



Women in Law & Leadership

Nigerian Bar



PATTERNS | PROGRESS | PROSPECTS

WOMEN IN LAW AND LEADERSHIP: NIGERIAN BAR

Patterns, Progress, and Prospects



Institute for African Women in Law
African Women in Law and Leadership Initiative



The Institute for African Women in Law (IAWL) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization established in 2015. It is committed to supporting the formidable works of women in law across the continent of Africa and the Diaspora. Our mission is to be a focal point for addressing issues across the legal and judicial professions. The institute is headquartered in Washington, DC, USA.

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We are forever indebted to the women in law who keep pushing forward, against all odds, to be heard, seen, and acknowledged for their contributions to their institutions, even if they are not rewarded with the leadership roles they deserve.

FOREWORD

I studied law in the United Kingdom and was called to the English bar, but I spent most of my legal career in Nigeria after being called to the Nigerian bar in July 1963. I have worked in various offices, including the Legal Aid Council, the Office of the Attorney General in Lagos State, the Nigerian Law School, and the Nigerian Bar Association. I was privileged to be the first female Life Bencher in Nigeria and the first female attorney general in Lagos. I can say that becoming a lawyer in Nigeria and thriving in the legal profession is not a walk in the park. Even when one successfully goes through the mill, one must overcome a litany of barriers. I have had my fair share of barriers amid my successes and thankfully overcame them as I rose to the top.

For women, it appears these barriers double, especially where leadership is concerned. It is, therefore, not surprising that this report that seeks, among other things, to outline the barriers and points of attrition for women in law and leadership in the Nigerian bar cites a long list of challenges. Some of these are age-old societal obstacles, such as patriarchal attitudes toward women, others relate to women's motherhood and family orientation; and still, others are due to the systems in the workplace environment.

Nevertheless, some women have defied the odds. The report lets us in on certain secrets of their ascent. One of the most significant was creating mentorship opportunities. An unmentored or poorly guided female lawyer is not likely to rise with ease, if at all. The up-and-coming lawyers need mentors and guides to show them the way to escape some of the unforgettable and even painful challenges that we seniors at the bar have faced. Another striking facilitator for me is transforming male gatekeepers into allies. Often, women's issues are left to women to handle, but that strategy yields few results. Women need men's support. Therefore, expanding male allies is a sure way of speedily advancing women in law and leadership.

I wish to recognize the efforts of the IAWL in putting together this insightful research report. I am particularly inspired by its representativeness and the voice it gives female lawyers in Nigeria to express themselves in the best and most realistic way possible. This report does not merely document the problems women in the bar and leadership face and proposes practical recommendations to address them. A great deal remains to be done to ensure that women are equally represented in the leadership at the Nigerian bar, and this report serves as a critical launch pad. I believe all readers and stakeholders will be able to take something away from this report to make the Nigerian legal profession more female-friendly than it is today.

Hairat Ade-Balogun, OON
Life Bencher, Nigeria

FOREWORD

When I started researching African women in law in 2015, I was frustrated by what I have consistently characterized as the arid desert of information on the topic. As my research continued, I likened seeking literature to the proverbial search for a needle in a haystack. The challenge was enormous, but rather than give up, I decided to make it my mission to build this field of knowledge. This mission led to my co-edited book, *Gender and the Judiciary in Africa: From Obscurity to Parity?* (Routledge, 2016), the first book to cover the topic of gender and judging in the African context. Its success spurred me on and inspired the second book, *International Courts and the African Woman Judge: Unveiled Narratives* (Routledge, 2018), which used the power of oral narratives to center the experiences, achievements, and challenges of African women who had served on international courts and tribunals. Other books followed, which included the World Bank project *Gender and Judging in Africa: Selected Studies* (Routledge, 2021) and *Intersectionality and Women's Access to Justice in Africa* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2022).

The first two books brought two major findings to my attention –the paucity of research on African women in law, and the challenges they face in accessing training and leadership skills, contributing to their underrepresentation in leadership. These two findings led me to merge my scholarship with activism to address these challenges. The Institute for African Women in Law (IAWL) was born from my passion for women's empowerment and research. By concentrating on its four main goals, IAWL has positioned itself as a leader in promoting women's development through research, training, mentoring, and advocacy. Today, IAWL is a leading hub for research on African women in law through an exhaustive digital archive that includes research reports, women's narratives, and a Legacy Project on the subject.

This report forms part of the four-nation priority countries of Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal, and South Africa, a series of reports under the IAWL-commissioned Women's Excellence in Law and Leadership (WELL) Initiative. The overarching goals of these reports are to examine women's access to positions of leadership in the legal professions; review their retention and intersectional challenges and barriers that lead to attrition from the profession; and provide recommendations on interventions that can promote and facilitate their representation in leadership roles, with the goal of meeting UN SDG #5 on gender equality. The initiative provides a blueprint and recommendations for interventions by policymakers, gatekeepers within the profession, civil society organizations, bar associations, judicial authorities, funding agencies, and other bodies interested in promoting women's leadership in law.

This report highlights the need for more research on several questions about women in law in Africa. I am hopeful that more investments will be directed toward providing empirically rich and theoretically grounded research, as seen in this report. Beyond research, what is needed is a comprehensive portal of current data on women in the legal professions across Africa—a project that IAWL is already spearheading. I hope this report provides some glimpses of hope that the problems women in law face can be addressed by adopting the multipronged approaches provided here. To borrow from popular parlance—*you cannot fix a problem if you cannot measure it*. I invite you to support our continued efforts in amplifying women's voices in law and enhancing their capacity for positive societal change and development. Thank you.

J. Jarpa Dawuni, Esq., Ph.D.
Executive Director
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

IAWL	Institute for African Women in Law
IBA	International Bar Association
NBA	Nigerian Bar Association
NBAWF	Nigerian Bar Association Women Forum
SAN	Senior Advocate of Nigeria
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

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Executive Summary

This study provides a broad overview of women's representation in leadership roles in the Nigerian bar. While there is focus on the representation of women in the bar in general, this study serves as a foundation to understand better the dynamics of gender inequality and the obstacles that impact the retention and advancement of women to leadership positions in the legal profession.






The legal system plays a unique role in addressing gender-based discrimination. Therefore, it is crucial for women to be well-represented in the legal sector. Based on their unique perspectives, women's participation and leadership in the justice system can play a valuable role in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically #5 on gender equality. This goal can be achieved by ensuring that women's specific interests and priorities are represented in decision-making processes.

The mere presence of women in a legal decision-making role can counteract actual bias and perceptions of gender bias. For this reason, it is critical to document the existing quantitative and qualitative data that identifies women's representation in the legal profession in general and analyze it to assess the points of attrition in the pipeline, barriers to retention, facilitators of promotion, and progress and trends over time. This report adds to the scant literature on women's leadership in the legal sector in the bar, the bench, and the legal academy and focuses on four priority countries in Africa, including Nigeria.

The report adopts intersectionality as the theoretical framework, which explains the nature of the multiple social categories, identities, and contexts that influence women's ascent to leadership in Nigeria's legal profession. Data were collected through a mixed-methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Participants and respondents for the qualitative study, drawn from female lawyers in one state per geopolitical zone, participated in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. For the quantitative data, an online survey was administered to female participants nationwide. It received 449 responses from lawyers with a decent range in the number of years at the bar.




This study combines rich qualitative responses from interviews with quantitative data to highlight the impact of intersectional challenges and key barriers to women's rise to leadership. These challenges affect the entire pipeline, leading to low retention in the profession and high attrition from the leadership pipeline.

The major challenges and barriers identified include the following:

	The procedural requirements for becoming a senior advocate of Nigeria (SAN)
	Sexual harassment and intimidation in the workplace
	Unspoken gender biases and stereotypes against women
	Women's caregiving, the burden of childcare, and family demands
	Lack of support for families in the workplace
	Limited capacity and self-imposed barriers
	Lack of mentoring opportunities
	Debilitating patriarchal culture

Using action-oriented and solution-driven approaches, the study draws on the research analyses and participants' suggestions to provide robust suggestions and recommendations on interventions that can lead to positive outcomes for women.

These facilitators of promotion to leadership and recommendations for supporting women in leadership include the following:

	Creating mentoring opportunities for women
	Understanding women's specific needs
	Establishing supportive family structures in the workplace
	Funding and data gathering to support evidence-based interventions
	Transforming gatekeepers into male allies
	Creating and enforcing policies that protect female lawyers
	Promoting, recognizing, and celebrating female lawyers
	Providing leadership training opportunities

Despite the challenges and barriers, women in the Nigerian bar are forging ahead. The general trends and patterns show that, first, the Nigerian bar is becoming feminized, based on the record of women who are called each year, with some women standing out as “firsts” in distinct areas. Second, an enduring trend noted from the survey is the persistent patriarchal cultures in the profession that maintain and reproduce gender stereotypes and biases against women's leadership roles. Third, some women exited the profession at the early stage of practice, some after marriage, some after childbirth, and some immediately after ascending to leadership. Women meet and must contend with shifting glass ceilings at all these stages. The intersectional challenges punctuate the path a female lawyer follows to the top and explain why the leaks in the pipeline and points of attrition remain considerable.

The findings from this study indicate the need for multipronged approaches to addressing the intersectional challenges women face in the legal profession. These solutions will require key actors and actions from the government, legal professional organizations, civil society actors, women's groups, and male allies in the profession. The role of philanthropic organizations and governmental funding agencies is vital to pushing Goal #5 forward to provide women equal and complete access to decision-making.

The results of the report indicate the need for further research and data collection on women's status in the legal profession. Additionally, investment in initiatives to enhance women's leadership opportunities is crucial due to the legal sector's use of the law to either perpetuate discriminatory practices or challenge them.



1 | INTRODUCTION



The bar is an essential component of the legal profession. It is critical in the robust democracies of Western cultures and the fragile democracies of the Global South alike. In the Global South, the bar is a powerful tool that makes it possible to create democratic spaces. Lawyers are a prerequisite for the adequate protection of human rights and for instituting the rule of law on the African continent. It is impossible to defend human rights successfully, ensure that victims have access to effective remedies, and hold abusers accountable without an inclusive and functional bar (ICJ, 2015).

Recently, the issue of women's experiences at the bar in Africa has garnered attention, particularly on questions of representation, marginalization, and access to leadership positions. Female representation fits global calls for gender equality, as in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5. Such equality is an essential prerequisite for a world with fairness and equality, which are necessary for fully realizing human potential. Therefore, research is needed to provide a framework of data that identifies the entry, points of attrition, barriers to progress, and promotion facilitators for female lawyers in leadership positions in African countries.

This report analyzes the changing context for women's (under) representation in the Nigerian bar. It further records the emerging quantitative and qualitative data that identify access to and participation in the bar and includes an empirical evaluation of the points of attrition in the pipeline, barriers to retention, facilitators, and progress and trends. Given the requirement to transform African societies and the need for inclusion in the African legal profession, this report is the first to provide a comprehensive overview of women's representation in the Nigerian bar.

As the report highlights, female lawyers in Nigeria are subjected to overwhelming obstacles. As reported in NBA (2019), women continue to face many barriers that thwart their ascension to leadership, particularly sexual harassment and bullying. Abiola (2019) analyzed the prevalence in the Nigerian legal community. This report corroborates the International Bar Association's (IBA, 2019) study, which showed that female lawyers experience a multitude of forms of workplace discrimination.

The Institute for African Women in Law (IAWL) added that:

64.1% of respondents had experienced harassment in the workplace, whilst 21.8% said that they had not, and 14.1% said that they were not sure. Most of the forms of discrimination they had faced included “inappropriate touch,” “sexist language,” “not being recognized to speak,” and being shown “no confidence in their work.” These findings support the plethora of research that states that sexual harassment and discrimination still exist in the workplace (IAWL, 2020, p. 10).

