



Youth Poverty In Nigeria

Its Causes, Impact and How it can be alleviated



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Jeffrey Kurebwa and Obadiah Dodo define youth poverty as “the type of poverty that is visible among young people and it renders them vulnerable to challenges relating to education and employment”². A problem that plagues the people of Nigeria today. Youth poverty is driven by the low income in Nigerian households with 63% of Nigerian residents being multidimensionally poor³. This article is concerned with the reasons for low household income and, by extension, youth poverty and what means we may

rectify the deplorable situation we find ourselves in.

CAUSES OF YOUTH POVERTY AND THEIR SOLUTIONS

Polygamy: Religion and Culture

Polygamy, according to the Oxford Dictionary of English, is the practice or custom of having more than one wife or husband at the same time. In Nigeria, as in most places where polygamy is practised, it takes the form of polygyny; the taking of multiple wives by a single man. Now to clarify the causes of polygamy and its nature and effect.

While Islam, under the Sharia law, is often viewed as an agent of polygamy, it is of note that polygamy is predominantly practised in Sub-Saharan Western Africa alone while being out of common practice

¹ ADEPARUA DAMILOLA (2021). Factors Stimulating Poverty In Nigeria. [online] Independent.ng. Available at: <https://independent.ng/factors-stimulating-poverty-in-nigeria/> [Accessed 9 Aug. 2023].

² Jeffrey, K. and Obadiah, D. (2019). Participation of Young People in Governance Processes in Africa. [online] Google Books. IGI Global. Available at: <https://www.google.com.ng/books/edition/Participation>

[of Young People in Governance/ZpGbDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA21&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.com.ng/books/edition/Participation_of_Young_People_in_Governance/ZpGbDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA21&printsec=frontcover) [Accessed 2 Aug. 2023].

³ News, L. (2023). World Bank Poverty Report On Nigeria. [online] Available at: <https://leadership.ng/world-bank-poverty-report-on-nigeria/>.



⁴ Tunisian women free to marry non-Muslims. (2017). BBC News. [online] 15 Sep. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-41278610>.

5 Kramer, S. (2020). Polygamy is rare around the world and mostly confined to a few regions. [online] Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/12/07/polygamy-is-rare-around-the-world-and-mostly-confined-to-a-few-regions/>.

6 Rohmadi, R., Fauzan, F. and Jafar, W.A. (2022). Positive and Negative Impacts of Poligamy in The Life of Muslim Family. *Madania: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman*, [online] 26(1), pp.75–84. doi:<https://doi.org/10.29300/madania.v26i1.6483>.

7 Kramer, S. (2020). Polygamy is rare around the world and mostly confined to a few regions. [online] Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/12/07/polygamy-is-rare-around-the-world-and-mostly-confined-to-a-few-regions/>.

⁸ www.stears.co. (n.d.). Understanding the costs of polygamy in Nigeria. [online] Available at: <https://www.stears.co/article/understanding-the-costs-of-polygamy-in-nigeria/#> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2023].

⁹ Olubajo, O. (2022). Alaafin of Oyo's 18 wives now available for suitors: Oyo Chief. [online] Peoples Gazette. Available at: <https://gazettengr.com/alaafin->

same”¹⁰¹¹ and these regions are the least financially secure¹². According to the National Bureau of Statistics, 63% of Nigerian residents are multidimensionally poor¹³. Taking into account the 28% of Nigerians in polygamous households, we get a 17.64% probability of being both multidimensionally poor and living in a polygamous household. That number on its own might seem small but when the hundreds of millions of Nigerians are considered, it becomes daunting.

The reason for this is simply the restriction it places on these families, specifically the men, in decreasing the probability of them escaping poverty and, as a result, they lack the means to sustain themselves and their families, giving us a glimpse of a self-perpetuated cycle of poverty.

