Women August Meeting and the Quest against Discrimination of OSU in South-East, Nigeria

Samuel C. Agunyai and John Etembo

Department of Political Science, Department of Local Government Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
* Corresponding author: samora20032008@yahoo.com, agunyais@oauife.edu.ng

Abstract
This paper examined the utility of yearly August meeting of Igbo women as a vehicle for denouncing the orthodox belief that sees the Osu as less humans in the South-East, Nigeria. The paper contends that this annual women meeting holds great promise in this direction in that, it will help to educate and create awareness against the treatment of the Osu as inferior human beings a situation that had caused more alienation among Igbo stock. The paper utilized qualitative data sourced through key respondents’ interviews of chairmen of the August women meeting, leaders of both Osu and Diala extractions purposively selected from two communities each in Enugu and Imo states. Imo and Enugu States were selected because they still have some communities that treat Osu as inferior human beings. While Umuoka community was selected in Imo state, Umuode community was selected in Enugu State. The data were analysed using descriptive and content analysis. Results of the analysis showed that discrimination against the Osus in the South-East was based on mere belief and ignorance transferred from one generation to the other and that patterns and levels of discrimination against the Osus took the form of rejection, open abuse, planned attacks, divorce, isolation, separation and applying of poison. The results showed that in spite of the useful potentials of the August meeting, little has been done by women in this meeting to nip the Osu caste system in the bud. The study concluded that effective and rapid mitigation of the Osu caste system in the South-East demands a multi-faceted approach in its implementation as it affects both men and women in the region.

Keywords: August meeting, Diala, Osu, Caste System and Women

Introduction
The rate at which women participate in politics, governance and public offices in Nigeria has been a recurrent phenomenon in the literature. This phenomenon had made many researchers (Anifowose and Enemuo, 1999; Obiyan and Akindele, 2002; Sanbonmatsu, 2003; Albert, 2005; Olaifa, 2009; Agbalajobi, 2010; Aina, 2012; Anah 2014; Soetan, 2014; Agunyai, Odeyemi and Wakili, 2014; Awofeso and Odeyemi, 2014), to focus more on marginalisation, underrepresentation, gender representation, travails and rights of women both in public and private life. And this has created some limitations in addressing the efforts of women in tackling certain social ills (callous treatment of widows and the Osu), however, few studies have pointed out that women through the annual August meeting have contributed to transformation of their communities (Nwankwo, 2010, Torehia &
The Osu, in the South-East, Nigeria represents a man or woman who is discriminated against or treated as less human based on the traditional belief that they were descendants of slaves to powerful high priest of the traditional religion that served deities or gods in the shrine. It is a group of men or women of lower status who without their own knowledge earned the name Osu because of the belief that their parents or grandparents had served a very powerful high priest. An Osu can be a man or woman who is inflicted with all manners of discrimination in terms of marriage, burial and public office. The true origin of the emergence of the Osu caste seems to be at large. Different stories are told about this living tale. For instance, Amadife tells us that the origin is traced to the era when the gods were believed to demand for human sacrifice during festivals, so as to cleanse the land of abomination. Then the people would contribute to the general purse for a purchase of a slave or for kidnapping one. This victims and their descendants became known as ‘Osu arusi’ (Amadife, 1988). Evidence shows that the Diala, generally referred to as the son of the soil or freeborn in all the Igbo communities in the South-East are more superior than the Osu who are seen as inferior or less human beings (Igwe and Akolokwu, 2014). However, the increasing discriminatory practices against the Osu and its grave implications have been well documented in Nigeria (Achebe, 1958; Afigbo, 1968; Arinze, 1970; Isichei, 1977; Imoagene, 1992; Obinna, 1993; Srinivas, 1996; Dike, 2002; Nwosu, 2008; Amadi and Agena, 2014; Amadi and Obomanu, 2016). Evidence shows grave consequences of these discriminatory practices which include conflicts, disinheritance, Ostracism, lack of inter-marriage/delayed marriage, denial of chieftaincy titles, organized attacks, deprivation of property and expulsion of wives and sometimes death (Ilo, 1992; Ajayi, 1995; Sarchet-Waller, 1996; Bishwakarma, 2001; Dike, 2002; Umahi, 2012; Igwe and Akolokwu, 2014).

