



## Gender Dynamics and Succession Planning in Family Businesses: Evidence from Ondo State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Succession in family business is a crucial component for business continuity and most of the family business successors are males which shows that leadership is skewed against females. This study explored gender dynamics and succession planning in family businesses: Evidence from in Ondo State. The study focuses on the perception about the succession process in family businesses related gender issues in Ondo State and why daughters may feel discriminated for succeeding their parents in a family firm. The study analyse the influence of cultural stereotype, trust and management ability on family business succession with focal point among Small And Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Ondo State. Structured questionnaire schedule was delivered and data were acquired from 220 SMEs of family businesses, utilising a cross-sectional survey of descriptive research design. Data from the questionnaire were analysed using multiple regression in determining link among the variables. The findings suggested that cultural stereotype and trust has substantial influence on the choice of a successor in family businesses in Ondo State while managerial skill has insignificant influence on the choice of a successor in family businesses in Ondo State. It was proposed that the ability to run family business should be crucial in choosing a successor rather than to stereotype daughters on the basis of culture, since that will determine if the firm would continue.*

**Keywords:** Family Business, Gender, Successor, Succession planning.

### Introduction

Family businesses represent a critical component of global economic development, serving as the backbone of many economies worldwide. These enterprises are often characterised by strong organizational structures, strategic leadership positions occupied by family members, and a deep commitment to long-term success (Hania, 2018; Sharma & Salvato, 2021). As noted by Timmons and Spinelli (2017), family businesses have endured for centuries and continue to account for a significant proportion of global economic activity.

Globally, family-owned enterprises constitute the largest form of business ownership, surpassing even multinational corporations in terms of prevalence. It is estimated that 65–80% of all businesses worldwide are either family-owned or family-managed (Foltz & Marshall, 2018; PwC, 2021). This trend is equally prominent in Africa, where family businesses are expanding rapidly. In Nigeria, family enterprises contribute approximately 46.54% to the nation's Gross Domestic Products (GDP) and represent over 80% of organized private sector businesses (SMEDAN, 2017, as cited in Ogbechi & Anetor, 2018). These businesses

form one of the oldest and most dominant organizational structures globally (Abouzaid, 2018), exerting significant influence on local and national economies (Shittu & Ibitomi, 2019).

Despite their socioeconomic relevance, succession planning remains a contentious issue in many family businesses, particularly in patriarchal societies like Nigeria. While both male and female offspring may be equally capable, succession tends to favour sons over daughters. This preference is often rooted in cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and societal expectations (Martin, 2011; Jimenez, 2009; Wang, 2016). The traditional primogeniture system, in which the first-born male inherits leadership, continues to shape succession decisions in many African and Middle Eastern contexts (Llano & Olguin, 2016).

Women in family businesses are frequently marginalized, relegated to less influential roles or excluded entirely from leadership (Byrne & Fattoum, 2015). Even in cases where daughters possess the requisite managerial skills, trustworthiness, and commitment, succession decisions are biased by perceptions of male dominance and concerns about

marital status or surname continuity (Miller, Steier, & Breton-Miller, 2013; Allen & Langowits, 2003; Pyromalis et al., 2008).

Recent studies have highlighted the barriers faced by women in attaining leadership positions within family enterprises (Barrett & Moores, 2019; Vera & Dean, 2015; Collins, Tucker, & Pierce, 2010). These barriers include not only overt gender discrimination but also subtler structural factors that disadvantage women. In patriarchal societies, cultural prescriptions often discourage female leadership, reinforcing the narrative that leadership is a male prerogative (Ayub & Jehn, 2022; OECD, 2023).

In Nigeria, particularly among the Yoruba ethnic group predominant in Ondo State, cultural factors play a central role in shaping succession decisions. Yoruba traditions often prioritize male heirs, viewing them as the legitimate bearers of the family name and authority (Aina, 2020). This study is thus situated in Ondo State, a region emblematic of gender-based succession biases, and covers the period from 2000 to 2025 capturing both pre- and post-COVID-19 perspectives.

This research focuses on three key variables cultural stereotypes, trust, and managerial aptitude as they relate to gender preference in the succession planning of family businesses. These factors were chosen due to their observable prevalence and influence in the succession practices of family-run enterprises in the region.

The study makes several contributions. First, it enriches existing literature on gender dynamics in family business succession. Second, it provides practical insights for business owners and family business leaders to develop transparent and inclusive succession frameworks. Lastly, it offers a road map for policymakers to design equitable succession policies that support gender diversity and sustainability in family enterprises.

