ADOLESCENT TRAUMA IN ARMED CONFLICT AREAS AND ASSOCIATED RISK OF GANGSTER VIOLENCE: THE MAIDUGURI, NIGERIA PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The study investigated traumatic experiences and risk factors associated with gangster violence among adolescents living in armed conflict areas, specifically Maiduguri, the Borno state capital, Nigeria. Three answers were provided with regards to Forms of traumatic experiences of adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri, Prevalence of risk factors associated with gangster violence among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri and Relationship between exposure to insurgency and risk factors associated with gangster violence among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri. 500 hundred adolescent students were randomly sampled from 10 junior secondary schools in Maiduguri. All participants were below 19 years of age. Participants responded to two instruments; Instrument for Risk Factor Associated with Gang/Insurgency (IRAGI) and Instrument for Traumatic Experiences of Insurgency Victims (ITEIV). IRAGI constitutes of 17 items measuring risk behaviour that may underlie gangster violence among adolescents. Response for the instrument was measured on a scale of “Much Like Me”, “Less like me” and “Unlike Me” = 3,2,1 respectively. Reliability of the instrument is .72 (Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient using SPSS). The second instrument ITEIV (Chronbach’s alpha reliability .69) constitutes of 15 items measuring traumatic experiences of adolescents exposed to Boko haram insurgency in Maiduguri. Responses to the items were on three-point (Verytrue, Uncertain and Nottrue). Items for both instruments were derived from literature and suggestions from student. The instrument was validated by experts in the department of education, University of Maiduguri, Borno state Nigeria. The instrument was pilot tested using students from schools other than the population of study. Data obtained were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics was used in answering research questions while hypothesis on relationship between traumatic experiences and risk factors associated with gangster violence among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). Findings of the study indicated that adolescents are traumatized by Loss of family home/properties, Loss of family business/source of income, Death of a family member at the hands of insurgents, attention be paid to adolescents psychological needs; effort shoulde be made to ameliorate the plights of victims of Insurgency in Maiduguri.

KEYWORDS: Traumatic Experiences, Risk Factors, Gangster Violence, Adolescents, Armed Conflict.

Introduction

Traumatic experience has been defined as events or experience that causes great distress, physical or psychological injury (Obidigbo, 2008). Most often, recall of such memory trigger or refresh anxiety, tension and/or emotional reaction. Armed conflict in the north-east Nigeria, specifically Borno, Yobe
and Adamawa states exposes adolescents to anxiety evoking circumstances such as loss of loved ones, loss of home and change in circumstance which may exert psychological stress and heighten the crises accompanying adolescence stage of development (Nwachukwu, Abdullahi and Bashir, 2014). Many of these adolescents have witnessed violence unleashed by Boko haram insurgents in their neighborhood. Adolescence is a period that holds great significance for young people, as adult preparatory stage, experiences from the environment goes a long way to impact on the personality of such adolescent through adulthood. The World Health Organization (2000) defined adolescence as the stage of young people within the age of 10 – 19. Similarly, Steinberg (2001) views adolescence as a period of transition from childhood to adulthood within 11–21 years. Difference in the age brackets notwithstanding, it is unanimously agreed that adolescence period is characterized by physical, cognitive, social/emotional and interpersonal changes coupled with self-identity crises; the result of which defines the emergence of an adult with healthy personality. Erikson (1987) refers to adolescence as a point of struggling to find oneself, to craft and assert one’s identities, to manage increasingly sophisticated social situations, suppress impulsive behaviour and manages anxiety evoking stimuli associated with the adolescence stage.

For adolescents in the North East Nigeria there is even more to the crises. Added to the usual challenges of this stage is the Boko haram insurgency with its attendant problems. Presently, adolescence stage of young people in north east Nigeria is characterized by severe internal crises occasioned by security challenges which has displaced many adolescents (Nathan, 2014), forced many adolescents out of school (Pana, 2009) and left them confused and traumatized for a long time. The experience heightens stress and anxiety level already impinging on the developing adolescent’s personality. Musa and Nwachukwu (2014) found that the Boko haram insurgency is adversely affecting adolescent’s development of self-identity in Maiduguri. The present study seek to determine likely manifestation of risk factors associated with gangstars among adolescents exposed to Boko haram insurgency in Maiduguri, Borno state, Nigeria.