Further, the discriminatory practices against the Osu has implication for divisiveness and alienation of the Igbo people (Dike, 2002). Specifically, discriminatory practices against the Osu has implications for peaceful co-existence of people in the South-East, Nigeria because of the sheer population size, which constitutes about 11.9% of Nigeria’s population (National Population Commission, 2006). Added to this is the increased susceptibility window to loss of lives, properties and displacement occasioned by increasing incident of crisis emanating between the Diala and Osu (Nwosu, 2008; Umahi, 2012; Madugba, 2014; Amadi and Obomanu, 2016). Identifying the factors influencing the discriminatory practices against people called Osu in the South-East has become a human rights and internal security priority and intervention to address the phenomenon (Akinbola, 2005; Nwagbara, Chukwu, Anyaoha and Scent, 2011). However, evidence is sparse on involvement of women August meeting in the crusade to end inhuman treatment of the Osu in the South-East Nigeria. While several studies have investigated the impact of women August meeting in community transformation, cooperative societies, empowerment initiatives, girl-child education, abolition of child marriage and public outcry against unfair treatment of widows in the South-East (Anah, 2012; Nzewi and Ojiagu, 2014; Nwankwo, 2010; Ohaegbuchi, 2014, Obinna and Odelemel, 2014); little is known on the role/influence of women in August meeting on ending the inhuman and discriminatory practices against the Osu in the South-East region. Also, not much empirical studies have investigated the reasons or basis of the inhuman treatment of Osus, patterns and levels of discrimination against them and the role played by women August meeting in the fight against discrimination against the Osus in the South-East, Nigeria.

In a bid to bridge the aforementioned gap, the paper aimed to advance the existing knowledge by investigating the role of women August meeting in creating public awareness to unfair treatment of the Osu and their influence on ending the orthodox belief that Osu are
slaves offered to deities. Amongst other functions of the August meeting, the paper attempted to tease out the influence of this annual meeting as an avenue to educate, criticised and appeal to those who still hold this archaic belief that Osu are less humans to drop such belief as all humans are equal. Understanding the influence of this evil belief on the Osu and the role of women August meeting in tackling it, will guide the design of appropriate interventions aimed at discouraging such unfair treatment of the Osu in the South-East region. Our understanding of the potentials of the August women meeting in terms of how they have vehemently resisted unjust treatment of widows, public outcry against child labour, child marriage, kidnapping and abuse of women via rape and domestic violence is key to achieving the abolition of the obnoxious belief and unfair treatment of the Osu in the South-East. Thus, this paper aims to answer the following questions: What are the rationale for discrimination against the Osus? What are the levels and patterns of discriminatory practices against the Osus in South-East, Nigeria? What are the influence of the women August meeting on the Osu caste system in South-East, Nigeria? Specifically, the paper objectives are to

i. identify the basis of discrimination against the Osu in the South-East;
ii. examine levels and patterns of discriminatory practices against the Osu in South-East, Nigeria; and
iii. determine the influence of women August meeting on the Osu caste system in South-East, Nigeria

Conceptual Clarifications
August Women Meeting

The women August Meeting is a yearly meeting of married Igbo women or women married to Igbo men which is held every August across the South-East region in Nigeria to discuss wide ranging issues affecting their communities. It is a platform used by women to pursue their interest which mainly bothers on development of their communities, protection of widows, rejection of the isolation of people generally referred to as Osu (outcast), collaborating efforts with the local government in the construction of community development projects like town halls, maternity homes, health centres, repair/reconstruction of Eze’s palace, payment of orphans’ school fees, youth empowerment (skills acquisition-hairdressing, barbing, phone repairs, and trading) and continual education of boys in Igbo land. According to Anah (2014) August movement’ is a mass movement in South East Nigeria that embraces all women within the region. It derives its name ‘August meeting’ from the eighth month of the year when all women of eastern Nigeria extraction and those married in this sub region are expected to return to their places of origin to rub minds, brain storm and plan on possible and feasible ways and means of developing their communities (Anah, 2014).

