

**INFLUENCE OF POST TRAUMATIC STRESS REACTION ON
SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS
LIVING IN CONFLICT AREAS OF WUKARI,
TARABA STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The study examined the influence of Post Traumatic Stress Reaction on School Adjustment among Primary School pupils living in Conflict Areas of Wukari, Taraba State Nigeria. The sample size was 381, out of which 211 were males (55.4%) and 170 females (44.6%), randomly drawn from final year primary school pupils. The study was guided by two hypotheses. The instruments used to collect data were Biodata form, Child Reaction to Traumatic Events Scale CRTES-R (Jones, Fletcher & Ribbe, 2002) and Child Adjustment Scale CAS (Santrock & Warshark, 1979). Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) was used to analyse the data. Results showed that Pupils' post traumatic stress reaction negatively correlated with school adjustment ($r = -0.875, p = 0.000$). Similarly, significant negative relationship exists between Conventional school pupils' post traumatic stress reaction and their school adjustment ($r = -0.874, p = 0.000$), and there is also a negative correlation between Nomadic school pupils' post traumatic stress reaction and their school adjustment ($r = -0.881, p = 0.000$) Recommendations made include the need for comprehensive and continuous psychological counselling by experts in psychology to assist the pupils in resolving their traumatic experiences. Post-trauma pupils should also be engaged in positive distractive activities like sports, competition and debate to develop more adaptive skills for proper school adjustment. In severe cases there is need for referral for psychiatric attention.

Keywords: Traumatic Stress, School Adjustment, School Pupils, Nigeria.

Introduction

Social relation and other forms of social interaction among human beings are prone to swings from harmony to conflict, this justifies the conjecture that conflict is inherent to human existence, recent years in Nigeria which is most populous country in Africa with multitudes of religious, ethnic and political fault lines, conflict have

periodically erupted into communal conflicts in many parts of the country. One of such area is Wukari in Taraba State.

Conflict occurs when parties have incompatible interest, the interest may be economic, political, cultural, social or religious (Mohammed, 2006). Conflict is considered here as a product of disagreement that is deep-rooted in divergent belief, ideas, interest and perception of people or nation.

Human Right Watch (2002) states that, Conflict between Taraba and Benue state have been ongoing for decades, principally between Tivs and Jukuns. While Tiv and Jukun ethnic groups had a cordial relationship for centuries, that amiable co-existence progressively turned sour between the 1930s and 1950s because of ecological as well as political changes in Wukari specifically and Benue Valley in general.

Conflict is caused by actual or perceived opposition of needs or interest. These interests, needs and values of the people are accompanied by accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimisation, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism and bigotry (Brahm, 2003). The discriminatory tendency especially at the local level has been a major and potential source of conflict, especially on the basis of indigeneship or citizenship which is quite problematic because it is directly tied to individual or group access to societal resources including political opportunities that sharpen the “we” and “you” divide, between the Jukuns and Kutebs, Tivs, and Hausas in Wukari Local Government, Taraba state. Jega (2002). This has fractured social relationships between the ethnic groups and resulted in killing and destruction of properties.

Children in Wukari Local Government are part of the vulnerable population that suffered death or injury which has sometimes led to permanent disability, abduction, malnutrition, overcrowding and psychological uncertainty, various forms of traumatic experiences and their access to education and psychological service are limited which may in turn result to behaviours such as withdrawal, isolation, anger, nightmares, desire for revenge and aggression etc. Apart from these losses, in lives and properties conflicts can result in family dislocations, distortion in career, loss of vital organs of the human body, loss of friends, relations and colleagues. In short, conflict result in life-long nightmares that may continue to afflict those that survive the terrible experience they had during the conflict, and it often manifests in post traumatic stress reactions, these psychological problems if not quickly and properly handled, may result in more serious problems like suicide (Mohammed, 2006).

Children from conflict areas suffer various forms of traumatic experience such as behaviour disorder, anxiety and phobia among others, which may in turn result in behaviors such as withdrawal, isolation, anger, nightmares, revenge, aggression and rebellion. Societies today are becoming more aware of the psychological impact of trauma as a result of communal violence that injure children, make them to be mutilated, dismembered, killed, forced in to military services, sexually abused, exploited and separated from their families, loosing opportunities to attend school and health care, suffering from various forms of trauma and more

(women's commission for refugees women and children, 2000). These lead to maladjustment in their behaviour.

Agbakwuru and Agbakwuru (2012) view school adjustment in the context of bringing an individual's behaviors to be in conformity with the norms of the school setting. It is a continuous process that is geared towards the adaptation of the individual to school life and culture. Gates and Jersild in Mangal (2008) see school adjustment as a continual process in which the students vary their behavior to produce a more harmonious relationship with the school environment. It can be taken in the process the students adopt in maintaining a balance between their academic, social and emotional needs and the school environment. Indeed students' school adjustment depends on the match between their competences, needs and the demands of the school environment.