Furthermore, polygamy convolutes and inhibits the full and proper function of marriage. Brooks articulates that “the institution of marriage encompasses far more than sexual relations, but extends to a host of functions, such as property rights, family alliances, and the raising of children”¹⁴. Even the bible, a book

erroneously used as a defence for polygamy, has its marriages considered holistically considering the entire socio-economic aspect even prohibiting its kings from taking multiple wives. And if the total extent of a single marriage is not reached as related in Mosaic and Islamic law, no additional wives may be allotted. Therefore, I find it apparent that the orthodox design of marriage is polygamy and that polygamy is inimical to the well-being of any entity, from a personal to a national scale.

Early marriages

Early or child marriages are defined as marriages occurring before the age of 18 around the world. The 1999 constitution holds the same definition¹⁵. However, there is a lot of discrepancy in the laws surrounding the legal age for an adult or marriage. Okafor articulates this conundrum in the following,

“Article 2 of Children and Young Persons Act, enacted in Eastern, Western and Northern regions... defines a ‘child’ means as person under the age of fourteen years, while ‘young person’

[of-oyos-18-wives-now-available-for-suitors-oyo-chief/](#) [Accessed 8 Aug. 2023].

¹⁰ www.stears.co. (n.d.). Understanding the costs of polygamy in Nigeria. [online] Available at: <https://www.stears.co/article/understanding-the-costs-of-polygamy-in-nigeria/#> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2023].

¹¹ Survey Findings Report. (2022). Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/media/6316/file/2021%20MICS%20full%20report%20.pdf>.

¹² www.stears.co. (n.d.). Welcome to the poverty capital of Nigeria. [online] Available at: <https://www.stears.co/article/welcome-to-the-poverty-capital-of-nigeria/> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2023].

¹³ News, L. (2023). World Bank Poverty Report On Nigeria. [online] Available at: <https://leadership.ng/world-bank-poverty-report-on-nigeria/>.

¹⁴ Brooks, Thom. “The Problem with Polygamy.” *Philosophical Topics*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2009, pp. 109–22. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43154559>. Accessed 3 Aug. 2023.

¹⁵ www.nigeria-law.org. (n.d.). Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. [online] Available at: http://www.nigeria-law.org/ConstitutionOfTheFederalRepublicOfNigeria.htm#Chapter_3 [Accessed 9 Aug. 2023].

means a person who has attained the age of fourteen years and is under the age of seventeen years”¹⁶

“The Immigration Act stipulates that any person below 16 years is a minor, whereas the Matrimonial Causes Act puts the age of maturity at 21. The latter act becomes irrelevant in practice, since the individual States state their age for marriage. As for penal responsibility, Article 50 of the Penal Code (North) states: No act is an offence which is done by a child under seven years of age; or by a child above seven years of age but under twelve years of age who has not attained sufficient maturity of understanding to judge the nature and consequence of such act”¹⁷

“The Matrimonial Causes Act, 2004, S3(1)(e), provides that a party to a marriage must not be an infant. Marriage law in the former Eastern Nigeria S3(1) in particular states that a marriage between or in respect of persons either of whom is under the age of 16 years shall be void”¹⁸

“In the Northern States of Borno, Benue and Kwara, the marriageable age for girls has been fixed by various declarations of Marriage law and Custom Orders. Hence, Kwara 13 years, Idoma and Tiv in Benue, 12 years. The Nigerian Criminal

Code S222 provides against the procurement of girls under 18 years of age and S233 provides against abduction”¹⁹.

Beyond legislation, another reason for child nuptials is religion, specifically Islam. The utilisation of Shari’a law in a third of all Nigerian states is in the North where early marriages are prevalent. And because Nigeria operates with a manifold judiciary system, Shari’a has a basis in legality. Even a senator, Ahmad Yerima, tied the knot with a thirteen-year-old Egyptian and justified it with the marriage of Mohammed to Aisha, a girl aged nine²⁰.

The legislation and religious backing surrounding the marriageable age is truly frightening. This fear is further exacerbated by the statistics of such premature unions in Nigeria^{21,22}.

- 11.5 million girls are married before the age of 15.
- 24.4 million girls are married before the age of 18.
- The majority of 31-70% of girls, wed before 18, aged 20-24 were married in the North with the rest in the East.

