Poverty And Insecurity in Nigeria: Its Effects on Early Childhood Care Education

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**Abstract**

*This paper discusses how poverty and insecurity in Nigeria affect early childhood care education. This is because poverty negatively affects a child’s physical and socio-emotional development. It shortens life expectancy, frustrates quality of life, undermines beliefs, poisons attitude and behaviour of children. Moreover, in this paper, insecurity as it affects educational generally, and early childhood care education in particular was discussed and some tips presented as a way forward for parents and pupils to use as a guide in order to be security conscious in order to avoid situations that will expose the Nigerian child to kidnapping and or abductions which has been hindering progress in education.*

**Keywords:** Poverty, Insecurity, Early Childhood Care Education

**Introduction**

Education in Nigeria has since been experiencing a lot of changes. One of the major challenges being the abduction of the 276 school girls from their dormitories in Chibock, Borno State at a time the students were writing their final year examination (Michiana, 2021). After this, a lot of kidnapping and or abduction have been taking place in the country. In short it has become a norm. In April 2021, more than 150 students were missing after armed men raided a school in Kaduna State. This attack was said to be the tenth of such attacks and mass kidnapping of children since December 2020. There are many other cases of abduction and kidnapping of school children currently in Nigeria. In Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria, parents were being kidnapped leaving children with no one to cater for or children are being kidnapped so that parents will run around for ransom. This is taking place in all states of the federation.

Moreover, poverty creates and widens achievement gaps. It causes children to underachieve in school and to have greater difficulty finding employment as adults. It denies poor children access to resources and limits educational opportunities; poor children are disproportionately less likely to attend school than their peers.

**Concept of Poverty**

The definition of poverty is very complex. A definition is difficult to formulate because poverty means different things to different people. Some people may define poverty as a lack of income resulting in the absence of a car or refrigerator, while other may describe it as a lack of formal housing, basic services or opportunities for training and employment. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1989), the adjective “poor” means “lacking adequate money or means to live comfortably.” and the noun “poverty” is defined as “the state of being poor” and as a “want of the necessities of life”. Other definitions for poverty and being poor include expression such as having a “deficiency in”, “lacking of”, “scantiness”, “inferiority”, “want of”, “leanness or feebleness”, and many more. Conceptually, poverty refers to a dearth of fundamental resources required to live a respectable and dignified existence. Poverty is a multifaceted condition that incorporates not only low income or lack of material possessions, but also limited access to education, healthcare, pure water, sanitation, adequate nutrition, and other essentials for human well-being. Individuals, families, or entire communities can be affected by poverty, which is prevalent in both developing and developed nations. There are a variety of methods to quantify and define poverty, which can vary between regions and cultures. Individuals or households with incomes below a certain threshold are considered impoverished, as this is the most prevalent method for measuring poverty. This method may not convey the complete complexity of poverty and the numerous deprivations individuals may endure.

Individuals and societies can experience grievous and far-reaching consequences as a result of poverty. It can result in malnutrition, illiteracy, poor health, restricted access to education and employment opportunities, and a shorter life span. In addition, poverty often perpetuates a difficult-to-break cycle, as it can impede economic development, perpetuate social inequality, and restrict social mobility.

**Effects of Poverty on Children**

Poverty can negatively impact child education, child well-being, child health, and child development in the following ways :

1. Poverty is associated with lower levels of academic achievements and educational attainment for children. This is because the experience of poverty poses many challenges for children. For example, children from low- Income families may not be able to concentrate become of hunger or may be victimized by bullies

2. Chronic or prolonged stress, such as the stress experienced by those who live in extreme poverty, can negatively impact early brain development, potentially resulting in cognitive impairment and other long - term consequences for children. This effect is sometimes referred to as toxic stress. The effects of stress and other social conditions of poverty also can increase the risk of children developing mental health issues and behaviour problems. For this reason, poverty has been described by some researchers as an adverse childhood experience.

