
**GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL INSECURITY AND
EMOTIONAL INSTABILITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR
FEMALE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT
IN TARABA STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Despite national efforts to promote girl-child education, female students in Northern Nigeria continue to face educational and psychological challenges. This study explores the relationship between social insecurity, emotional instability, and academic performance among female students at the College of Education, Zing, Taraba State. A descriptive survey design was employed, sampling 281 NCE students using the validated Social Insecurity and Emotional Instability Questionnaire (SIEIQ, $\alpha = 0.94$). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, regression, and exploratory factor analysis. Results revealed a strong positive correlation between social insecurity and emotional instability ($r = .98, p < .01$). Due to multicollinearity, a composite variable, psychological insecurity, was created and used in the regression model, which significantly predicted academic performance ($\beta = -0.97, R^2 = .95, p < .001$). Additionally, socio-cultural and religious factors significantly predict psychological insecurity, accounting for over 97% of the variance. These findings reveals the systemic impact of gender-

based cultural and religious norms in shaping educational vulnerability among female students. The study recommends that meaningful educational empowerment for girls requires integrated interventions that address not only access but also emotional well-being, gender equity, and socio-cultural transformation.

Keywords: Social insecurity, Emotional instability, Gender, Academic performance, Socio-cultural norms

Introduction

The insecurity of lives and property has increasingly become a national challenge in Nigeria, particularly in the northern region. States such as Plateau, Benue, Kaduna, Sokoto, Zamfara, Niger, Borno, Taraba, and Katsina have witnessed recurrent incidents of violence, insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and communal clashes, destabilising both rural and urban communities. This state of insecurity has produced widespread displacement, psychological trauma, and disruption of social services, posing enduring threats to individual and collective wellbeing (Emordi & Egbuchulam, 2023; Umar et al., 2024; Innocent, Musa, & Jacob, 2021; Alhassan & Muhammad, 2024).

Importantly, this climate of insecurity does not stop at the physical or economic level; it permeates the educational sector, manifesting through victimisation of students and staff, social neglect, and institutional breakdowns (Fahad & Fara, 2020; Matsayi, 2023; Okpanachi, 2023). School attacks, abductions, and widespread fear have disrupted learning environments, especially in states like Kaduna, Borno, and Katsina. Studies have shown that insecurity is now a critical factor undermining academic performance, causing school closures, and prompting parental withdrawal of children from schools in high-risk zones (Umar, Ibrahim & Bala, 2024; Peter, Ebute & Attah, 2023; Umar, Ibrahim & Adamu, 2023). Its psychological and institutional effects include rising absenteeism, teacher shortages, and

deteriorating infrastructure are common outcomes (Onwuasoanya, Yakubu & Ismail, 2021; Hauwa & Jacob, n.d.; Abubakar et al., 2023). In higher institutions, prolonged closures and disrupted academic calendars have affected learning outcomes and reduced graduation rates (Ogunbunmi & Olaoye, 2024; Akinfalabi et al., n.d.). As such, students experience not only emotional instability but also cognitive disengagement, all of which are compounded by trauma and socio-economic instability.

Female students are particularly vulnerable, often becoming the first casualties of educational disruption during periods of crisis. Families, guided by cultural norms and survival instincts, tend to prioritise the protection of girls by withdrawing them from school when threats are perceived (UNICEF, 2022). According to UNESCO (2023), girls are disproportionately affected by conflict-related school closures due to gendered expectations, early marriage, and economic hardship, which compel families to keep daughters at home while allowing boys to continue schooling. In addition to withdrawal, many girls who remain in school endure harassment, social stigma, and psychological neglect within the very institutions meant to educate them. Reports indicate that gender-based violence, lack of safe spaces, and insufficient menstrual hygiene management contribute to poor attendance and eventual dropout (UNESCO, 2023; EduGist, 2024). The trauma of abductions, such as the 2014 Chibok kidnapping of 276 girls by Boko Haram, continues to haunt communities and discourage girls' return to school even after their release (UNICEF, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Beland (2005) conceptualises social insecurity as a persistent condition of exclusion, vulnerability, and perceived social inadequacy, often rooted in systemic inequalities and perceived threats to well-being. Within conflict-affected educational environments, this sense of insecurity is especially pronounced among female students. Social rejection, gender stereotyping, and institutional apathy contribute to emotional dysregulation and deteriorating mental health. Emotional instability, manifesting as mood fluctuations, anxiety, irritability, and lack of academic focus, is not merely an individual deficiency but a symptom of structurally induced psycho-social pressure (Larsen & Diener, 1987; Beauchaine