In essence, this study aims to investigate the extent to which cultural norms, trust dynamics, and perceived managerial competence influence gendered succession choices in family businesses. By doing so, it seeks to promote gender-inclusive practices that enhance business continuity and inter-generational equity in Nigeria's evolving enterprise landscape.

## **Literature Review**

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Cultural Stereotype**

Stereotypes reflect a society's collective understanding of customs, values, beliefs, and social structures. These generalized assumptions are shaped by cultural, religious, and institutional influences (Macrae, et al., 2015). According to social cognition theories, stereotypes form a crucial part of an individual's social

knowledge and directly influence interpersonal behavior (Hibbard & Buhrmester, 2011; Witt, 2018).

Stereotyping is defined as the cognitive process through which individuals perceive and judge others, particularly outgroup members, based on generalized beliefs. Gender stereotypes, in particular, are linked to cognitive schemas that drive expectations men are often perceived as independent, assertive, and task-oriented, while women are viewed as nurturing, emotional, and people-oriented (Burr, 2000; Tavris, 2012).

Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework highlights how societies position men and women differently, influencing their roles both at work and at home (Ullah, 2015). In many traditional cultures, women's professional roles are often considered secondary to domestic responsibilities. This division is reinforced through early socialization via family, education, religion, and media (Hibbard & Buhrmester, 2011). Family, a fundamental cultural unit, significantly influences organizational outcomes yet remains underexplored from a management standpoint. As a core socializing agent, the family not only shapes gender norms but also directly affects succession patterns and stakeholder expectations in family-owned enterprises (Chrisman, Chua, & Steier, 2016).

Trust is defined as the willingness of an individual to be vulnerable to another, based on the expectation that the latter will act in a reliable and non-opportunistic manner (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 2015). Trust plays a pivotal role in family firms, where personal and professional relationships are deeply intertwined (Corbetta & Salvato, 2014; Steier, 2011).

Research shows that trust is a critical psychological construct influenced by emotion, past behavior, and social context (Baron, 2013; Dunn & Schweitzer, 2015; Weick, 2018). In family businesses, trust is not just a by-product of kinship ties but a strategic asset that enhances cooperation and reduces the need for formal control mechanisms (Sundaramurthy, 2018; Cruz et al., 2017).

Chrisman, Chua, Kellermanns, and Chang (2017) argue that long-term relational ties in family businesses foster unique trust dynamics, allowing for reduced agency costs and increased organizational commitment. Furthermore, the form and function of trust may vary depending on the stage of business development, leadership structure, and family involvement (Karra et al., 2016). Trust in family businesses may lead to stewardship behaviors, where leaders act in the interest of the firm rather than themselves, aligning with the family's long-term goals and values (Chrisman et al., 2017).

## Managerial Aptitudes

Managerial aptitude refers to a leader's ability to make strategic decisions, motivate others, and implement ideas effectively. It encompasses conceptual, interpersonal, and technical skills vital for both short-term performance and long-term sustainability (Daft, 2019).

According to Daft (2019), managerial effectiveness requires:

Conceptual skills: Understanding how the organization fits into its environment.

Human (people) skills: Relating and working well with others.

Technical skills: Proficiency in specific tasks or tools relevant to the organization.

Davis (2014) emphasizes that execution delivering projects on time and within budget is a cornerstone of family business success. In the context of succession, managerial aptitude is a major determinant of who is seen as "fit to lead." Family size, business complexity, and perceived leadership competence often influence whether a male or female successor is chosen (Arieu, 2016; Nuthall, 2017).

## Theoretical Review

### Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, introduced by Wernerfelt (1984), remains a foundational framework in strategic management. The theory posits that a firm's internal resources if valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) can offer sustainable competitive advantage and superior long-term performance (Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993). These resources extend beyond tangible assets to include intangible and socially complex capabilities such as organizational culture, trust, and leadership dynamics. In the context of family-owned businesses, the RBV provides a compelling explanation of how unique internal characteristics rooted in family involvement affect performance outcomes. Habbershon and Williams (1999) coined the term *familiness* to describe the idiosyncratic bundle of resources resulting from the interaction between family, business, and individual family members. These include trust-based relationships, commitment to long-term goals, shared values, and emotional attachment to the firm assets that are difficult to replicate in non-family businesses (Sirmon & Hitt, 2003; Chrisman, Chua, & Sharma, 2005).

