

Exploring Girls' Access and Retention in Higher Educational Institutions: Situation of Kogi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Based on the global recognition that education is an essential social component, a considerable attention has been directed by various governments and international bodies towards the participation of individual's predominantly young people who are indisputably the target and future of any nation and particularly young girls. There has been increasing global concern over young girls' access to formal education. Therefore the aim of this paper is to provide detailed description of the challenges encountered by girls in gaining access and retention to higher education within their specific socio-cultural contexts and particularly to examine whether girls are being affected by gender discrimination in different ways in their higher educational pursuit. This paper is a context-specific research that was conducted in three communities of Kogi State in Nigeria. Its method implores the qualitative research analysis. This paper concludes by identifying possible ways through which access of females can be enhanced into the higher educational institutions.

Keywords: *Development; Education; Female; Higher Education and; Young People.*

Introduction

In Africa and especially in Nigeria, education has been recognized as an essential drive for effecting development in the continent in order to reduce or eliminate

poverty (Asiyai, 2013). However, access to basic and secondary education appeared to have increased over the past decades (UNESCO, 2013). Studies have revealed that there has been little attention in improving access to school at higher institution levels (Frempong and Mensah, 2012). For instance, the Dakar summit on “Education for All” in year 2000 was sponsor towards increasing enrolment in primary education as a leading instrument for economic growth, without recognition of the place of higher institution (Tilak, 2003).

From a gender perspective, which this paper tends to explore, it is fundamental to acknowledge that earlier education in Sub-Saharan Africa including Asia was available for men (Ogunniyi and Dosunmu, 2014). Women were from the onset placed at a disadvantaged or marginalized position due to their low access to formal education and consequently less privileged to take up formal employment in the public sector (Ogunniyi and Dosunmu, 2014).

Against the afore-mentioned background, this paper presents a socially and culturally situated study of how female’s access and retention to higher educational institutions can be constructed within their local context. By examining females’ access to higher education through their voices; this paper also explores other relational positions such as the effect of poverty on the female themselves to higher education in Kogi State of Nigeria as a case study.

Hence, with the intent of providing an example of detailed research that attends to the various factors that expedite or limit female’s access to higher education, this paper seeks to provide answers to questions related to the different socio-cultural contexts that influenced females into higher educational institutions. It further explores the various ways in which females narrate their social and economic backgrounds and other relational positions that may influence their access into higher education.

One of the universally acceptable ways of improving young people's social and economic well-being is the attainment of formal education (World Bank, 1996; Durston and Nashire, 2001; Ucha, 2010). Nelson Mandela argues that:

“Education is the great engine to personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the president of a great nation” (McCullum 2005:1).

For the purpose of this paper, the definitional parameter of young girl is set between 18 to 28 years of age. Moreover, from a sociological perspective, the concept of 'young girl' is best understood as a relational concept: this group represents a constructed population in Western industrial societies, defined through prevailing social, historical and cultural processes (Wyn and White 1997: 10).

The State of Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Higher education which is also referred to as post-secondary or tertiary education is an education system which consists of Universities, Polytechnics, Institutes, Colleges of education and professional or specialized institutions (International Association of Universities (IAU), 2000; Federal Ministry of Education, 2004). In Sub-Saharan African countries, higher education has been recognized as the prerequisite for an investment in human capital and economic development for both African young people and the entire society (State of Education in Africa Report, 2015). As further argued, higher education has increased the rates of employment opportunities and job prospects, improved quality of life, economic growth and development (State of Education in Africa Report, 2015). Despite these tremendous benefits attached to higher education in Africa, the numbers of girl-child that have access to higher institutions are still limited.

In a study that reveals the perceptions of parents on factors that determine girl-child' access to formal education in the northern part of Nigeria, Eweniyi and Usman (2013) found that, one of the major social factors that shape access to education for a girl-child is parental religious orientation. Most parents expressed their fulfillment in adhering to their religious obligation, which entails denying their female children access to western education. Bagudo (2007) has also reported similar findings in a study on assessment of girl-child education in Sokoto State, also in northern Nigeria. Due to parental religious beliefs and love for Qua'ranic education for their children, Bagudo observed that female children were restrained from attending formal schools. This was coupled with the trepidation that formal education may expose their children to other religious orientations, western values and teenage pregnancy (Bagudo, 2007; Eweniyi and Usman, 2013).

