



## SCHOOL DROPOUT IN NIGERIA: A THREAT TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GENERATIONAL PROGRESS

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### Article Information:

**Article Type:**  
Research Article

**Manuscript Received:**  
30 January 2025

**Final Revision Received:**  
15 September 2025

**Accepted:**  
25 May 2025

**Published Online:**  
15 October 2025

**Keywords**  
School dropout,  
Development, Social  
consequences, shattered  
future

### Abstract:

School dropout is a significant social issue affecting numerous continents worldwide. The impact can shatter the individual's future. This study examines the cognitive, emotional, social, economic, and intergenerational effects of school dropout in Nigeria. This study adopted a qualitative interpretative paradigm to understand the implications of leaving school early among 21 participants in Lagos, Nigeria. The participants were purposively selected, having met the inclusion criteria. Findings indicate that dropouts experience limited cognitive development, including reduced critical thinking ability, analytic reasoning, and problem-solving skills, which limits their capacity to adapt in an evolving job market. Emotionally, dropouts are more vulnerable to low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression, often stemming from financial struggles and social stigma. Socially, they experience weakened interpersonal relationships, higher risks of delinquency, and lower civic engagement. Economically, dropouts encounter limited employment opportunities, increased poverty risks, and greater dependence on government assistance. Furthermore, the intergenerational effects include cycles of poverty, early parenthood, and reduced parental involvement in education. At a national level, high dropout rates contribute to lower workforce productivity, higher crime rates, and increased public health burdens. Addressing this issue requires targeted interventions such as mentorship programs, vocational training, and mental health support to reduce dropout rates and mitigate its long-term effects.

**Cite this article:** Akinwale G.A. and Victor Ojajorotu (2026). School Dropout in Nigeria: A Threat to Sustainable Development and Generational Progress. The Journal of Sustainable Development, Law and Policy, Vol. 17:2. 369-389. DOI: 10.4314/jsdlp.v17i2.17.



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**Publisher:** Institute for Oil, Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development (OGEES Institute), Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria.

## 1.0 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Adolescence is a critical period of growth and transformation, serving as a foundation for both personal and academic development. During this stage, formal education plays a critical role in shaping an individual's future. However, the rising school dropout rate among adolescents in Nigeria presents a significant challenge. Economic hardships, peer pressure, and cultural norms often disrupt students' educational journeys, leaving many unable to complete their schooling. Consequently, dropouts face social and economic disadvantages, with their aspirations and prospects often shattered by future goals.

The global issue of out-of-school children remains a pressing concern, with approximately 250 million children and youth currently not enrolled in educational institutions. This figure has seen an increase of 6 million since 2021, highlighting a stagnation in progress over the past decade<sup>1</sup>. This is corroborated by<sup>2</sup>, which states that a vast number of schoolchildren were dislocated by the climate crisis back in 2024. Factors contributing to this crisis include economic hardships, conflicts, climate-related disasters, and systemic inequalities. Dropping out of school can significantly impact social integration and further leads to a weakened ability of an individual been able to achieve personal success in a rightfully accepted occupation.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) address school dropout rates through multiple goals, particularly SDG 4: Quality Education. SDG 4 aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."

School dropout rates are closely connected to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Poverty (SDG 1: No Poverty) often forces children to leave school due to financial constraints, while Gender Inequality (SDG 5: Gender Equality) contributes to dropout rates as girls face challenges such as early marriage, pregnancy, and household responsibilities. Additionally, Health Issues (SDG 3: Good Health and

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, UNESCO in action: Education highlights in 2024: UNESCO Publishing. (2024)

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, *World's Children* report: UNICEF Press (2025)

Well-being), including malnutrition and poor healthcare, hinder students' ability both in comprehension and assimilation, which further impacts their overall performance in school. Furthermore, a lack of Infrastructure (SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) can result in inadequate school facilities and long travel distances, making education inaccessible for many children. Addressing these interconnected challenges is essential to achieving SDG 4: Quality Education and ensuring that every child can complete their education. Reducing school dropout rates is essential to achieving this goal.