¹⁶ Nwonu, C., Okafor and Oyakhiromen, I. (2014). Nigeria and Child Marriage: Legal Issues, Complications, Implications, Prospects and Solutions. [online] 29. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234649997.pdf>.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ www.ahrlj.up.ac.za. (n.d.). Braimah, T S - African Human Rights Law Journal (AHRLJ). [online] Available at: <http://www.ahrlj.up.ac.za/braimah-t-s> [Accessed 9 Aug. 2023].

²¹ Current levels of child marriage Prevalence of child marriage Regional and global comparisons Vulnerable populations. (n.d.). Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/cp/child-marriage/Child%20Marriage%20Country%20Profile%20NGA.pdf> [Accessed 9 Aug. 2023].

²² Child Marriage in West and Central Africa At a Glance. (n.d.). Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/chad/media/246/file/Child-Marriage-in-WCA-At-a-Glance.pdf>.

- 3 in 10 young women were married in childhood.
- 46% of women married before 18 believe wife-beating is justified.
- Over 90% of girls aged 15-17 in some form of a union are out of school.
- 63% of girls married before 18 aged 20-24 gave birth.



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Very worrying numbers, although they have been dropping steadily since the 90s, one little girl is still too many. Coupled with polygamy the dangers of early marriages become amplified. And like polygamy, a practice that victimises half of the nation's population from such a young age, limiting their potential directly contributes to the festering of youth poverty. Early marriage deteriorates the physiological welfare of these girls. Physically through sexual abuse, childbirth (causing conditions such as obstetric fistula—a condition where the rectum and vagina are abnormally connected) and mentally as they are subjugated from such an early age²³.

Okafor sums up my argument as such,

“Child marriage undermines nearly every Millennium Development Goal; it is an obstacle to eradicating poverty, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, improving maternal and child health, and reducing HIV and AIDS. Child marriage also infringes on the rights of women and children by denying them access to an education, good health, and freedom”²⁵.

To eradicate this degeneracy, there must and will be a repeal of inadequate and obscure legislation concerning marriages and children and the introduction of capital punishment for the practitioners of child unions. The tri-fold judiciary must be done away with for the sake of the vulnerable, little girls given in marriage

²³ Nwonu, C., Okafor and Oyakhiromen, I. (2014). Nigeria and Child Marriage: Legal Issues, Complications, Implications, Prospects and Solutions. [online] 29. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234649997.pdf>.

²⁴ OPARA, I. (2021). Save the Children says 78 per cent of girls in forced child marriage in northern Nigeria. [online] International Centre for Investigative Reporting. Available at:

<https://www.icirnigeria.org/save-the-children-says-78-per-cent-of-girls-in-forced-child-marriage-in-northern-nigeria/>.

²⁵ Nwonu, C., Okafor and Oyakhiromen, I. (2014). Nigeria and Child Marriage: Legal Issues, Complications, Implications, Prospects and Solutions. [online] 29. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234649997.pdf>.

every year in favour of singular, national laws that will foster their well-being.

Lack of marketable skills

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's 60x30 Strategic Plan defines marketable skills as "Those skills valued by employers that can be applied in a variety of work settings, including interpersonal, cognitive, and applied skills areas. These skills can be either primary or complementary to a major and are acquired by students through education, including curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities"²⁶. Nigeria lacks this.



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Senator Ngige—the nation's Minister of Labour and Employment—said last year that the rampant unemployment among the youths stems from a "lack of functional skills"²⁸. This ineptitude is due to the deficient educational system in the country. Minister of Education, Malam Adamu, stated at the National Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) conference that it fails to produce "graduates with marketable and employable skills" and it wrestles with the "challenges of skills gaps, especially in technical and vocational fields"²⁹.

Due to the outdated data from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics³⁰, I will rely on Statista for it. The youth unemployment rate in individuals aged 15-24 is 19.61% as of 2021. However, this number may be high because the people in that bracket may be full-time students. As a result of blowback from austerity following the 2016 recession, the tertiary education system became disoriented. Nigerians forked over the highest number of international students annually further increasing the youth unemployment rate probably due to less

²⁶ twu.edu. (n.d.). Marketable Skills | Texas Woman's University | BOLDLY GO. [online] Available at: <https://twu.edu/marketable-skills/#:~:text=Defined%20by%20the%20Texas%20Higher> [Accessed 10 Aug. 2023].

