

Analysis of Human insecurity and Child marriage among Secondary School Girls in Nigeria: A spatio-sectoral approach to school dropout

by  
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### **Abstract**

It is well established that human security is intricately related to access to education, food and human dignity. However, almost 8 years after the launch of the National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Twenty-five years of the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria, girl children are either denied access to education or enroll, but drop out of school. The aim of this study is to determine how human insecurity relate to girl-child school dropout in Nigeria. The study utilized data from National Bureau of Statistics and National Population Commission, Abuja. The data covered the 36 states of Nigeria including the Federal Capital Territory in 2021. ArcGIS software was used to evaluate the spatial pattern of girl child school dropout, while frequencies, tables, simple percentages and Ordinary Least Square techniques were used for analyses at  $p < 0.05$ . The results showed that female school attendance in lower secondary school was highest in south-east (20.3%) and lowest in North-west (16.4%). The geopolitical zones with the highest girl child school dropout were Northwest (56.8%), North East (50.2%) and North-central (30.6%). Meanwhile, the North West in which female school attendance was low had the highest girl child school dropout. Girls' child school dropout was significantly explained by 64% of the variation in girl child marriage, wealth quintile of households, food insecurity and feeling of safety ( $R^2 = 0.644425$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Girl-child marriage was a significant factor influencing girls school dropout in Nigeria (1.216;  $p < 0.05$ ). There was a weak positive relationship between the proportion of girls attending lower secondary school and feeling of safety (0.047890;  $p > 0.4045$ ). The study concludes that girl child school dropout varies across the states of Nigeria and closely related to socioeconomic and cultural factors. These findings have implications for designing school retention strategies.

**Keywords: Human, Insecurity, Education, Girl-child, Spatial Pattern, Dropout, Nigeria**

## INTRODUCTION

Access to education is intricately related to a broad range of human security outcomes. Recent studies on security have argued that threats and challenges to human life (in this case adolescent girls in school) transcend national defence, and law and order to encompass basic human needs (Harel-Shalev and Wolberg, 2020; Mack and Friedens-Warte, 2005). Human security is concerned with the political, economic and social issues that guarantee a life free from risk and fear (Bellamy, 2020; Bendek, 2016). In Nigeria, young girls and girls in school are being threatened by inadequate access to food, money, learning materials, healthcare, sanitation, water and hygiene (Ibor and Otiji, 2022). At the 2005 World Summit, it was declared that “all individuals, in particular, vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential” (Bendek, 2016; Human Security Research Center, 2005).

Despite the importance of girl child education, Nigeria still records the highest rates of girl child school dropout worldwide. Nigeria has over 10.2 million school age children that are not in school, with majority of them being females, especially from the North (United Nations Children’s Education Fund [UNICEF], 2021). Studies have shown that the increase in the number of girls involved in a marriage has led to a corresponding increase in the number of girls who are either denied access to or dropped out from school (Envuladu et al., 2016; Ehiemua, 2014). Violence against girls and the phenomenon of street hawking by girls of school age constitute a tragedy for the nation, and underscores Nigeria’s efforts in providing Universal Basic education to children. Hagen-Zanker and Holmes (2011), noted that patterns of vulnerability vary by geographic location and are also influenced by socio-cultural and religious norms and prevalence of conflict and instability, as much as by economic environment.

Several studies have shown that the most effective way of helping adolescent girls achieve their full potentials to make the right decisions and genuine choices in life is education (Ayodele and Arowolo, 2022; Achike and Achike, 2021; Delprato et al., 2015). While recent studies have suggested retention of girls in schools till age eighteen as an option to overcome child marriage (UNICEF, 2021; NSECM, 2016), most often than not, some of these girls drop-out of school or abandoned schooling (UNICEF, 2021; Ehiemua, 2014). There is evidence that not many girls who are enrolled in secondary education complete the cycle especially in northern Nigeria where the practice of child marriage is high (McKinley, 2023; UNICEF, 2021). Yet, most interventions are skewed towards married girls or child mothers (NSECM, 2016). This shows that very few studies have gone beyond school enrolment or the experiences of parenting girls to consider focused interventions that can reduce the economic and social vulnerabilities of adolescent girls who are already in school (Sidi et al., 2021; Achike and Achike, 2021). An understanding of the strategies and principles to tackle girl-child school dropout is at the core of this study. This study is critical in designing educational services to meet the needs of girls in school. The study is premised on the understanding that knowledge of vulnerability of school girls to drop-out is prerequisite for designing strategies for school retention, effective guidance and general educational planning.

