



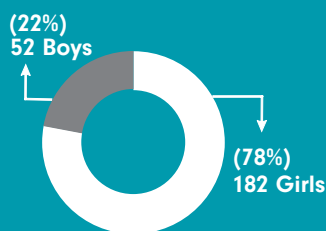
Emerging Barriers and Responses to Girls' Education in Kano State

Report Summary | 2022

Introduction

Kano State has the highest number of out-of-school children in Nigeria – 989,234 according to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown and post-COVID-19 realities further affected school attendance in the state. While there was a rise in domestic violence and sexual assault cases, the survey conducted in Kano found that the greatest threats to girls completing their education are financial hardship and early marriage. This report presents the findings from the survey, highlighting emerging barriers to girls' education and current government efforts to improve the situation.

Profile of Schools and Respondents



The survey exercise in Kano involved 234 student participants, 182 girls (78%) and 52 boys (22%). 75% of respondents were in senior secondary school, and the average respondent's age was 16 years old.

15 schools (10 public, 5 private) were sampled across six Kano local government areas: Kumbotso and Nasarawa (Central), Dambatta and Tofa (North), and Rano and Bunkure (South).

Total number of respondents
234 Students

The average age of respondents was
16 Years

15 Schools
10 Public schools
5 Private schools
were sampled across 6 LGAs

As Kano has a lower proportion of mixed-gender schools, 10 of the 15 schools selected were girl-only to enable better targeting of female respondents. The schools were located as follows: rural (7), semi-urban (3), and urban (5).

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

Dealing with stay-at-home orders: As schools shut down across Kano, 75% of respondents reported increased concern about their welfare, 81% of which were girls. The primary concern was falling ill (87%), then the fear of sexual assault (16%), and being kidnapped (14%). As only 18% of Kano respondents were in boarding schools, the lockdown did not change the living arrangements for most students. Those who lived in the surveyed areas (Bunkure and Rano), closest to Kaduna's border were more likely to be worried about kidnapping threats, showing a correlation between increased insecurity incident reports and heightened anxieties.

Trends related to gender-based violence: Overall, data in Kano on sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) is mixed. Data from the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), reflects an annual decline in the number of female cases reported from 2019 (615 cases) to 2020 (236) and 2021 (161 cases). With few well-resourced options and just one SARC centre, the reporting decline could be due to lockdown restrictions preventing access to reporting

mechanisms and slow pick-up post-lockdown. Discussions with teachers, parents and members of the community corroborate this view.

The learning experience during the lockdown: 87% of students noted the most difficult thing about not being able to attend classes was the prospect of doing poorly once schools reopened due to the disruptions to their classes. Girls were more likely to express performance anxieties related to their academics (94% compared to 60% of boys) and were twice as worried about their families falling into difficult times. While some schools provided online learning platforms during the lockdown, not every parent could afford data to access them and 47% of female respondents did not have any access. Remote learning platforms (such as radio and TV) and tutoring from relatives were the most dominant forms of education support. When students were asked about their views on the effectiveness of these tools, the highest majority opted for radio (36.4%), noting its ease of use and affordability, while 28% preferred online learning.

Post-lockdown Implications on Girls' Education

Retention challenges: The fears expressed of growing economic hardship were a lived reality for many girls who cited inadequate finances as the trigger for leaving school; in some cases, caused by the death of a caregiver or the effects of prolonged strains on earning activities. While Kano State's Free and Compulsory Basic and Post Basic Education came into effect in September 2019, several families indicated that COVID-19 sparked a heightened sense of urgency to marry off their daughters. The interplay between new household financial strains, the unpredictable length of school closures, and cultural preference against delaying marriage beyond a certain time or age likely contributed to girls dropping out of school during COVID-19 to get married. Another factor negatively impacting the completion and retention of girls in secondary school is the increased difficulty of accessing schools. This includes factors such as longer walking times (with more exposure to violence and insecurity along the way), higher transport costs and limited placement alternatives (especially where boarding facilities were preferred). Overall, the insecurity in North West Nigeria has impacted how students, especially girls and their parents regard their safety. 65% of student respondents were aware of at least one school that had been attacked.

Adjustment experience returning to school: Most students currently enrolled in school returned at the same time as their classmates, and with strong parental support. Although 19% of students, predominantly boys, noted worse performance post-lockdown than before the pandemic, most students returned to school without issues. 1 in 3 sampled students knew a peer who had dropped out because of the COVID-19 lockdown due to early marriage (28%), while other identified reasons for dropping out included entering small-scale businesses (21%), and the inability to finance education (22%).

Institutional Response

To ensure that education was prioritised during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period, Kano was the first state to leverage the use of radio as a tool for remote learning. In an attempt to safeguard students' welfare and education outcomes, they developed a home-based learning programme, which involved curriculum development, teacher training, and mass dissemination. In total, 160 educational episodes were recorded and disseminated, with strong backing from the state government and support from UNICEF's Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA) programme. The programme had an inbuilt feedback loop to assess the effectiveness of the literacy and numeracy distance learning programmes, through monitoring exercises that included feedback sessions with parents, and door-to-door community mapping led by Kano Literacy and Mathematics Accelerator (KALMA) facilitators.

To manage school security, a significant number of boarding schools were converted to day schools post-lockdown. Some remote schools were also shut down and merged with other institutions for ease of accessibility. When the school reopening processes began in October 2020, Kano State aligned with the Federal Government's phased approach, limiting the number of days per week and hours per day in classrooms to attempt to adhere to COVID-19 protocols.

Recommendations and Mitigation Measures

Poverty, early marriage, and the perceived lack of safety in school are the three biggest barriers affecting girls and their education in Kano.

- Understanding its drivers will help to address the trend of early marriage that resurfaced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most discussions with the girls themselves, community stakeholders, parents and educators point to both economic factors and a clear trade-off between education and marriage.
- To address safety concerns, female student respondents recommend human resource investments in better-trained and equipped school guards, teacher security training, and more female adult presence in schools. They also recommend infrastructure investments in sanitary facilities, improved lighting, and access to water within the premises. Policymakers and administrators should consider these in their planning and budgeting.
- Although Kano's distance learning platforms were well-designed and wide-reaching, future iterations should factor in students' reported preferences for more (social) interactive forms of learning.
- Messaging that more directly addresses the importance of girls' education and practical guidance on prioritisation and time management techniques should be disseminated to reduce access barriers caused by competing household responsibilities for girls.
- The government has already demonstrated political commitment to improving the Education sector funding through its budget allocation and performance over the last three years. Kano State has also taken additional commendable steps with new Public Finance Management (PFM) reforms that introduced the girl education code into the 2022 state budget, to track specific investments in education and health for women and girls. This should be sustained in subsequent budget cycles.
- Other developments to address barriers to girls' education in the state including finalising and implementing the draft Girl Child Education Policy as well as plans to set up a gender education directorate with gender desk officers across state education agencies, both supported by PERL, should be fast-tracked.

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Contact Address:
10 Bobo Street
Maitama, Abuja, Nigeria
✉ info@perlnigeria.net
🌐 www.perlnigeria.net

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