

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND INSECURITY IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS: IMPLICATIONS FOR GIRLS' ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated gender-based violence and insecurity in conflict-affected areas and their implications for girls' access to education in Nigeria. Four research questions guided the study. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and the study was carried out in Borno, Kaduna, and Zamfara States, which were purposively selected due to their high levels of insecurity and reported incidents of gender-based violence. The total population of the study consisted of 21,000 female students enrolled in public secondary schools across the selected states. From this population, a sample of 2,100 respondents, representing 10% was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. Data were collected using two structured instruments: the Gender-Based Violence Questionnaire (GBVQ) and the Insecurity and Girls' Education Questionnaire (IGEIQ). Both instruments were face validated by experts. The reliability coefficient was confirmed through a pilot study conducted in Gombe State, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.81 and 0.84, respectively. The findings of the study revealed that gender-based violence and insecurity significantly disrupted girls' enrollment, attendance, and completion of education in the affected areas. The findings also revealed that strengthening school security such as through fencing, trained guards, and community surveillance and creating safe access routes to school were among the most highly rated strategies for reducing the negative impact of conflict on girls' education. Based on the results, the study recommended among others that integrated, school-community-based safety mechanisms and targeted policy responses to improve girls' access to education in conflict-prone regions.

Keywords: Gender-based violence, insecurity, girls' education, conflict-affected areas

Introduction

Gender-based violence and insecurity in conflict-affected areas have continued to pose significant threats to girls' access to formal education in Nigeria. In many parts of the country, particularly in the North-East and North-West regions, persistent armed conflicts, insurgent attacks, and community violence have destabilized educational systems, disrupted learning environments, and undermined the safety and inclusion of female learners. The nature and scale of gender-based violence in these insecure zones are often heightened by armed

hostilities, socio-cultural practices, poverty, and weak institutional responses, which collectively impair the educational opportunities available to girls. Hence, gender-based violence in conflict settings is expressed through rape, sexual harassment, abduction, forced marriage, and other forms of physical and psychological abuse directed against females, especially young girls. These violent experiences have been shown to not only affect the physical and emotional well-being of victims but also lead to school absenteeism, dropout, early marriage, and long-term educational exclusion. Insecurity and gender-based violence are further reinforced by existing patriarchal norms, fear of attacks, and economic hardship, resulting in family decisions to withdraw girls from school for safety reasons or for domestic responsibilities (Ojong & Ogar, 2021; Mbaegbu, 2022).

Research conducted by Mbaegbu (2022) demonstrated that the educational experiences of girls in conflict-affected communities are shaped by intersecting challenges, including destruction of school infrastructure, limited presence of female teachers, inadequate security in learning spaces, and displacement of households (Edeh, Umezinwa, & Onwudinjo, 2020). These conditions lead to the disruption of school attendance, loss of academic continuity, and increased exposure to violence, thereby limiting their prospects for empowerment and participation in national development. The continued denial of educational access to girls under these conditions has profound implications for social inclusion, human capital development, and long-term peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria. The intersection of gender-based violence, insecurity, and education has gained significant attention in contemporary development discourse. Recent national and international policy frameworks emphasize the need to ensure gender-responsive education in fragile and conflict-affected settings. However, the persistence of insecurity and systemic violence against girls in many parts of Nigeria calls for more targeted research to understand the depth of the problem and propose sustainable educational responses. Understanding how gender-based violence and insecurity impact girls' access to education in Nigeria remains essential to advancing gender equality, safeguarding human rights, and fostering inclusive development in affected communities.

Gender-based violence has been widely conceptualized in scholarly discourse as a critical barrier to gender equality, particularly in contexts affected by conflict. According to Ojong and Ogar (2021), gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender, which are rooted in power imbalances and cultural norms. Edeh, Umezinwa, and Onwudinjo (2020) further describe gender-based violence as any act that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls, whether occurring in public or private life. In a similar perspective, Mbaegbu (2022) defines gender-based violence as the violation of the dignity and rights of girls and women, often normalized in patriarchal societies and exacerbated in conflict settings. For the purpose of this study, gender-based violence is conceptualized as all forms of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse experienced by girls, particularly in conflict-affected communities, which hinder their personal safety, self-worth, and educational participation. Understanding the nature and prevalence of gender-based violence is crucial to identifying how it intersects with insecurity in regions prone to violence. Insecurity in conflict-affected areas is another central concept in this study, often characterized by instability, violence, and a breakdown of law and order.

