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From Social Vulnerability to National Resilience: A Statistical Assessment of the Impact of Social Work Education on Nigeria's Evolving Security Environment

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's evolving security environment is increasingly shaped by the interaction of violence, poverty, displacement, unemployment, educational exclusion, social fragmentation and weakened community resilience. This study statistically assesses the potential impact of social work education on national resilience within this environment. It adopts a documentary and secondary-data research design, drawing on Nigerian and international statistics published between 2021 and 2026, including data on multidimensional poverty, youth disengagement, education, terrorism, displacement and social-work education. The analysis is complemented by evidence from recent studies of social-work curricula and conflict-management preparedness in Nigerian universities. Nigeria's 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index estimated that 62.9% of the population, approximately 132.9 million people, were multidimensionally poor, while 14.4% of young people aged 15–24 were not in employment, education or training in Q1 2024. At the same time, terrorism-related deaths increased by 46% to 750 in 2025. The study finds that social-work education can strengthen national resilience through early identification of vulnerability, psychosocial intervention, conflict prevention, community engagement, reintegration and social protection. However, its security impact depends on curriculum relevance, professional capacity, institutional deployment and inter-sectoral coordination. The study recommends repositioning social-work education as part of Nigeria's preventive national-security architecture

Introduction

National security is increasingly shaped by conditions that exist outside conventional security institutions. Terrorism, violent extremism, banditry, kidnapping and communal violence remain serious threats, but their persistence is often associated with social conditions including poverty, exclusion, unemployment, displacement, weak institutions, educational disadvantage and declining community trust. This makes national security partly a question of how effectively a state identifies and manages social vulnerability before it develops into violent instability.

The relationship is visible internationally. The contemporary security environment has moved beyond conventional military confrontation towards complex threats involving radicalisation, online mobilisation, social alienation, identity-based grievances, organised crime and community fragmentation. The United Nations has consequently continued to emphasise prevention, social inclusion, education and resilience alongside conventional counter-terrorism measures. The International Federation of Social Workers similarly identifies social-work education as relevant to peacebuilding, human rights, social justice and community resilience (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2024).

The European experience provides an important illustration. Countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Sweden have confronted forms of terrorism and radicalisation in which social isolation, identity, online propaganda, discrimination and community disengagement interact with extremist mobilisation. The lesson for Nigeria is not that its security challenges are identical to those of

Europe. Rather, it demonstrates that economic development and strong institutions do not eliminate vulnerability; they require preventive social systems capable of identifying exclusion, supporting vulnerable populations and strengthening community resilience.

The African context is considerably more difficult because social vulnerability frequently overlaps with weak institutional capacity, displacement, poverty and armed conflict. In the Sahel, countries such as **Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Chad** illustrate how insecurity can become entrenched where governance deficits, livelihood pressures, violent extremist networks and local grievances reinforce one another. UNESCO's International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa has therefore promoted education for peace, resilience-building and prevention of violent extremism across 28 African countries, emphasising the role of teachers, universities and educational institutions in preventing violence and strengthening peaceful communities (UNESCO-IICBA, n.d.).

Nigeria represents a particularly important case because of the scale and diversity of its vulnerabilities. The 2022 Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index found that 62.9% of Nigerians—approximately 132.9 million people—were multidimensionally poor, with deprivation extending across living standards, health, education, employment and security-related dimensions (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022).

Labour-market indicators reinforce this vulnerability. In Q1 2024, youth unemployment stood at 8.4%, while 14.4% of Nigerians aged 15–24 were not in employment, education or training (NEET). The NEET rate was higher among females, at 15.9% (NBS, 2024). Educational disruption adds another layer. UNICEF's 2025 assessment of Katsina, Zamfara and Niger States reported that armed violence, abductions and communal conflict had disrupted education, livelihoods and social cohesion. In the BAY states, UNICEF reported that more than 1,829 people were displaced in June 2025, including approximately 1,200 school-age children who remained out of school; emergency education needs across Adamawa, Borno and Yobe affected more than 1.6 million children.

