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An Appraisal of the Contribution of Muslim Women in the Judiciary in North-West Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explores Muslim women's contribution to the judiciary, which is for promoting gender equality and justice in North West Nigeria. The study aims to examine the impact of Muslim women's participation in the judiciary, exploring their roles, challenges, and contributions to the legal system. The research involves a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, judicial data, and possibly interviews with Muslim women in the judiciary. The study reveals the significant impact of Muslim women on the system. Despite facing challenges, they have made notable contributions, promoting diversity, inclusivity, and access to justice. It also highlights the benefits of increased Muslim women's participation in the judiciary in order to partake in decision-making, as well as assist in improved justice delivery in sensitive matters of women, and enhanced public trust in the legal system. The research would contribute to ongoing discussions about gender representation in the judiciary, particularly in Muslim-majority regions, and inform policies to support greater inclusion of women in the legal profession. In conclusion, the work has considerably discussed the contributions and challenges faced by Muslim women in the judicial system fact that Muslim Women have a greater role and responsibility to play in the judiciary system, not only in Northern Nigeria but Nigeria as a whole.

Keywords: Muslim Women; Appraisal; Contribution; Judiciary, North-West Nigeria.

Introduction

The judiciary plays a fundamental role in the good functioning of society. Judicial institutions guarantee order within society by protecting human rights, upholding the rule of law, providing redress to victims, and holding those responsible for injustices, including individuals, government, and other institutions under their jurisdiction, to account. An independent, impartial, and effective judiciary significantly contributes to building trust between the government and its citizens, maintaining peaceful relations, and cultivating respect for the rule of law. To achieve this goal, the judicial system must reflect the society it serves in all its diversity, allowing judicial institutions to deal with a wide range of particular scenarios with appropriate sensitivity [1]. Women's full engagement in the judiciary would serve as a better goal for society and also fulfill the right of women's participation in all aspects of decision-making, as well as a catalyst for the development of strong, independent, accessible, and gender-sensitive judicial institutions [2]. There is a rich body of evidence demonstrating that women's increased presence in the judiciary is beneficial for the good administration of justice, resulting in better outcomes for men and women alike. Diversity enriches the quality of judicial decision-making in general, and for cases affecting women in particular. In the judiciary, women play a very special role. It is not about equality only; it goes beyond that. In all judiciaries, at national and international courts, women assist in judicial assignments, and they decide about others [3].

Historically, the judiciary in Nigeria, particularly in North-Western Nigeria, has been male-dominated, with women facing numerous barriers to entry and advancement within the legal profession. However, increasing educational opportunities, advocacy for gender equality, and a shifting societal perception of women's roles have empowered Muslim women to engage actively in the legal system. These women not only serve as judges, lawyers, and legal scholars but also as vital agents of change, often bringing unique perspectives to legal interpretations and rulings that reflect the values and complexities of their communities [4]. The judiciary plays a crucial role in upholding the rule of law and ensuring justice in any society [5]. In Nigeria, the judiciary has made significant strides in recent years, with increased representation of women not only in administrative positions of the judiciary but also as judges [6]. However, the contribution of Muslim women in the judiciary, particularly in Northwest Nigeria, remains a topic of interest.

As a comprehensive way of life, Islam governs both the private and public life of individuals, and holds that all humans are equal and accountable for their deeds, regardless of gender, time, era, or epoch.

The Glorious Qur'an provided clear-cut evidence that spiritually, woman is equated with man in the Sight of Allah, in terms of rights and responsibilities. Allah says in the Qur'an:

Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily to him will We give a new life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to their actions [7].

The Prophet (SAW) during his time dignified the position of women and accorded their rights, as opposed to what was obtained in the pre-Islamic days. To fulfill their collective obligations and maintain the fundamental elements of the religious community as a whole, Muslim women are held accountable in the hereafter, based only on their acts, just like their male counterparts. In the Glorious Qur'an, Allah says:

Indeed, those who have believed and done righteous deeds- The Most Merciful will appoint for them affection [8].

In this sense, Muslim women are respected in a variety of contexts under Shari'ah. They also have to follow broad religious guidelines for behaviour, as well as societal norms and moral principles like justice, fairness, and truthfulness, towards their participation in all endeavors, including public participation, and by extension, their participation in the judiciary, even though it is not always simple to explain from the Islamic stance the why there are Muslim women enrolled in the judiciary in Northwest Nigeria. Similarly, the existing literature is lacking in comprehensive data on Muslim women's presence in the judiciary of Northwest Nigeria. However, some offered an analysis of the elements that support women's participation as adjudicators or judges in the legal profession, but not been carried out in this part of the globe.