Cabrera-Suárez, De Saá-Pérez, and García-Almeida (2011) emphasized that family firms often outperform their counterparts by leveraging unique combinations of knowledge, social capital, and managerial experience rooted in family tradition. However, the

same characteristics that provide competitive advantages may also constrain succession planning. Family dynamics and emotional ties can hinder rational decision-making during leadership transitions, especially when gender biases limit female successors' access to leadership (Bocatto, Gispert, & Rialp, 2010; Habbershon & Williams, 1999).

Thus, RBV offers a robust lens for examining succession in family businesses by linking internal firm characteristics such as managerial aptitude, trust, and family influence to organizational outcomes. In this study, RBV is relevant for understanding how gendered access to key managerial resources affects leadership succession decisions in Nigerian family firms.

### Liberal Feminist Theory

Liberal feminism offers an essential theoretical foundation for exploring gender inequality in organizational and entrepreneurial contexts. Rooted in Enlightenment thought, liberal feminist theory argues that women should be granted equal rights, opportunities, and access to resources as men, particularly in areas of education, employment, and leadership (Tong, 2013; Bryson, 2003).

Liberal feminists contend that inequality is not biologically determined but is a consequence of legal, institutional, and cultural barriers that limit women's participation and advancement in society. The theory advocates for reform through legislative changes and social policies aimed at creating equal opportunities for women and men in both private and public spheres (Lorber, 2010). In the business world, this translates to removing discriminatory practices that prevent women from advancing to leadership positions, particularly in male-dominated domains such as family enterprises.

Within the family business context, liberal feminism helps explain the gendered processes that govern succession decisions. Numerous studies have shown that female successors are often overlooked or relegated to secondary roles due to persistent stereotypes about women's leadership capabilities, emotional suitability, and perceived loyalty (Cromie & O'Sullivan, 1999; Dumas, 1989; Lewis & Massey, 2011). Even when women possess equivalent or superior qualifications to their male siblings, cultural norms and family traditions frequently disadvantage them in succession planning (Janjuha-Jivraj, 2004; Poza & Messer, 2017).

Moreover, liberal feminist scholars have emphasized that while women may not always hold formal authority, they often possess informal or "hidden" power that influences strategic decisions in family businesses (Dhaliwal, 1998; Hollander & Bukowitz, 1990). However, without structural changes, such

informal influence rarely translates into formal leadership.

In this study, the liberal feminist lens is essential for interpreting how cultural stereotypes and discriminatory practices shape gender preferences in the succession of family-owned businesses in Nigeria.

### **Empirical Review**

Gender bias in succession planning remains a persistent challenge across family businesses globally, with recent empirical evidence affirming the role of cultural norms, trust dynamics, and managerial competencies in shaping these outcomes.

Vicente, et al (2017) examined gender considerations in family business succession in Spain. Using qualitative methods through interviews with family business owners and successors, their findings revealed a persistent preference for male successors, despite claims of gender neutrality in leadership decisions. Female successors were often excluded based on traditional norms and self-selection bias, where daughters opt out due to anticipated gendered constraints and familial expectations.

In Nigeria, Nwadukwe (2016) studied the effect of Igbo inheritance culture on succession planning in indigenous enterprises in the South-East region. Using a descriptive survey and inferential analysis, the study showed that the primogeniture inheritance system significantly limits women's chances of ascending to leadership roles in family businesses. It concluded that succession in such contexts is predominantly guided by patriarchal norms that favour the eldest male child, reinforcing gender inequality.

Similarly, Irefin and Hammed (2012) assessed the influence of cultural beliefs on entrepreneurial succession in John Wax Nigeria Limited. Their study, based on data from 160 respondents, found a statistically significant relationship between indigenous cultural values and succession outcomes. The results emphasized that traditional norms serve as structural barriers to the inclusion of women in leadership transitions.

Bennedsen, et al (2017), in their landmark study of 5,334 family business successions in Denmark, found that first-born sons were significantly more likely to be chosen as successors than daughters. Their findings emphasized that even in Western contexts, gendered biases persist albeit in more nuanced forms affecting leadership continuity and gender representation.

Wang (2016), through a systematic literature review, concluded that daughters are consistently marginalized in family business succession across both developed and developing economies. The study identified a constellation of macro-level factors (societal attitudes) and micro-level dynamics (family preferences) that perpetuate female exclusion. These factors contribute

to the "invisibility" of women's contributions to family enterprises and reinforce stereotypes that daughters are less competent or trustworthy.

