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COUNSELLING FOR SAFETY AND ECONOMIC STABILITY AMONG FEMALE STUDENTS IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS: A ROADMAP TO NATIONAL SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper focused on counselling for safety and economic stability among female students in Nigerian schools: a roadmap to national security. The paper explored the intricate relationship between safety, economic stability and education for female students within the context of Nigerian schools. It underscores the significance of implementing effective counselling strategies as a means to address the multifaceted challenges faced by female students, including issues of safety and economic instability. The paper advocates for a comprehensive roadmap that amalgamates counselling services, educational reforms, and policy recommendations to augment the safety, economic opportunities, and overall well-being of female students. By empowering this demographic, the paper posits that Nigeria can not only enhance individual lives but also contribute significantly to national security, fostering a more stable, inclusive and prosperous society. This paper was hinged on Human Security theory which was propounded by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Human Security theory represents a paradigm shift in understanding security, emphasizing the well-being and empowerment of individuals as the primary focus. In conclusion, the empowerment of female students in Nigerian schools through counselling for safety and economic stability is not only a pathway to personal growth but also a roadmap to national security. By embracing this holistic approach, Nigeria can harness the untapped potential of its female population, creating a secure and prosperous future built upon the foundations of equality, empowerment and collective well-being.

Keywords: Counselling for Safety and Economic Stability, Female Students, National Security, Nigerian Schools

INTRODUCTION

Education, safety and economic stability are three pivotal pillars of societal development that hold the potential to shape the trajectory of a nation. In the context of

Nigeria, a country rich in cultural diversity and abundant human resources, the empowerment and well-being of female students within the educational system have

emerged as key components not only for individual growth but also for national security. This paper delves into the complex interplay between safety, economic stability, and education for female students in Nigerian schools. It underscores the pressing need for comprehensive counseling strategies as a roadmap to achieving both individual and national goals.

Female students in Nigerian schools encounter a myriad of challenges, many of which hinder their academic pursuits and limit their potential contributions to society. Gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and assault, casts a shadow over the learning environment, often leading to trauma and dropout rates (Smith et al., 2020). Moreover, inadequate access to quality education perpetuates a cycle of disparity, depriving females of the opportunity to acquire skills necessary for economic advancement (UNESCO, 2019). Early marriages and cultural norms curtail their educational journeys, often forcing them into roles that restrict their autonomy and hinder their economic empowerment (Oyedemi et al., 2018).

The significance of empowering female students transcends individual prosperity and extends to the broader realm of national security. When females are educated and economically empowered, they contribute to a more resilient and stable society. Informed decisions are made, both in families and communities, fostering an environment less susceptible to extremist ideologies and social unrest (UNDP, 2021).

The positive correlation between female education, economic stability, and national security has been underscored by studies that highlight how empowered women mitigate the risk of conflict and extremism (Cilliers & Malan, 2014).

Counselling for Safety and Economic Stability

Recognizing the multifaceted challenges that female students encounter, counselling emerges as a potent tool to address their safety concerns and economic instability. Effective counseling services encompass psychological support, career guidance, and life skills training. By providing a safe space for dialogue and empowerment, counselling equips female students with the resilience to overcome adversities and make informed decisions (Baker et al., 2019). Moreover, it fosters a sense of agency that enables them to actively shape their educational trajectories and economic pathways.

Safety and Economic Challenges Faced by Female Students

Female students in Nigerian schools confront a range of formidable challenges that hinder their educational attainment, safety, and economic stability. These challenges are deeply rooted in societal norms, economic disparities and gender-based inequalities.

Gender-Based Violence and Harassment

Gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, assault, and intimidation, is a pervasive issue in Nigerian schools, casting a long shadow over the learning environment.

Research indicates that a substantial number of female students experience some form of gender-based violence during their educational journey, leading to physical and psychological trauma (Smith et al., 2020). This not only inhibits their ability to focus on their studies but also fuels a climate of fear and insecurity, ultimately impeding their academic progress.