In Nigeria, a report by the National Literacy Statistics, UNESCO (2013) reported an overall literacy of Nigerian young people to be 51%. As can be observed, Nigeria remains the most populous nation in Africa with an estimated population of 167 million people of which women constitute more than 50% (NPC, 2011). Despite the influence of modern values, empirical evidences suggest that several factors have continued to widen the gender gap, and subjugate women to inferior and marginalized positions. For instance, among the young population, from ages 15 and above, a report states a gender disparity between the male and female status, of which the literacy rates is 61.38% for males and 41.4% for females (UNESCO, 2013). This observed gender discrepancy has resulted in the violation of women's social, economic and cultural rights, and their denial of human rights as full Nigerian citizens.

In a survey of Mushin women in Lagos, Fapohunda (2012) reveals the roots of constraints faced by women in the formal sector. Through a critical review of

relevant studies and a survey of 150 women, it identifies the lack of formal education and training as major obstacles to women's participation in the formal sector. Evidence from this study affirms that socio-cultural and limited economic resources interrelated as contributing factors to women's disadvantaged positions. For instance, it was observed in the study that various factors such as adolescent pregnancy, early marriage and the over burdensome household labour restrained many young females within the private domain. Moreover, out of the total of 150 female respondents in the study, about 11% had no formal education; about 41% had only primary education, while 32% had secondary school while only 14% had one form of higher educational qualification.

Meanwhile in a study that examines factors associated with dropping out of school girls in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, Grant and Hallman (2008) reveal that even though teenage pregnancy is not conceived as a social problem in KwaZulu-Natal, young women are observed to be at risk of becoming pregnant while attending school. Consequently, teenage pregnancy was found as a major factor affecting young women's capacity to complete their education or follow up their educational plans.

It is important to summarize here that the majority of empirical studies confirm some levels of disparity in accessing formal education, which afford the male folks an advantageous position over their female counterparts. The reason for this is that the studies have relied too heavily on demographic health assessments based on quantitative data. There is a dire need to augment these findings with further studies among young Nigerians and to pay particular attention to some neglected areas of the studies reviewed, such as how young people experienced their access or lack thereof to higher education by virtue of their gender.

Theoretical Orientation

The French Sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), is popularly recognized as one of the most preeminent sociologists of the late twentieth century. His theoretical contributions and methodological works have been of global influence and remained prominent in different academic fields of social sciences including political science, economics, educational research and essentially relevant to sociological analysis of the contemporary society (Reed-Danahey, 2004). There are two versions of Bourdieuan theory. The first is his theory of society generally termed as “*practical theory*” in which he emphasizes the significant role of social interaction and specific context of study objects in more accurate and complete sense. The second strand is Bourdieu’s concepts of *habitus* alongside with other concepts of different forms of capital which are linked in complex ways to his theory and together deepens understanding of the workings of power relations in human society as a whole (Bourdieu, 1984).

Pierrie Bourdieu, a renowned scholar in the field of sociology was especially prominent in the area of education, culture and political sociology. He was an author of almost 40 books and about 400 articles (Calhoun and Wacquant, 2002; Reed-Danahay, 2005). It is not surprising therefore that in Africa and Nigeria as a focus, the work of Bourdieu is taking a gradual diffusion, even though his core concepts have recently been pronounced interdisciplinary. To date, sociologists have become inclined to the work of Bourdieu, whether in chronological or reversed order.

