

**POVERTY AND HIGHER EDUCATION OF GIRLS IN ANDONI
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE**

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Abstract

The study investigated the effects of poverty on the acquisition of higher education by girls in Andoni Local government area of Rivers state. It also examined socio-economic level of parents in Andoni. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population for the study comprised all the girls of Andoni who are out of school. A total of one thousand two hundred and fifty (1250) constituted the sample using purposive and stratified sampling techniques for the selection. A 20- item questionnaire tagged Effects of Poverty on Girls Acquisition of Higher Education Questionnaire (EPGAHEQ) was designed by the researcher and used for data collection. It was based on 4-points modified Likert Type scale. To ensure its validity the instrument was presented to two experts for evaluation. To establish the reliability of the instrument, a test was carried on 20 girls who were part of the population of the study but not part of the study sample. Cronbach Alpha correlation coefficient was carried out and the result was highly positive with a correlation coefficient of .83. The data collected were analysed using mean statistics. Findings showed that the socio-economic levels of parents in Andoni are generally low as the majority of them are fishermen, business men, civil servant, craftsmen and politician. In addition the poverty state affects girls' acquisition of higher education as most girls cannot register for West African Examination Certificate, re-register for failed WAEC papers, register for JAMB, attend regular classes at secondary school level and drop out of school due to inadequate funding. On the other hand the study revealed the girls alternative options which include peasant fishing, early marriage and serving as house helps. The study therefore concluded that girls' acquisition of higher education is hindered by financial constraints. Based on the findings the study therefore recommended, among others, that the government should provide special scholarship scheme for girls in Andoni Local Government Area of Rivers State.

It is generally believed that no nation or individual can achieve any meaningful development without education. In addition to achieving development, both the males and their female counterparts of every nation should be able to acquire education. According to Osaat (2011) one major tool to achieving gender equity is education. Unfortunately, in many rural communities including Andoni in Rivers state, many girls are denied this basic and fundamental instrument for development especially higher education. A lot of reviews really have shown that, many factors are responsible for hindering girls from acquiring higher education. Examples include socio-economic factors, early marriage and teenage pregnancy. These factors which inhibit girls' access to education at the primary and secondary levels effectively cut off their access to higher education (Uche, 2011). As the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1997) rightly identifies, there are other factors such as discriminatory practices which discourage parents from investing in their daughters as well as religious beliefs which hinder the girl-child from acquiring higher education.

The researcher however is of the feeling that poverty in many homes is a major contributory factor hindering girls' access to higher education. In spite of all the laudable programmes of the governor of the Rivers state to make education at the grass root accessible to all especially by the provision of good school buildings at the primary and secondary school levels, yet many girls are still not able to

successfully conclude these lower levels and proceed to University, while some who are able to get to University become drop outs.

In Andoni, most homes in rural areas have parents of low socio-economic status. Most of the parents are predominantly mere peasant fishermen whose income cannot sustain their children's school fees. On this, Ebirim (2008:513) remarks:

The fact is that since the rural people live at a subsistence level they do not have enough, let alone the extra funds to cope with heavy domestic and social responsibilities which should enhance their general well being and those of their children.

Even those who are not fishermen but engage in other occupations like business, civil service, crafts, and politics operate at a very low level. As a result of their poor state, most of them choose to sponsor the male children up to the University level while the females are neglected. Madumere-Obike and Ukala (2011) supported this by asserting that in low income families boys might be chosen and sometimes compelled to go to school at the expense of the girl-child, the girl's levels of intelligence, notwithstanding. Most girls who have become drop outs have turned out to constitute problems to the society. Hence there is need to arrest this ugly trend. Against this backdrop therefore, the researcher sought to identify the effect of poverty on girls' acquisition of higher education in Andoni local

government area of Rivers state. The study also sought to determine subsequent effects on the socio- economic life of the girl-child and the strategies for the solution of the problem.

Higher Education

Formal education is given in different levels; the primary, secondary and the higher education. The higher level of education is the last and also the third level of education given in institutions of learning. It is graduate education, post secondary education which generally requires several years to be spent in the University, polytechnic, or college of education after secondary education. UNESCO (2005) defined it as an educational establishment to which access is available for people who have completed their secondary education and whose course of study lasts generally from four to six years. Consequently, it follows that higher education is the last stage of educational process which ought to add value to what was earlier offered to students at the lower levels.