Nwankwo and Ekene (2021) describe insecurity as a condition in which individuals or communities live in fear of violence, due to armed conflict, terrorism, or organized crime. Yusuf and Ibrahim (2022) define insecurity as the lack of protection and safety that results from insurgency, ethno-religious clashes, and other forms of armed conflict, which threaten the lives and well-being of civilians. Similarly, Chika and Nwosu (2020) view insecurity in conflict zones as the inability of the state to ensure peace, security, and basic human rights for its citizens, especially vulnerable populations such as women and children. Within this study, insecurity in conflict-affected areas is conceptualized as the ongoing threat to life, property, and human development resulting from armed conflict, displacement, and systemic violence. The relationship between insecurity and gender-based violence is particularly significant, as both serve to create an environment in which girls' access to safe and inclusive education is severely compromised.

Access to education is another concept central to this research, particularly in evaluating the effects of gender-based violence and insecurity. According to Udu and Uzoho (2020), access to education refers to the opportunity and ability of individuals to enroll, attend, and complete schooling without discrimination or barriers. Onah and Okechukwu (2021) define access to education as the right and practical ability of all learners, especially girls in conflict-affected zones, to gain entry into educational institutions and benefit from meaningful learning experiences. In the same vein, Okoro and Nwankwo (2022) explain access to education as the equitable availability and utilization of schooling facilities, free from fear, violence, and socio-economic constraints. In this study, access to education is defined as the extent to which girls in conflict-affected communities are able to enroll, attend, and successfully complete their education in an environment that is safe, inclusive, and conducive for learning. This concept is closely linked with human capital development, which emphasizes the role of education in empowering individuals and contributing to national growth. Girls' education and human capital development are interconnected concepts that highlight the long-term value of investing in female learners. According to Okeke and Onah (2021), girls' education is a foundational element of sustainable development, with direct benefits for family health, economic growth, and community resilience. Anyaogu and Ibe (2022) define girls' education as the process of equipping female children with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to participate fully in social, economic, and political life. Eze, Anyaogu and Igwe (2020) further emphasize that educating girls fosters gender equality, reduces poverty, and enhances national productivity. For the purpose of this study, girls' education and human capital development are understood as the process of investing in the cognitive and socio-emotional development of female learners to enhance their capacity for self-reliance, social integration, and contribution to national development. This final concept provides a comprehensive link to the research problem, as the combined effect of gender-based violence and insecurity serves to undermine the full realization of human capital development through the exclusion of girls from educational opportunities.

This study is anchored on two sociological theories: Feminist Theory by Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and Conflict Theory by Karl Marx (1848). These theories offer critical insights into the structural and gendered dimensions of violence, insecurity, and educational inequality, particularly as they affect girls in conflict-affected regions. The Feminist Theory,

as propounded by Simone de Beauvoir (1949), focuses on the socially constructed nature of gender roles and the systemic oppression of women and girls in patriarchal societies. A key feature of this theory is its emphasis on the historical subordination of women through cultural norms, institutional arrangements, and social expectations that privilege men while marginalizing female experiences. Feminist Theory asserts that gender-based violence, especially in conflict zones, is not merely an outcome of individual behavior but a structural problem embedded in unequal power relations. The theory further argues that women's and girls' lack of access to education, particularly in fragile contexts, is a reflection of deeply rooted gender disparities perpetuated by institutions and society at large. In the context of this study, Feminist Theory is relevant as it provides a framework for understanding how gender-based violence against girls during armed conflict is normalized and how such violence directly impacts their right to safe, inclusive, and uninterrupted education. Complementing this perspective is the Conflict Theory, developed by Karl Marx in 1848. Conflict Theory views society as being in a state of constant struggle over limited resources, with dominant groups exploiting and oppressing subordinate ones to maintain power. The theory underscores how inequalities in wealth, power, and access to services including education, lead to social unrest and conflict. One of its core characteristics is the emphasis on structural inequality as the root cause of instability and institutional breakdown. In the present study, Conflict Theory is instrumental in explaining how broader socio-economic and political inequalities, particularly in Nigeria's conflict-prone regions, generate insecurity and prevent equitable access to education. The displacement of communities, destruction of school infrastructure, and disruption of learning caused by armed groups are all reflections of systemic injustices that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, especially girls. Hence, collectively, these two theories provide a comprehensive lens for analyzing the impact of gender-based violence and insecurity on girls' access to education. While Feminist Theory addresses the gender-specific nature of violence and exclusion, Conflict Theory offers insight into the structural forces and socio-political conditions that reinforce these challenges in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria.