The Boko haram insurgency in north east Nigeria has been traced to Mohammed Yusuf’s quest to establish a state in which secular laws are relegated or totally expunged and the Sharia law is used for governance (Harman-tukur, Atsua and Nwachuku, 2014). To actualize this, he recruited like-minded “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad” and adopted Arabic translation “Jama'atul Ahlil Sunna Lidda'awatiwal-Jihad” as the movement’s official name (Haman-tukur, et al, 2014). The group views western education as sacrilege because it strongly propagates secular laws which they consider to oppose Sharia. At early stage of its evolution, Boko Haram attacks were relatively restricted to cases of provocation especially from the police who are seen as custodian of Western laws and who clamped down on their members for infringing on state laws and codes. At this point, attacks on police stations were carried out by Boko haram fighters using fuel-laden motor-cars.
cycles and bows with poisoned arrows. In 2004 the group relocated to Yusuf's home state of Yobe in the village Kanamma near the Niger Republic border. Here, Yusuf’s membership recruitment tentacles were extended to neighboring Chad and Niger most of whom speak only Arabic (Eme & Ibietan, 2012). In 2009, following an attempt to curb the group’s excesses several members of the group were arrested, sparking deadly clashes with Nigerian security forces. Mohammed Yusuf was arrested and killed in police custody (Adebayo, 2014). Apparently provoked by the death of their leader, the group escalated the frequency and intensity of Boko haram attacks (Eme & Ibietan, 2012) introducing Suicide bombing, outright shooting and kidnapping into the Nigerian crime space. Abubakar Shekau the new leader has perhaps been the bloodiest and most controversial. According to Harman-tukur, et al (2014), the identity, personality and authenticity of Shekau’s existence have perhaps been one of the hardest tight riddle Nigerians are yet to unknot; authorities had previously believed that “Shekau” died during the violence in 2009, latter reports indicated he died in Kolofota, Chad after sustaining gunshot injury from the Nigerian army during an offensive at the Sambisa forest. However, the name and visuals of Shekau kept claiming unabated attacks. On September 2014 after a foiled attempt by Boko Haram fighters to overrun Konduga, about 40 kilometers from Maiduguri, Shekau himself was believed to have led a revenge mission back to Konduga, where the military reportedly killed him. Moments of tranquility in Maiduguri and surroundings following Shekau’s purported death was almost crowned by the well-publicized ceasefire agreement between the Federal government and Boko Haram. The purported ceasefire notwithstanding Boko Haram fighters captured more towns including Mubi the second largest town in Adamawa state. At this point, the reportedly dead Shekau resurfaced to denounce any truce with government calling it false (Harman-tukur, et al 2014).

Boko haram as insurgency group shares features of outlawed gangs in mode of operation, recruitment and activities. For instance, youth gang research has focused extensively on the gang-drug activities, reports on this agree with Quinn and Downs (1995) who reiterated substance intoxication in Boko haram’s methods of attack and destruction. Again, recent research suggests a significant connection among gang involvement, gang violence, and firearms – this feature is happily shared by Boko haram group who wields sophisticated fire arms in their quest to drive home their points. Similarly, Sheley and Wright (1992) presented a report titled Youth, Guns, and Violence in Urban America. In their study, which sampled 835 male inmates in 6 juvenile correctional facilities in 4 States, they found that each newly recruited youth brought increase in most forms of gun-involved conduct. Forty-five percent described gun theft as a regular gang activity brought about by increase in gang size. Sixty-eight percent said their gang regularly bought and sold guns, and 61 percent described "driving around shooting at people you don't like" as a regular gang activity (Sheley and Wright, 1992). Additionally, experts report that gangs appear to be increasing their organizational sophistication and their propensity for individual and collective violence (Quinn and Downs, 1995). These structural and behavioral
changes are often, but not universally, attributed to the impact of the drug trade and the availability of firearms. Another study indicates similarities in gang homicide settings which are more likely to involve public areas, automobiles, and firearms, among other elements (Maxson, Gordon and Klein, 1985).