Henry, Erwee, and Kong (2013), in a qualitative case study of Canadian family businesses, explored the intersection of trust and gender in succession planning. They identified two key dimensions of trust: interpersonal trust and competence-based trust. Their study revealed that founders were more likely to entrust leadership to male heirs, perceiving them as inherently more competent, despite the absence of supporting evidence. Female successors had to "over-prove" their capabilities in ways that male counterparts did not.

In Canada, Ibrahim, et al (2014) conducted interviews with 42 CEOs of family businesses and highlighted three core components of successor effectiveness: leadership ability, managerial competence, and familial respect. The findings underscored that while managerial aptitude is critical, gendered perceptions often overshadow objective evaluations of competence, disadvantaging women in succession plans.

Morris, et al (1997) emphasized the importance of trust and interpersonal communication in succession outcomes. Their findings confirmed that family relationships, especially the level of trust between the founder and potential successor, play a decisive role in the succession process. Steier (2011) further supported this by noting that trust in family businesses often substitutes for formal governance mechanisms, but it can also reinforce patriarchal norms that marginalize female successors.

Sundaramurthy (2018) reinforced the notion that trust is not only critical to performance but is often rooted in emotional and affective ties within family enterprises. This can both strengthen the business and limit inclusivity, especially when leadership decisions are emotionally biased against daughters.

Additionally, Schenkel, et al (2016) found that out of 444 family businesses listed on stock exchanges, only one had a female successor in the absence of male heirs. This stark underrepresentation signals a deep-rooted structural imbalance. Martin (2011) reported that business founders sometimes opted to sell their businesses or appoint external CEOs rather than hand over leadership to their daughters, regardless of competence or birth order.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design, which is appropriate for investigating relationships among variables using primary data collected via structured questionnaires. The design was chosen to enable the collection of standardized responses from a broad cross-section of respondents and to examine the causal relationship between gender preference and succession planning in family-owned

businesses with minimal researcher interference (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The target population comprised all registered Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) with the Ondo State Ministry of Commerce and Industry. According to official data, there were 39,627 SMEs registered in Ondo State as of March 2025, encompassing family-owned businesses operating in Ondo Central, Ondo North, and Ondo South senatorial districts (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2025).

Table 1: Stratified Distribution of Sample

S/N	Region	SME Population	Sample Size
1	Ondo Central	26,345	265
2	Ondo North	7,213	72
3	Ondo South	6,069	62
	Total	39,627	399

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to elicit responses on cultural stereotypes, trust, managerial aptitude, and gender preference in succession planning. The instrument was pre-tested in a pilot study involving 40 respondents to , 2019).

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Statistics

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability
SFB (Succession in Family Business)	0.87	0.85	0.93
CSGP (Cultural Stereotype & Gender Preference)	0.92	0.76	0.78
TRGP (Trust & Gender Preference)	0.81	0.77	0.89
MAGP (Managerial Aptitude & Gender Preference)	0.79	0.82	0.92

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Data analysis was carried out using descriptive and inferential statistical methods with the aid of SPSS . Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, and standard

A representative sample was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size calculation. Therefore, a sample size of 399 respondents was drawn from the population to ensure statistical reliability. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation from the three senatorial districts. The SMEs population was divided into strata based on geographic location (Ondo Central, Ondo North, and Ondo South), and samples were drawn proportionally from each stratum.

assess its validity and reliability. The internal consistency of the measurement items was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, rho\_A, and Composite Reliability (CR) metrics. All constructs exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable levels of reliability (Hair et al.

deviation) were used to summarize demographic data and respondent perceptions. To test the study's hypotheses and evaluate the strength and direction of relationships between variables, Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis were employed.

## Data Analysis and Discussion

Table 3: Gender Distribution of Respondents Across Ondo State Senatorial Districts

Gender	Ondo North	%	Ondo South	%	Ondo Central	%	Total	%
Male	62	62.6	69	77.7	26	74.3	157	70.1
Female	37	37.4	21	22.3	9	25.7	67	29.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From Table 3, a total of 224 valid responses were obtained from the three senatorial districts in Ondo

State. In Ondo North, out of 99 respondents, 62 (62.6%) were male, while 37 (37.4%) were female. In Ondo South, 69 out of 90 respondents (77.7%) were male and

21 (22.3%) were female. Similarly, in Ondo Central, 26 out of 35 respondents (74.3%) were male and 9 (25.7%) were female. Overall, the data show a clear male dominance among respondents, with males constituting

70.1% and females 29.9%. This finding suggests a higher level of male participation or preference in succession planning within family-owned businesses in Ondo State.