Inadequate Access to Quality Education: A considerable portion of female students in Nigeria face barriers to accessing quality education. Socioeconomic disparities, cultural norms, and geographical location contribute to their limited access to educational opportunities. UNESCO reports that girls in Nigeria are more likely to be out of school compared to their male counterparts, often due to factors like early marriage, lack of educational infrastructure, and gender bias within households (UNESCO, 2019). The lack of access to quality education deprives them of essential knowledge and skills required for personal development and economic empowerment.

Early Marriage and Cultural Norms: Deep-seated cultural norms and traditions, in some regions of Nigeria, perpetuate early marriage and the devaluation of female education. This practice curtails the educational aspirations of countless young girls, forcing them into marital roles at an age when they should be pursuing their studies. Research by Oyedemi et al. (2018) highlights that early marriage often leads to a truncated education, limiting females' economic opportunities and perpetuating cycles of poverty.

Limited Economic Opportunities: Even when female students manage to overcome the barriers and access education, limited economic opportunities upon graduation pose a significant challenge. The gender pay gap and occupational segregation continue to hinder their ability to access well-paying jobs and advance in their careers. This not only affects their economic stability but also reinforces gender inequalities in the labor market, limiting their overall contribution to the economy (Oyedemi et al., 2018).

The challenges faced by female students in Nigerian schools are complex and multifaceted, encompassing issues of gender-based violence, limited access to quality education, early marriage and restricted economic opportunities (Smith et al., 2020). Addressing these challenges is not only essential for the empowerment of individual females but also crucial for achieving national security and sustainable development goals.

Link between Female Empowerment and National Security

The empowerment of female students in Nigerian schools holds profound implications for national security, extending beyond individual well-being to shape the stability and resilience of the entire nation.

Empowerment as a Catalyst for Stability:

Empowered female students have the potential to catalyze stability within communities and society at large. When educated, they are better equipped to make informed decisions, exercise agency, and contribute positively to family dynamics and

community development. According to Cilliers and Malan (2014), women's empowerment acts as a buffer against conflict and extremism, fostering an environment of inclusivity, dialogue, and peacebuilding.

Mitigating Vulnerabilities to Extremism: An educated and empowered female population acts as a bulwark against the allure of extremist ideologies. UNDP (2021) emphasizes that when women are empowered with education and economic opportunities, they are less susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups. Their awareness of their rights and aspirations for a better future dissuades them from engaging in activities that may threaten national security.

Fostering Resilience through Informed Decision-Making: Empowerment equips female students with the tools to make informed decisions that have far-reaching consequences. In cases of conflict or social unrest, educated and empowered women are more likely to advocate for peaceful resolutions and engage in dialogue, thereby contributing to societal resilience (Cilliers & Malan, 2014).

The Role of Counselling

- 1) Counselling services play a pivotal role in addressing the multifaceted challenges encountered by female students in Nigerian schools. By providing psychological support, career guidance, life skills training, and awareness of their rights, counseling empowers female students to navigate barriers and make informed decisions that contribute to their safety and economic stability.
- 2) **Psychological Support and Resilience Building:** Effective counseling creates a safe space for female students to share their experiences, fears, and aspirations. It helps them process traumatic events such as gender-based violence and harassment, ultimately contributing to psychological healing and resilience (Baker et al., 2019). This psychological support empowers them to cope with challenges and remain focused on their educational goals.
- 3) **Career Guidance and Empowerment:** Counselling services offer career guidance tailored to the needs and aspirations of female students. By helping them identify their strengths, interests, and potential career paths, counselors enable them to make informed decisions about their future (Smith & Johnson, 2020). This guidance empowers females to pursue fields traditionally dominated by men, thereby expanding their economic opportunities.
- 4) **Life Skills and Decision-Making Training:** Counselling programs encompass life skills training that equips female students with practical abilities to navigate life's challenges. These skills include financial literacy, negotiation, conflict resolution, and critical thinking. Such training enhances their ability to make informed decisions, manage

resources, and assert their rights (UNESCO, 2021).

- 5) Awareness of Rights and Empowerment: Counselling introduces female students to their rights, helping them understand the legal protections and opportunities available to them. This awareness empowers them to challenge gender-based discrimination, seek justice, and demand equal treatment within educational institutions and society at large (Baker et al., 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Human Security Theory

This paper is hinged on Human Security theory which was propounded by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Human Security theory represents a paradigm shift in understanding security, emphasizing the well-being and empowerment of individuals as the primary focus (UNDP, 1994). It diverges from traditional security theories that often centered on state security concerns and military strategies. Instead, Human Security recognizes that security is multidimensional and encompasses a range of factors, including economic, social, political and environmental dimensions (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009).