Several empirical studies such as those by Ojong and Ogar (2021), Mbaegbu (2022), Yusuf and Ibrahim (2022), Okoro and Nwankwo (2022), and Edeh, Umezinwa, and Onwudinjo (2020) have examined the complex relationship between gender-based violence, insecurity, and access to education in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria. These studies offer critical insights into how girls are disproportionately affected by armed conflict and systemic violence, often resulting in educational deprivation. For instance, Ojong and Ogar (2021) investigated the experiences of young girls in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Borno and Yobe States and documented widespread incidents of rape, forced marriage, and sexual exploitation perpetrated by armed actors and, in some cases, camp officials. These forms of abuse, according to their study, led to trauma, school withdrawal, and the loss of educational aspirations among many female victims. In a similar study, Mbaegbu (2022) examined the role of gender-based violence in limiting girls' educational participation in North-West Nigeria and found that girls who experienced sexual violence were more likely to disengage from school permanently due to shame, depression, or forced relocation.

In the area of general insecurity, Yusuf and Ibrahim (2022) assessed the impact of armed insurgency on basic education delivery in North-East Nigeria and reported that over 1,400 schools had been destroyed between 2013 and 2020 as a result of Boko Haram attacks. The study also noted that female students faced greater barriers due to the dual risk of school-related violence and societal pressure to abandon formal learning during crises. Similarly, Chika and Nwosu (2020) found that insecurity in Zamfara and Kaduna states disrupted academic calendars, triggered mass displacement, and created a climate of fear, particularly among female students. Their study showed that many families refused to send girls to school due to fear of abduction, leading to declining enrollment figures and poor learning outcomes. Udu and Uzoho (2020) also highlighted that insecurity resulted in teacher shortages, closure of girl-only schools, and a lack of basic infrastructure, all of which disproportionately affected the female student population. Studies focusing specifically on girls' access to education have revealed multiple barriers rooted in both gender norms and conflict-induced challenges. Onah and Okechukwu (2021) examined how early marriage, household poverty, and domestic responsibilities hindered girls' educational attainment in conflict-prone communities across Benue and Plateau states. The findings showed that cultural expectations to marry early are heightened in insecure environments where parents perceive school as unsafe or irrelevant during times of crisis. In a similar line, Okoro and Nwankwo (2022) conducted a regionally comparative study and found that in areas where conflict persisted, parents were more likely to withdraw daughters from school as a protective measure or to help supplement household income, further diminishing their long-term educational prospects. Edeh, Umezinwa, and Onwudinjo (2020) examined the psychological effects of displacement on adolescent girls in IDP camps and noted that many of them struggled with depression, post-traumatic stress, and disinterest in schoolwork, resulting in chronic absenteeism and eventual dropout. Interestingly, even though the value of these findings, critical gaps remain. Many of the reviewed studies focus on gender-based violence and insecurity as separate variables, with few examining their combined or intersecting impact on girls' access to education. In addition, most existing literature pays limited attention to educational responses, support services, or policy interventions targeted specifically at girls affected by both violence and insecurity. Furthermore, there is a lack of longitudinal or community-specific data to track long-term educational outcomes for girls who survive conflict-related trauma. These gaps necessitate further empirical inquiry that holistically examines how gender-based violence and insecurity co-produce educational exclusion and how this can be addressed within educational policy and practice in Nigeria.

Empirical evidence conducted by Okoro and Nwankwo (2022) among others has shown that gender-based violence against girls in conflict-affected areas of Nigeria takes multiple forms, including sexual assault, rape, abduction, forced marriage, and psychological abuse. Studies such as those by Ojong and Ogar (2021) and Mbaegbu (2022) reported that such acts are frequently perpetrated by insurgents, local militia, and sometimes even humanitarian workers, particularly in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. These forms of violence not only violate the dignity of girls but also cause long-term psychological trauma, stigmatization, and permanent withdrawal from school; thereby limiting their access to education. Insecurity in these regions is marked by widespread armed conflict, terrorism,

mass displacement, and the destruction of schools and public infrastructure. Yusuf and Ibrahim (2022) noted that the persistent activities of insurgent groups in the North-East have led to the closure of hundreds of schools and the displacement of thousands of students and teachers. Communities live in constant fear, and families often choose to keep their daughters at home to protect them from being kidnapped or attacked while on their way to school. This systemic breakdown of safety and public order discourages school attendance, especially among girls.