Despite the prevalence of sexual harassment, until 2021, no policy had ever been drafted to prevent, prohibit, or redress it since the commencement of the Nigerian legal community and the NBA. Very little empirical research on sexual harassment in the Nigerian legal industry has been conducted. According to Aina-Pelemo *et al.* (2019), studying 561 Nigerian lawyers (68% female and 3% male), 83.6% of respondents acknowledged that sexual harassment is a barrier to developing the profession. The majority (63.5%) knew of a colleague (a female or male lawyer/legal trainee) who had experienced workplace sexual harassment. Notably, all the respondents who resided in Abuja had been sexually harassed (Aina-Pelemo, *et al.*, 2019).

These challenges affect women's right to safe and respectful working conditions and hamper their mobility and advancement. This particular attrition point illustrates that it is vital to continue investigating and seeking ways to identify and dismantle systems of privilege that may inhibit women at the bar from obtaining leadership positions. IAWL (2020) showed that the many challenges that women face are partially caused by perceptions of law as a masculine occupation. This report, drawing from the Nigerian example, shows that women are commonly referred to as “brothers,” “gentlemen in skirts,” and other masculine terms that tend to insinuate that law is still a male profession, and women are intruders (IAWL, 2020, p. 11).

Although data from the bar associations of other African countries show a steady increase in the number of women in the pipeline, professional and societal expectations and gender norms have varying impacts (Aina-Pelemo, 2021; Chitapi, 2018; Uzebu-Imarhiagbe, 2020). Drawing on the development of women's participation in the Nigerian judiciary, Uzebu-Imarhiagbe (2020) observed that the inclusion of women in the bar was due to the bar being receptive to participation, regardless of gender.

This report obtained, collated, and documented data on the representation of women in leadership positions, barriers and points of attrition, and facilitators. Despite nearly equal numbers of male and female law school graduates in recent years, the leadership disparity in the NBA remains wide (Oyeweso, 2014). Female lawyers are actively contributing to the development of Nigeria by playing vital roles in the legal profession and participating in the formal structures of the economy and decision-making processes. However, their representation in leadership remains low (Oyeweso, 2014).

The history and status of women in the legal profession in Nigeria present a vantage point from which to assess the advancement of women in society. Although the male exclusivity of the profession was broken in 1935 by Stella Jane Thomas (Oyeweso, 2014), few women have ascended to the echelons of the NBA. It was not until 1981 that another woman, Folake Solanke, became the first Nigerian female lawyer to assume the rank of a senior advocate of Nigeria (SAN; Andrew, 2016; IAWL, 2021). However, women still face gender discrimination in their professional pursuits.

These numbers and percentages of discrimination show that it is critical to document the existing quantitative and qualitative data that identify women's representation at the bar with a synthesis of data to assess the points of attrition in the pipeline, barriers to retention, facilitators of promotion, and progress and trends. This report also identifies gaps that may merit further data collection efforts. It is imperative to prioritize eliminating all types of discrimination and ensure equitable access to opportunities for women to effectively participate and advance into leadership roles across all levels of decision-making. This prioritization will help empower female lawyers to contribute towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 and Article 6 of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa.



2

WOMEN IN THE NIGERIAN BAR: A REVIEW



This report engages the literature of scholars who also tried to understand the problems impeding female lawyers from attaining leadership. Scholars agree that lawyers, especially female lawyers, were greatly needed before 1970 (Adewoye, 1977, 1982; Michelson, 2013; Schultz & Shaw, 2003). However, from 1970 onward, a concerted global effort has been made to reinvigorate the bar by feminizing it (Menkel-Meadow, 1995; Michelson, 2013), often driven by the need for more lawyers. According to Michelson (2013), no country's legal profession had attained a feminization level of at least 30% before an overall ratio of more than 2,000 people per lawyer. From these statistics, almost 30% of all nations (55% of the world's populace) have crossed neither threshold (Michelson 2013). Therefore, as of 2013, Michelson concluded that lawyer feminization has barely begun globally (2013, p. 1071). Yet “[e]vidence that significant lawyer feminization generally does not occur in the absence of significant bar expansion would lend empirical support to this structural, demographic explanation” (Michelson, 2013, p. 1074).

Adewoye (1977) argued that before the introduction of the British-style litigation in Nigeria, traditional judicial institutions existed whose main purpose was “to maintain peace and harmony within the community rather than to uphold the rights of the individual” (p. xi). These native institutions had lawyers “without wigs or gowns” or “paid pleaders” (Adewoye, 1977, p. 1, 2) and were predominantly in northern Nigeria at the beginning of the 19th century. This practice demonstrates the idea of representation in the traditional justice system before the advent of colonialism. From 1970 onward, however, professional advocacy was entrenched in the justice system, borrowed heavily from the Europeans (Adewoye, 1982; Sharafi, 2007). The primary agencies were administered by European-type law courts, including the “native” courts. According to Adewoye (1982) and Oko (2009), one significant hurdle during this period was dealing with colonial administrators.

According to Oguamanam and Pue (2006), the judicial system, borrowing heavily from the British model, was first established in the cities before spreading to the other parts of the vast country. For instance, the progressively multicultural nature of Lagos, such as the growth of booming businesses, made British-modeled courts a compelling need because English was the language spoken by most people in Nigeria (Oguamanam & Pue, 2006). Oguamanam and Pue (2006, p. 9) contend that the Supreme Court system was established in Lagos before “its expansion into other urban and commercial centers in the country's Southern Provinces.” They note that the British law only applied to commercial centers, and “barristers were forbidden from practicing in hinterland regions based on the fear that lawyers and the legislation they imported could threaten the peace in regions governed by the indirect rule. British law was 'zoned' to only apply in commercial centers” (p.9).

In many parts of the continent, the legal establishment typically consisted of British administrators ruling over native courts. Surprisingly, Nigerians perceived the “Supreme Court” system, rather than the “native courts,” as more credible because lawyers were permitted to work in it. Native courts were widely disparaged as corrupt and tarnished by their affiliation with traditional rulers, who were progressively perceived as bowing to the demands of the imperial colonial authority. Although the colonial power would favor them, native courts were widely disdained (Amankwah, 1970; Oguamanam & Pue, 2006, p. 10). Little debate exists about what motivated their introduction; they were part of the instruments of “pacification” and colonial administration. However, in developing a new legal culture in Africa, the point of interest in the courts and the law imported by diverse European powers is not their variety but the mentality that sustained them. Essentially, they were in sharp contrast to the African traditional legal philosophy, which emphasizes social equilibrium rather than individual rights.

In colonial times, men dominated the legal profession, but women have gained ground (Henry & Evarista, 2017). Stella Jane Thomas was called to the bar 49 years after the first male lawyer, Christopher Alexander Sapara Williams, began practicing in Lagos Colony (Peters, 2019). By 1956, just 10 of Nigeria's 300 female lawyers could practice (Henry & Evarista, 2017). Folake Solanke was the first woman to be named a SAN in 1981, six years after the award was introduced. Since its inception, the NBA has had only one female president, Priscilla Kuye, in 1992 (Awomolo, 2021). Four female lawyers led several of its 100+ branches nationwide. However, a woman has never been minister of justice/attorney general of the Federation of Nigeria (top law officer), and few have reached the position in their states. Safiya Umar Badamasi is the first Muslim woman from northern Nigeria to become a SAN (Peters, 2019).

Female lawyers have experienced considerable hurdles, which continue today, including glass ceiling, work-life balance, and male-only clubs. Lare (2014) explored the impact of patriarchy on African female lawyers and argued that they encounter obstacles in settings where women are viewed as men's voiceless appendages. As women occupy historically male-only senior management roles, they must balance their private and professional lives to succeed in a male-dominated economic sector (Mathur-Helm, 2005). Women in professional occupations confront common problems (Rhode, 2007; Joan, 2003), such as the gender gap, unsupportive work environment, poor organizational culture, national cultural barriers, inadequate career planning, and balancing career and family. Many of the issues facing Nigerian lawyers arise from socialization. Whereas men are groomed to succeed their fathers, women are considered men's property (Agbalajobi, 2010; Fakeye et al., 2012; Omotola, 2007). Educating female children is considered a waste of resources (Ngwakwe, 2002).

Research is scant on female lawyers in Africa generally. In Nigeria, two studies stand out. The first study by Ozobia and Cruicshank (2006) adopted a biographical narrative approach. By focusing on 14 female lawyers, judges, and legal academics, the study mapped out the professional trajectory of selected women through in-depth interviews. Each narrative looked at women's lives and contributions to the profession. The second study by Balogun (2009) used interviews and focus groups with female lawyers in Lagos, Asaba, Enugu, and Kaduna to understand their experiences, challenges, and successes at the bar, bench, and legal academy. Unfortunately, the challenges both studies identified as barriers to women's retention and promotion remain largely the same today.

Professional women have challenges reaching leadership roles (Aina-Pelemo et al. 2019; Fakeye et al. 2012; Meyerson & Tompkins, 2007; Wilson, 2005). The restrictions hindering them from achieving their full potential reflect social and cultural expectations and stem from the responsibilities into which women are socialized. These responsibilities prejudice women and prevent them from attaining prominent leadership positions (Fenn, 1976; Gerson & Horowitz, 2002; Jones & George, 2003). These biases have infiltrated the legal profession. As Tamayo (2008), Ali (2009), and Epstein (1993) argued, women in the workplace, particularly in law, have been misrepresented and stereotyped as secretaries and homemakers rather than decision-makers.

Female lawyers struggle to advance in the male-dominated field. Only 4.2% of Senior Advocates of Nigeria (SAN) are women (IAWL, 2021). The phrasing and tone of legal texts dictating qualifications for leadership roles imply or expect only men to be candidates. As Dawuni and Kang (2015, p. 55) noted, Nigerian law states that “a person shall not be entitled to assume the office of Chief Justice unless he has been qualified to practice law in Nigeria for at least 15 years.” Section 5(2) of the Legal Practitioners Act states that a person cannot be a SAN unless 'he' has been qualified to practice law in Nigeria for at least ten years and attained distinction in the legal profession. The masculine pronoun in both is telling.

Patriarchal norms, practices, and conventions have reinforced discrimination in legal leadership positions. Female judges, magistrates, and customary court heads may be addressed as “his lordship,” “his worship,” or “his honor,” or as scholarly brothers. Other examples of discrimination include the clichés “no ladies at the bar,” “gentleman in skirts,” and “esquire.” As Connell (2005) argued, such phrasing asserts superiority and aggravates women's disadvantages, including gender and class (King, 1988). Demeaning female lawyers with male-specific qualities suggests that a woman cannot be a lawyer until she becomes a man (Ugwu, 2020).



3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



Despite efforts to reduce inequalities and discrimination by creating a diverse pool of leaders, there are still challenges regarding women's ascendancy. Women face hurdles that affect their entry, promotion, attrition, barriers, and contributions. In addition, some challenges impact their future aspirations of ascent to leadership—in law firms and the bar association. To unravel, evaluate, and understand these challenges, this project located itself within the framework of intersectionality theory.

Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Often, that framework erases what happens to people subject to all of these things (Crenshaw, 2017, p. 1).

Initially invented “to understand the complexities of oppression from a race and gender perspective in legal spaces” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242), intersectionality has crossed borders and has especially been adopted in Africa “and applied across various fields, making it a conceptual and methodological tool that is friendly to interdisciplinary research” (Mohammed, 2022, p. 6). According to May (2015), intersectionality:

[a]sks that we imagine future possibilities and reconsider omissions, past and present, from a “matrix” mindset: it also helps to expose historical silences and to understand oppression and privilege as lived experiences and processes situated in and shaped by material, political, and social conditions (May 2015, p. 6).

Within this framework of privileges and silences shaped by “material, political and social conditions” (May 2015, p. 6), women at the Nigerian bar have found themselves sidelined from leadership. Situating this report within the intersectionality framework allows an in-depth study from historical and institutional perspectives by examining women's entry into the bar, how (or whether) they are promoted, and what barriers they face. Mohammed (2022, p. 6) argued that while repatriating intersectionality discourse to Africa, “African feminists like Sylvia Tamale have drawn attention to the importance of intersectionality in African feminist scholarship and praxis.” Mohammed (2022, p. 7) added that intersectionality is a crucial tool for understanding the erasure of specific categories of oppression in an African context: “people with disabilities, Muslims, people from historically marginalized ethnic groups, sexual minorities, working-class people, among others.”