## **STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY**

Nigeria is located between latitudes 4° and 14°N, and longitudes 2° and 15°E, and shares borders with Republics of Benin and Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. It is a sub-Saharan West African Country on the Gulf of Guinea, east of the Greenwich and north of the equator. The country is made up of 36 states including the federal capital territory (FCT), Abuja. It has a land mass of 923,768 sq.km. The 800km of coastline confers on the country the potentials of the maritime

power. It has abundant land for agricultural, industrial and commercial activities (Abubakar, Usman, Shaba and Saidu, 2013).

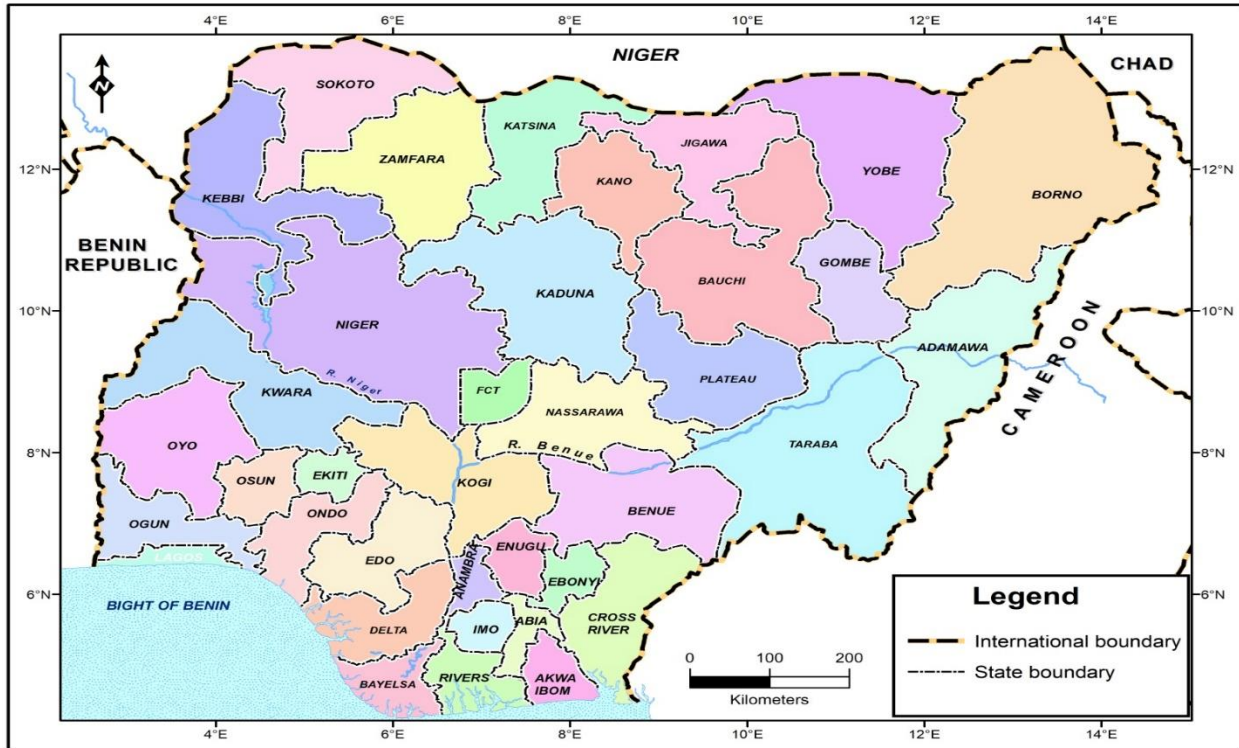


Figure 3.1: Nigeria – Study Area

Source: Kogi State Ministry of Lands and Urban Development, 2023.