Several studies indicate that risk factors associated with gang involvement are present long before the individual joins a gang (Howell & James, 2005) these factors could however be stimulated by experiences of such adolescents. Some of the risk factors as outlined by Wortley, Scot and Tanner (2003) are; Reduced attachment to family and community, Strict compliance to peer-approved lifestyle even if against parental training, reduced attachment to family and community, Poor parental supervision, Alcohol and drug use, Over reliance on anti-social friends. The counsellor needs to strengthen protective factors. Protective factors refer to positive influences that mitigate impacts of risk behaviour and decrease likelihood of problem behaviour (Howell & James, 2005). Young people exposed to armed conflict may exhibit behaviour which points to gangster violence later in life. Conner (2015) reported some of such behaviour to include intense anger, frequent loss of temper, extreme irritability and becoming easily frustrated among others. Similarly, Omoeguna (2012) reported temper tantrum, bullying, fighting and aggressiveness. Inculcating non-violence through peace education may impact on such child’s behaviour.

Armed conflict with its consequences may have received much research attention globally (Maxson, Gordon & Klein, 1985; Sheley & Wright, 1992; Musa & Nwachukwu, 2015), however, there tend to be paucity of studies on adolescent-related issues such as tendency to join gangs in Nigeria, specifically in the study area. The present study therefore seeks to fill knowledge gap in this area. The study is also distinguished by its social relevance in keeping up with the plight of adolescents in armed conflict areas of Nigeria.

**Objectives of the study**

The study aim to determine;

1. forms of traumatic experiences of adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri
2. prevalence of risk factors associated with gangster violence among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri
3. relationship between exposure to insurgency and risk factors associated with gangster violence among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri

**Research questions**

1. What are the forms of traumatic experiences of adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri?
2. What are the prevailing risk factors associated with gangsters’ violence among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri?

**Hypothesis**

H$_0$: There is no significant relationship between traumatic experience and risk factors associated with gangster violence among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri

**Methodology**

The population for this study constitutes of junior secondary school students in Maiduguri. From the population of 7,352 junior students, the researcher selected 500 students, randomly sample from 10 junior secondary schools in Maiduguri (50 students each from the 10 selected schools). Randomization is a process through which a true representative of the population could be drawn (Aboh & Obidigbo, 2002).

Two instruments were used for the study; Instrument for Risk Factor Associated with Gang/Insurgency (IRAGI) and Instrument for Traumatic Experiences of Insurgency Victims (ITEIV). IRAGI constitutes of 17 items measuring risk behaviour that may underlie violence in children on a scale of “Much Like Me”, “Less like me” and “Unlike Me” = 3,2,1 respectively. Reliability of the instrument is .72 (Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient using SPSS). The second instrument ITEIV (Chronbach’s alpha reliability .69) constitutes of 15 items measuring traumatic experiences of adolescents exposed to Bokoharam insurgency in Maiduguri. Responses to the item were three-point response (Verytrue, Uncertain and Nottrue). Items for both instruments were derived from literature and suggestions from student. The instrument was validated by experts in the department of education, University of Maiduguri, Borno state Nigeria. The instrument was pilot tested using students from schools other than the population of study. Data obtained were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics was used in answering research questions while hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test relationship between traumatic experiences and risk factors associated with gangster violence among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri.

**Result**

**Research question 1:** What are the forms of traumatic experiences of adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri?

Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Very true</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Not true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


Table 1 reveals forms of traumatic experiences experienced by adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri, Borno state, Nigeria. Experiences rated high includes; Loss of family home/properties, Loss of family business/source of income, Death of a family member at the hands of insurgents, Death of family members at the hands of insurgents and Witnessing death of other people at the hands of insurgents.

Research question 2: What are the prevailing risk factors associated with gangsters among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri?