The consistent rise in the number of children dropping out of school in Nigeria represents an overwhelming educational crisis with widespread socio-economic implications. Recent studies highlight that approximately 18.3 million Nigerian children falls in the category of either being a school dropouts or unable to attend school for one reason or the other, placing the country with the highest number of out-of-school children globally. This distressing statistic not only jeopardizes individual futures but also hampers national development by exacerbating poverty, inequality, and human capital deficits. Adolescents' development into adulthood is a common basis for all aspects of sustainable development, no advances can be made to societal development if its children fail to meet their developmental potential. Dropping out of school is thus a prevailing risk factor that can lead to a far-reaching loss of human potential, leading to insecurity that can disrupt the peace of any nation.

Education For All (EFA) is a global initiative spearheaded by UNESCO, aimed at fulfilling the educational needs of children, youth, and adults by 2015. However, this objective has largely not been achieved in Nigeria. According to UNESCO data, approximately one-third of Nigerian adolescents are school dropouts, highlighting the out-of-school category of children as a significant national challenge. Progress toward education for all is one of the defining developmental challenges for most nations, including Nigeria. Greater social, economic, and political goals can be attained through education. Only "educated citizens" can accomplish economic progress and independence in the current economic climate, which most countries in the world, including Nigeria, are fully bowing to, as well as in the presence of rivalry from competing interests. It is crucial to express the value of education in young people's and

adolescents' lives. Schools are cultural institutions where children and adolescents develop social skills and self-confidence, widen their views, and handle challenges as complete and active citizens. Education is more than a skill for economic sustenance, but a tool for achieving self-actualization.

Millions of children are still not attending school despite improvements in recent generations, according to<sup>3</sup>. Millions of children are still not attending school despite improvements in recent generations, according to Roser<sup>3</sup>. According to<sup>4</sup> the epidemic caused a temporary rise in the number of people who were not in school. However, the number was already high before the pandemic to levels that the world aspires to regain. A similar number of youngsters are denied the chance to acquire fundamental literacy skills, as 58 million lack access to primary school. Additionally, according to<sup>4</sup>, half of the population that is not in school lives in areas afflicted by conflict, such as Syria, Yemen, Sudan, and Nigeria.

School disengagement is a concern not only for researchers and practitioners but also for policymakers striving to solve and find lasting solutions, which extremely affects certain student groups, such as minorities and students with learning difficulties. There is broad consensus among federal policymakers that an essential component of any strategy to reduce dropout rates both overall and among vulnerable subgroups is for school leaders to strengthen family-school relationships and enhance parental involvement in education (<sup>5,6,7</sup>).

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<sup>3</sup> Roser, M., Global economic inequality: what matters most for your living conditions is not who you are, but where you are" Published online at OurWorldinData.org. Retrieved from: '<https://ourworldindata.org/global-economic-inequality-introduction>' (2021)

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), How fast can levels of proficiency improve? Examining historical trends to inform SDG 4.1.1 scenarios. Montreal. (2019)

<sup>5</sup> deCastro, B. S., and Catsambis, S., Parents still matter: Parental links to the behaviours and future outlook of high school seniors. In N. E. Hill and R. K. Chao, Families, schools, and the adolescent: Connecting research, policy, and practice. New York: Teachers College Press.( 2009)

<sup>6</sup> Hill, N. E., and Chao, R. K., Families, schools, and the adolescent: Connecting research, policy, and practice. New York: Teachers College Press. (2009)

<sup>7</sup> Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Ice, C. L., and Whitaker, M. C., We're way past reading together. Why and how parental involvement in adolescence makes sense. In N. E. Hill and R. K. Chao, Families, schools, and the adolescent: Connecting research, policy, and practice. New York: Teachers College Press. (2009)

## **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

The unendingly rising figure of school dropouts in Nigeria poses a serious threat to the future of its youth and the nation's overall development. Adolescents who drop out of school are deprived of essential knowledge and skills, limiting their career prospects and increasing their vulnerability to unemployment, poverty, and engaging in anti-social behaviors. Gender disparities further aggravate the issue, with girls disproportionately affected due to early marriages, teenage pregnancies, and cultural biases that hinder their education. The dropout issue is also linked to systemic challenges, including underfunded schools, inadequate infrastructure, and unmotivated teachers. In Nigeria, the alarming rise in the out-of-school population can be attributed to a multitude of interrelated factors, one major factor being socio-economic instability and environmental crises. The impact of poverty is profound, as many families prioritize immediate survival over education, often compelling children to work instead of attending school. Moreover, the escalating environmental degradation, reflected in climate change and biodiversity loss, exacerbates the situation by displacing communities and disrupting educational systems. There is a paucity of documented evidence to establish if truly the future will be shattered if the cycle of education is incomplete. The study will explore the impacts of school dropouts on the development of young adults in Nigeria.