Several scholars such as Edeh, Umezinwa, and Onwudinjo (2020) have proposed strategies for addressing these challenges through multi-level interventions. According to Okoro and Nwankwo (2022), improving physical security around schools in conflict zones through the deployment of community policing units and trained female security personnel is crucial to rebuilding trust in the education system. Schools can also implement early warning systems, crisis response mechanisms, and protective measures such as fencing, school escorts, and regular security drills to reduce exposure to attacks. Additionally, the provision of mobile classrooms and temporary learning spaces in IDP camps has been recommended to ensure educational continuity for displaced girls. Similarly, Edeh, Umezinwa, and Onwudinjo (2020) emphasize the need for school-based psychosocial support services, trauma-informed teaching practices, and the recruitment of female teachers who can serve as mentors and safeguards for vulnerable girls. Furthermore, community sensitization programs that challenge harmful gender norms, engage local leaders, and encourage the protection of girls' rights are essential for transforming public attitudes toward female education during conflict. Policy-wise, scholars such as Onah and Okechukwu (2021) advocate for stronger collaboration between ministries of education, humanitarian agencies, and civil society organizations to implement Safe School Declaration guidelines and integrate gender-sensitive crisis response plans into national education policy. Taken together, these strategies offer a multidimensional approach to preventing gender-based violence, reducing the impact of insecurity, and ensuring that girls in conflict-affected areas are not excluded from accessing quality education.

Current literature has documented the rising impact of gender-based violence and insecurity on educational outcomes for girls in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria. Existing studies have identified sexual violence, forced marriage, and exploitation as common forms of abuse affecting school-age girls, especially in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and unstable communities (Ojong & Ogar, 2021; Mbaegbu, 2022). Insecurity manifesting as insurgency, communal violence, and attacks on schools has also been linked to massive school closures, teacher shortages, and prolonged academic disruption, with girls being disproportionately affected due to their gender and vulnerability (Yusuf & Ibrahim, 2022; Chika & Nwosu, 2020). In addition, there is growing scholarly interest in strategies to mitigate these risks, such as the use of safe school declarations, community-based interventions, and trauma-informed educational support (Okoro & Nwankwo, 2022; Edeh et al., 2020). However, despite these advancements, critical gaps remain unaddressed. Most existing studies have tended to examine gender-based violence and insecurity as independent factors, without empirically analyzing how their intersection jointly affects girls' access to education. Very few works provide integrated frameworks or data-driven solutions that can be adapted to local realities in fragile and conflict-affected areas. Based on the researcher's

personal observation, no study has been specifically carried out that holistically explores the dual impact of gender-based violence and insecurity on girls' enrollment, attendance, and retention in education within the conflict-affected zones of Nigeria. This oversight creates a significant research gap, especially in terms of policy relevance and practical intervention. Accordingly, this study aims to fill that gap by offering a focused, context-specific analysis of the combined influence of gender-based violence and insecurity on girls' access to education. It also seeks to recommend actionable strategies that can be implemented by stakeholders to enhance safety, inclusiveness, and resilience in educational delivery within conflict-affected regions.

Statement of the Problem

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a critical tool for empowering girls and promoting national development. In an ideal situation, girls in every part of Nigeria, including conflict-affected regions ought to have equal, safe, and uninterrupted access to quality education in environments that are free from violence, fear, and discrimination. National and international frameworks such as the Universal Basic Education Act (2004), the Child Rights Act (2003), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 and 5) advocate inclusive and gender-sensitive education, particularly in vulnerable contexts. However, the reality in many conflict-affected areas of Nigeria significantly contrasts with this ideal. Armed insurgencies, communal clashes, and internal displacement have created a climate of insecurity that disrupts educational systems and exposes girls to multiple forms of gender-based violence. Empirical evidence from North-East and North-West Nigeria reveals widespread incidents of rape, abduction, forced marriage, and sexual exploitation of girls in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and during school attacks. Many girls are forced to drop out of school due to trauma, fear, or socio-cultural pressures intensified by conflict and insecurity. The collapse of safe learning environments, shortage of female teachers, and lack of targeted protection mechanisms have further compounded the exclusion of girls from education in these regions. Despite growing scholarly attention to the separate issues of insecurity and gender-based violence, limited studies have examined how both factors interact to affect girls' access to education. Based on the researcher's observation, no study has been specifically carried out to investigate the combined effects of gender-based violence and insecurity on girls' enrollment, attendance, and educational completion in conflict-affected areas of Nigeria. This presents a critical gap in knowledge and policy formulation. Therefore, the present study seeks to investigate how gender-based violence and insecurity jointly affect girls' access to education in conflict-affected areas of Nigeria. It also aims to identify practical strategies that can be adopted to prevent such violence and reduce the impact of insecurity on girls' educational opportunities.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine how gender-based violence and insecurity in conflict-affected areas influence girls' access to education in Nigeria. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. Investigate the forms of gender-based violence experienced by girls in conflict-affected areas of Nigeria.