The importance of higher education cannot be overemphasized. As rightly discussed by Uche (2011), higher education is significantly important because it aids in the upgrading of labour productivity by creating opportunities for the nation's workforce. It is a private good which has benefits accruing to the recipient in form of higher future wages and improved quality of life. Equally it enables significant contribution to the development of society. To Mattoon (2006), higher

education is an important public good which is viewed by some as private good with benefits accruing to the student in the form of higher future wages and improved quality of life. Porter in William and Hartnett (2004) also explained that awareness in higher education implies effort to upgrade labour productivity by creating opportunities for the nation's workforce.

Poverty

Poverty is defined in various dimensions and with various motives. However, according to Ezeibe and Eze (2011), poverty is the condition of not having the means to provide basic human needs such as clean water, nutrition, health care, clothing and shelter. To Adeleka (1995), poverty is measured in terms of absolute or relative terms. Absolute poverty has to do with condition of not able to afford basic amenities, while relative poverty is an index of income inequality. Infact poverty is relative. While the economist sees poverty in relation to income, the political scientists view it as lack of empowerment on the part of the masses (Akinwumi, 2008).

Freece (2005) on his part saw poverty in four major angles- income poverty, capability poverty, participation poverty and consequential poverty. While income poverty means lack of income, capability poverty means an absence of freedom to participate in economic life of the community (Sen, in Ogheta, 2008). However in this contribution poverty is upheld as income poverty which has to do

with the inability to have income to meet the desired needs.

Poverty has a great influence on the acquisition of education by boys and girls, and particularly the girls. The girl-child is often the victim of poverty in terms of acquiring education. No wonder Robert-Okah (2011) posited that in Nigeria today, the problem of education of women especially that of the girl-child is not often related to cultural or religious taboos as poverty-related factors. Infact, in a period of economic depression, the girl-child is the first to be withdrawn from school.

Statement of the Problem

There has been the clamour of achieving gender equity through education. It is believed that when this is done the women will not only be educated, but enlightened and achieve the highest degree of personal fulfillment, individual development that will also lead to the development of the society in terms of their contributions.

Unfortunately, most women are not oportuned to acquire this education not because it is evil, or because they are inferior and incapable. Rather the researcher assumes that the poverty level of most families in Nigeria and Andoni in particular, which is the focus of this study, is a major contributing factor. Many families are characterized as mere peasant fishermen and low in other occupations all which have continued to impoverish their homes. As a result, girls could not find themselves in higher education because they would be unable to fulfil the initial

requirements such as possession of complete WAEC papers, writing JAMB, and regularity in school attendance due to inadequate funding. Consequently they choose to engage in early marriage which is found to be a menace to the society.

Based on the foregoing presentation the researcher the researcher investigated into the effects of poverty on girls' acquisition of higher education in Andoni local government Area of Rivers State. The study therefore seeks to investigate into the following areas of problems; the socio-economic status of girls' parents/guidance in Andoni, ways poverty affects girls' acquisition of higher education in Andoni, the alternative options the girls engage in, in place of higher education and possible recommendations on the strategies that can be adopted to enable girls' acquisition of higher education in Andoni LGA.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate into the effects of poverty on girls' acquisition of higher education in Andoni LGA of Rivers state. Specifically the study sought to consider the following: to

1. Identify the socio-economic levels of parents and guidance of girls in Andoni Local government area of Rivers State.
2. Determine the ways poverty affects girls' acquisition of higher education in Andoni local government area of Rivers state

- Find out the alternative options the girls choose to engage in, in the place of not acquiring higher education

Research Questions

- What are the socio- economic levels of parents of young future university girls in Andoni local government area of Rivers state?
- In what ways does poverty affect the acquisition of higher education of girls in Andoni local government area of Rivers state?
- What alternative options to the acquisition of higher education do Andoni girls choose to engage in?

Methodology

The study was a descriptive survey designed to investigate the effects of poverty on girls’ acquisition of higher education. The population for the study comprised all the girls of Andoni who are out of school. A total of 1250 constituted the sample using purposive and stratified sampling techniques for the selection. Four groups were used for the study depending on the four main ethnic groups in Andoni which are Unyeada, Ataba, Ngo and Asarama. 25% were randomly selected from each of the groups. A 20 item questionnaire known as Effects of Poverty on Girls’ Acquisition of Higher Education Questionnaire (EPGAHEQ) was designed by the researcher and used for data collection. It was based on 4-point modified Likert Type scale. To ensure its

validity the instrument was presented to two experts in sociology of education for evaluation. To establish the reliability of the instrument a test was carried out on 20 girls who were part of the population of the study but not part of the research sample. The cronbach alpha correlation coefficient was carried out and the result was highly positive with a correlation coefficient of .83. 1250 questionnaires were administered and 1000 were retrieved. The percentage return rate was 80%. The data collected were analysed using mean. Deductions from the table were used to give answers to the research questions.

