

# THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE OIL INDUSTRY

Charles Gyan

Department of Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences,  
University of Ghana, P. O. Box LG419, Legon-Accra, Ghana

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## ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to ascertain the contribution of women in the oil industry. It also looked at the opportunities available and the barriers that prevent women from attaining higher heights in the oil industry. Findings from the study show several factors (institutional, cultural, social and personal) that prevent women from being employed in the oil industry. The study has implication for policy formulation. It brings to the fore, the fact that governments must institute affirmative action policies to bridge the gap between men and women at all level of the Ghanaian society.

**Keywords:** Women Subordination, Oil Industry, Gender, Glass Ceiling

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Oil is by far one of the natural resources that turn the fortunes of countries around. Darkwah (2010) is of the view that oil stimulates the global economy and converted petrol and diesel fuels facilitate the different means of transportation that allow the movement of goods and people around the globe. There is no doubt that oil serves as the engine that speeds growth in every economy. The advent of oil in Ghana will serve as a crucial ingredient in the development of the economy if oil proceeds are used well. The main drive behind the oil and gas industry in Ghana is the need to reduce the country's reliance on some of the natural resources in the country.

One of the social issues in Ghana, as a country, is the need for gender equality and equity in all spheres of socio-economic activities. This is also in line with meeting the Millennium Development Goal No. 3: "Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women". According to the United Nations, women are largely relegated to more vulnerable forms of employment. Women are over-represented in informal employment, with its lack of benefits and security.

In most developing countries, men outnumber women in paid employment yet women play a significant role in the development of our human resource. During formative years of a child they help tremendously in inculcating the culture and values of society in to the

child. In some instances, they single-handedly train and cater for their children who grow up and take top leadership positions in the country. In terms of population, females outnumber males. For instance, the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS 5) (GSS, 2008) estimates that women constitute about 51.4% of the entire population and majority of these women are engaged in microenterprises basically petty trading, craft work, menial jobs and farming with unsecured sources of income.

Empirical analysis of the gender and economic growth nexus for Ghana suggests that a significant increase in the female literacy rate could produce an increase in real output growth by about one-half. In other words, a significant improvement in gender equity, be it in terms of human capital accumulation, women's economic participation or otherwise will have significant positive effects on economic growth rates.

The most recent Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) (fourth round, conducted in 2008 estimates that agriculture is still the most important area of economic activity, followed by services and then industry. Agriculture contributes 34% of GDP (GSS, 2008) and employs about 50% of the population (GSS, 2008). The service sector has a growth rate of 10% and is the fastest growing sector of the economy, contributing 1/3 of the country's GDP. The industrial sector contributes 26% to GDP (expected to further rise with the discovery of oil) with the construction sub-sector

having the highest impact on this sector. Total informal employment in Ghana is estimated at 86.3% (74.1% in urban areas and 91.9% in rural areas).

Women are more likely to be found in Ghana's informal economy compared to men: 93.8% of all women work in the informal economy, compared to 77.3% of all men (GSS, 2008). Most new jobs are created in the informal economy, with formal sector employment growth largely stagnant.

This notwithstanding, most economically active women in Ghana operate in the informal economy, where they outnumber men and are particularly involved in various micro-enterprises and retail trade. In agriculture, women dominate in food crop production while men dominate cash crop farming. Incidentally, it is observed that food crop farmers are among the poorest in the country. Thus, even though women and men in Ghana play equally central roles in economic production, women, compared to their male counterparts (Cham, 2011), tend to experience greater poverty, have heavier time burdens and lower rates of utilization of productive assets (Roomi and Parrott, 2008).

It is also important to note that although oil affects gender relations, women are relegated to the background with the view that they do not have the technical know-how required in the oil industry. This perception and attitudes have the tendency of increasing the woes of women if no affirmative action is put in place to rescue the situation.

With Ghana becoming an emerging nation in the oil industry and with the industry already well dominated by males, there is the likelihood that women may be relegated to the background in the oil industry. In Ghana, it is perceived that women do not usually have access to the resources and education that would improve their skills and capabilities hence their inability to rise up to the occasion in getting opportunities in top industries in the country. Research evidence from the global context shows that women have little opportunities in the oil industry. The primary reason has been the low level of education and skills required for the industry. Even when a few of them possess the required skills, women are generally considered to be caretakers of the home (reproductive roles) which makes it very difficult for them to engage in the employment of such activities. Oil production has often been described as a very masculine job which most women are considered not to have the capacity to engage in.

