



TRIGGERS OF SCHOOL DROPOUT AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL GIRLS IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: No nation can toy with the education of the girl-child because of the sayings that goes that educate a woman and you educate a nation. Yet girls are often dogged with challenges of access, equality, performance and retention/dropout in terms of schooling. The study sought to establish the factors of dropping among secondary school girls in Calabar metropolis in Cross River State, Nigeria. One research question was formulated to guide the study. Survey design was utilized to unveil the implications. A sample size of 240 was drawn from school dropout girls and their parents/guardians, teachers, students in schools, youth and women leaders using the stratified random sampling technique. Questionnaire/checklist was used to collect the data which was analyzed using percentages. Poverty, teen pregnancy, peer influence and quest for money were identified as the paramount factors of dropout. It is recommended that schools be made free, qualitative and engaging in order to motivate the girl-child towards completion of school.

Keywords: Girl-child, dropout; causes, secondary school.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Education is the process through which individuals acquire adequate and appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and behavior necessary to function optimally as a citizen (Boonprasert, 2010). It is also the belief that no nation can develop without proper formal education of its citizenry since education is considered the bedrock of all facets of development of any nation (Anho, 2011). Hence, no country can afford to toy with the education of its citizenry, especially that of the girl-child. According to the popular adage, educate a man and you will educate an individual, but educate a woman and you educate a nation'. This buttresses the fact that education of the girl-child is a key factor in the development of the country, communities, economic empowerment, social accomplishment and the likes (Wood 2001).

The inception of the universal basic education (UBE) since 2000, with the main goal of education for all by the year 2015, is in

recognition of the need to educate as well as develop its citizenry and the Nigerian nation. Again, the road map for the Nigerian education sector which was flagged off in 2009, included among others, access and equity; standard and quality assurance (Obanya, 2010). These were steps in the right direction as gains were made in form of marginal increase in enrolment, however, there are still some challenges in terms of access, equity, achievement in school subjects and retention/dropout, especially among girls (Offorma, 2009).

Some children enroll in school but do not remain until graduation. A dropout is any student, who for one reason or the other leaves school prematurely before graduation, without transferring to another school. This is most common in rural areas where there is abject poverty, ignorance and children from a recognizable part of the family labor force (Kamla-Ra, 2007). It has been strongly observed that the Nigerian girl-child has not had a fair chance to qualitative education as a result of socio-economic, school related



and other societal factors and implications (Alike & Egbochukwu,2010).

The federal government of Nigeria itself has acknowledged the dropout syndrome currently ravaging the education sector. The then Minister of State for Education, at the 12th girl education (GE) national steering committee meeting in Abuja Nigeria, posited that the government is poised to stamp out the drop out malaise, hence is committed to achieving the universal primary and Junior secondary education (MDG2) and eliminate gender disparity in education (MDG3) by 2015 (Nigeria A – Z .com, 2012).

Girls find themselves out of school for a number of reasons which includes; child labor, poverty, lack of sponsorship, quest for money, bereavement, truancy, broken home, engagement as house helps and single parenthood (Okeke *et al*, 2008). Uche and Malike (2011) have attributed youth militancy and subsequent school dropout to poverty, unemployment, low level of education and ignorance, among others. In the face of hardship, it is more likely for girls to dropout of school than boys.

Quest for money has been shown to be the reasons why girls dropout of school, Kukreti and Sexana (2007) had identified the desire for money, peer influence, parental irresponsibility as factors of dropout syndrome among girls. The study of Inokoba and Maliki (2011) identified money and ignorance at the root of school dropout and other vices.

Quality of education and poor performance can also lead to school dropout among girls. Antwi-Danso & Edet (2011) reported that teacher's hostile attitude towards girls and poor performance are some of the academic factors that contributes to girl's school dropout. Inadequate teaching staff both in quality and quantity and lack of infrastructure vital for quality education are among the factors leading to high level of school dropout in Calabar (Balouga, 2009; Idumange, 2012).