Nigeria is the most populous black country in Africa. The 2006 census confirmed over 140 million people in Nigeria, but this population has grown steadily, and is presently estimated at more than 170 million people, making the country the seventh most populous country in the world (NPC 2007, World Bank 2013). According to United Nations projections, Nigeria is one of the eight countries expected to account collectively for half of the total population increase in the world from 2005-2050, and will by 2100, record a population amounting between 505 million and 1.03 billion people (United Nations 2004). The population of the country is young with approximately

40 percent under the age of 15 years. The country is vast and diverse in its geography, people and culture. There are over 250 ethnic groups who speak more than 500 languages.

Early and child Marriage along with urbanization which appear not to be accompanied by corresponding strategies to support humanitarian needs partly explains rapid population growth in Nigeria. School participation remains a challenge across Nigeria, and obstacles are particularly severe in northern states. In addition to issues of school access, family and school resources, and attitudes towards education, school attendance in northern Nigeria is impeded by the increasingly brazen extremism of Boko Haram, an Islamist militant group, and its targeting of girls' education (Ngbea, 2014). The Government of Nigeria, development partners and NGOs undertake many programs including funding to reduce poverty; increase income, ensure the survival and health of infants, children and women and invest in girls' education. In spite of these efforts to improve the socioeconomic wellbeing of the generality of the populace, there are still inherent attitudes, belief and practices militating against girl child development in different parts of the country.

The study utilized data compiled by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2021. The data collection covers the 36 states of Nigeria including the Federal Capital Territory. A total of 20,624 households was randomly selected. The data collected include the percentage of females attending lower secondary school, girl child school dropout, girl child marriage, wealth quintile of households, food insecurity and feeling of safety. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in analyzing the data. Descriptive statistical tools employed in the analysis are frequencies, tables, simple percentages and bar graphs. Pearson's Product Moment correlation analysis was used to find out if there is a negative correlation between human insecurity and females attending lower secondary school. The Ordinary Least Square Regression was employed to determine the influence of human insecurity indices on girl child school dropout.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Females school attendance and feelings of security

Table 1 shows the proportion of females attending lower secondary school in Nigeria. Benue state has the highest (31.3%) number of females attending lower secondary school. This is closely followed by Kogi state (28.4%), Imo (27.8%), Ogun (27.7%), Nasarawa (23.9%), and Bayelsa (23.5%). School attendance is highest in the southern part of Nigeria and north-central Nigeria. Kebbi state accounted for the lowest (6.1%) number of females attending lower secondary school representing the North West zone. The result of this analysis can be visually understood in figure 1.

Table 1: Female attending secondary school and feelings of safety.

States	Percentage of female Attending lower secondary school	Percentage of women who feel safe walking alone in their neighborhood after dark
Abia	18.6	66.5
Adamawa	22.5	77.1
Akwa Ibom	19.7	55.5
Anambra	17.6	72.1
Bauchi	13.4	65.8
Bayelsa	23.5	58.0
Benue	31.3	68.6
Borno	17.5	58.8
Cross River	11.1	68.8
Delta	15.7	75.5
Ebonyi	20.7	63.5

Edo	12.1	79.3
Ekiti	15.0	91.7
Enugu	16.9	57.9
Gombe	13.7	64.2
Imo	27.8	79.0
Jigawa	11.9	43.1
Kaduna	27.1	37.2
Kano	20.8	43.1
Katsina	16.9	39.2
Kebbi	6.1	42.7
Kogi	28.4	86.9
Kwara	16.2	56.8
Lagos	14.1	74.2
Nassarawa	23.9	50.0
Niger	13.8	79.1
Ogun	27.7	81.7
Ondo	20.1	88.4
Osun	20.1	80.8
Oyo	19.7	83.1
Plateau	20.2	26.5
Rivers	16.3	77.1
Sokoto	15.0	60.6
Taraba	22.6	45.4
Yobe	16.1	60.9
Zamfara	10.5	39.1

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Source: NBS, 2021.