Given the above, this paper attempts to analyse the effects of Muslim women's participation in the judiciary in a region like Northwest Nigeria, which operates within a dual legal framework that includes Shari'ah law, conventional system or common law, whereby Muslim women are being employed to serve as legal administrators and adjudicators to mention but few. It is also crucial to point out that Northwest Nigeria comprises the states of Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Kaduna, Kano, and Katsina. However, in the context of this article, Muslim women in Northwest Nigeria as employed refers to Muslim women serving the judiciary in Sokoto, Kebbi, and Zamfara States.

The role of women in the judiciary is a critical aspect of the broader discourse in contemporary society, particularly in the Muslim world. In Northwest Nigeria, a region rich in cultural diversity yet faced with significant socio-economic and political challenges, Muslim women have started to carve a

niche in the legal landscape. This appraisal aims to explore the contributions of Muslim women in the judiciary of Northwest Nigeria, highlighting their achievements, challenges, and the transformative impact they have had in their workplace and the society.

The paper is based on qualitative empirical data collected through interviews with Muslim female court staff members in the studied area, including judges, magistrates, registrars, and others. Although the discussion delves into the judiciary, the paper is not unaware of other justice-related institutions, such as the Ministry of Justice or legal aid groups. The choice of the topic is informed by the fact that, today, Muslim women in the judiciary in Northwest Nigeria are among the key actors in the field of justice. This historic journey of determination, sisterhood, and collective action can play a role in overcoming gender inequality across a range of areas – broadly in society, but also specifically within the justice system.

By analysing the contributions of Muslim women's involvement in the judiciary in Northwest Nigeria, the paper takes the first steps towards closing the gap left by several studies. For the fact that it is difficult to comprehend, the effects on the participation of Muslim women in the judiciary in Northwest Nigeria, the following fundamental questions emerged out of this presentation: (i) What is the nature of Muslim women's participation in the judiciary in Northwest Nigeria? (ii) What is the implication of Muslim women's participation in the judiciary in Northwest Nigeria?

Literature Review

This section provides a related literature review to study. Yousuf Ali's explores the debate surrounding women's roles as judges in the judiciary of Muslim countries and analyzes Islamic texts to determine whether women can serve as judges, considering differing interpretations among scholars. The author states that some Islamic scholars argue that women can serve as judges, citing examples of women in Islamic history who played significant roles in law and governance. And that, other scholars oppose the idea, citing some interpretations of Islamic law [9].

According to Iqra, Islamic law recognizes women's intellectual capacity and ability to hold positions of authority, including judicial roles. The research by Iqra is based on the question of whether a woman has enough competency or intellect to hold the position of a judge or any other position in the judiciary under the context of the Maqasid AlSharia. And the objective of Islamic rulings is mainly to protect these five elements from any harm. These preservations are known as Protection of religion (din), Protection of Life (nafs), Protection of Lineage (nasl), Protection of Intellect ('aql), and Protection of Property (mal).

Islamic history provides examples of women playing significant roles in law, governance, and leadership [10].

Aisha, Faiza & Muhammad discuss contemporary Muslim women in Northern Nigeria and the numerous challenges facing their social, educational, behavioural, and cultural development within their respective societies. The authors further explained that the challenges faced by Muslim women in Northern Nigeria have emerged and escalated due to the gradual adoption of Western culture and civilization facilitated by modern technological advancements. These changes have not arisen by chance; rather, they have been influenced by various factors, including Western biases against Muslim women and a lack of awareness and understanding of Islamic teachings among some Muslim women. Aisha, Faiza & Muhammad highlight the behaviours and challenges experienced by contemporary Muslim women in Northern Nigeria [11].

Method

In the course of investigating the contribution of Muslim women in the judiciary in Northwest Nigeria, a comprehensive research methodology was employed. The study utilises a qualitative research design to gather in-depth insights into the experiences and contributions of Muslim women in the judiciary, thereby using a case study approach to examine the experiences of Muslim women in the judiciary in Northwest Nigeria. The data for the study were collected utilizing semi-structured interview questions for Muslim women in the judicial system in the Northwest. Not only was that, but focus group discussions were also held with Muslim women in the judiciary to gather more insights into their experiences and challenges. Thematic analysis is used in analyzing the data in order to identify the patterns and themes in the data.