Teenage pregnancy is also a major contributor to the scourge of school dropout. Majority of girls admitted dropping out of school as a result of pregnancy and some became pregnant even in primary six (Antwi-Danso & Edet, 2011). There was a high correlation between pregnancy and school dropout of girls in the study of Maliki (2011). The reports of UNICEF (2004) indicated that about 7.3 million children do not go to school, of which 62% are girls. Sometimes even when the educational possibilities that are present the girl-child may not be able to access them. Access

to education has been defined by Offorma (2009) to include availability, convenience, ability and the opportunity to be educated and according to her, despite concerted efforts to push their cause forward, millions of girls still cannot access education or dropout of school because of their peculiar circumstances. Nigeria is among the 15 countries in sub-Saharan African reported to have more than one million girls out of school (UNICEF, 2003). The results of the study of Okpukpara and Chikwuone (2011) reiterated that the probability of dropout among girls is 23% compared to 12% for boys, in urban areas and that drop out for girls is more prominent in rural areas than boys with 16% rate for girls and 5% for boys.

Hence, the purpose of the study is to investigate and establish the factors responsible for school dropout among secondary school students in Calabar metropolis in Cross River state.

2.1 METHODOLOGY

Research question: the study formulated one research question which included thus; what are the contributing factors to secondary schools girls dropping out of schools?

2.2 Methodology adopted for the study: The study adopted a survey research design and employed same for the study because it focuses on determining the nature of situations, as at the time of investigation. It suits this particular study since it concerns itself with ascertaining and establishing the status quo, facts or pieces of information at the time of research, presenting such information as they are.

2.3 Population used for the study:

The population for the study comprised of women and youth leaders in the Calabar metropolis, teachers of secondary schools, the dropout girls themselves, parents, guardians, relations of dropout girls and students (girls) currently enrolled in junior secondary school 3 (JSS3) through senior secondary school 3 (SSS3) in each school.

The stratified simple random sampling technique was used to select 8 wards, 16 women leaders, 16 youth leaders, 16 teachers, 64 students (girls) currently enrolled, 64 dropout girls and 64 parents/guardians/relatives of the dropout, yielding a sample size of 240 population size. The survey instrument further consisted of a checklist, titled school dropout among the girls checklist.

3.1 RESULTS

The research question sought to establish the contributory factors of school dropout among secondary school girls in Calabar



Metropolis. Data were analyzed using percentages and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1:

Contributing factors to girls dropout of secondary schools in Calabar Metropolis (N=240)

Contributing factors	Yes	(%)	No	(%)	Total No.	Total percentage
Poverty	214	89	26	11	240	100
Quest for Money	148	62	92	38	240	100
Poor performance	36	15	204	85	240	100
Ill health	178	74	62	26	240	100
Difficult terrain	12	05	228	95	240	100
Death of parent	5	02	235	98	240	100
Pregnancy	26	11	214	89	240	100
Peer influence	158	66	82	32	240	100
Abandonment	125	52	115	48	240	100
No interest in school	89	37	151	63	240	100

The results as presented in Table 1 revealed that poverty is the highest contributing factor to school dropout among girls (89%). This is followed by teenage pregnancy accounting for (74%), peer influence (66%), the quest for money (62%), abandonment by parents (father) assumed (52%) while the lack of interest in school by the dropout was (37%). Other contributing factors included poor academic performance (15%), death of parents/guardian (02%), ill health (5%) and difficult terrain and long distances to school was 2%.

3.2 Discussion.

The results of the study indicate that poverty among parents was the main reason for girls dropping out of secondary school in Calabar Metropolis, respondents overwhelmingly identified poverty as the major factor (89%). Poverty indeed breeds ignorance and illiteracy which make such individuals vulnerable to sexual predators and peer pressure, to seek for crumbs from men, hence, teenage pregnancy and school dropout. In the investigation of Maliki (2011), 76% of the respondents indicated that low socio-economic status contributed immensely to teenage girls dropping out of school, mostly as a result of pregnancy. Also, Obanya (2010) identified poverty as the major militating factor against the girl-child education, even when it is purportedly free as a result of indirect and illegal costs.