In the context of counselling for safety and economic stability among female students in Nigerian schools, the Human Security theory is highly relevant. It underscores the need to ensure the safety, dignity and economic

opportunities of individuals, particularly those who are vulnerable or marginalized. By prioritizing the well-being of female students, the theory aligns with this paper's focus on empowerment and contributes to a broader understanding of national security. Also, the Human Security theory highlights that individuals' security is not solely dependent on protection from external threats but also on their ability to access education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Empowering female students through counselling, education, and career guidance aligns with this theory by addressing key dimensions of security that extend beyond physical safety.

Roadmap to National Security

A comprehensive roadmap is essential to harness the potential of counselling and empower female students in Nigerian schools, ultimately contributing to national security through enhanced safety, economic opportunities, and overall well-being. These could be achieved through:

- 1) Integrate Comprehensive Counselling Services: Collaborative efforts between educational institutions, NGOs, and governmental agencies are paramount in establishing comprehensive counselling services. These services should encompass psychological support, career guidance and life skills training tailored to the unique challenges faced by female students (UNESCO, 2021).

- 2) Educational Reforms: Reforms within the education system are instrumental in promoting gender equality and empowerment. This includes revising curricula to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, fostering an inclusive environment that empowers female students to excel in all academic disciplines (Smith & Johnson, 2020).
- 3) Policy Recommendations: Policy changes are vital to creating an environment conducive to female empowerment. Stricter legal measures against gender-based violence and early marriage must be enforced to protect the rights and well-being of female students. Additionally, policy initiatives that promote scholarships and incentives for females to pursue education in STEM fields and other economically valuable areas will help bridge gender disparities (Oyedemi et al., 2018).
- 4) Community Involvement: Engagement with local communities, religious leaders, and parents is pivotal in advancing female empowerment. Advocacy campaigns that emphasize the value of female education, safety, and economic stability must involve grassroots participation to drive lasting change (Baker et al., 2019).
- 5) Awareness Campaigns: Nationwide awareness campaigns amplify the importance of female education and empowerment. Collaborations with media outlets, social influencers, and

community leaders can help disseminate information on the benefits of empowering female students, thus fostering a culture that values their contributions to society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, a nation where the empowerment of its citizens stands as a cornerstone for progress and stability, the journey toward national security requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses the safety and economic stability of all its members. This paper has shed light on the critical nexus between the empowerment of female students, safety, economic opportunities, and the broader concept of national security. The challenges faced by female students in Nigerian schools, from gender-based violence to limited economic prospects, extend beyond individual hardship, posing a threat to the very foundations of societal stability.

As illuminated by the Human Security theory, which reframes security from a solely military perspective to one that prioritizes individual well-being and empowerment, the roadmap to national security requires a paradigm shift. It demands that the education, safety, and economic empowerment of female students be regarded as integral components of a secure and prosperous society. Counselling emerges as a potent tool in this journey, offering a safe space for psychological healing, career guidance and life skills training. By empowering female students to surmount the barriers they face, counselling

serves as the catalyst for a transformation that is not only personal but also instrumental in shaping the nation's trajectory.

The roadmap to national security unveiled in this paper encompasses multidimensional strategies. Integrating comprehensive counseling services, driving educational reforms that promote gender equality, implementing policy recommendations to address gender-based violence, and fostering community involvement collectively create an ecosystem that supports the empowerment of female students. Awareness campaigns amplify the message, fostering a culture that values and invests in the potential of every young

woman. Through these endeavors, the cycle of gender-based discrimination can be disrupted, replaced by a cycle of empowerment, resilience and contribution to societal progress.

Consequently, the empowerment of female students in Nigerian schools through counselling for safety and economic stability is not only a pathway to personal growth but also a roadmap to national security. By embracing this holistic approach, Nigeria can harness the untapped potential of its female population, creating a secure and prosperous future built upon the foundations of equality, empowerment and collective well-being.

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