According to Bourdieu, (1980), in attaining cultural capital and educational attainment, the roles of family cannot be underestimated as an agent of socialization for transferring cultural capital from parents to offspring, in a relatively vicious circle. Reflecting the class position, the concept of his

'habitus' introduced a form of cultural inheritance making only the elite's capital to be valued and recognized in society (Bourdieu, 1984). Young people from the elite family are therefore exposed to elite culture and are generally at an advantage. Once the differences between the two classes are created, it could lead to "*symbolic violence*" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990:5). It depicts that parental cultural capital is the background required for cultural capital to be transmitted from one generation to another generation.

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this study is to provide a detailed description of challenges faced by girls in gaining access and particularly to identify how they tend to retain their higher education status. Also, to know how their specific socio-cultural factors are being affected by gender discrimination in different ways in their higher educational pursuit.

Research Methodology

Given that the present study focuses on exploring girl's access and retention in higher educational institutions in relation to some underpinning factors, such as poverty and socio-cultural factors, this paper adopts the qualitative method. One feature that led to the decision for these approaches is that most empirical research on the effects of poverty on education, particularly in African countries, has emphasized causal explanations and the frequent occurrence of girls dropping out of school or not attending school. Such findings provide little understanding of the various contexts and absence of the voices of the girls themselves on what might be influencing their informed choices. Moreover, it is pertinent to this study to employ a method that would enhance a rich data in understanding the effects of social norms among girls in relation to their access and retention to higher education.

Thus, this paper adopts the social constructionist approach by Kvalve (1996) framework for qualitative research interviewing. These include the following seven stages: themes, designing, interviewing, transcribing, interpreting, verifying and reporting. This approach offers a systematic process that is capable of addressing the objectives and research questions of this study.

Research Setting

Lokoja, Kabba and Okene were the three selected community for this study. These areas are characterized with trading and commercial activities. Up until today, they continued to grow in terms of population, economic and commercial activities. It is a common practice for girls to engage in commercial or income generating activities especially during peak periods in motor parks, other public places and in market places. In terms of education, the cities have a host of higher educational institutions, among which are Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja; the Federal University, Lokoja; Federal College of Education, Okene, and; College of Agriculture, Ahmadu Bello University, Kabba.

Sample Size

The targeted females according to this study are 18 to 25 years that are in higher educational institutions (otherwise referred to as the in-school in this paper), and those dropped out of school (referred to as the out-of school). In other words, those who could retain their educational pursuit were regarded as the in-school, while those who could not were the out-of school. However, for the obvious reason of time and particularly financing the research (cost of running the research), a total of 120 participants were recruited for this study. For the individual in-depth interviews (IDIs), a total of 60 respondents were selected: this consists of 30 respondents from in-school and 30 respondents out of school. On the other hand however, 60 respondents were employed for the focus group discussions (FGDs) comprising 30 respondents in-school and 30 out-of school.

The participants were served with soft drinks to enable them feel free for interactions. Consequently, the data were analyzed using the micro soft word.

Presentation of Findings

Evidence from young people's account from the IDIs and FGDs also reveal that most of the participants' mothers had lower level of education compared to their fathers. Qualitative response to the level of parental education is captured in the excerpts that follow.

...my mother told me that she never attended any school as against her wish...but my dad was lucky to be his dad's favourite... so he had an HND... [FGD, in-school, aged 19]

...I had three elder sisters who had completed their secondary school education, but none is in higher school ...my dad believed that should be the peak of girls' education...so when I tried to go to Polytechnic, my dad didn't encourage me, so I dropped out [IDI, in-school, aged 20]

...my dad called my one day and told me to ask my mum if she knows the way to school. Although, initially I felt so bad, but now, I'm used to it. [IDI, out-of school, aged 20]

...as we're seated here, my younger brother is in the University while I'm trading...I also support him financially [FGD, out-of school, aged 21]

The unequal access to education might be attributed to the fact that Nigeria as in other African nation states is a male dominated society, where the male child is provided with greater socio-economic benefits and prioritized over their female counterparts. Similarly, previous studies (Duze and Yaz'ever, 2013; Amadi, 2014) across African societies have identified gender differentiation as a major determinant in gaining access to higher education in most African societies.