Osu

The Osu represents people (men or women) otherwise known as slaves offered as sacrifice to gods or idols in Igbo land. Osu, is man’s inhumanity to man created by a cult of wicked elders in order to intimidate the less privileged. It is a belief system, a traditional and religious belief that certain people should be discriminated from others. People originally referred to as Osu were those who had served as slaves to traditional high priests who worship deities or gods in their shrines in most Igbo communities. The descendants of these slaves are today called Osu in the South-East, Nigeria. And by implication, people see them as being too powerful on the belief that evil powers must have been transferred to them by the priests, this made people to fear and discriminate against them. On passage of time from one generation to the other, people began to uphold this belief. Today, this orthodox belief is still strongly upheld and practice in some Igbo communities, though, they are not offered as sacrificed to gods in the present world, but they are highly discriminated against because they earned that status by birth or marriage. Presently, one could acquire the Osu status through inheritance and marriage (Dike, 2002).
Diala

This represents the freeborn, the sons and daughters of the soil. They are the superior human beings while the Osu are less humans. The Diala belongs to the higher status of the caste system. This view was aptly corroborated by Obomanu and Amadi (2016) who aver that Diala or Nwadiala are freeborn who belongs to a higher social status. Nwadiala, in the view of Uchenna (2010) literally means ‘sons of the soil’.

The Osu Caste System in the South-East: A Spread of Superstitious Belief and Ignorance

Before now in some African countries, especially Nigeria, there are communities, villages or ethnic groups that forbids twin children but with the advent of missionaries, civilization and media interventions people began to drop this belief, today there are evidences of twin children that have done great exploits and have become great men and women in their countries. The case of Osu caste system in the South-East region is a similar case. Onwubuariri (2007) aptly corroborated this view when he avers that the problem is as old as the killing of twin babies, the killing of innocent children for developing first the upper incisor (teeth), the offering of human sacrifices, the problematic ideas of reincarnation which are practiced in the ancient Igbo nation and other nations in Nigeria and Africa at large. The Osu just like the forbidding twin children in the old African societies are superstitiously believed to be less humans who were slaves to the high priest of the traditional religion that serves deities or gods in the shrine. These slaves at that time had children and families and were offered as sacrifice to deities or gods in Igbo traditional societies. They were being offered as sacrifice in Igbo communities because of the belief that these slaves may have acquired the evil powers from shrines priests and based on this, they are initially being offered as sacrifice to gods or idols, but today, it has moved from using them as sacrifice to discrimination in marriage, burial ceremony and public office. This belief was strictly upheld and practiced in all Igbo communities at that time. But with the advent of the missionaries this belief was weakened by the spread of Christianity in the region. Today, this superstitious belief is still spreading relentlessly and it has constituted a firm basis for the treatment of Osu as less humans.

Besides, the ignorance of village heads, traditional rulers and grandfathers in Igbo communities who were strictly attached to their traditional religion at the expense of accepting Christianity brought to the region by the missionaries made the Osu castes system thrive in the South-East region. The unfair treatment of the Osus in most Igbo communities in the then precolonial era was borne out of sheer ignorance of traditional chiefs, elders and paramount rulers who initially resisted the acceptance of Christianity.

To them, worshiping of gods, offering of sacrifices to deities and fulfilling their god’s demands in averting problems affecting their society is preferred to a religion that is completely new to them. Ignorantly, they prefer gods that demand humans as sacrifice to Christianity. Achebe (1960) had in a similar vein, averred that “our fathers in their darkness and ignorance called an innocent man Osu, a thing given to the idols, and thereafter he became an outcast, and his children, and his children’s children forever”. This level of ignorance among grandfathers and traditional rulers had made the Osu caste system festered in the South-East region till date, though, with the advent of Christianity, there were reduction in numbers of unfair treatment of the Osus. For instance, the offering of the Osus as sacrifice to deities is rarely seen in most Igbo communities today.

