

**Uses of Psychological Coping Mechanisms and Resilience in Curbing  
Insecurity and Out-of-School Problems in Kogi State, Nigeria.**

**Alaji, Christopher Menyaga**

Department of General Education, College of Education (Technical), Kabba, Kogi

Email: megachrisdelight@gmail.com

Phone: 08037797388

**Nsan, Ogar Inongha**

Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Cross River State,  
Calaba.

Email: ogarnsanpsychology@gmail.com

Phone: 08161712347

**Abstract**

In Kogi State, Nigeria, the challenges of insecurity and an increasing population of out-of-school children have created significant socio-economic and educational concerns. This paper examines the roles of psychological coping mechanisms and resilience in addressing these issues, aiming to understand how effective psychological strategies can mitigate the adverse impacts on affected children and communities. The paper explores adaptive coping strategies utilised by children facing educational disruptions, including social support networks, cognitive restructuring, spiritual practices, and creativity. It further reviewed factors contributing to resilience, such as personality traits, positive role models, and community-based interventions that promote emotional well-being and foster long-term adaptive skills. The article revealed that while insecurity and educational instability present profound psychological challenges, children employ diverse coping mechanisms that support their mental health and help them navigate adversities. Resilience emerges as a crucial factor, with support from families, peers, and community initiatives playing a significant role in bolstering children's ability to persevere. The paper suggests that targeted interventions such as mental health services, educational opportunities, and empowerment programmes are essential for strengthening resilience among out-of-school children. By fostering these adaptive traits and coping mechanisms, policymakers and educators can develop comprehensive, culturally sensitive strategies to curb insecurity and reintegrate out-of-school children into educational systems, ultimately enhancing their long-term well-being and potential for success.

**Keywords:** Psychological, Coping Mechanisms, Resilience, Curbing, Insecurity, Out-of-School Problems.

**Introduction**

In central Nigeria, Kogi State has long grappled with the ramifications of persistent insecurity, a condition that has significantly hindered progress in various

sectors, including education. The rise in violent conflicts, armed banditry, and communal clashes has created an environment of uncertainty and fear, particularly affecting vulnerable populations like children. As a result, Ogunyemi and Olumide (2021) revealed that many students have been forced out of school, and unable to continue their education in the face of such instability. This disruption not only affects their academic progress but also has profound implications for their emotional and psychological well-being, as they are often exposed to traumatic events and the stress of living in an unsafe environment (Adeyemi & Omotayo, 2022). Consequently, these challenges necessitate the adoption of effective coping mechanisms to mitigate the adverse effects of domestic violence.

In response to these challenges, out-of-school children in Kogi State have developed a range of psychological coping mechanisms to navigate their uncertain and dangerous environments. These coping strategies, though often adaptive, may not be sufficient to address the long-term psychological toll of insecurity. Some children may exhibit avoidance behaviours, withdrawing from social interactions and educational opportunities to minimise exposure to traumatic events. Others may develop resilience strategies, such as relying on strong familial ties or community networks, which provide emotional support in times of crisis (Adeleke & Babalola, 2019). However, these coping mechanisms may be temporary solutions, as the ongoing insecurity can continue to strain their mental health, leading to post-traumatic stress and anxiety disorders, further exacerbating their challenges in returning to school (Ibe & Okeke, 2021). Moreover, the lack of adequate mental health services in the region makes it difficult for these children to receive the professional care they need, which perpetuates cycles of emotional distress and disengagement from education.

### **The Context of Insecurity in Kogi State**

Insecurity in Kogi State stems from a complex mix of communal clashes, political violence, and criminal activities such as banditry and kidnapping. These challenges have escalated over the years, with conflicts between ethnic groups,

political factions, and organised criminal gangs frequently disrupting daily life. Once peaceful communities are now embroiled in cycles of violence, creating an atmosphere where safety is a luxury many cannot afford (Okoro, Ogbu & Anozie, 2021). Local governments and state authorities struggle to manage the crises, often overwhelmed by the scale and frequency of violent incidents, leaving citizens, including children, vulnerable. This insecurity not only hinders socio-economic development but also erodes the social fabric of Kogi State, particularly impacting children and their access to education.

For children in Kogi State, the consequences of insecurity are profound. The ongoing violence and instability often lead to the closure of schools, further disrupting the already fragile education system. Schools, which should serve as sanctuaries for learning, safety, and development, have become sites of fear, with students and teachers at risk of violence or abduction. As a result, many children are left without a stable learning environment, increasing their likelihood of school dropout and academic failure (Adebayo & Olugbemi, 2020). The loss of educational opportunities limits children's chances to break the cycle of poverty and hampers the development of skills that are essential for future success.

