

# An Exploration of the Perception of Gender Inequality in Malawi through Gender, Discrimination, and Socialization

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**Abstract:** There is a continual search for knowledge on perceptions towards gender inequality globally. This study aimed to explore the factors that would predict perceived gender inequality in Malawi. For the data gathering, a questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 76 respondents (40 females and 36 males). The Predictive Analytic Software (PASW) was used for data analysis. Multiple regression analysis with stepwise option was conducted to examine the variance in perceived gender inequality that was explained by discrimination, gender, and socialization in Malawi. The results indicated that discrimination and gender were the major predictors of gender inequality in Malawi, and it also confirmed that there is strong perception of gender inequality, especially among the female and those who feel discriminated against. Further research is recommended to investigate the impact of perception of gender inequality on a sense of citizenship and belongingness, and how the perceived gender inequality impacts the academic and professional growth of women in Malawi.

**Keywords:** *Gender inequality, gender, socialization, discrimination, perceptions, Malawi.*

dimensions arising, including reversals, which occur when the victims of gender inequality shift from one gender to the other (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2013). The proliferation of studies on gender inequality is an indication of its relentless presence in society. As such, there is a need for more studies to help understand how to counter gender inequality and its negative impacts.

In 2011, Hofstede in his study of cultural dimensions stated that culture is one of the key effectors of gender inequality in society. Because of the cultural orientation in Malawi, gender inequality there is high. In 2015, United Nations Development Fund (UNFPA) also echoed the same idea stating that for many years, some cultural practices have put many women at a disadvantaged position. On another note, Kayuni (2017) stated that despite the support for women participation in politics, women still lag behind men. A study indicated that bringing awareness to the fact that not only changes in policy is needed but also appropriate contextualization and work with individual perceptions are critical in order to improve the acceptance of gender equality in society (Siddiqi & Shafiq, 2017). Gender-based discrimination is still affecting women in Malawi and it is experienced at the social, political, and economical level (OXFAM, 2018).

Therefore, this study aimed to understand the extent to which discrimination, gender, and socialization affect the perceptions of Malawians towards gender inequality in Malawi. This study contributes to the growing body of work on gender equality and may aid in filling some of the gaps in the way gender inequality is perceived in Malawi. As such, the results contribute to the theory of gender equality in Africa which could be used to fight for gender equality using statistical data that look beyond observed culture

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## Introduction

There have been numerous studies over decades on gender equality. The study of Siddiqi and Shafiq (2017) reported the persistence of gender inequality which is seen in the family, workplace, and society in general. Despite these studies, gender inequality does not seem to fade (Azuh & Amodu, 2017). Instead, there are new

for sustainable impact. The study also contributes to the wider theoretical knowledge on the effect of cultural values on gender equality through Malawian voices.

With a small body of research available on the subject, the study adds to the growing body of literature on perceptions of gender inequality, discrimination, and socialization in Malawi. It also provides recommendations on how to deal against deep-rooted gender inequality in the nation despite the promotion for gender equality through constitutional and legal reforms.

### Literature Review

The term gender is defined by Njogu and Orchardson-Mazrui (n.d.) as “a social construct which assets expectation capabilities and responsibilities of men and women which are not biologically determined” (p.2). On the other hand, gender inequality is defined “as the social process by which people are treated differently and disadvantageously, under similar circumstances, on the basis of gender” (Kent, 2007, p.137). With these definitions, it could be deduced that if the two genders were treated in the same manner, then there is gender equality. Thus, it can be cited that Section 20 of the Malawi Constitution had attributed to the discrimination as stated in the study of Nyirenda (2017):

Any distinction, exclusion or preference which is based on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, and which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by all persons, on an equal footing, of all rights and freedoms. (p.112)

From the constitution, Malawi has legalized gender equality and through the enactment of its Gender Equality Act of 2013. Prima facie, it looks like there is progress but gender inequality is still prevalent in Malawi. As cited by Adolfsson and Madsen (2020), despite the progress in the legal framework, socially, most of the unpaid work is done by women which signifies their inferior social position. Further, their involvement in work sectors dominated by men does not guarantee that the burden of labor without pay which they do at home will be alleviated. On the political arena, OXFAM reported in 2015 that access to political power in Malawi is culturally inclined towards men| “which works to the detriment of women’s political empowerment” (p.18) even though Malawi has signed several of the international obligations and treaties. An earlier study by Hofstede (as cited in Jandt, 2006) stated that masculine traits tend to maximize the difference between what either men or women are expected to do focusing on gender roles. In 2018, OXFAM reported progress on gender equality in education but little improvement on gender inequality in public services and suggested that Malawi should critically look at its social norms to address the issues that “are still undermining the progressive gender equality and women’s rights” (p 10).