2. Examine how insecurity in conflict-affected communities impacts the availability and safety of educational opportunities for girls.
3. Determine the extent to which gender-based violence and insecurity jointly affect girls' enrollment, attendance, and completion of basic education.
4. Identify strategies for preventing gender-based violence and mitigating the impact of insecurity on girls' access to education in conflict-affected areas.

Research Questions

To guide the study, the following research questions were raised:

1. What forms of gender-based violence are experienced by girls in conflict-affected areas of Nigeria?
2. In what ways does insecurity in conflict-affected communities impact the safety and availability of education for girls?
3. To what extent do gender-based violence and insecurity jointly affect girls' enrollment, attendance, and completion of basic education in Nigeria?
4. What strategies can be adopted to prevent gender-based violence and reduce the impact of insecurity on girls' access to education in conflict-affected areas?

Methods

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to explore the implications of gender-based violence and insecurity in conflict-affected areas on girls' access to education in Nigeria. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of data from a large group of respondents without manipulation of variables, allowing for a detailed understanding of prevailing conditions. The population of the study consisted of 21,000 female students enrolled in public secondary schools across three conflict-affected states in Northern Nigeria. Specifically, the population was distributed as follows: Borno State had 8,400 female students, Kaduna State had 6,700, and Zamfara State had 5,900. These states were purposively selected due to the intensity and persistence of insecurity and gender-based violence that have significantly disrupted girls' education in these areas. From this total population, a sample size of 2,100 students was drawn, representing 10% of the overall population. This sampling percentage is supported by Tuckman (1975), who recommended that 10% is appropriate when dealing with large and accessible populations in survey research. The 2,100 respondents were proportionately selected from the three states based on their individual population sizes, resulting in 840 students from Borno State, 670 from Kaduna State, and 590 from Zamfara State. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed in the selection process. First, the three states were chosen purposively due to their high exposure to conflict and displacement. At the second stage, two Local Government Areas (LGAs) were randomly selected from each state. At the third stage, three public secondary schools were selected from each LGA through stratified random sampling. Finally, the female students were selected from the senior secondary classes (SS1–SS3) based on proportional representation.

To collect data, two instruments were used, each focusing on a key component of the study. The first instrument was the Gender-Based Violence Questionnaire (GBVQ), which was designed to elicit responses on the forms, causes, and educational consequences of gender-

based violence among girls. The questionnaire had two sections: Section A captured demographic information, while Section B contained 20 structured items on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The second instrument was titled the Insecurity and Girls' Education Questionnaire (IGEQ). It focused on the effects of insecurity on school access, attendance, and completion, as well as on recommended strategies for reducing its impact. Like the GBVQ, the IGEQ was divided into Section A (demographic data) and Section B (20 structured items), also using a 4-point Likert scale. To ensure the validity of the instruments, three experts in Educational Psychology, Conflict Studies, and Measurement and Evaluation reviewed both tools for clarity, coverage, and relevance. Their comments were used to improve the final versions of the instruments. A pilot study was conducted in Gombe State (not part of the main study area) to test the reliability of the instruments. The pilot involved 60 female students. Using the Cronbach Alpha method, the GBVQ yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81, while the IGEQ produced 0.84, indicating a high level of internal consistency for both instruments. Data collection was facilitated by trained research assistants who administered the questionnaires in each school, with cooperation from school heads and guidance counselors. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically Mean and Standard Deviation. A decision rule was set at 2.50. Any item with a mean score of 2.50 or above was interpreted as "Agreed" (A), while items below 2.50 were interpreted as "Disagreed" (D). This allowed for clear interpretation of the responses in line with the research questions that guided the study.