The effects of insecurity extend beyond the physical disruption of education. The psychological toll on children is significant, as exposure to violence and instability could result in anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress (Oladeji & Akinmoladun, 2021). Many children witness violent acts, such as killings, kidnappings, and destruction of property, which can lead to emotional numbness, fear, and an inability to focus on schoolwork (Okoro & Adebayo, 2021). This constant state of alertness and fear impairs cognitive functioning, making it difficult for children to engage in meaningful learning when schools are reopened. As a result, these children may develop a deep-seated fear of education itself, associating school with danger rather than opportunity.

Insecurity also disrupts the socioeconomic stability of families in Kogi State, as livelihoods are affected by the violence. Parents are often unable to provide basic

needs such as food, clothing, and education for their children due to the inability to work in areas plagued by violence (Durojaiye, 2019). This lack of economic security further exacerbates the problems faced by children who are already at risk of falling behind in school (Adeleke & Ibrahim, 2020). Children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly vulnerable, as the psychosocial strain caused by poverty and insecurity compounds the barriers to learning, including limited access to learning resources, tutors, and safe environments for studying (Uche & Okafor, 2021). The education sector in Kogi State has been directly impacted by insecurity and indirectly by the lack of infrastructure and resources in schools (Ogunleye *et al.*, 2022).

Schools that remain open are often underfunded and lack the necessary materials to create an effective learning environment. Classrooms are overcrowded, and teachers are often demoralised and underprepared to deal with the trauma that students may have experienced due to violence (Abdullahi & Akanbi, 2020). The absence of trauma-informed teaching practices and counselling services leaves students without proper support systems to address their mental health needs. This lack of support further deepens the educational divide, as students from conflict-affected areas fall further behind their peers in more stable regions.

Children who are forced out of school due to insecurity often develop various psychological coping mechanisms to navigate their circumstances. These mechanisms may include avoidance of school or emotional detachment from their education. Some children exhibit hypervigilance, constantly being alert which could lead to academic disengagement and difficulties concentrating in class when schools resume (Agboola, 2021). Others might become apathetic towards their educational pursuits, seeing no value in an education system that has failed to provide them with safety and opportunities. This emotional and psychological disconnect from learning can have long-lasting consequences on their academic and personal development.

Familial structures significantly influence the coping mechanisms of children in Kogi State. Families grappling with insecurity often endure emotional and

financial hardships, which could impair their capacity to support their children's educational needs (Johnson & Olatunde, 2022). Parental stress frequently manifests as an emotional strain on children, further impeding their ability to navigate educational challenges. While parental involvement is vital for academic success, the anxiety and fear induced by insecurity can hinder parents from actively engaging in their children's learning processes.

Moreover, community networks that once provided a support system for children's education are being undermined by insecurity. Communities that were once able to offer safe spaces for children to learn, play, and grow are now often divided by violence and distrust. The loss of these support networks leaves children isolated, without the social and emotional reinforcement they need to thrive academically. Social relationships are essential for emotional well-being, and without these networks, many children struggle to find the social support necessary for resilience and positive academic outcomes (Kalu & Eze, 2020).

The response to insecurity in Kogi State, particularly in terms of education, must be multifaceted. Efforts to reinforce school security, such as providing safe spaces for learning and incorporating community policing initiatives, can help protect children and restore confidence in the education system. Additionally, mental health services tailored to the needs of children in conflict-affected areas are crucial in addressing the psychological impacts of insecurity. Programmes that include counselling, peer support groups, and trauma-informed teaching can help children process their experiences and regain trust in their educational futures (Chikwe & Okoro, 2021). Furthermore, programmes, like online learning or mobile schooling, can offer alternatives for children who cannot attend traditional schools due to ongoing insecurity.

Ultimately, addressing the insecurity in Kogi State requires a comprehensive approach that combines security, education, and psychosocial support to ensure that children can resume their education in a safe and supportive environment. By providing academic and psychological interventions, the state can help its most

vulnerable children overcome the effects of insecurity and build the resilience they need to succeed academically and personally.

### **Psychological Coping Mechanisms**

Despite the severe challenges faced by out-of-school children in Kogi State, many exhibit extraordinary resilience through various psychological coping mechanisms. These strategies, though diverse, serve as vital tools for survival and maintaining mental health in the face of adversity. In environments where safety and security are uncertain, these children rely on a variety of mechanisms to navigate their circumstances. These children's resilience, while often borne out of necessity, reflects the strength of their spirit and the essential role of community, adaptation, and self-expression in their survival.

Social Support Networks are a cornerstone of coping for out-of-school children in Kogi State. The importance of family, friends, and community members cannot be overstated. These social networks provide emotional support, help children manage day-to-day challenges, and offer practical assistance when resources are scarce (Ogbonna, 2019). For instance, many children rely on their families for both physical and emotional sustenance, while others may find strength in the community's collective resilience. The sense of belonging that these networks foster is essential, helping children maintain hope and a sense of normalcy amid insecurity and educational disruption. Community members often step in to offer mentorship or informal learning opportunities, serving as a critical resource in environments where formal education is unavailable.