The August Women Meeting and the Osu Caste System in South-East, Nigeria

Global history has proved that both males and females are capable of immense contribution to human development. Such contribution can be at any level or position of authority (Obiyan and Akindele, 2002). Women were able to transform "traditional methods for networking and expressing
disapproval” into powerful mechanisms that successfully challenged and disrupted the local colonial administration. In every society women exercise some degree of influence or power. However, the extent of that influence or power depends largely on the gender system of culture prevailing in a particular society Leacock cited in (Obiyan and Akindele, 2002). While some cultures make no demarcation between a male and a female in terms of who occupies what position, others may deliberately discriminate against females in filling certain positions (Obiyan and Akindele, 2002). For instance in Igbo communities, especially during the post-colonial era, women are now hardly seen in public sphere as most men dominate major public offices. Corroborating this view, Obiyan and Akindele (2002) aver that in the traditional Igbo society men were elevated above women. All traditional groups and/or councils were either completely dominated or monopolised by men. This has partly accounts for low involvement of women August meeting in protesting against discrimination against the Osus in the South-East. In reality, in many Igbo communities what actually defines women’s association in public life, in the traditional political systems, appeared to be “women are to be seen and not heard”. Women August meeting is merely a platform where women are seen in their beautiful attire, though their contribution is seen in the area of community development projects (like repairs of town halls, palace for traditional rulers, health centres, payment of school fees of orphans, construction of bore-hole etc) not much is heard of them in the fight against the Osu caste system. This seems to be partly due to the fact that women in this region still believe that Osus are less humans offered as sacrifice to gods. Also, majority of women in the August meeting have ignorantly used the meeting as platform to showcase the wealth of their husbands and the latest fashion in vogue. This has made them paid little attention to mobilising and protesting against discrimination against the Osus, though their efforts have been remarkable and notable against unfair treatment of widows.

The question then is why are women in the August meeting not showing concern to the inhuman treatment of Osu in areas of marriage and public office. It is true that women across the region through this meeting have touched lives and transformed communities but same cannot be said in the fight against the treatment of Osus as less humans. Women have rather paid lip service to the fight against unfair treatment of the Osu unlike the mal-treatment of widows. The weakness of this women group (August Meeting) can be traced to overbearing power and authority of their husbands. In Igbo communities, family heads, village heads, town heads and communities’ heads are dominated by men some of whom still believe and strictly practice the superstitious belief of their fore fathers. These heads (men) have wives who are submissive to them and obeyed their instructions. These men tend to instruct their wives (women) to adhere strictly to their traditional beliefs that see the Osus as less humans and their wives at various forum tend to have this belief in their heads and ignorantly practice it. This view had earlier been submitted by Obiyan and Akindele (2002) that in the traditional Igbo society men were elevated above women. All traditional groups and/or councils were either completely dominated or monopolised by men (Obiyan and Akindele, 2002).

Beside the domineering powers of men in Igbo society that tend to limit women in this meeting, the fear of who to move the agitation or call for an awareness programme against harsh treatment of the Osus among women in this meeting is another limiting factor. This is because women by nature are more fearful and wary when it comes to issue of customs, beliefs and traditions in a society largely dominated by men. One other factor that limit women in this meeting is the fact that anyone who relates with, tries to protect or opposes the unfair treatment of the Osus will automatically be regarded as an Osu or an outcast, this singular factor seems to scare women in the August meeting in tackling the Osu problem.

Thus, while the aforementioned factors might have inhibited the significant role of women in the August meeting in the fight against the Osu caste system in the South-East, they do not provide all the explanatory
variables. The perception of the nature of the role of women in Igbo society is prejudiced against women. Redefining that perception in a manner favourable to active women involvement in the fight, therefore, is a significant step to addressing the problem of Osu caste system in the South-East, Nigeria.