Result

The Judiciary

The word “judiciary” has been described as “the branch of authority in a country which is concerned with law and the legal system [12]. It is also a system of courts, by which it may be inferred that the entire system of courts cannot be limited to judges alone, but is inclusive of other offices that make up the system. The judiciary, or court system [13], encompasses more than just judges. It includes a complex network of individuals and offices that contribute to the administration of justice. These include court clerks, bailiffs, lawyers, and other personnel who ensure the smooth running and functioning of the system [14]. The Judiciary represents the court system in the land; it symbolizes judges and justice. It is the third arm of any modern government [15]. This was popularized

by Montesquieu, the French political philosopher and jurist who postulated that there should be a separation of judicial duties from legislative and executive functions to forestall tyranny. A court system implies a judicial arrangement of graduated competences of hierarchical structural arrangement from lower to superior courts, courts of first instance to the Supreme Court, where appeals are taken or heard, and special courts or tribunals exist in modern democratic countries. The role of the judiciary is to hear and decide legal cases based on the law and legal precedent.

In Islam, the judiciary is the guarantee for applying a just system of regulations and preventing disarray in social affairs. It requires the establishment of everything in its proper place [16], which means treating people equitably or the returning of every right to its owner, and everyone obtaining his due. Allah says in the glorious Qur'an:

O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witness for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So follow not (personal) inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort (your testimony) or refuse (to give it), then indeed Allah is ever, with that you do, Acquainted [17].

The judiciary, which is an independent body of government in Islam, settles all types of legal disputes involving competing claims. Its framework makes sure that there is justice among the populace, that tyranny ends, and that those who persecute others are held responsible. The rules of Allah and the Sunnah, or tradition, of the Prophet (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), are upheld by the Islamic system. In line with this, Allah says in the Glorious Qur'an:

O you who believe! Be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice, and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety, and be careful of (your duty to) Allah; surely Allah Is Aware of what you do [18].

Therefore, properly considered and understood based on scriptural texts, justice is an obligation in Islam, and injustice is forbidden.

Discussion

Muslim Women's Participation in the Judiciary in Northwest Nigeria

The active involvement of Muslim women in decision-making processes or activities that impact both them and the larger development landscape is referred to as Muslim women's participation. This refers to a procedure as well as a result in terms of Muslim women's involvement in the judiciary and the calibre and efficacy of their function in influencing choices and procedures. In order to guarantee that courts represent their constituents, attend to their problems, and render wise decisions, the aforementioned involvement in the judiciary is essential. The credibility of courts is increased by the presence of female judges, who demonstrate that the courts are accessible and available to anyone seeking justice. It also encourages the next generation of women to pursue their dreams and ensures that the legal system is created with the interests of the entire population in mind.

Based on practical findings from interviews and field research undertaken in the researched area, the following analysis may be made of Muslim women's involvement in the region's court system.

Muslim Women's Administrative Involvement in the Judiciary of North-West Nigeria

In Northwest Nigeria, Muslim women's administrative involvement in the judiciary takes the following forms.

Muslim Women as Court Clerks and Registrars in Northwest Nigeria's Judiciary

Muslim women Throughout this investigation, Muslim women were seen working as court clerks and registrars, performing crucial duties like setting up hearings, keeping court records, communicating with judges, attorneys, and litigants, and making sure litigants followed the rules [19]. Their painstaking work guarantees precise case processing and tracking. Although these positions do not entail making decisions or analysing the law, they are crucial to the courts' efficient operation. During the conversation, they talked about their experiences getting the judge's paperwork ready, calling all of the cases to court, and assisting witnesses with taking the oath or affirmation [20] are only a handful of the many important tasks that the court registrar does. Muslim women are frequently seen in the judiciary as Registrars, who sit on a platform that is slightly elevated beneath the judge, facing the court. If the registrar is also a lawyer, they will

sometimes wear the barrister's robes in court, but otherwise they don't wear any particular clothing.

In our capacity as supervisors [21], in the region under study, Muslim women registrars in both Shari'ah and conventional courts manage administrative teams and make sure that procedures are attentive to cultural differences. They discussed how they oversaw multidisciplinary teams, worked with judges, and dealt with logistical issues that arose during court proceedings. They frequently oversee groups of administrative personnel, making sure that everything runs well.