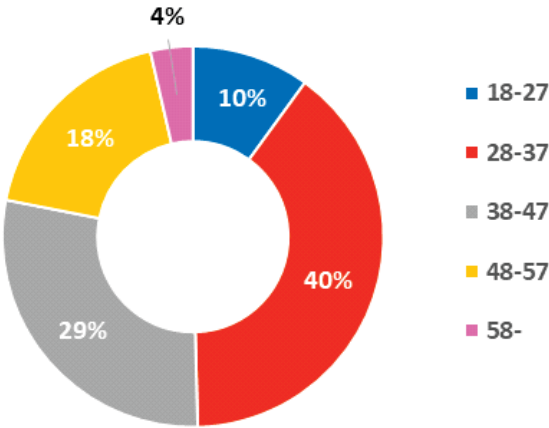
The importance of this expansive framing of intersectionality lies in addressing female lawyers in the Nigerian bar who have disabilities, are discriminated against because of their ethnic or religious backgrounds, and may identify with a minority religion. It is essential to see how these interlocking and layered matrices of power impact women.

Nigeria is an ethnically diverse country, despite not being racially segregated. Intersectionality theory is essential to diagnosing the barriers to women's legal participation and leadership. It also uncovers the many points and causes of attrition in educational, professional, and leadership pipelines, considering the varied impacts on women who face discrimination based on their sex, ethnicity, age, religion, etc. The paucity of literature on female lawyers in Nigeria is an important research gap, making it essential to study intragroup inequalities using an intersectional lens. Ibrahim (2016) discovered that the pluralist legal system and nuanced interplay between multiple sources of law catapulted women to the top of Nigerian judiciaries yet held them back in others. For example, while the Constitution is the most important source of law, which has provided many opportunities for female judges, Sharia courts have still not appointed female judges or registrars (Ibrahim, 2016, p. 68).

This report focuses on how intersectionality affects women in law and leadership. Some identity categories examined include age, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic factors and practice areas, disabilities, historically marginalized ethnic groups, sexual identity, and motherhood.

Age: Age had a double outcome (Figure 1). Younger people are more likely to face sexual harassment, gender-based intimidation at work, and the lack of strong support systems and networks. On the other hand, some older women mentioned being neglected and considered less useful to the profession or practice. Most respondents were aged 28–37, a range where most women typically begin a family and take on childbearing responsibilities.

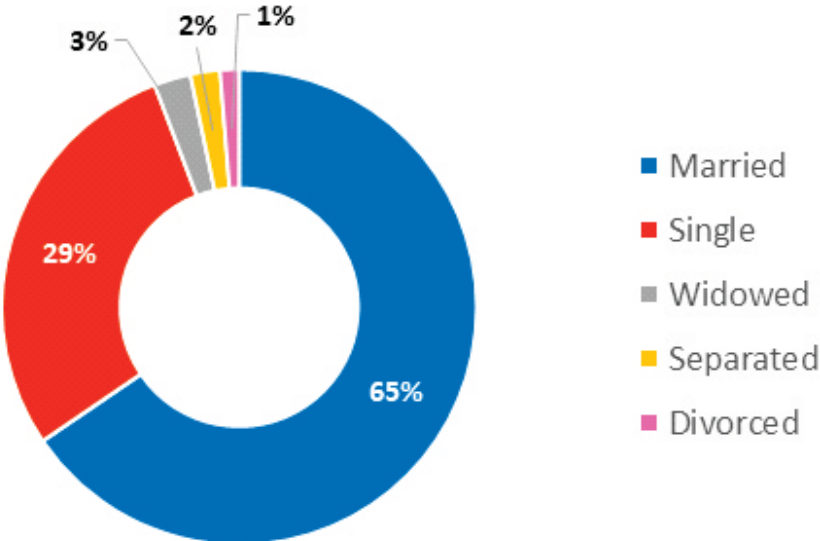
Figure 1 | Age of the respondents



Source: IAWL survey, 2022

Marital status: Marriage plays an important cultural role (Figure 2). Women who are married are assumed to have a better status. Most young female lawyers are liable to face the intersectional challenge of being unmarried and susceptible to sexual harassment. However, those who are married are not necessarily shielded. They must also deal with the challenges and intersection of balancing work and life, childcare, and a demanding professional workload.

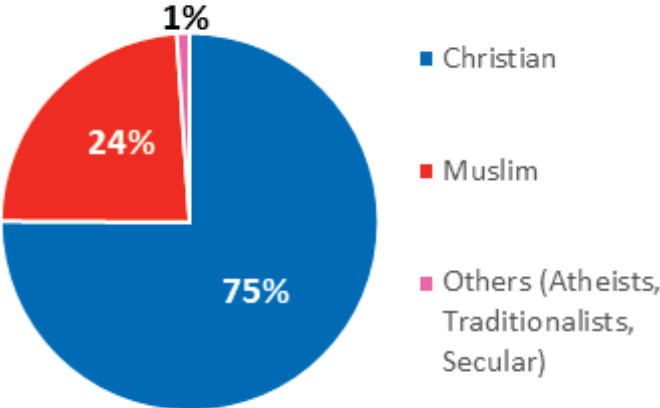
Figure 2 | Marital status of the respondents



Source: IAWL survey, 2022

Religion: Nigeria is a religiously heterogeneous country. As of 2018, the religious distribution was Islam, 53.5%; Roman Catholicism, 10.6%; other Christian sects, 35.6%; and other, 0.6% (Sasu, 2022). However, Christianity appears to be the dominant religion; 75.1% of this study's respondents indicated they were Christian (Figure 3). The impact of religion on women's lives as lawyers had no strong explanatory factor.

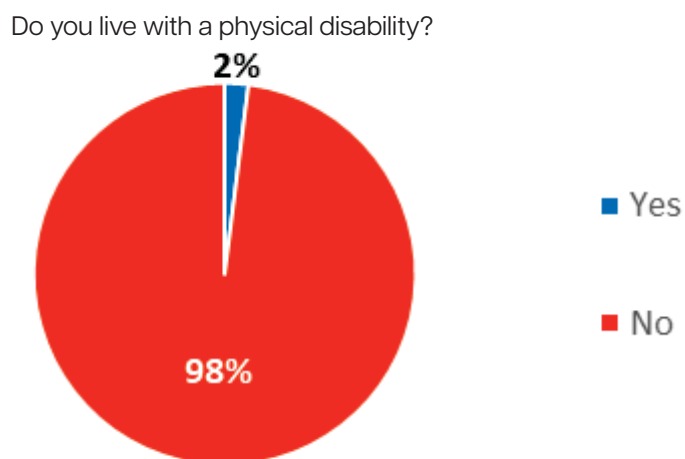
Figure 3 | Religious affiliation of the respondents



Source: IAWL survey, 2022

Ethnicity and historically marginalized groups: Nigeria is an ethnically heterogeneous country with an estimated 250 ethnic groups. In 2018, these groups were estimated as Hausa, 30%; Yoruba, 15.5%; Igbo (Ibo), 15.2%; Fulani, 6%; Tiv, 2.4%; Kanuri/Berberi, 2.4%; Ibibio, 1.8%; Ijaw/Izon, 1.8%; and other, 24.9% (CIA Factbook, n.d.). The Hausa are the most dominant group, located in the northern region—which is also the least developed due to the mix of the impact of colonization and religious policies that prevented girls from attending school. Consequently, women from northern regions have been underrepresented in the legal profession and leadership positions, with some notable exceptions. For example, Hauwa Ibrahim, a human rights lawyer awarded the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for advocating for women's rights, and Aloma Mariam Mukhtar, who made history in 2012 as the first female Chief Justice. This study did not isolate the impact of ethnicity on the professional trajectory of women in law. Still, others have documented the challenges the different ethnic groups have faced in accessing higher education (Daminabo, 2019). Thus, for ethnic minority women, ethnic stereotypes combine with historical marginalization and other factors to produce many hurdles.

Figure 4 | Physical disability



Disability: Figure 4 shows that only 2% of survey respondents identified as living with a disability. However, none of the interviewees or focus group respondents discussed how living with a disability affects them as lawyers. Women and girls living with a disability make up nearly one-fifth of the world's female population (WHO & World Bank, 2011). This group faces significant barriers when accessing the courts as lawyers or litigants because of discrimination that targets their gender and disability (CRPD, 2016). For female lawyers, living with a disability increases the challenges of establishing oneself in the field. This report draws from the general trends to show that people with disabilities (male and female) are stigmatized and discriminated against through lowered employment rates and social isolation in their communities. This observation implies that women living with disabilities are more likely to find themselves unemployed, denied partnership status in law firms, and paid less even when they are employed.

Sexual minorities: Sexual orientation remains a contentious issue. The traditional binary of male and female are the only categories considered legal. Sexual minorities who identify with the LGBTQI community face harsh social and religious consequences (Obani, 2021). This research found no respondent openly identifying as belonging to that community; such identification could be disastrous, including for queer people. As Shelby et al. (2018) stated, stigma and discrimination against those who do not fall under the accepted heteronormative sexual orientation are perceived, experienced, and reported differently by the victims versus the community that perpetrates this discrimination. Davila et al. (2019), Frederick and Shifrer (2019), and Naples et al. (2018) argued that sexual minority status is a marker of discrimination. Therefore, as with other identities, such as ethnicity and religious affiliation, it constitutes a broad conception that is necessarily affected by and impacts culture and attitudes.

Motherhood/caregiving: Across Nigeria, as in other parts of Africa, motherhood is not limited to natural birth. The extended family system means that women can be thrust into mothering roles for children who are not their biological offspring. For women who are married and have children, the age of the children can determine the burden of care needed and how that affects their work. Some women can afford to pay for babysitters, but the bulk of managing the children and family's needs still falls on them. Women in polygamous families or with large extended families also have to spread their time and resources to support other family members. Older female lawyers, who may not be taking care of young children, have to provide caregiving as grandmothers or care for more aging parents. Thus, irrespective of where in the motherhood/caregiving spectrum a female lawyer finds herself, the intersection of these identities with others can have multiple outcomes for her professional development.



4 | METHODOLOGY



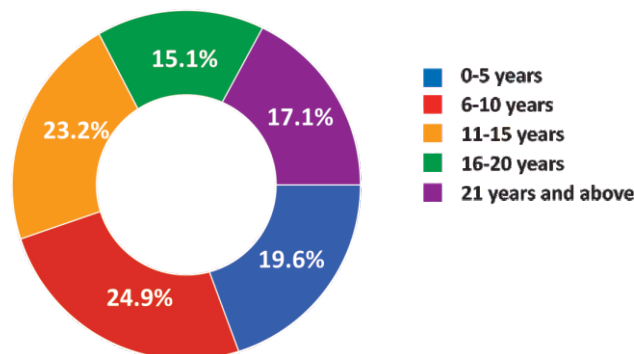
This study used a mixed methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative tools to collect and analyze the data. The triangulation of data sources helped to ascertain the symbolic and substantive representation of women in leadership positions in the Nigerian bar. It revealed the nuanced experiences of diverse female lawyers in different stages of their careers. Participants and respondents for the qualitative study participated in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Respondents were drawn from female lawyers in one state per geopolitical zone to reflect the diversity in the country's sociocultural composition and provide the needed representation in the sample for drawing generalizations.

The purposive sampling method was used to determine the six states chosen. Oyo State was selected from the South-West, Enugu State from the South-East, and Edo State from the South. Sokoto State was selected from the North-West, Kwara State from the North-Central, and Borno State from the North-East. Respondents were drawn from the focus areas in each state, bearing in mind diversity in age, experience, and ethnicity. Thirty-two lawyers participated in the focus group discussions across all the regions. To gain a deeper insight into the findings from the focus groups, 35 in-depth interviews were conducted with women lawyers across different regions in the country, in different sectors of the legal profession, and at different stages in their careers.