3. There is evidence that children living in poverty experience worse health outcomes; child poverty also contributes to poor health outcomes during adulthood. In general, poverty is widely understood to be a risk factor many health conditions, so much so that physicians are now encouraged to screen patients for poverty in order to be better respond to health concerns

4. Children who live in poverty typically have low levels of access to health care services and other social supports which are critical for promoting good health and managing and treating health conditions. Children from low – income families also have less for animal resources to draw upon in time of need and crises

5. Children living in food insecure households and communities may suffer from inadequate nutrition which can contribute to physical health problems (e.g diabetes, obesity) as well as mental health issues. During the early years, malnutrition can result in failure to thrive and developmental problems.

**Concept of Insecurity**

Insecurity is uncertainty or anxiety about oneself; lack of confidence. It is also seen as the state of being open to danger or threat; lack of protection. Thus, non provision of the elements at will cause the citizens to be doubtful of their life and existence. They are never sure of what is going to happen next. They find it difficult to plan ahead. This does not in any way encourage growth and development.

 Nigeria is experiencing serious insecurity at the moment. The pattern of insecurity seems to be regionalized. In the south, militia groups are disturbing here and there. In the east and south, kidnapping is very high, ritual killings are all over in the east and west, in the north there is insurgency and in the entire country, assassinations here and there. Generally, considering the happenings in Nigeria, one can confidently say that Nigeria is no safer. Many people travel but could not reach their destinations not because they had accidents and died but because they may have been kidnapped. Some people are taken away from their homes or offices for ransom to be paid some are tortured till they die; some are just shot dead. There is no safe place in Nigeria, urban and rural areas alike. This could be linked to the poverty experienced by hard working citizens except those in politics who care not really suffering but forcefully putting themselves there to torment the citizens. The connection between poverty and the difficulties encountered by industrious citizens is a complex and troubling issue that has afflicted societies for centuries.

Despite their dedication and diligent efforts to make ends meet, many industrious individuals find themselves unable to escape the cycle of destitution and economic hardship. Several factors have contributed to this unfortunate circumstance. One way in which poverty is exacerbated is via the uneven distribution of resources and opportunity. In numerous societies, wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of a privileged minority, who are frequently those in influential political positions. This wealth concentration leaves the remainder of the population with limited resources, making it difficult for industrious citizens to enhance their circumstances. The lack of access to quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities perpetuates the cycle of poverty by widening the divide between the wealthy and the impoverished.

In addition, political corruption and avarice can exacerbate the difficulties faced by ordinary citizens. Some legislators may use their positions of power for personal benefit while ignoring the needs and welfare of the people they are supposed to serve. They may engage in embezzlement, extortion, or other corrupt practices that divert funds from vital social welfare programs and infrastructure development. Furthermore, the emergence of self-interested and opportunistic politicians who do not really connect with the sufferings of the citizenry may result in policies and actions that further isolate the most vulnerable communities. These politicians may place their own interests and those of their elite circles above those of the working class, advancing policies that perpetuate income inequality and ignoring the most pressing problems facing the working class. Those who pursue power solely for their own benefit can inflict severe suffering on the citizens they are supposed to represent, in contrast to legislators who enter public service with a genuine desire to effect positive change. The lives of industrious citizens are disproportionately impacted by the absence of vital social safety nets, limited access to affordable housing, and inadequate healthcare systems.

To address these systemic issues, both citizens and accountable leaders must take concerted action. Empowering the voices of the marginalized, advocating transparency, and supporting ethical legislators can pave the way for policies that are more inclusive and equitable. Moreover, investing in education and skill development programs can help the working class rise out of poverty by providing them with better opportunities to do so.

**Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria**

Security is simply put as the safety of individuals. It is a primary responsibility of government to ensure that its citizens are safe at all times. Human security now, observe that human security is concerned with safeguarding and expanding people vital freedoms. It requires both protecting people from critical and pervasive threats and empowering people to take charge of their own lives. There are various categories of human security. These are; economic security, health security, environmental security, personal security, food security, community security and political security.

To ensure the safety of its citizens, a good government must make provision for the above 7 elements. When this is done, there will be freedom and calm. Everyone will live in peace. Without these, the entry country is not secured including its citizens.