Feeling of safety can promote girls' freedom of movement, school attendance and learning. In this study, feeling of safety was measured based on women who feel safe walking alone in their neighborhood after dark. Table 1 show that Ekiti state has the highest (91.7%) number of women with perceived safety in their neighborhood. This is closely followed by Ogun state (88.4%), Kogi (86.9%), Osun (83.1%), Oyo (83.1%), and Osun (80.8%). Most of these states with highest feeling of safety are located in South West Nigeria, except Kogi (North Central zone). Plateau state accounted for the least (26.5%) number of women who feel safe walking alone in their neighborhood after dark (also in the North central zone). This may not be unconnected with the high spate of insecurity on the Plateau relating to land grabbing and indigene-settler conflict that tend to put residents in perpetual fear of attack. This result indicates that states with the highest feelings of safety experience the highest girl school attendance. This means that feeling of safety encourages girls to attend and stay in school. Though the northern part of Nigeria is the worst hit of human insecurity, Kogi state fared better in school attendance and this corresponded with feeling of safety. One important explanation for this result is that Kogi state is one of the peaceful states in north central compared with other states in the region.



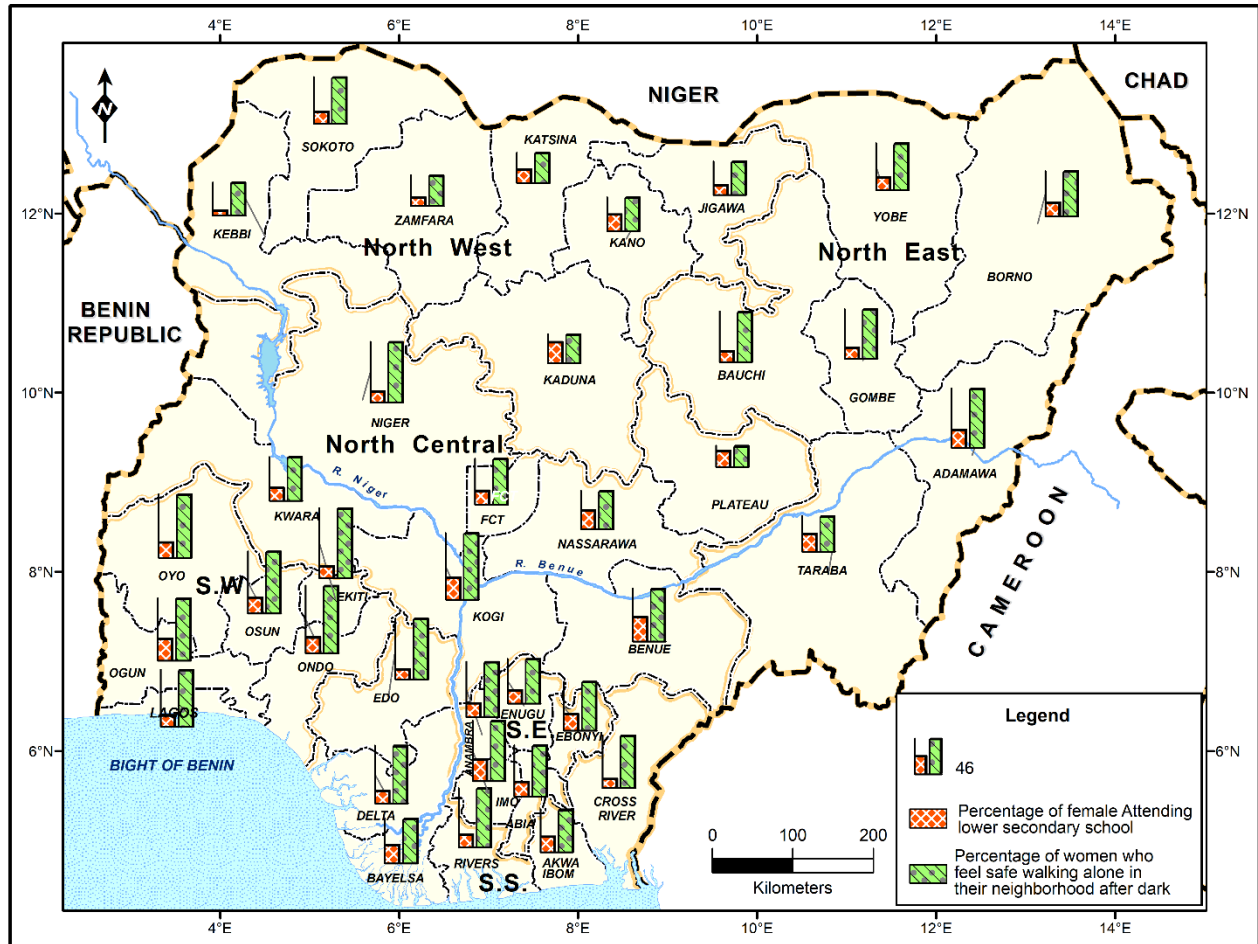


Figure 1: Females school and feeling of safety

The highest percentage of females attending lower secondary school and feeling of safe occurred in the South West, closely followed by the South South, and South East zones, all in southern Nigeria. Also, Kogi state in the North Central is the only state in this category. The result also shows low proportion of females attending lower secondary school and women who feel safe walking alone in their neighborhood after dark in the North West and North Central zones. However, North East zone occurred in the middle range of the number of females attending lower secondary school and of women who feel safe walking alone in their neighborhood after dark. The result further shows that females attending school in the southern part of the country feel safer

compared to those in northern Nigeria. This suggests that the recent state of happenings in northern Nigeria has affected adolescent's perceived level of safety and compromised school attendance.

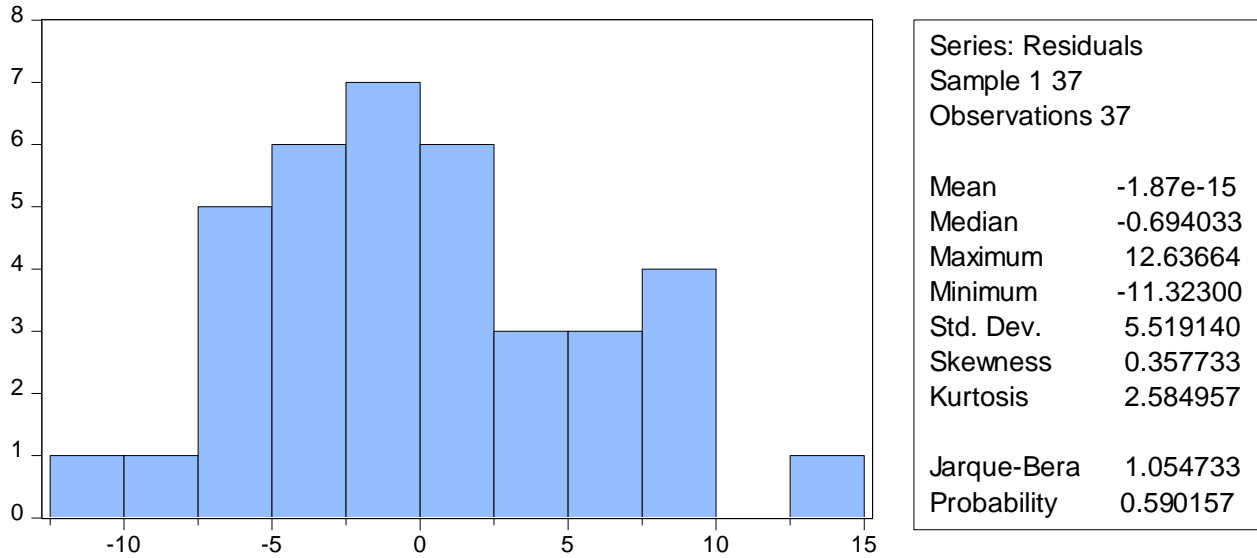


Table 1: Ordinary Least Square model showing relationship between female attending secondary school and feelings of safety