For the quantitative data, an online survey was developed and self-administered for female participants nationwide for the quantitative data. The survey link was widely shared on different online platforms, including the NBA Women's Forum and the Federation of International Women Lawyers. It received 449 responses, with a decent range in years since the respondents were called to the bar (Figure 5), providing a range of experiences.

Figure 5 | Number of years post-call

1. How many years post-call do you have?
449 responses



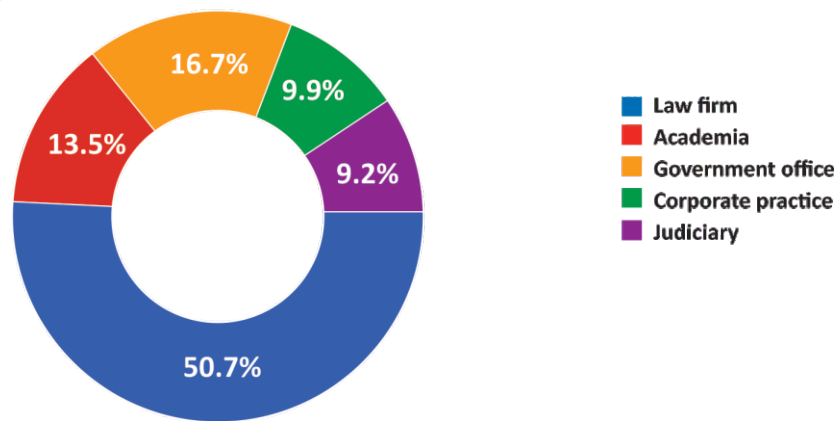
Source: IAWL survey, 2022

Survey respondents also represented different work areas (Figure 6), with a majority in law firms. The analyses, therefore, indicate that irrespective of the area of practice, women's challenges were similar.

Figure 6 | Legal sector

7. Which area of legal practice do you work in?

444 responses



Source: IAWL survey, 2022

Secondary data were obtained from a literature review and official websites of relevant offices, newspapers, and archival materials. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics, and tables, graphs, and thematic presentations illustrated major findings.

Most empirical data were collected from January 15, 2022, to April 27, 2022. Individual interviews were used to elicit personal experiences. Group interviews and FGDs illustrated the dynamics around the issues relating to ascendancy to leadership positions, the potential existence of unspoken bias and unequal treatment, work-family balance, and stereotypes of gender roles. An interview guide, comprising different questions for diverse participant subgroups, was developed as the data collection tool. The same topics were used for individual interviews and FGDs for data triangulation.

Respondents were recruited by sending letters to the heads of the respective institutions, who sometimes recommended individuals to be approached for interviews. The study observed the highest ethical standards by seeking informed consent before conducting or recording interviews and assuring participants of the needed anonymity and restriction of utilizing the information obtained for research purposes only.

The research had limitations concerning the sample size for the interviews and focus groups. These limitations arose from the challenges associated with time constraints on the part of lawyers to give up billing hours for an interview. There were also challenges in reaching people across all 36 regions in the country. To account for the difficulty arising from the geographical proximity, the research team used technology by conducting some interviews over Zoom, and in a few cases over WhatsApp. This innovation also led to another challenge, the cost of buying data and the instability of internet and electricity connectivity in the country. These limitations affected the number of interviews but not necessarily the quality of the interviews. This report provides an exhaustive triangulation of data sources collected to mitigate the risk of using a small sample size to represent the larger ecosystem of women lawyers in Nigeria. Drawing directly from the transcripts of the women interviewed further strengthens the narrative and reduces researcher reflexivity.

4.1. Data analysis of female lawyers and leadership in Nigeria

This subsection presents the data from the National Bar Association (NBA) branches of the six states representing the six geopolitical zones and the national level. Table 1 presents the number of female and male lawyers registered in the six focus states and the number of female leaders.

Table 1 | Sex-disaggregated data on the number of lawyers at the bar and leadership positions

State	Women (%)	Men (%)	Current leadership
Edo	Unavailable	Unavailable	There is only one woman per executive committee of 10, except in Auchi (two). Only one woman has ever been chair (at the Benin Branch).
Enugu	678	1643	Only 11 women have held an executive position in the past five years (three sets of executive committees, 11 members each).
Oyo ¹	316	952	From the cities of Ibadan, Saki, Oyo, and Ogbomoso, 30 men have served in leadership versus 11 women. No woman has been chair or secretary in any NBA branch in Oyo State, but they have been vice chair, treasurer, and welfare secretary.
FCT	Unavailable	Unavailable	The national NBA management team has seven men and three women.
Kwara	230	920	Treasurer and welfare officers are reserved for women. Neither branch has ever had a female chair or secretary.
Borno	Unavailable	Unavailable	There are 13 female executive committee members, including treasurer (5), welfare secretary (2), financial secretary (3), chair (1), and vice chair (1).
Sokoto	65	150	Ten men, four women

Source: Data collected from the individual branches, executive committee members of the respective national and branch bar association bodies, e-sources, 2022.

¹ (Ibadan branch only).

Table 1 shows that the NBA is male-dominated in both membership and leadership. Generally, female representation within the study time frame was considerably lower at the national level and in all six states studied. In addition, women are vastly underrepresented in the rank of SANs, with a dismal ratio of 26:1. This also applies to leadership positions in the executive committee of NBA branches, particularly chair and secretaries. Borno State is the exception, as it has a sitting female chair of a branch, the first in the state. In addition, a pioneering female acting chair in Sokoto became the chair after the previous chair became a judge. At the national level, the only female chair was Kuye. The general secretary, Joyce Oduah, is the first woman to occupy that seat in nearly four decades. The study aimed to go beyond the paltry symbolic representation of women in leadership and evaluate female lawyers' perceptions of the legal profession.





FINDINGS



5

POINTS OF ATTRITION AND BARRIERS



This section presents specific data on the points of attrition and causes of leaks within the legal profession's pipeline. Women are forced by these attrition points to exit at different stages.

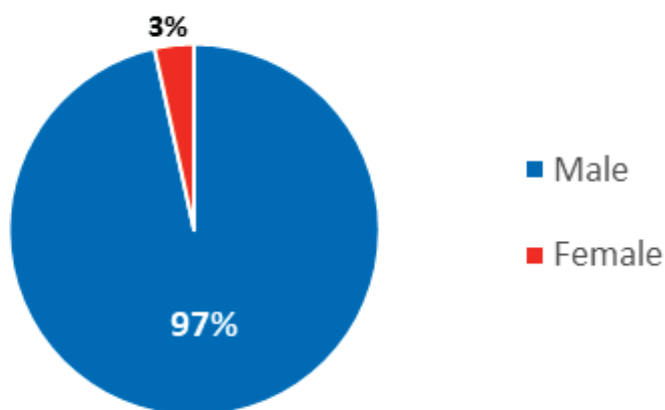
5.1. Women's ascension to leadership positions in the legal profession

Female lawyers' ascension to leadership in the Nigerian bar has been almost negligible. Women have successfully broken the glass ceilings of certain positions. However, biases, stereotypes, and subtle discrimination have often deterred others from reaching positions they are qualified to occupy. Some women could overcome these barriers to achieve their goals, but others have not been as fortunate and stagnate or exit the profession. Several factors contribute to this, and the attrition points differ in each sector.

5.2. Women's representation in the NBA leadership

Only 1 (3%) female lawyer has ever been president of the NBA in 1960–2022, compared to 28 men (Figure 7). This statistic is despite the profession undergoing significant change in recent years, with rapidly rising numbers of women among its membership.

Figure 7: | NBA presidents (1960–2022)



Source: Nigerian Bar Association

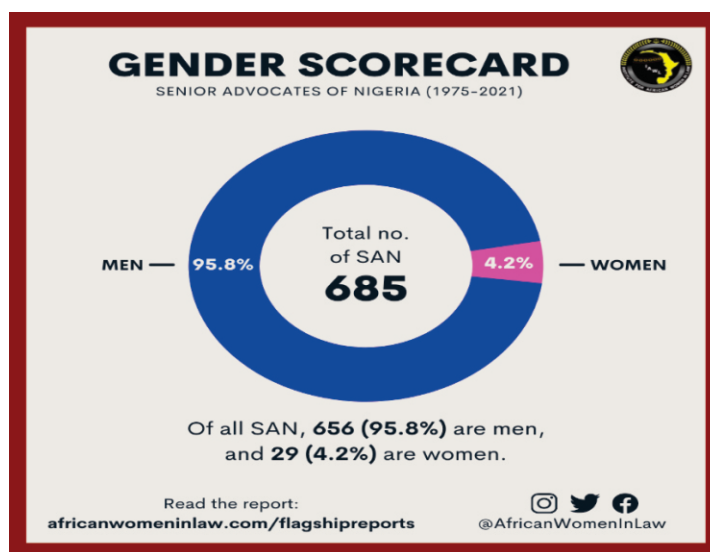
Women are visibly underrepresented in leadership positions. The leadership composition of the NBA indicates a scarcity of women in critical positions. One major reason for this is the entrenched intersecting hindrances rooted within patriarchy and sexism. In the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), a massive organization comprising nearly 200,000 learned individuals across 125 branches, only 26 women have held leadership positions since its establishment. More specifically, only one woman has been president, and two female lawyers have been general secretaries: Hairat Aderinsola Balogun (1981–1983) and Oduah (2022– date).

Few women have ascended the ranks in the NBA's leadership. Generally, at the national level and in all the six states studied, female representation in the bar's leadership within the study time frame was significantly lower. This underrepresentation of women also applies to the executive committee (EXCO) of NBA branches, particularly chairpersons and secretaries. This lack of women is due to institutionalized patriarchal norms and perceptions of leadership ability that privilege men, the historical underrepresentation of women at the bar (which is changing), and the general perception that women do not support women in elections. These explanations are investigated in detail later.

5.3. Women and becoming SAN

Another important leadership position in Nigeria is SAN, a prestigious title many lawyers aspire to. However, for women, the journey to the title is difficult and punctuated by discrimination and exclusion. IAWL (2022) describes it as “sticky floors and concrete ceilings”. Figure 8 shows that from 1975 to 2021, only 29 of 685 SANs were women.

Figure 8 | Senior advocates of Nigeria



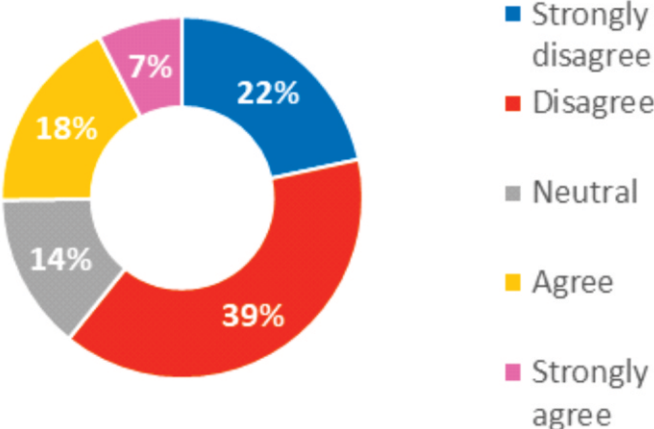
Source: <https://www.africanwomeninlaw.com/genderscorecard>

The challenges women encounter in becoming a SAN are not very different from the general patterns of challenges they face as lawyers. In an earlier study, IAWL identified several factors for this underrepresentation. These included the procedural requirements, which were skewed toward those actively engaged in litigation, lack of gender diversity in the selection body, institutional and workplace challenges that limited women's ability to meet the caseload requirements, sociocultural factors, and personal choice not to apply (IAWL, 2022).