**Education and the Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria**

As at 2015 according to the World Bank research, Nigerians population as at then was 120 million making Nigeria the most populous country in Africa and by revaluation, the country was said to be the richest in Africa then. As it concerns education, Ubong (2016) explains that the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) indicates that 40% of Nigerian children between the ages of 6-11 years are not attending primary schools especially in the Northern part of the country. It was also observed that 45% of the then population was made up of children bellow the age of 15 years. With a population of 120 million were under 15 years of age. If 40% of the number were not attending school, it means that about 31 million Nigerian children may end up as illiterates. These is because sources of insecurity. That is why the situation is getting worse. Many of those who were not matured yet as at then have matured and joined those who were already in the business of kidnapping and others. With the situation on ground, Ubong (2016) inquired, “which parent is happy to let a child leave the safety and comfort of home to face dangers on the way to school or while in school?” it has been difficult since these security issues surfaced in Nigeria.

Parents find it difficult to choose between sending children to school and losing them, and keeping them safe at home without going to school to plan the future of our children who are leaders of tomorrow. Idoko (2021) observe that the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has expressed concerns that the attack on schools and abductions of students have impacted negatively on the development of education in Nigeria. The author further observed that it is an attack on the connected development organization org. (CODE) (2021) report that kidnapping and abduction of school children has become a phenomenon in Nigeria. It started 7 years ago with over a thousand students kidnapped already. Recently the trend has accelerated with kidnappings in Dapchi 110 girls in February 2018, Kangar North North-Western 300 boys in December 2020, Kangara. (North central Niger State) 27 boys in February 2021; Jangebe Zamfara State 279 girls in March 2021.

 Lawal in CODE (2021) noted that the psychological and social consequences of these on parents and guardians are too grievous to describe and the abducted children often have to live with the scare for the rest of their lives for an education when schooling itself has its own share of challenges if going to school has become like preparing for or going for war, then what chances do the average Nigerian child have for a better education? In the same vein, Lawal (2018) observes that the recent abduction reveals the absence of safety measures in schools. He reports the case of a girl who said she saw them with her own eyes blocking the gate and they have to climb the fence to find a way of escape. She said “no matter what security is put in place; I honestly don’t think I can go back to this school”. I have a lot of friends who went missing. Many children have stopped attending school due to abductions and kidnapping. This is happening across all the states of Nigeria. It is really ruining the Nigerian education system.

**Concept of Early Childhood Care Education**

Early childhood education otherwise called pre-primary education does not enjoy uniform definition across board. Lillie (1979) defined pre-primary education as “an organized series of learning for children three to six years of age”. In the view of Hefferman (1877), early childhood education is concerned with the young child from the time that his informed learning at home is augments by group experience with his peers under adult guidance. In his own view, Elems (1988) perceived pre – primary education as “an informal education given by the home to children from age of one to three plus in preparation for the formal education.”

What could be gleaned from these definitions is that pre-primary education is the education given to children before they attain conventional primary school age which Jean Piaget (1896 - 1980) called the pre-operational stage of child development (2-7 years). According to the National Policy on Education (1998), pre – primary education means “an education in an education institution to children age 3 to 5 plus prior to their entering the primary school.

**Types of Early Childhood Education Institutions**

There are different types of pre-school facilities mushrooming all over the country. These vary from the ideal to appealing situation; and they operate under the name “nursery school” Awonyi (1978), Orebanjo (1980), Gbadamosi (1988) gave a list of these caricature of pre-school institution as follow:

1. Parental Care: These are pre-school institution set up either by the government or philanthropic organization for the deprived children as a result of maternal deprivation resulting from divorce of parents, desertion, death, alcoholism, neglect, cruelty, inexperience in parental responsibilities, mental illness of parents etc. A good example of this types of per – school provision is not academic in nature but for the general welfare of the deprive children.

2. Private Foster Parents: This is not a formal school. It is set up by private individuals to take care of children of the working parents who have not reached the statutory school age, whose parents could not combine caring for their children and working at the same time. Such pre–school institution is established by a person who, for reward purposes, undertake the care and maintenance of children below the upper limit of compulsory school age for a period exceeding one mouth.

3. Daily Guardians: These are neither a formal school nor academic oriented per – school institution, it is organized by person (s) to look after the children between the ages of two and five years for reward purposes when their parents are away to their places of works.