& Cicchetti, 2019).

Socio-cultural and religious norms further complicate this landscape. Deeply entrenched beliefs regarding gender roles, mobility restrictions, and the appropriateness of female education continue to influence school attendance and participation (Nwosu & Chukwu, 2020). In many communities, religious conservatism discourages co-educational settings, limits female autonomy, and frames obedience and silence as spiritual virtues (Imam, 2011; Adam & Castle, 1994). These cultural and religious systems are often internalised and reinforced through school policies, family decisions, and peer interactions, contributing to what may be termed psychological insecurity, a compounded form of vulnerability driven by both external threats and internalised gender expectations.

Globally, mental health concerns among youth are rising. The World Health Organization (2023) reports that one in seven adolescents suffers from mental health conditions, yet most lack access to support, especially in low-resource settings. In Nigeria, this crisis is intensified by community violence, gendered cultural norms, and inadequate institutional responses. Female students, in particular, are situated at the intersection of multiple stressors, making them highly susceptible to emotional burnout, disengagement, and academic decline (Chinawa et al., 2023; Abiola, Adegbite, & Bello, 2022). In most instances, female students often navigate multiple social identities, as daughters, potential wives, caregivers, and students, under immense pressure to conform to gendered expectations while striving for academic success.

Despite growing academic interest in the socio-emotional dimensions of education (Beauchaine & Cicchetti, 2019; WHO, 2023), much of the existing literature tends to examine these variables, social insecurity, emotional instability, and socio-cultural norms, in isolation. For instance, studies by Matsayi (2023) and Ogunbunmi & Olaoye (2024) focus primarily on the impact of insecurity on school infrastructure and attendance, without engaging the emotional consequences for students. Similarly, works like Nwosu & Chukwu (2020) and Imam (2011) address socio-cultural and religious

constraints on girls' education but often treat emotional distress as a secondary or indirect effect. Meanwhile, studies such as Chinawa et al. (2023) and Abiola, Adegbite, & Bello (2022) explore youth mental health in relation to family and economic stressors but do not fully account for educational implications. These studies have overlooked the combined effects these factors have on students' psychological wellbeing and academic engagement. It is against this backdrop, this study investigates gendered dimensions of social and emotional insecurity and their influence on academic outcomes among female students in Taraba State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are:

- i. To examine the relationship between social insecurity and emotional instability among female students in Taraba State
- ii. To investigate the influence of emotional instability on the academic performance of female students Taraba State.
- iii. To assess the impact of socio-cultural and religious factors on the levels of social insecurity and emotional instability experienced by female students in Taraba State.

Hypotheses

The study addresses the following hypotheses:

- H₀1: There is no significant relationship between social insecurity and emotional instability among female students in Taraba State.
- H₀2: Emotional instability does not significantly influence the academic performance of female students in Taraba State
- H₀3: Socio-cultural and religious factors do not significantly influence the levels of social insecurity and emotional instability experienced by female students in Taraba State.