It is the hope of all that the oil that has emerged in the country will improve the economic status of men and women alike. Hence, this study would seek to find out the various opportunities that are available to women in the oil industry. It would also find out the kind of roles that women

are likely to play in this industry to strive for economic independence from their male counterparts and their contribution to the economic development of the country.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted at the Tema Oil Refinery. The Tema Oil Refinery (TOR) was established in 1963 which is the only oil refinery in Ghana. TOR is incorporated under the Ghana companies Code 1963, Act 179 with the Government of Ghana as its sole shareholder. TOR's core business is to refine crude oil to yield refined petroleum products and sell. TOR has offered employment opportunities to over 600 Ghanaians but most of the opportunities were given to men and only few women are found working in this oil industry.

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the roles of women in the oil industry. The mixed method provided the opportunity for triangulation and complementarily (Creswell, 2003). Creswell (2003) indicated that the integration of results from both qualitative and quantitative approaches at the interpretation phase "can note the convergence of the findings as a way to strengthen the knowledge claim of the study". The qualitative method involved the use of in-depth interviews while the quantitative involved the use of face to face and self-administered questionnaire. The use of both methods provided an opportunity for elaboration, illustration and clarification of the results from quantitative method with results from the qualitative method.

The sample size for the study was one hundred and ten (110) comprising of seventy females and forty males. The sample size was designed this way because the study involves the roles of women in the oil industry and as such more women are needed to respond to the questionnaire. Again, the choice of this sample size is necessitated by the researcher's quest to reduce cost, obtain more comprehensive data as well as reduce manpower requirements in the form of research assistants.

The research adopted both Probability and non-probability Sampling Methods-precisely the Simple Random Sampling and purposive sampling techniques were adopted for the selection of the respondents for the study. The researcher's choice of these techniques was informed by the nature of the population. The department heads interviewed were sampled using the simple random sampling technique. This method gives each member of the population equal chance of being selected, thus making the final result truly representative of the entire population. With respect to

the rest of the staff, purposive non-probability sampling method was used to purposefully select the staff that can really provide the needed information for the study.

Data collected from the field was already pre-coded, except the case of open-ended questions. The researcher therefore went ahead to edit the data and this involved coding of open-ended questions and checking through the responses given by respondents to ensure consistency. The purpose of editing was to examine the data for consistency of responses.

Satisfied with the edited data, the researcher went ahead to do data entries using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software program. Thus, SPSS data analysis program was used in analyzing the data obtained from the field. Frequency tables were used in this analysis since they help readers to get a vivid picture from the result of the study. Brief statements were provided to explain the statistical tables; this was intended to bring out clarity and precision as well as make the tables and graphs understandable. These brief explanatory statements captured all the factors that could not be subjected to statistical treatment.

Data was interpreted based on the codified and tabulated responses from the administered questionnaires and the interviews held. Conclusions were however drawn based on the results the SPSS analysis generated and the inferences made from the study of the sampled population's responses.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents such as age and marital status are presented in **Table 1** and **2**.

**Table 1** above shows the age distribution of the respondents. From the **Table 1** (49.1%) of the respondents were between the ages of 36-50 years. Forty-three of the respondents representing 39.1% were within the age range of 21-35 years while seven respondents representing 6.3% were 20 years and below. The remaining six respondents were 50 years and above.

**Table 2** above showed the marital status of the respondents. The table shows that 72 (65.5%) of the respondents have married, 13 (11.8%) were divorcees, 9 (8.2%) were separated while 5 (4.5) were single. The remaining 11 (10%) respondents refused to respond to this question. This shows that majority of the respondents were married.

#### 3.2. Perceptions About Women Working in the Oil Industry

The respondents were asked to state their perceptions and feelings about women, their work life in the oil industry and that of their family life when working in the oil industry and their responses were presented in **Table 3-6**.

**Table 3** showed the responses of the respondents on the question as to whether the oil industry requires the services of men rather than women. Sixty-five respondents representing 59.1% affirmed that the oil industry requires the services of men rather than women while the remaining forty-five respondents representing 40.9% thought otherwise. Those who asserted that, the oil industry requires the services of men rather than women indicated that the technically inclined nature of the work at the oil industries demands individuals with such skills which most women lack while those who said it requires the services of both sexes claimed that women have the same talents and skills as men but since society through its socialization process relegate women and their capabilities to the background, erroneous impressions have been created about the capabilities of women.

From **Table 4** above it is evident that majority of the respondents that is 60 respondents representing 54.5% affirmed that when women occupy top positions they become bossy and the remaining fifty respondents representing 45.5% thought otherwise. A female respondent re-affirmed this by stating that "my boss behaves as if we those working under her are not human beings. At times her behaviour makes me side with the men that when women are given positions we overuse them". This shows that some women are their own enemies, their behaviours and inactions most often perpetuates the patriarchal norms which invariably lead to gender inequality in the society.