5.4. Women and working conditions in law firms

According to the IBA (2017) report on the pipeline, women make up most of the law students enrolled at the university. A considerable percentage are lawyers in law firms—even in the traditionally male reserve of the commercial law firm. However, their working conditions are no better, and they continue to experience barriers. One critical question is whether women get what they deserve: an equal share of work, equal treatment, and equal remuneration. Studies have shown that female lawyers have faced overwhelming obstacles during their careers. As reported in Nigerian Bar Association (NBA, 2019), women continue to face many barriers that make their working conditions and ascension to leadership positions difficult. Among these are sexual harassment and bullying (Abiola, 2019; IAWL, 2020; IBA, 2019). These difficulties are intersectional. Several women in law firms have experienced and continue to experience sexual harassment, alongside pay disparity and problems with work–life–family balance. These intersectional hindrances worsen women's working conditions, leaving them less content. This may influence the choices some women make to leave the profession.

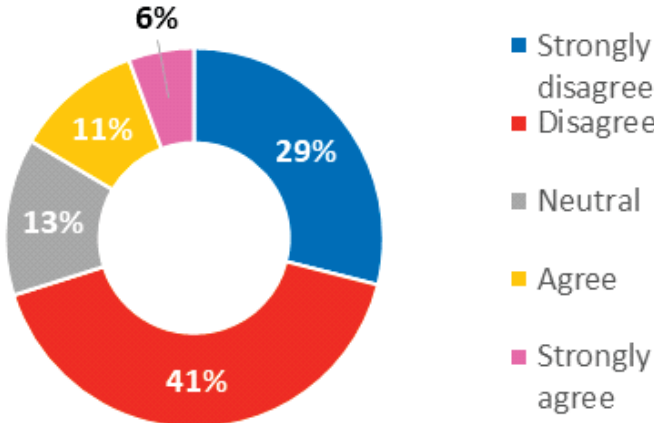
Figure 9 | Female lawyers have equal opportunities for employment and advancement as men



Source: IAWL survey, 2022

Sixty-one percent of respondents disagreed that female lawyers have equal opportunities. This strongly implies that, on average, women do not have the same trajectory as men. This observation corroborates the IBA (2019) report that, despite the perception of the gender gap occurring mostly in the early years (before partnership), it continues to widen after that. This contributes to disproportionately high rates of attrition among senior female lawyers (Quartey, Akuffo-Kwapong, & Etone, 2021).

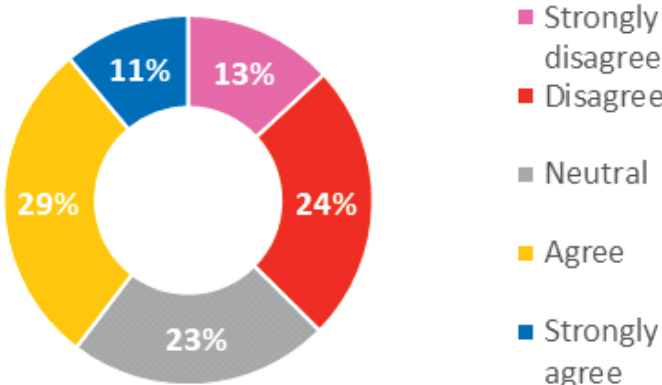
Figure 10 | Female lawyers have more favorable terms and conditions of employment than men



Source: IAWL survey, 2022

Figure 10 shows that 70% of the respondents did not agree that female lawyers have more favorable terms and conditions of employment. This starkly exposes the myth perpetuated by society that gender-related discrimination in the workplace has decreased.

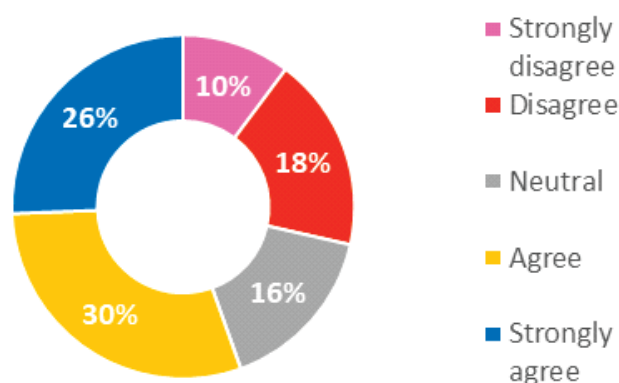
Figure 11 | Income parity between male and female lawyers



Source: IAWL survey, 2022

Figure 11 indicates no income parity in law firms. This finding corroborates Ibekwe (2020, p. 36), who argued that pay disparity is brought about by “the paucity of equal pay legislation in Nigeria.” However, the results reveal no consensus: 37% of respondents disagreed, 40% agreed, and 23% were neutral. Nigerian law states that no one should be discriminated against because of gender, race, or religion. The structure of law firms makes it impossible to assess how much lawyers earn due to the hourly rates and workload. However, some female lawyers hinted that men might make more money because they are given more extensive briefs, which pay better.

Figure 12 | Female lawyers must work harder than men to achieve the same results



Source: IAWL survey, 2022

Figure 12 shows that a little over half of respondents agreed that female lawyers must work harder than men to achieve the same results: 56% agreed, and 28% disagreed. Those who agreed argued that it is not because women lack the capacity or intellectual ability. Instead, it is due to exogenous factors that require most female lawyers to balance their professional duties with competing but equally important domestic and personal tasks. To perform their tasks well, women must invest more energy and time to achieve the same results due to the intersecting and competing demands on their time, such as motherhood or other caregiving. Studies have shown that these tasks may negatively impact career progression (IBA, 2017; Imosemi, 2021). These hindrances become attrition points and usually cause leaks in the pipeline.

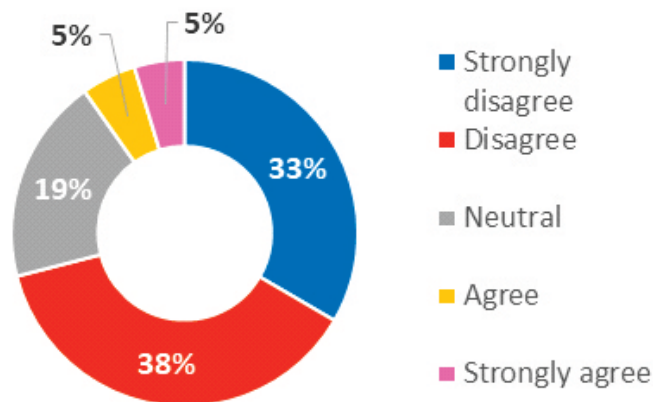
5.5. Women in leadership positions in law firms

The leadership roles within law firms vary but often take the form of managing or senior partner. Firms have different requirements to become a partner, including the amount of money or clients a lawyer brings into the firm, their ability to win cases, and the general match with the firm's culture. Performance is often tied to the hours worked on billing clients. Building a network of clients also requires being available to meet with potential clients during off hours and working in the office for long hours. These requirements are often difficult for women because of the challenge of working outside the office; female lawyers are doubly exposed to sexual harassment by clients or their co-lawyers (Chitapi, 2018). For women with childcare or caregiving roles, long hours in the office can be a major block to achieving a work–life balance. These intersectional challenges often converge to slow women's mobility to partnership in the law firm. From the survey results, progress to leadership positions has the second highest level of discrimination, with 66.40% of respondents supporting this. Ellis and Buckett (2017) argue that female lawyers of all ages experience gender stereotypes, “bearing in mind that many societies still hold very conservative views of the role of women in society” (Ellis & Buckett, 2017, p. 33).

Numerous firm cultures exhibited stereotypically masculine traits specifically associated with men in dominant senior roles. As a result, female lawyers are discriminated against due to sociocultural gender stereotypes that view women as incapable of or not fit to serve in leadership roles. From the FGDs, respondents agreed that female lawyers are discriminated against for leadership despite having all the qualifications. In 2021, IAWL introduced a gender scorecard (IAWL, 2021), which analyzed data from nine top law firms across selected African countries and found that almost all the managing partners were male. Because of the many intersecting vectors of oppression identified in this report, female lawyers generally do not establish their law firms. Men often establish law firms and inevitably occupy the firms' leadership.

Unfortunately, when female lawyers are employed, they are sometimes only offered jobs that do not prepare them for leadership, including, as recounted by a Sokoto-based lawyer, “...*brief taking in the office, note taking during appearance in courts, seeking for adjournments, moving of motions, or adoption of address sometimes, research, counseling and handling of women and children matters.*” These responses indicate the lack of leadership training from the outset of their careers, with little to no encouragement to participate in professional activities, conferences, and meetings and establishing and running their law firms.

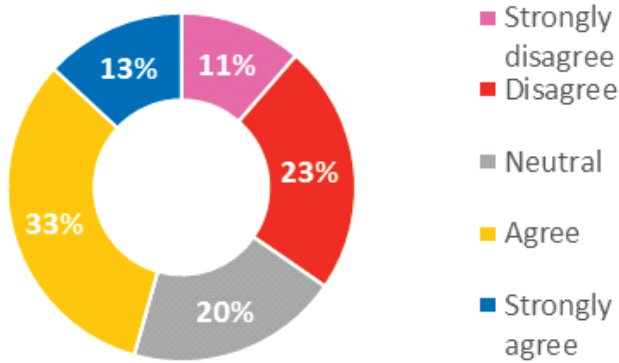
Figure 13 | Female lawyers attain partnership status faster than male lawyers in law firms



Source: IAWL survey, 2022

When asked whether female lawyers attain partnership status faster in law firms, 71% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 13). Data from the IAWL gender scorecard shows that as of 2021, only one law firm (ACAS-Dentons) had 50% of women represented as managing partners (two men and two women). None of the five top law firms (Afebabalola & Co, Aluko & Oyeboode, AELEX LAW, Banwo & Ighodalo, and Udo Udoma & Belo-Osagie) had a female managing partner at the time of this research. Although women are increasingly becoming partners, the pathway to managing partners is still slow, much like in other jurisdictions, such as Uganda (IBA, 2022, p. 27).

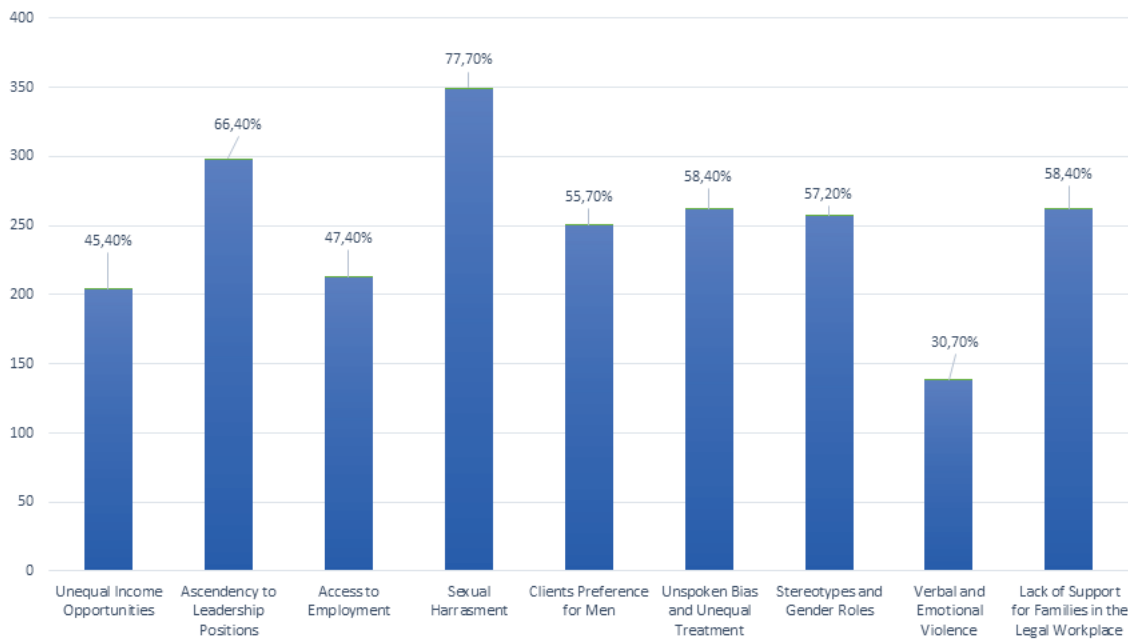
Figure 14 | Does leadership in the workplace reflect gender diversity and inclusion?