The security consequences are equally substantial. The *Global Terrorism Index 2026* reported that Nigeria experienced 171 terrorist incidents in 2025, up from 120 in 2024, while terrorism-related deaths increased by 46% to 750. Borno State accounted for 67% of attacks and 72% of deaths, while civilians represented the largest affected category (Institute for Economics & Peace [IEP], 2026).

These statistics reveal an important policy problem. Nigeria has invested substantially in military and intelligence responses to insecurity, but the social conditions that create vulnerability require a different category of professional intervention. Social workers are trained to assess individuals, families and communities; identify vulnerability; provide psychosocial support; mediate conflicts; facilitate access to services; support displaced populations; strengthen social networks; and promote reintegration. The question, therefore, is whether social-work education can be repositioned from a conventional welfare-oriented discipline into a strategic component of preventive national resilience.

Nigeria's social-work education system is already developing. Recent National Universities Commission (NUC) accreditation evidence shows that social-work programmes are being strengthened in Nigerian universities. For example, Ebonyi State University's Social Work programme received a 99.20% accreditation score and full accreditation in December 2024, with full scores in academic matters, staffing, physical facilities, library, research and collaboration, although funding received a lower score. The University of Jos also received approval to establish a B.Sc. Social Work programme for the 2025/2026 academic session.

However, the existence of programmes does not automatically translate into national-security impact. Recent Nigerian scholarship has identified gaps between curriculum content and the increasingly complex environments in which social workers are expected to operate. Onalu et al. (2023), for example, found that conflict-management content existed within the University of Nigeria's Social Work curriculum but recommended further curriculum development and incorporation of indigenous approaches to conflict management. Similarly, Nigerian scholarship has emphasised the need for locally relevant social-work education capable of responding to contemporary social conditions (Onalu & Okoye, 2022).

The central argument of this study is therefore that social-work education should be treated as a preventive national-security resource rather than solely as preparation for conventional social-service practice.

2. Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's security response remains heavily concentrated on detecting, containing and defeating threats after they have become sufficiently serious to attract security intervention. Military operations, intelligence gathering, policing, border management and judicial action remain indispensable. However, these interventions largely operate after risk has become visible. The challenge is that many security threats develop within social environments characterised by poverty, exclusion, displacement, unemployment, educational disruption, family instability, trauma and weak community institutions. The 132.9 million Nigerians classified as multidimensionally poor in the 2022 MPI cannot be considered a security problem merely because they are poor. Poverty does not automatically produce violence. The policy concern arises when multiple deprivations combine with exclusion, grievance, weak institutions and exposure to violent networks.

Similarly, a young person who is outside employment, education or training is not inherently a security threat. However, persistent disengagement may increase vulnerability to exploitation, criminal recruitment and extremist narratives when other protective institutions are weak. This distinction is critical. Social vulnerability is not terrorism, but unmanaged vulnerability can increase the opportunity structure within which violent actors operate. Nigeria therefore needs professional capacity capable of working at this preventive interface. Social-work education provides one potential mechanism, but its effectiveness has not been sufficiently assessed in relation to the country's evolving security environment.

3. Objectives of the Study

The general objective is to statistically assess the impact of social-work education on Nigeria's capacity to prevent and respond to social vulnerabilities associated with its evolving security environment.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

i. assess the statistical relationship between major indicators of social vulnerability and Nigeria's evolving security environment;
ii. examine the preparedness of social-work education in Nigeria to respond to conflict, displacement, radicalisation and community vulnerability;
iii. assess the potential contribution of professionally trained social workers to prevention, resilience, rehabilitation and reintegration;
iv. identify institutional and curriculum factors that limit the security relevance of social-work education; and
v. develop a policy framework for integrating social-work education into Nigeria's preventive national-security architecture.