The main objective of the study was to examine the implications of dropping out of school on young adults' domains of development. The specific objectives are to:

1. Explore the Psychological effects of school dropouts in adults.
2. Explore the implications of school dropouts on all their developmental domains.
3. Understand the social Consequences of school dropouts in adults.

The article started with Background of the study as (I) and Literature Review and Conceptualizing School drop as (II) as the second focus. The

method section is labelled as number (III) where the detailed explanation of how the study was carried out. The findings of the study are labeled as (IV) and the discussion is (V). The Strategies for reducing school dropout in Nigeria is labelled (VI) and the conclusion which is the final section is labelled as (VII).

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUALIZING SCHOOL DROP

The simplest definition of school dropout is an early departure from school. Premature school withdrawals result in these kids not receiving a diploma. Globally, school dropout is an unceasing crisis faced by the educational sector. This fact has since been supported by researchers such as (<sup>8,9,10 & 11</sup>). After their first encounter with academic failure, very few pupils leave school. Most persist for years, only dropping out after they fall so far behind that success seems impossible or they are worn down by repeated failure.

There exist sufficient evidence in the past literature indicating that most students who drop out of school or leave school before graduation have several traits in common, including unmotivated coursework, a high likelihood of having run afoul of the law, school officials, or both, frequent absences and routine class skipping, and a possibility of family problems, among other issues.

Many adolescents who drop out of school often find themselves in juvenile correctional institutions. Many of these students engage in unlawful activities, ultimately becoming both students and inmates in juvenile detention centers. Addressing juvenile delinquency requires a holistic approach that cuts across all societal sectors, which includes

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<sup>8</sup> Bridgeland, J. M., Dilulio, J. J., and Morison K. B., *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*. (2006)

<sup>9</sup> Oghuvbu, E., Absenteeism and lateness among secondary school students in Nigeria: profiling causes and solution. *Academic Leadership*, 6(3) (2008)

<sup>10</sup> De Cos, P.L., *High school dropouts, enrollment, and graduation rates in California*. California: California Research Bureau, California State Library (2005)

<sup>11</sup> Mohsin, A.O., Aslam, M. and Bashir, F., Causes of dropouts at the secondary level in Barani areas of the Punjab (a case study of Rawalpindi district). *Journal of Applied Sciences*, Vol (1); 155-158 (2004)

persons, families, educational institutions, religious institutions, local organisations, and the government. At the core of a civilized society is personal accountability for one's actions and decisions. Informed decision-making processes should be of germane importance, being taught both at home and in educational institutions. They should learn that there exists consequences for both good and poor decisions which can be either informed by tangible rewards or intangible rewards. Academic scholars have long acknowledged that delinquency is an adolescent game. The school curriculum is not designed based on its curriculum to meet the needs of students because of its theoretical nature.

A major challenge in the education system is student dropout, which negatively impacts individuals, families, the government, and society as a whole. The consequences include but not limited to the following; disorderliness, vandalism in the society, economic setbacks, traumatic life situations, wasted school resources, hindered technological progress, widespread illiteracy, and moral decline. Examining the dropout rates among school pupils in Nigeria reveals an urgent need for all stakeholders involved in child and adolescent development to take action. Identifying the key elements that subject this vulnerable population to dropping out of school and engaging in delinquent behavior is crucial for addressing this issue.

## **2.1 Factors Contributing to School Dropout in Nigeria**

### **A. Parental practices**

The level of parental practices for children's well-being can be responsible for the child's eventual dropout from school. Parental practices here include parenting styles, parental care, parental acceptance and rejection, they all contribute largely to the disengagement of children from school. Although basic education is relatively free in Nigeria, parents still must support the children with the provision of food, water, shelter, and books and ensure that their wards are healthy to learn. The inability of the parents to make adequate provisions for their children may cause some of them to be susceptible to dropping out, such children constitute a major percentage of the school population. Parental neglect happens primarily when parents don't have sufficient income and resources to provide for the needs of their children, influencing their

children academically and further leads to them dropping out of school. It has also been seen where parents are intentionally neglectful and pay little attention to the ward's needs. In Nigeria, a child's risk of dropping out of school is strongly influenced by their family's financial stability.