Teenage pregnancy has been shown to be a factor of school dropout among girls (74%). This is not surprising because this is part of the poverty trap, as they are easily seduced and deceived

into sexual activities, ostensibly for financial gains and benefits, which eventually lead to teenage pregnancy and dropout. Educational failure and school dropout have been identified as the negative effect of teenage pregnancy (Antwi-Danso & Edet, 2011; Robin, 2011). Peer influence and quest for money have also been identified as major contributors to school dropout by 66% and 62% respectively. There is always the tendency to make it and look good and no teenager hardly want to be left out. They always want to have a sense of belonging. Inokoba & Maliki (2011) pointed out that the quest for money also remains one of the causes of school dropout and related vices. Kukreti and Saxena (2007) also included peer pressure and quest for money as factors of school dropout among girls.

Abandonment by parents, especially the father and lack of interest in school also reveals strong as contributing to school dropout showing 52% and 37% respectively. Once the girl child is abandoned by the father and the mother is poor, the chances of finishing school are small and the tendency is to lose interest in school. It is not surprising because most of these teenagers were born by single teenage mothers and fathered by all and others who are within their reach. Some of them don't even know their biological fathers and even the psychological impact could be enormous. This according to Odoemena (2010), in the riverine settlements of the Cross River State, children give birth to children which lead to school dropout, illiteracy and ignorance.



Poor academic performance though only 15%, however, contributes to dropout. In Antwi-Danso & Edet (2011) study, 51% of the respondents agreed that academic performance is a factor and cause of school dropout. Death of parent which scores 11% could lead to lack of money for education further leading to dropout. Ill health which showed 5% score, especially among the poor, understandably can militate against completion of school. Even though only 2% of respondents regarded difficult terrain/distance from school as impediment to finishing school, it has been posited by Balouga (2009) that in the difficult wetland terrain of Calabar in addition to the absence and depleting social amenities, children are easily compelled to leave school before graduation.

3.2 Conclusion

The study had revealed the factors contributing to dropout among secondary school girls in Calabar metropolis. These factors included poverty, teenage pregnancy, peer influence, the quest for money, abandonment by parents (father), lack of interest in school, poor academic performance, death of parents, ill health and difficult terrain in that order. It is important to note that head teachers and other school authorities claimed there are no dropouts and as such would not provide any data on dropout/enrolment, perhaps, for political and financial reasons. According to them, there are really no dropouts that these girls only come and go at will. However, for any meaningful intervention on the girl's dropout syndrome to take place, there has to be sincerity and transparency on the part of all stakeholders. For the MDGs-2 and the MDGs-3 as well as total human resources development to be achieved in Cross River state and indeed Nigeria, the scourge of the girl-child dropout syndrome has to be contained.

The setting up of the Girl Education (GE) national steering committee by the federal government and the declaration of free education, free uniform and school meals by the Cross River State government in an inaugural meeting address was a right step taken in the right direction. However, the project which seeks to project counter girl's dropout syndrome is a very crucial one that requires all hands to be on deck. Schools need to collaborate with government to pay advocacy visit to the state in order to sensitize women, especially in the rural areas. Mothers unions, women leaders and other related groups need to work towards ensuring that the enabling environment is created for access, retention and

completion of education by the girl-child. Attention should shift from enrolment to active participation.

3.3 Recommendation

Since poverty has been shown to be the root of their dropout from schools, if schools are truly free, quantitative and engaging these girls would be motivated to rise above other challenges and move towards actualizing and development of their full potentials. Thus, guaranteeing an inclusive human resource development of all facets of the millennium development goals (MDGs) for the Nigerian nation.

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