4. Research Questions

The research questions correspond directly with the five objectives:

i. What statistical relationship exists between major indicators of social vulnerability and Nigeria's evolving security environment?
ii. To what extent is social-work education in Nigeria prepared to respond to conflict, displacement, radicalisation and community vulnerability?
iii. How can professionally trained social workers contribute to prevention, resilience, rehabilitation and reintegration?
iv. What institutional and curriculum factors constrain the security relevance of social-work education in Nigeria?
v. What policy framework can effectively integrate social-work education into Nigeria's preventive national-security architecture?

5. Conceptual Review

5.1 Social Vulnerability

Social vulnerability describes the susceptibility of individuals, households or communities to adverse outcomes because of socioeconomic, institutional, demographic or environmental conditions. In Nigeria, vulnerability is multidimensional. It may involve poverty, unemployment, educational exclusion, displacement, poor access to healthcare, family instability, discrimination and weak access to

government services. The NBS MPI illustrates this clearly. Its 62.9% incidence of multidimensional poverty means that vulnerability cannot be adequately captured through income alone (NBS, 2022).

5.2 National Resilience

National resilience refers to the capacity of institutions, communities and individuals to absorb shocks, adapt to changing threats and recover without allowing disruption to produce long-term instability. For Nigeria, resilience should include the ability of communities to withstand displacement, prevent recruitment into violent groups, maintain schooling during emergencies, rebuild livelihoods and restore trust following conflict.

5.3 Social Work Education

Social-work education is the formal academic and professional preparation through which students acquire knowledge, values and practical competencies for intervention at individual, family, group, organisational and community levels. Its relevance to national resilience lies particularly in its emphasis on:

i. psychosocial assessment;
ii. community organisation;
iii. conflict intervention;
iv. social protection;
v. case management;
vi. advocacy;
vii. rehabilitation;
viii. reintegration;
ix. crisis intervention; and
x. vulnerable-population support.

The profession therefore occupies an unusual position between the individual and the state.

6. Theoretical Framework

6.1 Ecological Systems Theory

The study is primarily anchored in Ecological Systems Theory, which understands individuals as embedded within interconnected family, community, institutional and wider social environments. This theory is particularly relevant because insecurity rarely emerges from a single variable. An unemployed young person, for example, may simultaneously experience family pressure, educational exclusion, community violence, poor state services and online exposure to extremist narratives. Social workers are trained to intervene across these interconnected environments rather than treating the individual as an isolated problem.

6.2 Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory complements the ecological perspective by shifting attention from the protection of territory alone towards the protection of human life, dignity, livelihood and freedom from fear and want. This approach provides a strong theoretical justification for linking social policy, education and professional social intervention with national resilience.

6.3 Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory provides a further explanation. Communities with stronger networks of trust, reciprocity and collective action are better positioned to respond to shocks. Social workers can contribute to social capital by strengthening community associations, supporting families, facilitating dialogue and connecting vulnerable populations with institutions.

7. Methodology

7.1 Research Design

The study adopts a documentary quantitative assessment design. It combines statistical analysis of secondary socioeconomic and security indicators with qualitative assessment of social-work education and professional capacity. The study does not claim that social-work education independently causes reductions in terrorism. Rather, it assesses the evidence pathway through which social-work education can influence measurable resilience-related outcomes.

This distinction strengthens the methodological credibility of the study.

7.2 Sources of Data

Data were obtained from official and high-quality institutional sources published primarily between 2021 and 2026, including:

i. National Bureau of Statistics;
ii. National Universities Commission;
iii. Nigerian government agencies;
iv. UNICEF;
v. UNESCO;
vi. World Bank;
vii. Institute for Economics & Peace;
viii. peer-reviewed social-work research; and
ix. international professional organisations.

The NBS MPI is particularly valuable because it was based on more than 56,000 households across Nigeria's 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, providing estimates down to senatorial-district level.

