

GENDER DIFFERENCES AND PERCEPTION OF NATIONAL SECURITY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OBANLIKU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE

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Abstract

National security is a key component and major concern of any sovereign state that seeks growth and national development at all levels. National security entails that a nation's sovereignty, its territory, integrity, national interests and pride, the general wellbeing of its citizenry, and the country's institutions are not only preserved, protected and improved, but are also enhanced. The aim of this study was to evaluate the differences in gender perception of national security among high school students in Obanliku Local Government Area of Cross River State. The current insecurity in contemporary Nigeria has raised concerns on development, security, and stability of the nation. These concerns cut across all social strata of the Nigerian state including secondary school students since the future appears bleak with no promises of hope for development and progress. It is in view of this predicament that this study investigated the gender differences and perception of national security among secondary school students in Obanliku Local Government Area of Cross River State. Survey method was used with mixed research techniques for data collection and analysis. The study revealed that there exist marginal differences in perceptions of national security by both genders within the study area. The result further revealed that the male gender is more aware of a future national security threat than the female gender. The study also showed that there is a huge gap in the general gender perception of national security among high school students. This is indicated by 65.6% for males as against 34.4% for females. The result revealed that females in high schools in Obanliku L.G.A. of Cross River State have lesser perception of national security threats as compared to their male counterparts. The study therefore, recommended that more aggressive measures should be put in place by the government and the guidance and counseling experts in order to create more awareness among high school students.

Keywords: National security, high school, secondary school students, gender differences and gender perception.

Introduction

Issues of national security have become critical topics of discussion among many stakeholders, scholars, journalists, entrepreneurs, politicians, security agencies, women groups, non-governmental organizations, foreign and local investors and secondary school students as well. In fact, one may argue that secondary school students are the worst hit in terms of their vulnerability to all forms of security threats. This is especially so, as in recent times, secondary school students, especially in Northern Nigeria have become soft targets to insurgents, bandits, kidnappers and other criminals that have consistently and persistently threatened the hitherto peaceful co-existence of the people in the region and the Nigerian state in general.

It is in light of this tempestuous and tumultuous circumstances in Northern Nigerian that Obiefuna and Adams (2017) assert that the culture of violent that has characterized Northern Nigeria is the root cause of this sustained insecurity atmosphere. In truth, these insecurity challenges in Northern and some states in other parts of the country, most importantly, the abduction of secondary school girls in several schools in Northern Nigeria, like the cases of Chibok school girls kidnap that took place on 14th April, 2014 in Borno State. Haruna (2018) opines that the issue of security of school children is a serious problem that is affecting the economy of Nigeria. He states how on Monday, 19th February, 2017, over 105 school girls were abducted in Dapchi, Yobe State of Nigeria. Another 300 schoolboys were also abducted by gunmen in Kankara, Katsina State. In Tegna, a town in Nigeria's Niger State, about 136 students and a number of teachers were kidnapped from SalihuTanko Islamic School. In Jangabe, in Zamfara State, another 300 girls of Government Girls Secondary School were abducted in February 2021. 11th March 2021 also witnessed yet another kidnap attack by armed bandits on Federal College of Forestry Mechanization, Afaka, in Igabi Local Government Area of Kaduna State, and over thirty students were abducted. At Damishi, Kaduna State, armed gunmen stormed the Bethel Baptist High School and 122 students were kidnapped on 5th July, 2021. This gruesome and inhuman abduction is what Yusuf (2021) describes as “Nigeria's alarming trend of mass abductions of school children” (p.1).

These cases of alarming abductions of school children are not only experienced in Northern Nigeria but their shadows cast fears among other students in other parts of the country, as these evil and mischievous acts are seen on all social media handles, watched on national television and in print. This has made the average Nigerian student, North or South, East or West to doubt the security of this nation especially as it concerns their future. It is, therefore, in view of this observed phenomenon that this paper intends to investigate the gender differences and perception of national security threats among secondary school students in Obanliku Local Government Area of Cross River State. The paper will discuss the conceptual clarification of basic terms, purpose of the study, justification of the study, review of related literature, research methodology, presentation and discussion of the result of the study, counseling implications, and the conclusion and major recommendations that will guide the government, non-governmental organizations, and future scholars.