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
WFS__X__C43	0.047890	0.056759	0.843741	0.4045
C	15.37809	3.732023	4.120578	0.0002
R-squared	0.019934	Mean dependent var		18.42973
Adjusted R-squared	-0.008067	S.D. dependent var		5.574987
S.E. of regression	5.597430	Akaike info criterion		6.335030
Sum squared resid	1096.593	Schwarz criterion		6.422107
Log likelihood	-115.1981	Hannan-Quinn criter.		6.365729
F-statistic	0.711899	Durbin-Watson stat		2.420559
Prob(F-statistic)	0.404544			

In order to analyze the relationship between the proportion of female attending secondary school and feelings of safety, the Ordinary Least Square analysis was done. The outcome shows that there

is a weak positive relationship between the proportion of female attending lower secondary school and feelings of safety thereby negating our a priori expectation. The result revealed that a 1% increase in women feeling of safety will generate a 0.047% (pv-0.4045) increase in female attending lower secondary school. This means that feeling of safety is an important factor in influencing the proportion of female attending lower secondary school even if it is not significant. This result aligns with the work of Adams et al., (2021) that reported that feelings of insecurity adversely affected school enrollment in primary schools and less so in secondary schools in Nigeria. This is further backed by the outcome from the  $R^2$  which suggest only 1.99% variation in the percentage of female attending lower secondary school is explained by women feeling of safety. The data was also subjected to normality test to ascertain if the variables are normally distributed in the period under consideration. The outcome shows that the variables are normally distributed as proved by the probability value (0.5902) of the Jarque- Bera. In essence, since the probability of the Jarque-Bera is not significant, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the variables are normally distributed.

### **Factors influencing girls child school dropout in Nigeria**

Table 2 shows results on girl child school dropout, child marriage (Percentage of Women 15-19 currently married in union, wealth quintile of households, food insecurity, and feeling of safety. The result in Table 3 clearly shows that almost seventy-five percent of girl child school dropout occurred in Jigawa state. Similar high prevalence was observed in Zamfara, Bauchi, Kebbi Sokoto, Yobe and Katsina states with proportions of 71.4%, 70.0%, 69.5%, 63.5%, 59.3% and 50.0% respectively. The lowest percentage of girl child school drop-out was recorded in Ebonyi state.

Although the intensity of child marriage is not as high as girl child school drop-out across the states, child marriage prevalence intensities tend to correspond with girl child school drop-out rates

in Nigeria. For instance, Kebbi state with 35.2% had the highest proportion of child marriage compared to Bauchi (34.8%) and Katsina (30.1%). More than one-fifth of child marriage incidences were recorded in Jigawa, Zamfara, Gombe and Kaduna states. Other states with less than 20% rates of child marriage include Sokoto, Benue and Yobe states (See table 3). These states with striking child marriage rates are located in North West and North East zones.

In terms of wealth quintile of household, Lagos and Anambra states recorded the highest richest households with values of 71.9%, and 61.5% respectively. Abia State in South East zone, recorded the highest percentage with outstanding 74.7% for food insecurity, while Ekiti and Ondo states in South West zone, recorded the highest percentage of 91.7% and 88.4% respectively for women's feeling safety. Overall, states in the southern part of the country have better human security indices compared with states in northern Nigeria.

Table 2: Number of girl child school dropout, prevalent girl Child marriage, Wealth quintile of households, Food insecurity and feeling of safety of adolescent girls in Nigeria.

States	Girl child school dropout	Child marriage (Percentage of Women 15-19 currently married in union)	Wealth quintile of households	Percentage of household population experiencing food insecurity in the previous 12 months	Feeling of safety
Abia	25.2	1.4	17.4	74.7	66.5
Adamawa	45.7	11.5	4.2	59.7	77.1