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Key Constructs**

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error
Succession in Family Business (SFB)	224	1	3	1.42	0.395	1.282	0.172
Cultural Stereotype (CS)	224	1	2	1.49	0.454	0.578	0.172
Trust (TR)	224	1	3	1.46	0.433	1.585	0.172
Managerial Aptitude (MA)	224	1	3	2.41	0.554	0.094	0.172

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for the main variables used in the study: Succession in Family Business (SFB), Cultural Stereotype (CS), Trust (TR), and Managerial Aptitude (MA). The mean scores indicate the average responses of participants on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The mean for SFB is 1.42 ( $SD = 0.395$ ), indicating general disagreement with items representing succession challenges. CS recorded a mean of 1.49 ( $SD = 0.454$ ), suggesting that cultural stereotypes were modestly acknowledged by respondents.

TR had a mean of 1.46 ( $SD = 0.433$ ), reflecting low levels of perceived trust as a barrier to succession. MA stood out with a mean of 2.41 ( $SD = 0.554$ ), indicating a relatively higher perception of managerial aptitude as an important factor in succession planning. Skewness values for SFB and TR show positive skew, indicating that a majority of responses clustered toward lower values (i.e., disagreement), especially in trust-related items. In contrast, MA had the lowest skewness, suggesting more balanced responses. These insights form the basis for further inferential analysis in the subsequent section.

*Table 5: Model Summary*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.823	.705	.610	0.305	1.756

a. Predictors: (Constant), Cultural Stereotype (CS), Trust (TR), Managerial Aptitude (MA)  
b. Dependent Variable: Succession in Family Business (SFB)

The model summary in Table 5 shows a strong correlation coefficient (R) of 0.823, indicating a robust positive relationship between the independent variables (CS, TR, MA) and the dependent variable (SFB). The

coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is 0.705, suggesting that approximately 70.5% of the variance in family business succession can be explained by the combined influence of cultural stereotypes, trust, and managerial aptitude. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.756 falls within an acceptable range, indicating that there is no significant autocorrelation among the residuals. This supports the reliability of the regression model for predictive and explanatory purposes.

*Table 6: ANOVA Results*

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	18.013	3	6.004	72.014	0.000
Residual	15.157	221	0.069		
Total	33.170	224			

a. Dependent Variable: Succession in Family Business (SFB)  
b. Predictors: (Constant), CS, TR, MA

The results of the ANOVA test indicate that the regression model is statistically significant ( $F = 72.014$ ;

$p < 0.001$ ), confirming that at least one of the predictors significantly contributes to explaining

changes in family business succession. This validates the model's overall fitness and rejects the null hypothesis that managerial aptitude, trust, and cultural stereotypes have no significant impact on family business succession.

**Table 7: Coefficient Estimates**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.829	0.128	—	6.611	0.000
Cultural Stereotype (CS)	0.555	0.047	0.638	12.380	0.000
Trust (TR)	0.173	0.048	0.188	3.820	0.000
Managerial Aptitude (MA)	-0.061	0.036	-0.082	-1.673	0.096

### Cultural Stereotypes and Family Business Succession

The regression results show that cultural stereotypes significantly influence succession planning in family businesses (**B = 0.555, p < 0.01**). This indicates that a unit increase in cultural stereotype perception leads to a 0.555 increase in succession outcomes. The high standardized beta coefficient ( $\beta = 0.638$ ) underscores its strong explanatory power. This supports the hypothesis that cultural perceptions significantly shape leadership transitions in family enterprises.

### Trust and Family Business Succession

Trust also emerged as a statistically significant predictor of succession (**B = 0.173, p < 0.01**). A unit increase in trust results in a 0.173 improvement in succession outcomes, suggesting that interpersonal trust among stakeholders fosters smoother transitions in family firms.

### Managerial Aptitude and Family Business Succession

Interestingly, managerial aptitude recorded a **negative and statistically insignificant effect** on succession outcomes (**B = -0.061, p = 0.096**), indicating that higher managerial capability does not necessarily guarantee a successful succession. This finding challenges conventional assumptions and may point to underlying sociocultural or political dynamics that prioritize lineage or gender over competence in succession planning.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide empirical support for the hypothesis that cultural stereotypes significantly influence the choice of successor in family-owned businesses in Ondo State, Nigeria. The study revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between cultural stereotypes and family business succession, suggesting that deeply ingrained gender norms and expectations shape succession

planning processes. This finding is consistent with the work of Vicente et al. (2017), Daspit et al. (2016), Bennedsen et al. (2007), and Wang (2016), all of whom reported that cultural perceptions and gender-based expectations play a key role in shaping succession decisions in family businesses. The results align with Gender Role Theory, which asserts that gender stereotypes influence how leadership potential is perceived. Stereotypical views portray women as nurturing, passive, and cooperative, while men are seen as assertive, decisive, and task-oriented. These social constructs affect how individuals judge their own leadership potential and how they are perceived by others. Consequently, female successors are often viewed as less capable or unsuitable for leadership, reinforcing a gender preference that favors male successors despite actual competence or managerial aptitude.

