	13.2
25-30yrs	9	60.5
30+	4	26.3

Source: Field Work, 2022

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents gathered on gender differentials in access to accommodation revealed that 55.3% were female, while males represented 44.7% of the sampled population. Among the respondents, 32.6% of the respondents were Igbo; 26.86% resided are Hausa, while (40.5%) resided are Yoruba. Also, the study reveals that many female respondents were able to secure accommodation. The study also revealed the age distributions of the

respondents. Those in the age group 18-24yrs constituted 13.2%, age group 25 – 30yrs 60.5%.

This shows that the majority of the respondents were in the age group of 25-30 years

Table 2
Analysis of Research Question

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Strategies Employed in sourcing Accommodation		
Direct from Landlords/Landladies	3	24.5
Registered Agent	7	48.5
Through fellow member	5	27.0
Landlords Preference (Which gender they prefer to let out accommodation to)		
Male	3	20.0
Female	12	80.0
Gender Experiences of Discriminatory Practices		
Any experienced of discrimination		
Yes	9	65.0
No	6	35.0
Types of discrimination experienced		
Riligious basis	4	27.0
Gender basis	4	27.0
Sexual harassment	7	46.0

Source: Field Work, 2022

- Strategies Employed By Students in Sourcing and Solving Accommodation Needs

We seek to examine the strategies that are likely to be adopted by NYSC corps members in securing their accommodation needs. The majority of the respondents, (73%) secured their accommodation from the landlords/landladies and transfers from Agents. For the intermediate and new corps members, registered agents and landlords/landladies were the major strategies used to

source for their accommodation needs. This implies that landlords/landladies were involved in the business of directly renting out accommodation to corps members on their own. The presence of registered agents was a new phenomenon in the resident area. The “registered” agents on their own, source for the rooms/flats and compile the list of houses available around the Area. Corps members were charged N500 (Five Hundred Naira) by the agents before information on available houses for rent can be obtained. If an agreement is reached between the corps member, the landlord, and the registered agent, the agent gets his commission in monetary terms.

27.0% of students solved their accommodation problems through fellow corps members. Corps members either sub-let or transfer their apartments to another new corps member upon the completion of their services or relocation. These new tenants were usually presented to the landlords/landladies either as brothers or sisters or friends who had shown interest in the apartment. In these cases, agents are bypassed, making the rent cheaper as the new tenant may not consummate a fresh agreement, which attracts a large sum of amount. This is one of the strategies adopted by some corps members in trying to cut costs and solve their accommodation needs.

On gender analysis of the strategies used by students to solve their accommodation problems, the data revealed that a majority of female Corps members in all categories (55.2%) secured their accommodation directly from the landlords/landladies while among the male students (44.8%) registered agents were the major strategy utilized. In Nigeria as well as other developing countries, securing accommodation is either through the landlords/landladies or registered agents. It is interesting to ask how female corps members secured accommodation in the neighborhood through the landlords/landladies considering the societal perception of the female gender and the age-long tradition of not letting out accommodation to single girls.

- *Landlords/Landladies Preference*

Information gathered from the respondents revealed that landlords/landladies preferred females to males. In the past, preference was given to males. A total percentage of (61.5%) representing more male corps members secured accommodation from landlords. However, among the respondents (67%) it was observed that landlords preferred females to males. What then are the reason(s) behind the change of preference from male to female? In an in-depth interview with fifteen landlords/landladies on which gender they prefer to let out accommodation to, 12 of them (80%)

indicated female while only 3 representing (20%) indicated male. The common expressions/statements among the thirteen (13) landlords/landladies that favored females were:

“Males were troublesome. They engaged in cultism and robbery. Male students do not keep to the terms of the agreement in the house. While the three (3) of the Landlords/Landladies that favored males commented on a female that

“They believe they may be of bad influence to their children because of their lifestyles”. And among those in favor of females, the common expressions were that

“Female keeps to the terms of the agreement. They are good housekeepers and they hardly cause any trouble in the house. They usually come out during monthly environmental sanitation”.

These perceptions are still in line with the traditional roles of women. Going by the views expressed by the landlords/landladies, it is pertinent to ask whether the traditional idea of renting out accommodation only to males in society is changing. One would have thought that there is a paradigm shift from traditional values about who gets accommodation from the landlords/landladies. But following in-depth interviews with the landlords/landladies, ten of them who prefer the female to male corps member gave the same responses

“We cannot give our rooms/flats to single girls. They have to come to us with their parents, brothers, or their uncles who were expected to be in contact with us from time – to time or if there is no one to come with, they will report to “Bale of the area who will turn give them a letter of introduction to us”.

The information revealed that though their preference may change, the traditional beliefs about giving out accommodation to single girls had not changed. The above findings corroborated a response reported in Omoluabi (2015) when a lady commented to him that “do you know that I had to tell my landlord that I was engaged before he agreed to rent out my flat to me”. This statement is still largely a confirmation that our society is patriarchal in nature. Milimo (2018) cited in Olatubara (2018) stated succinctly that patriarchy as a factor is strong enough to keep women in perpetual subjection. After securing accommodation from landlords /landladies, do female corps members face any form of discriminatory practices? The next section discusses the responses.

