

# Unravelling Insecurity: Exploring Psychological and Societal Dimensions in Nigerian Novels

<sup>1</sup>Ugwu Jovita Nnenna, <sup>2</sup>Amwiine Hassans, <sup>3</sup>Mwanaidi Kanyama and <sup>2</sup>Chidinma Esther Eze

<sup>1</sup>Department of Publication and Extension, Kampala International University Uganda

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Education Kampala International University Uganda

<sup>3</sup>Kampala International University Western Campus, Uganda

## ABSTRACT

This comprehensive study navigates the intricate terrain of insecurity within the human condition, examining its multifaceted dimensions through the lens of psychological and societal factors. Utilizing selected Nigerian novels as a backdrop, the research aims to unveil the complex biological and psychological processes that drive characters' actions, ultimately leading to societal unrest. By dissecting fear as a fundamental biological process, the study explores how intrinsic insecurities manifest and contribute to both individual and collective challenges. Through nuanced analyses of characters such as Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" and Beatrice and Eugene in Chimamanda Adichie's "Purple Hibiscus," the research sheds light on the profound transformations from intrinsic insecurity to physical manifestations, offering insights into the intricate interplay between emotional, psychological, and societal factors.

**Keywords:** Insecurity, Psychological Struggles, Societal Unrest, Nigerian Literature, Fear and Anxiety, Emotional Turmoil and Transformation in Characters.

## INTRODUCTION

Insecurity, a complex facet of the human condition, has often been extrinsically addressed, focusing on the subjectively experienced anticipation of involuntary events or an overall concern about future existence [1]; [2]. [3] elaborate on insecurity as an external threat, emphasizing the discrepancy between perceived and preferred levels of security (p.7). While these definitions underscore insecurity as an external manifestation, the connection between psychological insecurity and its externalization in societal insecurity remains understudied. This research endeavors to bridge this gap by delving into the intricate boundary between psychological uneasiness and its physical manifestation, arguing that psychological insecurity in individuals serves as the catalyst for societal insecurity.

**Understanding the Shift: From Individual to Social Structures**

[4] explores the evolution of the source of social insecurity, shifting from individuals to social structures, encompassing economic, political, and social patterns within a society (p.7). Sociological perspectives have transitioned from an individualistic approach to a focus on societal structures. Pepple posits that this shift is pivotal in steering away from unproductive scapegoating of individuals towards advocating for systemic social change (p.9). However, this societal approach, while instrumental in offering

solutions at a larger scale, neglects the emotional and psychological underpinnings that contribute to individual unease and collectively shape societal insecurity. Pepple's conclusion implies that poverty and the lack of basic amenities, though affecting individuals, are inherently societal issues (p.20). This externalization, while valuable in addressing systemic concerns, sidelines the internal emotional and psychological alterations that form the foundation of individual unease, contributing to the broader spectrum of insecurity.

[5] aligns with the sociological trend, defining insecurity as the lack of safety, evidence of danger, instability, lack of protection, and unsafety (p.3). Zubairu acknowledges that insecurity can stem from various sources, including childhood experiences, disturbing situations, mistreatment, and individual fears (p.4). Although Zubairu does not explicitly delve into the internal manifestation of insecurity, the reference to "individual fears" resonates with the emotional and psychological insecurity prevalent in modern Nigerian literature. This connection between external manifestations of insecurity and internal emotional struggles forms the crux of our research.

**Psychological Insecurity and Societal Unrest in Nigerian Literature:**

To elucidate the intricate relationship between psychological insecurity and societal unrest, this

research delves into modern Nigerian literature. The characters in these literary works serve as microcosms, embodying the psychological tumult that contributes to broader societal insecurity.

Examples from Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" and Adichie's "Purple Hibiscus":

The character of Okonkwo in Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" illustrates the link between psychological and societal insecurity. Okonkwo's internal fear of weakness drives him to commit murder, leading to his exile and eventual suicide, [6]. The repercussions extend beyond Okonkwo's individual plight, affecting the entire community of Umuofia. This narrative showcases how psychological unease can escalate into actions that reverberate on a societal level.