**Table 1.** Respondents' age

Age range	Frequency	Percent
20 and below	7	6.3
21-35	43	39.1
36-50	54	49.1
51 and above	6	5.5
Total	110	100.0

**Table 2.** Respondents' marital status

Marital status	Frequency	Percent
Single	5	4.5
Married	72	65.5
Divorced	13	11.8
Separated	9	8.2
Total	110	100.0

**Table 3.** Whether the oil industry requires the services of men rather than women

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	65	9.1
No	45	40.9
Total	110	100.0

**Table 4.** Whether women occupying top positions in the oil industry feel bossy or not

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	60	54.5
No	50	45.5
Total	110	100.0

**Table 5.** Whether the influx of too many women in the oil industry reduces productivity

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	62	56.4
No	41	37.3
N/R	7	6.3
Total	110	100.0

**Table 5** above shows the respondents' perception about whether the appointment of a lot of women in the oil industry is likely to affect productivity adversely. From the table it is clear that 62 (56.4%) respondents believe that when a lot of women are employed in the industry, it will retard productivity while 41 (37.3%) think the opposite. The remaining 7 (6.3%) respondents refused to respond to this question. A respondent in affirmation of this finding claimed that:

“Women are faced with a lot of challenges from their dual role as workers and mothers. This makes most women masters of none of those roles. They can neither work for long hours nor do overtime. What mostly affect production is whenever they are on maternity leave. Imagine that you have 60% of your employees being women, out of this number even 30% give birth within the same year and are given maternity leave, what will happen to productivity? Hmm is a difficult issue but employing more women than men poses a great challenge.”

The researcher further asked the respondents to indicate whether the women in the industry have ample time for their families and their responses are presented in **Table 6** below.

It is evident from **Table 6** that an overwhelming majority of the respondents think that most working

mothers in the oil industry have little or no time for their families. From the **Table 6** (75.5%) respondents indicated that women working in the oil industry do not have time for their families while the remaining 27 (24.5%) respondents think otherwise.

It is clear from the **Table 7** above that majority of the respondents think that women working in the oil industry are not discriminated against in terms of promotion, salary and any other fringe benefits on the basis of sex. From **Table 7** it is evident that 107 (97.3%) respondents think that women working in the oil industry are not discriminated against with regards to promotion, salary and any other benefits while the remaining 3 (2.7%) respondents think otherwise.

### 3.3. Opportunities for Women in the oil Industry

The responses of the respondents on the available opportunities for women in the oil industry are presented in **Table 8-10**.

**Table 8** shows the responses of the respondents on the question as to whether women are likely to occupy top positions in the oil industry due to the affirmative action policies. Eighty-six respondents representing 78.2% affirmed that women are likely to occupy top positions in the oil industry due to the affirmative action policies while the remaining twenty-four respondents representing 21.8% thought otherwise. Those who responded in affirmation were quick to add that, the policies can achieve their targets if women acquire the requisite skills for those positions since the affirmative action is not geared towards compromising quality for quantity.

From **Table 9** above it is clear that majority of the respondents that is 103 respondents representing 93.6% affirmed that when women pursue technically inclined courses, there will be opportunities for them in the oil industry while the remaining seven respondents representing 6.4% thought otherwise.

**Table 10** above shows that 99 respondents representing 90.0% of the total respondents believe that women can easily fit into general office duties, public relations and general administration in the oil and gas industry while the remaining 11 (10.0%) respondents refused to respond to this question. This affirms the reasons why most women take up subservient roles as compared to men in the oil industry. Perhaps, this explains why most women and girls study courses which not technically inclined thereby restricting them to administration and secretarial duties.

**Table 6.** Whether women working in the oil industry have time for their families

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	27	24.5
No	83	75.5
Total	110	100.0

**Table 7.** Whether women working in the oil industry are discriminated against with regards to promotion, salary and other fringe benefits

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	3	2.7
No	107	97.3
Total	110	100.0

**Table 8.** Whether Women are likely to occupy top positions in the oil industry due to affirmative action policies

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	86	78.2
No	24	21.8
Total	110	100.0

**Table 9.** Whether there will be opportunities for women when they pursue more technically inclined courses like engineering, physics, geology

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	103	93.6
No	7	6.4
Total	110	100.0

**Table 10.** Whether Women can easily fit into general office duties, public relations and the general administration of the oil industry or not

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	99	90.0
N/R	11	10.0
Total	110	100.0

**Table 11.** Whether the Tema oil Refinery gives Equal Chance to both men and Women in terms of Management Positions

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	73	66.4
No	24	21.8
N/R	11	10.0
Total	110	100.0

It is evident from **Table 11** that most of the respondents think that Tema Oil Refinery gives equal chance to both men and women in terms of management positions. From the **Table 11** (66.4%) respondents indicated that the Tema Oil Refinery gives equal chance

to both men and women in terms of management positions while 24 (21.8%) respondents think otherwise. The remaining 13 respondents representing 11.8% did not respond to this question.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The objectives for this study focus on exploring the perceptions about women in the oil industry, examining the roles of women in the oil industry and finding out the challenges that women face in assuming work positions in the oil industry.