Methodology
In accomplishing the above stated objectives, the study adopted a single method approach by eliciting information using qualitative research design. In order to deepen understanding about the influence of women August meeting on Osu caste system in the South East, the study collected qualitative data through the use of key respondents’ interviews (KRI) to provide depths and insights into the contexts of Osu caste system and efforts of August meeting at ending the obnoxious belief that Osu are less humans. The study was conducted in one community each, selected from Imo and Enugu states respectively. In Imo, Umuaka and in Enugu, Umuode communities were selected. The rationale for the selection of these communities is based on obvious cases of planned attacks on the Osu. A total of six key respondents were selected and interviewed in this order: 1 chairman of the August women meeting, 1 leader of the Osu and 1 leader of the Diala in Umuaka, Imo state. This process was replicated in Enugu state. The studies were conducted between 1 March, 2016 and 4th January, 2017. The respondents were selected mainly because of their knowledge of the subject matter. Data were subjected to content and ethnographic analyses.

Ethical Consideration
In respect of the qualitative data which involves primary data collection an informed consent form was given to the respondents to seek their consents before qualitative data collection is conducted. Ethical clearance was given by the communities’ boards’ chairmen in both states.

Analysis of Key Respondents Interviews (KRIs)
Personal interviews were held with key respondents drawn from the August women meeting, leaders of the Osu and Diala extraction in each community from Imo and Enugu States respectively, with the aim to reconcile their opinion on: “The impact of women August meeting on the Osu caste system in South-East, Nigeria” for a comprehensive discussion to confirm or disaffirm the achievement of the objectives. It is imperative to note that it was almost impossible getting respondents from the Osu group, except the very old ones who hardly speak English and sometimes their wives and children prevented them from being interviewed. The analysis was based on the paper’s objectives and questions relating to the objectives were asked.

Results
Basis of discrimination against the Osu in the South-East

The reasons or basis of discrimination against the Osus in the South-East was examined in under objective 1. Almost all of them, responded in the affirmative that the Osus are discriminated against because of the orthodox belief that these group of people were slaves been offered to gods.

Osus today are discriminated against and secretly treated as an outcast because of the orthodox belief that they are slaves sacrificed to deities by the priests of shrines. Most of us grew up to learn this from our parents, leaders and family members. In short it is a story that most Igbo men and women seem to believe because our fore fathers had ignorantly transferred this belief from their time to ours, today, this is still been practiced in most of our communities secretly (KRI, female, 50 years, chairman AWM, Umuaka, Imo, December 30, 2016)


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From the foregoing, it can be deduced that one of the basis for discrimination against the Osus is because of the superstitious belief and ignorance of fore fathers in the South-East region. This view had earlier been pointedly noted by Achebe (1960) that “our fathers in their darkness and ignorance called an innocent man Osu, a thing given to the idols, and thereafter he became an outcast, and his children, and his children’s children forever”

There was the issue of the fact the Osus are humans like the Idialas and must be treated fairly and equally like humans created by God which came up prominently in the course of the interview. For most of the respondents, the Osus are humans created by God, but the way they are treated makes them less humans. Of more concern was the belief by respondents that discrimination against Osus is borne out of ignorance and archaic traditions that relegate fellow human beings and abuse them. This view had been aptly confirmed by Igwe and Akolokwu (2014); Nwagbara et. al., (2011); Nwaka (1985); Onwubuariri (2007) and Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (1999). Most parents who are from the Osu extraction feels very bad telling their children how they come about having the Osu status, to some, they prefer hiding it from their children.

On a general note, intermarriages between the Osus and the Idialas have been highly discriminative and problematic. As a result of this ignorance and superstitious belief transferred from one generation to the other, marriages have been broken, children from such marriages have been separated from either their father or mother. For instance, husbands have abandoned both wives and children once they discovered that their wife is an Osu, leaving the children with the wife because of fear of being referred to as an Osu or an outcast in their father’s land.

… the way we treat the osu in our village is based on what our fore fathers told us about them. Everybody is afraid of curse and ill-luck that come with relating with them. Dealing with them, in our fore fathers view or ideology attract some ill-lucks like sore throat, barreness and poor farm yields…” (KRI, male, 56 years, community leader, Umuaka, Imo, 2nd January, 2017).

It is evidently seen in this submission that the basis of discriminating against the Osus is based on mere fabrication of belief widely accepted and transferred from generation to generation by ignorant fore-fathers who offered human beings they professedly referred to as slaves as sacrifice to gods in the South-East. Specifically, Osus are discriminated against because of the superstitious belief that they share lineage with slaves being offered as sacrifice to deities or gods in the Igbo traditional society.