Similarly, Adichie's "Purple Hibiscus" unveils the internal turmoil of characters like Eugene and Beatrice. Eugene's inability to reconcile conflicting beliefs culminates in violence towards his family, while Beatrice, grappling with her emotional insecurities, resorts to poisoning. These individual struggles contribute to the breakdown of the family unit, illustrating the intricate interplay between personal psychological unrest and broader societal implications.

This research aims to unravel the intricate nexus between psychological insecurity and societal unrest, examining the interplay between internal emotional struggles and external manifestations of insecurity. While sociological perspectives provide valuable insights into systemic issues, acknowledging and addressing the emotional and psychological underpinnings of individual unease is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of societal insecurity. By delving into modern Nigerian literature, this research sheds light on the nuanced connections between psychological insecurity and broader societal ramifications, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to address the multifaceted dimensions of insecurity in the human condition.

#### **Unveiling the Depths of Insecurity: A Comprehensive Exploration of the Human Experience in Selected Nigerian Novels**

This comprehensive study delves into the multifaceted portrayal of insecurity within the human condition, shedding light on the intricate interplay of emotional, psychological, and societal factors. Through a nuanced examination of selected Nigerian novels, this analysis seeks to recast and revamp the understanding of characters grappling with inherent insecurities, unraveling the complex biological and psychological processes that drive their actions.

#### **Fear as a Complex Biological Process:**

Biological processes, particularly fear, serve as foundational elements contributing to emotional and psychological unease. Fear, identified as a primal

reaction to danger or threat [7], triggers intricate physiological responses. [8] further elucidates that sensing potential danger prompts the release of hormones, reshaping bodily functions to prioritize survival. Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" provides a canvas for exploring how fear evolves into intrinsic insecurity, manifesting in physical and societal consequences.

#### **Okonkwo's Struggle with Inherent Insecurity:**

Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" presents the character of Okonkwo as a vivid exploration of the intricate relationship between fear, inherited expectations, and intrinsic insecurity. Okonkwo's journey is emblematic of the profound impact that familial legacies can have on an individual's psyche and subsequent actions.

The foundation of Okonkwo's intrinsic insecurity lies in the fear of failure inherited from his father, Unoka. Unoka is portrayed as an easygoing man associated with poverty, a stark contrast to Okonkwo's aspirations of prosperity and success. Unoka's lack of material success becomes a source of shame for Okonkwo, burdening him with an intense desire to distance himself from his father's perceived failures. The fear of replicating Unoka's fate creates a deep-seated anxiety within Okonkwo, setting the stage for his internal struggle.

This internal conflict significantly shapes Okonkwo's interactions within the Igbo community. Fueled by the fear of being associated with material failure, Okonkwo adopts a disdainful attitude towards those he deems materially unsuccessful. This disdain is not merely a reflection of Okonkwo's personal sentiments but is deeply rooted in his overarching fear of failure. In his pursuit of success, Okonkwo becomes stringent in his judgments, alienating individuals who do not meet his rigid standards of material prosperity.

The impact of this internal struggle is not confined to Okonkwo's personal life; it extends to the broader societal context depicted in the novel. Okonkwo's actions, driven by his intrinsic insecurity, contribute to the shaping of social dynamics within the Igbo community. His contempt for perceived weakness or material inadequacy influences not only his individual relationships but also the community's collective consciousness.

Scholars such as [7] posit that fear is a primal emotion, often serving as a biological response to perceived threats. In Okonkwo's case, this fear is not solely a reaction to external dangers but is deeply interwoven with internalized expectations and societal judgments. [8] further explains that the physiological responses to fear include heightened heart rates and redirected blood flow—a manifestation of the body's preparation for survival. Okonkwo's relentless pursuit of success can be seen

as his adaptive response to the fear of failure, a means of ensuring his survival in the socio-cultural milieu of the Igbo society.