Table 2:
Prevalent risk factors associated with gangsters among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sn</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Much like me</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Unlike me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Throwing objects when upset</td>
<td>88 %</td>
<td>06 %</td>
<td>06 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Constant fighting</td>
<td>33 %</td>
<td>59 %</td>
<td>08 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Setting objects on fire</td>
<td>06 %</td>
<td>22 %</td>
<td>72 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Participation in non-peaceful demonstrations</td>
<td>66 %</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td>06 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Waylaying teachers on their path</td>
<td>19 %</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td>55 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ganging to beat up teachers</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>28 %</td>
<td>59 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Shouting at teachers and fellow students</td>
<td>66 %</td>
<td>28 %</td>
<td>06 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 showed prevailing risk factors associated with gangster violence among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri metropolis. Highly rated among the risk factors are throwing objects when upset, participation in non-peaceful demonstrations, shouting at teachers and fellow students, hitting anyone infringing on your rights and friendship with bullies.

**Ho:** There is no significant relationship between traumatic experience and risk factors associated with gangster violence among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri

**Table 3:**

**Relationship between traumatic experience and risk factors associated with gangster violence among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic experience</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>36.06</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>.894</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk factors associated with gangster violence</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>41.35</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 indicates the result of Pearson Product Moment Correlation between traumatic experience and risk factors associated with gangster violence among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri. The result revealed significant relationship between traumatic experience and risk factors associated with gangster violence. The null hypothesis is rejected.

**Discussion**

Results of the study revealed reveals forms of traumatic experiences of adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri, Borno state, Nigeria. Most adolescents in Maiduguri experienced loss of
family home/properties, loss of family business/source of income, death of a family member at the hands of insurgents, death of family members at the hands of insurgents and witnessing death of other people at the hands of insurgents. This finding confirms studies of Nwachukwu, Abdullahi and Bashir (2014) which reported that armed conflict in the north-east Nigeria, specifically Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states exposes adolescents to anxiety evoking circumstances like as loss of loved ones, loss of home and change in circumstance which may exert psychological stress and heightens the crises accompanying adolescence stage of development. Other studies in agreement with this finding include Pana (2009), Nathan (2014) and Musa et al (2015).

The study also found risk factors associated with violence as prevailing in junior secondary schools in Maiduguri metropolis. Highly rated among the risk factors were throwing objects when upset, participation in non-peaceful demonstrations, shouting at teachers and fellow students, hitting anyone infringing on your rights, move with friends who are feared. Childhood behaviour no doubt may involve elements of delinquency, however, this may become worrisome when such delinquent child persists on such behaviour through growth or indulges in more of such behaviour. This finding agree with Conner (2015) who reported intense anger, frequent loss of temper, extreme irritability and becoming easily frustrated among signs of violence in children. Result of the study also aligned with Omoeguna (2012) who reported temper tantrum, bullying, fighting and aggressiveness. Another study in agreement with the finding includes Howell and James (2005). The result of Pearson Product Moment Correlation between traumatic experience and risk factors associated with gangster violence among adolescents exposed to insurgency in Maiduguri. The result revealed significant relationship between traumatic experience and risk factors associated with gangster violence. Studies in agreement with this finding includes.

Conclusion

Insurgency and counter-insurgency activities in north east Nigeria specifically Maiduguri, the Borno state capital, exposes adolescents to different forms of traumatic experiences such as loss of dear ones, loss of properties and consequent displacement. This circumstance and other prevailing conditions of the Internally Displaced People’s camp may predispose such young people to risk of gangster involvement and violence.

Recommendation

Based on findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Government of Nigeria needs to pay urgent attention to the psychological/counselling needs of adolescents who were directly or indirectly affected by the insurgency or counter-insurgency activities in the zone.
2. School teachers need to be sensitive to the signs of gangsterism among students. Students suspected to exhibit such sign should be recommended for counselling.

3. There is need to ameliorate the plight of victims through material intervention, financial assistance, relocation and rehabilitation if necessary. These will contribute in reducing hardship and risk of survival through clandestine activities.

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