Akwa Ibom	24.5	2.3	11.0	89.1	55.5
Anambra	17.8	0.1	61.4	65.5	72.1
Bauchi	70.0	34.8	1.8	83.6	65.8
Bayelsa	19.7	10.1	11.1	80.6	58.0
Benue	18.3	18.9	4.7	62.2	68.6
Borno	57.9	3.6	5.6	65.4	58.8
Cross River	21.5	6.0	6.2	83.4	68.8
Delta	26.2	2.5	33.2	64.6	75.5
Ebonyi	6.8	3.5	34.7	77.4	63.5
Edo	20.2	3.3	42.0	70.8	79.3
Ekiti	9.6	3.0	15.6	71.4	91.7
Enugu	16.2	2.1	39.7	83.9	57.9
Gombe	53.0	25.2	5.3	55.9	64.2
Imo	10.0	2.6	38.5	86.0	79.0
Jigawa	74.2	27.9	1.3	74.5	43.1
Kaduna	30.5	20.0	14.7	86.0	37.2
Kano	39.0	15.8	12.9	66.0	43.1
Katsina	50.0	30.1	4.8	79.6	39.2
Kebbi	69.5	35.2	12.9	74.7	42.7
Kogi	13.3	4.5	14.5	82.7	86.9
Kwara	39.0	4.6	21.0	73.7	56.8
Lagos	24.3	2.6	71.9	67.6	74.2
Nassarawa	31.2	5.3	5.7	67.5	50.0
Niger	46.7	10.0	9.0	80.8	79.1
Ogun	19.6	2.7	31.2	71.4	81.7

Ondo	23.0	2.4	19.8	62.2	88.4
Osun	27.6	3.1	26.8	62.6	80.8
Oyo	16.3	3.1	26.2	62.2	83.1
Plateau	32.1	9.6	7.1	92.0	26.5
Rivers	21.4	4.4	32.3	78.7	77.1
Sokoto	63.5	19.9	8.3	60.8	60.6
Taraba	35.0	16.3	2.1	81.5	45.4
Yobe	59.3	13.7	2.5	82.9	60.9
Zamfara	71.4	27.4	2.6	77.2	39.1
FCT	21.6	4.4	42.7	70.8	59.5

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Source: NBS, 2021.

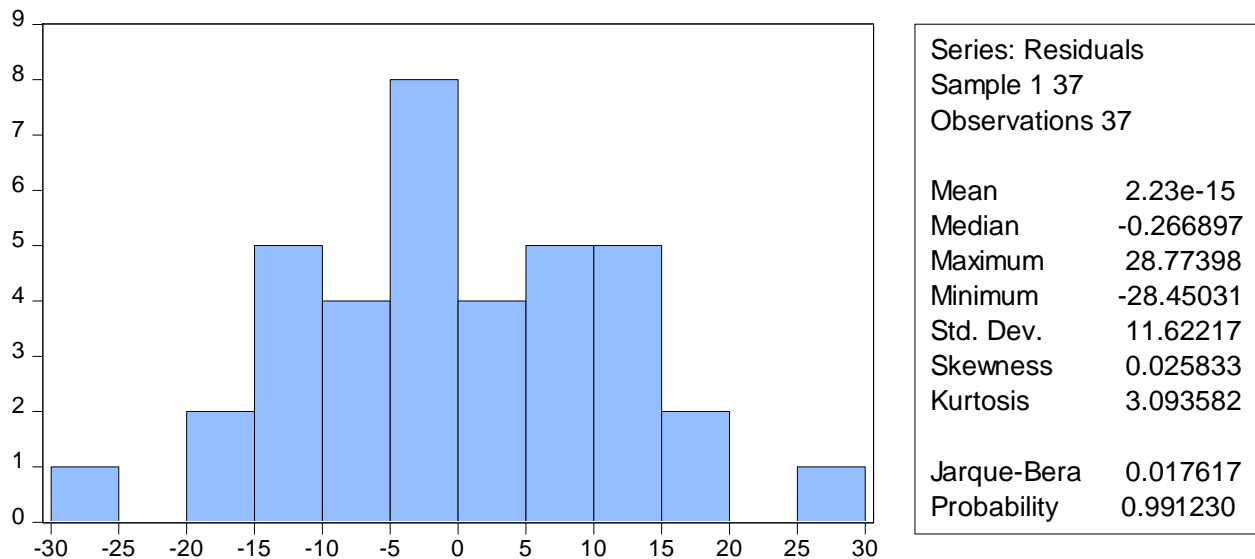
On the other hand, states that recorded the least girl child dropout include Ebonyi, and Ekiti (6.8%, and 6.7%) respectively. Anambra state in the South East zone recorded the least percentage of 0.1% for child marriage (15-24). Bauchi state in the North East zone, recorded the least value of 1.8% for of wealth quintile of household. Adamawa state with 34.8% recorded the least value for food insecurity, while 26.5% of women feeling of safety was recorded in Plateau state.