They coordinate efforts among court divisions in their capacity as registrars or deputy registrars. They assist in striking a balance between procedural justice and the Islamic precepts that underpin Shari'ah law in circumstances involving domestic conflicts. According to their recollection, the registrar's main responsibility is to assist the judge in the following ways:

- i. Calls out each case as soon as it starts so that the parties can identify themselves to the court;
- ii. Presents the witnesses under oath and gives each party the necessary paperwork;
- iii. Documents the case's decision. Having custody of court records and evidence.

Keeping a record of the judge's and registrar's diaries, as well as organising the files and draughting the orders the judge has issued during a court day. In a similar vein, the registrar typically handles the administrative duties necessary to maintain the courts' efficient operation. In a similar manner, the Registrar assigns an assistant Registrar to work in tandem with the Registrar.

Muslim Women as Chief Registrars in Northwest Nigeria's Judiciary

In northwest Nigeria, the Chief Registrar is another important position held by Muslim women in the judiciary. In their capacity as senior administrative personnel, they demonstrated their substantial involvement in court operations, staff coordination, effective case management, and the application of judicial policies [22]. During their interactions, Muslim women in this role—who ascended from the position of Chief Registrar in the Sokoto State judiciary to the Shari'ah Court of Appeal and High Court of Justice—shared their experiences, especially with regard to their involvement in the legal system. For instance, the chief registrars of both courts in Sokoto recapped their responsibilities as the highest ranking administrative officials in the court, in charge of supervising the

court's overall management and operations by giving the administrative staff strategic guidance. Additionally, they oversee how court cases are handled, including allocating cases to judges, keeping track of case progress, and organising court calendars [23]. Along with this, the court's policies and procedures are developed and implemented in cooperation with the Chief Justice, or CJ, and other senior judges. As the leader of the administrative unit, they also disclosed that one of their most important responsibilities was to supervise financial management and budgeting. More importantly, they actively engage in their representational duty by speaking on behalf of their particular courts in a variety of settings, such as judicial conferences, meetings with public authorities, and other outside events.

This suggests that Muslim women's roles as chief registrars in the area include administrative duties like overseeing court employees, facilities, and resources; managing cases and maintaining court records; judicial support duties like assisting judges administratively; organising court hearings (including witness lists and court exhibits); ensuring that court proceedings run smoothly; judicial reporting (case summaries and other pertinent information); and operational duties [24]. Assuring the safety of judges, court employees, and litigants, managing court security personnel, managing court facilities (including upkeep and repairs), managing financial operations (such as budgeting, submitting financial reports to appropriate authorities (including government agencies), managing fees and fines, and making sure that applicable laws and regulations are followed are just a few examples.

Muslim Women as Judicial Assistants in Northwest Nigeria's Judiciary

Interactions in the studied region showed that Muslim women work alongside judges in their administrative roles as judicial assistants, helping them to produce rulings or case summaries as well as legal briefs and recommendations [25]. Making sure that rulings are supported by thorough legal research and helping judges by obtaining factual data and creating written court records for both new and existing cases to ascertain whether the case that was recently submitted and the one that is now before them are the same [26]. Along with proofreading and communicating with the parties, they also help the judge reach a fair verdict, vet documents after they are typed, and provide the judge with legal advice. They also help shape court policies that address gender-specific issues like forced marriages and domestic violence. Intending to achieve the right result or judgement, women advisers in Sokoto have influenced processes that permit female litigants to introduce cases in private, promoting wider access to justice.

The unique involvement of Muslim women in the aforementioned unit strengthens the judiciary's intellectual base in Northwest Nigeria, enabling in-depth research and analysis that is essential for assisting with the administration of justice and guaranteeing that court rulings are supported by accurate and trustworthy legal data. Judicial assistants, on the other hand, concentrate on court operations and administrative support, whereas legal researchers concentrate on these areas. However, as our analysis has shown, they frequently collaborate. Providing research assistance, drafting opinions and memoranda, and keeping abreast of legal developments.

Muslim Women as Court Interpreters in the Judiciary in Northwest Nigeria

Because the area has a linguistically diverse population, Muslim women in the judicial profession in Northwest Nigeria recounted their experiences of occasionally acting as interpreters in court during legal processes. This is on top of helping (female) litigants with note-drafting. Muslim women who work in the legal field in Northwest Nigeria talked about how, because of the region's linguistically diverse population, they occasionally have to interpret in court during court procedures. This comes on top of helping (female) litigants with note-drafting [27], particularly if they were illiterate or unable to communicate in the court's official language. In this instance, they must help in order to prevent a communication breakdown and support the judicial processes.