In 2018, Nowack studied how legislation was introduced in Malawi to strengthen the support of gender equality through the criminalization of polygamy as well as child marriages. This was opposed in parliament for several years before finally passing into law, and that was not until the section criminalizing polygamy was removed (Nowack, 2018). Even to date, this legislation still meets opposition in the local communities. The behavior and attitudes of the Malawian parliament exhibit opposition towards gender equality as culture takes preference over the laws being passed. This supports Oppong’s (2013)

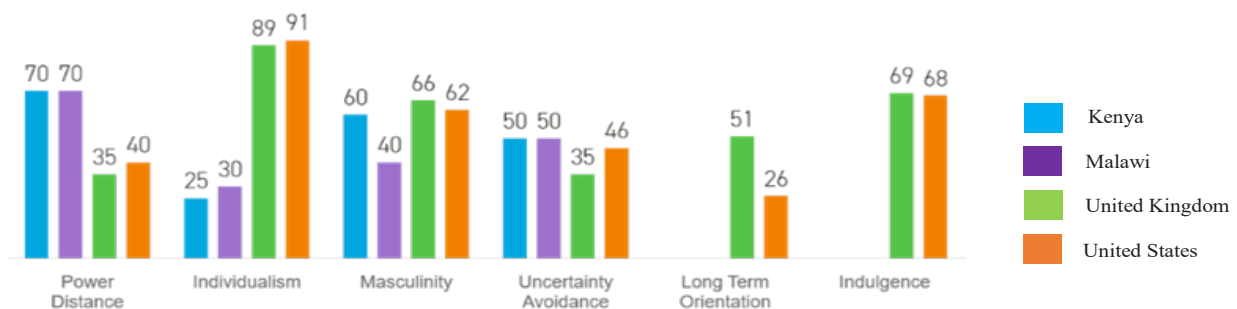


Figure 1. Hofstede’s insights on cultural dimensions.

statement that "...the African will always be influenced by his/her cultural values" (p. 2).

Hofstede's (2020) insight on cultural dimensions has been used to assess Malawi, Kenya, the United Kingdom, and the United States as shown in *Figure 1*.

This could explain that despite all the efforts toward gender inequality in Malawi such as local legislation, international obligations, and gender balance campaigns, parity has not been reached yet. In 2014, it was reported that the ratio of women in parliament went down from 43 to 32, which was a representation decrease from about 22% to 17% (Mussa & Masanjala, 2015). Kayuni (2017) also observed that politically, in Malawi, the number of women members of parliament is not stable to date. There had been progress from 1994 to 2009 (5.2% to 22.3%) but a decrease was observed in 2014 when the number went down to 17%. However, an increase in women winning the elections seats was observed in the 2019 parliament (Andsen, 2019). The parliament of Malawi has 192 members, out of which, 44 are women (23%). Out of 23 cabinet ministers, only 3 are women (13%) as reported by Africa Barometer (2021). Further, it also reported that Malawi is among the "African countries with no affirmative action provision for women decision making in the constitution" (p. 197). Therefore, there is inconsistency in the progress of gender equality as observed in women representation in the country's law and decision-making body—the parliament. This is an indication that in Malawi, a substantial number of women is still affected by gender inequality (Kayuni, 2017). Despite the strong support on women's rights in both rural and urban areas of Malawi, Kayuni's (2017) study shows that 1 in 3 Malawians report that gender equality has not yet been accomplished at the workplace or in the area of land ownership.

It is the persistence of gender inequality and the inconsistencies in its progress that prompted this study to explore the extent to which factors such as discrimination, gender, and socialization affect perceptions towards gender inequality in Malawi. The study is aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What relationship exists between perceptions towards gender inequality and gen-

der in Malawi?