Methods

This study adopted a descriptive survey. This design allowed for the systematic collection and analysis of data on students' perceptions,

behaviours, and emotional states within their academic and socio-cultural environments. The study population comprised all female students enrolled during the 2023/2024 academic session. According to the institutional records, there were 948 female NCE students, with 424 in NCE II and 524 in NCE III (Office of the Registrar, 2024). To determine the appropriate sample size, Yamane's (1967) formula was applied, using a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level: $n = N / [1 + N(e)^2]$. Substituting the values, the sample size was calculated as $n = 948 / [1 + 948(0.05)^2] = 948 / 3.36 = 281$. To enhance the representativeness of the sample, a stratified random sampling technique was employed. The population was first divided into two strata based on academic level (NCE II and NCE III). A proportional number of students were randomly selected from each stratum: 126 students from NCE II (44.8%) and 155 from NCE III (55.2%). Data were collected using a researcher-designed instrument titled Social Insecurity and Emotional Instability Questionnaire (SIEIQ), consisting of 37 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Content and face validity were established through review by three education and psychology experts. However, to enhance construct validity, a pilot testing, involving 40 students from College of Education, Hong, Adamawa State was conducted prior to the main study. Feedback from this pre-test was used to revise ambiguous items and improve internal consistency. The reliability of the final instruments was confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a high coefficient of $\alpha = 0.94$.

Data were collected over a two-week period using self-administered questionnaires distributed in supervised classroom settings. Ethical clearance was obtained from the College Research Ethics Committee, and participants provided informed consent. The data were analysed using SPSS Version 23. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were used to summarise demographic and response data. Inferential statistics included Pearson correlation, simple linear regression, and multivariate tests. To address the issue of multicollinearity between social insecurity and emotional instability, a composite variable was created and used in the regression model to predict academic performance. Results were interpreted at a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

Result

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between social insecurity and emotional instability among female students.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Between Social Insecurity and Emotional Instability Among Female Students (N = 281)

Variables	1	2
1. Social Insecurity	1.000	.983**
2. Emotional Instability	.983**	1.000

Note. $p < .01$ (2-tailed). **Method:** Pearson Product-Moment Correlation.

Table 1 shows a strong positive relationship between social insecurity and emotional instability ($r = .98$, $p < .01$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The strength of this correlation suggests that social and emotional stressors are deeply inter-connected in the lived experiences of the respondents. In practical terms, female students who perceive themselves as socially insecure, whether due to peer rejection, harassment, or cultural marginalization, are also more likely to experience emotional challenges such as anxiety, mood swings, and reduced concentration.

Hypothesis Two: Emotional instability does not significantly affect the academic performance of female students.

Table 2: Linear Regression Analysis of the Effect of Psychological Insecurity on Academic Performance

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate		F	df	Sig.
1	.977	.954	.953	0.206		5735.06	1, 279	.000
Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF	
(Constant)	5.403	0.036	—	151.684	.000	—	—	—
Combined Score	-0.732	0.010	0.977	-75.730	.000	1.000		1.000

Table 2 displays the results of a simple linear regression conducted to test Hypothesis Two, which stated that *emotional instability does not significantly affect the academic performance of female students*. Due to multicollinearity between social insecurity and emotional instability, a composite variable that combined social insecurity and emotional instability was created to represent their joint influence. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 279) = 5735.06$, $p < .001$, and explained 95.4% of the variance in academic performance ($R^2 = .954$). The combined psychological insecurity score significantly predicted academic performance ($\beta = -0.977$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of psychological insecurity are strongly associated with lower academic achievement among female students. Collinearity diagnostics confirmed the absence of multicollinearity (Tolerance = 1.000, VIF = 1.000). Based on these results, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it is concluded that psychological insecurity, encompassing both social and emotional dimensions, has a significant negative impact on academic performance.

Hypothesis Three: Socio-cultural and religious factors do not significantly influence the levels of social insecurity and emotional instability experienced by female students.