²⁷ Ayodele, B.B., Mercy (2021). Without new skills, Nigerians are being left behind in jobs of the future. [online] Businessday NG. Available at: <https://businessday.ng/features/article/without-new-skills-nigerians-are-being-left-behind-in-jobs-of-the-future/> [Accessed 11 Aug. 2023].

²⁸ Opejobi, S. (2022). Ngige reveals why Nigerian youths are not employable. [online] Daily Post

Nigeria. Available at:

<https://dailypost.ng/2022/04/07/ngige-reveals-why-nigerian-youths-are-not-employable/> [Accessed 10 Aug. 2023].

²⁹ Nigeria, G. (2021). Minister laments skills gap among graduates. [online] The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News. Available at: <https://guardian.ng/appointments/minister-laments-skills-gap-among-graduates/> [Accessed 10 Aug. 2023].

³⁰ nigerianstat.gov.ng. (n.d.). Reports | National Bureau of Statistics. [online] Available at: <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary/read/856>.

privileged youths rising in proportions in the country³¹.

Adamu recommended the government authorise the “mandatory inclusion of trade subjects in the secondary school curriculum and entrepreneurship education in the tertiary education curriculum as part of efforts to bridge the gap”³², arguing for a “curriculum that would equip graduates with the right set of skills to survive in a harsh economic environment”³³. Adamu nonetheless is aware that “most of the schools in the country lack competent teachers and instructional materials for the effective handling of the 37 trade subjects”³⁴. Ngige’s resolution to alleviate this issue was to qualify “37,000 unemployed graduates, 1,000 in each of the states of the federation and FCT, on soft skills and marketable resumes”³⁵. He further said “In the coming months, we will also train 3,500 unemployed youth in various vocations including fashion design, catering and event management, solar panel and CCTV installation, among others”³⁶. This was said 16 months ago. Festering this defunct

education system is the excess subsidy. It artificially controls the system leading to a lack of professionalism, insufficient education and inadequate funding.

More pragmatic steps should be taken to tackle marketability. My simple proposal is this. First, the government should create a pathway into vocational studies after the JSS3 examinations. The subsidies should be removed from the public schools and reallocated to the vocational pathway thereby feeding the immediate need for vocational personnel in the country. Simultaneously, the school-to-profession pipeline should be optimised and fast-tracked. By that I mean reassessing the qualifications for certain roles, for instance, a teacher at a level in SS3 and below does not need a degree before they can be employed. Again, if someone were to pursue cybersecurity, they would be put in apprenticeship programs instead of college which is cheaper, cuts down cost and puts them directly in the line of employment. Additional costs can be cut down by doing away with unnecessary practices such as uniforms then the money saved can be used to purchase profitable materials like textbooks. Of course, the most foundational to any

³¹ Statista. (n.d.). Nigeria - youth unemployment rate 1999-2019. [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/812300/youth-unemployment-rate-in-nigeria/> [Accessed 2 May 2020].

³² Nigeria, G. (2021). Minister laments skills gap among graduates. [online] The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News. Available at: <https://guardian.ng/appointments/minister-laments-skills-gap-among-graduates/> [Accessed 10 Aug. 2023].

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Opejobi, S. (2022). Ngige reveals why Nigerian youths are not employable. [online] Daily Post Nigeria. Available at: <https://dailypost.ng/2022/04/07/ngige-reveals-why-nigerian-youths-are-not-employable/> [Accessed 10 Aug. 2023].

³⁶ Ibid

advantageous change is good governance and that will require substantial reform.

Illiteracy

“Education will do it much faster than legislation. You can’t legislate goodwill” 1964 Malcolm X. The solution to the first two points had been strict legislation which, in itself, is not wrong. However, as pointed out by Mr X, the truly transformative change cannot be reached by mere law. Enlightenment will have to be undergone by society as a whole.