Levels and patterns of discriminatory practices against the Osu in South-East, Nigeria

The treatment of the Osus takes different dimension in this region. The patterns include refusing marriage proposal, burial rites, chieftaincy title and refusing to share or break kola nuts with the Osus and social ostracism. They are called an outcast, their status is despised, ridiculed and abhorred. Corroborating this view, Igwe and Akolokwu (2014) aver that
the Osus in extreme cases are not allowed to dance, drink, hold hands, associate or have sexual relations with Nwadiala. Further, they are not allowed to break Kola nuts (an offering of peace) at meetings. At the level of spirituality, an Osu cannot be allowed to pour libation or pray to the gods on behalf of a freeborn at a community gathering. It is believed that such prayers will bring calamity and misfortune. An Osu may find it difficult fulfilling a desire to occupy political position in Igboland particularly, where a Diala has indicated interest (Igwe and Akolokwu, 2014).

The patterns also take the form of poison, dis-inheritance, organised attacks, victimization, abuse, avoidance, backbiting, abandoning of wives and children, denial of occupying public office (chieftaincy title) etc. According to a female KRI, discrimination against Osus takes different levels and patterns.

"...the levels of unfair treatment of Osus here in Agwutakes the form of refusal to marry them, abandoning of wife and children, backbiting, gossiping, avoidance and humiliation" (KRI, female, 58 years, chairman WAM, Umuode, Enugu, 2nd January, 2017).

This submission affirms that patterns of discrimination against the Osus takes the form of refusing to marry an Osu, denying to take responsibility for the wife and children, degrading and abhorring them. By implication, such gesture has been responsible for broken marriages, child labour and attacks in some communities in the South-East. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that women and children are worse hit by the Osu caste system. This view is expressed by the submission of the following female KRI:

"...intermarriage is very difficult between the Osus and Idialas women are immediately dumped at the slightest news that they are osu. Daughters of Osu women in our meeting become too old before they married, while those who were mistakenly married by the freeborn were abandoned with children at discovery that they were osu. (KRI, female, 50 years chairman WAM, Umuaka, Imo, 30 December, 2016).

From the foregoing, it can be affirm that the August women meeting consists of both the Osu and Idiala women who meet yearly to discuss wide ranging issues including marriage. But the submission shows that in spite of this meeting, women in this group do not support their freeborn sons to marry the Osu daughters of their fellow women in the meeting. It can therefore be inferred that patterns of discrimination against Osus is of different forms and shapes ranging from separation, humiliation, isolation, open confrontation, avoidance, refusal to marry osu, denial of burial rites, organised attacks, dis-inheritance, abandoning of children, administering poison and shameful. Corroborating this view, Achebe said that when Okonkwo learns that his son wants to marry Clara, an Osu, he says:

"Osu is like a leprosy in the minds of my people. I beg of you my son not to bring the mark of shame and leprosy into your family. If you do, your children and your children children’s will curse you and your memory...you will bring sorrow on your head and on the heads of your children (Achebe, 1960).

The consequences of marrying an osu in the view of Okonkwo, is shame and mark of leprosy. To him, marrying an osu is capable of attracting generational curse and sorrow in a family. Today, this belief is still being held strongly by most heads of family in the South-East, such that their children and grandchildren are being compelled to practice same belief. This accounts for the lingering of the osu caste in the South-East, Nigeria.

Influence of women August meeting on the Osu caste system in South-East, Nigeria.

The intention of this objective is to ascertain if August women meeting has had any influence or intervention in curbing the dreaded social vice that has caused more division among the Igbo stock. It is imperative to note
that women through this platform, had fought against rape, humiliation of widows, kidnapping, settle communal disputes, and other domestic violence. But the question is why are women not seen taking the same bold step at fighting Osu caste system?