## **B. Schooling Costs**

Most schools are sometimes directly and indirectly leveling parents and because poverty is high in Nigeria, many of the students stop schooling. A child sometimes assists parents not only at home but also at work, and this has a significant impact on educational outcomes for the child. Children who reside in countryside sometimes get engaged to start working at an earlier age compared to their counterparts in the cities and sometimes the parents and siblings rely on the little money the child is coming with. It is sometimes called child labour, it can also be a situation where a girl child will be working in people's homes as a maid to support their siblings.

In some cases, children are forced to drop out of school to care for their younger siblings, particularly when their mother works outside the home for wages. In these situations, children take on household responsibilities that ultimately lead to their withdrawal from school.

## **C. School Level Factors**

**i. School Hygiene:** The lack of adequate sanitation facilities in schools significantly impacts girls, especially during menstruation, often discouraging them from attending school as it signals an unsafe environment. While poor hygiene and inadequate facilities affect both boys and girls, the negative impact is more severe for girls. Parents expect schools to provide safe and separate sanitation facilities for their daughters. The issue of privacy is a major factor contributing to high dropout rates among girls, particularly in Northern Nigeria, where gender segregation in public spaces is strongly upheld. UNICEF has emphasized the need for separate, hygienic toilets for boys and girls when designing school facilities. 'noted that in Nigeria and the whole of Africa, the lack of basic sanitation is the cause of decreasing enrollment of girls in secondary schools but girls spend more time in schools when sanitation facilities are adequate.



**ii. Teachers' Attitude:** A teacher's attitude toward students plays a crucial role in preventing school dropout. This attitude, which can encompass both physical and emotional abuse as well as their teaching practices, greatly influences a student's ability to stay in school. Teachers should be cheered to pay more courtesy to their students and be mindful of the type of language used in the classroom. Some teachers bully the students they are supposed to guide and mentor, several are even unprofessional and use foul language on their weak students. They call students 'OLODO', dump, idiot just to mention but a few.

**iii. School Distance:** The distance to school is a significant factor in student dropout rates. When schools are perceived to be too distanced from home, students are more likely to drop out. Parents often worry about the wellbeing of their young children especially when they have travel long distances before getting to the school. In fact, the chances of attending secondary school decrease as the distance increases, likened to schools that are closer to home. School distance is a major barrier to education, especially in Northern Nigeria. Several studies across Africa highlight that the distance to school can discourage students from pursuing education due to two primary issues.

Firstly, the time interval and resources required to cover the distance can be challenging for children who are hungry. Secondly, parents often worry about the safety of their children during long travels. Being closer to schools positively encourage students to attend and do better in school; encouraging greater attendance and engagement.

#### **D. Cultural Factors Early Marriage (especially for girls)**

In countryside of Nigeria, particularly in the north, girls face a high dropout rate due to the belief that their education holds little value, as they are expected to leave their families after marriage. Early marriage is the leading cause of girls dropping out of school in Nigeria. Teenage pregnancy is also prevalent, and many girls do not return to school after having a child. It is in fact disastrous that once girls reaches the adolescence milestone, some parents view it as the right time for marriage, often arranging marriages instead of allowing them to continue their education. Early marriage leads to school dropouts, and while

education could better prepare girls for marriage, many parents are hesitant to prioritize their daughters' schooling.

### **E. Teenage (Early) Pregnancy (for girls)**

Teenage pregnancy is a major factor contributing to school dropout among girls. Unforeseen challenges, such as a lack of financial support for their education, often lead to early motherhood, which results in girls dropping out of school. The dropout rate for girls is higher than that of boys, with pregnancy being the leading cause. Teenage pregnancy is widespread, and many girls do not return to school after having a child.

### **F. Cultural Beliefs (for girls)**

Cultural standards and beliefs significantly limit a girls' access to modern education in Nigeria and in other developing countries. In particular, the Northern region of Nigeria, traditional values and certain religious principles prevent girls from making an individual decision and expressing their opinions as concerning their livelihood. In these communities, parents often prioritize a girl's role at home, believing that education is unnecessary since their primary duties involve caring for children and preparing meals. As a result of this, girls are typically constrained to religious curricula that focus on acquiring skills for marital life. These traditional morals are more prevalent in the countryside than in urban ones, where many families do not allow girls to leave home, even for schooling.