Conceptualization of Basic Terms

Conceptual clarification of basic terms in any academic research of this nature is ideal for one to understand what the terms stand for, why they are used and how they apply in the research. Gender differences, according to Giudice (2015), the enquiry into the meaning of gender differences has a very long history of over a century. He asserts thus:

Competing theories of gender vary in the role they assign to evolutionary history, cultural practices, endocrine and neurobiological mechanisms, and individual learning; they also vary in the extent to which they regard these levels of explanation as complementary or mutually exclusive. While the field is rife with theoretical debate and controversy, decades of empirical research have yielded a wealth of robust generalizations about the way males and females differ across domains, cultures, and developmental stages. (p.750)

He further avers that gender differences are observed in almost every aspect of human relationship and communication. He notes that in cooperation and competition with males, temperament, personality traits, social play, non-verbal expression, verbal ability language use and conversational style, there are clear differences between the genders. By extension and implication, therefore, one can say that there are clear differences in gender perception of national security among secondary students in Obanliku Local Government Area.

Pagnani in the Encyclopedia of creativity (2011) defines gender differences as “distinctions that can be made between maleness and femaleness or between males and females themselves”. Pagnani (2011) further states that several researches have shown that there exists no sharp difference with regard to “potential” except with regards to “performance”. To explain further, he writes that these differences are, according to him ascribe to both genders by nature, as some scholars would have it, while others are ascribed to society as some scholars would want us to believe. He concludes that the truth may view between both opinions (p.11).

In her psychosocial contribution to the gender difference, Nolen-Hoeksema (2013) differs considerably from Pagnanis' (2011) “potential” and “performance” differences that may be occasioned by either nature or societal descriptions of the genders. She is of the view that there are no significant differences in psychosocial factors such as “cross-cultural differences in the amount of alcohol use in men and women” (p.2) and that there are also some of the factors one may consider when examining gender differences. Concluding, she affirms that men who drink alcohol are socially acceptable than those who do not drink alcohol. This gender difference has been shown and proven to be so by many scientific researches. Wallentin (2020) shares the same view and equally explains the concept of gender difference from the same point of view of Nolen-Hoeksema.

For Sam (2022) gender differences apply to “the typical differences between men and women that is often specific to a particular culture where domains as careers, communication, health, social awareness and orientation to the environment are seen” (p.25). The variations between male and female, according Sam could be observed in “behaviour, cognition, emotion or other psychological traits that are attributed to gender” (p.29). Conclusively, one may agree with the definition of gender as stated by the world Health Organization (WHO) which defines the concept thus: “gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men, such as norms, roles, relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed”. This definition gives a clearer picture of the concept of gender, while differences mark those disparities that exist between both genders.

Having explained the concept gender difference, it is also pertinent to examine what scholars have said about the concept of national security. As characteristics of most concepts; defining national security is also problematic and herculean a task to undertake. Various

conceptualizations and definitions have been advanced from various theoretical perspectives. Here, we should attempt some conceptual clarification of national security with the view to throwing more lights on the concept and thereby show how relevant these concepts are to this article. Osisanya (2011) defines national security as “the ability of a state to cater for the protection and defense of its citizen” (p.2). For one to understand this conceptual explanation as given by Osisanya, one must first and foremost understand Makinda's (1998) conceptual clarification of the term “Security”. Makinda explains that security means: “the preservation of the norms, rules, institutions and values of society”. (p.282). He further emphasizes that all these institutions, norms, values and rules must “be protected from both military and non-military threats” (p.283). From this conceptual clarification, it is obvious that the term “preservation” is key to understanding of national security.

The term security is very important since according to Osisanya (2011), it plays an important role in politics both at the national and international levels. Williams (2008) adds that “security is therefore, a powerful political tool in claiming attention for priority items in the competition for government attention” (p.40). The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs expands the concept security, nay, national security to cover such aspects and dimensions such as (i) economic-which has to do with economic stability in terms of creation of employment opportunities and eradication of poverty. (ii) Food-security which are measures put in place to fight food insecurity, famine, and hunger and starvation. (iii) Health-this has to do with the fight against HIV/AIDs, other diseases, malnutrition, unsafe food, and provision of health facilities for all its citizenry. (iv). Environmental protection (v) Community security, and (vi) Personal security, and (vii) political security. So, the concept national security covers all these aspects and not just the military security of the nation.