Muslim women as Religious and Cultural Mediators in Judiciary in Northwest Nigeria

The dual judicial system and the region's strong adherence to Islamic and traditional values make it possible for Muslim women working in Northwest Nigeria's justice sector to bridge the gap between religion, sociocultural standards, and legal procedures. In Zamfara state, for instance, research shows that female mediators have played a significant role in settling financial disputes and marital disputes [28], utilising non-aggressive methods that uphold justice and honour cultural values. This creates a win-win scenario where a successful settlement makes all parties feel good about themselves, promotes open communication, and helps the parties to a mutually acceptable agreement.

Muslim Women as Litigators in Northwest Nigeria's Judiciary

Muslim women attorneys actively engage in litigation, representing clients in family law, criminal, and civil disputes in Northwest Nigeria's judicial system. During the interview, they stated that the position includes a formal procedure for resolving legal disputes, either through the use of the civil or

criminal court system to handle a wide range of issues, from divorces to personal injury claims to contract violations [29].

In terms of civil litigation, women attorneys in Sokoto and Kebbi frequently take on cases pertaining to inheritance, property rights, and contract disputes. According to the research, Muslim women attorneys provide complex viewpoints to cases, especially when they include disadvantaged populations like widows and orphans. Similarly, they disclosed that they also defend clients in criminal matters, however, to some degree, their representation is less popular because of cultural hurdles. Nonetheless, field observations in the area under study showed that more and more women were defending clients who were charged with domestic abuse or petty theft [30], frequently entering the courtroom with empathy and a constructive mindset. Additionally, they play a crucial role in marriage, divorce, child custody, and maintenance disputes, particularly by promoting fair outcomes while upholding religious values.

Muslim Women as Judges and Magistrates in the Judiciary in Northwest Nigeria

Based on fieldwork and interviews, this qualitative study examines the function of Muslim women as judges and magistrates in Northwest Nigeria. They take on the role of court arbiter, sitting on a raised platform and wearing a white collar and black robe. During the trial, they recalled, their main responsibility is to supervise the proceedings, ensure a fair trial, and settle any potential conflicts [31]. As the head of the court, it is their duty to ensure that the accused receives a fair trial. This includes fair and balanced presentation of the evidence, resolution of any legal disputes, issuance of directives, and determining the appropriate penalty in the event that the defendant is found guilty. Likewise, the judge decides who wins and who loses. With sociocultural and religious dynamics, these responsibilities are studied within the framework of traditional courts.

In contrast, the magistrates shared their expertise of administering the law in a specific jurisdiction, such as a city or district, with restricted authority, unlike judges. They also hear cases involving criminal or civil cases before rendering a judgement. However, they underlined that a magistrate has limited authority and acts as a judge in some cases. It is also the duty of magistrates to hear cases in municipal courts [32]. They may hear matters from the criminal, family, or both courts. The magistrate courts have jurisdiction over both civil and criminal issues. They are referred to as District Courts when they handle civil issues and Magistrate Courts when they handle criminal cases. Magistrate courts can handle both civil and criminal cases. Considering that they operate in a traditional setting, the Muslim women who were questioned for the positions of judges and

magistrates revealed that their involvement involves some crucial functions, such as:

Adjudication and Decision-Making

Making decisions and making judgements, Muslim women judges are essential to the unbiased administration of justice since they decide cases. Their presence helps make the judiciary more welcoming. In conventional courts, Muslim women magistrates and judges oversee civil, criminal, and family law issues [33]. They communicated through their interactions that their rulings frequently strike a compromise between legal precepts and a sophisticated comprehension of social reality. They play a crucial role in guaranteeing gender-sensitive results.

Promoting Gender Sensitivity

Encouraging gender sensitivity, Women judges frequently support gender sensitivity in the legal system, particularly when it comes to issues involving inheritance, child custody, and domestic abuse. In a Sokoto case involving domestic abuse, a female judge described how her presence gave female litigants comfort [34], encouraging them to communicate freely.

The Handling of Cases

In addition to their judicial duties, women judges frequently oversee court administration. For example, female magistrates in Sokoto and Zamfara noted their pivotal role in case management, particularly in their efforts to reduce case backlogs by implementing efficient scheduling and mediation mechanisms. Aside from their judicial responsibilities, female judges often supervise court operations. For instance, female magistrates in Zamfara and Sokoto acknowledged their critical role in case management, especially in their attempts to lower case backlogs through the use of effective scheduling and mediation techniques.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

Alternative Dispute Resolution, otherwise known as ADR is another significant participation of Muslim women judges and magistrates in the field of justice in Northwest Nigeria. Engaging with Muslim women in the covered region throughout the inquiry demonstrated that the ADR is the area in which the majority of judges and magistrates have the greatest interest. As they recounted that the large number of cases that a single judge or magistrate must consider, and the high cost incurred by the parties in their pursuit of justice.