Research Question 1

- What are the socio-economic levels of parents or guidance of the young girls in Andoni L.G.A. of Rivers State?

Table 1: Socio-economic Levels of Parents and Guidance of the Young Girls in Andoni

S/N	Items	Responses				Mean	Rem.
		SA	A	D	SD		
1	Successful fishermen	50	100	650	200	2.00	Disagree
2	Peasant fisherman	650	200	100	50	3.45	Agree
3	Rich business man	20	150	525	300	1.90	Disagreed
4	Poor business man	725	200	25	50	3.60	Agreed
5	High level civil servant	125	175	625	75	2.35	Disagreed
6	Poor civil servant	350	400	175	75	3.03	Agreed
7	Highly skilled craftsman	100	150	275	475	1.88	Disagreed
8	Low skilled craftsman	750	125	50	75	3.55	Agreed
9	High level politician	100	150	275	475	1.88	Disagreed
10	Poor politician	800	13	162	25	3.48	Agreed

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The result in table 1 showed all the calculated mean scores of all the various socio-economic levels of parents in Andoni as responded by the girls. From the result the mean score for items 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9 are 2.00, 1.90, 2.35, 1.88, and 1.88 fell below the criterion mean of 2.50. This showed that the girls disagreed that their parents are successful fisherman, rich business man, high level civil servant, highly skilled craftsman, and high level politician. On the hand the mean scores of items 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 are 3.45, 3.60, 3.03, 3.55 and 3.48 which fell above the criterion mean of 2.50. This showed that the girls agreed that their parents are peasant fisherman, poor business man, poor civil servant, low level skilled man and poor politicians.

Research Question 2

In what ways does poverty affect girls' acquisition of higher education in Andoni Local government area of Rivers state?

Table 2: Ways Poverty Affects Girls' Acquisition of Higher Education in Andoni

S / N	Items	Responses				Mean	Rem.
		SA	A	D	SD		
1	Not able to register WAEC	500	300	100	100	3.20	Agreed
2	Not able to re register for failed papers	350	500	50	100	2.95	Agreed
3	Not able to register for JAMB	450	475	75	0	3.38	Agreed
4	Drop out of university due to lack of Money	300	575	88	37	3.14	Agreed

5	Unable to attend regular classes at secondary school level	350	500	50	100	2.95	Agreed
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The result in table 2 showed all the calculated mean scores of all the 5 items as 3.20, 2.95, 3.38, 3.14 and 2.95. All the mean scores fell above 2.50 (criterion). This showed that the respondents agreed that poverty affects their inability to register for WAEC, re-register for failed WAEC papers, register for JAMB, dropping out from university due to lack of money, and to attend regular classes at secondary school level.

Research Question 3

What alternative options to the acquisition of higher education do Andoni girls choose to engage in?

Table 3: Other Options by Andoni Girls in Place of Higher Education

S / N	Items	Responses				Mean	Rem.
		SA	A	D	SD		
1	Peasant Fishing	575	225	150	50	3.28	Agreed
2	Marriage	425	275	200	100	3.03	Agreed
3	Petty trading	0	250	500	250	2.00	Disagreed
4	Skill Acquisition	175	75	500	250	2.18	Disagreed
5	House Help	400	258	172	130	2.89	Agreed

The result in table 3 showed all the calculated means scores of all the items. From the result items 1, 2 and 5 are 3.29, 3.03 and 2.89 which fell above the criterion mean of 2.50. This showed that

the respondents agreed that in place of having access to higher education that they choose to go into peasant fishing, early marriage and helping in their families. On the other hand the mean scores of items 3 and 4 are 2.00 and 2.18 which fell below the criterion mean of 2.50. This showed that the respondents disagreed that they do not engage in petty trading and skill acquisition training even though they are not in higher education.

Discussions of Findings

The discussion shall be based on the following sub-headings.