7.3 Analytical Approach

The statistical assessment focuses on four interconnected indicator domains:

Social vulnerability: multidimensional poverty, youth NEET, unemployment and educational exclusion.

Educational resilience: school access, learning participation and curriculum preparedness.

Security exposure: terrorism incidents, terrorism-related deaths, displacement and disruption of education.

Professional capacity: curriculum content, accreditation evidence, conflict-management preparation and social-work training.

Descriptive statistics, percentage changes and comparative interpretation are used to establish patterns. The study does not manufacture causal coefficients where nationally comparable longitudinal data are unavailable.

8. Statistical Assessment of Nigeria's Social Vulnerability

Nigeria's vulnerability is measurable. The 2022 MPI recorded a multidimensional poverty incidence of 62.9%, representing approximately 132.92 million people. The intensity of deprivation among poor Nigerians was 40.9%, while the national MPI was 0.257 (NBS, 2022). This is important for security policy because multidimensional deprivation incorporates conditions beyond income, including education, health, living standards, employment and access to basic services.

The labour market provides another indicator. In Q1 2024, unemployment was 5.3%, youth unemployment was 8.4%, and the NEET rate among young people aged 15–24 was 14.4% (NBS, 2024). The significance of NEET is greater than the unemployment figure alone. A young person who is neither studying nor working is effectively disconnected from two of the most important institutional pathways through which societies integrate young people. This does not mean that NEET automatically produces insecurity. Rather, it identifies a population requiring stronger preventive social intervention.

9. Education, Displacement and Security

The relationship between education and security is particularly visible in northern Nigeria. UNICEF's 2025 assessment of Katsina, Zamfara and Niger States found that armed violence, banditry, abduction and communal conflict had disrupted education, healthcare, livelihoods and social cohesion. In June 2025, UNICEF reported that approximately 1,200 school-age children displaced by insecurity in affected LGAs of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe remained out of school. It also reported education-support needs affecting 444,298 children in Adamawa, 875,814 in Borno and 328,690 in Yobe. These numbers demonstrate why education should not be treated simply as a development sector.

When schools close, children lose learning opportunities. When education disappears for extended periods, children may lose protective routines, social networks and access to trusted adults. Where displacement continues, family structures and community support mechanisms can weaken. Social workers can operate within this space by providing psychosocial support, family case management, child protection, referral services, community mobilisation and reintegration assistance.

10. Nigeria's Evolving Security Environment

The terrorism statistics reinforce the scale of the challenge. According to the *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, Nigeria recorded 171 terrorist incidents in 2025, compared with 120 in 2024—a 43% increase. Terrorism-related deaths rose by 46% to 750, the highest level since 2020. Borno accounted for 67% of attacks and 72% of deaths.

The implication is not that social work should replace military operations. It cannot. Military forces are required to defeat armed groups. Intelligence services must identify threats. Police must investigate crime. Courts must prosecute offenders. The contribution of social work lies elsewhere - reducing the social conditions that allow insecurity to reproduce itself after military pressure has been applied. This distinction is fundamental.

11. Social Work Education and Conflict Preparedness

The evidence indicates that Nigerian social-work education is beginning to address conflict-related competencies, but further development is required. Onalu et al. (2023) examined the Social Work curriculum at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and found that conflict-management content was present. However, students and academics identified the need for curriculum improvement, including greater incorporation of indigenous conflict-management approaches.

This is significant because Nigeria's conflicts are locally embedded. A social worker working in Borno, Benue, Zamfara, Plateau or the Niger Delta cannot depend exclusively on generic imported intervention models. Recent scholarship has consequently called for stronger local relevance within Nigerian social-work education, including greater use of indigenous knowledge, local case examples and community-based learning (Onalu & Okoye, 2022).