While most of the conceptual clarifications present global and African perspectives to national security, one invaluable resource material that has examined the concept from a Nigerian point of view is the 2019 report of the Nigerian National Security Strategy. This document deals with the strategic plans of the Nigerian government on how best to handle the present security threats faced by the Nigerian government and its citizenry. The document, particularly chapter five deals with policies that handle key areas of our national security concerns such as: economic security and opportunities, energy security, research in science and technology, food security, labour security, health security, education security and environmental security. These key areas include political security, social security, cyber security, space technology, transnational organized crime, maritime security, and critical national assets and infrastructure. All these are crucial aspects of the nation's national security that have remain the priority of several administrations throughout Nigerian history. In summary, therefore, this section of the paper examined global, African as well as Nigerian perspectives to the concept of national security.

Review of Related Literature

In order to put this article in its proper research perspective, the following resource materials are reviewed with the sole aim of identifying the gap in scholarship. Albrecht and Barnes (2008) affirm, in the study of females' contribution to national security and policy-making that it is high time the government took the contributions of women in national security matters seriously. The duo assert that women's involvement would be of immense benefits and broaden their “opportunities to integrate gender issues into national level security policy making” (p.1). They conclude that the involvement of women in national security issues would change their perception of national security. This way, women's voices would be heard and gender dimensions

of women would also help in national security policy making. While this work is relevant in projecting the role women should play and how this will bring about their involvement, participation and perception of national security issues, the resource material did not mention, in clear and unambiguous terms how this could impact on secondary school students, especially those in Obanliku Local Government Area.

Polko and Kimic (2021) examine how gender differentiates the perception of safety in urban parks. The main purpose of the article was to investigate the perception security by women in public spaces since several studies have shown that they are the most vulnerable. The survey showed that there is a significant difference between male and female participants that were used for the study. This difference shows that women perception of safety or security is slightly higher than that of men. Men appear to be more secured in urban parks as compared to the women.

McGill and Thompson (2018) in their study, investigated the gender differences in information security perceptions and behaviours by using a sample of 624 home users. The results show that “females exhibit significantly lower overall levels of security behaviour than males. Furthermore, individual perceptions and behaviours in many cases also vary by gender. Our work provides evidence that gender effects should be considered when formulating information security education, training, and awareness initiatives. It also provides a foundation for future work to explore information security gender differences more deeply” (p.17).

Bonk (2015) in his article examines security from African perspective focusing on the role religion plays in security issues. He believes that security is every one's business irrespective of your gender differences. For him, Africa needs peace and security. He further pointed out that the only problem with Africa is that its religious practices, in a way, cause insecurity in most African communities. Bonk's work is of immense value as it examines the role religion plays in security issues from an African perspective. He however, did not examine gender differences and perception of national security among secondary school students.

Ajamu (2015) discusses the implications of ethnic and religious crises in northern Nigeria on the security of the nation. Just like Ampitan (2015), ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria have changed the entire narrative of national security discourses. Olaleye (2015) differ from the conclusions and submissions of Ajamu and Ampitan who assert that ethnic and religious conflicts have caused changes in Nigerian security system. For him, if Nigerians imbibe African indigenous knowledge of brotherly love and peaceful co-existence, security will return to the Nigerian nation. In a similar thought, Isanbor (2015) concludes that if there is a functional interplay of peace and human rights observances in Nigeria, national insecurity would be adequately addressed. This is, however, not the view expressed by Chenimuya (2015) who opines that for national security to be restored in the Nigerian state, ethical principles must be maintained by both political office holders and the entire people of Nigeria. This submission is in a way, the same as the opinion and conclusion of the work of scholars such as Familu, and Oke (2015).

Two scholars have stood out in their perspective on national security from a gender point of view. These are Iwuoha and Anusiem (2015). The scholars posit that security, be it at whatever level, is the primary concern of all genders. In the Nigerian context however, they both conclude that from a gender point of view, females should also form part of the decision-making body, especially at the national level, state and local government levels. This will enable women contribute their own ideas/opinions on national security issues especially as the United Nation has recognized the role women ought to play in security matter.

The above review has exposed the starkest truths so far. First, from a global perspective, there exist paucity of literature on gender differences and perception of national security among secondary students in Obanliku Local Government Area. This shows that no literature exists, at least, as far as we know, from the searches of the various search engines online, on the subject under investigation. Furthermore, most literature on the subject matter from an African point of view did not also address this research theme as majority of them only focus on security issues with none addressing how different gender among secondary school students perceive national security. Moreso, the reviewed literature that focused on the Nigerian experience of national security, also did not adequately discuss gender differences and their perception of national security among post-primary school students in the aforementioned area of study. In view of this academic gap, this research paper is significant as it addressed gender differences and perception of national security among post-primary school students in Obanliku Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Methodology