4. Child Minder: This is non- formal per-school institution set up to look after children under the age of five years for the day or substantial part thereof. It is set up to foster social development as well as emotional adjustment of children.

5. Private Nurseries: These are formal pre-school institution set up by factories, hospitals of learning, and individuals to cater for children who have not attained the upper limit of compulsory school age. It serves as a preparatory ground for the primary education.

6. Day Nurseries: These are formal pre- school institutions set up usually by the ministry of Economic Developments and social welfare to cater for the children lack at home such as feeding, health, love, affection, clothing etc.

7. Nursery Classes: These are not nursery school but only provision school age, to play around unit their elder brother and sister close as school. The purpose of this school is not academic in nature but for custodian guidance / security purpose as well as for social developments.

8. Laboratory Day Nurseries: These are per-school institutions originally planned as a laboratory for teaching practice in infant methodology. The school are attached training colleges and institution of higher learning. It is also aimed to cater for children of staff working in those institution. Sometime, they grow to become autonomous. The aims of this types of per-school institution are academic developments as well as research purpose.

9. Creche: These are accommodations for children with supervisory staff provide at local authority, maternity and child welfare centers etc. to take care of children under the age of premises. It is to ensure the safety of children while their parents are at work.

10. Nursery School: These are formal pre- school institutions which are used mainly for the purpose of providing education for children who have reached the statutory school age in Nigeria. This type of pre- school is expected foster academic, social, emotional, physical etc. developments of children. This type of school is established after the approval has been granted by the ministry of education.

Each of these institutions is expected to performed specific and distinct function. However, in Nigeria situation, they are all referred to as nursey school.

**Early Childhood Education and the Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria**

As earlier explained, early childhood care education does not exist in isolation. As the other levels of education are negatively affected so, it is the first level. The children at this level are still young and tender. They require adequate attention for effective care and successful transition for home to school. At this age, the children depend on adults for their livelihood. They are taken to and from school. While in school, they rely on the adult for instructions on what to do and what they should not do. Report across the country indicate that insecurity really is ruining early childhood education in Nigeria. In Cross River State, there are reports of abduction and kidnapping of children on various occasions. Two instances are cited here. There is a report by Cross River Watch (2014) of a 4-year-old Effiong Edet who was abducted at Ekorinim axis of Calabar at about 8.30 pm who when the children were playing outside. Also, Edem, (2018) reported how 2 primary school pupils were abducted by unknown persons from Government Primary School Ikot Efanga Mkpa in Calabar municipal council of cross River State. In Akwa Ibom State Onuegbu (2020) reported in vanguard how 2 pupils (two siblings of ages 4 and 3 years) were abducted from a primary school in Afia Nsit by an unknown woman suspected to be a child trafficker.

 In River State, Ekeinde (2007) reports that a 3 – year old boy was kidnapped while he was being taken to school by the family driver in the morning. Also, in ondo State Dayo Johnson, (2021) gave a report on how 2 nursery pupils were abducted by gunmen when their mother left them in the car to open the gate of her house. She couldn’t find her children when she returned to the car.

 In Kaduna State as in many other states in the north, it has been hail. Children are being kidnapped/abducted here and there; in short it has become a lucrative business. They believe that money is made from kidnapping or abducting children more because the parents will run to several places to look for money in order to save the lives of their children. In Kaduna, a parent explained that she had 5 of her children in the school Salihu Tanko Islaamiyya Primary school Kaduna/Mina Junction Rafi Local Government Area Niger State. All 5 were kidnapped but the two youngest were returned later ages 2 and 4 years leaving the ones of 6, 9 & 11 years.

It is observed that abduction was carried out in secondary schools and tertiary institutions but recently it has extended to the nursery and primary schools. Ekeinde (2007) and Arise news (2021) meanwhile these are the most delicate set of people going to school. What then should be done in order to ensure the safety of the Nigerian child.

**The Way Forward**

Parents, teachers, guardans, caregivers, students, children and many others that are concerned have been lamenting. Will the future of our children be blocked as a result of abduction/kidnapping? Education is said to be our key to success. Does it mean that our children will not succeed in life? In the words of Hawkins (2021) “with increasing incidents of attacks on schools and kidnapping of students, the entire educational system in northern Nigeria is at serious risk if nothing is done urgently to put a halt to the attacks and abductions”. We can’t just fold our hands and allow our children to suffer. Keeping them safe at home would not help them either. Something has to be done to save the Nigerian child.