2. What relationship exists between perceptions towards gender inequality and discrimination in Malawi?
3. What relationship exists between perceptions towards gender inequality and socialization in Malawi?

## **Methodology**

The purpose of the study was to understand the extent to which discrimination, gender, and socialization affect the perceptions of Malawians towards gender inequality in Malawi. This section discusses the methodology used to conduct this study in conformity with research standards.

### **Research Design**

A quantitative design was used to explore the relationship between perspective towards gender inequality and socialization, as well as the relationship between discrimination and gender in Malawi. This design allowed fast data collection and also ensured the objectivity in the study which controlled bias in considering the interpretation of the results.

### **Research Setting**

The questionnaire was administered in three regions of Malawi to a random sample of 76 respondents. The three regions have similar cultural practices with minor differences. All respondents were all Malawians based in Malawi.

### **Sampling**

The study utilized random sampling which allowed for each member of the population to have an equal chance of being included in the sample. A questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 76 respondents (40 females and 36 males) for the data gathering.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection was conducted using an adapted structured questionnaire from Hofstede's cultural dimensions question for 2013 and 2017. This was first reviewed by measurement experts, and was pilot-tested for suitability to the desired data to be collected from the sample.

## Data Analysis

After the data collection, it was entered into the Predictive Analytic Software (PASW) where it was explored for accurate entry and was analyzed. One of the aims of the study was to explore the relationship between perspectives towards gender inequality and socialization in Malawi. It also aimed to determine the relationship between perspectives on gender inequality and discrimination. The study further explored the relationship between perspectives on gender inequality and gender in Malawi.

## Results

This study aimed to examine if there is a relationship between perceptions towards gender inequality and gender. It also aimed to determine the relationship between perceptions towards gender inequality and discrimination. The study further explored the relationship between perceptions towards gender inequality and socialization to determine any significant relationship.

*Table 1*  
*Frequencies*

	Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	36	47.4	47.4	47.4
	Male	40	52.6	52.6	100.0
	Total	76	100.0	100.0	
<b>Age</b>					
Valid	Under 30	31	40.8	40.8	40.8
	31 - 40	22	28.9	28.9	69.7
	41 - 50	17	22.4	22.4	92.1
	51 - 60	6	7.9	7.9	100.0
	Total	76	100.0	100.0	
<b>Region of Origin in Malawi</b>					
Valid	South	13	17.1	17.1	17.1
	Central	11	14.5	14.5	31.6
	North	52	68.4	68.4	100.0
	Total	76	100.0	100.0	

To determine if there was statistical significance, multiple regression analysis was conducted. Correlation and regression analysis were used to show the strength of the linear relationships of the variables and their relationships, which led to some being left out because they correlated heavily with other variables. The assumption and reliability tests were carried out to determine the suitability of the processes to the data before analyses were run. The results of the analyses were then reported and interpreted.

## Ethical Considerations

The respondents were informed of the value of participating in the study, but they were also informed that participation was based on their voluntary decision. Participating in the study was voluntary and no respondent would be forced to do so. At the time that the respondents were starting to fill out the questionnaire, they were again informed that if they did not feel like continuing, they were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Out of 76 respondents in the study, 40 (52.6%) were males while 36 (47.4%) were females. There were 31 (41%) respondents who were under 30 years of age; 22 (29%) respondents were 31–40 years old; 17 (22%) respondents were 41–50 years; and 7 (8%) respondents were 51–60 years old.

Based on the region of origin, 13 (17%) respondents were from the south; 11 (15%) respondents were from central, and 52 (68%) respondents were from the north.

The Principal Components Factor (PCF) analysis was run on the data that were coded on a Likert scale. Four major components had Eigen value greater than one. These were: Perceived Gender Inequality (Cronbach's alpha = .70), Cultural Orientation (Cronbach's alpha = .71), Perceived Discrimination (Cronbach's alpha = .56), and Socialization (Cronbach's alpha = .77). Cultural Orientation and Socialization correlated strongly with each other so only Socialization was factored in the Regression Model to reduce chances of Multicollinearity.