Results

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on Forms of Gender-Based Violence Experienced by Girls in Conflict-Affected Areas of Nigeria

S/N	Item Statement	Mean (X̄)	Std Dev (SD)	Rank	Decision
1	Girls are exposed to sexual harassment in schools and IDP camps	3.62	0.51	1	A
2	Forced marriage is common among school-age girls in conflict areas	3.58	0.58	2	A
3	Many girls face physical abuse and intimidation during school activities	3.49	0.63	3	A
4	Emotional and psychological trauma is frequent due to sexual abuse	3.43	0.69	4	A
5	Rape and abduction are major threats facing girls in conflict zones	3.41	0.66	5	A
6	Girls are sometimes coerced into transactional sex for food or protection	3.40	0.60	6	A
7	Victims of gender violence often drop out of school permanently	3.38	0.64	7	A
8	Cases of early pregnancy linked to sexual abuse are	3.35	0.65	8	A

	frequent in conflict zones				
9	Many girls are sexually abused while fetching water or walking to school	3.30	0.68	9	A
10	Girls lack access to justice after incidents of abuse	3.28	0.70	10	A
11	Survivors of violence often face stigma and rejection from their communities	3.25	0.72	11	A
12	Fear of violence discourages girls from attending school regularly	3.21	0.74	12	A
Aggregate Score (Mean & SD)		3.40	0.65	A	

Data in Table 1 shows that all 12 items recorded high mean scores, ranging from 3.21 to 3.62, with a consistent decision of “A,” indicating agreement among respondents. The highest reported form of gender-based violence was sexual harassment (Mean = 3.62), followed by forced marriage (Mean = 3.58). The overall mean of 3.40 and standard deviation of 0.65 suggest a strong consensus that girls in conflict-affected areas experience multiple forms of violence that hinder their access to education. This validates the responses to Research Question 1.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the Impact of Insecurity on the Safety and Availability of Education for Girls

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std Dev (SD)	Rank	Decision
1	Armed attacks on schools disrupt academic activities for girls	3.60	0.55	1	A
2	Insecurity forces families to relocate, leading to school dropout	3.56	0.59	2	A
3	Fear of abduction discourages girls from attending school	3.52	0.62	3	A
4	Destruction of school facilities limits access to safe learning spaces	3.50	0.61	4	A
5	Insecurity causes teachers to flee, affecting girls’ learning continuity	3.46	0.63	5	A
6	Military presence near schools creates fear among female students	3.44	0.66	6	A
7	Insecurity restricts school hours and reduces learning time	3.42	0.68	7	A
8	Girls face harassment at checkpoints on their way to school	3.40	0.67	8	A
9	Closure of boarding facilities affects rural girls’ school attendance	3.38	0.70	9	A
10	Parents prefer keeping girls at home due to insecurity	3.34	0.71	10	A
11	Insecurity disrupts examination schedules and affects school calendars	3.30	0.69	11	A
12	Lack of emergency preparedness increases school vulnerability to attacks	3.28	0.73	12	A
Aggregate Score (Mean & SD)		3.44	0.65	A	

Data in Table 2 shows that all 12 item statements recorded high mean values ranging from 3.28 to 3.60, with consistent agreement across responses. The highest ranked item was armed attacks disrupting school activities (Mean = 3.60), while lack of emergency preparedness (Mean = 3.28) was least ranked. The overall mean of 3.44 and standard deviation of 0.65 indicate strong agreement that insecurity significantly affects both the safety and availability of education for girls in conflict-affected communities. This supports the findings related to

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the Joint Effects of Gender-Based Violence and Insecurity on Girls' Enrollment, Attendance, and Completion of Basic Education

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std Dev (SD)	Rank	Decision
1	Girls exposed to violence are more likely to drop out of school	3.70	0.60	1	A
2	Insecurity reduces school attendance among girls in conflict zones	3.65	0.58	2	A
3	Fear of gender violence prevents girls from enrolling in school	3.60	0.62	3	A
4	Gender violence leads to early pregnancy and withdrawal from school	3.53	0.65	4	A
5	Displaced girls often lose access to continuous schooling	3.47	0.69	5	A
6	Parental fear of violence keeps girls away from school	3.39	0.71	6	A
7	Repeated attacks on schools discourage girl-child education in rural areas	3.35	0.73	7	A
8	Insecurity and violence reduce interest and motivation among female students	3.30	0.75	8	A
9	School closures due to conflict disrupt girls' academic progression	3.25	0.76	9	A
10	Long-term exposure to violence leads to poor academic completion rates among girls	3.19	0.78	10	A
11	Conflict-affected girls have limited access to exam preparation and career guidance	3.13	0.79	11	A
12	School disruption due to insecurity hinders girls' chances of graduating	3.07	0.81	12	A
Aggregate Score (Mean & SD)		3.41	0.70		A