- *Gender Experiences of Discriminatory Practices*

Discrimination is making unfair differences in one's treatment of people. People may be unfairly treated for reasons of their sex, race, and tribe or even for reasons of their beliefs. Housing discrimination is a serious problem because it is difficult to challenge or prove. The majority (65%) of the female corps member of the total sampled respondents had experienced one form of discrimination or the other. While 35.3% of the male respondents had it before. 33.5% of the corps member had not experienced any form of discrimination while 64.7% of the male belong here.

Questions were asked about the types of discriminatory practices that had been experienced. Among the female corps member, 27% of the female commented that religion and gender biases were their major forms of discriminatory practices experienced respectively, while 41% of returning and freshers female mentioned sexual harassment as the major form of discriminatory practice. Sexual harassment according to Akande (2015) is seen to affect negatively the environment in which the offender and victim interact, either at work or in a social context. Sexual harassment pollutes the working environment and can have a devastating effect on the health, confidence, morals, and performances of those affected by it. Though there are no national statistics on sexual harassment in access to housing, sexual harassment includes a broad range of landlords' misbehaviors which include: making comments, touching, entering the home to watch women while they sleep or shower, exchanging sex for rent or repairs, sexual assault, and rape.

A female corps member recalled her experiences with her landlord;

“When my friend left for another place because of religious differences between us, my landlord called me and said I too should move out or we should be having sexual intercourse together. He was touching me aggressively. The pressure on me was so much that I had to pack to another place.

What is certain is that there is an imbalance of power relationships between landlords and female corps member tenants. Most landlords exercise this power unjustly on female NYSC members where such member refuses to cooperate. Hostility also may likely set in. Most corps member does not even know whom to tell of their predicaments. That was the reason why all the females responded to instances of discrimination by searching for alternative accommodation. This finding was also in line with the report stated in the United States Department of Justice Civil Rights

Division, Housing and Civil Enforcement Section (2015). On the other hand, corps members who are vulnerable and succumb to pressure from landlords' sexual advances are at risk of reproductive health behavior (Wusu, 2016). However, while it is necessary to maintain a good relationship with one's landlord, such relationships must be formal. Females need to have well-balanced self-esteem. Their sense of dressing must be proper, as improper dressing sends the wrong signal to male counterparts, even to the landlord.

Another major discriminatory practice experienced by females was differential rent charges. Female complained of discriminatory rent charges. They were made to pay a series of money by the agents before rooms can be allocated to them. For instance, they were made to pay for a year's electricity bill, damages, and water rates. A practice that was not common in Nigeria. One could state that the money culture had caught up with the landlords/landladies. They behave as shylock.

It is obvious that the house owners are concerned more with profit than making life comfortable for people (Oduwade, 2015).

Conclusions/Implications of Study

This study was interested in examining the accessibility challenges to housing among Female NYSC corps members in Lagos State. Specifically, it sought to examine the strategies and forms of discriminatory practices experienced by female corps members in sourcing and solving their accommodation problems. It was also interested in finding out the types of reciprocal relationships existing between corps members-tenants and community landlords/landladies. The challenges being faced by female corps members were examined.

The proposition of this study states that the gender of NYSC Corps members will affect access to housing and will also determine the types of discriminatory practices that will be experienced. To some extent, this was so, but it was noticed that the Previous rigid frame has given way to a more flexible attitude regarding the landlords/landladies' attitudes to Female tenants in the housing markets. Female corps members are strategizing to resist unfair treatment and forms of discriminatory practices directed at them for reasons of their gender. Feminist theorists advocate a continuous Struggle by women in fighting oppression in whatever way it expresses itself.

The study found empirical support that a significant level of female corps members had experienced sexual harassment from landlords. This was a confirmation of the report of research carried out by a human rights group on housing in the United Nations. The report states that: The victims of landlord-tenant sexual harassment were most often women in the most desperate circumstance, while many of them are extremely vulnerable.

It was revealed that the female gender secured their accommodation directly from the landlord/landladies. Though the landlords/landladies did not give them the accommodation based on their merit, the presence of their parents/guardians was required before accommodation can be given out for securing the accommodation. This goes a long way to show that Nigerians are still patriarchal in nature. Registered agents were utilized by both gender, but mostly by males. The study also revealed that landlords/landladies preferred females to males. There were lots of reasons behind their Preference. These include economic motives, fear of cultism by males, and the ability of females to keep to the terms of agreement more than males.

This study also found a significant relationship between gender and expressions of forms of discriminatory practices. Female corps members mentioned religion, gender bias, sexual harassment, and discriminatory rent charges, as the major forms of expressions of discriminatory practices they had experienced.

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