## **2.2 Borderline Intelligence**

Borderline intellectual functioning, also known as borderline mental retardation, refers to a level of cognitive ability that is below average, typically with an IQ range of 70-85<sup>12</sup>. However, this level of functioning is not as severe as intellectual disability, which is characterized by an IQ of 70 or below. It is sometimes referred to as below-average IQ (BAIQ).

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<sup>12</sup> Ninivaggi, F. J., Borderline intellectual functioning and academic problems. In: Sadock BJ, Sadock VA, Ruiz P, eds. Kaplan and Sadock's Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry. 9th ed. Vol. II. Philadelphia: WoltersKluwer/Lippincott Williams and Wilkins: 2505-2512. (2009)

A study by <sup>13</sup> found that a significant number of school dropout adolescents in South-west Nigeria had borderline intellectual functioning, indicating limited capacity for abstract thinking. According to the DSM-5, this condition is classified as a lower-than-average intellectual functioning, which may result from factors such as birth injuries, infections, genetics, fetal alcohol syndrome, or environmental exposure to toxins like lead. Parents of children with borderline intellectual functioning were found to be less positive and sensitive in their interactions, showing lower levels of positive engagement, despite their children not displaying more challenging behaviors.

Parents of children with borderline intellectual functioning were found to be less positive and sensitive in their interactions, showing lower levels of positive engagement, despite their children not displaying more challenging behaviors. Given the importance of positive and sensitive parenting for secure attachment and adaptive regulatory capabilities, children with borderline intellectual functioning might be at risk at a very early age. In adulthood stage, many people with borderline intellectual functioning do have problems in adaptive behaviour and functioning.

### **2.3 Theoretical framework**

**Academic mediation theory:** <sup>14</sup> posited five distinct models to explain school dropout. Among these, the academic mediation theory highlights academic achievement as the strongest predictor of school dropout. The deviant affiliation theory focuses on the connection between school dropout and a student's association with antisocial peers, who are typically disengaged from school and more likely to drop out. According to the family socialization theory, it was posited that family background plays a significant role in school dropout, noting that both the educational level of parent and their expectation from the children are critical factors. Lastly, structural strains theory explores the depth of relationship that exists between school dropout and sociodemographic

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<sup>13</sup> Akinwale, G. A., Borderline intelligence: At Risk for School Dropouts in South West Nigeria. *Journal of Human Development and Lifespan*, (1), 101-113 (2019)

<sup>14</sup> Battin-Pearson, S., Newcomb, M. D., Abbott, R. D., Hill, K. G., Catalano, R. F., and Hawkins, J. D., Predictors of early high school dropout: A test of five theories. *Journal of educational psychology*, 92(3), 568-582. (2000)

factors such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Research indicates that the inability to perform well academically is a significant predictor of high school dropout. This theory also examines how poor academic achievement mediates the impact of other factors, such as deviant affiliation, personal deviance, family socialization, and structural strains, on the likelihood of dropping out. Essentially, it investigates how poor academic performance interacts with and influences the relationship between dropout and these other factors. The model supporting this theory was found to statistically fit at an acceptable level.

### 3.0 METHOD

This study explored the population of out-of-school children in Nigeria during post-COVID-19 pandemic period in Lagos, Nigeria. The researchers used interpretivism, which promotes adaptability and welcoming of discussion to effectively communicate participants' personal experiences as they relate to them and the meanings they ascribed to the stimuli. The central thrust of the study was to understand how dropping out of school impacted the career development of young adults and how it has affected their developmental trajectories as they grow older. The choice of qualitative research model was adopted for this study as it allowed the researcher to explore and learn about the participants' peculiarity in terms of socially constructed meanings. Additionally, it helps comprehend the participants' various experiences as they navigate their developmental milestones without formal education. An explorative research design of this kind deploys a constructivist worldview, which provides an in-depth understanding of how leaving school impacts their development and reveals the challenges they face. This further aided the researcher in coming up with effective measures for the prospective improvements on how to understand its implications on their long-term development.

This study was carried out in Ikeja Local Government Area of Lagos State, a residential area. A purposive sampling approach was employed, enabling the researchers to select young adults who had dropped out of school, as they could provide firsthand insights into their experiences. The inclusion criteria for participants required individuals who had enrolled in basic education nine years ago but were unable to complete it or pursue further studies. A total of twenty-one people made up the

sample size; this was to allow the researchers to choose a small number of participants to elicit comprehensive information from them. The choice of thematic analysis was also helpful to assist in emphasising, pinpointing, examining, and recording the dropout responses and the impacts on their growth and development. This necessitated a proper analysis, which made the researcher understand from the point of view of the participants as well as reach a point of saturation in order to draw conclusions about participants and generate trustworthy results.