Method and material

The mixed research method was used in gathering and analyzing data for this paper. The questionnaire showed seven key areas of differences and perceptions of national security by male and female participants in the study. The questionnaire was pilot tested in a class of fifty and necessary adjustment on the questionnaire were made before they were finally distributed to the sample of 250 students, all in the High School class three (SS 3). Questionnaire items focused on: (i) general gender perception on national security by post-primary school students, (ii) extent to which both male and female differ on national security, (iii) female perception of national security, (iv) male responses on national security, (v) measure the level of perception by both genders, (vi), measure the level of awareness of national security by both genders, and (vii) investigate if both genders differ in their perception of security threat in Obanliku Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Research design

The questionnaire was designed in a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agreed, agreed, strongly disagreed, disagreed, and neutral. The study spans between May 15th and June 15th, that is one-month period and a census method was use in distributing the research instrument to students of SS 3 covering three different arms (SS 3A, SS 3B and SS 3C). A total of 100 instruments were distributed to SS 3A and same to SS 3B while SS 3C had fifty instruments. All these instruments were distributed in Busi Community Secondary, Ijua, in Obanliku Local Government Area and were calculated in simple percentage.

Sample size and technique

As stated above, a population size of 250 students of post-primary school in Busi Community Secondary School were selected carefully using census method. Three different arms (SS 3A, SS 3B and SS 3C) were used as participants. SS 3A N100, SS 3B N100, and SS 3CN50. Total = 250. The sample differ in term of gender but similar in terms of religion, age, socio-cultural background, life style and accommodation.

5. Result and discussion of research findings

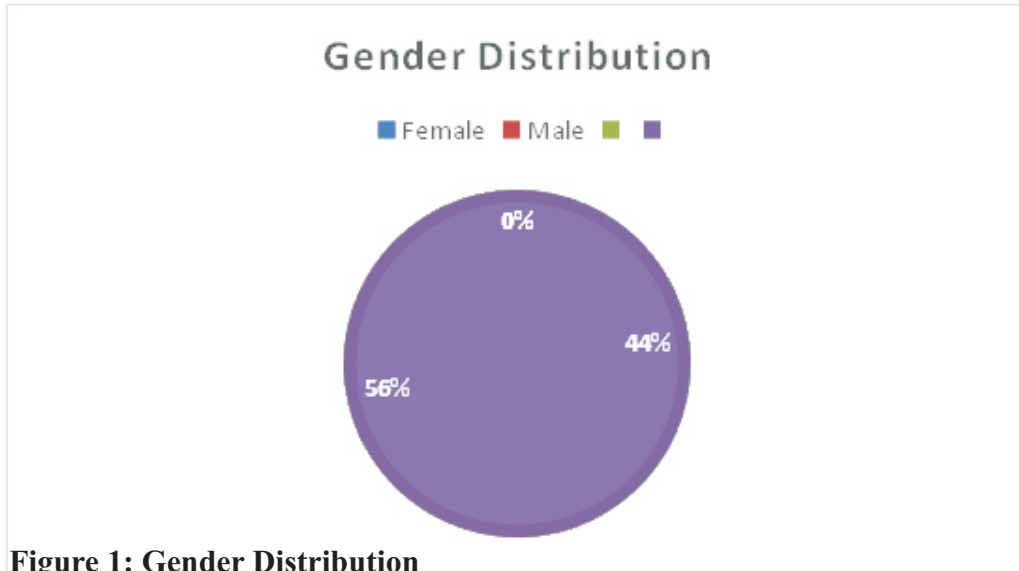


Figure 1: Gender Distribution

Table 1
Gender Distribution

| | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------|-----------|----------------|
| Female | 111 | 44.4% |
| Male | 139 | 55.6% |
| Total | 250 | 100% |

Figure 1 and Table one above showed that one hundred and eleven participants of the selected student population were female, amounting to 44.4% while male population stood at 139 that is, 55.6% of the student population selected for the study.

Table 2

General gender perception of national security threat among secondary school studen

| | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Female | 86 | 34.4% |
| Male | 164 | 65.6% |
| Total | 250 | 100% |

The difference in gender perception of national security is, as indicated above diverse as female participants strongly agreed that they have heard about national security issues on many social media platforms, television news and in print as well. This population has 34.6% while the male gender has 65.6%. None of the participant ticked other options of “agreed”, “strongly disagreed” and disagreed”. The difference therefore, is 31.2%

Table 3

| | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Female | 124 | 49.6% |
| Male | 126 | 50.4% |
| Total | 250 | 100% |

The result from the above table indicated that 49.6% of the student participants strongly agreed that they are aware of national security issues, while a slight margin – 50.4% of the male participants also agreed that there is adequate knowledge of national security issues. The difference in gender perception is therefore 0.8%.