In essence, Okonkwo's narrative unfolds as a poignant illustration of the transformative power of fear and its metamorphosis into intrinsic insecurity. His interactions and attitudes towards others, shaped by this internal struggle, reverberate through the novel, leaving an indelible mark on both Okonkwo's personal life and the broader societal landscape depicted by Achebe. The character of Okonkwo serves as a microcosm, allowing readers to delve into the complex interplay between individual fears, societal expectations, and the ensuing dynamics of intrinsic insecurity within the rich cultural tapestry of "Things Fall Apart."

#### **Flight or Fight Response:**

Choosing the path of fight over flight, Okonkwo's fear transforms into an unwavering pursuit of success in his farming business. This internal struggle becomes a physical manifestation, endowing him with resilience to fatigue and superiority over others. Yet, despite his remarkable achievements, Okonkwo's unresolved insecurities lead to tragic outcomes, such as the death of Ikemefuna, symbolizing the collateral damage of unchecked internal fears.

#### **Beatrice's Emotional and Psychological Insecurity in "Purple Hibiscus":**

Transitioning to contemporary literature, Chimamanda Adichie's "Purple Hibiscus" provides a lens into Beatrice's emotional and psychological insecurities as Eugene Achike's wife. Beatrice's anxiety over her relationship with Eugene and the domestic violence she endures contribute to the erosion of her emotional well-being.

#### **Domestic Violence and Miscarriages:**

Beatrice's emotional insecurity is compounded by physical abuse, leading to heartbreaking miscarriages. The narrative, articulated through the lens of Kambili, the protagonist, unveils the toll of Eugene's violence on Beatrice's mental well-being. Her depression deepens as she grapples not only with the trauma within her marriage but also with societal expectations and familial pressures.

#### **Eugene Achike's Dual Personality:**

Eugene, too, becomes a casualty of emotional and psychological insecurity, torn between his devout Catholicism and traditional roots. Struggling to balance family loyalty, religious devotion, and societal expectations, Eugene's intrinsic insecurities culminate in a dual personality – projecting calmness outside while harboring a vortex of turmoil within.

These selected Nigerian novels offer a profound exploration of the intricate interplay between biological, emotional, and psychological processes contributing to the human experience of insecurity.

The characters' struggles, shaped by fear, societal expectations, and internal conflicts, paint a vivid picture of the complex nature of intrinsic insecurities and their profound impact on individuals and society at large.

#### **The Unraveling Threads of Insecurity: A Psychological Exploration of Transformation in Selected Novels**

This study delves into the profound transformations of characters in response to life's challenges, leading them from a state of emotional and psychological security to profound insecurity. The intricate examination focuses on key characters like Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" and Beatrice and Eugene in Chimamanda Adichie's "Purple Hibiscus." The evolution from intrinsic insecurity to physical insecurity becomes evident as these characters grapple with the complexities of their own minds and external circumstances.

#### **Okonkwo's Descent into Physical Insecurity:**

In Achebe's "Things Fall Apart," Okonkwo's emotional and psychological insecurity serves as a precursor to his tragic descent into physical insecurity. Okonkwo's mind, clouded by fear of weakness, compels him to commit murder [9]. The killing of Ikemefuna, driven by the fear of being perceived as weak, becomes a pivotal moment that sets Okonkwo on a destructive path. The subsequent exile during the onset of colonial rule further exacerbates his emotional and psychological turmoil. Ultimately, Okonkwo's internal struggles manifest in the murder of a colonial government agent and his own suicide, resulting in irreparable damage to both himself and the community of Umuofia.

#### **Eugene and Beatrice's Covert Insecurities:**

In Adichie's "Purple Hibiscus," Eugene and Beatrice's intrinsic insecurities, though subtle, unfold into physically traumatizing outcomes comparable to Okonkwo's story. Eugene's struggle to reconcile his Christianity with traditional beliefs surfaces in acts of violence towards his family. The narrative spotlights a particularly distressing incident where Eugene, agitated by his father's visit to Auntie Ifeoma's home, subjects his daughter Kambili to scalding water. This manifestation of outward aggression underscores the escalation of Eugene's internal insecurities into tangible violence.