Adaptive Coping Strategies are another common mechanism used by children in Kogi State. Despite the challenges they face, many children engage in community activities, find part-time work, or participate in informal education programs. These strategies allow children to stay engaged and involved in society, providing a sense of agency and purpose. Adaptive coping strategies, such as helping with household chores or contributing to family income, also help to build self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment. Furthermore, participating in community-based education



programs, such as those organized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or local initiatives, gives children access to alternative forms of learning, which can foster resilience and a continued connection to educational goals, even outside the formal school system (Akintoye, 2020).

In many Nigerian communities, spiritual and religious practices offer an essential source of comfort and hope for out-of-school children. Religion plays a central role in the lives of many families in Kogi State, and it provides a foundation for coping with difficult situations. Participation in religious activities, prayer, and community worship can help children find solace in the belief that they are not alone in their struggles (Oladeji & Akinmoladun, 2021). These practices often provide emotional relief and a framework for making sense of life's difficulties. Spirituality offers children a way to reframe their experiences, seeing their challenges not as insurmountable obstacles but as part of a larger, meaningful narrative. This sense of hope and faith can significantly bolster their psychological well-being.

Another significant coping mechanism is cognitive restructuring, a psychological strategy wherein children change their thought patterns to adopt a more positive outlook on their situations (Crespo & Silva, 2020). This adaptive approach involves altering negative self-talk and reframing challenging experiences. Children who use cognitive restructuring focus on aspects of their lives that they can control, such as their attitudes, behaviours, and the goals they pursue despite their circumstances. This mindset helps them resist helplessness and maintain a sense of agency, even in the face of overwhelming adversity (Eze & Oyeyemi, 2019). By learning to perceive their environment in a more optimistic light, these children can maintain resilience, protect their mental health, and reduce feelings of anxiety and despair.

Creative activities, such as drawing, storytelling, and playing games, provide children with a safe outlet for emotional expression, which is particularly important when they can't access formal education or other support systems (Okoro, 2020). These activities offer emotional release and allow children to engage in imaginative

worlds where they can process their trauma and express complex feelings. (Porges, 2017)). Play, in particular, is a universally recognised form of coping, as it helps children release tension, improve their social skills, and develop a sense of joy and hope in otherwise grim circumstances (Olsson & Trondsen, 2021).

Additionally, community-based initiatives often create safe spaces for children to engage in constructive activities, including recreational play and educational support (Dyken & Cassidy, 2020). These initiatives can be vital in mitigating the effects of insecurity and educational deprivation. Providing children with a safe and supportive environment, such initiatives help to restore a sense of normalcy and continuity, even amid violence and chaos. Children participating in such programs often report feeling more confident and hopeful about their prospects, highlighting the importance of these grassroots efforts in supporting mental health and well-being (Okoro, Ogbu & Anozie, 2021).

Finally, peer relationships often act as a supportive buffer against the emotional toll of insecurity. Even though formal education may be disrupted, children continue to rely on friendships and peer connections to share experiences and offer mutual support. Through these interactions, children build resilience and social skills to help them navigate challenging environments. Peer relationships enhance companionship and solidarity, maintaining emotional stability and fostering a sense of belonging (Akinmoladun, Olatunji & Olugbemi, 2020). These relationships also serve as a foundation for collective resilience, as children come together to share resources, experiences, and coping strategies.

In conclusion, despite the significant challenges posed by insecurity and out-of-school status in Kogi State, children in the region exhibit remarkable resilience through a variety of psychological coping mechanisms. Social support networks, adaptive strategies, spirituality, cognitive restructuring, creativity, and peer relationships are all essential in helping these children manage their difficulties. However, while these coping mechanisms are vital for survival, they also highlight the pressing need for targeted interventions that address the root causes of



educational deprivation and provide sustainable mental health support. Without such interventions, the cycle of educational disruption and psychological distress will continue to affect the well-being and prospects of these children.

### **Resilience in the Face of Adversity**

The resilience of out-of-school children in Kogi State is a powerful testament to their strength and adaptability in the face of persistent adversity. Resilience goes beyond the mere ability to overcome challenges; it is about the ability to thrive despite obstacles encounters. For children in Kogi State, the constant threats posed by insecurity, displacement, and the disruption of their education have forced them to develop various coping mechanisms. These children are surviving and finding ways to adapt, grow, and keep hope alive. Several factors contribute to their resilience, including personality traits, the influence of positive role models, and community-driven initiatives supporting their mental health and educational growth.