The NUC's transition to the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) also provides an institutional opportunity to make programmes more responsive to twenty-first-century national needs. The CCMAS framework explicitly emphasises measurable knowledge, skills and competencies relevant to contemporary Nigerian society.

12. Statistical Evidence of Institutional Capacity

The expansion and accreditation of social-work programmes provide evidence that professional capacity is developing. Ebonyi State University's Social Work programme received a 99.20% overall accreditation score in 2024 and full accreditation. It achieved 100% in academic matters, staffing, physical facilities, library, research and collaboration, although its funding score was 66.67%. The significance of this example is twofold.

First, Nigerian universities are capable of producing programmes that satisfy national quality requirements. Second, the funding result highlights the difference between academic accreditation and strategic deployment. A programme may satisfy accreditation standards without necessarily producing graduates specifically prepared for national resilience, counter-radicalisation, humanitarian response or community security.

Similarly, NUC's approval of Social Work at the University of Jos for the 2025/2026 academic session demonstrates continued expansion of professional training. The implication is that Nigeria has an expanding institutional platform upon which to build a more security-relevant social-work profession.

13. How Social Work Education Can Affect National Resilience

The impact pathway can be understood through five mechanisms.

13.1 Early Identification of Vulnerability

Social workers are positioned to identify family breakdown, child vulnerability, school disengagement, substance abuse, displacement and social exclusion before these conditions become more difficult to manage.

13.2 Psychosocial Resilience

Conflict produces trauma. Psychosocial interventions can reduce the long-term social consequences of violence and improve the capacity of individuals and families to recover.

13.3 Community-Based Prevention

Social workers can build relationships with community leaders, youth groups, schools, religious organisations and local authorities. Such relationships improve information flow and social trust without converting social services into intelligence operations.

13.4 Reintegration

Individuals returning from displacement, detention or disengagement from violent groups often require more than physical release. They require family reconciliation, livelihood support, education, counselling and community acceptance.

13.5 Social Protection

Social workers can connect vulnerable households to government and development programmes. This is particularly relevant because Nigeria's social-protection coverage remains limited. The World Bank's 2025 Nigeria Development Update reported that social-protection coverage had been low and had been affected by interruptions to major programmes.

14. Discussion

The statistical evidence supports a strong relationship between social vulnerability and exposure to insecurity, but it does not justify the simplistic claim that poverty or educational disadvantage causes terrorism. The evidence instead supports a more nuanced proposition: Where multiple forms of social vulnerability accumulate, the capacity of communities to resist, absorb and recover from insecurity may weaken. Social-work education matters because it produces professionals capable of intervening within this vulnerability structure.

The European experience demonstrates that even relatively prosperous societies require professional systems capable of addressing social alienation, radicalisation and community fragmentation. African experience demonstrates that the consequences can be more severe where poverty, displacement and institutional weakness are extensive.

Nigeria combines elements of both environments. The country therefore needs a model of social-work education that prepares graduates not only for hospitals, schools, correctional institutions and welfare agencies, but also for:

i. conflict-affected communities;
ii. internally displaced populations;
iii. violent-extremism prevention;
iv. child protection in emergencies;
v. community reconciliation;
vi. correctional rehabilitation;
vii. border communities;
viii. disaster response;
ix. psychosocial intervention; and
x. post-conflict reintegration.

This does not mean militarising social work. Quite the opposite: the comparative advantage of social work is its civilian, community-based and preventive character.

15. Major Findings

The study establishes five principal findings. First, Nigeria's social vulnerability is extensive. The 2022 MPI identified 132.92 million multidimensionally poor Nigerians, while youth disengagement remained significant in 2024. Second, education disruption is increasingly intertwined with insecurity. Evidence from Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Zamfara, Katsina and Niger shows that violence directly affects educational access and community stability.

