



Emerging Barriers and Responses to Girls' Education in Kaduna State

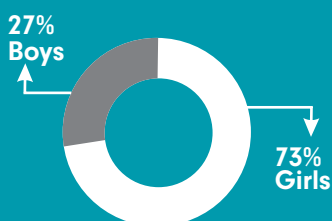
Report Summary | 2022

Introduction

The rising number of out-of-school children in Kaduna State must be considered within the context of the realities faced by its residents over the last few years. In addition to the worsening security crisis in the state, the government has also had to contend with the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. There is evidence from this study that strain on household incomes and rising unemployment are contributing to eroding parents' confidence in the value of investing in education for secondary school-aged girls. Overall, the greatest factors that have led to girls dropping out of school are insecurity, the deprioritisation of girls' education by their families and the personal loss of interest in schooling by the girls themselves.

The security situation in Kaduna has been heightened for years. However, in 2020, it worsened as the state experienced a near tripling of violent incidents involving armed groups. The pervasive violence has severely affected many communities and led to the displacement of over 50,000 people. 2020 also ushered in new pressures in the form of COVID-19 and its attendant economic challenges, which put enormous strain on Kaduna's public health systems and finances. Strong leadership and swift action enabled the state to navigate the worst of these challenges.

Profile of Schools and Respondents



The school survey administered in Kaduna in 2021 involved 171 secondary school students, 73% girls and 27% boys. It delves into the learning experience of 125 girls, including their fears and anxieties about insecurity and their reasons for or against continuing schooling. It provides a snapshot of the current realities for girls between the ages of 11-17 years that makes it difficult to access, perform, finish and return to education.

The survey was conducted across 15 schools (7 public and 8 private) located in five Local Government Areas (LGAs): Chikun and Igabi in Kaduna Central, Kuru in Kaduna South, and Makarfi and Sabon Gari in Kaduna North. In the Kuru district, a larger sample size was targeted to make up for the fact that there was only one participating LGA in line with security advice.

Total Number of Respondents
171 Students

15 Schools

7 Public Schools

8 Private Schools

were sampled across 5 LGAs

The average age of respondents was
15 Years

Impact of COVID-19 and Insecurity on Girls and their Learning Experience

Dealing with stay-at-home orders: During the pandemic lockdown, 75% of girls were worried or afraid of being on the receiving end of misfortune – slightly higher than 71.7% of boys, with the threat of abduction weighing highest on girls.

The top anxieties girls experienced were:

- Falling ill – 61.6%;
- Being kidnapped – 48%;
- Being beaten or bullied – 39.2%; and
- Being touched inappropriately by someone older – 27%.

About 1 in every 4 girls was worried about their “community being attacked,” while 12% were concerned about their “families not being able to cope with the hardship.” Girls in Kaduna were twice as likely to spend their time performing household chores and five times more likely to dedicate

time to taking care of younger siblings than boys. On the other hand, boys were twice as likely to dedicate their lockdown hours to working on the family farm or business (63%). The Malala Fund 2020 Report also found that girls surveyed in Kaduna had increased domestic burdens, lacked academic support from their families and had less access to distance learning platforms during the lockdown.

Trends related to gender-based violence: From the interviews with students and school staff, it is clear that Gender-Based Violence (GBV) mitigation measures within secondary schools need to be tightened, especially in rural locations. Assault cases increased more than three-fold in the lockdown year, and continued to increase the following year, according to evidence from the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in Jema'a, Southern Kaduna; with 19.5% of reported cases involving minors. Girls in Kaduna were six times more likely to be worried about being

Post-lockdown Implications on Girls' Education

Adjustment experience returning to school post-COVID-19 lockdown: Although 89% of sampled students resumed classroom-based learning at the state-sanctioned time, boys (46%) were three times more likely to be discouraged to do this than girls (15%). This is likely related to financial pressures and general pessimism about employment prospects post-graduation. Based on their self-assessment, about half of the students considered their post-lockdown academic performance to be "better than expected" or "the same as" their results prior to school closures. Over 87% of the respondents were concerned about falling behind in their studies or failing an exam, while 55.6% were concerned about timely advancement in the education system.

Retention challenges and reasons for discontinuing school: COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown increased dropout rates, 28% of students knew someone who did not return to school. Early marriage was the most dominant factor cited in the North (36.8%) and South (31.3%), however, it was not considered an emerging trend state-wide given the low number of affirmative responses. Other reasons for increased dropouts included a lack of parental support, safety concerns and financial constraints. However, several girls interviewed dropped out before the pandemic, indicating that the impact of insecurity and economic pressures was prevalent before the lockdown. In terms of perceived security and safety, risk exposure levels were moderate in Kaduna; with only 30% of students rating the likelihood of an attempted kidnapping or banditry attack at school as "likely" or "very likely." The relative confidence in school safety reported corresponds with other data gathered during this research.

In Kaduna, there is a rising disinclination towards public schooling, even though the state government provides free public primary and secondary education and runs a free school uniform program. Female dropouts, previously enrolled in private schools noted that even though they could no longer afford private school fees, their parents were unwilling to transfer them to free public schools. Other financial barriers included some parents' disinclination to pay full fees for a shorter term post-lockdown and being unable to afford the increased tuition in some private schools. Kaduna hosts a larger middle-class adult population in formal employment with private companies and in the civil service, whose salaries were slashed and jobs made redundant due to the effects of the pandemic, affecting the economic livelihood of many parents

Institutional Response

During COVID-19, Kaduna State's three main priorities were maintaining schooling, supporting small and micro business owners, and providing food welfare packages for the poor and most vulnerable. The Kaduna State Government's high level of commitment to Education reforms includes an inclusive education policy and a focus on teacher quality, student enrolment and learning outcomes. Education has received one of the highest budgetary allocations since 2017 and continues to secure financial backing from development partners. During the pandemic, the government deployed strategies to maintain traction in the Education sector, which included radio broadcasts of daily lessons, and other e-learning and blended learning system interventions. It clearly defined protocols for reopening schools and safety measures included:

- i) Launching Operation Accord in June 2020 as a joint task force (JTD) that integrated military and state security agencies at the state level, and
- ii) The state-wide deployment of local security outfits (the Kaduna State Vigilante Service and Edu Marshal), to ensure the safety of students and enforce COVID-19 protocols.

Recommendations and Mitigation Measures

- Out-of-school girls and young women interested in continuing their education requested the following support: financial support, opportunities to develop income-oriented skills and alternative arrangements that cater to those navigating teen pregnancy and early motherhood. More interventions aligned with the objectives of the state's Second Chance Education programme should be developed and implemented to resolve these challenges.
- Increased sensitisation is needed about existing programmes and initiatives that can benefit those willing to continue pursuing their education. For example, the Kaduna State's Second Chance Education programme, coordinated by the state's Planning and Budget Commission with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) offers skills development and literacy and numeracy training to women and young girls.
- As there are mixed reactions to the value of education for girls, including deepening cultural views and societal gender roles, Kaduna's inclusive education policy initiatives could be a setback, particularly as youth unemployment rates worsen nationally.
- While Kaduna State successfully navigated COVID-19's compounding challenges through robust and responsive systems, it is still grappling with more pronounced and multidimensional insecurity challenges and rising GBV risks. Parallel initiatives will be critical to ensure that local and regional security threats do not undermine the significant gains made in education reforms under the current administration.
- Additionally, the existing structures combatting GBV should be backed by legislation.
- School-centric policies and programmes are also required to build on Kaduna's existing strong stance against sexual exploitation and violence – one that incorporates anonymous reporting channels and spot-checks in schools along with safeguarding training for students and staffs.

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