### 4.1. Perceptions About Women in the oil Industry

The researchers in the study explored the perceptions of people about women in the oil industry in general but with specific reference to the Tema Oil Refinery. The study found that most of the respondents perceive the oil industry as the preserve for the services of men rather than women. They believe that the risks involved in working at the oil industry can be more faced by men than women. This finding is consistent with Graves and Powell (2007) assertion that the oil industry is perceived by many as a traditionally male-dominated terrain which most often affect recruiters' assessment of applicants' subjective qualifications.

It was also found that majority of the respondents that is 54.5% think that when women occupy top positions in the oil industry they become bossy and remain unconcern about the plight of their subordinates. Again, the findings of the study show that people perceive the appointment of a lot of women in the oil industry to be detrimental to the progress of the industry since this can affect production adversely. From the study it was clear that 62 (56.4%) respondents think that when a lot of women are employed in the industry, it would retard productivity. These perceptions are alleged to be the most influential factors in the recruitment of more males into the oil industries than females. These findings are in line with Simard and Gammal (2012) finding that few of the females who are so fortunate to assume top level management roles in most industries today would even prefer to recruit males rather than females because of their perceptions about females in the industrial setting. The female applicant however despite her qualification might not be considered for the position by the female employer because of the latter's perception that men would be able to do the job better than women.

## 4.2. The Roles of Women in the Oil Industry

It was found from the study that most women employed in the oil industry perform roles related to general office, public relations, administrative and secretarial duties. That is women are not more in the units and departments that require technical and engineering skills. In **Table 10** the study found that 90.0% of the respondents believe that women can easily fit into general office duties, public relations and general administration in the oil and gas industry. This finding is consistent with Graves and Powell (2007) finding that women best fit general administration, advertisement of products and services of the industry, marketing, human resource, communications and public relations units of industries than in the core technical aspects of the industry.

## 4.3. Opportunities for Women in the Oil Industry

The study revealed several opportunities available for women in the oil industry. The study showed that due to the affirmative action policies by governments, women have the opportunity to occupy any top position in the industry provided they have the requisite skills. It was found in **Table 8** that 78.2% of the respondents think that women are likely to occupy top positions in the oil industry due to the affirmative action policies. The study further revealed that women can harness these opportunities when at the tertiary institutions more women study courses such as geology, physics or engineering. In actual fact, these courses when pursued by women will brighten their chances of taking up key roles in the core areas of the oil industry. This is confirmed by the study in **Table 9** which revealed that 93.6% of the respondents claimed that when women pursue technically inclined courses, there will be opportunities for them in the oil industry.

It was however evident from the study that women in the oil industry face a lot of challenges. The main challenge revealed from the study is the expectation that women are to perform dual roles as mothers and workers. In the quest of women to perform their motherly roles they find it difficult working for long hours. It was evident from the study that most of the respondents think that most working mothers in the oil industry have little or no time for their families. From **Table 6**, 75.5% of the respondents indicated that women working in the oil industry do not have time for their families.

## 4.4. Recommendations

In the light of the title of this study, “the role of women in the oil industry” and on the basis of the above findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

The results of this study clearly confirm that women subordinate roles in the oil industry are driven by deeply-held beliefs, stereotypes and perceptions people have about women in general that do not necessarily lend themselves to discouragement through rational arguments. However, the researcher recommends that the perceptions and stereotypes that surround women subordination should be challenged. Workers and management of the oil industry, community members and youth should be educated about the negative repercussions of women subordination. Using mass media to increase the awareness of the whole community about the consequences of gender inequality on females themselves, their family and on the community as a whole is very key to the fight against women subordination. Media campaigns using radio and other traditional communication methods must be used to reach communities, especially those in rural areas. All these measures would help to ensure the domestic applicability of the national, as well as international legal instruments already ratified about women’s human rights.

It is also recommended that community networks and partnerships should be established to involve girls clubs, teachers, elders, local government officials, women and youth groups, community and religious leaders, to jointly work towards encouraging women and girls to pursue technically inclined courses such as geology, physics and engineering to help women harness the available opportunities in the oil industry.

It is again recommended that national government, local governments, non-governmental organizations and civil societies should institute scholarship programs for girls who pursue science related courses both at the second cycle and tertiary level to encourage parents to allow their female children to pursue sciences courses.

The science and Maths clinics for girls should be strengthened and resuscitated by the government and all other stakeholders.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The study can also conclude that numerous severe consequences result from women subordination. Women’s subordinate role in the oil industry is

intrinsically linked to their relatively low income levels as compared to their male counterparts. To address this challenging phenomenon, a joint effort to formulate and implement policies and strategies is needed.

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