Another notable way that Muslim women judges and magistrates participate in the legal system in Northwest Nigeria is through Alternative Dispute Resolution, or ADR. Throughout the investigation, interactions with Muslim women in the covered area revealed that the majority of judges and magistrates are most interested in the ADR. They recalled the exorbitant expenses expended by the parties in their quest for justice, as well as the sheer volume of cases that a single judge or magistrate must review. For being more beneficial, economical (decisions are made quickly), and are private in nature Alternative Dispute Resolution, which is more advantageous, economical (decisions are made quickly), and private, is needed to lessen the emotional and financial burden of litigation, especially for women, as many cases may be heard for two years or more [35], since all information exchanged during the process is private and cannot be disclosed to third parties without consent from both parties or a court order. Because only the parties and their representatives are allowed to attend, the ADR process also protects privacy and maintains the relationship that existed between the parties before the disagreement. This creates a friendly and courteous atmosphere because both parties are free to carry on with their relationship.

Mentorship

Involving Muslim women judges in the area under study showed that more experienced female judges' guide more junior Muslim women in the judiciary, encouraging resilience and professional growth. In the judicial area, a mutually committed partnership is a carefully developed and long-standing bond between a more seasoned practitioner and a less seasoned one. They claim that the individualised relationship between a mentor and mentee in the judiciary is frequently meant to boost self-esteem, help them overcome obstacles in their careers, find chances, expand their network, and direct them towards their professional objectives [36]. Mentoring provides a well-organised and easily navigable framework for obtaining guidance on professional growth. Although networking and mentoring are both crucial for career progression, they shouldn't be treated equally.

Similarly, as mentors, they also help through a variety of career development moments, like getting advancement or promotion, overcoming obstacles or pivots in career, being introduced to new opportunities, getting feedback with regards to one's strengths and weaknesses professionally, as well as continuing to grow professionally [37]. Although mentorship and networking are sometimes conjoined, there exists a marked difference between the two. This is because, while mentorship among Muslim women in the legal profession is more individualized and targeted; it may offer comprehensive advice and

assistance for inferior's professional development, to which at the end of the day, mentor relationships are not meant to happen overnight or to provide answers to urgent issues in the judiciary [38]. Instead, it is meant to assist in overcoming more difficult, long-term problems by working together to achieve incremental objectives, particularly in the justice sector. However, networking gives a wider viewpoint and can assist in creating a varied network of relationships. Building and sustaining professional connections requires intention and initiative, regardless of whether one decides to pursue networking, mentoring, or both. People and connections are important even in a digital age. Gender-specific issues prejudice, and work-life balance may all be addressed by Muslim female mentors. Effective communication, networking, and personal growth can result from seeking out a mentor at work using methodical and planned methods, and improve your reputation and exposure. It should however be noted that mentorship as a role in the judicial setup is not limited to the judges only; instead, seasoned lawyers in the legal arena are equally engaged in the bid to guide the younger ones in the profession.

Gender Advocacy and Support

Muslim women in the judiciary in Northwest Nigeria play a significant role in championing the rights of female litigants. According to the interviewed sources, the gender advocacy and support as a key role they undertake include the following:

Promoting Gender Equity

Muslim women in the judicial profession in northwest Nigeria recounted that the advisory role they engage in particularly to vulnerable, and indigent members of the society in the region have successfully advocated for gender-inclusivity in the judiciary of the region, giving rise to appointing additional female mediators in sensitive cases involving domestic violence, rape or sexual abuse.

Supporting Victims of Gender-Based Violence

Muslim women in North-West Nigeria's judicial career have become fervent supporters of justice and campaigners in the fight against sexual assault. They revealed the fact that many people are impacted by the extremely painful and terrible experience of sexual assault in the states of Sokoto, Kebbi, and Zamfara [39], which leaves them feeling scared and uneasy. However, through their unrelenting determination to end sexual assault, Muslim women in the judicial profession in the region are making significant contributions to the fight against it, in some ways. Among which include:

A. Revealing the Criminal Justice System

Muslim women in the legal profession of Northwest Nigeria unveiled that they are actively involved in the ongoing battle against cases of rape, and other forms of sexual assault [40]. Drawing from the interaction conducted in this investigation, it is evident what their objective is to “fight the culture of silence-stand up for survivors, and to prosecute offenders”, was made applicable.