Table 4
Female perception of national security by secondary school student

| | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Female | 111 | 100% |
| Total | 111 | 100% |

All the one hundred and eleven female participants that were selected for the study from the cluster of SS 3A, SS 3B and SS 3C agreed that they have a perception of the existence of national security as secondary school students.

Table 5
Male perception of national security by secondary school students

| | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Male | 139 | 100% |
| Total | 139 | 100% |

As shown on table 5 above, this group of male respondents also agreed (100%) that they have clear perception of the issue of national security as post-primary school students.

Table 6

Level of perception by both genders

| Frequency | | | | | | Percentage % | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|------------|----|---|---|--------------|------|------|------|------|
| | SA | A | SD | D | N | SA | A | SD | D | N |
| Female | 98 | 9 | 2 | 2 | - | 39.2% | 3.6% | 0.8% | 0.8% | - |
| Male | 109 | 11 | 7 | 8 | 4 | 43.6% | 4.4% | 2.8% | 3.2% | 1.6% |
| | Total | 250 | | | | 100% | | | | |

Measuring the level of awareness by both genders, the result from the study revealed that female participants indicated on the above table showed that 39.2% strongly agreed, 3.6% agreed, 0.8% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. On the other way round, male respondents indicated that 43.6% strongly agreed, 4.4% agreed, 2.8% strongly disagreed, 3.2% disagreed and 1.6% were neutral.

Table 7

Differences in perception of security threats in Obanliku L.G.A.
of Cross River State

| Frequency | | | | | | Percentage % | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|------------|----|----|---|--------------|------|-------|------|----|
| | SA | A | SD | D | N | SA | A | SD | D | N |
| Female | 40 | 6 | 48 | 12 | 5 | 16% | 2.4% | 19.2% | 4.8% | 2% |
| Male | 120 | 12 | 5 | 2 | - | 48% | 4.8% | 2% | 0.8% | - |
| | Total | 250 | | | | 100% | | | | |

The above table showed that female participants were less worried about security issues among secondary school students in Obanliku. This is shown as follows: 16% strongly agreed, 2.4% agreed while a higher 19.2% of the female participants strongly disagreed that they do not see any security threat among secondary students in Obanliku. 4.8% totally disagreed and an insignificant 2% were neutral. The male on the other hand, strongly agreed that they perceive security threat among post-primary school students. This is indicated by 48%. While 4.8%, 2% and 0.8% agreed, strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. No participant in this cluster was neutral.

From the research findings therefore, there exists gender differences and perception of national security among secondary school student in Obanliku Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Counseling Implications

The result from the field work showed among other things that there is need to adopt more aggressive measures in educating and enlightening post-primary school students of both genders on national security issues. The study further revealed that while there is marginal gender differences in the perception of national security by both genders, counselors are to step-up their commitments in counseling post-primary school students on national security issues. The result is indicative of the fact that counselors have not adequately educated and enlightened students at the post-primary school level.

The implication of all these lapses is that if no radical measures are put in place to address these issues, the post-primary school students will not only become vulnerable, but may be soft targets or victims of insecurity in the near future.

For a population that would grow and become future leaders, those in guidance and counseling ought to measure up and meet the security needs of these vulnerable school children.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has revealed that there is near absence of Guidance and Counseling teachers/staff in the study area. The result revealed that male participants are aware of national security threats than female participants in the study area. The result further revealed that while male respondents perceive future security threat with the percentages as indicated above, female participants are less concerned about future threat. (see table 7 above). From the above results, the following modest recommendations are hereby suggested:

1. The government should train and post more guidance/counseling experts to secondary schools in the rural areas, especially Obanliku which is the study area. This has become necessary as Fulani Jihadists are ravaging and uprooting many autochthonous people in their local communities and Obanliku Local Government Area is no exception.
2. Government should integrate guidance/counseling curriculum into the scheme of work through the Post-Primary Education Board (PPEB). This way, they (students) will be taught and guided by experts in the discipline. This way, young students at that level will be guided on how to avert future security threats.
3. The government at all levels beef up security in the study area especially as there is evidence of Fulani settlement up the Busihills. The presence of security should also be accompanied with, and complimented with the local villante groups that hitherto have been securing the lives and properties of members of the community in the study area.

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