The family is always seen and noted as the child’s first school. Parents have a responsibility of teaching the children to be security conscious. Let the children know that any strange person around them should not be trusted, that while at home, in the market, at school on the way, they could be attacked. They should learn to raise alarm where they do not understand what is happening around them. They should call the attention of any adult around them for help. Adedeji and Marco (2021) suggest that assessment should be done to find out schools that are prone to attacks so that the children in such schools will be relocated to safer schools. There should be strong security network developed using the commentary youths, whenever children are in school, they should be taught security education. To Atakpo (2020) the entire early childhood curriculum is built in such a way that when implemented the child will be equipped for future security challenges because the content is rich and involves the total development of the child with a lot of emphasis on social skills, relationships and team work.

Also, Pope and Romito (2020) observed that stranger abductions are rare, that most abductions and kidnappings are carried out by family members or acquaintances. So, they suggest that children should be trained to be aware of their surroundings, how to identify a threat and how to react. From the age of 3 years, they suggest that the children should be guided by the following tips by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to prevent abduction:

1. Stay away from strangers. Explain what makes someone a stranger. Note that even someone with a familiar face is a stranger if you do not know him or her well.
2. Stay away from someone who is following you on foot or in a car. Don’t get close to them or feel as though you must answer any questions, they ask you.
3. Run and scream if anyone tries to force you to go somewhere with them or tries to force you into a car.
4. Memorize a secret code word. Tell your child not to go with anyone under any circumstances unless that person also knows this code word.
5. Adults shouldn’t ask children for help for example a child shouldn’t trust grown-ups who ask kids for directions or for help finding a pappy or latten a child who is approached in this way should tell the person, wait here and I will check with my mom or Dad and then find his or her parents right away.
6. Always ask for help when you are lost. If you are lost in a public place, ask someone who works there for help.
7. Always ask for permission before going, how you will get there, who is going with you and when you will be back. Be home at the agreed upon time or else find a way to contact home directly.
8. If your child is lost or missing, being able to provide information quickly to the authorities will save them valuable time in searching for your child so parents/guardians/caregivers should be ready with.
9. Be prepared with a good description of your child. Have a close-up photograph of your child taken every 6 months. Keep tract of and write down details about your child’s appearance, such as height and weight, eye color, birthmarks, scars and identifiable mannerisms such as hair-twisted.
10. Have your child finger printed. Check your local police department for instructions.
11. Stay calm. You are more likely to remember helpful details if you can remain calm with terse a guide, many children will be saved from abduction/kidnapping.

Above all the federal government of Nigeria should re-assess the issue of security as Adedeji and Marco pointed out, they should address the long-term security treat in the country. Security measures should be put in place as it is rightly observed by Lawal (2018) that the attacks on schools frequently have exposed the absence of security in the schools.

**Suggestions**

(1) The parents should continuously insist on security consciousness so that the children will know what to do at all times.

(2) The teachers should implement the curriculum as it is observed that the curriculum content is rich enough to instill security consciousness in the children

(3) The government should supervise and ensure that appropriate content is taught to the children to ensure acquisition of appropriate skills that will help the child to grow in the larger society and be safe.

(4) Government should undertake the training of security guards in the community among the youth to avoid external attacks on communities.

**Conclusion**

It is observed that the greatest threat to life at the moment in Nigeria is the issue of insecurity. This is spreading to all other sectors of the economy. Food production is reduced leading to increased hunger, prices of food items are increasing on a daily bases since farmers are not safe. Many teachers combine teaching with other forms of businesses since the salary is no more enough to feed the family. This distraction has caused the teachers/caregivers not to concentrate on the children left under their care. With this, the safety of the children is not guaranteed. Abductors or kidnappers may go to schools when the teachers are out of the classes to pick the children from the classrooms without anybody noticing. The situation is so bad that the federal government has to do something urgently so save the situation before it becomes unbearable.

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