#### **Beatrice's Descent into Violence:**

Beatrice, reacting to Eugene's violence, decides to confront her intrinsic insecurities by resorting to physical harm. She poisons Eugene, an ironic act given his aversion to conventionality. This act reverberates through the family as Jaja assumes responsibility for the murder, leading to his incarceration. Beatrice's desperate act serves as a poignant example of how inner turmoil can manifest

as outward physical insecurity, resulting in the breakdown of the family unit.

The transformation from intrinsic insecurity to physical insecurity, as exemplified by Okonkwo, Eugene, and Beatrice, serves as a compelling exploration of the human psyche in response to life's challenges [10]. The narratives underscore the profound impact of internal struggles on external

#### CONCLUSION

This study has delved into the depths of insecurity, unraveling the transformative journey of characters facing life's challenges in selected Nigerian novels. The narratives of Okonkwo, Eugene, and Beatrice have served as poignant examples of the intricate interplay between internal psychological struggles and external manifestations of insecurity. The evolution from intrinsic insecurity to physical consequences underscores the profound impact of unchecked emotional turmoil on individuals and their

www.iaajournals.org  
actions, unraveling the complex layers of insecurity within these characters. As the characters grapple with their own minds and external pressures, the consequences ripple through their lives, leaving an indelible mark on both themselves and the societies they inhabit. These novels offer poignant insights into the transformative power of insecurity and the enduring consequences of its unchecked progression.

societies. As fear, societal expectations, and internal conflicts shape these characters' experiences, the consequences reverberate through their lives, leaving an indelible mark on both themselves and the societies they inhabit. This exploration not only enriches our understanding of insecurity but also emphasizes the need for a holistic approach in addressing the complex layers of insecurity within the human condition.

#### REFERENCES

1. Sverke, M., Hellgren, J., & Naswall, K. (2002). No security: A meta-analysis and review of job insecurity and its consequences, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 7, pp.242-264.
2. Rosenblatt, Z., & Ruvio, A. (1996). A test of a multidimensional model of job insecurity: The case of Israeli teachers. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 17, pp.587-605.
3. Hartley, J., & Klandermans, B., & van Vuuren, T. (1991). *Job insecurity: Coping with jobs at risk*. Sage.
4. Pepple, B. (2021). "The Issue of Insecurity in Nigeria." *The Guardian* 08 July 2021. Retrieved February 2021. <http://guardian.ng/opinion/the-issue-of-job-insecurity-in-nigeria/>
5. Zubairu, N. (2020). "Rising Insecurity in Nigeria: Causes and Solution". *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences*, Vol. 19 (4). www.infinitypress. Info
6. Mendrofa, M. P. (2023). Positioning a Literary Work into Major or Minor Literature: Comparative Studies of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. *Formosa Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2(1), 331-344.
7. Ohman, A. (2000). Fear and anxiety: Evolutionary, cognitive, and clinical perspectives. In M. Lewis & J. M. Haviland-Jones (Eds.). *Handbook of emotions*. (pp. 573-593). The Guilford Press.
8. Delagran, L. (2016). *Impact of fear and anxiety. Taking charge of your health and well-being*. The University of Minnesota. <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/impact-fear-and-anxiety...>
9. Irele, F. A. (2000). The crisis of cultural memory in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. *African Studies Quarterly*, 4(3), 1-40.
10. Wilson, J. D. (1978). *Beatrice Cenci and Shelley's Vision of Moral Responsibility*. *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 9(3).

**CITE AS: Ugwu Jovita Nnenna, Amwiine Hassans, Mwanaidi Kanyama and Chidinma Esther Eze (2024). Unravelling Insecurity: Exploring Psychological and Societal Dimensions in Nigerian Novels. IAA JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES 10(1):42-45. <https://doi.org/10.59298/IAAJSS/2024/101.42.45000>**