Strict adherence to ethical guidelines was maintained throughout the study. Participants had the freedom to voluntarily participate or withdraw at any time without any form of coercion. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants after they were fully informed about the study's purpose and procedures.

To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, participants' identities were safeguarded by using coded labels instead of their real names. Each participant was assigned a unique identifier, such as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and so forth. This approach ensured that their identities were kept confidential and would not be revealed at any point during the research.

#### 4.0 FINDINGS

This analysis of data on school dropouts in Lagos and how it impacts their development. The study selected 21 (twenty-one) participants consisting of 10 (males) and 11 (females) young adults in Lagos. The interview process was strictly unstructured.

##### 4.1 Biographical Information Young Adults

This table provides biographic information about all participants involved in the study, including details on gender, age, educational qualification, and marital status.

| Participant | Age | Gender | BASIC CLASS ATTENDED LAST | Marital status |
|-------------|-----|--------|---------------------------|----------------|
| 1.          | 23  | Female | BASIC 9                   | Single         |
| 2.          | 24  | Female | BASIC 9                   | Single mother  |

|     |    |        |         |               |
|-----|----|--------|---------|---------------|
| 3.  | 31 | Male   | BASIC 4 | Married       |
| 4.  | 28 | Male   | BASIC 8 | Single mother |
| 5.  | 24 | Male   | BASIC 7 | Single        |
| 6.  | 37 | Male   | BASIC 6 | Married       |
| 7.  | 27 | Female | BASIC6  | Married       |
| 8.  | 19 | Male   | BASIC 4 | Single        |
| 9.  | 27 | Female | BASIC 5 | Single        |
| 10. | 24 | Male   | BASIC 4 | Married       |
| 11. | 21 | Female | BASIC 6 | Married       |
| 12. | 27 | Female | BASIC 7 | Married       |
| 13. | 26 | Male   | BASIC 9 | Married       |
| 14. | 29 | Male   | BASIC 4 | Married       |
| 15. | 24 | Male   | BASIC 4 | Married       |
| 16. | 31 | Male   | BASIC 4 | Married       |
| 17. | 27 | Female | BASIC 7 | Married       |
| 18. | 35 | Male   | BASIC 8 | Married       |
| 19. | 27 | Female | BASIC 6 | Single        |
| 20. | 31 | Male   | BASIC 6 | Single        |
| 21. | 29 | Female | BASIC 8 | Single        |

**This is the tabular presentation of the demographic variables elicited from the participants, which are age, gender, educational qualifications, and marital status.**

The themes generated are presented below:

| Objectives/Themes                                      | Sub-Themes                                                                                                                                                                                             | Participants                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Explore the Psychological effects of school dropout | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Psychological distress</li><li>• Stress and anxiety</li><li>• Feeling deprived</li><li>• Learned helplessness</li><li>• Depression</li><li>• Regrets</li></ul> | 1,2,3,6,8,16,11,13,14,16,17,18,21 |

|                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2. Explore the implications of school dropouts on all their developmental domains | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive: impaired judgement, problem solving</li> <li>• Emotional: Identity Crisis, distress</li> <li>• Social: Inferiority complex, parental practices</li> </ul> | 1,2,3,6,8,16,11,13,14,16,19,21                                                                          |
| 3. Understand the social Consequences of school dropouts in Young Adults          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failed relationships</li> <li>• Social isolation</li> <li>• Economic implications</li> <li>• Poverty</li> <li>• Joblessness</li> <li>• Unskill jobs</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1,2,3,6,8,16,11,13,14,16,17,18,</li> <li>• 19,20,21</li> </ul> |

## 4.2 The Psychological Effects of Dropping Out of School on Young Adults

Out-of-school youth may experience heightened psychological distress due to limited opportunities, contributing to social instability. In this population sample, the study found that 54.5% of people experienced depression, 50.8% of people experienced anxiety, and 38.9% of people experienced stress. The study had two major problem statements.