Source: IAWL survey, 2022

Lastly, the survey asked if leadership in the legal profession reflected gender diversity (Figure 14). Although 46% agreed, 34% disagreed, and 20% were neutral. These results show that respondents did not believe women attain partnerships faster than men. Nonetheless, they believed that women are equitably represented in leadership positions. This finding does not accord with women's leadership within the NBA. Figure 15 provides the results on the areas where women experience discrimination, drawn from the survey of 449 respondents.

Figure 15 | Areas Nigerian female lawyers experience discrimination



Source: IAWL survey, 2022

5.6. Sexual harassment and intimidation in the workplace

In Figure 15, 77.70% of respondents view sexual harassment as an area where female lawyers experience discrimination—the highest score among the nine challenges listed in the survey, showing the prevalence and magnitude of the problem. Sexual harassment is endemic in Nigeria because there is no well-defined legislation detailing “what constitutes sexual harassment, as well as no provisions to punish offenders of the act” (Aina-Pelemo et al., 2019, p. 122).

Some respondents shared their experiences of suffering in silence with sexual harassment, gender-based abuse, and intimidation to get or keep their jobs. For example, a respondent narrated how

“several years ago, a prominent person promised to help me become a magistrate, but I turned it down because the deal was to be his girlfriend.”

In Aina-Pelemo et al. (2019), about 77% of respondents identified sexual harassment as existing in the workplace, yet only 62% reported having experienced or seen someone experience it. The difference could be that some may have heard about it from friends and colleagues but not experienced it firsthand. Nevertheless, 67% is very high for the legal profession as most people know their rights and punishment for lawbreaking. Regrettably, although the incidents of sexual harassment are very high, only 34% reported having a workplace sexual harassment policy. Recently, in collaboration with the NBA Women Forum (NBAWF), the NBA has launched a sexual harassment policy to create a safe workplace for women.

5.7. Unspoken gender bias and stereotypes

Data in Figure 15 shows that 58.40% of respondents agree that unspoken gender bias and stereotypes are a major challenge and barrier to advancing in their careers. These are born of the intersection of cultural, historical, social, and religious beliefs about women's ability to be effective workers and leaders. These biases stretch across a female lawyer's career, from entry to exit. They affect whether she will be hired, what types of cases she will be given, and if and when she will be promoted to partner or managing partner. Women experience both overt and covert unjust and biased treatment. These come in different forms—from employers, colleagues, clients, institutional biases, and societal stereotypes.

A respondent narrated her experience:

It is believed that a female lawyer cannot and should not head this office. I had so much opposition that the post was vacant for some months. I will give you an example of the bias I faced recently. There is a male lawyer who has always been allowed informally to do his personal business, he just comes and writes his name and then leaves. So one day, my secretary was going to be absent, and his name was put as an alternative. So I told him to come and record the files, and he blatantly told me “No,” he will not do [it]. But he answers to the males. There is also hand twisting because I am a female.

The discrimination based on gender stereotypes is most evident at the bar. Several respondents recounted experiences with client preference for men. For instance, one commented that:

[Clients] believe more in men handling their cases than ladies. It’s mainly when it comes to divorce cases, perhaps for keeping secrets, that they tend toward the female folks. Moreover, even when clients engage the services of female lawyers, they offer a low[er] payment than the male counterpart.

5.8. Caregiving and the burden of childcare

The respondents identified childbearing as a major barrier. Most times, women face difficulties during or after childbearing. Maher and Saugeres (2007) argued that the burden of childcare and motherhood curtails women’s advancement. Their findings imply that female lawyers who aspire to be leaders must recall the prejudices accompanying the idea of having and caring for children. Respondents argued that employers, partners, and associates in law firms are unwilling to employ or partner with women who are having children.

A respondent commented:

Nursing babies and caring for children is time-consuming and draining. A lawyer’s job is time-consuming and needs lots of concentration; the hours spent on research, writing and preparing for cases is much. Caring for children is a full-time job on its own in which one hardly has breaks. It almost surpasses the job of being a lawyer. Combining both is more or less impossible. At this stage in a female lawyer’s life, her career is more or less stagnated, some even exit and look for some other jobs or take to businesses for which timing is more flexible and can accommodate the breaks to attend to their children or nurture their family.

A private practitioner corroborated the sentiment:

The truth remains that most of the factors that make women stagnate in the profession have to do with the fact that those institutions have no policies of women becoming leaders, and it also boils down to this caregiving thing. Women must give birth and give care to their babies. In the process, before the[y] know it, time has passed, and a lot of people have gone ahead of them. At the end of the day, if you are not very proactive as a female lawyer, you realize that time has passed and even the years have passed. So, for me, I will suggest that a female lawyer who is working in any institution, that female lawyer must have a focus so that even when you are taking care of your babies, you come back.

Drawing on research conducted in Ghana, Darkwah et al. (2018) observed that, in the African context, although the burden of childcare is on the secondary caregivers, the mother, whether formally working or not, is always emotionally present and exercises a great deal of parental control over the services provided by that caregiver. Therefore, the mother works as a caregiver whether she is present with the child or not. This dynamic is emotionally and physically draining and often prevents female lawyers from being productive and advancing.

A respondent shared:

“

...those of us who have been at the bar for many years know what we could have done better. So those female lawyers who are coming up should plan their lives very well, especially the childbearing years. You must plan and target particular years to finish giving birth and raising your children and then concentrate on your practice.

”

The demands of childcare and motherhood curtail women's advancement. However, as respondents suggest, one can have children and still rise in the bar and law firms with proper planning.

5.9. Family demands and lack of support for families in the legal workplace

Striking a balance between family demands and work is a huge barrier for women who aspire to leadership.

For example, a lawyer in private practice noted:

“One of the barriers we face as women in practice is that so many law firms in my jurisdiction have the requirement of long working hours. As a married female lawyer, I have worked in a law firm where the closing time is as late as 9 pm. I worked on Saturdays and Sundays but with less working hours. Although the pay was very good, I had no option but to leave because my husband was no longer comfortable with the long hours. Also, in my jurisdiction, briefing a female lawyer in a land case and chieftaincy dispute is one out of a hundred. These are just a few of the barriers facing female lawyers in my jurisdiction.”

From this respondent's assertion, women have had to combine the demands of family and household chores with their work. These include pregnancy, nursing babies, childrearing, dealing with difficult spouses and families, and community and social engagements. Although many women successfully balanced these competing demands, these can slow, stagnate, or force women to quit (Levinson & Young, 2010). This has significantly challenged career advancement and leadership aspirations in all sectors, although it is most apparent and challenging for those at the bar.

The long working hours at law firms, frequent travel outside the jurisdiction, and lack of financial support during maternity make balancing work and family demands difficult. It is especially true for those in the bar, who may be required to close very late and work weekends, often causing friction at home. One respondent saw “...no option but to leave because my husband was no longer comfortable with the long hours.” Another commented that:

“some law firms refuse to retain female lawyers once she gives birth. As a result, she's back to hunting for a job after weaning the baby, and her chances of securing a job [are] slim.”

A respondent highlighted the impact of marital status:

I also think that marriage is another barrier. A while back, I had an experience where a lawyer informed me that he didn't hire married women because they always liked to excuse themselves as they had a lot of social responsibilities.

These responses indicate persistent gender-role stereotypes that cloud the judgment of male employers. Nigerian female lawyers face discrimination due to gender stereotypes (Figure 15). Instead of finding ways to change the systems and accommodate female lawyers, some employers close the door to women at the hiring stage or after they go on maternity leave.

5.10. Limited capacity and self-imposed barriers

Taking a reflexive position in addressing the question of why there are fewer women in leadership, some respondents indicated that women have to take the initiative to develop their skills and capabilities. The patriarchal systems of socialization have made most women accept that they cannot lead. For others, the toxicity in the system of men vying for leadership positions is aversive. Most respondents do not support offering a role simply because someone is a woman and not because of her qualifications.

On ensuring that only qualified women earn a leadership position, a respondent advised that women should be their biggest advocates. This assertion agrees with a commonly held belief that some barriers to leadership positions come from women themselves. A blog (Empower Women, 2016, p. 1) postulated that:

[W]omen often hold themselves back from advancement with self-imposed barriers and prevent themselves from achieving what they call impossible tasks. Women sometimes are afraid to tap into what society has named a men's world to an extent the few bold and courageous ones who have broken those intrinsic barriers would still suffer a lack of support from other women who are still in bondage of such malicious beliefs. Women, because of societal or religious hierarchy, which has always favored men to be the heads of families and because of such, women have been tamed second-class citizens.

This lack of support for women by their fellow women plays into the trappings of the patriarchal norms that have defined spaces and roles in society. Dismantling these norms and their underlying narratives will save women and allies from these self-imposed hindrances.

5.11. Lack of formal mentoring opportunities

Having more women in decision-making roles at the bar or in law firms is critical for the well-being of all women in the profession. Given the number of women graduating from law schools and entering the workforce, many should be advancing to senior positions in firms and the NBA. However, the data show a leaky pipeline (a big gap between those called to the bar and those in leadership; Williams, Dempsey, & Slaughter, 2014).

For the women who make it in the profession, mentoring programs can play an important part in developing their careers. With the right support at pivotal points, women can close knowledge gaps, broaden their perspectives, navigate the patriarchal politics at the bar, and build social capital. Mentoring is essential to help women battle traditional stereotypes and prove that competency has nothing to do with gender (AAUW, 2016; Numly, 2019).

Respondents identified a lack of mentorship as a significant challenge for women. This finding was consistent with findings from other jurisdictions (Wallace, 2001). Very few formal mentoring networks for female lawyers exist, with several respondents recognizing the recently revitalized NBAWF platform, a few acknowledging FIDA but pointing out its restrictive nature, and one identifying a paid mentorship run by a private legal practitioner. However, some respondents mentioned informal mentorship through interactions with senior colleagues and others in leadership positions as helpful to their career progression and learning how to navigate the profession.

5.12. Debilitating patriarchal culture

Adisa et. al (2019, p. 2) argue that Nigeria is a typical patriarchal African nation where men dominate women in all sectors of life. Patriarchal hegemony, or hegemonic masculinity, affects the social hierarchy and women's activities in the Global South.

A respondent provided a detailed account of the role of patriarchy in holding women back:

It's culture. ABU Zaria is a University in the North and a school for Muslims, there was a pilot study to provide intervention for girls to come to ABU to graduate and go back to their communities either as an English teacher, mathematics teacher, or geography teacher or physics teacher or as a nurse, doctor, pharmacist or something like that, so that there will be fuller development in the family and in the community, in the state and then in the Nation. I head the unit that sponsored it to do sensitization advocacy in northern Nigeria, including the FCT, to change this attitude, we are talking about their perceptions, their behaviors toward girls' child education and female lawyer[s] generally. The key rationale is that when you raise a girl and ensure that she doesn't drop [out] of primary school, you are changing society.

In Nigeria, as in many parts of the world, patriarchal standards impede women's work–life balance. According to this study, male dominance and excessive subjection of women and girls, household and gender-based labor division, and stronger patriarchal tendencies among men are components of a patriarchal culture. Therefore, female legal practitioners must overcome many societal stereotypes and break the glass ceiling.

A female lawyer leader said:

So by the time girls get to secondary school, there is so much attrition that they drop out, either because of early marriage, because of poverty, the culture that says you want to go to school, you won't marry, you will be the bad girl, you will corrupt other girls in our communities. All those kinds of culture, attitudes, perceptions and behaviors have left women behind. I blame the community and parents, and even the school.



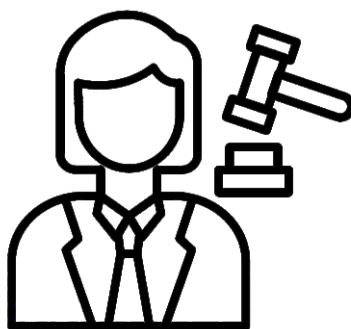
One respondent offered a solution:

The gender role has already dictated that the man is more reliable because he will probably give 100% attention to the work, and probably the female attention will be divided. I have also seen where they said, even within the female gender, that they preferred a single female lawyer over the married ones. Those are bias[es] we face because the single ones can do many other things, such as working longer hours. This is a mental issue we need to take off ourselves. I know we are really smart, but we have to be given that opportunity. But I tell people, don't wait to be given that opportunity, seize it. Don't wait to get a job, open a firm.