The study also confirms the positive and significant impact of trust on family business succession, supporting the second hypothesis. Trust between founders and potential successors was found to be a critical determinant of succession outcomes. This is in line with the conclusions of Henry et al. (2013) and Vera and Dean (2015), who emphasized that trust enhances communication, strengthens intergenerational relationships, and facilitates leadership transition in family enterprises. A high degree of trust reduces uncertainty and increases the likelihood of successful succession. In contrast, managerial aptitude was found to have a negative and statistically insignificant influence on family business succession. This suggests that managerial competence, while important, does not significantly determine who is chosen as a successor in the study context. These findings echo those of Martin (2011) and Sonfield and Lussier (2015), who argued that succession decisions are often influenced more by social and cultural expectations than by demonstrable leadership or management skills. The perception that women are more risk-averse, less confident, and less assertive than men continues to shape succession decisions,

regardless of their actual capabilities or professional experience.

In summary, the study reveals that non-technical and socio-cultural factors especially stereotypes and trust play a greater role than professional aptitude in shaping succession outcomes within family businesses in Ondo State. This emphasizes the need for a shift in succession planning frameworks, from culture-bound assumptions to merit-based criteria.

### **Conclusion And Recommendations**

This study investigated the influence of cultural stereotypes, trust, and managerial aptitude on gender preference in family business succession in Ondo State, Nigeria. Based on empirical findings, it was concluded that gender preference remains largely skewed toward male successors, driven by cultural norms and perceptions rather than objective evaluations of managerial competence.

The study revealed that cultural stereotypes play a dominant role in shaping succession decisions, with the prevailing belief that male children are more suitable successors due to their ability to preserve the family name, uphold traditional values, and maintain control over family resources. This reflects entrenched gender biases, often to the detriment of equally capable female successors.

Furthermore, the study concluded that trust significantly influences succession outcomes, as families tend to express greater confidence in male successors, assuming they are less likely to divert the business outside the family structure. There is a perceived risk that female successors may transfer ownership or influence through marital ties, leading to reluctance in appointing them as successors.

While managerial aptitude was hypothesized to be a key determinant of succession, the findings suggest it plays a less significant role in actual decision-making. Rather than being selected based on skill, competence, or education, successors are often chosen based on gendered assumptions and family trust dynamics. This undermines the principles of merit-based succession planning and may compromise the long-term sustainability of the business.

This research contributes to the growing literature on gender dynamics in family business succession and highlights the need for more inclusive and competence-driven succession practices. It emphasizes the importance of challenging cultural norms that hinder women's participation in leadership within family enterprises.

Based on the study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

i. Promote gender-inclusive succession planning: Daughters should be considered equally for succession based on their capabilities, commitment, and leadership potential. Cultural stereotypes that limit female participation in business leadership should be actively discouraged through awareness and policy reforms within family enterprises.

ii. Institutionalise trust based on competence, not gender: Families should build trust through transparency, mentorship, and shared experiences, rather than relying on gender-based assumptions. Trust should be cultivated based on demonstrated loyalty, business acumen, and integrity regardless of the successor's gender.

iii. Prioritize managerial competence over cultural assumptions: Succession decisions should be guided by managerial aptitude, educational qualifications, and leadership skills, rather than tradition or family expectations. Objective assessment tools and succession planning frameworks should be employed to identify the most competent successor.

iv. Capacity Building and Leadership Development for Female Successors: Family businesses should invest in leadership training, mentorship, and exposure for female members of the family to prepare them for potential leadership roles. This will help dismantle the myth of female inadequacy in business leadership.

v. Policy Advocacy and Legal Support: Stakeholders, including government and business associations, should promote policies that support gender equity in family business leadership and succession. Legal provisions should discourage discriminatory practices that exclude qualified female successors.

By adopting these recommendations, family-owned enterprises in Ondo State and by extension, Nigeria can foster inclusive, sustainable, and performance-driven succession planning, ensuring continuity, growth, and generational stability in family businesses.

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