...it is not true, in our own little way, we have demonstrated against it...we have openly criticised and sanctioned our members who discriminate against the Osu. At our meetings, we educate and orientate members to shun discriminatory practices against Osus. But we have not taken the protest or crusade to end inhuman treatment of Osus to communities’ level, it is still at the level of women August meeting, but the problem is the fear of being isolated or referred to as Osu because of the belief that anyone who associates with an Osu or protect an Osu automatically become Osu. This is the main reason why women have taken the back stage in the fight to end Osu syndrome...” (KRI, female, 58 years, chairman WAM, Umuode, Enugu, 2nd January, 2017).

Within the Igbo stock, “outcast” is usually the best description of people who are called Osu and even those who relate with them by marriage, birth or by whatever means. It is more of a status thing than the caste. It is a status earned through birth, marriage and heritage. And such, it is not reversible, it is permanent and difficult to overcome. Osu status is hereditary, although it can also be acquired through marriage (Dike, 2002). Osu status “cannot generally be overcome” (Human Rights Watch 2001). This view is expressed by the submission of the following female KRI:

... in our own little way we do talk against those who practice this belief but the problem is that anybody seen with an osu is automatically termed as an osu or outcast. This has slowed down the crusade against it. At meetings, we persuade our members to shun the practice, but when they go home, their husbands keep on reminding them of the consequences of their action. This has been the reason why we have done very little to eliminate the practice in Agwu. (KRI, female, 58 years, chairman WAM, Umuaka, Imo, December 30, 2016).

From the foregoing, it is evidently clear that the August women meeting in both Umuaka, Imo and Umuode, Enugu had only been able to caution their members (women/wives) against discriminatory practices against the Osu but has hardly mobilised to demonstrate publicly against the belief like they have always done against rape, discrimination against widows or kidnapping. Some of the challenges confronting their efforts against this obnoxious belief includes excessive domineering status of their husbands, the fear of being called an outcast, stigmatized and isolated. These factors have contributed largely to why most women in the August meeting don’t seem to talk about it openly. A late Nigerian professor who was also an Igbo advised that Osu is “still a status people know but don’t talk about” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999).

Discussion of findings

The results of the interview showed that the basis for discrimination against the Osus in the South-East was based on mere belief and ignorance transferred from one generation to the other. In the ancient Igbo traditional society, the sacrifice of slaves to deities had been in practice. These slaves are today referred to as Osu. The fear of relating with these people purportedly called Osu as servants of powerful high priests led to the belief that it is dangerous to relate with them, having served the powerful priests and this constitute the basis why they are discriminated against. Today, some people still secretly held on to this practice. Also, the results show that patterns and level of discrimination against the Osus is seen in the area of marriage, inheritance, chieftaincy title, burial rites and holding of public offices. It takes the form of rejection,
open abuse, planned attacks, divorce, isolation, separation, applying of poison, etc.

Lastly, the results showed that August women meeting only had little influence on the fight against the Osu caste system. The women at their meeting were able to caution themselves against the belief and practice, but little has been done to mobilise and demonstrate against the vice in a bid to dissuade people from practicing it because of the fear of being called an ‘outcast’ or being isolated or stigmatized. In the real sense of it, the August women meeting has had very little influence on osu caste system in the South-East, Nigeria.

**Conclusion**

At the soul of the August women meeting, as it has been pointed out, is the attempt to meet, discuss and contribute to community development. In pursing this focus, they sometime demonstrate to press home their demands on the authority. This can be by way of wearing black clothes or at the extreme cases go naked. Women through this meeting had mobilised to protect widows mal-treated by their in-laws. Also, victims of rape have gotten justice through this platform. But same cannot be said of the Osus. This is partly due to domineering influence of men in Igbo societies and fear of being referred to as Osu prevented these women group from actively protesting against this dreaded menace. It has been argued that for an effective and quick move towards mitigation of the Osu caste system in Igbo land a multi-pronged approach requiring a combination of factors need to be adopted. To this end, emphasis should be laid on, inter alia, creating in people’s mind, especially the older people in the region that all humans are created by God and are equal in the sight of God and law, discouraging practices that are discriminatory against fellow humans, particularly those that are adversative to Osus. We need to add that total eradication of the Osu caste system requires concerted and sustained effort. Considerable success in a glow of an eye requires thorough and continual awareness that will stimulate the rejection of the belief.

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