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The World Bank states that as of 2018, 25% of those aged 15-24³⁸ are illiterate

³⁷ Board, P.E. (2020). 14 million Nigerian children deprived of education. [online] Punch Newspapers. Available at: <https://punchng.com/14-million-nigerian-children-deprived-of-education/> [Accessed 11 May 2023].

³⁸ data.worldbank.org. (n.d.). Literacy rate, youth total (% of people ages 15-24) - Nigeria | Data. [online] Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.1524.LT.ZS?locations=NG>.

but the Federal Government said there had been a 7% drop in illiteracy of the whole population to 31% from 2015 to 2022³⁹. Data about literacy in Nigeria are either outdated or questionable therefore, I will be focusing on the dangers of illiteracy and the benefits of education.

The problem with illiteracy is the dependency and vulnerability it causes its victims. I will exemplify this through one aspect, radicalism, specifically Boko Haram. In six states examined in Northern Nigeria, illiteracy was a dominant factor in religious extremism. For instance, Gombe ranked it fourth out of sixteen factors as the cause of radicalism in the youth. It comes as no surprise that the uneducated are victimised by this separatist faction due to their inability for critical and independent thought. As a result, it is the poor that suffer the brunt of this as they are “unlikely to send their children to school and are likely to be illiterate”⁴⁰. In turn, the illiterate remain poor, continuing the cycle of poverty; further evidence of the self-sustaining trait of poverty. This is just one unfortunate effect of illiteracy.

³⁹ Onyedinefu, G. (2022). Nigeria’s illiteracy rate is now 31%, says FG. [online] Businessday NG. Available at: <https://businessday.ng/news/article/nigerias-illiteracy-rate-is-now-31-says-fg/#:~:text=The%20Federal%20Government%20on%20Tuesday>.

⁴⁰ Onuoha, Freedom C. *Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?* US Institute of Peace, 2014. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12548>. Accessed 11 Aug. 2023.

We must enforce an upheaval of the current, non-central educational system as with the marriage laws. Literacy programs must be established in the various regions of the country, adjusting for size and funding as needed⁴¹. Apart from basic education, the youth must be instilled with socially beneficial attitudes while discouraging negative character. Overall, a change like this cannot be enacted through the school system alone but through total societal change starting at the family level.

Lack of Documentation of Interest in Assets

An organised library of asset holding has been integral to the success of any capitalist society and its lack thereof, the cause of rampant disenfranchisement and inequality. This is well articulated with the following quotes from de Soto in *The Mystery of Capital*,

“What creates capital... is an implicit process buried in the intricacies of its formal property systems”⁴²

“Property... is... a mediating device that captures and stores most of the stuff required to make a market economy run”⁴³

“It is property documentation that fixes the economic characteristics of assets so that they can be used to secure

commercial and financial transactions, and ultimately provides the justification against which central banks issue money”⁴⁴

The value of documentation is exemplified by de Soto. Now to evaluate documentation in Nigeria. I will relate a personal experience regarding this section and then I will provide links to more elaborate articles on documentation, specifically in land ownership.

During this summer, I was privileged to witness a police mediation in a land dispute between some business associates and a family. The family sold the land to the associates to the men then, at a later date, they sold a different parcel of land to another group, infringing on the land of the original group. It has halted the construction on the land, inhibiting economic progress.

<https://guardian.ng/property/how-absence-of-land-titles-impedes-real-estate-growth/>

<https://businessday.ng/real-estate/article/poor-documentation-dampens-real-estate-investors-appetite/>

With the conclusion of this article, I implore all Nigerians everywhere not to

⁴¹ Thematic Group 4 (Early Childhood Development, Education and Transition to Work) of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, editor. “Education for Children between 5 and 18 Years of Age.” *The Future Of Our Children: Lifelong, Multi-Generational Learning For Sustainable Development*, Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2014, pp. 58–74.

JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep15863.8>. Accessed 11 Aug. 2023.

⁴² Soto, H. de (2000). *The mystery of capital : why capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else*. New York: Basic Books.

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid

delegate the restorative efforts against youth poverty but to be enraptured in the reformation of systematic issues in the country and to heal and soothe the scars of decades of neglected trauma.

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