### Participant 16

*"I wake up regretting my actions of not going to school; the struggle is too much. I feel invincible among my peers. Sometimes, I wish I could just die and start again, even when I joined politics, after working so hard for my political party, I*

*know it is only the educated ones that will be considered for appointment. I pray my children go to school. This suffering is too much; all the big cars are for people that went to school.”*

The college students described comprehensive social support to play a major role in their coping with school and mental health problems. There is a large interplay between young adults who are school dropouts. A study by <sup>15</sup> reported a bidirectional relationship between mental health and academic success. The study established that psychological issues including mental health could accounts for reasons why people drop out of school and that the presence of psychological issues such as suicide, depression and anxiety could be an effect of leaving school quite early.

### 4.3 Explore Developmental Implications of School Dropouts

The developmental implications of school dropouts are far-reaching, affecting individuals across cognitive, emotional, social, and economic domains. Below are some key areas of impact: Dropping out of school halts formal learning, restricting intellectual growth and problem-solving skills. Individuals may struggle with complex reasoning, reading comprehension, and numerical literacy. The lack of formal education can hinder lifelong learning and adaptation to technological advancements. Such a critical point in development occurs in the period of life between 18-29 years. It is the time during which financial independence is built, professional identities are formed, and vital skills required for gaining a career are developed. Extract from a participant on how dropping out has impeded other areas of life.

#### Participant 10

*“I am a 28-year-old man, and I always feel uncomfortable and very bad about my inability to have a sound education. People tend to say I am not intelligent because I can't approach certain issues from their views. A lot of people*

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<sup>15</sup> Guerrero-Puerta, L.M. and Guerrero, M.A., Exploring the Relationship between Early Leaving of Education and Training and mental Health among Youth in Spain. *Societies*,13, 103. (2023) <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc13050103>



*have embarrassed me; I couldn't even marry the woman I liked because I struggled to type good English. I mostly rely on voice notes from WhatsApp to have interact with people. I don't have smart friends because I have people like me more as friends. I am sure I will ensure that my children all go to school"*

Leaving school early without completion could affect low self-esteem and confidence. A lot of dropouts have a sense of failure and diminished self-worth. A higher risk of mental health challenges is also common among these young people because of their vulnerability to anxiety, depression, and stress due to financial struggles and societal stigma.

#### ***4.4 Social Consequences of Being Dropouts Among Young Adults***

Leaving school early without completion comes with a lot of social consequences and constraints, which include strained relationships, social isolation, and even delayed milestones like marriage, parenthood, etc. which could potentially lead to a cycle of negativity persisting over time. In the first instance, dropout can lead to difficulty in getting high-paying jobs and financial stress. Dropouts often miss out on critical peer interactions that develop communication and teamwork skills. Young adults are largely considered well into the stage of independence, financially and in every other major aspect; unemployment takes away this cloak of responsibility and often makes them susceptible to criminal activities, substance abuse, or delinquent behaviours due to lack of supervision and guidance. These individuals could then become withdrawn or less communicative. This is an extract of the interview below:

##### **Participant 21**

*"I am a family woman that men usually see as cheap because several young ladies like me are seen as prostitutes in my environment. Most people see dropouts as miscreants because many young people in my category are often used as thugs for politicians in Nigeria, they offer us little money to be part of political rallies. This is sad for me as the stigma becomes too much for me. I am hopeful that I will return*

*to school someday, as I cannot continue like this. My community only reckons with me during the election because I have lower participation in community engagement, voting, and leadership roles in my area”.*

The participants complain about how socially they are being treated in their environments, from being seen as thugs, harlots, and so many unprinted names. They lamented about how society compounded their issues by making things more difficult.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION

From a psychological standpoint, leaving school early causes low self-esteem, high-niggling tension, and mental health problems such as anxiety or depression. This effect may strain relationships and reduce access to supportive networks. Thus, understanding these developmental implications is essential for developing intervention plans against the adverse effects of school dropouts and putting young adults on the road toward realizing their fullest potential. Some psychological implications may include:

### 5.1 Stress and Anxiety

Dropping out of school can trigger significant stress and anxiety due to financial struggles, social pressures, and uncertainty about the future. Uncertainty about the future is the most well-known cause of both stress and anxiety, manifesting itself both immediately and in the long term. Feeling constantly apprehensive about being able to meet even minimal requirements like housing, food, and healthcare occupations is all due to direct unemployment costs, along with the indirect costs of all the social and personal pressures and therefore feelings of inadequacy that add tremendously to chronic stress. The expectations of family and parents mostly aggravate the anxiety level of school dropouts. Stress usually manifests itself physiologically via elevated cortisol levels, disrupted sleep patterns, and weakened immune function, all of which led to a generalized decline in health. Over time, the psychological weight of being a school drop can also produce anxiety disorders, typically defined by just excessive worry and/or irritability together with difficulty in concentrating on most tasks. The fear of being "too far behind" or judged

by peers can prevent dropouts from going back to school. This can result in difficulty in everyday functioning and, therefore, less effectiveness in job searching, perpetuating its own cycle of stress into unemployment. The absence of professional roles may interfere with individual routines and relationships, thereby compounding this disorientation<sup>16</sup>. This identity crisis calls for the combination of self-reflection, social support, and counseling for individuals in the rebuilding of personal self-worth and direction.

Once an analytical construct, Seligman's concept of learned helplessness addresses the psychological problem of leaving school early; this can lead to repeated failures in activities that can create an impression of powerlessness because one has resigned oneself to the will of life and seeking jobs again is discouraged or forbidden, which also erodes self-efficacy and motivation over time. All this leads in the long run to a widespread sense of despair manifested in the belief that no individual has any power to exert control over his or her life. This psychological paradigm is especially damaging for the young adult because it hampers the person from taking initiative and trying out new things. It requires targeted intervention, mainly addressing the issue of child enrolment in school. The issue of girl child retention in school was noted in a study by <sup>17</sup>, the study recommended that the students need emotional support for retention in school. Similarly, <sup>18</sup>, in a comprehensive study, noted that the government at all levels should seek the assistance of psychologists for early and proper assessments to help reduce the growing number of out-of-school youths in South West Nigeria. There is also a significant rise in robbery, assassination, and kidnapping involving youths, many of whom are school dropouts. Nigeria is currently facing severe insecurity

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<sup>16</sup> Baker, B.L., Blacher, J., Crnic, K. and Edelbrock, C., Behaviour problems and parenting stress in families of three-year-old children with and without developmental delays. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*. 107:433–444. (2012)

<sup>17</sup> Bada, B.V. & Akinwale, G.A., Barriers To Girl Child Retention In Schools In The Suburb Areas Of Ibadan. (2024). *Journal of South African Democratic Teachers Union (JSADTU)*, 3(1), 20-39. (2024).  
<https://ourjournal.jsadtu.com/index.php/jsadtu/article/view/4>

<sup>18</sup> Akinwale, G.A., Borderline Intelligence and The Role of Parental Practices on Adolescent School Drop-Outs in South-West Nigeria. An unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Department of Psychology, University of Lagos, Nigeria. (2019)

due to the criminal activities of these youths. This observation aligns with findings from both electronic and print media, which reported that over 85% of criminal activities in Nigeria are committed by youths who have dropped out of school.

## **6.0 STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING SCHOOL DROPOUT IN NIGERIA**

It is important for the government to develop sustainable policies that will not just compulsory for all citizens to be educated, but a serious effort in promoting inclusive education at all levels. There must be effective policy guidelines on several domains, which will involve ensuring that all stakeholders participate in the monitoring process. Domesticating and promoting the Indigenous knowledge system will help all stakeholders to know that education is not mainly about promoting Western culture but a tool for the development of the nation.

There must be policies that ensure that school encourages learners to learn, such that schools will be a major driver of the transformation agenda by developing guidelines that will serve as the point of reference for all interventions in the school system. Development of Policy on Repetition and Progression has been proven to be effective in most nations of the world, such that those kids will focus on progression as against the culture of repetition that has been used in the past in Nigeria. Additional infrastructure is required to add to the existing delapidated facilities.

## **7.0 CONCLUSION**

Addressing the out-of-school crisis requires a multifaceted approach that tackles the root causes while implementing sustainable solutions to ensure that every Nigerian child has access to quality education. The growing number of out-of-school adolescents exacerbates socio-economic challenges, including increased poverty levels, heightened inequality, and a decline in human capital development. This trajectory poses significant risks to Nigeria's future development and economic stability.

Enforce existing laws that mandate free and compulsory education for children up to a certain age. Collaborate with local communities to address cultural barriers to education, such as child marriage. Improve security measures around schools to ensure a safe learning environment. Provide financial assistance or incentives to low-income families to reduce the economic burden of schooling.