A respondent shared similar recommendations:

Nigerian female lawyers actually have access if they can push and be strong-willed. The problem we have is, how many are ready to break the barriers despite the fear of being called names and the fear of what society will say? This is because we have cultural and religious settings that have been misrepresented by boxing the female lawyer to a particular level, a female lawyer, according to most cultures, is expected not to be where men are, not to be outspoken in public, not to be a good leader.

These stories point to the need to disrupt the myths advanced by debilitating cultural beliefs in Nigeria. The realities of African women's experiences demonstrate not only what cultural stereotypes do to women in the legal profession but also that women want to be perceived for what they are—capable, knowledgeable, efficient, and strong.



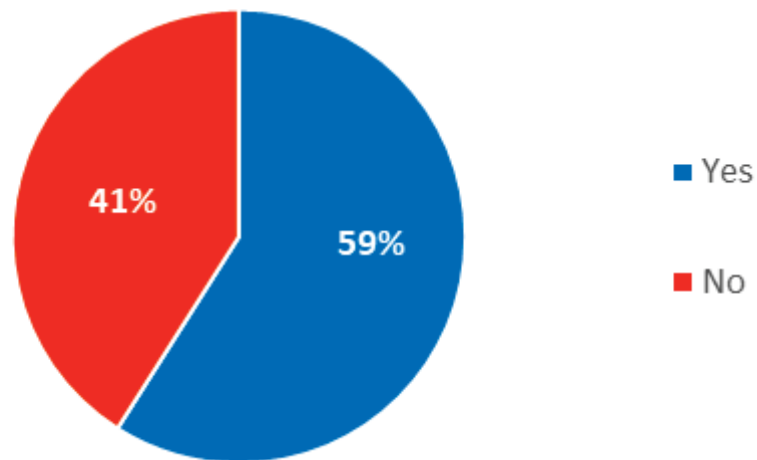
5.13. Impact of COVID-19 on female lawyers at the bar

The findings from this report demonstrated the intersectional challenges that women in the legal profession in Nigeria experience in their bid to achieve leadership and excel in their careers. COVID-19 had adverse effects and worsened the situation for some women. During the lockdown and general restriction, they were confined to their homes, caring for the family, including spouses and children who would otherwise have been at work or school. The domestic burden made it difficult to focus on work. According to a respondent:

“It was not easy for me, as I had to combine my own online work with assisting my children with Zoom classes, a constant stream of home lessons, and the pressure of domestic chores to meet the needs of family members who were all present at home, without going anywhere.”

Figure 16 | Impact of COVID-19 on female lawyers at the bar

COVID-19 has introduced adequate flexibility in working arrangements that allow women to advance their career



Source: IAWL survey, 2022

As presented in Figure 16, 59% of respondents believed that the pandemic introduced adequate flexibility in working arrangements to allow women to advance. However, 41% disagreed. The flexibility could depend on several factors—for example, those with younger children or eldercare responsibilities could have less time. The global increase in domestic tensions and domestic violence could have affected some women. Lastly, the availability of reliable internet and remote administrative support could make it difficult for some to work effectively from home.

Financial constraints are among the challenges that women experienced during the pandemic. The closure of courts had an immediate and direct effect on the incomes of a substantial portion of the Nigerian legal community, which depends on court practice as a primary source of revenue. Postponing court appearances prevented many attorneys from billing, which was a significant blow for many younger lawyers. A significant number of sole practitioners and small law firms derive the majority (if not all) of their revenue from litigating client disputes. These law firms were forced to lay off employees or cut salaries: “the impact was very devastating. The economy was very poor, coupled with a high inflation rate”, a practitioner confirmed.

Discriminatory practices also escalated, particularly in dealings with law enforcement agents, as law firms often preferred to send men to the police station or prisons. Given the COVID-19 protocols, some female lawyers reported challenges interacting with law enforcement officials.

The recourse to technology helped to cut costs and promote work–family balance. Instead of spending so much time in traffic away from home, many women could engage productively in online work while also attending to their families.

As stated by a respondent:

COVID-19 has made us work smarter, and a lot of us appreciate all the social media ways of receiving information while being at home to do other things rather than being in an office environment and unable to do other things in the home. It has also helped in taking up online courses to better ourselves to help to create greater value when the opportunity to work online/remotely occurs.

Another added:

Law offices need to embrace technology. Nursing mothers should be encouraged to work from home for fewer hours rather than stop working completely. If there is anything the COVID-19 lockdown taught us, it is that we need not go to the office to be effective at work. The developed world has embraced the work-from-home culture, and we need to do the same. Also, courts need to embrace virtual trials. Nursing mothers should be granted leave when an application is brought to represent their clients from home. It is not going to be easy, and it's going to take time, but we need not relent.

Essentially, COVID-19 affected and continues to affect female lawyers in unimaginable ways. Professional productivity dropped drastically, whether as partners in law firms or even as advocates. The burden of care, which is not considered “work,” increased and greatly impacted women's productivity. Whereas parenting is a shared responsibility, the patriarchal nature of most societies expects the woman, who was frequently at home during the lockdown, to be the primary caregiver. Therefore, although the virtual space should have allowed female lawyers to advance, working from home typically disadvantaged them.

6

FACILITATORS OF PROMOTION FOR ADVANCING WOMEN IN LAW & LEADERSHIP



This section isolates and discusses the opportunities women at the Nigerian bar can use to achieve leadership. It is against the backdrop of their notably slow progress compared to their male colleagues and the challenges they face once they attain leadership roles.

6.1. Formal mentoring opportunities

Mentorship programs and workshops would be a welcome opportunity to equip women with exposure and training essential to their career progression. As shown by the findings in this study, 65% of interviewees agree that a mentorship program provides the best opportunity for advancement. Female lawyers lag in mentorship opportunities because their pipelines are much narrower. Women's access to more opportunities is restricted by intersecting areas that impede their career growth.

A respondent remarked:

“Until now, I have not heard of any active private practice women support network that exists for mentoring or career development until the reinstatement of the NBAWF and from the little discussion from one or two persons and also from the just past NBA Women Forum Conference held in Lagos that opened my eyes to the fact that women in practice need mentoring. The female lawyer in Nigeria has the right to access almost all the male gender can access, but the discriminatory lifestyle of the community has blocked and made the access invisible, the culture and religion as misrepresented is a setback for women. Because of custom and religion, women are marginalized when it comes to political appointments and various decision-making bodies. How many women are partners in law firms today? What's the proportion? How many female judges do we have? How many female SANs do we have? How many female lecturers do we have?”

Establishing a policy in law firms that includes mentorship and career development programs is essential to develop a support system that does not create rancor among women and will allow them to achieve higher levels of success. Mentoring, capacity-building conferences, and engaging social forums that watch out for women's welfare should be among the top priorities for female lawyers collaborating to develop support groups and workshops for one another.

Therefore, supporting women requires understanding the numerous challenges they encounter before and after joining the profession. The imbalance in opportunities and chances to ascend the professional ladder facilitates identifying viable interventions. Mentorship and healthy and productive work environments will ensure that women can advance without navigating rigid structures. Furthermore, consistency in mentoring will gradually create a culture that recognizes women as equal and able individuals capable of becoming successful and productive leaders.

Several other opportunities were highlighted and recommended. Additionally, technologically enabled capacity-building platforms can also be launched and promoted. Relating to the importance of supportive networks, one respondent commented:

If we don't learn to support one another, the younger female lawyers will say even the women are not ready to help them. So we need a support framework. We also need to mentor ourselves. Female lawyers must mentor female lawyers. We shouldn't be backstabbers to each other. There should be intentional mentoring of the female lawyers by knowing that you can attain the highest leadership position ... only if you are as hardworking as you could be and intentional as you should be, and then we all support each other on our way up, you will see us becoming what we want to be.

6.2. Understanding women's specific needs

The findings indicate that women experience unique challenges that often derail their career progressions, such as their roles as mothers and wives. One respondent stated that women have specific needs. Law firms should develop inclusive gender workplace cultures that understand and create policies to accommodate these needs.



One respondent noted:

I worked in a law firm that actually gives women a lot of concessions when it comes to practice. In fact, once you are pregnant in my law firm and you indicate that you are pregnant, you have morning sickness that will keep you away from work and everything, nobody forces you to come to work. Each of us has cases assigned to us. The cases that have been assigned to me most times, if they are for minor things like moving of motions or just adopting written addresses or something that is not tedious like a trial and they are already in my diary, I can just pick the file and go home. The next day if my case is done, I just return the file to the office and go home and rest.

Law firms need to prioritize gender diversity as part of their strategic goals and should also allow for part-time work to accommodate women who may request work–family balance. In addition, the flexibility the pandemic introduced in office-home working arrangements should be sustained. Compensation criteria must be transparent and gender-neutral, avoiding the stereotype that men are the breadwinners and must be favored with better financial packages. Finally, law firms should effectively engage their clients to explain their female lawyers' excellent capabilities to discourage clients' preference for men. Although women would continue to play significant roles in childrearing and nurturing, law firms can provide support by providing crèches and other childcare arrangements at the workplace.

A respondent provided some caution with the suggestion on working from home:

Women need flexible work time. But flexible work time is also demanding, as you have to do your share of the work. You know, there is one thing we encourage as a Nigerian culture: we tend to think that we have much time, but at the end of the day, we are doing nothing. If you say you need more time for something, you must prove that you have to commit time to something else and support that activity, especially your home. Whatever it takes, for the business to thrive as a private legal practitioner, you need hands, good hands. Dedicated hands. So you also will need an accommodating team because you cannot work in isolation. So..., yes, if there [is] good proof that this person needs time, it is part of what we should support.

Therefore, it is important to understand women's specific needs because this allows for identifying the best effective strategies to mitigate them and makes it easy to facilitate flexible working schedules and conditions that allow them to be productive even during pregnancy and childbirth. More importantly, treating women fairly and allowing them to work without unnecessarily strict supervision cultivates inclusion, motivating them to be more productive in their roles.

6.3. Supportive family structures

Social support is crucial, especially at the family level. For married women, the family can create a support system that helps them attain more career stability and achievement. A supportive spouse is also vital. The support can be in different forms, including helping with responsibilities, such as household chores, providing both material and mental support, and building healthy working environments at home. Through supportive family structures, women feel recognized as able and productive individuals. Family members conscious of the nature of the work that women in their household do helps them focus on advancing their careers. But, more importantly, the support allows them to gain a balance between unpaid and paid responsibilities that improves their job performance, reduces stress, amplifies their job satisfaction, and allows them to pursue their career goals successfully.

A respondent noted:

“A female lawyer, one of the things that can make you remain in practice, both the litigation and non-litigation practice is that your husband must be a supportive husband. He has to be the kind of person that will allow you to go outside the jurisdiction to do your work and come back. But if you don't have a supportive husband and a supportive family, it is going to be difficult for you. Most husbands are the reason why most lawyers drop out on the way.”

6.4. Funding and data gathering to support evidence-based interventions

Effective interventions for advancing women's leadership are needed. Funding is needed to support strong research and data collection for consistent data on women's representation at the bar, in law firms, corporate and government organizations. More data is also needed in these organizations' leadership ranks, which will facilitate evidence-based, targeted interventions to address their needs without leaving any sector or group behind.

6.5. Turning gatekeepers into male allies

Gender equality and gender diversity cannot be achieved by women fighting alone. This report shows that gender, patriarchy, and cultural systems have combined to sideline women. To achieve effective and systemic changes, men must join the quest for gender equality. IAWL has developed one such program: the Men Advocates in Law for Equality (MALE) Allies. With the vision of igniting individual and organizational transformation toward achieving gender equality in the legal profession, the campaign is rooted in the belief that when women and men work in unity and solidarity, gender equality can be achieved. Other organizations can take up this challenge and start similar campaigns in the workplace.