Socio-economic Levels of Parents and Guidance in Andoni

First the study revealed that the socio- economic level of the parents of girls in Andoni generally low. The result revealed that most parents are peasant fishermen, poor business men, low level civil servant, poor craftsmen and poor politicians. This implies they cannot afford to send all their children to schools especially higher education. This agrees with Ebirim (2008:512) he remarks;

The fact is that since the rural people live at a subsistence level they do not have enough, let alone the extra funds to cope with heavy domestic and social responsibilities which should enhance their general well being and those of their children

Ways Poverty Affects Girls' Acquisition of Higher Education

From the study it was also found that the girls agreed on all the items as ways poverty affect their acquisition of higher education. These are; not able to write WAEC Examination due to lack of registration fee, not able to re-register for failed WAEC papers, not able to register for JAMB, not able to attend regular classes during secondary school level and dropping out of school due to lack of money. This implies that generally most of them have not been able to go to higher institution due to poverty. This agrees with Akomolafe (2005) who stated that poverty is a great problem militating against accomplishment of educational goals. It also agrees with Okah (2011), who said that the girl child is often a victim of returning back from school due to economic depression. In his language he remarked that:

The economic situation in the country has made it extremely difficult for most homes to meet the essentials of life including sending girl children to schools. In Nigeria today...the problem of education of women especially that of the girl children is not so often related to cultural or religious taboos as with poverty related factors. In a period of economic depression the girls' children are the first to be withdrawn from school because it is judged to be more beneficial to train the boys' children than girls.

The result also agrees with Madumere-obike and Mebralu (2010) who

posit that school drop outs has been observed to be high among females than males, that girls are dropped out from schools for several reasons ranging from poverty etc.

Other Options to Acquisition of Higher Education by Andoni Girls

The study revealed that most girls who could not find themselves in university choose other alternatives to occupy their lives. From the study the girls agreed that they choose to engage in peasant fishing, enter into early marriage and engage in becoming house helps. This agrees with UNICEF in Akomolafe (2005) who stated that 30% of school girls who got married early are drops out schools. For the issue of early marriage it implies that the girls will be exposed to producing many children that they cannot take care of and which could lead to over population which may not be healthy to the nation. This agrees with Etim in Okem and Umeh (2004) who posits that educated women delay childbirth and so produce fewer children than their uneducated counter parts. The girls also agreed that they become house helps in place of furthering their education. This also agrees with Adeniji (2009) who posits that girls who are deprived from education are made to serve as domestic servants. In the language of Jellema and Unterhalter in Fasokun (2008:462) they remarked:

Crucial issue of serious concern, especially in developing countries is the fact that many girls are not in school because of their state of poverty. They

are particularly at risk more than boys because of the belief that they tend to inherit the poverty of their mothers. They are prone to abuse of all forms, and very often confined to household in which they tend to be virtually slaves.

The study also revealed that the girls disagreed that they never engage in any petty trading or learning of skills. This means that since their parent's socio economic levels are low they cannot also afford to finance them for any type of trading nor ask them to go for skill acquisition. This also implies that these girls will still be wasting away since their potentials are not tapped. It also implies that the girls will continue to live idle lives and in attempt to fill the vacuum of idleness would choose to engage in some social vices such as prostitution. In the words of Madumere-Obike and Ukala (2010:144)

Education enables people to develop their capacities to live a fulfilling and dignified life. Quality education helps people give meaning to their lives, placing them in the context of human and natural history and creating in them an awareness which should protect them from prostitution or from being victims and perpetrators of terrorism.

Conclusion

It is important to note that knowledge, ideas and skills are achieved in higher institutions. Chance of getting a good job without some kind of higher education is pretty slim. Unfortunately it has been observed from the study that

girls' acquisition of this higher education is hindered by financial constraints. The implication is that women in that condition cannot be empowered and the chances of helping to translate their family and the entire society are extremely slim. Their potential and talents that can help develop the nation are hidden and untapped. Until the girls' talents are tapped by giving them education especially at the higher level Nigeria will still be crawling on the ladder of development. There is the need therefore develop this group of people.

Recommendations

1. Government should provide special entrepreneurial loan grants to parents of the girls. If such empowerment is given no doubt they can be used to create more wealth which could also be used to care for both the male and female children in terms of sending them to school.
2. Government should also provide skills acquisition for women to create jobs for them not only for self sufficiency but to help in training their children including the girls
3. Government should also provide fishing industries in the rural riverine communities to make provision for employment of people in such areas. This will also give room for the education of the boys and the girls specially to further their education.
4. NGOs, wealthy individuals etc should help to fund women education. If that is done most girls will be educated.
5. As a way of empowering girls to have access to higher education, government should provide special scholarship scheme for female children. This can be done by merit. When this is done most drop outs and their attendant problems such as prostitution will be minimized.
6. To those who cannot gain scholarship award, there should be a policy to reduce certain percentage in the school fees of higher institutions that has to be benefitted by potential university girls. A law should be enacted to enforce such policy. When that is done best brains among the girls will not be wasted.

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