According to Richard cited in Adeyemo (2005:3) students' adjustment is "the ability to cope, manage their emotions and anatomy to behave in socially appropriate and responsible way to meet up with school challenges and responsibilities". This means that adjustment involves coping ability of physiological and emotional components to meet up with the demands of the school environment. Adjustment potentials enable students deal better with pressures of peers, school life, academic challenges and temptation of alcohol, drugs and sex. School adjustment is also psychological disposition to cope with challenges (post traumatic stress reaction) confronting students in the school environment and the ability to accommodate any possible outcome or changes.

According to Santrock (2003) Post traumatic stress disorder is characterised by intrusive memories of the traumatic events, emotional withdrawal and heightened arousal. Yebuda (2002) viewed post traumatic stress disorder as an Anxiety disorder that may develop months or even years after experiencing a traumatic event that includes an expected lost of a loved one, accident, interpersonal violence and military combat, the major symptoms of post traumatic stress reaction include:-

1. Re-living the traumatic events in nightmares or flashbacks
2. Hyper arousal resulting in difficulty falling asleep, anger outburst, difficulty in concentrating, hyper vigilance and physical sensations.
3. Avoiding remembering the events along with constricted behaviour and feeling numb, leading to diminished interest in events going on around them or not participating in significant activities, feeling detached or estranged from others.

Generally symptoms of post traumatic stress remain high in the period soon after the conflict, recurrent conflict might increase the prevalence of mental disorder and repeated exposure to trauma increases the risk of post traumatic stress reaction and other common forms of mental stress in a well established dose affection relationship (Steel, Chey, Silove, Bryant & Marnane, 2009). Some of the pupils in Wukari lost their parents and other relations and are exposed to tension, fear, stress, anxiety and depression as a result of witnessing the killings, gun shots

and some other forms of violent destruction. As a result, Wukari conflict areas are facing the problems of mistrust and hostility in the communities.

Osongo (2008) Points out that post election violence had psychological effects on the pupils as a result of unpredicted and traumatic events, on the pupils which made them to suffer various forms of trauma, disorders and phobias report by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (2000), pointed out that during times of violence, children suffer various forms of trauma. Also Balarabe (2003), reports the effect of stress on students include inability to concentrate, settle down to work, memory losses, getting nervous attacks, feeling frightened for no good reason, having difficulties with sleep, heightened irritability and depression. According to Institute of Medicine of the National Academics (2007). Trauma is the silent killer in Americans rural and frontiers areas, rural people suffer disproportionate number of deaths from post traumatic stress disorder despite decreasing population density in many rural areas compared to their urban counterparts. Also Indiana State Department of Health (2007) also found the death risk for rural trauma patient is 15 times greater than for urban trauma patient and the preventable deaths in rural trauma setting are 30% higher than in urban settings. Trauma patient who die in a rural areas without formal post traumatic stress disorder are less severely than those in urban areas and are more likely to die at the scene of the incident.

Wukari local government in Taraba state found itself in a circle of conflict ranging from ethno-religious and Political conflict that lead to massive lost of lives and properties in the region. The recent 2013 and 2014 conflicts dislocated many families, shut down schools and exposed primary school pupils to nightmares, fear, anxiety, depression, helplessness and inability to concentrate, sometimes missing school activities which may lead to difficulty in coping with the challenges of school learning. The influctuating circumstances have exposed many pupils to the risk of post traumatic stress reaction and school adjustment problems which would impinge on their emotional stability and proper adjustment to school.

The study was guided by two hypotheses viz;

1. There is no significance relationship between influence Post traumatic stress reaction and school adjustment among primary school pupils living in conflict areas of Wukari.
2. There is no significant relationship between Post traumatic stress reaction and school Adjustment among Conventional and Nomadic school sample in conflict areas of Wukari.

Method

The population of the study comprised all primary school pupils in conflict areas of Wukari, Taraba state, Nigeria and it involved one hundred and forty two (142) primary schools, that include both Conventional and Nomadic Primary Schools and has a population of forty nine thousand nine hundred and fifty (49,950) pupils. (Data source: Taraba state Universal Basic Education Board, 2014).

The research design was the survey method. A total of 381 pupils participated in the study.

Two instruments were used for data collect. The first was the child Reaction to Traumatic Events Scale (CRTES-R) developed by Jones, Fletcher & Ribbe (2002) adapted that has 23 self report items to assess Post Traumatic Stress Reaction, and Child Adjustment Scale developed by Santrock and Warshark, (1979) it has 33 self report items that are divided into four categories which comprise: Peer Relation; School Works Habit; Emotional Health stability ;and Compliance to school Authority they were all scored on a rated 1- 4 likert scale, with 1=Not always, 2=Rarely, 3=Some times and 4=Often while CAS 1=Hardly ever, 2=Not usually, 3=Usually and 4=Always.

Data collected was analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient (r) to test all the two hypotheses. Below are the results of the analyses.