Table 2  
Model Summary

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
					F Change	df1	df2	
1	.44 <sup>a</sup>	.20	.66	.20	5.83	3	72	.00

a. Predictors: (Constant), Socialization, Gender, Discrimination

Multiple regression analysis was run using the stepwise regression option to determine how much variance was explained by three independent variables (socialization, gender, and discrimination) and which would have a statistically significant correlation with the dependent variable (perceived gender inequality). The results show that the three independent variables explained 20% of the variance in Perceived Gender Inequality ( $R^2 = .20$ ;  $F_{(3, 72)} = 5.83$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.00$ ), and that they are statistically significant indicating a regression model fit.

As indicated by the beta coefficients when one is a female, the perception of gender inequality increased by .26 which is a statistically significant increase ( $\beta = 0.26$ ,  $t = 2.41$ ,  $p=0.02$ ), while discrimination increased the perception of gender inequality by .24 which is also statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $t = 2.07$ ,  $p=0.04$ ). Socialization did not change the perception of gender inequality significantly. The variance inflation factor (VIF for Discrimination = 1.19; Gender = 1.02 and Socialization = 1.17 < 2.5) are all below the most conservative VIF threshold (Johnson, Jones, & Manley, 2018). Therefore, multicollinearity was minimal since any other independent variables that correlated

strongly among themselves were not entered into the regression model.

These regression results indicate that females have a higher perception of gender inequality in Malawi compared to males. The results also show that where there is discrimination in Malawi, there is a significant perception of gender inequality. It is also apparent in this study that the way one socializes does not necessarily predict perceived gender inequality. This was consistent with the lack of statistically significant correlation between the region where one was raised in Malawi and perceived gender inequality.

### Discussion

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine how much variance in perceived gender inequality was explained by discrimination, gender and socialization. The results indicate that discrimination and gender significantly explain one's perception of gender inequality in Malawi. The region that the respondent was from did not correlate significantly with perceived gender inequality; therefore, the perception of gender inequality did not depend on whether one was from the south, central or northern part of Malawi. Socialization correlated significantly with perceived gender inequality, but it was not included in the regression model to reduce

Table 3  
Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	.84	.56		1.52	.13	-.27	1.95		
Discrimination	.27	.13	.24	2.07	.04	.01	.53	.84	1.19
Gender	.37	.15	.26	2.42	.02	.07	.68	.98	1.02
Socialization	.27	.20	.15	1.33	.19	-.13	.67	.86	1.17

a. Dependent Variable: Perceived Gender Inequality

chances of multicollinearity because it also correlated significantly with discrimination. Unlike the 2018 report of OXFAM which suggested a look at the social norms to deal with gender inequality, it was evident from this study's results that socialization did not change the perception of gender inequality significantly. The regression results indicated that females perceived more than males that there is gender inequality in Malawi. The results also showed that where there was discrimination in Malawi, there was significant perception of gender inequality. Similarly, OXFAM (2018) reported that gender-based discrimination contributes to gender inequality in Malawi. It is also apparent from the results of the study that simply saying that there is gender equality did not decrease the perception of gender inequality in Malawi. These results also confirm that despite the government's provisions of gender equality in the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi and its different laws or its being signatory to the national and international conventions on gender equality, Malawi is still battling with gender inequality.

Subsequently, the results of this study indicate that Malawi is still experiencing gender inequality in many sectors. Its reluctance in embracing the affirmative action provision for women's decision making in the constitution reflects its stand on gender equality. Therefore, government policies on gender inequality seem ineffective in Malawi. For instance, legislation in support of gender equality took several years to pass in parliament which included revisions that removed a section prohibiting polygamy (Nowack, 2018). The present head of state of Malawi failing to respect gender equality in public appointments led to women's demonstrations. They took to the street to protest against the new appointments of the male-dominated cabinet and other public offices on October 9, 2020 (Masina, 2020). In Malawi, 9 out of 67 statutory boards are chaired by women which is 13% representation of women (APA-Lilongwe, 2020). Therefore, this study's results confirm that the situation of gender inequality has not changed since there is still perceived discrimination and gender inequality.

## Conclusion

World views about gender equality may be different from culture to culture. Since this study was conducted with data from Malawi, the results may not be similar to results in other countries. However, it is evident that discrimination and gender are significant predictors of gender inequality in Malawi. Future studies should investigate how perceived discrimination and gender impact the sense of citizenship and a sense of belonging in a country as well as academic and professional growth.

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