Several factors are likely to account for the spatial distribution of school girl drop out in Nigeria. These factors can be inferred from the review of literature. Some of these variables have been tested in this study. The Ordinary Least Square analysis was done using the five predictor variables, namely; child school dropout, girl Child marriage, Wealth quintile of households, Food insecurity and feeling of safety of adolescent girls. The results in Table 3 show that of the five predictor variables, only girl child marriage was retained and the regression coefficient was positive (1.216;  $p < 0.05$ ). The four variables jointly explained 64% of the spatial variation in school school girls drop out in Nigeria. Surprisingly, the coefficients of feeling of safety (-5605;  $p > 0.05$ ),

wealth quintile of households (-0.184;  $p > 0.05$ ), food insecurity (-0.6757;  $p > 0.05$ ). The fact that the R-square explains 64% of the variation in the girl child school drop suggests that the factors are contributory to the problem even if they are not significant. For example, wealth quintile is crude indicator of income of the household, while food security and feeling of safety might help promote positive attitudes toward school attendance, and in turn, promote school retention.

**Table 3: Model of Factors influencing girls child school dropout in Nigeria**

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	qProb.
WFS__X4__E31	-0.091510	0.155578	-0.588193	0.5605
WQH_X2_	-0.184153	0.147066	-1.252175	0.2196
GCM__X1_	1.216319	0.275424	4.416169	0.0001
FS__X3_	-0.127162	0.301223	-0.422153	0.6757
C	36.16951	20.61457	1.754561	0.0889
R-squared	0.644425	Mean dependent var		33.81351
Adjusted R-squared	0.599978	S.D. dependent var		19.49044
S.E. of regression	12.32717	Akaike info criterion		7.986577
Sum squared resid	4862.691	Schwarz criterion		8.204268
Log likelihood	-142.7517	Hannan-Quinn criter.		8.063323
F-statistic	14.49879	Durbin-Watson stat		2.508620
Prob(F-statistic)	0.000001			



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study has shown that girl child school dropout varies across the states of Nigeria and closely related to access to education, food, income and other forms of human needs that can help girls to achieve their full potentials and educational goals.

The study has expanded our understanding on the basic human wants faced by girls and how this affects their education. The study has established the fact that the phenomenon of human insecurity increases the social and economic vulnerability of girls who are already in school thereby pushing them into early child marriage. The United Nations Children’s Education Fund report (2021) confirmed that although the reduction of girl-child marriage has improved globally, the rate of progress is not substantial enough to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal target of gender equality by 2030 as child marriage is still a principal factor pushing girls to drop out of school in Nigeria.

The study has shown the amount of progress made in human security varies widely among households, across states and among regions. States in the southern part of Nigeria fared well compared with states in northern Nigeria. Based on these findings, it is recommended that school



related support to girls should focus more in North East and North West Nigeria. Interventions must take into account the relative risk of each state and region in the human security radar to meet the needs of girls.

Government and its agencies must put in place protection and empowerment programmes for girls in order to shield them from sexual and reproductive risks. Government must promote improved quality of life for girls and enhance human welfare that permits girls to make choices and seek opportunities that empower them. Aside protecting girls through the safe school initiative to provide security, girls must be protected in such a manner that they can satisfy their basic needs. To this end, improvement in the social, economic and environmental conditions of girls is crucial in protecting girls from child marriages and other harmful practices.

Career guidance and counseling should be centered on empowered beliefs that enable girls to develop their capacity and make informed choices and, therefore possess the ability to act on their own behalf. A girl being in school is a good avenue to educate her on the dangers of early, forced or child marriage. Empowerment not only enables girls to develop their full potentials but also permits them to participate in the design and implementation of solutions to ensure human security for themselves and others.

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