Apart from the occupational categories analyzed, the IDIs and FGD revealed that parents were engaged in dual or multiple income activities. For instance, some participants revealed the following:

...ah for many of us to survive and go to school... most of our parents have to combine different jobs with farming... (others nodding in agreement)
[FGDs, in-school, aged 18]

...my parents are farmers, at the same time my dad works in the Local Government as a security officer, he opened a shop for my mum where she sells different items...so most time we're either on farm or shop to assist them...so, that is how we survive as family...[IDIs, in-school, aged 19]

...my father work in the Ministry and also has a farmland, so most of the weekends, we are all in the farm... but I'm still planning to do more works on my own and save towards my higher education... [IDIs, out-of school, aged 24]

From these responses, one could observe that the levels of income or economic generating activities in the study locality are generally low and insufficient to see their children through higher education. This is evident by such responses in the IDIs where a female participant, aged 24 expressed her intention to seek further employment or income generating activity to be able to achieve her desire in obtaining higher education. Such comments are typical of many young people's accounts in this study. For example, a number of in-school girls were found combining economic activities with their studies, while some of the out-of school were found engaging in various income generating activities which confirms their enthusiasm to save towards their education and, or livelihood.

In similar vein, when the young people were further asked whether their financial constraint had any implications on their academic performance, the following comments are compelling to take note of:

...you know sometimes, I won't even have money to buy textbooks, make photocopies...and many times we're asked to do some online assignment, I kept needing money most time to fix many things in school... but I know God will see me through [IDI, in-school, aged 18]

...like in my first year, I was in the upper class, but now I'm in lower class due to the fact that I cannot afford some materials that were recommended... even now I have to combine my school with some petty jobs to make ends meet... the painful thing is that my grade has dropped because I'm not concentrating enough... [IDI, in-school, aged 25]

...in fact, I left school at a point when I couldn't cope again...I kept needing to pay this and that...and no hope from anywhere...I had to take time off to look out for money...even as I'm in school now, I still go out to do my business so that I can survive...so, we're really struggling to get through... [IDI, in-school, aged 24]

These qualitative responses provide insights to some of the barriers faced by girls in institutions of higher learning in sustaining their enrolment and performance. It confirms that a number of learners struggle for economic survival which has a direct impact on their academic performance. In the survey a vast majority of respondents (81.7%) affirmed that their performance in school have been negatively affected due to economic constraints. Such findings corroborate with existing literature across Africa that generally, young people are vulnerable to the effects of poverty, resulting in a large number dropping-out of school (Hervish and Clifton, 2012).

Participants' accounts in the IDIs and FGDs illustrate how girls were economically constrained and had to negotiate access to higher education through their involvement in economic activities and other sources that could generate monetary rewards for them. The following responses are representative of most participants.

...many times we do businesses that fetch us money while on campus...some do different part-time works like barbering, photography, plating of hairs, okada rider, tailoring and so forth... so we don't wait for our parents to fix everything from their little incomes...[FGD, in-school, aged 21]

Umm... as a young girl I'm very responsible and committed to anything I want to achieve...since I decided I wanted to go to school I started okada business (motor cycle) for transportation on commercial basis...even though it's a risky business ...it helps me to raise some money before I got the admission that got me here... [IDI, in-school, aged 23]

...I don't stress my parents any more for tuition or maintenance...I have mini cabs (locally referred to as keke or napep) I used to transport people at my leisure and during weekends... recently I added another one which I rented out for returns (money)...I have no regret going into transport although there was a time I had an accident while returning from town and couldn't walk for about 2 months but thank God I survived it... the money I realize here on this campus is enough for me...sometimes I even assist some of my friends and younger ones in need... [IDI, in-school, aged 22]

...before coming to this school, I had learnt tailoring...so I came to school with my sewing machines... leave off campus, so am able to relate with many people that patronize my service...I have an album where my customers can select their styles and many people patronize my service...doing tailoring has really sustained me on campus but consume much times (Interviewer: How?)