Table 3: Multivariate and Univariate Tests of the Influence of Socio-Cultural and Religious Factors on Social Insecurity and Emotional Instability among Female Students

Effect	Test Type	Dependent Variable	Wilks' Lambda	F	df	Sig.	R ²
Socio-Cultural Factors	Multivariate Test	Social Insecurity & Emotional Instability	.263	388.76	(2, 277)	.000	—
	Univariate Test	Social Insecurity	—	128.59	(1, 278)	.000	.976
		Emotional Instability	—	779.11	(1, 278)	.000	.984
Religious Factors	Multivariate Test	Social Insecurity & Emotional Instability	.525	125.35	(2, 277)	.000	—
	Univariate Test	Social Insecurity	—	244.05	(1, 278)	.000	.976
		Emotional Instability	—	19.65	(1, 278)	.000	.984

A multivariate multiple regression was conducted to examine whether socio-cultural and religious factors significantly influence levels of social insecurity and emotional instability among female students. The multivariate test using Wilks' Lambda revealed statistically significant effects for both socio-cultural factors, $\Lambda = .263$, $F(2, 277) = 388.76$, $p < .001$, and religious factors, $\Lambda = .525$, $F(2, 277) = 125.35$, $p < .001$. Follow-up univariate analyses indicates that socio-cultural factors significantly predicted both social insecurity ($F(1, 278) = 128.59$, $p < .001$) and emotional instability ($F(1, 278) = 779.11$, $p < .001$). Religious factors also significantly predicts both social insecurity ($F(1, 278) = 244.05$, $p < .001$) and emotional instability ($F(1, 278) = 19.65$, $p < .001$). The model explains 97.6% of the variance in social insecurity and 98.4% in emotional instability. These findings provides strong evidence that both socio-cultural and religious factors significantly influence female students' experiences of social insecurity and emotional instability. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was rejected.

Discussions

The study found a strong, statistically significant correlation between social insecurity and emotional instability. This confirms earlier theoretical positions by Beland (2005), who describes social insecurity as a condition of exclusion and perceived inadequacy, and by Beauchaine and Cicchetti (2019), who note that prolonged exposure to psycho-social stress undermines emotional regulation. This study aligns with the work of Matsayi (2023) and Okonkwo and Otu (2021), both of whom emphasise that emotional instability among female students in Northern Nigeria is largely driven by structural factors, including community violence and gendered expectations.

The regression results indicate that psychological insecurity, measured through a composite of emotional and social dimensions, negatively affects academic performance of female students. This reinforces the argument that emotional wellbeing is foundational to educational engagement. Larsen and Diener (1987) identified mood fluctuations, anxiety, and irritability as key aspects of emotional instability that affect focus and academic persistence. The present

study extends this by showing that these affective states are not just psychological traits but consequences of lived realities shaped by insecurity, harassment, and exclusion. This complements the view of Okonkwo and Otu (2021), who emphasise the impact of role conflict on female students, expected to be daughters, caregivers, and learners, within culturally rigid environments.

The multivariate analysis reveals that socio-cultural and religious factors significantly influence both social insecurity and emotional instability. This confirms assertions by Adam and Castle (1994), Imam (2011), and Okeke et al. (2008) that institutionalised cultural and religious ideologies play a decisive role in regulating female behaviour and access to education. In settings where early marriage, gender separation, and restrictions on female mobility prevail, girls are more likely to experience exclusion and emotional suppression, as also documented by UNESCO (2023) and UNICEF (2022). These systems are often internalised through school policies and social expectations, perpetuating psychological vulnerability.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is evident that emotional instability among female students is not merely an individual psychological concern, but rather a structural outcome of sustained exposure to systemic exclusion, socio-cultural rigidity, and normative pressures. The study has shown that social insecurity and emotional instability are not separate challenges but are closely interconnected aspects of the lived experiences of female learners in conflict-affected settings. Moreover, socio-cultural and religious norms influence these insecurities by creating environments that restrict female autonomy, exacerbate emotional distress, and undermine academic participation.

Recommendations

In line with the study's objectives, schools should adopt trauma-informed practices, provide accessible counselling services, and train educators to support students' emotional needs. Emotional instability's impact on academic performance calls for the implementation of flexible academic policies, targeted scholarships,

and mentorship programs that cater to the specific challenges faced by girls. Additionally, mitigating the influence of socio-cultural and religious norms requires active engagement with community and religious leaders, as well as curriculum reforms that embed gender equality, emotional literacy, and inclusive values across educational settings

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