6.6. Creating and enforcing policies that protect female lawyers

Although enacting laws that protect female lawyers is necessary, strengthening them would facilitate women's ascent. For instance, "[NBA Sexual Harassment Policy: Creating a Safe Work Space for All](#)" (NBA, 2021) is a commendable initiative. Yet, efforts must be made to ensure that it does not merely pay lip service to this problem. The NBAWF should work with the NBA EXCO to operationalize this policy at the branch levels and ensure that the adoption and implementation are prerequisites for the award of SAN and other appointments and elevations. Dedicated lines and email addresses should be made available to the public to report such offenses, along with sensitizing all lawyers on what constitutes sexual harassment and training and retraining all of those involved in implementation.

6.7. Promotion, recognition, and celebration of female lawyers

The contributions of female lawyers have been minimized or erased from the public view. As a strong socialization tool, the media can play an important role in centering their contributions in the public view. One such activity is the work of IAWL. The Amandla Series profiles top women in law who tell their stories of triumph and achievement. The digital archive curates female chief justices and international judges across the continent. The Pioneer Women in Law Project documents female firsts. Becoming a Partner displays short videos where female lawyers share their journeys. These resources center on the power and agency of African women in law. Another helpful recommendation is to have the NBAWF or similar organizations promote and celebrate leading women to increase their visibility, which motivates other women. It is not enough for women to be experts in their fields. Visibility will emphasize this expertise. In an era where data are a superpower, such a compilation of data on women's achievements also showcases their impact, productivity, and value in the legal profession.

6.8. Providing leadership training opportunities

Women's poor representation in the activities of the legal profession, such as conferences and bar meetings, needs to be addressed by providing funding and other support to encourage them to partake as much as possible. They must become intentional in becoming active members and ensure that they are financial members. They must also participate in professional politics at the bar and in academics. The NBAWF and mentors should also support women to collaborate in founding and running law firms. The IAWL is on the front line in providing leadership training opportunities for women in Africa. In 2022, IAWL launched the Women Excellence in Law and Leadership initiative, curating highly impactful online webinars and training sessions featuring as speakers and facilitators women across different sectors of law who have excelled.

7

PROGRESS AND TRENDS



As is happening worldwide, the Nigerian legal profession is becoming feminized, based on the record of female lawyers called to the bar each year. Despite the historical development of the profession and the slow integration of women, some women have stood out as “firsts” in distinct areas. Notwithstanding these remarkable achievements, the variables mentioned above – entry, promotion, and points of attrition- illustrate the many intersectional barriers that have limited women's leadership progress in law firms and the state and national bar associations. The convergence of institutional, structural, and individual factors creates different points at which women are forced to exit or stagnate within the pipeline.

Nonetheless, there are facilitators of promotion. An enduring trend noted from the survey points to the persistent patriarchal cultures in the profession that maintain and reproduce gender stereotypes and biases against women's leadership roles. These stereotypes act as solid structures and barriers against the ever-increasing calls for an equitable representation of women in leadership. However, the surveys highlight a growing number of women who have formed networks that, in mentoring young female lawyers, debunk the existing myths about women's leadership in general and at the bar specifically.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on businesses and the economy, policymakers and organizations such as the NBA must focus on women's experiences at the bar as not isolated cases but an ongoing dialogue. For the facilitators of promotion to be effective, an intersectional lens is necessary to truly understand the different vectors of oppression that impact female lawyers' lived experiences. By adopting an intersectional framework, this report highlighted multiple barriers and also recommended facilitators for women. The surveys showed that some women exited the profession at the early stage of practice, some after marriage, some after childbirth, and some immediately after ascending to leadership. At all of these stages, women meet and must contend with the shifting glass ceilings. The intersectional challenges punctuate the path that a female lawyer follows to the top and explain why the leaks in the pipeline and points of attrition remain high. These challenges also explain why only a small percentage of women reach full partnership status in law firms, becoming SANs and attaining leadership positions at the NBA.

8 | CONCLUSION



Generally, women in legal practice in Nigeria may be faring better now than in prior decades. However, more interventions are needed to increase the percentage of women in leadership positions in law firms and as heads of chambers, partners, SANs, and leaders within the state and national bar associations. The history and status of women in the legal profession in Nigeria present a vantage point from which to assess the advancement of women in society. Although the profession provides female lawyers with the training and platform to close the gender gap, sadly, female lawyers still experience gender disparity and discrimination. This report has provided the first comprehensive empirical study on these women and highlights the nuanced challenges experienced by different women based on age, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic factors, etc. It provides the needed data to help plan interventions to address the pervasive gender inequality.

The findings show that women are progressing but not fast enough to close the gender gaps. With limited visible representation at the highest levels of leadership, women at the bar will continue to suffer from institutional and structural challenges because of the marginalization of their voices and perspectives in decision-making. Women from northern Nigeria also have less access to leadership positions than their southern counterparts. Additionally, younger women experience the burdens of work–family demands and sexual harassment more than their older counterparts. Although older women may not suffer the burdens of childrearing, they could face other family-related challenges, including emotional stress associated with polygamy or neglect.

While there are a few all-female networking and mentoring opportunities that exist, they are not structured to target the different practice areas. Very limited female-targeted capacity-building workshops exist, and these are usually not sector specific. For gender equality to be achieved, strategic interventions targeting the institutional, structural, and individual variables identified in this report must be implemented immediately. Deliberate efforts must be made to close the gender gap for all female lawyers, while appreciating the nuanced needs and peculiarities of the legal practice, the shifting intersectional factors, and the different geographic regions in Nigeria.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

REQUEST FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. The survey requests for feedback on your knowledge and experience with regard to the dynamics of advancement of women to leadership in the legal profession in Nigeria.

The Purpose of the research

The goal of this research project is to map women's representation in the leadership of the different categories of legal practice in Nigeria and where applicable, characterize the underlying causes of inequality in women's representation.

Kindly assist by completing this questionnaire to enable us to achieve appropriate outcomes. Your cooperation is highly appreciated.

Consent Request

We would like to confirm your willingness to participate in this survey. It should take about 15 minutes.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. There are no anticipated risks and you are free to drop out of the study if you feel uncomfortable.

You must be 18 years and above to participate. Your answers will not be traceable to you, as it is for research purposes only.

There is no direct benefit of this research to you except that the results will be geared towards policy reforms to safeguard the interest of women. There are no anticipated financial costs to you.

Your response to the questions will constitute the required consent to participate.

Sincerely,

Consultants

Respondent

SECTION ONE - BIO-DATA

Please circle the correct option

1. How many years post call do you have?
 - a. 0-5 years
 - b. 6-10years
 - c. 11-15years
 - d. 16-20years
 - e. 21 years and above

2. What is your highest level of academic qualification?
 - a. PhD
 - b. LLM
 - c. LLB
 - d. BL

3. Please indicate your marital status?
 - a. Married
 - b. Single
 - c. Widowed
 - d. Separated
 - e. Divorced

4. Please indicate your religious affiliation?
 - a. Christian
 - b. Muslim
 - c. Traditional Religion
 - d. Others

5. Please indicate your ethnic group:

6. What is your employment status?
 - a. Self- employed
 - b. Employed
 - c. House-wife
 - d. No employment
 - e. Student

7. Please indicate your age bracket?
 - a. 18 – 27
 - b. 28 - 37
 - c. 38 - 47
 - d. 48 – 57.
 - e. 58 and above

8. Do you have any form of physical disability?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

SECTION TWO – General perceptions on women in the legal profession

9. Below are some statements on the representation and opportunities offered to women in legal workplaces in Nigeria. Kindly indicate whether you agree or disagree with them within the scales of 5 – 1 respectively.

5 = **Strongly agree**, 4 = **Agree**, 3 = **Neutral**, 2 = **Disagree**, 1 = **Strongly disagree**

Statement		5.	4.	3.	2.	1.
a.	The current leadership in most law firms reflects sexual diversity in men and women.					
b.	There is income disparity between male and female employees in the judiciary					
c.	Female lawyers are given the same employment and advancement opportunities as their male counterparts.					
d.	Female lawyers have <u>more favorable terms and conditions</u> of employment than their male counterparts.					
e.	Female lawyers have to work harder than male lawyers to achieve the same results.					
f.	Female lawyers are compensated the same as male lawyers for comparable work.					
g.	Female lawyers attain partnership status faster than male lawyers.					

SECTION THREE – AREAS WHERE WOMEN EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION

10. Below is a list of possible areas where women in the legal profession in Nigeria experience discrimination? Please

CIRCLE ANY 5 you think are the main areas.

- a. Unequal Income Opportunities
- b. Ascendancy to leadership positions
- c. Problems of Access to Employment
- d. Sexual harassment
- e. Client's preference for men
- f. Unspoken bias and unequal treatment
- g. Stereotypes on gender roles
- h. Verbal/emotional violence
- i. Lack of support for families in the legal workplace (Poor Work/Family Balance)

Others: Please specify.....

SECTION FOUR – PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH GENDER BIAS OR PREJUDICE WITHIN YOUR WORKPLACE

- 11.** Have you ever been or seen someone sexually harassed (inappropriate sexual jokes, questions, gestures or looks) in your workplace or within a law related setting, e.g court?
- a.** Yes
 - b.** No
- 12.** Is there a sexual harassment policy in your workplace?
- a.** Yes
 - b.** No
- 13.** Does your workplace have a maternity policy that supports exclusive breastfeeding till 6 months?
- a.** Yes
 - b.** No.
- 14.** What are the challenges women encounter in advancing their career in your workplace? Please circle all that apply.
- a.** Stereotypes on gender roles
 - b.** Limited relevant skills
 - c.** Workplace policies
 - d.** Poverty
 - e.** Lack of support for families in the legal workplace

SECTION FIVE – RECOMMENDATIONS

- 15.** What do you think that the Nigerian Bar Association can do to improve gender equality and diversity within the legal profession?
- a.** Nothing/Not Much Can Be Done
 - b.** Awareness/ Education/Training
 - c.** Set up a disciplinary committee to penalize offenders
 - d.** Others (specify please)
- 16.** Do you think that the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced flexibility in the working arrangement in law firms that allows women to advance their careers?
- a.** Yes
 - b.** No

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND COOPERATION!

In-Depth Interview Schedule

1. What kind of women support network exists for women in your legal practice, for mentoring and career development?
2. What access or other barriers and implicit bias do women in the legal practice face in Nigeria?
3. Which stage in the pipeline is the leak/exit most obvious for women lawyers leaving /stagnating in their professional legal career? What factors influence this?
4. How can we get big law firms to commit to consider at least 30 percent of open leadership and governance roles in the firm for women?
5. How can the legal profession help women stay full time within the profession, as most women lawyers continue to be the primary care giver for children? Give examples please.



Focus Group Discussion Guide

Location _____

FGD Group _____

Date _____

Duration _____

A. Discussion Guide

- I. Introduction and Warm-up
- II. Assurance of Confidentiality
- III. Permission to record discussion
- IV. Opening remark

We are here to hold discussions with you on the nature and extent of representation of women lawyers in leadership as well as identify challenges and prospects for a more robust presence for women in the legal profession in Nigeria. We count on your insights to gain further knowledge on the issue.

B. Topics for Discussion

1. The kind of women support network that exists for women for mentoring and career development?
2. The different access or other barriers and implicit bias do women in the legal profession face in Nigeria?
3. Let us discuss the stages in the pipeline where the leak is most obvious for women lawyers leaving/stagnating in their professional legal career? What factors influence this?
4. Let us recommend how we can get institutions in the public sector to commit to consider at least 30 percent of open leadership and governance roles for women?
5. Let us make recommendations on how the legal profession can help women stay full time within the profession, as most women lawyers continue to be the primary caregiver for children? Give examples please.
6. Please feel free to bring up anything we did not cover you want to talk about?

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

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Women in Law & Leadership

Nigerian Legal Profession