you know people can bring their clothes and expect you to complete the work in few days, so many times I miss my lectures because I don't want to lose their patronage ... (But don't you think such can affect your grade?)... well, I know... but I need the money to survive for now... [IDI, in-school, aged 22]

...well, I was able to raise some money during my IT (Industrial Training)... they still call me occasionally to come and help them do one thing or the other and pay me some amount of money... [IDI, in-school, aged 23]

...I plait hairs for other students and they pay me in return... I use this money to settle my hands out and other small expenses... [FGD, in-school, aged 25]

Yeah... I decided to go into modeling about 2 years ago... I model for some companies and they pay me very well... the only problem I have is timing of their events because sometimes they want me to come when I should be in school... it clashes a lot with my lectures and sometimes my exams... many times I also work with advertising agencies to showcase some products for different companies... that's how I make some money... [IDI, in-school, aged 25]

Additionally, a young girl in a particular focus group session recounted how some female students engage in sex for money:

...well, people survive somehow while on campus... some of our girls are into aristo business or sugar daddy... they make money by going out with rich men that come to pick them for weekends... we also have big boys that make money by arranging those girls on campus for those rich men... [FGD, in-school, aged 24]

These excerpts are representative of the narratives of most of the girls which reveal the social context in which they negotiate their access to higher education. The above data covers a wide range of economic activities such as trading, tailoring, transporting, hair dressing, modeling and including sex work as coping strategies for some in-school girls. As revealed earlier in this section, while girls may be expected to be economically dependent on their parents to a large extent, 'full' parental support seems to have been limited by the low socio-economic status of these communities and the relatively poor standard of living of most of its members which is common in many other communities in Nigeria and other parts of Africa (Yakubu and Aderonmu, 2010; Ojimba, 2011).

As revealed earlier, a number of on campus girls (in-school) in a FGD session also attest to the fact that education was a priority for some girls and make them proud among their peers, representing their hope to securing a brighter future. The following FGD data illustrates the on campus females students when the facilitators asked questions about their hopes and aspirations. See their comments:

...well, now that I made it to higher institution [she pause] I want to pass all my exams so that I can become someone of high reputation in life... it's good to be well educated, apart from the fact that it is highly prestigious in our place, I will also be able to get a good job and excel above those that didn't go to school... [Others nodding in agreement]

...yes, it's prestigious to be highly educated, especially in our town here...nobody will look down on you when you're educated...people will just have to respect you when you talk in public...that's why even if your parents [cannot afford] to pay your school fees, you will want to do anything to get money on your own to go to school...so that in future you will have opportunities to get good job, good life and so many other good things ...

...in fact as a woman, men of high caliber cannot ask you for marriage if you're not educated... (Facilitator interjected with the question: How?)...ah because generally men want educated women even when they're not educated...so if you're not educated as a woman, only lower cadre men will be after you...[Others nodding in agreement].

(Another respondent said)...it is only after completing your higher institution you can get good jobs, and live quality life...it will also make your parents proud...

(Another respondent affirmed that)...nothing good is easy to come by, so most of us try hard to do all that is possible to do well in school...just because of the future benefits...

...anything you want to do in life requires education... with your certificate, life is easier...I went to Lagos to visit my elder brother during our last holiday....he has a car, beautiful rented apartment, and doing a nice job...and I just love it...

Yeab....like my father would say, if you don't want to end up a farmer like me then you have to be studius and get all the marks....personally I love to do sophisticated jobs...you know, good office work...and I hate to be the odd one out of my peers...