Data in Table 3 shows mean scores ranging from 3.07 to 3.70, with all items receiving a decision of "A" (Agree). The highest mean score (3.70) was recorded for the view that girls exposed to violence are more likely to drop out, while the lowest (3.07) indicated that school disruption affects graduation. The recalculated aggregate mean of 3.41 and standard deviation of 0.70 reflect consistent agreement that gender-based violence and insecurity jointly and significantly hinder girls' enrollment, attendance, and completion of basic education in conflict-affected areas.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on Strategies for Preventing Gender-Based Violence and Insecurity Affecting Girls' Access to Education

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std Dev (SD)	Rank	Decision
1	Strengthening school security through fencing and trained personnel	3.78	0.54	1	A
2	Establishing safe transport and school access routes for girls in conflict zones	3.73	0.57	2	A
3	Community sensitization campaigns on girls' rights and protection	3.68	0.59	3	A
4	Providing psychosocial support and trauma counseling for affected girls	3.61	0.62	4	A
5	Deploying female teachers and counselors to encourage safe learning environments	3.55	0.64	5	A
6	Collaborating with security agencies to monitor school zones	3.50	0.66	6	A
7	Prosecuting offenders to discourage gender-based violence	3.46	0.68	7	A
8	Setting up school-based girls' safety clubs and watch groups	3.39	0.71	8	A
9	Reintegrating displaced girls through accelerated education programmes	3.33	0.72	9	A
10	Government incentives for girls in insecure areas to encourage enrollment	3.28	0.74	10	A
11	Partnering with NGOs to provide mobile education and protective services	3.22	0.75	11	A
12	Integrating safety education and gender sensitivity in school curricula	3.15	0.77	12	A
Aggregate Score (Mean & SD)		3.47	0.66		A

Data in Table 4 shows a range of responses with mean scores between 3.15 and 3.78, indicating that respondents agreed to all items. The most agreed-upon strategy was strengthening school security (Mean = 3.78), followed by safe access routes (Mean = 3.73). The least agreed-upon strategies were curriculum integration (Mean = 3.15) and NGO partnerships (Mean = 3.22). The overall aggregate mean of 3.47 and standard deviation of 0.66 reflect strong support for multi-sectoral, community-based, and institutional strategies to mitigate gender-based violence and insecurity and improve girls' access to education.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that girls in conflict-affected areas of Nigeria are exposed to multiple forms of gender-based violence, including sexual assault, rape, forced marriage, and psychological trauma, especially in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. The findings are in consonance with the study of Ojong and Ogar (2021), who posited that the girl-child in Northern Nigeria faces heightened vulnerability to sexual exploitation and physical abuse during crises. Similarly, Mbaegbu (2022) observed that in conflict-prone areas of Nigeria, girls often experience rape and coercive sexual relationships, which lead to

withdrawal from school and emotional distress. These findings underscore the widespread and multidimensional nature of violence faced by girls in unstable environments. The findings of the study revealed that insecurity in conflict-affected communities contributes to the destruction of school infrastructure, fear of abduction, displacement of teachers and students, and general disruption of the school system. The findings are in consonance with the study of Yusuf and Ibrahim (2022), who posited that insecurity driven by insurgency, has led to the closure of hundreds of schools, especially in the North-East, displacing students and teachers alike. In the same vein, Chika and Nwosu (2020) emphasized that the rise in attacks on schools and persistent insecurity discourage parents from sending their daughters to school due to fears of violence. These findings affirm that insecurity reduces both the physical access to schools and the willingness of families to educate their daughters during conflict.

The findings of the study revealed that gender-based violence and insecurity jointly result in reduced enrollment, poor attendance, and high dropout rates among school-age girls in conflict-affected areas. The findings are in consonance with the study of Edeh, Umezina, and Onwudinjo (2020), who posited that armed conflict leads to psychological trauma, school closure, and declining retention rates among girls, especially those who have been displaced. Similarly, Okoro and Nwankwo (2022) reported that combined threats of sexual violence and regional insecurity significantly contribute to reduced participation of girls in basic education, particularly in areas with recurring violence. These findings highlight the compounded negative effect of both insecurity and gender-based violence on girls' educational pathways. The findings of the study revealed that strategies such as strengthening school safety protocols, engaging community protection networks, deploying more female teachers, and providing psychosocial support services are effective in safeguarding girls' access to education. The findings are in consonance with the study of Onah and Okechukwu (2021), who posited that community-based sensitization, trauma counseling, and policy enforcement through the Safe School Initiative can help mitigate the impact of violence and insecurity. In agreement, Okoro and Nwankwo (2022) stressed the importance of multi-agency collaboration and gender-responsive interventions to support girls' continuous education during emergencies. These findings suggest that integrated and locally adapted strategies are necessary to improve girls' educational access in insecure regions.