Third, Nigeria's security environment remains severe. Terrorism incidents increased from 120 to 171 between 2024 and 2025, while terrorism-related deaths rose to 750. Fourth, Nigerian social-work education already contains relevant competencies, particularly conflict management, social justice and community intervention, but curriculum relevance and practical preparedness require strengthening. Fifth, the potential impact of social-work education is greatest when professional social workers are integrated into wider systems of education, humanitarian assistance, social protection, justice, community development and preventive security.

16. Conclusion

Nigeria's evolving security environment cannot be addressed through security institutions alone. The country's statistics show a convergence of poverty, youth disengagement, educational disruption, displacement and violence that requires preventive social intervention. The 132.9 million people living in multidimensional poverty, the 14.4% youth NEET rate and the 750 terrorism-related deaths recorded

in 2025 are not separate national problems. They represent interconnected dimensions of vulnerability and resilience.

Social-work education therefore deserves greater recognition within Nigeria's national-resilience strategy. Its contribution is not to replace military, intelligence or policing institutions but to address the human and community conditions that conventional security instruments cannot adequately manage. The evidence also suggests that the issue is no longer whether Nigeria needs social workers. It is whether Nigeria is educating, deploying and professionally integrating social workers for the realities of the twenty-first-century security environment. The study concludes that the answer should increasingly be yes.

17. Recommendations and Implementation Strategies

Recommendation One:

The Federal Government should formally recognise social-work education and professional practice as components of Nigeria's preventive national-resilience architecture.

Implementation Strategies

i. The Federal Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction, Federal Ministry of Interior and Office of the National Security Adviser, to develop a national policy framework defining the preventive roles of professionally trained social workers in vulnerable and conflict-affected communities.
ii. The National Assembly to strengthen the legislative and institutional framework for professional social-work practice across public-sector agencies responsible for education, security, humanitarian response, justice and social protection.

Recommendation Two

The National Universities Commission should strengthen social-work curricula to reflect Nigeria's contemporary security, humanitarian and social-policy challenges.

Implementation Strategies

i. The NUC, in collaboration with universities and professional social-work bodies, to integrate conflict management, violent-extremism prevention, psychosocial support, trauma-informed practice, disaster management, digital radicalisation, community resilience and reintegration into relevant Social Work programmes.
ii. Universities offering Social Work to expand field education and supervised practicum opportunities in conflict-affected communities, schools, correctional institutions, IDP settings, hospitals and community-development programmes.

Recommendation Three

The Federal Government should establish a national deployment mechanism for professionally trained social workers in high-vulnerability communities.

Implementation Strategies

i. The Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction, State Governments and relevant development partners to establish multidisciplinary community-resilience teams involving social workers, teachers, counsellors, health professionals and community-development personnel.
ii. State Governments to prioritise professionally trained social workers for deployment to communities experiencing displacement, school disruption, youth disengagement, communal conflict and severe social deprivation.

Recommendation Four

The Federal Government SHOULD strengthen the use of social-work interventions in prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

Implementation Strategies

i. The Office of the National Security Adviser, Nigerian Correctional Service, National Counter-Terrorism Centre and relevant humanitarian agencies to integrate qualified social workers into appropriate rehabilitation, disengagement, reintegration and community-resilience programmes while maintaining professional confidentiality and ethical safeguards.
ii. The Federal Ministry of Justice and Nigerian Correctional Service to expand social-work case management for persons leaving custodial, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

Recommendation Five

The National Bureau of Statistics SHOULD develop a Social Vulnerability and Resilience Data Framework to support evidence-based preventive policy**.**

Implementation Strategies

i. The NBS, in collaboration with the NUC, Federal Ministry of Education, security institutions, UNICEF and relevant research institutions, to develop interoperable indicators covering poverty, youth NEET, school exclusion, displacement, psychosocial vulnerability, community resilience and exposure to violence.

ii. The NBS and NUC to produce periodic statistical assessments examining whether communities receiving sustained social-work and resilience interventions demonstrate improvements in education participation, social inclusion, reintegration and vulnerability indicators.

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