As mentioned earlier, many respondents in the study appeared to have been socialized or highly sensitized towards western education as a gate way to brighter future and psychological wellbeing. Thus, acquiring higher education is of key importance among girls in this study. As revealed in the above quotations, every

participant consistently noted the importance of achieving higher education as a concept of success and prestigious social status within their social circle. Even among the out of campus (out-of school) respondents in the in-depth interviews, higher education was viewed as admirable. One female interviewee currently out of campus said:

“...my dream is to be a lawyer. We’re two girls and two boys in my family... my elderly ones are all in higher institutions, and one had just finished... so I don’t want to be left out, I’m praying hard to pass my JAMB this time around so that I can achieve my dream by going back to school...” [IDI, out-of school, aged 22]

And another (IDI, girl):

...well, I thank God because my business is growing bigger and bigger, I have money to spend and care for my family... so I’m not losing both sides... (Interviewer: How do you mean?) ...ah you know in our area people always mock or look down on people that didn’t go to school...even educated girls will tell you they can’t marry uneducated boys. if you don’t go to school like them...they think they have many advantages over you...but I have money that some of them that are well educated did not have now...I have about 5 people working under me now...am even planning to go back to school soon...I want to start a part-time study for ND certificate... [IDI, out of school, aged 23]

...em [she stammered]...I’m an apprentice at the moment...I’m just doing it to avoid being idle...I plan to further my education...but I need to retake my WAEC exam and Jamb...the whole thing look impossible to me but I pray for God to help me pass my Maths and English...even when I become fashion designer I still want to go school...I don’t want my secondary school

mates to start seeing me as inferior to them...then people don't really respect you when you speak in public like the educated ones...then going back to school will make my parents proud... [IDI, out-of school, aged 20]

Another out of campus respondent commented that:

Umm.. I've failed the entry exam three times now and I've given up furthering my education...even though my father kept encouraging me... my mom also kept pestering me that my sister is now ahead of me that I should keep trying...you know, they both kept asking people to talk to me...my friends and other people around would not let me be...so I've decided to go for another trial... [IDI, out-of school, aged 21]

From the data information, it became clear that even when the young people have no stable financial income or are relatively buoyant, they still prefer to pursue higher education to 'build' their self-esteem or personalities which accords respect in their societies. A typical example is the young lady (aged 23) who was ready to negotiate access to campus by enrolling in a part-time study to obtain a higher degree certificate. Also, a good number of participants regardless of religion background, and some of them have their religious groups as a motivating factor for their decisions to further their study at a higher educational level. The following comments allude to the Christian religion being a dominant influence on the participants' interest in pursuing higher education:

...well, I already know the importance of education...everything is changed now...you need your certificate to do many things...even before you can go to seminary school to be a Reverend father, you must first complete your higher institution... [IDI, in-school, aged 24]

Ah, we pray daily for God's provision ...about 4 of my home cell members in my church are now working in Abuja after their service year (NYSC) ... no body want to be the left out...our pastor is also helping people to raise money especially if you are known as serious member of the church... [FGD, in-school, aged 18]

...our pastor encourage us a lot...they inform us during church announcement whenever the Jamb form is out/open...they encourage us to pass Jamb and gain admission to higher institution... we have been made to understand that we cannot even spread Lord's gospel if we're not educated...to evangelize, do soul winning works requires high level of education this days... [IDI, in-school, aged 19]

And another:

...like our pastor used to say in our youth group...that without education, how can we get a good job or money to serve God better?...then we have been made to realize that education will provide us gainful employment for us if we can serve God, and help the less privilege... [FGD, in-school, aged 20]

...then if we look at the Bible some of the disciples of Jesus was well learned...Luke is Doctor even Paul is a lawyer... {all laughed} [FGD, in-school, aged 21]

...one of my source of encouragement is my youth leader in church...many times they organize extra moral classes for us as youth in the church...whenever we're writing exams the pastor calls for group intercessory prayer to pray for us so that we can have remarkable success...honestly, our churches encourage every one of us to do well in school...they also pray for

our parents' businesses to prosper so that they can have sufficient money to pay our school fees... [IDI, in-school, aged 20]

From these quotations, a major reason drawn in favour of western education is the domination of Christianity in the region. Most of the participants in this study are Christians; hence a number of them mentioned their religion as an important factor that encourages them to go to school. References were made to their pastors, church group leaders, and peers in church who have influenced them in different ways to further their education. Essentially, one of the empirical studies that utilized nationally representative data to study educational achievement in Nigeria have observed that young people belonging to Christian households are five times more likely to embrace formal education and attend school than children from other forms of religion Kazeem, A., Jensen, L. & Stokes, S. (2010). This corroborates existing literatures which argues that some cultures might be academically advantageous to formal education than others (Thernstrom, and Thernstrom, 2003).