B. Survivors' Legal Counsel

Through an empowering resource, representing and assisting survivors in court is one of the most important responsibilities played by Muslim women attorneys in Northwest Nigeria in this conflict. They guarantee that survivors' voices will be heard in courtrooms rather than being muffled under their legal competence [42]. This is why Muslim women in the profession give not only legal advice but also a calm hand to grip onto throughout a turbulent trip, thereby assisting the survivors and vulnerable groups through the legal proceedings, especially complicated ones.

Increased Credibility of the Courts in Northwest Nigeria's Justice Institutions

The ability to actively participate in the creation and implementation of regulations is necessary for them to be deemed genuinely representative of the populace. Institutions will be disregarded or ignored when they are thought to be representative of one particular group at the expense of others. The judiciary may be undermined in severe cases as a result of this, as members of the excluded group may be less inclined to seek legal assistance.

Women have historically faced discrimination and exclusion from public life, and the legal system has served as a tool for this exclusion, making gender diversity in the justice sector especially crucial. Just having women in positions of legal decision-making can mitigate perceived and actual gender prejudice. This in addition to public opinions that the judiciary is disconnected from the general populace. This indicates that the legitimacy of the legal system and confidence in its ability to uphold equality are enhanced by even female judges who are not gender-sensitive.

By being there, they show the public that justice—and the judiciary in particular—is open to diversity and comprises the various groups that comprise society at large. This has significant ramifications for practitioners of the rule of law because it raises the possibility that judicial diversity—not just in terms of gender but also in terms of race, ethnicity, and economic class—could be one of the numerous ways to restore the public perception and lack of trust that so commonly afflict courts in areas where there is conflict.

Increased Opportunities for Muslim Women in Northwest Nigeria

For individuals hoping to work in the justice sector, the presence of women in senior roles in particular sends a strong message that hiring practices in the sector—specifically the judiciary appointment process—are equitable, merit-based, and nondiscriminatory. The presence of female judges in positions improves gender balance in the judiciary by encouraging and actively mentoring women in the legal field, law students, and even younger women and girls to pursue, seek, and to be appointed to the judiciary.

A study on female judges in Ghana provides an example of this message, as some female judges attribute their decision to pursue a career in judging to the presence of women in higher positions on the bench and their belief that women can hold positions of power, including those that were previously held exclusively by men. In addition, women judges may practically assist in mentoring the upcoming generation of female judges and guarantee retention rates by means of a variety of organisations, boards, and mentorship networks. Women's involvement is not just "the right thing to do," but it can occasionally result in improved experiences and outcomes for justice.

In general, increases in the number of women serving on the judiciary—an institution highly valued in many societies—may occasionally have a cascading impact by facilitating women's entry into other positions of authority. When discussing the influence of women judges in Brazil, it is vividly emphasised that these justices set the standard for other hitherto male-dominated professions by confronting the structural impediments that prevented women from assuming positions of leadership. Because she serves as a role model for other women, particularly in underdeveloped areas where issues of feminine submissiveness are more common, the mere fact that she is a woman and a judge has significant societal ramifications.

In summary, women judges serve unique functions as agents of social change and women's economic independence by virtue of their status in the judiciary. The idea that men are the norm and that women are not qualified to handle justice is challenged by the presence of women.

Better Results in Terms of Justice

Making decisions that are inclusive, Women in the justice system contribute to inclusive decision-making and interests by drawing on perspectives, experiences, and expertise that differ from the norm for men. Evidence suggests that the under-representation of women in politics may skew policy decisions against the interests of women. On the other hand, studies reveal that when women participate in politics, they bring attention to problems that

others miss, support legislation that others oppose, fund initiatives that others reject, and work to put an end to injustices that others overlook. Researchers contend that women can eventually have a different impact on how public services are delivered, even if they are forced into positions of authority to serve as stand-ins for their male relatives.

Similar to this, incorporating women's perspectives into the justice system is a potent way to guarantee that their lived experiences can influence the decision-making process, resulting in more informed and unbiased decisions. According to the "representational" or "standpoint" theory, a judiciary with a more balanced gender makeup will better respond to and comprehend those contexts because some women have experienced pregnancy, childrearing, and in some cases, discrimination.