Educational Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have important implications for educational policy, planning, and practice in Nigeria, particularly in conflict-affected regions. First, the identification of gender-based violence as a major barrier to girls' education highlights the urgent need for gender-sensitive policies and protective school environments. Educational stakeholders must prioritize the implementation of school safety frameworks that specifically address the vulnerabilities of girls in areas experiencing insecurity. Second, the combined effects of gender-based violence and insecurity on school attendance and completion suggest the need for responsive curriculum and school management systems that consider trauma, displacement, and safety concerns. Schools in conflict-affected zones should integrate psychosocial support services and establish referral systems for survivors of violence, thereby enabling affected girls to continue their education in a supportive environment. Third, the findings imply that teacher deployment policies must take into account the gender and

security dynamics of conflict zones. The presence of female educators in such areas can improve students' sense of safety and facilitate mentorship for girls who may be victims of violence or at risk of dropping out.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of community engagement in education delivery. Community-based campaigns and local partnerships are essential in promoting school attendance, challenging harmful cultural norms, and enhancing collective responsibility for girls' education and safety. Finally, the study suggests that multi-sectoral collaboration among education, health, security, and social welfare institutions is essential to addressing the broader challenges that prevent girls from accessing and completing education in insecure environments. Integrating these findings into educational planning will contribute to achieving inclusive, equitable, and quality education, especially for vulnerable girls in Nigeria.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study has contributed meaningfully to existing literature by empirically establishing the relationship between gender-based violence, insecurity, and girls' access to education in conflict-affected areas of Nigeria. It has enhanced understanding of the specific forms of violence faced by girls such as rape, forced marriage, and harassment and how these acts directly hinder their school attendance and retention. In addition, the study has shown how insecurity, characterized by armed conflict, displacement, and attacks on schools, exacerbates educational exclusion among girls. Unlike previous works that treated gender-based violence and insecurity as isolated issues, this research examined their combined effect on girls' enrollment, attendance, and completion of basic education, thereby addressing a key gap in the literature. Furthermore, the study has contributed new knowledge by identifying context-specific strategies to address these challenges. These include the deployment of female teachers, provision of psychosocial support, enforcement of protective policies, and promotion of community-based sensitization campaigns. These findings are expected to inform educational policy, humanitarian response, and gender equity programming in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria. The study therefore serves as a practical guide for government agencies, education planners, non-governmental organizations, and development partners working to promote inclusive, safe, and equitable education for girls in insecure environments.

Conclusion

The study revealed that gender-based violence and insecurity are major barriers to girls' access to education in conflict-affected areas of Nigeria. Girls face multiple forms of violence, including rape, forced marriage, and harassment, especially in regions affected by insurgency and displacement. These experiences often result in emotional trauma and withdrawal from school. Insecurity further compounds the situation by leading to school closures, displacement of teachers, and increased fears among parents about their daughters' safety. The combined effects of gender-based violence and insecurity significantly reduce enrollment, attendance, and completion of education among girls in such areas. However, the study also identified practical strategies that can help mitigate these challenges. These include the deployment of female teachers, provision of psychosocial support, community awareness campaigns, and improved school safety mechanisms. If effectively implemented, these interventions can

enhance girls' educational access and support their retention in school despite conflict conditions. Therefore, to address gender-based violence and insecurity remains critical to achieving safe, inclusive, and equitable education for girls in Nigeria's conflict-affected regions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that gender-based violence and insecurity pose serious threats to girls' access to education in conflict-affected areas of Nigeria. The following recommendations are proposed to address these challenges effectively:

1. Schools and educational authorities should strengthen school security infrastructure by deploying trained personnel, building protective fences, and installing early warning systems in conflict-prone communities.
2. Government agencies and school administrators should recruit and deploy more female teachers and counselors in affected areas to provide gender-sensitive mentorship, supervision, and psychosocial support for girls.
3. Stakeholders should integrate psychosocial support programs into school systems, particularly in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and emergency learning centres, to assist girls in coping with trauma and emotional distress.
4. Communities and civil society organizations should conduct sustained awareness campaigns to address harmful socio-cultural norms, promote the value of girls' education, and encourage local vigilance against gender-based violence.
5. Relevant government institutions should enforce existing legal and policy frameworks such as the Child Rights Act and the Safe School Declaration, ensuring that violators of girls' rights are prosecuted and protective structures are institutionalized.
6. Stakeholders in education, health, security, and humanitarian sectors should foster multi-sectoral collaboration to develop and implement coordinated responses that promote safe and inclusive learning environments for girls.

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