Results

Table 1 Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) analysis between post traumatic stress reaction and school adjustment.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-value	Df	p=
Post traumatic Stress reaction	381	50.8635	11.67464		380	
School Adjustment	381	71.1706	13.30749	-.875**		0.000

** Correlation significant at 0.01 level (2-tail).

The results revealed a highly significant negative relationship between post traumatic stress reaction and school adjustment among the pupils. At 0.01 level. this reveals that the higher the level of post trauma stress reaction in the pupils the lower the school adjustment this finding is in the expected direction, hence the higher the post traumatic stress reaction, the lower the school adjustment.

Table 2 Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) analysis on the influence of post traumatic stress reaction on school adjustment by school type.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-value	Df	p=
Post traumatic stress of Conventional schools-	316	50.6930	11.54552			
School Adjustment of Conventional schools	316	70.9272	13.16818	-.874**	315	0.000
Post traumatic stress of Nomadic schools	65	51.6923	12.34266			
School Adjustment of Nomadic schools	65	72.3538	14.01052	-.881**	64	0.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The result revealed a significant negative correlation between post traumatic stress reaction and school adjustment in Conventional and Nomadic primary schools pupils. At 0.01 level, the results in Conventional schools that post traumatic stress reaction significantly influences school adjustment negatively, a significant negative correlation was also reveals between post traumatic stress reaction and school adjustment among Nomadic primary school pupils. This suggests that Post traumatic stress reaction significantly influences school adjustment negatively with respect to the Nomadic primary school pupils. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between post traumatic stress reactions on school adjustment by school type is hereby rejected.

Discussion

The study examines the influence of post traumatic stress reaction on school adjustment among primary school pupils living in conflict areas of Wukari, Taraba state. In discussing the findings of the study, the study results revealed a significant negative correlation between Post traumatic stress reaction and school adjustment ($r = -.875$) among primary school pupils investigated. The negative correlation is high which suggests that the level of pupils' post traumatic reaction is significantly high negative correlation. Post traumatic stress reaction weakened the pupils normative or positive competencies and their harmonious relationship with their school environment that include peer relation, emotional health stability, school work habit and compliance to school authority with correlation r value of $-.875^{**}$, $-.875^{**}$, $-.560^{**}$ and $-.560^{**}$ respectively as post traumatic stress reaction correlation run by the subscale of school adjustment. This result further concurred with the view of Osongo (2000) and Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (2000) that the intensity of one's exposure to traumatic events could affect individual's biological, psychological and social wellbeing. When post traumatic reaction is high, the school adjustment will be low. Thus, the emotional withdrawal and heighten arousal created by the traumatic events results to maladaptive student outcome like inattentive or disruptive behaviour, coping with school programmes will depend on the pupils' ability to manage their biological, psychological and social problems through interventions. This is in line with the findings of Balarabe (2003), that the effect of stress on students include inability to concentrate, settle down to work, memory losses, getting nervous attack feeling frightened for no good reason, difficulties with sleep, heightened irritability and depression. The participants of this study have witness re-current different conflict that exposed them to post traumatic experience yet their reaction to the events seems to influence school adjustment.

Likewise, a higher negative correlation was also found between post traumatic stress reactions and school adjustment of Nomadic primary school pupils. From the results, the impact of post traumatic stress reactions on Nomadic pupils' adjustment is a bit higher than that of Conventional schools pupils. The findings has some implications as all Nomadic schools are found in rural areas where the conflict are more re-current and intense than urban areas. Thus, looking at the nature of each school type and where it is cited may be a reason for the difference. This concurred

with the findings of Institute of Medicine of the National Academics (2007). That Trauma is the silent killer in Americans rural and frontiers areas, rural people suffer disproportionate number of deaths from post traumatic stress disorder despite decreasing population density in many rural areas compared to their urban counterparts. Also the findings is in line with the Indiana State Department of Health (2007) who found the death risk for rural trauma patient is 15 times greater than for urban trauma patient and the preventable deaths in rural trauma setting are 30% higher than in urban settings. The Conventional schools are located in urban areas where the conflicts are less intense and more securities were deployed in the areas than rural areas, this had put them (Nomadic schools) into certain disadvantage and to have higher level of post traumatic stress reaction than Conventional schools in urban areas.

Conclusion.

The following conclusions can be deduced based on the result of the study post traumatic stress reaction on school adjustment among primary school pupils living in conflict areas of Wukari, Taraba state.

Post traumatic stress reaction has negative influence on school adjustment of primary school pupils living in conflict areas of wukari.

Post traumatic stress reaction significantly influenced school adjustment of Nomadic school pupils negatively bit higher than their Conventional counterpart living in conflict areas of Wukari. Taraba State.

Recommendations

There is need for primary schools in wukari local government to develop a comprehensive and continuous Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) through experts in Psychology and other related psychotherapist to provide the therapy as an intervention to the affected pupils.

There should be increase awareness that effective intervention for children exposed to post traumatic stress reaction can be implemented and integrated across the whole conflict affected areas through functional guidance and counseling centers to counsel pupils with post traumatic stress reaction so as to do away with their mal adjustment problems.

Engagement in positive distractive activities like Sport and games, reading, competitions and debate should also be organized by the school to developed more adaptive skills for proper adjustment and intervention should be made to pupils with high Post traumatic stress reaction through referral services for clinical attention.

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