This was brought to light by several judges in a research that states that "the overall quality of judicial decision making is impoverished, and this impacts generally and also specifically in cases particularly affecting women, without full and equal representation of women in the judiciary. "While the majority of female judges will acknowledge that they are uniquely positioned to comprehend women's issues, they always stress in all studies that their gender has no bearing on their impartiality. This is one response to calls for a more diverse judiciary: judges are apolitical, and gender should not matter—judges simply apply the law.

In fact, "institutional pressure" for impartiality can occasionally have antifeminist effects. Women judges who use their knowledge of human rights and violence against women to challenge established judicial standards have come under fire for adding subjectivity and partiality to the impartial process of enforcing the law. For instance, female judges are sometimes chastised for judicial activism when they make decisions that support female litigants, especially in appeals involving sexual assault.

A judicial complaint was filed against a female judge in a well-known case in Canada for consenting to reverse a lower court ruling that rejected a sexual assault case because the victim had not actively resisted. The judge was accused of "feminist bias."

However, concentrating on the alleged bias of female judges may be a reflection of society's unconscious predilection for the historical masculine perspective, which is frequently skewed towards the experiences of men. "Legal expertise in human rights and violence against women issues is considered a source of bias in the hands of women, but [the absence of such expertise is] an asset in the hands of men," according to a specialist on gender equality and women's history. It is necessary to challenge the validity of the law that

minimises or overlooks the reality of women's lived experiences and judges the veracity of women's evidence based on stereotypes in the discussion of partiality.

The Impact of Muslim Women in the Judiciary in North-West

Women's involvement could improve decision-making that takes gender into account. It is maintained that having women in the judiciary strengthens equality by resulting in gender-sensitive decisions and public policies that directly affect women's lives, such as those about employment discrimination, divorce, child custody, gender-based violence, asylum, criminal and commercial law, and matrimonial property rights. If women are not fully and equally represented in the judiciary, the general standard of judicial decision-making may be deemed inadequate, particularly when it comes to issues that directly affect women and other vulnerable individuals.

Although there are differing views on whether a judge's gender influences their decisions, it is maintained that female judges may contribute a distinct viewpoint to the bench and may support gender equality in their rulings, even though their desire for perceived legitimacy may limit their ability to make a significant difference.

Therefore, having a female judge on a mixed panel may affect how a case involving sexual harassment or gender discrimination turns out or highlight the gendered aspect of some offences in a way that male judges might not otherwise recognise.

Suggestions

This paper wishes to proffer some solutions that will help and enhance more productivity of Muslim Women in the judiciary system in North West Nigeria, where the majority of them are Muslims and are guided by the principles and tenets of Islam:

1. That Muslim woman should see themselves as a role model to all other women both within and outside the judicial fold,
2. That Muslim women in the judiciary should be more versatile in Islamic knowledge, as most of the cases before them relate to Islamic cases.
3. That husbands of judges in the career give more encouragement to their wives to ease the delivery of justice;
4. That more Muslim women should be encouraged to learn and study the Shari'ah system of law, as most cases in the judiciary are related to women.

5. That an enabling environment be provided women in the judiciary in the North West Nigeria in order to help facilitate justice

Conclusion

This paper attests to the very fact that Muslim Women has a greater role and responsibility to play in the judiciary system of Nigeria. This is for the very fact that, they permeate into all areas of the judiciary and mostly those in the center point of cases in the courts are women. Therefore, the need for more women in this regard is imperative and important due to the fact that women understand themselves better than men do. The paper therefore advocates the need for more women in the system and encouragement in their contribution to the system. Not only that, it should be recognised that Muslim women are present in all of the aforementioned court categories in one capacity or another (as adjudicators or administrators). One significant difference, though, is in adjudication; in Shari'ah courts, they only participate in administrative capacities, but in the traditional system, they serve as both administrators and adjudicators. The study reveals the significant impact of Muslim women on the system. Despite facing challenges, they have made notable contributions, promoting diversity, inclusivity, and access to justice. Muslim women in the judiciary bring diverse perspectives and experiences. They serve as role models, inspiring young girls to pursue careers. Also, the study's findings highlight the need for further research on the experiences of Muslim women in the judiciary. Future studies can explore the impact of their contributions on the legal system and society.

Author Contributions

Shafa'atu Aliyu Barmo: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration. **Aisha Abubakar Tsoho:** Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Investigation.

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Conflict of Interest

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