Innate Personality Traits play a significant role in fostering resilience among out-of-school children in Kogi State. Children with optimism, flexibility, and a strong sense of self-efficacy are often better equipped to navigate their challenges. These children tend to have a more positive outlook on life, which allows them to view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable barriers (Akintoye, 2020). Optimistic children might be more likely to engage at problem-solving strategies, make proactive decisions, and persevere through setbacks. Additionally, those with strong self-efficacy believe in their ability to handle difficult situations, which empowers them to take initiative and remain motivated even when faced with overwhelming adversity.

The Positive Role Models within a child's immediate environment can further strengthen their resilience. Whether within the family or the broader community, these role models serve as guiding figures who inspire children to continue striving, even when faced with hardship. Positive role models offer children strength and perseverance, showing them that overcoming adversity is possible and achievable (Oluwole & Oyebode, 2019). These individuals, often community leaders, teachers,

or family members, provide encouragement, practical advice, and emotional support. The influence of such role models helps children build hope for a brighter future and reinforces the belief that they can change their circumstances with determination and effort.

Community Initiatives have also played an essential role in building resilience among out-of-school children in Kogi State. Local programs designed to support children in crisis have provided vital resources, safe spaces, and opportunities for learning and development. These community-driven initiatives can mitigate the negative effects of insecurity by offering children access to education, recreational activities, and mental health support (Akinmoladun, Olatunji & Olugbemi, 2020). For instance, community-based learning centres and after-school programmes provide children with alternative educational opportunities that are safe and also tailored to their needs. These initiatives also offer a sense of belonging and connection to a supportive network, further bolstering the children's ability to cope with their challenges.

However, while the resilience of out-of-school children in Kogi State is commendable, it should not overshadow the urgent need for targeted interventions. These children require structured support to enhance their coping strategies and ensure long-term well-being. Without such interventions, their resilience might be tested to its limits, potentially hindering their chances of thriving. Effective interventions could help to provide these children with the necessary resources, skills, and emotional support.

One critical area in need of attention is Mental Health Services. The emotional toll of insecurity, displacement, and educational disruption can be overwhelming for children, and many may struggle to process their experiences on their own. Accessible counselling and therapy services are essential to help children process their trauma, develop healthy coping strategies, and build emotional resilience (Ogbonna, 2019). Mental health professionals can offer individualised support, tailoring their interventions to the specific challenges of out-of-school children, and

creating a safe space where these children can express their fears and frustrations. These services are crucial in preventing long-term psychological issues and ensuring that children can regain a sense of stability and well-being.

Educational Opportunities are equally important in helping these children rebuild their futures. While formal schooling may be inaccessible due to security concerns, alternative educational programs can provide much-needed opportunities for learning. Community-based learning centres, online education platforms, and vocational training programs can help children continue their education in safer, more flexible environments. These alternative educational options provide a sense of normalcy and equip children with the skills necessary to build a better future (Akintoye, 2020). By focusing on education, children can gain the knowledge and confidence they need to overcome their challenges and break free from the cycle of poverty and insecurity.

Strengthening Social support networks is also vital in enhancing the resilience of out-of-school children. Community centres and outreach programmes could connect children with supportive adults who can offer guidance, mentorship, and emotional support. These connections can serve as a safety net for children, ensuring they are not left to face their challenges alone (Oladeji & Akinmoladun, 2021). By fostering a sense of community, children are more likely to feel supported and less isolated, which can improve their emotional well-being and overall resilience.

Finally, empowerment programs focused on developing practical skills and leadership abilities can equip children with essential tools to navigate adversity effectively. Initiatives that emphasise problem-solving, decision-making, and leadership skills enable children to take charge of their lives and feel empowered to shape their futures. These programs also foster self-esteem, critical thinking, and confidence in their ability to overcome challenges (Eze & Oyeyemi, 2019). By providing children with practical knowledge and skills, empowerment initiatives play a crucial role in enhancing their resilience and preparing them to face future uncertainties.

## **Recommendations**

1. Establishing community-based mental health services to support out-of-school children affected by insecurity, focusing on counselling and resilience-building.
2. Tailored educational outreach programs should be developed to reintegrate these children, offering flexible learning options like vocational training.
3. Strengthening social support networks, including peer groups and mentorship programs, can enhance resilience by fostering positive social connections.
4. Resilience training should be integrated into school curricula to equip children with essential coping skills for navigating adversities and educational challenges.

## **Conclusion**

This paper highlights the critical role of psychological coping mechanisms and resilience in addressing the challenges of insecurity and out-of-school issues in Kogi State. Children could better cope with educational disruptions and associated psychological stress by employing adaptive strategies such as social support, cognitive restructuring, and community-based interventions. Strengthening resilience through mental health services, educational outreach, and social support networks offers a sustainable approach to improving their well-being and reintegration prospects. This paper underscores the need for targeted, culturally sensitive interventions to foster resilience and provide out-of-school children with the tools necessary to thrive despite adversity.

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