It should be noted that a few of the young females appeared to be powerless or constrained in terms of their parents low economic status, obliging them to exploit various other means to negotiate access to higher education. The following comments were emphatically stated in a short interview with three young girls who are currently out of school:

...yes, I've completed my secondary school... I've come here to work so that I can start a big business...(do you have younger ones in school)...yes, I also have a younger brother in Polytechnics...(who is responsible for their education?) my Dad and Mum...then they often request for money from my uncle in Abuja...(do you like to further your study?)...ah I've given up on that...you know, my father is only desperate for his sons....he wanted to send me to his sister living in the North but I refused...his sister has a

restaurant and I refused to go to her because I don't want to be a sales girl like one of my friend...so I will save my own money here and continue my life... [IDI, out-of school, aged 23]

My boyfriend is the one responsible for my school fees...anything he tells me to do, I just have to comply...so he'll not be annoyed and stop it...I couldn't stop him from whatever he wants...I give him any time he wants sex...can't say no...as a matter of fact, he hasn't used condom before, he does skin to skin. S, because I refused him sex without condom, he stopped paying for my school. That's why I'm out of school now... [IDI, out-of school, aged 23]

...I was doing my own business when I met this man...we started dating...I was so happy when he told me that he will sponsor me to higher institution, so I've taken JAMB form and reading for the exam... [Researcher asked: Are your parents aware of this man and his intention to train you in school?] Ah, yes they know that they can't afford to train me to University, so they're praying for him...but the funny aspect is that they went round to look for money to put my brother in University, he's now in year two...am not angry at them because my elder brother is the first...and he's a man... [IDI, out of school, aged 24]

...I finished secondary school about 3 years ago but my result was not really good... I made another attempt but it didn't work out again...I didn't pass English subject...then, my father was upset that I'm wasting his little money so I just decided to relax about school and look for other things to do...recently I got a job...through this man I met sometimes ago...He was working at that company as one of the top officers...we just met by chance and he seemed to like me, so I didn't hesitate to move closer to him...because I knew he would be able to help me regarding a job and even for my

brother...he was able to use his influence to secure this job for me and promised to assist my brother ... [IDI, out of school, aged 24].

These narratives reveal volumes on how young women's access to higher education was negatively impacted. One set of data reveals how young women negotiated sexual relationships with their partners who could support them economically. Such narratives of her parent's awareness and support also indicate how poorer parents may support the engagement of their daughters in this form of relationship, as opposed to the traditional norms and moral discourses that condemn transactional and premarital sex in this community. In the African context, it has been argued that despite the trends towards a more global culture often accompanied by a shift to western ideas and values, such as on western education, evidence from this study have shown that young ladies are influenced by dominant gender norms and their economic circumstances. In this study, a number of girls were found to be actively involved in negotiating access and retention to higher institutions in various complex ways such as the young woman negotiating access through her male partner. However, some of the young females like the second and third female participants illustrate that some of the deprived young females had accepted their limitations and would not negotiate other means to enroll into higher education.

Conclusions

By way of inference, studies have revealed that patriarchy is a system of practice that dominates and subordinates women, particularly on the basis of religion, economics, ethnicity and socio-cultural practices. The unequal social and economic power relations between young women and their male partners often limit women's exercise of their sexual agency and safety, such that young women like those quoted earlier were unable to negotiate sexual pleasure and safety such as to insist on the use of protective condom in their relationships.

Clearly, socio-cultural and economic factors including social norms, religion, as well as gender-based expectations remained a major influence on young women's access and retention to higher education in the research locality.

Contribution to Knowledge

Since only a few studies have attended to the link between the multiple factors and the various contexts that influence young people, and particularly girl's access into higher education. This paper has been able to explore the relativity of girl's access to their educational pursuit in relation to their social cultural context.

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